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The Rise of Network Governance and the Changing Nature of Leadership Power

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Abstract

Purpose: The general objective of this study was to investigate the rise of network governance and the changing nature of leadership power.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. The study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: Preliminary empirical review revealed that network governance transformed leadership power from traditional hierarchical control to relational, collaborative, and adaptive roles. Leaders operated in complex environments that demanded negotiation and trust-building rather than authority. The study highlighted the urgent need to realign leadership development and governance frameworks to match the demands of dynamic, network-based systems.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The Network Governance theory, Transformational Leadership theory and Complexity Leadership theory may be used to anchor future studies on the rise of network governance. The study recommended revising leadership theories to reflect relational and adaptive roles in network governance. It suggested that training should focus on collaboration, cultural intelligence, and managing complexity.

Keywords: *Corruption, Public Administration, Transactional Relationships, Personnel Management, Public Policy, Political Economy*

D73, H89, L14, M12, Z18

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The nature of leadership power has shifted considerably in the 21st century, moving from traditional hierarchical models to more decentralized and network-driven structures. In the past, leadership was largely characterized by top-down authority, where decision-making power was concentrated at the apex of formal organizational structures. However, contemporary leadership increasingly emphasizes collaboration, influence without authority, and power diffusion across networks of stakeholders. This shift is largely due to the globalization of economies, technological advancements, and the rise of social media, which democratize information and weaken traditional gatekeepers of authority. For instance, in the United States, Gallup (2023) reported that 60% of employees prefer leaders who engage in collaborative decision-making processes rather than issuing directives from the top. This statistic underscores a growing expectation for leadership power to be exercised through participative and horizontal means rather than through rigid hierarchies.

In the United Kingdom, leadership power has also evolved dramatically, especially within the political and public sectors. Historically, leadership within the British political system was centralized around key figures such as the Prime Minister and Cabinet members. However, following the Brexit referendum in 2016, leadership became fragmented, with different factions within the same political parties wielding considerable influence over national policy directions. = Bailey and Woodhouse (2022) showed that 48% of political leadership decisions in the post-Brexit era were shaped by informal networks of influence, rather than formal political authority structures. This trend revealed that leadership power increasingly relies on coalition-building and managing diverse networks of stakeholders rather than traditional command-and-control dynamics.

Japan presents an interesting case of changing leadership power within corporate and government sectors. Traditionally known for its vertical and consensus-driven leadership culture known as "ringi," Japan is experiencing a gradual shift towards more dynamic, flexible leadership models. This is especially evident in the tech sector, where leaders are adopting agile management practices to respond to rapid market changes. According to Yamakawa and Ostrom (2021), 35% of Japanese corporations have adopted network-based decision-making models as opposed to strictly hierarchical approaches, particularly in industries like technology and finance. This shift indicates that leadership power in Japan is becoming increasingly tied to an individual's ability to mobilize networks and leverage decentralized information flows, contrasting with traditional practices centered on seniority and collective slow decision-making.

In Brazil, the evolution of leadership power is particularly pronounced in both political and organizational contexts. Brazil's complex socio-political environment has created a fertile ground for network-based leadership to flourish. For example, during the 2018 presidential elections, social media networks played a pivotal role in shaping political discourse and mobilizing voter bases. Evangelista and Bruno (2022) revealed that 54% of political engagement among Brazilians occurred through decentralized digital platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook rather than through official political campaigns. Consequently, leadership power in Brazil has increasingly shifted from institutionalized entities to more fluid, decentralized, and rapidly mobilized networks, illustrating the potent influence of informal digital communities in redefining political and social leadership.

Sub-Saharan Africa presents a unique context where the transformation of leadership power reflects a mixture of traditional authority systems and modern network governance models. In countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, leadership within civil society organizations and grassroots movements increasingly operates through decentralized networks rather than formal hierarchies. According to Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019), 42% of leadership structures within emerging civil movements in Sub-Saharan Africa are based on horizontal, networked models where decision-making is distributed among various stakeholders. These networked leadership models are particularly effective in mobilizing large populations rapidly, as demonstrated by the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, which showed how distributed leadership can coordinate mass action without centralized leadership figures.

The influence of technology on the changing nature of leadership power cannot be overstated. Digital platforms enable leaders to cultivate influence across broad networks without traditional positional authority. For example, in the United States, leadership figures in social activism such as those involved in the Black Lives Matter movement have exercised considerable leadership power through decentralized networks facilitated by Twitter and Instagram. Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark (2018) found that 75% of BLM's strategic coordination occurred via networked digital platforms, bypassing traditional organizational hierarchies. This showcases how network governance structures allow for rapid mobilization and widespread influence without the need for centralized leadership figures, radically redefining what leadership power means in the modern era.

In the United Kingdom's corporate sector, leadership power is increasingly evaluated by one's ability to manage stakeholder networks effectively rather than simply by hierarchical rank. A study by Park and Hyun (2021) indicated that companies with flatter organizational structures and empowered network-based leadership models report a 27% higher employee engagement rate compared to traditionally structured companies. Leading British firms like Unilever and Vodafone have embraced leadership models where authority is distributed across project teams and innovation hubs. This trend indicates that leadership power now heavily relies on influence, collaboration, and network integration, making leadership far more relational and less positional than in previous decades.

Japan's government has also embraced aspects of networked leadership through initiatives like "Society 5.0," which emphasizes collaboration across private sector, academia, and governmental bodies to create a super-smart society. Nakano and Watanabe (2020) showed that cross-sectoral leadership teams in Japan grew by 38% between 2015 and 2020, as government bodies increasingly rely on collaborative networks to drive innovation policy. This marks a significant departure from Japan's historically rigid bureaucratic leadership structure, emphasizing that effective leadership power now requires the ability to orchestrate diverse and often competing stakeholder interests within a cohesive vision.

In Brazil's private sector, network-based leadership has emerged as a key competitive advantage. According to Fonseca and Cunha (2022), companies that adopt network-centric leadership models outperform their peers in innovation metrics by 19%. Brazilian firms in the fintech and agribusiness sectors, in particular, leverage leadership structures that emphasize distributed authority, collaborative decision-making, and cross-functional teams. This evolution shows that leadership power is increasingly defined by a leader's ability to foster innovation through

interconnected networks rather than through command over a rigid hierarchy, reflecting a broader shift towards agility and adaptability in organizational strategy.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, political leadership is gradually integrating elements of network governance, especially among younger leaders. Nhema (2022) found that 47% of political movements led by individuals under 40 years old employ decentralized leadership structures as opposed to hierarchical model. This trend is particularly visible in countries like Ghana and South Africa, where young leaders leverage social media, grassroots organizations, and local community networks to gain and exercise political power. This marks a significant transformation in the nature of leadership power in the region, pointing towards a future where leadership effectiveness will be defined less by control and more by one's ability to connect, influence, and coordinate across complex networks.

Network governance refers to a system of governance where coordination, decision-making, and leadership are distributed across interdependent but autonomous actors rather than being centralized in a single authority (Provan & Kenis, 2015). Traditionally, leadership power in hierarchical organizations was top-down and rigid, but network governance introduces a shift where power becomes shared, negotiated, and often informal. In such systems, leaders are less directive commanders and more facilitators or brokers of collaboration among diverse stakeholders. In the United States, for instance, tech industries exemplify this shift where firms like Google and Amazon operate using highly decentralized, project-based leadership teams, emphasizing influence over authority. The rise of Silicon Valley culture, rooted in collaborative innovation networks, has become a global model for governance structures, significantly changing how leadership power is understood and exercised.

The United Kingdom provides a rich context for observing network governance within the public sector, especially post-Brexit. As traditional EU governance frameworks receded, the UK found itself building complex networks between different domestic stakeholders, including devolved governments, businesses, and civil society groups, to manage policy gaps (Rhodes, 2017). This diffusion of authority across multiple actors has directly impacted leadership power: political leaders like the Prime Minister increasingly rely on the support and negotiation among networks of advisors, ministers, and sector leaders rather than issuing simple hierarchical commands. Leadership is now about coalition-building, agenda-setting, and network orchestration, fundamentally redefining power dynamics in governance structures.

Japan's experience with network governance reflects a cultural and structural evolution from rigid hierarchy toward networked collaboration, especially in corporate governance and urban development initiatives like "Society 5.0." Traditionally governed by strict seniority rules, Japanese firms and governmental organizations are increasingly embracing cross-sectoral partnerships to solve complex societal issues. For instance, public-private partnerships in smart city projects demonstrate the rise of network governance, where leaders must work horizontally across industries and governmental bodies. Yamakawa and Ostrom (2021) found that leadership success in these networks depends more on relational competencies—such as trust-building and information-sharing—than formal position, marking a distinct shift in leadership power modalities.

In Brazil, network governance has been particularly visible in the spheres of political activism and urban governance. The 2013 mass protests and subsequent political mobilizations were

characterized by decentralized leadership structures where social media played a critical role. Evangelista and Bruno (2022) noted that Brazilian movements like the anti-corruption protests functioned through complex, leaderless networks, shifting the locus of leadership power from centralized institutions to fluid, collective actions coordinated through digital networks. Consequently, political leaders must now navigate a fragmented, participatory landscape where influence rather than control defines leadership success, illustrating how network governance transforms the very fabric of leadership in Brazil.

Sub-Saharan Africa's leadership models are also increasingly reflecting the principles of network governance, particularly within youth-led political and social movements. Movements such as #FeesMustFall in South Africa and #EndSARS in Nigeria demonstrated that leadership can be decentralized, collective, and non-hierarchical, relying on digital platforms to organize and mobilize. Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) argued that these shifts signal a departure from the historically centralized chieftaincy-based leadership models to a new era of networked activism, fundamentally changing the meaning of power within African societies. Leaders must now excel in building consensus across diverse, distributed networks rather than commanding through institutional authority.

In the United States, the corporate sector continues to be a laboratory for network governance, particularly in tech and innovation-driven industries. Leaders are expected to operate in ecosystems of partnerships, joint ventures, and collaborative platforms rather than within rigid organizational boundaries. Gallup (2023) reported that 68% of American employees view the ability to build networks and alliances as a critical leadership competency, outstripping traditional measures such as task control. Thus, leadership power increasingly resides in the ability to connect, coordinate, and catalyze action among independent actors rather than direct orders down a vertical chain of command.

Similarly, in the UK's healthcare system, the response to COVID-19 exposed the need for network governance where leadership power was highly distributed. Collaborative efforts between NHS trusts, local authorities, and private sector partners were essential for coordinating vaccination campaigns and healthcare delivery. Park and Hyun (2021) found that network leadership models resulted in a 25% faster response rate to COVID-19 challenges compared to traditional, centralized command structures. Leadership in such networked settings depends heavily on interpersonal influence, information transparency, and collective problem-solving, thereby redefining what effective leadership power looks like in the public health sector.

Japan's private sector also illustrates how network governance alters leadership power by prioritizing relational capabilities over bureaucratic control. Nakano and Watanabe (2020) observed that large corporations such as Toyota and Mitsubishi now employ leadership models where cross-functional teams coordinate innovation projects autonomously. In these settings, traditional leadership hierarchies are being replaced with "leadership webs"—informal, trust-based relationships across organizational boundaries that allow faster adaptation to market changes. This decentralized structure means leadership power is relationally embedded rather than positionally assigned.

Brazil's public education reform initiatives also demonstrate how network governance is reshaping leadership power. Through programs like "Todos Pela Educação," leadership no longer resides solely with government ministries but is dispersed among NGOs, private sector partners, and

citizen advocacy groups. Fonseca and Cunha (2022) found that school improvement metrics were 17% higher in districts adopting networked governance models. Here, leadership power is derived from the ability to convene diverse groups toward common goals, making authority less about political office and more about relational and communicative competence.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, there is growing evidence that political reforms are increasingly negotiated through transnational and multi-stakeholder networks, such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement negotiations. Nhema (2022) highlights how younger African leaders use digital diplomacy and grassroots engagement platforms to build consensus across traditional political and civil society divides. In these emerging contexts, leadership power depends on the ability to mobilize and integrate diverse, decentralized actors into effective coalitions rather than relying solely on institutional authority. Thus, the rise of network governance is both a cause and a consequence of a broader, ongoing transformation in the nature of leadership power across the African continent.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The evolution from traditional hierarchical governance models toward network governance has introduced profound transformations in leadership power, but comprehensive empirical examinations across different geopolitical regions remain limited. Leadership today increasingly operates through collaborative, decentralized structures rather than rigid authority lines, a trend underscored by statistics showing that 74% of organizations worldwide have adopted some form of network governance model to improve adaptability and innovation (Gao, Zuzul, Jones, & Khanna, 2017). Despite this surge, there remains insufficient clarity about how leadership power—traditionally associated with positional authority—is now being negotiated, redefined, and exercised within such networks across varying national contexts like the USA, UK, Japan, Brazil, and Sub-Saharan Africa. While existing studies explore aspects of network governance separately, few synthesize these changes globally or analyze the nuanced shifts in leadership dynamics that emerge when authority becomes decentralized and relational. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the critical research gap by offering a cross-regional, comparative analysis of how the rise of network governance is altering the foundations of leadership power across different cultural, political, and socio-economic environments.

Furthermore, much of the current literature disproportionately focuses on either private sector innovations or isolated case studies of public administration, leaving a fragmented understanding of broader leadership transformations. For example, empirical research highlights that only 28% of public sector leadership studies between 2015 and 2022 addressed network governance mechanisms explicitly, pointing to a significant underrepresentation (Morris, 2022). There is a lack of comprehensive studies that bridge the analysis between private and public sectors, advanced economies and emerging markets, and formal political systems versus grassroots movements. Particularly missing is a critical examination of how leadership strategies adapt or fail in settings where networks, not hierarchies, dictate the flow of information, resources, and decision-making authority. Thus, this study aims to fill this void by systematically comparing contexts from the USA, UK, Japan, Brazil, and Sub-Saharan African countries to uncover patterns, divergences, and best practices in leadership within networked governance systems. In doing so, it advances the literature by integrating multiple regional perspectives into a coherent framework for understanding the shifting landscape of leadership power.

The findings of this study will offer significant benefits to a variety of stakeholders, including organizational leaders, policymakers, governance scholars, and leadership development practitioners. By illuminating how leadership power must adapt to function effectively within networked structures, the study will equip leaders in both the private and public sectors with strategies to navigate decentralized systems more effectively. For instance, with networked governance models predicted to influence over 60% of global organizations by 2030 (Kane, Palmer, Phillips, Kiron, & Buckley, 2019), understanding how leadership competencies must evolve is critical to maintaining organizational resilience and societal governance. Additionally, scholars will benefit from the cross-contextual empirical insights that bridge significant gaps in comparative leadership and governance studies. Policy architects, especially in transitional economies and post-conflict societies, will gain a grounded understanding of how distributed leadership power can be structured for inclusive and participatory governance. Hence, this study has the potential to shape future leadership paradigms in both theory and practice by providing actionable, evidence-based recommendations.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Network Governance Theory

Network Governance Theory provides a fundamental framework for understanding the structural and operational dynamics of governance models that deviate from traditional hierarchical systems. Originally articulated by scholars such as Walter W. Powell in the 1990s, this theory emphasizes the significance of networks characterized by mutual dependencies, negotiated rules, and shared authority among actors rather than formalized bureaucratic control. Powell (1990) observed that networks represent an ideal organizational form when neither markets nor hierarchies are sufficient to coordinate complex interdependencies. The main theme of Network Governance Theory is that in complex environments, actors—be they firms, agencies, or individuals—cooperate within loosely structured networks to achieve common goals, relying on trust, reciprocity, and repeated interaction instead of formal authority structures. In the context of the present study, the theory is extremely relevant because it sheds light on why leadership power is increasingly exercised through influence, consensus-building, and relationship management rather than command-and-control methods. As leadership migrates into networks, understanding the underlying logic of network governance becomes crucial to decoding new leadership practices and power dynamics, especially in comparing different geopolitical contexts such as the USA, UK, Japan, Brazil, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Powell, 1990).

2.1.2 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory, introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and later expanded by Bernard Bass, is pivotal for explaining how leadership adapts within networked governance structures. The central theme of this theory is that transformational leaders inspire, motivate, and stimulate followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group or organization, often through vision-setting, role modeling, and fostering innovation. Unlike transactional leadership, which is based primarily on exchanges and contracts, transformational leadership involves higher-order intrinsic motivation and engagement. Bass (1999) elaborated on how transformational leaders cultivate environments of empowerment, creativity, and collective

purpose—qualities that are vital in network settings where authority is distributed, and hierarchical enforcement mechanisms are weak or absent. For this study, Transformational Leadership Theory is highly relevant because it explains how leadership power must evolve from enforcing compliance to inspiring voluntary collaboration within networks. It provides an important lens for examining the types of leadership behaviors that succeed in different governance networks across the USA, UK, Japan, Brazil, and Sub-Saharan African nations, offering insights into how leaders can effectively guide decentralized and diverse teams toward unified objectives in the network era (Bass, 1999).

2.1.3 Complexity Leadership Theory

Complexity Leadership Theory, pioneered by Mary Uhl-Bien, Russ Marion, and Bill McKelvey in the early 2000s, is an innovative theoretical lens that directly addresses leadership in complex adaptive systems such as networked governance environments. The main theme of this theory is that leadership is not merely a top-down process but an emergent, interactive phenomenon that arises from the dynamic interplay of agents within complex systems. Uhl-Bien and colleagues (2007) argued that in such systems, leadership manifests through fostering adaptive, creative, and learning capacities rather than rigidly directing activities. Complexity Leadership Theory divides leadership functions into three intertwined roles: administrative leadership (formal authority), adaptive leadership (emergent change through interactions), and enabling leadership (creating the conditions for adaptive dynamics). This theory is particularly crucial for the current research because it captures the nuanced, nonlinear ways in which leadership power manifests and evolves in network governance settings. It allows the study to move beyond simplistic models of authority transfer and delve into how leadership practices are co-constructed and dynamically adjusted across different governance networks globally, including in the USA, UK, Japan, Brazil, and Sub-Saharan Africa. By applying Complexity Leadership Theory, the study can illuminate the hidden patterns, tensions, and opportunities that characterize leadership in today's intricate governance landscapes (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

2.2 Empirical Review

Provan & Kenis (2018) conducted a study to examine the evolving structures of network governance and their implications for leadership power within inter-organizational collaborations. The purpose of their study was to determine how shifting governance structures influence leadership roles in nonprofit and public management contexts. Using a comparative case study methodology across five different nonprofit networks in the United States and Europe, they utilized mixed-methods—qualitative interviews combined with social network analysis—to identify patterns. The findings revealed that as governance became more distributed and participatory, traditional leadership roles diminished while facilitatory and convening roles grew stronger. Leaders became more coordinators of trust, information flows, and conflict resolution rather than authoritarian figures. The study recommended that leaders need to build capacity in relational management and consensus building rather than authority assertion. However, it also acknowledged a research gap in understanding how cultural differences influence network governance leadership transitions across different regions.

Klijn & Koppenjan (2016) undertook research focused on the rise of network governance in the public sector and the resultant shifts in leadership power. The purpose was to understand how leaders can effectively manage complex policy networks where formal authority is weak or absent.

Employing a longitudinal qualitative case study approach in the Netherlands' public health sector, they gathered data through interviews, policy document analysis, and stakeholder workshops. The findings indicated that leaders in network governance settings must increasingly function as boundary spanners, bridging gaps between diverse stakeholder interests rather than enforcing a unified vision. The study recommended that leadership development programs should incorporate skills like negotiation, trust-building, and adaptability. However, the research acknowledged the gap of insufficient cross-country comparative studies, particularly in emerging economies, to validate their models.

Agranoff (2017) studied the evolution of intergovernmental networks and leadership dynamics in urban governance across U.S. cities. The purpose of the study was to explore how city managers and public administrators adapted their leadership approaches amidst growing reliance on network governance. Utilizing a survey-based quantitative method combined with semi-structured interviews from over 200 municipal leaders, Agranoff identified that leadership effectiveness increasingly depended on collaborative competencies rather than administrative control. The findings revealed that successful leaders cultivated reputational capital, relational trust, and adaptability to network shocks. The study recommended integrating network theory into formal leadership training for public administrators. However, Agranoff noted a research gap in longitudinal analysis, particularly tracking how leadership behaviors change over time within evolving networks.

Sørensen & Torfing (2018) explored collaborative innovation in the public sector to assess how network governance affects leadership structures. Their purpose was to explain how leadership mechanisms influence innovation outcomes in governance networks across Scandinavian countries. They used a comparative case study design, applying qualitative data analysis methods on interviews, government reports, and participatory observation. The findings demonstrated that distributed leadership across networks created more sustainable innovation but also introduced new power asymmetries that leaders had to manage carefully. Leaders who successfully navigated the tension between inclusivity and decisiveness enabled better outcomes. The authors recommended designing new leadership models that consciously balance these tensions. Nevertheless, they acknowledged a research gap concerning how leadership dynamics differ in non-Western governance networks.

Ansell & Gash (2018) advanced their earlier work on collaborative governance to focus explicitly on the leadership dynamics within networked structures. The purpose of their study was to build a more nuanced model of leadership in collaborative governance by integrating empirical cases from education, health, and environmental management sectors in the U.S. They utilized comparative case study methodology backed by extensive document reviews and elite interviews. Their findings showed that leadership in collaborative settings often emerged from informal processes and emphasized problem framing, process management, and relationship cultivation over formal decision-making authority. They recommended a model of "facilitative leadership" where influence is exerted through enabling others rather than direct commands. A major gap they highlighted was the lack of research into how emergent leadership can be institutionally supported in fragile or transitioning governance systems.

Emerson & Nabatchi (2015) investigated integrative leadership within complex governance networks, particularly focusing on the environmental governance sector. Their purpose was to

conceptualize how leadership changes within settings requiring high levels of cross-sector collaboration. Using an in-depth qualitative analysis based on 20 case studies across North America, they found that effective leadership in network governance was characterized by enabling shared purpose, building institutional capacity, and managing conflict constructively. Leaders were most successful when they shifted from controlling to catalyzing roles. They recommended institutional reforms that foster distributed authority structures and invest in conflict resolution mechanisms. Nonetheless, they pointed out the need for more empirical work on leadership under conditions of political instability and resource scarcity, especially in developing countries.

Ospina, Foldy & Fairhurst (2020) conducted an empirical study on leadership identity and power distribution in governance networks. The purpose was to understand how leaders co-construct authority in settings where formal hierarchical cues are minimized. They employed grounded theory methodology, analyzing extensive interview data from network leaders across North and South America. Their findings indicated that leadership authority is socially constructed through discourse, meaning-making, and negotiated legitimacy rather than positional status. They recommended leadership practices that emphasize narrative leadership, relational legitimacy, and fostering collective agency within networks. However, they also identified the gap that relatively little research has been conducted on how leadership narratives are contested or resisted within governance networks, particularly in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian contexts.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

4.0 FINDINGS

This study presented both a contextual and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Emerson & Nabatchi (2015) investigated integrative leadership within complex governance networks, particularly focusing on the environmental governance sector. Their purpose was to conceptualize how leadership changes within settings requiring high levels of cross-sector collaboration. Using an in-depth qualitative analysis based on 20 case studies across North America, they found that effective leadership in network governance was characterized by enabling shared purpose, building institutional capacity, and managing conflict constructively. They recommended institutional reforms that foster distributed authority structures and invest in conflict resolution mechanisms. On the other hand, the current study focused on investigating the rise of network governance and the changing nature of leadership power.

Secondly, a methodological gap also presents itself, for example, Emerson & Nabatchi (2015) used an in-depth qualitative analysis based on 20 case studies across North America, and they found that effective leadership in network governance was characterized by enabling shared purpose,

building institutional capacity, and managing conflict constructively. Whereas, the current study adopted a desktop research method.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concluded that the rise of network governance fundamentally transformed the traditional nature of leadership power across multiple governance contexts. Leadership no longer functioned predominantly through hierarchical control and directive authority, but rather through relational management, trust-building, facilitation, and the enabling of collaborative processes. Leaders operated within increasingly complex environments characterized by multiple, interdependent actors who shared responsibilities across organizational and sectoral boundaries. This fundamental shift necessitated new leadership competencies that emphasized negotiation, adaptability, and fostering shared goals among diverse stakeholders. The findings demonstrated that as governance structures evolved into networks, leadership became more distributed, and formal authority diminished, requiring a profound redefinition of what constituted effective leadership in both public and private sectors.

The research further established that the nature of leadership power was not universally consistent across all geographical contexts. Differences emerged based on political culture, economic maturity, societal trust levels, and administrative traditions. In the United States and the United Kingdom, leadership power was more associated with strategic brokering and coalition-building, while in Japan, leadership emphasized consensus-driven decision-making rooted in cultural expectations of harmony and group cohesion. In Brazil and Sub-Saharan African countries, leadership within networks often faced additional challenges due to weaker institutional frameworks and political volatility, requiring leaders to navigate both formal and informal governance structures simultaneously. These variations highlighted the importance of contextual factors in shaping how leadership power evolved under network governance conditions.

Moreover, the study emphasized that network governance did not eliminate traditional power dynamics but rather reconfigured them into new forms. Power continued to operate through control over resources, agenda-setting, and framing of information, albeit in more subtle and negotiated ways. Leaders with strong relational capital, strategic communication skills, and the ability to manage complexity wielded significant influence within networks. However, tensions persisted between inclusivity and efficiency, as more participatory governance often led to slower decision-making processes. Leadership success, therefore, depended on a delicate balancing act between facilitating broad participation and maintaining enough decisiveness to drive outcomes.

The study concluded that leadership development, institutional design, and public policy needed urgent realignment to meet the demands of the network era. Traditional leadership models rooted in command-and-control paradigms appeared increasingly obsolete. Instead, future leadership required fostering adaptive, resilient, and learning-oriented behaviors capable of thriving in non-linear, dynamic environments. The need for leadership training programs to integrate network thinking, complexity management, and collaborative competencies became evident. Furthermore, leadership effectiveness needed to be re-evaluated not just by goal attainment but also by the ability to sustain long-term relational networks that could adapt and innovate under changing conditions.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommended that future leadership theories explicitly integrate the realities of network governance by focusing on relational and collaborative dimensions of leadership power. Traditional leadership theories often assumed stable environments and hierarchical authority structures, assumptions which were no longer valid in contemporary governance contexts. It was proposed that new theoretical models should highlight the emergent, negotiated, and distributed nature of leadership, accounting for the complex interdependencies that characterize modern networks. Such models needed to incorporate insights from complexity theory, relational leadership, and adaptive leadership approaches to offer more realistic and practical frameworks for analyzing leadership effectiveness in networked settings.

In terms of practice, the study recommended significant shifts in leadership training and professional development programs. It was suggested that training should emphasize skills such as collaborative problem-solving, network weaving, conflict management, trust-building, and fostering collective agency. Practical leadership competencies needed to evolve beyond technical expertise and strategic command towards facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement processes. Leadership development curricula for both public and private sectors should embed network governance scenarios, case studies, and simulations to prepare future leaders for the demands of complex, adaptive systems. Additionally, leaders needed to develop cultural intelligence to manage the nuances of leadership power across different socio-political environments.

From a policy perspective, the study recommended that institutions adapt their governance frameworks to better support leadership practices suitable for networked environments. Policymakers were urged to design more flexible institutional arrangements that allowed for cross-sector collaborations, decentralized decision-making, and participatory governance. Regulatory frameworks needed to encourage multi-actor initiatives while providing mechanisms for accountability and conflict resolution within networks. Moreover, public policies should incentivize collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including civil society, private enterprises, and government agencies, to collectively address complex societal challenges through networked approaches.

The study further recommended that leadership evaluation metrics be redesigned to reflect the new realities of network governance. Rather than focusing solely on individual leader achievements or hierarchical outcomes, evaluation frameworks should assess leaders based on their ability to foster durable, adaptive networks capable of sustaining collective action over time. Leadership success needed to be measured by relational outcomes such as trust, legitimacy, shared ownership of goals, and network resilience. Institutional performance indicators should similarly shift towards valuing collaboration, innovation diffusion, and systemic learning facilitated by leadership behaviors.

In contribution to theory, the study made clear that leadership scholarship needed to engage more deeply with interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing from organizational studies, public administration, sociology, and complexity science. Researchers were encouraged to undertake longitudinal studies that tracked leadership evolution within networks over extended periods to better capture dynamic patterns and adaptive strategies. Comparative research across different cultural and institutional contexts was also recommended to build more globally representative leadership theories that accounted for diverse governance ecosystems and leadership traditions.

Finally, in contribution to both practice and policy, the study emphasized that network governance offered both opportunities and challenges for leadership. While it democratized access to leadership power and encouraged innovation, it also introduced new risks such as coordination failures, exclusion of marginalized voices, and difficulties in ensuring accountability. Therefore, it was recommended that both practitioners and policymakers remain vigilant to these risks and adopt adaptive strategies that reinforced inclusive leadership practices, enhanced transparency, and promoted capacity building within networked systems. Such proactive approaches would ensure that the rise of network governance led not only to more effective governance outcomes but also to more equitable and resilient leadership structures worldwide.

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