

FROM TRANSFORMATIONAL TO AGENTIC LEADERSHIP: RETHINKING LEADERSHIP STYLES IN AI-ENABLED ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

The transition from conventional artificial intelligence to increasingly autonomous, goal-directed, and agentic AI systems is altering not only organizational processes but also the assumptions underlying contemporary leadership theory. Transformational leadership has traditionally emphasized vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and the mobilization of human followers toward organizational change. In AI-enabled organizations, however, leaders increasingly operate within hybrid systems in which artificial agents can analyze information, generate alternatives, coordinate tasks, initiate actions, and exercise bounded forms of decision autonomy. This development raises a critical question: whether established leadership styles remain sufficient when leadership involves orchestrating interactions among humans, AI systems, and organizational structures rather than influencing human followers alone. This study therefore examines the conceptual transition from transformational to agentic leadership and identifies the leadership capabilities required for organizations operating with increasingly autonomous AI. Drawing on a structured conceptual synthesis of recent research on transformational and digital leadership, human–AI collaboration, AI-enabled decision-making, organizational transformation, and responsible AI, the study distinguishes agentic leadership from the simple use of AI by leaders. Agentic leadership is conceptualized as an emerging leadership orientation through which leaders strategically distribute agency across human and artificial actors while retaining responsibility for organizational purpose, ethical boundaries, and consequential decisions. The analysis indicates that transformational leadership remains relevant for articulating vision, motivating employees, and enabling change, but requires extension in environments where AI participates actively in cognition, coordination, and action. Five interconnected capabilities emerge as central to agentic leadership: adaptive orchestration of human and artificial agency; dynamic allocation of decision rights; development of human–AI collaborative capability; continuous learning and strategic experimentation; and responsible governance of AI autonomy. The study consequently proposes a conceptual progression from human-centred transformational leadership toward hybrid, agentic leadership rather than a complete replacement of established leadership theory. It argues that effective leaders in AI-enabled organizations will increasingly be evaluated not only by how effectively they influence people, but by how responsibly they configure systems of distributed intelligence and agency. The study contributes to emerging leadership research by reframing AI from a managerial support technology into an organizational actor whose increasing autonomy changes the architecture of leadership itself. Future empirical research should examine the proposed construct across industries, leadership levels, organizational cultures, and different degrees of AI-agent autonomy.

Keywords: Human–machine agency; Decision rights; Hybrid intelligence; Responsible autonomy; Organizational orchestration

Clasificare JEL : M12, M14, O33, L22

1. Introduction and context of the study

Transformational leadership has remained one of the most influential paradigms in contemporary organizational research because it explains how leaders mobilize followers through vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and the reframing of collective purpose. Its empirical robustness across performance criteria and organizational levels has been repeatedly demonstrated, reinforcing its relevance for periods of strategic and technological change [1]. Yet the conditions under which transformational leadership was originally theorized were overwhelmingly human-centred: leaders influenced followers, followers interpreted organizational goals, and technologies were principally treated as instruments embedded within human-controlled structures. The accelerating diffusion of artificial intelligence changes this assumption. Digital transformation has already altered organizational structures, coordination mechanisms, information flows, and managerial roles [2,3], while AI introduces a further shift by enabling computational systems to participate directly in analysis, recommendation, prediction, communication, and increasingly autonomous task execution. Leadership in such environments therefore involves not only influencing people through a compelling vision but also configuring the relationship between human judgment and increasingly agentic technological systems.

This shift is especially consequential because AI-enabled organizations differ qualitatively from organizations that merely digitize existing processes. Digital leadership research has emphasized the need for leaders to combine strategic vision with technological understanding, organizational adaptability, and the capacity to guide employees through digitally mediated change [2]. However, contemporary AI systems increasingly exceed the role of passive technological infrastructure. Intelligent agents can process information independently, generate alternatives, coordinate work, interact with other agents, and in bounded contexts initiate actions without continuous human intervention. Research on AI-enabled information systems has accordingly begun to conceptualize intelligent agents as participants in networked business systems rather than as conventional software tools [4], while work on machines as teammates has similarly argued that artificial systems can occupy increasingly collaborative roles within organizational teams [5]. The emergence of agentic AI consequently creates a new theoretical problem for leadership research: when non-human systems possess meaningful operational agency, the central leadership question shifts from how leaders use technology to how leaders allocate, coordinate, and govern agency across heterogeneous human and artificial actors.

The implications become particularly visible in organizational decision-making. AI has already challenged established decision structures by changing how information is produced, how alternatives are evaluated, and where decision authority resides [6]. The introduction of agentic information systems extends this challenge because delegation can occur not only from managers to employees but also from humans to artificial agents and, in complex systems, among technological artifacts themselves [7]. This redistribution of decision capacity introduces a distinction between AI-supported leadership and leadership in agentic organizational systems. In the first case, AI enhances the leader's cognitive capacity while ultimate agency remains clearly human; in the second, leaders must determine which decisions can be delegated, how much autonomy artificial agents should possess, under what conditions human intervention becomes mandatory, and how accountability should be assigned when outcomes emerge from distributed human–AI action. These questions are insufficiently addressed by leadership theories that presuppose a predominantly human architecture of agency.

At the same time, the rise of agentic systems does not invalidate transformational leadership. Its core functions remain highly relevant in AI-enabled organizations because technological transformation still depends on the creation of meaning, employee commitment, learning, experimentation, and the ability to mobilize organizational actors around uncertain change. Research on leadership in digital environments consistently demonstrates that technological transformation

requires more than technical implementation and depends on leadership capabilities that align strategy, people, culture, and technological resources [2,3,8]. Recent studies similarly show that AI is reshaping leadership competencies and managerial practices rather than eliminating the need for leadership [9,10]. The theoretical problem is therefore not that transformational leadership has become obsolete, but that it provides an incomplete account of leadership where artificial systems themselves participate in cognition, coordination, and action. The emerging challenge is to extend the leadership lens from human influence toward the orchestration of distributed intelligence and distributed agency.

Human–AI collaboration research provides an important bridge for this extension. Studies increasingly reject a strict substitution logic and instead conceptualize AI as a complementary organizational actor whose analytical and computational capacities can be combined with human contextual judgment, creativity, social intelligence, and ethical reasoning [5,11]. Trust is central to this relationship because effective collaboration requires neither uncritical reliance nor generalized resistance, but calibrated dependence on AI according to task characteristics, system reliability, and organizational context [12]. Leadership therefore acquires a dual responsibility: enabling employees to exploit AI capabilities while preserving their capacity to challenge, override, and contextualize algorithmic outputs. Empirical and conceptual work on leadership and human–AI collaboration indicates that leadership conditions materially influence the quality of this interaction [13], while recent measurement research suggests that the field is beginning to operationalize leadership as a determinant of effective human–AI collaboration [14]. Nevertheless, much of this literature still treats collaboration as an interaction between human workers and AI tools rather than as a broader organizational architecture in which autonomous agents may exercise bounded decision authority.

The development of agentic AI intensifies the conceptual importance of this distinction. Recent research on AI agents and agentic systems emphasizes that increasing autonomy brings questions of agency, delegation, coordination, trust, and governance to the foreground [15], while contemporary syntheses describe agentic AI as an emerging organizational phenomenon requiring new forms of human control and governance [16]. As AI systems acquire the ability to pursue goals across multiple steps rather than merely respond to discrete prompts, leadership increasingly involves the intentional design of boundaries around machine autonomy. This alters the architecture of leadership because decision rights can no longer be understood solely as hierarchical allocations among human actors; they must also specify which forms of organizational agency can be delegated to artificial systems, how such delegation is monitored, and when responsibility must revert unequivocally to human decision-makers. In this context, governance ceases to be an external compliance function and becomes an intrinsic component of leadership itself.

This theoretical reorientation also exposes a series of unresolved gaps. First, leadership theory and research on distributed human–AI agency remain insufficiently integrated, despite the growing organizational presence of intelligent and increasingly autonomous systems. Second, the constructs of digital leadership, AI leadership, AI-augmented leadership, algorithmic leadership, and emerging forms of agentic leadership often overlap conceptually, creating ambiguity regarding what is genuinely novel. Third, although research has examined AI-supported decision-making and delegation, considerably less attention has been devoted to the systematic allocation of decision rights between human and artificial actors under different levels of autonomy [6,7]. Fourth, human agency, deskilling, overreliance, and accountability are frequently treated as implementation risks rather than as constitutive elements of leadership design. Finally, the literature remains fragmented across individual, team, and organizational levels, despite evidence that AI simultaneously affects employee experience, team coordination, managerial decision-making, and organizational structure [17]. These limitations indicate the need for a more integrative leadership perspective capable of connecting leader-level capabilities with team-level human–AI collaboration and organizational-level outcomes.

Against this background, the present study examines the conceptual transition from transformational to agentic leadership in AI-enabled organizations. It defines Agentic Leadership as

a leadership orientation through which human leaders purposefully configure, coordinate, and govern the distribution of agency, decision rights, and accountability across human and autonomous artificial actors while preserving strategic coherence, ethical responsibility, and meaningful human control. The study does not position agentic leadership as a replacement for transformational leadership; rather, it conceptualizes it as an extension required by organizational environments in which agency is increasingly distributed across human and artificial participants. Building on established leadership theory, digital transformation research, human–AI collaboration, agentic information systems, and recent AI leadership scholarship, the analysis investigates five interconnected capabilities that characterize this emerging orientation: adaptive orchestration of human and artificial agency, dynamic allocation of decision rights, development of human–AI collaborative capability, continuous learning and strategic experimentation, and responsible governance of AI autonomy. By integrating these dimensions, the study seeks to clarify how leadership theory may evolve when the central leadership problem is no longer exclusively how to influence human followers, but how to design and govern organizational systems in which both humans and artificial agents contribute to collective action.

2. Literature Review

Transformational leadership provides the theoretical point of departure for examining leadership under conditions of technological discontinuity because it explains how leaders generate commitment to change through vision, intellectual stimulation, motivation, and the transformation of followers’ assumptions about organizational possibilities. Its relevance is supported by extensive empirical evidence demonstrating relationships with performance across different criteria and levels of analysis [1]. Nevertheless, transformational leadership was conceptualized within an essentially human-centred architecture in which leaders influence human followers and technologies function primarily as resources through which organizational objectives are pursued. Digitalization began to challenge this architecture by altering communication, coordination, knowledge flows, and organizational boundaries. Cortellazzo et al. demonstrate that leadership in a digitalized environment increasingly requires leaders to navigate technological complexity while simultaneously maintaining relational and organizational capabilities [2]. Digital transformation research similarly establishes that technological change extends beyond technology adoption to encompass changes in structures, processes, capabilities, and value creation [3]. The multidisciplinary perspective advanced by Verhoef et al. further indicates that digital transformation requires coordinated organizational adaptation rather than isolated technological implementation [8]. These developments broaden traditional leadership theory, but they do not yet fully address organizational environments in which technological systems themselves possess bounded capacity for autonomous action.

Artificial intelligence intensifies this theoretical challenge because its organizational role increasingly extends from information processing toward participation in decision and coordination processes. Unlike conventional digital technologies that primarily mediate human activity, AI systems can analyze complex information, generate recommendations, identify patterns, and increasingly perform sequences of tasks with limited direct intervention. Research on AI-enabled information systems accordingly describes intelligent agents as participants within networked organizational arrangements [4], while Seeber et al. conceptualize AI systems as potential teammates whose capabilities can become integrated into collaborative work [5]. This transition is theoretically significant because leadership can no longer be interpreted exclusively as a relationship between human leaders and human followers. When artificial agents contribute to organizational cognition and action, leaders must coordinate heterogeneous capabilities and establish boundaries concerning what artificial systems may analyze, recommend, decide, or execute. The resulting leadership environment is therefore characterized by **distributed agency**, in which organizational action can emerge through interdependent contributions from human and artificial actors.

Human–AI collaboration research provides a second foundation for understanding this development. The emerging literature generally moves away from a simple substitution perspective toward complementarity, in which AI contributes computational scale, analytical consistency, and information-processing capacity while humans contribute contextual interpretation, social understanding, creativity, ethical reasoning, and accountability. Kolbjørnsrud argues that effective human–AI collaboration requires deliberate organizational design rather than merely placing AI technologies within existing structures [11]. This distinction has important leadership implications because complementarity is not an inherent property of technology; it depends on how tasks, responsibilities, workflows, and interaction mechanisms are configured. Leadership therefore becomes responsible for determining not only whether AI should be adopted but how human and artificial capabilities should be combined. Evidence linking leadership with human–AI collaboration supports this interpretation [13], while the development of a specific measurement scale for leadership and human–AI collaboration demonstrates that the relationship is becoming sufficiently mature for systematic empirical investigation [14].

Trust further complicates collaborative arrangements because the effectiveness of human–AI interaction depends on whether organizational actors rely on technological recommendations appropriately rather than maximally. Glikson and Woolley’s review demonstrates that human trust in AI is shaped by characteristics of the system, task, representation, and interaction environment [12]. In leadership terms, the relevant objective is therefore calibrated reliance rather than generalized acceptance of artificial intelligence. Employees who systematically distrust AI may fail to capture valuable analytical capabilities, whereas employees who defer excessively to algorithmic recommendations may weaken professional judgment and become vulnerable to erroneous, biased, or contextually inappropriate outputs. This tension becomes increasingly important as artificial agents acquire greater autonomy because the consequences of misplaced trust can extend from accepting a recommendation to allowing a system to initiate organizational action. Agentic leadership must consequently preserve meaningful human agency while enabling organizations to exploit the advantages of machine intelligence, requiring leaders to cultivate both technological confidence and the capacity for informed challenge.

The redistribution of decision authority represents the clearest conceptual distinction between conventional AI-enabled leadership and the agentic leadership proposed in this study. Shrestha et al. demonstrate that artificial intelligence can alter organizational decision-making structures by changing how decisions are generated and where authority is located [6]. Baird and Maruping develop this issue more explicitly through their theoretical framework of delegation to and from agentic information-system artifacts [7]. Together, these perspectives suggest that decision rights in AI-enabled organizations can no longer be conceptualized solely as allocations among executives, managers, teams, and employees. As artificial systems acquire functional autonomy, organizations must determine which tasks and decisions may be delegated to AI, the conditions under which such delegation remains valid, the thresholds requiring human intervention, and the location of final accountability. This produces a fundamental governance question for leadership: *who should decide what, under which level of AI autonomy, and with what accountability structure?* Agentic leadership becomes theoretically meaningful precisely because it addresses this redistribution of organizational agency rather than simply describing technologically proficient leadership.

Existing scholarship on digital and AI-Leadership provides important elements of this emerging orientation but remains conceptually fragmented. Research on leadership competencies in the AI era identifies technological understanding, adaptive capability, ethical awareness, decision competence, and human-centred skills as increasingly important [9], while work on AI-driven leader capabilities suggests that leadership in technologically intensive organizations should be understood through a dynamic capability perspective. Madanchian et al. similarly show that AI is transforming leadership practices and managerial processes [10]. These studies establish that leadership

competencies must evolve alongside technological capability, yet they primarily examine how AI changes the work or capabilities of human leaders. The distinction developed here is that AI-supported leadership concerns leaders using AI to improve their own analysis and action, whereas agentic leadership concerns leaders designing and governing organizational systems in which artificial actors possess delegated capacity to act. Digital leadership, AI leadership, AI-augmented leadership, and agentic leadership should therefore not be treated as interchangeable constructs.

Recent research on agentic systems makes this distinction increasingly consequential. Hughes et al. identify agency, delegation, collaboration, and governance among the central issues emerging from AI agents and agentic systems [15], while recent synthesis of the agentic AI literature emphasizes the tension between expanding machine autonomy and maintaining appropriate forms of human control [16]. The technological progression from systems that respond to individual requests toward systems capable of pursuing goals, decomposing tasks, coordinating actions, and operating across multi-stage processes transforms the organizational meaning of autonomy. Leadership must consequently establish not only strategic objectives but also the permissible scope of artificial agency. Responsible autonomy therefore requires an explicit relationship among delegated authority, monitoring capacity, intervention rights, and accountability. Without such alignment, organizations may obtain efficiency from AI delegation while simultaneously creating ambiguity concerning responsibility for decisions and outcomes.

These developments also reveal a multilevel problem that existing leadership research has not fully resolved. Bankins et al. show that AI produces consequences across individual, team, and organizational levels [17], implying that leadership responses cannot be confined to the behaviour of individual executives. At the individual level, AI affects expertise, trust, autonomy, and professional judgment; at the team level, it changes collaboration and coordination; and at the organizational level, it can modify structures, decision rights, governance mechanisms, and capability configurations. Agentic leadership must therefore connect these levels by translating leader-level capabilities into effective human–AI collaboration and, ultimately, organizational outcomes. This multilevel perspective is particularly relevant to educational institutions and other knowledge-intensive organizations, where professional judgment, distributed expertise, and accountability remain central even as AI becomes increasingly integrated into administrative, analytical, and decision-support processes. It also exposes an important methodological gap: the rapidly developing literature remains dominated by conceptual analyses, reviews, and cross-sectional investigations, leaving limited longitudinal evidence concerning how leadership changes after increasingly autonomous AI systems become embedded in organizational routines.

The reviewed literature consequently suggests a progressive expansion in the locus of leadership as AI evolves from a technological resource toward an organizational actor with bounded autonomy. Figure 1 synthesizes this progression, illustrating how transformational leadership capabilities remain foundational while digital, AI-augmented, and ultimately agentic organizational conditions introduce additional requirements concerning distributed agency, decision rights, and accountability



Source: Authors' own conceptual contribution

Figure 1: From Transformational to Agentic Leadership in AI-Enabled Organizations

Taken together, the literature indicates a progressive expansion of leadership from human-centred influence toward the orchestration of increasingly complex socio-technical systems. Transformational leadership remains indispensable for vision, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and organizational change [1], while digital leadership adds capabilities associated with technological transformation [2,3], and human-AI collaboration research introduces complementarity, trust, and hybrid forms of work [5,11–14]. Research on AI-enabled decision structures and agentic information systems then introduces a qualitatively different problem: the distribution of agency and decision authority between humans and artificial systems [6,7]. The remaining theoretical gap lies in integrating these streams into a leadership construct capable of explaining how human leaders should configure, coordinate, and govern distributed agency while preserving strategic coherence and meaningful human accountability. The present study addresses this gap by conceptualizing *agentic leadership as an extension of transformational leadership for organizational environments characterized by bounded AI autonomy*, structured around five interdependent capabilities: adaptive orchestration of human and artificial agency, dynamic allocation of decision rights, development of human-AI collaborative capability, continuous learning and strategic experimentation, and responsible governance of AI autonomy. This synthesis establishes the conceptual basis for the methodology and subsequent development of the proposed agentic leadership framework.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a structured conceptual synthesis to examine how the emergence of increasingly autonomous AI systems changes the theoretical requirements of leadership in AI-enabled organizations. A conceptual design is appropriate because the research objective is not to estimate the effect of a predefined leadership style on organizational performance, but to integrate previously separated theoretical streams and determine whether their intersection supports a distinctive leadership orientation. The analysis therefore brings together research on transformational and digital leadership, organizational digital transformation, human-AI collaboration, AI-enabled decision-making, agentic information systems, leadership competencies, and emerging agentic AI. This approach is consistent with the present state of the field, in which evidence concerning AI and leadership is dispersed across management, organizational behavior, information systems, and human-AI interaction research, while scholarship specifically addressing agentic AI remains comparatively recent [15,16].

The analytical corpus was constructed from the peer-reviewed literature supplied for the study, prioritizing publications that contribute directly to one or more elements of the proposed theoretical transition. Foundational research was retained where necessary to establish the conceptual properties and empirical relevance of transformational leadership [1], while more recent literature was emphasized for digital transformation [3,8], organizational AI and decision structures [6,17], human–AI collaboration [5], agentic information systems [4,7], and AI-era leadership competencies [9,10]. The study consequently uses purposive theoretical selection rather than claiming an exhaustive systematic review. This distinction is methodologically important: the purpose is to achieve conceptual coverage of the mechanisms necessary for theory development rather than to calculate publication frequencies, pooled effects, or bibliometric relationships.

The analysis proceeded through comparative conceptual coding. Each source was examined for constructs and relationships concerning leadership functions, technological agency, human–AI interaction, task delegation, decision authority, trust, organizational learning, human oversight, accountability, and AI autonomy. Particular attention was given to whether the literature conceptualized AI as a passive tool, decision-support resource, collaborative partner, or agent capable of bounded autonomous action. This distinction provided the principal analytical axis for comparing established leadership perspectives because increasing technological agency changes the organizational problem confronting leaders: the relevant question progresses from how technology can support leadership toward how leadership should configure and govern systems in which artificial actors participate directly in organizational action.

A second analytical stage compared the explanatory scope of transformational leadership with the requirements identified in AI-enabled organizational research. Transformational leadership was assessed in relation to its established functions of vision articulation, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and change mobilization, while digital and AI leadership research was examined for capabilities associated with technological adaptation, organizational reconfiguration, and AI-supported management. These characteristics were then contrasted with requirements emerging from human–AI and agentic-system research, particularly delegation, distributed agency, trust calibration, decision-right allocation, human intervention, and accountability. The comparison was designed to identify theoretical continuity as well as discontinuity, thereby avoiding the unsupported assumption that emerging AI technologies render established leadership theory obsolete.

The final synthesis organized the resulting mechanisms into five interconnected capabilities: *adaptive orchestration of human and artificial agency, dynamic allocation of decision rights, development of human–AI collaborative capability, continuous learning and strategic experimentation, and responsible governance of AI autonomy*. These capabilities were retained when they addressed organizational requirements that become increasingly consequential as AI progresses from decision support toward bounded autonomous action and when they could be theoretically connected to the supplied leadership and organizational AI literature. The resulting construct was defined as agentic leadership and positioned as an extension of transformational leadership rather than an alternative that eliminates its established human-centred functions.

The methodological outcome is therefore a theory-building framework rather than an empirically validated leadership model. Relationships among agentic leadership, human–AI collaboration, decision structures, and organizational outcomes are interpreted as theoretically derived propositions and should not be understood as demonstrated causal effects. This limitation is particularly relevant because the rapid evolution of agentic AI currently exceeds the availability of longitudinal organizational evidence [16]. The proposed construct consequently requires subsequent validation through comparative case research, longitudinal designs, multilevel studies, and scale-development procedures capable of distinguishing agentic leadership empirically from transformational, digital, and AI-augmented leadership. Within these boundaries, the structured conceptual synthesis provides a transparent basis for examining how established leadership theory

may be extended when organizational agency and decision authority become increasingly distributed between human and artificial actors.

4. Results and Discussion

The conceptual synthesis indicates that the transition from transformational to agentic leadership should be understood as *an extension of leadership architecture rather than a substitution of leadership styles*. Transformational leadership retains substantial explanatory value because vision, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and commitment to change remain essential when organizations adopt increasingly sophisticated AI [1]. What changes is the configuration of actors through which organizational objectives are pursued. In conventional transformational leadership, agency is concentrated primarily in human leaders and followers; in AI-enabled organizations, cognition, coordination, recommendation, and selected forms of execution can be distributed across human and artificial actors [4,5,7]. The principal result of the analysis is therefore that agentic leadership becomes relevant when AI moves beyond supporting human decisions and acquires bounded functional autonomy. Under these conditions, leadership must simultaneously influence people and design the distribution of agency within the organizational system.

The synthesis identifies five interdependent capabilities that distinguish this emerging orientation. The first is *adaptive orchestration of human and artificial agency*, through which leaders determine how complementary capabilities should be combined rather than approaching AI exclusively through substitution. Human actors remain particularly important where contextual interpretation, ethical judgment, creativity, interpersonal understanding, and responsibility are required, whereas AI can provide analytical scale, rapid information processing, pattern identification, and increasingly autonomous execution.

The second capability is *dynamic allocation of decision rights*. Existing research demonstrates that AI can alter organizational decision structures [6] and that delegation can occur between human actors and agentic information-system artifacts [7]. Agentic leadership consequently requires decisions about what can be delegated, to what degree, for how long, and under which conditions authority must return to a human decision-maker. Decision rights should therefore be treated as dynamic organizational design variables rather than permanent allocations attached exclusively to formal positions.

The third capability, *human–AI collaborative capability*, concerns the organizational conditions through which distributed intelligence becomes productive rather than disruptive. Evidence connecting leadership and human–AI collaboration suggests that leadership practices influence how effectively human expertise and artificial capabilities are integrated. Trust is particularly important, although effective collaboration does not imply maximizing trust in AI. As Glikson and Woolley demonstrate, trust depends on multiple characteristics of the system and interaction context [12]; consequently, leaders should seek calibrated reliance in which confidence corresponds to demonstrated technological capability and task requirements. This finding has an important implication for leadership development: AI literacy must include not only the ability to use intelligent systems but also the capacity to recognize their limitations, interrogate outputs, identify situations requiring human escalation, and preserve independent professional judgment. In knowledge-intensive settings, including higher education, this capability becomes particularly consequential because organizational effectiveness depends on expertise that should be augmented rather than progressively displaced by automated cognition.

The fourth capability is *continuous learning and strategic experimentation*. Digital transformation is inherently associated with organizational reconfiguration rather than one-time technological implementation, while contemporary research on AI leadership competencies similarly indicates that leaders require adaptive capabilities capable of evolving alongside technological change [9,10]. Agentic AI intensifies this requirement because the capabilities assigned to an artificial agent may change as models, interfaces, data environments, and organizational applications

evolve. Leadership arrangements that are appropriate for one level of technological autonomy may therefore become inadequate as systems acquire greater capacity for independent planning and execution. Agentic leadership consequently requires recurrent reassessment of task boundaries, decision authority, employee competencies, and oversight arrangements. From this perspective, experimentation should not imply unrestricted technological deployment but controlled organizational learning in which expanded autonomy is accompanied by evidence concerning reliability, organizational consequences, and human capacity to intervene.

The fifth capability, *responsible governance of AI autonomy*, differentiates agentic leadership most clearly from technology-oriented interpretations of digital leadership. Emerging agentic AI research places autonomy, decision agency, human control, and governance among the central organizational challenges associated with autonomous systems [15,16]. The synthesis suggests that greater AI autonomy should not automatically entail reduced human accountability. On the contrary, increasing delegation creates a stronger requirement to specify responsibility for objectives, system boundaries, monitoring, intervention, and consequential outcomes. Leadership and governance therefore become increasingly intertwined: leaders must determine not simply whether an artificial agent can perform a task, but whether delegating that task is strategically appropriate, ethically defensible, sufficiently transparent, and compatible with meaningful human oversight. Responsible autonomy is thus better conceptualized as *bounded and governable agency* than as unrestricted technological independence.

The five capabilities identified through the conceptual synthesis operate across interconnected levels rather than as independent leadership attributes. As illustrated in Figure 2, leader-level agentic capabilities shape the conditions for team-level human–AI collaboration and, through these mechanisms, influence organizational outcomes, while the appropriate distribution of agency remains contingent on AI autonomy, task characteristics, organizational risk, and governance maturity.



Source: Authors' own conceptual contribution

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Agentic Leadership in AI-Enabled Organizations

Taken together, these capabilities support a conceptual progression from transformational through digitally enabled and AI-augmented leadership toward agentic leadership. The progression should not be interpreted as a linear historical replacement in which each new leadership form invalidates the previous one. Instead, successive technological conditions add leadership requirements. Transformational leadership contributes vision and mobilization; digital leadership introduces the capability to navigate technological transformation; AI-augmented leadership incorporates machine intelligence into managerial cognition; and agentic leadership adds the orchestration of distributed agency, dynamic decision rights, and governance of artificial autonomy. This distinction provides an important construct boundary. A leader who uses generative AI to analyze information remains an AI-supported leader; a leader who designs an organizational system in which autonomous agents receive tasks, initiate actions, collaborate with employees, and operate within explicitly governed decision boundaries performs an.

This progression also reveals a central paradox. Increasing AI autonomy can expand organizational responsiveness and analytical capacity while simultaneously weakening human agency if delegation becomes excessive or poorly governed. The multilevel effects of AI identified by Bankins et al. indicate that technological adoption can reshape individual experiences, team processes, and organizational structures simultaneously [17]. At the individual level, excessive reliance may reduce opportunities to exercise judgment; at the team level, unclear boundaries between human and machine contributions can complicate coordination; and at the organizational level, poorly specified decision rights may separate effective control from formal accountability.

Agentic leadership must therefore manage a moving boundary between productive delegation and cognitive displacement. The objective is not maximum AI autonomy, but an allocation of autonomy proportional to system capability, task consequences, uncertainty, and the organization's capacity to maintain effective oversight.

These findings have particular implications for leadership and management in educational and other knowledge-intensive organizations. Universities increasingly operate through digitally mediated systems while simultaneously carrying responsibilities for professional autonomy, academic integrity, institutional accountability, and continuous development of human expertise. The logic of agentic leadership suggests that introducing autonomous AI into such environments requires more than technological competence among institutional leaders. Leaders must determine which analytical, administrative, educational, or coordination activities may appropriately be delegated while protecting domains in which human judgment, professional responsibility, and stakeholder legitimacy remain indispensable. Agentic leadership therefore complements rather than contradicts human-centred leadership: its purpose is to ensure that increasing machine agency strengthens organizational capability without progressively transferring responsibility away from accountable human actors.

The resulting conceptual model positions *agentic leadership as an organizational orchestration capability linking AI autonomy to human–AI collaboration and organizational outcomes through the allocation of decision rights and responsible governance*. At the leader level, the model requires the capacity to configure agency and establish strategic and ethical boundaries; at the team level, these choices shape trust, role clarity, collaboration, and the preservation of human judgment; and at the organizational level, they influence adaptability, innovation, decision quality, resilience, and accountability. The proposed relationship can therefore be expressed as a multilevel sequence in which leader-level agentic capabilities shape team-level human–AI collaborative effectiveness, which subsequently contributes to organizational outcomes, while the degree of AI autonomy and governance maturity condition these relationships. This structure also provides a basis for future empirical operationalization, including the development of measures capable of distinguishing agentic leadership from established transformational and digital leadership constructs.

The analysis ultimately suggests that the defining question for leadership in AI-enabled organizations is shifting from How leaders can use AI effectively toward how leaders should distribute and govern agency when AI can act. This distinction constitutes the principal theoretical contribution of the study. Transformational leadership remains essential for mobilizing people toward organizational change, but agentic environments introduce responsibilities that cannot be explained solely through interpersonal influence: leaders must determine the architecture of human–machine authority itself. Agentic leadership consequently extends transformational leadership from the mobilization of human followers toward the purposeful orchestration of distributed human and artificial agency, while retaining human responsibility for strategic purpose, ethical boundaries, and consequential organizational decisions.

5. Conclusions

The emergence of increasingly autonomous and goal-directed AI systems requires a reconsideration of leadership theory that extends beyond the established distinction between traditional and digital leadership. This study argues that transformational leadership remains highly relevant because organizational adaptation to AI continues to depend on vision, intellectual stimulation, motivation, and the mobilization of people around technological change. Nevertheless, these capabilities do not fully explain leadership in environments where artificial systems participate directly in analysis, coordination, decision-making, and task execution. As AI progresses from decision support toward bounded autonomous action, leadership increasingly involves configuring relationships among human judgment, artificial agency, decision authority, and accountability. Agentic leadership should therefore be understood not as a replacement for transformational

leadership, but as its extension into organizational systems in which consequential agency is no longer exclusively human.

The conceptual synthesis identifies five interconnected capabilities that distinguish this emerging leadership orientation: adaptive orchestration of human and artificial agency, dynamic allocation of decision rights, development of human–AI collaborative capability, continuous learning and strategic experimentation, and responsible governance of AI autonomy. Their integration differentiates agentic leadership from digital or AI-supported leadership. Whereas AI-supported leadership primarily concerns the use of artificial intelligence to enhance managerial cognition and action, agentic leadership addresses the organizational consequences of allowing artificial systems to exercise delegated agency. The central leadership problem consequently shifts from deciding how AI should assist leaders to determining who - or what - should decide, under which degree of autonomy, and within what accountability structure. This shift establishes decision-right allocation as a defining mechanism through which agentic leadership connects technological autonomy with organizational responsibility.

A central implication is that increasing AI autonomy must not produce a corresponding erosion of human accountability. Emerging research on agentic systems places autonomy, delegation, human control, and accountability among the defining challenges associated with this technological transition. Leaders must therefore establish the objectives assigned to artificial agents, determine the boundaries of permissible action, specify escalation and intervention mechanisms, and preserve human responsibility for consequential decisions. The objective is neither maximum automation nor permanent human intervention, but a context-sensitive allocation of agency in which the degree of delegated autonomy reflects system capability, task complexity, organizational risk, and the availability of effective oversight. This principle is particularly important in knowledge-intensive and educational organizations, where professional judgment, institutional legitimacy, ethical responsibility, and the continuing development of human expertise cannot be treated as residual functions after automation.

The study is conceptual and its propositions consequently require empirical validation. Future research should examine agentic leadership across industries, organizational cultures, leadership levels, and different degrees of AI autonomy, while explicitly distinguishing individual-, team-, and organizational-level effects. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for establishing how leadership practices evolve as organizations progress from conventional and generative AI toward autonomous agentic systems, whereas comparative case studies, field experiments, and multilevel models could test relationships among leader-level agentic capabilities, team-level human–AI collaboration, and organizational outcomes. A further priority is the development and validation of an agentic leadership measurement scale with demonstrated discriminant validity relative to transformational, digital, and AI-augmented leadership. Such research should also investigate whether excessive delegation generates deskilling, automation bias, declining human judgment, or accountability gaps, and how governance maturity moderates these effects.

Ultimately, the transition from transformational to agentic leadership reflects a deeper transformation in the architecture of organizational agency. Transformational leadership remains essential for mobilizing people around purpose and change, but AI-enabled organizations increasingly require leaders to determine where machine agency should begin, where it should end, and where human responsibility must remain non-delegable. The principal theoretical contribution of agentic leadership therefore lies in extending leadership from the influence of human followers toward the purposeful orchestration of distributed human–AI agency. As artificial systems acquire greater capacity to act rather than merely inform, effective leadership will depend not simply on using more capable AI, but on designing organizational arrangements in which technological autonomy remains strategically coherent, ethically governed, and meaningfully accountable to human decision-makers.

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