

Leadership profiles in a multinational industry: how close or how far from relational leadership?

Perfis da liderança em uma indústria multinacional: quão perto ou quão distante da liderança relacional?

Perfiles de liderazgo en una industria multinacional: ¿qué tan cerca o qué tan lejos del liderazgo relacional?

Neile Patricia Ferreira Azevedo

Pontifícia Universidade Católica de MG (PUC Minas), Programa de Pós-graduação stricto-sensu em Administração (PPGA), Minas Gerais, Brasil.

Endereço: Av. Itaú, 525 - Prédio Redentoristas, Bairro Dom Cabral, Belo Horizonte - MG, CEP 30535-012.

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0180-6781>

e-mail: neilepatricia77@gmail.com

Antônio Moreira de Carvalho Neto

Pontifícia Universidade Católica de MG (PUC Minas), Programa de Pós-graduação stricto-sensu em Administração (PPGA), Minas Gerais, Brasil.

Endereço: Av. Itaú, 525 - Prédio Redentoristas, Bairro Dom Cabral, Belo Horizonte - MG, CEP 30535-012.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5439-2845>

e-mail: carvalhoneto@pucminas.br

Daniela Martins Diniz

Universidade Federal de São João del Rei (UFSJ), Departamento de Ciências Administrativas e Contábeis (DECAC), São João del Rei, Minas Gerais, Brasil.

Endereço: Avenida Visconde do Rio Preto, s/nº (Rodovia BR 494, km 02), bairro Colônia do Bengo, São João del-Rei - MG, CEP 36301-360

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1110-756X>

e-mail: danidiniz09@yahoo.com.br

Abstract: *The vast majority of research on relational leadership is theoretical and qualitative in nature, with few studies attempting to define more objective characteristics and attributes of relational leadership. Addressing this gap, this study sought to measure the perception of 99 managers from a multinational industry regarding leadership characteristics found in the L.A.B.E.L. scale, particularly those related to the organizational dimension of the model by Mendes, Sant'Anna, and Diniz (2021). It is worth noting that the L.A.B.E.L. scale is a validated instrument in Brazil and internationally, designed to assess people's psychological profiles. The study results show, firstly, that of the 22 indicators of the organizational dimension of the model by Mendes, Sant'Anna, and Diniz (2021), twelve are close to the characteristics of a relational leader, while ten are far from them. Nevertheless, of the eight statements that received the highest ratings from the managers participating in the research, seven contradict the notion of relational leadership (for example, the organization's leadership is results-oriented and control-driven, and relationships within the organization are vertical). On the other hand, although focused on results and control, the findings also reveal that leaders value the human dimension. These findings may highlight a realistic view of leadership, which in practice sometimes adopts behaviors focused on the human dimension, and sometimes emphasizes procedural and control aspects.*

Keywords: *Relational Leadership; L.A.B.E.L scale*

Resumo: A grande maioria das pesquisas sobre liderança relacional é de natureza teórica e qualitativa, sendo raros os estudos que tentaram traçar características e atributos mais objetivos da liderança relacional. Partindo dessa lacuna, este trabalho buscou mensurar a percepção de 99 gestores de uma indústria multinacional sobre características de liderança constantes na escala L.A.B.E.L., particularmente àquelas relacionados à dimensão organizacional do modelo de Mendes, Sant’Anna, Diniz (2021). Ressalta-se que a escala L.A.B.E.L. é um instrumento validado no Brasil e internacionalmente, voltado para avaliar perfis psicológicos das pessoas. Os resultados do estudo evidenciam, primeiramente, que dos 22 indicadores da dimensão organizacional do modelo de Mendes, Sant’Anna, Diniz (2021), doze se aproximam das características de um líder relacional, enquanto dez se distanciam. Não obstante, das oito primeiras afirmativas que obtiveram as percepções mais elevadas na visão dos gestores participantes da pesquisa, sete são contrárias à noção de liderança relacional (como por exemplo, as lideranças da organização são orientadas a resultados e ao controle e as relações na organização são verticalizadas). Por outro lado, embora focados em resultados e controle, os resultados obtidos revelam também que os líderes valorizam a dimensão humana. Tais achados talvez evidenciem uma visão real das lideranças que, na prática, ora adotam comportamentos focados na dimensão humana, ora enfatizam aspectos processuais e de controle.

Palavras-chave: Liderança Relacional; Escala L.A.B.E.L.

Resumen: La gran mayoría de las investigaciones sobre liderazgo relacional son teóricas y cualitativas, con pocos estudios que intenten definir características y atributos más objetivos de este tipo de liderazgo. Para abordar esta brecha, este estudio buscó medir la percepción de 99 gerentes de una empresa multinacional sobre las características de liderazgo encontradas en la escala L.A.B.E.L., particularmente aquellas relacionadas con la dimensión organizacional del modelo de Mendes, Sant’Anna y Diniz (2021). Cabe destacar que la escala L.A.B.E.L. es un instrumento validado en Brasil e internacionalmente, diseñado para evaluar los perfiles psicológicos de las personas. Los resultados del estudio muestran, en primer lugar, que de los 22 indicadores de la dimensión organizacional del modelo de Mendes, Sant’Anna y Diniz (2021), doce se aproximan a las características de un líder relacional, mientras que diez se alejan de ellas. Sin embargo, de las ocho afirmaciones que recibieron las mejores calificaciones por parte de los gerentes participantes en la investigación, siete contradicen la noción de liderazgo relacional (por ejemplo, el liderazgo de la organización está orientado a los resultados y al control, y las relaciones dentro de la organización son verticales). Por otro lado, si bien se centran en los resultados y el control, los hallazgos también revelan que los líderes valoran la dimensión humana. Estos hallazgos pueden resaltar una visión realista del liderazgo, que en la práctica a veces adopta comportamientos centrados en la dimensión humana y otras veces enfatiza los aspectos procedimentales y de control.

Palabras Clave: Liderazgo relacional; escala L.A.B.E.L.

Introduction

Leadership is one of the organizational behavior constructs most studied in academic literature. Following studies in the field of leadership, some approaches have gained prominence at both the academic and business levels. Among them, transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), multidimensional and multi-faceted leadership (Yammarino, Dansereau & Kennedy, 2001), and, more recently, relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2003; 2006), point to new ways of understanding the phenomenon of leadership in contexts marked by increasingly complex technological forces (Sant’Anna, Nelson & Carvalho-Neto, 2015; Mendes, Sant’Anna and Diniz, 2021).

The relational approach starts from the premise that leadership stems from the interrelation of different dimensions – beyond the unidirectional leader-follower relationship – encompassing individual levels, but also organizational and societal levels (Sant’Anna, Nelson & Carvalho-Neto, 2015; Mendes, Sant’Anna and Diniz, 2021; Kantovitz, Sant’Anna and Diniz, 2024). Its focus is, therefore, on the complex interactions underlying the dynamics of influence and change, in different spheres and levels.

Unlike approaches that focus on investigating traits or behaviors effective in leadership, mostly centered on the individual or, at most, on the leader-follower dyad, relational leadership emphasizes the complex network of relationships through which leadership is built, activated, exercised, and reconfigured (Sant'Anna, Nelson & Carvalho-Neto, 2015; D'ávila et al., 2020). The relational approach also assumes that leadership is independent of hierarchy (Hunt, 2004). Therefore, leadership is a relational property, socially constructed and changeable over time.

Despite its relevant contributions, relational leadership is a relatively recent topic, the debate of which began with the studies of Uhl-Bien (2003; 2006). In Brazil, in particular, studies that investigate leadership from a relational perspective are rare, with most scientific efforts having been made after 2010. Therefore, the meaning and implications of relational leadership are still open to different interpretations (Simão Lima et al., 2019; Mendes, Sant'Anna and Diniz, 2021). Added to this is the fact that the vast majority of studies in the area are theoretical and qualitative in nature. There are few studies that have attempted to outline more objective characteristics and attributes of relational leadership, trying to add a quantitative perspective to studies in the area (Uhl-Bien and Arena, 2018; Soela et al., 2024; Vinte et al., 2024; Kantovitz, Sant'Anna and Diniz, 2024; Ferreira et al., 2025).

Starting from this gap, this work sought to identify and measure the perception of managers of a multinational industry about leadership characteristics contained in the L.A.B.E.L. scale, particularly those related to the organizational dimension of the model by Mendes, Sant'Anna, Diniz (2021).

The L.A.B.E.L. scale (List of Bipolar Adjectives and Likert Scale) is an instrument validated in Brazil and internationally aimed at evaluating psychological profiles of people, as will be explored in more detail in the methodological section of the article. It is worth highlighting that the relationship between relational leadership and the L.A.B.E.L. scale can be understood from a perspective of empirical operationalization of abstract and complex constructs (in this case, relational leadership), insofar as the scale functions as an instrument capable of translating subjective attributes of leadership into observable indicators.

Regarding its contribution, the study presents an advance in the operationalization of relational leadership, a contemporary approach in the field of leadership that shifts the focus from the individual leader to the dynamics of interaction, context, and organizational relationships (Mendes, Sant'Anna & Diniz, 2021; Soela et al., 2024; Kantovitz, Sant'Anna and Diniz, 2024; Ferreira et al., 2025). However, the literature indicates that relational leadership is still a field undergoing conceptual consolidation, presenting gaps in the operationalization of its constructs, especially in translating abstract concepts into measurable indicators—a gap that this study seeks to mitigate through the use of the L.A.B.E.L. scale. Furthermore, on an empirical level, the study can provide insights for the development of leadership policies and practices for the investigated context, since, by measuring managers' perceptions, the research allows mapping predominant leadership characteristics and identifying gaps between desired and perceived leadership.

Theoretical Framework: Relational Leadership

From the late 1970s to the present, a series of leadership theories have been developed under the umbrella of the so-called New Leadership approach. Most of these theories have focused on leader behaviors, as a legacy of the behavioral approach, whereas the relational perspective goes further by also considering followers and their relationships with the leader, as well as the complex network of relationships among them, their peers, other involved actors, and contextual factors of the organization and the environment. Within the relational approach, the organization is understood as a network of

people and complex, continuous relationships that evolve over time and space (Uhl-Bien, 2003; 2006; Soela et al., 2024; Vinte et al., 2024; Kantovitz, Sant'Anna & Diniz, 2024; Ferreira et al., 2025).

According to Uhl-Bien (2003; 2006), a pioneer in this field, relational leadership is a process of social influence resulting from the connections among the individual, the organization, and the environment in which they are embedded. Leadership, therefore, is context-dependent and grounded in relationships (Drath, 2001). Although multiple definitions of relational leadership can be found in the literature, two key terms are commonly emphasized: influence and change. In this regard, some of the main foundations of relational leadership are: (i) leadership occurs when individuals use their influence to generate change; (ii) leadership concerns relational behaviors and dynamics rather than formal positions and, therefore, can occur at all levels of the organization; and (iii) leadership is effective when the leader is able to establish social relationships of trust with others (Uhl-Bien, 2003; 2006).

It is important to note that the second foundation is reinforced by several studies within the relational leadership approach (Hunt, 2004; Day & Harrison, 2007; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Sant'Anna, Nelson & Neto, 2015; Lima et al., 2019). Leadership is far from being a formal position deliberately defined within a hierarchical structure (Hunt, 2004). Rather, leadership is a relational property that is socially constructed and evolves over time. Thus, relational leadership emerges as a consensual process endorsed by members of an organization, in which individuals mutually agree on who will be perceived as temporarily assuming the role of leader (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

For Day and Harrison (2007), leadership is a shared relational property of a social system characterized by interrelations among individuals, work teams, society, and organizations, involving the construction of shared understandings. Leader development should therefore incorporate collective-based actions, moving beyond an exclusive focus on the individual leader and fostering the creation and strengthening of social capital (Miranda, 2015).

The focus of relational theory lies in analyzing leadership from the perspective of relationships rather than individuals (Uhl-Bien, 2006), distinguishing it from other leadership approaches centered on the leader figure and their skills. Accordingly, relational leadership emphasizes the importance of understanding relationships; it views leadership not merely as a product of leader and follower behaviors, but as an interactive process constituted by all involved social actors; and it highlights the importance of understanding the context in which leadership occurs. Thus, multiple social relationships and realities are constructed by participants and observers both within and outside the organization (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Relational leadership can be observed not only in the influence relationship between leader and follower, in which individuals align toward achieving goals, but also in the multiple interpersonal relationships among leaders and groups, leaders and triads, leaders and other leaders, and followers among themselves. Attention is therefore directed to the quality and type of social ties developed within this multilateral network of relationships, which is continuously constructed and deconstructed (Dachler, 1992; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Offstein, Madhavan & Gnyawali, 2006; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012). These social ties may be strong or weak, as well as positive or negative (Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003).

Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) identify three approaches to investigating relational leadership: actor-network, social construction, and post-heroic. The first is based on the notion that the leader is one of several elements in the relational network construction process, rather than the sole one. The second focuses on examining micro-processes through which leaders socially construct organizational norms,

values, and strategies within the environments in which they operate. Finally, post-heroic leadership is grounded in the premise that leadership is exercised in non-hierarchical organizations based on collaboration, trust, and teamwork (Miranda, 2015).

Within the relational approach, leadership may emerge through language and communication in everyday situations, such as meetings, social media groups, phone calls, informal conversations, and the use of various textual artifacts (Kelly, 2014). These interactions contribute to understanding how actors build commitment, alignment, and direction (Dachler, 1988; Uhl-Bien, 2006; Klein, 2017).

International studies on relational leadership provide important contributions to this field. Henry and Wolfgramm (2018), for instance, studied indigenous tribes in New Zealand and found that relational leadership is a socially constructed process that emerges from the dynamic interaction between ontology (ways of being) and praxis (ways of doing). This perspective thus shifts the focus from individual to collective dynamics.

Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018), in turn, emphasize the importance of relationship networks in the innovation process. In their study, the authors discuss two leadership styles: (i) the adaptive leader, who may not generate as many original ideas but is more capable of finding programmable solutions suited to the context; and (ii) the innovative leader, who is more adept at bringing new perspectives and information from diverse sources, even external ones, and is receptive within interconnected networks, thereby fostering intrapreneurship.

In Brazil, contemporary studies have increasingly emphasized the relational leadership approach (see, for example, Sant'Anna, Nelson & Carvalho-Neto, 2015; Mendes, Sant'Anna & Diniz, 2021; Soela et al., 2024; Vinte et al., 2024; Kantovitz, Sant'Anna & Diniz, 2024; Ferreira et al., 2025). After observing professionals occupying strategic positions in different organizations, Sant'Anna, Nelson, and Carvalho-Neto (2015) highlight that the ability to build effective relationships is a central characteristic of this leadership style.

These authors are based on the notion that the leader is situated at the intersection of three dimensions: Individual–Organization–Society. The individual dimension refers to the leader's ability to mobilize individuals' competencies within relationships. The organizational dimension relates to the leader's ability to create environments conducive to the development of people, relationships, and innovation. Finally, the societal dimension concerns the leader's ability to operate across different environments and with diverse stakeholders (Sant'Anna, Nelson & Carvalho-Neto, 2015; Mendes, Sant'Anna & Diniz, 2021). Sant'Anna, Nelson, and Carvalho-Neto (2015, p. 18) further note that:

(...) the relational leader focuses more of their energy on developing relationships with key partners than on developing formal management mechanisms or dependency ties with colleagues and team members.

A study by D'Ávila et al. (2020), conducted within the context of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti and involving leaders from the Brazilian Army, demonstrated that the context requires a relational and people-oriented leadership style, one that is sensitive to individuals' emotional issues. Therefore, leadership authority in the studied mission derives more from relational ability than from formal position.

Based on the individual, organizational, and societal dimensions emphasized by Sant'Anna, Nelson, and Carvalho-Neto (2015), Mendes, Sant'Anna, and Diniz (2021) propose a set of statements aimed at investigating how individuals perceive leadership, in order to assess how close or distant it is from the relational approach.

The Relational Leadership indicators included in the model proposed by Mendes, Sant'Anna, and Diniz (2021) are grouped in Table 1. This model was selected for the present study because no national studies were found that provide specific indicators of relational leadership.

Table 1 - **Indicators of Relational Leadership**

Dimensions	Indicators
Societal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coherence between organizational values advocated by leadership and societal values • Coherence between organizational values and adopted management policies • Coherence between organizational values and implemented management practices • Coherence between organizational values and leadership behavior • Leadership behavior in relation to different stakeholders • Leadership reputation among internal and external audiences • Leadership behavior in the face of changes in the macro-business environment • Leadership attention to agendas and issues relevant to the organization's different audiences • Ethical behavior of leadership
Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is genuine concern from leadership for the people in the organization. • Leadership is open to listening to people. • Financial results are the main focus of the organization's leadership actions. • The organization's leaders inspire people to innovate. • The organization's leaders are results-oriented. • The organization's leaders are control-oriented. • Leaders involve people in key decisions. • I have confidence in the organization's leadership. • I perceive a great distance between myself and the organization's leadership. • I disagree with the way leadership is exercised in the organization. • The leadership style in the organization is, in general, conservative. • The leadership style in the organization is, in general, bold and innovative. • The leadership style in the organization is, in general, participative. • The leadership style in the organization is, in general, bureaucratic. • The main characteristic of the organization's leadership is charisma. • The main characteristic of the leadership is knowledge of business management. • The main characteristic of the leadership is their relationships with the outside world. • I feel Controlled by the organization's leadership • Leaders are considered "leaders" because they own the business • The organization's leader is considered as such because they are the founder • I do not consider leadership an important element in the organization's dynamics • Relationships within the organization are vertical
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I consider leadership an important skill in my profession. • For me, "leading" is synonymous with "commanding." • Leadership is a priority in the development of my skills. • Leadership is a skill for exceptional people. • I feel like a leader in the organization. • I prefer "commanding" to "obeying." • For me, leadership stems from technical knowledge. • I believe it is possible to develop leadership skills. • For me, leadership is innate. • I find it easy to influence people. • For me, leadership is a personal trait. • I don't see how to develop leadership: "either you are a leader or you are not." • Leadership is something that can be built in the day-to-day relationships. • Leadership is directly associated with the hierarchical position occupied by the individual. • I like to make decisions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To lead is to control. • I like to exercise power. • I feel more task-oriented than people-oriented. • In groups, I always take the initiative.
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Source: Prepared based on Mendes, Sant'Anna and Diniz (2021).

Research methodology

Based on data collected from 99 respondents through a structured questionnaire using the L.A.B.E.L. scale, descriptive statistics were applied. The information was extracted from a database on the psychological profiles of employees in a multinational industry, using a scale validated both in Brazil and internationally, known as L.A.B.E.L. (List of Bipolar Adjectives in a Likert Scale format).

This scale was developed in 1997 by Francis Gendre, Roland Capel, and Renzo Oswald, researchers from the Institute of Psychology at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). The instrument provides statistical data on individuals' "personality traits," based on a list of 261 bipolar adjectives presented on a Likert-type scale. It measures most scientifically recognized personality traits identified over recent decades, generating both absolute and standardized scores. It also incorporates elements of the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), although it is more comprehensive.

The study was conducted with 99 senior executives holding management positions within the industry, including roles such as president, director, general manager, area manager, coordinator, and supervisor. Of these, 24 were female and 75 were male. Thirty respondents were aged between 26 and 36 years, 30 between 37 and 47 years, and 15 between 48 and 62 years. This group consists of individuals currently in leadership positions or with leadership potential within the organization. All participants completed the assessment, received feedback, and validated the results provided by the L.A.B.E.L. scale. It is noteworthy that the data generated by this tool are used within the organization across various human resource management processes, such as recruitment, hiring, and promotions, among others.

The L.A.B.E.L. scale includes five consistency indicators designed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information. These indicators provide data on the extent to which respondents may attempt to manipulate their answers in order to present themselves more favorably. If the score is high and below 30, the test is considered invalid, meaning that the information is not regarded as reliable. These indicators also assess whether the respondent was attentive and focused while completing the test, reflecting the level of care in responding, which may be affected by fatigue, inattention, or irritation.

Another relevant aspect is that the scale includes duplicated questions presented in different forms, allowing the respondent's perception of the tested characteristics to be assessed more than once. This approach enables the reinforcement or questioning of the respondent's consistency regarding the analyzed aspects.

Figure 1 illustrates how the L.A.B.E.L. scale is administered and how respondents are expected to evaluate the adjectives displayed in gray using the scale values highlighted in yellow and orange.

Figure 1 - Example of application of the L.A.B.E.L. scale.

169	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	tranquilo	
170	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	fanfarrão	1 O adjetivo proposto não corresponde absolutamente
171	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	vigoroso	2 O adjetivo proposto corresponde bastante mal
172	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	vingativo	3 O adjetivo proposto corresponde mais ou menos
173	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	inconstante	4 O adjetivo proposto corresponde bastante bem
174	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	tem réplica pronta	5 O adjetivo proposto corresponde muito bem

Source: Extracted from L.A.B.E.L.

Average responses and percentages ranging from 30% to 70% are considered within the standard assessment range, with scales above 45% regarded as relevant and those below 45% considered low or of limited relevance for the characteristic analyzed. Given that the L.A.B.E.L. test measures a very broad set of personality adjectives (specifically 261 adjectives), this study focused on those related to the organizational dimension of the model proposed by Mendes, Sant’Anna, and Diniz (2021).

In this regard, the following adjectives from the L.A.B.E.L. scale were selected and analyzed: extroversion; ambition; authority; locus of control; openness to experience and creativity; mature leadership; conscientiousness; conformism; understanding of others; empathy; agreeableness; subordination; perfectionism; sociability; and delegation. These are associated with the 22 statements of the Organizational dimension of the model proposed by Mendes, Sant’Anna, and Diniz (2021) (as shown in Table 1).

Results and discussion

The percentages presented in this section refer to respondents’ perceptions regarding the adjectives included in the L.A.B.E.L. scale, particularly those associated with the organizational dimension of the model proposed by Mendes, Sant’Anna, and Diniz (2021). Accordingly, respondents assessed the extent to which they perceive themselves as possessing certain characteristics, with percentages above 45 considered high and scores below 30 considered low.

The indicator entitled “Leadership in the organization is results-oriented,” from the model of Mendes, Sant’Anna, and Diniz (2021), is associated with the adjective “Ambition” in the L.A.B.E.L. scale. This adjective aims to measure the individual’s tendency to exert effort and make sacrifices to achieve results, as well as their willingness to grow and develop professionally.

The average percentage obtained from the 99 evaluated managers for “Ambition” was 57.51%, the highest value among the analyzed dimensions, indicating a strong focus on achieving results. It can be inferred that these individuals are determined and goal-oriented. Uhl-Bien (2006), for example, emphasizes the importance of relationships in achieving results. Nevertheless, although the relational leader seeks to mobilize individuals toward achieving intended outcomes, such a leader prioritizes relationships and mutual understanding; therefore, financial results are not the primary focus of relational leadership actions (Mendes, Sant’Anna & Diniz, 2021).

The indicator “Relationships in the organization are verticalized” is associated with the adjective “Authority” in the L.A.B.E.L. scale. This adjective measures the individual’s tendency to exercise

authority over others. The higher the level of authority, the more centralized power tends to be in the organization, and the less horizontal interpersonal relationships become.

The average percentage obtained for this dimension was 57.16%, indicating that respondents perceive organizational relationships as more vertical and characterized by the use of authority. This suggests a certain degree of power centralization, which diverges from the relational leadership model, where leadership is exercised through collaboration, grounded in horizontal relationships and mutual trust rather than hierarchical structures (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Miranda, 2015).

The indicator “Leadership in the organization is control-oriented” is associated with the adjective “Locus of Control.” This adjective measures the individual’s tendency to seek control over their surroundings and assume responsibility for their actions.

The average percentage obtained was 56.94%, the third highest among the evaluated adjectives, suggesting a strong orientation toward control. This may indicate a contradiction in the responses of the evaluated managers, who also reported relatively high levels of listening ability (49.65%) and openness to change and creativity (54.39%), both lower than the score for locus of control. This finding suggests that managers value discussion and idea exchange while simultaneously seeking to control processes and results.

Such a result may represent an obstacle to the exercise of relational leadership, which prioritizes relationships in the leadership process. A more controlling leadership style may encounter difficulties in delegating and establishing more reciprocal exchanges. Wang, Zhou, and Liu (2014) emphasize that control and dominance in relationships tend to reinforce hierarchical dynamics, which contrasts with the network-based relationships advocated by relational leadership.

The indicator “Leadership inspires innovation” is associated with the adjective “Openness to Change and Creativity.” This measures the individual’s tendency to deal effectively with uncertainty, demonstrate creativity, and remain open to novelty and experimentation. The average score for the 99 managers was 54.39%, indicating that respondents value innovation and learning processes. Consequently, they appear open to listening to their teams’ ideas, which reinforces social ties between leaders and followers.

Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018), for instance, highlight the importance of relational networks in the innovation process, noting that innovative leaders foster internal and external networks to enhance opportunities, remaining open to new contacts and possibilities.

The indicator “I trust the organization’s leadership” is associated with the adjective “Mature Leader,” which measures reliability, discipline, and a sense of justice. The average percentage obtained was 53.20%, suggesting that managers seek to convey trust and act fairly, aligning with relational leadership principles. Building trust is a central pillar of this approach (Uhl-Bien, 2003; 2006). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) further argue that when leaders act fairly, trust increases, strengthening social ties and positively impacting follower performance.

The indicator “Leadership style is generally conservative” is associated with the adjective “Conformism,” which measures the tendency to value tradition and adhere to social norms. The average score was 49.93%, indicating that respondents perceive themselves as conservative and oriented toward tradition, which may hinder innovation processes. This finding partially contradicts the relatively high score for openness to experience and creativity (54.39%).

The indicator “Leadership is open to listening” corresponds to the adjective “Understanding Others,” which measures listening ability. The average percentage was 49.65%, indicating that respondents recognize the importance of listening and understanding others’ perspectives. Sant’Anna, Nelson, and Carvalho-Neto (2015) emphasize that relational leadership is grounded in reciprocity, with

healthy leader–follower relationships depending on openness and acceptance of differences.

The indicator “Charisma is the main leadership trait” is associated with the adjective “Empathy,” which measures the ability to place oneself in another’s position and to act attentively and supportively. The average score was 47.88%, indicating that managers perceive themselves as considerate and attentive leaders. In this sense, charismatic leaders seek to build trust and exert influence through social connections and bonds with followers. Charisma in leadership is often studied as a socially constructed phenomenon related to the leader’s listening ability (Wang, Zhou & Liu, 2014).

The indicator “There is genuine concern from leadership for people in the organization” is associated with the adjective “Agreeableness,” which measures the tendency to be cooperative, conciliatory, and helpful, as well as to enjoy interacting with others. The average score was 47.28%, indicating a relatively high level. This suggests that managers demonstrate concern for social relationships and for individuals within the organization. In this regard, Brito and Magalhães (2018) argue that leadership is a process of social influence aimed, among other objectives, at maintaining a cooperative and positive organizational climate. For Uhl-Bien (2006), the ability to reconcile and socialize aligns with the characteristics of a relational leader.

The indicator “I feel controlled by the organization’s leadership” is associated with the adjective “Subordination,” which measures the tendency to be dependent on others, to prefer receiving orders, and to serve a superior. The average score was 43.64%, below the 45% threshold, indicating lower relevance. This suggests that managers do not feel strongly controlled, nor do they perceive their relationships with superiors as dominated by orders and pressure. Therefore, at higher hierarchical levels, relationships do not appear to be characterized by subordination and control—an aspect consistent with relational leadership, which emphasizes more emergent and less hierarchical social processes (Dachler, 1988; 1992; Hosking et al., 1995).

The indicator “Leadership involves people in key decisions” can be measured through the L.A.B.E.L. scale “Delegation,” which obtained an average score of 51.9%.

The indicator “I perceive a large distance between myself and the organization’s leadership” is associated with the “Agreeableness” scale, previously discussed. With an average score of 47.28%, it suggests relative proximity between leaders and followers.

The indicator “I do not agree with how leadership is exercised in the organization” is associated with the “Perfectionism” scale. The average score of 49.12% indicates that leadership is perceived as perfectionist, given the value above 45%.

The indicator “Leadership style is generally bold and innovative” corresponds to the “Openness to Experience” scale, with an average of 52.85%, indicating that leaders are more open to innovation than conservative, suggesting some alignment with relational leadership attributes.

The indicator “Leadership style is generally participative” is associated with the “Sociability” scale, with an average of 51.37%, indicating participative leadership, consistent with relational leadership principles.

The indicator “Leadership style is generally bureaucratic” can be operationalized through the “Conscientiousness” scale. The average score of 54.07% suggests that leadership is perceived as oriented toward rules, norms, and formal organizational procedures.

The indicator “Leadership is primarily characterized by business knowledge” is associated with the “Openness to Experience” scale, with an average of 52.85%, reflecting curiosity and a willingness to learn about the business.

The indicator “Leadership is characterized by its relationship with the external environment” corresponds to the “Extroversion” scale, with an average score of 57.62%, indicating strong external

orientation.

The indicator “Leaders are considered leaders because they are business owners” is associated with the “Locus of Control” scale. With an average of 56.94%, this reflects a strong sense of ownership and control.

The indicator “The leader is considered as such because they are the founder” is associated with the “Authority” scale, with an average of 57.16%, which may represent a barrier to the development of relational leadership.

Finally, the indicator “I do not consider leadership an important element in organizational dynamics” is also associated with the “Locus of Control” scale, with an average of 56.94%, suggesting that leaders consider control an important component of organizational functioning.

Based on the above, Table 2 presents the results of the L.A.B.E.L. scale adjectives associated with the organizational dimension of the model proposed by Mendes, Sant’Anna, and Diniz (2021), organized in descending order.

Table 2 - **Organizational Dimension and L.A.B.E.L. Scale**

Mendes, Sant’Anna and Diniz Model (2021)	L.A.B.E.L.	Percentage	Aligned with relational leadership?
The main characteristic of leadership in the organization is its relationship with the external world. The organization's leaders are results-oriented. Financial results are the main focus of the organization's leaders' actions. Relationships within the organization are vertical.	Extroversion	57,62%	Yes
	Ambition	57,51%	No
	Ambition	57,51%	No
	Authority	57,16%	No
The organization's leader is considered as such because they are the founder.	Authority	57,16%	No
The organization's leaders are control-oriented.	Locus of Control	56,94%	No
Leaders are considered leaders because they own the business.	Locus of Control	56,94%	No
	Locus of Control	56,94%	No
I do not consider leadership an important element in the organization's dynamics. The organization's leaders inspire people to innovate.	Openness to Experience	54,39%	Yes
	Conscientiousness	54,07%	No
The leadership style is, in general, bureaucratic. I have confidence in the organization's leaders.	Mature Leader	53,20%	Yes
	Openness to New Experiences	52,85%	Yes
The main characteristic of leadership in the organization is knowledge of the business.	Openness to New Experiences	52,85%	Yes
The leadership style in the organization is, in general, bold and innovative.	Openness to New Experiences	52,85%	Yes
The leadership style is, in general, participative. Leaders involve people in key decisions.	Sociability	51,37%	Yes
	Delegation	51,07%	Yes
The leadership style in the organization is, in general, conservative. There is openness from leadership to listen to people.	Conformity	49,93%	No
	Understanding of Others	49,65%	Yes
I disagree with the way leadership is exercised in the organization.	Perfectionist	49,12%	No
The main characteristic of leadership in the organization is charisma.	Empathy	47,88%	Yes
There is genuine concern for... Leadership and the	Empathy	47,88%	Yes

people in the organization			
I perceive a great distance between myself and the leadership.	Agreeableness	47,28%	Yes
I feel controlled by the organization's leadership.	Agreeableness	47,28%	Yes
The main characteristic of leadership in the organization is its relationship with the external world.	Subordination	43,64%	Yes

Source: research data.

Final Considerations

The comparison of the percentages obtained on the L.A.B.E.L. scale applied to the managers of the researched organization with the organizational dimension of the Mendes, Sant'Anna, Diniz (2021) model brought to light relevant results from the perspective of relational leadership. It was an exercise that helped generate some reflections, without exhausting other possibilities of interpretation that certainly exist.

The findings indicate, firstly, that of the 22 indicators of the organizational dimension of the Mendes, Sant'Anna, Diniz (2021) model, twelve are close to the characteristics of a relational leader, while ten are far from them. However, of the first eight statements that obtained the highest perceptions in the view of the managers participating in the research, seven are contrary to the notion of relational leadership (for example, the organization's leadership is results-oriented and control-oriented, and the relationships in the organization are vertical).

Therefore, for the managers evaluated, there is a high focus from leadership on achieving results and controlling processes and decisions, aspects that distance themselves from the relational approach to leadership. These findings contrast with the main foundations of this approach, which prioritizes horizontal and collaborative relationships.

Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting the managers' perception that there is an openness from leadership to listen to people and a concern for the individuals in the organization. Therefore, although focused on results and controls, leaders also value human dimension, caring about the well-being of people in the organization.

The findings indicate, therefore, that there are leaders capable of listening to people, understanding the other's position, and still adopting mechanisms to control processes and results. This result may reveal a real vision of organizational leadership which, in practice, adopts behaviors that are sometimes more focused on the human dimension, and sometimes emphasize procedural and control aspects. Therefore, the two types of behavior can naturally coexist.

Given the above, this study contributes to the field of leadership, as Clegg et al. (2021) point out, there is a tendency to romanticize the figure of the leader. Another important contribution concerns the attempt to measure aspects of relational leadership, one of the most contemporary approaches to the subject, whose studies are mostly qualitative in nature. In this sense, very few studies in Brazil have attempted to bring a quantitative and less abstract perspective to the phenomenon of relational leadership.

Nevertheless, the results presented encompass the views of 99 managers from a multinational company with more than 1000 employees, bringing the perspective of this specific group of professionals. Furthermore, this work only analyzed some indicators of the organizational dimension of the model by Mendes, Sant'Anna and Diniz (2021), leaving room for future studies to address the individual and societal level dimensions.

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