A Systematic Review Study on Predominant Leadership Styles in India

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT

This review-based study explores the prevailing leadership styles in India by synthesizing existing literature across various sectors including corporate, political, educational, and non-governmental organizations. The paper seeks to understand how cultural, social, and organizational contexts shape the leadership approaches practiced in the Indian milieu. It highlights transformational, transactional, servant, and autocratic leadership styles as commonly observed, with a growing inclination towards transformational and servant leadership due to evolving organizational values and employee expectations. The study emphasizes that Indian leadership is significantly influenced by hierarchical societal structures, collectivist cultural values, and spiritual philosophies. These factors contribute to a unique blend of traditional and modern leadership approaches, where personal values, ethical conduct, and relationship-building play pivotal roles. The paper notes regional diversity and generational shifts as key variables influencing leadership preferences and effectiveness. It also acknowledges the rising role of women and youth in redefining leadership dynamics in contemporary India. The study concludes by recommending context-specific leadership development programs and greater empirical research to uncover nuanced insights into effective leadership in India's

diverse organizational environments. The findings aim to inform both academic inquiry and practical strategies for leadership development tailored to the Indian context.

1. Introduction

Leadership, a cornerstone of organizational success, has been studied extensively across various cultural and geographical contexts (Khajeh, 2018). In the pursuit of global development, organizations are allocating resources to cultivate leaders who possess the ability to comprehend and effectively manage diversity, both domestically and internationally (Ly, 2020). India, with its unique socio-cultural dynamics and rapidly evolving economic landscape, presents a particularly interesting context for examining leadership styles (Khilji et al., 2015). The success of an organization is intertwined with industrialization and overall organizational development (Hariyani et al., 2024; Nwankwo et al., 2024). India's unique cultural characteristics influence the perception of ideal leadership styles within organizations (Soon, 2013). Acknowledging the critical role of leadership in organizational success, it becomes imperative to delve into the predominant leadership styles prevalent in India, analyzing their effectiveness and impact on organizational outcomes (Singh, 2021). Furthermore, leadership deficiencies have been shown to significantly contribute to organizational failure, emphasizing the necessity of a clear vision for organizational success (Kumar, 2021). The political environment and governmental regulations play a vital role in shaping organizational success, including foreign trade policies, labor regulations, and tax laws (Ghaleb, 2024).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of leadership in the Indian context, this study undertakes a review-based approach, synthesizing existing literature and research on the topic. This review encompasses a wide range of leadership theories and their practical applications within Indian organizations, considering the influence of cultural values, ethical considerations, and the evolving business environment (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2018). Identifying the causes of organizational failure through research provides a detailed understanding of why organizations fail, which is crucial for driving learning, proactive risk management, and continuous improvement (Hariyani et al., 2024). Indian business leaders, while cognizant of Western leadership principles, have cultivated distinctive principles that emphasize a broad mission and purpose, encompassing not only the needs of stockholders but also focusing on family prosperity, regional advancement, and national growth (Cappelli et al., 2015). This paper investigates how these cultural nuances shape leadership styles and their impact on

organizational performance, employee engagement, and overall business outcomes. In light of the increasing presence of US multinational corporations in India, understanding the cultural preferences is imperative for facilitating a smoother transition for these global companies (Rao, 2011).

This review will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of leadership in India, providing insights for both academics and practitioners. Ultimately, understanding organizational failures enables the creation of resilient organizational cultures capable of navigating crises and adapting to market demands (Hariyani et al., 2024). By identifying common themes, best practices, and areas for further research, this study aims to provide a valuable resource for those seeking to enhance their leadership effectiveness in the Indian context. Moreover, the paper seeks to explain the increasing recognition of Indian companies for ambidextrous leadership, linking it to specific Indian cultural dimensions that reinforce successful internationalization (Chebbi et al., 2016). The study further suggests the need for leadership development programs that are tailored to address contemporary challenges and incorporate relevant leadership theories.

This exploration of predominant leadership styles will not only enrich the academic discourse on leadership but also offer practical guidance for organizations operating in India, enabling them to cultivate effective leaders who can navigate the country's unique business environment and drive sustainable growth. (Iqbal et al., 2021)

1.1 Theoretical Frameworks of Leadership

Leadership effectiveness hinges on various theoretical underpinnings that describe how leaders influence their followers to achieve organizational goals. These theories provide frameworks for understanding different leadership behaviors, their impact on subordinates, and the situations in which they are most effective. Among the plethora of leadership theories, several have gained prominence and applicability in diverse cultural settings. (Dinibutun, 2020) Transformational leadership, characterized by inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence, has been widely recognized for its potential to foster innovation, commitment, and high performance within organizations. (Jun & Lee, 2023)

Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiring a shared vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence, has been widely recognized as a potent approach to leadership (Hariyani et al., 2024). This framework emphasizes that effective leadership is crucial for mitigating organizational failure by promoting operational agility, continuous process improvement, and a proactive approach to risk management(Ford et al., 2021) (Hariyani et al., 2024). Transactional leadership, on the other hand, focuses on the exchange between leaders and followers, where rewards

and punishments are used to motivate performance and ensure compliance (Atasoy, 2020). This theory posits that leaders establish clear expectations, monitor performance, and provide feedback to maintain stability and efficiency within the organization (Hariyani et al., 2024). The situational leadership theory suggests that effective leaders adapt their style based on the readiness and competence of their followers, providing guidance and support as needed.

Ethical leadership theory is also crucial, especially in preventing fraudulent management activities within organizations (Hariyani et al., 2024). This approach posits that leaders must act with integrity, fairness, and transparency, fostering a culture of trust and ethical conduct within the organization. Positive leadership is emerging as a relevant style, focusing on enhancing employee well-being and relational team building through quality approaches (Azila-Gbettor et al., 2024). The application of each of these theories varies across cultures, with certain approaches being more effective depending on cultural values and norms.

In the Indian context, the effectiveness of different leadership styles is shaped by the country's unique cultural values, historical context, and evolving business landscape. Understanding the nuances of these theoretical frameworks and their applicability in the Indian context is essential for cultivating effective leaders who can drive organizational success.(Ly, 2020) Transformational leaders motivate performance beyond expectations through their ability to influence attitudes, effectively communicating their vision in a way that creates unity and collective purpose (Al-Sawai, 2013).

Given the increasing scrutiny on ethical conduct and governance, this framework's emphasis on integrity and ethical decision-making resonates particularly well in today's business environment. (Quezado et al., 2022) In summary, a robust theoretical framework is essential for understanding and applying different leadership styles within an organization.

1.2 Current Research on Leadership in India

Recent scholarly explorations into the landscape of leadership within India have unveiled a multifaceted interplay of traditional values and contemporary management practices. Several studies have highlighted the enduring influence of India's rich socio-economic and historical context on the leadership styles adopted by its business leaders (Tripathi et al., 2015). Specifically, qualities such as wisdom, integrity, and selflessness, often derived from Hindu mythology, are frequently cited as essential attributes of effective leaders in the Indian context (Tripathi et al., 2015). These findings emphasize the importance of cultural relevance in shaping leadership approaches, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all model may not be suitable for the diverse and nuanced Indian business environment.

Moreover, there is a growing recognition of the need to develop indigenous models of leadership development that are tailored to the specific context of India (Alagaraja et al., 2017). These models incorporate elements of both Western management thought and traditional Indian values, aiming to create a synthesis that is both effective and culturally appropriate (Sapre, 2000). In addition to the influence of cultural values, current research also explores the impact of globalization and technological advancements on leadership styles in India.

Furthermore, the rise of entrepreneurial ventures and startups in India has spurred interest in understanding the leadership qualities that drive innovation and growth in these dynamic organizations. The insights gained from these studies can inform the development of leadership training programs and organizational practices that foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship (Chebbi et al., 2016).

As the Indian economy continues to evolve and integrate into the global marketplace, the role of leadership in driving sustainable and inclusive growth becomes increasingly critical. This includes promoting ethical governance, fostering social responsibility, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources and opportunities (Kumar et al., 2024). Such leadership has enabled pragmatism and a performance focus in the face of group and collective orientation (Tripathi et al., 2015).

2. Literature Review

Leadership styles significantly influence organizational effectiveness, employee engagement, and overall workplace culture. In the Indian context, where diverse cultural, social, and economic factors interplay, understanding the predominant leadership styles is crucial for fostering innovation and enhancing employee outcomes (Liu et al., 2023). This literature review synthesizes existing research findings on leadership styles in India, particularly focusing on transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and the impact of cultural values. It highlights knowledge gaps and proposes directions for future research (Adawiyah & Sopiah, 2023).

A study by Mittal and Dhar (2015) emphasizes that transformational leadership fosters employee creativity by enhancing creative self-efficacy and promoting knowledge sharing. This finding underscores the critical role of transformational leaders in driving innovation, which is essential for organizations operating in rapidly evolving environments like the IT industry. The implications of this research suggest that organizations should prioritize transformational leadership training to cultivate an innovative workforce.

Offermann and Coats (2017) explore how various leadership styles are perceived within high power distance organizations in India. Their findings indicate that instrumental leadership is effective in promoting employee effort and job performance, demonstrating the importance of aligning leadership

approaches with cultural sensitivities. This insight is vital for organizations aiming to enhance leadership effectiveness by considering the cultural context in which they operate.

Research conducted by Elkhwesky et al. (2022) reveals that transactional leadership positively impacts collective efficacy and well-being among employees in the Indian education sector. This study highlights the need for leaders to adopt transactional strategies to foster a positive work environment. The findings contribute to the discourse on leadership by demonstrating that different leadership styles can have varying effects on employee outcomes, thereby emphasizing the importance of context-specific leadership strategies.

Kumar and Sharma (2017) examine the relationship between leadership styles and TQM focus within Indian firms, revealing significant correlations between various leadership styles and the effectiveness of TQM practices. Their research indicates that transformational and servant leadership styles are particularly effective in driving continuous improvement and innovation within organizations. This finding is crucial for leaders aiming to enhance TQM practices, suggesting that aligning leadership styles with organizational goals can lead to better performance outcomes.

Lysonski and Durvasula (2013) provide comparative insights into leadership effectiveness across different cultural contexts. Their research highlights the necessity of adapting leadership styles to local contexts, which resonates with the Indian leadership landscape. This comparative perspective enriches the understanding of how contextual factors, such as cultural nuances and organizational structures, shape leadership practices in India and beyond.

Despite the insights gained from existing studies, significant knowledge gaps remain. For instance, there is limited research on the impact of emerging leadership styles, such as responsible leadership, in the Indian context. Future studies should explore how ethical considerations and cultural sensitivities influence leadership practices in India, particularly in relation to stakeholder relationships (Tirmizi et al., 2023). Additionally, there is a need for research that examines the intersection of leadership styles and employee empowerment, as this is increasingly recognized as vital for organizational success (Purohit, 2023).

Moreover, while existing research predominantly focuses on the IT and education sectors, further investigation into leadership styles within other industries, such as hospitality and manufacturing, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the leadership landscape in India. Exploring the effectiveness of various leadership styles in these sectors can offer valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers (Siyal et al., 2023).

The cultural context significantly influences leadership effectiveness, necessitating a nuanced approach to leadership development. While existing research provides valuable insights, there remain critical gaps that warrant further exploration (Zander, 2020). Future research should focus on the evolving landscape of leadership in India, considering the implications of ethical and cultural factors, as well as the impact of emerging leadership styles on organizational success (Pless et al., 2021).

3. Research Methodology

The purpose of this research is to synthesize the current literature on the most prevalent leadership styles in India by using an approach known as systematic review. The process of doing a systematic review is one that is thorough and controlled, and it ensures the integration of relevant research while simultaneously decreasing bias. Among the steps included in the process are the creation of research questions, the development of search techniques, the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the synthesis of the findings. The focus of this method is to offer a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the leadership styles that are most popular in India, as well as to provide direction to future research and implementation. It is possible to assure scientific rigor, transparency, and replicability by using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework.

3.1 Research Questions

1. What are the predominant leadership styles practiced across various Indian sectors?
2. How do cultural, economic, and organizational factors influence these leadership styles?
3. What are the organizational implications of these leadership styles on outcomes like employee satisfaction and innovation?

3.2 Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted using academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, ACM Digital Library and Google Scholar, using a combination of keywords. The search strategy utilized Boolean operators and keywords such as:

- "Leadership styles in Indian organizations"
- "Transformational leadership in India"
- "Transactional leadership and Indian culture"
- "Cultural influences on leadership practices"

To capture recent trends, the publication timeline was restricted to studies published between 2000 and 2025. Reference lists of key articles were reviewed to identify supplementary research.

To refine the results, search filters were applied based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, as outlined below.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the selection of high-quality, relevant studies. These criteria are summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Literature Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and book chapters	Conference proceedings, non-peer-reviewed articles, PhD theses, technical papers
Content	Studies exploring leadership styles in the Indian context.	Studies unrelated to leadership in India.
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	2000 and 2025	Published before 2000
Subject Area	Leadership styles in Indian organizations, Cultural influences on leadership practices	Studies not focused on Leadership styles, Cultural influences on leadership practices

3.4 PRISMA Flowchart
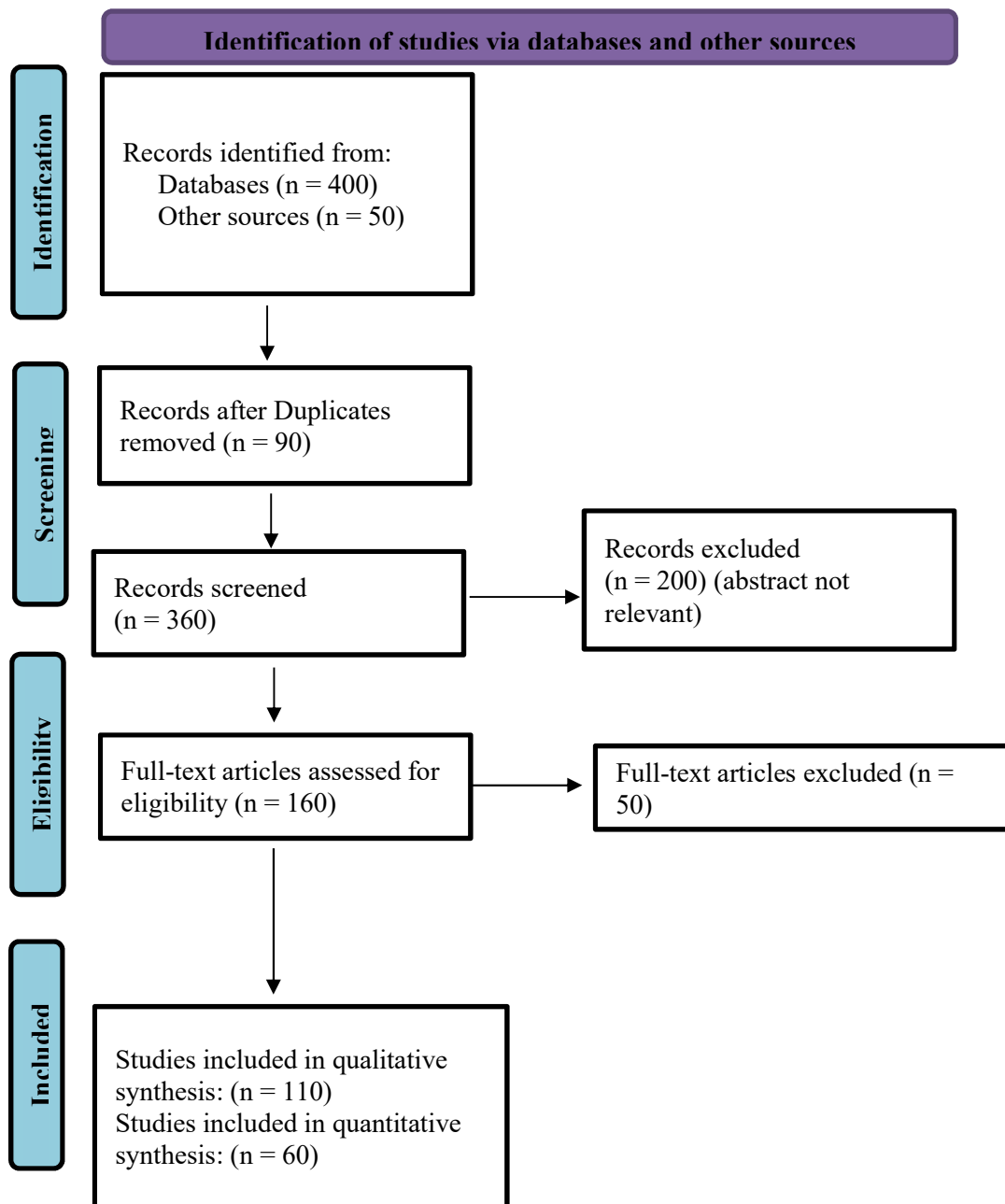
Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

3.5 Data Extraction Strategy

The extraction framework ensured systematic capture of relevant information from selected studies.

1. **Criteria for Extraction**:

   - Bibliographic details: Author(s), title, publication year, and source.

   - Study design and methodology.

- Leadership styles analyzed (e.g., transformational, transactional, servant leadership).

- Key findings related to organizational outcomes.

- Contextual factors influencing leadership styles (e.g., culture, economic conditions).

2. **Data Collection Process**: A standardized data extraction form was used, featuring sections to log:

- Study objectives and hypotheses.

- Demographic characteristics (e.g., industry, region, sample size).

- Results and theoretical implications.

3. **Quality Assessment**: Studies were evaluated using criteria such as:

- Methodological rigor and reliability.

- Relevance to Indian organizational contexts.

- Depth of analysis and clarity in reporting findings.

4. **Thematic Synthesis**: Extracted data were grouped into thematic categories focusing on:

- Leadership styles prevalent in India.

- Cultural dimensions shaping these styles (e.g., collectivism, power distance).

- Impacts on employee satisfaction, productivity, and innovation.

4. Findings

This study explores the prevailing leadership styles in India through a comprehensive review of literature. It reveals that Indian leadership is predominantly shaped by cultural heritage, socio-political influences, organizational structures, and the shift toward global practices.

One of the key findings is the persistence of **transformational and charismatic leadership** styles in Indian organizations, particularly in corporate sectors. These styles resonate well with Indian hierarchical and collectivist values while encouraging innovation, employee motivation, and a shared vision. Indian leaders often blend these with **servant leadership** traits, emphasizing empathy, care, and team well-being.

Another dominant style is **autocratic leadership**, especially prevalent in traditional and family-run businesses. This approach aligns with India's high power distance culture, where authority is respected and unquestioned. However, there is a gradual shift, especially among younger leaders, toward **democratic and participative leadership**, particularly in startups and MNCs operating in India.

Situational leadership also appears prominently, where leaders adapt their style according to context, organizational goals, and employee readiness. This adaptive style reflects the diversity of the Indian workforce and the need for flexibility in leadership.

The review also identifies the growing significance of **ethical and spiritual leadership**, influenced by Indian philosophical traditions. Leaders exhibiting integrity, social responsibility, and emotional intelligence are gaining traction, particularly in the non-profit and public sectors.

In conclusion, the Indian leadership landscape is dynamic, transitioning from rigid, hierarchical models to more inclusive, participatory, and value-driven approaches. The blending of Western leadership theories with Indian ethos creates a hybrid model unique to the country.

Table: 2 Key Findings on Predominant Leadership Styles in India

Leadership Style	Key Characteristics	Prevalence	Sector/Application
Transformational	Visionary, motivating, change-oriented	High	Corporate, MNCs
Autocratic	Centralized authority, control, less delegation	Moderate to High	Traditional businesses, family firms
Democratic/Participative	Involvement in decision-making, team-oriented	Increasing	Startups, progressive organizations
Servant	Empathetic, people-first, team well-being	Emerging	NGOs, educational institutions
Situational	Adaptive based on context and readiness	Widespread	Across sectors
Ethical/Spiritual	Value-based, integrity, moral leadership	Gaining Importance	Public sector, NGOs

5. Discussion

The review highlights that leadership in India is evolving through a blend of traditional cultural values and modern managerial practices. Historically, Indian leadership has leaned towards **authoritative and hierarchical models**, influenced by the country's collectivist culture and respect for authority. However, with increasing globalization and exposure to Western organizational practices, there has been a gradual shift toward **transformational, participative, and servant leadership styles**.

The dominance of **transformational leadership** reflects the growing emphasis on innovation, employee empowerment, and vision-driven growth, especially in corporate and entrepreneurial settings. Meanwhile, **autocratic leadership** remains prevalent in many traditional and family-run businesses, showing the lingering influence of hierarchy in Indian work culture.

The rise of **situational leadership** shows that adaptability has become essential in managing India's diverse workforce and dynamic business environment. Additionally, the incorporation of **ethical and spiritual leadership**, rooted in Indian philosophical traditions, underlines the growing importance of emotional intelligence, values, and social responsibility in leadership roles.

Overall, Indian leadership is undergoing a hybrid transformation—one that respects cultural roots while embracing global trends. This fluidity allows leaders to be both traditional and progressive, depending on context, which is crucial in India's complex and rapidly changing organizational landscape.

6. Future Research Directions

1. **Empirical Validation of Leadership Styles**: Future studies should conduct large-scale surveys and interviews to empirically validate the dominance and effectiveness of various leadership styles across different Indian industries.

2. **Comparative Studies Across Sectors**: There is a need to compare leadership styles in public vs. private sectors, startups vs. established firms, and urban vs. rural enterprises to understand contextual variations.

3. **Gender and Leadership**: Future research can explore the role of gender in leadership styles, focusing on whether female leaders adopt different styles and how they impact organizational culture and outcomes.

4. **Impact of Technology and Remote Work**: With the rise of digitalization and remote work, studies should investigate how leadership styles are adapting in virtual and hybrid work environments in India.

5. **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** Comparative studies between Indian and global leadership approaches can highlight unique leadership patterns and the influence of Indian cultural values on managerial behavior.

6. **Leadership Development Programs**: Research could focus on the effectiveness of leadership training and development programs in cultivating modern leadership traits among Indian managers.

7. **Millennial and Gen Z Leadership**: Investigating emerging leadership patterns among younger generations in India would provide insight into future organizational dynamics.

7. Conclusion

This review-based study sheds light on the diverse and evolving leadership landscape in India. Drawing insights from a wide range of literature, it is evident that Indian leadership is undergoing a significant transformation. Traditionally characterized by **hierarchical, authoritative, and autocratic styles**, Indian leadership has been deeply rooted in the country's cultural values such as respect for authority, collectivism, and emotional bonds within teams. These traits continue to influence leadership, particularly in family-owned businesses and traditional sectors.

However, the advent of globalization, liberalization of the Indian economy, and increasing interaction with multinational corporations have brought a visible shift in leadership approaches. **Transformational, participative, and servant leadership styles** are gaining momentum, especially in modern enterprises, startups, and knowledge-based industries. These contemporary styles promote empowerment, innovation, collaboration, and employee well-being—values that align with global leadership trends.

Moreover, **situational leadership** has emerged as a practical approach, allowing leaders to be flexible and adaptive to different organizational challenges and employee readiness levels. The growing relevance of **ethical and spiritual leadership** rooted in Indian philosophy further adds a unique dimension to leadership practices in the country.

In essence, leadership in India today is best described as **hybrid and context-driven**. Indian leaders often blend traditional values with modern management practices to navigate complex and diverse organizational environments. This adaptability is a strength, enabling Indian businesses to thrive in both domestic and global contexts.

Despite the rich insights, the study acknowledges the need for empirical research to substantiate the review findings. As India continues to develop economically and socially, leadership styles will further evolve. Understanding these shifts is crucial not only for academic discourse but also for practical leadership development across sectors. Thus, Indian leadership stands at a crossroads—honoring tradition while embracing change.

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