

THE LEADERSHIP MEANING-MAKING PROCESS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CULTURE

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Abstract - Leadership transcends mere management by fundamentally shaping the social and emotional reality of organizations. This literature study explores the dual function of leadership as an architect of meaning and a shaper of psychological culture. Through a qualitative thematic analysis, the research elucidates the architectural process whereby leaders interpret reality, construct visionary narratives, and institutionalize meaning through symbols, systems, and rituals. This constructed meaning is not an end in itself but the primary mechanism influencing the organization's psychological culture. The analysis details how leadership narratives directly mold collective perceptions of trust, psychological safety, justice, work meaningfulness, shared identity, and resilience. The findings present an integrated framework that connects symbolic leadership theories with organizational climate studies, emphasizing the leader's moral responsibility in this reality-shaping process. The study concludes that the experienced psychological culture is a crystallization of leadership's meaning-making activities. Practical implications highlight the need for leadership development focused on narrative competence and accountability for fostering healthy psychological climates, while future research should empirically test the proposed relationships in varied contexts.

Keywords: Meaning Architecture; Psychological Culture; Meaning Making; Organizational Climate; Narrative; Psychological Safety.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations, as collective entities, cannot survive on formal structures and operational procedures alone. Organizational life is colored by complex human dynamics, in which the meaning of work, relationships and common goals must be continuously constructed and agreed upon. Without a coherent shared understanding, collective efforts can fragment into a series of mechanical tasks that lose their direction and value. This is where the symbolic and interpretive dimensions of organizational life come to the fore, demanding attention to how social reality within the organization is constructed. This process of meaning construction is not something that happens automatically or randomly; it requires a guiding force capable of embracing diverse individual perceptions and uniting them into a narrative that inspires enthusiasm and commitment (Pérez, 2024). Understanding organizations as living systems of meaning provides a foundation for appreciating the function of leadership that goes beyond transactional management.

Traditional leadership is often defined through the lens of influence, motivation, and the achievement of predetermined goals (Sahid et al., 2023). This view, while valid, tends to overlook the fundamental dimensions of leadership as a cultural and symbolic activity. A leader, in a broader view, operates in the realm of creating and managing meaning for the members of the organization. Their activities include framing experiences, interpreting events, and telling stories that give coherence to the endeavors undertaken. This is also mentioned in a more practical context regarding the role of leadership in job satisfaction (Radjawane & Darmawan, 2022). Leaders act as the main interpreters for the organization, translating external challenges and internal opportunities into language that can be understood and responded to by all levels (Aslamazishvili et al., 2020). Through their words, actions, and strategic decisions, leaders gradually shape how members of the organization view themselves, their work, and their competitive environment.

The architectural function of leadership lies in its ability to design and build a structure of meaning that forms the basis for the organization's thinking and actions (Aslamazishvili et al., 2020). Just as a physical architect does not merely stack bricks but creates functional and inspirational spaces, leaders as architects of meaning do not merely convey instructions but design the cognitive and emotional frameworks that shape shared reality. They identify and highlight core values, formulate inspiring visions, and create symbolic links between daily activities and greater goals. This structure of meaning serves as a navigation map that reduces uncertainty, provides moral justification for difficult decisions, and becomes a source of organizational identity that distinguishes it from other entities (Darmawan, 2024). This concept aligns with the dynamics of inclusive leadership needed to manage a multigenerational workforce and increase motivation, which emphasizes framing meaning that is relevant to diverse groups (Mardikaningsih, 2025). Without a strong meaning architecture, organizations are prone to disorientation and conflicts of interpretation that undermine cohesion.

Organizational psychological culture refers to the emotional climate and shared perceptions of psychological reality in the workplace. It encompasses collective beliefs about psychological safety, fairness, support, and how members

of the organization relate to one another. Psychological culture is not an automatic derivative of the corporate culture written on the walls; it is actively shaped and maintained through daily interactions, management policies, and most importantly, through the example set by leaders (Whittington et al., 2017). Every action of a leader, from how they give feedback to how they handle failure, sends powerful signals about what is valued and what behaviors are acceptable. This influence is also reflected in the formation of organizational commitment through leadership and culture (Hariani, 2023). Thus, leadership acts as the main catalyst in the formation and maintenance of psychological culture, which ultimately determines the level of engagement, well-being, and psychological resilience of organizational members, including psychological capital as a strategic resource (Hariani & Putra, 2024).

The relationship between leadership as an architect of meaning and a shaper of organisational psychological culture is the main focus of this study. The process of meaning-building carried out by leaders directly influences the fundamental elements of psychological culture, such as the level of trust, sense of belonging, and meaning of the work itself. When leaders succeed in building a coherent and inspiring narrative about the organisation's journey, it can foster a sense of security and purpose among members, which in turn has an impact on discipline, motivation, and performance (Irfan, 2022). Conversely, failure in this architectural function or contradictions between leaders' words and actions can result in a psychological culture characterised by cynicism, distrust, and alienation (Łyszkowska, 2023). Therefore, examining leadership through these two interrelated functions as designers of collective meaning structures and as shapers of the emotional-organisational climate provides a comprehensive perspective on how leaders fundamentally shape human experiences within organisations. This includes building a culture that is responsive to change (Al Hakim et al., 2022).

The main problem encountered in understanding leadership through this perspective is the tendency to separate these two functions in academic and practical analyses. Many theoretical frameworks discuss the construction of leadership meaning separately from discussions of organisational psychological climate or culture. As a result, there is a conceptual gap in explaining the specific mechanisms by which symbolic and interpretive leadership activities are transferred and transformed into a psychological reality that can be felt and experienced by every member of the organisation (Xenikou, 2022). How is a leader's visionary rhetoric translated into a sense of security to take risks? How does a leader's interpretation of a crisis shape collective perceptions of fairness and support? These types of connecting questions are often not adequately answered, causing leadership theory to lose its clarity regarding organisational phenomena that are actually holistic and integrated.

Another problem lies in the nature of psychological culture itself, which is often considered implicit, difficult to measure, and organically formed. This assumption can obscure leadership's direct responsibility in shaping it. If psychological culture is viewed only as the result of interactions between all members, then the specific role of leaders as actors with disproportionate influence and moral responsibility may be reduced. This has the potential to absolve leaders of accountability for unhealthy emotional climates in their organisations. On the other hand, an overly deterministic understanding that places leaders as the sole creators of culture is also problematic, as it ignores the agency of other organisational members (Pincus, 2024). The right middle ground, which recognises leadership as a major shaping force while considering the reciprocal process with members, still requires stronger and clearer theoretical elaboration, including consideration of managerial challenges in uncertainty (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2021).

The importance of examining this topic today is driven by major transformations in the world of work. The shift towards a knowledge-based economy, increased workforce diversity, and demands for continuous innovation have placed human assets and psychological capital as key factors in organisational success. In such a dynamic and uncertain environment, rigid and hierarchical structures of meaning are often no longer adequate. Organisations need leaders who are capable of building and maintaining an adaptive, inclusive, and empowering framework of meaning. A leader's ability to create a psychological culture where individuals feel safe to share ideas, learn from mistakes, and collaborate authentically is a key determinant of an organisation's competitiveness and sustainability in the 21st century (Handa & Sangal, 2025). Without a thorough understanding of how these two leadership functions work together, leadership development efforts may only scratch the surface.

Changes in social values and the expectations of the new generation of workers also reinforce the relevance of this topic. Today's employees are increasingly seeking meaning and purpose in their work, not just financial rewards (Fireks, 2025). They expect a work environment that respects psychological well-being, transparency, and ethics. Leadership that fails to meet these expectations, that is unable to function as a credible architect of meaning and a shaper of positive psychological culture, will face significant challenges in recruiting, retaining, and inspiring the best talent. Therefore, a systematic study of how leadership builds meaning and shapes the psychological climate is not only an academic necessity but also a practical imperative to ensure that organisations can become vehicles for the fulfilment of human potential and the achievement of collective goals in a sustainable and responsible manner. This literature review aims to analyse and synthesise theoretical thinking on the two main functions of leadership: as a designer of collective meaning structures and as a shaper of the emotional-organisational climate. Specifically, this study seeks to elucidate the mechanisms by which leaders construct, disseminate, and reinforce meaning within organisations, as well as to trace the impact of the meaning construction process on elements that shape psychological culture, such as trust, psychological security, and shared identity. The expected theoretical contribution is the provision of an integrated

conceptual framework that links symbolic-transformational leadership theory with organisational culture and climate theory, thereby enriching academic understanding of the human and symbolic dynamics of organisations. Practically, this synthesis is expected to provide reflective guidance for leadership practitioners to become more aware of and accountable for the profound influence of their words, actions, and strategic decisions on the psychological reality experienced by all members of the organisations they lead.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative literature study designed to construct a deep and coherent conceptual synthesis of the role of leadership as a designer of meaning and shaper of psychological culture. A qualitative approach was chosen because of its suitability for exploring and interpreting abstract, complex, and interrelated concepts that cannot be measured quantitatively. This study does not aim to test hypotheses, but rather to construct a rich and nuanced understanding through critical examination of existing academic works. The focus is on searching for patterns, relationships, and contradictions within the established body of knowledge, so as to produce a new, more integrated framework of thinking. With its interpretive nature, this study attempts to capture the essence and substance of the concepts of symbolic leadership and organizational culture, going beyond narrow operational definitions.

The data collection and analysis methods follow adaptive systematic literature study procedures. Primary data sources consist of fundamental textbooks, reputable scientific journal articles, and selected academic publications discussing leadership theory, social meaning construction, organizational culture, and psychological climate. The search process was conducted in stages, beginning with the identification of seminal works using keywords such as leadership and meaning-making, symbolic leadership, psychological climate, and organizational sensemaking. The snowballing technique from the bibliography of sources found was then applied to broaden the scope of the study. Data analysis was conducted thematically using an approach inspired by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. The stages included a comprehensive introduction to the data, the creation of initial codes for key concepts, the search for themes, a review of the themes, and the determination and reporting of the final themes that answered the research questions. This analysis process is iterative and reflective, allowing the author to continuously refine and perfect the conceptual synthesis until achieving theoretical saturation and strong argumentative coherence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Architectural Function of Leadership in Constructing Organisational Meaning

The leadership process as an architectural activity begins with the fundamental function of being the primary interpreter for the organisation. Leaders are in a strategic position that allows them to scan the external environment, receive information that is often ambiguous and contradictory, and then provide coherent explanations (Pincus, 2024). This act of interpretation is not a neutral activity; it is a strategic choice about which realities to acknowledge and which to ignore. Leaders choose specific words, metaphors, and analogies to describe situations, thereby actively shaping the collective understanding of what the organisation is facing. The application of adaptive situational leadership, which contextualises messages and communication styles, has been proven to effectively build employee engagement and team development, the essence of which is building trust (Rojak & Darmawan, 2023). When facing a crisis, for example, a leader may choose to frame it as an "existential threat" or as an "inevitable test of resilience". Each frame will elicit very different emotional and behavioural responses from members of the organisation. Thus, the first stage of this meaning architecture is the establishment of an interpretive foundation, a shared cognitive ground on which all subsequent events will be assessed and understood.

Once the interpretive foundation is laid, leaders move on to the function of providing visionary direction. Here, the architecture of meaning moves from explaining the current state to describing the desired future state. Vision is not merely a measurable strategic goal; it is a living narrative of possibility, a compelling story about the organisation's journey and ultimate destination. Effective leaders act as master storytellers, weaving core values, organisational history, and shared aspirations into a compelling plot (Hruška, 2020). This narrative serves as a guide that gives meaning to daily efforts, transforming routine tasks into part of a larger mission. This dynamic is also evident in the context of improving team performance, where the construction of collective meaning becomes the foundation for collaboration (Darmawan & Marsal, 2025). The power of visionary narratives lies in their ability to connect the personal identities of members with the identity of the organisation, so that the achievement of organisational goals is also felt as the fulfilment of personal goals. Architecture at this stage builds pillars of hope and future orientation, providing answers to fundamental questions about "where we are going and why it matters".

The process of meaning construction will not be effective if it remains at the level of rhetoric. Therefore, the next crucial stage is the institutionalisation of meaning into organisational structures, systems, and rituals. This is where meaning architecture becomes concrete and measurable. Leaders use formal organisational tools to reinforce the meaning they want to build. The design of organisational structures, reward and punishment systems, recruitment and promotion

procedures, and budget allocation are all powerful media for communicating what the organisation truly values (Oral, 2019). A leader who declares that innovation is a core value, for example, must design a system that tangibly rewards creative efforts and does not punish reasonable failure. Rituals and ceremonies, such as regular meetings, celebrations of success, or even the way new employees are welcomed, become moments of dramatization in which values and meanings are symbolically displayed. This institutionalisation process is central to how organisational culture as a system of meaning is formed and relates to performance (Irfan et al., 2024). This institutionalisation transforms meaning from an abstract idea into an operational reality that is experienced on a daily basis.

Communication, in all its forms, is the main building block in the architecture of leadership meaning. However, what is most influential is often not formal communication through official channels, but rather the stories, symbols, and symbolic actions performed by leaders. Leaders are constant storytellers. Stories about the organization's founders, about overcoming obstacles, or about the sacrifices of ordinary members, are powerful tools for conveying values in a form that is easy to remember and internalize. Symbols, whether in the form of logos, physical space arrangements, or dress codes, are visual representations of the organization's identity and meaning. Symbolic actions, such as a CEO deliberately spending time on the front lines or cutting his own salary in difficult times, speak louder than a thousand words in a speech (Westover, 2025). The physical and social work environment itself is a medium of symbolic communication that shapes organizational perceptions and culture, which ultimately affects performance (Putra et al., 2020). These actions condense complex meanings into easily understood and interpretable gestures, thereby reinforcing the message to be conveyed.

Leaders also serve as managers of ambiguity and reducers of anxiety. In uncertain organizational environments, anxiety can be paralyzing. A robust architecture of meaning serves as an anxiety buffer by providing a stable explanatory framework. Leaders reduce ambiguity by providing reasonable explanations for confusing events, even when those explanations may not be entirely accurate. The ability to provide convincing answers, or at least to acknowledge ignorance in a way that maintains trust, is an important aspect of meaning construction (Kollenscher et al., 2017). By creating a coherent narrative, leaders offer a sense of psychological order and predictability. Uncertainty and ambiguity can trigger turnover intentions, making the stability of meaning constructed by leaders crucial for maintaining individual-organizational value compatibility (Mardikaningsih & Essa, 2025). This does not mean eliminating all uncertainty, but rather providing organizational members with mental tools to cope with uncertainty without being overwhelmed by paralyzing anxiety. This function stabilizes the psychological environment and allows the organization to continue functioning even in the most chaotic situations.

The relationship between leaders and followers in the meaning construction process is dialectical, not one-way. Although leaders initiate and frame the narrative, the legitimacy and ultimate power of that meaning depend on the acceptance and active participation of organizational members. Meaning architecture is not a monologue; it is a process of negotiation and co-creation of meaning. Wise leaders understand that they are not the sole source of meaning (Raelin, 2006). They create space for others to contribute to the shared narrative, listen to stories from the field, and accommodate interpretations that emerge from below. This process makes the constructed meaning structure more resilient and richer, as it is supported by a broader collective experience. This reciprocal relationship is similar to the reciprocal model between leaders' interactional justice, psychological contracts, and employee behavior (Darmawan & Mardikaningsih, 2025), in which meaning and commitment are built together. Leadership in this framework is the facilitation of an ongoing organizational conversation about identity and purpose. The success of meaning architecture is measured not only by the leader's eloquence in speaking, but by the extent to which the narrative is lived, adapted, and championed by all members of the organization.

The main challenge in this architectural function is maintaining consistency and authenticity. The structure of meaning will collapse if cracks are found due to inconsistencies between the words and actions of leaders. When there is inconsistency between the narrative that is constructed and the operational decisions that are made, or when the leader's actions appear manipulative and insincere, the trust that binds the structure together will be eroded (Souba & Souba, 2016). This can lead to cynicism, where members of the organization begin to see all leadership rhetoric as a mere tool of control. Meaning architecture requires a building block called credibility. This credibility is built through transparency, integrity, and perseverance in implementing the values that are proclaimed. Leaders must constantly check the alignment between the meaning design they carry and the reality of the experience they create for others. Any misalignment is a design flaw that can weaken the entire structure.

The evolution and adaptation of the meaning structure is also the responsibility of its architect. Meaning that is rigid and unable to adapt to changing times will become obsolete and lose its relevance. Leaders must periodically review the organizational narrative, modifying it in line with changes in the external environment, internal dynamics, and generational shifts among members. This may involve reinterpreting old values in a new light, or even carefully shifting the emphasis from one aspect of identity to another. This process requires sensitivity and courage. On the one hand, leaders must respect the heritage and traditions that provide continuity. On the other hand, they must open up possibilities for growth and renewal of meaning (Obholzer & Miller, 2018). This ability to adapt is a key factor in maintaining the relevance and performance of the organizational culture itself (Irfan et al., 2024). Balancing stability and change are one

of the most difficult tasks in leadership as an architect of meaning, determining whether an organization will remain relevant or become trapped in its past.

This architectural function also has a profound ethical dimension. Because leaders have great power to shape the reality perceived by many people, they bear a moral responsibility for the kind of meaning they construct. Narratives that are divisive, that sacrifice certain groups, or that encourage unethical behavior for the sake of organizational goals, are examples of destructive meaning architecture. Leaders as architects of meaning must consider the long-term consequences of the narratives they disseminate (Hazy, 2012). Do these narratives humanize or degrade? Do they build up or tear down? Do they inspire noble things or justify base ones? This ethical awareness must be an integral part of the design process, ensuring that the meaning structures built are not only functionally effective but also dignified and socially responsible.

The success of the architectural function of leadership can be seen in the degree to which meaning has been internalized. A sign that the meaning structure is firmly established is when it no longer needs to be explicitly stated. It becomes "the way we do things here", an unquestioned assumption, a natural lens through which to view the world. Members of the organization begin to use the leader's language and metaphors spontaneously, the organization's stories are retold by others as if they were their own, and decisions are made with reference to an established value framework without the need for detailed instructions. At this point, the leader has successfully transferred the architecture of meaning from their own mind into the collective mindset of the organization. The structure becomes shared property, lives in everyday conversations and actions, and continues to be maintained even when the original architect is no longer present.

The architectural function of leadership in the construction of organizational meaning is a complex and dynamic multi-stage process. This process begins with the interpretation of reality, develops towards the provision of a vision, and is realized through institutionalization into systems and rituals. Symbolic communication, the management of ambiguity, and dialectical relationships with followers are key mechanisms that bring this process to life. The challenges of consistency, the need for adaptation, and ethical dimensions color all of these architectural activities. The expected end result is the establishment of a coherent, legitimate, and internalized collective meaning structure that functions as a navigation map and source of identity for the entire organization. This achievement creates the psychological and cognitive conditions necessary for the organization to function effectively and meaningfully, which then becomes the basis for the formation of a specific psychological culture, as will be discussed in the next section.

The Influence of Leadership Meaning Construction on the Formation of Psychological Culture

The meaning structure designed by leadership does not remain in the realm of abstract ideas; it takes root and shapes the psychological atmosphere that every member of the organization breathes in every day. Psychological culture, as a manifestation of the emotional climate and shared perceptions of the reality of work, is directly influenced by the quality and substance of this meaning architecture. When leaders consistently frame challenges as opportunities for learning and growth, for example, this gradually creates a collective perception that the workplace is an environment that supports growth. Organizational members begin to feel that their abilities can be developed, that their efforts are valued, and that failure is not the end of everything but part of the process. Conversely, a leadership narrative that constantly focuses on threats, punishment, and external demands will result in an atmosphere filled with anxiety and defensiveness (Whittington et al., 2017). Thus, the core messages constructed by meaning architects act as seeds from which collective behavioral norms and emotional patterns grow, forming the basis of an organization's psychological culture.

One of the most central elements of psychological culture is trust. Trust does not arise in a vacuum; it is built on a foundation of transparency, reliability, and goodwill that is communicated continuously. This is where the construction of leadership meaning shows its most direct influence. Trust in leaders and, ultimately, trust among members of the organization, depends heavily on the coherence between the narrative that is constructed and the reality that is experienced. This coherence is also a key lever in distributing and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the organization (Darmawan, 2024). If leaders construct a narrative of collaboration and reciprocity, but the reward system is highly competitive and individualistic, then this double message will destroy trust. Trust develops when leaders' words align with their actions, when announced visions are followed by consistent resource allocation, and when promises are kept (Varney, 2009). The process of honest and reliable meaning architecture creates an environment where people feel safe to depend on each other, trust that information is shared with good intentions, and believe that common interests are upheld. A high-trust psychological culture is a direct product of credible leadership in its construction of reality.

The concept of psychological safety, which is the belief that one can express opinions, questions, or concerns without fear of embarrassment or punishment, is greatly influenced by how leaders frame mistakes and differences of opinion. Leaders who construct narratives of perfection and blamelessness, who always look for scapegoats when problems arise, actively create a culture of fear. Organizational members will hide problems, avoid risks, and be reluctant to put forward uncertain ideas. Conversely, leaders who function as architects of meaning by framing mistakes as valuable learning opportunities, who openly discuss their own failures as part of the organizational narrative, are building the foundations for strong psychological safety (R & R, 2024). This type of constructive leadership style, which encourages innovative behavior and work engagement, has been proven to be an important driver of employee performance (Putra & Mardikaningsih, 2022). In multicultural organizations, this flexibility and adaptability in

leadership is even more crucial for creating inclusive psychological safety and driving team performance (Gardi et al., 2024). Such narratives provide psychological permission to be imperfect, to experiment, and to engage in difficult conversations. A psychologically safe culture is the result of leadership that deliberately designs a meaning structure that prioritizes growth and honesty over image and mistakes.

Meaning architecture also directly shapes perceptions of fairness within organizations, which is another pillar of a healthy psychological culture. Procedural and distributive fairness is not just about mathematical formulas for bonus distribution; it is closely related to the explanations and narratives that accompany difficult decisions. Leaders, as the primary interpreters, are responsible for providing meaningful explanations of why a decision was made, how the process unfolded, and why the outcome appears as it does (Forte et al., 2024). Even when the outcome is unpleasant for some, an honest, transparent explanation that shows respect can maintain a sense of fair treatment. The quality of supervision and career development that is fairly framed by leadership is a concrete example of how meaning construction influences job satisfaction (Sinambela et al., 2023). A leader's ability to positively build and manage the work climate is a direct manifestation of procedural justice, which significantly influences employee performance (Jahroni et al., 2020). Conversely, decisions announced without adequate explanation, or with narratives that feel manipulative, will create perceptions of injustice that poison the psychological culture. By designing communication that respects the dignity and common sense of others, leaders establish the norm that everyone deserves an explanation, thereby reinforcing feelings of being valued and treated equally.

The meaning of the work itself, which is a key component of engagement and well-being, is completely reshaped by leadership architectural activities (Vacariu, 2005). An administrative task can be perceived as a tedious routine, or it can be perceived as an important part of serving customers and supporting colleagues; the difference often lies in the narrative built around it. Leaders who connect each role to the larger organizational purpose, who tell the story of how specific individual contributions make a difference, are fundamentally changing the work experience. They provide satisfying answers to the existential question, "Why am I doing this?" This construction of meaning, which connects individual work to broader goals, is at the heart of efforts to encourage employee engagement in sustainable initiatives to achieve social goals (Hariani & Mardikaningsih, 2024). Especially in social organizations, effective leadership development is directed towards increasing the capacity to respond to complex challenges by framing the meaning of work in a powerful and socially impactful way (Corte-Real et al., 2021). A psychological culture characterized by high engagement and a sense of belonging is one in which the majority of members find personal meaning in collective work. This achievement is not accidental; it is the result of continuous leadership efforts to weave the threads of individual endeavors into a coherent and dignified narrative.

The social identity of organizational members, that is, how they define themselves in relation to the group, is also a product of leadership meaning construction (Mercurio et al., 2023). The narrative of "us" constructed by leaders about who we are, what we believe in, and what distinguishes us from others directly shapes collective identity. Is that identity inclusive or exclusive? Is it based on excellence or victimhood? Is it rigid or adaptive? The answers to these questions determine the nature of psychological culture. The leadership style applied by leaders not only affects performance but also fundamentally shapes employees' affective commitment to organizational identity (Anjanarko & Arifin, 2022). Servant leadership practices, for example, explicitly build collective identity based on service and team effectiveness, which impacts organizational performance (Irfan & Al Hakim, 2022). Inclusive narratives based on positive values create a culture of pride and healthy solidarity. Exclusive and hostile narratives can create a strong in-group culture, but are often accompanied by prejudice, closed-mindedness, and fear of difference. Leaders, through their choice of words and stories, actively shape the boundaries of this identity and the emotional tone that accompanies it, which ultimately determines how members of the organization treat each other and those outside the organization.

An organization's psychological resilience, its ability to bounce back from setbacks, is also rooted in the quality of its meaning architecture (Willett et al., 2023). Organizations that have strong narratives about their history of overcoming adversity, about their collective strength, and about their unwavering purpose, will have greater psychological reserves when facing crises. Leaders play a crucial role in nurturing this narrative of resilience. They remind the organization of its resources and capabilities, frame setbacks as temporary challenges in a long journey, and emphasize unity and shared purpose as the foundation for recovery. A resilient psychological culture is characterized by realistic optimism and collective resolve, both of which are psychological conditions that can be cultivated through stories that are strategically selected and disseminated by leadership. Without narratives that build resilience, organizations can quickly be overcome by panic and despair when times get tough.

However, this influence is not a deterministic and frictionless process. Organizational members are not passive recipients of the meaning offered by leaders. They have their own experiences, values, and interpretations, which may accept, reject, or modify leadership narratives. Therefore, the psychological culture that ultimately emerges is always the result of interaction, sometimes negotiation, between meaning proposed from above and meaning experienced and articulated from below. Effective leaders understand this. They do not impose a monologue; they facilitate dialogue. They create channels for other voices to be heard, acknowledge the diversity of experiences, and allow a shared narrative to develop through conversation. The healthiest and most authentic psychological cultures usually emerge from this kind of

collaborative process, where leadership provides the framework and direction, but the content is enriched by collective contributions. This results in a greater sense of ownership of the culture, making it more stable and enduring.

The influence of meaning construction on psychological culture also operates through role modelling. Every action of a leader is a message about what is acceptable and expected. The way they react under pressure, the way they treat people who disagree with them, the way they celebrate success – all of these are direct lessons about the culture they want to create. This modelling is the most powerful form of meaning communication because it is direct and undeniable. When a leader actively listens, shows empathy, and acknowledges the contributions of others, they are not just talking about respect; they are demonstrating respect, thereby making it a living norm. Psychological culture is ultimately shaped by thousands of micro-moments like these, where proclaimed values are tested and proven in practice. Consistency between a leader's verbal messages and non-verbal behavior is the most important catalyst for crystallizing meaning into operational cultural norms.

Meaning construction by leadership acts as the primary shaping mechanism for an organization's psychological culture. Through narrative, explanation, and behavioral modelling, leadership systematically influences fundamental elements such as trust levels, psychological safety, perceptions of fairness, meaning of work, collective identity, and resilience. This process is interactive and dialectical, requiring credibility and consistency from leaders as well as participation from organizational members. The result is a shared emotional and cognitive climate that can foster growth, engagement, and high performance, or conversely, create an environment of fear, cynicism, and disengagement. Understanding these channels of influence confirms that responsibility for organizational psychological culture cannot be separated from leadership's responsibility to carefully, ethically, and effectively design and communicate meaning.

CONCLUSIONS

This literature study has successfully outlined and linked two closely related leadership functions: as an architect of meaning and as a shaper of organizational psychological culture. The analysis shows that leadership operates through a dynamic architectural process, starting from the interpretation of reality, the formulation of a narrative vision, to the institutionalization of meaning into organizational systems and rituals. This process is carried out through symbolic communication, ambiguity management, and dialectical relationships with organizational members, with its effectiveness highly dependent on the consistency, credibility, and ethical awareness of the leader. Furthermore, this construction of meaning is not the end goal; it is the main causal mechanism that shapes the psychological climate of the organization. The structure of meaning constructed by leadership directly influences collective perceptions of trust, psychological security, fairness, meaning of work, shared identity, and resilience. Thus, the psychological culture experienced daily by organizational members is essentially the crystallization and operationalization of leadership narratives that are repeatedly communicated and modelled. These findings reinforce the view that leadership is essentially a practice of shaping social and emotional reality within organizations.

The theoretical implication of this synthesis is the strengthening of a framework that combines symbolic-transformational leadership theory with studies of organizational culture and climate. This framework invites researchers to no longer view the construction of meaning and the formation of culture as separate domains, but rather as two stages in a continuous leadership process. The practical implications are significant for executives, managers, and aspiring leaders. First, there is a need to increase awareness that every communication, decision, and action is part of meaning-building activities that have direct psychological consequences. Leadership development programmed need to incorporate training in narrative skills, event interpretation, and consistent value modelling. Second, organizations must design leadership evaluation systems that not only measure financial or operational results but also assess the impact of leaders on psychological cultural elements such as levels of trust and psychological safety in the units they lead. Accountability for a healthy work climate must be an integral part of leadership responsibility.

Based on these findings and implications, several suggestions can be made. For the academic community, it is recommended to conduct further empirical research that examines the specific relationship between certain types of leadership narratives (e.g., growth-based versus threat-based narratives) and measurable psychological culture indicators, such as the level of voluntary error reporting or employee engagement survey scores. Qualitative research could also explore how organizational members actively accept, reject, or modify the meanings offered by leaders in different national or industry contexts. For practitioners in organizations, it is recommended to regularly reflect on and audit the dominant organizational narratives. This exercise can be conducted through focus group discussions or anonymous surveys to understand how leadership messages are interpreted at the employee level. In addition, establishing a safe forum for conversation where employees can express the gap between stated values and their experiences can be a valuable tool for leaders to adjust and refine their meaning architecture. Finally, leadership succession programmed should priorities candidates who not only possess strategic competencies, but also the emotional maturity and symbolic ability to nurture and develop the meaning structures and positive psychological culture that have been built.

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