

## ACADEMIC PAPER

# Transdisciplinary public leadership theory: Between the extremes of “traditional public administration” and “new public management”

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The 21st century public organization is faced with complex problems, informed stakeholders, and information flows, which necessitate a corresponding open system view of leadership. The traditional notions of public administration and new public management had been structured by strict bureaucratic rules and managerial flexibility, respectively. This paper begins by theorizing two hypothetical constructs (helicopter and deadbeat leadership), which engage in extreme micromanagement/surveillance and negligence/indifference, respectively. Those form basis for designing an optimal (transdisciplinary) leadership, which forges synergistic link between leaders, subordinates, and external actors in codesigning objectives and strategies to address societal problems. Strategies to promote transdisciplinary leadership are discussed.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The public leadership literature had mainly been underpinned by Weberian bureaucracy and Taylor's scientific management theory (Bingham, O'leary, & Carlson, 2014; Frederickson, Smith, Larimer, & Licari, 2015), which had maintained that mechanistic organizational control remains more appropriate to stable organizational environments (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Rational calculation (excessive control), rules (precision) associated with these theories tended to reduce leaders and workers into a bureaucratic machine and behaved as “a cog in a wheel.” In other words, ingenuity, initiative, and context-dependent decision making appeared largely inhibited (Torsteinsen, 2012). Observing the structural constraints and practical limitations associated with the regime, new public management (NPM) theorists rose in the 1980s and 1990s to advance a need for flexibility, innovation, managerialism, and responsiveness in the public sector, which challenged the basic tenets of bureaucratic/mechanistic organizational forms (Miles, Snow, Matthews, & Coleman, 1997).

The 21st century public sector is faced with complex social problems mostly ill-defined and “wicked” in nature (Geyer & Rihani, 2012; Innes & Booher, 2010). Public organizations and officials are faced with challenging goals exacerbated by limited resources flanked by complex and informed stakeholders, alert media, advances in information technology (IT), and information flow (Head & Alford, 2015; Thomas, 2013). That regard, subordinates or external actors may be

well-informed on a prevailing issue at times even more than management or the so-called “experts” (Von Krogh, Nonaka, & Rechsteiner, 2012). Public organizations have multiple departments or units and stakeholders. Each of these entities has a peculiar goal (solving societal problems) to make lives better for their clients (citizens), at times, mandate or goals may overlap. Thomas (2013) contends “today's public managers face a public far more complex than their predecessors encountered. This public is more complex in its numbers, with more organizations and more people, and more complex in the interests those organizations and individuals represent, ranging from the concerns of traditional business and labor groups to those of citizen and public interest groups” (p. 1). This calls for a shift in the organizational leadership approach toward a one that strives for an interplay between leaders, organizational members, and external constituents in a more participatory and consultative manner.

Assessment of literature reveals that theories of leadership mainly emanate or are determined by the nature of interaction between leaders and their subordinates (House & Aditya, 1997). They posit “to this day, the dominant proportion of ... studies is primarily concerned with the relationship between leaders and followers” (p. 409). A missing link has been an apparent neglect of the cultural context within, which leaders operate, the interaction between leaders and their external constituencies. Scholars (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1998) propose the chaos and complexity theories to recommend a new focus on the leadership literature and discourse. This current study

conceptualizes transdisciplinary leadership (hereafter “trans'd'leadership”) and advances how such approach is applicable and relevant to administrative processes in the public sector. The concept of transdisciplinarity is credited to Nicolescu (1985) who contends a need to remove the boundaries between entities and the rest of the world to solve societal problems. Taking cues from his notion, this paper argues that the transdisciplinary leader is the one that strives to remove the boundaries between the organization (management and key decision makers), its departments (line supervisors and staff), and outside world (external environment and stakeholders) to really serve the latter well or address their problems. A hallmark of transdisciplinary leader is integration, resilience, deep learning, and the quest for organizational sustainability underscored by philosophy of making decision “with” stakeholders and tailor-made “for” them. McGregor and Volckmann (2013) provide that transdisciplinarity is the appropriate means to create those interspaces to facilitate cross-sectoral learning and integrative knowledge. From the notions above, this paper posits that public organization needs to become borderless and cordless by building bridges between its departments and outside world in attempt to confront the complex challenges facing society. The main goal of this paper is to conceptualize an optimal leadership typology that is more tailor-made to governing the 21st century public sector organization, which is faced with complex problems and stakeholders.

## 2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 | Great man theory vs. open system view of leadership

The great man theory had underpinned leadership treatise in the 19th century, which developed out of the extraordinary qualities of renowned leaders (including Julius Caesar, Mahatma Gandhi, and Cyrus the Great) leading to the idea that great leaders are born with unique qualities/traits, which cannot be found in all members of society. That regard, such theory posits that leaders are born and not made. Knee-deep in this mentality, many leaders/managers are tempted to carry themselves as repository of knowledge, expertise, and experience, or age and may tend to operate as a lone ranger in steering the affairs of the organization and decision making processes (Ireland & Hitt, 2005).

Scholars (Fernandez, Cho, & Perry, 2010) focus on the leader/manager as a strategic individual; it nonetheless, does not suggest that he/she acts as a lone ranger but in concert with other stakeholders. These scholars focus on the interplay of leaders and followers in the traditional leader–follower dyadic relationship. However, it could be observed that a greater amount of interactions in the organization transpire between colleagues along the horizontal or vertical levels rather than between formal leaders and their subordinates (Kickul & Neuman, 2000). This has given rise to the idea of distributed leadership (Fernandez et al., 2010; Van Wart, 2014). Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) contend “leadership is not only incremental influence of a boss toward subordinates, but most importantly it is the collective incremental influence of leaders in and around the system” (see also Scott, 1987). The open system theory

provides useful model for explaining the interaction between an organization, its immediate, and remote stakeholders. Organizations are not cut off from their environments (Scott, 1987), “but are open to and rely on flows of both human and non-human resources from outside” (ibid, p. 23). In an age of greater interdependence and networks, an organization cannot function as a closed loop (self-regulating), but an open loop, which has to rely heavily on its external environments to survive (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002).

## 3 | METHODOLOGY

This study analyzes from theoretical and existing empirical studies, drawn from journal articles, cases, and online resources to assess the challenges in contemporary public sector leadership and attempts to conceptualize a transdisciplinary leadership, which is premised on the open system view of organization. The literature search covered all terminologies related to the concept of leadership in the public sector: “public sector leadership,” “new public management,” “bureaucratic public sector management,” and “public governance.” Authors combined adjectives related to common obstacles faced in public leadership under archetypical bureaucratic leadership and NPM. The study first developed two ideal leadership constructs labeled “helicopter leadership<sup>1</sup>” and “deadbeat leadership<sup>2</sup>” framed along “bureaucracy” of traditional public administration and “managerial flexibility” of NPM, respectively. Finally, the study searched for literature on optimal leadership typology (transdisciplinary leadership<sup>3</sup>) situated within a midpoint of the two extremes. Search words for developing the optimal leadership typology included “public value governance,” “collaborative governance,” “shared leadership,” “distributed leadership,” and “participatory leadership.”

The above phrases were combined variously to obtain a pool of relevant literature on the study. The following search domains were adopted based on their relevance to the study and accessibility to the researchers: Springer, Tandfonline, EmeraldInsight, and Google Scholar. The large pool of articles was initially sorted for relevance by skimming through their abstracts. After this heuristic process, all abstracts were independently reviewed by each of the three authors. At the end of the process, authors met to eliminate duplicates and made a short list of abstracts for detailed and systematic review.

## 4 | THE TRANS'D'LEADERSHIP THEORY

This study discusses a new approach to leadership in public sector. The study initially designs two extreme hypothetical leadership constructs, deadbeat leadership and helicopter leadership, respectively. A midpoint between these two constructs is the transdisciplinary leadership (trans'd'leadership theory). Deadbeat is used in this study to

<sup>1</sup>A leader who engages in extreme surveillance approach, “micromanages” everything subordinates do.

<sup>2</sup>A purely idle and clueless leader who is oblivious of his/her supervisory role.

<sup>3</sup>Transdisciplinary leadership forges link between leaders, subordinates, and external actors in codesigning objectives and strategies.

represent a purely idle and clueless leader who is oblivious of his/her supervisory role and mainly leaves subordinates to do whatever they desire without recourse to adequate supervision. This is denoted by greater and thicker arrows (see Figure 1) flowing from subordinates/staff, demonstrating their unfettered influence vis-à-vis the leader/manager as far as business of the organization is concerned. Helicopter is used to conceptualize a leader who engages in extreme surveillance approach, “micromanages” everything subordinates do; and he/she does not allow them space for ingenious participation. This is denoted by total and maximum flows from the leader (Figure 1) demonstrating that all instructions, directives, insights, and inputs flow from top-down leader while subordinates are reduced to tools and objects who only comply without any meaningful input or ingenuity. The transdisciplinary leadership theory seeks to distinguish between two types of organizations, namely, those dominated by deadbeat leadership and those dominated by helicopter leadership. Being hypothetical suggests, these two extreme organizations (those by deadbeat and helicopter leadership) may not exist in the real world although there might be some organizational context, which could come too close. The transd leadership represents a midpoint between deadbeat leadership and helicopter leadership and consolidates other relevant features, which make it optimal for addressing 21st century complex public sector problems. The proportional array of arrows flowing in equilibrium position (Figure 1) demonstrates that the leader and subordinates codesign and cocreate strategies and enforce in a more collaborative/participatory manner. Beyond the interaction of leader-subordinate, a striking attribute of the transdisciplinary leader is its open system view, which lays emphasis on external stakeholders in strategy formulation and task execution.

#### 4.1 | Deadbeat leadership

“Deadbeat” is used to illustrate a completely “hands-off” leadership approach where leaders allow their subordinates a total unguarded space to make own decisions on how organizational objectives set up by leaders would be achieved. Typically, there is a disconnection between the leader and subordinates in their expectations; the leader is concerned with setting objectives for the organization and also provision of requisite resources using his own “expertise” or how he/she deems fit. The subordinates or staff on the hand, have a task to adopt ways to accomplish such objectives in a way they also deem fit. The latter is to resolve problems, overcome issues, and generate work schedules by themselves. In other words, there is centrifugal force<sup>4</sup> between the two, where both the leader and subordinate drift away from the center (achieving organizational goals). This type of leadership typifies a situation where leaders demonstrate total disregard for supervisory duties and lack of guidance to subordinates (see Bradford & Lippitt, 1945).

<sup>4</sup>A concept borrowed from natural science, which means a force, arising from the body's inertia,... and is directed away from the center around which the body is moving.

#### Box 1: Structural weaknesses with deadbeat leadership

Deadbeat leadership is susceptible to widespread manipulation of the system by subordinates due to the total freedom and could also be suicidal if subordinates do not possess high expertise, discipline, (Eagly, et al. 2003) or skills on the job. The disconnection between leaders and staff in setting objectives or tasks to be accomplished may reduce the quality of goals. Superiors should know that the sum of product derived from synergy between leaders and staff is far greater than the exclusive setting of organizational goals by leaders. For example, the duo could actively brainstorm on how public welfare could be enhanced or how to structure public problems and could avail to the organization various policy alternatives, alternate ways of achieving the desired choice. The deadbeat leadership also becomes caput where organizational members do not possess the ability to set their own timelines and how to manage projects and problems on their own. This would have a negative impact on organizational outcomes. This leadership typology may lead to disjointedness in the organization as members within a group may be unaware of their own roles within the broader framework of the organization. The deadbeat leadership approach leaves leaders largely uninvolved and mainly segregated from how things are done in the organization. It is more likely to usher staff to exhibit carelessness in the operationalization of their duties. Due to the disconnection between leaders and staff, it is possible for the former to insulate himself/herself personal accountability and responsibility for the subordinate's failures. Finally, unethical staff may see the unfettered freedom to perpetrate other unorthodox administrative practices including corruption of all forms and kinds.

#### 4.2 | Helicopter leadership

This illustrates leadership approach whereby the leader closely monitors and controls the activities of subordinates or employees without recourse to the views of the latter. Leaders “micromanage” the subordinates in a typical surveillance approach where the latter do not have breathing space for ingenuity. Typically, helicopter leader attempts at digging his/her fingers deep into the pie of those actually doing the work; the leader pokes his/her nose in the whole kit and caboodle of the subordinate ostensibly to ensure objectives and tasks are executed precisely in the “leader's way.” This reflects a typical traditional public administration structured by ideal type bureaucracy underpinned with strict rules, strict adherence to procedures/orders, and detailed supervision. Workers operate according to the will and detailed direction of the leader who rewards the efforts of subordinates positively or negatively. These leaders are in constant flux with their subordinates directing them on “what,” the “how” as well as

“when” to do and ensures compliance by closely monitoring them. Followers may be obliged to carry out these conscientiously, albeit, they may not know “the why” behind the objectives, or they could have achieved such objective using more prudent approach in an efficient or effective manner (Sosik & Jung, 2010). Stress management, which remains crucial in public sector HR tends to be downplayed in this leadership typology and rather nourishes stressful work environment (Elshout, Scherp, & Feltz-Cornelis, 2013).

### Box 2: Helicopter leadership makes workplace a hell

Helicopter leadership makes the management tools of leaders become narrowed, almost limited to control and surveillance, which when overtly resorted to becomes problematic, and leaders would end up losing same. If leadership gets reduced to surveillance and control, participation, “give and take” communication between leaders and subordinates get eroded. Excessive display of control as an instrument of leadership will eventually lead to breakdown of trust in the organization. Helicopter leaders are authoritarians whose approach may be viewed by subordinates as despotic, and an insistence on micromanaging may suggest distrust for employees and the latter may feel same. Behn (1995) viewed the micromanagement problem as a trust question; distrust between funding organizations and contractors has resulted in many procedural rules. Attempts at micromanagement impose considerable operational constraints that prevent workers from experimentation or innovation in service delivery (Behn & Kant, 1999). Higher degrees and prolonged period of helicopter governance nurture/nourish a very dependent workforce who lack confidence; produces a timid workplace climate where people become less assertive and staff may feel disabled in carrying out task without leader's instruction even if urgent and contextually appreciable. Why would the leader/management spend resources to hire competent/experienced staff if their views will not count? Steve Jobs put it, “it doesn't make sense to hire smart people and then tell them what to do. We hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.” This is against a backdrop that organizations recruit their workforce by assessing their core competencies.

Staff who feel being surveilled by their leaders and only reduced to “robots” may eventually consider resigning or seeking alternative employment elsewhere. A major reason for helicopter leadership is perhaps because leaders feel employees are inexperienced, not too perfect, and not trustworthy; insecurity and ego of leaders which in all cases tend to view workers in a negative sense (Chambers, 2009). This leadership may achieve short term objectives but repugnant to medium and long-term productivity and growth of organizations.

### 4.3 | Structural constraints with the helicopter leadership model

The helicopter leadership regime with extreme adherence to procedures is usually underpinned by strictest sense of Weber's ideal type bureaucracy, which calls for total subservience to formal and systematic procedures, which might not necessarily be the most effective or efficient in performance of context-specific tasks. There are various studies, which demonstrate that the sets of formalized procedures tend to constrain the process of delivering services to the public sector (De Vries & Nemec, 2013). Detailed attention to instructions, laid down rules tends to create “paper trails” and only slows down the public sector's capacity to achieve stated goals. Helicopter leadership, with strict bureaucratic underpinnings, result in over formalization, rigidity in policy, and task execution (Raadschelders, 2014).

Additionally, helicopter leadership, which mainly hinges on the exclusive expertise of leaders is prone to a phenomenon Veblen refers to as “trained incapacity,” which is “that state of affairs which one's abilities function as inadequacies or blind spots; .. and inadequate flexibility in the application of skills will in a changing milieu, result in more or less serious maladjustments.” Strict adherence to rules and instructions and impersonal touch with duty becomes problematic because “functionaries minimize personal characterization and resort to categorization, the peculiarities of individual cases are often ignored” (Merton, 1940, p. 566). Employees are reduced to robots, which is counterproductive because the “... inadequate flexibility in the application of skills will in a changing milieu, result in more or less serious maladjustments” (Merton. 1940, p. 4).

### 4.4 | An optimal leadership typology: Trans'd leadership

While the deadbeat leader totally is secluded from employees, the helicopter leader also unduly hawks on the employees, which in both cases often are detrimental to employee productivity. In both cases, the leader and the organization remain silent on external stakeholders and how their concerns are brought into the larger picture of organizational goal setting/objectives. They appear to view the organization as closed system because they make no clear-cut reference to the external environment. This paper conceptualizes the transdisciplinary leader (trans'd leader) as one who neither totally ignores the subordinates in goal setting or task accomplishment nor totally micromanages how things are to be done. This leadership ensures optimal connection between leaders and subordinates in goal setting and task accomplishment in a collaborative manner. The leader engages workers by designing a common objective, which also takes into consideration the numerous external actors who are stakeholders to the organization or would be affected by the organization's decisions. In other words, this leader is a team player, collaborative, transformational, and engages with workers within the organizational walls and those external stakeholders.

This leadership typology typically is focused on carrying subordinates along by transforming their values and beliefs (Johnson & Dipboye, 2008). The leader inspires subordinates and brings them into

a common platform of joint goal setting and how best to accomplish organizational goals. Decision making is neither the sole responsibility of the leader nor totally delegated to subordinates but a joint task undertaken by both leaders and staff. Task accomplishment is also not the sole responsibility of subordinates but a brainstorming process between leaders and relevant actors on “how best” to accomplish the task in a more effective and efficient manner. Due to the collaborative approach, this leadership adopts, workers are well motivated hence they perform with their hand, head, and heart (3Hs) to accomplish the desired organizational goals. Burns (1978) provides key features (personality, communication, rational stimulation, and individualized thought), which are relevant to stimulating a joint action and process between leaders and followers.

TD leader is also a transformational leader, very charismatic and possesses unique qualities (McLaurin & Al-Amri, 2008). This leadership typology is more pronounced and ideal at the upper level of management where strategic decisions are conceptualized and carried out. Subordinates or staff are carried along, involved in the decision processes and views are consolidated in the total decision processes. These leaders do not hawk on staff, do not fully ignore them but try to develop workers' full potential by engaging and actively involving them in relevant activities of the organization (Johnson & Dipboye, 2008). The leader's ability to motivate the follower to accomplish more than what the follower planned to accomplish (Krishnan 2005) is the synergistic value derived from transdisciplinarity.

In this typology, the leadership space is very opened and embraces the idea of shared responsibility (Pearce, 2004) between leader, their subordinates, and external environment; and decisions are made taking cues from the organizational environment and external actors (Ireland & Hitt, 2005). This type of leadership whose emphasis is on networks and collaborative approach to decision making is ideal for 21st century public sector, which is confronted with complex and wicked problems, which are in a flux exacerbated by advancement in information flow. Pearce, Manz, and Sims (2009) maintain “senior most leaders may not possess sufficient and relevant information to make highly effective decisions in a fast-changing and complex world ...” (p. 235). In reality, “managers down the line may be more highly informed and in a far better position to provide leadership” (ibid, p. 235). The growing complexities of public problems and sophisticated public (stakeholders) in the 21st century fly in the face of the traditional idea of how organizations and public sector should operate, which necessitates transdisciplinary leadership. The fundamental distinction between traditional notions of leadership and transdisciplinary leadership is that the influence process is built upon more than just downward influence on subordinates or followers by an appointed or elected leader. The latter entails broadly sharing power and influence among a set of individuals rather than centralizing it in the hands of a single individual who acts in the clear role of a dominant superior. Essentially, public leadership should be viewed as a dynamic, unfolding, interactive influence process among individuals, where the objective is to lead one another toward the achievement of collective goals and that, the influence process often involves peer influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence. The “machine-like” tendencies of helicopter leadership (underpinned by micromanagement and extreme bureaucracy) tend to complicate

the task of providing good customer service and public value to citizens; Lovell (1992) puts it, bureaucracies “are developed to do a specific job” and mostly execute such jobs and but “do not lend themselves easily to change,” (even when context demands such flexibility and dynamism; p. 395).

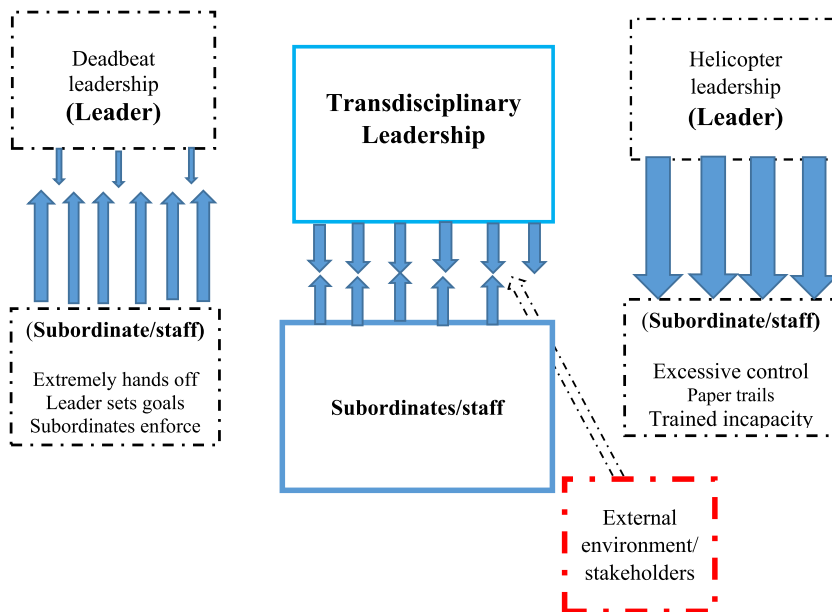
#### 4.5 | 4.3 Justification of transdisciplinary leadership theory

A dominant leadership paradigm has been conceptualized along a single individual with an emphasis on how that individual (leader) inspires, commands, and controls followers. Such framing has underpinned leadership discourse and practice largely reinforced by media attention to great leaders (Pearce et al., 2009, p. 234). Meanwhile, empirical evidence suggests that effective teams and shared leadership produce appreciable outcomes which have made some scholars argue for shared leadership (Pearce et al., 2009; Taylor, 2013; Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). For instance, a study of 500 companies revealed that although the role of CEOs remained paramount, those companies that really performed well were those organized in teams with shared leadership (see Pearce et al., 2009). In their study, some relevant narratives were quoted by managers and team leaders, which remain relevant to transdisciplinary leadership theorizing. See Box 3.

##### Box 3: Narratives relevant to transdisciplinary leadership

“my [manager's] most important role is for building the team; getting them to interact without being directed”;  
 “you [manager] have to play cheerleader sometimes [and] you [manager] have to be careful not to be a dictator”  
 “I [manager] have told them [employees] their goal is to replace me. “let's have a critical conversation”  
 Pearce et al., 2009

The foregoing discussions have been corroborated by Vera and Crossan (2004) that leaders should carry themselves largely as facilitators/enablers to foster the congenial atmosphere that support organizational learning and knowledge sharing throughout the organization. Public leaders should therefore not be seen as setting the strategy but rather establishing the parameters or boundaries within which strategy could develop/emerge. Lewin (1999) advances a new “management logic,” whereby leaders adopt/select the arenas of competition, setting strategic performance aspirations or setting the strategic stance, and to facilitate a process of collaboratively unpacking with subordinates and other external stakeholders. Jonas et al. (1990) corroborate that an optimal leader should strive to create a room for change, nurture commitment and ownership, and needs to balance stability and innovation in a shared manner. Observing the challenges associated with mutually exclusive tendencies (lone ranger practices) of leaders, Clark (1999) sees it distasteful for leaders to take decisions and strategies and impose on subordinates. Clark rather argues for leadership interventions that will bring forth “emergent strategy”



**FIGURE 1** Transdisciplinary leadership model

defined in this current study to mean outcomes derived through ideas synthesized from the deliberative interaction between different organizational members who are integrated, involving team members from diverse backgrounds and units within the organization together with key external constituents by bridging the barrier between management, staff and external environment. The transdisciplinary leader does not see himself or herself as a lone ranger or a repository of knowledge (all knowing) but a cocreator (primus inter pares—first among equals) and team player with other relevant stakeholders especially the subordinates. That regard, the leader strives very hard to keep the staff along, involves and engages them in strategy formulation and execution and thrives on networks. This leadership typology (Figure 1), places value on democracy or participation, staff or subordinates, public value creation, and effective engagement (see Meynhardt, 2009).

The transdisciplinary leadership is underpinned by an open system<sup>5</sup> view of organization, which not only argues for a steady collaboration or partnership between leaders and their staff/subordinates but also their external environment or actors (see Figure 2). This view is a step toward advancing existing theories of public leadership by arguing for a greater cocreation of strategies and decisions between leadership and staff with also greater inputs from their external constituents. This point has been advanced by Cooper (1984) that administrators should have an orientation to work as “professional citizens” who “seek ‘power with’ rather than ‘power over’ the citizenry” (p. 143). This calls for an active deliberation and participation of the public in the delivery of public value to the people. Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) posit a need for public leaders to engage local community members and actors from different interests and sectors because “public values and public value are not the exclusive province of government, nor is government the only set of institutions having public value obligations [*albeit*] government has a special role as guarantor of public values” (p. 373). In the public sector, a major reason that has accounted for poor policy outcomes has been lack of coordination

between ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), which end up distorting productivity (Thomas, 2013). It also becomes more problematic when leadership in the public sector secludes itself from its external environment and relevant stakeholders.<sup>6</sup> For example, in Ghana, this leadership seclusion from staff and external actors has led to the neglect of many public markets that have been constructed with public resources due to poor engagement with relevant stakeholders and somewhat failure to govern in networks. The 21st century public sector should aim at promoting “public value” in what has become known as public value governance (Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014).

#### 4.6 | From theory to praxis: Toolkit of transdisciplinary leadership

This section provides a toolkit and process for actualizing and optimizing a transdisciplinary leadership. The key strategies for ensuring TD leadership practices are illustrated in Figure 2.

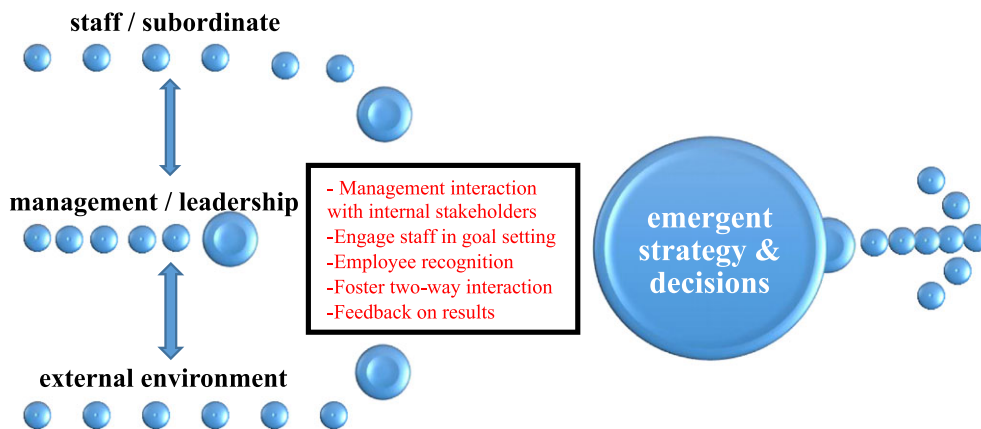
Creating and promoting public value cannot be done by the leader alone acting as a lone ranger, a collaborative approach is quintessential as this helps to bring the workers and constituents on board toward emergent strategy and outcomes (see Figure 2). The following key pointers are crucial in forging leader–follower external interaction. These are discussed below:

##### 4.6.1 | Engage employees in goal setting

A major element required to glue public organizations together is for leadership to involve the staff or subordinates in relevant decision making and target setting. Engaging employees in target and goal setting remains centerpiece in effective and efficient delivery of public sector goals. In a study of 116 health and welfare agencies, Aiken and Hage (1966) contend that high levels of formalization served as constraints on

<sup>5</sup>The concept that organizations are strongly influenced by their internal and external environment (Scott, 2007).

<sup>6</sup>Meanwhile, a new movement in post-NPM has arisen for a networked, multisector, no-one-wholly in-charge world, and to the shortcomings of previous public administration approaches.

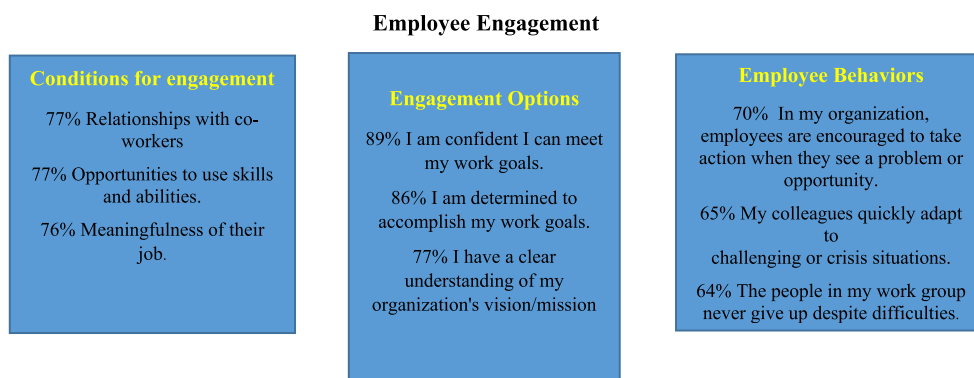


**FIGURE 2** Transdisciplinary leadership and emergent strategy

caseworker decisions. These constraints served as a source of alienation among professional employees. Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner (1994) suggests that the values emphasized in an organization's culture influence the structural characteristics that moderate the level and type of discretion exercised. From a proficiency perspective, these kinds of constraints are important because they enhance accountability, protect clients from the whims and caprices of individual bureaucrats, and reduce the potential for workers to breach the public trust, usurp political authority, and/or interject institutional, group, or individual bias into decision making (Blau & Meyer 1971; Burke 1986). A third, albeit mixed, stream of research points to the importance of client attributes in influencing decision outcomes in human service organizations (Franklin 1985; Stone 1981; Weimann 1982). If leaders fail to engage their subordinates in goal setting, there is always a fear that the goals set for staff would not be based on their individual potentials, but what the leader rather expects from them, in most cases, they would not exactly be motivated (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017; Guan & Frenkel, 2018; Yalabik, Rayton, & Rapti, 2017). It is crucial to get them in the goal setting process so that they could see purpose in the work. In an empirical survey to assess indicators and praxis of employee engagement in the United States, the Society for Human Resource Management (2016) observed that relationships between persons in the workplace and opportunities for engagement among others rank high in the engagement discourse and workplace happiness, which also has implication for employee behavior and productivity. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

### 4.6.2 | Foster a two-way conversation

A two-way communication between leadership and subordinates that is freely and regularly done helps nurture a trustworthy workplace. It is an approach to access precious inputs from subordinates as well as critical success factors from their perspective. It is also an avenue to get to know fundamental challenges and problems prevalent in the organization. A two-way communication suggests that leaders communicate with staff and staff members are also free to make their concerns and opinions expressed without fear of intimidation/victimization. In short, things are not always done in the leader's way only but in a coordinated manner. Rather than issuing orders and directives here and there, it is appreciable to ask employees for their ideas and opinions with a view to ascertaining how best a task could be accomplished more effectively and efficiently. There are many ways in killing a cat, and employees might even know the best way. It is also instructive to adopt both formal and informal avenues in order to get relevant information. This suggests that engaging employees and other stakeholders and providing avenues/platforms for their concerns/opinions/thoughts help engender emergent public value or outcomes and an added advantage of driving out the zeal and motivation required to enforce strategies and goals achieved. Cooper and Wood (2011) contend available evidence suggest that employees are moved and motivated in the workplace by things other than money, which is an indication that the



**FIGURE 3** Implications and options for employee engagement

leadership style and extent to which staff are engaged and valued contributes immensely to employee satisfaction and overall productivity. They posit, the top motivator is "respect"; how valued and trusted by their organization employees feel (Cooper & Wood, 2011).

#### 4.6.3 | Make employee recognition personal

Trans'd'leadership particularly gets to appreciate contribution of subordinates in a way, which helps to motivate them to contribute more in the productivity of the public sector. These leaders engage employees and stakeholders well in their employee recognition programs. The leaders do not micromanage what forms of rewards that should be given to employees but cocreated although leadership may have budget threshold for such program. A 2016 Society for Human Resource Management Report contends "the way jobs are shaped, by both managers and employees, has a huge impact on our sense of wellbeing at work ... , we need managers with better social and interpersonal skills, who manage people by praise and reward and not fault-finding ... , individuals should have autonomy and control over their work - the absence of micro-management".<sup>7</sup> Leaders could choose the threshold on how much budget to be spent on such efforts but should allow employees have a say in choosing what satisfies them most. That makes the recognition more personal and more motivating. Cocreating employee recognition programs will help make such reward schemes more meaningful to subordinates and more effective.

#### 4.6.4 | Focus feedback on results

Appropriately, it is imperative for leaders to be in constant touch with employees and external stakeholders in the spirit of regular feedback from its internal and external environment, which enables the organization to grow. It is instructive to guide subordinates using feedback as an input for further improvement and should avoid helicopter approach. After cocreating the objectives and process, leaders need not to micromanage employees but allow them to use their own feedback results. Employees can look at their results and think about whether or not their process worked as well as they would hope. They can see what they are doing right and what is leading to their success, as well as how they need to adapt. This type of feedback gives them more control over how they improve. It is more collaborative than being told what they are doing "right" or "wrong."

## 5 | CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has postulated that due to the growing demands on public leaders coupled with complex stakeholders and people's access to information irrespective of their positions in the organization or status in society; it has become crucial for public leaders to forge tighter and synergistic relations with the subordinates and external stakeholders in identifying public problems and codesigning workable solutions in a

synergistic manner. The paper critiques dominant arguments on leadership, which tend to either pay peculiar attention to the extraordinary traits of leaders or the dyadic leader-follower relations, which in both cases are more of close systems in nature. The paper has advanced that leadership style dominated by dictates/dominance of leader (helicopter leadership) mostly is borne out of the leader's intense fear, which may emanate from his/her perception of poor professional competence of staff, previous failure of others or experience from elsewhere, fear of being left out of the loop, risk avoidance, loss of recognition or credit for achievement, loss of influence over the final outcome, and a feeling or belief that leaders are super humans with extraordinary competence (Pearce et al., 2009). This paper maintains, the thinking that leaders are better informed or well-equipped and that subordinates or wider constituents are ill-informed should be discarded toward a paradigm shift to embrace a new public leadership practice that advances a greater collaboration and wider engagement of internal and external stakeholders. The public officer operates within a professional and political milieu and needs to balance these two imperatives through ambidexterity. Leadership ambidexterity connotes an organization's ability to be efficient in its management of current activities while enduring adaptably to address subsequent emergent demands. It implores leaders to prudently manage tensions between and among the following imperatives: stability vs. change, hierarchy vs. lateral relations, existing power structure vs. voluntary vs. involuntary power sharing, formal networks vs. informal networks, and existing forums vs. new (Bryson et al., 2014; O'Reilly & Tushman 2013). Ambidexterity is crucial for public sector leaders who need to manage between political and professional administrative imperatives. How to manage political and technical requirements in ways without compromising professionalism is crucial for public leaders. In the workplace or public sector, leadership is very important, and it is also crucial to identify some binding forces and entities within the organization that can forge or facilitate cordial collaboration between leadership, workers, and external constituents. More important is how to bridge the gap between the organization and external stakeholders. This requires the role of a champion who would act as a "collaborative capacity builder" defined to mean an individual(s) who either by legal authority, expertise valued in the network, reputation as an honest broker assists in forging greater collaboration or helps in building bridges across leaders, staff, and external stakeholders (Weber & Khademian, 2008).

In order to promote transdisciplinary leadership, the paper has provided some key signposts including an involvement of employees in goal setting, fostering a two-way conversation, making employee recognition personal, and focusing feedback on results. It is essential for public leaders to promote knowledge and information sharing between leaders, staff, and external constituents to optimize the public outcomes as well as the relevance of public outcomes to the greater good of the public (O'Leary & Vrij, 2012). There is therefore, a need to promote a clearly defined outcomes/expectation of staff so that leaders would not have to hawk or micromanage their staff all the time. A commonly defined means for evaluating employee progress should be encouraged.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.mas.org.uk/uploads/articles/Happiness\\_at\\_work\\_Why\\_it\\_Counts.pdf](http://www.mas.org.uk/uploads/articles/Happiness_at_work_Why_it_Counts.pdf)



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