

Which Leadership Principles Currently Have the Most Appeal: Leadership in Light of Contemporary Popular Leadership Literature

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Abstract

There have been countless different leadership models and principles throughout human history at other times. What kind of leadership is widely used and recognized today? One way to answer this question is to search the scholarly literature for current leadership models and - deductively - explore their academic dissemination or citation. This study takes the opposite approach: it examines whether there are references in the contemporary popular business and leadership literature to leadership as such and then to particular leadership models or principles that have a specific appeal. The guiding question, then, is whether current business books can be used to derive thematic complexes that can be traced back to virulent topoi, also with regard to leadership, and, more specifically, which popular leadership books are most in-demand and whether one can then find recurring models or principles for leadership in them. For this purpose, the New York Times bestseller list for business books is examined in a quantitative-qualitative study over three years to determine which topics in the broadest sense are currently crucial for leadership and whether and if so which elements of leadership can be derived from them. The results show that the current popular business literature focuses on the leader as a person, respectively, on the personality of the leader, and in particular on transformational leadership, including elements of transactional leadership.

Keywords: leadership; transformational; transactional; great man