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Flourishing for Sustainability: A Capabilities-Based Approach to Rethinking Leadership in Corporate Contexts

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M.A.

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the
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Abstract

In this dissertation I explore how leadership in corporate contexts might be reimagined as an educational, ethical, and developmental practice oriented towards human and organisational flourishing. I develop a conceptual argument that understands ideal leadership as relational work in conditions that enable people to expand their capabilities and to be respected and to exercise dignity at work. I argue that organisations risk undermining long-term potential when short-term efficiency is prioritised in preference to human dignity and participatory leadership, as this is likely to erode trust and constrain the very capabilities needed for resilience, innovation and, ultimately, for profitability.

I integrate Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach (CA) with selected transformational, ethical, and educational leadership theories to address the central research question: What leadership approaches are needed to enable both organisational and individual flourishing in increasingly complex and rapidly changing environments? I reimagine leadership not as a neutral technique or activity but as a normative and pedagogical practice that can act as a catalyst to enable flourishing. I conceptualise flourishing as an open-ended, relational process rather than as a fixed state or performance indicator, with practical implications for participation, inclusion, and reflective agency.

Across five chapters, I develop this conceptual argument in a cumulative way. In Chapter One, I introduce the problem, justify a conceptual mode of inquiry, and situate the study within my professional context. In Chapter Two, I elaborate the theoretical lens, focusing on the philosophical and normative foundations of Nussbaum's CA and engaging with concepts such as *Bildung*, agency, and reflective practice. In Chapter Three, I trace the development of leadership theories—ethical, educational, and corporate—through a critical lens, examining how assumptions about influence, control, and performance shape organisational life. I consider

adult learning and leadership learning as practices through which capabilities and ethical judgement can be cultivated. In Chapter Four, I synthesise what has come before to propose an integrative leadership model that aims to balance organisational efficiency with human flourishing by embedding dignity, inclusive decision-making, and shared responsibility into everyday practices. In Chapter Five, I reflect on the implications of this model for practice and research, including its significance for leadership development as adult learning.

I conclude that organisations adopting capability-oriented leadership approaches that support flourishing as a shared, situated capacity will be well positioned to cultivate long-term resilience, trust, and innovation. By positioning leadership as a pedagogical endeavour—concerned with ethical judgement, reflective engagement, and the co-construction of values—I contribute to the field of Education by extending its reach into corporate life and by offering an integrative leadership model grounded in the CA as a foundation for sustainable organisational development.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name:

Melanie Straub

Prologue: A Note on Positionality and Educational Biography

This dissertation is deeply rooted in my personal and professional trajectory. As a practitioner-researcher today, my lens is shaped by a non-linear educational path that informs my normative commitment to human potential. While the reflexive lessons of this doctoral journey are detailed in the final chapter of this work, this prologue serves to ground my research lens in specific formative experiences of inequality and agency.

My commitment to human development took a practical form during my university years. Working extensively as a private tutor (*Nachhilfelehrerin*) for pupils, I was confronted with the stark reality of inequality of opportunity. Following Nussbaum's Approach (2011) which I introduce properly later, I witnessed first-hand the gap between some students' internal abilities and their lack of 'combined capabilities'—the external conditions required to turn potential into action. As a young tutor, I instinctively adopted a holistic approach, choosing to see the whole person rather than reducing them to their functional 'student role'. While I did not have the language to explain it, this early experience solidified my understanding that flourishing is not just about individual effort, but about the structural and relational conditions that surround us.

My subsequent professional career further deepened this understanding of structural inequality. Having held a wide spectrum of roles—from unskilled factory worker (*Hilfsarbeiter*) to senior leadership and CEO-level positions—I observed the profound impact of rigid hierarchies on human agency. In the factories, I experienced how workers were often excluded from the very conversations that shaped their working conditions. They were rarely asked for their input on improvements, whereas white-collar employees were systematically included. This discrepancy reinforced my perception that voice and participation are often distributed according to hierarchical status rather than human potential or equity.

Consequently, this dissertation's central argument—that flourishing is a relational and institutional achievement—is a situated response to the unease I have felt when leadership practices reduce personhood to functional utility. By acknowledging my background as a first-generation academic and my journey across various organisational levels, I position myself as a reflective insider committed to human dignity, agency, and the transformative power of education within the corporate organisation.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introducing the Topic

In this dissertation, I develop an integrative leadership approach that understands leadership as an ethical and educational practice oriented towards human flourishing in contemporary corporate contexts. I bring Martha Nussbaum's CA into dialogue with selected leadership theories to explore how organisations can benefit from cultivating such flourishing. In this study, I address how leadership might expand organisational understandings of success beyond technical and economic gain. This introductory chapter serves several purposes. It begins by clarifying the key terms and conceptual distinctions that form the foundation of this conceptual interrogation. It outlines the rationale for selecting Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach (CA) as the central theoretical lens. The chapter also introduces the guiding research question, delineates the scope of the study, and explains the conceptual mode of inquiry that informs the dissertation's methodological stance. Ethical considerations, particularly in relation to the use of my own professional context, are also considered. At the end of this chapter, I outline how the dissertation is structured.

Contemporary organisations operate within a confluence of pressures that have fundamentally altered the conditions under which leadership is practised. Economic volatility, marked by financial uncertainty, fluctuating markets, and disrupted employment, has intensified the drive for short-term performance at the expense of longer-term, human-centred strategies. This has been compounded by rapid technological change and the rise of digital and hybrid working environments, which simultaneously expand flexibility and erode the relational fabric of organisational life. Running alongside these structural shifts is a deepening of societal inequality: uneven access to resources and opportunities that increasingly demands ethical as

well as strategic responses from those in positions of leadership. It is within this multi-layered landscape of disruption—economic, organisational, and societal—that the conditions for human flourishing have come under particular pressure.

Neglecting the enabling conditions for human flourishing in the face of economic and social disruption not only undermines ethical orientation but may also erode the very organisational capacities—such as resilience, trust and innovation—that are needed for long-term sustainability. By sustainability, I refer here to the capacity of organisations to endure and adapt over time in ways that honour both economic viability and human well-being—a concept explored in greater depth in section 1.2.3.

Against this backdrop, the following section situates the study within a wider landscape of global disruptions—economic, organisational, and partly societal—which sharpen the urgency of rethinking leadership as a practice not merely oriented towards performance and coordination but concerned with ethical and educational responsibility. As Bakker and Demerouti (2017) observe, in the face of global challenges such as economic instability, shifting workplace dynamics, and growing societal inequality, leadership is increasingly recognised as a critical factor in promoting both organisational success and individual well-being. This is a proposition I address in section 1.4 and develop conceptually across Chapters Three and Four. Economic instability refers particularly to periods marked by uncertainty in financial systems, fluctuating markets, and disruptions in employment opportunities. Jones and Klenow (2016) argue that such instability creates significant challenges for organisations as they struggle to maintain operational stability while adapting to fluctuating economic conditions. This often drives organisations to prioritise short-term operational goals, which, as Kotter (2012) highlights, can lead to a neglect of long-term sustainability and human-centric strategies within the workforce. Pfeffer (2018) echoes this viewpoint, noting that economic pressures often result in decisions that undermine employee well-being and compromise organisational resilience. It is precisely this tension, between

short-term economic imperatives and the conditions necessary for human flourishing, that this dissertation seeks to address through a capabilities-based rethinking of leadership.

In addition to economic pressures, a second set of challenges arises from shifting workplace dynamics and technological advancement, each placing distinct demands on leadership's capacity to foster organisational and individual flourishing. Pfeffer (2018) emphasises that these changes demand adaptive leadership capable of navigating increasingly complex environments. Avolio et al. (2009) stress that the rise of remote work and digital transformation has created both opportunities and challenges for organisations. While Avolio et al. (2009) initially highlighted the challenges of digital cohesion, Avolio et al. (2014) later refined this through the concept of e-leadership. They argue that leadership is no longer merely 'supplemented' by technology but is fundamentally mediated by it, necessitating a shift in how influence and trust are transmitted across digital boundaries. More recent scholarship by Avolio (2024) further explores 'Algorithmic Leadership,' noting that leaders must now navigate the ethical tensions between automated surveillance and the preservation of authentic relational transparency. While these developments allow for flexibility, they also risk diminishing employee engagement and cohesion if not managed effectively. The acceleration of technology-driven change, shifting workforce expectations, and the rise of hybrid or remote models of work demand not only structural flexibility, but also an explicit commitment to cultivating belonging, trust, and shared purpose—a concern that, as Bloom et al. (2015) demonstrated in their landmark study on management practices across firms, remains structurally embedded in how organisations are designed. This raises questions about what leadership ought to prioritise in contexts where the conditions for stable coordination cannot be taken for granted. Is it sufficient to focus on efficiency and responsiveness alone—or must leadership also grapple with how people experience meaning, participation, and dignity at work? I answer in favour of the latter: a leadership approach that neglects meaning, participation, and

dignity is, I argue, not only ethically insufficient but organisationally unsustainable. Such an approach risks not only short-term ineffectiveness but longer-term fragility and social disengagement.

When flourishing, understood here as the realisation of human potential in dignified and meaningful ways, and inclusion, understood as the active recognition of diverse voices and capacities, are reduced to tools for economic performance, their ethical significance may be hollowed out. With it, the potential of leadership to contribute meaningfully to just and sustainable futures, as I shall argue throughout this dissertation, is equally diminished. As Cascio (2014) argues, this tendency—while often presented as pragmatic realism in the face of market volatility—has significant costs. He identifies high turnover rates as a key consequence, linking them to insufficient attention to personal development and well-being, which in turn disrupts organisational continuity, erodes culture, and increases operational costs associated with recruitment, the integration of new employees, and the managed departure of those who leave. Such patterns illustrate a deeper paradox: when sustainability is framed through cost-efficiency alone, the very people who sustain organisational life may become expendable. According to Wilkinson and Pickett (2019), frequent job changes hinder employees from developing a sense of belonging to their organisations, their products, and their leadership. This lack of continuity, they suggest, leads to diminished performance, reduced innovation, and, eventually, economic losses and so the pursuit of efficiency may, when severed from ethical and educational concern, render organisations less, not more, resilient.

I contend that this reimagining calls for an educational approach which examines the institutional logics that determine value, voice, and organisational definitions of success. Failing to resist the instrumentalisation of flourishing can leave leadership complicit in perpetuating exclusion, inequality, and short-termism. In addressing these interlaced challenges, I contend that leadership is best understood

not as a managerial technique, but as a reflective and ethical engagement, negotiating efficiency's demands alongside the imperative to support human well-being. The language of balance is often used yet may conceal genuine tensions between aims. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) stress that well-being—as a holistic state encompassing physical, mental, and emotional health—is closely linked to employee engagement and productivity. While this adds strategic merit to well-being initiatives, their normative value becomes threatened when mainly justified in instrumental terms. Deloitte (2020) notes that organisations are increasingly concerned with sustainability, understood as balancing economic, social, and environmental aims. However, such balancing acts often occur within structures where economic imperatives remain dominant. For this reason, leadership requires more than the balancing of competing interests: it demands sustained ethical reflection on the interests of all those affected, legitimacy, and forms of agency enabled within the organisation. Supporting my contention that leadership can be understood as an ethical and educational practice, contemporary workplaces, as Achor (2013) and Ciulla (2020) argue, demand leadership practices that extend beyond technical metrics to encompass ethical responsibility. This refers to decision-making processes grounded in moral principles such as fairness, accountability, and transparency. For Ciulla (2000), such principles cannot remain rhetorical ornaments—they must be enacted as orienting commitments that shape how power is exercised, how relationships are structured, and how tensions between competing claims are navigated.

This dissertation addresses these concerns by developing an integrative leadership approach oriented towards flourishing, understood, following Nussbaum (2011), as the unfolding of individual and organisational potential in a meaningful and dignified manner. Flourishing is conceptualised as an open-ended horizon—emerging through situated practices, ethical judgement, and dialogic processes. The underlying assumption is that organisational and individual flourishing are not separate objectives, but interdependent processes that form the foundation for a

sustainable and humane economic order. Nussbaum's CA—a philosophical framework focused on enabling individuals to develop and exercise essential capabilities such as dignity, autonomy, and well-being—provides a foundation for this research. Its strength lies not in prescribing what counts as flourishing, but in affirming the right of individuals to define and pursue lives they have reason to value, in contexts marked by plurality and constraint. I shall demonstrate that it can potentially responds to the growing body of literature advocating for leadership approaches that integrate ethical considerations with corporate objectives. The core proposition developed in this dissertation is that Nussbaum's CA, when synthesised with contemporary leadership theories, offers a normatively grounded and practically relevant framework for addressing the persistent tension between efficiency and human flourishing. This tension is not approached as a problem to be solved once and for all, but as an ongoing site of negotiation—one that demands reflexivity, contextual judgement, and an explicit refusal to reduce human value to economic function. The integrative model that emerges is not designed simply to enhance well-being: it seeks to contribute to a reimagination of leadership as ethical and educational practice, supporting development organisation-wide and at the societal level. To clarify the conceptual foundation of this dissertation, the key terms underpinning the argument for an integrative approach to flourishing in leadership are introduced below.

1.2 Terminology and Concepts Used in This Dissertation

1.2.1 Key Concepts: Flourishing, Respect, Personhood, and Well-being

These concepts are presented relationally, forming the scaffolding of a framework grounded in dignity, respect, and human development. Flourishing, as conceptualised in this study, draws on Nussbaum (2011) and rooted in Aristotle's concept of Eudaimonia, refers to the realisation of human potential—both individual and organisational—in a meaningful, dignified, and sustainable way. It serves as an

open-ended aspiration that encompasses growth, capability expansion, and ethical purpose. Flourishing is treated here not as an isolated goal but as the integrating concept that connects respect, personhood, and well-being. Following Nussbaum's (2011) capabilities-based account of dignity, respect is understood as the moral acknowledgment of each person as an end in themselves, whose central capabilities must be protected and promoted if they are to live a life worthy of human dignity. Nussbaum (2011) grounds this in the human capacity for practical reason and affiliation, that is, the ability to form one's own conception of the good and to engage with others as equals, which she identifies as the basis for recognising persons as worthy of equal dignity. It implies, I argue, a refusal to reduce individuals to mere functions or assets, insisting instead on the recognition of their dignity as the foundation of organisational life.

Central to Nussbaum's CA is the concept of personhood, which reflects a philosophical stance on human distinctiveness. Drawing on Walker and Unterhalter (2007), personhood denotes the idea that individuals are to be seen not solely as economic resources but as agents capable of growth, judgment, and participation—resonating with Nussbaum's emphasis on practical reason and, with due caution given the term's conceptual inconsistency in her work, on autonomy understood here as the capacity for self-directed participation in organisational and social life and affiliation (Nussbaum, 2011). Closely related to personhood is the concept of well-being, which, following Nussbaum (2011), is understood here as encompassing the substantive freedoms and opportunities necessary to pursue a meaningful life in accordance with one's own conception of the good. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) complement this by grounding well-being in the organisational conditions that enable individuals to maintain health, motivation, and engagement at work. In both accounts, well-being is deeply relational and context dependent. These concepts, respect, personhood, and well-being, are not isolated; together they form a constellation of meaning that orients the conceptual work of this dissertation, with flourishing serving as the integrating horizon that connects them. They offer a

conceptual framework rather than merely a vocabulary for rethinking leadership in corporate settings in ways that centre human dignity, challenge instrumental logics, and make space for ethical and educational practice within organisational life.

In this dissertation, I use the term normative in a specifically philosophical sense, consistent with the way in which I frame leadership and flourishing as ethical concerns. Normative here refers to reasoned value commitments that articulate what ought to matter in organisational and leadership practice, for instance when judging which forms of influence or development are ethically acceptable. As Rainer Forst (2012) argues, normativity concerns the space of justification in which claims must be made answerable to reasons that others could reasonably accept. Similarly, John Rawls (1999) characterises political philosophy as concerned with principles that can be justified to free and equal persons. A normative claim, in the context of this dissertation, advances a justificatory position about the conditions under which leadership can be considered ethically defensible and oriented towards flourishing. In grounding this inquiry in Nussbaum's (2011) Capabilities Approach, the dissertation adopts what she explicitly frames as a normative political theory, one that specifies central human entitlements and evaluates social institutions - including organisational leadership practices - in light of their contribution to human dignity and flourishing.

The following figure (Sketchnote 1.1) was developed during an early stage of my reflective journaling process. It represents a visual attempt to order and relate the complex, interdependent core concepts of this study—flourishing, respect, personhood, and well-being—and the resulting research structure. This image is a direct scan of an original entry from my reflective journal, presented in landscape orientation to maximize legibility. To preserve the authentic state of the entries, original spelling and textual errors have been left unaltered.

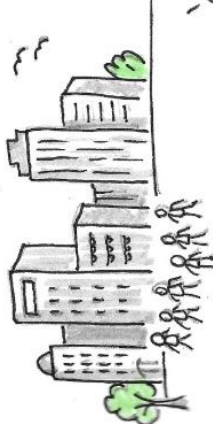
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION - SUMMARY

Why this matters.
Why now.



1. INTRODUCING THE TOPIC



Leadership needs to be
reimagined as a practice
that enables flourishing
for people and organisations.

2. KEY CONCEPTS

FLOURISHING
Living well and doing well.

RESPECT
Seeing people as equals with
dignity.

PERSONHOOD
Valuing people as ends in
themselves, not as means.

WELL-BEING
Physical, emotional, social & inter-
lectual.

SUSTAINABILITY
Meeting today's needs
without compromising tomorrow.

All inter-
linked.
Mutually
reinforcing.

3. THEORETICAL LENS

Martha Nussbaum's
Capabilities Approach
(CA)

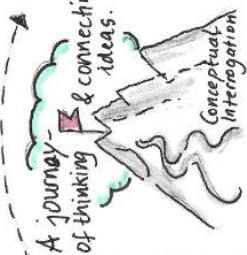
4. RESEARCH QUESTION

What leadership approaches are needed
to enable both organisational and
individual flourishing in increasingly complex
and rapidly changing environments?

5. RESEARCH

Develop a conceptual understanding.
Integrate relevant theories.
Propose an integrative leadership model
Reflect on implications for practice & research

7. RESEARCH APPROACH



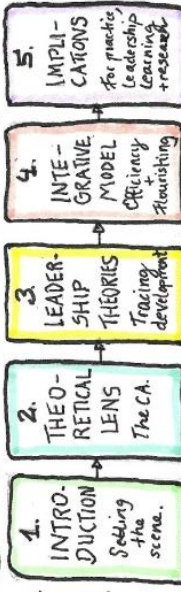
Leadership can
shape learning
environments.
Learning is relational.
Ethical judgement and
reflection are educable.
Organisations are
sites for flourishing.

6. HOW IT IS EDUCATIONAL

Leadership as
a pedagogical
practice.
Leadership is
inherently relational,
and can promote
critical reflection.

A journey
of thinking
& connecting
ideas.

8. DISSERTATION STRUCTURE



REFLECTIVE NOTE



I have seen how good intentions in leadership
can get lost in pressure for results. This study
is my way of asking: How can we lead in a way
that truly supports people to thrive - and not just survive?

At the heart of
this work is my
belief in
humanity.

May this research
contribute to more
human, wise
and sustainable
leadership.

... towards
a better
world of
work.

Figure 1.1: Reflective Journal Sketchnote - Introduction Summary

1.2.2 Linking Flourishing, Respect, Personhood, and Well-being

Flourishing, respect, personhood, and well-being form an integrated ethical framework that challenges dominant instrumental logics in leadership and opens new pathways for organisational and individual development. For the purposes of this dissertation, the emphasis lies on Nussbaum's notion of flourishing, personhood, and well-being. These concepts are conceptualised as mutually constitutive and contextually embedded—forming a relational framework that redefines the goals of leadership. This dissertation introduces an integrative approach to leadership for flourishing. The conceptual model I develop here links these ideas in a way tailored specifically to the dissertation's focus and professional context, incorporating the contextual meaning of sustainability. Building on the conceptual groundwork laid in section 1.2.1, this section briefly clarifies how flourishing functions as the integrating horizon of respect, personhood, and well-being. A more detailed elaboration of this interrelation will be developed in Chapter Two. White (2007) argues that flourishing, often linked to personal well-being, should be understood as the result of engaging in culturally and socially meaningful activities rather than being derived solely from human nature. He argues that flourishing is inherently a cultural product, shaped by evolving societal values and practices. This view unsettles attempts to treat flourishing as a universal good detached from context or power and affirms its embeddedness in democratic ideals and collective purpose. In the context of education, White emphasises the importance of equipping individuals to lead flourishing lives and support others in doing so. This underscores that flourishing is not merely an individual pursuit but a collective, culturally embedded goal that resonates with the interconnected concepts of respect, personhood, and well-being.

As Leithwood et al. (2020), Ryff (2014), and Seligman (2004) suggest, these concepts are widely recognised in leadership and ethical frameworks as interdependent and essential for achieving holistic success. Thus, flourishing, as a

central concept in leadership contexts, can be understood as a holistic approach to human and organisational growth that transcends mere economic objectives. As Nussbaum (2011) argues, it is about fostering opportunities for individuals to develop and exercise their capabilities, thereby enabling them to lead dignified and fulfilling lives. At its core, flourishing implies creating environments where both individuals and organisations can thrive in a sustainable and meaningful way. These interrelations establish flourishing not as an output of leadership, but as its ongoing ethical and educational orientation. An integrative leadership model grounded in these interrelations invites a redefinition of success in contemporary corporate contexts marked by economic disruption, shifting workplace dynamics, and growing societal inequality. Such a redefinition prioritises meaning, capability, and dignity over mere technical or economic gain. One concept that requires particular reconceptualisation within this framework is sustainability, to which I now turn.

1.2.3 Intersecting with Sustainability

In this dissertation, sustainability refers to leadership practices that ensure the long-term viability and flourishing of both individuals and the organisation. Thus, it is reframed as an ethical orientation toward care, intergenerational responsibility, and collective thriving. Wiersum (1995) traces the concept to forestry, where sustainability implies harvesting resources only to the extent that they can naturally regenerate. Applied to organisational leadership, this principle translates into a business model that respects not only economic efficiency but also social and environmental responsibilities—commonly articulated as the "triple bottom line" (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). Leadership, then, requires balancing the needs and well-being of internal stakeholders (such as managers and employees) with those of external and future stakeholders (such as clients, the broader community, and the environment), ensuring that organisational growth does not undermine durable viability or ethical standards. This perspective situates sustainability as a

negotiated, context-sensitive commitment grounded in respect for both human and ecological difference.

As Freeman (2015), a pioneer of stakeholder theory and a professor of business ethics, suggests, the key to success lies in satisfying all stakeholders, both within and outside the organisation. This means leadership must adopt strategies that address the diverse and sometimes competing needs of these stakeholders, aligning economic growth with the well-being of employees, customers, and the wider community. Freeman's insistence on stakeholder satisfaction invites a deeper interrogation of the values and power relations that shape how organisational priorities are constructed. Sustainability here cannot be reduced to mere alignment but needs to remain attentive to asymmetries of power, voice, and recognition. By adopting such a sustainable approach, organisations foster a balance between various dimensions of success to ensure that both they and their stakeholders can thrive in the long run. This involves recognising the intrinsic value of all stakeholders, respecting their personhood, and fostering their overall well-being. Sustainability thus becomes not simply a strategy, but a normative commitment to the conditions of flourishing—conditions that must be continually negotiated, protected, and reimaged. Leadership, if it is to support flourishing sustainably, requires the embrace of relational, ethical responsibility as a core practice.

Respect serves as a foundation for organisational flourishing by acknowledging the inherent dignity and uniqueness of each individual, thereby affirming personhood, and enabling participation. Aligning closely with Nussbaum's (2018) CA, respect transcends mere courtesy. It is understood here as an ethical stance—representing a moral obligation to recognise individuals as autonomous beings, resisting their instrumentalisation and demanding attentiveness to the relational conditions under which value is ascribed. Leithwood et al. (2020) and Sergiovanni (2012) similarly emphasise respect as a cornerstone of successful leadership, fostering trust, collaboration, and moral authority, which are crucial for both organisational and

individual growth. Their work positions respect not as an optional soft skill but as a structuring principle of relational legitimacy within leadership practice. Research in both adult learning and corporate training highlights the role of respect in creating inclusive and empowering spaces that enhance engagement and productivity. These findings suggest that respect operates not only at the interpersonal level but also as a condition for learning, transformation, and critical engagement.

Without respect, individuals are unlikely to invest in their roles or contribute meaningfully, ultimately compromising the organisation's capacity for growth. By promoting opportunities for professional and personal development, respect affirms the intrinsic value of employees and strengthens the relational foundation necessary for organisational flourishing. It is in this sense that respect becomes more than a value—it becomes a form of ethical pedagogy, shaping the kinds of selves and collectives that an organisation can support. Recognising personhood in organisational life requires a shift from economic logic to ethical regard—centering individuals as capable agents. Personhood, first articulated by Locke (1690) as the capacity to recognise oneself as a conscious, responsible agent, remains foundational to contemporary discussions of moral agency and autonomy. Yet these ideals, while powerful, must also be reinterpreted within contemporary contexts that include interdependence, systemic constraint, and collective responsibility.

In modern philosophy, particularly in ethics, personhood is considered a central aspect of human identity and moral agency. Both Sen (2001) and Nussbaum (2013) build on these ideas, emphasising that personhood plays a crucial role in understanding human flourishing. Nussbaum (2011, 2013), in particular, ties personhood to her CA, arguing that recognising individuals as persons means enabling them to develop and exercise essential capabilities, most notably practical reason and affiliation (Nussbaum, 2011). For Nussbaum, personhood encompasses a commitment to treating individuals as ends in themselves rather than as means to other ends, a formulation that echoes Kant's categorical imperative (Kant,

1785/1993). This formulation anchors personhood in practice: it is not simply an ontological status, but a normative claim—one that demands institutional conditions that make autonomy, reflection, and voice genuinely possible. Building on this broader normative account, personhood also becomes a lens for thinking about how social and economic institutions relate to individuals, including in the context of employment contexts.

Following Sen (2001), personhood, closely linked to respect, refers to the recognition of individuals as more than just workers or contributors to profit; it involves seeing them as whole persons with diverse needs, ambitions, and capabilities. In the corporate context, this concept transcends the traditional view of employees as economic units, instead recognising them as autonomous, capable individuals who can engage in meaningful work, build relationships, and develop their full range of talents. By fostering environments where this is possible, organisations can contribute to both individual and collective growth. Personhood, on this view, is not a background assumption—it is an active horizon for leadership. To lead ethically is to ask not only what people do, but who they are becoming through the structures and relationships in which they work. Personhood, grounded in practical reason and capability, redefines leadership as a developmental and ethical practice that enables human becoming. This is a contention I develop through the theoretical and conceptual work of Chapters Two, Three, and Four.

Well-being, when framed as relational and ethical rather than instrumental, becomes central to the moral architecture of organisational life. Well-being extends beyond physical and mental health to encompass psychological safety and a sense of purpose, creating a foundation for innovation, collaboration, and sustainability. In this dissertation, well-being is not treated as an individual attribute to be measured, but as a relational and situated condition—one that emerges through trust, inclusion, and meaningful participation.

As briefly defined earlier in this Chapter, psychological safety refers to an individual's perception that they can express themselves, share ideas, and take risks without fear of negative consequences to their self-image, status, or career. Edmondson (1999) identifies it as a critical element in fostering collaborative and innovative environments, as it allows team members to engage openly and contribute meaningfully without fear of retribution or embarrassment. This form of safety is not simply instrumental; it reflects the ethical architecture of an organisation and signals whether people are recognised as capable of voice, dissent, and contribution. Together, these elements shape, as Bakker and Demerouti (2017) suggest, a framework for organisational and individual growth opportunities. Foundational studies (Amabile & Kramer, 2011; Pfeffer, 2018) and more recent research (Deloitte, 2020; Demerouti et al., 2021) consistently demonstrate that supportive work environments and high employee engagement correlate with sustained productivity, innovation, and reduced turnover. If this instrumental focus becomes dominant, however, there is a risk that well-being is extended only to those deemed productive. Yet this persistent economic framing, while powerful, may obscure what well-being means in human terms: the experience of being seen, supported, and able to grow in ways one has reason to value. Nussbaum (2004) further deepens the understanding of well-being, arguing that it is intrinsically linked to the development and exercise of core human capabilities, such as the ability to form meaningful relationships, pursue purposeful goals, and engage in critical reflection. She emphasises that well-being is not only about individual happiness or satisfaction but also about creating conditions where people can realise their potential and flourish as autonomous beings. In this sense, well-being becomes a matter of justice as much as of care: it reflects how the structure of an organisation affirms or limits the becoming of persons. I shall demonstrate that the CA, when applied to leadership contexts, offers a way to integrate ethical and educational perspectives into organisational life without resorting to instrumental logic. Having established the key concepts that underpin this dissertation, I now turn to the theoretical lens through which they are examined.

1.3 Theoretical Orientation—The Research Lens

As a conceptual study, this exploratory research integrates leadership theory from both educational and corporate perspectives. The study seeks to explore how leadership might be reimagined when ethical and educational perspectives are brought into dialogue with the complexities of organisational life. Nussbaum's CA, developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s with a focus on human flourishing and personhood, is used here not as a prescriptive system, but as a normative lens—one that may offer conceptual resources for engaging critically with questions of participation, dignity, and the conditions under which flourishing might become possible.

Nussbaum's (2011) version of the Capabilities Approach is anchored in ten 'Central Capabilities,' which specify the minimum conditions of a life worthy of human dignity. To provide a scaffold for the reader, these ten capabilities are listed here as they form the theoretical interpretive framework for this study: (1) Life; (2) Bodily Health; (3) Bodily Integrity; (4) Senses, Imagination, and Thought; (5) Emotions; (6) Practical Reason; (7) Affiliation; (8) Other Species; (9) Play; and (10) Control over One's Environment.

During my theoretical engagement with Nussbaum's work, I sketched the core pillars of her approach (see Sketchnote 2.1). This visualization, depicting a temple structure, helped me grasp the architectonic significance of 'Practical Reason' and 'Affiliation' for the other capabilities and pre-structure their relevance for the organizational context.

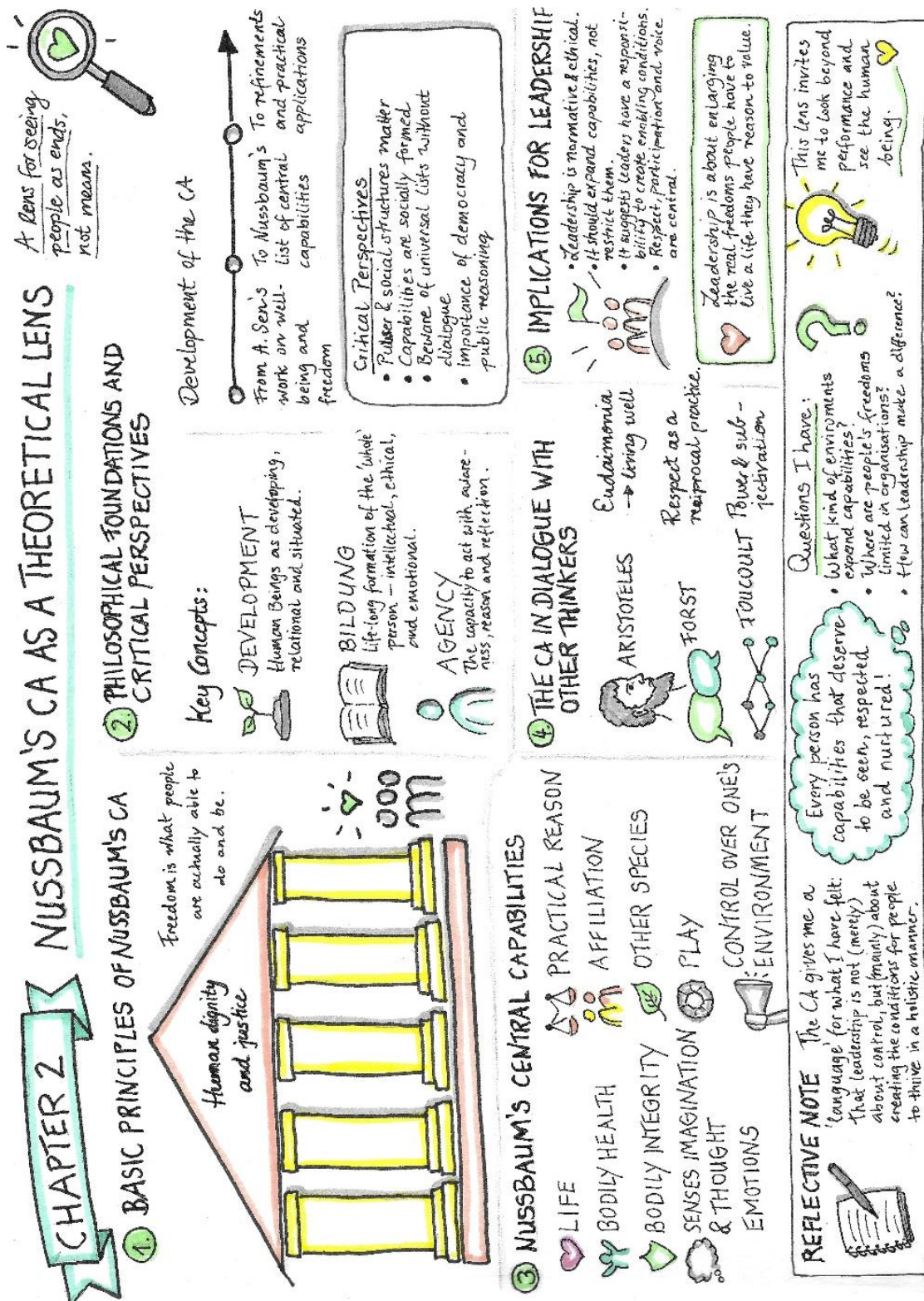


Figure 2.1: Reflective Journal Sketchnote - Theoretical Lens Summary

Given the increasing complexities of modern workplaces, marked by the tension between human and organisational needs, the CA offers a way of thinking about leadership that foregrounds values often overlooked in managerial discourse. Nussbaum's CA integrates philosophy, ethics, and social justice, which mirrors the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation that draws on education and business leadership studies. Nussbaum's focus on the practical capabilities of individuals provides a realistic approach to leadership transformation, balancing utopian ideals with the constraints of the real world. Moreover, the idea of "flourishing" is deeply connected with human aspirations, making it an ideal concept for organisations striving to create inspiring and healthy workplaces. It introduces a powerful narrative that humanises management. The CA seems to be universal—it applies to all people, in all contexts—yet flexible enough to adapt to the unique challenges of corporate leadership. This apparent universality, however, calls for interrogation: can a framework developed in a human development context be meaningfully applied to organisational life shaped by hierarchy, speed, and instrumental logic? The framework disrupts the dominant corporate culture of short-term profit maximisation by emphasising long-term, sustainable goals rooted in dignity and well-being. Its incorporation of the least advantaged fits well in leadership contexts where hierarchies often marginalise employees at lower levels. This alignment is evident in Nussbaum's (2011) focus on creating environments that enable all individuals, including those at the margins, to exercise their capabilities and flourish. For example, in leadership settings, prioritising the voices and needs of lower-level employees can lead to inclusion, innovation, and organisational trust (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). While corporate hierarchies can pose challenges, Nussbaum's CA provides a lens through which leaders can identify and address systemic barriers, ensuring that those at the lower end of the hierarchy are not excluded from meaningful participation. Nussbaum's CA, when reinterpreted as a normative lens for leadership, can be understood as supporting a shift away from narrow, output-driven logics towards an inclusive understanding of human development in organisations. This reinterpretation is my own, developed through

the conceptual work of this dissertation, and draws on the interconnected concepts of flourishing, respect, personhood, and well-being elaborated in section 1.2.

This approach resonates with ethical leadership styles, highlighting values such as respect, autonomy, and growth—principles that seamlessly align with my research that focusses on combining theories from diverse disciplines. Leadership in corporate settings increasingly acknowledges the need for individual and organisational flourishing, aligning personal development with organisational goals (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). However, it remains uncertain how far such alignment genuinely reflects a shift in organisational ethos, or whether it simply reframes individual development in service of productivity. This tension is one that I take seriously in this dissertation, as it shapes the conditions under which flourishing can be meaningfully pursued in organisational life.

I consider some criticisms of the CA here, not to undermine its relevance, but to ensure that its application to leadership contexts remains conceptually honest and attentive to its limitations. Critics have pointed out that while the CA provides a universal framework, it faces practical challenges when applied to specific organisational or cultural settings. Walker and Unterhalter (2007) argue that its universality may overlook cultural norms, local power structures, and context-specific factors that significantly shape leadership and well-being. Similarly, Jaggard (2006) raises concerns about the normative authority embedded in the CA, suggesting that the predetermined list of capabilities risks reflecting philosophical bias. Wild (2012a) adds that individuals' self-assessments of flourishing may be shaped by adaptive preferences formed through hegemonic norms rather than genuine agency—thereby raising the question of whose values underpin the very notion of a “life one has reason to value”. Dean (2009) critiques the CA for its abstractness, arguing that its aspirational nature often lacks clear guidance for practical implementation in real-world contexts, particularly in corporate environments dominated by short-term metrics and profit-driven priorities.

Nussbaum addresses these concerns directly. On cultural adaptation, she argues in *Creating Capabilities* (2011) that her central capabilities list remains open to contextual specification while maintaining threshold levels of dignity. To Jaggar's charge of philosophical bias, Nussbaum (2000) grounds capabilities in cross-cultural intuitions of human worth. Regarding Wild's concern about adaptive preferences, Nussbaum (2011) argues that assessments of well-being must focus on people's real opportunities for Central Capabilities rather than on desires that may have been shaped by deprivation. Finally, against Dean's practicality critique, Nussbaum (2011) stresses that combined capabilities, that is, internal abilities alongside enabling conditions, are actionable thresholds rather than utopian abstractions. Such critiques are not seen here as limitations to be resolved, but as invitations to proceed with caution. They foreground the tension between ethical aspiration and institutional complexity—tensions I seek to stay with within this dissertation.

In addition, Deneulin and McGregor (2010) challenge the CA's focus on individual agency, suggesting that it does not sufficiently account for structural inequalities and systemic barriers that can limit the exercise of capabilities. They argue that the CA's emphasis on individual empowerment risks overlooking collective dynamics and institutional constraints that play a significant role in organisational settings. Stewart (2005) raises concerns about the prioritisation of capabilities, questioning how decision-makers choose which capabilities to focus on in environments with competing priorities and limited resources. These reflections serve as a reminder that the CA, while compelling in its ethical intent, must be approached as a living and contested framework—one that requires interpretation, adaptation, and sensitivity to context. Engaging with the critique of the CA is itself a leadership practice—one that affirms ethical reflexivity and resists premature closure.

Nussbaum counters Deneulin and McGregor's concern about structural inequality by stressing that capabilities are inherently shaped by social and institutional conversion factors. Building on this, she defines combined capabilities as internal

abilities plus the external conditions that make their exercise a real option. According to Nussbaum (2011), such combined capabilities exist only where individual abilities are supported by social, political, and economic arrangements that remove obstacles to exercising those abilities. Against Stewart's concern about prioritisation, Nussbaum (2000) grounds her list of ten central capabilities in cross-cultural deliberation and a threshold logic, according to which each capability must be supported up to a minimum level of dignity, rather than ranked against one another. It is precisely because the CA remains open to critique and contextual adaptation that it serves as a productive normative lens for this dissertation, one that invites ongoing ethical reflection. It is offered here as a means of asking critical questions about leadership: questions that foreground justice, participation, and the possibility of leading in ways that do not reduce people to means or outcomes. Current leadership and management models risk undermining organisational and individual flourishing if they reduce human development to a mere strategic resource, failing to uphold it as a core ethical commitment. I shall now take a closer look at the research problem that leads to the research question.

1.4 The Research Problem, the Research Question, and the Research Objectives

The question arises from a concern that current approaches to leadership and management may be insufficiently responsive to the ethical and educational dimensions of organisational life. If organisations fail to promote not only organisational flourishing but also personal flourishing, I suggest that they risk adopting a short-term approach that undermines long-term sustainability. While such risks are well-documented in organisational research, their ethical implications are often left unexamined: what is lost when people are treated as interchangeable parts? What kinds of relationships are needed for sustainability to be more than a

slogan? Yet the language of performance may itself obscure more fundamental concerns. If individuals are unable to develop a sense of purpose or participation, what does this say about the organisation's values, and whose flourishing is being prioritised, and at whose expense?

The scope of my dissertation covers the following question, which guided me through this research:

What leadership and management approaches are needed to address the challenge of enabling both organisational and individual flourishing in increasingly complex and rapidly changing corporate environments? Specifically, how can these approaches reconcile economic demands with human needs to create conditions for sustainable flourishing, informed by Nussbaum's CA and leadership theories?

The objective of this dissertation is to develop a conceptual model based on rethinking leadership in light of the tension between economic efficiency and human flourishing. I explore how this tension might be understood, interrogated, and reframed, drawing on philosophical, educational, and ethical perspectives. I argue that integrative leadership and management approaches, grounded in Nussbaum's CA, can speak to this tension, not by solving it, but by rethinking how it is lived, negotiated, and ethically held. A guiding question serves a structuring function while remaining open to rethinking, orienting thought and holding open a space in which theory and practice can be brought into dialogue without foreclosing alternatives. Flourishing can serve as a normative orientation for leadership and management practice that enables organisations to move beyond economic metrics without disregarding them. The following section elaborates on how this understanding shapes the educational character of this dissertation.

1.5 How This Dissertation Is Educational

My dissertation, *Flourishing for Sustainability: A Capabilities-Based Approach to Rethinking Leadership in Corporate Contexts*, is inherently educational in its conceptual lens, normative orientation, and societal purpose. Although situated within a corporate environment, its central concern is with how leadership can be reimagined as developmental and participatory practices—concerned not only with organisational outcomes but with human flourishing, reflective capacity, and individual agency. These dimensions lie at the heart of educational thought. In this way, the dissertation not only draws from educational theory but also contributes to it by reimagining the corporate organisation as a legitimate site of educational engagement, where leadership becomes a vehicle for personal development, critical reflection, and democratic participation. Such a reimagining is grounded in an understanding of leadership as a developmental and transformative practice.

While in this dissertation I argue that the corporate organisation is a legitimate site of educational engagement, it is crucial to distinguish its structural mandate from that of traditional Higher Education (HE) contexts to avoid conceptual blurring. In HE, leadership is primarily oriented toward academic freedom, the pursuit of knowledge, and the democratic formation of citizens as ends in themselves (Biesta, 2010). In contrast, corporate leadership operates within a framework primarily driven by economic viability and market competition. The ‘pedagogical leadership’ proposed here is not a direct replication of academic administration, but an ethical intervention into a system whose primary logic is often efficiency (Ball, 2003). While the methods of development (such as critical reflection and dialogue) may overlap, the institutional purposes remain distinct—one mandated by public educational goals, the other by private economic imperatives.

As noted earlier, this dissertation treats leadership as a dynamic and context-sensitive practice—one that requires continuous experimentation, reflection, and

ethical responsiveness. Leaders are conceptualised here as learners, in particular, individuals who must navigate complex tensions between economic goals and the well-being of their teams. Such navigation is not technocratic but educational; it requires interpretive judgement, critical reflexivity, and ethical engagement. Leadership, in this sense, becomes a form of praxis, understood as “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (Freire, 1970, p. 126), aligning with the pedagogical imperative to engage ethically and critically with one’s context. Reinforcing this view, drawing on Nussbaum’s (2011) CA, I argue that dignity, affiliation, and practical reasoning are central capabilities that a leadership orientation towards flourishing must actively support. These capabilities necessitate reflective judgment, ethical sensitivity, and an action-oriented mindset, resonating with Freire’s concept of praxis as ethically grounded action informed by reflection. In this way, leadership serves as a site of learning and transformation, where leaders are encouraged to navigate tensions between competing values with critical awareness and dialogic sensitivity. As Biesta (2010) articulates, education should facilitate subjectification, enabling individuals to become autonomous agents who critically engage with their surroundings. Similarly, Brookfield (2017) claims that critically reflective practitioners must scrutinise their assumptions through multiple lenses, including those of students, colleagues, personal experience, and theoretical frameworks, to foster genuine dialogue and informed action. By integrating Nussbaum’s normative framework with educational and ethical leadership theories, this dissertation develops a model of leadership that is inherently educational—promoting growth, dialogue, participation, and informed decision-making.

Moreover, this view of leadership echoes the concept of the leader as a *reflective practitioner* (Schön, 1983)—a figure who learns in and from action. Leadership is not reduced here to efficiency or performance metrics but is recast as an evolving form of personal and organisational learning. In this way, the dissertation not only contributes to leadership theory but also to the educational endeavour of rethinking

what it means to lead in complex, uncertain, and ethically demanding environments. This educational stance also challenges the dominant logic of performativity that pervades much of the corporate world—a culture of audit and output-based assessment that, as Ball (2003) argues, reshapes professional identity through judgement, comparison, and control. Leadership is seen as an act of ethical care, situated judgment, and developmental intent. Such a reframing is fundamentally aligned with the EdD mission to enable educational change through theoretically grounded practice. This shift in orientation—from performance-driven optimisation to ethically grounded development—not only redefines leadership as an educational practice but also foregrounds the conditions necessary for fostering human agency and informed decision-making. From here, the focus shifts to how the dissertation foregrounds agency and reflective judgement as educational concerns in their own right.

According to Bröckling (2016), contemporary individuals are increasingly positioned as entrepreneurial selves—selves subject to a cultural logic that demands constant self-optimisation, self-responsibility, and continual self-improvement. These demands, deeply embedded in modern work environments, transform human beings into ongoing projects of productivity and performance. My dissertation critically resists this trend by drawing on Martha Nussbaum's CA (2011), which shifts the focus from performance to possibility, advocating for individual autonomy, dignity, and ethical self-authorship. Extending the concern with human development, Gert Biesta (2013) argues that the true task of education is not to shape compliant or optimised individuals, but to cultivate subjectness—that is, the capacity for individuals to take responsibility for their desires and actions, and to live according to values they can critically reflect upon and endorse. In this sense, my dissertation aligns with the educational tradition of *Bildung*, understood as the formation of the person through critical reflection, situated judgement, and informed decision-making.

Educational theorists such as Biesta (2010) and Brookfield (2017) have long argued that true education must enable individuals to make *informed decisions* about their own lives. I extend that principle to organisational settings, contending that employees must have the space to decide—freely and reflectively—whether to engage in further development. Such decisions require opportunities to consider whether the organisation’s values align with their own, and how they wish to contribute to collective life. This presupposes the development of capacities for critical reflection, ethical discernment, and holistic decision-making.

In this sense, the dissertation does not merely adopt educational terminology but enacts a central educational value: the right to agency and meaningful participation in shaping one’s environment. It advocates for leadership models that cultivate—not constrain—such agency, enabling people to be more than instruments of economic goals. This view is fully consonant with the emancipatory tradition in education, where learning is about becoming, questioning, and deciding, not merely complying, or adapting. Freire (1970) famously framed education as a practice of freedom, where learners are called to critically read the world and act upon it.

Furthermore, I critique managerial cultures that impose developmental expectations on individuals without considering their needs, interests, or capacities. In doing so, I advance a humane, ethical, and educationally responsible approach to leadership—one that honours the individual’s right to refuse growth that is prescribed solely by others and instead supports forms of becoming rooted in personal meaning and ethical self-direction.

A further way in which this dissertation is educational lies in its reconceptualisation of the organisation itself—not merely as a site of production, but as a *learning environment*. Drawing on traditions in workplace learning (Billett, 2001)—such as the view that learning arises through participation in authentic, socially situated

practices—the study views organisations as cultural and educational spaces where individuals engage in meaning-making, reflection, and co-construction of practice. This understanding reflects the broader movement within educational research that calls for learning to be recognised across the lifespan and across settings, including the workplace, as suggested by Illeris (2011) and Jarvis (2009). However, in this dissertation I go further: I argue that organisations are not only *spaces* of learning but also *subjects* of learning. They, too, I contend, must reflect, adapt, and grow in ways that are aligned with ethical and democratic values.

Building on Dewey's (1938) vision of learning through participatory engagement, in this study, I extend the logic of *Bildung* to the organisational level. If individuals can become through reflective, dialogic practice, then so too can organisations be understood as moral and educational agents—capable of learning, adapting, and exercising ethical judgement. On this view, organisations are not merely the backdrop for development, but active participants in processes of meaning-making and societal shaping. This reframes leadership as a practice of organisational subjectification—a becoming that is collective, reflective, and responsive, and aligns with the emerging field of organisational *Bildung*. This field explores how institutions can develop their own reflective capacities, ethical orientations, and democratic sensibilities. Organisational *Bildung* moves beyond individualised or instrumental approaches to learning, emphasising the cultivation of shared meaning, value-based decision-making, and collective becoming. In this view, organisational learning transcends mere efficiency gains and innovation cycles; it inherently involves cultivating shared understandings, navigating values conflicts, and enabling dialogue between diverse stakeholders. This demands engaging employees as active participants in shaping corporate culture, purpose, and practice, refusing their reduction to passive recipients of top-down communication. Resonating with participatory leadership this echoes the educational ideal of democratic engagement as articulated by Dewey (1938) and extended in more recent scholarship (Shields, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2020) on ethical and inclusive

leadership. Against the backdrop of managerialism and control, I position voice, *participation*, and *dialogue* as foundational to ethical leadership. In doing so, I align my argument with traditions in education that view power not as something to be exercised over others but as something to be shared, questioned, and reconfigured. This ethical-political dimension marks my contribution as educational. A final strand of this educational contribution lies in how I treat flourishing within this dissertation—as a relational and societal horizon.

Flourishing, in this context, is both a personal and collective goal: it requires conditions in which people are respected, supported, and able to contribute meaningfully to the communities they are part of—including organisations. As Hart (2020) suggests, flourishing must be understood as relationally embedded and institutionally mediated, requiring organisational contexts that uphold agency, dignity, and participation. This emphasis on *shared flourishing* reflects a commitment to the broader aims of education in democratic societies: to cultivate not only skilled workers, but capable, critical, and caring citizens. By proposing an integrative leadership model that aligns organisational sustainability with human development, I invite those working in both educational and business environments to rethink the very purpose of leadership—not merely as a tool for economic growth, but as a tool for flourishing. Organisations themselves can be reconceptualised as educational agents—capable of learning, adapting, and making value-based decisions that support shared flourishing.

Through the dissertation's engagement with educational philosophy, leadership theory, and real-world organisational contexts, it builds what I aim to be a compelling case for a wider view of leadership—one that is developmental, inclusive, reflective, and transformative. It is this vision that firmly situates my dissertation within the educational tradition, making it an appropriate and valuable contribution to the field of education. Conceptual research can challenge the dominance of instrumental logic in leadership studies by opening up space for

normative reflection and educational inquiry. It is this understanding that informs the research approach adopted in this dissertation, to which I now turn.

1.6 Selecting and Embedding of the Research Approach

1.6.1 A Conceptual Research Approach

The selection of a conceptual research approach for this dissertation stems from the need to explore and address complex, multifaceted issues in business leadership theories that require deep theoretical and philosophical considerations. I aim to fundamentally explore the theoretical underpinnings that might lead to the adoption of neoliberal leadership strategies. Harvey (2005) highlights how neoliberalism prioritises economic efficiency and profit maximisation, often restructuring institutions and management practices at the expense of humanistic values. Similarly, Dardot and Laval (2014) argue that neoliberalism permeates cultural and social norms, transforming organisations into competitive entities that prioritise performance over ethical and collective considerations. The justification for a conceptual rather than empirical approach lies in the theoretical nature of the problem. The issues at hand involve abstract concepts such as value systems, ethical considerations, and human welfare, which are best explored through comprehensively reviewing the literature, theoretical synthesis, and philosophical discourse. In this sense, a conceptual inquiry offers the openness required to reflect on leadership not only as a managerial activity, but as a normative and political practice.

This study adopts a reflective methodology as a deliberate response to the situated, value-laden, and complex nature of educational inquiry. The aim here is to articulate an interpretive understanding of leadership as a site of learning, ethical deliberation, and human development. As Biesta (2020b) argues, education is not

merely about producing effective outcomes, but about engaging with the question of what constitutes a good and meaningful life in a particular context. A conceptual methodology allows this question to remain central, enabling a sustained engagement with values, tensions, and possibilities as they emerge through practice. In this sense, the dissertation follows what Flyvbjerg (2001) describes as *phronetic research*—a form of inquiry oriented not towards prediction or control, but towards practical wisdom, contextual understanding, and ethical judgement. Similarly, Schön's (1983) notion of the reflective practitioner informs this approach, positioning the researcher not as an objective observer, but as an insider engaged in a cycle of action and reflection. The knowledge generated is understood here as situated, dialogic, and partial, emerging from and responsive to lived tensions.

This stance also acknowledges the critical insight that dominant leadership narratives are reproduced even within ostensibly progressive cultures. The approach aligns with Hammersley's (2007) view of theorising as a modest, yet meaningful contribution: one that does not claim universality but offers concepts that may resonate with others in comparable situations. By engaging critically with theory and practice, and by framing leadership as an educational project rather than a purely strategic one, this methodology enables the generation of insights that are both practically grounded and philosophically robust. Unlike empirical methods, which often require extensive data collection and control over variables, particularly in positivist paradigms, a conceptual approach, situated within an interpretivist tradition, allows for a focused exploration of theoretical models. This flexibility enables the integration of interdisciplinary insights and fosters a more nuanced understanding of how different approaches to leadership might work in practice, without the complexities and constraints of empirical experimentation. It also makes space for reflexivity—acknowledging the interpretive position of the researcher and the limitations of abstraction. However, a conceptual approach also has its limitations, as it may lack the empirical validation required to assess the practical applicability of its theoretical propositions. This is not ignored but taken

seriously: theory is presented here not as solution, but as orientation.

Acknowledging this, the study adopts a problem-solution structure to ensure theoretical findings remain grounded in practical challenges. Besides, a conceptual approach facilitates the integration of interdisciplinary insights, fostering a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the interplay between different leadership approaches and their potential impacts on the individual and our society. This ensures that the proposed integrative framework draws from diverse perspectives, avoiding the narrow focus that single-discipline approaches might impose.

This study also reflects a personal engagement with leadership dilemmas in practice. Elements of this model draw directly from my observations as a practitioner with leadership responsibility navigating leadership dilemmas in a business context that delivers educational services. For instance, the emphasis on participatory decision-making emerged in response to tensions I encountered when standardising training content while seeking to honour employee voice and client-specific needs. These observations are treated as experiential provocations—encounters with complexity that shaped the theoretical sensibilities of the dissertation.

Still, the aim is not to offer a generalisable solution, but to create space for reflective, ethically grounded forms of leadership to be imagined, questioned, and practiced. This dissertation also draws on my professional context, which is discussed in more detail in the following chapter—as a reflective and situated lens through which conceptual questions are rendered visible. In the following, I will explain why and how I will use my professional context as a platform for philosophical interrogation. I will provide insights from a real-world business environment to strengthen my theoretical discussion. These insights do not serve as proof, but as lived encounters with tensions that inform the theoretical trajectory of the work. One reason for integrating my own professional context into this dissertation is that it helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering

insights into how theoretical models can be potentially adapted to specific organisational settings. More precisely, it enables a dialogic relationship between abstract frameworks and situated challenges, helping to explore how leadership is performed, resisted, or reinterpreted in daily practice. While Schön's (1983) concept of reflective practice provides a foundation for this approach, additional frameworks, such as Argyris and Schön's (1974) work on organisational learning, will also inform this analysis to address a wider range of challenges in leadership practices. Brookfield's (2017) critical reflection model further supports this approach, particularly by encouraging the questioning of assumptions within professional contexts. Additionally, Raelin (2016) highlights collaborative leadership as a complementary practice that aligns reflective insights with collective organisational goals. Together, they create a space for reflection that is situated yet conceptually rich—capable of troubling dominant assumptions and inviting alternative interpretations.

Yet the aim is not to use experience to generate generalisable findings, but to foreground its partiality, relationality, and ethical ambiguity. This allows my reflections to remain situated while remaining in conversation with broader theoretical debates. However, it is crucial to consider the ethical implications and limits of incorporating my own professional context. Ethical considerations include ensuring confidentiality of the individuals and organisations involved. Brookfield (2017) stresses the importance of navigating potential conflicts of interest and being transparent about the dual role of researcher and practitioner. By addressing these ethical challenges, the integration of my professional context can be conducted responsibly, enriching my research while upholding academic integrity. Furthermore, there is a risk that my personal involvement in the professional context may shape or bias the interpretation of practices within the organisation. There is also the risk of overgeneralisation from one specific context, which may not be representative of other professional settings. I will mitigate these risks by critically reflecting on my observations and comparing them with existing literature

and theoretical frameworks. This will help ensure that my arguments are grounded in established research and not solely based on personal experience. However, I will clearly distinguish my personal observations from theoretical discussions, aiming for a balanced perspective while striving for scholarly rigor. In this way, reflection becomes not a window into truth, but a practice of humility and conceptual engagement.

In terms of how I will use my professional context, I maintained a reflective journal documenting my observations, experiences, and insights related to management practices within the organisation I am employed with. This will help me systematically analyse my professional context, ensuring that my reflections are consistently aligned with the theoretical frameworks discussed in the dissertation (Schön, 1983). To strengthen this methodological approach, I will integrate more contemporary perspectives on reflective practice and organisational behaviour, such as those by Brookfield (2017) and Raelin (2016), to ensure a balanced and updated scholarly foundation. Given that my discussion is based on personal observations rather than empirical data collection, this anonymisation process ensures that I uphold ethical standards in presenting my professional context responsibly. The use of a reflective journal supports the conceptual nature of the study by foregrounding the subjectivity, selectivity, and temporality of insight. It provides a space in which I can attend to the situatedness of knowledge—without claiming authority or generality, but with critical reflection.

Yet I remain cautious of claiming too much from reflection alone; it is one stance among others, shaped by the very systems it seeks to examine. What matters is not the stability of my own position, but the openness to question how that position is implicated in the knowledge produced. A conceptual and reflective research approach enables a critical interrogation of leadership by making visible the normative, ethical, and political dimensions often obscured in instrumental discourses. Linking abstract leadership theories to a situated professional context

allows for a grounded interrogation of flourishing in commercially driven, pedagogically oriented organisations. In the following, I turn to my own professional context as a concrete site in which these questions of value, efficiency, and learning are negotiated.

1.6.2 My Professional Landscape

While not framed explicitly in theoretical terms, the organisation's work intersects with educational and managerial discourses in ways that raise questions about value, efficiency, and learning. The context from which I write—my place of professional practice—forms an important backdrop for the conceptual questions developed in this dissertation. My professional context is a small, profit-oriented, owner-managed company with approximately 40 employees, selling products for educational purposes, based in the southern part of Germany. With an annual turnover below €5 million, the company falls within the European definition of a small enterprise. It operates within Germany and offers a wide range of courses tailored to meet the specific needs of its business clients. These include language courses for English and German as a foreign language, business skills development, and train-the-trainer programmes.

The unique selling point (USP) of the company is that they closely collaborate with their clients to tailor courses to their specific job requirements. This collaboration typically begins with an in-depth consultation to assess the client's and related stakeholders' learning objectives. Based on this analysis, the company designs customised courses and programmes that fit into the client's working environment concerning the learning content, pace, and delivery methods. Regular feedback loops and progress assessments are also part of the collaboration to continually refine and adapt the courses as needed. Such tailoring raises interesting tensions between standardisation and responsiveness—tensions that resonate with broader

debates about autonomy, learning, and the role of leadership in facilitating flourishing.

Lean Management Theory (LMT) is also embedded in the company's approach to process optimisation and training delivery. This connection is evident in the company's focus on tailoring courses to client needs while minimising inefficiencies in delivery, such as redundant processes or misaligned content. By focusing on principles such as efficiency, waste reduction, and value creation, LMT supports the development of streamlined processes that align with the company's goal of meeting client needs effectively. This alignment invites reflection: can such an efficiency-focused model truly support a broader educational vision of leadership? Or might it constrain the very capabilities it seeks to enable? These questions will be developed further in Chapter Two.

The company's flexible approach to training delivery includes both online and in-person formats at customers' premises, or blended learning, which combines the benefits of both training formats. By offering blended formats, the company aims for flexibility in scheduling courses, enabling the hiring of teachers and trainers from across Germany and other European countries, while offering the opportunity for in-depth, interactive learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2007). The online courses are designed to be interactive and engaging, utilising state-of-the-art educational technology, while the in-person sessions offer hands-on, immersive experiences. The company's primary clientele includes a wide range of business professionals in various job roles, spanning different ages, cultural and educational backgrounds, as well as academic staff such as professors, post-docs, doctoral students, postgraduate and undergraduate students. These clients seek tailored training solutions to enhance communication and language skills to be able to communicate with international colleagues or customers at work. Such diversity invites further inquiry into how leadership practices and pedagogical values might intersect, and whether flourishing can be fostered across such heterogeneous learner groups.

With over 25 years of experience in the field of language learning and teaching, the company remains competitive by continually updating its programs and methodologies to meet the evolving needs of clients in a fast-changing market. While this context offers practical insight into the application of educational and managerial theories, it is not used here as empirical evidence. Rather, it provides a situated lens—a space from which to ask how flourishing might be interpreted, constrained, or enabled within a commercially-driven, pedagogically-oriented organisation.

The professional landscape described is situated within the specific socio-economic conditions of corporate Germany, a context characterised by an accelerating pace of change. The German corporate sector, arguably the corporate sector, beyond Germany too, currently navigates a dual pressure: the necessity for rapid digital transformation and the simultaneous preservation of human-centred industrial traditions. This environment operates within the framework of a liberal democratic society—what Habermas (1996) conceptualises as a *Rechtsstaat* (a state governed by the rule of law). This institutional backdrop provides the structural stability and normative expectations of justice that make a capabilities-based approach to leadership not only viable but particularly 'fit' for such a context.

To understand how leadership influences this landscape, it is helpful to invoke Giddens' (2013) duality of structure, which posits that social structures are both the medium and the outcome of the practices they recursively organise. In German organisations, leaders are both constrained by and contributors to the very structures—legal, cultural, and procedural—that they inhabit. The 'dislocated complexity' (Giddens, 1990) of modern corporate life means that leadership must often navigate paradoxes: between the rigid requirements of German labour law and the fluidity required by agile working models. By acknowledging this duality, the proposed model recognises that flourishing does not happen in a vacuum; it is mediated by a structural mandate that assumes certain civil liberties and institutional protections.

Recognising these contextual origins is a deliberate move to address the limits of the model's applicability. While the model draws on universal philosophical principles from Nussbaum, its practical enactment is deeply tethered to the infrastructure of a democratic *Rechtsstaat*. Consequently, its application in contexts with different institutional conversion factors—such as might pertain in Guinea or Ghana—would encounter distinct power dynamics and structural barriers not addressed here. By situating this inquiry within the 'fit' of a rule-of-law framework, the analysis remains limited but conceptually honest about the conditions required for the integrative model to take root. Having delineated the professional and institutional landscape that anchors this conceptual inquiry, the following section maps out how the study's central argument progresses across the subsequent chapters.

1.7 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is structured into five chapters, each contributing to a developing inquiry into how leadership might be reimagined to support both organisational and individual flourishing. These chapters are designed to build a coherent narrative that integrates theoretical insights, practical reflections, and critical analysis to address the complexities of leadership in modern organisations. The structure follows the movement of a conceptual interrogation—beginning with a problem, engaging with theory, and imagining alternatives.

Chapter One introduces the research problem, key concepts, and professional context, and it justifies the conceptual mode of inquiry. Chapter Two elaborates the theoretical lens, centring on Nussbaum's CA and its relevance for organisational leadership. Chapter Three examines selected leadership theories through this CA lens, tracing their assumptions, tensions, and limitations to prepare the ground for

the integrative model. Chapter Four develops this model, synthesising the preceding chapters and reflecting on implications from my professional context. Chapter Five, shorter than the others as much of its synthesis is already embedded in Chapter Four, concludes by outlining the study's contributions, limitations, and implications for future research.

The following chapter therefore turns to the theoretical foundations of the study, elaborating the conceptual lens through which the central problem will be examined.

Chapter Two: Nussbaum's CA as a Theoretical Lens

In this chapter, I position Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach (CA) as a powerful normative lens through which organisational flourishing may be rethought beyond managerialism and instrumental logics. This chapter proceeds in five stages. Section 2.1 introduces the basic principles of Nussbaum's CA, clarifying its philosophical foundations and normative orientation. Section 2.2 then orients the theoretical lens closely by situating the CA within broader debates on *Bildung*, leadership, power, and ethical formation, tracing its development and addressing critical perspectives. Section 2.3 turns to the question of organisational practice, exploring how Nussbaum's central capabilities may be interpreted within corporate contexts and examining themes such as reflective leadership, flourishing beyond productivity, social justice, sustainability, and the operationalisation of theoretical constructs. Section 2.4 reflects explicitly on the relevance of the CA to my research question and professional context. Finally, Section 2.5 considers the implications of embedding the CA within a perspective that is both globally interconnected and oriented toward future decision-making.

2.1 Basic Principles of Nussbaum's CA

The CA was first articulated by Amartya Sen in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and later developed by Nussbaum (2000, 2006, 2011). It invites us to consider what people are actually able to do and to be - that is, what substantive opportunities are genuinely open to them, beyond formal rights or abstract resources. The CA provides a normative orientation for thinking about human development, well-being, and the conditions under which people are able to live meaningful lives. Capabilities refer to real freedoms shaped by social, institutional, and material conditions. Nussbaum's contribution lies in articulating a philosophically grounded list of central capabilities intended to specify the minimum conditions of a life worthy of human dignity. Central to the CA is the distinction between capabilities and functionings. Functionings refer to the states and activities that constitute a person's life, what they actually do and are. Capabilities, by contrast, refer to the real freedoms or opportunities to achieve these functionings. The evaluative focus falls on capabilities rather than functionings because what matters is not only what people achieve, but what they are genuinely free to achieve.

I selected Nussbaum's CA as the theoretical foundation for this research because it addresses both longstanding and emerging challenges in society. Nussbaum (2011) presents the CA as a normative yet flexible framework: it is outcome-oriented, in that it specifies threshold levels for Central Capabilities, while remaining open to contextual interpretation and future revision. Its orientation toward enabling human capabilities makes it particularly relevant for rethinking leadership as a relational and developmental practice. This flexibility aligns well with the needs of my professional context, which will be elaborated on later in this dissertation. To provide a foundation for this exploration, I will first outline the background, the development, and the key elements of the CA before examining its key principles and relevance in greater detail.

The CA, as articulated by Nussbaum (2011), is grounded in a commitment to human dignity, plurality, and justice. Unless I state otherwise, the CA in this dissertation always refers to Nussbaum's version of the approach. In her later work, Nussbaum (2006) describes the CA as a partial theory of justice that specifies a minimum threshold of central capabilities, not a full theory of distributive justice. Instead of asking what people have achieved, it asks what they are actually able to do and to be, given the social, political, and economic conditions in which they live. This shift from outcomes to freedoms has particular resonance for this study, which seeks to understand leadership not as performance, but as the creation of spaces in which individuals and collectives can flourish.

The ten Central Capabilities listed in Section 1.3—not a definitive checklist, but a philosophical outline of what any society ought to make possible for all its members—relate to what Nussbaum (2011) describes as a life worthy of human dignity, a formulation that has been both influential and contested within the capabilities debate. In organisational and educational contexts, the CA offers a powerful lens to ask not only what outcomes are achieved, but what capabilities are genuinely being fostered—and for whom. This conceptual foundation will be returned to throughout the chapter, as I note its relevance for leadership and flourishing in corporate environment. The following section situates this foundation within its philosophical context and traces the critical debates that shape its application in this study.

2.2 Philosophical Foundations and Critical Perspectives on the Capabilities Approach

2.2.1 Key Concepts: Development, *Bildung*, and Agency

This dissertation draws on concepts that have rich and often contested meanings across traditions—particularly development, *Bildung*, and agency. To sharpen the theoretical lens and clarify the role in the argument that follows, this section outlines how these terms are understood and operationalised within the context of this study. This clarification is not intended to fix the meanings of these concepts, but to position them in relation to the questions this research seeks to raise. The following reflections offer working orientations that guide the study's conceptual interrogation.

While the term development is frequently used in management and psychology to describe the acquisition of competencies or the achievement of performance goals, this study deliberately shifts its focus. Drawing on educational and philosophical traditions, development is here understood in terms of *Bildung*—the formation of the person through critical reflection, ethical judgment, and the capacity to act meaningfully in the world. As Biesta (2010, 2020) claims, such formation is not a linear process of improvement but a relational, unpredictable, and dialogic engagement with what is “other”. *Bildung* thus implies not only intellectual growth, but the deepening of selfhood and situated judgment in response to social, organisational, and existential challenges. The inclusion of *Bildung* here reflects an understanding of development that resists instrumental framings. On this view, to develop is not to become optimised, but to become attuned: to self, to others, and to context. This implies a process that is ongoing, ethically demanding, and irreducible to predefined outcomes. Relatedly, in this dissertation, agency is not defined as individual autonomy in the liberal sense, nor as productivity or the capacity for self-assertion in performance-driven contexts. Additionally, in this

context, voice refers to the capacity and opportunity to express concerns, contribute to decisions, and shape organisational practices in ways that are recognised as legitimate and consequential. Closely tied to agency and personhood, as elaborated in section 1.2.1 and later in this section, voice signals whether individuals are seen as participants in meaning-making or as voiceless instruments within predefined structures. This understanding resonates with Biesta's (2010) subjectification: the educational task of supporting individuals in becoming subjects rather than objects of external agendas. To act as a subject means to engage in decision-making informed by reflection and responsibility, rather than conformity or optimisation. Such agency is inherently educational, as it depends on the cultivation of judgment, voice, and the ability to act with integrity. This notion of agency challenges the tendency in organisational contexts to equate initiative with compliance or to measure autonomy through output. It shifts the focus from control to responsibility, from self-promotion to ethical responsiveness. Subjectification, in this light, is not something individuals achieve alone, but something that becomes possible within relational and dialogic spaces. While autonomy, in the liberal tradition, denotes the individual's capacity for self-governance and independent choice, agency as understood here is inherently relational and situational—it depends not only on inner capacity but on the conditions, relationships, and structures that make meaningful action possible.

These understandings of development, agency, and voice converge in how this study positions leadership—as a learning practice oriented towards ethical responsiveness and human flourishing. Similarly, learning is not treated as the acquisition of knowledge but as a reflexive process of becoming—closely tied to identity, ethics, and participation. Leaders are understood here as learners who engage in continuous sense-making, who reflect on values and assumptions, and who adapt to complexity not through control, but through dialogue and attentiveness. This resonates with Schön's (1983) account of the reflective practitioner and with Illeris's (2011) understanding of learning as a potentially

transformative change in the learner's capacities and identity. In this framing, leadership becomes a site of educational possibility: a space where judgement is formed, values are interrogated, and new ways of relating can emerge. It is not reduced to, for example, only managing change, but involves engaging with uncertainty in ways that are generative, ethical, and open-ended. Having clarified how key concepts such as development, *Bildung*, agency, and voice are understood in this study, the following section traces the historical development of the CA itself.

2.2.2 Tracing the Development of the CA

This section situates the CA as a generative normative framework for interrogating the ethical and educational dimensions of leadership in contexts shaped by complexity and inequality. Martha Nussbaum's work spans moral and political philosophy, with significant contributions to discussions on justice, human rights, and education. Nussbaum's research often focuses on the role of emotions in shaping ethical and political judgments, and she has developed influential theories, such as the CA, which connect philosophical insights with real-world challenges in inequality and human development.

I read Nussbaum's CA here as a normative orientation that invites reflection on what it means to create environments in which people can lead lives they have reason to value. Her framework foregrounds conditions under which agency, dignity, and relational autonomy may become possible. I suggest that this makes the CA particularly relevant to educational and organisational contexts in which competing values, structural constraints, and human vulnerability intersect. Within the liberal theory of justice, which posits that the state has a role in regulating the pursuit of individual and collective interests (Gutmann, 1980, p. 3), various approaches to human welfare have emerged. Among these, Nussbaum's (2011) increasingly influential CA offers a theoretical paradigm for human welfare that centres on

individuals' capabilities to achieve well-being and dignity, with well-being conceptualised in terms of the capabilities and functionings people have reason to value. While liberal justice theories often start from assumptions of individual rational choice, the CA shifts the question: not "what resources do people have," but "what are they actually able to do and be?" This focus on real freedoms—rather than formal entitlements—brings questions of context, vulnerability, and support into the foreground. Nussbaum's work builds on Aristotle's idea that a human being is a social being that is capable of ethical reasoning (Nussbaum, 2006).

Kant insists that human beings, as ends in themselves, must never be treated merely as means (1785/1997). This provides a normative anchor, informing Nussbaum's insistence that institutions be evaluated by whether they secure the conditions under which persons can exercise practical reason and shape their own lives (Nussbaum, 2011). While Nussbaum does not adopt his materialist framework, she shares Marx's (1844/1975) concern that formal rights are insufficient without the substantive opportunities to realise human capacities. Together these points illuminate two complementary dimensions of the CA, the inviolability of the person and the necessity of institutional transformation.

Building on these philosophical foundations, Nussbaum (2011) frames the human being not as an autonomous actor in abstraction, but as a relational being, whose dignity depends on the surrounding social, institutional, and cultural conditions. While Sen and Nussbaum both distinguish between capabilities and functionings, their approaches diverge significantly. Sen (1999) deliberately refrains from specifying which functionings are valuable, arguing that this must emerge through democratic deliberation and individual choice. Nussbaum (2006), by contrast, proposes a specific list of ten central capabilities as a threshold of human dignity, arguing that some functionings are so fundamental that no society can remain just without securing them. Moreover, Nussbaum insists that a function must be fulfilled in a "truly human way" (p. 76)—that is, through genuine choice rather than

compulsion. To achieve this, both practical reasoning and affiliation are of particular importance (Walker, 2003, p. 173). While practical reason allows individuals to reflect on and pursue their own goals, affiliation speaks to the relational and social conditions of flourishing. Both are presented by Nussbaum as architectonic capabilities, meaning they shape and support the realisation of all other central capabilities.

According to Deneulin (2009), much but not all the literature on the CA concerns Nussbaum's (2006) Central Human Capabilities. For instance, the CA also deals with unsolved ethical questions such as how to extend justice to all citizens regardless of their socio-cultural background and their physical and mental state of health, as well as the question of how to provide justice to non-human animals (Nussbaum, 2006, 2023). Nussbaum's engagement with Rawls' social contract theory extends the CA into a broader conversation about justice, particularly in relation to those who are excluded from traditional models of moral agency. Her inclusion of non-human animals and persons with severe disabilities signals a refusal to ground dignity solely in cognitive or economic competence. Over the years, the CA has been applied in diverse fields, including education, public policy, and corporate leadership, demonstrating its adaptability and relevance. In the context of this study, I suggest that it is not only the flexibility but the ethical ambition of the CA that makes it an appropriate generative lens for rethinking leadership as a practice of human development and learning. The following subsection situates Rawls within the CA to clarify where concerns for basic liberties, fair equality of opportunity and the difference principle intersect—and where the capabilities' focus on substantive freedoms reorients the normative terrain.

2.2.3 Situating Rawls within the CA

The social contract theory, as per Rawls (1999), envisions society as an agreement among free and equal individuals cooperating under mutually acceptable principles of justice. This framework prioritises fairness and equity for all members, irrespective of individual advantages (Freeman, 2007). Central to Rawls's theory is the "original position", a thought experiment in which individuals, behind a "veil of ignorance", design an equitable system of justice. Deprived of knowledge about their own social standing, wealth, or personal attributes, decision-makers are compelled to create impartial principles (Wenar, 2021). This construct provides a mechanism to explore how resources, opportunities, and rights might be distributed without self-interest (Pogge & Kosch, 2007). By imagining a situation where personal interests cannot skew decisions, Rawls (2005) challenges individuals to adopt principles that safeguard the most vulnerable members of society.

While Rawls's model of justice offers a compelling thought experiment for imagining fairness, its assumptions about rational agency and the universality of agreement have been critically debated. Nussbaum engages with Rawls not to replicate the structure of ideal theory, but, as she argues in *Frontiers of Justice* (2006), to extend the concern of justice to those whom social contract framings have typically left outside its scope, including persons with severe disabilities and non-human animals. Her concern lies less with hypothetical procedures and more with the material and relational conditions that shape real opportunities to flourish. Rawls's notion of the "original position" can offer a useful analogy for reflecting on organisational justice—but not a blueprint for leadership practice. It provides a heuristic for reflecting on whose interests leadership models prioritise, and whether existing organisational practices risk marginalising those whose capabilities are not aligned with dominant norms of performance or self-assertion. In that sense, the question for my study is not only how resources are distributed, but how capabilities are either enabled or constrained within specific

organisational and cultural conditions. These critical perspectives on Rawls and justice set the stage for a situated engagement with the CA itself. The following section examines how scholars have interrogated the CA's normative assumptions, attending to questions of power, adaptive preferences, and the conditions under which capabilities can genuinely be developed.

2.2.4 Critical Perspectives on Capabilities, Power, and Formation

Critical perspectives on the Capabilities Approach expose its normative tensions and invite a situated, power sensitive engagement with capability formation in organisational and educational contexts. Walker (2004a) appreciates the value and potential usefulness of Nussbaum's list of ten capabilities for the advancement of pedagogy in higher education but also highlights some limitations. Walker (2004b) suggests that alternative ways of conceptualising social justice are needed so that we can assess which educational practices might lead towards social justice in the future. Nussbaum (2011) responds to such concerns by emphasising that her list remains open to revision through democratic deliberation and to contextual reinterpretation. Her framework, which encompasses both individual and institutional dimensions, underscores that justice emerges not only from personal choices but also from organizational and systemic norms.

Walker (2004b) also argues for a bivalent theory that considers both individual and institutional development as well as the interplay between agents and social patterns. This resonates with Nussbaum's CA's attention to relational conditions. Lewis (2012, p. 526) emphasises the importance of adequately translating people's resources into capabilities while recognising potential barriers arising from people's social backgrounds. She demonstrates the interrelationship between the CA and adult community learning (ACL) for mental health and concludes that, by focusing on opportunities and choices offered by the environment, the CA reframes the

discussion on mental wellbeing with respect to social influences (p. 534). This has implications for leadership practices that overlook how structural barriers persist even in seemingly inclusive environments. For instance, leadership development programmes may appear inclusive by design, yet structural barriers persist through selection criteria that systematically favour certain profiles. In one of my organisational contexts, a leadership programme was formally open to all employees through an application process. However, selected participants were consistently drawn from those with the longest organisational tenure and advanced English language proficiency. These criteria, while seemingly neutral, effectively excluded employees from different linguistic or cultural backgrounds as well as those in earlier career stages. This illustrates how seemingly meritocratic processes can reproduce existing hierarchies, constraining the capabilities of those whose potential remains unrecognised within dominant organisational norms.

Such observations resonate with theoretical perspectives that examine how individuals come to perceive and value their own capabilities within constrained environments. Wild (2012b, p. 196) suggests that, within the CA, certain capabilities are treated as universally valuable insofar as they are considered necessary for a life lived with human dignity. However, this does not imply that all individuals share identical conceptions of the good life or value the same functionings in the same way. However, Wild cautions that an individual's self-evaluation of which exact capabilities and functions are desirable can be misleading insofar as one's own judgements may be shaped by dysfunctional self-regulatory styles (Wild, 2012b, p. 195) or hegemonic assumptions (Brookfield, 2017, p. 39). While it remains debatable whether all people share the same vision of the good life, Wild draws attention to how adaptive preferences can limit self-determined flourishing. Brookfield (2017) reinforces this by highlighting the role of internalised norms that present structural inequality as natural. Although he does not write in terms of the CA, his analysis of hegemonic assumptions aligns with its concern for how opportunities for flourishing are constrained in everyday contexts. If hegemony

prevents people from challenging their status quo, as Brookfield suggests, inequalities in education and in other fields are then perceived as “a normal and natural state of affairs” (p. 40). He notes that critically reflecting on one’s implicit assumptions is essential for addressing these inequities. In this sense, reflection becomes an ethical task. The CA gains force when paired with pedagogical practices that help individuals interrogate what they have come to accept as normal, especially within workplace cultures. Nussbaum’s discussion of adaptive preferences further clarifies how deprivation and socialisation can lead individuals to lower their aspirations and to endorse conditions that fall short of what they have reason to value (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 111-134).

Williams (1987) discusses what it means to have a capability and whether it can be understood merely as a possibility, emphasising the necessary link to real options for choice. Although his intervention predates more recent systematic formulations of the CA, it remains relevant because it addresses a conceptual ambiguity that later theorists continue to grapple with. Jaggar (2006) critiques Nussbaum’s CA, arguing that it is the philosopher who determines which capabilities are desirable, and implicitly, what constitutes informed and morally good decisions. Per Jaggar, this “assigns undue authority to the philosopher or that the philosopher assumes undue authority in using it” (2006, p. 320). Jaggar (2006, pp. 316-318) also points out that Nussbaum does not pay sufficient attention to asymmetrical power relations in privileged and less privileged citizens who often lack equal opportunities to access and develop their capabilities. Jaggar’s concern with normative authority raises a familiar dilemma about who is entitled to define which capabilities should count as central and for whom they ought to apply. While I do not see Nussbaum’s list as prescriptive in practice, it does reflect a particular philosophical stance. For the purposes of this study, I approach the CA as a generative orientation. In contexts marked by structural inequality, including organisational life, questions of who defines flourishing and under what conditions may become especially relevant. Accordingly, a critical engagement with the CA is

treated as essential to avoid reproducing normative closure or blind spots regarding power, privilege, and situated agency. The following section explores how *Bildung*, understood as ethical self-formation, deepens and extends the CA's orientation towards human development.

2.2.5 *Bildung*, Autonomy and Ethical Formation

Otto and Ziegler (2008), building on the understanding of *Bildung* introduced in Section 2.2.1, highlight the CA's potential to serve as its non-idealistic, materialistic philosophical foundation. They argue that, when learning in professional contexts extends beyond mere training or the acquisition of knowledge, the CA offers a complementary framework through which *Bildung* as 'educative and cultural self-formation' can be examined in organisational contexts, fostering the capacity for autonomous decision-making (Otto & Ziegler, 2010, p. 235). Building on this, the integration of knowledge, expertise, and moral considerations is essential for developing ethically informed educational judgments. These perspectives on moral reasoning and ethical awareness resonate with the CA's broader concern for the conditions under which individuals can develop judgment and act with integrity in professional contexts. Narvaez and Gleason (2007) argue that moral judgment development and educational experience are intricately linked, influencing how individuals process and recall moral narratives and expository texts. Similarly, Neeley (2023) emphasises the necessity of a holistic approach in professional education, particularly in fields like engineering. Neeley advocates for integrating sociotechnical systems thinking, effective communication skills, and ethical reasoning, framing these elements as essential for fostering ethical action. In my own practice, in the field of leadership and organisational development, I have observed this dynamic repeatedly: leaders who integrate professional expertise with ethical awareness and relational sensitivity are equipped to navigate the complex human and structural tensions that arise in organisational life - particularly when performance pressures conflict with the conditions needed for genuine human

flourishing. On this account, Nussbaum's CA provides a meaningful philosophical companion to *Bildung*, enriching its reimagining as the cultivation of moral discernment and ethical responsiveness in professional practice. To better understand the practical implications of Nussbaum's CA, I will turn to examining the core components she identifies as fundamental to human flourishing. These components, known as the Central Capabilities, provide a structured yet flexible framework for evaluating and supporting well-being and development.

2.3 Nussbaum's Central Capabilities in Organisational Practice

The Capabilities Approach is presented as a powerful alternative to outcome-based frameworks by focusing on what individuals are actually able to do and to be in specific organisational contexts. Nussbaum's concept of Central Capabilities provides a philosophically grounded model for evaluating human well-being and growth based on a set of universally valued dimensions. According to the CA, well-being is not solely determined by access to resources, but also by an individual's ability to use those resources to achieve valued states of being and doing (Nussbaum, 2011). Rather than offering a prescriptive formula, the approach invites critical reflection on which forms of development are supported or constrained within a given institutional context. This perspective challenges traditional, output-driven measures of success—whether in educational or organisational settings—by asking what meaningful opportunities are made available for individuals to flourish.

In organisational life, this means asking not only what people achieve, but what they are genuinely enabled to do and become. Nussbaum's framework encourages a rethinking of leadership not simply as performance management, but as a relational practice attentive to ethical and developmental concerns. Implementing the CA requires a critical evaluation of organisational practices, leadership strategies, and workplace policies to consider how they might promote a broad range of human

capabilities. This includes fostering spaces in which individuals express voice, develop judgment, and experience affiliation in ways that contribute to both personal and collective flourishing. According to Nussbaum (2011), the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation are particularly important as they support ethical reflection and participation within shared contexts. In leadership contexts, this aligns with creating environments that value human dignity, respect, and personal growth, which resonate with Capabilities-informed concerns for human dignity, the development of people's capabilities, and the conditions for flourishing in organisational life (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Applied to leadership, the CA reframes development as an ethical and relational endeavour, transcending the technocratic process of skill acquisition. Yet applying these ideas in corporate settings presents difficulties, especially where capability development is subordinated to narrow conceptions of performance. Defining universal organisational outcomes that reflect the richness of Nussbaum's framework is complex, as well-being and flourishing are shaped by the combination of individual needs, workplace culture, and broader societal dynamics. Measuring the success of such capabilities is equally challenging, given their qualitative and context-dependent nature. Nonetheless, I suggest that the CA could still serve as a generative lens—one that prompts reflection on how organisational environments expand or restrict human possibility.

A further tension lies between the aspirational goal of fostering a broad range of human capabilities and the practical limitations of corporate systems, which are often shaped by economic and operational pressures. This raises a critical question: should leadership practices centre on holistic human development, or should they limit themselves to enhancing skills that directly improve performance, or might a blend of both, forging space for development and flourishing, offer a viable path? Biesta (2015) suggests that when development is reduced to productivity, its educational character is compromised. Leaders and policymakers may therefore need to adopt a critically reflective stance, acknowledging the complexity of their environment while keeping open the possibility of comprehensive human

development. Such a blend does not resolve the tension, but it may create space in which both organisational demands and human flourishing can be held together—not as competing aims, but as mutually conditioning possibilities.

The CA does not offer a resolution to this tension, but it does encourage ongoing inquiry. It opens questions about what kinds of flourishing are made possible, for whom, and under what conditions. This calls for a reimagining of organisational culture as a transformative and relational process—one that expands employees' freedoms and opportunities to lead fulfilling professional and personal lives, in alignment with Nussbaum's vision of human flourishing. Such reimagining does not guarantee flourishing, but it may make space for it, especially if ethical deliberation, agency, and mutual respect are not marginal, but central. This orientation is closely tied to the ethical principles underpinning the CA. By recognising the intrinsic worth of each individual, organisations would be encouraged to balance economic aims with moral responsibilities. The following section explores this ethical foundation in depth, examining how its principles challenge conventional metrics of success and prioritise human dignity and flourishing.

The ethical foundations of Nussbaum's CA are grounded in a vision of justice that foregrounds human dignity, the irreducibility of individual worth, and the conditions under which people are genuinely able to lead lives they have reason to value. This orientation challenges reductionist organisational logics that treat human development as a by-product of productivity or economic gain. Instead, the CA insists on a broader understanding of what it means to be fully human, one that does not reduce flourishing to function or output. Locating leadership within the CA would entail that ethical reasoning became central, not as a procedural add-on but as a condition for the possibility of equitable organisational life that is just and equitable for all.

Some corporate initiatives, while not explicitly framed in terms of the CA, reflect commitments that resonate with its core principles, suggesting that capability-oriented thinking may already be present, if unarticulated, in certain organisational practices. For example, Unilever's (2023) Sustainable Living Plan positions health, well-being, and sustainable livelihoods as central to the company's long-term strategy. Such an initiative could be read, through the lens of the CA, as an attempt to expand what people are enabled to do and to be, particularly if practical reasoning, affiliation, and dignity are supported. Similarly, Patagonia's emphasis on environmental stewardship and ethical supply chains reflects, as Chouinard (2016) describes, an orientation toward values that transcend short-term profitability. However, such initiatives also raise further questions: whose flourishing is prioritised, under what conditions, and how are tensions between ethical commitments and commercial imperatives navigated?

In corporate contexts, such a reframing prompts critical reflection on how success is defined, understood, measured, and pursued. It brings into focus questions about whose capabilities are supported, whose voices are heard, and which values are privileged or marginalised. This structural importance suggests that flourishing is inseparable from ethical deliberation and social embeddedness. Leaders are thus called upon not merely to optimise, but to cultivate environments in which judgment, recognition, and participation can take root. If this were to occur, the CA would cultivate the conditions for ethical reflection, situated responsibility, and genuine dialogue—a foundation from which flourishing in organisations might become possible.

On this view, flourishing in organisations requires resisting dominant performance logics and creating space for ethical judgement and ethical deliberation, as well as for relationality, understood here as the capacity to act with and through others. This vision resonates with philosophical accounts that treat virtue as embedded in practice. MacIntyre (2007), for example, argues that meaningful work requires not

only technical competence but also an ethic of care grounded in the internal goods of practice. While his account is rooted in a specific and different tradition from the CA, Nussbaum (2011) similarly insists that ethical leadership involves enabling others to develop and exercise their capabilities as ends in themselves, rather than merely as means to organisational performance. This view moves beyond compliance models of ethics and calls for a sustained inquiry into how organisational norms shape what is possible for individuals working in organisations. Emotional and moral capabilities—including empathy, compassion, and a sense of justice—are also central here. As Noddings (2013) has argued, with respect to care, these are not secondary to rationality, but integral to ethical reasoning and educational judgment. In this light, organisations may be seen as microcosms of society: structured spaces in which social relations are formed, values negotiated, and responsibilities enacted. When organisations are understood as such spaces, they become not only sites of work, but potential sites of *Bildung* and ethical formation. Following this, leadership practices that attend to moral and emotional development are not an indulgence, not an ‘added extra,’ but part of the broader task of cultivating just and humane institutions.

This perspective also invites organisations to reconsider their role in relation to the broader social world. Rather than seeing leadership solely as the pursuit of internal performance goals, the CA invites an expansive reflection on how corporate life might contribute to shared flourishing. This includes asking how structures of decision-making, recognition, and inclusion affect not only efficiency but also the capacity for people to grow, relate, and act responsibly. Such a reorientation is not easily achieved. Yet it may offer a way of resisting the instrumentalisation of human potential by grounding leadership in an ethic of possibility and care. Nussbaum's Central Capabilities can redirect attention from formal indicators to the lived and situated possibilities for human flourishing within organisational environments. How such flourishing might be made actionable through leadership practice is the concern of the following section.

2.3.1 Reflective Leadership as an Educational Practice

Leadership can be understood here as a reflexive and educational practice through which ethical and developmental concerns can be made actionable in complex organisational settings. Critical reflection has long been recognised as a foundational practice in professional learning, particularly in education and leadership. It denotes more than a technical exercise of self-observation; rather, it entails a moral, situated, and political engagement with one's assumptions, values, and practices (Brookfield, 2017; Carr and Kemmis, 2005). In the context of this dissertation, critical reflection provides a generative link between the CA, educational theory, and leadership practice, offering a conceptual bridge that enables leaders to engage deeply with the ethical and developmental dimensions of their work. Drawing on Dewey's (1933/1998) framing of reflection as "active, persistent, and careful consideration" of beliefs and actions in light of their consequences, reflective leadership can be seen as a way of thinking and acting that resists routine and opens up possibilities for change. Schön (1983) later expanded this into the notion of the "reflective practitioner", someone who engages in both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as a means of navigating complexity and ambiguity in professional life. For leadership within contemporary organisations—often shaped by uncertainty, competing demands, and shifting power dynamics—such reflexivity should not be regarded as an add-on but as a necessary part of navigating ethical responsibility. This conception positions leaders as learners, engaged in continuous, situated inquiry that bridges action and reflection.

The course on Critical Reflection in Professional Learning and Practice, undertaken during my doctoral studies, shaped this understanding further. Exploring the relationship between knowledge, identity, and values, I came to view leadership as

a situated and value-laden activity. The EdD taught courses introduced frameworks that problematise professional identity (Hargreaves, 2000; Sachs, 2016), contextualise dilemmas (Cuban, 1992; Fransson and Grannas, 2013), and highlighted how policy, institutional cultures, and habitus shape leadership practices (Braun et al., 2011; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). This resonates with the CA, which foregrounds agency, dignity, and justice. From this perspective, to lead reflectively means to recognise how structures enable or constrain flourishing, and to act in ways that potentially extend rather than diminish others' capabilities. This also involves examining how one's values inform practice, and how one's own development is entangled with the growth of others. Such a reciprocal view challenges instrumentalist paradigms and reframes leadership as an educational activity in its own right. The reflective practitioner is accountable to both organisational priorities and the ethical possibilities of learning and becoming. Accordingly, I understand leadership as a reflexive, value-informed pedagogical practice. Serving as a foundational orientation, critical reflection enables leaders to engage with complexity, resist negative normative assumptions, and cultivate inclusive developmental approaches. It provides a way of linking theory and practice, power and ethics, structure, and agency, thereby reinforcing the educational orientation of the integrative model proposed later in this study. On this view, leadership becomes inseparable from learning—a pedagogical process of becoming, questioning, and reimagining action within complex systems. Such a stance also sharpens awareness of the theoretical tensions that arise when applying normative concepts such as the CA in practice. These tensions invite closer examination.

While the CA offers a rich framework for reimagining leadership and organisational development, it is not without tensions. One recurring difficulty lies in translating relatively abstract capabilities into workplace realities. Organisations are often driven by economic and operational pressures, which can make it difficult to create and maintain spaces for practices that centre dignity, participation, and ethical reflection. Tensions may emerge when the pursuit of measurable success

overshadows the longer-term slower, more uncertain processes of human development. The question of how to enact the CA in diverse institutional settings, without reducing it to a checklist, remains challenging. Cultural and organisational contexts vary significantly, and what counts as a meaningful opportunity may differ across social, economic, cultural, and political environments. In this light, the application of CA principles calls for attentiveness to the specific dynamics of each organisational setting, including the distribution of power, voice, and recognition. Furthermore, Nussbaum (2011) warns that a strong focus on individual capabilities must go hand in hand with serious attention to entrenched social injustices and the institutional arrangements that shape people's real opportunities. These tensions do not invalidate the approach but highlight the importance of engaging with it critically.

Two frameworks that continue to shape leadership discourse—Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory—offer a useful point of contrast for clarifying what distinguishes the CA from conventional, instrumental approaches to human development. Maslow's (1943) fixed five-level sequence and emphasis on individualistic self-actualisation (Kenrick et al., 2010; Copley, 2024), alongside Herzberg's (1966) focus on extrinsic hygiene factors and intrinsic motivators (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020; Northouse, 2022), offer little space for structural critique or relational flourishing. By contrast, the CA avoids imposing a universal developmental sequence, shifting the focus from managing behaviour to enabling human development. Transcending the mere question of how to optimise productivity, it invites reflection on what kind of organisational culture makes practical reason, affiliation, and ethical deliberation possible. These are not managerial instruments but educational and moral questions that resist easy measurement. Accordingly, flourishing is redefined beyond productivity, recognising the development of judgement, relationality, and ethical self-formation as central to long-term organisational flourishing, a theme the following section develops further.

2.3.2 Flourishing as Development Beyond Productivity

The CA, as articulated by Nussbaum, emphasises individual well-being and development as key indicators and essential measures of societal systems. I argue that leaders, informed by the CA, should challenge narrow definitions of success tied solely to economic performance or material outcomes, suggesting that employees must balance both their contribution to the organisation and their own well-being, focusing on individuals' freedom and opportunities to achieve lives they have reason to value (Sen, 2001; Nussbaum, 2013). I suggest that stakeholders across organisational hierarchies are invited to reflect on how corporate environments and learning cultures contribute not only to the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also to the cultivation of capabilities that enable employees to lead fulfilling lives. Based on my own observations, however, such a commitment is often far from universal. In practice, capability-oriented thinking frequently gives way to top-down decision making, where ideas are determined at management level and employees are consulted rhetorically rather than genuinely included in shaping the conditions of their working lives. Yet the question remains how such aspirations might be translated into practice without reducing them to instrumental goals. Achieving this focus on individual well-being and development within organisational practices requires a nuanced understanding of the diversity of human aspirations and the barriers that may impede their realisation. Nussbaum's CA emphasises that individual flourishing cannot be reduced to uniform measures but must account for context-specific factors that influence capabilities and opportunities (Nussbaum, 2013).

This resonates with White's (2007) argument that flourishing cannot be reduced to individual desire-satisfaction, nor derived solely from human nature or fixed developmental stages. Instead, he conceptualises well-being goods as cultural

products—historically, located, yet not relativistic. The value of an activity such as creating art, enjoying nature, or forming deep relationships, according to White, emerges not from biology or instinct but from shared cultural practices and ongoing conversations about what constitutes a worthwhile life. On this view, flourishing is sustained not by optimisation but by participation: in forms of life that allow for expression, reflection, and connection across difference. This perspective strengthens the present study's critique of instrumental rationality and affirms the role of education in enabling individuals to recognise, access and contribute to evolving conceptions of the good life. In my own professional experience, the introduction of collegial case consultation among leaders offered one such environment: a structured space in which reflection, mutual recognition, and ethical deliberation became possible outside of hierarchical pressures. As Haniford's (2023) account of collaborative reflection as a protected relational space for critically questioning practice with trusted colleagues suggests, such settings can enable leaders to surface assumptions together and experiment with responsible forms of action.

Such an orientation suggests that human development may be supported not by predetermined scripts, but by environments that leave space for ethical self-formation. The focus on flourishing, particularly well-being, underscores the ethical obligation of organisations to foster environments that encourage exploration, critical reflection, and the development of autonomy and purpose. Drawing on Nussbaum's (2013) account of political emotions, organisations can be understood as microcosms of society that bear responsibility not only for developing professional skills but also for attending to the emotional and social dimensions of growth, which she treats as integral to human flourishing. This includes attention to how daily routines, workplace hierarchies, and organisational narratives enable or limit forms of participation and personhood. The CA thus provides guiding principles for creating workplaces that prioritise both individual growth and collective well-being by aligning professional development with meaningful pursuits that transcend

economic imperatives. This may involve protected time for reflection, participatory decision-making, and sustained attention to relational dynamics. Concretely, this involves cultivating ongoing opportunities for collaborative reflection, mentoring, and feedback, through which employees can negotiate meaning, address tensions, and develop capabilities in relationship with others. Yet such inclusive cultures cannot emerge without attention to the structural conditions of justice and equity that shape whose capabilities are genuinely supported—a concern that I examine in the following section.

2.3.3 Social Justice and Equity

I argue that social justice and equity are not secondary concerns but central dimensions of organisational flourishing: only under just and equitable conditions can capabilities meaningfully develop. The CA provides a powerful lens for examining issues of social justice and equity within organisational contexts and beyond. This approach posits, following Nussbaum (2006), that justice involves not only ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities but also enabling individuals to actively shape their professional and personal lives, free from the constraints of systemic inequalities, discrimination, or exclusion. In corporate environments, this requires identifying and recognising the diverse capabilities necessary for employees to fully contribute to and thrive within their workplaces. It highlights the interconnectedness of individual well-being and organisational equity, where fostering inclusion and equal opportunities for all employees strengthens both the moral and functional fabric of organisations. Nussbaum's (2011) work makes clear that the capability for affiliation cannot develop in environments marked by exclusion or humiliation, making institutional transformation a necessary precondition for justice. While this claim remains normative, empirical research such as that conducted by Aguinis & Glavas (2019) increasingly supports the view that inclusive environments correlate with both psychological well-being and organisational commitment. Moreover, addressing social justice within leadership

practices is crucial to ensuring that organisational success does not come at the cost of marginalising underrepresented or disadvantaged groups, a concern that is increasingly central to ethical and sustainable leadership frameworks (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). In organisational contexts, this perspective requires a critical examination of the structures and practices that may perpetuate systemic inequalities or hinder the professional development of certain groups. It is not sufficient to provide equal access to opportunities and resources; organisations must also identify and dismantle barriers that prevent employees—particularly those from marginalised or underrepresented backgrounds—from fully realising their potential.

This includes addressing biases within recruitment, promotion pathways, and leadership development to create equitable opportunities across all levels (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018a). Furthermore, Shore et al. (2011) argue that fostering inclusivity requires organisational cultures sensitive to diverse socio-economic, cultural, and physical needs, ensuring that policies and practices actively accommodate differences rather than enforcing conformity. Inclusive leadership approaches can help cultivate environments where employees are empowered to contribute meaningfully while fostering belonging and mutual respect (Nishii, 2013). In addition, a focus on structural equity extends beyond internal policies to external interactions, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that engage with wider societal inequalities (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). From the perspective of the leadership theories discussed in Chapter Three, these efforts can only contribute to social justice when leadership is enacted as a relational, educational, and ethically oriented practice that expands people's capabilities rather than instrumentalising inclusion for performance or reputation. Transformational, relational, authentic, and distributed leadership approaches, when read through the CA, therefore call for CSR and inclusivity initiatives that are co-constructed with those affected, scrutinise underlying power relations, and open genuine spaces

for participation and shared authorship of organisational purposes.

From a Capabilities perspective, such CSR and inclusivity initiatives are not add-ons but core components of justice, because they shape whether individuals are genuinely able to pursue lives they have reason to value. Yet the degree to which CSR initiatives reflect these aims in practice remains contested, particularly when programmes are used to enhance brand image rather than substantively challenge social inequities - for instance, when diversity and well-being campaigns are launched without corresponding changes to hiring, promotion, or pay structures. By addressing these interconnected challenges, organisations can align economic performance with ethical responsibility, creating spaces where both individual development and collective flourishing are prioritised. Still, such alignment remains aspirational rather than guaranteed, and its realisation depends on context-specific institutional will, leadership priorities, and broader socio-economic conditions. Leaders and policymakers will need to navigate deeply ingrained societal norms, organisational biases, and resource constraints that can hinder progress towards equity. Systemic power dynamics within corporate structures often perpetuate unequal access to opportunities, requiring critical interventions to challenge and disrupt these patterns.

Nussbaum (2006) argues that capability deprivation is not merely a matter of individual misfortune but of structural injustice that demands public redress. Ongoing dialogue and collaboration among organisational stakeholders—including leadership, employees, and external partners—are essential to identifying and implementing sustainable strategies that genuinely promote fairness, empowerment, and equal participation. This requires leaders to act as facilitators of equity, fostering transparent processes and actively addressing imbalances within workplace systems (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018a). Moreover, achieving social justice within organisations necessitates a broader societal commitment to addressing the underlying structural inequalities that impact the workforce. Where organisations

engage with wider inequities, research suggests that the conditions for long-term and meaningful change are supported (Burchi & Muro, 2016). Yet what counts as justice and whose flourishing is prioritised remains open to contestation, particularly in corporate cultures where efficiency tends to override ethical deliberation. Nussbaum (2006) acknowledges this directly: the capabilities threshold she proposes is not a final settlement but a political and institutional achievement, always subject to revision through deliberation and dissent. This means that in organisational contexts, the CA does not resolve questions of justice so much as sharpen them—asking whose capabilities are structurally constrained, which organisational arrangements perpetuate deprivation, and what forms of leadership might begin to address these conditions. Such questions resist easy answers, but they are more productive than the silence that often surrounds them in performance-driven cultures. I contend that organisations committed to flourishing need to treat equity and justice not as supplementary values but as conditions for enabling capabilities, requiring critical reflection, structural change, and inclusive leadership practice. I also argue that sustainability, when viewed through the CA, should be understood as an ethical commitment to interdependence and dignity—a perspective that the following section develops fully.

2.3.4 Rethinking Sustainability through the CA

Sustainability has become a critical concern for modern organisations, and Nussbaum's CA offers valuable insights for integrating sustainability into leadership practices. However, this integration is not without difficulty. Nussbaum does not explicitly frame environmental sustainability as a central capability, though her eighth capability, living with concern for and in relation to other species and the natural world, acknowledges the relationship between human flourishing and the natural environment. As Van Jaarsveld (2025) notes, this capability remains

underdeveloped in its practical implications, which limits its direct application to organisational contexts. By prioritising capabilities such as environmental stewardship and social responsibility, leaders can align organisational goals with broader societal and ecological imperatives. This raises the question of whether corporate environments can meaningfully prioritise these concerns, or whether such commitments remain aspirational within systems driven by growth, output, and scale.

Recent literature suggests that CA can guide the development of sustainable business models that balance economic performance with ethical and environmental considerations (Bansal & Song, 2024). Such proposals are promising, though they risk remaining symbolic unless sustainability is embedded not only in strategy but in organisational learning, reflection, and relationships. This alignment not only enhances organisational resilience but also contributes to long-term societal well-being. Still, resilience itself must be interrogated. Is resilience in service of organisational continuity, or of ethical responsiveness to ecological and social fragility? The CA does not resolve this tension directly, but its normative commitments to dignity and interdependence provide a basis for asking such questions more openly.

By embedding sustainability into the core of leadership practices, organisations can create a positive impact that extends beyond their immediate operational boundaries. Yet this impact is contingent upon more than intention—it depends on how sustainability is enacted, for whom, and with what consequences. I argue that the CA offers a critical lens for rethinking sustainability in leadership, not as a strategic tool but as a normative orientation that keeps the questions of for whom, how, and to what end organisational resilience is pursued persistently open. How such a normative orientation might be translated into concrete leadership practice is the question to which the following section turns.

2.3.5 Operationalising Theoretical Constructs in Organisational Contexts

Yet this bridge is not always stable. The translation of a concept such as human dignity into measurable workplace indicators, for instance, risks flattening its ethical complexity into a checklist. The concept of operationalisation serves as a critical bridge connecting the rich theoretical underpinnings of frameworks such as Nussbaum's CA with concrete, observable practices in organisational settings. Operationalisation can be understood as the process of translating abstract theoretical concepts into measurable and observable components that can be systematically implemented in practice (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). During operationalisation, it is important to ask what gets foregrounded in this process—and what might be left out. At stake is not only the application of concepts, but the interpretation of what they mean in context: whose flourishing is being prioritised, how dignity is defined, and whether complexity is preserved or flattened. In the corporate context, operationalisation can be read as a pragmatist move: it seeks to make leadership theories practically useful and, to some extent, measurable, aligning theoretical ideals with organisational realities (see Dewey, 1927/2024). Drawing on Deweyan pragmatism, operationalisation might be understood as a mode of experimental inquiry—one that tests ideas in action, without assuming their meaning is fixed. For example, translating the abstract notion of “dignity and autonomy” into specific workplace practices—such as participatory decision-making, flexible work arrangements, or professional development opportunities—provides a pathway for fostering individual and organisational flourishing. Such translations are, of course, interpretive acts rather than straightforward derivations from Nussbaum's framework. Yet even these practices raise further questions: Who participates? What forms of autonomy are enabled—and which remain out of reach? Such questions are not resolved here, but they resurface in the integrative leadership model developed in Chapter Four, where the conditions under which flourishing is enabled—and for whom—are examined more closely. However, operationalising leadership theories presents notable challenges. A key concern is

reductionism, where complex flourishing-related constructs risk being oversimplified into narrow, quantifiable metrics, such as employee satisfaction scores or productivity outputs (Biesta, 2015), possibly on economic grounds.

Biesta (2015) warns that the pressure to demonstrate effectiveness may shift attention from educational values to technical performance. Such simplification can overlook the nuanced interplay between individual capabilities, organisational culture, and broader societal influences. Indeed, what matters may be what escapes measurement—experiences of belonging, narrative identity, or the space to refuse development altogether. Despite these challenges, operationalisation remains essential for aligning leadership theories with actionable workplace strategies. The point is not to reject operationalisation, but to remain alert to how it frames the possibilities for flourishing. It provides organisations with tools to critically assess and refine their practices, ensuring that theoretical concepts—such as flourishing or equity—are not merely aspirational but actively integrated into leadership models, policies, and cultures. In this sense, operationalisation can become an occasion for critical reflection rather than closure—a way to surface tensions rather than conceal them.

By operationalising the CA, managers and leaders can identify discrepancies between ideals and practical outcomes, driving innovation and fostering environments that balance human and organisational development and flourishing (Marzano et al., 2008; Burchi & Muro, 2016). It may also reveal where flourishing is constrained, for whom, and by what. This process highlights the importance of critical reflection and ongoing adaptation, ensuring that operational definitions evolve alongside shifting organisational and societal challenges. Rather than finalising meaning, such reflection keeps the educational dimension of leadership alive—resisting managerial closure in favour of ethical responsiveness. Operationalising such concepts ultimately can enable organisations to create more equitable, meaningful, and sustainable workplaces, consistent with Nussbaum's

notion of flourishing. But only if operationalisation is approached not as compliance, but as inquiry. I argue that operationalisation, if pursued as an ethical and reflective process rather than a technical fix, can enable organisations to enact the CA in ways that support inclusive, context-aware, and developmental leadership practices. How this plays out in the context of emerging workplace technologies, and where the limits of capability enhancement lie, is the question to which the following section turns.

2.3.6 Integration of Technology and the Limits of Capability Enhancement

While digital tools such as personalised learning management platforms (LMS) or artificial intelligence (AI) systems are often presented as vehicles for individual autonomy and professional development (Smith & Anderson, 2023), the ethical implications of such integrations remain under-examined. Nussbaum's (2011) emphasis on capabilities such as practical reason, affiliation, senses, imagination and thought, and emotional development calls for more than technical optimisation—it requires that technology is embedded within relational, dialogic, and context-sensitive frameworks that uphold dignity rather than reduce individuals to data points. If flourishing is to be understood as the freedom to pursue a life one has reason to value, then the mere presence of choice architectures or algorithmically tailored content is insufficient. Who defines what counts as development? Whose values shape the algorithms? These questions matter especially in corporate contexts, where, as noted above, efficiency narratives often override considerations of equity, participation, or subjectivity. Technological tools may offer scaffolding for growth, but only if situated within organisational cultures that recognise vulnerability, resist surveillance logics, and preserve space for human judgement. In this light, the CA does not simply endorse innovation but invites a critical stance, asking not, 'What can technology do for flourishing?' but

rather 'Under what conditions can technology be made compatible with human dignity and educational agency? Addressing this question is essential if leadership is to be reframed not as technical control but as an ethical and learning-oriented practice. I argue that Nussbaum's CA provides a robust normative and developmental framework for rethinking leadership and workplace learning in my professional context, particularly in relation to Lean Management (section 1.6.2), examined in greater depth in the following section, and the pursuit of human flourishing.

2.4 Relevance of CA to My Research Topic and Professional Context

The integration of Martha Nussbaum's CA into organisational leadership and workplace learning provides a holistic and human-centred lens for addressing challenges in modern management frameworks, such as Lean Management Theory (LMT). While LMT is widely adopted for its emphasis on efficiency and structured processes, this includes my own organisational context, where it shapes process optimisation and training delivery. Its assumptions and implications will be examined in depth in Chapter 3.6.3, where its alignment with the aims of human flourishing is critically interrogated. According to Womack and Jones (2006), LMT prioritises efficiency, process improvement, and operational excellence, focusing on waste elimination and the maximisation of value creation. However, critics such as Liker (2021) and Emiliani (2008) argue that this emphasis often overlooks the human dimensions of leadership and employee flourishing, which are essential for fostering sustainable organisational success. By integrating Nussbaum's (2011) CA into Lean Management practices, organisations could expand their focus beyond operational outcomes to prioritise the dignity, autonomy, holistic development, and flourishing of employees. This framework may offer a valuable orientation for

leadership and management, especially when the aim is to foster human flourishing not merely as a by-product, but as a central ethical commitment. Nussbaum's Central Capabilities—such as senses, imagination, thought, emotions, and practical reason—are particularly relevant to organisational settings, where leadership practices and workplace policies can profoundly influence individuals' opportunities to thrive. For instance, the capability of senses, imagination, and thought can be seen as pointing to the need for workplaces to provide intellectually stimulating and creative challenges, thereby aligning leadership development with continuous learning opportunities. Leaders can promote this capability by encouraging innovation, reflective practices, and providing access to personalised professional growth resources. Similarly, the capability of emotions underscores the importance of fostering psychologically safe and supportive workplace cultures where employees feel valued, motivated, and connected. This aligns with Nussbaum's (2011, 2013) focus on dignity and affiliation as essential elements for human flourishing. By integrating CA principles into leadership strategies, organisations may be positioned to prioritise emotional well-being alongside operational goals, particularly when leadership is understood as an ethical and relational practice.

The capability of practical reason, understood as the ability to engage in critical reflection and pursue one's vision of a good life, has significant implications for leadership development. In practice, this might mean designing training programmes that invite participants to articulate personal learning goals and connect professional development to their own sense of a meaningful working life, as reflected in my employer's approach to tailored, needs-oriented training design. Leaders who adopt CA principles can empower employees to take ownership of their personal and professional growth, align personal values with organisational goals, and contribute meaningfully to both their own flourishing and organisational success. This reflects a departure from one-size-fits-all management and leadership models towards context- and culture-sensitive, adaptive leadership practices that acknowledge individual aspirations and capabilities. By integrating the capabilities

of affiliation, practical reason, and play into leadership development, the model embraces human diversity and supports ethical, relational, and creative flourishing in organisational life, for instance through learning formats that privilege dialogue, collaborative learning, and participant autonomy, where learning is co-constructed rather than delivered. This dissertation thus positions leadership not simply as a set of skills or strategic tools, but as a distinctively educational undertaking. By framing leadership as a site of learning, reflection, and ethical subject-formation, the model extends the educational project into the heart of organisational life. It engages with the tradition of *Bildung* as a process of becoming that is situated, unfinished, and relational (Biesta, 2020), and aligns with Dewey's (1938) notion of education as continuous reconstruction of experience through participatory engagement. On this view, leadership could become an ongoing pedagogical practice concerned with cultivating judgement, fostering dialogue, and enabling the emergence of democratic and responsible forms of organisational life. Rather than drawing only from education, the model contributes to the field of education by showing how leadership in corporate contexts can serve as a meaningful site of educational transformation. To conceptualise such a model, this dissertation critically analyses the alignment and tension between efficiency, operational goals, and the holistic development of employees, drawing on CA principles to propose a normative reorientation of leadership practice.

Recent literature has further expanded on the practical applications of Nussbaum's CA in leadership and management, particularly in addressing contemporary challenges in corporate environments. Esenyel (2024) highlights the integration of CA with adaptive leadership models to navigate volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments. This integration emphasises the importance of fostering resilience and adaptability among employees, aligning with Nussbaum's principles of dignity and autonomy. Moreover, recent critiques and adaptations of CA in corporate contexts underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of value creation and stakeholder engagement. Akampurira (2024) argues that combining CA with stakeholder theory can provide a robust framework for balancing

diverse interests within organisations. According to Parmar et al. (2010), stakeholder theory holds that organisations bear ethical responsibilities not only toward shareholders but also toward all parties affected by their decisions, including employees, customers, suppliers, and wider communities. By integrating CA with contemporary leadership theories, organisations can move beyond traditional efficiency metrics to embrace a more comprehensive view of success that includes human well-being and social justice. Building on Akampurira's (2024) analysis, this alignment with ethical leadership practices can be understood as a way of ensuring that organisational goals are pursued in a manner that respects and enhances the capabilities of all stakeholders involved.

In addition to integrating Nussbaum's CA with adaptive leadership models, recent studies have explored the synergy between CA and transformational leadership. Transformational leadership, which focuses on inspiring and motivating employees to achieve their full potential, aligns well with the principles of CA by emphasising the development of individual capabilities. Leaders who adopt a transformational approach can leverage CA to create a work environment that not only drives performance but also fosters personal growth and well-being. This alignment may be particularly relevant in today's fast-paced and ever-changing corporate landscape, where the ability to adapt and innovate is crucial for long-term success (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Furthermore, the integration of CA with inclusive leadership practices has gained traction as a means to address diversity and equity within organisations. Inclusive leadership, which prioritises the inclusion and engagement of diverse perspectives, can benefit from the CA's emphasis on respecting and developing each individual's unique capabilities. This approach not only enhances organisational performance by leveraging diverse talents but also promotes a culture of equity and respect. Recent research by Shore et al. (2018) suggests that inclusive leadership, when combined with CA, can enhance employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Chapter

III will explore the origins, evolution, and contemporary applications of leadership theories, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding how different leadership models can be aligned with Nussbaum's CA to foster both organisational efficiency and human flourishing. This exploration will set the stage for proposing an integrative leadership model that addresses the complex challenges of modern corporate environments. I argue that Nussbaum's CA offers a compelling educational and ethical lens for rethinking leadership in my professional context, enabling a shift from instrumental success measures to relational, inclusive, and human-centred organisational development. The following section considers how this orientation extends to global and future-oriented applications of the CA.

2.5 Towards a Globally Embedded and Future-Oriented CA

The application of Nussbaum's CA in leadership and management is not limited to Western contexts. Recent research has highlighted the relevance of CA in diverse cultural settings, demonstrating its adaptability and universal appeal. For example, studies in Asian corporate environments have shown how CA can be integrated with local leadership practices to promote holistic development and social equity (Cheng & Wang, 2024). This global perspective underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in applying CA, ensuring that leadership practices are contextually relevant and ethically grounded.

In my role as Consultant for Personnel and Organisational Development, with responsibility for global learning, I have begun to explore how integrating CA principles into a global learning strategy might enhance both individual capabilities and organisational alignment. Developing and managing a global learning strategy involves setting goals, establishing metrics, and tracking progress against key performance indicators (KPIs), all of which align with the CA's emphasis on practical reasoning and autonomy. By designing and implementing a global learning

technology ecosystem, we can provide personalised learning experiences that cater to the diverse needs of employees across different regions. This approach can not only enhance individual capabilities but can also foster a culture of learning and development. Furthermore, collaborating with the global learning community to build a seamless learning experience for employees highlights the CA's focus on affiliation and social interaction. By engaging learning content experts and functional academies, we can create inclusive learning environments that respect and develop each individual's unique capabilities. This collaborative approach ensures that learning and development initiatives are aligned with both organisational goals and the personal growth of employees, promoting a more holistic and equitable form of organisational success.

In sum, the relevance of CA to this research lies in its potential to enrich existing management and leadership approaches while offering a foundation for developing new or adapted approaches. In particular, integrating CA with Lean Management Theory (LMT) appears promising due to its focus on human capabilities and flourishing. However, this assumption requires further critical evaluation and an in-depth exploration to understand its potential applicability and effectiveness, a critical evaluation this dissertation undertakes in Chapter 3.6.3. By bridging efficiency with ethical leadership and personal development, organisations could create workplaces that may support the emergence of transformative workplace cultures. Such an integrative leadership orientation, thus, can contribute to fostering dignity, growth, and resilience among employees.

This chapter has outlined the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of Nussbaum's CA, establishing it as a theoretically robust and normatively compelling foundation for rethinking leadership in corporate contexts. The CA not only foregrounds human dignity and flourishing but also challenges dominant paradigms that reduce leadership to managerial control or economic output. Yet, for this framework to become practically meaningful, it must be brought into dialogue with the

leadership theories and organisational models currently shaping practice. Hence, the following chapter examines how leadership has been theorised, evolved, and critiqued over time—with the aim of identifying possibilities for integration, tension, and transformation. This sets the stage for the formulation of an integrative model of leadership that is philosophically informed, ethically grounded, and organisationally relevant.

Chapter Three: Leadership Theories - From Control to Learning

In this chapter, I explore how leadership can be reframed through an educational and ethical lens to consider how organisations might move beyond narrow concerns with control and optimisation towards practices oriented to dignity, participation, and human flourishing. This chapter begins with a critique of conventional strategic management frameworks, particularly those that prioritise market positioning. While still influential, such models can often perpetuate narrow, instrumental logics of value, sidelining questions of human development and ethical responsibility. By contrast, leadership is treated here not as a neutral function of efficiency, but as a discursive and relational practice that is deeply entangled with how organisations imagine purpose, value, and flourishing. Framing leadership as a participatory and educational endeavour allows the analysis to illuminate the tacit norms, expectations, and cultural assumptions embedded in organisational life, including how these norms shape whose voices are heard, whose development is supported, and how responsibility is distributed.

Having established in Chapter One that neglecting human flourishing can carry long-term organisational risks and having shown in Chapter Two how Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach provides a normative framework for reimagining leadership, this chapter now interrogates the evolution of leadership theories themselves. To frame this discussion, I will consider the historical and etymological roots of management and leadership. The chapter therefore moves from historical foundations towards contemporary and future-oriented models, examining not only what these theories propose but also what they assume, enable, or foreclose. By reading leadership theories through the CA, the chapter seeks to expose not only their transformative possibilities but also their normative limitations, particularly considering whose flourishing is prioritised and under what organisational

conditions. The following section begins this examination by tracing the conceptual distinction between management and leadership.

3.1 From Management to Leadership

Historically, the term ‘management’ evolved to describe the planning, organising, leading, and controlling of organisational activities to achieve defined objectives (Fayol, 1967; Koontz and Weihrich, 2010). These early definitions foreground the structural and functional dimensions of management, which were subsequently expanded through diverse theoretical perspectives. Drucker (2010) later emphasised adaptability as a central managerial competence, while Mintzberg’s (1989) widely cited articulation of managerial roles highlighted the behavioural complexity that characterises managerial work in contemporary organisations. Over the centuries, ‘leadership’ similarly shifted from describing physical guidance to denoting influence, direction, and governance in political, social, and organisational contexts. By the nineteenth century, the term increasingly described the guiding of groups toward collective aims. As Grint (2005) notes, its usage has always been shaped by cultural, institutional, and ideological assumptions, resulting in multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations. This etymological trajectory also signals the emergence of leadership as a relational and meaning-making practice, one concerned not only with direction but also with forms of educational and ethical influence. For this study, this matters because it foregrounds leadership as a practice that actively shapes the conditions under which individuals learn, exercise agency, and develop practical reason within organisations.

To trace the historical shift from control-oriented management models toward learning-oriented leadership approaches, I summarized the timeline of theoretical development in Sketchnote 3.1. This sketch served as an orienting guide during my literature analysis to critically question the normative assumptions of each era.

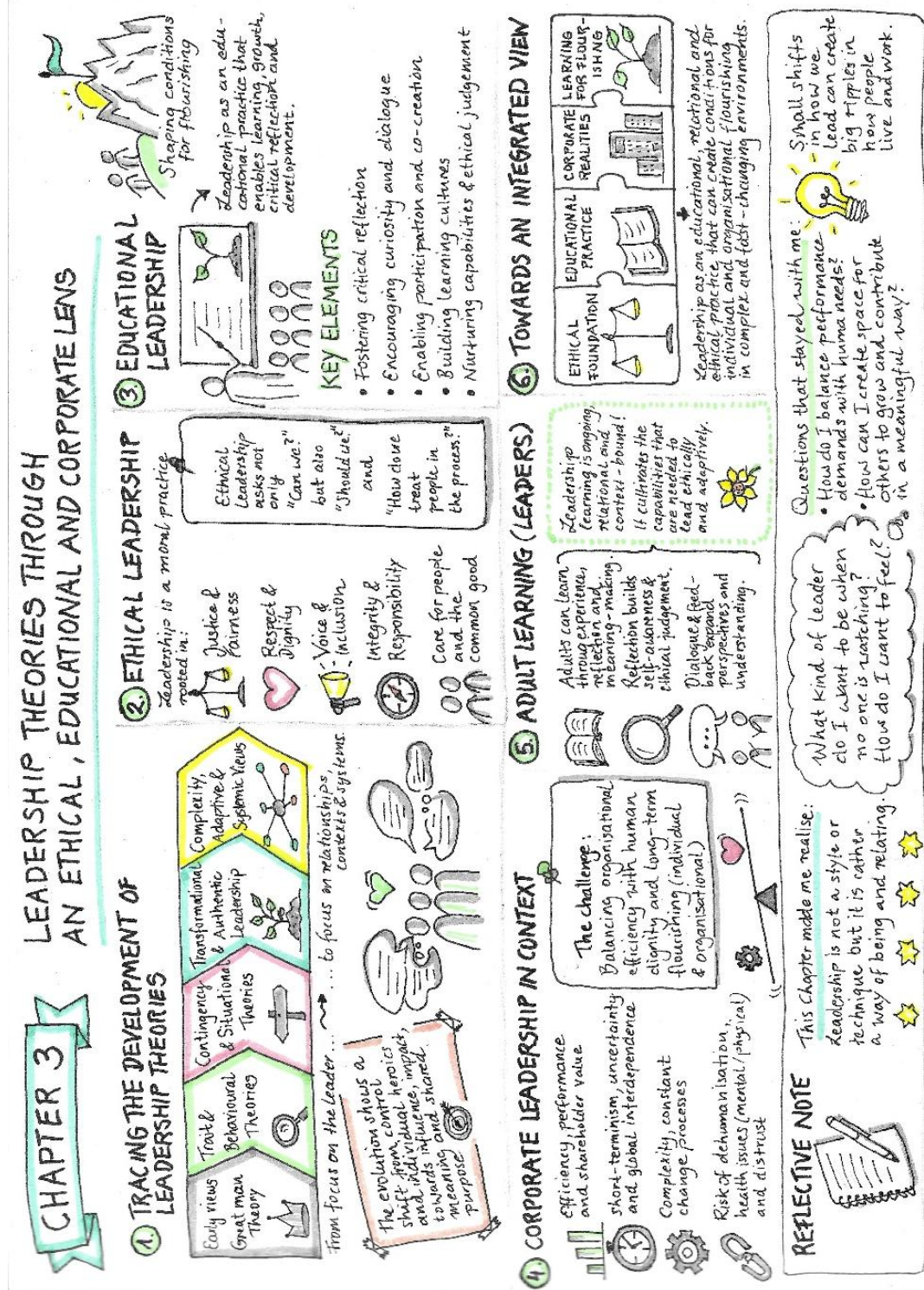


Figure 3.1: Reflective Journal Sketchnote - Leadership Theories Summary

3.2 Evolving Theories and Expanding Organisational Roles

This historical tracing may offer a conceptual grounding for understanding how leadership has been theorised, practised, and adapted within shifting institutional and economic contexts, and how such developments inform the framework proposed in this study. My aim is to highlight conceptual shifts that matter for the integrative leadership model developed in Chapter Four, particularly in terms of how these theories frame human agency, learning, and ethical responsibility. Building on the conceptual distinction between management and leadership developed in Section 3.1, the following discussion traces how successive leadership theories have both inherited and reworked assumptions about control, agency, and development in organisational life.

These early conceptualisations laid the groundwork for understanding management as a dynamic and multifaceted organisational practice. They also reveal how assumptions about coordination, efficiency, and control have historically shaped managerial expectations—assumptions that later leadership theories would seek both to draw upon and to challenge.

Building on foundational contributions by theorists such as Koontz and Weihrich (2010), Drucker (2006), Mintzberg (1989), and Fayol (1967), subsequent theories have broadened the scope of management study to include areas such as workforce motivation, organisational learning, and culture. These developments can be seen as signalling a shift away from purely technical understandings of management toward more human-centred, relational, and adaptive models that resonate with contemporary leadership challenges. However, the extent to which such models genuinely centre human flourishing—rather than incorporate it as a means to

improved organisational performance—remains contested, and this tension is central to the conceptual interrogation undertaken in this dissertation.

To support this conceptual interrogation, I shall consider several influential contributions from management theory that have shaped how leadership is enacted in organisational life. While the thinkers I discuss are not part of educational theory *per se*, their emphasis on culture, learning, and motivation offers valuable entry points for reinterpreting leadership as a developmental, relational, and reflective practice. Rather than resolving tensions between control and autonomy, these perspectives foreground differing assumptions about how individuals are understood and governed within organisations. For instance, McGregor and Cutcher-Gershenfeld (2008) introduced Theory X and Theory Y, contrasting models that view employees either as inherently passive and in need of close supervision (Theory X) or as self-directed, intrinsically motivated, and capable of responsible autonomy (Theory Y). These theories matter in this dissertation not because they resolve the tension between control and autonomy, but because they reveal the normative assumptions embedded in leadership practice—assumptions about personhood, agency, and the conditions under which individuals are deemed trustworthy or capable.

Argyris and Schön (1993) emphasised the necessity of organisational learning and adaptability, advocating for continuous improvement and open communication as critical components of organisational success. Their emphasis on double loop learning and on reflexivity, understood here as the capacity to critically examine underlying assumptions and practices, resonates with this study's aim of understanding leadership as an educational and ethical practice that supports value formation and systemic transformation. Their work in this regard directly relates to leadership practices that encourage reflection and growth within teams, both of which this study interprets as key mechanisms for fostering participatory learning and capability development in organisational life. Double loop learning, in particular, can be read as an organisational analogue to the kind of critical

reflection central to the CA, insofar as it invites organisations to question the norms, purposes, and assumptions that shape action rather than merely optimises existing routines.

Schein (2010) explored the influence of organisational culture and leadership, demonstrating how a strong, adaptive culture can drive effective management practices. His findings underscore the interplay between leadership, culture, and employee well-being—key components in fostering corporate cultures in which individuals and organisations can thrive. Schein’s emphasis on culture highlights how effective leadership can align shared values with strategic goals. From a Capabilities perspective, this prompts important questions: does the prevailing culture enable individuals to exercise, for example, practical reason, affiliation, and control over their environment, or does it constrain these capabilities through unexamined norms and power dynamics?

Taken together, these theories illustrate how understandings of management and leadership have expanded from coordination and control toward more relational, developmental, and ethically oriented practices—but they also reveal the persistence of instrumental logics in which human development is valued primarily for its contribution to organisational performance. I suggest that reinterpreting classical management theories through the CA enables a shift from control towards leadership practices that support learning, well-being, and human flourishing in my professional context. This reinterpretation does not dismiss the strategic and operational dimensions of management; rather, it suggests that these dimensions must be held in ethical tension with commitments to human dignity, participation, and development.

While strategic management theories such as those of Porter (1998/2004) place emphasis on competitive advantage, their relevance here lies not in the technicalities of market positioning, but in how such frameworks can shape underlying assumptions about what organisations are for—and what leadership is

expected to deliver. In the context of this dissertation, such theories serve less as operational models and more as cultural artefacts, reflecting and reinforcing dominant narratives that this inquiry seeks to interrogate and disrupt through a human-centred and educational perspective. These contributions underscore the evolution of management as a dynamic field, shaped by the need to balance operational demands with an understanding of human and organisational complexities. Building on this foundation, the next section explores how scientific and relational approaches to leadership further advanced these ideas, highlighting the interplay between individual agency, situational contexts, and organisational goals.

3.2.1 Scientific and Relational Approaches in Leadership Thought

Frederick Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) introduced methods for optimising task performance through standardisation and the division of labour. Scientific management is included here not as a historical curiosity, but because it exemplifies an early framing of organisational work that prioritised efficiency, predictability, and control—a normative baseline whose assumptions continue to resurface in contemporary organisational life. I argue that Taylor's scientific management increased productivity but did so by treating workers as interchangeable components, reducing personhood to function and foreclosing opportunities for agency, judgement, or meaningful participation—assumptions that a capabilities perspective finds deeply problematic.

Subsequent theories represent partial attempts to move beyond these mechanistic assumptions by acknowledging that context, relationships, and individual differences matter. Early models, such as the trait approach (Judge et al., 2002) and situational leadership (Hersey et al., 1996), introduced adaptability but frequently remained tied to performance-oriented logics. By the late 20th century,

approaches including Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Transformational Leadership (Burns, 1978) shifted the focus toward relational dynamics, mutual respect, and collective goals. While these models align with educational concerns by emphasising shared purpose, they still risk instrumentalising relationships if not grounded in a broader ethical framework.

In response to growing complexity in global and digital environments, contemporary models such as authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) and algorithmic leadership (Daugherty & Wilson, 2018) have emerged. These approaches attempt to navigate the tension between technological efficiency and moral coherence. Yet, while they offer partial responses to changing demands, they tend to remain tethered to strategic logic. Taken together, this developmental trajectory—from compliance-driven models to relational and digital frameworks—serves as an invitation to rethink leadership as an educational and ethical practice. It is to these specific contingency, relational, and learning-oriented models that the following sections turn, examining how they navigate the shift beyond Taylor's mechanistic baseline.

3.2.2 Contingency and Behavioural Leadership Models

Contingency and behavioural models matter for this study because they mark the first serious attempt to move beyond Taylor's mechanistic logic, yet they reveal how difficult it is to escape instrumental framings of leadership effectiveness. Building on Blake's (1977) contribution to behavioural leadership research, the behavioural era is often characterised as emphasising how leaders act and what impact their behaviour has on followers. The emerging contingency era in leadership theory, introduced by Fiedler (1967), refers to a shift from earlier models that suggested there was a single best way to lead, to an understanding that effective leadership is dependent on the specific situation or context. These

theories can be read as moving beyond trait-based determinism, yet they also reveal how definitions of effectiveness are often tied to outcome-oriented or organisationally driven criteria rather than to ethical or developmental considerations.

As Bolden et al. (2019) highlight, these theoretical contributions, though developed several decades ago, continue to inform contemporary debates about flexible and adaptive forms of leadership. What distinguishes them is their early recognition that context matters—a notion now central to leadership practice across sectors. Yet even these behavioural and contingency models tended to retain an instrumental understanding of success, in which the effectiveness of leadership was primarily defined by outcomes and fit. From a Capabilities perspective, such framings tend to privilege organisational optimisation over individual flourishing, positioning adaptation as a mechanism for sustaining prevailing structures rather than interrogating their normative foundations.

For the purposes of this study, contingency and behavioural leadership models are read through a capabilities-informed perspective, suggesting that leadership may be understood not only as context-sensitive, but also as ethically and educationally engaged. Revisiting contingency theories through this lens allows me to consider the kinds of contextual assumptions that are being reinforced and the forms of flourishing that are being enabled or constrained. Such an interrogation shifts the focus from merely responding to context, to examining how contexts themselves are constructed—and how leadership might contribute to environments that genuinely support judgement, participation, and human development.

The following section examines transformational and networked approaches through this same relational lens.

3.2.3 Transformational and Networked Approaches

Transformational leadership is the theoretical tradition most directly informing the integrative model developed in Chapter Four, but only when reread through the CA, which exposes both its possibilities and its risks. As Kotter (2012) argues, effective leadership involves more than maintaining the status quo; it aspires to shape the future by mobilising people around a sense of direction and change, particularly during times of organisational uncertainty. This aspiration is central to transformational leadership, a model that has gained wide recognition for its capacity to inspire commitment and guide systemic renewal through values-based influence (Heifetz and Linsky, 2017). The emphasis on aligning individuals around a shared purpose is central to this model, though such alignment is not without its tensions, particularly when viewed through a critical lens that attends to how purposes are constructed, whose interests they reflect, and what forms of agency are made possible or constrained through such alignment. From a capabilities perspective, alignment without genuine participation risks becoming a sophisticated form of compliance, in which individuals appear empowered yet lack meaningful influence over the aims they are asked to pursue. For this study, this tension matters because it highlights how transformational leadership may both expand and restrict capabilities, depending on how practices of alignment are enacted. Where participation is substantive and dialogic, such practices can support flourishing; where alignment is pursued without shared authorship of purpose, they risk reinforcing instrumental logics.

Crucially, transformational leadership does not operate in isolation. Contemporary organisational life is shaped by distributed networks, hybrid work forms, and fluid relational dynamics. In such settings, leadership cannot be reduced to charismatic vision or unilateral influence. Instead, it unfolds across contexts that demand attentiveness, responsiveness, and the capacity to navigate complexity with others. Kalish and Luria (2021) stress that leadership emerges not through authority alone,

but through mutual perception, shared experience, and interactional sense making. Building on earlier relational models, Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) provide an integrative framework for organisational adaptability. They contend that leadership in complex environments must act as an 'enabling' force that bridges the gap between entrepreneurial 'agile' pockets and the formal 'operational' system. This adaptive space is crucial for flourishing, as it allows for the emergence of new capabilities without a collapse into chaos. Uhl-Bien's (2021) subsequent work emphasises that, in a post-pandemic landscape, this adaptability is inextricably linked to complexity leadership, where the leader's role is to facilitate collective intelligence rather than to exercise top-down control. From this perspective, leadership becomes a shared process of ethical discernment and meaning-making, requiring leaders to navigate uncertainty alongside others rather than merely guiding those others.

Networked leadership models, while often framed in terms of efficiency and adaptability, also offer possibilities for rethinking leadership as a dialogic, relational, and co-constructed process that invites participation and shared learning. Such models reflect an increasingly distributed organisational reality in which influence is negotiated across roles, locations, and areas of expertise, and leadership may emerge from interaction rather than position. These developments are significant for my argument that leadership should be reimagined as an educational and ethical practice, grounded in shared inquiry, because they indicate an opening to reposition leadership as an educational and ethical practice—one oriented toward cultivating meaning, supporting judgement, and enabling flourishing within unpredictable environments.

In my own professional context, I have observed how the rhetoric of transformation can sometimes be deployed to generate enthusiasm for strategic initiatives without creating real opportunities for deliberation or shared authorship. Individuals may be inspired to commit to a vision they did not help shape, creating the appearance of

empowerment while leaving underlying power relations intact. This dynamic illustrates how transformational language can be appropriated in ways that secure commitment without enabling capability, thereby reinforcing rather than challenging dominant organisational logics. By contrast, I have also experienced instances where distributed and networked practices genuinely encouraged collaborative inquiry and mutual learning, creating spaces in which individuals could question assumptions, contribute perspectives, and co construct collective aims.

I have contended that the increasing prominence of transformational and networked leadership models signals an opening for reimagining leadership as a dialogic and educational practice, grounded not in control but in mutual sense making, ethical responsibility, and shared human development. However, this potential cannot be assumed. It depends on whether such models are enacted in ways that support agency, participation, and reflective judgement, or whether they become appropriated as mechanisms for securing alignment under the guise of empowerment. In light of these developments, this study explores how leadership in contemporary organisations might be reoriented as an educational and ethical practice—one that does not merely respond to complexity, but seeks to hold space for flourishing, dialogue, and reflective responsibility in contexts shaped by uncertainty. Reinterpreting transformational and networked models through Nussbaum's CA allows me, in later chapters, to show more concretely how such organisational conditions might be conceptualised and gathered into an integrative leadership model. The following section examines how adaptability and situational thinking can be reread through a similar ethical and relational lens.

3.2.4 Adaptability and Situational Thinking

In this study, I suggest that adaptability in leadership is understood as an ethically situated, relational, and reflective practice that engages with the human complexity of organisational life. While early contingency models (Fiedler, 1967) and situational leadership theory (Hersey et al., 1996) remain influential for recognising the role of context and team readiness, they often persist despite embodying mechanistic assumptions and limited engagement with ethics, power, or human development. Although these theories are dated, their enduring presence in both academic and practitioner literature suggests they continue to shape how leadership is taught, understood, and enacted. This persistence merits critical attention, particularly regarding the assumptions about authority, human potential, and acceptable forms of responsiveness that such models implicitly reproduce. More recent contributions, such as Yukl's (2020) work on flexible and adaptive leadership, affirm the importance of responsiveness to context while critiquing earlier models for their overly mechanistic assumptions. McCleskey (2014), in a comprehensive review, also notes that while contingency and situational theories help foreground the role of context, they often neglect the deeper social and ethical dimensions of leadership—dimensions that this study seeks to foreground.

From an educational perspective, the interest lies not only in the ability to adapt, but in the question of how such adaptation is framed, enacted, and evaluated. In many organisational contexts, the designation of a response as “effective” tends to privilege organisational priorities over individual flourishing, thereby shaping expectations of adaptability in ways that may not always align with ethical or developmental commitments. In my own professional context, working in agile, cross-functional teams within a dynamic corporate environment, I have found situational awareness to be essential. Leading without formal authority has meant responding flexibly to varying levels of experience and autonomy, offering structure when needed, and stepping back when leadership emerged organically. For

example, during the rollout of a new digital learning platform, I initially coordinated the project by setting timelines and clarifying roles for colleagues who felt uncertain about the technology but later invited more experienced team members to take the lead in redesigning workshop formats and co-facilitating training sessions. I have learned to navigate ambiguity through attentiveness, dialogue, and trust, treating adaptability as a shared process of interpreting circumstances and deciding together what responsible action might entail.

While the reflection on my experience of leading without formal authority in agile, cross-functional teams is not offered as generalisable insight, it illustrates how contingency-based thinking can inform practice when approached as a reflective and relational process. From this angle, leadership becomes less about matching style to context and more about staying open to the complex human dynamics that shape everyday organisational life. Such an approach shifts the orientation of situational thinking from technique to judgement, from adaptation to given conditions to active participation in creating conditions where capabilities can expand. I have argued that situational leadership theories, while often framed in instrumental terms, can be reinterpreted as invitations to cultivate educational, responsive, and value-sensitive forms of leadership practice. However, such reinterpretation requires vigilance: it depends on attentiveness to whose perspectives shape situational definitions, whose readiness is assessed, and how adaptive responses are evaluated within organisational cultures. For this study, this means that adaptability is treated not as neutral flexibility in the service of organisational goals, but as a site where ethical judgement, participation, and the distribution of capabilities are continually negotiated. From this angle, adaptability is not only a matter of fitting style to context, but of how relationships make such contextual judgements possible; the next section therefore turns to relational leadership theories that foreground recognition, trust, and responsiveness, most notably Leader-Member Exchange (LMX).

3.2.5 Relationships and Recognition in Leadership Practice

I argue that leadership must be understood as a relational practice grounded in recognition, trust, and responsiveness, where flourishing emerges not from positional power but from the quality of ethical engagement between individuals. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), high quality leader member exchanges (LMX), characterised by trust, mutual respect, and emotional support, have been shown to enhance employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organisational citizenship behaviours. Originally introduced by Dansereau et al. (1975), LMX theory provides a useful lens for understanding the dyadic, individualised relationships between leaders and their followers. While low quality exchanges tend to be impersonal and transactional, high-quality relationships create space for mutual recognition and responsiveness, aligning with a more developmental view of leadership. In this respect, LMX can be read as opening a conceptual space in which leadership is enacted through relational quality.

This resonates with Nussbaum's CA and my argument that leadership should be reframed as an educational and ethical practice oriented towards human flourishing, in that both emphasise conditions under which individuals may participate meaningfully and exercise agency in organisational life. However, it is important to consider how notions of "high quality" exchange are constructed, since relational quality can be experienced unevenly and may, in some cases, be contingent on conformity or emotional labour. Trust, in this context, becomes not a managerial tool or an unequivocal good, but a negotiated and fragile dynamic shaped by context, perception, and practice, understood in this study as a capability-relevant condition for affiliation in Nussbaum's sense, grounded in relationships of mutual recognition and protection from humiliation rather than in mere compliance (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011). As discussed in Chapter Two, this understanding of trust underpins the treatment of affiliation, well-being, and psychological safety as relational conditions for flourishing (Sections 2.2 and 2.3),

and is further interrogated in Chapter Three through reflections on adaptive leadership in agile team settings (Section 3.2.4), the ambivalent role of trust in high- and low-quality leader-member exchanges (Section 3.2.5), and debates about authenticity, agency, and evaluation in contemporary leadership practice (Sections 3.2.6, 3.7, and 3.8).

Having worked in a multicultural organisation with a flat hierarchy, I have observed how the quality of leader member interactions can affect not only performance but also retention, learning, and the capacity of teams to navigate uncertainty. Where trust-based relationships have been fostered, teams have tended to become resilient, adaptive, and open to learning. Yet I have also witnessed how relational dynamics can be appropriated to secure compliance or discourage dissent, illustrating that trust may be invoked to reinforce organisational expectations rather than to support agency or reflection. This reinforces the idea that leadership is not solely exercised through position but through the quality of relationship—a theme that this dissertation embeds deeply in its educational orientation.

From this perspective, LMX theory helps illuminate how everyday leadership encounters might become sites for ethical responsiveness and the cultivation of conditions conducive to human flourishing. At the same time, it underscores that relational quality is not a static attribute, but an ongoing ethical achievement shaped by institutional culture, power dynamics, and the willingness to engage with vulnerability, difference, and dissent. This reading foregrounds leadership encounters as spaces where ethical responsiveness and participatory agency can emerge, reaffirming the dissertation's commitment to human flourishing as a relational and situated possibility—but only when such relationships are characterised by genuine mutuality rather than instrumental calculation. The following section attends to authenticity and agency in leadership, examining how claims to authentic leadership intersect with trust, vulnerability, and capability for participation.

3.2.6 Authenticity and Agency in Leadership

I argue that authentic leadership may be understood not as a personality trait, but as an ethical and dialogic practice through which trust, vulnerability, and moral agency can emerge. Avolio and Gardner (2005) define authentic leadership as grounded in self-awareness, relational transparency, and an internalised moral perspective. These qualities are believed to foster trust, openness, and ethical responsibility in leadership practices. Walumbwa et al. (2008) argue that authentic leadership contributes to positive ethical climates by promoting psychological safety, moral reflection, and empowerment. These principles resonate with the educational emphasis of this dissertation, especially in their concern for integrity, justice, and long-term human development. This stands in contrast to performative or coercive leadership models, which rely on hierarchy or control. Authentic leadership, in this framing, is less about authority and more about creating conditions under which ethical responsiveness - understood here as a willingness to open one's decisions, assumptions, and use of power to dialogue and critique, and to adjust action in ways that protect dignity and expand people's capabilities for participation - and human flourishing can emerge. In my own professional context, authenticity has often emerged not through grand strategic gestures but in the subtle, daily practices of conversation, listening, and co creation. It has been evident in moments where I or others have acknowledged uncertainty, shared mistakes, or invited multiple perspectives into decision making. Such interactions, however informal and merely to a certain extent, have supported trust and collective ownership. They illustrate how relational transparency and ethical intent can shape leadership as a dialogic and educational practice. For example, I once paused a rollout meeting with senior managers to voice my concern that the deadline was unrealistic, invited the team to share their reservations, and together

we adjusted scope and timeline while agreeing how to communicate this transparently to stakeholders.

However, it is important to acknowledge the risks of framing authenticity uncritically. Hedge and Enslin (2021) argue that vulnerability is never a neutral virtue but a form of exposure that may be unevenly distributed and differentially sanctioned. In some organisational contexts, the permission to be vulnerable is granted selectively, while in others it may even diminish credibility or professional standing. In my own experience, showing vulnerability as a leader has at times been met with diminished authority, particularly in high-stakes strategic settings. This suggests that authenticity, like trust, cannot be treated as an individual disposition but is dependent on cultural and institutional conditions that either enable or foreclose its ethical possibilities, and thus its contribution to human flourishing, understood here as the creation of conditions in which people can participate meaningfully, exercise judgement, and be recognised with dignity.

These lived experiences align with the normative orientation of this dissertation: that leadership involves not only direction setting but also holding space for others to act with moral agency. In this sense, authenticity is not a private virtue but a shared possibility—especially in cultures where learning and vulnerability are not seen as weaknesses but as resources. This also connects to Nussbaum's (2011) CA, particularly its emphasis on agency, dignity, and the freedom to pursue valued ways of being and doing. I have argued that when grounded in ethical reflection and enacted through trust-based practices, authentic leadership can create relational spaces for participation, judgement, and human flourishing. In this study, this claim is explored through my professional context of agile, cross-functional teams and leadership development in corporate education, where episodes of shared uncertainty, error acknowledgement, and co-created decisions serve as concrete illustrations of such spaces. Yet this potential can only be realised in organisational cultures that genuinely support dissent, ethical deliberation, and reciprocal vulnerability—rather than merely celebrating authenticity as a managerial

virtue. The next section therefore considers how wider organisational conditions and leadership discourses can either sustain or undermine such practices, preparing the ground for the capabilities-informed leadership model developed in Chapter Four.

3.2.7 Self-Leadership and Reflexive Development

Self-leadership, understood as a reflective and pedagogical process, creates opportunities for agency, judgement, and co-constructed meaning within fluid and decentralised organisational contexts. Dengler and Matthes (2018) suggest that the paradigm of New Work prioritises flexibility, self-organisation, and meaningful participation over traditional hierarchies. Within this context, the concept of self-leadership represents a crucial shift in how leadership is understood and enacted. This shift, however, is not straightforward; it involves complex negotiations between autonomy, organisational expectations, and the systemic conditions that either enable or constrain individual agency.

Manz (1986) originally defined self-leadership as a set of cognitive and behavioural strategies through which individuals influence themselves to achieve self-direction and intrinsic motivation. Such strategies—goal setting, self-observation, and self-reward—resonate with Nussbaum's (2011) CA, which frames agency not as individual independence but as the capacity to act meaningfully within enabling structures. Similarly, Pink (2009) emphasises that autonomy in contemporary work settings is most effective when aligned with shared purpose and mutual accountability. Mader and Göhlich (2021) claim that self-leadership involves not only internal regulation but also reflective engagement with organisational structures, enabling individuals to navigate the tensions between individual autonomy and systemic alignment. Schön (1983) and Biesta (2010) emphasise that self-leadership reflects a developmental process of becoming—one that relies on critical reflection, value-

based judgement, and initiative. These formulations support an understanding of self-leadership as an educational practice, rather than as a purely psychological or individualistic endeavour.

In this dissertation, I foreground self-leadership to strengthen its educational orientation, positioning leadership as distributed authorship—what Raelin (2016) describes as a collective negotiation of meaning and ownership that challenges hierarchical understandings of leadership. Such a perspective reinforces the view that leadership is enacted through participation, responsiveness, and shared ethical responsibility. In my own professional practice within a flat, client-oriented structure, I have observed how self-leadership has distinguished those who simply executed predefined tasks from those who actively shaped the organisational culture. This suggests that leadership emerges through interaction, participation, and the capacity to co-construct meaning and sustain reflective action in conditions of uncertainty. These experiences illustrate how self-leadership, when genuinely supported, can generate spaces for agency and creative contribution even in the absence of formal authority.

However, it is also necessary to recognise the risks associated with self-leadership discourse. The language of autonomy and self-direction can be coopted in ways that individualise responsibility for structural challenges, turning self-leadership into a euphemism for navigating precarity rather than a practice grounded in ethical empowerment. When organisational conditions lack time, resources, or psychological safety, expectations of self-leadership can mask systemic shortcomings by framing them as individual deficits. This risk becomes particularly acute in contexts shaped by neoliberal logics, where autonomy is celebrated rhetorically while material conditions for exercising it remain limited.

Biesta (2010) concludes that when seen through this lens, self-leadership becomes a pedagogical practice—one that cultivates agency, adaptability, and ethical responsiveness as preconditions for both human and organisational flourishing. I

have suggested that self-leadership, when reinterpreted through the lens of the CA, offers a pathway for developing ethically grounded, reflective, and participatory leadership in decentralised organisational settings. Yet this potential can only be realised where institutional conditions genuinely support agency, mutual accountability, and reflective practice, rather than transferring the burden of organisational complexity onto individuals.

Against the backdrop of these reflective accounts of self-leadership, it may also be useful to consider how more recent formulations—often situated within technologically mediated contexts—have sought to frame leadership in relation to broader societal and economic shifts. While often framed in terms of agility and strategic responsiveness, these ideas may also be read as indicative of a deeper concern: how to sustain meaning making, ethical orientation, and adaptive judgement in fast evolving environments. From the perspective of this dissertation, such developments highlight the need to consider what kinds of leadership practices can foster flourishing—not only through efficiency or innovation but through reflective engagement with uncertainty, interconnectedness, and responsibility, themes that the following section explores through the lens of Leadership 4.0.

3.2.8 Leadership 4.0 and the Digital Landscape

Building on this discussion of self-leadership and reflexive development, I suggest that Leadership 4.0, when reframed through an educational lens, offers a critical opportunity to reconcile technological responsiveness with ethical responsibility, participatory agency, and the cultivation of human flourishing. As Schwab (2017) and Zentgraf (2024) have suggested, the notion of Leadership 4.0 has emerged in response to the challenges posed by rapid digitalisation and the broader transformations associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Agile leadership, often framed as part of this paradigm, refers to the ability to lead adaptively in

rapidly changing environments by enabling self-organising teams, fostering learning, and responding iteratively—that is, through repeated, reflective adjustments—to complexity. Rather than defining a unified model, the term tends to signal a shifting landscape in which leadership is expected to be digitally fluent, emotionally intelligent, and responsive to volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, commonly referred to as VUCA conditions. These environments demand not only technical adaptability but also the capacity for reflective judgement, ethical orientation, and learning in action. Joiner and Josephs (2007) characterise agility as a key competency for leaders navigating such spaces, noting its relevance not only for performance but also for sustaining coherence under conditions of disruption. Denning (2018), too, has emphasised the significance of resilience and responsiveness in settings shaped by fast paced change and digital interdependence. Such contributions foreground the increasing complexity of organisational life, yet they often retain an instrumental framing that positions adaptability as an expectation rather than as a relational and ethically situated practice.

These ideas resonate with earlier models explored in this chapter, particularly transformational and networked forms of leadership, but Leadership 4.0 arguably adds a socio technological dimension that invites further critical attention. Its language of adaptability and innovation can, at times, obscure the normative assumptions it carries: that leadership should remain effective, future-oriented, and agile even under conditions that resist stability. From the perspective of this dissertation, the relevance of Leadership 4.0 lies not simply in its emphasis on responsiveness, but in how it draws attention to the pressures that contemporary leaders must navigate and the ethical implications of doing so. In this sense, Leadership 4.0 can be read both as a response to technological acceleration and as an expression of broader societal expectations that individuals remain continually adaptable, often without corresponding institutional support.

In my own leadership practice, I have experienced firsthand how Leadership 4.0 requires not only technical knowledge but also the emotional and pedagogical capacity to support teams through digital transformation processes. Leading in hybrid settings, introducing digital learning formats, and fostering psychological safety in times of uncertainty were not separate from strategy—they were central to it. These experiences demonstrated that the challenges of digital transformation are not primarily technical but relational and ethical, involving questions of connection, trust, and the conditions under which learning and participation become possible. I have also observed how the discourse of Leadership 4.0 can be mobilised to intensify performance expectations without corresponding institutional supports. The rhetoric of agility and innovation can obscure structural inequities, such as unequal access to digital infrastructure, uneven distributions of care responsibilities, and the erosion of boundaries between work and life. When agility becomes an imperative rather than a cultivated capacity, it risks becoming another mechanism through which employees are expected to absorb organisational volatility, thereby individualising systemic pressures.

By embedding Leadership 4.0 into this dissertation, I suggest that emerging leadership paradigms, when critically reinterpreted through the CA, can move beyond performance-based expectations towards relational, ethical, and reflexive practices that enable human flourishing in digitalised and uncertain organisational environments. This requires not only digital fluency but also ethical literacy: the capacity to interrogate the purposes to which technologies are deployed, the values that inform their use, and the human consequences of their implementation. From this perspective on Leadership 4.0, I read collaborative and distributed leadership models as creating openings for rethinking leadership as a dialogic and participatory practice, and it is these models that the following section examines.

3.2.9 Collaborative and Distributed Models

Gronn (2008) argued that leadership in contemporary organisations cannot be adequately captured by traditional hierarchical models. Instead, he proposed a shift towards more distributed and collaborative approaches, particularly in team-based environments, where decision making and expertise are often shared. This shift is especially relevant for this dissertation's concern with leadership as a co-constructed and participatory practice.

Spillane (2006) developed the concept of distributed leadership through empirical research in educational settings, where leadership was observed as emerging through interactions across individuals rather than residing solely in the role of the leader. Drawing on this work, Bolden (2011) and Woods et al. (2020) explored how shared leadership practices can foster accountability, adaptability, and mutual engagement, especially in fast paced or globalised work contexts. These studies point to a form of leadership that is not simply about delegation, but about the relational processes through which meaning, purpose, and responsibility are negotiated. Such processes align with this dissertation's emphasis on leadership as a shared ethical practice in which individuals participate in the co construction of organisational direction.

Recent studies have added further empirical weight to this perspective. Harris (2014), for instance, examined how distributed leadership supports adaptability and responsiveness in school improvement initiatives, while Woods et al. (2020) documented how shared decision-making structures can enhance motivation and performance in professional teams. DeFlaminis (2016), drawing from longitudinal research in educational change, argued that distributed leadership strengthens organisational resilience by encouraging shared ethical responsibility and deeper engagement with uncertainty. Together, these contributions suggest that

distributed leadership is not merely a structural adjustment, but a cultural orientation towards collective agency and shared sense making.

In this dissertation, these perspectives matter not only because they reflect a growing emphasis on collaborative practice, but because they help reframe leadership as an ethical and educational endeavour. Rather than viewing leadership as a set of technical tasks or competences, distributed approaches highlight the conditions under which individuals can participate meaningfully in organisational life, especially when trust, openness, and shared agency are cultivated. However, the rhetoric of distribution warrants careful interrogation. In some organisational settings, distributed leadership is invoked symbolically, while strategic authority remains centralised. This results in what might be described as a performance of participation—one that invites contributions without allowing those contributions to shape direction in consequential ways.

From a capabilities perspective, genuine distributed leadership requires more than rhetorical commitment: it demands institutional conditions that enable individuals to exercise agency, contribute to shared deliberation, and influence outcomes. This includes attending to intersectional dynamics that may shape who is recognised as a legitimate contributor, whose expertise is valued, and whose leadership remains invisible or marginalised. In this section, I suggest that distributed leadership models, when interpreted through an educational and capabilities-oriented lens, foreground participation and shared ethical responsibility as enabling conditions for flourishing in complex organisational contexts. Yet these structural questions already implicate ethical ones. Section 3.3 takes up this thread.

3.3 Ethical Leadership in Context

Ethical leadership, in this study, is understood not as a discrete style or set of personal traits, but as a situated and relational mode of practice that gains meaning through organisational context, cultural conditions, and ethical engagement. While some accounts introduce ethical leadership at the outset, this dissertation deliberately engages with it only after having discussed more functional, strategic, and relational models. This structure allows the ethical dimension to emerge not as a separate concern, but as a thread that cuts across and ultimately reorients those earlier perspectives.

Brown and Treviño (2006) define ethical leadership as a practice that prioritises the well-being of others and incorporates accountability into decision making processes. Rather than promoting fixed rules or rigid standards, such accounts tend to centre the relational and cultural dimensions of leadership—how expectations are shaped, negotiated, and enacted within organisations. From this perspective, leadership becomes not only a matter of individual conduct, but also a reflection of collective norms and shared understandings. This relational emphasis intersects with a broader recognition of ethical leadership as a critical component of organisational practice, particularly in contexts marked by ethical dilemmas, ambiguity, and increasing expectations for corporate responsibility. While ethical leadership is often defined through reference to values such as integrity, fairness, and accountability (Brown & Treviño, 2006), its conceptual foundations extend much further. Drawing on philosophical traditions, particularly classical virtue ethics, contemporary understandings of ethical leadership highlight the importance of practical reasoning and moral character. Aristotle, for instance, associated leadership with virtues such as justice and integrity—capacities seen not merely as individual traits but as dispositions cultivated through reflection and social practice (Aristotle, ca. 350 BCE/2009). In the twentieth century, Max Weber expanded this line of thinking by examining how values and ethical principles influence the

legitimacy of authority, and how norms shape leadership conduct within institutional systems (Weber, 1922/1947). These philosophical traditions foreground the interpretive, relational, and culturally embedded dimensions of ethical reasoning, positioning ethical leadership as an ongoing and situated achievement.

Ethical leadership, as conceptualised by Brown and Treviño (2006), refers not simply to compliance with codified standards but to the cultivation of a workplace climate in which moral principles are made visible and actionable. Defined as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers” (p. 595), this framing positions leaders as role models whose practices shape shared expectations over time. Seen in this way, ethical leadership operates not through formal directives but through relational processes—observation, dialogue, and the subtle reinforcement of shared values. It thereby invites reflection on how ethical judgement is enacted in settings characterised by ambiguity, risk, or competing demands.

However, these concepts are not neutral. Trust, fairness, or integrity—often celebrated within ethical leadership discourse—can each be deployed in ways that enable agency or suppress it, depending on how power and responsibility are distributed. This makes it necessary to interrogate how such values are enacted in hierarchical contexts, and how seemingly benign concepts may reinforce conformity or discourage dissent. A capabilities-informed reading therefore foregrounds the conditions under which individuals can meaningfully participate in ethical deliberation and exercise judgement, rather than merely comply with organisational expectations.

This view aligns with Ciulla’s (2014) interpretation of ethical leadership as grounded in Kantian ethics, which frame individuals not as means to an end but as ends in themselves. In practice, this requires moral courage—not merely to follow

principles, but to respond ethically in contexts of ambiguity, inequity, or organisational risk. It is precisely this responsiveness that renders ethical leadership an ongoing and situated mode of ethical engagement, which raises questions about how organisational cultures can either sustain or undermine such responsiveness—questions taken up in the following section on ethical leadership and organisational culture.

3.3.1 Ethical Leadership and Organisational Culture

Organisational culture matters here because it determines whether the ethical commitments of the integrative model can take root in practice or remain aspirational abstractions. Research highlights the transformative impact of ethical leadership on organisational culture and performance. Leaders who prioritise ethical behaviour are often said to foster climates of trust and psychological safety, which have been linked to enhanced engagement, creativity, and organisational citizenship behaviours (Edmondson, 2018; Walumbwa et al., 2011). Aligned with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), this perspective assumes that ethical leadership builds reciprocal relationships, whereby employees respond to perceived fairness, integrity, and benevolence with loyalty and positive behaviours (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This view sits comfortably within functional approaches to ethical leadership, where trust and fairness are regarded as drivers of performance and cohesion.

Yet such functional framings raise important conceptual questions. What exactly is meant by trust in these accounts? Can it be assumed to operate as a straightforward good, or does it also entail risk, vulnerability, and asymmetry? As Hedge and Enslin (2021) argue, trust is not a neutral virtue, but a form of exposure—a situated relation that leaves individuals and institutions open to harm as well as hope. From this perspective, treating trust as a predictable input or outcome may obscure the

institutional and cultural conditions under which it is produced. This dissertation asks: Who is expected to trust whom, under what conditions, and with what consequences?

Framing trust as an unequivocal asset may therefore oversimplify the dynamics of ethical leadership. If invoked too easily, trust risks becoming an empty signifier—a managerial placeholder that signals relational warmth while bypassing critical reflection. This study therefore treats trust not as a stable resource, but as a contingent and contested aspect of ethical practice—one that warrants attention not only for its affordances, but also for its limitations. This aligns with Schein’s (2010) understanding of organisational culture as a pattern of shared assumptions and norms that shape how ethical principles are interpreted, enacted, and evaluated.

In my own professional experience, particularly in leadership roles within agile, cross-functional teams, I have found that trust is often demanded as a condition for collaboration, yet not always reciprocated or safeguarded. Trust has at times felt risky—especially when speaking up about organisational tensions or ethical concerns might have undermined my credibility or strategic standing. This raises questions about who is authorised to withhold or extend trust in professional environments, and under what terms. Such experiences highlight how ethical leadership is inseparable from organisational culture, since cultural norms determine which forms of vulnerability are permitted, valued, or penalised.

Rather than accepting trust as a moral good or managerial asset—as is often the case with the related notion of psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018)—these experiences suggest the need for a more critical examination of trust as a relational dynamic shaped by culture, positionality, and vulnerability. From a CA perspective, this implies that ethical organisational culture can support individuals’ opportunities to reason, to participate meaningfully, and to exercise agency—not only when doing so is convenient or risk-free. Ethical leadership therefore gains

meaning not through espoused values alone but through the relational and cultural practices that enable or foreclose ethical agency, including how organisations construe and respond to trust and vulnerability. These issues are explored in more depth in the following section.

3.3.2 Vulnerability and the Ethics of Exposure

This invites a closer look at vulnerability—not as a weakness to be minimised, but as a constitutive condition of ethical leadership. To lead ethically may involve acting without guarantees, risking misunderstanding, or holding space for dissent and emotional discomfort. Kalish and Luria (2021), for instance, suggest that mutual perception and sense making in leadership is sustained not by control, but through a willingness to engage in uncertain and affectively charged exchanges.

Vulnerability thus becomes a site of possibility—yet one whose value depends on organisational conditions that render it visible, legitimate, and shared, rather than asymmetrically imposed, or denied. For Nussbaum (2004), vulnerability is a feature of every human person and, following Hedge and Enslin (2021), this study approaches vulnerability not as a lack to be overcome, but as a critical lens for interrogating how power, legitimacy, and ethical risk circulate within leadership practice. This aligns with recent critiques of leadership discourse that caution against framing vulnerability as a universalised virtue, since the capacity to be vulnerable is shaped by social position, institutional privilege, and organisational expectations.

These questions resonate with my own past experience in senior leadership roles, where acting with vulnerability often entailed reputational risk. In one instance, acknowledging uncertainty during a strategic reorientation process was met not with collaborative problem solving but with a subtle withdrawal of trust from peers who interpreted this openness as a lack of competence. The decision to speak

transparently—motivated by an intention to build shared understanding—exposed the fragile boundary between authenticity and institutional expectations of control. In such moments, vulnerability did not operate as an interpersonal virtue, but as a structural fault line: visible only when it disrupted the flow of expected managerial confidence. Such experiences illustrate that vulnerability is never neutral; it tends to be mediated by organisational hierarchies and informal norms that determine whose exposure is acceptable and whose is professionally sanctioned. In my professional context—an organisation where executive decision making remained closely tied to ownership structures—the tone from the top profoundly influenced what forms of vulnerability were permitted, acknowledged, or quietly discouraged. The courage to show vulnerability as a leader—especially when trust is unevenly distributed—depends in part on whether those who hold ultimate authority model that same ethical exposure themselves. When vulnerability becomes one directional, demanded from some while avoided by others, it risks functioning as another form of organisational asymmetry rather than a shared ethical commitment.

In this study, vulnerability is understood as a feature of personhood and not as a private trait of the ethical leader but as a situated ethical dynamic that reveals the institutional conditions under which moral responsibility can be shared, enacted, or foreclosed. From a CA perspective, the question is less about whether leaders should be vulnerable and more about whether organisational cultures create conditions in which ethical exposure does not result in disproportionate risk for certain individuals. Only under such conditions can vulnerability support—not undermine—the possibilities for practical reason, affiliation, and human flourishing. The following section examines how ethical leadership is negotiated within diverse, situated organisational contexts.

3.3.3 Flourishing and Situated Ethics

Ethical leadership, when situated within complex organisational realities, cannot be reduced to a fixed set of traits or actions. In contexts shaped by cultural plurality and global interconnectedness, what does it mean for leadership to remain ethical? Who defines which values should take precedence when fairness in one context may be perceived differently in another? While universal principles such as justice or dignity are often cited (Brown & Treviño, 2006), their application across diverse cultural landscapes remains fraught with negotiation. Leaders navigating international or multicultural settings may find themselves balancing between moral commitments and organisational pragmatics—between inclusivity and alignment. In this tension, the concept of ethical leadership risks being over-personalised, positioned as an individual stance rather than recognised as a collective, situated, and contested process.

Rather than assuming cohesion arises from shared ethical principles alone, it may be more fruitful to ask how these principles are interpreted, by whom, and in relation to which organisational aims. This reframing invites a critical understanding of ethics not as a fixed compass, but as a dialogic engagement—one that seeks resonance across difference without erasing it. Inclusivity here becomes more than an organisational goal; it becomes an ethical responsibility to attend to dissonance without rushing toward closure. If trust is mobilised as a unifying mechanism, one must ask whether it fosters cohesion or obscures structural asymmetries beneath a veneer of mutuality. In this sense, ethical leadership requires not only principled intention but an attentiveness to the situated dynamics through which meaning, legitimacy, and agency are negotiated.

These tensions become particularly salient when ethical leadership is framed not as a means to an end—such as performance or retention—but as an end in itself: a way of organising that respects human dignity and cultivates the conditions for

flourishing. Yet what do we mean when we invoke flourishing in corporate settings, and whose flourishing is envisioned? The Capabilities Approach (Nussbaum, 2011) offers a valuable lens here, not because it provides a ready-made answer, but because it foregrounds agency, choice, and the plurality of human aims. Ethical leadership, in this sense, becomes less about controlling conduct through values and more about making space for deliberation, participation, and the acknowledgement of vulnerability. This is aligned with Ciulla's (2020) argument that leadership ethics must extend beyond individual moral conduct to the systemic question of whether organisational structures genuinely support human dignity and development.

At the same time, flourishing risks being absorbed into managerial discourses that instrumentalise well-being as a route to productivity. Empirical work by Cameron (2012) and Bakker and Demerouti (2017) has shown that organisations investing in well-being may outperform peers; yet such findings must be read with caution, as they may reduce flourishing to an organisational strategy. The ethical significance of flourishing becomes hollowed out if it is defended primarily on performance grounds. A situated ethics, by contrast, recognises flourishing as an intrinsic concern—one that often exists in tension with efficiency imperatives rather than in seamless alignment. I have argued that ethical leadership, when understood as a situated, dialogic, and participatory practice, allows for a reframing of flourishing not as individual success or organisational performance but as the collective possibility of acting with dignity, judgement, and relational responsibility. In the following section, I explore how educational and learning theories can enrich the conceptualisation of leadership by foregrounding development, participation, and ethical reflection as central to organisational flourishing.

3.4 Educational and Learning Approaches

The migration of educational leadership principles into the corporate domain requires careful interrogation of the differing institutional mandates in order to avoid conceptual blurring. As Simkins (2005) suggests, corporate and educational leadership have increasingly mapped onto one another due to the rise of managerialism within schools and universities. However, a critical distinction remains in the distribution of authority and the nature of the ‘learner’ (Bush & Glover, 2014). In a corporate context, the employee is simultaneously a subject of development and a resource for productivity. This dual role creates tensions not typically found in the traditional teacher-student relationship of compulsory schooling or Higher Education (HE). By acknowledging these differing mandates, this analysis explores how leadership can foster flourishing specifically as a response to the instrumental pressures of the commercial environment (Pfeffer, 1994), rather than assuming a seamless alignment with academic pedagogy and educational aims.

Rather than assuming that educational principles transfer directly into corporate environments, this section treats their migration as a site of conceptual inquiry—examining both the possibilities and tensions that arise when learning becomes an orienting principle in organisational life.

3.4.1 Educational Leadership and Participatory Practice

Drawing on a concept rooted in academia to make sense of corporate organisational life requires critical reflection. As Bush and Glover (2014) and Gunter (2016) suggest, leadership oriented toward human development bears a striking resemblance to pedagogy—seeking participation, learning, and growth. Yet educational leadership is not a neutral import; it risks being reduced to instrumental techniques for improving performance. Hence, I explore educational

leadership as a site of critical reflection to ask what kind of leadership genuinely enables flourishing and what conditions are required.

Simkins (2005) has argued that educational leadership, although traditionally anchored in schools and academic institutions, has increasingly been explored in corporate and organisational contexts. This shift prompts a critical question: what exactly is being transferred, and to what effect? While the appeal of educational leadership may lie in its emphasis on human development, collaboration, and ethical purpose, its migration into business settings is not without tensions. Does the framing of employees as learners risk reproducing paternalistic assumptions, or does it open up genuinely dialogic possibilities for leadership? Leithwood et al. (2020) define educational leadership as the ability to mobilise individuals toward collective goals of learning and improvement. From this perspective, leadership enables growth—an idea that resonates with recent calls for participatory and value-driven forms of organisational life (Harris & Jones, 2020; Bush & Glover, 2014). At the same time, educational leadership emerged within systems that often retain a long-term commitment to learning and care; whether such commitments translate meaningfully into commercial environments remains a matter for critical examination rather than assumption.

If organisations were treated as learning communities rather than performance systems, what forms of leadership might become possible—and what might be foreclosed? At its core, educational leadership seeks to create environments in which continuous learning, reflective development, and ethical responsibility are foregrounded. As Spillane (2006) suggests, when leadership is genuinely distributed, it can foster shared accountability and collaboration across teams—a quality that seems increasingly relevant in corporate contexts marked by complexity and interdependence. When applied beyond schools, this model potentially enables leaders to support adaptive teamwork and collaborative problem solving, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), building

on this logic, argue that educational leadership can nurture an organisational culture rooted in trust, care, and relational accountability. These dimensions speak to the conditions in which leadership may become sustainable and inclusive.

Yet the very idea of embedding such values across all levels of an organisation—aiming for alignment between personal growth and institutional goals—raises important questions. As Day and Sammons (2016) observe, such alignment can support motivation and resilience in environments where change is ongoing. However, this convergence is not guaranteed. Commercial priorities, especially in target-driven settings, often compress the space available for reflection, care, or participatory deliberation. Educational leadership therefore remains contingent on wider organisational conditions and cannot be assumed to flourish under all circumstances.

3.4.2 Transformative Leadership and the Politics of Change

One particular strand of educational leadership theory that deepens this ethical and reflective orientation is the concept of transformative leadership. Developed in response to concerns about equity, inclusion, and institutional injustice, transformative leadership reframes leadership as a critical, value-based practice with political and pedagogical dimensions (Shields, 2010). This framing positions leadership as an engagement with questions of justice, participation, and the conditions under which individuals and groups can act with dignity and agency.

Transformative leadership, as described by Shields (2010), challenges the status quo by foregrounding equity, inclusion, and reflective dialogue. Within corporate contexts, such practices have been associated with commitments to employee development and the creation of just and sustainable opportunities for learning and advancement—a view that resonates with Senge’s (2006) model of learning

organisations. Yet the transformative potential of leadership remains contested. From a sociological perspective, Argyris and Schön (1977) suggest that double-loop learning enables individuals and groups to reflect on underlying norms and purposes rather than merely improving existing practices. This becomes increasingly relevant in environments where complexity and interdependence render unreflective adaptation insufficient.

Yet this emphasis invites further reflection. Lembke (2004), for example, warns that adaptability risks being absorbed into efficiency discourses that shift attention away from deeper structural questions. Bolden (2011) responds by framing leadership as a relational process distributed across roles, technologies, and institutional boundaries, where agency, voice, and responsibility are collectively negotiated rather than centrally assigned. Here, leadership is interpreted less as a discrete act and more as a relational process that depends on how organisations distribute agency, voice, and responsibility. Similar calls have been made in higher education, where Barnett (2024) suggests that feasible utopias depend on the interplay between collective aspiration and material constraint. In this light, transformative leadership becomes a matter of ethical responsibility—asking what kinds of change are meaningful and for whom.

Such questions become particularly salient when leadership is invoked to serve both economic and ethical goals. Ciulla (2014), for instance, critiques forms of leadership development that claim transformation while leaving structural inequities unexamined. Shields (2010) and Biesta (2010) both argue that transformative leadership, understood as ethical praxis, involves fostering critical reflection, personal autonomy, and value-based judgement. These capacities do not merely support individual success; they help reorient organisational practices towards forms of flourishing attentive to relational and structural dimensions. In my own professional context, I have observed how calls for transformation can both illuminate and obscure tensions between stated commitments and organisational

realities. At times, invitations to “think differently” have opened valuable dialogue about assumptions guiding our work. At other times, such invitations appeared to encourage creativity while leaving decision-making structures largely unchanged. These moments highlighted that transformation is as much about material arrangements and relational dynamics as it is about individual disposition.

In this section, I have suggested that transformative leadership provides a generative framework for rethinking leadership as a political and educational commitment to justice, critical reflection, and collective agency, even under complex institutional pressures. Its relevance lies in drawing attention to the ethical and relational questions that shape how organisations imagine their purposes and practices. In the following section, I explore how educational leadership becomes relevant in organisational and leadership contexts not through direct transfer, but by cultivating reflective, value-sensitive, and relationally grounded learning cultures that resist reduction to performance logics.

3.4.3 Educational Leadership and Learning Cultures in Organisational Contexts

While educational leadership principles may appear promising for practice, their translation into business environments is marked by tensions that require careful, contextual interpretation. Garvin et al. (2008) note that learning-oriented leadership depends not only on processes or structures but also on cultural foundations such as trust, reflective engagement, and adaptability. Without these conditions, organisations may take up learning rhetoric while enacting practices that lead to discouragement, resistance, or disengagement. These tensions become more visible when learning logics intersect with performance demands. Senge’s (2006) account of learning organisations highlights systems thinking, shared vision, and team learning, yet critics such as Coopey (1995) observe that such frameworks

risk overlooking power dynamics and uneven access to influence. Edmondson's (2018) work on psychological safety further illustrates how interpersonal risk-taking is connected to learning, yet psychological safety tends to contract in environments that rely heavily on performance metrics, rapid delivery pressures, or punitive accountability. In such contexts, individuals may learn to perform competence rather than acknowledge uncertainty, limiting the possibility of collective inquiry. These dynamics resonate with my own organisational experience. Attempts to establish learning-oriented processes often reflected institutional priorities more than pedagogical intentions. At times, review mechanisms framed as opportunities for reflection became focused primarily on identifying individual accountability, which narrowed the space for systemic questions. By contrast, when inquiry was approached collaboratively—with time allocated for reflection and without premature search for corrective action—it created opportunities for rethinking assumptions and practices in ways that felt genuinely developmental. These examples suggest that learning cultures are shaped less by formal procedures than by how organisations structure time, sanction uncertainty, and make sense of failure. Argyris (1990) distinguishes between espoused theories and theories-in-use, drawing attention to how organisations often value learning conceptually while functioning through routines that emphasise predictability and control. This gap can create cynicism, particularly when calls for learning coexist with pressures that discourage experimentation or critical questioning.

From a CA perspective, drawing on Nussbaum's account of practical reason and affiliation, leadership evaluation should foreground critical reflection, situated judgement, and opportunities to participate in shaping organisational meaning. This orientation extends beyond knowledge transfer or skills development. It depends on conditions that recognise uncertainty as part of practice, provide time for deliberation, and acknowledge learning as a relational and collective process rather than a managerial tool. Brookfield (2017) emphasises that critical reflection involves examining assumptions and considering alternative possibilities, yet these

activities may be difficult to sustain in contexts shaped by time pressure or strategic ambiguity. Creating space for such reflection therefore becomes both a pedagogical and an organisational question. I have argued that learning-oriented leadership approaches, when grounded in ethical commitment and relational trust, can support meaningful innovation and flourishing in corporate settings. Their realisation, however, depends on organisational cultures and structures that allow learning to emerge as a shared and reflective endeavour rather than as an instrument of performance improvement. I further argue that learning theories, when approached as conceptual resources rather than behavioural prescriptions, can support a view of leadership as an educational and ethical practice grounded in reflection, participation, and situated judgement. Section 3.4.4 attends to this.

3.4.4 Learning Theories as Conceptual Resources for Leadership Practice

This also invites a consideration of how leaders themselves continue to learn, particularly in contexts characterised by uncertainty and shifting demands. Learning theories may offer tentative insights into how individuals and groups make sense of experience, negotiate meaning, and develop the capacity to respond thoughtfully in uncertain or shifting conditions. These theories can serve as conceptual resources—opening up ways of thinking about how leadership might foster spaces in which reflection, participation, and personal growth are made possible. While such theories can be categorised in various ways, a common distinction—used for instance by Illeris (2009) and Petty (2009)—is made between behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism. In selecting these three broad traditions, I do not suggest they form an exhaustive framework, but rather that they represent influential strands of thought that continue to shape learning cultures in both educational and organisational settings. Their relevance to this dissertation lies less in their technical application and more in how they invite reflection on the kinds of environments in which individuals might flourish,

intellectually, relationally, and ethically, as Section 3.5 explores through the traditions of behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism.

3.5 Behaviourism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism

3.5.1 Behaviourism and the Question of Control

I argue that while behaviourist approaches can support certain forms of skill acquisition, they are insufficient for leadership development unless reframed within a broader pedagogical and ethical commitment. Behaviourism, which emphasises observable changes in behaviour through reinforcement and repetition, has long informed instructional design and workplace training. Developed by theorists such as Watson (2009) and Skinner (1976), this approach seeks to shape behaviour through structured feedback and external rewards. In educational settings, behaviourist strategies have underpinned skill-building approaches such as the audio-lingual method (Howatt, 2004), which relies on repetition and corrective feedback to achieve mastery. In corporate contexts, these principles are frequently applied in employee onboarding and compliance training, where clear goals, structured guidance, and consistent feedback aim to produce measurable outcomes (Williams & Burden, 1997).

Yet from an educational and philosophical standpoint, behaviourism raises pressing questions about what kind of learning is privileged, and at what cost. Its focus on observable performance risks reducing learning to the achievement of predetermined objectives, while neglecting autonomy, agency, and meaning making. Dewey (1938) was already critical of such reductive views, arguing that knowledge cannot be transmitted through stimulus-response mechanisms alone. From this perspective, behaviourist leadership strategies may reinforce compliance, but they offer little room for critical reflection, creativity, or ethical judgement—qualities that matter for leadership understood as a relational and educative

practice. When viewed through the lens of adult learning, further limitations emerge. As Knowles (1984) notes, adult learners tend to be self-directed and value learning that builds on prior experience. Behaviourist strategies that rely heavily on external control may therefore conflict with the intrinsic motivation and contextual sensitivity associated with adult development. This is not to say that behaviourism has no place in organisational learning. In environments that require precision or rapid behavioural adaptation—such as safety training or technical upskilling—behaviourist techniques may offer useful scaffolding. However, their value tends to remain bounded; they provide structure without necessarily supporting the reflective or dialogic dimensions of leadership.

A balanced approach is surely helpful—one that acknowledges the practical value of behaviourist strategies for certain forms of skill development while integrating them into broader frameworks that recognise learners as active, reflective agents. Such an approach resonates with ethical considerations of human dignity, as outlined by Nussbaum (2011), who reminds us that meaningful development involves capability, autonomy, and the freedom to pursue valued ways of acting and being. In this light, behaviourism can still contribute to leadership practice—but only when reframed within a wider pedagogical commitment to ethical growth, institutional care, and reflective professionalism. These critiques become even more pertinent when considering how behaviourist assumptions may continue to shape leadership implicitly. Many leaders were themselves educated in systems influenced by behaviourist principles—systems that rewarded compliance, punctuality, and task completion through grades, praise, and correction (Biesta, 2010; Furedi, 2016). Such early learning experiences do not simply fade but may leave lasting impressions on what counts as ‘good’ behaviour, effective performance, or legitimate authority. As Illeris (2009) argues, adult learning builds upon—or unconsciously reproduces—earlier experiences and internalised norms. A conceptual interrogation of leadership thus requires attending not only to what leaders do, but also to how their earlier learning has shaped their understanding of

learning itself. I have argued that leadership development calls for a shift away from behaviourist assumptions of control and compliance towards a more reflective and participatory ethos that affirms human dignity and autonomy. The following section turns to cognitivist approaches and what they offer for reflective leadership practice.

3.5.2 Cognitivism and Reflective Meaning-Making

I argue that cognitivist approaches offer valuable conceptual grounding for leadership understood as reflective, participatory, and ethically situated practice. Cognitivism shifts the focus from external stimuli to internal processes, such as how individuals perceive, organise, and integrate information. Cognitivist learning theories, developed by theorists such as Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky, view learners as active meaning-makers rather than passive recipients of stimuli. Building on this tradition, Petty (2009) highlights teaching approaches that actively engage learners in constructing their own understanding. In organisational contexts, this perspective has informed leadership training, for instance in problem-solving workshops and reflective practices that encourage employees to actively relate new concepts to their existing knowledge. Drawing on Ausubel's (1963) theory of meaningful learning, such approaches seek to connect new material with learners' prior cognitive structures.

From a philosophical standpoint, cognitivism's emphasis on autonomy and meaning making resonates with ethical leadership ideals that prioritise individual agency and reflective growth. These qualities appear especially relevant for adult learners, who tend to value learning that is purposeful, self-directed, and connected to prior experience (Knowles, 1984; Illeris, 2009). Such an orientation speaks to my interest in leadership as a learning practice in which engagement with complexity becomes central to development. Yet from a critical perspective, the model is not without

limitations. Brookfield (2017) argues that cognitive theories can underplay the institutional and structural forces that influence access to meaningful learning—such as unequal workloads, lack of protected time for reflection, or organisational norms that discourage vulnerability. Moreover, the assumption that all learners are equally ready or able to engage in reflective meaning-making may overlook the emotional and political labour that such engagement entails, particularly in hierarchical settings. Reflection, in this sense, is not only a cognitive act but a relational and contextual experience, shaped by expectations, pressures, and organisational culture.

As with behaviourism, a balanced approach seems helpful—one that recognises the contributions of cognitive learning strategies without assuming their universal relevance or efficacy. When integrated with broader organisational considerations, cognitivist insights can contribute to leadership practices that support personal and collective development. However, their possibilities depend on institutional conditions that allow time, openness, and a willingness to engage with uncertainty. I have argued that while cognitivism strengthens the educational dimension of leadership by highlighting reflection and meaning making, it must be embedded in an awareness of the organisational structures that enable or constrain such processes. Held in this way, cognitivist thinking invites leadership practices oriented towards thoughtful engagement rather than prescriptive control. Constructivist approaches deepen this orientation further, as the following section explores.

3.5.3 Constructivism and Shared Knowledge Creation

I will argue that constructivist learning theories are particularly relevant for reframing leadership as a participatory, dialogic, and context-sensitive practice. Constructivism, often seen as an extension of cognitivism, suggests that learning

involves active construction of meaning through experience and interaction. Merrill (1991) identifies its foundational assumptions: that knowledge is built from experience, that learning is inherently personal and situated, and that collaboration deepens understanding. On the surface, these principles appear highly compatible with leadership development—particularly within organisational cultures that prioritise participation, dialogue, and co-creation. In this dissertation, I approach such principles are approached not as universal truths, but as conceptual resources that highlight the relational and situated nature of leadership learning. Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on social interaction and scaffolding offers a compelling account of learning as a shared activity—one that aligns with organisational practices centred on collaboration and collective problem-solving. Constructivist methods such as guided discovery and diagnostic questioning (Petty, 2009) may well support critical thinking and team learning.

Philosophically, constructivism offers a humanistic alternative to behaviourist conditioning, positioning individuals as reflective agents. This resonates with ethical models of leadership that value autonomy, voice, and shared meaning-making. However, the constructivist ideal also risks assuming a level playing field—one in which all learners have equal capacity, support, and safety to engage in dialogue and experimentation. As Brookfield (2017) cautions, individual meaning-making can obscure the structural and political constraints that shape how—and whether—learning can occur. This suggests that constructivist principles gain meaning only when interpreted in relation to organisational conditions that either enable or constrain participation.

Thus, while constructivist principles may offer significant affordances for leadership learning, their practical value depends on the conditions under which they are enacted. Constructivist approaches rely on space, time, and relational openness—conditions that may be diminished in settings shaped by strict performance logics or hierarchical control. Rather than embracing constructivism as a normative good,

this dissertation treats it as a contingent and situated resource—one that can support flourishing, but only when embedded in structures that genuinely support participation and shared sense-making. I have argued that constructivist approaches support a relational and situated view of leadership development, yet their contribution to flourishing depends on organisational conditions that enable shared inquiry rather than merely perform its language. These conditions, and the adult learning frameworks that help articulate them, are the focus of the following section.

3.6 Leadership in the Context of Adult Learning and Capabilities

I argue that reframing leadership through the lens of adult learning theories allows for a deeper understanding than dominant trait- or behaviour-based models, positioning leadership as a situated, developmental, and ethical practice.

3.6.1 Adult Learning and Reflective Practice

Building on the previously discussed traditions, several complementary perspectives from adult learning and organisational theory offer further conceptual resources for examining leadership as a site of development and flourishing. Knowles' (1984) andragogical model, with its emphasis on self-direction, experience, and purpose, resonates with professional learning in corporate contexts. Yet this model, often framed as universal, invites scrutiny: does it account for power dynamics, cultural expectations, or structural constraints that shape learning in hierarchical organisations? Brookfield's (1995) critique reminds us that adult learners do not operate in neutral spaces—they bring histories marked by inequity, as well as

differing capacities for reflection and autonomy. The promise of transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991), often celebrated for fostering deep perspective shifts, similarly depends on conditions rarely guaranteed in fast-paced or high-stakes leadership environments.

In such contexts, Schön's (1983) notion of reflective practice may offer a grounded alternative—not as a linear method, but as an ongoing effort to learn through ambiguity, feedback, and situated judgement. Meanwhile, Kolb's (1984) experiential model and Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of Communities of Practice shift attention toward learning as embedded in action, collaboration, and evolving professional identities. These perspectives collectively draw attention to the relational, situated, and iterative character of adult learning, and indicate that leadership development is shaped as much by organisational conditions as by individual aspiration. Within this dissertation, these theories are treated as conceptual resources that illuminate the tensions inherent in leadership learning—tensions between reflection and performance, autonomy and organisational constraint, or learning and operational urgency. These accounts, taken together, do not resolve such tensions but help articulate their stakes: the challenge of cultivating spaces where critical reflection, ethical responsibility, and organisational demands are not mutually exclusive, but continually negotiated in practice. So, adult learning theories, when brought into dialogue with leadership practice, foreground the significance of organisational conditions that enable reflective engagement, autonomy, and participatory meaning-making, a point developed further in Section 3.6.2 through the lens of situated and transformational learning.

3.6.2 Leadership Learning as Situated Development

Transformational learning, as introduced by Mezirow (1991), adds a reflective and critical dimension to leadership development. Mezirow's (2009) later reflections on transformative learning shift the focus toward the social and political dimensions of perspective transformation. He argues that the questioning of deeply held assumptions is not only an individual cognitive act but a collective necessity for navigating the ethical complexities of contemporary life. Current reinterpretations in the *Handbook of Transformative Learning* (2023) align Mezirow's theory with global justice and corporate ethics, suggesting that 'disorienting dilemmas' (Kokkos, 2023, p. 14) in leadership can serve as powerful catalysts for re-evaluating an organisation's commitment to human dignity. It emphasises the process of questioning deeply held assumptions and fostering perspective shifts, enabling leaders to adapt to complex, rapidly changing environments. When applied to leadership contexts, transformational learning offers a framework through which leaders might reassess inherited norms, engage in ethical deliberation, and develop responsiveness to organisational ambiguity. This approach aligns closely with the aims of ethical and transformative leadership, which seek to hold organisational objectives alongside broader social and ethical considerations, including human flourishing. However, transformational learning is not without limitations. Cranton (2006) notes that its effectiveness often hinges on learners' willingness and ability to engage in critical reflection—conditions that may not always be available in hierarchical or fast-paced corporate settings. Such observations indicate that the transformative potential of adult learning remains closely tied to organisational structures, cultural norms, and the uneven distribution of reflective space.

These accounts—reflective practice (Schön, 1983), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991)—do not offer a unified model of leadership learning. While Kolb (1984) established the foundational cycle of experiential learning, Kolb et al. (2001) and the revised second edition of Kolb

(2014) have expanded this to emphasise the importance of 'learning spaces' (p. 297). This updated perspective suggests that for leadership development to be effective, organisations must intentionally design psychological and physical environments which allow learners to move between action and reflection. Further research by Kolb and Kolb (2022) highlights the 'Learning Way' as a meta-capability, positioning lifelong learning not as an episodic activity but as a continuous mode of being within the workplace. Nor do they resolve the inherent tensions between performance pressures and the need for ethical reflection. Yet each, in its own way, reframes leadership development as an iterative, situated, and relational process. What emerges is not a linear path toward competence, but a continual negotiation of meaning, where leaders learn with and through others amid uncertainty, constraint, and change. Such perspectives draw attention to the relational, dialogic, and situated nature of learning, challenging managerial framings that position learning as a set of discrete, transferable skills. Viewed from this angle, the relevance of learning theories to leadership lies not in their instructional potential alone, but in how they recast leadership as a pedagogical practice—a site where ethical, political, and developmental stakes remain present. This is especially salient in corporate settings, where leadership development is often aligned with performance expectations or organisational change agendas. Learning theories offer, in this context, a reminder that leadership development can also involve attending to values, relational integrity, and the slow work of reflective judgement.

In my own professional experience, leadership learning has rarely unfolded in neat stages. Instead, it has occurred in the messiness of practice—through feedback conversations, failed experiments, informal mentoring, and moments of doubt. Some of the most meaningful learning emerged not from formal programmes but from collective reflection in team settings, often prompted by unresolved tensions. These moments were rarely planned, but they were powerful. They illustrate how leadership, when treated as an educational practice, can create openings for

shared sense-making, ethical responsiveness, and the co-construction of purpose, even under the constraints of commercial pressures. Across these perspectives, the conditions that enable such learning become central: time for reflection, relational openness, and institutional support for exploring uncertainty. These conditions are not guaranteed; their availability depends on organisational priorities, implicit norms, and the distribution of authority. Situating leadership development within adult learning theories reframes leadership as a pedagogical practice grounded in reflection, participation, and the cultivation of human flourishing, a claim Section 3.6.3 tests against the Lean Management model.

3.6.3 Interrogating Lean Management Through a Capabilities Lens

I argue that interrogating dominant management models such as the Lean Management model (LMT) through the lens of human flourishing exposes both the normative assumptions and the transformative possibilities embedded in contemporary leadership practice. LMT, with its long-established emphasis on efficiency, waste reduction, and continuous improvement (Ohno 1988; Womack et al. 1991, is widely adopted across sectors, including my own professional context. At the same time, its pervasiveness makes it a significant site for examining how concepts of value, efficiency, and participation are framed, and whether these principles can be reimaged to support flourishing. According to Womack and Jones (1996), the Lean Management Approach emerged from manufacturing logics that sought to reduce variation and eliminate waste to improve flow. Imai's (1986) introductory account of Kaizen remains influential, especially in organisations that promote continuous incremental improvement as a marker of modern professionalism. Yet, in many organisational settings these practices are presented as universal solutions, requiring little contextual interpretation.

Yet, when viewed through an educational and ethical lens, the assumptions embedded within these practices call for closer interrogation. The claim that the Lean Management Approach fosters participation and shared responsibility (Osada 1993), appears compelling, yet critiques suggest that the Lean Management Approach's human-centred rhetoric often conceals a more instrumental orientation. Pfeffer (1994) warns that organisations often treat employees primarily as instruments for improving processes and performance, rather than recognising them as persons with broader capabilities, aspirations, and developmental needs. Drawing on Christensen (1997) and Ries (2011), the Lean Management Approach's customer orientation eliminates non-value-adding activities to enhance measurable performance, but this metric-driven focus can sideline reflective development, well-being and sustainable participation. Spear and Bowen (1999) show that a continuous improvement ethos can, in some contexts, support employees' agency and problem solving; in others, it risks producing environments marked by relentless performance pressure, reduced tolerance for ambiguity and diminished space for ethical or educational reflection, a tension that Liker (2004) also observes in his account of the Toyota Way. Such pressures not only limit opportunities for capability development but also intensify vulnerabilities to burnout, especially where individuals feel compelled to demonstrate constant optimisation.

This dynamic resonates with what Haslam, Alvesson and Reicher (2024) describe as "Zombie Leadership": models that persist despite being empirically and ethically out of step with contemporary organisational life. These forms of leadership often reproduce inherited assumptions, narrow performance metrics, and managerial certainty, presenting themselves as objective despite their deeply normative underpinnings. In my own practice, I have observed how such routines can reappear subtly, not through explicit endorsement but through habitual responses, inherited templates, or unexamined preferences for predictability. These residues rarely present themselves as questionable, yet they quietly constrain the imaginative and relational dimensions of leadership. From a CA perspective, these tendencies invite

a different orientation. Rather than assessing individuals by their contribution to streamlined processes, a capabilities-informed model asks whether organisational arrangements enable people to exercise practical reason, sustain affiliation, and shape the conditions of their work. This shifts the evaluative centre from compliance and metric-driven output to judgement, participation, and developmental growth. It also recasts efficiency not as an unquestioned aim but as one value among many, requiring interpretation and contextual negotiation.

Demographic transformations further amplify these concerns. The ageing of workforces and ongoing shortages of skilled professionals demonstrate that inclusion, dignity, and intergenerational continuity are not peripheral issues but central to organisational sustainability. In my own professional experience, I have seen how older colleagues were sometimes overlooked in developmental initiatives because of assumptions about adaptability or digital competence. These implicit exclusions obscure the rich experiential knowledge and contextual judgement such individuals hold, and they limit the potential for shared learning and organisational continuity. A flourishing-oriented model would therefore treat demographic complexity as an educational and ethical question rather than an operational inconvenience. Central to this reorientation is a sustained engagement with power. Leadership scholarship often underplays the formative effects of power, yet power shapes who is heard, what is considered legitimate, and which forms of learning become possible. Foucault (1980) reminds us that power is not solely repressive but productive: it shapes visibility, discourse, and the imaginative boundaries of organisational life. A capabilities-informed view thus considers who can develop and exercise capabilities such as practical reason, affiliation, or control over their environment, and under what conditions. In my own practice, I have observed that influence often operates less through formal hierarchy and more through access to information, informal alliances, or visibility in strategic conversations. Such dynamics require a reflexive orientation to how leadership distributes, withholds, or enables opportunities for participation.

Brookfield (2017) argues that critical leadership involves naming and challenging hegemonic assumptions, including those that define what a good leader looks like, how success is interpreted, or whose voice is considered strategic. Engaging with these interpretative frames can open space for dissent, plurality, and emergent agency. From this perspective, the integrative leadership model developed in this dissertation is not only ethical and educational but also political, concerned with cultivating organisational conditions where flourishing can be collectively pursued rather than merely assumed. I have argued that critical engagement with the Lean Management Approach and other dominant models reveals the importance of repositioning leadership in terms of flourishing, inclusion, and ethical responsibility—particularly in contexts shaped by demographic change, institutional inertia, and latent power dynamics. Such a reframing invites leadership practices that privilege attentiveness, relational deliberation, and shared interpretative work over managerial certainty or inherited success templates. The following section considers how such practices are complicated by structural inequalities and the reproduction of existing hierarchies.

3.6.4 Leadership and the Reproduction of Inequality: A Critical Perspective

I suggest that leadership development frameworks risk reproducing inequality when they fail to interrogate the tacit norms and power dynamics embedded in cultural and institutional expectations. While leadership is often portrayed as an avenue for empowerment and opportunity, it can also function—however unintentionally—as a mechanism through which social and organisational inequalities are sustained. Drawing on Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) analysis, it becomes clear that organisational practices framed as neutral or inclusive may nonetheless privilege particular forms of cultural capital. These include ways of speaking, reasoning,

presenting oneself, or interpreting organisational expectations that align closely with dominant norms.

Leadership pipelines and talent programmes can therefore appear accessible while implicitly favouring those whose habitus already mirrors institutional expectations. Even widely used practices such as 360-degree feedback or standardised performance evaluations, although ostensibly developmental, can reinforce asymmetrical relations. The terminology of subordinates, for instance, signals acceptance of hierarchical assumptions, while reward and recognition systems often confirm the legitimacy of those already positioned advantageously within organisational cultures. Such mechanisms can quietly affirm existing distributions of authority and voice, while those whose dispositions or experiences diverge from the dominant norm may find their contributions interpreted through less generous lenses.

In my own professional experience, I have observed how narratives of autonomy, initiative, and innovation were applied unevenly. For example, when a senior consultant bypassed standard procedures to redesign a client workshop, this was celebrated as entrepreneurial and strategic, while similar attempts by less privileged colleagues were framed as inappropriate or defiant. These patterns reveal how organisational interpretations of leadership behaviour can hinge on preexisting notions of credibility, legitimacy, or cultural fit. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) describe this dynamic as reproduction through pedagogic action, where certain forms of knowledge or comportment are continually affirmed as normative while others are implicitly marginalised. A capabilities-oriented perspective draws attention to these subtle but consequential processes. From this viewpoint, access to leadership development is not meaningful unless individuals can exercise real freedom to develop voice, agency, and distinct forms of contribution. Formal opportunities alone are insufficient if the underlying norms governing recognition, judgement, and evaluation remain unexamined. Leadership oriented toward

flourishing therefore requires attentiveness to how dissent, plurality, and alternative interpretations of value are not only welcomed but institutionalised within organisational life. This involves creating conditions where individuals can question inherited assumptions, articulate divergent perspectives, and participate meaningfully in shaping collective purpose. Given the conceptual nature of this dissertation, section 3.6.5 develops this argument further, examining how leadership can be understood as educational in both essence and contribution.

3.6.5 Ethical Leadership and Educational Praxis

In this dissertation I conceptualise leadership as an inherently ethical and educational practice, rather than a neutral mechanism for managing resources or aligning people with strategic goals. As Dewey (1933) argued, ethical inquiry is not separable from action; rather, it is a condition for acting well in situations characterised by uncertainty, plurality, and consequence. If leadership involves making decisions that shape the lives, identities, and possibilities of others, can it ever be value-neutral?

Leadership, when viewed through an educational lens, is therefore more than the transmission of vision or motivation. It becomes a space of praxis—of continuous reflection on how power is exercised, how dignity is maintained, and how judgment is formed in relation to others. Freire’s (1970) notion of *praxis* as the unity of action and reflection directed at structural transformation provides a critical foundation here. In this sense, ethical leadership is not simply about knowing what is “right” but about staying open to context, relation, and transformation. Schön’s (1983) model of the reflective practitioner aligns with this vision by portraying professional action as iterative, uncertain, and morally complex. Similarly, Nussbaum’s (2011) emphasis on human capabilities—particularly practical reason, affiliation, and dignity—requires leaders to cultivate not only technical competence but also ethical sensitivity and imaginative openness to others’ experiences. As Biesta (2020a) argues, education is not simply about producing outcomes or competencies, but

about making wise, situated decisions that affirm human subjectivity. In this light, leadership becomes a pedagogical encounter—one that requires judgement, responsiveness, and the courage to act without guarantees. This requires the development of moral perception, narrative understanding, and the capacity to stand in relation to others as equals in a shared ethical project. If leadership is to be educational in the fullest sense, it must not only enable learning but also resist the reproduction of dominant norms about whose learning counts. It must resist the reproduction of inequality disguised as meritocracy and actively seek to co-create environments where diverse capabilities can flourish on their own terms. I have argued that when leadership is recognised as both educational and ethical, it requires ongoing reflection on how power is exercised, whose learning is legitimised, and how inclusive conditions for human flourishing are actively supported. The following section examines how paradoxical leadership holds such tensions reflectively.

3.6.6 Paradoxical Leadership: Holding Tension as a Form of Wisdom

I argue that leadership becomes most generative when it engages organisational paradoxes reflectively, treating contradiction not as failure but as a site for ethical judgement and adaptive wisdom. Integrative leadership, as proposed in this dissertation, often requires navigating seemingly contradictory demands—between stability and change, autonomy and alignment, care, and performance. Rather than resolving these tensions through rigid prioritisation, paradoxical leadership recognises them as enduring and invites leaders to engage with them reflectively. As Smith and Lewis (2011) suggest, organisational life is shaped by persistent interdependent contradictions that cannot be fully eliminated, only worked with.

Building on Smith and Lewis's (2011) paradox perspective and a Capabilities-oriented understanding of leadership, such paradoxes can be viewed not as problems to be solved but as invitations to deliberate: What matters most,

for whom, and under what conditions. In the context of this dissertation, a key paradox lies in balancing organisational efficiency with human flourishing. Attempts to maximise both can appear incompatible, particularly in environments governed by metrics, speed, and scalability. Yet it is precisely in engaging with such tensions that leadership becomes a form of wisdom rather than technique. Zhang et al. (2015) show that paradoxical leadership—defined by cognitive and behavioural complexity—can foster both flexibility and performance by holding space for contradiction. Practically, this may involve creating cultures where experimentation is encouraged alongside accountability, or where reflective learning is not opposed to productivity but integrated into it. For example, in my own professional context, I encountered moments where team members expressed a need for both clarity and creative freedom—needs that were not easily reconciled. Rather than choosing one over the other, we explored how structure could serve as a scaffold for exploration rather than a constraint.

Paradox theory suggests that such tensions are not temporary dilemmas to be solved, but generative spaces for ongoing development (Schad et al., 2016). This resonates with the CA, which foregrounds complexity, plurality, and situated judgement over formulaic solutions. When leadership acknowledges and engages with paradox, it opens the possibility for adaptive sensemaking rather than binary logic. Leadership, thus, becomes an ongoing interpretive practice—responsive, open-ended, and attentive to complexity. It enacts a form of educational judgment: not the resolution of tension, but its careful holding in relation to people, purpose, and place. Holding paradox does not require certainty, but curiosity and presence. It reflects an educational orientation that values ambiguity not as a problem, but as an opportunity to learn, grow, and relate differently. I suggest that paradoxical leadership, when grounded in a Capabilities-oriented and educational lens, enables leaders to engage with complexity not as a deficit to be resolved but as a condition for reflective practice, relational judgement, and the co-construction of more

humane organisational possibilities, an emphasis taken up first in Section 3.7 and subsequently in the integrative leadership model developed in Chapter Four.

3.7 Intersectional Barriers to Flourishing at Work

I argue that leadership committed to human flourishing must address the intersectional barriers that shape individuals' real freedoms to participate, develop, and be recognised in organisational life. While the CA provides a normative framework for thinking about human development, it does not assume that capabilities are equally accessible to all. As Nussbaum (2011) emphasises, justice requires recognising the unequal starting points individuals face, shaped by overlapping axes of identity and structural constraint. Gender, ethnicity, disability, and class are not separate dimensions of experience; they interact to shape how individuals are seen, heard, and treated within institutions—including the workplace. From a leadership perspective, this raises critical questions: who is expected to thrive within existing norms of confidence, speed, or ambition—and who is inadvertently excluded by them? From this perspective, flourishing is not merely a matter of offering equal opportunities in abstract terms, but of attending to the specific, lived realities that constrain or enable agency. Intersectionality, as a lens, makes visible the ways in which institutional norms may benefit some while silencing others. When leadership ignores these patterns, it risks reproducing exclusion under the guise of meritocracy or neutrality.

Nussbaum (2011) argues that respecting human dignity requires more than non-interference; it calls for active support in developing Central Capabilities—including affiliation, control over one's environment, and practical reason. In workplaces shaped by implicit bias or structural disadvantage, these capabilities may remain aspirational for many. For example, a leadership programme that requires assertive self-promotion may disadvantage individuals socialised into relational or deferential

modes of interaction. Similarly, career progression models based on linearity may penalise those whose biographies are shaped by caregiving, migration, or illness. In my own leadership context, I have witnessed how well-intentioned practices can unintentionally privilege the already privileged—those fluent in dominant codes of language, confidence, and tempo. For example, in promotion discussions, colleagues who spoke quickly and assertively in English were often read as more ‘ready’ for leadership, while equally capable peers with different communication styles were overlooked. Such patterns are not easily dismantled, but they can be interrogated. This highlights the importance of reflexive leadership that remains attuned to the structural conditions under which people are expected to thrive. An integrative leadership model that draws on the CA can respond to these intersectional challenges by fostering spaces of recognition, flexibility, and participation. Rather than assuming a level playing field, such leadership acknowledges that flourishing requires not only access, but adaptation—recognising and removing barriers that differentially shape people’s real freedoms to pursue lives they have reason to value. I have argued that a Capabilities-oriented leadership model, when reflexively applied, can move beyond abstract notions of equality by attending to the lived realities of structural exclusion—thus enabling more context-sensitive, relational, and ethically grounded responses to the question of who gets to flourish at work. The following section considers how leadership evaluation might be reimagined accordingly.

3.8 Rethinking Leadership Evaluation through the Capabilities Lens

Traditional approaches to leadership evaluation often rely on quantifiable indicators such as engagement scores, turnover rates, or productivity metrics. As Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) and Cunliffe (2009) observe, while such measures can provide

useful insights, they tend to reflect narrow managerial definitions of success and may obscure the more subtle, developmental dimensions of leadership. If leadership is to be understood as an educational and ethical practice, as I argue, then it must be evaluated according to different criteria—ones that foreground human flourishing. From a CA perspective, the question is not simply whether leadership delivers efficiency, but whether it enables people to develop and exercise their central human capabilities, which Nussbaum (2011) identifies as including practical reason and affiliation, often interpreted as key dimensions of autonomy and dignity. Yet such questions are rarely addressed in standard leadership performance frameworks: whether people feel able to express dissent, whether they are included in reflective learning processes, and whether they have real agency in shaping organisational culture and decision-making. This tension calls for a more expansive evaluative imagination. Rather than asking whether employees feel “engaged,” we might ask: Do they have authentic opportunities to influence their work? Can they meaningfully participate in dialogue and co-construction? Are dissenting voices heard without fear of repercussion? These are not questions easily captured through Likert scales—but they speak directly to the educational and relational quality of leadership (Biesta, 2020; Brookfield, 2017).

In my own leadership practice, I have encountered tensions between formal feedback mechanisms and the lived experience of teams. Annual surveys might report high satisfaction, while informal conversations reveal fatigue, misalignment, or exclusion. Building on Gabriel’s (2015) analysis of caring leadership, this suggests clear limits to relying solely on numerical indicators, especially when these are disconnected from employees’ lived experiences. Nussbaum (2011) distinguishes between basic, internal, and combined capabilities with the latter referring to an individual’s real freedom to act in context. For instance, the opportunity to participate in a leadership development programme may represent a basic capability. However, if an individual lacks the confidence, time, or institutional support to fully engage, their internal capabilities remain underdeveloped. A

combined capability would emerge when both formal access and the real ability to act meaningfully in that context come together: when a reflective learning environment supports voice, trust, and agency. Seen through this lens, leadership evaluation must not only account for procedural fairness or clarity of goals, but for how people experience their capacity to grow, contribute, and shape their environments. A capabilities-informed evaluation framework would necessarily be dialogic. It might include reflective conversations, narrative feedback, peer review, and participatory goal-setting—methods that foreground mutual learning and voice rather than hierarchical control (Raelin, 2016; Higgins et al., 2017). Such methods treat evaluation not as judgement, but as shared inquiry: a co-created effort to understand how leadership is lived, and what it makes possible. By reimagining evaluation in this way, organisations affirm that flourishing is not a by-product of leadership, but its very purpose. And that the value of leadership lies not only in what it achieves, but in how it enables others to grow. I have argued that a capabilities-informed evaluation of leadership must treat leadership assessment as a relational and developmental practice—one that supports human agency, voice, and the co-construction of meaningful organisational life, a view that Section 3.9 extends by reconceiving leadership itself as a pedagogical profession.

3.9 Leadership as a Pedagogical Profession

I argue that leadership should be understood as a pedagogical profession, one in which the cultivation of human dignity, agency, and ethical judgement takes precedence over mere coordination or control. Drawing on Dewey's (1938) conception of education as the reconstruction of experience through participatory reflection, leadership can be seen as the cultivation of meaning, judgement, and responsibility within organisational life. Leadership in this sense creates spaces in which others can think, act, and grow with dignity and agency. Leadership, similarly, becomes an interpretive and formative act—one in which ethical questions

are never abstract, but always embodied, contextual, and consequential. Every feedback conversation, every strategic decision, every moment of silence or encouragement teaches something: about who belongs, what matters, and how people are expected to relate. Such gestures, though often unnoticed, are pedagogical in nature.

From this viewpoint, leadership is not merely a site of organisational functionality, but a practice of human formation. It carries the power to include or marginalise, to affirm or to diminish. In organisational settings, this means that leadership must be approached not as a series of solutions, but as a commitment to learning. As Nussbaum (2011) argues, the development of Central Capabilities—such as affiliation, practical reason, and control over one’s environment—depends on the creation of enabling conditions. Leadership forms the ethical and imaginative infrastructures through which agency becomes possible.

This orientation invites a final reflection: if leadership is to be understood as pedagogical, what conception of education is being invoked? In much of the organisational literature, learning’ tends to be associated with adaptation, upskilling, and performance. However, education, in a more philosophical and historical sense, may imply something different, something more open-ended, resistant to closure, and oriented towards human becoming. As Biesta (2020b) cautions, the reduction of education to learning flattens its ethical and political dimensions, turning it into a merely functional response to external demands. Education, in this fuller sense, often involves confrontation with differences, discomfort, and the unknown. It does not simply concern development, but the formation of subjectivity through encounters that escape total control.

From this perspective, leadership might be seen as more than a curriculum of skills. If it is to remain educational in the sense developed here, it may need to remain open to interruption, to the slow and often uncomfortable processes through which values are questioned, voices are heard, and power is negotiated. In my own

practice, some of the most meaningful learning moments did not emerge from polished programmes, but from situations marked by tension and uncertainty—where what was ‘right’ appeared ambiguous, and mutual reflection became the only viable path forward. These experiences suggest that education in organisations is not merely what leaders deliver, but what they co-create in conditions of risk, dialogue, and incompleteness. To speak of leadership as *Bildung*, then, is to reclaim its conceptual richness. *Bildung*, as a European philosophical tradition—most prominently formulated by thinkers such as Humboldt and Hegel—, does not refer to instruction or training, but to a lifelong process of becoming—always situated, always provisional. It resists the commodification of learning and draws attention to the ethical dimension of self and world formation. Leadership, in this light, is not simply about managing people, but about engaging in an educational relationship—with others, and with oneself. It can be understood as slow practice, requiring patience and reflective presence. It invites an ongoing question: what might it mean to lead in ways that acknowledge both the complexity of human lives and the uncertain, open-ended possibilities of what we might become?

This is why, in this dissertation, leadership is framed as a pedagogical profession. It is a conceptual repositioning: leadership as a formative practice in which flourishing is both the purpose and the method. To lead is to teach—not through the delivery of content, but through the creation of environments that expand human possibility. I have argued that leadership, when understood through the lens of pedagogical and capabilities-based thinking, becomes a practice of relational and ethical formation—one that requires reflective judgement, attentiveness to power, and a commitment to co-constructing conditions in which diverse human capabilities can thrive. Building on this theoretical groundwork, Chapter Four develops the integrative leadership model that translates these ideas into a conceptual framework for organisational practice.

Chapter Four: Towards an Integrative Leadership Model

This chapter synthesises the theoretical strands developed in Chapters Two and Three to introduce an integrative leadership model oriented towards flourishing. It outlines the relationships between organisational prerequisites, cultivated leadership qualities, core elements of flourishing in practice, and desired outcomes. The subsequent sections unpack these dimensions, elaborating the model's ethical and educational commitments, the attitudes and learning practices it presupposes, and the organisational risks of instrumentalisation. The chapter concludes by exploring practical applications and evaluating success within this framework. To explain the proposed model, I advance two interconnected arguments. First, organisational success requires reimagining in terms of sustainable flourishing for both humans and organisations. Second, an integrative model of leadership offers a viable way of holding flourishing and efficiency together. These arguments are presented as normative propositions informed by Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach, transformational leadership theories, and my professional experience.

First, I propose that organisational success should move beyond narrow quantitative metrics. It should position flourishing as a strategic priority. This reimagination generates competitive advantage and supports the organisation for the long-term. Organisations committed to human flourishing are more likely than organisations without such a commitment to cultivate workplace cultures that support well-being, engagement, and ethical awareness. Second, I propose that an integrative leadership model provides a normative and practical framework for embedding flourishing. This model enables a balanced consideration of efficiency and flourishing. It establishes a culture of ethical responsibility. Within this culture, dignity and respect are materialised in everyday organisational life rather than

remaining aspirational statements. Finally, this model fosters inclusive decision-making and embeds capabilities that support flourishing within organisational structures.

The integrative leadership model I propose emerges from and is part of my overall conceptual interrogation of the relationship between efficiency and human flourishing. It remains provisional, open, and reflexive, and it synthesises the key arguments of the study to date without prescribing strategies or prematurely resolving inherent tensions that may emerge within these discussions. This model is offered in support of a conceptual claim: namely, that leadership in corporate contexts can be reimagined as an educational, ethical, and developmental practice when flourishing is treated as a normative commitment oriented towards human and organisational flourishing. The CA is presented as a theoretical lens that provides moral grounding and conceptual direction for the development of the model. Against this background, I revisit the following claims as the conceptual foundations upon which the integrative leadership model is developed.

- **Leadership as a Catalyst for Flourishing:** Leadership plays a catalytic, ethically consequential role in shaping the conditions under which individuals and organisations can flourish.
- **Towards an Integrative Leadership Model:** Inclusive decision-making and participatory practices embed dignity and respect into everyday organisational life, linking philosophical claims to organisational practice.

I bring these arguments together in the model outlined below, drawing on philosophical, ethical, educational, and organisational insights. The model is not presented as a purely abstract synthesis, but as a practical outcome of these interconnected claims, grounded in critique as well as reconstruction, and situated within my professional and cultural context in Germany. I aim to provoke informed

reflection and resulting action in relation to what an integrative approach to leadership could become, while remaining contingent, context-sensitive, evolving, and open to reinterpretation. I deliberately sustain the tension between flourishing and efficiency as a productive space for ethical engagement. This lays the conceptual foundation for addressing the central concern of this study: how leadership might be reimagined as an educational and ethical practice that supports both individual flourishing and organisational sustainability. The following conceptual model visually draws these claims together, illustrating how prerequisites, core practices, and desired outcomes interrelate within an integrative approach to leadership oriented towards flourishing.

4.1 My Conceptual Model of Leadership for Flourishing

The Integrative Leadership Model is intended as a linear sequence or a causal mechanism, but as a heuristic and normative framework that structures how leadership for flourishing may be understood and practised in organisational life. It identifies organisational prerequisites, leadership qualities, and core practices as interdependent, mutually shaping conditions rather than sequential stages. Leadership qualities and core practices function both as enabling conditions and as mediating dimensions that orient organisational life towards the desired outcome of sustainable flourishing. In this sense, the model reflects a relational understanding of leadership for flourishing.

Before presenting the final integrative model, Sketchnote 4.1 illustrates the conceptual merging of my core ideas, documenting a moment of synthesis in my research process where the connection between the ethical foundation, organisational conditions, and the desired flourishing outcomes became visible.

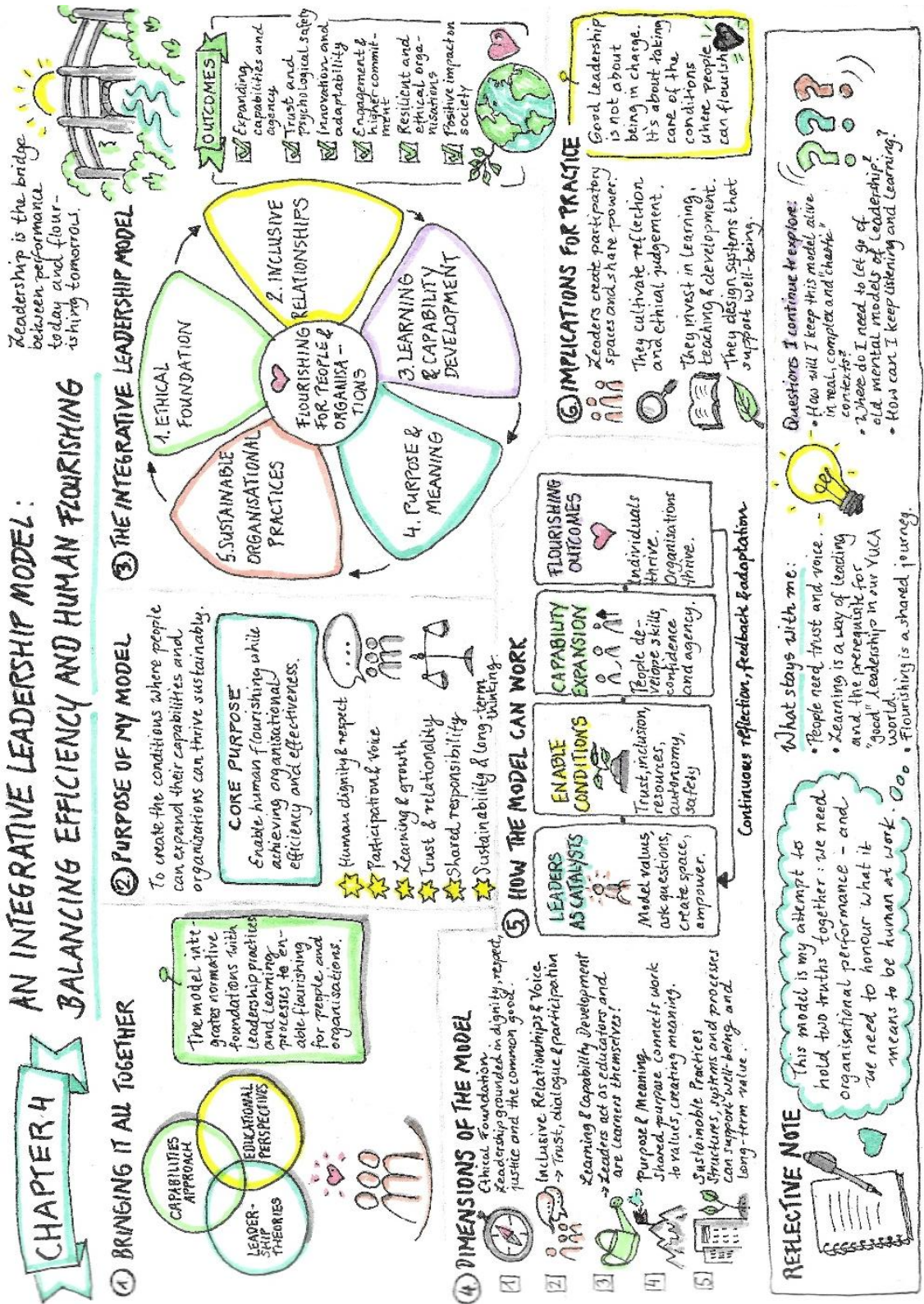


Figure 4.1: Reflective Journal Sketchnote - Integrative Model Summary

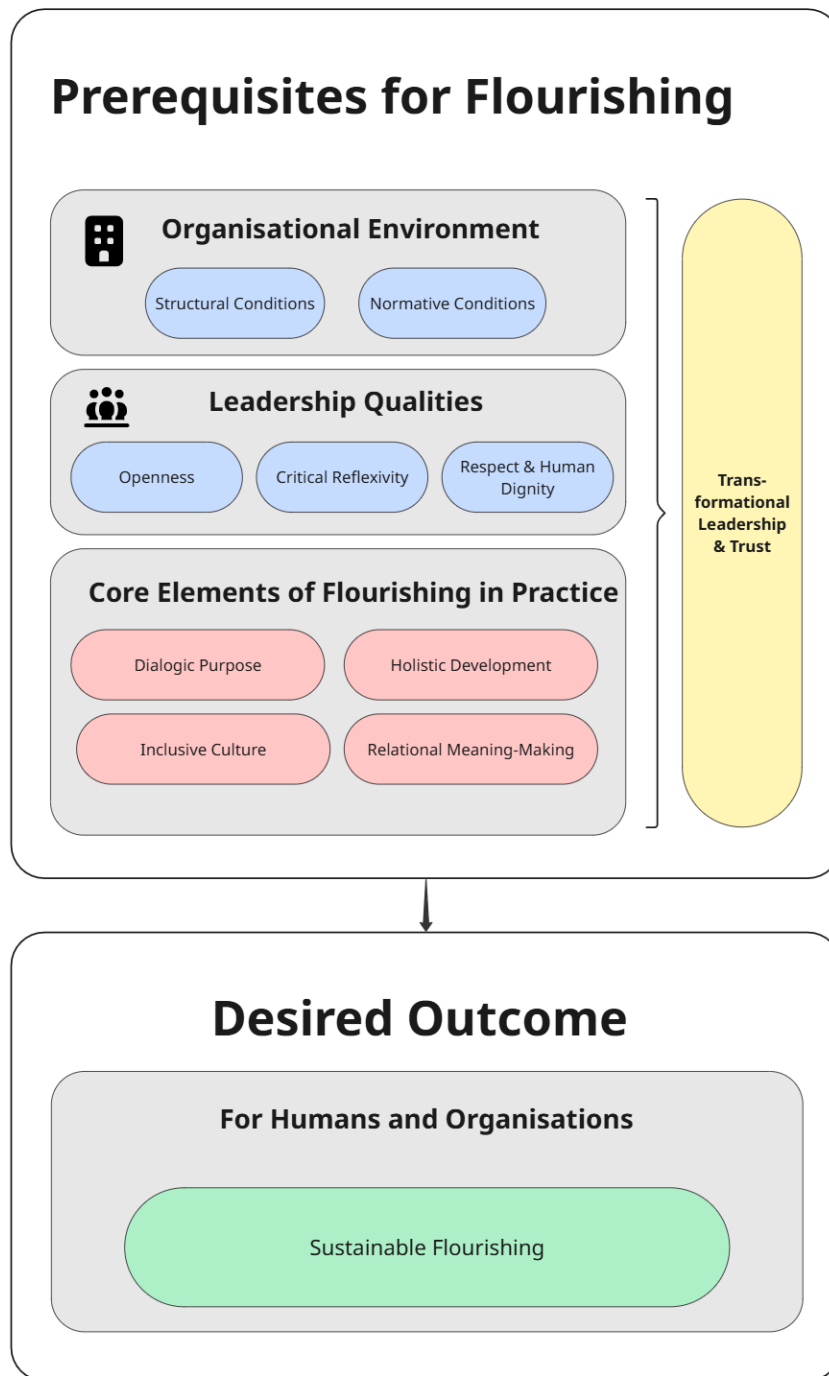


Figure 4.2: The Integrative Leadership Model for Flourishing

The model, shown in Figure 4.2, is to be read vertically and relationally: structural and normative conditions shape the emergence of leadership qualities; these qualities enable specific practices; and these practices orient organisational life towards sustainable flourishing for both humans and organisations. Within this architecture, I distinguish between three interconnected dimensions—prerequisites, core practices, and desired outcomes—while understanding structural conditions and cultivated dispositions as mutually reinforcing elements that enable flourishing-oriented leadership in practice. This alignment is specifically designed to support the development of combined capabilities—a concept drawn from Nussbaum’s (2011) CA, which posits that individual internal abilities must be matched by real, external opportunities to act meaningfully within the organisational environment. Trust and transformational leadership function as cross-cutting dimensions that permeate all levels of the framework, aligning organisational conditions, leader dispositions, and everyday practices around the normative commitment to human dignity and capability development.

Leadership for flourishing is conceptualised here as an educational and ethical practice grounded in Nussbaum’s CA, positioning flourishing as a normative orientation for both organisational sustainability and human development. This repositioning understands the leader not as a technocratic manager of performance, but as a reflective practitioner engaged in a pedagogical profession. Such a practice aims at subjectification, enabling individuals to become autonomous agents who can resist the logic of performativity and contribute to the co-construction of shared values. In the following sections, I examine each of these three dimensions in turn, moving from the organisational environment to leadership qualities and finally to their enactment in practice.

4.1.1 Prerequisites for Flourishing

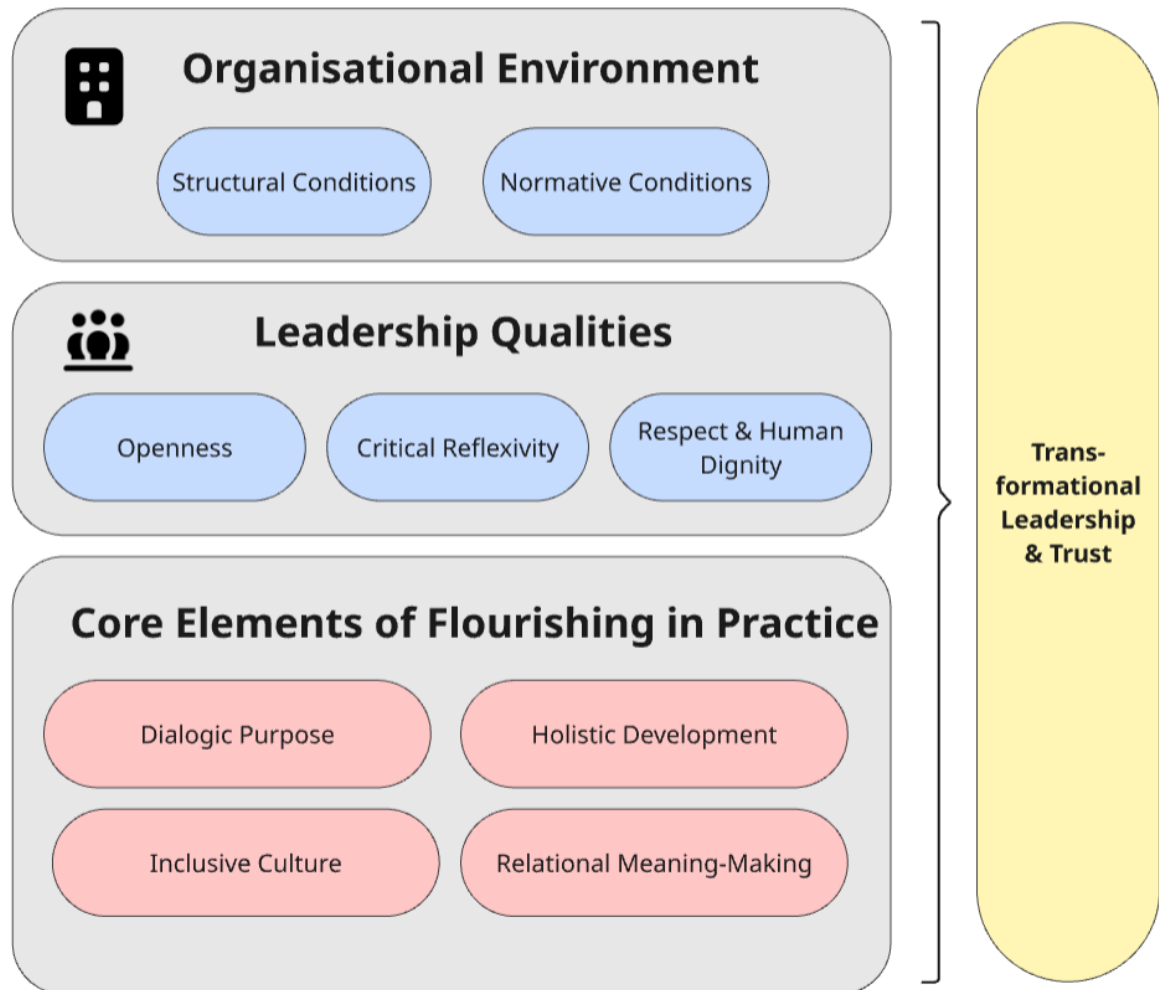


Figure 4.3: Prerequisites for Flourishing: Overview

Figure 4.3 groups three interrelated dimensions under the heading “Prerequisites for Flourishing”: the organisational environment, leadership qualities, and the core elements of flourishing in practice. Although analytically distinguishable, these dimensions are presented within a single architectural frame to indicate that flourishing does not emerge from isolated interventions, but from the alignment of structural conditions, cultivated dispositions, and enacted practices. The vertical arrangement reflects a movement from the broader organisational environment,

through leadership within teams, to the practical enactment of flourishing in everyday organisational life. In the following, I examine these prerequisites more explicitly.

4.1.1.1 Organisational Environment

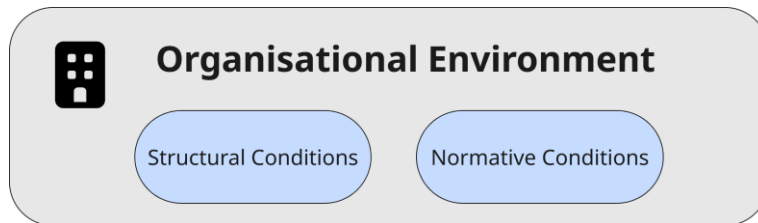


Figure 4.4: The Organisational Environment

Figure 4.4 depicts the organisational environment as one dimension of the integrative leadership model, highlighting the structural and normative conditions on which flourishing depends. At the broadest level, the organisational environment is shaped by structural conditions (such as governance arrangements - that is, how decisions are made, who holds which responsibilities, and how accountability is organised - and resource allocation, i.e. how time, money, and personnel are distributed across activities) and by normative conditions (such as shared values and institutional commitments). The required leadership qualities (such as openness, critical reflexivity, respect for human dignity, and trust) and organisational prerequisites (such as structural and normative conditions) derive from my contention that long-term organisational success depends on balancing economic imperatives with the enabling of core human capabilities, consistent with Nussbaum's (2011) CA. This reflects my broader argument that, rather than treating human development as a secondary outcome of economic performance, leadership for flourishing requires both cultivated leader dispositions and organisational conditions that make capability expansion possible. By embedding such organisational conditions into practice, these prerequisites establish the normative

and structural foundations under which the core practices discussed in the following section can meaningfully support flourishing (as argued in Chapter Two, which addressed the theoretical foundations, and in Chapter Three, which considered leadership dispositions and their enactment). Concretely, such prerequisites are embedded, for example, through transparent decision-making processes, opportunities for participation, and policies that protect time and space for reflexive and developmental work. Building on this environmental framing, the next subsection turns to the leadership qualities that are required to inhabit these conditions in ways that actively support flourishing.

4.1.1.2 Leadership Qualities

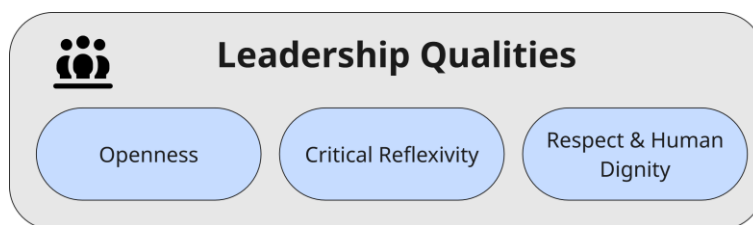


Figure 4.5: Leadership Qualities

Figure 4.5 highlights three leadership qualities within the model: openness, critical reflexivity, and respect for human dignity. Openness is defined as a principled willingness to engage with uncertainty, diversity, and not knowing in a dialogic manner, while critical reflexivity is understood as the ongoing, structured examination of one's own assumptions, positionality, power, and influence. Along with trust, these leadership qualities can be understood as cultivated capacities rather than fixed personality traits; they are developed over time through structured opportunities for reflection, feedback, and learning. As argued in Chapter Three, these cultivated capacities, in combination with the structural and normative conditions described above, form the ethical and educational foundation of flourishing-oriented leadership. Building on this foundation, I now turn to the

core elements of flourishing in practice—dialogic purpose, holistic development, inclusive culture, and relational meaning-making, which represent the third dimension within the prerequisites frame.

4.1.1.3 Core Elements of Flourishing in Practice

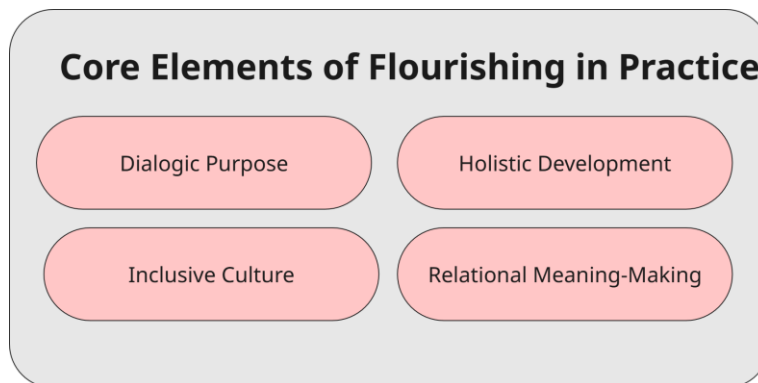


Figure 4.6: Core Elements of Flourishing in Practice

Figure 4.6 illustrates the four core elements of flourishing in practice. Building on these prerequisites, outlined above, I identify four core elements of flourishing in practice, each grounded in the argument that leadership can function as a catalyst for flourishing. As I discussed in Chapter Two, I connected dialogic engagement to the theoretical foundations of meaning making and purpose. In Chapter Three, I developed the ethical and educational dimensions of leadership as praxis. In this chapter, I elaborate on how these practices can be operationalised within organisational contexts.

Dialogic Purpose: I understand leadership as dialogic when organisational actors intentionally foster inclusive, participatory, and multi-voiced exchanges, thereby co-constructing meaning and purpose with others. As I argued in Chapter Two, I relate this practice to capabilities that enable dignity, respect, and flourishing, specifically the capabilities of affiliation and practical reason. Drawing on the

educational tradition of deliberative inquiry, this orientation moves beyond hierarchical mission statements toward iterative conversations and the negotiation of values across difference. By doing so, leadership becomes a pedagogical and dialogic act that allows individuals to critically examine the goals they pursue and the processes through which collective decisions are made. Ultimately, this practice challenges instrumental notions of purpose by framing it as a living, relationally constructed, and ethically responsive process rather than one that is strategically imposed from above.

Holistic Development: By explicitly foregrounding the educational dimension of leadership, I conceptualise leaders as facilitators of ongoing learning and co-evolution, supporting individual and collective growth through ethical judgement and capacity development. As I argued throughout, and particularly in Chapter Three, I understand leadership here in line with traditions such as *Bildung* and subjectification (Biesta, 2010), framing it as praxis: a reflective, context-sensitive, and relational process that resists reduction to competency frameworks. I position these practices as recursive, continually shaped by and shaping both individual and organisational learning, thereby embedding flourishing into organisational structures and practices.

Inclusive Culture: I understand an inclusive culture as one in which organisational norms and everyday interactions signal that different identities, perspectives, and life situations are expected and valued, not merely tolerated. Inclusive practices open decision-making to diverse voices, ensure fair and transparent opportunities for recognition and advancement, and actively challenge patterns of exclusion. Such a culture supports capabilities related to affiliation and control over one's environment and provides the relational ground for dialogic purpose, holistic development, and relational meaning-making to take root in organisational life.

Relational Meaning-Making: I conceptualise leadership as an ongoing process of building relationships, nurturing mutual recognition, trust, and a shared sense of belonging. As I argued in Chapter Three, such practices directly support the Capabilities of Affiliation and Practical Reason, while resisting the risk of instrumentalising relationships for short-term gains. Relational meaning-making thus completes the four core elements through which flourishing can take root in organisational life. The following section attends to two cross-cutting orientations of the integrative leadership model - transformational leadership and trust, which connect these elements across organisational conditions, leader dispositions, and everyday practices.

4.1.2 Transformational Leadership and Trust

In the integrative leadership model, transformational leadership and trust, as shown in Figure 4.7, function as cross-cutting orientations that connect organisational conditions, leader dispositions, and everyday practices. Next, I clarify how transformational leadership is understood in my model and how it is interwoven with trust as both a prerequisite for and a contingent outcome of flourishing-oriented leadership.



Figure 4.7: Transformational Leadership and Trust

4.1.2.1 How Transformational Leadership is Understood in My Model

I interpret transformational leadership not as heroic inspiration but as a relational practice in which leaders seek to expand people's capabilities and sense of purpose through ethical influence, individualised consideration, and shared vision. Drawing on Bass and Riggio's (2006) account, this involves encouraging critical reflection, supporting autonomous judgement, and fostering participation in shaping organisational goals. While transformational leadership is often discussed in managerial terms, its inclusion here is not for its strategic appeal alone, but because it foregrounds vision and values in ways that resonate with an educational rethinking of leadership. By bringing this tradition into dialogue with Nussbaum's CA, transformational leadership is reframed as a moral and relational process through which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality, as originally suggested by Burns (1978). Within my model,

this approach functions as a catalyst that translates normative commitments into lived practice. It helps to move beyond 'zombie leadership' models that rely on narrow performance metrics and managerial certainty, offering instead a way to inhabit the tension between organisational efficiency and human flourishing. Transformational leadership thus aligns structural and normative conditions with core practices such as dialogic purpose, holistic development, and inclusive culture, thereby helping to hold together commitments to flourishing and organisational performance.

4.1.2.2 How Trust is Understood in My Model

Here, I understand trust as both a prerequisite and an outcome, evolving through sustained relational practices at individual and organisational levels. It is intentionally cultivated and sustained over time, connecting leadership qualities with organisational requisites. Drawing on Enslin and Hedge's (2021) discussion of trust and institutional values in higher education, I treat trust as emerging where people consistently experience mutual recognition, reliability, and shared responsibility in their work relationships. This builds on the discussion in Chapter Three (Sections 3.2.5 and 3.3.1), where I conceptualised trust not as a managerial instrument, but as a fragile, relational dynamic and a capability-relevant condition for affiliation. This becomes visible, for example, when transparent decision-making processes enable leaders to act reflexively, or when participatory governance structures institutionalise relational accountability. Taken together, transformational leadership and trust represent the practical enactment of flourishing within organisational life. While analytically distinct, they operate relationally and recursively, translating structural commitments and cultivated dispositions into lived practice. In the next section, I clarify how flourishing is understood as the desired outcome of the integrative leadership model.

4.1.3 Desired Outcome

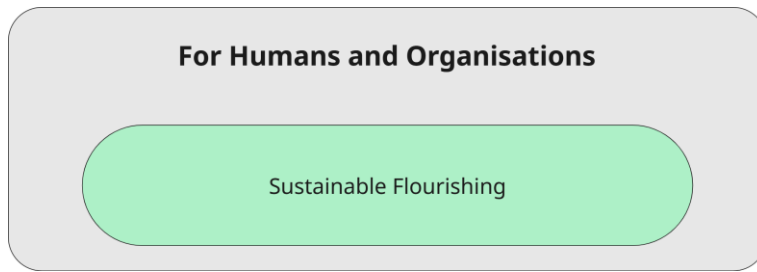


Figure 4.8: Desired Outcome: Sustainable Flourishing

Figure 4.8 depicts this desired outcome as sustainable flourishing for both humans and organisations. The integration of these elements is intended to orient leadership towards flourishing, conceived, transcending any static end state, as an ongoing and iterative process that enables personal and organisational development. With this conception, I resist the instrumentalisation of flourishing as a KPI, emphasising instead its role as a normative and ethical commitment that orients organisational life towards dignity, capability expansion, and shared responsibility. As argued in Chapter Two, flourishing provides the normative foundation; as argued in Chapter Three, it is enabled through cultivated leader dispositions; and as developed in Chapter Four, it requires organisational structures that sustain dialogic, inclusive, and innovative practices. In concrete terms, flourishing becomes visible, for example, when leaders use participatory decision-making forums to deliberate on strategic priorities with staff, or when feedback and development processes are designed to expand people’s capabilities. In this way, the model proposes a possible answer to the question of how leadership can be oriented towards flourishing: by aligning structural conditions, cultivated dispositions, and everyday practices so that they systematically expand people’s capabilities and shared sense of purpose. In my own professional practice, for example, such flourishing-oriented leadership involved opening curriculum decisions to co-creation with teaching teams and student representatives, even when this slowed down decision-making. It also meant redesigning appraisal conversations

away from narrow performance targets towards developmental dialogues. In these dialogues, staff were invited to articulate their own learning goals and constraints, and to negotiate concrete support to expand their capabilities. Here, I explicitly understand flourishing as both an individual and a collective good, as a relational process, to the benefit of both individuals and the organisation. In practical terms, this process is facilitated through leadership practices that create regular spaces for dialogic openness and critical reflection, and that embed educationally grounded feedback and development processes into everyday work. From this central orientation, further outcomes can be identified as follows. The model culminates in sustainability, understood as an ongoing ethical commitment to practices that foster resilience, justice, and the well-being of current and future stakeholders. In what follows, I outline the conceptual framework that brings these theoretical lenses and organisational conditions together.

4.2 The Conceptual Framework of the Integrative Leadership Model

In Chapter Three, I argued that transformational leadership offers a particularly relevant approach for contemporary organisations, given its emphasis on articulating shared purpose and individualised support for people's development. Alongside Nussbaum's CA, this tradition provides a second, practice-oriented strand that informs the integrative leadership model developed in this chapter. Building on this, I now propose a reorientation of leadership that brings the CA into dialogue with selected elements of transformational leadership to conceptualise leadership as an educational and ethical practice concerned with enabling human capabilities. While not unproblematic, its emphasis on purpose, inspiration, and relational commitment opens up possibilities for leadership as a dialogic and morally responsive practice, especially when reframed through the normative lens of the CA.

By bringing together these different orientations, namely a normative philosophical framework grounded in the CA and selected aspects of transformational leadership, I aimed to develop a leadership model that addresses both individual and organisational dimensions of flourishing. The conceptual orientation of the model is grounded in a set of ethically framed commitments through which I articulate its normative direction. These commitments are normative orientations, held provisionally and open to contextual reinterpretation. Each of these commitments articulates a normative stance on how leadership might support flourishing through ethical responsiveness, dialogic practice, and sustained attentiveness to human development, as understood in this study. The commitments are as follows, each grounded in Nussbaum's (2011) Capabilities Approach:

- A commitment to human dignity and respect, not as instruments of motivation or control, but as ends in themselves.
- A commitment to holistic development, understood as the development of capabilities that help individuals to become more fully themselves in relation to others, emotionally, intellectually, and relationally.
- A commitment to the cultivation of dialogic meaning-making across difference, in ways that honour plurality while enabling collective reflection and belonging.
- A commitment to an inclusive and ethically responsive organisational culture, understood not as a strategy but as a condition for participation, recognition, and trust.
- A commitment to sustained attention to learning and innovation, not as continual demands for change, but as opportunities for ethical inquiry, judgment, and situated growth.

These commitments do not define the results of leadership practice. Rather, they shape the normative architecture of a leadership practice that refuses fixed outcomes and remains attentive to ethical complexity. They ground an understanding of leadership as an ongoing practice of situated judgement, normative orientation, and dialogic negotiation, responsive to context, accountable to plural values, and committed to human development. Their role is not to settle questions, but to prompt them, to guide reflection on what might matter, to whom, and under what conditions. I treat these commitments as sustaining the tension between efficiency and flourishing as a productive ethical space, one in which leadership is reimagined as reflective engagement with competing demands and multiple needs and values.

4.3 Basic Commitments of the Integrative Leadership Model

Within the integrative leadership model, human dignity and respect function as foundational normative commitments that inform organisational prerequisites and core practices of flourishing. Transcending abstract values, they take shape as relational and organisational commitments through everyday practices, such as participatory decision-making, recognition, and appreciation. These practices express an ethical orientation that affirms the intrinsic worth of individuals and seeks to foster inclusive and flourishing organisational cultures. Involving employees in decision-making processes elevates them beyond mere functional contributors, recognising them as agents whose voices carry weight in shaping organisational life. This commitment is operationalised through clear feedback systems, collaborative planning structures, and dialogic leadership practices that actively listen across hierarchies. The emphasis here is not on procedural inclusion alone, but on cultivating conditions in which individuals feel heard, valued, and able to

participate meaningfully. While Nussbaum (2011) does not directly address organisational settings, her philosophical insistence that human beings are to be treated as ends in themselves, rather than as the means to the ends of others, aligns with this leadership commitment. Such participatory practices, moreover, resonate with Edmondson's (1999) work on psychological safety, which suggests that environments where individuals feel safe to speak up without fear of humiliation or penalty are likely to enable innovation, cooperation, and learning.

On this view of participation, I understand it not simply as a managerial tool, but as a means of sustaining dignity within everyday organisational life. Recognition and appreciation further embed this commitment by affirming the presence and contribution of individuals in ways that are visible and meaningful. This may take the form of personalised feedback, team-based acknowledgment, or public recognition of effort, but its deeper significance lies in fostering relationships of mutual regard and trust. As Bass and Riggio (2006) emphasise within transformational leadership theory, individualised consideration is central to enabling individuals to feel seen, supported, and part of a shared purpose. Likewise, Cameron (2012) argues that recognition contributes not only to morale and retention, but also to the cultivation of a positive organisational climate. When integrated within a broader ethical orientation, such practices cease to be reward mechanisms and instead become enactments of respect. Drawing on Nancy Fraser's status model of recognition, participation and recognition are understood here not as discrete techniques, but as conditions that enable individuals to "participate as peers in social life," challenging forms of misrecognition that reduce them to instruments of organisational performance. Rather than treating recognition as the affirmation of fixed identities, I read it as an ongoing, context-sensitive practice of establishing parity of participation, which resonates with Nussbaum's concern for capabilities such as affiliation and control over one's environment. Taken together, participatory decision making and recognition are not discrete techniques but

interwoven expressions of a leadership model that, as I propose it, seeks to affirm human dignity in context-sensitive, relationally grounded, and ethically reflexive ways. In the integrative leadership model I propose, these practices are read as concrete enactments of an ethical commitment to parity of participation, linking the CA's focus on enabling conditions for flourishing with Fraser's insistence on just recognition in institutional arrangements. In what follows, I develop these commitments more concretely in the integrative leadership model, beginning with the principle of holistic development and its implications for personalised learning and employee capabilities.

4.3.1 Holistic Development

Designing and implementing personalised learning and development programmes that cater to the diverse needs and aspirations of employees can play a significant role in fostering holistic development, as I understand it in this model. This could include personalised learning plans, mentorship programs, and opportunities for continuous learning. In this model, I regard holistic development not simply as a matter of providing skill building opportunities, but as creating conditions in which employees can expand their capabilities in ways that are personally meaningful and contextually relevant. Nussbaum (2013) emphasises the importance of enabling individuals to develop and exercise their capabilities, a principle that can be extended to the design of personalised learning and development initiatives in organisational settings. Personalised learning plans allow employees to set and pursue their own developmental goals, aligning their personal aspirations with organisational objectives. Yet before such plans can be meaningfully implemented, employees often need structured opportunities to reflect on their own goals and values. This may involve facilitated conversations, reflective prompts, or exploratory coaching formats that support self-awareness and help surface latent

aspirations. Rather than assuming clarity of direction, personalised development should, I suggest, begin by creating spaces in which such direction can emerge.

Mentorship programs and opportunities for continuous learning go beyond productivity metrics; by providing guidance and skills development, they enable individuals to flourish through autonomy, relational support, and sustained cognitive and emotional growth. Research by Bakker and Demerouti (2017) indicates that personalised learning and development programmes can lead to increased employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention. By investing in the holistic development of employees, organisations can create a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, ultimately contributing to long-term organisational success. Creating clear career pathways and providing opportunities for professional growth and advancement are crucial for fostering a culture of development and progression within organisations. This can include leadership development programmes, cross-functional projects, and internal mobility initiatives. Bass and Riggio (2006) argue that transformational leadership involves creating environments where employees are supported in their professional growth and development, aligning well with initiatives such as leadership development programmes and cross-functional projects. Such practices do not compete with profitability; they indicate that investing in employees' holistic development and flourishing can underpin, rather than undermine, sustainable organisational performance over time. Leadership development programmes can support employees in developing skills and forms of understanding that may enable them to take on leadership roles, thereby contributing to the development of future leadership capacity within the organisation. Cross-functional projects can provide employees with opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from different departments, potentially broadening their skill sets and perspectives over time. Internal mobility initiatives can enable employees to explore different roles and career paths within the organisation, which may contribute to career satisfaction and longer-term engagement. When framed through the lens of the CA, such pathways can be understood not merely as

tools for succession planning, but as expressions of a deeper commitment to enabling individuals to pursue lives they have reason to value. Research by Cameron (2012) suggests that providing clear career pathways and growth opportunities may be associated with high levels of employee engagement, motivation, and loyalty. By prioritising the professional growth and advancement of employees, organisations may contribute to the development of a resilient and adaptable workforce over time. Considered together, these pathways suggest that holistic development within the integrative leadership model is not only about individual growth, but about creating capability-enhancing conditions that require ongoing dialogic engagement with employees' purposes, values, and aspirations—an orientation that I now develop further through the notion of dialogic purpose and relational meaning-making.

4.3.2 Dialogic Purpose and Relational Meaning-Making

I foreground the importance of dialogic meaning-making in shaping organisational purpose within this model. Leadership, in this sense, is understood not as the articulation of a singular direction but as a practice of holding space for diverse interpretations, tensions, and aspirations. This orientation draws on the educational tradition of deliberative inquiry, in which meaning is not transmitted but co-constructed. Dewey (1938) emphasised that democracy requires participation in the formation of purposes, not simply adherence to them—and this principle can resonate strongly within organisational life.

Instead of asking whether employees are aligned with the leader's vision, the more generative concern becomes how shared meaning is actively shaped and sustained through ethical responsiveness, dialogic engagement, and context-sensitive practice. This shift allows leadership to be repositioned as a reflective and dialogic practice that values plurality, responsiveness, and situated judgement. The CA

offers conceptual support for this shift by emphasising affiliation and practical reason as central to human flourishing. These capabilities suggest that employees flourish not when they adopt given goals, but when they are afforded the opportunity to reflect, co-construct, and engage critically with the purposes that shape their work. This does not imply endless negotiation or the absence of direction, but rather a form of purpose that remains ethically responsive and context-sensitive, open to revision in the light of evolving needs, relationships, and social responsibilities. As illustrated earlier in the context of relational leadership (see Section 3.2.1), this dialogic approach has meant moving away from rigid trainer evaluations towards structured peer observations. Such practices foreground the co-construction of meaning as a condition for participation. The aim is not to reach perfect consensus, but to cultivate shared responsibility for holding purpose as a living, contestable, and relational construct, a commitment that Section 4.3.3 extends through the question of inclusive culture.

4.3.3 An Inclusive Culture

Implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives—such as diversity training, inclusive hiring practices, and employee resource groups—plays a significant role in promoting equity and representation. While Nussbaum (2013) does not specifically focus on organisational diversity strategies, her emphasis on respecting individual capabilities aligns with such initiatives. I suggest they should be understood not merely as compliance mechanisms, but as expressions of an ethical commitment to dignity, recognition, and participation, fostering a sense of belonging and community within organisations. Research by Shore et al. (2011) suggests that diversity and inclusion initiatives may be associated with enhanced organisational performance, particularly where diverse talents and perspectives are engaged by individuals in ways they find meaningful. Agile leadership practices, as Riggio (2021) suggests, may further support these aspirations by fostering decentralised decision-

making and responsiveness, aligning with the CA's emphasis on equal dignity and participation. From a CA perspective, I understand these efforts as aiming to create conditions under which individuals from diverse backgrounds can develop and participate meaningfully in organisational life. By promoting equity and representation, organisations may contribute to the development of inclusive and supportive cultures in which diversity is recognised as a potential source of collective learning and flourishing.

Fostering a culture of psychological safety and well-being can help create environments in which employees may feel valued, supported, and more able to take interpersonal risks and engage creatively. This can include mental health programmes, flexible work arrangements, and supportive leadership practices. Bass and Riggio (2006) argue that transformational leadership involves creating conditions that support employees' psychological well-being and encourage open communication. Mental health programmes can provide resources that may support employees in managing stress and maintaining well-being. Flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options and flexible hours, can support employees in negotiating personal and professional responsibilities. Such arrangements may also reduce experiences of burnout and, in doing so, potentially increase individuals' capacity to flourish through meaningful participation and supportive organisational cultures. Within a CA, I argue such efforts are not only instrumental but formative, shaping what is perceived as possible, permissible, and worthwhile within organisational life, a question Section 4.3.4 pursues through the lens of learning, reflection, and innovation.

4.3.4 Learning, Reflection, and the Possibility of Innovation

Innovation and improvement are often celebrated in organisational discourse, yet when treated as imperatives, they can generate subtle pressure for constant and

exhausting change, adaptation, and productivity, as I have observed in my professional contexts. In recent commentary on higher education, Atkinson (2026) similarly criticises regimes of “innovation” that operate as institutionalised imperatives, imposed through top-down change programmes rather than emerging from genuine, locally grounded learning practice. In such cases, learning and innovation risk becoming instruments of control rather than conditions for ethical development or flourishing. Within this model, I reframe both learning and innovation as contingent possibilities, dependent on context, purpose, and the capabilities of those involved.

Creating innovation labs and collaborative spaces fosters environments where employees are invited to experiment, share ideas, and co-create solutions. This aligns with Bass and Riggio’s (2006) argument that transformational leadership involves encouraging intellectual stimulation and fostering a culture of innovation. For example, hackathons can be described as time-limited and structured collaborative workshops in which participants work intensively on shared problems, creating opportunities for experimentation and collaborative problem-solving. Cross-functional workshops can facilitate collaboration across different departments, allowing employees to draw on diverse skills and perspectives in the processes of co-creation. If innovation initiatives become mandatory or overly target-driven, they risk undermining the very capabilities they are meant to foster. The CA highlights the importance of autonomy, voice, and practical reason, emphasising that individuals are not only involved in processes but also have a genuine say in shaping purpose and direction (Nussbaum, 2011), as well as opportunities for enjoyment and play. In this sense, formats such as hackathons can also be understood as serious games that integrate elements of play and gamification into organisational learning, creating spaces where experimentation, curiosity, and imaginative engagement are explicitly valued rather than treated as distractions from productive work.

While these approaches may indeed foster creativity and engagement, they should be implemented with care. As Amabile and Kramer (2011) suggest, motivation and engagement are most effectively supported when individuals experience a sense of progress in meaningful work. Such progress, however, cannot be reduced to novelty or speed alone. Equally significant are reflective practices that support critical engagement and situational judgment. Implementing feedback and reflection mechanisms can support ongoing learning and reflective development within organisations. Such reflective practices can take different forms within organisational contexts, including regular performance reviews, peer feedback sessions, and reflective practice workshops. These formats do not function as techniques with guaranteed outcomes, but as structured spaces in which reflection, dialogue, and learning may become possible. While Nussbaum (2011) does not explicitly address organisational feedback systems, her emphasis on practical reasoning and critical self-reflection can be brought into dialogue with practices that invite individuals to reflect on their actions, assumptions, and judgments. Schön (1983) similarly conceptualises reflective practice as central to professional learning, suggesting that professionals learn to respond to complexity and uncertainty through iterative cycles of inquiry, action, and reflection. In this sense, regular performance reviews can be understood not as instruments of control, but as occasions for reflective dialogue about practice and development. Peer feedback sessions may create opportunities for shared learning and mutual recognition, while reflective practice workshops can offer protected spaces in which experiences are examined, learning is articulated, and insights are tentatively connected to future action. Across these practices, what matters is not frequency or formalisation, but whether reflection remains connected to purpose, agency, and the dignity of those involved, and whether there is room for moments of enjoyment and play that sustain curiosity and relational energy over time. In *Creating Capabilities*, Nussbaum (2011) deepens this point by explicitly identifying play as one of the central human capabilities, arguing that the opportunity to laugh, to enjoy recreational activity, and to experience non-instrumental forms of engagement

constitutes a basic condition of a life worthy of human dignity. However, when reflection is reduced to compliance or feedback becomes a managerial device to ensure conformity, its educative function may be undermined. In this framework, innovation and learning are not goals in themselves, but possible outcomes of environments that nurture trust, voice, and ethical openness. They are valuable only insofar as they support the development of human capabilities, the practice of practical reasoning, and the capacity to act with and for others. The discussion so far has explored how leadership, when framed through the CA, can enable ethical reflection, participation, and the development of human potential. Yet for these practices to remain responsive and grounded, what seems to matter most is an ongoing attentiveness to reflexivity. The following sections therefore turn to leadership not only as a site of influence, but as a space of continual learning where questioning, ethical deliberation, and openness to change become central to organisational and individual flourishing.

Transformational leadership theory, as articulated by Burns (1978), while not unproblematic, contributes a complementary set of ideas. Burns distinguishes transforming leadership from transactional exchange and conceptualises it as a moral and relational process through which leaders and followers raise one another to high levels of motivation and morality. When reframed through the lens of the CA, these ideas can be disentangled from managerialism and redirected toward ethical and dialogic concerns. Practices often associated with transformational leadership, such as shared vision formation and collective goal articulation, can be reinterpreted not as motivation strategies, but as conditions that honour relational dignity and shared belonging. In the corporate setting in which I have worked, a shift from standardised KPIs to team-led goal formulation created space for diverse voices and increased perceived psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018), understood as a shared belief that one can speak up or take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences. This shift was reflected in an internal employee survey,

which reported higher levels of trust and participation than had been recorded in earlier survey rounds.

Walker and Unterhalter (2007) argue that continuous learning and innovation should not be reduced to technical adaptability alone. Instead, continuous learning and innovation can be understood as ethical invitations to rethink practices, expand judgement, and remain attuned to the evolving needs of individuals and organisations. This reading bridges the normative depth of the CA with the more dynamic, future-oriented aspects of transformational leadership. If leadership is understood through this integrated lens, then its ethical commitments cannot remain abstract. They require translation into concrete organisational practices that structure how dialogue, evaluation, and decision-making take place. In this sense, leadership practices that create structured spaces for reflective engagement may be understood as practical enactments of these normative commitments. For example, in my professional context, reflective feedback loops in leadership meetings have been used not merely to optimise team performance, but to open dialogue about value tensions, relational challenges, and conditions for shared growth. This example illustrates how the normative commitments discussed above may take organisational form. It shows that the move from abstract ethical orientation to practice does not occur through prescription, but through the design of structures that invite dialogue, reflection, and shared responsibility.

Having outlined these philosophical commitments, I now turn to how they shape the architecture of the integrative model—understanding leadership not through traits or roles, but through situated judgement, relational responsibility, and attentiveness to context. While Nussbaum's (2011) CA does not explicitly address leadership in business organisations, I suggest that its ethical architecture provides a generative orientation for reimagining what leadership could become. It offers a language for reflecting on human development, dignity, and agency—not as outcomes to be managed, but as ongoing concerns that shape how organisations

define purpose and success. The inclusion of selected elements from transformational leadership, particularly its emphasis on vision and growth, enables this model to respond to the demands of contemporary organisational life without collapsing into performativity. As Heifetz and Linsky (2017) argue, leadership is most effective when it combines moral clarity with contextual responsiveness.

Their notion of adaptive leadership, situated within the model as part of the leadership qualities that enable the enactment of its normative commitments, reinforces the idea that ethically grounded approaches can remain attuned to changing conditions while holding space for value-based deliberation. This integrative approach, drawing on the philosophical depth of the CA and transformational leadership's emphasis on relational influence, offers a framework that is both practically oriented and ethically attuned. It does not seek to resolve the tensions between flourishing and efficiency, but to sustain them as sites of critical reflection and educational possibility. In what follows, I move from the ethical and philosophical commitments underlying the model to a consideration of how they might be translated into organisational practice. This shift does not imply a linear application of theory, but rather explores how values such as dignity, development, and responsibility might inform leadership strategies in contextually sensitive ways. In drawing together these normative and practical strands, I aim to create an orientation for leadership that is both practically effective and supportive of human flourishing. Operationalising the integrative leadership model involves translating the theoretical principles of human dignity, holistic development, sense of direction grounded in shared dialogue, inclusive culture, and continuous learning into practical, actionable strategies within organisational contexts. Higgs and Dulewicz (2016) emphasise that leadership development requires deliberate and structured organisational processes rather than remaining at the level of abstract principles. Similarly, Meyer and Meijers (2018) argue that the operationalisation of leadership models is necessary if they are to influence concrete organisational practices rather than remain abstract conceptual frameworks. This approach aligns

with insights from Jackson and Parry (2021), who advocate for leadership approaches that not only provide strategic direction but also establish clear pathways for implementation and measurable impact. The emphasis on strategic direction, structured implementation, and measurable organisational impact covers key dimensions of leadership and development, making this body of work particularly relevant for the proposed model. Building on these arguments, the following section turns to the attitudes and learning practices that underpin the integrative leadership model in practice.

4.4 The Attitude Behind Leadership

4.4.1 Leadership as a Learning Practice: The Role of Critical Reflexivity

I position critical reflexivity as a vital, though often underestimated, condition for operationalising integrative leadership, understood here as an ongoing learning practice rather than a discrete intervention. From an educational standpoint, I understand leadership not as a set of transferable behaviours or strategies, but as a continuous and situated engagement with complexity that calls for ethical judgement, self-awareness, and the capacity to question one's own assumptions. This understanding explicitly challenges instrumental conceptions of leadership that seek fixed outcomes or rely on behavioural prescriptions detached from context. Instead, it opens a conceptual space in which leadership can be understood as a process of becoming, responsive to uncertainty, tension, and lived experience.

Drawing on Brookfield (2017), I treat critical reflection as central to educational growth, as it enables individuals to examine not only what they do, but why they do it and whose interests their actions serve. In this context, I use critical reflexivity to denote more than reflection on success or failure. Rather, it involves interrogating the values, power dynamics, and cultural narratives that underpin

organisational life and leadership practice. I understand such interrogation not as an abstract intellectual exercise, but as a moral and educational necessity grounded in practice. This orientation demands attentiveness to how power operates through habits, language, and organisational structures, as well as a willingness to remain vulnerable to critique. Following Dewey's (1933, p. 9) description of reflection as the 'active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge', I emphasise that reflexivity invites leaders to engage with discomfort, ambiguity, and dissent rather than seek premature closure. This resonates with Schön's (1983) notion of the 'reflective practitioner,' understood here as a leader who learns in and through action and adapts practice in response to unfolding experience. Taken together, these perspectives support my argument that leadership is not exercised from a position of certainty, but from a sustained stance of inquiry. Such a stance does not aim at definitive solutions but deliberately holds open the possibility of reframing both problems and responses. Within the integrative leadership model, I understand reflexivity as something that can be enacted through multiple practices, without being reducible to any single form. These practices may include structured individual approaches, such as reflective journaling or leadership diaries, as well as collective formats such as facilitated debriefs, learning circles, or dialogic supervision. However, I emphasise that it is not the specific format that carries ethical weight, but the intention with which such practices are approached.

Accordingly, I argue that reflective practices should not be treated as compliance exercises or as mechanisms for individual optimisation, but as invitations to engage with ethical complexity and to explore what it means to lead well in particular contexts. In this sense, reflexivity is framed as developmental: it is not oriented towards 'fixing' performance, but towards deepening insight and supporting leaders' growth as moral and relational agents. Such processes contribute to what Biesta (2020a) describes as the educational task of subjectification, understood as becoming someone who can respond thoughtfully rather than merely react.

Embedding reflexivity into leadership practice therefore supports an understanding of subject-formation in which individuals are not only shaped by organisational systems but are enabled to be capable of shaping them in return. This recursive relationship between structure and agency plays a pivotal role in contexts marked by complexity, diversity, and competing demands. Such contexts call for leaders who are able to pause, reframe, and reconsider rather than simply execute decisions. Reflexivity, in this sense, is not about looking inward for self-assessment alone but about cultivating an outward ethical orientation. Critical reflexivity can enable leaders to hold space for these tensions without reducing them to binary choices, and to lead with humility, curiosity, and integrity. These are qualities Section 4.4.2 examines through the lens of communicative and ethical learning practice.

4.4.2 Leadership as Communicative and Ethical Learning Practice

I understand leadership as a communicative and ethical learning practice, foregrounding its inherently relational nature. Instead of treating leadership as the enactment of strategies or behaviours directed towards predetermined goals, I emphasise leadership as a situated, dialogic engagement in which meaning, trust, and ethical orientation are co-constructed. Drawing on Hölker's (2014) concept of communicative leadership ethics (*kommunikative Führungsethik*), I understand leadership not merely as instruction or influence, but as a relational practice grounded in mutual understanding and shared responsibility. This view resonates with Freire's (1970) notion of praxis as the reciprocal interplay between reflection and action directed at transformation, as well as with Biesta's (2010) argument that educational practice is always a matter of subjectification, not merely of qualification or socialisation. Communication, then, is not a neutral means to deliver leadership but the very terrain on which leadership emerges.

Seen this way, I do not position the leader as the central authority on vision or outcomes, but as a participant in a dynamic field of sense-making. Ethical leadership, on this reading, becomes less about enforcing compliance and more about enabling dialogue, cultivating responsiveness, and attending to emotional and moral complexity. This understanding can be brought into dialogue with Watzlawick, Bavelas, and Jackson's (1967/2011) theory of human communication, which highlights the recursive and often tacit nature of interpersonal exchange. Communication, within this understanding, can be seen as a system of relationships in which meaning is negotiated rather than imposed. This becomes particularly salient in organisational contexts, where leadership is called upon to navigate diverse values, expectations, and modes of participation.

Importantly, this dialogic orientation requires leaders to tolerate ambiguity and to engage openly with multiple, and at times conflicting, perspectives. It demands emotional attunement, the ability to listen with generosity, and a willingness to be changed by what one hears. These dispositions echo Biesta's (2020) call for educational responsibility, which includes the readiness to respond to others not as instruments of one's purpose but as subjects in their own right. In the terms of Nussbaum's CA, this means recognising organisational members as persons whose dignity and central capabilities must be respected and supported, rather than as resources to be optimised, and it is this understanding of personhood that underpins the integrative leadership model developed in this chapter. In organisational life, this implies that leadership may be understood as an ongoing learning process through which ethical orientations are explored and negotiated in relation to context, grounded in relational openness and educational depth. It involves attending to how values are expressed, how trust is built, and how power circulates through everyday interactions. Such an orientation does not offer technical solutions to leadership challenges but invites an inquiry into what it means to lead well in the company of others. In this sense, communication becomes the moral infrastructure of the organisation, shaping not only what gets done but also

influencing how relationships are formed and sustained, and how flourishing is imagined, pursued, and shared. Section 4.4.3 draws on educational leadership traditions that understand leadership as a reflective and ethically oriented practice, in which flourishing involves remaining open to learning, unfinished, and attentive to questions of how to live and lead well within a shared world.

4.4.3 Educational Leadership as Reflective Practice

Drawing on Dewey's (1933) vision of education as a process of ethical inquiry and Schön's (1983) concept of the "reflective practitioner," this dissertation positions leadership not merely as a technical or managerial task but as a profoundly educational practice. Educational leadership, in this sense, entails a commitment to moral responsibility, dialogic engagement, and praxis, understood as the continuous interplay between reflection and action. This framing assumes that leaders are always in the process of becoming, learning through uncertainty and contradiction, and that any authority they hold is grounded in their capacity to respond with integrity to complex human situations. I frame leadership in this way in direct response to the central tension of this dissertation: how leadership might enable both organisational functioning and human flourishing without reducing one to the other. In this model, flourishing is not an outcome to be delivered by the leader but a possibility to be held open through ongoing educational engagement. This understanding of leadership as reflective and dialogical practice resonates with John White's (2007) critique of expert-driven notions of human flourishing. Rather than locating authority in abstract expertise or prescriptive knowledge, White (2007) argues for a democratic conception of authority as dispersed and evolving, grounded in diverse lived experiences and collective reflection on the good life. Viewed educationally, leadership is therefore not about claiming expertise on what constitutes a flourishing life, but about enabling opportunities in which such conversations can take place in open-ended, inclusive, and context-

sensitive ways. It requires an openness to others' perspectives and a willingness to co-construct, rather than impose, ethical direction. In this way, I conceptualise the leader not as the arbiter of value, but as a participant in an ongoing, dialogical process of collective sense-making. Such framing also places demands on organisational systems. This framing challenges hierarchical models that centralise decision-making and expertise and, instead, opens space for participatory and non-linear processes of value creation. This aligns with the CA insofar as it affirms the necessity of real freedom, affiliation, and practical reason as organisational goods rather than only as individual traits.

In Dewey's pragmatist philosophy, learning is not confined to formal instruction but emerges through active participation in real-life challenges. He described reflective thinking as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it" (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). This form of reflection is inherently ethical, as it requires attention to context, consequences, and alternative courses of action. For leaders, such reflection is not an intellectual luxury but a practical necessity in navigating value tensions, organisational dilemmas, and competing expectations. Building on Dewey, Schön (1983) introduced the concept of the reflective practitioner to describe professionals who engage in both "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action". In his view, practice is not the application of abstract knowledge but a dynamic process of sense-making, grounded in lived experience. Educational leadership, then, involves the cultivation of an inquiry stance, a willingness to problematise taken-for-granted routines, engage with uncertainty, and respond creatively to evolving contexts. Rather than relying solely on strategic tools or technocratic solutions, reflective leaders act with judgement and ethical discernment. This orientation also supports my broader argument that leadership cannot be reduced to competence models or predefined metrics. It is an unfolding ethical practice that holds open the possibility for organisations to become more than efficient systems. They may instead become places of learning, co-creation, and

ethical development. This understanding aligns with the broader educational aim of supporting human beings in becoming thoughtful and responsible agents in the world. In this sense, reflective leadership can be seen as a site of ongoing learning, where meaning is co-constructed, values are made visible, and responsibility is exercised, a practice Section 4.4.4 examines through the lens of communicative and ethical leadership.

4.4.4 Leadership as a Communicative and Ethical Practice

I argue that an ethical orientation to leadership requires more than a commitment to moral ideals; it involves an ongoing investment in the communicative processes through which values are shared, interpreted, and enacted in organisational life. In this sense, ethics becomes an inherently dialogical and developmental endeavour. Suchanek's (2007, p. 33) approach to economic ethics is particularly insightful here. His guiding imperative, "invest in the conditions for cooperation to mutual advantage," shifts ethical reflection from abstract idealism to concrete organisational practice. This normative orientation calls upon leaders to create spaces where trust, understanding, and shared purposes can emerge organically through dialogue, rather than being imposed by authority or formal rules. This emphasis on communicative processes can be understood as strengthening the link between ethical leadership and educational practice. As I have argued, leadership is not only about setting direction or aligning goals but also about navigating tensions, surfacing values, and negotiating meaning within diverse teams and shifting environments. From the perspective of my proposed model, ethical leadership is a mode of participatory learning that unfolds in relation the other as a subject in their own right. According to Watzlawick et al. (1967/2011), communication is a circular and self-regulating system in which outcomes are determined less by initial conditions than by the quality and nature of the ongoing process. Such a process orientation underscores the need for what Biesta (2020b) calls 'educational

responsibility', the leader's willingness to engage with the unpredictable and unfinished nature of others without seeking control or closure. This responsibility is not managerial but relational. It requires a shift from knowing to listening, from planning to attending.

To lead communicatively is to respond in real time to complexity and contradiction, while remaining anchored in ethical purpose. Such an approach resists the assumption that leadership is required to provide clarity or certainty. Instead, it embraces the educational imperative to dwell with uncertainty and to engage others not as obstacles or resources but as co-constructors of shared direction. Bringing these strands together, I argue that leadership, when understood through the lens of communicative ethics, is inseparable from learning. It is a reflective, emotionally attuned, and ethically situated process of becoming-with-others. From a Capabilities perspective, this emphasis on emotional attunement resonates with Nussbaum's (2011) inclusion of emotion as a central human capability. The capacity to experience attachment, concern, compassion, grief, and joy is not peripheral to organisational life but constitutive of how individuals deliberate, relate, and exercise practical reason. Leadership that neglects this dimension risks reducing persons to functional roles rather than recognising them as affective and relational beings.

As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest in their model of professional capital, sustainable leadership involves cultivating environments where trust, participation, and reflection are treated as conditions for both organisational learning and individual flourishing. On this view, communication is more than a tool of coordination. It can be understood as part of the moral infrastructure of an organisation, shaping not only what is done but how it is understood, interpreted, and reimagined over time. Such communicative spaces are not guaranteed by structures but can be sustained only through ongoing practice and they require intentional leadership that is both pedagogical and relational, willing to learn

through dialogue rather than assert meaning from above. This also resonates strongly with Nussbaum's (2011) CA, which highlights the necessity of creating conditions under which individuals can choose lives they have reason to value. Within my Integrative Leadership Model, communication functions as the process through which organisational prerequisites, leadership qualities, and core elements of flourishing are enacted and sustained, conditions that Section 4.4.5 examines through the question of time and space for leadership learning.

4.4.5 Creating Time and Space for Leadership Learning

While the operationalisation of leadership models often focuses on competencies and structures, I argue that equal attention needs to be given to the temporal and spatial conditions that enable meaningful learning and reflection. Educational theorists have long argued that growth and transformation require not only intention but also protected time and space in which individuals can step back from immediate pressures (for example, see Dewey, 1938; Mezirow, 1991). In fast-paced corporate environments, such pauses are frequently sacrificed in favour of so-called productivity, undermining the very conditions needed for sustainable development. This tension raises questions about how leadership can be understood as an educational and ethical practice within environments shaped by acceleration, fragmentation and demands for efficiency. If flourishing is to be taken seriously, creating opportunities to pause, reflect, and decentre output may be understood as a necessary condition for leadership that is attentive, ethical, and educational.

Creating time and space for leadership learning involves more than scheduling training sessions. It means embedding reflective, dialogical, and exploratory practices into the fabric of organisational life. This may include practices such as leadership labs, peer supervision groups, or facilitated retreats, in which leaders are invited to surface uncertainties, share dilemmas, and engage in structured sense-making. Such practices do not guarantee outcomes but can open up spaces in

which hesitation, doubt and ethical tension are made visible. In doing so, they may allow a different kind of knowledge to emerge—one that is relational, situated, and responsive to lived complexity. Within this model, learning raises the structural question of how time and space are allocated, whose participation is legitimised, and under what conditions reflection becomes possible. Furthermore, spatial conditions matter. Physical and digital environments shape what kinds of interaction are possible. Creating learning-conducive settings—such as informal meeting zones, virtual communities of practice, or designated reflection rooms—can signal that leadership development is not marginal but integral to organisational life. Such settings may support the development of capabilities such as practical reason, affiliation, and control over one’s environment (Nussbaum, 2011), which can be understood as closely linked to both personal and collective flourishing. The act of creating space can be seen as an ethical practice in itself, suggesting that listening, dwelling, and dialogic presence are organisationally valued, not merely tolerated. Ultimately, fostering leadership learning is not about extraction of new competencies, but about nurturing a way of being that is responsive, ethical, and grounded. By making time and space for such learning visible and legitimate, organisations can affirm the possibility that leadership is a lifelong educational process that can no longer be treated as episodic training or skills acquisition but needs to be reconceptualised as a form of adult learning, as Section 4.4.6 develops.

4.4.6 Repositioning Leadership Development as Adult Learning

A further dimension of operationalising the integrative leadership model I am proposing lies in repositioning leadership development as a form of adult education. This reconceptualisation invites a shift away from leadership development as skills acquisition or competency training. It rests on the premise that leaders can be understood as lifelong learners who engage with complexity, reflect on values and assumptions, and co-construct meaning within organisational life. In this

dissertation, I foreground learning as a transformative and reflective process that unfolds across a professional life. This view aligns with key principles in adult education theory, particularly Knowles's (1984) andragogy, Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning, and Illeris's (2011) account of experiential workplace learning. This framing shifts the emphasis from delivery to development, from transmission to dialogue. Leadership learning is here not primarily about absorbing abstract models, but about using such models, including the one I propose here, to support engagement with real tensions and lived questions.

In this light, leadership development can be understood as an ongoing educational encounter rather than a linear path toward competence. According to Knowles (1984), adult learners bring with them rich reservoirs of experience and a desire for self-direction. Leadership development grounded in this tradition recognises executives and managers as co-constructors of meaning and practice. This understanding supports the integrative model's commitment to human dignity, autonomy, and lifelong growth. Leaders are not merely recipients of knowledge—they are also learners, teachers, and reflective agents in their own right. This view allows for a broader understanding of what counts as knowledge in leadership than is typically assumed in managerial discourse, encompassing relational knowing, embodied knowing, and emotional insight, not just analytical frameworks, or performance indicators.

Mezirow's (1991) concept of transformative learning provides an especially powerful lens here. He argues that adults learn most profoundly when they engage in critical reflection on their assumptions, leading to perspective transformation. In the leadership context, this may involve questioning inherited norms of authority, rethinking success metrics, or confronting internalised narratives about power and value. These are not technical adjustments but deep educational shifts—often uncomfortable, yet generative. Framing leadership development as transformative education may enable organisations to invest not only in capacity, but also in forms

of critical consciousness. From the perspective of the CA, this involves cultivating the ability to reason, to choose, and to relate in ways that are grounded in one's values. Development becomes not a path to performance but a way of becoming fully human in relation to others and the world. Moreover, adult education emphasises the importance of relevance and application. Illeris (2011) stresses that learning connects most powerfully when it resonates with learners' real-life contexts, including their emotional and social dimensions. Recent empirical work on leadership development similarly shows that experiential, workplace-embedded learning activities enable leaders to integrate new knowledge with ongoing challenges, enhancing both engagement and transfer into practice (Alawamleh & Al-Tawarah, 2021). For leadership development to be educational in this sense, I suggest that it ought to be embedded in lived organisational realities, rather than detached from them. This means grounding learning in the actual challenges leaders face—conflicts, uncertainty, change—and creating opportunities for experimentation, feedback, and reflective dialogue. Leadership development functions as situated inquiry, inviting openness and responsiveness. This repositioning entails flexible, dialogical learning pathways.

This reconceptualisation of leadership development suggests the need for diverse learning formats—coaching, peer learning, action research, collaborative inquiry—all designed to cultivate not only knowledge, but judgement, empathy, and courage. Such approaches align well with Nussbaum's capabilities of practical reason, affiliation, control over one's environment, and emotions. Nussbaum (2011) understands the capability of emotions as the human capacity to form and sustain attachments to others, to experience love, grief, gratitude, and justified anger, and to develop emotionally without being blighted by fear or anxiety, which underscores the educational relevance of these capabilities in organisational settings. The implications for practice are potentially significant. If leadership is conceptualised as an ongoing form of adult learning, then the organisation becomes not only a place of production but a site of inquiry. Leaders are no longer trained to deliver

outcomes but are supported to ask critical questions, navigate ambiguity, and engage others in shared meaning-making. In sum, understanding leadership development through the lens of adult education deepens the integrative model's educational foundations. It affirms that to lead is to learn—and that such learning, if it is to be meaningful, requires ethical grounding, responsiveness to context, and a commitment to transformative engagement. Yet precisely because flourishing and learning are framed here as normative and ethical commitments, it becomes necessary to ask under what conditions they may be undermined, distorted, or instrumentalised in organisational life. Hence, I turn to the prerequisites and risks of flourishing, examining in particular the ethical dangers of instrumentalising human flourishing.

4.5 Prerequisites and Risks of Flourishing

4.5.1 The Ethical Risks of Instrumentalising Human Flourishing

While the integrative leadership model I propose promotes flourishing as a legitimate and necessary aim of organisational life, I also recognise the ethical risks associated with its potential instrumentalisation. In this section, I therefore attend explicitly to these risks. In contemporary organisational discourse, terms like 'purpose,' 'well-being,' and even 'flourishing' are increasingly invoked in strategic communications, branding, and HR initiatives. However, I suggest that when these concepts are deployed without ethical depth or educational intention, they may risk becoming rhetorical devices, serving managerial agendas while masking underlying issues of power, inequality, and control. Educational theorists such as Biesta (2010) have warned against the reduction of complex human aims to measurable outcomes, a concern I read as closely related to what he calls the 'learnification' of education. A comparable risk can be observed within leadership discourse, there is a danger that flourishing can be co-opted as a means of

enhancing productivity, employee retention, or corporate image, without challenging the structural and cultural conditions that inhibit genuine well-being. When flourishing is treated as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, its ethical and educational value appears to be compromised.

The CA, as articulated by Nussbaum (2011), resists this instrumental logic by insisting on the intrinsic worth of human beings and the irreducibility of their lived experiences. Yet even within the CA framework, I suggest that there is a risk of selective appropriation: celebrating certain capabilities while overlooking others, aligning capabilities with organisational goals rather than individual aspirations, or implementing CA-informed practices in ways that are symbolic but not substantive. To guard against such risks, the integrative model seeks to nurture an ethos of ethical vigilance. This requires leaders to remain attentive to whose flourishing is being foregrounded, under what conditions, and in service of which ends. It also entails cultivating spaces within organisations where employees are invited to question or reframe dominant narratives of success, rather than feeling obliged to conform to them. From this perspective, true flourishing cannot be imposed or engineered; it is more likely to be co-created in dialogue, with respect for difference, dissent, and freedom. From an educational standpoint, this may involve cultivating critical literacy within organisations—the capacity to engage with institutional practices not only for their stated aims but also for the hidden curricula they may carry. Rather than prescribing specific outcomes, this orientation encourages leaders to remain attentive to the ethical implications of flourishing discourses, distinguishing between flourishing as normative commitment and flourishing as a managerial trend. Such attentiveness can help ensure that the model retains its transformative potential, enabling organisations to pursue human development not as a strategy, but as a shared and situated responsibility. In light of these considerations, I next discuss the role of organisational narratives in supporting flourishing.

4.5.2 The Role of Organisational Narratives in Supporting Flourishing

Beyond policies and practices, organisations are shaped by the stories they tell—about who they are, what they value, and what constitutes success. According to Bolton (2010) and Gabriel (2000), organisational narratives can function as both learning resources and moral signposts. They teach individuals how to interpret experience, relate to others, and locate themselves within a broader institutional purpose. These narratives also play a crucial role in shaping collective identity, guiding decision-making, and framing what is considered possible or desirable. In the context of integrative leadership, such narratives are not treated merely as communication tools but may be understood as formative structures that influence ethical orientation and human development. The kinds of stories organisations circulate—whether about resilience, innovation, care, or growth—carry implicit assumptions about what is valued, whose perspectives matter, and what forms of action are seen as legitimate. These narrative patterns may open up, or foreclose, possibilities for flourishing.

When leaders participate in and respond to stories of purpose, struggle, care, and growth, they may contribute to making visible the emotional and ethical dimensions of organisational life. Such stories can support experiences of affiliation—a central capability in Nussbaum’s (2011) framework—by helping individuals feel seen, valued, and connected to something larger than themselves. However, there is a risk that dominant organisational narratives become overly linear, celebratory, or success-driven, thereby excluding forms of complexity, uncertainty, and dissent. Stories that emphasise relentless progress or heroic leadership may inadvertently suppress vulnerability, ambiguity, or non-conformity—all of which play a vital role in ethical learning. As Gabriel (2000) suggests, counter-narratives that challenge such dominant tropes may function as educational interruptions, maintaining space for critique, reflection, and relational openness. Integrative leaders are therefore

invited to cultivate narrative awareness: the ability to read, question, and reframe the stories that circulate within their organisations.

This includes creating opportunities for multiple voices to be heard, especially those on the margins; honouring stories of care and resistance as much as those of innovation and success; and modelling transparency and humility in their own storytelling practices. Narrative awareness in this sense is not a communicative technique, but a form of ethical attention to how meaning is co-constructed and power is negotiated through language. It invites leaders to see themselves as participants in a shared, evolving narrative—one that remains open to new interpretations and attuned to the lived realities of others. Through such narrative leadership, organisations become not only places of production, but also sites of shared meaning and participatory sense-making. In doing so, leaders position themselves as learners within the organisation, attuned to emerging meaning, open to counter-narratives, and committed to ongoing development through relational and dialogic practices. Ultimately, narrative can be understood as an educational medium—one that carries values, shapes identity, and enables ethical reflection. By embedding narrative awareness into the integrative leadership model, organisations may foster an inclusive, context-sensitive, and ethically responsive culture—one in which flourishing is not predefined, but continuously interpreted, negotiated, and lived. In the following section, I turn to the practical applications of the integrative leadership model, outlining how its basic commitments can inform concrete organisational practices that foster innovation, resilience, and social justice in corporate contexts.

4.6 Practical Applications

The practical application of the proposed integrative leadership model can be understood as offering organisations a way of engaging with tensions between

operational effectiveness and the ethical aspiration of human flourishing. Rather than reducing flourishing to an organisational outcome, this section illustrates how selected principles from the model—such as dignity, voice, and well-being—may orient leadership practice in ways that remain attentive to the complexities of contemporary work environments. These examples are illustrative rather than prescriptive and are intended to prompt reflection on how values-led leadership might be more concretely enacted in organisational life. Implementing elements of the integrative leadership model may contribute to shaping environments in which employees experience recognition, belonging, and support in their everyday work. When such conditions are present, individuals may be more inclined to invest emotionally and intellectually in their work and to remain with the organisation over longer periods. Empirical studies on engagement suggest associations between workplaces that support employees' commitment and involvement and indicators such as productivity, profitability, customer-related outcomes, and reported turnover.

I suggest that engagement may be carefully understood as a relational and ethical phenomenon emerging from environments that centre recognition, participatory inclusion, and respect for personhood. For example, Harter et al. (2002) are frequently cited to demonstrate statistical links between employee engagement and organisational indicators. Yet such findings can also be read as indirect indication that when individuals experience meaningful participation and acknowledgement, broader organisational stability may follow. This can lead to low turnover rates, low recruitment costs, and a stable and cohesive workforce. Fostering a sense of belonging and purpose may support employees' emotional and psychological well-being, further contributing to their overall job satisfaction and loyalty. From a Capabilities perspective, this may support the development of affiliation and practical reason (Nussbaum, 2000), by creating space for employees to act with others in ways they have reason to value.

The integrative leadership model foregrounds employee voice and participation across organisational levels, fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. This may contribute to experiences of recognition and belonging, while also opening opportunities for perspectives that might otherwise remain marginal. While these outcomes may be desirable, the deeper value lies in enabling individuals to contribute meaningfully to the ethical and operational direction of the organisation. By actively listening to and acting upon employee feedback, organisations demonstrate their commitment to creating a truly collaborative and inclusive culture, supporting the capability of practical reason from Nussbaum's CA (Nussbaum, 2000) by empowering employees to shape their work environment.

Furthermore, the integrative leadership model recognises that employee engagement and retention are inextricably linked to balancing work and life, and overall well-being. Organisations may seek to create supportive environments in which employees feel empowered to manage their personal and professional lives effectively. This may involve, for example, offering flexible work arrangements, providing access to health-related programs, and promoting a culture that values rest and rejuvenation. Such practices, when guided by ethical reflection, move beyond mere HR strategy and begin to reflect a deeper investment in flourishing. By attending to employee well-being, organisations may reduce experiences of stress, probably leading to job satisfaction, loyalty, and ultimately, improved organisational outcomes. This orientation is not only ethically defensible but may also strengthen organisational resilience by supporting individuals in navigating personal and systemic demands. It also connects directly to Argument 1 of this dissertation, which suggests that organisations may miss opportunities for both individual and collective flourishing when they fail to consider the ethical significance of leadership practices. Thus, fostering cultures of collaboration, participation, and care may enable organisations to be understood not only as sites of performance, but as sites of ethical learning and shared responsibility. In doing so, they potentially contribute to a reorientation of organisational life, a

reorientation Section 4.6.1 pursues through the conditions for innovation and creativity.

4.6.1 Fostering Innovation and Creativity

The integrative leadership model is concerned with how conditions for innovation and improvement may emerge, particularly in environments in which employees are invited to experiment, share ideas, and co-create solutions. This section approaches innovation as a potential outgrowth of environments in which trust, curiosity, and the capability for play are actively cultivated. When seen this way, innovation becomes less about novelty for its own sake and more about the ethical and dialogic renewal of practice. By providing innovation labs—understood here as physical spaces in which time, collaboration, and feedback are intentionally structured—organisations may create opportunities for creative exploration and shared inquiry. As Amabile and Kramer (2011) suggest, such environments may be associated with experiences of engagement and satisfaction, particularly where individuals perceive their contributions as meaningful. These findings suggest that when people are invited to contribute meaningfully to processes of change, their sense of agency and belonging may deepen. Yet innovation cannot be assumed to follow from structure alone. It is relational, fragile, and context-sensitive.

While innovation may result in new products, services, or processes, the integrative model is less concerned with competitiveness as an outcome than with how innovation is experienced by those involved. From a capabilities perspective, what matters is not the rate of innovation but whether individuals are able to develop and exercise their practical reason, autonomy, and relational capabilities through such activities. Encouraging a culture of innovation can also help employees to be equipped to navigate challenges and seize opportunities for personal and professional development. However, when innovation becomes a normative expectation, it risks shifting from a creative opportunity to a source of pressure.

The integrative model invites a different question: under what conditions can innovation be experienced as meaningful, and by whom? Beyond structured initiatives, the integrative leadership model also emphasises the importance of intrinsic motivation and autonomy in driving innovation. By encouraging employees to pursue their own ideas and passions, organisations can unlock a wealth of creativity that might otherwise remain untapped. I suggest that leadership can contribute to conditions that support such autonomy by making resources, support, and room for experimentation available. This approach aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985), which suggests that individuals are more motivated and engaged when they feel a sense of control over their work and are given opportunities to develop their skills and pursue their interests. Additionally, this resonates with Nussbaum's CA (Nussbaum, 2000), particularly with its emphasis on practical reason and the capacity to reflect, choose, and act in relation to one's values, without positioning flourishing as a strategic objective. Framed through the lens of flourishing, autonomy is understood here as a form of *positive freedom*: not simply the absence of constraint, but the real opportunity to ask questions, explore alternatives, and act in ways that align with one's values. Innovation, understood in this sense, is not only strategic, but also educational, as it may involve courage, reflection, and dialogue.

Furthermore, the integrative model recognises that innovation is not solely the domain of designated "innovators" or research and development (R and D) departments, but rather a collective endeavour that involves contributions from individuals across all levels and functions of the organisation. I suggest that, in environments in which silos are questioned, cross-functional collaboration is supported, and opportunities for knowledge sharing are created, organisations may be positioned to draw on diverse perspectives and forms of expertise. Drawing on relational leadership perspectives (Uhl-Bien, 2006), I understand such collaboration not as a guarantee of innovation, but as a relational condition that may allow innovations to resonate closely with the needs and priorities of different

stakeholders. From a Capabilities perspective, this orientation may support affiliation by enabling people to engage with others in ways that are meaningful to them, while also opening space for commitment and adaptability to emerge over time.

In this light, innovation is reimagined not as the pursuit of disruption, but as a participatory process of renewal. This may involve small shifts, gradual experiments or critical interventions into the ways things are routinely done. What matters is not scale, but whether innovation enables more people to participate in shaping the conditions of their work. Fostering innovation and creativity is not merely about implementing specific tools or processes, but rather about cultivating a supportive environment in which employees feel encouraged to experiment, take risks and contribute their unique talents to the collective effort. By embracing an integrative leadership model that prioritises autonomy, collaboration and self-determined learning, organisations may create conditions that allow the potential of their workforce to be fully expressed, and in some contexts this may contribute to forms of innovation that are experienced as meaningful by different stakeholders, including employees. As Bass (1985) suggests, such orientations can be understood as contributing to both organisational effectiveness and human flourishing, without collapsing either into the other. In this sense, the model resonates with ethical and transformational leadership perspectives, while remaining aligned with the CA in resisting a purely instrumental reading of organisational success.

4.6.2 Promoting Organisational Resilience and Sustainability

The integrative leadership model aligns with the principles of sustainability and resilience—as outlined in Chapter One, by foregrounding practices that seek to hold economic performance in relation to social and environmental responsibilities. As per Bansal and Song (2017), embedding sustainability within leadership practice can

involve attentiveness to how organisational decisions generate effects beyond immediate operational boundaries. This connection between integrative leadership and sustainability should not be approached primarily as a strategic advantage. Rather, I treat it as an invitation to re-examine how organisations position themselves in relation to their wider ecosystems. Resilience, in this context, is not understood simply as adaptation, but as an ethically grounded responsiveness to conditions of uncertainty and constraint. This may include initiatives such as reducing environmental footprints, supporting community development, or fostering ethical supply chains. Such orientations may contribute to organisational viability over time, while also remaining attentive to broader societal well-being. According to Epstein and Buhovac (2014), building internal resilience through sustainability initiatives involves not only environmental measures but also cultivating organisational capacities for learning, adjustment, and reflection. At the same time, resilience discourse has often functioned as a form of “responsibilization” (O'Malley, 2009), implicitly expecting individuals and teams to absorb systemic pressures and adapt to harmful conditions without corresponding structural change. Within the integrative leadership model developed here, resilience is therefore not framed as a demand for ever-greater personal toughness, but as a shared organisational and institutional responsibility to create conditions in which people can withstand and transform challenges without being blamed for them. The integrative leadership model supports this orientation by encouraging experimentation, knowledge-sharing, and cross-departmental collaboration. However, the concept of continuous improvement requires careful handling. When taken uncritically, it may reinforce performative expectations rather than create space for ethical reflection. Within this model, improvement is not framed as linear progression, but as a deepening capacity to engage with complexity in relational and inclusive ways.

For instance, Epstein and Buhovac (2014) argue in favour of sustainability audits, which I have also explored within my professional context, as a way of identifying

opportunities to reduce resource consumption, such as minimising travel through the increased use of digital and blended learning formats. While such measures may be operationally beneficial, they also signal an orientation that values systemic thinking, reflexivity, and shared responsibility. In a similar vein, Senge's (2006) notion of the learning organisation emphasises the importance of ongoing learning and adaptation in sustaining resilience. From this perspective, leadership involves supporting conditions in which individuals and groups can respond to uncertainty, reflect on practice, and adjust their ways of working. Yet even well-intentioned improvement initiatives invite critical interrogation of who defines what counts as necessary or desirable change within the organisation. Improvement may signal progress, but not all progress is ethically desirable or contextually sustainable. Without sustained reflection, continuous improvement risks becoming an unexamined imperative, privileging acceleration over depth, and change over purpose. Rather than striving relentlessly to do more or to be better, a capabilities-informed practice might ask what forms of change are meaningful, for whom, and under what conditions. It may recognise that flourishing is not necessarily about addition, but sometimes about subtraction, about knowing what to let go, what to unlearn, and when 'less' might serve deeper human purposes.

As Sennett (2008) reminds us, the pursuit of overperformance can erode craftsmanship, attentiveness, and care. Similarly, as Biesta (2010) argues, educational responsibility begins not with maximisation, but with judgement, with asking what is educationally desirable, not simply what is possible. Bansal and Song (2017) illustrate one prominent example of how sustainability has been embedded into core business strategy, without suggesting a universally transferable model. Epstein and Buhovac (2014) likewise point to the potential of integrating sustainability into core practices as a way of supporting organisational resilience. Similarly, in my own professional context, the implementation of sustainable course design and delivery, such as incorporating sustainability-related themes into business and language training, illustrates how such orientations might be explored

in practice. These examples do not offer a formula for success, nor are they intended as exemplars, but they suggest that sustainability becomes more credible and impactful when it is tied to meaningful learning, participation, and reflexivity across organisational contexts. Moreover, the integrative leadership model recognises the importance of stakeholder engagement in promoting organisational resilience and sustainability, understood here as a relational process rather than a managerial technique.

This requires a shift away from extractive relationships towards mutual engagement and attentiveness. The process is not always efficient, nor is it free of tension, but it may allow for deeper legitimacy and longer-term resilience through actively listening to stakeholder concerns, remaining open to critique, and collaborating on negotiated responses. For instance, Patagonia is often cited for its emphasis on environmental responsibility and transparent communication. Rather than treating this case as a benchmark, Chouinard (2016) illustrates how sustained stakeholder engagement in participatory evaluation can help build trust and legitimacy over time. Porter and Kramer's (2006) work on shared value has similarly been taken up in organisational contexts of varying scale, including smaller organisations that experiment with aligning sustainability and purpose, rather than optimising performance alone. In my own professional context, this could involve critically examining the ecological and social implications of digital learning formats, including their infrastructural demands and potential exclusions. More concretely, I have begun exploring the integration of sustainability-related themes into learning content, not as a curriculum add-on, but as an invitation to reflect on interdependence and responsibility.

On an organisational level, measures such as minimising print materials, favouring virtual formats where pedagogically appropriate, and reviewing vendor choices in terms of environmental and labour ethics may form part of a sustainability-aware learning culture—but such efforts require ethical scrutiny. As Banerjee (2008) and

Parker (2018) both caution, corporate sustainability can become a site of contradiction: performative gestures, often described as 'greenwashing', may project responsibility while leaving underlying power relations and inequalities intact. From a CA perspective, what matters is not whether sustainability is pursued rhetorically, but whether it is enacted in ways that enable participation, dialogue, and shared ownership. In this sense, initiatives such as embedding sustainability themes into training programmes can be understood less as market positioning tools and more as educational interventions that invite reflection on practice. Such efforts may also encourage clients and participants to reconsider how learning, leadership, and sustainability intersect. Nussbaum (2000) emphasises that the capability of affiliation is central to human flourishing, which can be supported through practices that foster interdependence and mutual recognition, including across organisational boundaries.

This orientation also resonates with relational leadership perspectives (Uhl-Bien, 2006), which emphasise leadership as an emergent and relational process, rather than an individual function. By aligning with Argument 1 of this dissertation, this section reinforces the claim that organisations may miss opportunities for individual and organisational flourishing when sustainability and long-term responsibility are treated as secondary concerns. It also aligns with Argument 3 by illustrating how the CA can inform organisational practices without collapsing into instrumentalism. Ultimately, the integrative leadership model does not treat resilience and sustainability as isolated goals. It positions them as relational processes that unfold through dialogue, uncertainty, and shared accountability, thereby keeping open the possibility of flourishing that is ethically grounded rather than guaranteed, a commitment Section 4.6.3 extends to questions of social justice and equity.

4.6.3 Addressing Social Justice and Equity

The integrative leadership model places a strong emphasis on addressing social justice and equity within organisations by attending to the systemic and structural conditions that shape collective well-being. According to Nussbaum (2006), a just society can be understood as one that enables all individuals to develop and exercise their capabilities, a claim that foregrounds the ethical importance of equitable opportunities within organisational life. From this perspective, initiatives concerned with diversity, inclusion, and psychological safety may contribute to reducing disparities and improving representation, provided they are understood as part of a broader ethical orientation rather than as isolated interventions (Dobbin and Kalev, 2018b). This aligns with Nussbaum's (2011) emphasis on the capability of affiliation, understood as the ability to engage in social relations marked by respect, recognition, and non-discrimination.

Yet inclusion cannot be reduced to numerical representation or procedural fairness alone. The integrative leadership model draws attention to the deeper educational and relational dimensions of equity by inviting reflection on how everyday organisational practices—such as hiring, feedback, recognition, and collaboration—may either reproduce or disrupt patterns of inequality. In this sense, equity becomes visible not only in formal policies, but in the lived texture of organisational interaction. Walker's (2003) work on social justice in education, which emphasises the interplay between individual development and institutional conditions, offers a useful point of reference here. Translated into corporate contexts, this perspective suggests that ethical leadership involves attending simultaneously to personal agency and structural constraint.

Engaging stakeholders, particularly those from underrepresented or marginalised groups, may further contribute to this ethical orientation by broadening whose perspectives are recognised in organisational decision-making. Such engagement

can be understood not merely as a reputational strategy, but as an expression of Nussbaum's (2006) principle of treating each person as an end in themselves rather than as a means to organisational goals. When participation is taken seriously, it may open space for more inclusive forms of sense-making and shared responsibility, in line with Lewis' (2012) broader discussion of participation and organisational justice. At the same time, the model remains attentive to the risks associated with depoliticising equity agendas. When questions of justice are framed primarily through compliance, metrics, or branding, they may lose their critical force. The integrative leadership model therefore encourages sustained engagement with questions of power, privilege, and historical exclusion. Leaders are invited not only to widen participation, but to interrogate the conditions under which participation becomes possible. This includes asking who defines legitimate forms of contribution, which voices are amplified or marginalised, and how organisational norms continue to reflect unequal distributions of power.

From a Capabilities perspective, justice involves more than the equal distribution of resources. As Nussbaum (2011) argues, it requires ensuring that individuals have real freedom to pursue valued ways of being and doing. In organisational contexts, this may involve critically examining recruitment, promotion, and development practices to identify barriers that limit such freedoms. Brookfield's (2017) work on critical reflection is particularly relevant here, as it highlights the importance of surfacing implicit assumptions and hegemonic norms that often remain unexamined. Within the integrative model, reflective leadership is understood as the cultivation of spaces for shared inquiry, ethical discomfort, and, following Nussbaum (2006), imaginative courage. Equity, in this light, is not a destination to be reached, but a relational and ongoing process that demands attentiveness, humility, and ethical courage. By integrating these insights into leadership practice, the model frames social justice not as a managerial challenge to be solved, but as an educational and ethical commitment. In doing so, it strengthens the connection between flourishing and practices of recognition, participation, and redistribution across difference.

Building on this perspective, the following section turns to the question of how organisational flourishing may require a redefinition of success itself, moving beyond economic output toward an expansive understanding of what kinds of organisational life are worth sustaining within wider debates about global justice. Such a reconceptualisation is not merely a theoretical preference, but a response to the limitations of dominant management paradigms and a condition for long-term organisational sustainability, a claim Section 4.6.4 develops.

4.6.4 Redefining Organisational Success: An Ethical and Strategic Imperative

Contemporary approaches to leadership and management often remain insufficiently attentive to the ethical and educational dimensions of organisational life. A prevailing emphasis on short-term efficiency and profit maximisation, shaped by neoliberal assumptions, frequently prioritises immediate operational goals at the expense of human dignity, participation, and long-term development. While such approaches may deliver short-term gains, they risk undermining organisational resilience by eroding trust, continuity, and opportunities for collective learning. In this sense, narrowly instrumental definitions of success may generate forms of fragility rather than stability.

From this perspective, organisations that neglect both organisational and personal flourishing may become locked into short-term cycles that compromise long-term sustainability. High turnover, disengagement, and reduced innovative capacity can be understood not simply as operational failures, but as symptoms of leadership practices that insufficiently attend to human meaning, recognition, and participation. When people are treated primarily as interchangeable resources, the ethical significance of personhood is diminished, and the conditions for durable commitment and learning are weakened. Without resisting the instrumentalisation

of flourishing, leadership practices may inadvertently reinforce inequality, exclusion, and organisational short-termism. At the same time, the relationship between flourishing and performance warrants careful handling. While empirical studies suggest that organisations attending to employee well-being often perform well on indicators such as engagement and productivity, framing flourishing primarily as a means to improved output risks hollowing out its ethical content. This raises a critical question: what is being sustained when sustainability itself is reduced to efficiency calculations, and whose development becomes expendable in the process? From this standpoint, redefining success to include human flourishing can be understood as ethically necessary, not because it guarantees performance, but because it affirms the intrinsic worth of human beings within organisational life.

This ethical grounding draws on the integrated understanding of flourishing, respect, personhood, and well-being established in Chapters One and Two, which redefines organisational success through the lens of human dignity and capability expansion rather than technical output alone. Within this conceptual constellation, leadership is reframed as an educational and ethical practice rather than a technique for performance optimisation. Ethical leadership, understood as situated and relational, involves cultivating conditions of trust, transparency, and responsibility, while remaining attentive to power, vulnerability, and inequality. Concepts such as trust are therefore treated not as managerial levers, but as fragile and negotiated relational dynamics. From this perspective, capabilities cannot meaningfully develop unless questions of social justice and equity are treated as central to organisational flourishing.

Beyond ethical considerations, this redefinition of success also has strategic implications. Organisations that attend to human flourishing may be positioned to sustain commitment, learning, and adaptability over time. Rather than forcing innovation or engagement, such organisations may create environments in which

trust, curiosity, and reflective space are actively cultivated. In this sense, strategic advantage emerges not from instrumentalising flourishing, but as a possible outcome of leadership practices grounded in ethical responsiveness and educational depth. The integrative leadership model proposed in this chapter embodies this broad understanding of success by articulating leadership as a normative practice that foregrounds ethical attentiveness, dialogic engagement, and ongoing responsibility for human development within organisational life. This reconceptualisation of success is operationalised through the five core commitments established earlier in this chapter (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3), which align ethical responsiveness with strategic adaptability. By embedding these commitments—ranging from human dignity to continuous learning—into the fabric of organisational life, the model provides a framework for navigating the tensions between efficiency and flourishing.

This redefinition of success suggests that the attitude behind leadership itself becomes a significant element of how success is understood. Ultimately, leadership is repositioned as a pedagogical practice in which the cultivation of human dignity, ethical judgement, and reflective capacity takes precedence over mere coordination. Evaluating this redefined understanding of success calls for a shift away from an exclusive reliance on conventional metrics, which often focus on quantifiable indicators of engagement, turnover, or productivity. Instead, evaluation may foreground human flourishing by attending to whether leadership enables people to develop and exercise central human capabilities, particularly those related to affiliation and practical reason. This means asking: Do people have authentic opportunities to influence their work? Can they meaningfully participate in dialogue and co-construction? Are dissenting voices heard without fear of repercussion? Such an evaluative orientation may call for dialogic and participatory methods, including reflective conversations, narrative feedback, and peer review, which foreground mutual learning and voice rather than hierarchical control. While quantitative metrics can provide initial points of orientation, they offer only a

partial view and may serve as entry points for deeper analysis and dialogue. Critical reflection becomes important in interpreting such data, ensuring that performance evaluations transcend definitive judgements to serve as starting points for inquiry and development, remaining aligned with broader ethical and educational concerns.

In conclusion, redefining organisational success is not primarily about adopting new strategies, but about articulating an ethical and educational commitment to human flourishing. This re-conceptualisation repositions leadership as a dynamic, reflective, and value-oriented practice that seeks to enable individuals and organisations to engage with flourishing as an ongoing, situated, and sustainable process. Having outlined how organisational success might be reimagined in ethical and educational terms, the following section turns to the question of how the integrative leadership model proposed here could be evaluated in practice, and what opportunities and limitations arise when attempting to measure its impact.

4.7 Measuring Success and Impact

4.7.1 Opportunities and Limitations

Evaluating the integrative leadership model proposed here will involve engaging with the challenge of assessing both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of human flourishing and organisational performance. While the development of adaptable metrics may offer orientation, I suggest that some dimensions of success and impact resist precise measurement, particularly where lived experience, ethical complexity, or relational depth are concerned. As Luthans et al. (2020) argue, translating qualitative leadership outcomes into quantitative metrics often carries the risk of oversimplification and misinterpretation, potentially leading to misleading conclusions and ineffective decision making. This difficulty invites a

reflective approach to evaluation, one that foregrounds the normative purposes of leadership. Quantitative metrics such as employee engagement surveys, performance evaluations, and absenteeism rates can, as Demerouti et al. (2021) suggest, provide partial insights into how leadership practices are experienced within organisations. However, these metrics offer only a limited view of organisational health. For example, while high engagement scores may indicate a supportive work environment, they do not necessarily capture the quality of workplace relationships or the ethical texture of everyday interactions. As Stocker et al. (2019) claim, relying solely on numerical data can obscure underlying issues, since indicators such as employee turnover rates do not necessarily reveal whether departures are voluntary or driven by dissatisfaction. Quantitative assessments may therefore serve as entry points for deeper analysis and dialogue rather than endpoints in themselves.

Large multinational organisations such as Siemens AG are frequently cited in the literature as illustrative cases of how servant leadership principles are enacted in complex organisational settings. Servant leadership, as conceptualised by Greenleaf (1977), emphasises the leader's orientation towards supporting the growth, well-being, and development of others rather than exercising authority through hierarchical control. Published accounts describe how decentralised leadership structures and responsibility at local levels are associated with experiences of alignment and accountability. Such accounts suggest that evaluation practices combining numerical indicators with dialogic and localised inquiry may offer an ethically grounded picture of organisational success, while remaining cautious about causal claims. Comparable patterns can also be observed in organisations such as Starbucks, where data informed approaches are combined with an emphasis on community and dialogue. Reported outcomes include high employee satisfaction and lower turnover, although these are best understood in relation to broader organisational cultures of communication and belonging. Such examples reinforce the model's stance that leadership evaluation should remain context sensitive,

ethically responsive, and grounded in reflective inquiry rather than outcome tracking alone. As Cooperrider and Whitney (2020) argue, quantitative metrics require careful interpretation within their broader organisational and cultural contexts to avoid reductive conclusions.

Complementary work on open-ended survey questions suggests that free-text responses can capture this complexity more fully than closed items alone. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2021) characterise appreciative inquiry as a participatory change methodology that deliberately focuses on organisational strengths and ‘what works’ to generate shared learning and positive transformation. Building on this understanding, approaches such as appreciative inquiry offer structured ways of engaging with organisational strengths while remaining open to reflection and critique, thereby aligning with the conceptual stance of the integrative leadership model, which understands evaluation as a practice that should support reflection and learning rather than merely auditing performance. Together, such approaches can contribute to a holistic understanding of leadership effectiveness by creating space for diverse voices and perspectives. Qualitative data need not be treated as supplementary but can form an integral component of a multi-perspectival evaluation approach. As Heifetz et al. (2023) argue, qualitative assessments can transform evaluation processes into invitations for open dialogue, encouraging transparency and collaborative sense making. This orientation is particularly suited to organisations that understand leadership not as an instrument of control but as a reflective and participatory practice. In this sense, leadership evaluation becomes part of a broader educational process that values collective meaning making alongside measurable outcomes.

Published accounts of organisations such as Philips and the John Lewis Partnership describe efforts to combine quantitative indicators with structured conversations that contextualise data and explore lived experience. These practices are presented as attempts to align leadership approaches with organisational values while remaining responsive to changing conditions. Such examples suggest that

success may be understood not only in terms of goal achievement but as an ongoing alignment between values, processes, and human development. If flourishing is to be taken seriously as an ethical and educational commitment, measurement cannot be understood as verification alone. It becomes a form of inquiry, a dialogic practice that helps reveal what leadership makes possible, for whom, and under what conditions. Rather than asking what works in general, the integrative leadership model invites organisations to ask what matters, where, and for whom, and to remain open to this question over time, a commitment Section 4.7.2 pursues through the conditions for communication and reflection.

4.7.2 Creating a Culture of Communication and Reflection

An effective way to mitigate the risks of misinterpretation is to adopt a 360-degree feedback approach, which gathers perspectives from multiple rater groups. Building on work by Luthans and colleagues on multi-source feedback in leadership development, organisations can use 360-degree feedback to reduce the risk of relying on a single vantage point. This method ensures that evaluations reflect a broad spectrum of perspectives, reducing bias and promoting a balanced view of leadership impact. Additionally, presenting evaluation results as an invitation to communicate rather than as a final judgment can help organisations maintain a growth-oriented mindset. Such an approach aligns with Edmondson's (2019) principles of psychological safety, where employees feel comfortable sharing honest feedback without fear of retribution. While such mechanisms offer practical structure, their value depends on how they are enacted and whether they are embedded in a culture that genuinely values voice, vulnerability, and learning. Rather than seeing feedback as closure, the integrative model views it as a dialogic opportunity—an opening for reflection and shared responsibility. Ultimately, while measuring the success and impact of the integrative leadership model presents significant challenges, a well-rounded assessment strategy that integrates quantitative data with rich qualitative insights can provide valuable guidance.

Organisations should remain aware of the inherent limitations of metrics and embrace a reflective, communicative approach to interpreting results.

As Nussbaum (2021) emphasises, fostering a culture of open dialogue and critical reflection is key to creating workplaces that support both individual well-being and organisational success. A crucial element of effectively combining quantitative and qualitative insights into leadership strategies is the practice of critical reflection. Critical reflection, as articulated by Dewey (1933), involves a deliberate and structured process of examining experiences, not only to identify what happened but to explore why it happened and how it might inform future practice. Unlike simple reflection, which may focus on immediate outcomes or surface-level insights, Brookfield (2017) argues that critical reflection requires practitioners to interrogate their assumptions, question habitual ways of thinking, and engage with the broader context of their actions. This aligns with Schön's (1983) concept of the 'reflective practitioner,' who continuously questions their practices and adapts their approach based on real-time feedback and evolving circumstances.

One of the significant challenges in leadership practice is the risk of misinterpreting data, particularly when quantitative metrics are isolated from qualitative insights. Quantitative data, while valuable, often presents a reductionist view of complex phenomena (Brookfield, 2017). For instance, as Avey et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis shows, while development-oriented resources like positive psychological capital are linked to favourable attitudes, high engagement can still co-exist with stress, cynicism, or burnout. This underscores the need to probe beyond headline scores when interpreting survey data. Critical reflection plays a pivotal role here, allowing leaders to explore whether metrics genuinely align with broader organisational goals and employee well-being. Critical reflection not only helps avoid misinterpretation but also transforms evaluation processes into opportunities for growth and dialogue. As Brookfield (2017) argues, the process of reflecting on both successes and failures is crucial for learning, as it invites practitioners to reframe

their understanding of practice. Dewey (1933) emphasises that failure is not merely a setback but a valuable learning experience when approached reflectively. By critically examining why certain leadership initiatives did not achieve their intended impact, organisations can develop a resilient and adaptive leadership model. Such an approach encourages a culture of psychological safety where employees feel valued and heard, contributing to an engaged and innovative organisational climate.

In practical terms, critical reflection within leadership practices can be operationalised through structured reflection sessions, such as ‘Retrospectives’ and ‘Reviews’ commonly used in Agile methodologies (Schwaber and Sutherland, 2020). These sessions provide formal opportunities for teams to reflect on what worked well, what did not, and how processes might be improved. These reflective practices need to reach beyond surface-level analysis and engage with the assumptions and values that underpin organisational behaviours. This involves creating safe spaces where all voices can contribute to the reflective process, thereby enhancing the quality of insights gained and promoting shared ownership of outcomes. For example, organisations like Siemens have successfully integrated critical reflection into their leadership strategies, using open forums and focus groups not only to gather feedback but to critically engage with it, exploring how leadership practices can be adapted to support employee development and organisational objectives. Ultimately, critical reflection bridges data-driven evaluation and the human aspects of leadership, turning metrics into starting points for deeper inquiry rather than closure—keeping organisations adaptive and aligned with their ethical goals. Cultivating a culture of communication and reflection enables leadership to become a process of shared inquiry, where meaning is negotiated, responsibility is distributed, and values are continuously revisited. In such a culture, learning is a function of relation, and leadership facilitates thoughtful presence in complex systems.

In this chapter, I proposed redefining organisational success to centre human flourishing as both an ethical imperative and a strategic resource. This redefinition requires moving beyond short-term performance indicators, recognising flourishing as integral to long-term resilience, engagement, and innovation. It is not merely desirable but necessary if organisations are to act responsibly in contexts marked by complexity, inequality, and shifting expectations around the meaning of work. Furthermore, an integrative leadership model—grounded in Nussbaum’s CA and informed by transformational leadership thinking—offers a coherent framework for embedding flourishing within organisational practice. It holds the potential to reconcile demands for efficiency with commitments to dignity and inclusion, shaping a workplace culture in which capabilities for flourishing are actively supported. In doing so, the chapter has attempted to move beyond abstract ideals and instead sketch out an ethically grounded, contextually situated, and practically orientated leadership approach.

What remains is to reflect on the implications of this integrative leadership model for organisational practice, leadership development, and future re-search, as well as to acknowledge its limitations and unresolved questions. Accordingly, Chapter Five turns to a critical synthesis of the study’s contributions, considering the challenges, implications, and ethical considerations that arise when leadership is approached as an ongoing learning practice oriented towards human flourishing.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Implications

This final Chapter draws together the main arguments of the dissertation and reflects on their implications for leadership, education, and organisational practice. It begins by revisiting the central research question and summarising the theoretical, conceptual, and educational contributions of the study. It then explores the educational implications of the integrative leadership model, as well as the challenges of balancing ethical commitments and efficiency within diverse cultural and organisational contexts. The chapter concludes by outlining the study's limitations and directions for future research, before turning to my own professional learning and offering final reflections on how leadership for flourishing might be enacted in organisational life. It opens, however, by reflecting on the challenges and lessons learned from conducting this research itself.

This study emerged from an unease with dominant leadership models and resulting behaviours that often prioritise efficiency over ethics, and that seem to rarely pause to ask how organisational practices could enhance or hinder human flourishing. In the previous chapters I have not aimed to prescribe a new leadership formula. Instead, I have sought to create a reflective space in which flourishing is treated not as an output to be engineered and measured, but as a relational and ethical concern, grounded in the argument that the conditions for flourishing can be actively cultivated through leadership practice. In the Integrative Leadership Model articulated in Chapter Four, I presented these concerns, particularly the tensions between efficiency and dignity and the ethical risks of instrumentalising flourishing, in a structured way. I did so by linking organisational prerequisites, leadership qualities, and flourishing practices with their anticipated outcomes. In the following sections, I revisit the central research question of what leadership approaches are needed to enable both organisational and individual flourishing in complex corporate environments. I draw together the study's core contributions and

implications, consider the educational and cultural implications of the model, address the anticipated challenges and limitations of this study, and reflect on what this inquiry has meant for my professional practice.

5.1 Conducting this Research: Challenges and Lessons Learned

Undertaking this dissertation as a practitioner-researcher in full-time employment has itself been an exercise in the tensions this study explores. The conditions under which the research was conducted were rarely optimal: time for sustained theoretical engagement had to be carved out alongside professional responsibilities, and the pace of academic inquiry often sat uneasily with the rhythms of organisational life. In corporate settings, decisions are typically made quickly, reflections deferred, and outputs privileged over process. Working within an EdD has required a conscious and at times effortful reorientation towards slowness, depth, and the kind of conceptual attentiveness that resists premature closure. That this reorientation was itself difficult is, I would suggest, evidence of precisely what this dissertation argues: that the conditions for flourishing are not given but must be actively cultivated, and that doing so requires both structural support and personal commitment.

The process has also been marked by circumstances beyond the research itself. The disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic, several career transitions, relocations, and significant changes in my personal and family life all shaped this journey. As the first in my family to pursue higher education and a doctoral degree, I navigated the particular solitude of having no shared frame of reference within my immediate environment—neither at home, where the challenges and small victories of doctoral work could not easily be named or understood, nor among close colleagues, where the pursuit of doctoral study sometimes required justification rather than finding support. The doctoral and EdD communities I was fortunate to find therefore

mattered not only practically but in a deeper sense: they made it possible to be seen in this work. In the language of this dissertation, they provided what the integrative leadership model identifies as a prerequisite for flourishing: spaces of affiliation, recognition, and shared purpose.

That this doctorate was completed alongside senior professional responsibilities, family life, and in a second language—building on the educational path described in the Prologue—is not incidental biographical detail. It is, I would argue, itself an enactment of what Nussbaum means by practical reason and affiliation: the capacity to pursue a life one has reason to value, even when the conditions for doing so must first be created rather than simply found, and even when those closest to you cannot yet see the path you are taking. It is this experience that sustains my intention to continue contributing to this field through further empirical and scholarly inquiry.

5.2 Revisiting the Research Question

This dissertation set out to examine how leadership approaches, informed by Nussbaum's CA and ethical leadership theories, might reconcile organisational efficiency with flourishing to the benefit of all stakeholders. According to Nussbaum (2011), flourishing cannot be understood in isolation from the conditions that either constrain or enable human dignity. In revisiting the research question, I suggest that leadership for flourishing can usefully be considered not as a technical exercise in optimisation, but as a practice embedded in values, context, and power. This argument does not reject the value of effectiveness or commercial success, but it questions the assumptions that frequently define what counts as organisational achievement. I propose a reframing that positions leadership as a site of ethical engagement if flourishing is to be genuinely pursued rather than merely declared.

This study was guided by the following question: What leadership and management approaches are needed to enable both organisational and individual flourishing in increasingly complex and rapidly changing corporate environments, and how can these approaches address the tension between economic demands and human needs? This study's central response to that question is that leadership approaches grounded in Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach, and informed by transformational and ethical leadership theory, offer a principled basis for addressing this challenge. The tension between efficiency and flourishing will not be resolved once and for all, but re-thought as an ongoing site of negotiation, ethically held and contextually lived. By reframing leadership as a pedagogical and relational practice, and by positioning human dignity and capability development as normative criteria for organisational life, the Integrative Leadership Model developed in Chapter Four provides a structured framework for doing so. My aim, to gain theoretical traction and to ensure a solid theoretical foundation on the tension to afford flourishing in the workplace, was fulfilled and I now feel able to test and put the model to work in practice.

This claim is not a call for abstraction but emerges from a conceptual analysis of the tensions between short-term economic objectives and long-term human development. I suggest that these tensions can be addressed by reimagining leadership not as a fixed function or position, but as a situated, ethically grounded, and educational practice. Transformational leadership, as interpreted in relation to the normative concerns on which this study is based, offers a relational modality through which these tensions may be confronted, though not resolved in any final sense. What is at stake is not a managerial recipe but an orientation that values flourishing as a principle of organisational life. In Chapter Four, this orientation is rendered visible through a model that connects organisational conditions such as trust, openness, and dialogic structures with leadership practices that explicitly attend to capabilities and flourishing. I have argued that leadership for flourishing requires the alignment of organisational conditions, cultivated dispositions, and

enacted practices within corporate life. In the next section, I outline how this reframing of leadership for flourishing translates into the core contributions of this study.

5.3 Core Contributions

This dissertation makes three interrelated contributions: a theoretical, a conceptual, and an educational contribution. Firstly, it makes a theoretical contribution by integrating Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach with leadership theory to broaden what counts as organisational success. This reframing of organisational success is not a soft supplement to efficiency but a significant expansion of prevailing definitions of success. Success, on this view, becomes inseparable from the question of what kind of human relationships and developmental possibilities leadership makes possible, while remaining compatible with economic viability. The Integrative Leadership Model proposed here operationalises this broader than usual understanding of success by making flourishing a central evaluative criterion for organisational life, rather than an occasional unintended, serendipitous side effect of economic performance.

Secondly, it offers a conceptual contribution through the development of the Integrative Leadership Model as a normative and heuristic framework. The model brings together the normative orientation of the CA with the relational and future-focused qualities of transformational leadership. It is not offered as a formulaic solution, but as a structured framework to enable critical reflection, participatory engagement, and context-sensitive responsiveness. By providing a language through which tensions between efficiency and flourishing can be examined, the model supports explicit engagement with the values and assumptions that shape leadership practice. Unlike existing leadership frameworks that either neglect

normative foundations or subordinate them to effectiveness goals, this model holds ethical and educational commitments as constitutive rather than supplementary.

Thirdly, the study makes an educational contribution by reframing corporate leadership as a pedagogical and ethical practice oriented towards human flourishing. Organisations are conceptualised as environments in which adult learning, subjectification (which I explain below), and ethical judgement are enacted through leadership practice. By bringing Nussbaum's CA into dialogue with educational theory, this analysis advances an understanding of leadership not merely as management, but as an educational practice that shapes sustainable organisational life and capability development. Unlike management-focused models of leadership development, this study treats the corporate organisation itself as a legitimate site of educational inquiry and ethical formation. Building on these three contributions, the following section turns explicitly to the educational implications of this study for reframing leadership development and organisational learning in corporate contexts.

5.4 Educational Implications of the Study

Positioned within the field of education, this study has been guided by commitments to autonomy, the capacity to act with ethical judgment, critical reflection, and the creation of environments in which individuals may grow. As argued in earlier chapters, leadership, when grounded in educational values, can offer an alternative to performance-driven cultures that reduce development to compliance. Instead, I have framed leadership as a practice of enabling ethical presence, reflective judgment, and participatory sense-making within complex organisational contexts. According to Biesta (2013), the educational task lies not in shaping individuals according to pre-given outcomes but in making space for subjectification, that is, for becoming a person in one's own right. Rather than

offering predefined competences, the integrative model invites reflection on the dispositions, attentiveness, and forms of engagement that leadership of the sort I am advocating makes possible. By resisting what Ball (2003) calls the logic of performativity and what Bröckling (2016) identifies as the imperative of self-optimisation, the study defends and promotes the right of individuals to shape their own developmental trajectories. Subjectification, in this context, involves the capacity to interrupt expected roles and to act in ways not fully determined by organisational scripts. On this account, dialogic team spaces and reflective conversations function not merely as communication tools, but as educational practices through which such agency can be realised.

This reframing challenges corporate learning agendas that tether development exclusively to productivity. It rests on a different understanding of the human: not as resource, but as an agent capable of ethical judgment and situated responsibility. Organisations are conceptualised as spaces of learning and participation, in which leadership becomes pedagogical: enabling dialogue, co-constructing meaning, and making space for uncertainty and plurality. Leadership, thus understood, engages not only with organisational performance but with wider cultural and societal questions about flourishing. It becomes educational not because it trains, but because it creates conditions in which agency, dignity, and ethical judgment can be exercised within institutional life. Educationally, the model suggests that leadership development be designed less as training in discrete skills and more as sustained engagement with questions of dignity, power, and responsibility, supported by organisational structures that protect time and space for such inquiry. The next section considers the anticipated challenges that may arise when such an ethically and educationally oriented understanding of leadership encounters efficiency-driven organisational logics.

5.5 Anticipated Challenges in Balancing Ethics and Efficiency

A primary challenge lies in aligning short-term performance goals with the long-term pursuit of human flourishing. This tension is particularly pronounced in corporate cultures governed by output-oriented metrics. As Biesta (2015) argues with respect to education, evaluation that focuses solely on outcomes obscures the question of whether educational practices can be justified ethically. In a similar way, the present model calls for rethinking what counts as “success” and for developing evaluative approaches that include ethical and developmental dimensions alongside an economic focus. For example, organisations might complement quantitative targets with structured, dialogic review processes that examine how decisions have affected trust, dignity, and capability development across different groups.

Drawing on Nussbaum’s (2011, 2013) account of capabilities, dignity, and emotion, leadership attentive to flourishing involves recognising the unequal distribution of capabilities and considering what each person may require in order to flourish. Respect for dignity would also entail acknowledging that not all employees may wish, or be able, to develop in the ways envisaged by a flourishing-oriented model. Respecting such limits, not as deficits but as legitimate forms of professional presence, can itself constitute a refusal of managerial coercion. Such recognition cannot be derived from efficiency logics alone but requires context-sensitive judgment.

Ultimately, the tension between operational and ethical imperatives should not be regarded as a managerial problem that can be conclusively solved, but as a persistent site of practical judgment. Balancing ethics and efficiency thus become an ongoing educational task requiring attentiveness, reflexivity, and openness to complexity. Transformational leadership, interpreted here not as heroic inspiration but as a relational and dialogic practice, may support such navigation by fostering

trust and shared sense-making around these tensions without dissolving them. Having outlined these tensions between ethical commitments and operational imperatives, the subsequent section attends to the cultural and organisational conditions that shape how such leadership practices could be interpreted and enacted in different contexts.

5.6 Cultural and Organisational Sensitivities

Leadership cannot be abstracted from context. Cultural norms, organisational histories, and systemic structures shape how leadership is enacted, interpreted, and experienced. Scholars such as Hofstede et al. (2010) and Meyer (2014) emphasise the importance of cultural intelligence and contextual adaptability, while Poppenborg (2021) reminds us that organisations are social systems in which formal structures and informal dynamics interact. According to Schein and Schein (2021), organisational culture operates at the level of shared, often unspoken assumptions. Leadership that neglects this dimension risks remaining normatively ambitious yet practically ineffective. For the integrative model developed in this dissertation, this means that its implementation cannot be reduced to procedural adjustments. Edmondson (2022) argues that psychological safety and communicative openness are essential for surfacing and critically examining implicit assumptions. In this light, the model depends on organisational environments in which dialogue, dissent, and reflexive questioning are institutionally supported. This may involve structured reflective spaces, cross-hierarchical dialogue formats, and decision-making processes that explicitly examine whose perspectives are included and whose remain marginal. If leadership is understood as educational practice, it requires more than consultation or symbolic participation. It involves sustained attentiveness to resistance, discomfort, and contestation within organisational life. Such moments may indicate not dysfunction, but the presence

of competing interpretations of dignity, trust, and flourishing. In intercultural contexts, this becomes particularly salient: concepts central to the model may carry different meanings across cultural settings. The integrative framework therefore requires cautious and context-sensitive application, resisting the assumption that a single understanding of flourishing can be universally imposed.

This dissertation is grounded in a German, arguably European, corporate context, and I do not claim universal applicability for the integrative model it proposes. The concepts at its centre—flourishing, dignity, practical reason, affiliation—carry philosophical roots in Western, and particularly Aristotelian and Kantian, traditions of thought. Post-colonial scholarship has drawn attention to the ways in which such frameworks, however well-intentioned, can reproduce the epistemic hierarchies they seek to challenge, by positioning European normative categories as the default against which other conceptions of the good life are measured. Applying the CA in non-European or post-colonial contexts therefore requires more than contextual sensitivity: it demands a genuine openness to the possibility that flourishing may be conceptualised in fundamentally different ways across different cultural, historical, and political locations.

Drawing on Hedge and Enslin's (2021) work on vulnerability and trust in educational contexts, this dissertation has sought to remain attentive to asymmetries of power and the conditions under which certain voices are heard while others remain marginal. Yet I acknowledge that this attentiveness has been exercised primarily from within a European organisational setting. Future engagement with the model would benefit from perspectives that centre the lived experience of those whose understandings of dignity, community, and leadership have been shaped by colonial histories and their ongoing legacies. Such perspectives would not merely add diversity to the model but could fundamentally reorient some of its assumptions—a possibility this study holds open rather than resolves. In light of these contextual contingencies, the next section acknowledges the limitations of this study and

identifies avenues for future research that could test and refine the integrative model.

5.7 Limitations and Future Research

In corporate and educational settings, there seems to be a frequent tendency to jump directly into implementing new leadership models without first working through the underlying theoretical and conceptual issues. Rushing to apply untested solutions carries significant risks, as leaders and managers may fail to reflect on the deeper assumptions guiding their actions. For this reason, this dissertation deliberately prioritises a rigorous conceptual interrogation. Before asking how a model works in practice, it is worth asking what assumptions it rests on, whose interests it serves, and whether its foundational commitments are coherent. This study undertakes that conceptual work. As a conceptual study, this research provokes reflection, reframes assumptions, and makes visible certain normative tensions within leadership discourse that are often rendered invisible by managerial rationalities. Yet precisely because it remains theoretical, its practical relevance and feasibility would most likely benefit from testing now through empirical inquiry. The model developed here remains provisional and context-dependent, open to further exploration, critique, and refinement.

An additional limitation concerns the theoretical scope of the work. While the integration of Nussbaum's CA with elements of transformational leadership provides a potentially fruitful foundation, other theoretical lenses such as feminist ethics or post-colonial perspectives could expand the analysis and surface additional dimensions of flourishing. Future research could critically examine how intersecting forms of power, history, and identity including gender, race, and colonial legacies shape the lived experience of leadership in ways not fully addressed in this dissertation and may further illuminate the possibilities and limits of human

flourishing in organisational life. While this dissertation is grounded in a German, European corporate context, the questions it raises about flourishing and leadership also intersect with debates on global justice—for instance in relation to transnational supply chains, uneven working conditions, and cross-cultural conceptions of dignity. Future empirical and conceptual work would be needed to examine how the integrative leadership model might be adapted, contested, or expanded in non-European contexts, and how far it can speak to injustices that extend beyond single organisations.

While the discussion has been informed by elements of my professional context, the model has not yet been applied or explored within an actual organisational setting. Before empirical testing becomes possible, a prior step is needed: a structured account of how the model might be introduced and used within an organisational setting. This would involve, for instance, identifying entry points for capability-oriented leadership development, establishing conditions for reflective practice, and clarifying the roles of different stakeholders in supporting flourishing as a shared commitment. Developing such an implementation framework would itself constitute a valuable contribution to the field and could serve as the basis for subsequent empirical inquiry. Future studies might explore the operational implications of this integrative model within specific organisations, industries, or cultures. Participatory action research would be particularly well suited to this purpose, as it allows for collaborative inquiry that respects the agency and knowledge of participants—a commitment consistent with the model's own ethical foundations. Case study approaches and ethnographically informed leadership inquiry could similarly surface the contextual, relational, and culturally specific dimensions of flourishing in practice. Such empirical exploration could be particularly valuable for critically assessing how the integrative model can navigate tensions between ethical ideals and organisational realities and for identifying potential practical constraints. This would also include examining, in concrete organisational settings, how trust functions both as a prerequisite and as an

outcome of leadership practices oriented toward flourishing. Established frameworks such as the OECD Guidelines on Measuring Trust provide a potential methodological reference point for developing appropriate indicators, linking the model's ethical commitments to measurable organisational outcomes.

Future research might also examine how the integrative model holds up against the pressures of contemporary working environments—digital transformation and the spread of remote and hybrid work, for instance, raise questions about individuals' real freedoms to learn, adapt, and sustain affiliation and situated judgement, capabilities Nussbaum identifies as central to a flourishing human life. Taken together, these trends suggest that the model's conceptual commitments are not only historically relevant but increasingly urgent as the conditions of organisational life continue to shift. I acknowledge the potential disconnect between academic conceptualisation and organisational communication styles, for instance when concepts such as flourishing or dignity are perceived as vague, idealistic, or difficult to align with performance-driven discourse. Further work is therefore needed to explore how the philosophical and ethical commitments of this model might be translated into organisational language without reducing their critical force. Such translation work may itself be understood as a form of educational leadership.

A further challenge relates to language and scholarly register. This dissertation was written in English, which is not my first language. While I have endeavoured to write clearly and precisely, I am aware that certain choices of expression may reflect conventions of German academic writing that do not translate seamlessly into English scholarly prose. There is also a risk that concepts with deep roots in German philosophical and educational thought—most notably *Bildung*, but also notions of *Mündigkeit* (critical autonomy) and *Verantwortung* (responsibility as relational obligation)—lose some of their conceptual density when rendered in English. I have attempted to introduce and contextualise such terms where they appear, but I acknowledge that readers working primarily within Anglophone

scholarly traditions may encounter these translations differently than intended. This linguistic dimension of the work is itself a form of the translation challenge noted above: carrying meaning across not only theoretical frameworks, but also disciplinary and linguistic cultures. At least some of these directions for future research reflect intentions I hold for my own continued scholarly development, as I hope to extend this conceptual work through empirical inquiry in a subsequent doctoral programme. Against this backdrop of theoretical, empirical, and communicative limitations, the following section turns to my own professional learning, considering how the insights developed in this study are already beginning to reshape my leadership practice.

5.8 My Learning: Professional Practice Impacts

In engaging with this study, I have been repeatedly confronted with the subtle, sometimes obvious, ways in which efficiency-driven assumptions shape my own expectations of leadership and organisational life. This has led me to recognise more clearly how easily questions of dignity, flourishing, and vulnerability can be sidelined when leadership is framed primarily in terms of performance and control. Working with Nussbaum's CA and transformational leadership has encouraged me to treat leadership practice as a form of ongoing ethical and educational inquiry, in which disagreement, doubt, and critique are not signs of weakness but conditions for learning. It has also sharpened my awareness of the importance of language in professional settings. How concepts such as flourishing, capability, or dignity are introduced, negotiated, and translated into organisational discourse significantly influences whether they remain inspirational abstractions or become orienting principles that inform everyday decisions and relationships. Equally, I have come to see how fragile and yet central trust is within my own practice, shaping whether difficult conversations about power and flourishing can take place in ways that are experienced as meaningful by those involved.

In my own professional context, these insights have prompted specific changes in how I design and facilitate programmes for adult learners. Instead of structuring leadership development primarily around competency checklists and performance targets, I have begun to redesign workshops to include structured dialogic sessions in which participants examine real organisational dilemmas through the lens of dignity, power, and flourishing. In one recent programme, this involved inviting managers to analyse everyday decisions, such as resource allocation or feedback practices, by asking whose capabilities were being supported or constrained. The responses were uneven: some participants engaged with genuine curiosity, while others found the framing difficult to connect to the pressures of their daily work. This unevenness was itself instructive, surfacing the gap between conceptual aspiration and organisational readiness that this dissertation has identified as a central challenge. I have also started to review the feedback and evaluation practices I use, asking whether they invite honest disagreement and vulnerability or subtly reward compliance and self-optimisation, though I recognise that asking the question does not guarantee the conditions for an honest answer. Looking ahead, the integrative leadership model developed in Chapter Four has encouraged me to work more intentionally with colleagues and organisational stakeholders to make questions such as "whose flourishing is being advanced here, and at what cost?" part of routine decision-making. In practical terms, I intend to pilot small-scale cross-hierarchical dialogue formats in my own work setting to explore how far the model's assumptions about trust, participation, and capability enhancement can be realised within real organisational constraints. What remains most uncertain, and most interesting, is whether the language of flourishing can travel from conceptual scaffolding into everyday organisational life without losing the critical force that makes it worth using at all. Section 5.8 returns to these questions in a final reflection on what this dissertation has made possible and what it leaves open.

5.9 Final Reflections

This dissertation began with a set of concerns about what is being asked of leaders in a context of increasing complexity, precarity, and moral uncertainty. It also began with the hope that leadership could be reimagined—not only as a functional response to change, but as a space for learning, becoming, and co-creating a more just and flourishing organisational life. This hope remains, though it has become more nuanced. Leadership, as framed in the Integrative Leadership Model I have developed here, cannot resolve all tensions. However, it might provide conditions under which ethical judgment becomes possible, and under which flourishing can be thought, desired, and enacted in ways that remain attentive to difference, fragility, and interdependence.

Central to this reframing is the normative and philosophical foundation provided by Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. Nussbaum's perspective invites organisations to consider which capabilities and forms of practical reasoning their practices enable or constrain. Drawing on Nussbaum's account of practical reason as a central capability, the capacity to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection on one's life circumstances, I understand leadership as partly responsible for creating organisational spaces in which such reflection becomes possible in everyday work.

From this perspective, organisational arrangements that structure participation, feedback, and decision-making in ways that foreclose such reflection, for example through excessive performance monitoring, rigid compliance cultures, or the marginalisation of dissent, can be understood as constraining this fundamental human capability. This shifts the conversation from enhancing performance towards attending to dignity, practical reason, and the relational possibilities inherent in institutional life. In this way, the CA informs a more ethically attentive

understanding of leadership, one that treats human development as both an educational and an ethical concern.

In this sense, the study contributes not only to leadership scholarship, but also to a broader conversation about how people live, work, and learn together in organisational settings. If flourishing is to become more than a rhetorical gesture, it will require courage, listening, and what Nussbaum (2008) describes as narrative imagination: the capacity to understand another person's situation with both intellectual and moral seriousness, to inhabit perspectives different from one's own, and to act from that understanding. This is not a soft supplement to leadership; it is a precondition for it. Without such imaginative attentiveness, flourishing risks becoming a managerial aspiration rather than a relational practice. It will also require the willingness to remain with uncertainty without converting it prematurely into control. It will require leadership that understands itself not as mastery, but as an ongoing educational practice.

Looking back on the entire research process, Sketchnote 5.1 summarizes the essential findings and their significance for the practice of leadership development. It reflects my changed understanding of leadership as a pedagogical practice and captures the open questions that will guide my future path as a practitioner-researcher.

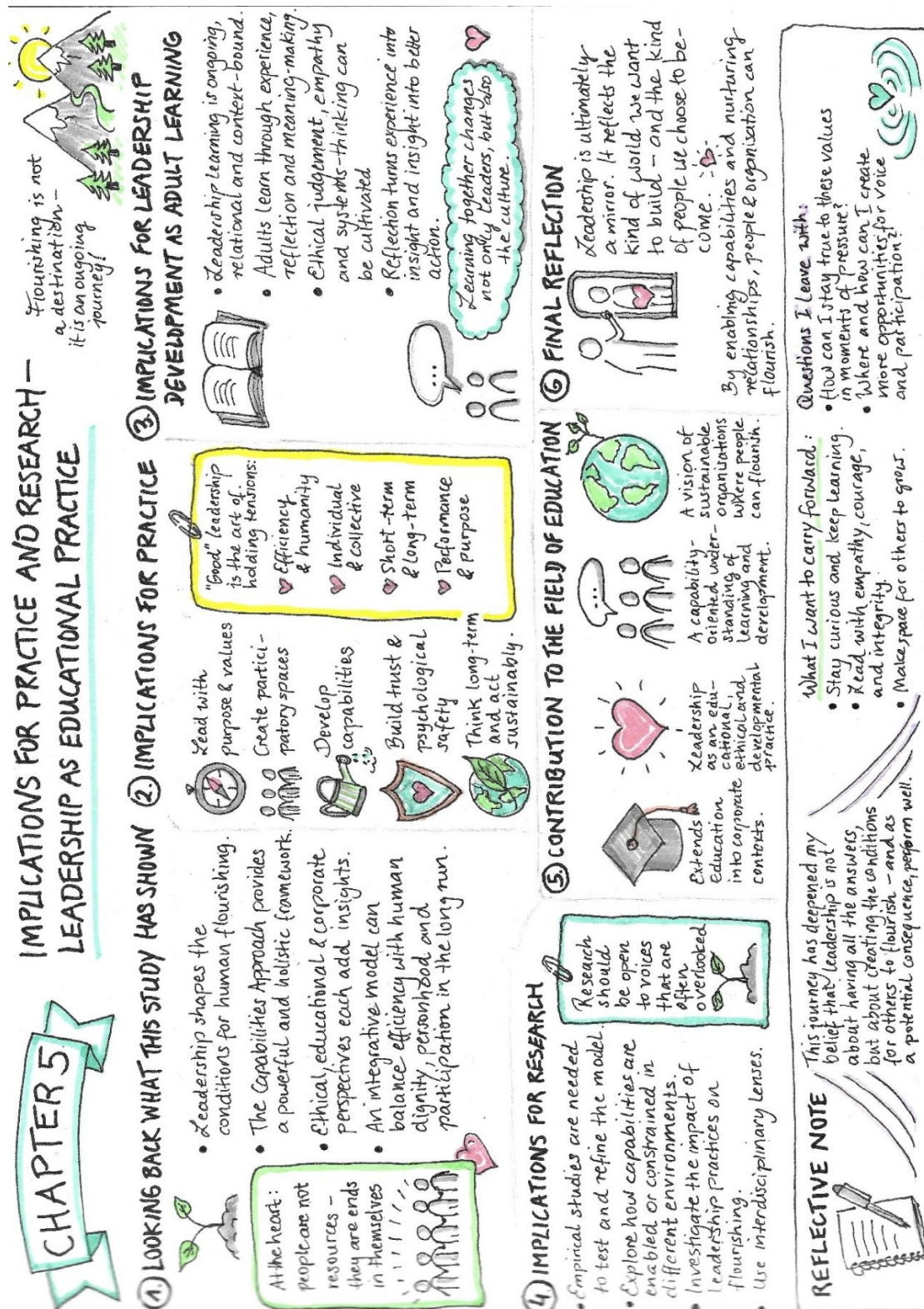


Figure 5.1: Reflective Journal Sketchnote - Conclusion Summary

The Integrative Leadership Model is offered as one possible contribution to this conversation: a conceptual scaffold, informed by transformational leadership and the CA, that invites leaders, educators, and organisations to experiment with practices that place flourishing, trust, and ethical responsibility at the centre of organisational life, while acknowledging the persistent pressures of efficiency and performance within which such work unfolds.

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