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THE ROLE OF A LEADER IN SHAPING EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOUR IN THE VUCA/BANI WORLD

ABSTRACT

The challenges of the turbulent VUCA/BANI world, faced by modern organisations, have led to a different perception of the role of a leadership. An organisation is often able to overcome difficulties owing to a leader who does not only make strategic decisions, but also supports employees. The aim of this article is to identify the role of a leader in shaping employee behaviour in companies in the VUCA/BANI era. The leadership competencies necessary in crisis situations were identified thanks to an analysis of the literature on the subject. Then it was examined how they influence the attitudes and behaviour of contemporary employees. The authors of the study also diagnosed the characteristics and behaviour of leaders shaping both positive and negative attitudes as well as approaches of employees. Furthermore, the relationship between a leadership style and employee commitment was identified, and the dominant communication style in the supervisor-subordinate relationship in situations of uncertainty and threat was determined. In addition, the authors identified the actions taken by leaders who prioritise the development of their team. The research is an attempt to answer the following question: what concept of leadership and what leadership opportunities and threats are present in contemporary organisations? The study used a diagnostic survey method. At the first stage of the research the questionnaire was filled in by employees of enterprises from various industries. The responses were then supplemented with the information gathered during in-depth interviews with managers of the selected organisations and further empirical analyses were conducted. The research confirmed that leaders play a key role in shaping positive behaviour of their subordinates in the VUCA/BANI era, thanks to their attitude, commitment and a proper leadership style. The uncertainty of tomorrow as well as the complexity and instability of organisations constitute a test of leadership. In case of a crisis good leaders seek opportunities for themselves and their organisations, demonstrate creativity, take care of their own and their subordinates' development, set ambitious goals, are resilient to stress, empathetic and able to respond to changing conditions and needs of employees immediately. The presented results may contribute to the popularisation of knowledge about leadership in the VUCA/BANI era, enrich the literature on the subject with practical issues concerning the formation of positive employee behaviour as well as contribute to further research on this issue.

KEYWORDS: *leader competencies, leadership, organisational behaviour, VUCA and BANI world, management style.*

SUMMARY

The challenges of the turbulent VUCA/BANI world faced by modern organisations resulted in a different perception of the role of leadership. Organisations are capable of overcoming difficulties thanks to their leaders who do not only take strategic decisions, but also support their employees. The aim of this article is to identify the role of leadership in shaping employee behaviour in the VUCA/BANI era. The analysis of the literature on the subject made it possible to identify the leadership competencies necessary in case of crisis and to assess how they influence the attitudes and conduct of contemporary employees. The authors of the study also diagnosed the characteristics and behaviour of leaders that shape both positive and negative attitudes of employees. Furthermore, the authors determined the relationship between a leadership style and an employee engagement was identified, and the dominant communication style in the supervisor-subordinate relationship in situations of uncertainty and threat. In addition, the actions taken by leaders who prioritise the development of their team were identified. The discussion was the attempt to answer the following question: what concept of leadership and what leadership opportunities and threats can be observed in contemporary organisations? The authors of the article used a diagnostic survey method. At the first stage of the research, employees from various industries filled in a questionnaire. Their responses were then supplemented with information gathered during in-depth interviews from managers of selected organisations and further empirical analysis. The research confirmed that leaders in the VUCA/BANI era, owing to their attitude, commitment, as well as a proper leadership style, play a key role in shaping the positive behaviour of their subordinates. The uncertainty of tomorrow as well as the complexity and instability of organisations create the conditions in which one may test the efficiency of leadership. Good leaders seek opportunities for themselves and their organisations in crisis, demonstrate creativity, take care of their own and employees' development, set ambitious goals, are resilient to stress, empathetic and able to react quickly to changing conditions and needs of employees. The results of the research may contribute to the popularisation of knowledge about leadership in the VUCA/BANI era, enrich the literature on the subject with practical issues concerning the formation of positive employee behaviour and contribute to further research on this issue.

INTRODUCTION

The dynamic changes in modern organisations have resulted in a different perception of the role of a leader. Effective leadership provides stability and an opportunity to survive in a turbulent environment. Moreover, it also depends on effective communication. Not only do leaders need to make managerial decisions, but they also must have the ability to listen to their subordinates, diagnose problems and care about employees' well-being. A leader should be authentic, inspire trust, reduce stress and build morale in a team. He or she should be a good conversation partner for his or her employees and must be able to notice any irregularities in unstable conditions. Skilful creation of relationships, intuition and, above all, knowledge result in a successful business management.

Because of the major disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic, organisations had to face new leadership challenges, such as managing workers remotely, ensuring health and safety as well as maintaining continuity of employment. According to Walecka and Zakrzewska-Bielawska, in case of a crisis a good leader is able to think on a long-term basis, looking far beyond the current problems, and seeks to broaden the scope of his or her influence. He or she does not accept the present state of affairs and is a visionary, creating attractive goals that he or she communicates to subordinates in a way that inspires them to act emotionally in order to realise the organisational vision (Walecka, Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2009, pp. 381-391).

The challenges of operating an organisation in a rapidly changing world are described by such terms as VUCA and BANI. The acronym VUCA stands for Volatility (Volatility), Uncertainty (Uncertainty), Complexity (Complexity) and Ambiguity (Ambiguity) and is used to describe the dynamic and unpredictable changes in the external environment that affect companies and, above all, the functioning of employees and managers in the business environment (Kaczkowska-Serafińska, 2022, p. 93). The BANI model goes one step further and helps companies to take into account the chaotic and completely unpredictable effects that can have a major impact on their businesses (WU Executive Academy, 2022). BANI is a more complex alternative of VUCA that calls for new leadership, strategic thinking and innovative approaches in solving the problems of the contemporary world (Kolluru, 2023, p. 25).

It offers a fresh perspective, emphasising the fragility (Brittle) of systems, the pervasive anxiety (Anxious), the non-linearity (Non-linear) of development and the inherent incomprehensibility (Incomprehensible) of complex events (Menaria, 2024, p. 1). The aim of the research was to explain the role played by a leader in contemporary organisations, check whether and to what extent leaders' competencies shape employee behaviour and which leadership style is dominant in generating commitment to work in the VUCA/BANI times. Furthermore, the authors of the research studied the importance of communication in the supervisor-subordinate relationship in the face of corporate crises and the developmental actions taken by leaders in situations of uncertainty and threat. In addition, the authors of the study identified leadership opportunities and dangers as well as examined the position of employees, depending on the adopted leadership concept. The information gained thanks to the research can be directly transferable and provides a basis for change for practitioners. In addition, it makes a valuable contribution to the literature on leadership in times of a crisis.

THE ROLE OF LEADERS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON EMPLOYEES BEHAVIOUR

Leadership, as one of the most complex and multidimensional phenomena, has been intensively studied over the years (Olkowicz, Jarosik-Michalak, 2022, pp. 55-63) and has changed in recent years. One may find many definitions of leadership in the literature. What remains constant, however, is that leadership influences behaviour of other people (Pondy 1978, pp. 87-102). It is an art of encouraging people to take effective action, and its essence is a conscious exertion of a particular influence in a group's environment in order to bring it closer to the goal of permanently satisfying its essential needs (Kozminski, Piotrowski, 2004, p. 392). In the discussion on leadership researchers point to so-called old and new paradigms covering approaches to leadership issues. The main periods of leadership theory include such theories as the Great Man era called trait theory (1930-1940), the behavioural era (1940-1950), the situational era (1960), the new leadership i.e. transactional and transformational

leadership (1990) and others (2000) (Olkowicz, Jarosik-Michalak, 2022, pp. 55-63). Leadership is also related to the concept of power, and manifests itself in the ability to use different attitudes and sources of power in order to influence others (Ciuk, 2016, p. 469). Power, therefore, is a form of influencing a person, a group and an organisation, namely an impact on their behaviour, conduct, values and needs. The cause of influence is a negatively or positively motivating action, while the effect is passivity or a change in previous actions, conduct, goals and needs (Gross, 2003, pp. 178-179).

Analysing the bases of power, one may distinguish its five sources: coercion, reward, entitlement, competence and frame of reference (Robbins, 2001, p. 165). The basis of the coercive power is dependency caused by fear. A person submits to an authority, fearing the negative consequences that might result from any disobedience. The reward power, on the other hand, is the opposite of the coercive power. It consists in granting or withdrawing rewards. The more control a leader has over the rewards and the more valuable they are to subordinates, the greater this power is (Lachiewicz, Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2017, p. 395). The legitimate power is a formal power obtained as a result of holding a certain position in a formal organisational hierarchy. All managers in a company have this type of authority: the greater the extent of the authority is, the higher in the organisational hierarchy the managerial position is. The authority of competence or the expert power refers to influence exercised because of experience, special skills or knowledge. The last type of power is the referent power. It denotes an ability to influence other people by identifying with a person and following them. This type of power is possessed only by those leaders who show special qualities that influence informal authority. The effect of this authority is admiration, respect, loyalty and devotion. Subordinates may identify with their leaders because of their personality traits, attitudes, background or views (Lachiewicz, Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2017, p. 396).

Power is greater if leaders' behaviour becomes a model for subordinates. Such leaders motivate their followers to cooperate and contribute to the achievement of a common goal (Antonakis, Bastardoz, Jacquart, & Shamir, 2016, pp. 293-319). They act as role models by demonstrating benevolent, pro-social and generous behaviour, which increases the likelihood that followers will replicate such behaviour (Kafashan, Sparks, Griskevicius, Barclay, 2014,

pp. 139-158). People rely on the guidance of a charismatic leader as a heuristic that the information presented is reliable, trustworthy and valid (Engelbert, Elk, Kandrik, Theeuwes, van Vugt, 2023, p. 3). In order to be able to manage people effectively, it is important to use both formal authority, which encourages obedience, and informal authority gained in everyday work through a dignified attitude, commitment, solidarity, cultural behaviour or raising the level of knowledge (Nogalski, Śniadecki, 2001, p. 118). Efficient leaders are able to recruit and motivate followers for collective action (Bastardo, van Vugt, 2019, pp. 81-95; Grabo, Spisak, van Vugt, 2017, pp. 473-485).

The typology presented above demonstrates that an authority is a complex phenomenon based on a creation of relationships between a person exercising authority and those obliged to accept it. The extent to which subordinates accept an authority depends largely on their ability and willingness to submit to the authority of a superior. However, the authority itself does not make every manager a leader. What is crucial, it is a number of specific actions that, when implemented continuously, thoughtfully and appropriately to the situation, will make it possible to create a leader and a positive image of authority (Stoner, Wankel, 1996, p. 261). Consequently, leadership is one of the key factors influencing business development. It is a multidimensional and complex issue that has been the subject of many interpretations and approaches. The perception of the role and importance of the leader has been changing in recent years. In the traditional approach, leadership was seen as a gift that only a few possessed. Nowadays, many researchers, theorists and practitioners emphasise the need to consider the whole spectrum of different aspects and styles of leadership, which requires new approaches and concepts of leadership (Tidd, Bessant, 2013).

LEADERSHIP IN THE VUCA/BANI WORLD

In the business world, the term VUCA gained popularity after the 2008 global financial crisis and refers to unstable and chaotic business, economic and physical environment we face every day (Sullivan, 2012). Reflections on a complex and uncertain world, referred to by the acronym VUCA, first

appeared in Bennis and Nanus' leadership theory in 1985 (Czarkowska, Zawadzka-Jabłonowska, 2021, p. 55). The acronym consists of the first letters of four English words, namely volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. The only constant is change (**V – volatility**); thus, past experiences and best practices are no longer solid markers for identifying solutions for today and the future (Codreanu, 2016, pp. 31-38). We are constantly aware that many of the phenomena around us are unpredictable. It can therefore be argued that the future is also unpredictable (**U – uncertainty**). The sense of chaos we experience is mainly due to information overload. It is therefore difficult to distinguish between what is important and what is meaningless, and it is hard to answer this question (**C – complexity**). The phenomena we encounter are usually different from what we initially expected, they are ambiguous (**A – ambiguity**). There is a lack of interpretative clues. The only guidance seems to be total freedom of interpretation (Sidor-Rządowska, 2022, pp. 393-394).

The acronym VUCA, which has been used for years, and the accompanying slogan that 'the only constant is change' are no longer sufficient, and so a new term has emerged, BANI, which more accurately characterises the main features of reality, emphasising that it is fragile, restless, non-linear and incomprehensible. The author of this acronym is Jamais Casio, according to whom we live in an age of chaos, an age that intensely, almost violently, rejects structure. This is not mere instability, it is a reality that seems to actively resist efforts to understand what is happening. The current moment of political chaos, climate catastrophes, global pandemics and more – clearly demonstrates the need to make sense of the world, the need for a new method or tool to see shapes in an era of chaos. The methods that have been developed over the years to recognise and respond to widespread disruption seem increasingly, painfully inadequate as the world seems to be falling apart (Cascio, 2020).

The acronyms presented above help to make sense of the contemporary reality. The main similarities between VUCA and BANI include the fact that these models facilitate a creation of solutions that will make it easier to deal with the challenges faced by organisations at present. The main difference is that BANI is more up-to-date than VUCA and enables answering key questions about the future. BANI focuses on the answer to the question on what should be done and how to manage organisations at present (Meter, 2023).

The models allow us to understand the dynamically changing business world and to adapt to it, while the choice between them depends on the specific needs and situation of an organisation.

The VUCA model is particularly useful in industries that experience rapid changes, such as IT, media and high-tech. It helps to anticipate, plan and find a solution in uncertain situations such as market changes, new trends or economic crises. However, the BANI model approach may be more useful in sectors where communication skills and employee flexibility are important, such as business, services or education. It helps to identify employees who are more flexible and able to adapt to the changing demands of an organisation. Certainly, the VUCA model is better suited to dynamic environments where change is inevitable and companies need to get used to new circumstances. The BANI model, on the other hand, is useful in situations where a concrete and rapid response to a crisis such as a pandemic is required (Kowalski, 2023). The world of BANI is a world of conscious people striving for greater resilience, adaptation, validity and intuition, providing guidance on how to deal with the current challenges to which the VUCA model does not sufficiently respond.

Many organisations did not manage to survive during the crisis, and one of the main reasons of this fact was the lack of competence of managers. This difficult period required leaders to act immediately. According to Adair, a leader is *a person who possesses the qualities (personality and character) and expertise in his or her field that enable him or her to lead a group so that it carries out its tasks effectively, forms a cohesive team and meets the individual needs of its members. The leader does not act in isolation, but shares his or her functions with the team. He or she is in charge of the group's work so that all members can feel responsible for achieving the defined goals* (Adair, 2007, p. 32). According to Pagonis (2006), competence and empathy are the essence of leadership. What can help a leader to produce creative activities in teams, according to Brzezinski, is a creative management style that increases commitment, perpetuates 'team spirit' and communication embedded in patterns of interpersonal relationships (Brzezinski, 2009, p. 95). Leadership effectiveness therefore depends on a number of factors. Brzezinski argues that these factors include: management styles, experience, personality and aptitude to be a leader, ability to work in a team, ability to influence others and responsibility

(Brzezinski, 2009, p. 103). As emphasised by many authors in the literature, there is no universal leadership style and no immutable list of qualities that leaders should possess, but it is known that they should incorporate a variety of leadership styles from traditional to creative i.e. encouraging and motivating employees to achieve goals and results.

In the world of VUCA and BANI, the definition of the core of leadership needs a new interpretation. Hierarchical leadership does not work effectively anymore in this increasingly complex BANI world in which changes are rapid and incomprehensible and where a society is rapidly changing. It requires collaborative, participative, delegated and distributed leadership. Transformational leaders have been observed to focus on long-term issues and future requirements. Leaders are useful, humanistic and inspiring from a complete perspective (Avolio, Bass, 2001). Transformational leadership can build greater innovation and a satisfying organisational culture and lead to organisational effectiveness. Transformational leadership intellectually stimulates employees and encourages them to find new solutions in the face of rapid changes. Additionally, it builds strong relationships within a team. Change leaders treat each team member individually, which helps to create an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. Transactional leadership is goal-oriented with an emphasis on further monitoring and regulating outcomes. The phenomenon of the transformational leader, according to Bass, stems from treating subordinates as equal partners. He formulates high, but unambiguous, standards that apply to all, is open, willing to offer advice, help and support, is an attentive listener, leaves colleagues plenty of autonomy, encourages self-development and, when necessary, shares knowledge and experience. At the same time, he or she is perceived as a firm person, able to reprimand when necessary, but generally maintaining a close and informal relationship with employees (Strategor, Potocki, 2002, p. 226). Transformational leadership can be an effective leadership style in the BANI world because it focuses on inspiring people, building relationships and adapting to organisational changes, instead of sticking to rigid structures as well as punishment and reward systems. Nowadays organisations need leaders who are more self-aware, emotionally intelligent and able to apply various leadership styles in various situations. Therefore, they need all these attributes to be able to build a performance-enhancing culture in their organisations. They

need to think radically, be authentic and transcend their egos however, no one can achieve this without continuous personal and professional development (Knights, Grant, Young, 2020, pp. 6-21). In the literature, we call them Transpersonal Leaders (Knights, Grant, Young, 2018). For a leader to reach the heights of leadership competence, he or she must reach an advanced level of adult development (Kegan, 1982). However, if organisations make use of the cutting-edge training solutions developed over recent years together with the learning process, new habits and experiences of the leaders of the future can be shaped in the most effective way. The new coaching processes proposed by organisations make it possible to develop new transpersonal leaders in a short period of time. However, in order to achieve this, they need to fully understand what leadership is all about in today's world and how emotions influence behaviour and the way leadership styles determine the climate and culture of the organisation (Ogbonna, Harris, 2000, pp. 766-788). The aforementioned development process can take place at two levels individual and organisational only when a leader has reached the stage of personal development can he or she focus on leadership development at the level of the whole organisation.

VUCA and BANI theories have important implications for leadership in the contemporary world. According to the VUCA theory, leaders face challenges that require a new approach to leadership. They need to ensure that their vision and mission are being implemented regardless of the changing circumstances. They must understand opportunities in a rapidly evolving environment, build on strengths and address weaknesses, foster a culture of collaboration and commitment within teams, while listening to employees and incorporating their views into decision-making processes as well as have the ability to adapt to changes quickly with the focus on organisational goals.

According to the BANI theory, leaders are required to be resilient, i.e. they must be able to deal with problems at any time and understand that their subordinates may feel anxious, helpless and incapable of making decisions. They must be able to accept that cause and effect are no longer predictable and to deal with seemingly senseless consequences.

To sum up, the above theories require leaders to acquire new skills such as collaboration, agility, flexibility, empathy, adaptability and intuition to deal effectively in a changing and chaotic environment. In order to function

reliably and prudently, organisations should be aware of the right leadership in shaping the desired attitudes and behaviours of employees and the opportunities and risks associated with it. Leadership, therefore, is the ability to lead an organisation into the future, it is about looking for new opportunities that are emerging more and more quickly and making effective use of the best ones (Zgoda, Nowakowska, Nowakowska, 2017).

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research was to identify the role of leadership in shaping employee behaviour in companies in the VUCA/BANI era. This objective was achieved through specific objectives. Firstly, the focus was on identifying the differences between a manager and a leader in order to clearly define the concept of a leader. In addition, leadership competencies in times of crisis were identified on the basis of scientific literature and the impact of such skills on employee attitudes and behaviour was determined. The authors also analysed and assessed the influence of leaders' competencies and behaviours on employee engagement and attitudes in times of VUCA/BANI. Owing to this, it was possible to determine which competencies of leaders are helpful in shaping positive behaviour of subordinates and those that negatively affect the fulfilment of their tasks. The role of communication in leader-employee relations in changing organisational conditions was also determined. Besides, some mechanisms of a communication process were described and it was stated what barriers may occur during any flow of information and what should leaders pay special attention to in a situation of constant turbulence in organisations. The next step was to find out what leadership style is used by leaders in modern organisations and to explain the correlation between a particular leadership style and behaviour of employees. An important aspect in achieving the main objective was also to determine leaders' commitment to their teams' development in case of uncertainty and risk. This is crucial because a competent team may often guarantee an organisation's success. In addition, the authors identified the leadership concepts prevalent in companies in times of crisis and determined the relationship between these concepts

and employee behaviour. The last specific objective of the research was to identify opportunities and threats faced by leaders in contemporary organisations. Times of crisis are often a test for team managers and allow for the identification of individuals who should take on leadership roles, which, in correlation with the main objective, is extremely important.

The research adopted the main hypothesis according to which a leader in the VUCA/BANI era, through his/her attitude, commitment, as well as leadership style, plays a significant role in shaping positive behaviour of his/her subordinates. In addition to the main hypothesis, **six subsidiary hypotheses were adopted**. The first was that a leader's competence generates both positive and negative attitudes and behaviours of employees. According to the second hypothesis, communication is a key factor in leader-subordinate relationships under changing organisational conditions. The next hypotheses stated that the democratic leadership style is the most desirable in creating positive employee behaviour in a crisis and, due to uncertainty and threats in which modern organisations operate, a leader places even more emphasis on the developmental activities of his or her team. The next hypothesis was that transformational leadership dominates in companies in the VUCA/BANI era. The last supporting hypothesis, on the other hand, was that in contemporary organisations one may observe both leadership opportunities and dangers.

The research on the role of leadership in the VUCA/BANI era included in the following stages: research design, execution of the study, analysis of the results and a summary of conclusions and recommendations. The first stage involved defining the research sample, establishing the technique for collecting information, pre-defining the method of data analysis. The study population consisted of employees and managers of enterprises, located in Poland and belonging to various industries. For the research purposes, direct and indirect techniques of collecting information were applied and a measurement tool in the form of a questionnaire was used. The choice of the research methods was motivated by the need to gather detailed information on the perception of the role of leadership from the perspective of employees and leaders themselves as well as the paucity of research on leadership issues analysed in the broader context of shaping employee behaviour in the VUCA/BANI era. A detailed analysis of the literature on the subject made it possible not only to recall the

most important concepts concerning the issues at stake in the article, but also to formulate methodological assumptions and to develop the authors' questionnaire. The diagnostic survey made it possible to collect the necessary data for the verification of the proposed hypotheses. The choice of statistical methods was necessary to establish the relationship between management and leadership styles, and employee behaviour.

In the first stage of the research, a questionnaire survey was conducted among employees of enterprises from different industries. The responses were then supplemented with information gathered through in-depth interviews from managers of the selected organisations. The sample selection was purposive and the questionnaire was addressed to people working in companies located in Poland and representing individuals from various industries. The first people to fill in the questionnaires were the employees managed by the leaders invited to the interview. Due to the low return of the questionnaires, employees of other enterprises who were willing to participate in the study were also asked to complete them. The survey was anonymous and the participants were informed of the purpose of collection of their data as well as assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The respondents were therefore able to undertake the prepared questionnaire in an informed manner. Also, in order to evaluate the questionnaire, there was a pilot study during which the survey was made available to 9 employees, representing small, medium and large enterprises and industries in case of which their future might be uncertain, complex and ambiguous. It included such industries as catering, hospitality, energy, administration and TSL. The respondents' suggestions regarding the re-editing the selected questions and answers into closed ones were taken into account. The feedback helped to improve the measurement tool and to determine the actual time needed to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared in Google Forms platform and the research was conducted between April and June 2023. The data was reviewed on an ongoing basis in order to ensure a correct completion. Thanks to the pre-verification of the survey tool and the targeted selection of respondents, a lack of response to the obligatory questions was avoided.

These responses were complemented with the information gathered through in-depth interviews with managers in the selected organisations. The range of questions used in the interviews was developed as a result of the literature

study and consultations with a group of managers in previous leadership research. Individuals were invited to participate in the research if they met specific criteria, i.e. if they managed a team of at least 10 people in organisations of different sizes, operating in industries particularly vulnerable to change at present, and if they had at least five-year work experience in their current organisation. Each respondent was made aware of the research assumptions and assured of the confidentiality of the information provided, the anonymisation of their personal data and the provision of the compiled survey results upon request, which resulted in none of the invited individuals refusing to participate in the interview. The interview dates were set at least two weeks in advance and the respondents received a range of questions by email. The interviews were conducted on the dates set by the respondents either in person or through the designated communication tools. None of the respondents consented to have their statements recorded, hence the data were transcribed on the fly. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Respondents provided comprehensive answers to each of the questions asked and expressed a strong interest in the topics covered, while also indicating the need for such research.

The final stage of the research design process was the selection of the data analysis method. Taking into account the purpose of the research and the methodology, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis for nominal data and cluster analysis were selected for the development of the results of the research. Descriptive statistics (mean, median and standard deviation) were used to summarise numerical variables. Correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between a management style and employees' behaviour, and between a leadership concept and personnel actions. Cramér's V was chosen as the measure of correlation of two nominal variables. Cluster analysis was used to discover groups of employees' behaviours, i.e. behaviours that often occur together. The hierarchical clustering was performed, using variables as objects. The similarity measure was Jaccard index as the variables were binary and the average linkage was used. The choice of these methods made it possible to answer the question of whether a particular leadership style influences a positive or negative employee behaviour and how the concept of a given leadership influences the attitudes and commitment of subordinates. The calculations were performed with the use of the R environment (R Core Team, 2023) and Microsoft Excel.

The authors of this article are aware of the limitations of the adopted methodology and know how these limitations may affect the conclusions of the research. Potential biases might have been brought about by non-probability sample selection, a lack of responses and measurement errors. Nevertheless, the results provide valuable data for both academics and management practitioners. In case of a larger number of participants of the survey the responses could differ slightly. However, despite the not overly large sample of respondents (148), the responses of employees and managers on a common theme were often consistent, so it can be assumed that the respondents have a similar view on the role of leadership in the VUCA/BANI world. In order to increase the representativeness of the sample, diverse individuals were selected. The participants in the survey were employees of companies in different industries. An analysis of the survey results with regards to an industry could have given a more detailed insight into whether the type of business has an impact on the leadership concept and leadership style of particular leaders, and whether certain behaviours of superiors and subordinates are more or less required for specific tasks. Potential measurement errors are inherent in all questionnaire-based surveys process as described above. In conclusion, in terms of future research on the role of leadership in the VUCA/BANI world, it is recommended that separate studies are conducted on different groups of respondents.

A total of 99 women and 49 men participated in the survey (2 people did not specify gender). There were adults of all ages. The largest group of respondents was 18-25 years old. The smallest proportion was recorded among those aged 46 and over. The majority of respondents (98%) had a secondary or higher education. They were employees of companies in various sectors. The most frequently mentioned industries were: economic-administrative-office (18%), hotel, catering and tourism (11%), transport and freight business (7%), electricity, electronics and energy (5%). These organisations ranged from micro (17%) to large companies with more than 250 employees (35%). The largest number of people who were willing to participate in the survey had been working in their current organisations for between 2 and 5 years (41%). Those with the longest length of service were 13%, while those with the shortest were 33%. The respondents' monthly salary was most often up to PLN 6,000 net (73%).

The interviews were conducted with 10 people (seven women and three men). They were managers of medium and large organisations operating in different industries. Each of the interviewees managed a team of at least ten people and had been in a managerial position in their current organisation for at least five years.

THE ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

In the first stage of the research, on the basis of a thorough analysis of the literature, e.g. Jarosik-Michalak, Miętkiewicz, Olkowicz (2022), the competencies of a leader particularly desirable in times of business crisis were diagnosed and fourteen of them were listed. The respondents were asked to indicate to what extent, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means *no influence* and 5 *a large impact*, the studied competency influences their behaviour and attitudes. The answers with the highest number of indications were: responsibility, ethical behaviour, work culture and sharing knowledge (see Table 1.). The data show it clearly that employees want their leaders to act ethically at work, share their knowledge with them and take responsibility for their decisions. This is particularly important in times of VUCA/BANI, as the uncertain future and rapid changes cause stress and fear regarding the continuity of employment among employees. Leaders' bad attitude, lack of respect or irresponsible behaviour could intensify conflicts within a team and thus affect work efficiency.

Table 1. *Evaluation of the impact of the leaders' competencies on the attitudes and behaviour of employees (descriptive statistics concern the assessment of the impact of a given competency on the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant no influence and 5 meant a large impact)*

Competencies of a leader	Mean	Median	Std. dev.
Responsibility	4,23	4	0,93
Ethical behaviour	4,23	5	1,00
Work culturew	4,21	4	0,91
Sharing knowledge	4,17	4	0,99
Specialist knowledge	4,04	4	0,90
Dealing with stress	4,02	4	1,10
Adaptation to changes	3,87	4	1,10
Creativity	3,73	4	1,01
Analytical thinking	3,71	4	1,04
Instant messaging skills	3,40	3	1,14
Ability to work in virtual teams	3,34	3	1,17
Knowledge on new technologies	3,24	3	1,09

Source: the authors' own study

In the next part of the survey the respondents were asked to indicate actions and/or traits that, in their opinion, trigger positive behaviour and those that negatively affect their commitment and attitude to work. Among the traits that build positive employee attitudes and willingness to complete tasks the most common one was motivating employees, marked by as many as 63% of people. This was followed by listening effectively to employees, providing accurate information and honesty. The details, in order from the most desired by employees to the least important, are summarised in Table 2. As can be seen from the results presented, in order for employees to be committed to their tasks, willing to perform them, and at the same time care about interpersonal relationships, they should be properly motivated by their leader. A true leader should know his or her team and select tools individually to meet the needs of the individual. This can only happen if he is able to listen to what his subordinates are saying to him. A leader is also expected to be reliably informed, honest and quick to make decisions, especially when the survival of the organisation

depends on them. A wise leader is able to admit mistakes, as every failure is a lesson for the future. He or she should also be able to inspire others to action, without disregarding their opinion in making final decisions. The modern leader does not need to be confident, persistent, charismatic, it is good for him to be able to show a 'human face' in these difficult times for everyone.

On the other hand, behaviour perceived negatively by subordinates mainly included unethical behaviour, e.g. humiliation, discrimination and bullying. This answer was marked by almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents (73%). Employees also disliked disrespectful behaviour towards employees (38%), favouritism towards selected employees (33%) and lack of communication (28%). Slightly fewer respondents further indicated a lack of respect and appreciation for the employee's talent, a poor culture of being a supervisor, inappropriate treatment of subordinates, providing false information and excessive supervision. From the responses quoted, it is clear that people want to be respected, valued and informed about the issues facing the organisation. Money or material benefits are not always the deciding factor in mobilising a team.

Table 2. *Ranking of the importance of leadership competencies in shaping positive behaviour of employees*

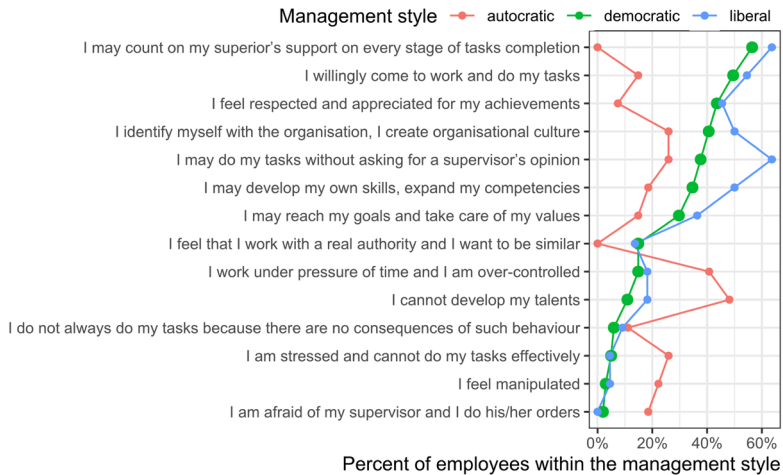
Competencies	Percent of respondents
Motivating employees	63%
Effective listening to employees	39%
Providing reliable information	28%
Honesty	28%
Inspiring subordinates	23%
Admitting mistakes	21%
Quick decision making	20%
Empathy	19%
Common decision taking	15%
Openness	13%
Delegating tasks	12%
Self-confidence	11%
Ability to influence others	5%
Perseverance	3%

Source: the authors' own study

The next analysed aspect was the communication process between leaders and employees. The majority of respondents rated this aspect well. More than half of the respondents indicated that their leader is open to communication. There was also a high response rate for providing accurate information (48%), giving feedback (41%), communicating clearly and to the point (39%), remembering answers heard during a conversation (34%) and being an attentive listener and observer (33%).

The authors of the study wanted also to find out which leadership styles are used by leaders in contemporary organisations. In order to determine this, the respondents were asked to identify the behaviours that most closely reflect the way their superiors behave. The responses showed that the most common contemporary leader is a democrat who involves employees in decision-making, delegates authority, encourages participation in deciding work methods and goals, and provides feedback. This was the answer marked by as many as 67% of respondents. It should be noted, however, that apart from the democratic style, the autocratic (18%) and liberal (15%) styles are still used in organisations in Poland. Such answers are not surprising, as the leadership style often depends on the situation, sometimes the industry in which organisations operate or the expectations of staff. While some employees want to participate in the process of co-determining the fate of the organisation, others prefer to have tasks to be imposed on them.

A specific leadership style has a strong influence on employee behaviour. With regard to leaders behaviour, a diagnosis was made of the behaviour of employees directed by their superiors. According to the identified democratic leadership style, employees indicated the following behaviours as the most frequent behaviours of their supervisor: support from their supervisor at every stage of the tasks, willingness to come to work, experiencing respect from their supervisor, identifying with the organisation, being able to complete tasks without being asked by their supervisor, being able to achieve their own goals or expanding their scope of competence. The prevalence of the different behaviours depending on the leadership style is shown graphically in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Employee behaviour and leadership management style*

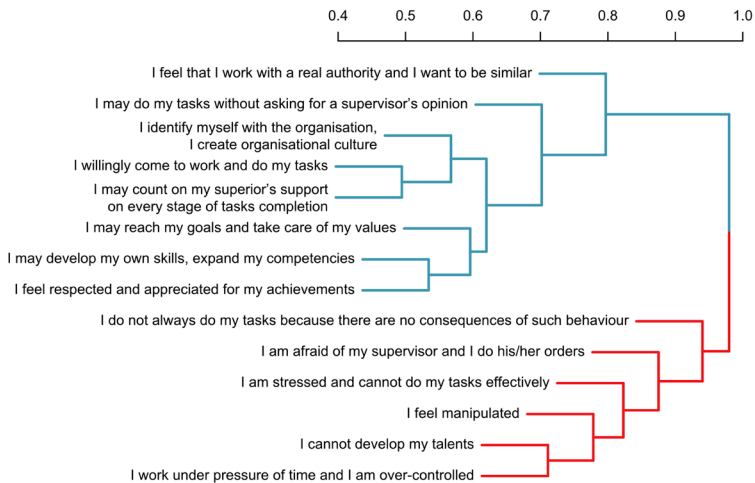
Source: the authors' own study

As far as the implementation of tasks commissioned by a leader was concerned, the respondents they could select any number of the listed behaviours. Some behaviours occurred more often together, others less often. In order to recognise the group structure of these behaviours, a hierarchical cluster analysis was performed. Variables rather than cases were the units of analysis. These variables were binary (the behaviour is present or absent). The measure of the distance between the variables was $d = 1 - \text{Jaccard index}$, instead of the usual Euclidean distance. The Jaccard index was chosen because it puts more emphasis on the co-occurrence of variants than the co-non-occurrence, while the Euclidean distance treats the two cases equally.

The grouping results are shown in the dendrogram in Figure 2. The dendrogram shows the levels at which the variables combine. From the left, the faster the behaviours combine, the more often they occurred together in the respondents. Conversely, the later the groups of behaviours come together, the less often they occur together. From the analysis of the chart, two separate groups emerge, which can be described as positive behaviour (blue lines) and negative behaviour (red lines). Positive behaviours are more similar to each other – most of them connect at lower levels (further to the left in the graph) – than most

of the negative behaviours. This means that various positive behaviours often occur together, while negative behaviours are more likely to occur alone. In particular, indications of *I do not always do my tasks...* are the least associated with other negative behaviours (they appear least in connection with others). Overall, the grouping is consistent. Silhouette value for each variable is greater than zero. The average silhouette equals 0.32 and 0.12 in the positive and negative behaviour group respectively. The larger average silhouette in the group of positive behaviours confirms the conclusion about the greater coherence of this group, i.e. more frequent occurrence of various behaviours simultaneously.

Figure 2. Dendrogram for the cluster analysis of employee's behaviours



Source: the authors' own study

As two groups of behaviours were identified, which usually do not occur together, each respondent was assigned to one of the two separate groups. If the respondent had only positive or only negative behaviours, she/he was assigned to the positive or negative category, respectively. In the few cases where behaviours of both types occurred, the respondent was assigned to the positive category if she/he had a predominance of positive behaviours and to the negative category if there was a predominance of negative behaviours or an equal number of positive and negative behaviours.

The relationship between behaviour type and management style was examined by creating a contingency table (Table 3) and calculating the association measure. Cramer's V amounted to 0.45, which indicates strong relationship between these variables. As shown in the contingency table, democratic and liberal management styles correlate with positive behaviours, whereas autocratic style mainly evokes negative ones.

Table 3. Contingency table for behaviour type and management style

Type of behaviour	Management style		
	Autocratic	Democratic	Liberal
Negative	19	18	4
Positive	8	83	18

Note: $\chi^2 = 30.71$, $V = 0.45$

Source: own study

Despite the difficulties that leaders have to face in contemporary organisations, they do not forget about employee development issues. A good leader understands that in order to survive in the market, to be competitive, it is necessary to build a competent team that is able to overcome any difficulties. Of the employee development activities listed in the questionnaire, according to the respondents, all are applicable (see Table 4). Most often, as part of development, the leader delegates tasks, increases responsibilities and authority, and identifies employees' development needs and provides feedback on work. Rotation, delegation and individual career paths are used least frequently.

In line with the research assumptions, an attempt was also made to establish which concept of leadership – transactional or transformational – is present in contemporary organisations. The respondents' opinions were divided. Slightly more (54%) people indicated transactional leadership based on enhancing employee motivation through transaction. Although transformational leadership based on inspiring subordinates is more frequently indicated in the literature in the VUCA/BANI era, in Polish companies people still expect motivational tools from the leader (which is also confirmed by the answers to the earlier question).

Table 4. Frequency of leaders' activities directed at employee development (Statistics for respondents' indications on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant that the activity is not used and 5 that it is used commonly)

Action	Mean	Median	Std. dev.
Delegates tasks and increases my responsibility and authority	3,59	4	1,15
Identifies my development needs and provides feedback on my work	3,23	3	1,35
Takes care of my relationships socially and well-being	3,07	3	1,38
Offers training that meets my needs	2,77	3	1,38
Uses rotations and/or secondments to develop competencies	2,47	2	1,31
Develops an individual career path	2,46	2	1,30

Source: the authors' own study

The correlation between employees' behaviour and leadership concept was also examined. As shown in Table 5, the transformational style attracts almost exclusively positive behaviours, whereas the transactional style, despite the majority of people displaying positive behaviour, pulls most of the people with negative behaviours. Cramer's V amounted to 0.33, which is less than the correlation between employee's behaviour and management style but still it is a considerable association.

Table 5. Contingency table for behaviour type and leadership concept

Type of behaviour	The concept of leadership	
	Transactional	Transformational
Negative	33	8
Positive	48	61

Note: $\chi^2 = 14,50$, $V = 0,33$

Source: the authors' own study

According to the presented data one may observe that in the case of the transactional leadership, negative behaviour is quite common. Thus, disciplining, using admonitions, punishing, etc. is used by leaders in the organisations studied. It is important to bear in mind that this situation may not always be

due to bad intentions on the part of the leader. In some cases, it is necessary to discipline staff in order to increase work efficiency. Negative motivation is also applied to employees who are not characterised by independence or creativity.

The aim of the final stage of the research was to find out what leadership threats are present in modern organisations and what opportunities arise from leading employees well. The main threats included the deterioration of communication in social relationships, the underutilisation of employee talent and chaos in employee selection. Bad leadership can also have a disruptive effect on work-life relationships and affect the deterioration of working conditions.

On the other hand, the leaders in the VUCA/BANI era have an opportunity to gain employee loyalty and commitment, contribute to employee well-being and correct social relations as well as employment stability. Quite a few people also opined that good leadership has an impact on the image of the organisation, a cohesive and competent team and good quality products/services. From the responses quoted, it can be concluded that a good leader is the calling card of an organisation that attracts and retains the best employees. A leader, through his or her attitudes and behaviours, builds his or her personal brand, which in today's world can be a guarantor of an organisation's success.

In order to complement the information obtained from employees, the authors of this article carried out in-depth interviews among the managers of the selected organisations. A total of 10 interviews were conducted. Each person interviewed managed a team of at least ten people in a company operating in the market for at least five years. The respondents were first asked to identify, in their opinion, the differences between a manager and a leader, in particular the roles they performed. For the respondents, there was no clear answer. Some respondents said that every manager is a leader, others had a different opinion. What all responses have in common is that being a leader is closely linked to certain competencies. According to the respondents, a leader is a person who, above all, inspires the team, motivates them to act and has a vision. He or she is someone who can be trusted and counted on, especially in crises. A manager, unfortunately, does not always have these competences. He or she is primarily focused on completing tasks and achieving results, which does not exclude being a leader. In summary, it is possible to be a leader and a manager at the same time if, in addition to management

functions, you have soft competencies and, based on your authority, you can convince your employees of your vision.

The main focus was put on the behaviour of subordinates and an attempt to identify which leadership competencies are essential in shaping positive employee behaviour and attitudes in times of uncertainty and constant change. Among the competencies mentioned by all respondents, trust, empathy, honesty, communication and feedback skills were repeated. Also important for subordinates, according to the respondents, is the creativity of their supervisor, reacting quickly to change and looking for opportunities in changing organisational conditions. Some of the respondents pointed out that the listed competences are universal and, whether we are talking about the world of VUCA or already BANI, they will be needed to shape the positive behaviour of their employees.

The next stage of the research was to examine the communication process in a situation of constant change in organisations' environment. According to all respondents, communication is essential for a company to survive and for employees to have stable employment. Information should be checked and communicated in a way that the employee can understand. In an environment of constant change, it is also important not to overload employees with too much information and to always make sure that the message has been read correctly. It is also worth integrating available tools/communicators into the communication process, as their use will be inevitable in the future. On the other hand, oral communication still comes first according to the majority of respondents, as a four-way conversation helps to build trust within the team. The main barriers mentioned were a reluctance to communicate, a lack of willingness to solve current problems and socio-cultural differences as a result of globalisation and employee migration.

The next question was which leadership style the respondents use in their work and how they manage their team as well as whether their behaviour results in employee engagement and motivation. As in the survey, as many as nine managers chose a democratic style based on partnership, delegation of tasks and full support in the daily struggles.

As it was highlighted in the theoretical section, the VUCA world, in which modern organisations have to operate nowadays, requires leaders to learn

continuously in order to be able to react and adapt quickly to inevitable changes. Leaders were asked whether they prioritise the development of their staff, whether they take steps to improve their competencies and whether, in their view, this approach is key to being competitive. All leaders agreed that staff development is important, especially in these difficult and uncertain times. With a competent workforce, it is easier to achieve the goals set or to fight the competition. As for the actions taken in organisations, the most frequently mentioned answer was training on the job, which was given by 7 respondents. Subsidising specialised courses or studies, as well as increasing the scope of tasks and responsibilities were also mentioned.

The final stage of the research focused on determination what concept of leadership dominates in organisations and what opportunities and threats they see for themselves as leaders in a VUCA/BANI world. Similarly, as with employees, there was no clear answer as to what type of leadership is dominant in contemporary organisations, although in this case also one vote more was given to the answer that it is transactional leadership. Such answers may be due to the fact that enterprises in Poland are not yet prepared for transformations related to such rapid development of new technologies and thus implementation of new management concepts.

According to the respondents there are both threats and opportunities waiting for leaders in contemporary enterprises. A major danger is the loss of corporate reputation. Through widespread access to the Internet, information can be passed on very quickly, which can even determine the demise of a company. Any unethical behaviour of a leader, lack of or poor quality information or conflicts at work are noted. Therefore, leaders strive to act ethically and take care of their personal branding. Also, the fear of what is new and not keeping up with the times can pose a certain threat to leadership, as the leader will not be able to meet the demands of the company and may lose authority in the eyes of subordinates or be replaced. Half of the respondents therefore try to keep their knowledge and technical skills up to date with new IT technologies.

When it comes to opportunities, every difficult situation is a chance to test ourselves. It is in crises that we discover true leaders – people who are responsible, emotionally mature and not afraid to take risks. The uncertainty of tomorrow, the complexity and instability of an organisation is a test

of leadership. According to all respondents, the leader who is able to mobilise his or her team in the difficult conditions of the organisation and maintain the quality of the products and/or services offered is a winner. The VUCA/BANI times really show who is a true leader and who should not be in this role.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The world in which modern organisations have to operate is full of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. Technology is evolving at an astonishing pace and artificial intelligence is dominating many areas of business, replacing human labour. The rapid transfer of data, ever-changing societal trends, as well as crises: economic, energy or environmental, make managing a business quite a challenge. A leader, in order to stay in the market nowadays, should be flexible, catch all irregularities quickly and make the right decisions and communicate them to his or her team. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to predict future events and situations, as exemplified by the Covid-19 pandemic, where a leader not only had to manage his team and keep employees safe, but also become a support for his subordinates in a situation where it was unclear what the next day would bring.

The research has confirmed that in the VUCA/BANI era a leader plays a significant role in shaping positive behaviour of his or her subordinates through his or her attitude, commitment and leadership style. Leaders are responsible for quality and flow of information, they do not only talk but also listen, as communication is a key factor in leader-subordinate relationships in changing organisational settings. He is a democrat who is a partner in discussion with his subordinates.

The complexity of the phenomena taking place in companies environment as well as their ambiguity, make it necessary to be open to new experiences, to continuously explore knowledge and to look for leadership opportunities in every situation. A good leader is creative, cares about his or her own development and that of his or her subordinates, sets ambitious goals and is a keen observer who is able to respond in a timely manner to the surrounding variables and the needs of employees. Because the future is fragile, turbulent,

non-linear and incomprehensible, that is, a BANI leader should be resilient to stress, empathetic, have intuition, and look for opportunities for himself and the organisation in the situation.

The authors of the study are aware of the fact that the small number of participants in the study (both employees and group leaders) is a limitation to extend the findings and conclusions to a wider population. Nevertheless, there is little research addressing the issue of leadership in shaping employee behaviour, hence this study serves as a guide for leaders on how to lead their team to achieve success as well as a contribution to further research on this issue.

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