

Adaptive Leadership as a Systemic Enabler of Business Model Transformation in the Digital Economy: A Bibliometric and Exploratory Study

Diana-Maria Georgescu¹ and Florina-Raluca Voiteanu²

^{1) 2)} *Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania.*

E-mail: georgescudiana25@stud.ase.ro; E-mail: voiteanuflorina14@stud.ase.ro

Please cite this paper as:

Georgescu, D. M. & Voiteanu, F. R. (2026). Adaptive Leadership as a Systemic Enabler of Business Model Transformation in the Digital Economy: A Bibliometric and Exploratory Study. In C. Vasiliu, D.-C. Dabija, A. Tziner, D. Pleșea, & V. Dinu (Eds.), *Proceedings of BASIQ International Conference on New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption, 12th Edition* (pp. 224-232). Editura ASE.

DOI: 10.24818/BASIQ/2026/12/064

Abstract

Organizations currently operate in a volatile business environment, struggling to keep up with the accelerated technological evolution. Operating in this fast-paced changing framework characterized also by an increasing environmental complexity and fast-tracked digital transformation, adaptive leadership has emerged as a critical capability for organizations undergoing business model transformation. The purpose of this paper is to explore the intersection of adaptive leadership and business model transformation through a mixed-methods approach that combines bibliometric analysis and an exploratory conceptual investigation. Based on a dataset extracted from Scopus and Web of Science covering the period of 2022–2025, the study identifies key research trends, thematic clusters, and structural gaps in the literature. The bibliometric analysis covering 12,028 scientific documents from 4,216 sources, reveals a rapidly expanding field, registering 33.81% annual growth rate and an increase in scientific production from 1,890 publications in 2022, to 4,528 in 2025. The findings also highlight a strong international collaboration dynamic involving 26,965 authors identifying adaptive leadership, sustainable development, innovation and artificial intelligence as dominant research themes. The results indicate journals such as Sustainability, Frontiers in Psychology, and Journal of Business Research being the most influential publications sources, while China, US and UK emerging as leading contributors to scientific production. These findings reveal a fragmented field dominated by micro-level behavioral perspectives and lacking integrative frameworks linking leadership, transformation, and organizational performance. To address this gap, an exploratory conceptual model, Business Soul2Soul, is proposed, a systemic perspective on aligning human potential, leadership processes, and organizational transformation. This perspective responds to real-world challenges leaders face in aligning strategic organizational change with human adaptability. The paper contributes to the literature on innovative business models by proposing a systemic perspective on adaptive leadership as a multi-level enabler of business model transformation and by outlining directions for future research and managerial practice.

Keywords

Adaptive leadership; business model transformation; bibliometric analysis; organizational change; innovative business models

DOI 10.24818/BASIQ/2026/12/064

Introduction

Organizations operating in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments are increasingly required to transform their business models in response to technological disruption, evolving market dynamics, and shifting stakeholder expectations. VUCA, a concept developed initially by the U.S. Army War College, was adopted in management research to describe unpredictable business environments

(Bennet and Lemoine, 2014; Snowden and Boone, 2007). In the current unstable economic situation, leadership plays a central role in enabling not only strategic change, but also organizational adaptability, and here, the human factors empowering the alignment between individual talents, leadership actions, and organizational purpose are not consistently included in business models (Foss and Saebi, 2017; Teece, 2010).

While adaptive leadership and business model transformation have been extensively explored as separate domains, their integration remains conceptually underdeveloped (Heifetz et al., 2009). Existing research tends to emphasize either leadership behaviors in uncertain contexts or structural and technological aspects of transformation, without offering a coherent integrative perspective (Foss & Saebi, 2017; Teece, 2018; Wirtz et al., 2016).

This paper addresses this gap by combining bibliometric analysis with exploratory empirical insights, aiming to map the structure and evolution of the research field, identify dominant themes and influential contributors, uncover structural gaps, and propose a systemic perspective on adaptive leadership.

1. Review of the scientific literature

In the scientific literature, adaptive leadership is conceptualized as the capacity to mobilize individuals and organizations to respond effectively to complex and changing environments (Heifetz, 1994). It emphasizes learning, flexibility, and the ability to navigate uncertainty. In parallel, business model transformation focuses on reconfiguring value creation, delivery, and capture mechanisms in response to technological and market changes (Foss & Saebi, 2017; Teece, 2010;).

Despite their conceptual compatibility, the integration between adaptive leadership and business model transformation remains limited. Leadership is often treated as a contextual or behavioral variable, rather than as a central mechanism shaping transformation processes. This disconnect highlights the need for a more integrative perspective. Empirical and conceptual research suggests that leadership attributes such as flexibility, learning orientation, and tolerance for ambiguity are positively associated with innovation capacity, organizational resilience, and strategic renewal (Teece, 2022). However, these relationships are often presented as linear and universally applicable, with limited consideration of contextual possibilities and organizational heterogeneity.

While such leadership characteristics are assumed to foster adaptive cultures that encourage experimentation, knowledge exchange, and continuous improvement, the mechanisms through which these cultural dynamics are enacted and sustained remain insufficiently theorized. Moreover, although employees in such environments are generally expected to engage more actively in change initiatives and organizational learning processes, the extent to which this engagement translates into effective capability development is not consistently demonstrated. And this may result from the difficulty of organizations in becoming conscious that managing rapid change means adapting to uncertainties by leaning (Năstase et al., 2024).

This limitation reflects a broader gap in the literature on the micro-foundations of dynamic capabilities, where the linkage between individual-level actions and organizational-level outcomes remains conceptually underdeveloped (Barney & Felin, 2013; Felin & Foss, 2005; Felin et al., 2015).

2. Research methodology

Bibliometrics, as an integral component of the contemporary research apparatus, fulfills a critical role in documenting the evolution of scientific inquiry, augmenting the institutional information environment, and refining the information literacy of the academic community. The adoption of bibliometric methodologies has accelerated significantly, facilitated by the development of sophisticated software capable of processing extensive longitudinal datasets with high precision.

This research is grounded in contemporary perspectives on leadership theory and dynamic capabilities, with a particular emphasis on how leadership behaviors contribute to the emergence of organizational alignment processes that integrate human, strategic, and technological dimensions (Helfat & Martin, 2015). It is hypothesized that these internal coherence mechanisms act as key mediators in the relationship between leadership and organizational performance outcomes.

The objective of this inquiry is to identify and analyze the current knowledge frontiers regarding adaptive leadership in complex environments. Utilizing the Biblioshiny 5.0 interface (a component of the Bibliometrix R-package), this study interrogates author networks, institutional affiliations, and national collaborations to delineate the domain's architecture. The research aims to provide a comprehensive landscape to guide future management practices, guided by four primary research questions:

R.Q.1. What is the trajectory of scientific production regarding adaptive leadership, and what is the observed annual growth rate of the field?

R.Q.2. What are the primary document types and domains defining the application of adaptive leadership in optimizing organizational performance?

R.Q.3. Which countries have emerged as the most significant contributors to the topic from 2022 until late 2025?

R.Q.4. What are the predominant thematic clusters identified through the co-occurrence matrix of the research corpus?

To identify the role of leadership in organizational optimization, a multi-stage bibliometric approach was developed. Data were retrieved from Elsevier's Scopus and Clarivate's Web of Science Databases using a Boolean search string focused on: "adaptive leadership", "leadership adaptability", "business model innovation", and "business model transformation".

From the Scopus database, the query string used led to 12.000 results, which were cleaned for duplicates, articles with no authors, or without a DOI. The keywords that were put on an exclusion list were: article, humans, and n/a. For Web of Science Databases, the query string output resulted in a smaller number of articles, only 141 results, filtered then by the same publication years as in the Scopus database (2022-2025), ending up to 79 results, then filtered in English, ending up to 77 results. The two databases were merged, removing duplicates and analyzing 12.028 articles. The document types were articles, books, book chapters, conference papers, proceedings, and reviews.

The temporal scope of the analysis was restricted to the period between 2022 and 2025. Following the initial extraction, records were filtered to include articles, conference papers, books, book chapters, and reviews. The final curated dataset comprises 12.028 documents sourced from 4.216 distinct academic outlets. The structural composition of the corpus is dominated by original articles ($N = 9.205$), complemented by books ($N = 1.388$) and book chapters ($N = 1.258$). The annual scientific production demonstrated a consistent upward trajectory, escalating from 1.890 documents in 2022 to 4.528 in 2025.

The data were processed using Biblioshiny, an interactive web interface for the Bibliometrix R-package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). This software was selected for its robust science mapping capabilities and advanced visualization of performance metrics. The analysis evaluates 26.965 unique authors, characterized by a collaboration index of 3.15 co-authors per document.

The study employs the following bibliometric parameters:

- Performance Analysis assessing citation impact, with the dataset showing an average of 10.41 citations per document and a document average age of 2.14 years.
- Science Mapping utilizing a density of 13.650 "Keywords Plus" (ID) and 25.472 "Author's Keywords" (DE) to perform co-word analysis and identify thematic clusters.
- Collaboration Patterns analyzing the internationalization of the field, which currently exhibits an international co-authorship rate of 22.45%.

The high document-to-author ratio and the concentration of scientific production suggest an adherence to Lotka's Law within this emerging domain, where a core group of highly productive authors drives the majority of the intellectual output. Statistical validity is maintained by addressing the sparsity of the co-occurrence matrix and acknowledging potential database biases inherent in Scopus-indexed metadata.

3. Results and discussion

The bibliometric analysis of the research corpus from 2022 to 2025 reveals a field in a state of exponential expansion, characterized by a robust annual growth rate of 33.81%. With scientific production escalating from 1.890 to 4.528 annual documents, the domain demonstrates high intellectual vitality. This growth is underpinned by a dense network of 26.965 authors and a high collaboration index of 3.15, signaling a

transition toward large-scale, multidisciplinary inquiries into adaptive leadership and organizational alignment.

The structural integrity of the field is reinforced by the predominance of original articles ($n = 9.205$), complemented by a significant volume of books and chapters that suggest the codification of foundational theories. Despite the low average document age of 2.14 years, the average citation rate stands at a high 10.41 per document. This immediate impact pattern indicates that the scholarship is highly relevant to contemporary management challenges, facilitating rapid knowledge transfer and theoretical refinement within the academic community.

As can be seen in Table no. 1., for the scientific production, the internationalization of the field is evidenced by a 22.45% international co-authorship rate, reflecting a global consensus on the necessity of adaptive frameworks in volatile environments. The high density of “Author’s Keywords” (25.472) relative to “Keywords Plus” suggests a conceptually diverse and expanding field.

Table no. 1. Scientific Production

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	2022:2025
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	4216
Documents	12028
Annual Growth Rate %	33.81
Document Average Age	2.14
Average citations per doc	10.41
References	0
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	13650
Author's Keywords (DE)	25472
AUTHORS	
Authors	26965
Authors of single-authored docs	1901
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	2100
Co-Authors per Doc	3.15
International co-authorships %	0.2245
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	9205
article; early access	7
book	1388
book chapter	1258
conference paper	161
proceedings paper	4
review	5

Source: Authors' own research landscape

During the analyzed period, the volume of publications increased from 1.890 documents in 2022 to 4.528 by the end of 2025 (Figure no. 1.), representing an impressive total growth of approximately 140% over four years. This escalation, reflected in the calculated annual growth rate of 33.81%, signifies a period of “scientific intensification”, where the academic community is rapidly prioritizing these constructs to address the complexities of modern management and dynamic organizational environments.

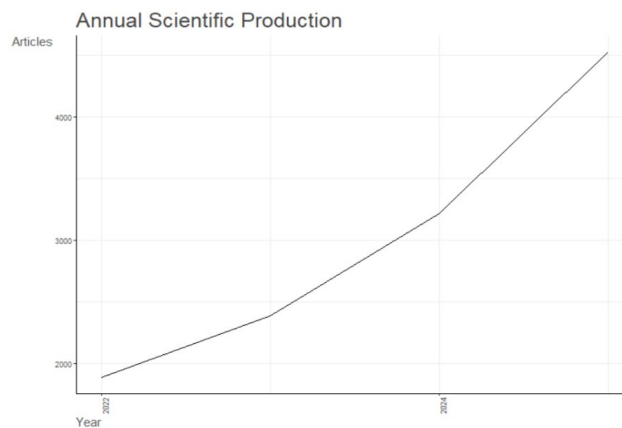


Figure no. 1. Publication landscape on adaptive leadership

Source: Biblioshiny Annual Scientific Production Report.

The identification of most relevant sources (Figure no. 2.) highlights a diverse and multidisciplinary publication landscape, where a core group of high-impact journals concentrates the primary intellectual output of the field. Leading the corpus is Sustainability, with 359 documents, followed by Frontiers in Psychology with 197 and the Journal of Business Research with 127 papers. This concentration suggests that adaptive leadership and organizational alignment and performance are increasingly examined through the lenses of sustainable development and occupational well-being, highlighting the need for cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches in studying and proposing new and more efficient ways of operating.

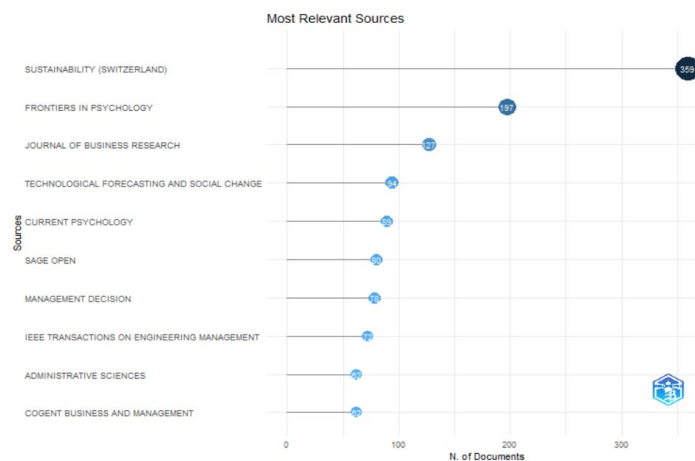


Figure no. 2. Most Influential Sources

Source: Biblioshiny Most Relevant Sources Report

The Country Scientific Production (Figure no. 3.) analysis delineates a global distribution of research, characterized by the absolute dominance of China as the primary knowledge producer in the field. With a staggering 1.342 documents, China's output stands out significantly in front of other leading nations, such as the United States (1.022) and the United Kingdom (489), followed closely by India (446), Indonesia (372), and Australia (332), suggesting a concentrated geopolitical focus on adaptive systems and organizational frameworks within the Asia-Pacific powerhouse. The presence of European nations like the Germany (323) and Italy (285), followed by Malaysia (231) and then Spain (222) on the last position of the top 10 countries, indicates that while the "intellectual center of gravity" is currently situated in the East, the scholarly interest in these management constructs remains a truly global phenomenon with broad cross-cultural representation.

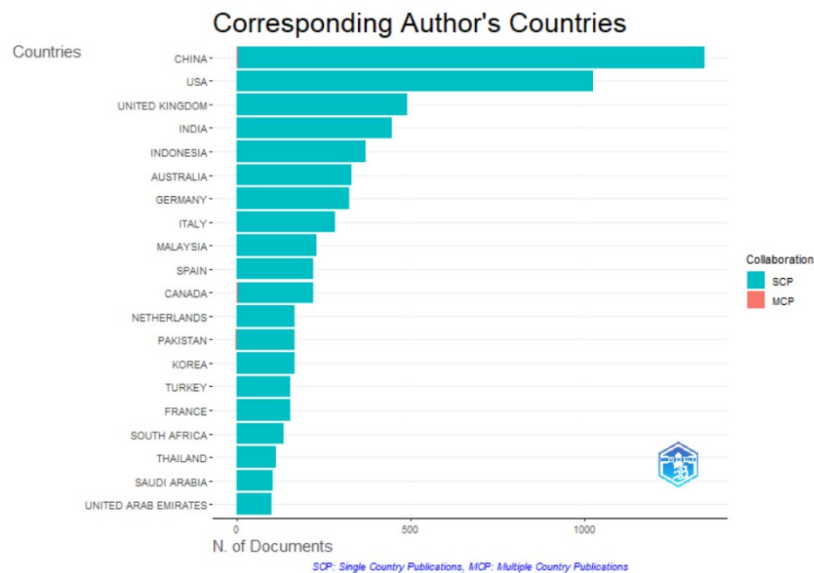


Figure no. 3. Distribution of Corresponding Authors by Country

Source: Biblioshiny Corresponding Author's Countries Report

The analysis of Most Relevant Words (Figure no. 4.) and the Co-word Map of Trend Topics (Figure no. 5.) reveals a conceptual framework heavily oriented toward the intersection of human agency and technological systems. Dominant terms such as “human”, “humans”, and “female/male” (appearing with frequencies exceeding 3.000) underscore the persistent focus on individual actors within organizational structures. Crucially, the high occurrence of terms like “artificial intelligence”, “machine learning”, and “algorithms” (ranging from 1.100 to 1.800) confirms that contemporary adaptive leadership is being studied primarily within the context of digital transformation. This linguistic landscape provides the theoretical justification for further research questionnaire, which explicitly seeks to bridge these bibliometric findings by measuring how leadership behaviors facilitate the internal coherence mechanisms required to align these human and technological dimensions.



Figure no. 4. Most Prominent Research Terms

Source: Biblioshiny Most Relevant Words Report

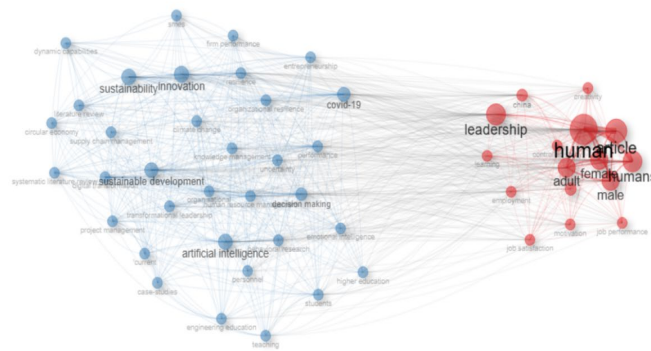


Figure no. 5. Thematic Co-Word Map of Emerging Topics

Source: Biblioshiny Co-word Map of Trend Topics Report

By linking the bibliometric results to a further survey design, it becomes evident that the questionnaire will aim to fill a critical empirical gap: moving from the broad thematic associations found in the literature to a granular, structural validation of how leadership influences organizational performance. The prevalence of terms like “sustainable development”, “innovation”, “artificial intelligence”, and “leadership” in the bibliometric data should be directly mirrored in the survey’s focus on organizational alignment. This alignment ensures that the study does not merely replicate existing bibliometric trends but actively tests the mediating relationships, specifically how leaders navigate the “human-algorithm” nexus to drive competitive advantage and operational responsiveness in a digital-first environment.

Based on the findings resulting from the bibliometric analysis, organizations should move beyond purely technological approaches to transformation, invest in adaptive leadership capabilities, and integrate human, strategic, and operational dimensions.

Leaders must act as facilitators of meaning, alignment, and adaptability, ensuring coherence between organizational change initiatives and human dynamics.

The findings of this study reveal a structural fragmentation in the literature, characterized by the separation between leadership theory, organizational behavior, and business model transformation. While prior research provides valuable insights into each of these domains, it fails to offer a coherent integrative framework. To address this gap, this paper proposes a systemic reconceptualization of adaptive leadership as a multi-level orchestration mechanism that connects individual adaptability, organizational transformation, and performance outcomes.

In this context, emerging integrative approaches such as the Business Soul2Soul conceptual framework suggest that sustainable transformation cannot be achieved solely through structural or technological change, but requires alignment between human potential, organizational purpose, and strategic direction. The Business Soul2Soul framework is proposed as a conceptual integration grounded in practice-based observations and existing theoretical perspectives, serving as a foundation for future empirical research rather than a validated measurement model. Further studies are required to operationalize its constructs, test the proposed relationships, and assess their applicability across diverse organizational and contextual settings.

The framework responds to the growing need for integrative approaches that connect the human dimension of organizations with strategic renewal processes. While existing research on dynamic capabilities and business model transformation emphasizes structural flexibility, resource reconfiguration, and strategic decision-making, the human factors enabling or constraining these processes are often treated separately. In contrast, the Business Soul2Soul framework conceptualizes organizational adaptability as an emergent outcome of alignment across the four interdependent analytical levels: organizational purpose, values, culture, leadership behavior, and strategic direction.

Such perspectives extend the role of leadership beyond adaptation, positioning it as a catalyst for coherence, meaning-making, and value integration across the organization.

Therefore, this paper advances the perspective that adaptive leadership should be reconceptualized not only as a response to change but as a systemic capability that actively shapes and enables business model transformation.

Conclusions

This paper contributes to the literature by combining bibliometric analysis with exploratory conceptual insights to better understand the role of adaptive leadership in business model transformation. The findings reveal a fragmented research literature focused on micro-level behavioral dynamics and limited integration with comprehensive transformation processes.

The results highlight the need for integrative frameworks capable of bridging fragmented research streams and addressing real-world complexity. This implies reconceptualizing adaptive leadership as a systemic capability aligning individual behaviors with organizational transformation and performance results. In particular, the insufficient integration of human-centric dimensions such as employee engagement, talent alignment, and organizational culture within existing business model frameworks represents a critical gap in the literature. The paper also proposes a conceptual framework, Business Soul2Soul, as an alternative to the current situation. Upcoming studies and developments will test and validate the model.

Future research should focus on the development and empirical validation of such frameworks across diverse organizational contexts, using multi-method and longitudinal approaches to better capture the dynamic nature of adaptive leadership and transformation processes.

Acknowledgement(s):

ChatGPT (version 5.0) was responsibly used for language improvement. After this process, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the present article. This paper was co-financed by The Bucharest University of Economic Studies during the PhD program.

References

- Aria, M., & Cuccurullo, C. (2017). Bibliometrix: An R-tool for comprehensive science mapping analysis. *Journal of Informetrics*, 11(4), 959–975. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2017.08.007>.
- Barney, J.B. and Felin, T., 2013. What are microfoundations? *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 27(2), pp.138–155. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2012.0107>.
- Bennett, N. & Lemoine, G. J. (2014). What a Difference a Word Makes: Understanding Threats to Performance in a VUCA World. *Business Horizons*, 57, 311–317. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.01.001>.
- Broadus, R. N. (1987). Towards a definition of “Bibliometrics”. *Scientometry*, 12, 373–379. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02016680>.
- Felin, T. and Foss, N.J., 2005. Strategic organization: A field in search of micro-foundations. *Strategic Organization*, 3(4), pp.441–455, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127005055796>.
- Felin, T., Foss, N.J. and Ployhart, R.E., 2015. The microfoundations movement in strategy and organization theory. *Academy of Management Annals*, 9(1), pp. 575–632. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2015.1007651>.
- Foss, N.J. and Saebi, T., 2017. Fifteen years of research on business model innovation. *Journal of Management*, 43(1), pp.200–227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316675927>.
- Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Harvard Business Press.
- Heifetz, R., 1994. *Leadership without easy answers*. Harvard University Press. <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/books/9780674518582>.
- Helfat, C. E., & Martin, J. A. (2015). Dynamic managerial capabilities: Review and assessment of managerial impact on strategic change. *Journal of Management*, 41(5), 1281–1312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314561301>.
- Năstase, M. (2009). Leadership in times of change. *Review of International Comparative Management*, 10(1), 77–84.

- Nastase, M., Tîrnovanu, A.C., Şişu, J.A., Obreja, M-M., 2024, Mapping the Field of Change Management – A Bibliometric Analysis Using Vosviewer, *Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence*, <https://doi.org/10.2478/picbe-2024-0269>.
- Teece, D. J. (2022). Evolutionary economics, routines, and dynamic capabilities (*IIPP Working Paper 2022-17*). UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/wp2022-17>.
- Teece, D.J., 2010. Business models, business strategy and innovation. *Long Range Planning*, 43(2–3), pp.172–194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2009.07.003>.
- Uhl-Bien, M., Marion, R., & McKelvey, B. (2007). Complexity Leadership Theory: Shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18(4), 298-318. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.04.002>.
- Wirtz, B. W., Pistoia, A., Ullrich, S., & Göttel, V. (2016). *Business models: Origin, development and future research perspectives*. *Long Range Planning*, 49(1), 36–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2015.04.001>