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## Leadership and organizational innovation in the third sector: A systematic literature review

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### ABSTRACT

The impact of the global recession has served to increase pressure on non-profit organizations resources. Executive leadership is an essential component of the success of these institutions. The two-fold purpose of this article is to provide a state-of-the-art overview about the existing literature on leadership and organizational innovation in the third sector, as well as to identify research gaps leading to a research model, which can be used in further empirical research. For this, we used the collection of existing literature in the Web of Science. The 144 articles selected in the database were analysed using the VOSviewer software. Results show a concern with the renewal of management bodies and a lack of qualified leaders. This study contributes to the construction of an action agenda leading to the establishment of new leadership and organizational innovation model for the third sector.

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### 1. Introduction

The Third Sector (TS) is a vital pillar of the welfare state and territorial cohesion, which represents a considerable part of many countries' economy and a significant percentage of gross national product. This supportive sector has undergone major alterations due to changes in the European socio-economic landscape over the last decade. It faces the challenge of doing more and more with fewer and fewer resources. Thus, the issue of leadership and organizational innovation becomes crucial when it comes to ensuring the sustainability of Non-profit Organizations (NPO) (Berzin, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Gaitan-Rossi, 2015; Hoefler & Sliva, 2014; Marx & Davis, 2012; Samples et al., 2011).

While leadership in NPO has similarities to that of the business sector, it also faces unique specificities: managing volunteers, donations, limited resources, typically lower salaries, and competition with other talent-seeking sectors (Allen, Winston, Tatone, & Crowson, 2018; Park, Kim, Park, & Lim, 2018). Management capacities have been widely investigated in the public and private sector, but this has not happened in TS (Bish & Becker, 2016). Instead, there tends to be a "scattered" approach to leadership in the sector (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). In recent years, the issue of leadership and organizational innovation within NPOs, which can be described as the adoption and implementation of new and creative ideas, services or processes at the organizational level, little studied in previous decades, has received increasing attention from academics and become a key strategy enhancing an organization's ability to achieve its goals (Harrison, Murray, & Cornforth, 2013; Harrison

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& Murray, 2012; Jaskyte, 2015; Mitchell, 2015; Rowold & Rohmann, 2009; Shin & Choi, 2019). As the NPO board ends up deciding the direction of the organization, it has been subject to some attention (Jaskyte, 2017). A large number of NPO leaders are elderly, and so research into the leadership of these institutions is important to prepare the sustainable future of the sector (Gothard & Austin, 2013), at a time when there is a shortage of qualified leaders in TS (Wilson & Lau, 2011).

Despite increasing attention paid by society and academics to NPO leadership and innovation, this is still an underdeveloped subject (Jaskyte, 2018). Research on the TS is evolving, but still has much to reveal in the field of knowledge (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018).

The aim of this standalone literature review is to summarize and provide a state-of-the-art overview (Kraus, Breier, & Dasí-rodíguez, 2020) of leadership and organizational innovation in the TS. To this end, and after identifying sufficient literature (Kraus et al., 2020), the systematic literature review (SLR) method was adopted using a bibliometric analysis with VOSviewer software. The co-word and co-citation analyses produced 3 clusters whose correspondence is shown in Table 5. This SLR also intends to identify research gaps and develops a research model which might then be used as a basis for further (empirical) research (Kraus et al., 2020). Based on the literature studied, an operational tool is proposed, to establish a new model of leadership and organizational innovation for the TS.

Descriptive analysis was used to organize and categorize the main topics covered, the most productive journals and the most active countries on the subject, providing insights into what can be explored in the years to come. It is expected that more researchers will benefit from these results to guide their research and assertively obtain perceptions about what can still be a relevant subject for several areas. This study is structured as follows: after consulting the literature on the relationship between models of leadership and organizational innovation applied to the third sector and describing the methodological design, 144 articles were extracted from the Web of Science (WoS) database followed by presentation of the descriptive results (areas of study, citations, countries, journals, methodology, most cited articles and publications) and clustering. Lastly, the conclusions, limitations and future lines of research are pointed out.

## 2. Literature review

The growth of the TS combined with society's increased demand for more effective changes in the political, economic and social environments, and with public administration's increasing need for accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, forces NPOs to become more entrepreneurial and innovative in delivering services to their communities and in designing their operational business models. Major external funders of human service organizations, such as governments and private foundations, require innovation in those organizations in order to improve their organizational performance. The need for innovation is more evident in an atmosphere characterized by scarcity (CNIS, 2018; Jaskyte, 2015, 2018; Shin & Choi, 2019). Organizational culture can help foster social innovations. Engaging staff at all levels might shape the culture of an organization as receptive to innovative practices. A climate that is supportive of innovation, personal initiative and psychological safety can enhance an organization's innovative capacity (Park et al., 2018; Wit & Mensink, 2019).

### 2.1. *The third sector, a pillar of society seeking sustainability*

TS academics and practitioners agree that the goal of NPOs is to pursue a social mission and not to generate monetary benefits (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018), in search of a more inclusive and sustainable society. NPOs can improve a community (Florian, Costas, & Kärreman, 2019), reduce inequality in society (Fulton, Oyakawa, & Wood, 2019), can be used to prepare for crisis periods and are useful for their communities due to the increasing pressure to respond (Netting & Nelson, 2020). Nowadays, they are a fundamental pillar of the economy in most societies (Vincent & Marmo, 2018), not only to care for the most deprived, often in areas where there is a complete lack of public response, but also in the consequent creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs (CNIS, 2018) and volunteering (Southby, 2019).

Today's growing competition in the TS market, for example, when it comes to securing financial support (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018), forces NPOs to adapt to the environment and diversify their activities, but also to adopt a variety of fundraising strategies (Tian & Konrath, 2019), in order to be able to provide communities with quality services. In addition, these organizations have to meet the increasingly high expectations of their donors (public and private), who are more and more attentive to transparent and efficient management methods (Jaskyte, 2018; Laurett & Ferreira, 2018). To ensure their sustainability, NPOs seek to professionalize their leadership and engage in a continuous innovation process (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018).

### 2.2. *New management models as a response to an uncertain future*

According to the study by Ruvio, Rosenblatt, and Hertz-Lazarowitz (2010), non-profit entrepreneurs are less conservative than profit-oriented ones. This more competitive stance and willingness to take risks can be useful in a constantly changing socio-economic landscape, to which the TS had to adapt. Indeed, NPO theory was founded in the 1980s and its strategy consolidated in the 1990s. Already at the beginning of this century, TS organizations were concerned about improving their management, professionalizing it and diversifying their strategy in an ever more competitive market (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018). Thus, private sector management techniques were introduced with appropriate adaptations (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018; Taliento & Silverman, 2005) in view of the specificities of the TS (CNIS, 2018). As employees are viewed as an

**Table 1**  
Inclusion and exclusion criteria of publications in the systematic literature review.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
WoS database from start of indexation until February 2020; "Non-profit" or "third sector" or "social sector" and "Leadership" or "organizational innov*" in title, abstract or keyword; Article or review; English language publication; WoS Categories: <i>Management, social issues, social work, nursing</i> . Only the articles that fit the study object were considered: leadership and organizational innovation in TS institutions, described in the introduction of this study	Text not available; Decontextualized keywords; Books, books chapters, conference reports, grey literature; Publications related to public and/or private sector, armed forces, and other areas whose focus was not directly related to social sector: environment, arts, health, etc.

Source: Own elaboration.

indispensable resource to achieve the organization's mission, human resource management plays an increasingly important role in enhancing NPOs' effectiveness and efficiency (Bastida, Marimon, & Carreras, 2018).

The impact of the global recession has increased the pressure on NPO resources, restricting the choices offered to organizational leaders (Never, 2011). NPOs face several challenges in implementing continuous improvement in terms of resistance (a change initiative can be perceived as threat), culture (lack of formal processes and professionalization) and the diversity of customers and training (need for innovative ways to train staff) (Jevanesan, Antony, Rodgers, & Prashar, 2019). Executive leadership has been an essential component of an NPO's success (Froelich, McKee, & Rathge, 2011). It is vital for TS institutions to invest in development activities to ensure their leaders are prepared, particularly when it comes to placing or recruiting volunteers, who sometimes encounter obstacles that affect their ability (Southby, 2019), for them to establish lasting links with the organization (Schreiner, Trent, Prange, & Allen, 2018).

Increased organizational innovation is directly related to executive education in the field of innovation (Jaskyte, 2017). In a broader field, the future of education for responsible and efficient management is in the hands of universities, which together with policy-makers (M. Austin, 2018; Bassiry, 1990, pp. 799–805) should provide the necessary sources of financing to train socially responsible managers, a *sine qua non* condition to exercise in TS. Thus, organizations should seek executive leaders who also share a social justice orientation and have the skills to communicate that vision to their middle managers. Employers dedicated to social justice can retain employees who share this dedication at all levels of the organizational structure. Dedicated middle managers are essential to the success of an NPO (Vincent & Marmo, 2018). However, to achieve ever more ambitious goals, TS also has to adapt the leadership methods of the private sector (Taliento & Silverman, 2005).

These goals are very much about the service the NPO provides to the community and these are only attainable with a set of structures and functions, the organizational capacity that intuitions need. Organizational changes in NPOs often lack timely planning and need to be reconsidered. These are some of the challenges facing NPOs that lead us to propose an operational model of leadership and organizational innovation for TS.

### 3. Methodological design

To carry out this analysis, a SLR was performed by making use of a bibliometric analysis (Gonçales Filho, Campos, & Assumpção, 2016). The SLR is used to identify and evaluate the state-of-the-art of a specific theme, that is, leadership and organizational innovation in the TS. The SLR aims to carry out a survey of researches with related scope and topics, evaluating them critically. Using SLR method the bibliometric research results are disclosed and the process of sample construction is described, in a subsequent way.

For identifying the literature, a protocol was established (see Table 1) and a search of the WoS database was made in February 2020. A recent study (Martín-martín, Orduna-malea, & López-cózar, 2018) showed that the Google Scholar database has the most extensive collection of themed documents (93–96%). The partnership between WoS (Clarivate Analytics/Thomson Reuters) and Google Scholar provides hyperlinks between these two databases. So, when making a search in the WoS Core Collection, links to Google Scholar appear in the results and vice versa (Biblioteca Central Ribeirão Preto, 2017).

In the first phase, articles using the expression "non-profit" or "third sector" or "social sector" and "leadership" or "organizational innov\*<sup>1</sup>" in the title, abstract or keywords were selected from start of indexation for all WoS categories. The initial results returned 599 documents. The search was limited to "article" and "review" documents, since these are the main source of up-to-date knowledge with a probably greater impact in the field (Keupp, Palmié, & Gassmann, 2012; López-Fernández, Serrano-Bedia, & Pérez-Pérez, 2016), with 515 publications selected. Only texts in English were considered, since the dissemination of scientific knowledge is fundamentally carried out in that language and is a criterion in several journals (López-Fernández et al., 2016), reducing the selection to 507 articles. The categories of "economics, health care science services, health policy services, management, nursing, social issues, social work and sociology" were checked, and the set of analysis was reduced to 263 publications. At this stage, titles, summaries and key-words were read as well as analyzing

<sup>1</sup> Innov\*: All terms starting with "innov" (innovation, innovative, etc.).

the content of articles (Figueiró & Raufflet, 2015) in full whenever necessary, and 144 documents (see Table 2) published between 1998 and 2020 were selected, totaling 1170 citations, which served as the final sample for this analysis. When articles were not available for consultation and/or download in WoS, the Emerald, ResearchGate and Google Scholar databases were used.

Bibliometric study involves the application of statistical analyses to publications. By revealing information about the level of activity in a given scientific field, results can be used to evaluate the performance of researchers, journals, countries and institutions (Ferreira et al., 2015). Co-word and co-citation techniques were used. VOSviewer software was used to extract terms, calculating the distance between these (Eck & Waltman, 2011). The stronger the relationship between two terms, the shorter the distance between them. For cluster formation, the software produces a color chart where each one indicates the concentration of terms for each group (Dias, Rodrigues, & Ferreira, 2019).

In the bibliometric technique of co-words, the unit of analysis is the article, and the corresponding variables are identified in the title, abstract and keywords of the 144 documents (Dias et al., 2019). This technique, based on the analysis of terms' co-occurrence, results in a relational map and their association in clusters (López-Fernández et al., 2016). Great repetition of similar key words indicates that the studies are generally close (Shen, Nguyen, & Hsu, 2019).

The binary counting method already applied in previous studies was chosen, considering the occurrences of a term in several documents. With this method, 2940 terms were identified, later defining 8 as the minimum number of occurrences resulting in 67 terms, with VOSviewer automatically setting 60% of the most relevant terms, totaling 40 terms. After their visualization, 12 were removed because they were considered irrelevant (“article, author, paper, year, ...”) for the purpose (Dias et al., 2019).

Two documents become co-cited when jointly cited by one or more articles. The co-citation analysis is a methodology used to map in detail the ongoing relations between the central ideas of a specific scientific domain, assisting in identifying the fundamental scientific articles and their influential authors. Several studies have demonstrated the validity of co-citation analysis to understand the intellectual structure of a research field (Fernandes et al., 2017). Using this method, 6533 cited references were identified, later defining 8 as the minimum number of occurrences and resulting in 14 nodes (references).

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Descriptive analysis

In order to analyze how the topic of leadership and organizational innovation in the TS has been approached in the academic universe, this section will deal with the evolution of the number of articles citations and publications, with identification of the 10 most cited, main journals, countries in which the subject has been studied, and the main methodologies used.

When analyzing the evolution of the 144 publications, we can see a slight increase (Fig. 1) in recent years, albeit quite marginal. The number of citations accompanies that trend, with intensification since 2015 with 279 citations in 2019.

Table 3 presents the 10 most cited articles among the 144 considered for the present study. *Administration in Social Work* with 4 articles is the most represented journal, followed by *Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly* with 3.

Regarding journals, Fig. 2 shows the following: *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* leads the classification with 38 articles (but with only one article in the top ten most cited articles), followed by *Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly*(27), *Administration in Social Work* (18), *Voluntas* (17), *Human Service Organizations Management Leadership and Governance* (13), *Leadership and Organization Management Journal* (4), *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, *Human Resource Development Quarterly* (2), and finally the remaining 23 journals with 1 publication each.

It should be noted that 70% of the literature on leadership and organizational innovation in the TS is published in 4 journals, which is a relative concentration, some of them covering several areas of study.

In relation to areas of research, *Public Administration* and *Business Economics* are the fields with most publications in the period studied, with respectively 70 and 64 articles, followed by *Social Issues* (45), *Social work* (35), *Psychology* (5), *Public*

**Table 2**  
WoS research process.

Steps	Description
1st step: 599 articles	Words and expressions search: “non-profit” OR “third sector” OR “social sector” AND “leadership” OR “organizational innov*” in title, abstract and keywords – All WoS categories
2nd step: 515 articles	Document type: <i>article or review</i>
3rd step: 507 articles	English language
4th step: 263 articles	Selected WoS Categories: <i>economics, health care sciences services, health policy services, management, nursing, social issues, social work and sociology,</i>
5th step: 144 articles	Titles, abstracts, keywords and whenever necessary full reading of some articles.

Source: Own elaboration.

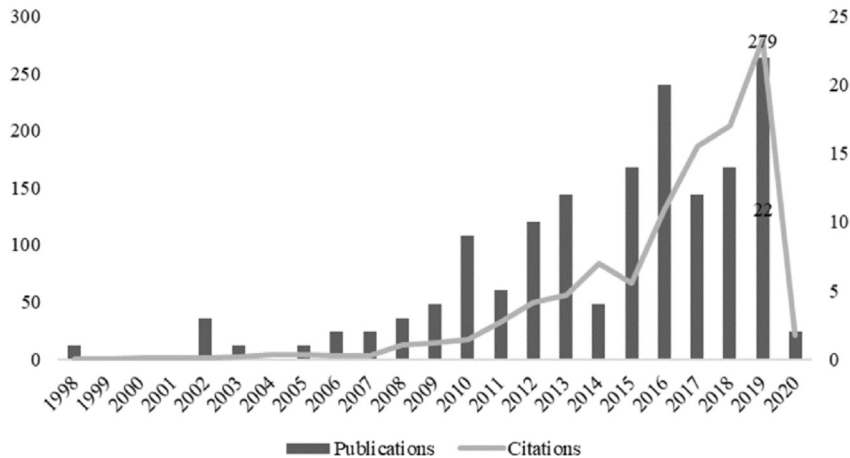


Fig. 1. Publications and citations. Source: Data collected from WoS.

*Environment Occupational Health* (2), *Education Educational Research*, *Environmental Sciences Ecology*, *Social Sciences*, *Other Topics and Sport Science* with 1 article each (see Table 4 below).

With regard to countries (Fig. 3), the top 10 is led by the United States of America, by far the most active with 90 publications, followed by Canada and Germany (9), England (7), Australia and China (5), Israel (4), Belgium, Brazil and the Netherlands (3).

Analyzing the 144 articles selected as the final sample in this study, the methodologies used in each of them were classified, in order to identify the main and most relevant for the field of study. Fig. 4 shows a tendency for researchers to use quantitative methodologies (59) with intensification of these methods since 2018. Qualitative articles (47) based on interviews and study cases also appear frequently regarding mixed empirical work (26). Thus, there is a great preponderance of empirical methodologies, showing that this area of study is recent and lacks factual exemplifications which will help in developing a theory from within the TS (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). This scenario is recognized by some sectoral associations which do not hesitate to invest large amounts to understand the state of play of the social economy sector (CNIS, 2018).

## 4.2. Cluster analysis

To analyze the main themes in the literature related to leadership and organizational innovation in TS, we used the bibliometric techniques of co-words and co-citation.

### 4.2.1. Co-word clusters

In the first analysis, 28 terms were extracted from the titles, abstracts and keywords of the 144 articles studied using VOSviewer software (Dias et al., 2019). The map in Fig. 5 has 3 clusters showing the relations between the different terms and their association in thematic groups.

As can be seen, a set of clusters is proposed by the quantitative analysis. The first cluster defined by the terms of board, CEO, challenge, director, extent, insight, nonprofit leader, perspective and support was named “Challenges and perspectives of NPO Boards”. The second, in which the terms of community, employee, field, influence, leadership style, perception, transformational leadership, volunteer and work appeared, was named “The Impact of Leadership Style on Workers and Community in the Third Sector”. The third and final cluster containing the following terms: capacity, effectiveness, framework, impact, importance, innovation, manager, nonprofit human service organization, resource and structure was called “The impact of board efficiency on NPO innovation”. Next, an in-depth analysis of each cluster is presented.

**4.2.1.1. Cluster 1. challenges and perspectives of NPO boards.** Entrepreneurial vision, i.e. an idealized goal to be achieved in the future, is important for the creation and growth of ventures (Ruvio et al., 2010). Leadership support is a key factor for the success of work environment transformation. Leaders must be willing to experiment and introduce new projects into their organizations (Jaskyte, Byerly, Bryant, & Koksarova, 2010).

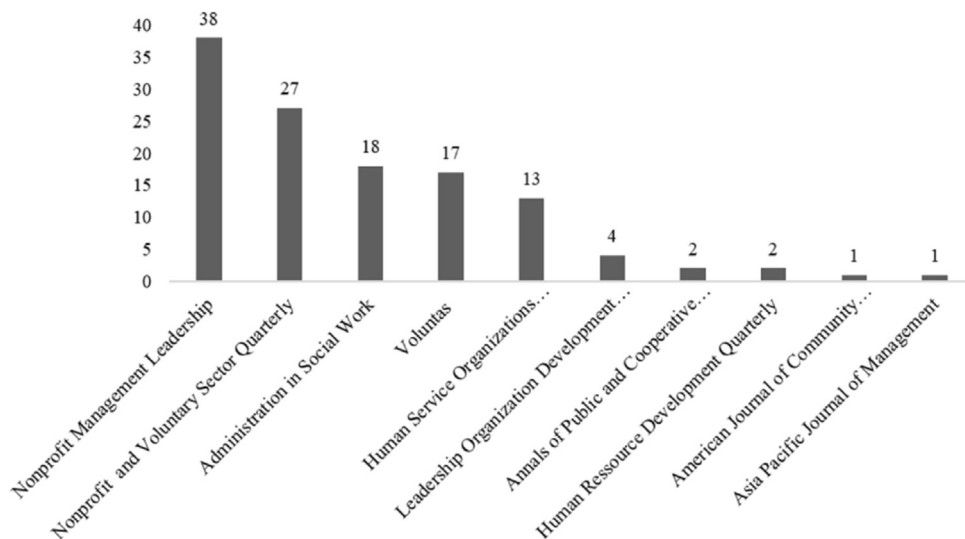
Leaders of NPOs have the opportunity to shape the cultural values of their institution in favor of collaboration and the norms of truth and reciprocity (Snavelly & Tracy, 2002). This form of leadership must be implemented every day to improve organizational culture (Gibbons & Hazy, 2017). Finding ways to ensure positive workplace outcomes is especially critical for NPOs that strive to increase employee commitment and performance (Li, 2019). Non-profit leaders are faced with the challenge of effectively managing their workforce (Brimhall, 2019). Creating a climate for inclusion and affective commitment and promoting social welfare in organizations are key factors for how leaders can increase non-profit performance. It is

**Table 3**

Top 10 most cited articles.

Author(s)/Year	Article	Citations
1 Jaskyte and Dressler (2005)	Organizational culture and innovation in non-profit human service organizations	67
2 Ruvio et al. (2010)	Entrepreneurial leadership vision in non-profit vs. for-profit organizations	44
3 Chan and Mak (2012)	Benevolent leadership and follower performance: The mediating role of leader-member exchange (LMX)	39
4 Suarez, David F., 2010	Street Credentials and Management Backgrounds: Careers of Non-profit Executives in an Evolving Sector	37
5 Rowold and Rohmann (2009)	Transformational and Transactional Leadership Styles, Followers' Positive and Negative Emotions, 36 and Performance in German Non-profit Orchestras	36
6 Snaveley and Tracy (2002)	Development of trust in rural non-profit collaborations	34
7 Donaldson (2008)	Developing a progressive advocacy program within a human services agency	31
8 Kunreuther (2003)	The changing of the guard: What generational differences tell us about social-change organizations	31
9 Shin & McClomb, 1998	Top executive leadership and organizational innovation: An empirical investigation of non-profit human service organizations (HSOs)	30
10 Austin, Regan, Samples, Schwartz, and Carnochan (2011)	Building managerial and organizational capacity in non-profit human service organizations through a leadership development program	26

Source: Own elaboration.

**Fig. 2.** Number of articles by journal. Source: Data collected from WoS.

fundamental to ensure everyone in the NPO feels valued and appreciated for their personal characteristics as an important member of the group (Brimhall, 2019; Brimhall & Saastamoinen, 2020).

Many NPO employees feel personally committed to their institution and motivated by their social response and dedication to solve their users' problems (Brimhall, 2019; Vincent & Marmo, 2018). In fact, NPOs rely heavily on their employees, often attracted to these institutions because of their social mission and significance, to achieve their goals (Knapp, Smith, & Sprinkle, 2017). Happiness at work has a preponderant role in TS in retaining good professionals (Watson & Hoefler, 2016). Unlike the business sector, where resources are available to support job satisfaction, many NPOs face challenges in maintaining a skilled management team. A better understanding of how to maintain job satisfaction is important to be able to retain skilled workers and managers. Orientation to social justice and organizational commitment influence job satisfaction and the intention to leave NPOs (Vincent & Marmo, 2018).

Inclusion in cluster 1 gives rise to 2 reflections: the board's relationship with the manager; and the importance of leadership for efficient management of human resources:

- The literature delimits NPO management in terms of separation between management and administration using agency and administration theories (Bernstein, Buse, & Bilimoria, 2016). According to Takos, Murray, and O'Boyle (2018), the nature of relations between the executives of an NPO, particularly the chairman and manager, has a more positive influence on the functionality of the executive board if characterized by authenticity and this produces higher levels of trust, reduced disharmony and limitation of small harmful groups. The strategic involvement of management enhances NPO

**Table 4**  
Main research areas per journal.

Research Area	Journal	Total Number <sup>a</sup>
Public Administration	Nonprofit Management and Leadership	38
	Administration in Social Work	18
	Human Service Organizations Management Leadership & Governance	13
Business Economics	Public Management Review	1
	Nonprofit Management and Leadership	38
	Leadership and Organization Development Journal	4
	Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics	2
	Human Resource Development Quarterly	2
	Asia Pacific Journal of Management	1
	Chinese Management Studies	1
	Disaster Prevention and Management	1
	European Management Journal	1
	Foundations of Management	1
	Harvard Business Review	1
	Human Resource Development Review	1
	Human Resource Management	1
	International Journal of Manpower	1
	International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management	1
	Journal of General Management	1
	Journal of Management Studies	1
	Journal of Sport Management	1
	Leadership Quarterly	1
	Public Management Review	1
Revista Gestão Organizacional	1	
Revue Interventions Economiques -Papers in Political Economy	1	
Total Quality Management and Business Excellence	1	
Social Issues	Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly	27
	Voluntas	17
Social work	Australian Journal of Social Issues	1
	Administration in Social Work	18
	Human Service Organizations Management Leadership and Governance	13
	American Journal of Community Psychology	1
	International Social Work	1
Psychology	Journal of Social Work Education	1
	Research on Social Work Practice	1
	Human Resource Development Quarterly	2
	American Journal of Community Psychology	1
Public Environment Occupational Health	Human Resource Management	1
	Leadership Quarterly	1
Education Educational Research	American Journal of Community Psychology	1
	Disaster Prevention and Management	1
Environmental Sciences Ecology	Journal of Social Work Education	1
	Disaster Prevention and Management	1
Social Sciences Other Topics	Journal of Sport Management	1
	Journal of Sport Management	1
Sport Science	Journal of Sport Management	1

Source: Data collected from WoS.

performance in terms of competitiveness and innovation (Jaskyte, 2017). However, divergences between the NPO board, managers and workers operating on the basis of different realities may have an impact on the institution's perspectives and performance (Bernstein et al., 2016). NPO executive managers often deal with disconnected, depleted and unenthusiastic boards, power-seeking and controlling members, and overly compliant bodies that give little or no direction to the institution. In addition, some executive bodies work as social clubs, where people gather to see friends and acquaintances, but avoid the difficult issues involved in managing NPOs. Meetings are often misdirected (Marx & Davis, 2012). The board's interference in the manager's role increases the latter's stress and can lead to situations of burnout which end up undermining this individual's performance and consequently that of the NPO (Olinske & Hellman, 2017). Some studies have shown that the board often doubts the manager's ability to satisfy the basic requirements for performing functions as well as the board's overconfidence in its own governance skills (Bernstein et al., 2016). Thus, the behavior of both organs often contributes to ambiguities, confusion and conflict. The divergences between these two bodies can be explained by a frequent lack of role clarification (Bernstein et al., 2016). Olinske and Hellman (2017) reported that although the literature related to organizational management of NPOs has increased in the last two decades, the relationship between the board and the executive director has been little studied. Thanks to the present SLR, several more recent investigations (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Jaskyte, 2017, 2018; Takos et al., 2018; Van Puyvelde, Brown, Walker, & Tenuta, 2018) have been identified, demonstrating increasing interest in this field.

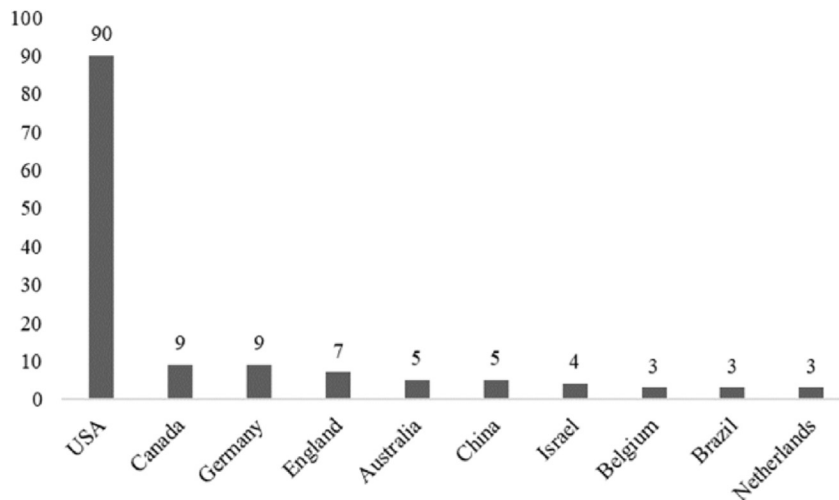


Fig. 3. Publications by country. Source: Data collected from WoS.

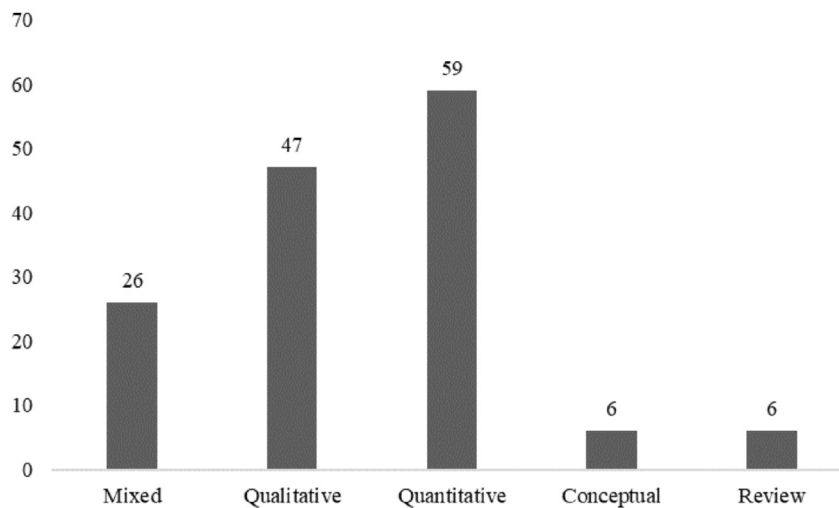


Fig. 4. Methodologies. Source: Own elaboration

- Leadership plays a central role in efforts to retain the work force and increase their commitment to an organization (Schreiner et al., 2018). Committed workers are more likely to remain in the organization (Brimhall, 2019) and this organizational commitment represents an attitude towards an organization. This attitude can be differentiated according to perceptions of leaders' behavior (Allen et al., 2018), recognizing that various environmental factors have powerful effects on establishing trust (Snaveley & Tracy, 2002). As employees are viewed as an indispensable resource to achieve the organization's mission, human resource management plays an increasingly important role in improving the NPO's effectiveness and efficiency (Bastida et al., 2018). Finding ways to ensure positive workplace outcomes is especially critical for NPOs that strive to increase employee commitment and performance (Li, 2019). Non-profit leaders are faced with the challenge of effectively managing their workforce (Brimhall, 2019). Structural empowerment provides NPO employees with the information, resources, support and opportunity needed to make the work challenging and enriching (rather than boring or overpowering), increasing their level of organizational commitment (Allen et al., 2018). Thus, the leader's behavior is directly related to employee satisfaction, independent of gender (Schreiner et al., 2018). Job satisfaction, psychological empowerment and corporate citizenship are central to TS organizations becoming effective in an ever more competitive environment (Jiménez, 2018; Vincent & Marmo, 2018) and where obligations with greater accountability to the growing demands of the trusteeship, notably in the accounting field, mean more implications for NPOs at the time of hiring executives (Schlosser, McPhee, & Forsyth, 2017). Experienced TS managers have more career options and competitive salaries within the sector, but the skill set developed in the TS is transferable to the private sector, with

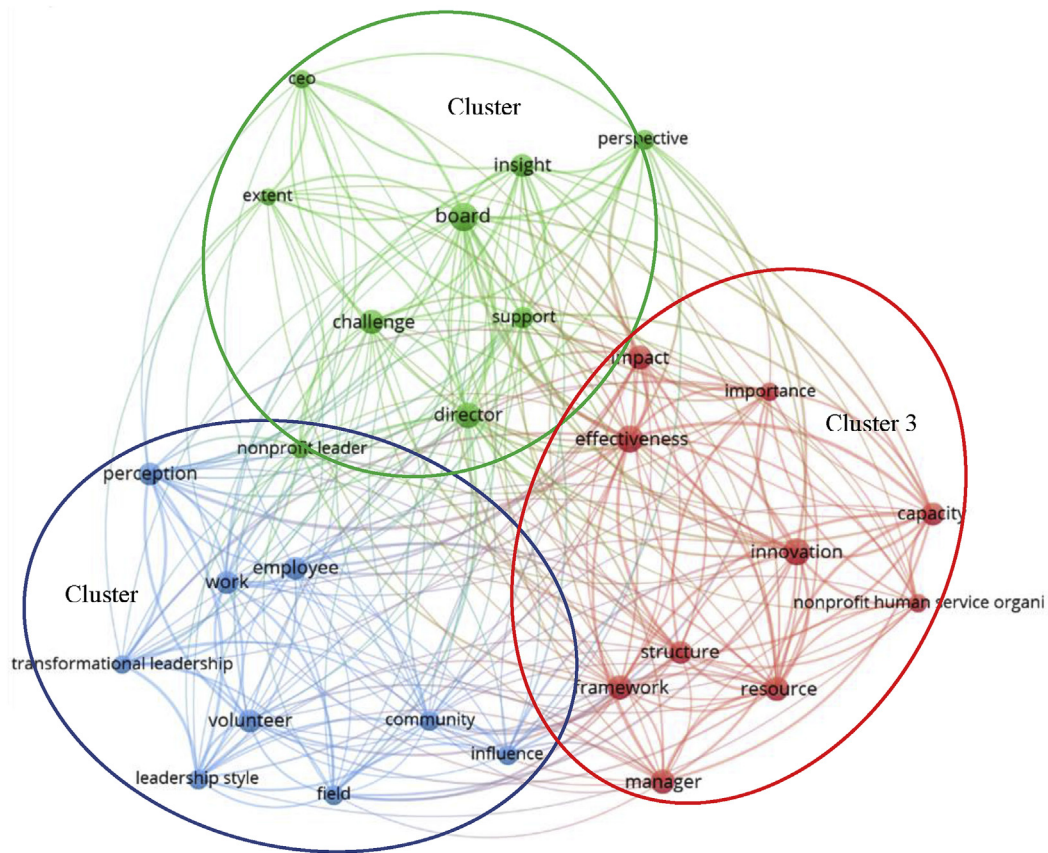


Fig. 5. Co-word clusters. Source: Adapted from VOSviewer.

potentially significantly higher pay (Vincent & Marmo, 2018). Salaries that are normally lower than those paid in the first and second sectors make it difficult to hire experienced leaders (Froelich et al., 2011).

The retention and management of volunteers and key staff is a critical task for non-profit management (Bozer, Kuna, & Santora, 2015). A major challenge for board members is to foster autonomous motivation among volunteers (Clerck, Willem, Aelterman, & Haerens, 2019). These leaders play a key role in shaping and implementing volunteer programs and are strong sources of relationships and vision, and inspire their followers thanks to their charisma, encouraging them on the path of change (Follman, Cseh, & Brudney, 2016). Autonomously motivated volunteers have been shown to be more willing to continue volunteering, more engaged and more committed to their volunteer work (Clerck et al., 2019). Access to infrastructure and individualized training programs is critical, because experiencing such organizational support can enhance volunteers' perceived fit. Organizations should establish team-building efforts to foster volunteers' perceived complementarity with colleagues, increase team cohesion and enhance performance. Effectiveness at both organizational and individual levels requires the right volunteers for the right job. In order to increase volunteers' motivation and group-task cohesion, board members also need to rely on human skills (Clerck et al., 2019; Florian et al., 2019).

Good leadership, promoting job satisfaction (Vincent & Marmo, 2018), a culture of recognition, appreciation of performance and support, is important for volunteers and essential to avoid their departure, as they do not normally receive remuneration, are not formally bound to the organization and the leader's power is consequently weakened (Englert, Thaler, & Helmig, 2019; Florian et al., 2019; Schreiner et al., 2018). Thus, psychological commitment is important in managing resources (do Nascimento, Porto, & Kwantes, 2018). A significant human resource turnover, including volunteers, can have negative effects on NPOs' performance (Selden & Sowa, 2015), besides the added financial cost.

Another major challenge for boards lies in the lack of succession planning, which can be partially explained by barriers present in the NPO (Mckee & Froelich, 2016). Today, the academic community agrees NPOs are in a phase of transition. There is a leadership crisis in the social sector, with experienced leaders, the generation of baby boomers, about to leave (Froelich et al., 2011; Watson & Hoefler, 2016). Leadership succession is critical to NPOs' performance. It is not succession *per se*, but the succession context (i.e. founders' control, board governance, professionalization and the political environment) and the successor's strategic orientations that affect post-succession performance in NPOs (Li, 2019).

4.2.1.2. *Cluster 2. the impact of leadership style on workers and community in the third sector.* As stated above, an NPO can improve a community (Florian et al., 2019). Boards and executive leaders' engagement with the community can contribute to developing an orientation to social innovation. A tenured manager and a positive attitude towards change can also contribute to an organization's innovative capacity (Wit & Mensink, 2019). NPOs need this innovative capacity to improve and expand programs and services to achieve greater community impact (Despard, 2016). This view is confirmed by Brimhall (2019), for whom non-profit leaders who engage others in critical organizational processes can help foster an inclusive climate that leads to increased innovation, employee job satisfaction and perceived quality of care.

In recent decades, managers have realized that employees, who are no longer seen only as a cost to be reduced or an asset to be exploited, have become more active in the workplace context, which in turn contributes to organizational results. Leadership is also measured by how it shapes the organizational context (goals, incentives and culture) and not solely through its economic impact (Park, Kim, & Song, 2015; do Nascimento et al., 2018).

According to Bassous (2014), studies have shown a positive correlation between NPO workers' motivation and non-monetary incentives such as leadership style or organizational culture, but such evidence does not come with financial rewards. Monetary compensation is very relevant, but it is not enough to motivate people to engage in voluntary activities. So the role of leadership and transformational leadership is important to support performance and satisfaction, particularly among volunteers (Kammerhoff, Lauenstein, & Schütz, 2019).

The behavior of boards (ethical or otherwise) can define an organization's culture, so ethical leadership has been a focus of interest. Studies show that ethical leadership influences subordinates and improves their professional performance (Park et al., 2015). Establishing collaboration, mutual trust and respect are essential in developing a successful working relationship. When trust begins to break down there is a danger of the relationship entering into a downward spiral (Cornforth & Macmillan, 2016; Snavely & Tracy, 2002). Thus, non-profit leaders with emotion-related behavior congruent with these norms generate engagement and loyalty among followers (Silard, 2018). Employees' relations with leaders have important repercussions on job satisfaction (Yildiz & Simsek, 2016) through team development and implementation of strategies to improve the organizational commitment to these critical team members (Vincent & Marmo, 2018). The values of leadership contribute to building a reputation of organizational efficiency (Mitchell, 2015).

Thus, leadership is a critical concept for organizations because of its effects on employees' attitudes and actions as well as their emotions and opinions (Yildiz & Simsek, 2016). When authority and decision-making are concentrated at the top of an organization, i.e. organizational centralization, management hierarchy, communication channels are restricted and the information available for activating new ideas is reduced (Shin & Choi, 2019).

Previous research has shown that transformational leaders have an explicit influence on followers: increased performance, job satisfaction and improved organizational outcomes (Yildiz & Simsek, 2016). Transformational leadership, which is characterized by behavior that focuses on individual needs and the creation of shared objectives and thus inspires followers through a vision that goes beyond individual goals (Kammerhoff et al., 2019), has positive effects on resilience and fostering an environment of intellectual creativity (Lutz-Allen, Smith, & Da Silva, 2013; Valero, Jung, & Andrew, 2015), and performance (McMurray, Islam, Sarros, & Pirola-Merlo, 2013; Taylor, Cornelius, & Colvin, 2014), while "laissez-faire" leadership has a negative impact (Clerck et al., 2019; Lutz-Allen et al., 2013) on NPOs. So, the former type of leaders is a source of inspiration to subordinates, with a positive return for the organization, and they can also improve the satisfaction, engagement and proactive behavior of NPO volunteers (do Nascimento et al., 2018; Kammerhoff et al., 2019) whose motivation is not financial, but altruistic or for personal fulfilment.

Transformational style is also related to emotional intelligence and both are related to organizational performance, desirable in times of change (Jiménez, 2018; Kammerhoff et al., 2019). In periods of tension and crisis, whatever their nature (internal to the organization, environmental, political, social, economic), it is necessary to adapt leadership to changing circumstances (Dixon & Schoeneman, 2018).

Providing sufficient communication about crises and enabling job satisfaction can lessen the negative effects of more difficult periods (Kovoor-Misra & Olk, 2016). Little is known about the actual behavior of emotion-related leaders in the NPO context. Emotional intelligence has become a focus for studies to explain why some individuals are more competent than others in solving situations involving organizational change (Jiménez, 2018). A lack of understanding of emotional intelligence can lead to an organization's failure. A manager who uses transformational leadership with the ability to adapt emotions, thoughts, and behaviors to unpredictable change possesses emotional intelligence skills, and is consequently more prepared to drive organizational change by giving more attention to employees (Jiménez, 2018). Transformational leaders help increase perceptions of inclusion, which improves employee commitment to the organization, and ultimately enhances perceived work group performance (Brimhall, 2019). Thus, in accordance with Shin and Choi (2019), the degree of organizational innovativeness increases as the degree of formalization decreases.

Some executives have found it difficult to motivate teams because of a lack of resources and a lack of reward programs (Schlosser et al., 2017), such as evaluation and performance systems. Board members generally continue to struggle to raise funds for their institutions and understand little about the assessment of organizational performance, although the monitoring and evaluation of results are commonly seen one of their primary responsibilities (Marx & Davis, 2012).

4.2.1.3. *Cluster 3. the impact of board efficiency on NPO innovation.* Social innovation is an important competitive strategy for the third sector (Ko, Liu, Yusoff, & Che Mat, 2019). However, literature in the area is scarce and comes mostly from developed

countries. Leadership within NPOs is understood to be complex in terms of behaviors, linkages, group needs and mission objectives (Gilstrap, Gilstrap, Nigel, Katrina, & Valera, 2016). In an environment of globalized change, organizational innovation is crucial for NPOs (Jaskyte, 2012). Because of their high dependence on external environments (namely funds and legitimacy), recent economic and social changes, and their engagement with stakeholders (clients and families) NPOs must be aware of organizational innovation (Shin & Choi, 2019).

Managerial behavior during crises includes making clear and direct decisions, being decisive without inducing a sense of ambiguity, acting resiliently, and demonstrating compassion and flexibility (Gilstrap et al., 2016). Faced with the reduction of most NPO budgets, leadership and organizational innovation play a key role in ensuring their sustainability (Mano, 2010). Innovations can help NPOs to grow (Jaskyte, 2018). Their leaders are the main actors of organizational innovation (Jaskyte, 2012, 2015), since they coordinate members' efforts and work to achieve organizational goals (Kammerhoff et al., 2019).

The interactions perceived in the meeting room are associated with the perceptions of steering effectiveness in NPOs. Relationships between the chairman's leadership, board meeting practices, board dynamics, and the perceived effectiveness of the board in various governance roles and responsibilities are directly related and positively associated with the perception of chief executives and managers' effectiveness (Van Puyvelde et al., 2018). The president of the board holding some political power is a significant source of resources for the institution (Snaveley & Tracy, 2002). Size, heterogeneity, cohesion, communication, summarizing, the collaboration between board members, but also their cultural and social capital, are directly related to the institution's innovation and performance. A greater number of members may favor openness to the external environment and be more alert to its changes, while a smaller number may be more effective in solving internal problems (Jaskyte, 2018). According to Lee (2019), gender diversity in top management contributes to organizational effectiveness, especially in a complex environment. Several authors suggest that management influences innovation directly and indirectly (creating an environment conducive to innovation, the emergence of new ideas) through its involvement in strategy and fundraising (Jaskyte, 2017, 2018). According to Song and Yin (2019), NPOs led by individuals with prior business experience and more extensive business networking are more likely to adopt rationalized structures and practices.

This influence can be positive or negative in the case of a too strong cultural consensus, or even the existence of hidden agendas, which harms innovation (Jaskyte, 2015, 2018). Too much diversity can undermine innovation, but strong cohesion will favor it. Research has shown that the relationship between management effectiveness and innovation varies according to the type of innovation (service, administrative, product, process and innovation capacity) (Jaskyte, 2017).

Organizational innovation is heavily influenced by NPOs' malleability and is often a test of the institution's resistance, since changes often come up against a lack of flexibility and openness among workers (Berzin et al., 2015; Oppenheimer, Warburton, & Carey, 2015). Yet, it should be borne in mind that not every change is an innovation, for example, when one NPO adopts practices from another in its environment (Wit & Mensink, 2019).

Several theories (e.g. agency, resource dependency, resource-based) are used to relate organizational performance to innovation. Agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) stresses the board's responsibility to monitor the executive director and ensure that this individual's attitude is in tune with associates' requests regarding, for example, strategic decisions or fiscal efficiency through necessary organizational innovations (Jaskyte, 2017), in the administrative domain, but also in NPOs' operational area (Oppenheimer et al., 2015), introducing, for example, a new way of delivering food to a needy population, or in the institution's own operation (Bassous, 2014).

NPOs face many leadership challenges, such as increased pressure to become more efficient, which require strategic and operational changes in the face of rapidly evolving technology or even regulatory changes (Jiménez, 2018). These strategic changes involve organizational innovation.

#### 4.2.2. Co-citation clusters

Co-citation analysis identifies the frequency with which articles are quoted together in the most recent literature (Small, 1973). In summary, two publications are said to be co-cited when a third one quotes them together. Thus, the greater the number of documents in which two publications are co-cited, the stronger the co-citation relationship between them (Eck & Waltman, 2011). Fig. 6 presented below shows the network of authors' co-citation relationships. The cut-off criterion was the minimum number of eight citations, which led to a co-citation network of 14 nodes.

In this analysis, the size of each node of the network indicates the number of citations that the respective author received, not the number of articles published, as would be the case in analyzing co-authorship. The closer they are to each other, the stronger the co-citation relationship between them: the greater the number of co-quotations, or "third authors" who cited both together. The citation network is distributed in three clusters. The first consists of 6 references, with emphasis on the following most cited ones: Bass (1985), Burns (1978), Jaskyte (2004), and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003). This cluster groups studies related to the different styles of leadership and their relation to performance. The second cluster consists of 5 citations, notably Glaser and Strauss (1967), Jaskyte and Dressler (2005), and Pfeffer and Salancik (1978). We find here more work related to organizational culture and organizational innovativeness, external constraints that affect organizations and how to design and manage organizations under such constraints. The third cluster of the co-citation network consists of 3 quotes: Herman and Renz (2000, 2008) and Brown (2005). In the studies considered, it is observed that cluster 3 mainly concentrates authors that investigate leadership, the organizational effectiveness of non-profit boards and governance practices.

There is a correspondence between the clusters of the co-word and co-citation networks, as shown in Table 5 below.

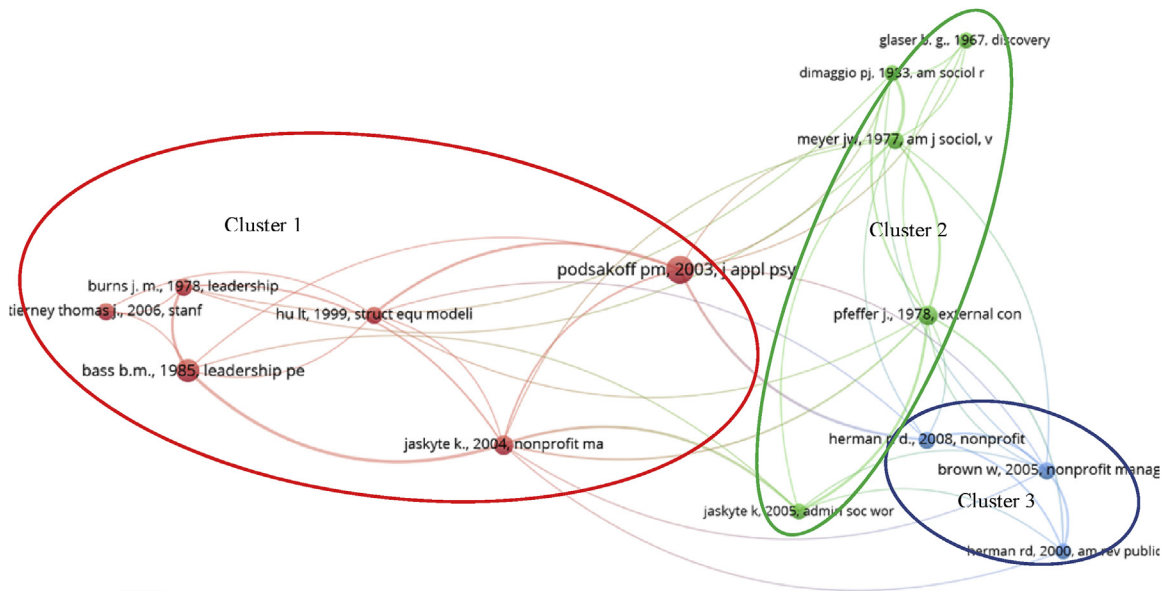


Fig. 6. Co-citation clusters. Source: Adapted from VOSviewer.

4.2.3. Operational model proposal for leadership and organizational innovation in the third sector

The success and nature of leadership has been treated as a “top-down” process of influence, in which leaders change followers’ vision and values to achieve a predefined goal (Hodges & Howieson, 2017) and boost organizational innovation, which in turn impacts on the internal and external factors of the institution. The process of organizational innovation (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018) depends on determinants such as organizational culture (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010; Jaskyte & Dressler, 2005), leadership (Lutz-Allen et al., 2013; Shin & McClomb, 1998), internal organizational properties such as centralization and formalization (Jaskyte, 2012; Shin & McClomb, 1998) external environmental pressures or turbulence, and organizations’ general characteristics such as size (Jaskyte, 2018; Jaskyte & Dressler, 2005) or age (Shin & Choi, 2019). Fig. 7 exemplifies the model of leadership and organizational innovation in NPOs.

The board, made up of people with distinct characteristics, appears at the center of the model. It is these characteristics (gender, age, profession, etc.), together with the cohesion between its members, their culture and social capital, that will enrich and assist it in determining the organizational strategy. However, the board is subject to internal (collaborative) and external (community, etc.) factors. The sum of this set of attributes leads to efficient leadership which in turn is essential in creating continuous organizational innovation. It is this organizational innovation that ultimately impacts the internal and external factors of NPOs, thus closing the circle of leadership and organizational innovation in TS.

The literature review highlighted several aspects that led to proposing the model presented:

- NPOs are made up of people with their own characteristics;
- NPOs are part of a community;
- NPOs are subject to internal and external forces;
- The ability to adapt to the socio-economic landscape is fundamental; and

Table 5  
Cluster matching.

Co-words network	Co-citations network
Cluster 1. Challenges and perspectives of NPO boards	➡ Cluster 1 – organizational culture, innovativeness, external constraints
Cluster 2. The Impact of Leadership Style on Workers and Community in the Third Sector	➡ Cluster 3 – Leadership styles and their relation to performance
Cluster 3. The impact of board efficiency on NPO innovation	➡ Cluster 2 – Leadership, organizational effectiveness of non-profit boards and governance practices

Source: Own elaboration.

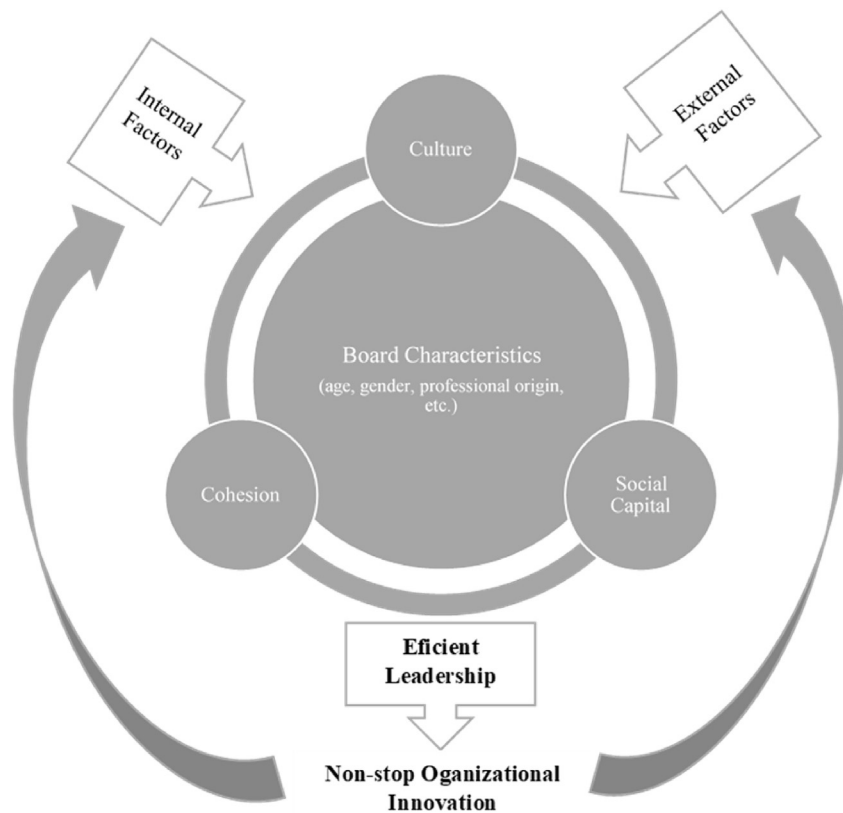


Fig. 7. Leadership and organizational innovation in NPOs: An operational model proposal.  
Source: Own elaboration, based on Jaskyte (2012, 2015).

- This adaptive capacity translates into efficient leadership that will enable the organizational innovation needed to sustain NPOs and achieve their statutory objectives.

## 5. Conclusions, implications and future research

This SLR summarizes and provides a state-of-the-art overview about leadership and organizational innovation in the TS. Thus, the dominant clusters of the related literature streams are identified, and an operational model of leadership and organizational innovation applied to the TS is proposed. Bearing in mind the findings derived from the current SLR, several practical implications are provided, under a critical lens formulated by the authors, considering at least three clusters (that is, dimensions of analysis and action), which require further research and policy efforts, as well as professional management applied to: “The Challenges and perspectives of NPO Boards”; “The Impact of Leadership Style on Workers and Community in the Third Sector”; and “The impact of board efficiency on NPO innovation”. The authors advocate that the clusters now identified and the proposed model could provide a good basis for further research and help policy makers and TS leaders in their decision-making processes, alerting them to the importance of the human capital that makes up the organization, as well as that of the uncertain environment their NPO belongs to. However, the present SLR has its limitations, which are transparently listed (Kraus et al., 2020), probably the main one being the fact that only one database was used. Secondly, content analysis would be useful to learn more about the variables, something that was not done here due to limitations concerning the maximum length of the manuscript, and this could be a guideline for future research. However, this study presents consistent contributions to the literature in the field of organizational leadership and innovation in TS by proposing, in addition to an operational model of leadership and organizational innovations, a descriptive analysis (most cited articles, number of publications and most active countries, classification of the main journals by area of research, showing that 70% of publications are concentrated in 4 journals, methodologies used, revealing the increase in quantitative methods in recent years) and a cluster analysis that clearly identified room for future research.

Proposals for future lines of research are presented in relation to the three clusters analysed:

- Challenges and perspectives of the NPO board:  
Relationship between the most appropriate leadership type and resilience in times of crisis (Valero et al., 2015).

Impact of NPO worker rotation on the performance of services provided (Selden & Sowa, 2015).

Analysis of the relationship between board and administration (Bernstein et al., 2016).

Analysis from a quantitative perspective, how some contextual and strategic elements affect post-succession performance in NPOs (Li, 2019).

There is room for additional studies dealing with the still unexplored relationship between the board and the executive director in the specific context of NPOs, for example, exploring the role played by the type of organizational culture in the third sector, in terms of social capital, lobbying, non-profit orientation and innovative practices (Olinske & Hellman, 2017).

- The impact of leadership style on workers and community in the third sector:
  - Analysis of the positive impact of ethical leadership and how the organizational structure, system and environment interact in the perception of this (Park et al., 2015).
  - Investigate why residence service organizations are more innovative than community service organizations (Shin & Choi, 2019).
- The impact of board efficiency on NPO innovation:
  - To deepen research in the field of the connections between NPO board members' characteristics and the organizational innovation consequently implemented. While some results of empirical research point to a positive relationship between heterogeneity and innovation, some authors argue that if boards become too diverse, this relationship can become negative (Jaskyte, 2015, 2018).
  - Study of the relationship between organizational efficiency and perception of reputation among peers, the relationship between leadership practices and objective measures of organizational efficiency based on independent efficiency programs rather than on the subjective judgment of associates (Mitchell, 2015).
  - Further research on several aspects of diversity, including gender, race, culture and sexual orientation will analyze several gaps in non-profit organizations' top management, which imply that the sector collectively is not reaching its highest level of performance.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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