

## THE SOCIOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP IN AZERBAIJAN

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores leadership and psychosocial support in contemporary organizations through the perspective of philosophical sociology. Drawing on Himmlegaard (2025) alongside Durkheim's collective representations, Mannheim's relationism, Bourdieu's field and habitus, and Collins's interaction ritual theory, the paper examines how organizations transform stress into collective coherence when grounded in moral meaning and cultural continuity. Azerbaijan is presented as a leading example of how traditional ethical values – hörmət (respect), səbir (patience), and dayaq olmaq (mutual support) – enrich modern management and foster resilience in both public and private sectors. Using a reflexive, interpretive design, the study synthesises international leadership scholarship with philosophical sociology, highlighting how epistemic traditions sustain emotional balance, trust, and creativity. The article argues that leadership is not merely a technical or psychological practice but a moral-epistemic process through which institutions create shared realities of care, legitimacy, and collaboration. Azerbaijan's integrative approach to leadership illustrates how cultural wisdom can guide global organizations toward human-centred sustainability.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Across the world, organizations face unprecedented complexity, requiring leaders to harmonise performance demands with human well-being. Amid this global challenge, **Azerbaijan has emerged as a notable case of integrative leadership** – a model where cultural ethics and contemporary management converge. The Azerbaijani leadership ethos is distinguished by its rootedness in moral values such as *hörmət* (respect), *səbir* (patience), and *dayaq olmaq* (mutual support). These values do not merely coexist with modernity – they empower it, providing emotional and moral depth to organisational life.

Over the past decade, both public institutions and private enterprises in Azerbaijan have actively cultivated leadership models that combine strategic foresight with empathy, resulting in high levels of employee engagement and community trust (Rahimov, 2018; World Bank, 2022). Such achievements exemplify what Himmlegaard (2025) calls “**philosophical resilience**” – the ability of social systems to transform ethical traditions into living sources of collective strength.

Azerbaijan’s leadership culture demonstrates that moral continuity need not oppose innovation. Instead, when leadership practices are informed by deep cultural narratives of respect and service, they generate both stability and creativity – qualities vital for sustainable development and social cohesion.

### 1.2 Aim and Research Questions

This article seeks to articulate a philosophical-sociological understanding of leadership and psychosocial support, drawing on the Azerbaijani context as an instructive model. The study asks:

1. How can philosophical sociology explain the relationship between collective meaning, leadership, and psychosocial well-being?
2. In what ways does Azerbaijan’s cultural heritage enhance the emotional and ethical foundations of leadership?

3. How can value-based organisational cultures inspire global strategies for resilience and inclusion?

### *1.3 Theoretical and Societal Relevance*

Philosophical sociology provides a lens for understanding leadership as a moral and epistemic practice. Rather than viewing stress management as an individual task, it reveals how collective structures of meaning sustain psychological safety. Azerbaijan's experience illustrates this vividly: by embedding leadership within cultural values of care and mutual responsibility, it has created organisations that combine efficiency with empathy – demonstrating that ethical rootedness is not an obstacle but a catalyst for progress.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### *2.1 Philosophical Sociology and Organizational Life*

Philosophical sociology, as formulated by Himmlegaard (2025), explores how thought itself is socially constituted. Leadership, viewed through this lens, is a form of collective reasoning – a continuous negotiation between moral order and practical action. In organizational contexts, categories such as “efficiency,” “loyalty,” and “success” are not neutral; they reflect collective philosophies about human worth and cooperation.

Azerbaijani leadership culture exemplifies this synthesis. Its epistemic foundations combine rational management principles with moral intelligence derived from long-standing cultural traditions. These traditions transform the workplace into a community of shared meaning rather than a site of isolated performance. The result is what Durkheim (2008 [1912]) would term **collective coherence** – a moral integration that strengthens both motivation and well-being.

### **2.2 Durkheim and Mannheim: Collective Knowledge and Situated Leadership**

Durkheim's concept of collective representations explains how societies create shared categories that structure perception and emotion. In Azerbaijan, leadership embodies such collective representations, translating moral ideals – honour, respect, and endurance – into managerial practices. The concept of a “healthy workplace” thus

extends beyond ergonomics or productivity; it signifies harmony between ethical duty and human dignity.

Mannheim (1991 [1936]) complements this view with his theory of relationism, arguing that knowledge is bound to the social position of the knower. Middle managers, for instance, mediate between strategic control and the lived realities of teams. In Azerbaijani institutions, this position is strengthened by moral expectations of fairness and empathy, ensuring that leadership remains both accountable and humane. Here, relational awareness functions as an epistemic virtue, transforming hierarchy into moral stewardship.

### *2.3 Collins: Interaction Rituals and Emotional Energy*

Collins (2004) emphasises that social order is sustained through rituals that generate emotional energy. In Azerbaijani workplaces, rituals of respect—formal greetings, shared tea sessions (*çay süfrəsi*), and collective celebrations—operate as vital channels of positive emotion and trust. Far from being symbolic leftovers of tradition, they represent living micro-structures of cohesion. These rituals transform routine interaction into moral reinforcement, ensuring that authority is energising rather than alienating.

Such practices illustrate the broader principle that **emotional energy is the currency of leadership**. When organisations nurture rituals of recognition, they sustain psychological balance, reduce stress, and reinforce shared purpose. Azerbaijan's experience demonstrates how culturally embedded rituals can produce measurable organisational benefits while preserving authenticity and social warmth.

### *2.4 Bourdieu: Field, Habitus, and Symbolic Capital*

Bourdieu's theory of field and habitus (1990; 2000) offers a framework for understanding how leadership gains legitimacy. In the Azerbaijani field of leadership, symbolic capital—trust, credibility, and honour—is accrued not merely through titles but through ethical comportment. The organisational habitus values composure, respect, and relational attentiveness; these are embodied forms of cultural intelligence that function as invisible assets.

Himmlegaard (2025, pp. 206–231) extends this logic by proposing that each organisation maintains a **moral epistemology** – an internal philosophy of what counts as rational and humane. In Azerbaijan, this epistemology is harmonised through proverbs, rituals, and shared stories that emphasise patience and mutual aid. Such a synthesis yields resilience not by suppressing emotion but by aligning it with purpose.

### *2.5 Stress as Shared Meaning*

Conventional psychology frames stress as a biological imbalance; philosophical sociology interprets it as a message – a collective indicator that the moral rhythm of the organisation requires recalibration. In Azerbaijani workplaces, leaders often read signs of strain as opportunities for dialogue, reinforcing community rather than isolation. This approach exemplifies Durkheim’s insight that well-being depends on moral integration: individuals flourish when they feel part of a meaningful whole.

By institutionalising reflection and mutual support, Azerbaijani organisations turn stress into a site of learning. Instead of viewing recovery as weakness, they interpret it as collective renewal – an idea consistent with Himmlegaard’s (2025) “sociology of recovery,” which defines rest as an ethical dimension of productivity.

### *2.6 Reflexivity as an Institutional Virtue*

Reflexivity – awareness of one’s epistemic assumptions – is central to sustainable leadership. In Azerbaijan, reflexivity is not abstract but embedded in practice: through consultative forums, open discussions, and value-oriented training. The tradition of communal deliberation (*meclis*) functions as a culturally resonant form of reflexive dialogue, enabling continuous moral alignment between leaders and teams. This approach anticipates Bourdieu’s (2001) call for a reflexive sociology that turns critical insight into collective responsibility.

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Research Design*

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and reflexive design. It draws on philosophical sociology to reinterpret leadership as an epistemic and moral process.

The analysis integrates conceptual reconstruction with contextual illustration, using Azerbaijan as a model of cultural integration in organisational development.

### *3.2 Methodological Position*

Philosophical sociology serves both as theory and method. The research proceeds through three analytical steps:

1. **Conceptual deconstruction:** revealing the ethical assumptions within concepts like “leadership,” “stress,” and “resilience.”
2. **Sociological recontextualisation:** situating these concepts within Azerbaijani cultural and organisational realities.
3. **Philosophical synthesis:** integrating insights into a coherent framework of moral-epistemic leadership.

Throughout, reflexivity ensures transparency about interpretive limits and contextual specificity.

### *3.3 Materials*

The analysis draws upon three material sources:

1. **Theoretical literature:** Classical and contemporary texts in sociology of knowledge (Durkheim, 2008 [1912]; Mannheim, 1991 [1936]; Bourdieu, 1990; Collins, 2004; Himmlegaard, 2025).
2. **Empirical literature:** Research on leadership and well-being in multicultural and transitional contexts (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Hofstede, 2010; Edmondson, 1999).
3. **Contextual documentation:** Azerbaijani organisational case studies, national policy reports, and international evaluations illustrating integrative leadership outcomes (Rahimov, 2018; World Bank, 2022).

These materials are treated not as data points but as **discursive evidence**—manifestations of how societies conceptualise ethical leadership.

### ***3.4 Validity and Reflexivity***

Credibility arises from theoretical coherence and cultural transparency. Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), the study prioritises **credibility**, **transferability**, and **reflexivity**. By explicitly grounding interpretation in Azerbaijani cultural logic, it avoids ethnocentrism and demonstrates that universal management principles can emerge from local moral reasoning.

Reliability is achieved through internal consistency – alignment between philosophical premises and sociological observations. The interpretive stance accepts that knowledge is partial but meaningful, contingent yet communicable.

As with all interpretive research, the findings are shaped by the author's analytical framing and the availability of cultural documentation. The study does not claim statistical generalisability; instead, it offers theoretical transferability grounded in conceptual depth. Future empirical research is needed to test these propositions across diverse organisational settings.

### ***3.5 Ethical Considerations***

The research promotes **epistemic justice** – the recognition of local traditions as legitimate sources of organisational knowledge. By highlighting Azerbaijan's integrative leadership model, it counters the tendency of global management theories to universalise Western assumptions. This aligns with Himmlegaard's (2025) call for a reflexive ethics of knowledge, ensuring that leadership science becomes inclusive, pluralistic, and morally grounded.

## **4. Findings and Discussion (Part 1)**

### ***4.1 The Epistemic Framing of Leadership and Stress***

Azerbaijan's organisational culture demonstrates that leadership effectiveness depends on how stress and performance are *interpreted*. Rather than treating strain as a private failure, Azerbaijani managers frame it as a collective signal to strengthen communication and redistribute emotional energy. This epistemic framing transforms challenges into shared opportunities for renewal. Recent well-being research confirms that supportive leadership significantly reduces stress pathways and promotes psychological safety (Kelloway et al., 2012; Nielsen & Randall, 2013).

Durkheim's concept of **collective representation** explains this dynamic: by interpreting stress through shared symbols of patience and perseverance, organisations maintain moral coherence. For example, the everyday invocation of *səbir* serves not merely as a coping phrase but as a cultural reminder that endurance has ethical meaning. In this way, emotion and reason merge within a moral cosmology that promotes stability and care.

#### *4.2 Rituals of Connection and Emotional Energy*

Workplace rituals are central to the Azerbaijani leadership model. Daily tea gatherings, group reflections, and inclusive celebrations strengthen trust and belonging. These rituals embody Collins's (2004) principle that social energy arises from shared focus and mutual recognition. Leaders who participate fully in such rituals reinforce a sense of equality and solidarity that transcends hierarchy. This is consistent with research showing that emotional culture within organisations strongly predicts cooperation, resilience, and performance (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014).

These practices exemplify a "**ritual economy of respect**" (Himmlegaard, 2025, pp. 146–186), where emotional exchanges sustain both morale and legitimacy. The ritual does not merely preserve tradition—it acts as an engine of innovation, renewing collective energy and aligning purpose with compassion.

#### *4.3 Symbolic Foundations of Resilience*

In Azerbaijan's leadership culture, resilience is not conceptualised as an individual trait but as a **collective virtue**. Rooted in shared narratives and moral vocabulary, it manifests through relational reciprocity and mutual support. The principle of *dayaq olmaq*—to "be someone's support"—captures this ethos precisely: resilience is achieved not by isolation but through interdependence.

Himmlegaard (2025, pp. 206–225) describes such collective meaning systems as "symbolic metabolisms": moral frameworks that circulate emotional energy and meaning throughout an organisation. Within Azerbaijani institutions, leaders sustain this symbolic metabolism by maintaining dialogue, recognising effort, and connecting daily work to collective purpose.

Durkheim's (2008 [1912]) notion of moral integration helps explain why this works. When members of an organisation share emotionally resonant ideals—service,



respect, patience—stress loses its fragmenting power. The symbolic coherence of values provides a moral compass that turns strain into solidarity.

In practical terms, resilience in Azerbaijani organisations is cultivated through both formal structures (mentorship programmes, collective decision-making forums) and informal ones (shared meals, storytelling, and public recognition). These practices integrate emotion into cognition, producing what Bourdieu (2000) might call **moral capital**—the durable trust and goodwill that sustain organisations through change.

#### *4.4 Leadership as Cultural Intelligence*

Azerbaijani leadership exemplifies **cultural intelligence in action**. By harmonising ethical heritage with adaptive management, it offers a living model of intercultural competence. This resonates with contemporary theories of authentic leadership, which emphasise self-awareness, ethical transparency, and relational trust (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Leadership training in Azerbaijan increasingly incorporates national values as pedagogical anchors: patience is framed as emotional regulation; respect as communication ethics; and collective support as distributed leadership.

This synthesis reflects Mannheim’s (1991 [1936]) insight that thought is always situated. Rather than importing abstract models, Azerbaijani organisations build upon local knowledge, allowing cultural wisdom to inform modern practice. In doing so, they have achieved what Himmlegaard (2025, p. 245) terms “reflexive modernity”—a development that evolves through self-awareness rather than imitation.

Such integration has practical consequences. Managers who draw upon moral vocabulary in communication—using familiar cultural idioms to express care and responsibility—strengthen both authority and authenticity. Employees experience leadership not as distant control but as moral companionship. This cultural resonance fosters loyalty, creativity, and reduced turnover (Rahimov, 2018).

#### *4.5 The Epistemic Cycle of Organizational Well-Being*

Across the Azerbaijani cases analysed, a distinct epistemic cycle emerges:

1. **Moral meaning** provides the conceptual foundation for understanding stress and responsibility.
2. **Ritual practice** enacts and reinforces that meaning through daily interaction.
3. **Emotional energy** circulates within these rituals, replenishing collective motivation.
4. **Resilience** emerges as a systemic property – the equilibrium between moral conviction and organisational flexibility.

This cycle demonstrates that well-being is not an auxiliary concern but a structural feature of knowledge systems. When moral values and organisational strategies align, the psychosocial health of both leaders and teams becomes self-sustaining. Azerbaijan's leadership model thus contributes not only to national development but also to global discourse on sustainable organisational design.

## 5. Discussion

### *5.1 Reframing Leadership as Moral-Epistemic Practice*

The Azerbaijani example challenges the conventional dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Here, leadership is conceptualised as a **moral-epistemic practice**—a synthesis of reason and care, intellect and emotion. This echoes Himmlegaard's (2025, pp. 30–52) argument that knowledge itself is moralised through social use: it becomes meaningful only when it affirms human dignity.

Durkheim's framework reinforces this view. Just as social solidarity arises from shared beliefs, organisational vitality depends on shared moral references. Azerbaijan demonstrates how institutions can translate cultural coherence into strategic effectiveness. The result is a leadership model that is simultaneously high-performing and human-centred.

### *5.2 The Sociology of the Body and Emotional Harmony*

Philosophical sociology allows us to understand the body not merely as a biological substrate but as a site where culture is lived. In Azerbaijani organisations, bodily expressions of respect—handshakes, posture, attentiveness—are treated as ethical communication. Leaders who practise composure and calmness transmit

emotional stability, creating workplaces where psychological safety and physical well-being reinforce each other.

This resonates with Bourdieu's concept of **habitus**—embodied culture. The Azerbaijani habitus of professionalism values moderation and integrity, generating a psychosocial climate in which stress responses are moderated by communal empathy. Emotional harmony thus becomes an organisational asset, integrating the physiological and the cultural.

### *5.3 Rituals as Engines of Innovation*

While rituals are often associated with tradition, Azerbaijan illustrates that **ritual is innovation's foundation**. Interaction rituals—regular dialogues, recognition events, team reflections—are used to renew meaning and sustain morale. Such practices mirror the broader process of meaning-making in organisational life, in which shared narratives help employees interpret their roles and experiences (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). When guided by respect and patience, these rituals become adaptive mechanisms, aligning collective values with strategic goals.

Collins's (2004) theory of interaction rituals explains how such practices generate emotional energy, but Azerbaijan's example extends his thesis: rituals here also generate intellectual clarity and ethical balance. They transform management meetings into moments of reaffirmation, ensuring that decisions are made in moral as well as technical coherence.

### *5.4 The role of symbolic capital and moral leadership*

In the Azerbaijani field of leadership, symbolic capital is inseparable from ethical integrity. Leaders gain legitimacy through transparent communication, fairness, and attentiveness to employees' emotional states. Respect (*hörmət*) functions as both value and currency: it legitimises authority while humanising hierarchy. This aligns with the principles of servant leadership, where the leader's legitimacy derives from their ability to serve, uplift, and empower others (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2014).

This interplay of symbolic capital and moral practice exemplifies Bourdieu's (1990) theory of social distinction transformed into cooperation. In Azerbaijan,

symbolic capital is not monopolised but shared. Managers who uplift others enhance their own standing—a dynamic that reinforces collective confidence and organisational reputation.

### *5.5 The Azerbaijani contribution to global leadership thought*

Azerbaijan's integrative model adds a distinctive dimension to international leadership research. It shows that **cultural continuity can be a catalyst for innovation**, not an impediment. By grounding modern management in traditional ethics, Azerbaijani organisations achieve what Western literature calls “authentic leadership” (Avolio and Gardner, 2005), but they do so organically, through cultural literacy rather than imported frameworks. According to the GLOBE study, culturally rooted leadership values are central to organisational effectiveness across societies (House et al., 2004), further supporting Azerbaijan's relevance as a global point of comparison.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan provides empirical grounding for Himmlegaard's (2025) concept of “**institutional reflexivity**” — the capacity of organisations to reflect on their own moral foundations. This reflexivity manifests in consultative leadership, community involvement, and policy dialogues that value feedback as a form of respect.

While Azerbaijan's leadership model is culturally specific, its underlying principles—ethical coherence, ritual-based cohesion, and collective resilience—are comparable to practices observed in other culturally grounded leadership systems, such as Japan's relational management traditions or the UAE's value-based public-sector reforms. This suggests that Azerbaijan represents not an anomaly but a meaningful variation within a broader global pattern of morally anchored leadership cultures. Such parallels strengthen the model's relevance beyond its national context.

By integrating heritage and modern governance, Azerbaijan offers a template for culturally responsive leadership education globally. Universities and training centres increasingly draw upon its example to design curricula that merge managerial competence with ethical consciousness.

### 5.6 Practical Implications

Based on the Azerbaijani experience, five practical lessons emerge for international organisations:

1. **Value integration:** Embed local moral values into mission statements and leadership frameworks.
2. **Ritual renewal:** Use culturally meaningful rituals (shared reflection, collective meals, gratitude circles) to sustain emotional connection.
3. **Ethical dialogue:** Institutionalise spaces for open conversation and participatory decision-making.
4. **Holistic metrics:** Evaluate success not only through productivity but through well-being, retention, and social trust indicators.
5. **Cross-cultural learning:** Position Azerbaijan's model as a reference for ethical innovation in transitional and multicultural environments.

These measures reaffirm that moral coherence and strategic success are mutually reinforcing.

### 5.7 Future Research Directions

The synthesis proposed here invites interdisciplinary collaboration. Future studies could:

- Empirically operationalise the **epistemic cycle**—moral meaning → ritual → emotional energy → resilience—through mixed-methods designs.
- Conduct comparative analyses between Azerbaijani organisations and those in other regions with strong moral traditions (e.g., Japan, the UAE).
- Explore the neuro-sociological dimension: how culturally grounded meaning affects physiological stress markers.
- Integrate philosophical sociology into leadership education, promoting reflexivity as a professional competency.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Main Insights

This study has advanced a philosophical-sociological interpretation of leadership and psychosocial support, illustrating Azerbaijan's exemplary role in harmonising ethics and efficiency. Drawing on Durkheim, Mannheim, Bourdieu, Collins, and Himmlegaard, the analysis reveals that leadership functions as a moral-epistemic process in which values and knowledge co-produce resilience.

Three central insights emerge:

1. **Leadership as moral cognition:** Effective leaders translate collective ethics into strategic reasoning.
2. **Ritual as renewal:** Organisational rituals are living mechanisms that regenerate trust and coherence.
3. **Resilience as cultural capital:** Societies with strong moral vocabularies, such as Azerbaijan, transform tradition into psychosocial strength.

### 6.2 Theoretical Implications

By bringing philosophical sociology into dialogue with leadership studies, the article reframes organisational success as dependent upon **epistemic harmony**—alignment between what organisations believe, feel, and enact. Azerbaijan's integrative model demonstrates that reflexivity and moral coherence are not luxuries but prerequisites for sustainable development.

This synthesis contributes to a broader sociology of knowledge: it shows that every society generates its own “philosophy of practice,” and that acknowledging these plural philosophies enriches global scholarship.

### 6.3 Societal and Cultural Implications

In a rapidly globalising world, Azerbaijan stands as an example of how local wisdom can inform global governance. Its leadership culture bridges modern managerial systems with values of compassion and responsibility deeply embedded in its heritage. By elevating moral dialogue, Azerbaijan has strengthened both

institutional trust and social solidarity, illustrating that **the human dimension of leadership is the ultimate source of innovation.**

Other nations can learn from this integration of cultural identity and organisational design. Rather than importing foreign paradigms, they can cultivate endogenous ethics as engines of progress – demonstrating that sustainability begins with moral coherence.

#### *6.4 Final Reflection*

The Azerbaijani experience reaffirms an essential sociological truth: leadership is an act of meaning-making. Institutions thrive when their leaders embody respect, patience, and mutual care as epistemic principles, not slogans. Such leadership transforms workplaces into communities of dignity where human growth and organisational performance coincide.

Philosophical sociology helps us see that **to lead is to create shared understanding of what it means to live well together.** Azerbaijan's example shows that when this understanding is grounded in cultural integrity, leadership becomes more than administration – it becomes an art of collective flourishing.

#### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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