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Four leadership models and their effects on distributed (remote) work

Cuatro modelos de liderazgo y sus efectos en el trabajo distribuido (remoto)

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Abstract

The worldwide consequences generated by the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated and changed the way of working as people were abruptly led away from face-to-face interaction with their leaders. Therefore, the global situation forced organizations to review their leadership models seeking to adjust them to the new or rushed forms of distributed work. For this reason, four of the most solid and widely used leadership models are explained, and the definitions of distributed work and its associated variables are reviewed to finally explain the influence found in these models on the new forms of work. The method that was used for the preparation of this work was based on a systematic review from results of research to what and found evidence regarding the relationship between these two variables. Leadership in distributed groups have shown an impact that has progressively increased both in terms of trends, evolution, and models. It was identified that FRL and situational models have effects on distributed workers because they facilitate commitment, goal achievement, and the engagement of collaborators. It is necessary to go deeper into the study of the other models with the aim of empirically verifying the effects they have on distributed work.

Keywords: Remote work; Transformational leadership; Situational leadership; Contingency leadership; Conscious leadership.

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Resumen

Las consecuencias a nivel mundial generadas por la pandemia de la Covid 19 cambiaron la forma de trabajar, pues llevaron a los grupos lejos del seguimiento presencial de sus líderes, esto ha obligado a las organizaciones a revisar sus modelos de liderazgo para buscar ajustarlos a las nuevas formas de trabajo distribuido. Por esto, en principio se explican cuatro modelos de liderazgo sólidos y utilizados, se revisan las definiciones de trabajo distribuido y sus variables asociadas, para finalmente evidenciar la influencia de estos modelos sobre las nuevas formas de trabajo. La investigación que se empleó para la elaboración de este trabajo se fundamentó en una revisión sistemática de los estudios que han relacionado y encontrado evidencias al respecto de la dependencia entre estas dos variables. El liderazgo en grupos distribuidos ha tenido un impacto que progresivamente ha ido en incremento, tanto en sus tendencias, evolución y modelos. Se identifica que el liderazgo transaccional y transformacional son fundamentales para el trabajo distribuido porque consiguen el compromiso y la implicación de los colaboradores. De los demás modelos es necesario que se profundice más en su estudio, con el ánimo de verificar empíricamente los efectos que tienen sobre el trabajo distribuido.

Palabras Clave: Trabajo remoto; Liderazgo transformacional; Liderazgo situacional; Liderazgo contingencial; Liderazgo conciente.

1. Introduction

Distributed work (Trabajo en remoto. 2023) is a topic that has been generating greater interest in current organizations as a consequence of the situation experienced worldwide due to the pandemic and the quarantines generated by Covid-19, as it forced the accelerated transformation of the subtleties that revolve around the world of work and companies, thus conditioning the operation, the strategies and the people who progressively had to adapt their behavior, including leaders, creating environments of greater collaboration, empowerment and above all, incorporating into its dynamics the radical change from in-person to virtuality. It is expected that this work will contribute to the understanding and dissemination of the impacts of the selected leadership models and their contributions or not to the new ways of working in the face of this new reality for organizations, in which they are faced with a topic that looked distant. With this contribution, companies will be able to guide their strategies and the

training of knowledgeable leaders, in this case in leadership models, to accompany the materialization of their objectives more effectively under the new work rules.

Since ancient times, leadership has been presented in human society as a key issue, its most obvious manifestation has been through hierarchies, such as kings and emperors. As seen in a couple of examples, the Sumerian civilization appointed priests who had to manage the property of the people in 25 BC (Estrada, 2007).

Considering this background, it can be stated that, at first, the study of leadership focused on defining a series of structures that could direct society and second, on how great leaders could be described, identifying the characteristics that differentiated them from others, concluding that leaders were born and not made. However, the evidence has allowed us to refute this conception, given that the leadership styles that exist today can be learned, thanks to the fact that their characteristics are possible to acquire through organizational practices such as training and development (Daft, 2006).

Thus, the concept of leadership has been controversial in scientific literature until now, which is why there have been different interpretations, a multiplicity of authors and disciplines that have developed the construct, and hence a vast variety of models that seek to explain it. Fiedler (1961), cited by Kreitner and Kinicki (1997), defines leadership as subjective, its structure is the power of a group. This structuring is conducted through the relationships between the leader and the remaining members of the group. This leader, according to the author, must have the characteristics of satisfying the needs of his group, security, and unity to integrate it. McClelland (1961) defines his theory of human motivation based on the needs for power, achievement and affiliation that are used for the analysis of leadership. For his part, Robbins (1999) defines leadership as the ability to influence a group to guide them to clearly defined objectives. The influence may be formal, according to this author, provided by having a general rank in an organization. The above are just a sample of the possibilities faced by a company that wants to impact the achievement of its results

through the development of a leadership proposal, which until a few years ago was predominantly face-to-face and now, thanks to factors such as new forms of work and the pandemic, must achieve the same or better results with leaders who are distant from their work groups.

2. Theoretical framework

Due to its complex nature, leadership has been approached by various explanatory models that aim to facilitate its understanding and application. This interest has directed multiple approaches that, in the last century, created a scenario that makes its understanding more complex however, it was possible to group them into dominant theoretical explanations where the personal characteristics from the individuals who own said qualities are operationalized. History and the research linked to it revealed that models have been developed showing us to have a vision of the concept of leadership throughout the history in the organization. Some will be outlined below (Zamora and Poriet, 2006).

Lewin in 1939 (cited by Moosa, *et al.*, 2023) proposed the “Laissez-Faire” leadership style. This French concept could be translated as “letting go”, “non-interventionism” or “passive”. In this style, the leader avoids making decisions, hands in responsibility to his collaborators, he or she does not use authority.

Later, Fiedler in 1967 (cited by Reams, 2023) developed the model of “Contingential Leadership”, in which the situation determines leadership in the most effective way and, the various techniques and methods are given by an analysis of the variables that intervene in a certain moment, that is, it seeks to determine patterns, and their relationships, and act accordingly, in complementarity with the lack of interventionism of Lewin’s model. In this sense, the leader should appear when he is needed (Verkerk, 1990).

In 1969, Hersey and Blanchard (1982) (cited by Mahapatra and Jain, 2023) developed a leadership model named “Situational Leadership Theory” focused on followers, also known as collaborators. Taking as a

premise that successful leadership occurs when the appropriate style is selected, it is thus possible to increase the level of maturity or preparation from the followers until they become a high-performance team. These developments resemble a combination in the understanding of the models described so far by understanding the importance from the analysis of the situation and the followers for the development of the group process with the aim of achieving results. This model is based on Lewin’s group studies and seeks to complement what he found (Schermerhorn, 1997).

Hollander in 1978 (cited by Ali *et al.*, 2023) proposes “Transactional Leadership” in which leadership is based on an exchange of relationships between the leader and the followers, which determines what one expects from the other, which generates a set of expectations that is what will regulate the behavior of both parties mediated by constant negotiations to achieve the objectives, attempting to fill the space with expectations left by passive and contingency leadership. Based on the theory of learning from psychology, moving away from the situational model by viewing the human as just another animal that responds to a stimulus and whose response is conditioned through reinforcements or punishments.

In the same year, Burns (cited by Greimel *et al.*, 2023) defined “Transformational Leadership” as the process by which a leader seeks to satisfy higher needs and engage followers to pursue and achieve organizational goals. This model focuses on achieving the commitment and connection of followers with the organization’s purposes. It seeks to “raise the level of human behavior and ethical aspiration of both the leader and the follower. Therefore, has a transformative effect on both” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Burns juxtaposes his theoretical stance with the strength of Hollander’s behaviorist model and his emphasis on the possibility of human transcendence.

In 1991, Avolio (2010) and Bass (1999) (cited by Lawrason *et al.*, 2023) proposed the “Full-Range Leadership Theory” (FRLT). According to the authors, the constructs that make up this theory are three models of leadership behavior: transactional leadership,

Table 1. Summary description of the leadership models

Model	Description
Transformational	It focuses on offering a purpose that transcends the short term and focuses on issues related to the intrinsic needs of the group members.
Transactional	The leader and the collaborator determine what they expect from each other. Motivation is achieved through rewards.
Contingent	Depending on the situation, the most effective way to lead, the techniques and methods will be determined by the analysis of the variables that intervene at a given moment. It seeks to determine patterns and their relationships.
Situational	Identify three forces that lead to action in leadership: the force of the situation, the strength of the followers and the strength of the leader.
Full Range	It includes components of laissez-faire behavior, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership, its purpose is to create a unity that allows the needs of both individuals and the group to be satisfied.
Mindful	Leadership is characterized by charisma, authenticity, and being worthy of full trust, which makes it possible to see, name and work hand in hand with uncertainty, along with strategic processes that allow organizations to be directed.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

transformational leadership, and laissez-faire leadership. This model studies the behavior of leaders, from the most avoidant to the most inspiring and idealized. Since Bass (1985) and Avolio (2010) are co-authors of the transformational leadership model, they decided to complement their original model to better explain the phenomenon, provide better results in the organizational field correcting one of its main criticisms.

Hopper in 2010 (cited by Cilasun and Hook, 2023) formulates that one of the great dangers of leaders is that they can bias the organization with their own mission or vision or be affected by the power of their positions. His formulation draws attention to an aspect that, until then, had been left aside by the other models outlined here. Therefore, it builds a leadership model focused on full or conscious attention, since this allows the leader's perceptions to expand and provides him with authenticity and self-knowledge that allow him to be coherent, authentic and trust his own values. (Lange *et al*, 2018) According to this author, mindfulness can also help ensure that leaders are taking responsibility for the difficulties present in an organization and therefore acting accordingly. The Table 1 summarizes the models described before.

The previously described models were

structured based on the premise of working in the physical company of the leader in the workplace, however, contemporary events have put these constructs to the test since organizations with the aim of continuing to function have seen the need to migrate to forms of distributed work, which include all ways of working away from the physical presence of the leader, sometimes even asynchronously. This work model, although it includes them, goes beyond what is understood by remote work, teleworking, work at home, and work from home. The central objective of this work is to identify if it has been studied how to build teams that work together regardless of the geographical location of their members. For the scope of this research, distributed work includes the work modalities known as remote work, distance work, teleworking, and work at home. The aim is then to describe, through what has been found in empirical research, the effects that the following leadership models generate in distributed work: Full Range (FRL), Situational, Contingent and Mindful (De la Villa, 1966).

For this work, a systematic review is conducted. The scope of the research is descriptive, since it seeks to run a documentary exploration of the concepts associated with leadership and distributed work models.

The method used is documentary research, which is a tool that makes it possible to obtain information, analyze it, and interpret it, combining both primary and secondary sources. Here, documentary analysis is used as a data collection technique that allows tracking, locating, inventorying, selecting, consulting sources through selective, strategic, and critical reading of books and articles to obtain relevant data. (Galeano, 2012).

These sources are classified as primary, secondary, and tertiary (Hernández *et al.*, 2010). For this paper, research and scientific articles found within bibliographic databases are considered primary sources; secondary sources are postgraduate theses and books. Initially, a search is carried out in the Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo and Dialnet databases, thus achieving an approximation to the variables of interest: leadership and distributed work, hoping to have sources of information that allow achieving the proposed objectives and being able to generate a basis for the construction of knowledge regarding this topic that is new for considerable organizations. Subsequently, a general search is conducted through Google Academic.

Considering that the study is documentary in nature, the participants are documents such as articles, theses, books, and official institutional documents. 208 documents referring to the variables under study were selected, thus constituting the total population of this study that is explored. The documents considered in this research work must meet the following criteria:

- Documentation that references the thematic axes, leadership, and distributed work, as well as their relationship.
- Documentation in bibliographic databases such as Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo, Dialnet and Google Academic.
- In general, it is determined to be 10 years old; however, some are a little older due to the number of articles found. Regarding the language, what was found in English and Spanish is reviewed, experimental and non-experimental designs are included.
- To obtain the required information, within the information searched criteria in

bibliographic databases, words such as: telework, remote working, home working, home work, remote teams, distributed work, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, full-range leadership, contingency leadership, situational leadership and mindful leadership are used.

- After reading all the documents fifteen articles in total were selected. The information analysis is conducted using the content analysis technique. It is not intended to perform a bibliometric analysis of the variables, as it is not the objective of the study; for this purpose, it is cited a paper regarding this matter.

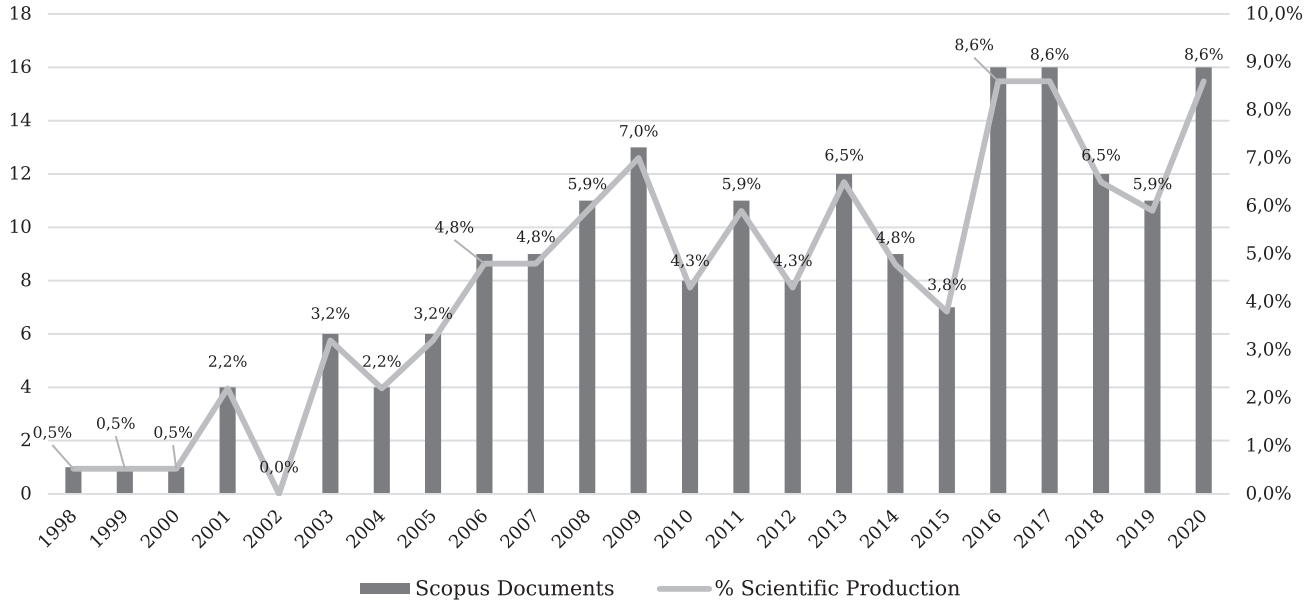
3. Theoretical development

In relation to the bibliometric findings, leadership in distributed groups have shown an impact that has progressively increased, both in terms of trends, evolution, and scientific dissemination. Santamaría (2021) presents an article that aims to highlight in a bibliometric way the topics related to leadership and distributed groups. Scientific production in databases such as Scopus began in 1998, with the first publication being “Result-centered Virtual Teamwork”, additionally, the most cited document according to this database is “Transformational leadership in context: face-to-face and virtual teams”, published in 2009. The Graph 1 illustrates how interest in these variables has increased.

It should be considered that it is likely that scientific production will increase in popularity in the coming years due to the health emergency, people’s new preferences regarding work flexibility and the urgency of adapting distributed work. The Table 2 shows the interest in the study of distributed work from 1998 to the present.

These scientific productions were distributed around the world, it should be noted that Latin American countries only represent 1.59% of this (Santamaría, 2021). With this premise, the importance of deepening this type of study in the region as a contribution to the world of work is highlighted (Organización Internacional del Trabajo [OIT], 2020a).

Graph 1. Interest in the study of distributed work from 1998 to the present



Source: Santamaría (2021).

Table 2. Scientific productions per year related to the distributed work variable

Period	Articles	% Scientific production
1998 - 2000	3	1,60
2001 - 2005	20	10,50
2006 - 2010	50	26,20
2011 - 2015	47	24,60
2016 - 2020	71	37,20

Source: Santamaría (2021).

In relation to the findings of the objective from the study, Ruggieri (2009) examined the level of satisfaction and the various perceptions of leadership, showing that members of virtual groups were more satisfied with a transformational leadership style than a transactional one (Neufeld *et al.*, 2010). Note that the higher the level of job satisfaction, the greater the employee loyalty and the better the levels of customer satisfaction (Holmström and Lindsjö, 2021).

Along the same lines, Fraboulet (2021), Joshi *et al.* (2009) and Radulović and Epitropaki (2020) identified that

mixing transformational and transactional leadership styles is more effective for achieving objectives, improving relationships and communication in virtual groups. This confirms that the FRL model yields numeric results in relation to the work of distributed groups. They also point out the importance of the study due to the lack of research on this topic.

Authors such as Purvanova and Bono (2009) in “Transformational leadership in context: face-to-face and virtual teams” and Brunelle (2013) in the study “Leadership and Mobile Working: The Impact of Distance on the Superior-Subordinate Relationship and the Moderating Effects of Leadership Style”, revealed that the most effective leaders are those who implemented transformational leadership in virtuality, this effect was stronger in virtual teams than in face-to-face ones. In virtual teams the quality of interpersonal relationships improved, which results in higher levels of psychological security for the members of the groups (Jaramillo Benavides, 2017).

On the other hand, Gross (2018) conducted a study titled “Connecting the Links Between Leadership Styles and Virtual Team Effectiveness”, in which he focused his

interest on understanding the links between virtual teams, their effectiveness and different leadership styles. In his findings, he reveals that transformational leadership is useful when solid and trusting relationships are established between team members; transactional leadership focuses more on results, which improves the task, and the communications to achieve it; finally, *laissez-faire* strengthens the innovative capacity, taking into account that there is no one person guiding the team's work. The latter opens the door for a more complex conception of virtual group support from leadership based on the group's needs (Hogue, 2015).

Finally, Greimel et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review, finding nine articles related to virtual teams and transformational leadership. Which shows the opportunity that exists to expand this field of research, even expanding the analysis with other leadership models according to new needs, the realities of the labor market and work life in the company (Alcázar, 2020).

Up to this point, it seems evident that the transformational leadership model or a combination that includes it, such as the FRL, could yield better results with distributed groups, however, evidence was found that contrasts this position.

In studies published by Wong and Berntzen (2019) and AL-Nawafah *et al.* (2020), they showed that transformational leadership was negatively associated with teams, so it would not always be the most effective model for managing distributed groups. They also found that of the leadership models analyzed, the transformational one was the least effective. The above results underscore the need to understand the group's situation to apply the best model according to the conditions. The activities of collaborators when working in a distributed manner can generate doubts in leaders about the degree of control needed. Dasborough and Scandura (2021) conclude that leaders of virtual teams who leave control entirely in the hands of employees run the risk of moving to a *laissez-faire* leadership model, which has been shown to serve empowerment to a certain extent, then job performance declines when "non-intervention" turns into negligence and increased control may lead to improvement

in initial performance, but then it begins to decline (Contreras and Barbosa, 2013).

The previous findings circumscribe evidence for and against the models included in the FRL, both in a segmented and integrated way, although some of them refer to the importance of appropriately applying the leadership style at the right time, they do not point out the characteristics of the situation in which one or the other should be applied.

Distributed work represents a challenge for leaders, the situational model with its approach to the relationship and the task could serve as a guide for leaders in this new way of working, as indicated by Gibson et al., (2002) in the article "Telecommuting in the 21st Century: Benefits, Issues, and a Leadership Model Which Will Work", here they carry out an analysis of the evolution of distributed work in the United States. It suggests that situational leadership is an effective model for 21st-century distributed work group leaders to deliver results and meet people's needs (Spurk and Straub, 2020).

Subsequently, Farmer (2005) aims to describe the model that would help healthcare leaders incorporate situational leadership into their practice with teleworkers. The result was that the principles of situational leadership can be used in both traditional and virtual teams if you adapt your style to the maturity level of the collaborator. For his part, Liang (2021) conducted interviews with leaders of technology SMEs in Sweden about the transition of their collaborators to teleworking because of Covid-19. It was concluded that the leaders had to change their leadership styles to a situational model because they needed to give flexibility and freedom to the members of their groups, who were distributed workers, to undertake the tasks assigned to them. Additionally, Tvedt *et al.* (2023), found that flexibility in the application of leadership styles is essential to contributing to the effectiveness, communication, and achievement of distributed teams.

The findings for the situational model show two pieces of evidence, that it is a model that works for both face-to-face and distributed contexts, a great advantage over mixed

teams that most companies have, and that it favors both the fulfillment of the task and the development of people as long as the leader applies the necessary style according to the conditions of the group (Guzmán *et al.*, 2020).

Madlock in his article “The Influence of Leadership Style on Telecommuters in the Insurance Industry: A Contingency Theory Approach” (2018) concludes that teleworkers have a better perception of leaders who focus on the task rather than on relationships. Providing quick and timely task-related information has added value by increasing employee and customer satisfaction levels.

Finally, the most recent model is mindful leadership. Faced with this, Lange and Rowold. (2019), and later Mackowski (2023), indicate that when developing an intervention for leaders based on mindfulness, they found that the leaders who participated significantly reduced their level of stress and increased their mindfulness skills. They described findings in more considerate communication towards their collaborators, emotional regulation, and conscious listening.

Leadership in distributed groups has been a topic of study for a couple of decades, however, the global pandemic context has accelerated the incorporation of hybrid or distributed models in most organizations globally (McNamara, 2021). In this way, the need to have group support practices that, on the one hand, contribute to people’s loyalty and simultaneously allow groups to achieve the necessary results to maintain the performance of companies is evident. This is why it is necessary to reflect on the implications and capabilities necessary for companies to continue being competitive in an increasingly globalized labor market, based on leaders better prepared to face distributed or mixed teams (Mayer *et al.*, 2023).

4. Conclusions

Through the findings of the systematic review, it is evident that post contemporary organizations and leaders are leaving aside their traditional management models to acquire new models that allow them to manage in a distributed manner, which is a challenge for organizations today (Kaul *et al.*,

2020). Also finding the type of leaders able to manage groups when physical presence is exchanged for a distributed or mixed one is more difficult, so groups and leaders must have adequate training and effective support derived from a specific leadership model that allows achieving the organization’s objectives. For the Latin American context, it is key to consider the new scope of hiring by multinationals that can attract talent in a distributed manner and in this way, incorporate elements of leadership models that enhance distributed work as a factor of human capital loyalty (OIT, 1996) (OIT, 2020b).

It was evident how transactional and transformational leadership are fundamental for distributed leadership because they achieve the commitment and engagement of collaborators. Furthermore, in comparisons between these, there is a predominance of implementing the transformational model over the transactional one, without finding irrefutable evidence that one outweighs in results over the other. Since there are studies where it is evident how it could sometimes be negatively associated with distributed teams and their performance due to the lack of emphasis on results, when they are mixed under the FRL proposal, higher levels of trust, commitment, and the quality of relationships in the groups were found.

It was found in the studies collected that, compared to face-to-face groups, the transformational leadership model gave better performance in distributed teams. However, studies found less effectiveness between this model and group performance. The laissez-faire model was found to initially provide an increase in autonomy, but it quickly declined due to the emergence of neglect by the group over time.

On the other hand, this review made it possible to highlight situational leadership, as an adaptive model that encourages leaders to identify the environmental variables and the particularities of each collaborator to achieve their objectives. Evidence was found that reports an increase in the productivity of distributed teams when this model is applied by facilitating flexibility and freedom according to the needs of the group and the maturity of the members.

It was evident that the FRL, situational, contingency, and mindful leadership models influence distributed work. With the first two having greater production, the hypothesis of this phenomenon is that the FRL and the situational are more robust models that operationalize in greater depth the expected behavior of the leader.

It is important to mention that this work has limitations that can be taken up for future research. The methodology implemented focused on a documentary review fixated on leadership models; however, distributed teams have a series of characteristics that make them particular and would be important when it comes to understanding their functioning. Also, a wide range of behaviors were presented from the various leadership models and how these contribute to the performance of a distributed team, though, no tools are given to achieve these behaviors. Finally, it is necessary for Latin America to take a greater role in this issue, which is a fundamental point for the development of organizations, understanding how the context is constantly changing.

5. Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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