



Trust as the Foundation of Leadership: A Conceptual Analysis of “The Law of Solid Ground” in John C. Maxwell’s Leadership Theory

Ranto

Universitas Pelita Harapan Surabaya

E-mail: rasmaredja@gmail.com

Digital Object Identifier (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.33856/kerugma.v9i1.641>

Article history

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
21 January 2026	24 March 2026	12 April 2026	30 April 2026

ABSTRACT

Effective leadership is determined not only by a leader’s managerial abilities or technical skills, but also by the moral qualities and character that underpin their leadership. One key concept that emphasizes the moral dimension of leadership is the principle of “The Law of Solid Ground,” as articulated by John C. Maxwell. This principle asserts that trust is the primary foundation supporting the entire structure of leadership. Without trust, leadership loses its moral legitimacy and its influence over followers. This article aims to theoretically analyze the concept of the Law of Solid Ground within Maxwell’s leadership theory and explore its implications for effective leadership practice. This study employs a literature review (library research) method, utilizing a conceptual analysis of Maxwell’s works alongside a critical dialogue with modern leadership literature from various experts. The results of the study indicate that trust is a fundamental element of effective leadership and that a leader’s character integrity is a key factor in building that trust. Integrity fosters credibility, strengthens the moral legitimacy of leadership, and fosters a healthy and sustainable organizational culture.

Keywords: leadership; integrity; trust; John C. Maxwell; effective leadership

Citation Style (APA): Ranto, R. (2026). Trust as the Foundation of Leadership: A Conceptual Analysis of “The Law of Solid Ground” in John C. Maxwell’s Leadership Theory. *Theological Journal Kerugma*, 9(1), 48–60. <https://doi.org/10.33856/kerugma.v9i1.641>

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is one of the most decisive factors in the success or failure of an organization. Various studies on both leadership theory and practice indicate that leadership quality is often identified as the primary variable influencing leadership success, as well as an organization’s ability to achieve its long-term goals. This means that discussions on leadership-related topics will likely never be “complete,” given the ever-evolving dynamics of organizations across various fields. Consequently, research on the fundamental principles of leadership continues to evolve across various disciplines, such as management, organizational sociology, leadership psychology, and applied Christian theology.

In the development of modern leadership theory, there is a new emphasis in which experts increasingly highlight the importance of moral dimensions and character in leadership. Whereas in the past many leadership theories primarily focused on managerial skills or leadership styles, in recent decades attention has increasingly shifted toward the leader’s character as a fundamental factor determining leadership success without, of course, disregarding existing theories of technical skills. Paul G. Northouse (2022) asserts that effective leadership is not

only related to the ability to influence others, but also to the ethical qualities that underpin a leader's actions in exercising that influence.

One figure who has consistently emphasized the importance of character in leadership is John C. Maxwell. In his renowned work "*The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*", Maxwell (2007) outlines various fundamental principles that he believes are universal in leadership practice and are crucial for effective leadership. Among these principles, Maxwell (2007) identifies The Law of Solid Ground as the most fundamental law of leadership. This principle states that trust is the primary foundation underpinning effective leadership. Without trust, leadership lacks a strong foundation to effectively influence followers.

Within Maxwell's framework, leadership is essentially influence (Maxwell, 2007). This influence drives leadership dynamics toward the organization's goals. However, such influence can only occur if followers trust the leader. That trust does not arise on its own but is built through the leader's character integrity, reflected in the consistency between values, words, and actions. In other words, integrity serves as the primary source of leadership credibility, which in turn fosters trust. Thus, trust becomes the foundation that determines the success and effectiveness of leadership. Maxwell is perhaps the most prominent figure in widely emphasizing this principle in his writings. However, several modern authors also acknowledge the importance of this principle, even if they do not use the same technical terminology, including: Stephen R. Covey (2004), James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (2017), and Francis Fukuyama (1995).

On the one hand, Maxwell's claim is actually not too far-fetched. It is not uncommon in modern leadership practice to encounter various integrity crises that undermine trust in leaders. Various scandals in the worlds of politics, business, and religious organizations demonstrate that a leader's moral failure can quickly destroy the legitimacy of leadership that had been built up over many years. Failure to establish a solid foundation of principles causes a person's leadership to collapse; no matter how skilled or talented that person may be, it results in severe damage, often difficult for others or their followers to comprehend. This phenomenon demonstrates that integrity is not merely a matter of a leader's personal morality but a strategic factor determining the sustainability of their leadership. (Maxwell, 2022).

Based on this background, a study on the principle of The Law of Solid Ground in John C. Maxwell's leadership theory becomes relevant to be examined more deeply and objectively in relation to effective leadership. Although this concept is quite popular in practical leadership literature, academic studies that analyze the concept in dialogue with modern leadership theory as well as leadership theology perspectives are still relatively limited. Therefore, this research seeks to provide a conceptual contribution by analyzing the principle more systematically.

The purpose of this study is to theoretically analyze the concept of The Law of Solid Ground in Maxwell's leadership theory and to explore its implications for effective leadership.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a literature study method (library research) with a conceptual analysis approach to John C. Maxwell's leadership theory, particularly regarding the principle of The Law of Solid Ground. This approach was chosen because the main focus of the study is to examine the theoretical concept concerning the relationship between integrity, trust, and leadership effectiveness. Through this literature study method, the research aims to collect, review, and analyze various literary sources relevant to the research topic (Creswell, 2018). In this study, the sources used include academic books and works in the field of leadership. The main sources in this research are

the works of John C. Maxwell that discuss leadership principles, particularly the book “*The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*”, which becomes the object of study and analysis. In addition, this research also utilizes various supplementary literature from leadership experts such as Stephen R. Covey, James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, Paul G. Northouse, Edgar H. Schein, Robert K. Greenleaf, George Barna, Petrus Octavianus, as well as Yakub Tomatala, who specifically discuss leadership in a Christian context.

The data analysis technique was carried out through several stages. First, the researcher identified the main concepts related to the principle of a Firm Foundation Law in Maxwell's theory. Second, these concepts were critically analyzed by comparing them with the ideas of other leadership experts who discuss the relationship between character, trust, and leadership effectiveness. Third, the results of this analysis were used to formulate theoretical and practical implications for leadership development rooted in character integrity.

Through this approach, the research is expected to provide a conceptual contribution in enriching leadership studies, particularly in understanding the relationship between integrity and trust as the foundation of effective leadership.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership is one of the most extensively researched concepts and spans a wide range of fields. Maxwell himself defines leadership as influence, nothing more, nothing less. He believes that leadership is not determined by position, title, or organizational structure, but by a person's ability to attract followers and influence others to move toward achieving a goal (John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*). Maxwell's definition is supported by Northouse, who defines leadership as a process in which an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. (Paul G. Northouse, 2022).

This definition emphasizes that leadership is not merely a formal position within an organizational structure, but a process of influence that occurs in the interaction between leaders and followers. However, it does not stop there; both Maxwell and Northouse assert that effective leadership is not only related to the ability to influence others, but also to the ethical qualities that support the leader's actions in exercising that influence. Specifically for Maxwell (2007), such influence is rooted in character, integrity (ethical quality) that generates trust. A similar point is also made by Paul G. Northouse (2022), who highlights the relationship between moral character and integrity with effective leadership.

Maxwell's view on the importance of character and integrity in leadership aligns with Stephen R. Covey's (2004) thinking, which distinguishes between the ethic of character and the ethic of personality. Covey (2004) argues that sustainable success cannot be built solely through communication techniques or image manipulation, but must be rooted in strong character and consistent moral integrity. From this perspective, integrity is not just a personal moral quality, but also the foundation that enables trust to be created in leadership relationships. Such trust is what Maxwell calls the Law of Solid Ground for true leadership. As proven in practice, this principle is an undeniable axiom for strong and enduring leadership.

In addition, research in the field of organizational leadership also shows that trust plays an important role in shaping a healthy organizational dynamic. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (2017), in their study on leadership, found that credibility is the main factor that determines whether someone is worthy of being trusted as a leader, while credibility itself arises from integrity. According to their research, followers tend to follow leaders whom they consider honest, competent, inspiring, and having a clear vision of the future.

In a broader context, trust can also be understood as a form of social capital within an organization. Francis Fukuyama (1995) explains that trust enables effective social cooperation within a community or organization. When trust is high, individuals in the organization tend to collaborate more effectively, conflicts can be minimized, and organizational productivity can increase. Therefore, there is an undeniable close relationship between integrity and credibility that builds trust and the dynamics of leadership that run effectively.

Analysis of the Concept of The Law of Solid Ground

The concept analysis of The Law of Solid Ground will refer to two main focuses, namely examining the basic concepts and critically evaluating the principles in this leadership theory, as well as their implications in effective leadership.

The Basic Concept of The Law of Solid Ground

The Law of Solid Ground is a law in leadership which states that the foundation that serves as the basis for true leadership is trust. Trust in this context is not trust in the sense of faith or religious belief, but rather a statement of a person's credibility so that they can be relied upon. Therefore, trust is the main foundation in leadership. (Maxwell, 2007). Meanwhile, trust itself is built/formed mainly from the role of character and integrity, which are key factors for the creation of trust in leadership. Character serves as the defense base that becomes the root for the realization of trust which supports and sustains leadership from collapse. Thus, trust in this case becomes a solid foundation that supports the structure of strong and effective leadership. Character is the key that allows the creation of trust; whereas trust is the strong foundation that makes the creation of strong and effective leadership possible.

That is the firm foundational law in leadership. According to Maxwell (2007), this principle has been proven in practice, as a premise or irrefutable law for strong and enduring leadership. Yakub Tomatala (1997) also refers to this foundation of character and trust as a basic competency in leadership, and it is one of the most important factors in leadership alongside skills and knowledge. Meanwhile, Petrus Octavianus (1991) stated that trust is one of the most crucial determining factors for the success or failure of spiritual leadership, alongside other factors.

The basic principle in this law refers to the understanding that trust built from the character, integrity, and credibility of a leader is an absolute requirement for establishing strong and effective leadership in and through that individual. This means that without trust as the foundation, leadership will collapse and cannot function. Maxwell (2007) emphasizes that in this foundational concept, it is trust that enables leadership. That is why trust is called a solid foundation, as it serves as the base that supports leadership. In his belief, Maxwell (2007) stated that among the 21 laws of leadership in his book, the law of solid foundation is the most important of all. This is understandable, because this law serves as the base, the main foundation that supports the entire structure of leadership above it, so if this solid foundation collapses, the leadership will fall apart.

Actually, referring to the theory of The Law of Solid Ground, trust itself is built by involving several factors/qualifications, such as: ability, connections, and character. However, in the context of a solid foundation of leadership, a leader's character is the main factor, the key and most significant factor, and cannot be compromised in the effort to build trust. Maxwell (2007) argues that mistakes/failures once in terms of ability and connections can basically be forgiven, especially in the context of good character; however, mistakes and failures in character once can undermine the foundation as well as the structure of leadership. This caused his leadership to collapse –

no matter how extensive the person's connections and talents were, it caused very severe damage, and it was often difficult to forgive or excuse by others/followers. Even if it could be repaired, it would take a very long time and a very high price would have to be paid. Trust is the foundation that supports the structure of leadership built upon it; that is the meaning of a solid or strong foundation in leadership.

Based on this basic concept, the formulation that becomes the concept scheme can be summarized as follows: trust as a strong foundation will generate/drive influence, which is the fundamental key to effective leadership. Trust itself originates from and is produced by integrity and credibility, while integrity itself is rooted in character.

Trust as the Foundation in Leadership

As has been explained in the previous section regarding this foundational law, the firm foundation in true leadership is trust. It is trust that enables leadership and allows the dynamics of true leadership to operate and function well. Trust becomes the foundation that supports the existence of leadership, so without good trust as a solid foundation, the structure of leadership built upon it can certainly be expected to collapse.

Trust itself is actually a form of credibility and at the same time a form of appreciation/commitment manifested by others towards the individual and the existence of a leader. As a result or logical consequence, trust, although it naturally comes on its own, is not without a basis or reason. Trust does not come suddenly, or by chance, nor can it be forced. In Maxwell's research (2007), trust involves reason factors including competence, connection, and character. However, while competence and connection can be negotiated, and failure to a certain extent can be tolerated, the same is not true for character. In leadership, character is non-negotiable and irreplaceable. Thus, character or integrity is the most important determining factor for the emergence of trust.

Some leadership experts do not always agree on the other elements that build and give rise to trust; however, they always agree on the main and most important element or factor that forms trust, namely character/credibility/integrity, followed by other factors. (George Barna, *Leaders On Leadership: Pandangan Para Pemimpin Tentang Kepemimpinan*, Malang: Gandum Mas, 2002, pp. 74, 75; John C. Maxwell, *Mengembangkan Kepemimpinan Dalam Diri Anda*, Jakarta: Binarupa Aksara, 1995, p. 41; Petrus Octavianus, *Manajemen Dan Kepemimpinan Menurut Wahyu Allah*, Malang: Yayasan Persekutuan Pekabaran Injil Indonesia and Gandum Mas, 1991, p. 9; Tomatala, *Kepemimpinan Yang Dinamis*, Malang: Gandum Mas, 1997, pp. 329-331).

The basic principle that is emphasized in this foundational law is that trust as the basis of true leadership primarily arises from character, is founded on, and originates from the character, credibility, and integrity of a leader. For the same purpose, some authors use the term "credibility" or "integrity." Although these three terms are not entirely the same, what is meant in relation to the trust they generate is generally the same, namely concerning the personal qualifications of the leader. Quoting the thoughts of Stephen R. Covey (2004), the scope of areas included in this character qualification encompasses: integrity, humility, loyalty, self-control, courage, justice, purity, patience, diligence, simplicity, courtesy, and the Greatest Law (the law of Love: toward God and fellow human beings). Meanwhile, Jack W. Hayford in George Barna's compilation (2002) stated that the character and integrity referred to are none other than all the Christian-spiritual characters within a leader.

It can be concluded here that the character of a leader, which forms the basis for building trust, is a qualification of a leader that expresses grand moral, ethical, spiritual, and mental characteristics and values; and at the same time is well-integrated and actualized in life statements: behavior, attitude, lifestyle, exemplary conduct,

and so on. Such a life reality is an embodiment of integrity. Good integrity like this automatically builds strong credibility for the leader's personality. And in turn, strong trust in the leader arises, which underpins his leadership over others.

So, character, credibility, integrity, and then trust, which become important foundations in leadership, primarily do not concern leadership material matters, approaches, techniques, theories, strategies, planning, or methods; it is not about what a leader does, but primarily about who and what kind of person the leader is. (Maxwell, 1995). It is about the basic character and essence of the leader's personal life, which forms the foundation for the leadership they build and practice, and which significantly influences whether their leadership succeeds or fails. As Wayford (2002) stated, only by having spiritual character is there a guarantee of true fruits, lasting influence in leadership. There is no "good working method" or "number of orders and regulations that can produce a truly spiritual leader". Human nature generally finds it easier to spend time 'adopting various systems' rather than prioritizing sincere introspection before God (which is crucial for character development) and a continuous readiness to undergo transformation.

Regarding this matter, George Barna (2002) argues that without effective, godly leadership that honors Christ, it will essentially lead to a point of sad reality. He adds that a Christian leader must be a person with a Christ-like character. Since the primary function of a leader is to enable people to know, love, and serve God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, it is inevitable that the leader must first possess a personal character that reflects Christ's character. This is the area that forms the foundation and basis for building true, strong leadership.

In other words, it can be asserted that this solid foundational law pays attention to the personal life domain of a leader, which encompasses all aspects that build credibility and integrity. Yakub Tomatala (1997) stated that competence in this character domain is a determining factor that is permanent in nature. This competence is essentially a permanent domain that builds trust, which always serves as a solid foundation for leadership. As a permanent domain within this foundational framework, it is irreplaceable and must be built from here. Because of this permanent and irreplaceable determining foundational domain, Tomatala (1997) added that there is only one possibility for it, namely to continue developing within oneself through its interactions with various other factors.

Trust is an important element in the relationship between leaders and followers. In the organizational context, trust enables effective collaboration as well as open communication among members of the organization. Francis Fukuyama (1995) explains that trust is a form of social capital that allows individuals within a community to work together productively. When the level of trust is high, organizations tend to have lower levels of conflict and better collaboration capabilities.

In leadership, trust has very important implications for organizational effectiveness. Leaders who are trusted by their followers will find it easier to gain support in implementing policies and achieving organizational goals. Conversely, leaders who have lost the trust of their followers will face various obstacles in carrying out their leadership. It is within this framework that the principle of The Law of Solid Ground proposed by Maxwell becomes relevant for deeper analysis. The principle asserts that trust is the foundation that supports the entire structure of leadership.

Integrity as a Source of Trust

Integrity is one of the most fundamental elements in leadership. In general, effective leadership cannot be separated from the good integrity of a leader. Generally, integrity can be understood as the alignment between a

person's values, words, and actions. A leader who has integrity will demonstrate consistency between values, words, and actions in their behavior and the decisions they make.

Stephen R. Covey (2004) emphasizes that integrity is part of what he calls the ethic of character. Integrity becomes one of the important pillars in building strong and effective leadership. From Covey's perspective, true success cannot be built solely through communication techniques or managerial strategies, but must be rooted in strong character and consistent moral integrity. Referring to the basic concept of leadership as 'influence,' without strong character and integrity, the structure of leadership becomes fragile, the influence weak, and it is difficult to generate commitment from followers.

Therefore, in the context of leadership, integrity plays a very important role. First, integrity creates the leader's credibility in the eyes of followers. Second, integrity builds trust, which allows the creation of healthy working relationships and strong synergy within the organization. Third, integrity strengthens the moral legitimacy of leadership, so that followers are willing to provide voluntary support and express commitment to the leader and their vision. Kouzes and Posner (2017), in their research on leadership, found that the quality most expected by followers from a leader is honesty. Honesty itself is an important element of integrity.

As is known, honesty is a part of the embodiment of integrity. This finding shows that integrity is a very important element in building leadership credibility, which then results in trust.

Character as the Root of Integrity

Integrity is a very important concept in the study of modern leadership. In the context of leadership, integrity is not only related to honesty in the narrow sense, but also encompasses comprehensive moral consistency in a leader's life. It is understood as fundamental moral values that are consistently and sincerely integrated and manifested in a real way throughout all aspects of leadership dynamics. Stephen R. Covey (2004) emphasizes that integrity is part of the ethic of character that serves as the foundation for an effective life, including in leadership. According to Covey (2004), sustainable success cannot be built through communication techniques or self-image manipulation. True success can only be achieved if a person has strong and consistent moral integrity.

It appears that integrity is closely related to and inseparable from moral character. In this relationship, character comes first and gives rise to integrity. Character speaks to the personal identity of a leader, while integrity speaks to what and how a leader acts (decisions, actions) based on that personal identity. In this context, character is an internal operating system composed of a set of values, beliefs held, and ethical morals. This internal operating system plays an important role in determining a personal disposition that will result in an external manifestation, such as integrity.

Character becomes a moral-ethical presupposition for decisions and actions. It is like a blueprint of the structure of integrity. Thus, strong character will provide a steady moral compass, in which moral character commitment is integrated into behavior. Without solid character, a person will easily be swayed by situational pressures. Integrity emerges when that character directs and is consistently integrated into actions, regardless of personal consequences (Maxwell, 2007).

Character is the source from which integrity originates. Character produces integrity when there is no gap between the values that are believed (character) and the behaviors displayed. Leaders with integrity are those who embody the principle of one word with action, and that is rooted in a mature character (Covey, 2004).

Furthermore, Luthans and Avolio (2003) state that in the study of authentic leadership, character is referred to as psychological capital, which plays a role as the driving force of behavioral integrity within the organization.

Character also allows a leader to succeed in tests or difficult situations, which then results in integrity. In this case, integrity is the outcome of a character that chooses to adhere to the principle of what is right rather than taking shortcuts that are instantly advantageous but damage moral values and undermine trust. Cloud Henry (2006) concluded that integrity is the ability of character to function fully and meet the demands of reality without compromise.

Critical Evaluation of The Law of Solid Ground in John C. Maxwell's Leadership Theory

First, the concept of The Law of Solid Ground primarily views leadership as focused on the individual leader. This becomes clear when looking at the overall context of the concept within the entire book that discusses the 21 laws of leadership according to Maxwell (2007). Maxwell takes aspects of a leader's personal character in leadership and assumes that personal character (such as integrity-credibility/trust) becomes the foundation or basis for strong and effective leadership. Although it cannot be denied that a leader's personal character (morals, integrity, credibility) is very influential and also determines the dynamics of effective leadership, Maxwell's conclusion has invited a lot of criticism for being considered too simplistic a formula for effective leadership. Referring to Gary Yukl's (2013) academic study, which has become a widely referenced source, leadership itself involves very complex aspects, making it difficult to conclude that The Law of Solid Ground is the main key to leadership effectiveness.

Although the character traits of leaders are indeed very important, modern leadership literature shows that leadership effectiveness is also significantly influenced by a variety of broader contextual factors. Gary Yukl (2013), for example, asserts that leadership is a complex phenomenon that involves the interaction between leaders, followers, and organizational situations. Thus, leadership success cannot be explained solely by the individual character of the leader, but also by structural and contextual factors that affect organizational dynamics. In a similar framework, Edgar H. Schein (2010) shows that leadership has a very close relationship with the formation of organizational culture. According to Schein (2010), one of the main functions of a leader is to create, maintain, and transform the organizational culture that enables members of the organization to work effectively to achieve shared goals within that framework. From this perspective, leadership effectiveness is not only determined by the character of the leader but also by the leader's ability to shape the organization's value system and practices that support the organization's vision. This approach suggests that leadership should be understood as a systemic and contextual phenomenon, not merely as an expression of the individual character of the leader.

Second, the concept material of The Law of Solid Ground in Maxwell's writing shows the pattern or character of a popular-practical-inspirational style compared to the academic discussion of concepts and the development of knowledge. This does not mean that this writing is bad or unimportant, but it is insufficient to develop and build standardized theories in leadership. The character of Maxwell's leadership concept construction, such as The Law of Solid Ground, is very suitable to support and inspire leadership practices in field implementation by leadership practitioners. In any case, leadership practice in various fields is very important to be supported and based on good integrity and credibility of the leader. These characteristics make Maxwell's approach emphasize practical and inspirational principles rather than theoretical frameworks built through systematic empirical research. In academic literature, leadership theory is generally developed through research following standard and objective

guidelines. Paul G. Northouse (2022) asserts that modern leadership theory arises through a systematic research process involving both quantitative and qualitative methods to understand the dynamics of influence between leaders and followers.

However, this criticism does not automatically diminish the value of Maxwell's contribution to the development of leadership discourse. On the contrary, Maxwell's approach can be understood as an effort to translate complex leadership concepts into practical principles that are easy to understand and apply in everyday organizational life. Although Maxwell's approach was not explicitly built through systematic empirical research, a number of principles he proposed align with findings in modern leadership research. One of the clearest examples is Maxwell's emphasis on integrity as the foundation of effective leadership. This is consistent with the research of James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (2017) on leader credibility. Based on their research involving thousands of respondents from various organizations, Kouzes and Posner found that the quality most expected by followers from a leader is integrity. Meanwhile, integrity serves as the foundation that shapes a leader's credibility in the eyes of their followers and generates trust.

Third, when comparing and looking at Maxwell's ideas in the context of the broader leadership theory canon, the characteristics of Maxwell's leadership theory in *The Law of Solid Ground* can be categorized within the model of inspirational or transformational leadership as developed by James McGregor Burns, and also Bernard M. Bass. (2006). The theory emphasizes that an effective leader is able to inspire followers through a strong moral vision and through a deep trust relationship between the leader and the followers. Within this framework, the character and integrity of the leader become important factors that enable the creation of such trust.

Moreover, Maxwell's concept is also characteristically closely related to the theory of authentic leadership, which has developed in modern leadership literature. In general, this theory emphasizes that effective leaders are those who lead authentically by demonstrating consistency between personal values, moral beliefs, and real actions. This principle is very close to the principle of *The Law of Solid Ground*, which is based on character and integrity in Maxwell's concept. Bruce J. Avolio and William L. Gardner (2005) explain that authentic leadership requires relational transparency and high moral integrity from a leader. This principle characteristically has similarities with Maxwell's idea about the importance of integrity in building trust.

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that the concept of *The Law of Solid Ground* proposed by Maxwell has a significant contribution in emphasizing the importance of integrity and trust in leadership. This principle is in line with various studies in the field of modern leadership that show that a leader's credibility is an important factor in building effective relationships between leaders and followers.

Nevertheless, Maxwell's approach also has a number of limitations. First, Maxwell's approach tends to be more normative and practical rather than academically analytical. Second, this approach overemphasizes the role of individual leaders without giving sufficient attention to contextual factors within the organization. Third, within the broader realm of leadership theory, the characteristics of Maxwell's theory can be identified and categorized as transformational and authentic leadership theories. Nevertheless, the relevance of the principles of *The Law of Solid Ground* remains strong in the context of contemporary leadership. Especially in an era where many organizations face a crisis of trust in their leaders, Maxwell's emphasis on integrity as the foundation of leadership provides an important reminder that effective leadership, on one hand, ultimately relies on the moral character of the leader.

Implications of The Law of Solid Ground Concept in Effective Leadership

The implication of speaking about the correlative impact concerning this solid foundational law on leadership. More specifically, it is 'how factors or elements such as character, credibility, integrity, and trust manifest relationships that have a significant impact in the context of leadership?' The principle promoted by Maxwell in the concept of the law of solid ground in his leadership theory does not cover all areas of leadership, nor is it academic in nature. Nevertheless, Maxwell addresses the personal domain of leaders, which also has a significant correlative impact on effective leadership.

Correlative Impact of Trust on Effective Leadership Dynamics

At the most basic level, the dynamics of effective leadership are built on a foundation of mutual trust between the leader and those being led, specifically the trust of the followers in their leader. The absence of trust in a leader or a low level of trust in a leader is directly related to leadership dynamics, leadership effectiveness, and will subsequently impact many aspects of the leadership journey. Maxwell (1995) cited the results of a Carnegie-Mellon survey which found that one-third of subordinates did not trust their superiors, primarily due to issues of credibility, which greatly affects organizational dynamics. Cavett Roberts said, as quoted by Maxwell: 'If my people trust me, I will get their actions.' (Maxwell, 1995, p. 41, 42.)

Robert's statement expresses that trust leads to the occurrence of leadership dynamics that run effectively in the implementation through subordinates or followers, in terms of: obeying and carrying out decisions/policies/rules/vision, in responsibility, dedication/loyalty, in completing tasks, in stating contributions, in maximum involvement, as well as in positive and effective relationships because there are no obstacles that become barriers. This means that obstacles and disturbances in trust simultaneously impact and are directly related to obstacles in the effective dynamics of leadership.

Having trust means having and gaining followers/people who are led, at the same time winning their hearts to walk together in the leader's vision, obtaining their commitment, and their responsibility to be part of the dynamics and course of that leadership. In a poor relationship with minimal trust, even many good things will be full of suspicion and lose their effective dynamics.

The Correlative Impact of Trust on Power and Authority in Leadership

Basically, a true leader moves the organization and its people, mobilizes, and influences others to follow him and his vision not because of the position he holds, nor the status he possesses. Even the authority that comes as an integral part of his position and status does not automatically create ideal influence and power in leading. Because if it is only because of these things, leadership can easily become authoritarian, intimidating, and give rise to unhealthy leadership patterns, and actually damage leadership, even though it may seem successful at first. For a leader to have full authoritative power, he needs more than just the name, position, and status displayed on his office door. (Maxwell, 1995).

Power and authority in effective authority, namely authority in prestige that is capable of influencing, mobilizing, making others willingly follow, express commitment, participate, support, contribute, and so on, are born from sincere and strong trust in the integrity and credibility of the leader.

There is no doubt that authority in the power of effective leadership directly and broadly impacts the process and even the success of leadership. Such a situation can only be achieved if there is a high level of trust, which cannot be attained merely through discipline, firm commands, strict systems, supervision, or high/strong

organizational authority. All of these are important factors that play a significant role in the effort to achieve the ideal situation mentioned above; however, trust underlies all of them and enables the other factors to function effectively.

Belief Institutionalizes Intrinsic Values That Inspire Leadership

As has been mentioned in the previous sections, trust is built based on values of character, credibility, and integrity, which are fundamental values that support leadership. Meanwhile, a leader essentially leads through himself and his own values, and only afterward comes issues of strategy, methods, planning, and so on. However, as has been widely proven in the field, all methods, motivations, strategies, planning, and so forth will only be broadly and sustainably effective if they are imbued with noble and eternal values that uphold truth, justice, love, humility, care, and so forth.

This is where trust, rooted in the character, credibility, and integrity of leaders, institutionalizes the fundamental values that underpin effective leadership. Leadership, within it and through it, expands intrinsic values that uphold truth, love, honor, justice, humanity, nobility, etc. In this regard, through the foundation of trust and the basic values underlying it, leadership is not merely seen as a tool or means to achieve goals, nor just a pragmatic function; more than that, it is a manifestation of the dynamics of expanding and institutionalizing noble values, whether in process, communication, carrying out responsibilities, achieving results, mobilization, goal setting, orientation, and so on.

All of this starts from the starting point of a foundation of trust, which is built based on noble values manifested in character, credibility, and integrity, and which by and through the leader is institutionalized and imbued throughout all dimensions of leadership. That is true leadership.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to conceptually analyze the principle of The Law of Solid Ground in John C. Maxwell's leadership theory and to explore its implications for the development of effective leadership. Based on an analysis of this concept and in dialogue with various modern leadership literature, several important conclusions can be formulated as follows.

First, this study shows that trust is the main foundation in effective leadership. Within Maxwell's theoretical framework, leadership is essentially an influence that occurs in the relationship between leaders and followers. However, this influence can only be sustained if there is trust from the followers toward the leader. Without trust, leadership loses the moral foundation that supports its influence, or the structure of leadership will collapse. Therefore, trust can be understood as the foundation that allows leadership to function effectively in organizations as well as communities. Furthermore, trust itself does not arise spontaneously. Trust is born as a result of a leader's integrity and credibility. Integrity itself is rooted in the character of the leader.

Secondly, this study shows that the integrity of a leader's character is a key factor that shapes that trust. Integrity in this context is not only related to honesty in the narrow sense but also includes the alignment between values, words, and actions in a leader's life. When a leader can demonstrate strong and authentic moral consistency, followers will see that the leader has credibility worthy of trust. Likewise, conversely, when there is a discrepancy between words and actions, trust can easily be lost even in a short period of time. Such situations can quickly undermine followers' trust and weaken the leadership itself.

These findings are in line with various studies in the field of leadership that emphasize the importance of character in building a leader's credibility. Integrity not only has moral implications but also has strategic implications in organizational leadership. Leaders who have good integrity tend to be able to build healthy working relationships, increase followers' commitment to the organization's vision, and create a work environment based on trust and cooperation. Such leadership situations will greatly affect leadership effectiveness.

Third, this study shows that the principle of the law of solid ground has broad and significant implications for effective leadership, including in organizational dynamics. Trust built through a leader's integrity can create a healthy and sustainable organizational culture. In organizations with high levels of trust, communication between leaders and organizational members tends to be more open, solid collaboration and teamwork will be created, and strong and sustainable commitment will also grow. Conversely, in organizations with low levels of trust, working relationships often emerge colored by unhealthy situations, such as suspicion, tension, and poor relations, which ultimately hinder organizational effectiveness.

Fourth, Maxwell's writing, which is more practical and inspirational-transformational in nature, opens opportunities for further research in the field of leadership, particularly to examine the extent to which the concept of the law of solid ground concretely affects leadership effectiveness in various fields. Future research can develop empirical studies that test the relationship between leader integrity, the level of trust within an organization, and leadership effectiveness in various organizational contexts. In addition, further studies can also explore more deeply the relationship between Maxwell's leadership concepts and the perspective of Christian leadership theology.

Based on these findings, this article provides several theoretical contributions to the study of leadership. First, this study reinforces the understanding that integrity is a fundamental element in effective leadership. Second, this study shows that the leadership principles put forward by Maxwell can be analyzed more deeply in dialogue with modern leadership theory as well as theological perspectives. Third, this study emphasizes that the development of a leader's character must be a top priority in sustainable leadership development.

REFERENCES

- Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, W. L. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 315–338.
- Banks, R., & Ledbetter, B. (2004). *Reviewing leadership: A Christian evaluation of current approaches*. Baker Academic.
- Barna, G. (2002). *Leaders on leadership: Pandangan Para Pemimpin Tentang Kepemimpinan*. Gandum Mas.
- Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Blackaby, H. T., & Blackaby, R. (2011). *Spiritual leadership: Moving people on to God's agenda*. B&H Publishing Group.
- Blanchard, K., & Hodges, P. (2005). *Lead like Jesus: Lessons from the greatest leadership role model of all time*. Thomas Nelson.
- Cohen, William A. (1993). *Seni Kepemimpinan*. Mitra Utama
- Clinton, J. R. (2012). *The making of a leader*. NavPress.
- Covey, S. R. (2004). *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. Free Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

- Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust: The social virtues and the creation of prosperity*. Free Press.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Paulist Press.
- Grudem, W. (1994). *Systematic theology: An introduction to biblical doctrine*. Zondervan.
- Cloud, H. (2006). *Integrity: The courage to meet the demands of reality*. HarperCollins.
- Koehler, L., & Baumgartner, W. (2001). *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*. Brill.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2017). *The leadership challenge* (6th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Maxwell, J. C. (1997). *Becoming a person of influence*. Thomas Nelson.
- Maxwell, John C. (1995). *Mengembangkan Kepemimpinan Dalam Diri Anda*. Binarupa Aksara
- Maxwell, John C. (2002). *21 Menit Paling Bermakna Dalam Hari-Hari Pemimpin Sejati*, Interaksara
- Maxwell, John C. (2007). *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership (21 Hukum Kepemimpinan Sejati: Terapkan Hukum-Hukum Ini Maka Orang Akan Menjadi Pengikut Anda)*. Interaksara.
- Northouse, P. G. (2022). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (9th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Octavianus, Petrus, (1991). *Manajemen Dan Kepemimpinan Menurut Wahyu Allah*. Yayasan Persekutuan Pekabaran Injil Indonesia dan Gandum Mas
- Sanders, J. O. (2007). *Spiritual leadership*. Moody Press.
- Schein, E. H. (2010). *Organizational culture and leadership* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Tomatala, Y. (1997). *Kepemimpinan yang dinamis*. Gandum Mas.
- Yukl, G. (2013). *Leadership in organizations* (8th ed.). Pearson Education.