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Within-Group Consensus in Nonprofit Leadership Teams: Two Approaches for Analyzing and Visualizing Within-Group Consensus

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of consensus within nonprofit leadership teams, including management team members, board members, and highly involved advisors or members of additional specialist committees. This article has three main aims: (1) demonstrate the potential for research and practice of incorporating a within-group consensus perspective into nonprofit (leadership) studies; (2) provide a comprehensive overview of theoretical and methodological considerations for scholars and practitioners when studying within-group consensus as a core construct in their nonprofit (leadership) studies; and (3) offer empirical insights into within-group leadership consensus on perceived organizational purposes by illustrating consensus mapping and plotting approaches, and comparing the benefits and challenges of rating versus ranking methodologies. We use a two-wave dataset comprising 473 nonprofit leadership team members from 56 nonprofit organizations, to demonstrate how different survey question formats impact within-group consensus reporting and elucidate the role of within-group consensus in shaping organizational purpose. Given the content of our data, which focuses on organizational purposes perceived by nonprofit leadership teams, we also frame our findings in the theoretical discussions on nonprofit leader team dynamics. Our showcase analysis outlines future research avenues, both methodologically and theoretically.

1 | Introduction

Nonprofit organizations play a crucial role in society, addressing various societal needs that may not be covered by for-profit and public organizations (Frumkin 2005; Lecy et al. 2012; Matsunaga and Yamauchi 2004). They are characterized by formalized structures that bring together a diverse array of stakeholders. These stakeholders encompass, but are not limited to, beneficiaries, customers, funders, donors, employees, volunteers, and (delegated) policy makers (Krashinsky 1997; Raith and Starke 2017). While these stakeholders interact with each

other within the context of a specific nonprofit organization, united by a common societal challenge, their individual needs and preferences in relationship to the nonprofit organization can vary widely (Schubert and Willems 2021). Consequently, while nonprofit stakeholders may share similar views on, for instance, overarching societal needs addressed by the nonprofit's activities, they may hold differing and even conflicting opinions on other aspects, such as funding strategy, management practices, or evaluation methods (Stevenson and Radin 2009; Van Puyvelde et al. 2012). This diversity is typically reflected in the leadership of nonprofit organizations. Namely, in their board

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and management team, nonprofit organizations not only strive for leadership competencies but also seek inclusive representation of the various stakeholders' perspectives (Cornforth 2002; Cornforth and Edwards 1999; Van Puyvelde et al. 2012). Throughout the remainder of this article, we use the term nonprofit "leadership team" to refer to the group of decision makers in the management team as well as the board of directors and highly involved advisors or members of additional specialist committees. In essence, the individuals in these functions that are central to strategic management and governance decisions, navigate in collaboration the intricate landscape of nonprofit leadership.

Against this background, examining consensus within nonprofit leadership teams on various tactical, strategic, and ideological issues is crucial for a nuanced understanding of how leadership teams collaborate and make collaborative decisions. Intuitively, we can assume that a baseline within-group consensus on core organizational elements, such as organizational mission, ethical standards, or governance practices, serves as a prerequisite for the effective functioning of nonprofit organizations or, at the very least, to prevent a devastating organizational crisis. However, a perfect within-group consensus might not be perceived as advantageous. It would limit constructive debates wherein diverse stakeholder preferences are deliberated and collectively balanced to arrive at a viable decision within the nonprofit leadership team (Maier and Meyer 2011; Suykens et al. 2022). However, it is reasonable to assume that extremely low levels of within-group consensus signal a highly dysfunctional leadership team, posing a threat to the social impact of the nonprofit organization. In other words, within-group consensus is not only indicative of leadership dynamics that reflect the quality of decision-making, but is also a concept that warrants practical management recommendations and even serves as a subject for scientific research questions, such as the effect of leadership consensus on organizational performance.

While diversity and representation among nonprofit leaders have been studied extensively (Brown and Iverson 2004; Callen et al. 2003, 2010), little theoretical and methodological attention has been invested in investigating consensus within nonprofit leadership teams. Therefore, our article pursues a triple objective. First, within the context of the special issue in *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* on "Advanced Methodologies in Nonprofit Management and Leadership Research," we present theoretical and practical considerations for adopting a stronger within-group consensus perspective in nonprofit (leadership) research. We argue that this approach can enhance theoretical insights and improve practitioner recommendations across various areas of nonprofit literature. By advocating for greater scholarly engagement with the concept of within-group consensus, we argue that it can improve the precision of scientific predictions and increase the relevance of practical recommendations. Second, we provide an overview of concrete theoretical and methodological considerations for scholars and practitioners when incorporating within-group consensus as a key construct in their studies and decision-making processes. We not only highlight the importance of a stronger within-group consensus perspective in certain areas of nonprofit research but also provide straightforward guidelines for studying within-group

consensus. Third, through illustrative examples of consensus within nonprofit leadership teams (473 leaders nested in 56 nonprofit organizations), we aim to offer concrete empirical insights into within-group consensus on organizational purpose (Jasinenko and Steuber 2023).

Concretely, we document in different ways how various leaders think, agree, and/or disagree about the primary and secondary purposes of their respective organizations. In our empirical analysis, we compare and discuss a rating- versus ranking-based approach for combining leadership opinions, and we elaborate our findings based on within-group consensus mapping and within-group consensus plotting approaches. We do this with a detailed example rooted in a substantial data collection project conducted in Belgium (Willems, Huybrechts, et al. 2012b; Willems 2016b; Schubert and Willems 2021). In this dataset, managers and board members have expressed their perspectives twice on the primary and secondary purposes of their respective nonprofit organizations. We solicited this information through two survey waves for the same set of respondents, utilizing in each wave distinct survey question formats on organizational purpose. This dual-wave survey approach with distinct survey questions on organizational purpose enables us to illustrate within-group consensus reporting in two different ways, all (1) within the same sample of individuals across various nonprofit organizations and (2) still focused on the same concept. This creates a unique opportunity to compare within-group consensus reporting methods, while the underlying data have the same source and content, and can thus be assumed quite stable. As a result, we elucidate the advantages and challenges associated with each approach, aligning with our research aim of providing methodological clarification for consensus reporting and testing.

Hence, we discuss, evaluate, and clarify quantitative operationalizations of within-group consensus. While the metrics and indices we discuss can be used for various applications of correlational and multivariate analyses, we employ a quantitative exploratory approach to showcase a pathway for future nonprofit within-group consensus research. To this end, we also use and discuss visualizations, as this approach helps clarify the meanings behind the metrics and indices. Additionally, it provides empirical evidence that can fuel the development of propositions and hypotheses for future research. This not only deepens our understanding of within-group consensus concerning organizational purposes, but also serves as a methodological exemplar for studying leadership consensus in relation to other relevant concepts. For instance, our example on organizational purpose paves the way for exploring within-group consensus on governance practices, individual and collective motivations, attributions, political ideologies, and more (Lindell and Brandt 2000; Luria 2019). In sum, this study offers both methodological and theoretical contributions to the existing body of knowledge.

2 | Conceptual Considerations on Within-Group Consensus, in General and for Nonprofit Research

Within-group consensus is defined as the extent to which opinions about a particular topic are shared within a group of people (González-Romá and Hernández 2014; Luria 2019; Schneider

et al. 2002). Its origins lie in the literature on the compositional models in psychology, based on the work of Chan (1998), and the literature on organizational culture/climate or consensus, stemming from Martin (1992), and Trice and Beyer (1993). While higher levels of within-group consensus reflect greater sharedness in opinions and beliefs—with full within-group consensus depicted as a scenario where all leaders within a leadership team unanimously agree—lower levels of within-group consensus indicate more divergence (Kellermanns et al. 2011; Schwenk 1990).

Differences in the level of within-group consensus matter: a situation where only one leader out of 10 disagrees reflects higher levels of consensus and carries a different meaning compared to a scenario where half of the leaders within the leadership team consider a purpose as the primary purpose, while the other half deems it irrelevant. While this article focuses on within-group consensus in terms of organizational purposes (e.g., Meyfroodt et al. 2019; Meyfroodt and Desmidt 2024), other nonprofit-related concepts are also relevant to examine from a (leadership) team consensus perspective. For instance, within-group consensus on organizational values (i.e., cultural consensus) may impact organizational innovativeness (e.g., Jaskyte and Dressler 2005). Similarly, within-group consensus on needed governance practices in a leadership team (e.g., Brown 2007; Willems 2016a) can be studied in relation to performance of both the leadership team and the organization as a whole (e.g., Brimhall 2019; Green and Griesinger 1996; Kwan et al. 2024). Additionally, the absence of consensus among a group of volunteers regarding goals or necessary practices can be viewed as an antecedent or mediator for volunteer group conflicts (e.g., Bassous 2015; Kreutzer and Jäger 2011; Rimes et al. 2017).

From both a conceptual (theory) and measurement (methodology) perspective, it is important to clarify that consensus is inherently related to social and group dynamics; it is the outcome of social interactions between at least two individuals (Kellermanns 2003). However, consensus does not always have to reflect the entire group. It can also be operationalized at the individual level, where the perspective of one leadership team member is compared to the perspectives of a reference person, a group, or the rest of the team (Ateş et al. 2020; Boswell 2006; Boswell et al. 2006; Kellermanns et al. 2005; Meyfroodt and Desmidt 2024; Tarakci et al. 2014).

For nonprofit research, this two-level perspective is theoretically and empirically relevant. Consensus can be conceptualized at group level (e.g., boards, volunteer groups, stakeholder groups, employee groups) or at the individual level, where similarity of an individual's perspective compared to others is a focal concept for future studies. For example, the extent to which a single person aligns with others in a group or organization can be tested in relation to their background, motivation or experience (e.g., Chen and Bozeman 2013). Conceptually, within-group consensus can be categorized as “high” or “low,” and its quantification involves a diverse set of potential group-level metrics. These metrics include *z* scores (e.g., Desmidt and George 2016), standard deviation scores (e.g., Bowman and Ambrosini 1997) or the standard deviation of similarity ratings (e.g., Daniels et al. 2002). Other options include the strategic consensus measurement based on vector model of unfolding (Tarakci et al. 2014), indices based on analysis of variance components, the intraclass correlation, or the index of interrater agreement (e.g., Kluijtmans et al. 2024; Willems 2016b). Some also find it valuable to use the mean Mahalanobis distances, or employ

Pearson, Cattell's or Cohen's correlation coefficients to signify the level of within-group consensus (Lindell and Brandt 2000).

These metrics offer varying advantages and potential challenges related to (1) computability (e.g., standalone metrics for each group or metrics calculated relative to other groups), (2) comparability (e.g., how they account for differences in group sizes when comparing leadership teams of varying sizes), and (3) potential statistical relatedness with other relevant metrics about the focal concept (e.g., whether the measure of consensus on a concept is related to the aggregated mean score in a group for that concept). We argue that there is not a single dominant metric universally applicable to within-group consensus research in nonprofit management and leadership. Instead, the choice of an appropriate within-group consensus measure depends on the specific concepts being studied and the structure of the available data (Kellermanns et al. 2005). Our methods section provides detailed explanations of two metrics and approaches especially suitable for our case.

Determining whether within-group consensus is “high” or “low” is an initial, context-dependent step. Next, evaluating whether that level of within-group consensus is considered “good” or “bad” depends on the specific theoretical framework and its connection to other desired management outcomes. For instance, theory can be developed and/or tested by empirically linking levels of within-group consensus with relevant concepts such as effective leadership decision-making and perceived professionalization (Maier et al. 2014; Suykens et al. 2019, 2022), governance quality (Willems, Huybrechts, et al. 2012b), team and organizational performance (Suykens et al. 2022), organizational crisis resistance (Willems 2016a), and/or organizational social impact (Maier et al. 2015; Sowa et al. 2004).

Similarly, a theory-driven approach is imperative for explaining levels of within-group consensus on various core concepts, grounded either in contextual factors or in inherent characteristics of the leadership group. Contextual factors, such as the field of nonprofit operation, national culture, or sociopolitical challenges in civil society, may delineate the boundaries of minimal and maximal within-group consensus. Conversely, inherent leadership group characteristics, including board composition, diversity, motivations, and competencies of managers and board members can provide a theoretical foundation for explaining within-group consensus levels (Meyfroodt et al. 2019). These factors are amenable to governance, offering a direct means to influence within-group consensus levels, while indirectly considering contextual factors. Figure 1 presents a meta-conceptual framework illustrating potential relationships between types of variables in explaining leadership consensus.

Central in this model is the concept of consensus in nonprofit leadership teams. While our list is not exhaustive and serves the purpose of providing an indication of potentially relevant concepts, within-group consensus can be examined across various concepts, such as leadership perceptions on organizational purposes, organizational mission, management and governance practices, or desired policy strategies (e.g., Brown 2007; Herman and Renz 2000; Liket and Maas 2015).

At least two clusters of relevant antecedents for such consensus concepts can be identified. First, there are (aggregated)

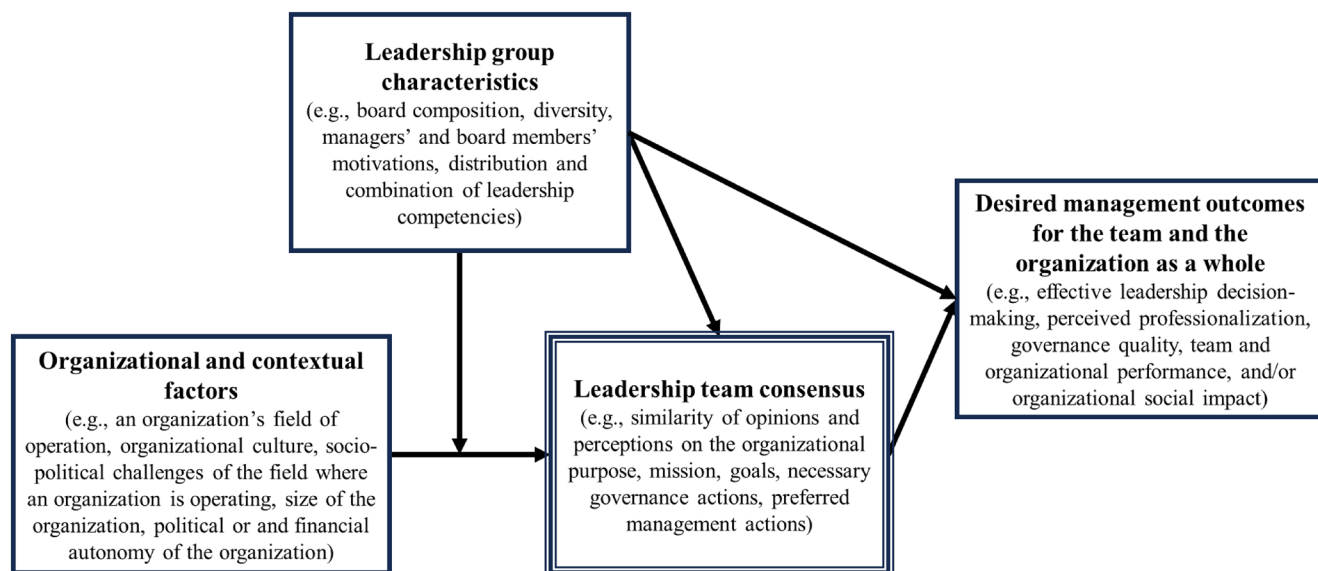


FIGURE 1 | Conceptual model situating nonprofit leadership team consensus between antecedents and desired management outcomes.

leadership group characteristics. Several of these characteristics have been studied across a broad range of nonprofit leadership studies, including diversity and composition of nonprofit boards, leaders' motivation and/or engagement, and leadership competencies (Herman and Renz 2000; Moldavanova 2016; Purdy and Lawless 2012; Zollo et al. 2019).

The second cluster of relevant antecedents comprises organizational and contextual factors of the nonprofit organizations being studied. A plethora of variables can be theorized and tested. These include differences in funding structures, the organization's field of operations, financial and political autonomy, size, age, internal organizational culture, and the challenges organizations face (Li 2019; Zollo et al. 2019).

Moreover, it is not only relevant to study the antecedents of consensus in leadership teams, but also to examine how consensus can influence important management outcomes for leadership teams and organizations as a whole. For example, the influence of within-group consensus can be theorized and tested in relation to the effectiveness of leadership decision making or the perception and reputation of the leadership team and the organization (Mitchell 2015; Padanyi and Gainer 2003; Willems et al. 2016). Ultimately, it is essential to study the effect of within-group consensus on various aspects of organizational performance and social impact (e.g., Brimhall 2019; Green and Griesinger 1996; Herman and Renz 2004; Li 2019).

3 | Testing and Visualizing Within-Group Consensus on Organizational Purposes

3.1 | Data Collection and Sampling Considerations

Data for this study were collected through a large-scale project conducted in Belgium. Nonprofit leadership groups were invited to participate by furnishing information about their organizations and themselves as leaders. These nonprofit leaders were informed of the dual purpose of the data collection: first, to

generate detailed, organization-specific feedback reports offering insights into management and governance strengths and areas for improvement; and second, to contribute to scientific research. Receipt of the organization-level feedback report was contingent upon achieving a sufficiently high response rate from each organization, which served as an incentive to ensure high response rates per organization. Participation at both the organizational and individual levels was voluntarily and confidential, but not anonymous. Leaders within an organization collectively decided whether the organization would partake in the study. Once this decision was made, each leader within the organization was individually invited to complete two online surveys, with invitations for these two surveys spaced about 1 month apart. Organizational leaders—including management team members, board members, and highly involved advisors or members of specialist committees—were identified and contacted in collaboration with at least one key contact person within the organization. While data were handled confidentially, responses were not anonymous. A key contact person provided the names and email addresses of leaders in the organization to one of the authors, who thus could identify individuals. This allowed for the allocation of respondents per organization, which is important for the multilevel analysis of this study, and facilitated the matching of responses from the two surveys completed at different times. The use of multilevel data and the two-time survey approach help reduce common-method bias. However, concerns about potential identification could lead some respondents to answer in socially desirable ways.

To address such potential biases, several anticipatory measures were implemented: (1) Individual confidentiality was maintained by not disclosing names in organizational feedback reports and anonymizing reports on organizations to prevent identification based on unique roles (e.g., “the board chairperson said [...]”). Feedback reports were provided only when a sufficient number of respondents participated, avoiding the risk of identifying single respondents. (2) respondents were encouraged to provide honest answers, as this would enhance the value of the feedback reports for their organization; (3) the author coordinating

the data collection was bound by confidentiality agreements, including (3a) secure data storage and non-publication of raw data (this was clearly communicated in the invitation to participate), and (3b) anonymization of the database for further analyses, with organizations and individuals recoded using abstract codes. These measures aimed to balance the need for rich multilevel leadership team data while mitigating social desirability and common-method biases.

The data collection project targeted a broad range of nonprofit organizations. Approximately 200 organizations were directly contacted through various channels (e.g., emails, phone calls after identifying organizations online, and contacts from professional events and sector networks), resulting in a convenience sample that included a broad and heterogeneous range of nonprofit organizations. Participation in this project was free of charge, eliminating potential barriers for any type of nonprofit organization to take part. This dataset is valuable for two reasons: it provides a sufficient number of organizational cases with sufficiently diverse responses per organization, and our findings are not limited to a specific subsector or cluster of nonprofit organizations.

3.2 | Two-Level Sample

Due to our sampling procedure, we assembled a heterogeneous sample of organizations varying in size, from a few volunteers and/or employees to large organizations with more than 1000 employees, or more than 25,000 volunteers. The sample includes both large and grassroots organizations with diverse funding structures (“commercial” revenues, private or public funding, or combinations thereof). The organizations also differ in their day-to-day activities. The sample encompasses various types, including sports organizations (15.9%), interest groups (15.9%), community and neighborhood centers (13.6%), environmental organizations (11.4%), theaters and museums (11.4%), (health) care centers for children and/or less-abled people (9.1%), international development organizations (9.1%), elderly houses (6.8%), and youth movements/nonformal education providers (6.8%). The number of invited respondents per organization ranged from 5 to 40 (mean = 15.52). Response rates within organizations varied between 9.09% and 100% (mean = 55.18%).

Moreover, our focus is on organizations where at least three respondents completed both surveys about their organization. Our dataset comprises 473 leadership team members from 56 organizations, with an average of eight responses per organization. Of these respondents, 55% are board members. On average, respondents were 42 years old, 68.4% of respondents are male, and 43.2% have a higher level of education (4 or 5 years of study).

3.3 | Post Hoc Analysis for Illustrative Purposes

For transparency, we disclose that only two scientific studies were initially planned prior to the commencement of the overall data collection (Willems, Van den Bergh, et al. 2012a; Willems, Huybrechts, et al. 2012b; Willems 2016b). Nevertheless, additional constructs were incorporated into the surveys. This was done to facilitate (1) specific feedback on various topics

toward the organizations, and (2) theoretical exploration. One exploratory study has been published on such additional set of constructs, specifically focusing on stakeholder representation (Schubert and Willems 2021).

In sum, this post hoc analysis of a convenience sample serves the purpose of illustrating within-group consensus reporting and providing exploratory insights for the specific context of nonprofit leadership teams. However, we encourage fellow scholars to join the efforts and investments in new data collections with multi-level data structures involving nonprofit leaders, aiming to further validate some of our exploratory findings. The inclusion of constructs discussed herein primarily serves the goal of offering practical feedback to nonprofit leader teams. Additionally, the various insights gained through post hoc reporting, discussions with, and reflections from nonprofit managers played a crucial role in shaping the research aims of this article. Despite acknowledging a partial overlap with other studies in terms of sample observations, we emphasize that the variables used in this study have not been published before.

3.4 | Organizational Purposes as Content of Within-Group Consensus

In this study, we test and visualize the level of consensus within leadership teams on two key aspects: (1) the prioritization of their organization’s purposes and (2) the perceived importance of each purpose for their organization. To achieve this, we first developed a list of 17 potential purposes for nonprofit organizations, which are presented in Table 1.

We developed this list of purposes by employing a three-step process. First, we screened the nonprofit literature including articles, books, and book chapters that explicitly or implicitly discuss various functions or purposes of nonprofit organizations and subsectors of the broader nonprofit sector (among others: Ebrahim et al. 2014; Frumkin 2005; Kirk and Beth Nolan 2010; Wright and Pandey 2011). Second, we reviewed approximately 50 mission statements from a diverse set of nonprofit organizations, deliberately selecting a broad and heterogeneous range of organizations across different fields. These mission statements were retrieved from organizational websites. Third, we (re-)analyzed interview materials with nonprofit leaders and consultants engaged in civil society organizations. These additional exploratory interviews were conducted using a convenience and snowball sampling procedure, targeting persons not involved in the main quantitative data collection for this article. In selecting potential interviewees, we ensured diversity in both personal and organizational backgrounds. We included individuals holding various positions (e.g., CEO, board member, advisor) and often having multiple roles across organizations (e.g., being a CEO in one organization and a board member in another). The interviewees represented a wide range of nonprofit sectors, including education, service provision, lobbying, social work, culture and entertainment, sports, and youth movements. Each interview, averaging 87.9 min, was recorded and fully transcribed. These interviews were particularly valuable, as they allowed for in-depth discussions on specific situations where multiple organizational purposes were combined and negotiated by different leaders or coalitions within the leadership team.

TABLE 1 | The set of 17 potential purposes a nonprofit organization could prioritize (Survey 1) or rate (Survey 2).

Purpose	Description	Survey 1—Respondents (%)				Survey 2—Descriptives			
		Cat. 1	Cat. 2	Cat. 3	Cat. 4	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Purpose P1	Support actions that critically question contemporary customs, habits and beliefs.	8.5%	17.3%	57.7%	16.5%	0.60	1.39	−3	3
Purpose P2	Development of progressive ideas to change society in a substantial way.	16.7%	19.0%	47.8%	16.5%	0.79	1.37	−3	3
Purpose P3	Influence policy making, directly or indirectly.	27.5%	31.7%	31.9%	8.9%	1.36	1.14	−3	3
Purpose P4	Advocate on behalf of groups and individuals.	33.0%	26.2%	34.7%	6.1%	1.52	1.12	−3	3
Purpose P5	Delivery of services to society in a way that impossibly can be done by government or profit organizations.	23.3%	24.5%	43.8%	8.5%	1.15	1.21	−3	3
Purpose P6	Guarantee a fair quality of the services that the organization generates.	34.7%	29.0%	34.7%	1.7%	1.89	0.83	−2	3
Purpose P7	Filling the gaps that are left open by government and the open market system.	15.2%	19.2%	48.8%	16.7%	1.00	1.28	−3	3
Purpose P8	Realization of services to beneficiaries.	60.3%	17.1%	19.0%	3.6%	1.93	0.96	−3	3
Purpose P9	Being a place where people can meet.	16.9%	23.0%	44.2%	15.9%	0.90	1.36	−3	3
Purpose P10	Enabling participants to express their personal values and beliefs regarding contemporary society.	9.1%	24.3%	50.3%	16.3%	0.68	1.32	−3	3
Purpose P11	Provide a platform for opinions from all involved participants of the organization.	9.9%	27.5%	52.9%	9.7%	0.84	1.23	−3	3
Purpose P12	Give people an opportunity to participate to societal life.	51.2%	18.4%	26.4%	4.0%	1.61	1.22	−3	3
Purpose P13	Development of innovative solutions for new challenges in society.	16.9%	26.6%	45.5%	11.0%	1.06	1.24	−3	3
Purpose P14	Support creative ideas on how to deal with societal challenges.	13.5%	28.5%	50.3%	7.6%	1.11	1.09	−3	3
Purpose P15	Continuously renewing ongoing projects and activities in the field.	19.5%	36.6%	40.6%	3.4%	1.41	0.98	−3	3
Purpose P16	Promote social entrepreneurship.	9.3%	25.2%	45.2%	20.3%	0.67	1.49	−3	3
Purpose P17	Self-actualization of the organization's participants.	33.8%	34.2%	25.8%	6.1%	1.54	0.97	−2	3

Note: $n = 473$ nonprofit leadership team members.

Abbreviations: Cat. 1 = primary purposes of the organization; Cat. 2 = secondary purposes of the organization; Cat. 3 = not applicable; Cat. 4 = not at all a purpose of the organization; Max. = maximum; Min. = minimum; SD = standard deviation.

The process of identifying relevant information—through scientific literature, mission statements, and interviews—was guided by a pragmatic saturation principle. This approach involved collecting data until no substantially new purposes emerged. Item formulation was conducted iteratively, with adjustments made based on the ongoing analysis of the collected information. This iterative process ensured that a diverse and distinct set of purposes for nonprofit organizations was adequately captured. For the purpose of this article, the 17 items serve as a basis for analyzing the extent of within-group consensus. However, we acknowledge that

for a truly exhaustive and mutually exclusive list of purposes of nonprofits, a more structured literature review and/or larger sample of mission statements needs to be combined with an advanced item analysis (e.g., exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and/or various validity tests, such as test–retest reliability).

The obtained set of purposes was used for two distinct approaches: (1) a ranking-based approach to capture purpose prioritization and (2) a rating-based approach to capture the perceived importance of the different purposes. We split these

two constructs into separate surveys sent to the same leadership team members to mitigate respondent fatigue, allow for more focused attention on the construct under study, more clearly distinguish the two different constructs and their respective approaches, and avoid the possibility that answers on purpose prioritization might influence answers on the importance of purposes. In the Supporting Information Appendix A1 (Tables A1 and A2), we present additional exploratory analysis results, specifically the correlations of the 17 purposes for Survey 2 and the correlations of purposes across the surveys. The findings highlight that while the purposes significantly correlate across both surveys (indicated by a negative correlation: higher ratings for a purpose in Survey 2 correlate with a lower number representing a higher ranking in Survey 1), it is not a direct one-to-one match. This underscores the importance of carefully considering both options (i.e., choosing a ranking or rating approach).

3.5 | Approach 1—Within-Group Consensus on Organizational Purpose Prioritization

To test and visualize the level of consensus within leadership teams on the prioritization of purposes of their respective organizations, we took four steps.

3.5.1 | Step 1. Ranking Organizational Purposes

We used the ranked-construct approach (operationalized in Survey 1) to capture each leadership team member's purpose prioritization according to predefined and ordinal categories. The ranking-based approach is insightful for a relatively small set of items (<20), provides ipsative data (i.e., respondents provide scores that must always sum to the same constant), and forces respondents to make distinctions between purposes (Russell and Gray 1994).

Concretely, we designed a “drag-and-drop” classification for which participants were presented with a randomized list of the 17 organizational purposes. Respondents were tasked with dragging and dropping these purposes into one of four categories: (1) “Primary purposes of the organization” (coded as 1: “The core purposes for which the organization is, in fact, founded. These purposes are the reason for the existence of the organization.”), (2) “Secondary purposes of the organization” (coded as 2: “Goals that are rather supportive and/or complementary to the core goals of the organization.”), (3) “Not applicable” (coded as 3: “In this category, you can drop the purposes that do not fit in any of the previous two categories. Or this includes purposes not classified.”), and (4) “Not at all a purpose of the organization” (coded as 4: “Purposes that the organization deliberately avoids.”). Table 1 also presents the percentage distribution of respondents who ranked the purposes (designated with Purpose numbers P1 until P17) in one of these four categories, offering a clear insight into the data utilized.

3.5.2 | Step 2. Mapping Within-Group Consensus for Ranked Purposes

Within-group consensus mapping for ranked purposes (referred to by Tarakci et al. 2014 as strategic consensus mapping) is a comprehensive consensus testing and visualization technique

that provides an overall within-group consensus score and allows exploring multiple facets underlying that score through intuitive and easily understandable visualizations. It uses the vector model for unfolding (VMU), a method for dimensionality reduction, or multidimensional scaling (Borg and Groenen 1997), to measure the degree of within-group consensus and geometrically visualize each respondent's preference order of the purposes. This technique, which departs from organizing leadership team members in columns as variables and organizational purposes in rows, allows the identification of (1) the organizational purposes' positioning on a biplot and (2) the different vectors representing the members of a specific non-profit leadership team.

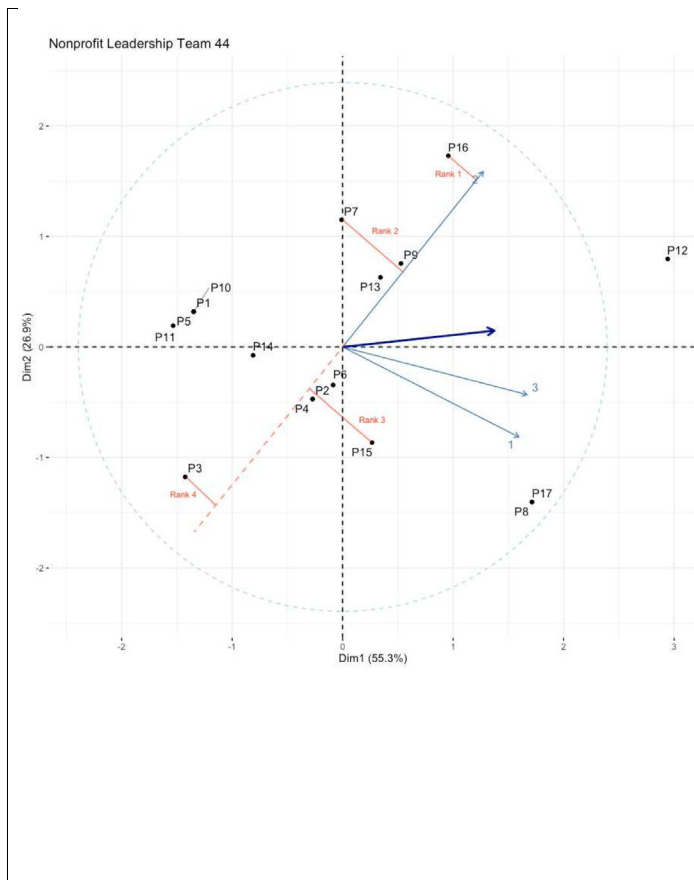
3.5.3 | Step 3. Understanding How to Interpret Within-Group Consensus Mapping

Figure 2 shows the biplot representation of the VMU solution for Nonprofit Leadership Team 44 (NLT44) when applying the consensus mapping approach originally developed by Tarakci et al. (2014). This figure illustrates how the projections of all organizational purposes on a vector (representing a specific leadership team member) reflect the individual prioritization of purposes by that specific leadership team member of NLT44.

The cosine of the angle between two leadership team members' vectors serves as an approximation of their pairwise correlation, implying that leadership team members with smaller angles between their vectors hold more similar opinions on the prioritization of purposes. The spread of all vectors in Figure 2 reflects the degree of within-group consensus; a tight cluster of vectors indicates a high degree of consensus on the prioritization of purposes within the leadership team, while a dispersed arrangement signifies the opposite (i.e., very different opinions on the prioritization of purposes within the leadership team).

The length of the vector lines—with each vector line representing one nonprofit leadership team member—indicates how well a leadership team member is represented in the biplot. A vector line with a length of one denotes a perfect fit. The (horizontal and vertical) dimensions reflect the transformed two-dimensional space, together with the percentage of variation they capture. The degree of within-group consensus of a leadership team is quantified through the α measure, which builds upon the length of the vector of the average leadership team member (Tarakci et al. 2014), and ranges between zero and one. If all leadership team members in an organization share similar views on the prioritization of purposes, the α measure will be close to one. Hence, when nearly all of the respondents have vectors with a length that is close to 1, a high percentage of the variance is accounted for in the biplot. Vice versa, short vectors indicate that for those vectors low variance is accounted for (Linting et al. 2007). We use a leadership team circle to reveal the longest possible vector.

As indicated in Figure 2, the orthogonal projection of a purpose (represented as a dot and labeled with purpose numbers [P1–P17]) onto a leadership team member's vector signifies the leadership team member's ranking for that particular purpose. Purposes projected in the direction of the vector indicate a



- Members 1 to 3 of the Nonprofit Leadership Team 44 (NLT44)
- Purposes P1 until P17: one dot per purpose.
- Each vector represents one member.
 - Smaller angles between vectors represent more similar opinions on the prioritization of purposes.
 - The length of a vector line indicates how well that member's ordering is captured by this two-dimensional representation. The circle reveals the longest possible vector. Thus, a member whose vector touches the circle would have her/his opinions perfectly captured in this biplot.
- The orthogonal projection of a purpose on a member's extended vector signifies the member's ranking for that purpose. For instance, member 2 ranks P16 highest (rank 1) and P3 lowest (rank 4).
- The thick arrow represents the prototypical group member.
- Dimension 1 (Dim1) captures 55.3% of the variation in the data and Dimension 2 (Dim2) captures 26.9%. Remaining 17.8% is not captured by these two dimensions. To capture 100%, one needs to include 17 dimensions, which is against the goal of dimensionality reduction.

FIGURE 2 | Within-group consensus mapping—ranking based (nonprofit Leadership Team 44 [NLT44] having four members; Survey 1).

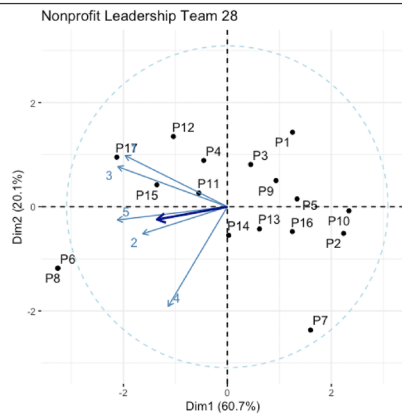
higher prioritization by the respective leadership team member (i.e., Rank 1 reflects the highest priority and Rank 4 the lowest). Furthermore, the closer a purpose to a dimension, the higher its representation on it. For instance, the variations in P11, P12, and P14 are captured by Dimension 1 to a larger extent, and variations in P7 and P15 are captured by Dimension 2 (e.g., higher values on Dimension 2 indicate higher P7 and lower P15 values, whereas Dimension 1 does not change with changing P7 and P15 values).

3.5.4 | Step 4. Discussing Exemplary Situations of Nonprofit Leadership Teams

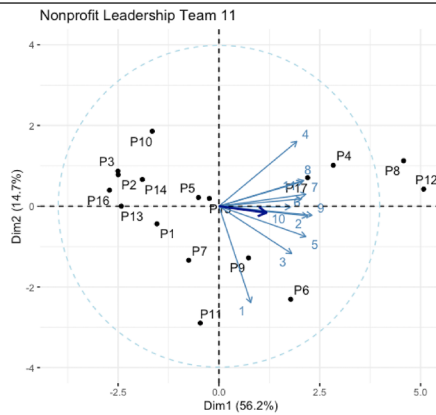
We now present exemplary within-group consensus situations of different nonprofit leadership teams when applying the consensus mapping approach. As a first example, Figure 3 depicts the results of consensus mapping for Nonprofit Leadership Team 28 (NLT28) and Nonprofit Leadership Team 11 (NLT11). NLT28 has a relatively high level of within-group consensus on the prioritization of purposes ($\alpha = 0.77$, with 1 being perfect within-group consensus), although there are two subgroups. Subgroups are identified with arrows that have smaller angles within themselves and larger angles with others outside their subgroup. Note that the two subgroups do not encompass all members as the member 4 is not in any of the two subgroups. NLT11 also has a relatively high within-group consensus score ($\alpha = 0.74$), with only one large subgroup, leaving the Members 1 and 4 outside. Note that Members 1 and 4 are not in a subgroup.

Figure 4 illustrates the situation of two nonprofit leadership teams (i.e., Nonprofit Leadership Team NLT56 and NLT29) having a lower level of within-group consensus ($\alpha = 0.52$ for both NLT56 and NLT29) compared to the situations presented in Figure 3. While the angles between the vectors representing the respective nonprofit leadership teams are larger, both teams also have a team member with clearly opposite opinions regarding the prioritization of purposes. Having opposite opinions as a team member becomes visible when the vector line representing that team member is oriented in the opposite direction (e.g., from right to left) compared to the other nonprofit leadership team members. Specifically, when orthogonally projecting the purposes on the vector that is directed in the opposite direction, results will indicate that purposes are ranked in the opposite way in comparison to the consensus among other members and the prototypical leadership team member. Figure 4 shows such a situation in Nonprofit Leadership Team NLT56 for Member 7 and in Nonprofit Leadership Team NLT29 for Member 6.

While Member 4 ranks the purpose denominated as P7 (i.e., "Filling the gaps that are left open by government and the open market system") last and the purpose P8 (i.e., "Realization of services to beneficiaries") as the one before the last, the outlier Member 7 of Nonprofit Leadership Team NLT56 prioritizes both as the highest. On the other hand, while Member 7 ranks the purpose P11 (i.e., "Provide a platform for opinions from all involved participants of the organization") as the one before the last in priority ranking, Member 4 ranks it as the highest priority purpose. A similar situation is observed in Nonprofit Leadership



- $\alpha = .77$ (i.e., a high level of consensus within Nonprofit Leadership Team 28 [NLT28] given the maximum score of 1).
- 5 leadership team members (i.e., members 1 until 5) in NLT28 – one vector line per member.
- 17 purposes (labeled as P1 until P17) – one dot per purpose.
- 2 subgroups in NLT28: Subgroup 1 with members 1 and 3, Subgroup 2 with members 2 and 5.
- No opposite opinions in NLT28 as we do not observe vectors in opposite directions.



- $\alpha = .74$ (i.e., a high level of consensus within Nonprofit Leadership Team 11 [NLT11]).
- 11 leadership team members (i.e., members 1 until 11) in NLT11 – one vector line per member.
- 17 purposes (labeled as P1 until P17) – one dot per purpose.
- One large subgroup excluding members 1 and 4.
- No opposite opinions in NLT11 as we do not observe vectors in opposite directions.

FIGURE 3 | Within-group consensus mapping—ranking-based (Survey 1).

Team NLT29 in Figure 4, where the Member 6 prioritizes P17 (i.e., “Self-actualization of the organization’s participants”), which is one of the least prioritized purposes by Members 3 and 10. On the other hand, Members 3 and 10 prioritize P5 (i.e., “Delivery of services to society in a way that impossibly can be done by government or profit organizations”), which is one of the least prioritized purposes by the Member 6. These are among the explanations for why there is only a “medium” level of within-group consensus in Nonprofit Leadership Teams NLT29 and NLT56 ($\alpha = 0.52$).

3.6 | Approach 2—Within-Group Consensus on the Importance of Organizational Purposes

To test and visualize the level of consensus within leadership teams on the perceived importance of each of the organizational purposes of their respective organizations, we took four steps.

3.6.1 | Step 1. Rating Organizational Purposes

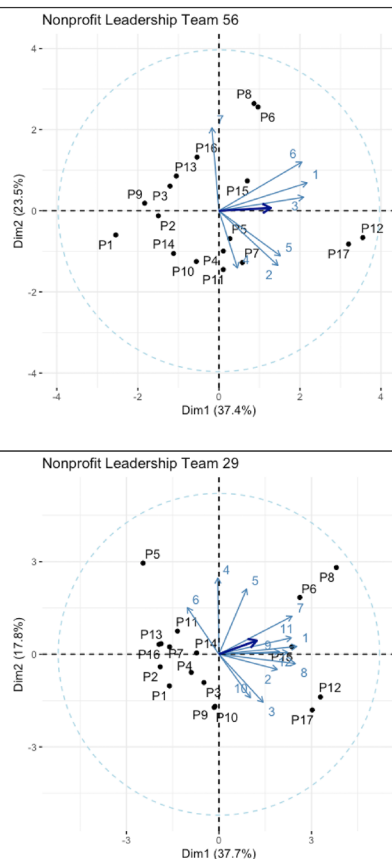
We used the rated-construct approach (operationalized in Survey 2) to capture leadership team members' perceived importance of each of the purposes. Rating purposes on a scale is considered relatively low effort (even for larger sets of purposes) for respondents and allows them to make judgments in a more absolute way as each purpose can be compared independently with other known purposes. However, caution is needed as respondents

can place more than one purpose on a particular scale point or restrict ratings to a small region of the scale, potentially underestimating true differences between purposes (e.g., avoiding the use of either extreme of the scale by opting for the middle of the scale) (Russell and Gray 1994).

Concretely, participants were presented with the set of 17 organizational purposes, arranged in random order using the built-in randomization function of Qualtrics Surveys. Respondents were tasked to rate each organizational purpose using a 7-point Likert-type scale, indicating the perceived importance for the organization. The response labels were (−3) “Not at all important,” (−2) “Very unimportant,” (−1) “Somewhat unimportant,” (0) “Neither important nor unimportant,” (+1) “Somewhat important,” (+2) “Very important,” (+3) “Extremely important.” Providing responses for all 17 items was mandatory to complete the survey page, and eventually finish the survey. For Survey 2, the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum are reported in Table 1.

3.6.2 | Step 2. Plotting Within-Group Consensus for Rated Purposes

Within-group consensus plotting provides a visual representation of the mean-consensus relationship within nonprofit leadership teams regarding organizational purposes (labeled as Purposes P1 until P17). Similar to the within-group consensus mapping approach, the objective is to offer intuitive and easily



- $\alpha = .52$ (i.e., a medium level of consensus within Nonprofit Leadership Team 56 [NLT56]).
- 7 leadership team members in NLT56 (i.e., members 1 until 7) – one vector line per member.
- 17 purposes (labeled as P1 until P17) – one dot per purpose.
- 2 subgroups in NLT56: Subgroup 1 with members 2 and 5 and Subgroup 2 with members 1,3, and 6.
- 1 opposite opinion in NLT56 (i.e., member 7) as we observe a vector in the (almost exact) opposite direction.

- $\alpha = .52$ (i.e., a medium level of consensus within Nonprofit Leadership Team 29 [NLT29]).
- 12 leadership team members in NLT29 (i.e., members 1 until 12) – one vector line per team member
- 17 purposes (labeled as P1 until P17) – one dot per purpose.
- 3 subgroups in NLT29: Subgroup 1 with members 3 and 10, Subgroup 2 with members 4 and 5, and Subgroup 3 with all the remaining members except member 6).
- 1 opposite opinion in NLT29 (i.e., member 6) as we observe two vectors in the opposite direction.

FIGURE 4 | Within-group consensus mapping—ranking-based (Survey 1) (continued).

understandable visualizations. The within-group consensus plotting method relies on data quantifying how leadership team members assess the importance of each of the purposes by rating them on a Likert-type scale presented in the second online survey. Concretely, two measures need to be calculated to create a mean-consensus plot: (1) the average or mean score and (2) the within-group consensus score. While calculating mean scores is straightforward, understanding the calculation of within-group consensus scores requires more explanation.

The degree of within-group consensus on the perceived importance of purposes is determined by using the “reversed average-squared Euclidean distance” measure (Kellermanns et al. 2011; Walter et al. 2013). Concretely, we begin by using the reversed average-squared Euclidean distance to obtain a workable and straightforward metric for this study, which can also be applied in future qualitative and quantitative research. This metric is calculated for each rated purpose individually, following four computational steps: (1) take the squared difference between the score of each leadership team member and each other leadership team member within the same nonprofit leadership team (standardized scores range between zero and one); (2) for all dyads in a leadership team, average these scores to compose a team-level measure reflecting the overall consensus between members in the leadership team; (3) reverse these obtained scores for ease of interpretation, ensuring that higher scores represent higher levels of within-group consensus; and (4) increment each score by one to transform the range, facilitating a more intuitive interpretation (Willems and Meyfroodt 2024). Scores closer to zero

indicate lower levels of within-group consensus, while scores closer to one indicate higher levels of within-group consensus.

We recommend using this specific variance metric because it helps reduce potential measurement errors arising from the statistical relationship between mean-based and variance-based aggregate scores of the same unit-level construct. Mean-based refers to the group mean for a particular purpose, representing the average of all scores within a team. Variance-based, on the other hand, explains the spread or distribution of individual responses within a team. Specifically, since the variance-based score is derived from the differences in each leadership team member’s score, the metric calculated using the reversed average squared Euclidean distance is typically less related to the group mean compared to other variance-based metrics, such as the intraclass correlation or standard deviation (Lindell and Brandt 2000; Meyfroodt et al. 2019). As a result, a higher (or lower) group mean can correspond with a wider and uncorrelated variety of potential variance scores, enabling the study of consensus measures and group averages in multivariate analyses without risking robustness issues like multicollinearity. For a more detailed explanation and empirical example, we refer to Meyfroodt et al. (2019) and the [Supporting Information](#), in particular. Appendix A1 (Table A3) presents the results of a correlation analysis investigating the associations between within-group average (i.e., the group mean) scores and within-group consensus scores, calculated using the reversed average-squared Euclidean distance. As anticipated, the results reveal no clear pattern of

positive or negative correlations between within-group average scores (i.e., group means) and within-group consensus scores.

3.6.3 | Step 3. Understanding How to Interpret Within-Group Consensus Plotting

Mean rating scores and the within-group consensus scores are plotted in a two-dimensional graph (see Figure 5).

The horizontal axis of the diagram indicates the within-group mean or average score, while the vertical axis shows the level of within-group consensus. Interpretation of results is as follows: In the top-right corner quadrant, a relatively high level of within-group consensus is combined with a relatively high within-group average score. The nonprofit leadership team agrees that the purpose is important for the nonprofit organization. The more the nonprofit leadership team is situated toward the top-left corner, the more all nonprofit leadership team members agree that, for instance, a purpose is not very important for the nonprofit organization. When a nonprofit leadership team is located in the bottom-right corner quadrant, their within-group average score is relatively high, but only because some nonprofit leadership team members consider the purpose important, while others perceive that purpose as less important. A situation like this deserves special attention, whereby one-to-one clarification might be needed to foster consensus on the importance of that purpose for the organization. Finally, nonprofit leadership teams situated at the bottom-left corner face a situation where opinions are broadly scattered, and not many have strongly positive opinions. In such a case, it might be useful to take a step back and open up a discussion with the leadership team on what a particular purpose means in the context of their nonprofit organization.

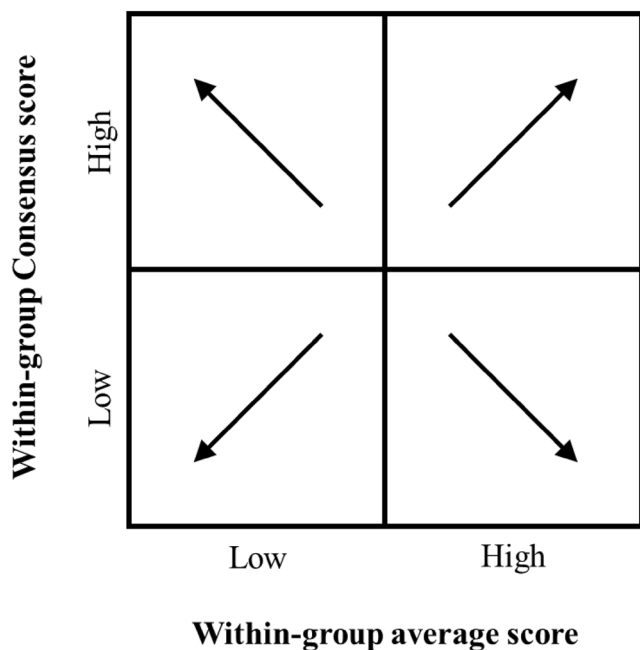


FIGURE 5 | Plot diagram on the mean-consensus relationship—rating-based.

3.6.4 | Step 4. Discussing Exemplary Situations of Nonprofit Leadership Teams

We now present exemplary within-group consensus situations of different nonprofit leadership teams when applying the within-group consensus plotting approach. Figure 6 depicts the situation for Nonprofit Leadership Team 1 (NLT1), showcasing diverse ratings for purposes (labeled as Purpose P1 till P17). Members of NLT1 tend to agree with each other on the ratings given (within-group consensus score = 0.83, with 1 representing a perfect within-group consensus). The only exception is regarding the importance of Purpose P8 (i.e., “Realization of services to beneficiaries”), where there is comparatively less consensus within Nonprofit Leadership Team NLT1 (within-group consensus score for P8 = 0.62).

In contrast to NLT1, Nonprofit Leadership Team 8 (NLT8) showcases lower levels of within-group consensus on ratings given for purposes (within-group consensus score = 0.54). Particularly, noteworthy is the positioning of some purposes in the bottom-left corner quadrant, indicating a situation where opinions are widely scattered, and there are not many strongly positive opinions. This is the case for Purpose P5 (i.e., “Delivery of services to society in a way that impossibly can be done by government or profit organizations.”) and Purpose P11 (i.e., “Provide a platform for opinions from all involved participants of the organization.”).

Figure 7 visualizes a situation of Nonprofit Leadership Team 21 (NLT21), where the importance of purposes is rated differently, yet there is a low level of within-group consensus regarding the importance of most purposes. This implies that some leadership team members of NLT21 consider certain purposes important, while others perceive them as less important. However, there is complete consensus within the Nonprofit Leadership Team NLT21 concerning the high importance of Purpose P1 (i.e., “Support actions that critically question contemporary customs, habits and beliefs.”), Purpose P3 (i.e., “Influence policy making, directly or indirectly.”), Purpose P6 (i.e., “Guarantee a fair quality of the services that the organization generates.”), and Purpose P8 (i.e., “Realization of services to beneficiaries”).

In Figure 7, NLT28 demonstrates less variation in the importance ascribed to different purposes. However, it simultaneously reveals substantial differences in the level of within-group consensus concerning specific within-group average rating scores. Although Purpose P13 (i.e., “Development of innovative solutions for new challenges in society.”) and Purpose P14 (i.e., “Support creative ideas on how to deal with societal challenges.”) show relatively similar within-group average scores, the respective level of within-group consensus regarding the average score differs significantly (Purpose P13: within-group consensus score = 1.00, Purpose P14: within-group consensus score = 0.40).

4 | Discussion

In this article, we present the theoretical underpinnings of within-group consensus to offer a comprehensive

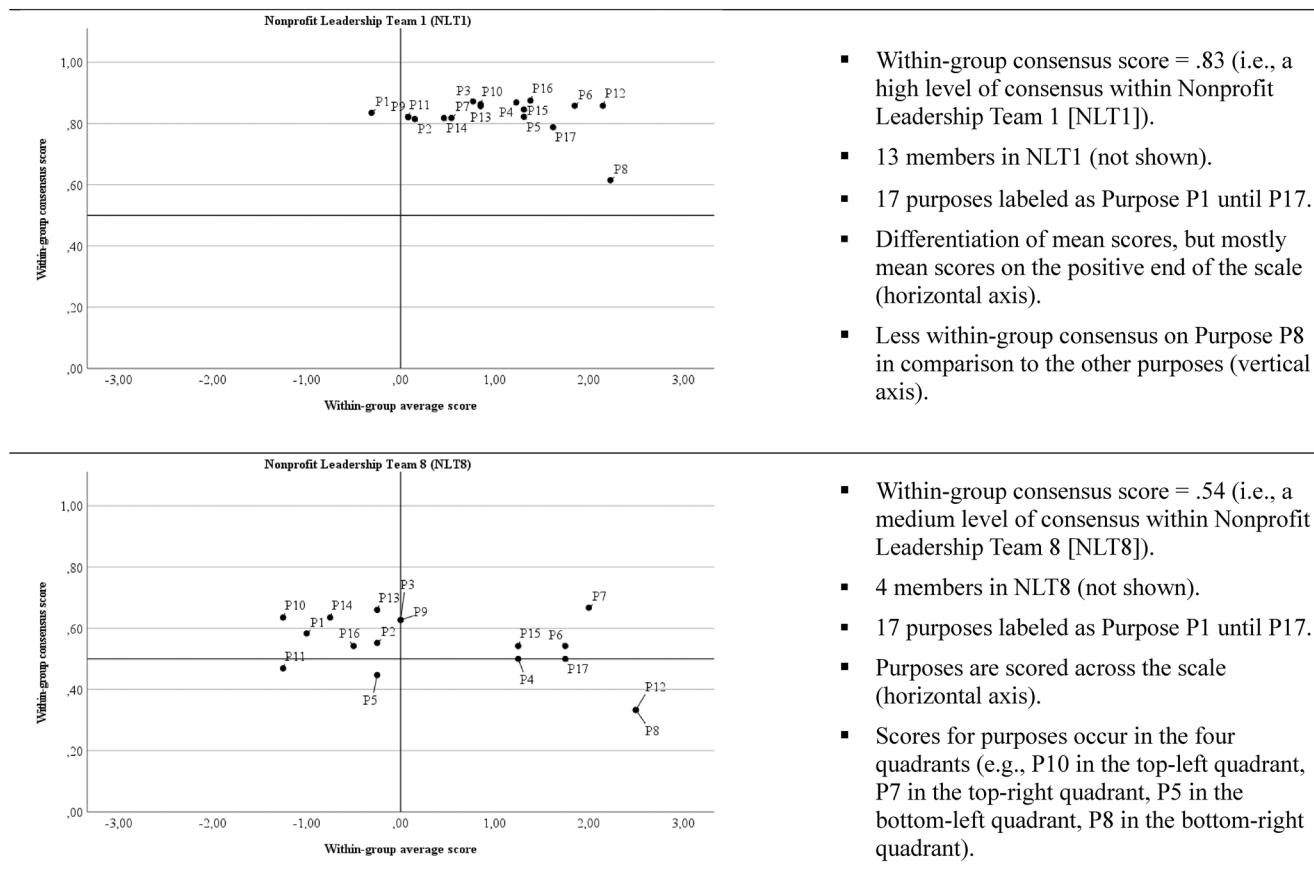


FIGURE 6 | Within-group consensus plotting—rating-based (survey 2).

understanding of the potential these concepts hold in shaping new and relevant research questions for nonprofit management and leadership. Specifically, addressing our first aim—that is, offering theoretical and practical considerations for strengthening a within-group consensus perspective in nonprofit (leadership) research and its potential to enrich various ongoing debates—we offer insights into the specific conceptual considerations of within-group consensus. These insights can facilitate the development of theoretical propositions and testable hypotheses. Additionally, we offer suggestions on how these ideas can be applied to specific streams and debates within the nonprofit (leadership) literature. However, we acknowledge that this is just a starting point. We call for further exploration and identification of how within-group consensus applications can be used in various areas of the nonprofit research. The structure provided in Figure 1 serves as an initial framework that can be expanded to identify and test both antecedents and outcomes of various levels of nonprofit leadership consensus.

For our second aim—that is, providing readers with an overview of concrete theoretical and methodological considerations for incorporating a within-group consensus perspective into their own work—we offer a detailed example illustrating and comparing two distinct ways of reporting and visualizing within-group consensus. Concretely, we explain how quantitative measures of within-group consensus can be used and interpreted in both qualitative and quantitative research. In

this study, we relied on visualizations to explore differences between these within-group consensus measures and operationalizations. Future research can employ these underlying metrics directly in quantitative correlational or multi-variate analyses. Although our data was not initially collected for this particular showcase, the detailed example we provide should serve as a practical guide for other scholars to better understand the methodological steps and trade-offs involved in empirical studies that focus on within-group consensus. We also call for further theoretical and empirical work in the nonprofit literature to build upon and complement our example and arguments. In this context, other consensus-related methods, such as those exploring consensus emergence (Willems and Meyfroodt 2024) or line-of-sight (Meyfroodt and Desmidt 2024) should be further explored for their applicability in nonprofit (leadership) research.

Since our data reflects the perceptions of various leaders within different organization, we provide preliminary exploratory insights into the role of consensus in shaping organizational purpose, particularly, within nonprofit leadership teams. This aligns with our third aim, which focuses on offering empirical insights into consensus regarding organizational purposes in leadership teams. We argue that this is an important topic for further exploration within nonprofit leadership, as it can shed light on how governance mechanisms can be improved (e.g., Brown 2007; Willems 2016a) and/or how the performance of organizations is influenced by it (e.g.,

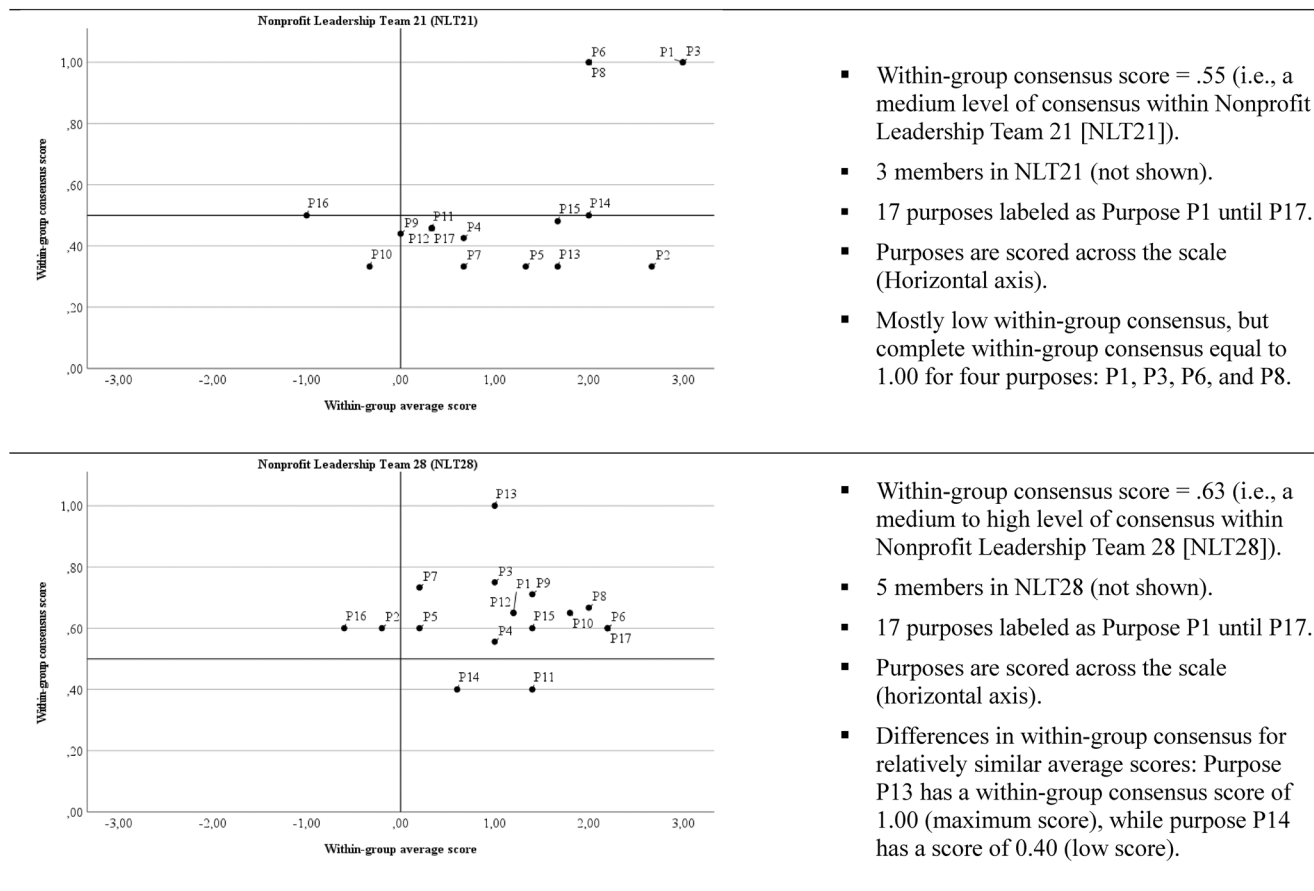


FIGURE 7 | Within-group consensus plotting—rating-based (survey 2) (continued).

Brimhall 2019; Green and Griesinger 1996; Kwan et al. 2024; Suykens et al. 2022). Our preliminary insights on shared leadership perceptions of organizational purposes serve as an invitation for other scholars to engage in further theorizing based on these results and to validate the theoretical propositions that arise from this work.

4.1 | Implications for Research

Clearly, both within-group consensus mapping and plotting offer the opportunity to study within-group consensus on organizational purposes in an integrative manner. Both approaches (1) allow for an in-depth understanding of what within-group consensus comprehends, (2) enable the analysis of within-group consensus at different levels, and (3) provide a visualization that is both intuitive, informative, and relevant for both qualitative and quantitative research. For example, the within-group consensus metrics and indices described and visualized in this article can be used to test the relatedness with other variables to explain levels of within-group consensus, or to test how within-group consensus explains other relevant variables in the field of nonprofit leadership research (see Figure 1). Researchers could test whether dimensions of organizational culture explain levels of within-group consensus and vice versa. In other words, within-group consensus mapping and plotting provide scholars and practitioners with tools for conducting more fine-tuned and extended analyses of within-group consensus on different topics, offering opportunities for contributing to theory.

The exemplary situations of nonprofit leadership teams' opinions on organizational purposes illustrate that different situations require different actions. The feasibility of those actions in terms of enabling true organizational improvements, however, will heavily depend on having an in-depth understanding of the within-group consensus of nonprofit leadership teams' opinions on the importance of the different organizational purposes. Deciding on actions solely based on within-group average scores would be a shot in the dark (Kluijtmans et al. 2024; Willems and Meyfroot 2024). Proper knowledge of the nonprofit leadership team's level of consensus is needed to prevent actions that do not work or even have perverse and harmful effects (Bragaw and Misangyi 2022; Samba et al. 2018; Willems, Van den Bergh, et al. 2012a). In sum, the multifaceted view obtained through the usage of the within-group consensus mapping and plotting approaches facilitates a qualitative multiple-case exploration, enabling the drawing of cross-case as well as case-specific conclusions (Yin 2009).

Besides its usefulness for qualitative exploration and inductive research, consensus also has relevant applications in quantitative and deductive research. Metrics for within-group consensus—or agreement—can be used for purely methodological reasons in multilevel studies, for example, as a condition for aggregating individual opinions into a group-level variable for further analysis (Burke and Dunlap 2002; Lebreton et al. 2003; LeBreton and Senter 2008). Even more interestingly, within-group consensus metrics can also serve as the operationalization of a core theoretical construct (Willems

and Meyfroodt 2024). We refer to our section on conceptual considerations for some opportunities in the concrete context of nonprofit (leadership) research. When within-group consensus is employed for methodological reasons in multilevel studies, it is operationalized with concrete metrics, justified in terms of technical and methodological criteria (e.g., as a condition for using data or specifying how data is used) (Brown and Hauenstein 2005; LeBreton and Senter 2008; Lindell and Brandt 2000), and reported to advocate in favor of or against applying multilevel model specifications (Bliese 2000; Bliese et al. 2018). However, when within-group consensus is treated as a “meaningful, higher-level construct rather than a statistical prerequisite for aggregation” (Holt et al. 2017, 64), it can hold significant theoretical value. As depicted in Figure 1, researchers then have the opportunity to explain the mechanisms forming within-group consensus (e.g., Desmidt et al. 2019; Meyfroodt et al. 2019), when this consensus occurs (e.g., Lang et al. 2018), and why certain behaviors and outcomes arise at both individual and collective levels (Powell et al. 2011).

Another way to expand consensus research is by examining not only consensus *within* leadership teams but also *across* or *between* teams. For example, within an organization, some teams and their respective members might have more similar opinions than other teams and their members. This also deserves more attention in the nonprofit leadership literature because such analyses on consensus across teams can, for example, clarify how some teams within organizations can better collaborate and/or are less susceptible to between-team conflicts (e.g., volunteers versus paid staff). Similarly, such mapping of consensus across teams can be applied for leadership teams of different organizations. For example, higher consensus on goals across leadership teams of different organizations can be explored to test the likelihood of these organizations being able to better collaborate on goals and challenges that extend the boundaries of single organizations. The methodological aspects of such cross-organization consensus mapping are elaborated in Meyfroodt et al. (2025). In that extension article, we showcase with the same data of this article how further valuable extensions to what is dealt with in this article are possible. This enables further elaboration as well as comparison of these consensus methods.

In sum, we call for a stronger consensus perspective in various areas of the nonprofit (leadership) literature, and we argue that both qualitative and quantitative approaches (or combinations) are valuable to explore and test consensus-related theories, research questions, and hypotheses.

4.2 | Implications for Practice

For practitioners, understanding their own levels of within-group consensus is crucial for making impactful decisions. To empower nonprofit leadership teams in navigating within-group consensus for effective decision-making, we offer three practical takeaways. First, relying solely on aggregated data and mean scores, without considering within-group consensus, can lead to poor decision-making. Nonprofit leadership teams should therefore assess the level of within-group consensus when making decisions (in this case, on organizational purposes), as

within-group consensus is a key group-level attribute. Second, fostering consensus within nonprofit leadership teams can yield positive organizational outcomes by reducing transaction costs and promoting coordination. Within-group consensus mapping and plotting approaches can be used to track the effectiveness of investments and interventions aimed at building within-group consensus. Third, low levels of within-group consensus, indicating underlying issues or concerns within a nonprofit leadership team, should not be overlooked. Rather than dismissing low levels of within-group consensus, it can help to pinpoint underlying issues, encourage critical thinking, and lead to innovative solutions.

4.3 | Limitations and Additional Avenues for Further Research

Our study has at least three limitations. First, although our data collection process ensured confidentiality, the requirement for participation to receive feedback reports and the identification of individuals through key contact persons may have allowed for indirect identification of participants by these contacts or others within the organization. Participants may have been aware of this, potentially leading to social desirability in their responses. While our focus has been on capturing the sharedness of leadership team members' opinions on the most relevant purposes of their respective organizations (rather than on case- or person-specific, sensitive, and/or critical input), future research could adopt even stricter confidentiality measures. Researchers could even try to employ fully anonymous data collection methods, while still preserving the multilevel structure of the data, to mitigate any negative impact due to the potential indirect identification of participants.

Second, we used convenience sampling at the organizational level, which limits our ability to claim full representativeness across all nonprofit organizations and their specific subsectors. However, we intentionally included a diverse range of organization types to ensure broad inclusivity. Future research using representative samples at the organizational level—for example, focusing on specific regions or subsectors—could further explore how organizational characteristics influence the shared opinions of leaders within these organizations.

Third, we separated the ranking-based and rating-based approaches to measure and visualize within-group consensus on purposes into different surveys to reduce respondent fatigue and avoid the influence of ranking-based answers on rating-based answers. However, this approach increased the risk of higher non-response rates across the two surveys. Moreover, the time lag between the two surveys among the same respondents may have allowed for changes in the organization or the external environment to influence responses. Nevertheless, to reduce potential common-method bias by avoiding the inclusion of both purpose-related constructs in a single survey, we operated under the assumption that organizational purposes and leadership perceptions of them would not change massively within the timespan of a few weeks. We acknowledge, however, that future research should carefully weigh such trade-offs, particularly, when addressing the specific challenges of collecting rich, multilevel data among nonprofit leaders.

5 | Conclusion

This article underscores the pivotal potential of within-group consensus mapping and plotting for nonprofit management and leadership. By offering tools to qualitatively and quantitatively analyze consensus at different levels, the suggested approaches enable scholars to advance theories and methodologies related to organizational behavior and leadership. For practitioners, understanding and leveraging within-group consensus empowers them toward more effective decision-making, fostering alignment, and collaboration that enhance organizational success.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.