



Crisis of Leadership in a Fast Changing Digital World

Dr. K. R. Subramanian
Professor of Management & Senior
Consultant - Operations, Credait.com, India

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ABSTRACT

By 2050 world population could be around 9 billion people - to feed, clothe, transport, employ and educate. With our commitment to a growth-driven world economy that will face inflation, supply endless consumption to everyone, we add a digital device everyday that helps everyone to succeed and prosper. We have reached

greatness, no doubt, but our magnificent successes will be matched by the growing Crisis of Success. As we pursue unlimited growth, our endless consumption threatens to warm the climate, overspending of our financial resources, requiring more fresh water than we have, increasing income inequality, diminishing other species and triggering shock waves whenever we are unable to cope with a problem. Billions of people are at the “bottom” of the economy. The middle class is becoming irrelevant in advanced societies. Many no longer believe today’s leaders can improve this, though they are increasing their power and digital devices. Leaders want new options as much as everyone else. Apparently, there is room to dream about a more successful world along with new technology. The big questions are: Can we envision a world where tech helps everyone succeed and prosper? Can that world be designed and built now, without waiting for “the future” to arrive?

Keywords: world economy, inflation, digital age, propensity, consumption, economy people, middle class, future.

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has introduced a new era of human empowerment and engagement across business, society and in every aspect of our lives. The effects of this shift on society are tremendous and, in particular, are dramatically changing our leadership responsibilities whether in politics, professionals in business, teachers in school or parents raising children.

Leading in the new digital world is like tightrope walking. Digital devices deliver immense value, enabling us to connect, collaborate and broaden our minds – raising awareness about important issues, bringing people together for a common purpose and achieving new breakthroughs. But these very same technologies can also cause people to feel isolated and disconnected, leaving them vulnerable to the malicious intent of digital perpetrators and as we have seen in recent times, even terrorist activity. The opportunity for users to fulfill the need for social interaction, entertainment and learning is almost equal to the risk of impairment to cognitive, emotional and behavioral development and even mental health issues. Digital technology is extremely powerful at either end of the spectrum, and leaders have a heightened sense of responsibility to answer the call to action.

In the past, the information that was disseminated by media contained a wide, comprehensive range of content that viewers could use to obtain a full view of the news. Today, that is no longer the case and consumers now demand (and customize) content to match their world view. The results are a new world where *opinion is fact and the truth is debatable*. There is no doubt that this shift in how people consume information has shaped people’s perceptions and

influenced how we behave. This gap suggests that the influence of our daily digital interactions on our perceptions and decision making is significant, perhaps even dominant; yet, we still know so little about how digital technology is truly influencing human behavior. Closing this gap – understanding the role of digital technology in shaping culture and behavior and using it to an advantage – is the key to effective leadership in the future.



Figure 1.1: Leading in the digital age

As the World Economic Forum in Davos asserted, “You either disrupt or are disrupted.” This statement rightfully puts pressure on leaders to change, not just with the curve, but to be ahead of the curve. CEOs, world leaders, teachers and parents alike must be initiators of change and assume responsibility for creating the digital culture and mindset and to generate a thoughtful and fruitful digital experience for those they lead (and often love). Whether it is connecting with employees using the latest social media tool, engaging with your children, revamping outdated policies, or simply reading emerging research, leaders must be the first adopters of digital trends and get comfortable with being uncomfortable. The digital world is one of empowered, individualized experiences, and leaders must embrace that it has no boundaries or titles. By nature, digital technology is diverse and inclusive and, when nurtured, can give leaders endless opportunities to harness innovation, solve problems, share knowledge and learn from others. There is no room for hierarchy.

Human workers are being replaced by a digital workforce with the unstoppable development of artificial intelligence. It is not only about physical robots and self-driving cars; but about software agents that carry out repeatable routine activities with increasing cognitive ability as they “learn” by doing. As already seen, the spectrum of emotions, experiences and behaviors driven by digital are vast, and no one is immune to its influence. Our personal values can be easily corrupted if we are not careful in protecting them, so in the wake of all that noise, leaders – and everyone – must remember what and who are truly important, set boundaries and act accordingly. Many will not make the journey. But those who do will find a transformative, hyper-connected world that is teeming with unimaginable opportunities. The new territory is uncharted and uncertain. But by diving in with courage, respect and care, digital technology can be the greatest gift we give to our global community.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The coming years will be a time of “Digital Leaders”. Around the world, leaders in different fields have already started to embrace the digital revolution and recognize the power of game-changing technology. There is an abundance of literature on leadership, but only some of it addresses an issue of how disruptive technologies can define the new wave of leaders in today’s world. Before we move on to digital leadership, we should take a look at what leadership means in general and whether universal characteristics of leadership apply to the fast-changing world of disruptive technologies. Different ages require different kinds of leadership, but many leading theorists claim that there are certain universal characteristics that are timeless.

A charismatic person possesses a rare gift that allows him/her to influence followers while inspiring loyalty and compliance. Even those who possess natural charisma are not able to pursue their right course of action because they are forced to balance various interests, maintain order and seek consensus. Apart from ‘inner’ or personal levels of

leadership, there is also an 'outer' or behavioral level which relates to how leaders deliver results, according to more integrated psychological theory. There are several universal skills that are worth mentioning, such as: (1) motivational skills; (2) team building; (3) emotional intelligence. Obviously, this list of skills is not exhaustive but indicates the core abilities required to deliver successful results. And although these 'outer' characteristics have largely remained the same, there are also a few which have changed substantially due to the unprecedented impact of technology.

2.1 Human impacted by technology

We live in a world of rapidly advancing technology which is influencing lives like never before. Digital technology is transforming politics, businesses, economies and society, as well as our day-to-day lives. Digital technology has not only broken down the old, familiar models of organizations, but has also created a broad set of new challenges. Reusable rockets are a fantastic business opportunity, a source of entertainment and, more importantly, another step forward in the commercialization of space travel and ultimately toward a possible colonization of other planets. Back here on earth, we can't deny that our world is changing as never before. Technological revolution is evident and examples of our new reality abound. The most popular social media creates no content (Face book), the fastest growing banks have no actual money (Society One), the world's largest taxi company owns no taxis (Uber), and the largest accommodation provider owns no real estate (Air bnb). Today's game changers drive with completely different fuel and sometimes – as the above examples clearly indicate – they revolutionize even the most basic characteristics of particular industries. On a conceptual level, the Digital Age - called sometimes the knowledge society or networked society - is marked by several key structural changes that are reshaping leadership: (1) rapid and far-reaching technological changes, (2) globalization leading to the dynamic spread of information; (3) a shift from physical attributes toward knowledge and (4) more dispersed less hierarchical forms of organization.

2.2 Impact of the Digital Age on leadership

Traditional skills have not been supplanted but they now co-exist with a mix of new factors. First of all, digital leadership can be defined by a leader's contribution to the transition toward a knowledge society and their knowledge of technology. Digital leaders have an obligation to keep up with the ongoing global revolution. They must understand technology, not merely as an enabler but also for its revolutionary force. Leadership must be driven by an attitude of openness and a genuine hunger for knowledge. Of course, no rule dictates that leaders must be literate in coding or that they graduated from machine-learning but yes, there is an imperative to understand the impact of breakthrough technologies.

Today's leaders must have the ability to identify technological trends across different sectors, such as big data, cloud computing, automation, and robotics. However, first and foremost they must possess sufficient knowledge and the vision to use these resources most effectively.

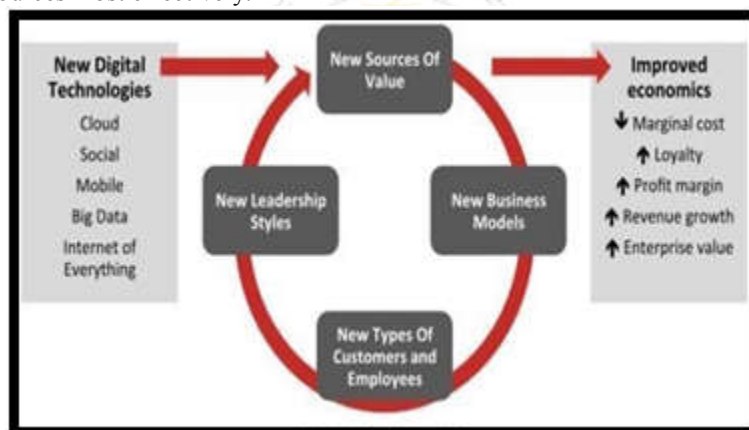


Figure 2.1: Leadership models shows change in knowledge of society

Secondly, in a knowledgeable society, what we do not know is as important as what we do know. Leaders should know their limits and know how to acquire missing knowledge. A leader of the future is more like a community manager rather than an authoritarian. These processes, by and large, will continue to grow. As a result, the

hierarchical model tends to be suppressed and replaced by horizontal structures among executives, leaders from different sectors, researchers and representatives from civic society. Hierarchy fails in the digital age because it's slow and bureaucratic, whereas the new world is constantly changing and requires immediate responses. Information is key in today's world; power is not gained by expanding new territories or areas of influence but by deepening and widening networks and connections.

2.3 Leadership turns attention towards technology for good

We have to shift our focus from the threat of new technologies to the opportunities they bring. The debate concerning the threat of technologies, especially the internet, will never end. Policymakers have proposed different ways of regulating the web, but they always are one or two steps behind. This is because law and regulations are stable and designed to be long-lasting, whereas the digital environment is changing rapidly. We do not claim that regulation is purely ineffective, and thus we should abandon any legal solutions for creating a more secure environment. But we do suggest that we look at technologies through different lenses. We can transform the one thing that is good and bad in breakthrough technologies - the human factor. Having acknowledged that digital technology will play a decisive role our future, leaders cannot afford to show fear or reluctance in implementing it. Instead, they must embrace technology with a clear view of its potential. We must set sail for new, ambitious lands. We choose to go to Mars because our technology enables us to at least attempt the exploration on other planets by the 2030s. And we choose to develop other fantastic things every day – self-driving cars, more powerful batteries, the Apple Watch, drones – to name only just a few.

A balanced mix of universal characteristics and digital leadership traits has the potential to guide us through years of transformation with optimism and idealism. Technology continues to prove that it can be used for the benefit of mankind, but only if we set sail on the right course and with the right companions. Digital technology is transforming businesses, economies and societies. The digital infrastructure is a powerful democratizing force, providing access to networks and markets for many more people and businesses around the world. The nature of work is changing, as software increasingly automates tasks, freeing up people to create novel types of value. Innovative business models are emerging based on platforms and ideas of a sharing economy. Leadership involves commitment to values and a value based leadership is recognized, however long it takes. The best example from Indian history is of Mahatma Gandhi who is remembered world over for his principled leadership. It was a crisis situation for India which did not have any military power to fight and oust the British, but Gandhi by his peaceful methods achieved the objective because of his commitment to values and his charisma got all the people around to support.

3. LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS

The chaos of the times seems to present a new disaster every week, plunging leaders who may be top-notch performers under normal operations into a world of chaos and expectations — situations they are both unequipped to handle and also prone to make well-meaning yet disastrous decisions in the heat of the moment. The organizational operating models that provide the framework for a smooth-running enterprise during normal times become inoperative during a crisis, throwing the leadership into uncertainty and chaos. But the chaos can be managed successfully if its impacts are understood with the following:

1. **Tension and stress:** In any crisis, leaders are thrown into a stressful and tense environment that puts them under enormous psychological, mental, and physical pressure. Even minor decisions made under these circumstances can result in catastrophic impacts.
1. **Speed:** Everything may initially happen at great speed, giving little time for thoughtful consideration or consultation. In a crisis, worlds collide and time is the first victim.
2. **Personnel:** The right people may not be available to respond to the crisis, resulting in untrained and inexperienced leaders being called upon to step into the chaos. Without the right people the organization will stumble in normal times, but during a crisis the problems are accentuated exponentially.
3. **Organization:** Businesses and governments are not necessarily organized to handle crisis. In fact, the organizational hierarchy may be a hindrance to response and recovery. The flexibility to adapt the organization to the situation is critical to success.
4. **Stakeholders:** The list of stakeholders will rapidly expand, bringing in to play new channels of communication, new expectations, and new players--all simultaneously. Suppliers, regulators, families, customers, hospitals, law enforcement will all require a leaders time and interaction.

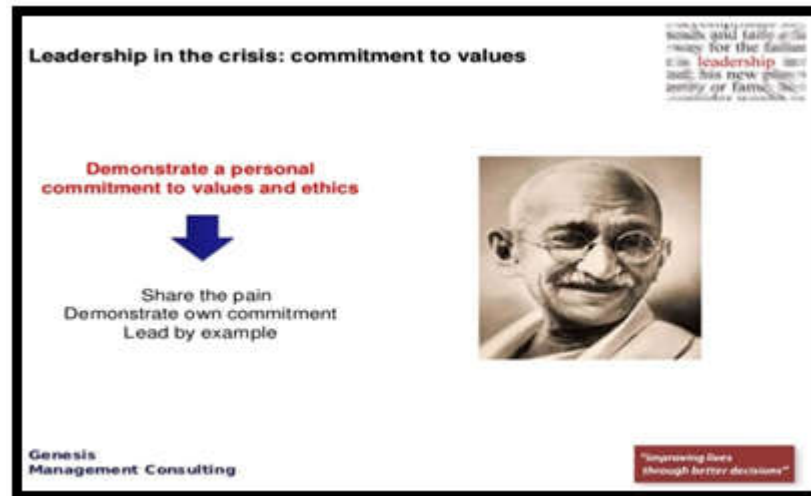


Figure3.1: Leadership is commitment to values

5. **Communication:** The normal channels of communication may not be operative or may be overloaded, requiring new channels and protocols that must be quickly mastered.
6. **Media:** Leader in crisis has the media spotlight suddenly amplified, all waiting to report and find fault.
7. **Simplicity:** Simplicity is the key in a crisis. Simplicity ultimately wins. The more complex a leader makes a solution in a crisis the less likely success will be the end result.

Understanding the impact of a crisis has on the leader is critical in teaching crisis leadership; the following lessons can help you prepare:

1. **Experiential:** Provide your audience with an example of a crisis that is as real as possible, addressing as many of the above impacts as appropriate. Make the environment of the session as real as possible. If you are not going to make it real, they can read a book and not get the leadership crisis experience.
2. **Do your homework:** Each organization has different stress points and leadership expectations. What creates a crisis in the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health is very different from a large multinational conglomerate. Teaching leadership in crisis without understanding the organization will certainly undermine the effectiveness of the workshop.
3. **Audio Visuals:** Use as many audio visual tools as practical. They not only educate and entertain, but also can be used to control an audience.
4. **Case studies:** Actual events that make the point and are relevant to the organization in training are invaluable.

The behavior of many Western leaders could do as much damage to the international leadership the ongoing migration crisis or even a trade war. Beyond the cruelty of their policies, they risk strengthening governments like those in China and Russia, as it makes them seem reasonable, even reliable. “The wise man builds bridges; the fool builds wall”, was a slogan in Chinese media. United States imposed 25% tariffs on some \$50 billion of Chinese goods. Unfortunately, that isolationist approach extends beyond US trade policy in ways that are not just foolish, but also unethical – and they are depleting what is left of the West’s moral authority. When it comes to trade, China of course immediately retaliated with its own tariffs on \$50 billion of US imports, just as Canada, the European Union, and Mexico are retaliating for US tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. Such disputes, if they continue to escalate, will hurt people all over the world – not least US consumers, businesses, and workers.

But the US is not alone in pursuing policies that betray values that it long espoused. In Italy, the new right-wing populist government has begun targeting the Roma population, and Matteo Salvini, the interior minister and deputy prime minister, has been turning away ships carrying rescued migrants. Hungary, for its part, has just adopted the so-called Stop Soros Law, which criminalizes any effort by an individual or NGO to help an illegal immigrant claim asylum. It is named after George Soros, the Hungarian-born financier and founder of the Open Society Foundations,

whom Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán irrationally accuses of encouraging mass immigration to weaken European nations.

All of this highlights a deepening crisis of ethical leadership that could do as much damage as uncontrolled migration or even a trade war. Beyond the cruel policies that it enables, it risks emboldening governments like those in China and Russia, as it makes them seem reasonable, even reliable. The crisis of leadership in organizations is deepened by frequent disruptions due to technological developments. Leadership in organizations has to negotiate such dramatic changes without succumbing to despair or lack of perspective.

4. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Leadership has been a subject of discussion and debate for a long time and it may be said that it is topical at all times changing and adapting to the requirement of dynamic times. Starting from the World Economic Forum, leaders all over the world have recognized the need for 'digital leaders' in the current economic environment. As the human interactions and societal needs evolve and change, it is only expected that styles of leadership will also undergo changes. Environmental changes have profoundly influenced human endeavors. Development of digital technologies and the fast rate of changes in the same have already started influencing the way of thinking. Businesses are very much susceptible to environmental changes and digital technologies have their own share in the scheme of things. The present research is to find out the influence of such technologies. The Leadership styles in organizations undergo changes due to environmental pressures and the digital developments have created a temporary crisis of leadership due the new ways of doing business and the cultural impact of societal changes in organizations. With these thoughts in mind the following specific objectives have been identified for the current research work:

1. A brief review of environmental changes due to digital progress.
2. Impact of these changes on organizational culture and outlook.
3. How organizations are coping with such changes.
4. Futuristic outlook for organizational change and evolution.
5. Suggestions and recommendation for action plans.

There is a significant amount of literature on leadership development from time to time. Currently digital developments are front page topics on all management and technical literature. Because of the availability of a large volume of literature on the print as well as web media there was no necessity to do a separate survey needed to collect information useful to address the above research questions. What was required was to systematically arrange information from various sources which would facilitate analysis and review. During the process of collecting and identifying information sources, data adequacy was found to be suitable to arrive at Conclusions on the above mentioned research questions. The data collected has been collated, edited and suitably arranged to arrive at Conclusions as indicated in the following pages.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Environmental changes are often disruptive in nature particularly the technological innovations calling for rapid and whole sale changes in the outlook as well as structure of organizations. Leadership is critical to negotiate companies and corporations through such rough weather and regain the confidence of customers and stake holders. Change of machinery, layout and even product design and delivery are not as critical as the change in the mentality and perspectives of employees to deliver customer satisfaction consistently. Digital devices have seen proliferation in the organization scene. Such devices have a tendency to generalize the response (sometimes more the merrier attitude!) and more often it is a consensus approach to solution rather than a long term perspective for durable problem solving. But one thing is common and that is the responses have to be quicker before the competition catches on.

No doubt, organization cultures are affected in tune with the necessities of the market and customer perspectives. The common example is the speed of delivery of solutions to customer problems. When organizations find it difficult to respond fast, a crisis situation is created. Top management and leadership of organizations have to play a critical and decisive role in overcoming the crisis. Sometimes it will require cultural changes in an organization apart from technology and cosmetic changes will be short lived. New processes, product development, customer service and speed of response are some of the critical areas which would need the attention.

Organizations are constantly revamping and adjusting to the new realities. Leadership in organization and at industry level needs to recognize that traditional methods of Leadership will not do, and they have to find new means of motivating employees and obtaining their commitment to the organization. Employees need independence and flexibility and the employer need focus on the objectives. These two have to become congruent at some point so that leadership can take the organization towards its stated objectives. This is precisely the leadership challenge of the current environment. Organizations do cope with these realities by reorganizing the work into high power self managed teams to achieve the desired results. It is not by any means easy; but it is the reality and organizations need to cope with this reality.

Future becomes the present in no time! Unless organizations are tuned towards this new reality they will find the journey to be that much more difficult. Digital devices have become increasingly popular and organizations do encourage employees to become savvy. The work and leisure activities are very much intertwined and organizations have to provide for flexibility in the working hours so that the objectives of the company are not compromised. Training, development and recruitment of new employees need special attention so that the new recruits merge well with the organizational culture and the organizations do not fall behind in understanding the aspirations of the new recruits.

6. SUGGESTIONS

There are no hard and fast rules and organizational flexibility and innovation are the key ingredients of success. Leadership in organizations is not governed by any theory or rules, but is actually controlled by results and long term health of organizations. Crisis of any sort not only of Leadership is not born in a day. There are sure indications of brewing and organizations can prevent any untoward result by early intervention strategy. Learning organizations as the term indicates understand and face the critical issue without losing time. That is the hall mark of a good organization.

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