

Lead in the Digital Age– Check for & Fit in your Leadership Style

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ABSTRACT

Today, we are living in the world of technology and information. In this present writeup, the authors attempt to understand human leadership style in the digital age, also known as the computer age or the new media age. New business plans and other professions today have undergone changes according to technological inventions as part of this digital era. Many human resource management practices are also being redefined to reflect the digital age. The writeup focuses on redefined leadership in the digital age, suggesting the need to identify the right leadership style for businesses or organisations in this era. This paper further examines how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and cybersecurity are reshaping leadership practices, influencing decision-making, governance, and organizational risk management in the digital age. It explores how these technologies impact modern digital leadership, governance, decision-making, and risk management. This writeup aims to understand the role of leadership styles in the digital age, redefining and checking the right style to fit the digital age.

Keywords: Agile Leadership, Business Environment, Data-Driven Leadership, Digital Age, Servant Leadership.

Introduction

This is the era of Digital age leaders. The world has already begun to realise the power of game-changing technology and the impact of the digital revolution (Kluz & Firlaj, 2016) [2]. Like any other revelation, the digital revolution can be viewed either as a catastrophe or as a world of opportunity – depending on whether your allegiances lie with the old/new order. Optimism is a prerequisite for survival. Every country needs a minister of the future in this digital age, said CEO Marc Benioff at the World Economic Forum in 2016. Technology is indeed forcing leaders to adapt to environmental demands (Andersson & Van der Heyden, 2017) [3]. In the digital age, leadership styles demand tech-savviness, a people-first mindset, and quick adaptability. As organisations become more digitised, interconnected, and fast-moving, traditional leadership models are evolving.

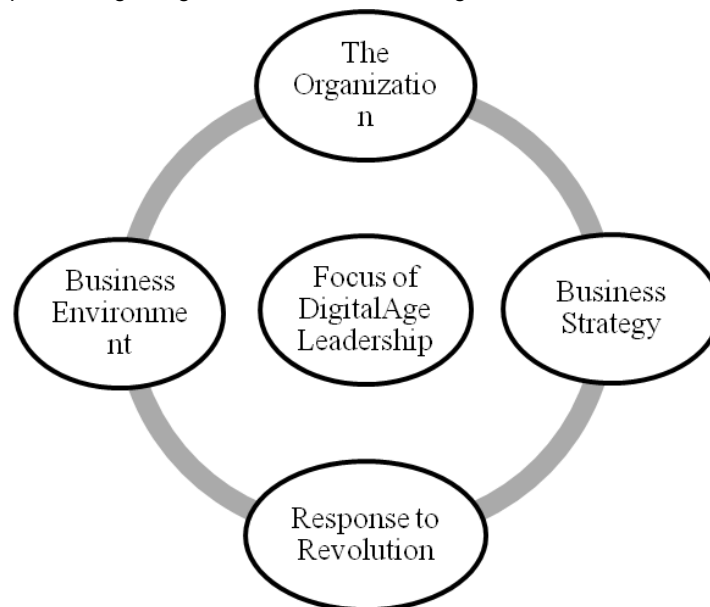
Overview of key leadership styles that are prominent and effective in the digital age:

- **Transformational Leadership:** It inspires and motivates teams to innovate and embrace change. The key traits of this style include visionary thinking, a focus on empowerment, Emphasis on purpose and values, and Championing of innovation. It is relevant to this style because the digital transformation requires cultural shifts. Transformational leaders can inspire people to adopt new technologies and ways of working.

- **Servant Leadership:** It focuses on serving the team and putting the needs of followers first. The key Traits here include empathy and active listening, empowering others, a humble and ethical approach, and building trust in the leader. Servant leaders foster the well-being and team cohesion in hybrid work environments.
- **Data-Driven Leadership:** It bases decisions on analytics and real-time data insights. The key traits here include an analytical mindset, effective use of KPIs and metrics, encouragement of a culture of measurement, and a balance of data with intuition. It is relevant because the data is a critical asset in digital strategy, marketing, operations, and customer experience.
- **Inclusive Leadership:** It values diversity and actively seeks input from all voices. The key traits here include building diverse teams, promoting psychological safety, encouraging open dialogue and fostering innovation through inclusion. Furthermore, it aligns with the digital age due to its varied perspectives, which are crucial for tackling complex digital challenges and developing global products.
- **Digital Leadership:** It integrates digital knowledge with strategic leadership. The key traits include being tech-savvy, having a high data literacy rate, encouraging digital upskilling, and possessing an agile mindset that navigates digital tools and ecosystems effectively. These leaders must make informed decisions based on data and guide digital transformation efforts.
- **Agile Leadership:** It emphasises flexibility, collaboration, and rapid adaptation. The key traits of this leadership style include quick decision-making, iterative planning and feedback loops, support for cross-functional teams and tolerance of failure and experimentation. The fast pace of change in the digital age requires nimble, responsive leadership (Northouse, 2012)[1].

Focus of Leadership in the Digital Age

Leadership in the digital age focuses on the following areas of business.



The table below highlights the focal area of business, digital requirements and its inference on the Digital age leadership.

Focal area of business	Digitalisation Requirements	Inference/Remark
Business Environment	As suggested in Porter's Five-force model, digitalization is rapidly replacing traditional physical barriers to entry with intangible barriers like purpose, resonant mission, trust and authenticity etc. that no amount of industry prominence or cash can overcome.	Hence, digitalisation requires an unbiased understanding of the external environment.

The organization	The changes in the environment due to the changes in the digital world are today challenging the existence of individual companies and even industries. The managing directors, owners, and executives of the companies need to question the pre-existing assumptions about the firm's mission and industrial positioning, as well as the sustainability of its business models and methods. Digitalisation advantage is based on the opportunity to customise products and services, as well as the organisational structure and its strategies. Instead of going through the existing documentation procedure, firms need to have their own digital clear roadmap for the future growth of the organisation. Managers or team members need to design an in-house dictionary to meet the digital era's requirements. Further, this dictionary encourages frequent updates to reflect organisational structure changes or strategy. Digitalization is not possible with a few members' commitment; it involves many great experts, but the ultimate responsibility to transform these changes is within the organisation. The successful modifications require cooperation from all contributors to link organisational structural changes with digitalisation. Digitalisation is the revolution of both cultural and technological aspects. The reason is that the technological change requires a large-scale cultural change under executive leadership. The success of any business can be achieved through continuous collaboration and ongoing conversations between shareholders, owners, executives and employees. Furthermore, it also demands cross-functional collaboration between industries today. The trend in customer engagement has also changed. Customers in the digital age are dominant in rating product value for money, size, scope, and quality. They also post their ideas about products or services and write reviews on social media platforms like Twitter.	<i>Hence, digitalisation requires the reformulation of the organisation's mission based on the requirements of the digital age.</i> <i>Hence, the meaning and purpose of the digitalisation era is clearly stated by the organisation.</i> <i>Hence, the digital age requires understanding the capabilities which are essential across the firm.</i> <i>Hence, the digital revolution is indeed supported by corporate culture.</i> <i>Hence, digitalisation is demanding a greater level of collaboration.</i> <i>Hence, the digital age necessitates meeting customer needs promptly and fostering greater public engagement.</i>
The Business Strategy	Companies used to follow five-year plans in the past, but today, it's highly impossible because the business world is changing rapidly. It is developing strategies to implement its new formulations simultaneously, in response to environmental demands. Business today is not old-fashioned, and research analysis indicates that binary choices are necessary to make the strategy work all the time in today's digital age. Organisations seeking to expand their businesses today must explore new business models and revenue streams through experimentation and learning. Executives and owners must mentally prepare for uncertainty based on their comfort levels.	<i>Hence, business strategy in the digital age has become a continuous process.</i> <i>Hence, Business strategy-related decision-making is primarily data-driven.</i> <i>Hence, digitalisation needs to enter uncharted territories.</i>

	In the present digital world, change management programs pay dividends for years if not decades. The directors and executives in this context must ensure that firms can continuously adapt and integrate into the advanced facility of organizations.	<i>Hence, digitalisation is not a single-day show, but a continuous change process.</i>
The Response to Revolution	Digital revolution is making all in common both (customers and businessmen), making us move with unprecedented levels of innovation, competence, effectiveness, leadership and responsibility. The intention is to produce positive results for both firms and society. It is not just the organisational leadership that is sufficient to respond to the digital revolution, but all stakeholders in the business.	<i>Hence, digitalisation seeks a role from all shareholders to reshape and function smoothly for the future.</i>

How to Lead Organizations in the Digital Age

There is a plethora of literature on leadership, but some people can find ways in which technology is defining new waves of leadership. Before understanding digital age leaders, it is essential to understand the universal features of leadership that can be applied to the changing world of disruptive technologies (Northouse, 2012) [1].

• The first universal feature, leading theorists claim, is personal Charisma – a rare gift that inspires loyalty and obedience. • Second, apart from the above inner features of leadership, it is also essential from the outer or behavioural level that several universal skills, such as team building, motivational, and emotional intelligence, play a greater role in constructing a leader's personality.
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Many universities, such as Boston University, are now offering courses on leadership in the digital age, focusing on imparting skills that help individuals adapt to the digital age (Authors experiences, n.d.) [5].

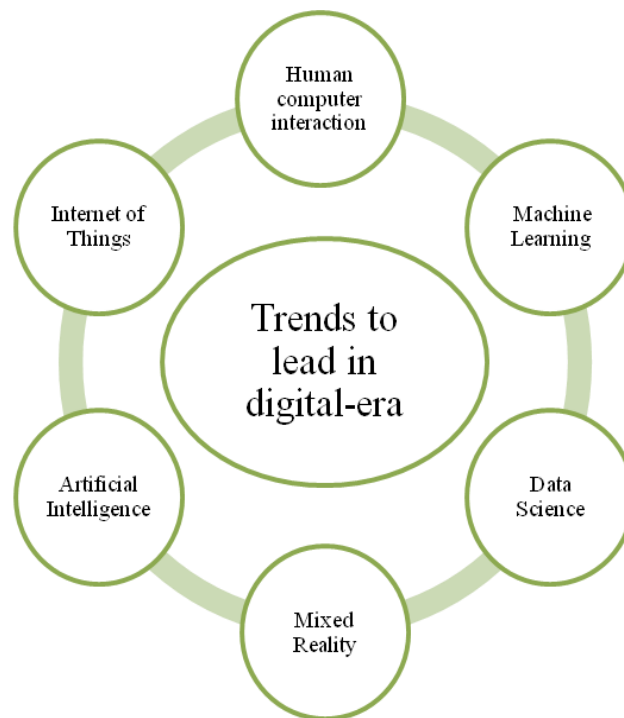
The practical skills which they are imparting to the students include:

- Leveraging a network of relationships
- Using conflict to drive creativity
- Working across boundaries
- Making a common agenda of core purpose across competing agendas and metrics
- Leading change through experimentation and implementation

The above skills acquisition helps them lead and manage themselves in the fast-changing digital age, build and maintain critical relationships, and manage virtual teams. Additionally, acquiring negotiating and collaboration skills, positively influencing and leading change efforts, executing and experimenting with initiatives, and developing a personal leadership improvement plan.

Technological Integration

Human-Computer Interaction is playing a vital role in digitalization. It is all about advancing human interaction and automation, the coupling of intelligent systems with direct manipulation. Trends such as the Internet of Things, machine learning, data science, mixed reality, and artificial intelligence are playing a vital role in digitalization today (Kluz & Firlej, 2016) [2].



The Internet of Things is a network of connected objects and devices that collect and exchange data. Machine learning is about pattern recognition to learn from and make predictions on data. Data science involves predictive analytics in areas such as machine translation, speech recognition, robotics, and search engines. Mixed reality is merging real and virtual worlds to produce new environments and visualisations to interact and co-exist in real time. Artificial intelligence encompasses reasoning, knowledge, learning, perception, and the ability to manipulate objects.

Redefining Leadership in the Digital Age

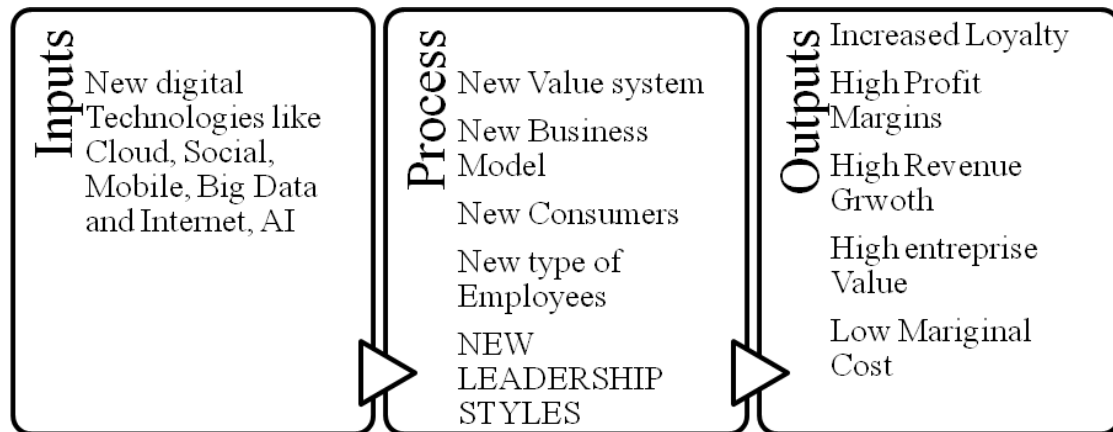
• **The Human Impact of Technology**

Human resources are working in rapidly changing technology today. Digital technology is transforming politics, businesses, economies, and society as well as our day-to-day lives (Kluz & Firlej, 2016) [2]. Digital technology has not only broken down the old, familiar models of organizations, but has also created a set of new challenges. The world today is undergoing unprecedented changes, and the technological revolution is a clear example. Examples include social media, fast-growing banks, and taxi services. Based on the concepts, the digital age is often called the knowledge society or a networked society. This society is marked by several key structural changes that are giving a new shape to leadership. It includes:

- Rapidly moving technological changes.
- Globalisation leads to the dynamic spread of information
- Shift from physical attributes towards knowledge
- More distributed and less hierarchical organisational forms

The new business models are based on new sources of value, as well as new types of customers and employees. Also, new styles of leadership. Leaders in the digital age must be able to identify technological trends across various sectors, such as big data, computing, automation, and robotics, and possess the knowledge and vision to utilise these resources effectively. It results in improved economics by minimizing costs, improving loyalty, profit margin, revenue growth and enterprise value.

• **Input – Process – Output model of Digital Leadership**

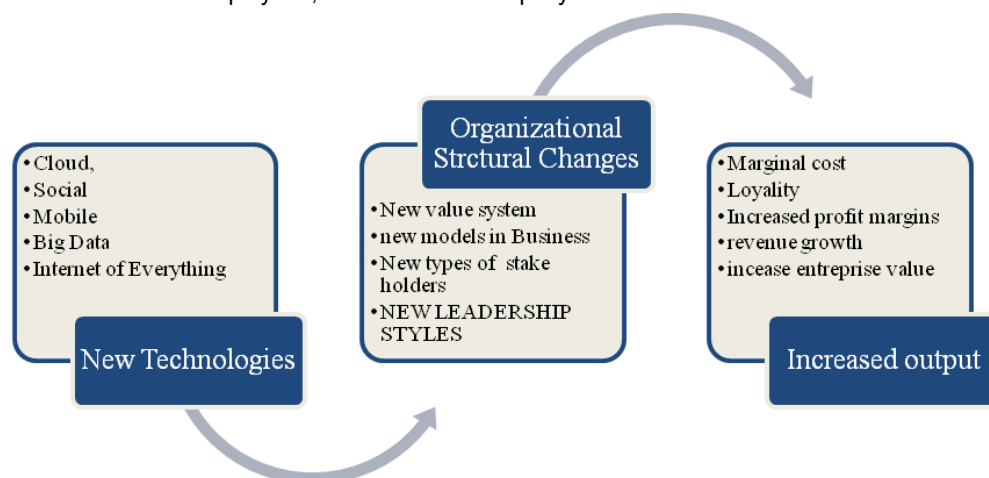


Source: By the author based on reviews

A leader's attention is crucial in preventing threats from emerging technologies, such as hacking into organisational websites, networks, fingerprint records, and official personnel management databases, as well as addressing threats posed by the internet. Policymakers have different ways to trigger the problems related to technology, but laws and regulations related to it are not long-lasting. Technology is also playing a decisive role in the future and in legal solutions. Technology can be viewed as its potential role in today's organisations, but not for easy access. Technological knowledge for a leader can benefit the people in the organisation.

• **Identify the Right Leadership Style for the Digital Age**

According to Barry Libert, Jerry Wind and Megan Beck Fenley, the digital revolution has changed all, including the style of a leader (Libert, Wind, & Beck Fenley, 2015) [4]. Today's followers expect more ownership, and customers want to be involved in redefining the market development process. However, leaders are hesitant to delay, waiting for management to provide guidelines. They want to be collaborators rather than supervisors. The drastic changes in technological aspects over the last 20-30 years are significantly impacting marketing aspects and compelling leaders to make swift decisions, thereby eliminating the scope for hierarchical decisions. Hence, the Autocratic Leadership style today is redefined to meet the demands. Further, the integration of technology and the demands of the digital age are compelling organizations to develop new business models, new sources of value, new types of customers and employees, and new leadership styles to enhance their economic standards.



Source: developed by the author based on the review of literature

Further, leaders in the digital era are communicators, creators, and cooperators to their followers. A leader of a traditional company with digital start-ups may act as a co-creator in developing new products and making them available in the market. Here, the leader requires a new set of skills to lead the business processes. A leader who acts as a co-creator for their employees can elicit significant output from their style. For instance, Coca-Cola's free-style machines enable customers to create their own drinks, making them more loyal and less price-sensitive, while also reducing defects and improving customer lifetime value.

- **Emerging Technologies and Leadership Impact**

Leaders today must navigate emerging technologies, as innovations in artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and cybersecurity are reshaping decision-making, governance, and risk management. Each innovation presents unique opportunities and challenges for leaders.

Today's digital age leaders must navigate modern technologies and innovations such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and blockchain, and understand that these are reshaping decision-making, governance, and even risk management. Each of these innovations presents unique opportunities and challenges for today's leaders.

- **AI-Driven Decision-Making**

The fact can't be denied that generative AI tools are increasingly being adopted by leaders in the decision-making process. Today's artificial Intelligence systems can analyze large data sets and generate insights or give recommendations, thus adding a digital age leader in problem-solving and strategic planning. Studies also indicate that by leveraging the power of generative AI, leaders can improve their accuracy of decision-making; however, this needs to be balanced with human expertise as well. Let's not forget that human knowledge or human judgment remains crucial (López-Solís et al., 2025) [6]. An effective digital aid leadership in an environment which is AI-driven involves balancing the generative AI's data-driven capabilities with human insights and ensuring that leaders only use AI as a support tool without sacrificing ethical standards or without bias.

Blockchain Governance: Transparency and Trust

The blockchain technology is known for its transparency and safety (Akbar et al., 2025) [7]. This technology offers a new model of governance that emphasizes transparency and trust. By incorporating decentralized tamper-proof record keeping, blockchain can make accompanying processes not only more accountable but also transparent. The leaders of today can utilize blockchain technology to enhance stakeholder trust by increasing the accountability of every transaction. Research suggests that using blockchain technology can transform a company into a trust-based environment from a traditional leadership system. The challenge for leaders is to navigate the complexities of this technology, regulatory uncertainties in today's global ecosystem, and manage cultural resistance during its implementation. While implementing blockchain systems, today's digital leaders will face challenges including regulatory hurdles, uncertainties in global geopolitical environments, and cultural resistance from employees. By successfully navigating these challenges, today's leaders can not only become more trustworthy but also practice inclusive leadership.

Cybersecurity Leadership and Digital Threats

Cybersecurity threats are increasing for every organization but making cybersecurity leadership crucial for the organization the digital age leaders play an essential role in minimizing digital risks by fostering a culture of strong security along with proactive risk management it is no longer sufficient to have just technical defense systems because human factors are often the weakest link studies have found out that human errors account for about 80% of the security breaches making employees the top most risk (Triplett, 2022)[8].

Today's leadership must prepare the company for cybersecurity by prioritizing training, awareness, and clear policies. The leaders must not only display model secure behaviour but also align cybersecurity strategies with their company's business goals. This initiative from the leadership will result in an informed workforce ensuring robust safeguards through every step of the company's processes. With such proactive digital age leadership, organizations can anticipate threats, minimise vulnerabilities, and expand their digital landscape.

Findings

- It is clear from the review that digital age leaders must focus on four key areas of business: Business Environment, Organization, Business Strategy and Response to Revolution to meet customer demands.
- The leadership styles discussed are changing their role to fit the digital age. Coming to the implementation of the selected style, leaders need to acquire the personal Charisma and universal skills like communication. Coordination, support, motivation and so on. Further, Leaders also need to focus on the technological trends (tech-Savvy) - Human-computer interaction, Machine Learning, data science, mixed reality, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things.
- Determining the right leadership style for the digital age requires analysing the availability of new technology, organisational structural changes, and the expected increase in economic output. It is important for today's leaders to integrate emerging technologies like AI-driven insights, but to carefully balance them with human judgment.
- Effective leadership in digital age depends on adaptability and leaders' vision and on ability to build trust through the transparency of blockchain systems and to ensure a robust organizational policy against cyber threats. Also, the writeup tried to make the readers understand the impact of AI driven Decision making and effects of digital challenges on cyber security leadership.
- It is clear that, building a right style for leader need to get an understanding of the innate preferences based on their capabilities to fit in the digital age, leaders need to act as mentors to give support to subordinates and develop them to produce desired output. Further, required to act as co-creators and coaches to help in making outputs, need to act as a commander when it is necessary to develop policies for the system/unit.

Conclusion

In today's digital age, leadership must evolve to meet the dynamic demands of the modern business environment. This writeup tried to connect key concepts and pave the way for future research into factors such as technological advancements and their impact on leadership. Identifying the right skill sets and leadership variables is essential for adopting an appropriate style that aligns with digital transformation, ultimately influencing the growth and scalability of business and service organisations.

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