

Transformational Leadership in Digital Era

Ravi Patil

Research Scholar,
Department of Management,
Poornima University, Jaipur
ravipatil111a@gmail.com

Dr. S K Mathur

Professor,
Faculty of Management and Commerce,
Poornima University, Jaipur
skmonnet@gmail.com

Abstract

In recent years, the world has experienced a rapid transformation driven by advancements in technology and the rise of the digital era. This shift has brought about significant changes in the way organizations function and has created a need for leaders who can navigate the new landscape and help their organizations adapt to the changing environment. Transformational leadership has emerged as a leadership style that is well-suited to this new era, as it emphasizes a leader's ability to inspire and motivate followers to achieve a shared vision. This paper brings out the facets of Transformational Leadership, challenges posed by Digital Era on Transformational Leaders and the way ahead.

Keywords - Digital Era, Transformational Leadership, Technology Infusion, Change Management & Networking.

Introduction

When we speak of leadership and different types of leadership, it is essential to understand that the bifurcation of leadership into types doesn't mandate individual leaders to follow a particular type of leadership. On the contrary, it is more often than not, true that any leader shall possess certain dominant or dormant traits of other types of leadership as well. Apropos, in the ever changing world we need to study and ascertain the impacts of the global changes on the types of leadership as well.

Out of the various types of leadership viz Transactional, Transformational, Charismatic, Democratic, Autocratic, Laissez-Faire Leadership and any other type considered by global scholars, there are spheres of intersection where any leader can find himself. In advent of digitalization and penetration of technology in our everyday life, the leadership styles must also undergo paradigm changes. Constant technology upgrades at workplace, access to information, freedom of voicing opinion, infusion of social media apps and networking apps in social life, digitalization of private as well as public administration, availability of hi-tech gadgets in every walk of life etc have impacted the

very fabric of routine life. Thus, does it by any means mean that in the digital era the followers require something different from the classical leaders for infusing motivation? Apropos, in this paper it is intended to study the impact of digitalization on the Transformational Leadership.

Transformational Leadership is in a way the champion amongst leadership styles. This style has a blend of Charismatic Leadership and a pinch of Democratic Leadership. In the digital era the ideology of the followers is different than yester years. Now, everyone needs more information on the course of action, everyone seeks the rationale behind orders and they expect faster decisions which are transparent. At the same time, they expect the leaders to be Savant in exploitation of technology. Thus, it is likelihood that majority of individuals may find it redundant to have a classical leader. The traditional leadership skills are still there — teamwork, project monitoring and management, organizational skills, performance tracking, encouraging growth and development. However, they are being joined by transformational skills such as digital infusion, accountability and accessibility through networking apps, change management, multitasking, approachability and driving upgradation in consonance with the competition (Pialat, 2020).

The paper brings out the facets of 'Transformational Leadership in Digital Era' in the following parts:-

Part I - Facets of Transformational Leadership.

Part II - Effects of Digitalisation on Organisations and challenges for Transformational Leaders.

Part III - Way forward for Transformational Leaders.

Part I : Facets Of Transformational Leadership

Transformational Leadership: The concept of transformational leadership was first introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978, and it has since been widely studied and researched. Transformational leadership has been found to have a positive impact on organizations and their employees, as it leads to increased motivation, higher

levels of job satisfaction, and improved organizational performance. A transformational leader focuses on 'transforming' others to help each other, to look out for each other, to be encouraging and harmonious, and to look out for the organization as a whole. In this leadership, the leader enhances the motivation, morale and performance of his follower group. By combining trait, behavioral, and contingency approaches of leadership, one of the new integrative leadership theories, namely transformational leadership was developed (Abu Daud (2009) and Lussier & Achua (2007)). Transformational leadership are foremost methods to understanding leader efficiency. This was the leadership in which the leader was expected to motivate, inspire his followers in such a way that it assisted them to achieve their goals and the leader works towards bringing about a change in the conduct, attitude, trust and morals (Hall, et al. 1969). There are four factors to this nature of leadership and the same are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Prakasha, Raharjo & Wiratama, 2020). These factors play a very important role when we want to analyse the leadership principles.

Idealized Influence: Here the leader displays an ideal personality as per organization's or society's values. His ideal personality builds reverence, respect, self-assurance, faith and hopefulness in the followers. The leader infuses trust and rapport by which he commands respect. He also demonstrates an exceptional standard of moral and ethical values for all to match.

Inspirational Motivation: The leader is aware of the followers' psychology and knows how to inspire them into action. His actions as well as directions are very clear and certain. Even if the leader might not be the best amongst the team but he is able to motivate the team by rationale and clarity if thoughts.

Intellectual Stimulation: Here the leader earns the trust and obedience of the followers by intellectual stimulation. He outmatches the others with IQ and has to offer better solutions to all problems. He inculcates ingenuity, revolution, and risk-taking in his methodology. Thus, the

team follows the leader as they consider him wiser or his ideas better.

Individual Consideration: Such a Leader knows his team in depth. He has insight into their strengths, necessities, drawbacks and potential. He seeks feedback from the team to maintain participation and thus ensures involvement and development. The leader has empathy and provides support, communicates more and gives challenges to the followers to improve performance. Individual contribution and achievements are acknowledged and thus nourished. Every member thus considers himself as important part of the team and contributes to full potential.

Part II - Effects Of Digitalisation On Organisations And Challenges For Transformational Leaders

In a very basic sense Digitalization refers to the process of converting analog information, data, and processes into digital format. It involves the use of digital technologies such as computers, the internet, and software to automate and streamline processes, improve communication, and enhance decision-making. Digitalization enables organizations to store, access, and analyze vast amounts of data, and it enables individuals to engage in activities such as online shopping, social networking, and mobile banking. The rise of digitalization has transformed many aspects of our lives and has had a profound impact on businesses and economies around the world. In a nut shell, it is the entry of networking technology, automation, communication and computing. This infusion of technology and digitalization has brought in an era of speed, connectivity, information, awareness, freedom of speech and ease of influence. This has impacted the way followers look at orders passed to them by leaders. Thus, the relationship between the leader and lead has changed. Decisions and orders are now amenable to scrutiny, discussion as well as challenge more than what could be done in the past. Infusion of technology has also majorly influenced the qualification and educational background of the society, implicating that the basic level of interaction is at a different plane.

Traditionally, Transformational Leaders are meant to be the ideal individuals who are apparently a notch better than the

followers and the ideal personalities, it is imperative that they have to maintain their edge even in the digital era with changed realities. Now, the Transformational Leaders cannot continue to stick to basic mannerism, charm, cooperation and motivational tactics to exercise control and coordination over the technocrat followers. The challenges confronting them are as under:-

Coping Up With Technology One of the major challenges facing the Transformational Leaders in Digital Era is the need to keep pace with rapid technological advancements. Transformational Leaders have to keep themselves up breast with latest technology in their area of operation. They have to be deeply knowledgeable about the processes and the technology under utilisation by their team to maintain appropriate control and also to provide guidance.

Change Management Work force in any business or organisation is usually a carefully selected mix of employees from all age groups working in different capacities of HR, administration, finance, logistics, tech solution providers etc. Willy-nilly all of them have to adopt to infusion of new technology and associated practices and everyone has a different uptake. This in itself is a huge challenge termed as 'Change Management'. All tech companies aka tech giants today like Microsoft, Google, Amazon etc have dedicated teams to educate and upgrade the employees to the newly inducted technology. Similarly, very few organisations have dedicated programs for training the Top Leadership/ Management of the organisations over the changes in Leadership that are required to be incorporated. Thus, a Transformational Leader has to ensure this change management by taking lead. Thus, apart from being ideal, intellectual, charismatic and considerate; the leader now has to be good at handling and steering rapid changes induced by digitalization.

Management of Talent and Retention of Talented Individuals. With the blooming industrialization, there are plenty of opportunities for talented individuals. Entrepreneurship is also a green pasture these days. Thus, Transformational Leaders have to make sure that apart from breeding and grooming their team with tech advancements they also have to make sure that the talent gets retained under their command and doesn't flee away to seemingly

rewarding opportunities. Though, talent retention has always been a management problem but with the advent of digital era this problem has become more pronounced and needs incorporation into the facets of Transformational Leadership. This can be plainly termed as 'Identifying the Changes in Expectations of Followers and addressing them'.

Managing the Use of Technological Tools i.e. Ensuring Optimum Exploitation of Available Technology As well As Defining Boundaries. Even the basic office culture now has seen changes in terms of typewriters being replaced by networked computers and office management suits. The clerk is not just a clerk any more but he is a clerk and data analyzer/manager. It is thus a challenge now to choose and implement correct technological tools into work environment. A leader can utterly fail in leading an organisation if in spite of being a good Transformational Leader he/ she is not able to micromanage the Technological Tools being exploited by his team. The selection of wrong technologies can substantially slow down the growth or may lead to cyber threats, sabotage, subversion etc. Apropos, managing the use of technological tools i.e. ensuring optimum exploitation of available technology as well as defining boundaries has become an important challenge.

Management of Networking and Freedom of Speech. Social Networking and Micro blogging has become a part and parcel of life. Thus, freedom of speech, access to information and opinion formation are the fall out of digitalization. The screen time of every employee has increased exponentially. Participation in Equitymarket through apps, social networking, sharing of info on social networking platforms and many such nuances are irrupting day by day. Few of these have direct negative impact on the functioning while some impact the moral fabric over a long period. With this comes the freedom of speech which can have utmost positive as well as destructive impacts on organisations well being as well as goals. We often see that the market value or the individual valuation of multinational companies waiver by Billions of Dollars just at the behest of 'Tweets'. Any positive announcements can raise the fortunes and the same is true for the opposite.

Thus, a Transformational Leader now has to keep himself abreast with the latest social networking trends and must implement a robust mechanism to restrain or empower freedom of speech, in consonance with the pros and cons.

Impacts on Idealized Influence. As discussed above, with digitalization the values, tolerance limits, aspirations, ideals, moral values and character traits of individuals have changed. The ideal values required by a leader to be seen as an idol more akin to being a technocrat himself e.g. Steve Jobs of Apple, Bill Gates of Microsoft, Narayan Murthy of Infosys, Sundar Pichai of Google etc. A tall, handsome and well-built charismatic leader may not be the best suit absent the technological prowess.

Impacts on Intellectual Stimulation. The requirements with this aspect remain the same however, the content and complexity has changed. To intellectually stimulate an intellectual employee or team is a challenge in itself.

Impacts on Individual Consideration. This is more of a HR perspective which has not got affected much. The effect however lies in the way the leader exploits technology to remain connected with the followers and provides them the sense of individual consideration. It is important that the leader now exploits technology to expand his presence, provision of personal touch and audience to a large magnitude of followers at the same time.

Impacts on Inspirational Motivation. It is clear that changes in society have changed the factors which influence individuals. For example, huge masses are now involved in making and enjoying Tik Tok videos, reels on Instagram etc. It might appear silly to few but even this has to be exploited by the leader to influence the followers. Thus, the factors which influence individuals have undergone massive change. Something which was inspirational a decade ago might have just lost relevance in current time. Thus, Transformational Leaders now have to identify all these facets which can lead to inspiration in his team and then implement the same.

Part III –way Forward For Transformational Leaders

Transformational Leadership is amalgam of idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individual

consideration, and inspirational motivation. The dynamics of technology infusion have cropped up steeply in last decade or so and the impact thereof has to be accounted in Transformational Leaderships as well. We cannot discount the changes in society, economy, interpersonal relations and behavior changes brought into effect by technology infusion in the digital world (Mathur, 2022).

In the digital era, transformational leadership can be improved through the following steps: -

Adopt Digital Technology. In the digital era, it's important for leaders to understand and make use of digital technology. Leaders can use technology to communicate with their followers, provide them with training, and give them access to information that can help them grow.

Foster a Culture of Innovation. Encourage followers to think creatively, try new things, and experiment with new ways of working. Encourage open communication and collaboration and create a culture where it's safe for people to take risks and try new things.

Inculcate Transparency. With suo-moto increase in info availability with the everyone it is imperative that Transformational Leaders enhance and inculcate transparency in planning, decision making and implementation. This will annihilate the requirement of the followers to doubt or judge the motives and decisions. Thus, use of digital media for inculcating transparency can be used as a confidence building measure rather than a security threat.

Provide Perennial Support and Development. Provide followers with opportunities for professional development and growth. Offer training, mentorship, and coaching programs that help them build the skills they need to succeed in the digital era.

Lead by Example. Transformational Leaders should lead by example, demonstrating the values and behaviors they want their followers to adopt. This can include embracing digital technology, being transparent and trustworthy, and providing ongoing support and development for their followers. By following these steps, leaders can create a supportive and innovative environment that helps their followers thrive in the digital era.

Adoption of Social Media and Networking Platforms.

These are powerful tools of connecting with masses as well as influencing the masses. Transformational Leaders have to leverage these tools to bring about positive changes and propagate the core values of the organisation rather than imposing disproportionate scrutiny or bans on use of social media.

Adaptation to Change. Transformational Leaders must get well-equipped to meet the challenge posed by tech infusion and quickly adjust their strategies and approach as the environment changes. This process will require leaders to study the array of technology and tools available to them and decide which will give their team the best advantage. They will also need to ask some big questions about the regularity and effectiveness of their communication channels, including questions like these: -

Is it necessary to use social media, networking, blogging, email, chat, project management platforms and the intranet?

How can we consolidate and streamline communication?

Who will be most hesitant to change?

Information consumption has become mostly digital, and many people interact more with their work devices than with their colleagues. Transformational leaders remind their teams that they are not working alone but are a vital part of a team and on the journey toward accomplishing important goals.

For too long, senior managers have attempted to solve complex problems with a top-down approach, but as they often aren't on the front line working with those issues themselves, their advice often has gaps. Transformational leaders show [humility](#), probe issues with the right questions, and let team members with relevant professional knowledge and experience provide input. This has to be implemented by exploiting technology and by using decision making tools based on amalgamated inputs.

Conclusion

The rise of the digital era has created a need for leaders who can navigate the rapidly changing landscape and help their organizations adapt to new challenges. Transformational Leadership is well-suited to this task, as it emphasizes a

leader's ability to inspire and motivate others. In the digital era, Transformational Leaders will be able to harness the power of technology to connect with their followers, communicate their vision, and motivate their teams to achieve their goals given the fact that they adopt to the digital era.

The digital era has created opportunities, ambiguities, constant change, multitasking and rapidity. To avert being outdated and overrun Transformational Leaders have to inculcate digital knowhow, technological superiority, flexibility in learning new things on a go, ability to shed old technology, fostering transparency, providing space for opinion of others and adopt each facet of individual personality to the changes induced by Digital Era.

References

- Abu Daud, S. (2009). Leadership theories, research and practices: Framing future leadership thinking. Serdang, SDE: PenerbitUniversiti Putra Malaysia.
- Burns, J. M. (1978). Leadership. New York: Harper and Row.
- Hall, J., Johnson, S., Wysocki, A., & Kepner, K. (1969). Transformational Leadership: The Transformation of Managers and Associates. EDIS, 2002(2). <https://doi.org/10.32473/edis-hr020-2002>
- Lussier, R., & Achua, C. F. (2007). Leadership: Theory, application and skill development. Cincinnati, OH: South Western Publishing
- Patil, R., Mathur., S.K. (2022). Military Leadership in Digital Era Research. 3rd International Online Conference on Emerging Trends in Multi- Disciplinary Research "ETMDR-2022" January 20-22, 2022. ISBN: 978-93-5593-524-3;80-87
- Pialat, G. (2020). Transformational Leadership in the Digital Age. Training Industry;
- Prakasa, Y., Raharjo, K., & Wiratama, I. (January, 2020). Transformational Leadership and Digital Maturity:: The Mediating Role of Organizational Culture. Proceedings of the 2nd Annual International Conference on Business and Public Administration (AICoBPA 2019). Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research. Volume 154. DOI:10.2991/aebmr.k.201116.045; 224-229