Chapter I

The Changing Face of Leadership: The Influence of Information Technology

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Leadership, as a concept, has been with us ever since people have fashioned themselves into groups. Although the definition of leadership depends upon one’s theoretical perspective, “few of us would dispute the point that leaders exercise influence, taking actions that, in one way or another, shape the behavior of others” (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000, p. 11). Effective leadership, however, is somewhat dependent upon the current context and environment. In this regard, it is readily apparent that advancing information technologies have forever changed the management landscape (Hitt, 2000). “As we enter the post-industrial information age, … a premium is placed on the organization’s ability to rapidly adapt to changing competitive environments and new technologies” (Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly, & Marks, 2000, p. 167). Organizations will operate in a state of continual transformation, leaving managers to struggle in a changing environment of ambiguity and uncertainty (Hitt, 2000). Indeed, many prominent university programs are beginning to offer courses that attempt to “explore and analyze dynamic, practical solutions for breaking the shackles of traditional management techniques to develop the leadership
organizations need to succeed in the fast-changing business environment” (Clerk, 2000, p. 16). To further compound the confusion, it is obvious that emerging technology is also changing the leader-follower context and that traditional leadership constructs are simply not adequate during such a period of escalating technological advancement (Fulmer, Gibbs, & Goldsmith, 2000). What is clear is that emerging technologies have forced many organizations to alter their hierarchical management designs (Dervitsiotis, 1998) and diminished the traditional power base of many managers (Sawhney & Prandelli, 2000). No longer is it common for a manager to possess the information monopoly necessary to sustain such formal position power (Wang, 1997). As technologies emerge and advance, it is simply a business imperative that organizational leadership evolves as well. There is much agreement that an organization’s IT human capital must be effectively managed for both organizational and individual success (Mata, Fuerst, & Barney, 1995; Ross, Beath, & Goodhue, 1996). There is a growing consensus that in the new world of advancing technology, human capital may well be the preeminent strategic capability (Stewart, 1997) and the primary asset by which organizational change and effectiveness can be achieved (Roepke, 2000). Many IT leaders understand that the greatest challenges to organizational success are more often associated with people rather than information technology itself (Roepke, 2000) and that a new type of leadership will be needed to effectively develop this human capital (Hitt, 2000).

In this Chapter’s beginning, we introduce the degree to which emerging information technologies have changed both the organizational context and the traditional leader-follower power relationship, and the significant challenges that have arisen from this evolution. In addition, we examine the emergence of leadership substitutes, such as teams, that are common to many information technology work groups and discuss the kind of leader influence that appears to be warranted. Most importantly, however, we present a leader behavior model tied closely to the situational leadership paradigm. In this model, we seek to show that unique actions and behaviors are associated with four specific leadership styles. Further, the model shows leaders’ behavioral differences based upon whether they do or do not possess rational legal authority, commonly referred to as “position power.” Most leadership discussions are limited to the descriptive nature of leadership and fail to offer specific guidance in identifying which leadership style is situational appropriate. We seek to remedy that shortcoming and take the critical next step of identifying leader behaviors that are appropriate for enhancing followers’ effort toward successful goal-directed behavior.
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