

Chapter 2

The Evolving Roles of First-Time Leaderships in the Digital Era: A Hybrid Leadership Approach

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ABSTRACT

The disruptive and uncertain nature of the digital space requires that the first-time leader be very responsive in the dynamic environment. The agile and lean approaches provide the platform for the continuous development of talent and give autonomy to team members, allowing them to be creative and innovative in their approach which can result in novel solutions. New thinking and flexibility in leadership is paramount in a decentralized space that is filled with unpredictable, evolving, and complicated events. The success of first-time leaders will be dependent on their ability to navigate the evolving digital environment where the traditional hierarchical command-and-control leadership constructs are not welcome. Dynamic and revolutionary leadership practices are paramount in the new “workplace order” where changes occur almost at the speed of light. This exploratory study investigates how the merger of agile and lean thinking principles can result in a hybrid approach to leadership in the digital era.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7592-5.ch002

INTRODUCTION

The roles of First-time leaders in the information age are challenging. The digital revolution brings with it many “new” opportunities and “new” challenges. Success will depend on the leaders’ ability to be imaginative, adaptable and innovative (Chattell, 2016). The role of the First-Time leader is not “cast in stone” but it is an evolving one and therefore requires a change from the traditional approach to leadership. There is no rule book that can be used to guide the process of leadership in the information revolution because there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The evolving nature of the digital space presents many novel challenges that require out-of-the-box thinking and novel solutions to the evolving problems in the electronic space. With the advent of social media and many new forms of communication, old problems now have new dimensions and the scope is extended because of the global nature of the digital space. Addressing these problems will require new approaches to problem solving. First-Time leaders are therefore challenged to adopt the lean thinking approach, apply scientific problem solving methodologies and commit to constantly changing their approach to leadership and decision making (Cattaneo, Rossi, Negri, Powell, & Terzi, 2017).

In today’s digital world, information is almost unlimited, therefore the success of First-Time leaders hinges on their ability to manipulate and use available data to their advantage. The abundance of information, along with the advent of the industry 4.0 concepts, social networks and other technological innovations, has resulted in a paradigm shift. Many processes and the services that are related to these processes are closely intertwined (Amin, 2016; Cattaneo et al., 2017). These changes have resulted in more complex requirements and desires for improved product and services. The success of First-Time leaders therefore weighs heavily on their ability to capture the hearts and imaginations of the teams they lead. The development of human capital and improvement of employees’ capabilities are catalysts for growth in a world that is moving at the pace of lightning.

Several studies have looked at agile management and lean-thinking mainly in manufacturing and their individual application in the management processes. However, very few studies have investigated how these approaches can be applied to the practice of management in a general way. This study combines the agile and lean approaches and applies them to the practice of management. The findings reveal that a combination of these two approaches could result in a hybrid approach to management that can assist First-Time leaders in their quest for success in the digital era.

BACKGROUND

In this section we investigate the present approach to leadership. We review the relevant literature based on the context of our study.

Research reveals that there is a relationship between employee satisfaction and performance and the type of leadership in any organization. According to Yaghoubipoor, Tee, and Ahmed (2013) leadership plays the greatest role in employee loyalty, happiness and job satisfaction. However, in many organizations, traditional leadership approaches fail to pay attention to the interplay between motivation, dedication and loyalty of employees and the leadership of the organization.

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