

Chapter 3

Leading in the Era of Digital Abundance

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ABSTRACT

Leaders grapple with the challenges of leading and working with the millennial generation in business and society. The emerging digital ecosystems emit strong signals for a transformation in leadership models and styles. Drawing on empirical and theoretical work on the movement in the generations of people, especially the workforce in the economic and social world, it is evident that new leadership models need to be explored in alignment to the digital era. This chapter attempts to evolve a framework of leadership for the digital era. The framework further has been used as an illustration through an initiative designed and implemented for mid-level leaders. The chapter strongly recommends a revisit to leadership concepts and development in the era of digital abundance.

INTRODUCTION

The emerging world is characterized by complex changes in lifestyles, aspirations, business culture, and use of technology. These according to many are creating discontinuities from the past to the present and to the future. Organizations refer them as problems of generation gap and failure of current policies amongst new millennium workforce. Culture and practices are questioned for relevance and

use, without providing alternatives to the future. Aligning people and influencing them, to achieve specific goals are becoming extremely difficult in the interactive, chaotic and complex world. Complexity is increasing because of information abundance. The increased availability of information is causing multiple interpretations of the reality. The speed at which the information is gathered, processed or analyzed does not really lead to a better understanding of the problem. Invariably

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it creates confusion leading to inaction. People take positions based on their beliefs and interests. There is blurring of right and wrongs. There is a lack of understanding in connecting thoughts to actions to reasons. The role of leadership needs to be renegotiated in the emerging era of abundance. This chapter argues that the emerging digital era is completely different from the experiences of the leaders in the past decades. Further it builds a framework based on three pillars. They are: (a) leadership thoughts, (b) influence and actions and (c) driving results in the digital era. The chapter is presented in three parts:

- The first part provides characteristics of the emerging digital era and compares with the pre-digital eras.
- In the second part we propose a leadership framework to define the leaders of the era of digital abundance.
- The third part provides an illustration of an organizational Initiative using the developed leadership framework at four levels – “Self, Team, Organization and at Industry levels to identify the drivers of leadership in the digital era.

Finally the chapter argues and advocates an integrated holistic Initiative towards leadership effort and effectiveness based on assessment and reflection.

BACKGROUND

The Digital Era has been defined and conceptualized by studies done in the context of understanding the generational gaps and reflecting on the future trends (The Information Age, n.d.).

Authors have elaborated the related issues of digital era not only to the generational gap issues but have also focused on the influence of technology in terms of simplicity and speed. Cisco in a whitepaper on Transitioning to Workforce 2020

(Cisco, 2011), has elaborated how organizations are reorganizing the business models to reach the new expectations of their workforce and customers.

“The Digital Era is characterized by technology which increases the speed and breadth of knowledge turnover within the economy and society” (Doukidis, Mylonopoulos, & Pouloudi, 2004). The influence of technology has rewritten the way business is done. According to Berman (2011) “to succeed in a Digital Transformation Era, leading companies focus on two complementary activities: reshaping customer value propositions and transforming their operations using digital technologies for greater customer interaction and collaboration.” Any Business or Industry that does not embrace the nodes of technology and understand the new digitally connected customers will not be considered to be in the game! They may perish without evidence of their existence. The Indian Postal Department is a good example. Today with the evolution of fast reaching Short Messaging Services (SMS) and Email services, erstwhile emergency mediums of communication such as Trunk calls or Telegrams are completely erased. The Postman who delivered letters at our doorstep was once a very anxiously expected guest for many households, especially in the remote villages. But today this “Guest of Ours” is slowly getting out of our memory. The mobile phones are far effective in connecting people across geographies. Digital era demands both connecting to the customers and being more adaptable to the changing influence of innovation and technology.

Another example can be the music, media and entertainment Industry. According to a study by Berman, Battino, and Feldman (2009), music industry was one of the first to feel the brunt of the digital revolution. With the standardized mp3 format for digitized music and the availability of broadband connections for Internet distribution, the reality of industry disruption became apparent to all. Traditional music companies were expected to lose more than 35 percent of value

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