

Chapter 6

The Challenge of Leadership Development in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the challenge of developing effective leadership in the digital era. As technology develops, a growing trend emerges that interpersonal relationship in organizations is characterized by technology-based interactions. This chapter shows how this trend pose a challenge to developing effective leadership in organizations. In doing so, this chapter posits that effective leadership emerges thorough frequent in-person interactions between leader and followers. To establish this position, this chapter proposes a relationship-based model of leadership development, in which the methods of exerting interpersonal influence that leader uses evolve as relationship develops. Using these different methods results in follower's commitments of different kinds and qualities. With this model, the chapter aims to explain why prevalence of technology-based interaction in organization makes it difficult for leader to develop close interpersonal relationship with their followers, which is followed by the suggestions on how to overcome these barriers.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is such an important factor for the success of today's organizations. The classic theories of organization have placed a greater emphasis on the design of organizational structure based on the belief that establishing one-fits-all approach can ensure the optimal productivity of an organization. According to these theories, the role of managers was mainly to implement the bureaucratic rules, formal regulations, and standardized procedures (Zaleznik, 1977). However, as the rate of changes in societal and market environment increases, timely organizational responses to the rapidly changing demands of various stakeholders has become a keyword for their survival and prosperity (Suarez & Oliva, 2005). In this context, the role of those occupying leadership positions to create the momentum for organizational change and adjustment to meet the environmental demands is increasing emphasized (Johnson, 1998). It

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seems clear that organizations need leaders who can better mobilize their employees to achieve greater performance than just making sure their employees are fulfilling their routine tasks.

The concept of leadership involves a type of interpersonal interaction in which one person affects behaviors of others. A conceptual clarification is in order because there are some concepts similar to leadership in social science literature. One of which is the concept of management. Management also involves interpersonal influence. Managers determine what their subordinates should do and the subordinates follow the instructions from managers. The concept of management is predicated on the existence of organizational context in which hierarchical authority characterizes relationship among employees. In essence, manager's activity of influencing subordinate's behavior takes place in the situation in which it is subordinate's formal responsibility to do so (Kerr & Jeremier, 1978). In contrast, leadership tends to focus on the ability of leaders inducing employees to make voluntary efforts to achieve tasks goals sometimes going beyond formal responsibility. The distinction between management and leadership is reflected in a line of current leadership studies. For instance, effective leadership is found to increase organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) indicating that people can do more work than they are required when they are inspired by an effective leadership (Bambale, Shamdusin, & Subramaniam, 2011; Dartey-Baak & Addo, 2018).

Another scholarly concept similar to leadership is power. Power also refers to the situation where a person makes others do what he/she wants. However, power is a broader term than leadership in that power can be exerted through coercive measure, whereas leadership tends to emphasize follower's voluntary compliance. This distinction is well shown in the notion of transformational leadership. Bass (1990) proposed a taxonomy of leadership by which he introduced a new concept of transformational leadership, positioning it in juxtaposition with a more traditional notion of transactional leadership. He goes on to argue that transformational leadership is more effective in that it enables to achieve extraordinary performance beyond expectation by transforming the follower's motivation tendency such that they voluntarily internalize the goals of leader or organization.

Also notable in the concept of leadership is its relational aspect. Leaders influence their followers through close and intimate relationship, which is reflected in the behavioral approach in the 1940-50's as well as the recent theory of leader-member exchange. The early scholars of leadership attempted to identify the types of leadership behaviors. In 1947, a group of researchers from University of Michigan conducted a research to find what specific behaviors can induce subordinate to follow their leaders (Ronald, 2014). In this study, they identified two types of leadership behavior, one of which is the behaviors of heeding to employee's personal needs. This indicates that employees want to follow leaders when they care about individuals in organizations. This further implies that leaders not only need to focus on improving the productivity of an organization but also to develop intimate relationships with individual followers. Leaders need to view their employees not only as one of their resources to get the job done but also treat them as humans with which task goal are shared.

The relational aspect of leadership is reflected in more recent studies as well. For instance, the multidimensional concept of transformational leadership contains the element of individualized consideration. This shows that it is necessary for leaders to show a genuine care about their employees in order to achieve extraordinary performance. Furthermore, a group of leadership scholars proposed the LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The theory posits that how intimate a leader is with their subordinate determines the quality and magnitudes of influences he/she can exert on the subordinate. It can be drawn from these streams of leadership research that the effectiveness of leadership hinges on the quality of relationships between leader and followers.

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