


Chapter 5

Digital Leadership– Challenges and Promises of Digital Transformation for Higher Education Through a Critical Review

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ABSTRACT

The advent of Industry 4.0 and the Covid-19 pandemic created a disruptive shift towards digital leadership in promoting digital transformation across many sectors. However, there remains a paucity of related research especially within the Higher Education Sector. Through a critical review method, this chapter contributed to addressing this gap to create more understanding of the opportunities, challenges and factors informing the adoption of Digital Leadership the sector. Key findings suggest that Digital Leadership can positively reshape Higher Education by fostering innovation, improving efficiency and enhancing teaching and learning experiences. Digital Leadership connects stakeholders and breaks down silos. Challenges hindering Digital Leadership included lack of clear vision, resistance to change, fragmented strategies and ethical concerns. Factors for successful adoption of Digital Leadership requires a clear vision aligned with strategic goals, investment in digital literacy skills development and fostering a digital culture that supports

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continuous learning and adaptability.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic created a game-changing effect in all sectors in terms of digital transformation. Leadership had to adapt to the sudden change and digital growth within their organisations and sectors. In higher education, such as universities, effective leadership is critical for organisational improvement and successful teaching and learning processes. Therefore, Digital technologies play a vital role in teaching, learning, research and university operations, making their integration indispensable for future success (Hashim, Tlemsani and Matthews, 2022). Alenezi (2021) argued that understanding technological initiatives and how they align with institutional objectives is essential for transforming business models. For universities to remain competitive and effective, their leaders must actively incorporate digital technologies into their strategic plans. This integration will not only enhance institutional performance but also ensure that universities are able to keep pace with the rapid advancements taking place in the digital world. However, whilst technology and digitalisation has advanced across sectors, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) remain behind other industries in developing digital maturity, which is crucial for effective leadership in an increasingly digital environment (Van Wart et al., 2020; Jameson et al., 2022). In light of this, there is a growing need for strong Digital Leadership within higher education institutions, particularly as the global digital transformation has accelerated following the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the advent of Industry 4.0. Educational leaders are now tasked with the responsibility of guiding their institutions through the complexities of technological change and innovation (Eberl and Drews, 2021; European Commission, 2021). Digital Leadership is no longer a luxury or a supplementary function, but a core component of any successful institution's strategy for navigating the future of education. It is therefore critical to examine the dynamics of Digital Leadership in higher education and to identify the factors that influence its adoption and effective practice.

Despite the growing body of research on Digital Leadership across various industrial fields, there remains a significant paucity of such research focusing on higher education. This gap in the literature is notable and require a more nuanced understanding of Digital Leadership in the context of higher education (Petry, 2018; Ehlers, 2020; Karakose, Polat and Papadakis, 2021). This chapter aims to address this gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive and critical review of Digital Leadership in higher education. It specifically focuses on examining the opportunities that Digital Leadership presents for guiding HEIs towards embracing digital transformation. At the same time, the chapter aims to explore the potential

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