

Exploring Leadership Strategies in the Era of Digital Transformation: A Management Studies Perspective

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Abstract - In addressing this research objective, this work hopes to include the crucial aspect of leadership styles within the context of change management with a focus on the inclusive leadership. Organizational change, therefore is the act or process of altering the elements of an organization, and this impacts all the stakeholders of the organization down to the subordinate level of the organization and its performance. From the various theories within the literature, it can be posited that organizational change and leadership behaviour during the process can significantly affect the behaviours of the workforce. This qualitative, narrative study describes the experiences of ten managers working for a financial firm in Johannesburg to examine the possibility of both possibility for positive and negative impact change through leadership. These are the issues necessary to establish that there is a proper need for engaging stakeholders in all organizations, and these can never be in a doubt while ensuring that organizations remain inclusive to everyone. This is a good realization but it is easier said than done because it is always easier to try to appeal to everyone even if the change process does not directly impact an employee then the leadership should consider the organizational point of view. The respondents also specify general main types of leadership which are servant, collaborative, and open leadership – characterized by empathy, humility, and flexibility. It also discusses digitized and realistic forms of leadership which are present in the current business society. Chapter recapitulates again concerns that state that leadership styles are crucial in the pursuit of change agenda, gaining commitment and managing change across organisations. Some of the various approaches that have emerged as a result of the advancement of digital shift are; such strategies demand that leaders be technologically and have adequate knowledge on digital techniques.

This study is relevant as it provides a point of reference regarding the leadership style during change; defining leadership strategies and operational strengths required for change, which are necessary for organisations to implement change initiatives systematically. As recommended, it is advised that executives and other managers and leaders at the different tiers continue learning as well as sharpen their skills within the digital arsenal. This means that it becomes critical for organizations to periodically know new leadership approaches in order to effect change where necessary because leadership has a vital role to play in change initiatives.

Key Words: Inclusive Leadership, Change Management, Organizational Change, Leadership Styles, Digital Leadership, Leadership behaviour, Workforce behaviour

1.INTRODUCTION

The Influence of Leadership Styles in the Digital Era: Management is one of the most central aspects in directing all facets of an organization with an aim of achieving objectives efficiently. Leadership requires communication with all the employees, establishing objectives, and directing subordinates with an aim of attaining them. But for leadership to be effective, the leadership style must fit the motivational requirements of subordinates, or else, leadership loses some of its potency. The subject of leadership and its effect on the performance of the organisations has in the recent past received more attention in studies especially the transformational leadership [1]. Digital leadership is an important concept that is also associated with transformational leadership since it incorporates the use of digital technology in leadership alongside the fundamental aspects of leadership. Today, there is growing interest in the concept of digital leadership especially in the highly volatile technological environment. However, for digital leaders, these competencies should be unique from traditional leaders to effectively cause the change. These are a clear vision on digital, deep understanding of digital, willingness to fail and learn, ability to engage and empower, and right management of multitude [2]. A digital transformative leader continually promotes innovation as a way of ensuring that the organization thrives and adapts to the ever-changing economy. These are the leaders who understand how to convey strategic visions and goals, match customers' expectations, and incorporate technologies into their offerings. He/she seeks organizational success by creating new and competitive products and services, as well as efficiently working with and motivating teams to openly contribute to decision-making [3]. Thus, in such a rapidly developing digital business environment, companies need to interact digitally, evaluate technologies, and develop strategies accordingly. It is crucial for organisations to have a purposeful dose of direction regarding how to prosper in the digital environment. In the context of new technological advancement, leadership is a crucial factor for proactively

preparing itself to meet social and digital requirements that would enhance organizational value for all its players. This paper aims at discussing the necessity of leadership competencies in the context of the digital age and the key approaches to improve them [4].

As organizations seek to harness the values of digitalization agendas become marred, many organizations struggle with leading digital transformations due to... One of the major reasons why digital transformation initiatives do not work is the failure to adequately address change management features regarding relations with employees and customers [5].

Research indicates that organizations with successful digital integrated business strategy have a clear vision of being digital. The digital vision should be inspiring, encompassing, and ambitious and should clearly communicate the company's offering and its reason for existing. On this competitive world, business organizations need to embrace the social and digital elements and thereby make good use of the benefits afforded by the digital era. Nonetheless, certain competencies that differentiate a digital leader capable of catalysing change are still somewhat unclear. Such leaders help to make sure that organisational methods match customer requirements, digital understanding, and technology solutions underpinning the products and services that characterise their work [11]. Evaluating organizational superiority is paramount, to provide competitive solutions and services that foster an improved quality of life for organizational and external entities. Different leadership practices are adopted by leaders and the strategies they use to execute their plans are therefore different. Another recent trend that is worth mentioning is the discussions about digital leadership, according to which leaders should acquire technology literacy and use technologies effectively. There is also research on shared leadership explaining how it might influence team performance and develop proactive behaviour and innovation [4].

Transformational leadership strengthens the commitment to change and engages and empowers people during change initiatives, be they proactive or reactive. The concepts of transformational leadership provide that these leaders are very much in view to their followers and are always at the forefront; in fact, the actions and behaviour of a transformational leader become persuasive tools. On the other hand, servant leadership impacts the followers in a certain way though the leaders downplay their role and give all the credit to the followers. The force of transformational leadership comes from the leader position and the attitude of charisma, where the leader forms a sight of efficacy while servant leadership includes modesty and the follower-oriented [5, 7]. AL is a less researched approach which came to the leadership literature relatively recently and focuses on the leader's authenticity. Being an authentic leader is characterized by the ability of a leader to influence employees through his/her pleasant words and actions. They

have self-insights, that is, they know their strengths and weaknesses, and look at internal and external factors within the organization. Authentic leaders respect and integrate their follower's input while making decisions, and always act according to their stated values, beliefs, and ethics [1]. As this review has demonstrated, there is need to understand leadership styles to encourage the implementation of digital transformation strategies noting that transformational, servant and authentic leadership are critical to transformation in the digital age and organizational performance [10, 11].

Honest leadership is characterized by awareness of the self and ability to form an emotional bond with the followers, which makes it possible for the leaders to communicate a vision they hold dearly for the change that will occur, thus creating commitment to the change process. To sum up, authentic leaders are very important for the positive impact on the followers' performance regarding the consistent actions and behaviours that build the trust and improve the work engagement. They do not imitative but they act as real persons with integrity and embrace personal ethics and principles [12]. Authentic leadership is characterized by four key attributes: accurate self-monitoring, mutuality of communication based on trustful security, selective, systematic information management, and incorporation of the moral point of view. This type of leadership enhances the readiness to change by encouraging people and engaging them in their work and organizational goals. Credible leaders are agents of change and thus contribute to the improvement of the desirable moral personality, values, and ethics of the followers [12]. Servant leadership, on the other hand, is based on the understanding that meeting, developing and taking care of followers' needs can effectively contribute to organizational goals through people's loyalty. This approach fosters the leader's ego-depletion, concentration more on the needs of other people. A servant leader empowers the junior employees to bring the best out of them, thus, promoting self-employment and leadership abilities. Change can be managed by motivating the employees to accept the change through offering incentives for the change and through creating an environment that would encourage the employees to change their behaviour.

Servant leadership is centred on the followers and leaders act as servants and agents of change. These leaders are especially interested in the justification for change, that is, in the change process the organization and people in it are protected. This category of leaders spends time learning followers' needs and ensuring their satisfaction instead of dominating the group [13].

The purpose of this research is to provide a systematic analysis of the impact of leadership styles, with a spotlight on profiling inclusive, servant and both digital and authentic leadership, with relation to the changes within organizations. To some extent, this research aims to enrich the literature on what these types of leadership entail, how

they affect workers' behaviours, attitudes, and performance, particularly during change management processes. From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are presented for the leader and practitioners engaged in attending and managing organizational change. Thus, it can be stated that the study aims at discussing the leading styles – inclusive, servant and digital and authentic combined leadership that is going to elucidate how the leaders can improve the success rates of the organizational change initiatives in the digital age. It is with these understandings that the research seeks to provide leaders with relevant recommendations on how they can foster employees' engagement, commitment, and seek positive organisational outcomes during periods of digital transformation [14].

2. Materials and Methods

The researcher, as noted in [15] is expected to carry out interviews as well as document analysis in qualitative research. This study used semi-structured in-depth telephone interviews to gather data from the participants because; structured interviews provide detailed data by asking follow up questions. This is because the research problem requires exploration that encompasses a number of aspects of the working environment hence the use of Qualitative research designs. This approach is advantageous in developing an extensive and realistic view in words and offers a precise and systematic view of participants in their environment. [16] Stresses that in the context of qualitative research, it is mandatory for the researchers to remain sensitive to the participants' perspectives and remain untouched by their own assumptions derived from the literature. The rationale of qualitative research involves developing an understanding of an issue from the participants' perspectives and lens to respond to the research question. Exploratory research, which is also a part of qualitative technique, uses inductive reasoning to analyse meaning, procedure and context based on observation and interviews with participants.

Participants of this research include ten managers, from the organization under analysis, who hold positions of department heads or assistants. These participants who have a leadership position ensure they have active participation in change planning and implementation. They were chosen because of their usefulness and relevance to provide information that can assist in answering the research question. The type of sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling whereby the participants are deliberately selected in order to possess specific characteristics relevant to the study.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Inclusive Leadership Style:

The type of leadership is another crucial consideration that determines the degree of the reaction of employees of the organisation undergoing the process of change either

positively or negatively. That is why it is important to elaborate the given concept. Participants were given an opportunity to include information concerning leadership practices they used during change in their respective organizations. Organisational change is always a complex process and it is not always an easy thing as it is faced with a number of problems that affect the various stakeholders of the organisations starting from the employees up to the senior management level and may therefore shape the future of organisations significantly. This paper therefore presents a brief discussion on the leadership styles to be adopted in organizations during such times. This paper shall delve deeper into identifying the participant's perception towards inclusive leadership during change in organization with corroborating literature. As evidenced by quotes presented throughout this research, the emphasized message is that practical implementation of inclusive leadership points to its role in the area of managing change. Another idea is a call to be as inclusive as possible and that everyone has to be consistent. It was deemed pertinent to note that participants highlighted that with or without a direct correlation to employees, it is important to engage everyone in the organization and consider the next level of , the broader perspective, in change management.

Respondent 1:

"I do agree with two strategies to an important extent – it is possible to adopt completely inclusive approach which means that everyone has to be involved and has to believe in the change, especially given the fact that I do agree that when managing change in an organization it is important to include all people, and even those who are not directly affected by the particular change.

This participant allays to this fact by noting that all members of the organization should be involved in the change process since it affects everyone and not only those who are involved. This orientation focuses on the assertion that, for change initiatives in organizations to succeed, the concept of inclusive leadership ought to be adopted. Inclusive leadership refers to integrating all the groups into the decision making processes, as a legal requirements to eliminate any prejudice and also as a duty to attain the objectives of an organization since there is inverse correlation between exclusion and organizational performance. On the other hand, decision-making that excludes some stakeholders result in unfriendly climate, factions and poor rates of return to stakeholders. Inclusive leadership is especially important for facilitating the effectiveness of the work teams that are comprised in many organizations especially from the diverse population because this aspect is not addressed by other leadership styles. It supports diversity because all differences including; ideas, background, and skills of every team member are welcomed and valued, ultimately resulting in productivity. Even though various leadership methodologies have been successful, none is as effective in fulfilling two primary survival needs of an individual, the

needs for inclusion and acceptance for the individual's diversity as the Inclusive Leadership. In essence, the concept of inclusive leadership during organizational change is backed by research from the participants' point of view. This approach to adoption is not only ethically sound but also grounded in practice as a way of avoiding post-decisional regret, boosting the productivity of the teams, and satisfying two psychological needs, the need to belong and the need to be acknowledged as special. The outcomes lined up show that it is necessary to embrace inclusive leadership when enacting change in organizations. It enhances togetherness, innovation, and par value of an organization members, all of which are crucial during the process of change. This paper argues that the idea of practicing inclusive leadership in the management of organizational change processes is a strategic and visionary approach that can create a great improvement in change processes.

3.2 Combination of Inclusive and Servant Leadership:

When it comes to the very essential areas of perspective brought up by the research participants, Respondent 2 has a fairly distinctive point of view regarding leadership for organisational change. This viewpoint is anti-autarchy as it does not see one person making decisions while discouraging other people and ignoring their advice. Becomes servant leadership that can offer a somewhat more appealing form of leadership because of the focus of the leader to serve the people.

Respondent 2:

"Those employees will be comfortable with this kind of leadership style of serving people sort of thing, call it servant leadership, I think it would be more effective. He seems to have this autocratic kind of leadership where he makes decisions and tells people to go and do it. I don't think they will be comfortable with that type of leadership style. Leadership should be more of a serving type because the employees are the most critical component in any business,

The literature points to the fact that inclusive leadership positively influences the level of proactive workplace behaviour, which means that people are encouraged to develop not only themselves and their skills for the job but also bring about positive changes to organisational systems and processes. Another factor necessary in this setting is the psychological safety of employees, which will make them comfortable in adapting and leading changes. Review of literature revealed that inclusive leadership entails leaders accepting peoples 'statuses for inclusion, valuing the employees, appreciating them and acknowledging their worth and facilitating their well-being. This idea can be best related to servant leadership concept, where leaders have people in their teams as their main focus and ensure that they make them happy. Inclusive leadership includes; equity, a concept that highlights on the fair treatment of all

subordinates and the ability to respect diversity. To a large extent, this speaks to participants' view that leadership during change processes should be all embracing and help employees. From the results of the study, it can be concluded that there is significant evidence that validates the relationship between inclusive leadership and readiness to undertake responsibilities within the working environment. This relationship is mediated by two critical factors: psychological safety and human being during the work. Apart from the fact that employees are supposed to accomplish their work assignments proficiently in the contexts of the constantly evolving business environment, such expectations are made that these employees should also be ready to seize their opportunities to prevent the occurrence of certain business-related issues, develop themselves personally and professionally, and improve the general functionality of the organizations by actively participating in the processes of functional changes and improvements. The findings of the study are in line with theoretical propositions of inclusive leadership, whereby it relates both to psychological climate and to promotion of well-being in organizational settings. As presented in the study and argued by prior works, inclusive leadership is a useful tactic that can help organizations not only mobilize employee and harness their proactive behaviour for organisational benefits, but also build up the core competence of the organisation. This is why it is important that a team inclusive leadership is applied in the current complex business environment.

3.3 Collaborative Leadership Approach:

One of the Respondent 3 opposes the authoritarianism view of skill and supports the collaborative leadership, stressing that such methods are inapplicable to their organizational setting. They have not supported a hierarchical type of leadership but rather one that embraces consultation across the team.

Respondent 3:

"That I have a lot of faith in this approach of shared leadership I think any strict kind of dictatorship will not work and it was out of the question in our case anyway, so the best approach I have found is one of consultation.

Distributed leadership, which is also referred by numerous terms including shared, collective, relational, interdependent and systemic leadership, can be described as "Leadership where everyone gets involved in leadership activities and various individuals with leadership responsibilities in various organizations collaborate to achieve society's objectives". This is more so important in social change coalitions that involves leadership at organizational and systems levels. It maintains that implementing change involves the cooperation of people across different areas of an organization, a process that is referred to as distributed leadership. It requires a different skill set and different approach is required to managing

leadership compared to other forms of leadership that exists in an organization as it has more affinity to shared leadership, but in another organization. For instance, it can be suggested that one of the typical activities that many coalition leaders engage in is the definition of a vision that can be spearheaded through negotiation activities. Huggins and Burns, therefore, further stress the importance of working together in collaborative leadership, as the participant also pointed out when endorsing a co-ordinated approach to change in an organization. The participant's preference for collaboration and consultation as leadership behaviour has a high level of support in the literature since the adoption of more communal and inclusionary process for the involvement of multiple entities for the greater public good is effective. In the context of change in organizations, collaborative leadership can go a long way promoting ownership concerning change processes while guaranteeing that the changes being planned all encompass the support from the stakeholders. This is in line with the ideology of shared responsibility to lead implying that collaboration forms the core of positioning the best approaches to managing change. Thus, the experience of the participant in combination with the review of the literature reveals that the teamwork and leadership is critical when an organisation is in the process of change. This aspect of both sources underlines the necessity of integration, comprehensive stakeholders' engagement, and collective efforts to contribute to successful change processes.

3.4 Charismatic Leadership:

Respondent 4 serves as an excellent example of the duality in the process of leadership for the organizational change, underlining the need to have a leader who is strong but also sociable and receptive to other people's ideas. This leadership is not a one man show; the leader must be able to act, provide direction yet at the same time listen and act on ideas from the members.

Respondent 4:

"You need a very organized leader and not afraid to take that last step, to stand up and say this is how we need to go, but at the same time, you have to be willing to turn around and say, all right, let's listen to some of the other people too so ultimately, we can move together as a team at the end of the day."

Charismatic leaders, as defined by research, are leaders with a strategic plan on how they will engage their followers. They have this vision well defined and are willing to work very hard, sometimes sacrificing personal comforts to bring it to fulfilment. These leaders possess empathy and understand the emotions of their followers; they adopt unusual and extraordinary ways to motivate their subordinates. It means they are very much aware of internal and external occurrences within the organization and also brings creativity to overcome all odds for the accomplishment of the organizational objectives. These are

leaders who are able to evoke strong emotions within the followers through identification and imitation and many people consider them as heroes rather than just figures of authority. From the above analysis, it is evident that these leaders exhibit certain personality and behaviour traits. One common trait is an inherent assertiveness and a firm conviction in the rightfulness and moral uprightness of their struggle and their cause. This self-assurance tends to make goal achievement less complicated for followers, which also contributes to the success of their strategies. The higher the level of confidence a leader has the higher rate of motivation people get and hence the levels of success achieve the goal set by the leaders. Besides the self-esteem, the charismatic leaders exhibit a high energy in them. This energy in tandem with their strategic perspectives and leadership skills enables one to view them as oriented towards change and being capable of delivering important outcomes in an organisational setting.

Going beyond the research participants' experiences with an emphasis on faith, Respondent 5 stands out as a lighthouse in the new economy landscape of organisational change. They therefore call for a contextual approach that entails critical examination of content and context, communication, and the involvement of all parties within the assumed change processes of a firm. An important difference of Respondent 5 is that the first pillar of their viewpoint is competence.

Respondent 5:

Because the new economy actually requires that you think more contextually, that you analyse content, contextualise, communicate and get everyone involved with regards to change. To me it is a totally different thing I do, I actually think in terms of competence, how competent am I in a certain situation and I felt that using a combination between digital and authentic leadership is even better.

They have stressed the need for the contextual approach to emphasize the competencies for managing change. As such, it emphasizes the need to critically examine content and context, communication, and ensuring that all stakeholders are enlisted. When asked which of the approaches identified in the questionnaire Respondent 5 found most effective, the answer was the blend of digital and authentic leadership strategies. This perspective highlights the fundamental behaviour and leadership of change because of the dynamism and complexity experienced in the system. Strong leadership capacities have been developing by successful digital companies and able to enshrine digital entrepreneurship visions. These are the skills that define tactics and approaches that managers use to enable alteration. Scholars have adopted a variety of explanations for the term 'digital leadership' – it refers to a leader's capacity to articulate a useful plan for the digital agenda and possesses the skill set in achieving the set objectives. In the context of digital leadership, a competence model identifies two key dimensions for successful leaders: The first is about

confidence, skills, and actions that are necessary in the digital media era, for instance, Digital Literacy. The second dimension comprises the following competencies relevant for the digital transition: Leading digital change is essential, and other competencies focus on leadership.

Those are the key findings as to why it is important to build digital leadership among managerial staff to correctly cope with digital transformation. A leader's responsibility is to work with the workforce and influence positive change towards maintaining sustainability and efficiency in an organization during the process of digitalization. As a result, the participant expressed a preference toward using both digital coupled with authentic leadership while implementing change in an organization, this assertion is in line with literature relating to digital leadership. Hofstede stresses leadership competence, a vision, and the capacity for mobilizing and empowering during digital transformation and changes. Scharmer focuses on the same components of leadership competence, vision, the ability to lead and involve employees during digital transformations and changes. In today's global economy where the environment is troubled with digitization and other modern changes, assuring leadership is fundamental for the success of change. This paper found that there is a consensus with Respondent 5 for the use of digital and authentic leadership pillar documented in the literature and discovered traits and competencies that may potentially be useful in leadership especially when it comes to complex forms of change.

3.5 Limitations and Future Directions for Study Development:

Examining the possible constraints and opportunities opened for this study reveals recommendations for future research. One possible direction is to extend the knowledge of the effect of leadership behaviours to the implementation of organizational change in different cultures. Culture is understood to influence the effectiveness of various leadership styles, which is why it might be helpful to look at it in relation to different cultures. Also, extending research efforts into longitudinal context could help answer questions about the long-term impact of leadership approaches to those outcomes of organisational change. Studying these dynamics over time provides much richer insight into whether or not leadership styles change and if continued leadership behaviour can sustain change efforts in the organization. Finally, using qualitative data in complementation with quantitative approaches offer a chance for a better analysis. In this view, the use of quantitative research methods can reveal other sets of dynamic and complex connections between leadership behaviours and organizational change outcomes, which would improve the body of knowledge in this field.

However, the interpretation of data by the researcher, might give rise to some biases that were not originally there in the data. However, it should be noted that the main limitation of the study is scarcity of the large sample group of participants

that would be statistically representative. Samples such as these are usually necessary when drawing more general conclusions. In addition, replicating the results of the study might prove to be a challenge because the study had a qualitative approach. Because qualitative research is conducted in particular contexts, demographic differences, timing issues, or specific organizational factors can have drastic effects on the replication of the results. Therefore, there is a need for subsequent research studies to work around these limitations and blaze other trails toward building more awareness of leadership approaches in change processes in organizations.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In general, this investigation demonstrates the significance of leadership types in describing and predicting employee conduct during organisational change. Inclusion becomes an important theme of leadership as a key force that can protect organizations and help them to face complex issues in change, establish commitment and perseverance. In the ever-shifting landscape of business survivors in today's digital world, leadership must progress and adapt in similar fashion. The conclusions of this research demonstrate an important fact about leaders and leadership: empathy paired with interest and active involvement of stakeholders. They explain that leadership behaviours and strategies that have to do with inclusiveness, servant leadership, people's participation, digitization, and authenticity are crucial for managing change and guaranteeing sustainable success today and in the future.

With constant transformation and digitalization in the business environment, organizations that understand the significance of leadership in driving of effective change processes stand to benefit from the modern business environment. This study provides pertinent information and builds a strong recommendation for developing leadership skills and approaches necessary for organizations in addressing the dynamic requirements of the new leadership age and demands of change management toward achieving growth, enlargement, and perpetual success. Here, based on the analysis and findings of this study, the following recommendations which may help organizations to better manage change initiatives and enhance leadership skills are proposed. Organisations should move to support and encourage inclusive leadership where all the stakeholders are involved in the change process to ensure commitment. Further, there is the need to establish such practices as training and development programs to ensure that leaders acquire qualities required for practice of inclusive leadership. Finally, it is necessary to strengthen the process of learning and innovation in the digital environment to expand the skills and knowledge of leaders at all levels. Moreover, it is crucial to continue the research of the leadership trends in organizations and adjust the strategies applied constantly to the changing business environment, especially with increasing use of digital technology. In other

words, all these recommendations offer a comprehensive strategy for organizations that strive to strengthen their leadership profiles while adequately managing change to foster organizational, resilience, and relevance in today's dynamic business world.

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