

REVIEW ARTICLE

E-Leadership- A New and modern Style of Leadership

Renu, Anchal Aggarwal*

Deptt. of Commerce, University of Delhi, Delhi, India.

**Corresponding Author: E-mail: aggarwalanchal.585@gmail.com*

Abstract

The latest innovations in information and communication technology such as internet and e-commerce, has changed the way of the working of Organizations. Consequently, new form of organizations (virtual organizations) and a modern & new leadership form (e-leadership) are taking place in the current business scenario. The main feature of E-Leadership is the way of interaction between leader and his followers. They communicate with each other by electronic medium through internet. So the objective of the study is to make E-leadership as clear as possible with the help of literature review, to highlight qualities of e-leaders and the challenges faced by them, to give recommendations and suggestions from the study. Finally it was concluded that e-leadership is taking place because of the development in ICT and has positive impact as it removes time and distance barriers as it take place through electronic medium.

Keywords: *E-leadership, ICT, Traditional leadership, leaders, followers, E- business.*

Introduction

Leadership means the interaction between the leader and his followers where the leader guide and supervise his followers to do the work. So leadership means getting the work done from the people to achieve the objectives of the organizations. But with the development and innovations in the information and communication technology such as the development of e-commerce and internet, the new style of leadership has emerged called e-leadership.

Now all the business firms are doing business through electronic medium and they are doing business beyond the national boundaries so traditional leadership can no longer be effective in managing and leading the business to achieve the organizational objectives, so there is a need to go beyond the traditional leadership and use a new style of leadership. E- Leadership can play an important role in this regard where the leader directs his followers through ICT by using electronic medium. The traditional face to face interaction has replaced with the electronic medium. The letter 'E' became common after the invention of internet electronic mail (e-mail) was the first word to have the 'E' placed before it. Then e-business, e-commerce, E-book, e-seminars, etc. and now e leadership started to be a part of this revolution.

E-leadership (Electronic leadership) takes place in the context of e-environment in which the work is

done through information technology especially through the internet In this context not only the communication but the collection and dissemination of information also takes place through electronic medium between followers and the leader. Here the leaders are called virtual leaders. They use new technologies to improve their work, to discover new business models, to communicate with their followers.

Virtual leaders are those leaders who direct the people from distance to do the work in order to achieve the objectives of the organisation. E-Leaders are mainly found in e-business. E-business means doing business through electronic medium especially through internet. E-leadership is also called Distance leadership or virtual leadership and it is replacing traditional leadership because of advancement in technology.

The development of information technology has changed the way of working of the business firms. So we can say that the main objective of leaders has not changed rather use of technology is taking place for communicating and disseminating the information. They can communicate with each other from a distance which is not possible through traditional leadership where face to face communication is must for leadership. There are few problems about E leadership. There is no international model of E-leadership that can be applied in all contexts. Different organizations are

different in contexts like use of technology, their resources, and their business models so a global model of e-leadership cannot be applied. But the traits of traditional leaders are also applicable to e-leaders. The main difference between these exists in terms of skills, attitudes, knowledge, and their professional and personal experiences in terms of use of new and latest technology.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the study:

- To make E-leadership as clear as possible through literature review.
- To highlight the difference between traditional and E-leadership
- To highlight the qualities of E-leaders.
- To highlight the challenges faced by E-leaders in current technological driven business scenario.
- To give recommendations and suggestions drawn from the study.

Data and Research Methodology

This study is based upon secondary data which has been obtained from various published sources, websites, books, articles and journals.

Literature Review

Zaccaro and Bader [1] highlighted that the current leaders are facing two new things first is increasing globalisation of companies as they are doing business beyond national boundaries and second is the innovation and development of new information and communication technology. As a result new style of leadership is required which involve the new technology and also help the organisation to do the business beyond the national boundaries and which is possible only through a new leadership type called E-leadership. Here the communication takes place through electronic medium especially through internet between leader and his followers.

Avolio, Kahai, and Dodge [2] indicated that there is a relationship between technology and leadership. Use of new technology generates a new style of leadership called E-leadership. If leaders use the new technology then continuous improvements are required in the technology to make that user friendly. Kissler [3] highlighted that e-leadership is the main feature of e-businesses where business is conducted through electronic medium i.e. through internet and business is done beyond national boundaries. He also suggested some attributes that

should be acquired by e-leaders (virtual leaders) such as knowledge about new technology, quick response to the changing business environment, Ability to work under the different departmental heads, experience in various areas of business, transfer and convince the followers with his unique ideas.

Kerfoot [4] asserted that e-leadership is required by the business firms to cope up with the changing business environment where technological changes are taking place. In e-leadership the e-leaders communicate and direct their followers virtually through internet from a distance. Here face to face communication is not required. He found that it is replacing traditional leadership because companies are using new technology in their business. But he said that new skills are required by e-leaders to achieve high performance among the group across the boundaries. They should have the knowledge how to cross the time, space, and cultural hurdles to have the benefits of the use of ICT in the business enterprises. where direct supervision and interaction are not possible. Hanna [5] suggested that e-leadership also applies government sector and public institutions. New technologies are also used by government institutions across the world various e-government programs are introduced by government such as e-panchayat, e-governance, and Aadhaar card are introduced in India where communication technology is used by the government. So proper leadership is required to conduct these programs.

Avolio and Kahai [6] discussed that technology affects the leadership style, leaders, and followers in the organisation. The authors described that e-leadership is a fundamental change in the interaction of leaders and followers within the organizations and between the organizations. He described that the revolution in ICT has changed the way of leadership where leaders use electronic medium to lead his followers from a distance. By ICT the leader can communicate to not only to hundreds but thousands of people at a time simply by touching a button through ICT. They focussed on the balancing of traditional leadership with the new one, to openly communicate with their followers and to fully use technology to reach to their followers.

Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber [7] observed that the virtual leadership involves not only guiding people of various departments of the same company even the people of competitor firms are also led by virtual leaders. Holland, Malvey and Fottler [8] studied the challenges for e-leaders

In healthcare organizations. As health care organizations are moving towards international level so they have to face various challenges in leadership as they have to guide the people who are scattered all over the world. It requires the leaders to lead the members virtually. But virtual leaders and virtual teams have to face various challenges like isolation of employees, confusion, language barriers, cultural differences, and technological problems.

Walker [9] studied a new business model where internet is used by the companies to do the business this kind of business is called e-business. For the success of the business capable and good leaders are required who have the knowledge of new technology are required. In current business scenario internet based activities has become the part of every business. So virtual leadership is required in every business.

Difference between Traditional Leadership and E-leadership

Type of Communication

In traditional leadership face to face communication takes place between the leader and his followers but in case of E-leadership face to face communication does not take place rather communication takes place through electronic medium like internet between the leader and his followers.

Members

In case of traditional leadership leader and his followers are the main members but in case of e-leadership leader are called the virtual leader and followers are called the virtual followers.

Qualities

Qualities of both are the same but the members in e-leadership should have the knowledge about new and modern information and communication technology (ICT) in addition which is not required in case of traditional leadership.

Place Required

In case of traditional leadership a particular office or place is required to do the work by the leader and his followers. But in case of e-leadership a particular office is not required they can communicate with each other even from a distance from one place to another, from one country to another.

Availability of Members

In case of traditional leadership all the members are available only during office hours but the

members of e-leadership are available even beyond business hours, 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

Qualities of E-Leaders

E-leaders should possess the following skills:

- **Good communication skills**-e-leadership requires the use of electronic medium to communicate with the followers. E-mails are mostly used by virtual leaders so they must possess the written communication skills to get the work done from their followers according to their directions.
- **Social networking skills**- social networking sites like Facebook, twitter can also be used by leaders to lead their followers so they must have skills to use these sites effectively to achieve the objective of their organisation.
- **Global and multicultural mind-set** –the e-leaders operate from the distance, they may guide the people of an organisation which is working beyond the national boundaries, which involves the employees of different culture in that case it is important for the virtual leader to have a mind-set and attitude to guide them properly.
- **Sensitivity towards followers' mind-set**- here it is also important that the followers come from different social and economic background so the virtual leader should be able to understand the mind-set and the values of the followers.
- **24x7orientation**- virtual leaders operate from the distance they may communicate to their followers anytime so they should be able to work anytime 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.
- **Well Education**- virtual leader should possess the skills of a good leader; he must be well educated and have the knowledge of the management.
- **Flexibility** – he should be flexible enough to cope up with the changing business environment, change in technological environment so that he can do the work in order to achieve the organisational objectives keeping in mind the changes in the business environment.
- **Ability to work under the different departmental heads**- a virtual may guide the people of different departments within the organisations so he should be able to work for more than one departmental heads.

- **Knowledge of various different fields**-virtual leaders may guide the people of different departments so he should have the knowledge of different fields like finance, marketing, accounts, audit etc. to be a successful leader.
- **Transfer and convince the followers with his unique ideas**-he must have ability to transfer his unique ideas from himself to the different followers and able to convince them about his ideas.
- **Ability to use ICT in a better way**- he must have the knowledge of new information and communication technology in order to direct the people through electronic medium as it is the base of e-leadership.
- **Ability to monitor and manage the virtual work effectively**-he must possess the quality to monitor and manage the virtual work effectively to know whether they are working properly or not, whether electronic communication is working or not, whether followers are understanding his directions or not.
- **Ability to check the performance of his virtual team**- he should possess the ability to monitor the progress of his leadership and his followers with the help of technology.
- **Ability to convince others about the benefits of new and latest technology**- he should be able to convince others that the communication through electronic medium provide various benefits like it helps to remove time and distance barriers.
- **Innovative** – he should be innovative enough to use new and latest technology in his leadership to reap the benefits of modern technology.
- **Encourage people to use modern technology**- He should be able to encourage the people in the organisation to use latest technology for communication and dissemination of information.

Challenges Faced by E-Leaders

We have seen that e-leadership is a new paradigm, it is a new style of leadership where new and modern ICT plays an important role. So with the use of new technology e-leaders have to face various challenges which are as follows:

To create a collaborative virtual culture- here all the communication takes place through

internet where the virtual leader has to direct and guide the people from a distance which create a great challenge for the leader to create a culture that helps him to be heard by all the followers so that they can coordinate with him a achieve common goals.

- **Establish a social climate through ICT**- it is a big challenge for the e-leader to create a social climate through ICT so that his followers coordinate with each other and work in a more socially responsible manner keeping in mind the others.
- **Communicating to the people through the electronic medium effectively**-this is a big challenge for the e-leaders to communicate effectively as it requires the knowledge of ICT from both the parts. Leader as well as the followers should know how to communicate electronically.
- **Building trust in a virtual communication**-it is a great challenge for the leader to build trust with the followers as face to face communication is not taking place between them. Without face to face communication it is very difficult to trust on someone.
- **Developing a good electronic presence**- it is also a create challenge for the leader to develop a good electronic presence over internet to guide the followers.
- **Inspiring people from a distance**- it is also very difficult for the leader to inspire the people in a situation where face to face communication is not taking place. It becomes difficult for the leader to motivate and inspire them to do work properly in a virtual situation as he is not able to see their reaction and expression about his direction and guidance.
- **Monitoring and controlling virtual employees**- it is also very difficult to for the virtual leader to monitor the virtual employees whether they are working according to his direction or not. It is also a big challenge for the e-leader to control them in a virtual environment.
- **Developing technical competence**-as we know technological competence is required for e-leadership. It is a big challenge for the e-leaders to develop the technical competence of the followers as well of him so that the performance will not be affected.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Till now we have observed that e-leadership is a new and modern style of leadership where communication between the leader and the followers takes place through electronic medium. E-business is taking place in the current business scenario where they conduct the business through electronic medium where traditional leadership style can no longer be effective so a new style of leadership is required where the virtual leaders communicate and disseminate information by electronic medium. E-leadership provides a lot of benefits like through electronic medium the virtual leader can communicate to thousands of employees one to one it helps to save time and it also removes distance barriers but the virtual leader has to face various challenges that we have observed in the previous section. So we can say that there is a great future for the virtual leadership. We can see that almost all the companies are doing their business electronically. So following measures can be used for the successful implementation of e-leadership in the business:

- **Proper training-** proper training should be given to the leaders as well as to the followers to impart knowledge about latest and modern communication technologies. As we know that ICT is the base for the e-leadership. Without the knowledge of latest information technology e-leadership cannot be successfully used by the companies.
- **Face to face communication should be used in e-leadership-** we have explained that face to face communication is not required for the virtual leader to guide his followers. But without face to face interaction it can be difficult for the e-leader to see the expression and reactions of the followers about his instructions. It can be difficult for the e-leader to inspire and motivate the followers in a better way. So video calling can be used to have face to face communication between the e-leader and his followers [10-24].

Conclusion

So leadership means getting the work done from the people to achieve the objectives of the organizations. But with the development and

innovations in the information and communication technology such as the development of e-commerce and internet, the new style of leadership has emerged called e-leadership. Now all the business firms are doing business through electronic medium and they are doing business beyond the national boundaries so traditional leadership can no longer be effective in managing and leading the business to achieve the organizational objectives, so there is a need to go beyond the traditional leadership and use a new style of leadership. E-Leadership can play an important role in this regard where the leader directs his followers through ICT by using electronic medium. The traditional face to face interaction has replaced with the electronic medium. But the role, responsibilities and the objectives of leaders have not changed but the only change is the way of communication between the leaders and his followers where they can interact with each other from a distance. E-leadership helps to remove time and distance barriers. But for successful e-leadership all the members involved should have knowledge about latest and modern technology such as internet. E-leaders should possess certain qualities like knowledge of ICT, good communication skills to communicate, inspire and motivate the followers from a distance. Besides these qualities they should be able to face certain challenges of e-leadership like how to develop a cooperative and social environment over the internet, how to monitor, control and manage the people electronically by using ICT. But the main problem with this type of leadership is that the face to face communication is not compulsory for communication between the leader and his followers and without face to face interaction it can be difficult for the e-leader to see the expression and reactions of the followers about his instructions. It can be difficult for the e-leader to inspire and motivate the followers in a better way. So video calling can be used to have face to face communication between the e-leader and his followers. But there is no global model of e-leadership that can be applied to all business firms. This new leadership style differs from country to country, culture to culture, and sector to sector. This style is more used in the economically organizations where latest and modern techniques of information technology are used. So there is a long way to go, to use e-leadership practically.

References

1. Zaccaro SJ, Bader P (2003) E-leadership and the challenges of leading e-teams: Minimizing the bad

and maximizing the good. *Organizational Dynamics*, 31(4).

2. Avolio BJ, Kahai S, Dodge GE (2000) E-leadership: Implications for theory, research, and practice. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 11(4).
3. Kissler GD (2001) E-leadership. *Organizational Dynamics*, 30(2):121-133.
4. Kerfoot KM (2010) Listening to see: The key to virtual leadership. *Nursing Economics*, 28(2):114-115.
5. Han na NK (2007) E-Leadership institutions for the knowledge economy. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
6. Avolio BJ, Kahai S (2003) Adding the -e6 to e-leadership: How it may impact your leadership. *Organizational Dynamics*, 31(4).
7. Avolio BJ, Walumbwa FO, Weber TJ (2009) Leadership: Current theories, research, and future directions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1):421-449.
8. Holland JB, Malvey D, Fottler MD (2009) Health care globalization: A need for virtual leadership. *The Health Care Manager (Frederick)*, 28(2):117-123.
9. Walker JW (2000) E-leadership? *Human Resource Planning*, 23(1):5-6
10. Darleen D (2009) Virtual success: The keys to effectiveness in leading from a distance. *Leadership in Action*, 28(6):9-11.
11. Colfax RS, Santos AT, Diego J (2009) Virtual leadership: A green possibility in critical times but can it really work? *Journal of International Business Research*, 8(2).
12. Karpova E, Correia AP, Baran E (2009) Learn to use and use to learn: Technology in virtual collaboration experience. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 12(1):45-52.
13. Zigurs I (2009) Leadership in virtual teams: Oxymoron or opportunity? *Organizational Dynamics*, 31(4).
14. Hunsaker PL, Hunsaker JS (2008) Virtual teams: A leader's guide. *Team Performance Management*, 14(1/2), 86-101.
15. Potter RE (2002) Virtual team interaction styles: Assessment and effects. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 56(4):423-443.
16. Pulley ML, Sessa, VI (2001) E-leadership: Tackling complex challenges. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 33(6/7).
17. Shulman Richard R (2001) In search of e-leadership. *Supermarket Business*, New York: 56(10).
18. Ryssen SV, Godar SH (2000) Going international without going international: Multinational virtual teams. *Journal of International Management*, 6:49-60.
19. Yagil D (1998) Charismatic leadership and organizational hierarchy: Attribution of charisma to close and distant leaders. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 9(2).
20. Yukl G (1994) *Leadership in Organisation*, 3rd ed. Prentice Hall, Inc.
21. Howell JM, Frost, PJ (1989) A Laboratory Study of Charismatic Leadership', *Organisational Behavior and Human Decision Process*, Vol.43.
22. Bass BM (1985) *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*, New York: Free Press.
23. Buchanan B (1974) Building Organisational Commitment: The Socialization of Managers in Work Organisations', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol.19.
24. Stogdill RM (1974) *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of the Literature*, New York: Free Press.