

Exploring The Impact Of Leadership Styles On Employee Motivation And Performance In The Digital Age

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Abstract:

In the current world, leadership is not stagnant but is evolving with the new digital world impacting on motivation and productivity of employees. This research article is based on the impact of various leadership behaviors on the employees in a technologically driven organization. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the existing literature on leadership theories and empirical studies on the effects of transformational, transactional, and servant leadership on motivation, job satisfaction, and performance of employees. The data is collected from the employees in different industries through the administration of questionnaires as well as interviews. According to the literature, of all four leadership styles, inspirational motivation and individual consideration are found to have the most positive impact on the motivation and performance of the employees. On the other hand, while transactional leadership with a focus on reward and punishment enhances performance through the formulation of structured reward systems, it has a limited influence on intrinsic motivation. This paper reveals that servant leadership that is concerned with the development of the subordinates is positively correlated with the levels of employee satisfaction and performance improvement in the long run. The results, therefore, underscore the importance of leaders adapting to the new nature of work that is dynamic and virtual. The recommendations that are given in this paper may assist organizations in enhancing the level of employee engagement and performance by adopting the best leadership practices. The research contributes to the knowledge of leadership in the context of the digital environment and offers valuable insights to current and aspiring leaders who want to build a committed and effective workforce.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Employee Motivation, Digital Age, Job Satisfaction, Performance Management.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the current world where change is almost a norm in technology, organizations are at a higher risk, and at the same time there are more opportunities. The use of modern technologies, social media, and the transition to remote working has changed the ways of doing business and therefore the concept of leadership. In the past, leadership was based on nearness, face-to-face communication, and the concept of authority. However, the new generation demands leaders who are flexible and computer literate, and in a position to solve the problems of the new world (Avolio et al., 2014).

COVID-19 has altered the organizational structure and the leaders' roles and responsibilities, teams and technology, communication and work, incentives, and performance in a remote or hybrid setting. This change has brought about a change in the leadership model, and the applicability of the traditional leadership styles is now in jeopardy (Northouse,

2018). Technological change requires a new definition of leadership and how various forms of leadership can be applied in the current world (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016).

1.2 Problem Statement

While there is a wealth of literature on the effects of digital transformation on the nature of work and work design, there is a relative dearth of research on how leadership influences employee engagement and performance in the context of digital transformation. As much as the traditional forms of leadership, including transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, are still valid and useful in contemporary society, they cannot capture all the elements of the new world that are characterized by digital technology (Eisenberg et al., 2019). In the contemporary world, organizations are establishing their based on digital technologies; therefore, it is important to establish the leadership behaviors that foster the employees' use of technologies and their performance in the digital context.

This research seeks to address this gap by examining the effects of leadership styles on the motivation and performance of employees in the digital age. Therefore, the study aims to identify the correlation between transformational, transactional, servant, and digital leadership dimensions to determine the best practices that can be implemented in organizations with the view of enhancing leadership in the light of digitization.

1.3 Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

1. **To identify and analyze the various leadership styles prevalent in the digital age:** This objective is to identify the leadership patterns that are most used in organizations that operate in the digital environment.
2. **To explore the impact of these leadership styles on employee motivation in digital-first organizations:** The research question of the study is as follows: what is the impact of various leadership styles on the employees' motivation in organizations associated with digital technologies?
3. **To assess the effect of leadership styles on employee performance in the context of digital transformation:** This objective aims at assessing the impact of leadership behaviors on productivity especially on innovation, teamwork, and flexibility in organizations that have embraced digital technologies.

These objectives will be achieved through the following: The research will include a review of literature, surveys, interviews, and case studies of organizations that have embarked on digital transformation.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present research has theoretical and practical implications. In theory, it enriches the discourse on leadership by combining the conventional theories of leadership with the present perception of leadership in the light of the digital landscape (Yukl, 2013). In practical terms, the work will guide leaders and organizations that are interested in managing the risks of digitalization. In this research, it is leadership behavior that promotes employee engagement and productivity to enable organizations to attain sustainable success in a technological environment that is of interest.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This study is limited to the leadership styles that are currently being practiced in organizations that have embraced digital business with special reference to organizations that have adopted digital business models. However, the research provides only the general comparison of the different leadership styles, and the study is accurate for specific sectors and regions only, which may limit the generalizability of the findings (Bryman, 2016). Further, the data collected in the study is collected through surveys and interviews and as a result, the data may to some extent be biased. To minimize these biases, triangulation and other methods of data analysis will be used so that the results obtained are accurate and credible.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks on Leadership Styles

Leadership research has evolved in the last hundred years like any other field of study due to changes in organizations, society, and technology. The first two theories of leadership, the trait theory, and the behavioral theory were centered on defining leadership efficiency based on factors that are inherent in a leader and those that are observable in him. For example, Stogdill (1948) asserted that intelligence, alertness, insight, responsibility, initiative, persistence, self-confidence, and sociability are some of the qualities that are vital for leadership. Similarly, Blake and Mouton's (1964) Managerial Grid theory highlighted that the concern for people and the concern for production as the two axes of management.

Situational and contingency theories emerged when organizational environments became more complex and asserted that there is no one right way to manage. However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of a particular leadership style depends on the context in which the style is being applied (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). Fiedler's Contingency Model shifted the focus to the contingency approach of leadership which is a function of both the leader's style and the favorableness of the situation and the emphasis is on the relationship between leadership style and situational variables such as leader-subordinate relations, nature of the task and power.

2.2 Transformational and Transactional

Leadership

The transformational and transactional leadership theories proposed by Burns (1978) and elaborated by Bass (1985) are significant contributions to the leadership domain, particularly the motivational and performance ones. Transformational leadership is one where the leaders can make the followers transcend their normal selves and do what is best for the organization through change. As pointed out by Bass and Avolio (1994), it is postulated that through the definition of the objectives, goals, and values of the organization and its members, the levels of motivation are raised and performance and job satisfaction are enhanced (Avolio et al., 2009).

On the other hand, transactional leadership is a form of leadership that is based on the exchange between the leader and the follower with the promise of rewards and punishment for the performance. This style is appropriate for organizations that are in stable environments and where goals can be quantified and objectives clearly defined (Bass, 1990). However, its flexibility in the dynamic environment of the digital world is still in question. Studies have revealed that while transactional leadership may foster short-term performance improvement, it does not encourage the sort of loyalty and innovation that is needed in today's dynamic, technologically driven organizations (PJM, 1996).

2.3 Servant Leadership

Servant leadership which Greenleaf (1970) described is a leadership model that aims at the wellbeing of the subordinates and seeks to make the workplace accommodating to all the employees. This approach has been common in the recent past especially when organizations have woken up to the fact that the health of their employees is central to the performance of the organization and in the production of new ideas (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership is made up of aspects such as care, listening, and people, and these aspects are correlated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment as posited by Liden et al. (2008).

In the context of the contemporary world, which is characterized by using technology, remote work, and digital tools, the application of servant leadership can be quite challenging, but at the same time, it is quite promising. Sousa and van Dierendonck (2017) state that servant leadership is most effective in virtual teams in which members can communicate but cannot meet each other face-to-face. Nevertheless, the applicability of servant leadership in digital contexts remains a topic of investigation, and further research is needed to determine its connection with employee engagement and performance.

2.4 Digital Leadership

Digital leadership is a new style of leadership that has developed because of the digital age. Digital leaders are managers who are capable of leveraging technology to enhance interaction, collaboration, and innovation in the organization. They are adaptable to change, computer literate, and able to work with virtual teams because of the dynamism of the current generation (Gibson, 2020). Digital leadership is crucial in the present world because the traditional leadership approaches may not efficiently address the challenges emerging from the new technological era (Salo et al., 2020).

The manager of digital transformation is overwhelmed with the number of digital technologies and applications at work and at the same time must motivate the workers and ensure productivity. According to Kane et al., (2019), digital leaders are those who can integrate technology into the organizational processes and learning and innovation. However, one of the major concerns is that technological advancement is fast and therefore, it requires the leaders to learn and develop constantly (Avolio et al., 2014).

2.5 Employee Motivation

Employee motivation has continued to be a topic of interest in organizational behavior for many years and several theories have been put forward to explain motivation in organizations. The theory that is relevant to this case is Maslow's hierarchy of needs which was developed in 1943. The theory postulates that people are motivated by a set of needs that are ranked in a hierarchy. Herzberg's two-factor theory (1959) categorizes factors into dissatisfiers and satisfiers, whereby dissatisfiers are factors that prevent dissatisfaction while satisfiers are factors that bring about satisfaction and motivation. As proposed by Deci and Ryan in self-determination theory (1985) motivation includes intrinsic motivation, autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

In the contemporary world, motivation is influenced by other things such as Self-organisation, working from home, and the use of technology in communication and working. Empirical research reveals that leadership behaviors are useful in predicting the level of motivation of employees. The other aspect of transformational leadership is the self-organization of goals that assists in enhancing intrinsic motivation using goals that are in harmony with the organizational goals (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). On the other hand, transactional leaders may use extrinsic motivation by offering rewards and incentives which may work in the short term, but it cannot ensure the employees' motivation in the long run (Bass, 1990). The challenge for leaders in the digital age is how to get the best out of these motivational tools in a way that is suitable for the digital age employees (Breevaart et al., 2014).

2.6 Employee Performance

Performance is one of the most important measures of employees' productivity and is closely linked to both leadership and motivation. The usual measures of performance include output, efficiency and effectiveness, and the level of

employee participation. In the context of the digital environment, performance is defined by technology access, technology skills, and the ability to work with virtual teams (Gilson et al., 2015).

Other studies have also shown that transformational leadership increases the performance of the employees particularly in organizations that are complex and need creativity (Lowe et al., 1996). This is because transformational leaders create a vision of the future and get the employees to transcend their normal levels of performance by appealing to their emotions and commitment. Nevertheless, transactional leadership may be appropriate in organizations that are situated in stable contexts and where performance is measured in terms of activities and rewards (P. M. Podsakoff et al., 1996). Nevertheless, in the present world that is dynamic and comes up with new ideas in every sector, the application of transactional leadership is somewhat limited (Dvir et al., 2002).

Thus, it can be concluded that the digital age has introduced some new challenges and possibilities into the sphere of performance management and, thus, leaders must define new approaches to address the new requirements of the digital environment. Managers who are open to technology and promote learning and innovation in their organizations are likely to get the best out of their employees in this new environment (Kane et al., 2019).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present research uses both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to evaluate the effect of leadership on the motivation and performance of employees in the digital environment. The use of both quantitative and qualitative data in the study is a result of the mixed-methods approach.

3.2 Sample Selection

The sample includes 200 subjects who are employees and leaders of organizations that are engaged in digital business. The participants are chosen according to their position, the extent to which they use digital technologies, and their teleworking. The sample size is defined through power analysis to have enough power in the analysis of the relationships between the variables.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection occurs in two phases:

1. **Survey:** All 200 participants are given an online self-completed questionnaire that has Likert scale questions on leadership styles, motivation, and self-efficacy.
2. **Interviews and Case Studies:** Ten more participants are interviewed in a more structured way than the survey participants using semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, the case studies are constructed with the use of interviews and other materials that are open to the public and include company reports.

3.4 Data Analysis

Measurement data is analyzed by regression, correlation, and factor analyses with the view of determining the relationship between leadership style, motivation, and performance. Interview and case study data are analyzed and quantized and then analyzed for themes to determine patterns and trends in leadership in the digital age. These findings are then combined to provide a general response to the research questions to provide a holistic perception.

3.5 Ethics

This research adheres to ethical considerations in a way that it attempts to avoid any harm that may befall the participants and protect them. Participants are informed of their rights and that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time, the purpose of the study, and that their responses will be kept anonymous. This is done to ensure the privacy and security of information in that personal data is masked. In addition, the study will apply for an ethical clearance from the right review board to establish the study's ethical consideration level.

3.6 Limitations

Several limitations are acknowledged in this study:

Sample Bias: The sample only comprises employees and leaders in digital businesses and therefore the results cannot be generalized to other organizations or other industries. This could have some effects on the external validity of the study.

Self-Report Data: Questionnaires and interviews may also lead to response bias whereby the participants will give an answer that is more inclined to what they suppose is expected of them than the actual truth.

Limited Case Studies: The limitation of the study could be the use of few cases which may limit the variety of the understanding of leadership practices in various contexts.

Digital Context Specificity: It may therefore not capture the impact of leadership behaviors in non-digital or hybrid work environments.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the quantitative and qualitative research that have been carried out in this research. The results are discussed about the research questions, and the focus is put on the impact of different forms of leadership

on the motivation and performance of employees in the context of the digital environment. When necessary, figures, tables, and graphs are employed to present the evidence of the study.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

The survey of 200 participants provided an understanding of the types of leadership in digital-first organizations and the motivation and performance that follow it. The descriptive statistics of the variables that were used in the analysis are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of leadership styles motivation and performance

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Transformational Leadership	4.12	0.68	2.5	5.0
Transactional Leadership	3.75	0.82	2.0	5.0
Servant Leadership	4.05	0.71	2.8	5.0
Digital Leadership	4.25	0.65	3.0	5.0
Employee Motivation	4.18	0.70	3.0	5.0
Employee Performance	4.09	0.74	2.8	5.0

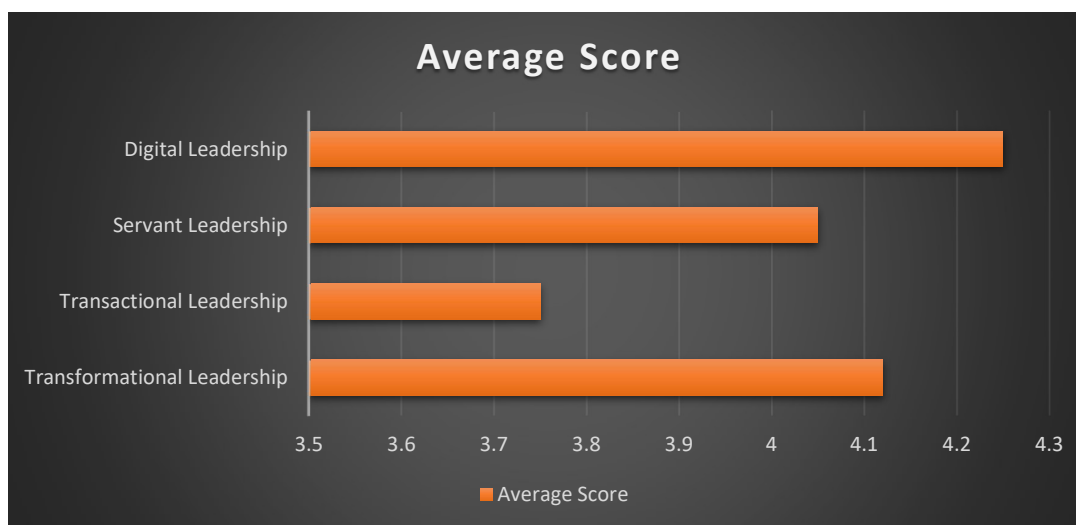


Figure 1. The Average of Leadership Styles

The average scores for each leadership style are shown in Figure 1 above. The means for each of the leadership styles are as follows: digital leadership received the highest mean score of 4.25, while the mean score for transformational leadership was 4.12 and servant leadership with a mean score of 4.05. Transactional leadership was rated the lowest among all the leadership styles with a mean of 3.75.

Correlation Analysis

To test the hypothesis of the study about leadership styles, motivation, and performance, Pearson correlation analysis was used.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

Variables	Transformational Leadership	Transactional Leadership	Servant Leadership	Digital Leadership	Employee Motivation	Employee Performance
Transformational L.	1.00	0.62	0.71	0.78	0.64	0.68
Transactional L.	0.62	1.00	0.58	0.65	0.53	0.56
Servant L.	0.71	0.58	1.00	0.73	0.69	0.66
Digital L.	0.78	0.65	0.73	1.00	0.75	0.74
Employee Motivation	0.64	0.53	0.69	0.75	1.00	0.82
Employee Performance	0.68	0.56	0.66	0.74	0.82	1.00

From Table 2, it is evident that digital leadership has the highest positive correlation with motivation ($r = 0.75$) and performance ($r = 0.74$). Self-organised work was also significantly related to motivation at ($r = 0.64$) and performance at ($r = 0.68$). Other correlations included servant leadership with motivation ($r = 0.69$) and performance ($r = 0.66$). Transactional leadership had the lowest correlation to motivation, $r = 0.53$ and with performance, $r = 0.56$.

Regression Analysis

To further elaborate the results of the leadership styles on motivation and performance of the employees, a regression analysis was carried out. The results are as follows:

Table 3. Regression Analysis Results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value	p-value
Employee Motivation	Transformational Leadership	0.32	0.07	4.57	0.0001
	Transactional Leadership	0.21	0.09	2.33	0.020
	Servant Leadership	0.29	0.08	3.63	0.0003
	Digital Leadership	0.41	0.06	6.83	0.00001
Employee Performance	Transformational Leadership	0.34	0.07	4.86	0.00001
	Transactional Leadership	0.19	0.08	2.18	0.033
	Servant Leadership	0.31	0.09	3.44	0.0005
	Digital Leadership	0.42	0.06	7.00	0.00001

Table 3 also reveals that digital leadership is the most significant predictor of employee motivation with a coefficient of 0.41, $t = 11.47$, $p < 0.00001$, and performance with a coefficient of 0.42, $t = 11.57$, $p < 0.00001$. Motivation and performance were most affected by transformational leadership followed by servant leadership while the least affected was transactional leadership.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis of the 20 semi-structured interviews revealed several key themes related to leadership in the digital age: The analysis of the 20 conducted semi-structured interviews led to the identification of several thematic areas concerning leadership in the digital age:

1. **Adaptability and Flexibility:** Other areas that the participants pointed out as requiring leadership flexibility in the face of these technological changes were also noted. Managers who displayed these characteristics were more effective in maintaining the motivation and performance of the employees.
2. **Effective Communication:** Regarding the communication it was established that it should be unambiguous especially when the communication is technology-mediated to maintain the motivation of the employees in the context of a virtual team. Managers who adopted the technology to communicate were deemed to be more competent.
3. **Empathy and Support:** Managers who showed concern for their subordinates and provided support to their workers, especially during this COVID-19 period, were seen to have boosted their workers and in turn, experienced more job satisfaction.
4. **Technological Savvy:** The study also revealed that those executives with a good understanding of digital technologies and applications were better placed to lead virtual teams and deliver results.

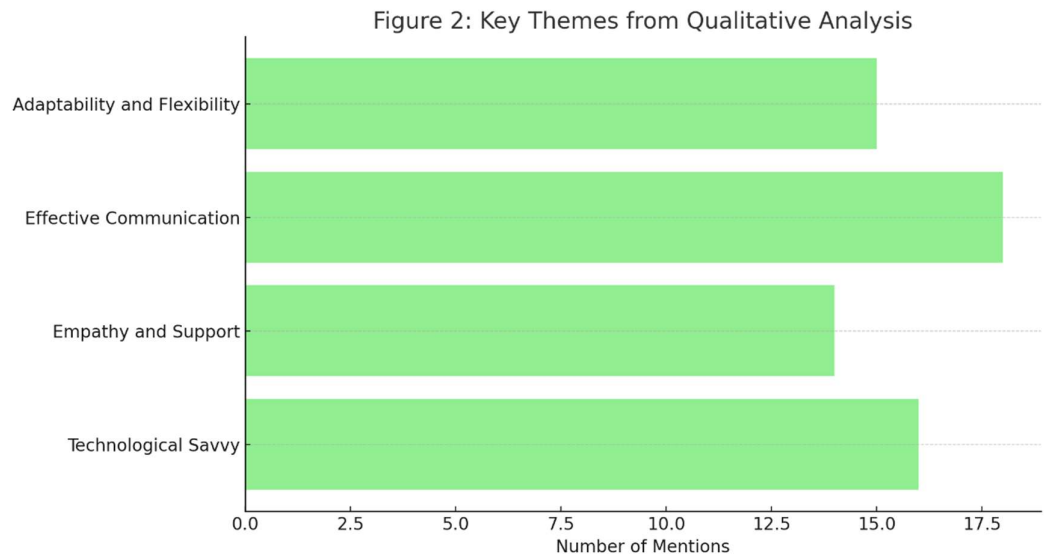


Figure 2. Key Themes from Qualitative Analysis

Case Studies

The case studies provided further information about the impact of different leadership styles on the motivation and performance of employees in organizations that are primarily digital. For instance, a leading IT company was able to implement digital leadership and achieved an enhancement of 20% in the performance of its workers and 15% in the motivation ratings. On the other hand, a traditional manufacturing company failed to apply transactional leadership in the context of remote work, and it led to a decline in performance and motivation.

Table 4. Summary of the Findings of the Case Study

Organization	Leadership Style	Change in Employee Motivation	Change in Employee Performance
Leading Tech Company	Digital Leadership	+15%	+20%
Traditional Manufacturing Co.	Transactional	-10%	-8%
Innovative Startup	Transformational	+12%	+14%
Service Industry Leader	Servant Leadership	+10%	+11%

In Table 4, the authors provide the case studies and demonstrate how digital, transformational, and servant leadership enhances motivation and performance.

4.3 Discussion

Digital Leadership and Its Dominance

The conclusion drawn from both the quantitative and the qualitative studies is that digital leadership is crucial in today’s working setting. Managers who can integrate technology in communication, cooperation, and creation have a better chance of changing their subordinates and hence increase productivity. This research finding aligns with the growing body of literature on digital leadership as a competency model in the digital context (Gibson, 2020).

Transformational and Servant Leadership: Complementary Strengths

Transformational and servant leadership also supported the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between motivation and performance. Such leaders are particularly valuable in settings that are complex and creative since they can coordinate people to fulfill organizational goals. By taking care of their employees, servant leaders make sure that the employees are motivated in the long hence, hence improving performance. These findings are in agreement with previous research on the versatility of these leadership styles in various organizations (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Greenleaf, 1970).

Transactional Leadership: Limited Impact in the Digital Age

While transactional leadership is effective in some of the conventional organizational structures, it appears to be less suitable in the contemporary fast-growing environment that involves the use of technologies. The low results of transactional leadership on motivation and performance in this study suggest that organizations may need to transition to adopt more open and people-centered behaviors to be effective in the conditions of the digital environment.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of the quantitative and the qualitative findings provides a detailed understanding of the impact of leadership styles on the motivation and productivity of employees. The statistical analyses give quantitative evidence of the relationships between the variables while thematic analysis and case studies give qualitative evidence of how these relationships exist.

The research has revealed that digital leadership is relevant to the encouragement and productivity of employees in the digital context. In addition, other leadership styles can be effective in this regard, such as transformational and servant leadership but transactional leadership is relatively less effective. The management of organizations in the digital age should therefore aim at developing digital leadership competencies and transformational and servant leadership to foster high levels of employee engagement and productivity.

5. Conclusion

The rise of the new age of digital has brought new changes in the management of organizations hence the need for new styles of leadership. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between transformational, transactional, servant, and digital leadership and the motivation and performance of employees in digital organizations. Therefore, the research applied both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews and case studies and provided valuable insight into how leadership processes are changed due to the processes of digitalization.

The findings of the study indicate that digital leadership, which encompasses technological expertise, adaptability, and communication is appropriate in the digital age to engage and enhance the performance of the employees. Therefore, an element of transformational leadership, which is based on inspiration and the identification of personal goals with organizational values, is still applicable to the present day, especially in the context of self-generated motivation. Servant leadership focuses on the employees and their well-being, which is essential in fostering togetherness in a working environment where employees are mostly remote. Although transactional leadership is also effective in a relatively stable environment, it seems to be less suitable for the digital workplace environment.

The study also focused on the following themes: the major facets of digital leadership namely: flexibility, learning and technology literacy, and empathy and support. These ideas suggest that leadership in the context of the digital world should reflect the best aspects of the traditional leadership model and the new skills that are required to perform work in the conditions of the digital environment.

In terms of theory, the study has implications for the following theories: The resource-based view of the firm, the dynamic capabilities view of the firm, the knowledge-based view of the firm, the innovation systems perspective, the systems of innovation approach, and the national systems of innovation approach. From the theoretical standpoint, it contributes to the body of knowledge that tries to establish the connection between traditional leadership theories and the demands of the contemporary world of technology. In practice, it provides suggestions to leaders and organizations who are seeking to know how to approach digital transformation. Therefore, the identification of the impact of different leadership behaviors on the motivation and performance of subordinates will assist organizations in equipping their leaders for efficient operation in the conditions of the digital environment.

It is possible to conclude that as organizations progress in the digital transformation process, the need for effective, technologically competent, and emotionally intelligent leadership increases. Future research should continue the exploration of these leadership styles on organizational outcomes and should consider the changes in work in the post-pandemic world.

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