Developing Model of Digital Leadership for a Successful Digital Transformation

Dr. Chaiyaset Promsri

Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon

Corresponding author: Dr. Chaiyaset Promsri Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon **Email:** Chaiyaset.p@rmutp.ac.th

Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to analyze digital leader characteristics from related digital leadership articles on the Internet and develop qualities of a digital leader model. Google was utilized as a search engine tool for data collection. Key words such as digital leadership, digital leaders, characteristics of digital leaders, qualities of digital leaders, traits of digital leaders, leadership traits for digital transformation success, and leadership skill for digital transformation were included for the search on the Internet. Content analysis with the synthesis matrix methods with the congruence index of sources technique was employed. The consistency of key components from at least four sources was required for further model development. Results of this study found 64 qualities of digital leaders retrieved from 12 sources of 11 websites. These characteristics were synthesized and analyzed by using the congruence index criterion in which at least four sources were required for the finalized traits of a digital leader. Findings demonstrated that six characteristics of digital leaders met this criterion, which included digital knowledge and literacy, vision, customer focus, agility, risk-talking (experimental atmosphere creation), and collaboration. These qualities were employed to create a model called "Six Characteristics of a Digital Leader for Digital Transformation Success."

Keywords:

Leadership, Leaders, Digital leadership, Digital leaders, Digital transformation.

Introduction

As today's society becomes more dependent on technology, organizations need to harness and cultivate the power of digital technologies in order to create their competitive advantage (Sheninger, 2019). A recent study indicated that organizations that embrace digital transformation can be advantageous and more profitable than their rivals (Capgemini Consulting, 2017). Nonetheless, some organizations are fallen into digital resister or digital adventurer categories, which require more efforts,

Time, and energies to survival (Smith, 2018). Leadership is a key success factor that enhances organizational success for digital transformation. Most organizations nowadays need a leader who has sufficient knowledge and skills to run the organization under the world of digitization (Dhingra, 2019).Transformation in leadership sense refers to creating an indispensable difference, which requires new leader mindsets and qualities (Williams, 2006). Digitalization creates huge leadership gaps in organizations around the world, which requires today's leaders to hold different skill

sets (George, 2018). In the digital era, digital leaders need to possess different mindset and qualities to more traditional leadership styles (Roe, 2018). According to Manpower Group report, today's leaders are required to utilize 80 percent of their traditional leadership qualities along with new 20 percent of digital leadership qualities to successfully run digital transformation in organizations (Gray, 2018).

A successful digital transformation is more reliant on a leader who has sufficient digital literacy and skills. A leader is a key component for success, not technology. However, a digital leader need to understand what key qualities that help increase their capabilities to ne a mature participant in the digital world and connect with their subordinates, teams, and organizations. Even though various articles on the Internet have comprehensively provided information about characteristics of a digital leader, there were some greater inconsistencies among those articles. To have a robust knowledge on what key qualities of a digital leader must possess in order to accomplish a successful digital transformation, this study sought to analyze qualities of a digital leader from the literature and develop a model of key characteristics of a digital leader for digital transformation success.

Literature Reviews

Based on the literature reviews, this study found that numerous articles on the Internet proposed essential qualities of digital leaders for organizations' digital transformation success.

Fukuzawa (2016) delineated seven keys traits of digital leaders for digital transformation, which focused on retailing business and market encompassing vision, influence, educate, and collaborate, having traditional business acumen, an omni-channel evangelist, cultivate talents for transformation, be agile, and know the market. These characteristics heavily emphasized digital leaders in business area and specifically demonstrated the key traits of digital leaders for dealing with changing business environment. A

recent article based on the latest findings of MIT digital business research proposed key traits of digital leaders based on the answers of respondents on "what would you like your leaders to have more of to navigate digital trends?" were vision and purpose provision, creation experiment conditions for people, empowerment to think difference, and encouraging collaborations across boundaries (Kane, 2018; People Matters Editorial Team, 2019). Sullivan (2017) reported eight characteristics every digital leader should have according to Digital Workplace Group's digital leadership skills assessment including digital literacy, digital vision, advocacy, presence, communication, adaptability, self-awareness, and cultural awareness. To focus on business environment, a recent article on Linkeit.com website outlined four characteristics of digital leaders including prioritizing digital transformation, focus on transforming customers' digital experiences first, investing in HR process for digital talent workforces, and a bimodal architecture adoption (Editorial Team, 2017).

Roe (2018) proposed seven skills and characteristics of a digital leader in a successful workplace, which encompassed intellectual curiosity, understanding human and customer nature, clear vision, passion and purpose, ability to leverage analytics, communication, and ability to delegate. Gorton (2018) described six characteristics of digital leadership, which comprised of understanding of digital transformation, digital skills development across the organization, using digital process and technologies to shape the organization and create strategies, financial support and mandate for digital technology experiment, research based and user needs for developing projects, and team inspiration to see the benefits of digital transformation. In addition, Newman (2018) labeled five traits of leadership needed for a successful digital transformation including clear purpose, forward-looking and thinking, fix what's broken and seek out what's not right, risk-taking, and strive for partnership. Moreover, Hughes (2018) also noted that excellent digital leaders do not only possess a robust digital knowledge and skills, but also

demonstrate their soft skills that strengthen the collaboration in leading digital transformation success in the organization. Five essential traits of a successful digital leader were proposed including vision, curiosity, and collaborative, experimental, and networking proficiency. George (2018) briefly outlined key characteristics of digital leadership, which consisted of people first focus, building trust and collaboration, and sharing leadership role.

HR dive (2019) proposed six successful digital leader traits for digital transformation including change agents, recognizing customers as a heart of decision making process, broad perspectives, collaborations and teamwork focus, new vernacular skills, and shared accountability. Koen (2019) stated that in order to increase leadership effectiveness in a digital world, leaders need to possess five essential qualities, which are innovative thinking, staying current and up to date, collaborations and connections, agile, and data savvy. Similar characteristics of digital leaders were proposed by Trefler (2019) in which technological vision, innovation, and analytics prowess, organizational management, collaboration, and empathy were highlighted as four essential qualities of a digital leader.

Methodology

This study was a documentary analysis. The study aimed at analyzing key characteristics of digital leaders for a successful digital transformation. Secondary data were used for data analysis. Google was utilized as a search engine tool for data collection. Key words such as digital leadership, digital leaders, characteristics of digital leaders, qualities of digital leaders, traits of digital leaders, leadership traits for digital transformation success, and leadership skill for digital transformation were included for the search on the Internet. Only the related websites provided information about characteristics of digital leaders were utilized for data analysis. Information from these sources were synthesized and analyzed to ultimately develop a digital leadership model. Content analysis with the synthesis matrix methods with the congruence index

of sources technique was employed. The consistency of key components from at least four sources was required for further model development.

Findings

According to the search on the Internet, 12 sources from 11 websites were found to have information about digital leadership qualities and utilized for data synthesis and analysis. These websites included hrdive.com, medium.com, sloanreview.mit.edu, cmswire.com, digileaders.com, forbes.com, digitalmarketinginstitute.com, linkeit.com, gartner.com, weforum.org, and spencerstuart.com. Based on the Internet search, a total of 64 digital leader qualities were discovered, which some of them might be repetitive and overlapped. The maximum number of digital leader qualities found in this study was eight, which was from "8 skills every digital leader needs" article on cmswire.com website whereas the minimum number of digital leader characteristics was three, which discovered on "3 characteristics of the new digital leader mindset" article in gartner.com website. The average number of qualities for a digital leader was four and five. These characteristics were utilized for analysis to determine the similarity of these characteristics for a model development.

Table 1: Summary of Information about Qualities of Digital Leaders on the Internet Search

Website	Article	Author(S)	Numbers of Digital Leader Qualities
hrdive.com	6 Characteristics of Digital Leadership	HRdive (2019)	6
medium.com	Five Qualities of a Digital Leader	Koen, S. (2019)	5
sloanreview.mit.edu	Common Traits of the Best Digital Leaders	Kane, G. C. (2018)	4
cmswire.com	8 Skills Every Digital Leader Needs	Sullivan, L. (2017)	8
cmswire.com	7 Skills and Characteristics of a Successful Digital Workplace Leader.	Roe, D. (2018)	7
digileaders.com	6 Characteristics of Digital Leadership	Gorton, C. (2018)	6
forbes.com	5 Leadership Traits Required for Digital Transformation Success	Newman, D. (2018)	5
digitalmarketinginstitute.com	5 Traits of a Successful Digital Leader	Hughes, D. (2017)	5
linkeit.com	4 Characteristics of the Digital Leaders	Editorial Team (2017)	4
gartner.com	3 Characteristics of the New Digital Leader Mindset	George, S. (2018)	3
weforum.org	4 Essential Qualities for Digital Leaders	Trefler, A. (2019)	4
spencerstuart.com	Seven Key Traits of Transformational Digital Leaders	Fukazawa, K. (2016)	7

Table 2 demonstrated results of digital leader characteristics synthesis and analysis. Among 12 distinctive sources relating to digital leader qualities, similar traits and repetitive qualities were reorganized and presented in the same or similar names in Table 2, which contained totally 17 characteristics of digital leaders. For this study's criterion for data analysis, the congruence of qualities used to finalize what characteristics were taken into account for a model development was determined at least four different sources. Results found that six characteristics of digital leaders met this criterion, which comprised of digital knowledge and literacy, vision, customer focus, agility, risk-talking (experimental atmosphere creation), and collaboration. Among these traits, vision (ƒ=9) had the highest frequency followed by collaboration (ƒ=7), digital literacy (ƒ=5), and risk-taking (ƒ=5), respectively.

Table 1: *Summary of Information about Qualities of Digital Leaders on the Internet Search*

Authors / Qualities	HRdive (2019)	Keon (2019)	Kane (2018)	Sullivan (2017)	Roe (2018)	Gorton (2018)	Newman (2018)	Hughes (2017)	Editorial Team	Goerge (2018)	Trefler (2019)	Fukazawa (2016)	Total
Digital Knowledge/ Literacy		√		√	√	√					√		5
Vision/ Forward Looking and Thinking	√		√	√	√		√	√	√		√	√	9
Clear Purpose			√		√								2
Customer Focus	√				√				√	√			4
Knowing Business		√						√				√	3
Agility/ Adaptability	√	√		√								√	4
Risk-Taking/ Experimental Atmosphere Creation			√			√	√	√			√		5
Inspire/ Cultivate Talent Workforces						√			√			√	3
Communication				√	√								2
Self-Awareness				√									1
Cultural Awareness				√									1
Collaborative Skills	√	√	√					√		√	√	√	7
Networking Proficiency		√					√	√					3
Empathy											√		1
Empowerment			√										1
Shared Leadership Role/ Delegation	√				√					√			3
Advocacy				√		√			√				3

These six qualities of a digital leader for digital transformation success were further employed to create digital leader qualities model for a successful digital transformation (See Figure 1). For benefits of further research development, each characteristic of a digital leader was clarified respectively.

1. *Digital knowledge and literacy* – a digital leader needs to understand the changing environment engaged with digital technologies that influence digital transformation in an organization.

2. *Vision* – a digital leader needs to have a clear vision and purpose relating to digital transformation, and communicate that vision to all levels of Employees in the organization.

3. *Understanding of customers* – a digital leader needs to take customers' needs and changes into consideration when doing the digital transformation. A digital leader need to understand the effect of digital transformation may have on customers.

4. *Agility* – a digital leader needs to be agile, flexible, and adaptive to deal with a rapidly changing environment in a digital world. Also, a digital leader needs to establish agility in the workplace for digital transformation success.

5. *Risk-taking* – a digital leader needs to seek for new opportunities and embrace the mistakes occurred during new experiments of employees in the organization. A digital leader needs to create the experimental atmosphere and advocate employees to experiment new things even they will finally end up with failure.

6. *Collaboration* – a digital leader needs to encourage employees and teams collaborations across boundaries to ensure that everyone strives to work together for digital transformation Success.
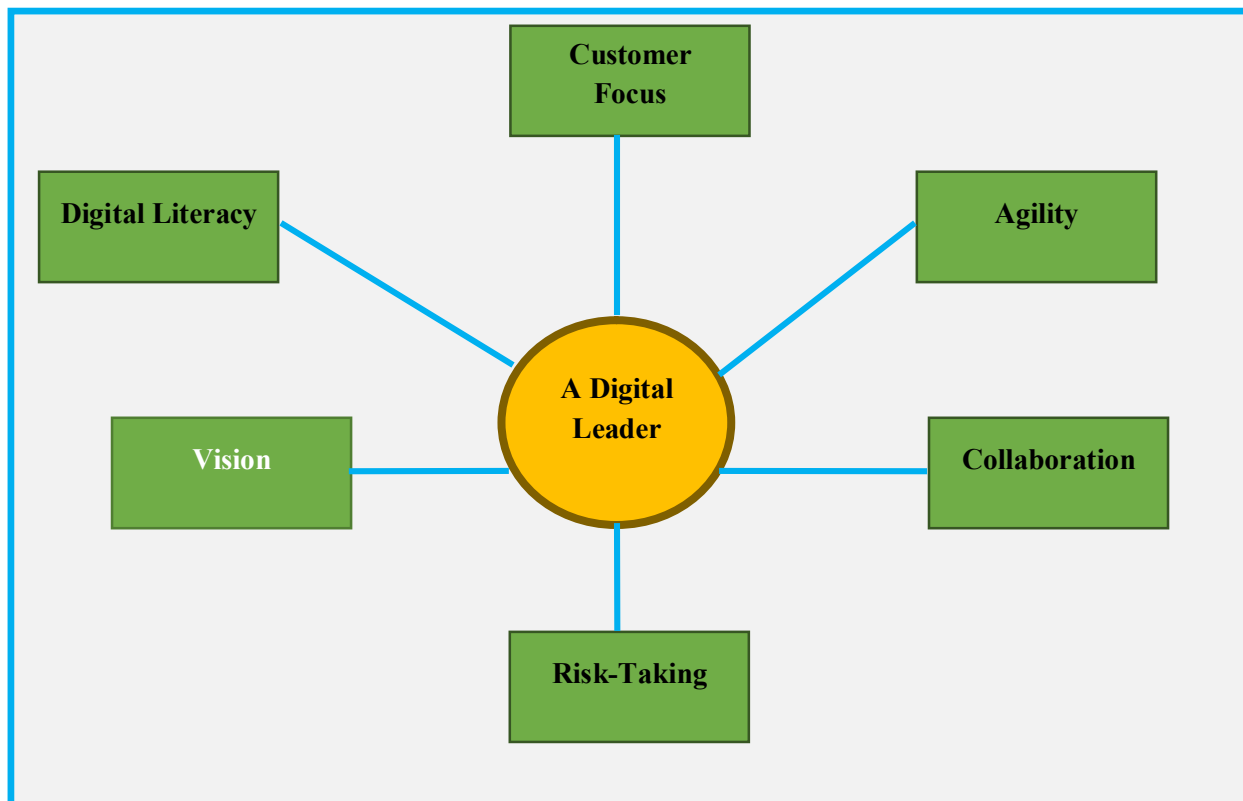

Figure 1: Six Characteristics of a Digital Leader for Digital Transformation Success

Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to analyze digital leader qualities from related digital leadership articles on the Internet and create characteristics of a digital leader model. Results of this study found 64 qualities of digital leaders retrieved from 12 sources of 11 websites. These characteristics were synthesized and analyzed by using the congruence index criterion in which at least four sources were required for the finalized traits of a digital leader. Findings demonstrated that six characteristics of digital leaders met this criterion, which included digital knowledge and literacy, vision, customer focus, agility, risk-talking (experimental atmosphere creation), and collaboration. These qualities were employed to develop a model called "Six Characteristics of a Digital Leader for Digital Transformation Success." This model can be used as a fundamental concept for a further research on this topic. In addition, as this present study used only a documentary analysis approach, a quantitative method with factor analysis technique should be conducted to explore and confirm these qualities of a digital leader for a successful digital transformation.

For limitations of this study, characteristics of a digital leader presented in this study were solely retrieved from the website on the Internet, which may not represent the findings of research in this area. Hence, the next study should include additional sources of data analysis such as research articles and related books on digital leadership. Also, six characteristics of a digital leader presented in this study were crystallized from a document analysis, Delphi technique should be added in a future study to increase the trustworthiness of findings.

For research implications, organizations can take a lot of benefits from this study's outcomes. On the one hand, they can develop programs that help enhance these six characteristics of a digital leader for their employees. On the other hand, they can utilize this information to cultivate the research about digital leadership for a successful digital transformation to ensure the fit of these qualities in their nature and context.

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