



What Defines Modern Leadership? An Analysis Based on Literature from 2021-2023

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Abstract: *This research paper presents an original exploration into the central question: "What defines modern leadership?" It is imperative to emphasize that this study highlights the imperative for modern leaders to harness the capabilities of Artificial Intelligence (AI) without allowing biases to taint their decision-making process. In the past, the role of a manager was often characterized by authority and command, where people followed directions unquestioningly. In the modern business landscape, marked by rapid changes, the impact of COVID-19, and evolving workplace dynamics, the nature of leadership has transformed. This study aims to explore modern management practices by investigating scholarly papers and online resources from Google Scholar and Google Search, focusing on the period from 2021 to 2023.*

What we found is that modern leaders need to possess different skills. They should focus on building trust, persuading, and influencing people instead of merely giving orders, as was done in the past. Our research indicates that the ability to adapt, understand others, engage in lifelong learning, and demonstrate care are truly essential for leaders in today's ever-changing business world. This research paper presents a novel perspective on modern leadership. It underscores that future leaders will leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI) to aid in problem-solving and boost productivity.

1. INTRODUCTION

In earlier times, being a manager typically involved giving orders, which were followed without question. However, times have evolved considerably. Nowadays, work environments are in a constant state of change, and leadership has adjusted accordingly.

Recent literature has explored various facets of modern leadership, often with a focus on women's perspectives. For instance, [Brzezińska \(2023\)](#) investigates whether women, driven by strong internal religious motivations like Catholicism, exhibit greater determination to engage in public activities, particularly in politics. They tend to favor a relational style of political leadership combined with goal-oriented strategies, showcasing adaptability. In another study [Yuan et al. \(2023\)](#) delve into ethical issues in leadership, emphasizing that Western philosophical traditions may not be universally applicable, especially in cultural contexts like China, where Confucian virtue ethics shape leadership ideals. [Coats \(2022\)](#) highlights Frances Perkins' significant contributions as a servant leader, impacting social justice and labor policies in the United States. Perkins' commitment to marginalized groups, women's rights, and creating a social safety net exemplifies the qualities of a servant leader, such as empathy, vision, persuasion, and a commitment to others' growth.

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This research paper examines modern leadership characteristics, with a specific focus on the relationship between leaders and employees, without delving into the question of whether women or men are superior leaders in general.

We conducted a thorough examination of academic papers and online resources available on Google Scholar and Google Search, focusing on the years from 2021 to 2023.

Within this paper, we explore modern leadership and the qualities required to excel as a contemporary leader. We endeavor to provide a holistic understanding of modern leadership, shedding light on the qualities, challenges, and opportunities that define leadership in today's dynamic world.

2. THE TRAITS OF MODERN LEADERSHIP

[Jameslopresti \(2022\)](#) provides an overview of three types of management theories: classical management theory, behavioral management theory, and modern management theory. It discusses the origins, key concepts, strengths, and shortcomings of each approach. The paper covers various theories within each management approach, including scientific management theory, bureaucratic management theory, administrative management theory, human relations theory, and contingency management theory. It emphasizes the importance of adapting different management theories to handle new situations and highlights the complex nature of the modern business world.

[Dasmadi's \(2023\)](#) research paper delves into transformational leadership and its impact on organizations. It explains how this leadership style translates an organization's vision into action by transforming individuals. The paper highlights key factors in transformational leadership, such as idealized influence, inspiration, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation. It also underscores the importance of vision, motivation, creativity, innovation, a learning culture, and effective communication.

[Workhuman \(2022\)](#) discusses two key trends in the workplace: humanizing the workplace and revitalizing the community. The first trend focuses on creating a human-centric work environment where employees can thrive. It emphasizes the need to unlearn traditional ways of doing business and reimagine work in a way that leverages the power of human connection. The paper suggests promoting work-life unity by recognizing that work is a part of life and showcasing the human moments employees experience both inside and outside the office. It also highlights the importance of creating a culture of caring and supporting employees' well-being, especially in the context of remote or hybrid work arrangements. The second trend highlights the growing expectation for organizations to address social and environmental issues and make a positive impact on the community. It discusses the risks that climate change poses to businesses and the need for collective action to mitigate them. The paper recommends involving employees through sustainability employee resource groups and internal campaigns to promote energy-saving practices. It also suggests providing volunteer opportunities and donations to support causes employees are passionate about. Furthermore, it emphasizes the significance of making even small changes to reduce the organization's carbon footprint and celebrating wins to foster positive habits.

[Center for Creative Leadership \(2022\)](#) highlights twelve challenges that new managers often encounter. These challenges include:

1. Shifting Mindset: Adapting from a task-focused mindset to a leadership mindset.
2. Building Relationships: Establishing effective relationships with team members and colleagues.
3. Asserting Authority: Finding the right balance between being approachable and asserting authority.
4. Delegating Effectively: Learning to delegate tasks and responsibilities to team members.
5. Providing Feedback: Delivering constructive feedback and performance evaluations.
6. Managing Conflict: Addressing and resolving conflicts that arise within the team.
7. Time Management: Prioritizing tasks and managing time effectively.
8. Making Decisions: Developing decision-making skills and making informed choices.
9. Developing Others: Mentoring and developing the skills of team members.
10. Managing Upwards: Building a positive relationship with superiors and managing expectations.
11. Handling Stress: Coping with the pressures and demands of the managerial role.
12. Continuous Learning: Embracing a mindset of ongoing learning and professional development.

[CMOE \(2023\)](#) blog discusses influential business leaders who have made a significant impact on the business world. It highlights the qualities that make these leaders successful, such as being informative and innovative, goal-oriented, possessing solid communication skills, and being risk-takers. The article provides a list of 20 influential business leaders, including:

1. Reshma Saujani: Founder of Girls Who Code, empowering women in the workplace.
2. Tim Cook: CEO of Apple, leading the company through innovation and expansion.
3. Sheryl Sandberg: Former COO of Facebook and advocate for women in business.
4. Bob Iger: Executive Chairman of Disney, responsible for major acquisitions and park expansions.
5. Reed Hastings: Co-founder and CEO of Netflix, transforming digital entertainment.
6. Mary Barra: Chairman and CEO of General Motors, driving innovation in the electric automobile market.
7. Huateng “Pony” Ma: Founder and president of Tencent, one of the largest internet companies in China.
8. Jack Ma: Founder of Alibaba Group, leading the company to become a global e-commerce giant.
9. Jan Koum: Co-founder of WhatsApp, revolutionizing communication through the popular messaging app.
10. Bill Gates: Co-founder of Microsoft, philanthropist, and advocate for global health and education.
11. Elon Musk: Founder of SpaceX, Tesla Motors, and advocate for renewable energy and space exploration.
12. Warren Buffett: CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, renowned investor, and philanthropist.

The article also discusses other influential leaders such as Jeff Bezos, Ursula Burns, Arianna Huffington, Indra Nooyi, Meg Whitman, and Rosalind Brewer ([CMOE, 2023](#)).

As highlighted in the article “The Top 15 Management Challenges Facing Managers Today” by [Growth Engineering \(2023\)](#), some of the key challenges include managing remote teams, ensuring employee well-being, addressing skill shortages, promoting diversity and inclusion, and navigating data compliance and cybersecurity issues. To overcome these challenges, managers

need to prioritize effective communication, foster a supportive and inclusive work culture, and provide resources and support for remote employees. It is crucial to invest in upskilling and re-skilling initiatives to bridge the skills gap and ensure the organization remains competitive. Attracting a diverse talent pool and implementing a comprehensive onboarding process are vital for successful talent acquisition.

The article explains the benefits of incorporating modern management theories, such as boosting productivity, aiding decision-making, improving employee engagement, promoting objectivity, and enabling adaptability. It also explores three approaches to modern management: the quantitative approach, the contingency approach, and the systems approach. The quantitative approach uses statistics and mathematical techniques to solve complex problems and make objective decisions. The contingency approach states that the optimal management style depends on the situation and requires leaders to be flexible and adaptable. The systems approach views organizations as complex collections of various components that work together towards a common goal. Overall, the article emphasizes the importance of understanding and implementing modern management theories to effectively lead organizations in today's rapidly changing business environment ([Indeed Editorial Team, 2023](#)).

Managers used to be selected and promoted based on their ability to evaluate performance and manage tasks. However, three disruptive trends - normalization of remote work, automation, and changing employee expectations - are challenging traditional definitions of the manager role. In this new era of management, it is more important for managers to understand how employees feel rather than just what they are doing. Leading with empathy is crucial for success in this environment. Organizations and HR functions need to develop managers' skills, shift mindsets, and create the capacity for this new approach ([Kropp et al., 2021](#)).

The YouTube video titled "Why this is the moment to change" discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic could serve as a positive catalyst for substantial management changes. In the video, Jo Owen CMgr CCMI explores the notion that the pandemic has opened up an opportunity for transformative shifts in management practices. In the past, simply being the manager that people had to follow was sufficient, but nowadays, rather than relying on command and control, managers need to acquire the skills of trust-building, influencing, and persuasion ([Chartered Management Institute, 2022](#)).

The author ([From Day One, 2022](#)) underscores the imperative for businesses to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion, particularly in championing marginalized communities. It also delves into the evolving landscape of caregiving and its influence on employee well-being. Additionally, the article underscores the significance of managers in cultivating meaningful connections with their team members and the role of empathy in effective leadership.

According to [Schwantes \(2022\)](#), Google conducted a year-long research project called Project Oxygen to identify the traits of great managers. The project involved gathering over 10,000 observations about managers across more than 100 variables. The researchers also conducted interviews with managers to gather additional data. The results of the research identified five key traits that successful managers consistently exhibited:

1. Being good coaches: Successful managers engage with their team members, care about their development, and help them perform at their best.
2. Not micromanaging: Empowering employees and trusting them to perform their work leads to a more positive employee experience.

3. Showing interest in employees' well-being: Leaders need to prioritize employees' holistic well-being, including their mental, emotional, and physical health.
4. Listening to the team: Active listening is a crucial skill for effective communication and building trust with employees.
5. Helping employees with career development: Managers play a vital role in supporting and fostering the growth and development of their team members.

Watson (2023) emphasizes the importance of strong leadership and management skills for success in today's business landscape. The article highlights that effective leadership and management are crucial for navigating the ever-changing business environment and competing in the global economy. It distinguishes between leadership and management, stating that while management focuses on getting things done, leadership involves inspiring and influencing others to achieve a common goal. The article emphasizes the role of leadership in setting the vision for a company, making tough decisions, communicating effectively, and building strong teams. On the other hand, it discusses the importance of management in ensuring smooth day-to-day operations, handling various tasks, motivating employees, and fostering collaboration. To be successful leaders or managers in a competitive environment, the article provides several tips. It suggests staying updated with the latest trends and changes in the business world, being a good communicator, and being proactive in taking control and making decisions. It also recommends developing leadership and management skills through studying principles, practical application, taking courses or workshops, and learning from others.

Vorina et al. (2023) emphasize the challenge of developing smart individuals due to a combination of natural abilities, education, and training. Limited access to education worldwide contributes to a scarcity of smart people. Hence, investing in education is vital for nurturing intelligence and fostering a smart world. This requires a blend of smart people and compassionate love. The paper's thesis, supported by a literature review, underscores the need for more intelligent individuals and the promotion of compassionate love to achieve a smarter world.

Recent research (Računalniške novice, 2023) suggests that advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) may lead to the automation of a quarter of human work. Generative AI, such as ChatGPT, is expected to increase productivity and raise the global gross domestic product by seven percent over a decade. The article highlights the potential impact of AI on various professions, including lawyers, administrative workers, and even company directors. Dictador, a Polish beverage company, is the first in the world to "employ" an AI named Mika as its director. Mika assists the company in finding new customers, selecting designers for packaging, and organizing events. The decisions made by Mika are unbiased and rational, as it does not rely on emotions. However, Mika's decision-making is still subject to human approval, and it cannot terminate employees or implement radical company reorganizations without the consent of other directors.

The paper "Do You Have What It Takes To Be A Modern Leader?" explores the qualities of modern leaders. It highlights that modern leaders embrace different perspectives and approaches to problem-solving, rather than considering themselves the smartest individuals in the room (Forbes, 2021).

"What Does it Mean to Be a Modern Leader?" discusses modern leadership as a combination of intellectual and emotional intelligence. Modern leaders lead with curiosity, wisdom, and perspective (head) as well as empathy and compassion (heart) (The Growth Faculty, 2023).

[Fleximize \(2023\)](#) emphasizes the importance of connecting employees to purpose, accomplishment, and each other. Modern leaders demonstrate how their employees' work contributes to a greater impact.

[CoachHub \(2022\)](#) examines different leadership styles and their impact on employee well-being. The following modern leadership styles are discussed:

1. Transformational leadership: This style focuses on the positive development of followers and encourages collaboration, independent thinking, and job satisfaction. Transformational leaders inspire their teams through their passion for a shared vision or cause.
2. Agile leadership: Agile leaders create an environment that fosters team growth and success, regardless of circumstances. They provide support, clear expectations, regular feedback, and resources to empower their team members.
3. Servant leadership: Servant leaders focus on serving their team and company. They mentor and guide their team members, promote an inclusive environment, and prioritize the needs and growth of their employees.
4. Authentic leadership: Authentic leaders lead by example and value integrity in everything they do. They are honest, trustworthy, and make decisions based on principles rather than personal gain.
5. Positive leadership: Positive leaders create an optimistic and community-oriented environment. They focus on a shared vision of success, encourage their teams, and foster a positive mindset among team members.

It explores the positive effects of transformational leadership and agile leadership on well-being.

3. DISCUSSION

Our objective is to address the question: What defines modern leadership?

Multiple authors present varying viewpoints and conclusions regarding the definition of modern leadership. Here, we will discuss a few of them. Several papers delve into modern leadership:

“Do You Have What It Takes To Be A Modern Leader?” ([Forbes, 2021](#)) emphasizes diverse problem-solving approaches.

“What Does it Mean to Be a Modern Leader?” ([The Growth Faculty, 2023](#)) highlights emotional and intellectual intelligence in leadership.

“Modern Leadership in Today’s Workplace” ([Fleximize, 2023](#)) underscores connecting employees to purpose.

[Jameslopresti \(2022\)](#) gives us a good look at three types of management theories: classical, behavioral, and modern. It tells us where these ideas came from, what they’re about, where they work well, and where they have limitations. The paper also mentions different theories within these groups, showing that there are many ways to think about how to manage people and organizations. It reminds us that in today’s complex business world, it’s important to be flexible and use different theories as needed.

[Workhuman \(2022\)](#) talks about two important trends in the workplace. The first trend is all about making the workplace more people-friendly. It’s about creating an environment where

employees can be their best selves. It says we should rethink how we do business and remember that work is part of life. We should value the moments that make us human, both at work and outside of it. The paper also tells us to care for our employees' well-being, especially when they work from home or in a mix of in-office and remote settings.

The article discusses the benefits of modern management theories, such as productivity enhancement, better decision-making, improved employee engagement, objectivity, and adaptability. It explores three modern management approaches: quantitative, contingency, and systems. The quantitative approach uses math for objective decisions, the contingency approach stresses adaptability, and the systems approach sees organizations as complex systems. In summary, the article emphasizes the importance of understanding and applying these theories to lead effectively in today's fast-changing business world ([Indeed Editorial Team, 2023](#)).

The way managers used to be chosen and promoted was based on their ability to evaluate work and handle tasks, but now, things have changed because of remote work, automation, and how employees expect to be treated. In this new way of managing, it's more important for managers to understand how their employees feel, not just what they're doing. Being understanding and caring as a leader is really important for success in this new situation. So, organizations and HR departments need to help managers learn and think differently to be good at this new way of leading ([Kropp et al., 2021](#)).

In the past, simply being the manager that people had to follow was sufficient, but nowadays, rather than relying on command and control, managers need to acquire the skills of trust-building, influencing, and persuasion ([Chartered Management Institute, 2022](#)).

[Watson \(2023\)](#) spotlights the significance of leadership and management skills in today's business landscape, differentiating their roles and advocating for continuous learning and adaptability.

Recent research suggests that AI advancements may automate a significant portion of human work, potentially impacting various professions. Polish company Dictador employs an AI named Mika as a director, aiding in customer acquisition and decision-making. Mika's decisions are rational and unbiased but require human approval for major actions ([Računalniške novice, 2023](#)).

[CoachHub \(2022\)](#) explores transformational, agile, servant, authentic, and positive leadership styles' impact on well-being.

To sum up, modern leadership involves building trust and signifies a fundamental shift in leadership paradigms, emphasizing the necessity for adaptability, empathy, and trust-building. Leadership and management should recognize the importance of continuous learning, growth, and the practical application of leadership and management skills. Also, the role of AI in business operations is expected to become increasingly crucial.

4. CONCLUSION

Modern leadership requires agility, adaptability, and a proactive approach to address the complex challenges faced by managers today. By embracing innovative solutions, nurturing a supportive work environment, and prioritizing the well-being and development of employees, leaders can navigate the modern landscape successfully and drive organizational growth.

The article concludes by summarizing the key points of modern leadership: striving for improvement, holding back to let others shine, working at eye level, serving the system, and responsibly managing resources. Furthermore, managers should focus on enhancing team productivity through effective tracking and collaboration tools. Building a strong organizational culture that fosters employee engagement and a sense of purpose is key to driving performance and motivation. Leaders must continuously adapt their leadership styles and strategies to meet the evolving needs of their teams and the business landscape.

We can conclude, based on [Kropp et al. \(2021\)](#), that managers should pay attention to how employees feel, not just what they do. This means being caring and understanding leaders, so companies and HR teams should help managers learn these new skills. In the past, just being the manager that people had to follow was enough, but now, instead of commanding and controlling, managers need to learn how to build trust, influence, and persuade, as noted by the [Chartered Management Institute \(2022\)](#).

Study limitations include contextual variability, where leadership effectiveness varies with organizational factors, and a temporal scope limited to data up to 2023, potentially missing evolving leadership trends. Additionally, the paper primarily focuses on leaders' responsibilities towards employees, neglecting the examination of social and environmental responsibilities, which are not addressed in the research.”

Practical applications encompass fostering innovation, prioritizing employee well-being, advancing leadership development, integrating technology, and entrusting AI to aid leadership.

Future explorations in modern leadership should encompass a range of domains. These domains include Ethical Leadership, which explores ethical decision-making in our rapidly evolving world. Cultural Intelligence is another vital area that entails studying cultural sensitivity to promote inclusivity in global workplaces. Additionally, Cross-Generational Leadership is of utmost importance, as it focuses on effectively bridging generational gaps and addressing the unique challenges of leading Generation Z.

“The modern world requires smart leaders who are highly empathetic and compassionate. These leaders will need to engage in continuous learning and utilize AI as assistants.”

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