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E-Leadership and its Impact on Employee Motivation

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Abstract
The rapid development of digital technologies and the increasing adoption of remote and hybrid work have transformed the way organizations communicate, coordinate, and lead employees. E-leadership refers to the process of influencing individuals and teams through information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly when leaders and followers are geographically or physically separated. This research paper examines the relationship between e-leadership and employee motivation through a review of existing academic literature. The paper focuses on how digital communication, trust, empowerment, transformational leadership, recognition, employee autonomy, and virtual team management influence employee motivation. Existing research indicates that effective leadership is positively associated with intrinsic motivation, while leadership characterized by inadequate communication, excessive control, or abusive behavior can reduce motivation. Research on e-leadership further suggests that trust, communication, coordination, and supportive leadership are particularly important in virtual work environments. The paper concludes that e-leadership can strengthen employee motivation when leaders combine technological competence with interpersonal and motivational skills. Organizations should therefore develop e-leaders who can communicate effectively, build trust, provide autonomy, recognize employee contributions, and create meaningful connections in digitally mediated workplaces.

Keywords: E-leadership, employee motivation, digital leadership, virtual teams, transformational leadership, remote work, employee engagement

1. Introduction

Technology has fundamentally changed the modern workplace. Organizations increasingly depend on email, video conferencing, collaboration platforms, instant messaging, project-management systems, and other digital technologies to coordinate employees. The growth of remote and hybrid working has also reduced the importance of physical proximity between leaders and employees. As a result, traditional approaches to leadership have increasingly been supplemented by forms of leadership conducted through digital technologies.

One important concept emerging from this transformation is e-leadership. E-leadership can broadly be understood as leadership in which information and communication technologies mediate interactions between leaders and followers. Avolio, Kahai, and Dodge (2000) [1] established an important theoretical foundation for e-leadership by arguing that technology does not simply support leadership; rather, technology can change organizational structures and the way leadership itself is practiced. ScienceDirect

E-leadership has become particularly important because employees working remotely may experience reduced face-to-face interaction, social isolation, communication difficulties, and uncertainty concerning expectations and performance. Consequently, the ability of leaders to motivate employees through digital channels has become a significant organizational issue.

Employee motivation is another fundamental factor affecting organizational effectiveness. Motivated employees are more likely to demonstrate commitment, persistence, creativity, engagement, and high-quality performance. A meta-analysis of 50 independent samples involving 21,873 participants found that transformational, ethical, servant, empowering, and leader-member exchange leadership were positively associated with intrinsic motivation, whereas abusive supervision was negatively associated with intrinsic motivation (Zhang *et al*., 2022) [9]. PubMed Central (PMC)+1 Therefore, this paper examines how e-leadership influences employee motivation and identifies the major leadership practices that can enhance motivation in virtual and digitally mediated workplaces.

2. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of this research paper are:

1. To explain the concept and importance of e-leadership.
2. To examine the relationship between e-leadership and employee motivation.
3. To identify leadership practices that enhance employee motivation in virtual work environments.

3. Concept of E-Leadership

E-leadership emerged in response to the growing use of advanced information technologies in organizations. Avolio *et al*. (2000) [1] proposed that technology and leadership influence each other. In other words, technology changes how leaders communicate and coordinate, while leadership practices also influence how technology is adopted and used within organizations. ScienceDirect

Avolio, Sosik, Kahai, and Baker (2014) [2] later revisited the concept and emphasized that e-leadership encompasses leadership processes influenced by advanced information technologies, including virtual teams, electronic communication, video conferencing, and other digital systems. ScienceDirect

E-leadership therefore involves more than simply using technology to communicate. An effective e-leader must understand how digital communication affects relationships, trust, collaboration, employee autonomy, and organizational culture.

In traditional workplaces, leaders can observe employees directly, communicate informally, and provide immediate feedback. In virtual workplaces, many of these interactions occur through technological platforms. Consequently, e-leaders must deliberately create opportunities for communication, recognition, collaboration, and social connection.

4. Employee Motivation

Employee motivation refers to the psychological forces that influence employees' willingness to initiate, direct, and sustain work-related behavior. Motivation can be broadly divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation occurs when individuals engage in work because they find it interesting, meaningful, satisfying, or personally rewarding. Extrinsic motivation is influenced by external outcomes such as financial rewards, promotions, recognition, job security, or other benefits.

Kavitha M (2017) The main aim of this study is to identify the perceptual difference of Employees with respect to the job satisfaction of the firm and to find out the factors determining Job Satisfaction of employees in the firm. Finally, To measure the impact of job satisfaction of employees. The researcher used Simple random sampling technique has been used for analysis. Sample size of the study consists of 100 respondents. The results shows that monetary factors of salary and Non-monetary factor training and development influenced employees to get job satisfaction. Finally it concludes that job satisfaction is the main factor to increased wealth of the firm and to feel happiness to the employees.

Leadership plays an important role in creating conditions that support motivation. The meta-analysis conducted by Zhang *et al*. (2022) [9] provides particularly strong evidence. Their findings demonstrated positive relationships between intrinsic motivation and several leadership approaches, including transformational, ethical, servant, empowering, and leader-member exchange leadership. Frontiers

Interestingly, the study found that empowering, ethical, and servant leadership had stronger relative contributions to intrinsic motivation than transformational leadership. This suggests that employee motivation is not dependent on a single leadership style. Instead, leaders can motivate employees by providing autonomy, demonstrating ethical behavior, supporting employees, and developing high-quality relationships.

5. Relationship Between E-Leadership and Employee Motivation

E-leadership can influence employee motivation through several mechanisms.

5.1. Digital Communication

Communication is one of the most important responsibilities of an e-leader. In virtual workplaces, employees may have fewer opportunities for spontaneous conversations with managers and colleagues. Poor communication can result in uncertainty, misunderstanding, isolation, and reduced motivation.

Effective e-leaders use appropriate digital communication channels and establish clear expectations. Regular video meetings, instant messaging, digital feedback, and collaborative platforms can help employees understand their responsibilities and remain connected to organizational objectives.

Research on e-leadership in virtual teams indicates that leader communication and coordination are important components of perceived e-leadership. A study of 184 participants in a Canadian public organization found that perceived e-leadership—including leader trust, communication, coordination, and leader behavior—had a significant, although relatively small, effect on virtual-team performance. ScienceDirect

Although performance and motivation are distinct concepts, this evidence demonstrates that leadership behavior in virtual environments has measurable organizational consequences.

5.2. Trust

Trust is particularly important when leaders and employees do not regularly interact face-to-face. Employees need

confidence that their leaders will communicate honestly, support them, evaluate them fairly, and recognize their contributions.

E-leaders can build trust by being consistent, transparent, responsive, and reliable. Excessive monitoring can have the opposite effect because employees may feel that they are not trusted to perform their work independently.

Research on virtual teams identifies trust, leadership, communication technology, and collaboration as major themes in the virtual-team literature. DOI.org+1

Thus, trust should be considered an important motivational mechanism in e-leadership.

5.3. Empowerment and Autonomy

Digital work environments can provide employees with greater flexibility and independence. However, this potential benefit can be undermined if managers attempt to control every aspect of employees' work through digital monitoring.

Empowering leadership is positively associated with intrinsic motivation. The meta-analysis by Zhang *et al.* (2022) [9] reported a positive relationship between empowering leadership and intrinsic motivation, with a corrected correlation of approximately.45. Frontiers

E-leaders can therefore enhance motivation by giving employees appropriate decision-making authority, flexibility, and responsibility. Rather than constantly monitoring employees, leaders should focus on goals, outcomes, support, and accountability.

5.4. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is another important component of effective e-leadership. Transformational leaders motivate employees by communicating an inspiring vision, encouraging innovation, demonstrating individualized consideration, and stimulating employees intellectually.

The relationship between transformational leadership and motivation is supported by meta-analytic evidence. Zhang *et al.* (2022) [9] found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and intrinsic motivation. PubMed

More recent evidence also indicates that transformational leadership can influence employee behavior through motivational, relational, and collaborative mechanisms. A 2026 meta-analysis found that psychological empowerment, work engagement, intrinsic motivation, psychological safety, and knowledge sharing can help explain the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative workplace behavior. Springer

For e-leaders, transformational behaviors can be communicated through digital channels by articulating a clear organizational vision, recognizing achievements, encouraging new ideas, and helping employees understand how their individual work contributes to broader organizational goals.

5.5. Recognition and Feedback

Recognition is another important motivational factor. In physical workplaces, leaders may provide informal recognition through everyday interactions. In virtual workplaces, these opportunities may be reduced.

E-leaders should therefore deliberately recognize employee achievements through digital meetings, messages, organizational communication platforms, and performance reviews. Feedback should be timely, constructive, and specific.

Recognition can strengthen employees' perception that their work is valued. It can also contribute to organizational commitment and engagement.

6. E-Leadership During Remote and Hybrid Work

The importance of e-leadership increased substantially as organizations moved toward remote and hybrid working. Chamakiotis, Panteli, and Davison (2021) [4] examined e-leadership in the context of the large-scale transition to virtual work and argued that leaders need to adapt their practices to the characteristics of reconfigured virtual teams. ScienceDirect

Remote work creates several leadership challenges. Employees may experience reduced social interaction, difficulty separating work from personal life, communication overload, and uncertainty about expectations. Leaders must therefore balance digital communication with employee autonomy.

A systematic review of digital leadership literature similarly identifies e-leadership, digital leadership, and virtual leadership as related concepts involving leadership through ICT and digital environments. MDPI

Consequently, effective e-leadership requires both technological and human competencies. Technology provides the communication infrastructure, but leadership determines whether that technology creates connection or disconnection.

7. Challenges of E-Leadership

Despite its potential benefits, e-leadership presents several challenges.

7.1. Communication Barriers

Digital communication can remove important non-verbal cues. Tone, facial expressions, and body language may be difficult to interpret through email or text messages. Misunderstandings can therefore occur more frequently.

7.2. Social Isolation

Remote employees may feel disconnected from colleagues and the organization. E-leaders must create opportunities for social interaction and team cohesion.

7.3. Digital Overload

Constant emails, online meetings, messages, and notifications can create digital fatigue. Leaders should avoid unnecessary meetings and establish appropriate communication norms.

7.4. Lack of Trust

If managers rely excessively on digital surveillance, employees may perceive a lack of trust. This can reduce autonomy and intrinsic motivation.

7.5. Technological Inequality

Not all employees have the same access to reliable internet connections, devices, software, or appropriate work environments. These differences can influence employee experiences and motivation.

7.6. Reduced Personal Connection

Technology can make communication more efficient but does not completely replace human interaction. Leaders need to maintain personal relationships with employees even when most interactions occur digitally.

8. Theoretical Framework

The relationship between e-leadership and motivation can be understood using several leadership and motivational theories.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that people are more intrinsically motivated when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported. E-leadership can contribute to these needs by giving employees autonomy, providing developmental feedback, and creating opportunities for social connection.

Transformational Leadership Theory explains how leaders motivate followers through vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These principles can be adapted to digital environments.

Social Exchange Theory proposes that positive relationships between leaders and employees can encourage employees to reciprocate through commitment and positive work behaviors. In virtual teams, trust and supportive communication are particularly important for developing these relationships.

These theoretical perspectives indicate that technology itself does not motivate employees. Instead, the leadership behaviors communicated through technology determine whether digital work environments support or weaken motivation.

9. Discussion

The literature reviewed in this paper indicates that e-leadership has an important relationship with employee motivation, particularly in remote and virtual work environments. However, the relationship should not be interpreted as simply technological. Effective e-leadership depends on how leaders use technology to facilitate meaningful human interactions.

The strongest evidence comes from research demonstrating that leadership behaviors such as empowerment, ethical leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and high-quality leader-member relationships are positively related to intrinsic motivation. PubMed Central (PMC)

This finding has an important implication for organizations. Providing managers with sophisticated digital platforms will not automatically create motivated employees. Organizations must also train leaders in communication, emotional intelligence, trust building, conflict management, coaching, recognition, and employee empowerment.

Recent research also suggests that leadership effectiveness depends on context. A 2026 meta-analysis of 625 samples and more than 200,000 participants found that transformational leadership was positively associated with several outcomes but that its effects differed across occupational, cultural, and temporal contexts. PubMed

Therefore, e-leaders should avoid applying a single leadership style to every employee or situation. Different employees may require different forms of support depending on their experience, job characteristics, cultural background, technological skills, and degree of independence.

10. Recommendations

Based on the literature reviewed, organizations can improve e-leadership and employee motivation by adopting the following practices:

1. **Develop digital communication skills:** Train managers to communicate clearly and effectively through email, video conferencing, messaging platforms, and collaboration systems.
2. **Build trust rather than excessive surveillance:** Leaders should evaluate employees primarily through outcomes and agreed objectives rather than constant digital monitoring.
3. **Increase employee autonomy:** Give employees appropriate flexibility regarding how and when they complete their work.
4. **Provide regular feedback:** Virtual employees need timely feedback so that they understand their performance and development opportunities.
5. **Recognize employee contributions:** Digital platforms should be used to acknowledge achievements and celebrate team successes.
6. **Promote social connection:** Organizations should provide opportunities for informal interaction and team-building in addition to formal work meetings.
7. **Develop transformational leadership capabilities:** Leaders should communicate an inspiring vision and help employees understand how their work contributes to organizational objectives.
8. **Support employee well-being:** Leaders should recognize the risks of digital overload and encourage reasonable boundaries between work and personal life.
9. **Improve technological competence:** Employees and leaders should receive appropriate training in the digital tools required for effective collaboration.
10. **Adapt leadership to context:** Organizations should recognize that employees differ in their needs and motivational preferences.

11. Conclusion

E-leadership has become increasingly important as organizations adopt remote, hybrid, and digitally mediated forms of work. The literature indicates that effective e-leadership can contribute to employee motivation through communication, trust, empowerment, recognition, support, and transformational leadership behaviors.

However, e-leadership should not be viewed simply as the use of technology to manage employees. Its effectiveness depends on the leader's ability to use technology to create meaningful relationships and support employees' psychological and professional needs. Research demonstrates that empowering, ethical, servant, transformational, and relationship-oriented leadership are positively associated with intrinsic motivation. Frontiers

The major implication is that organizations need to develop **human-centered digital leadership**. Technology should be treated as an enabler of leadership rather than a substitute for leadership. When e-leaders communicate clearly, establish trust, provide autonomy, recognize contributions, encourage development, and maintain social connection, digital workplaces can become environments in which employees remain motivated and engaged.

Future research should examine e-leadership across different

cultures, industries, generations, and hybrid-work arrangements. Longitudinal research would also be useful for determining how e-leadership affects employee motivation over extended periods. As digital technologies and artificial intelligence continue to transform workplaces, understanding the human side of digital leadership will remain an important area of organizational research.

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