

## Communication Significance in Digital Leadership: Does it Matter?

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### Abstract

One of the leadership philosophies that is now getting a lot of attention is digital leadership. Communication is one of the concepts that is directly associated with digital leadership. However, there hasn't been much discussion of this concept to gauge digital leadership. This has bad consequences because the role of communication in digital leadership and related theory cannot be properly explained. So, the initiative of this study is to explore the significance of communication in evaluating digital leadership. In this study context, it was mentioned that communication is a key component of digital leadership because effective communication enables sharing expertise, improving communication with students in the classroom, and solving the problem of students not understanding instructions during the online teaching and learning process. Communication in digital leadership is also important to make the teaching and learning process smooth and help students solve problems in the classroom. The five-dimensional model of human communication and the dynamic transactional model are theories that are strongly linked to this concept. These two theories will guide the design of the communication aspects in digital leadership. This is because both theories can explain the elements that are necessary for effective communication. This study will help the education sector successfully integrate digital leadership by ensuring that important elements of communication are embedded in digital leadership. It is advisable to conduct a study on the communication level by creating an index as empirical evidence of digital leadership among educators.

**Keywords:** Communication, Digital Leadership, Five-Dimensional Model of Human Communication, Dynamic Transactional Model, Education.

### Introduction

Organizations may manage risks and ongoing uncertainty with the aid of digital leadership (Fenwick et al., 2021). Digital leadership combines the transformational leadership style with

the application of digital technology (Alif & Sary, 2022). The combination of a leader's culture and expertise in maximising the use of digital technologies to provide value for the organisations is known as "digital leadership" (Rudito & Sinaga, 2017). Rendering to Mohamed (2022), research shows that digital leadership has a considerable impact on employee performance and has a direct impact on that performance. Based on this research, digital leadership is a combination of leadership context and technology that improves employee performance (Avolio et al., 2000).

At various times, digital leadership necessitates the use of extra leadership philosophies (Balci et al., 2022). The concept of leadership is also shaped by modern technical developments (Narbona, 2016). Digital technologies in this context change the character of teamwork, having a substantial impact on the idea of leadership (Larson & DeChurch, 2020). For aspiring leaders in the online "tribe structure", Chieffi (2010) believes that digital tools are essential. According to Castells (2012), there is a clear link between the use of new technologies and the influence of leaders on the general populace. This interaction between leadership and technology is said to be mutually beneficial.

The Covid-19 pandemic outbreak towards the end of 2019 had a significant impact on the rise in popularity of the concept of digital leadership (Balci et al., 2022). Traditional physical leadership varies from digital leadership in specific ways (Balci et al., 2022). The ability to use digital technology effectively will enable digital leaders to build their interventions practically (Narbona, 2016). Digital tools are expected to enable distant (remote) communication among digital leaders (Balci et al., 2022). Moreover, the difficulties caused by virtual collaboration should be handled and compensated for by digital leaders (Larson & DeChurch, 2020).

### **Worldwide and Malaysian Perspectives on The Functions of Digital Leadership in Educational Overview**

On the international scene, literature shows that the evolution of digital leadership is occurring in school leadership (Thompson, 2015). Overseas, many of the definitions given by researchers include creating connections, influencing others, initiating sustainable change through access to information, and building relationships in an effort to anticipate significant change for future school success (Herold & Fedor, 2008). Another function is a combination of dynamic thinking, behavior, and the skills to change and improve school culture using technology (Sheninger, 2014). In New York, for example, most principals use iPads to supervise teachers through programs synonymous with Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) or Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) (Sheninger, 2014).

In Malaysia, school leaders are not yet able to fully implement the constructs of digital leadership, which shows that the functions of the digital learning space do not yet meet the minimum requirements (Yusof et al., 2019). School leaders who want to implement digital leadership must use their space and opportunities wisely to bring about major changes in school culture to have a positive impact on the education system in Malaysia, which aims to leverage the elements of technology and digital mastery to improve students' marketability in the 4.0 era of education (Bahtiar et al., 2014). Efforts in this direction include the Malaysian Ministry of Education issuing a circular allowing students to bring personal devices such as laptops, tablets, and audio devices for learning and other activities that support the implementation of the curriculum and co-curriculum in schools (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2018).

**Communication for Digital Leadership in Malaysia: Reasons Why it's Important to be Ambitious!**

Communication is an important aspect of digital leadership in Malaysia. Sheninger (2019) explains that communication focuses on different types of information that can be transmitted through different devices. Communication helps complete and prepare tasks, receive and share important information, promote a shared vision and mission, make decisions consensually, build relationships, and encourage people to embrace change. Leaders who communicate effectively listen carefully, encourage dialogue (listening, responding, adding thoughts), ask questions, explain intentions clearly, create an open environment for conversation, and use a multi-faceted approach. A teacher should have effective communication skills. Sheninger (2019) states the best communicators rely on being noticeable, consistent, and engaging to get the right information to the right people at the right time. The power of social media can engage stakeholders through two-way communication. Examples of social media include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and blogs. Video conferencing such as Skype and Facetime create communication opportunities like face-to-face meetings where eye contact, tone of voice, empathy, and mutual respect are required.

In Malaysia, there are several situations that can be associated with the communication aspect of digital leadership. These include effective communication to share expertise, improving communication with students in class, and communication to solve the problem of students not understanding instructions during the online teaching and learning process. Teachers are recommended to adopt an online approach and use the appropriate features of an application or software. Communication in digital leadership is also important to make the teaching and learning process smooth and to help students solve problems in the classroom. The teacher must design a smart unwinding strategy so that the teaching and learning process can proceed as planned.

**Communication in Digital Leadership**

One of the key components of digital leadership is communication. As evidence, numerous studies list communication as one of the constructs used to evaluate digital leadership in education. For example, studies by (Saraih et al., 2022; Karakose et al., 2021; Yusof et al., 2019; Rusnati & Gaffar, 2021). This demonstrates that in recent years, Malaysia and other nations have utilised communication as a way to assess digital leadership. As a result, the paper will go into great detail about the various forms of communication that are pertinent to digital leadership.

Before an explanation of forms of communication, theories related to communication will be discovered earlier. There are two significant theories which are the five-dimensional model of human communication and the transactional model. The five-dimensional model of human communication in this study is referred to Mowlana (2018) while the transactional model is explained by (West and Turner, 2007). Explanation of the theories is important as a fundamental for the constructs in digital leadership.

It will first be identified linked theories before explaining various ways of communication. Two important theories include the transactional model and the five-dimensional model of human communication. This study used the five-dimensional model of human communication proposed by Mowlana (2018), whereas the transactional model proposed by West and Turner (2007). Theoretical explanations are crucial because they serve as the foundation for digital leadership structures. Doherty et al (2008); White and Klein (2002)'s explanation reported

that, theorising is the act of methodically arranging and developing ideas to explain phenomena, and a theory is the entire collection of empirically testable, interconnected concepts that have been developed to explain those phenomena.

### **Communication Theory in Digital leadership**

#### **Five-dimensional Model of Human Communication**

Fundamentally, communication is a social process of sharing (Mowlana, 2019). Sharing indicates that a sign is in some manner accepted, recognised, and kept in common and does not only mean that it is passed from one person to another (Mowlana, 2019). Human communication refers to the exchange of information and ideas between two or more people, typically via language or other forms of technology (Mowlana, 1971, 1974). One-dimensional studies of human-to-human communication have prompted the growth of the domains of interpersonal, group, organisational, and mass communication (Mowlana, 1971, 1974). This model's five interconnected and dynamic components are connection with God, with nature, with oneself, with people, and with technology (Mowlana, 2019).

Mowlana (2019) emphasized that every worldwide religious and cultural system has its own unique communication rituals. For instance, millions of Muslims practise their regular salat (prayer) five times each day, and they have profound connections to God, themselves, and nature (Mowlana, 2019). Next, the majority of people have engaged in direct communication with "mother nature" throughout recorded human history (Mowlana, 2019). Japanese culture, for instance, has always placed a high value on interaction with nature (Mowlana, 2019). However, digital leadership in the educational setting is not closely related to the two dimensions of connection with God and communication with nature.

Next, in a five-dimensional model of human communication, expressing oneself through words or signs can entail communicating with others (Mowlana, 2019). It is generally acknowledged that a key aspect of human communication and experience is our capacity to converse with ourselves (Mowlana, 2019). Both intrapersonal and interpersonal communication involve talking to oneself (Mowlana, 2019). An essential component of balanced human communication is intrapersonal communication (Mowlana, 2019). Digital leadership therefore requires communication with oneself and communication with others. Moreover, communication has always involved technology, even in the earliest civilisations (Mowlana, 2019). In addition to being utilised as a way of facilitating human conversation, communication technologies and tools can also be employed for that purpose alone (Mowlana, 2019). Individuals use communication technology just as much as people use other technologies (Mowlana, 2019). The term "communication technology" referred to the tools that humanity uses "for survival and evolution" (Mowlana, 2019). Technology influence has a significant impact on digital leadership.

#### **Transactional Model**

A dynamic transactional model (DTM) of communication was found after a review of the literature to be appropriate for simulating "two-way communication" at the level of the general public (Parackal et al., 2021). The fundamental principle of DTM is that communication involves active participation on the parts of both the sender and the recipient (Barnlund, 1970; Wood, 2017). Interactions at two different levels have an impact on communication (Parackal et al., 2021). One takes place between sender and receiver on a personal level (inter-transaction), and the other happens when people engage with their knowledge base on a cognitive level (intra-transaction) (Parackal et al., 2021).

The two kinds of interactions interact in a sophisticated way to reveal information (shared information), which serves as the foundation for co-creating meaning (Parackal et al., 2021). Some researchers have applied DTM in an innovative approach to assess the efficiency of communication in mass media. These scholars connected inter-transactional and intra-transactional transactions to mass media communication (Parackal et al., 2021). Dialogue and learning, two characteristics of social media that the model took into account (Colliander et al., 2015; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012, 2013; Ravenscroft, 2011; Wood, 2017). Digital leadership in educational settings places a strong emphasis on using social media as a communication tool.

### **Theory Contribution to Digital Leadership in Communication on Education Overviews Model**

Both theories are intended to contribute to digital leadership in communication. This article states that both theories, namely the five-dimensional model of human communication and the transactional model, can be developed. In the five-dimensional model of human communication, digital leadership in education relies more on connections with people and with technology. For example, communication with colleagues and communication with students. This communication takes place with the help of digital technology.

Also, in the transactional model, communication involves active participation of both teachers and colleagues and teachers and students. As explained in the previous subtopic, communication in digital leadership occurs both inter- and intransactionally to share information and create meaning together. In most situations, teachers are more inclined to use digital technologies such as social media platforms to support the teaching and learning process.

### **Communication in Digital Leadership: What can we Expect for Another 10 Years Ahead?**

School leadership plays a very important role in the effectiveness of educational institutions, starting with goal setting and ending with goal achievement (Nawawi et al., 2022). In the next 10 years, digital leadership will be the leading leadership style in education worldwide. It has been shown that strong school leadership is very important to significantly increase student achievement (Nawawi et al., 2022). This is in line with the findings of Dutta and Sahney (2016) that student achievement and school excellence are positively correlated with effective school leadership.

As leadership style moves toward digital leadership, all related constructs, including communication, must also be examined. Communication is divided into two areas, namely oral and written (Jeffri & Hamid, 2022). Nawawi et al (2022) claim that a new medium, namely virtual communication, is beginning to take a place in society. Therefore, more applications and software are being developed for communication that will influence digital leadership. These applications and software are beneficial for virtual oral or written communication.

### **Conclusion**

A few indicators are frequently mentioned to assess digital leadership. Communication is one of the indicators. The five-dimensional model of human communication and the transactional model are two theories that connect to communication based on this study. Each theory serves as direction for measuring communication in digital leadership. Verbal and non-verbal communication are the two main forms of communication. This study's discussion might be able to inform those who desire to undertake digital leadership training on things like the

details that need to be taken into consideration. Future study on digital leadership is encouraged to measure communication as one of the constructs.

This study contributes to communication theory in the context of digital leadership in education. Based on the five-dimensional model of human communication, digital leadership in education is closely related to only three dimensions, namely, connection to self, connection to people, and connection to technology. In contrast, the other two dimensions, namely connection with God and communication with nature, are not closely related. This study also supports the transactional model, meaning that communication in digital leadership occurs both inter- and intransactionally. In the context of this study, this refers to communication that involves active participation by teachers and colleagues as well as teachers and students. The study also suggests that the two theories of communication discussed serve as a reference for creating guidelines, standards, or manuals for communication in digital leadership in the education sector.

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