

ADAPTED COMMUNICATION IN LEADERSHIP: HOW FIVE LEADERSHIP STYLES NAVIGATE THE CHALLENGES OF DIGITALIZATION

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Abstract: The digital transformation of organizations has changed something fundamental in leadership. And not all leadership styles are equipped to handle this in the same way. How does authoritarian, democratic, transactional, transformational and servant leadership manage the digital transformation of communication? The examination is based on systematic review of refereed literature in Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar, presented under three theories: Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX), the communicative nature of leadership in terms of framing, and e-leadership. Authoritarian leadership receives new monitoring tools in digital platforms, but its authority was always based on being physically present and no app makes up for that. Democratic leadership has the participation it has always craved, but it is one thing to participate and quite another to deliberate, and the latter is harder online. Transactional leadership transitions to the digital world almost effortlessly because its task-monitoring style is a good fit, but this accelerates a motivational deficit. Transformational leadership is the hardest to adapt to: it requires the sense of being taken seriously and this is precisely what is hardest to convey digitally. Servant leadership is also affected because the individual focus of its attention has to be engineered rather than happen by proximity. This is not a hierarchy but rather a diagnostic of where the problem is for each leadership style, and what it takes for each to adapt.

Keywords: Digitalization; e-leadership; adaptation in an environment change; communication; leadership styles

Özet: Dijitalleşme çağı, farklı sektörlerde pek çok şeyi değiştirmiştir; liderlik ve liderlik iletişimi de bu durumdan muaf değildir. Kuruluşlar artık işin sadece yüz yüze değil, aynı zamanda uzaktan ve çevrimiçi olarak da yapılabileceği gerçeğiyle yüzleşmektedir. Bu zorlu değişim karşısında, farklı liderlik tarzlarına sahip liderler, dijital çağa uyum sağlamak için resmi çalışma tarzlarını değiştirmek zorundadır. Bu durumda, tüm liderlik tarzlarının aynı şekilde etkilendiği açıktır; bazıları bu süreçte daha fazla olanak kazanırken, bazıları kaybetmektedir. Bu makale, otoriter, demokratik, işlemsel, dönüşümsel ve hizmetkâr olmak üzere beş liderlik tarzında iletişimin nasıl farklı şekilde ele alındığını göstermektedir. Makale, dijitalleşme ve liderlere yönelik yapıcı talepleri, liderlik-üye değiş tokuş teorisi ve liderliğin iletişimsel inşası gibi bu konu üzerine kurulmuş farklı teoriler üzerinde teorik inceleme analizi kullanmıştır. Ayrıca makale, her liderlik stili için

dijitalleşmeye nasıl tepki verdiğini de göstermiştir. Bulgular, hiçbir stilin dijital dönüşümün baskılarından muaf olmadığını göstermektedir. Otoriter liderlik, gözetim araçları kazanır, ancak otoritesini işler kılan fiziksel varlığını yitirir. Demokratik liderlik daha fazla insana ulaşabilir, ancak gerçek diyalog korunmazsa gösterişçi hale gelme riskini taşır. İşlemsel liderlik, dijital sistemlere kolayca uyarlanabilir, ancak motivasyonel sınırlamaları yoğunlaştırır. Dönüşümsel liderlik, en güçlü nitelikleri ekranların filtrelediği insani sıcaklığa bağlı olduğu için en büyük zorlukla karşı karşıyadır. Hizmetkâr liderlik, dijital kanallar aracılığıyla samimi ilgiyi ifade etmekte zorlanır, ancak bilinçli çaba gösterildiğinde bağlantıyı sürdürmenin yeni yollarını bulur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijitalleşme; e-liderlik; çerçeveleme teorisi; liderlik iletişimi; liderlik stilleri

1. Introduction

Communicative environments are very different today than most leaders would have experienced them just thirty years ago. Leaders who used to interact with their teams in the office now need to build relationships, trust, and drive performance from screens, time zones and digital channels that are often asynchronous. This is not a minor organizational change. It alters the communicative resources available to leaders and this alteration has different effects on different leadership styles. Torre et al. (2020) suggested that digitalization is not just the use of new technology; it is the integration of technology into the organization that alters communication, relationships and power. Avolio et al. (2000) coined the term e-leadership to refer to this: if you are leading via advanced information technology, you need communicative skills that are not the same as those used in face-to-face settings.

The point of this argument is that not all leadership styles fare equally under digitalization. Each has its own communicative logic, its own assumptions about power, what motivates, what a leadership relationship is. Each of these logics has its own vulnerability to disruption when communication goes online. The approach of viewing digital leadership as one big challenge leads to advice that doesn't help a leader within any particular style. This review does not, however, take a universal approach, but draws comparisons among five styles: authoritarian, democratic, transactional, transformational, and servant leadership. These five styles were chosen because they represent the major

styles identified in the literature on leadership in organizations, and because they operate with different communicative principles. Authoritarian leadership retains communicative authority in the leader. Democratic leadership moves it down. Transactional leadership positions communication as a transaction: you do good, you get rewards. Transformational leadership communicates to followers to move them towards a greater goal. Servant leadership uses communication as a form of service. And they encounter digital communication in different ways, with different adaptation challenges. Three theories guide the analysis.

Leader-Member Exchange theory (Graen et al., 1995) forms the relational foundation: the quality of the leader-member relationship with each individual follower is crucial to leadership effectiveness, and quality of that relationship depends on quality of communication. Framing theory (Charteris-Black, 2006; Fairhurst, 2011) describes how leaders create meaning through language and other symbolic activities, and how changing the communication medium alters the framing resources available. The e-leadership model (Avolio et al., 2000; Torre et al., 2020) pinpoints what leaders of all five styles are required to do in a digital environment. The contribution of this article to the leadership communication field is a comparative rather than an individual approach to explaining the styles of leadership. The use of the three frameworks on all five styles allows us to see the different pattern of impact that digitalization has on leadership and what adaptation each style needs. The conceptual framework in Table 1 has captured these insights in a way that is useful for researchers and practitioners.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Leader-member exchange theory.

Graen et al. (1995) argued that leaders don't and can't treat all their followers the same. The relationship between a leader and each of their team members is separate and distinct, and is based on trust, respect, mutual commitment, and the role of the person in the organization. Martin et al. (2016) verified this and explained how it works: high-quality LMX creates trust in leadership, motivation, empowerment and job satisfaction, and these four factors combine to create higher performance. The relationship is a chain,

and it's the quality of the chain at an individual level that makes the difference. Dulebohn et al. (2012) showed that LMX quality is determined by both leaders and members. The leader's characteristics are support, trustworthiness, transformational leadership and fairness. On the member side, it is competence, positive attitude, personality, and performance.

LMX quality is also affected by relationship traits namely similarity, trust, and communication quality and by contextual traits such as climate, team and job traits. Fein et al. (2021) argued that all five styles of leadership examined here are associated with different LMX, because the style of communication impacts the quality of the leader-member relationship and that is what drives leadership effectiveness. When leadership communications are taken online, it is not just communication that is changing. It is the quality of those relationships, which is the key to leadership effectiveness.

2.2. The communicative construction of leadership

Leadership communication is multimodal and metaphorical as well as literal. Leaders influence followers not only through the content of their words but the frames they construct, the symbols they use and the narrative they tell of the organization (Charteris-Black, 2006). Fairhurst (2011) demonstrated meaning-making through framing is a key activity of leadership: selecting what aspects of a situation to emphasize, deciding on specific linguistic and narrative structures, and directing followers' interpretation of events in a way consistent with organizational goals.

Joullié et al. (2021) demonstrated that leaders' linguistic and rhetorical choices do not just convey pre-established authority they also constitute it. Leaders do not so much convey as they create organizational reality through their communicative choices. Seyranian (2014) complemented this by noting that leaders use inclusive language - the social language of "we" and collective identity - to create a sense of community and encourage collective action. By making the goals of the organization a matter of community concern, rather than hierarchical command, leaders can greatly boost their followers' motivation and commitment to action. The implications of this for digitalization are clear. Different channels, email, Skype, Facebook, Trello, provide different resources

for framing. Not all the metaphors, tones and symbolic acts of in-person communication are available in the digital. Some framing resources disappear when leadership goes virtual; some are modified; some are added. With each of the five leadership styles corresponding to a different combination of framing resources, this will have differential effects.

2.3. Digitalization and Its Constructive Demands on Leaders

Torre et al., (2020) showed that digitalization is not about using digital means but integrating technology into the very fabric of the organization and changing communication, social interactions and power dynamics. Avolio et al. (2000) introduced the concept of e-leadership to refer to the social influence process mediated by advanced information technology. The claim is that digital media will impose specific constraints and opportunities on leaders' influence strategies, and that such strategies can be learned, rather than just being a personality trait.

Wittmer et al., (2022) demonstrated that the emotional intelligence of leaders is a critical advantage in remote and digital communication, because the loss of nonverbal cues leads to a greater risk of miscommunication and a loss of spontaneous emotional resonance that is possible in face-to-face communication. Hoddinghaus et al. (2024) confirmed, in a systematic review of 66 empirical studies, that relational-oriented leadership, that is, those leadership styles most dependent on warmth, presence and spontaneity, are not only more important but also harder to enact for leaders online. This is the refrain that emerges from the comparative analysis below: the styles most reliant on relational communication are hardest to sustain in digital communication.

3. Methodology

This article is a theoretical literature review organized around a comparative analytical design. The goal is not to collect primary data but to trace, through the existing research, how each of five major leadership styles responds when communication moves onto digital platforms, and to use three theoretical frameworks as the lens through which those responses are examined and compared.

3.1. Literature Search and Selection

The search for literature was performed in the databases of Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar. The search terms included specific language for each leadership style (authoritarian leadership, democratic leadership, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership) and digitalization and communication terms (digital communication, e-leadership, remote leadership, virtual leadership, and digitalization). Specific searches were also carried out for the three theories reviewed in this study: Leader-Member Exchange theory, framing theory leadership and e-leadership. There was no temporal limit placed on searches, yet the analysis draws mainly on the last 25 years; seminal texts were also used regardless of their date of publication. To be included, sources needed to focus on at least one of the five leadership styles in focus; they had to engage with communication as the medium of leadership; and they had to be published in peer-reviewed journals or be well-cited theoretical papers. Sources that only addressed performance outcomes and did not consider the communicative processes that led to these outcomes were excluded.

3.2. Analytical Approach

First, the different leadership styles are analyzed in terms of their core communicative logic: the assumptions each style makes about the establishment of authority and motivation of followers, and the building of relationships. This provides the foundation for assessing the effects of digital communication on each style: what it affects, what it simplifies, and what changes it forces. The three theoretical perspectives are used in a complex and integrated way. LMX theory offers the leadership-relational focus, by explaining why individual leader-member relationship quality is the key predictor of leadership effectiveness, and why digital communication threatens to undermine this quality. Framing theory provides an account of how the change in media alters the types of symbols and language leaders can draw on when making meaning. E-leadership research brings the empirical research on leadership in digitalized organizations to the table. The framework for comparison in Table 1 is built on what this review finds about each style. It is the result, not starting point, of the review.

4. Leadership Styles and Their Core Communication Logic

4.1. Authoritarian Leadership

Pizzolitto et al. (2023) highlighted two paradoxical aspects of authoritarian leadership: the latter's link to impaired performance through demotivation, creativity stifling and poor work climate and the latter's successful application in crises as a means of rapid and collective top-down control. Lewin et al. (1939) first defined authoritarian leadership as the oldest leadership style, one that is characterized by unilateral decision-making and centralization of power. Du et al. (2020) showed that the response of passive resistance to authoritarian leaders who push their followers to the limit is instinctive. Yet, Harms et al. (2018) and Pizzolitto et al. (2023) also verified that in situations where hierarchy and authority need to be swiftly restored, authoritarian leadership has a beneficial effect.

4.2. Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership is a participative form of leadership that involves followers in the decision-making process (Wang et al., 2022). Akonkwa et al. (2022) confirmed that democratic leadership promotes high levels of organizational commitment and member effectiveness. Woods (2005) identified four dimensions of democratic leadership that collectively build participative team environments: power-sharing, transforming dialogue, holistic learning, and relational well-being. These four dimensions are mutually reinforcing; each contributes to the organizational climate in which genuine participation becomes possible.

4.3. Transactional Leadership

Ghosh et al. (2024) defined transactional leadership as an exchange relationship between leaders and followers in which leaders clarify tasks and expectations, followers perform accordingly, and rewards or corrections follow based on results. Khairy et al. (2023) demonstrated how transactional leadership operates through internal communication in remote contexts. The fundamental limitation of this style is that it links follower motivation exclusively to external reward, producing compliance rather than

commitment (Bass, 1985). When the reward for each transaction is maximized, followers tend to work only to the level required to obtain the reward, not beyond it.

4.4. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership was initially defined by Burns (1978) as leadership that creates a relationship between the leader and his/her followers that raises the level of motivation and morality in both parties. Bass et al., (1994) expanded this into the Four Is: Idealized Influence, where the leader provides a moral role model for followers; Inspirational Motivation, where the leader inspires through a shared vision; Intellectual Stimulation, where the leader challenges followers to be innovative and creative; and Individualized Consideration, where the leader considers followers' individual needs for growth and development. These four elements are all communicative in nature, played out in the leader's day-to-day interactions with his/her followers. In highly digitalized environments, Boccoli et al. (2024) demonstrated that leaders who invest in digital communication skills are much better in engaging followers remotely.

4.5. Servant Leadership

Jin et al., (2024) suggested servant leadership decreases workplace loneliness by creating a cascading effect of empathic communication: servant leadership creates empathic communication from the leader, which subsequently creates empathic communication among peers, and this, in turn, decreases workplace loneliness. Canavesi et al. (2022) found empathic communication as the core mechanism of servant leadership. Eva et al. (2019) have demonstrated that servant leadership has a greater range of positive effects on the organization than the other four leadership styles examined in this paper: servant leadership leads to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work engagement and follower well-being. Servant leadership has the strongest predictive power for follower attitudes, behaviors and performance compared to transformational, authentic and ethical leadership.

5. How Each Leadership Style Adapts to Digitalization

5.1. Authoritarian Leadership in a Digitalized World

Digitalized contexts pose a paradox for authoritarian leaders - they give rise to more control, but less authority. On the one hand, digital surveillance systems, email monitoring, AI-based performance analysis, productivity/dashboard reporting, and algorithm-driven management, provide authoritarian leaders with surveillance capabilities that reach well beyond the physical space of the workplace. Patapan (2022) revealed how digital technologies can establish conditions of continuous surveillance in which the effect of being watched is ingrained in the organizational architecture, rather than depending on the leader's presence. Fest et al. (2021) documented how in gig economy workplaces like Uber and Amazon Mechanical Turk, algorithmic management systems have replaced human supervisory presence, while preserving all of the structural elements of authoritarian control.

On the flipside, digital tools eliminate the bodily affordances that authoritarianism draws upon. Digital communication lacks spatial cues of authority such as proximity and vocal authority, and Harms et al. (2018) showed that the coercive force of authority is substantially diminished when expressed through a digital screen. Digital technologies also create new upward voice channels for followers that circumvent the silencing apparatus of authoritarianism, such as anonymous feedback, social media and secure messaging apps (Pizzolitto et al., 2023). The public nature of digital communication makes authoritarianism more publicly visible than ever before. The stakes of failure to adapt are high. Tourish (2013) demonstrated that authoritarian communication suppresses upward voice, thus increasingly depriving leaders of the information they need. Hoogh et al. (2015) showed that constant surveillance induces fear and self-censorship, which quash the innovations and initiative that digitalized organizations need more than ever. The critical adaptation is to replace fear-based authority with competence-based authority: Du et al. (2020) showed that followers are more active in obeying leaders they respect and trust than those they just fear.

5.2. Democratic Leadership in a Digital Environment

Digital democratic leadership offers new platforms for reaching participants, but risks stripping the true dialogic nature from its democratic content. Online polls, digital townhalls, the ability to edit digital documents and asynchronous discussion threads, allow democratic leaders to engage in decision-making with followers who are geographically separated in ways that are impossible in face-to-face deliberation (Akonkwa et al., 2022). Wang et al. (2022) confirmed that participative leadership is beneficial across a variety of organizational types when followers perceive their contribution is valued.

But asynchronous digital participation is not mutually responsive or iterative like democratic dialogue. Followers who post comments and surveys, rather than engage in real time, cannot feed off each other's reasoning or test assumptions. The leader can gather digital inputs without fully integrating them, and followers become disheartened if they perceive this. Woods (2005) said the key to democratic leadership is not the existence of participatory structures but the leader's openness to being changed by the input they receive. Barthold et al. (2022) built on this perspective to show that many forms of institutional democratic leadership are more performative than participatory. Suppose that digital communications support, rather than challenge, performative democracy. Hilton et al. (2021) demonstrated that democratic leadership only works when followers' contributions are widely believed to matter. The needed changes are both technical and attitudinal: using synchronous digital deliberation for decisions of significance to the organization, being transparent about how input was used, and consistently showing through practice that one is willing to be changed by follower input.

5.3. Transactional Leadership in a Digitalized Environment

Digital platform most easily operationalizes transactional leadership. Project management software like Asana, Jira, and Monday.com explicitly translate the transactional rules into practice: task delegation, performance monitoring, time management, and reward allocation; all with much greater efficiency and consistency than human supervisory management can achieve (Hargis et al., 2011). In the gig

economy, Fest et al. (2021) showed that digital algorithms have completely automated the transactional leadership function.

But this apparent fit is a mixed blessing. Gumusluoglu et al., (2009) demonstrated that transactional leadership is already inimical to creativity because it focuses the attention of followers on compliance, not creative initiative. When this is continually and automatically enforced by the digital surveillance system, in the absence of human judgement and support that softens the most demotivating aspects of transactional management, this hostility to creativity and intrinsic motivation is compounded. Bass (1985) has already demonstrated that transactional leadership leads to compliance rather than commitment; this is strengthened by digital surveillance. Nieken (2023) suggested how this can be done: even in fully algorithmically mediated digital environments, the communicative practices that frame tasks and feedback, to the extent that they are experienced as autonomy supportive versus controlling, play a crucial role in follower motivation and performance. The adaptation required in digital environments for transactional leaders is thus not technical but communicative: to retain digital accountability systems while supplementing them with a communicative framing that respects the dignity of followers, the meaning of their work beyond the instrumental level and their intrinsic motivation, which pure transactional exchange destroys.

5.4. Transformational Leadership in a Digitalized World

The adaptation challenge is greatest for transformational leadership. The Four Is that constitute transformational leadership's exercise of influence, Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration, vary in their reliance on the multimodal, spontaneously relational, embodied nature of face-to-face interaction. Idealized Influence depends on genuine presence; Inspirational Motivation depends on the emotional impact of physical co-presence and speech; Individualized Consideration depends on ongoing, intimate, responsive communicative interactions. All are limited by the turn online. Boccoli et al. (2024) showed empirically that transformational leaders who lack digital communicative competency skills are much less effective in sustaining engagement with followers in virtual settings than those who

have them. Ernst et al. (2022) confirmed using a prospective meta-analysis across five countries that virtual charismatic leadership is possible, but only when leaders are more mindful of communication strategies: by expressing emotion more explicitly in text communication, paying more attention to self-presentation in video communication, and using more storytelling and narrative to create the emotional appeal that in-person proximity would otherwise convey.

On the other hand, digitalization creates new opportunities for transformational impact. Videos, vision statements, and "narratives" can be distributed, replayed, and amplified in ways that increase their motivational reach beyond what is possible in face-to-face interaction. Tourish (2013), however, warned that the unidirectional nature of digital transformational communication, where the leader's appeal is directed at a large audience without the corrective effect of direct feedback, reinforces the inherent risk of squelching follower critical thinking and conditions of uncritical organizational compliance. The call for adaptation is to explicitly train digital communication skills, writing warmly, presenting videos well and using social media strategically as a separate professional skill (Boccoli et al., 2024).

5.5. Servant Leadership in a Digitalized Environment

The defining communicative practices of servant leadership, empathic listening, individual attentiveness, care and responsiveness to the needs of followers, are most easily expressed through dense face-to-face channels. The vocal expressivity, eye contact, and physical presence that communicate care and attentiveness are largely removed in digital communication. Jin et al. (2024) found servant leaders diminish workplace loneliness through a sequence of empathic responses that rely on the nonverbal cues that are most diminished in text and video communications. Dierendonck (2011) defined individual attentiveness as the essence of servant leadership, which is most difficult to maintain in digital networks and large groups. Hoddinghaus et al. (2024) demonstrated that relationship-oriented leadership, of which servant leadership is the quintessential expression, is more important in the virtual environment as it becomes more challenging to enact.

Despite the difficulties, digital technology provides servant leaders with new ways to express care for large teams: individual video meetings, digital feedback and analytics, team engagement, and pulse surveys, allow for personalized attention for followers in ways impossible prior to digitalization (Canavesi et al., 2022). Liden et al. (2008) highlighted emotional support as one of the most empirically important elements of servant leadership, and this element becomes more important in remote and hybrid workplaces as a documented response to digital fatigue and social isolation. The skill needed is intentionality: transforming the spontaneous empathic communication of in-person servant leadership into deliberate, scheduled, and intentional digital practices that use communicative tools as expressions of relational care, not transactions.

Table 1. Comparative Framework: Digital Impact and Adaptation Requirements by Leadership Style

	What Digitalization Amplifies / Enables	What Digitalization Undermines	Risk of Non-Adaptation	Required Adaptation
L E A D E R S H	Authoritarian Leadership Style			
	Expanded surveillance via AI, dashboards, algorithmic management (Patapan, 2022; Fest et al., 2021)	Physical presence as the vehicle of authority; embodied dominance signals (Harms et al., 2018)	Epistemic isolation from honest feedback; talent exit; reputational damage (Tourish, 2013)	Shift from fear-based to competence-based authority (Du et al., 2020)
	Democratic Leadership Style			
	Greater participatory reach via digital tools; more inclusive decision processes (Akonkwa et al., 2022)	Dialogic quality of genuine deliberation; real-time responsiveness; iterative reasoning (Woods, 2005)	Performative democracy; follower disengagement when voice is solicited but ignored (Barthold et al., 2022)	Invest in genuine openness; use synchronous tools for key decisions; be transparent about how input is used
	Transactional Leadership Style			

I P S T Y L E	Seamless integration with digital PM platforms; automated accountability; scalable monitoring (Hargis et al., 2011)	Intrinsic motivation; creativity; relational warmth (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Bass, 1985)	Disengagement; minimum-effort culture; loss of organizational citizenship behavior (Nieken, 2023)	Humanize digital accountability: add relational communication that preserves follower dignity (Nieken, 2023)
	Transformational Leadership Style			
	Extended reach of vision via social media; messages can be replayed and widely shared (Ernst et al., 2022)	Emotional resonance; physical charisma; spontaneous individualized connection (Boccoli et al., 2024)	Inspirational collapse; increased risk of uncritical followership at broadcast scale (Tourish, 2013)	Develop digital competencies: written warmth, video presence, strategic social media (Boccoli et al., 2024)
	Servant Leadership Style			
	New tools for individualized care at scale: video check-ins, pulse surveys, engagement analytics (Liden et al., 2008)	Non-verbal empathic signals; spontaneous informal connection; physical presence of care (Jin et al., 2024)	Followers feel unseen and abandoned; loneliness and disengagement in distributed teams (Dierendonck, 2011)	Deliberate digital habits: planned check-ins, personalized messages as genuine relational investments (Canavesi et al., 2022)

6. Discussion

6.1. Digitalization Does Not Affect All Leadership Styles in the Same Way

The comparative examination of the five types of leadership confirms the thesis: digitalization is a discriminating force on leadership. Autocratic leadership gains monitoring power but loses charisma. Democratic leadership gains participatory technology but loses participatory legitimacy. Transactional leadership is a natural fit for digital systems, which exacerbates its motivational shortcomings. Transformational leadership suffers most in the digital transition because its most potent attributes are most bound up with co-presence and embodiment. Servant leadership faces a problem of expression, not content: its communicative ethic is very compatible with the digital medium, but its natural expressivity is not. This is no coincidence. There is a logic to this pattern: digitalization eliminates the physical and embodied practices that each style has

relied on to offset its communicative weakness. Authoritarian leaders could retain control through the physical presence of their bodies, even if they were not digitally literate. Transformational leaders could inspire others with the vitality of their physical presence, even if their message was vague. Servant leaders could express concern spontaneously through incidental physical contact. When these are taken away, each style's inherent flaws stand out more and have more damaging organizational consequences.

6.2. The Tools Are Necessary but Not Sufficient

The message from the literature reviewed is that the problems of adaptation for the five styles are not solved by merely equipping them with digital communication platforms. Nieken (2023) demonstrated that even in a completely algorithmically managed working environment, the communicative presentation of tasks (experienced as autonomy supporting or controlling) has an impact on performance. Boccoli et al. (2024) showed that the effectiveness of transformational leadership in digital environments rests not on the availability of digital platforms but on the particular communicative skills, which leaders bring to platforms. Woods (2005) showed that democratic leadership effectiveness is not a function of participatory structures but the leader's openness to being influenced by the followers. Across the five styles, the evidence suggests that, rather than simply investing in digital platforms, organizations need to invest in training in style-specific communicative skills.

6.3. LMX Theory Explains Why Relational Styles Face Greater Challenges

Leader-Member Exchange theory (Graen et al., 1995) offers the best theoretical framework for understanding why some styles are more challenged than others by digitalization. It is a theory that argues that the quality of the individual dyadic relationship between leader and follower is the key predictor of leadership success. The styles that prioritize investment in individual relationship quality, servant and transformational leadership, are most challenged by digitalization, as digital communication renders spontaneous development of high-quality individual relationships more difficult. Hoddinghaus et al. (2024) indeed confirmed that relational leadership is more important and more challenging in the virtual environment. Those that invest less in individual

relationship quality, such as transactional and authoritarian leadership styles, face a different challenge: digitalization makes their structural strengths and weaknesses even stronger and weaker. Transactional leadership is more efficient but more demotivating. Authoritarian leadership becomes more monitored but less intimidating. Democratic leadership is in the middle, with its success dependent on whether the relational substance of democratic exchange is lost in the switch to digital media.

7. Conclusion

This article has explored the communicative implications of digitalization on five major leadership styles, authoritarian, democratic, transactional, transformational and servant leadership. Drawing on LMX theory, framing theory and the e-leadership framework, it has demonstrated that the impacts of digitalization vary across leadership styles. The particular communicative logic of each style determines the gains and losses associated with the digitalization of corporate communication, and each needs a mode of adaptation reflecting its communicative vulnerabilities. The comparative table (Table 1) provides a summary of these insights. Authoritarian leadership must trade fear-driven for competence-driven authority. Democratic leadership must prioritize authentic, not token, digital participation. Transactional leadership must humanize its digital accountability practices. Transformational leadership must articulate its digital communication skills. Servant leadership must operationalize its humane ethos into strategic digital communicative practices.

This article makes a contribution to the literature on leadership communication by moving beyond individual descriptions of the five styles. By comparing all five styles through the same three perspectives, it is possible to detect the differential pattern of how digitalization impacts leadership and to determine what each style has to do to adapt to the digital environment. It also brings LMX, framing, and e-leadership studies together into an integrated framework that helps explain why digitalization impacts the different styles differently rather than simply as a homogenous group. The conceptual comparison table is designed to be a resource for researchers and practitioners. This analysis provides a number of opportunities for future research. Research that tests the various

adaptation hypotheses for each of the styles, especially in cross-cultural and cross-sectoral settings, will be required to confirm the comparative framework. Studies on the use of artificial intelligence in communication give rise to new questions about whether algorithms can exert leadership functions and implications for each of the five styles. The development of style-specific e-communication skills is also important for practice and should be studied empirically.

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