A study on Leadership - Emerging trends

Manu G.C

Ph.D Research Scholar, Dept. of Commerce and Management

Dayananda Sagar University, Bangalore

manugc21@gmail.com

Dr. Chandrakala G

Associate Professor, Dept. of Commerce and Management

Dayananda Sagar University, Bangalore

Abstract

Study of the emerging trends in leadership - how these trends compare to the traditional facets of leadership and try to make an educated prediction on what the future of leadership will look like. We will analyze the changes in people needs, business imperatives and competition over the last decade and study how the leadership styles have changed to meet the same. The study will be through interviews and surveys at various levels of leadership in disparate segments of industries to examine how leaders have adapted to the changing trends.

Keywords: *Leadership, Emerging Trends in Leadership, Future of Leadership, Leadership 4.0*

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to draw attention to Leadership emerging trends - their multi-facets, different leadership styles in managing an ever-changing landscape of people, technology and business needs. We will analyze the changes in people needs and business imperatives to study how leadership needs to evolve to address new challenges and trends. We will conduct surveys at various levels of leadership and individual contributors in disparate segments of industries to examine how they perceive and respond to the changing trends.

Objective

Leaders have always had the daunting task of effectively leading and creating high performing teams to achieve organizational results. New problems and trends have always posed a challenge to emerging leaders and these in a way have helped them to evolve as better managers, guiding their teams to organization and Individual successes. Different theories of leadership have been explained and used to handle disparate situations, contexts, and outcomes. The scope of this study will be only be focussed on current and near-term issues that the VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) world poses.

Below are some of the challenges we will explore

Accountability – Striking a balance between accountability and flexibility

Coaching – Individual focus for career development

Collaboration – Networking internally and externally for improved results

Diversity - Providing equal opportunities without biases

Empowerment – Allowing to make choices/ decisions

Influencing - Managing virtual and remote teams

Learning – Keeping abreast of changes in the landscape

Self-Starter – Sufficiently motivated to work without needing direction

Technology – Leveraging technology for improving productivity

Values – Deep rooted beliefs that guide us when in doubt

Vision – Connecting the dots to go above and beyond

Methodology - Survey and Analysis

Methodology

We will first try to understand more about individual contributors working in different industries at different levels of their career – their need from their leaders and how they perceive their leaders in supporting and guiding them. We will take these inputs by posing relevant questions to these individual contributors. Then we will take inputs from leaders across different industries and experience levels to understand how they think they are tackling some of these challenges.

Industry and experience level of individual contributors and leaders used is as follows:

Industry	Experience Level
IT / Services	0 - 5 Years
FMCG	5 - 10 Years
Manufacturing	10 - 20 Years
E-Commerce	> 20 Years
Finance and Banking	

To gain insights from the individual contributors and the leaders we will run a survey with 10 questions on a "*Likert scale*" of 1-5-point basis using "*Google forms*". Through analysis of the survey results and leadership theories we will define how leaders need to adapt and transform to face new challenges and trends.

Survey Questionnaire

Survey questions to Individual Contributors

The below questions need to be evaluated on a scale of 1 to 5 basis.
1 – Strongly disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Agree; 5 – Strongly agree;

Do you think automation is a risk to your job?

Is it important to keep abreast with the ever-changing technology?

Will you take up the challenge If you are offered a leadership role today?

My immediate manager spends quality time in my career development

My leader helps me connect my goals to the larger organisational goals.

I perform better when a plan and structure is provided than when I create my own plan

I deliver better when a deadline is given

I feel that working as a team has helped me achieve my goals at work

I have all the freedom to make choices and decisions to complete my work and achieve goals

I believe I can set my own targets with minimal supervision

Survey questions to Leaders

The below questions need to be evaluated on a scale of 1 to 5 basis.
1 – Strongly disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Agree; 5 – Strongly agree;

I believe giving more flexibility to the team members leads to better results.

Technology adoption will eliminate most of existing routine tasks in the next 2-3 years.

I think leaders need to change their style/ approach based on situations/ outcomes.

Will you take a risk on a project by giving it to a high potential but less experienced employee?

I produce same outcomes irrespective of the teams, collaborating virtually or physically.

I constantly need to reinvent my leadership skills to adapt to new trends and challenges.

I am enabled to manage diverse workforce including Gen-Y and Gen-Z.

I am ready to adopt new technologies to guide teams toward achieve organizational goals.

Team members should be encouraged to network during and outside of office hours.

The outcomes/results of an initiative matter more to me than the path taken to achieve them.

Observations and Inferences From The Survey

We had more than 200 survey responses from various industries at different levels of Individual contributor and Leader experience. Manufacturing and IT are the industries which have contributed to more than 65% of the total survey responses.

Below are some interesting observations from the survey results and inferences drawn under each of the themes:

Accountability – Striking a balance with Flexibility

Survey Question:

I deliver better when a deadline is given.

Survey results show that irrespective of the industry more responses favour improved delivery if a deadline is provided, signifying that employees prefer top down accountability setting. However, in the IT industry we saw that 25% of responders did not agree with the given statement and believed that they can deliver better if a deadline is NOT provided. **Flexibility is one attribute that they think will help them improve their outcomes.**


IT   Manufacturing
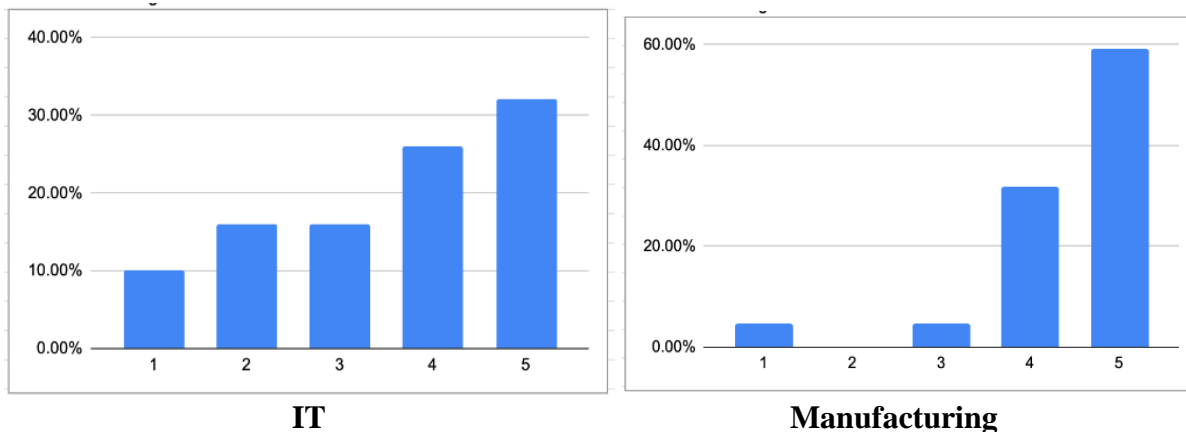
*Coaching – Individual focus for Career development*
Survey Question
*My immediate manager spends quality time in my career development.*

Irrespective of the industry, we notice a similar trend for people at different experience levels. At entry level team members need more of support and direction. They also need managers to spend time to develop and chart out a career plan. As experience grows team members figure out ways to get attention from their immediate supervisors for coaching them and providing direction (which could be minimal but sufficient) in their careers. However, with people with more than 20 years' experience who would have by now in this phase gained sufficient clarity which will demand less support from their managers. **We could therefore infer that leaders need to provide individual attention to employees especially in the early periods of their career.**
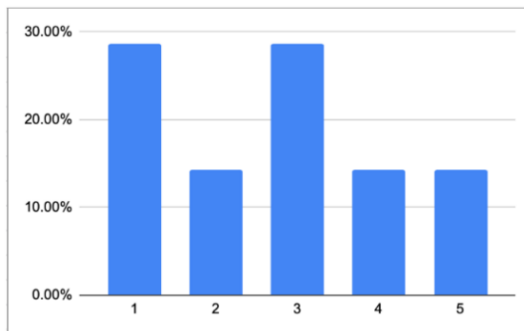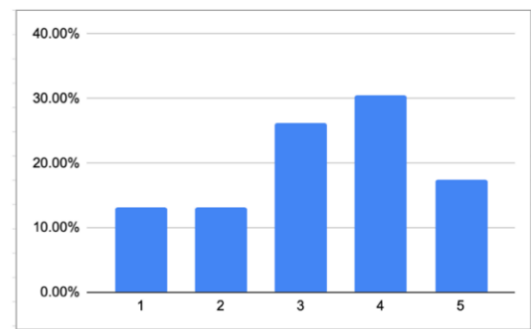
0 - 5 Years exp
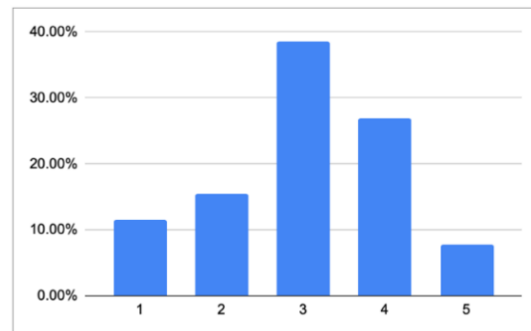
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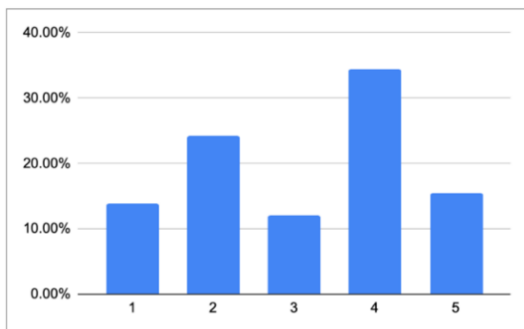
10 - 20 Years

> 20 Years

Collaboration – Networking internally and externally for Improved results
Survey Question
Team members should be encouraged to network during and outside of office hours.

Irrespective of the industry and at various leadership levels, more than 93% of the leaders think that team members should be encouraged to collaborate. **This is a very positive trend considering leaders are thinking long term and not tactically worried about employees collaborating during work time.**

Diversity - Providing Equal Opportunities without biases

Survey Question 1:

### *I am enabled to manage diverse workforce including Gen-Y and Gen-Z.*

Irrespective of the industry and at various leadership levels, leaders think that they are equipped to manage diverse workforce with more than 83% leaders responding that they feel enabled to manage diverse workforce. **This is a positive trend suggesting that companies are investing in training around managing diversity.**

Empowerment – Allowing to make choices/ decisions
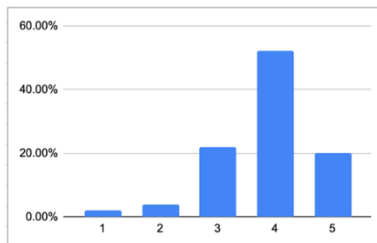### *Survey Question 1 (Leaders):*

Will you take a risk on a project by giving it to a high potential but less experienced employee?

We saw an interesting trend across different industries on this question. Manufacturing industry leaders were seen as risk averse, where they will not rely on less experienced employee. Whereas In e-commerce and IT industry the leaders were willing to take risk and were more trusting of less experienced employees. **This is an opportunity where Manufacturing leaders could start thinking about creating platforms and facilitating opportunities for team members to innovate and contribute for the larger good of the organization.**
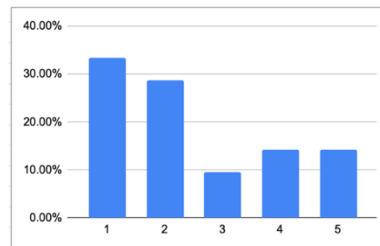
Manufacturing

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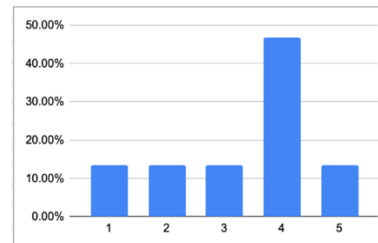
e commerce

Survey Question 2 (Leaders):

I believe giving more flexibility to the team members leads to better results.

All results pointed to leader's willingness to provide more flexibility with the belief that it would result in improved results. With more than 93% leaders agreeing with this statement.

Survey Question 3 (IC):

I have all the freedom to make choices and decisions to complete my work and achieve goals.

Team members with less than 5 years' experience had 50% responders thinking they are not empowered to do their work effectively. However, all industries pointed out that above 10 years' experience they were empowered enough to carry out their work. Leaders need to be more strategic and foresighted to keep their employees engaged for the long haul. This has to happen right from the entry level. They need to coach them individually, engage them in the goal setting process and empower them by sharing accountability.

Influencing - Managing Virtual teams
Survey Question:
I produce same outcomes irrespective of the teams, collaborating virtually or physically.

Leaders from IT and manufacturing had different inputs. IT leaders think they can manage teams operating out virtually while manufacturing leaders think differently. The ongoing pandemic is a good example where manufacturing companies had SOPs released and made it mandatory for employees to be at the workplace while IT is still continuing to manage and work from home with little or "No" drop in productivity. With the advent of industry 4.0 and technology adoption, most of the work in manufacturing could be done remotely as well. Leaders in the Manufacturing segment are not used to the virtual world as much as the IT leaders. They should be trained on Collaboration tools to gain confidence and capability to manage teams virtually as well.
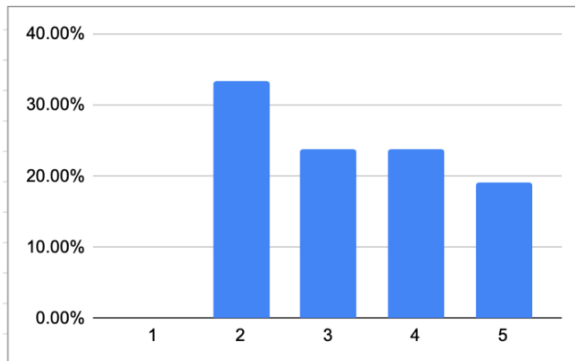
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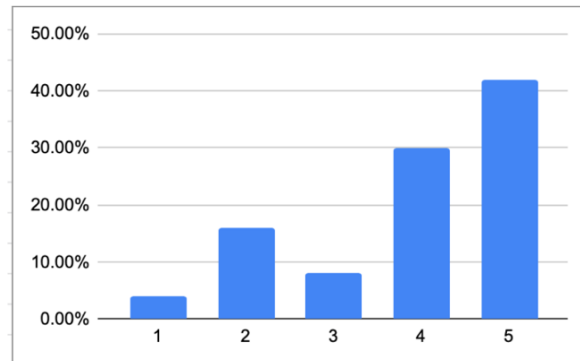
IT

Learning – Keeping abreast of technology changes and new learnings

Survey Question 1:

Is it important to keep abreast with the ever-changing technology?

Survey Question 2:

I constantly need to reinvent my leadership skills to adapt to new trends and challenges.

All results pointed to leaders and employees agreeing to stay abreast of the latest happenings in their industry, with more than 88% leaders agreeing to both the questions. This even though expected is a very positive re-emphasizing message that learning at all levels in all industries is a key element for staying in the race.

Self-starter – Sufficiently motivated to work without needing direction

Survey Question:

I believe I can set my own targets with minimal supervision.

Individual contributors at the entry level irrespective of the industry need more guidance in setting targets than at the higher level of experiences. So individualized coaching needs at the entry level of employment should be addressed by leaders.

Technology – Leveraging for improving Productivity

Survey Question:

Do you think Automation is a risk to your job?

35 % of Individual contributors with less than 5 years of experience think that automation is a risk to their jobs. This is an area of major work Leadership to get innovative and communicate how automation can be leveraged to do mundane work and more value generating tasks can be accommodated.

Survey Question 2:

Technology adoption will eliminate most of existing routine tasks in the next 2-3 years.

68% of responders are positive that most routine tasks will be eliminated in the next couple of years.

Values – Deep rooted beliefs that guide us when in doubt

Survey Question:

The outcomes/results of an initiative matter more to me than the path taken to achieve them.

24% of Manufacturing leaders think that along with the end goals, "means" play an important role. 66% path think that the end goal is more important. For IT 34% think it is important to consider the path while 44% thinks it is the end that matters. Overall, for all Industry and at different levels of leadership while 34% incline toward values, 50% are focused on the end result only. This is a huge opportunity where Leaders can be trained and enabled to inculcate Company values and cultural beliefs and help them lead their teams from the front

Vision – Connecting the dots to go above and beyond

Survey Question 1:

My leader helps me connect my goals to the larger organisational goals.

It is noted that at the entry level team members found it difficult to connect their goals to the larger organization goals with 35% responders not agreeing with the above statement. As the years of experience increased, they are able to connect the dots, only 17% on respondents with more than 20 years' experience disagree with the above statement. This could be a natural learning as they get into larger responsibilities and thereby learning to understand the big picture. This could be an area where leaders can help bridge the gap between the individual/ team goals and the Organization goals. This is a trend seen in all industries.

Leadership Solutions

The qualities of effective leadership can be paradoxical - requiring effective leaders to be passionate and unbiased, detailed, and strategic, hard driving and sustainable, fact focused and intuitive, self-confident, and selfless - all often at the same time (Metcalf, 2015). We will review and select leadership theories to try to create a guiding plan for emerging leaders to address challenges posed by the VUCA world.

Leaders are critical to both organizations and to their employees. The understanding of leadership is constantly evolving. Various theories have been laid down to discover the unique ways leaders emerge, influence, and guide their team / followers and their organization. Transformational leadership is a new paradigm approach to how leaders manage their resources / team members. It aims at instilling positive change in the team members and transform them into future leaders. Unlike conventional leadership styles, transactional leadership promotes motivation and performance by inculcating a sense of personal identity and the identity of the organization. It encourages to challenge oneself while accepting new work. This kind of leadership sets clear goals with high expectations while providing support and recognition towards the individual. It also has an inspirational side that germinates empathy for the whole team and not only delve on self-care. Such a leader will build a vision, paint the same to the team and motivate them to strive for it and ensure they reach the goal together. (Arikkök, 2017)

Transformational leadership has four main elements:

Individualized consideration, where the leader gives priority to individual needs of the team. The leader supports and helps wherever needed and recognizes achievements and encourages self-development.

Intellectual stimulation, in which the leader provides a ground to the individual to achieve their full potential and promote creativity while instilling confidence to take risks. The leader focuses on members who can work independently and are not afraid to take calculated risks. The individual's creativity can be uncovered and nurtured this way.

Inspirational motivation, where the leader inspires the team members by coming up with appealing innovative ideas. Leaders with inspirational motivation will challenge the individual by assigning competitive goals / targets, future achievements, and stimulation. The team member should have a strong sense of purpose in order to get motivated by inspirational motivation style.

Idealized influence, where the leader acts as a role model displaying high ethics, pride and trustworthiness. Inspirational motivation is gaining popularity in today's world. Transformational leadership works best in organizations that are due for a change and have legacy working structures. It is a wonderful way to promote creativity while building mutual trust and creating a harmonious workplace with importance to empathy and understanding. (Arikkök, 2017)

We will explore Transformational leadership for viable solutions for the inferences that we drew from the surveys conducted. Below is an attempt in mapping the Leadership elements to the various

Accountability – Striking a balance between accountability and flexibility

Individualized Influence (Transformational Leadership)

Accountability at workplace is the quickest way of growing employee engagement by making them feel more empowered. It gives employees more meaning to their work, thereby re-enforcing the value the organisation places in the employees. It encourages self-reliance and confidence in the team. As a result of all these, accountability helps in retaining and grooming talent. (Getsmarter, 2019)

Coaching – Individual focus for Career development

Individualized Consideration (Transformational Leadership)

Leaders should study employee learning styles, understand their aspirations, and help develop individual talent and development plans. This will give leaders a chance to groom high performers for more challenging tasks or to rally behind underachievers, so they feel more included in the team. Leaders should give personal attention and treat each employee individually as their needs and wants are very customized.

Collaboration – Networking internally and externally for improved results

Individualized Influence (Transformational Leadership)

Collaboration is very important within the teams as well as with the external stakeholders. It helps individuals to improve their networking skills both internally and externally by providing more insights to understand different business scenario. It also helps employees to perform better at their workplace.

Diversity - Providing equal opportunities without biases

Individualized motivation (Transformational Leadership)

Leaders should believe that irrespective of diversity – culture, race, gender, age, team members can deliver similar outcomes if the right individual attention and direction is given. Also, leaders should not assign tasks and promote people based on their years of experience but should be based on merit. Assigning tasks without biases will win the trust of the employees and they will put their best efforts to accomplish team goals.

Empowerment – Allowing to make choices/ decisions

Intellectual Simulation (Transformational Leadership)

Leaders should let go and allow their team members to take over some of the activities that they can delegate. Leaders should create frameworks within which team members should be allowed to exercise their freedom to make choices and decisions. This will help team members to try and take risks with guidance from their leader. Leaders should facilitate by creating systems that will help team members to try and fail fast in the process. Leaders should create environments to foster creative and innovative behaviours among team members.

Influencing - Managing virtual and remote teams

Idealized Influence (Transformational Leadership)

In today's world, it is imperative that leaders have to manage global teams working in different time zones and ensure they are working in tandem to deliver business outcomes. For this to happen the entire team should be galloping toward one goal. Leaders have to lead the team with a compelling vision and create a sense of mission to have team members stay focused through the journey. Every team member should know their goals and how it ties back to the larger Organizational goals. By building trust, empathizing and facilitating, leaders can go a long way managing remote teams to deliver outcomes. By rewarding and recognizing the values that team members bring in, leaders can instil pride and encourage them in the right direction. The clarity the leader provides, and the trust shown in the team members will go a long way in getting team members to deliver irrespective of time and place.

Learning – Keeping abreast of technology changes and new learnings

Individualized Consideration (Transformational Leadership)

Technologies cannot replace human employees. So, invest in employees further learning so they can work at their full potential and will help grow your business.

Leaders and team members should be given learning opportunities through internal and external trainings, on the job assignments and tours of duty. To motivate team members leaders can document their aspirations (ITDPs) and chart out a career plan based on it. As part of the charter, leaders can recommend training interventions to keep employees engaged and valuable. Any opportunity for technology or process exposures should be explored and executed. ITDPs (individual talent development plans) should be reviewed frequently and progress for action plans updated. Horizontal or lateral experiences should be provided to create pipeline for vertical career growth as well.

Self-Starter – Sufficiently motivated to work without needing direction

Individualized motivation (Transformational Leadership)

Redesign of management structure using performance management: Help employees set clear goals. Help them with means of measuring their progress over time. In return, employees should feel welcome to give their honest assessment of our leadership style, so that everyone in the organization can help build a collaborative environment. (Hamm, 2006)

Technology – Leveraging for improving Productivity

Individualized motivation (Transformational Leadership)

Through technologies now leaders can gather valuable amounts of data about their employees. These can help in determining employees' leave patterns, employees speech nuances during client calls, different areas of talent management, such as training, assessments and other employee development activities – all of which can give insights on how to help employees to help perform their tasks better. (Hamm, 2006)

Values – Deep rooted beliefs that guide us when in doubt

Individualized Influence (Transformational Leadership)

Organisation culture: The culture at an organisation drives the values that the leadership wants to drive. While Organization goals and targets of profitability and market growth are important for sustenance, so are Integrity and Ethics. Leaders should take utmost care to understand and clarify Organization values to the employees and the importance of these non-negotiables. As the survey trend clearly shows that young team members and leaders are sometimes blinded by the targets that they ignore the means to reach to their end goals. Leaders should repeatedly provide clarity about the deep-rooted beliefs on which Organization foundations are built-on.

Vision – Connecting the dots to go above and beyond

Individualized Influence (Transformational Leadership)

Align with company vision: Leaders should have full understanding of what the company believes in and hopes to achieve, exert efforts to stay in that direction and, as a result, inspire the same kind of response among the members of the team. Leaders should take the extra effort to relate goals of every team member to the Organization goals. (Hamm, 2006)

Discussion and Conclusion

Today, even though we understand that the future cannot be predicted, we still have an unwavering desire to prognosticate. This urge to forecast the future has promoted predictions in all fields of study. Leadership is one of such fields that has metamorphosed itself along with time and humans have been on the lookout for better and more efficient ways of finding solutions. (Mack, 2015)

In the coming decades leaders need to be ready for challenges that include but not limited to:

Wall of White Noise

Too much information can be a spoiler to analyze and consume.

Response to Complex, Multi-Sector Changes

Many organizations adapt to change, not when they should but only when they must adapt, but their adaptations are often too late.

Unplanned Development/ Progress

Unplanned development without consideration of social, political, economic, environmental, and/or health consequences.

Difficulties of an Unpredictable Future

A vast majority of all communications are machine-generated or machine to machine thus underlying the value of a communication network in relation to user growth.

Diminishing Resources

Leaders of the future must embrace imagination and innovation as essential to both identification of emerging problems and designing of workable solutions.

Data Collection: Use and Abuse

Leadership information services are increasing but getting more complicated and a lot of white noise is seeping in. Deep transformations of new values, new connections, and new tools are making many old approaches and resources to lose viability. (Mack, 2015)

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