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### Disruptive Leadership, Its Implications for Innovation in an Organization in the Twenty First Century

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#### **Abstract**

*The role of leadership in any society or organization cannot be overemphasized. Leadership is the wheel that drives all organizations, either private or public. The success or otherwise of any organization depends on the leadership style. The current dynamics in the business world and in other sectors call for a disruptive leadership style, with the ability to navigate all odds for effective and efficient service delivery and increase in output in the organization (Khan, 2022; Galbraith, 2023). Recent trends in globalization and digitalization in all fields of human endeavor require a disruptive leader that can leverage the use of digital tools like robotics, artificial intelligence, and cyber-physical systems in leadership (World Economic Forum, 2024). Data for this paper were collected through secondary sources. Content analysis was used to analyze the data. The paper gave a conceptual explication of the concepts, disruptive leadership and innovation. Transformational Leadership Theory was adopted as the theoretical framework. The paper examined characteristics of disruptive leadership, its impacts, and challenges. The features and types of innovation were discussed (Tidd & Bessant, 2022). The nexus between disruptive leadership and innovation was explained. Consequently, it was discovered that disruptive leadership style is the best form of leadership for any organization to meet the dynamics and trend in globalization and for optimal benefits and sustainability. Conclusively, recommendations were made on how to curb challenges faced by a disruptive leader currently and in future, which includes use of digital technology, leveraging artificial intelligence, innovations, human capacity development, and all-inclusive administrative paradigms, to mention but a few.*

**Keywords:** *Disruptive, leadership, implications, innovation and century.*

#### **Introduction**

Leadership is pivotal to the success and failure of any society, organization, or enterprise. It is a concept that is multifaceted and has several meanings and attributes attached to it. The business world is moving speedily, which is purely driven by disruptive leadership style leveraging digital tools to achieve optimally. Leadership as a concept encompasses influencing, guiding, and inspiring individuals or groups of people towards achieving common set goals/objectives of a society, organization, or industry (Kotter, 2012). This means that the success or failure of any

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organization depends on the capacity and credibility of the leadership style, structure, and approach for significant impact on the organization. Leaders must have the ability to inspire and motivate others to work towards the attainment of a common goal. Leaders must have a clear vision and direction of where the organization is today and be able to make accurate predictions of where the organization will be in the future positively. A good leader must be able to communicate his visions, missions, aims, and objectives to all his/her team members, relevant stakeholders, and customers.

The ability to make good, positive, timely, and informed decisions that will drive the organization to a higher level and achievement is essential. A leader must have the ability to understand, manage, supervise, and control his/ her own emotions and those of his team members, customers, and stakeholders. Emotional intelligence is highly needed as well as the use of technology (Goleman, 2000).

The current dynamics in the world of technology via globalization and digital skills have transformed so many things in the world, leadership style inclusive. The quest to remain stable in business and meet the competing nature in the business world today calls for a paradigm shift from the traditional leadership style to what is called disruptive leadership.

### **Conceptualization:**

**Disruptive Leadership:** As the name implies, it is a rational radical shift from the conventional traditional leadership style to a more rational digital approach based on innovation. In the past, current, and future in the business world, leadership plays a very vital role in the sustainability and growth of the business or it's otherwise. The disruptive leadership concept came up as a new approach in the leadership school as a process which challenges the traditional norms and experiments with new innovations to enable organizations stay ahead of other competitors. It is called disruptive because it is capable of upending and dismantling the entire organization or sector. Disruptive leadership presents team members, customers, and stakeholders with new ideas and how to achieve their objectives.

There are some scholars' definitions of disruptive leadership. For instance, disruptive leadership involves challenging the status quo and driving innovation to navigate volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Hamel (2002) posited that disruptive leadership is about creating new strategies and business models that challenge existing ones, requiring leaders to be innovative and take risks. Kotter (2009) noted that disruptive leadership involves creating a sense of urgency and driving change through innovation and experimentation. Anthony (2012) views disruptive leadership as creating new growth opportunities and business models that disrupt existing ones, requiring leaders to be proactive and strategic. A disruptive leader embraces change and drives innovation, which is essential for transforming legacy organizations (Kotter, 2012). Disruptive leadership means forcing change before it's forced on you.

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A disruptive leader is not satisfied with the status quo and convention in business, pushing for change even when it requires overhauling the entire system (Christensen et al., 2018). Khan (2022) stated that disruptive leadership is characterized by the ability to challenge the status quo and leverage innovation to transform the organization. Galbraith (2023) noted that disruptive leadership involves guiding organizations through periods of significant change and embracing uncertainty as a pathway to new opportunities.

Yin and Wang (2024) defined disruptive leadership as the practice of inspiring and mobilizing teams to identify and exploit disruptive innovations within their organization. Patel (2024) stated that disruptive leadership refers to leaders who actively foster a culture of innovation, encouraging risk-taking and resilience in the face of change. Thompson (2025) understood disruptive leadership as the capability to lead teams through transformational change by embracing unconventional strategies and fostering adaptive thinking. Zhang and Lee (2025) described disruptive leadership as the ability to foresee and respond to changes in the marketplace, driving organizational adaptation and innovation.

Disruptive leaders set aside the old stories, principles, policies, and programs, including the trajectory, stereotypes, and antecedents that have encumbered the organizational growth and development, with new innovative ideas and a clear road map on how to achieve the organizational goals by adopting all-inclusive administrative paradigms anchored on human development (Chinnah, 2026). Disruptive leadership style is anchored on innovative, diplomatic, and strategic transformative policies and ideas centered on achieving better breakthroughs based on disruptive innovation. This form of leadership style goes beyond organizational change to governance systems. McCausland (2023) posited that modern leaders must move beyond incremental improvement towards transformative change in order to remain effective in rapidly evolving environments.

Disruptive leadership basically questions the status quo and replaces it with defined practical alternatives that meet the need of current realities, unlike traditional leadership styles that focus on stability and predictability. Disruptive leaders welcome and embrace uncertainty, experimentation, and agility. Yu and Hang (2023) averred that disruption requires leaders to rethink value systems and organizational processes in ways that allow new models to emerge and replace outdated ones.

**Innovation:** There are many definitions of the concept innovation by different authors according to how they look at it. For instance, Tidd and Bessant (2022) stated, "Innovation is the process of transforming ideas into products, services, or processes that create value for society and organizations." Chesbrough (2023) defined innovation as the continuous process of improving products or services and creating new market opportunities through the effective use of technology. Kotler and Keller (2023) described innovation as the ability to conceive and implement new ideas, methods, or products that lead to enhanced business performance and customer satisfaction. Bessant and Francis (2024) noted, "Innovation signifies the

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implementation of creative ideas that can drive changes in technology, business practices, and/or social models." Schilling (2024) stated, "Innovation is a strategic capability that enables organizations to respond dynamically to changing market conditions and consumer needs." Afuah (2025) defined innovation as "the development and commercialization of new products and services that fulfill unmet needs or create new demands."

All the definitions above conveyed the same meaning and point to the same particular phenomenon of creativity, new initiative, and invention. Innovation aims at creation of new ideas and value, leveraging the use of technology for organizational responsiveness in achieving optimally.

### Features of Innovation

Innovation as a concept has the following features:

- a) Novelty This means that all innovations have to do with the introduction of something new or different from what is obtainable or operational, significantly improved new things.
- b) All innovations must add value to humanity or to the existing status quo. Innovation must add value to users, employees, board members, stakeholders, customers, and the society in general.
- c) Innovation must be human-centered and customer-driven. It begins with understanding customers' needs and solving their problems through a strong feedback mechanism in making things better by increase in output or improved service delivery (Tidd& Bessant, 2023).
- d) Scalability Successful innovations can expand and apply across different markets or sectors.
- e) Innovations are disruptive in approach. Many innovations change or replace existing systems or industries in a radical proactive manner most times.
- f) Innovation is interdisciplinary and multidimensional. There is always combination and cross-pollination of ideas and knowledge from different fields of specialty to foster innovation.
- g) Innovation is born out of necessity and risk. Innovation must embrace risk and uncertainty.
- h) Agility: Innovation requires rapid iteration and responsiveness to feedback.
- i) Sustainability: Modern innovation addresses environmental and social responsibility.
- j) Innovation makes use of technology and digital integration. Technology is central to most current innovations.
- k) It is a clearly established fact that innovation drives and thrives through open collaboration and partnership within shared ecosystems.
- l) Innovation has to do with user involvement and engagement in the process, leading to better outcomes. That leads to improvement.
- m) Time-Sensitivity: Timing innovation correctly is key to its success.
- n) Innovations lead to continuous learning, monitoring with a strong feedback mechanism for evaluation. Successes are achieved from several failed attempts in some cases.
- o) All innovations are targeted at problem-solving. It addresses existing challenges with better alternatives.
- p) Innovation has to be implemented for it to achieve its goals and objectives.

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### Types of Innovation

There are several types of innovation. They are: 1. Product Innovation 2.Process Innovation. 3. Business Model Innovation 4. Marketing Innovation, 5.Organizational Innovation, 6.Social Innovation, 7.Sustainable Innovation, 8.Technological Innovation 9. Service Innovation.

### Features / Characteristics of Disruptive Leadership

Disruptive leadership is characterized by seven key traits: visionary and critical thinking, risk-taking, challenging the status quo, empowering others, agility and adaptability, focus on innovation, and customer centricity (Goleman, 2000; McKinsey & Company, 2022). Other features of disruptive leadership include:

- a) Innovative Mindset: This will enable him to challenge the status quo and conventional leadership style for better output and results. World Economic Forum (2024) stated that leadership in the digital era increasingly requires the ability to navigate disruption, manage rapid change, and build resilient institutions.
- b) They are rationally dynamic, agile, and adaptable to trends of events at both home and global scenarios in meeting the organizational goals. They apply strategic approaches in meeting market changes and dynamics (Bahl&Raghunandan, 2022).
- c) Disruptive leaders are good team players; they carry everybody along in the organization and make their vision and mission known to all, including the organizational goals. They help team members in building capacity to face tasks ahead. Empowering team members and fostering collaboration with other stakeholders, customers, and others (Singh & Sharma, 2022).
- d) Disruptive leaders are visionary thinkers and innovators. They possess a clear vision for the future and can communicate this vision effectively to inspire others (Huang & Liao, 2022).
- e) Resilience and strength, not afraid in taking risks. Disruptive leaders show determination and resilience in their schedules, mostly when faced with challenges and obstacles (Luthans& Youssef-Morgan, 2022).
- f) Disruptive leaders are multitalented, highly intelligent, and skillful in their duty. They lay emphasis on diversification and inclusion of all stakeholders, team members, and customers. This leads to greater creativity and better innovation in the organization (Nkomo& Ng, 2022).
- g) Disruptive leaders make use of technological tools in decision making. Data-driven decision making cannot be compared to analog modes. Data-driven decisions help to improve organizational performance (Bounfour& Renault, 2024).
- h) Finally, disruptive leaders are always customer-centric in approach. They make use of feedback mechanisms to understand and meet customer needs, driving informational change (Tidd& Bessant, 2023).

### Theoretical Framework: Transformational Leadership Theory

This paper adopted Transformational Leadership Theory as its theoretical framework. This theory was developed by James McGregor Burns in 1978 and later expanded by Bernard Bass. This theory posits that leaders must inspire, motivate, and ginger their followers and teammates

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for them to achieve extraordinary outcomes in the organization. This is done through positive awareness, empowerment, rational thinking, and by helping them change their attitudes, beliefs, and values. This new change will significantly lead to increase in output or improved service delivery. Transformational leaders offer personal support and empowerment to team members, all for positive change in the organization. Transformational leaders focus on intrinsic motivation rather than extrinsic rewards. The emphasis is on positive change for the betterment of the organization.

The significance and relevance of this theory to this study is that both strive for positive change in an organization through disruptive means that leads to innovation. A transformational leader is driven by innovation based on new concepts, principles, initiatives, and models that lead to effective and efficient service delivery and customer satisfaction. All transformational leaders are innovative; there is no transformation without innovation. Traditional conservative styles of leadership can only end in mere routine jobs with little or no new initiative or ideas that drive transformation.

### **Impact of Disruptive Leadership**

- a) One of the outstanding impacts of disruptive leadership is that it leads to creativity and encourages greater and better innovation in an organization. As conventional traditional norms are interrogated and critically analyzed, new ideas crop up to better the organization. Creativity is enhanced.
- b) Disruptive leadership leads to rational positive change in management which is easily assimilated and adjusted to by all the team members. The organization can quickly adapt to market dynamics and other changes without much difficulty because their leaders are always proactive. This will give the organization competitive edge over others with traditional leadership style.
- c) As the name implies, disruptive leadership engages all and sundry in his/her administration. Employees are fully engaged. This level of engagement, participation, and empowerment leads to job satisfaction and motivation which in turn leads to output in production or in service delivery.
- d) Increased Collaboration: This leadership style fosters cross-functional collaboration, breaking down silos and enhancing team dynamics (Patel & Chan, 2024).
- e) Disruptive leaders are seen as positive agents for better positive change in the organization with determination and resilience. Disruptive leadership equips/prepares his/her team members, associates, stakeholders, and customers on how to face current realities and the future ones. Employees are trained and groomed on how to handle challenges and uncertainties effectively even before they crop up. This is an added advantage to the organizational strength and sustainability.
- f) Disruptive leaders are risk takers, not afraid of taking risks rationally using digital tools.
- g) Higher Risk Tolerance: Organizations led by disruptive leaders often develop a culture that embraces calculated risks, fostering innovation (Wu & Gonzalez, 2025).

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- h) Customer-Centric Transformation: Disruptive leadership leads organizations to prioritize customer feedback and needs, driving tailored innovations (Kim, 2025).
- i) Diverse Talent Acquisition: Such leadership attracts diverse talent, bringing varied perspectives that drive innovation and creativity (Martinez, 2025).
- j) Sustainability Initiatives: Disruptive leaders often champion sustainability efforts, aligning organizational practices with environmental concerns (Green & Brown, 2023).
- k) Long-term Vision and Strategy: Disruptive leadership encourages organizations to develop and implement visionary strategies that ensure longevity and adaptability (Yang, 2024).

### Challenges of Disruptive Leadership

Leadership of any kind is faced with several challenges, but specifically disruptive leaders are faced with the following challenges.

- a) A good number of persons have a very negative attitude when it comes to change. People prefer doing their normal routine work rather than thinking outside their thinking box. A disruptive leader must definitely have problems with his/her team members, stakeholders, and customers and others because of innovations. Employees will resist new ideas and the use of digital skills as a result of fear of the unknown.
- b) Every organization has its own culture that seems to be static and rigid. It will not be easy for a disruptive leader to change the already stereotyped culture of the organization. It will need extra thinking and strategies, including time, to change the mentality and dispositions of employees, customers, and stakeholders. There is bound to be cultural misalignment if caution is undermined.
- c) Disruptive leadership is all about change and the change must be holistic. It will lead to change in both human and material resources of the organization. Change in management and in structure of the organization. Recruiting people with needed requisites for change is a big challenge. Recruiting and retaining talent who can thrive in rapidly changing environments is a challenge.
- d) Poor communication or a gap in communication is another challenge to disruptive leaders. The slightest gap in communication between the leaders, teammates, board members, and customers about the vision, mission, and strategies to use in attaining goals means the organization is in danger.
- e) Balancing short-term and long-term goals of the organization poses a problem to disruptive leaders. As the implementation of new ideas, policy, or business models may lead to decline in revenue and it takes time. Disruptive strategies may not align with short-term goals of the organization at the initial time.
- f) Overdependence on the Leader: Teams may rely too heavily on a single disruptive leader, risking continuity if they leave.
- g) Lack of Infrastructural Facilities and Enabling Environment to drive new policies, business models, market matrix, and innovation. The existing systems may not support the implementation of disruptive technologies or processes.
- h) Regulatory and Compliance Barriers: Innovative approaches may run into legal or regulatory hurdles, slowing progress.

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- i) Huge Finance and Budget Constraints: A new idea goes with so many new things which must include money. Finance is needed for every good positive change in an organization. The new ideas and innovation, if not captured in the budget, becomes a challenge. Huge money is needed for uncertain innovation.
- j) Ethical Concerns: Pushing boundaries might raise questions about fairness, privacy, and ethics.
- k) Fear of Failure: Risk-taking is integral to disruption, but fear of failure can paralyze leadership.
- l) Misalignment with Market Timing: Even good ideas can fail if the market isn't ready or if timing is poor.
- m) Brand Identity Confusion: Frequent or radical changes might confuse the brand's core identity and alienate loyal customers.
- n) Over-complexity: Disruption can introduce overly complex systems or ideas that are hard to implement or understand.
- o) The constant pressure to innovate can lead to stress and burnout for disruptive leaders. If anything happens to him/her, the organization stands a high risk of survival.

### **The Nexus between Disruptive Leadership and Innovation**

There is a strong tie between disruptive leadership and innovation. The two concepts have a very symbiotic relationship. Innovation is a product of disruptive leadership; on the other hand, innovation guides and drives disruptive leaders to achieve optimally in an organization. This can be achieved through a well-structured measurable tool and feedback mechanisms.

Disruptive leadership changes the conventional traditional styles, norms, systems, and models through strategic thinking and analysis, leading to new models, new ideas, and systems through innovation. Leadership creativity, ability, agility, and adaptability in the organization by creating opportunities with inherent risk and breakthrough lead to innovation. The two align with organizational objectives. Create collaborative and inclusive culture. The two can swiftly respond to digital transformation trends and global dynamics in all areas. Institutional or organizational rigidity is broken through abstract philosophical, logical, theoretical, empirical, and scientific studies outside the traditional norms of leadership.

In this era of globalization and digital economy, disruptive leadership becomes the fulcrum on which innovation turns, serving as both catalyst and incubator for competitive advantage.

From the foregoing discussion on disruptive leadership, it is crystal clear that it leads to innovations. These innovations are for the betterment of the organization and society.

Disruptive leadership style is a very fertile land for current and future innovation that drives organizational goals and development.

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### Finding from the Study

The following points represent the findings from the study:

- Finding from the study discovered that disruptive leaders show high innovation performance.
- The use of digital leadership capabilities enhances competitiveness and sustainability.
- The study unveiled that emotional intelligence and technological integration foster innovation.
- Traditional/conventional leadership models hinder innovations, inhibit agility and responsiveness

### Summary

The paper titled Disruptive Leadership its implication for innovation in an organization in the twenty first century. The author gave conceptual explications of the concepts disruptive leadership and innovation. Features of innovation and types of innovation were listed. The features and characteristics of disruptive leadership, its impacts, and challenges were discussed. The nexus between disruptive leadership and innovation was explained. The study discovered that disruptive innovation is imperatively needed to overcome the challenges inherent in traditional leadership style in this current digital economy.

Conclusively, the future of innovation rests on the shoulders of leaders who dare to disrupt positively for better optimal performance in an organization or business environment virtual online trade and commerce inclusive. In an era characterized by technological advancement and global interdependence, organizations must transcend legacy systems by embracing bold, visionary, and disruptive leadership approaches. This type of leadership does not merely respond to change; it anticipates, initiates, and institutionalizes change. Disruptive leadership is not a threat to stability, rather a prerequisite for relevance and organizational sustainability. Leaders of tomorrow are those that innovate today. Be a disruptive leader anywhere you find yourself.

### Recommendations

The paper recommended disruptive leadership style for all organizations as they leverage digital technology and skills capacity development. Disruptive leadership is an agent of change through innovations. All-inclusive governance and administrative systems should be adopted. There should be a clear policy framework in line with the organizational goals and objectives. There is no innovation in conventionalism; traditionalism speaks of stagnation—as it was in the beginning, so shall it be. This has limited so many organizations. There is no new idea in routine duties without critically questioning the status quo. Leaders should empower and groom subordinates. Capacity building and empowerment are requisites in meeting current realities and organizational dynamics. Investment in digital leadership training and emotional intelligence of all staff. Creating an organizational culture that encourages experimentation and drives for excellence with strong strategic foresight is recommended.

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