# E-Leadership: Reflections in COVID-19

*Rafia Naz, National University of Samoa*

## Abstract

*This paper presents an overview of e-leadership in the pandemic COVID-19 and illuminates on the difference from traditional leadership. Leadership is a classic in itself and successful leadership via information and communication technologies (ICTs) poses numerous challenges. How these challenges can be tackled though e-leadership would be explained via reflections of the author amid the pandemic.*
**Keywords:** COVID-19, ICT, e-Leadership, Virtual teams.

## Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the nature of leadership changed from the traditional forms of leadership to e-leadership. The transference necessitated both cultural, social, and technological adaptations. Scholars indicated that leadership has been transformed via the intermediation of new forms of ICTs and changes the manner in which leadership ought to be practiced (Avolio et al., 2000; Avolio and Kahai, 2003a,b; Dasgupta, 2011; Cortellazzo et al., 2019). Scholastically, research on leadership and technology began in 2000 (Avolio et al., 2001), but the deliberations lacked vigor (Van Wart et al., 2019). Even though e-leadership developed immensely (Van Wart et al., 2016) the scholastic contributions have been scanty (Avolio et al., 2014; Oh and Chua, 2018; Roman et al., 2019). Contemporary work indicates that digital leadership has been considered as tantamount for e-leadership (Hüsing et al., 2013; Roman et al., 2019).

Subsequent to the current deliberations (Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Uhlin and Crevani, 2019), this research contributes to the existing scholarship on the correlation between leadership and technology at work. Explicitly, it seeks at facilitating conception of the phenomenon of e-leadership and its definition, and offers philosophical perspective (reflective practice) of the author. Consequently, it highpoints the challenges.

## Conceptual Underpinnings and Literature Review

E-leadership is conceptualised as those leaders who conduct many of the processes of leadership largely though electronic channels (Zaccaro and Bader, 2003). It is also regarded as leading via digital forms (Darics, 2020). The concept and its definition has been studied by scholars (Avolio et al., 2000; Van Wart et al., 2017) and tested in the field (Liu et al., 2020).

Based on the reviews of the literature, the scholarship into the research area pertaining to the examination of the interaction of leaders and followers via ICTs showed restricted academic consideration (Roman et al., 2019; Van Wart et al., 2019). There are scholars that have endeavored to operationalize the meaning of e-leadership contemplating it as a competence or a set of competencies (Jones et al., 2017; Roman et al., 2019; Van Wart et al., 2019). The concept has been investigated in the public sector

and the navy (Bergum, 2015; Ch et al., 2020).  Scholarships have also explored e-leadership in the context of teams (Ibañez-Cubillas and Miranda Pinto, 2019).

Avolio et al. (2000, 2014) states that e-leadership should be conceptualized as "a social influence process" (p. 619), while Liu et al. (2020) relates e-leadership to inclusiveness and highpoints that e-leadership is all about blending electronic and traditional methods of communication. Van Wart et al. (2019) on the other hand, conceptualizes e-leadership as pertaining to having an enhanced awareness of current ICTs, discerning the adoption of new ICTs and exploring the organization and technical competence in ICT utilization.

## Methodology

This study follows from an inquiry-based approach that has primarily relied on the review of the literature both desk reviews and online journal articles with an intent of comprehending e-leadership and providing reflective practice to account for a deeper understanding in the context of the pandemic.

## Discussion and Implications

E-leadership is not only a concept but in reflective application and practice of the author during the pandemic, e-leadership was a reality.  During the pandemic when the lockdown happened, traditional forms of leadership and support could not be availed to the workforce.  It is in this trying period, e-leadership surfaced. E-leadership demanded a change in thinking, the readiness and adaptability as well as the flexibility to leverage technology of the leader and followers ie: the workforce.  This mandated basic communication skills, tech competency, social skills, team skills for operationalising virtual teams, change management skills, basic management skills, and the ability to consider work from home contexts and challenges. It was trying to lead and maintain relationships and building trust given challenges posed due to tech glitches, accessibility, workload demands, financial constraints coupled with the workforce being located in different locations with differing ICT tools.  The challenge of managing family commitments and balancing the work commitments also added to the diverse challenges in e-leadership.  E-leadership mandated the leader/author to set a framework for communication protocols, maintain flexibility and show greater empathy in the pandemic.  Rapid transformational change and leadership was required and the leader had to utilise social media, text messages and zoom to interact with the workforce.

## Conclusion

It also needs to be stressed out that the author of the article is aware of the research limitations of the findings. The main deficiency is that this research has not relied in primary data collection but rather is an account of the authors' reflections in the pandemic. It would be difficult to draw conclusions just from one reflection on e-leadership practices holistically.

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