

Analysis of Disruptive Leaders: Key Qualities for Dealing with a Changing Environment in a Digital Age

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Abstract

The purpose of this documentary analysis study was to ascertain key qualities of disruptive leaders using content analysis methods for data analysis. Google search engine was a primary tool for gathering data. Key words such as disruptive leadership, disruptive leaders, traits of disruptive leaders, characteristics of disruptive leaders, and qualities of disruptive leaders were included for the search for data collection. Results found 46 attributes of disruptive leaders retrieved from 6 distinctive sources. This study used congruence index method to identify key characteristics, which was formulated by the median of source consistency. Findings revealed eight qualities of disruptive leaders encompassing lifelong learner, truth acceptance, guide others through disruption, decisiveness, rule breakers, unlock others' potentials, self-confidence, and business understanding.

Keywords: Leadership, Leaders, Disruptive leaders, Disruptive leadership, Digital age

Introduction

Today's organizations are mandatory to possess a disruptive capability to prevent them from extermination and to enhance their competitiveness (Kaplan, 2012). The emergence of new business and startups as well as the competition in existing markets has situated pressure on companies to be more innovative (Hoque, 2015). Organizations that focus solely on incremental changes to existing products, processes, systems, and business models may be placed into a risky position (Deloitte, 2018). The recent collapses and struggles of ever-well-known companies such as Blockbuster, Blackberry, and Kodak indicate the need of agility to cope with disruptive forces in a digital age. In 2010, the disappearance of more than 40 percent of listed firms in Fortune 500 in 2000 was reported, which exemplified the company's failure to disrupt (Joy, 2017). By definition, the word "disrupt" refers to something to be unable to carry on in a regular way (Weaver, 2016). To support companies' survival in the disruptive time, leaders are responsible for this task. Leaders not only embrace change and react to the rapidly changing environment to get their companies through the tempestuous forces, but also create change in the organization, which is part of disruption (Yorkovich, 2012). Although the latest global survey of more than 1,000 leaders across 20 distinctive industries reported that 92 percent of these executives realized and were aware of disruption and technological changes, less than 15 percent of them were found to be prepared to deal with the force of digital disruption (Wade, 2017). The findings of this survey illustrated the lack of disruptive leaders in many organizations.

The word "disruptive" implies to a negative meaning, which does not have a strong connection to describe leadership characteristics, leading to confusion over the term "disruptive leadership." However, disruptive leadership alludes to the ability to interrupt the normal mindsets and behaviors of leaders in order to run through innovative, creative, resourceful, and different approaches for organizational success (Diorio, 2016). A disruptive leader can be defined as a person who always seeks for better solutions and ways to increase processes and the corporation overall (Joy, 2017). A disruptive leader is also someone who can discontinue an organization's normal operations suddenly if found to be obsolete and could make an organization to lose its competitiveness. According to Elevate Corporate

Training (2019), a disruptive leader is a leader who searches for better solutions and methods to improve processes, systems, products, and organizations. A disruptive leader has a fearless to challenge the status quo and conventional approaches. Today's leaders realize that they need to be more proactive for disruption. To become a disruptive leader, the traditional training may provide the understanding of principles, yet leaders still need to continuously learn something outside the classroom and change their mindsets and behaviors that make their current success leading to complacency (Kaplan, 2012).

Numerous articles and features on the Internet have suggested key characteristics of disruptive leaders for development. However, according to this information, there are some consistencies and discrepancies of main qualities that a disruptive leader must have. Some characteristics are recommended based on author's experience while many of these qualities are based on leaders' survey or empirical research. In the light of this, this study aims at examining essential characteristics of leaders in a disruptive time through the analysis of secondary data to determine key qualities of disruptive leaders and develop a model of disruptive leader qualities.

Literature Reviews

Changing the status quo is not an easy task for a leader. Moving the organization to the right direction while producing essential changes or disruptions requires a subtle harmony proficiency of a leader. In addition, disruptive ideas can alter existing ways of doing things, processes, systems, and businesses to be more effective, efficient and competitive. It is quite interesting for studies in leadership area to place an emphasis on seeking crucial attributes for disruptive leaders. A recent study of Billington and Ellersgaard (2017) attempted to seek for key traits of disruptive leaders and developed a model of leadership to measure 24 competencies for all leadership levels. These 24 competencies were developed solely based on the 4 essential attributes of leadership including business know-how, actions, leadership, and relationship with others. They also described responsibilities of leaders in different level when facing disruptions. However, this study did not explain how leadership model for disruption containing 24 competencies was developed.

Based on systematic reviews, this study found numerous articles on the Internet that proposed key traits of disruptive leaders. Nevertheless, no collective main characteristics that a disruptive leader must possess were found. This study, therefore, attempted to seek for consistency of qualities to determine key characteristics of disruptive leaders. Related literatures were reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Hoque (2015) noted that disruptive leadership is about assimilating change into the organization's working systems. In his perspective, the real disruptive leader takes action rather than talking about disruption and five methods leaders who embrace disruption and discharge it through their entire organizations include the pursuit of the truth, guide others through chaos, be decisive, break normal ways, and concede uncertainty. Network of Executive Women (NEW) (2015) reported the talk of Cindy Kent, the president and GM for drug delivery systems at 3M, for more than 300 leaders at the New Executive Leaders Forum in July 2015 referring to 10 attributes of disruptive leadership. These qualities of disruptive leadership include: self-awareness, authentic, accountability, intellectual curiosity, integrative thinking, contextual intelligence, unleash others' potential, master change and thrive in challenge, don't fear for failure, and think big and bold. Garner (2015) proposed 5 rules of disruptive leadership, which encompassed curiosity, self-confidence, agility, build intellectual bank, and seek for different ideas and opinions.

Jackson (2017) outlined 11 traits of great disruptive leaders possess that help strengthen organization in disruptive times. The 11 attributes comprised of self-confidence and courage, self-control, a keen sense of justice, decisiveness, definiteness of plans, doing

more than paid for, a great personality, sympathy and understanding, mastery of detail, accountability, and cooperation.

Furth (2018) proposed 8 characteristics of disruptive leaders, which in his book, "Owning Tomorrow: The Unstoppable Force of Disruptive Leadership." He noted that most successful disruptive leaders in business firms usually possess eight basic attributes in common, which are lifelong learning, rule breakers, disrupt their own frames of reference and unproductive mindsets, search for information, insights, and inspiration for various sources, business focused for more efficiency and effectiveness, understand the negative consequence of disruption, take actions and commitment, and generate unimaginable wealth for themselves all stakeholders. Additionally, Elevate Corporate Training (2019) described the overall characteristic of disruptive leaders that they do not change because organizations need to be altered solely, but they attempt to enhance value through change. They are trying to change all aspects of their organizations before they are forced to change. This institution provided seven traits of disruptive leaders as follows: fearless in pursuing the truth, decisive and inspire confidence, adaptability, life-long learners, understand that disruption can cause uncertainty, customer focused, and rule breakers.

Methodology

This study was a documentary analysis, which a secondary data retrieved on the Internet were used for data analysis. Google search engine was a primary tool for gathering data. Key words such as disruptive leadership, disruptive leaders, traits of disruptive leaders, characteristics of disruptive leaders, and qualities of disruptive leaders were included for the search for data collection. This study limited its search for only general websites that provided relevant information about characteristics of disruptive leaders, not academic websites. Some related books were also incorporated for data analysis. Content analysis technique was utilized for synthesizing and analyzing data to determine key characteristics of disruptive leaders based on the congruence of qualities from at least X distinctive sources depending on the total number of sources. The formulation used to identify the congruence of source was the 50 percent of a total source. The model of disruptive leaders' qualities was to be developed in accordance with the consequences of analysis.

Findings

Based on the documentary analysis, this study found 6 distinctive sources that provided essential characteristics of disruptive leaders. In fact, there were plenty of related articles in this topic posted on the Internet, yet many of them were the same as they copied the idea from original papers or sources without providing references. The researcher collected all this information and removed unproductive articles from the list. Finally, this study came up with 6 original sources consisting of 5 websites and 1 book to use for data analysis. Findings showed 46 characteristics of disruptive leaders retrieved altogether from 6 different sources. The minimum qualities of disruptive leaders proposed by Hoque (2015) were 5 while the maximum attributes of disruptive leaders were 11, which found on Furth's book (2018).

Table 1: Summary of Disruptive Leader Characteristics on the Internet Search

Website	Article/ Book	Author(S)	Numbers of Disruptive Leader Qualities
www.fastcompany.com	5 habits of truly disruptive leaders	Hoque, F. (2015)	5
www.newonline.org	Cindy Kent: Embrace 10 traits of disruptive leaders	Network of Executive Women (2015)	10
success.com	5 rules of disruptive leadership	Garner, J. (2015)	5
linkedin.com	11 traits of the disruptive leader	Jackson, T. (2017)	11
www.amazon.com	Owning tomorrow: the unstoppable force of disruptive leadership	Furth, J. (2018)	8
www.elevatecorporatetraining.com.au	The 7 characteristics of disruptive leaders	Elevate Corporate Training (2019)	7

Table 2 revealed results of disruptive leader characteristics synthesis and analysis. Of 6 distinctive sources, 46 characteristics of disruptive leaders were synthesized and analyzed by using content analysis approach. The consistency of disruptive leaders from at least 3 sources (the formulation used to determine the congruence of source was the 50 percent of a total source). Findings indicated that 8 characteristics of disruptive leaders were found to have a consistency from at least 3 distinctive sources. Results demonstrated that intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning ($f=4$) had the highest frequency followed by pursuit of truth ($f=3$), guide others through chaos ($f=3$), be decisive ($f=3$), rule breakers ($f=3$), unleash others' potentials ($f=3$), self-confidence ($f=3$), and understand business ($f=3$), respectively.

Table 2: Synthesis and Analysis of Disruptive Leader Characteristics

Author(S) Qualities	Hoque (2015)	Network of Executive Women (2015)	Garner (2015)	Jackson (2017)	Furth (2018)	Elevate Corporate Training (2019)	Total
Pursuit of Truth	√				√	√	3
Guide Others Through Chaos	√			√	√		3
Be Decisive	√		√			√	3
Rule Breakers	√				√	√	3
Thrive on Uncertainty	√					√	2
Self-Awareness		√		√			2
Authentic		√					1
Accountability		√		√			1
Intellectual Curiosity		√	√		√	√	4
Integrative Thinking		√					1
Unleash Others' Potential		√	√		√		3
Thrive in Challenge		√					1
Fearless for Failure		√					1
Think Big and Bold		√					1
Self-Confidence			√	√		√	3
Agility			√			√	2
Understanding the Business				√	√	√	3
Cooperation				√			1

Next, these eight qualities of disruptive leaders were to be described and utilized for developing disruptive leadership qualities model. Descriptions for each characteristic were proposed as follows:

1. *Lifelong learner* – a disruptive leader must possess this trait so as to successful run the organization to accomplish the new goals. A digital leader must continuously seek for new knowledge and ideas from various sources and be curious to ask critical questions that help change the organization to be more effective and efficient.
2. *Truth acceptance* – a disruptive leader must admit truth of whatever consequences that might happen to the organization. Also, a disruptive leader needs to understand the limitation and weaknesses of the organization in a face of disruption, and try to seek for solutions to better performance.
3. *Guide others through times of disruption* – a disruptive leader needs to be responsible for assisting people in the organization to get through times of disruption by motivating, inspiring, and supporting them.
4. *Decisiveness* – a disruptive leader must be decisive for what would benefit the organization to enhance better quality of products, processes, systems, markets, and businesses. A disruptive leader gathers information to help support his/her decision-making and accept for what would occur after making decision.

5. *Rule breakers* – a disruptive leader must challenge the organization’s status quo or traditional ways of doing things in order to produce valuable change.
6. *Unlock others’ potentials* – a disruptive leader needs to understand that disrupting the organization’s conventional ways cannot be successful without employees’ cooperation and collaboration. However, existing capabilities of employees may not be sufficient for helping organizations to succeed in times of disruption. A disruptive leader needs to unleash employees’ potentials, which are hidden inside them to exposure.
7. *Self-confidence* – a disruptive leader must be confident enough to make decisions that are advantageous for the disruption.
8. *Business understanding* – a disruptive leader must understand the nature of business and be able to participate the positive and negative consequences that might happen before and after deciding for disruption.

Figure 1 illustrated qualities of disruptive leader model in which eight characteristics were proposed as key components to develop disruptive leaders. Disruptive leaders must possess these key characteristics in order to successfully run organizations in times of disruption.

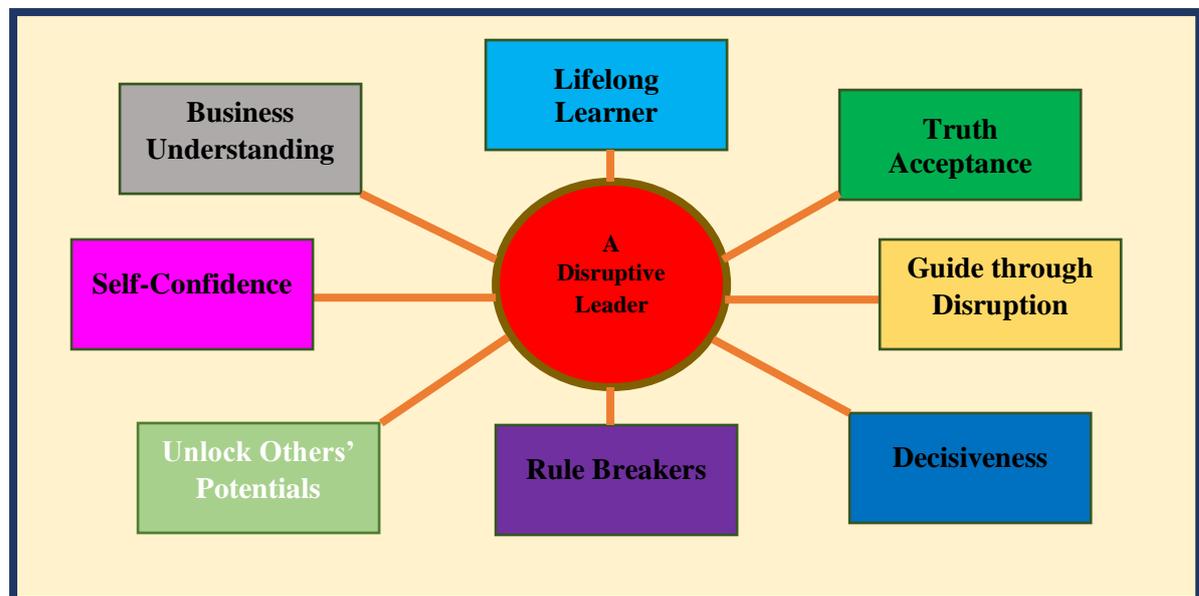


Figure 1: Eight Qualities of a Disruptive Leader

Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to identify key characteristics of disruptive leaders using documentary analysis and content analysis methods. Findings revealed 46 attributes of disruptive leaders retrieved from 6 distinctive sources. This study used content analysis approach to synthesize and analyze these 46 qualities using congruence index method to determine key characteristics, which was formulated by the median of source consistency. Findings demonstrated eight qualities of disruptive leaders including lifelong learner, truth acceptance, guide others through disruption, decisiveness, rule breakers, unlock others’ potentials, self-confidence, and business understanding.

Although this study provided various benefits for leadership development, findings of this study were limited to the search on the Internet solely. A further study should enhance the methodology by enhancing its search on relevant textbooks, books, and research articles rather than websites, which may represent only writer’s perspectives. Also, to increase

trustworthiness of findings, a future study should conduct Delphi technique or exploratory factor analysis as part of data analysis.

Businesses and organizations can utilize these eight characteristics to develop the training and development programs for all leadership levels in order to improve their disruptive skills in times of disruption. Case studies of disruptive leaders who possess these qualities should be analyzed to confirm the findings of this study in the future.

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