



LEADING THROUGH DISRUPTIONS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

Disruptions present both challenges and opportunities for leaders. Resilient leaders embrace challenges through proactive and forward thinking by building internal trust and planning for growth by taking advantage of technological advances. Failure to do so will certainly lead to disastrous results for any business. During periods of uncertainty, individual employees look for guidance and reassurance from top level managers. While management theories and best practices may suggest a variety of strategies to handle disruptions, the realities on the ground will certainly suggest adapting to change, and a strong commitment to the mission of the organization, from both leaders and followers. This article provides an overview of the role of leadership in interacting with disruptions.

Keywords

Leadership; Technological disruptions; Organizational change

Introduction

Throughout history, disruptions have impacted several aspects of everyday life such as transportation, healthcare, and communication. Technological disruptions have been the most impactful by changing the way businesses operate. In addition to creating new market opportunities, technological disruptions make current business processes obsolete, and lead to the elimination of certain jobs that will be lost to automation. Artificial intelligence (AI) has led to disruptions in every industry and how people live and work. Its accelerating pace has created a great opportunity for many businesses to transform customers' experiences and lives. Businesses are exploiting AI disruptions to lead by combining data, AI, and human intelligence to create financial prosperity for consumers. Armed with AI tools businesses process transactions at an entirely new speed. Businesses are investing in data, data services, AI, and human expertise to mine for intelligence about their customers for the purpose of delivering personalized experiences to respond to their needs.

Today, the pace of disruptions, uncertainty, and the global talent shortage is reaching 85 million (Anonymous, 2025). In the U.S., there were 7.6 million opening in 2025 (Jackson, 2025). Furthermore, according to the World Economic Forum's future jobs report 2025, about 92 million jobs are predicted to be displaced by 2030, while 170 million new roles are expected to be created by the same year. Several factors contributed to talent shortage such as aging and retiring (Brower, 2024; Kornfield & Natanson, 2025); decline in fertility (Calfas & DeBarros, 2025; Yang & Verdi, 2025); restrictions on immigration (Jansen, 2025; Ngo, 2025); and skills mismatch, where applicants don't have the skills employers need (Brower, 2024; Kornfield & Natanson, 2025). This will require a joint effort by government, businesses, and educational institutions to supply employees with the future-ready skills. For example, several states are restructuring education and workforce systems to better align curriculum with careers in order to meet labor

needs (Donadel, 2026). Educational institutions are creating partnerships with industries to secure internships for students to provide experiential skills-based learning. For example, in Virginia, “InternshipVA” is a state-wide initiative to connect students with paid internships for the purpose of gaining professional experience before graduation. Also, there are a several other programs across the USA, at the state as well as the federal levels for the purpose of building a workforce ready for the future.

Leadership: Challenges and Opportunities

Leadership can be a struggle, but embracing uncertainty is the essence of leadership (Clampitt & DeKoch, 2001). It has been said there is no leadership without followership. In the face of disruptive tensions, however, there are growth opportunities. This is especially when taking advantage of advances in information technology. However, some leaders remain tied to the traditional command-and-control model of leadership with the multi-layered structures to establish control through rules and procedures (George, 2010). In addition, few leaders may attempt to centralize decisions in crisis response. This may lead to micromanagement resulting in psychosocial hazards among employees such as stress, anxiety, or bullying. Specifically, this style of leadership will not foster a good working climate for talent retention, and different components of the diverse workforce. That is, leading through crisis isn’t about control- it’s about learning how to ride the storm (Schulze & Pinkow, 2020). Leaders are expected to add value by accepting adaptability to ambiguity as the norm (Corkran & Kemper, 2025). This may include adopting agility, flattened structures, decentralized decision-making, and collaboration (Hebbar, 2023). For years, organizations have downsized their workforce in the name of efficiency, cost pressure, and AI automation. However, some suggested that AI is not delivering what the initial hype promised (Stadler, 2024; Procopio, 2025).

Today, disruption from technology, globalization, and proliferation of AI requires leaders to cultivate three competencies: adaptability, cross-cultural understanding embedding in transparency, and trust. Specifically, leaders should not cling to the strategies that brought them success and should instead embrace disruption as an opportunity for transformation. For example, when Alan Mulally took over as CEO of Ford, he discovered that the company was struggling to lose billions of dollars. Instead of criticizing his senior team, he understood that admitting reality was not a failure, but the beginning of progress. That is, creating a culture of moving from protecting past decisions to improving them was a better strategy (Gostick, 2026). Although no one-size fits all strategy to effective leadership, Table 1 represents a list of leadership theories to select from, based on the influence of their internal and external environmental conditions (Chiwisa, 2024; Khan & Hussanie, 2017).

Table 1: Leadership Theories

Theory	Description
Situational Leadership Theory	Situational theory emphasizes the importance of shaping leaders’ responses to be more relationship or task motivated, or more authoritative or participative. The focus of the situational approach to leadership is on observed behavior, not only on any hypothetical inborn or acquired ability or potential for leadership.
Contingency Leadership Theory	Contingency theory suggests that leaders’ influence is contingent on variables related to the environment determining leadership styles. Leader behaviors have a direct impact on the performance and satisfaction of a group. To do this, various factors interact, including the leader, their position, group members, and the internal and external environment of the organization
Transformational	Transformational leaders are focused on the performance of the group members, but also on each person fulfilling his or her potential.
Participative Leadership Theory	The ideal leadership style is one that takes the input of others into account.
Skills Leadership Theory	States that learned knowledge and acquired skills/abilities are significant factors in the practice of effective leadership.
Behavioral Leadership Theory	Behavioral theories of leadership argue that a specific set of behaviors can be classified as a leadership style. Leadership style is the distinct behavior exhibited by individuals in formal leadership roles.

Complicated times demand great leaders. Leadership is not about titles, authority, or egoism. It's about results, character, humility, and empowering others to become better. President Ronald Reagan reminded us that great leaders lift others up, not just themselves. He said "the greatest leaders are not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do greatest things." (Humans of Globe, 2025).

Here's an overview of leadership competencies required to succeed as a leader in today's increasingly competitive marketplace, facing talent shortages, technology, and shifting demographics:

- (1) Ability to direct and contribute to initiatives and processes within the organization.
- (2) Ability to integrate core values, integrity, and accountability throughout all organizational and business practices.
- (3) Ability to advocate for culturally diverse and inclusive workplace. For example, in today's intense political rhetoric, about 85 percent of surveyed companies expressed their commitment to building fair and inclusive workplaces (Guynn, 2025).
- (4) Ability to have strengths in dealing with uncertainty and coping with adversity. Effective leadership skills happen on the job in successfully managing today's disruptions.
- (5) Ability to foster a cross-culture of adaptability. It includes the power of humility by demonstrating empathetic and compassionate leadership (Feit, 2025). It is the belief that something is greater than self-existence.
- (6) To overcome the unspoken expectations of perfection, leaders should acknowledge their own mistakes and share their alternative ideas with their management teams for their feedback.

Disruptions offer opportunities to leaders in the context of organizational change management. This is through careful planning for a cultural shift to ensure that changes are successfully adopted into the daily workflows of employees. Successful leaders would rely on their experiences to navigate through situations of employees' resistance to change and offer all resources necessary for training and development opportunities. Consequently, disruptions could turn out to be a major factor contributing to celebrating both a successful transition and a leader who is now a champion of the people.

Conclusion

Given today's unpredictable disruptions in the global business environment, leaders who embrace adaptability can make the necessary adjustments to navigate through the new technologies, market trends, and stakeholders' preferences. Specifically, leaders who are flexible and willing to create a positive organizational culture where employees feel valued and engaged, which will lead to growth in a competitive global market. In general, the leaders that people trust are those who show how to adjust, adapt, and move forward.

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