Chapter 4

Long Tail Leadership:
A Covid Case Study Illustrates the Importance of Understanding Soft Power Affecting Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The increased weighting of digital natives in a fattening long tail has added complexity to organizational leadership, particularly during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Trends affecting the individual come from social, economic, and technological sources and affect leadership behaviors, and this in turn affects society. In order to understand this interconnection, lower-level influences and how they affect the higher-level visible signs are discussed. These lead to influences on behavior. Influences are felt as intensity and embeddedness of engagement, decision-management, feedback ability, and motivators. This chapter begins with a discussion of causes for this phenomenon and concludes with ways to work with the long tail, either from within as a member or externally as a leader. The chapter ends with a brief comment on future research based on findings discussed in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

The discussion in this chapter is based on original empirical research into 'engagement with digital networked technologies' and involved both qualitative and quantitative research into personality factor correlations related to engagement. This revised

chapter summarizes the original chapter and includes discussion on the application of these concepts in a case study, where the soft power of long tail leadership and the agility of an organization led to not simply the survival of the organization during the during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, but rather to its thriving by accommodating fulfillment of basic human needs such as work, recreation and connection. General relevant literature related to the discussed social phenomenon is still sparse and in order to progress this discussion the literature review is not specifically confined to the background section of this chapter but is dispersed throughout the chapter.

Qualitative research, in the form of interviews and focus groups, revealed significant insights pertinent to this chapter and have been used to substantiate aspects of the discussion. In the initial research it was observed that participants who were deeply engaged with technology also appeared to participate in 'social activism' to a greater degree. This raised the question: what mechanism could translate minor acts of activism on a mass scale into social change and challenges for leaders of organizations

We can see a number of changes rippling through society. One of the most startling is the behavior of the long tail. The previously least influential members of society are becoming more important both as a proportion of the total and in their willingness to exert influence. It appears that the long tail is getting fatter! There are significant behavioral changes at the individual level that can be traced to social trends: the individual believes they have self-worth, they assume their individualism will be acknowledged, and they are increasingly primed for instant gratification as demonstrated in the documentary 'The Social Dilemma'. The long tail is now more assertive! Of great significance are the changed behaviors resulting from engagement with technology: the expectation that in the digital environment things are cheap, fast, connected and that there will be a like-minded peer group to support and assist them. The long tail has expectations! In the long tail it is harder to differentiate leaders from those being led: individuals may simultaneously be both. Most people in society are part of the influential long tail even if they are not aware of it! And it may be that leaders are being led (upward management), and they are not aware of it.

The discussion looks at digital technology as an environment and how the individual operates within the duality of real world and digital environments. It then continues to a discussion on digital technology as a tool and how through engagement with the technology the individual becomes enmeshed and synthesized with the technologies. This leads onto how engagement with technology amplifies individual's behaviors, which affects society and challenges leaders. Each challenge has a suggestion for coping with this social phenomenon. Finally, the chapter concludes with a look at future research directions. It should be noted that the nature of this topic requires a

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