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E-leadership: what it is and what skills it requires

The changes brought about by new technologies have led to the emergence of the e-leader, who combines digital and leadership skills to foster innovation.

New technologies have brought significant changes to everyday life, digitizing various aspects of work, education, and daily activities. This trend intensified during the pandemic, as more people turned to **digital solutions** for studying and working from home. In this new landscape, a different approach to education management has become necessary, and **eLearning** has taken hold across the country, supporting the education of both young people and adults.

Online courses are now a widespread mode of learning, offering the possibility to complete a customized educational path tailored to the user's needs, both in terms of access times and lesson modes, and in the choice of topics. These changes have led to the emergence of new **professional figures** who have had to develop digital skills to keep pace with the times. Among these, the role of the **e-leader** is of primary importance. An e-leader is a charismatic guide capable of leveraging new technologies to help the company grow and stay updated on digital changes.

What is E-leadership?

The term "**e-leadership**" refers to the set of abilities that enable a person to guide, influence, and motivate a group by intelligently using digital tools. E-leadership signifies the aptitude to optimally utilize new technologies within a company or organization, or to introduce digital solutions into the sector in which one operates. E-leadership skills consist of the combination of traditional leadership abilities and those specific to the digital environment. Thus, tradition and digitalization merge into a single figure.

The person who possesses these skills is called an e-leader. According to the website of the Agency for Digital Italy, an e-leader is someone capable of "**leveraging digital technologies to define and implement digital innovation projects.**" This person possesses both traditional leadership skills and digital abilities, showing themselves as a multifaceted professional in continuous evolution and updating. They have acquired and continue to learn new skills through both formal educational paths and work experiences.

The path of the E-leader

An e-leader is a professional with **creative and innovative abilities**, driving the companies and organizations they work for towards evolution and change in an innovative future scenario. An e-leader can hold a leadership role at the top of a company, such as an executive or manager leading their workers, or they may serve as a consultant for innovations.

The importance of this figure lies in their ability to look beyond the present and think of new projects capable of breaking traditional patterns to bring about change. To do this, an e-leader must possess various skills, including an excellent knowledge of the digital world, strong communication and relational abilities, and organizational and management skills.

The path of the e-leader involves a continuous integration of different components, making them a versatile professional capable of keeping up with the times and proposing innovative projects for their sector. In general, an e-leader must possess:

- **Formal skills**, learned during their educational journey, whether at school, university, or through online learning courses. These are the academic knowledge the person carries with them.
- **Non-formal skills**, acquired during their working career, through participation in projects or simulations of real situations, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge practically.
- **Informal skills**, learned on the field, through direct work experience or daily life.

To acquire e-leadership skills useful for becoming a professional capable of driving change and innovation, it is necessary to combine one's knowledge with experiences, always aiming to stay updated with new technologies and looking to the future with foresight, to anticipate trends that keep the work world evolving.

E-leadership skills

The fundamental skills of an e-leader include the proper use of new technologies and the introduction of digital innovation within the company or organization. However, these skills must be closely integrated with the traditional skills typical of a leader and those specific to the sector in which one operates.

The essential components of e-leadership can be divided into five areas, corresponding to **three general skills** that an e-leader must possess to become a good, up-to-date guide.

1. **Knowledge of the digital world**. Mastering the digital world is a fundamental skill for becoming a good e-leader. Without a broad understanding of new devices, it would be very difficult to use technologies innovatively to help one's company make strides forward and evolve. Beyond possible programs, an e-leader must also keep up with information and communication technologies. It is particularly important to know the main tools for managing online security to avoid **risks**, and the applications of various online programs, regardless of the device used (be it a computer or smartphone). An e-leader must also stay informed about data related to digital tools and know the applications useful for online management and sharing and for optimizing work times. This way, they will be able to understand the processes that characterize digital innovation and apply it to their company or organization.
2. **Soft skills**. **Soft skills** refer to individual and personal competencies, including attitudes and behaviors in how one perceives the world and communicates and relates to others. Clearly, many soft skills depend on an individual's character and fall within the traditional leadership competencies. Charisma, communication skills, and group and conflict management are partly innate qualities. However, this does not mean that those who do not naturally possess these skills cannot become good leaders. The abilities to adapt to different situations, solve problems, communicate effectively, manage conflicts, and motivate employees can be learned or refined through appropriate training and experience.
3. **Organizational leadership**. This includes the organizational skills required to plan, design, and program future events, managing resources effectively. A good leader must be able to coordinate their team, valuing each member and encouraging collaboration with colleagues. This way, employees will look together in one direction and be more motivated to achieve the set goal of digital innovation. Specifically, an e-leader with organizational leadership must be able to:

- **Recognize opportunities for innovation** and change based on the potential offered by applying digital solutions to various work environments.
- **Identify innovative and comprehensive projects** that do not merely involve digitizing existing projects but are specifically designed for the conscious use of new technologies, offering completely different and innovative opportunities. Adapting what was intended for paper to digital is never a good solution, as the online world uses a completely different perspective that can be leveraged to create a wholly new evolution of various work fields.

In addition to these general competencies, two more are specifically aimed at e-leaders in public administration:

- **Public administration management**. Besides the ability to lead and manage their team, a good e-leader must also understand the public administration context to identify new trends and potential applications in this field. They must possess the organizational and ethical knowledge and skills necessary to make decisions that conform to legislative guidelines, linked to the strategy and specific mission of public administration.
- **Knowledge of public administration digital processes.** To implement innovative changes, the public administration e-leader must also possess technological and digital skills. This figure must ensure compliance with the principles governing digital citizenship, creating an inclusive, accessible, and transparent environment to enable citizens to exercise their digital rights, respecting privacy and security. Additionally, the public administration e-leader must be able to create innovative and reorganization projects that improve the effectiveness and quality of services.

In the new digital environment, the role of the e-leader has become crucial for every company, enabling it to have a future-oriented vision and use new technologies not just to optimize and improve existing processes but also to anticipate future needs and trends. Therefore, the ability to manage digital resources and organizational and motivational skills are essential for a

company leader to be a good e-leader.