



**TECHNIUM**  
**SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL**

**Vol. 12, 2020**

**A new decade  
for social changes**

[www.techniumscience.com](http://www.techniumscience.com)

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

## **Improving The Leadership Quality In Disruptive Era : Challenges For Leaders In Government Agencies**

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**Abstract.** This study aims at answering the research questions of what competencies needed by leaders in the disruptive era, and how to improve the quality of leaders in government agencies. This study uses a phenomenological approach of a qualitative research design. In this study a semi-structured interview is used to understand how participants experienced the phenomenon. The research proved that leaders in the disruptive era have to have a high understanding of VUCA and the changes that have occurred radically. Leaders in the disruptive era must also be agile, more open and willing to communicate and collaborate with various parties. By changing the perspective and attitude, the old leadership style that is no longer suitable for the era of disruption can be changed. This research will contribute significantly benefits and add empirical evidence about leadership related to the disruptive era, for the development of social sciences, especially management and leadership

**Keywords.** Leadership quality, disruptive era, agile

### **1. Introduction**

Since the Indonesian government announced the national coronavirus disaster (COVID-19) on March 14, our society has been faced with a new era in which the use of technology dominates all aspects of people's lives. The internet of things (IoT) has become a new culture that was previously considered a complement, now it has become an indispensable necessity for those who work from home, learn from home, or do any activity from home. With the COVID 19 pandemic, it is not only private companies that are disrupted by the presence of today's technology. Based on data from the Ministry of Manpower as of April 7, 2020, there were 39,977 companies that terminated their employment and laid off 1,010,579 employees. Meanwhile, the number of companies and workers affected in the informal sector was 34,453 companies with a total of 189,452 workers.<sup>1</sup> Government agencies have also experienced the same thing with the accelerated use of information and communication technology in governance practices. Therefore, any organization or institution will be threatened with disruption if it does not immediately make changes and adjustments to the existing situation. So, only those who are most adaptive or responsive to change will survive. In other words, change is inevitable. Nothing is sustainable in this world except change itself.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-52218475>

Thus, directly or indirectly the COVID-19 pandemic has opened our eyes to prepare ourselves for the era of change which is currently known as the disruptive era or VUCA. VUCA stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. With this volatile situation, leaders are required to have the ability to unleash the potential of all people by instilling and encouraging them to adapt to VUCA situations which are very confusing. For example, leaders try to reduce employee anxiety in dealing with change. In this era of disruption, high standards of quality are needed to lead an organization or work unit. With bigger challenges, changing conditions that are very fast, changing job targets according to market needs that are also moving exponentially must be answered by organizational leaders with appropriate leadership qualities. Kotter's study concluded that successful change or transformation is the result of 70-90 percent of leadership and only 10-30 percent of management. Therefore, companies or organizations that are over-managed and underled will find it difficult to succeed in transforming themselves according to the demands of the times.

Several studies related to the disruptive era have been conducted. In 2018, [1] conducted a research entitled *Librarian Self Disruptive Facing the Industrial Revolution Era 4.0*. This research states that in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, librarians cannot stand by the onslaught of technology. It is not impossible, the position of librarians will be shifted considering that today's virtual world facilitates the connectivity of humans, machines and data. If their existence is to be maintained, librarians must be ready to improve their quality and create innovations in library services. Another researcher who also examines the disruptive era is [2]. In his research entitled *Rahardja Higher Education Innovation in a Disruptive Era Using the iLearning Methodology*, Rahardja said that the STMIK Rahardja Tangerang campus has now innovated to run a lecture using the iLearning method. The similarity of the above research and this research, both raise the problem of the disruptive era or industry 4.0. The next researcher who also examined the problem of the disruptive era was [3] with the title *The Effect of Job Satisfaction on Employee Performance at the Agent of PT Jasaraharja Putera, Jakarta Branch*. The results of her research prove that company leaders must pay attention to work morale because morale is a mental attitude that can encourage someone to work harder, faster, and better. Another factor that determines job productivity is work discipline because the loss of work discipline will affect work efficiency and employee duties.

The difference between the three studies above and this research is the methodology applied. The first research used mixed methods, namely quantitative and qualitative, while the second and third research used quantitative methods. Meanwhile, this study uses a qualitative methodology. In addition, this study took research locations in government agencies, while previous researchers took the locations in private companies. The three researchers above also did not focus their research on leadership. This is very different from this research, which in addition to examining the problems of the disruptive era, also examines leadership problems, such as a research conducted by [4] which states that company performance is influenced by *ambidextrous* leadership and is mediated by organizational learning. Research conducted by [5] states that *ambidextrous* leadership is needed to face an innovative era. Research conducted by [6] states that in order to survive, organizations need leaders who have a growth mindset (active in seeing opportunities, innovative, creative, and not afraid of risk). Research conducted by [7] states that companies with a growth mindset outperform companies with a fixed mindset. Of the three studies related to leadership above, not one has examined leadership in the disruptive era which is the object of this research. Herein lies the difference.

The purpose of this paper is to answer the research questions of what factors needed by leaders in the disruptive era and how to improve the quality of leaders in government agencies. This research will contribute significantly benefits and add empirical evidence about leadership related to the disruptive era, for the development of social sciences, especially management and leadership. This research is also expected to be useful as information material for human resources development in government agencies and also can be used as reference materials to provide training to civil servants about the leadership skills in the disruptive era.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Definition of Disruptive Era**

The term disruption is widely defined as an era of disruption, which is considered to have caused many losses to society, institutions and even a country. In the business world, we also hear that many companies have experienced a decline in revenue, and even some have gone bankrupt and have been closed down. The disruptive era has also always been associated with technology with all its sophistication, and its rapid progress. This technology gives rise to various innovations, and leaves various conventional systems, such as conventional transportation which is starting to be abandoned, and replaced with application-based transportation, as well as conventional newspapers which have been replaced by digital newspapers.

The era of disruption cannot be interpreted as a phenomenon that only describes today's change but also reflects tomorrow's change or the future change [8]. The era of disruption is considered to have disrupted existing businesses. However, this era also has a positive side, namely that it can encourage the development of products or service systems, resulting in lower prices [9]. Thus, the era of disruption will continue to create significant changes in response to demands and needs. The domain of the disruption era also extends from the cost structure, culture to industrial ideology. The implication is that business management is no longer centered on individual ownership, but becomes a division of roles or collaboration or mutual cooperation [8].

The current era of disruption is always associated with VUCA. With this volatile situation, leaders are required to have the ability to unleash the potential of all people by instilling and encouraging them to adapt to VUCA situations which are very confusing. VUCA which stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity is a description of the situation in the business world and organizations today. The term was originally coined by the American military to describe the geo-political situation at that time. However, due to the similarity in meaning, the term VUCA is now being adopted by the business world and the public sector [10]. The bureaucrats in this era of disruption are expected to be able to innovate without stopping, also collaborate with many parties to be massive, create inspiring programs to support innovation and must be adaptive. This era does not need leaders who only like to give instructions, but never motivate and inspire. A conservative leadership style will only make employees who are mostly born in the Gen Y era and millennials uncomfortable. Companies that have many young employees will feel overwhelmed by this conservative leadership style. Young employees hope that their superiors are not only good at commanding, but also open-minded who in the end understand what complaints are experienced by their employees, in government organizations too. In the past, each division or directorate was challenged to be the best. Now, each division or directorate is challenged to be the one who synergizes and collaborates with other divisions or directorates. Individually, staff performance indicators should also be changed. Each staff must be challenged to be the one who synergizes and collaborates the most, not competing.

## 2.2 Leadership in Disruptive Era

In this condition of disruption that tends to change, leaders in companies, organizations and government institutions are required to have the ability to encourage their entire HR team to be able to adapt to the very confusing VUCA situation. For example, leaders should seek to reduce employee anxiety in facing change by turning challenges into opportunities for increased performance and competitive advantage. Not only that, leaders must be able to become agents of positive change in the midst of chaos. The Corona Virus Diseases (COVID-19) pandemic is like a shock to the current situation and inevitably everyone is forced to understand conditions that do not provide comfort. One example is the conditions related to work culture that was previously applied with conventional systems, then forced to take part in the era of disruption by doing work from home (WFH).

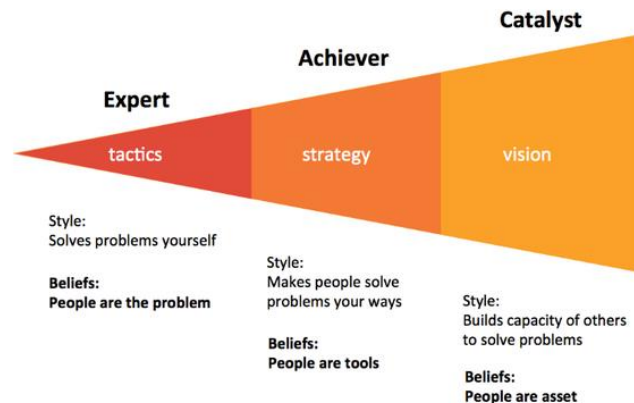
Of the many leadership theories, there are two of the best known, namely transformational leadership and transactional leadership theory. Transformational leadership theory was developed by [11] in an organizational context after being previously introduced by [12] in a political context. Transformational Leadership Theory states that leaders can optimize their power and influence primarily through charisma (referent power) and inspiration (visionary processes). According to [13] as quoted by [14] that transformation occurs through a three-act drama (a three-act drama), namely: Awakening, Envisioning, and Researchitecturing. [15] states that a transformational leader must have a strong vision. Thus, a transformational leader must also be a visionary [16], [17].

Meanwhile, transactional leadership is based on social learning theory [18] and social exchange theory [19]. Transactional leadership theory recognizes the nature of leadership with reciprocal deterministic relationships [11], [12]. [19], [13]. Transactional leaders always transact with their subordinates. If there is something he gives then he always thinks what he will get. For example, if he says there will be an increase in honorarium or overtime pay, the transactional leader will tell his employees beforehand to show their work productivity or performance. Transactional leadership always refers to the assumption that rewards and punishments are the best system to be implemented to motivate the subordinates [20]. Transactional leadership tends not to make the organization or the parties related to it develop, let alone the people it leads. [21] examined whether employees who worked under transformational leadership felt their leaders were more effective than employees who worked for transactional leaders and the result is that those who work for transformational leaders felt their leaders were more effective.

In an unstable situation, projecting what happened in the past can actually be misleading if it is used as a reference for decision making. Leaders need to respond with an unusual mindset. The skills and knowledge that were used as a mainstay are very likely to be irrelevant. A large part of the workforce with knowledge of the past can now turn into a burden on the company. If their knowledge and experience are not equipped with reskilling and mindset changes, it will be difficult to be able to swim in the swiftness of the VUCA environment. [9] emphasizes the aspect of public leaders as part of politics because they have to be accountable to their voters (the people), so it is different from leaders in private companies who must be responsible to the board of shareholders. Thus political leaders play a very important role in the process of organizational change and must be competent and trained in the process of organizational transformation [22]. In facing an uncertain era like VUCA, as leaders we must be confident and continue to find ways not to be disrupted. We must also be able to bring energy and trust to the teams in our organization. A book, entitled "Leadership Agility" written by [23] describes a validated leadership model for doing that. Research shows that only about 10% of managers have the necessary level of agility to be able to work effectively and be able to withstand the volatile business world like today. Research shows that there are currently three levels of agility

in leadership that organizations generally have: *Expert* (55% of leaders), *Achiever* (35% of leaders), *Catalyst* (10% of leaders).

Figure 1 Leadership Agility



Source: Joiner and Joseph (2006)

Still based on research results, the *Expert* level works tactical. Their orientation is to solve problems. They believe that leaders are respected and followed by others because of their authority and expertise. For the *Achiever* level, they are both strategy and results oriented. They believe that leaders need to challenge employees so that they are motivated and ensure they are satisfied so that they want to contribute to bigger goals. And lastly, the *Catalyst* leader is a visionary person. Their orientation is to build strengths, articulate an innovative and inspiring vision and bring the right people onto the team to make it happen. They empower others and actively facilitate their development. To move from being an *Expert* to an *Achiever*, and finally to a *Catalyst*, a leader must increase agility in the four competency areas above. As stated by Bill Joiner :

"The pace of change and the level of interdependence in today's global business environment demands that the top management levels can act as a catalyst. Organizations need to help their many high-achieving senior managers to grow to Catalyst level and their Expert managers to become Achievers. "

[23] state that catalyst leaders work consistently using four types of agility competencies, namely: *Context-setting Agility*, *Stakeholder Agility*, *Creative Agility*, and *Self Leadership Agility*. *Context setting Agility* is the ability to anticipate what might change, and frame the context in a way that influences others. It also enables to recognize the environment which allows one to see the long term impact and think visionary. While *Stakeholder Agility* means the ability to identify, locate and engage key stakeholders. It is the capacity to understand and empathize with the views of stakeholders, not only to gain support but also to respect their views in order to make better decisions. *Creative Ability* explores problems using multiple points of view. Catalyst leaders are always involved in the short term vs long term, practical vs idealistic paradox to be able to come up with unique solutions. And the last is *Self-Leadership Agility* which means an ability to develop self-awareness and lead themselves by imagining what kind of leader they want. They seek to align their behavior with values and use personal growth to promote professional development.

Figure 2 Four Types of Agility



Source: Joiner and Joseph (2006)

In Indonesia, the phenomenon of leaders who do not have a leadership spirit is still widely found in the government bureaucracy. This happens because our bureaucratic personnel promotion system, as indicated is still not fully based on expertise (merit-based promotion), but is still colored by party or family relationships (nepotism), career system (career), work performance (performance) , or even protection (patronage). So there are still many unit heads who can only give instructions, without knowing how to lead employees.

### 3. Methods

This research is a qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is an approach developed by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) to study the experience of human life that was previously had been introduced by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). [24] states that phenomenology is used in a study with the aim of examining the essence or structure of experience into human consciousness because qualitative research is a study that is interested in analyzing and describing a phenomenon of individual experiences in everyday life (Creswell as quoted by [25]). The advantages of phenomenology are first, as a scientific method, phenomenology can describe a phenomenon without manipulating data. In this case the data is obtained as it is. Second, this approach emphasizes a holistic and non-partial approach so that a complete understanding of an object.

Data collection was carried out by semi structured interviews to obtain detailed data about the phenomena being studied. Interview guidelines are prepared but the manner in which questions are asked and the rhythm of the interview is entirely at the discretion of the interviewer. Researchers have the freedom to explore reasons and encouragement with probing that is not rigid, so the direction of the interview is still in the hands of the interviewer in [26]. Participants in this study were determined based on purposive sampling. Interviews were conducted with 20 informants, consisting of 10 leaders in government agencies at the ministry level to find out what difficulties they face in leading an organization or department and 10 staff. The researcher categorized the leaders into 2 groups, namely 5 leaders who have led a directorate, department or division in a government agency for 15-20 years and 5 young leaders who have been in charge of a directorate for 3-5 years. This grouping is intended to see how the experiences of these leaders in government agencies and whether there are differences in views regarding ideal leadership in the era of disruption. Apart from interviewing the leaders, the researcher also

interviewed 10 staff members. The aim is to see how they experience being led by leaders with different leadership styles. Due to ethical issues and objections from the participants, the names of the agencies and informants are not mentioned in this paper. The data obtained from this in-depth interview were then analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The stages in science are: (1) reading and re-reading, (2) initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving the next cases, and (6) looking for patterns across cases) as stated by Smith in [27].

#### 4. Results

To answer the research question about what competencies needed by leaders in this disruptive era the researcher conducted interviews with 10 leaders in different governmental agencies. The answers are summarized in the following table.

Table 1  
Summary of the interview results with leaders of government agencies

Aspects	Leaders with 15-20 years of experience in leading government agencies	Leaders with 5-8 years of experience in leading government agencies
Competency of Leaders in Disruptive Era/ Understanding about VUCA	Public leaders of the disruptive era : a. Must know how to follow the demand of the change. b. Must be stricter in monitoring the work of subordinates, especially if employees work outside the office, so reward and punishment must be enforced. c. Must be braver to make a decision from their point of view as visionary leaders.	Public leaders of the disruptive era : a. Must be adaptive to a change (e.g technology) b. Must understand the VUCA world and the strategy to survive in VUCA era. c. Must not only as transformational leaders, but also as Agile Leaders (anticipate the change, good communication skills, motivate and inspire subordinates, creative and innovative, become a role model for subordinates) d. Must explore problems using multiple points of view.
Problems faced in leading in government agencies	a. Public leaders as part of politics so they have to be accountable to their voters. b. Public leaders often find difficulties in expressing and developing ideas so we cannot create program innovation in a more flexible system.	a. Public leaders often have difficulty convincing superiors about new programs. However, we must be dare to propose strong and logical arguments if we want a change. b. Public leaders indeed still serve as parts of politics. However we still can create good and innovative programs if we build a good communication with the political cadres.
Strategy of the government to improve the quality of leaders in various state institutions.	a. Organize Internal Training by collaborating with HR Department and invite professional trainers.	a. Recruitment process must be improved, not based on political reasons or family relationship (nepotism) anymore but it should be expertise based and merit based promotion. b. Training should be done by collaborating with professional private training institutions which have outstanding programs and trainers. c. Sufficient funds must be budgeted for Human Resources upgrading through training, workshops, FGD or gathering.

Table 2  
Summary of the interview results with staff

Aspects	Staff being led by leaders with 15-20 years of experience in leading government agencies	Staff being led by leaders with 3-5 years of experience in leading government agencies
Monitoring staff Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Always check the attendance list</li> <li>b. Never ask subordinates what problems they faced</li> <li>c. Always give punishment to staff if leaders thought that their performance is under the target goal (e.g : not being involved in some program activities)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Always check the attendance list</li> <li>b. Always ask the subordinates what problems they faced</li> <li>c. Always ask subordinates to communicate if they have personal problems or technical problems in the work place</li> </ul>
Motivating/ Inspiring Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Leaders seldom organize staff meeting and communicate with staff regarding issues in their department</li> <li>b. Leaders never motivate staff. If there is a problem, leaders prefer call the staff and remind them the sanction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. There are periodical staff meeting organized to become a means of communication between leaders and subordinates</li> <li>b. The staff meeting is also used by leaders to motivate subordinates</li> </ul>
Team Building/ Empowering staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Leaders only ask staff to build a good teamwork but never facilitate and accommodate it with concrete activities</li> <li>b. Activities prepared for Staff: Only once a year training and general staff meeting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Leaders always give a chance for subordinates to work together and build a good teamwork.</li> <li>b. Activities prepared for Staff Upgrading and Team Building: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family Gathering</li> <li>- Outbound Training</li> <li>- Periodical Workshop</li> <li>- ESQ training</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## 5. Discussion

From the results of interviews with 10 leaders in government agencies, it can be seen that there is a very significant difference between 5 leaders who have 15-20 years of experience leading in government agencies and 5 other leaders who have 5-8 years of experience. When asked about the competency issues a leader must have in the era of disruption, a more senior leader said that currently leaders must be more stringent in monitoring the work of their subordinates, especially in an era like this where government agencies have also decided to work from home.

“As leaders we must be firm and have the courage to enforce" reward and punishment "so that our subordinates can work with more discipline even though they have to work from home. If the leader can enforce discipline, then subordinates can work more effectively. "

From the answers given, we know that these more senior leaders still apply transactional leadership where reward and punishment are still measures of employee performance appraisal (Kuhnert 1994). This is different from the younger leaders who adopted the leadership style of the VUCA era, as stated by Bill Joiner and Stephen Josephs (2006), namely Agile Leader, consisting of: Expert Agility, Achiever Agility and Catalyst Agility. The more junior leadership also said that leaders in the era of disruption must be agile to anticipate change, have good communication skills in order to maintain good relations with politicians and all stakeholders. Leaders in an era of disruption must also be able to motivate and inspire their subordinates. Must be creative and innovative and become a role model for their subordinates (Joiner and

Joseph, 2006). The more senior leaders still apply a conservative leadership style. Decision making must be taken from the opinion of the leader based on his vision.

This is very different from younger leaders who say that leaders in the era of disruption must be able to explore problems by looking at the point of view of several different people (creative abilities). When asked about the difficulties faced in leading government agencies in this disruptive era, both senior and junior leaders said that they faced difficulties, especially because public leaders were closely related to politics so they had to be responsible and accommodate those who supported them. However, more junior leaders said that as far as they could convince related parties including political cadres, through good communication, everything could be overcome and creative and innovative ideas could be implemented (stakeholder agility). The junior leader also said that improving the quality of the leader must start with a change in the recruitment system, which is currently still very thick with nepotism and politics. In addition, the government must also be more serious about budgeting funds for training by collaborating with credible training providers.

Interviews were also conducted with 10 staff who were divided into 5 staff members who shared their experiences being led by a senior leader and 5 staff led by a more junior leader. From this interview, the results are very different. Senior leaders still lead in a conservative and transactional style. Senior leaders still prioritize enforcing employee discipline with rewards and punishments and not by motivating, inspiring and opening communication with their subordinates (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Hollander, 1978; Tichy & Devanna, 1986). Senior leaders are still trying to keep their distance by never holding activities that can foster togetherness between leaders and subordinates. This is in stark contrast to the younger leaders where they have a much faster ability to adapt to very fast changes. Junior leaders also better understand what is meant by the VUCA era and how to deal with radical change strategies. More open minded, willing to open dialogue and communication to find solutions to common problems. Thus teamwork can be built.

"I feel very comfortable having a leader who understands the problems faced by his subordinates. Especially in this pandemic, where we have to work from home, of course there will be many obstacles, such as difficulties in using digital technology. Led by a leader who is always open, willing to communicate with staff, always motivates his employees, we will feel comfortable and even try to give our best. "

From interviews with staff, it is known that staff led by younger leaders feel very comfortable so that they can continue to have motivation to work better and they can make their leaders as role models for future career development (self awareness agility) as stated by Joiner and Joseph (2006).

## **6. Conclusion**

From the analysis of the data above, it can be concluded that leaders in the disruptive era must have a high understanding of VUCA and its radical changes. Leaders in the disruptive era must also be more open and willing to communicate and collaborate with various parties. By changing the perspective, the old leadership style that is not suitable for the era of disruption can be changed. The limitation of this study is that this research only focuses on leaders in government agencies so that it cannot extend to private organizations. Therefore, for further research, the researcher recommends that a study be conducted on how leadership training can be implemented with a different approach.

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