



Trust-Building in e-Leadership: A Case Study of Leaders' Challenges and Skills in Technology-Mediated Interaction

Taina Savolainen, University of Eastern Finland, Business School

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses and examines e-leadership practices, more specifically, what skills leaders need and what challenges they encounter in the new e-context of business management. Digitalized business world transforms remarkably the context of leading where e-relationships become more and more common in technology-aided management. This change challenges daily leadership work as to social skills and forms of interaction. Trust and trust-building is a necessary resource, intangible asset and skill as a foundation for collaborative actions in organizations and their leadership. This article is about studying e-leaders' views of the new e-leadership context focusing especially on trust-building in followers. The paper presents new findings from qualitative study not explicitly reported in the prior empirical studies of e-leaders. A case study was made interviewing leaders from five large organizations in Finland. The findings show that the e-leaders' changing work context is not yet well recognized and is poorly understood and supported by supervisors and managers in the organizations involved in the study. Key findings are discussed more widely and implications made to practicing leaders in today's e-world.

Introduction

Fast-developing technology transforms leadership work and the ways of interaction in workplace relationships. This change challenges leaders' competences and skills development in organizations. Today trust-building belongs to key leadership skills (Yukl, 2010). Trust in organizations has become an increasingly important issue in both academic research and management practice due to major change and increasing needs for collaborative actions in business life. Trust forms a foundation for co-operation and has been examined more extensively in the management and organization research field during the last two decades or so. This paper focuses on studying trust-building from leaders' perspective in e-business management context. E-leading practices are still scarcely studied empirically. E-leadership is a fairly new concept launched in the new millennium. Management researchers have begun to use the concept to identify and understand changing leadership practices towards technology-aided ways of managing organizations. According to Avolio and Kahai (2003), the term e-leadership refers to leading people mainly through IT-mediated and supported interaction. Technology-mediated leadership (TML) is characterized by the geographical distance between the leader and follower (distant leading), or by work methods such as electronic information sharing. New ways of working and skills for interacting are needed in the digitizing work plac-

es where e-business brings changes and challenges in the leader's work.

Mackenzie (2010) foresees China, South Korea and India increasingly adapting e-leadership processes and digital communication methods. The phenomenon is altering global business and organization boundaries, removing e.g. limitations set by the workplace and working hours. This transition requires change in the leadership roles and work in the countries mentioned. Not enough research has been done so far about the practices and impact of those changes on the structures and managerial processes of organizations including leader-follower relationships. It is the purpose of this paper to fill in that research gap and discussion by studying the viewpoint of e-leaders in building trust in their followers through TMI.

Although the goals of leadership may not have changed, e-leaders pursue achieving the business goals through people through digital communication which alters the traditional leader-follower relationship. In developed countries there has been a move from authoritarian leadership to knowledge- and expert-based leadership, where the leader can no longer base his/her power on one's position only (Savolainen, 2011a). In the e-era, physical workplace is also undergoing change into more or even completely virtual. These changes have affected face-to-face interaction in leader-follower relationships decreasing personal contacts. Work has become more technology-dependent. Work



instructions, leadership, feedback, follow-up and training are often in a digital format. When all these technology-mediated activities and processes are combined, it is the culture of e-leadership and its everyday practices that emerge (Mackenzie, 2010).

An interesting question arises about how people adapt to technological mediation in their work and relationships in the workplace as opposed to their earlier face-to-face activities? Trust-building as one of the basic leadership skills has lately gained in importance. Trust has become a human intellectual resource and skill for leaders; A way of leading by trust have been recognized and gained more ground (Savolainen and Lopez-Fresno, 2013; Savolainen, 2011a). Trust formation, as understood "traditionally", occurs in face-to-face interaction. This gives rise to an interesting consideration forming the key research question in this study, *how leaders build trust in their followers in technology-mediated interaction, what skills are used and needed and what challenges TMI presents to e-leaders*. The leader initially plays a crucial role in creating trust in leader-follower relationship (see e.g. Yukl, 2010; Whitener et al., 1998; Savolainen, 2011a, Ikonen, 2013). While there are fairly large number of studies made so far on trust-building in virtual teams (DasGupta, 2011; Avolio et.al, 2009) e-leaders' experiences and perceptions of their daily managerial work with followers warrants further research and need to be understood better in order to enhance leader skills development. Employing a qualitative case approach the paper aims to increase our understanding of the e-leaders' daily practices and challenges which is scarcely studied so far. The key findings of e-leaders' daily work and challenges in trust-building are discussed and implications made to leaders interacting with followers via technological devices.

Theoretical Discussion

E-relationships - A New Context for Interaction

In the leadership research, e-leadership is an emerging topic and quite scarcely studied empirically so far (Dinh, et al., 2014). It is a new context for management due to changes in leadership work and skills which are discussed in this paper. Theoretical discussion focuses on the

features and nature of e-leadership also compared to traditional leadership. The concept and role of trust and building of trust are examined. More specifically, trust building in e-leaders' work is discussed and studied. The emphasis of this study differs from the prior research where trust in virtual teams has been largely a focus in empirical studies. (see e.g. Ocker et al., 2011; Coerdery et al., 2009; Walvoord et al., 2008; Savolainen, 2008; Piccoli & Ives, 2003; Yoo, 2004; Kanawattanachai and Yoo, 2002; Jarvenpaa et.al, 1998). The leader's point of view is the focus in this study. Although the prior research on virtual teams has partly examined trust from team leaders' point of view, it has concentrated more on team members' perceptions and less the e-leader's work. E-leaders daily activities and trust building in their followers in particular has been quite scarcely studied so far (Savolainen, 2013). However, some scholarly work has been done recently (e.g., Yoo; 2004; Bansal, 2011; Savolainen, 2013).

E-leadership Defined

Following the most often described 'common nominators' in the large number of leadership definitions two key features can be identified: interaction and influence. Leadership is about reciprocal influence between leaders and followers and a social interaction process between individuals and groups for getting 'things done' through people. Leadership is defined as a complex process aiming at achieving the goals of the organization (Yukl, 2010; Northouse, 2010). Leaders and followers are both part of the leadership process and when leaders' perceptions of the reciprocal relationship are studied followers are supposedly in the focus. Leadership is a dynamic state and not a static and permanent. It transforms along with the changing context of leading for which technology-aided economy forms a remarkably new context for leaders as to skills requirements and challenges in daily leadership work.

At the turn of the new millennium the first review of the literature on e-leadership by Avolio et.al, (2000) provided scholars with a basic understanding of what e-leadership in organizations contains. The review also launched the term *e-leadership* defined as a process of social influence where, mainly with the help of advanced IT, changes are brought about in atti-



tudes, feelings, thoughts, behavior and organization. The concept of e-leadership refers to leaders who mainly use technological mediation in their leadership work (Avolio et al., 2000; Avolio & Kahai, 2003; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003; Mackenzie, 2010). Technological mediation may occur due to geographical, cultural or temporal causes (Ocker et al., 2011). This study employs the concept of e-leadership and not, for example, virtual leader, a parallel concept that signifies an avatar and not a real leader. E-leadership represents both a new kind of managerial work and context for executing and studying leadership. Still in the 1980's, e-leadership was rarely mentioned in the literature. In the 1990's, management of organizations began to change even faster towards technological mediation. In the organization research, more and more was talked about e-leadership, a new leadership phenomenon and approach (Avolio & Kahai, 2003; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003; Mackenzie, 2010). After the mid-1990's, literature on the topic started expanding. Recently, trust and the new ways of interaction have developed into central issues of e-leadership (e.g. Bergum, 2009).

E-leadership Work

Effective and functioning e-leadership requires key competences as do traditional leadership such as problem solving capacity, social skills and professional know-how listed by Mumford et al. (2000) in their well known skills model. The e-leader influences people by communicating with them for building trust, motivating, and sharing the organization's vision to the followers, among others. Interaction that would best support these key activities is seen as the greatest challenge for skilful e-leadership (Walvoord et al., 2008; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). An important question is how to enact presence via technological devices. The e-leader may need to make more efforts to build relationships with the followers because of the more infrequent physical presence, missing body language, gestures and less satisfactory mediation of the tone of voice in TM-communication. Moreover, the boundaries of organizations, workplaces and working hours have changed which lay more pressures for leaders in digitally-based communication (cf. Mackenzie, 2010). Since traditional leadership has been of the face-to-face variety, followers expect visibility instead of mere receive-

ing of information, messages and knowledge from the leader.

Several central e-leaders' skills and tasks are proposed in the literature (Coerdery et al., 2009) containing also more or less overlapping traditional skills such as human relations skills, task and activities management, resource acquisition, creation and alignment of vision and direction for the operations. E-leadership skills differ partly from those in traditional leadership and are examined and suggested in the last decade's literature on the topic (e.g. Mumford et al., 2000, Kissler 2001, Avolio & Kahai, 2003; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003, Walvoord et al., 2008; Bergum, 2009; Mackenzie, 2010). In the e-leadership literature study and review Dasgupta (2011) summarizes some of the new skills proposed to the e-leader as follows: stronger written communication skills, strong social networking skills, a global multi-cultural mindset, greater sensitivity towards followers' state of mind, and a 24x7 orientation. Human relations and interaction skills are suggested as the strongest challenges that face the e-leader. The available time for the e-leader to exert influence is often shorter, as there are fewer personal meetings. Communication problems and misunderstandings in TM-communication are frequently seen as common in e-leadership. Especially in the initial phase of the leader-follower relationship high frequency of interaction is recommended with the follower. Most importantly, this is depicted to have impact on the trust-building in the relationship.

Bergum (2009) suggests that e-leaders' regular face-to-face meetings are important for the motivation of the followers as well as in clarifying and confirming messages. F-to-f meetings can 'smooth' the obstacles in TMI between the leader and follower and hence promote trust-building. Quality weekly meetings were seen more important than numerous free-form meetings: the risk of misunderstanding is decreased. Frequent meetings facilitate trust-building by increasing openness.

According to Avolio and Kahai (2003), technology has enabled the strong growth of knowledge and communication as well as its transfer through the organization faster and faster. E-leading is mainly about coordinating and managing information (over) flow to process



information acquiring, storing, conveying and sharing. While massive flow of information moves in and around organizations, a real challenge exists in its selection, interpretation and utilization for the success of the organization. Abundant or overflow of information is one of the ideas behind e-leadership. Yet, leadership is not only about information. It is about people and relationships where trust forms a foundation for cooperation and requires, in turn, knowledge sharing between individuals, groups and organizations. Reshaping leadership will be earned through new competences, skills and resources. E-relationships require new managerial skills for interactive operations in e-business management, where the performing context has changed into digitized.

Trust in E-Leadership

Role and Definition of Trust in Organizations

Trust is a multi-disciplinary, multi-faceted and multi-level concept and has been defined in numerous ways. Yet, the concept remains without a generally accepted definition. Deutsch (1962) defines trust comprising of a person's beliefs and expectations about how the trustee will behave. One of the early trust theorists Rotter (1967) has defined interpersonal trust as expectancy by an individual or a group that the word, verbal or written statement or promise of another individual or group can be relied upon. In the literature, trust is acknowledged to be *a relational phenomenon* evolving gradually over time in interactions between trustor and trustee (Mayer et al., 1995). In this study, the relational definition of trust is applicable, as the paper looks at trust building in leader-follower relationships in an organizational context. According to Mayer (1995, p.712) trust is defined as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to control that other party". Following this definition trust involves risk and requires a willingness and courage to take risk.

Trust has grown in importance in organizations during the last decade. Building trust is recently recognized as one of the leader's key tasks (Yukl, 2010). Leaders enable the creation

of trustful workplace climate. Vitality and competitiveness in organizations are fostered through 'leadership by trust'. Trust is intangible resource and also a skill for leaders. It is hardly recognized from that perspective in the previous trust literature on e-leadership (Savolainen, 2011a; Savolainen & Lopez-Fresno, 2013). As trust is challenged and put into test in work places especially by major business life transformation, trustful interpersonal relationships may form essential intellectual human asset in work places. Trust is often taken for granted until it is broken (Savolainen, 2011a; Savolainen & Lopez-Fresno, 2013). Trust may open an opportunity to get an access to knowledge, and economical, and relational resources in organizations. It is also a social coordination mechanism to sustain loyal relationships which do not deteriorate or break easily. In the long run, these established relationships form human intellectual capital which become rooted in and stratify as social and cultural intangible capital forming a significant part of competitive advantage (Savolainen, 2011a).

Trust in Leader-Follower Relationship

In work place relationships such as leader-follower relations trust has traditionally been based on interdependence and reciprocal influence between parties when common goals are pursued by individuals and groups. A relationship exists where there is an element of interdependence (Atkinson, 2004). Trust is a bond and 'emotional glue' in co-operation between leader and follower and depends on the form and quality of interactions between trusting parties. As to e-relationships interaction is specifically the issue that makes a difference in daily work. Lewicki et.al (2006) note the key role that trust plays as a foundation for effective collaboration and, hence, multiple motives that shape collaborative behavior. The authors also discuss a 'new' view of relationships, stating that relationships are multifaceted and multiplex. In TMI, organization members need to develop capacity to know when, in what respects and what ways to trust or be trusted or when to possibly monitor or control others in relationships. As to the leadership role, showing trustworthiness forms an influential way of behavior towards followers. Trustworthiness consists of three dimensions of competence, benevolence and integrity (Mayer et.al, 1995). In leadership practice



it is manifested, for example, in open communication, expertise, fairness, and good intentions (see Häkkinen, 2012). In the literature trust formation between individuals within work relationships has modeled to develop through stages. The three-stage model of trust formation suggested by Lewicki and Bunker (1996) is based on the assumption of a progressive, linear-type of development. Assumptions of progressive trust may be questioned, as trust formation is dynamic and complex in nature (Savolainen, 2011b). In three stage model, trust is seen to develop in relationships from calculative-based to competence-based, and finally to identification-based trust. The better the other party is known the deeper the relationship between the parties is assumed to develop in the course of time.

Building and Sustaining Interpersonal Trust in E-leadership Context

Trust support functioning of relationships. E-leaders build up trust in their followers in different forms of interaction. The experience of an interactive situation consists of several factors. Interaction is influenced not only by a technical device but also by the situation, i.e., the interpersonal relationship and the matter under consideration. Quality of communication and the selection of a communication tool are affected also by other issues than technical features of a device (Sivunen, 2007, Savolainen et al., 2014). The frequency, procedures and norms of interaction are also seen important. Poor quality of communication may cause deterioration of trust and even lead to trust breach (Savolainen, et al., 2014).

In the case of infrequent face-to-face meetings, the parties need to show openness and share information even more in order to build and maintain mutual trust. A practical daily example is using, for example, 'out of office' automatic e-mail messages. Communication behavior and workplace trust within the manager–employee e-relationship has been recently studied with the aim to reveal the frequency of using digital communication equipment (Mackenzie, 2010) and the interplay between trust development and communication quality by studying building, violation, breaches and restoration of trust in inter-personal workplace relationships (Savolainen, et al., 2014). In e-leader communi-

cation and workplace trust building almost 80% used mostly digital communications equipment (computer and mobile phone) in their work tasks. E-mail is identified as being still the most important device. Poor communication plays a role in deterioration and breaches of trust. Distrust may permeate widely within the organization and beyond the relationships involved. If the low trust climate tends to develop the consequences may be unfavorable and harmful in the organization.

Bergum (2009) discusses how e-leaders manage face-to-face and technologically-aided meetings. Face-to-face meetings focus on the issues that require openness, sharing opinions and conversation. Routine information, such as the latest news or achievements, can be taken care of by TMI. Experiences about TM communications are often subjective, and interaction through the technological devices may be experienced and perceived quite differently.

In conclusion, in e-leader-follower interaction for building trust, the forms, frequency and quality of interactions are context-specific depending on the situation, devices, relationships, quality and frequency of communication and other specific issues in question. Theoretical discussions with key concepts are summarized in Figure 1. Empirical study setting is explained in the next chapter.

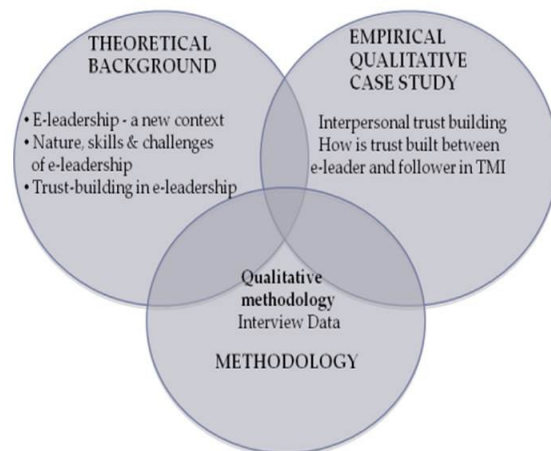


Figure1. Summary of theoretical discussions and methodology of the study.



Qualitative Case Study of E-Leaders

Methodology

A qualitative methodological approach is employed in the empirical study since it fulfills the purpose of the paper to increase understanding of the abstract phenomenon of trust-building under study and produce in-depth contextual knowledge of the real life case. Compared to the quantitative study, the topic of trust-building is more generally still scarcely studied empirically and needs appropriate methods for 'digging' more deeply in the issue (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The trust research has been dominated by quantitative studies and, therefore, qualitative methods have been called for lately (Lewicki et.al, 2006). Conducting of qualitative studies has lately gained more foothold. Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) and Lewicki et.al, (2006) call for more multiple method, especially encouraging to employ qualitative methods. Compared to quantitative, positivistic approach in empirical studies different strating points in assumptions, design and procedures characterize qualitative, interpretive research approach such as different purpose, role of theory and framework (understanding *not* explaining), form of research questions (how, why, where, who), and the sources and methods of data collection, and, finally, the amount of data needed (for example, number of interviewees, and small vs. rich data). Reporting of findings is descriptive in nature containing also direct quotations from the interview data for a reader to make sense of the 'audit trail' from data to researcher's interpretations. The main aim of qualitative studies is to increase our *understanding* of the issues, topics and phenomena that are *abstract, need descriptions, deeper conceptualization, and may not yet be or are scarcely studied empirically* (cf. Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The purpose is *not* to produce statistically generalizable results and explanations based on hypotheses and their testing as is the aim in the quantitative research.

Yet, theory plays an important role in a qualitative study aiding the pre-understanding of the research topic, guiding the formulation of research questions, theoretical framework. It should be noted however, that the framework may be also 'loose' 'for example, formed for

guiding open interview questions in gathering and analyzing of data. The purpose of the qualitative study is to describe still 'unstructured' research problems and issues and produce *contextual findings*, as is the main purpose in this study; and also provide possible insights into further research in which quantitative methods can be also applied (e.g. mixed methods research). By qualitative methods, experiences, opinions, perceptions and beliefs of people can be studied in-depth *in the real life contexts* of people and organizations. Several data sources and methods can be also used comprehensively (Savolainen, 2011b). Interpretive study allows one to concentrate on the perceptions and meanings of those studied (called as informants) share about the topic more deeply (Ticehurst and Veal, 2000). It is typical to restrict the number of cases or informants to a few that are studied in-depth - differently from, e.g., the quantitative survey study data. In the qualitative study, it is *the quality and richness of data* not the quantity that forms the decisive criterion for assessing the scientific quality of the research results highlighting the point that the purpose is not statistical generalization.

Research Questions and Data Collection

The qualitative data was collected by interviewing e-leaders (Varhimo, 2012). The interview method for data collection is well grounded, as the topic is abstract, still scarcely studied empirically, and descriptive research is needed of the issue. The complexity and deepness of the topic under study is taken into account (Hirsjärvi et. al, 1998) and the interview method is flexible giving the interviewer an opportunity to have deep or in-depth discussions with the informant even several 'rounds' (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002). That also makes it possible to the interviewee to supplement the data if needed (Hirsjärvi et al., 1998). The interviews were conducted as an open interview which is the closest to discussion amongst the forms of interviews (Myers, 2009; Hirsjärvi et al., 1998). Discussion "rambles on freely". The data was collected by interviewing the selected informants once, and the interviews were recorded.

The informants of the study were all e-leaders selected from different industries and large organizations in Finland remaining ano-



nym in the study. The work of the selected leaders had to mainly satisfy the characteristics of e-leadership - the majority of the leadership activities being technologically mediated (Avolio & Kahai, 2003). The selection criteria included also the leaders' potential to use different, 'typical type' of technological devices and solutions in interactive situations such as teleconferencing, video meetings etc. in which the size of the organization concerned was thought to matter. Size is commonly related to the amount of resources and, pertaining to this study, it meant the use of various technological devices for communication in interaction. In large organizations, the leaders also often have more experience about managerial situations with different followers. The reason for selecting several, different industries (service and industrial, not for profit) is to understand more comprehensively and diversely of the rather scarcely studied topic of e-leaders and trust-building in different organizational contexts.

Five leaders were selected in all for informants of the study. Referring the purpose of the study stated above, the number of interviewees was based on the theoretical purpose of the study i.e., to increase understanding about leaders' daily e-leading practices by examining the five 'cases' (leaders). The amount of data gathered from five informants in five organizations met and satisfied the theoretical aim of the study – to understand and not aiming to generalizations of findings - which is one of the most important grounds for considering the amount of data, i.e., how many interviews need to be made and what is the amount of information needed (number of interviewees and volume of interview material, in this case). No explicit answer to the exact number of informants/interviews or amount of data exists. In this study a larger number of informants would not have added up essentially to the content and richness of data gathered from the e-leaders. The saturation of data was gradually appearing in the course of the interview process which means that more and more similar type of expressions of leaders' perceptions were identified during the process.

The selection of informants could be called as the kind of elite sampling, in the sense that they all were highly experienced as leaders, for over five years, and each had acted over three

years as e-leader. The number of subordinates of the leaders varied between from a few to over 30 varying also temporarily due to the project work. The duration of each interview ranged from 54 minutes to one hour 2 minutes. At the end, the interviewees were still allowed to add their thoughts about both e-leadership characteristics and trust-building. The informants were also provided an opportunity to supplement the material by phone or e-mail afterwards.

Some questions clarifying the background information on interviewees and the two key interview questions were employed. The two questions were as follows: How do you lead? And how do you build trust in leader-follower relationship? *The open research questions* provided an opportunity for informants to freely answer within the scope of the topic (Ticehurst & Veal, 2000; Myers, 2009). Although the e-leader's view is studied, the term leader-follower relationship is mainly used. This is based on the research question - viewing e-leader as interacting with a follower (within relationship) where inter-personal trust-building is mainly reciprocal (see e.g., Atkinson, 2004). Pertaining to leadership, it is a social interaction process occurring with people (Yukl, 2010; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

The idea behind the question "How do you lead?" was to examine the nature of e-leadership and find out the differences between TM-management and the traditional face-to-face leadership. This question has a connection to the second question: How do you build trust in leader-follower relationship? The second question aims to identify and reveal factors and elements that emerge and affect TM trust-building and to find out special features of TMI in trust-building. It is typical for an open interview to have a fairly loose topic definition. The task of the interviewer is to ensure that the data needed is gathered without "perturbing" the discussion. As a rule, moving from one subject to another in the interview takes mainly place under the terms of the interviewee flowing freely (Myers, 2009; Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 1980).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this interpretive case study is theory-driven which means that the the-



oretical discussion and key concepts above and research questions function as a basis for data analysis guiding it, as opposed to the opportunity of using data-driven analysis in qualitative studies. The analysis method used is *content analysis*, which can be well applied in open interview data (Myers, 2009; Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 1980). With content analysis, the data is arranged in a concise and clear form so that the information will not be lost. The contents of the recorded and transcribed interview texts are examined, including the issues brought up, themes occurring, and meanings (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002). The analysis advances stage by stage: description, classification, combination, and synthesis. The initial approach is the forming of themes out of the data: this provides an opportunity to separate themes that provide 'clues' and information from the viewpoint of the research questions (Eskola & Suoranta, 2005). In this paper, a three-stage process is used: first, summarizing and encoding; second, classifying – similarities are sought among other things – third, conceptualization which means forming of theoretical concepts by abstracting. Answers to the research questions will be sought by combining concepts based on interpretation of the researcher, and inference of them (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002.). This is an inductive type of study 'from details to more general classifications and concepts'. The analysis of the findings leads to a synthesis, i.e., reveals the core and essential findings and points on which conclusions will be based (Hirsjärvi et al., 1998).

Key Findings and Discussion

The nature and features of e-leadership proved somewhat different from the traditional leadership. It is the TMI context that creates different conditions for the leader-follower relationship and trust-building. The overview of the data and findings show that the interviewees stress antecedents of trust and real life work practices of their e-leading in the interviews instead of a tendency to tell just success stories, i.e. (Varhimo, 2012). Key findings, their interpretation and discussion are presented next intertwined. In the reporting below a few quotations of the interviewees *in italics* describe the leaders' authentic expressions illustrating the trail (bridging) from the interview data to the researcher's interpretations.

Skills and Features of e-Leadership

TMI between the leader and the follower seems to affect the role perception and skills in the leadership work. A common feature of the interviewed e-leaders was their desire to be a humane leader despite of being dependent on the use of technology in leading. The e-leaders describe their role mainly as expert leadership. This was reflected in the data that the leaders perceived their followers who are experts having an influence on the leadership style and work. There was a desire to give the subordinates autonomy and responsibility for their work. One's own role was seen as that of a coordinator - consulting and guiding which typically was described with the word *coach*. Leading by example became one of the most important attribute that the leaders mentioned. That was thought to create and support good work atmosphere as well as to show openness and honesty. Suitable, appropriate work settings for both the leader and the follower became also emphasized in the findings. These were seen to promote trust-building in the leader-follower relationship.

Trust-Building and Challenges in TMI

In trust-building through TMI, the biggest difference between traditional and e-leadership seems to be that TM-leading forms a reality that need to be taken into account in all work and interactions with the subordinate. Geographical distance, different cultures, time-zones and behavioral etiquettes was told to require the leader to have the ability to pay attention to one's followers in various manners, depending on the location. As to building trusting relationships, several *antecedents and requirements and challenges* were expressed. The interviewee saw that TMI requires attention to many practical daily matters in trust-building. TMI is seen as speeding up the flow of information and improving work performance, but it is also seen as creating misinterpretations in interaction. Depending on the leaders' organizations, leaders have various technical devices at their disposal, generally the email and telephone. E-leaders try to reflect their know-how, feelings and characteristics to their followers by attempting to show their trustworthiness. They describe trustworthiness as being open, honest



and integral with their followers (Savolainen and Häkkinen, 2011; Häkkinen, 2012).

Communication was perceived challenging and skill development needs were expressed especially due to TMI. The interviewed brought up the skills such as importance of listening as well as approachability, human relations skills, honesty, supporting and equal treatment. Communication turned out to be one of the most challenging issues in TMI; As it covered only *short and often fragmented moments* in the subordinate's daily life, getting a good overall view of the subordinate's daily situation was seen as one of the greatest challenges according to these leaders. They felt it is difficult to get insight with only short moments of interaction and even irregular personal contacts or get to a mood or deal with problems and their causes. Thus, the leader's contact and help is limited to short moments of sharing. In problem solving, for example, it may appear as that of a fragmented individual situation. It is here trust provides support to the comprehension of the subordinate's daily work situation. Trusting followers feel encouraged to speak more openly about matters related to both work and private life. This seems to be essential in e-leadership, as the possibility of one's own presence is limited due to time and distance. Keeping track of the follower's wellbeing and daily life and intervention to these become challenges. For this reason, in addition to dealing with work matters, the leaders keep in contact with the follower also in a more informal way. This is a different kind of the sharing moment, which enables one to have an occasional peek into another's daily life and to communicate information and feelings.

"...a weekly happy hour when how they are and many other matters are shared. I try to build trust in my group this way, too."

Significance of time in TMI came up clearly in the interview data. Traditionally, it is assumed that trust develops and is built in the course of time. In contradiction to that, trust in e-relationships is perceived to be built in a more intensive way and shorter time (see also Avolio & Kahai, 2003). TMI requires a lot of the leader's time which lays an emphasis on the appropriate number of followers. This was seen to be a way to assure the organization's support to e-

leaders which the interviewed perceived as low or even lacking.

"Top management does not think this is e-leadership but rather we have tasks to do and issues to deal with. There is not necessarily considerations and comprehension of e-leadership in the organization in order to provide e-leaders with sufficient resources, devices and skills to develop this matter (i.e. e-leading)."

It is notable that while most of the leaders perceived TMI as functioning, they saw a need for regular face-to-face interaction. This was the case especially in the building of trust in a *new leader-follower relationship*. On the basis of the interview data, face-to-face meetings form a way to more fruitful and intensive interaction in a shorter time. All the informants of the study believed that it wouldn't be possible to make a sufficient leadership and contact with the follower through technology-aided interaction devices alone.

"Once within two weeks we have teleconference all together, and meanwhile I call daily. Every third week we get together in the same place face-to-face."

In one way, face-to-face interaction was seen to strengthen the relationships, as the leaders valued relationships building. It seems that through today's technology such rich, personal like presence in interactive situations, that would replace face-to-face meetings, cannot be achieved. While TMI was still experienced as more distant, to some extent more inefficient, slower and troublesome, face-to-face meetings were seen to represent the richness of interaction with emotions, facial expressions and gestures. They facilitate to building and sustaining relationships and trust accordingly.

"...if you meet your subordinate two times a year you really cannot call that as a leader-follower relationship. You have to be in contact with him or her. I just hired a new subordinate and I've thought I need to see her face to face."

Moreover, handling of various issues and especially complex and troublesome situa-



tions involving emotions were encountered in TMI. The interviewed leaders preferred face-to-face interaction in spite of even long geographical distances, for example, in orientations to new issues, HR developmental discussions between the leader and follower, and problem solving situations. In TML, the role of trust in relationship is recognized as even more significant than in the face-to-face form of 'traditional' relationship. Inferring from the leaders' perceptions they deliberately invest in trust-creation which requires time, continuous efforts and deeds. The leaders recognize their important role in trust-building in their followers. The key findings are summarized in Table 1 (below).

Conclusions and Implications

On the basis of the findings, e-leadership seems still a new context of leadership in the organizations where the work of e-leaders in the study was poorly understood and recognized. Stronger support was expected from the higher management level. Prior research indicates that to succeed e-leadership needs support from the entire organization (Martinez-Sánchez et al., 2008). Following Mintzberg's

(1973) classic management roles, the findings emphasize the information and interpersonal relationship roles. The findings of the study support the skills model (Mumford et al., 2000). Social skills are emphasized in e-leaders' perceptions. Good leader characteristics (Northouse, 2010; Yukl, 2010) included honesty and sociability and were brought out most forcefully in the interview data. In this data, availability (reaching) of the leader for the followers seemed to matter in trust-building. Leaders perceived that, in spite of the followers' distant location they regard themselves as important and expect the leader to be reachable. This implies that the number of followers needs to be on a reasonable level.

In conclusion, the findings of this study add to what the prior research has presented on e-leadership practices revealing also a few findings not explicitly reported in prior studies of e-leadership; First, skills required of the leader to *mediate, receive and deal with emotions* in TMI which is connected to success of interactions and to troubles and problems in work situations; Second, a *challenge to create an overall picture of the subordinate's everyday life* with its "joys

Table 1: *Summary of Key Findings - Trust Building in e-Leadership*

Leadership Skills and Features	Practices of Interaction	Antecedents of Trust-Building in TML	Challenges of TMI to E-leaders
Emotional skills: receiving and dealing with emotions in TMI; sharing, recognizing Social skills: open communication, listening, assertiveness Technical skills: Using of facilities and equipments in TMI Authenticity; Showing trustworthiness - openness, honesty, integrity	Information and knowledge sharing Formal and informal phone discussions, teleconferences, face to face meetings - 'shared moments', e.g., weekly 'happy hour' Oral or written feedback and support Problem solving; handling complex issues & troublesome situations HR development discussions Empowerment, responsibility sharing, delegation of work	Significance of time Relationship building; 'Presence making' - Leader availability and reaching - Importance of the 'shared moments' Frequency and length of the moments shared: - Intensity, easiness and effectiveness of relationship building Initiation for newcomers Suitable work settings	Receiving and dealing with emotions Forming overview of subordinates daily work situations and circumstances Communication – insufficient time; fragmented, short moments Having personal and personal like presence - More face-to-face meetings expected in TML; distance Skill improvement needs in communication

(Key points bolded in Table).



and sorrows". When the e-leader's communication is occasional and fragmentary, getting a picture of the follower's daily work become difficult which affects trust. The 'shared moments' were meaningful to followers' and were perceived by interviewees as highly expected and appreciated; Third, the study shows *the time and its significance in relationship and trust-building* as well as a challenge the time presents to the e-leaders in trust-building. This feature was not well recognized, understood and supported in the organizations.

The role of trust in e-leader-follower relationship was considered even more significant than in the face-to-face traditional leadership. Inferring from the informants' perceptions they deliberately pursued investing in trust-creation which required time, continuing efforts and deeds. The leaders recognize their important role for trust-building. Finally, organizations and their environments undergo continuous change into TML direction. This study implies that organizations should invest in supporting e-leaders' work more strongly in the future. Fast-developing technology may still transform the ways of interaction in work environments. This could stimulate further empirical research on e-leadership practices. As e-relationships become more and more common and multiplex, trust-building needs to be examined in different contexts in the future.

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Taina Savolainen holds a Professorship of Management and Leadership at the University of Eastern Finland, Business School, where she leads the research group “*Trust within Organizations*”. She is one of the world’s leading experts in trust research, focusing on inter-personal trust-building in leadership and workplace relationships. She has contributed to each of the three books in the Series of TRUST Inc., “*Trust across America - Trust around the World*”. Prof. Savolainen is also specializing in organizational change, global business competitiveness and intellectual capital management. With over 100 international academic publications, her scientific achievements have been recognized in, e.g., Who’s Who in the World. Her publications can be retrieved at <http://uef.academia.edu/TainaSavolainen>, where she ranks in the top 0.5% by publication views.

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