

# RETHINKING THE ROLE OF THE LEADER IN THE TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGES OF INDUSTRIALIZATION 4.0 FOR SMES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Irina Dorogaia<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**<sup>2</sup>: Today, the concept of Industrialization 4.0 is very popular. Many entrepreneurs and managers are thinking through their transformation strategies, which, in the face of transformational change, are necessary for the survival of organizations. An important issue in organizational change is the role of the transforming leader. What should it be like in order to make changes and achieve the goal? This article focuses on changing the approach to leadership, the qualities of a leader and how the leader of the future is seen by employees of SMEs in the Republic of Moldova. For this purpose, the author of the article has conducted a detailed study of the conceptual aspects of leadership in a period of change, as well as an empirical study that determines the importance of various factors in a complex model of a transformational manager. In the course of the study, the main skills and traits of leaders are clarified, which makes it possible to implement changes that correspond to the new conditions of activity.

**Key words:** Industrialization 4.0, transformations, changes, leadership, leadership skills.

**JEL:** M10, M14, O14, O30.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.58861/tae.bm.2023.4.03>

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<sup>2</sup> This work is part of a post-doctoral study funded by the state budget of the Republic of Moldova on the topic: "Creating the organizational change management model for small and medium enterprises through the challenges of Industrialization 4.0", within the framework of the project numbered 22.00208.0807.10/PD

## **Introduction**

The processes that date from the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) date back to 2011, although the prerequisites for their appearance may be the end of the 90s, simultaneously with the spread of the Internet. Today, there is no doubt about the scale and pervasiveness of the changes associated with digitalization, the emergence of artificial intelligence in many areas of life and activity, robotization of processes, the use of big data in business, etc. Many companies that are not industry leaders and have not had time to introduce modern technologies into their activities, of course, also think about the need to introduce organizational change processes that will be based on both the latest technologies and new approaches to management. First of all, we are talking about SMEs, which, for the most part, are inferior in the field of digitalization and the introduction of breakthrough technologies to large enterprises. There are many reasons for this: weak financial stability, which does not allow additional investments for modernization, lack of qualified employees with skills in working with the latest technologies, lack of the necessary infrastructure, and often a lack of understanding of owners or managers how to implement changes. Here, an approach to effective leadership acquires special significance, which would help not only develop a strategy, but, most importantly, lead the staff to realize the need for changes and effectively implement them.

So, the question that naturally arises is: who will carry out these changes, what qualities should an employee who has taken on such responsibility have? This study was conducted in order to determine the new role of the leader in the context of turbulent changes.

## **1. Literature review**

### **1.1. Synthesis of conceptual features of change management and Industrialization 4.0**

Interest in the concepts of organizational development and change management began to intensify in the mid-1950s, during the period of the school of human relations and behavioral sciences. During this period, researchers began to wonder about the importance of the human factor in the activities of the enterprises. Most often, the beginning of research on

change management leads to the well-known 3-step model of Kurt Lewin "unfreeze-move-freeze".

In addition, Douglas, Richard Beckhard, Harris, Brook, P. Senge, M. Pedler, D. Burgouni, T. Boydell, J. Kotter, R. Daft, I. Adizes, L. Greiner, G. Mintzberg and many other scientists developed many concepts and models of change.

As for 4IR, or Industrialization 4.0, this is a relatively new concept that is associated with understanding the essence of industrial revolutions and the modern context.

All industrial revolutions occurred due to the technical and *technological factor*:

- *the first* was associated with the advent of water and steam engines, the development of metallurgy and transport, and with the advent of looms.
- *the second* - with the advent and development of electricity, steel and petrochemical production, the advent of the telephone, telegraph, new management tools.
- *the third* - with the advent of personal computers, the Internet, the beginning of digitalization, software, the use of databases, integrated programs.
- *4PR* - with the widespread use of artificial intelligence, Big Data, the Internet of Things, neural networks, 3D printers.

Some researchers, such as Thomas M. Siebel, believe that 4PR is a continuation of the third, but with rapidly changing consequences that will invariably lead to changes in the way of life of all mankind in the future (Siebel, 2019). Often, this term is associated with the WEF-World Economic Forum, namely, with its president, K. Schwab.

Many authors have also devoted research to this concept: R. Kurzweil, T. Bloommarth, J. Ross, Sebastian I., St. J.Endriole, J.Kane, D.Palmer, A.N.Phillips, C.Linz, G. Muller-Stewens, A. McAffe, Eric Brynjolfsson, Th. M.Siebel and many others.

The *concept of 4PR* comes down to a generalizing understanding of all the processes taking place in the modern world, involving widespread digitalization and total automation of processes based on the latest technologies and transforming all spheres of human life and activity: social, economic, spiritual and political.

Here, it is also appropriate to single out the term *organizational development*, which means changing the organization over time under the influence of internal and external factors, which includes the implementation of activities aimed at implementing organizational changes (Douglas, R.

Beckhard, W.L.French, S.Bell, U.Brouck). From this definition, it is clear that effective change management is necessary for long-term and successful organizational development.

Obviously, in such global changes that are associated with Industrialization 4.0, certain approaches to change management are needed. Since management in such companies is changing dramatically: systems, structures, business processes, functional responsibilities are being transformed, some professions are likely to disappear or change significantly. The skills that employees need to have are changing. And of course, the type of the leader is changing.

## 1.2. Strategic vision in a period of transformation

Conducting the concept of organizational development through the prism of transformational changes associated with the 4IR, we note that most researchers focus on the essence and depth of ongoing changes, as well as breakthrough technologies, believing that the very understanding of organizational development does not change, but the essence of transformations changes:

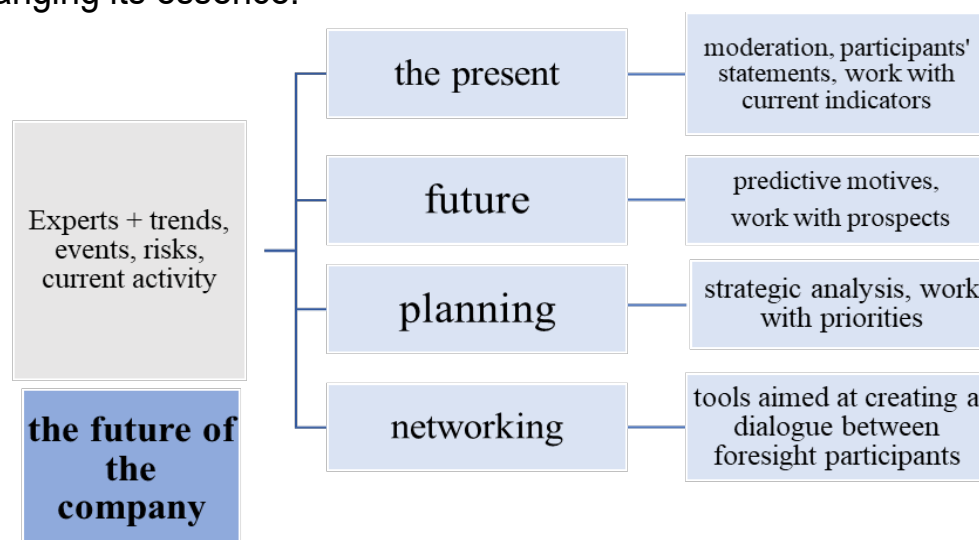
- short duration of accurate forecasts;
- variability of transformation programs;
- also by their constancy, so that the end of one program may mean the beginning of another;
- in addition, one enterprise can implement several change programs at the same time, taking into account the principle of consistency, which assumes that a change in one component of the system will certainly affect the rest (Dorogaia, 2022).

Summing up the described features of the concepts under study and expressing our own understanding, **organizational development in the era of Industrialization 4.0** is an approach that involves the formation of an organization's vision, aimed at constant transformation, taking into account exponential changes in the external environment, orientation towards the introduction of the latest technologies and the construction of new business models under their impact; as well as adapting to changes occurring in all elements of the business model in order to gain competitive advantage and organizational sustainability (Dorogaia, 2022).

In the context of changing the paradigm of planning, new tools appear in modern enterprises, for example, **Foresight** - this is a form of determining the future based on group communication, foreseeing possible scenarios, taking into account the conditions in which the organization operates, thus, having determined the desired, to agree on the possibilities

of its implementation. Moreover, it is more important not to predict the future, but to find a consensus for the implementation of the scenario.

The figure 1 shows a diagram of the principle work of foresight, which, in our opinion, organically fits into the change planning process, radically changing its essence.



Source:(Dorogaia, 2022)

Figure 1. Foresight methodology

The peculiarity of such a forecasting process lies in the possibility of adjustment, that is, depending on the situation, the scenarios are revised. At the same time, strategic foresight will not create a concrete plan, so planning is also extremely important, but takes on a very flexible form due to blurry future prospects.

Foresight methods include both the already familiar brainstorming, modeling and scanning, gaming or simulation, analysis, monitoring and projection of trends, vision.

## 2. Research method

### 2.1. Methodology for studying the problems of "new leadership" in the context of transformation

The features of this study are dictated by the objective necessity that is emerging in the world community and in the Republic of Moldova. Changes pass through all stages of our life, steadily affecting small and

medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Republic of Moldova. It is known that this category of enterprises is the most vulnerable one due to many reasons:

- a small amount of investment,
- lack of professional staff to carry out changes,
- underdeveloped infrastructure,
- lack of financial resources, lack of knowledge and others.

At the same time, according to the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, at the end of 2022, the number of SMEs amounted to 62.1 thousand, which is about 99.2% of the total number of enterprises.

The pandemic associated with the COVID-19 virus has had a serious impact on the SME sector, both in Moldova and in other countries, especially considering that most of the enterprises in this sector are microenterprises: as of January 1 2022, 85.1% were micro-enterprises, as of January 1 2023 - 87.7% of the total number of enterprises.

Based on the presented data, the main goal of the study is to develop such an approach to leadership in the process of organizational change, which would contribute to the effective transition of organizations to a new level of development. Thus, the main actor in this process will be the leader, or agent of change, who will take responsibility for such a transformation.

## **2.2. Review of research methods**

Research methods include:

1. Analysis and synthesis of such important concepts as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), change management and organizational development;
2. Analysis of statistical data provided by official Moldovan and international statistical databases, which was attended by representatives of 210 SMEs (managers and employees), who were presented with a questionnaire to identify the features of organizational changes and further development trends of those companies;
3. A graphical method was used to present the results of the study;
4. As a result of the study, conclusions were drawn up regarding further development strategies, in particular, the approaches to leadership, which are acceptable for SMEs in the Republic of Moldova.

**2.3. The limits of the study** were to limit the empirical base of the study; so, when planning the sample, the author identified at least 200

SMEs from the Republic of Moldova; the time limit was the period January-May 2023, then this study had to move to another stage - drawing conclusions. Also, one of the limits was the time for processing and analyzing information to move to the next stage of the study - the formation of a comprehensive model of changes. The difficulty, which also relates to the limits of the study, lies in comparing the two conceptual directions – 4IR and change management.

### 3. Result

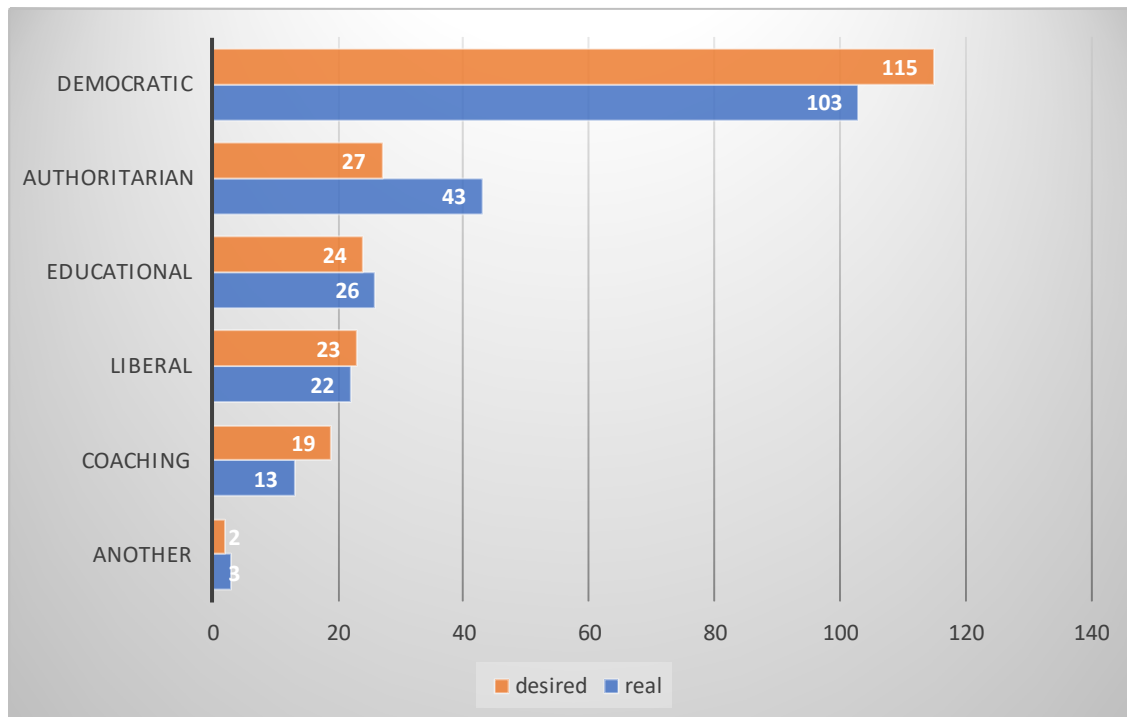
#### **Leader: new role and qualities**

So, the purpose of this study is the new qualities of a leader who will have the ability to plan in a new way and respond adequately to the situation; create a dialogue with interested persons who, in the same spirit, will not be afraid to participate in changes. In our opinion, such an understanding of a person in the process of change is close in meaning to the concept of "super leadership" or the leader's performance of the roles of a teacher, designer, steward (servant), in the terminology of P. Senge.

In order to clarify the actual and desired style of leadership in the SMEs in the Republic of Moldova, the questionnaire includes a question regarding the current situation and the preferred one. The results are presented in Figure 2.

As can be seen from the diagram, the majority of representatives of enterprises assess the leadership style that exists in the enterprise as *democratic* (49%), while 55% of respondents assess it as desirable. Other styles account for less percent. The second most popular style is *authoritarian*. Really effective - almost 21%, but only 13% of the respondents see it as desirable. Teaching and coaching styles account for 12% and 6% respectively, as already implemented in the enterprise, and desired in both cases by 11%.

In our opinion, it is precisely these two styles that fall under the modern idea of super-leadership. *Educational* - a style that involves the construction of a learning organization, in which each member is an independent person with initiative, creativity and not afraid of change. The *coaching style* implies a type of relationship between employees and the leader, in which the leader does not command and make directive decisions, but acts in these relations as a coach, pushing and helping employees to work independently in teams.



Source: according to the results of the study

*Figure 2. Real and desired style of leadership in the studied SMEs of the Republic of Moldova (number of those who answered yes )*

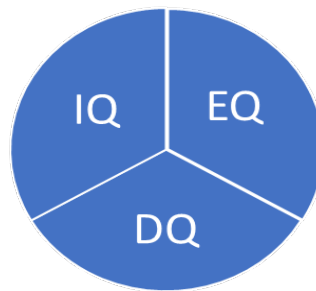
The predominance of a democratic style in organizations is, in our opinion, a favorable factor. At the same time, in such changes that have been described above, the manager needs something more. It is quite possible to combine styles depending on the situation, that is, a situational approach to leadership.

In addition, the modern approach to leadership includes the presence of certain qualities that, until recently, have not been given enough attention.

Analyzing various conceptual and statistical studies, we have come to the conclusion that a modern leader must have a set of three components: intelligence in its usual perception, emotional intelligence, and decency. That is, the qualities are a combination of three elements, or coefficients (IQ + EQ + DQ), as shown in figure 3.

In the traditional approach to leadership, most attention is usually paid to the intellectual abilities of leaders, their ability to make decisions and develop a strategy based on analytical abilities. Therefore, usually, a lot of emphasis is placed on the level of IQ, considering it the best measure of leadership qualities. Of course, no one can deny the importance of education, professional skills and practical skills of leaders. At the same time, emphasis has recently been placed on the other two components - EQ and DQ.

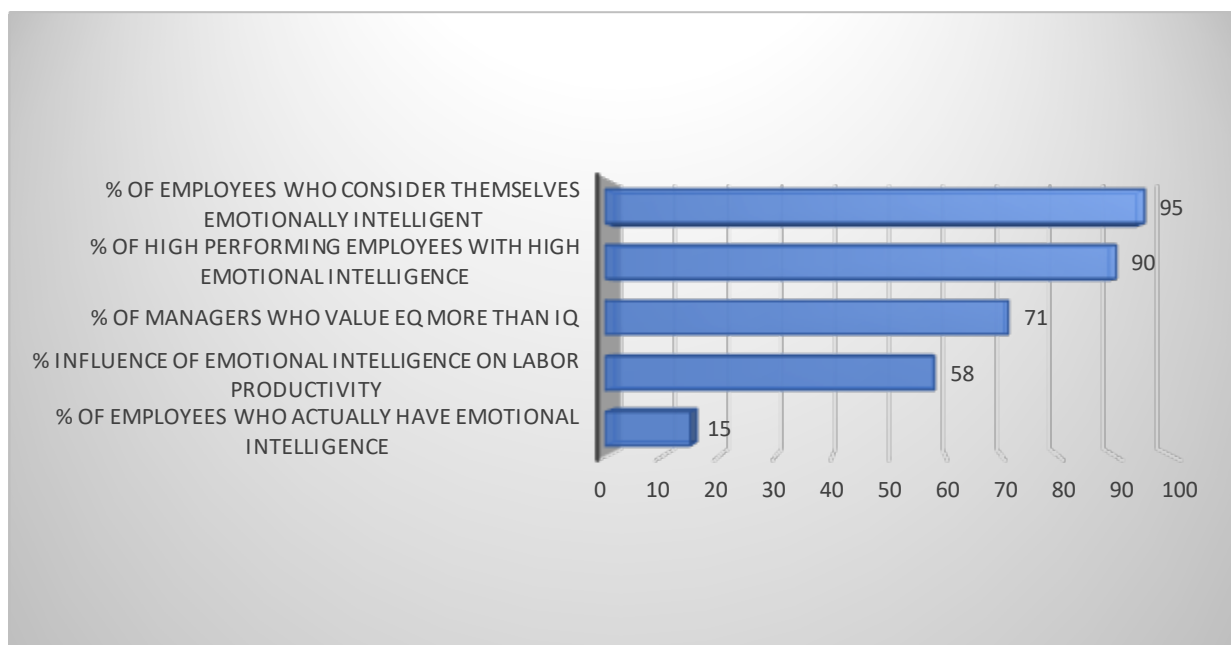




Source: Dorogaia I., 2022

Figure 3. Components of leadership abilities

Taking into account numerous studies (Goleman, D. Caruso, P. Salovey, J. Mayer, etc.), by emotional intelligence we understand the totality of abilities to control one's own emotions in any situation, behave appropriately and feel, recognize and respond correctly to the emotions of others. In other words, it is the ability to feel the situation, show resistance to stress, be balanced in an unforeseen situation and manage the emotions and reactions of other people. So, according to data presented by the Harvard Business Review (HBR), EQ (emotional quotient) is four times more reliable than IQ (intelligence quotient) in determining success.



Source: (Soocial, 2023)

Figure 4. Some Research Indicators on Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

The chart shows that most employees believe they have emotional intelligence. At the same time, according to experts, the real level of EQ is only 15%. High performers are 90% emotionally intelligent. Also, according to researchers, in 58% of cases, emotional intelligence affects performance and 71% of managers rate the development of EQ higher than IQ.

This aspect is of particular importance for the changes in the field of management, since much more cognitive, interpersonal and psychodynamic processes take place during this period.

In addition, researchers note the following facts that testify to the importance of EQ:

- Leaders with empathy (as an integral part of emotional intelligence) implement algorithms in the work of employees by more than 40%, make decisions and train.
  - 75% of Fortune 500 companies use tools to teach emotional intelligence.
  - 40% of HR managers report that they find it more difficult to train employees in interpersonal skills than in technical skills.
  - 30% of HR managers believe that employers do not pay enough attention to emotional intelligence when hiring.
  - high EQ employees win promotions over high IQ employees 75% of the time.

The ongoing analysis of leadership qualities that determine the progressiveness of change refers to the results that have recently become popular among researchers. It is necessary to talk about the integrity quotient (*DQ - the decency quantity*) that occurs with the other two (IQ and EQ) and should be an integral part of leadership qualities.

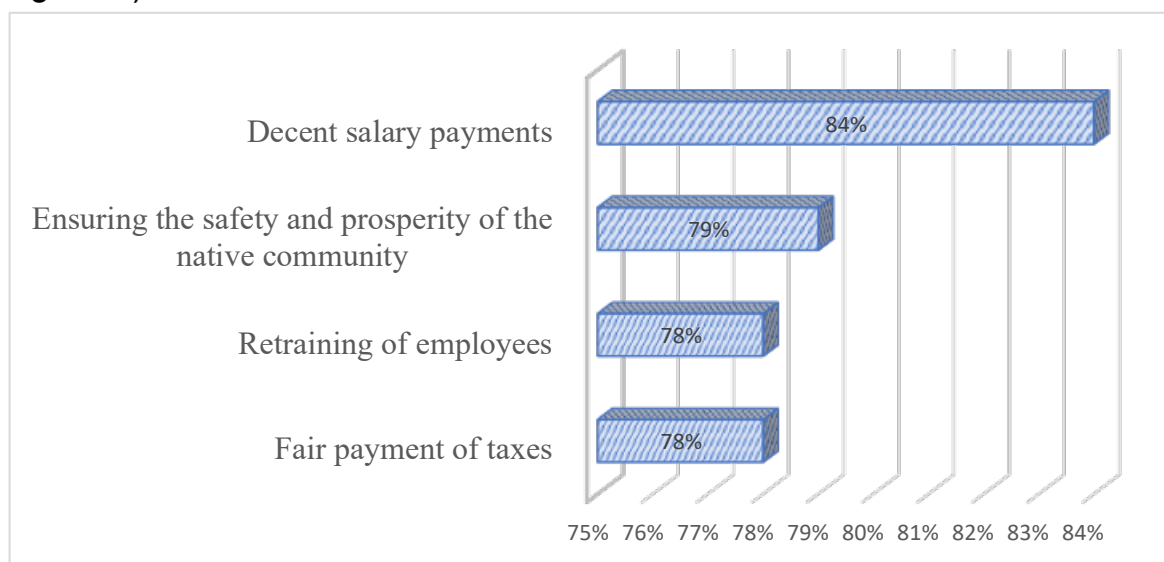
So, decency is understood as the ability of people with leadership qualities not to dominate (as previously thought), but to serve, and Senge's service leadership style is related to this. Such leaders care about the well-being of the team, unlocking the creative potential of their colleagues, helping to overcome resistance to change, which leads to the prosperity of the entire team. In addition, a person with a high level of DQ is distinguished by modesty and an adequate perception of criticism.

The era of modern changes associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution causes an increase in mistrust. Technology, innovation and automation are changing the very nature of work. Therefore, the use of the principles of integrity in management is an integral part. Innovation and change should not only drive new solutions, but also new approaches.

Thus, high DQ leaders understand that their decisions should not only be about profitability, but also affect the lives of many people.

Leaders' trust in times of change is also justified by employees' expectations, which are related to the various motivational factors that they believe a manager should provide. To clarify the qualities inherent in such leaders, let us turn to world studies. So, for example, the Edelman Barometer for 2023 published a survey that clarified the role of the leader of the ongoing change.

The data from the Edelman Trust Barometer shows significant expectations that top management can realize, rather than waiting for change from above. Respondents' answers are distributed as follows (Figure 5):



Source: (Edelman, 2023)

Figure 5. Employees' expectations regarding leadership behavior, in %

## 4. Discussion

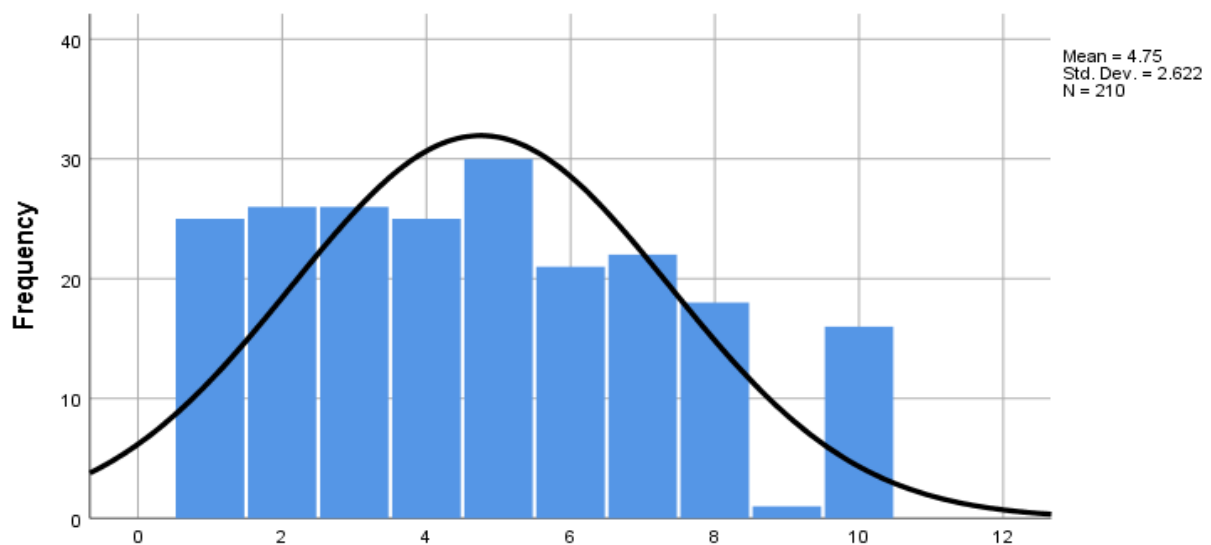
### Changes and leadership in SMEs in the Republic of Moldova

Conducting observations, communicating with employees of SMEs from the Republic of Moldova, as well as based on the results of the survey, we can highlight the following *positive points regarding the position of leadership in an enterprise*:

- the majority of employees evaluate favorable relations with their direct manager, this is also evidenced by the data of the study, proving that,

in the vast majority of cases, the desired style coincides with the real one and is democratic (see Figure 2);

- most employees believe that there is no need to change the leadership style in order to carry out transformational changes, which is also proved by the results of the survey presented below (Figure 6). The diagram shows the results of the study, in which from 1 to 10 respondents were asked to evaluate the factors of successful changes. "Change in leadership style" was chosen as the analyzed factor.

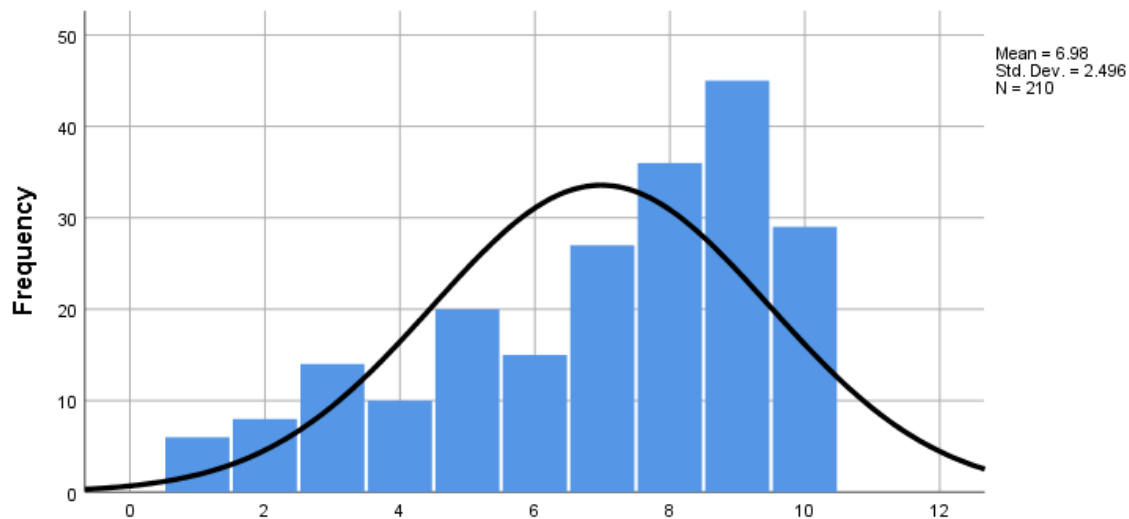


Source: study results

*Figure 6. Distribution of answers "Change in leadership style as a factor in the successful development of the company" (on a scale from 1 to 10, where: 1 is not significant, 10 is extremely important)*

It can be seen from the figure that the median, or average value of the answers, is 4.75, which is almost polar in the definition of "good-bad". Also, the size of the standard deviation, which reflects the spread of values, is not critically large and is equal to 2.622. At the same time, it is impossible to state with certainty the uniqueness of this value. In our opinion, it is not critically bad, and employees see in its change rather less significant support such as state aid or partnership and cooperation with other SMEs.

- On a positive note, we observe the readiness of management to carry out changes related to 4PR. They are also reflected in Figure 7, where the employees evaluate readiness on a 10-point scale.



Source: study results

Figure 7. The willingness of the company's managers to work with the latest technologies according to employees' assessments (from 1 to 10, where 1 is not ready at all, 10 is ready and already working)

The chart indicates above-average readiness of SME leaders to work with new technologies, including artificial intelligence, big data, etc. This is indicated by a median of 6.98. In addition, the average deviation here is also lower, compared to the previous chart. This indicates the understanding of the managers of most companies about the need to move to a new level of management.

The following should be noted as *not particularly favorable moments*:

- poor knowledge and understanding of such leadership styles as service, teaching and coaching hinders the development of today's SMEs (Figure 2), which should become full-fledged enterprises in the economic environment, and the described trends lead to such a need;
- the underestimation of the importance of emotional intelligence by some leaders, which boils down to a predominant focus on the task rather than the person;
- an insufficient percentage of team work (according to the study, 28% of respondents spend up to 30% of their working time in teams), which is extremely small considering the requirements of the modern environment, which also inhibits creativity, adaptability, and, in general, the transformational processes of modern organizations. At the same time, 79% of respondents believe that teams should spend from 30 to 100% of the working time.

## Conclusions

Considering the conducted theoretical and practical research, we clarify that the topic of leadership in management is inexhaustible. Leadership in a new era of change takes on a new essence. And if earlier, when it came to a leader, they emphasized their personality, charisma and outstanding qualities to a greater extent, today's approach implies more humanity, understanding, trust between employees, leadership ability to create such a corporate environment, a culture in which an atmosphere of mutual understanding not only between employees and managers, but also external factors: partners, customers, government agencies.

Equally important is emotional intelligence, which is more of a "human" advantage than artificial intelligence. The leader's ability to feel their employees, understand their motives and moods and adequately respond to success and failure - these factors for employees are more motivating than financial means. Today's leader is a visionary who develops a strategy and constantly adapts in accordance with changes in the external environment. The extreme complexity of this approach is realized with the help of a team of specialists who are ready in any situation to respond correctly to the need for change.

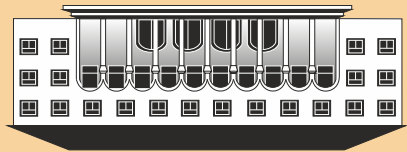
The studies that have been carried out on the SMEs in the Republic of Moldova show that the staff and management, for the most part, are ready to implement organizational changes, understand their importance and necessity. At the same time, many challenges stand in the way of change, one of which is leadership style. The majority of employees believe that the democratic style prevails at the enterprises, as well as the less authoritarian one (Figure 2), while other styles are given less importance. In our opinion, the most relevant styles in today's Industry 4.0 are the coaching and teaching styles that Moldovan leaders should adopt.

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4/2023



# БИЗНЕС управление

PUBLISHED BY  
D. A. TSENOV ACADEMY  
OF ECONOMICS - SVISHTOV

ISSN 0861 - 6604  
ISSN 2534 - 8396

BUSINESS management

4/2023

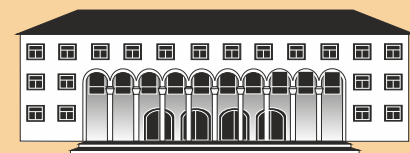
4/2023

БИЗНЕС управление

ISSN 2534 - 8396  
ISSN 0861 - 6604

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*The printing of the issue 4-2023 is funded with a grand from the Scientific Research Fund, Contract KP-06-NP4/75 /16.12.2022 by the competition “Bulgarian Scientific Periodicals - 2023”.*

Submitted for publishing on 22.11.2023, published on 23.11.2023, format 70x100/16, total print 80

© D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov,

2 Emanuil Chakarov Str, telephone number: +359 631 66298

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