

Leadership Transformation in the AI Era: A Delphi Study on Role Shifts and Ethical Challenges in Indian Corporates

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ABSTRACT

The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a distant technological frontier; it is now an embedded force reshaping the foundations of contemporary organizations. Across functions such as recruitment, supply chain management, customer engagement, and strategic forecasting, AI is enabling organizations to make faster, data-driven, and increasingly autonomous decisions. In doing so, it is transforming not only how decisions are made but who makes them- and more importantly, what leadership means in this emergent reality. This evolution presents a dual-edged opportunity and challenge for leaders. On one hand, AI systems offer unprecedented analytical precision and automation that can free leaders from operational overload. On the other, they demand new forms of leadership that can navigate algorithmic complexity, foster digital trust, ensure ethical governance, and maintain human relevance in machine-augmented ecosystems. The strategic incorporation of AI is not merely a technological upgrade- it is a catalyst for organizational change at cultural, structural, and psychological levels. This shift is particularly significant in emerging economies like India, where the pace of digital transformation is intensifying across both legacy firms and startups. Indian corporates are grappling with the simultaneous pressures of global competitiveness, digital innovation, regulatory complexity, and workforce demographic shifts. Amidst this flux, leadership is no longer confined to positional authority; it is becoming a capability to manage digital-human collaboration, interpret AI-informed insights, and orchestrate inclusive, ethical decision-making under uncertainty. However, existing research on leadership in AI-enhanced environments remains largely conceptual or Western-centric. There is a dearth of empirical and consensus-based understanding of how Indian corporate leaders perceive and respond to AI's growing role in decision-making, and what new expectations and responsibilities are being placed upon them. This knowledge gap poses both academic and practical limitations, especially for leadership development, organizational design, and change management strategies. To address this gap, the present study explores how AI-driven decision-making is impacting leadership roles in Indian corporates. Employing a Delphi methodology, the research engages a panel of experts across industries to uncover consensus on emerging leadership traits, dilemmas, and transformations in AI-intensive organizational contexts. The study proposes a consensus-based framework for leadership transformation in AI-integrated Indian corporates.

Keywords: AI Leadership, Algorithmic Decision-Making, Digital Trust, Ethical Leadership, Delphi Study

Leadership Transformation in the Age of AI: A Conceptual Synthesis

Classical Leadership Paradigms and Their Evolution

Leadership theory has evolved over the decades from **trait-based** and **behavioural models** to more dynamic constructs such as **transformational**, **servant**, and **authentic leadership**. Classical paradigms like **transactional leadership** emphasized control, stability, and task execution (Bass, 1985), whereas **transformational leadership** sought to inspire and motivate followers through vision and value alignment (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1994). These models were developed for largely hierarchical, human-centric organizational settings.

However, the assumptions embedded in these frameworks—particularly the primacy of human judgment, relational influence, and decision autonomy—are increasingly being challenged in environments where **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** is embedded in critical decision-making processes. The evolution of leadership thus demands not just a behavioural shift, but a **cognitive and structural reconfiguration**. These classical models inadequately address leadership challenges arising from AI's predictive authority and lack of explainability, necessitating newer paradigms that integrate technological awareness and ethical reflexivity.

The Rise of AI in Decision-Making and Organizational Design

AI technologies—ranging from machine learning algorithms to natural language processing and robotic process automation—are transforming how organizations process information and make decisions (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). In many firms, AI systems now perform functions once reserved for senior executives: forecasting demand, recommending pricing, screening candidates, or even evaluating performance (Wilson & Daugherty, 2018).

This shift introduces **algorithmic decision-making** into domains traditionally governed by leadership intuition and experience. As AI becomes more autonomous and intelligent, it **challenges the epistemic authority of human leaders**, raising key questions about legitimacy, trust, and accountability (Makridakis, 2017). Leaders must now operate in **hybrid decision environments** where human judgment and machine reasoning co-exist, often with opaque logic or “black box” analytics (Burrell, 2016).

Recent cases in fintech and healthcare underscore the tension between algorithmic recommendations and human accountability, a dilemma increasingly documented in post-2020 leadership literature (Shrestha et al., 2021).

Leadership in AI-Augmented Organizations: Core Shifts

Emerging literature suggests several foundational shifts in leadership roles within AI-intensive organizations:

- **From Authority to Orchestration:** Leaders are transitioning from being central decision-makers to **orchestrators of distributed intelligence** (Huang & Rust, 2021). AI systems can outperform humans in certain domains, but leaders are needed to align technologies with strategic goals and human values.
- **From Control to Trust-Building:** As algorithmic systems take on more decision power, the leader's role increasingly includes fostering **digital trust**- both toward machines and within human teams (Verhulst et al., 2020).
- **From Experience-Based Judgment to Data-Augmented Insight:** Traditional leadership often rewarded tenure-based judgment. In contrast, AI-driven settings prioritize **data literacy, interpretive ability**, and the capability to ask the right questions (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017).
- **From Unilateral to Ethical Decision-Making:** Leaders must now ensure that decisions made or supported by AI are **transparent, fair, and ethically defensible** (Floridi et al., 2018). This includes confronting algorithmic bias and ensuring inclusive outcomes.

Competencies such as digital humility and systems thinking suggest a shift from skill-based models to adaptive leadership mindsets capable of navigating uncertainty and machine augmentation.

Leadership Competencies in the Algorithmic Age

New leadership competencies are emerging in response to AI integration:

1. **Digital Fluency** – Understanding how AI systems function, even if not coding them (Bughin et al., 2019).
2. **Algorithmic Responsibility** – Ability to govern, question, and challenge AI decisions.

3. **Human-Centered Thinking** – Ensuring emotional intelligence and empathy remain central to leadership (George et al., 2020).
4. **Sense-Making and Systems Thinking** – Making strategic sense of complex, real-time data flows (Sawy et al., 2016).
5. **Change Agility** – Guiding teams through continuous digital transformation (Nadkarni & Prügl, 2021).

Indian Context: A Nascent but Critical Research Gap

In the Indian corporate landscape, the adoption of AI is accelerating, particularly in sectors like IT services, fintech, manufacturing, and health tech. Yet, academic studies on **how Indian leaders perceive and adapt to AI integration** are limited. While organizations like TCS, Infosys, and Reliance are embedding AI into operations, there is **minimal scholarly consensus** on what leadership transformation looks like in this context (Panda & Sharma, 2022).

Moreover, Indian businesses face unique challenges including diverse workforce skill levels, regulatory ambiguities, infrastructural asymmetries, and socio-cultural norms that may affect human-AI collaboration. This context demands **localized frameworks** to understand leadership transitions—not simply imported models from Western AI literature.

Identified Gaps in Literature

- Lack of **context-specific research** in emerging economies on AI-leadership dynamics
- Limited exploration of **how AI alters leadership authority, ethics, and identity**
- Scarcity of **consensus-building methodologies**, like Delphi studies, to map emerging leadership competencies
- Few studies integrating **AI ethics, trust, and decision accountability** into leadership models

This study responds directly to these identified gaps.

Summary and Research Justification

While the technological aspects of AI integration are well-documented, its implications for **leadership theory and practice**—particularly in emerging markets like India—remain under-explored. Existing leadership frameworks require updating to accommodate **AI-infused cognitive systems, ethical governance, and algorithmic decision delegation**.

This study aims to address these gaps by using a **Delphi-based expert consensus approach** to explore leadership transformations in Indian corporates where AI plays a central role in decision-making. The Delphi method thus serves as both a methodological and epistemological bridge in an under-theorized but rapidly evolving domain.

While scholars have explored AI's influence on HR functions, productivity, and work-life dynamics in the Indian corporate context (Halder & Mukherjee, 2024; Halder, Mukherjee & Chatterjee, 2024), few studies have examined how such technological integration redefines **leadership authority, ethical responsibility, and decision ownership**. The current study builds on this prior research by shifting the focus from organizational outcomes to **leadership identity and role evolution** in AI-driven settings.

This conversation is especially timely for readers of the Journal of Organizational Change Management, which has long emphasized the interplay between leadership evolution, digital disruption, and organizational transformation (Bawany, 2023; Chakraborty & Sanyal, 2022). As AI-driven change accelerates, the leadership lens must evolve to account for the sociotechnical dynamics reshaping authority, culture, and governance in

organizations. These shifts are not merely functional but discursive, redefining how leadership identity and legitimacy are constructed within firms (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001).

Research Objectives and Questions

As organizations increasingly adopt artificial intelligence (AI) to support decision-making, the roles and expectations of leaders are undergoing significant transformation. While the literature acknowledges the growing presence of AI in operational and strategic contexts, there remains a lack of empirical consensus on how leadership itself is being redefined- particularly in emerging economies like India. This study aims to fill that gap by identifying the evolving dimensions of leadership in AI-integrated organizations, using the Delphi method to derive expert insights.

Research Objectives

The core objectives of this study are to:

1. **Identify** the keyways in which AI-driven decision-making is influencing leadership roles in Indian corporates.
2. **Explore** the emerging leadership competencies, behaviours, and ethical considerations required in AI-integrated work environments.
3. **Assess** the perceived challenges and dilemmas that leaders face while navigating human-AI collaboration.
4. **Develop** a consensus-based framework outlining the leadership transformations occurring in response to organizational AI adoption.

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How is AI-driven decision-making transforming the roles and responsibilities of corporate leaders in India?
2. What new leadership competencies are emerging as critical in AI-integrated organizational contexts?
3. How do experts perceive the ethical, strategic, and relational dilemmas faced by leaders in algorithmic decision environments?
4. To what extent is there a consensus among industry experts on the changing definition and function of leadership in the age of AI?

Delphi Method Justification

To achieve these objectives, a Delphi method was selected, as it is well-suited for obtaining structured, expert consensus on complex, evolving phenomena. Given the nascent nature of AI-leadership literature in the Indian context, the Delphi technique allows for the iterative refinement of themes and identification of shared perspectives among practitioners, consultants, and academic thought leaders.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach

Given the exploratory and consensus-seeking nature of this study, a **Delphi method** was adopted to systematically collect and refine expert insights on the evolving leadership roles in AI-driven organizations. The

Delphi technique is well-suited to contexts where empirical literature is emergent, theoretical clarity is evolving, and practitioner insight is essential (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). This study employed a **two-round Delphi process** involving selected experts from Indian corporates, academia, consulting, and technology leadership roles. The method enabled iterative validation of ideas and convergence of expert opinion regarding leadership competencies, challenges, and transformations emerging from AI integration in decision-making.

Participant Selection and Panel Formation

A total of **35 experts** were invited to participate in the study using purposive and snowball sampling strategies. Of these, **24 participants completed Round 1**, offering detailed qualitative responses across thematic areas such as AI decision augmentation, ethical dilemmas, and leadership role shifts. **18 participants completed both rounds**, thereby forming the final Delphi panel.

This response rate is **methodologically acceptable** for Delphi studies, which prioritize depth of expertise over volume. Moreover, it is consistent with previous scholarly applications of the Delphi method in organizational research, where panel sizes typically range between 10–30 experts (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004; Skulmoski et al., 2007). The retention of 18 participants across both rounds ensured reliable thematic convergence and informed the development of a consensus-based framework for leadership transformation in AI-enabled organizations.

Inclusion criteria included:

- Minimum 10 years of professional or academic experience in leadership, HR, or AI deployment
- Direct involvement in or observation of AI-enabled decision-making processes
- Representation from at least one of the following sectors: IT/ITES, finance, healthcare, manufacturing, HR consulting, or academia

Panel diversity was ensured across sectors, roles, and organization sizes to capture multi-sectoral insights relevant to Indian corporate contexts.

Delphi Process and Round Structure

The study followed a **two-round Delphi process**:

- **Round 1 (Exploratory Phase):**

Participants were presented with **open-ended questions** designed to elicit broad themes, experiences, and foresight about leadership shifts due to AI integration. Thematic analysis of responses generated key categories for Round 2.

- **Round 2 (Consensus Phase):**

Based on Round 1 responses, a set of **22 structured statements** was developed. Participants were asked to rate their **level of agreement** using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). **Consensus was defined as $\geq 75\%$ agreement** (ratings of 4 or 5).

Each round was conducted online over a secure platform, with clear instructions, voluntary participation, and participant confidentiality maintained throughout.

Data Analysis Techniques

Round 1 response were analysed using **thematic coding** to identify recurrent categories related to leadership role shifts, required competencies, ethical concerns, and organizational implications. Codes were independently reviewed and categorized by two researchers to enhance reliability.

Round 2 quantitative responses were analysed using:

- **Descriptive statistics** (mean, standard deviation)
- **Consensus threshold analysis** ($\geq 75\%$ agreement)
- **Gap Analysis** for statements that did not reach consensus, highlighting divergence in expert opinion

Statements with strong consensus formed the basis of a **consensus-driven leadership transformation framework**, while non-consensus items were flagged for further investigation in future studies.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of the study, data confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any point. Informed consent was obtained digitally prior to Round 1. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines for Delphi research as outlined by Skulmoski et al. (2007), ensuring transparency, anonymity, and respect for participants' intellectual contributions.

Methodological Limitations

While the Delphi method enables expert consensus on emerging topics, it is not free from limitations. The findings reflect the perspectives of a relatively small panel, which may limit broader generalizability. Nonetheless, the panel was carefully constructed to ensure **relevance, diversity, and credibility**, offering strong insight into leadership-AI dynamics within the Indian context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Round 2 Findings

In the second round of the Delphi process, 18 expert respondents evaluated 15 structured Likert-scale statements developed from the thematic coding of Round 1 responses. These statements were grouped into five thematic clusters: leadership role shifts, emerging competencies, human-AI collaboration and trust, ethical leadership, and organizational impact. Quantitative analysis focused on descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation), agreement rates (percentage of ratings as 4 or 5), and interquartile ranges (IQRs) to evaluate the degree of consensus. Statements with high mean scores, low standard deviation, high agreement percentages, and $IQR \leq 1.00$ were considered to demonstrate strong consensus.

Quantitative Summary of Round 2 Responses

Table 2 presents a consolidated view of expert responses across the 15 Likert-scale statements categorized under five thematic sections. The metrics include mean scores, standard deviations, interquartile ranges (IQR), and the percentage of agreement (defined as percentage of respondents selecting 4 or 5). Statements with high mean scores (≥ 4.0), low SD, and $IQR \leq 1.00$ indicate stronger consensus.

Table 1. Summary of Delphi Round 2 Ratings and Consensus Metrics (n = 18)

Code	Statement (Short Form)	Mean	SD	IQR	% Agreement
Q1	AI reduces operational workload	3.89	0.8	1.8	66.67%
Q2	Shift to orchestration role	3.83	0.7	1	61.11%
Q3	AI replaces intuition-based decisions	4.28	0.6	1	77.78%
Q4	Algorithmic awareness is a critical leadership competency	4.22	0.7	1	77.78%
Q5	Need to question AI outputs for contextual accuracy	3.72	0.9	1.5	55.56%

Q6	Digital fluency = Domain expertise	3.94	0.9	2	66.67%
Q7	Leaders must mediate trust between humans and AI	4.11	0.8	1.8	72.22%
Q8	Transparency and explainability are leadership mandates	4.28	0.6	1	77.78%
Q9	Human oversight must remain central	4.17	0.7	1	66.67%
Q10	Leaders not yet ethically prepared for AI dilemmas	3.89	0.9	2	66.67%
Q11	Need for ethical frameworks on bias/fairness	4	0.9	1.8	72.22%
Q12	Leaders must be accountable for AI-assisted decisions	4.44	0.6	1	83.33%
Q13	AI alters leadership hierarchies	4.17	0.7	1	72.22%
Q14	Leadership programs must include AI literacy and ethics	4.11	0.8	1	72.22%
Q15	Succession planning should favor adaptive leadership	3.78	1	2	55.56%

Source: Authors own work

Note: Agreement defined as the percentage of respondents selecting '4 – Agree' or '5 – Strongly Agree'.

Theme-Wise Findings and Consensus Patterns

Leadership Role Shifts

The findings reflect a notable shift in how leadership is perceived in AI-integrated environments. Respondents strongly agreed that AI tools are replacing intuition-based decisions (Q3: Mean = 4.28, Agreement = 77.78%, IQR = 1.00), reinforcing Round 1 insights that AI is no longer merely advisory but now influences final outcomes. A moderately strong consensus also emerged around the notion that leadership is evolving toward orchestration rather than direct decision-making (Q2: Mean = 3.83, IQR = 1.00). However, the belief that AI significantly reduces operational workloads (Q1: Mean = 3.89, IQR = 1.75) showed only partial agreement, indicating contextual variability depending on organizational maturity and sector.

These results align with prior work by Dwivedi et al. (2021), which suggests that AI is driving a paradigm shift in leadership, requiring redefinition of strategic versus operational boundaries.

Emerging Leadership Competencies

Participants demonstrated high consensus that data interpretation and algorithmic literacy are now indispensable leadership competencies (Q4: Mean = 4.22, Agreement = 77.78%). Likewise, digital fluency was seen as equivalent in importance to traditional domain expertise (Q6: Mean = 3.94), though the IQR (2.00) suggests some divergence.

Interestingly, lower agreement was observed regarding leaders' ability to challenge AI outputs for contextual relevance (Q5: Mean = 3.72, Agreement = 55.56%). This indicates a gap between technical reliance on AI and critical questioning capacity, a trend also reported in Jarrahi (2018), who warned against over-dependence on black-box systems without interpretive capacity.

Human-AI Collaboration and Trust

AI integration appears to have heightened the leadership role in mediating human-AI relationships. Respondents agreed that leaders must promote transparency and ensure human oversight (Q8 and Q9, Agreement = 77.78% and 66.67% respectively). However, trust mediation (Q7: Mean = 4.11, IQR = 1.75) fell slightly short of strong consensus, suggesting a newer domain of responsibility not yet uniformly internalized across leadership tiers.

These findings mirror the emerging literature on explainable AI (XAI) and its role in leadership credibility (Siau & Wang, 2018), particularly in people-centric domains such as HR, healthcare, and customer services.

Ethical Leadership and Accountability

There is robust agreement that leaders must be held accountable for AI-assisted decisions (Q12: Mean = 4.44, Agreement = 83.33%), even when systems operate autonomously. However, the community showed less consensus on whether current leadership is ethically prepared to handle the dilemmas posed by algorithmic systems (Q10: Mean = 3.89, IQR = 2.00).

While ethical frameworks are seen as necessary (Q11: Agreement = 72.22%), the high IQR (1.75) implies varying perceptions of urgency or readiness. These discrepancies underscore the need for structured training in digital ethics and reflect the challenges raised by evolving regulatory expectations (e.g., the EU AI Act, 2024).

Organizational Impact and Succession

Participants acknowledged that AI integration is transforming traditional leadership hierarchies (Q13: Mean = 4.17). However, weaker agreement emerged around the need to redesign succession planning around adaptability and collaborative traits (Q15: Agreement = 55.56%, IQR = 2.00). This finding is notable given the strong support in Round 1 for rethinking talent development pipelines.

The limited consensus suggests resistance to replacing legacy models, despite the growing literature advocating for flatter, more agile leadership frameworks in the AI era (Bawany, 2023).

Cross-Round Synthesis

Comparative analysis of Rounds 1 and 2 reveals several validated insights and a few contested zones. Strong consensus in Round 2 reaffirmed Round 1 themes like “AI as Decision Augmentor,” “Algorithmic Accountability,” and “Digital Trust Building.” These affirmations confirm a clear directional shift in leadership expectations toward tech-savviness, transparency, and ethical mediation.

Conversely, areas such as ethical readiness (Q10) and succession transformation (Q15) showed lower consensus, highlighting that while leaders conceptually endorse AI integration, the practical realities of preparedness and systemic change are lagging. This tension between strategic vision and executional maturity is a consistent thread in both global and Indian leadership literature (Chakraborty & Sanyal, 2022).

Implications for Theory and Practice

These findings offer actionable implications across multiple domains:

- **Leadership Development:** Organizations must embed algorithmic literacy, critical interpretation, and ethical reflexivity into formal leadership development programs.
- **Organizational Design:** HR frameworks should evolve toward flexible, AI-adaptive leadership pipelines that reward collaborative behaviors over rigid authority structures.
- **Policy and Regulation:** Industry bodies and academic institutions must co-develop ethical leadership frameworks to guide decision accountability in AI-influenced contexts.
- **Academic Inquiry:** Future research should examine sector-specific leadership adaptation curves and explore interventions that promote AI skepticism without resistance.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study advances the scholarly understanding of leadership transformation in the context of artificial intelligence (AI) integration, particularly within Indian corporate environments. The Delphi-based findings contribute to the emerging body of literature that explores how AI not only reshapes operational workflows but

also reconfigures strategic leadership roles, competencies, and ethical responsibilities. The findings extend the work of Jarrahi (2018) and Dwivedi et al. (2021) by empirically validating that the leader's role is evolving from direct decision-maker to orchestrator of AI-enabled insights.

Additionally, the study reinforces the relevance of sociotechnical systems theory by highlighting the need for symbiotic relationships between humans and intelligent systems. The emergence of new leadership competencies such as algorithmic awareness, digital fluency, and contextual questioning of AI outputs reflects a shift from traditional trait-based models to dynamic, techno-contextual leadership frameworks. The identification of ethical dilemmas and trust mediation roles suggests a convergence of leadership theory with digital ethics and organizational psychology, offering an interdisciplinary platform for further theoretical refinement.

Practical Implications

The results have significant implications for corporate leaders, human resource professionals, and leadership development strategists operating in AI-integrated environments. Organizations must now reorient their leadership pipelines to prioritize adaptive, ethical, and tech-savvy individuals. Traditional notions of leadership based solely on domain expertise or seniority may no longer suffice in AI-augmented settings. The consensus among experts regarding the need for AI literacy, systems thinking, and digital transparency highlights an urgent need to redesign existing leadership training programs.

Furthermore, the insights suggest that leadership development in Indian corporates should incorporate real-time AI simulations, ethical dilemma resolution exercises, and modules on human-AI collaboration. HR policies must also accommodate frameworks that ensure accountability for AI-assisted decisions, especially in high-stakes or sensitive domains. As AI systems increasingly mediate human interactions and decision pathways, leaders are expected not only to manage performance but also to cultivate trust among stakeholders, regulate bias, and uphold ethical standards. These findings equip practitioners with a foundational direction for future-proofing leadership in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how artificial intelligence is transforming leadership roles in Indian corporate settings through a structured two-round Delphi methodology. Drawing insights from 24 expert participants in Round 1 and 18 in Round 2, the research systematically captured evolving consensus on role shifts, emerging competencies, human-AI collaboration, ethical considerations, and organizational redesign. The study confirms that the integration of AI into organizational systems is not merely a technological disruption but a fundamental redefinition of leadership practice.

Key findings suggest that leadership is progressively shifting from operational execution to strategic orchestration of AI insights, necessitating new competencies such as algorithmic awareness, digital fluency, and ethical foresight. The results also highlight growing concerns around transparency, fairness, and human oversight, indicating that leaders must be equipped to navigate both technical and moral dimensions of AI-driven decision-making. These shifts are not isolated but system-wide, impacting leadership hierarchies, succession planning, and trust dynamics.

In synthesizing expert consensus, this study contributes a grounded framework to better understand leadership transformation in AI-integrated contexts. It emphasizes that leadership in the AI era must be fluid, interdisciplinary, and ethically anchored. By identifying the core areas where leadership roles are most affected, the research offers both theoretical enrichment and practical direction for organizations seeking to future-proof their leadership pipelines. In doing so, it lays the foundation for continued inquiry into how organizations can lead not only with AI, but through AI- ethically, adaptively, and inclusively.

Future Research Directions

While this study provides a structured consensus on leadership transformation in the AI era, it also opens several avenues for future scholarly inquiry. First, longitudinal studies are needed to track how the identified leadership

shifts and competencies evolve over time, particularly as AI systems become more autonomous and embedded in strategic functions. Such studies could investigate the trajectory of leadership transformation across industries, organizational sizes, and levels of AI maturity.

Second, future research can explore sector-specific dynamics, especially in sectors like healthcare, manufacturing, banking, and education, where AI adoption patterns and leadership responses may differ significantly. A comparative Delphi approach across sectors or geographies—such as contrasting Indian corporates with global counterparts—can yield richer cross-cultural and contextual insights.

Third, while this study focused on leadership perceptions and consensus, future work could integrate AI-readiness or leadership-analytics indices that quantitatively assess leadership preparedness and behavioral adaptation to AI environments. Such integration of qualitative insights with HR analytics and machine learning models would further strengthen decision-making frameworks for talent development and succession planning.

Fourth, the ethical implications of AI-assisted leadership decisions merit deeper philosophical and regulatory examination. Future studies may explore how algorithmic accountability frameworks can be practically implemented in leadership evaluation systems, or how trust-building between humans and AI systems can be operationalized within organizational culture.

Finally, expanding the scope of inquiry to include employees' perspectives on AI-led leadership changes can provide a more holistic understanding of acceptance, resistance, and trust in digitally transformed workplaces.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Round 1 – Open-Ended Delphi Questionnaire

Title: Leadership Transformation in the Age of AI: Insights from Indian Corporates

Instructions to Participants:

Please respond to the following open-ended questions based on your knowledge and experience. Your insights will help shape a consensus framework for understanding the impact of AI on leadership roles.

1. In your view, how is AI impacting the traditional decision-making responsibilities of corporate leaders?
2. What new competencies or skills do you believe leaders need to develop to work effectively in AI-integrated environments?
3. What ethical or accountability concerns do you foresee when leaders rely on AI-driven recommendations?
4. How does AI influence trust relationships within leadership hierarchies and between leaders and employees?
5. In what ways are leadership training and development programs adapting (or failing to adapt) to the rise of AI in organizations?
6. Do you foresee AI altering power dynamics or leadership hierarchies in your organization or industry? If yes, how?
7. Please share any examples, observations, or concerns related to AI's growing influence on leadership in your domain.

Final Reflection (Optional)

8. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding AI and leadership transformation that was not covered above?

Appendix B: Round 2 – Likert-Scale Delphi Questionnaire

Instructions:

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using the scale below. You may also provide comments.

Scale:

1 – Strongly Disagree | 2 – Disagree | 3 – Neutral | 4 – Agree | 5 – Strongly Agree

Section A: Leadership Role Shifts

1. AI integration is significantly reducing the operational workload of mid-level and senior leaders.
2. The role of corporate leaders is shifting from decision-making to orchestration of AI-supported insights.
3. AI-driven recommendations are increasingly replacing traditional intuition-based leadership decisions.

Section B: Emerging Leadership Competencies

4. Data interpretation and algorithmic awareness are now critical competencies for leaders in AI-integrated organizations.

5. Leaders must develop the ability to question and challenge AI-generated outputs to ensure contextual relevance.
6. Digital fluency is becoming as important as domain expertise in leadership development programs.

Section C: Human-AI Collaboration and Trust

7. Corporate leaders are now expected to mediate trust between employees and AI systems.
8. AI integration has increased the importance of transparency and explainability in leadership communication.
9. Leaders must ensure that human oversight remains central even when AI systems handle core decisions.

Section D: Ethical Leadership and Accountability

10. AI-based decision-making introduces new ethical dilemmas that leaders are not yet fully equipped to handle.
11. There is a growing need for ethical leadership frameworks that address algorithmic bias and fairness.
12. Leaders should be held accountable for the outcomes of AI-assisted decisions made under their supervision.

Section E: Organizational Impact and Development

13. The presence of AI in organizations is fundamentally altering leadership hierarchies and power dynamics.
14. Organizations must redesign leadership development programs to include AI literacy, digital ethics, and systems thinking.
15. Succession planning in AI-integrated organizations must prioritize adaptive and collaborative leadership traits over traditional command-control models.

Appendix C: Thematic Cluster Coding Framework (Round 1)

Cluster Theme	Representative Codes / Ideas
Role Shifts	From decision-maker to AI-orchestrator, reduced operational load, augmented strategic vision
Competency Redefinition	Algorithmic awareness, digital fluency, contextual intelligence, systems thinking
Ethical and Accountability Concerns	AI opacity, ethical dilemmas, leadership liability, fairness, bias regulation
Human-AI Trust and Mediation	Transparency, trust calibration, human oversight, employee resistance
Organizational Transformation	Hierarchical flattening, leadership succession, development program redesign

Source: Authors own work