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AI ADOPTION AND THE EVOLUTION OF LECTURER LEADERSHIP IN UK BUSINESS SCHOOLS

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Cite this article:

W. I., Boumsoud, B., Zaghmout, I., Maazouz, Y., Suleiman (2026), AI Adoption and the Evolution of Lecturer Leadership in UK Business Schools. British Journal of Management and Marketing Studies 9(1), 19-33. DOI: 10.52589/BJMMS-LAUNGBSN

Manuscript History

Received: 4 Dec 2025

Accepted: 6 Jan 2026

Published: 26 Jan 2026

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ABSTRACT: *This paper explores the ways in which the implementation of artificial intelligence is transforming the leadership roles of lecturers in business schools in the UK in terms of adapted leadership practices, role diffusion in academia, and decision-making. It aims to gain insight into the leadership role of lecturers in AI-infused learning environments. This study has a qualitative research design that is fundamentally interpretive in nature. Data for this research were gathered using a series of semi-structured interviews that were carried out with lecturers who were involved with AI technology in UK business schools. This research used a reflexive type of thematic analysis that allowed for a detailed examination of issues related to the leadership practices of AI technology in higher education. These results have shown that AI implementation is transforming the leadership of lecturers from being more individual-role-based to more practice-based forms of leadership. The leadership practices of lecturers are becoming more practice-based, including leadership through expertise exchange, support, and sensemaking, as opposed to role-based leadership. This transformation of leadership is also accompanied by various challenges of emotional labour, role ambiguity, and ethical complexities related to issues of academic integrity. It was revealed that support structures of institutions played important roles in determining the degree to which leadership practices enabled by AI were empowering or disempowering. This research makes a contribution to both the literature on leadership practices and literature on higher education by reframing the adoption of AI as a trigger for the development of lecturer leadership, as opposed to it being a technological issue. This research also pushes the development of literature on both distributed leadership practices as well as leadership practices by highlighting the importance of ethics being at the heart of AI-enhanced academic leadership practices.*

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence; Lecturer Leadership; Distributed Leadership; Higher Education; UK Business Schools.



INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence is increasingly shifting from the periphery of innovation to becoming one of the core elements of the current higher educational setting. Within UK business schools, it is evident that the application of AI-enhanced solutions is increasingly being incorporated into learning delivery, learning assessment, learning analytics, as well as student support services. Such trends are not only revolutionizing the learning processes but are also impacting the dynamics of organization and leadership through which learning takes place. Despite the current literature highlighting the implications of AI on learning in higher institutions, there is a significant lack of research covering the aspect of lecturer leadership that is shaped by AI adoption.

Historically, university leadership has ordinarily been linked to formal management positions such as the leadership of programs, faculties, or university administration. Yet, academic practice has for a significant period of time involved informal, distributive models of leadership developed through collegiate collaboration, curriculum management, or discipline management. These considerations are complicated by the advent of AI applications in learning and assessment with their inherent expertise development, authority reconfigurations, or complex issues of ethics. In this scenario, lecturers must increasingly provide leadership on issues like responsible AI use, academic integrity, trust, or the boundaries of automation without necessarily being formally recognized or advised.

AI technology adoption creates a situation of both promise and tensions for the leadership of lecturers. While AI technology could provide opportunities for innovation, improvements in the process of feedback, and evidence-based decision-making, it could also pose challenges related to surveillance, fairness, transparency, workload density, and loss of academic freedom. These matters lie not in the area of technology need but in areas of leadership practice predicated on a sense of ethics, relationship, and shared understanding. As such, the adoption of AI places the practice of leadership in the realm of the academic everyday, as distinct from the role of a supervisory position.

In terms of leadership theory, these trends could be regarded as consistent with approaches that signify a shift towards more social forms of leadership such as distributed leadership or leadership as practice. However, in the context of AI-enabling higher education institutions, there is clearly a drift of leadership from formal leadership roles to those who tend to be competent in terms of digital literacy or possess certain qualities of ethics or pedagogy. This could potentially lead to better collaboration or shared responsibility, or it could pose challenges with regard to inequalities, ambiguities, or anxieties.

Despite the increasingly important role of such matters, there is still little related empirical research about AI or leadership in higher education, especially with regard to the personal reality of lecturing staff. This is especially true for existing research that focuses on AI implementation as a type of challenge for the organization or technology, without regard for its significance for leadership identity or the collegiate governance of such issues. This is especially evident for UK business schools that seek to stay at the cutting edge of digital developments.

This research is aimed at filling the research gap by investigating the role of AI implementation on lecturer leadership practices in UK business schools. It would examine practices of



leadership with regard to AI-infused learning environments, informal forms of shared leadership, and challenges of using AI as it affects lecturers. This research would provide a human-centered approach to understanding the implications of AI in higher education.

This paper is structured as follows. In the next section, a review of literature with respect to AI in HE institutions, leadership of lecturers, as well as the theoretical framework of distributed leadership is explored. This is followed by the methodology adopted for conducting this research. In the subsequent section, the findings are elaborated, and then there is a discussion of those findings from an established theoretical framework of leadership studies. This paper will then end with theoretical contributions, implications, and areas of further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the changing role of lecturer leadership with the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in UK business schools. This literature review distils the literature related to the review synthesises scholarship on (a) AI adoption and academic work, (b) distributed and informal leadership in higher education, (c) the intersection of digitally mediated work with collegial governance, and (d) the ethical, relational, and organisational tensions that arise when AI tools are normalised in teaching and assessment. It concludes by specifying theoretical, empirical, methodological, and practical gaps that motivate the study's focus and research design.

AI in Higher Education Institutions and Academic Work Practices

While the adoption of AI in higher education has taken off quickly, especially with regard to generative AI systems that enable drafting, feedback, summarization, or assessment tasks, recent evidence suggests that higher education institutions are shifting from experimentation to institution-wide integration, but with unequal adoption rates in various areas of study, occupation, or levels of confidence. Research on faculty members suggests that self-efficacy, usefulness, or access to professional development opportunities play key roles in determining the integration of AI in teaching practices as principal or supplementary means for lecturers (Mah & Groß, 2024). Moreover, systematic reviews suggest that development opportunities for faculty members are often lagging the introduction of AI, causing faculty members or lecturers to explore innovative learning or development among peers or through personal experimentation (Tan et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2025).

At the same time, sector guidance has emphasized the importance of rethinking assessment practices and integrating "AI literacy" into the curriculum, which tends to indicate that the adoption of AI is more than just a technology procurement issue but a learning one (QAA, 2023). This is likely to be particularly relevant for business schools, where employability, evidence-informed practice, digital transformation strategies, or other drivers could foster the adoption of AI applications without necessarily waiting for policy convergence.



Academic Leadership and Distributed Leadership in Universities

Leadership by lecturers in higher institutions is often lived out outside of official management structures through such things as leadership of educational programs, coordination of educational modules, care of the curriculum, personal development, improvement of educational quality, and development of educational communities. Literature on leadership for teaching and learning focuses on how leadership in higher educational institutions is often complex, negotiated, and influenced by both collegial or more formal management approaches (Kinnunen et al., 2024). Literature on the identities of educational leaders suggests that leadership is often realized through role-based power or boundary work with needs for development including relationship building, communication, or managing complexity (Grajfoner et al., 2022).

The role of distributed leadership approaches is more pertinent here, as they view leadership as an “emergent property of collective practice, rather than something that is embedded in particular roles or positions” (Bolden et al., 2009). Moreover, literature analysis in educational leadership draws attention to the point that the concept of distributed leadership “has moved from being a normative ideal to something more complex and context-contingent, shaped by issues of workload, organizational context, and culture” (Harris, 2022). Additionally, recent evidence from a systematic literature review underscores that “in HE contexts, distributed leadership is often characterized by the complex interplay between institutional structures, performance regimes, and everyday academic practices, without necessarily being a fully devolved or more egalitarian practice (Zaghmout & Harrison, 2025). More specifically for UK business schools, evidence from relevant research studies denotes that “distributed leadership talk can drift apart from practice, especially in the context of accountability systems, performance measurement, and managerialism” (Floyd, 2015). At the same time, UK business school lecturers are required to work with “leadership roles such as innovation or digital learning, while being managed by rigorously controlled QA frameworks related to learning quality assurance.

Where AI Meets Lecturer Leadership: Reconfiguring Influence, Coordination, and Decision-making

It could fundamentally reshape “who leads” and “how leadership takes place” in educational work. Firstly, AI applications could reorient the centre of excellence or authority. Lecturers with better AI literacy could emerge with a role of informal leadership, guiding colleagues on test design, prompt techniques, and resource management, thus setting the tone for departments. Secondly, AI-enhanced processes could re-orient decisions with more emphasis on templates, analytics platforms, and standardized systems, possibly decentralizing pedagogical decisions from local discretionary practices to more formalized approaches. Thirdly, AI applications could heighten coordination efforts to align on appropriate use, testing integrity, and student support, shifting new leadership work to program or equivalent module levels.

Research into faculty adoption reveals that staff tend to fall into various profiles of adoption and confidence (Mah & Groß, 2024). Meanwhile, advice on generative AI and assessment/curriculum suggests that higher education leadership is increasingly a process of sense-making, of establishing what is normal or acceptable practice, rather than the implementation of established best practice (QAA, 2023). This is clearly a leadership context



that is seeing more significance to informal, or distributed, leadership practices, since policy is still developing, learning is by experimentation, and practice is being negotiated in real-time.

Ethical, Relational, or Organisational Challenges Affecting Lecturer

AI adoption presents some important ethics/relations challenges that could become leadership issues for lecturers, apart from senior university leaders. These would encompass issues of academic integrity, issues of assessment practice, issues of the need to disclose AI use, and issues of equity for students who would have unequal access or skills levels. Guidance for the sector within the UK context suggested that generative AI systems would need to be clearly managed by individual institutions through “stress testing” for assessment, among other factors (QAA, 2023). These issues would actually fall to the level of the program or module leader for lecturers.

Data governance issues are also relevant to leadership as lecturers could be involved in the selection or recommendation of the software, student data, or application of compliant practices. It is important to note that UK regulations are clear that in the deployment of AI systems that process personal data, it is essential for the organization to consider the principles of transparency, accountability, or compliant processing (Information Commissioner’s Office, 2024). In the context of business schools where external platforms or analytics software are widely utilized, the issue of governance could significantly affect lecturers’ readiness to adopt leadership roles.

Relationally, AI could fundamentally change the emotional and interactive complexities of leadership in teaching. A degree of dependency among students, staff perplexity about what constitutes detection, and a further level of ambiguity about what constitutes 'good' academic practice could generate more conflict, worry, and workload concerns. Although there is still an evolving evidence base in the literature of higher education, evidence suggests that staff experience both opportunities and challenges, with capability deficits and ambiguity of policy contributing to challenges faced by staff (Wu et al., 2025; Tan et al., 2024). This is important to leadership in terms of psychological safety in teaching units.

Conditions and Competences of Institutions That Provide Responsible AI-based Lecturer Leadership

Research literature indicates that for such AI-enhanced lecturer leadership to become a reality, certain key conditions need to be established on three levels: Firstly, individual levels with regard to AI literacy, pedagogic judgment, or reflexivity on ethics are increasingly framed as key professional skills that need to be developed, but should not become optional “digital skills” (QAA, 2023; Mah & Groß, 2024). Secondly, team levels with shared values, learning collaboration, and team-based decision-making become crucial, especially with regard to practice that is achieved through the mechanism of distributed leadership. Finally, organisational levels with clarity in policy, professional development opportunities, or supportive governance structures could minimize any possibility of role conflict or fragmented practice (QAA, 2023; Information Commissioner’s Office, 2024).

However, research into leadership development in the higher education sector suggests that leadership development is often disregarded or development opportunities tend to prioritize formal leadership opportunities over the lived leadership of lecturers in learning (Grajfoner et



al., 2022). This can mean that lecturers are expected to drive the implementation of AI without necessarily having the power, time, or authority to influence learning, often resulting in compliance-led learning practice over pedagogical innovation.

Gaps Identified

AI research tends to break off into questions of technology acceptance or digital pedagogy, with lecturer leadership being a distinct stream dealing with roles, identities, and governance. More integrated theorization is called for that understands the role of AI software in reshaping the processes of distributed leadership, such as transformations of influence grounded in expertise, decision-making authority, or the micro-practices of teaching leadership enacted through practice (Kinnunen et al., 2024; Harris, 2022). There is little theory that explores, for example, the relationship between AI-mediated work practices or collegial or managerial influences on informal leadership practice for lecturers (Floyd, 2015).

Research into AI for faculty is still relative by comparison to student-centered research, and there is a lack of representation of the UK business school context in the literature (Mah & Groß, 2024; Wu et al., 2025). There is a need for cross-institutional research into the lecturing faculty experience of AI-influenced changes to leadership roles in curriculum development, assessment management, and student engagement.

A significant amount of literature encompassing AI in higher education is dependent on surveys or individual institutional studies, potentially leading to an undertreatment of the dynamic of DL in a qualitative study of leadership practice, such as the negotiation of norms, authority, or accountability related to using AI (Grajfoner et al., 2022; Mah & Groß, 2024).

While policy and guidance continue to include the emphasis on the need for assessment redesign, AI literacy, and responsible use, what this means in terms of day-to-day leadership practice in the department is far from clear. There is very little guidance on what institutional support factors are important for responsible, psychologically-safe, and coordinated lecturer leadership practice with respect to workload, governance, or development of capability (QAA, 2023; Information Commissioner's Office, 2024).

Taken together, these areas of lacunae provide a rationale for conducting research that focuses on the leadership practices of lecturers amidst the adoption of AI technology in UK business schools, understanding the distribution of leadership via collaboration, influence, and coordination work, with the conditions for responsible sustainable leadership through AI.



METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology is utilised in this research study to understand the implications of the adoption of artificial intelligence on the leadership of lecturers in UK business schools. This research methodology is relevant to the research study's understanding of leadership as something that is situationally emergent, with a relational or practice-based understanding of it, as opposed to a more formal or position-based understanding of it. This is attributed to the fact that qualitative research is suited for understanding something like leadership that is being lived out in digital transformations of learning spaces (Bolden, 2011; Raelin, 2021).

Research Philosophy

The study adopts the philosophical position of interpretivism, which perceives social reality as an interactive process of interpretation and shared understanding (Crotty, 2015; Bleiker, 2019). Adopting such a philosophical position implies that leadership is socially situated and context-based (Johnson, 2020). Interpretivism remains one of the widely utilised philosophical approaches for investigating how social actors experience organisational change, digital transformations, and changes in their occupational roles (Johnson, 2020; Tourish & Robson, 2023). Adopting a philosophical position of interpretivism is consistent with the distribution of leadership approaches and practice-based theories of leadership since these concepts significantly lay more emphasis on interactivity or actions, as suggested by Spillane (2006) and Raelin (2021).

Research Approach

An inductive research methodology is adopted in order to enable the practices of leadership, as well as their significance with regard to AI implementation, to be discovered through research data, thereby avoiding any direct influence of the study's objectives on leadership practices. Though this research study is informed by theoretical concepts related to leadership practices, digital leadership, or research work in higher educational institutions, it does not work on testing any hypothesis related to research objectives. Inductive research methodology is apt for areas of research that remain uncharted or explored, such as AI-based leadership practices in higher educational institutions (Gioia et al., 2013; Eisenhardt et al., 2016).

Research Design

Additionally, this study adopts a qualitative multiple-case study design, targeting UK business schools that have adopted AI technology in learning, examination, curriculum development, or academic administration. Case study research is an effective technique for leadership research since it creates opportunities for in-depth analysis of the complex social processes, in their context, with the possibility of multiple-case comparison (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2018). Additionally, business schools were chosen given their significant familiarity with digital innovation, analytics-based curriculum development, and demands for the integration of AI technology into the teaching-learning process.



Sampling Strategy and Participants

Purposive sampling was employed to seek out people with direct experience of the implementation of AI and related leadership roles in the business departments of institutions. Purposive sampling is where the research focuses on people with direct experience of the research topic. This is important in that it allows the research to get into the depth of matters related to formal or informal leadership in institutions. This is linked to the influence of informal leadership, which is found outside formal structures of leadership (Bolden, 2011; Spillane, 2006). Participants were recruited from a number of UK institutions, including research-led universities and teaching-intensive institutions, to ensure representation of various governance models, institutional environments, and levels of digital maturity. A prerequisite for participant selection was that individuals must have at least two years' experience of UK HE learning environments with evidence of using AI-enabled services or systems. Sampling stopped once saturation of themes was achieved, that is, no significantly new information could be gained from additional interviews (Guest et al., 2006).

Data Collection

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, which is a widely accepted approach for gaining insight into leadership experience, sensemaking, and identity construction (Johnson, 2020; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). An interview schedule was designed to ensure that certain topics were explored, such as perceptions of AI implementation, leadership practices, collaboration, decision-making, challenges with ethics/relations, and support systems. A semi-structured schedule allowed for some consistency between research interviews while still permitting areas to be explored that were serendipitously discovered. These interviews took place online using video-conferencing software that is encrypted for security, such that a 45- to 75-minute session was held. Both interviews were audio-recorded with consent from the research participants, with reflexive notes taken throughout data gathering. This is best practice for qualitative research (Johnson, 2020).

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded with a reflexive thematic analysis methodology, which is especially helpful for interpretive research studies such as this one, with their need to explore complex socially constructed topics (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Data analysis involved initial familiarity with the data through repeat reading of the transcripts with the aim of immersion in the data. Initial open coding of data involved conducting the analysis in an inductive manner, with the analysis being closer to the expressions used by the research participants. As the analysis unfolded, abductive reasoning became evident in the attempt to link themes with relevant theoretical literature on distributive leadership, leadership-as-practice, or digital transformation. This dynamic of moving back-and-forth between data and theoretical constructs facilitated the construction of themes that were grounded in data as well as theoretically sound (Gioia et al., 2013). A software-assisted qualitative data analysis was utilized for the purposes of systematic coding.



Research Rigour and Trustworthiness

Rigor of the methods involved utilization of qualitative trustworthiness criteria. Credibility was established through multi-institutional participant selection, with detailed information about their experiences. Reflexiveness was achieved through utilization of analysis memos for recording interpreter decisions and their positionality. Dependability involved utilization of an audit trail for data analysis and selection procedures. Transferability was established through provision of detailed information about the context, allowing evaluation of similarities between the study context and other higher educational institutions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Johnson, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was received from the research ethics committee before collecting data. Information sheets were given to all research participants to inform about the purposes of the research, the procedure involved, and the ethical considerations that governed it. Written consent was taken from research participants, who were assured that data would remain confidential. Participants' identities were concealed by using pseudonyms for referencing purposes, with identifying information of institutions stripped. Data was protected in compliance with UK data protection regulations.

Methodological Limitations

Since it is a qualitative study, the results should not be taken as statistically generalisable. Instead, it provides analytically generalisable findings about the ways that the adoption of AI is transforming lecturer leadership practices in UK business schools. While using self-report data could potentially be regarded as introducing subjective bias, this does fit with the broadly interpretivist approach of the research, and is alleviated by appropriate research design (Johnson, 2020).

FINDINGS

These results provide insight into the adoption of artificial intelligence and its influence on the role of lecturer leadership in UK business schools, in terms of power, coordination, ethics, and labour. Additionally, analysis of the data gathered through the interviews brought out four themes that reflected practices of leadership in an AI-infused learning context.

AI as a Catalyst for DL Practices

There was a consistent impression that the introduction of AI is allowing the spread of leadership to extend beyond the boundaries of formal academic roles. Instead of leadership centring on either the director of programs or professors, there were new areas of influence that developed through qualifications, experimentation, or networking. In some instances, lecturers who were more digitally equipped became leaders. One senior lecturer said:

“Leadership automatically transferred to people who knew about AI. Now everyone came to me for advice, even though I am not any kind of manager.”

Similarly, a programme leader reflected that AI disrupted traditional hierarchies:



“Designing assessments or using AI in instruction is no longer a top-down issue. Now leadership occurs in clusters, depending on who knows what at a given time.”

Such explanations reveal that the implementation of AI systems facilitates situational leadership that focuses on practice instead of position or titles. It is in accord with the practice-based approach of situational leadership in the context of higher education.

Reconfiguration of Decision-Making and Academic Authority

AI implementation caused a substantial shift in decision-making patterns in the departments, especially related to integrity in assessment, curriculum transformation, and pedagogy development. Participants shared their experience of collective discussion in the decision-making process instead of individual faculty freedom.

“Now, with AI, we actually have to reach an agreement as a team because one person’s judgment would then undermine everyone else’s integrity as a human marker.”

A further participant stressed the importance of shared responsibility:

“It’s impossible to make decisions by yourself on matters of using AI in an ethical way. Now it is more of a shared leadership responsibility.”

This reflects the redistribution of intellectual authority, where authority is exercised through the processes of coordination, negotiation, and shared sense-making. Some of the participants, though, observed a tension between collective decision-making and the loss of the classic independence of academia.

Ethical & Emotional Labour: An Emergent Type of Leadership Challenge

One of the most significant findings relates to the ethical-emotional roles of AI-enabled leadership. Participants discussed an intensified role of leadership that deals with reassurance for students, issues of ethics, as well as emotional issues.

“We get students with anxiety, confusion, and sometimes fear about allegations of AI use. Dealing with that emotional aspect is also a role of leadership, although it is invisible work.”

A reflection by another individual concerned with ethical responsibility:

“We are left to be the morality police regarding AI use, but it is vaguely defined. It becomes more about leadership by example.”

These considerations evidence the ways in which the adoption of AI systems increases emotional labor and ethical responsibility, especially for lecturers who are caught between the demands imposed by institutions and the concerns of students. So, leadership is both relational and affective.



Institutional Support, Capability Gaps, and Leadership Strain

Although opportunities for leadership development were created by AI, factors such as unequal support from institutions were mentioned by some participants as a hindrance. Issues related to training, policy support, and workload recognition influenced the degree of confidence that lecturers could embrace leadership. A participant from a teaching-intensive university said:

“We are challenged to be innovative with AI, but the support systems aren’t in place. It makes leadership stressful, not empowering.”

Another added:

“Those who opt to be leaders in the AI system are driven by goodwill, not by any rewards by the system.”

This theme reveals the structural tension: whereas AI facilitates leadership, the lack of support for such leadership could make it an unseen added burden. It was cited that the lack of governance clarity could make AI-based leadership fragmented or unfair.

Overall, the results indicate that AI implementation in UK business schools alters the leadership of lecturers in four major ways: It distributes leadership according to expertise, not hierarchy; it is a transformation of decision-making into collective practice; it increases emotional labor related to ethics; and it reveals the shortcomings of institutional readiness. It is noticeable that the concept of leadership is relational, diffuse, and context dependent. These results provide the basis for the discussion that follows, in which the outcomes are explored through the theoretical lens of distributed leadership, as well as through research literature related to digital transformation.

DISCUSSION

This research aimed to investigate the ways in which the implementation of artificial intelligence is transforming the role of lecturer leadership in UK business schools. From the results, it is revealed that artificial intelligence is more of a structural shift that alters the manner of distributing leadership in an academic context, among other forms of leadership. This section presents an interpretation of the results using the perspectives of distributed leadership, leadership-as-practice, and ethical leadership.

Adoption of AI: Transfer of Leadership Powers

The results show that the adoption of AI speeds up the process of redistribution of leadership from formal to expertise-based forms. Lecturers who are digital-iterate begin to fulfil more informal leadership roles as they guide other lecturers on reshaping assessments, adapting curricula, and using AI correctly. This is consistent with the concept of distributive leadership, which suggests that leadership is viewed as a situational group process that is independent of hierarchy. This is evident in digitally networked settings, where power is dependent on knowledge, experimentation, and social recognition.

Notably, the results contribute to the literature on distributed leadership by indicating that technological change is a catalyst for the redistribution of leadership. This is because AI is



uncertain and ambiguous, creating a leadership gap that is then filled by individuals who understand, translate, and implement new technology. This is evidence that leadership is developed through practice and social interaction, consistent with various leadership-as-practice approaches that propose that leadership is more concerned with everyday practices than with structural matters. This redistribution is, however, unequal and leads to those who are digitally capitalized being favoured.

Collective Decision-Making and the Erosion of Individual Academic Autonomy

A second important contribution of this research work is that it helps understand the ways in which AI influences decision-making in business schools. An analysis of the research study reveals a movement toward collective forms of leadership decision-making, especially with regard to issues like integrity of assessment, curriculum development, and student support services, instead of individualized forms of academic freedom. Traditional norms of individualized discretion are challenged by AI due to collective risk considerations.

From a leadership point of view, what is observed here is a shift towards shared governance and shared sensemaking. Decision-making becomes a practice of leadership that is team-based, as opposed to the responsibility of individual leaders. Although it does improve consistency and ethics, it creates a dilemma as well. This dilemma is that shared governance could potentially suppress the creativity of learning practices in pedagogy, or it could impede the path of innovation with shared structures of governance. This dilemma is related to the paradox of shared responsibility for governance through AI leadership.

Ethical and Emotional Dimensions of AI-Enabled Leadership

The data clearly shows that the use of AI increases the human facets of leadership practices among lecturers. This is evident from the discussion of leadership, which is increasingly characterized by making moral or immoral decisions about student surveillance, as well as dealing with student anxiety about possible improper use of AI. All these tasks are not formalized but are core to ensuring psychological safety at learning institutions.

This is an extension of scholarly work related to ethical leadership since it is shown that AI heightens moral ambiguity on the frontlines of intellectual work. Leadership is a practice that does not necessarily occur by way of policy implementation but by way of relationship-building, understanding, or interpretation. This emotional labor brought to bear by the research participants highlights that AI-based leadership is far from value-free since it imposes affective workloads on lecturers that are not accounted for by current workload allocations.

Institutional Readiness and the Fragility of Distributed Leadership

Although AI facilitates distributed leadership, it is important to note that it is also vulnerable in situations where supportive institutional contexts are not in place. This is evident from the fact that the interviewed subjects mentioned shortcomings in training, a lack of policy support, as well as the lack of recognition of contributions in the area of leadership, related to AI.

In organisational terms, it implies that whereas FL does not necessarily occur on its own through technology, it would need certain structures to be in place, such as governance frameworks, investment in capability development, or approaches to valorise informal leadership work. If such aspects are not addressed, it could widen role overload and leadership



pressures, especially in regard to lecturing staff who act as informal leadership brokers between institutional demands and student needs.

Theoretical Contributions

This research makes three significant contributions to the literature on leadership. Firstly, it develops the theoretical understanding of distributed leadership by empirically illustrating that AI is a trigger for the redistribution of leadership in higher education. Secondly, it furthers the understanding of leadership-as-practice by revealing that what matters is that leadership is created through digital-ethical micro-practices, not through authority. Lastly, it broadens discussions of academic leadership by including considerations of ethics and emotional labor that are marginal in research about both technology and leadership. In placing the adoption of AI into everyday practices of leadership, it reframes the research on lecturer leadership into a socio-technical practice that is conditioned by power, ethics, and relations. It is revealed that leadership in an AI-enabled university is contingent, negotiated, and emotional, as opposed to being fixed or role-related.

Implications for UK Business Schools

Concerning UK business schools, it is apparent that in order for AI to be adopted, challenges related to leadership development needs must be faced. This is because it is important for institutions to view AI-related leadership work as academic work that deserves investment in capability development and collective ethical reflection. This is important since the current situation could be seen as exacerbating inequalities on campus. Notably, the issue of the adoption of AI is not just about efficiency or innovation but is recognized as a shift in the leadership of higher education institutions that calls for considerable attention to issues of power and responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This research work has explored the way in which the integration of artificial intelligence is transforming lecturer leadership practices in UK business schools, finding that the integration of artificial intelligence is far more than a technical improvement; it is a deep-seated transformation of the organisation and the way in which it is led. Findings from this research clearly show that AI implementation impacts leadership practice in various ways, including governance, ethics, and identity.

Based on analysis, it is evident that AI facilitates new forms of distributed or informal leadership, especially among university lecturers who possess digital literacy skills, who become themselves knowledge brokers, ethics interpreters, as well as organizers or facilitators of collective decision-making. Leadership is increasingly characterized by everyday practices like advising colleagues on matters related to the design of tests, negotiation of academic integrity issues, or helping students in navigating AI-based learning environments.

At the same time, the literature also reveals the presence of various tensions that are inherent in AI-enabled leadership. It is clear that collective leadership is one of the factors that improve consistency and moral traction, but it is also potentially individual academic freedom-constricting, while role ambiguity is potentially exacerbated by collective leadership.



Moreover, the emotional-moral work involved with AI technology use is related to additional, invisible demands being placed on lecturers that could potentially result in leadership fatigue, with potentially unequal distribution of leadership roles.

These results also accentuate the significance of readiness for institutions for ensuring the sustainability of effective AI-based leadership. Distributed leadership does not emerge as an aftermath of the implementation of technology in institutions. It demands proper governance structures, investment in digital-ethical competency development, and recognition of efforts in leadership capacities that are external to managerial capacities. Anything less would constitute the opposite of equity with AI implementation. It would shift the burden of responsibility from institutions to individuals.

From a theoretical point of view, this research makes a couple of contributions to the literature on leadership as well as scholarship on higher education. It furthers the understanding of the role of technological advancements in influencing leadership practice. Specifically, it furthers the concepts of distributed leadership and leadership-as-practice by illustrating that AI is both an agent for leadership redistribution and, at the same time, constitutes a catalyst that accentuates the role of ethics and emotion in such practice.

In practice, it is suggested that UK business schools need to look past the technical implementation plans and that AI implementation needs to be viewed as a leadership change process. It is important for responsible AI-enabled leadership that institutions address collective sensemaking, that ethics are incorporated into communities of practice, and that invisible leadership labour is recognized, that is, provided by lecturers. This is crucial if trust, integrity, and sustainability are to be enhanced by AI implementation and not undermined.

AI adoption is a tipping point moment for leadership by lecturers in UK business schools. Future horizons for teaching/learning, as well as the form of academic leadership, will be determined by what happens with AI adoption. Academic leadership needs to accept that it is a phenomenon that is distributed, ethical, and practice-based if it is to ensure that AI adoption helps to produce an inclusive, robust, and intellectually sound higher education system.

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