

September 10th, 2025

Leadership Book Talk by:

Prof. Amit S. Mukherjee, President, Ishan Advisors, LLC & Professor, Hult International Business School

Leading in the Digital World: How to Foster Creativity, Collaboration, and Inclusivity

The Ashank Desai Centre for Leadership and Organisational Development (ADCLOD) at IIM Ahmedabad hosted Prof. Amit S. Mukherjee for a one-day visit marked by a packed schedule of interactions with faculty, PhD scholars and students. The highlight of his visit was a thought-provoking book talk on *Leading in the Digital World: How to Foster Creativity, Collaboration, and Inclusivity* (MIT Press, 2020).

In his lecture, Prof. Mukherjee emphasized that leadership attributes are not fixed across time but evolve in response to the changing nature of work and organizational structures. He reminded the audience that ideas of effective leadership have shifted dramatically in the past century: the efficiency-focused era of Scientific Management in the early 1900s defined the good boss as someone who ensured order and execution, while the Quality Management revolution in the 1980s shifted expectations toward empowerment, coaching, and learning from the frontlines. These models were products of their times, and in today's context of rapid digital transformation, he argued, leaders once again need to reinvent their practices.

He then elaborated on the five principles that underlie this transformation. First, digital technologies deskill many tasks by automating routine and repetitive functions, from manufacturing assembly lines to basic clerical operations. This frees human energy but simultaneously raises questions about displaced work. Second, they also upskill demanding new capabilities, from data literacy to adaptive learning. Employees must continuously reskill to remain relevant, and organizations must provide environments where lifelong learning is embedded in their culture. Third, work is becoming more cerebral, with human effort concentrated on complex, ambiguous, and creative challenges that machines cannot easily resolve. Such work thrives only when organizations cultivate psychological

safety and support innovation. Fourth, digital economies increasingly create unpredictable sources of value, where breakthroughs emerge unexpectedly be it from user-generated content, viral trends, or cross-disciplinary collaborations. Leaders must be alert to serendipity and agile in seizing these opportunities. Finally, digital technologies enforce radical transparency. Information about performance, culture, or customer feedback is instantly visible, within and outside organizations. This diminishes information asymmetry but also means leaders must act consistently and ethically, as lapses are swiftly exposed.

These transformations in work have been accompanied by parallel shifts in organizational design. Prof. Mukherjee described how technology enables distributed work, where teams are spread across geographies and cultures, demanding that leaders orchestrate collaboration without relying on physical proximity. At the same time, organizations experience tight connect, with workflows, data, and decision-making tightly integrated through digital tools. A small change in one unit can reverberate instantly across the system, making alignment and coordination more critical than ever.

From these dynamics, Prof. Mukherjee drew three imperatives for leadership in the digital era. Leaders must privilege creativity over productivity, recognizing that efficiency alone no longer secures competitive advantage. Surveys from IBM and the World Economic Forum confirm that creativity, originality, and initiative are among the most valued skills for the present and future workforce. Leaders must also embrace inclusivity as existential, intentionally harnessing differences across gender, culture, and background, and moving beyond symbolic gestures to systemic equity. Finally, they must foster true collaboration, abandoning superficial notions of “win-win” in favour of deep interdependence, where success is only possible through the complementary talents of others. As he put it, the shift is from “we can get it done” to “without you, we can’t get it done brilliantly.”

By weaving together historical insight, empirical findings, and practical reflection, Prof. Mukherjee offered a compelling roadmap for leadership in the digital era. His talk reinforced ADCLOD’s commitment to nurturing inclusive, evidence-based, and future-ready leadership, capable of navigating the opportunities and challenges posed by transformative technologies.

References:

1. Mukherjee, A. S. (2020). Leading in the Digital World: How to Foster Creativity, Collaboration and Inclusivity. MIT Press & Sloan Management Review.
<https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262043946/leading-in-the-digital-world/>
2. World Economic Forum (2020). The Future of Jobs Report.
<https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020/>