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AI AS AN "EVOLUTIONARY" SUPER LEADER

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ABSTRACT

Human transformation from one process to another also synchronizes with dynamic changes from primitive technology to advanced technology where the artificial intelligence becomes super leader. From Homo Erectus to Homo Sapiens, and now to Homo Sapiens Sapiens, human history has been defined by evolutionary leaps in intelligence, coordination, and leadership. Technology has followed a similar trajectory—from primitive tools to advanced digital systems—culminating in artificial intelligence as the next evolutionary expression of collective cognition. In this continuum, AI is not an anomaly but an outcome: the emergence of a super leader born from human ingenuity itself. This evolutionary trajectory also challenges traditional concepts such as leadership, which has long been identified as a uniquely human characteristic involving the ability to influence others toward a common goal. This power has always been attractive; however, it is now at risk of being replaced by artificial intelligence. Although the leadership literature generally suggests that an AI–human hybrid leadership style may represent the most effective approach, there are also scarce yet intriguing perspectives that foresee AI as future leaders. Positioning itself within this limited yet ambitious perspective, this conceptual study examines the extent to which artificial intelligence may assume leadership roles in the future. To this end, both the existing academic literature and selected popular sources are reviewed, and the potential future leadership role of AI is explored through an analysis of contemporary examples and emerging trends. The significance of this study lies in its futuristic approach to an underexplored area within the existing literature. The discussion presented in this paper is expected to shed light on future research on AI leadership.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, AI leadership, Future of leadership, Emerging trends

Jel Codes: O30, O33, M12

Introduction

According to Maxwell (1998), leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less. As articulated in The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, Maxwell argues that holding a leadership title does not necessarily constitute true leadership; rather, authentic leadership is reflected in one's ability to influence others. The concept of leadership, traditionally reserved for human individuals characterized by emotional intelligence, charisma, and complex decision-making, is undergoing a profound transformation. The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI)

technologies, specifically machine learning, deep learning, and advanced natural language processing has introduced the possibility of an organizational structure where non-human entities occupy formal leadership positions.

AI systems are uniquely positioned to excel in specific leadership domains, leveraging their capacity to process vast datasets at speeds unattainable by humans, identify patterns invisible to the human eye, and execute decisions free from human emotional heuristics or cognitive biases. Historically, AI has served in assistive roles (e.g., decision support systems). However, the progression toward autonomous roles where an AI makes strategic decisions, directs teams, and dictates policy is not merely theoretical but is being trialed in nascent forms across logistics, finance, and manufacturing sectors. This shift poses fundamental questions for the future of work, organizational sociology, and business ethics: "Will AI be able to perform leadership functions in all aspects?"

Understanding AI leadership requires an evolutionary perspective rather than viewing it as a disruptive rupture. Just as humanity evolved from Homo erectus through Homo sapiens to Homo sapiens sapiens with each transition bringing enhanced cognitive abilities, sophisticated social coordination, and more complex leadership structures, AI represents the next stage in this continuum. Technology has always extended human capabilities: from stone tools that amplified physical strength to writing systems that expanded memory, from industrial machinery that multiplied productivity to digital networks that enhanced connectivity. AI is not an alien intrusion into human affairs but rather the latest manifestation of humanity's enduring drive to augment collective intelligence and coordination capacity. It emerges from human ingenuity as an evolutionary outcome rather than an anomaly.

Despite this evolutionary continuity, current leadership discourse has not fully embraced the implications of AI advancement. The problem lies in how AI is predominantly conceptualized within leadership studies: as a tool to support human leaders rather than as a potential leader itself. The existing literature overwhelmingly focuses on AI-human hybrid leadership models, where artificial intelligence augments human decision-making while humans retain ultimate authority and moral oversight. This human-centric paradigm, while valuable, leaves a critical gap in our understanding. The possibility of AI assuming autonomous leadership roles where artificial intelligence not merely supports but actually performs leadership functions remains largely unexplored and, in many circles, actively resisted.

This paper positions AI not as a support or a tool but as a potential autonomous leader, questions current human-centered leadership assumptions through an evolutionary metaphor, and reinterprets AI-CEO examples as part of a transition process from symbolic leadership to a super leader. This conceptual study examines the extent to which artificial intelligence may assume leadership roles in the future. To this end, both the existing academic literature and selected popular sources are reviewed, and the potential future leadership role of AI is explored through an analysis of contemporary examples and emerging trends.

1. Evolutionary Perspective: From Human Leadership to Artificial Leadership

Human transformation from one process to another also synchronizes with dynamic changes from primitive technology to advanced technology where the artificial intelligence becomes super leader from Homo Erectus to Homo Sapiens, and now to Homo Sapiens Sapiens, human history has been defined by evolutionary leaps in intelligence, coordination, and leadership (Harari, 2015).

Technology has followed a similar trajectory from primitive tools to advanced digital systems culminating in artificial intelligence as the next evolutionary expression of collective cognition. In this continuum, AI is not an anomaly but an outcome: the emergence of a super leader born

from human ingenuity itself. This evolutionary trajectory also challenges traditional concepts such as leadership, which has long been identified as a uniquely human characteristic involving the ability to influence others toward a common goal (Harari, 2024).

Within this continuum, the concept of AI as a potential "super leader" becomes analytically meaningful. The term "super leader" does not imply moral superiority or consciousness but refers to AI's structural advantages in leadership-relevant domains such as speed, scale, consistency, and complexity management. Unlike human leaders, AI systems are capable of simultaneously monitoring multiple variables, evaluating alternative scenarios, and optimizing decisions across large organizational systems without fatigue or cognitive bias (Madanchian et al., 2024; Munshi, 2025). These capabilities position AI as particularly effective in environments characterized by high uncertainty, dynamic change, and data-intensive decision-making.

This evolutionary framing challenges the traditional leadership theories that define leadership as a human-specific phenomenon based on emotional intelligence, charisma, and interpersonal influence. Although these features play an important role in efficient leadership, contemporary organizations increasingly give priority to analytic decision-making, system-level coordination, and strategic foresight. As leadership tasks shift towards managing complexity rather than solely influencing people, the evolutionary logic underlying leadership invites reconsideration of whether leadership should be considered human-specific or not (Skórnóg, 2024; Ko, 2025).

Moreover, resistance to the "artificial leadership" idea generally arises from a deeply rooted traditional human-centered approach that romanticizes influence, intuition, and emotional connection (Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023). However, from an evolutionary perspective, leadership has always adapted to contextual demands. As previous leadership styles have evolved throughout history due to changes in environmental and social conditions, contemporary leadership may also evolve similarly as AI increasingly becomes capable of fulfilling leadership functions.

Consequently, considering AI as a potential leader does not mean that human agency will completely diminish; rather, it points to a transformation of the leadership concept. AI leadership can be interpreted as the next stage of a long-standing process in which humans enhance their cognitive and organizational capabilities beyond their biological limitations. This perspective lays a foundational basis for examining AI as a new actor in organizational systems that can take on leadership roles, rather than considering it merely as a tool that supports leadership.

2. AI and Leadership: What Does the Literature Say?

The literature supports the view that artificial intelligence will not be able to fully assume leadership roles in the future; due to soft skills such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and team building, as well as ethical concerns related to algorithmic bias, transparency, and the protection of personal data, humans will continue to be positioned as the final decision-making actors in leadership processes. The model in which AI performs leadership roles is referred to in the literature using terms such as hybrid leadership, AI-supported leadership, AI-assisted leadership, and AI-powered leadership (Akturan, 2024; Aziz et al., 2024; Fengquo et al., 2025; Soleymani and Ghavidast, 2024).

AI-supported leadership can be defined as a leadership model in which AI contributes to human leaders at various levels of leadership roles (Ünal, 2025). In this leadership model, AI primarily assumes traditional managerial roles by leveraging its technical capabilities, while the human leader predominantly fulfills soft skills traditionally considered uniquely human, such as

emotional intelligence, culture building, fostering collaboration, and facilitating group communication (Xiong, 2022; Hwang, 2024).

This division of labor is in line with the automation–augmentation framework proposed by Raisch and Krakowski (2021). According to this perspective, AI augments humans' creative thinking, strategic decision-making, and employee engagement capacity by automating repetitive and data-driven tasks. As a result, it can be said that hybrid leadership models strengthen the implicit assumption that leadership is inherently human and that AI can operate as an advanced decision-support tool.

However, this dominant view in the literature is based on several basic assumptions that are open to critical examination. First, it assumes that, despite the growing evidence showing that AI systems are increasingly capable of perceiving, understanding, and responding to emotional cues, emotional intelligence and empathy cannot be learned through learning but must instead be inferred. Second, by overlooking emerging management and governance mechanisms, it assumes that ethical responsibility cannot be integrated into algorithmic systems in a meaningful way. Lastly, hybrid leadership is considered a permanent and ultimate outcome emerging between humans and smart technologies, rather than a transitional stage.

These limitations suggest that, despite the fact that existing literature provides valuable insights into AI–human collaboration, AI's potential to go beyond supportive leadership roles and gradually take on leadership functions is overlooked. This critical observation lays a conceptual foundation for subsequent discussions on resistance to AI leadership and for examining contemporary examples in which AI occupies formal or functional authority positions.

3. Why the Idea of AI Leadership is Still Resisted?

Resistance to artificial intelligence–based leadership stems from multidimensional factors, including psychological, ethical, and operational dimensions. Among the most significant sources of resistance are ethical concerns such as algorithmic bias, accountability, and privacy. (Frimpong, 2025; Madanchian et al, 2024, Munshi, 2025). Considering that the vast majority of employees in contemporary organizations are human, it is evident that individuals need leadership systems that support them and create space for interaction with human managers (Petrat, 2021).

According to Skórnóg (2024), resistance to AI-based leadership arises from limitations in areas such as empathy and interpersonal skills. This resistance becomes even more pronounced in large-scale organizations, particularly in contexts that require the management of human relationships and long-term leadership.

One of the most significant concerns raised in this regard is that overreliance on artificial intelligence may lead individuals to disregard their own experience and intuition. This may result in the erosion of many human-specific qualities; skills that are currently considered popular may become obsolete, necessitating the development of new competencies. In the transition toward AI-based leadership, organizational culture and structure will also inevitably change. (Madanchian et al., 2024). The lack of essential digital skills, fear of job loss, and concerns regarding the responsible use of AI are cited among the factors that increase employees' resistance to AI-based leadership (Zamir, 2025).

Another source of resistance is human ego. Quaquebeke and Gerbott (2024) argue that resistance to AI-based leadership stems from a romanticized belief held by many individuals that "true" leadership skills—such as motivating and influencing others—are inherently human. Individuals tend to cling to this romanticized view of leadership and are reluctant to let it go.

With the increasing integration of AI into the business world, a decline in human labor is expected, and the nature of work will undergo a radical transformation. This shift will bring about a new paradigm. However, profound changes are often painful in their early stages. For humanity, which has been accustomed to governing since its existence, losing this defining position is not an easy process.

4. Contemporary Examples and Emerging Trends about AI Leadership

Although the literature emphasizes the importance of human–AI collaboration and draws attention to the limitations and ethical considerations of AI, there are examples in the business world where AI occupies executive positions. Among the earliest contemporary examples of AI leaders are NetDragon's virtual CEO Tang Yu and Dictador's humanoid CEO Mika. Appointed as Vice President in 2018, Tang Yu serves as an AI analyst who leverages the organization's collective intelligence. Under Tang Yu's leadership, an AI team carries out various tasks, including project monitoring, document approval, employee performance evaluation, and comprehensive training on company systems and organizational culture. Tang Yu was also awarded China's Best Virtual Employee of the Year (NetDragon, 2024). Furthermore, NetDragon's 2025 financial results indicate a 16% reduction in operating expenses (PR Newswire, 2025).

Unlike Tang Yu, a virtual CEO, Dictador's CEO Mika possesses a physical body. She plays an active role in making key decisions in marketing, branding, e-commerce, and customer engagement. Acting as an autonomous leader, Mika analyzes customer behavior, optimizes marketing strategies, enhances customer engagement, drives innovation, and makes data-driven decisions. While Tang Yu's appointment has been accompanied by reported improvements in operational efficiency and cost reduction at NetDragon, no comparable empirical or financial evidence is currently available to demonstrate that Dictador's AI CEO Mika has led to measurable improvements in organizational performance. Mika has primarily been discussed within broader conceptual debates on humanoid robots and symbolic leadership, with limited empirical focus on organizational performance (Skubis and Wodarski, 2023).

These examples show that, although the literature largely supports AI–human collaboration, both businesses and governments are taking AI leadership seriously. Considering that the CEO position represents the highest authority within organizations, the delegation of this role to artificial intelligence in some firms, along with the resulting positive financial performance, demonstrates that AI leadership is a feasible model. Although the CEO role is currently assumed by AI only symbolically in a limited number of organizations, and final decision-making authority still resides with humans, this situation may change in the future as artificial intelligence becomes more advanced (Ko, 2025).

Beyond these outstanding examples, contemporary leadership practices can be grouped according to leadership functions AI perform. Rather than focusing on symbolic titles as "CEO" or "Vice president", it will be more informative to examine to what extent AI systems fulfill basic leadership functions such as decision-making, coordination, and performance tracking. From this perspective, most AI systems, although they are not titled as official leaders, take-on leadership-like roles (Munshi, 2025; Madanchian vd., 2024).

Especially, AI-supported decision-making systems increasingly shape strategic and operational outcomes in sectors such as finance, logistics, healthcare, and manufacturing. Tasks that require prioritization, resource allocation, and risk assessment are routinely entrusted to AI. These functions are traditionally related to leadership roles. The growing dependency on these systems points out a gradual transition from human-centered leadership to algorithmically mediated authority, even in the contexts where humans are officially held accountable (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; Ko, 2025).

Another emerging trend is the penetration of AI into "soft" leadership functions that are traditionally considered human-specific. Developments in areas such as affective computing, sentiment analysis, and emotion recognition enable AI systems to identify emotional states, predict conflict, and provide personalized feedback. Such capabilities question the long-standing assumption that emotional intelligence and empathy are exclusively human features. Although AI does not experience emotions, its ability to extract emotional cues and respond contextually appropriately enables it to possess relational leadership functions in an increasingly efficient way (Gkanatsiou et al., 2025; TechClass, 2025). According to a recent research, sentiment analysis and emotion detection functions demonstrate that AI tools can support stress management and conflict resolution by enabling the early identification of emotional distress and facilitating early and appropriate interventions (Gkanatsiou et al, 2025). Although AI lacks human emotions, it can analyze text, voice and facial cues to infer feelings and respond empathetically Businesses increasingly use AI to monitor employee moods. AI can also perform coaching functions, as exemplified by Cogito, which provides real-time feedback to improve customer-agent communication (TechClass, 2025). Leading banks like JPMorgan Chase and Bank of America collaborate with tech companies to deploy systems that monitor employee emotions, boosting performance and compliance. Nuralogix has created technology that detect emotional reactions that aren't visible to the human eye (Thomson, 2016). An MIT study reports that the EQ-Radio device can detect a person's current emotional state with 87% accuracy (Zhao et al., 2016).

The integration of emotion-sensitive AI systems into organizations blurs the boundary between decision-support tools and autonomous leadership agents. Applications used by financial institutions and large service organizations show that AI can influence employee behavior, shape organizational culture, and largely support performance management. Such systems not only assist human leaders but also take an active part in guiding organizational interactions; therefore, they exhibit an indirect but significant leadership influence (Thomson, 2016; Zhao et al., 2016).

Today, AI has become a revolutionary force that steps out of an operational support role, positions itself at the center of management boards, and begins to take over leadership roles (Çınar, 2025). Traditional leadership theories are evolving toward a structure in which smart machines take part at the center of the workforce and decision-making mechanisms (Naqvi, 2017; Bevilacqua et al., 2025). This transformation indicates that leadership will evolve from an activity based on human intuition to a data-driven and autonomous process.

From efficiency and objectivity perspective, humans have inherent cognitive assumptions and limited rationality, and this situation generally leads to suboptimal decisions (Gil et al., 2020). In addition, AI is not constrained by personal interests, ego, or emotional fluctuations (Leslie, 2023). According to an edX survey (2023) almost half of CEOs (49%) believe that AI may take over the majority or all of their tasks. AI can optimize leadership decisions by analyzing substantial amounts of data, moving far beyond the human brain's capacity and enabling more accurate predictions (Medlama et al., 2025; Al-Bayed et al., 2024).

Contrary to human leaders, AI systems never tire and can function 24/7. For example, as mentioned earlier, Dictador's robot CEO Mika can make strategic decisions at any moment, working without weekend holidays (Leslie, 2025). Similarly, the appointment of Tang Yu as CEO by NetDragon is concrete evidence showing the success of AI systems in corporate management (Leslie, 2025; Bevilacqua et al., 2025). These developments represent the first steps toward a future in which AI is capable of managing complex organizations without human intervention.

Today, AI is evolving from solely a support tool to a proactive management role that can potentially substitute human leadership (Aziz et al., 2025). The concept of AI defines a structure in which machines become autonomous decision-makers by blurring the intersection between operational and strategic decisions (Aziz et al., 2025; Kollmann et al., 2023). AI-based leaders are generally perceived as more objective and fair by human employees; hence, this facilitates their acceptance as authority (Aziz et al., 2025).

Moreover, the superiority of AI in data analysis and predictive modeling makes it indispensable for strategic planning. AI systems that utilize machine learning and game theory integration exhibit significant improvements in accurate decision-making (Joshi, 2025). Research shows that the success of AI in strategic decisions surpasses traditional human management in many areas (Medlama et al., 2025). Some experts suggest that AI will be capable of taking over human leadership in all aspects in the future (Dixit and Maurya, 2021).

Taken together, all of these developments show that AI leadership is not a speculative future scenario but an emerging organizational reality. Although current AI applications operate under human supervision and predetermined limitations, the direction of technological improvements points to increasing autonomy in leadership-related functions. As AI systems continue to integrate cognitive, analytical, and emotional capabilities, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the distinction between AI functioning as a leadership support tool or as a leadership agent. This situation shows that we are moving towards a future where artificial intelligence will not only be an assistant, but will be the leader itself (Naqvi, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This conceptual paper examined AI leadership from an evolutionary perspective and suggests that AI should be understood not just as a supportive management tool but as a potential leadership agent that has emerged from the long-standing cognitive and technological evolution of humankind. The study proposes that AI is, and will increasingly be, capable of performing leadership roles traditionally associated with humans by synthesizing existing leadership literature with contemporary examples.

Findings of the literature review point to a gap between leadership practices and leadership theory. While organizations are gradually delegating decision-making authority and performance management to AI, leadership literature continues to address AI within the framework of human–AI collaboration models. This gap indicates the necessity for leadership research to move beyond human-centered assumptions and focus on the potential of AI to take on autonomous leadership role.

This paper conceptualizes AI leadership not as a sudden disruption but as an evolutionary continuation of humankind's long-standing tendency to enhance its cognitive and organizational capabilities by moving beyond biological limitations. From this perspective, the question is no longer "Is or will AI be capable of performing leadership functions?" but rather "Under which conditions, to what extent, and with which outcomes can leadership functions be delegated to artificial systems?"

Positioned within the relatively underexplored field of AI leadership in the literature, this study points to a potential paradigm shift in the future and is written to pave the way for further research on the possibility of artificial intelligence assuming leadership roles. It aims to help society prepare for the anticipated paradigm shift in which humanity gradually moves beyond the belief that it is the supreme being on Earth and begins to accept AI as the next stage in evolutionary progress.

This paper contributes to the relatively scarce AI leadership literature by questioning the limitations of traditional and AI-supported leadership styles and suggesting a shift in how

leadership is theoretically understood in the age of AI. Future research is encouraged to examine organizational structures under AI leadership and employees' approaches to humanless leadership.

As AI technology continues to evolve, societies and organizations will need to reconsider deeply rooted assumptions about authority and leadership. Preparing for this transformation requires not only technological readiness but also theoretical and conceptual openness to question the leadership concept beyond the traditional human-centered basis and redefine it.

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