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Leading from a Distance: How Emotional Intelligence, Trust, Training, and Core Beliefs Drive Virtual Leadership Effectiveness

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Abstract. Leaders are managing global teams with technology in virtual environments. This study examines how training and development, trust, emotional intelligence, and core beliefs influence leadership effectiveness in virtual environments. Using data from 385 professionals working in virtual platforms across freelancing, online learning, and healthcare sectors in Nepal, the research employed a quantitative approach with validated measurement scales. Multiple regression analysis revealed that emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.535$, $p < 0.01$) most strongly predicted virtual leadership effectiveness, followed by training and development ($\beta = 0.196$, $p < 0.01$), trust ($\beta = 0.143$, $p < 0.01$), and core beliefs ($\beta = 0.075$, $p <0.05$). Prevailing leadership traits explained the virtual leadership effectiveness in this study. The findings suggest that organizations should prioritize emotional intelligence development in leadership training programs, establish trust-building mechanisms, and maintain alignment between leaders' core values and organizational goals to enhance virtual team performance. This research contributes to leadership theory by empirically validating the relative importance of these traits in technology-mediated leadership circumstances.

Keywords: Adaptability, communication, decision-making, employee engagement, innovation

1. Introduction

Organizations are progressively shifting to a virtual environment, with people working together as a team while being dispersed (Gilson et al., 2014; Schmidt, 2014). Leaders of such internationally scattered workforces must be efficient with intercultural experiences to communicate and lead more successfully (Lu et al., 2022). Virtual leadership is a technology-enabled approach to relationship and communication management (Ghimire et al., 2024). Functioning virtual leaders use technology and make long-term decisions about which technology to adopt for themselves and their organizations (Larson & DeChurch, 2020). They are accountable for its successful implementation (Van Wart et al., 2017).

Virtual leaders must know the shift in business, which includes managers learning how to keep their teams running through videoconferences, colleagues learning how to design or develop products while not being physically present, and professionals learning how to advise, sell, and serve clients remotely (Citrin & DeRosa, 2021). Leadership attributes in virtual academic administration involve utilizing contextually appropriate technology, cultivating a communal spirit centred on shared objectives, and facilitating collaboration across institutional boundaries (Hill et al., 2014). Remote team managers must recognize the basics of managing virtual teams and the variables contributing to developing a culture of cooperation, trust, and proper communication among virtual teams for business success (Zakaria & Yosof, 2020). Targeted education and training may help individuals become adept in using digital technologies and keep a team together when they are separated by geography. Many studies on virtual leadership focus on short-term outcomes such as team performance and individual productivity. The study analyzing leadership traits focuses on long-term impacts such as organizational success, employee retention and overall team well-being.

Trust between team members and leaders is essential in a digital world where technology enhances contact and reduces hands-on monitoring (Dinh et al., 2021; Zhu & Lee, 2017). Emotional intelligence and the ability to identify, comprehend, and manage one's own and other people's emotions are essential to effectively developing team spirit and productivity in the absence of physical encounters (Lubich et al., 2022). E-leaders must have emotional intelligence, fundamental values, and trust (Tuschner et al., 2022). Managers run the danger of team members being resistant to change and underperforming if they don't establish an atmosphere of trust. Managers and remote workers need to build a solid, trusting culture to compensate for not being able to meet face-to-face. Seth et al. (2022) pointed out that virtual employees lacking trust in their supervisor or organization demonstrate low organizational citizenship. Consequently, these personnel may lack dedication to the firm and inadequately fulfil the company's requirements. The study has considered highly sensitive and autonomous working environments among the respondents working remotely in various industries; in such instances, trust and emotional intelligence impact the efficiency of virtual leadership.

Traditional and virtual leadership face comparable issues, but virtual leadership approaches them differently due to a lack of direct engagement and oversight (Kerfoot, 2010). Transitioning from traditional face-to-face management to virtual leadership presents clear benefits and challenges (Johnson, 2022; Wei et al., 2024; Ziroli, 2022). The study fills gaps there by establishing the impact of individual traits on virtual leadership effectiveness rather than just comparing traditional leadership with virtual leadership. The epidemic has forced many firms throughout the globe to demand their workers to work from home, in which virtual leadership replaces physical leadership and virtual work teams are formed (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2020). Working online provides benefits, time efficiency, and faster communication and challenges leaders in inspiration, connectedness, and team member devotion. The employment landscape in Nepal is undergoing significant transformation, embracing a more digital and interconnected world where traditional jobs are evolving and new opportunities are emerging (Ghimire et al., 2023; Sharma, 2024). Sherk et al. (2009) claimed that teams' abilities to recognize and respond to health issues can be enhanced through the Virtual Leadership Development Program (VLDP). This web-based leadership development program integrates traditional classroom

instruction with online resources. Virtual leadership requires different skills and techniques, such as emotional intelligence, trust, training and core beliefs and values identified by the study, whereas traditional leadership skills, delegation, motivation and problem-solving have been studied in various research.

The foundation for the growth of e-commerce in Nepal has been established by the quickening pace of internet penetration, rising smartphone ownership, and urbanization (Karki et al., 2024; Pokharel, 2023). The gig economy has grown significantly, with more professionals opting for freelance work in graphic design, content creation, and IT (Paudel, 2024). The study has addressed cultural contexts in the study by establishing core beliefs and values as an essential trait for maintaining effectiveness in virtual leadership, taking evolving digital landscapes and workforce dynamics into consideration. Virtual leadership may confront challenges, including creating trust, expressing influence, and communicating clearly (Alfehaid, 2019). For instance, formerly successful leadership practices are becoming mismatched with future leadership difficulties (Petrie, 2014).

Online leaders must be proficient in the use of many forms of electronic communication in order to lead their teams effectively (Thambusamy & Bekiroğulları, 2020). They should also have no trouble telling their teammates what to expect from them. It is typical for virtual associates to misinterpret directives; thus, efficient communication is essential (Liao 2017). They may also build relationships and keep in contact with team members through the use of digital technologies such as social media (Alward & Phelps, 2019; Rai & Dahal, 2024). Virtual leaders must create a variety of personality and cognitive skills to mentor and share information. Effective virtual team management requires creative and new ways, including information exchange (Davidavičienė et al., 2020). A strong feeling of trust is essential for success. Thus, this study explored leadership effectiveness in the virtual world where self-cognition, team-building approaches, and human resources activities need to be more concerning factors.

Virtual world businesses operate in challenging environments, and research expertise is essential to resolving uncertainty and ongoing operational changes. Feeney and Welch (2012) argued that the increasing use of ICT has reduced traditional physical communication methods like meetings, emails, shared files, telephone messages, memorandums and guidelines. To cope with changing scenarios in the working process in an organization, virtual leaders must be intact with the newest technology and possess skills to build trust, enhance team structure and maintain productivity. The research in The research has examined the influence of leadership traits such as training and development, confidence, emotional intelligence and core beliefs with virtual leadership working in virtual contexts. The general objective of this study is to examine the factors that influence the effectiveness of virtual leadership. The specific objectives are as follows:

i) To assess the relationship and influence of training and development, trust, emotional intelligence, and core beliefs on virtual leadership effectiveness.
ii) To analyze the impact of training and development, trust, emotional intelligence, and core beliefs on the effectiveness of virtual leadership.

Yet, specific analysis factors influencing leadership effectiveness in virtual business are not commonly explored. In virtual teams, leadership effectiveness can be influenced by team dynamic factors and individuals' belief systems (Dahal, 2022). Directly managing each team member's activities across multiple geographic locations is challenging for a team leader. Vuchkovski et al. (2023) insisted that the digital transformation of teams from typical to digital environments may present various challenges. At the individual level, issues such as disparities in communication may occur, while at the level of the organization, challenges may include onboarding difficulties, structural obstacles, and barriers inherent in a virtual environment. Lal et al. (2023) showed the challenge of maintaining social connections with technology, citing a lack of signals and emotional intelligence. They commonly identified more factors influencing their work life, such as employment insecurity, higher workloads,

and extensive use of technology. People who work remotely frequently rest. The interaction between leaders and employees should remain smooth to control the working environment, understand emotions, and build trust while improving working eagerness and communicably understanding others' feelings and managing their own.

Traditional leadership styles based on face-to-face contact fail to handle the unique issues that virtual environments offer. To embrace new ways of creating value, companies must adapt their structure, processes, culture, employee roles and skills, and leadership style (Bhattarai et al., 2020; Małecka et al., 2022; Mitrega et al., 2021; Pfajfar & Małecka, 2022). Online teams in which personnel operate in isolation lack informal contact, resulting in a feeling of detachment and misunderstanding. So, leaders' attributes seem critical to their teams' performance in the virtual environment (Lee, 2021). In the virtual world, trusting anything in a hundred can be impossible; trust between leaders and members fosters cooperation and information sharing, enabling team members to be more responsible and resilient even without direct supervision. Leaders with high emotional intelligence can convey empathy, address concerns, and offer feedback despite the constraints of virtual communication platforms and cultural variations, all while boosting team morale and motivation (Shrestha & Dahal, 2023).

In a virtual workplace where teams might quickly feel detached and disengaged, resulting in uncertainty, the leader's integrity, respect, and dedication to progress for building an inclusive culture, focusing that all team members feel appreciated. Farinha et al. (2024) stated that fundamental convictions provide ethical guidance, trust establishes the foundation for cooperation, emotional intelligence promotes communication and conflict resolution, and training provides leaders with the skills they need to manage virtual settings successfully. Businesses without these adaptable skills risk being challenged and surpassed by rivals (Barreto, 2010; Puliga & Ponta, 2022), having their digital transformation process prominently slowed down, and having their competitive advantages contested (Ellstrom et al., 2022; Konopik et al., 2022). Despite the absence of in-person connection and other hurdles, these traits ensure that virtual teams remain engaged, successful, and aligned with corporate goals. Its issue is: What are the major influencing factors that influence leadership effectiveness in virtual business practices?

This study improves strategic management knowledge of virtual leadership in remote work, especially as businesses adopt digital platforms and virtual teams. The findings will help enterprises enhance remote leadership and teams' paradigm shifts to promote engagement and collaboration. This study will help create digitally focused leadership training programs and actionable recommendations. It will also inform ICT training and professional development policies to help virtual leaders transition to digital and remote leadership. The study contributes to freelancers, online educators, and telemedicine to improve communication, collaboration, and success.

The study was limited to the non-probability convenience sampling design, with 385 samples, so generalizability limits this study. The study's structure is divided into seven sections: an introduction where the background, problem, objective significance, limitation and structure of the study are presented; a literature review is framed with theoretical guidance and empirical base with hypothesis development; methodology includes study design, sample strategy and population, data, nature sources and instruments for data collections, and data presentation includes analysis results from descriptive and inferential analysis, with the study's results and discussion. The sixth section covers this study's conclusion, and the last section is the limitation and future scope.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical foundations guide the study where the "upper echelon theory" serves as the study's baseline hypothesis. As a result, this approach focuses on corporate leadership. According to Ahiauzu et al. (2016), this theory has consequences for leaders' emotional intelligence because it focuses on the manager or leadership of an organization who is accountable for ensuring the organization's

effectiveness. UET states that leaders' emotional intelligence and core beliefs affect virtual leadership outcomes. Personal traits affect how virtual leaders make decisions, manage challenges, and interact with teams. The Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) describes how a leader and a follower share information. Based on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), LMX theory proposes that leaders use physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to create and sustain exchange relationships with their subordinates. LMX Theory emphasizes trust and emotional intelligence in quality leader-team relationships. Trust between leaders and team members improves collaboration and performance, especially in remote settings with limited direct supervision. These conversations lay the groundwork for how leaders and followers interact, determining the quality of their professional relationships and overall effectiveness.

Workers in high-quality exchange connections are more likely to get organizational resources than those in low-quality exchange partnerships (information and support) and interpersonal resources (leaders trust). Another leadership theory, Situational Leadership Theory (SLT), states that there is no single optimum approach to lead (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). As an alternative, the optimum leadership style varies depending on the followers' level of preparation and ability and the specific situation (Cairns et al., 1998). Trainers and leaders can build trust and emotional intelligence through behaviour modelling in terms of SLT. Leaders can influence virtual team behaviour by modelling and reinforcing good behaviour. According to the transformational leadership theory (TL), successful leaders motivate their followers to exceed expectations by emphasizing idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and personalized reflection (Yammarino & Dubinsky, 1994).

Regardless of physical distance, transformational leadership may be particularly effective in virtual contexts for inspiring remote team members, stimulating creativity, and raising a shared sense of purpose and vision (Purvanova & Bono, 2009). TL aligns emotional intelligence and core beliefs to inspire, motivate, and engage virtual teams. A transformational leader must emotionally connect with team members and share a vision to maintain cohesion and performance. Applying Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) principles allows virtual leaders to better identify and handle the issues that influence their team's propensity to embrace and use digital platforms and solutions (Gupta & Yadav, 2022). TAM emphasizes training and development for technology adoption. Virtual leaders must help team members understand and trust their tools to improve leadership and team productivity. This theory involves applying acceptable technologies that fulfil the team's requirements and ensuring that co-workers regard these tools as helpful and upfront. These theories explain how leadership traits and practices affect virtual leadership effectiveness.

Virtual Leadership

Virtuality can be defined in a virtual leadership study as the physical separation between leaders and followers. This idea is quantified in a variety of ways, including whether the leader and follower are in separate cities and the proportion of time they spend working away from a shared office site. Such metrics seek to quantify the level of virtuality in their working relationships, indicating how distance affects communication, cooperation, and leadership progress (Bonet & Salvador, 2017). Virtual leaders manage virtual teams and workers and help them become as productive as possible. Maheshwari et al. (2024) and Shahi et al. (2022) found that perceived e-leadership substantially impacted workers' job engagement, well-being, and organizational citizenship behaviour. Virtual mentoring empowers individuals and promotes innovative and proactive problem-solving by providing emotional support, encouraging communication, and raising work-life balance (Ghimire et al., 2024). Hoddinghaus et al. (2024) found that goal-oriented, relational-oriented, and change-oriented leadership had primarily favourable relationships with followers' responses in highly virtual workplaces.

To cope with rapid change, e-leaders must be adaptable and prepared to take chances. To promote cooperation in diverse groups, they must also possess higher interpersonal and emotional intelligence levels. Effective virtual leadership comprises essential e-communication skills and the proactive

management of potential misunderstandings (Marlow et al., 2017; Moday-Banzon, 2021), digital interpersonal abilities for promoting a welcoming atmosphere and a positive workplace culture (Chaudhary et al., 2022), collaboration to inspire strong commitment and responsibility (Gupta & Mohapatra, 2023), abilities to manage change in virtual contexts (Bagga et al., 2023), fundamental technological knowledge to operate and maintain standard media. Soon and Salamzadeh (2021) discovered that E-Communication Competency and E-Trust Competency were positively and significantly related to the effectiveness of virtual team leaders. Most of the actions that leaders take these days are done via technology. As organizations grow and spread worldwide, virtual leadership will become the most preferred company management technique (Torre & Sarti, 2020). Virtual leadership is a relatively new phenomenon, and the literature on leadership in virtual communication contexts is in the early stages (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). This leadership is evolving, and its effectiveness can be implemented in policy-making and managerial strategic choices.

Training and Development

With the growth of remote work and virtual teams, leaders must be equipped with standards for best management practices in these dynamic contexts. Effective training programs should include various training modalities, which ought to be customized to the particular requirements of individuals and organizations and evaluated frequently to ensure effectiveness (Bresk, 2023). Banta et al. (2021) found that supervisor and participant satisfaction evaluations with the online program for developing organizational leadership are expectant. The participants appreciated the program's virtual structure and the instructors' talents. According to Kodama (2020), enterprises should focus on adopting digital technologies and the skills and capacities necessary to employ new technologies successfully. Adkere et al. (2023) contend that virtual reality-based simulations fully engage trainees and provide more transferable information than video-based training. In this approach, virtual leaders and team subordinates may increase their self-awareness, communication skills, and ability to effect positive change.

Virtual leaders must learn to use digital technology for effective communication, whether official or informal (Eslamdoust et al., 2024; Varhelahti & Turnquist, 2021). Virtual leadership should implement online leadership courses (Martin et al., 2020; Mullen, 2020), virtual team-building activities (Keith, 2021; Kuznetsova, 2023), and technological competence training (Catog, 2023; Gilli, 2024). Ongoing technology training ensures that leaders can use the most recent tools and platforms to boost team productivity and creativity. These programs improve virtual leaders' abilities and competencies, promoting community emotion and peer collaboration and increasing virtual teams' efficacy. Leadership training and development programs for virtual leaders boost communication effectiveness (Albrahim, 2020; Dahal et al., 2024), team cohesiveness (Ben Sedrine, 2021), and problem-solving abilities (Aslan & Duruhan, 2021). Virtual leaders must be able to express clear messages, listen actively, and offer timely feedback to ensure that virtual teams run well. Okechuku and Nebo (2020) proposed that e-leadership organizations' management create practical leadership guidelines for managers and staff members and a recurring training course on the latest ICTs. Training can be enhanced through precise teaching methodologies to update the abilities that can trigger entrepreneurial intentions (Karki et al., 2023). Leaders who get training and development in areas like technical competence and emotional intelligence are more suited to guiding their teams through complicated problem-solving processes, resulting in more efficient and successful solutions.

H1: The effectiveness of virtual leadership is significantly impacted by training and development.

Trust

Employee confidence in leaders and fellow employees determines employee trust in the organization.

In this situation, the organization's leader is critical in improving employee confidence (Rahayuningsih, 2019). In virtual team applications, trust has been thoroughly examined (Hoffmann & Baracskai, 2020; Tucker et al., 2023). Building trust is a decisive motivating factor in virtual teams. The e-leader has to improve trust, boosting team members' motivation (Breuer et al., 2020). High-quality conversations helped remote employees view their leaders as competent in facilitating remote work, enhancing trust and strong relationships (Qin, 2024). Martins and Araújo (2016) found a connection between leadership and organizational trust in their research. According to De Jong et al. (2021), competent managers and leaders are in charge of enhancing organizational trust in their organizations. Trust is fundamentally established via internal communication (Poloski et al., 2021). Sagar et al. (2023) revealed that skills, ethics and dependability are the most essential characteristics of team members in developing trust among virtual teammates. Trust is significant as a vital mechanism for causing favourable leadership results (Legood et al., 2021).

A successful case of trust-based leadership was offered in a Danish municipal job centre. Public leaders can enhance trust-building on personal, group, and organizational levels by using and combining interactional and institutional remedies (Bentzen, 2022). Within a virtual workplace, followers' trust in their leaders seems to be affected by their impressions of the leaders' media realism. Norman et al. (2020) claimed that other factors influencing leader-follower trust relationships include leader and follower personal traits, depth of relationship and time. Leaders' trust is enhanced by three factors: open communication, cognitive diversity, and the ability to inspire and engage followers (Tigre et al., 2022). The effectiveness of a virtual team is severely impacted by the perception of e-leadership, which involves the trust, communication, and coordination of leaders and their behaviour (Elyousfi et al., 2021). Under uncertain circumstances, such as a pandemic, trust in leadership is essential for transformative group action. It takes appropriate action, including planning and preparation, gathering intelligence and information, leading adaptation, and guaranteeing a coordinated response, for leaders to build trust in their followers (Ahern & Loh, 2020; Dahal et al., 2023). The literature proves that trust is a significant trait among others in virtual leadership. Therefore, it can be hypothesized as:

H2: There is a significant impact of trust in virtual leadership effectiveness.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the capacity to understand and respond to the emotions of others in social circumstances; it is also the ability to control and regulate one's emotions and utilize this knowledge to affect others around you (Ruisel, 1992). Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as the ability to identify and transmit emotion, integrate emotion and cognition, interpret and rationalize emotion, and regulate emotion in oneself and others. Mysirlaki and Paraskeva (2020) discovered a significant correlation between leaders' perceived emotional intelligence and virtual teams' performance. Leaders' EI can be enhanced through mindfulness practices, and organizations can use techno-supported tools in the workplace to implement mindfulness practices (Joshi & Subedi, 2024). Effective leadership can have a significant emotional component; hence, leaders must be emotionally sophisticated (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence is self-awareness, articulation, and socialization robust to leader concerns when leading remotely (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2022).

Good leadership may require the ability to influence others' emotions proactively and reactively (Edelman & van Knippenberg, 2018; Joshi et al., 2023; Rawat et al., 2021). Emotional intelligence significantly and considerably impacts lecturers' innovative work practices (Hadi et al., 2024). Academics and corporate executives increasingly recognize EI's importance in leadership, necessitating the inclusion of EI in discussions about leadership. People with emotional intelligence are more likely to be calm and confident in their abilities, increasing their employment prospects. Highly emotionally intelligent people can relate to others, enabling coherent and supportive relationships. (Alsalminy &

Omrane, 2023; Zhoc et al., 2020). Emotionally intelligent people may think creatively and build environments encouraging these activities (Durnali et al., 2023; Rizwi & Lokuliyana, 2023; Winton & Sabol, 2024). As a result, several studies suggest that EI abilities are strongly associated with individual performance (Chong et al., 2019; Matta & Alam, 2023). There is an urgent and obvious need to link students' and instructors' emotional reactions to the teaching process and student-teacher relationships (Sharma & Bhargava, 2023). Leaders may increase their efficacy by cultivating EI. Human resource management necessitates leadership effectiveness due to the need for emotional intelligence and leadership congruence. As a result, firms and human resource managers must spend more on emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness.

H3: There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and virtual leadership effectiveness.

Core Belief

In addition to training and growth, trust, and emotional intelligence, several studies indicate that leaders' primary beliefs impact the efficacy of virtual leadership. Leadership self-efficacy, which is the belief that one can lead a virtual team, is especially important for virtual leaders (Maduka et al., 2018). This idea pertains to a more situational conviction in one's capacity to do a specific task, as opposed to self-confidence. Flexible and realistic hope is beneficial for virtual leaders who are confronting difficulties. According to the followers, trustworthy interactions in virtual environments require virtual leaders to exhibit dependability, honesty, and integrity (Norman et al., 2020). An entirely novel form of leadership that inspires and provides insights into a hands-on approach to leadership in a period of unmatched environmental and economic concern is based on the core principles of respect, relate, reflect, and reproduce (Somoza-Norton et al., 2023).

Flynn et al. (2016) found that leaders' fundamental self-evaluations are positively connected to followers' judgments of servant leadership and leader performance. Tuan (2021) showed the advantageous connection between employer event communication and the resilience of hotel workers, employing core beliefs assessment as a mediating factor. Core beliefs challenges were discovered to counteract the favourable relationship between leader crisis response and salespeople's constructive stress mentality (Tuan, 2022). Malureanu et al. (2021) found that self-confidence, a core belief, affects resilience, self-efficacy, and perceived ease of use of corporate e-learning platforms. Self-confidence promotes lifelong learning and business outcomes. Strand (2021) addressed the broader issue of wrong employee views of leadership morality and decency and the accompanying low levels of enthusiasm and assurance in the workplace. Spoelstra et al. (2021) determined that the field of leadership studies is significantly reliant on faith in two respects: (a) faith in leadership concepts, despite their associated measures often lacking methodological rigour, and (b) belief in leadership studies as a scientific endeavour, even when influenced by commercial interests and professional incentives. Afshar-Jalili and Ghaleh (2018) discovered a favourable association between fundamental values and information-sharing behaviour, which is critical for establishing effective leadership in a virtual setting. These theories were created in this way to look at how core values affect the efficacy of virtual leadership.

H4: There is a significant association between core beliefs and virtual leadership effectiveness.

Figure 1 presents the study's framework based on the theoretical foundation and literature review.

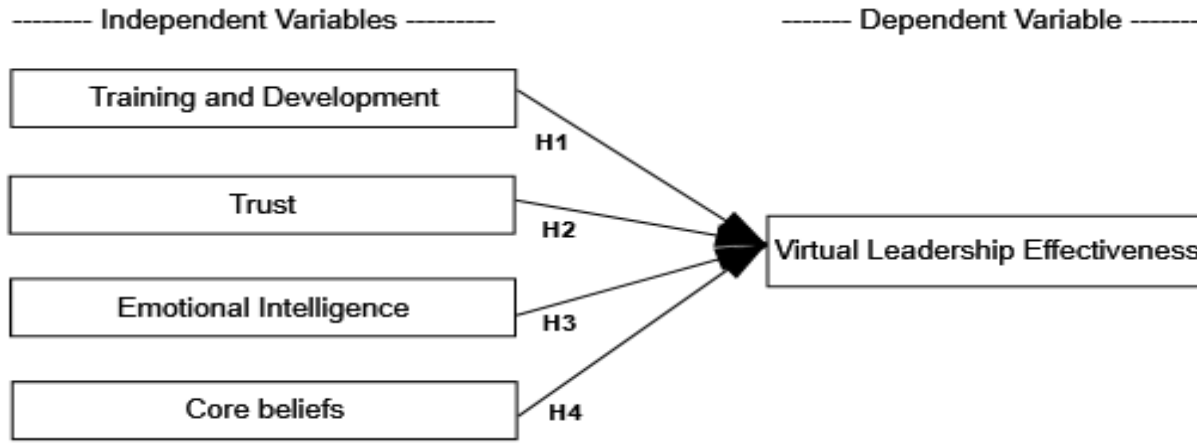

Fig.1: Research Framework

3. Materials and Methods

The research used a positivist research philosophy and a quantitative research approach. It employed a descriptive and casual research design with a population of virtually working organizations (freelancers and gig workers), online healthcare services, virtual learning platforms, and university professionals. The research design is used because the study describes the scenario of virtual leadership along with required traits and aims to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between individual traits and leadership effectiveness. Table 1 depicts the specifics of the study's sample size.

Table 1. Sample of the Study

Industry (Service)	No of sample
Freelancers	110
Online learning platforms	200
Online health care (Telemedicine)	75
Total	385

This study systematically employed a stratified sampling design based on the industries in Table 1. This sampling design ensures representation across different industries and improves precision in analyzing leadership traits. Sampling freelancers allows the study to assess a highly autonomous environment. Whereas, online learning and health care platforms explore leadership dynamics in high-stake and trust-sensitive environments through remote settings to measure leadership effectiveness. The study methodically utilized a stratified sampling approach based in these mentioned industries to assure proportional representation and improve the applicability of the results. The data collection was primary in nature. In such frame, a Likert scale questionnaire was circulated online through Google Forms and email to correspond with the virtual environment of the participants. Data collection occurred for four weeks, with follow-up reminders delivered to enhance the response rate. As Equation (1) explains, Cochran's formula supports the sample size calculation.

$$n_0 = \frac{z^2.p.(1-p)}{e^2} \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots (1)$$

Where:

n_0 = required sample size

Z = Z-score (which corresponds to the desired confidence level)

p = estimated proportion of the population (unknown, p=0.5)

e = margin of error

The study adopted a framework from Alward and Phelps (2019) and Tuschner et al. (2022). Table 2 presents the status of the study variables.

Table 2. Study Variables

Latent variables	Observed items	Adapted from
Training and Development (TD)	5	Mullen, 2020; Newman et al., 2020; Salas et al., 2012
Trust (TR)	5	Kuznetsova et al., 2023; Yang & Mossholder, 2010
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	5	Chong et al., 2019; Hadi et al., 2024
Core Beliefs (CB)	5	Maduka et al., 2018
Virtual Leadership Effectiveness (VLE)	6	Hadi et al., 2024

The study included a pilot test to assess the validity of the survey instrument. The test used a Five-point Likert scale questionnaire with 20-30 respondents to confirm that the instrument was adequate for relevant variables. Cronbach's Alpha (α) was used to test reliability, confirming that the scale items properly represented the subjects for the study.

To address potential Common Method Bias (CMB), Harman's single-factor variance analysis was applied. This approach confirmed that the data's variation was not disproportionately explained by a single component, reducing worries about bias. The study increased its validity by using known and verified measurement scales from previous research, confirming that the questionnaire accurately evaluated the important components of the variables.

Table 3 summarizes the findings of the reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) and the Common Method Bias evaluation, as well as the suggested thresholds for these metrics. These data suggest that the survey instrument is robust and appropriate for the study aims.

Table 3. Reliability and CMB Tests

Latent variables	Observed items	Cronbach Alpha (α)	Harman single-factor variance
TD	5	0.884	
TR	5	0.737	
EI	5	0.792	38.253 %
CB	5	0.811	
VLE	6	0.797	
Suggested threshold scales		≥ 0.70, (Taber, 2018)	≤ 50.0 %, (Cho & Lee, 2012)

Taber (2018) states that every Cronbach's alpha value in Table 3 exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70. The variance of the 26 observed items was calculated to be 38.253 %, which falls below the 50 % threshold stated by Cho and Lee (2012). Consequently, 26 observed items were confined to five fundamental qualities employed in the study.

The study's external validity was evaluated using sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) tests.

Hair et al. (2018) reported a KMO sample test statistic of 0.938, exceeding the established threshold of 0.8. The Bartlett's sphericity test of the correlation matrix indicated that each association had a significant impact. A Chi-square value of 5450.308 was estimated, with 325 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000 derived from the test. The evaluation concluded that 26 items were appropriate for further analysis.

The study utilized SPSS Version 26 for data analysis through statistical methods, ensuring accurate and dependable results. Descriptive analysis is used to elucidate and emphasize the principal characteristics of the data. Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to assess and quantify the strength and direction of the associations, while regression analysis was utilized to examine the causal linkages among the research variables. Moreover, multi-collinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Equation (2) illustrates the regression model employed in the study.

$$VLE\ (Y) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + e \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots (2)$$

VLE = Virtual Leadership Effectiveness

X_1 = Training and Development (TD)

X_2 = Trust (TR)

X_3 = Emotional Intelligence (EI)

X_4 = Core Belief (CB)

e = error term

4. Results

This part presents and analyzes the study results, demographics, correlation test, regression analysis and findings.

Demographic Profile

This section shows the study's demographic results, including gender, work experience, education level, and age groups.

Table 4. Demographic Information

Groups	Nos	%	Groups	Nos	%
Gender:			***Experience in virtual teams:***		
Male	210	54.55	Less than one year	32	8.30
Female	175	45.45	1-3 years	41	10.60
How would you rate your			4-6 years	300	77.90
Proficiency with digital tools:			7-10 years	10	2.60
Beginner	149	38.70	More than 10 years	2	0.60
Intermediate	189	49.10	**Age group:**		
Advance	47	12.20	18-25 Years	103	26.80
			26-35 Years	191	49.60
			36-45 Years	54	14.00
			46-55 Years	13	3.4
			55 and above	24	6.2
Total of each section	385		Total of each section	385	100.0

Table 4 indicates that most participants have 4-6 years of expertise in virtual teamwork. This is significant because it demonstrates the growing trend of remote work in recent years, especially since

the pandemic prompted many businesses to switch to virtual operations. Many individuals categorize themselves as beginner or intermediate users regarding digital skills but were experienced through years. The age distribution indicates that most participants are aged 26 to 35, followed by those aged 18 to 25, with fewer in the older age brackets. This demographic profile indicates a predominantly young workforce that is moderately experienced with virtual teams and typically possesses an intermediate level of digital proficiency. The respondents are likely to have gained a great deal of experience during this transitional period, making their observations particularly pertinent to understanding the dynamics of virtual leadership and teamwork in today's digital workplace.

Table 5. Correlation insights and descriptive statistics (N = 385)

	Descriptive Statistics			Pearson Correlation Insights			
Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	TAD	TR	EI	CB
TAD	3.621	.945	.902				
TR	3.526	.748	.561	.677**			
EI	3.671	.828	.686	.656**	.748**		
CB	2.949	.944	.892	.134**	.111*	.130*	
VLE	3.722	.776	.603	.653**	.684**	.780**	.186**

***. Significant=0.01 (2-tailed).*

**. Significant=0.05(2-tailed).*

Table 5 shows VLE having the highest mean value of 3.722, indicating participant agreement on the efficacy of leadership in virtual environments. Conversely, CB had the lowest mean score of 2.949, indicating relatively neutral or critical perceptions. Response variability, determined by variance and standard deviation, reveals more about the distribution of participant perspectives. TR had a minor standard deviation, 0.748, indicating response homogeneity, whereas TAD and CB had more significant deviations, 0.945 and 0.944, respectively, indicating considerable divergence in participant evaluations. The lower variance for VLE of 0.603 demonstrates relative consistency in perceptions of its effectiveness. These results coincide with the study's theoretical framework and respondent variability. Table 5 also illustrates the latent variables' associations through a correlation test. The statistical significance of the relationships assesses subsequent regression analysis concerning how these variables collectively predict virtual leadership effectiveness.

The results presented in Table 5 show statistically significant correlations between VLE and variables such as TAD, TR, EI, and CB, with emotional intelligence showing the strongest relationship ($r = .780$, $p < .01$). These findings highlight the importance of interpersonal and adaptive capabilities in virtual leadership contexts. While descriptive statistics reveal moderate to high mean scores for most variables, the notably lower mean for CB (2.949) and its weak correlations suggest limited influence or variability in beliefs among participants. However, the demographic profile, with 77.9% of respondents having 4–6 years of virtual experience, raises concerns about sample representativeness and possible bias toward more seasoned virtual workers. Furthermore, the regression analysis would benefit from deeper interpretation, including effect sizes and assumptions testing, to support the strength and generalizability of the model. This result confirms the theoretical framework to research objectives.

Table 6. Model Summary

					Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.810[a]	.657	.653	.45736	.657	181.859	4	380	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), TAD, TR, EI, and CB

b. Dependent Variable: VLE

Table 6 displays the model summary from the regression study, demonstrating how effectively training and development, emotional intelligence, trust, and fundamental values predict virtual leadership performance. The correlation coefficient (R) shows a strong and positive link, indicating that virtual leadership is successful. The R Square value demonstrates the importance of independent latent factors in explaining significant variance in virtual leadership effectiveness. Adjusted R Square takes into account the number of predictors, verifying the model's reliability and relevance to its importance.

Table 7. Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	152.161	4	38.040	181.859	.000[b]
	Residual	79.486	380	.209		
	Total	231.647	384			

a. Dependent Variable: VLE

b. Predictors: (Constant), TAD, TR, EI, and CB

Table 7 displays the analysis of variance (ANOVA), which provides an overview of the regression model's significance and demonstrates how well the TAD, TR, EI, and CB combine to explain virtual leadership effectiveness.

Table 8. Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.597	.131		4.556	.000		
TAD	.160	.035	.196	4.550	.000	.489	2.047
TR	.148	.051	.143	2.926	.004	.379	2.635
EI	.502	.045	.535	11.249	.000	.399	2.508
CB	.061	.025	.075	2.455	.015	.979	1.021

a. Dependent Variable: VLE

Table 8 depicts the regression coefficients that indicate how much virtual leadership effectiveness was expected to change with a one-unit increase in each trait. Emotional intelligence has the most significant positive effect, followed by training and development, trust, and core beliefs. Each t-statistic confirms the importance of the characteristics in explaining virtual leadership effectiveness, as all p-values were significant at a 5 % significance level. Collinearity statistics (Tolerance and VIF) ensure that each trait contributes to the model independently and without redundancy, confirming the analysis's stability and reliability.

Assessing Hypotheses

Table 8 summarizes the study hypotheses, including the standardized regression coefficients, significance thresholds, and conclusions about the hypotheses' acceptability.

Table 9. Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Standardized	p-value	Remarks

		coefficient (β)		
H1:	*The effectiveness of virtual leadership is significantly impacted by training and development.*	.196	.000	Accepted
H2:	*There is a significant impact of trust in virtual leadership effectiveness.*	.143	.004	Accepted
H3:	*There is a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and virtual leadership effectiveness.*	.535	.000	Accepted
H4:	*There is a significant association between core beliefs and virtual leadership effectiveness.*	.075	.015	Accepted

Emotional intelligence is the most influential trait because it allows leaders to manage emotions and implement a confident, cohesive virtual work environment. Training and development have the most significant impact on virtual leadership, helping leaders adapt to remote work challenges and improve the communication skills required in virtual settings. Trust also significantly contributes to virtual leadership by fostering an environment of open communication and collaboration across physical distances. In contrast, while less influential, core beliefs still positively impact virtual leadership by encouraging authenticity and alignment around shared values.

5. Discussions

This study shows that the effectiveness of virtual leadership can be significantly predicted by individual leadership traits, particularly trust, emotional intelligence, training and development, and core beliefs. By placing traditional leadership theories in the context of digital workspaces, especially in Nepal's educational system, the findings expand on them. The Upper Echelon Theory shows the impact of leaders' psychological characteristics on organizational outcomes, which is consistent with the strong relationship between emotional intelligence and virtual leadership effectiveness (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). According to Joshi et al. (2023), emotional intelligence in virtual environments helps leaders react sympathetically to the needs of their team, improving engagement and cooperation. Rawat et al. (2021) provide additional support for this, arguing that emotional control and technological proficiency promote creativity in remote environments.

The leader–member exchange theory, which holds that trust and solid dyadic relationships are essential to effective leadership, is also supported by the study. De Jong et al. (2021) and Martins and Araújo (2016) show structural trust as a fundamental component of virtual teams. The importance of emotional availability, communication consistency, and transparency in establishing and preserving trust, the current research broadens this viewpoint. The study publicized the need for flexibility, both in terms of leadership style and digital adaptability, in accordance with situational leadership theory. This advocates the changing skill set needed by leaders working in virtual environments. The technology acceptance model supports this by stating that team members are expected to advocate for digital tools that are easy to use and improve perceived utility. The importance of emotional intelligence and core values in inspiring, motivating, and directing virtual teams, this sensed the need of transformational leadership theory in management. Leaders are better able to manage uncertainty and promote team cohesion when they exhibit realistic optimism and a strong moral conviction. This is consistent with Afshar-Jalili and Ghaleh (2018), who contend that fundamental beliefs promote efficient information exchange and improve the development of subordinate skills. In a similar vein, Somoza-Norton et al. (2023) show belief systems support enduring loyalty and flexible leadership practices in the face of difficulty.

This presents empirical clarity with previous research. Breck (2023) promotes individualized training that is in line with organizational requirements. This study shows the three main areas that

should be given priority in virtual leadership development: communication, digital competency, and emotional intelligence. This study confirms that technology proficiency training and virtual team-building exercises are important for effective virtual leadership, as supported by studies by Gill (2024), Kuznetsova (2023), and Mullen (2020). Qin (2024) shows that building trust requires leaders and team members to communicate consistently.

The study's practical implications are especially pertinent to Nepal's educational system, where the quick transition to virtual learning platforms has brought to light serious deficiencies in faculty readiness and digital infrastructure. Many teachers find it difficult to use virtual platforms, particularly in rural areas, which results in poor communication and lower student engagement. In line with the conclusions of Eslamdoust et al. (2024), this study suggests that faculty proficiency with online resources like Google Classroom and virtual assessment systems be increased through organized training courses and makeshift support systems like regional YouTube tutorials and workshops. Since leaders who are employing empathic behaviour through individualized communication and stress check-ins need to be less fake and more welcoming by inherited heart and capable of encouraging virtual environments, thorough training is significant for educational culture.

Now, in education, trust is still essential, particularly when overseeing tests or remotely resolving student issues; favouritism should be completely eliminated. Establishing a safe learning environment requires openness, consistent attendance, and unambiguous rules, which leads to creative human capital rather than resources. This study also reaffirms the importance of fundamental beliefs in promoting resilience and community-centered behaviour. Long-term organizational loyalty and sustainable virtual engagement are specifically found to be influenced by beliefs that are in line with social justice and environmental stewardship.

This study theoretically advances knowledge of virtual leadership by questioning the idea that virtual leadership is just a digital replication of traditional leadership. While fundamental components like direction, influence, and motivation are still important (Savolainen, 2014; Trivedi & Desai, 2012), the methods for attaining them have changed. Now, strategic vision, emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and digital fluency are necessary for effective virtual leadership.

The study admits a number of limitations despite stating that the participants had worked virtually for four to six years. This raises the possibility of sampling bias and could restrict the applicability to populations with less experience. This study is limited to team member traits that are more important to virtual team dynamics, like communication preferences or digital literacy. Future research can explore the model of virtual leadership effectiveness with psychological and attitude factors of technology's influence on leadership effectiveness.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study adds a root for virtual leadership that effectively tackles the difficulties associated with working remotely. Virtual leadership is essential to organizations that are operating through virtual platforms. Leaders and subordinates should receive communication training to build trust. Leaders' emotional intelligence affects trust in virtual teams. People's engagement in cloud work is increasing as the internet reaches the globe. This study shows that in a virtual environment, emotional intelligence enables leaders to control their emotions. Training and development can enhance the leader's effectiveness, which gives leaders the tools to adjust to changing technology and interact with others in virtual settings. Trust and core beliefs create a foundation of dependability and unite virtual teams in line with organizational objectives. While core beliefs guarantee that leaders sustain consistency and integrity, trust promotes open communication and collaboration.

Following the pandemic, more virtual platforms for service exchange have emerged. Businesses are increasingly adopting virtual meetings and training. The health sector benefits from video call apps and other software that allow doctors and patients to schedule appointments and consultations. Virtual leadership can help to promote sustainability by reducing environmental impact, allowing for remote

work, and encouraging digital transformation. Businesses that shift their strategies to virtual environments can create inclusive and resilient virtual workplaces, resulting in an integrated approach to organizational success and sustainability.

The study practically involves managers in improving leadership effectiveness in virtual contexts, demonstrating core traits required for online firm management and growth. It lays the groundwork for future research that will examine these dynamics across sectors and cultures, despite limitations such as convenience sampling and sector-specificity. Virtual leadership effectiveness can improve workplace sustainability by increasing accessibility and resource efficiency across education, technology, finance, and social media business platforms.

Emotionally intelligent virtual leaders can connect remote teams with innovation by reducing resource-intensive processes and encouraging more sustainable work practices through digital tools. Policymakers can support online learning and training initiatives with training and development; educational leaders can reduce energy consumption, carbon emissions, and infrastructure needs. Future researchers can explore the role of emerging technologies, such as AI, in improving virtual leadership effectiveness. Researchers may also evaluate the impact of virtual leadership on employee well-being and performance.

The study examined popular but not all-inclusive virtual platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Slack. Future studies, however, might examine how AI-powered collaboration and virtual reality technology tools affect the efficacy of virtual leadership. Future research could address confidentiality concerns using safe online survey platforms with unambiguous privacy guarantees to promote consistent participation. Since the degree of experience and difficulties may vary, future research could also address confidentiality concerns using safe online survey platforms with unambiguous privacy guarantees.

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