Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Business Administration

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A Digital Leadership Lens for a Physical World:
Digital Transformation Levers of Control for Incumbent Companies

Date: September 19, 2022
Time: 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
Place: Anheuser-Busch Hall, Room 106

Abstract
A new wave of advanced technologies is disrupting companies of all types and transforming business models within every industry. Long-standing industrial firms that rose to prominence in a pre-digital economy are particularly vulnerable. Prevailing views suggest these companies (hereafter referred to as incumbents) must reimagine their value propositions and transform themselves by leveraging today’s advanced technologies. The opportunities provided by these advanced technologies will significantly affect incumbents whether they participate or not. The pursuit of these opportunities, commonly referred to as digital transformation (DX), is the focus of our research.

Traditional technology-enabled business endeavors, which created incremental operational improvements, fell within the domain of information technology (IT) organizations. DX is more profound and has become a leadership imperative for all top-level managers. The leaders of incumbent companies are facing a “moment-of-truth” with some characterizing the situation as “digital or death”. With this gravity, it is not surprising that academic and business research highlights the critical role of leadership.

To address this challenge, our research leveraged prior academic knowledge on the use of management control systems utilized by companies to guide organizational change and employee behavior. We tested a DX control system model to identify specific leadership processes which are correlated to DX success. We extended prior research with the addition of digital acuity as a new construct. Our research highlights a required new leadership capability for top-level managers, which we refer to as digital acuity. Evidence suggests these leaders need high levels of digital acuity to understand these new technologies, develop a digitally enabled vision for their organization and champion digital innovation. Finally, we provide evidence which points to a mediation model explaining how digital acuity interacts with the utilization of the process components to drive DX success.

As famed management consultant, Peter Drucker, once said “the greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence, it is to act with yesterday’s logic”. Our findings provide incremental and original insights into a new digital leadership lens for leaders of incumbent companies in their pursuit of a digitally enabled future.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Dr. Dinesh Mirchandani, PhD, Chairperson
Dr. Joseph Rottman, D. Sc., Committee Member
Dr. Douglas Smith, PhD, Committee Member