

The Influence of Digital Leadership on Innovation Performance by Mediating Employee Creativity

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Abstract

Innovation has become an important part of organizational strategy to achieve competitive advantage in the era of digitalization. This research aims to examine the influence of digital leadership on innovation performance, with employee creativity as a mediating factor. Methods: This research is a quantitative research using primary data obtained through a questionnaire survey of employees at a company in Indonesia which operates in the field of fertilizer production. The measurements were carried out using a Likert scale and data analysis was carried out with the help of the PLS-SEM tool. Research findings show that digital leadership has a positive and significant effect on innovation performance and employee creativity. Apart from that, employee creativity also has a significant effect on innovation performance and mediates the relationship between digital leadership and innovation performance. This research shows that effective digital leadership can increase innovation performance in the workplace by supporting employee creativity. This study fills the literature gap by exploring digital leadership as the main predictor of employee creativity at the micro level. The results provide valuable insights for leaders and management in responding to environmental changes by creating innovation.

Keyword: digital leadership, innovation performance, employee creativity

1. Introduction

During the phase of Industry 4.0, organizations face internal and external challenges to maintain their existence in the global market. The company's external challenge is to face increasing growth, technological transformation, and competition throughout the world, while the internal challenge is to produce new, better products and services (Azeem et al., 2021). Facing globalization and a volatile and uncertain economic situation, companies are facing increasingly fierce competition. If a company wants to gain a competitive advantage, it needs to create innovation to improve its performance because innovation is necessary for the company's survival (Jing et al., 2022)

Innovation has become a core part of organizational strategies to achieve and maintain competitive advantage (Shahzad et al., 2017). However, the innovation process is often full of uncertainty and controversy, which means that the process and results of innovation are unpredictable because progress occurs unexpectedly including: challenges, obstacles and unexpected costs. Because of this, employees are often reluctant to be involved in innovation because they are afraid of the possibility of failure. (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). To surface and identify employee factors to be motivated in innovation is something that is still frequently

researched today. One study suggests the importance of the leader's role as a catalyst for innovative work behavior because of its ability to shape the work environment and control over resource allocation (Iqbal et al., 2022).

Leaders as top managers are in a crucial position and their leadership behavior can influence organizational innovation in several ways. Besides that, several studies also state that leadership is identified as a key factor in encouraging organizational innovation (Jia et al., 2018). In the new era, leaders need to keep up with technological developments and gain knowledge about changes in organizational structure. This change brings an acceptable requirement for organizations to be part of digitalization. So, the need for digital leadership arises because organizations are currently transforming into digitalization (Erhan et al., 2022).

Several literatures have discussed leadership styles on innovation performance, such as transactional and transformational leadership styles (e.g. Sandhu & Al Naqbi, 2022), but the topic of digital leadership is a topic that still needs to be explored. Wang et al. (2022) define digital leadership as a style that merges transformational leadership with the utilization of digital technology, highlighting the leader's capacity to identify and leverage opportunities to generate value through the efficient and effective application of digital tools. Digital leaders, viewed as transformational, must adopt a proactive role to achieve organizational goals and objectives, thereby boosting employee motivation and fostering innovation and creativity (Erhan et al., 2022). Employee creativity differs from innovation in that creativity entails the generation of new and useful ideas by employees, whereas innovation is concerned with the implementation of these creative ideas (Zhou & George, 2001).

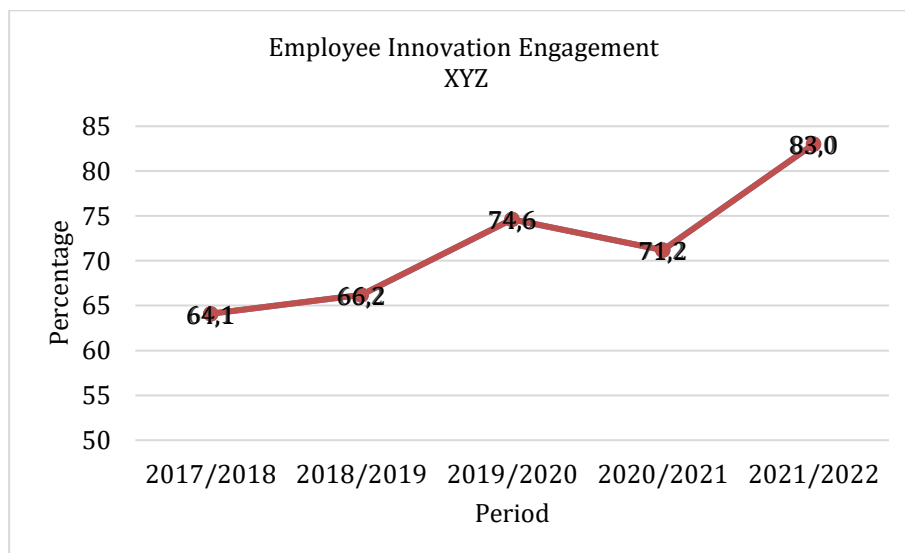


Figure 1. XYZ Employee Innovation Engagement Graph

XYZ (name anonymized) considers innovation to be an important aspect because it can provide potential cost savings during the 2021/2022 period of 240.68 billion rupiah. The results of innovation that have been implemented at XYZ prove that innovation is important for the

sustainability of the company to gain profits and company savings. In Figure 1, the number of employee involvement in innovation at XYZ has increased in the last few periods, and increasing employee involvement in innovation provides potential benefits and cost savings for the company.

Based on the phenomenon of leadership roles, especially digital leadership and innovation, this research aims to answer the identified research gaps. The first gap is related to literature on digital leadership on innovation performance. Several literatures have conducted research at the organizational and team level (e.g. Shin et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022; Niu et al., 2022). This study focuses on exploring the influence of digital leadership on individual innovation performance, due to a lack of extensive research into how digital leadership can either foster or restrict innovative work behaviors (Erhan et al., 2021).

The subsequent research gap concerns the correlation between digital leadership and employee creativity, an aspect that has received limited attention in research (Zhu et al., 2022). Some literature still uses a transformational leadership style on employee creativity (e.g. Gumusluoglu & Ilsev., 2009). This research aims to explore the direct impact of digital leadership on employee creativity, as well as the mediating role of employee creativity in the relationship between digital leadership and individual-level innovation performance. The literature emphasizes the importance of positive leadership behavior in enriching organizational culture and stimulating employee creativity through various ideas (Shandu and Naqbi, 2022). Therefore, to overcome gaps in previous research, this research focuses on exploring the impact of digital leadership on innovation performance with employee creativity as a mediator.

2. Literature Review

Digital leadership. Digital leadership theory is characterized as a leadership style centered on digital transformation and the utilization of digital technology (Mihardjo et al, 2019; Erhan et al., 2022; Shin et al., 2023). An organization that has realized a digital leadership style shows that the leader has unique characteristics and performance in influencing his behavior and decisions when leading, which in turn influences various aspects at the company level (Wang et al., 2022). Digital leaders are crucial for realizing transformation due to their focus on change and adaptability, along with their transformative and future-oriented vision, which is essential for committing to transformation and instigating cultural change in a rapidly changing environment (Benitez et al., 2022).

Innovation performance. Innovation is a complex and demanding undertaking, involving various cognitive and social activities such as generating, promoting, evaluating, adapting, and implementing creative ideas (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). Innovative companies will be more flexible and have a higher capacity to adapt to market and technological changes (Shahzad et al., 2017). The ideal definition of innovation performance includes a simple and comprehensive approach that includes all factors that determine how innovation is developed and disseminated, which ultimately leads the company to achieve innovative advantage or success in the market (Robertson et al., 2023). Robertson (2021) further said that innovation performance is the result of various factors that influence and represent all achievements and results obtained from

innovation.

Employee creativity. Creativity within an organization involves the development of fresh and potentially valuable ideas, requiring novelty and utility for recognition as creative. Employee creativity differs from innovation, as it pertains to the creation of new and beneficial ideas by employees, while innovation involves the practical application of these creative ideas (Zhou & George, 2001). Employee creativity has been discussed by various research experts, e.g. Sandhu & Al Naqbi (2022) highlighting creativity as the ability to create something new or something useful, including bringing new solutions to complex dilemmas, new procedures or methods, or bringing something creative or artistic.

Employee creativity is a key component of human resources, involving the creation of valuable ideas. Article put forward by Jain & Jain (2016) shows various factors that have a direct or indirect influence on employee creativity including: personality dimensions, self-efficacy, cognitive characteristics, motivation and knowledge, intrinsic motivation, complex work, supportive leadership, support from direct superiors (supervisors), support from colleagues, relationships social, transformational leadership, leader-member exchange, and work environment. By understanding and managing the factors that influence employee creativity, organizations can achieve their innovative potential optimally, create unique solutions, and compete effectively in an ever-changing market.

The influence of digital leadership on innovation performance. Digitalization and organizational transformation in the digital era cause companies to face uncertainty and challenges to maintain sustainable growth. Therefore, to help companies implement change, leaders with specific competencies in digital leadership are needed (Shin et al., 2023). Further exploration is needed in studies investigating the influence of digital leadership on innovation to ascertain whether digital leadership indeed contributes to enhancing innovation performance (Benitez et al., 2022). Numerous research endeavors have examined how digital leadership affects innovation performance. For instance, Wang et al (2022) explored the impact of digital leadership on exploratory innovation, revealing a positive correlation between digital leadership and the encouragement of innovative endeavors. Furthermore, Miwardjo et al (2019) focused on the significance of digital leadership in fostering business model innovation and customer experience orientation within the framework of Industry 4.0. Their findings demonstrated the positive role of digital leadership in steering innovative strategies and customer-centric approaches. Moreover, a study by Theng et al (2021) delved into the impact of transformational leadership, servant leadership, and digital transformation on organizational performance and innovative capabilities in the digital age. The findings underscored how different leadership styles can affect innovation within organizations. Based on the explanation above, the following hypothetical conclusions can be drawn:

H1: digital leadership positively and significantly influences innovation performance.

The influence of digital leadership on employee creativity. Organizations need to create an atmosphere that encourages employees to innovate. Furthermore, the existence of an environment that supports creativity within the organization has an important role in increasing

employee creativity towards organizational innovation (Chaubey & Sahoo, 2022). The study by Shandu & Naqbi (2023) found that transformational and transactional leadership positively influence individual creativity. This finding is further supported by Zhu et al. (2022), which found that the influence of digital leadership can positively stimulate employee creativity. Therefore, this study aims to delve deeper into and identify the concrete impact of digital leadership on employee creativity. Based on the above explanation, the following hypothesis can be drawn:

H2: digital leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity

The role of employee creativity as mediation in the influence of digital leadership on innovation performance. The literature indicates an influence of employee creativity on innovation performance, as demonstrated by Chaubey & Sahoo (2022), who explored the relationship between employee creativity and organizational innovation. Their results indicate that employee creativity has a significant effect on organizational innovation. Based on this, creativity is a key driver of innovation. Creative employees tend to generate ideas and find ways to implement them after conducting a thorough assessment. They foster an environment that encourages others to think beyond conventional boundaries. Thus, innovation can be seen as a manifestation of employee creativity (Chaubey & Sahoo, 2022). Research by Zhou et al (2022) reveals that digital leadership influences employee creativity. Furthermore, in the era of the digital economy, digital technology has revolutionized leadership and profoundly affected organizations and employees. Leaders now focus on creating opportunities for team members to develop their creative potential through collaboration and continuous learning, rather than just assigning tasks. Digital leadership exemplifies continuous learning and provides the necessary authority to nurture an innovative environment for the team. Consequently, team members adapt their work methods to meet changing conditions, perform tasks more efficiently, and enhance their creativity in response to leadership that encourages an innovative culture (Zhou et al., 2022). Based on the explanation above, the following hypothesis can be drawn:

H3: Employee creativity has a positive and significant effect on innovation performance

H4: employee creativity mediates the relationship between digital leadership and innovation performance

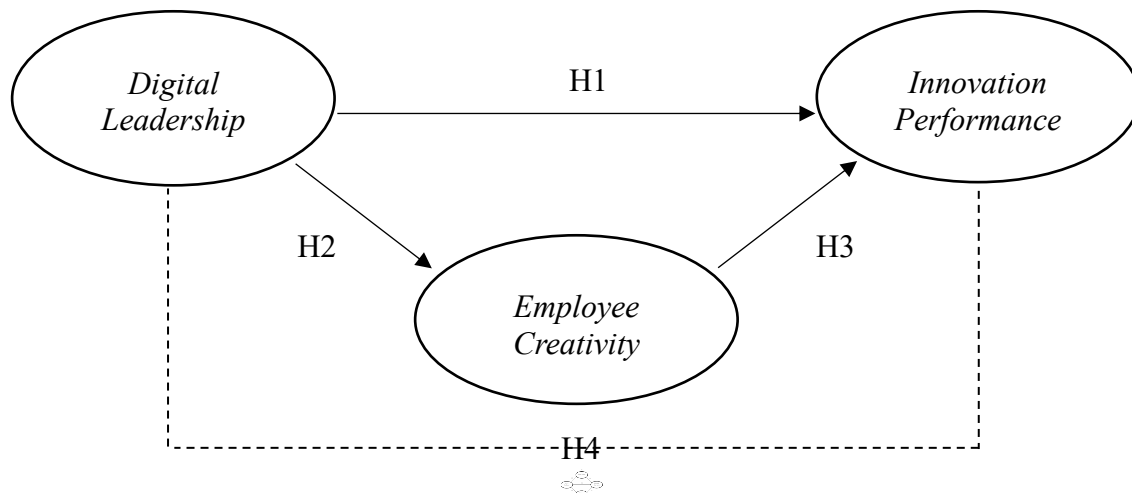


Figure 2. Hypothesis Model

3. Research Method

A quantitative method was used in this study, and to determine the significance of the relationships between the evaluated variables, this type of research employed hypothesis testing. The study involved all employees with positions ranging from staff to field workers at XYZ Company (name anonymized), a fertilizer production company in East Java, Indonesia.

Population and sample. The total population in this study consisted of 1588 employees. The methodology of random sampling was chosen for this research, and the sample for this study was determined using the Slovin formula, namely:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

n = Number of samples required

N = Number of population

e = Sample error rate

$$n = \frac{1588}{1 + ((1588)(0,1)^2)}$$

$$n = 94,07$$

Based on the Slovin formula, the minimum number of samples required in this research is 94 respondents. With a total of 217 respondents, these minimum requirements have been met. The data analysis technique used in this research is Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

The measurement of digital leadership and digital culture adopts a research instrument from Shin et al (2023) which consists of 6 items and 5 assessment items. Innovation performance

was measured using an adaptation developed by Janssen & Yperen (2004) which consists of 9 questionnaire items.

4. Finding and Discussion

Validity and Reliability Test. Validity testing through evaluation of the AVE criteria for each research variable has met the required criteria, namely having a value greater than 0.5. However, previously there were five items that had to be eliminated because they could not meet the AVE value, namely items with codes IP4, IP8, EC4, EC6, and EC10. After considering these five items as having the lowest outer loading value, an AVE value is obtained that meets the standards. The test results show that digital leadership has a value of 0.64, innovation performance has a value of 0.51, and employee creativity has a value of 0.51. Reliability evaluation was conducted by testing the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values. Both values must exceed 0.7 to ensure the reliability of the measurements. The Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for the variables of digital leadership, innovation performance, and employee creativity all exceeded 0.7. This indicates that the three variables are reliable.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Digital Leadership	0.89	0.91	0.64
Innovation Performance	0.84	0.88	0.51
Employee Creativity	0.89	0.91	0.51

Data Analysis Results. The next test is to look at the path coefficient, t-statistic, and p-value to help in drawing conclusions from testing the proposed hypothesis. The hypothesis will be deemed significant and accepted if the p-value is below 0.05 and the statistical value exceeds 1.96.

Table 2. Hypothesis Test Results

Variable	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values	Information
Digital Leadership -> Innovation Performance	0.1071	2.0949	0.0362	Accepted
Digital Leadership -> Employee Creativity	0.4188	5.5434	0.0000	Accepted
Employee Creativity -> Innovation Performance	0.6749	11.3164	0.0000	Accepted
Digital Leadership -> Employee Creativity -> Innovation Performance	0.2826	5.3123	0.0000	Accepted

Table 2 presents the values of the structural model testing results for the testing hypothesis, which are interpreted as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Digital Leadership has a positive effect on Innovation Performance

The influence of digital leadership on innovation performance was obtained at 0.1071 with a positive influence direction. The t-statistic value is 2.0949 which is >1.96 , and the p-value is 0.0362 which is <0.05 . It can be concluded that digital leadership has a positive and significant effect on innovation performance. Therefore, H1 is proven to have been accepted.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Digital leadership has a positive effect on employee creativity

The influence of digital leadership on employee creativity was obtained by an influence of 0.4188 with a positive influence direction. The t-statistic value is 5.5434 which is >1.96 , and the p-value is 0.000 which is <0.05 . It can be concluded that digital leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity. Therefore, H2 is proven to have been accepted.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Employee creativity has a positive effect on Innovation performance

The influence of employee creativity on innovation performance was obtained by an influence of 0.6749 with a positive influence direction. The t-statistic value is 11.3154 which is >1.96 , and the p-value is 0.000 which is <0.05 . It can be concluded that employee creativity has a positive and significant effect on innovation performance. Therefore, H3 is proven to have been accepted.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Employee creativity mediates the positive impact of Digital leadership on Innovation performance

Employee creativity mediation on digital leadership and innovation performance obtained an influence of 0.2826 with a positive influence direction. The t-statistic value is 5.3123 which is >1.96 , and the p-value is 0.000 which is <0.05 . It can be concluded that employee creativity mediation has a positive and significant effect on digital leadership and innovation performance. Therefore, H4 is proven to have been accepted.

After the measurement and structural testing processes, as well as hypothesis testing, the discussion will focus on explaining each hypothesis in this research.

Digital Leadership has a positive effect on Innovation Performance. Based on the results of hypothesis testing, it can be seen that the influence of digital leadership has a significant and positive effect on innovation performance, this is shown in the p-value and t-statistics that comply with standards. This finding is in line with Wang et al (2022) which shows that there is a positive and significant influence of digital leadership on innovation performance. As well as research by Erhan et al (2021) which shows that employee perceptions of digital leadership positively and significantly affect all dimensions of innovative work behavior. Thus, these findings imply that the more management or leaders use digital leadership, the more effective practices in innovation that will produce innovation performance will be influenced.

Digital Leadership has a positive effect on Employee creativity. Based on the results of hypothesis testing, it can be seen that the influence of digital leadership has a positive and significant influence on employee creativity. This is shown by the t-statistical value and p-value according to standards which show the significance of the relationship between these variables.

The empirical results of the significance of the direct influence of digital leadership on employee creativity are also in line with and support the arguments of previous research, namely by Zhu et al (2022) conducted in various companies in China, that leaders who have a digital leadership style play an important role in helping to create employee creativity. The consistency between the findings of this study and those of Zhu et al (2022) adds further credibility to the view that the higher the level of digital leadership applied by leaders, the more effectively they stimulate employee creativity. The results of this study imply that leaders who are capable of integrating aspects of digital leadership tend to create an environment conducive to the development of creative ideas, ultimately fostering employee creativity.

Employee creativity has a positive effect on innovation performance. The data management related to the variable of employee creativity on innovation performance indicates that as proposed in hypothesis 3, it is accepted. With p-value and t-statistic values meeting the standards, it can be said that the direct influence of employee creativity on innovation performance is positively and significantly categorized. The empirical evidence regarding the significance of the direct influence of employee creativity on innovation performance aligns with and supports the arguments of previous research by Chaubey & Sahoo (2022) that employee creativity plays a crucial role in generating and fostering innovation performance. Therefore, the higher the practices of employee creativity, the higher the resulting innovation performance.

Employee creativity mediates the positive impact of Digital leadership on Innovation performance. Based on the results of hypothesis testing, the mediating role of employee creativity has a significant and positive effect on digital leadership and innovation performance. This can be seen from the p-value and t-statistic which meet the established standards. Research on the mediating influence of employee creativity from digital leadership on innovation performance supports the findings of Shandu and Naqbi (2022) in the information technology and telecommunications industry in the UAE. This research shows that transformational and transactional leadership styles influence innovation performance through the mediation of individual employee creativity. However, this research uses a different leadership style, namely digital leadership. Based on existing literature, digital leadership is characterized by the integration of transformational leadership style with the utilization of digital technology. (AlNuaimi et al., 2022; Mihardjo et al., 2019). In a digital context, transformational leadership has a similar meaning to digital leadership. Hence, it can be deduced that digital leadership affects innovation performance by leveraging employee creativity as a mediator.

5. Conclusion

This research aims to test the influence of digital leadership on innovation performance with employee creativity as a mediator at Company XYZ, a fertilizer production company. The research results show that digital leadership has a positive and significant effect on innovation performance and employee creativity. Apart from that, employee creativity also has a significant effect on innovation performance and mediates the relationship between digital leadership and innovation performance. This confirms that digital leadership plays an important

role in improving innovation performance at PT XYZ, both directly and indirectly through increasing employee creativity, which encourages the creation of creative ideas for new products or services.

This research contributes to the literature by showing that effective digital leadership can improve innovation performance in the workplace. Digital leadership, which combines transformational leadership and digital skills (Shin et al., 2023), has been proven to support employee creativity. This emphasizes the important role of leaders in increasing employee creativity for innovation performance. This research also addresses a deficiency in the literature by examining digital leadership as a primary predictor of employee creativity at the micro level (Zhu et al., 2022). The findings of this study provide valuable insights for leaders and management to respond to environmental changes by creating innovation.

This research has several limitations. First, the research was only conducted on one organization. Future research should involve data from multiple industries for more in-depth comparison and analysis. Second, a larger sample from different sectors would allow a clearer comparison of the relationships tested. Third, this research focuses on the correlation between digital leadership and individual-level creativity. Future studies could explore this relationship using a multi-level approach. Lastly, this research uses quantitative methods, future research needs to use qualitative methods to further explore the role of digital leadership in innovation performance.

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