Digital leadership and organisational performance: a systematic literature review

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ABSTRACT

The rapid evolution of digital technologies has fundamentally reshaped organisational structures and leadership dynamics, prompting an urgent need to understand the role of digital leadership in enhancing organisational performance. Despite growing scholarly attention, insights remain fragmented regarding how digital leadership influences performance across different organisational contexts. This systematic literature review aims to synthesise recent empirical evidence on this relationship by examining scholarly articles published between 2023 and 2025. An advanced search strategy was employed across the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases, following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, to identify, screen, and synthesise empirical studies on digital leadership and organisational performance within the specified period. After de-duplication and eligibility checks, 20 primary studies were retained for synthesis. The analysis was organised into three thematic categories: digital leadership and organisational performance in sustainable and technological contexts; digital leadership in public sector and knowledge-driven organisations; and digital leadership, employee dynamics, and organisational agility. Findings reveal that digital leadership plays a multifaceted role in improving organisational performance by enabling sustainability practices, accelerating digital transformation, and promoting innovation. This review addresses three research questions concerning adoption challenges, implementation pathways that enhance performance, and employee and managerial challenges in driving organisational change and sustainability, and proposes a conceptual research model to consolidate the reviewed evidence. In conclusion, digital leadership emerges as a strategic enabler that not only drives technological adoption but also cultivates a performance-oriented culture across sectors.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

In today's business environment, the swift progress of digital technologies has deeply reshaped how organisations operate and how leadership is exercised. This evolution has introduced the idea of digital leadership, which is now widely acknowledged as a crucial element in enhancing organisational outcomes. Digital leadership refers to the use of digital tools and strategies to support better decision-making, encourage innovation, and increase both efficiency and effectiveness across the organisation.

Studies have demonstrated that digital leadership plays a vital role in improving organisational performance across different industries. Research findings reveal that it contributes positively to digital transformation, which in turn strengthens overall organisational results (Lathabhavan & V, 2024; Qiao et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2023). This effect is visible in public sector entities, where digital leadership not only directly enhances performance but also promotes digital transformation, leading to even greater outcomes (Yusuf et al., 2023). Likewise, in private companies, digital leadership has been associated with stronger employee performance and a higher level of organisational commitment, largely due to the influence of digital transformation (Qiao et al., 2024).

There are several elements that influence how digital leadership affects organisational performance. Digital transformation and innovation act as core mediators that strengthen the link between digital leadership and improved outcomes (Lathabhavan & V, 2024; Mollah et al., 2024). Furthermore, digital culture and the digital skills of employees also contribute to this connection, underscoring the need to cultivate a supportive digital atmosphere and enhance employees' technological abilities (Shin et al., 2023). Additionally, the availability of technology and the use of data-informed management methods can shape how effectively digital leadership improves performance. These factors show that having access to digital resources and making decisions based on solid evidence are essential for achieving the full potential of digital leadership (Lathabhavan & V, 2024).

The insights from this research carry important implications for both academic understanding and organisational practice. To boost performance, organisations should focus on developing strong digital leadership and building a culture that encourages transformation through digital means. This requires investing in modern technologies, providing training to upgrade employees' digital competencies, and applying management approaches grounded in evidence. These steps can lead to improved organisational outcomes, long-term success, and stronger competitiveness in the digital age (Mollah et al., 2024; Qiao et al., 2024; Shin et al., 2023).

To summarise, digital leadership serves as a key contributor to organisational success in the current era. By recognising and addressing the factors that influence this relationship, organisations can better manage the challenges of digital transformation and attain enhanced performance. For definitional clarity, this systematic literature review (SLR) adopts widely used operationalisations of digital leadership that emphasise vision-driven, technology-enabled leadership behaviours that foster innovation, digital culture, and employee capabilities (Shin et al., 2023; Chatterjee et al., 2023). Prior systematic evidence on digital leadership remains fragmented. Accordingly, this SLR consolidates recent empirical studies published between 2023-2025 and explicitly applies the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) to enhance transparency and reproducibility.

Outline of the study: Section 2 synthesises the relevant literature; Section 3 presents the research questions using the PICo framework; Section 4 details the PRISMA-based methodology; Section 5 provides a conceptual research model; Section 6 reports the results, including the quality appraisal; Section 7 discusses the findings in relation to the three research questions; Section 8 outlines the theoretical and practical implications; and Section 9 concludes the paper by highlighting the limitations and directions for future research.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of digital leadership in advancing organisational performance has emerged as a focal point across disciplines, industries, and global regions. Digital leadership is increasingly recognised as a strategic enabler, particularly in contexts of digital transformation or high uncertainty. Numerous empirical studies highlight its importance across sectors, including manufacturing, healthcare, education, and public administration. For instance, in Chinese manufacturing firms, digital leadership has been linked to the advancement of circular economy practices, which directly contribute to enhanced organisational performance (Khan et al., 2024). In Vietnam's coal mining industry, digital leadership shows no direct impact on performance but exerts a strong indirect effect via digital transformation initiatives (Van Chien et al., 2023). Similarly, in Indian SMEs during the COVID-19 crisis, digital leadership, when coupled with digital training and empowerment, facilitates performance improvement, particularly when mediated by organisational resilience (Lathabhavan & Kuppusamy, 2024). These findings underscore a key trend: digital leadership often functions indirectly, exerting its influence through mediators such as transformation strategies, empowerment, and sustainability practices.

A major strength of the current body of literature is its incorporation of mediating constructs, which enrich our understanding of the mechanisms through which digital leadership influences performance. Empowerment (Khan et al., 2025), digital innovation behaviour (Yuan & Khan, 2024), and employee digital capabilities (Shin et al., 2023), consistently mediate the leadership–performance link. However, not all mediators yield consistent outcomes. In the Indonesian student club context, digital leadership significantly impacted digital skills and organisational performance, but digital skills failed to mediate this relationship (Maulida & Prasetyaningtyas, 2024). Furthermore, sample sizes and design limitations weaken some findings. For example, most studies employ cross-sectional methods, limiting causal inference. Additionally, even when models such as structural equation modelling (SEM) are used (Fatima & Masood, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2023), the absence of longitudinal data restricts understanding of how digital leadership evolves and sustains its impact over time.

The literature further emphasises the role of organisational learning, knowledge sharing, and innovation as essential internal processes influenced by digital leadership. The Resource-Based View framework is often applied to explain how digital leadership leverages internal capabilities for competitive advantage (Lathabhavan & V, 2024; Mollah et al., 2024, 2025). For instance, Mollah et al (2023) found that organisational learning, rather than IT infrastructure alone, mediated the impact of digital leadership on performance. Similarly, Fatima and Masood (2024) demonstrated that open innovation is driven by knowledge sharing and innovation capability, both of which are influenced by digital leadership. Saif et al. (2025) introduced digital citizenship as a partial mediator that enhances knowledge sharing and performance in healthcare. These studies suggest that digital leadership excels not by technological implementation alone, but by cultivating cognitive, behavioural, and cultural enablers that amplify its organisational impact.

In dynamic and crisis-laden environments, agility and adaptability emerge as crucial extensions of digital leadership. In the supply chain context, Dubey et al. (2024) demonstrated that digital leadership facilitates crisis management by improving coordination and talent flexibility through digital transformation. Carbonara and Basile (2025) echoed this in their research on smart working models, where digital leadership mediates the relationship between enabling resources and organisational performance. These findings converge on the idea that digital leadership becomes essential in high-uncertainty or remote work scenarios, making it a critical capability for post-pandemic organisational resilience.

Sectoral studies confirm that digital leadership transcends industry boundaries. In public universities, it fosters innovation through enhanced employee innovation behaviour (Yuan & Khan, 2024). In healthcare, adaptive digital leadership improves communication, team building, and service quality (Sayyed et al., 2025). In education, digital leadership dimensions like visionary thinking and digital citizenship improve emotional intelligence and knowledge sharing, ultimately benefiting institutional performance (Anwar & Saraih, 2024). These findings reinforce digital leadership's relevance across diverse

institutional cultures. However, contextual limitations emerge. Hammami (2024) found that in the telecom sector, digital leadership failed to generate performance benefits due to weak managerial knowledge systems. Similarly, Firmansyah et al. (2025) reported that in Indonesia's tax administration, digital leadership did not significantly moderate intellectual capital's impact on performance, indicating barriers in traditional, bureaucratic structures.

The increasing integration of AI and digital ethics introduces a new frontier in digital leadership. Anvari (2025) emphasises that modern digital leaders must not only adopt AI technologies but also strategically manage their implications, particularly in human resources and algorithmic decision-making. This shift requires a blend of technological literacy, ethical foresight, and strategic governance skills traditionally absent from leadership development models. As organisations become more digitally complex, the demand for ethically grounded, innovation-oriented leadership will intensify. This evolution expands the leadership mandate from simply driving change to managing risk, trust, and accountability in AI-driven environments.

Despite its growth, the literature on digital leadership and organisational performance has notable gaps. First, only a minority of studies employ longitudinal or time-lagged designs, limiting the ability to track performance changes over time (Khan et al., 2024). Second, there is a disproportionate geographic concentration of research in Asia, particularly China, India, and Vietnam, with limited cross-cultural comparisons involving Western or African contexts (Hammami, 2024; Mollah et al., 2025; Shin et al., 2023). Third, while mediators such as innovation, digital behaviour, and empowerment are frequently examined, their effectiveness varies across settings and remains under-theorised. For example, empowerment mediates outcomes in healthcare but shows mixed results in student organisations (Khan et al., 2025; Maulida & Prasetyaningtyas, 2024). Furthermore, potential moderators such as organisational resilience, technological readiness, or environmental volatility are underexplored, despite their critical role in shaping outcomes (Dubey et al., 2024; Lathabhavan & Kuppusamy, 2024).

Although most studies focus on manufacturing, education, healthcare, public administration, and smart working findings by Mollah et al. (2024) provide insights relevant to banking and financial services. Similarly, findings from public and knowledge-driven sectors (Yusuf et al., 2023; Yuan & Khan, 2024; Saif et al., 2025) are instructive for nonprofit and NGO environments, where mission-driven performance, empowerment, and knowledge sharing are central. These domains are identified as priorities for future empirical SLR coverage and are reflected in the implications and future research agenda.

In summary, digital leadership is widely recognised as a critical driver of organisational performance, particularly in digitally transforming and uncertain environments. Its impact is most effective when coupled with mediating mechanisms such as innovation behaviour, knowledge sharing, employee empowerment, and strategic IT alignment. However, inconsistencies in mediating outcomes, sectoral rigidity, and methodological constraints highlight the need for more diversified, longitudinal, and cross-contextual research. As organisations continue to navigate the challenges of digitalisation, AI, and hybrid work models, digital leadership research must evolve to address emerging ethical, strategic, and operational complexities in shaping future-ready organisations.

2.1   Theoretical Foundations

To strengthen the theoretical grounding of this review, three lenses frequently used to explain the digital leadership and organisational performance relationship are foregrounded. First, the Resource-Based View and dynamic capabilities perspectives emphasise how digital leadership mobilises internal resources to achieve competitive advantage (Mollah et al., 2023, 2024, 2025; Lathabhavan & V, 2024). Second, socio-technical systems and digital culture and capability perspectives highlight the interaction between technology, human capabilities, and organisational culture (Shin et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2025). Third, transformational and e-leadership perspectives emphasise vision, empowerment, and innovation as key drivers of performance outcomes in digital contexts (Yuan & Khan, 2024; Fatima & Masood, 2024). Together, these perspectives explain how leaders integrate digital assets, human capital, and organisational culture to enhance performance.

3.   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Developing precise research questions is a crucial element in conducting a systematic literature review, as these questions establish the core structure that directs the entire process. They define the boundaries and focus of the review, determining which studies should be considered or excluded, thus ensuring that the review remains closely aligned with the research topic. Clearly defined questions facilitate a well-organised and thorough search of the literature, helping to include all relevant studies that address the main aspects of the subject. This strategy helps reduce potential bias and supports a comprehensive integration of existing research.

In addition, research questions provide a clear framework for managing and sorting the data collected from selected publications. They contribute to the accurate interpretation and combination of findings, leading to conclusions that are both insightful and applicable. Well-crafted questions remove uncertainty, ensuring that the review remains consistent with its original goals and increases the practical significance of the results. Furthermore, thoughtfully formulated questions enhance the transparency and repeatability of the review process, allowing future researchers to replicate or build upon the study. In summary, strong research questions are fundamental in achieving the goals of a systematic review, whether it involves identifying areas lacking sufficient research, evaluating the results of specific interventions, or analysing patterns within a particular area of study.

Establishing the research questions is not only an essential step in the planning stage but also a key aspect of the systematic review methodology (Kitchenham, 2007). Since the purpose of this review is to investigate and assess recent advancements in the field, the PICo framework was used, as recommended by Lockwood et al. (2015). This framework, commonly applied in qualitative studies to help structure research questions, includes three components: Population, Interest, and Context.

Applying the PICo framework allows for the formulation of precise and structured research questions by clearly identifying these three core elements. This structured approach improves the focus and clarity of the research, facilitating the identification of relevant studies. Based on this approach, this study developed the following research questions:

1.   What are the main issues and problems encountered by organisational leaders (Population) in adopting digital leadership (Interest) within organisational settings (Context)?
2.   How is digital leadership (Interest) implemented by organisations (Population) to enhance organisational performance (Context)?
3.   What challenges do employees and managers (Population) face in applying digital leadership (Interest) to drive organisational change and sustainability (Context)?

We confirm that this SLR employs the PICo (Population–Interest–Context) framework to structure the three research questions.

4.   METHODOLOGY

The PRISMA method, which stands for Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, is a widely recognised standard used for conducting systematic literature reviews. It promotes transparency, completeness, and consistency throughout the review process (Page et al., 2021). By following the PRISMA guidelines, researchers can enhance the reliability and precision of their reviews, as the framework provides detailed instructions on how to systematically locate, assess, and select studies for inclusion. The approach also emphasises the importance of randomised studies, recognising their role in minimising bias and strengthening the quality of evidence. In this study, two comprehensive databases, Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, were selected due to their extensive coverage and credibility.

PRISMA divides the review process into four main steps: identification, screening, eligibility, and data extraction. During the identification step, relevant studies are gathered by searching selected databases. The screening step involves comparing these studies with predefined criteria to filter out those that do not meet the necessary standards. In the eligibility step, the remaining studies are reviewed in more depth to verify they fulfil all inclusion conditions. Finally, the data extraction step involves collecting and organising information from the chosen studies, which is critical for drawing accurate and useful conclusions. This systematic approach ensures that the review is performed with a high level of rigor, producing dependable results that can inform both future research and practical applications.

We explicitly follow PRISMA 2020 reporting guidelines (Page et al., 2021) and provide a PRISMA-style flow diagram (Figure 2). The search strategy was applied to two major databases: Scopus and WoS. For Scopus, the search used TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Digital leadership" AND "organisational performance") limited to articles published between 2023 and 2025. For WoS, the search included ("digital leadership" AND "organisational performance") with the same publication years and restricted to article document types.

Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed journal articles, published in English, and in the final publication stage. Exclusion criteria were non-English publications, articles published before 2023, and conference papers, book chapters, reviews, or in-press articles.

4.1   Identification

The identification phase serves as the initial and essential step in the process of conducting a systematic literature review, following the PRISMA guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). This stage centres on performing a thorough and well-organised search for relevant academic sources using clearly specified keywords and predetermined inclusion criteria. In the context of this research, the main objective is to investigate the connection between Digital Leadership and Organisational Performance, a topic that has gained notable attention both academically and practically due to the ongoing shift towards digital transformation and strategic leadership.

For this purpose, two leading academic databases, Scopus and WoS, were chosen for their strong indexing quality, broad subject coverage, and representation of peer-reviewed research in fields such as management, leadership, and digital innovation. The search process produced 25 results from Scopus and 118 from WoS, giving a preliminary total of 143 distinct articles considered for the following steps of screening, assessment, and synthesis. The search terms and strategy applied in the study are detailed in Table 1.

The disparity in search results between Scopus and WoS can be attributed to several contextual and structural differences in the databases. WoS generally hosts a broader range of journals in the social sciences and business domains and often indexes journals earlier in their publication cycle compared to Scopus. Furthermore, WoS's curated indexing of high-impact journals and its stronger archival coverage may explain its higher retrieval rate for articles matching the digital leadership–organisational performance nexus. However, the inclusion of Scopus remains justified due to its growing repository of interdisciplinary journals and its strong representation in technology and innovation research, critical dimensions for the digital leadership theme. Employing both databases ensures methodological robustness by mitigating database bias and enhancing the comprehensiveness of the identification process. Additionally, it reflects adherence to best practices in systematic literature review methodology, where triangulation of multiple data sources is recommended to ensure validity and minimise the risk of overlooking seminal contributions. Thus, the combined total of 143 records serves as a well-rounded and methodologically defensible starting point for a rigorous literature synthesis that aligns with PRISMA standards.

Table 1. The search string

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Digital leadership" AND "organisational performance") AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2023) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2024) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2025)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar"))
	Date of Access: 7 August 2025
WoS	"digital leadership" and "organisational performance" and 2025 or 2024 or 2023 (Publication Years) and Web of Science Core Collection (Database) and Article (Document Types) and 2025 or 2024 or 2023 (Publication Years) and Article (Document Types) and Web of Science Core Collection (Database)
	Date of Access: 7 August 2025

4.2 Screening

Following the initial identification phase, the systematic review progressed into the screening stage, a critical step within the PRISMA framework that ensures relevance, quality, and focus in the literature selected for inclusion. From the initial 143 records retrieved (25 from Scopus and 118 from WoS), a rigorous screening process was conducted to assess the relevance and quality of each source based on pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria. The screening process involved a two-stage filtration. First, articles were screened by title and abstract to remove items not directly aligned with the intersection of Digital Leadership and Organisational Performance. This preliminary assessment yielded 18 relevant records from Scopus and 51 from WoS, narrowing the pool to 69 studies considered potentially eligible for full-text review. This reduction reflects a significant refinement, underscoring the importance of stringent criteria in maintaining a focused scope of high-quality, peer-reviewed journal articles.

The exclusion of 74 records during this phase was guided by well-defined criteria to ensure academic rigor and contextual relevance. Specifically, articles that were non-English, published before 2023, or classified as conference papers, book chapters, reviews, or in-press works were systematically removed, as seen in Table 2. These exclusions are consistent with best practices in SLR methodology, which recommend focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles in English to maintain consistency, accessibility, and quality across the review. The exclusion of conference papers and in-press articles is particularly crucial, as such sources may not have undergone full peer review and often lack the depth and methodological transparency required for systematic synthesis. Furthermore, by setting a temporal boundary from 2023 onward, the review prioritises current and relevant literature, capturing recent advancements in digital leadership frameworks, organisational adaptability, and performance metrics in the digital era.

Table 2. The selection criterion in searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	2023 – 2025	< 2023
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press

Additionally, a de-duplication process identified and removed 12 redundant entries appearing across both databases, further refining the dataset to avoid skewed representation of frequently indexed articles. The final result, a curated set of 69 unique, relevant, and high-quality studies, represents a methodologically sound foundation for the subsequent eligibility and synthesis stages. This outcome reflects the review's commitment to methodological rigor, conceptual clarity, and academic relevance in evaluating the evolving discourse surrounding digital leadership and its measurable impact on organisational performance.

4.3   Eligibility

In alignment with the PRISMA framework, the third stage of the systematic review process, eligibility, involves a deeper and more critical evaluation of the articles retained after the initial screening. From the 69 articles that passed the screening phase, a total of 57 full-text articles were successfully accessed for thorough examination. This step aimed to determine whether each study met the core inclusion criteria based on the review's objectives, scope, and methodological rigor. At this stage, inclusion was contingent upon a clear and direct focus on the relationship between *Digital Leadership* and *Organisational Performance*, supported by empirical evidence, theoretical relevance, or conceptual depth. Each article was evaluated based on the coherence and alignment of its title, abstract, methodology, and findings with the overarching research objective. The use of a detailed review protocol ensured consistency and objectivity in decision-making, thus enhancing the reliability of the eligibility process.

Out of the 57 full-text articles reviewed, 37 were excluded based on several critical factors. Articles were removed if they were found to be outside the thematic scope of the review (e.g., those focusing on digital transformation without leadership elements, or on leadership without performance outcomes), if the title lacked relevance, or if the abstract failed to indicate any direct link to digital leadership's influence on organisational performance. Additionally, several studies were excluded due to the unavailability of full-text access, which impeded the ability to assess the methodological soundness and substantive content of the research. These exclusions, while narrowing the dataset significantly, were essential in preserving the conceptual integrity and academic focus of the review. The final result, a set of 20 primary studies, represents a highly curated and thematically aligned body of literature. These studies form the empirical and theoretical backbone of the synthesis phase and provide a strong foundation for analysing contemporary insights, methodological approaches, and practical implications surrounding digital leadership's impact on organisational performance. The rigorous selection process at this stage reinforces the review's commitment to quality, relevance, and academic contribution, ensuring that only the most pertinent and methodologically sound studies are advanced for in-depth analysis.

4.4   Data Abstraction and Analysis

This study applied an integrated analysis method as a central evaluation strategy to explore and combine findings from various qualitative research designs. The main goal was to uncover and organise major themes and related subthemes connected to the core focus of the research. The process started with gathering data, which laid the groundwork for identifying thematic patterns. As shown in Figure 2, the authors performed an in-depth analysis of 20 selected studies, extracting relevant content and statements aligned with the study's objectives. This step was followed by a critical review of the existing literature concerning digital leadership and organisational performance, including an examination of the research methods used and significant findings across the selected sources. The lead researcher collaborated closely with the co-authors to develop thematic categories based on the collected data. During this stage, a reflective journal was used to document observations, interpretations, questions, and any insights that emerged from the data. To ensure consistency and reliability, the resulting themes were reviewed for discrepancies, and any differences in interpretation were resolved through team discussions.

4.5   Quality of Appraisal

In line with the methodological guidance provided by Kitchenham and Charters (Kitchenham, 2007), once the relevant primary studies were selected, their methodological quality was evaluated, and a comparative analysis was carried out. This review adopted the evaluation framework presented by Abouzahra et al. (2020), which is based on six quality criteria labelled QA1 to QA6. Each study was reviewed using a standardised scoring approach: a full score of 1 was given if the criterion was completely met (Yes), a score of 0.5 if it was partly fulfilled (Partly), and a score of 0 if the criterion was not met (No).

The evaluation is based on six specific criteria:

- QA1. Is the aim of the study clearly defined?
- QA2. Is the relevance and value of the research clearly explained?
- QA3. Is the research method clearly outlined?
- QA4. Are the core concepts and approach well explained?
- QA5. Is the study compared and assessed against other similar research?
- QA6. Are the study's limitations clearly acknowledged?

Each study is reviewed independently by three evaluators using these criteria. The total score is obtained by adding the individual scores given by all reviewers. To move forward in the systematic review process, a study must achieve a combined score higher than 3.0. This requirement ensures that only high-quality and relevant research is included in the final analysis.

4.6 Conceptual research model

To consolidate the evidence, we propose a conceptual research model derived from the twenty included studies (see Figure 1). Digital Leadership influences Organisational Performance, reflecting both direct and indirect effects. The model incorporates key mediating and moderating factors identified across the reviewed studies.
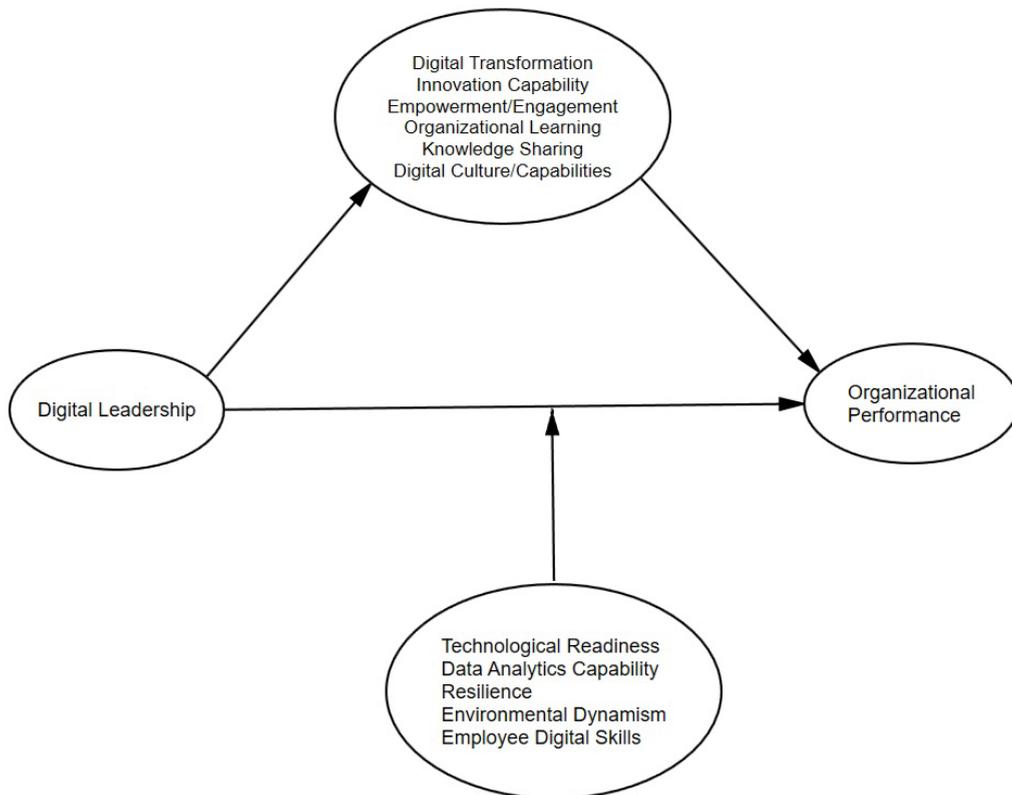

Fig. 1. Conceptual Research Model

Key mediators include:
- Digital Transformation
- Innovation Capability
- Empowerment and Engagement
- Organisational Learning and Knowledge Sharing
- Digital Culture and Capabilities

Contextual moderators include:
- Technological Readiness and Data Analytics Capability
- Resilience
- Environmental Dynamism
- Employee Digital Skills

Textual schematic:

Digital Leadership → {Digital Transformation; Innovation Capability; Empowerment and Engagement; Organisational Learning and Knowledge Sharing; Digital Culture and Capabilities} → Organisational Performance, with moderators (Technological Readiness and Data Analytics Capability, Resilience, Environmental Dynamism, Employee Digital Skills) conditioning these paths.

This conceptual research model is aligned with PRISMA-synthesised findings and serves as a framework to structure the discussion and implications. It provides a clear representation of how digital leadership affects organisational performance both directly and indirectly, while considering key mediators and contextual moderators that shape these relationships.

5.   FINDINGS

The quality assessment of the selected studies was conducted using six criteria, each scored as 1 (fully met), 0.5 (partly met), or 0 (not met). The total scores across the studies ranged from 4.0 to 6.0 out of a possible 6, reflecting an overall high methodological quality. Most studies scored consistently well on the first three criteria, indicating strong alignment with essential quality benchmarks. However, some variation was observed in the latter criteria, particularly QA5 and QA6, where several studies partially met the standards, leading to scores of 0.5 in those categories. The highest-rated study achieved a perfect score of 6.0 (100%), while others mostly scored above 4.0, corresponding to a minimum of 67% in quality percentage. This demonstrates that the majority of the included research possesses sound rigor and reliability, with minor gaps primarily in areas related to detailed reporting or completeness. Overall, the assessment confirms the credibility of the reviewed literature for supporting conclusions on digital leadership and organisational performance, as shown in Figure 2.
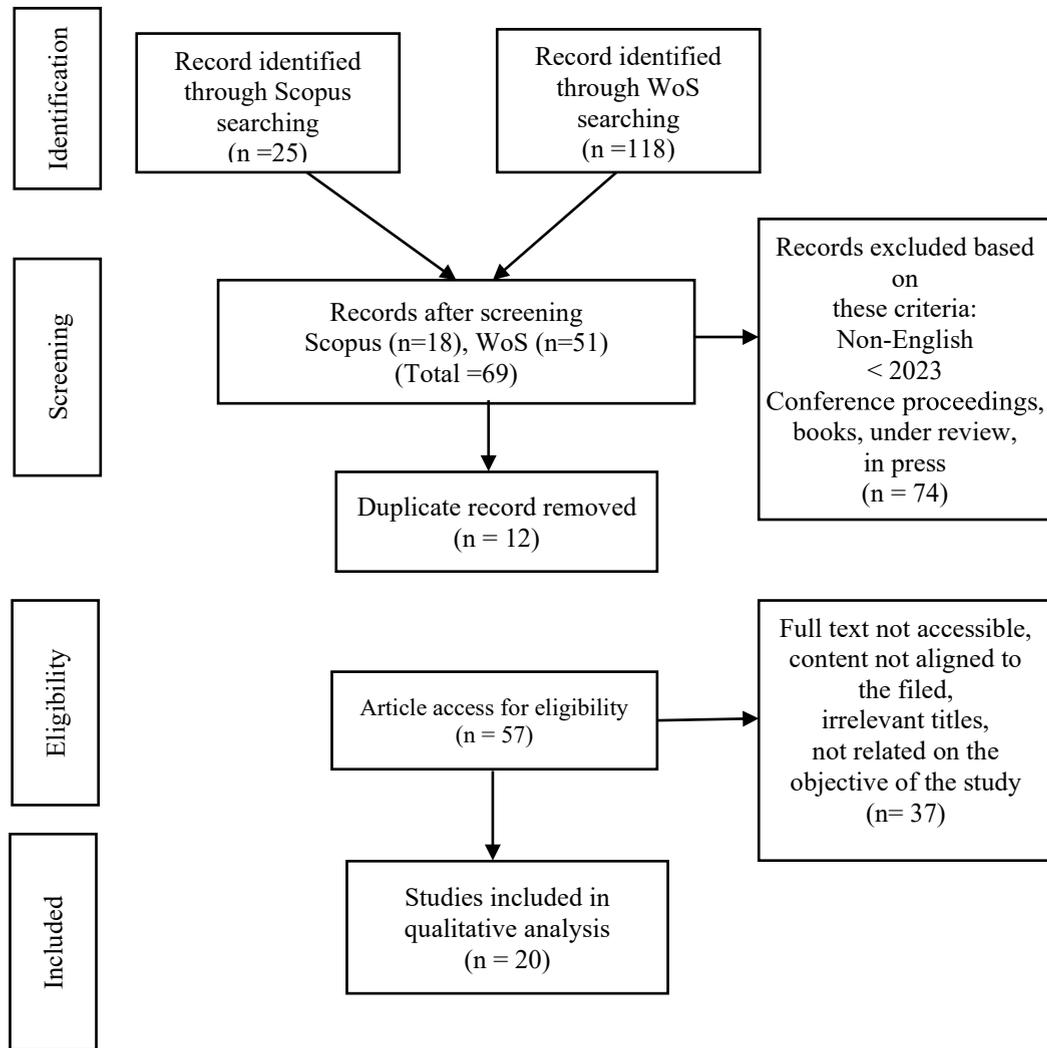
Fig. 2. Flow chart of the literature search

Linking findings to research questions:

RQ1 – Adoption issues and problems in implementing digital leadership within organisational settings:

Barriers to adoption are largely socio-technical and institutional (e.g., capability gaps (Maulida & Prasetyaningtyas, 2024), bureaucratic constraints (Firmansyah et al., 2025), and managerial knowledge systems (Hammami, 2024)), suggesting that digital leadership effectiveness depends on complementary investments in employee skills, analytics, and governance structures (Hammami, 2024; Lathabhavan & V, 2024; Firmansyah et al., 2025).

RQ2 – Implementation pathways that enhance organisational performance:

The strongest performance effects occur when digital leadership activates mediating mechanisms, including digital transformation (Yusuf et al., 2023; Van Chien et al., 2023), innovation capability/open innovation (Fatima & Masood, 2024; Yuan & Khan, 2024), empowerment/engagement (Khan et al., 2025; Lathabhavan & Kuppusamy, 2024), organisational learning/knowledge-sharing (Mollah et al., 2023; Saif et al., 2025), and digital culture/capabilities (Shin et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2025), especially under conditions of sufficient technological readiness and organisational resilience (Yusuf et al., 2023; Fatima & Masood, 2024; Mollah et al., 2023, 2024, 2025). Contextual moderators such as resilience and technological readiness further strengthen these pathways (Lathabhavan & V, 2024; Carbonara & Basile, 2025).

RQ3 – Employee and managerial challenges in driving organisational change and sustainability:

Leaders must balance technology adoption with human-centric strategies, where empowerment and motivation are pivotal (Öztirak & Bayram, 2023; Palmucci et al., 2025). Remote and smart-working contexts require coordinated digital culture, mobile tooling, and skill upgrading (Carbonara & Basile, 2025). Sustainability outcomes depend on absorptive capacity, an innovation-supportive atmosphere, and ethical governance (Cheng et al., 2025; Anvari, 2025).

6. DISCUSSION

To effectively interpret the selected studies and uncover common patterns, the finalised articles were categorised into three key thematic areas based on their focus and scope. This thematic classification allows for a structured discussion that highlights how digital leadership influences various organisational outcomes across different contexts. The identified themes reflect the prevailing research interests and provide insights into the multidimensional impact of digital leadership on sustainability, public sector performance, and employee dynamics, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3. Result Performance for Quality Assessment of Primary Data

Author(s) /Year	Title	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	Total Mark	(%)
Khan et al. (2024)	Digitalisation for a sustainable performance: Dual-Study analysis of digital leadership, circular economy, and technological innovation	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	4.0	67%
Firmansyah et al. (2025)	Unlocking public sector excellence: The synergy of intellectual capital and digital leadership in tax administration	1	1	1	1	1	1	6.0	100%
Lathabhavan & Kuppusamy (2024)	Examining the role of digital leadership and organisational resilience on the performance of SMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0	4.0	67%
Carbonara & Basile (2025)	Organisation performance in smart working settings: The mediating role of digital leadership	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	5.0	83%
Hammami (2024)	Digital leadership moderating effect in improving the	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.5	4.5	75%

Author(s) /Year	Title	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	Total Mark	(%)
	organisational performance of telecom companies through the organisational knowledge capabilities pillars								
Shin et al. (2023)	Sustainability and organisational performance in South Korea: The effect of digital leadership on digital culture and employees' digital capabilities	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	5.0	83%
Yusuf et al. (2023)	Exploring the role of digital leadership and digital transformation on the performance of the public sector organisations	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	5.0	83%
Mollah et al. (2025)	Digital leadership and organisational performance in the post COVID-19: Mediating roles of human capital development and technological innovation	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	92%
Lathabhavan & V (2024)	Examining the impact of digital leadership on data analytics capability and organisational performance in the Indian context	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	92%
Mollah et al. (2023)	Exploring a pathway to sustainable organisational performance of South Korea in the Digital Age: The effect of digital leadership on it capabilities and organisational learning	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	92%
Mollah et al. (2024)	Nexus among digital leadership, digital transformation, and digital innovation for sustainable financial Performance: Revealing the influence of environmental dynamism	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	92%
Van Chien et al. (2023)	The impact of digital leadership on organisational performance: A study in Vietnam's coal mining companies	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	5.0	83%

Author(s) /Year	Title	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	Total Mark	(%)
Palmucci et al. (2025)	The post-COVID era: Digital leadership, organisational performance and employee motivation	1	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5	4.0	67%
Khan et al. (2024)	Digitalisation for a sustainable performance: Dual-Study analysis of digital leadership, circular economy, and technological innovation	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	92%
Khan et al. (2025)	Digital leadership enhances employee empowerment, techno-work engagement, and sustainability: SEM analysis in public healthcare	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	92%
Chatterjee et al. (2023)	Digital workplace and organisation performance: Moderating role of digital leadership capability	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	92%
Malik et al. (2025)	Navigating the change: a case study of the textile industry on digital leadership, digital transformation and innovative business models	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	5.0	83%
Öztirak & Bayram (2023)	The mediator role of individual motivation in the relationship between digital leadership and organisational agility	1	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	5.0	83%
Carbonara & Basile (2025)	Organisation performance in smart working settings: The mediating role of digital leadership	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	92%
Cheng et al. (2025)	Using the new positive aspect of digital leadership to improve organisational sustainability: Testing a moderated mediation model	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	5.5	92%

6.1　　Digital leadership and organisational performance in sustainable and technological contexts

The influence of digital leadership on sustainable organisational performance is widely acknowledged across multiple industries and geographic contexts. A consistent finding in various studies is that digital leadership significantly contributes to organisational sustainability through mediators such as digital capabilities, innovation, and culture. For instance, Shin et al. (2023), Mollah et al. (2023), and Cheng et al. (2025) found that digital leadership directly and indirectly boosts sustainable organisational performance by enhancing digital culture and employee digital capabilities. Cheng et al. (2025) further confirmed that digital leadership positively affects both digital organisational culture and digital capability, which in turn mediate its relationship with sustainable organisational performance. Additionally, absorptive capacity and innovation atmosphere were shown to strengthen these indirect effects.

Multiple researchers have highlighted the importance of digital leadership in navigating post-pandemic challenges, digital transformation, and technological innovation. Mollah et al. (2025), Lathabhavan and V (2024), and Chatterjee et al. (2023) confirmed that digital leadership is pivotal in supporting human capital development and fostering innovation in times of organisational change. Mollah et al. (2025) highlighted the significant mediating role of human capital, while Chatterjee et al. (2023) demonstrated the moderating role of digital leadership capability in improving employee performance within digital workplaces. These studies suggest that digital leadership not only guides transformation but also ensures optimal performance under disruptive conditions.

A number of studies have investigated the mediating and moderating mechanisms through which digital leadership exerts its influence. Khan et al. (2024), Mollah et al. (2024), and Carbonara and Basile (2025) found that circular economy practices, digital transformation, and smart working capabilities serve as critical channels for digital leadership's impact. Khan et al. (2024) noted that technological innovation strengthens the relationship between circular economy practices and organisational performance. Similarly, Carbonara and Basile (2025) revealed that digital leadership mediates the link between smart working resources and enhanced organisational outcomes, reinforcing the role of digital leadership as a strategic enabler.

Other researchers explored specific organisational enablers and internal competencies required for sustaining performance under digital leadership. Hammami (2024), Van Chien et al. (2023), and Mollah et al. (2024) addressed the role of organisational knowledge capabilities, digital strategies, and transformation initiatives. Hammami (2024) found that managerial knowledge capability negatively influences performance when moderated by digital leadership, suggesting that not all knowledge-related factors are positively aligned. In contrast, Mollah et al. (2024) revealed that digital innovation and transformation mediate the impact of digital leadership on performance. Van Chien et al. (2023) observed that digital leadership influences performance indirectly through digital transformation strategies, and that employee digital skills moderate this relationship.

Finally, several studies have investigated the intersection of digital leadership with business model innovation, industry-specific dynamics, and environmental influences. Malik et al. (2025), Cheng et al. (2025), and Mollah et al. (2024) illustrated that digital leadership enables firms to adapt and thrive through business model transformation and environmental responsiveness. Malik et al. (2025) emphasised the value of leadership traits such as adaptability, honesty, and communication in fostering innovation within the textile sector. Cheng et al. (2025) and Mollah et al. (2024) noted that while external factors like environmental dynamism may not directly moderate digital leadership's impact, they significantly influence internal organisational dynamics that affect long-term sustainability.

RQ1 alignment: These findings indicate that adoption challenges are primarily socio-technical and institutional, such as capability gaps, bureaucratic constraints, and managerial knowledge limitations, suggesting that digital leadership effectiveness depends on complementary investments in employee skills, analytics, and governance structures (Hammami, 2024; Lathabhavan & V, 2024; Firmansyah et al., 2025).

6.2   Digital leadership in public sector and knowledge-driven organisations

A growing body of research has emphasised the transformative role of digital leadership in enhancing public sector performance, particularly through mechanisms such as empowerment, digital transformation, and intellectual capital utilisation. Digital leadership has emerged as a central construct for fostering performance outcomes across various public sector environments, albeit with varying levels of effectiveness based on organisational context.

Digital leadership has been shown to exert a strong and direct positive effect on the performance of public organisations, often through its ability to facilitate and accelerate digital transformation processes. As reported by Yusuf et al. (2023), digital leadership not only enhances digital transformation efforts but also independently boosts organisational performance. This linkage is supported by empirical evidence using structural equation modelling, which confirms the sequential effect of digital leadership fostering digital transformation, subsequently leading to improved public sector outcomes. These findings underline the dual pathway through which digital leadership operates: directly through leadership practices and indirectly via transformation initiatives.

Further extending this perspective, Khan et al. (2025) provide evidence from the healthcare sector, where digital leadership has been instrumental in employee empowerment. This empowerment leads to greater techno-work engagement, which is significantly contributes to sustainability performance. Importantly, their study highlights that empowerment acts as a mediating variable between digital leadership and both techno-work engagement and sustainability. These findings suggest that leadership within digital environments must prioritise human-centric strategies that enable employees to adapt and thrive in evolving technological contexts. When employees are empowered, the benefits of digital leadership extend beyond operational performance to include more strategic outcomes like sustainability.

In contrast, Firmansyah et al. (2025) present a nuanced view of the interaction between digital leadership and intellectual capital in Indonesia's Directorate General of Taxes. Their study found that while components of intellectual capital, namely structural, relational, and human capital, positively influence organisational performance, digital leadership did not significantly moderate these relationships. This divergence suggests that digital leadership, although effective as a standalone influence, may face integration challenges when combined with legacy public sector structures or existing interpersonal systems. The limited moderating effect may stem from difficulties in aligning digital initiatives with traditional performance frameworks, or from insufficient structural readiness within the public sector to embrace transformational leadership fully.

Despite these varied findings, a common thread across all studies is the recognition that digital leadership must be contextualised to fit the organisational environment in which it operates. In public sector and knowledge-driven organisations, where hierarchical structures and regulatory constraints are more pronounced, the success of digital leadership depends not just on technical capacity but also on organisational readiness and cultural alignment. Moreover, while some contexts (such as public healthcare) benefit significantly from empowerment-based leadership, others (like taxation) may require structural and procedural adjustments to fully harness digital leadership's potential.

RQ2 alignment: These findings indicate that the most effective organisational performance outcomes occur when digital leadership leverages mediating mechanisms such as digital transformation, innovation, empowerment, organisational learning, and digital culture, under conditions of sufficient technological readiness and organisational resilience (Yusuf et al., 2023; Fatima & Masood, 2024; Mollah et al., 2023, 2024, 2025).

6.3　Digital leadership, employee dynamics, and organisational agility during/post-COVID-19

The post-COVID-19 landscape has significantly reshaped the role of digital leadership, emphasising its importance in maintaining and enhancing organisational performance, particularly through employee motivation, agility, and digital workplace transformations. A cross-section of empirical studies supports the assertion that digital leadership plays a mediating and enabling role across diverse contexts, especially where resilience, smart working conditions, and motivational dynamics are critical.

A recurring finding across multiple studies is the pivotal function of employee empowerment and motivation as mechanisms through which digital leadership translates into improved organisational outcomes. Lathabhavan and Kuppusamy (2024) established that empowerment mediates the link between digital leadership and organisational performance within Indian SMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The presence of digital training enhanced this empowerment effect, while organisational resilience strengthened its connection to performance. This aligns with Palmucci et al. (2025), who identified employee motivation as a critical leadership domain in the post-pandemic period. Their qualitative analysis proposed a framework outlining new leadership competencies necessary for motivating employees under technologically intensive and uncertain conditions. Extending this concept, Öztirak and Bayram (2023) confirmed that individual motivation acts as a mediating variable between digital leadership and organisational agility. These converging insights suggest that leadership effectiveness is amplified when it integrates human-centric strategies that foster both psychological and operational agility.

The influence of digital leadership is also prominently observed in the smart working environments. Carbonara and Basile (2025) demonstrated that digital leadership acts as a mediator between smart working resources (e.g., mobile technologies, digital culture, and skills) and organisational performance. In this context, digital leadership enabled organisations to derive greater value from their technological investments, serving as a critical capability for optimal performance. Findings from this study further emphasised that digital competencies alone are insufficient without the presence of leadership structures that strategically integrate digital tools with human resource strategies. Similarly, Lathabhavan and Kuppusamy (2024) highlighted the strategic need for skill upgrades during digital transitions, especially within small and medium-sized enterprises. This indicates that digital leadership not only bridges the gap between resources and outcomes but also helps employees adapt to transformed workflows and expectations.

Across all studies, a consistent pattern emerges wherein organisational agility and adaptive capability are achieved through the synchronisation of digital leadership and employee engagement. The mediating influence of individual motivation, as observed by Öztirak and Bayram (2023), illustrates that agility is not solely dependent on systems or structures but also on employee responsiveness. When examined alongside the findings of Palmucci et al. (2025), who highlighted the importance of context-specific leadership skills, it becomes evident that successful digital leadership must adapt to evolving employee needs in volatile environments. Carbonara and Basile (2025) and Lathabhavan and Kuppusamy (2024) both confirmed that performance gains are maximised when leadership practices are aligned with digital infrastructure and resilience frameworks.

RQ3 alignment: Sustaining organisational change and agility in post-pandemic, hybrid environments relies on employee motivation, empowerment, and context-specific leadership competencies (Öztirak & Bayram, 2023; Palmucci et al., 2025; Carbonara & Basile, 2025).

In summary, the research presents the integrated role of digital leadership in fostering motivation, resilience, and strategic performance, particularly in the face of rapid technological and organisational change induced by global disruptions. As the public and private sectors navigate post-pandemic challenges, these findings suggest that cultivating leadership capabilities tailored to digitally enabled environments is essential for sustained performance and agility.

7. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Theoretical implications

This study extends the literature by integrating the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities perspective with socio-technical and transformational leadership frameworks. By examining mediation mechanisms such as employee empowerment, motivation, and digital skills, and moderators such as organisational readiness and resilience, the study highlights the complex ways in which digital leadership affects organisational performance. These findings contribute to theory by showing that digital leadership effectiveness is not universal but rather depends on organisational and contextual factors. Furthermore, the research emphasises the importance of combining human-centred strategies with technology-driven initiatives when conceptualising digital leadership in post-pandemic and hybrid work environments.

7.2 Practical implications

The findings provide actionable guidance for leaders to enhance digital leadership effectiveness. Leaders should invest in data analytics capabilities and continuously develop employee skills to ensure the effective use of digital tools. At the same time, organisations should implement empowerment and knowledge-sharing routines to foster engagement, innovation, and organisational agility. Cultivating a digital culture and an innovation-oriented atmosphere is essential for embedding adaptability and sustainable practices across the organisation. Furthermore, establishing ethical and artificial intelligence governance frameworks can maintain trust and ensure sustainable performance. Together, these practices offer managers a comprehensive approach to leveraging digital leadership for improved organisational outcomes, particularly in environments characterised by technological change and post-pandemic challenges.

8. CONCLUSION

This study synthesised the recent literature on the relationship between digital leadership and organisational performance using the PRISMA framework. Digital leadership has been instrumental in fostering organisational resilience, employee motivation, and agility under uncertain and remote work conditions. Several studies also emphasise the mediating and moderating roles of digital leadership in areas such as empowerment, motivation, and digital resource utilisation. In conclusion, digital leadership emerges as a strategic enabler that not only drives technological adoption but also cultivates a performance-oriented culture across sectors. These insights provide a foundational framework for both academic inquiry and practical implementation aimed at aligning leadership strategies with evolving digital demands.

RQ1: Adoption challenges are primarily related to capability deficits, institutional rigidities, and environmental volatility. Effective digital leadership requires complementary investments in analytics, employee skills, and governance structures.

RQ2: Pathways that enhance organisational performance operate through digital transformation, innovation, empowerment, knowledge sharing, and the development of digital culture and capabilities, all of which are reinforced by organisational readiness and resilience.

RQ3: Addressing employee and managerial challenges requires human-centric leadership that sustains motivation, empowerment, and agile routines in smart working and remote contexts while ensuring ethical governance and sustainability.

Future research could examine the emotional intelligence aspects of digital leadership, especially with the increasing prevalence of virtual teams, and their impact on organisational performance. Furthermore, future research should adopt multi-method approaches, including longitudinal, experimental, and qualitative designs, to deepen causal understanding and uncover contextual nuances. Cross-sectoral

and international comparative studies are also vital to determine whether digital leadership's efficacy is universal or context-specific. Additionally, diversity dimensions such as gender, age, and leadership style variation remain poorly understood. Ethical dimensions in artificial intelligence governance and digital trust-building also require urgent scholarly attention (Anvari, 2025). Exploring combinations of mediators and moderators, such as digital skills, emotional intelligence, innovation capacity, and digital maturity, can help build more robust explanatory models. Qualitative insights into why certain mechanisms fail or succeed in specific organisational environments will further enrich theoretical development and practical implementation.

9.   CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS

Shatha Abu-Mahfouz designed the research idea and wrote the article. Fung Chorng Yuan did the literature search and co-wrote the article. Ellen Chung worked on revising and formatting the final version of the manuscript.

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The authors state that there are no conflicts of interest.

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13.   REFERENCES

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