



Transformational leadership as a mediator of the influence of digital workplace and digital culture on employee engagement (Evidence from the Indonesian public sector)

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation is a strategic priority for public sector performance, yet employee engagement among Indonesian Civil Servants (ASN) remains low. This study examines the impact of digital workplace and digital culture on employee engagement, with transformational leadership as a mediating variable, among 399 Civil Servants in the South Sumatra Provincial Government. Utilizing a quantitative explanatory design with proportionate stratified random sampling, data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that both digital workplace and digital culture significantly and positively influence employee engagement and transformational leadership. Furthermore, transformational leadership partially mediates these relationships. These findings demonstrate that digital initiatives are most effective when supported by leadership that fosters collaboration and innovation. This study offers an empirically validated model for public sector engagement and provides actionable guidance for policymakers advancing bureaucratic reform.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bureaucratic reform is critical, as Indonesia's public service performance remains among the lowest globally. Data show 80% of civil servants deliver poor service (Riwu Kore et al., 2026), with rankings for productivity and service quality at the world's lowest levels (Haba Ora et al., 2026; Riwu Kore et al., 2023). Low scores are also recorded for work culture and bureaucratic quality (HUMAS MENPANRB, 2024; Pradana et al., 2025). alongside public dissatisfaction, inefficient work practices, and a yearly decline in professionalism (Karunia, 2022; Suryaningtyas, 2025). Riwu Kore et al. (2025) also report that the professionalism of civil servants declines by an average of 9.75% annually.

Digital transformation is crucial for improving public services in Indonesia through the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE). However, low performance of Civil Servants shows that technology needs organizational support and strong leadership

to be effective (Haba Ora, Riwu Kore, et al., 2026). While existing research confirms that digital workplace, digital culture, and transformational leadership individually drive employee engagement by enhancing collaboration, adaptability, and motivation, several critical literature gaps remain (Haba Ora, 2020; J R Riwu Kore & Haba Ora, 2022; Han et al., 2025; Sibassaha et al., 2025; Haba Ora, Riwu Kore, et al., 2026; Lolu et al., 2026; Ly, 2025; Haba Ora, 2022; Marnisah et al., 2021; Riwu Kore et al., 2022; Riwu Kore & Haba Ora, 2021).

Current literature suffers from four main limitations: theoretically, it lacks an integrated framework explaining how digital and leadership factors interact; empirically, it focuses on direct effects while neglecting mediating mechanisms; contextually, it relies heavily on private sectors in developed nations rather than public bureaucracies; and methodologically, it depends on simplistic direct-effect models. To address these limitations, transformational leadership is positioned as a critical mediating mechanism connecting digital resources to employee engagement, grounded in three core theories: Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985) for inspiring vision and change, Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) for driving employee reciprocation, and the JD-R Model for leveraging organizational resources into heightened motivation. Addressing previous literature gaps, this study proposes an integrated structural model where transformational leadership mediates the effects of digital workplace and digital culture on employee engagement among South Sumatran Civil Servants. This research extends public sector digital transformation literature by validating a holistic mediation framework and offering actionable insights for bureaucratic reform.

Based on the theoretical arguments and previous empirical findings, the following hypotheses are proposed: H1: Digital workplace has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement; H2: Digital culture has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement; H3: Digital workplace has a positive and significant effect on transformational leadership; H4: Digital culture has a positive and significant effect on transformational leadership; H5: Transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement; H6: Transformational leadership mediates the relationship between digital workplace and employee engagement; H7: Transformational leadership mediates the relationship between digital culture and employee engagement.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a cross-sectional, quantitative explanatory design surveying 399 civil servants selected from a population of 12,261 across 22 SPBE-implementing agencies in South Sumatra Province. Using Slovin's formula and proportionate stratified random sampling, 399 valid questionnaires were collected and analyzed (100% response rate) under strict ethical, voluntary, and anonymous research protocols. Data were collected using an expert-reviewed and pilot-tested structured questionnaire measuring four latent variables across 24 indicators on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). All measurement scales were adapted from validated instruments and contextually modified for the Indonesian public sector, spanning Digital Workplace (6 indicators), Digital Culture (6 indicators), Transformational Leadership (6 indicators based on Bass), and Employee Engagement (6 indicators reflecting vigor, dedication, and absorption).

Table 1. Operational variable

Variable	Dimensions	Number of Items	Source
Digital Workplace	Digital infrastructure, accessibility, communication, collaboration, flexibility, digital support	6	Chatterjee et al., 2023; Vuchkovski et al., 2023
Digital Culture	Digital values, innovation, adaptability, collaboration, knowledge sharing, digital	6	Cyfert et al., 2025; Ly,

Variable	Dimensions	Number of Items	Source
Transformational Leadership	learning Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration	6	2025 B M Bass et al., 1996; Bernard Morris Bass, 1985
Employee Engagement	Vigor, dedication, absorption	6	(Demerouti et al., 2001; Katz & Kahn, 1966)

The final sample size of $N = 399$ substantially exceeds the minimum PLS-SEM requirements (Hair et al., 2022) to ensure robust statistical power for structural model estimation and mediation testing. Common Method Bias (CMB) was assessed and ruled out via Harman's Single-Factor Test (first unrotated factor < 50% total variance) and inner VIF values below the 3.3 threshold. The measurement model was assessed for convergent validity (loading factor > 0.70), discriminant validity (AVE > 0.50), and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability > 0.70). The structural model was evaluated using R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2 . Hypotheses were tested through bootstrapping, with significance set at $t > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$; mediation was examined via indirect effect analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Of the respondents, 83.7% were male and 16.3% were female. Most respondents were aged 46–60 years (55.0%), followed by those aged 20–29 years (25.5%) and 30–45 years (24.5%). In terms of education, the majority had completed senior high school (47.5%), followed by bachelor's degree holders (42.2%) and continuing education graduates (10.3%). Regarding length of service, most respondents had worked for more than 10 years (69.7%), while 15.3% had 1–5 years of service, 11.6% had 5–10 years, and only a small proportion had less than one year of service.

3.1 Model

The study employs Variance-Based Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), as presented in the research path diagram.

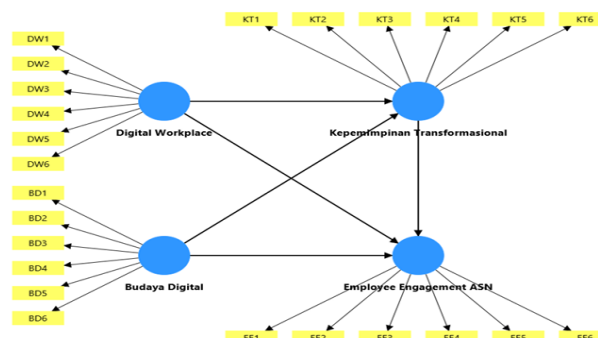


Figure 1. Structural model of the study before PLS-SEM data estimation

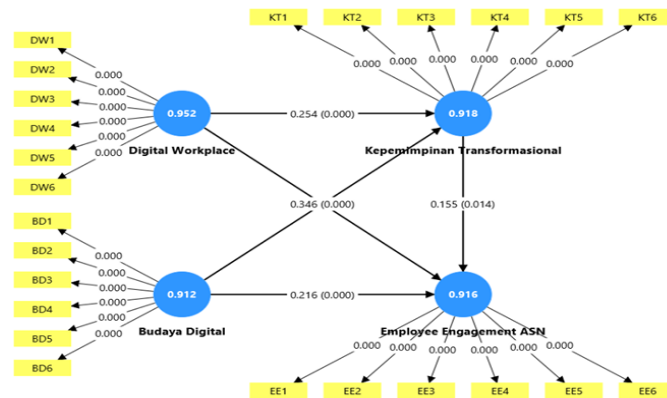


Figure 2. Structural model of the study after PLS-SEM data estimation

3.2 Validity Test

Convergent validity was evaluated using indicator loadings > 0.6 (Dam & Solanki, 2024). As shown in Table 1, all items are valid, and composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha exceed the required thresholds, confirming the constructs meet quality criteria.

Table 1. Tabulation of loading factor estimates

Variable	Construct	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha's	Composite Reliability		Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
				Rho_a	Rho_c	
Digital Culture (X ₂)	BD ₁	0.887	0.912	0.922	0.932	0.698
	BD ₂	0.884				
	BD ₃	0.872				
	BD ₄	0.878				
	BD ₅	0.679				
	BD ₆	0.792				
Digital Workplace (X ₁)	DW ₁	0.928	0.952	0.956	0.962	0.809
	DW ₂	0.928				
	DW ₃	0.930				
	DW ₄	0.935				
	DW ₅	0.803				
	DW ₆	0.866				
Employee Engagement (Y)	EE ₁	0.878	0.916	0.936	0.934	0.704
	EE ₂	0.879				
	EE ₃	0.812				
	EE ₄	0.844				
	EE ₅	0.838				
	EE ₆	0.777				
Transformational Leadership (Z)	KT ₁	0.911	0.918	0.945	0.937	0.716
	KT ₂	0.923				
	KT ₃	0.925				
	KT ₄	0.910				
	KT ₅	0.660				
	KT ₆	0.703				

Source : Processed data, 2025

3.3 Effect Size Test (F² Test)

The F² test measures effect size, with thresholds defined as large (≥ 0.35), medium (0.15–0.35), small (0.02–0.15), and negligible (< 0.02) (Hair et al., 2022). As presented in Table 2, most relationships show only a small effect size, suggesting future studies with larger samples for more robust findings.

Table 2. Effect size test (F-square test)

Interactions Between Variables	F Square Test	Category
Digital Culture → Employee Engagement	0.044	Small
Digital Culture → Transformational Leadership	0.126	Small
Digital Workplace → Employee Engagement	0.077	Small
Digital Workplace → Transformational Leadership	0.068	Small
Transformational Leadership → Employee Engagement	0.024	Small

Source : Processed data, 2025

All structural relationships are statistically significant, but the f^2 values show only small effect sizes. Digital predictors add value, yet they are not the main drivers of public sector outcomes. Engagement is multidimensional, requiring broader human resource strategies.

3.4 Q² Test

The Q-square (Q²) value assesses predictive relevance; values above 0 indicate adequate predictive capability (Table 3). All constructs meet this criterion, confirming the model has good predictive quality.

Table 3. Results of the Q² test

	Q ² Predict	RMSE	MAE
Employee Engagement	0.242	0.880	0.576
Transformational Leadership	0.255	0.871	0.543

Source : Processed data, 2025

3.5 R² Test

R² measures the variance explained by exogenous variables; values ≥ 0.26 indicate substantial explanatory power. As shown in Table 4, employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.273$) and transformational leadership ($R^2 = 0.268$) both meet this threshold, confirming the model provides a substantial explanation of their variance.

Tabel 4. R square test

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Employee Engagement	0.273	0.267
Transformational Leadership	0.268	0.265

Source : Processed data, 2025

The structural model explains 27.3% of employee engagement and 26.8% of transformational leadership. About 72% of engagement is influenced by other factors.

3.6 CV-PAT

The Cross-Validated Predictive Ability Test (CVPAT) evaluates PLS model predictive performance against the Indicator Average (IA) and Linear Model (LM) benchmarks. Lower loss values for the PLS model and a p-value < 0.05 (Table 5) confirm it has satisfactory predictive quality.

Table 5. Results of the CVPAT assessment

	PLS Loss	IA Loss	Average Loss Difference	t Value	p Value
Employee Engagement	0.964	1.157	-0.192	4.183	0.000
Transformational Leadership	0.719	0.876	-0.157	4.250	0.000
Overall	0.842	1.017	-0.175	4.881	0.000

Source : Processed data, 2025

3.7 Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR)

The SRMR fit index evaluates model fit; a value ≤ 0.08 indicates good fit. The obtained SRMR = 0.080 meets this criterion (Table 6), confirming the model has acceptable overall fit.

Table 6. Model goodness of fit test

Indicator	Saturated Model	Estimated Model	Criteria	Interpretation
SRMR	0.080	0.080	≤ 0.08	Good fit
Chi-Square	1913.473	1913.473	Relatively large	Acceptable fit
NFI	0.803	0.803	≥ 0.9	Moderate / Reasonable fit

Source : Processed data, 2025

3.8 Normed Fit Index (NFI) Text

The Normed Fit Index (NFI) assesses model fit, with values ranging from 0 to 1. The obtained NFI = 0.803 indicates moderate fit (Table 6).

3.9 Multicollinearity Test

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) tests for multicollinearity; values above 5 indicate a problem. All VIF values are below 5 (Table 7), confirming no multicollinearity exists among the exogenous variables.

Table 7. Multicollinearity test results

	VIF
Digital Culture → Employee Engagement	1.461
Digital Culture → Transformational Leadership	1.298
Digital Workplace → Employee Engagement	1.386
Digital Workplace → Transformational Leadership	1.298
Transformational Leadership → Employee Engagement	1.367

Source : Processed data, 2025

3.10 Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis testing (Table 8) reveals digital culture positively and significantly influences employee engagement ($\beta = 0.216$) and transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.346$). The digital workplace also shows positive effects on both variables. Transformational leadership significantly increases engagement and functions as a mediator for both digital culture and digital workplace; all hypotheses are supported.

Table 8. Results of hypothesis testing

Relationship Variables	Between		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	p Values	Results
Digital Culture → Employee Engagement	→		0.216	0.217	0.058	3.726	0.000	Hypothesis Accepted
Digital Culture → Transformational Leadership	→		0.346	0.350	0.058	5.991	0.000	Hypothesis Accepted
Digital Workplace → Employee Engagement	→		0.278	0.276	0.058	4.767	0.000	Hypothesis Accepted
Digital Workplace → Transformational Leadership	→		0.254	0.255	0.049	5.148	0.000	Hypothesis Accepted
Transformational Leadership → Employee Engagement	→		0.155	0.157	0.063	2.446	0.014	Hypothesis Accepted
Digital Culture → Transformational Leadership	→		0.053	0.056	0.026	2.025	0.043	Hypothesis Accepted
Digital Workplace → Transformational Leadership	→		0.039	0.041	0.019	2.022	0.043	Hypothesis Accepted

Leadership → Employee
Engagement

Source : Processed data, 2025

The mediation analysis shows partial mediation, with both direct and indirect effects significant. Digital culture and workplace affect employee engagement directly and indirectly through transformational leadership.

3.11 Effect of Digital Culture on Employee Engagement

Results confirm digital culture has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.216$, $p = 0.000$), so the hypothesis is accepted—stronger digital culture increases engagement. However, digital literacy alone shows no significant direct effect on performance. The findings align with William A Kahn et al. (1964) concept of engagement, which arises from cognitive, emotional, and behavioral connection to work. A supportive digital culture creates conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability that foster engagement. The results also support Peter Blau (1964) Social Exchange Theory: a supportive digital environment encourages employees to reciprocate with greater commitment and loyalty. Empirically, the results agree with prior studies showing digital transformation and digital culture positively influence employee engagement (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Sibassaha et al., 2025). This implies public organizations should enhance digital culture via training, infrastructure, and collaborative practices for better outcomes.

3.12 Effect of Digital Culture on Transformational Leadership

Digital culture positively and significantly influences transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.346$), as shared digital values encourage visionary and innovative leadership practices. Internalizing these values strengthens transformational leadership among civil servants, supporting the hypothesis. This result supports Bernard M. Bass (1985) transformational leadership theory, where digital culture reinforces its core dimensions of inspiration and innovation. It also aligns with Kotter's organizational change framework (Haba Ora, 2015a), which holds that digital transformation needs adaptive, visionary leadership; a strong digital culture enables leaders to communicate goals and foster commitment to technological change. Empirically, this aligns with studies showing higher digital maturity correlates with more innovative, responsive leadership. Digital culture encourages technology-driven decision-making and collaboration, strengthening transformational leadership behaviors (Cyfert et al., 2025; Sibassaha et al., 2025; Silva et al., 2025). Practically, public agencies should build digital culture through supportive policies, training, and competency development to improve leadership quality and overall performance.

3.13 Effect of Digital Workplace on Employee Engagement

The digital workplace has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.278$, $t = 4.767$, $p = 0.000$). An effective digital work environment boosts employee involvement in tasks and organizational obligations, so this hypothesis is accepted. The results align with Katz & Kahn (1966) framework, which links engagement to favorable work conditions; digital workplaces foster meaningfulness, safety, and access to resources through tools and flexibility. They also support the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), positioning the digital workplace as a key resource that eases workload pressure and raises motivation. Empirically, the findings confirm that digital workplaces boost engagement by improving collaboration, transparency, and decision-making, while fostering a sense of belonging. This aligns with Sociotechnical Systems Theory, which stresses the integration of technology and social factors (Abhari, 2025; Vuchkovski et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2025). For civil servants, digital

workplaces complement e-government systems, raising efficiency, enabling flexibility, and supporting effective task performance.

3.14 Effect of Digital Workplace on Transformational Leadership

The digital workplace positively and significantly influences transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.254$). Advanced digital systems and tools offer greater flexibility and transparency, helping leaders manage change and effectively carry out their transformational roles: influence, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The findings support B M Bass et al. (1996) transformational leadership theory, as technology helps leaders communicate vision and inspire change. They also align with the network society theory (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020), which notes that digitalization reshapes organizational structures and leadership. Empirically, digital workplaces enhance leadership effectiveness through better communication, data-driven oversight, and feedback (Ahmić & Ćosić, 2025; Khatoon et al., 2025; Tagscherer & Carbon, 2023). Thus, investing in a strong digital workplace improves both operational efficiency and leadership quality.

3.15 Effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee Engagement

Transformational leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.155$, $t = 2.446$, $p = 0.014$). Effective leadership practices strengthen employee engagement, so this hypothesis is accepted. The results support Bernard Morris Bass (1985) transformational leadership theory, where vision, inspiration, and individualized attention build the emotional connection needed for engagement. They also align with Kahn et al. (1964) engagement framework and Edward L. Deci & Ryan (1985) Self-Determination Theory, which highlights that satisfying basic psychological needs boosts employee involvement and commitment. Empirically, the results agree with existing studies showing transformational leadership positively impacts employee engagement in both public and private sectors; inspirational leaders create supportive environments that boost participation and dedication (Ali et al., 2024; Li et al., 2025; Riwu Kore, 2020). This underscores the need for training and development programs to build stronger transformational leadership competencies.

3.16 The Mediating Role of Transformational Leadership in the Relationship Between Digital Culture and Employee Engagement

Transformational leadership acts as a mediator between digital culture and employee engagement, with an indirect effect of $\beta = 0.053$ ($t = 2.025$, $p = 0.043$). Both direct and indirect effects are present, so the mediation hypothesis is accepted. The mediation finding aligns with Bernard Morris Bass (1985) transformational leadership theory and Katz & Kahn (1966) engagement framework — digital culture enables leaders to create the conditions needed for engagement. It also supports Peter Blau (1964) Social Exchange Theory: digital culture acts as organizational support, translated into leadership practices, which in turn elicits greater involvement and commitment from employees. Empirically, the findings confirm leadership serves as a key bridge between digital culture and employee engagement. Digital culture alone does not guarantee higher engagement — it depends on active leadership. Transformational leaders embed digital values into daily work, which then strengthens engagement (Boccoli et al., 2024; Cheng et al., 2025; Ly, 2024). This shows public organizations must combine digital culture development with leadership training to effectively boost employee engagement.

3.17 The Mediating Role of Transformational Leadership in the Relationship Between Digital Workplace and Employee Engagement

Transformational leadership mediates the relationship between the digital workplace and employee engagement, with an indirect effect of $\beta = 0.039$ ($t = 2.022$, $p = 0.043$). This

confirms that transformational leadership amplifies the positive impact of the digital workplace on employee engagement. The findings combine Bernard Morris Bass (1985) transformational leadership theory and Kahn et al. (1964) engagement framework: while the digital workplace boosts efficiency, its full value depends on leadership guidance and inspiration. They also align with the Job Demands-Resources Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and Sociotechnical Systems Theory (Trist), which emphasize that technology's benefits rely on alignment with social dynamics and effective leadership. Empirically, this confirms transformational leadership serves as a critical link between digital environments and engagement (Haba Ora, 2020; Fellyanus Haba Ora, 2015b; Boccoli et al., 2024; Jia et al., 2025). Practically, improving engagement requires combining a well-built digital workplace with strong transformational leadership.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that a digital workplace and digital culture significantly boost employee engagement, while transformational leadership plays a crucial role by enhancing engagement and linking the effects of the digital environment. Conducted among civil servants in South Sumatra's Regional Government Agencies, it suggests that public organizations should enhance digital infrastructure and develop leadership skills. It also recommends integrating technology with leadership and culture in reform programs. Future research should explore wider contexts and include more variables for better insights.

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