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(IJEMP)**www.gaexcellence.com/ijemp**EXPLAINING EMPLOYEE JOB PERFORMANCE
THROUGH EMPLOYEE AGILITY: A CONCEPTUAL
MODEL OF DIGITAL COMPETENCY, PERSONAL
INNOVATIVENESS, AND PERCEIVED ADAPTIVE
LEADERSHIP**Almizar Amil Hamzah^{1*}, Sylvia Nabila Azwa Ambad², Johari Abdullah³¹Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Sabah, Malaysia 2024536903@student.uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0725-8052>²Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Sabah, Malaysia nabila1793@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1693-8514>³Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Sarawak, Malaysia johariabdullah@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4330-8780>

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

Purpose: This conceptual paper develops an employee-level framework explaining how digital competency, personal innovativeness, and perceived adaptive leadership contribute to employee job performance through employee agility in the context of digital transformation. Methodology: The conceptual framework is developed through an integrative synthesis of relevant theoretical and empirical literature, with the Theory of Work Adjustment providing the overarching theoretical lens for specifying the relationships among digital competency, personal innovativeness, perceived adaptive leadership, employee agility, and employee job performance. Findings: The proposed model positions employee agility as the behavioural mechanism through which digital competency, personal innovativeness, and perceived adaptive leadership contribute to employee job performance. Digital competency provides employees with the capability to respond to digital work demands, personal innovativeness supports willingness to experiment with unfamiliar technologies, and perceived adaptive leadership provides an environmental condition supportive of behavioural adjustment. Employee agility is therefore proposed to mediate the relationships between these three antecedents and employee job performance. Research Implications: The framework provides a theoretical basis for subsequent empirical testing of the

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proposed mediation relationships and extends the application of the Theory of Work Adjustment to employee adaptation during digital transformation. Practical Implications: The model suggests that organisations seeking to sustain employee performance during digital transformation should develop digital competency, encourage technological innovativeness, strengthen adaptive leadership behaviours, and support employee agility.

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Keyword:

Digital Competency; Employee Agility; Job Performance; Perceived Adaptive Leadership; Personal Innovativeness



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Introduction

Digital transformation continues to reshape work processes, employee responsibilities, and performance expectations across organisations. As digital technologies become increasingly embedded in daily operations, employees are required to work with new systems, respond to changing task requirements, and maintain effective performance despite continuous technological and organisational change. These conditions make employee job performance an important organisational outcome, particularly because successful digital transformation ultimately depends on employees' ability to perform their core responsibilities while contributing effectively to the broader work environment. In government-linked companies (GLCs), where organisations operate under increasing expectations for organisational effectiveness and digital readiness, understanding the employee-level factors that support sustained job performance becomes particularly important.

Existing research has identified several factors that may contribute to employee effectiveness in digital transformation in the workplace. Digital competency is the ability of employees to use digital technologies and information effectively in performing work-related tasks (Ferrari, 2012; van Deursen et al., 2016), and personal innovativeness is the willingness to try and adopt new technologies (Agarwal & Prasad, 1998). Leadership factors might also shape employees' responses to organisational change, as leaders can give direction and support when work requirements are uncertain. However, these factors have been looked at in isolation and not as predictive factors for performance.

This limitation suggests that the unresolved problem is not just whether digital competency, personal innovativeness and perceived adaptive leadership are linked to job performance but how these antecedents become performance-relevant when employees encounter changing work demands. Employee agility offers a theoretically meaningful explanation (Sherehiy & Karwowski, 2014) for the capacity for employees to change their behaviour and work effectively when task requirements and work conditions change. From this perspective, possessing digital competency or being willing to experiment with new technology may not automatically produce better job performance unless employees can translate these resources into adaptive work behaviour. Similarly, perceived adaptive leadership may support performance by creating conditions that facilitate behavioural adjustment when established work routines become inadequate. Employee agility can therefore be positioned as the proximal behavioural mechanism connecting these antecedents with employee job performance.

Accordingly, this conceptual paper proposes an employee-level framework in which digital competency, personal innovativeness, and perceived adaptive leadership contribute to employee job performance through employee agility. The framework contributes to the literature by integrating individual capability and individual orientation toward technological novelty with the perceived leadership context through a common behavioural mechanism. Rather than treating these antecedents primarily as direct predictors of performance, the model explains how they may enable employees to adapt their behaviour as work requirements change. Employee agility is therefore positioned as the mediating mechanism through which these antecedents contribute to job performance, while job performance is conceptualised through task and contextual performance. This distinction provides a more precise explanation of how employees maintain effectiveness during digital transformation and establishes the theoretical basis for the propositions developed in this paper.

Theoretical Foundation: Theory of Work Adjustment

The proposed framework is based on the theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), which describes behaviour in the workplace through the correspondence with work situations (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). TWA posits that human beings have both abilities and other characteristics, and work environments are expected to meet those needs. When employees do meet these requirements, good correspondence is formed, but when work requirements change, the employees need to change their behaviour or abilities to maintain that good relationship with the work environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1978, 1984). This is especially relevant in the context of digital transformation where new technology, working processes and performance expectations constantly change the demands on human resources (HR) in the workplace.

Within the proposed framework, digital competency, personal innovativeness, and perceived adaptive leadership represent distinct individual and environmental conditions that can facilitate adjustment. Digital competency reflects an employee capability relevant to increasingly technology-dependent work requirements. Personal innovativeness represents an individual orientation toward experimenting with and adapting to unfamiliar technologies. Perceived adaptive leadership represents an environmental condition through which employees perceive their leaders as responsive, flexible, and supportive when work requirements change. Although personal innovativeness and perceived adaptive leadership are not original TWA constructs, they are theoretically consistent with TWA because they represent person- and environment-related conditions that may influence how employees respond when established work correspondence is disrupted.

Employee agility is positioned as the proximal behavioural mechanism through which adjustment is enacted. It is not treated as equivalent to the original adjustment dimensions of TWA, but as a contemporary employee capability that reflects the ability to modify behaviour and respond effectively to changing job requirements. Digital competency provides the capability in responding to digital demands, personal innovativeness provides an orientation toward technological exploration, and perceived adaptive leadership provides an environmental condition supportive of adjustment. Employee agility subsequently enables these resources to be translated into effective task and contextual performance. Accordingly, the proposed framework applies TWA as a correspondence-adjustment-performance logic in which changing work requirements create a need for adjustment, employee agility facilitates that adjustment, and effective adjustment contributes to sustained employee job performance. Although TWA's concept of satisfactoriness is not equivalent to employee job performance, its correspondence logic supports the expectation that effective adjustment enables employees to fulfil work requirements, which the present framework examines through task and contextual performance.

Literature Review

Employee Job Performance

Job performance is a multidimensional construct, usually comprising task performance as well as contextual performance. Task performance refers to a person's effectiveness in performing core functions and obtaining required outputs, whereas contextual performance refers to their non-core behaviours that underlie the organisational social, psychological, and coordination infrastructure, such as cooperation, initiative, and change-supportive behaviour (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993, 1997; Organ, 1988). Such differentiation is important when considering transformations around the new task in digitally advancing organisations, as tasks are often re-designed through new systems and data-driven workflows, and successful implementation often depends on contextual contributions to performance, including knowledge sharing, helping, and proactive problem-solving. Conventional frameworks therefore conceptualise job performance as a set of observable work behaviours and support the assessment of both core task execution and contextual contributions to organisational functioning (Koopmans et al., 2011). Thus, job performance for employee roles in a digital transformation context is most effectively understood as a dual-domain outcome, with sustaining task output and enacting supportive contextual behaviours jointly determining effectiveness.

Employee Agility as the Adjustment Mechanism

Employee agility is a theoretically relevant capability for maintaining effectiveness in dynamic work environments. From a behavioural perspective, agility reflects employees' capacity to respond proactively to change, adapt their behaviour and work practices, and remain effective under changing or stressful conditions (Sherehiy & Karwowski, 2014). From a TWA perspective, digital transformation can disrupt established correspondence between employees' existing capabilities and changing job requirements. Employee agility becomes particularly important under these conditions because it enables employees to modify their behaviour, learn new work routines, and respond effectively as task demands change. Successful behavioural adjustment should allow employees to maintain effective execution of core tasks while continuing to contribute constructively to the broader organisational environment. Employee

agility is therefore expected to support both task and contextual performance when work requirements change.

Digital Competency and Employee Agility

Digital competency has moved beyond basic ICT literacy toward a multidimensional capability that enables employees to operate digital systems, evaluate and navigate information, collaborate through digital channels, and create or modify digital outputs for work purposes (Ferrari, 2012; van Deursen et al., 2016). The Internet Skills Scale work operationalises digital competency through five domains: operational, information navigation, social, creative, and mobile skills, reflecting the breadth of digital demands in contemporary work (van Deursen et al., 2016). From a performance perspective, digital competency reduces execution friction by improving technology use efficiency and information processing quality. Evidence in public-sector contexts indicates that digital competency relates positively to job performance and empowerment, suggesting that employees with stronger digital competency experience greater control and effectiveness in technology-mediated work (Ochoa Pacheco & Coello-Montecel, 2023). From a TWA perspective, digital competency strengthens employees' capability to meet increasingly digital work requirements. When technologies and workflows change, employees with stronger digital competency are better able to understand new systems, modify established routines, and recalibrate their behaviour. Digital competency should therefore facilitate employee agility by increasing employees' capacity to respond effectively to changing digital demands.

Personal Innovativeness and Employee Agility

In this framework, personal innovativeness is conceptualised specifically within the information technology domain, referring to an individual's willingness to experiment with new information technologies (Agarwal & Prasad, 1998). Unlike competence-based constructs, personal innovativeness reflects a predisposition toward novelty and exploration, which is particularly relevant in transformation contexts characterised by ambiguous requirements and iterative learning. Agarwal and Prasad (1998) conceptualise personal innovativeness as a stable tendency to be among the earlier adopters of IT innovations, which implies greater behavioural engagement with new systems and a lower threshold for trial. Empirical evidence connecting personal innovativeness to adoption behaviour in mobile or digital service contexts indicates that personal innovativeness influences technology-related engagement and persistence and suggests that it can influence technology-related activity patterns for technology-enabled users (Lu et al., 2005). In digitally transforming work environments, this predisposition is adjustment-relevant because it increases employees' willingness to experiment with and learn from new technologies and work processes while reducing behavioural withdrawal when initial implementation is imperfect. From a TWA perspective, personal innovativeness may facilitate adjustment when digital transformation introduces unfamiliar technologies and work routines. Employees with stronger personal innovativeness are more willing to experiment with new systems, explore alternative approaches, and persist when initial attempts are unsuccessful. This orientation toward technological exploration should increase employees' readiness to modify established work behaviours when job requirements change. Personal innovativeness is therefore expected to contribute positively to employee agility.

Perceived Adaptive Leadership and Employee Agility

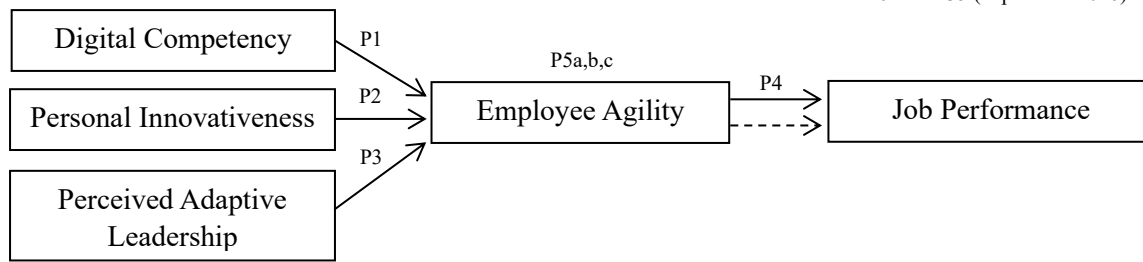
Adaptive leadership theory addresses contexts in which problems are complex and uncertain and established technical responses are insufficient, requiring learning, behavioural adjustment, and collective adaptation (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009). These conditions are characteristic of digital transformation, where technology-mediated change is frequently accompanied by shifting priorities, uncertain outcomes, and coordination demands across functional areas. More recent work has operationalised adaptive leadership as a measurable behavioural construct. Nöthel et al. (2023) developed and validated the Adaptive Leadership Behaviour Scale to assess leaders' flexible responses to changing workplace demands. From a TWA perspective, perceived adaptive leadership represents an environmental condition that may facilitate employee adjustment when work requirements change. Employees who perceive their leaders as flexible, responsive, and supportive of learning may experience greater latitude to experiment, revise established routines, and respond constructively to uncertainty. Such leadership conditions can reduce barriers to behavioural adjustment and strengthen employees' ability to respond to changing work demands. Perceived adaptive leadership is therefore expected to contribute positively to employee agility.

The Mediating Role of Employee Agility

The proposed mediation relationships follow from the adjustment logic of TWA. Digital competency, personal innovativeness, and perceived adaptive leadership provide distinct resources that facilitate employees' responses to changing work requirements, but these resources do not necessarily translate directly into effective job performance. Employee agility provides the behavioural mechanism through which employees use these individual and environmental resources to modify their work behaviour as demands change. Accordingly, digital competency provides adjustment capability, personal innovativeness facilitates technological exploration, and perceived adaptive leadership provides an environment supportive of adaptation. Their contribution to employee job performance is therefore expected to operate through employee agility.

Material and Method

This paper develops an employee-level framework examining how digital competency, personal innovativeness, and perceived adaptive leadership contribute to employee job performance through employee agility in digitally transforming organisational settings. The conceptual framework was developed through an integrative synthesis of relevant theoretical and empirical literature, with the Theory of Work Adjustment providing the overarching theoretical lens for specifying the relationships among the constructs. The proposed model comprises five constructs: digital competency, personal innovativeness, perceived adaptive leadership, employee agility, and employee job performance. Employee agility is positioned as the mediating mechanism through which the three antecedents are proposed to contribute to employee job performance.



Proposed Propositions

In this study, the expected outcomes are expressed as theoretical rather than empirical predictions. According to the proposed research model, employee agility is expected to mediate the relationships between the three antecedents, digital competency, personal innovativeness, and perceived adaptive leadership, and employee job performance. Consistent with TWA, these antecedents provide individual and environmental conditions that facilitate behavioural adjustment, while employee agility represents the proximal mechanism through which such adjustment contributes to job performance under changing work demands.

- Proposition 1 (P1): Digital competency is positively associated with employee agility.
- Proposition 2 (P2): Personal innovativeness is positively associated with employee agility.
- Proposition 3 (P3): Perceived adaptive leadership is positively associated with employee agility.
- Proposition 4 (P4): Employee agility is positively associated with employee job performance.
- Proposition 5a (P5a): Employee agility mediates the positive relationship between digital competency and employee job performance.
- Proposition 5b (P5b): Employee agility mediates the positive relationship between personal innovativeness and employee job performance.
- Proposition 5c (P5c): Employee agility mediates the positive relationship between perceived adaptive leadership and employee job performance.

Discussion

From the TWA perspective, the proposed framework suggests digital transformation might be a source of disrupted correspondence between employees and changing work requirements. Digital technologies, workflows, and performance expectations can change what employees need to do and how to do it, and that leads to a need for behavioural change. Employee agility is the easiest way for employees to absorb it by learning new routines, changing established behaviour, and working well together when work needs to change. Digital competency, personal innovation, and perceived adaptive leadership are not performance mechanisms. Their relevance in terms of performance occurs mainly because employees convert these resources into adaptive behaviour with employee agility. Digital competency enables employees to tap into digital information, work with technology, and adapt to changing work patterns as the technology changes. Personal innovation encourages innovation and persistence when employees are confronted with new technologies and processes. In the world of adaptive leadership, we have an environment in which learning is easy, uncertainty is low, and behaviour changes can be made. When taken together, these past experiences are individual and

environmental resources, and employee agility is how those resources are translated into sustained performance in employees' jobs in changing work situations. It is a good model to be used in Sabah GLCs when digital transformation demands that employees maintain good performance but keep up with technology, workflows, and work expectations. In this context, performance will be more or less contingent on employees' ability to adapt their behaviour and stay productive in order to cope with the digital changes in work requirements.

From this perspective, the framework helps explain why some employees maintain reliable task performance and constructive contextual contributions during digital disruption while others experience declining performance, by positioning employee agility as the mechanism through which digital competency, personal innovativeness, and perceived adaptive leadership contribute to sustained employee job performance.

Conclusion

This paper proposes that digital competency, personal innovativeness, and perceived adaptive leadership contribute to employee job performance through employee agility as the principal mechanism of adjustment under digital transformation. From a practical perspective, the model suggests that organisations pursuing performance benefits of digital transformation should focus on agility-building interventions, including structured digital competency development, recruitment and development practices that encourage employees' willingness to experiment with new technologies, and leadership development programmes that strengthen adaptive leadership behaviours and create conditions supportive of employee learning and behavioural flexibility. Future empirical research may test the proposed mediation structure using survey-based measures and PLS-SEM, supported by power-based sample determination, robust instrument pre-testing, and bootstrapped assessment of indirect effects.

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