

Examining the Impact of Digital Leadership on Innovative Work Behavior and Knowledge Sharing Behavior Through Psychological Ownership

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of digital leadership on employees' innovative work behavior and knowledge sharing behavior, with a particular focus on the mediating role of psychological ownership. The independent variable, digital leadership, is examined through its supportive and innovative sub-dimensions, while psychological ownership is explored through emotional and work-based ownership. The dependent variables are innovative work behavior and knowledge sharing behavior. To test the research model, eight sub-models were developed and analyzed using PLS-SEM. Mediation was assessed through the Variance Accounted For (VAF) metric. Data were collected from 287 managers and employees working in IT departments within technology parks located in Ankara, Türkiye. The results reveal that both supportive and innovative forms of digital leadership have a positive and statistically significant influence on employees' innovative behavior and knowledge sharing. However, a portion of this effect operates indirectly through psychological ownership.

KEYWORDS

Digital Leadership, Psychological Ownership, Innovative Work Behavior, Knowledge Sharing Behavior

INTRODUCTION

In the context of accelerating digital transformation, organizations are increasingly compelled to restructure their strategies, cultures, and workforce competencies. As digital technologies reshape business environments, leadership styles that merely emphasize operational efficiency are no longer sufficient. Instead, a more adaptive and innovation-oriented leadership paradigm has emerged: digital leadership (Malakyan, 2020a; Narbona, 2016). Digital leadership has become a pivotal approach to managing organizational transformation in the digital age (Sawy et al., 2016)

Digital transformation cannot succeed in isolation from human dynamics. Employees' commitment, creativity, technological adaptability, and knowledge-sharing behavior play a vital

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role in realizing the potential of digitalization (Abbas et al., 2024). Leaders who possess digital competence and emotional intelligence are in a unique position to cultivate psychological ownership among employees—a concept that encompasses individuals' sense of possessiveness and connection to their work and organization (Pierce et al., 2001; Olckers & Koekemoer, 2017). When psychological ownership is present, employees are more likely to internalize organizational goals and proactively contribute to innovation processes (Avey et al., 2009; Jeswani & Dave, 2011).

The workplace today is also characterized by the increasing need for knowledge-based collaboration. Knowledge sharing is no longer optional but has become a critical component of organizational resilience and innovation capacity (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002; Lin, 2007). Leaders who foster a culture of openness and collaborative learning can enable employees to engage in both incremental and radical innovation (Akram, Lei, Haider, & Hussain, 2018). A leadership approach that supports transparent communication and encourages the distribution of tacit knowledge has been shown to enhance innovation effectiveness in both public and private sector organizations (Cummins, 2003; Al Issa & Omar, 2024).

In this regard, digital leadership is considered a key facilitator of not only technological adaptation but also behavioral transformation at the individual level (Ahmed et al., 2024). Leaders influence employees' innovative work behavior by promoting a digital culture, mitigating technostress, and ensuring the alignment between organizational strategies and individual competencies (Gao & Gao, 2024; Karafakioglu & Findikli, 2024).

Building on these theoretical and empirical insights, the present study explores how digital leadership influences innovative work behavior and knowledge sharing behavior, with psychological ownership serving as a mediating variable. The research is situated within technology parks in Ankara, Turkey—a context that is particularly rich in digital initiatives and organizational innovation. By focusing on this environment, the study provides insights into how leadership behaviors can translate into tangible innovation outcomes through psychological and cognitive mechanisms. In doing so, it aims to contribute to both academic literature and practical leadership models relevant to the digital age.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Digital Leadership

Digital leadership has emerged as a pivotal concept in contemporary organizational research, especially in light of the accelerating pace of digital transformation. At its core, digital leadership refers to the strategic and intentional use of digital assets and technologies to achieve organizational objectives (Malakyan, 2020a; Narbona, 2016). However, its scope extends far beyond technical skills—it embodies a shift in mindset, a rethinking of traditional organizational structures, and a focus on agility, collaboration, and continuous innovation (Sawy et al., 2016).

Leaders who adopt a digital leadership approach are not only expected to understand and implement technology but also to cultivate an organizational culture that values experimentation and learning. Recent empirical work has shown that digital leadership can strongly influence innovative work behavior (IWB), particularly when supported by entrepreneurial orientation and a digitally conducive organizational environment (Abbas et al., 2024). This effect is observable across sectors ranging from information technology (Zia et al., 2024) to traditional manufacturing (Erhan et al., 2022).

In addition to these organizational dynamics, digital leadership also activates psychological mechanisms. Leaders who encourage autonomy and risk-taking help build psychological empowerment, which in turn fosters a proactive approach to innovation (Gao & Gao, 2024). Capabilities such as vision-setting, strategic thinking, and digital literacy enable these leaders to create work environments that support both individual creativity and collective innovation performance (Schuster et al., 2023).

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