A DIGITAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR TALENT RETENTION IN EMERGING ASIAN ECONOMIES

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To cite this article:
Nasir, N. S. M. (2025). A DIGITAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR TALENT RETENTION IN EMERGING ASIAN ECONOMIES. *Journal of Business Innovation, 10(1), 185-201.*

ABSTRACT
The acceleration of digital transformation across emerging Asian economies has intensified organizational challenges related to attracting and retaining skilled talent. While technological investments continue to expand, many organizations struggle to retain employees due to leadership capability gaps in managing digitally mediated work environments. Existing talent management research has largely emphasized structural and human resource practices, offering limited insight into the role of leadership in fostering employee retention within digital contexts. Addressing this gap, this concept paper proposes a digital leadership framework for talent retention tailored to emerging Asian economies. Drawing on leadership theory, digital transformation literature, and talent management research, the paper develops an integrative framework that positions digital leadership as a strategic driver of talent retention, with employee digital readiness serving as a key mediating mechanism. The framework further recognizes the importance of contextual influences by incorporating a comparative perspective across Malaysia, Indonesia, and China, reflecting variations in institutional development, cultural values, and digital maturity. The proposed framework advances theory by extending leadership and talent retention models into the digital domain while offering a context-sensitive approach grounded in emerging Asian economies. Practically, it provides organizational leaders and policymakers with a structured guide for developing digital leadership capabilities that enhance employee adaptability, engagement, and long-term retention. The paper concludes by outlining directions for future empirical validation using structural equation modeling and cross-national comparative analysis.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The rapid acceleration of digital transformation across emerging Asian economies has fundamentally reshaped organizational structures, leadership practices, and workforce dynamics. As countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and China intensify their participation in the global digital economy, competition for skilled and digitally competent talent has increased significantly, elevating talent retention to a critical strategic priority. In this context, leadership capability has emerged as a decisive factor in determining whether organizations can sustain employee commitment amid continuous technological disruption.

Recent studies emphasize that digital leadership characterized by adaptability, emotional intelligence, technological competence, and the ability to inspire and engage employees plays a central role in shaping retention outcomes in digitally transforming organizations. Evidence from East Asian multinational corporations suggests that leaders who combine digital innovation with culturally sensitive and relational leadership practices are more effective in building trust, emotional identification, and long-term employee attachment (Hauer et al., 2021). These findings highlight that digital leadership extends beyond technical expertise to include human-centered capabilities, which are particularly salient in Asian contexts.

As organizations navigate the dual pressures of globalization and digital disruption, workforce expectations are also evolving. Employees increasingly seek meaningful work, continuous skill development, and leadership support that enables them to adapt confidently to digital change. Research indicates that organizations lacking coherent digital leadership frameworks often struggle to translate digital investments into positive employee outcomes, resulting in disengagement and higher turnover (Tigre et al., 2024). Conversely, leadership approaches that integrate digital competency development with inclusive and transformational practices enhance employee engagement and retention (Ekhsan et al., 2025).

Scholars further argue that effective digital leadership must be embedded within broader human capital development strategies. Investment in digital upskilling and continuous learning strengthens organizational competitiveness while reinforcing employees' perceptions of organizational support and future employability (Setyanti et al., 2025). However, despite growing recognition of digital leadership's importance, existing research remains fragmented and largely descriptive, with limited conceptual integration explaining how digital leadership systematically contributes to talent retention, particularly in emerging Asian economies.

In response to these gaps, this conceptual paper proposes a Digital Leadership Framework for Talent Retention in Emerging Asian Economies. By synthesizing leadership theory, talent management literature, and digital transformation research, the paper advances an integrative framework that explains how digital leadership capabilities foster employee digital readiness and, in turn, long-term talent retention across Malaysia, Indonesia, and China.

2.0 METHODOLOGY: CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS APPROACH

This study adopts a conceptual synthesis methodology, integrating and critically analyzing established theories and contemporary empirical literature related to digital leadership, talent retention, and digital readiness. Specifically, transformational leadership theory, human capital theory, and socio-technical systems theory are systematically examined and synthesized to identify key mechanisms linking leadership behaviors to employee retention in digital contexts.

Rather than generating empirical data, this paper develops a theoretically grounded framework by comparing, integrating, and extending existing scholarly insights. This approach enables the formulation of propositions that can guide future empirical research using comparative and structural equation modeling designs, particularly within emerging Asian economies.

3.0 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The proposed digital leadership framework for talent retention is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: transformational leadership theory, human capital theory, and socio-technical systems theory. Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for understanding how leadership behaviors, employee capabilities, and digital technologies interact to influence long-term employee retention in digitally transforming organizations.

3.1 Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory emphasizes leaders' capacity to inspire and motivate followers to transcend self-interest for collective goals through vision articulation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence. Extensive empirical evidence demonstrates that transformational leadership is strongly associated with positive employee outcomes, including engagement, performance, adaptability, and readiness for change (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020; Peng et al., 2020; Deng et al., 2022). Meta-analytic findings further suggest that transformational leadership remains one of the most effective leadership approaches in predicting employee attitudes and behaviors, even when compared to more recent leadership models (Bakker et al., 2022; Harrison, 2020).

In the context of digital transformation, transformational leadership provides a critical behavioral foundation for digital leadership. Leaders are required not only to articulate a

compelling digital vision but also to support employees psychologically and cognitively as they navigate technologically induced change. Recent studies highlight that transformational leadership behaviors enacted on a daily basis can significantly enhance employees' capacity to cope with change and uncertainty, which is particularly relevant in digitally mediated work environments (Bakker et al., 2022; Baker & Hoidn, 2023).

Within emerging Asian economies, where digital transformation often unfolds alongside institutional complexity and workforce heterogeneity, transformational leadership principles underpin leaders' ability to align digital initiatives with employee values and expectations. As such, transformational leadership theory provides a crucial explanatory lens for understanding how digital leadership influences employee commitment and retention in contexts characterized by rapid technological and organizational change.

3.2 Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory conceptualizes employees' skills, knowledge, competencies, and health as strategic assets that contribute to organizational productivity and economic growth. Classical and contemporary scholarship emphasizes that sustained organizational success depends on continuous investment in education, training, and capability development (Keeley, 2020; Deming, 2022). Empirical research consistently demonstrates positive returns on human capital investments at individual, organizational, and societal levels (Mayilyan & Yedigaryan, 2022).

More recent critiques of human capital theory argue that traditional economic perspectives underestimate the role of psychological, social, and organizational factors in shaping the value and sustainability of human capital (Auerbach & Green, 2024; Abbas et al., 2022). These critiques advocate for broader conceptualizations that incorporate employees' readiness, motivation, and well-being elements that are particularly salient in digital work environments.

Within this expanded perspective, employee digital readiness represents a contemporary dimension of human capital. Digital readiness reflects not only technical skills but also employees' confidence, adaptability, and willingness to engage with digital technologies. Studies increasingly recognize that organizations failing to develop digital human capital risk higher turnover, as digitally skilled employees possess greater mobility and external opportunities (Arteaga-Fonseca et al., 2025; Babadjanova, 2025).

Accordingly, human capital theory provides a strong theoretical rationale for positioning employee digital readiness as a mediating mechanism through which digital leadership influences talent retention. Leaders who actively invest in employees' digital development enhance both the perceived and actual value of human capital, thereby strengthening employees' long-term attachment to the organization.

3.3 Socio-Technical Systems Theory

Socio-technical systems theory posits that organizations are complex systems comprising interdependent social and technical subsystems. Effective organizational functioning and

sustainable change require the joint optimization of both elements rather than prioritizing technology over people (Sony & Naik, 2020; Patriarca et al., 2021). This theory has gained renewed relevance in the context of digital transformation, Industry 4.0, and artificial intelligence adoption.

Recent research applying socio-technical systems theory to digital workplaces emphasizes the importance of human-centered design, leadership involvement, and employee participation in technology implementation (Yu et al., 2022; Münch et al., 2022). Studies show that digital initiatives that neglect the social subsystem such as leadership behaviors, employee readiness, and work design often lead to resistance, disengagement, and increased turnover intentions (Guest et al., 2022).

In emerging Asian economies, where digital technologies are frequently introduced rapidly and at scale, socio-technical misalignment poses significant risks to talent retention. Leaders play a pivotal role in bridging social and technical domains by ensuring that digital tools are integrated in ways that support employees' capabilities, well-being, and work quality (Simoens et al., 2022).

Thus, socio-technical systems theory reinforces the central argument of this paper: digital leadership is not solely about technology adoption but about orchestrating the interaction between people and digital systems. When leaders successfully align these subsystems, employees are more likely to experience competence, meaning, and support, thereby increasing their willingness to remain with the organization.

3.4 Integrative Theoretical Perspective

While each theoretical perspective offers distinct insights, their integration provides a more comprehensive explanation of talent retention in digitally transforming organizations. Transformational leadership theory explains how leaders influence employee motivation, trust, and commitment during change. Human capital theory highlights the strategic importance of investing in employees' digital capabilities and readiness as retention-enhancing assets. Socio-technical systems theory clarifies how misalignment between digital technologies and human systems can undermine employee engagement and increase turnover. Together, these theories explain not only why digital leadership matters, but how it operates through employee digital readiness to sustain long-term talent retention.

4.0 DIGITAL LEADERSHIP IN EMERGING ASIAN ECONOMIES

Digital leadership has emerged as a critical capability shaping organizational transformation, innovation, and sustainable development across emerging Asian economies. As digitalization accelerates, leaders in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and China are increasingly required to navigate complex technological, institutional, and cultural environments while sustaining workforce stability. Digital leadership in this

context extends beyond technological proficiency to encompass strategic vision, adaptability, and the ability to align digital initiatives with human capital development.

4.1 Core Attributes of Digital Leadership

Effective digital leadership in emerging Asian economies is characterized by agility, adaptability, risk-taking, collaboration, and strategic vision. Leaders are expected to adopt ambidextrous leadership approaches, balancing the exploration of new digital opportunities with the exploitation of existing organizational capabilities. Such ambidexterity enables organizations to remain competitive while minimizing disruption to established work processes (Karippur & Balaramachandran, 2022; Hai et al., 2021).

Empirical studies across the Asia-Pacific region emphasize that digital leaders must foster a culture that encourages experimentation, continuous learning, and cross-functional collaboration. Developing employees' digital skills and nurturing digitally capable talent are identified as central leadership responsibilities, particularly in environments where digital competencies vary widely among employees (Van Hoang et al., 2025; Gustiawan et al., 2025; Widiyati & Nuryani, 2024). In emerging economies, where digital maturity levels differ significantly across industries and organizations, leadership adaptability becomes essential for sustaining employee engagement and commitment.

4.2 Contextual Challenges and Institutional Factors

Despite the growing recognition of digital leadership, leaders in emerging Asian economies face a range of contextual challenges that influence the effectiveness of digital transformation initiatives. These challenges include infrastructural limitations, digital illiteracy, cybersecurity risks, regulatory uncertainty, and resistance to organizational change. Such constraints require leaders to possess not only digital knowledge but also strong strategic thinking and relational capabilities (Hai et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020).

National policies and institutional frameworks play a significant role in shaping digital leadership practices. Comparative analyses highlight that government support for the digital economy, regulatory clarity, and investment in digital infrastructure vary considerably across Malaysia, Indonesia, and China, creating distinct leadership demands within each context (Lei et al., 2024; Widiyati & Nuryani, 2024). Leaders must therefore interpret and adapt digital strategies in ways that align with both organizational goals and national digital agendas, reinforcing the importance of context-sensitive leadership models.

4.3 Digital Leadership, Sustainability, and Organizational Performance

Recent literature increasingly links digital leadership to sustainable organizational performance and green innovation, particularly in China and Southeast Asia. Leaders who champion digital transformation are found to enhance operational efficiency, innovation capacity, and long-term competitiveness by integrating digital strategies with sustainability objectives (Zada et al., 2025; Sahibzada et al., 2024).

In manufacturing and IT sectors, digital leadership has been shown to strengthen organizational capabilities by leveraging digital tools to improve decision-making, process optimization, and customer responsiveness (Jagadisen et al., 2021; Van Hoang et al., 2025). In small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly within ASEAN economies, leadership agility and digital maturity are critical determinants of successful digital transformation and sustained performance (Fachrunnisa et al., 2020; Putra et al., 2025; Gustiawan et al., 2025).

4.4 Contextual Differences Across Malaysia, Indonesia, and China

Although Malaysia, Indonesia, and China share characteristics as emerging Asian economies, they differ significantly in digital maturity, institutional support, and workforce readiness. China exhibits advanced digital ecosystems and strong state-driven digital infrastructure, placing greater emphasis on leadership capability in managing scale and technological intensity. Malaysia demonstrates structured digital policies and institutional frameworks, but faces uneven adoption across sectors, requiring leaders to balance innovation with workforce inclusivity. Indonesia's rapid digital growth, particularly among SMEs, is accompanied by digital skill gaps, making leadership support and employee readiness especially critical. These contextual differences suggest that the strength and pathways of the digital leadership–talent retention relationship may vary across national settings, reinforcing the value of a comparative framework.

5.0   TALENT RETENTION IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Talent retention in the digital era has become a strategic imperative for organizations facing rapid technological change, evolving employee expectations, and intensified competition for digitally skilled talent. Unlike traditional retention approaches that emphasize job security and compensation, retention in digitally transforming environments is increasingly shaped by employees' experiences of digital work design, leadership support, and opportunities for continuous learning and development.

5.1 Drivers of Talent Retention in Digital Contexts

A growing body of research highlights digital skill development as a central driver of talent retention. Employees who are provided with opportunities to develop digital competencies report higher levels of engagement, trust, and organizational commitment, which significantly reduce turnover intentions (Ekhsan et al., 2025; Guerra et al., 2023; Rani et al., 2025; Lin & Wang, 2022). Digital upskilling signals organizational investment in employees' future employability, thereby strengthening the psychological contract between employees and employers.

Another critical driver is work flexibility, enabled by digital technologies. Flexible and hybrid work arrangements enhance work–life balance and job satisfaction, particularly among younger generations such as Generation Y and Z, who place high value on autonomy and digitally enabled work practices (Dieguez & Loureiro, 2025; Sheshadri et al., 2024; Lin & Wang, 2022). These arrangements not only improve employee well-being

but also increase retention by aligning work structures with contemporary lifestyle expectations.

5.2 Leadership and Organizational Culture

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping talent retention outcomes in digital environments. Studies consistently demonstrate that inclusive and transformational leadership styles foster psychological safety, recognition, and trust—key antecedents of retention in remote and technology-mediated work settings (Purnama et al., 2025; Shinde, 2025; Sinulingga et al., 2024). Leaders who prioritize open communication, employee involvement, and fairness are better positioned to mitigate uncertainty and resistance associated with digital change.

In digitally intensive organizations, leadership behaviors influence not only task execution but also employees' emotional responses to continuous change. Effective leaders create supportive cultures that encourage experimentation and learning, reducing fear of failure and digital anxiety. Such cultures are particularly important in emerging Asian economies, where disparities in digital literacy may heighten employees' vulnerability during transformation processes.

5.3 Digital HR Practices and Advanced Technologies

The integration of data-driven human resource practices, including artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics, has introduced new mechanisms for predicting and managing employee turnover. Digital HR systems enable organizations to identify retention risks, personalize development pathways, and enhance workforce agility (Abrar et al., 2025; Adias, 2025; L, 2024). When implemented ethically and transparently, these tools can support more targeted and effective retention strategies.

However, the increasing use of digital technologies in HR management also raises concerns related to surveillance, fairness, and employee well-being. Excessive digital monitoring and poorly designed digital workflows can contribute to digital overload and burnout, undermining retention efforts (Rani et al., 2025; Sheshadri et al., 2024). These challenges highlight the importance of leadership in ensuring that digital HR practices are human-centered and aligned with employee needs.

5.4 Challenges in Retaining Digital Talent

Retaining high-skilled digital talent presents distinct challenges, as such employees possess transferable skills and greater labor market mobility. Empirical evidence suggests that the loss of digitally skilled employees can significantly impede organizational innovation, sustainability, and digital transformation outcomes (Shi et al., 2025; Ekhsan et al., 2025). Consequently, organizations must adopt differentiated retention strategies that address the expectations and career aspirations of digital professionals.

Generational differences further complicate retention dynamics. While younger employees often seek autonomy, rapid skill development, and meaningful work, older employees may require additional support to adapt to digital tools and processes (Dieguez & Loureiro, 2025; Lin & Wang, 2022). Failure to address these diverse needs may exacerbate disengagement and turnover.

5.5 Implications for Digital Leadership and the Proposed Framework

Collectively, the literature indicates that talent retention in the digital era is a multidimensional outcome shaped by leadership behaviors, employee digital capability development, flexible work arrangements, and supportive organizational cultures. Importantly, many of these factors converge at the leadership level. Leaders who actively support digital skill development, promote inclusive practices, and manage digital workloads effectively are more likely to enhance employee digital readiness, which in turn strengthens organizational commitment and retention.

This perspective reinforces the central premise of the proposed conceptual framework: digital leadership serves as a critical mechanism through which organizations can sustain talent retention amid ongoing digital disruption, particularly in emerging Asian economies characterized by rapid change and intense competition for digital talent..

6.0   EMPLOYEE DIGITAL READINESS AS A MEDIATING MECHANISM

Employee digital readiness refers to employees' ability, confidence, and willingness to adopt and effectively utilize digital technologies in their work. In the context of digital transformation, digital readiness has emerged as a critical psychological and capability-based construct that explains why digital initiatives and leadership practices succeed in some organizations but fail in others. Rather than functioning as a direct outcome, employee digital readiness operates as a mediating mechanism that translates leadership behaviors, digital competencies, and organizational strategies into positive employee and organizational outcomes.

6.1 Conceptualizing Employee Digital Readiness

Recent research conceptualizes employee digital readiness as a multidimensional construct encompassing digital competence, adaptability, innovation self-efficacy, and intentional readiness for digital change. Employees with high levels of digital readiness demonstrate greater confidence in using digital tools, are more open to experimentation, and are better able to cope with uncertainty in digitally mediated work environments (Höyng & Lau, 2023; Hamid, 2022).

Importantly, digital readiness extends beyond technical skill acquisition. Studies emphasize that readiness reflects employees' psychological preparedness to engage with digital technologies, including their perceived job meaningfulness and belief that digital transformation enhances rather than threatens their work roles (Hamid, 2022; Höyng & Lau, 2023). These perceptions are particularly salient in emerging Asian economies, where

disparities in digital literacy and access may intensify employees' apprehension toward digital change.

6.2 Digital Readiness as a Mediator Between Leadership and Employee Outcomes

A growing body of empirical evidence supports the mediating role of employee digital readiness in the relationship between leadership and employee outcomes. Digital leadership has been shown to enhance employee creativity and performance primarily through mechanisms such as innovation self-efficacy, knowledge-sharing readiness, and digital readiness (Yang et al., 2025; Dewi et al., 2025). Employees who perceive their leaders as digitally competent and supportive are more likely to develop confidence in using digital tools, which subsequently enhances engagement, creativity, and adaptability.

Studies further indicate that digital readiness facilitates knowledge sharing and collaboration by reducing anxiety associated with digital platforms and fostering trust in digital systems (Yang et al., 2025; Aldhi et al., 2025). These mechanisms are essential for sustaining performance and commitment in digitally intensive work environments. Without sufficient digital readiness, even well-designed digital strategies and leadership initiatives may fail to yield desired outcomes, underscoring its critical mediating function.

6.3 Organizational Support and Contextual Enablers

Organizational support plays a crucial role in strengthening the mediating effect of employee digital readiness. Supportive learning environments, access to training, and leadership encouragement amplify the impact of digital readiness on employee performance and adaptability (Zheng, 2024; Kim & Park, 2024). In such environments, employees are more likely to perceive digital transformation as an opportunity for growth rather than a source of stress or job insecurity.

Research in public sector and smart city contexts further demonstrates that managerial and employee digital readiness serve as key channels through which digital capabilities are converted into tangible performance improvements (Aldhi et al., 2025; Ghrbeia & Alzubi, 2024). These findings highlight the importance of aligning leadership practices, organizational support systems, and employee readiness to achieve sustainable digital transformation outcomes.

6.4 Implications for Talent Retention

From a talent retention perspective, employee digital readiness functions as a stabilizing mechanism that buffers employees against the demands of continuous technological change. Employees who feel digitally prepared experience higher levels of competence, autonomy, and job meaningfulness, which strengthen their emotional attachment to the organization (Hamid, 2022; Höyng & Lau, 2023). Conversely, low digital readiness may lead to frustration, disengagement, and increased turnover intentions, particularly among employees facing rapid digitalization without adequate support.

Within emerging Asian economies, where competition for digitally skilled talent is intense, fostering employee digital readiness becomes a strategic priority. Leaders who invest in developing digital readiness not only enhance employees' capacity to perform but also reinforce their intention to remain with the organization. This reinforces the central premise of the proposed framework: employee digital readiness mediates the relationship between digital leadership and talent retention, translating leadership behaviors into sustainable workforce outcomes.

6.5 Integration with the Proposed Framework

Collectively, the literature affirms that employee digital readiness is a critical mechanism linking digital leadership to employee outcomes such as creativity, performance, and retention. By positioning digital readiness as a mediator, the proposed framework provides a more nuanced explanation of how leadership operates in digital contexts. This perspective advances leadership and talent management scholarship by highlighting that sustainable talent retention in the digital era depends not only on technological investments but also on leaders' ability to cultivate digitally ready and psychologically resilient employees.

7.0   PROPOSED DIGITAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Building on the preceding discussion, this paper proposes a conceptual framework that links digital leadership, employee digital readiness, and talent retention within emerging Asian economies.
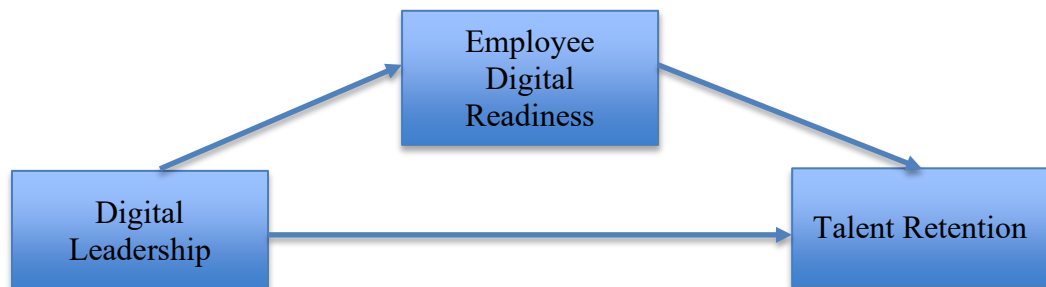
The framework positions digital leadership as the primary antecedent influencing talent retention both directly and indirectly through employee digital readiness. The indirect pathway highlights how leadership behaviors shape employees' adaptive capacities, which in turn enhance organizational attachment. Additionally, the framework incorporates national context as a comparative dimension, acknowledging that institutional and cultural differences across Malaysia, Indonesia, and China may influence the strength of these relationships.

8.0   OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This conceptual paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To develop a comprehensive digital leadership framework that explains talent retention in emerging Asian economies.
2. To conceptualize the mediating role of employee digital readiness in the relationship between digital leadership and talent retention.
3. To examine how contextual differences across Malaysia, Indonesia, and China shape the digital leadership–talent retention relationship.
4. To provide theoretical foundations and directions for future empirical validation using comparative and structural equation modeling approaches.

9.0 PROPOSED DIGITAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Based on the conceptual framework, the following propositions are advanced:

- Proposition 1: Digital leadership is positively associated with talent retention in emerging Asian economies.
- Proposition 2: Digital leadership is positively associated with employee digital readiness.
- Proposition 3: Employee digital readiness is positively associated with talent retention.
- Proposition 4: Employee digital readiness mediates the relationship between digital leadership and talent retention.
- Proposition 5: The relationships among digital leadership, employee digital readiness, and talent retention differ across Malaysia, Indonesia, and China due to contextual variations.

These propositions provide a foundation for future empirical testing using structural equation modeling and comparative research designs.

10.0 IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Theoretical Implications

This conceptual paper advances leadership and talent management literature by reframing digital leadership as a retention-oriented capability rather than a purely technological or performance-driven construct. By integrating employee digital readiness as a mediating mechanism, the framework clarifies how leadership behaviors translate into long-term employee outcomes. Furthermore, the Asia-centric comparative perspective responds to calls for greater contextual diversity in leadership research.

10.2 Practical Implications

For practitioners, the framework underscores the importance of developing leaders who can simultaneously manage digital systems and human experiences. Organizations should invest in leadership development programs that emphasize digital vision, employee support, and continuous learning. Policymakers may also leverage the framework to design national talent strategies that align leadership development with digital workforce readiness.

11.0   DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies may empirically validate the proposed framework using cross-sectional or longitudinal designs across multiple industries. Multi-group structural equation modeling can be employed to examine cross-national differences. Qualitative approaches may also enrich understanding of how digital leadership is enacted in specific cultural contexts. Additionally, future research could explore moderating variables such as generational differences, industry type, or organizational digital maturity.

12.0   CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper advances understanding of talent retention in the digital era by proposing a comprehensive digital leadership framework grounded in transformational leadership, human capital, and socio-technical systems theories. By positioning employee digital readiness as a central mediating mechanism, the framework explains how digital leadership behaviors translate into sustained employee commitment rather than short-term performance outcomes. The paper contributes theoretically by extending digital leadership scholarship toward retention-focused mechanisms and offering an Asia-centric comparative perspective across Malaysia, Indonesia, and China. Practically, the framework provides guidance for organizational leaders and policymakers in designing leadership development initiatives and digital workforce strategies aligned with national and organizational contexts. Future research may empirically validate the proposed framework using multi-group structural equation modeling and cross-national comparative designs. Ultimately, sustainable digital transformation in emerging Asian economies depends not only on technological advancement but also on leaders' ability to cultivate digitally ready, resilient, and committed talent.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nasir, N. S. M.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Writing-Original Draft Preparation

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by other journals. All authors have approved the review, agree with its submission and declare no conflict of interest on the manuscript.

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