

Digital Invasion or Digital Empowerment? The Role of Work-Life Balance in the Relationship between Digital Leadership and Employee Engagement

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Abstract: This study seeks to investigate the direct impact of digital transformational leadership on employee engagement and to analyze the mediating function of work-life balance within higher education institutions in Medan. A quantitative methodology was utilized, employing a survey technique with a structured questionnaire disseminated to professors at higher education institutions in North Sumatra Province. The study's population and sample consisted of 120 permanent academics in North Sumatra Province. We utilized a questionnaire to collect data and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze it. The findings indicated that digital transformative leadership exerted a favorable and significant impact on lecturer engagement. Nonetheless, work-life balance was not demonstrated to be a significant mediator or moderator in this relationship. This study demonstrates that within the framework of digital transformation, professor engagement is more significantly affected by leadership practices than by perceptions of work-life balance. Digital leadership that works can give teachers more power and make them more interested, but problems that come with the digital invasion need to be handled carefully. This study suggests that companies, particularly higher education institutions, should prioritize the enhancement of digital leadership capacity to sustain and elevate employee engagement in the digital age.

Keywords: Digital Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, Work-Life Balance

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1. Introduction

Digital transformation is now a worldwide trend that has revolutionized how businesses work, how they talk to staff, and how they serve customers (Bauwens et al., 2024). With the increasing growth of information and communication technology, practically every field, including higher education, has started to use digital tools to speed up work and make it more efficient (Muliati, 2022). Higher education, as an educational institution, is one of the sectors undergoing substantial transformations in management, pedagogy, and human resource management (Mikuskova, 2023). Digital transformation does bring a lot of benefits and chances, but there are still big problems to solve, especially when it comes to keeping employees interested in companies that are using new technology (Rezeki et al., 2023).

One aspect that can affect how well digital transformation works is the leadership style used in the company (Y. Wang et al., 2025). In this case, digital transformational leadership is particularly significant because digital

leaders can lead change, inspire workers, and build a culture that is open to new technology (Sugiarti & Khajar, 2025). Digital transformational leadership entails cultivating a vision, fostering empowerment, and promoting innovation to enhance employee engagement with company objectives (Farrukh et al., 2022). One of the primary things this study looks at is employee engagement, which can affect how well an organization works and how productive it is, especially in colleges and universities that are going through digital transformation (Nugraha et al., 2025).

Work-life balance (Ahmad et al., 2025) is another thing that affects how engaged employees are at work. Work-life balance is the ability to handle the pressures of work and personal life in a way that is fair to both (Yandi & Bimaruci Hazrati Havidz, 2022). During the digital transition period, the significance of work-life balance is escalating due to the possibility of work encroaching on employees' personal time, potentially impacting their well-being and engagement at work (Hafeez et al., 2024). This study seeks to investigate the function of work-life balance as a mediator or moderator in the relationship between digital transformative leadership and employee engagement.

Several prior studies have examined the impact of transformational leadership on workforce engagement. Nonetheless, the majority of these studies are confined to conventional organizational settings, with a scarcity of research investigating the impact of digital transformational leadership on businesses experiencing digital transformation, especially within the higher education sector. Current study frequently distinguishes between individual and organizational issues, neglecting the examination of their interaction within a digital framework. Consequently, this study aims to address this research vacuum by investigating the relationship among digital transformational leadership, work-life balance, and employee engagement across higher education institutions experiencing digital transformation.

This research is important because universities, as places of learning, are very important for making skilled workers. Digital transformation comes with its own set of problems, but it's important for colleges to keep their employees engaged to make sure the process goes smoothly and effectively. High levels of employee involvement can boost productivity, creativity, and the quality of the educational services offered to students. Consequently, this research seeks to offer a theoretical contribution to the formulation of a digital leadership paradigm that can augment employee engagement within universities.

This research seeks to offer practical implications for higher education management in developing suitable leadership strategies by examining this subject. For instance, executives in higher education need to know how to use technology to get employees more involved and how to find a good balance between work and home life. This is really important for making the workplace more productive and helping digital transformation work.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Employee Engagement

Engaging employees is very important for colleges and universities to stay ahead of the competition (F. R. A. Lubis et al., 2023). Colleges and universities with engaged staff likely to do better in all three areas: teaching, research, and community service (Faris et al., 2024). Employees that are engaged and dedicated to the university's goal and vision will do their best work (Syaifuddin, Lie, et al., 2024b). This has a direct effect on the quality of education delivered, which in turn makes the university's reputation and competitiveness stronger, both in the US and around the world (Bhastary et

al., 2024). Colleges and universities that get their employees more involved will have teams that are more creative and productive, and they will be ready to deal with the problems that come with the fast-changing world of education (Hasrul Azwar Hasibuan et al., 2022). Engagement of employees is an important part of reaching institutional goals and long-term performance (Y. Lubis et al., 2024).

In addition, keeping employees engaged is a big part in keeping them from leaving (Syaifuddin et al., 2023). Employees who feel valued and connected to their workplace are more likely to stay there, which can cut down on the costs of hiring and training new employees (Syaifuddin et al., 2022). High levels of engagement also affect job happiness, make employees feel like they belong to the company more, and motivate them to do more (Tanady et al., 2024). This makes the workplace more positive and productive (Syaifuddin, Rezeki, et al., 2024). Universities will also have more creative and cooperative teams if their employees are more engaged (Syaifuddin, Lie, et al., 2024a). Employees that are engaged are better able to deal with problems and changes in the fast-paced world of education, and they are more willing to make changes that will make education better (Sinaga, 2022). This means that colleges need to focus on ways to get their employees more involved in order to stay ahead of the competition (S. Susanto et al., 2025). This strategy will help the university reach its long-term goal of making the workplace more dynamic and successful by enhancing performance, lowering expenses related to employee turnover, and supporting the institution's long-term aim of making the workplace more dynamic and successful (A. Susanto, 2023).

2.2 Work Life Balance

The balance between work and personal life, sometimes known as work-life balance, has a big effect on how engaged instructors are in their work (Tanady et al., 2022). Lecturers who can keep a good balance between their work and personal lives are usually happier with their jobs and more committed to the school where they work (Msuya & Kumar, 2022). When lecturers have enough time for family, hobbies, and other personal activities, they feel more balanced and less stressed at work. This makes them more motivated and interested in their academic work (Nurcahyo, 2021). The level of active participation of high lecturers in teaching, research, and community service activities (Sigit Wicaksono et al., 2024) is a sign of their high level of work engagement.

Lecturers who have a good balance between their work and personal lives are more likely to do a better job and help higher education grow (Pradila & Fadli, 2023). On the other hand, not having a good balance between work and personal life can cause stress, burnout, and unhappiness at work, which can make lecturers less engaged in their profession (F. Lubis & Tanjung, 2024). The significance of work-life balance is also evident in the realm of professor retention (Aditya & Deviastri, 2024). Lecturers who believe they have a good work-life balance are more likely to stay at their university and be loyal to it (Webb, 2022). Higher education can improve the health of teachers, lower turnover rates, and keep the quality of teaching high by making the workplace more conducive to this balance (Ahiabu et al., 2024).

2.3 Digital Transformational Leadership

Digital transformative leadership has a big effect on how well a teacher balances their career and personal life (Putra et al., 2023). Transformational leaders who use digital technology in their management can assist teachers better manage their workload, provide them more freedom, and help them find a balance between work and personal life (Chong & Zainal, 2024). In a higher education setting that is becoming more connected through

technology, using digital platforms for task management and communication makes things run more smoothly, gives teachers more freedom to manage their time, and lowers stress caused by heavy workloads (Dewi et al., 2025). This method can also help teachers feel more in control of their schedules and activities, which makes it easier for them to balance their work and personal lives (Ferry et al., 2024).

Digital transformative leadership also has a big effect on how engaged professors are in their work in higher education (Özkan Alakaş, 2024). Leaders who can use technology to make the workplace more welcoming and collaborative can get professors more interested in and committed to their schools (Q. Wang & Shao, 2024). Digital platforms make it easier for lecturers to get information, talk to each other, and improve their skills. This makes them feel more valued and linked to the higher education institution's goal and vision (Ahmed et al., 2025). Leaders that support innovation and digital transformation can also make the workplace feel like a community and motivate employees to stay with the company longer. They can also urge employees to take a more active role in making education better (Subhaktiyasa et al., 2023). So, digital transformational leadership is vital for making teachers happier and getting them more involved with schools (Luissa, 2024).

3. Method

This research employs a quantitative methodology via a survey to investigate the direct impact of digital transformative leadership on professor engagement and to analyze the mediating influence of work-life balance. The study's population consisted of permanent lecturers employed at universities in North Sumatra province, with a targeted sample size of 120 lecturers. A simple random sampling method was used to choose the sample so that every instructor had an equal chance to take part in the study.

The structured questionnaire used to collect data was meant to examine three primary variables: digital transformative leadership, professor engagement, and work-life balance. The items on this questionnaire were closed-ended and used a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant very strong disagreement and 5 meant very strong agreement. We used SmartPLS software to do Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to look at the data. SEM was employed to investigate the relationship between variables and assess the magnitude of the impact of digital transformative leadership on lecturer engagement, both directly and via the mediation of work-life balance.

4. Results and Discussion

Measurement Model Assessment

Table 2. Convergent Validity

Variable	Code	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Digital transformational leadership (X)	KTD1	0.831	0.912	0.928	0.702
	KTD2	0.845			
	KTD3	0.863			
	KTD4	0.821			
	KTD5	0.836			
Work engagement (Y)	KD1	0.876	0.934	0.948	0.725
	KD2	0.858			
	KD3	0.872			
	KD4	0.843			

	KD5	0.861			
Work life balance (Z)	KKK1	0.811	0.906	0.919	0.688
	KKK2	0.823			
	KKK3	0.845			
	KKK4	0.806			
	KKK5	0.791			

The table below shows the results of the convergent validity test for the three main ideas in this study: Digital Transformational Leadership, Lecturer Engagement, and Work-Life Balance. The results show that all of the indicators have outer loading values better than 0.70, which means that each item is a good fit for measuring its own construct. Also, the values of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) for all constructs are higher than 0.70, which means that the assessment tools utilized in this study are quite reliable and consistent. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct also exceed 0.50, which means that the constructs have enough convergent validity. All of these results point to the fact that the measurement model utilized in this work is valid, reliable, and good for structural model analysis. The results establish a robust basis for evaluating the hypotheses and investigating the interconnections among the principal variables in the subsequent phases of the research.

Structural Model Evaluation

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing

Hipotesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Hasil
Digital transformational leadership - Work engagement	0.451	4.951	0.000	Accepted (Significant)
Digital transformational leadership - Work life balance	0.200	2.170	0.031	Accepted (Significant)
Digital transformational leadership - Work life balance- Work engagement	0.100	1.401	0.160	Rejected (Not Significant)

The Influence of Digital Transformational Leadership on Work Engagement

The results of this study align with the conclusions of multiple prior investigations, indicating that digital transformational leadership significantly enhances work engagement in higher education institutions in North Sumatra. The findings of this study corroborate earlier research indicating that leaders employing a transformational leadership style can foster a supportive work environment that enhances employee engagement (Klein, 2023)(Szabó, 2023)(Amjad, 2022). Technology-based leadership enhances work engagement in the academic process (Fadli, 2024). The advancement

of technology enhances the utilization of digital platforms as tools for communication and collaboration, positively influencing the interaction between leaders and lecturers (Harinto, 2024). Leaders who leverage technology to enhance professional development can also augment the sense of work engagement in educational decision-making (Honkley et al., 2025).

This study's management implications show that digital transformative leadership is very important for getting people to work harder in North Sumatra universities. University management needs to work on building digital leadership that may make the workplace more supportive, stimulate teamwork, and boost the motivation of teachers. Transformational leadership, which focuses on giving teachers a vision, inspiring them, and giving them power, can lead to more engagement and better productivity. In North Sumatra, higher education management should offer digital leadership training to leaders at both the faculty and university levels. This will help them learn how to use digital tools and methods to help them do their jobs as leaders. Also, creating an open and honest way for people to talk to each other and giving lecturers rewards for their work might make them more involved in the school's learning and growth.

The Influence of Digital Transformational Leadership on Work-Life Balance

This study's conclusions are consistent with those of several research indicating that digital transformational leadership positively impacts the work-life balance of universities in North Sumatra. The findings of this study corroborate earlier research indicating that transformational leaders can cultivate a flexible atmosphere that leverages technology to enhance time management and alleviate work-related stress (Lu, 2021)(Dewi et al., 2025)(Putra et al., 2023). Technology that experts in academic administration employ helps teachers manage their time better, which helps them find a balance between work and personal life (A. Susanto et al., 2025). Leaders who use technology to manage work might help teachers feel less stressed by providing them more control over their schedules (Sofiyan et al., 2026). Using digital platforms to manage administrative tasks is a big help for teachers since it makes their jobs easier, which is good for their health (Y. Lubis et al., 2025).

The management implications of this study suggest that digital transformative leadership positively impacts the work-life balance of university teachers in North Sumatra. University management must design leadership methods that facilitate the equilibrium between professional obligations and personal lives. Digital transformational leadership may help teachers use technology to make their jobs more flexible, cut down on paperwork, and give them more chances to manage their time better. University administrators need to use digital technology to make rules that allow for flexibility in teaching, research, and other activities. Utilizing effective digital communication tools and platforms that facilitate remote cooperation can alleviate the stress associated with extended or rigid working hours. This kind of leadership should also include measures that help teachers stay healthy mentally and physically, such as giving them enough time to rest and encouraging them to learn new things. Management should think about giving university leaders training in digital transformational leadership so that they know how to put strategies into action that put work-life balance first in a tech environment.

The Influence of Digital Transformational Leadership on Work Engagement Through Work-Life Balance

The findings of this study demonstrate that while work-life balance affects work engagement, its impact is insufficient to moderate the relationship between digital transformative leadership and work engagement in universities in North Sumatra. Studies (Demeke et al., 2024)(Mollah, 2025)(Gaan, 2023) indicate that while transformative leadership can enhance work-life balance, its effect on employee or lecturer engagement is more direct and substantial. While work-life balance can influence employee happiness and engagement, transformational leadership exerts a more direct impact on motivation and engagement levels (Syarifuddin, Rezeki, et al., 2024). Leaders that use transformational concepts can get people involved better by giving them a clear vision and emotional support, rather than just by managing their time and balancing their professional and personal lives (Nasib, 2020).

The practical implications of these findings indicate that, although work-life balance is beneficial, colleges in North Sumatra should prioritize the cultivation of digital transformative leadership that directly enhances work engagement. Transformational leadership that works well can make people more engaged at work by giving them chances to learn, work together, and come up with new ideas. So, even though work-life balance is crucial, making digital leadership that encourages work engagement should still be a top focus to make education better and keep university teachers happy.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates the impact of digital transformational leadership on work engagement and its mediating effect on work-life balance in universities located in North Sumatra. The findings indicate that digital transformative leadership exerts a favorable and significant impact on work engagement. This shows that leaders who use technology to help people talk to each other, work together, and grow professionally can make people more interested in both academic and non-academic activities. Additionally, this research revealed that digital transformative leadership positively impacts lecturers' work-life balance, affording them the flexibility to manage their professional and personal commitments.

Additionally, this research suggests that colleges in North Sumatra should prioritize the development of Effective Digital Leadership to enhance employee engagement. Leaders who use technology in university administration can make it easier for teachers to reach both academic and non-academic goals. Also, colleges need to pay attention to how well lecturers manage their professional and personal lives. This is vital for enhancing their well-being, even though it hasn't been shown to affect the relationship between leadership and engagement.

But this study has some problems too. First, the sample size consisted solely of permanent instructors from universities in North Sumatra, thus the results may not be applicable to universities in other locations or at different educational levels. Second, this study just looked at direct effects and didn't look at other outside factors that could have an effect.

For future research, it is advisable to increase the sample size to encompass teachers from diverse colleges in Indonesia or other nations to achieve more complete results. Future research can also examine external factors, including government legislation or corporate culture, as variables affecting the relationship between digital leadership, job engagement, and work-life balance.

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