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Impact of Digital Transformational Leadership on High Performance Work Culture Mediated by the Adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Organisations

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Abstract: This conceptual paper integrates digital transformational leadership (DTL), adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and high-performance work culture (HPWC) into a unified sociotechnical framework. Based on the ability, motivation, opportunity (AMO) theory and sociotechnical systems perspectives, it identifies AI adoption as the mediating mechanism through which DTL influences HPWC. AI can reshape employees' abilities, motivation, and opportunities, according to the paper. This in turn could alter cultural norms and expectations of performance. Responsible AI governance moderates such effects by enhancing transparency, trust, and fairness. It bridges leadership and digitalization research, advancing theory and providing a comprehensive framework for empirical research. Practical implications are that organizations must develop resilient high-performance cultures in AI enabled workplaces, which require leaders to align technology adoption with human cantered values.

Keywords: Digital Transformational Leadership, Artificial Intelligence, High-Performance Work Culture, AI adoption, AMO Framework.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has expanded rapidly, and its impact on organizations is considerable, impacting how organizations conduct operations, make decisions, and design work systems. In various sectors, but particularly within the information technology (IT) industry, AI is reshaping job roles, skill requirements, communication patterns, and cultural dynamics (Vrontis *et al.*, 2023; Collins *et al.*, 2021). Organizations rely on AI-driven insights to enhance speed, reduce operational errors, and improve decision-making efficiency (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). Given the increasing penetration of AI in the workplace, leaders encounter new complexities of orchestrating digital adoption, fostering employee confidence in new systems, preserving standards of performance, and making certain that technological change fosters organizational culture rather than undermines it (Hossain *et al.*, 2025; English & Kenny, 2025).

Research background

This increasing complexity is why Digital Transformational Leadership (DTL) emerges as one of the most vital leadership paradigms for the present day. DTL synthesizes conventional transformational competencies, where leaders create inspirational visions, foster innovation, provide empowerment for followers, with new digital competences focused on data-based decision-making, digital literacy, agility, and how to responsibly utilize emerging technologies (McCarthy, Sammon, & Alhassan, 2024; Müller *et al.*, 2024). Leading the way in such association of these approaches enables a leader to facilitate this change process with organizations, promoting an environment in which technology supports human ability rather than replaces it (Ly, 2024; Sacavém *et al.*, 2025).

Similarly, institutions seek to implement High-Performance Work Cultures (HPWC), working with high commitment, innovation, continuous learning, participative decision making, and sustained excellence (Hassan & Basit, 2024; Boxall, 2012; Walton, 1985). HPWC is associated with increased productivity, teamwork, collaboration, and organizational performance, according to Saks (2019), Evans, and Davis (2005). In an IT industry, characterised by a fast pace of innovation and fierce competition, HPWC is crucial if organizations are to be flexible and to be sustained for the future (Montañés-Sanchez *et al.*, 2025).

However, while HPWC is widely recognized as a strategic necessity, the mechanisms that shape such cultures in digital environments are still evolving. In particular, the integration of AI raises fundamental questions: Does AI enhance employee ability, motivation, and opportunity? Can AI contribute positively to cultural performance norms? Or does it risk triggering resistance, technostress, and fear of job displacement? The emerging research is both hopeful and worrying making a proper leadership role so critical (Jia *et al.*, 2025; Murire, 2024; Rick *et al.*, 2024).

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Building on this theory, this conceptual paper attempts to tackle these emerging patterns by creating an integrative model that combines Digital Transformational Leadership, adoption of AI, and High-Performance Work Culture. The paper identifies that AI adoption serves as a mediating mechanism by which DTL shapes HPWC. By adopting the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework and drawing on sociotechnical systems theory, it discusses how AI technologies redefine cultural expectations and performance standards. This holistic view builds on previous literature in creating a more nuanced causal pathway that includes technological, human, and cultural dimensions of organizational life.

The paper's goal is not to underscore the significance of leadership in digital transformation but also to show how the deployment of AI in the right manner may enhance the conditions of high performance. Accordingly, it puts forth several conceptual propositions and hypotheses for future empirical investigation, especially in contexts where technology is the basis of everyday work practices.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the increased relevance of AI, DTL, and performance-driven cultures, published studies are still inconsistent, with little cohesive and robust theoretically based explanation of the interplay of these constructs. The current literature offers useful contributions to digital transformation (McCarthy *et al.*, 2024; Sacavém *et al.*, 2025); the consequences of AI on work practices (Murire, 2024; Tinguely *et al.*, 2023); and the usefulness of HPWC for organizational effectiveness (Boxall & Purcell, 2022; Saks, 2019). Nonetheless, there are significant theoretical and empirical gaps

Most researchers explore digital leadership and AI adoption as distinct entities, not as related socio-technical constructs. This connection between leadership and technology uptake is critical and yet little analysed. For instance, although DTL is associated with digital readiness and innovation, the ways in which leadership implements AI capability into cultural performance outcomes remain ambiguous.

While AI has been studied extensively on its efficiency, automation and accuracy of decision-making, its impact on culture is less well-understood. Recent work from English and Kenny (2025) documents how AI can facilitate collaboration, reduce conflict, and promote equity, but can also create fear, suspicion, and resistance. This dual role raises the question: whether AI can enhance HPWC or undermine it, and under which conditions.

Leadership theories were traditionally concerned with direct effects on culture and on behaviour (Avolio, 2000; Nohe & Hertel, 2017). In digital landscapes, however, AI becomes a more mediating device through which leaders affect their employees. The proposed research model does not contain a link between DTL and AI adoption, explains how AI impacts employee experience and culture, and shows how HPWC is affected by the dynamic.

According to studies, AI is known to increase performance and engagement (Zahoor *et al.*, 2024; Rick *et al.*, 2024); while in others risks of job insecurity, decreased autonomy and erosion of trust are associated with AI use (Jia *et al.*, 2025). These contradictory findings suggest that situational factors, including the strength of leadership and implementation strategy, are significant in shaping consequences.

The IT industry is a growing ground in the AI led transformation. Nevertheless, most of the literature on AI concentrates mostly in the areas of manufacturing, healthcare or HR analytics, leaving more IT-specific culture dynamics unexplored. Overall, these gaps reveal the need for an integrated conceptual design. This paper fills the above gaps, by suggesting that a strong DTL and HPWC are linked through quality AI adoption, managed ethically, and applied as part of a broader cultural strategy. In articulating these interactions, this paper aims to contribute to theoretical progress and generate policy implications for transformational leaders in the challenging AI world.

Research objectives

The main objective of this research is to analyse the impact of digital transformational leadership on high performance work culture, mediated by the adoption of artificial Intelligence, in an organization.

The following are the sub-objectives:

- To conceptualize the direct impact of digital transformational leadership on High performance work culture.
- To examine the mediating role of AI Adaptation in the relationship between DTL and HPWC.

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- To conceptualize the relationship between Digital Transformational Leadership (DTL) and the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in organizations.
- To conceptualize the relationship between adoption of AI and the High-performance work culture.

Research Questions

How do digital transformational leadership influence high performance work culture of an organization, and to what extent is this influence channelled through the adoption of artificial intelligence?

The following are the sub-research Questions:

- How Does DTL influence the high-performance work culture of an organization.?
- To what extent does adoption of AI mediate the effect of the digital transformational leadership on the high-performance work culture?
- What is the relationship between Digital Transformational Leadership (DTL) and the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in organizations
- What is the relationship between adoption of AI and the High-performance work culture

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of key concepts

Digital Transformational Leadership

Definitions	Author (s)
Digital transformational leadership involves leaders articulating a clear digital strategy, fostering innovation, and utilizing collaborative tools to enhance employee performance and engagement, ultimately boosting organizational effectiveness.	PT. Nusa & Asia Medika (2025)
Digital transformational leadership refers to the capacity to steer and influence organizations through digital transitions by incorporating digital technologies, fostering a digital culture, and enhancing the digital skills of employees.	Shin, J., Mollah, M. A., & Choi, J. (2023)
Digital transformational leadership is a leadership approach that utilizes digital technologies to instigate organizational change, stimulate innovation, and improve performance by advocating for digital transformation, promoting digital competencies, and nurturing a culture of ongoing learning and flexibility.	Malik, M., Raziq, M., Sarwar, N., & Tariq, A. (2024)

Based on the identified definitions, we define digital transformational leadership as a strategic leadership approach that guides organizations through technological transitions by communicating a clear digital vision and integrating digital tools. It focuses on fostering a culture of innovation, continuous learning, and flexibility while actively enhancing employee digital competencies. Ultimately, this approach aims to drive organizational change, improve employee engagement, and boost overall organizational effectiveness and performance.

Adoption of Artificial Intelligence

Definitions	Author (s)
The adoption of AI serves as an instance of embracing IT innovation, which is a process that introduces something novel to the organization adopting it. This could involve the implementation and utilization of a technology, product, process, or practice, and it encompasses the effective use of computer hardware and software applications to aid in operations, management, and decision-making.	Oliver Neumann, Katharina Guirguis & Reto Steiner (2022)
The integration of Artificial Intelligence into business operations is a complex endeavor influenced by a variety of elements. Factors such as leadership within the organization, company culture, the availability of resources, anticipated advantages, regulatory issues, data protection, technology assessment, and the preparedness of the workforce all contribute significantly to this process.	Oyekunle, D., & Boohene, D. (2024)

Based on the identified definitions, we can state that AI Adoption is the complex process of embracing IT innovation by introducing hardware and software technologies to optimize operations, management, and decision-making. Rather than a purely technical implementation, this integration is a multi-faceted endeavour significantly influenced by organizational readiness factors, including leadership support, company culture, workforce preparedness, resource availability, and regulatory compliance.

Adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Organizations

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AI has transformed from its initial conceptualization as an imitation of human reasoning in computational analysis (Russell & Norvig, 2020) to a complex system that can perform perception, prediction, natural language processing, and autonomous decision-making. AI systems have the potential to add to accuracy, speed up operations, recognize patterns of occurrences in big data, and assist in problem-solving problems on very complex levels (Davies, 2023; Han *et al.*, 2023).

AI is an enabler and contributor to functional and strategic performance-driven organizational transformation. AI helps in a number of activities (including forecasting, predictive modeling, analyzing customer behavior, resource allocation, workflow automation, and optimizing routine administrative tasks) (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). In IT industry, this accelerates software testing, debugging, cybersecurity monitoring, incident response too, allowing teams to work more quickly and with fewer errors.

A useful perspective for examining the role of AI is to use the AMO framework. Research indicates that AI enhances employee proficiency by giving immediate feedback, providing personalized learning pathways, developing abilities through decision-support systems, boosting cognitive resources, and enabling predictive talent development (Rožman *et al.*, 2022; Benabou & Touhami, 2025). Research demonstrates this effect in that AI can have positive impacts on motivation by reducing workload, taking away repetitive work and promoting authentic, creative work (Rožman *et al.*, 2023; Rick *et al.*, 2024). The more AI systems emphasize fairness (For instance, objective performance measurement or unbiased performance evaluation), the more motivation and trust there is.

Nonetheless, there are also negative effects. A poor implementation results in fear of job displacement, anxiety of surveillance, lowered autonomy and reduced trust in management (Jia *et al.*, 2025; English & Kenny, 2025). AI provides opportunities by relieving the administrative burden of workers and empowering them to take part in higher-value decision-making (Tinguely *et al.*, 2023). Automated workflows maximize the time for creativity, innovation, and strategic thinking. However, this opportunity is not a given; if the decisions AI makes are not clear, or if workers are excluded from the adoption, AI can decrease, not amplify possibilities (Shokrollahi, 2025). Contemporary studies also view the AI itself not only as a tool but also as a component of the "digital teammate" ecosystem shaping cultural norms (English & Kenny, 2025). AI transforms employee collaboration, information access, fairness, and so forth. It increases transparency and objectivity yet may also stir up anxiety and conflict if it appears invasive. This duality means leadership is pivotal to navigating the cultural implications of AI.

Digital Transformational Leadership (DTL)

DTL emerges at the intersection of transformational leadership and digital competency frameworks (Avolio, 2000; Van Wart, 2016). As organizations embrace digitalization, leaders must combine inspirational, supportive behaviors with advanced digital literacy, innovation orientation, and technological foresight (Alawiah & Tukiran, 2024).

DTL is now defined more and more by various key concept areas by scholars, for example:
Digital visioning: the capacity to describe with clear articulation, what you think and articulate a successful digital strategy that is aligned with the business mission and objectives (McCarthy *et al.*, 2024).

- Promotion of innovation: promoting experimentation, taking risks and creativity (Bellis, Cunial & Trabucchi, 2024).
- Empowerment and collaboration – building for example a cross-functional team, participative processes and shared ownership of initiatives for digital (Braojos *et al.*, 2024).
- Literacy in digital: learning about digital tools and data analytics and AI capabilities (Müller *et al.*, 2024).
- Ethics: transparent, privacy-respectable fairness and responsible use of technology (Sacavém *et al.*, 2025).

These behaviours are essential for orchestrating digital transformation and cultivating a culture receptive to AI.

It is documented that DTL decreases the resistance of employees, supports trust in digital initiatives, increases agility of organizations, digital readiness and capacity, and speeds up integration of emerging technologies (Ly, 2024; Marcel *et al.*, 2024). DTL is especially important in the introduction of complex disruptive technologies, such as AI.

DTL encourages continuous learning by promoting digital upskilling, knowledge sharing, and

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collaborative problem-solving (Hossain *et al.*, 2025). Such leaders align human capital development with technological initiatives, ensuring employees are prepared to work in AI-augmented environments.

Transformational leadership has long been connected to culture (Nohe & Hertel, 2017). With digital transformation, DTL becomes responsible for shaping digital-first cultural values such as agility, transparency, data-driven decision-making, trust in automation, and collaborative innovation. These values facilitate the establishment of High-Performance Work Cultures.

High-Performance Work Culture (HPWC)

HPWC is a collective set of cultural norms and expectations fostering both exceptional performance and learning behaviours as well as collaboration and innovation. The basis of this is the High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) which focuses on empowerment, training, incentive alignment and teamwork (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2000; Huselid, 1995).

HPWC in IT entails fast learning, continuous innovation and resilience (Montañés-Sanchez *et al.*, 2025). Cultures that promote experimentation and collective problem-solving tend to work better than systems that operate based on rigid structures. Transformational leadership is frequently linked to stronger work cultures, higher engagement, and greater organizational commitment (Cho & Kao, 2022; García-Morales *et al.*, 2012).

DTL builds on this by integrating digital tools, analytics, and AI into cultural routines. Empirical evidence demonstrates that AI enables continuous learning, enhances autonomy and quality of decisions, lowers workload, increases fairness in evaluation, and works towards ensuring transparent workflows (Zahoor *et al.*, 2024; Zhou & Zou, 2023). However, AI that is not well managed may damage trust, collaboration, and engagement (Jia *et al.*, 2025), rendering leadership indispensable.

Review of Underlying Theory

AMO Framework

The Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework offers a strong theoretical underpinning for understanding the manner in which AI and DTL collectively shape HPWC. Developed as a theoretical mechanism to understand performance outcomes in terms of employee ability, motivation, and opportunities (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2000; Boxall & Purcell, 2022), AMO has also been embraced as a foundation for strategic HRM, organizational behavior, and digital work studies. Its significance in AI-driven contexts is now more apparent given the cross-interaction of the three dimensions affected by AI.

The AMO framework is particularly well-suited for the study of DTL, AI, and HPWC for a number of reasons.

At its core HPWC research aims at unlocking the "black box" between organizational practices (e.g., leadership and technology) and tangible results (Boxall, 2012). The AMO model does this by offering a straightforward, psychological, and behavioral map of how DTL and AI function on an employee base:

- Ability (A): AI-based sustainable HRM and training projects help employees develop technical and social skills directly in order for them to do more complex jobs (Böhmer & Schinnenburg, 2023).
- Motivation (M): Transformational leaders motivate followers, leading them to work harder on discretionary tasks, and AI-based tools and performance feedback systems can foster followers' commitment by celebrating achievement in a timely manner (Bass, 1985; Murugesan *et al.*, 2023).
- Opportunity (O): AI automates routine work, allowing employees to concentrate on high-value activities, thus creating the Opportunity to make strategic contributions. Also, DTL often involves fostering an atmosphere of participation and voice. In this way we structurally present employees with the opportunity to put to use their newfound skills effectively (Boxall & Purcell, 2022).

In simple words, AI and DTL are the inputs (practices) that trigger the AMO processes, which then translate into the output (HPWC) (Saks, 2019). The AMO model is quite similar to the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, where the RBV contends that competitive advantage is achieved by means of rare, valuable, inimitable and non-substitutable resources, particularly human capital (Barney, 1991).

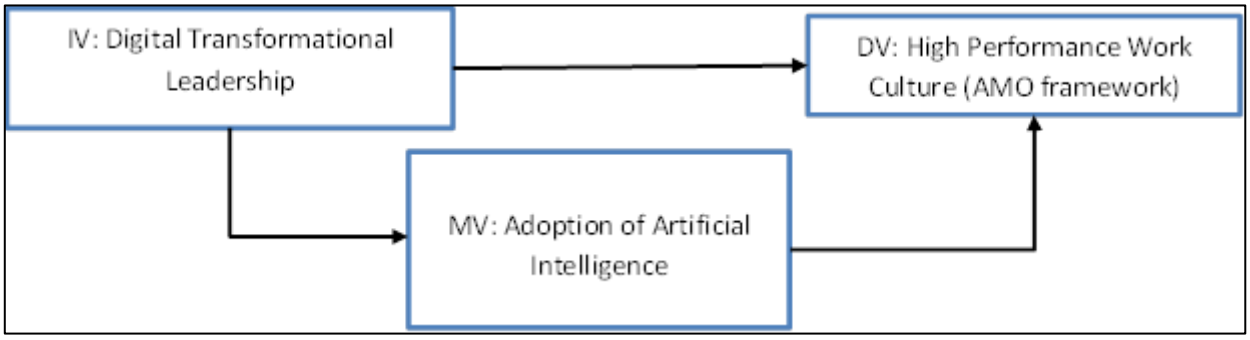
HPWC is an organizational capability dependent on remarkable human resources (Crook *et al.*, 2011). For the purpose of this study, the AMO framework facilitates the way to consider AI not solely as a technology, but as a resource management mechanism. AI plays an active role in helping managers create (and promote) the digital capability set, to deliver appropriate motivation

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(For instance, tailored rewards or specific feedback) and to facilitate opportunity through optimized workflows (Binsaeed *et al.,* 2023). This intersection, which is sometimes referred to as AI-Driven Sustainable HRM, directly contributes towards the AMO mechanisms (Lu *et al.,* 2022).

Conceptual Framework



Keys:
- IV: Independent Variable
- MV: Mediating Variable
- DV: Dependent variable

Based on the literature, this paper proposes an integrated model in which:
Digital Transformational Leadership influences High-Performance Work Culture directly and indirectly through Artificial Intelligence Adoption. The model recognizes adoption of AI as a mediating mechanism because AI serves as the technological vehicle through which leaders enact cultural transformation.

Theoretical Propositions
The theoretical propositions developed from the review and conceptual model serve as a foundation for empirical validation.

The Direct Role of DTL in Shaping HPWC
Transformational leadership has been linked to organizational culture formation. Inspiration, role modeling, empowerment, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support enable leaders to create expectations, norms, and shared values (Avolio, 2000; Nohe & Hertel, 2017). In DTL, these traditional roles are broadened by integrating digital specific behaviors, such as digital visioning, data-driven decision-making, and technological foresight (McCarthy *et al.,* 2024).

DTL is linked to HPWC through the development of a shared digital-first mindset that encourages agility and ongoing learning, strengthens cross-disciplinary collaboration, and fosters psychological safety when experimenting digitally. Thus, organizations where DTL is strong will actively foster HPWC before AI is entirely integrated. The impact of DTL on High Performance Work Culture (AMO framework).

The behaviours adopted by DTL allow AI to strengthen AMO in the following ways:
- Ability: DTL encourages upskilling, digital training and knowledge sharing.
- Motivation: DTL encourages psychological safety, inspiration, and fairness.
- Opportunity: DTL ensures employee involvement, autonomy, and participation during digital transformation.

In such a context, DTL performs the role of the orchestrator driving the transition from AI as an empowering instrument to AI as a feared and fractured cultural force.

In addition to AMO, sociotechnical systems theory provides a crucial macro-level context of the interface between technology and human processes. This theory focuses on the idea that the best performances come from the integration of social systems (culture, leadership, roles, relationships) with technical systems (tools, workflows, data, AI) (Rai *et al.,* 2019). A large body of studies backs this theoretical stance which digital transformational leadership (DTL) is a boon to a high performance work culture.

DTL combines transformational leadership and digital expertise leading to innovation, employee attention and adaptability - all of which are important parts of a high performance culture (Qiao *et al.,* 2024; Shin *et al.,* 2023; PT. Nusa & Asia Medika, 2025).

Leaders who communicate a clear digital direction, stimulate innovation, and work with others to utilize digital platforms positively impact employee performance, and engagement in turn stimulates organizational output and the culture of high performance (PT. Nusa & Asia Medika, 2025).

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Empirical studies showed that digital leadership improves organizational performance both directly and indirectly by building a digital culture and building employees' digital capabilities (Shin *et al.,* 2023).

In addition, digital leadership accelerates the digital transformation by creating employee empowerment and the conditions of openness and innovation and continuous learning which are a core aspect of high-performance work cultures (Qiao *et al.,* 2024). Moreover, studies have revealed the importance of digital leaders in translating digital strategy and organizational goals and trust building, and the effort to mobilize employees for the motivation of change are critical to maintaining high performance in the digital age (Öngel *et al.,* 2023; Chatterjee *et al.,* 2023).

Therefore we propose the following;
Proposition 1 : DTL have a significant positive effect on HPWC

Digital transformational leadership on adoption of Artificial Intelligence
A growing body of research supports the theoretical position that digital transformational leadership (DTL) positively affects the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within organizations.. Transformational leaders who can provide vision, intellectual stimulation and personal encouragement play a crucial role in catalyzing the adoption of AI by encouraging an innovative culture, inspiring teams and linking digital strategies to firm objectives (Patnaik & Bakkar, 2024; Bevilacqua *et al.,* 2025).

Empirical evidence shows that DTL promotes organizational readiness for AI, knowledge sharing and reduces resistance to technological change, which is necessary to accelerating successful AI implementation (Alharbi, 2025; Dey *et al.,* 2023).

In addition, the research conducted in Saudi Arabia confirms a strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and AI implementation emphasizing the leadership function in driving change and technology (Alharbi, 2025). Similarly, a large-scale study applying the Diffusion of Innovation theory evidenced that transformational leadership is the most critical driver of adopting AI as the leaders' vision and support significantly impact employees' intention to adopt AI (Patnaik & Bakkar, 2024).

Literature reviews confirm the idea that digital leadership and strategic orientation in upper management is key to establishing flexible digital strategies and successfully infusing AI practices into business processes (Bevilacqua *et al.,* 2025). Furthermore, digital leadership not only mediates the relationship between digital transformation and sustainable organizational performance but also creates an innovative and adaptive company culture that is crucial for AI adoption to occur (Mahmood *et al.,* 2024). The influence of leadership can also carry through to shaping organizational culture, generating trust and employee competencies: these are all critical enablers in AI adoption (Dey *et al.,* 2023).

Therefore, we propose the following:
Proposition 2 : DTL have a significant positive effect on the adoption of artificial intelligence

Adoption of Artificial Intelligence on High Performance Work Culture (AMO framework)
AI systems assist in decision-making, interpretation of data, coordination of workflows, and problem-solving. They provide immediate feedback, skill improvement, and tailored learning experiences to augment employees' skills (Rožman *et al.,* 2022). AI-driven systems also assist employees in learning new digital skills through adaptive learning, enrich their analytical skills, and lower their cognitive load.

AI-enhanced ability is crucial to performance when it comes to IT environments and IT processes where employees are expected to manage complicated coding, cybersecurity, platform management, and technical incidents. AI supports employees with tasks that rely on accuracy and reduce time pressure by suggesting solutions, automating diagnostics, or issuing predictive alerts (Rick *et al.,* 2024).

AI increases motivation when it takes the load off the individuals, and when it decreases unnecessary workload, relieves them from menial tasks, increases fairness, and improves the work-life balance. When employees perceive that AI systems are supportive not coercive, they are more likely to cooperate, innovate, and act for themselves (Rožman *et al.,* 2023). AI also influences motivation by providing clear performance dashboards, transparent evaluation methods, ensuring equitable access to information, and fair distribution of assignments (Zahoor *et al.,* 2024).

Yet motivation depends heavily on perceptions. When AI is seen as a surveillance mechanism, the motivation to operate by AI can plummet,

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resulting in resistance, disengagement and stress (Jia *et al.,* 2025; English & Kenny, 2025). AI allows employees to spend time away from dull or routine tasks and create opportunities to concentrate on productive output, creative problem-solving, and collaboration (Benabou & Touhami, 2025). Also, the increased opportunity due to automation-enabling autonomy is offered, more time and freedom on part of the employees is obtained for more significant contribution. But AI could also reduce opportunity if employees are left out of AI implementation process, or if AI centralizes decision authority on leaders or on algorithms (Shokrollahi, 2025). So, opportunity relies very much on the leadership's approach to implementation.

Considering the literature reviews, we propose the following:

Proposition 3: Adoption of Artificial Intelligence positively influence High-Performance Work Culture.

The Indirect Role of DTL through AI Adoption on HPWC

It has been identified through empirical studies that digital leadership not only affects organizational performance directly, but also indirectly through AI adoption, which fosters more creative capabilities and sustainable performance (Munir *et al.,* 2023; Mahmood *et al.,* 2024). AI adoption mediates this relationship by enabling data-driven decision-making, automating routine tasks, and fostering innovation. Organizations with strong digital leadership are better positioned to integrate AI, which in turn cultivates a culture of continuous learning, agility, and high performance (Murire, 2024; Dey *et al.,* 2023). The mediating role of AI adoption is further reinforced by the need for leaders to cultivate digital skills among employees and foster a digital culture, both of which are essential for successful AI integration and high performance (Shin *et al.,* 2023; Bevilacqua *et al.,* 2025).

Key Findings

- AI adoption transforms work practices, optimizes processes, and fosters a culture of innovation and high performance (Murire, 2024; Dey *et al.,* 2023).
- A digital culture and employee digital capabilities partially mediate the relationship between digital leadership and organizational performance, indicating that AI adoption plays an important role in this process (Shin *et al.,* 2023).
- Leadership support for AI adoption is essential for building trust, reducing resistance, and ensuring successful cultural transformation toward high performance (Dey *et al.,* 2023; Bevilacqua *et al.,* 2025).

Considering the above findings, we propose the following;

Proposition 4: Adoption of Artificial Intelligence mediates the relationship between DTL and HPWC

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to integrate the fragmented domains of Digital Transformational Leadership (DTL), Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption, and High-Performance Work Culture (HPWC) into a unified theoretical model.

Theoretical Contributions

The linking of DTL with AI adoption expands the AMO framework by illustrating how leaders strengthen employees' capabilities, motivation, and opportunities through digital tools, resulting in HPWC (Trenerry *et al.,* 2021; Patnaik & Bakkar, 2024; AlNuaimi & Singh, 2022; Rubinstein, 2025).

In addition to motivating vision and innovation, Transformational Leadership theory is built upon by showing that DTL not only promotes a vision and innovation but also shapes the organizational culture and readiness for AI, which in turn mediates performance outcomes (Patnaik & Bakkar, 2024; Trenerry *et al.,* 2021; Dey *et al.,* 2023; AlNuaimi & Singh, 2022). I

Further, the UTAUT model consolidates the leadership influence in the acceptance of a technology as a key determinant in AI adoption by suggesting a key role for leaders in technology attitude about perceived usefulness, ease of use, and social influence (Patnaik & Bakkar, 2024; Bevilacqua *et al.,* 2025; Dey *et al.,* 2023).

The implication of this multi-theoretical integration is to provide an overview of DTL's transformative function via AI on work culture and performance (Bevilacqua *et al.,* 2025; Trenerry *et al.,* 2021; AlNuaimi & Singh, 2022).

This study further advances organizational theory and digital leadership scholarship in four primary areas.

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Bridging Digitalization Research with Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership literature emphasizes vision, inspiration, and empowerment (Avolio, 2000; Nohe & Hertel, 2017), yet neglects the context of technology-mediated work. On the other hand, the research on digital transformation emphasizes levels of adoption and readiness to adopt digital technologies, as well as system performance, but it does not consider leadership and human behaviours and culture at its core in the face of digital disruption. This paper brings together these streams by illustrating how DTL serves as the connective tissue linking sociotechnical systems and cultural outputs. Leaders who exemplify digital behaviours, celebrate experimentation, and make data practices ethical set the stage for AI to be embraced rather than resisted (Benneh, 2025; Suthari et al., 2025).

Framing AI as Mediating Tool

This study illustrates how AI alters cultural norms from within the organisation by aligning AI's effects with AMO theory. This framework emphasizes that AI must not be understood as an artificial technological force. However, as a cultural force, which promotes transparency, collaboration, fairness, and employee autonomy (Ratnayake, 2025).

Sociotechnical Approach to High-Performance Culture

The paper advances HPWC theory by investigating how the cultural roots of high performance transition within the digital context. Historically, HPWC has been studied with reference to HRM systems, such as training, participation, teamwork, and performance incentives (Boxall & Purcell, 2022; Huselid, 1995). But digital ecosystems require:

- faster learning cycles,
- algorithm-supported decision-making,
- data-driven collaboration,
- and a readiness to use AI-enabled workflows.

Hence, this work builds on HPWC research by describing how artificial intelligence supported AMO conditions integrate into a modern high-performance culture.

Embedding Responsibility for AI Governance in Leadership Culture Models

The importance of responsible AI governance is another big contribution. Building on recent studies demonstrating AI's dual effect (both good and bad) (English & Kenny, 2025; Jia *et al.*, 2025), as the above argument reveals, this paper argues that cultural outcomes are not only influenced by AI, but also by:

- how transparent it is,
- whether employees understand it,
- whether biases are mitigated,
- and how leaders build trust in AI systems.

Therefore, the model presents a moderated mediation viewpoint that provides a more realistic explanation of AI's cultural consequences that is sensitive to the context (A-Clottey, 2025).

Practical Implications

Including vision, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration will help organizations facilitate AI adoption and develop appropriate DTL competencies (Patnaik & Bakkar, 2024; Bevilacqua *et al.*, 2025; Dey *et al.*, 2023; Trenerry *et al.*, 2021) with support that fosters a supportive culture.

Leaders must systematically assess organizational readiness, build digital skills, and align AI projects with ethical standards and business objectives (Bevilacqua *et al.*, 2025; Tursunbayeva & Gal, 2024; Mahmood *et al.*, 2024; Shin *et al.*, 2023).

The TOP (Technology-Organization-People) checklist and related practical frameworks will also help practitioners assess barriers to integrating AI into the organization and find solutions for them (Tursunbayeva & Gal, 2024).

To alleviate resistance and maximize AI's positive effect on performance and culture, transparent communication, employee training, and ethical governance are of paramount importance (Murire, 2024; Ateeq *et al.*, 2025; Mahmood *et al.*, 2024).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This conceptual model opens numerous avenues for empirical study.

Future studies should empirically test the mediating mechanisms of AI adoption between DTL and HPWC across diverse contexts and industries (Patnaik & Bakkar, 2024; Bevilacqua *et al.*, 2025; Dey *et al.*, 2023; Trenerry *et al.*, 2021).

Longitudinal and multi-level research is needed to explore how DTL influences individual, team, and organizational outcomes over time (Trenerry *et al.*, 2021; Yu *et al.*, 2022).

Further investigation into the interplay between digital leadership, organizational agility, and digital culture will clarify how these factors jointly

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drive sustainable high performance (Shin *et al.*, 2023; AlNuaimi & Singh, 2022).

Research should also examine the ethical, psychological, and cultural challenges of AI integration, including employee trust, well-being, and inclusion (Ateeq *et al.*, 2025; Murire, 2024; Yu *et al.*, 2022).

We also believe that Structural equation modelling (SEM) or PLS-SEM could test the mediation effects across IT organizations. Future studies might explore moderators such as organizational digital maturity, employee AI literacy, sector (IT vs. non-IT), AI transparency levels, cultural values (collectivist vs. individualist), and remote vs. onsite work environments. These insights will reveal when and how AI produces the best cultural outcomes (Puthiya, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Digital transformation is reshaping the nature of work, leadership, and culture. AI systems, once limited to decision-support tasks, now play active roles in shaping employee experience, collaboration, and performance expectations. As such, leadership must evolve to guide organizations through this complexity. This paper has a comprehensive model linking Digital Transformational Leadership, adoption of AI, and High-Performance Work Culture, grounded in the AMO framework. The central argument is that AI is not simply a technological investment, rather it is a cultural mediator. When guided by strong DTL, AI enhances employee abilities, motivates performance, and expands opportunities, strengthening HPWC.

Equally, poorly implemented AI can undermine trust, autonomy, and motivation, weakening cultural cohesiveness. The proposed conceptual model contributes to theory by clarifying the pathways through which leadership and technology jointly influence culture. It offers practical guidance for leaders seeking to leverage AI for high performance while ensuring employee well-being, fairness, and autonomy. Ultimately, the future of work will be shaped by leaders who can balance technological innovation with human-centered values. By integrating responsible AI governance, digital visioning, employee empowerment, and transparent communication, organizations can harness AI to create cultures of excellence, resilience, and sustainable high performance.

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