

DIGITAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL ADAPTABILITY IN UNCERTAIN ECONOMIES

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the relationship between digital leadership competencies and organizational adaptability in uncertain economic conditions through a literature review approach. The study employs a qualitative literature review by systematically examining recent scientific publications from reputable national and international journals, books, and scholarly reports relevant to digital leadership, organizational adaptability, and economic uncertainty. The collected literature was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring concepts, patterns, and theoretical relationships. The findings indicate that digital leadership competencies, including digital literacy, strategic vision, innovation capability, data-driven decision-making, agile leadership, collaborative communication, and change management, play a pivotal role in strengthening organizational adaptability. These competencies enable organizations to respond proactively to environmental volatility, technological disruption, shifting market demands, and emerging organizational risks. The study concludes that digital leadership competencies represent a strategic capability for sustaining organizational performance and competitiveness in uncertain economies. The findings contribute to the development of digital leadership literature and provide practical insights for organizations seeking to enhance adaptive capacity amid rapidly changing business environments.

Keywords: Digital Leadership Competencies, Organizational Adaptability, Uncertain Economies, Digital Transformation

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital transformation in recent years has transformed the way organizations conduct business processes, manage resources, and build competitive advantage amidst an increasingly complex

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environment. Advances in digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, data analytics, the Internet of Things, and automation have created new opportunities for organizations to improve efficiency, productivity, and the quality of decision-making. However, this transformation also presents increasing challenges due to increasing global economic uncertainty influenced by market fluctuations, geopolitical shifts, inflation, supply chain disruptions, and rapidly changing consumer behavior (Santoso et al., 2025). These conditions require organizations not only to be able to adopt digital technology but also to possess a high capacity for adaptation to maintain operational sustainability and competitiveness. In this context, digital leadership is a strategic factor determining an organization's success in navigating the dynamic environment.

The shift in leadership paradigm from conventional to digital leadership is a logical consequence of increasing digitalization in various industrial sectors (Alam et al., 2025a). Leaders are no longer solely required to possess administrative and managerial skills; they must also be able to understand developments in digital technology, integrate innovation into organizational strategy, build an adaptive organizational culture, and manage change sustainably. Digital leadership competencies are a crucial foundation for creating organizations capable of responding quickly and effectively to various external challenges (Trieu et al., 2023a). Leaders with digital competencies serve not only as decision-makers but also as drivers of transformation, able to connect technology with the organization's strategic objectives so that changes can add value to all stakeholders.

Increasing economic uncertainty causes organizations to face unpredictable conditions (Abed Alhameed & Emeagwali, 2026a). Fluctuating commodity prices, financial market volatility, accelerating technological innovation, global competition, and regulatory changes force organizations to continuously adjust their business strategies. In situations like these, an organization's ability to adapt is a crucial factor in ensuring business continuity. Organizational adaptability is understood not only as the ability to withstand change but also as an organization's capacity to anticipate change, capitalize on new opportunities, continuously innovate, and develop more flexible work systems. Adaptive organizations tend to be better able to manage risks, accelerate organizational learning processes, and increase resilience in the face of evolving environmental pressures (Jingwei & Bhaumik, 2026).

An organization's success in building adaptive capacity is strongly influenced by the quality of its leadership. Digital leadership competencies are

crucial because they foster a culture of innovation, cross-functional collaboration, optimal use of technology, and data-driven decision-making. Leaders with strong digital literacy are better able to understand the potential of technology to improve organizational effectiveness and are able to identify risks that may arise from its implementation. Furthermore, strategic thinking, digital communication, agile leadership, and the ability to manage change are integral parts of the digital leadership competencies needed to build an organization that is responsive to changes in the external environment (Razzak et al., 2025). Thus, the presence of digitally competent leaders not only contributes to the success of digital transformation but also strengthens the organization's ability to navigate economic uncertainty.

Various previous studies have shown that digital transformation is closely linked to improved organizational performance. However, most research still focuses on technology implementation, information system adoption, and the impact of digitalization on organizational productivity. Studies specifically addressing the relationship between digital leadership competencies and organizational adaptability in the context of economic uncertainty are still relatively limited. Some studies also tend to examine the two concepts separately, thus failing to provide a comprehensive picture of the mechanisms by which digital leadership competencies can build organizational adaptability in the face of volatile business environments. This gap in research highlights the need for a literature synthesis that integrates various conceptual perspectives to yield a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between these two variables (Kuziv et al., 2025).

A literature review approach is relevant for this study because it allows researchers to synthesize various empirical and conceptual research findings published in reputable scientific journals. Through the process of identification, evaluation, and thematic analysis of various scientific sources, this study seeks to identify patterns in the relationship between digital leadership competencies and organizational adaptability in uncertain economic conditions. This approach also provides an opportunity to compare various theoretical perspectives, resulting in a more comprehensive conceptual framework regarding the factors that strengthen organizational adaptability through the development of digital leadership competencies.

This research is highly urgent given that more and more organizations are facing challenges due to the acceleration of digital transformation and increasing global economic uncertainty (Ye, 2025). Organizations need leaders who not only master digital technology but also possess strategic vision, the

ability to build collaboration, foster innovation, and manage change adaptively. By understanding the relationship between digital leadership competencies and organizational adaptability, organizations are expected to design more effective leadership development strategies, thereby increasing their readiness to face increasingly complex changes. The results of this study are also expected to enrich the literature on digital leadership and provide a conceptual contribution to the development of organizational adaptability theory in the era of digital transformation and economic uncertainty. Therefore, this study seeks to present a scientific synthesis of how digital leadership competencies become strategic capabilities that can strengthen organizational adaptability, maintain sustainable performance, and enhance organizational competitiveness in the face of ever-changing economic dynamics.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to analyze the relationship between digital leadership competencies and organizational adaptability in the face of economic uncertainty. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to synthesize various published empirical and conceptual findings, thus gaining a comprehensive understanding of conceptual developments, interrelationships, and research directions in this field. To enhance the credibility of the study results, researchers implemented a source triangulation process by comparing various references from reputable journals and academic publications with a high level of validity. Through this procedure, this study produces a systematic conceptual synthesis of the role of digital leadership competencies in strengthening organizational adaptability, enabling them to more effectively face the dynamics of digital transformation and economic uncertainty.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Dimensions of Digital Leadership Competence in Supporting Organizational Transformation in an Era of Economic Uncertainty

One of the key dimensions of digital leadership is digital literacy (Irziqat, 2026b). Digital literacy reflects not only the ability to use digital devices but also encompasses an understanding of the technology ecosystem, information security, digital platform utilization, data analysis, and the ethical implications of technology use. Leaders with a high level of digital literacy will more easily identify opportunities to utilize technology to improve the quality of business processes, accelerate services, and optimize decision-making. Digital literacy

also enables leaders to understand the potential and limitations of technology, thus making more informed technology investment decisions. In an uncertain economic environment, this ability helps organizations reduce the risk of errors in technology implementation while increasing the effectiveness of available resources.

The next dimension is strategic digital vision, which is the leader's ability to formulate an organizational vision that aligns with developments in digital technology and the dynamics of the external environment. Digital vision goes beyond setting transformation targets but becomes a strategic direction that integrates technological innovation with long-term business goals. Leaders with a digital vision will be able to translate technological change into strategic opportunities through policy formulation, development of new business models, and the establishment of an organizational culture that supports innovation (Trieu et al., 2023b). In an uncertain economic climate, a digital vision provides clear direction for all members of the organization, ensuring that the transformation process is not sporadic but rather planned, measurable, and oriented toward creating sustainable competitive advantage (Schiuma et al., 2021).

Data-driven decision-making competencies are also becoming an increasingly important dimension of digital leadership. The rapidly changing business environment makes decisions based solely on intuition less adequate. Leaders need to utilize data as a basis for evaluating organizational conditions, predicting market changes, identifying risks, and determining strategic priorities. The use of data analytics enables organizations to obtain more accurate information about customer behavior, operational efficiency, and the effectiveness of implemented policies. This allows decisions to be more objective, adaptive, and responsive to changes in the external environment. Amid economic uncertainty, a data-driven approach helps organizations reduce uncertainty in the decision-making process while enhancing their ability to conduct short- and long-term planning (Philip et al., 2023).

Furthermore, agile leadership is becoming an increasingly relevant competency in the face of rapid and complex change. Agile leadership is characterized by the ability to adapt to change, the courage to experiment, flexibility in strategic development, and the ability to make quick decisions based on available information. This approach differs from conventional leadership styles, which tend to be bureaucratic and stability-oriented (Alam et al., 2025b). In digital transformation, organizations need leaders capable of building a culture of continuous learning, encouraging cross-functional

collaboration, and embracing change as part of the organizational process. These characteristics enable organizations to respond more effectively to economic dynamics without losing strategic direction. In other words, agile leadership is a crucial mechanism for increasing organizational resilience to various forms of disruption.

Collaborative communication is also an integral dimension of digital leadership competency (Sacavém et al., 2025). The implementation of digital transformation involves various stakeholders, both internal and external to the organization, so the success of change is greatly influenced by the quality of communication established by leaders. Digital leaders must be able to create open, transparent, and participatory communication by utilizing various digital platforms. This communication pattern encourages cross-departmental collaboration, accelerates information exchange, and increases employee engagement in the change process. Furthermore, effective communication can reduce resistance to change because every member of the organization shares a common understanding of the goals, benefits, and stages of the transformation being implemented. In an uncertain economic climate, collaborative communication also strengthens trust among organizational members, allowing for a more rapid and harmonious adaptation process (Irziqat, 2026a).

The next dimension is innovation capability, which is the ability of leaders to build an organizational environment that supports the emergence of new ideas, creativity, and technology-based experimentation. Innovation is no longer understood as an incidental activity but rather as an organizational culture that is continuously developed through learning, collaboration, and the use of digital technology. Digital leaders act as facilitators, providing space for employees to develop innovative solutions to various organizational challenges. This capability is crucial because economic uncertainty often leads to changing customer needs and the emergence of new, more competitive business models. Organizations with a culture of innovation tend to be more agile in creating products, services, and work processes that are relevant to the changing environment, thereby maintaining long-term business sustainability (Senadjki et al., 2023).

The final, equally important dimension is change management. Digital transformation is essentially a process of organizational change that impacts structure, culture, technology, and even individual behavior. Therefore, the success of the transformation depends heavily on the leader's ability to systematically manage change. This competency includes identifying the need

for change, developing an implementation strategy, building commitment from all organizational members, and evaluating the effectiveness of the transformation process. Leaders must also be able to overcome various forms of resistance through persuasive communication approaches, empowering human resources, and providing training that supports the improvement of employees' digital competencies (Cyfert et al., 2025). With effective change management, organizations are not only able to implement new technologies but also build a work culture that adapts to technological developments and global economic dynamics.

The Role of Digital Leadership Competencies in Improving Organizational Adaptability

The first mechanism demonstrating the influence of digital leadership competencies on organizational adaptability is seen through increased organizational flexibility. Leaders with digital competencies tend to understand that overly bureaucratic organizational structures slow down decision-making (Alam et al., 2025c). Therefore, they encourage the creation of more flexible work systems through the digitization of business processes, the use of online collaboration platforms, and the implementation of information systems that enable real-time data exchange. This flexibility enables organizations to respond more quickly to changing market demands without having to go through lengthy procedures. Furthermore, digital leaders are able to integrate technology into operational processes so that every organizational unit has access to the same information, reducing coordination barriers and accelerating the implementation of strategic decisions. This results in a more agile organization, able to adapt to policy changes, technological developments, and dynamic customer needs more effectively than organizations that still rely on conventional work systems (Nasrun et al., 2025).

Digital leadership competencies also contribute to the formation of a culture of continuous learning, the primary foundation of an adaptive organization. Digital transformation is not only about technological change, but also about changing the mindset of all organizational members. Digital leaders understand that the success of transformation depends on the ability of human resources to continuously learn new competencies (Albannai et al., 2024). Therefore, they encourage the creation of a work environment that supports learning, experimentation, knowledge sharing, and continuous evaluation of implemented work practices. This learning culture accelerates the process of improving employee competencies, thus empowering the organization to cope

with rapid change. When each individual is accustomed to updating their knowledge and skills, the organization is not only able to keep up with technological developments but also to anticipate future changes. Thus, organizational adaptability develops as a result of the accumulation of individual and collective learning capacity facilitated by digital leadership (Shahzad, 2024).

Furthermore, digital leadership competencies strengthen digital collaboration, a hallmark of modern organizations. The complexity of today's business challenges demands problem-solving through collaboration across departments, locations, and even organizations. Digital leaders utilize various communication technologies and collaborative platforms to create more effective, transparent, and responsive coordination. The use of digital technology enables the exchange of information without geographical or time barriers, thus accelerating the decision-making process. On the other hand, digital collaboration also broadens access to diverse perspectives from individuals with diverse competency backgrounds. This diversity of ideas becomes a source of innovation and strengthens the organization's ability to identify solutions to emerging challenges. Thus, digital leadership not only improves communication efficiency but also strengthens the organization's capacity to build the synergies necessary to navigate the changing business environment (Shatila, 2025a).

Another important role of digital leadership competencies is enhancing organizational resilience. Organizational resilience reflects the ability to survive, recover, and thrive after facing disruptions or crises. In situations of economic uncertainty, regulatory changes, or technological disruption, digital leaders play a role in building resilient organizational systems by utilizing data, analytics, and digital technology to detect risks early. Decisions based on accurate information enable organizations to take mitigation measures more quickly before risks escalate into larger crises. Furthermore, digital leaders encourage the development of various alternative scenarios so that organizations are prepared to face various potential changes. Organizational resilience is determined not only by financial strength but also by the leader's ability to create an adaptive culture that is unafraid of change. Organizations with leaders with digital competencies tend to be better prepared to face uncertainty because they are able to combine technological innovation with effective human resource management (Brunner et al., 2021).

Digital leadership competencies also accelerate the organizational innovation process. Innovation is a key indicator of adaptability because

organizations can only maintain competitiveness if they are able to produce new solutions relevant to the evolving business environment. Digital leaders create a work climate that supports creativity by providing space for employees to develop ideas, experiment, and utilize technology as a tool for innovation. In addition to providing digital infrastructure, leaders also establish evaluation mechanisms that allow each innovation to be continuously tested and refined based on feedback from customers and other stakeholders. This approach results in a faster innovation cycle than organizations with a rigid work culture. The speed of innovation becomes a competitive advantage because it allows organizations to respond to market changes before competitors make similar adjustments. Thus, digital leadership not only produces innovation in the form of products or services, but also innovations in business processes, organizational models, and resource management strategies (Malik et al., 2024).

An organization's ability to respond quickly and effectively to changes in the business environment is also influenced by the leader's competence in utilizing data as a basis for decision-making. One of the key characteristics of digital leadership is the ability to integrate data analysis into managerial processes so that decisions are based not only on intuition but also on available empirical evidence in real time. The use of analytical technology allows organizations to continuously monitor changes in customer behavior, market trends, operational performance, and potential risks. This information provides the basis for leaders to quickly adjust strategies when external conditions change. The speed of processing information and translating it into strategic actions is a crucial factor in improving organizational adaptability. Organizations that are able to make decisions quickly have a greater chance of maintaining business continuity than those that are slow to respond to environmental changes.

Integrating Digital Leadership and Organizational Adaptability as a Strategy for Building Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Digital leadership is not only related to a leader's ability to use digital technology, but also encompasses the ability to develop a clear transformation vision, drive innovation, manage change, and create a collaborative work environment. Leaders with digital competence are able to identify strategic opportunities from technological developments and then translate these into organizational policies relevant to the needs of the business environment. Meanwhile, organizational adaptability is manifested through structural

flexibility, speed of decision-making, continuous organizational learning, and readiness to change work processes according to external environmental demands (Abed Alhameed & Emeagwali, 2026b). When digital leadership can systematically direct this adaptation process, organizations have a greater capacity to face disruption and develop value-added innovations.

One consistent synthesis of findings across various studies is the importance of strengthening digital culture as the foundation for integrating digital leadership and organizational adaptability. Digital culture reflects a set of values, norms, and behaviors that encourage the productive use of technology in organizational activities (Rahmadani & Fiteriani, 2025). Organizations with a digital culture tend to be more open to change, embrace innovation more readily, and foster cross-functional collaboration more easily. In such an environment, digital leaders serve not only as decision-makers but also as facilitators, creating a climate of learning and experimentation without fear of failure. A culture that supports innovation enables every individual to contribute to generating creative solutions to various organizational challenges. Conversely, organizations that maintain a conventional work culture often encounter obstacles in implementing digital transformation due to resistance to change, limited communication, and low readiness to adopt new technologies (Rahmadani & Fiteriani, 2025).

Human resource empowerment is also an integral element of integrating digital leadership and organizational adaptability. The literature shows that successful digital transformation always places people at the center of change. Employee digital competence, the ability to continuously learn, and the readiness to develop new skills are key assets in supporting organizational adaptability. Digital leaders have a strategic role in creating a work environment that encourages lifelong learning through training, mentoring, knowledge sharing, and competency development based on organizational needs. This approach produces a workforce that is more adaptable to technological change while increasing employee engagement in the innovation process. Organizations that optimally empower their human resources will have a higher capacity to generate new ideas, accelerate the implementation of innovation, and improve the quality of customer service (Tathavadekar & Mahankale, 2025).

Another aspect highlighted in the literature synthesis is data-driven decision-making, a key characteristic of organizations with digital leadership and high adaptability. The rapidly changing business environment demands that organizations make decisions based on accurate, relevant, and up-to-date

information. Utilizing data analytics enables leaders to identify market trends, understand customer behavior, evaluate policy effectiveness, and predict potential risks. Data-driven decision-making provides a higher level of objectivity than decisions based solely on intuition or experience (Hussein et al., 2024). However, various studies also confirm that the successful implementation of data-driven decision-making depends heavily on leaders' ability to interpret information, establish sound data governance, and ensure that all organizational units have access to the information needed to support collaboration and innovation.

The integration of digital leadership and organizational adaptability also has strategic implications for creating sustainable competitive advantage. Competitive advantage is no longer viewed as a static condition achieved through cost leadership or product differentiation alone, but rather as an organization's ability to continuously innovate, learn, and adapt to environmental changes. Organizations that are able to combine a digital leadership vision with organizational flexibility will more easily identify new opportunities, develop innovative business models, and build more responsive relationships with customers and strategic partners. This capability creates value that is difficult for competitors to imitate because it relies not only on technology but also on organizational culture, leadership quality, learning processes, and the ability to consistently manage change (Zada et al., 2025).

In an increasingly dynamic global economy, the integration of these two concepts also contributes to increased organizational resilience. Various studies have shown that organizations with high levels of adaptability tend to be better able to maintain performance when facing economic crises, supply chain disruptions, or changes in consumer preferences. Digital leadership accelerates the risk identification process and enables organizations to design mitigation strategies based on more accurate information. The synergy between digital leadership, an adaptive organizational culture, technological readiness, and human resource competency creates an organization's ability to maintain operational sustainability while simultaneously creating innovation. Thus, organizations are not only able to survive in uncertain conditions but also leverage change as an opportunity to improve their competitive position (Shatila, 2025b).

CONCLUSION

The literature review shows that digital leadership competencies are strategic capabilities that play a crucial role in enhancing organizational

adaptability amidst uncertain economic conditions. Competencies, which include digital literacy, technology-based strategic vision, data-driven decision-making, adaptive leadership, the ability to manage change, collaborative communication, and an orientation toward innovation, have been proven to strengthen an organization's ability to respond quickly and effectively to changes in the business environment. Organizations led by leaders with strong digital competencies tend to be better prepared to face technological disruption, market dynamics, and various external challenges by developing a culture of continuous learning, increasing organizational flexibility, and optimizing the use of digital technology to support business processes and decision-making.

Based on a synthesis of the literature, it can be concluded that the integration of digital leadership competencies and organizational adaptability is a key foundation for building resilience and sustainable competitive advantage in the era of digital transformation. The implementation of digital leadership not only contributes to the success of organizational transformation but also strengthens the organization's readiness to anticipate change, manage risk, and create value-added innovation amidst economic uncertainty. Therefore, developing digital leadership competencies needs to be a strategic priority for every organization through investments in human resource development, strengthening digital culture, and enhancing technological readiness. Further research is recommended to empirically test the relationship between digital leadership competencies and organizational adaptability in various organizational sectors to obtain more comprehensive evidence regarding its influence on organizational performance and sustainability.

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