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The Effect of Digital Leadership Style on Employee Work Motivation with Role Ambiguity as A Mediating Variable

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Keywords
digital leadership; role ambiguity; work motivation; PLS-SEM; digital transformation.

Abstract
This research aims to analyse the influence of digital leadership on work motivation and examine the role of role ambiguity as a mediating variable. This study used a quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method. Data were obtained through questionnaires distributed to respondents working in organisations implementing digital transformation. The results of the study indicate that digital leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation. Furthermore, digital leadership also significantly reduces role ambiguity. However, role ambiguity was not shown to significantly influence work motivation and did not act as a mediator in the relationship between digital leadership and work motivation. These findings confirm that digital leadership plays a direct role in enhancing employee work motivation, particularly in the context of organisations adapting to technological change. This research provides theoretical contributions to the development of digital leadership literature and offers practical implications for organisations in strengthening leadership effectiveness in the era of digital transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has brought fundamental changes to human life in all aspects, especially in organisational life. Within an organisation, digital transformation also demands that the organisation develops in line with these changes. Essentially, every organisation has a leadership structure and organisational culture. Therefore, according to Handayani et al. (2025) in their literature review, this technological advancement has a significant impact on transformation both structurally and culturally, enabling operations to be conducted digitally.

The implications of today's digital-oriented organisational life ultimately give rise to digital leadership. Digital leadership is the ability of leaders to utilise information and communication technology in managing the organisation, directing strategy, and inspiring and motivating teams (Iman & Siregar, 2024). Digital leadership requires leaders to understand key components such as digital literacy, digital vision, agility and adaptability, digital collaboration, data-driven innovation, and digital ethics skills (Indarta, 2024). It can be concluded that a digital skills gap may occur when leaders cannot understand these key components, which can directly or indirectly affect the teams they lead (Gilli et al., 2023; Kazim, 2019; Sacavém et al., 2025).

Whilst digital change in an organisation can support leaders in carrying out their duties, it can also often impede them. According to research by Nguyen (2026) and Al Shbail et al. (2025; Xie et al., 2019), ambiguity and uncertainty have become inevitable characteristics of digital or modern work environments.

In previous research conducted by Nguyen (2026), task ambiguity was a significant factor influencing active observation behaviour. Lee (2023) found that job insecurity and role ambiguity interfere with the formation of consistent and strong working relationships for employees and affect their self-perception in the job. According to Kreitner and Kinicki (2014), as cited by Kusumayadi (2022), role ambiguity is a condition in which employees do not receive sufficient information regarding clear directions and goals. Such role ambiguity can affect employees' emotions, thought processes, and overall condition. Therefore, the researchers aim to investigate role ambiguity in this context (Khawaldeh, 2023; Maden-Eyiusta, 2021).

The occasional lack of role clarity can lead to decreased employee performance, which may be exacerbated by a lack of work motivation (Asamani et al., 2025; Parker & Knight, 2024; Tuckey et al., 2017). According to Hasibuan, as cited in Andriani et al. (2024), motivation is the driving force that encourages employees to work enthusiastically, effectively, and diligently to achieve organisational goals and personal satisfaction.

In previous research conducted by Moumdouh (2025), a strong direct positive influence of the digital leadership dimension on employee motivation was identified, as well as an indirect effect through motivational pathways that significantly influenced the relationship between digital leadership and digital self-efficacy.

Based on the foregoing discussion and previous research, this study examines the direct and indirect effects of digital leadership on employee motivation, with role ambiguity as a mediating variable. This research provides both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it enriches the digital leadership literature by clarifying the direct and indirect effects of digital leadership on work motivation, particularly through the mediating role of role ambiguity. Practically, the findings assist organisations in designing effective leadership training, improving communication clarity, and creating a supportive digital work environment to enhance employee motivation.

METHOD

Types of research

In this study, the researcher used a quantitative method with an explanatory approach, aiming to explain the causal relationship between digital leadership, role ambiguity, and employee work motivation. Primary data collection was conducted through an online questionnaire.

Variables and Measurement

Table 1. Operational Definitions and Variable Indicators

Variables	Code	Indicator	Measurement Scale
Digital Leadership Van Wart et al.,	KD 1	Effectiveness of Digital Communication Clarity	Interval

Variables	Code	Indicator	Measurement Scale
(2019) in Pringgabayu, (2025)	KD 2	Effectiveness in building team relationships digitally	Interval
			Interval
	KD 3	Effectiveness of technology utilization for digital team effectiveness	Interval
	KD 4	Effectiveness in driving adaptation to digital change	Interval
	KD 5	Effectiveness in demonstrating empathy and emotional intelligence in digital interactions	Interval
	KD 6	Effectiveness in using digital data in decision making	Interval
Role Ambiguity Triyono & Priyitno (2017) ; Rahayu (2023) ; Rizzo, House & Lirtzman (1970) in Tamba et all. (2020)	AP 1	unclear role objectives	Interval
	AP 2	Unclear Accountability	Interval
	AP 3	Lack of understanding of what is expected	Interval
	AP 4	Lack of understanding of the role of work in achieving goals	Interval
	AP 5	Inadequate authority for assigned tasks	Interval
	AP 6	Team reciprocal relationship in explaining work	Interval
Work Motivation Yosodipuro et al., (2021); Fajriyanti et al. (2023)	MB 1	Work targets and goals	Interval
	MB 2		Interval
	MB 3	Achievement and Recognition from superiors	Interval
	MB 4	Vertical and Horizontal Relationships	Interval
	MB 5		Interval

Source: Adapted from Van Wart et al., 2019; Triyono & Priyitno, 2017; Rizzo et al., 1970 in Tamba et al., 2020; Yosodipuro et al., 2021; Fajriyanti et al., 2023

Population, Sample Size and Sample Collection Techniques

The population determination in this study is all employees, both female and male, who work in the Jakarta area (East, South, Central, North, West), and who work either face-to-face, hybrid or full remote. Categorization of working face-to-face (where Meetings must be face-to-face), Hybrid (Working WFH/WFO. Meetings do not need to be face-to-face), Full Remote (Working using social media, and never meeting in an office environment). The number of samples in this study was 250 respondents, and data measurement used a Likert Scale with measurements of 1) Strongly Disagree to 5) Strongly Agree.

Validity & Reliability Test

Validity and reliability testing are conducted to ensure that the measuring instruments used in the research are truly capable of accurately measuring the intended construct and producing consistent results. Indicator validity is evaluated through the *outer loading value* . An indicator is considered valid if it has a loading value above 0.70, as this figure indicates that the indicator has a strong contribution in representing the latent construct.

Next, convergent validity was analyzed using the *Average Variance Extracted* (AVE) value. A construct is considered to have good convergent validity if the AVE value exceeds 0.50. This indicates that more than half of the indicator's variance can be explained by the underlying construct.

Meanwhile, reliability testing is conducted by examining *the Cronbach's Alpha* and *Composite Reliability* (CR) values. Cronbach's Alpha is used to assess the level of internal consistency between items within a construct, while Composite Reliability measures the extent to which the construct as a whole is able to provide stable and reliable measurement results. A construct is considered reliable if both values are above 0.70, as this limit reflects an adequate level of internal consistency in a research instrument.

Outer Model Test

Measurement model testing was conducted to ensure that each indicator accurately reflects the latent constructs in this study, namely digital leadership, role ambiguity, and work motivation. This evaluation was conducted prior to the structural relationship analysis to ensure that the research instrument had adequate measurement quality.

The outer model assessment covers several main aspects, namely:

a. Indicator reliability: evaluated through the *outer loading value*. An indicator is declared to meet the criteria if it has a loading value ≥ 0.70, which indicates that the indicator has a strong contribution in explaining the construct being measured.
b. Internal consistency of the construct: analyzed using *Cronbach's Alpha* and *Composite Reliability values*. A construct is considered reliable if both values are above 0.70, indicating the level of consistency between indicators in a single latent variable.
c. Convergent validity: measured by *the Average Variance Extracted* (AVE) value. A construct is said to have good convergent validity if the AVE value is ≥ 0.50, which means that more than half of the indicator's variance can be explained by the latent construct.
d. Discriminant validity: tested using the *Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio* (HTMT) criteria. The model meets discriminant validity if the HTMT value is below the 0.90 limit, thus indicating that each construct has clear differences from one another.

The measurement model is declared feasible if all indicators and constructs meet the statistical criteria, so that it can proceed to the structural model evaluation stage (inner model).

Inner Model Test

Structural model testing was conducted to analyze the relationships between latent constructs in the study, specifically to determine the effect of digital leadership on role ambiguity and work motivation. The model was evaluated using several indicators, namely:

a. R-Square (R^2) to assess the ability of independent variables to explain dependent variables,
   Effect Size (f^2) to measure the magnitude of the influence of each variable, and c. Predictive
b. Relevance (Q^2) to see the predictive ability of the model.

The model is considered to have good quality if the R^2 value is in the moderate to high category and the Q^2 value is greater than zero.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping method in the SmartPLS application to obtain t-statistics and p-values as the basis for determining the significance of the relationship between variables. The hypothesis was declared accepted if the p-value was ≤ 0.05 and the t-statistic was ≥ 1.96 at a 95% confidence level.

This test aims to determine whether digital leadership has a significant effect on role ambiguity and work motivation, as well as to analyze the relationship between variables according to the research model that has been formulated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

No	Information	Respondent Characteristics	Frequency (People)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Woman	156	51
		Man	150	49
2	Age	< 20 years	6	2
		21–25 years	117	38.2
		26–30 years	105	34.3
		31–35 years	62	20.3
		> 35 years	16	5.2
3	Last education	High School/Vocational School	8	2.6
		Diploma	80	26.1
		S1	200	65.4
		S2	18	5.9
		S3	0	0
4	Length of work	< 1 year	11	3.6
		1–3 years	53	17.3
		4–6 years	124	40.5
		> 6 years	118	38.6
5	Position/Title	Staff	183	59.8
		Supervisor	87	28.4
		Manager	36	11.8
6	Work Location	Central Jakarta	72	23.5
		North Jakarta	71	23.2
		West Jakarta	44	14.4
		South Jakarta	77	25.2
		East Jakarta	42	13.7
7	System Working	Face to face with digital system support (Meetings MUST be face to face)	122	39.9
		Hybrid (WFO&WFH) (Meetings DO NOT HAVE TO BE face-to-face)	133	43.5
		Full digital / remote	51	16.7

Source: Primary data processed, 2025

Based on the research results of 306 respondents who work around Jakarta with different backgrounds, in this study, the population is dominated by women with a percentage of 51%,

and the age dominance is in the range of 21-25 years with a percentage of 38.2%, and with a Bachelor's degree background of 65.4%.

In the scope of work, the population of this study is dominated by employees who have worked for a period of 4-6 years with a percentage of 40.5%, and the respondents' job positions are dominated at the staff level by 59.8%, the work location is dominated by South Jakarta with a percentage of 25.2% and the *Hybrid work system* is 43.5%.

Outer Model

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity aims to ensure that indicators within a construct have a high level of correlation and truly represent the latent variable being measured. In the PLS-SEM approach, convergent validity is evaluated through the outer loading value and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). According to Hair et al. (…), the outer loading value reflects the magnitude of the correlation between the indicator and the latent construct. An indicator is said to have good reliability if the outer loading value is ≥ 0.70. The 0.70 limit is used because this value indicates that the construct is able to explain approximately 49% of the indicator's variance ($0.70^2 = 0.49$), which is considered adequate in social science research. In addition, a construct is said to meet convergent validity if it has an AVE value ≥ 0.50, which means that more than 50% of the indicator's variance can be explained by the latent construct.

Table 3. Outer Loading (Convergent Validity)

Variables	Indicator	Loading Factor	Rule of Thumb	Conclusion
Role Ambiguity (Y)	AP 1	0.884	0.700	Valid
	AP 2	0.902	0.700	Valid
	AP 3	0.862	0.700	Valid
	AP 4	0.878	0.700	Valid
	AP 5	0.894	0.700	Valid
	AP 6	0.890	0.700	Valid
Digital Leadership (X)	KD 1	0.893	0.700	Valid
	KD 2	0.886	0.700	Valid
	KD 3	0.873	0.700	Valid
	KD 4	0.874	0.700	Valid
	KD 5	0.871	0.700	Valid
	KD 6	0.886	0.700	Valid
Work Motivation (Z)	MB 1	0.883	0.700	Valid
	MB 2	0.880	0.700	Valid
	MB 3	0.857	0.700	Valid
	MB 4	0.868	0.700	Valid
	MB 5	0.891	0.700	Valid
	MB 6	0.875	0.700	Valid

Source: SmartPLS output, 2025

The results of the outer loading data processing showed that all indicators in the variables Role Ambiguity, Digital Leadership, and Work Motivation had outer loading values greater

than their reference values. Thus, it can be concluded that all indicators have met the requirements for convergent validity.

Table 4. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Indicator	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Role Ambiguity	0.783
Digital Leadership	0.775
Work Motivation	0.767

Source: SmartPLS output, 2025

And in the results of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) data processing, the figure obtained was 0.7, which is above the figure that should be 0.5, so it can be concluded that it meets the convergent validity criteria.

Reliability

In addition to validity testing, this study also conducted reliability testing using two main measures: Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability. Cronbach's Alpha is used to measure the level of internal consistency between indicators within a construct. This value indicates the extent to which items within a variable correlate with each other and support the explanation of the latent construct. According to Hair (2010), a construct is considered reliable if its Cronbach's Alpha value is ≥ 0.70. Values between 0.60–0.70 are acceptable in exploratory research, while values above 0.80 indicate a good level of internal consistency.

Additionally, reliability is also measured using Composite Reliability. This measure is considered more accurate in the context of PLS-SEM because it takes into account the outer loading values of each indicator, thus not assuming that all indicators contribute equally.

Table 5. Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha & Composite Reliability)

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Rule of Thumb	Conclusion
Role Ambiguity (Z)	0.945	0.956	0.700	Reliable
Digital Leadership (X)	0.942	0.954	0.700	Reliable
Work Motivation (Y)	0.939	0.952	0.700	Reliable

Source: SmartPLS output, 2025

The results of data processing to see the reliable relationship between variables using Coronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability show a number greater than 0.700, so that the relationship between variables and all constructs has met the reliable criteria.

Inner Model

R-Square

Table 6. R-Square

Variables	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Role Ambiguity	0.907	0.906
Work Motivation	0.946	0.945

Source: SmartPLS output, 2025

The R Square (R^2) value indicates the ability of exogenous variables to explain the variance of endogenous variables in the PLS-SEM structural model (Hair et al., 2021). The analysis results show that the R^2 value for Role Ambiguity is 0.907 and Work Motivation is 0.946. This means that 90.7% of the variation in Role Ambiguity can be explained by Digital Leadership, while 94.6% of the variation in Work Motivation can be explained by Digital Leadership and Role Ambiguity.

Referring to the PLS-SEM evaluation criteria, an R^2 value of 0.75 is categorized as strong (Hair et al., 2021; Chin, 1998). Thus, this research model has very strong explanatory power for endogenous variables.

F-Square

Table 7. F-Square (Effect Size)

Relationship between variables	F Square	Influence Category
Digital Leadership(X) -> Role Ambiguity(Z)	9,714	Big
Digital Leadership(X) -> Work Motivation(Y)	0.880	Big
Role Ambiguity(Y) -> Work Motivation(Z)	0.121	Small

Source: SmartPLS output, 2025

The effect size (f^2) value is used to measure the contribution of exogenous variables to endogenous variables in the PLS-SEM structural model (Hair et al., 2021). Referring to Cohen's (1988) criteria, an f^2 value of 0.02 is categorized as small, 0.15 as medium, and 0.35 as large. The results show that the effect of Digital Leadership on Role Ambiguity is categorized as very large (f^2 = 9.714), while the effect of Digital Leadership on Work Motivation is categorized as large (f^2 = 0.880). Meanwhile, the effect of Role Ambiguity on Work Motivation is categorized as small (f^2 = 0.121).

Hypothesis Testing

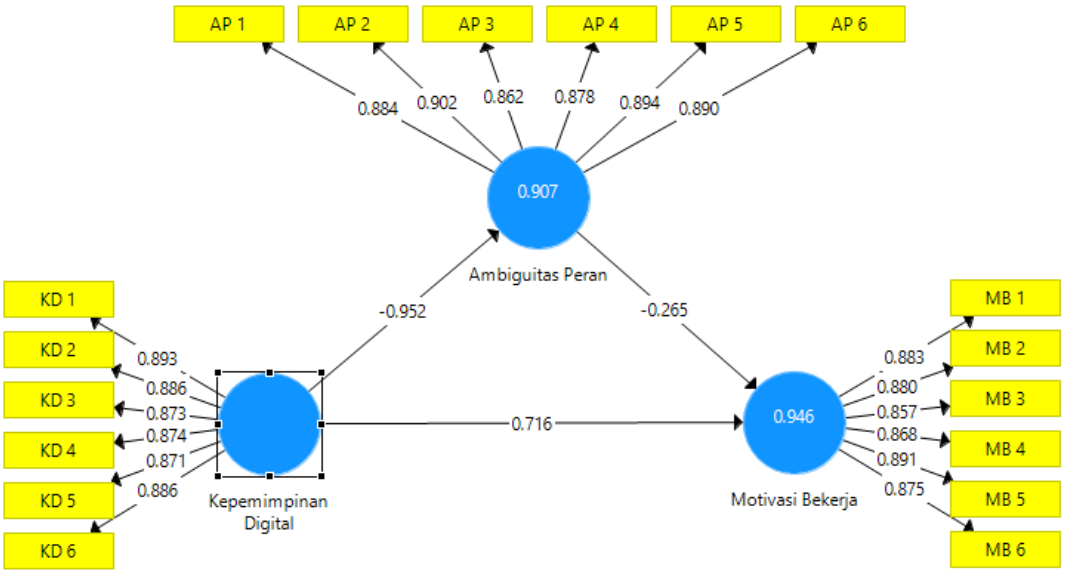

Figure 1. Research Model (Path Diagram)
Source: SmartPLS output, 2025

Hypothesis testing in this study was conducted to analyze the direct influence between variables, namely Digital Leadership on Role Ambiguity and Work Motivation, as well as the influence of Role Ambiguity on Work Motivation. Furthermore, testing was also conducted to determine the mediating role of Role Ambiguity in the relationship between Digital Leadership and Work Motivation.

The analysis was conducted using a Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach through a bootstrapping procedure. Hypothesis evaluation was based on the path coefficient (original sample), t-statistic, and p-value. A hypothesis is accepted if the t-statistic is >1.96 and the p-value is <0.05 (Ghozali, 2021). Detailed hypothesis testing results are presented in the following table.

Table 8. Hypothesis Testing (Direct & Indirect Effects)

Hypothesis	Relationship between variables	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
H1	Digital Leadership (X) -> Work Motivation (Y)	0.716	0.666	0.153	4,667	0.000
H2	Digital Leadership (X) -> Role Ambiguity (Z)	-0.952	-0.952	0.017	54,474	0.000
H3	Role Ambiguity (Z) -> Work Motivation (Y)	-0.265	-0.316	0.156	1,702	0.089
H4	Digital Leadership (X) -> Role Ambiguity (Z) -> Work Motivation (Y)	0.253	0.303	0.153	1,647	0.100

Source: SmartPLS bootstrapping procedure, 2025

The Influence of Digital Leadership on Work Motivation

The test results show that Digital Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Work Motivation ($\beta = 0.716$; $t = 4.667$; $p = 0.000$). Since the t-statistic value is greater than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05, H1 is accepted. This finding indicates that the more effective the implementation of digital leadership in an organization, the higher the level of employee work motivation. Leaders who are able to utilize technology, adapt to digital changes, and provide clear direction in a technology-based work environment are proven to be able to increase employee enthusiasm, commitment, and work drive.

Test results indicate that digital leadership has a positive and significant effect on work motivation. This finding aligns with transformational leadership theory, which states that leaders who are able to inspire, provide vision, and utilize technology effectively can increase employee morale and engagement (Avolio et al., 2004; Yukl, 2013).

In a digital context, leaders who adapt to technological changes can create an innovative and supportive work environment, thereby increasing employee intrinsic motivation (Purwanto, 2020; Ahmad, 2023). Furthermore, Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory also explains that leader support can increase an individual's confidence in their abilities, ultimately boosting work motivation.

The Influence of Digital Leadership on Role Ambiguity

The analysis results show that Digital Leadership has a negative and significant effect on Role Ambiguity (β = -0.952; t = 54.474; p = 0.000), thus H2 is accepted. The negative coefficient indicates that the better the digital leadership, the lower the level of role ambiguity perceived by employees. This indicates that digitally adaptive leaders tend to be able to provide clarity of tasks, work expectations, and more effective communication through technological support, thereby minimizing role ambiguity in the organization.

The results of the study indicate that digital leadership significantly influences role ambiguity. The negative direction of the coefficient indicates that better digital leadership tends to decrease role ambiguity.

This is supported by leadership theory, which states that clear communication and direction from leaders play a crucial role in reducing task ambiguity (Yukl, 2013). Effective leadership in a digital environment can clarify work expectations through structured systems and technology (Arifin, 2023; Gultom, 2023).

Furthermore, Hair et al. (2019) explained that in the structural model, a significant negative relationship such as this indicates the role of leadership as a psychological risk-reducing factor in organizations.

The Influence of Role Ambiguity on Work Motivation

Role Ambiguity has a negative coefficient on Work Motivation (β = -0.265), but this effect is not statistically significant (t = 1.702; p = 0.089). Thus, H3 is rejected. Although the direction of the relationship indicates that increasing role ambiguity tends to decrease work motivation, this result is not empirically strong enough. This indicates that in the context of this study, the role ambiguity factor is not yet a primary determinant influencing the level of employee work motivation.

The results show that role ambiguity does not significantly impact work motivation. Theoretically, role ambiguity typically negatively impacts motivation because it creates stress and uncertainty (Yukl, 2013). However, in certain contexts, employees who are accustomed to the dynamics of digital change may be able to adapt so that role ambiguity does not directly reduce motivation.

Several studies also show that other factors such as leadership and organizational culture can be dominant variables that influence motivation more strongly than role ambiguity itself (Suharnomo, 2022; Setiawan, 2023). Therefore, role ambiguity has not been proven to be a primary determinant of work motivation in this study.

The Influence of Digital Leadership on Work Motivation Mediated by Role Ambiguity

The results of the indirect effect test indicate that Digital Leadership does not significantly influence Work Motivation through Role Ambiguity (β = 0.253; t = 1.647; p = 0.100). Since the t-statistic value is <1.96 and p-value >0.05, H4 is rejected. Thus, Role Ambiguity is not proven to mediate the relationship between Digital Leadership and Work Motivation. This finding indicates that the increase in work motivation is more directly influenced by Digital Leadership than through the mechanism of reducing role ambiguity.

Because the relationship between role ambiguity and work motivation (H3) is insignificant, role ambiguity cannot mediate the influence of digital leadership on work motivation. According to Ghozali (2018), in mediation analysis, the indirect path can only be declared significant if the relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable is

significant. Hair et al. (2019) also emphasized that the failure of one of the paths in the mediation model results in the mediation effect not being statistically fulfilled.

Thus, in this study, digital leadership plays a more direct role in increasing work motivation than through the mechanism of reducing role ambiguity.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that digital leadership has a positive and significant impact on work motivation. This confirms that a leader's ability to utilize technology, provide clear direction, and create an adaptive digital work environment can increase employee motivation and enthusiasm. Furthermore, digital leadership has also been shown to significantly reduce role ambiguity, meaning effective leadership can clarify tasks, responsibilities, and work expectations within an organization.

However, role ambiguity was not shown to have a significant effect on work motivation. This finding suggests that, in the context of this study, the level of role ambiguity is not necessarily a primary factor determining employee motivation. Consequently, role ambiguity also does not act as a mediating variable in the relationship between digital leadership and work motivation. Thus, the influence of digital leadership on work motivation is direct. Overall, this study confirms that digital leadership is a strategic factor in enhancing work motivation in the era of digital transformation.

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