

## The Role of Inclusive Leadership in Enhancing Digital Transformation Field Study

Hasan Abdulsalam Ali Emran<sup>1\*</sup>, Fathia. M. Elhony<sup>2</sup>  
Fezzan University

**Corresponding Author:** Hasan Abdulsalam Ali Emran

[Has.omran@fezzanu.edu.ly](mailto:Has.omran@fezzanu.edu.ly)

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the role that inclusive leadership plays in enhancing digital transformation in higher education institutions. The study examined the opinions of a sample of faculty members from Libyan universities, totaling 214 individuals, through an electronically designed questionnaire. The results of the study confirmed a strong positive relationship between the presence of inclusive leadership and the process of digital transformation in universities. It also indicated that the existence of regulations and laws governing digital transformation, as well as comprehensive strategic plans, would contribute to enhancing this process and achieving significant successes. The study recommends increasing investment in digital infrastructure and modern technologies, enhancing the technical capabilities of higher education institutions, improving the legislative and legal framework, and developing comprehensive strategic plans for digital transformation at the level of higher education institutions.

## INTRODUCTION

The world is witnessing rapid development in the field of technology and digital transformation, which makes it essential for institutions to have leadership that can keep pace with these changes and effectively direct their human and technological resources. As a result, inclusive leadership, which focuses on innovation and flexibility, has become one of the key drivers for achieving digital transformation. This transformation requires radical changes in organizational structures and institutional cultures, making the study of the role of inclusive leadership in enhancing digital transformation necessary to understand the mechanisms of success and avoid obstacles.

Therefore, it is crucial to better understand the relationship between leadership competencies and digital transformation. In this context, this research aims to study the relationship between inclusive leadership skills in the context of digital transformation, as well as to explore the potential enhanced role of inclusive leadership competencies in the relationship between the institution's information technology capabilities and digital transformation. Accordingly, we hope that this research will stimulate discussion and expand existing theories regarding the impact of leadership competencies on digital transformation.

### *Previous Studies*

Leadership plays a pivotal role in guiding organizations through the challenges of adopting and implementing digital transformation strategies. (Emran, Elhony, 2024) Many studies have addressed the role of leadership in the digital transformation process. A study by Ongena et al. (2024) examined the relationship between digital leadership competencies and digital transformation, conducted on a sample of 433 participants. The study found that digital leadership competency has a strong impact on organizational digital transformation.

In the same context, the results of the study by (Tarsik et al. 2025) revealed a significant increase in scientific production in recent years, emphasizing the growing interest in the role of leadership in digital advancement. It also concluded that transformational and digital leadership are among the key models that can contribute to digital transformation. Additionally, the study by Katharina Gilli (2023) found that the role of leadership in managing digital transformation in organizations is critically important, as effective leadership ensures the success and effectiveness of change. The results of the same study indicated that digital transformation requires leaders who are people-focused, understand the nature of work, and are capable of guiding and directing their team members through the change process. Therefore, leaders need to listen, build strong relationships, and collaborate with their team members; in other words, they must nurture their subordinates.

In a related context, the results of the study by Al-Husseini (2023) revealed that one of the most important requirements for digital transformation is the provision of the basic IT infrastructure at the university, along with a team of IT specialists. Also, a study by Al-Muzain (2024) found that digital

transformation will bring about a significant qualitative shift in the development of the educational process and the sharing of information anytime and anywhere, moving away from traditional methods. In contrast, a study by Abdullah (2024) concluded that there is currently no possibility for digital transformation due to the weak level of administrative and technical infrastructure. The results of (Emran and Elhony, 2023) showed a statistically significant relationship between leadership and achieving strategic success. The results (Emran and Elhony, 2023) show a significant impact of digital transformation on human resources management strategies, highlighting the need for organizations to adapt and introduce technology in their systems to achieve sustainable development goals.

Reviewing previous studies, it is clear that leadership plays an important role in the digital transformation process, and the most critical requirement for achieving digital transformation is the existence of a strong infrastructure, along with support from senior management for the digital transformation process.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

Digital transformation integrates digital technologies into all aspects of an organization's operations, including business processes, corporate culture, and customer experiences. It also involves a comprehensive rethinking of business models and strategies, as well as practices, to leverage the potential of digital technologies, drive innovation, enhance efficiency, and improve competitiveness. Digital transformation is not limited to the adoption of new technologies; it requires a fundamental shift in mindset, embracing a culture of experimentation, collaboration, and flexibility (Yang Yansen & Zhou Yujie, 2023).

(Ziyadin et al., 2020) defined digital transformation as "the process through which organizations respond to numerous new digital innovations, enabled by a global network, with the aim of achieving outstanding performance and managed superiority by changing various business metrics." Many authors view digital transformation as a result of market changes and the emergence of the industry. Some argue that market fluctuations lead to a need for better responsiveness to market demand, encouraging companies to undergo digital transformation to ensure better adaptability to business requirements and to change the way individuals work to improve their performance. Some claim that the development and application of information technology have had a significant impact on the way individuals operate.

Digital transformation is defined as a continuous process of climbing the digital maturity ladder by employing digital technologies and other practices, alongside organizational practices, to create a digital culture. Therefore, digital transformation concerns the changes brought about by digital technology in the business models of organizations, their products, processes, and organizational structures. Digital transformation impacts multiple areas within the company, and there are many stakeholders involved in defining the transformation

strategy, such as marketing, information technology, product development, strategic management, and human resources. It is essential for all of them to develop a shared understanding of the priorities of digital transformation activities, which means that all areas within the organization should be aligned when planning digital transformation activities, and all stakeholders must participate in this process.

Some believe that digital transformation refers to changes related to the application of digital technologies in all aspects of society, and that the digital revolution leads to increased flexibility in production, enhanced speed, a new dimension of mass production, advanced productivity levels, superior quality outcomes, and emerging new business models (Karolina Kokot et al., 2021).

Digital transformation has profound effects on institutions across various sectors, as it reshapes business models, creates value, and enhances competitiveness. It enables organizations to streamline processes, improve customer experiences, and develop new products and services by leveraging data-driven insights and advanced analytics. Digital transformation can enhance innovation, agility, and adaptability, allowing organizations to respond more effectively to market fluctuations and rapidly changing customer needs. However, realizing the full potential of digital transformation requires organizations to overcome various challenges, including legacy systems, organizational silos, and resistance to change (Yang Yansen & Zhou Yujie, 2023).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Institutions and their leaders have faced enormous challenges resulting from digital transformation, a radical change brought about by new digital technologies that affect all aspects of life. Digital transformation has fundamentally altered the nature of work, as many employees operate in self-organizing, non-hierarchical virtual teams, at least partially, using flexible methods and digital technologies to generate innovative products and services.

In this context, this study focuses on the important role of inclusive leadership in promoting digital transformation. It can be said that few studies have addressed the role and function of inclusive leadership in the digital transformation process. To address this research gap, this study aims to discuss the role of inclusive leadership in facilitating the transition to a digital organization.

Thus, the problem is framed around understanding whether there is a role for inclusive leadership in promoting digital transformation in Libyan universities. Consequently, the objective of the study is to identify the role of inclusive leadership in enhancing digital transformation in Libyan universities from the perspective of faculty members. The descriptive analytical approach was employed as it is suitable for achieving the study's objectives, and an electronic questionnaire was used to collect data from the study sample.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership in managing digital transformation within organizations is of paramount importance, as it plays a critical role in ensuring the effectiveness and success of these changes. Digital transformation involves the use of digital technology and innovation to enact comprehensive reforms and improvements in business processes, operational frameworks, and customer experiences within an organizational context .

Effective leadership includes the ability to make strategic decisions, provide guidance, empower individuals, and facilitate the successful adoption of technology. For a leader to be considered effective, they must possess the ability to proactively identify and anticipate market shifts, emerging technological trends, and evolving customer requirements. It is essential to promote the adoption of new technologies and transform established operational practices within organizations. In the realm of digital transformation, possessing proactive and inclusive leadership is crucial to ensuring the ongoing relevance and competitive capability of organizations in the digital age.

The results of the current study indicate that university leadership possesses a good degree of openness to new ideas and is striving to improve performance within the university, with support for digital transformation. The findings also showed significant agreement among the sample participants regarding the positive role of digital transformation in enhancing institutional performance. Specifically, 88.1% of respondents indicated that digital transformation significantly contributes to enhancing the creative capabilities of employees. Furthermore, 72.9% of the study sample confirmed that digital transformation reduces personal judgments and reflects a high level of trust in the objectivity of digital processes. Additionally, 89.8% of the study sample emphasized the important role of digital transformation in achieving transparency and accountability, as well as improving services. It was noted that 83.5% believe that the digital work environment requires a better balance between life and work, reflecting employees' awareness of the importance of digital transformation in improving performance and quality of work life. Finally, the study results confirm a strong positive relationship between inclusive leadership and the digital transformation process in universities. The study also demonstrated that the presence of regulations and laws governing digital transformation, along with comprehensive strategic plans for digital transformation, can contribute to enhancing the transformation process and achieving significant successes.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight that inclusive leadership plays a fundamental role in ensuring the success of digital transformation initiatives within organizations. Leaders who embrace inclusivity are able to integrate technological advancements with the human aspects of change, creating an environment where employees feel valued and engaged. This integration not

only accelerates the adoption of new technologies but also ensures that the transformation process is more sustainable and aligned with the organization's strategic goals.

Inclusive leadership fosters a culture of openness, collaboration, and adaptability, which is essential in the rapidly changing digital landscape. By promoting transparent communication and encouraging diverse perspectives, inclusive leaders reduce uncertainty and build trust among employees. Such trust becomes a catalyst for overcoming resistance to change, thereby enabling smoother transitions to new digital systems and processes. The presence of an inclusive leader thus bridges the gap between organizational aspirations and employee readiness, a critical factor in driving digital initiatives forward.

Furthermore, the study reveals that organizations led by inclusive leaders experience significant improvements in innovation and problem-solving capabilities. The ability to leverage team diversity as a source of creativity enables these organizations to develop more effective and competitive digital solutions. This approach transforms digital transformation from a mere technological upgrade into a holistic organizational evolution, enhancing overall business performance and market competitiveness in the digital era.

Another key insight from the field study is that inclusive leadership directly contributes to employee empowerment and skill development. Leaders who prioritize inclusivity provide opportunities for employees to acquire new digital competencies, preparing them to navigate technological disruptions with confidence. This investment in people ensures that the workforce remains agile and resilient, further strengthening the organization's ability to adapt to future digital challenges.

Ultimately, inclusive leadership emerges as a strategic necessity for organizations seeking long-term success in digital transformation. It serves as a unifying force that connects strategy, technology, and human capital, ensuring that digital initiatives are not only implemented effectively but also embraced by the entire organization. The study concludes that without inclusive leadership, digital transformation efforts risk being superficial, fragmented, and unsustainable in the face of rapid technological evolution.

### ***Recommendations***

Organizations aiming to succeed in their digital transformation journeys should embed inclusive leadership practices into their core management frameworks. Leaders must move beyond a purely technological focus and recognize the central role of people in the success of digital initiatives. By cultivating an environment that values diverse perspectives and active participation, organizations can create a sense of ownership and commitment among employees, which is crucial for achieving long-term transformation objectives.

Inclusive leaders are encouraged to maintain consistent and transparent communication throughout the digital transformation process. This includes clearly articulating the purpose, benefits, and expected outcomes of technological changes while actively seeking employee feedback. Such an approach not only

builds trust but also ensures that potential issues are identified and addressed early, preventing setbacks and resistance that often hinder digital initiatives.

Furthermore, organizations should prioritize continuous learning and development programs tailored to the evolving digital landscape. By equipping employees with the necessary skills and fostering a culture of adaptability, organizations can enhance their readiness to embrace future innovations. This proactive stance helps maintain momentum in transformation efforts, ensuring that the workforce remains competent, confident, and motivated to drive digital progress.

Finally, future research should continue to explore the dynamic relationship between inclusive leadership and digital transformation across various sectors and cultural contexts. Understanding how inclusivity interacts with emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and automation, will provide valuable insights for developing leadership models that are responsive to the demands of the digital age. Such studies can guide both practitioners and academics in refining strategies that maximize the potential of inclusive leadership in driving sustainable digital success.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

### **1. Industry-Specific Analysis**

Future research should explore the role of inclusive leadership in digital transformation across different industries (e.g., manufacturing, healthcare, education, public sector) to determine whether its impact varies by sectoral characteristics.

### **2. Longitudinal Approach**

Conducting longitudinal studies would provide deeper insights into how inclusive leadership influences digital transformation outcomes over time, particularly in sustaining long-term digital maturity.

### **3. Cross-Cultural Perspectives**

Comparative studies across countries and cultures could highlight how cultural dimensions (e.g., collectivism vs. individualism, power distance) interact with inclusive leadership in driving digital transformation success.

### **4. Integration with Emerging Technologies**

Further research can examine how inclusive leadership supports the adoption and ethical use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data analytics, and automation.

### **5. Quantitative-Qualitative Mixed Methods**

Employing mixed methods research could enrich findings by combining statistical evidence with in-depth employee perspectives regarding inclusive leadership practices during digital change.

### **6. Impact on Employee Well-Being and Organizational Resilience**

Future studies should investigate how inclusive leadership during digital transformation not only drives innovation but also supports

employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational resilience in times of rapid technological disruption.

#### 7. **Measurement Framework Development**

Research is needed to develop comprehensive measurement tools or frameworks that assess the effectiveness of inclusive leadership in accelerating and sustaining digital transformation efforts.

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