

Faculty of Economics and Business

Leadership Competencies for Digital Implementation in Malaysia: A Case Study of a Retailer in the Energy Industry

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Leadership Competencies for Digital Implementation in Malaysia: A Case Study of a Retailer in the Energy Industry

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DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Except where due acknowledgements have been made, the work is that of the author alone. The dissertation has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.



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ABSTRACT

This study explored leadership competencies required to drive digital implementation at the case study organisation, a retailer in the energy industry in Malaysia. Although significant advancements have been made in digital tools and strategies, many retailers have yet to achieve the anticipated business performance outcomes, highlighting a gap in leadership competencies required to manage successful digital implementation. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the leadership competencies required to achieve successful digital implementation at the case study organisation. This qualitative case study employed semi-structured interviews with eight top-performing retailers. The data were analysed using thematic analysis with the support of NVivo 14 software. The analysis identified fourteen leadership competencies distributed across five dimensions of digital maturity: (1) Strategy Orientation, (2) Customer Orientation, (3) Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Process Infrastructure, (4) Talent and Capability Development, and (5) Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment, which align with Transformational, Situational, and Authentic Leadership theories. The study recommends a conceptual framework that integrates the identified competencies, digital maturity dimensions, and leadership theories to drive digital implementation success, incorporating them into performance management and training development programmes.

Keywords: Leadership Competencies, Digital Implementation, Digital Maturity Dimensions

Kompetensi Kepimpinan untuk Implementasi Digital di Malaysia: Kajian Kes Peruncit dalam Industri Tenaga

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneroka kompetensi kepimpinan yang diperlukan untuk memacu implementasi digital di Organisasi Kajian Kes, iaitu peruncit dalam industri tenaga di Malaysia. Walaupun kemajuan ketara telah dicapai dalam alatan dan strategi digital, ramai peruncit masih belum mencapai hasil prestasi perniagaan yang dijangkakan, sekali gus menekankan jurang dalam kompetensi kepimpinan yang diperlukan bagi mengurus implementasi digital yang berjaya. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti kompetensi kepimpinan yang diperlukan untuk mencapai kejayaan dalam implementasi digital di Organisasi Kajian Kes. Kajian kes kualitatif ini menggunakan temu bual separa berstruktur dengan lapan peruncit berprestasi tinggi. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dengan sokongan perisian NVivo 14. Analisis mengenal pasti empat belas kompetensi kepimpinan yang diedarkan merentasi lima dimensi kematangan digital: (1) Orientasi Strategi, (2) Orientasi Pelanggan, (3) Teknologi Maklumat dan Komunikasi (ICT) dan Proses Infrastruktur, (4) Pembangunan Bakat dan Keupayaan, dan (5) Budaya Inovasi dan Komitmen Organisasi, yang sejajar dengan teori kepimpinan Transformasional, Situasional dan Autentik. Kajian ini mencadangkan kerangka konseptual yang menggabungkan kompetensi yang dikenal pasti, dimensi kematangan digital, dan teori kepimpinan untuk memacu kejayaan implementasi digital, serta mengintegrasikannya ke dalam pengurusan prestasi dan program pembangunan latihan.

***Kata kunci*:** *Kompetensi Kepimpinan, Implementasi Digital, Dimensi Kematangan Digital*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CARNet	Croatian Academic and Research Network
CIO	Chief Information Officer
CSO	Case Study Organisation
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
EV	Electric Vehicle
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IoT	Internet of Things
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
QR Code	Quick Response Code
RFID	Radio Frequency Identification
TM Forum	TeleManagement Forum
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study Background

In the era of digitalisation, businesses must undergo a transformation that utilises technology to remain competitive (Troise et al., 2022). Rapid advancements in digital technologies have disrupted traditional business structures, forcing businesses to rethink their models, processes, and strategies to adapt to the digital landscape. Businesses increasingly adopt innovations like Artificial Intelligence (AI), data analytics, and the Internet of Things (IoT) to stay competitive and relevant. These digital technologies improve operations and create new opportunities, enabling businesses to meet evolving demands and achieve long-term growth.

Malaysia's business sector exemplifies this shift, with organisations accelerating digital implementation to improve efficiency and strengthen competitiveness (Low et al., 2022). Its dynamic culture and growing economy make Malaysia an ideal setting for studying leadership, digital implementation, and organisational success (Apriliyanti et al., 2021). In the rapidly evolving energy retail business, digital implementation is important to optimise operations, improve efficiencies, and deliver greater customer value for long-term success (Guo et al., 2023). In the present digital era, effective leadership plays a key role in navigating this transformation. Leaders must demonstrate agility, vision, and technological expertise to shape organisational strategies and decisions (Wang et al., 2022). According to Brunner et al. (2023), identifying leadership competencies such as technological expertise, strategic decision-making, and innovation is essential for driving digital implementation.

This study explores leadership competencies for digital implementation in the retail business of Malaysia's energy industry. In order to ensure confidentiality and uphold ethical standards, the organisation studied is anonymised and referred to as the Case Study Organisation (CSO) throughout this dissertation. The CSO operates as a retailer in the energy industry, managing a network of retail sites that provide fuel, convenience stores, lubricants, and related services. In this study, the term retailers refers to the individuals responsible for leading and managing the CSO's retail sites. With a strong presence in Malaysia, CSO has implemented digital technologies to enhance business performance.

1.2 Global Digitalisation Trends

Global digitalisation transforms business operations, employment, and services, with industries leveraging digital transformation for competitive advantages. According to Siuta-Tokarska et al. (2022), the energy industry has embraced early adoption of digitalisation, aligning with global trends. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Digital Economy Report highlights a 35% rise in global internet bandwidth in 2020, the most significant increase since 2013, reflecting the COVID-19 pandemic's impact (*UNCTAD Digital Economy Report*, 2024). Monthly data traffic is projected to grow substantially by 2026, underscoring digitalisation's importance.

Data from countries representing three-quarters of the global gross domestic product (GDP) indicate that business e-commerce sales grew nearly 60% from 2016 to 2022, reaching $27 trillion (*UNCTAD Digital Economy Report,* 2024). Digital advertising spending is forecasted to grow by 13.2% in 2024, compared to 2.4% for traditional advertisements (Cramer-Flood, 2024). The digital economy in Southeast Asia is expanding rapidly, with the rise of technology companies and digital technologies transforming various

sectors (Beschorner, 2021).

The UNCTAD report highlights the importance of digital implementation for businesses, particularly by adopting advanced technologies, including AI, IoT, electric vehicles and green hydrogen (*UNCTAD Technology and Innovation Report*, 2023). As shown in Figure 1.1, the market size is projected to grow from $1.5 trillion in 2020 to over $9.5 trillion by 2030.

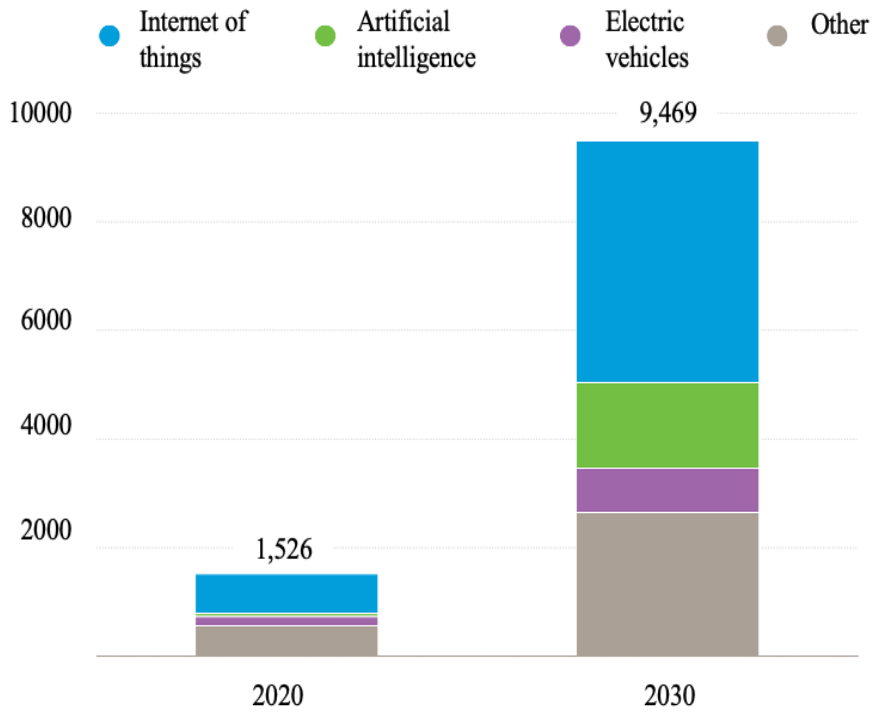


Figure 1.1: Market Size Estimates of Frontier Technologies by 2030

Note. UNCTAD Technology and Innovation Report (2023).

The World Economic Forum underlines the importance of organisational leaders realising the benefits and consequences of technology to capitalise on the digital potential of the next decade (*Future Focus 2025*, 2023). Leaders in organisations must adopt forward-thinking strategies and develop key competencies that align with digitalisation.

1.3 Digitalisation and Implementation in Malaysia

Malaysia's digital economy grew consistently, with annual rates between 6 to 10% from 2015 to 2020, reflecting a robust Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector and expanding e-commerce (Edrak et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this growth, driving businesses to shift online and fostering the emergence of digital enterprises (Cheong et al., 2020). Malaysians increasingly relied on online platforms for shopping, entertainment, and education, boosting the digital economy. Key innovations, including e-commerce, the IoT, AI, data science, and blockchain, have reshaped markets and demand-supply dynamics (Akter et al., 2020). These advancements highlight the digital economy's role in Malaysia's economic and societal frameworks.

Malaysia supports local technology businesses, empowers technopreneurs, and attracts investments to enhance ICT competitiveness and accelerate digital transformation (Tung et al., 2022). In 2021, e-commerce income reached RM1.09 trillion, up 21.8% from the previous year (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). This aligns with the National E-Commerce Strategic Roadmap's RM1.65 trillion target by 2025. Malaysia prioritises infrastructure, innovation, and ecosystem development by applying digital technologies to reconfigure processes, enhance customer experiences, and explore new opportunities (Wahid & Zulkifli, 2021). Under the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) framework, digitalisation is essential for maintaining competitiveness (Halili et al., 2021). Malaysia's ICT revenues, RM289 billion or 19.1% of GDP in 2019, highlight its proactive digital strategy (Mhmood et al., 2021).

Digital implementation success in Malaysia depends on understanding the connection between leadership, digital transformation, local culture, and the distinct

requirements of both the workforce and customers (Hamilton & Webster, 2018). Leadership in the digital era in Malaysia requires a detailed strategy that considers the cultural aspects of business initiatives and staff engagement (Chan et al., 2021). Leaders must create inclusive and collaborative environments that encourage skill development, innovation, and adaptability. Malaysian business culture's hierarchical structure emphasises leaders' role in communicating the vision of digital transformation, addressing issues, and building a common commitment to digital excellence. Retail businesses in Malaysia experience slow progress in digital implementation, requiring leadership to align strategies with cultural values, provide training, and address staff concerns to minimise disruptions (Parvand & Rasiah, 2021).

Malaysia’s rapid digital transformation highlights the adoption of advanced technologies, e-commerce growth, and supportive policies, establishing it as a relevant context for exploring leadership and implementation strategies in the digital era (Chandrakasan et al., 2023). The CSO demonstrates the potential to advance digital implementation in the retail business by aligning digital initiatives with Malaysia's unique needs, preferences, and challenges.

1.4 Digital Implementation Overview at the CSO

The energy industry transition drives digital transformation, enabling businesses to connect with diverse data sources, streamline operations, standardise processes and create new business models (Wanasinghe et al., 2020). Organisations like the CSO have responded to this shift by implementing digital strategies that standardise operations, simplify supply chains, and enhance business models (Daneeva et al., 2020). The CSO operates a robust retail network offering fuels, lubricants, convenience stores, and electric vehicle (EV)

charging facilities. The CSO has achieved high digital maturity by implementing advanced digital technologies and strategic initiatives, improving sales performance, customer experience, and operational efficiency, contributing to overall business performance. Digital tools, including payment systems, loyalty programmes, inventory management, and data analytics, drive innovation and streamline operations.

The CSO has advanced its retail digital transformation through platforms and applications that streamline operations. Early initiatives included a retailer management platform for orders, inventory, and transactions. An app-based point-of-sale system integrated with radio-frequency identification (RFID) and quick response (QR) code payments, supported by a back-office portal for real-time sales data, enhances efficiency. The transition from physical loyalty cards to a loyalty application enables point redemption, payments, and voucher validation. The CSO has enhanced convenience retailing through digital tools for site planograms, promotions, and shop layouts. Wet stock management was modernised with a web portal for inventory and delivery tracking, while mobile applications improved staff management, training, and service standards. Digital portals provide analytics to optimise customer experience, and a payment application allows mobile payments directly from vehicles, improving speed and convenience. These initiatives, collectively, reflect the CSO's commitment to digitalising its retail operations, improving operational efficiency, enhancing customer experience, and positioning itself as a leader in digital transformation within the retail business.

In conclusion, the CSO exemplifies effective leadership in digital implementation through digital strategies, streamlined operations, and diversified investments in EV infrastructure and convenience retailing. Its strong network, performance, and workforce

highlight efficiency and service excellence, reinforcing its role as a key player in Malaysia's energy sector. Digitalisation has significant implications for businesses and the workforce, requiring leaders to develop new competencies, leadership styles, and organisational capabilities (Benchea & Ilie, 2023).

1.5 Digital Implementation Outcome at the CSO

The digital implementation initiative was launched to improve business performance. The initiative was expected to increase sales, customer satisfaction and operational efficiency. However, only a small proportion of retailers achieved top-tier status, meeting their business performance targets post-digital implementation. Overall business performance by retailer category shows top-tier retailers, achieving the highest percentage of their targets, experienced a significant decline in representation from 2022 to 2023. Correspondingly, the proportion of medium-tier and bottom-tier retailers increased, indicating a performance redistribution across the lower tiers.

Digital implementation initiatives often face challenges that can impact performance outcomes. According to Lang (2021), digital implementation can disrupt existing processes and require significant adaptation periods. The sales performance analysis reveals a notable decline in 2023 compared to 2022 in key profit areas, particularly in fuels, lubricants and convenience retailing. While various external factors might influence sales performance, this study focuses on the direct impacts of digital implementation on sales performance. Factors such as road closures, road diversions, and temporary closures due to safety incidents have been accounted for and excluded from this analysis to ensure that the results reflect the direct effects of the digital implementation efforts. The overall sales performance indicates that significant areas require attention and improvement to achieve optimal performance.

The efficacy of digital deployment is greatly shaped by the alignment of digital plans with organisational competencies and customer needs (Jonathan & Watat, 2020). Customer satisfaction level has also declined from 2022 to 2023. The comparative analysis indicates a decrease in the percentage of very satisfied and satisfied customers, accompanied by a rise in the percentage of unsatisfied and very unsatisfied customers. This shift indicates that the digital implementation did not yield the expected improvements in customer experience. Factors such as employee adaptation, customer acceptance, and integration of new technologies play important roles in determining the success of digital implementation initiatives (Vial, 2019).

The CSO continues encountering low digital adoption rates among retailers and site staff. Digital customer engagement tools that include payment apps, loyalty apps, and customer experience portals show minimal engagement, low usage, and limited feedback. Similarly, digital operational systems for fuel delivery, supplier management, and site staff management remain underutilised, with inconsistent integration into daily processes. Data and analytics tools, such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems and business intelligence platforms, also experience low adoption, with minimal reporting activity and limited user engagement. The organisation needs to address barriers to digital adoption, such as ensuring proper training for retailers and staff, aligning digital tools with business processes, and enhancing user experiences to realise the full benefits of digital implementation (Chandrakasan et al., 2023).

Overall, the business performance highlights the outcome and challenges the CSO faced following its digital implementation. The decline in sales performance, customer satisfaction, and relatively low digital adoption rates point to critical areas requiring strategic

focus. The CSO must address these challenges as they are necessary for fully leveraging its digital implementation and driving future growth.

1.6 Problem Statement

As one of Malaysia's leading retailers in the energy industry, the CSO have implemented advanced digital tools and systems to enhance business performance. However, post-implementation analysis reveals a notable gap between expected and actual business performance outcomes, particularly in alignment with the five dimensions of digital maturity.

Pihir et al. (2018) identified five dimensions of digital maturity: strategic orientation, customer centricity, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development, and a culture of innovation and organisational commitment. These dimensions are important as they underpin the leadership competencies necessary to drive successful digital implementation. Leadership competencies are a blend of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to observable behaviours, which are instrumental in achieving high performance and desirable outcomes essential for fostering these dimensions (Pihir et al., 2019).

Strategy Orientation reflects a leadership gap in aligning digital initiatives with business objectives. While tools for inventory management and operational optimisation have been introduced, business performance outcomes suggest inefficiencies in aligning strategies with on-the-ground implementation. Retailers face challenges in addressing resistance to change as site staff struggle to transition from manual operations to digital platforms due to concerns about job loss and disruption to familiar workflows (Razlan & Masrom, 2023). This highlights the need for retailers to set a clear strategic vision that

communicates the value of digital tools in enhancing operations and long-term growth.

Customer Orientation underscores challenges in implementing digital tools while maintaining customer satisfaction. Despite the availability of digital payment apps, loyalty programmes, and customer experience portals, adoption remains low among retailers and customers, contributing to a decline in customer experience. Feedback indicates concerns that digital tools prioritise transactional efficiency over personalised service, a core value for site staff in retail (Razlan & Masrom, 2023). Customer service process automation has led to fears about losing the human touch, further discouraging adoption. Retailers must bridge this gap by integrating digital tools effectively while preserving customer-centric practices.

ICT and Process Infrastructure present barriers to the successful integration of digital systems. Existing ICT infrastructure, particularly in rural or suburban areas, is insufficient to support emerging technologies such as digital payment and fuel delivery systems (Ravi & Chelliah, 2023). Delays or failures in digital payment systems during peak periods disrupt operations and reduce service quality. Technical incompatibility between new tools and legacy systems further hampers efficiency, requiring retailers to advocate for infrastructure upgrades, phased implementations, and contingency planning to minimise disruptions (Ahmad et al.,2023)

Talent and Capability Development highlights the deficiency of digital competencies among retailers and site staff, which continues to hinder digital adoption. Although they have experience in traditional operations, retailers and site staff do not possess the skills required to effectively use advanced tools like customer experience analytics and inventory management systems (Han & Trimi, 2022). Low adoption rates for operational tools and data analytics platforms suggest that retailers must adjust to the ongoing digitisation process

and actively participate in self-development to acquire additional skills to address these skill gaps (Chandrakasan et al., 2023). The rapid digitalisation outpaces the staff's ability to adapt, leading to uneven digital literacy and reduced productivity. Leadership must prioritise targeted training and talent retention strategies to build a digitally capable workforce.

Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment reflect challenges in fostering a culture that embraces innovation and change. Resistance to digital transformation arises from fears of job redundancy, insufficient training, and concerns about workload increases (Imran et al., 2020). For example, the shift to self-service tools and automated processes has created anxiety among site staff, who view digitalisation as disruptive rather than enabling. Retailers must foster an environment that promotes innovation, addresses employee concerns, and aligns digital initiatives with organisational growth objectives.

The challenges identified across the five dimensions of digital maturity highlight a notable gap in leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation at the CSO. In order to address the gap in leadership competencies at the CSO, it is important to understand and define the specific competencies that successful retailers need to manage digital implementation effectively. According to Maheshwari and Yadav (2020), understanding these competencies will help retailers to effectively implement new technologies and ensure that their teams are well-supported, skilled, and adaptable to change.

1.7 Research Objectives

This study aims to address challenges in achieving successful digital implementation by identifying and understanding the leadership competencies required. The objectives of the study are structured into one main objective and five specific objectives, each aligned

with the five key dimensions of digital maturity.

1.7.1 Main Objective

The main objective of this study is to identify the leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation in Malaysia through a case study of a retailer in the energy industry.

1.7.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objective of this study is to identify the leadership competencies fundamental for successful digital implementation across each dimension of digital maturity. This can be accomplished through the following set of objectives:

i. To identify the leadership competencies for strategy orientation in successful digital implementation.
ii. To identify the leadership competencies for customer orientation in successful digital implementation.
iii. To identify the leadership competencies for ICT and process infrastructure in successful digital implementation.
iv. To identify the leadership competencies for talent and capability development in successful digital implementation.
v. To identify the leadership competencies for innovation culture and organisational commitments in successful digital implementation.

1.8 Research Questions

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive and thorough investigation to gain in-depth insights from the CSO's retailers into the following key research questions. The study will focus on addressing the following five key research questions:

i. What are the leadership competencies required for strategy orientation to achieve successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia?
ii. What are the leadership competencies required for customer orientation to achieve successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia?
iii. What are the leadership competencies required for ICT and process infrastructure to achieve successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia?
iv. What are the leadership competencies required for talent and capability development to achieve successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia?
v. What are the leadership competencies required for innovation culture and organisational commitment to achieve successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia?

1.9 Significance of the Study

In the current digital era, businesses must be highly adaptable and innovative to remain competitive by keeping up with the latest technological advancements and meeting the ever-changing needs of their customers (Marganaha, 2024). The CSO's retail business in the energy industry in Malaysia serves as an example of such an organisation. In this business, retailers play an important role in driving digital implementation. This study involves sampling from the CSO's top-performing retailers nationwide. These retailers have

demonstrated exemplary business performance as a result of their successful digital implementation. By focusing on these leading examples, the study aims to explore the leadership competencies that enable such success in digital implementation. The valuable insights from this study allow the CSO to identify and develop retailers skilled in digital strategies and technologies.

This study contributes to the existing knowledge of the leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation in the retail business. By empowering retailers with the appropriate leadership competencies, the business is better positioned to survive and thrive in the rapidly evolving digital landscape of today's business environment (Weritz, 2022). This study also further expands on Pihir et al. (2018) digital maturity dimensions and Hensellek's (2022) digital leadership framework by incorporating leadership competencies specifically from the context of retailers in Malaysia, which can serve as a model for other retailers and industries.

In the dynamic digital setting, retailers, as leaders, must possess competencies beyond technical competencies. Leadership in the digital era is important for organisations to survive and thrive by adapting and transforming business strategies (De Araujo et al., 2021). This effort requires training various skills and offering digital tools to improve the business teams. This study presents a comprehensive strategic framework for the CSO's retail business to align its retailers' leadership competencies with digital implementation requirements.

This study gives management valuable insights into digital implementation for strategic decision-making about investments, talent management, and digital readiness. The CSO can optimise resource allocation by focusing on high-impact areas, like technology

adoption or leadership development. This study enables the CSO to develop a comprehensive training and performance management framework emphasising effective leadership competencies for successful digital implementation.

This study focuses on the CSO's retail business operations in Malaysia. The consequences of this study may go beyond a single business. This study can assist other businesses undergoing digital implementation. The effective leadership competencies outlined can serve as a blueprint for other sectors seeking to capitalise on opportunities presented by digital implementation. In this age of extensive digital technology usage, organisations across industries in Malaysia face both leadership competencies challenges and opportunities from digital transformation (Maruthuvellu et al., 2022). Thus, this research aims to develop a comprehensive and widely applicable framework of leadership competencies for businesses navigating this transformational landscape. By understanding the complexities of digital leadership in a specific context, different sectors can make connections, identify commonalities, and find relevant strategies for their digital ventures.

This study may have a broader impact by providing management and other stakeholders with fundamental insights into digital implementation strategies for their organisations from the lens of leadership competencies (Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022). The study's findings may have implications beyond the CSO retail business. The following information can assist other businesses in making informed investments to ensure their leaders have the required competencies to drive digital implementation. These insights can aid businesses in managing leadership issues and opportunities in the digital era. Additionally, it helps organisations in various sectors navigate the complex challenges of digital implementation.

1.10 Scope of the Study

This study explores the leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia's energy sector, using the CSO as a case study.

This study is geographically confined to an organisation operating in Malaysia. This deliberate limitation enables a thorough study of the ways in which local factors shape and influence leadership and the implementation of digital initiatives in the Malaysian context. The focus is specifically targeted at the retail business in the energy industry. The CSO, one of the key players in the retail business in Malaysia, serves as the case study. The study sample comprises top-performing retailers from the CSO, selected based on business performance demonstrating successful digital implementation.

Leadership competencies are the central theme of this study, as they enable leaders to manage digital implementation to enhance business performance. This study specifically explores competencies related to strategy orientation, customer orientation, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development, and innovation culture and organisational commitment (Pihir et al., 2018). By focusing on these dimensions, the study aims to provide insights into the leadership competencies necessary for successful digital implementation.

This context provides a rich ground for studying leadership in a digital era. The study focuses on insights from 2022 to 2024, capturing recent trends and developments to provide a present understanding of leadership in the digital era.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This chapter reviews the literature guiding this study, focusing on leadership competencies for digital implementation. It discusses transformational, situational, and authentic leadership, as well as digital maturity dimensions related to leadership competencies. The chapter concludes by identifying research gaps and framing the study's focus on digital implementation in the CSO retail business in Malaysia.

2.2 Digital Transformation and Implementation

Digital transformation fundamentally redefines organisational operations and value delivery through technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence, data analytics and cloud computing (Tang, 2021). Integrating people, processes, and technologies is essential for organisations to remain competitive in a digitalised landscape (Ilieva & Gaydarov, 2021; Lang, 2021). Digital transformation is a disruptive process that impacts entire organisations and requires new leadership approaches, and leaders must adopt multiple roles and behaviours to navigate its complexities (Weber et al., 2022).

Digital transformation involves restructuring operations by integrating digital tools and technologies into organisational functions, improving customer interactions and internal processes (Hanelt et al., 2020). While some organisations have achieved digital maturity, others remain in the early stages, focusing on reshaping business models, processes, structures, and human capital (Adama & Okeke, 2024). Many digital transformation

initiatives experience high failure rates, emphasising the need for detailed planning, clear objectives, and proactive risk management to enhance success rates (Correani et al., 2020). An organisation requires a strategic framework for successful digital transformation, serving as a roadmap to guide necessary changes and align resources with transformation goals (Albukhitan, 2020). According to Tekic and Koroteev (2019), effective strategies focus on shifting from technology-centric approaches to operational impacts, redefining value chains, aligning frameworks with digital models, and implementing financial strategies to support transformation.

While digital transformation represents a broader, organisation-wide shift towards digital-first processes and culture, digital implementation is a more focused phase that specifically addresses the operationalisation of digital tools, systems, and processes (Ferreira et al., 2020). Digital implementation integrates digital technologies and processes across an organisation, focusing on technology deployment, process integration, user adoption, and alignment with the organisational strategy (Schallmo & Williams, 2021). The digital implementation phase is crucial as it integrates the formulated digital transformation strategies into the organisation's daily operations to achieve the intended outcomes (Schallmo & Williams, 2021).

Li (2020) identifies two foundational approaches for digital implementation, which are leading digital culture and fostering learning. Organisational culture shapes behaviours and must evolve with technological advancements to remain competitive (Morelli & Wang, 2020). Technology reshapes norms, requiring organisations to integrate digital practices into daily operations to drive innovation (Deep, 2023). Digitally oriented cultures emphasise skills, adaptive mindsets, and knowledge networks aligned with business models (Kocak &

Pawlowski, 2022). Continuous learning complements digital implementation by addressing skill gaps, promoting adaptability, and enhancing competencies (Voruganti, 2022). Learning cultures enable organisations to manage transitions, foster innovation, and create environments that support collaboration, experimentation, and risk-taking (Cárdenas-Navia & Fitzgerald, 2019; Trenerry et al., 2021). Digital learning further enhances workforce development through flexible skills-building approaches, enabling employees to meet evolving organisational needs (Hiremath et al., 2021; Verma, 2021). Leaders play a key role in enabling these foundational principles. They set strategic directions, promote innovation, and foster collaboration to integrate digital culture across the organisation (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). Leaders empower teams by providing training, facilitating knowledge sharing, and offering continuous support to drive learning and adaptability (Sow & Aborbie, 2018).

Various barriers hinder digital implementation including data issues, organisational structures, staff readiness, technology limitations, expertise gaps, and financial constraints (Uzule & Verina, 2023). Resistance often arises from limited understanding rather than opposition to change. Organisation entrenched culture and structures may also slow progress, especially where past successes deter innovation. Early financial planning is crucial for timely implementation (Verhoef et al., 2021). Organisational inertia, or resistance to change, reinforces the status quo (Haskamp et al., 2021). Employee resistance, stemming from unclear benefits of new tools, worsens this inertia. Addressing these barriers requires employee engagement through workshops to clarify transformation benefits (Kaganer et al., 2023) and adopting flexible processes to support change (Schmid et al., 2019). In order to address these barriers, Töytäri et al. (2017) emphasise the need to prepare organisations for change with a clear vision, redesign frameworks to align strategies, and embed new practices to ensure sustainable implementation.

2.3 Digital Implementation and Leadership Challenges at the CSO

Digital implementation at the CSO involves a strategic reassessment of the business's vision and objectives alongside implementing new technology (Tajudeen et al., 2021). The CSO integrates advanced technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), data analytics, automation tools, digital payment systems, and mobile applications into business processes to enhance operational efficiency, customer engagement, and overall business performance (Khang et al., 2023). This strategy positions the CSO as a competitive retailer in Malaysia's energy industry by focusing on adaptability, sustainability, and customer satisfaction through cutting-edge solutions (Albukhitan, 2020; Martínez-Peláez et al., 2023).

The CSO faces several organisational challenges in its digital implementation, particularly in adapting to structural and cultural changes. Staff readiness and skill gaps create barriers to adopting new technologies, requiring continuous training and upskilling programmes to ensure staff are prepared for evolving roles (Bednarčíková & Repiská, 2021). Resistance to change and cultural inertia further complicate adoption, requiring structured efforts to shift mindsets and embed innovation practices (Li et al., 2023). Sustainability goals introduce additional complexity, demanding alignment between digital strategies and eco-friendly operations while optimising processes and maintaining environmental responsibility (Bednarčíková & Repiská, 2021).

Digital implementation transition has significant effects on operations as global trends and local dynamics influence business operations. In response to rapid worldwide technical breakthroughs, leaders must tailor their digital strategy to specifically address the needs and complexities of the Malaysian market (Lee et al., 2020). For instance, successful digital implementation in the CSO requires knowledge of local rules, customer preferences,

and competitive landscapes, which are key determinants of success, ensuring relevance in today's fast-paced business world (Vial, 2021).

Leadership at the CSO faces challenges in managing cultural transformation, aligning strategies, and addressing skill gaps. Leaders must overcome resistance to change by fostering adaptability and building trust through clear communication and engagement strategies (Asbari, 2020). Visionary leadership is essential for articulating the transformation roadmap and ensuring alignment across departments, enabling seamless integration of technologies and maintaining focus on shared objectives (Khang et al., 2023).

Leaders also address skill gaps through targeted training programmes, equipping staff to adapt to evolving roles and responsibilities (Wahl, 2023). Promoting collaboration across teams is key to breaking down silos, improving accountability, and streamlining workflows (Trenerry et al., 2021). Effective leadership sustains operational progress and enables continuous innovation, ensuring resilience in the face of ongoing technological advancements and market changes (Li et al., 2023).

Digital implementation at the CSO is a transformative process that extends beyond technology adoption to create sustainable and competitive operations. Addressing challenges through strategies driven by effective leadership ensures the alignment of digital tools with business objectives, enabling innovation and efficiency (Vial, 2021; Ubiparipović et al., 2020). Leadership competencies, combining technical expertise, strategic vision, and cultural adaptability, remain central to sustaining long-term transformation and positioning the CSO as a leader in Malaysia's energy sector (Tajudeen et al., 2021).

2.4 Leadership Concepts for Digital Implementation

In the digital landscape, organisations are increasingly integrating digital technologies into their operations, making digital implementation necessary and, consequently, requiring leaders to navigate new tools and base their decisions on the available data (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). Kokot et al. (2021) indicate that no single leadership style is pre-eminently effective in driving such organisational changes, with technical knowledge being fundamental for leaders to fully grasp the scope and impact of digital changes. Moreover, a leader's competencies significantly influence the success of digital implementation initiatives, with effective strategic thinking and communication being essential for facilitating change, ensuring all stakeholders are aligned, and sharing a unified vision for the future (Kokot et al.,2021). According to Souza and Pietrafesa (2023), leadership success in the digital era demands strong communication and social competencies, as leaders must effectively engage with socially diverse employees and customers. Leaders in digital initiatives must be adaptable, proficient in various situations, and able to guide their teams in responding effectively to challenges (Hoerudin, 2020). Overall, successful leadership in the digital era demands integrating conventional leadership competencies with new ones specifically designed for digital contexts (Souza & Pietrafesa, 2023).

Recent studies on leadership in digital transformation and organisational change highlight the essential roles of transformational, situational and authentic leadership approaches in executing digital strategies. Transformational leadership, in particular, is important in digital settings that prioritise innovation and agility. Transformational leaders not only inspire and motivate employees to embrace digital innovation but also create a

compelling vision for the future that integrates digital technologies seamlessly into business operations (Gachugu, 2023). They foster a culture of innovation, encouraging experimentation and risk-taking, which are essential for digital advancement (AlNuaimi et al., 2022). Effective digital transformative leaders possess qualities such as empathy, humility, and integrity, alongside a thorough knowledge of digital technology, which empowers them to steer their organisations through complex digital landscapes (Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022; Schiuma et al., 2024). Situational leadership is valued for its flexibility and adaptability, which are essential in fast-paced digital environments. This approach has gained prominence as it allows leaders to adjust their management style to meet the evolving demands of digital projects and team dynamics (Dana & Chare, 2022). By assessing and responding to the needs and readiness of their team, situational leaders can effectively guide their teams through the implementation of new technologies and processes, ensuring optimal performance across various stages of digital projects (Islam et al., 2021). Authentic leadership enhances trust and transparency, elements that are indispensable during periods of digital transition. This leadership style boosts employee innovation and engagement by offering a stable and reliable presence, helping employees navigate the challenges of digital transformation (Helmuth et al., 2023). Authentic leaders, characterised by self-awareness, transparency, and strong moral values, foster environments where employees feel valued and supported, enhancing their willingness to adapt to new digital processes (Covelli & Mason, 2017; Ogunyemi & Ogunyemi, 2020).

In order to gain a further understanding of the diverse approaches leaders can adopt to manage digital implementation effectively, it is essential to examine these specific leadership theories that provide comprehensive frameworks for navigating this complex landscape. In this study, three main leadership theories, transformational, situational, and

authentic leadership, offer valuable insights into how leaders can adapt their styles and strategies to drive successful digital implementation within their organisations. The subsequent sections will thoroughly explore each of these theories, explaining their principles, applications, and relevance to digital implementation. By comprehending these theories, leaders can more effectively navigate the challenges of digital transformation and lead their organisations toward lasting success in a continuously evolving digital landscape.

2.5 Transformational Leadership

In the context of digital implementation, the principles of transformational leadership become increasingly relevant as they provide a robust framework for guiding organisations through complex and dynamic changes. This section explores the foundational principles of transformational leadership and examines how these principles apply to digital implementation.

2.5.1 Transformational Leadership Principles

Transformational leadership theory introduced by Burns (1978) and the work further elaborated by Bass and Avolio (1997) revolves around the use of vision and inspiration to motivate followers towards shared objectives. Transformational leadership is defined by four main elements shaping the leader-follower relationship, including idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Gonfa, 2020). Transformational leaders articulate inspiring visions, exhibit passion and confidence, and prioritise ethics while setting high standards (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). They inspire followers to exceed expectations and align individual aspirations with organisational goals (Chiș-Manolache, 2022).

Transformational leadership, as described by Sayyadi and Provitera (2022), focuses on creating open and effective communication pathways and requires leaders to exert additional effort with their team members. This leadership style aims to foster exceptional performance by employing a mix of the four identified components of transformational leadership. The ethical and moral foundations of transformational leadership play an important role in driving the motivational behaviours of followers (Egorov et al., 2019). Rose and Mamabolo (2019) describe transformational leadership as a style in which leaders inspire their followers to rise above their own immediate self-interests through charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Sayyadi and Provitera (2022) also emphasise that transformational leaders, known for their charisma, work closely with followers to achieve shared goals. Such leaders are often seen as role models and are instrumental in helping their followers navigate and overcome organisational challenges.

As illustrated in Figure 2.1, the Transformational Leadership Framework showcases the four foundational components that guide leaders in fostering a transformative impact in their organisations. This model, adapted from Burn's (1978) work by Hughes (2018), refines our understanding of how transformational leaders can effectively inspire and engage their teams through a cycle of continuous development and empowerment. The four foundational components are supported by various studies (Bass, 1985; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006). These components include Idealised Influence, where leaders serve as role models; Intellectual Stimulation, which encourages innovation and critical thinking; Inspirational Motivation, which propels individuals towards achieving higher goals; and Individualised Consideration, focusing on the tailored coaching and development of each team member (Hughes, 2018).

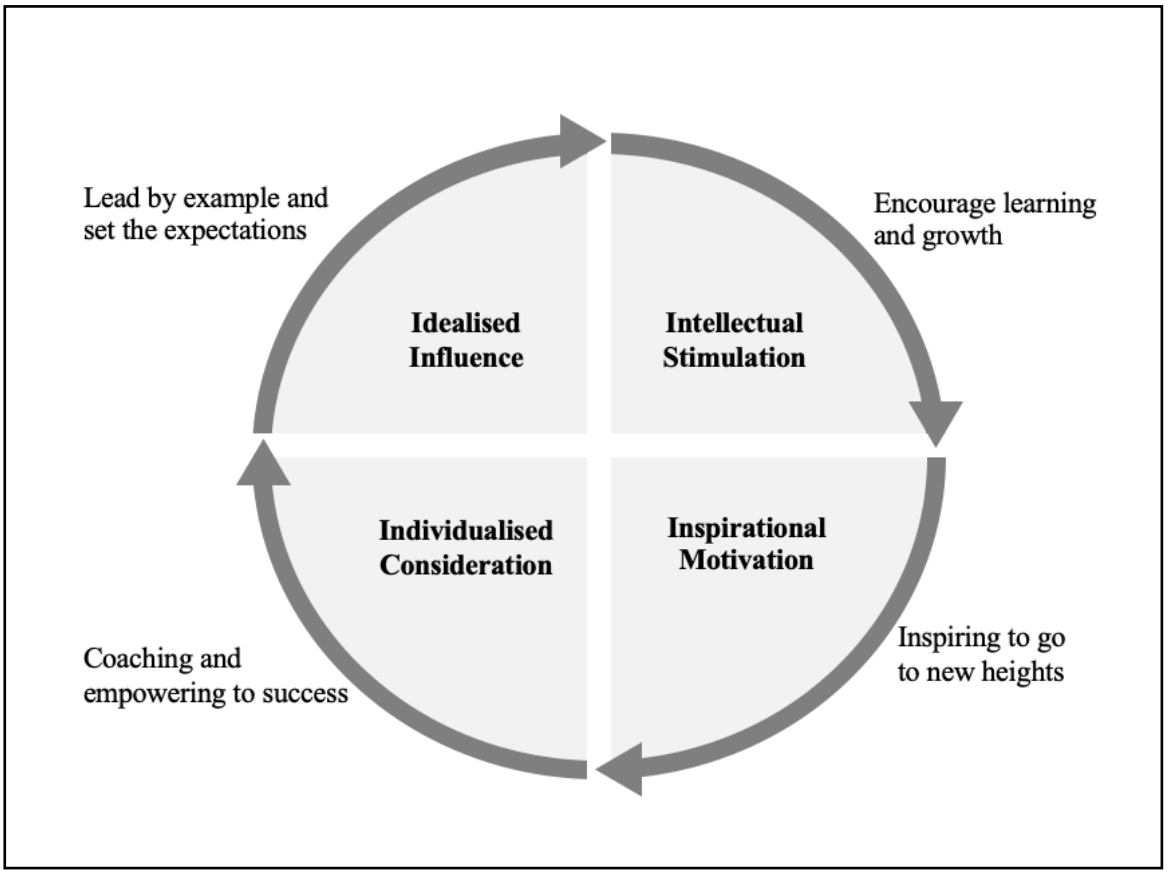


Figure 2.1: Transformational Leadership Framework

Note. Hughes (2018).

According to Hughes (2018), the framework demonstrates that individuals in leadership positions must continuously explore methods beyond traditional management, particularly in response to crises. The Transformational Leadership framework encourages leaders to take proactive ownership of their roles, develop a deep understanding of their followers' strengths and weaknesses, and effectively match followers with tasks to enhance their performance while also emphasising the significance of robust governance structures within any organisation (Hughes,2018; Motsepe & Naidoo, 2022).

These are the details of each component of the transformational leadership framework:

i. Idealised Influence

Idealised influence implies that leaders should exemplify respectability and trustworthiness, serving as role models who subordinates or followers can emulate and whose ideals they can internalise (Hughes, 2018). The leaders serve as exemplary role models, demonstrating charismatic behaviours that earn them trust, admiration, and respect from followers who seek to emulate them, as they are perceived as possessing exceptional capabilities and persistence (Gonfa, 2020). Idealised influence manifests in two key aspects: the leaders' behaviours and the attributes their followers ascribe to them (Avolio et al., 2020). Such leaders exemplify optimism and high ethical standards in decision-making, actively leading by example (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Afshari (2021) highlight that a leader's effective and transparent communication of vision and objectives is important in gaining acceptance and increasing follower satisfaction. Additionally, Kariuki (2021) emphasise that it is the responsibility of leaders to maintain high ethical and moral standards within the organisation, which instils a strong sense of purpose among followers.

Idealised influence plays a significant role in enabling followers to recognise and value their leader's ethical and moral standards, thus deepening their respect (Tushar et al., 2022). Furthermore, idealised influence creates a supportive environment that promotes empowerment and ownership among followers. This concept of empowerment aligns with McClelland’s theory of needs, which suggests that the pursuit of power is a compelling motivator among peers (Clayton & Ritter, 2023). Idealised influence characterises leaders who exemplify extraordinary capabilities and adhere to high ethical principles, making them role models for their followers (Chebon et al., 2019). Such leaders are admired, respected, and trusted for their role-model behaviour. Gonfa (2020) describes idealised influence as a

charismatic component of transformational leadership, where charisma is defined as the ability to envision and inspire new perspectives. Overall, transformational leaders serve as exemplary figures, significantly influencing their followers to adopt ethical values and embrace positive change through their strong commitment to these principles. (Gonfa, 2020).

ii. Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation is the process through which transformational leaders energise their followers by encouraging innovation and creativity, challenging existing expectations, and presenting new perspectives on issues (Karuthi, 2022). This process empowers followers to analyse problems and enhance their problem-solving skills independently. Gonfa (2020) further explains that intellectual stimulation is the capability of transformational leaders to prompt followers to think creatively and innovatively. This involves questioning established assumptions, reinterpreting challenges, and viewing familiar situations from fresh angles. Moreover, Gonfa (2020) notes that intellectual stimulation gauges the degree to which leaders can activate the creative and innovative potential of their followers. Intellectual stimulation has a beneficial impact on the quality of work, innovation, problem-solving, and employee growth (Ligombi et al., 2023).

Intellectual stimulation is a key component of transformational leadership, as the leaders actively promote a setting that nurtures innovation and critical thinking in the organisation (Karuthi, 2022). By constructively challenging prevailing assumptions, followers can freely express unique ideas and propose innovative solutions, fostering a culture where creativity is encouraged and all team members feel valued. This approach promotes a collaborative atmosphere for creative problem-solving and knowledge sharing

(Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders not only question existing practices but also foster creativity within their teams by encouraging the exploration of innovative approaches and learning opportunities (Hughes, 2018).

iii. Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation is a key component of transformational leadership, as the leaders inspire and motivate their teams through exemplary behaviour and decisive actions, effectively guiding them toward their objectives (Hughes, 2018). In situations of uncertainty, a leader who inspires their team can significantly boost job satisfaction and productivity (Hughes, 2018). In leadership, inspirational motivation plays a fundamental role in effectively articulating the value of digital strategies, hence developing a profound feeling of purpose and excitement within the workforce, particularly in industries facing volatility like oil and gas (Lubis et al., 2020). Leaders inspire and motivate their teams by fostering a sense of purpose, challenging them in their tasks, and articulating a clear and hopeful vision for the future, engaging followers in meaningful activities (Kehr et al., 2022). This builds commitment to a shared vision and secures active participation from the team.

Inspirational motivation is fundamentally about a leader's ability to elevate followers' performance beyond typical expectations (Almahasneh et al., 2022). Transformational leaders ignite enthusiasm and challenge their followers by infusing their tasks with significance. This is accomplished by aligning individual ambitions with broader organisational objectives, avoiding potential goal conflicts (Mohamed, 2023). Additionally, inspirational motivation is recognised as a core element of transformational leadership, with leaders engaging in behaviours that continuously motivate and inspire their followers to embrace innovative ideas (Gonfa, 2020). According to Almahasneh et al. (2022),

transformational leaders facilitate inspirational motivation through the effective communication of objectives and providing a vivid roadmap for achieving them. Their followers often perceive these leaders as creative, open-minded, innovative, committed, energetic, team-focused, accomplished, and empowering. Mohamed (2023) adds that transformational leaders boost employee satisfaction by encouraging followers to align with collective goals rather than pursuing solely individual ambitions.

iv. Individualised Consideration

Transformational leaders, acting as mentors, closely attend to the individual needs and aspirations of their followers, using tailored approaches to provide support and encouragement while setting high expectations. This personalised mentorship facilitates a safe learning environment where followers can experiment and grow (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Individualised consideration focuses on fostering employee growth within the framework of organisational objectives (Alharbi et al.,2023).

This approach is important in enhancing employee satisfaction by attentively addressing individual needs, establishing a solid foundation for their development and supporting their journey towards self-actualisation (Oswald, 2019). According to Decker and Cangemi (2018), leaders must demonstrate emotional intelligence to effectively synchronise followers' individual aspirations with organisational goals. Further, by delegating authority and assigning challenging tasks, leaders can nurture personal growth and instil a sense of responsibility and ownership in their followers. Leaders must also provide continual reassurance to followers, ensuring their unique needs are recognised and valued (Odeh et al.,2021). This consistent support motivates employees and aligns their personal development with the organisation's broader goals.

Transformational leaders actively support and encourage their teams, maintaining open lines of communication to promote supportive relationships (Bhatti et al., 2024). Within this framework, leaders emphasise the importance of transparency, promoting unity and mutual support among team members. This approach not only enhances effective communication but also builds trust within the team. As Fernandes et al. (2024) highlight, transparent communication involves providing truthful and precise descriptions of the situation, clearly outlining what is known, what is expected, and its implications for everyone involved.

2.5.2. The Impact of Transformational Leadership in Organisation

Transformational leadership is particularly effective in addressing organisational challenges and promoting change due to its unparalleled ability to inspire innovation and facilitate continuous positive change within organisations (Sahid et al., 2023). Transformational leaders serve as role models, motivating followers to prioritise organisational objectives over personal interests, this form of leadership is important for organisational advancement and stability, particularly in responding to market dynamics (Lingera & Guantai, 2020) The approach is associated with improved individual and organisational performance, making it increasingly popular in corporate and business domains (Almashhadani & Almashhadani, 2023).

Transformational leadership is a powerful conceptual framework that helps leaders understand leadership dynamics beyond daily tasks. Transformational leadership fosters significant organisational change by cultivating a deep commitment to the organisation and its objectives (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). This leadership style is distinguished by its focus on emotions and values, where leaders inspire followers by articulating a visionary and

idealistic future, thus emphasising each individual contribution to the organisational vision (Karauri & Kyongo, 2024). It is fundamentally people-centric, motivating employees to exceed expectations through a strong alignment with the organisation's goals.

Furthermore, transformational leadership is known for enhancing employee satisfaction by clearly communicating the organisation’s vision, mission, and values (Prochazka et al., 2018). Leaders employing this style prioritise synergy, mutual respect, effective communication, and delegation to achieve both individual and collective goals, which sets them apart as transformational (Khan et al., 2020). Unlike other leadership styles, transformational leadership uniquely inspires and motivates through its visionary capability (Qabool & Jalees, 2017).

Transformational leadership develops an atmosphere characterised by trust and active engagement, boosting employee satisfaction (Qabool & Jalees, 2017). It has also been linked to key performance indicators, including enhanced commitment and employee job satisfaction. This leadership style influences followers through relational exchanges and strategically managing rewards and penalties, elevating their morale and satisfaction levels.

Transformational leaders play a fundamental role in guiding organisational change. According to Korejan and Shahbazi (2016), they not only align followers with organisational values and goals but also adeptly recognise the organisation’s setting demands and implement necessary adaptations, steering the organisation toward future readiness. Moreover, these leaders are proactive in spotting potential opportunities for employees, fostering a commitment to cultural enhancement and the strategic redesign necessary for optimal resource utilisation.

2.5.3 Transformational Leadership in Organisations During the Digital Era

Transformational Leadership in the digital era combines the principles of transformational leadership with the demands and opportunities of the digital era in a time of rapid technological advancement, global interconnectedness, and widespread digital transformation (Magesa & Jonathan, 2022). These fundamental concepts redefine leadership in the constantly evolving digital environment, emphasising inspiring vision, personalised consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealised influence (Osmanović,2022). Transformational leadership in the digital era is about envisioning a digital future beyond current limits, and this idea encourages leaders to communicate a compelling digital vision that motivates and guides businesses through digital transformation (Antonopoulou et al., 2020). Transformational leader visionary character inspires teamwork, creating an organisational culture of digital innovation and growth (Antonopoulou et al., 2020). Transformational leaders may excite and drive their people by communicating a clear and ambitious digital vision (Flink et al., 2023).

Idealised influence goes beyond charisma and includes ethical role modelling, with leaders acting as exemplars of digital literacy and setting benchmarks for the business adoption of digital practices (Flink et al., 2023). The leaders model the values and behaviours expected from their teams, building trust and confidence. Idealised influence is significant in the digital era, as ethics impact decision-making and organisational rules (Philip, 2021). Through the embodiment of idealised influence, leaders can foster a culture within an organisation that goes beyond mere compliance with digital initiatives but rather instils a collective appreciation and adherence to these initiatives as an integral part of the organisational ethos.

In the digital era, leaders can motivate their teams to embrace innovation and develop a dynamic work setting, thereby driving digital excellence and fostering creativity and intellectual stimulation (Antonopoulou et al., 2020). Intellectual stimulation is key in driving technological innovation in the organisation (Karuthi, 2022). Creating an atmosphere that actively seeks new ideas and digital solutions fosters a culture that supports and encourages innovation, which, in turn, helps businesses adapt to the ever-changing digital landscape with agility and innovation (Taylor et al., 2019). The nurturing of intellectual stimulation by transformational leaders is proven to generate an atmosphere characterised by continual learning and adaptation to technological improvements. According to Taylor et al. (2019), this cultural transformation is essential for building a common readiness to adapt and thrive in the ever-changing digital world.

In the digital era, transformational leaders play a key role by inspiring and motivating employees to embrace digital innovation (Gachugu, 2023). This inspirational motivation significantly influences digital maturity in the organisation, fostering an organisational setting where continuous learning and adaptation are valued (Effendy & Arquisola, 2022). By inspiring motivation, transformational leaders help organisations achieve sustainable development goals, ensuring that digital advancements contribute to long-term growth and societal benefits (Safaruddin et al., 2023). Inspirational motivation by transformational leaders greatly impacts organisational innovation across multiple dimensions; this includes administrative innovation, where new policies and management practices are introduced; process innovation, which involves improving operational procedures; and product innovation, where new and enhanced products are developed (Ameen et al., 2020). By fostering a culture of innovation, transformational leaders ensure that their organisations remain competitive and responsive to the ever-evolving digital landscape.

In the context of the digital era, transformational leaders demonstrating individualised consideration are particularly attuned to the needs and aspirations of their followers, providing support and fostering personal development while recognising the unique challenges and opportunities presented by digital transformation (Mwaniki et al., 2020). These leaders acknowledge team members' diverse needs and goals, proactively personalising their interactions to show a deep understanding of digital issues and opportunities (Antonopoulou et al., 2020). Transformational leaders in the digital era recognise the necessity of adapting to each individual's situation and requirements, creating a digitally inclusive setting where each team member's unique skills are acknowledged and utilised, encouraging intellectual stimulation (Antonopoulou et al., 2020). This approach promotes learning, adaptation, and innovation, essential for navigating the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

In the digital era, transformational leadership is a versatile and holistic approach that effectively addresses the various challenges of leadership. Technology-driven leaders anticipate and capitalise on digital trends, understanding that artificial intelligence, blockchain, and data analytics have transformative capabilities that can strategically reconfigure industries and organisational systems (Akter et al., 2022). Additionally, technology-driven leaders affect cultural transformation. Leaders must recognise the important need for a complete digital transformation by fostering a culture that supports change, encourages ongoing learning, and promotes stakeholder collaboration (Firican, 2023). Transformational leadership enables organisations in the digital era to navigate uncertainty, respond to market demands, and capitalise on opportunities, positively influencing digital transformation efforts and organisational agility (AlNuaimi et al., 2022). It enhances employees' ability to manage uncertainty during digital transitions and drives

innovation in digital business models (Montasser et al., 2023).

Due to the importance of digital skill literacy, transformational leaders should actively promote continuous learning of digital skills at all levels of the organisation and demonstrate customised thinking in their behaviour to support the growth and enhancement of digital skills within their teams (Johnson & Voelkel, 2021). This iterative approach helps people adapt and overcome problems by learning and improving. Transformational leaders in the digital era prioritise data integrity and privacy while balancing innovation and prudent technology (Chatterjee et al., 2023). Additionally, transformational leaders require increased cybersecurity monitoring to protect their digital assets with robust strategies and strengthen the business's cybersecurity defences (Hepfer & Powell, 2020).

Transformational leadership in the digital era helps guide organisations to long-term success in the dynamic digital environment by integrating forward-thinking and innovative concepts while promoting an inclusive digital culture that accepts diversity and encourages collaboration, agility, and adaptation to respond to new challenges and opportunities (Hyun et al., 2020). In the digital era, leaders with transformational competencies are essential for guiding organisations to success by ensuring flexibility, creativity, and adaptability amid technological advancements (Schiuma et al., 2024).

2.6 Situational Leadership

In the context of digital implementation, the principles of situational leadership are becoming more relevant as they provide a strong framework for guiding organisations through complex and dynamic changes. This section explores the foundational principles of situational leadership and examines how these principles apply to digital implementation.

2.6.1 Situational Leadership Principles

Situational Leadership, introduced by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in 1969, highlights that effective leadership is dynamic and responds to changing circumstances. According to the Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Theory, effective leadership relies on the ability of leaders to adapt their approach to specific circumstances. In this process, it is necessary to evaluate important factors, including the scope of the job, the team's qualities, and other surrounding factors that influence the achievement of goals (Graeff, 1997). This theory argues that leaders must modify their style and approach based on their subordinates' specific needs and motivational levels (Ghazzawi et al., 2017). Leaders adapt their styles to their subordinates' needs and maturity levels to ensure the most effective approach for any situation (Pedroso, 2021). Specifically, if followers are both unable and unwilling to perform tasks, leaders should provide clear, direct instructions. Conversely, if a follower is unable to perform but willing, leaders should demonstrate strong support and guidance in both task-related and interpersonal aspects. In scenarios where a follower is capable but not motivated, a more supportive and engaging leadership style is necessary. Finally, when followers are capable and motivated, leaders can step back and intervene less, allowing followers to take more initiative. This approach emphasises the need for leaders to continually assess and respond to their team's readiness and willingness to work effectively (Marić et al., 2022)

The Situational Leadership model emphasises the need to adapt leadership approaches to match the different levels of employee readiness, as shown in Figure 2.2 and detailed in the accompanying descriptions. This approach underscores the necessity for leaders to be flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of their team members.

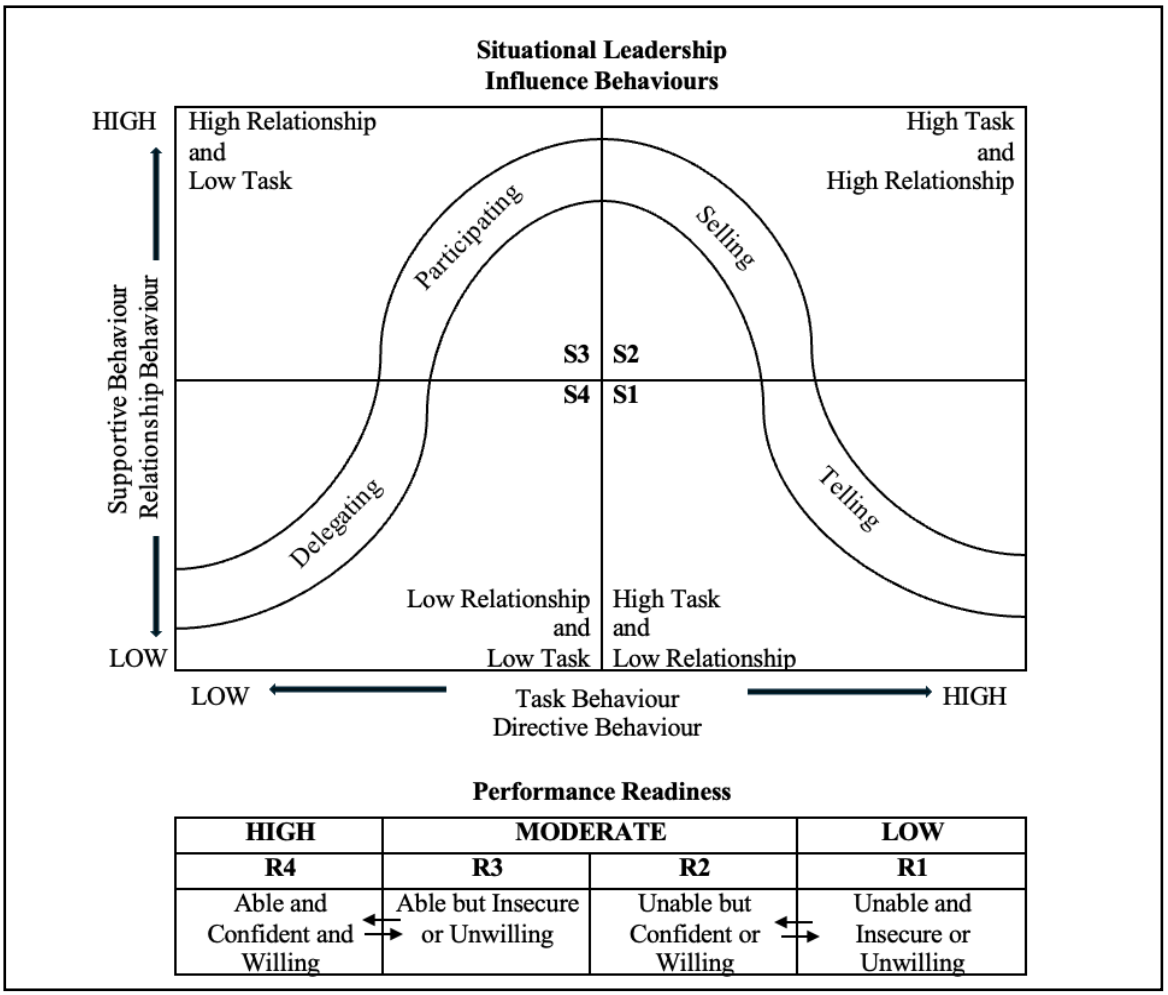


Figure 2.2: The Situational Leadership Model

Note. Hersey et al. (2013).

The Situational Leadership model, as detailed by Hersey et al. (2013), advocates that leadership should be adaptive and tailored to the followers' current state, including their readiness, willingness, maturity, and developmental level. The model identifies effective leaders as those who adeptly adjust their leadership style across a performance matrix. It delineates four principal leadership styles: 'telling' (S1), 'selling' (S2), 'participating' (S3), and 'delegating' (S4). These styles correspond to four distinct levels of employee readiness: R1 (Unable or insecure or unwilling), R2 (Unable but confident or willing), R3 (Able but insecure or unwilling), and R4 (Able, confident, and willing).

2.6.2 The Impact of Situational Leadership in Organisation

Situational leadership has been demonstrated to enhance employee commitment and drive organisational success (Chukwuocha, 2023). This leadership approach is particularly effective in managing workplace crises, as it encourages employees to seek guidance from their leaders on resolving challenging situations, such as mitigating risks (Islam et al., 2021). By emphasising adaptability and the use of multiple leadership styles based on subordinates' maturity and proficiency (Manyuchi & Sukdeo, 2021), situational leadership proves to be versatile and impactful across various sectors. Key aspects of situational leadership include understanding employee needs, adjusting management approaches accordingly, and continuous leader development. Leaders must continuously develop their skills to remain effective in a digital environment (Vidyakala, 2020). This continuous development ensures that leaders can effectively guide their teams through digital transformation, fostering a culture of learning and innovation (Islam et al., 2021).

In service organisations, situational leadership can lead to improved personnel management and increased profits (Todorović & Todorović, 2020). Leaders who practise situational leadership can understand employee needs better and adjust their management approaches accordingly, which is important in a digital landscape where employee roles and expectations are continually shifting (Todorović & Todorović, 2020). This approach not only enhances employee satisfaction but also contributes to organisational wealth (Vidyakala, 2020). The situational leadership model was also found to be effective and beneficial in educational organisations, as it can impact the success of a leader in improving the performance of subordinates through a situational approach (Maisyaroh et al., 2019). In the digital era, situational leadership has become more important due to the rapid pace of

technological advancements. Leaders must quickly adapt their management styles to meet the evolving needs of their teams. This adaptability is essential for manoeuvring through the complexities of digital work settings, where change is constant, and innovation is important (Manyuchi & Sukdeo, 2021).

Overall, the studies demonstrate the versatility and effectiveness of situational leadership across different industries and organisational structures. In the digital era, this leadership proves beneficial in helping organisations attain digital maturity and success by creating an organisation setting that is adaptive, responsive, and supportive (Chukwuocha, 2023; Maisyaroh et al., 2019; Manyuchi & Sukdeo, 2021; Vidyakala, 2020).

2.6.3 Situational Leadership in Organisation During the Digital Era

Situational Leadership in the digital era is a strategic and complex framework that integrates situational leadership with digital difficulties in the fast-paced digital world (Francisco et al., 2020). According to Francisco et al. (2020), situational leaders need to assess the digital maturity of their teams and organisations, evaluate their readiness and skills in using digital tools, procedures, and innovations, and tailor their strategies to specific digital contexts based on this understanding. This approach involves assessing the organisation's digital readiness and transformation requirements, excelling at integrating new digital technologies.

In the digital era, situational leadership requires leaders to be adaptable and flexible, recognising that different digital environments necessitate different methods and emphasising the need for a flexible and adaptable approach to the ever-changing digital environment where leadership styles may work in one context but not another (Akbar &

Manurung, 2020). Leaders must continuously review their teams' digital maturity, reevaluate their leadership techniques, and make necessary changes to maintain a competitive advantage in the ever-changing digital landscape (Francisco et al., 2020). They must successfully manage and leverage their teams' digital capabilities, offering fundamental support to teams with lower digital maturity to improve their digital skills and competencies (Francisco et al., 2020). According to Wuryani et al. (2021), in Situational Leadership, leaders must provide customised support and guidance by tailoring their interventions based on their teams' digital maturity. This means offering more direction and support to less digitally mature teams while promoting autonomy among members of digitally mature teams. This approach encourages team members to innovate and make their own decisions, ensuring that leadership interventions meet the needs and capabilities of the team.

Situational leaders must adapt to the digital era by encouraging experimentation, granting decision-making power, and fostering environments where teams can enhance their digital skills and seize new growth opportunities (Demja & Shurif, 2021). In today's digital era, the ability to adapt to different leadership styles has become increasingly important. Leaders must have the flexibility to switch between styles based on individual needs and effectively tackle the ever-evolving digital challenges. According to Demja and Shurif (2021), mastering this skill involves gaining a profound understanding of both leadership fundamentals and the dynamics of the digital landscape. Additionally, leaders must take proactive steps to promote digital competency among their staff.

Situational leadership is considered fundamental for success in today's ever-changing digital era. It enables leaders to modify their style based on the needs of their team and the challenges faced by the organisation (Dana & Chare, 2022). This strategy involves

identifying digital skill gaps and implementing targeted training alongside creating an atmosphere that encourages continuous learning to improve digital skills. Achieving an optimal balance between autonomy and supervision is of utmost importance in digital project management. Leaders must possess the discernment to effectively delegate authority when necessary, empowering team members to make independent decisions while also recognising the need for coaching to support them in achieving project objectives. Maintaining a balance between different elements is important for achieving optimal outcomes, especially when dealing with the evolving challenges of the digital landscape (Dana & Chare, 2022).

2.7 Authentic Leadership

In the context of digital implementation, the principles of authentic leadership are becoming more relevant as they provide a strong framework for guiding organisations through complex and dynamic changes. This section explores the foundational principles of authentic leadership and examines how these principles apply to digital implementation.

2.7.1 Authentic Leadership Principles

Authentic leadership, which surfaced as a distinct paradigm in leadership studies during the late 1990s, integrates principles from leadership ethics and positive organisational behaviour (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Northhouse, 2019; McLaughlin & Kunk-Czaplicki, 2020). Authentic leadership focuses on self-awareness, core values, and genuine relationships with followers (Ogunyemi & Ogunyemi, 2020; Johnson, 2019). Four components of authentic leadership are self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency (Northhouse, 2019; Masimane, 2021).

As illustrated in Figure 2.3, the Authentic Leadership conceptual model, outlined by Northouse (2019), describes fundamental components that form authentic leadership.

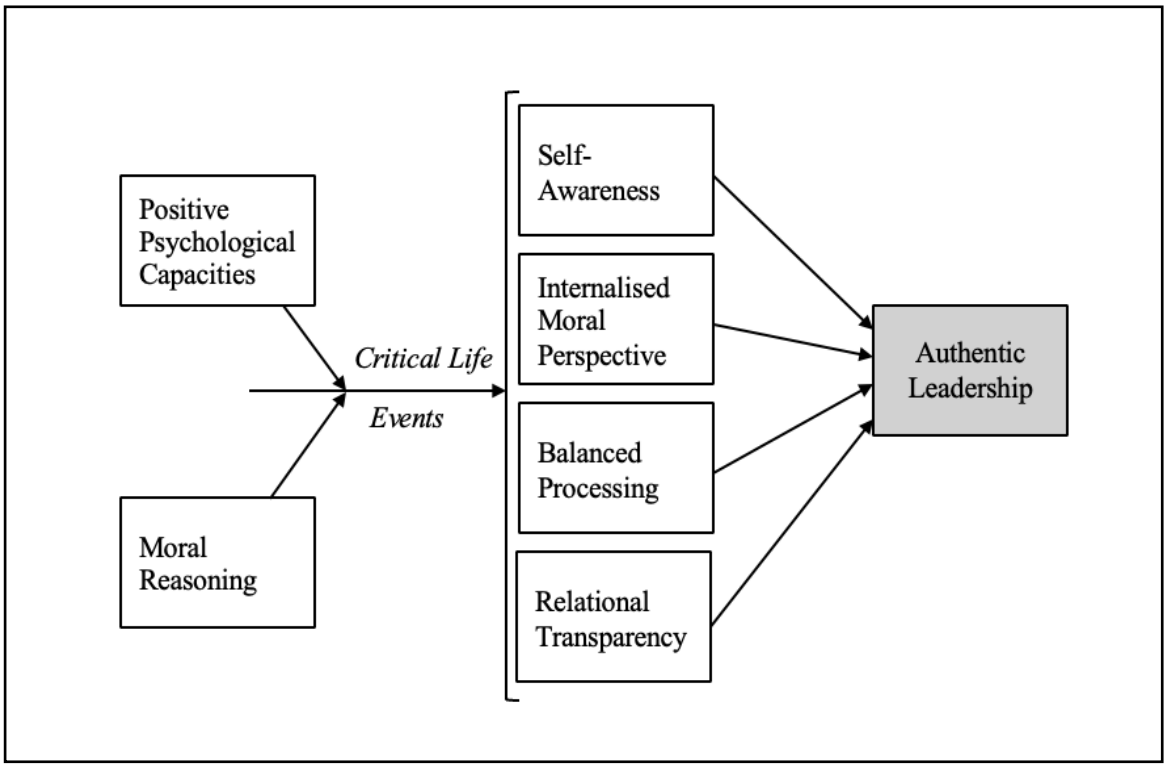


Figure 2.3: Authentic Leadership Conceptual Model

Note. Northouse (2019).

The model highlights four primary components, self-awareness, internalised moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. Additionally, the model identifies fundamental factors that influence the development of these components, such as positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning, and critical life events. Positive psychological capacities, such as confidence, optimism, hope and resilience, support authentic behaviours. Moral reasoning, the ability to make ethical decisions with the greater good in mind, shapes a leader's internal moral perspective. Critical life events are significant experiences that shape a leader's development, enhance self-awareness and refine personal

values, playing a pivotal role in forming authentic leadership qualities. These factors work together to nurture the four main components of authentic leadership. By combining these elements, the Authentic Leadership Conceptual Model offers a thorough framework for understanding how leaders can develop and sustain authenticity in their leadership.

i. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness refers to a leader's understanding of their own strengths, weaknesses, and the effect they have on others, ensuring their actions align with their core beliefs (Northouse, 2019). Leaders who are self-aware actively pursue an understanding of their role and influence in the world (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). They engage in reflective practices such as soliciting feedback and enhancing communication with others, allowing them to perceive their own identity through the perspectives of others and understand the repercussions of their decisions (McLaughlin & Kunk-Czaplicki, 2020). This introspection helps them gain comprehensive self-knowledge and acknowledge their limitations (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

ii. Internalised Moral Perspective

Internalised moral perspective refers to a self-regulatory process where individuals rely on their ethical standards and values to direct their behaviour rather than being influenced by external pressures or societal norms (Northhouse, 2019). Authentic leadership is deeply rooted in the integration of self-regulation with personal values and ethics, enabling leaders to withstand external pressures and align their behaviours with their core principles (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This self-regulation ensures that their decisions and actions consistently reflect their ethical standards and intentions (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

iii. Balanced Processing

Balanced processing involves a leader's competency to evaluate information objectively, consider diverse perspectives, and make well-informed decisions. (Northouse, 2019). Effective leaders adopt a method of balanced processing, where they engage in thorough, objective data analysis before making decisions (McLaughlin & Kunk-Czaplicki, 2020). This approach ensures that they consider both relevant and irrelevant information, free from biases or distorted perceptions, and are more likely to reach equitable decisions that reflect genuine leadership integrity (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Luthans et al., 2006). Braun and Peus (2018) emphasised that involving followers in decision-making enhances their psychological capital and strengthens perceptions of leader authenticity, particularly when this practice is observed within and beyond the workplace.

v. Relational Transparency

Relational transparency is a self-regulatory process where leaders appropriately share their core feelings, motives, and inclinations with others (Northouse, 2019). Relational transparency involves openly communicating and being genuine in relationships. This transparency builds trust and fosters a deeper engagement among followers, encouraging an environment where the complexities of personal character, including both strengths and weaknesses, are openly acknowledged (Luthans et al., 2006; Zeb et al., 2019). Relational transparency, involving leaders openly communicating and being genuine in their relationships, positively impacts employee engagement, trust, and performance (Lorenzo, 2022; Jiang & Shen, 2020). Leaders who practise relational transparency create an engaging work environment where employees perceive them as authentic and trustworthy, fostering cohesion and improving performance by motivating and aligning with organisational goals.

2.7.2 The Impact of Authentic Leadership in Organisation

Authentic leadership fosters personal growth from within, resulting in more meaningful work and increased motivation and engagement among individuals (Zeb et al., 2019). Authentic leaders are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and actively display this self-awareness, fostering self-esteem and forming solid workplace relationships. Authentic leaders prioritise the collective good over personal gain, focusing on what is morally right (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Farid et al. (2020) support this view, indicating that leaders who prioritise their employees' interests over their own are better able to meet their needs.

Shinde (2018) discovered that authentic leadership in the petroleum industry improves employee well-being by fostering supportive environments that enhance mental and emotional health. Furthermore, Farid et al. (2020) indicate that authentic leadership fosters organisational citizenship behaviours, encouraging employees to go above and beyond their formal job responsibilities to contribute positively to the organisation. Additionally, authentic leadership significantly boosts organisational commitment, with employees exhibiting greater loyalty and dedication to their organisations. According to Khalil and Siddiqui (2020), authentic leadership stimulates innovative work behaviour, inspiring employees to develop new ideas and approaches. Furthermore, authentic leaders enhance work engagement, motivating employees to be more invested and passionate about their work.

The impact of authentic leadership on employee motivation and job satisfaction was explored by Bordei et al. (2019), who observed a strong influence on general work motivation but not intrinsic motivation. Authentic leadership positively affects employee

commitment by fostering environments of collaboration, respect, and participatory decision-making. However, the effectiveness of authentic leadership in enhancing employee engagement appears to vary based on the initial motivation levels of the employees, with those already motivated experiencing higher boosts in engagement compared to their less motivated counterparts. This suggests that the effectiveness of authentic leadership in motivating employees depends significantly on their existing levels of motivation. Authentic leadership, as indicated by Inceoglua et al. (2018), resulted in a direct and indirect effect on job satisfaction, improved well-being, reduced stress levels, and lessened sense of insecurity among staff. In addition, the performance, behaviour, and overall well-being of staff within an organisation are significantly influenced by leaders.

Authentic leaders promote trust, occupational self-efficacy, and organisational learning, which mediate these positive outcomes (Farid et al., 2020; Khalil & Siddiqui, 2020). By leading with purpose, meaning, and core values, authentic leaders empower followers and contribute to organisational growth. When combined with sustainable leadership practices, authentic leadership can also support sustainable development goals within organisations, highlighting its role in fostering long-term success and ethical practices (Malik & Mehmood, 2022).

In summary, Authentic leaders who embody purpose, values, and integrity are pivotal in creating sustainable organisations, inspiring superior customer service, and enhancing shareholder value (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). In their comprehensive work on leadership, Ogunyemi and Ogunyemi (2020) provided an in-depth description of these leaders, portraying them as individuals striving to build stable organisations, inspire staff to deliver exceptional customer service, and ultimately enhance shareholder value.

2.7.3 Authentic Leadership in the Digital Era

Authentic Leadership in the digital era combines authenticity with the demands of the digital era, emphasising genuine, open, and efficient leadership while recognising digital challenges and opportunities (Crawford & Butler-Henderson, 2020). Authentic leadership in the digital era relies on transparent digital communication and leaders who employ this strategy value honest digital communication. Authentic leaders use digital tools to build trust with their colleagues, establishing an open, transparent work atmosphere despite limited in-person encounters (Khaw et al., 2022). In the digital era, authentic leadership entails personal branding, a strong digital presence, and the conscious curation and presentation of one's genuine self on various online platforms to align digital identities with leadership beliefs (Khaw et al., 2022).

In addition, authentic leaders in the digital era are adaptable and tech-savvy, valuing digital tools and technologies as opportunities to connect, collaborate, and lead (Khaw et al., 2022). The leaders maintain effective industry leadership by adeptly navigating the evolving digital landscape and staying current with technological advancements (Trafican, 2022). Authentic leaders foster a culture prioritising authenticity and collaboration, where leaders create a space that enables team members to confidently express themselves, share ideas, and engage digitally (Blanch et al., 2021). The focus on authenticity extends beyond leaders to the team culture, creating a digital workplace where transparency and honesty are firmly established and essential for success. Ethical values guide authentic digital leaders as they navigate the digital world, with the cornerstone of transparent digital communication being honesty and ethics.

Authentic leaders align their online personas with their true personalities to establish

transparency and reliability in digital interactions (Chully & Jose, 2022). By doing so, they use virtual platforms to foster open debate and a culture of trust. Understanding the importance of authenticity for trust and influence online, people actively develop their personal brand on digital platforms. Authentic leadership in the digital era is characterised by leaders' adaptability and technology proficiency, allowing them to easily integrate digital tools into their leadership tactics, thus improving their effectiveness (Trafican, 2022). Leaders can implement these strategies to develop a team culture that fosters authenticity, collaboration, and open communication, creating a digital workplace that thrives on genuine connections.

In digital transformation, authentic leadership positively influences employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Lorenzo, 2022). Authentic leadership can significantly enhance structural empowerment, boost employee engagement, increase job satisfaction, and improve job quality while reducing burnout (Valle et al., 2021). This approach ensures that employees experience a sense of empowerment and value, leading to improved service outcomes and increased job satisfaction. By fostering a supportive work environment, authentic leadership enhances retention and improves work outcomes (Thomas, 2023). Authentic leaders' self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalised moral perspective competencies create healthy work environments, reduce mental exhaustion, and foster structural empowerment (Maziero et al., 2020). In the digital era, the impact of authentic leadership is amplified, as digital tools and platforms enable leaders to connect with employees more effectively, build stronger relationships, and maintain open lines of communication. Authentic leadership remains a valuable approach in various organisational contexts, with potential benefits for leaders and followers, ultimately driving long-term success and sustainability in the digital era (Hester,

2021). As digital transformation reshapes the workplace, authentic leadership stands out as a fundamental component of success. By empowering employees and fostering a supportive environment, authentic leaders enhance engagement, job satisfaction, and care quality while mitigating burnout. The digital era amplifies these benefits, allowing leaders to leverage technology for stronger relationships and open communication.

2.8 Leadership in the Digital Era Managing Digital Natives

The digital era has transformed leadership paradigms, necessitating new approaches to managing digital natives and leading a technology-driven world (Verma et al., 2021). Digital natives, primarily Millennials and Generation Z, have grown up immersed in technology, which shapes their unique skills and expectations in the workplace (Prensky, 2001; Spiegel,2021). These individuals are highly proficient in digital tools and possess innovative potential, presenting both challenges and opportunities for leadership (Marzo & Braccini, 2016). Their preference for explicit knowledge and digital resources requires a new perspective on leadership in the digital era.

Effective leadership in the digital era involves leveraging the skills of digital natives, who excel in using digital tools and understanding how emerging technologies can impact business performance (Kivunja, 2014). Successful leaders adapt creatively, viewing technological change as an asset that fosters innovation and aligns with organisational goals (Lapiedra, 2021). They excel in digital communication, using tools like video conferencing and messaging apps to facilitate collaboration across dispersed teams. Additionally, they must ensure all employees, not just digital natives, are equipped with digital skills, promoting an organisation-wide commitment to continuous learning (Marzo & Braccini, 2016). Managing digital natives presents challenges as they challenge existing corporate

cultures and leadership models (Mihai & Crețu, 2017). Leaders must bridge the gap between digitally adept employees and those with less technical proficiency while balancing rapid technological adoption with stable operational processes.

2.9 The Emerging Concept of Leadership in the Digital Era

Digital leadership has emerged as an important concept for organisations navigating the digital era to address the competency leaders must build in the current digital era due to the increased focus on digital technologies and solutions that are fast disrupting organisations and industries (Tutar & Güler, 2022).

2.9.1 Digital Leadership Principles

According to Hensellek (2020), digital leadership is a collaborative concept that advocates for a comprehensive strategy that involves active engagement from employees across all levels of the organisation. El Sawy et al. (2020) describe it as the ability to drive successful digitalisation through competency development. Cortellazzo et al. (2019) highlight five key competencies of digital leaders, which are understanding digital tools, handling failure, promoting involvement in decision-making, empowering lower-level employees, and managing diverse teams. Digital leadership emphasises adaptability, inclusivity, and teamwork (Oberer and Erkolar, 2018).

El Sawy et al. (2020) assert that effective digital leadership involves deploying strategies for digital transformation. Bawany (2019) describes it as leader competencies to lead and develop their teams through change. It is a social influence process to improve performance (Avolio et al., 2014). Van Laar et al. (2017) describe digital competencies as the essential knowledge, skills, and digital literacy leaders need to manage digital systems.

Meanwhile, Chaker (2020) defines digital competencies as the capability to safeguard and effectively utilise digital systems. Leaders in the digital era must promote digital learning and development (Hildebrandt & Beimborn, 2021). Ferreras et al. (2016) assert leaders are key in driving technology adoption and knowledge sharing. Successful digital implementation requires understanding the technological impacts on stakeholders and adopting strategies that add value (Loh et al., 2018; Sainger, 2018). Leaders must develop new competencies to guide organisations through digital advancements (Maheshwari & Yadav, 2020; Promsri, 2019).

From Malaysia's context, strong leadership is critical for establishing a sustainable digital ecosystem (Maruthuvellu et al., 2021). Carvalho (2020) highlights key competencies such as risk-taking, adaptability, curiosity, self-confidence, and tolerance for complexity. These qualities enable innovation, strategic vision, and impactful outcomes.

2.9.2 Digital Leadership Framework

Hensellek's (2022) digital leadership framework provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the emergence, development, and practical application of digital transformation within organisations. The framework emphasises the fundamental role of leadership in navigating technological advancements and addressing dynamic stakeholder settings to drive organisational success. It highlights key attributes of digital leaders, including their ability to guide organisations through evolving technologies and stakeholder influences.

As shown in Figure 2.4, the framework provides a structured view of how leadership facilitates the seamless integration of digital transformation processes.

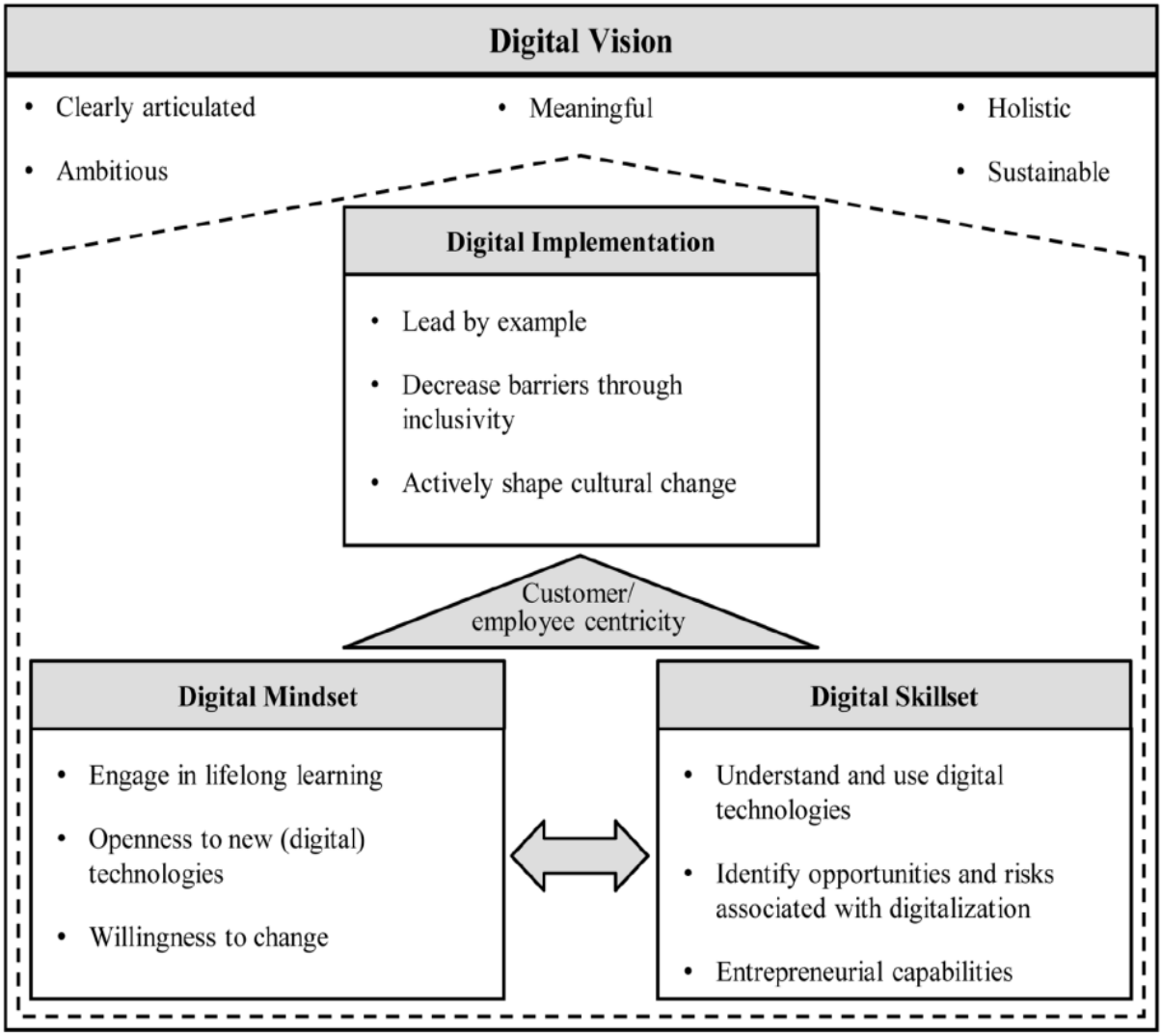


Figure 2.4: The Digital Leadership Framework

Note. Hensellek (2022).

According to Hensellek (2022), digital leaders are defined by a digital mindset, a digital skillset, and the ability to implement strategies effectively. The framework stresses the importance of a clear digital vision aligned with organisational goals to drive transformation and gain a competitive edge. Digital vision sets measurable goals and provides direction for integrating technologies into strategies (Hensellek, 2022). It promotes alignment, adaptability, and innovation while guiding decisions and evaluating progress (Butt, 2020). A digital mindset reflects an openness to learning, adaptability, and viewing

technology as a tool for improvement (Hensellek, 2022). Leaders with this mindset anticipate changes, align strategies, and encourage collaboration, agility, and innovation (Allen, 2020; Wong et al., 2022).

Digital skillsets include technological proficiency, data literacy, and adaptability (Hensellek, 2022). Effective leaders cultivate these skills across teams, fostering innovation and productivity (van Kessel et al., 2022). Investing in digital skills enhances competitiveness and readiness for transformation (Zhang et al., 2023). Digital implementation involves integrating technologies and strategies to foster change (Hensellek, 2022). Leaders must demonstrate commitment, inclusivity, and adaptability, reducing barriers and promoting cultural shifts for sustainable growth (Rybski & Jochem, 2020). Hensellek's (2022) framework highlights the importance of prioritising customer and employee experiences. Focusing on these stakeholders ensures engagement, satisfaction, and alignment with transformation goals, enabling long-term growth.

This framework provides insights into enabling seamless digital implementation, particularly by addressing leadership competencies required to execute strategies effectively.

2.10 Digital Maturity in The CSO in Malaysia

Digital maturity refers to the extent to which an organisation has undergone a complete digital transformation, encompassing the integration of digital strategies into every element of business operations, including human processes (Aslanova & Kulichkina, 2020; Kane et al., 2017). Minh and Thanh (2022) described digital maturity as evaluating how well an organisation has embraced digital transformation rather than the process. The managerial viewpoint examines the modifications an organisation has previously implemented in its

capabilities, products, services, operations, skills, and culture during its digital transformation process. In light of the digital realm's continuous transformation, organisations must constantly assess their digital maturity (Borštnar & Pucihar, 2021).

Digital maturity measures the level of digital integration in business strategy and processes, enhancing organisational operations across three key dimensions (Borštnar & Pucihar, 2021). The first dimension focuses on firm performance, showing a positive link between digital maturity and metrics like sales, market share, profitability, and return on investment. The second dimension addresses customer experience, including analytics-driven segmentation, predictive marketing, streamlined processes, and self-service options to meet evolving needs. The third dimension highlights operational excellence through digital technologies, enabling flexible work arrangements, faster communication, knowledge sharing, transparency, and data-driven decision-making processes. Together, these dimensions drive efficiency, adaptability, and competitive advantage.

The CSO exemplifies digital maturity for retailers in Malaysia’s energy retail industry. Its advanced digital integration and strategic initiatives highlight its ability to leverage technology for operational efficiency and sustainable practices (Ferreira et al., 2020). Data-driven decision-making supports the CSO in optimising infrastructure and sustainability efforts while improving services and streamlining operations. Its customer-centric digital ecosystem further enhances personalised interactions and customer experiences, ensuring competitiveness and adaptability to market changes (Ferreira et al., 2020). Despite its digital maturity, the CSO faces challenges in Malaysia’s context, including a shortage of digital talent, skills gaps, resistance to change, and ICT infrastructure limitations. Leadership is key in strengthening digital strategies, ensuring successful

implementation, sustaining growth, and establishing industry benchmarks (Fahmy et al., 2022).

2.11 Digital Maturity Dimension Framework

Digital transformation can be assessed using a digital maturity model, which organises the factors that measure an organisation's progress in this area. Teichert (2023) describes digital maturity as the extent organisations have realised digital transformation, emphasising consistency across all business functions. This includes integrating digital technologies into every aspect of the business to ensure that all processes and operations are aligned with the digital strategy. Digital maturity reflects an organisation's ability to adapt to new digital trends, leverage data for decision-making, and sustain competitive advantage in an increasingly digital marketplace.

The current research is built upon a robust conceptual framework that integrates the various categories and key dimensions of digital maturity outlined by Pihir et al. (2018). This framework was developed following a comprehensive analysis of five influential digital maturity models, namely Digital Maturity Model-TeleManagement (TM) Forum, Digital Maturity Model 5,0-Forrester, Digital Maturity Assessment Tool-Government of South Australia, Key Pillars of Digital Transformation- Chief Information Officer (CIO) Report, and Framework for Digital Maturity of Schools-CARNet, ensures a thorough understanding of the field.

The summarised data in Table 2.1 systematically presents the distinct methodologies crafted by esteemed scholars, esteemed research institutions, and reputable consulting organisations. Each of these methodologies has made substantial contributions towards

advancing the comprehension and evolution of digital maturity within diverse organisational landscapes. These carefully selected methodologies offer valuable insights into understanding digital maturity across organisational contexts.

Table 2.1: Dimensions of the Digital Maturity Model

Digital maturity model- TM Forum	**Digital maturity model 5.0.- Forrester**	**Digital maturity assessment tool - Government of South Australia**	**Key pillars of digital transformation -CIO**	**Framework for digital maturity of schools- CARNet**
1. Customer centricity 2. Organisation and culture 3. IT and software skills	1. Culture 2. Organisation 3. Technology 4. Insights	1. Governance and leadership 2. People and culture 3. Capacity and capability 4. Innovation 5. Technology	1. Strategy and vision 2. People and culture 3. Process and governance 4. Technology and capabilities	1. Planning, management and leadership 2. ICT in learning and teaching 3. Development of digital competences 4. ICT culture 5. ICT infrastructure

Within this framework, Pihir et al. (2018) identified five key dimensions fundamental for digital transformation: strategic orientation, customer centricity, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development, and a culture of innovation and organisational commitment. These dimensions are important as they underpin the leadership competencies necessary to drive successful digital transformations. Leadership competencies are a blend of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to observable

behaviours, which are instrumental in achieving high performance and desirable outcomes essential for fostering these dimensions (Pihir et al., 2019). Pihir et al. (2018) outline five key dimensions for guiding digital maturity in organisations, as shown in Figure 2.5.

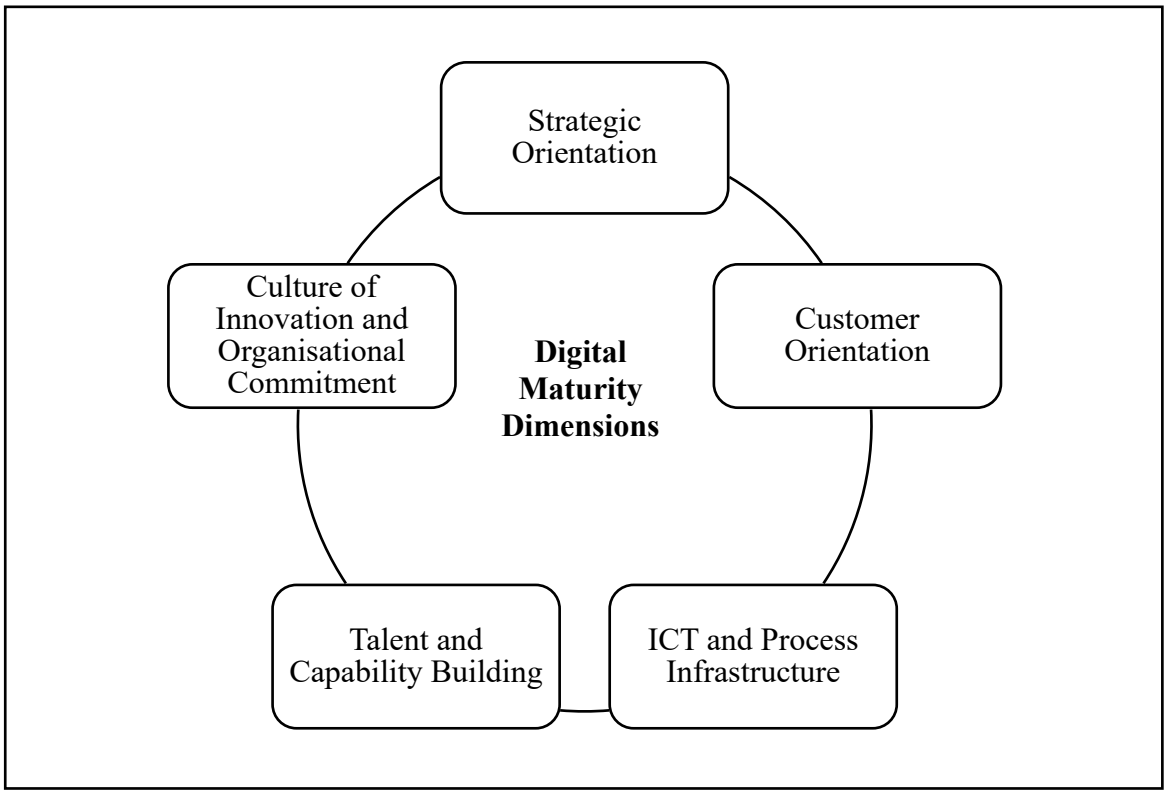


Figure 2.5: Conceptual Framework of Digital Maturity Dimension

Note. Adapted from Pihir et al. (2018).

i. Strategy Orientation

The successful implementation of digital transformation relies heavily on strong and visionary leadership. This entails the unwavering support of top management and a clear, visible commitment to established goals. Leaders play a key role in directing organisational efforts towards achieving these objectives, ensuring the transformation process is effectively managed and executed.

ii. Customer Centricity

In order to achieve digital maturity, organisations must have a deep understanding of customer needs and be able to predict and anticipate their future requirements. This involves leveraging advanced technological capabilities and adopting innovative approaches to monitor and analyse customer behaviours continuously. This enables organisations to proactively refine their strategies and offerings to align with changing market demands and maintain a competitive edge.

iii. ICT and Process Infrastructure

Digital transformation is a comprehensive process that extends beyond just implementing new technology. It encompasses the strategic integration of ICT to bring about fundamental changes in an organisation's services, products, and processes. This integration aims to enhance the organisation's capacity to effectively respond to and adapt to changes in the market, thereby bolstering its competitive edge and agility. This holistic approach to digital transformation empowers organisations to harness the potential of technology in reshaping their operations and positioning themselves for success in an evolving business landscape.

iv. Talent and Capability Development

In order to remain competitive and keep pace with the fast-evolving business landscape, organisations must make ongoing investments in their workforce. This means providing employees with the necessary technical skills to leverage technology effectively and fostering a culture of continuous learning and development. Through targeted human resource development initiatives, businesses can ensure that their employees are equipped

to drive operational efficiencies and contribute to the success of transformational projects. Additionally, securing the right talent involves hiring individuals with the required skills and creating a workplace that encourages innovation, collaboration, and professional growth.

v. Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment

For digital transformation to succeed, an organisation must establish a workplace that actively encourages and supports innovation while remaining adaptable to change. This requires promoting a culture where all staff are dedicated to these objectives and aligning the organisational structure and processes to facilitate and support these initiatives. For the organisation to effectively navigate their digital transformation journey, the organisation must first accurately assess their current state and define a clear future state for each determinant (Pihir et al., 2019). This involves identifying actionable steps and initiatives to bridge the gap between the current and desired states. These initiatives may range from incremental improvements to radical changes, but they must all align with the organisation's broader strategic objectives. The process also involves evaluating and potentially adapting existing technologies to support these transformation efforts.

2.12 Leadership Competencies for Strategy Orientation

Strategic orientation aligns an organisation’s vision with its value propositions, anticipates change, supports employees, and drives performance to ensure organisational success (Pihir et al., 2018). Leadership competencies for strategic orientation include the ability to articulate a clear and forward-thinking strategic vision, foster employee centricity by prioritising development and engagement, and establish a performance driven approach to achieve organisational objectives.

2.12.1 Strategic Vision

The leader requires a thorough understanding and proficiency in technology, the ability to develop a strategic perspective that considers the digital setting, effectively communicating this perspective to relevant parties, creating a creative and forward-thinking work environment, skilfully navigating the challenges of organisational transformation in the digital domain, and ensuring leadership is important to steering organisations through digital transformation (Bonnet & Westerman, 2020). In today's digital world, it's important to create and communicate a strategic vision that integrates digital technologies. Leadership is fundamental in crafting and executing a digital vision within organisations undergoing digital transformation (Imran et al., 2020). It plays a key role in envisioning the potential benefits of digital technology for the retail business and ensuring that the digital vision aligns with the organisation's long-term goals.

Effective communication is essential to leadership in creating a digital vision. Creating a forward-thinking digital story by leaders is fundamental since it guides the organisation and requires effective dissemination (Promsri, 2019). A clear digital vision guides teams creates a shared knowledge of the organisation's future and instils a strong sense of purpose. Corporate cohesion and digital goal implementation depend on effective communication. Effective communication encourages a joint effort to achieve the digital goal by informing and involving all employees (Promsri, 2019). Competent leaders can develop a fascinating narrative that includes current technological trends and their acumen in predicting future changes (Antonopoulou et al., 2020). A sector-wide digital vision is essential, and its successful communication guarantees that all stakeholders are aligned with the goals and objectives of digital transformation. This requires an environment promoting

creativity and exploring new technologies (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020). Transparent and effective communication is essential for aligning stakeholders with the digital vision.

Technologically savvy leaders can anticipate and understand how technology might help a business achieve its goals. These people excel in aligning digital implementation with business objectives (Klein, 2020). They do so to align technological investments with the organisation's long-term strategy. These recognised leaders also excel in predicting market trends, allowing them to manage the ever-changing digital landscape (Klein, 2020). By understanding diverse viewpoints within the organisation, leaders can communicate the digital vision in a way that resonates across the organisational structure, facilitating alignment and commitment among team members (Tagscherer & Carbon, 2023). Strategic thinking is important as it allows leaders to anticipate future challenges, understand emerging technologies, and position the organisation strategically within the rapidly evolving retail sector. Leaders must articulate and align the vision with transformation goals to manage change resistance and ensure stakeholder engagement (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020).

Individuals with exceptional perception, keen insight, and sharp analytical skills can forecast trends, assess novel technologies, and devise methods to leverage them for the organisation's benefit (Promsri, 2019). Skilled leadership is fundamental in defining and articulating a digital vision that drives innovation and sustainability in the ever-changing retail sector (Antonopoulou et al., 2020). The strategic building of a digital strategy requires leaders to navigate diverse terrain and find and capitalise on chances for innovation and long-term viability (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020). This insight helps them position their companies for long-term success in the digital environment. Leaders must effectively

implement a digital vision to fulfil their goals. Leaders must secure resource acquisition, guide teams during implementation, and adapt to changing circumstances to maximise job performance.

2.12.2 Employee Centricity

The organisation's ongoing commitment to investing in its employees is a fundamental component for achieving success in the digital transformation and implementation process. This dedication underscores the importance of fostering and developing the necessary skills and competencies that empower employees to effectively navigate and leverage digital technologies within the organisational context. (Blanka et al., 2022). Leadership practices that place high importance on the well-being of employees and emphasise the value they bring to the organisation play an important role in maintaining a motivated and efficient workforce, and they are essential in driving successful digital transformations (Butschan et al., 2019). Furthermore, fostering a culture of respect and inclusiveness bolsters employee well-being and work-life balance, enhancing overall organisational commitment.

According to Abdul et al. (2024), employee-centric competencies focused on employees' needs and perspectives are essential for ensuring that employees are fully engaged and aligned with the organisation's digital objectives. When employees possess these competencies, they become key drivers of successful digital implementation. In order to achieve this, leaders must work towards creating a culture within the organisation that fosters an environment where team members feel valued and motivated and are encouraged to actively participate in organisation-wide learning initiatives without relying solely on their

authority. This proactive approach to employee development and engagement is important for the organisation's overall success in a digital environment.

2.12.3 Performance Driven

Performance driven competencies are fundamental in the context of digital implementation, where emphasising performance as a key indicator of success guides strategic decision-making and execution. The adoption of key performance indicators (KPIs) is instrumental in driving strategic, quantifiable outcomes, ensuring that all digital initiatives are aligned with the organisation's broader objectives (Gwarzo & Bahari, 2021). Leadership that effectively integrates communication, motivation, and reward systems plays a critical role in shaping a high-performance culture that aligns employee efforts with organisational goals. Such leadership practices significantly enhance organisational performance, ensuring that each team member contributes to achieving strategic outcomes (Meirinhos, 2023). Additionally, creating a change-oriented and positive work environment is essential for fostering an atmosphere where continuous improvement and innovation are encouraged, which are essential for long-term success and growth in the digital era. This holistic approach to performance management centred on clear KPIs and effective leadership, is essential for driving successful digital implementation, ensuring that the organisation adapts to digital changes and thrives in a competitive digital marketplace (Setiawan & Purba, 2020).

Effective leadership and project management are fundamental for mastering the challenges of digital transformation, directly contributing to performance driven competencies. Leaders who can foster innovation and manage complex digital environments are essential for driving organisational change and achieving strategic objectives (Bonnet & Westerman, 2020). In the digital era, leveraging data-driven decision-making is fundamental

for leaders aiming to enhance organisational performance. By utilising data analytics, leaders can obtain actionable insights, which are fundamental in making informed strategic decisions that boost organisational performance. This approach improves decision-making and underpins evidence-based leadership, aligning daily operations with the organisation's performance metrics and long-term strategic goals (Akter et al., 2022). Emphasising data as a foundation of the organisational framework ensures that all decisions are aligned with measurable outcomes, reinforcing the core aspects of performance-driven competency.

2.13 Leadership Competencies for Customer Orientation

Customer orientation emphasises understanding customer needs, predicting expectations, rethinking value propositions, and leading by example through innovative technologies to enhance engagement and satisfaction (Pihir et al., 2018). Leadership competencies for customer orientation include customer centricity and lead by example.

2.13.1 Customer Centricity

Customer Centricity is a strategic approach essential for organisations aiming to succeed in today's digital landscape. By developing comprehensive customer-focused strategies, organisations can enhance their digital initiatives and bolster customer engagement efforts effectively (Madhani, 2020). Implementing robust customer relationship management systems is fundamental for improving customer engagement and satisfaction, which in turn strengthens the strategic efforts directed towards customer retention and loyalty (Algamdi, 2021). Leadership plays an important role in linking customer-centric approaches to gaining a competitive edge, making it necessary for sustained market success (Akbar, 2024). Leaders must foster an agile digital vision that dynamically adapts to

technological advances, shifts in market dynamics, and evolving customer preferences to maintain a competitive edge and relevance in the rapidly changing market (Turuk, 2020). Regularly reviewing and realigning the digital strategy with the organisation's broader transformation goals is important for ensuring responsiveness and strategic alignment.

Effective digital implementation demands a strategic plan that includes clearly defined goals and allocates sufficient resources to support these goals. Central to this strategic plan is the commitment to being customer-centric, ensuring that digital initiatives are aligned with the organisation's mission and values, thus driving innovative and sustainable solutions (Bonnet & Westerman, 2020). By prioritising customer needs at the core of strategic planning, organisations can enhance customer satisfaction and promote long-term loyalty. This customer-focused approach not only propels the organisation's strategic direction forward but also guarantees that every step taken enhances customer experience and engagement,

2.13.2 Lead by Example

Lead by example drives value creation and boosts employee engagement, fostering a culture of innovation and active participation (Eldor, 2021). When leaders demonstrate the behaviours and attitudes they wish to see in their teams, it creates a positive organisational culture that supports digital transformation efforts. By setting a strong example, leaders can inspire their employees to embrace change, experiment with new ideas, and commit to the organisation's digital vision. Leaders who focus on customer needs guide organisational strategy and operations effectively (Widelska & Krot, 2021). By leading by example in prioritising customer satisfaction, leaders ensure that all digital initiatives are aligned with the evolving expectations and preferences of customers, thereby enhancing the overall

success of digital projects. This customer-centric approach, demonstrated through leaders' actions and decisions, shows employees the importance of integrating feedback into their strategies to remain competitive and responsive to market demands.

Lead by example is most effective when it emphasises integrity and transparency, particularly in the realm of digital implementation. Leaders who demonstrate these qualities set the standard for organisational conduct, fostering trust among stakeholders as digital solutions are adopted (Shiundu, 2024). Digital projects heavily rely on leadership integrity, promoting trust and ethical standards throughout the organisation (Sama et al., 2022). Through their actions, they establish a foundation of trust and responsibility, ensuring that all digital initiatives are carried out with transparency and accountability. The role of leading by example extends beyond personal behaviour, as it also involves guiding the organisation in managing cultural diversity ethically. Leaders who embrace and navigate cultural differences foster an inclusive atmosphere where diverse perspectives are respected and valued (Romani & Holgersson, 2020). This approach not only promotes an inclusive workplace but also enhances the morale and productivity of the team, thereby driving more effective digital transformation efforts. Moreover, leaders with strong ethical and cultural acumen can effectively manage and lead diverse teams by acknowledging and respecting cultural differences (Romani & Holgersson, 2020).

Leading by example in culturally sensitive practices also means understanding and appreciating global and cultural differences. Leaders with strong cultural acumen can effectively manage diverse teams, adapting their leadership styles to different cultural contexts (Sarwar et al., 2020). This adaptability is important for fostering a collaborative and inclusive workplace where diverse perspectives are leveraged for innovation. By

exemplifying integrity and cultural sensitivity, leaders ensure that digital transformation efforts are inclusive and considerate of cultural differences, leading to strategies that resonate across different markets and drive global success (Sarwar et al., 2020). Moreover, by setting a strong example in these areas, leaders can positively influence organisational culture, ensuring that ethical practices and cultural sensitivity are deeply ingrained in the organisation's operations (Martins et al., 2023).

An iterative leadership approach involving continuous feedback and adaptation is another way leaders can lead by example to ensure that digital implementation meets evolving customer demands (Tardieu et al., 2020). Leaders who adopt and model this approach navigate the complexities of digital transformation by constantly refining their strategies based on real-time insights and feedback. This adaptability, shown through their actions, is key to overcoming the challenges and uncertainties associated with digital projects. Effective leadership today requires the capability to negotiate varied problems and overcome hurdles while delivering innovative projects. The digital vision requires resilience, adaptability, and persistent dedication to overcoming implementation challenges (Promsri, 2019). By leading by example, leaders demonstrate these qualities, motivating their teams to persevere and innovate despite obstacles. This hands-on approach to leadership not only builds trust and credibility but also ensures that all team members are aligned with the organisation’s goals and committed to achieving them. Leading by example is a fundamental competency for driving successful digital implementation. According to Eldor (2021), it fosters a culture of engagement and innovation, aligns organisational strategies with customer needs, and ensures that leadership practices are adaptable and resilient. By exemplifying the principles they advocate, leaders can effectively steer their organisations through the complexities of digital transformation, achieving sustained success and growth.

2.14 Leadership Competencies for ICT and Process Infrastructure

ICT and Process Infrastructure require alignment with organisational objectives and agility to respond to challenges by staying current with emerging technologies, leveraging digital literacy, and fostering collaboration to optimise processes and realise their full potential (Pihir et al., 2018). Leadership competencies for this include continuous learning, digital skills advancement and collaboration.

2.14.1 Continuous Learning

Continuous learning has emerged as an important factor in enhancing organisational performance in the digital landscape. Continuous learning supports versatile learning, which is positively linked to organisational performance during digital transformation, essential for adapting to changes in the business landscape (Wu et al., 2021). Organisations that prioritise continuous learning are better equipped to respond to market shifts, technological advancements, and evolving customer needs. By constantly updating their knowledge and skills, employees can contribute more effectively to digital initiatives and drive the organisation forward. Leaders must foster a continuous learning culture, enhancing skills and driving technological and process innovations (Tomašević, 2023). By leading by example, leaders can demonstrate the importance of lifelong learning and create a workplace where employees feel encouraged to pursue new knowledge and competencies. This commitment to continuous learning not only improves individual performance but also enhances the collective capabilities of the organisation, making it more agile and resilient in the face of change.

Continuous learning is essential for the workforce to adapt to technological change

and stay competitive, as it enables organisations to stay ahead of the curve by anticipating and preparing for future trends and challenges (Arora, 2023). Leaders who actively engage in learning activities and encourage their teams to do the same can better navigate the complexities of digital transformation. This proactive approach ensures that the organisation remains competitive and innovative, continuously improving its processes and technologies to meet the demands of the digital era. By integrating continuous learning competencies into leadership practices, organisations can build a workforce that is adaptable, skilled, and ready to tackle the challenges of digital implementation (Voruganti, 2023). Leaders who prioritise learning set a strong example, fostering a culture of curiosity and improvement that drives the organisation's success. This approach not only enhances individual capabilities but also contributes to the overall growth and development of the organisation, ensuring long-term success in the digital landscape (Zivkovic, 2022).

2.14.2 Digital Skills Advancement

Digital skills advancement is fundamental for organisations seeking to excel in a technology-driven industry. This advancement supports key areas such as digital literacy, effective communication, and data analytics, equipping the workforce with the necessary tools to leverage technological opportunities (Weritz, 2022). The integration of these digital skills with traditional leadership qualities enables ongoing adaptation and innovation, ensuring that leaders can effectively steer their teams through the evolving digital landscape. Cybersecurity knowledge is increasingly important for leaders as digital threats continue to rise. These digital competencies are important to protect their organisations, fostering a culture of security that safeguards digital assets and ensures operational integrity (Lohrmann & Tan, 2021). The commitment to cybersecurity forms a critical component of an

organisation's digital skills framework, emphasising proactive risk management and resilience.

In the digital era, leadership requires a high level of technological skill, and leaders must understand and actively use digital technologies to drive innovation and improve organisational processes (Maharani et al., 2023). These digital skills are fundamental for navigating the organisation through digital transformation, demonstrating a commitment to leveraging digital tools for strategic advantage. It also includes the ability to embrace change and mentor teams effectively, ensuring the organisation is agile and responsive to new challenges (Maharani et al., 2023).

2.14.3 Collaboration

Collaboration is essential for successful digital transformation, as effective stakeholder integration in digital projects facilitates comprehensive project management and outcome realisation (Abbu et al., 2020). Collaboration involves direct engagement through negotiation, discussion, and consideration of diverse viewpoints, ultimately leading to new insights and creativity that surpass individual efforts (Kvellestad et al., 2021). Leaders who emphasise collaboration skills and utilise digital technologies for hybrid team collaboration can significantly enhance digital strategies. This approach not only streamlines operations but also ensures that diverse groups are aligned and moving towards shared objectives (Gilli, 2023). Effective collaboration is key for the success of digital initiatives, necessitating the formation of interdisciplinary teams.

According to Ismail et al. (2022), leaders must possess high emotional intelligence to manage diverse team dynamics effectively, especially in digital and geographically

dispersed workplaces. The ability to understand and regulate emotions within the team is essential for building strong virtual teams, enhancing team cohesion and ensuring seamless communication. Moreover, emotional intelligence plays a significant role in handling the complexities of digital implementation. Leaders skilled in understanding and managing their own emotions, as well as those of their team members, are better equipped to foster a collaborative environment. This competency is important for ensuring effective communication, enhancing collaboration and resolving conflicts, which become particularly challenging during the significant cultural and organisational changes that accompany digital projects.

According to Kvellestad et al. (2021), collaboration extends beyond the confines of a single team, involving cooperation across different departments, functions, or even organisations. Unlike teamwork, which focuses on a well-defined group working towards a common goal, collaboration is characterised by its broader scope and flexibility, enabling the sharing of resources, knowledge, and ideas across various boundaries (Kvellestad et al., 2021). This broader cooperation is important for driving innovation and achieving comprehensive digital transformation.

However, a significant concern for organisations is the potential lack of trust and poor communication regarding shared goals and strategies, which can impede effective collaboration (Srivastava, 2020). In order to overcome these challenges, it is fundamental to improve communication channels and build trust among stakeholders, which are fundamental aspects of collaboration competencies. By dedicating resources to strengthening these competencies, organisations can ensure team members are engaged and committed to the success of digital initiatives, fostering a cohesive work setting.

2.15 Leadership Competencies for Talent and Capability Development

Talent and capability development involves nurturing talent and building competencies to thrive in technology-driven landscapes, with leaders empowering teams, fostering teamwork, and recognising achievements to build the essential knowledge and skills required in technology-driven settings (Pihir et al., 2018). Leadership competencies for talent and capability development include empowerment, teamwork and recognition.

2.15.1 Empowerment

Empowerment in leadership fosters psychological empowerment among employees, enhancing creativity, teamwork, and overall organisational effectiveness (Cai, 2022). Practices such as promoting autonomy and shifting to self-directed teams boost motivation and dedication, which are essential elements for driving digital transformation. When employees feel empowered, they are more likely to take initiative, suggest innovative solutions, and collaborate effectively with their peers, significantly contributing to digital projects' success. Cultivating a corporate culture centred on empowering people and developing their skills is fundamental for business success, as it generates innovative ideas (Riel et al., 2020). Empowerment encourages a learning environment where employees continuously develop digital skills and apply them creatively to solve complex problems. This culture of continuous improvement and skill development is particularly important in the fast-paced digital landscape, where staying ahead of technological advancements is important for maintaining a competitive edge.

Individuals should actively participate in digital change, as this involvement is a key component of empowerment (Promsri, 2019). A leadership style that promotes innovation

focuses on creating a digital vision beyond hierarchical orders. This participative and flexible strategy encourages stakeholder participation, building a strong sense of ownership and commitment to digital transformation (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020). By involving employees in decision-making and giving them the autonomy to experiment and innovate, leaders can harness the collective intelligence of the organisation to drive digital initiatives forward. Leadership prioritising empowerment competencies ensures the workforce is motivated, engaged, and equipped to contribute to successful digital implementation. When employees feel empowered, they are more adaptable to change and more resilient in the face of challenges, which is essential for navigating the complexities of digital transformation. Empowered employees are also more likely to embrace new technologies and processes, leading to smoother implementation and greater overall success of digital initiatives.

2.15.2 Teamwork

Teamwork integrates diverse skills and perspectives, which are fundamental for implementing digital transformation initiatives (Jadhav et al., 2023). Teamwork is the structured collaboration within a defined group, where team members work closely to achieve a common goal. While similar to collaboration, teamwork is distinguished by its focus on internal group dynamics, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities that drive collective effort (De La Cruz et al., 2024). In the context of digital transformation, effective teamwork is important as it harnesses the diverse skills and expertise of team members to tackle complex challenges and innovate. According to Oberländer et al. (2020), teamwork within digital teams allows for the integration of varied competencies, leading to more comprehensive problem-solving and the successful implementation of digital initiatives. Leaders who foster strong teamwork create a cohesive environment that encourages

cooperation, mutual support, and the efficient execution of tasks.

Digital technologies reshape teamwork, necessitating new leadership approaches (Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Effective teams in the digital era require diverse skills, including digital competencies. According to Oberländer et al. (2020), effective teamwork brings together varied expertise, allowing for more comprehensive problem-solving and innovative solutions. By leveraging the unique strengths of each team member, organisations can more effectively pursue their digital transformation goals and address complex challenges. Adaptive leadership ensures team effectiveness in integrating new technologies and achieving digital outcomes (Bettayeb & Marri, 2021). Leaders who adopt an adaptive approach can guide their teams through the dynamic landscape of digital change, ensuring that new technologies are seamlessly integrated into existing workflows. This adaptability helps teams stay aligned with the organisation's strategic objectives and enhances their ability to deliver successful digital projects.

In the digital realm, teamwork skills are essential for developing and executing strategies that promote a culture of employee engagement (Kerns, 2019). Leaders may boost employees' engagement and commitment to digital efforts by encouraging teamwork. Effective teamwork encourages open communication, mutual support, and a shared vision, which are important for driving digital success. Integrating teamwork competencies into leadership practices allows organisations to create a culture of collaboration that supports continuous innovation and improvement (Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Leaders who prioritise teamwork set a strong example, encouraging their teams to work together towards common goals. This enhances their performance and contributes to the success of the organisation's digital initiatives.

Overall, effective teamwork is essential for successful digital implementation. It brings together diverse skills, supports adaptive leadership, and fosters a culture of engagement and collaboration. By prioritising teamwork competencies, organisations can drive their digital agendas forward and achieve sustained success in the digital landscape.

2.15.3 Recognition

Recognition is key in enhancing employee task fulfilment and overall enthusiasm, significantly influencing organisational commitment (Yang et al., 2022). Acknowledging and appreciating employees' efforts boosts their morale and motivates them to contribute more effectively to digital initiatives. By recognising and rewarding achievements, organisations promote a positive work atmosphere in which workforces feel valued and engaged. Recognising employees publicly fosters perceptions of organisational justice and increases work engagement (Montani et al., 2020). When employees see their hard work is noticed and appreciated, it enhances their sense of fairness and inclusion within the organisation. This, in turn, drives higher levels of engagement and dedication, which are essential for the successful implementation of digital projects.

Recognition helps build trust and loyalty, making employees more committed to the organisation's digital transformation goals. Moreover, the effective use of reward and recognition strategies is linked to better employee performance and higher organisational growth (Baqir et al., 2020). Implementing a structured recognition programme that highlights individual and team achievements leads to improved performance metrics. Such strategies ensure that employees are aware of their contributions and encouraged to exceed expectations. This continuous recognition and performance enhancement cycle propels the organisation towards its digital transformation objectives.

By integrating recognition competencies into leadership practices, organisations create a culture that celebrates success and encourages continuous improvement. Leaders who actively recognise and reward their employees' efforts set a precedent that drives the team towards achieving common digital goals. This approach boosts individual performance while also contributing to the overall success of the organisation's digital initiatives.

2.16 Leadership Competencies for Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment

A culture of innovation and a strong organisational commitment encourage creativity, embrace risk-taking, and foster resilience, enabling teams to generate new ideas and solutions, learn from failures, and focus on objectives to ensure continuous digital innovation (Pihir et al., 2018). The key leadership competencies identified in fostering innovation culture and organisational commitment include Creativity and Innovation, Risk-taking, and Resilience.

2.16.1 Creativity and Innovation

Creativity and Innovation in leadership are fundamental to driving successful digital implementation. Leadership strategies that focus on developing the right group norms and maintaining frequent communication foster an environment where innovation can thrive (Mumford & England, 2022). By establishing a culture that encourages creativity, leaders enable employees to think outside the box and propose innovative solutions to complex problems, which is essential for digital transformation. Transformative leadership plays a significant role in enhancing employee creativity, which drives the digital transformation process (Zhu et al., 2022).

Leaders who inspire and motivate their teams to embrace new ideas and technologies create a dynamic and forward-thinking workplace, supporting the generation and effective implementation of innovative ideas. Frequent communication between leaders and subordinates is key to creating a climate conducive to innovation (Hoang et al., 2020). Open and ongoing dialogue fosters the free exchange of ideas, feedback, and collaboration, which is important for an innovative culture while promoting transparency and inclusivity, enabling leaders to harness the collective creativity of their teams for more effective digital initiatives.

Building a digital vision requires a creative environment. Leaders must create and encourage a cognitive framework that is flexible, open to experimentation, and always improving to navigate modern businesses (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020). This proactive, adaptive perspective helps leaders address difficulties and seize new opportunities. Leaders who tolerate change question norms and actively pursue new possibilities, establishing a culture of creativity and advancing their fields. A commitment to experimentation helps leaders assess and enhance new ideas (Promsri, 2019). Empowerment and the freedom for team members to actively generate ideas, challenge norms, and disrupt traditions foster an innovative atmosphere.

Successful leaders create an innovative, failure-friendly workplace. Businesses need innovation to stay flexible in a volatile economy (Promsri, 2019). Leaders who prioritise innovation and creativity promote a culture of continuous improvement and flexibility (Ismail et al., 2023). Leaders in the digital era need to generate new ideas and promote experimentation and failure as a means to learn and succeed. Businesses must foster creativity and innovation to remain adaptable to market changes, enabling them to respond to opportunities and challenges while ensuring growth, resilience, and a competitive edge.

2.16.2 Risk Taking

Risk-taking is essential for leaders in the digital era, fostering a culture of innovation and organisational commitment (Kocak & Pawlowski, 2022). Developing risk literacy and promoting a culture of calculated risk-taking is fundamental to driving digital transformation initiatives. Leaders who encourage and embody a risk-taking mindset can effectively gain support and propel digital initiatives forward. Promoting a risk-taking culture within an organisation involves encouraging leaders and employees to embrace uncertainty and view potential failures as opportunities for learning and growth (Fragouli & Chukwudum, 2019). This approach not only enhances the organisation's ability to innovate but also strengthens its capacity to adapt to changing technological landscapes.

Jung et al. (2020) suggest that by adopting a mindset that embraces calculated risks, organisations can better navigate the challenges of digital transformation and promote sustainable growth. Moreover, a willingness to take risks enables organisations to explore new technologies and innovative solutions that offer competitive advantages. It allows for experimentation to discover the most effective digital strategies and solutions. Kleef et al. (2021) emphasised that leaders who support risk-taking are likely to inspire their teams to think creatively and challenge conventional practices, leading to breakthrough innovations.

Strategic decision-making is a key risk-taking aspect, where leaders weigh potential benefits against possible drawbacks (Jung et al.,2020). Risk evaluation and aligning decisions with the organisation’s long-term objectives help avoid excessive caution and leverage opportunities that drive digital progress. Organisations can ensure they are prepared to seize opportunities that facilitate successful digital transformation by nurturing a balanced approach to risk.

2.16.3 Resilience

Resilience, the ability to bounce back from setbacks, is essential in navigating the uncertainties of digital implementation and fostering organisational commitment (Richard, 2020). Integrating resilience into leadership practices promotes continuous improvement, innovation, and strong engagement within teams. Maintaining a positive outlook as part of resilient leadership enables implementing digital solutions tailored to meet unique organisational needs (Browder, 2023). Flexibility and agility are necessary as leaders must quickly adapt their strategies, capitalise on new opportunities, and guide their teams through dynamic shifts to succeed in the ever-changing corporate world (Miceli et al., 2021). Adaptable leaders need to critically evaluate traditional methods and maintain a continual desire to learn in order to stay resilient amid fast technological change.

Leaders must navigate uncertainty and rapid transitions in the digital environment, leading their teams effectively during transformations (Behie et al., 2023). Instilling resilience and adaptability into the business culture is key to successfully navigating uncharted territories in digital disruption. Resilient leaders overcome failures and persist, while flexible leaders thrive in changing situations (Richard, 2020). These traits are essential for leaders in the fast-changing digital retail sector to manage its complexities and uncertainties.

Overall, all these leadership competencies discussed above are essential for effectively managing organisational change. They are important for ensuring a smooth transition during periods of change, upskilling the workforce to adapt to new challenges, and overcoming resistance to change in a fast-changing organisation (Antonopoulou et al., 2020). Effective leadership with a high level of competence is fundamental to ensure that

digital initiatives are in line with the goals of the organisation. These leaders are responsible for integrating digital efforts seamlessly into the overarching strategy and objectives, thus contributing to the expansion and long-term survival of the organisation (Promsri, 2019). In order to conduct a thorough qualitative study at the CSO in Malaysia, it is important to understand all the leadership competencies that are fundamental for the successful implementation of digital initiatives. It is necessary to comprehend these leadership competencies as they provide valuable insights into the elements that lead to successful digital implementation. Furthermore, this understanding is instrumental in devising effective strategies for nurturing and improving these leadership competencies within the organisation.

2.17 Challenges in Leadership for Digital Implementation

The digital implementation landscape presents a wide range of challenges. Effective leadership in this domain requires overcoming barriers, managing change, addressing skills gaps, ensuring cybersecurity, fostering adaptability, and upholding ethical considerations (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020; Deep, 2023).

Overcoming barriers to organisational change is a key challenge. Process-oriented staff often resist new technologies, necessitating leadership to create a culture that values change (Deep, 2023). Effective communication about the benefits of digital implementation is essential for reducing resistance and securing stakeholder buy-in. Leaders must also provide training and support to empower employees to navigate digital implementation successfully. A significant challenge lies in bridging the skills gap. As technology advances faster than the workforce, leaders must prioritise upskilling, defining digital-era competencies, and fostering continuous learning opportunities to ensure the successful

integration of digital technologies (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020). Cybersecurity threats also pose substantial challenges, requiring leaders to establish robust security processes, protect sensitive data, and promote a cybersecurity-conscious culture (Attar & Abdul-Kareem, 2020).

Adaptability is another challenge in digital implementation. Effective change management and technical adaptation are essential to digital implementation, involving clear communication, active employee participation, and addressing both technological and human aspects (Bellantuono et al., 2021). Leaders must anticipate and respond to internal and external changes, guiding teams through transitions while fostering resilience and flexibility (Uhl-Bien, 2021).

Collaboration and ethical considerations add further complexity. Digital work settings require cross-functional teams with skills in data analytics, logistics, and customer experience design (Marion & Fixson, 2021). Leaders must also address ethical concerns, including data privacy and accountability. Strong data privacy safeguards, transparency about data usage, and compliance with local regulations are essential for building trust and maintaining organisational integrity (Cortellazzo et al., 2019).

Effective leadership is fundamental for navigating the complexities of digital implementation, where the integration of technological advancements with human-focused strategies drives business growth and ensures long-term success. Leadership that fosters resilience, ethical integrity, and a culture of innovation enables organisations to thrive in an increasingly dynamic and competitive digital landscape. A balanced approach that addresses these challenges empowers employees and positions the organisation for sustained success in the digital era.

2.14 Integrating Leadership Competencies with Digital Maturity Dimensions for Successful Digital Implementation

Successful digital implementation depends on understanding digital maturity dimensions and applying appropriate leadership theories along with specific leadership competencies. This study explores the integration of these elements, drawing on the dimensions identified by Pihir et al. (2018) and examining how transformational, situational and authentic leadership theories can enhance organisational capabilities to achieve digital maturity. The synthesis of leadership competencies with digital maturity dimensions provides a strategic framework fundamental for aligning digital initiatives with organisational objectives.

Digital transformation implementation requires managing a blend of key dimensions essential for navigating its details. Pihir et al. (2018) have methodically outlined these dimensions, which include strategic orientation, customer centricity, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability strengthening, and fostering an innovation culture with organisational commitment. For a successful digital transformation, each dimension requires specific leadership competencies that, when applied through suitable leadership theories, can significantly improve the process. Strategic orientation requires leaders to possess visionary thinking and strategic decision-making competencies. Transformational leadership is particularly effective as it motivates and inspires the organisation towards achieving a shared vision, which is important for the strategic alignment of digital initiatives (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This leadership style facilitates embedding digital strategies within the fabric of organisational goals, fostering an environment that nurtures innovation. In customer centricity, competencies such as empathy and advanced customer relationship management

are indispensable. Authentic leadership plays a critical role by promoting transparency and ethical practices, thereby building customer trust and loyalty (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This leadership ensures that digital implementation efforts align with customer values and needs, enhancing customer engagement and satisfaction. Managing ICT and process infrastructure effectively demands a robust understanding of technology and innovative process management. Situational leadership is adept in this dimension as it allows leaders to tailor their style based on the team's readiness and the specific technological demands of projects (Demja & Shurif, 2021). Leaders proficient in technological literacy and innovation management provide guidance and support to integrate new technologies seamlessly and enhance the organisation's digital infrastructure. Talent and capability strengthening are fundamental for cultivating a workforce that can support and propel digital initiatives forward. Transformational leadership again proves beneficial by fostering an environment that encourages continuous learning and skill development, which is essential for enhancing digital competencies within the team (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Lastly, promoting an innovation culture and organisational commitment requires leaders to manage risk and stimulate creativity. Both transformational and authentic leadership styles are beneficial here. Transformational leaders inspire risk-taking and creativity, which are critical for innovation (Bass & Riggio, 2006), while authentic leaders ensure that these innovative practices are pursued within an ethical and transparent framework (Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Integrating digital maturity dimensions with targeted leadership competencies through transformational, situational and authentic leadership theories offers a comprehensive approach to managing digital transformation. Zivkovic (2022) stated that integration ensures that digital initiatives are strategically aligned with both the operational goals and the broader vision of the organisation, facilitating successful outcomes. Such

strategic alignment boosts the immediate effectiveness of digital implementation efforts and positions the organisation for long-term success in an increasingly digitalised global landscape. The current study will examine deeper into identifying and examining the fundamental leadership competencies required for each dimension of digital maturity. By understanding the precise competencies necessary for successful digital implementation, the study aims to provide a detailed framework organisation can adopt to enhance their digital implementation processes. This detailed examination will explain how leadership competencies can be effectively integrated with digital maturity dimensions to foster a resilient and innovative organisational culture.

2.15 Current Leadership Development and Its Challenges at the CSO

The leadership development programme at the CSO retail business provides a general foundation for digital implementation tools and processes. The programme focuses on digital technologies but lacks strategies for optimal application, offering only foundational knowledge without sufficiently developing the necessary competencies for digital transformation (Peng, 2021). The programme remains generic, concentrating on basic principles rather than addressing specific digital implementation needs. It adopts a one-size-fits-all approach and lacks tailored modules, leaving retailers unprepared for digital transformation complexities (Schiuma et al., 2022).

The strategic vision component also lacks a focus on leveraging digital strategies to optimise retail solutions (Guinan et al., 2019). While aligned with organisational goals, it does not sufficiently prepare retailers to anticipate trends and integrate strategies with long-term objectives. Limited collaboration across functions and between retailers further restricts the development of a holistic view of the digital ecosystem (Van den Berg & Brongers,

2022). Mentorship programmes are insufficient to guide emerging talent for digital implementation challenges (Karaboga et al., 2021). Additionally, the programme struggles to balance traditional and digital leadership skills, requiring better integration of digital techniques with core values (Fotso, 2021).

The leadership development framework incorporates transformational, situational, and authentic leadership theories, but its application remains too general to address digital demands (Kabeta & Halubanza, 2023). Further refinement can improve their relevance to evolving digital requirements. Overall, while the CSO's leadership development programme provides a foundation for digital implementation, it lacks depth, specificity, and personalisation to support effective transformation.

2.16 Research Gap on Leadership Competencies in Digital Implementation

This study aims to address existing gaps in the literature by exploring the leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation in the retail business of Malaysia's energy industry. Based on the existing literature review, there is still a lack of studies addressing the unique challenges retailers face in this industry. First, prior research has examined leadership roles, including both leadership-focused positions (Fernandes et al., 2024; Gilli et al., 2022) and non-leadership roles (Hristov, Chirico, & Camilli, 2022; Hyun et al., 2020). These studies have explored leadership practices across diverse industries such as education (Francisco et al., 2020; Halili et al., 2021), business (Ghazzawi et al., 2017; Bellantuono et al., 2021), and healthcare (Bennett et al., 2018; Hughes et al., 2022;). However, there is limited study of retailers in the energy industry, particularly in Malaysia. This gap is significant because retailers operate in a dynamic and competitive environment, making digital implementation both a challenge and a necessity. Therefore, targeted studies

that explore leadership frameworks tailored to the unique needs of retailers in Malaysia's energy sector are required to advance both theory and practice.

Another critical gap is the lack of findings on leadership competencies for successful digital implementation. While previous studies have explored leadership competencies (Christoffels, 2019; Imran et al., 2020) and digital competencies (Fonseca & Picoto, 2020; Oberländer et al., 2020), there remains insufficient evidence identifying the specific competencies required to drive successful digital implementation. Most studies focus on general leadership rather than the competencies required to lead digital transformation. For example, while competencies like strategic vision (Philip & Gavrilova Aguilar, 2021) are widely discussed, their practical application in digital implementation has not been empirically validated. This limitation hinders the development of competency-based frameworks and training programmes essential for preparing leaders to successfully implement digital strategies. The third gap identified is the lack of studies on the impact of leadership practices on business performance. While several studies have investigated performance metrics (Afram et al., 2022; Karauri & Kyongo, 2024), change management (Bellantuono et al., 2021) and organisational culture (Blanka et al., 2022; Montasser et al., 2023), few have examined the direct link between leadership strategies and business outcomes. Key performance areas such as business performance, customer experience, and operational efficiency remain underexplored in digital transformation. Addressing this gap can provide empirical evidence and practical insights into how leadership competencies influence performance, offering actionable strategies for aligning organisational goals with digital implementation. Figure 2.6 provides a comprehensive overview of the research gaps, which are categorised based on individual and organisational dimensions.

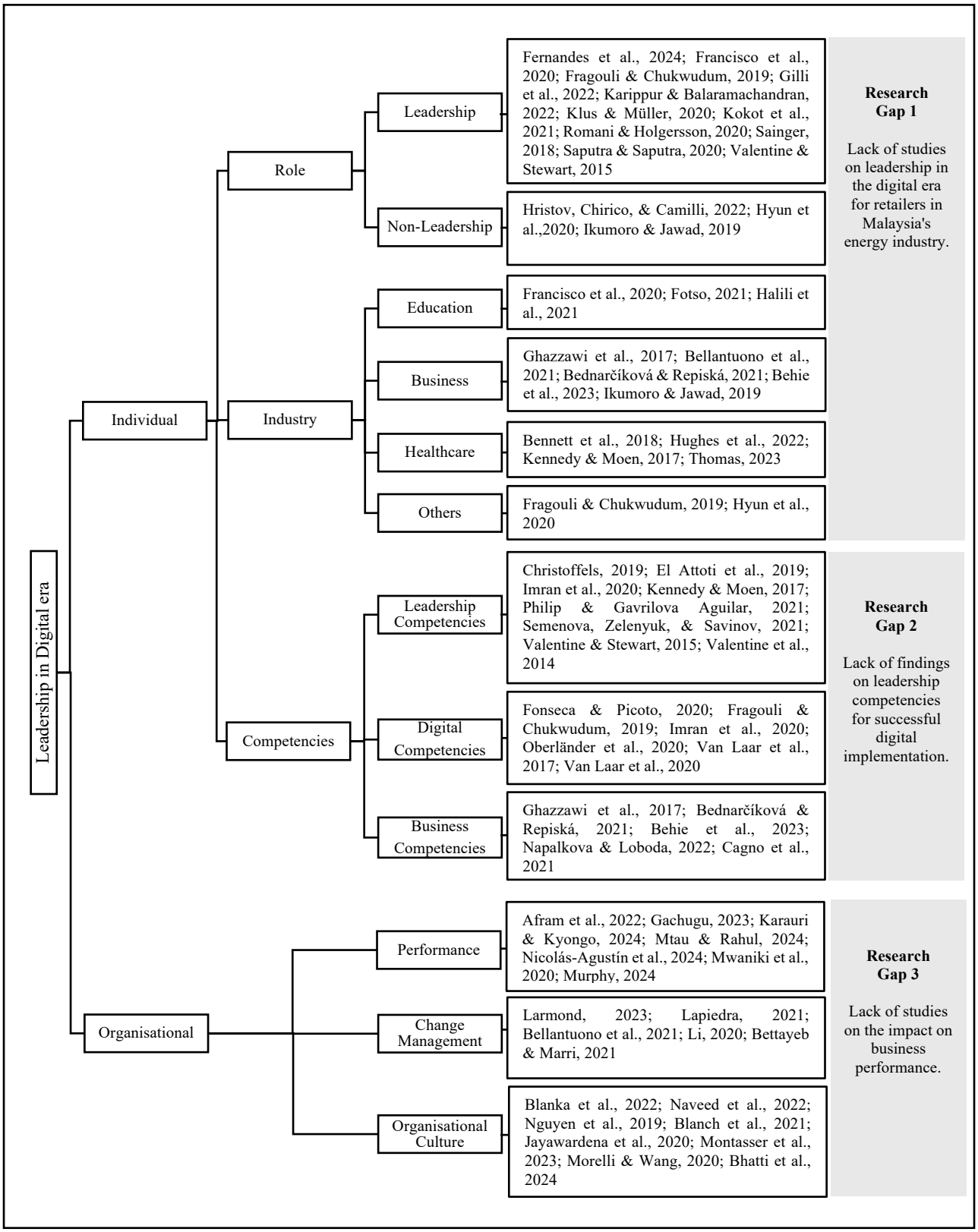


Figure 2.6: Leadership in the Digital Era Research Gaps in the Literature Review

Note. Created by the author based on the literature review.

In addition, it becomes evident that only a limited number of studies explore leadership competencies as enablers of digital transformation, with most viewing leadership as a contributing factor rather than its distinct role. This highlights the need for further research, particularly in Malaysia's energy industry. Table 2.2 summarises key leadership competencies highlighted in previous studies.

Table 2.2: Leadership Competencies Identified in the Study Focus

Authors	Key Leadership Competencies
Philip & Gavrilova Aguilar, 2021	Strategic Vision, Collaboration, Lead by Example, Digital Skills Advancement
Semenova et al., 2021	Strategic Vision, Employee Centricity, Performance Driven, Resilience, Continuous Learning
Imran et al., 2020	Strategic Vision, Empowerment, Teamwork, Digital Skills Advancement
Christoffels, 2019	Strategic Vision, Digital Skills Advancement
El Attoti et al., 2019	Collaboration, Lead by Example, Continuous Learning, Flexibility
Kennedy & Moen, 2017	Digital Skills Advancement, Teamwork, Collaboration
Valentine & Stewart, 2015	Strategic Vision, Performance Driven, Creativity and Innovation, Risk Taking
Valentine et al., 2014	Strategic Vision, Performance Driven, Creativity and Innovation, Risk Taking

This study addresses the gaps by exploring the leadership competencies required for digital implementation in Malaysia's energy industry. It builds on existing literature to develop a framework identifying competencies for successful digital implementation that drive business performance. By addressing the lack of studies, the study contributes theoretical insights and practical strategies for leaders navigating digital transformation.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the research methodology used to identify the leadership competencies required for the successful digital implementation of CSO retailers in Malaysia. The literature review analysis in Chapter 2 provides a foundation for the subsequent development of the research methodology, design, and interview questions. This section outlines the research design, conceptual framework, sampling strategy, data collection, analysis, and procedures for ensuring data validation and reliability.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative methodology. This approach is utilised to systematically collect and analyse data, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of participants. A case study design is employed, focusing on the CSO to explore the leadership competencies fundamental for successful digital implementation. Data are collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which are instrumental in obtaining detailed insights from participants. These interviews are conducted face-to-face or through videoconferencing, based on the participant's availability.

The systematic process of collecting and analysing data follows a well-defined research methodology, which includes specific steps and procedures to ensure the accuracy and unbiased nature of the study into the research problem (Tandon, 2021). This involves careful planning, data collection, analysis, and interpretation to produce reliable and valid

results. The qualitative research process, adapted from Creswell and Guetterman (2024), is demonstrated through the flow presented in Figure 3.1.

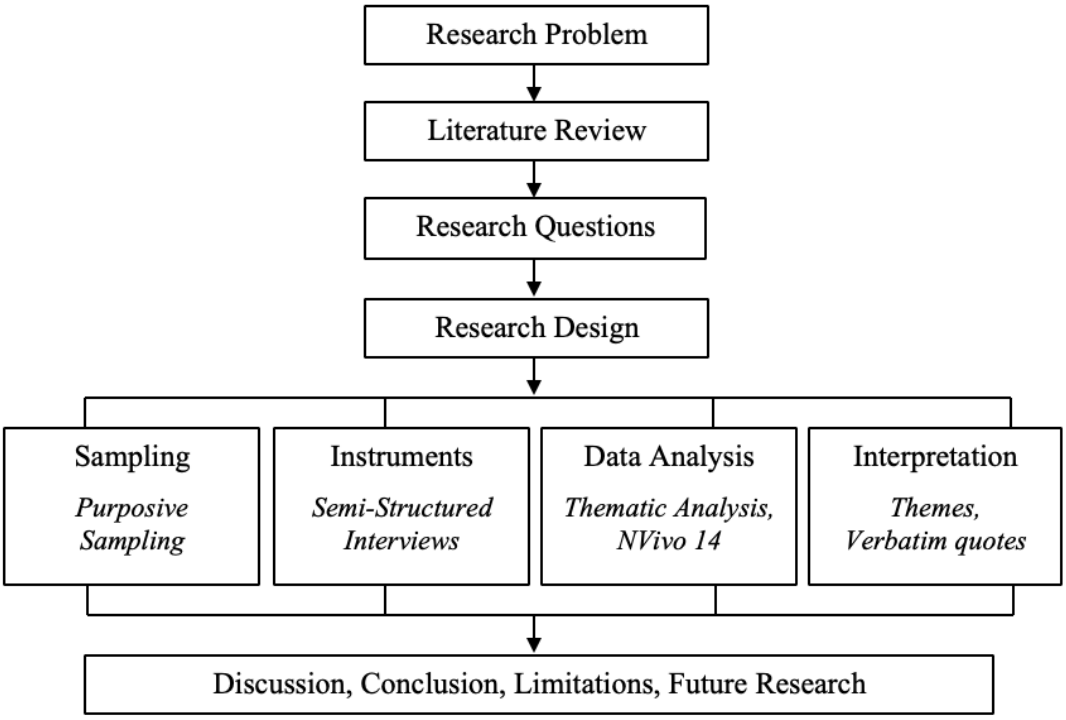


Figure 3.1: Flow of the Qualitative Research Process

Note. Creswell and Guetterman (2024).

This research begins with identifying the problem statement and conducting a literature review, which forms the basis for the conceptual framework and leadership theories. The next steps involve determining the sampling method and size. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on eight top retailers across regions. Semi-structured questionnaires, developed as the interview instrument, are adapted from the digital maturity dimension framework outlined by Pihir et al. (2018). The interview instrument was validated by experts from the CSO and the academic supervisor. Data were collected through interviews, both in-person and online. The data were analysed using thematic analysis with the support of NVivo 14 software. The data undergo thorough processing and coding,

leading to the identification of themes. These themes are then analysed, resulting in the findings of leadership competencies fundamental to successful digital implementation. This research concludes by discussing the implications of leadership competencies for digital implementation, acknowledging the study's limitations and recommending future research directions to extend these findings. Overall, this comprehensive research design ensures a thorough exploration of the research focus.

3.3 Conceptual Framework

Building on the foundation established in the literature review, the conceptual framework for this study is adapted from Pihir et al.'s (2018) five digital maturity dimensions, as shown in Figure 3.2. All these dimensions serve as a guide for identifying the leadership competencies required to drive successful digital implementation in the CSO.

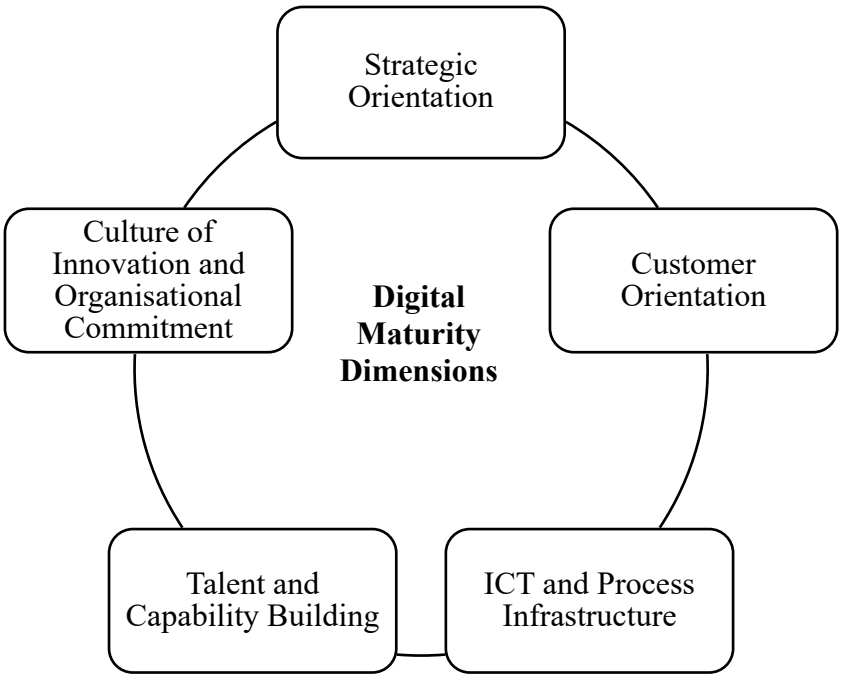


Figure 3.2: Digital Maturity Conceptual Framework for Methodological Application

Note. Adapted from Pihir et al. (2018).

This framework serves as the basis for developing interview questions and analysis techniques, ensuring alignment with each dimension to identify leadership competencies effectively. It also provides a structured approach for organising and interpreting the data collected during the research process.

3.4 Case Study Organisation

This research adopts a case study approach to explore the leadership competencies fundamental for successful digital implementation at the CSO. Rashid et al. (2019) assert that the utilisation of a case study methodology facilitates an in-depth examination of the intricate and contextually specific elements pertaining to the implementation of digital technologies within a business setting.

The CSO was selected as a case study because it is one of the leaders in digitalisation among retailers in the energy industry, demonstrates strong leadership, leverages advanced digital technologies, provides accessible data, and operates at a scale and complexity suitable for in-depth exploration (Yansen & Yujie, 2023). It also has a strong market presence and an extensive network across Malaysia. These aspects make it well-suited for exploring leadership competencies driving effective digital implementation.

The CSO retail site is managed by Retailer. Retailer is the leader of their respective retail site, making important decisions that impact business performance, customer satisfaction, and overall operations. This study focuses on their leadership, which is key to effective digital implementation at the site level. In the context of digital implementation, although the CSO provides advanced digital technologies and processes, their full potential can only be achieved through effective implementation by the retailer.

3.5 Sampling Strategy

Purposeful sampling is a widely used method in qualitative research as it allows researchers to identify and acquire valuable insights efficiently within limited resources and time (Humble & Radina, 2024). This approach involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics or qualities that align with the research objectives, ensuring the collection of rich and relevant data. This study employs purposive sampling to identify leadership competencies driving successful digital implementation in the CSO, focusing on top-performing retailers who can provide comprehensive and in-depth insights into the retail business context. Creswell and Guetterman (2024) emphasise purposeful sampling is particularly beneficial in qualitative studies where the depth of insight is prioritised over the breadth of data.

The sampling process was designed to include participants best suited to provide rich, contextualised insights into the leadership competencies fundamental for successful digital implementation. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2024), the goal is to identify individuals who deeply understand the study matter. First, specific selection criteria were established, requiring participants to have at least 10 years of experience managing retail sites, significant involvement in digital implementation efforts, and a proven track record of success, as evidenced by their post-digital implementation business performance. These criteria ensured that participants possessed a comprehensive understanding of both operational and strategic aspects of retail business digitalisation. Next, the process was further guided by the CSO insights and data, which were utilised to identify potential participants who met the established selection criteria. Lastly, detailed evaluations were conducted to ensure the selected participants had the experience and expertise to provide

meaningful perspectives on leadership competencies.

The population for this study comprises 900 retailers managed by the CSO across Malaysia, based on internal organisational reports (CSO, 2024). These retailers represent diverse geographical regions, including Central, North, South, and East Malaysia, and operate across various site categories such as urban, suburban, rural, and highway locations. From this population, a proportion of retailers who successfully achieved their business performance plans post-digital implementation were identified as top-tier retailers. These retailers were evaluated based on their business key performance indicators (KPIs), which cover fuels, convenience retailing, lubricants, and customer experience standards of excellence. This subset of top-tier retailers provided the pool from which the participants were selected for the study.

Eight retailers were selected from this top-tier group as the sample for this study. This sample represents retailers who are successful in digital implementation, making them suitable participants for this study. According to Subedi (2021), this sample size is sufficient for in-depth exploration and rich data collection for qualitative research. In qualitative studies, data saturation, where additional data collection no longer generates new themes or insights, is often achieved with smaller, focused sample sizes. The adequacy of the sample size was determined based on the exploratory nature of the research and the specific objective of gaining insights into the underlying concepts related to the topic. The selection process ensured a balanced representation of two top-performing retailers from each geographical region in Malaysia.

Additionally, the sample includes retailers with varied demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and education level, contributing to the diversity of perspectives

represented in the study. These participants also represent a mix of site categories, including urban, suburban, rural, and highway sites. This diversity enriches the overall analysis by capturing various viewpoints and experiences. According to (Subedi, 2021), ensuring a diverse sample is important for the validity and depth of qualitative research.

This rigorous process ensures the selected participants are well-suited to provide valuable insights and a contextual understanding of the leadership competencies that drive digital success in Malaysia's retail energy industry. The application of clear selection criteria and thorough evaluations ensure the relevance and depth of the collected data, making it robust enough to meet the study's objectives.

3.6 Data Collection

This data collection thoroughly examines the participants involved, outlines the interview process, and explores the use of secondary data sources. The study's initial phase focused on gaining a comprehensive understanding of the subject and the organisation's perspective by collecting data through consultations with domain experts affiliated with the organisation (Gallagher, 2024).

A meeting was organised with the CSO's senior managers and top-performance retailers to review the research details, specifically focusing on the research and interview questions. The involvement of these experts ensured that the questions were comprehensive, relevant, and aligned with the industry's practical realities. Additionally, the academic professor supervising this study reviewed the questionnaires to ensure their methodological soundness and academic rigour, further enhancing the study's reliability.

3.6.1 Participants

The participants in this study are the retailers, which refers to the individuals responsible for leading and managing the CSO's retail sites. The study employed a sample size of eight participants specifically chosen from the CSO to participate in interview sessions. This approach was chosen to gather comprehensive perspectives and sufficient data to address the research questions effectively (Robson, 2024). The sample was derived from a larger population of retailers duly recognised as top-tier performance achievers. The study involved the participation of two retailers from each region in Malaysia, including Central, North, South and East Malaysia. All the interviews were completed within four weeks in March 2024, either in person or online.

3.6.2 Interview Process

The primary data for this study was obtained through semi-structured interviews, selected for their flexibility and potential to generate insightful responses (Gallagher, 2024). This method aligns with the research objectives and theoretical framework outlined in the review of relevant literature. Semi-structured interviews facilitate systematic data collection, comprehensive analysis, and dynamic interactions, incorporating spontaneous follow-up questions to enhance research outcomes. They also allow participants to express their viewpoints verbally, which is important in the studied context. The interview process was guided by a thorough literature review, which provided secondary data to lay the foundation for the study. This review identified frameworks and key themes relevant to the research objectives, ensuring interviews collected rich, targeted data aligned with existing knowledge while addressing gaps in the literature. The interviews were carefully planned based on a well-established framework to ensure the research validity (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

The interview questions were adapted from the digital maturity dimensions by Pihir et al. (2018). The five digital maturity dimensions are strategy orientation, customer orientation, ICTs and process infrastructure, talent and capacity development, innovation culture, and organisational commitment. Each dimension is critical for the success of digital initiatives. The interview questions focused on identifying the leadership competencies required for each dimension. The questions are rooted in the operationalisation of the conceptual framework, ensuring they align with the study's objectives and theoretical foundations.

According to Robson (2024), expert reviews are important for refining the interview guide and improving question clarity, relevance, and depth. This process ensures the questions successfully capture the important data to address the research objectives. The interview instrument was validated through a focus group involving the CSO's senior managers and top retailers to ensure relevance and practical alignment. Additionally, the academic supervisor reviewed the instrument to ensure a strong methodological approach. A pilot interview with two retailers was conducted to evaluate the comprehension of the questionnaires, the feasibility of face-to-face sessions, and the use of video or audio technology. Feedback from this session led to further revisions and enhancements of the interview questions.

This study follows Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) five phases of the interview process, as shown in Figure 3.3. The process starts with the briefing phase, where the interviewer sets clear expectations by outlining the interview's purpose, scope, and structure. In the introduction, the retailer introduces their personal and business background and discusses their experiences leading digital implementation initiatives, setting the groundwork for

deeper exploration. The main phase involves discussing semi-structured questions focused on leadership competencies, where the retailer is encouraged to provide detailed answers and examples. Follow-up and spontaneous questions help probe deeper into the topic. The debriefing phase summarises key points and clarifies ambiguities, ensuring all important aspects are covered. Finally, the reflective question gathers insights into the participant's thoughts on the discussed topics. This structured yet flexible approach facilitates a comprehensive examination of leadership skills in digital implementation.

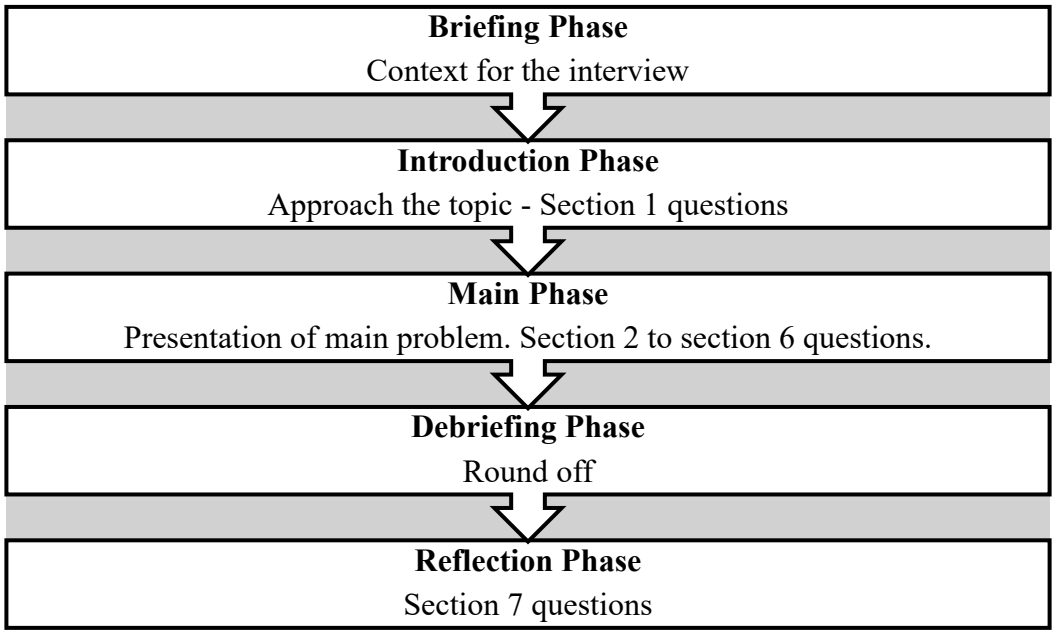


Figure 3.3: Flowchart of a Semi-structured Interview

Note. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015).

All eight interviews are scheduled to take place within one month, considering the participants' busy schedules. The research utilised both online and physical platforms to accommodate participants' preferences. Participants were given an interview schedule with proposed dates, times, locations, and platforms. The participants received a briefing along with an interview guide, a set of questions, and a consent form that explained the study's

aims, interview specifics, and guarantees of confidentiality. After completing the consent forms, interviews are scheduled and confirmed to accommodate participants' availability, with flexibility for alternative dates if necessary.

With clear consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to preserve precise and reliable data. The confidentiality of each participant is rigorously protected, ensuring privacy and anonymity. Strict protocols prohibit collecting or disclosing any identifying information. The interview sessions are systematically recorded, transcribed, and securely stored for subsequent analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2024).

3.6.3 Interview Setting

The interview settings are carefully planned and based on a well-established framework to ensure the validity of the research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2024). The conceptual framework developed by Pihir et al. (2018) guides the development of interview topics and structured questions. Before the actual interviews, a structured interview guide is provided to the participants, allowing them to become familiar with the questions and prepare suitable responses. This approach establishes a clear framework for the interviews, enhancing participant engagement and willingness to participate by providing a clear understanding of the expected questions.

Interviews are conducted face-to-face by the researcher, who leads the session, takes comprehensive notes, and poses additional questions as needed. Interviews are conducted either online via Zoom or in person at the participants' offices, depending on their preferences and availability. This flexibility ensures that each interview is conducted in a setting conducive to open, detailed discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The interview

sessions, lasting 60 to 90 minutes, are divided into sections with prudently crafted questions (Gallagher, 2024). Whether online or in-person, each setting is equipped to ensure participant comfort and minimal distractions.

Proper technology is employed to support the recording and conducting of interviews, ensuring high-quality audio and video captures. Venues are chosen for their quiet atmosphere and privacy. Participants receive a preliminary version of the research findings for review and approval before completion to mitigate potential misinterpretations. This detailed interview setting emphasises the adaptability and careful planning of the interview process to ensure that all participants can fully engage, regardless of their circumstances.

3.6.4 Interview Instruments

The study employs a semi-structured interview approach, supporting the researcher to utilise a comprehensive set of questions, providing the flexibility to explore specific inquiries in more depth or customising the questions to fit the circumstances (Edwards & Holland, 2023). The interview questions are created based on the operationalisation of the conceptual framework, ensuring they align with the study's objectives and theoretical foundations.

According to Edwards and Holland (2023), using open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews is advantageous as it allows respondents to provide detailed descriptions of their experiences and perspectives. In this study, employing open-ended questions is deemed most suitable as it enables participants to offer comprehensive and detailed responses, facilitating the disclosure of sentiments and the collection of specific information by the interviewer. Additionally, the questions are designed to probe participants

to share examples and elaborate on their responses, which can lead to richer and more detailed data. This approach also enhances the validity and reliability of the data collected, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

The present study incorporates a comprehensive set of research interview questions, methodically organised into seven sections as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Semi-structured Interview Questions

Sections	Questions
1. Introduction	The introduction sets a formal tone for the interview. The retailer introduces themselves, describes their retail site, and shares their experience in leading digital implementation initiatives. 1. To begin, please introduce yourself, your site and share your experience as a retailer leading digital implementation.
2. Strategy Orientation	This section explores the leadership competencies required for strategic orientation in digital implementation. The findings aim to provide insights into the competencies retailers need to navigate and succeed in digital implementation at their site. 2. Could you describe the fundamental leadership competencies that have been most effective in guiding strategic direction during digital implementation at your site? 3. How do these competencies influence your approach to managing digital implementation and contribute to the success of your site?
3. Customer Orientation	This section explores the leadership competencies required for customer orientation in digital implementation. The findings aim to identify competencies that enhance customer interactions and ensure satisfaction during digital implementation. 4. In terms of customer focus, what leadership competencies do you consider fundamental for maintaining strong customer relations during digital initiatives? 5. Could you provide an example of how these competencies have helped your site meet customer expectations during a digital implementation?

Table 3.1 continued

4. ICT and Process Infrastructure	This section explores the leadership competencies required to manage ICT and process infrastructure effectively. The findings aim to provide insights into competencies that support technology integration and process streamlining for successful digital implementations. 6. What leadership competencies do you find fundamental for managing the integration of ICT and process infrastructure in digital implementation projects? 7. How do these competencies contribute to the success and help address challenges related to ICT and process infrastructure in digital implementations?
5. Talent and Capability Development	This section explores the leadership competencies required for developing talent and capability. The findings aim to identify competencies retailers need to build their teams and meet the demands of digital strategies and operations. 8. In terms of developing talent and building capability for digital implementation, what competencies do you view as fundamental? 9. Could you describe an instance where you have leveraged these competencies to develop a team skilled in managing the demands of digital implementation?
6. Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment	This section explores the leadership competencies required for Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment. The findings aim to provide insights into the competencies required to drive team innovation and commitment. 10. When considering the development of an innovation culture and enhancement of organisational commitment, what leadership competencies do you consider fundamental? 11. Please share an example of how these competencies played a fundamental role in achieving digital implementation goals.
7. Conclusion	The final section asks the retailer to reflect on their leadership style and share additional insights about their experience in digital implementation. 12. Reflecting on our discussion today about leadership competencies across various aspects of digital implementation, can you describe the leadership style you use and how it has influenced the success of digital implementation? Are there any additional insights you believe are important for leading successful digital implementation in your context?

These questions are adapted from the conceptual framework proposed by Pihir et al. (2018) to ensure consistency and relevance within the study's context. The instrument went through a thorough process to ensure its effectiveness. This included subjecting the questions to pilot testing to identify any issues and to gather feedback from experts in the field. These steps were taken to guarantee that the questions successfully captured the intended information.

The design of the interview questions addressed ethical considerations, such as ensuring participant anonymity and obtaining informed consent (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The interview protocol includes guidelines on conducting the interviews, expected duration, and methods for recording and transcribing data. The interviewer should ensure consistency, minimise bias, and handle sensitive topics. The flexibility of the semi-structured format allows the interviewer to follow up on interesting points raised by participants, leading to richer data and unexpected insights. The collected data will be analysed using coding techniques and thematic analysis to identify patterns and draw meaningful insights. This comprehensive approach ensures the robustness of the interview instrument and its alignment with the study's research objectives.

3.7 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is utilised in this study to evaluate data obtained from in-depth semi-structured interviews (Wolgemuth et al., 2024). Data collected from the interviews were analysed using NVivo 14 software, which facilitates the systematic organisation, analysis, and visualisation of qualitative data, thereby enhancing the accuracy and depth of thematic analysis (Maher et al., 2018). The interview data is systematically reviewed to identify noteworthy patterns or themes. This process involves recognising patterns within

the data that correspond to the participants' personal experiences, viewpoints, and perceptions. By using thematic analysis, substantial amounts of qualitative data can be efficiently managed while maintaining the depth and richness of the content.

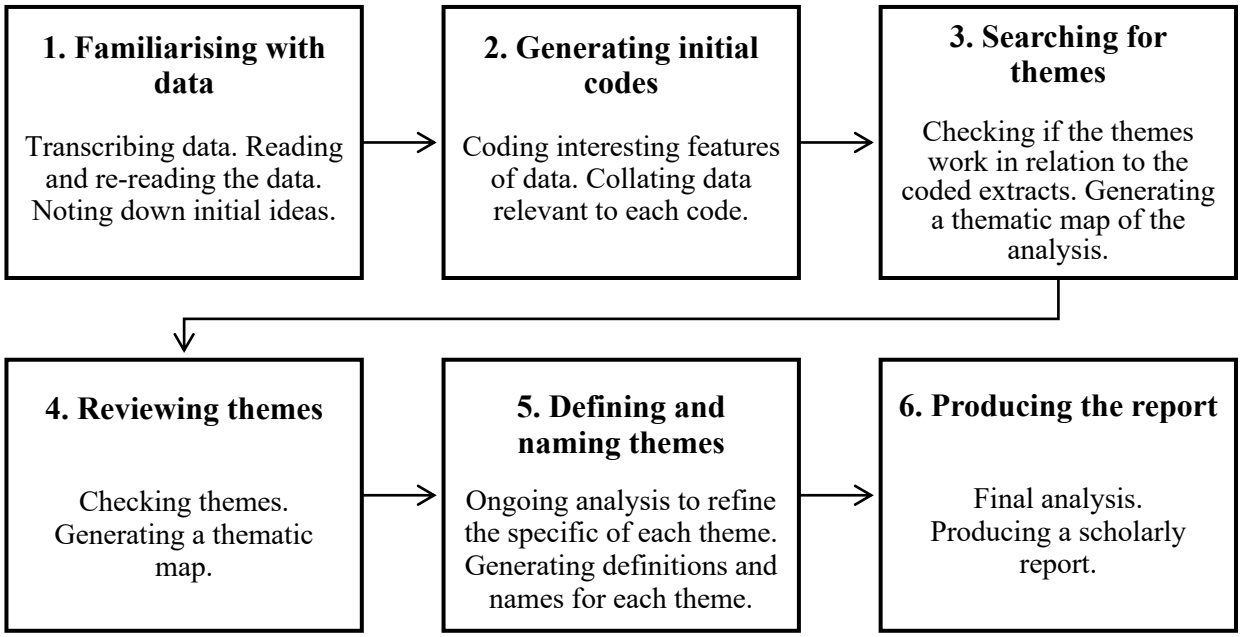


Figure 3.4: Thematic Analysis Six Phases Process

Note. Braun & Clarke (2012).

This study utilised Braun and Clarke (2012) six-phase thematic analysis to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns in leadership competencies during digital implementation. As illustrated in Figure 3.4, Braun and Clarke (2012) outline the first phase involves familiarising oneself with the data through transcription, comprehensive reading, and noting preliminary insights and observations. This step ensures a comprehensive understanding of the data before generating initial codes. Data collected from the eight retailers was transcribed and reviewed multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding. Initial insights into leadership competencies were noted. This was followed by generating the initial

code that captured participants' leadership competencies. Deductive coding was applied to classify data into leadership competencies based on participant responses. Next, in phase three, themes were systematically categorised using a hierarchical coding system, linking participant data to digital maturity dimensions and leadership theories. The first order themes are derived from the digital maturity dimensions, the second order themes are competencies derived from interview data, and aggregate dimensions mapped themes to leadership theories. The fourth phase entails reviewing and refining these themes to ensure that the themes are coherent and accurately represent the data. Overlapping sub-themes were consolidated for clarity. The fifth phase involved defining and naming the final themes. Ongoing analysis refines the specifics of each theme, leading to clear definitions and names for each one. The final phase is producing the report, which involves final analysis and interpretation, concluding in a scholarly report that integrates the themes found in the data. A description was constructed, supported by participant quotes and visualised. This comprehensive description provides a detailed and insightful understanding of the research findings.

The thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase framework and supported by NVivo 14, enabled the systematic identification and interpretation of patterns in leadership competencies during digital implementation. This structured approach ensured the analysis captured rich, context-specific insights aligned with the study's objectives.

3.8 Reliability and Validity

Reliability, which refers to the consistency of the study's results with the chosen research methods and analysis, is important for ensuring robustness and verifiability (Rose

& Johnson, 2020). The study employs standardised semi-structured questionnaires to maintain a consistent structure across all interviews. This approach reduces variability, ensures uniformity in data collection, and facilitates replicability while allowing flexibility in exploring participants' perspectives (Creswell & Guetterman, 2024). The interview instruments were also reviewed by the CSO senior managers, retailers, and the academic advisor to ensure their relevance and alignment with industry practices, further strengthening the reliability of the research process (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Additionally, adherence to uniform protocols for interview settings, time allocations, and procedures minimised variability and enhanced the consistency of data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Validity pertains to the accuracy with which the research methods capture the expected phenomena, ensuring credible findings (Rose & Johnson, 2020). The design of unbiased and open-ended interview questions encouraged authentic and accurate responses while safeguarding the objectivity of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Member checking enhanced validity, allowing participants to review and validate the findings, ensuring their views were accurately represented. This feedback loop not only enhanced the credibility of the research but also reinforced the validity of the data. Confidentiality assurances were established to encourage honest and open responses. Participants provided informed consent before the interview. Anonymity was maintained through pseudonyms and secure data storage, fostering trust and unbiased data collection.

The study's rigorous methodology ensured the reliability and validity of the collected data. By addressing consistency and accuracy, these measures strengthened the credibility and robustness of the research findings, providing a trustworthy foundation for the study's conclusions.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are fundamental to maintaining the integrity of qualitative research. This study emphasised establishing respectful relationships with participants, ensuring transparency, confidentiality, and fairness throughout the research process (Miller et al., 2012).

Participants were informed about the study's purpose, potential impact, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained before data collection, ensuring participants could make a conscious and autonomous decision to participate. This process upheld ethical principles of respect and autonomy (Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023). Strict data protection measures were implemented, including secure data storage and limited access to authorised personnel. Participants' identities were safeguarded through pseudonyms, ensuring confidentiality and compliance with ethical standards. These measures protected participants from risks and maintained their privacy (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Participants were treated with respect and inclusivity, with their perspectives valued as central to the study. Ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence guided this study by ensuring participant well-being and minimising potential risks. Interviews were conducted in safe and familiar environments, with strict confidentiality measures to protect participants' identities and promote openness (Laryeafio & Ogbewe, 2023).

Ethical integrity was upheld in this study through informed consent, robust data protection, and respectful, inclusive engagement with participants. The study's ethical practices ensured that the research upheld ethical integrity, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of its findings.

3.10 Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology applied in the study. The study adopts a constructivist paradigm to interpret and understand the leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation within a specific organisational context. Using qualitative methods, it captures subjective experiences and synthesises insights into themes that inform a conceptual framework integrating leadership competencies with digital maturity dimensions (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

The research draws upon the conceptual framework of the digital maturity dimension by Pihir et al. (2018), providing a foundation for exploring leadership competencies in digital implementation at the CSO. A purposive sampling method was employed to select eight retailers from the CSO in Malaysia, ensuring participants possessed relevant experience and insights into leadership and digital implementation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, enabling an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives. Thematic analysis, supported by NVivo 14 software, was used to identify key themes and patterns within the qualitative data. Reliability and validity were maintained through rigorous measures, ensuring the consistency, accuracy, and credibility of the findings.

The research methodology employed in this study ensures robustness, credibility, and relevance, providing valuable insights into leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation in Malaysia’s energy retail sector. The study adopts a constructivist paradigm, purposive sampling, and rigorous qualitative methods to capture and analyse participants' experiences. This approach provides a strong foundation for understanding the leadership competencies fundamental for successful digital implementation.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview

This chapter will discuss the data collection and analysis methodology for this study. Specifically, it will elaborate on the results and present thematically, pinpointing those leadership competencies deemed fundamental for successful digital implementation. The study involved eight high performing retailers who provided insight into the leadership competencies fundamental for successful digital implementation. Semi-structured interviews were used, and the data were analysed using NVivo 14, which organises the data and identifies recurrent words within their contexts, thus facilitating the interviews' analysis. Following this analysis, themes were categorised based on the consistency of responses.

4.2 Data Collection

In this qualitative, descriptive case study, eight high-performing retailers were interviewed for data collection. The study used purposive sampling to select eight participants from the CSO retailers. The retailers were purposefully sampled from a pool of high-performing retailers ranked nationwide. This sampling method, chosen for its relevance to the research, ensures that participants have specific experience and insights into leadership competencies fundamental for digital success (Creswell & Guetterman, 2024). The data collection involved a semi-structured format with twelve open-ended questions, following the research objectives, the competencies that make the retailers successful, and practices to address digital implementation in the competitive retail business. During the study, interviews were conducted and recorded, with direct observations and detailed notetaking,

contributing to a relaxed atmosphere conducive to candid discussion.

The retailers voluntarily participated in the study, which was conducted at their convenience. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online. For participant preparation, participants received a thorough briefing, provided informed consent, and were given the interview questions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2024). The participants were made to feel at ease and prepared to respond to in-depth questions. It was emphasised that their participation, identities, and business details were confidential, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The interviews were conducted within four weeks, with two to three participants interviewed. The sessions lasted for 60 to 90 minutes. All the sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. During the presentation of the study results, all participants were highly attentive and engaged.

Data analysis employed a thematic approach, guided by the study's research questions and supported by systematic coding using NVivo 14 (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). Triangulation was achieved through comparing and validating themes across diverse participants, ensuring consistency and credibility of the findings. A pilot study was conducted to test and refine interview protocols, while member checking validated findings with participants, enhancing trustworthiness and ensuring interpretive accuracy. Data saturation was reached by the sixth interview, with all eight interviews completed to confirm consistency and provide comprehensive insights aligned with the study’s objectives.

The comprehensive data collected from these retailers provided insightful, thematically rich narratives aligned with the study's objectives, highlighting key leadership competencies for digital implementation success. This rigorous approach ensured the collection of valuable insights into effective leadership in digital contexts.

4.3 Pilot Study Results

The pilot study in February 2024, engaged two retailers meeting the sampling framework's specified leadership criteria. This preliminary phase scrutinised the interview protocol, ensuring the questions were robust, logically sequenced, and conducive to obtaining meaningful insights (Creswell & Poth, 2024). These selected participants, recognised for their exemplary leadership within the digital retail domain, provided critical insights into the effectiveness of the interview questions. They reported no difficulty in comprehension or articulation, confirming the questions were conducive to probing deep into their leadership experiences with digital implementation.

The insights garnered from these participants were important, leading to calibrated adjustments to the interview protocol (Creswell & Poth, 2024). This involved discarding inessential details, such as ethnicity, to maintain the focus on the primary research intent. Furthermore, to enhance the specificity of the language, terms like 'distinct competencies' were substituted with 'fundamental competencies', resonating more accurately with the anticipated responses. Based on the input collected during the pilot study, certain questions, such as the Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment application question, have been revised to focus more specifically on the impact of leadership competencies in practical, real-world business scenarios.

All these changes refined the questions to emphasise the practical application of leadership competencies and assess their impact on implementation activities while also considering the unique challenges and opportunities of digital implementation in dynamic retail settings. Additionally, these changes also resulted in a shorter version that is clear and to the point, making it easier for respondents to understand and address the question.

Creswell and Poth (2024) state that refinements from the pilot phase optimised the clarity and relevance of the questions without changing the research's foundational design. This change expedited the main study by streamlining the interview process, thus enhancing the overall data collection efficiency and optimising the data analysis. Data from the pilot were excluded from the final study results.

4.4 Demographic and Site Profile of Interview Participants

A comprehensive overview of the demographic and site profiles of the interview participants is presented to highlight their diversity and relevance to the study. The participants in this study are top-performing retailers from the CSO in Malaysia. They were selected based on their proven success in digital implementation, as demonstrated by their high business performance. These retailers, who are responsible for leading and managing the CSO's retail sites, play a significant role in managing operations and driving business performance. Their leadership and experience are well-suited to provide valuable insights in this study.

Table 4.1 provides a detailed summary of the demographics and site profiles of the participants, underscoring the sample's representativeness and the robustness of the findings across various operational contexts. The demographic profile reflects a well-balanced distribution of participants in terms of years of professional experience, gender, age, and educational attainment, ensuring diverse perspectives are represented. The site profiles add depth to the study by showcasing varied operational settings and geographic representation, which provide insights into varying challenges and opportunities across different retail settings. This diversity within the sample enhances the comprehensiveness of the study, ensuring insights are drawn from a wide range of perspectives and backgrounds.

Table 4.1: Demographics and Site Profiles of the Retailers

Demographic	Measures	Frequency	Percentage
Years of Experiences	10-13 Years	2	25.0%
	14-17	2	25.0%
	18-21	4	50.0%
Gender	Male	4	50.0%
	Female	4	50.0%
Age	39 and below	2	25.0%
	40-44	2	25.0%
	45-49	2	25.0%
	50-54	2	25.0%
Education Level	Bachelor	5	62.5%
	Master	3	37.5%
Site Region	East Malaysia	2	25.0%
	Central	2	25.0%
	North	2	25.0%
	South	2	25.0%
Site Category	Urban	2	25.0%
	Suburban	2	25.0%
	Rural	2	25.0%
	Highway	2	25.0%
Number of staff	11-15 Staff	1	12.5%
	16-20	3	37.5%
	21-25	2	25.0%
	26-30	2	25.0%

All participants have at least 12 years of experience, with the majority accounting for 50% having 18–21 years, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. This extensive experience establishes their expertise and eligibility for providing credible insights and understanding the impacts of strategic changes, such as digital implementation (Edwards & Holland, 2023). Qualitative research sampling suggests that a minimum of 10 years of experience is often sufficient to ensure participants have the necessary depth of experience to contribute meaningfully to such studies (Edwards & Holland, 2023).

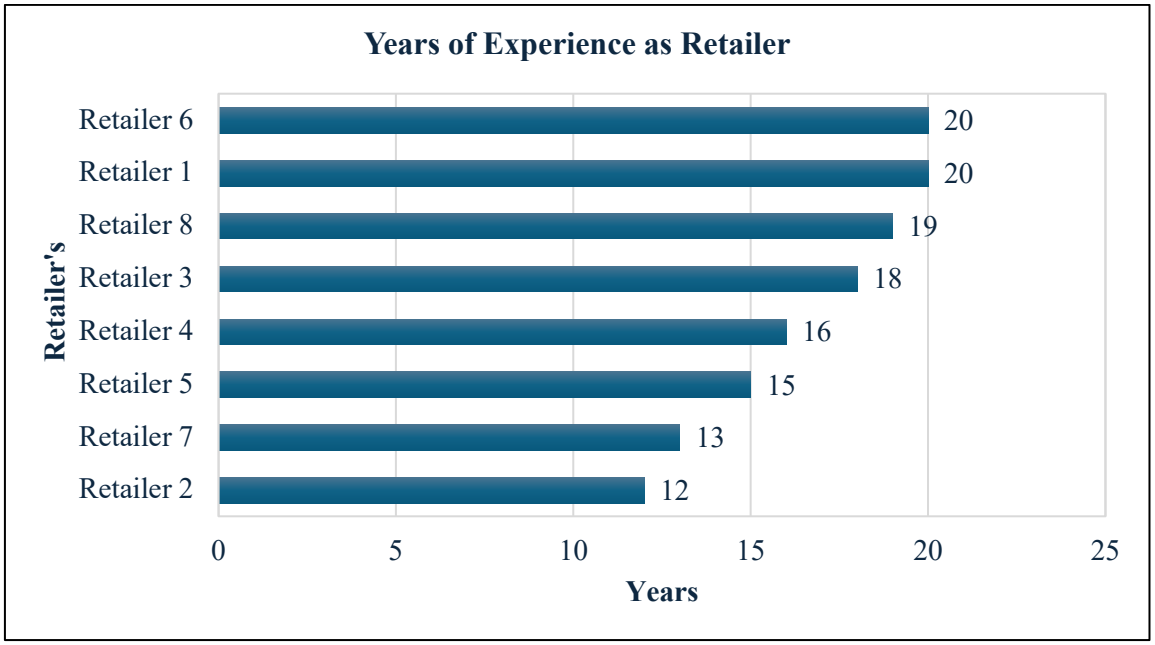


Figure 4.1: Years of Experience as a Retailer

Gender representation is balanced, with 50% male and 50% female participants, ensuring diverse perspectives. As illustrated in Figure 4.2, the age distribution is also evenly spread across four groups, each comprising 25%, reflecting generational diversity.

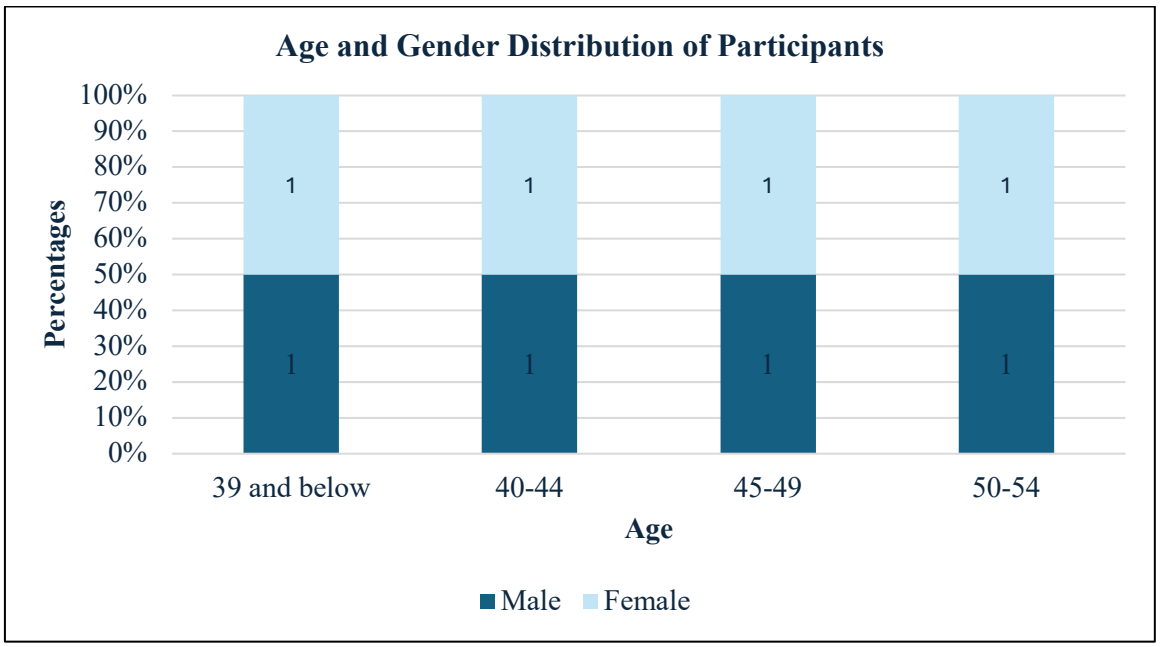


Figure 4.2: Age and Gender Distribution of Retailers

Educational qualifications further enhance diversity, with five retailers holding bachelor's degrees and three retailers possessing master's degrees, signifying a high level of academic achievement.

The site profile highlights business performance levels, regional representation, location types, and staff size, ensuring operational diversity. All participants were selected from high-performing sites, demonstrating their ability to meet or exceed business performance benchmarks in sales across fuels, lubricants, and convenience retailing, as well as maintaining high standards of customer satisfaction. This ensures insights are drawn from successful samples of digital implementation.

The performance is categorised into high, medium, and low based on the CSO's operational criteria, which evaluate business performance in sales of fuels, lubricants and convenience retailing, along with customer satisfaction. High-performing sites meet or exceed these benchmarks, medium performers meet average benchmarks, and low performers fall below benchmarks. This study focuses on high-performing sites that demonstrated successful digital implementation, offering insights into key leadership competencies and establishing benchmarks for best practices. Geographically, participants represent all regions in Malaysia. Each region is equally represented, with 25% of the retailers coming from Central, North, South and East Malaysia, ensuring a balanced representation of regional contexts.

The CSO's retail sites are equally distributed across Urban, Suburban, Rural, and Highway categories, each comprising 25% of the sample. This categorisation highlights the diverse operational contexts, customer bases, and service offerings relevant to digital implementation strategies. Urban sites cater to high-traffic areas with fuel, convenience

retailing, and cafes for commuters and residents. Suburban sites serve residential communities, offering fuel, convenience stores, and additional services such as lube bays and car washes. Highway sites target transient travellers, providing fuel, convenience retailing, cafes, and rest area facilities. Rural sites focus on local needs, offering essential fuel and convenience services with simpler setups. This distribution captures diverse operational demands and challenges, providing insights into digital implementation across varied contexts. Figure 4.3 illustrates the distribution of staff across different site categories, reflecting variations in operational scale. The majority of sites operate with 16–20 staff, while others range between 11–30 staff. Suburban sites tend to have moderate staffing levels, rural sites feature lower staffing needs, and highway sites typically require larger teams due to higher traffic volumes and broader service offerings. This distribution highlights the operational diversity and staffing demands across site categories.

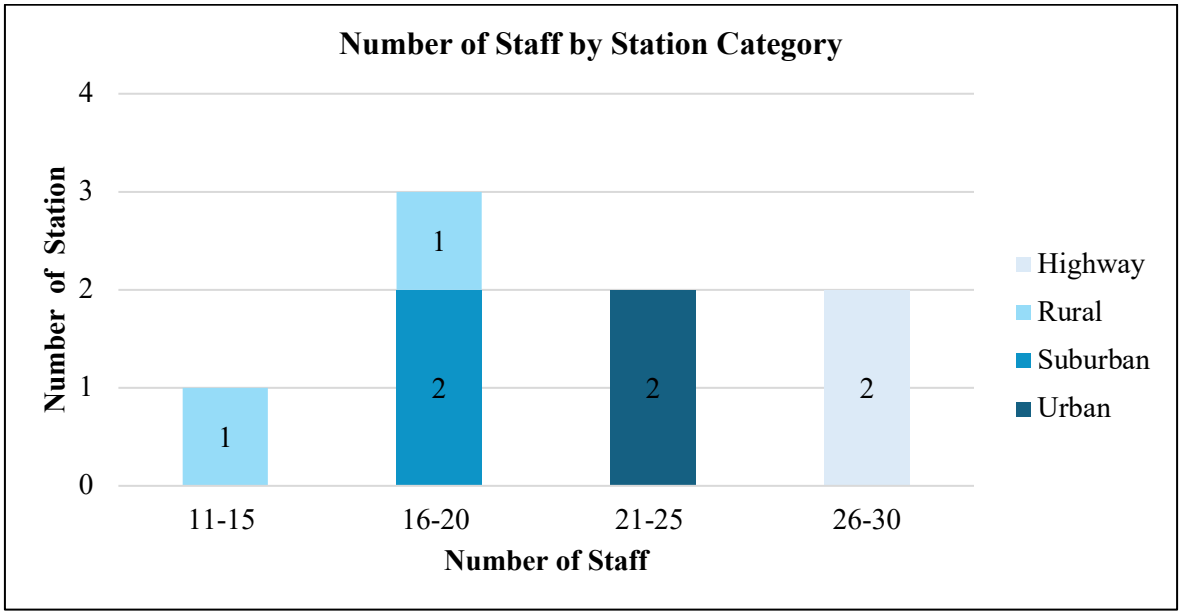


Figure 4.3: Number of Staff by Site Category

The demographic and site profiles of the participants demonstrate a comprehensive, diverse and balanced representation. This enhances the credibility of the sample and its

relevance for providing meaningful insights into the leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation across varied operations contexts.

4.5 Data Analysis Findings

Building upon the analytical framework outlined earlier, this section presents the findings derived from the data analysis using NVivo 14. The systematic analysis using NVivo 14 categorised the data thematically, reflecting the retailers' perceptions and experiences with leadership in digital implementation (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019).

The data analysis discovered five primary themes and fourteen subthemes, with a total frequency of 100 coded phrases distributed across these sub-themes, as summarised in Table 4.2. This thematic categorisation provides rich, in-depth insights into the leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation in the CSO.

Table 4.2: Frequency of Sub-themes

Primary Themes	**Sub themes**	**Frequency**
Strategy Orientation	Strategic Vision	8
	Employee Centricity	8
	Performance Driven	7
Customer Orientation	Customer Centricity	8
	Lead by Example	7
ICT and Process Infrastructure	Continuous Learning	8
	Digital Skills Advancement	8
	Collaboration	6

Table 4.2: continued

Talent and Capability Development	Empowerment	8
	Teamwork	7
	Recognition	7
Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment	Creativity and Innovation	8
	Risk Taking	5
	Resilience	5
Total Frequency		100

A comprehensive analysis of the frequency with which leadership competencies have been referenced within the dataset is shown in the graphical representation in Figure 4.4.

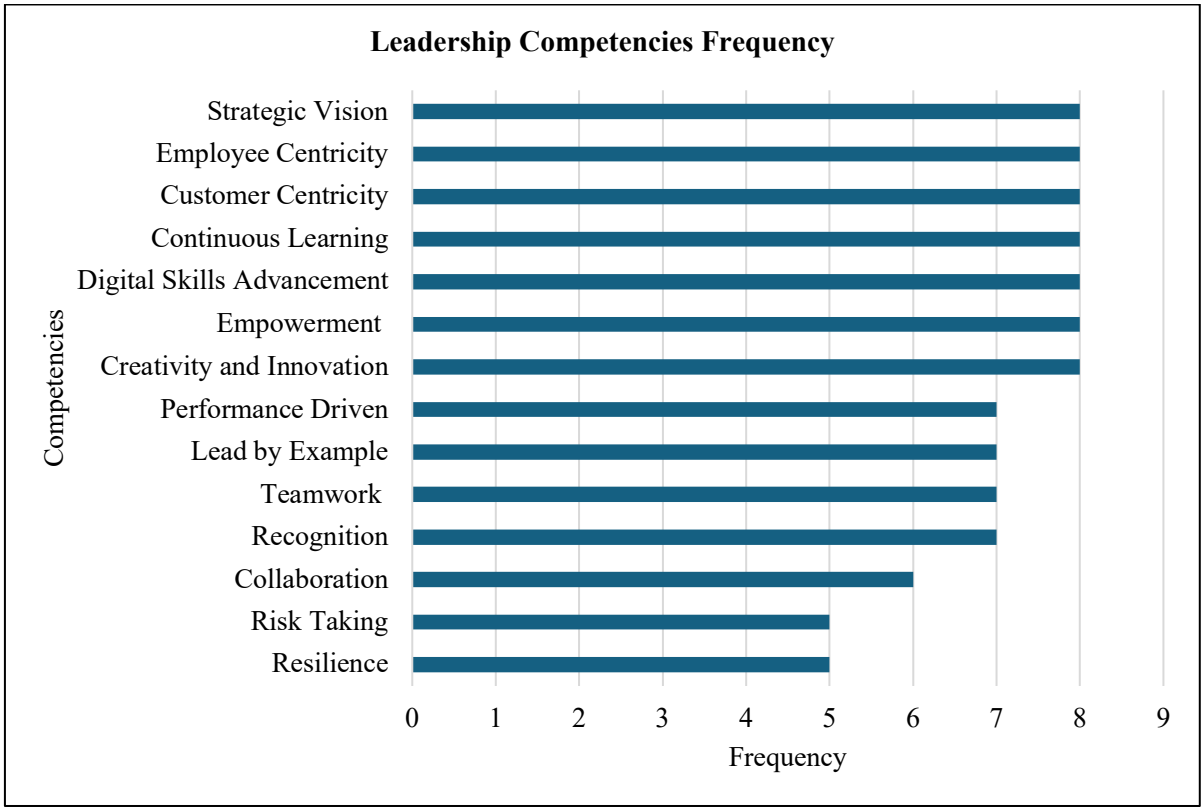


Figure 4.4: Leadership Competencies Frequency

Figure 4.4. provides detailed insights into the emphasis placed on different leadership competencies within the dataset, clearly highlighting the most prominent ones. The graph gives a comprehensive overview of the frequency with which each competency is mentioned, revealing variations in the emphasis placed on each. Notably, seven sub-themes are distinguished by being mentioned by all eight retailers, highlighting them as the most prominent competencies in the dataset. All retailers concurred on the necessity of competencies such as Strategic Vision, Employee Centricity, Customer Centricity, Continuous Learning, Digital Skills Advancement, Empowerment and Creativity Innovation, indicating the strong perceived importance of these areas in driving successful digital implementation.

This is followed by the sub-themes of Performance Driven, Lead by Example, Teamwork and Recognition, each cited by seven out of eight participants, reflecting the emphasis on these themes. Collaboration was mentioned by six participants, reflecting a moderate emphasis. Lastly, among the competencies discussed, Risk-taking and Resilience were the least frequently cited in this set of findings, with each being mentioned only five times, indicating a lower emphasis than other leadership competencies explored.

The leadership competencies identified through a detailed frequency analysis have been grouped into five categories. Each of these categories aligned with one of the five dimensions of digital maturity, as comprehensively outlined by Pihir et al. (2018). This categorisation is illustrated in Figure 4.5, which provides a comprehensive overview of how the competencies correspond to each dimension of digital maturity. It shows the proportional representation of each competency, providing a clear depiction of their distribution across the dimensions.

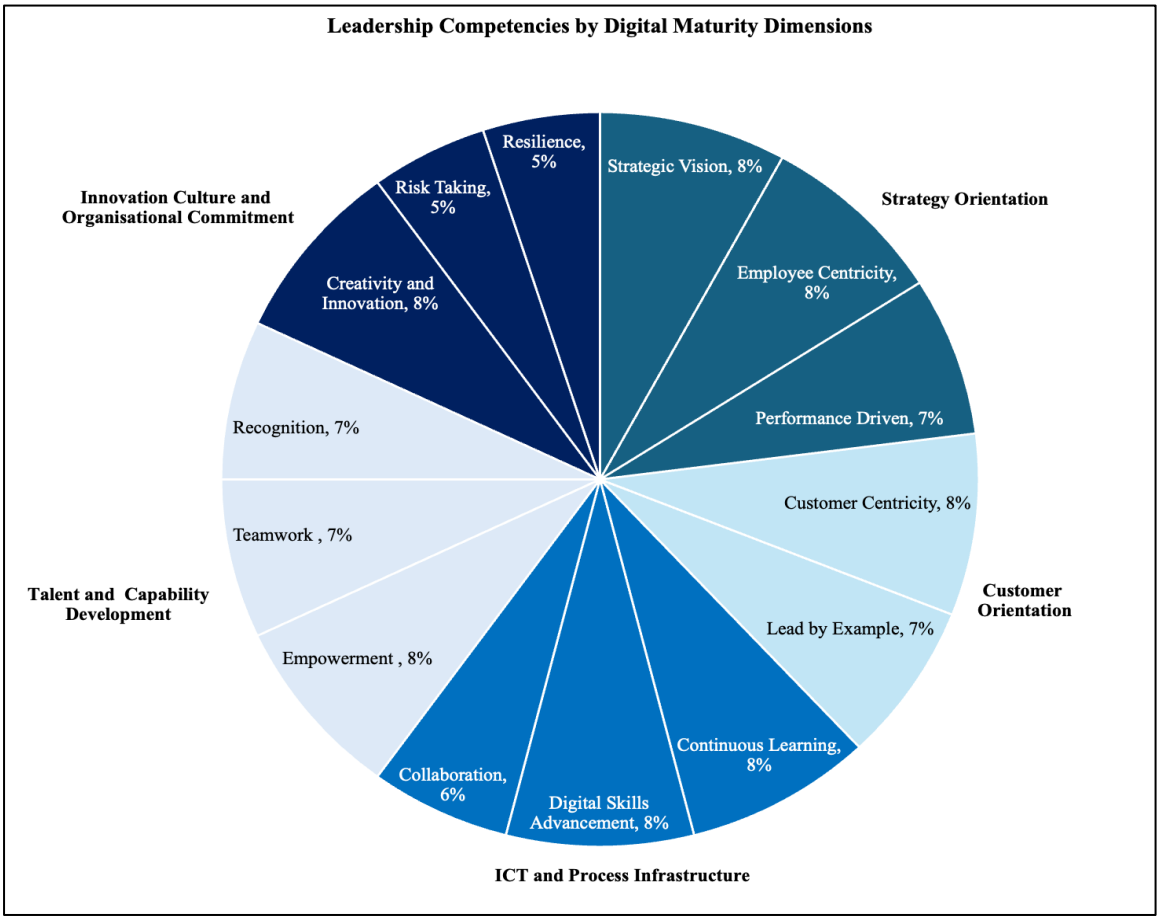


Figure 4.5: Leadership Competencies by Digital Maturity Dimensions

4.6 Research Proposition

Based on this comprehensive study on leadership competencies for successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia's energy industry, the following research propositions have been developed. These propositions address the research questions and provide a structured framework for understanding the leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation.

4.6.1 Strategy Orientation

Research Question 1: What leadership competencies are fundamental for strategy orientation

in achieving successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia's energy industry?

Proposition 1: Leadership competencies fundamental for strategy orientation in achieving successful digital implementation are strategic vision, employee centricity, and performance driven.

4.6.2 Customer Orientation

Research Question 2: What leadership competencies are fundamental for customer orientation in achieving successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia's energy industry?

Proposition 2: Leadership competencies fundamental for customer orientation in achieving successful digital implementation are customer-centricity and leading by example.

4.6.3 ICT and Process Infrastructure

Research Question 3: What leadership competencies are fundamental for ICT and process infrastructure in achieving successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia's energy industry?

Proposition 3: Leadership competencies fundamental for ICT and process infrastructure in achieving successful digital implementation are continuous learning, digital skills advancement, and collaboration.

4.6.4 Talent and Capability Development

Research Question 4: What leadership competencies are fundamental for talent and capability development in achieving successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia's energy industry?

Proposition 4: Leadership competencies fundamental for talent and capability development in achieving successful digital implementation are empowerment, teamwork, and recognition.

4.6.5 Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment

Research Question 5: What leadership competencies are fundamental for innovation culture and organisational commitment in achieving successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia's energy industry?

Proposition 5: Leadership competencies fundamental for innovation culture and organisational commitment in achieving successful digital implementation are creativity and innovation, risk-taking, and resilience.

These propositions serve as a guide for the analysis and discussion of findings in this study, providing a focused approach to understanding the leadership competencies required to drive successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia's energy industry.

4.7 Leadership Competencies Overview in Successful Digital Implementation

This study was structured around carefully crafted research questions to identify fundamental leadership competencies in achieving successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia's energy industry. The research questionnaires are based on a conceptual framework developed by Pihir et al. (2018), established from five digital maturity models. The framework examines the key dimensions of digital maturity, including strategy orientation, customer orientation, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development and innovation culture and organisational commitment.

The first research question aimed to understand the fundamental leadership competencies for strategy orientation when embarking on digital implementation. The second question shifted focus to customer orientation, the leadership competencies these retailers perceive as fundamental in navigating customers towards digital success. Subsequent research question three aimed to discover the leadership competencies for ICT and process infrastructure success in digital implementation. Research question four examines the competencies necessary for talent and capability development. The fifth question delves into the leadership competencies needed to foster an innovation culture and develop organisational commitment.

From the data collected through semi-structured interviews, themes emerged and were classified as either major or sub-themes, supported by the frequency of references in the interview transcripts (Humble & Radina, 2024). These themes were strategically aligned with the research questions to ensure coherence and relevance. The five major themes identified were leadership competencies for (1) strategy orientation, (2) customer orientation, (3) ICT and process infrastructure, (4) talent and capability development, and (5) innovation culture and organisational commitment.

This word cloud visualisation in Figure 4.6 was generated using NVivo 14 software based on the interview data. It illustrates the relative frequency of each competency mentioned by study participants, with the size of each word proportional to its emphasis (Humble & Radina, 2024). This is merely an overview with prominent competencies such as Strategic Vision, Digital Skills, Continuous Learning, and Empowerment dominating the display, highlighting their critical roles in effective digital implementation. Conversely, though less prominent, Collaboration and Risk Taking are also recognised, reflecting their

importance in enhancing operational effectiveness and fostering interpersonal relationships within leadership practices.



Figure 4.6: Themes for Leadership Competencies.

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

This graphical representation succinctly encapsulates the diverse leadership skills and attributes identified as fundamental in navigating and leading digital innovations. The themes and subthemes identified will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

4.8 Theme One: Leadership Competencies for Strategy Orientation in Successful Digital Implementation

Strategy orientation, the strategic direction an organisation implements to produce behaviours conducive to continuous superior performance, is an important stimulus for

achieving and maintaining a competitive advantage for all organisations (Presutti,2020). Strategy orientation plays an important role in improving organisational performance, strategy development, and the achievement of organisational goals (Lesníková, 2022). The study examined leadership competencies specific to strategy orientation in successful digital implementation, uncovering diverse perspectives and experiences from participants. It identified three essential sub-themes: strategic vision, leading by example, and employee centricity.

Figure 4.7 illustrates the key sub-themes of leadership competencies essential for effective strategy orientation. The competencies include strategic vision, highlighted by all eight out of eight retailers; employee centricity, emphasised by all eight retailers; and performance driven, recognised by seven out of eight retailers.

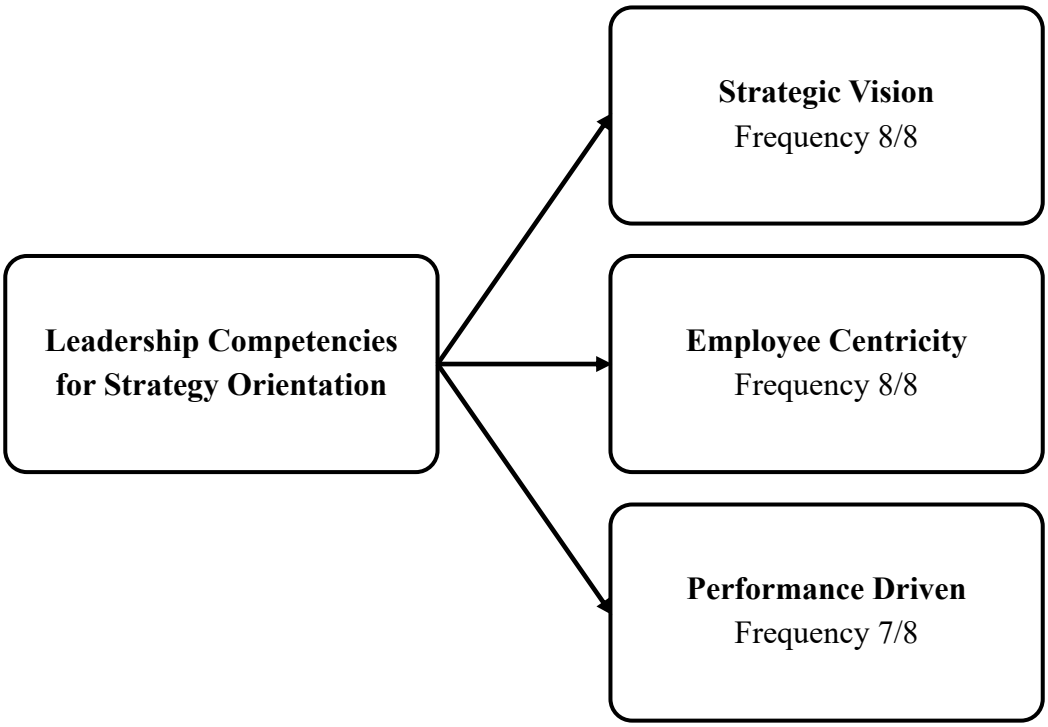


Figure 4.7: Sub-themes on Leadership Competencies for Strategy Orientation

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

4.8.1 Sub-theme One: Strategic Vision

In the context of strategy orientation of successful digital implementation, all retailers emphasised the importance of leaders having a strategic vision that fully incorporates the effects of digital advancements. Strategic vision involves predicting changes, establishing organisational objectives, and balancing long-term and mid-term strategies (Graesser, 2019). It allows leaders to recognise technological trends and integrate them into a business's transformative strategy while proactively anticipating shifts that may impact their business (Imran et al., 2020; Zaoui and Souissi, 2020). Figure 4.8 illustrates a mind map of strategic vision competencies for effective strategy orientation in digital implementation.

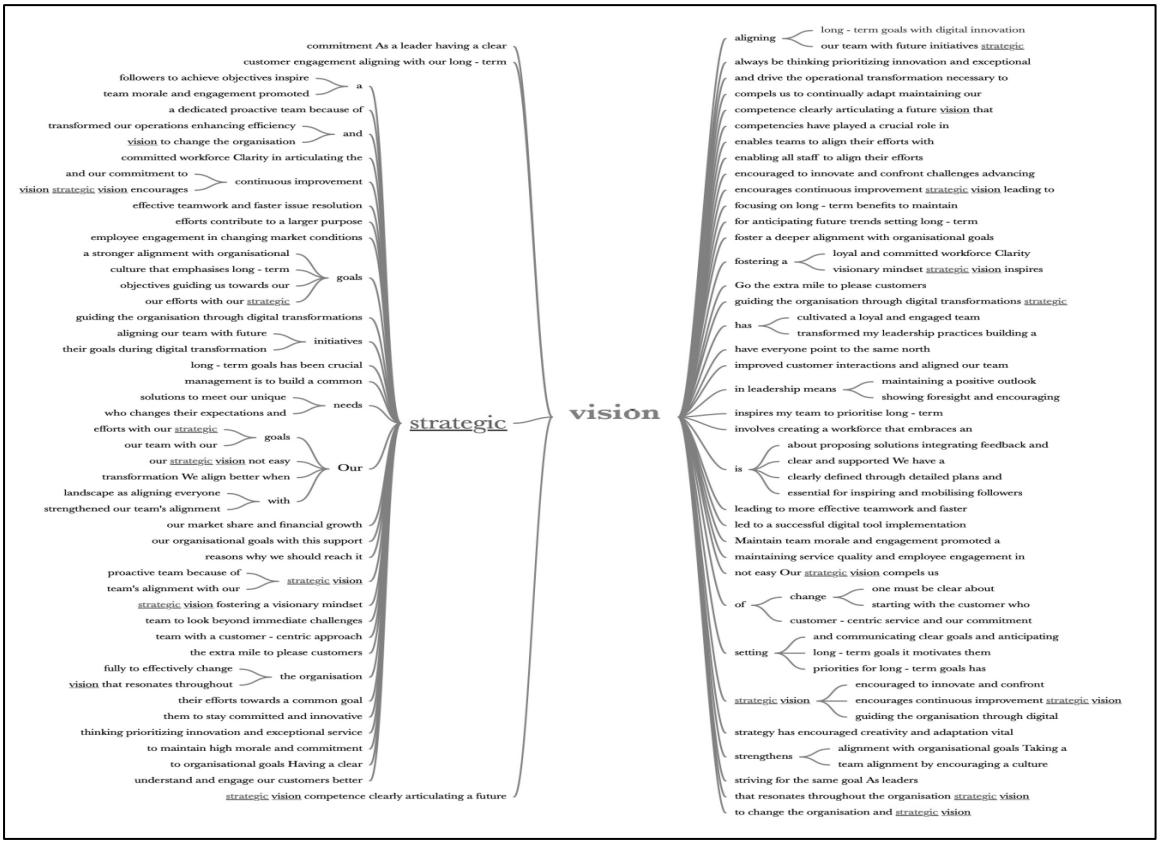


Figure 4.8: Strategic Vision Competencies for Strategy Orientation

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Retailers highlighted the need for a strategic vision to guide the organisation through digital implementation, emphasising the importance of setting clear goals, anticipating future trends, inspiring team alignment, and driving commitment. Retailer 1 emphasised, "As a leader, having a clear vision is important for anticipating future trends, setting long-term digital transformation goals, and inspiring my team to align their efforts with our strategic goals". Retailer 2 echoed this sentiment, "Our strategic vision is clearly defined through detailed plans and objectives, guiding us towards our goals". Retailer 2 elaborated on the importance of fostering a visionary mindset, stating, "Strategic vision inspires my team to prioritise long-term goals over immediate challenges. This has been important in managing digital implementation and aligning our efforts with our strategic goals". Retailer 3 demonstrates strategic vision competence by clearly articulating a future vision that resonates throughout the organisation, enabling all staff to align their efforts towards a common goal, "We know our strategic vision striving for the same goal. As leaders, we must fully comprehend the organisation to change effectively". Retailer 3 emphasised the need for a vision that adapts to changing customer needs, "Define the vision, have a clear vision of change, always starting with the customer who changes their expectations and needs".

Retailer strategic vision involves creating a workforce that embraces an open-minded and forward-thinking culture, keeping the team motivated and focused even amidst uncertainties, thereby enhancing their commitment to organisational goals. Retailer 4 mentioned, "Having a clear vision in leadership means showing foresight and encouraging the team to look beyond immediate challenges. When my team sees me setting long-term goals, it motivates them to stay committed and innovative". Retailer 5 discussed, "Strategic Vision has transformed my leadership practices, building a culture of continuous improvement and strong engagement. Our team is dedicated, knowing their efforts

contribute to a larger purpose". Retailer 6 noted, "Having a strategic vision in leadership means maintaining a positive outlook, encouraging the team to embrace future possibilities, and successfully implementing digital solutions to meet our unique needs, fostering a loyal and committed workforce". Clarity articulating the vision is essential for inspiring and mobilising followers to achieve objectives, as Retailer 6 noted: "To inspire a vision of change, one must be clear about the destination and, more importantly, the reasons why we should reach it".

Retailers emphasised that having a strategic vision strengthens team alignment and encourages a culture that focuses on long-term goals. The adoption of this approach creates an organisational setting that nurtures creativity, leading to the generation of novel ideas and solutions. Furthermore, it promotes flexibility and the ability to adjust to new circumstances, both of which are essential for effectively navigating digital transformation. Retailer 7 highlighted, "Setting priorities for long-term goals has been important. This strategy has encouraged creativity and adaptation, which are important for digital implementation. We align better when our strategic vision is clear and supported". Retailer 8 shared, " We have a dedicated, proactive team because of strategic vision. Our team is encouraged to innovate and confront challenges, advancing our digital projects. They align better with our organisational goals with this support".

Retailers provide practical examples of how strategic vision competencies have played a fundamental role in steering the strategic orientation to achieving their goals during digital transformation initiatives. Strategic Vision enables teams to align their efforts with long-term goals and implement innovative digital tools, building a stronger alignment with organisational goals. Retailer 1 shared a specific instance where Strategic Vision led to a

successful digital tool implementation: "Implementing digital payments strategically transformed our operations, enhancing efficiency, and aligning our team with future initiatives". Retailer 2 provided an example of aligning long-term goals with digital innovation: "We've made a big strategic move by adopting a loyalty application to improve customer engagement, aligning with our long-term vision of customer-centric service and our commitment to continuous improvement".

Retailer strategic vision is important for maintaining service quality and employee engagement in changing market conditions. These attributes help foster a deeper alignment with organisational goals. Retailer 3 highlighted a case of adapting to market changes: "After noticing a shift in customer preferences, we revamped our product offerings and integrated new digital marketing strategies. This move attracted more customers and increased our team's alignment with our evolving goals". Retailer 4 recounted a similar experience: "During the market downturn, we invested in innovative customer relationship management software to understand and engage our customers better. This decision improved customer interactions and aligned our team with a customer-centric approach". Retailer 8 emphasised the importance of going above and beyond for customer satisfaction, reflecting a visionary mindset: "Go the extra mile to please customers. A visionary must always think, prioritise innovation and exceptional service".

Maintaining team morale and engagement through strategic vision is important during digital implementation initiatives. This helps to keep the team motivated and committed to organisational goals. Retailer 5 discussed maintaining team morale: "Introducing new digital tools can cause stress for the team. We promoted a strategic vision focusing on long-term benefits to maintain high morale and commitment. This approach has

encouraged a loyal and engaged team". Retailer 6 used a community-based approach: "We involved the local community in our digital initiatives, overcoming resistance and gaining their support to implement the changes successfully. This success strengthened our team's alignment with our vision".

Strategic vision encourages continuous improvement, leading to more effective teamwork and faster issue resolution. This strengthens alignment with organisational goals. Retailer 7 shared a story of encouraging improvement when faced with a major challenge with the inventory management system. “Taking a strategic decision to invest in a new system paid off, resulting in better control and faster issue resolution, aligning our team with our goals”. Retailer 7 added, " Our strategic vision is about proposing solutions, integrating feedback, and pivoting as necessary". Retailer 8 focused on using digital tools for staff recognition and motivation: "We've implemented a digital recognition platform to celebrate staff achievements, boosting engagement and cultivating a culture of appreciation and motivation within our team”. Ultimately, the role of leadership in digital change management is to build a common vision and drive the operational transformation necessary to adapt to and thrive in a digital landscape as Retailer 1 stated, "We are asking people to change the way you think, the way you do, and the way you interact with customers, aligning everyone with our strategic vision, which is not easy". Retailer 3 highlights that “As a successful business leader, it's important to embrace change, even when it seems unnecessary because we're doing well. Our vision compels us to adapt continually, maintaining our market share and financial growth". Retailer 5 further describes that as a leader, "We have to understand and articulate our strategic vision to be able to change the organisation and have everyone point to the same north star".

This comprehensive analysis demonstrates that strategic vision competencies are integral to the strategy orientation of digital implementation. This collective insight from retailers illustrates that strategic vision prepares organisations for future challenges and ensures that these preparations are quantifiable and aligned with overarching business objectives. By fostering an environment that encourages forward-thinking and innovation, retailers can develop a committed and proactive workforce, ensuring high performance and customer satisfaction.

4.8.2 Sub-theme Two: Employee Centricity

This analysis of the insights gathered from retailers highlights the importance of focusing on employee centricity when formulating digital strategy initiatives. The successful implementation of digital initiatives in the retail business can be attributed to effective leadership qualities that prioritise employees' needs and involvement. All the retailers portrayed leadership competencies centred on employees as fundamental to the strategy orientation of digital implementation.

Employee centricity emphasises the importance of leadership styles and employee-centric strategies in enhancing employee satisfaction, motivation, and job performance (Matira, 2020; Osmundsen, 2024). Leadership that focuses on employee well-being directly influence the work environment, ensuring that employees feel valued, which increases job satisfaction and ultimately drives improved performance and alignment with digital strategy goals. It also highlights the role of trust, autonomy, and employee participation in creating an employee-centric culture and improving organisational performance (Bonsu, 2020). Figure 4.9 illustrates a mind map of employee centricity competencies for strategy orientation in successful digital implementation.

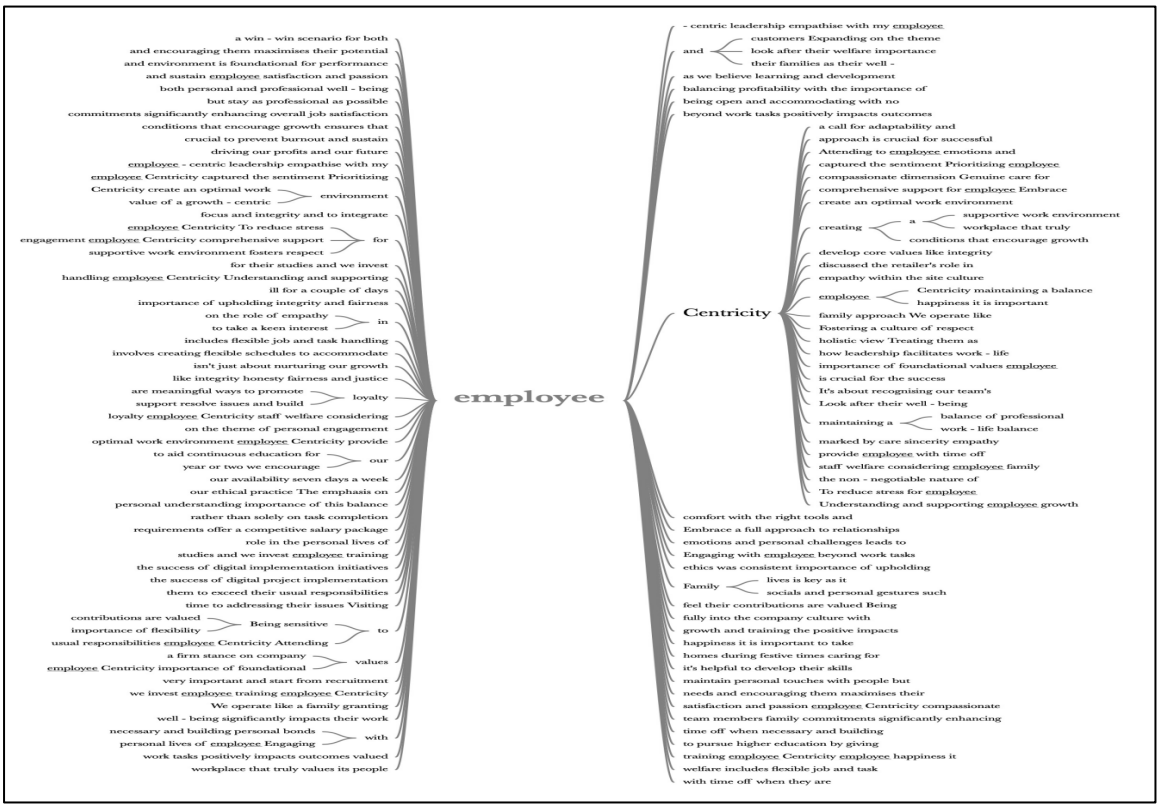


Figure 4.9: Employee Centricity Competencies for Strategy Orientation

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Retailers emphasised the significance of employee centricity and engagement, highlighting the importance of building strong relationships with employees, recognising their contributions, and providing support beyond work-related tasks. They stress that personal engagement, empathy, and creating a nurturing work environment are essential for valuing and developing employees. Retailer 1 discussed the retailer's role in the personal lives of staff, "Engaging with staff beyond work tasks positively impacts outcomes". Retailer 1 shared his approach to valued employees: "Family socials and personal gestures such as home visits and gifts are meaningful ways to promote loyalty". Retailer 2 commented on her family approach: “We operate like a family, granting staff time off when necessary and building personal bonds with staff and customers”. Expanding on the theme of personal

engagement, Retailer 3 described comprehensive support for staff, “Embrace a full approach to relationships and dedicate time to addressing their issues”. He added, “Visiting employees’ homes during festive times, caring for their children, and offering encouragement and support resolve issues and build loyalty”. Retailer 6 discussed empathy within the site culture: "Our policy of empathy, such as granting days off when needed, has been beneficial". Retailer 6 shared, "Empathy is important. People’s concerns come first. This is achieved by setting targets within specific contexts and addressing people's issues while ensuring employees allocate enough time for their work tasks". The study captured Retailer 3's perspective on the role of empathy in employee-centric leadership, "I empathise with my staff and look after their welfare". Retailer 7 emphasised the need for a nurturing work environment: "Creating conditions that encourage growth ensures that staff feel their contributions are valued". Retailer 7 revealed: "Understanding and supporting staff will encourage their growth and training". Retailer 7 discussed the positive impacts of professional growth and nurturing personal relationships, stressing a developed focus on balance between people and tasks rather than solely on task completion. He offered a concrete example, “Look after their well-being and requirements, offer a competitive salary package, and create an optimal work environment. For instance, provide them with time off when they are ill for a couple of days”. Retailer 8 added, "Being sensitive to staff needs and encouraging them maximises their potential." Retailer 8 expressed a holistic view: "Treating them as individuals creates a win-win scenario for both". Retailer 8 further elaborated, " To reduce stress for staff, it's helpful to develop their skills align with the business". Retailer 8 suggests, “After a year or two, we encourage our staff to pursue higher education by giving them time off for their studies, and we invest in their training”. Retailer 6 captured the sentiment, "Prioritising staff comfort with the right tools and environment is key to their

good performance as it helps them feel supported, engaged, and motivated."

Retailers highlighted the importance of foundational values and ethics in creating a trustworthy and fair work environment. They emphasised the significance of integrity, honesty, and a strong ethical framework, starting from the recruitment stage and permeating all aspects of the organisation. Retailer 2 underscored the importance of foundational values, "In order to be employee centricity, we must develop core values like integrity, honesty, fairness, and justice". Retailer 3 added to the conversation with a call for adaptability and a firm stance on business values, "It's about being open and accommodating, with no room for nonsense". Retailer 4 highlighted the role of a strong ethical framework within the organisation, where fostering a sense of community and personal growth is key, "We implement programmes to aid continuous education for our staff, as we believe learning and development are fundamental parts of our ethical practice". The emphasis on ethics was consistent, with Retailer 5 and Retailer 6 stressing the importance of upholding integrity and fairness. Retailer 5 stressed the non-negotiable nature of ethics within the business culture, "We cannot waive ethics internally, no late coming, maintaining HSSE standards and site image is critical". Retailer 6 further highlighted the foundational role of ethics in the organisation's operations, beginning from the recruitment stage, "Ethics or values are very important, and start from recruitment".

Retailers stressed that effective leadership involves not just managing tasks but also showing genuine care for employees. They highlighted the importance of empathy, understanding employees' perspectives, and providing support that goes beyond work-related issues to enhance loyalty and job performance. Retailer 1 shared how leadership facilitates work-life balance, "Our leadership approach involves creating flexible schedules

to accommodate our team members' family commitments, significantly enhancing overall job satisfaction". Retailer 6 spoke of leadership's compassionate dimension, "Genuine care for our team's point of view and their family resonates back into their work, impacting our digital outcomes positively". Retailer 7 spoke on the importance of employee care: “Engage with your employees, invite their insights, and learn alongside them. This promotes a solid relationship, inspiring them to exceed their usual responsibilities”. Retailer 8 touched on the importance of personal relationships: "Attending to staff emotions and personal challenges leads to better results". Retailer 8 asserts that “By understanding employees' perspectives and caring for their well-being, we can influence their productivity and the success of digital project implementation”.

Retailers emphasised that maintaining a work-life balance is important for employee satisfaction and long-term business success. They highlighted the importance of personal engagement, flexible schedules, and considering employees' family lives to create a supportive and sustainable work environment. Retailer 1 shared that maintaining a balance of professional engagement with personal understanding was fundamental, "You have to maintain personal touches with people but stay as professional as possible”. Retailer 4 spoke on staff welfare: "Considering staff family lives is key, as it reflects on their work performance". Retailer 4 emphasised the important role of staff welfare in sustaining a business over a decade, attributing the business's endurance to a passion and unwavering commitment. She noted, "Our business's twenty-year success relies on our availability seven days a week. Maintaining a work-life balance is important to prevent burnout and sustain employee satisfaction and passion”. Retailer 5 discussed creating a supportive work environment that fosters respect for employees, balancing profitability with the importance of human capital. Retailer 5 underscored the value of a growth-centric environment,

"Fostering a culture of respect isn't just about nurturing our growth. It's about recognising our team's role in driving our profits and our future". Retailer 5 highlighted the importance of flexibility: "Being sensitive to staff welfare includes flexible job and task handling". Retailer 6 focused on employee happiness, "It is important to take a keen interest in staff and their families as their well-being significantly impacts their work".

This analysis from retailers' insights demonstrates that successful digital implementation requires a strategy orientation that prioritises employee centricity. Building strong relationships, maintaining high ethical standards, and creating a supportive work environment are key to enhancing employee satisfaction and performance. By fostering trust, autonomy, and personal engagement, leaders can encourage a positive culture that boosts both employee well-being and digital transformation efforts. Ultimately, a balance of professional and personal care, core values, and genuine concern for employees' well-being is essential for a thriving and innovative organisation.

4.8.3 Sub-theme Three: Performance Driven

A significant proportion of seven out of eight retailers have emphasised that performance driven competencies are fundamental for the strategy orientation of digital implementation. Performance driven is fundamental for organisational success, as it enhances employee effectiveness and contributes to better overall performance (Agarwal, 2020). By fostering a performance driven approach, organisations can drive higher levels of productivity and engagement, aligning employees' daily actions with the overarching strategic goals of digital implementation. This is particularly important and can significantly improve efficiency and effectiveness, ultimately leading to success (Stříteská & Sein, 2021). Prioritising performance streamlines operations and ensures the effective implementation of

digital initiatives. Figure 4.10 illustrates a mind map of performance driven competency for effective strategy orientation in digital implementation.

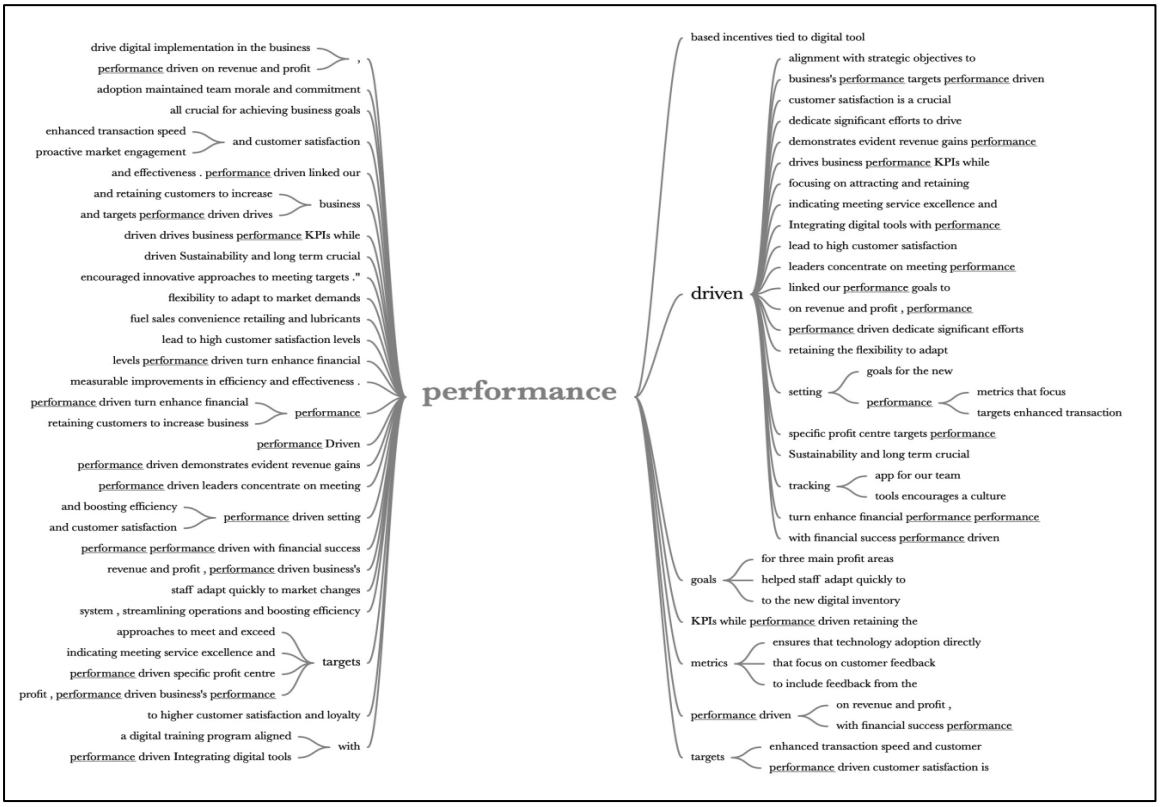


Figure 4.10: Performance Driven Competencies for Strategy Orientation

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Retailer 1 emphasised the need for a retailer to be performance driven, “As a performance driven person, I dedicate significant efforts to drive digital implementation in the business, focusing on attracting and retaining customers to increase business performance”. Retailer 2 linked her business performance driven with financial success, “A retailer who drives performance with robust strategies demonstrates evident revenue gains, indicating meeting service excellence and targets". Retailer 3 connected strong leadership with the fulfilment of digital implementation objectives, “Effective leadership is key for successful digital implementation, measured by how the retailer drives business performance

KPIs while retaining the flexibility to adapt to market demands". Retailer 4 pinpointed specific profit centre targets, "Leaders should concentrate on meeting performance goals for three main profit areas: fuel sales, convenience retailing, and lubricants. Digital implementation is instrumental in fuelling growth in our business". Retailer 5 highlighted customer satisfaction as a benchmark for success, "Successful digital implementations lead to high customer satisfaction levels, which in turn enhance financial performance". Retailer 7 spoke on revenue and profit, "Digital implementation will increase the customer base and transaction volumes, which is directly aligned with the business's performance targets". Retailer 8 provided a comprehensive perspective on how leadership's approach to digital implementation can affect the business, "Customer satisfaction is a key metric that goes beyond financial outcomes. It also includes new business acquisitions, process efficiencies, and employee development, all necessary for achieving business goals". She further stressed the importance of a long-term outlook, "Sustainability and long-term performance are important for the next 5-10 years, driving alignment with strategic objectives to promote collaboration, proactive market engagement, and customer satisfaction".

Retailers share practical examples of how Performance Driven competencies have played an important role in achieving their goals during digital transformation initiatives, focusing on steering the strategic orientation. Integrating digital tools with performance metrics ensures that technology adoption directly contributes to measurable improvements in efficiency and effectiveness. Retailer 1 shared that this alignment helps in achieving organisational goals more systematically. "We linked our performance goals to the new digital inventory system, streamlining operations and boosting efficiency". Retailer 2 highlighted, "Adopting the new payment app and setting performance targets enhanced transaction speed and customer satisfaction". By setting performance metrics that focus on

customer feedback and experience, retailers can continually improve service quality, leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty. Retailer 3 noted, "We adapted our performance metrics to include feedback from the digital customer experience app, improving service quality". Retailer 4 stated, "Introducing a digital training programme aligned with performance goals helped staff adapt quickly to market changes".

Performance-based incentives tied to digital tool adoption can maintain and enhance team morale and commitment, ensuring that staff are motivated to achieve and exceed set targets. Retailer 5 shared, "The use of performance incentives tied to digital tool adoption helped maintain team morale and commitment". Implementing performance-tracking tools encourages a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, allowing teams to explore new approaches to meet and exceed targets. Retailer 7 mentioned, "Implementing a performance-tracking app for our team encouraged innovative approaches to meeting targets". Using digital tools focused on performance metrics helps streamline operations, making processes more efficient and reducing errors, which enhances overall productivity. Retailer 8 noted, "Setting performance goals for the new scheduling app optimised staff allocation and increased productivity".

The insights from retailers emphasise the significance of performance driven competencies for strategy orientation. By linking performance goals with digital tools, organisations can achieve significant improvements in efficiency, effectiveness, and customer satisfaction. Strategies such as adopting new technologies, aligning performance metrics, and offering performance-based incentives drive business performance and foster continuous improvement. Ultimately, a performance driven approach ensures that digital implementation aligns with organisational goals, leading to sustainable growth and success.

4.9 Theme Two: Leadership Competencies for Customer Orientation in Successful Digital Implementation

Customer orientation is a dimension that aligns all business activities with the goal of identifying and meeting customer needs, thereby delivering exceptional value (Zhao, 2022). Customer orientation is important for an organisation to gain a competitive advantage and achieve successful business performance (Prodan, 2020). According to Racela and Thoumrungroje (2019), placing a strong emphasis on comprehending and fulfilling customer needs in an organisation can significantly elevate the overall level of creative output and enhance the capability for innovation.

Figure 4.11 illustrates the key sub-themes of leadership competencies essential for effective customer orientation. The competencies include customer centricity, highlighted by all eight retailers and lead by example, recognised by seven of eight retailers.

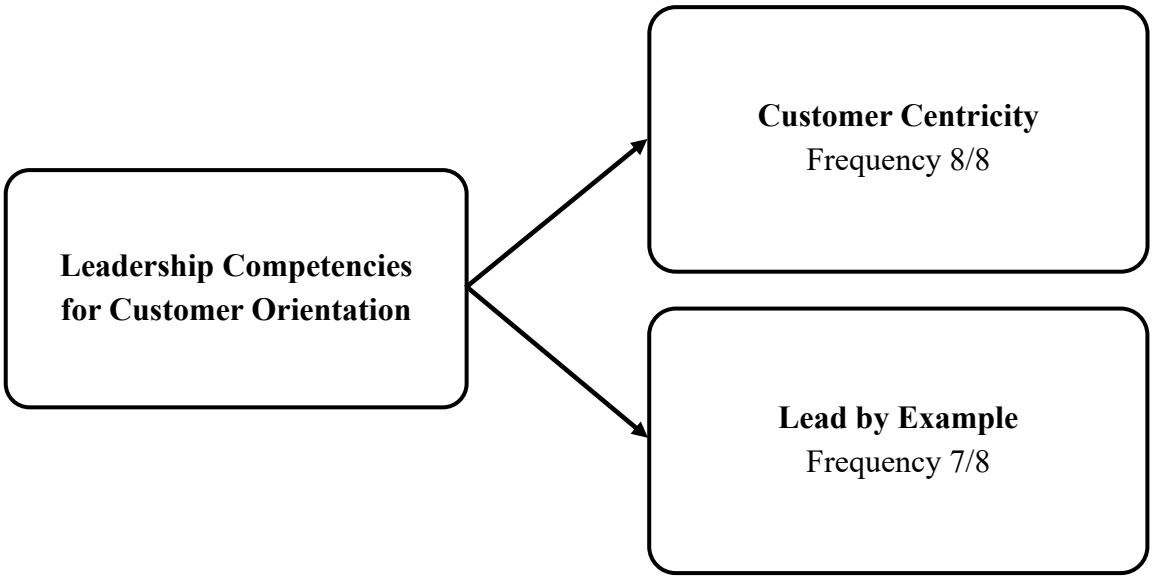


Figure 4.11: Sub-themes on Leadership Competencies for Customer Orientation

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Every retailer recognised the set of key performance indicators (KPIs) as essential metrics for evaluating the success of their business operations. As the business outlines, these KPIs encompass various aspects of business efficiency, including health, safety, security, and environmental standards (HSSE), fuel sales, the convenience retail segment, lubricant products, customer service quality and loyalty programmes. Every participant highlighted customer centricity as a fundamental element for digital implementation success in the retail business.

4.9.1. Sub-theme One: Customer Centricity

In the realm of digital implementation in the retail sector, all the retailers exhibited strong leadership competencies focused on customer centricity. The retailers show competency in detecting and addressing customer needs, integrating them into organisational strategies through technology. Customer centricity is important for integrating digital advancements into business operations, as high digital maturity is evident in sectors where leaders excel in understanding and meeting customer needs (Aslanova & Kulichkina, 2020; Schneider et al.,2022). Customer centricity has emerged as a fundamental paradigm shift in business management, driven by digital technologies that enable organisations to understand and cater to individual customer preferences (Shin & Kim, 2022). From a digital perspective, the shift requires organisations to develop new competencies, particularly in data analysis, digital technology use, and collaboration (Fonseca & Picoto, 2020). Customer-centric organisations leverage data, AI, and automation to enhance customer loyalty and market share (Tardieu et al., 2020). This approach involves understanding and meeting the needs of digitally savvy customers, whose expectations are rapidly evolving due to technological advancements. Habel et al. (2019) explain that

customers perceive organisations as customer-centric when the organisations are customer-oriented at both the overall organisation level and the salesperson level. Figure 4.12 illustrates a mind map of customer centricity competencies for effective customer orientation in digital implementation.

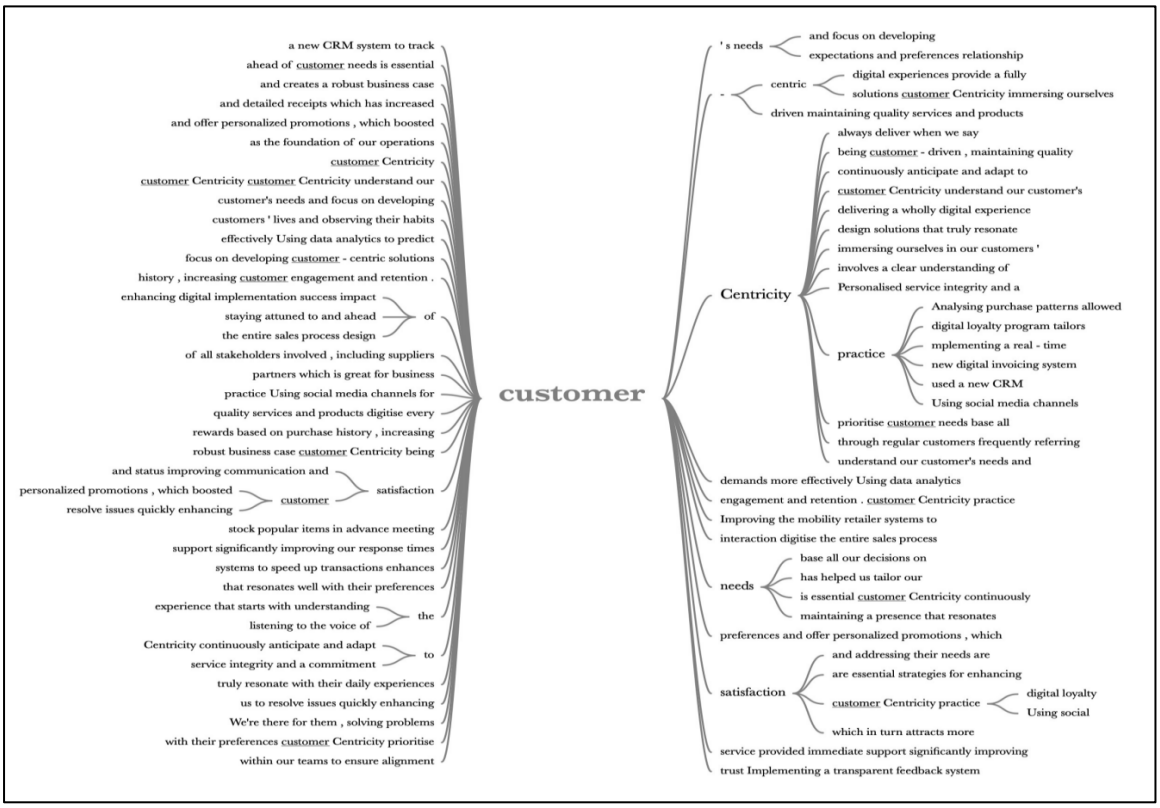


Figure 4.12: Customer Centricity Competencies for Customer Orientation

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

The customer centricity approach is substantiated by understanding customer behaviours as Retailer 1 highlighted, “We must understand our customer's needs and focus on developing customer-centric solutions. We learned that by immersing ourselves in our customers' lives and observing their habits, we could design solutions that truly resonate with their daily experiences”. As Retailer 2 specified, “Customer satisfaction and addressing their needs are essential to our business objectives, serving as the foundation of our

operations”. Retailer 3 further elaborated, "Our business involves a clear understanding of the changes in customers' desires, evolving expectations, and needs. It is important to articulate this vision clearly and instil it within our teams to ensure alignment". Retailer 4 emphasised the focus on delivering a wholly digital experience to customers: "Our goal is precisely to provide customers with a completely digital experience". Moreover, staying attuned to and ahead of customer needs is essential, as Retailer 4 also noted: "It's important that we continuously anticipate and adapt to customer needs, maintaining a presence that resonates well with their preferences". Moreover, leaders consistently prioritise customer needs, focusing on customer satisfaction in their decision-making processes, as shared by Retailer 5, who emphasised the customer-centric approach to decision-making: "We base all our decisions on listening to the voice of the customer". Retailer 6 underscored the essential role of customer orientation in achieving significant returns on investment through improved service delivery that enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty. As noted by Retailer 6 "Improving the retailer systems to speed up transactions enhances customer satisfaction, which in turn attracts more customers and creates a robust business case". In addition, Retailer 5 and Retailer 6 also resonated with the significance of ethical practices and trust in the customer relationship. Retailer 5 emphasised, "Doing the right thing is important, being customer-driven, maintaining quality services and products". Retailer 7 discussed the strategy of leveraging digital technology: "We aim to digitise every customer interaction, not just for the customer's benefit but also to digitise the entire sales process". From the same context, Retailer 2 highlighted that she prioritised the design of customer-centric digital experiences: "Our goal is to provide a fully digital experience that starts with understanding the customer's needs, expectations, and preferences".

In addition, collectively these insights emphasise that in the context of digital implementation, the relationship with customers extends beyond mere transactions. Retailer 8 elaborated on the breadth of customer relationships: "It's like one big family with our customers. We're there for them, solving problems, even on weekends if we need to". Retailer 8 added, "Personalised service, integrity, and a commitment to customer satisfaction are essential strategies for enhancing digital implementation success". Retailer 2 illustrated the impact of customer centricity through regular customers frequently referring their service to others: "Everyone who shops with us should leave happy. That's how you get people coming back and telling their friends". Retailer 3 talked about treating customers fairly: "It doesn't matter how much they spend; we treat all our customers the same to keep them coming back". Retailer 4 mentioned the value of personal touch: "Getting to know your customers can turn them into partners, which is great for business". Retailer 5 stressed on-time delivery: "We always deliver when we say we will. That's our promise". Retailer 6 shared their strategy for customer relationships: "We do more than just sell things. We visit customers, celebrate with them, and keep things friendly but professional". Retailer 7 highlighted the importance of customer follow-ups: "A quick call to customers after they buy from us shows we care and keeps them close". Retailer 8 focused on trust to build the customer relationship: "If we make a mistake, we fix it. We're honest, and our customers know it". Retailer 8 suitably concludes the importance of customer centricity by stating, "Doing this business, implementing digital transformation is all about our commitment to serving and understanding customers, solving their problems, and considering the needs of all stakeholders involved, including suppliers".

In terms of practical application examples, customer centricity competencies have played a fundamental role in helping the retailer achieve goals during digital transformation

initiatives by focusing on meeting customer expectations. Customer centricity involves using digital tools to provide personalised services that meet individual customer needs, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Retailer 1 shared, "We used a new CRM system to track customer preferences and offer personalised promotions, which boosted customer satisfaction". Retailer 2 explained, "Our digital loyalty programme tailors rewards based on purchase history, increasing customer engagement and retention". Offering real-time customer support via digital platforms helps address customer concerns promptly, improving their overall experience. Retailer 3 noted, "Implementing a real-time chat support system on our app allowed us to resolve issues quickly, enhancing customer satisfaction". Retailer 4 stated, "Using social media channels for customer service provided immediate support, significantly improving our response times". Leveraging digital solutions, such as reporting tools and customer portals, to ensure openness and clarity in business operations helps establish and maintain strong customer trust and loyalty. Retailer 5 shared, "Our new digital invoicing system provides clear and detailed receipts, which has increased customer trust". Retailer 6 commented, "Implementing a transparent feedback system where customers can see how their feedback is acted upon has strengthened trust". Streamlining customer interactions with automation through digital tools makes processes more efficient and enhances the customer experience. Retailer 7 mentioned, "Automating our booking system for car service appointments has streamlined the process, making it easier for customers". Retailer 8 added, "Our automated email updates keep customers informed about their car service appointment and status, improving communication and satisfaction". Data analytics can proactively address customer needs, help provide better service and anticipate future demands. Retailer 1 shared, "Analysing purchase patterns allowed us to stock popular items in advance, meeting customer demands more effectively".

Retailer 2 noted, "Using data analytics to predict customer needs has helped us tailor our services and improve overall satisfaction".

This comprehensive analysis shows that retailers' insights emphasise the importance of customer-centricity in digital implementation. By prioritising customer needs, preferences, and experiences, retailers leverage digital tools to enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall organisational performance. The practical examples provided by retailers demonstrate how customer-centric strategies, such as personalised services, real-time support, transparent operations, and data-driven decision-making, contribute to successful digital implementation initiatives. Ultimately, fostering customer centricity helps retailers meet the evolving expectations of digitally savvy customers and drives long-term business success and competitive advantage in the digital era.

4.9.2. Sub-theme Two: Lead by Example

Leading by example was embraced by all the retailers, highlighting its effectiveness in driving customer orientation during digital implementation. It is fundamental for customer orientation, significantly influencing productivity and service quality while linking employee behaviour to customer experiences (Eldor, 2020). When leaders align their words with their actions, consistently demonstrating the values and standards they advocate, they set a powerful precedent for others to follow, effectively influencing and inspiring their team members to adopt and internalise these behaviours (Eisenkopf, 2020). Retailers emphasised hands-on leadership, inspiring teams through active engagement and task execution. This level of personal engagement entails an intricate understanding of the business and the ability to execute all necessary tasks. These retailers advocate for a robust and ongoing feedback system to maintain a real-time pulse on the business, which they believe significantly

contributes to the success of digital endeavours. Madhani (2020) highlights the critical role of leadership in driving and maintaining this customer-centric orientation. Leading by example involves demonstrating the behaviours, values, and attitudes leaders wish to see in their team members (Rainey, 2022). In addition, Ye et al. (2022) highlight the importance of leading by example in fostering employees' sense of ownership and identification with the organisation. Figure 4.13 illustrates a mind map of lead by example competencies for effective customer orientation in digital implementation.

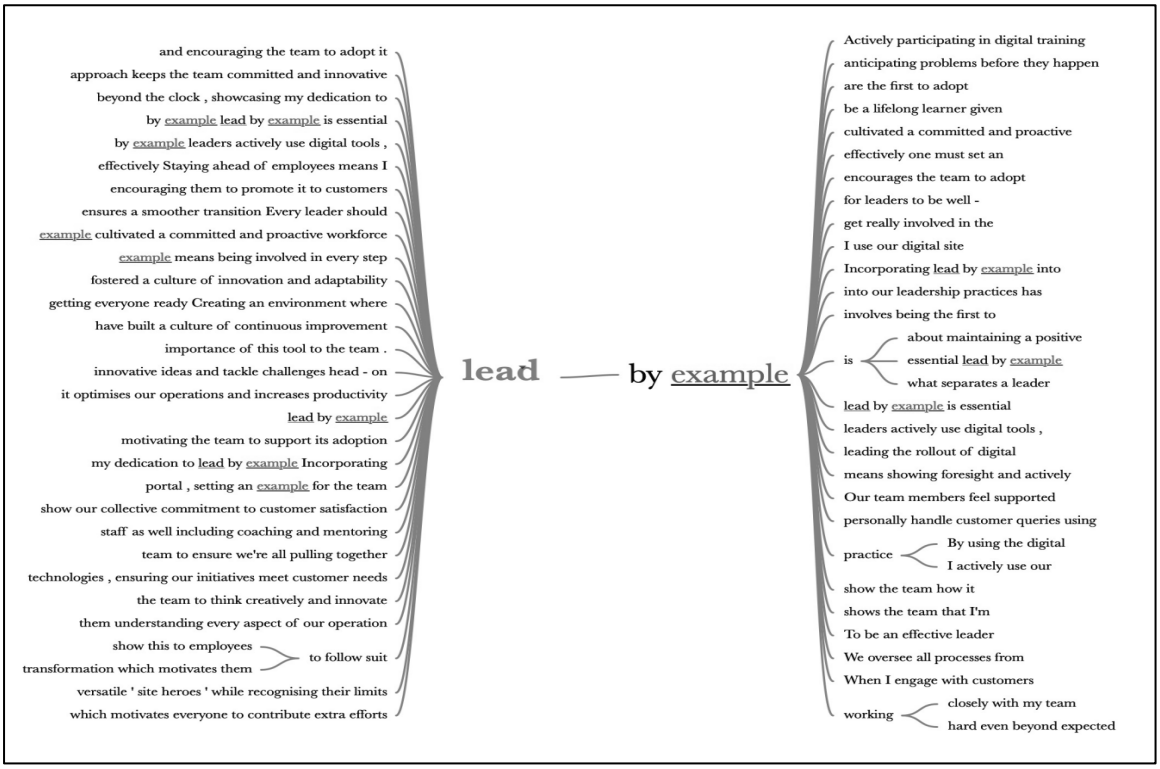


Figure 4.13: Lead by Example Competencies for Customer Orientation

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

By demonstrating commitment and enthusiasm for digital initiatives, retailers inspire their teams to align with the business's customer orientation strategies and drive commitment. Retailer 1 sets the stage, "Leading by example is essential. It shows the team that I'm committed to the digital transformation, which motivates them to follow suit."

Retailer 1 highlights the depth of personal involvement necessary for effective leadership, "I get really involved in the daily operations; it's all about leading by example to shape versatile staff while recognising their limits". Retailer 2 explained, "When leaders actively use digital tools, it encourages the team to adopt these technologies, ensuring our initiatives meet customer needs". Retailer 2 describes the importance of leading by example for leaders to be well-versed in their business's ins and outs, "A true leader must master every aspect of the business, leading by example helps me to always know what happening, and then I show this to employees to follow suit". Retailer 3 noted, "Leading by example involves being the first to embrace new systems. This sets a standard for the team and ensures a smoother transition". Retailer 3 strongly believes that “Every leader should lead by example, be a lifelong learner given the new trend in technology, and train their staff as well, including coaching and mentoring”.

Creating a team that embraces leading by example involves maintaining an environment where retailers actively participate in digital initiatives, showing their commitment to customer satisfaction. Retailer 4 mentioned, "Leading by example means showing foresight and actively participating in digital initiatives. This approach keeps the team committed and innovative". Retailer 4 focuses on adaptability and foresight, "Adapting to changes and being at the forefront of leading by example is what separates a leader from a boss. My commitment extends beyond the clock, showcasing my dedication to leading by example". Retailer 5 discussed, "Incorporating leading by example into our leadership practices has transformed our organisational alignment. By demonstrating a customer-focused approach, we have built a culture of continuous improvement". Retailer 6 commented, "Leading by example is about maintaining a positive outlook and embracing future possibilities in customer service. This mindset has enabled us to stay ahead and

implement digital solutions effectively". Retailer 6 added the importance of having this competency for being forward-thinking in leadership: "Staying ahead of employees means I lead by example, anticipating problems before they happen and getting everyone ready".

Retailers actively participating in digital initiatives can strengthen team alignment, fostering innovation and adaptability essential for digital implementation. Retailer 8 highlighted, "Creating an environment where leaders are the first to adopt digital tools has been essential. This approach has fostered a culture of innovation and adaptability". Retailer 8 shared, "By prioritising leading by example, we have encouraged a committed and proactive workforce. Our team members feel supported and motivated to pursue innovative ideas and tackle challenges head-on". Retailer 8 pointed out the motivational impact, "I lead by example, working hard even beyond expected hours, which motivates everyone to contribute extra efforts".

The retailers provide practical examples of how leadership competencies, such as leading by example, have played an important role in achieving customer-oriented goals during digital implementation initiatives. Leading by example involves retailers actively using digital tools to demonstrate their commitment to digital implementation, encouraging the team to follow suit. Retailer 1 shared, "I actively use our new digital loyalty app, showing the team its benefits and encouraging them to promote it to customers". Retailer 2 explained, "By using the digital payment app myself, I demonstrate its ease and efficiency, motivating the team to support its adoption". This comprehensive involvement enables staff to embody these skills in their positions as Retailer 2 elaborates, "To be an effective leader and inspire the team, it's about diving into the trenches with them, understanding every aspect of our operation". Retailers who actively participate in digital initiatives can directly influence

customer experience, showing their team the importance of these tools. Retailer 3 noted, "I personally handle customer queries using our digital customer service portal, setting an example for the team". Retailer 4 stated, "When I engage with customers via our new digital feedback system, it highlights the importance of this tool to the team".

Leading by example in digital initiatives can boost team morale and demonstrate retailers' equal involvement in the implementation process. Retailer 5 shared, "By leading the rollout of digital tools, I maintain team morale and show our collective commitment to customer satisfaction". Retailer 5 commented, "Actively participating in digital training sessions with my team keeps morale high and demonstrates our commitment to learning and improvement".

Retailers leading by example encourage innovation and continuous improvement, showing the team that they are invested in exploring new approaches. Retailer 8 mentioned, "By actively engaging in our digital innovation meetings, I encourage the team to think creatively and innovate". Retailer 8, in partnership with his spouse, also emphasised their comprehensive role: "We oversee all processes from beginning to end, including operations and marketing, because leading by example means being involved in every step". Retailer 8 added, "Leaders who participate in using digital tools can help streamline operations, showing the team how these tools improve efficiency and productivity". Retailer 1 shared, "I use our digital site management platform daily, demonstrating its efficiency and encouraging the team to adopt it". Retailer 1 provides insights on how leading by example with a leader's comprehensive business acumen helps him manage challenges in his absence: "Understanding every aspect is important. Even though I'm not there all the time, I lead by example, working closely with my team to ensure we're all pulling together". Retailer 2

noted, "By managing schedules through our new digital app, I show the team how it optimises our operations and increases productivity". Retailer 2 emphasises, "To lead effectively, one must set an example and always learn. It's important to guide individuals in problem-solving and impart key skills to the team".

This comprehensive analysis demonstrates that leading by example competencies are fundamental to successful digital implementation in the retail business. By fostering an atmosphere where retailers actively participate in digital initiatives, retailers can develop a committed and proactive workforce, ensuring high performance and customer satisfaction. Through their collective insights and detailed testimonies, most of these retailers illustrate that effective digital implementation centres not just on technology but critically on the active, informed involvement of leadership at every operational level. This hands-on approach motivates teams and drives comprehensive digital integration, demonstrating that the essence of transformative leadership extends beyond directive to participative engagement.

4.10. Theme Three: Leadership Competencies for ICT and Process Infrastructure in Successful Digital Implementation

In the realm of digital implementation, integrating ICT and process infrastructure is essential. Recognising digital transformation as a holistic, non-linear, and iterative process that enhances organisational capabilities and efficiency is critical (Pihir et al., 2018). Effective leadership in this area centres on three fundamental competencies: Continuous Learning, Digital Skills Advancement and Collaboration. Figure 4.14 illustrates the sub-themes, showing that all eight retailers highlighted Continuous Learning and Digital Skills Advancement, while six noted Collaboration.

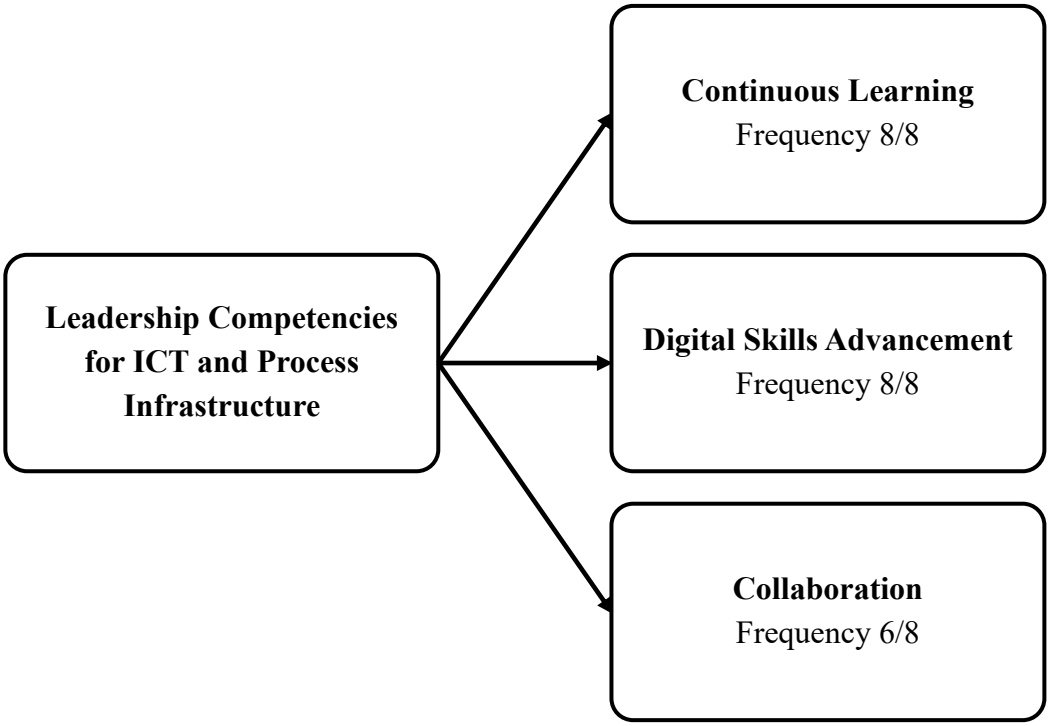


Figure 4.14: Sub-themes on Leadership Competencies for ICT and Process Infrastructure

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

4.10.1. Sub-theme One: Continuous Learning

In today's fast-paced and dynamic digital environment, continuous learning is a cornerstone of success for businesses, and it encompasses the ongoing acquisition of new knowledge, the adaptation of habits, and the willingness to embrace change (Hijfte, 2020). These elements are key for fostering a business culture that remains successful, innovative, and competitive in the ever-evolving marketplace. According to Živković (2022), continuous learning plays a pivotal role in driving digital implementation, and this competency is particularly important for leaders as it helps them stay abreast of technological advancements and evolving market demands. Leaders can successfully manage the complexities of the digital landscape and foster innovation within their organisations by embracing continuous learning and adaptability. Balaraman et al. (2020) reiterate that

continuous learning is important for digital transformation, ensuring the staff remains adaptable and proficient in new technologies and processes. Based on this study analysis, all eight retailers emphasised the importance of continuous learning for effective leadership in driving ICT and process infrastructure. Figure 4.15 illustrates a mind map of continuous learning competencies for effective leadership in driving ICT and process infrastructure.

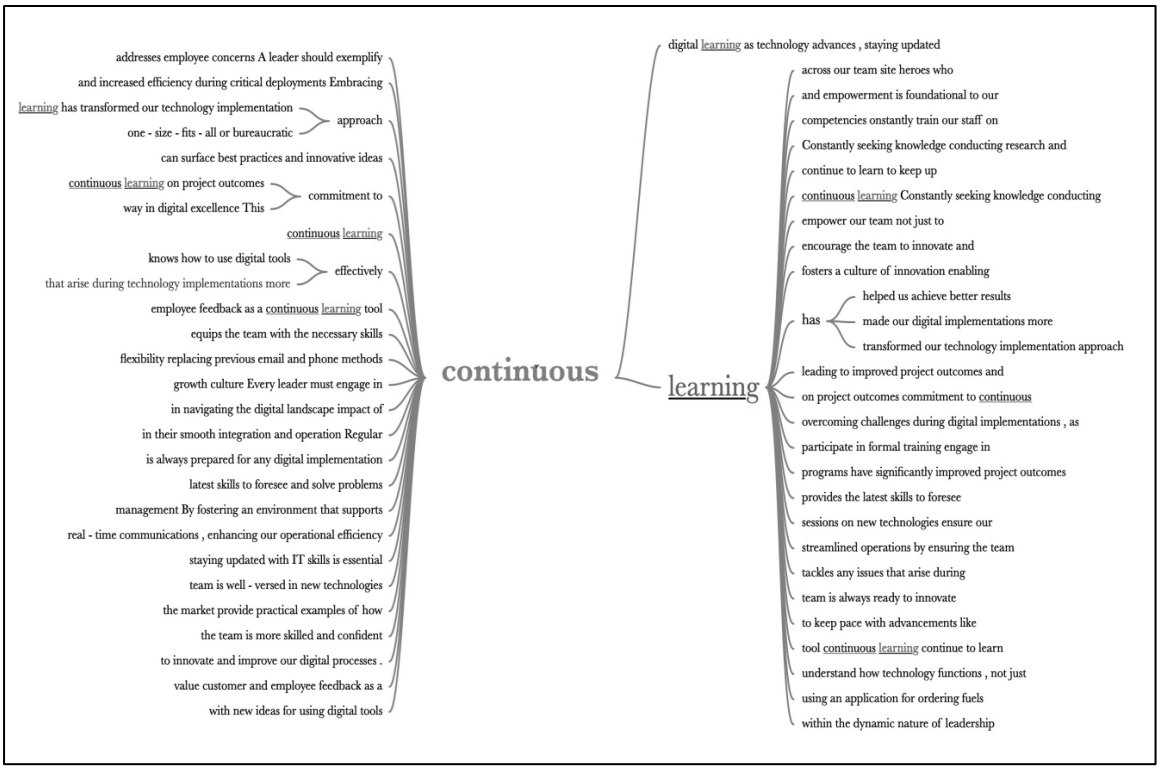


Figure 4.15: Continuous Learning Competencies for ICT and Process Infrastructure

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Retailer 1 opens the discussion by defining what makes an effective leader in the context of digital implementation, “Constantly seeking knowledge, conducting research, and fostering innovation. The retailer must also value customer and employee feedback as a continuous learning tool”. Retailer 2 highlights the importance of continuous learning in adapting to modern tools, "At this age, I must continue to learn to keep up with the new way of working. Now, we use tools like email in Teams for meetings and real-time

communications, enhancing our operational efficiency". Retailer 3 notes the integration of modern application platforms to maintain organisational agility: "We've started using an application for ordering fuels, lubricants, and shop stocks, as well as managing customer complaints. This change streamlines our processes and boosts organisational flexibility, replacing previous email and phone methods". Retailer 5 emphasises the integrative role of technology within organisational strategies: "We need to continue to learn and deeply understand how technology functions, not just as a supportive backdrop but as a fundamental pillar within our organisation". Retailer 4 shares a similar sentiment about the enduring quest for knowledge: “A leader never ceases to learn, for knowledge is a quest that lasts a lifetime. They should remain dynamic and adaptable and avoid a one-size-fits-all or bureaucratic approach”. Retailer 2 spoke of continuous learning within the dynamic nature of leadership: “A good leader constantly learns, embraces innovation, and effectively addresses employee concerns”. Retailer 3 linked continuous learning to skill competency and personal growth: "A leader should exemplify continuous learning, participate in formal training, engage in digital dialogues, attend seminars, and nurture a personal growth culture”.

Retailers 5, Retailer 6 and Retailer 7 discuss how staying current with technology is critical for effective leadership. Retailer 5 strongly believes that continuous learning is a relevant way to stay current with technological trends, “Every leader must engage in lifelong learning to keep pace with advancements like cloud computing and offsite data storage and to effectively lead and train staff for the digital era”. Retailer 6 considered a leader’s openness to learning from their team, “A leader learns from employee experiences and creativity, training and discussions can surface best practices and innovative ideas.” Retailer 7 stresses the importance of continuous digital learning, “Learning never stops, as technology advances, staying updated with IT skills is essential”. Retailer 7 emphasises his

approach to leadership in the context of digital advancement and team development, reflecting a deep commitment to continuous learning and the practical empowerment of team members, “I see it as my responsibility to ensure that our technological foundation is continually evolving. We prioritise ongoing digital learning across our team, especially for our staff who implement these technologies. We invest significantly in training programmes to enhance their skills in documentation, process mastery, and system management”. Retailer 6 added, “By fostering an environment that supports continuous growth, we empower our team not just to keep up, but to lead the way in digital excellence”. Retailer 5 echoed this “This commitment to education and empowerment is foundational to our success in navigating the digital landscape".

Retailer 1 and Retailer 8 close the discussion by reflecting on the impact of continuous learning on digital transformation implementation**.** Retailer 1 emphasises the impact of continuous learning on project outcomes, "In the technology realm, the ever-changing landscape presents challenges like integration issues and emerging trends. My commitment to continuous learning provides the latest skills to foresee and solve problems, leading to improved project outcomes and increased efficiency during critical deployments”. Retailer 8 discussed how these competencies help overcome technology-related challenges, “Embracing continuous learning has transformed our technology implementation approach. It fosters a culture of innovation, enabling us to smoothly integrate advanced technologies and maintain our competitive edge in the market”.

All eight retailers provide practical examples of how continuous learning competencies have played an important role in achieving their goals during digital implementation initiatives, focusing on overcoming challenges related to technology

implementations. Continuous learning enables retailer site staff to adapt to new technologies more effectively, ensuring smooth integration and operation across the entire team. Retailer 1 shared, "We constantly train our staff on new digital tools, which helps in their smooth integration and operation". Retailer 2 explained, "Regular learning sessions on new technologies ensure our team is always prepared for any digital implementation". By engaging in continuous learning, the retailer can achieve better project outcomes, as their team are more knowledgeable and skilled in using new technologies. Retailer 3 noted, "Our continuous learning programmes have significantly improved project outcomes by ensuring the team is well-versed in new technologies". Retailer 4 stated, "Continuous learning has helped us achieve better results in our digital projects, as the team is more skilled and confident".

Continuous learning helps the retailer overcome challenges related to technology implementations by providing the site staff with the necessary skills and knowledge. Retailer 5 shared, "Continuous learning has been important in overcoming challenges during digital implementations, as it equips the team with the necessary skills". Retailer 6 commented, "Learning new skills regularly helps us tackle any issues that arise during technology implementations more effectively". Continuous learning encourages innovation, as it keeps the retailer and site staff updated with the latest trends and technologies, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Retailer 7 mentioned, "Regular learning sessions encourage the team to innovate and come up with new ideas for using digital tools". Retailer 8 added, "By staying updated with the latest trends, our team is always ready to innovate and improve our digital processes". Continuous learning helps retailers streamline operations, as the site staff is more knowledgeable and can implement digital tools more efficiently. Retailer 2 shared, "Our learning programmes have streamlined operations by ensuring the team knows how to

use digital tools effectively". Retailer 6 noted, "Continuous learning has made our digital implementations more efficient, as the team is well-prepared and knowledgeable".

This comprehensive analysis demonstrates that continuous learning competencies are important for effective leadership in driving ICT and process infrastructure. In essence, these insights illustrate that effective digital implementation leadership is characterised by an ongoing commitment to learning, both from structured learning environments and from everyday interactions with staff and the evolving technology landscape. By fostering an atmosphere encouraging continuous learning and adaptation, retailers can develop a dedicated and proactive workforce, ensuring high performance and customer satisfaction.

4.10.2. Sub-theme Two: Digital Skills Advancement

All eight retailers emphasise the importance of digital skills advancement as a key competency for effective leadership in driving ICT and Process Infrastructure in successful digital implementation. Cordella et al. (2024) highlight the importance of advanced digital skills in driving successful digital implementation, with key factors for developing these skills including access to technology tools and formal training. Digital competence involves effectively using technology in personal and professional settings, mastering digital platforms, and leveraging tools for collaboration and innovation (Manana & Mawela, 2022). Nicolás-Agustín et al. (2024) emphasise the need to provide training programmes for acquiring and retaining digital skills, as well as promoting informal learning of digital skills necessary for digital implementation. Leaders should prioritise digital implementation and innovation by investing in developing human capital through ICT training and encouraging staff to embrace new practices. Figure 4.16 illustrates a mind map of the digital skills advancement competencies.

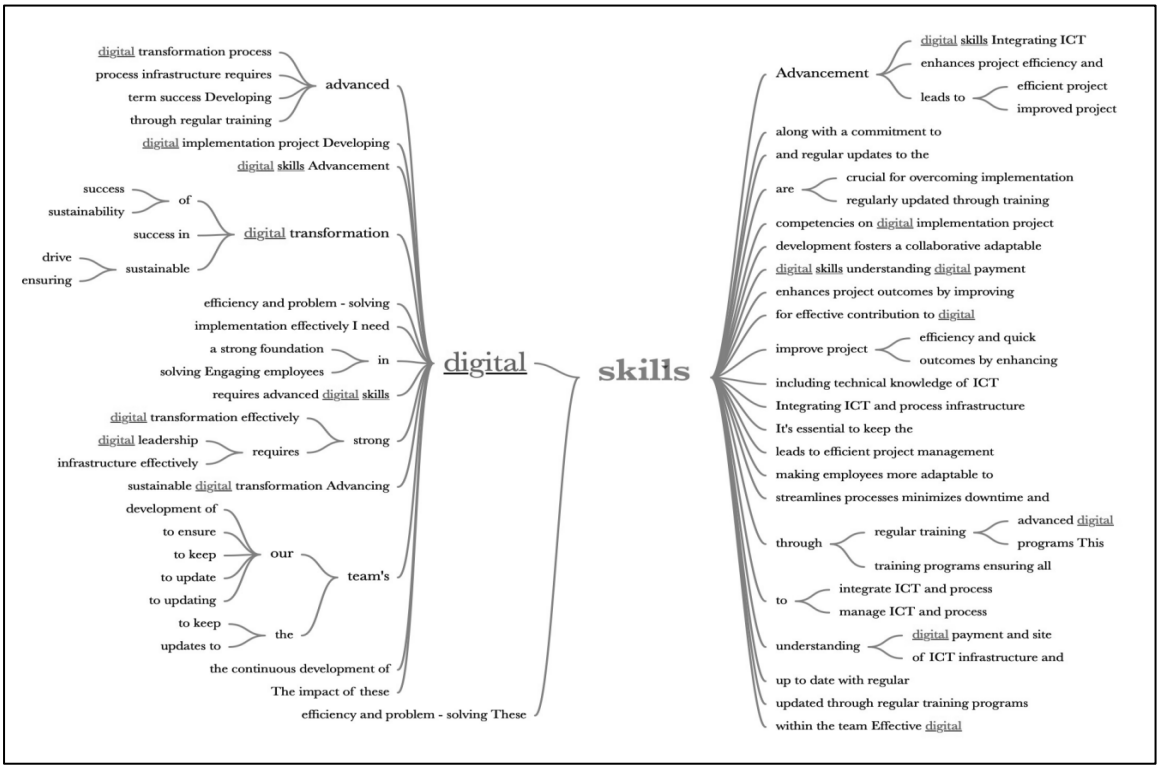


Figure 4.16: Digital Skills Advancement Competencies for ICT and Process Infrastructure

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Retailers shared the importance of a deep understanding of ICT and digital tools, which allows them to effectively navigate the complexities of digital payment systems, customer relationship management (CRM) software, and IoT applications. Retailer 1 explained the importance of these skills, "Integrating ICT and process infrastructure requires advanced digital skills, including understanding digital payment and site management systems. It's important to ensure our team's digital skills are regularly updated through training programmes to support the digital transformation process". Retailer 2 emphasised that leadership in digital implementation hinges on robust digital skills, with leaders needing to be technically proficient in ICT and digital tools, "To lead digital implementation effectively, I need to be proficient in ICT and digital tools. It's essential to keep the team's

digital skills updated through regular training programmes and workshops, enabling effective contribution to digital transformation". Retailer 3 highlighted that effective leadership in digital projects requires a strong foundation in digital skills, including technical knowledge of ICT infrastructure and digital tools, "Effective leadership in digital projects requires a strong foundation in digital skills, including technical knowledge of ICT infrastructure and digital tools. I prioritise the development of our team's digital skills through regular training". Retailer 4 pointed out that as a leader she needs advanced digital skills to integrate ICT and process infrastructure successfully: "I need advanced digital skills to integrate ICT and process infrastructure successfully. It's important to keep our team's digital skills up to date with regular training. This commitment ensures that all team members can support digital implementation effectively".

Retailer 5 added that integrating ICT and process infrastructure effectively necessitates strong digital skills and regular updates to the team's skills, "Integrating ICT and process infrastructure effectively requires strong digital skills and regular updates to the team's skills through training programmes, ensuring all team members are capable of supporting the digital transformation process". Retailer 6 emphasised the importance of technical knowledge and the continual development of their team's digital skills: "I need advanced digital skills to manage ICT and process infrastructure integration, including regular training to update our team's digital skills for effective contribution to digital implementation". Retailer 7 also stressed the need for technical proficiency and the continuous development of digital skills within the team: "Effective digital leadership requires strong digital skills, understanding of ICT infrastructure and tools, and continuous coaching for the team to support the digital transformation effectively". Retailer 8 highlighted the role of technical skills and the commitment to ongoing training for the team:

"I need strong digital skills, along with a commitment to updating our team's digital skills through regular training programmes. This will ensure that all team members can effectively contribute to the digital transformation process".

The impact of these competencies on digital implementation project results and overcoming challenges was also highlighted. Retailer 1 noted, "Developing digital skills streamlines processes, minimises downtime, and improves problem-solving. Engaging employees in digital skills development fosters a collaborative, adaptable team, ensuring sustainable digital transformation". Retailer 2 added, "Advancing digital skills leads to efficient project management and quick problem resolution, while engaged employees are more willing to adopt new technologies, which is essential for long-term success in digital transformation". Retailer 3 mentioned, "Digital skills advancement enhances project efficiency and problem-solving, fostering collaboration and adaptability to overcome technology challenges and drive sustainable digital transformation". Retailer 4 stated, "Advanced digital skills improve project outcomes by enhancing efficiency and problem-solving and making employees more adaptable to new technologies, important for ensuring the sustainability of digital transformation". Retailer 5 echoed these sentiments, "Digital skills improve project efficiency and quick problem-solving. Engaged employees are more receptive to new technologies, fostering adaptability, and ensuring the long-term success of digital transformation". Retailer 6 emphasised, "Digital skills advancement leads to improved project execution, enhanced problem-solving, and sustainable digital transformation for long-term success". Retailer 7 mentioned, "Developing advanced digital skills enhances project outcomes by improving efficiency and problem-solving. These skills are important for overcoming implementation challenges and ensuring sustainable digital transformation". Finally, Retailer 8 highlighted, "Digital skills advancement leads to

efficient project management, quick problem resolution, and enhances adaptability to new technologies, which are key to ensuring the long-term success of digital transformation".

In summary, these retailers' insights highlight that digital skills advancement competencies are fundamental for the successful integration of ICT and process infrastructure in digital implementation projects. Retailers have stated that these skills improve project efficiency and problem-solving, nurture a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability, and ensure sustainable digital implementation. In addition, retailers' commitment to the digital skills advancement of their staff is instrumental in driving the success of digital transformation initiatives.

4.10.3. Sub-theme Three: Collaboration

Collaboration is emphasised as significant in digital implementation, with collaboration through digital technologies identified as a key competency (Fonseca & Picoto, 2020). Six out of eight retailers recognised that collaborative competency plays a significant role in effective leadership for driving ICT and process infrastructure in successful digital implementation. The finding indicates that retailers have shared their experiences and insights, emphasising the need for effective collaboration among team members, retailers and service providers to drive successful digital implementation.

Collaboration in a digital environment enhances productivity, innovation, adaptability, and resilience amid rapid technological changes, highlighting the important role of collaboration as organisations navigate the complexities of digitalisation and aim to utilise emerging technologies to achieve growth and success (Pandey & Suri 2020; Thekkoote, 2022). Effective collaboration across interfaces between technology and operations is

important in the energy industry (Jones & Fullmer, 2022). Leaders in the energy industry must foster a collaborative environment, necessitating significant shifts within the organisation from hierarchical, siloed structures to more fluid, horizontal interactions. Figure 4.17 illustrates a mind map of collaboration competencies for effective leadership in driving ICT and process infrastructure.

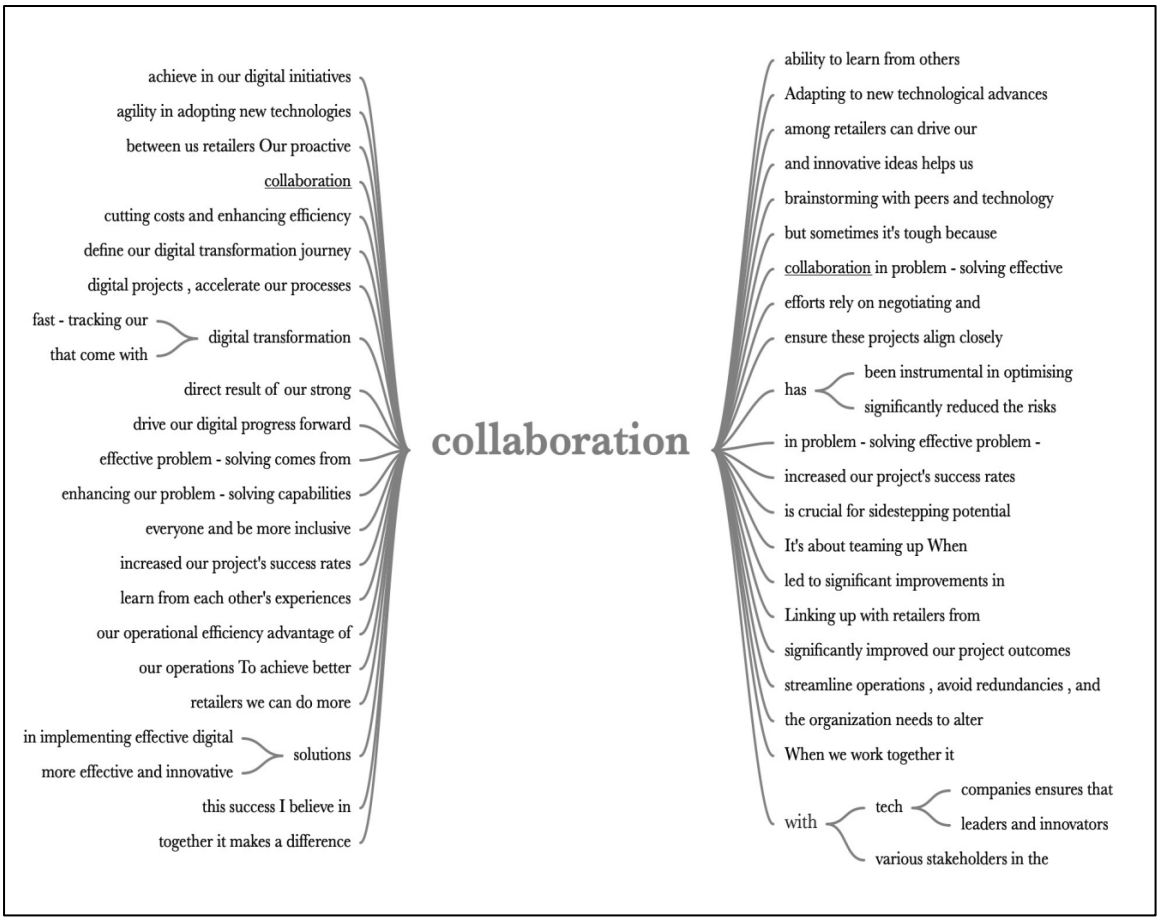


Figure 4.17: Collaboration Competencies for ICT and Process Infrastructure

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Based on the retailers' insights, collaboration enhances problem-solving and innovation. Three of the retailers highlighted how collaboration has driven innovative solutions within their operations. Retailer 1 reflected on the critical role of collaboration in problem-solving: "As a leader, I believe effective problem-solving comes from collaborative

brainstorming with peers and technology partners, bringing out innovative and transformative solutions for our operations". Retailer 1 further elaborated, "To achieve better collaboration, the organisation needs to alter its approach. Processes should involve everyone and be more inclusive". Retailer 4 observed, "When we work together, it makes a difference. Collaboration among retailers can drive our digital progress forward". Retailer 4 emphasised the strategic aspect of collaboration: "Our collaborative efforts rely on negotiating and building consensus to ensure seamless integration across our digital platforms, resulting in innovative outcomes that define our digital transformation journey". Retailer 8 discussed the cultural impact of collaboration: "In our projects, we prioritise collaboration and innovative ideas. This leadership approach helps us push the boundaries of what we can achieve in our digital initiatives". Retailer 8 shared, "It's about teaming up. When we work together with other retailers, we can do more".

Collaboration is important for emphasising resource optimisation and efficiency, as mentioned by Retailer 2 and Retailer 5. Retailer 2 shared insights on operational efficiency, "Collaborating effectively helps streamline operations, avoid redundancies, and optimise resource usage, cutting costs and enhancing efficiency". Retailer 2 added, "Linking up with retailers from different sites can open new perspectives and ways to work together". Retailer 5 highlighted the inclusivity of collaborative strategies: "Involving diverse stakeholders in planning leads to stronger strategies and faster execution, the key to our project's success".

Collaborating with others helps Retailer 6 and Retailer 8 reduce the chances of potential risks and uncertainties while also facilitating the implementation of proven and effective methods and procedures. Retailer 6 pointed out the benefits of learning from peers, "Working closely with other industry players lets us share risks and learn from each other's

experiences. This collaboration is important for sidestepping potential pitfalls and fast-tracking our digital transformation". Retailer 8 echoed this, “Our collaborative leadership style has significantly reduced the risks associated with digital projects. Sharing insights and learning from each other's experiences within the industry has been key to this success". However, Retailer 8 noted a challenge, "I believe in collaboration, but sometimes, it's tough because there's not enough trust between us retailers".

Collaboration is emphasised by Retailer 1 and Retailer 4 as a significant factor that greatly influences adaptability to technological changes. Retailer 1 commented on the agility provided by collaboration: "Our proactive collaboration with tech provider ensures that we are quick to adapt to new technologies. This agility is essential for maintaining a competitive edge in a rapidly evolving digital landscape". Retailer 4 spoke about the continuous engagement necessary for adaptability, "Keeping a continuous dialogue with our partners allows us to be flexible and responsive. This adaptability is essential for navigating the challenges and seizing the opportunities that come with digital transformation".

The collaborative competencies developed and honed by these retailers have profoundly impacted their project outcomes and their ability to overcome implementation challenges. These competencies facilitate not only the technical integration of new systems in the CSO but also foster a culture of innovation, shared learning, and mutual support among industry peers and partners. Retailer 1 described the outcome of collaboration, "Our ability to learn from others and quickly integrate these lessons into our operations has drastically reduced implementation errors and increased our agility in adopting new technologies". Retailer 2 noted the direct benefits to project outcomes, "The collaborative competencies we've nurtured have significantly improved our project outcomes by enhancing our problem-

solving capabilities. This approach has not only sped up implementations but also increased our project's success rates". Retailer 4 discussed resource optimisation, "Our focus on collaboration has been instrumental in optimising resources across projects. By working together, we've been able to reduce costs significantly and increase our operational efficiency".

Retailer 5 highlighted the advantage of collaboration for swift technological adaptation, "Adapting to new technological advances swiftly is a direct result of our strong collaborative ties with tech leaders and innovators. This responsiveness has kept us ahead in implementing effective digital solutions". Retailer 6 focused on innovative outcomes from diverse perspectives, "Our collaborative strategies have led to significant improvements in managing large-scale digital implementations, bringing diverse perspectives for more effective and innovative solutions". Retailer 8 found out the impact of collaboration among various stakeholders, "Collaborating with various stakeholders has accelerated processes, aligned projects with strategic objectives and enhanced overall project delivery".

Based on the retailers' insights, collaboration emerges as a fundamental competency important for driving successful digital implementation within retail operations. The findings emphasise that effective collaboration improves problem-solving, innovation, adaptability, and efficiency when navigating the complexities of digital implementation in their business. The evidence from retailers demonstrates that well-developed collaboration skills contribute to technical integration, continuous improvement, and competitive advantage in the digital landscape.

4.11 Theme Four: Leadership Competencies for Talent and Capability Development in Successful Digital Implementation

The study highlights the significant role of leadership in fostering talent and capability development for successful digital implementation. Talent and capability development in successful digital implementation involves identifying, developing, and managing talent through targeted training, mentorship, and defined career pathways, ensuring the workforce possesses the necessary skills to meet current and future challenges (Voruganti, 2022). The effective utilisation of digital technologies requires the development of internal and organisational capabilities.

Fahmi (2020) emphasises the importance of developing a talented workforce with digital competencies to facilitate implementation and capitalise on existing capabilities for sustainable digital transformation. Successful digital implementation is closely linked to how well organisations manage their talent, making it essential for organisations to integrate talent development into their digital strategies (Guerra et al., 2023). This study indicates that leadership competencies for developing this talent and capability dimension include empowerment, recognition, work-life balance, and teamwork.

Figure 4.18 provides a detailed illustration of the key sub-themes of leadership competencies that are fundamental for driving effective Talent and Capability Development within the organisation. Based on the findings, all eight retailers emphasised the importance of empowerment as a key leadership competency. Furthermore, seven out of eight retailers strongly highlighted the significance of teamwork in achieving success in this area. Similarly, an equal number of retailers recognised the importance of recognition as a leadership competency in fostering and developing talent and capabilities effectively.

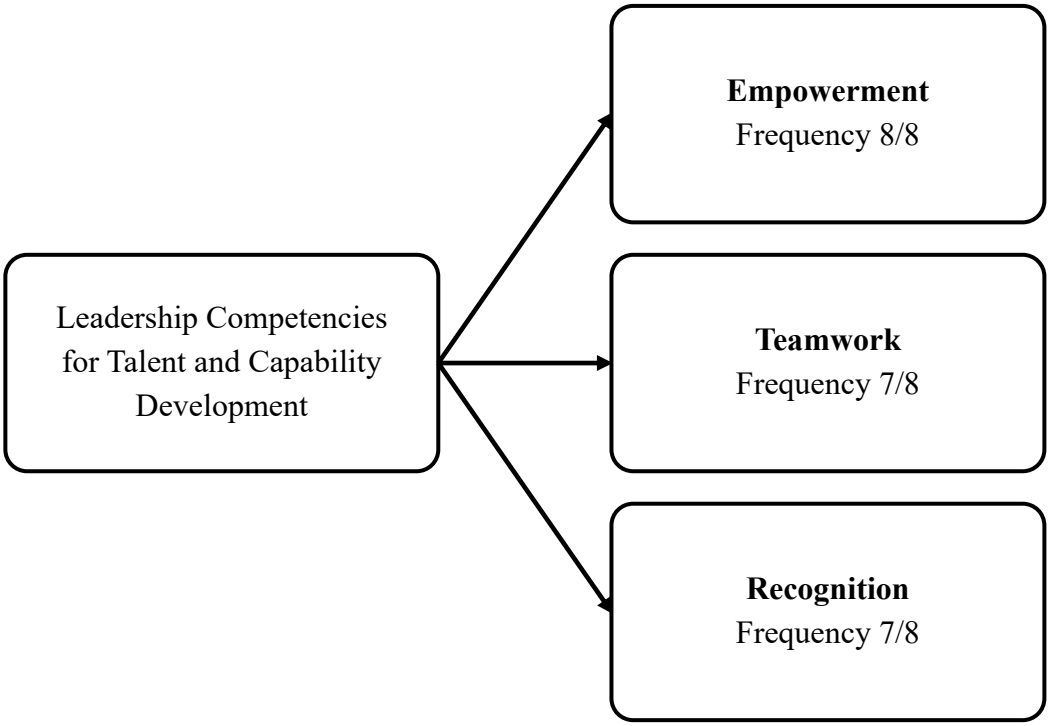


Figure 4.18: Sub-themes on Leadership Competencies for Talent and Capability Development

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

4.11.1. Sub-theme One: Empowerment

In this study, all eight retailers emphasised the importance of empowerment competencies for effective leadership in talent and capability development. Empowerment is recognised as the ability to delegate authority to team members, equipping them with the necessary resources, training, and autonomy to propose ideas and make decisions within certain organisational bounds (Kahl et al., 2023). Empowerment involves setting clear, measurable performance goals and assigning the appropriate responsibilities. Empowerment is about building trust with team members, allowing them to take responsibility for their actions while having the autonomy to adjust or innovate in their processes (Afram et al., 2022). The effectiveness of empowerment is enhanced when leaders provide a supportive

environment, coupled with regular feedback, to ensure goals are met without undermining the autonomy granted (Li, 2020). Implementing empowerment practices helps leaders utilise organisations' human resources for a competitive edge and enhance overall organisational performance (Han et al., 2016). In the fast-changing digital era, employee empowerment has emerged as a fundamental management tool for enhancing organisational success by improving talent productivity and satisfaction (Monica, 2019). Top management should embrace employee empowerment to navigate resistance to change and establish ethical standards for decision-making in a complex business landscape. Figure 4.19 illustrates a mind map of empowerment competencies for effective leadership in talent and capability development for successful digital implementation.

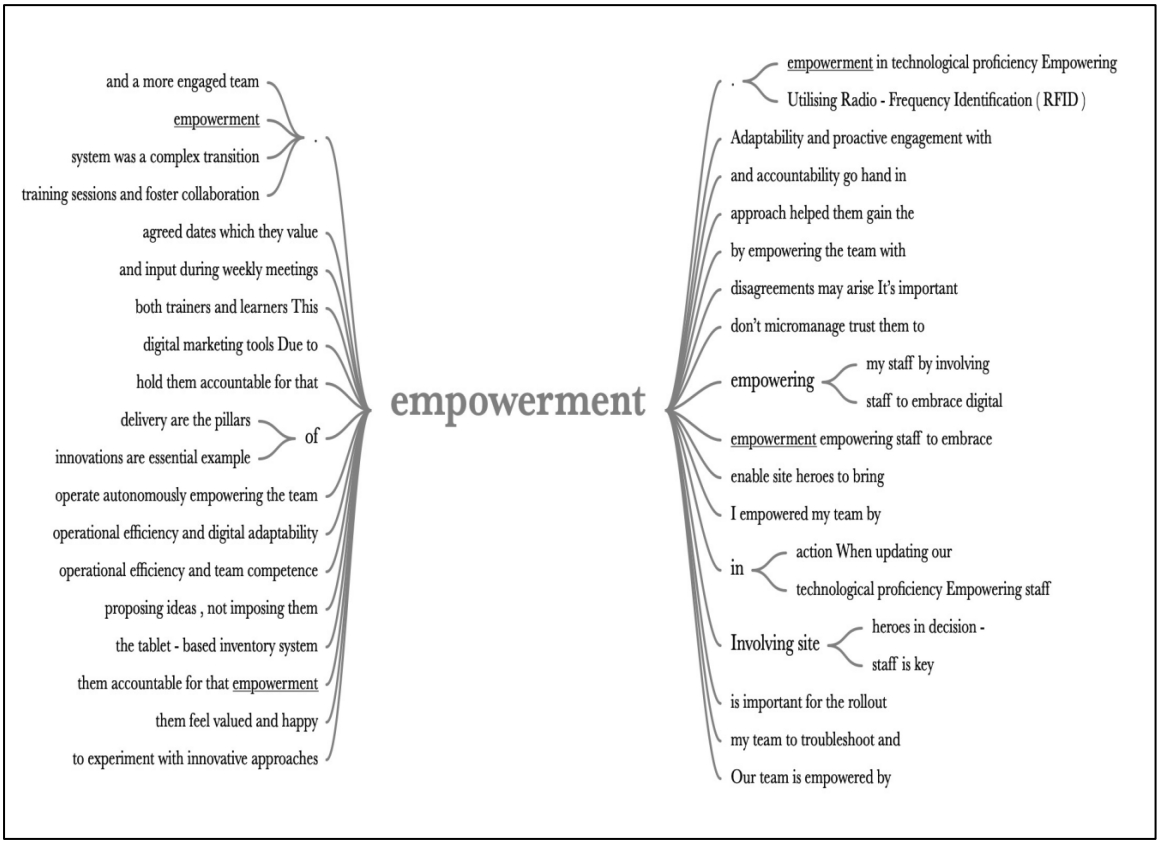


Figure 4.19: Empowerment Competencies for Talent and Capability Development

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

In rapidly evolving technological environments, Retailer 1 and Retailer 4 highlight the importance of empowering their site staff to manage digital platforms independently, as this enhances operational efficiency and instils a deep sense of responsibility among team members. Retailer 1 elaborated on the significance of empowerment in technological proficiency, “Empowering staff to use the centralised marketplace platform independently fosters confidence and initiative in managing day-to-day operations". He shared a specific example where empowerment played a critical role, "I empowered the team by assigning them roles that matched their strengths, facilitated training, and encouraged them to take charge of the system, which significantly improved our operational efficiency and digital adaptability". Retailer 1 also mentioned the non-intrusive nature of empowerment: "I don’t micromanage; I trust them to do their work, and I wait for the results on the agreed dates, which they value".

Retailer 4 emphasised empowerment through strategic involvement and training and further explained, "Our team is empowered by effectively using digital tools and working independently. Training on the back-office portal provides important real-time sales data insights for making informed decisions to improve service efficiency". He added, "I led sessions for the team to suggest improvements based on real-time sales data, leading to better decision-making and a more engaged team". Retailer 4 strongly believes that “Involving site staff is key to reaching our business goals and working effectively with our team”.

In high-traffic environments such as highway sites managed by Retailer 3 and diverse suburban areas handled by Retailer 8, the empowerment of employees in adaptability and customer-centric innovation is important. These qualities ensure that teams can respond effectively to rapid changes and varied customer demands. Retailer 3 focused on

empowerment through innovation and customer-oriented service delivery, "Innovation and customer-oriented service delivery are the pillars of empowerment. Utilising Radio-Frequency Identification and app-based payment systems effectively requires a team that is quick to adapt and eager to implement new solutions directly impacting customer experience". Retailer 3 pointed out the necessity of delegation, “As a leader we must delegate, encouraging site staff to operate autonomously”. He detailed his method of empowering the team, "By empowering my team to troubleshoot and interact directly with customers during transactions, they became more adept at using digital tools and improving customer interactions". At the same time, Retailer 3 described how he supports team autonomy, "I outline our goals, and you are fully empowered to suggest ideas and drive projects. I will help prioritise and secure the resources needed". Retailer 3 highlighted the value of fostering autonomy, “We inspire self-motivation in our staff, granting them the right to experiment with innovative approaches”.

Retailer 8 discussed the necessity of empowerment in adaptability within suburban settings, stating, "Adaptability and proactive engagement with digital innovations are essential. By using the store space online portal, our team can optimise shop layout and manage promotions, effectively responding to market needs". He shared an example of empowerment in action, "When updating our shop layout online, I empowered the team to lead the task from data analysis to layout adjustments. Their direct involvement in using digital tools improved operational efficiency and team competence". Retailer 8 linked empowerment to accountability: "Empowerment and accountability go hand in hand. I fully empower them and hold them accountable for that empowerment".

In rural areas where resistance to new technologies can be significant, such as those

overseen by Retailer 2 and Retailer 6, overcoming technological barriers and effectively engaging teams through empowerment strategies are essential for smooth digital transitions. Retailer 2 highlighted the importance of empowerment in communication and adaptability, "Empowering staff to embrace digital payments enhances their capability to educate customers on new technologies, improving communication and adaptability". He detailed his approach to training, "When introducing the digital payment system, I organised workshops where team members acted as both trainers and learners. This empowerment approach helped them gain the confidence and skills to effectively assist customers, smoothing the transition to digital payments". Furthermore, Retailer 2 highlighted the shift in communication styles needed: "You must engage them in believing and challenging; it's about proposing ideas, not imposing them". Retailer 2 shared the outcome from her practice, noting, "We enable staff to bring their ideas into action to meet objectives outlined throughout the year. They provide valuable solutions and input during weekly meetings".

Retailer 6 emphasised, "By empowering the team with knowledge and skills to utilise the tablet-based inventory system, they become more adaptable and confident in integrating new technologies into our workflow". He explained how he fosters ownership and skill development, " When we implemented the tablet-based inventory system, I empowered my team by allowing them to lead the process, organise training sessions, and foster collaboration". Retailer 6 also highlighted the role of empowerment and communication "Involving staff in decision-making and keeping them informed makes them feel valued and happy".

Empowerment is important for improving team engagement and efficiency, particularly in managing complex operations within the retail industry. Retailer 5 shared his

approach to rolling out new programmes, "For the rollout of our new loyalty programme, I empowered the team to lead the campaign, from setting up the loyalty terminals to handling customer inquiries. Their active involvement and the responsibility given helped them develop a deeper understanding of digital marketing tools". However, Retailer 5 also acknowledges how empowerment can sometimes lead to decisive leadership: "Due to empowerment, disagreements may arise. It’s important that everyone feels heard when they occur. Explaining decisions can be more constructive than dictating them".

Retailer 7 emphasised how empowerment develops staff in managing new digital initiatives, he described the challenges of introducing new systems: "The implementation of the wet stock management system was a complex transition. Empowering my staff by involving them in the early stages of the pilot testing enabled them to handle real-time issues and streamline the fuel management process". He added, “The wet stock management system empowers our staff to manage fuel delivery and tank processes more efficiently, providing them with autonomy to make operational adjustments as needed". Retailer 7 continued, discussing the trust aspect of empowerment: "They take ownership of their responsibilities, feeling accountable for the outcomes. This is something my team greatly appreciates".

These narratives collectively illustrate how retailers have effectively leveraged empowerment through digital competencies to develop teams skilled in managing the demands of digital implementation across various retail settings. Each retailer has successfully used empowerment to drive digital transformation within their sites, demonstrating significant gains in team capability and business outcomes. This approach highlights empowerment's role in developing talent and capabilities.

4.11.2. Sub-theme Two: Teamwork

The study indicates that seven out of eight retailers emphasised the importance of teamwork competency, highlighting that working with diverse teams is key for leadership in the realm of talent and capability development. Teamwork is an important competency that involves effectively utilising the diverse range of professional backgrounds and experiences within a team to create a high-performing collaborative unit, recognising and integrating talent from various disciplines and backgrounds, allowing for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to problem-solving and goal achievement (Guinan et al., 2019; Vuchkovski et al., 2023). Figure 4.20 illustrates a mind map of teamwork competencies for effective leadership in talent and capability development for successful digital implementation.

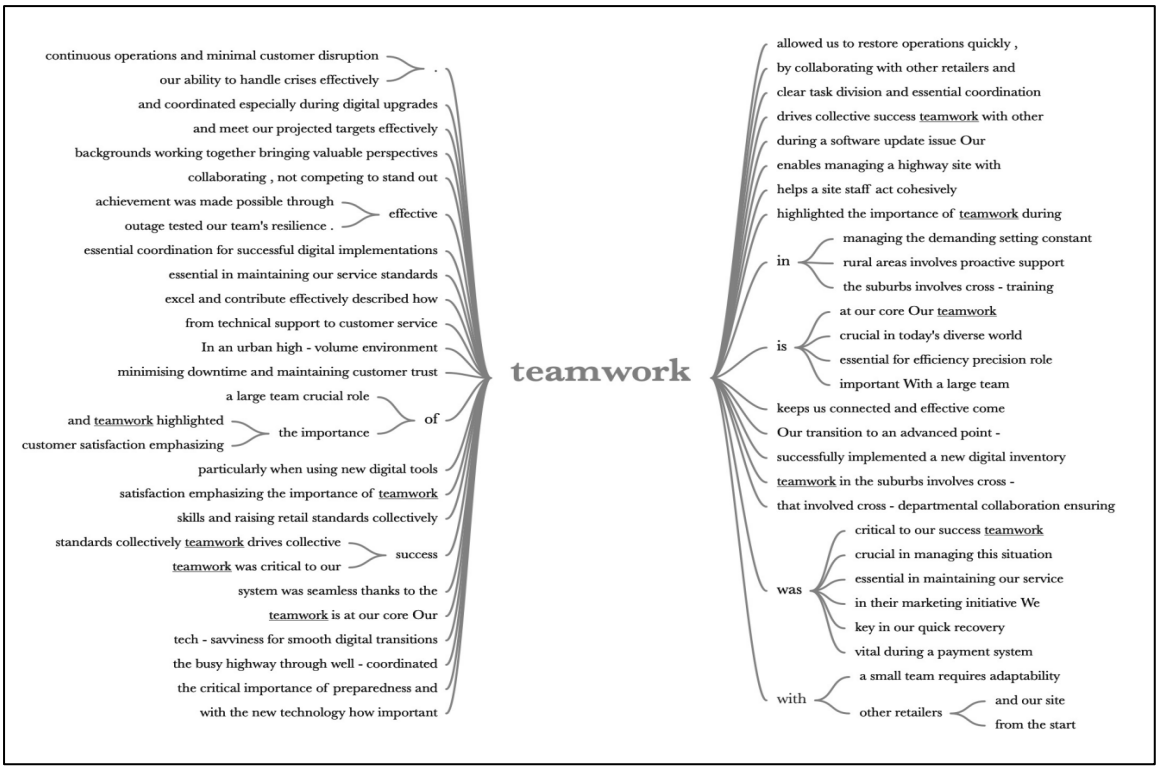


Figure 4.20: Teamwork Competencies for Talent and Capability Development

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Effective teamwork relies on leaders aligning their behaviours with the team's needs, whether through fostering information sharing via task-focused leadership or reducing intergroup bias through person-centred leadership (Homan et al., 2020). Successful digital implementation relies heavily on seamless teamwork, with integrated teams working collaboratively towards a common goal (Bettayeb & Marri, 2021). Teamwork significantly impacts digital implementation by addressing individual communication differences and organisational challenges, such as onboarding and structural barriers, thus facilitating a smooth transition (Vuchkovski et al., 2023).

The retailers stressed the significance of teamwork for the success of both large and small teams, especially in maintaining effective coordination and communication during digital implementation projects. Retailer 3, who manages a large team of 28 staff, detailed, "With a large team, it's challenging to keep everyone informed and coordinated, especially during digital upgrades. Teamwork is key for maintaining coordination and efficiency". Retailer 3 further remarked on the interdisciplinary nature of teams, "In today's diverse world, teamwork is important. We have people from various backgrounds working together, bringing valuable perspectives". Meanwhile, Retailer 2, with a small team, stated, "Our small team of 11 staff requires adaptability and strong communication. Daily briefings ensure everyone knows their roles, particularly when using new digital tools. Teamwork keeps us connected and effective". Retailer 2 also acknowledged, "As most of our team members come from the local community, they have a strong ability to collaborate and comfortably challenge ideas". Retailers shared that the teamwork strategies must be tailored to the operational context, whether urban, suburban, highway, or rural, each setting demands specific teamwork approaches to overcome its unique challenges. Retailer 4, who manages a site in an urban setting, stated, "In an urban high-volume environment, teamwork is

essential for efficiency, precision, role clarity, quick problem-solving, and managing customer flow and technology updates". Meanwhile suburban areas, Retailer 5 indicated, "In suburban areas, our team integrates digital and traditional methods to ensure smooth operations and customer satisfaction, emphasising the importance of teamwork". Retailer 8 also added, "Teamwork in the suburbs involves cross-training to enhance versatility, preparing us to seamlessly handle various functions, from technical support to customer service". Retailer 6 highlighted that in rural settings, "Teamwork in rural areas involves proactive support to address connectivity and tech-savviness for smooth digital transitions. Teamwork enables us to overcome these challenges". Retailer 7, managing a highway site with a large team, highlighted the important role of teamwork in managing the demanding setting, "We handle constant demands on the busy highway through well-coordinated teamwork, clear task division, and essential coordination for successful digital implementations. Teamwork is at our core".

By leveraging structured team efforts, retailers facilitate successful digital upgrades and innovations across varied retail environments. Retailer 4 shared instances of leveraging teamwork competencies, "Our team successfully implemented a new digital inventory system, enhancing operational efficiency through task delegation based on individual strengths. This achievement was made possible through effective teamwork". Retailer 5 further highlighted how it helped the digital implementation transition, “Our transition to an advanced point-of-sale system was seamless, thanks to the teamwork that involved cross-departmental collaboration, ensuring all staff were trained and comfortable with the new technology. Teamwork facilitated this smooth transition". Retailer 8 explained how important teamwork was in their marketing initiative, "We implemented a digital marketing strategy that required input and cooperation from various teams. By working together, we

were able to launch the campaign smoothly and meet our projected targets effectively. Teamwork was critical to our success". During crisis management and emergency response, the retailers acknowledge that leveraging teamwork helps staff act cohesively under pressure. Retailer 3 describes how his teams manage crises through effective collaboration in their response to an IT outage, "A sudden IT outage tested our team's resilience. Effective teamwork allowed us to restore operations quickly, minimising downtime and maintaining customer trust. Teamwork was pivotal in our quick recovery". Retailer 3 also shared his approach to supporting teamwork: "Sometimes my team needs my support, then I step in to collaborate with my counterpart in that area". Retailer 2 shared the same encounter during an emergency, "During a power outage, our team quickly implemented our emergency protocol, efficiently managing customer flow and transactions manually, demonstrating our ability to handle crises effectively. Teamwork was important in managing this situation". Retailer 2 also expressed the necessity for leadership support: "They need both the encouragement and the autonomy from me to excel and contribute effectively". Retailer 7 described how teamwork was important during a payment system crash: "Our team's rapid and coordinated response prevented a potential service failure, showcasing the critical importance of preparedness and teamwork. Teamwork ensured we handled the crisis effectively". Retailer 6 highlighted the importance of teamwork during a software update issue: "Our team worked together to manage service delivery manually while the issue was resolved, ensuring continuous operations and minimal customer disruption. Teamwork was essential in maintaining our service standards". In addition, Retailer 3 elaborated on the participatory approach beyond the site level, including other retailers, "Teamwork with other retailers from the start promotes a non-selfish work ethic and leads to better outcomes. It’s about collaborating, not competing to stand out". Retailer 4 also emphasised teamwork with

other retailers in enhancing skills among staff, “By collaborating with other retailers and involving our staff, we share best practices and innovative ideas, improving our staff skills and raising retail standards collectively. Teamwork drives collective success". Retailer 6 highlighted the importance of continuous learning through teamwork with staff, “Teamwork with other retailers and our staff facilitates continuous learning and development. By working together, we can address skill gaps and improve our competencies, ensuring everyone stays updated with the latest industry trends and practices".

This comprehensive analysis highlights that successful digital transformation in retail settings relies heavily on effective teamwork. Each retailer, regardless of their environment or team size, has demonstrated that effective teamwork is important for managing the complexities of digital initiatives and ensuring continuous improvement and adaptability in their operations. Ultimately, the leader's role is to guide their teams through a leadership style that promotes collaborative and inclusive efforts towards organisational goals.

4.11.3 Sub-theme Three: Recognition

The study indicates that seven out of eight retailers emphasised the importance of recognition competencies in developing talent and improving the capability to implement digital technologies. Recognition plays an important role in motivating staff, increasing engagement, and fostering a supportive culture that values achievements and efforts, especially in the context of navigating digital implementation (Kuleshov et al.,2024). Recognition is important for organisational performance and employee well-being, as studies show it has a positive impact on performance and fosters employee pride (Yang et al., 2022). It is important for leaders to recognise their employees as it significantly impacts

organisational performance and plays an important role in fostering positive organisational dynamics and interpersonal relationships (Mwiraria & Kembu, 2021). Figure 4.21 illustrates a mind map of recognition competencies for effective leadership in talent and capability development for successful digital implementation.

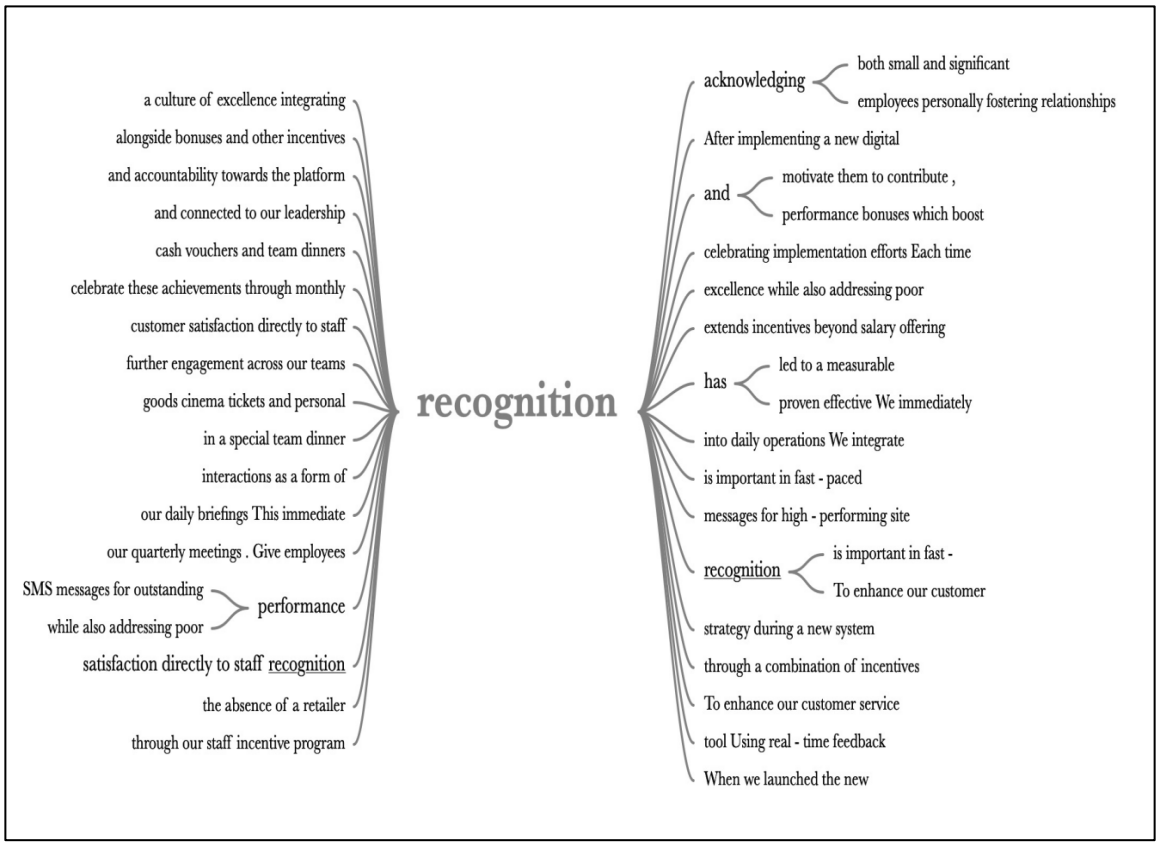


Figure 4.21: Recognition Competencies for Talent and Capability Development

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Recognition is important in fast-paced urban settings, as highlighted by Retailer 1 and Retailer 4, to acknowledge the skills and efforts of employees navigating and implementing new digital tools. It boosts confidence and commitment, creating an environment where innovation is celebrated and driving further engagement and adoption of new technologies. Retailer 1 emphasised the importance of recognising technological mastery, "Recognising the efforts of our staff as they master new digital tools is important.

We celebrate these achievements through monthly recognition and performance bonuses, which boost morale and drive further engagement across our teams". Retailer 1 shared a specific instance in which he recognised his staff during the new digital payment systems rollout: "When we launched the new payment apps, recognising each team member's contributions during the launch helped in quickly overcoming initial challenges and fostered a sense of ownership and accountability towards the platform". Retailer 4 highlighted the need to acknowledge both minor and significant technological advancements: "We focus on acknowledging both small and significant technological wins. Whether it's mastering a new point-of-sale system or digital payment app, we make sure to recognise these milestones in team meetings and through our staff incentive programme". Retailer 4 described a recognition strategy during a new system implementation: "During our shift to a fully integrated site management system, we recognised the team members who facilitated the smoothest transitions through cash vouchers and team dinners". Retailer 4 emphasises incentives and appreciation based on efficiency and contributions through the Employee of the Month award.

In high-customer-interaction settings such as the retail business, Retailer 3 and Retailer 8 emphasised using customer feedback to improve, enhance service quality, and boost employee morale. Retailer 3 discussed using customer feedback as a recognition tool: "Using real-time feedback from customer interactions as a form of recognition has proven effective. We immediately commend the staff for positive customer feedback, reinforcing good practices and motivating all team members to excel in customer service". Retailer 3 outlined an example of feedback during a major system upgrade: "During a major system upgrade at our site, we implemented real-time feedback where customers could rate their experience. Staff who consistently received positive feedback were recognised weekly,

boosting their morale and encouraging a culture of excellence". Retailer 8 talked about integrating recognition into daily operations through digital platforms: "We integrate customer feedback into our digital dashboards where staff achievements are highlighted. Positive reviews are celebrated, and staff involved are recognised in front of their peers, linking customer satisfaction directly to staff recognition". She highlighted an effective practice in customer service: "To enhance our customer service, we started sharing positive customer feedback directly with the involved employees and recognised their efforts in our daily briefings. This immediate recognition has led to a measurable increase in employee engagement". Retailer 8 also highlighted the implementation of compulsory annual leave for all staff, coupled with bonuses and other incentives, stating, "Every year, every employee must take compulsory leave to rest and enjoy festive periods, alongside bonuses and other incentives".

In contrast, the rural retail site managed by Retailer 6, where digital tools are being introduced and adopted amid challenges such as connectivity issues and a lack of skills among staff and customers, particularly values and celebrates the recognition of innovative efforts. This recognition encourages continual learning and adaptation, essential for successful digital transformation. Retailer 6 commented on the importance of celebrating implementation efforts: "Each time a team member successfully acquires the skill to implement new digital tools, we recognise their achievement in our quarterly meetings. Give employees recognition and motivate them to contribute, especially in the absence of a retailer". Retailer 2 provided an example of recognising digital adoption: "After implementing a new digital payment system, it was important to recognise and reward the team for their efforts to boost user adoption. Their efforts were acknowledged in a special team dinner". Retailer 7 emphasised the importance of personal acknowledgement, "We

believe in acknowledging employees personally, fostering relationships through gestures like buying meals, to ensure they feel valued and connected to our leadership". He extends incentives beyond salary, offering daily goods, cinema tickets, and personal recognition messages for high-performing staff. He elaborated, "My incentives include grocery subsidies and cinema tickets, and I also sent personalised WhatsApp or SMS messages for outstanding performance". However, Retailer 7 also advocated a balanced approach of recognising excellence and addressing poor performance, stating, "We believe in recognising excellence while also addressing poor performance through a combination of incentives and constructive feedback". Retailer 7 emphasised all-inclusive employee support, "We provide training, meals, medical subsidies, education assistance, and support for personal milestones like weddings and births to ensure our employees feel recognised".

This comprehensive analysis shows that recognition competencies are fundamentally integrated into successful digital transformation strategies in retail. By systematically acknowledging efforts and achievements, retailers promote an atmosphere where staff feel supported and valued, driving them to improve and innovate continually. This strategic approach to recognition is essential for maintaining high morale and fostering a culture of continuous improvement and adaptation in the fast-evolving retail sector.

4.12 Theme Five: Leadership Competencies for Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment in Successful Digital Implementation

In the digital era, the successful advancement of a culture that fosters innovation and a strong organisational commitment to digital implementation greatly depends on effective leadership (Wang et al., 2022). By taking the lead in implementing digitalisation strategies across the organisational platform, competent leaders pave the way for enhanced innovation

performance (Benitez et al., 2022). This leadership role is important in ensuring that digital implementation efforts are sustainable and deliver measurable outcomes in terms of operational efficiency and market competitiveness. According to Nguyen et al. (2019), there is a positive relationship between organisational culture, commitment, and employee innovation, underscoring the important role of leadership in fostering innovation culture and organisational commitment. This relationship highlights how a supportive organisational culture, facilitated by strong leadership, can motivate employees to embrace innovation.

Leadership has a strong positive impact on innovative culture and organisational commitment by fostering elevated motivation, beliefs, and alignment with organisational objectives, thus creating a supportive and innovative environment (Katper, 2020). By aligning team efforts with clear organisational objectives, leaders ensure that innovation is purpose-driven and impactful. Moreover, fostering trust and collaboration within teams further enhances their ability to adapt and respond to challenges in a rapidly changing business landscape. Saputra et al. (2020) stated that effective leadership fosters an innovation culture by promoting the use of digital technologies and innovative practices, and it enhances organisational commitment by inspiring and motivating employees to achieve collective objectives. Based on this study analysis, the findings indicate that retailers most frequently discuss competencies such as creativity and innovation, risk-taking, and resilience.

Figure 4.22 illustrates the key sub-themes of effective leadership competencies fundamental for Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment. All eight retailers emphasised the importance of creativity and innovation as a key competency. Five out of eight retailers highlighted the significance of risk-taking. For resilience, five out of eight retailers recognised the importance of recognition as a competency.

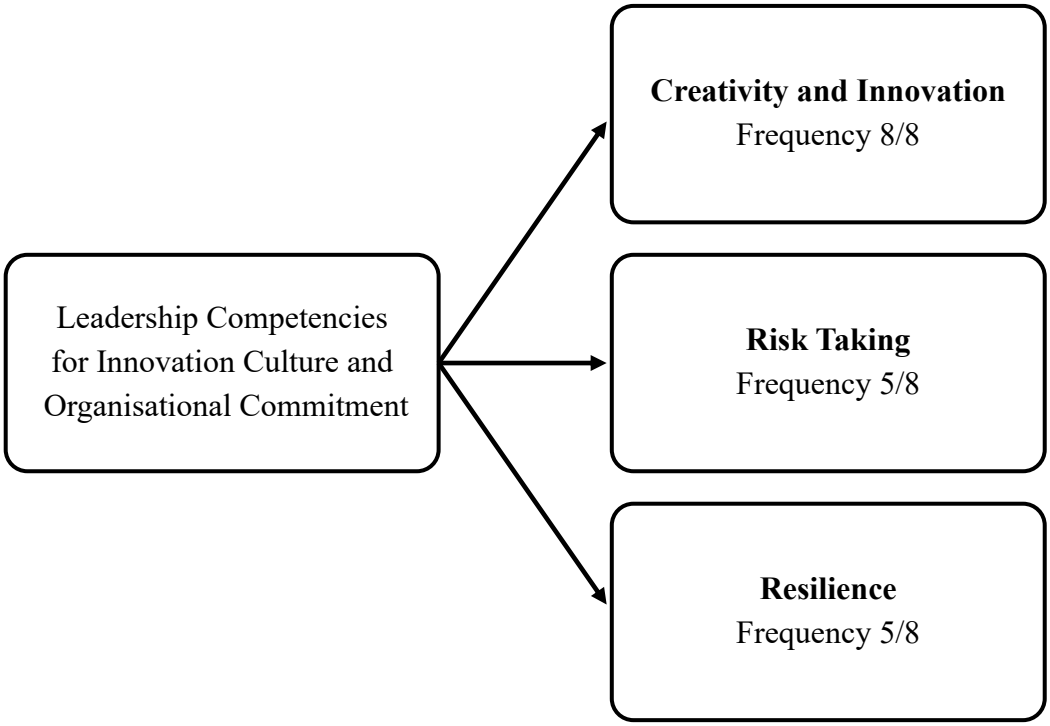


Figure 4.22: Sub-themes on Leadership Competencies for Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

4.12.1 Sub-theme One: Creativity and Innovation

Creativity and innovation were emphasised by all eight retailers in this study as fundamental competencies for fostering innovation culture and organisational commitment in successful digital implementation. Creativity and innovation are important for leaders, involving the capability to comprehend novel approaches and foster ongoing innovation through new technologies within a supportive environment that enables the generation of new ideas and the constructive handling of mistakes, criticisms, and complaints (Van Laar et al., 2020; Wohl, 2021). Kiefer (2021) highlights that creativity and innovation are important for leaders to drive because they enable the organisation to stay competitive, adapt to changes, and continuously improve. Leaders who foster these qualities create a culture

that supports sustained innovation and organisational success. According to AlBawardi (2022), creativity enables organisations to develop novel solutions and approaches, which can lead to the creation of new products or services. Innovation, on the other hand, involves the practical application of these creative ideas, leading to commercial success and widespread use. This process is essential for maintaining competitiveness and achieving growth. Figure 4.23 shows a mind map of creativity and innovation competencies for fostering innovation culture and organisational commitment in successful digital implementation.

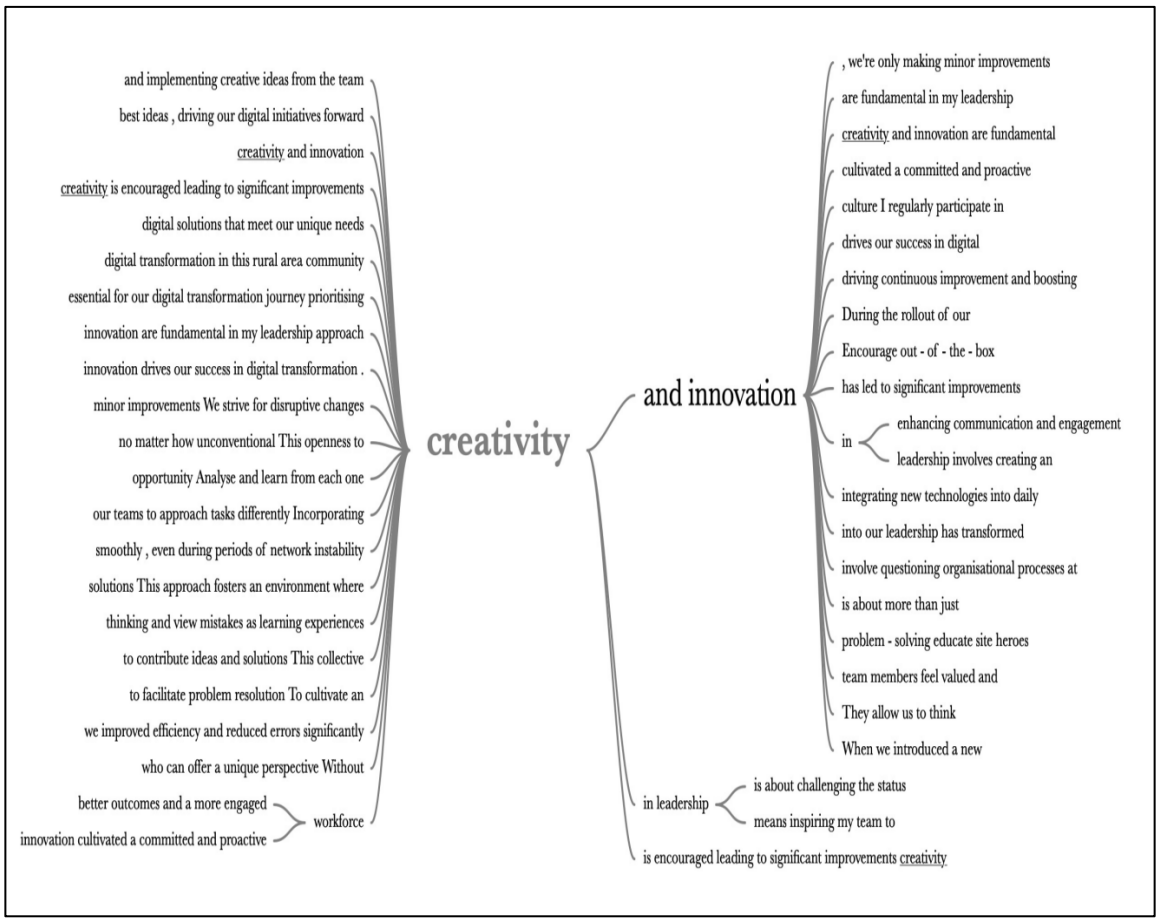


Figure 4.23: Creativity and Innovation Competencies for Fostering Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Retailers highlighted the significance of creativity and innovation in leadership roles to foster an environment that supports digital implementation. Retailers shared that these competencies are essential in encouraging team members to think outside the box and adapt effectively to new digital tools and processes. Retailer 1 emphasised, "Creativity and innovation are fundamental in my leadership approach. They allow us to think outside the box and adapt quickly to new digital tools". He added, "I always encourage my team to step back and think differently about their approaches. Encouraging the team to explore creative solutions leads to better outcomes and a more engaged workforce". Retailer 2 highlighted the importance of fostering a creative mindset, stating, "Creativity in leadership means inspiring my team to come up with innovative solutions to daily challenges. This approach has been important in overcoming obstacles and ensuring the smooth implementation of digital initiatives". Retailer 2 shared, "I am very receptive to different, even contradictory ideas. I always seek out those who can offer a unique perspective". Retailer 3 emphasised the necessity of innovation, "Without innovation, we're only making minor improvements. We strive for disruptive changes". Retailer 3 further elaborated, "Innovation is about more than just new technology. It involves creating a culture where team members feel empowered to contribute ideas and solutions. This collective creativity drives our success in digital transformation". Retailer 3 highlighted innovative problem-solving, "Educate staff with examples and clear, step-by-step guidance to facilitate problem resolution, emphasising both dos and don'ts". Retailer 4 mentioned, "To encourage an innovation culture, I regularly participate in brainstorming sessions and encourage my team to voice their ideas, no matter how unconventional. This openness to creativity has led to significant improvements in our digital processes". Retailer 4 also mentioned, "We must think creatively about how we challenge our teams to approach tasks differently". Retailer 5 discussed, "Incorporating

creativity and innovation into our leadership has transformed our organisational commitment, building a culture of continuous improvement and strong engagement by valuing and implementing creative ideas from the team". Retailer 6 noted, "Creativity in leadership is about challenging the status quo and exploring new possibilities. This mindset has enabled us to stay ahead of the curve and successfully implement digital solutions that meet our unique needs". Retailer 7 highlighted, " Innovative leadership is about building a culture where trying new things is encouraged, and failure is seen as a chance to learn. This approach has fostered a culture of resilience and adaptability, essential for our digital transformation journey". Retailer 8 shared, "We have nurtured a committed and proactive workforce by prioritising creativity and innovation. Our team members feel valued and motivated to contribute their best ideas, driving our digital initiatives forward".

Creativity and innovation competencies played an important role in successful digital tool implementations and process improvements, as shared by Retailer 1 and Retailer 2. Retailer 1 shared a specific instance where creative problem-solving led to a successful digital tool implementation: "When we introduced a new digital payment system, we faced initial resistance from both staff and customers. By organising interactive workshops and training sessions, we demonstrated the benefits effectively, leading to a smooth transition". Retailer 2 provided an example of overcoming constraints: " During our digital payment system rollout, we innovatively combined digital and traditional methods, ensuring seamless operations despite connectivity challenges. This creative solution allowed us to continue processing transactions smoothly, even during network instability". Creativity and innovation were highlighted by Retailer 3 and Retailer 4 as essential for leveraging real-time data and feedback for continuous improvement, thus boosting service quality and enhancing employee engagement through innovative practices. Retailer 3 highlighted a case of using

real-time data creatively: "We implemented a real-time feedback system that allowed us to monitor and address customer issues instantly. This innovation improved service quality and boosted staff morale as their efforts were recognised immediately". He also underscored the importance of having a disruptor within meetings: "There needs to be someone who thinks differently, helping us to break away from minor improvements and see completely different solutions". This approach fosters an environment where creativity is encouraged, leading to significant improvements. Retailer 4 recounted a similar experience: "During the rollout of our digital loyalty programme, we used gamification strategies to engage employees and customers. This innovative approach significantly increased adoption rates and customer satisfaction". She asserted the inseparability of creativity from leadership success: "Every issue presents a learning opportunity. Analyse and learn from it". Retailer 4 encouraged a non-critical approach to new mistakes: "Encourage out-of-the-box thinking and view mistakes as learning experiences". This mindset promotes continuous innovation and improvement, driving successful digital transformation.

Creativity and innovation are important for integrating new technologies into daily operations, streamlining processes, and improving efficiency, as retailers discussed how these competencies lead to significant operational improvements using digital tools. Retailer 5 discussed integrating new technologies into daily operations: "We introduced a digital inventory management system that streamlined our processes. By encouraging the team to think creatively about its applications, we improved efficiency and reduced errors significantly". Retailer 5 deliberated leader should foster a mindset that constantly seeks better solutions and asks challenging questions, “Creativity and innovation involve questioning organisational processes at various levels, from routine tasks to strategic initiatives, and constantly seeking improvement. Our team is always looking to challenge

our methods because there’s always room for improvement". Retailer 6 described a community-based approach: "We involved the local community in our digital initiatives, creating a sense of ownership and collaboration. This innovative strategy helped us overcome resistance and fostered a supportive environment for digital transformation in this rural area community”. In addition, creativity and innovation in enhancing communication and engagement among staff are important for fostering effective teamwork and resolving issues efficiently. Retailers shared stories of using digital platforms to achieve these goals, illustrating the value of innovative internal communication practices. Retailer 7 shared a story of using digital platforms to enhance communication: "We developed an internal communication app that facilitated better coordination among staff. This innovation led to more effective teamwork and faster resolution of issues". Retailer 7 observed, "There's a tremendous openness to ideas here, fostering a proactive attitude among the team. Honestly, the ideas aren’t coming from me anymore. If it were up to my ideas alone, we wouldn't get far". Retailer 8 focused on using digital tools for staff recognition and motivation: "We implemented a digital recognition platform where staff achievements are highlighted and celebrated. This innovative approach has increased employee engagement and fostered a culture of appreciation and motivation within our team".

The study's findings emphasise the important role of creativity and innovation in cultivating an innovation culture and organisational commitment fundamental for successful digital implementation. The retailers consistently identified that fostering and encouraging these competencies creates environments conducive to idea generation, innovative problem-solving, and agile adaptation to digital advancements. By prioritising creativity and innovation, these retailers effectively navigate challenges and resistance, facilitating continuous improvement and heightened engagement. The retailers' experiences underscore

that a creative and innovative mindset contributes significantly to operational efficiency, service quality enhancement, and employee satisfaction.

4.12.2 Sub-theme Two: Risk-Taking

Risk-taking was emphasised by five retailers in this study as a fundamental competency for fostering innovation culture and organisational commitment in successful digital implementation. Risk-taking is a key characteristic of organisational culture that supports digital innovation and mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and employees' commitment to organisational change (Kiefer et al., 2021; Kocak, 2022). Figure 4.24 illustrates a mind map of risk-taking competencies for fostering innovation culture and organisational commitment.

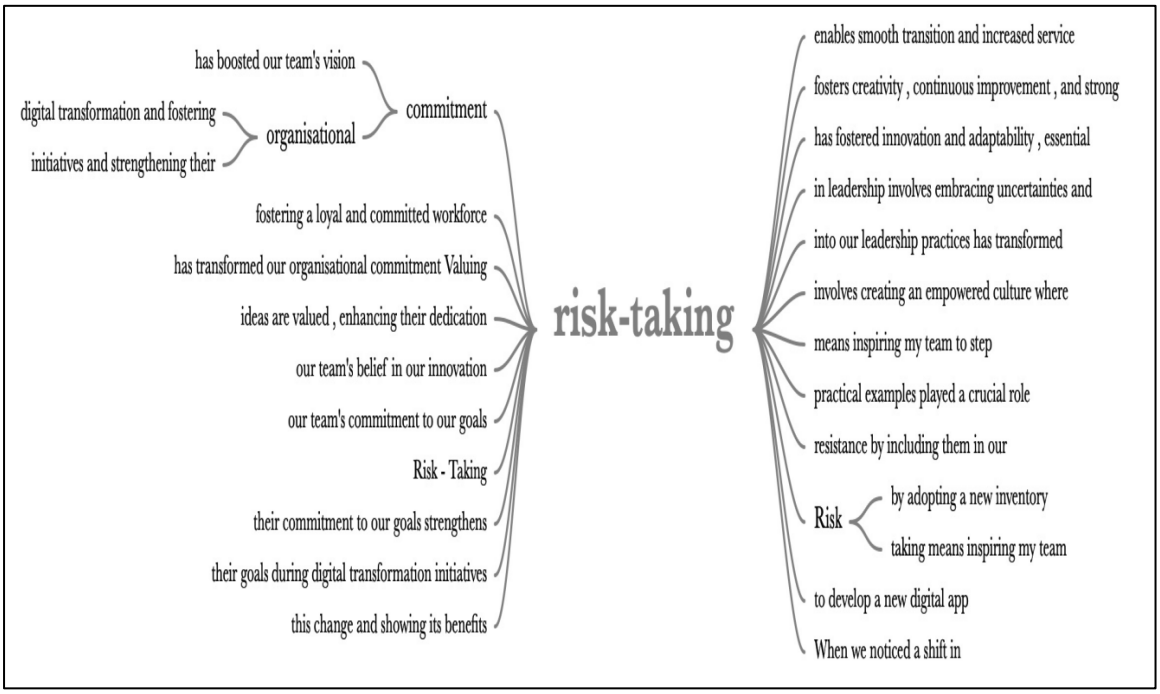


Figure 4.24: Risk-Taking Competencies for Fostering Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Jung et al. (2020) describe risk-taking as the willingness of individuals to openly undertake potential risks for a positive outcome in a situation where negative consequences are expected. This behaviour is essential for fostering an innovation culture and organisational commitment, particularly in the context of successful digital implementation. Risk-taking plays an intermediary role between digital transformation implementation and innovation, specifically it serves as a mechanism through which digital transformation influences organisational innovation (Liu, 2023). Risk-taking propels digital innovation within an organisation while also contributing to the reinforcement of organisational commitment.

Risk-taking is essential for retailers to motivate their teams, pursue innovative ideas, and foster a culture of innovation by encouraging calculated risks, as highlighted by Retailer 1 and Retailer 3. Retailer 1 highlighted the importance of fostering a risk-taking mindset in the implementation of new digital initiatives, stating, "Risk-taking means inspiring my team to step out of their comfort zones and try new approaches. This has been important in overcoming obstacles and ensuring the smooth implementation". He realised the outcome: "When my team sees that it's okay to take risks and learn from failures, their commitment to our goals strengthens". Retailer 3 shared, "Taking calculated risks involves creating an empowered culture where team members propose bold ideas and take initiative, driving success in digital transformation and fostering organisational commitment".

Encouraging risk-taking, Retailer 5 and Retailer 6 are cultivating a culture that fosters open-mindedness and provides support, creating a motivated and focused team that remains committed to organisational goals even in the face of uncertainties. Retailer 5 discussed, "Incorporating risk-taking into our leadership practices has transformed our organisational

commitment. Valuing risk-taking fosters creativity, continuous improvement, and strong engagement. Our team knows their innovative ideas are valued, enhancing their dedication". Retailer 6 noted, "Risk-taking in leadership involves embracing uncertainties and fostering innovation. This keeps us ahead of the curve and successfully implements digital solutions that meet our unique needs, fostering a loyal and committed workforce". Retailer 7 mentioned that he fosters a culture where risks are viewed as opportunities, which could enhance team commitment and foster innovation and adaptability, key for digital implementation. According to Retailer 7, “This approach has fostered innovation and adaptability, essential for our digital transformation. Our team feels supported to propose ideas and tackle challenges, driving digital initiatives and strengthening their organisational commitment".

The retailers provide practical examples of how risk-taking competencies have been important to achieving their goals during digital implementation initiatives. Risk-taking enables retailers and teams to explore new ideas and implement innovative digital tools, strengthening commitment to organisational goals. Retailer 3 shared a specific instance where risk-taking led to a successful digital tool implementation: " We took risks when the business required us to implement a new digital payment due to its higher cost and unpredictability. We made a smooth transition and increased service quality by embracing this change and showing its benefits”. Retailer 5 provided an example of embracing risks to enhance operations: "We took a significant risk by adopting a new inventory management system. Despite the initial challenges, this decision paid off as it streamlined our operations and reduced errors. This bold move strengthened our team's belief in our innovation”.

Risk-taking is essential for a retailer to maintain service quality and employee

engagement in evolving market conditions, fostering a deeper organisational commitment. Retailer 6 highlighted a case of adapting to market changes: "When we noticed a shift in customer preferences, we took a risk by revamping our product offerings and integrating new digital marketing strategies. This bold move attracted more customers and increased our team's commitment to our goals". Risk-taking helps the retailer maintain team commitment towards organisational goals, Retailer 7 shared a community-based approach, "We risked local community resistance by including them in our digital activities. We won the community's support and implemented the adjustments by staying resilient and interacting positively. Success has boosted our team's vision commitment". Risk-taking fosters retailer innovation and continuous improvement, promoting better teamwork and quicker issue resolution, thus enhancing organisational commitment. Retailer 1 shared a story of encouraging innovation to improve the accuracy and efficiency of product discharge calculations, traditionally done manually, reducing the significant risk of loss of product containment, “Taking the risk to develop a new digital app for discharge calculations was daunting. Despite initial doubts, it improved accuracy, mitigated loss of product risk, and reinforced our team's commitment to innovative solutions”.

The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of risk-taking as a competency for fostering an innovation culture and organisational commitment. Retailers emphasised that encouraging risk-taking is essential for motivating teams, pursuing innovative ideas, and overcoming obstacles inherent in digital implementation. The practical examples provided by the retailers illustrate how embracing calculated risks leads to enhanced service quality, operational efficiency, and employee engagement. Retailers acknowledge that fostering a risk-supportive environment can drive continuous improvement, adaptability, and commitment to organisational goals.

4.12.3 Sub-theme Three: Resilience

This study's findings emphasise that five retailers recognise the importance of resilience competencies in fostering an innovative culture and improving organisational commitment to ensure successful digital implementation. Fostering resilience among employees and ensuring organisational readiness for change is essential for driving innovation, with leaders playing a key role in promoting resilience by facilitating emotion management and supporting their followers in coping with adversity by enhancing positive emotional states and mitigating negative ones (Richard, 2020; Senbeto, 2020). Figure 4.25 illustrates a mind map of resilience competencies required to promote an innovative culture and organisational commitment for successful digital implementation.

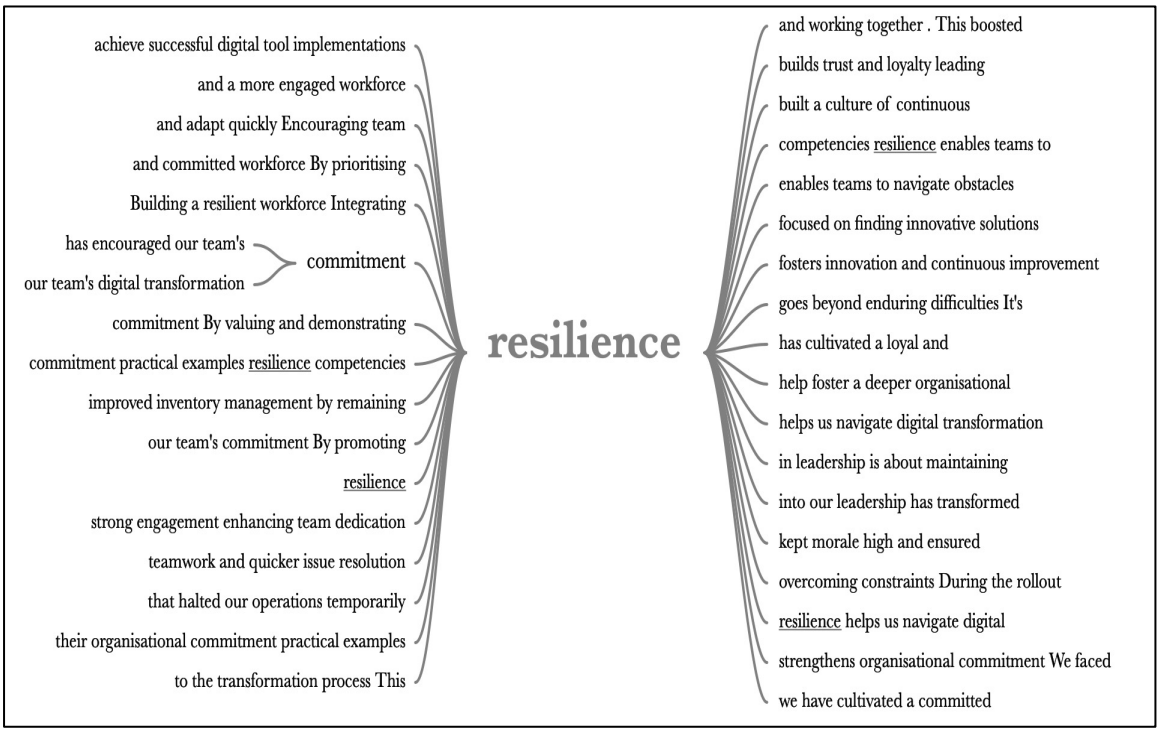


Figure 4.25: Resilience Competencies for Fostering Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Resilience in the workplace, particularly under uncertainty and high pressure, is essential because it is positively associated with employee and organisational resilience, highlighting the importance of coping mechanisms, managerial resilience, and the critical role of leaders in fostering resilience within their teams (Liang, 2021). Resilience is increasingly imperative in the workplace due to high pressure and uncertainty, requiring leaders to build their own resilience, foster team resilience, and create resilient team cultures and organisations (McEwen, 2022).

Retailer 1 and Retailer 3 highlight that fostering resilience can build trust and loyalty within their teams, leading to better outcomes and higher engagement. Retailer 1 emphasised, "Resilience helps us navigate digital transformation uncertainties and adapt quickly. Encouraging team resilience builds trust and loyalty, leading to better outcomes and a more engaged workforce". Retailer 3 shared, "Resilience goes beyond enduring difficulties. It's about creating a culture where team members feel empowered to recover from setbacks, driving digital transformation success and fostering organisational commitment".

Retailer 5 and Retailer 6 shared that building a resilient workforce involves maintaining a positive outlook and encouraging adaptability to keep the team motivated, focused, and committed to organisational goals. Retailer 5 discussed, " Integrating resilience into our leadership has transformed our organisational commitment. By valuing and demonstrating resilience, we've built a culture of continuous improvement and strong engagement, enhancing team dedication". Retailer 6 noted, "Resilience in leadership is about maintaining a positive outlook and encouraging the team to do the same. This mindset has enabled us to implement digital solutions that meet our unique needs, fostering a loyal and

committed workforce". Resilience can be fostered by encouraging a culture that views setbacks as learning opportunities, which in turn strengthens team commitment and adaptability, as Retailer 8 shares, "By prioritising resilience, we have nurtured a committed and proactive workforce. Our team feels supported and motivated to overcome challenges and contribute their best ideas, driving our digital initiatives forward. This sense of support enhances their organisational commitment".

The retailers provide practical examples of how resilience competencies have played an important role in achieving their goals during digital transformation initiatives. Resilience enables Retailer 1 and teams to overcome challenges and successfully implement digital tools, fostering a stronger commitment to organisational goals. Retailer 1 provided an example of overcoming constraints, "During the rollout of a new digital inventory system, we encountered significant technical issues. We successfully implemented the system and improved inventory management by remaining resilient and working together. This boosted our team's digital transformation commitment". Resilience is essential for Retailer 3 to maintain service quality and employee engagement in changing market conditions, fostering deeper organisational commitment. Retailer 3 highlighted that "Major delivery system changes by a key supplier disrupted our operations. Fostering a resilient mindset within the team helped us adapt quickly, find new solutions, and maintain service standards. This strengthened our team's commitment".

Resilience is key to maintaining team morale and engagement during digital implementation initiatives, as Retailer 5 deliberated, "Introducing new digital tools can be stressful for the team. By promoting resilience, we kept morale high and ensured everyone remained committed to the transformation process. This resilience has nurtured a loyal and

engaged team". Retailer 6 described a community-based approach: "We faced resistance from the community when introducing digital initiatives. By staying resilient and engaging with the community positively, we managed to gain their support and successfully implement the changes. This success has encouraged our team's commitment". Retailer 8 shared a story of fostering innovation through resilience and continuous improvement, which enhances teamwork and speeds up issue resolution, ultimately strengthening organisational commitment, "We faced a major system crash that halted our operations temporarily. Instead of panicking, we focused on finding innovative solutions to get back on track quickly. This resilient and innovative approach resolved the issue and reinforced our team's commitment".

The study highlights the essential role of resilience in fostering an innovative culture and enhancing organisational commitment for successful digital implementation. Retailers emphasised that resilience involves maintaining a positive outlook, adapting to change, and learning from setbacks. Practical examples show that resilience improves morale, engagement, and outcomes in digital initiatives. By integrating resilience into leadership, retailers can build trust, loyalty, and continuous improvement, driving successful digital innovation and reinforcing organisational commitment.

4.13 Discussion on Leadership Competencies for Successful Digital Implementation

This study explores the fundamental leadership competencies required to achieve successful digital implementation for retailers in Malaysia’s energy industry. Building on Pihir et al. (2018) conceptual model, the study provided a robust basis for exploring key dimensions such as strategy orientation, customer orientation, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development, and innovation culture and organisational commitment. All the competencies identified through in-depth interviews with retailers in

the CSO provide a detailed understanding of the qualities and skills required to navigate the complexities of digital implementation.

Table 4.3 presents a comprehensive summary of the leadership competencies identified as fundamental for successful digital implementation, categorised based on retailers' responses.

Table 4.3: Summary of Leadership Competencies for Successful Digital Implementation Themes

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency
Leadership Competencies for Strategy Orientation	Strategic Vision	8
	Employee Centricity	8
	Performance Driven	7
Leadership Competencies for Customer Orientation	Customer Centricity	8
	Lead by Example	7
Leadership Competencies for ICT and Process Infrastructure	Continuous Learning	8
	Digital Skills Advancement	8
	Collaboration	6
Leadership Competencies for Talent and Capability Development	Empowerment	8
	Teamwork	7
	Recognition	7
Leadership Competencies for Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment	Creativity and Innovation	8
	Risk Taking	5
	Resilience	5

By organising the responses into major themes and sub-themes, the summary provides a structured analysis of the various dimensions of leadership that contribute to effective digital implementation. The detailed categorisation into dimensions of Strategy Orientation, Customer Orientation, ICT and Process Infrastructure, Talent and Capability Development, and Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment offers a holistic view of the multifaceted nature of leadership required to implement digital initiatives within the organisation successfully. Each major theme comprises specific leadership competencies that are instrumental in driving digital implementation efforts within the CSO. These competencies collectively form the backbone of effective leadership that supports and drives forward digital strategies within the CSO, as evidenced by their frequency of mention and perceived importance among the retailers.

In strategy orientation, all eight retailers underscored the importance of a strategic vision in navigating digital transformations. Retailers highlighted that this competency involves anticipating changes, setting clear goals, and inspiring team alignment. Employee centricity, emphasised by all retailers, focuses on engaging and supporting employees to foster commitment and high performance. The performance-driven competency, recognised by seven retailers, highlights the need for achieving high standards and aligning efforts with strategic objectives. In customer orientation, all retailers highlighted the importance of understanding and meeting customer needs through digital tools to enhance satisfaction and loyalty. Seven retailers stressed the importance of leaders demonstrating commitment to customer-centric strategies by actively engaging in digital initiatives.

Regarding ICT and process infrastructure, all retailers agreed on the necessity of continuous learning to keep abreast of technological advancements and drive digital

innovation. Retailers emphasised that advancing digital skills is fundamental for effective digital tool integration and operational efficiency. Collaboration, recognised by six retailers, fosters innovation, resource optimisation, and adaptability in digital projects. In talent and capability development, all retailers highlighted the importance of empowering employees to manage digital tools independently, enhancing engagement and operational efficiency. Retailers also emphasised that teamwork plays a critical role in maintaining effective coordination and communication during digital transformations. Recognition, acknowledged by seven retailers, boosts morale and fosters a supportive culture essential for digital adoption. For innovation culture and organisational commitment, all retailers stressed the need for creativity and innovation to drive continuous improvement and successful digital implementations. Retailers highlighted that embracing risk-taking, emphasised by five retailers, is important for motivating teams and pursuing innovative ideas. Resilience, recognised by five retailers, is fundamental for navigating uncertainties and maintaining commitment during digital transformations.

The findings emphasise the significance of adopting a multidimensional approach to leadership in digital implementation. Leadership in the digital era requires a diverse set of competencies to drive organisational change (Zivkovic, 2022). Retailers emphasised that leaders must develop a strategic vision, focus on customer and employee centricity, and foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation. Empowering staff, promoting teamwork, and recognising efforts are important for driving engagement and commitment. Retailers noted that embracing risk-taking and fostering resilience are essential for overcoming challenges and ensuring sustainable digital transformation. The study highlights that successful digital implementation in retail sites relies on a comprehensive understanding of diverse leadership competencies. Retailers believe that by integrating these competencies

into their leadership practices, they can effectively navigate the complexities of digital implementation, ensuring high performance, customer satisfaction, and organisational commitment.

4.14 Leadership Competencies for Successful Digital Implementation Aligning with Leadership Theories

Based on the findings from this study, the competencies have been categorised under sub-themes within the major themes of strategy orientation, customer orientation, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development, and innovation culture and organisational commitment. All these identified competencies are then aligned with the most relevant leadership theories, providing a deeper analysis of how they support effective digital implementation. This study's literature review analysis identified transformational, situational, and authentic leadership theories as valuable frameworks for understanding how different competencies contribute to successful digital implementation (Klein, 2020; Philip, 2021; Zhang, 2023).

Following a comprehensive analysis of interviews, a hierarchical coding system is utilised to generate and categorise themes. This analysis displays primary and secondary themes and aggregate dimensions to classify data within the leadership framework for digital implementation success. In Figure 4.26, the structured framework explains how leadership competencies for each digital maturity dimension relate to broader leadership theory, which is essential for achieving success in digital implementation. This framework categorises the dimensions into First Order Themes and the leadership competencies into Second Order Themes, which then converge into three Aggregate Dimensions representing leadership theories. The structured layout delineates themes and competencies that lead to leadership

theories and provides a comprehensive visual and conceptual map. It illustrates how specific leadership competencies aggregate into overarching theories that are important for effectively managing and succeeding in digital implementation endeavours.

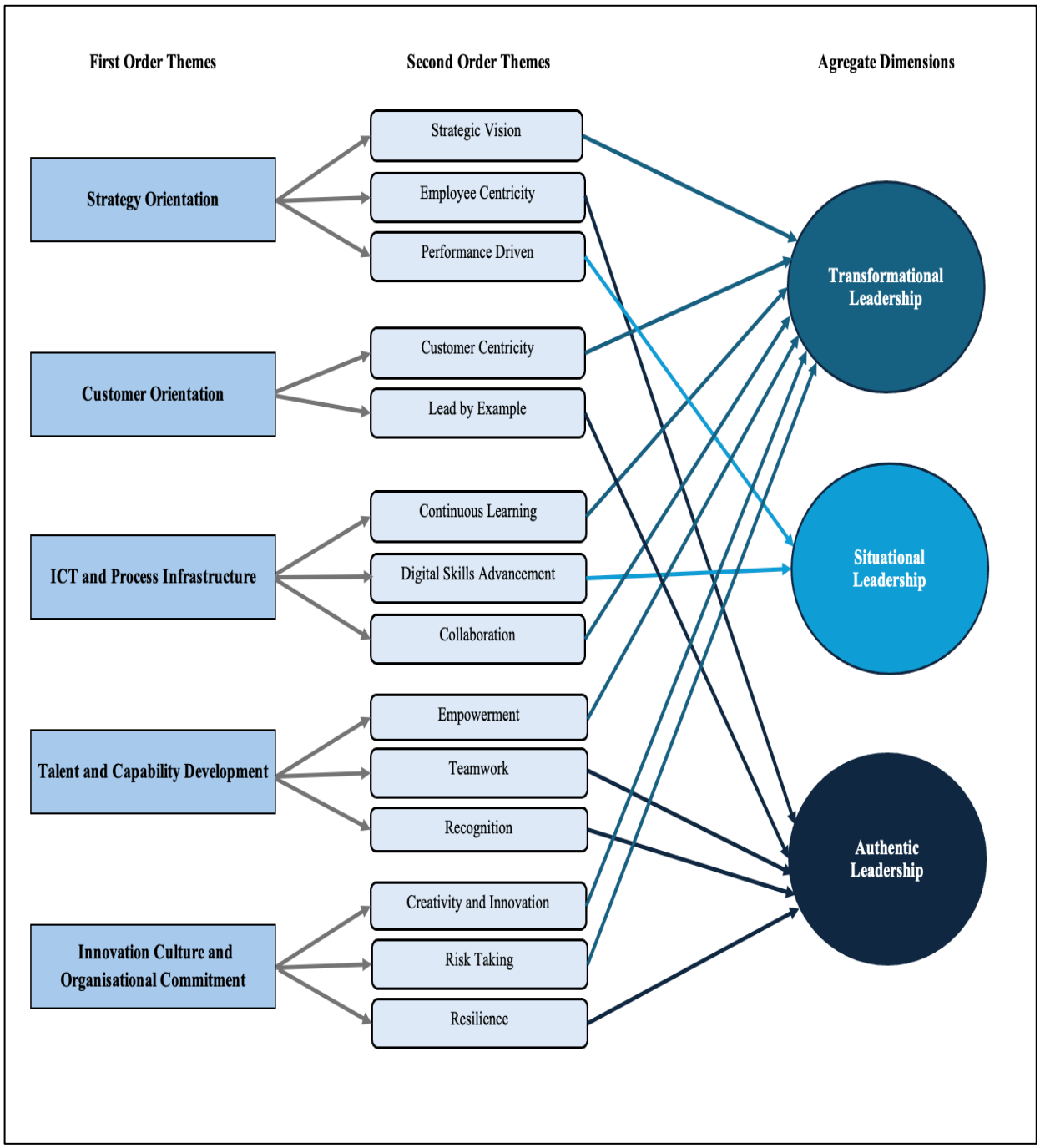


Figure 4.26: Data Structure of the Results

Note. Generated using NVivo (version 14).

Table 4.4 offers more details by quantifying the alignment of competencies with each leadership theory. This table shows the frequency of each competency mentioned by the retailers and maps these frequencies to the corresponding leadership theories, providing a clear numerical representation of their alignment.

Table 4.4: Leadership Competencies for Successful Digital Implementation Aligning with Leadership Theories

Major Theme	**Sub-themes**	**Leadership Theory**		
		Transformation	**Situational**	**Authentic**
Strategy Orientation	Strategic Vision	8		
	Employee Centricity			8
	Performance Driven		7	
Customer Orientation	Customer Centricity	8		
	Lead by Example			7
ICT and Process Infrastructure	Continuous Learning	8		
	Digital Skills Advancement		8	
	Collaboration	6		
Talent and Capability Development	Empowerment	8		
	Teamwork			7
	Recognition			7
Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment	Creativity and Innovation	8		
	Risk Taking	5		
	Resilience			5
Total Frequency		**51**	**15**	**34**

Transformational leadership theory, characterised by idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to exceed their own self-interests for the good of the organisation (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass, 1999; Gonfa, 2020). The analysis reveals that several competencies align closely with this theory. Under the strategy orientation, the competency of strategic vision is highly relevant to transformational leadership. In this study, all eight retailers emphasised the importance of strategic vision in guiding digital implementation. They highlighted how a clear strategic vision helps anticipate future trends, set long-term goals, and inspire team alignment, which is important for successful digital implementation. Additionally, customer centricity, a key competency under customer orientation, aligns with transformational leadership. Retailers who prioritise customer needs and focus on delivering exceptional value can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. In this study, all eight retailers demonstrated strong leadership competencies in understanding and meeting customer needs through digital tools, which is a characteristic of transformational leadership.

Moreover, the competencies of continuous learning and collaboration fall under ICT and process infrastructure, which also align with transformational leadership. Retailers in this study emphasised the importance of continuous learning and collaboration, recognising that staying updated with technological trends and working effectively as a team is important for effective digital implementation. They encourage continuous learning and development to create an environment where staff are motivated to acquire new skills and adapt to technological changes. Empowerment, a core competency that aligns with transformational leadership, was highlighted by all eight retailers as essential in enhancing team engagement and efficiency, particularly in managing digital initiatives. Creativity and innovation, critical

competencies for fostering an innovative culture and organisational commitment, are also central to transformational leadership. Retailers who encourage creativity and innovation can drive continuous improvement and foster a supportive environment for digital implementation. In this study, all eight retailers recognised the importance of these competencies in achieving successful digital implementation. Lastly, risk-taking, a competency under innovation culture and organisational commitment, fits well with transformational leadership. Retailers assess the risk tolerance of their team and adapt their approach to encourage calculated risks that drive innovation. Five retailers in this study emphasised the importance of risk-taking in fostering an innovative culture and achieving organisational commitment.

Situational Leadership theory proposes that the most effective leadership style depends on the situation and the followers' level of competence and commitment and that leaders should adjust their approach accordingly (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). Recent literature confirms the effectiveness of situational leadership theory, highlighting its positive impact and emphasising the importance of adapting leadership styles to the specific needs and maturity levels of followers to ensure the most effective approach for any given situation (Rodić & Marić, 2021; Pedroso et al.,2021). Within the dimension of strategy orientation, performance-driven competency aligns with situational leadership. Retailers adapt their approach to meet performance goals and respond to changing market demands. Seven out of eight retailers highlighted the importance of being performance-driven, demonstrating flexibility and adaptability in their leadership practices. Furthermore, digital skills advancement, another competency under ICT and process infrastructure, aligns with situational leadership. Effective retailers ensure their teams are well-equipped with the necessary digital skills to handle technological changes and challenges. Eight retailers in this

study recognised the importance of digital skills advancement in achieving successful digital implementation.

Authentic leadership theory emphasises the genuineness and integrity of the leader, who is self-aware, transparent, and ethical, fostering trust and loyalty among their followers (Covelli & Mason, 2017; Helmuth et al., 2023). Authentic leadership has been shown to have a positive impact on various aspects of organisations, including employee well-being and organisational outcomes (Adams, 2020; Thomas, 2023). Employee centricity under strategy orientation aligns with authentic leadership. Retailers who prioritise the well-being and development of their employees can build strong, trust-based relationships. In this study, eight retailers demonstrated a commitment to employee centricity, recognising its importance in achieving successful digital implementation. Leading by example, a competency that fits well with authentic leadership, was emphasised by seven retailers as fundamental for driving customer orientation behaviours and practices. Teamwork and recognition, competencies under talent and capability development, also align with authentic leadership. Retailers foster a collaborative environment and recognise the contributions of their team members to maintain high engagement and motivation. Seven retailers highlighted the importance of teamwork and recognition in developing talent and enhancing capability for digital implementation. Finally, resilience, a competency under innovation culture and organisational commitment, aligns with authentic leadership. Retailers help their employees cope with adversity and maintain a positive outlook, fostering resilience in the face of challenges. Five retailers in this study recognised the importance of resilience in fostering an innovative culture and achieving organisational commitment.

Table 4.5 provides an overview of the leadership competencies for successful digital

implementation, categorised under its theoretical foundations of Transformational, Situational, and Authentic Leadership theories.

Table 4.5: Overview of Leadership Competencies Theoretical Foundations

Theoretical Foundations	Leadership Competencies	Authors
Transformational Leadership	The competencies are Strategic Vision, Customer Centricity, Continuous Learning, Collaboration, Empowerment, Creativity and Innovation, and Risk Taking. Transformational Leadership aligning the organisation with a strategic vision and prioritising customer centricity. Leaders promote continuous learning to adapt to digital challenges, emphasise collaboration and teamwork, and empower employees to enhance motivation and commitment. By driving creativity, innovation and encouraging risk-taking, the leaders create a dynamic culture that supports change and continuous improvement, ensuring long-term success in the digital era.	Avolio et al., 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass, 1999; Gonfa, 2020
Situational Leadership	The competencies are Performance Driven and Digital Skills Advancement. Situational Leadership is key to successful digital implementation by being performance-driven and focusing on digital skills advancement. Leaders adapt their management styles to meet the evolving needs of their teams, ensuring that performance remains high and digital skills are continuously developed. This adaptability allows organisations to navigate digital challenges effectively, fostering an environment where teams can thrive and excel.	Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Pedroso et al.,2022; Rodić & Marić, 2021
Authentic Leadership	The competencies are Employee Centricity, Led by Example, Teamwork, Recognition and Resilience. Authentic Leadership is essential for successful digital implementation, with a focus on employee centricity and leading by example. Leaders emphasise teamwork and recognition, fostering a supportive and collaborative environment. By demonstrating resilience, authentic leaders inspire their teams to overcome digital challenges and adapt to new opportunities, ensuring sustained success and innovation.	Adams, 2020; Covelli & Mason, 2017; Helmuth et al., 2023; Thomas, 2023

This analysis demonstrates how the identified leadership competencies align with transformational, situational, and authentic leadership theories. It further illustrates their application and adaptability to diverse organisational needs during digital implementation. These alignments provide a structured framework to drive effective leadership practices, enhance organisational effectiveness, and ensure digital success. By leveraging these competencies, the CSO can better support and achieve successful digital implementation.

4.15 Leadership Theories Contribution for Successful Digital Implementation

The study further explores each leadership theory's contribution through its aligned competencies. This analysis identifies the most impactful leadership styles for digital implementation. Figure 4.27 shows the contributions of transformational, situational, and authentic leadership theories, highlighting their roles in shaping competencies for successful digital implementation.

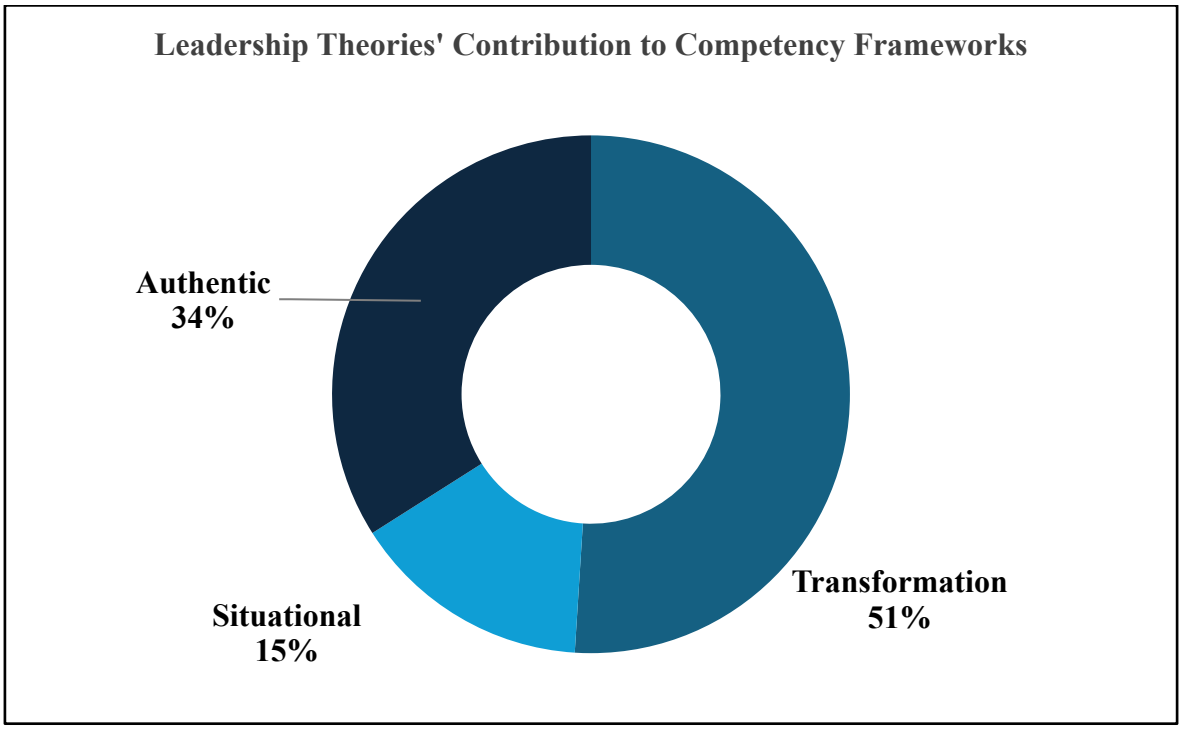


Figure 4.27: Leadership Theories' Contribution to Competency Frameworks

The chart briefly illustrates that Transformational Leadership, accounting for 51% of the distribution, plays a pivotal role in driving strategic initiatives that inspire and motivate organisational growth and development. This is particularly evident in competencies related to strategic vision, customer centricity, continuous learning, collaboration, empowerment, risk-taking, creativity and innovation. Situational Leadership, representing 15% of the competencies, underscores the necessity for adaptability and responsiveness in leadership, particularly in environments characterised by rapid technological changes or varying performance demands. This theory proves important in managing an organisation's dynamic aspects, especially in areas of performance-driven and digital skill advancement. Authentic Leadership, comprising 34% of the framework, highlights the importance of ethical practices, genuine relationships, and the holistic well-being of employees. It plays a fundamental role in fostering environments where employee centricity, lead by example, teamwork, recognition and resilience are prioritised.

Understanding the proportion of leadership theories' contributions to the competency frameworks is important to help identify which leadership styles are most effective in driving digital implementation within retail organisations. This knowledge allows retailers to adopt and enhance the competencies that align with the most impactful theories, ensuring their leadership approach is both relevant and effective. This analysis also recognises the significant roles of situational and authentic leadership alongside transformational leadership, highlighting the need for a balanced and adaptable leadership strategy. This balance ensures that leadership practices are not only innovative and inspiring but also ethical, responsive, and deeply attuned to the needs of employees and the organisation.

Lastly, this analysis provides a strategic roadmap for the CSO to develop a robust

leadership framework that can navigate the complexities of digital implementation, ultimately leading to sustainable success and competitive advantage in the digital era.

4.16 Relational Perspective of Leadership Competencies in Digital Implementation

Based on the interview analysis, the feedback from retailers reveals the existence of relationships between specific competencies, indicating a shared influence that potentially enhances overall leadership effectiveness. Different competencies relate and collectively contribute to nurturing effective leadership, which is essential for navigating digital implementation (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). For instance, the relationship between empowerment and creativity innovation emerged distinctly. Interview responses highlighted that when the CSO proposes new digitalisation projects, Retailer 2 shared their dynamic approach to budgeting, which empowers innovation, “Instead of sticking to rigid, long-term plans, we allocate a small initial amount of money to test new ideas. If these ideas show potential, we quickly increase funding, encouraging iteration and innovation." Another retailer, Retailer 3, highlighted how this empowerment fosters creativity, “My role requires me to be receptive to new possibilities. I actively empower my team to experiment and take risks, fostering an innovative mindset”.

Retailer 5 emphasised that a key aspect of fostering an innovative environment is learning from mistakes. He mentioned, "I encourage mistakes in my team. I like it when they make mistakes because it is the best way to learn.” This sentiment was echoed by Retailer 6, who highlighted the importance of sharing both successes and failures within the organisation, "Just as we do sessions to showcase our successes, we also discuss where we have failed, ensuring these stories are told in a way that focuses on learning, not blaming the person whose idea it was". These insights underscore the relationship between empowerment

and innovation, suggesting that when leaders empower their employees, it increases engagement at work, fostering innovation (Tian & Zhang, 2020). This aligns with the perspective that empowerment allows employees to express themselves without fear of negative consequences. According to Echebiri (2020), empowerment is related to innovation through structural and psychological empowerment. Structural empowerment provides resources and opportunities for innovation, while psychological empowerment, involving meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, motivates creativity and autonomy.

A relationship was identified between strategic vision and customer-centricity among leaders. The interview data illustrated how a customer-focused approach shapes business strategy. This influence is evident in retailers' comments, highlighting their dedication to centring customer needs in service design and strategic direction. Retailer 2 expressed, "When designing service methods, we truly place the customer at the core, considering their needs, preferences, and timing. Our digital initiatives have significantly enhanced our understanding of customer-centric design". Another Retailer 3 noted, "Customer priority is ingrained in our values. All strategic decisions are fundamentally customer-oriented". Further reinforcing this perspective, Retailer 4 shared, "Our decision-making process is heavily influenced by the customer's voice" and added, "Often, it's our customers who guide us towards innovative ideas". Additionally, the importance of a clear customer-focused vision was discussed by retailer 5, who stated, "It's important to have a final vision that starts with understanding the customer, what they desire, how their needs are evolving and then communicate this vision across the business to ensure alignment and action". The study found that a retailer's dedication to customer orientation is related to organisational commitment and a more defined business strategy. This relationship underscores customer orientation not only as a strategic asset but as a fundamental leadership

quality for guiding modern businesses.

Another relationship was found between the competence of Lead by Example, which is related to empowerment. Retailer 3 noted, “Our staff sees how I align decisions with our core values, which has a big impact. They find it inspiring and feel more confident to take the initiative. Leading by example empowers my team to take charge". This shows that leading by example enhances a retailer's ability to empower employees, demonstrating trust and respect for the team's capabilities. This method boosts team confidence and encourages proactive behaviour, reinforcing the retailer's role as a role model. The findings underscore the profound relationship of leadership competencies within the CSO. The data analysis reveals that competencies such as innovation, empowerment, customer centricity, and leading by example are not isolated competencies but can be connected, each one strengthening the effectiveness of the others (Živković, 2022).

During the interviews, retailers displayed diverse leadership styles, predominantly centred around Transformational leadership principles. Although retailers integrated aspects of Transformational and Authentic leadership, Transformational leadership was more frequently mentioned, likely due to its association with change and innovation, which are the key elements in digital implementation. Interestingly, while three retailers noted that they employ elements typical of Situational leadership, only one retailer identified their practices as Situational. This discrepancy suggests a potential lack of awareness or understanding of the Situational leadership framework among the retailers despite their engagement with its competencies.

This finding indicates a gap between the practical application of leadership styles and the theoretical frameworks used to categorise them. While retailers are implementing

competencies associated with various leadership theories, their familiarity and comfort with Transformational leadership, particularly given its relevance to driving change, may influence their identification and articulation of their leadership approach. This misalignment between practice and theory suggests that retailers might not fully recognise or articulate the full spectrum of their leadership styles, especially those aspects that align with Authentic and Situational leadership. This aspect of the study reveals an area for further exploration, aiming to bridge the gap between the leader's practical execution and their theoretical understanding within the digital implementation landscape.

4.17 Preliminary Leadership Model for Digital Implementation Success

Based on this study's analysis of insights gathered from interviews and relevant literature, a conceptual framework has been developed to understand the role of leadership in navigating successful digital implementation. The framework is adapted from Pihir et al.'s (2018) five fundamental dimensions essential to the digital maturity process.

First, Strategic Orientation involves setting a clear vision for the organisation, supported by effective leadership and management practices that guide the strategic direction. Building upon this, Customer Centricity is fundamental to continuously monitor and predict customer needs, ensuring that the organisation remains responsive and aligned with market demands. In order to support this effort, the ICT and Process Infrastructure dimension covers the sufficiency of technological resources and the management of business processes, which are important for sustaining the organisation's operational and strategic goals.

Talent and Capability dimension is important for sustaining a competitive advantage,

as investing in human capital improves the workforce's knowledge and skills. Finally, fostering an Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment is essential for promoting and embedding a culture of innovation within the organisation, ensuring continual improvement and adaptation.

Figure 4.28 illustrates the preliminary Leadership Model for Digital Implementation Success derived from this study.

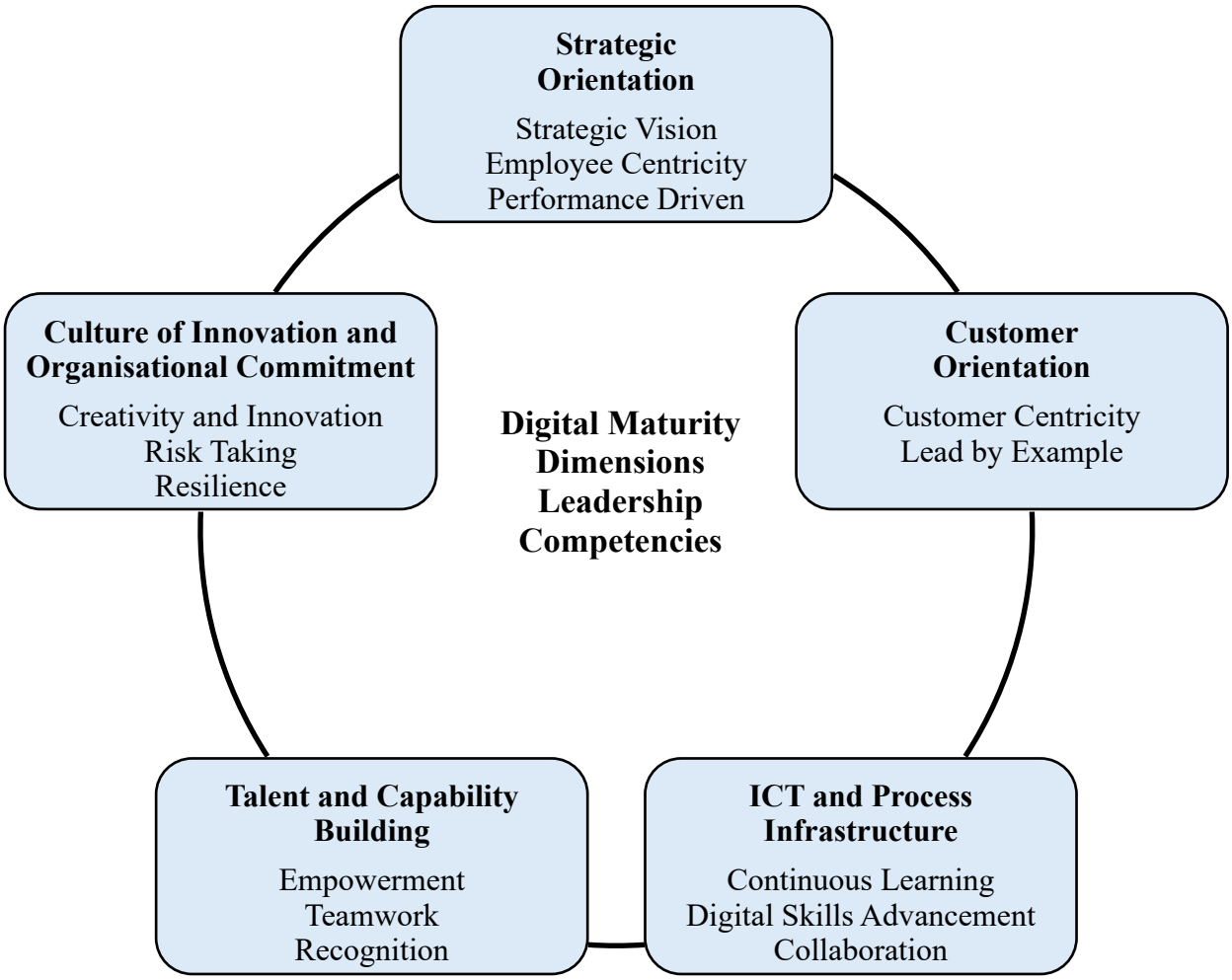


Figure 4.28: Preliminary Leadership Model for Digital Implementation Success

Note. Adapted from Pihir et al.'s (2018).

This study has resulted in a comprehensive description of the leadership competencies required for effective leadership in digital implementation for retail, particularly in the CSO. Based on the analysis, each competency description has been summarised and presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Leadership Competencies for Successful Digital Implementation in the CSO

Competence	Description
1. Strategic Vision	Competency to identify market trends and anticipate shifts in the retail industry, effectively communicating their impact to align organisational efforts and digital initiatives towards maximising potential benefits in the business.
2. Employee Centricity	Competency to prioritise the well-being and development of site staffs, recognising them as the core asset of the business and ensuring their alignment with digital initiatives.
3. Performance Driven	Competency to adjust leadership styles to drive business performance through strategic digital initiatives. Retailers quickly adjust to digital trends and customer needs, optimising processes at retail sites to achieve key business performance indicators such as fuel, retail convenience, lubricants and customer loyalty.
4. Customer Centricity	Competency to accurately identify and anticipate customer preferences and needs in a digital context, using data analytics to enhance customer experience at retail sites, ensuring alignment with strategic goals, and improving services like mobile payments and loyalty programmes.
5. Lead by Example	Competency to embody principles of integrity and dedication, inspiring site staff through personal demonstration of expected behaviours and values, particularly in adopting and utilizing new digital tools and technologies.
6. Continuous Learning	Competency to foster an atmosphere where constant learning and adaptation are valued, ensuring that the business stays competitive in the rapidly evolving retail landscape, and equipping staffs with the latest digital skills and knowledge.
7.Digital Skills Advancement	Competency to enhance digital skills across the business, leveraging technological advancements such as digital payment systems, automation and data analytics for improved productivity and efficiency at retail sites.

Table 4.6 continued

8. Collaboration	Competency to foster cooperative working relationships within and across teams, encouraging open communication, mutual support, and the sharing of knowledge and resources to achieve common goals in digital implementation projects.
9. Empowerment	Competency to delegate authority and provide necessary resources, enabling site managers and staff to effectively implement and manage digital tools and processes, driving organisational objectives.
10. Teamwork	Competency to promote collaborative atmospheres at all levels, where diverse ideas and perspectives can merge to create innovative solutions for enhancing the retailer and customer experience through digital means.
11. Recognition	Competency to recognise and reward efforts and achievements, reinforcing desired behaviours and outcomes among staffs, particularly those contributing to digital innovation and operational excellence.
12. Creativity and Innovation	Competency to envision the retail atmosphere from unique perspectives, generating new ideas, strategies, products, or services that proactively meet customer needs and solve problems through digital innovations.
13. Risk Taking	Competency to embrace uncertainty and take calculated risks, encouraging innovation and growth in digital initiatives while managing potential downsides effectively in the retail business.
14. Resilience	Competency to withstand and recover from setbacks, maintaining a positive attitude and perseverance in the face of challenges, ensuring sustained progress towards organisational goals, particularly during the transition to digital operations.

4.18 Conclusion

This chapter presented the results and discussion on the leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation in the CSO. A detailed overview of the demographic and site profiles of the interview participants demonstrated their diversity and relevance to the study.

The results identified fourteen key leadership competencies distributed across five dimensions of digital maturity adapted from Pihir et al. (2018). Strategy Orientation includes strategic vision, employee centricity, and performance-driven approaches. Customer Orientation focuses on customer centricity and leading by example. ICT and Process Infrastructure emphasises continuous learning, digital skills advancement, and collaboration. Talent and Capability Development covers empowerment, teamwork, and recognition. Finally, Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment highlight creativity and innovation, risk-taking, and resilience. These competencies align with transformational, situational, and authentic leadership theories, offering structured insights into their practical application for digital implementation.

Overall, this chapter provided the results of an in-depth analysis of the leadership competencies fundamental for supporting successful digital implementation. By understanding and cultivating these competencies, the CSO can better adapt to digital implementation challenges, drive innovation, and enhance organisational resilience and commitment in the ever-evolving digital landscape.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Overview

This chapter summarises the key findings of the study, which investigated the leadership competencies required for successful digital implementation for retailers at the CSO in Malaysia. It begins with an exploration of emergent themes. The study identified fourteen leadership competencies distributed across five dimensions of digital maturity: (1) Strategy Orientation, (2) Customer Orientation, (3) ICT and Process Infrastructure, (4) Talent and Capability Development, and (5) Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment. These competencies align with Transformational, Situational, and Authentic Leadership theories. The chapter also discusses the significance and limitations of the study, highlighting its theoretical and practical implications. It further recommends a conceptual framework based on the findings, integrating them into performance management and training programmes.

5.2 Emergent Themes

This study emerged with five primary themes and fourteen sub-themes. The five primary themes are strategy orientation, customer orientation, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development, innovation culture, and organisational commitment, which are fundamental to the digital maturity process for achieving success in digital implementation (Pihir et al., 2018). Fourteen leadership competencies associated with the five dimensions have been identified. The analysis revealed major themes and subthemes that collectively explain the multidimensional aspect of successful digital implementation

through a leadership competencies lens. This implies that the organisation has effectively integrated digital technologies across all business areas, transforming its operations and enhancing value delivery to customers.

The strategic orientation of an organisation encompasses three key competencies: Strategic Vision, Employee Centricity, and Performance Driven. Customer orientation, on the other hand, is centred on two subthemes, Customer Centricity and Lead by Example. The third theme, ICT and Process Infrastructure, includes subthemes such as Continuous Learning, Digital Skills Advancement, and Collaboration. The fourth major theme focuses on Talent and Capability Development and encompasses subthemes, including Empowerment, Teamwork, and Recognition. The final theme centres around Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment, associated with three subthemes, Creativity and Innovation, Risk Taking, and Resilience.

5.2.1 The Leadership Competencies for Strategy Orientation in Successful Digital Implementation

This study highlights the important role of strategic vision in leadership competencies fundamental for the successful digital implementation at the CSO. A strategic vision in the digital era involves a forward-thinking approach that leverages digital technologies and encourages a digital mindset to achieve successful digital transformation (Hensellek, 2022). Leaders who can articulate a compelling digital vision are fundamental as they secure commitment and inspire followers toward a shared objective. In the context of digital implementation at the CSO, this strategic vision must be not only transformative but also multidimensional, extending across various facets of the organisation. The strategic vision is foundational, and the effectiveness of digital transformation is significantly

enhanced when driven by clear visionary leadership (Eberl & Drews, 2021). The retailers need to develop a clear, comprehensive, and inspiring vision that aligns with the organisation's values and objectives. This vision must be effectively communicated across all levels of the organisation to ensure alignment with the key digital objectives. Imran et al. (2020) emphasise that a well-articulated vision facilitates digital progress by integrating digital initiatives into the organisation's strategic framework, guiding every decision and action towards this unified goal. Furthermore, the role of leaders extends beyond vision setting, and it involves the strategic mobilisation of resources, alignment of team efforts, and the establishment of quantifiable objectives and incentives to ensure the realisation of digital goals (Eberl & Drews, 2021). In conclusion, the successful digital implementation at the CSO requires leaders who are not only visionaries but also adept in implementing these visions through effective strategic management and organisational alignment.

Employee centricity is fundamental in driving successful digital implementation, as highlighted in this case study at the CSO. Commitment to continuously investing in human capital has been fundamental in achieving digital success. Miller (2023) confirms the important role that human capital plays in promoting employee engagement and the overall well-being of employees in the workplace. Furthermore, organisations that create meaningful work experiences facilitate organisational transformation, a practice emphasised as essential for employee-centric approaches. At the CSO, retailer's practices prioritising employee value and well-being are a foundation for maintaining a motivated and effective workforce. Leaders play an important role in fostering employee well-being, which ultimately contributes to organisational effectiveness and productivity (Murphy, 2024). This includes emphasising the benefits of family-friendly practices, which have been effectively implemented to ensure that employees feel valued and supported. Additionally, the role of

organisation culture in enhancing employee well-being is critically acknowledged by retailers at the CSO. According to Li and Hu (2024), a culture that promotes respect and inclusiveness significantly enhances employee well-being. Bello et al. (2024) highlight the benefits of fostering a work-life balance, which supports the physical and emotional health of the workforce and contributes to a sense of belonging and commitment to the organisation. Overall, the retailers at the CSO, with its focus on valuing people, investing in human capital, and promoting holistic well-being, has been fundamental to its successful digital implementation.

Performance-driven leadership competencies have enhanced digital implementation success at the CSO. The business practices place significant emphasis on performance as a key indicator of success in achieving the business strategy. Gwarzo and Bahari (2021) highlighted the importance of performance-driven leadership, particularly in the use of key performance indicators (KPIs) to drive strategic, quantifiable outcomes. At the CSO, the outcomes include achieving business growth, innovating products, receiving positive customer feedback, and gaining external validation such as industry accreditations and awards for excellence. It significantly impacts organisational strategy by ensuring that strategic objectives are clearly defined, measurable, and aligned with the overall goals of the organisation, thereby playing a key role in enhancing overall business performance (Mtau, 2024). The retailers have effectively created change towards a performance-driven atmosphere. According to Sunarsi et al. (2024), leadership should create change and foster a culture in which challenging opportunities become extraordinary successes. This approach is important for the organisation's long-term success and growth, requiring strong leadership competencies to ensure success and maintain competitiveness. Performance-driven retailers at the CSO apply effective communication, motivation, and rewards to drive substantial

performance. The application of these elements is important for achieving organisational success (Meirinhos, 2023). Overall, performance-driven competencies impact organisational strategy in digital implementation by enabling continuous performance measurement (Setiawan & Purba, 2020). This helps align daily operations with strategic goals, promoting accountability and results-oriented behaviour. These competencies ensure actions are strategically aligned, enhancing business outcomes and operational performance. In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that performance-driven leadership competencies are integral to both employee and operational performance enhancement.

5.2.2 Leadership Competencies for Customer Orientation in Successful Digital Implementation

A business's emphasis on customer orientation is fundamental to digital implementation success. The CSO's implementation of customer-centric competencies has been a key factor in its success in digital implementation. According to Madhani (2020), the adoption of customer-focused strategies has significantly enhanced the organisation's digital initiatives and customer engagement efforts, driving its success in digital implementation. Subsequently, it emphasised the importance of integrating change management and employee engagement to enhance customer centricity. Napalkova and Loboda (2022) highlight the vital role of customer relationship management systems and their effectiveness in improving customer engagement and satisfaction. This supports the CSO's use of advanced digital tools to improve interactions and build customer loyalty, demonstrating a practical application within the organisation's strategic efforts to strengthen customer relationships. In conclusion, the integration of customer-centric leadership at the CSO has driven its digital success and positioned it effectively to thrive in a competitive setting.

At the CSO, the retailer's commitment to leading by example has been fundamental in fostering customer orientation and enhancing digital implementation efforts' success. Eldor (2020) identifies leading by example as a powerful method to drive value creation and boost employee engagement. By personally committing to digital transformation initiatives, retailers at the CSO inspire their teams to adopt and champion these changes, fostering a culture of innovation and active participation. Widelska (2021) underscores the importance of leaders being customer-oriented, emphasising that focusing on customer needs is important for guiding organisational strategy and operations. Leading by example involves actively engaging employees with the organisation's goals and adjusting to changes in fundamental values, as employees often imitate the behaviour of their leaders as role models (Eldor, 2021).

5.2.3 Leadership Competencies for ICT and Process Infrastructure in Successful Digital Implementation

At the CSO, the leaders demonstrate that continuous learning is a fundamental competency within ICT and process infrastructure for successful digital implementation. They actively encourage a culture of continuous learning, fostering innovation and adaptability. This aligns with insights from Braojos et al. (2024), stating that continuous learning is important for adapting to changes in the business landscape, as it enhances competencies, reduces transaction costs, and helps owners and managers remain competitive. Leaders play an important role in driving continuous learning to improve organisational performance, especially within a digital context (Hijfte, 2020; Osmundsen & Bygstad, 2021). Additionally, Zivkovic (2022) highlights that continuous learning is facilitated by leadership competencies focused on continuous adaptation and knowledge

enhancement, confirming that the organisation's leadership is well-equipped to drive technological and process innovations. Leaders at the CSO are committed to staying updated on digital trends and solutions, enhancing their ability to lead effective digital implementation. These perspectives validate the CSO approach, demonstrating how continuous learning drives ICT and process infrastructure.

At the CSO, retailers show that they have effectively driven the advancement of digital skills among their staff. The retailers are committed to developing digital skills across all levels to help organisations effectively navigate the digital landscape. Retailers at the CSO emphasise the need for digital skills advancement for their site staff in today's digital workplace. This approach aligns with the findings of Weritz (2022), who emphasises the importance of having a skilled workforce proficient in digital literacy, communication, and data analytics in today's digital era. Barykin et al. (2020) assert that digital skills are essential for the advancement of a digital economy that relies on efficient management of big data, intelligent digital platforms, artificial intelligence and robotics technology. Therefore, it is necessary to develop staff competencies to meet the demand for new high-quality competencies. Retailers at the CSO emphasise digital skill acquisition among their staff through training to adapt to rapid technological changes. Nagalingam et al. (2022) stress the importance of training in maintaining a competitive edge in a digital ecosystem. As employees' skills can become outdated, continuous learning and skill updates are essential for organisational growth in technological advancements.

Retailers at the CSO demonstrate collaboration for steering the successful digital implementation efforts. Collaboration can enhance an organisation's performance by fostering knowledge creation and transfer, improving innovativeness, maximising resource

utilisation, and gaining a competitive advantage (Sepuru et al., 2020). The retailers demonstrate a proactive approach by leading stakeholder collaboration for the successful implementation of digital projects. Through open communication, active engagement, and strategic partnerships, they effectively drive the execution of digital initiatives for the benefit of all parties involved. Collaboration among stakeholders in digital transformation involves aligning diverse perspectives, motivations, and capabilities to achieve common goals. Stakeholders influence each other through frame alignment mechanisms in planning, implementation, and communication, ensuring unified interpretations of the digital transformation process (Hoblos, 2023).

The retailers drive collaboration among staff to drive ICT and process infrastructure by aligning team goals and fostering a shared understanding in their digital implementation efforts. They articulate a clear vision, which builds personal and social identification with team objectives (Van Der Voet & Steijn, 2020). This creates a safe environment for experimentation, risk-taking, cooperation, and idea exchange, all essential for innovation in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. By fostering team cohesion, retailers ensure that staff are committed to digital initiatives and can effectively utilise ICT and process infrastructure resources. This cohesive atmosphere allows the team to address challenges innovatively, leading to successful digital implementation and improved business performance (Van Der Voet & Steijn, 2020). Additionally, the CSO leaders fully utilised the use of digital technologies to facilitate collaboration within the team. Digital technologies used to facilitate collaboration within teams include virtual workspaces and various collaborative systems. These technologies streamline collaboration efforts to support the organisation in achieving operational excellence by creating environments that guarantee stakeholder satisfaction, optimise processes, and enhance customer and market orientation (Khatib, 2022). However,

some retailers have reservations about engaging in collaborations due to concerns that their counterparts may potentially acquire significant skills critical to their business and subsequently utilise them to the detriment of their business.

5.2.4 Leadership Competencies for Talent and Capability Development in Successful Digital Implementation

At the CSO, all the retailers recognised that empowerment of team members is a key competency for enhancing talent and capability development within digital implementation efforts. Empowerment within an organisation, involving the sharing of power and motivation of employees toward superior performance, significantly enhances employee performance, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, customer satisfaction, productivity, and overall business growth, with leaders playing an important role in empowering staff (Monica, 2019; Cai et al., 2022). Webber (2020) highlights empowerment as an emerging approach for leading teams, emphasising power sharing, motivation support, and development support, which are linked to enhancing creativity, teamwork, and overall organisational effectiveness. The retailers in the CSO empower their staff to implement digital solutions by allowing them to experiment with new tools and be involved in strategic decisions. The retailers provide constructive feedback, encourage open communication for sharing digital insights, and acknowledge knowledge-sharing behaviours, fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation. According to Joo et al. (2022), effective leaders should drive empowerment by engaging in behaviours that boost employees' work engagement and encourage knowledge sharing. They enhance work engagement by providing autonomy, involving employees in decision-making, and offering meaningful feedback, which increases emotional and cognitive investment in their work. Additionally, leaders promote knowledge sharing by

fostering open communication, creating collaborative opportunities, and recognising and rewarding those who share their ideas and expertise. The CSO retailer's insights emphasise the importance of empowerment as a fundamental practice for successful digital implementation in the business.

Teamwork is another key competency demonstrated by retailers in the CSO's success in digital implementation. At the CSO, teamwork among different groups across the organisation is essential to their success in digital implementation, as the collective capabilities and engagement of every team member enhance the alignment of technology and processes with organisational goals. The teams leverage diverse skills and insights, fostering innovation and ensuring a quick adaptation to new technologies and methodologies. According to Kerns (2019), effective teamwork allows an organisation to navigate the complexities of digital change and ensure that diverse skills and perspectives are harmonised to drive its digital agenda successfully. In the CSO, the retailers acknowledged that managing teamwork effectively is a key leadership practice that significantly enhances managerial effectiveness and team success. In the digital realm, teamwork is essential for executing strategies that promote a culture of employee engagement, providing a competitive edge by ensuring that teams are well-prepared, united, and adaptable to the fast-paced changes and challenges present in digital projects (Kerns, 2019). In the context of achieving successful digital outcomes, the retailer at the CSO underscores the important role of teamwork dynamics and emphasises that structured team approaches, characterised by diverse and strategic team composition, are fundamental for realising effective digital strategies in today's rapidly evolving technological landscape. This highlights the necessity of cohesive and well-composed teams in navigating the complexities of digital transformation and ensuring the successful implementation of digital initiatives

(Guinan et al., 2019). Additionally, the retailers meet the changing needs of their teams, including effectively integrating new technologies into team processes to drive successful outcomes. This approach is supported by Larson (2020), who emphasises that digital technologies are transforming teamwork and underscores the key role of adaptive leadership in ensuring team effectiveness.

Retailers at the CSO acknowledge that recognition competencies significantly impact talent and capability development by enhancing their site staff performance, motivation, job satisfaction, and loyalty while also encouraging skill development and strengthening organisational commitment. The retailers shared their implementation of recognition programmes. They recognise their staff through programmes like "Employee of the Month" and national-level initiatives to celebrate outstanding team members. They also provide personalised verbal praise to acknowledge specific contributions and achievements by their staff. Additionally, they have introduced customised rewards and incentives tailored to employees' preferences, such as gift cards, extra time off, and professional development opportunities.

Recognition of employees plays a fundamental role in nurturing talent and capability development by boosting motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, and retention, all of which are essential for cultivating a competent and effective workforce (Baqir et al.2020; Tamunomiebi, 2020). Organisations must establish and maintain a rewards and recognition system that not only fulfils employees' basic needs but also ensures the presence of skilled individuals, thereby facilitating significant progress within the organisation. According to Científico (2023), recognition can be realised through talent development, which involves investing in employees' skills and providing opportunities for career growth. Additionally,

regular personalised recognition of employees' contributions and achievements is an essential strategy for fostering a supportive workplace environment. For instance, verbal appreciation from leaders significantly influences employee motivation and engagement. In addition, leaders can recognise employees effectively through financial incentives such as pay, bonuses, promotions, and non-financial benefits like holiday trips, club memberships and preferred lunch hours (Baqir et al., 2020). Recognition can also come in the form of supervisor support, which includes empathy, care, feedback, and guidance. Yang (2023) notes that employees are more likely to perceive their organisation as fair and engage more deeply in their work when they see their leaders recognising the contributions of others. It is important for leaders to excel in identifying the strengths and advantages of their team members, enabling them to effectively acknowledge and commend employees for their achievements and contributions to the management practice. Overall, in the CSO, the effective use of recognition strategies drives overall digital implementation success.

5.2.5 Leadership Competencies for Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment in Successful Digital Implementation

At the CSO, effective leadership management of the creativity and innovation process is important for developing successful products, processes, or services throughout the digital implementation. Mumford (2022) highlights the key role of organisational leaders in facilitating the creative problem-solving process and integrating innovative ideas. A business should prioritise innovation and the swift introduction of new products or services to the market to establish a strong reputation among customers in the industry (Kassema, 2019). Retailers at the CSO prioritise frequent communication and knowledge-sharing to foster an innovative atmosphere. Hoang et al. (2020) emphasise that frequent communication

among leaders and subordinates creates a climate conducive to innovation development. During digital implementation, retailers enhance innovation through strategies such as establishing group norms that promote open communication, embracing digital tools, and fostering continuous learning. They also form diverse teams combining seasoned supervisors, tech-savvy staff, and customer service experts to boost collaboration and problem-solving. Kremer et al. (2019) support these practices with evidence-based recommendations, emphasising that managers can lead innovation by developing suitable group norms, strategically designing teams, managing external interactions, and demonstrating robust leadership and organisational support, along with effective performance management. Zhu (2022) indicates leadership has a positive effect on employee innovation culture and organisational commitment, underlining its impact in a digital business landscape.

The CSO 's digital implementation success was facilitated by retailers who maintained risk-taking competencies, demonstrating their ability to effectively drive the implementation. This study found that five retailers emphasised risk-taking as a key competency for fostering innovation culture and organisational commitment, which is important for successful digital implementation. Risk-taking is a key competency for modern leaders in organisations, as they face rapid and complex problems requiring quick decision-making, emphasising its essential role in addressing the dynamic and unpredictable nature of contemporary organisational environments (Çitaku et al., 2020; Promsri, 2019). Hofmann (2022) emphasises the importance of developing risk literacy as a leadership competency, particularly in the context of decision-making under risk and uncertainty, highlighting the need for the CSO 's retailers to undergo training and practise to mitigate the prevalence of strategic mistakes in daily decision-making. This aligns with findings from retailers who

noted that embracing risk-taking fosters creativity, continuous improvement, and strong engagement among teams, thereby enhancing their commitment to organisational goals. Van Kleef et al. (2021) explore the impact of risk-taking, particularly in the context of leadership endorsement, and find that risk-taking can enhance perceptions of prestige, leading to increased leadership endorsement. At the CSO, fostering a risk-taking mindset among retailers has proven to be instrumental in gaining support and driving initiatives, as indicated by retailers who highlighted the importance of inspiring teams to step out of their comfort zones and try new approaches to ensure smooth digital implementation. Risk-taking mediates the positive relationship between empowering leadership and employees' commitment to organisational change fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability (Jung et al.,2020). Retailers emphasised that incorporating risk-taking into their practices has transformed organisational commitment by valuing innovation and encouraging bold ideas. This enhances staff commitment, especially in complex task settings such as digital implementation. The culture of calculated risk-taking displayed by retailers and their staff has driven innovation and improved commitment to digital implementation initiatives.

Digital implementation at the CSO was driven by resilient retailers, demonstrating their ability to navigate challenges and implement digital changes effectively. Retailers acknowledged the importance of resilience in navigating digital implementation uncertainties, fostering team trust, and driving organisational commitment. Resilience, the ability to bounce back from setbacks, is a key leadership trait in the digital era (Senbeto, 2020). Resilience involves creating a culture where team members feel empowered to recover from setbacks, leading to digital implementation success. Resilience is particularly important in the context of digital implementation, where it can help leaders navigate uncertainty and drive sustainable growth (Akib et al., 2022; Ukhova, 2020). Retailers

discussed that integrating resilience into leadership practices has transformed organisational commitment by fostering a culture of continuous improvement and strong engagement. They shared that resilience involves maintaining a positive outlook, which has enabled the implementation of digital solutions that meet unique needs, fostering a loyal and committed staff. Resilience is also a key factor in organisational success, with digital capabilities playing a significant role in promoting resilience and enabling organisations to adapt and thrive (Browder et al., 2023). Retailers shared instances where resilience helped overcome technical issues during digital implementation. They stressed the importance of fostering a resilient mindset to help teams adapt quickly to changes and maintain service standards, which kept morale high during the introduction of new tools and ensured continued commitment. Retailers noted that resilience fostered innovation, improved teamwork, and strengthened organisational commitment. By integrating resilience into leadership, the CSO can build trust, loyalty, and continuous improvement, driving successful digital innovation and reinforcing organisational commitment.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study hold significant implications for both theoretical exploration and practical application in the realm of leadership during the digital era, specifically within the digital implementation context of the retail business in the energy industry. This section explores in detail the theoretical contributions and practical outcomes derived from the research. It aims to lay a solid foundation for future scholarly inquiry while guiding organisational practices in leadership and digital implementation. By doing so, it bridges the gap between academic research and real-world application, ensuring that the insights gained are both informative and actionable.

5.3.1 Theoretical Implications

This study makes a significant contribution by proposing a new conceptual framework designed as a foundation for future research on digital implementation processes for retailers in the energy industry or any sector where strong leadership in the digital era is essential. Initially, it leverages the digital maturity categories and dimensions identified by Pihir et al. (2018) to establish a clear association with the study's objectives and research questions. Subsequently, it identifies the fundamental leadership competencies needed for effective digital implementation, drawing on the top retailer insights. This study outlines the fundamental leadership competencies necessary for managing digital implementation effectively, providing a conceptual basis derived from thorough analysis. The developed conceptual model not only serves as a guide for future research but also aims to enhance the likelihood of successful digital implementation. Additionally, this study opens the door for further exploratory research aimed at deepening our understanding of what constitutes effective leadership in digital implementation scenarios. It encourages future studies to refine and redefine the competencies identified based on the insights gained.

The study's findings underscored the necessity for retailers as leaders to develop experiences and demonstrate leadership qualities that motivate and inspire employees, as advocated by transformational leadership theorists (Bass et al., 2003). These findings align with the principles of transformational leadership, including idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration, which collectively foster a leadership environment conducive to digital success. Additionally, the study validated the effectiveness of transformational leadership practices such as value-centric leadership, customer focus, respect, and employee empowerment. The recognition

concept was expanded to include gratitude for positive and challenging experiences (Yang et al., 2022), supporting the broader leadership values of integrity and resilience in the face of emerging challenges (Ukhova, 2020). Emergent themes also resonated with authentic leadership theories, highlighting the importance of authenticity principles like stewardship, obligation, partnership, and elevating purposes in leadership practice. The interconnectedness of transformational, authentic, and situational leadership styles was evident, supporting a shift towards leadership that emphasises inspiration, vision, and relationships (Deshwal & Ali, 2020). This shift reflects broader economic changes towards organisations driven by service, experience, knowledge, and innovation, requiring a supportive leadership approach.

Furthermore, the study's findings contribute significantly to the concept of digital leadership, providing empirical support and detailed elaboration of the competencies essential for leaders in the digital era. By defining these competencies, the study enriches the Digital Leadership Framework developed by Hensellek (2022), which emphasises the integration of Digital Vision, Digital Implementation, Digital Mindset and Digital Skillset. Hensellek (2022) also underscores the importance of customer and employee centricity within the domain of digital implementation. In principle, the study's detailed exploration of digital leadership competencies offers a robust foundation that contributes to and expands the Digital Leadership Framework by Hensellek (2022). This alignment not only strengthens the theoretical constructs within the framework but also provides practical insights that can guide organisations in developing leaders who are well-prepared to lead digital implementation initiatives effectively. This finding will give a clearer understanding to the scholars within the concept that argue that digital leadership lacks a clear definition and tends to be confused regarding the competencies (Klein, 2020). In the digital transformation field,

scholars reveal that digital strategy research lacks specific guidelines for organisations (Verhoef et al., 2021). Consequently, the study findings enable future scholars to apply and compare how these competencies are practised in the reality of digital strategy and to identify if there are any differences between the theoretical derivation and reality.

The findings offer valuable insights for business leaders pursuing digital implementation success. They suggest re-evaluating leadership strategies in line with those of successful Malaysian retailers. These insights are important for advancing organisational leadership and digital strategy, providing a foundation for further research across various retail contexts in the energy sector.

5.3.2 Practical Implications

The insights gained from the study could lead to the establishment of targeted training programmes designed to enhance specific leadership skills fundamental for digital implementation. These programmes would focus on developing identified competencies outlined by Pihir et al. (2018) in the dimensions of strategy orientation, customer orientation, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development, innovation culture, and organisational commitment. The competencies encompass strategic vision, employee centricity, performance driven, customer centricity, lead by example, continuous learning, digital skills advancement, collaboration, empowerment, teamwork, recognition, creativity and innovation, risk-taking and resilience. By equipping leaders with these competencies ensures that they are prepared to effectively guide their organisations through the challenges of digital change, thereby maintaining competitiveness and adaptability in a fast-evolving technological landscape. Moreover, these programmes could assist in focusing on coaching processes tailored to develop effective leadership competencies fundamental for managing

digital implementation in various organisations.

The study findings provide the value of potential development, creating a competency assessment tool tailored to identify leaders skilled in digital implementation. This tool would be particularly beneficial for the CSO, enabling them to pinpoint ideal candidates for Retailer roles critical to managing retail sites and leading digital efforts. Implementing such a tool would not only enhance the selection process but also increase the chances of business success in the digital era, especially in organisations with emerging digital capabilities. Additionally, the adaptability of this tool across different sectors could facilitate broader improvements in digital practices significantly enhancing the likelihood of success in retailer organisations with lower levels of digital maturity, as well as in other sectors and industries.

This study is significant for the enhancement of organisational adaptation and performance, particularly in the context of digital implementation. Effective leadership is important for an organisation's ability to adapt to and fully leverage digital technologies, thereby boosting overall business performance. Leaders who actively promote and support digital transformation initiatives not only improve operational efficiencies but also nurture a culture that is receptive to change, which in turn benefits all stakeholders. De Araujo et al. (2021) explore the profound transformative impact that such leadership has on business performance, providing empirical evidence that strategic leadership practices lead to significant organisational changes. Similarly, Karauri and Kyongo (2024) illustrate how effective leadership extends beyond immediate business gains, creating substantial value for both customers and employees by establishing an environment conducive to digital implementation. These insights collectively highlight the fundamental role of leadership in

ensuring successful organisational adaptation and performance in the digital era, thus positioning this study as a valuable contribution to the field.

Based on the insights above, the organisation can refine its performance management and training policies by adopting leadership competency-based evaluations and business performance KPIs to measure digital implementation success. Policies should also support the development of leadership strategies aligned with digital goals, promoting organisational growth, adaptability, and innovation.

Utilising the study's findings to enhance leadership effectiveness in diverse organisational contexts involves more than just training and assessment. It includes reevaluating and possibly reshaping leadership roles to align closely with digital objectives and restructuring teams to support effective digital project management. Furthermore, these insights enable organisations to identify and address potential weaknesses in their leadership frameworks, facilitating strategic initiatives for improvement through recruitment or internal development.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory case study approach, using semi-structured interviews with eight retailers at the CSO in Malaysia to explore leadership competencies for successful digital implementation. While this method provided rich, in-depth insights, several limitations should be noted.

The qualitative approach introduced interpretive constraints, as data analysis relied on thematic coding, which may have been shaped by researcher subjectivity (Wolgemuth et al., 2024). As a result, the findings may lack broader reproducibility and objectivity, limiting

their application beyond the specific research context. The sample size was limited to eight participants from a single organisation, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other sectors, industries, or geographic regions with varied organisational structures and digital maturity levels (Subedi, 2021). Although gender diversity was considered, broader organisational roles and industry experiences were not fully represented.

Some participants' reluctance and scepticism about the research purpose may have limited data collection, resulting in underrepresented perspectives, particularly those hesitant to communicate openly (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This could limit the completeness of perspectives on leadership competencies required for digital implementation. Furthermore, the study's context-specific focus on Malaysia's energy sector, particularly a leading organisation with high digital maturity, may not reflect challenges faced by organisations at different digital transformation stages (Subedi, 2021). The findings may, therefore, be less applicable to industries with distinct economic, cultural, or regulatory frameworks.

Building on these limitations, future research could address broader contexts and extend the scope of inquiry to deepen insights into leadership competencies for digital implementation.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study conducted within the CSO, several key recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness and success of leadership strategies within organisations. These recommendations aim to better equip leaders within the organisation and potentially across similar sectors.

Firstly, the fundamental leadership competencies findings of this study can be used

to strengthen and develop leadership competencies within the CSO. The CSO should focus on elevating the existing leadership competencies of its current leaders. This can be achieved by identifying key competencies gaps and providing tailored training sessions that directly address specific needs related to leadership in the digital era. Howes and Taylor (2021) highlight the need for effective evaluation and the identification of competency gaps to enhance leadership development in the oil and gas industry. Additionally, leaders should be encouraged to adopt and integrate the Pihir et al. (2018) conceptual framework into their daily operations. This framework has been specifically designed to develop the competencies identified as essential for effective digital implementation leadership. Engagement with this framework will enable leaders to understand and implement best practices, innovate more effectively, and drive digital implementation initiatives with greater confidence and competence.

Secondly, the insights derived from this study should be systematically integrated into the CSO's leadership development and evaluation strategies. This integration ensures that leaders are aware of and actively developing the competencies essential for digital implementation. Zivkovic (2022) emphasises the importance of leadership development and evaluation strategies activities in developing these competencies, with practical applications including structured leadership development programmes, regular performance evaluations focused on leadership competencies and the establishment of clear benchmarks for leadership performance in digital initiatives. The leaders of the CSO should participate in leadership programmes and create personal development plans to enhance their own leadership competencies as well as those of their team members. Additionally, targeted interventions such as training, coaching, and mentoring should be implemented to support leaders currently in or transitioning into digital transformation roles. Targeted training is

important for developing leaders as it enhances specific leadership characteristics. When designed and delivered with clear goals and effective features, it maximises the effectiveness and returns of such programmes (Day et al., 2021). These interventions should be designed based on the specific competencies and challenges identified in the study, ensuring that they are highly relevant and effective for the leaders within the organisation.

Finally, there is a need to expand research and explore diversity in leadership within the CSO. Broadening the research to include a quantitative analysis across all retailers in Malaysia will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the leadership competencies necessary for digital implementation. According to Foroudi and Dennis (2024), quantitative methods can be used to support qualitative data analysis primarily to enhance completeness, reduce potential biases, and improve the reliability of the conclusions drawn from qualitative studies. This expanded study will enable the organisation to benchmark its practices against a wider set of data points, enhancing strategic decision-making and policy development. Furthermore, it is recommended to examine gender dynamics and contextual differences in leadership. Examining how gender influences leadership styles and effectiveness during digital implementation can reveal valuable insights into the dynamics of leadership within the organisation. The study of gender in leadership is important due to the impact of personal and psychological characteristics on decision-making and management actions (Vieira et al., 2022). Additionally, this study can also expand by comparing leadership competencies in global versus national settings to identify unique competencies that might be required in different retailer locality contexts. This exploration will help tailor leadership development programmes to be more familiar with cultural, organisational, and market differences, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and adaptive leadership approach. While global settings require leaders to possess high cultural intelligence and adaptability to navigate

diverse cultural contexts, national settings demand a deep understanding of local cultural dimensions and alignment of leadership styles with these values (Nwankwo et al., 2024). In retailer locality contexts, leaders must be equipped with competencies that address specific cultural dynamics, power distance, and potential biases to foster effective leadership and organisational success.

These recommendations are important for the CSO to establish a robust framework for enhancing leadership in the digital era. This will ensure that its leaders are well-equipped to effectively navigate and capitalise on the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital era.

5.5.1 Proposed Conceptual Framework of Leadership Competencies for Successful Digital Implementation

The proposed conceptual framework provides a thorough and detailed overview of the five key dimensions of digital maturity dimensions, leadership competencies, and the leadership theories that contribute to successful and effective digital implementation.

Figure 5.1 presents the comprehensive framework that connects the first-order themes (Digital Maturity Dimensions), second-order themes (Leadership Competencies), and aggregate dimensions (Leadership Theories). This framework maps the interconnections between these elements, emphasising their collective importance in navigating the complexities associated with digital implementation. These connections underline how leadership competencies, supported by the dimensions of digital maturity and informed by theory, play a central role in driving successful digital implementation within an increasingly digital-driven organisation.

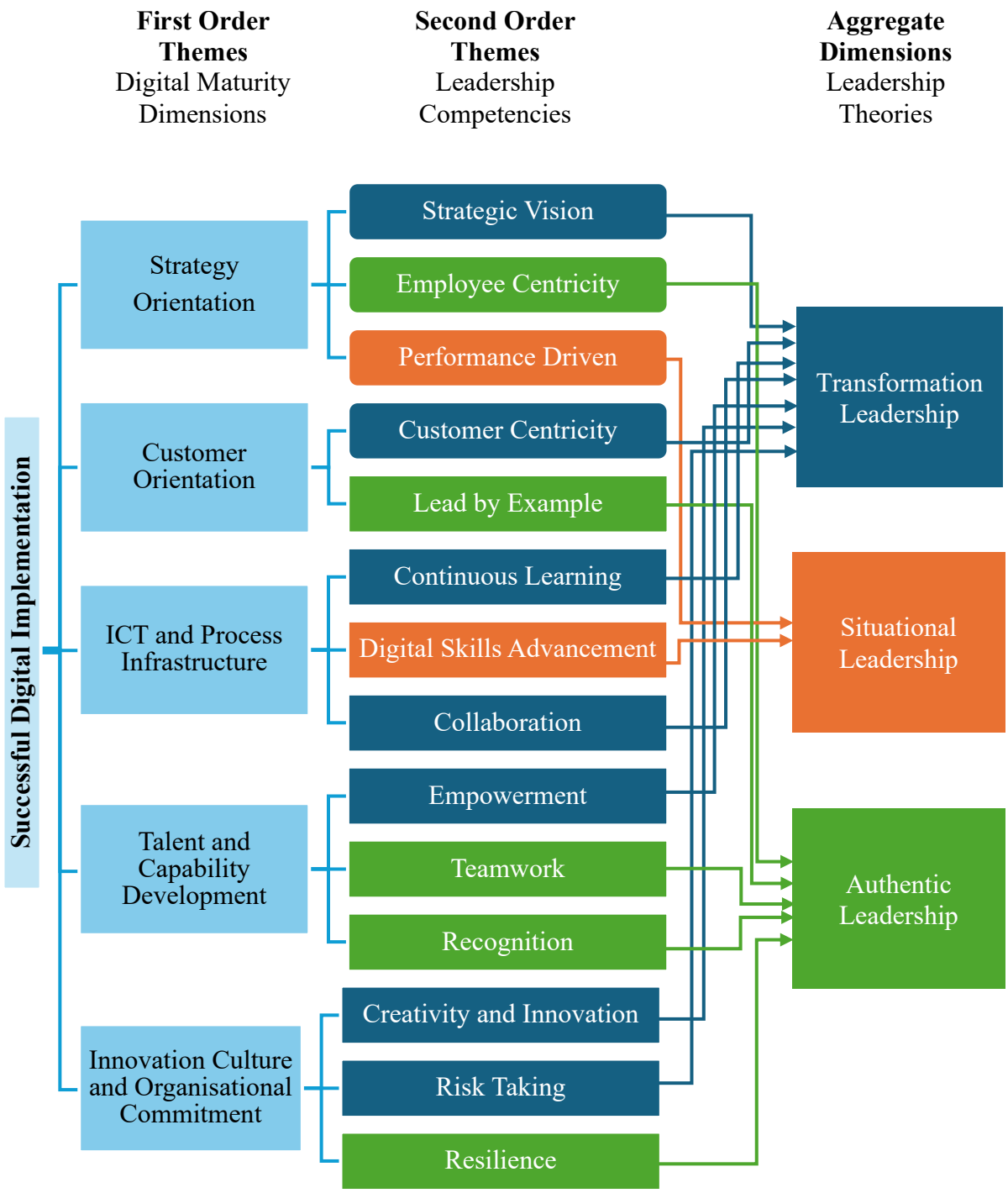


Figure 5.1: Proposed Conceptual Framework of Leadership Competencies for Successful Digital Implementation

The framework starts with five dimensions adapted from Pihir et al. (2018), which are essential to the digital maturity process. The organisation's strategic orientation involves establishing a clear vision supported by effective leadership and management practices. Customer orientation is essential for monitoring and predicting customer needs, while the ICT and process infrastructure dimension covers technological resources and business process management. Investing in human capital enhances talent and capability. Fostering an innovation culture and organisational commitment promotes continual improvement and adaptation. Each dimension encompasses specific leadership competencies that are fundamental for digital implementation. For strategy orientation, the competencies include strategic vision, employee capability, and performance driven. Customer orientation encompasses customer centricity and leading by example. ICT and process infrastructure include continuous learning, digital skills advancement, and collaboration. Talent and capability development involves empowerment, teamwork, and recognition. Lastly, innovation culture and organisational commitment are associated with creativity and innovation, risk-taking, and resilience.

These competencies are mapped onto three leadership theories. Transformational leadership, which has been extensively studied and is well-established in the context of digital implementation, emphasises the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating their teams, driving innovation, and fostering a vision for the future (Avolio et al.,1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Gonfa, 2020). This theory is linked to competencies such as strategic vision, employee centricity, performance-driven, customer centricity, empowerment, continuous learning, and creativity and innovation. Situational leadership highlights the importance of leaders adapting their style to the needs of their team and the specific situation (Marić, 2022; Pedroso, 2021). The study emphasises the necessity of situational leadership for successful

digital implementation, especially in adaptable and responsive situations. The competencies pertinent to this Situational leadership theory include collaboration with others, advancement of digital skills and a focus on achieving performance-driven results. Authentic leadership, as highlighted in this study, emphasises the importance of leaders being genuine, transparent, and ethical, which is important for fostering trust, commitment, openness, and support within the organisation (Adams, 2020; Covelli & Mason, 2017; Thomas, 2023). Competencies associated with this theory include employee centricity, leading by example, teamwork, recognition, and resilience.

Based on the findings and the proposed conceptual framework, several strategic recommendations can enhance the CSO's leadership capabilities for successful digital implementation. The CSO should adopt a strategic orientation by establishing a clear vision supported by effective leadership and management practices. Retailers must develop strategic vision, promote employee centricity, and drive performance. Regular training programmes and workshops can enhance these competencies, ensuring that retailers can effectively guide the strategic direction of digital transformation. Additionally, customer orientation is critical for monitoring and predicting customer needs. Retailers should adopt a customer-centric approach and lead by example. Investing in advanced data analytics and customer relationship management (CRM) systems will help in understanding and responding to customer demands, thereby aligning the organisation with market needs. Strengthening the ICT and process infrastructure is fundamental for ensuring the sufficiency of technological resources and efficient management of business processes. Retailers should focus on continuous learning, digital skills advancement, and fostering collaboration. Providing ongoing training and development opportunities for employees will enhance their digital competencies and support the organisation's operational and strategic goals. Investing

in human capital is essential for sustaining a competitive advantage. Retailers should empower their teams, promote teamwork, and implement recognition programmes. By creating a supportive environment, retailers can boost morale, enhance employee engagement, and drive organisational commitment. Fostering an innovation culture and organisational commitment is important for continual improvement and adaptation. Retailers should encourage risk-taking and resilience, creating an environment where innovative ideas are valued and explored. Supporting employees in overcoming challenges and adapting to changes will strengthen organisational commitment and drive digital success.

A range of studies have underscored the significance of transformational leadership in successful digital transformation and implementation (Akter et al., 2022; AlNuaimi et al., 2022; Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Klein, 2020; Kokot et al., 2021; Schiuma et al., 2024). This study reveals that while previous research primarily emphasised Transformational Leadership for digital implementation, incorporating Situational and Authentic Leadership theories is equally important. Situational Leadership is critical for adapting to the rapidly changing digital landscape, ensuring leaders can provide the appropriate support and guidance based on the context. Authentic Leadership fosters a trustworthy and supportive environment, which is fundamental for maintaining team morale and commitment during digital transformation initiatives. These findings will be instrumental in enabling the CSO to strategise and implement training programmes specifically designed to enhance these competencies.

In conclusion, the proposed conceptual framework for leadership competencies in successful digital implementation offers a comprehensive guide for the CSO to enhance its leadership competencies. By integrating the dimensions of strategic orientation, customer

orientation, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development, and innovation culture and organisational commitment, the framework provides a structured approach to achieving digital maturity. The incorporation of Transformational, Situational, and Authentic Leadership theories ensures a multidimensional perspective, addressing the complexities and dynamic nature of digital implementation. Ultimately, this framework equips retailers to navigate the challenges of digital implementation, fostering innovation, adaptability, and a strong commitment to organisational goals.

5.5.2 Proposed Performance Management Framework with Leadership Competencies Assessment

In alignment with the conceptual framework established earlier in this study, this study also developed a comprehensive performance management framework that incorporates the assessment of leadership competencies. This framework builds on the identified leadership competencies and integrates them into the performance management process, directly linking leadership effectiveness to business performance outcomes. Business performance outcomes are driven by effective leadership competencies (Chow & Singh, 2023; Mai et al., 2022). The integration of these leadership competencies ensures that leaders are not only evaluated based on quantitative metrics but also on their ability to drive digital implementation through effective leadership practices. Based on findings from a meta-analytic review by Ramos et al. (2020), performance management mainly focuses primarily on business performance indicators, assessing retailers based on quantitative metrics.

As illustrated in Figure 5.2, the framework outlines the key components and processes involved in the assessment and management of retailers' performance in the CSO.

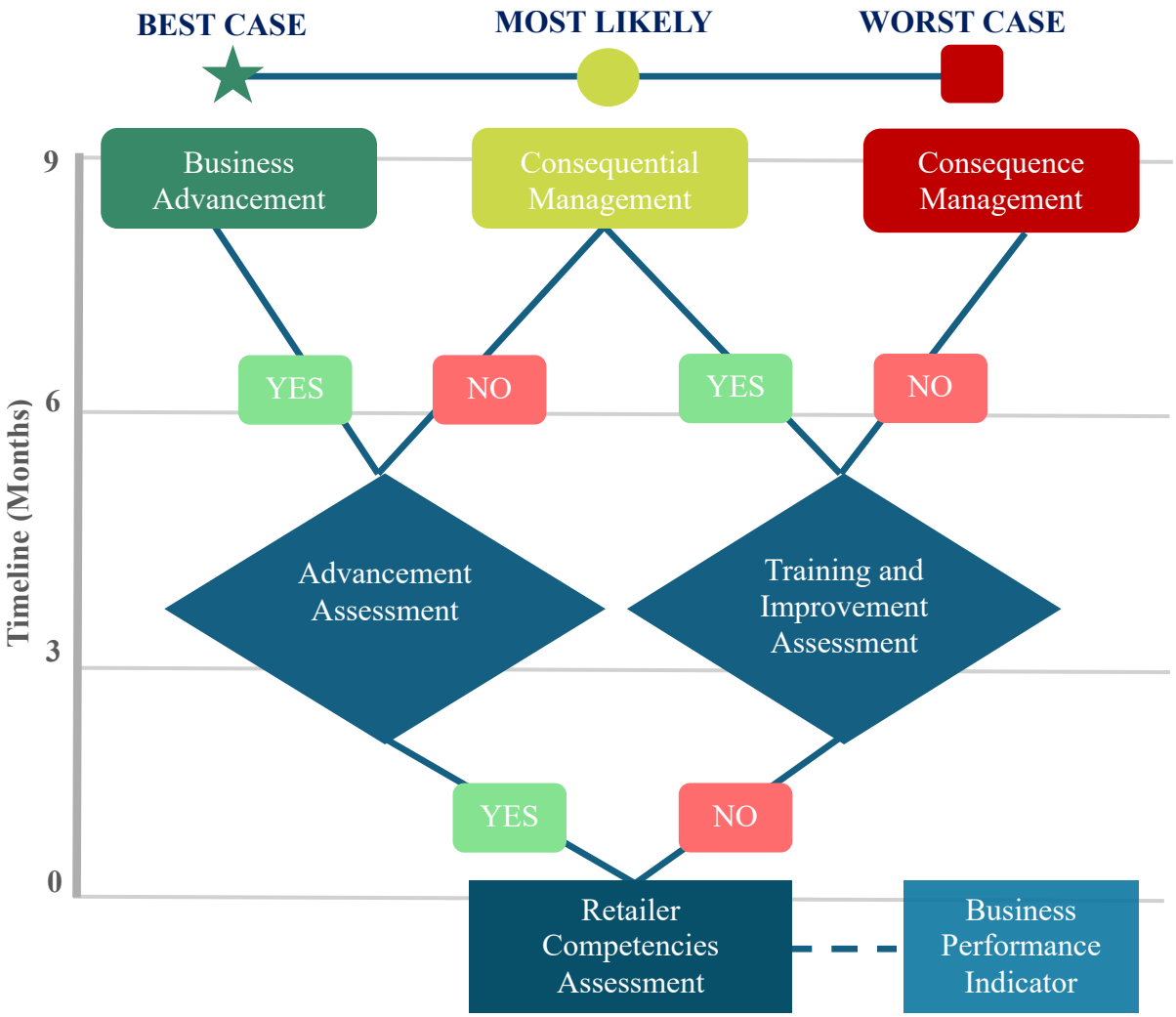


Figure 5.2: Proposed Performance Management Framework with Retailer Leadership Competencies Assessment

In Figure 5.2, the performance management framework includes a decision tree that has been carefully constructed to assess the outcomes of a specific business process over a nine-month period. This decision tree outlines three primary scenarios: Best Case, Most Likely, and Worst Case. Each scenario is accompanied by its own unique pathway and corresponding assessments, allowing for a comprehensive and detailed evaluation of potential outcomes. The diagram outlines the pathways and decision points that determine

whether the business achieves advancement, manages consequences, or falls into consequence management, with assessments guiding the progress at each stage.

Currently, at the CSO, performance management focuses primarily on business performance indicators, assessing retailers based on quantitative metrics. The proposed addition of the retailer competencies assessment introduces a qualitative dimension, evaluating leadership skills through interviews and evidence from digital implementations at sites. Hristov et al. (2022) specifically noted the need to balance qualitative and quantitative indicators in performance management. This new element ensures that retailers meet business performance standards and demonstrate the necessary leadership competencies to drive digital implementation and overall business growth.

The inclusion of best-case and worst-case scenarios in this framework serves as a diagnostic tool for organisations to enhance communication and decision-making. In the business world, scenario planning has been proposed as a tool to diagnose and address disruptions within organisations, emphasising the importance of a pragmatic framework and systems thinking in promoting effective decision-making and ethical deliberation (Borgo & Sasia, 2022). This model helps organisations assess the full range of possible outcomes, from the most favourable to the least desirable, stemming from strategic decisions or external changes. It provides a clear and structured way to outline potential outcomes and set stakeholder expectations.

The Best-Case scenario, represented by Business Advancement, illustrates the ideal outcome where a retailer demonstrates exceptional leadership competencies and business performance, leading to increased responsibilities and management of larger or multiple sites. Conversely, the Worst-Case scenario, represented by Consequence Management,

shows the potential outcome for retailers who fail to improve, ending in a structured and fair process for termination. By incorporating these scenarios, the model emphasises transparency and accountability in performance management. It helps communicate the importance of leadership competencies in digital implementation and their direct impact on business performance. This structured approach ensures that all stakeholders understand the criteria for success and the consequences of underperformance, thereby fostering a culture of continuous improvement and excellence.

Retailers who pass the competencies assessment move to the Advancement Assessment stage, which is an existing part of the process in the CSO. This stage includes a panel interview and case study to evaluate their readiness for increased responsibilities, such as managing a larger site or cluster of sites. This ensures that only those with proven capabilities are considered for managing more complex operations. Conversely, retailers who fail the initial competencies assessment will need to attend the Training and Improvement Assessment programme. This programme is now targeted to address specific key competencies that retailers lack, providing continuous training. Retailers will be re-evaluated based on actual business performance to ensure ongoing improvement. If they successfully address the deficiencies, they are considered to have met the required standards and move to Consequential Management. Consequential Management involves providing continuous support and development for retailers to help them achieve better performance. It is an ongoing process that ensures retailers receive the guidance and resources needed to improve their competencies and meet the required standards. This stage includes regular performance reviews to track progress and make necessary adjustments. Retailers who do not show improvement through the Training and Improvement Assessment enter Consequence Management. This is the final review of a 3-month performance period, and if

the retailer does not show improvement, it will lead to termination.

The model retains the Business Performance Indicators linked via a dotted line to the Retailer Competencies Assessment, highlighting the relationship between qualitative leadership competencies and quantitative business performance metrics. According to Hristov et al. (2022), this ensures a holistic approach to performance management, balancing qualitative and quantitative assessments. The timeline, spanning 0 to 6 months, clearly progresses the evaluation process with logical and easy-to-follow flow and connections. This enhanced performance management model offers a robust framework for evaluating and developing retailers, ensuring a comprehensive approach that supports digital transformation and drives business growth. The integration of effective leadership competencies in digital implementation is important for fostering leadership and enhancing overall business outcomes, making this model a valuable tool for organisational success.

5.6 Conclusion

This case study explores the fundamental leadership competencies for successful digital implementation, focusing on a retailer in the energy industry in Malaysia. Grounded in leadership theories and competencies from the digital maturity dimension conceptual framework outlined by Pihir et al. (2018), this study integrates insights from literature reviews and semi-structured interviews with eight retailers. The study revealed five major themes with fourteen subthemes pertinent to leadership competencies fundamental for digital implementation success. The five primary themes are the dimensions of strategy orientation, customer orientation, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development, innovation culture, and organisational commitment, which are fundamental to the digital maturity process for achieving success in digital implementation (Pihir et al.,

2018). The fourteen subthemes are the leadership competencies identified and associated with the five dimensions. The analysis revealed major themes and subthemes that collectively explain the multidimensional aspect of successful digital implementation through a leadership competencies lens. This implies that the organisation has successfully integrated digital technologies into all business areas, fundamentally changing how it operates and delivering value to employees and customers.

The strategic orientation of an organisation encompasses three key competencies, strategic vision, employee centricity, and performance driven. Customer orientation, on the other hand, is centred on two subthemes, customer centricity and lead by example. The third theme, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and process infrastructure, includes subthemes such as continuous learning, digital skills advancement, and collaboration. The fourth major theme focuses on talent and capability development, encompasses subthemes such as empowerment, teamwork and recognition. The final theme centres around innovation culture and organisational commitment, associated with three subthemes, creativity and innovation, risk taking and resilience.

Furthermore, this study has identified the leadership competencies associated with three leadership theories, Transformational, Situational, and Authentic (Klein, 2020; Philip, 2021; Zhang, 2023). Each competency is specifically aligned with a leadership theory, providing insights into how these competencies can be effectively applied to enhance digital implementation strategies within the CSO. Under transformational leadership theory, the competencies include strategic vision, customer centricity, continuous learning, collaboration, empowerment, creativity and innovation, and risk-taking. For situational leadership theory, the identified competencies are performance driven and digital skills

advancement. Under authentic leadership theory, the competencies are employee centricity, leading by example, teamwork, recognition, and resilience.

The study's limitations include limited sample size, homogeneity among participants, and a focus confined to a single geographic and industrial context, which may have constrained the breadth and diversity of insights into leadership competencies (Subedi, 2021). Additionally, the specific research design and methodology, combined with some participants' reluctance to engage fully, may have limited the depth of the analysis. In order to transcend these limitations and enhance the study's utility, it is recommended that future research diversify the participant pool and expand the investigatory framework to encompass a broader array of industries and regions. Such enhancements would not only deepen the understanding of leadership competencies but also improve the generalizability and relevance of the findings. By integrating diverse perspectives and contexts, subsequent studies can offer richer, more comprehensive insights, fostering a more detailed appreciation of effective leadership across different cultural and organisational landscapes in our increasingly digital world.

This study has proposed two key frameworks to enhance leadership competencies and performance management within the CSO, which is essential for successful digital implementation. The first, the proposed conceptual framework of leadership competencies, identifies five key leadership dimensions, strategic orientation, customer orientation, ICT and process infrastructure, talent and capability development, and innovation culture and organisational commitment. It integrates Transformational, Situational, and Authentic leadership theories to ensure a comprehensive approach to leadership development, aiming to drive digital maturity, innovation, and adaptability within the organisation. The second

framework, the proposed performance management framework with leadership competencies assessment, builds on the identified competencies by incorporating them into the performance management process. This framework emphasises a balanced evaluation of leadership effectiveness through qualitative and quantitative metrics, introducing retailer competencies assessment to enhance leadership skills important for digital transformation. It includes best-case and worst-case scenarios as diagnostic tools for better communication and decision-making, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and excellence. These frameworks offer strategic recommendations for the organisation, including tailored training sessions, integration of competencies into leadership development and evaluation strategies, and expanding research to include a broader range of contexts and quantitative analysis. These initiatives aim to equip leaders with the necessary skills to navigate the challenges of the digital era, ensuring sustainable business growth and competitive advantage.

In summary, this study identifies the leadership competencies that are fundamental to drive and achieve successful digital implementation in a retailer in the energy industry in Malaysia. It highlights how these leadership competencies enable the organisation to adapt to digital advancements, optimise processes, deliver value, and achieve the anticipated business performance outcomes in a highly competitive and rapidly evolving sector. Based on this finding, proposed frameworks for leadership development and performance management have been developed, offering practical tools to enhance leadership effectiveness. Future research should build on these findings by exploring diverse contexts and industries, offering a richer perspective on how leadership competencies contribute to digital implementation across various organisational settings. A broader scope of research could help develop tailored leadership strategies to meet the unique demands of digital implementation and drive organisational success.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide



Leadership Competencies for Digital Implementation in Malaysia: A Case Study of a Retailer in the Energy Industry

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Date : ……

Time : ……

Interviewee : ……

Site Location : ……

Introduction

Dear Participant, thank you for your commitment to contributing to this study. The interview is scheduled to last 45-60 minutes. The discussion will explore the retailer's experience and insights in leading digital implementation initiatives in a retail business setting.

Purpose of the Research Project

This study will identify the leadership competencies required for effective digital implementation. These insights will assist the business in developing retailers with the leadership competencies required to thrive in the digital era.

Ethical Concerns

All interview data will be kept confidential and anonymous to protect the business's interests and respect individual privacy. Consent to record the interview is necessary, as the recording will be used to facilitate accurate data analysis. It is important to emphasise that participants have the option to pause or end the discussion at any time, and their decision will be fully respected.

Benefits of Participating in Research

Participation in this research does not offer any direct personal benefits. However, insights from participants will be important in understanding effective leadership competencies for digital implementation at the retail business in Malaysia. This information may be used in an academic dissertation and shared through conference presentations or scholarly publications.

The cooperation and insights offered by participants are sincerely valued and essential to the academic contribution of this study.

Thank you.

Best regards
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Interview Questions

Section	Questions
1. Introduction	1. To begin, please introduce yourself, your site and share your experience as a retailer leading digital implementation.
2. Strategy Orientation	2. Could you describe the fundamental leadership competencies that have been most effective in guiding strategic direction during digital implementation at your site? 3. How do these competencies influence your approach to managing digital implementation and contribute to the success of your site?
3. Customer Orientation	4. In terms of customer focus, what leadership competencies do you consider fundamental for maintaining strong customer relations during digital initiatives? 5. Could you provide an example of how these competencies have helped your retail site meet customer expectations during a digital implementation?
4. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Process Infrastructure	6. What leadership competencies do you find fundamental for managing the integration of ICT and process infrastructure in digital implementation projects? 7. How do these competencies contribute to the success and help address challenges related to ICT and process infrastructure in digital implementations?
5. Talent and Capability Development	8. In terms of developing talent and building capability for digital implementation, what competencies do you view as fundamental? 9. Could you describe an instance where you have leveraged these competencies to develop a team skilled in managing the demands of digital implementation?

Section	Questions
6. Innovation Culture and Organisational Commitment	10. When considering the development of an innovation culture and enhancement of organisational commitment, what leadership competencies do you consider fundamental? 11. Please share an example of how these competencies played a fundamental role in achieving digital implementation goals.
7. Conclusion	12. Reflecting on our discussion today about leadership competencies across various aspects of digital implementation, can you describe the leadership style you use and how it has influenced the success of digital implementation? Are there any additional insights you believe are important for leading successful digital implementation in your context?