

# Effect of Transformational Leadership Style on the Adoption of Digital Transformation in the Public Sector in Kenya

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## Abstract

Public sector institutions in Kenya are struggling with digital transformation due to ineffective leadership, a lack of understanding of how leadership styles impact this process, and a significant digital divide, which hinders equitable access to services and exacerbates social inequalities, ultimately risking the country's economic and social benefits as outlined in its Vision 2030 plan. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to investigate the effect of transformational leadership style on the adoption of digital transformation in the public sector in Kenya. Transformational Leadership Theory was guiding the study. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population was 230 employees of the CAK involved in digital transformation projects. Yamane formulae was used to calculate a sample size of 146 respondents. Stratified sampling was used to select respondents. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires. A pilot study was conducted in the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) to ascertain the validity and reliability of research instruments. The data was coded and entered into the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 25). Quantitative data from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. The inferential analysis was carried out through regression analysis to test the direct and indirect effects of the study variables. Data was presented in tables. The study results revealed that transformational leadership style has a positive and significant effect on the adoption of digital transformation in the public sector in Kenya ( $\beta=0.253$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). The study concluded that digital transformation in Kenya's public sector is influenced by transformational leadership style. The study recommended that leaders should cultivate transformational leadership styles to effectively communicate the vision for digital transformation and inspire employees to embrace new digital tools and processes.

**Keywords:** Transformational, Leadership Style, Adoption, Digital Transformation, Public Sector, Kenya

**Introduction**

An effective leader influences employees productivity in the desired manner to achieve desired goals such as organizational digital transformation. Different leadership styles, may affect organizational digital transformation (Erdel & Takkaç, 2020). Leadership is a crucial aspect of any organization's success. Effective leadership plays a pivotal role in influencing employee productivity, particularly in the context of achieving organizational goals such as digital transformation. Leadership styles significantly affect how organizations navigate this transformative process (Erdel & Takkaç, 2020). Leaders are essential in shaping the work environment and driving employee engagement. Effective leaders communicate their vision clearly, fostering an atmosphere where employees feel motivated to contribute to organizational objectives.

To effectively lead an organization through digital transformation, leaders must employ specific strategies that align with the goals of the transformation process. Leaders must articulate the vision and objectives of digital transformation clearly to ensure all employees understand their roles in the process (Mwita & Joanthan, 2019). Encouraging employee involvement in decision-making fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, which can enhance productivity and innovation. Implementing systems that recognize and reward employee contributions can boost morale and motivation, driving higher productivity levels. Leaders should promote a culture that embraces change and encourages experimentation, allowing the organization to respond effectively to technological advancements and market demands. Leadership styles can be adopted such as transformational to influence digital transformation (Islam, Juraybi & Alraythi, 2021).

Transformational leadership inspire and motivate their teams. But they also go a step further by helping team members develop their full potential (Al Harbi et al., 2019). They challenge the status quo, encourage creativity, and help people grow both personally and professionally. Transformational leadership is a management style characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate followers to achieve extraordinary results. Transformational leaders articulate a compelling vision and inspire their followers to pursue ambitious goals (Manu, 2022). They motivate their teams by appealing to their values and aspirations. These leaders serve as role models, demonstrating high moral standards and ethical conduct. They earn the trust and respect of their followers through their actions and integrity.

Kenya's public sector institutions, including the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK), are grappling with challenges in adopting digital transformation initiatives. The impact of leadership styles on digital transformation success is unclear, and progress is slow. Ineffective leadership hinders the implementation of digital strategies and service delivery efficiency, leading to public dissatisfaction with government services. Streamlined digital processes can improve access to information and services, impacting citizen trust and engagement. The digital divide within Kenya's workforce and citizens exacerbates these challenges, as leaders struggle to ensure equitable access to digital services. The lack of comprehensive understanding about the impact of digital transformation on leadership styles complicates efforts to identify effective leadership practices. The digital divide further marginalizes vulnerable groups, undermining the goal of equitable access to digital services. Addressing this gap is crucial for identifying potential challenges and opportunities associated with digital

transformation and developing strategies to enable public sector leaders to navigate and lead in the digital age.

### **Theoretical Literature Review**

The study was guided by Transformational Leadership Theory, developed by James MacGregor Burns in 1978, posits that effective leadership involves inspiring and motivating followers to achieve collective goals beyond their self-interests (Ismail, 2018). Burns distinguished transformational leadership from transactional leadership by emphasizing the importance of visionary and charismatic leaders who empower and stimulate followers to exceed performance expectations. The theory assumes that transformational leaders possess certain qualities, such as charisma, vision, and the ability to inspire trust and confidence in their followers, thereby fostering a sense of collective purpose and commitment towards organizational objectives. Transformational leadership theory has been widely influential in leadership research and practice, serving as a foundational framework for understanding leadership effectiveness and organizational change processes.

Owaya (2018), critics of transformational leadership theory have raised concerns about its conceptual ambiguity and the lack of empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness in all contexts. Some argue that the emphasis on charismatic leadership may lead to a reliance on individual leaders rather than building sustainable organizational systems and structures that promote leadership at all levels. Additionally, critics question the ethical implications of transformational leadership, particularly in situations where leaders may exploit their influence for personal gain or manipulate followers' emotions to achieve organizational goals. Furthermore, critics highlight the potential for transformational leadership to reinforce existing power imbalances and inequalities within organizations, as leaders may selectively empower certain individuals or groups while marginalizing others.

Despite these criticisms, transformational leadership theory has found widespread application in various organizational settings, including business, education, healthcare, and government. Many empirical studies have provided evidence of the positive effects of transformational leadership on employee motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance outcomes (Purwanto, 2020). Organizations often seek to cultivate transformational leadership qualities among their leaders through training, mentoring, and leadership development programs. Moreover, transformational leadership has been associated with facilitating organizational change and innovation, as leaders inspire and empower employees to embrace new ideas, challenge the status quo, and pursue ambitious goals.

This leadership style is particularly relevant in the context of digital transformation, where organizations must adapt to rapidly changing technological landscapes. Transformational leaders foster a culture of innovation and agility, essential for navigating the complexities of digital change. They articulate a compelling vision that encourages employees to embrace new technologies and processes, thereby facilitating organizational adaptation and growth in a digital-first environment.

Transformational leaders can significantly enhance employee engagement and satisfaction during digital transformation initiatives, as they create an environment that values

experimentation and creativity. However, some studies suggest that while transformational leadership contributes positively to digital transformation, it may not be as effective as digital leadership in certain contexts. This distinction highlights the need for organizations to cultivate both transformational and digital leadership qualities to ensure successful digital transitions. Ultimately, transformational leadership serves as a catalyst for fostering an innovative mindset and collective commitment, which are crucial for achieving sustainable success in the digital age.

### **Empirical Literature Review**

Transformational leadership can be described as a process that changes and transforms individuals through an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected (Reza, 2019). Transformational leadership is basically concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. CEOs who lead firms that have created outstanding value for the Kenyan public rather than private or personal gain have been profiled from time to time (Abu-Rumman, 2021). However, every leader in a firm needs to understand the principles of renewal for the process to succeed.

According to Bojovic and Jovanovic (2020), transformational leadership can be seen when "leaders and followers make each other to advance to a higher level of moral and motivation." Through the strength of their vision and personality, transformational leaders are able to inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work towards common goals and for this matter aid in adoption of digital transformation. Later, Tintoré (2019) expanded upon this to develop what is today referred to as Bass' Transformational Leadership Theory. According to Bass, transformational leadership can be defined based on the impact that it has on followers. Transformational leaders, Bass suggested, garner trust, respect, and admiration from their followers.

Transformational leaders are individuals whom with their own knowledge, imaginations and ability are able to influence the behavior of people, make conditions for transforming the "soft" variables of transformational arrangement (Kotamena et al., 2020). Those are the variables which are more complicated, compared to the change of so-called "hard" Transformational Leadership - because it includes the "inner", qualitative or mental change of an organization (Crowne, 2019). It is considered that no factor is so crucial in organizations, and so important for their successful functioning and or for their survival.

The optimal profile is characterized by the presence of certain qualities of transformational leadership (Schiuma et al., 2022). They are the leaders' qualities contained in appropriate transformational abilities of leaders and in certain attributes which are assumptions for the use of leaders' skills and for successful performance of leader jobs. Although there is different classification given by Chege (2018), is quoted here. Chege classification of skills of transformational leaders is known as "Four I's" and includes the following skills – idealized influence, – Inspirational motivation, – Intellectual stimulation, – Individualized consideration.

Idealized influence: represents the ability of building confidence in the leader and appreciating the leader by his followers, which forms the basis for accepting adoption of digital transformation in organization (Carreiro & Oliveira, 2019). Without such confidence in

the leader, that is, in his motives and aims, an attempt to redirect the organization may cause great resistance. You can "lead" people if you make them ready to follow you (Khan et al., 2022). If you perform your job well, it is for certain that others (potential followers) will appreciate you and people will believe you.

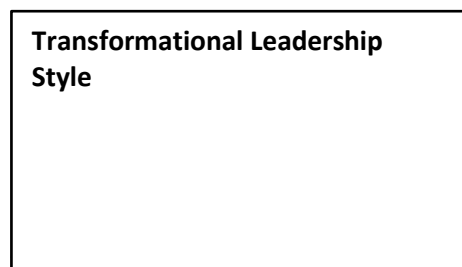
**Inspirational motivation:** This characteristic reflects the extent to which a leader is also capable of being a cheerleader, so to speak, on behalf of his or her followers (Griffin, 2019). These leaders demonstrate enthusiasm and optimism, and emphasize commitment to a shared goal. It is the ability of transformational leader to act as a figure, which inspires and motivates the followers to appropriate behavior (Kubai, 2023). In the conditions when transformational change is being conducted in an organization, the leader has the task of clear and continuous stimulating others to follow a new idea. Transformational leaders should, therefore, behave in such a way, which motivates and inspires followers (Zatu, 2022). Such behavior includes implicitly showing enthusiasm and optimism of followers, stimulating team work, pointing out positive results, advantages, emphasizing aims, stimulating followers.

**Intellectual stimulation:** as transformational leader has an important role in the transformation process of organization (Owuor, 2018). Transformational leader stimulate the efforts of their followers as regards innovativeness and creativity, stimulate permanent re-examination of the existent assumptions, stimulate change in the way of thinking about problems, plead the use of analogy and metaphor. It makes it possible for employees to get creative ideas for solving problems from the followers (Ondari, 2019). It also instills creativity, as well – followers are encouraged to approach problems in new ways. Intellectually stimulating leaders relate to statements such as "I re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate" and "I suggest new ways of looking at how to complete assignments".

**Individualized consideration:** a transformational leader is reduced to the ability of individual analysis of followers (Koveshnikov & Ehrnrooth, 2018). Namely, inclusion of followers into the transformation process of an organization implies the need to diagnose their wishes, needs, values and abilities in the right way. Leaders are invested in the development of their followers – they serve also as mentors and coaches, and take into account individual needs and desires within a group (Khan et al., 2022). Two-way communication is particularly recognized under this dimension. Human wishes and needs are different. Some want certainty, some want excitement and change; some prefer money, and some free time. It is upon the leader to "eaves drop", observe, analyze and predict the needs and wishes of his followers. The leader, who is aware of the difference in needs and wishes of people, has an opportunity to use all those different demands in the right way.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study elucidates the intricate interplay between leadership styles and the adoption of digital transformation within organizations.

**Independent Variables****Dependent Variable****Research Design and Methodology**

The study on adopted a descriptive research design. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive and detailed description of the leadership styles within the Communications Authority of Kenya. Descriptive research design is a type of research design that focuses on describing the characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied (Siedlecki, 2024). The target population for this study encompasses all 230 employees of the CAK involved in digital transformation projects. This included Administration, Technical staff and Subordinate staff. The researcher obtained the sample size of 146 using Yamane formulae (1967). The study employed stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Stratified sampling was used to achieve desired representation from various subgroups in the population.

Data was collected through a questionnaire. A questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data on leadership styles and their perceived impact on adoption. Questionnaires is preferred in this study because they are very economical in terms of time, energy and finances.

A pilot study was conducted in Media Council of Kenya (MCK). A pilot study is a small-scale study that is conducted to test the feasibility of a larger study (Doody & Doody, 2015). Pilot study was carried out with 15 respondents representing 10 percent of sample size. The study tested content validity and construct validity. Content validity refers to the extent to which a test measures the intended content. Reliability was ensured through piloting of research instruments. Piloted data was used to test for internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha. It was used in this study because of five-point Likert scale questions in the questionnaire to determine if the scale is reliable.

After all data has been collected, the researcher conducted data cleaning, which involves identification of incomplete or inaccurate responses and correct to improve the quality of the responses. The data was coded and entered in the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 25). Quantitative data from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics was frequency, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Inferential analysis was carried through regression analysis to test direct effects of the study variables. Data was presented in form of tables. Regression model specification is as follows;

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots \text{Eq 3.1}$$

Where:

- Y Represents adoption of digital transformation
- X<sub>1</sub> Represents transformational leadership style
- ε represents Error term (Disturbance factors) which represents residual
- β<sub>0</sub> Represents a constant
- β<sub>1</sub>, represents the regression model’s coefficients

**Results**

*Response Rate*

The study evaluated the response rate and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Response Rate*

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Responded	126	83.56
Not responded	20	16.44
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The study findings in Table 1 revealed that out of 146 administered questionnaires 126 were fully filled and returned. This gave a response rate of 83.6%. The study revealed that there was a high response rate, which means that the results are likely to be representative of the population that was studied. A response rate of 83.6% is considered to be excellent, and it is higher than the average response rate for surveys of this type. As the rate exceeded 50%, it satisfied Mugenda's (2008) criteria for statistical analysis.

*Transformational Leadership Style*

The objective of the study was to establish the effect of transformational leadership style on the adoption of digital transformation in the public sector in Kenya. A 5-point Likert scale was used where SD symbolized strongly disagree, D symbolized disagree, UD symbolized undecided, A symbolized agree and SA symbolized strongly agree. A total of 7 statements were used to establish the effect of transformational leadership style on the adoption of digital transformation in the public sector in Kenya and responses elicited on a 5-point Likert scale as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Transformational Leadership Style*

Statement		SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Sd
1. My leader clearly articulates a vision for how digital transformation will benefit the organization	F %	41 32.5	54 42.9	5 4.0	17 13.5	9 7.1	3.80	1.23
2. My leader inspires me to think creatively and challenge the status quo when it comes to digital solutions.	F %	39 31.0	49 38.9	9 7.1	19 15.1	10 7.9	3.70	1.27
3. My leader provides me with the resources and support I need to learn new digital skills	F %	37 29.4	48 38.1	10 7.9	20 15.9	11 8.7	3.63	1.29
4. My leader empowers me to make decisions and take ownership of my work during the digital transformation process	F %	37 29.4	54 42.9	5 4.0	21 16.7	9 7.1	3.71	1.25
5. My leader celebrates successes and milestones achieved during the digital transformation journey	F %	38 30.2	53 42.1	6 4.8	20 15.9	9 7.1	3.72	1.25
6. I feel confident in my ability to contribute to the organization's digital transformation because of my leader's guidance and support	F %	30 23.8	59 46.8	7 5.6	21 16.7	9 7.1	3.63	1.22
7. I am excited about the future of the organization because of the leader's vision for digital transformation.	F %	25 19.8	67 53.2	5 4.0	20 15.9	9 7.1	3.63	1.18

Table 2 showed that 95(75.4%) of the respondents agreed that their leader clearly articulates a vision for how digital transformation will benefit the organization. However, 26(20.6%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that their leader clearly articulates a vision for how digital transformation will benefit the organization. As per the survey results, the participants agreed in terms of mean and standard deviation that their leader clearly



articulates a vision for how digital transformation will benefit the organization (Mean, =3.80, Std. dev=1.23). The study by Ziadlou (2021), discerned digital transformation as a positive evolution of health care that has improved communication, increased quality, fortified decision support making, improved knowledge sharing and removed distance and geographical barriers.

Further, 88(69.9%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that their leader inspires me to think creatively and challenge the status quo when it comes to digital solutions. However, 29(23.0%) of the respondents disagreed that their leader inspires me to think creatively and challenge the status quo when it comes to digital solutions. From mean and standard deviation, the respondents agreed that their leader inspires me to think creatively and challenge the status quo when it comes to digital solutions (Mean, =3.70, Std. dev=1.27). Shah and Patki, (2020) exploring the relationship between leadership and digitalization in the eastern cultures, especially India becomes more significant; as the technology is booming and drastically changing how daily activities are carried out as an influence of digitalization.

However, 85(67.5%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that their leader provides them with the resources and support they need to learn new digital skills, contrary 31(24.6%) of the respondents disagree with the statement that their leader provides them with the resources and support they need to learn new digital skills. The respondents also agreed on the mean and standard deviation on the statement that their leader provides them with the resources and support they need to learn new digital skills (Mean, =3.63, Std. dev=1.29). These findings are consistent with the study done by Karakose, Polat and Papadakis, (2021) revealed that school principals' digital leadership skills were clustered under three categories: technology use, managerial skills, and individual skills.

Moreover, 91(72.3%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that their leader empowers them to make decisions and take ownership of their work during the digital transformation process while 30(23.8%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that their leader empowers them to make decisions and take ownership of their work during the digital transformation process. Consequently, the respondents agreed in terms of mean and standard deviation that their leader empowers them to make decisions and take ownership of their work during the digital transformation process (Mean, =3.71, Std. dev=1.25). Schiuma, Schettini and Santarsiero (2021), suggests that the context is rapidly changing, and the rapid development of new capacities linked to innovation is critical to surviving under these new circumstances. The HR Departments of organizations that navigate digital transformation could use the Abilities Model to measure specific behaviors that leaders should demonstrate.

Futhermore, 91(72.3%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that their leader celebrates successes and milestones achieved during the digital transformation journey while 29(23.0%) of the respondents disagree with the statement that their leader celebrates successes and milestones achieved during the digital transformation journey. Consequently, the respondents agreed in terms of mean and standard deviation that their leader celebrates successes and milestones achieved during the digital transformation journey (Mean, =3.72, Std. dev=1.25). The study done by Olbert and Walbrach, (2019) four basic agility fitness programs have been deducted, showing how to achieve a basic agility constitution ("Basic

Physical Workout”), how to build the frame and leadership capabilities to transform the entire organization (“Mental Strength”), how to build and develop the required human capital of the firm (“HR Pentathlon”) and how to transform the company into a testing engine fueling innovation continuously from the inside-out (“Innovation Jump”).

Also, 89(70.6%) of the respondents agreed that they feel confident in they ability to contribute to the organization’s digital transformation because of their leader’s guidance and support. However, 30(23.8%) of the respondents disagreed that they feel confident in they ability to contribute to the organization’s digital transformation because of their leader’s guidance and support. Analysis on mean and standard deviation revealed the respondents agreed that they feel confident in they ability to contribute to the organization’s digital transformation because of their leader’s guidance and support (Mean, =3.63, Std. dev=1.22). Finally, the study revealed that 92(70.0%) of the respondents comply with the statement that they are excited about the future of the organization because of the leader's vision for digital transformation. Moreover, 29(23.0%) of the respondents disagree with the statement that they are excited about the future of the organization because of the leader's vision for digital transformation. However, in terms of mean and standard deviation the respondents in correspondences of the statement that they are excited about the future of the organization because of the leader's vision for digital transformation (Mean, =3.63, Std. dev=1.18). According to Philip, (2021) continued exploration of how companies approach digital transformation and scholarly applications of conventional organizational leadership theories will help reveal the importance of parameters outside the scope of technology and strategy that contribute to successful implementation of new digital technologies.

#### *Regression Analysis*

Regression analysis for the transactional leadership style and the adoption of digital transformation in the public sector in Kenya were performed and the results are as presented in Tables 3.

Table 3

#### *Model Summary*

<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	<b>Std. Error of the Estimate</b>
<b>.754<sup>a</sup></b>	.569	.551	.58629

The results of the regression in Table 3 indicated that  $R^2$  value was 0.569 and R value was 0.754. R value of 0.754 gave an indication that there was a strong linear relationship between transactional leadership style, adoption of digital transformation in the public sector in Kenya. The  $R^2$  indicates that explanatory power of the independent variable was 0.569.

#### *Model Fitness Results*

The analysis employed Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine if the model’s predictive capabilities surpassed those of the mean, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4

*Regression Model Fitness Results (ANOVA)*

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Regression	54.368	5	10.874	31.633	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	41.249	120	.344		
<b>Total</b>	<b>95.616</b>	<b>125</b>			

Table 4 showed that F-statistics produced ( $F = 31.633$ ) which was significant at  $p = 0.000$  thus confirming the fitness of the model. This implies that the multiple regression model was fit for the data. Hence the transformational leadership style have a significant effect on the adoption of digital transformation in the public sector in Kenya.

*Coefficients of Regression Model Fitness*

Regression model coefficients were run in order to use in the regression equation. The study results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Regression Model Coefficients*

	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>		<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>		
(Constant)	.205	.287		.714	.477
Transformational leadership style	.253	.077	.250	3.304	.001

The study results in Table 5 revealed that transformational leadership style has a positive and significant effect on the adoption of digital transformation in the public sector in Kenya ( $\beta_2 = 0.253$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). This implies that an increase in transformational leadership style leads to increase in the adoption of digital transformation in the public sector in Kenya by 0.253 units. Thus, the regression equation becomes;

$$Y = 205 + 0.253X_1 \dots \dots \dots \text{Equation 4.1}$$

**Conclusions**

The study concluded that transformational leadership style plays a crucial role in the adoption of digital transformation. Respondents indicated that their leaders articulate a clear vision of how digital transformation will benefit the organization, inspire creativity, and challenge the status quo. The leaders empower employees to make decisions, provide resources and support for learning new digital skills, celebrate successes, and foster confidence and excitement about the future of the organization through their guidance and vision.

The study's findings contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge on leadership and digital transformation by highlighting the nuanced role of transformational leadership in fostering an environment conducive to digital adoption. While previous literature has often emphasized the importance of digital leadership, this research underscores that transformational leaders can effectively inspire and motivate employees to embrace change,

thereby enhancing organizational agility and innovation. This research contextualizes transformational leadership within the framework of digital transformation, suggesting that leaders who articulate a compelling vision and empower their teams are crucial for navigating the complexities of digital initiatives. By providing empirical evidence that supports the positive impact of transformational leadership on employee engagement and creativity, this study not only enriches theoretical discussions but also offers practical insights for public sector organizations seeking to enhance their digital transformation efforts. The implications are profound; as organizations increasingly rely on digital technologies to remain competitive, understanding the interplay between leadership styles and digital transformation becomes essential for driving successful outcomes in an ever-evolving landscape.

### Recommendations

Public sector organizations should cultivate transformational leadership styles. Leaders should be encouraged to articulate clear visions for digital transformation, inspire creative thinking, and challenge the status quo. Providing resources and support for employees to learn new digital skills, celebrating successes, and fostering a positive outlook on the future of the organization can significantly enhance the digital transformation journey.

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