



Digital Leadership Capabilities in the Era of Generative AI: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda

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Abstract. The rapid proliferation of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) technologies, including large language models and AI-driven decision-support systems, has fundamentally altered the organizational landscape, creating unprecedented demands on leadership capabilities. Despite growing scholarly interest in digital leadership, existing systematic reviews have not comprehensively addressed how GenAI specifically reshapes the competencies required of organizational leaders in the context of digital transformation strategy. This study aims to synthesize the extant literature on digital leadership capabilities within the era of GenAI, identify dominant theoretical frameworks, and map current research gaps. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol, a structured search was conducted across Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Taylor & Francis Online, covering publications from January 2019 to March 2026. Following the PRISMA-guided screening and eligibility process, 10 highly relevant peer-reviewed articles were included in the final thematic and content analysis. Findings reveal several critical digital leadership capabilities required in GenAI environments, including technological literacy, adaptive decision-making, transformational leadership, ethical AI governance, and human-centered leadership. The results further indicate that Upper Echelons Theory and Dynamic Managerial Capabilities Theory dominate the field, while human-machine collaboration and ethical AI governance remain critically undertheorized. This study provides an integrated understanding of digital leadership and GenAI adoption, offering strategic guidance for organizations navigating AI-driven transformation. Practically, the findings inform leadership development programs and digital transformation policy, particularly in emerging-economy contexts where GenAI integration is accelerating.

Keywords: digital leadership, generative AI, dynamic managerial capabilities, digital transformation strategy

1 Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology and artificial intelligence has fundamentally transformed organizational structures, business strategies, and leadership practices across industries. One of the most disruptive innovations in recent years is Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), including large language models, AI-driven analytics, and intelligent automation systems. These technologies significantly accelerate digital transformation by enhancing operational efficiency, automating cognitive tasks, improving strategic decision-making, and supporting organizational innovation. Recent studies emphasize that GenAI is increasingly becoming a strategic organizational resource that reshapes business competitiveness and managerial processes [1,2].

The integration of GenAI technologies has also changed leadership dynamics within organizations. Organizational leaders are no longer expected to rely solely on traditional managerial competencies, but are increasingly required to possess digital leadership capabilities that enable them to lead technology-driven transformation effectively. Digital leadership capability includes technological literacy, strategic agility, innovation orientation, and the ability to manage organizational adaptation in digitally disrupted environments. Previous studies show that digital leadership positively influences organizational performance, employee adaptability, innovation capability, and digital transformation success [2].

Digital leadership refers to the capability of leaders to envision, direct, and manage digital transformation initiatives through the effective utilization of digital technologies and innovation-oriented leadership approaches. In the era of Generative AI, leadership complexity has increased significantly because AI systems increasingly influence organizational decision-making processes, communication patterns, knowledge management, and collaborative work systems. Consequently, leaders are expected to understand AI governance, ethical implications, algorithmic accountability, and human-AI collaboration to ensure responsible and sustainable AI implementation [1].

Recent literature also indicates that organizations implementing GenAI frequently encounter challenges related to employee readiness, organizational culture, trust management, and capability gaps [3]. Human-centered leadership therefore becomes increasingly important to balance technological advancement with employee well-being and organizational sustainability. Studies on AI-driven organizational environments further highlight that leaders play a critical role in fostering collaboration, innovation culture, and adaptive learning ecosystems in digital workplaces [3].

Although previous studies have examined digital leadership, digital transformation, and AI adoption independently, the literature remains fragmented regarding the specific leadership capabilities required in the era of Generative AI. Existing research often emphasizes technical AI implementation rather than leadership capability dimensions and organizational implications. Furthermore, empirical findings regarding AI-driven leadership effectiveness remain inconsistent across organizational contexts and industrial sectors.

The growing relevance of Generative AI in organizational transformation creates an urgent need for a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature concerning digital leadership capabilities. Therefore, this study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to identify dominant digital leadership capabilities, theoretical perspectives, methodological trends, and future research directions related to digital

leadership capabilities in the era of Generative AI. This study contributes theoretically by integrating fragmented literature into a comprehensive conceptual understanding of digital leadership capabilities in the GenAI era. Practically, the findings are expected to provide guidance for organizations, policymakers, and leadership development institutions in preparing leaders capable of managing AI-driven transformation effectively.

2 Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize studies related to digital leadership capabilities in the era of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). The SLR method was selected because it enables comprehensive mapping of scientific developments, dominant theories, empirical findings, and research gaps within a specific field in a transparent and structured manner.

The implementation of the SLR in this study follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, which consist of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. This approach ensures that the literature selection process is conducted objectively, systematically, and replicably.

2.2 Literature Search Strategy

2.2.1 Search Databases

The literature search was systematically conducted using three internationally recognized databases relevant to management, digital technology, and organizational transformation studies: Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Taylor & Francis Online. These databases were selected because they contain high-quality peer-reviewed international journals frequently publishing studies related to digital leadership, artificial intelligence, organizational transformation, and strategic management. The search included peer-reviewed English-language research articles published between January 2019 and March 2026 with full-text accessibility. This publication period was selected because the development of modern Generative AI technologies accelerated significantly during this period and substantially influenced organizational digital transformation.

2.2.2 Search Keywords

The search strategy utilized combinations of keywords with Boolean Operators (AND, OR) to ensure comprehensive and specific retrieval of relevant literature. The search strings were developed based on the core research variables, namely digital leadership and Generative AI. The search string used in this study was:

("digital leadership" OR "digital leader*" OR "leadership capability" OR "leadership competence") AND ("generative AI" OR "GenAI" OR "artificial intelligence" OR "large language model*" OR "AI-driven decision making") AND ("digital transformation" OR "organizational transformation" OR "technology strategy")

In addition to the primary search process, manual searching was conducted through the reference lists of relevant articles to identify additional studies related to the research topic.

2.3 Article Selection Strategy

2.3.1 PICOC Approach

This study employed the PICOC (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Context) framework to define the research focus and establish article selection criteria.

Table 1. PICOC Framework

PICOC Component	Description
Population	Organizations, leaders, managers, or executives within digital transformation contexts
Intervention	Digital leadership capabilities in the use or adoption of Generative AI
Comparison	Differences in leadership approaches, technology adoption levels, or organizational contexts
Outcome	Digital leadership competencies, adaptive decision-making, organizational transformation, AI governance, and innovation
Context	The era of Generative AI and organizational digital transformation

The PICOC framework was used because this study not only focuses on variable relationships but also considers the broader context of digital transformation and GenAI implementation in organizations.

2.3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

a. Inclusion Criteria

Articles included in this study had to meet the following criteria: Original research articles, discuss digital leadership, AI leadership, or leadership capabilities within the context of GenAI or digital transformation, published in reputable peer-reviewed international journals, published between January 2019 and March 2026, available in full-text format, and employ qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method, or conceptual approaches relevant to the topic.

b. Exclusion Criteria

Articles were excluded if they met one or more of the following conditions: Editorials, book reviews, conference summaries, or opinion papers, did not specifically discuss digital leadership, focused solely on technical AI aspects without leadership implications, duplicate articles across databases, unavailable in full-text format, and not written in English.

2.4 Screening and Article Selection Process

All articles retrieved from the search process were exported into reference management software such as Mendeley or Zotero to identify and remove duplicate records. The article selection process consisted of the following stages:

1. Identification

Articles were identified from Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Taylor & Francis databases using predefined search keywords.

2. Screening

Articles were screened based on title, abstract, and keywords to assess relevance to the research topic.

3. Eligibility

Full-text articles were reviewed to ensure consistency with inclusion and exclusion criteria.

4. Included

Eligible studies were further assessed for conceptual relevance and direct alignment with the review objectives before inclusion in the final synthesis.

Based on the screening report and eligibility assessment, 44 articles underwent full-text review. Of these, 20 articles met the inclusion criteria, while 24 were excluded due to insufficient relevance or lack of focus on digital leadership. Following a detailed content assessment, 10 studies that directly addressed digital leadership capabilities in AI and Generative AI contexts were included in the final synthesis. The article selection process was visualized using the PRISMA Flow Diagram.

2.5 Data Extraction

Data extraction was conducted systematically using a synthesis table to ensure consistency across studies. The extracted information included: author(s) and publication year, country or research context, research objectives, research methodology, theoretical frameworks used, organizational or industrial sector, focus of digital leadership capabilities, forms of GenAI implementation, main findings, and research gaps and future recommendations. The data extraction table facilitated the identification of research patterns and thematic categorization.

2.6 Quality Assessment

Quality assessment was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the studies included in the final synthesis. The assessment criteria included: clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of research methodology, transparency of data collection and analysis, relevance of theoretical frameworks, consistency between findings and discussion, and contribution to scientific development. Studies with low methodological quality or insufficient relevance were excluded from the final synthesis.

2.7 Data Analysis Technique

The data were analysed using thematic analysis and content analysis approaches. The analysis process involved:

1. Identifying dominant themes in digital leadership within the GenAI era
2. Categorizing types of digital leadership capabilities
3. Identifying dominant theoretical frameworks
4. Analysing organizational challenges associated with GenAI implementation
5. Identifying research gaps
6. Developing a future research agenda based on emerging trends and research needs

The synthesized findings were subsequently used to construct an integrative conceptual framework regarding digital leadership capabilities in the era of GenAI.

2.8 Validity and Reliability

To enhance validity, the literature search and article selection processes were conducted systematically using PRISMA guidelines and clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Furthermore, the use of multiple international databases minimized literature source bias and broadened the coverage of the review. Reliability was ensured through comprehensive documentation of all review stages, including search strategies, screening procedures, eligibility assessment, and synthesis processes, enabling future replication of the study.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Article Selection Process

The article selection process in this study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to ensure transparency, consistency, and systematic identification of the literature. The initial search process was conducted using three international databases, namely Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Taylor & Francis Online, using predefined keywords related to digital leadership, Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), AI-driven leadership, and digital transformation.

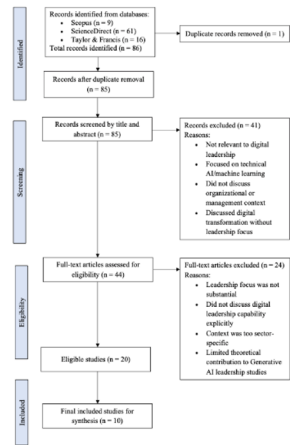


Fig. 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Article Selection Process

During the identification stage, all retrieved articles were collected and exported into reference management software to remove duplicate records. Subsequently, the screening stage was conducted by reviewing article titles, abstracts, and keywords to assess their relevance to the research topic. Articles that did not specifically discuss digital leadership, AI-related leadership capability, or organizational digital transformation were excluded from further analysis.

In the eligibility stage, full-text reviews were conducted to evaluate the methodological quality and conceptual relevance of the articles based on the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. A total of 44 articles underwent full-text eligibility assessment, resulting in 20 eligible studies. After a further relevance prioritization process, 10 final included studies were selected for the synthesis stage because they demonstrated the strongest alignment with the research objectives and provided the most significant theoretical and empirical contributions regarding digital leadership capabilities in the era of Generative AI.

Table 2. Top 10 Final Included Studies and Their Main Contributions

Article Title	Main Contribution
Artificial Intelligence and Digital Leadership: Mapping Research Trends and Thematic Patterns [4]	Systematically maps research trends and thematic patterns related to AI and digital leadership; identifies major research gaps; serves as a bibliometric foundation for the SLR.
The Role of AI in Digital Leadership – New Competencies of Leaders [5]	Defines emerging competencies and capabilities required for digital leaders in the AI era; identifies evolving dimensions of digital leadership influenced by AI.
Digital Workplace and Organization Performance: Moderating Role of Digital Leadership Capability [6]	Empirically demonstrates the moderating role of digital leadership capability on organizational performance; operationalizes measurable dimensions of digital leadership capability.

Adoption of Artificial Intelligence: A TOP Framework-Based Checklist for Digital Leaders [7]	Provides a practical TOP (Technology–Organization–People) framework for digital leaders in AI adoption; offers applicable AI leadership capability guidelines.
Digital Transformation Leadership and AI Capabilities as Drivers of Sustainable Competitive Advantage: The Mediating Role of Organizational Agility in Spain's New S-Curve Industries [8]	Develops an empirical mediation model linking digital transformation leadership, AI capabilities, organizational agility, and sustainable competitive advantage.
Digital Leadership and AI Performance Assessment Impact on Organisational Performance: Role of Empowerment and Engagement [9]	Examines the impact of digital leadership and AI performance assessment on organizational performance mediated by empowerment and engagement.
Digital Servitization and Sustainable Growth in the Era of Generative AI: The Role of Leadership, Knowledge Sharing, and Employee Attitudes [10]	Explains the role of leadership in promoting digital servitization and sustainable growth in the Generative AI era through knowledge sharing mechanisms.
Mastering Digital Transformation: The Nexus Between Leadership, Agility, and Digital Strategy [11]	Develops an integrative model connecting leadership, organizational agility, and digital strategy as determinants of successful digital transformation.
Managing Digital Transformation: The View from the Top [12]	Presents senior executive perspectives regarding roles, challenges, and capabilities required to lead organizational digital transformation.
Project Leaders Digital Capabilities: A Sentiment Analysis Perspective [13]	Identifies dimensions of project leaders' digital capabilities through sentiment analysis and practitioner-based perspectives.

The final included studies represent diverse organizational contexts, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches related to digital leadership and AI-driven transformation. Although the search covered publications from January 2019 to March 2026, all studies included in the final synthesis were published between 2022 and 2026. This finding suggests that scholarly attention to digital leadership capabilities in the context of Generative AI is relatively recent and has increased substantially following the rapid advancement of GenAI technologies. The selected articles collectively discuss critical dimensions of digital leadership capability, including technological literacy, organizational agility, AI governance, strategic decision-making, digital transformation leadership, and human-centered leadership approaches.

3.2 Dominant Themes of Digital Leadership Capabilities

The thematic analysis identified several dominant digital leadership capabilities required in the era of Generative AI.

3.2.1 Technological Literacy and AI Understanding

One of the most dominant themes identified in the literature is technological literacy. Leaders are expected to understand AI systems, data analytics, machine learning applications, and digital infrastructures to effectively integrate GenAI into organizational processes. Several studies emphasize that leaders who possess strong technological understanding are more capable of making strategic decisions regarding AI investment, implementation, and governance. Technological literacy also enables leaders to communicate effectively with technical teams and align technological innovation with organizational objectives. In the GenAI context, technological literacy extends beyond operational understanding and includes awareness of ethical implications, algorithmic transparency, and AI risk management. Leaders are increasingly required to understand how large language models and AI-driven systems influence organizational communication, decision-making, and knowledge management [4,5,13].

3.2.2 Adaptive Decision-Making Capability

Adaptive decision-making capability emerged as another major leadership competency in the literature. The rapidly evolving nature of GenAI technologies creates

high levels of uncertainty and organizational complexity, requiring leaders to make agile and data-driven decisions. The literature indicates that successful digital leaders demonstrate flexibility, strategic responsiveness, and the ability to rapidly adapt organizational strategies in response to technological disruption. Leaders must balance innovation opportunities with organizational risks while continuously evaluating the implications of AI adoption. Several studies also highlight the importance of evidence-based decision-making supported by AI-generated insights. However, leaders remain responsible for interpreting AI outputs critically and ensuring that strategic decisions align with organizational values and ethical standards [8,9,10].

3.2.3 Transformational and Visionary Leadership

The reviewed studies consistently emphasize the role of transformational leadership in managing digital transformation initiatives. Leaders are expected to create a clear digital vision, foster innovation culture, motivate employees, and encourage organizational learning. Transformational leadership is particularly important in GenAI implementation because employees often experience uncertainty, resistance, and fear regarding AI-driven automation. Leaders who communicate strategic vision effectively and promote collaborative organizational culture are more likely to facilitate successful transformation. The literature also suggests that visionary leadership capability helps organizations identify emerging opportunities associated with GenAI technologies and maintain long-term competitiveness [7,11,12].

3.2.4 Ethical AI Governance Capability

Ethical governance emerged as one of the most critical issues in GenAI leadership literature. Several studies emphasize that leaders must ensure responsible AI implementation while addressing concerns related to algorithmic bias, data privacy, transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making. The increasing autonomy of GenAI systems creates ethical challenges that require proactive governance mechanisms. Leaders are expected to establish organizational policies, ethical standards, and governance frameworks that regulate AI usage responsibly. Ethical leadership capability is also associated with stakeholder trust. Organizations implementing GenAI technologies without clear ethical governance may face reputational risks, employee distrust, and regulatory challenges [6,13].

3.2.5 Human-Centered Leadership and Collaboration

Another dominant theme identified in the literature is the importance of human-centered leadership. Although GenAI technologies automate various organizational functions, human leadership remains essential in fostering collaboration, empathy, creativity, and organizational culture. Several studies highlight the need for leaders to balance technological efficiency with employee well-being. Human-centered leadership involves supporting employee adaptation, facilitating digital capability development, and promoting collaborative relationships between humans and AI systems. The literature further indicates that organizations achieving successful AI transformation often emphasize human-AI collaboration rather than full technological replacement [11,12].

3.3 Dominant Theoretical Perspectives

The literature review identified several theoretical frameworks commonly used in studies on digital leadership and GenAI.

3.3.1 Dynamic Managerial Capabilities Theory

Dynamic Managerial Capabilities Theory emerged as one of the most dominant theoretical perspectives. This theory emphasizes the ability of leaders to integrate, build, and reconfigure organizational resources in response to environmental change. In the context of GenAI, dynamic managerial capability reflects leaders' ability to identify technological opportunities, adapt organizational strategies, and manage digital transformation effectively.

3.3.2 Upper Echelons Theory

Upper Echelons Theory was also frequently used to explain how leaders' characteristics, cognitive capabilities, and strategic orientations influence organizational digital transformation. Several studies argue that leaders with strong digital orientation and innovation mindset are more likely to encourage AI adoption and organizational agility.

3.3.3 Socio-Technical Systems Theory

Socio-Technical Systems Theory highlights the interaction between technological systems and social structures within organizations. The literature suggests that successful GenAI implementation requires alignment between AI technologies, organizational culture, leadership practices, and employee readiness.

3.3.4 Digital Transformation Theory

Digital Transformation Theory was commonly employed to explain organizational adaptation processes resulting from digital technological disruption. This perspective emphasizes that digital transformation involves not only technological adoption but also strategic, cultural, and structural change.

3.4 Research Gaps

The literature review identified several important research gaps. First, empirical studies specifically focusing on Generative AI leadership remain limited. Many studies discuss digital transformation generally without addressing the unique implications of GenAI technologies. Second, cross-cultural perspectives on digital leadership in AI environments remain underexplored. Existing literature is dominated by studies conducted in developed economies, while research from emerging economies is still relatively limited. Third, there is insufficient investigation regarding ethical AI governance capability and long-term organizational sustainability. Fourth, limited studies examine psychological and human-centered dimensions of AI leadership, including employee trust, emotional intelligence, and organizational well-being. Fifth, longitudinal studies investigating the long-term impact of GenAI implementation on organizational leadership remain scarce.

4 Conclusion

This study systematically reviewed literature related to digital leadership capabilities in the era of Generative Artificial Intelligence using the PRISMA-guided SLR method. Based on the review of 10 final included studies, the findings demonstrate that the emergence of GenAI has significantly transformed organizational leadership requirements. The review identified several dominant digital leadership capabilities, including technological literacy, adaptive decision-making, transformational leadership, ethical AI governance capability, and human-centered leadership orientation. These competencies are increasingly essential for organizations navigating

AI-driven digital transformation. The study also identified dominant theoretical frameworks such as Dynamic Managerial Capabilities Theory, Upper Echelons Theory, Socio-Technical Systems Theory, and Digital Transformation Theory. Additionally, the review highlighted critical organizational challenges related to ethical governance, employee resistance, capability gaps, organizational culture, and trust management. This study contributes theoretically by integrating fragmented literature into a comprehensive understanding of digital leadership in the GenAI era. Practically, the findings provide valuable insights for organizations, policymakers, and leadership development institutions in preparing leaders capable of managing AI-driven transformation effectively. Finally, the study proposes several future research directions emphasizing ethical AI governance, human-AI collaboration, leadership capability development, cross-cultural perspectives, and sustainable digital transformation.

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