The Mediating Roles of Public Service Motivation and Digital Technology in the Relationship Between Leadership Turnover and Organisational Resilience in Public Sector– A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract. This study explores the mediating roles of public service motivation (PSM) and digital technology in determining how leadership turnover affects organizational resilience in public sector entities. Recognizing frequent leadership transitions as a recurring internal crisis, the research addresses a gap in the literature regarding how organizations navigate such disruptions. Specifically, it clarifies the synergy between intrinsic psychological drivers and technological support systems in buffering bureaucratic environments against internal shocks. Through a structured conceptual framework synthesizing existing research, the study demonstrates that both PSM and digital tools significantly influence the link between leadership shifts and resilience. The findings emphasize that public sector organizations must combine employee motivation with digital integration to mitigate vulnerabilities and bolster adaptive capacity.

Keywords: organisational resilience, leadership turnover, public service motivation, digital technology

1 Introduction

In today's world of uncertainty and ever increased public demands, organisational resilience has emerged as an essential foundation for public sector agencies to maintain stability and service sustainability [1]. Today's public organization governance is often confronted with internal and external disruption characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA), that often disrupt operational frameworks [2]. Disruptive dynamics caused by the COVID-19 pandemic [3]; geopolitical shifts [4]; climate change and natural disaster [5]; economy and supply chain turbulence [6]; alongside other disruptive phenomena, have compelled bureaucratic systems to shift from merely maintaining static efficiency toward developing robust, and adaptive capabilities [7]. Furthermore this condition has pushed government in many countries to conduct a structural, cultural and operational adjustment in to maintain its public service effectivity [8]. Organisational Resilience (OR) represents an institutions's

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strategic capability to not only endure disruptions but to actively adapt and thrive through them [9]. A resilient organization poses specific capacities, namely adaptive capacity and transformative capacity [10]. Public sector organizations exhibiting resilience generally demonstrate improved adaptability and responsiveness to crises [11]), more sustainable public services during critical conditions [12], enhanced psychological well-being among employees [13], stronger support for decision-making processes [7], and elevated organisational learning capabilities [14].

Conversely, efforts to maintain institutional resilience are also frequently undermined by internal shocks, among which leadership turnover often emerges as a significant threat to the strategic and operational stability of an organization [15]. Leadership turnover [16], [17], often termed as CEO turnover [18], [19] or executive turnover [17], [20] in previous studies, carrying significant implications for institutional performance and sustainability [21]. This occurrence is characterized by diverse structural factors, encompassing both deliberate and forced leadership shifts, in addition to the recruitment of successors from internal pipelines or external markets [22].

Leadership turnover can produce positive effects by creating opportunities for essential strategic redirection and by improving ethical transparency and sustainability (ESG) reporting, often when newly appointed executives seek legitimacy and align with stakeholder expectations [22]. Nonetheless, frequent leadership turnover generally has adverse effects on organizations by interrupting strategic and operational continuity. This frequently results in declines in financial performance, firm value, and stakeholder satisfaction metrics [16]. Changes at the highest level of management show a negative correlation and pose a severe threat to OR when the succession process loses sight of institutional sustainability. If these transitions are not mitigated, the vulnerability of bureaucratic systems increases through the erosion of institutional memory and critical tacit knowledge among frontline providers of public services [23]. Rapid and frequent leadership changes can also lower employee morale and engagement; for instance, employees may begin to experience uncertainty about their roles in the organization or about the future direction of organisational objectives [24].

To limit the impact of such managerial shocks, discussions on public sector OR must extend further into both the technological and psychological dimensions. However, prior research has largely concentrated on structural adjustments, disregarding the role of inherent human resource driver [44]. Resilience in the public sector or within government agencies cannot be separated from the role of PSM. Organizations with high levels of PSM are demonstrably able to buffer crises, because their employees remain committed beyond the turbulence associated with leadership changes [1]. PSM, functioning as a form of psychological resilience, carries out adaptive transformation in practice [25]. This intrinsic motivation must be reinforced by the intermediary capacity of digital technology. The measured adoption of digital technologies has been empirically shown to be a key enabler that integrates structural agility and helps institutions to manage shocks in real time [26].

Previous literature has tended to focus on structural adaptations to external crises, with the majority of positive findings regarding leadership turnover based in the private sector. Conversely, within the context of the public sector and bureaucratic systems, this research bridges the existing gap by examining how the integration of PSM and digital technology can build organisational resilience to cushion internal

shocks caused by rapid leadership turnover in the public sector.

Grounded in the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, this study proposes a comprehensive theoretical framework. Digital technology readiness and PSM are treated as essential prerequisites. In this process, OR is developed in a clear and deliberate manner and defined as the dependent variable. Lastly, embedding this resilience within institutions is a critical driver of operational stability, which subsequently supports organisational performance. This analytical pattern is intended to enable the public sector to convert structural weaknesses caused by leadership turnover into strong public service continuity. This framework aligns with actual disruptive phenomena within the Indonesian government landscape. The issuance of the Circular Letter of the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (SE Menteri PANRB) No. 19 of 2023 has impacted the flexibility of mutations and rotations for high-ranking officials who have served for less than two years.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Developed by Teece in 1997, Dynamic Capability is organization's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to respond to extreme environmental changes [27]. The theory was initially developed to address the limitation of Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, which struggles to explain how an organization achieves and maintains competitive advantage in turbulence market. Nowadays, this framework has shifted from merely exploiting static resource advantages to creating long-term value structured managerial and organisational renewal [28]. In public organizations, dynamic capabilities offer a paradigm shift from traditional, routine, rigid, compliance-driven bureaucratic model to an approach that emphasises adaptability, innovation, and proactive governance [29]. The presence of this capability urges the bureaucratic sector to balance service stability with strategic transformation when facing shocks, uncertainties, or operational disruptions [10].

Dynamic capability is supported by three main micro-foundations. The first foundation is sensing, that refers to the organization's capacity to identify, analyse and respond to external trends and stakeholder needs under uncertainty [28]. İn public sector, sensing manifest in proactive monitoring of regulatory changes and bureaucratic dynamics, which heavily relies on strategic foresight. The second foundation is seizing (opportunity capture). Definitively, seizing is the organization's capability to mobilise resources, make decisions and execute strategies based on sensed opportunity. For public organizations with limited resources, strategic agility is essential so that innovation and adoption of new technologies can be implements to maintain an innovation climate. And the third foundation according to Teece (2025) is transforming or reconfiguring. This foundation represents the organization's capability to continuously adjust its structure, processes, and culture to achieve strategic alignment. Strategic flexibility in this foundation is crucial for minimising bureaucratic inertia and navigating cultural barriers, especially during times of crisis or leader transition [30].

2.2 Organisational Resilience

Resilience has emerged as a fundamental capability that needs to be built by companies [31]. This ability enables companies to quickly adapt to environmental changes and become a primary source of sustainable competitive advantage in today's ever-changing business dynamic [32]. Organisational resilience (OR) is essentially a strategic capability that enables institution not only to survive but also to adapt and thrive when facing environmental shocks [33]. Although its definition continues to evolve [34], this concept can be understood through three logical process stages: anticipation of potential crises, operational handling (coping) when shocks occur, adaptation thereafter [35]. These three processes are driven by the organization's capacity to absorb pressure without altering its basic structure (absorptive), adjust strategies (adaptive) and make fundamental changes to its operations if the situation demands it (transformative), which is often referred to as the OR model [36]. Unlike robustness, which is purely focuses on antifragility [37], resilience requires organizations to review their managerial practice in order to ensure their functionality continues to improve sustainably.

OR is conceptualised as a multi-phase dynamic capability that integrates proactive pre-crisis preparedness, adaptive absorptive capacity during a crisis, and reactive post-crisis recovery capacity to transform towards a new operational equilibrium [38]. Through the lens of dynamic capability, OR is positioned as a crucial variable that represents the capacity of an organization not just to endure or absorb shocks from leadership succession, but to transform and "bounce forward". Therefore, OR functions as a critical, multi-phase dynamic capability.

2.3 Leadership Turnover

Leadership turnover is a critical organisational event defined as the transition of executive positions that encompasses internal, external, voluntary, and forced changes and significantly impacts institutional performance and sustainability [21]. Leadership turnover refers specifically to the disruptive event of departure or structural change at the top management level that destabilizes operations, initiates strategic shifts, and directly affects firm performance [20]. In contrast, leadership succession encompasses the procedural mechanisms of this transition, which include selection, successor readiness, and adaptation to new operational complexities and ideological shifts [39].

The immediate consequence of leadership turnover is the risk of severe disruption to the human and social capital of an organization [40]. Frequent leadership changes cultivate organisational instability, impede professional agency, and increase the risk of institutional failure [41]. In the public sector, this turnover acts as a substantial institutional barrier that hinders the implementation of dynamic capabilities and disrupts the continuity of strategic initiatives [29]. Conversely, management stability mitigates unsustainable practices, reduces agency costs, and enhances institutional reputation [42]. While leadership turnover is inherently disruptive, it also presents a strategic opportunity to build new structural values and cultivate organisational resilience through structured decision making models [43].

2.4 Public Service Motivation

Public Service Motivation (PSM), introduced by James Perry, is a dynamic psychological construct based on altruism where individuals are driven to serve the public interest and help others without expecting material rewards [44]. PSM is shaped by environmental factors and unique experiences, not by genetics. PSM is measured through four main dimensions rooted in the moral foundations of care and justice: interest in policy-making, commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice [45].

In the discourse of Dynamic Capabilities Theory, PSM serves as the micro-foundation that drives the institution's ability to sense threats and seize opportunities through its change agents. This motivation for public service encourages the courage of officials to take the initiative in prosocial rule-breaking during a crisis, which allows the bureaucracy to reconfigure its service routines adaptively for the public good [46]. PSM transforms succession disruptions into self-sustaining work resilience, and this intrinsic commitment dampens the shocks of executive turnover, thereby maintaining the operational resilience of the institution [47].

2.5 Digital Technology

According to Martin-rojas, digital technologies are defined as combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies that, when used together, transform business processes and firm capabilities [31]. Conceptually, this technology began with the technical need to address the inefficiencies of conventional bureaucracy, which over time evolved into a comprehensive ecosystem involving flexible automation, big data analytics, and decentralised electronic governance [48].

The presence of digital technology plays an essential role in shaping OR by providing buffer resources against external crisis pressures and disruptions [14]. Digitalisation acts as a structural catalyst that strengthens the institution's capacity to respond to shocks with precision, maintain operational continuity across divisions, and stimulate the flow of knowledge integration amidst the uncertainty of the work environment [49].

The implementation of this technology is strongly rooted in the elaboration of the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, where the orientation of digital capabilities enables bureaucratic entities to detect environmental threats and respond to strategic opportunities through technical solutions [50]. Information system infrastructure proactively facilitates the reconfiguration of static operational resources into agile strategic steps, making it a fundamental instrument in shaping adaptive agility. Since digitalisation is a continuous process that enables organisations to balance exploration and exploitation. This helps in the development of dynamic capabilities in terms of sensing, seizing opportunities, and transforming, which ultimately solidly builds organisational resilience [31].

3 Methodology

This study uses systematic review secondary source which based on existing literature

to develop new conceptual approach on how Public Service Motivation and Digital technology can mitigate the effect of frequently leadership turnover on public sector organisational's resilience. Systematic review can be uses to compare what has been done in initional researches, review previous researches, build conecting points between related topic areas, and identify key issues in a field [51]. The research of this approach can be use to identify future research as well [52]. This approach is build to answer these following questions: (1) Does leadership turnover negatively affect organisational resilience in the public sector? (2) Does leadership turnover negatively affect public service motivation in the public sector? (3) Does leadership turnover negatively affect digital technology in the public sector? (4) Does Public Service Motivation have a positive effect on Organisational Resilience in the public sector? (5) Does digital technology have a positive impact on Organisational Resilience in the public sector? (6) Can Public Service Motivation mediate the negative impact of Leadership turnover on Organisational Resilience in the public sector? And (7) Can digital technology mediate the negative impact of Leadership turnover on Organisational Resilience in the public sector?

4 Result & Discussion

4.1 The Impact of Leadership Turnover on Organisational Resilience

Leadership turnover is a critical transition phase that inherently triggers structural uncertainty and disrupts organisational operations. Empirical studies show that extreme leadership instability, especially in the public sector, undermines long-term strategic continuity and creates serious governance challenges [18]. Moreover, excessively frequent turnover consistently disrupts operational stability, directly impacting performance deterioration [20]. From a disruption-adaptation perspective, executive leadership succession erodes the relational assets that have been built, thereby weakening the resilience and adaptive capacity of the organization [17]. In the public sector, the loss of continuity directly impacts the significant decline in the quality of basic services.

4.2 The Impact of Leadership Turnover on Public Service Motivation (PSM)

Unplanned or politically motivated leadership turnover can degrade PSM by disrupting the fulfilment of basic psychological needs and altering the organisational climate. The transition of leadership from supportive styles, such as servant or ethical leadership, to autocratic or toxic styles has been shown to decrease public service orientation by disrupting observational learning mechanisms and value identification [53]. Moreover, the appointment of external leaders based on political loyalty often triggers perceptions of illegitimacy in the eyes of career employees, resulting in a work environment filled with fear, alienation, and defensive silence. This condition systematically erodes the motivational integrity necessary for the sustainability of public service.

Structurally, periods of leadership transition often increase job demands and uncertainty, triggering work stress and emotional exhaustion. Organisational changes that are not managed inclusively can lead to organisational cynicism and counterproductive work behaviour, especially if the new leader fails to provide

perceived organisational support. This instability weakens OR increasing turnover intention among street-level bureaucrats, especially when PSM, which serves as a protective factor, begins to erode due to environmental stress and loss of trust in superiors [54].

4.3 The Impact of Leadership Turnover on digital technology

Leadership turnover in the public sector often triggers the phenomenon of organisational restlessness, which hinders the sustainable utilisation of digital technology. Frequent and uncoordinated leadership changes create policy discontinuity, where strategic priorities often shift according to the agenda of the new leader. This negative impact is further exacerbated if the new leader has a conservative traditional leadership background, which tends to resist change and trigger organisational inertia [55]. As a result, digital transformation initiatives often stall at the adoption phase without reaching full implementation, causing significant investments in technology to fail to deliver optimal value for governance.

In addition to policy discontinuity, leadership turnover also disrupts the development of digital capabilities and technological literacy, which require long-term commitment. Based on the attention-based view perspective, the allocation of resources and policy attention towards digital innovation heavily relies on top managerial support; when turnover occurs, this support can weaken or be redirected to other sectors [56]. This disruption not only hinders the assimilation of cutting-edge technologies such as AI and analytics but also weakens the institutional coherence necessary for cross-organisational system integration [57]. Without mature succession mechanisms and policy institutionalisation, leadership turnover will continue to be a structural impediment that triggers fragmentation in the digital government ecosystem.

4.4 The Influence of Public Service Motivation (PSM) on Organisational Resilience

PSM serves as a crucial catalyst in strengthening OR by enhancing adaptive capacity and employee engagement, especially in facing systemic crises. Employees with high PSM tend to exhibit greater individual resilience and commitment to innovation, which collectively build the organization's readiness for change [47]. In conditions of extreme pressure such as a pandemic, PSM acts as a stable contextual resource, mitigating the negative impacts of work stress and goal ambiguity, and ensuring the sustainability of public service through continuous voluntary support [58]. Additionally, PSM broadly strengthens the perception of community resilience, making it a fundamental element in maintaining the performance of public organisations amidst turbulent environments [59].

4.5 The Influence of Digital Technology on Organisational Resilience

The utilisation of digital technology significantly strengthens organisational resilience by enhancing the organization's capacity to absorb shocks and adapt through the mechanisms of dynamic capabilities theory. Investment in technologies such as AI, big

data analytics, and digital platforms enables organisations to develop essential sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capabilities to respond to volatile market dynamics [30]. Empirically, digitalisation acts as a strategic asset that mediates resilience enhancement through the strengthening of innovation capabilities and supply chain integration, thereby enabling faster recovery post-disruption [60].

The integration of digital technology with human resources, such as through digital leadership and an innovative culture, has proven to create a synergistic effect that maximises long-term competitiveness. Digital capabilities not only reduce organisational inertia but also facilitate employee job crafting that supports readiness for change [61]. Additionally, external support such as the effectiveness of government policies and the availability of digital infrastructure play a key moderating role that strengthens the relationship between digital orientation and organisational resilience [62]. By institutionalising technology into operational processes and risk management strategies, organisations can transform disruptions into opportunities for sustainable growth.

4.6 The Mediating role of Public Service Motivation (PSM) in the impact of leadership turnover on Organisational Resilience

Leadership turnover inherently triggers structural instability that threatens the resilience of public organisations due to the loss of managerial continuity and the strategic direction of the institution. Within the framework of the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the cycle of intense executive turnover disrupts the bureaucracy's capacity to sense environmental changes and respond effectively to challenges, as leadership transitions often disorient operational resources and hinder the implementation of adaptive strategies [29]. This succession transition results in internal shocks such as task ambiguity and increased work pressure on personnel, which directly degrade the operational resilience of the bureaucracy. To mitigate the absence of managerial navigation from the top structure during the transition period, a buffering mechanism at the employee level is needed to compensate for the disruption so that the institution's capacity to endure and function essential can be maintained [63]. In this mitigation mechanism, PSM operates as a crucial mediating variable that significantly bridges the leadership transition shock with the maintenance of organisational resilience. PSM acts as an intrinsic psychological drive that strongly binds officials to the commitment of public service, so their productivity does not absolutely depend on the figure of the structural leadership mandate holder [64]. When executive transitions disrupt the formal bureaucratic order, personnel with a high basis of PSM demonstrate autonomous motivation to maintain service continuity and address managerial dysfunction, which collectively converts their individual resilience into organisational-level resilience capacity [65]. Through this shock-absorbing function, the motivational energy from PSM neutralises the destructive impact of succession instability, making it a structural mediator that ensures the agility of dynamic capabilities continues to operate independently to secure the resilience of public organisations [66].

Mechanically, it transforms the pressure resulting from leadership changes into proactive actions through the dimensions of self-sacrifice and commitment to public interests, which directly strengthen the ten capacities of organisational resilience. As a mediator, PSM compensates for the depletion of motivation caused by the politicisation of bureaucracy or illegitimate leadership styles, thereby preventing

the emergence of silence and burnout that can paralyse institutional resilience [67]. Thus, the presence of a strong PSM within the bureaucracy ensures that organisational resilience does not entirely depend on individual leader figures, but is instead embedded in the value orientation of personnel that is resilient to leadership turbulence.

4.7 The Role of Digital Technology Mediation in the Impact of Leadership Turnover on Organisational Resilience

The utilisation of digital technology serves as a crucial mediation mechanism that supports the destructive impact of leadership turnover on organisational resilience in the public sector. Leadership turnover often triggers turbulence, loss of institutional knowledge, and operational uncertainty that threaten organisational resilience [2]. However, the integration of digital capabilities compensates for this instability by shifting dependence from individual leader figures to structured and autonomous operational systems. The development of dynamic digital capabilities significantly enhances organisational agility, allowing institutions to remain adaptive and responsive during leadership transitions [68]. Additionally, institutionalised digital maturity has proven capable of maintaining organisational trust and employee work engagement, thereby mitigating the negative psychological impact of constant changes in the administrative agenda [69].

Specifically, the adoption of technological instruments, proactively mitigates turnover effects by standardising recruitment, training, and performance management processes, which effectively preserves institutional memory. The availability of digital systems also provides operational flexibility and transparent communication channels, ensuring that collaborative decision-making remains stable even in the event of disruptions at the top management level. Ultimately, institutionalising work procedures through digital platforms and integrated information systems enables public sector organisations to maintain business continuity and transform vulnerabilities due to leadership changes into long-term institutional resilience [62].

4.8 Conceptual Framework

This framework explains the relationship between leadership turnover and organisational resilience, by adding public service motivation and digital technology as the mediating variables. This model aims to understand how leadership turnover can shape organisational resilience directly or indirectly through public service motivation and digital technology. Within this framework, leadership turnover is assumed to have a direct negative influence on public service motivation, which is stated in the H2 hypothesis, and a direct negative influence on digital technology, stated in the H3 hypothesis. Then, leadership turnover is also assumed to have a direct negative impact on organisational resilience, which is represented by the hypothesis of H1. Furthermore, public service motivation and digital technology are assumed to have a direct positive influence on organisational resilience, represented by hypotheses H4 and H5. This reflects that public service motivation and digital technology not only directly encourage an organization to remain resilient but also serve as crucial mediators (H6 and H7) in bridging the shock of leadership changes. The depiction of this framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

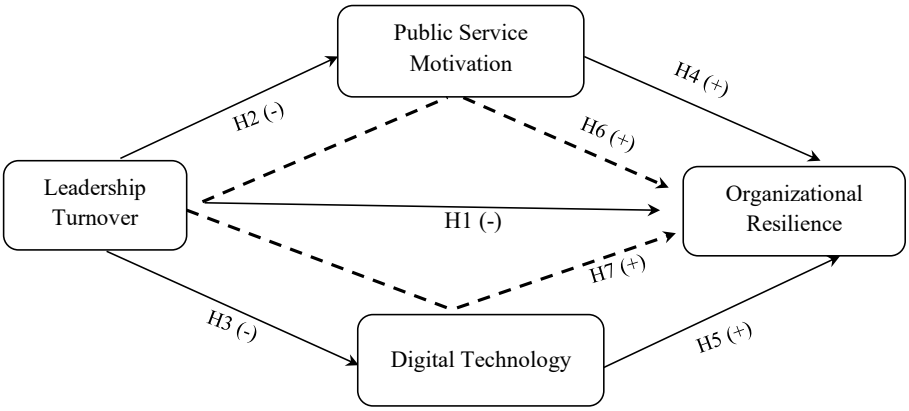


Figure 1. Developed Conceptual Framework

5 Conclusion

The dynamics of rapid leadership turnover in the public sector have a significant negative impact by disrupting operational stability and threatening organisational resilience. The structural instability from this succession has also been proven to trigger a decline in Public Service Motivation (PSM) among bureaucratic apparatus, as well as hinder the continuity of digital technology adoption. Nevertheless, the conceptual analysis in this study emphasises that PSM and digital technology play a crucial role as effective mediating variables in mitigating these internal shocks. PSM functions as an intrinsic psychological foundation that ensures the commitment to public service continues without being entirely dependent on the figure of a leader, while digital technology compensates for turbulence by providing structural agility through automated and stable operational systems. Ultimately, a solid integration between the psychological motivation of the apparatus and the support of digital infrastructure is essential to eliminate bureaucratic vulnerabilities, while simultaneously transforming it into adaptive capacity to maintain the continuity of public service during periods of managerial transition.

This conceptual research opens up broad opportunities for further research, particularly through structural model testing using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) or path analysis to validate the mediating effects of digital technology and public service motivation on organisational resilience. The development of this framework can be carried out by expanding the research model, namely by explicitly positioning

Organisational Resilience as the dependent variable and adding Performance Accountability as the final output variable to measure the real impact of that resilience. Operationally, this empirical testing is highly relevant to be applied through comparative or longitudinal field studies in government work units that directly face high leadership turnover intensity due to the implementation of regulatory changes or other dynamic changes. Through this approach, further research can directly observe fluctuations in employee motivation and differences in the effectiveness of digital infrastructure in mitigating the shocks of managerial transitions and maintaining the operational stability of the agency.

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