



The Relationships Among Digital Leadership, Crisis Management and Competitive Performance: Mediating Role of Career Development

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ABSTRACT

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This research study aimed to examine the intricate associations between digital leadership, crisis management, and competitiveness in higher education institutions by specifically looking at the mediating variables of career development. With the digital revolution occurring at the fast pace, and frequent upheavals in the higher education institutions, digitally competent leadership is becoming essential in universities as they find ways of weathering the storm whilst maintaining competitive edge. Thus, using leadership theory, crisis management literature, and literature on the digital transformation, the research hypothesizes that digital leadership improves the crisis management outcomes of institutions, as it leads to agile decision-making, technological flexibility, and innovative oriented cultures that also lead to competitive performance. Moreover, study claims that career development prospects and digital interaction are key psychological and behavioral processes where the digital leadership is to be transformed into actual crisis response and long-term performance outcomes that are aimed to be examined in the current study. The quantitative research design was applied, with data on surveys done on teacher in higher education institutions. To test proposed relationships and mediation effects, the statistical tools were used to chase hypothesized relationships.

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1.0 Introduction

In contemporary digital era, organizations face unparalleled opportunities and challenges driven by rapid economic fluctuations, technological advancements, and global crises. The integration of leadership actions into digital technologies allows organizations to adapt to disruptions, optimize decision-making, and foster innovation (Bharadwaj et al., 2013). Digital leadership has emerged as crucial determinant of organizational success, mainly in enhancing competitive performance and navigating crises (Khaw et al., 2022). The institutions that effectively maintain operational continuity and manage crises can mitigate risks and sustain their competitive edge. Effective digital leadership is characterized by a proactive approach to digital transformation, technological adaptability, and the ability to leverage digital tools for strategic growth (Erhan et al., 2022). On the other hand, crisis management is an essential organizational capability that ensures resilience in the face of uncertainties.

The relationship between crisis management and digital leadership is significant particularly in contemporary volatile business landscape (Sawy et al., 2020), as leaders who show digital competence employ real-time communication, data-driven strategies, and digital tools to respond to crises effectively. Competitive performance is a key organizational instrument that reflects institutional ability to outperform competitors in financial performance, market share, innovation, and customer satisfaction (Farhan et al., 2024). Still, the mechanisms through which these relationships operate remain an area of empirical examination, as digital leadership and crisis management collectively contribute toward attaining greater competitive performance by nurturing resilience, agility, and strategic adaptability (Jameson et al., 2022). Thus, career development comprises continuous learning, skill enhancement, and professional growth opportunities that enable employees to thrive in a digital-driven environment.

The current study aims to offer empirical insights into these dynamics, providing implications for organizational leaders, policymakers, and researchers in developing strategies to enhance business sustainability and performance in a digitalized world (Malik et al., 2024). Given the increasing reliance on digital transformation across industries, it is imperative to explore the relationships among crisis management, digital leadership, and competitive performance while considering the mediating role of career development (Lee & Chen, 2023). Digital leadership involves leveraging technology to guide organizations through change, fostering innovation, and enhancing performance. The interplay between digital leadership, crisis management, and competitive performance is a critical area of study in today's rapidly evolving business landscape (Pasupuleti, 2024).

The literature reveals that digital leadership positively influences competitive performance, with digital culture and affective commitment serving as mediating factors (Johnson & Brown, 2021; Liu et al., 2021). In this context, AI-driven tools such as real-time data monitoring and analytical reasoning are reshaping crisis management practices and decision-making processes (Zhang & Chen, 2023). Similarly, recent research highlights the significant impact of digital leadership on competitive performance (Malik et al., 2024). Thus, competitive performance reflects an organization's ability to maintain an edge through operational excellence and strategic

initiatives (Pasupuleti, 2024). It also emphasizes adaptability, ethical considerations, and effective use of AI for proactive crisis response.

By equipping employees with necessary skills and fostering an environment that embraces digital tools, organizations can navigate challenges more effectively and sustain their competitive edge (Hussein et al., 2024). Digital leadership significantly influences crisis management and competitive performance, with career development acting as a key mediating factor (Sawy et al., 2020). Thus, digital leadership—defined as the ability to leverage digital technologies to achieve organizational goals—has become a critical competency for modern leaders (Johnson & Brown, 2021).

Unlike traditional leadership approaches, digital leadership emphasizes innovation, collaboration, and strategic use of digital tools to navigate complex environments (Li et al., 2023). Institutions, particularly in dynamic sectors, are frequently exposed to crises that threaten competitiveness and operational continuity. In highly competitive global markets, organizations must not only survive crises but also position themselves as industry leaders (Philip et al., 2023). Effective crisis management requires agility, strategic decision-making, and stakeholder engagement through digital platforms. Digital leadership contributes to competitive performance by enhancing efficiency, fostering innovation, and maintaining market relevance (Malik et al., 2024).

1.2 Problem Statement

In the fast-growing digital era, institutions face unprecedented challenges, including global crises like diverse pandemics, which have redefined traditional business paradigms. The effective digital leadership has emerged as the crucial determinant for guiding institutions through crises, yet its linkages with crisis management and competitive performance remains underexplored. Besides, while career development are familiar as significant institutional assets, their roles as mediators in these relationships require deeper investigation. The institutions are struggling to adapt to digital transformation while simultaneously managing crises and sustaining competitive performance. The traditional leadership models often fail to address the dynamic and complex demands of digital environments, leaving organizations vulnerable to inefficiencies and market stagnation. By exploring these dynamics, the research aims to provide actionable insights into how institutions can navigate the challenges of the digital era and enhance their competitive edge in competitive era.

1.3 Objectives of Study

1. To examine association among digital leadership, career development, crisis management and competitive performance (correlation).
2. To examine the impact of digital leadership, career development, on crisis management (regression).
3. To examine the impact of digital leadership, career development, on competitive performance (regression).
4. To examine the mediating role of career development in the relationship between digital leadership and crisis management (mediation).

5. To examine the mediating role of career development in the relationship between digital leadership and competitive performance (mediation).
6. To examine mean group differences about demographic variables to research variables in particular context (test of significance).

2.0 Literature Review

With growing dependence on digital technologies, institutions face dynamic challenges that require effective leadership strategies for managing crises and sustaining competitive performance in the digital economy (Johnson & Brown, 2021). Still, the mechanisms through which digital leadership fosters crisis management and competitive performance remain underexplored. Digital leadership involves leveraging technology to drive innovation, efficiency, and adaptability, as leaders with digital acumen enhance decision-making, employee engagement, and responsiveness in uncertain environments (Lee & Chen, 2023). Crisis management strategies have evolved with digital advancements, where proactive digital frameworks help mitigate risks, maintain stability, and sustain performance (Liu et al., 2021). Competitive performance depends on an organization's ability to adapt to market changes, facilitated by digital leadership that inspires innovation and improved institutional outcomes.

Digital leadership has emerged as an essential element in supporting organizational change in the digital era. Digital leaders foster innovation by effectively integrating digital technologies into business strategies, encouraging agile and responsive cultures (Yang & Li, 2022). They act as catalysts for digital transformation by promoting collaboration and ensuring employees are equipped with appropriate tools and mindsets (Johnson & Brown, 2021). Furthermore, digital leadership extends beyond technical capability, requiring strategic vision, emotional intelligence, and adaptability to navigate rapidly evolving environments (Zia et al., 2024). Organizations led by digitally competent leaders tend to be more adaptive, innovative, and resilient in the face of technological disruption.

Career development in the context of digital transformation emphasizes continuous learning and upskilling. The concept of protean careers highlights individual responsibility for career growth in dynamic digital workplaces (Johnson & Brown, 2021). Literature suggests that digital transformation requires increased focus on e-learning, mentorship, and competency-based training to prepare employees for future demands (Malik et al., 2024). Integrating career development into organizational strategy not only enhances employee growth but also contributes to innovation capacity and long-term sustainability (Lee & Chen, 2023).

In the digital environment, technologies such as collaborative platforms, cloud computing, and AI systems enhance communication and decision-making. Organizations investing in digital infrastructure and training tend to have more engaged and innovative workforces (Li et al., 2023). Modern crises extend beyond traditional risks to include cyber threats, social media backlash, and data breaches (Johnson & Brown, 2021). Effective crisis management requires proactive planning, real-time communication, and digital monitoring tools, where digital leaders play a crucial role in ensuring rapid response and clarity during disruptions.

A well-developed digital crisis management strategy minimizes reputational damage and

maintains stakeholder trust. Competitive performance reflects an organization's ability to outperform competitors in efficiency, innovation, and responsiveness (Wang et al., 2024a). This performance is increasingly linked to digital transformation and leadership capabilities. Strategic decision-making and market responsiveness are enhanced through digital tools and analytics (Yang & Li, 2022). Organizations aligning digital strategies with customer needs demonstrate higher satisfaction and market share (Zia et al., 2024). Thus, digital leadership provides the strategic agility necessary for sustained competitive advantage.

Research indicates that transformational digital leaders foster environments of trust, innovation, and collaboration, influencing employee readiness for technological change (Li et al., 2023). Digitally engaged employees are more likely to contribute innovative ideas and adapt to organizational changes. Empirical evidence, including studies in developing contexts, shows that digital leadership enhances innovation and efficiency through employee engagement and learning cultures (Zhang & Chen, 2023). Consequently, digital leadership and engagement are critical drivers of sustainable competitive performance.

There is increasing demand for integrating crisis management with career development strategies to ensure workforce resilience (Liu et al., 2021). Skill gaps, psychological stress, and organizational weaknesses can intensify crises if not addressed effectively. Organizations that link crisis learning with employee development—through post-crisis training, psychological support, and strategic workforce planning—are better equipped for future uncertainties (Yang & Li, 2022). Additionally, digital leaders who promote adaptive learning and psychological safety enhance employee preparedness for disruptions (Zia et al., 2024).

In an increasingly digital and uncertain environment, effective digital leadership enables institutions to anticipate and manage crises through technological preparedness and agile decision-making, thereby strengthening competitive performance (Kim et al., 2021). Career development and digital engagement serve as key mechanisms through which digital leadership enhances employee competencies, motivation, and commitment during disruptions (Pasupuleti, 2024). Integrating digital leadership and crisis management perspectives provides deeper insight into how institutions invest in digital strategies and human capital development (Philip et al., 2023).

Digital leadership plays a central role in shaping an institution's ability to anticipate, respond to, and recover from crises through data-driven decision-making and technological flexibility (Johnson & Brown, 2021). Effective crisis management supports competitive performance by ensuring operational continuity, protecting institutional reputation, and strengthening stakeholder trust (Yang & Li, 2022). Career development acts as a critical mediating factor, as digitally oriented leaders foster learning environments that enhance employee skills, confidence, and commitment (Zia et al., 2024).

Overall, the interaction between digital leadership, crisis management, and competitive performance represents a critical research domain in the evolving institutional landscape. Digital leadership drives innovation and performance, while crisis management ensures resilience and stability. Competitive performance reflects the organization's ability to sustain strategic advantage through operational excellence (Li et al., 2023). Evidence suggests that digital leadership

positively influences performance through mediating mechanisms such as affective commitment and digital culture (Liu et al., 2021).

3.0 Methodology

The research design of current study is quantitative in order to examine the diverse nature of relationships to follows the quantitative and explanatory research approach is normally used to provide the complex relationship among these variables within higher education setting in particular context. In this study, population includes faculty members from the southern region higher institutions of KP, Pakistan. The total faculty working in these institutions are (2280), wherein sample (340) was selected via statistical. Thus, 340 questionnaires were distributed among the faculty members in these institutions and response rate was computed at main study level in order to collect and analyze the data to reach the desired conclusion. Thus, 340 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents of the current study wherein 322 questionnaires were recollected and used for data analysis to find the answers of research questions.

The study population serves in institutions of higher learning because they are the ones that are directly engaged in leadership processes, crisis response, and activities that promote professional growth, and digitally enabled institutional practices. A representative sample is normally selected on basis of universities and degree awarding institutions and probability-based sampling method is frequently employed to improve generalizability, desirable to offer sufficient coverage of various departments, roles and institutional types. Such sampling approach enables the research to focus on variety of views on digital leadership, experience in crisis management, career growth chances, and offer valid and reliable information on their joint impact on the higher institutional performance.

Table 3.1 Sample-Size Determination

Formula	E	N = 2280	Sample = 340
$n = N/1 + Ne^2$	0.05	$n = 2280/ (1+2280 (0.0025))$, $n = 340.29$	Sample = 340

The data collection and its analysis are important phases in research aims at reaching the desired conclusion and decisions. In this linking, by combining qualitative and quantitative methods and ensuring data analysis, it helps in gaining a comprehensive understanding to interrelations in particular context. The sources of data collection will include secondary and primary wherein secondary data will be collected from existing literature while primary data will be collected from questionnaires for measuring variables over different statements by using Liker scale as suggested by different researchers. Both the primary and secondary data were collected through different sources and analyzed through different procedures to attain the desired and leading outcomes to reach the conclusion.

The information necessary to analyze relationships between digital leadership, crisis management and competitive performance with mediating effect of career development. The

secondary data was collected through different online databases concerning the research variables of study. The data analysis is often performed with the help of descriptive and inferential statistics, where the reliability and validity measures are conducted then followed by correlation and analysis. More cultured approaches like statistical tools are used in order to test the direct and indirect association between variables with the help of which the entire mediation effect can be evaluated and effective empirical verification of hypothesized relationships. The survey approach enables researchers to use an instrumentation for data collection and thus researcher will use questionnaire for primary data collection on variables. The questionnaire scales were already used in different contexts for analyzing the different outcomes based upon the nature and objectives of research study for analyzing the desired leading outcomes.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Digital Leadership	322	1.30	4.80	3.1971	.75908
Career Development	322	1.33	4.67	3.0831	.79556
Crises Management	322	1.60	4.60	3.3920	.67233
Competitive Performance	322	1.63	4.70	3.3297	.61987
Valid N (listwise)	322				

The descriptive statistics is crucial part of social research because it enables a clear and systematic overview of the obtained data giving researcher an understanding of general features of the sample and investigated variables. They assist in classifying large and complicated data into useful forms and measures include frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations that give a rough outline of the trends, central tendencies, and variability of the data. It is vital in social research to profile demographic information of the respondents, determine trends in attitudes or behaviours and to estimate general distribution of the respondent responses in order to pursue more complex inferential statistics.

H1: There is a significant association among the digital leadership, career development, crisis management and competitive performance.

Correlations

Table 4.2 Correlations Analysis

		[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Digital Leadership [1]	Pearson Correlation	1	.03**	.460**	.573**	.520**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	322	322	322	322	322
Career Development [2]	Pearson Correlation	.303**	1	.342**	.329**	.334**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	322	322	322	322	322
Crises Management [4]	Pearson Correlation	.573**	.329**	.440**	1	.555**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	322	322	322	322	322
Competitive Performance [5]	Pearson Correlation	.520**	.334**	.528**	.555**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	322	322	322	322	322

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation procedure was used to examine the association among digital leadership, career development, crisis management and competitive performance to confirm the strength and direction in relationship through association by using correlation analysis to reach the desired conclusion and make decision. The results of correlation confirmed the association in research variables like the digital leadership and crisis management (R = .573 & P = .000), career development and crisis management (R = .329 & P = .000), and crisis management (R = .440 & P = .000), digital leadership and competitive performance (R = .520 & P = .000), career development and competitive performance (R = .334 & P = .000), and the competitive performance (R = .528 & P = .000), and consequently from these correlation outcomes, the hypothesis is accepted in the current study about the strength and direction in the relationship amid variables.

H2: There is significant impact of digital leadership, career development on crisis management.

Table 4.3 Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	SEE
1	.618 ^a	.382	.376		.53094

Table 4.4 Regression Analysis

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	55.458	3	18.486	65.578	.000 ^b
	Residual	89.642	318	.282		
	Total	145.100	321			

Table 4.5 Regression Analysis

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	SE	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.298	.169		7.673	.000
	Digital Leadership	.368	.042	.446	8.855	.000
	Career Development	.107	.040	.128	2.696	.007

a. Predictors: Digital Leadership, Career Development

b. Dependent Variable: Crises Management

The regression procedure was used to explore the cause-&-effect relationship among the research variables under considerations like digital leadership, career development, and crisis management to ensure predictability of crisis management over and digital leadership, career development, to reach the conclusion. The results revealed that there is 38.2% variance in the crisis management is due to digital leadership, career development, with the significant positive leading impact of the predictors on the criterion variable of the study like digital leadership ($\beta = .368$ & $P = .000$), career development ($\beta = .107$ & $P = .007$), and thus hypothesis was accepted from the results of regression procedure.

H3: There is significant impact of digital leadership, career development on competitive performance.

Table 4.6 Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SEE
1	.624 ^a	.389	.383	.48687

Table 4.7 Regression Analysis

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	47.958	3	15.986	67.439	.000 ^b
	Residual	75.381	318	.237		
	Total	123.339	321			

Table 4.8 Regression Analysis

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	SE	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.251	.155		8.063	.000
	Digital Leadership	.250	.038	.330	6.572	.000
	Career Development	.092	.036	.120	2.523	.012

a. Predictors: Digital Leadership, Career Development
 b. Dependent Variable: Competitive Performance

The regression procedure was used to explore the cause-&-effect relationship among the research variables under considerations like digital leadership, career development, and competitive performance to ensure predictability of crisis management via digital leadership, career development to reach the conclusion. The results revealed that there is 38.2% variance in the competitive performance is due to digital leadership, career development, with the significant positive leading impact of the predictors on the criterion variable of the study like digital leadership ($\beta = .250$ & $P = .000$), career development ($\beta = .092$ & $P = .007$), and hypothesis was accepted from results of regression procedure.

H4: There is significant mediating role of career development in the relationship amid digital leadership and crisis management.

Mediation First Step (a)

Table 4.9 Model Summary

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.3032	.0919	.5898	31.6836	1.0000	320.0000	.0000

Table 4.10 Coefficients of Regression

Model	Coefficient	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.2813	.1607	14.1937	.0000	1.9651	2.5976
Digital Leadership	.2988	.0531	5.6288	.0000	.1943	.4032

Predicting Variable: Digital Leadership

Criterion Variable: Career Development

Mediation Second & Third Steps (b & c)

Table 4.11 Model Summary

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5959	.3551	.2933	90.2504	2.0000	319.0000	.0000

Table 4.12 Coefficients of Regression

Model	Coefficient	Se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.6262	.1512	10.7573	.0000	1.3288	1.9237
Career Development	.1429	.0493	2.8999	.0040	.0459	.2398
Digital Leadership	.4293	.0451	9.5232	.0000	.3406	.5180

Predicting Variable: Digital Leadership, Career Development

Criterion Variable: Crisis Management

Mediation Fourth Step (c)

Table 4.13 Model Summary

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5732	.3286	.3044	139.8160	1.0000	320.0000	.0000

Table 4.14 Coefficients of Regression

Model	Coefficient	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.9522	.1270	15.3669	.0000	1.7022	2.2021
Digital Leadership	.4720	.0399	11.8244	.0000	.3934	.5505

Predicting Variable: Digital Leadership

Criterion Variable: Crisis Management

The mediation procedure provides significant information about the career development in the relationship amid digital leadership and crisis management through four different paths using the Hayes Process Macro Model to ensure mediation outcomes. The main theme behind these paths is the assurance that whether the mediator partially mediated the relationship between predictor and criterion variable or fully mediated the relationship. The results of mediation through all the different paths revealed important information through significant outcomes in reaching decision about the mediation. The results revealed that career development partially mediated relationship between digital leadership and crisis management due to decrease in the coefficient value from (.4720) in direct relationship to (.4293) in indirect relationship while the remaining values thus remained significant in the entire process which thus confirmed the mediation and hypothesis was accepted from results.

H5: There is significant mediating role of career development in the relationship amid digital leadership and competitive performance.

Mediation First Step (a)

Table 4.15 Model Summary

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.3032	.0919	.5898	31.6836	1.0000	320.0000	.0000

Table 4.16 Coefficients of Regression

Model	Coefficient	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.2813	.1607	14.1937	.0000	1.9651	2.5976
Digital Leadership	.2988	.0531	5.6288	.0000	.1943	.4032

Predicting Variable: Digital Leadership

Criterion Variable: Career Development

Mediation Second & Third Steps (b & c)

Table 4.17 Model Summary

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5523	.3051	.2687	69.2149	2.0000	319.0000	.0000

Table 4.18 Coefficients of Regression

Model	Coefficient	Se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.7831	.1413	12.6211	.0000	1.5052	2.0611
Career Development	.1497	.0413	3.6223	.0003	.0684	.2311
Digital Leadership	.3502	.0422	8.3016	.0000		.4332

Predicting Variable: Digital Leadership, Career Development

Criterion Variable: Competitive Performance

Mediation Fourth Step (c)

Table 4.19 Model Summary

R	R Square	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5203	.2707	.2811	95.1744	1.0000	320.0000	.0000

Table 4.20 Coefficients of Regression

Model	Coefficient	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.1248	.1356	15.6723	.0000	1.8580	2.3915
Digital Leadership	.3950	.0405	9.7557	.0000	.3153	.4746

Predicting Variable: Digital Leadership

Criterion Variable: Competitive Performance

The mediation procedure provides significant information about the career development in the relationship amid digital leadership and competitive performance through four different paths using Hayes Process Macro Model to ensure mediation outcomes. The main theme behind these paths is assurance that whether mediator partially mediated the relationship between predictor and criterion variable or fully mediated the relationship. The results of mediation through all the different paths revealed important information through significant outcomes in reaching decision about the mediation. The results revealed that career development partially mediated relationship between digital leadership and competitive performance due to decrease in the coefficient value from (.3950) in direct relationship to (.3502) in indirect relationship while the remaining values thus remained significant in entire process which thus confirmed the mediation and hypothesis was accepted from results.

5.0 Conclusion

The research study concludes that digital leadership is of critical importance in determining the ability of higher education institutions to effectively cope with crisis and attain a competitive performance within the increasingly sophisticated and technology-driven environment. It shows that digital leadership goes beyond use of technology to include strategic vision, adaptive culture and innovation enabling which all lead to institutional resilience in cases of disruption. Crisis management appears as essential operation which is impactful with regards to digital leadership which allows institutions to predict, react and recover against obstacles without jeopardizing the quality of academics and stakeholders’ trust. But all in all, results confirm the idea that sustainable competitive performance in higher education is result of interconnected, self-reinforcing nature of digital leadership, effective corporate crisis management, dedicated career development.

With such a holistic approach adopted by institutions, they become more resilient to uncertainty, develop innovations, and retain their strategic relevance and excellence in the global educational environment. The research identifies the essential intervening significance of career development, demonstrating that faculty engagement in professional development and skill advancement can enable them to operate in the digital realm and respond to the constantly changing needs, thus converting leadership and crisis management actions into specific improvements in performance.

It confirms that digital leadership creates a culture of innovation, flexibility, and strategic focus, which is important to overcome the challenges of the contemporary educational

environments. Moreover, the career development is found to be one of the major mediators by showing that, by investing in the career development and skills improvement of the faculty and staff, institutions produce a workforce that can capitalize reinforces the effect of leadership and crisis management on performance outcomes. The study emphasizes the need to note that crisis management is a key process under the umbrella of which the digital leadership will be converted into organizational resilience so that institutions could continue to exist despite the disruption affecting them, retain knowledge because it combines digital leadership, crisis management, career development in the unified system that justifies the overall impact of these factors on the competitive performance. Such holistic approach questions the traditional approaches to leadership and crisis response and performance outcomes as independent variables and focuses on importance of interdependency and the role of human capital development and digital participation as the mediating variables. Practically, the research highlights that higher education institutions need to develop the digital leadership skills that will lead to technological innovations, as well as organizational flexibility and resilience when facing a crisis.

The research indorses expansion of holistic approaches that can bridge leadership development, crisis preparedness, professional development, and digital inclusivity as a related priority to the success of the institutions. Thus, each of these effects, combined, highlights the interdependence of leadership, human capital formation, digital involvement, and crisis preparedness in leading to sustainable competitive advantage among institutions of higher education in an even more digital and unstable world. The results of the study can be significant in terms of their implications on theory, practice, and policy in the higher education. It emphasizes the importance of investing in career development programs, which can improve the digital competencies and adaptive skills of faculty and staff, and, in turn, contribute to managing crises better and improving its performance over time that are required for comprehending the tasks towards conducive environment from different perspectives.

The findings of study recommended that policy makers and institutional leaders should develop structures to promote lifelong learning, fair access to online resources, and adaptive leadership frameworks which can overcome uncertainty and change. The inability to cover the interrelated areas can undermine institutional competitiveness, lower crisis resiliencies, and impact the ability to manage the changing stakeholder expectations. On the whole, the implications of the research suggest systemic and integrative nature of approach to addressing the issues and opportunities that the digital transformation and crisis environment offer, which would make higher education institutions dynamic, creative, and competitive in the fast-changing global context. The findings of study provide significant information through theoretical and empirical investigations from different dimensions to realize the desired outcomes leading towards required contributions in the particular context.

Muhammad Mujeeb Khan: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework, Data Analysis, and Drafting

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Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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