



Exploring the Influence of Digital Transformation on Human Capital Development: Evidence from Small and Medium Enterprises in Indonesia

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ABSTRAK

This study explores the causal and conditional influence of Digital Transformation (DT) on Human Capital Development (HCD) within Indonesian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was conducted among 405 SME managers across Indonesia's trade, manufacturing, and service sectors. Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS, the study tested five hypotheses linking digital strategy alignment (DSA), digital infrastructure investment (DII), and digital culture and flexibility (DCF) to two dimensions of HCD—digital skills (DS) and specialized digital knowledge (SDK)—while incorporating resource scarcity (RS) as a structural constraint and DS as a moderator. The results reveal that strategic alignment (DSA) exerts the strongest influence on specialized digital knowledge (SDK) ($\beta=0.45$, $p<0.001$), confirming that only strategically guided digitalization fosters advanced human capital formation. For SME managers, the study underscores that strategic digital alignment and continuous skill upgrading must precede technological investment to ensure sustainable transformation and competitiveness. This research advances the Resource-Based View (RBV) by empirically modeling human capital as a dynamic capability within digital transformation processes, offering rare quantitative evidence from an emerging economy context. It also introduces resource scarcity as a conditioning mechanism, enriching theoretical frameworks of digital maturity for developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

Contextualizing the Digital Imperative

The global economy is currently undergoing a pervasive and radical transformation driven by the Digital Revolution, characterized by rapid technological innovation and systemic changes across industrial and economic structures. This era mandates a fundamental reshaping of operational models, compelling organizations, regardless of their size or resource endowments, to confront a modification of the competitive environment. Traditional value chains are collapsing, giving way to dynamic, collaborative digital value networks where organizations co-create products and services with partners and customers. This complex shift constitutes a new logic of digital entrepreneurship.

Central to successfully navigating this transition is the proactive development and formation of human capital (HCD). The adoption of digital technologies in human resource management is not merely an administrative shift but an integral component of forming and updating the knowledge layer essential for transitioning to this new digital paradigm. This effort specifically aims to cultivate highly qualified personnel equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge demanded by digitized systems and processes. Therefore, the study of how organizational digitalization efforts directly translate into measurable HCD gains is paramount for understanding global economic adaptation.

The Critical Role of SMEs in Indonesia

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) constitute the overwhelming majority of the Indonesian economic landscape. Statistically, SMEs account for more than 99% of registered businesses and are responsible for employing over 97% of the national workforce. Given this scale, the performance and maturity of the SME sector are inextricably linked to Indonesia's ability to achieve inclusive economic growth, rural development, and innovation diffusion. Consequently, the trajectory of digital transformation (DT) within this segment holds profound implications for national competitiveness.

The Indonesian government has actively recognized digitalization as a vital national instrument. Policy discourse has progressed beyond perceiving digitalization solely as a means for online marketing or basic financial recording. Instead, it is increasingly viewed as a tool critical for strengthening downstream processing, improving production efficiency, refining supply chain management, and ensuring traceability systems necessary to align local products with international standards and maximize added value. Official pronouncements emphasize the necessity of an inclusive and collaborative digital ecosystem, requiring synergy among government bodies, academia, the private sector, and the entrepreneurial community to provide practical solutions and support. This policy push validates the necessity of empirical research that evaluates the efficacy of DT initiatives in preparing the human capital base for these strategic objectives.

Problem Statement and Research Gap

Despite the economic significance of SMEs and the strong policy mandate for digitalization, the realized digital maturity across the sector remains uneven.² While Indonesia has witnessed a notable growth in the adoption of various digital tools—such as e-commerce, mobile payments, and cloud accounting², this adoption is frequently characterized by a fundamental strategic deficit. Literature suggests that many SMEs adopt digital tools in a reactive or fragmented manner, rather than integrating them through comprehensive strategic alignment.

This phenomenon, termed the fragmentation paradox, results in a fundamental disconnect between technological investment and genuine organizational transformation. If technology is adopted merely as a quick fix, the resulting human capital development tends to be superficial, focusing perhaps on basic platform operation skills rather than the deeper, specialized knowledge required for structural efficiency gains, such as advanced digital supply chain optimization.

Exacerbating this challenge are structural limitations unique to the Indonesian SME context. These barriers include severe resource scarcity, critically limited access to tailored training programs, and often inadequate policy coordination across regulatory bodies. Financial constraints, requiring substantial capital investment for both digital infrastructure and subsequent human capital upgrading, act as a significant obstacle to sustained DT efforts.⁵ Although the literature identifies high adoption rates and acknowledges these structural limitations, there is a distinct lack of quantitative evidence empirically linking the *quality* of DT adoption (strategic vs. fragmented) to the *depth* of HCD outcomes (general skills vs. specialized knowledge) within this specific context. This study seeks to bridge this gap by establishing and testing complex causal and conditional relationships.

Research Objectives and Value Proposition

The primary goal of this research is to empirically quantify the influence of different dimensions of Digital Transformation on the multi-dimensional facets of Human Capital Development within Indonesian Small and Medium Enterprises, using advanced statistical modeling.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Defining Digital Transformation in the SME Context

Digital transformation is understood as the continuous, iterative organizational shift driven by technology, leading to changes in business models, processes, and corporate capabilities. DT is not a static state; its progression is often measured through digital maturity models that assess organizational readiness across various critical dimensions. These dimensions typically encompass digital strategy roadmap, information technology (IT) infrastructure, organizational flexibility, employee skill and culture, and external environment integration.

For SMEs, particularly those facing resource constraints, DT success is highly dependent on internal organizational factors. Top management commitment to strategy, the adaptability of the organizational structure, and the inherent corporate culture all play pivotal roles in determining the likelihood of successful transformation. Based on a review of relevant literature, this study models DT using three key constructs tailored to the SME environment:

1. **Digital Strategy Alignment (DSA):** This construct assesses the degree to which digital technology adoption is integrated into the core long-term business strategy, mitigating the risk of fragmented, reactive tool adoption.
2. **Digital Infrastructure Investment (DII):** This measures the organization's commitment of capital toward core technological assets, such as cloud computing services, integrated platforms, and network capacity, which require substantial initial investment.
3. **Digital Culture and Flexibility (DCF):** This reflects the organization's intangible assets related to change management, including an open culture toward innovation and the ability to adapt processes rapidly in response to environmental influences.

The Conceptualization of Human Capital Development (HCD)

Human Capital is universally recognized as a multi-dimensional construct, central to organizational performance and innovation. Studies focusing on SMEs, especially within the Asian context, consistently identify four fundamental components of HC: **education, knowledge, experience, and skills**. These elements represent the collective intellectual assets that determine a firm's capacity for growth and internationalization.

In the current digital paradigm, HCD requires specific competencies related to agility, responsiveness, and proactivity, moving beyond static knowledge accumulation. To accurately reflect the differential impact of DT, this study operationalizes HCD into two distinct outcome variables:

1. **Employee Digital Skills (DS):** Pertaining to the practical proficiency and capability of employees in using digital technologies to execute routine and non-routine daily work tasks.
2. **Specialized Digital Knowledge (SDK):** Referring to the deeper, technical understanding of digitally mediated processes, such as advanced analytics, digital production management, or cyber-security protocols, necessary for structural improvements like down-streaming.

A critical consideration in this research is the recognized dual role of human capital. While HCD is a primary objective (dependent variable) of organizational investment and training, advanced theoretical models indicate that existing human capital, specifically employee skill levels, also function as a crucial *moderating* variable. The presence of adequate skills acts as a bridge or a precondition, positively influencing the internal support and response to new DT initiatives. This implies that a skilled workforce reduces the inherent resistance to change, thereby amplifying the overall success rate of strategic transformation efforts. This reciprocal relationship necessitates a sophisticated structural modeling approach to fully capture HCD's influence.

Hypothesis Development

The theoretical framework posits a model where strategic intent and infrastructure serve as drivers, HCD components act as outcomes and moderators, and Resource Scarcity operates as an external constraint.

- **H1: Digital Strategy Alignment (DSA) is positively and significantly related to Specialized Digital Knowledge (SDK) acquisition in Indonesian SMEs.**
 - Rationale: Only when DT is strategically aligned will management allocate resources specifically to high-level training necessary for specialized process knowledge (SDK), distinguishing it from fragmented, reactive skill acquisition.
- **H2: Digital Infrastructure Investment (DII) is positively and significantly related to employee Digital Skills (DS).**
 - Rationale: The physical introduction of new digital technologies and systems (DII) forces employees to engage with these platforms, thereby compelling the acquisition of practical operating skills (DS).
- **H3: Digital Culture and Flexibility (DCF) positively influences the successful integration of Digital Transformation efforts (DT Success).**
 - Rationale: A flexible organizational culture fosters internal buy-in and adaptability, critical non-structural factors supporting successful organizational change and transformation integration.
- **H4: Employee Digital Skills (DS) positively moderates the relationship between Digital Strategy Alignment (DSA) and DT Success.**
 - Rationale: Existing digital skills increase employee responsiveness and support for new initiatives, enhancing the impact of strategic planning on measurable DT success, demonstrating the dynamic capability of human capital.
- **H5: Perceived Resource Scarcity negatively influences the strength of the DII → DS path.**
 - Rationale: This hypothesis directly tests the empirical impact of the structural limitations known to plague Indonesian SMEs. Financial and training constraints (Resource Scarcity) are expected to significantly weaken the ability of SMEs to translate infrastructure investment (DII) into realized employee skill development (DS).

METHODOLOGY

Empirical Design and Advanced Statistical Modeling Research Design, Sampling, and Data Collection

This investigation utilized a deductive, quantitative methodology based on survey data, essential for testing the complex causal and conditional relationships outlined in the theoretical model. The cross-sectional design was executed through the distribution of structured questionnaires to a targeted population of Indonesian SME owners, top managers, and middle managers. Targeting managers was necessary because they possess the requisite knowledge regarding organizational resource allocation, strategic intent, infrastructure

investment, and human capital training initiatives, which are central to the study's constructs.

Data was collected electronically, yielding a final analytical sample of N=405 respondents, exceeding the minimum requirement of N=371 suggested for adequate power in Structural Equation Modeling applications. The sample was diversified across major economic sectors in Indonesia (Trade, Manufacturing, and Service) to ensure broad representation. All procedures adhered to ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent and assuring data privacy, recognizing the subjective nature of some HCD measurements.

Measurement Scales and Construct Validation

All latent variables were operationalized using previously validated reflective indicators measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Specific attention was paid to adapting scale items to the specific context of resource-constrained Asian SMEs, leveraging validated frameworks that emphasize knowledge, experience, and skills as core HC dimensions.

Construct Operationalization:

- **DT Constructs:** Items for DSA, DII, and DCF were designed to cover the breadth of organizational transformation, ranging from initial technological introduction (digitization) to fundamental process change (transformation).
- **HCD Constructs:** The items for Digital Skills (DS) focused on functional application proficiency, while Specialized Digital Knowledge (SDK) items targeted conceptual and strategic understanding of digital process changes (e.g., supply chain integration).
- **Resource Scarcity (RS):** Items measured perceived limits related to financial capital availability, access to affordable technology, and the constraints on external training providers.

Statistical Procedure for Validation

To ensure high methodological rigor suitable for an international journal, a two-step approach was used: reliability assessment (SPSS) followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using IBM AMOS.

1. **Reliability:** Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (α). All constructs exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, with critical variables such as Digital Skills demonstrating high reliability ($\alpha=0.91$), justifying their role as a robust moderator.
2. **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA):** The CFA established construct validity. Convergent validity was confirmed by high Composite Reliability (CR >0.70) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE >0.50). Discriminant validity was also verified using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, ensuring that, for instance, Digital Strategy was conceptually and empirically distinct from Digital Culture. This rigorous validation step was essential for confirming that the adapted measurement model accurately represented the constructs within the specific resource-constrained and often fragmented digital context of Indonesian SMEs, reducing the risk of measurement error in subsequent path analysis.

3. The measurement model demonstrated an excellent fit to the data (CFI=0.93, TLI=0.92, RMSEA=0.057).

Table 1: Measurement Model Assessment and Scale Validation (CFA Output Summary)

Construct	Dimensions	Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Status
Digital Strategy (DSA)	Alignment, Vision	5	0.88	0.86	0.58	Acceptable
Digital Infrastructure (DII)	Investment, Technology	4	0.83	0.79	0.53	Acceptable
Digital Skills (DS)	Proficiency, Application	6	0.91	0.89	0.62	Strong
Specialized Knowledge (SDK)	Process, Supply Chain	5	0.82	0.77	0.51	Acceptable
Resource Scarcity (RS)	Financial, Training	3	0.76	0.74	0.48	Marginal (Accepted due to critical constraint role)

Data Analysis Strategy: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via IBM AMOS was employed to test the complex relationships simultaneously. The overall structural model fit indices were satisfactory (CFI=0.91, TLI=0.90, RMSEA=0.063), confirming the adequacy of the theoretical framework.

The analysis specifically required advanced SEM techniques:

- Mediation:** Bootstrapping (5,000 samples) was utilized to test the significance of the indirect effect (mediation) for H2, establishing the mechanism through which strategic intent is realized via investment.
- Moderation:** The complex interaction terms necessary for testing H4 (DS moderation) and the conditional path for H5 (RS constraint) were constructed using established interaction modeling protocols within AMOS. This allowed for a precise test of how the effect of one variable on another is conditioned by the level of a third variable, providing the necessary statistical rigor for the study's theoretical assertions regarding the dual role of HC and structural limitations.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Sample Characteristics

The analytical sample of N=405 Indonesian SMEs showed an average length of operation of 9.4 years, indicating a stable population base. Sectoral distribution confirmed a strong representation from Trade (45%), Manufacturing (30%), and Service (25%). In terms of digital adoption, 93% of respondents reported utilizing at least one e-commerce or mobile payment platform, substantiating the high but fragmented adoption observed in the literature.² However, only 38% reported using integrated, company-wide platforms for supply chain or enterprise resource planning, highlighting the disparity between simple tool usage and deep, structural digitalization.

Measurement Model Assessment (CFA)

As detailed in Section 3.2, the CFA results confirmed robust validity and reliability across all constructs. The observed fit indices strongly supported the factor structure, ensuring that the latent variables used in the structural model accurately reflected the intended psychological and organizational phenomena.

Structural Model Testing and Model Fit

The final structural model demonstrated strong overall fit, confirming that the hypothesized structure adequately explained the relationships among Digital Transformation, Human Capital Development, and DT Success, while accounting for the constraint of Resource Scarcity.

Hypothesis Testing Output

The results of the hypothesis testing within the Structural Equation Model are presented below.

Table 2: Results of Structural Model Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Standardized Coefficient (β)	S.E.	C.R. (t-value)	p-value (Sig.)	Result
H1	DSA → Specialized Knowledge (SDK)	0.45	0.06	7.50	<0.001	Supported
H2	DII → Digital Skills (DS)	0.32	0.05	6.40	<0.001	Supported
H3	Digital Culture (DCF) → DT Success	0.28	0.04	7.00	<0.001	Supported
H4 (Moderation)	DS x DSA → DT Success	0.19	0.03	6.33	<0.001	Supported

H5 (Constraint)	RS → DII → DS (Indirect Effect)	-0.15	0.02	7.50	<0.001	Supported (Negative Constraint)
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Detailed Path Interpretation:

- **H1 (DSA → SDK):** This path was highly significant ($\beta=0.45, p<0.001$). The strong positive coefficient indicates that strategic alignment of DT is the most critical factor driving the development of specialized, high-value knowledge (SDK) among employees. This contrasts sharply with the lower reliance on non-strategic investment.
- **H2 (DII → DS):** The relationship was positive and significant ($\beta=0.32, p<0.001$). This confirms that investment in digital infrastructure acts as a necessary trigger, compelling the workforce to gain the requisite operational Digital Skills (DS).
- **H3 (DCF → DT Success):** The path was positive and significant ($\beta=0.28, p<0.001$). This reinforces the notion that organizational factors, specifically culture and flexibility, are essential for successful transformation integration, regardless of capital or skill levels.⁵
- **H4 (Moderation):** The interaction term was significant ($\beta=0.19, p<0.001$). The positive moderation confirms that existing employee Digital Skills significantly enhance the effectiveness of a robust Digital Strategy Alignment (DSA) in achieving overall DT Success. This indicates that a skilled human capital base reduces implementation friction and maximizes strategic returns.¹³
- **H5 (Constraint):** The analysis of the conditional path revealed a strong, significant negative indirect effect of Perceived Resource Scarcity (RS) on the translation of DII into DS ($\beta=-0.15, p<0.001$). This outcome empirically validates the structural limitations highlighted in policy discussions, confirming that financial and resource deficits severely inhibit the ability of SMEs to convert technology investment into realized workforce capabilities.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Key Findings

The results of this study offer a nuanced understanding of how DT influences HCD, moving beyond simple correlational analysis to establish complex causal and conditional relationships specific to Indonesian SMEs.

The Dominance of Strategic Alignment over Fragmented Adoption

The overwhelming support for H1 suggests that the crucial difference between merely adopting digital tools and achieving genuine human capital transformation lies in strategic intent. The high standardized coefficient for the DSA → SDK path demonstrates that without a clear, non-fragmented digital strategy, SMEs are unlikely to generate the specialized knowledge necessary to restructure operational processes, such as digital supply chain management.³ This finding provides empirical justification for the observed fragmentation

paradox²; superficial technology usage generates only superficial skills, failing to unlock the potential for competitive gains through advanced HCD. For Indonesian SMEs to effectively move up the value chain, as targeted by government initiatives, strategic planning must precede, or at least concurrently drive, technological adoption.

The Conditional Nature of Investment-Driven Skill Development

The support for H2 (DII → DS) confirms that investment in digital infrastructure is the fundamental, tangible mechanism by which strategic vision is translated into skill requirements. However, this instrumental relationship is shown to be highly vulnerable to external constraints, validated by the powerful negative effect of Resource Scarcity (H5).

The significant constraint identified in H5 empirically validates that the structural limitations—resource scarcity, limited capital, and inadequate technical assistance—are not theoretical difficulties but measurable forces actively undermining the DT efforts of Indonesian SMEs. When an SME faces financial limitations, it curtails not only the scale of infrastructure investment (DII) but also the crucial subsequent training necessary for employees to acquire Digital Skills (DS). This confirms that organizational capacity for HCD gains is fundamentally dependent on overcoming financial hurdles. Effective policy cannot simply assume training availability; it must address investment barriers as a necessary first step to stabilize the DII → DS path.

Human Capital as a Dynamic Capability Amplifier

The significance of the moderation hypothesis (H4) highlights the crucial dynamic capability of human capital. Employee Digital Skills (DS) are demonstrated to be more than just an end product; they are an enabling asset that reduces resistance to change and amplifies the successful outcome of strategic DT initiatives.¹³ This establishes a critical reinforcing loop: initial investment generates skills (H2), and these skills, in turn, enhance the effectiveness of subsequent strategic alignments (H4). SME management must therefore treat the existing skill base as an organizational lever, prioritizing internal development concurrently with strategic planning to maximize the success of ongoing transformation efforts.

Theoretical Implications

The research significantly contributes to the Resource-Based View (RBV) literature by specifically modeling the complex, interdependent relationship between technological resources (DII) and human resources (HCD) within the highly constrained context of an emerging economy. By demonstrating that HCD functions simultaneously as an outcome variable and a critical moderating variable, the study substantiates the notion of human capital as a dynamic capability pathway for SMEs seeking sustained competitive advantage.

Furthermore, the integration and empirical validation of Perceived Resource Scarcity (H5) refine existing theoretical models of digital maturity. These models, often developed in developed economies, tend to overlook the profound negative impact of financial and resource constraints. By showing that these structural factors conditionally weaken the internal pathways linking investment to skill development, this research provides essential contextual

nuance for adapting global DT frameworks to resource-constrained environments like Indonesia.

Practical Implications for Indonesian SMEs and Policy Makers

The quantitative findings derived from this study offer specific, evidence-based guidance for practitioners and policymakers aiming to enhance DT success and HCD outcomes in Indonesia.

For Policy Makers:

The constraint finding (H5) necessitates a fundamental recalibration of support programs. Simply offering generalized training is insufficient. Government initiatives, such as the digital platform based on a public-private partnership (KPBU) promoted by the Ministry of MSMEs 3, must be designed to simultaneously address financial barriers to infrastructure investment and provide targeted technical assistance. Policies should favor integrated financial packages that subsidize the acquisition of core digital infrastructure (DII) tied to mandatory training curricula focused on specialized process knowledge (SDK).⁴ This targeted approach ensures that scarce government resources mitigate the primary structural limitation and foster high-value HCD outcomes.

For SME Managers:

The results underscore the need to shift management focus from reactive technology adoption to strategic planning (H1). Managers must prioritize the formulation of a clear Digital Strategy Alignment (DSA) before scaling up technological expenditures. Crucially, given the reciprocal nature of human capital (H4), managers should treat employee skill development as a prerequisite investment. Actively upgrading employee digital skills ensures a supportive internal environment, minimizing resistance to change and maximizing the successful integration of subsequent strategic initiatives, thereby generating higher returns on all DT investments.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary of Contribution

This research successfully utilized Structural Equation Modeling to investigate the complex influence of Digital Transformation on Human Capital Development among Indonesian SMEs, clarifying the critical mechanisms of strategic alignment, investment, and cultural support. The study provided robust empirical evidence confirming that: (1) Strategic Alignment, rather than fragmented adoption, is necessary to develop specialized, high-value human capital (SDK); (2) Digital Infrastructure Investment acts as the instrumental catalyst for skill acquisition; (3) Existing Digital Skills function as a crucial dynamic capability, enhancing strategic success; and (4) Pervasive Resource Scarcity operates as a significant negative constraint, actively undermining the ability of SMEs to translate technological investment into employee skill gains. This synthesis provides a validated framework for understanding and addressing the DT and HCD challenges in the context of emerging Asian economies.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the findings are robust, the reliance on cross-sectional survey data limits the definitive establishment of causal pathways, despite the use of SEM. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported measures from managers may introduce perception biases.

Future research should focus on methodological and conceptual extensions:

1. **Longitudinal Design:** Future studies should employ longitudinal tracking of SMEs undergoing specific DT interventions to observe how HCD metrics evolve over time, offering stronger causal inference regarding the DSA → SDK pathway.
2. **Sectoral Differentiation:** Given the diverse nature of the Indonesian SME economy and the historical vertical focus of some DT literature⁷, comparative studies between distinct sectors (e.g., digitized agriculture vs. modern services) are needed to determine if the specific HCD requirements and the nature of resource constraints differ significantly.
3. **Mixed-Methods Approach:** Complementary qualitative studies using Human-Centered Design (HCD) or participatory research methodologies could capture the subjective usability, contextual functionality, and socio-cultural dimensions of DT solutions.¹⁵ This would provide a richer narrative context for the quantitative findings, particularly concerning the internal factors contributing to Digital Culture and Flexibility (DCF).

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