Digital competency and self-efficacy as drivers of innovative behavior among displaced workers in post-pandemic Indonesia

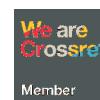Author Name(s): Eduard Sinaga, Suparto Wijoyo, Yetty Dwi Lestary, Adrid Indaryanto, Bambang Dwi Harijadi

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Article

Digital competency and self-efficacy as drivers of innovative behavior among displaced workers in post-pandemic Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation in the world of work, requiring individuals to have qualified digital competencies and high innovative capacity. This study aims to analyze the relationship between self-efficacy and digital competence on innovative behavior, with absorptive capacity as a mediating variable. This study also responds to the literature gap regarding the mediating role of absorptive capacity in the post-pandemic context. A quantitative approach was used with a survey method of 250 respondents. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique. The results showed that self-efficacy and digital competence have a positive and significant effect on innovative behavior. Absorptive capacity was shown to mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and innovative behavior, but did not mediate the relationship between digital competence and innovative behavior. These findings provide important practical implications for organizations in strengthening a post-pandemic culture of innovation. This research highlights the importance of building self-efficacy, increasing digital competence and strengthening absorptive capacity to foster innovative adaptation amid digital disruption.

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Introduction

In the era of global disruption and uncertainty, human resource competence is the main key in ensuring the sustainability and success of the organization in achieving its vision and mission. Hu, (2023) & Mielniczuk & Laguna, (2020) emphasizes that the success of an organization depends heavily on what its members know and can do. In the context of increasingly competitive business competition, organizations need members who have functional competencies that are in line with the dynamics of the work situation to maintain their competitive advantage (Jung et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the global crises that highlights the importance of these competencies. Many organizations have made layoffs as a cost-efficiency strategy, thereby increasing the unemployment rate (Vladić et al., 2021). BPS data (2020) shows that 2.56 million people were directly affected by the pandemic. Under these conditions, employee selection is more selective and tailored to the organization's production capacity (Ávila, 2022; Bourini, 2021). In the midst of these limitations, the digital sector has experienced significant growth, utilizing information technology as the main transaction medium.

This digital transformation requires individuals to have digital competencies and the ability to innovate to survive and thrive. Innovation is a crucial source of competitive advantage Noerchoidah et al. (2022), and can arise from individual innovative work behavior driven by the capacity to absorb external knowledge (absorptive capacity) through the process of identification, assimilation, and utilization of information (Bourini, 2021). Therefore, understanding digital competence as a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Santana & Díaz-Fernández, 2022), as well as a high willingness to learn is important.

Literature Review and Development of Hypotheses

Digital Competency

Digital competency refers to an individual's ability to effectively use digital tools, platforms, and data in a professional setting. It enables employees to access, evaluate, and apply digital knowledge, which enhances their learning and adaptability (Mazurchenko & Zelenka, 2022; Blanka et al., 2022). Digital competency can also promote the development of absorptive capacity, which is the ability to acquire, assimilate, transform, and exploit knowledge from external sources (Zhang & Huang, 2021). H1: Digital competency is positively related to absorptive capacity.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to perform specific tasks successfully (Garg & Norman, 2021). Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to demonstrate greater resilience in challenging environments and are more proactive in seeking and integrating new knowledge (Jiang, 2020). This internal confidence facilitates the acquisition and application of external information, thereby enhancing absorptive capacity (Mao et al., 2021). H2: Self-efficacy is positively related to absorptive capacity.

Digital Competency and Individual Innovative Behavior

Digital competency not only aids in knowledge absorption but also empowers employees to use digital tools creatively to solve problems and implement novel ideas (Yu et al., 2021). This aligns with the concept of innovative behavior, which involves the exploration, generation, and implementation of new ideas in the workplace (Afsar & Umrani, 2020; Muchiri et al., 2020). Employees with strong digital skills are more likely to engage in innovative actions. H3: Digital competency is positively related to individual innovative behavior.

Self-Efficacy and Individual Innovative Behavior

Employees with higher self-efficacy are more confident in their ability to innovate and are more likely to take initiative in proposing and executing new ideas (Akbari et al., 2021; Mumtaz & Parahoo, 2020). They exhibit persistence, optimism, and a proactive approach in facing obstacles—all of which are essential for innovation. H4: Self-efficacy is positively related to individual innovative behavior.

Absortipe Capacity as a Mediator

Absorptive capacity is a crucial mechanism that facilitates the transformation of individual resources (like digital skills and self-belief) into innovative outcomes. Employees with greater absorptive capacity are better at translating knowledge and skills into actionable innovation (Godfrey et al., 2023; Kastelli et al., 2024; Knudsen & Schleimer, 2022). Therefore, absorptive capacity may mediate the relationship between both digital competency and self-efficacy with innovative behavior. H5: Absorptive capacity mediates the relationship between (a) digital competency and innovative behavior, and (b) self-efficacy and innovative behavior.

Various studies have examined the relationship between digital competence, absorptive capacity, and innovative behavior. Akbari et al. (2021) explain that innovative behavior is an expression of individual creativity that is actualized in the work environment. (Ávila, 2022; Bourini, 2021) added that innovative behavior is a prerequisite for organizational survival. However, most studies are still limited in highlighting how digital competencies indirectly affect innovation through the mediation of absorptive capacity.

Meanwhile, previous studies tend to focus on large organizations or technology companies, paying less attention to pandemic-affected workers who re-enter the workforce or seek to innovate in the

informal sector. On the other hand, the literature on absorptive capacity has expanded from the organizational context to the individual level (Dzhengiz & Niesten, 2020; Zhao et al., 2021), but is still limited in linking it directly with digital competency and self-efficacy in generating individual innovation. In addition, although self-efficacy has been proven to strengthen individual confidence and resilience in the face of challenges (Rayyan et al., 2023; Siddique et al., 2023), not many studies have made it a moderator variable in the relationship between absorptive capacity and innovative behavior.

Based on the above explanation, the problem formulation in this study is as the effect of digital competence on workers' innovative behavior, with absorptive capacity as a mediating variable, and self-efficacy as a moderating variable. Operationally, this study explores the relationship between four main variables: digital competence, absorptive capacity, self-efficacy, and innovative work behavior.

The absorptive capacity theory Cohen & Levinthal (1990) is the main foundation of this research, which explains how individuals or organizations can identify, assimilate and apply external knowledge for the sake of innovation (Ul Zia et al., 2023). In this context, digital competence provides the "input" in the form of access and understanding of digital information, while absorptive capacity acts as the "mechanism" that enables the transformation of this information into innovative ideas. Self-efficacy in social cognitive theory Bandura (1986) serves as a driver of individual motivation and resilience in the face of learning and innovation challenges (Amit et al., 2024).

This study aims to analyze the influence of digital competency on individual innovative work behavior. Furthermore, it examines the mediating role of absorptive capacity in the relationship between digital competency and innovative behavior. In addition, the study investigates the moderating effect of self-efficacy in strengthening the relationship between absorptive capacity and innovative work behavior.

Practically, this research is expected to provide recommendations for the development of digital training policies for the workforce, especially those affected by the pandemic. An understanding of the importance of digital competency supported by absorptive capacity and self-efficacy can be the basis for training institutions, companies, and policymakers in developing innovative skills improvement programs that are relevant to the demands of the digital era.

Methods
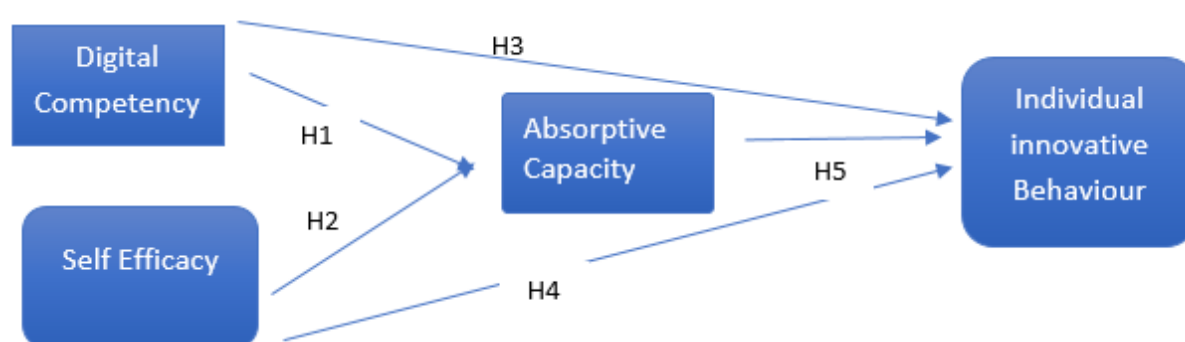
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design using a cross-sectional survey method, which is particularly suitable for testing hypotheses involving the relationships between latent variables within a defined time frame. This design structurally supports the investigation of causal paths and mediation mechanisms among digital competency, absorptive capacity, self-efficacy, and innovative work behavior through the application of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the Partial Least Squares approach (SmartPLS 3.0).

The target population comprises employees who experienced layoffs and job seekers post-COVID-19 pandemic across diverse professional and educational backgrounds. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents meet the criteria relevant to the research objectives, particularly having experienced job displacement due to the pandemic. Respondents were recruited through online forums, social media platforms, and career support networks. A total of 250 valid responses were collected, which exceeds the minimum sample size requirement for SEM-PLS analysis.

The hypotheses in this study are H1, The relationship between Digital competency is positively related to Absorptive capacity; H2, The relationship between Self Efficacy is positively related to absorptive capacity; H3, The relationship between Digital competency is positively related to innovative behavior; H4, The relationship between Self Efficacy is positively related to innovative behavior; H5 The relationship between Absorptive capacity and innovative behavior is positively related as a mediation of digital competence and Self Efficacy and innovative behavior.

Each construct in this study was measured using previously validated instruments to ensure reliability and construct validity. Digital Competency was assessed using five items adapted from Alarcón et al. (2020), which focus on individuals' ability to effectively utilize digital tools in a professional context. Absorptive Capacity was measured through ten items developed by Zhou et al. (2020), capturing key dimensions such as knowledge acquisition, assimilation, transformation, and exploitation. Self-Efficacy was evaluated using seven items adapted from Lestari et al. (2024), reflecting an individual's belief in their capacity to perform tasks and overcome challenges. Meanwhile, Individual Innovative Work Behavior was measured using nine items from Shahid et al. (2022), which cover the stages of idea exploration, idea generation, idea championing, and idea implementation. All items across the four constructs were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to capture the extent of respondents' agreement with each statement.

Prior to the main survey, a pilot study was conducted with 30 respondents matching the sample criteria to assess the reliability and clarity of the items. The pilot results indicated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7 for all constructs). Additionally, to minimize response bias, the questionnaire was constructed using neutral wording, and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality were provided. Reverse-coded items were also incorporated to detect potential response manipulation or inattentiveness. Given the diverse demographic backgrounds of respondents, back-translation procedures were applied to the questionnaire. Expert validation involving bilingual professionals was conducted to ensure linguistic equivalence and conceptual consistency of the constructs across different cultural interpretations.

Data were analyzed using SmartPLS 3.0. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess convergent and discriminant validity, and the model's reliability was evaluated through composite reliability and AVE thresholds. The hypotheses were tested using the bootstrapping procedure (5,000 samples) to determine the significance of the path coefficients. The mediating role of absorptive capacity was tested following the guidelines of Baron and Kenny (1986) and the contemporary bootstrapping approach by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The model assessed both the direct and indirect effects of digital competency and self-efficacy on innovative behavior through absorptive capacity, while also ensuring that assumptions of linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were met.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics

This research uses partial least squares (PLS) (Hair et al., 2018; Henseler et al., 2016), which can measure complex models with various latent variables and use bootstrapping methods to estimate the significance of path coefficients. In general, the explanatory research method is a method approach that uses PLS. This is because, in this method, there is hypothesis testing. Testing the

hypothesis can be seen from the t-statistic and probability values. For hypothesis testing using statistical values, for alpha 5%, the t-statistic value used is 1.96. So, the criteria for accepting/rejecting the hypothesis is Ha is accepted, and H0 is rescinded when the t-statistic> 1.96. To reject/accept the hypothesis using probability, Ha is accepted if the p-value is <0.05. (Hair et al., 2018).

Reliability testing was conducted using composite scale reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). The results show that the cut-off value of the outer loading is above 0.700, and the AVE is more than the cut-off value 0.500. All variables had composite reliabilities above 0.800. Convergent validity was evaluated by examining the standardized loadings of the measures within each construct. All measures were found to exhibit standardized loadings of more than 0.500. Discriminant validity was assessed based on AVE values greater than the squared latent factor correlation between pairs of constructs. The endogenous variable innovative behavior is predicted by digital competence and absorptive capacity by 90%, the remaining 10% is predicted by variables outside this study, and the endogenous variable absorptive capacity is predicted by self efficacy by 53% and the remaining 47% is predicted by variables outside this study.

Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis 1 test results of boostrap analysis on the path coefficient show the original sample 0.373 and T Statistics < T. table (1.96) at 95 percent confidence interval and P Values (0.001) < 0.05 this indicates that digital competency directly has a positive and significant correlation with absorptive capacity.

Hypothesis 2 test results of boostrap analysis on the path coefficient show the original sample 0.433 and T Statistics < T. table (1.96) at the 95 percent confidence interval and P Values (0.000) < 0.05 this indicates that selfefficacy directly has a positive and significant correlation with absorptive capacity.

Hypothesis 3 test results of boostrap analysis on the path coefficient show the original sample 0.810 and T Statistics < T. table (1.96) at a 95 percent confidence interval and P Values (0.000) < 0.05, this indicates that digital competency directly has a positive and significant correlation with innovative behavior.

Hypothesis Test 4 the results of the boostrap analysis on the path coefficient show the original sample 0.101 and T Statistics < T. table (1.96) at the 95 percent confidence interval and P Values (0.027) < 0.05, this indicates that Self Efficacy directly has a positive and significant correlation with innovative behavior.

Hypothesis 5 test results of boostrap analysis on the path coefficient show the original sample 0.108 and T Statistics < T. table (1.96) at a 95 percent confidence interval and P Values (0.028) < 0.05 this indicates that Absooptip capacity directly has a positive and significant correlation with innovative behavior.

The specific test of the indirect effect of mediation of the intervening variable boostrap analysis on the path coefficient of digital competence -> Absorptive capacity -> innovative behavior shows the Original sample value (0.040), T Statistics (1.546) < (1.96), [there is a 95 percent confidence interval P Value value (0.123) > 0.05, this indicates that absorptive capacity indirectly does not significantly affect innovative behavior or does not act as a mediation for digital competency variables in influencing innovative behavior.

Boostrap analysis on the path coefficient Self Efficacy -> Absorptive capacity -> Innovative behavior shows the original sample value (0.047), T Statistics (2.162)> (1.96), [there is a 95 percent confidence interval P Value (0.031) <0.05, this indicates that absorptive capacity indirectly affects innovative behavior significantly or acts as a mediator for the Self Efficacy variable in influencing innovative behavior.

The indirect analysis above proves that the absortip behavior variable is proven to be a variable that significantly mediates the Self Efficacy variable on the innovative behavior variable partially, but does not mediate the digital competency variable on innovative behavior, this shows

that absortip capacity has a positive and significant effect as an intervening variable for innovative behavior, meaning that without absortip capacity, innovative behavior does not occur.

Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the respondents indicate that 54.5% were male and 45.5% female, with ages ranging from 17 to 70 years. The highest age group was 43 years (13.5%), followed by 29 years (9.1%) and 24 years (7.5%). Most respondents were of productive working age. Educational backgrounds were predominantly Diploma (36.4), equivalent to high school (35.4%), and Bachelor's degree (22.9%). These characteristics suggest that respondents possess the potential and readiness to adapt to digital technological advancements in the workplace, serving as a foundation to support innovative behavior.

The findings reveal that both digital competence and self-efficacy have a positive and significant relationship with innovative behavior. This supports prior studies suggesting that increased digitalization enhances workers' ability to adapt to change and supports (Blanka et al., 2022; Chyzhevska et al., 2021; Mazurchenko et al., 2020). Individuals with high digital competence tend to be more confident in using technology, exploring new approaches, and contributing to organizational transformation (Mazurchenko & Zelenka, 2022).

However, the mediation analysis provides an important nuance: absorptive capacity was found to mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and innovative behavior, but did not mediate the relationship between digital competence and innovative behavior. This is reflected in the statistical test of Hypothesis 5, where the path coefficient showed a T value < 1.96 at a 95% confidence level, indicating non-significance. This result suggests that while digital competence contributes directly to innovative behavior, this influence does not occur through the knowledge acquisition and transformation mechanisms facilitated by absorptive capacity.

Theoretically, this may be because digital skills tend to be practical and directly applicable in daily work activities, thus not necessarily requiring the internalization or integration of external knowledge—a core aspect of absorptive capacity. In contrast, self-efficacy plays a greater role in encouraging learning processes and the internalization of external knowledge into work practices, consistent with Bandura's theory (2006) and study by (Cundawan et al., 2021), which highlight that individuals' belief in their capabilities strengthens their ability to absorb and apply new knowledge. Accordingly, it is important to differentiate innovation development strategies based on these influence pathways. Digital competence may be improved through technical training focused on practical application, while enhancing self-efficacy should be integrated with the development of absorptive capacity to achieve an optimal impact on innovation.

While this research provides new insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the quantitative design with a correlational approach limits the interpretation of causal relationships between variables. The results cannot be considered as definitive evidence of causation. Second, the study does not account for external variables such as organizational culture, industrial environment, or psychosocial factors that might influence the relationships among the primary variables. Third, methodological limitations related to sample size and population characteristics may affect the external validity and generalizability of the findings to other organizational settings. This study also offers practical implications. Organizations should encourage the development of digital competence through task-oriented training and strengthen employees' self-efficacy through coaching, mentoring, or psychological reinforcement. Enhancing absorptive capacity can be achieved by cultivating a learning culture and encouraging cross-functional collaboration, making the knowledge integration process more effective.

In contrast, a comparative analysis with previous research reveals that some studies found differing results regarding the mediating role of absorptive capacity (Abourokbah et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2022). These discrepancies may be due to contextual factors such as the type of organization, industry, or level of digital maturity—highlighting the need for further investigation. Finally, this study has not yet explored the potential moderating effects of variables such as organizational culture or

managerial support, which may strengthen or weaken the relationships among constructs. The possibility of indirect relationships, such as serial mediation or multiple psychological and competency pathways, may offer fruitful directions for future research.

Conclusion

This research shows that self-efficacy and digital competence have a significant and positive influence on innovative behavior, confirming that individuals who have confidence in their abilities and strong digital skills are more likely to engage in workplace innovation. These findings emphasize the importance of individual capabilities in driving innovation, especially in an increasingly digital and dynamic work environment. In addition, the analysis revealed that absorptive capacity significantly mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and innovative behavior. This suggests an important role in the process of knowledge acquisition, assimilation and transformation in transforming individual confidence into innovative actions. However, no significant mediating effect was found in the relationship between digital competence and innovative behavior, which suggests that digital skills may have a more direct influence on innovation without going through the absorption process.

These findings have practical implications for organizations looking to foster innovation. Efforts to improve self-efficacy and absorptive capacity-through a learning culture, psychological support, and knowledge-sharing initiatives-can contribute significantly to innovative behavior. Meanwhile, digital competencies need to be strengthened through practical and applicable technical training, so that individuals are able to directly use technology in their work. Despite its theoretical and practical contributions, this study has several limitations. It does not account for external variables such as organizational culture and industry environment, which could also influence innovative behavior. Additionally, the use of a cross-sectional quantitative approach limits the ability to draw causal inferences. The relatively narrow sample scope may also affect the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal approaches and consider contextual factors to deepen the understanding of innovation dynamics in various work settings.

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