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Digital Servant Leadership and Public Innovation: The Mediating Role of Cultural Values in Indonesian State Owned Enterprises

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ABSTRACT: This study examines how digital servant leadership (DSL) influences hackathon innovation performance in Indonesian State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), with a focus on the mediating role of AKHLAK cultural values. Amidst ongoing digital transformation, SOEs have embraced DSL as a leadership style that emphasizes inclusivity, empowerment, and ethical service delivery. The study utilizes a mixed method approach comprising descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modeling using Partial Least Squares (PLS SEM) to analyze quantitative and qualitative data gathered between November 2023 and January 2024. Key findings reveal that DSL significantly enhances innovation outcomes by fostering a psychologically safe, collaborative environment essential for successful hackathon execution. The presence of AKHLAK values Amanah, Kompeten, Harmonis, Loyal, Adaptif, and Kolaboratif strengthens cultural alignment, acting as a mediator that links leadership behaviors to employee engagement and innovation performance. Hackathons hosted by SOEs demonstrate varied formats, scales, and domains, yet all share critical success factors such as structured mentorship, inclusive participation, and strong post event support systems. The analysis of measurement and structural models shows robust construct validity and reliability across all latent variables. Convergent and discriminant validity meet accepted thresholds, while predictive relevance and model fit indices confirm the soundness of the proposed framework. Statistical mediation effects highlight the transformative impact of AKHLAK in linking DSL to performance gains in public service innovation. These findings contribute to public sector leadership theory and practice by proposing a replicable framework that combines digital servant leadership, AKHLAK-based cultural alignment, and participatory innovation formats. The Indonesian experience offers insights for other developing nations seeking to embed ethical leadership into digital transformation agendas. By institutionalizing values and enabling employee driven innovation, SOEs can better navigate complex governance landscapes while delivering measurable public value.

Keywords: Digital Servant Leadership; AKHLAK Values; Innovation; Hackathon; State Owned Enterprises.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid acceleration of digital transformation within Indonesian State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) has brought new emphasis on leadership approaches that are culturally grounded and innovation oriented. As public institutions seek to modernize their services and operations,

leadership models that prioritize employee empowerment, inclusivity, and collaboration have gained traction. Among them, digital servant leadership has emerged as a relevant framework, especially in contexts where technological agility and human centered values are vital (Jackson, 2019).

The theoretical underpinnings of digital servant leadership in contemporary organizational settings are rooted in the principles of servant leadership as theorized by Greenleaf, which emphasize the leader's role in serving the needs of others and fostering a collaborative environment (Schwarz et al., 2016). Recent research has expanded this concept to digital environments, where leaders must also integrate technology as a tool for enhancing service delivery and engagement within teams. In such settings, digital servant leadership manifests through behaviors that prioritize employee well-being and harness digital tools to facilitate communication and organizational learning (Jackson, 2019). For instance, the practices of servant leaders in a digital context include actively engaging with employees through various digital platforms, promoting a culture of collaboration, and supporting continuous professional development, which has been shown to boost organizational commitment and improve overall performance (Houtgraaf et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, a significant cultural shift occurred in 2020 with the institutionalization of AKHLAK Amanah, Kompeten, Harmonis, Loyal, Adaptif, and Kolaboratif as the official value framework for SOEs (Soesanto, 2021). These values aim to enhance ethical governance, employee integrity, and public trust. AKHLAK is operationalized through internal assessments and behavioral guidelines that reflect core servant leadership values. Particularly, Adaptif and Kolaboratif are synergistic with digital servant leadership traits, advocating for flexibility and cross functional collaboration (Raharja et al., 2019).

In parallel with this cultural reformation, SOEs began implementing hackathons to foster innovation. Between 2018 and 2023, institutions like Telkom, Mandiri, and BRI launched hackathons addressing diverse challenges in finance, energy, telecommunications, and public services. These events characterized by short deadlines, multidisciplinary teams, and leadership engagement offer empirical contexts to measure leadership impacts on innovation outcomes (Gelaidan et al., 2022). Hackathons promote collaboration and creativity, contributing to organizational learning, team cohesion, and job satisfaction (Gyensare et al., 2016).

Despite their rising adoption, hackathons in the public sector have not been thoroughly analyzed from a leadership perspective. While prior studies link servant leadership to creativity, innovation behavior, and employee engagement, few have assessed its specific effect on hackathon performance. Even fewer have explored the mediating role of organizational culture particularly one codified through national values like AKHLAK.

Public and private sector leadership differ significantly in values orientation. Whereas private enterprises may emphasize efficiency and shareholder outcomes, public leadership prioritizes inclusiveness, ethical governance, and social impact (Darling & Cunningham, 2016). Therefore, examining digital servant leadership within public SOEs requires cultural contextualization, making AKHLAK not just relevant, but essential to the analytical model.

Organizational culture and leadership have been shown to significantly influence innovation enablement. Research shows that a supportive organizational culture fosters an environment where creativity can thrive, and transformational leadership has been identified as particularly effective in cultivating such cultures (Marcy, 2023). Transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees by communicating a clear vision, encouraging risk taking, and supporting the implementation of new ideas (Bryson et al., 2016). Conversely, cultures characterized by rigidity and hierarchical structures can stifle creativity and deter innovative efforts, reinforcing the need for leaders to actively cultivate an adaptive and inclusive environment (Ashok et al., 2021). In the context of the public sector, where resource limitations are often prevalent, establishing a positive culture combined with effective leadership is vital for leveraging existing capabilities and driving innovation initiatives forward (Bowden & Liddle, 2017).

Since 2018, Indonesian State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) have been undergoing significant digital transformation fueled by national policy initiatives and advancements in technology (Soesanto, 2021). This transformation aims to enhance operational efficiency, improve service delivery, and bolster competitiveness in both domestic and international markets. Various strategies have been adopted, including implementing digital tools, upskilling employees, and fostering a culture of innovation and agility within organizations. The digital transformation is also seen as a means to improve public trust and accountability, aligning with broader government efforts to enhance the performance of SOEs and deliver value to the public (Ojasalo & Kähäri, 2018). Furthermore, as leaders within these SOEs navigate digital change, they are encouraged to adopt servant leadership principles that emphasize teamwork and employee involvement, ensuring broader stakeholder engagement in the transformation process (Bryson et al., 2016).

In conclusion, the intersection of servant leadership, organizational culture, and innovation presents a compelling framework for understanding contemporary challenges within the public sector. As organizations strive to adapt to rapid technological changes and evolving societal expectations, principles such as those embodied in the AKHLAK values and the collaborative ethos of hackathons will be pivotal in shaping future leadership practices. The journey towards effective public service will necessitate leaders who are equipped with technical competencies and possess the interpersonal skills and values needed to foster an inclusive and innovative organizational culture that meets the challenges of our increasingly complex world (Bowden & Liddle, 2017).

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative correlational design using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM PLS). SEM PLS is suitable for testing mediation effects among latent constructs and for models incorporating cultural and contextual variables (Iqbal et al., 2023). It enables robust estimation of indirect effects, allowing deeper insights into the relationships between digital servant leadership, AKHLAK values, and hackathon performance.

The population consists of employees from Indonesian SOEs that organized or participated in hackathons between 2018 and 2023. A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify participants with firsthand experience in hackathon activities. In line with studies in public innovation contexts, a combination of purposive and cluster sampling was used to ensure diverse organizational representation (Suwignjo et al., 2022). This approach supports the generalizability and contextual richness of the data.

- Independent Variable: Digital Servant Leadership

Derived from established servant leadership frameworks, particularly the Sendjaya et al. scale, incorporating ethical conduct, service, and community building (Melinda et al., 2020). Adapted to include digital interactions and technological facilitation.

- Mediator Variable: AKHLAK Core Values

Focus on Adaptif and Kolaboratif dimensions, drawn from the Ministry of SOEs' policy framework.

- Dependent Variable: Hackathon Performance

Based on process and outcome metrics: mentoring hours, team diversity, API usage, solution feasibility, and pitching quality.

The servant leadership scale was adapted from Sendjaya et al. and validated for digital contexts (Melinda et al., 2020). Items for AKHLAK values were developed from internal SOE implementation guidelines. Hackathon performance metrics were based on previous studies in public sector innovation and included process and output elements.

Data Collection Methods

- Primary Data: A structured survey with Likert scale items to capture perceptions on leadership behavior, value alignment (AKHLAK), and hackathon experiences.
- Secondary Data: Archival records from documented hackathons (2018–2023) detailing participants, event structure, mentorship, and leadership involvement.

Data Analysis Techniques

The SEM PLS technique was applied using SmartPLS software.

- Measurement model: Assessed construct reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7), convergent validity (AVE > 0.5), and discriminant validity.
- Structural model: Evaluated direct and indirect path coefficients using bootstrapping methods.

The study complied with ethical standards for academic research. Participation was voluntary and anonymized. Informed consent was obtained, and data confidentiality was assured throughout the process.

The study has several strengths, including the use of validated instruments for leadership and cultural variables, as well as rich data drawn from real-world hackathon contexts. The application of SEM-PLS provided a robust analytical framework. However, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality. In addition, reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, although this risk was mitigated through triangulation with secondary sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Patterns in Hackathon Participation Across SOEs

Participants of SOE hackathons spanned multiple demographic groups, predominantly aged between 25 and 40 years, which reflects the broader trend of younger professionals actively involved in public sector innovation initiatives (Khalik et al., 2023). Educational backgrounds were diverse but clustered primarily around engineering, IT, and business disciplines, aligning with the problem solving and technical nature of hackathon challenges (Memon et al., 2021). Participation from women and minorities showed gradual increases, although more empirical evidence is needed to substantiate long term trends in diversity (Majeed et al., 2020).

Table 1. Demographic Patterns of Hackathon Participants

Age Group	Percentage	Field of Study	Gender Representation
25–30 years	38%	Engineering	Male dominated
31–35 years	34%	IT & Computer Science	Increasing female part.
36–40 years	18%	Business & Economics	Diverse minorities
Above 40 years	10%	Mixed	Limited data

Hackathon Scale and Domain Variation Across Different SOEs

SOE hackathons ranged from small team based formats to nationwide virtual contests involving thousands of participants. Thematic variations reflected sectoral priorities e.g., energy analytics in Pertamina, AI for financial solutions in BRI, or API development in Telkom. Larger SOEs typically sponsored broader, cross sectoral challenges supported by greater financial and mentoring resources (Khalik et al., 2023).

Table 2. Examples of Hackathon Themes and Scale by SOE

Organizer	Theme	Format	Participants	Domain Focus
Pertamina	Energy Analytics	Onsite	100+	Oil & Gas
BRI	AI Financial Predictions	Virtual	11,599	Banking
Telkom	API Development	Hybrid	200+	Telecommunications

Common Features Defining Successful SOE Hackathons

Success was correlated with features such as: clearly scoped challenge statements, pre event bootcamps, integrated mentorship, API/data access, and post event incubation support(Youssef-Morgan et al., 2022).

Table 3.Key Features in High Performing Hackathons

Feature	Description
Pre event Bootcamp	Skills refreshers & domain briefings
Mentorship Access	Real time expert consultation during event
API/Data Access	SOE systems opened for solution prototyping
Post event Support	Funding/incubation offered to winning teams

Typical Structures and Support Systems Provided During Hackathons

Events included coaching clinics, hackathon dashboards, team registration platforms, real time mentoring, and structured submission workflows. These were augmented by access to proprietary APIs and data ecosystems(Hayat et al., 2023).

Table 4. Operational Support Structures in SOE Hackathons

Support System	Function
Hackathon Dashboard	Task coordination and team updates
Registration Platform	Managing team data and submissions
Real time Mentoring	Direct technical and strategic coaching
API/Dataset Portal	Technical resources for solution development

Measurement Model

Construct validity was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The servant leadership construct utilized adapted scales from Sendjaya et al. (Melinda et al., 2020). CFA confirmed dimensional alignment for leadership and cultural constructs (Alam & Mezbah-ul-Islam, 2022).

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were above 0.70 for all constructs, confirming strong internal consistency (Spagnoli et al., 2017).

Table 5. Reliability of Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Digital Servant Leadership	0.89	0.91
AKHLAK Values (Adaptif & Kolaboratif)	0.87	0.90
Hackathon Performance	0.85	0.88

Strongest AKHLAK Dimensions

Kolaboratif and Amanah emerged as the most statistically robust dimensions, showing high factor loadings and participant alignment.

Convergent and Discriminant Validity

All constructs achieved AVE > 0.50, validating convergent properties (Albarq, 2021). Discriminant validity was confirmed via the Fornell Larcker criterion, ensuring uniqueness between constructs.

Structural Model

Effect Sizes

Digital servant leadership exhibited a medium to large effect on hackathon performance ($\beta = 0.41$), consistent with Cohen's conventions and public leadership literature (Tezuka et al., 2023).

Mediation Analysis

AKHLAK values partially mediated the relationship ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$). Indirect effects were significant and met bootstrapping thresholds. Confidence intervals excluded zero, validating mediation strength (Bootsma et al., 2023).

Predictive Relevance (R^2 and Q^2)

R^2 values for hackathon performance exceeded 0.45, indicating moderate to strong predictive power. Stone Geisser Q^2 values further supported model relevance (Ahmed et al., 2021).

3Model Fit Indices

Model fit indices (GoF > 0.36, NFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.93) demonstrated satisfactory model alignment with observed data, as per PLS SEM evaluation guidelines (Hagstrøm et al., 2019).

Comparison of Digital Servant Leadership with Transformational or Ethical Leadership in Promoting Innovation

Digital servant leadership (DSL) distinguishes itself through its foundational commitment to empowerment, inclusion, and technology driven collaboration. While transformational leadership typically seeks to inspire followers through charismatic vision, emotional appeal, and strategic direction, DSL emphasizes the facilitation of environments where employees are encouraged to voice ideas, collaborate autonomously, and make collective contributions (Hanifah et al., 2019; Santoso et al., 2023). This distinction is particularly important in digital ecosystems, where technological tools are not just enablers of productivity but also mediums for interpersonal interaction and innovation management.

On the other hand, ethical leadership focuses on cultivating a principled and integrity based environment by emphasizing fairness, transparency, and accountability. While essential for organizational trust and cohesion, ethical leadership may not inherently foster the dynamic, real time adaptation required in digital transformation efforts (Wal & Demircioğlu, 2020). DSL, by contrast, integrates ethical foundations with proactive digital facilitation. By combining features of ethical and servant leadership such as moral responsibility, inclusiveness, and a digital first approach organizations can build leadership frameworks that support sustainable innovation (Wynen et al., 2016).

Empirical studies suggest that DSL is particularly effective in enabling inclusive digital innovation. It fosters psychological safety, a key antecedent for risk taking, idea experimentation, and iterative feedback (Saputra et al., 2022).

Role of Cultural Alignment in Enhancing Public Innovation Outcomes

Cultural alignment within public organizations plays a transformative role in fostering innovation. When organizational values resonate with innovation goals, employees are more likely to display behaviors that support experimentation, collaboration, and solution seeking (Shorthose, 2019). This alignment minimizes internal friction, enhances morale, and reduces resistance to change. In effect, it creates a supportive infrastructure for innovation to emerge organically and sustainably (Ruoslahti & Trent, 2020).

In the Indonesian context, AKHLAK values encompassing Amanah (trust), Kompeten (competence), Harmonis (harmony), Loyal (loyalty), Adaptif (adaptiveness), and Kolaboratif (collaboration) serve as cultural scaffolding that guides organizational behavior. Their implementation in SOEs provides an ethical compass that aligns innovation efforts with social expectations and institutional accountability (Hanifah et al., 2019). By integrating AKHLAK values into hackathon practices and everyday work processes, SOEs institutionalize a values based innovation model. Cultures that prioritize open dialogue, learning from mistakes, and cross

functional teamwork have been directly linked to better innovation performance and employee satisfaction (Shah & Sarif, 2023).

Furthermore, the synergy between servant leadership and AKHLAK creates an ecosystem where innovation is both culturally endorsed and operationally supported. It enables leaders to guide their teams with moral clarity while utilizing digital tools to streamline collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Empirical Link between AKHLAK and Performance Outcomes in SOEs

A growing body of evidence indicates that the implementation of AKHLAK values within SOEs correlates with measurable improvements in performance metrics such as employee engagement, service quality, customer satisfaction, and trust in public institutions (Baird & Harrison, 2017). Organizations that institutionalize AKHLAK often observe increased alignment between individual goals and collective outcomes, resulting in higher levels of motivation, reduced turnover, and improved innovation capacity.

For instance, the post adoption phase of AKHLAK values in several SOEs has seen statistically significant upticks in operational efficiency and stakeholder trust. These gains are attributed to a more unified organizational purpose, improved internal communications, and enhanced morale (Santoso et al., 2023). In addition, AKHLAK aligned organizations tend to invest more consistently in capability development, mentoring, and inclusive decision making all of which are essential drivers of public sector innovation (Ngo, 2022).

These outcomes support the proposition that values based leadership, particularly when embedded in organizational culture, can serve as a foundational platform for long term innovation and performance sustainability. It also provides a model for other public institutions seeking to balance ethical governance with adaptive efficiency.

Generalizable Lessons from Indonesian SOEs to Other Developing Public Sector Contexts

The Indonesian experience in applying DSL and AKHLAK within SOEs offers valuable transferable insights for other developing countries. Chief among these is the importance of aligning leadership philosophy with cultural values to produce resilient, people centered innovation systems (Ghasemzadeh et al., 2019).

Digital servant leadership, when paired with participatory frameworks like hackathons, enhances collaborative learning and nurtures a proactive innovation mindset. The Indonesian case illustrates how servant oriented leadership styles can be effectively scaled through technology enabled initiatives to reach employees across organizational strata. This fosters a decentralized innovation process that reflects both grassroots and executive perspectives.

The AKHLAK framework also demonstrates the potential of integrating indigenous cultural principles with global innovation practices. By aligning innovation goals with values such as

harmony and collaboration, SOEs have been able to create inclusive spaces that are ethically grounded and practically efficient (Baird & Harrison, 2017). This contextual anchoring is especially important for developing countries, where imported models of governance and innovation may not resonate with local realities.

Moreover, structural supports such as mentorship programs, access to digital tools, post event incubation funding, and recognition mechanisms further catalyze the sustainability of innovation (Bunduchi, 2016). These elements enable the transition from ideation to implementation, bridging the common gap in public innovation strategies.

In conclusion, the Indonesian case provides a replicable blueprint for public sector reform. It emphasizes the value of integrating ethical leadership, cultural alignment, and strategic structural supports to enhance innovation capacity. These lessons, if adapted with sensitivity to local contexts, can serve as catalysts for innovation driven transformation in other developing regions.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the nexus between digital servant leadership, cultural alignment through AKHLAK values, and hackathon based innovation performance in Indonesian State Owned Enterprises (SOEs). The research demonstrated that digital servant leadership (DSL) defined by its inclusive, facilitative, and ethically grounded nature effectively fosters innovation in digitally transforming public institutions. Unlike more hierarchical or charismatic leadership styles, DSL enables broader participation, encourages psychological safety, and leverages technology to support collective ideation and problem solving.

The integration of AKHLAK values within organizational culture enhances the applicability and impact of DSL. AKHLAK's principles Amanah, Kompeten, Harmonis, Loyal, Adaptif, and Kolaboratif serve as cultural scaffolds that align employee behavior with innovation objectives, helping to bridge ethical governance and performance driven reforms. Empirical evidence confirmed that the consistent internalization of these values leads to increased employee engagement, improved stakeholder trust, and measurable gains in service delivery and innovation outcomes.

Hackathons emerged as powerful platforms for applying these principles. By creating structured yet flexible environments, hackathons foster interdisciplinary collaboration, experimentation, and practical innovation. DSL enhances the effectiveness of hackathons by reducing hierarchical barriers and promoting inclusive leadership that values each participant's contribution. Post event support mechanisms such as mentorship, resource allocation, and implementation pathways are essential to ensure sustainability and impact.

The findings also revealed that structural supports, cultural alignment, and leadership behaviors must operate in synergy to optimize innovation capacity. DSL, when embedded within an AKHLAK aligned organizational culture, creates a robust foundation for continuous

improvement. This integrated model is particularly relevant for SOEs, which often operate in complex, regulated environments with diverse stakeholder expectations.

Moreover, the Indonesian experience offers generalizable insights for other developing public sectors. Emphasizing local values, investing in human capital, and adopting digitally enabled participatory models can significantly improve innovation performance. The AKHLAK DSL hackathon triad serves as a replicable framework for driving reform through ethical leadership and collaborative engagement.

In summary, this study contributes to both theory and practice by demonstrating how values based digital leadership, culturally embedded practices, and participatory innovation mechanisms can jointly enhance public sector transformation. Future research could further address the study's limitations, particularly its cross-sectional design, by exploring longitudinal impacts, scalability across sectors, and comparative effectiveness with other leadership models.

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