“Digital and sustainable leadership, person-organization fit, and job involvement: Evidence from Vietnamese higher education”

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DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP, PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT, AND JOB INVOLVEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract

Higher education institutions face a dual imperative: accelerating digital transformation while advancing sustainability commitments. For academic staff, these agendas converge in a single psychological space, yet leadership research has largely treated digital leadership and sustainable leadership as parallel paradigms. This study examines how both styles concurrently shape lecturers' job involvement, and whether person-organization (P-O) fit acts as a common mechanism linking them to role investment. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, Job Demands-Resources Theory, and Person-Environment Fit Theory, an integrated structural model was tested on survey data from a non-probability sample of 312 full-time lecturers in selected Vietnamese public and private universities using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Results show that digital leadership exerts both a direct positive effect on job involvement (β = 0.333) and an indirect effect via P-O fit, while sustainable leadership strongly enhances P-O fit (β = 0.663) but has a non-significant direct path to job involvement, revealing a fully mediated, value-lagged structure. P-O fit emerges as the central gateway (β = 0.488) through which both leadership styles activate job involvement, with the model explaining 70.4% of its variance. The study contributes by integrating two leadership paradigms within a unified framework, conceptualizing P-O fit as a dynamic mediating process shaped by leadership behaviors, and foregrounding job involvement as a strategically important outcome driven by these dual leadership orientations. Practical implications point to the design of integrated leadership development and fit-focused HR practices in higher education institutions, navigating concurrent digital and sustainability transitions.

Keywords digital leadership, sustainable leadership, person-organization fit, job involvement, higher education

JEL Classification M12, M14, I23, L26

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions globally are confronting two simultaneous and interrelated transformation imperatives. Digital technologies have penetrated teaching, research, and administrative functions with a speed and breadth that distinguishes higher education as one of the most rapidly transforming sectors in recent years (AlNuaimi et al., 2022; Benitez et al., 2022). At the same time, universities face growing accountability pressure from governments, accreditation bodies, and civil society to demonstrate responsible stewardship – integrating social, environmental, and ethical criteria into strategic and operational decision-making (Hallinger & Suriyankietkaew, 2018; Iqbal et al., 2020). While each imperative draws on different leadership competencies, both land on the same group of people – academic staff whose motivation, identity, and daily work are shaped by how their institutions are led.

Digital leadership refers to a cluster of leader behaviors directed at harnessing technology to advance organizational goals – spanning vision-setting for digital adoption, infrastructure investment, and the cultivation of data-informed working cultures (Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Mihardjo et al., 2019; Van Wart et al., 2019; Erhan et al., 2022). In practice, such leaders communicate a coherent rationale for technological change, reconfigure workflows around digital tools, and create the psychological safety that staff need to adopt unfamiliar practices. Sustainable leadership operates through a different logic, anchoring decisions in long-term responsibility toward multiple stakeholders and embedding ethical, social, and environmental considerations into organizational strategy and culture (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011; Iqbal et al., 2021). Despite the substantive literature on each style in isolation, scholars have rarely positioned them as complementary forces within a single model, leaving open the question of how their combined influence shapes employee attitudes and motivation (Liao, 2022).

Beyond direct motivational effects, leadership shapes employee attitudes and behaviors through a less visible but consequential pathway – the degree to which staff perceive their values and goals as congruent with those of their organization, known as Person-organization (P-O) fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Edwards and Cable (2009) conceptualize this congruence broadly, treating it as the subjective sense that one's personal values, goals, and needs find a meaningful correspondence in the culture and priorities of the employing organization. Where this alignment is strong, organizational identification deepens, work takes on greater personal significance, and role investment intensifies – outcomes documented across both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Vleugels et al., 2018). Sustainable leadership is positioned as a driver of P-O fit primarily through the normative channel – by articulating and enacting organizational values that resonate with lecturers' own ethical commitments – while digital leadership shapes fit through a more instrumental route, reducing the mismatch between staff competencies and the technological demands of a transformed workplace (Zeike et al., 2019).

However, several gaps remain. First, the two leadership paradigms have rarely been positioned within a common empirical framework, leaving unresolved whether their effects on employee outcomes are mutually reinforcing or substitutive. Second, P-O fit as a mediator has been examined predominantly within sustainable, ethical, and spiritually oriented leadership traditions – as illustrated by Afsar et al. (2016) and reviewed comprehensively by Liao (2022) – leaving open whether it functions equivalently as a motivational bridge in digitally oriented leadership contexts. Third, leadership-motivation scholarship in higher education has gravitated toward broad outcomes such as engagement or organizational commitment; job involvement – defined by Kanungo (1982) as the centrality of work to an individual's psychological identity – has attracted comparatively less attention despite its particular relevance for autonomous, knowledge-intensive academic roles (Diefendorff et al., 2002).

This study addresses these gaps by examining how digital leadership and sustainable leadership relate to job involvement among university lecturers in Vietnam, and whether P-O fit mediates these relationships. Vietnam represents a fitting empirical context because its higher education institutions are operating within a broader national agenda of digital transformation and sustainable development. Recent evidence shows that Vietnam has actively promoted digital transformation through national strategies, policy reforms, and institutional support mechanisms, although implementation continues to face technical, financial, infrastructural, and regulatory challenges (Chuc & Anh, 2023). At the same time, Vietnamese universities are increasingly expected to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into institutional strategy, governance, operations, education, research, and community engagement (Le & Nguyen, 2023). Meanwhile, the nature of academic work in Vietnam has shifted toward greater autonomy, technology dependence, and measurable output expectations (Pham & Ho, 2020; Truong et al., 2017).

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1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

The proposed model draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives. Social Exchange Theory holds that workplace relationships operate on a logic of reciprocity – when leaders demonstrate care, integrity, and support, employees respond by channeling greater effort and commitment into their roles (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Job Demands-Resources Theory further positions leadership as a structural job resource whose function is to offset workplace demands and sustain motivational capacity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017). Within this framework, the two leadership styles under study contribute distinct resource types – digital leadership supplies instrumental and informational resources such as technological infrastructure and performance feedback, while sustainable leadership supplies normative and relational resources such as ethical direction and value-based guidance – each targeting different sources of strain and engagement.

Person-Environment Fit Theory, operationalized here as P-O fit, addresses a different explanatory layer – how the perceived compatibility between an individual's values and capabilities and those demanded by the organization shapes work-related attitudes and behavior (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Lecturers who perceive strong value congruence with their institution are spared the psychological costs of role conflict, freeing cognitive and motivational resources for deeper investment in teaching, research, and service. P-O fit thus emerges as a theoretically coherent bridge between leadership behavior and the depth of role investment lecturers are willing to sustain. Taken together, the three perspectives map a coherent motivational pathway. Leadership generates both resources that reduce strain and signals that communicate organizational values; when employees perceive these signals as aligned with their own capabilities and commitments, P-O fit is strengthened, and sustained role investment follows.

Sustainable leadership is characterized by a deliberate orientation toward decisions that serve multiple stakeholder groups over the long term, embedding social and environmental responsibility into the fabric of organizational practice rather than treating them as peripheral concerns (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). Leaders enacting this style are distinguished by behavioral consistency between espoused values and enacted decisions – a pattern that Ng and Feldman's (2015) meta-analytic evidence on ethical leadership confirms as a cross-contextually robust predictor of employee trust and perceived leader integrity, and one that sustainable leadership scholars identify as central to the style's definition (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011). Bibliometric mapping of the sustainable leadership literature confirms the growth of research linking this leadership style to positive employee outcomes in education contexts (Hallinger & Suriyankietkaew, 2018), while empirical studies show that employees who perceive their leaders as sustainability-oriented report stronger value alignment and greater confidence in organizational decisions (Iqbal et al., 2020).

By behaving consistently with stated values, treating staff equitably, and communicating institutional priorities in transparent terms, sustainable leaders reduce the interpretive uncertainty that often surrounds organizational values, making it easier for lecturers to assess where they stand in relation to the institution. Where that uncertainty is reduced, perceived value congruence is more readily formed and more stably maintained (Edwards & Cable, 2009). For lecturers in Vietnamese universities – including those undergoing professional identity transformation in the context of institutional change (Pham et al., 2023; Truong et al., 2017) – an institutional leadership style that enacts compatible values is expected to produce particularly strong perceptions of Person-organization congruence.

In the context of P-O fit, the relevant dimension of digital leadership is its capacity to shape the technological environment in which lecturers work – through infrastructure decisions, capability development, and the articulation of a coherent digital direction for the institution (Mihardjo et al., 2019; AlNuaimi et al., 2022). These actions collectively determine whether staff experience the institution's digital trajectory as compatible with their own capabilities or as a source of strain and mismatch. While much of the digital leadership literature has focused on instrumental outcomes

such as performance or innovation (Benitez et al., 2022; Erhan et al., 2022), digital leadership can also shape perceptions of fit.

Lecturers who receive adequate technological training, work within systems designed around their functional needs, and understand the institution's digital rationale are better positioned to experience their competencies as valued and fit for purpose – a form of Person-organization congruence specific to technology-intensive work settings (Zeike et al., 2019). Digital leadership is therefore expected to strengthen P-O fit by narrowing the gap between institutional technological demands and individual staff capability – an instrumental form of congruence distinct from, but complementary to, the value-based congruence fostered by sustainable leadership.

Job involvement denotes the extent to which a person's occupational role occupies a central place in their psychological identity – a construct first systematically measured by Lodahl and Kejner (1965), refined by Kanungo (1982), and subsequently confirmed as a robust predictor of work behavior in meta-analytic synthesis (Brown, 1996). Highly involved employees treat their role as personally defining, directing sustained cognitive and emotional attention toward its demands rather than treating work as instrumentally separate from the self (Diefendorff et al., 2002). Among the antecedents of job involvement, P-O fit occupies a particularly important position. When lecturers perceive their values as mirrored in those of their institution, the internal friction that would otherwise divert motivational energy away from role tasks – value dissonance, identity ambiguity, felt incongruence – is substantially attenuated (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Vleugels et al., 2018). The result is a motivational environment in which role investment can consolidate rather than being interrupted by unresolved conflicts between personal and institutional commitments.

This dynamic is particularly pronounced in higher education, where academic roles are not merely occupational categories but expressions of intellectual identity, disciplinary community, and personal vocation – making value congruence with the institution a precondition rather than a supplement to sustained job involvement (Pham et al., 2023). Lecturers who experience high P-O fit are therefore more likely to find their institutional context genuinely enabling – a setting where aspirations can be pursued and ethical commitments honored – and to translate that sense of fit into deeper engagement with teaching, research, and collegial service.

Beyond their influence through P-O fit, leadership styles may exert direct effects on job involvement. Sustainable leaders may directly activate job involvement by rendering daily academic tasks meaningful in relation to broader institutional and societal missions, creating conditions for professional development, and signaling genuine concern for staff welfare (Iqbal et al., 2021). Such behaviors may encourage lecturers to view their roles as intrinsically worthwhile and deserving of deeper investment, even prior to fully internalizing value fit. Digital leaders, by contrast, may directly affect involvement through the removal of procedural barriers – streamlining workflows, enabling flexible task execution, and deploying digital tools in ways that give lecturers timely performance information and a greater sense of control over their work (Zeike et al., 2019; AlNuaimi et al., 2022). When lecturers experience fewer obstacles to performing their tasks and greater autonomy in deciding how to achieve their goals, they may become more involved in their roles, independent of broader fit perceptions.

While direct effects are possible, the theoretical arguments above suggest that P-O fit is a central mechanism through which both leadership styles exert their influence on job involvement. For sustainable leadership, the mediation operates through a normative sequence – leadership behavior defines the institution's value climate, lecturers assess the correspondence between that climate and their own commitments, and perceived congruence translates into stronger role identification and sustained involvement (Liao, 2022). For digital leadership, the mediation is primarily instrumental: leaders design digital work systems that align with employees' skills and preferences, reduce mismatch and ambiguity, and thus facilitate involvement (Zeike et al., 2019).

Taken together, the preceding arguments suggest that P-O fit functions as a pivotal mechanism linking sustainable leadership and digital

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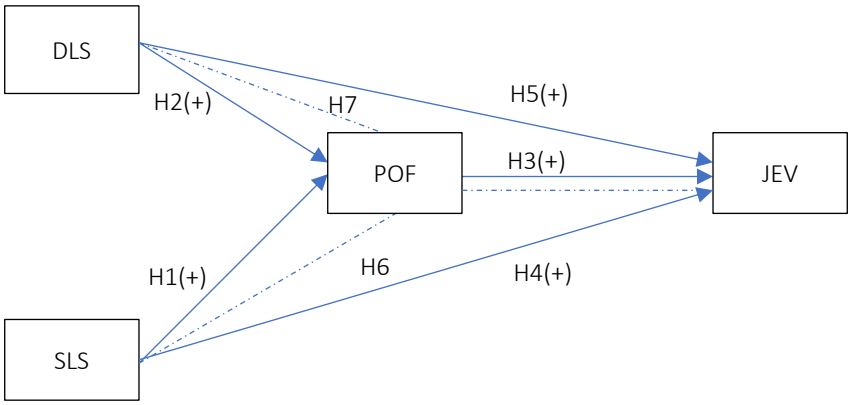

Note: SLS → POF → JEV; DLS → POF → JEV; SLS → JEV (direct); *DLS → JEV* (direct). *SLS* = sustainable leadership*; DLS* = digital leadership*; POF* = Person-organization fit*; JEV* = job involvement.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

leadership to job involvement, although the two leadership styles may operate through different underlying processes. Therefore, this study aims to explain how and why digital leadership and sustainable leadership foster job involvement among university lecturers in Vietnam by examining person–organization fit as a mediating mechanism. Based on this objective and the literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Sustainable leadership positively influences person-organization fit among university lecturers.

H2: Digital leadership positively influences person-organization fit among university lecturers.

H3: Person-organization fit positively influences job involvement among university lecturers.

H4: Sustainable leadership positively influences job involvement among university lecturers.

H5: Digital leadership positively influences job involvement among university lecturers.

H6: Person-organization fit mediates the relationship between sustainable leadership and job involvement.

H7: Person-organization fit mediates the relationship between digital leadership and job involvement.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model of the study.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research design and sampling

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to test the proposed model in the context of Vietnamese higher education. The target population consisted of full-time lecturers employed in public and private universities across Vietnam. Higher education provided an appropriate empirical setting because Vietnamese lecturers simultaneously navigate institutional digitalization – encompassing platform-based teaching, digital assessment tools, and learning management systems – and sustainability governance requirements such as environmental accountability frameworks and social responsibility mandates. Data were collected between March and June 2025 using an online questionnaire. As no centralized national register of university lecturers exists in Vietnam, participant recruitment combined purposive outreach through institutional email networks with referral-based chain sampling. Initial invitations were sent via institutional email lists and professional networks at several universities, asking recipients to complete the survey and share the link with colleagues. Participation was entirely voluntary. Respondents were briefed on the study's academic purpose and data handling procedures, and remained free to discontinue at any point without consequence.

Of 356 responses received, 44 were excluded due to missing data or identifiable low-quality response patterns – including uniform responding across items and implausibly short completion times – leaving 312 usable questionnaires. Statistical power was confirmed using the inverse square root method of Kock and Hadaya (2018), which indicated that 312 cases exceeded the minimum requirement for the present model structure. The sample comprised 54.2% female and 45.8% male respondents, with 63.8% aged between 30 and 45 years, 72.1% holding a master's degree, and 24.4% a doctoral degree, and 58.3% working in public universities. Average tenure in higher education was 9.7 years (SD = 6.4).

2.2. Measures

All constructs were measured using multi-item reflective scales adapted from established instruments. Items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). Digital leadership was measured using six items adapted from AlNuaimi et al. (2022) and Erhan et al. (2022), capturing leaders' digital vision, support for digital tools, and facilitation of technology-enabled collaboration. Sustainable leadership was measured using six items derived from Iqbal et al. (2020) and Suriyankietkaew and Avery (2016), reflecting leaders' long-term orientation, ethical behavior, concern for multiple stakeholders, and emphasis on social and environmental responsibility. Person-organization fit was measured with five items adapted from Cable and DeRue (2002), assessing perceived congruence between personal and organizational values, goals, and preferences. Job involvement was measured using six items derived from Kanungo (1982) and Diefendorff et al. (2002), capturing the centrality of work in respondents' lives and the degree of psychological identification with their job. The English questionnaire was adapted for Vietnamese administration through a back-translation protocol (Brislin, 1970). Two bilingual academics worked independently – one producing the Vietnamese version, another translating it back into English – with discrepancies resolved through discussion until conceptual equivalence was achieved. A pilot test with 32 lecturers preceded full deployment; their responses prompted minor item wording refinements before the main data collection began. The final instrument is summarized in Table 1.

2.3. Data analysis strategy

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4. This approach was selected given the model's complexity, the non-normal distribution of several indicators, and the moderate sample size – conditions under which PLS-SEM is known to perform reliably (Hair et al., 2019; 2021). Following the two-step procedure of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we first evaluated the measurement model. Acceptable indicator reliability required standardized loadings above 0.70. Internal consistency was assessed via Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), both requiring values above 0.70, while convergent validity was evaluated through average variance extracted (AVE), with 0.50 set as the minimum threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was examined using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), applying the 0.85 boundary recommended by Henseler et al. (2015).

The structural model was then assessed. Inner VIF values were inspected to rule out multicollinear-

Table 1. Measurement scales

Construct	Representative item (abbreviated)	Source
Digital leadership (DLS, 6 items)	"My leader articulates a clear vision for the use of digital technologies in our work"	AlNuaimi et al. (2022); Erhan et al. (2022)
Sustainable leadership (SLS, 6 items)	"My leader takes the long-term interests of multiple stakeholders into account when making decisions"	Iqbal et al. (2020); Suriyankietkaew and Avery (2016)
Person-organization fit (POF, 5 items)	"My personal values match my organization's values and culture"	Cable and DeRue (2002)
Job involvement (JEV, 6 items)	"The most important things that happen to me involve my present job"	Kanungo (1982); Diefendorff et al. (2002)

Note: All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

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ity, with 3.3 adopted as the upper bound (Kock, 2015). Explanatory power was evaluated through R^2 for both endogenous constructs, supplemented by effect sizes (f^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) obtained via blindfolding. Path coefficient significance was established through bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. For the mediation hypotheses, indirect effects were quantified using bootstrap-derived confidence intervals alongside the VAF index to determine mediation type (Hair et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2010). A 5% significance threshold was applied throughout. Potential common method bias was examined using two complementary diagnostics – Harman's single-factor test and the full collinearity VIF approach – consistent with recommendations by Kock (2015) and Podsakoff et al. (2003).

3. RESULTS

3.1. Measurement model

Indicator reliability was confirmed across all 23 items, with standardized loadings falling between 0.813 and 0.896, comfortably exceeding the 0.70 benchmark (Table 2). Internal consistency was strong across all four constructs, with Cronbach's alpha between 0.919 and 0.933 and composite reliability between 0.931 and 0.945. AVE values ranged from 0.693 to 0.742, each exceeding the 0.50 threshold and thereby satisfying the convergent validity criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Full collinearity VIF values remained below 3.3 for all constructs, providing no indication of problematic common method bias in the data (Kock, 2015).

Table 3 presents discriminant validity evidence evaluated through two complementary procedures – the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). Four of the six construct pairs satisfy both criteria without qualification – the AVE square root for each construct exceeds its highest inter-construct correlation, and HTMT ratios fall within the 0.85 boundary. Two pairs – DLS-SLS (HTMT = 0.859) and SLS-POF (HTMT = 0.877) – register values marginally exceeding 0.85 yet falling within the 0.90 upper boundary that Henseler et al. (2015) recognize as acceptable under less restrictive conditions. This modest elevation in HTMT is theoretically interpretable – digital leadership, sustainable leadership, and P-O fit all capture leader-driven aspects of the lecturer's organizational experience and are therefore expected to share variance – yet the constructs retain sufficient empirical separation to be treated as distinct in the structural model under the liberal criterion. The implications of this overlap for construct interpretation are addressed in the limitations section; nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that the full collinearity VIF values for all constructs remained strictly below the 3.3 threshold. According to Kock (2015), when full collinearity VIFs do not exceed 3.3, the model can be considered free from substantial common method bias (CMB) and excessive conceptual redundancy. Therefore, despite the marginally elevated HTMT ratios, the constructs demonstrate sufficient empirical independence and statistical separation to justify their retention as distinct entities in the structural model.

Table 3. Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT)

Construct	DLS	SLS	POF	JEV
DLS	0.845	0.858	0.818	0.784
SLS	0.859	0.861	0.877	0.774
POF	0.818	***0.877***	0.860	0.813
JEV	0.784	0.774	***0.813***	0.832

Note: Diagonal values in bold = √AVE; off-diagonal upper triangle = latent correlations; lower triangle = HTMT ratios (in italics). Two HTMT values (DLS–SLS = 0.859; SLS–POF = 0.877) marginally exceed 0.85 but remain below 0.90.

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity

Source: SmartPLS 4 output.

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Digital leadership (DLS)	6	0.925	0.937	0.714
Sustainable leadership (SLS)	6	0.933	0.945	0.742
Person-organization fit (POF)	5	0.922	0.934	0.740
Job involvement (JEV)	6	0.919	0.931	0.693

Note: AVE = average variance extracted. All loadings > 0.70.

3.2. Structural model

Inner VIF values for all predictor constructs fell below 3.3, ruling out multicollinearity as a concern (Kock, 2015). Model fit descriptive indicators registered an SRMR of 0.054 and an NFI of 0.906. While fit indices in PLS-SEM should be interpreted with caution as they do not conceptualize fit in the same manner as covariance-based SEM, these values fall within commonly accepted heuristic thresholds in the PLS-SEM literature (Hair et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2016). The two leadership constructs jointly explained 78.5% of variance in P-O fit ($R^2 = 0.785$), and the full model accounted for 70.4% of variance in job involvement ($R^2 = 0.704$) – both reflecting strong explanatory reach for a behavioral model of this scope (Hair et al., 2019). Blindfolding yielded Q^2 values of 0.560 for P-O fit and 0.448 for job involvement, indicating that the model retains predictive relevance beyond the sample.

Table 4 reports the estimated path coefficients, significance tests, and hypothesis outcomes. Sustainable leadership exerted a markedly strong effect on P-O fit ($\beta = 0.663$, $t = 16.57$, $p < 0.001$), supporting *H1*. Digital leadership also predicted P-O fit positively and significantly ($\beta = 0.249$, $t = 4.79$, $p < 0.001$), though its effect was considerably weaker in magnitude, supporting *H2*. *H3* was supported: P-O fit exerted the largest direct effect on job involvement among all predictors ($\beta = 0.488$, $t = 8.41$, $p < 0.001$). Digital leadership additionally exerted a significant direct effect on job involvement ($\beta = 0.333$, $t = 6.17$, $p < 0.001$), supporting *H5*. By contrast, the direct path from sustainable leadership to job involvement was negligible and fell short of significance ($\beta = 0.060$, $t = 1.03$, $p = 0.302$), resulting in the non-support of *H4*. This pattern indicates that sustainable leadership reaches job involvement only indirectly – its motivational effect contingent on first building value congruence between lecturers and their institution.

3.3. Mediation analysis

Table 5 reports mediation results, with indirect effects quantified through bootstrap percentile confidence intervals and classified using the VAF procedure (Hair et al., 2017). As shown in Table 5, P-O fit fully mediated the relationship between sustainable leadership and job involvement ($\beta = 0.324$, $t = 7.36$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.241; 0.412], VAF = 84.4%), supporting *H6*. Given that the direct *SLS → JEV* path is non-significant while the indirect path is both significant and substantial in magnitude, the pattern satisfies the conditions for full mediation as defined by Zhao et al. (2010). P-O fit also mediated the relationship between digital leadership and job involvement ($\beta = 0.122$, $t = 4.07$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.067; 0.184], VAF = 26.7%), supporting H7. For digital leadership, both the direct and indirect paths reach significance with the same directional sign, meeting the criteria for complementary partial mediation.

Table 4. Direct effects and hypotheses testing

Source: SmartPLS 4 output.

H	Path	β	SE	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	SLS → POF	0.663	0.040	16.57	< 0.001	Supported
H2	DLS → POF	0.249	0.052	4.79	< 0.001	Supported
H3	POF → JEV	0.488	0.058	8.41	< 0.001	Supported
H4	SLS → JEV	0.060	0.058	1.03	0.302	Rejected
H5	DLS → JEV	0.333	0.054	6.17	< 0.001	Supported

Note: β = standardized path coefficient; SE = bootstrap standard error (5,000 resamples).

Table 5. Mediation analysis via person-organization fit

H	Indirect path	β (indirect)	t-value	95% CI [LL; UL]	VAF	Type
H6	SLS → POF → JEV	0.324	7.36	[0.241; 0.412]	84.4%	Full
H7	DLS → POF → JEV	0.122	4.07	[0.067; 0.184]	26.7%	Partial

Note: CI = bootstrap confidence interval (5,000 resamples); VAF = variance accounted for = indirect effect / total effect. Full mediation: non-significant direct effect with significant indirect effect; complementary partial mediation: both direct and indirect effects are significant and of the same sign (Zhao et al., 2010).

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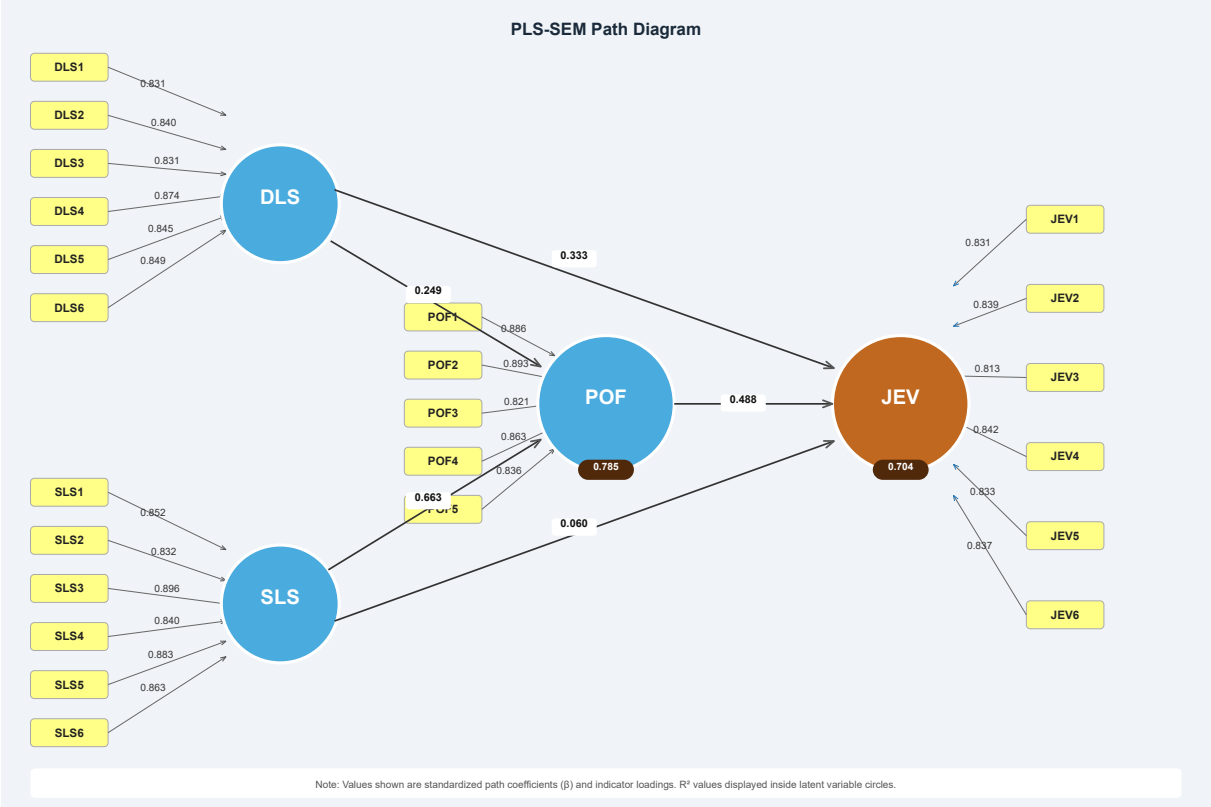

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; n.s. = not significant. R^2 (POF) = 0.785; R^2 (JEV) = 0.704. Standardized path coefficients reported.

Figure 2. Structural model results

4. DISCUSSION

Three findings from the structural model carry theoretical weight for understanding leadership in knowledge-intensive institutional settings. First, digital leadership influences job involvement through a dual pathway: a significant direct effect and an indirect effect via P-O fit. Digital leaders strengthen involvement both through direct operational improvements – greater clarity, reduced friction, enhanced autonomy – and through the fit perceptions that emerge when lecturers' competencies align with the institution's technological trajectory. This finding aligns with the resource-provisioning logic of Job Demands–Resources Theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and extends prior digital leadership research that has focused primarily on innovation and performance outcomes (Benitez et al., 2022; Erhan et al., 2022) by foregrounding an employee-centered psychological mechanism.

Second, sustainable leadership influences job involvement entirely through P-O fit. Although sustainable leadership strongly predicts P-O fit, its direct effect on job involvement is non-significant. The finding points to a temporally sequenced process – sustainable leadership's motivational reach is contingent on first establishing value congruence, with involvement effects emerging only once that congruence is consolidated. This pattern is consistent with Liao (2022), who documented that the motivational effects of values-based leadership are channeled through employees' cognitive appraisal of fit rather than through direct behavioral prompts. In the Vietnamese higher education context, where cultural norms emphasize hierarchy, harmony, and collective orientation (Truong et al., 2017), value internalization may be slower and more strongly mediated by organizational structures, reinforcing the role of P-O fit as a necessary translational mechanism among the surveyed lecturers.

Third, P-O fit emerges as the central psychological gateway connecting both leadership styles to job involvement. It is simultaneously an outcome

of leadership behavior and a proximal antecedent of lecturers' willingness to invest themselves in their roles. The magnitude of the P-O fit to the job involvement path (β = 0.488) exceeds that of any direct leadership effect, underscoring the relative importance of this mediating mechanism in knowledge-intensive academic work.

The study contributes to leadership and fit literatures in several ways. First, it integrates digital and sustainable leadership within a single model and demonstrates that they produce complementary, not substitutive, effects. Digital leadership primarily supplies instrumental and structural resources, while sustainable leadership supplies normative and relational resources. Together, they form an integrated leadership framework that appears particularly appropriate for universities managing both digital and sustainability transitions (Iqbal et al., 2021; AlNuaimi et al., 2022). Second, the findings reconceptualize P-O fit as a dynamic mediating process rather than a static background condition. Consistent with recent calls for more process-oriented treatments of fit (Vleugels et al., 2018), leadership behaviors shape perceptions of fit, which then shape job involvement. P-O fit thus bridges macro-level leadership with micro-level motivation and helps explain why leadership effects on work involvement can be substantial even when they are not directly observable in traditional path analyses.

Third, by focusing on job involvement rather than broader engagement or commitment measures, the study highlights the importance of role-specific identity processes in academic work. For lecturers, whose professional identity is closely bound to teaching and research roles, job involvement is a critical indicator of leadership effectiveness. The magnitude of the P-O fit → job involvement path affirms that value congruence between the person and the institution is not a background variable but an active determinant of how deeply lecturers commit to their academic roles (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Brown, 1996).

For university leaders and policymakers, the findings underscore the need to purposefully design a dual leadership approach rather than choosing between digital and sustainable orientations. In the short run, investment in digital leadership capabilities – such as providing digital tools, training, and data-driven feedback – can directly increase lecturers' job involvement by making work more efficient, autonomous, and meaningful. At the same time, sustainable leadership should not be neglected simply because its effects on involvement are not immediately visible. The full mediation via P-O fit indicates that sustainable leadership works by gradually building value congruence and institutional identification. University leaders should therefore regularly assess P-O fit, for example, through surveys, focus groups, or structured feedback mechanisms, and treat it as a key leading indicator of future job involvement.

Four HR practice domains follow from these insights. Leadership development programs should build digital and sustainability competencies in parallel, so that department chairs and deans can navigate both agendas without treating them as competing priorities. Onboarding and socialization processes should make institutional values visible and discussable, helping incoming lecturers form an early and accurate sense of fit. Digital platforms should serve not only administrative purposes but also value communication functions, embedding sustainability commitments into the technological touchpoints of everyday academic life. Finally, structured channels through which lecturers can report their fit perceptions and digital support experiences create feedback loops that allow leadership to adjust and signal responsiveness to staff concerns.

The study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design precludes strong causal claims and prevents direct observation of the temporal dynamics implied by the value-lagged effect of sustainable leadership. Longitudinal studies with repeated measures would be valuable to track how P-O fit and job involvement develop over time under different leadership profiles. The focus on Vietnamese higher education limits the generalizability of the findings; comparative research across countries and educational systems could examine whether the full mediation of sustainable leadership through P-O fit is

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a context-specific phenomenon or a more general pattern. Similarly, the combined convenience and referral-based recruitment strategy may have introduced sampling bias toward more digitally engaged or values-conscious lecturers; probability-based designs stratified by discipline and institutional type would improve representativeness. All measures were self-reported, raising the possibility of common method variance, although Harman's single-factor test and full collinearity VIF diagnostics did not indicate serious bias (Kock, 2015; Podsakoff et al., 2003). The strong inter-construct correlations between digital leadership, sustainable leadership, and P-O fit, as reflected in HTMT values for the DLS-SLS and SLS-POF pairs that marginally exceed 0.85 but remain below 0.90, suggest substantial conceptual overlap among these leader-driven constructs. Although the model passes the liberal HTMT criterion of Henseler et al. (2015) and yields theoretically interpretable, distinguishable path estimates, future research should refine the measurement of digital and sustainable leadership through more behaviorally specific items or experimental manipulations to sharpen empirical separation between the two paradigms. Supplementing self-reported data with external indicators – such as supervisory assessments, behavioral records, or institutional performance archives – and replacing perceptual P-O fit measures with more objective congruence indices would address the common method concern more decisively. Finally, future research could extend the model by incorporating boundary conditions such as digital maturity, academic discipline, or individual digital literacy, which may moderate the strength of the proposed pathways.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how digital and sustainable leadership jointly shape job involvement among university lecturers in Vietnam and clarified the mediating role of Person-organization fit. Drawing on PLS-SEM estimated with 312 valid responses, the results show that digital leadership reaches job involvement through both a direct operational channel and an indirect fit-mediated channel, while sustainable leadership's motivational effect operates exclusively through P-O fit. P-O fit thus constitutes a central psychological mechanism through which leadership affects lecturers' willingness to invest in their roles.

Conceptually, the findings support the idea of an integrated leadership framework in higher education, where digital and sustainable leadership are deployed together rather than in isolation. The study contributes to the leadership and fit literatures by integrating two previously parallel paradigms within a single model, by reconceptualizing P-O fit as a dynamic mediating process shaped by leadership behaviors, and by demonstrating the value of job involvement as a theoretically and practically meaningful outcome in academic settings. Practically, the results suggest that university leaders seeking to foster job involvement should focus not only on providing digital resources and autonomy but also on cultivating value congruence between lecturers and institutions through consistent, values-based leadership behavior.

As universities continue to confront simultaneous digital and sustainability challenges, understanding how different leadership styles interact through P-O fit to shape academic staff motivation will remain a critical research and managerial task. Future work extending this model longitudinally and cross-culturally can further refine the temporal and contextual boundary conditions of integrated digital and sustainable leadership effects on the motivational architecture of knowledge workers.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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DECLARATION ON THE USE OF AI STATEMENT

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used generative AI tools for language polishing and clarity improvements only. All content, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions are entirely the work and responsibility of the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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