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The Effect of Digital Competence on Employee Performance Mediated by Psychological Empowerment

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Abstract
Drawing on survey data from civil servants at the Health Office of Konawe Kepulauan Regency, Indonesia, this research examines whether digital competence raises employee performance and whether psychological empowerment carries part of that influence. An explanatory quantitative design with cross-sectional data was adopted. Every civil servant in the office took part (census, n = 60) by completing a questionnaire scored on a five-point Likert scale, and the responses were processed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Digital competence was found to strengthen both performance and psychological empowerment, while empowerment, in turn, contributed to higher performance. Part of the influence of digital competence on performance travelled through empowerment, which means that employees' digital abilities pay off on their own and also by making staff feel that their work matters, that they are capable, that they have discretion, and that their contribution counts. Health agencies that invest in digital training should therefore pair it with managerial practices that give employees genuine empowerment.

Keywords: *Digital Competence, Psychological Empowerment, Employee Performance*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, digitalization has moved to the center of public administration reform. Indonesia formalized this direction in Presidential Regulation No. 95/2018 concerning SPBE (Sistem Pemerintahan Berbasis Elektronik), under which the digital capacity of the state apparatus is treated as a precondition for faster and more efficient services and more reliable data. Health administration shows how far the shift has gone: district health offices now feed regional health information systems, submit community health data through KOMDAT Kesmas, report nutrition and family health indicators, operate environmental health and surveillance platforms, and record staff performance electronically, in addition to many other online reporting channels. Much of what health office staff do each day therefore passes through a screen, and whether digitalization actually yields the promised gains in speed and accuracy depends heavily on how well these staff can handle the tools.

Having technology in place, however, is not the same as performing well. Hakim (2016) showed that information technology improves managerial performance only when people capable of producing and using good-quality information stand behind it. In a similar vein, task–technology fit theory holds that gains in individual performance appear only when what

a technology demands corresponds to what its users are able to do (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995). This places digital competence at the heart of the matter. The concept describes a person's ability to apply digital technologies at work with confidence, a critical eye, and a sense of responsibility, and it spans five areas: handling information and data, communicating and collaborating, producing digital content, staying safe, and solving problems (Carretero et al., 2017; Ferrari, 2013). van Laar et al. (2017) likewise portray it as a blend of technical, informational, communicative, collaborative, and problem-solving abilities exercised in digital environments. For government staff, such competence has ceased to be an optional extra; it is now part of what professional conduct means and it directly shapes the services citizens receive (Mergel, 2019).

Employee performance is among the clearest signals of whether a public institution is succeeding, since it shows how well civil servants fulfil their responsibilities (Mangkunegara, 2013). The current framework for civil servant performance management, set out in Minister of PANRB Regulation No. 6/2022, judges performance by the quality and punctuality of outputs, innovation, and target attainment, as well as by the core behavioral values of the civil service (BerAKHLAK), namely service orientation, accountability, competence, harmony, loyalty, adaptability, and collaboration. If digital systems are rolled out faster than staff can build the skills to use them, the mismatch can depress output quantity, quality, punctuality, and service orientation. Digitalization may then add workload rather than save it, provoke resistance, and leave the organization relying on a handful of tech-savvy individuals.

Yet the path from digital competence to performance need not be a straight line; it may run through psychological processes, and psychological empowerment is a strong candidate. Spreitzer (1995) treats psychological empowerment as a motivational state expressed in four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Extending the earlier work of Conger and Kanungo (1988) and Thomas and Velthouse (1990), this perspective argues that people who find their work worthwhile, trust their own abilities, can decide how to do their jobs, and see that their efforts make a difference are more intrinsically motivated and, as a result, achieve more. Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory adds that a sense of mastery over a task raises engagement and achievement. Where work is digital, becoming proficient with technology therefore builds more than technical skill: it also lifts employees' confidence that they can get the job done, which corresponds directly to the competence dimension of empowerment. Meta-analytic findings show that empowerment is reliably linked with how well people perform, how satisfied they are with their jobs, and how committed they are to their organization (Seibert et al., 2011).

These issues are visible at the Health Office of Konawe Kepulauan Regency in Southeast Sulawesi. Staff there must work with a range of health information applications for program reporting, management of community health center (puskesmas) data, surveillance records, and electronic administrative reports. Initial observations revealed that a number of employees, older staff in particular, continue to struggle with these applications. Roughly 50% of routine program reports arrive after the deadline, and about fifteen reports were sent back for revision owing to inconsistent data or entry mistakes. Digital tasks also tend to pile up on a small group of capable colleagues, while the rest rely on them and contribute less. In addition, new systems have typically been imposed from above without sufficient training or ongoing support, so some staff regard technology as an extra burden instead of something that helps them work. If

employees do not see why a system matters (meaning), doubt their ability to use it (competence), have little freedom to organize their digital tasks (self-determination), and cannot see what their contribution achieves (impact), their sense of empowerment stays weak, and performance is likely to fall short even when the systems themselves are in place.

Empirical evidence on these relationships is mixed. Some studies find that digital competence significantly improves employee performance (Chaedir et al., 2024; Emilia & Soemaryani, 2025; Firman et al., 2025; Kinanthi & Priyastiwi, 2024; Sulaiman et al., 2024), while others detect no meaningful effect (Garini & Muafi, 2023; Nazwani et al., 2025; Widyastuti et al., 2025). Results for psychological empowerment are equally divided: it raised performance in some samples (Damayanti, 2021; Ihtian, 2025; Rani et al., 2021) but not in others (Alfiana, 2023; Dealisa & Widodo, 2024; Romadhani et al., 2022). Few studies have examined whether digital competence fosters empowerment or whether empowerment links digital competence to performance, and such work is especially scarce for the Indonesian public sector (Ochoa Pacheco & Coello-Montecel, 2023; Setyaasih et al., 2025). The inconsistency points to a relationship that is more complex than a direct effect and that may hinge on an intervening psychological mechanism.

A recent systematic literature review also concludes that digital literacy is more likely to support employee performance when it is embedded in actual workflows and accompanied by effective training and engagement. This supports the need to distinguish the possession of digital skills from the organizational and psychological conditions that allow those skills to translate into results. The cross-sectional design used here can test the consistency of the proposed mechanism with observed associations, but it cannot establish temporal causation.

Recent public-sector evidence further suggests that the digital competence–performance relationship depends on the organizational mechanism through which skills are applied. Nawawi et al. (2026), studying 142 employees of the Central Java Provincial Secretariat, found that smart digital services partially mediated this relationship. Their findings are relevant but do not establish that the same mechanism operates in a district health office. In the present study, psychological empowerment is examined as a distinct, employee-level motivational pathway rather than a digital-service pathway. This distinction sharpens the contribution of the study while avoiding a claim that mediation by psychological empowerment is entirely new.

Hypothesis Development

Digitally competent employees can handle data, compile reports, and operate technology-based work systems with greater speed, precision, and order. In public bodies where most administrative and service activities run on information systems, such employees make fewer mistakes, meet deadlines more often, and deliver better outputs (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995; van Laar et al., 2017). Hence, the first hypothesis reads:

H1: Digital competence positively and significantly influences employee performance.

Beyond its technical benefits, digital competence also shapes how employees feel about their work. Being able to master digital tools gives staff a sense that they are capable (competence) and in control of their tasks (self-determination); these feelings then reinforce their view that the work is worthwhile (meaning) and that their input matters (impact)

(Spreitzer, 1995; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Staff who run systems competently need less help from colleagues and see themselves as real contributors to organizational goals (Ochoa Pacheco & Coello-Montecel, 2023).

H2: Digital competence positively and significantly influences psychological empowerment.

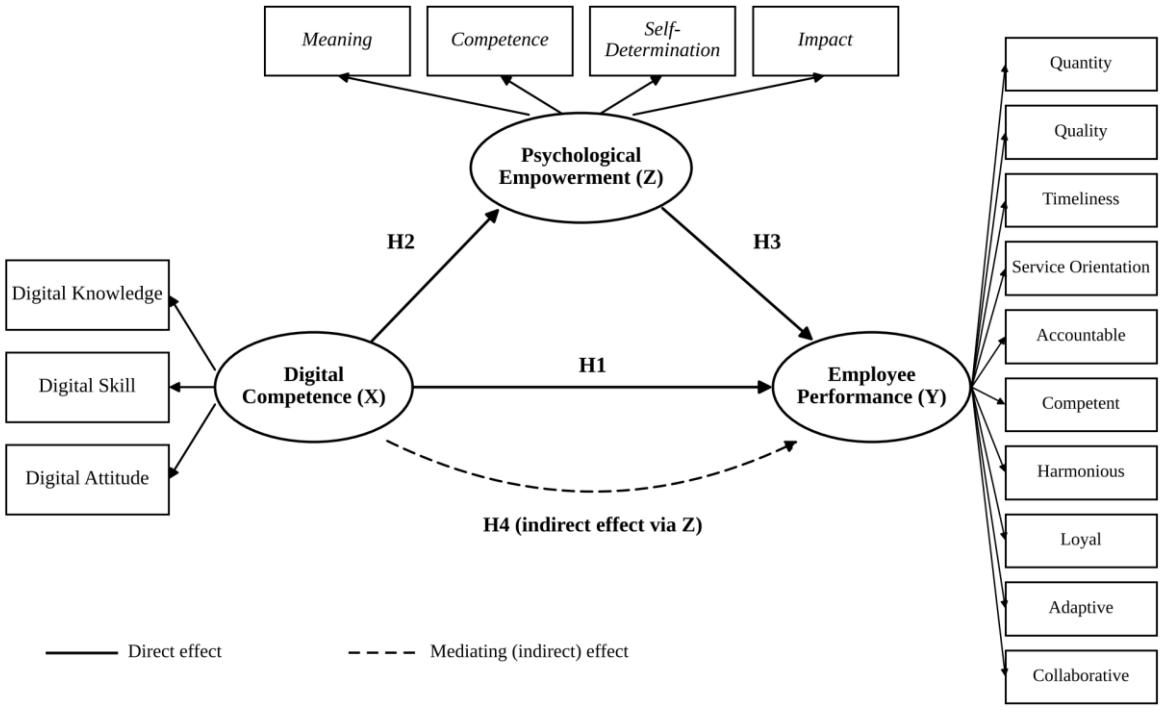
Employees who feel empowered are more intrinsically motivated and more absorbed in their work. They behave proactively, own their responsibilities, focus on results, take the initiative to finish tasks, guard the quality of what they produce, and work hard to hit their targets (Seibert et al., 2011; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). In a bureaucracy, empowerment also lessens the need to wait for step-by-step direction from superiors.

H3: Psychological empowerment positively and significantly influences employee performance.

Taken together, these arguments imply that digital competence should raise performance through two routes: directly, and indirectly by building psychological empowerment. Digital competence supplies the technical means, whereas empowerment supplies the inner drive to make full use of those means (Ochoa Pacheco & Coello-Montecel, 2023; Setyaasih et al., 2025).

H4: Psychological empowerment mediates the influence of digital competence on employee performance.

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in Figure 1.



Source: Developed by the authors (2026)

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework*

Against this background, the article sets out to examine (1) how digital competence affects employee performance, (2) how digital competence affects psychological empowerment, (3) how psychological empowerment affects employee performance, and (4)

whether psychological empowerment mediates the link between digital competence and employee performance among civil servants at the Health Office of Konawe Kepulauan Regency. By uncovering the psychological route through which digital competence becomes performance, the study seeks to add empirical evidence to the literature on public sector human resource management.

METHOD

A quantitative, explanatory approach was chosen because the study tests hypotheses and examines theoretically specified associations between variables, both directly and via a mediator. Data were gathered once, making the design cross-sectional. Fieldwork took place at the Health Office of Konawe Kepulauan Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province, an island regency whose health administration depends to a large degree on digital reporting.

The study population consisted of the 60 civil servants (Aparatur Sipil Negara, ASN) employed at the office. Given this small and reachable population, every member was included through a census (saturated sampling), yielding 60 respondents. Primary data came from an online questionnaire, while secondary data such as personnel records, performance reports, and relevant regulations were drawn from the office's official documents.

Each construct was measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), with three items per indicator. Digital competence comprised three dimensions, namely digital knowledge, digital skill, and digital attitude, following the knowledge–skill–attitude conception of competence and the European DigComp framework (Carretero et al., 2017; Ferrari, 2013). Psychological empowerment was captured through the four dimensions proposed by Spreitzer (1995). Employee performance was assessed with ten indicators taken from the civil servant performance management framework in Minister of PANRB Regulation No. 6/2022: three concerning work results (quantity, quality, timeliness) and seven concerning work behavior (service orientation, accountability, competence, harmony, loyalty, adaptability, collaboration). Table 1 summarizes how the variables were operationalized.

Table 1. *Operationalization of Research Variables*

Variable	Indicators	Main Reference
Digital Competence (X)	Digital knowledge (DC1); digital skill (DC2); digital attitude (DC3)	Ferrari (2013); Carretero et al. (2017)
Psychological Empowerment (Z)	Meaning (PE1); competence (PE2); self-determination (PE3); impact (PE4)	Spreitzer (1995)
Employee Performance (Y)	Quantity (EP1); quality (EP2); timeliness (EP3); service orientation (EP4); accountable (EP5); competent (EP6); harmonious (EP7); loyal (EP8); adaptive (EP9); collaborative (EP10)	Regulation of the Minister of PANRB No. 6/2022

Source: Compiled by the authors (2026)

Prior to the main analysis, the validity and reliability of the instrument were checked in IBM SPSS. Item validity was judged from Pearson product-moment correlations between each item and the total score; items were retained when r exceeded 0.30 at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Sekaran &

Bougie, 2016), a condition that all items satisfied. Reliability was judged from Cronbach's alpha against a minimum of 0.60. The coefficients reached 0.950 for digital competence, 0.956 for psychological empowerment, and 0.980 for employee performance, so the instrument was deemed reliable. The reported linearity-test significance alone is insufficient to establish linearity without identifying the tested statistic and decision rule; this claim is therefore not retained.

Hypotheses were tested with PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4. This technique suited the study because it handles models containing both direct and mediated paths between latent variables, works with modest sample sizes, and makes no strict assumptions about data distribution (Hair et al., 2017). Analysis proceeded in two steps. The outer (measurement) model was assessed first, using indicator loadings (> 0.70), average variance extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50), Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (> 0.70), and discriminant validity based on the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loadings (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2016). The inner (structural) model was then assessed through R^2, Q^2, and path coefficients. Bootstrapping at the 5% level served for hypothesis testing; a hypothesis was accepted if $t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$, and the sign of the coefficient matched the predicted direction. Mediation was judged from the significance of the specific indirect effect, and its strength was quantified with the variance accounted for (VAF)

The PLS-SEM analysis was conducted in two stages: assessment of the measurement model and evaluation of the structural model. The measurement model was evaluated using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The structural model was assessed using coefficients of determination (R^2), path coefficients, and the significance of direct and indirect relationships estimated through bootstrapping (Hair et al., 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

Table 2 describes the 60 respondents. The typical respondent was a woman holding an undergraduate degree, aged 32–38, with one to eight years of service. The workforce is thus largely of productive age, fairly well educated, and still building its professional competence.

Because all 60 employees in the defined office population were included, the sample describes this particular institutional setting. Census coverage does not eliminate response bias, measurement error, or common method variance, and it does not make the results automatically generalizable to other health offices. The demographic profile is consequently used to characterize respondents rather than to explain the estimated structural coefficients.

Table 2. *Respondent Profile*

No	Characteristic / Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Gender		
	Male	24	40
	Female	36	60
2	Education		
	Diploma (D3)	8	13
	Bachelor (S1)	40	67

No	Characteristic / Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
	Professional degree	1	2
	Master (S2)	11	18
3	Age (years)		
	25–31	11	18
	32–38	36	60
	39–45	10	17
	46–52	3	5
4	Length of service (years)		
	1–8	41	68
	9–16	13	22
	17–24	5	8
	25–32	1	2

Source: Primary data processed (2026)

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 reports mean scores for every variable and indicator, and all three variables sit in the "agree" range. Within digital competence, digital knowledge scored highest and digital attitude lowest, implying that staff understand the technologies they use but are less ready to embrace and adjust to technological change. Within employee performance, accountability scored highest and collaboration lowest: employees take responsibility for their own outputs, yet teamwork and inter-unit coordination remain comparatively weak. Within psychological empowerment, self-determination scored highest and meaning lowest, which suggests that staff feel free to organize their work but have yet to fully absorb how much that work matters to the organization and the public.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables*

Variable / Indicator	Mean	Category
Digital Competence (X)	*3.94*	*Agree*
Digital knowledge	3.98	Agree
Digital skill	3.93	Agree
Digital attitude	3.91	Agree
Psychological Empowerment (Z)	*3.80*	*Agree*
Meaning	3.64	Agree
Competence	3.68	Agree
Self-determination	4.06	Agree
Impact	3.83	Agree
Employee Performance (Y)	*3.86*	*Agree*
Quantity	3.82	Agree
Quality	3.76	Agree
Timeliness	3.78	Agree
Service orientation	3.94	Agree
Accountable	4.17	Agree
Competent	3.83	Agree
Harmonious	4.00	Agree
Loyal	3.76	Agree
Adaptive	3.96	Agree
Collaborative	3.54	Agree

Source: Primary data processed (2026)

Measurement Model Evaluation

Table 4 presents the measurement model results. Every outer loading was above 0.70 and significant ($p < 0.001$), from 0.789 for impact to 0.968 for competent, so each indicator is a valid reflection of its construct (Hair et al., 2017). Digital skill loaded most strongly on digital competence, showing that the ability to operate devices, applications, and information systems is what most defines employees' digital competence. The competent indicator loaded most strongly on employee performance, and self-determination most strongly on psychological empowerment.

Table 4. *Outer Loadings, Reliability, and Convergent Validity*

Construct / Indicator	Loading	t-statistic	Cronbach's α	CR (ρc)	AVE
Digital Competence (X)			*0.844*	*0.906*	*0.763*
Digital knowledge (DC1)	0.865	12.382			
Digital skill (DC2)	0.890	22.012			
Digital attitude (DC3)	0.865	12.166			
Psychological Empowerment (Z)			*0.826*	*0.885*	*0.658*
Meaning (PE1)	0.817	6.479			
Competence (PE2)	0.794	7.414			
Self-determination (PE3)	0.843	14.434			
Impact (PE4)	0.789	5.063			
Employee Performance (Y)			*0.976*	*0.979*	*0.823*
Quantity (EP1)	0.875	9.727			
Quality (EP2)	0.928	23.049			
Timeliness (EP3)	0.851	7.381			
Service orientation (EP4)	0.895	16.390			
Accountable (EP5)	0.948	47.212			
Competent (EP6)	0.968	65.547			
Harmonious (EP7)	0.929	35.257			
Loyal (EP8)	0.878	9.312			
Adaptive (EP9)	0.930	34.922			
Collaborative (EP10)	0.862	8.304			

Source: SmartPLS output (2026); all loadings significant at $p < 0.001$

Internal consistency was also adequate: Cronbach's alpha lay between 0.826 and 0.976 and composite reliability (ρc) between 0.885 and 0.979, all exceeding 0.70. AVE values (0.658–0.823) surpassed 0.50 for each construct, establishing convergent validity, because every construct accounts for over half of the variance in its indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The Fornell–Larcker criterion served to check discriminant validity. Table 5 shows that the √AVE of each construct on the diagonal is larger than its correlations with the other constructs, and the cross-loadings show that each indicator correlates more strongly with its own construct than with any other. The three constructs are therefore empirically distinguishable (Henseler et al., 2016).

Table 5. *Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)*

Construct	DC	PE	EP
Digital Competence (DC)	**0.873**		
Psychological Empowerment (PE)	0.709	**0.811**	
Employee Performance (EP)	0.734	0.713	**0.907**

Source: SmartPLS output (2026); diagonal values are √AVE

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was judged by the coefficient of determination (R^2). According to Table 6, digital competence accounts for 50.2% of the variance in psychological empowerment, and digital competence together with psychological empowerment accounts for 61.2% of the variance in employee performance; both values reflect moderate explanatory power.

Table 6. *Coefficient of Determination*

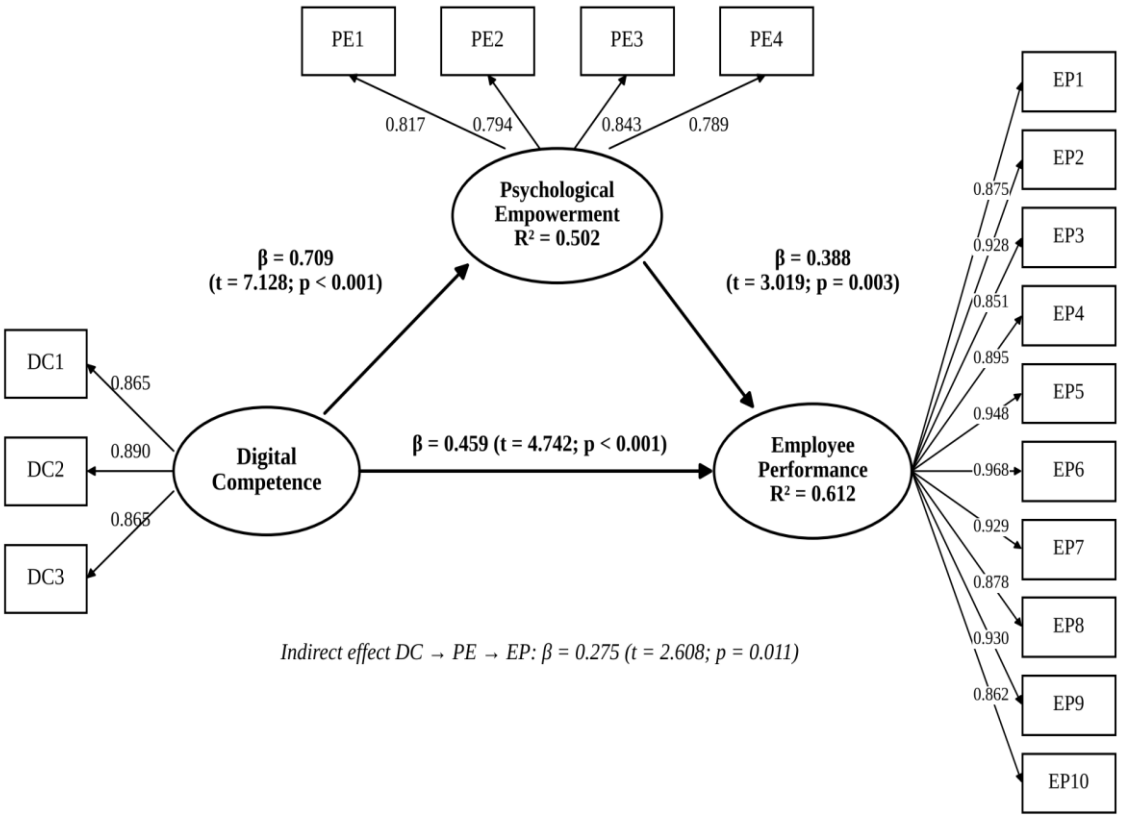
No	Endogenous Variable	R^2	Adjusted R^2
1	Employee Performance (Y)	0.612	0.599
2	Psychological Empowerment (Z)	0.502	0.494

Source: SmartPLS output (2026)

The coefficient of determination indicates that digital competence explains 50.2% of the variance in psychological empowerment, whereas digital competence and psychological empowerment jointly explain 61.2% of the variance in employee performance. These findings indicate substantial explanatory relevance within the observed sample. The interpretation of model performance is therefore based on the reported R^2 values and the estimated structural relationships (Hair et al., 2019).

Hypothesis Testing

The results of the bootstrapping procedure are presented in Figure 2 and Table 7.



Source: SmartPLS output (2026), redrawn by the authors

Figure 2. *Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing*

Table 7. *Results of Hypothesis Testing*

Path	β	SD	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
Direct effects					
H1: DC → EP	0.459	0.097	4.742	0.000	Supported
H2: DC → PE	0.709	0.099	7.128	0.000	Supported
H3: PE → EP	0.388	0.128	3.019	0.003	Supported
Indirect effect					
H4: DC → PE → EP	0.275	0.105	2.608	0.011	Supported

Source: SmartPLS output (2026); DC = digital competence, PE = psychological empowerment, EP = employee performance

All four hypotheses are supported (Table 7). Digital competence raises both employee performance ($\beta = 0.459$; $t = 4.742$; $p < 0.05$) and psychological empowerment ($\beta = 0.709$; $t = 7.128$; $p < 0.05$), and psychological empowerment raises employee performance ($\beta = 0.388$; $t = 3.019$; $p < 0.05$). The indirect path from digital competence to performance via empowerment is also significant ($\beta = 0.275$; $t = 2.608$; $p < 0.05$). Because digital competence still affects performance directly once the mediator enters the model, empowerment plays a partial mediating role. The total effect of digital competence on performance equals 0.734 (0.459 + 0.275), giving a VAF of 0.275/0.734 = 37.5%; values between 20% and 80% denote partial mediation (Hair et al., 2017).

Digital Competence and Employee Performance

The first result shows that digital competence makes a significant contribution to employee performance: staff who are more adept with digital technology carry out their duties better. This is unsurprising, since administrative and health service work at the office increasingly relies on information systems, digital applications, electronic data processing, and technology-mediated communication. On a typical day, staff draft letters, process data, and prepare reports in office software; coordinate and share documents through instant messaging and e-mail; and use web-based platforms for health program reporting, personnel administration, attendance, and setting individual performance targets. Those who handle these tools well finish work sooner, make fewer administrative errors, and submit more accurate reports.

The findings can also be read alongside Nawawi et al. (2026), who identified smart digital services as a mediator between digital competence and performance in a different Indonesian public institution. Whereas their mediation mechanism concerns service-system functioning, the present model highlights perceived meaning, capability, discretion, and impact. Both approaches suggest that digital skills alone are not a sufficient organizational intervention; however, the two mediation pathways cannot be compared statistically without a common model and comparable data.

The respondent profile is in line with this reading. Most employees are of productive age, hold undergraduate degrees, and are at an early or middle career stage, which tends to make them open to technology and willing to learn new systems. The descriptive data add nuance: digital knowledge is already high, but digital attitude is the weakest dimension and collaboration the weakest performance indicator. In other words, digital competence helps staff work faster and more precisely, but it would add more to performance if it were also channeled into better coordination and teamwork.

From a theoretical standpoint, the result fits the task–technology fit model, according to which technology improves individual performance when users' abilities correspond to what the technology requires (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995), as well as the argument that digital skills are now a core element of competence at work (van Laar et al., 2017). It agrees with earlier reports of a positive digital competence effect among public employees (Chaedir et al., 2024; Emilia & Soemaryani, 2025; Kinanthi & Priyastiwi, 2024; Sulaiman et al., 2024) but contrasts with studies that found none (Garini & Muafi, 2023; Nazwani et al., 2025). One explanation for the difference is that digital competence matters more where digital systems are embedded in the organization's core processes, as in this health office, where nearly all reporting duties are now carried out online.

Digital Competence and Psychological Empowerment

The second result indicates that digital competence exerts a strong, positive, and significant influence on psychological empowerment, and this path carries the largest coefficient in the model. Technological ability therefore affects not only the technical side of the job but also employees' self-confidence, autonomy, capacity to make decisions, and belief that they contribute to the organization. Staff who can run digital systems on their own no longer depend on co-workers to finish their reports, and this independence strengthens their feeling of competence and control.

The strong association between digital competence and empowerment should not be interpreted as proof that training automatically creates autonomy. Employees may be skilled yet still lack authority to redesign procedures or access to reliable digital infrastructure. In this sample, the comparatively low mean for meaning (3.64) indicates a practical area for management attention, but the descriptive difference does not by itself establish a causal explanation.

Spreitzer's (1995) framework helps explain the result. Digital competence feeds the competence cognition, as employees feel better equipped to do their tasks with technological support, and it feeds the self-determination cognition, as technologically skilled staff enjoy more freedom in deciding how to get their work done, which is consistent with self-determination being the highest-rated empowerment dimension. In line with self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), successful experiences with technology raise employees' confidence in their own capacity to succeed, a key ingredient of empowerment. The result echoes Ochoa Pacheco and Coello-Montecel (2023), who showed that digital competencies promote psychological empowerment, and Setyaasih et al. (2025), who found that digital literacy strengthens employees' psychological empowerment. Even so, meaning received the lowest rating, which shows that growing digital capability has not yet been matched by an appreciation of the strategic value of employees' work. Efforts to build digital capacity should therefore go hand in hand with leadership that explains how digital reporting feeds into better health services.

Psychological Empowerment and Employee Performance

The third result confirms that psychological empowerment improves employee performance positively and significantly. Staff who regard their work as worthwhile, are confident in their abilities, can choose how to complete tasks, and believe their efforts affect

the organization generally achieve better results. Rather than treating the job as a mere duty, these employees see themselves as playing an important part in organizational success, which pushes them to work more effectively, responsibly, and proactively.

A distinction is necessary between individual and collective outcomes. The relatively low collaboration score (3.54) is consistent with the possibility that employees feel personally accountable while cross-unit coordination remains challenging. This is an interpretation of the descriptive pattern, not an independently tested effect of collaboration or leadership.

The result agrees with Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and Spreitzer (1995), who conceive of empowerment as intrinsic task motivation, and with the meta-analytic evidence of Seibert et al. (2011) linking empowerment positively to task performance. It also corroborates earlier empirical work (Damayanti, 2021; Ihtian, 2025; Rani et al., 2021), although it diverges from studies reporting no significant effect (Alfiana, 2023; Dealisa & Widodo, 2024; Romadhani et al., 2022). Such divergence may stem from contextual differences, including supervisory support, organizational structure, and how much employees are allowed to participate. Here, respondents reported high levels of self-determination and accountability, suggesting that they have been given adequate room and trust for empowerment to turn into performance. The low collaboration score, however, implies that empowerment has so far shown up mainly as individual responsibility rather than collective effort, so staff should be encouraged to take part in solving problems across units.

The Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment

The fourth result shows that psychological empowerment significantly mediates the influence of digital competence on employee performance. Digital competence shapes performance both directly and through empowerment. With both routes significant, the mediation is partial: empowerment does not take the place of the direct link but carries a considerable share of it. Put simply, solid digital skills make employees feel more capable, independent, and self-assured, and these feelings then spur better performance.

The indirect effect of digital competence on employee performance through psychological empowerment is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.275$; $t = 2.608$; $p = 0.011$). The direct relationship also remains significant ($\beta = 0.459$; $p < 0.001$), indicating complementary partial mediation. The estimated total effect is 0.734, of which approximately 37.5% is represented by the indirect pathway. These results suggest that digital competence is associated with performance both through its direct contribution and through employees' perceived psychological empowerment.

This mechanism reflects the view in human resource management that competencies deliver their full performance benefit only when backed by supportive psychological conditions. Digital competence offers the technical capacity, and psychological empowerment offers the motivation to exploit that capacity fully. The result is in line with Ochoa Pacheco and Coello-Montecel (2023), who showed empowerment to mediate between digital competencies and job performance, and with Setyaasih et al. (2025), who found empowerment to mediate between digital literacy and employee performance. In Indonesian public health agencies, where new digital systems are frequently mandated from the top down, the finding signals that technical training on its own will not suffice. Raising performance calls for digital

capacity building together with trust, participation in decisions, reinforcement of the meaning of work, and organizational support, so that staff feel both able and empowered to do their jobs.

Implications and Limitations

On the theoretical side, the study carries psychological empowerment theory into the setting of digital transformation in local government health offices and, by revealing an intervening psychological mechanism, offers evidence that may help explain the conflicting results on how digital competence relates to performance. On the practical side, the management of the Health Office of Konawe Kepulauan Regency is advised to (a) improve employees' digital attitude by offering continuous support in using work applications, building everyday digital work habits, and communicating what technology offers; (b) strengthen collaboration through routine coordination meetings, a clearer division of tasks, cross-unit teams, and shared digital workspaces; and (c) deepen the meaning of work by showing staff explicitly how their tasks connect to health service goals.

Several limitations should be noted. To begin with, data came from one institution with a small population, so the results may not extend to other regions or sectors. Next, the cross-sectional design reflects conditions at a single moment and cannot fully establish causality; shifts in policy, technology, or work patterns could produce different outcomes. Finally, every variable relied on self-reports, which raises the possibility of common method bias. Subsequent studies might adopt longitudinal or multi-source designs, draw larger samples from several regional health offices, and add variables such as organizational culture, leadership style, work motivation, digital training, job satisfaction, and readiness for digital transformation.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that digital competence positively and significantly affects the performance of civil servants at the Health Office of Konawe Kepulauan Regency: as digital knowledge, skill, and attitude grow, so do work quantity, quality, timeliness, service orientation, accountability, competence, harmony, loyalty, adaptability, and collaboration. Digital competence likewise has a positive and significant effect on psychological empowerment, so employees who understand, use, and accept digital technology more readily experience greater meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact at work. Psychological empowerment, in turn, positively and significantly affects performance. Lastly, empowerment partially mediates the digital competence–performance relationship, meaning that digital competence lifts performance both directly and by strengthening employees' psychological empowerment.

For public sector human resource management, the findings show that digital transformation succeeds not only through available technology and technical skill but also through the psychological empowerment of staff. Public health agencies should therefore combine digital competence development with empowering leadership, above all by improving staff attitudes toward technology, reinforcing the meaning of their work, and encouraging collaboration among individuals and work units.

DECLARATIONS

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