

Relationship between Teachers' Perceived Cruciality of Digital Leadership among Principals and Their Wellbeing in Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teachers' perceived cruciality of digital leadership among principals and their wellbeing in Sabah, Malaysia. The sample consisted of 102 teachers who responded to the questionnaires on Google Forms. Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0. Findings showed that teachers' perceived cruciality of digital leadership among principals was significantly related to their perceived wellbeing, with a Spearman's coefficient of 0.32 ($p < 0.01$). Wilcoxon signed rank test revealed that all digital leadership items were significant at $p < 0.001$, with the median being significantly different from the hypothesized test value of 3.5, indicating strong agreement for all the items. Wilcoxon signed rank test also revealed that 11 out of 12 wellbeing items were significant at $p < 0.05$, with the median being significantly different from the test value, indicating strong agreement for the 11 items. In light of the findings, several recommendations were made on how digital school leaders can enhance teachers' wellbeing.

Keywords: digital leadership, Malaysia, principals, Sabah, teachers' wellbeing.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Context of the study

Research shows that effective leadership plays a crucial role in shaping staff wellbeing in relation to overall health, job satisfaction, and productivity. Staff wellbeing is likely to be enhanced when leaders demonstrate the appropriate styles that are congruent with the effective leadership behaviors identified by staff (Kim & Cruz, 2022). Hawthorne (2025) asserted that leaders who prioritize staff wellbeing often use their power of influence, demonstrate emotional intelligence and empathy, and practice clear communication and transparency. Their position often influences staff morale, motivation, and mental health since their attitudes, behaviors, and decisions set the tone for a more positive, engaged, and productive workplace. Moreover, with high emotional intelligence and empathy, they can help create a supportive environment where staff feel valued and understood. Lastly, their effective interpersonal communication skills and transparency not only build trust, but also ensure that staff are well-informed, feel heard, and are encouraged to share their ideas and concerns.

Hawthorne (2025) added that effective leaders also promote staff wellbeing by emphasizing work-life balance, eliminating burnout, building a wellbeing culture, and encouraging professional growth. They often advocate a healthy work-life balance by setting flexible work schedules, respecting off-hours, and setting realistic expectations. Moreover, they are able

to ameliorate burnout by providing adequate resources and support systems, while ensuring manageable workloads. Besides, they also implement healthcare programs, promote physical and mental health resources, and adopt a holistic approach to wellbeing. Lastly, to promote a sense of progress and achievement amongst staff, they facilitate opportunities for professional development, training, and career advancement.

According to Gowan Health (2023), effective leaders often promote wellbeing by building a culture of mental health awareness and support, setting realistic work expectations, and developing organizational resiliency. First, by being flexible and actively seeking to reduce stigma at the workplace, they help create a culture where employees perceive that they can voice their mental health concerns without fear of judgement or repercussions. To communicate effectively and foster positive relationships at the workplace, they attempt to learn the signs of distress and notice behavioral changes amongst staff. Second, they set clear work expectations, reasonable workloads, and uphold work-life balance by involving staff in problem solving and decision making. Moreover, they succinctly communicate to staff what they need to do, how they can contribute to the organization, and any changes to their role. To foster work-life balance, they provide flexibility by adapting to staff's unique schedules, while showing trust that they will perform well in their job and meet expectations. Third, they develop a resilient team so that staff can work together through challenges, seek opportunities for growth, feel safe to take risks, and feel free to voice their opinions. In brief, they try to implement wellness and resiliency activities that promote inclusivity, optimism, problem-solving, compassion and respect, and psychological safety.

Effective leaders also promote mental health and wellbeing by accepting staff's unique needs and help them know their value in the organization. First, instead of adopting a cookie cutter approach, they are aware that staff may require different strategies and levels of support. Staff who are dealing with change, challenge, and difficult experiences may need strategies and tools to acquire healthy behaviors to reduce stress; therefore, they may increase awareness related to stress reduction, positive mental health, or occupational therapy. Aware that mental health and wellbeing are essential for staff productivity and work quality, they introduce benefits programs to ensure that there is adequate coverage for, and access to, mental healthcare. Second, as coaches, they understand that staff work not only to help the organization achieve its vision, but also to attain their own career and personal goals. Therefore, they provide recognition and reward for staff accomplishments, which builds trust and motivates staff to continue to succeed and innovate. They work closely with staff to support them in achieving their professional development goals, while encouraging them to learn, grow, and excel (Gowan Health, 2023).

B. Statement of the problem

With the ever-changing digital routines, educational leaders in Malaysia have the responsibility and accountability to ensure wellbeing at the workplace. They need to ascertain that all staff learn new skills not only to effectively execute organizational tasks, but also to acknowledge and practice self-care to thrive in their professional and personal lives. Further, leaders need to help their teams, staff, and communities become more mindful to embrace strategies that embody wellbeing and unlock healthier, more purposeful lifestyles. They also need to take control of their own wellbeing, while helping others navigate new digital challenges and opportunities. Lastly, both principals and teachers need to focus on their relationships with digital devices and with each other. They should reestablish their social contracts and the ways they regard digital devices in their work and personal lives. In general, to maintain digital wellbeing, Malaysians need to pause and make time for better self-care, creativity, and originality in their routines.

C. Purpose and significance of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between teachers' perceived cruciality of digital leadership among principals and their wellbeing in Sabah, Malaysia. It is significant for the following reasons. First, there is a research gap as few researchers have investigated the impact of digital leadership on teachers' wellbeing in Malaysia. Second, current findings would shed some light on how digital leaders can leverage their leadership styles to promote staff wellbeing in a constantly evolving digital ecosystem. Third, this study would provide a useful framework for principals to successfully drive digital transformation at their schools and make teachers enthusiastic about it. Since digital transformation in education is fundamentally about teachers, how they work, and how they spend their time, current findings would provide principals with greater insight into the digital structures and processes needed to promote a higher level of staff wellbeing. Lastly, findings of this study would contribute to the existing knowledge and highlight the importance of implementing appropriate strategies that allow teachers to merge the essence of human wellbeing into their digital interactions to elevate themselves toward mental tranquility, creativity, and innovation.

D. Research questions

To guide the study, two research questions were formulated:

- Was perceived cruciality of digital leadership significantly related to teachers' wellbeing?
- Were there any significant differences (agreement/disagreement) on digital leadership and wellbeing based on a hypothesized value of 3.5?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Leadership styles and wellbeing

Research shows that some leadership styles tend to impact staff wellbeing. For example, Kuoppala *et al.* (2008) found that good leadership tends to be associated with job wellbeing as it improves job satisfaction, while decreasing sickness absenteeism and disability pensions. Skakon *et al.* (2010) discovered that leader behaviors, the relationship between leaders and their employees, and positive leadership styles tend to be associated with greater affective wellbeing and lower job stress. A study by Leroy, Anseel, Gardner, and Sels (2015) revealed that authentic leadership tends to promote staff wellbeing. Authentic leaders not only display transparency, balanced processing of information, and high moral standards, but they also strive to boost staff wellbeing by nurturing self-awareness, relationship-building, and meaning at work, which have been positively associated with work engagement, life satisfaction, optimism, and resilience amongst staff.

Sudha, Shah Nawaz, and Farhat (2016) found that transactional leadership style tends to influence leaders' collective efficacy, effectiveness, and wellbeing, while Croft (2024) reiterated that goal-focused leaders often promote staff wellbeing by clarifying tasks, constant monitoring, and steering towards progress. While Niinihuhta and Häggman-Laitila (2022) found that relationally-focused leadership styles appear to have a statistically significant impact on nurses' work-related wellbeing, Shelton, Hein, and Phipps (2022) revealed that positive leadership tends to be significantly related work process behaviors (e.g. time management, cooperation, receptiveness), while moderating stressful life events on leader satisfaction and wellbeing.

B. Transformational leadership and wellbeing

Several studies have shown that transformational leadership tends to yield better staff outcomes in terms of wellbeing. Erskine and Georgiou (2017) summarized that transformational leadership is often associated with not only better general health, but also less depression, anxiety, and stress. Besides having positive impact on affective wellbeing, this leadership style is also mediated by increasing experience of meaning in work, greater role clarity, improved developmental opportunities, and higher self-efficacy. Apart from evoking more favorable emotions, transformational leadership also tends to increase employee support, which is linked to increased wellbeing and satisfaction. Similarly, Arnold (2017) postulated that transformational leaders are empowering individuals who motivate and inspire high performance by appealing to morals and values. They consider individual needs, stimulate creativity, and provide intellectual challenges, which in turn enhance employee wellbeing, optimism, trust, and organizational commitment.

On the other hand, Dompheh (2019) who investigated the effect of leadership styles on the wellbeing and stress among staff at commercial banks found a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee wellbeing, thus providing a compelling justification to adopt transformational leadership to enhance employee wellbeing, which in turn will positively impact organizational outcomes. Similarly, Sabbah *et al.* (2020) discovered that transformational leadership tends to contribute to an increase in the quality of life and several outcome variables (extra effort, perceived leader effectiveness, and satisfaction) among nurses, implying that, the more subordinates perceive their leaders to be transformational, the more motivated they are to demonstrate a high level of commitment through empowerment and meaningful participation in decision-making.

Kim and Cruz (2022) found that perceived wellbeing of male employees and those working outside of the healthcare sector tends to be positively higher when their leaders practice transformational leadership. Additionally, a study by Kamali (2023) revealed a significant relationship between transformational leadership style and staff wellbeing. On the other hand, Das and Pattanayak (2023) revealed that transformational leadership tends to be indirectly associated with employee wellbeing through leader-member exchange (LMX), while servant leadership tends to directly affect employee wellbeing. A study by

Heidmets and Liik (2024) indicated that transformational principals tend to demonstrate stronger affective and cognitive identification with their staff compared to those with other leadership styles, implying that principals' leadership styles can shape staff wellbeing as well as their emotional attachment to their workplace.

Croft (2024) asserted that transformational leadership forms a vivid pathway to staff wellbeing; transformational leaders, who lead with a vision and charisma, often enhance staff wellbeing by promoting creative thinking and showing concern toward their general welfare. Moreover, Tanko *et al.* (2024) found that transformational leadership tends to have a positive and significant relationship with staff emotional wellbeing, implying that organizations should invest in training programs that can boost the transformational leadership skills among managers and supervisors to enhance the wellbeing of organizational members.

Lastly, Raman (2024) postulated that transformational leaders often impact employee psychological wellbeing by ensuring psychological safety at the workplace. First, they promote greater engagement and motivation by encouraging staff to achieve their desired goals, which leads to increasing productivity. Moreover, their diverse leadership approach also allows staff to perform to their fullest potential. Second, transformational leaders support mental wellbeing by identifying and addressing mental health and wellbeing issues, which makes staff feel more connected and involved. Third, they strive to foster an environment characterized by open communication and trust, which facilitates staff to express their thoughts and concerns without fear of judgement or retaliation. Lastly, they foster a positive work culture that values growth, learning, and development, which encourages staff to strive for personal and professional excellence.

C. Digital leadership and wellbeing

Zeike, *et al.* (2019) who examined the relationship between digital leadership and psychological wellbeing found that 78.5 percent of managers tended to have a high level of wellbeing, while perceived digital leadership ability ranged from medium to high level, implying that better digital leadership skills tend to yield higher psychological wellbeing. Further, Dewi and Sjabadhymi (2021) who examined digital leadership as a resource to enhance managers' psychological wellbeing found that digital leadership tends to be a strong predictor of psychological wellbeing, while also exerting a significant and positive effect on psychological wellbeing. Additionally, the digital leadership/skill dimension also tends to have a significant and positive effect on psychological wellbeing. A study by Mohamed (2022) that examined the impact of digital training and leadership on staff subjective wellbeing revealed that subjective wellbeing tends to have a significant and favorable impact on employee performance. Overall, staff with high levels of wellbeing tend to be more productive at work and are also more likely to display happiness and contentment.

Finally, Nugroho, Said, and Arifin (2024) who examined the influence of digital leadership on staff affective wellbeing at Internet providers found that digital leadership tends to have a significant positive effect on staff affective wellbeing. Findings imply that digital leaders can enhance staff wellbeing by providing motivation and direction, while being committed to helping them achieve their full potential through training, mentoring, and ongoing support. Additionally, they also establish favorable relationships with staff that foster affective wellbeing, which in turn augments overall organizational performance. Lastly, Alkhayyal and Bajaba (2024) who examined technostress in relation to digital leadership and staff wellbeing found that technostress and work exhaustion tend to be negatively and significantly related to staff wellbeing. However, digital leadership capability tends to moderate the negative relationship between work exhaustion and staff wellbeing.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Sample

The sample comprised 102 teachers ($n = 102$) who were recruited from secondary schools in Sabah, Malaysia. A total of 20 randomly selected principals were contacted via email and phone, but only five were able to share the survey link with their teachers and urge them to respond. Respondents come from ethnically diverse backgrounds and are fluent in both Malay and English. Male teachers comprised 49 percent, while female teachers comprised 51 percent of the sample. About 38.2 percent were 23 to 33 years old, 32.4 percent were 34 to 44 years old, 20.6 percent were 45 to 55 years old, and 8.8 percent were 56 and above. Their demographic details are found in Table I.

Table I: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	50	49.0%
	Female	52	51.0%
Age	23-33	39	38.2%
	34-44	33	32.4%
	45-55	21	20.6%
	56 and above	9	8.8%
Job experience (years)	1-5	24	23.5%
	6-11	29	28.4%
	12-17	20	19.6%
	18-23	12	11.8%
	More than 23	17	16.7%
Highest qualification	Bachelor	54	52.9%
	Master	22	21.6%
	PhD	10	9.8%
	Diploma	16	15.7%

B. Instruments

Two questionnaires were used to collect data. Perceived cruciality of digital leadership was measured by administering the Multifactor Digital Leadership (Chin & Yong, 2023), which consists of 47 Likert-scale items (Highly crucial = 5, Crucial = 4, Neutral = 3, Not crucial = 2, Not crucial at all = 1) derived from the literature (EHL Insights, 2023; Munsamy, Dhanpat, & Barkhuizen, 2023). To determine its reliability, a pilot study was carried out by administering it to 20 teachers. Data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0, and results indicated that its Cronbach's value was 0.97, reflecting high internal consistency.

Wellbeing was assessed by adapting the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) designed by Goldberg and Williams (1988), which consists of 12 Likert-scale items (Never = 1, Rarely = 2, Sometimes = 3, Always = 4, Often = 5). Sánchez-López and Dresch (2008) analyzed its internal consistency as well as external and structure validity on a stratified sample of 1,001 respondents. Results indicated that its Cronbach's value was 0.76, indicating its adequate reliability and validity to assess overall psychological wellbeing.

C. Data collection and analysis

A total of 102 teachers from five secondary schools completed the questionnaires online; they were told that their completion was their indication of consent to voluntarily participate in the study. All respondents were assured of their anonymity, while their responses were kept strictly confidential. Data that were collected were automatically transferred onto a spreadsheet and subsequently analyzed using SPSS 26.0. First, Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were any significant differences in perceived cruciality of digital leadership and wellbeing in relation to age, job experience, and qualifications, while Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine if there were any significant differences in terms of gender. Second, Spearman rank correlation was used to describe the monotonic relationship between perceived digital leadership and wellbeing. It was used in this study because it (1) is suitable for analyzing nonnormally distributed continuous data, (2) can be used for ordinal data, and (3) is relatively robust to outliers. Third, Wilcoxon signed rank was used to determine if significant differences (agreement/disagreement) existed in digital leadership and wellbeing based on the hypothesized value of 3.5.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Non-parametric test results

Non-parametric tests showed no significant differences in terms gender, age, and job experience in teachers' perceived cruciality of digital leadership among principals. Significant differences were only found in terms of teachers' qualifications at $p < 0.05$ (see Table II).

TABLE II: Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H results for digital leadership

Variables	Non-parametric test	p-value
Gender	Mann-Whitney U test	0.399
Age	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.865
Job Experience	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.240
Highest qualification	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.026*

* $p < 0.05$

Additionally, non-parametric tests also showed no significant differences in teachers' wellbeing in terms gender and qualifications, except for age and job experience at the significant level of $p < 0.05$. (see Table III).

Table III: Results of Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H results for wellbeing

Variables	Non-parametric test	p-value
Gender	Mann-Whitney U test	0.685
Age	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.007*
Job Experience	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.002*
Highest qualification	Kruskal-Wallis H test	0.914

* $p < 0.05$

B. Spearman's coefficient

Findings showed that teachers' perceived cruciality of digital leadership among principals was significantly related to their perceived wellbeing, with a Spearman's coefficient of 0.32

($p < 0.01$).

C. Wilcoxon signed rank test for perceived cruciality of digital leadership

Wilcoxon signed rank test revealed that all items were significant at $p < 0.001$, with the median being significantly different from the test value, indicating strong agreement for all the items (see Table IV).

TABLE IV: Wilcoxon signed rank test with a hypothesized value of 3.5

It is crucial for principals to	p-value
Stay up-to-date on the latest technological tools and trends	< 0.001*
Evaluate the impact of new technologies on their organizations	< 0.001*
Use data for effective decision-making	< 0.001*
Assess and manage risks related to data privacy and security	< 0.001*
Be agile and flexible in order to adapt their opinions quickly	< 0.001*
Embrace change and view failure as an opportunity for growth	< 0.001*
Encourage curiosity and creativity to promote innovation	< 0.001*
Embrace continuous learning for themselves and their teams	< 0.001*
Empower their teams to make data-driven decisions	< 0.001*
Identify and recruit people who have skills for current and future work opportunities	< 0.001*
Proactively nurture talented people to retain and motivate them	< 0.001*
Create a culture of teamwork and engagement that celebrates group success	< 0.001*
Improve collaboration by facilitating remote work/virtual teamwork	< 0.001*
Model clear two-way communication with stakeholders and employees	< 0.001*
Share a well-defined strategic vision to get stakeholders to buy in	< 0.001*
Talk about what success looks like and the roadmap to get there	< 0.001*
Use active listening and encourage others to do the same	< 0.001*
Have a continuous learning mindset	< 0.001*

Have self-leading ability	< 0.001*
Can fulfil collaboration/ownership/commitment requirements	< 0.001*
Demonstrate strong business acumen	< 0.001*
Show concern and care toward employees	< 0.001*
Demonstrate knowledge of value creation 91.2	< 0.001*
Adopt a solution-based approach	< 0.001*
Practice digital knowledge sharing	< 0.001*
Adopt a complexity leadership approach	< 0.001*
Adopt digital tools and support ongoing digital learning	< 0.001*
Demonstrate digital technical skills and big data understanding	< 0.001*
Possess digital technical skills and domain know-how	< 0.001*
Practise active listening when using digital tools	< 0.001*
Cultivate an inclusive culture with effective working relationships	< 0.001*
Encourage creativity and innovation	< 0.001*
Demonstrate effective communication skills	< 0.001*
Encourage continuous improvement and lifelong learning	< 0.001*
Adopt a relationship-based approach	< 0.001*
Adapt to constant change in the digital world	< 0.001*
Demonstrate ability in change management	< 0.001*
Demonstrate self-awareness	< 0.001*
Use digital processes to attract customers	< 0.001*
Use digital processes to get a competitive edge	< 0.001*
Demonstrate systemic thinking	< 0.001*
Take calculated digital risks to foster an experimental atmosphere	< 0.001*
Demonstrate market and business intelligence	< 0.001*
Demonstrate effective networking skills	< 0.001*
Demonstrate social dynamic understanding	< 0.001*
Have clear external focus in terms of customers' expectations/wishes	< 0.001*
Understand the potential risks associated with digitalization	< 0.001*

* $p < 0.001$

D. Wilcoxon signed rank test for perceived wellbeing

Results showed that 11 out of 12 items were significant at $p < 0.05$, with the median being significantly different from the test value, again indicating strong agreement for the 11 items (see Table V).

Table V: Wilcoxon signed rank test with a hypothesized value of 3.5

Item	<i>p</i> -value
I have been able to concentrate on my work over the past few weeks	< 0.001*
I have been able to sleep without any worry over the past few weeks	0.063
I have been playing a useful part at my organization over the past few weeks	< 0.001*
I have been capable of making decisions over the past few weeks	0.001*
I have not felt under any strain over the past few weeks	0.029*
I could overcome difficulties over the past few weeks	0.001*
I have been able to enjoy day-to-day activities over the past few weeks	< 0.001*
I have been able to face problems over the past few weeks	< 0.001*
I have been feeling cheerful over the past few weeks	< 0.001*
I have been feeling confident over the past few weeks	< 0.001*
I have been thinking of myself as useful/valuable over the past few weeks	< 0.001*
I have been feeling reasonably happy over the past few weeks	< 0.001*

* $p < 0.05$

V. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings showed that teachers' perceived cruciality of digital leadership among principals was significantly related to their perceived wellbeing. The r value indicates a positive relationship, where the values of both digital leadership and wellbeing tend to increase together. This finding was supported by previous research (Alkhayyal & Bajaba, 2024; Dewi & Sjabadhymi, 2021; Mohamed, 2022; Nugroho, Said, & Arifin, 2024; Zeike *et al.*, 2019).

Rijcken (2013) suggested that leaders can promote digital wellbeing and productivity in several ways. First, principals can schedule time for informal contact moments or weekly check-ins to foster team cohesion especially for staff who work remotely. Second, they should try to arrange regular live events to make staff feel connected since all contact should not be solely work-related. Third, they should communicate regularly and liaise with remote staff to help them stay connected to the school and keep abreast with current changes, which can be done via regular voice messages. Fourth, they should set a good example by engaging in one-on-one conversations with all staff with regard to mental wellbeing and challenges, while establishing genuine connections with them. Fifth, they should build a culture of trust, and avoid micromanagement since it often leads to fake work rather than order and compliance. Sixth, they should practice active listening to ensure that they know what staff really want and need; while some staff are good at working independently, others may need more support. Lastly, they should provide regular and active feedback since it is regarded as an indispensable part of school culture.

Lewarne (2023) reiterated that leaders should adopt wellbeing behaviors, create a culture of wellbeing, establish resources for staff, and foster staff agency and ownership. First, principals should be empathetic, focusing on their staff, while leading with compassion and integrity. They need to model the behavior they expect of staff, which includes being transparent, acknowledging their own mistakes, and responding to feedback. They also need to consistently match what they say with what they do, besides showing long-term commitment to respecting and nurturing wellbeing initiatives. Second, principals should identify wellbeing as their priority and embed it in the school's vision, mission, and values. Third, they should provide assistance packages, wellbeing leaves, and links to external organizational assistance to ensure that staff life outside school is valued equally with life inside it. Fourth, they should develop staff agency and ownership to ensure the creation of safe spaces for wellbeing to thrive. Lastly, by establishing clear guidelines and boundaries and allowing everyone's voice to be heard, principals not only can promote staff agency to practice core values and objectives, but also positively impact leadership development.

Fargis (2023) recommended three ways for leaders to embed wellbeing into staff's digital interactions to promote mental tranquility, creativity, and innovation. First, principals should arrange digital retreats to encourage staff to take periodic breaks from screens as occasional digital timeouts can revitalize minds with fresh insights. A digital retreat can just be a weekend immersed in nature, away from digital distractions. Second, they should promote clear digital boundaries by creating an environment where evenings and weekends are times to disconnect, which not only mitigates burnout, but also underscores a culture of personal time. Third, they should empower staff through wellbeing education by hosting regular workshops that highlight the synergy between technology and mental wellbeing, which in turn encourages staff to balance their digital engagements and utilize technology thoughtfully and efficiently.

On the other hand, Jairick (2024) maintained that, while digital technologies offer incredible opportunities, they have also ushered in several psychological wellbeing challenges, ranging from smartphone addictions and endless distraction to complex issues around identity and social dynamics in immersive virtual worlds. To promote digital wellbeing as the new frontier of holistic workplace health, principals need to prioritize proactive, science-backed digital wellness initiatives to prevent burnout, anxiety, and performance impairment that can cripple staff performance. By embracing digital wellness as a strategic imperative for long-term success, principals can unlock sustainable competitive advantages through a calmer, more focused, and psychologically resilient workforce that is capable of thriving amid the complexities of the virtual era.

To promote staff wellbeing, leaders should integrate mental health into professional development, make positive leadership the norm, and treat poor leadership as a psychosocial hazard (Croft, 2024). First, principals' attitudes and feelings toward mental health tend to guide how they look after themselves and treat others who are experiencing difficulties. Some staff are more likely to experience presenteeism (working while unwell) without getting any support they need, while internalizing stigmas on help-seeking. Therefore, principals should undergo actionable training to challenge stigmas, reflect on their own health, and feel equipped to support staff during difficult times. Second, principals should boost their team's wellbeing by

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clearly communicating their vision of success, regularly setting and reviewing goals, being open to change, and adopting healthful habits. Third, they should strive to minimize the risk of burnout and stress among staff.

Pontefract (2024) quoted Amy Blankson of the Digital Wellness Institute, who emphasizes that leaders need to create a balance between digital technologies and human connections and mental health by integrating wellbeing into corporate culture to ensure that digital tools enhance rather than harm staff's professional and personal lives. Since wellbeing is crucial for staff productivity, principals need to create a workplace where digital tools should promote excellence rather than job burnout, for example, by redefining workplace norms to implement workflows that include intentional breaks that encourage staff to engage in non-digital activities.

Further, Blankson also advocates for the use of wellbeing technologies that help monitor and manage work habits and stress levels, which can provide valuable insights into employee behavior and wellness that allow leaders to create a healthier work environment. Digital technology should enhance interpersonal relationships amongst staff, particularly in a hybrid work environment that often makes staff feel more isolated than those who work in the office. Principals should create digital spaces that facilitate genuine interactions and provide platforms for teachers to foster a sense of community and belonging by leveraging technology to schedule regular check-ins, create virtual social events, and use collaborative tools that encourage teamwork and camaraderie. Lastly, they should implement intuitive digital interfaces that foster connectivity, for example, by adopting digital designs that can significantly enhance the user experience and reduce feelings of frustration and disconnection amongst staff (Pontefract, 2024).

According to Robinson (2024), leaders who support occupational wellbeing tend to exhibit interpersonal sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and strategic self-awareness. First, principals who emphasize staff wellbeing are adept at understanding and empathizing with their staff members' emotions to foster strong relationships and employ conflict resolution strategies. Second, with high emotional intelligence, they often create a psychologically safe environment where staff feel comfortable to express their views, thereby promoting open communication and enhancing occupational wellbeing. Third, with knowledge of their own strengths and limitations, they are more willing to modify their leadership style to implement activities that are conducive to staff wellbeing.

Robinson (2024) added that leaders should practice "mattering" that requires them to make staff feel that they matter and make a difference at the workplace. Most teachers want to feel that they are valued for the hard work they do. While they must safeguard their own wellbeing, principals should provide wellbeing support, mitigate stressors, and foster a work environment that yields job satisfaction. While teachers need to let their value be shown, principals should recognize and reward their performance. In brief, teachers need to know how to get noticed at work and make themselves known to enhance their visibility, while principals should find ways to show that every one of them counts.

To conclude, this study was the first to examine the relationship between teachers' perceived cruciality of digital leadership among principals and their own wellbeing in Sabah, Malaysia. First, although the sample size was quite large, all the respondents in this study originated from only one small area. Therefore, limitations inherent in the sampling area might affect the generalizability of the findings to a certain extent. Future studies should consider the selection of more diversified regional and age-group samples for validation. Second, the two attributes were dependent upon teachers' self-reporting; therefore, deviations or inaccuracies could occur due to social desirability. Lastly, future research should combine the questionnaires with behavioral observation, teacher reporting, and classroom evaluations that can help obtain more objective and accurate information on both constructs.

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