

**Dissertation Proposal Form**

**SECTION-1:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name:** |  | **Student No:** |  |
| **Course: Msc Management** | | | |
| **Please note that this form must be completed and submitted by the deadline set by the course tutor or scheme leader for your course.** | | | |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **SUBMISSION DATE** | | | |
| 8th February 2025 |  |  |  |

I, the student, understand that I will submit my dissertation by the date specified (see check box above) and recognise this will be regarded as my first submission.  Should I fail to submit by the agreed date, I will be deemed to have failed the module and will be subject to the university assessment boards’ rules and regulations.

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL:**

***THE ROLE OF DIGITAL LEADERSHIP IN DRIVING INNOVATION IN SMES WITHIN THE MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY***

**TABLE OF CONTENT**

[**SECTION 2- INTRODUCTION** 3](#_Toc179065825)

[**SECTION 3- RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES** 4](#_Toc179065826)

[**3.1 RESEARCH AIM** 4](#_Toc179065827)

[**3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES** 4](#_Toc179065828)

[**SECTION 4- LITERATURE REVIEW** 5](#_Toc179065829)

[**4.1 CONCEPT OF DIGITAL LEADERSHIP** 5](#_Toc179065830)

[**4.2 SMEs IN MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY** 6](#_Toc179065831)

[**4.3 DIGITAL LEADERSHIP IN MANUFACTURING SMEs** 7](#_Toc179065832)

[**4.4 BARRIERS TO DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN SMEs** 8](#_Toc179065833)

[**SECTION 5- RESEARCH METHODS** 8](#_Toc179065834)

[**5.1 DATA COLLECTION** 9](#_Toc179065835)

[**5.1.1 QUANTITATIVE METHOD** 9](#_Toc179065836)

[**5.1.2 QUALITATIVE METHOD** 9](#_Toc179065837)

[**5.2 DATA ANALYSIS** 9](#_Toc179065838)

[**5.3 PERSONAL CAPABILITIES** 10](#_Toc179065839)

[**SECTION 6- TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITY** 10](#_Toc179065840)

[**SECTION 7- ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS** 11](#_Toc179065841)

[**SECTION 8: DECLARATION AND STUDENT SIGNATURE** 12](#_Toc179065842)

[**SECTION 8- REFERENCES** 13](#_Toc179065843)

# **SECTION 2- INTRODUCTION**

The manufacturing sector has been encountering a digital revolution owing to significant technological advancements like Automation, Artificial Intelligence as well as IoT (Internet of Things). However, digital innovation has brought about advantages and issues both for small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) functioning in this industry. These small and medium-sized companies contribute significantly towards our economy (The Manufacturer, 2022). At the same time, SMEs face numerous restrictions like limited financial resources, skilled worker deficit as well as a demand for swift innovations to remain competitive. Our manufacturing industry is changing owing to digital technology, and handling these constant innovations requires competent leadership, which has been becoming more and more recognized.

Digital Leadership serves as the capacity of organisational leaders to encourage digital transformation by means of promoting technological usage, developing a culture of innovation, and aligning digital initiatives with organisational goals. Digital Leadership is important for SMEs as they sustain more resource restrictions than large multinational companies and may adopt technology to enhance productiveness, develop goods & services, and optimize practices. Digital leaders have three primary obligations: Establishing a forward-thinking attitude, embracing evolution, as well as making strategic judgements on the utilization of novel technologies.

The main purpose of this research is to evaluate how innovation in SMEs within manufacturing industry is affected by digital leadership. SMEs mostly struggle because of financial limitations, quick speed of technological enhancement along with rivalries from bigger firms. Such obstacles can be taken care of by help of digital leadership, which might enable SMEs to integrate inexpensive digital instruments and stimulate technical innovation. This research study will assess how leaders of these organization adopt digital leadership strategies for improving innovation & business successfulness through case studies of specific SMEs from manufacturing industry. The findings will showcase optimal methodologies with the barriers and opportunities which emerge from implementing digital leadership in the sector.

The increased significance of digital technology in numerous businesses, specifically the manufacturing sector where adaptability is importance for competitiveness renders this problem of personal interest. Recognizing the manner in which digital leaderships might affect and augment innovation within SMEs will not only augment academic discourse but also supply important counsel for SME leaders attempting to evolve & profit in out constantly evolving technological setting.

# **SECTION 3- RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

## **3.1 RESEARCH AIM**

The main purpose of this research is to investigate critically how digital leadership impacts innovation in SMEs (Small and Medium-sized firms) within the manufacturing sector. In our increasingly digital business corporate environment, this study will identify how digital leadership assists SMEs integrate newer technologies, overcome bottlenecks to innovations, and enhance their overall competitiveness.

## **3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives are listed below for proposal dissertation:

* To identify how development is well supported by the digital leadership within the manufacturing SMEs. The study will assess how leaders of SMEs encourage technological adoption, develop unique problem-solving, and align digital strategy with operational goals.
* To identify internal and external constraints that SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises) confront when aiming to apply digital leadership procedures; via this assessment it will be possible to analyze the problems and barriers that SMEs face while adopting digital leadership. Factors like organizational culture, budget constraints, reluctance to adaptability as well as that fast rate of technical enhancements would be looked at.
* To identify how digital leadership influences the integration of digital technology. The research aims to identify possible correlation between proficient digital leadership & adequate adoption of technology which promotes efficiencies, innovation as well as a competitive edge.
* To deliver SME leaders with practical recommendations on how to utilize digital leadership to encourage innovation. The recommendations will concentrate on how to capitalize on digital leadership to create a culture of creativity and promote the adoption of digital technology.

# **SECTION 4- LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **4.1 CONCEPT OF DIGITAL LEADERSHIP**

Many small and big firms have undergone pressure to integrate digital technology in order to stay competitive; this made digital leadership even more essential. As per (Kane, 2019), digital leadership entails establishing an innovative culture and aligning digital strategies with business goals alongside technological implementation. Kane states that senior executives were interviewed from distinct sectors for their UK-based research. The main finding was that businesses with sufficient digital leadership are better equipped to adopt digital instruments and methods that stimulate innovation.

Digital Leadership is very important within the manufacturing industry as companies strive to utilize automations, data analytics as well as Artificial Intelligence. The research by (MakeUK.org, 2020) shows that more than 200 manufacturing SMEs revealed the significance of digital leadership in the integration of Industry 4.0 technology. As per findings, only 30% SMEs had definite digital strategy where numerous of them stated absence of leadership being the reason why they were not able to adopt newer technologies. In accordance to Make UK’s results, digital leadership plays very important role in determination of whether manufacturing sector can sufficiently utilize digital remedies to enhance efficiencies & innovation.

(Manlio Del Giudice, 2020) conducted a research to identify manner via which foundations of agility, adaptability as well as adaptability affects digital innovation within smart manufacturing SMEs. By using SEM (Structural Equation Modelling) & data analysis, this study evaluated how 280 self-tuned SMEs adopt digital frameworks for innovation and are adaptable to outside stimuli. As per this research, SMEs are adopting networking as well as open approaches to innovation specifically within manufacturing sector. The main purpose is to achieve an equilibrium between exploration & exploitation whilst promoting both gradual as well as revolutionary advancements. The main findings have shown that SME’s capability for innovation is much enhanced by the adoption of 3 pillars; this makes them easier to modify and be adaptable within context of Industry 4.0. Finally, the results of this paper has shown that multinational corporations have already embraced these developments, however small and medium sized SMEs are gradually employing them, specifically within manufacturing to stimulate digital transformation.

## **4.2 SMEs IN MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY**

Innovation is commonly referred as important for SMEs to preserve their edge over rivals specifically in industries as competitive as manufacturing. In their assessment of hardships and prospects for development in UK manufacturing firms, (Joe Tidd, 2021) identified that risk aversion, absence of digital skills as well as absence of financial resources serve as main barriers to innovation. The study revealed that SMEs with sufficient digital leadership have stronger opportunity to tackle these problems. The study included conducting interviews with 50 SME leaders of the manufacturing industry. The behaviour that digital leaders adopt is one that favors testing, risk-taking as well as continual learning- qualities which are important for innovation.

(Tuğba Erhan, 2022) has conducted a research to evaluate the association between innovative corporate practices & digital leadership within the Turkish Textile industry. The primary objective of this study was to assess the manner in which worker’s capability for adaptation & innovative behaviour ought to be affected by the evolution from traditional to digital leadership. The main goal of this paper was to ascertain how employees’ innovative work conduct is favored by digital leadership, putting a strong emphasis on impact of digital expertise on workplace dynamics & worker creativity. Approximately 320 Turkish department managers had contributed in surveys that attained data utilizing innovative work behaviour measures as well as digital leadership. The researchers used SPSS & AMOS; analysis was done by using route analysis. Main findings suggested that each aspect of employees working conduct & digital leadership were in strong correlation. Innovative behaviour was more likely to be adopted by employees under direct supervision of leaders with exceptional digital skills.

(Lathabhavan, 2023) carried out a research to assess how worker empowerment, digital training & digital leadership impacted organizational activities in Indian SMEs amidst covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of this paper was to identify the leadership & workforce abilities necessitated for adjustment to digital revolutions brought about by epidemics. By using a cross-sectional approach, data was collected from 487 workers and questionnaires were distributed via distinct social media apps and email. The results demonstrated a positive correlation among empowerment, digital leadership, company performances and empowerment training; putting strong emphasis on role played by worker empowerment for enhancing performance. This paper has also focused on the intermediary role of empowerment in the connection among leadership & performance, where organizational resilience moderated this association. This study adds to our understanding of how SMEs in developing countries like India may manage digital transition amidst time of crisis, showing the importance of skill enhancement and leadership in boosting organizational productivity & resilience.

## **4.3 DIGITAL LEADERSHIP IN MANUFACTURING SMEs**

(Darma, 2020) has carried out a qualitative study to identify how individual interpret digital leadership in context of 4.0 industrial evolution adopting a phenomenological strategy. The study concentrated on how leaders comprehend digital leadership via in-depth interviews & documentation, focusing on the significance of transparencies, team work as well the capability to respond to technological advancements. The findings made clear that a leader’s capability to encourage & inspire capable individuals for accomplishing shared goals is of equal importance to digital leadership as technical proficiencies. The research showed that leaders of conventional communities like villages have to strike an equilibrium between cultural roots & technological adaption. As per the report, leading innovation within a digitalized environment whilst upholding a cooperative approach & adhering to standards is important for effective digital leadership.

(Mehreen Malik, 2024) has carried out a research to assess the capabilities required for digital leadership in order to modify company models towards the direction of digital transformation. The research has used theme analysis & semi-structured interviews with 20 participants from 5 distinct textile companies of Pakistan to identify essential leadership characteristics. The results showed that technological know-how, inventiveness, flexibilities, team work as well as communication are essential for facilitation of textile industry’s sufficient digital transformation. In addition, digital leaders enhance value generation, create ecosystem alliances & revolutionaries business models. By developing a linkage between digital leadership with inventive business frameworks, and showcasing potential future research avenues, the research closes a gap in the literature. Finally, study has shown how digital leaders can assist companies attain a competitive edge via transformation initiatives that are effective.

## **4.4 BARRIERS TO DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN SMEs**

(Sven Packmohr, 2023) conducted a research to identify the obstacles that small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) face when considering the Digital Transformation in comparison to larger multinational firms (Les). The research was done using mixed-methods approach, adopting qualitative data within frequencies & utilizing quantitative analysis with the Mann-Whitney U test. Data was acquired from 238 SMEs and 281 LE for qualitative assessment, whereas for quantitative analysis, it was gathered from participants of 189 SMEs 221 Le. The survey has identified that organisational culture & structure serve as major issues that both small and large companies face while adopting digital transformation. But, although large companies face more individual hurdles, small and medium-sized companies saw more problems in allocation of resources specifically for handling digital evolution. This paper has emphasized how the firm’s size impacts how digital transformation issues are seen & managed.

(Pujari, 2024) has explored the interdependency within small and medium-sized businesses as well the obstacles impeding their digital transformation. Main barriers were identified & assessed by an interactive questionnaire after an extensive literature study & expert panel consultation. After utilizing the DEMATEL technique for data analysis, it was evident that the main barrier to implementation of digital transformation tech was absence of digital vision/plan. This study also showed the causal link among the obstacles, emphasizing the fact that taking care of these problems would boost firm decision-making & resource utilization. The paper showed that removing obstacle to digital transformation can enhance the overall productivity of SMEs manufacturing frameworks and process along with operational efficiencies.

# **SECTION 5- RESEARCH METHODS**

For the dissertation, a mixed-method approach is most suitable as per the topic chosen. Through the collection and evaluation of both qualitative and quantitative data, this technique provides an in-depth understanding of how innovation is encouraged by digital leadership.

## **5.1 DATA COLLECTION**

### **5.1.1 QUANTITATIVE METHOD**

Digital Leaders and Executives of SMEs from the industrial sector will be provided a survey questionnaire. Likert-scale questions determining distinct leadership traits like adaptiveness, communication & technological proficiencies and innovation levels like new product manufacturing, process improvements would be adopted in our questionnaire design for evaluating the impact digital leadership has on innovation. The main purpose of this questionnaire is to attain knowledge and perspective about digital leadership as well as ow it enhances creativity. Additionally, to guarantee distinct representation, the sample size would consist of 100-150 participants taken from various SMEs. Our survey would be done using online platform like Google Forms as it encourages easy accessibility & distributions. This would enable the individuals participating to complete the questionnaire at their own comfort.

### **5.1.2 QUALITATIVE METHOD**

Semi-structured interviews with 10-15 SMEs leaders who have utilized digital leadership practices within their firms would be carried out alongside the survey. These interviews will evaluate in-depth the manner in which innovation methods & results are influenced by digital leadership. The semi-structured method would offer interviewees the freedom to fully express their understandings & experiences about digital leadership and management.

## **5.2 DATA ANALYSIS**

For quantitative analysis, Excel or SPSS would be used for analyzing the survey data. Descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation would be computed. For ascertaining the association among digital leadership attributes & innovation results, also to put more insight on the degree or direction of these linkages, correlation analysis would be utilized.

For qualitative analysis, thematic analysis would be used to examine all the qualitative information gained from interviews. The interview transcripts would be coded for identification of essential themes and trends which highlight the manner in which digital leadership enhances innovation. The quantitative findings would be enhanced by an extensive understanding of perspectives and encounters of the participants made possible by thematic analysis.

## **5.3 PERSONAL CAPABILITIES**

I have the basic understanding of statistical analysis of Excel/SPSS. These are deemed necessary for both correlation & descriptive assessments. Also, I have previously worked with interview transcripts in other research projects, so I possess the familiarity with thematic analysis required for qualitative data. The sufficient adoption of mixed-method study would be facilitated by my own analytical capabilities as well as experience with data analysis instruments. This would enable the generation of strong results which advance our understanding of how digital leadership stimulates innovation in SMEs within manufacturing sector.

# **SECTION 6- TIMETABLE OF ACTIVITY**

Gantt chart is given below for the full schedule of my dissertation.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Week 1** | **Week 2** | **Week 3** | **Week 4** | **Week 5** | **Week 6** | **Week 7** |
| **Scheme briefing** | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Taught support** | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Complete proposal** | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Submit proposal** |  | X |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Allocated supervisor** | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Contact supervisor** | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Literature review** |  | X |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Methodology chapter** |  |  | X |  |  |  |  |
| **Data collection** |  |  | X |  |  |  |  |
| **Data analysis** |  |  |  | X |  |  |  |
| **Findings chapter** |  |  |  |  | X |  |  |
| **Discussion chapter** |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |
| **Conclusion** |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |
| **Recommendations** |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |
| **Introduction** |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |
| **Abstract** |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |
| **Complete first draft** |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |
| **Rewrites** |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |
| Complete final draft |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |
| Printing / binding |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |
| Submission |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |

# **SECTION 7- ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The following questions are based on University guidelines and should be answered in full by ticking either Yes, No, or not applicable (N/A).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Yes** | **No** | **N/A** |
| Does the aim and method of your research respect the independence of your participants? |  |  |  |
| Are measures in place to ensure confidentiality for participants? |  |  |  |
| Are participants clearly asked to give consent to take part in the research? |  |  |  |
| Can participants withdraw at any time if they chose? |  |  |  |
| Will the collected data be kept safe? |  |  |  |

If you ticked **NO** to any of the above questions, you should indicate below how you intend to address these ethical concerns.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Yes** | **No** | **N/A** |
| Do the objectives of your research lead participants to break confidentiality or otherwise engage in deceit? |  |  |  |
| Will your respondents be in a position where they might feel coerced into taking part in the research? |  |  |  |
| Will the data be used in ways not fully explained to the participants or respondents? |  |  |  |
| Is your research at all likely to cause physical or psychological harm (even fleeting) or stress to participants? |  |  |  |
| Is the impartiality of the research at risk of being compromised by dependence upon the support of a particular sponsor or organization? |  |  |  |
| Is permission required for data collection? |  |  |  |
| Are there any risks to the safety of the investigator? |  |  |  |
| Could this investigation pose any risk of damage to the reputation of the University? |  |  |  |

If you ticked **YES** to any of the above questions, you should indicate below how you intend to address these ethical concerns.

# **SECTION 8: DECLARATION AND STUDENT SIGNATURE**

Please tick the following to confirm:

* I have read, understood, and will comply with the University of South Wales’ ethics policy. Copy provided by Module team.

In consultation with the USW Ethics Policy, this project is (tick one)

:

* Straightforward. Meets the USW ethics policy definition of light touch ethical review (low-risk) by the supervisor only. No ethical issues beyond informed consent, confidentiality, and data storage. **I will employ ethical practice and will seek advice if I am in any doubt about what is required**.

☐  2. Possibly ‘high risk’ as described by the USW Ethics Policy. Some challenging ethical issues identified but these can be resolved through reference to existing literature which deals with the relevant issues. **I confirm this project will be discussed carefully with my academic supervisor and consulted with the Faculty Ethics Chair**.

The project will only be permitted to proceed after confirmation from the Faculty Ethics Chair.

☐  3. Problematic. Meets the criteria for full ethical review (high-risk) in the USW ethics policy. Students should not be permitted to carry out projects that meet the criteria for Full Review by an Ethics Committee. An alternative project should be selected**.**

**By submitting this proposal, I declare that the above questions have been answered correctly, and that if ethical issues emerge in the course of my research then I will notify my supervisor immediately.**

**Please note: You cannot begin data collection until you have received ethical approval – that is to say, until your Module Leader accepted this Ethics Declaration Form.**

# **SECTION 8- REFERENCES**

* Darma, G. S., 2020. Revealing the Digital Leadership Spurs in 4.0 Industrial Revolution. *International Journal of Business, Economics & Management,* 3(1), pp. 93-100.
* Deloitte, 2020. *Digital Leadership in UK SMEs: Bridging the Gap in Manufacturing.* [Online]   
  Available at: https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/digital-transformation/digital-transformation-survey.html
* Joe Tidd, J. B., 2021. Managing Innovation Integrating Technological, Market and Organizational Change (6th ed.). Wiley..
* Kane, G., 2019. The Technology Fallacy: People Are the Real Key to Digital Transformation. *Research-Technology Management,* 62(6), pp. 44-49.
* Lathabhavan, R., 2023. Examining the role of digital leadership and organisational resilience on the performance of SMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management,* 73(8).
* MakeUK.org, 2020. INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY: A MANUFACTURING AMBITION.
* Manlio Del Giudice, V. S. M. W., 2020. A Self-Tuning Model for Smart Manufacturing SMEs: Effects on Digital Innovation. *Journal of Product Innovation and Management,* 38(1), pp. 1-215.
* Mehreen Malik, M. M. R. N. S. M. G., 2024. Navigating the change: a case study of the textile industry on digital leadership, digital transformation and innovative business models. *Benchmarking: An International Journal,* 31(8).
* Pujari, S. K., 2024. Barriers Hindering Digital Transformation in SMEs. *IGI Global,* p. 17.
* Sven Packmohr, H. B. F.-H. P., 2023. UNRAVELING PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS TO DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION – CONTRASTING SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED WITH LARGE ENTERPRISES. *IADIS International Journal on Computer Science and Information Systems ,* 18(1), pp. 102-119.
* The Manufacturer, 2022. *Digitalising SMEs is critical to the future of UK manufacturing.* [Online]   
  Available at: https://www.themanufacturer.com/articles/digitalising-smes-is-critical-to-the-future-of-uk-manufacturing/
* Tuğba Erhan, E. A., 2022. From conventional to digital leadership: exploring digitalization of leadership and innovative work behavior. *Management Research Review,* 45(11).