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Hybrid Work and Digital Leadership on Employee Performance through Work-Life Balance in Startups in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of hybrid work and digital leadership style on employee performance, with work-life balance as a mediating variable in technology startup environments. A quantitative explanatory design was applied to test the proposed relationships among variables. Data were collected through surveys of 200 employees working in hybrid-based technology startups across Java. The analysis used Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate both direct and indirect effects between constructs. The results indicate that hybrid work has no significant direct effect on employee performance, while digital leadership shows a significant positive effect on performance improvement. Both hybrid work and digital leadership significantly enhance work-life balance among employees. Furthermore, work-life balance positively influences employee performance and functions as a full mediator in the relationship between hybrid work and performance, and as a partial mediator between digital leadership and performance. These findings highlight the importance of balancing work arrangements and leadership practices to optimize employee outcomes in digital startup ecosystems.

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INTRODUCTION

Employee performance has become a critical determinant of organizational sustainability in the digital economy era. In rapidly evolving industries, particularly technology-driven startups, performance reflects not only task completion but also productivity, adaptability, and output quality under continuous technological change (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015). The increasing reliance on digital systems has reshaped how work is designed and evaluated, requiring employees to operate efficiently in dynamic and uncertain environments. This condition is highly relevant for society because startup ecosystems contribute significantly to innovation, job creation, and economic

growth. According to Bank Indonesia (2024), Indonesia's digital economy is entering a consolidation phase, shifting from aggressive expansion toward sustainable profitability. This transition increases pressure on human resources to perform more efficiently. Therefore, understanding factors that influence employee performance is essential to ensure organizational resilience and long-term economic stability in the digital transformation era.

Despite the strategic importance of employee performance, many organizations face serious challenges in maintaining stable performance levels in digital work environments. High workload intensity, organizational restructuring, and rapid technological change have created sustained pressure on employees across industries. PwC Indonesia (2024) reports a significant increase in workload burden among employees across sectors, indicating rising stress levels and performance risks. In startup environments, these conditions are more severe due to lean organizational structures and limited resources. Employees are often required to handle expanded responsibilities after restructuring, leading to role overload and potential performance decline. Without effective organizational support, these pressures can reduce efficiency and weaken long-term productivity. Moreover, the shift toward digital operations has blurred work boundaries, making it more difficult for employees to separate work responsibilities from personal life. These conditions create a structural problem that directly threatens employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

In response to increasing demands for flexibility and efficiency, many organizations have adopted hybrid work as a long-term work arrangement. Cisco (2025) reports that hybrid work policies have become a global standard in many organizations as part of post-pandemic workforce restructuring. In Indonesia, survey evidence shows that younger generations, particularly Generation Z and Millennials, prefer hybrid and Work From Anywhere (WFA) models, while Generation X shows more balanced preferences between remote and office-based work (Simbolon, 2024). This indicates a strong shift in workplace expectations across demographic groups. However, empirical observations suggest that hybrid work does not always lead to improved performance outcomes. In some cases, unclear role distribution and communication barriers reduce coordination effectiveness. Lauring & Jonasson (2025) argue that without structured management systems, hybrid work can create role ambiguity and reduce employee focus. Therefore, the effectiveness of hybrid work depends heavily on organizational design and leadership quality.

Previous studies have widely examined the relationship between hybrid work, leadership styles, and employee performance. Digital leadership has been identified as a key factor in maintaining coordination and engagement in geographically dispersed teams. Leaders who effectively use digital tools can enhance communication efficiency and organizational responsiveness (Kim &

Yoon, 2025; Nasrun et al., 2025). In parallel, hybrid work arrangements have been associated with both positive and negative outcomes depending on implementation quality. Some studies report increased flexibility and autonomy, while others highlight risks such as reduced collaboration and weakened supervision. However, most existing research focuses on direct relationships between variables without fully explaining underlying psychological or behavioral mechanisms. This creates a limitation in understanding how organizational factors translate into performance outcomes in digital work settings. As a result, there is still insufficient explanation regarding the internal processes that connect work arrangements and leadership to employee performance.

Work-life balance has also been widely studied as an important determinant of employee well-being and performance outcomes. Bakker & Demerouti (2007) emphasize that imbalance between work demands and personal life resources can lead to psychological strain and reduced productivity. Empirical findings show that work-life balance contributes positively to employee satisfaction and long-term performance stability. However, most studies treat work-life balance as either an independent variable or a simple mediator without integrating it into broader organizational frameworks. Additionally, prior research on digital leadership tends to focus on traditional organizational settings rather than startup ecosystems, which are characterized by high uncertainty, rapid scaling, and innovation-driven work cultures (Kim & Yoon, 2025). This indicates a contextual gap in the literature. Furthermore, existing studies often rely on single-theory approaches, limiting their ability to explain complex interactions among leadership, work design, and employee outcomes in digital environments.

Based on the identified gaps, this study proposes a more integrated model that positions work-life balance as a central mediating mechanism linking hybrid work and digital leadership to employee performance. Unlike previous studies that focus on isolated relationships, this research combines Job Demands–Resources Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Work-Family Border Theory to provide a more comprehensive analytical framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Clark, 2000). The integration of these theories allows a deeper understanding of how job demands and organizational resources interact in shaping employee outcomes. This study also focuses specifically on startup environments in Java, Indonesia, which represent one of the fastest-growing digital ecosystems globally, with more than 3,053 startups operating nationally (Redaksi, 2025). This context provides a relevant setting to examine dynamic work structures and leadership practices in the digital economy.

This study argues that employee performance in digital startups is not solely determined by work arrangements or leadership style, but is significantly

influenced by how employees manage the balance between professional and personal life. Hybrid work may not directly improve performance due to structural and coordination challenges, while digital leadership can enhance performance through improved communication and organizational support. However, both factors are expected to operate more effectively when employees experience a healthy work-life balance. Therefore, work-life balance is positioned as a critical psychological and behavioral mechanism that translates organizational practices into performance outcomes. This study aims to empirically test the direct and indirect effects of hybrid work and digital leadership on employee performance through work-life balance. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective human resource strategies in digital startup environments, particularly in designing sustainable hybrid work systems that support long-term employee productivity and organizational competitiveness.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study applies a quantitative research design using an explanatory research approach to examine causal relationships among observed constructs (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This design is selected because it enables hypothesis testing and allows the researcher to quantify the influence of hybrid work and digital leadership style on employee performance, with work-life balance as a mediating variable in a structured and statistically measurable framework. The study is conducted in startup companies within the digital and technology sector located in Java, Indonesia. This location is chosen due to its dominant role as the center of Indonesia's digital economy ecosystem and its rapid startup growth, which provides a relevant and context-rich environment for investigating modern work system transformation. Startup digital firms in this study refer to organizations where digital technology serves as the core of business processes and operational activities (Blank & Dorf, 2012; Nasrun et al., 2025). The unit of analysis is individual employees who experience hybrid work arrangements and digital leadership practices directly in their daily work environment.

Data collection is conducted using a structured questionnaire with a 1–5 Likert scale distributed digitally through Google Forms. Primary data are obtained from employees who meet the predefined sampling criteria, including minimum one year of experience working in a digital startup, exposure to hybrid work arrangements, and direct supervision under digitally active leadership. The study employs non-probability purposive sampling to ensure that respondents are relevant to the research objectives. Before the main survey, a pilot test involving 30 respondents is conducted to ensure clarity, readability, and measurement consistency of all items. To reduce response bias, the instrument includes attention-check questions and reverse-coded items to improve data

accuracy and response reliability.

Data analysis is carried out using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.1 software, following a structured two-stage approach (Hair et al., 2019). The first stage involves evaluation of the measurement model through data reduction and validation processes to ensure construct validity and reliability. This includes assessing indicator loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability, and discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcker criteria and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The second stage focuses on the structural model, where relationships among latent variables are tested using path coefficients to determine hypothesis significance based on p-value < 0.05. Data interpretation follows a systematic process of data condensation, data display, and verification to ensure that empirical findings are structured, interpretable, and aligned with research objectives.

The validity and reliability of data are ensured through multiple validation procedures. Content validity is established by adapting measurement instruments from prior validated studies, while construct validity is confirmed through convergent and discriminant validity testing within the PLS-SEM framework. Reliability is assessed using Composite Reliability and indicator consistency thresholds. In addition, internal validity is strengthened through triangulation at the methodological level by combining pilot testing results with main survey data evaluation. These procedures ensure that the research findings are robust, stable, and suitable for drawing empirical conclusions regarding the relationships among hybrid work, digital leadership style, work-life balance, and employee performance in startup environments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondent Characteristics

The distribution of respondent characteristics involved in this study is presented in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Category	Item	F	%
Gender	Female	76	38%
	Male	124	62%
	TOTAL	200	100%
Domicile	Banten	44	22%
	DI Yogyakarta	24	12%
	DKI Jakarta	46	23%

	West Java	44	22%
	Central Java	21	11%
	East Java	21	11%
	TOTAL	200	100%
Age	21–25 Years	48	24%
	26–30 Years	40	20%
	31–35 Years	24	12%
	36–40 Years	21	11%
	41–45 Years	24	12%
	46–50 Years	18	9%
	51–55 Years	25	13%
	TOTAL	200	100%
Education	Senior High School	26	17%
	Diploma (D3)	31	21%
	Applied Bachelor (D4)	23	15%
	Bachelor (S1)	48	32%
	Postgraduate (S2/S3)	22	15%
	TOTAL	200	100%
Work Tenure	1–2 years	58	29%
	3–4 years	63	32%
	5–6 years	46	23%
	7–10 years	33	17%
	TOTAL	200	100%

Source: Processed Data by Researcher (2026)

This study involved 200 employees working in digital and technology startup environments that have implemented hybrid work systems as part of their operational structure. The composition of respondents reflects a relatively balanced distribution across demographic categories, allowing for a comprehensive representation of employee experiences within the startup ecosystem. In terms of gender distribution, male respondents dominate the sample at 62%, while female respondents account for 38%, indicating a moderately male-oriented workforce structure commonly found in technology-based industries.

From a geographical perspective, respondents are distributed across major provinces in Java, with the highest concentration located in DKI Jakarta (23%), followed closely by Banten (22%) and West Java (22%). This distribution reflects the centralization of digital startup activity in urban and economically developed regions. In terms of age structure, the majority of respondents fall within the productive working-age group of 21–30 years (44%), which is highly relevant for studying adaptive work behavior in digital environments. Educational background shows that most respondents hold a bachelor's degree

(32%), indicating a relatively high level of formal education among startup employees. Work tenure data further shows that the majority of respondents have 1–4 years of experience (61%), suggesting that most participants are still in an early-to-mid career stage with sufficient exposure to hybrid work practices and digital leadership environments.

Instrument Validity and Reliability Analysis

The evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) in this study is conducted to ensure that all constructs used are statistically valid and reliable in representing the theoretical variables. The assessment is based on multiple statistical indicators, including outer loadings, Cronbach's Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which collectively provide evidence of measurement quality and construct consistency.

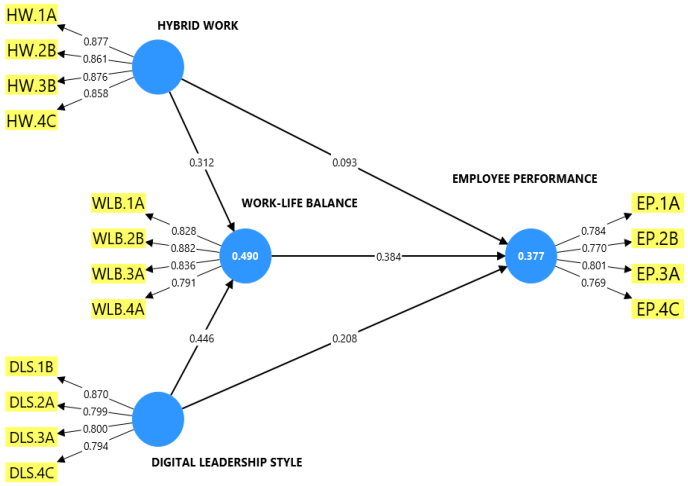

Figure 3. Full PLS-SEM Model

Source: Data Processing Using SmartPLS 4.1

The full structural model presented in Figure 3 illustrates the relationships among Hybrid Work (HW), Digital Leadership Style (DLS), Work-Life Balance (WLB), and Employee Performance (EP). The estimation results are further detailed in Table 2, which presents the measurement properties of each indicator and construct. The use of SmartPLS 4.1 enables robust estimation of latent variables in complex structural relationships, particularly suitable for exploratory and predictive-oriented research models.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Test Results

Item Code	OL	CA	CR	AVE

HW.1A	0.877	0.891	0.894	0.753
HW.2B	0.861			
HW.3B	0.876			
HW.4C	0.858			
DLS.1B	0.870	0.832	0.835	0.666
DLS.2A	0.799			
DLS.3A	0.800			
DLS.4C	0.794			
WLB.1A	0.828	0.855	0.858	0.697
WLB.2B	0.882			
WLB.3A	0.836			
WLB.4A	0.791			
EP.1A	0.784	0.788	0.791	0.610
EP.2B	0.770			
EP.3A	0.801			
EP.4A	0.769			

Source: Data Processed Using SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

The results of the measurement model evaluation indicate that all indicators demonstrate satisfactory outer loading values ranging from 0.769 to 0.882. These values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming that each indicator has a strong explanatory contribution to its respective latent construct. This suggests that the measurement model has achieved an adequate level of convergent validity, ensuring that the observed variables effectively represent the theoretical constructs being examined.

Furthermore, reliability testing results show that all constructs meet the required standards of internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.788 to 0.891, while Composite Reliability values range from 0.791 to 0.894. These results indicate that the measurement instruments used in this study are highly reliable and produce consistent results across indicators. In addition, AVE values ranging from 0.610 to 0.753 confirm that each construct is able to explain more than 50% of the variance of its indicators, thereby reinforcing the adequacy of convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity Test

Discriminant validity analysis is conducted to ensure that each construct in the research model is empirically distinct and does not overlap conceptually or statistically with other constructs. This study applies two complementary approaches, namely the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion, to provide a more robust validation of construct distinctiveness.

Table 3. HTMT Values

	Digital Leadership Style	Employee Performance	Hybrid Work	Work-Life Balance
Digital Leadership Style				
Employee Performance	0.642			
Hybrid Work	0.808	0.561		
Work-Life Balance	0.786	0.703	0.709	

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Digital Leadership Style	Employee Performance	Hybrid Work	Work-Life Balance
Digital Leadership Style	0.816			
Employee Performance	0.528	0.781		
Hybrid Work	0.698	0.478	0.868	
Work-Life Balance	0.664	0.580	0.623	0.835

The HTMT results show that all inter-construct correlation values remain below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating that there is no evidence of discriminant validity problems in the measurement model. This suggests that each construct captures a unique conceptual domain without excessive overlap. Similarly, the Fornell-Larcker criterion confirms that the square root of AVE for each construct is higher than its correlations with other constructs. This further strengthens the evidence that all constructs possess strong discriminant validity and are statistically distinct from one another.

Structural Model Evaluation

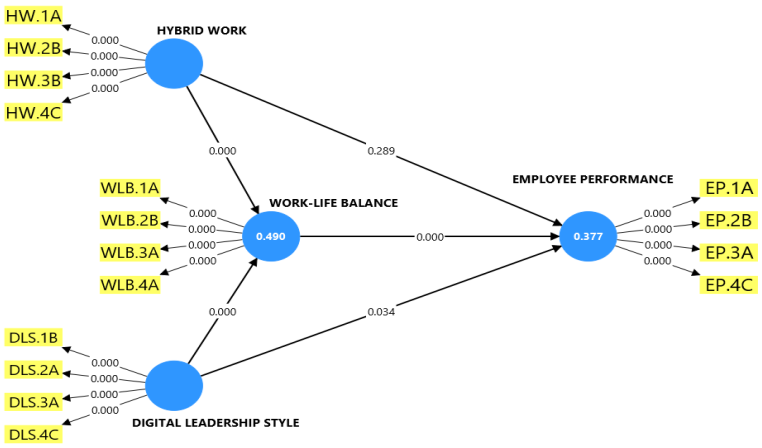

Figure 4. Bootstrapping Results of Research Model

Source: Processed Data Output

Table 5. Direct Effect Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	M	STDEV	T Statistics	p-values	Result
H1	HW -> EP	0.093	0.093	0.088	1.061	0.289	Rejected
H2	DLS -> EP	0.208	0.205	0.098	2.121	0.034	Accepted
H3	HW -> WLB	0.312	0.314	0.076	4.097	0.000	Accepted
H4	DLS -> WLB	0.446	0.447	0.076	5.900	0.000	Accepted
H5	WLB -> EP	0.384	0.386	0.093	4.133	0.000	Accepted

Source: Processed Data (2026)

The structural model results indicate that hybrid work does not have a statistically significant direct effect on employee performance. This finding suggests that flexibility in work arrangements alone is insufficient to directly enhance employee output without the presence of supporting organizational mechanisms. In contrast, digital leadership style demonstrates a significant positive effect on employee performance, indicating that effective leadership in digital environments plays a crucial role in improving employee productivity and coordination.

In addition, both hybrid work and digital leadership show significant positive effects on work-life balance, indicating that these two organizational factors contribute to improving employees' ability to manage work and personal life demands. Furthermore, work-life balance itself has a strong and significant positive effect on employee performance, highlighting its critical role as a psychological and behavioral mechanism that influences work outcomes.

Table 6. Indirect Effect Testing Results

Hypothesis	Indirect Effect	β	M	STDEV	T Statistics	p-values	Result
H6	HW -> WLB -> EP	0.120	0.122	0.045	2.677	0.007	Accepted
H7	DLS -> WLB -> EP	0.171	0.173	0.052	3.266	0.001	Accepted

Source: Processed Data (2026)

The mediation analysis confirms that work-life balance plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between hybrid work and employee performance as well as between digital leadership style and employee performance. Specifically, work-life balance acts as a full mediator in the relationship between hybrid work and employee performance, indicating that hybrid work influences performance only through its effect on employees' work-life balance. Meanwhile, work-life balance functions as a partial mediator in the relationship between digital leadership style and employee performance, suggesting that digital leadership not only affects performance directly but also indirectly through improvements in work-life balance.

Discussion

The discriminant validity results obtained through HTMT and the Fornell-Larcker criterion provide a strong empirical foundation for the structural model in this study. All constructs Hybrid Work, Digital Leadership Style, Work-Life Balance, and Employee Performance—meet the required thresholds, confirming clear conceptual and empirical distinctiveness among variables (Hair et al., 2019; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This finding aligns with measurement theory assumptions that constructs in behavioral research must demonstrate non-overlapping variance to ensure structural estimations are unbiased. In comparison with prior studies in digital work environments, this result strengthens the argument that modern workplace constructs are multidimensional and cannot be treated as interchangeable concepts. This contributes theoretically by reinforcing construct clarity in hybrid work research and practically by ensuring that organizational interventions targeting these variables must be designed separately rather than generalized.

The finding that Hybrid Work does not have a significant direct effect on Employee Performance contrasts with several studies that suggest flexible work arrangements directly improve productivity. However, it is consistent with recent literature arguing that flexibility alone is insufficient without supporting organizational mechanisms (Lauring & Jonasson, 2025). In startup environments, where task demands are high and coordination is complex, hybrid work functions more as a structural resource that reduces strain rather than directly increasing output. This supports the Job Demands–Resources Model, which positions flexible work arrangements as resources that primarily enhance well-being rather than immediate performance outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The theoretical implication is that hybrid work should be conceptualized as an indirect performance driver. The practical implication is that organizations should not rely on hybrid policies alone but must integrate them with psychological and managerial support systems to achieve performance gains.

In contrast, Digital Leadership Style shows a significant positive effect on Employee Performance, confirming findings from previous studies that emphasize the importance of technology-enabled leadership in digital environments (Bangun et al., 2021; Nasrun et al., 2025). This result is consistent with Transformational Leadership Theory, where leaders who provide clear direction, motivation, and support enhance employee effectiveness. Compared to prior research, this study strengthens the argument that digital leadership is not merely a communication adaptation but a core strategic capability in startup ecosystems. The theoretical contribution lies in extending leadership theory into digitally mediated work contexts the practical implication highlights the need for startups to invest in digital leadership competencies such as virtual coordination, real-time feedback systems, and digital communication governance.

The positive relationship between Hybrid Work and Digital Leadership Style with Work-Life Balance aligns strongly with Work-Family Border Theory, which states that flexibility and supportive leadership reduce work-life conflict (Clark, 2000). This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that flexible work arrangements and supportive leadership behaviors improve employee well-being (Lauring & Jonasson, 2025; Marnoto et al., 2024). However, this study expands prior research by showing that both structural (hybrid work) and behavioral (digital leadership) factors jointly influence work-life balance in startup environments. The theoretical implication is that work-life balance should be viewed as a central psychological mechanism linking organizational practices to performance outcomes. Practically, this suggests that organizations must not only design flexible systems but also ensure leadership actively supports boundary management between work and personal life.

Work-Life Balance is also found to have a significant positive effect on Employee Performance, which is consistent with prior empirical studies indicating that balanced work-life conditions reduce stress and enhance motivation and engagement (Khaerunnisa & Nuraeni, 2025; Valery et al., 2023). This finding reinforces the Job Demands–Resources Model by confirming that personal resources significantly contribute to improved work outcomes. Compared to previous studies, this research strengthens the mediating role of psychological well-being in digital work environments. The theoretical contribution lies in positioning Work-Life Balance as a key explanatory mechanism in performance models, while the practical implication emphasizes that organizations should prioritize employee well-being strategies as a core performance improvement approach, not merely as a supportive policy.

The mediation analysis further confirms that Work-Life Balance plays a critical explanatory role in the relationship between Hybrid Work, Digital Leadership Style, and Employee Performance. Specifically, it acts as a full mediator between Hybrid Work and Employee Performance, and as a partial mediator in the relationship between Digital Leadership Style and Employee Performance. These findings refine previous studies that mostly emphasized direct effects by demonstrating that performance outcomes in digital startups are largely shaped through psychological mechanisms rather than structural arrangements alone (Ishak et al., 2025; Pradipta & Martdianty, 2023). The theoretical contribution of this study lies in integrating Job Demands–Resources Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Work-Family Border Theory into a unified explanatory model. Practically, this implies that startup organizations should prioritize interventions that strengthen employee work-life balance as the central pathway for improving performance, rather than relying solely on hybrid work policies or leadership improvements in isolation.

CONCLUSION

This study provides several key insights regarding employee performance in digital startup environments. The most important finding is that hybrid work does not directly enhance employee performance, indicating that flexibility in time and place of work is not sufficient to improve productivity without supporting psychological and organizational conditions. Instead, digital leadership emerges as a critical driver of performance, emphasizing the importance of leaders' ability to manage communication, coordination, and employee support in digitally mediated environments. Another major insight is the central role of work-life balance as a psychological mechanism that translates organizational practices into performance outcomes. Hybrid work and digital leadership both contribute significantly to improving work-life balance, which in turn strongly enhances employee performance. The key lesson from this study is that modern work systems are not effective in isolation; their impact depends on how well they support employees' well-being and life stability. This reinforces the idea that performance in digital ecosystems is fundamentally shaped by the interaction between structural flexibility and psychological sustainability.

In terms of academic contribution, this study strengthens the integration of Job Demands–Resources Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, and Work-Family Border Theory into a unified explanatory model for understanding employee performance in startup contexts. It extends prior research by positioning work-life balance as both a full and partial mediating mechanism, offering a more nuanced explanation of how hybrid work and digital leadership influence performance outcomes. However, this study has several limitations. First, it uses a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to capture changes in employee behavior over time. Second, the data are based on self-reported responses, which may introduce subjective bias. Third, the study is geographically limited to startup employees in Java, which may reduce generalizability to other regions or industries. Future research is recommended to adopt longitudinal designs, incorporate multi-source data such as supervisor evaluations, and expand the geographical scope to different types of organizations and cultural settings in order to enhance the robustness and external validity of the findings.

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