

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF FLEXIBLE WORK IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

In today's dynamic and competitive work environment, adaptive leadership has emerged as a key driver for enhancing employee productivity by enabling organizations to effectively respond to rapid change. However, the effectiveness of adaptive leadership is often influenced by workplace practices, particularly those that provide autonomy and flexibility. This study investigates the mediating role of flexible work in the relationship between adaptive leadership and employee productivity in a media company in Malang, Indonesia. A quantitative research design was employed, using survey data collected from 34 employees, analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings demonstrate that adaptive leadership significantly and positively affects employee productivity, both directly and indirectly, through flexible work arrangements. Flexible work partially mediates this relationship, indicating that adaptive leaders can enhance productivity more effectively when supported by flexible work practices. This study contributes to the literature on leadership and organizational behavior by integrating adaptive leadership theory with flexible work to predict productivity outcomes. Practical implications are offered for organizations aiming to align leadership practices with flexible work to maximize performance.

Keywords: Adaptive Leadership, Employee Productivity, Flexible Work, Media Company

INTRODUCTION

The rapid digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the media and news industry. Traditional channels such as television, radio, and newspapers, once the primary sources of information, have been increasingly replaced by digital platforms (Nuraini et al., 2023). This technological disruption has intensified competition and created a dynamic environment that demands rapid adaptation in business models, operational strategies, and human resource management (Wulandari & Pudjiarti, 2024).

Leadership is considered one of the most crucial organizational factors and has a direct influence on employee productivity (Sabran et al., 2022). In such a fast-changing landscape, adaptive leadership emerges as a crucial determinant of organizational success. Adaptive leaders possess the ability to anticipate changes, respond to uncertainties, and guide teams through complex challenges with innovative approaches (Heifetz et al., 2009). In media organizations, adaptive leadership is particularly vital for aligning content strategies with shifting audience preferences, leveraging emerging technologies, and maintaining high levels of employee performance amidst continuous change (Norman & Pahlawati, 2024). In fact, various other studies have shown that leadership style influences employee attitudes and performance, such as the finding that democratic leadership improves employee performance (Khan & Firmansyah, 2023). These findings underscore the importance of examining adaptive leadership as another approach that can increase productivity through various mechanisms.

In this era of rapid development, changes occur quickly in the work environment (Maksum et al., 2022). Flexible work arrangements have gained prominence as a workplace strategy to enhance employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity. Flexible work encompasses autonomy in work schedules, locations, and methods, enabling employees to balance professional responsibilities with personal needs (Bloom et al., 2015). Empirical evidence shows that such flexibility can serve as a mediating mechanism, reinforcing the positive effects of leadership on productivity by creating supportive and empowering work conditions (Sofyan & Elmi, 2024). Furthermore, employee productivity remains a key

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performance indicator for organizations in the media industry, reflecting both operational efficiency and competitiveness (Saputra et al., 2024).

Despite the growing body of literature on adaptive leadership, flexible work, and productivity, research that integrates these variables into a single conceptual model particularly within the Indonesian digital media context remains limited. Furthermore, studies examining flexible work as a mediating variable between leadership and productivity are scarce, leaving a gap in understanding how these factors interact to influence organizational performance. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the mediating role of flexible work in the relationship between adaptive leadership and employee productivity in an online news media company in Malang, Indonesia. The findings aim to provide both theoretical contributions by integrating leadership and workplace flexibility theories and practical implications for media organizations navigating the challenges of the digital era

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership refers to a leader's ability to adjust strategies, behaviors, and approaches in response to rapidly changing environments and complex challenges (Magfiroh et al., 2023). According to (Heifetz et al., 2009) this leadership style emphasizes diagnosing challenges, regulating pressure, empowering employees, and fostering innovation. Indicators include strategic perspective, identifying adaptive challenges, regulating organizational pressure, empowering employees, and listening to diverse voices. Previous studies show that adaptive leadership can enhance employee engagement, innovation, and productivity by creating a responsive and supportive work environment (Nourthouse, 2016)

Employee Productivity

Employee productivity is defined as the efficiency and effectiveness with which individuals produce outputs relative to inputs within a given timeframe (Mangkunegara, 2013). Productivity encompasses both quantitative and qualitative measures, including volume of work, accuracy, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness (Rizki & Rozamuri, 2024). It is one of the most important indicators of organizational performance and competitiveness (Saputra et al., 2024). (Fatimah et al., 2019) identified that productivity is shaped by individual competencies, motivation, leadership support, and organizational culture. Leadership is considered one of the most crucial organizational factors and has a direct impact on employee productivity (Supriyanto et al., 2024). In knowledge-intensive industries such as media, productivity is not only determined by output quantity but also by creativity and adaptability in meeting changing audience demands.

Flexible Work

According to (Malayu et al., 2022) flexible work enhances work–life balance, reduces stress, and increases retention rates. Flexible work refers to work arrangements that grant employees autonomy in determining when, where, and how they perform their tasks ((Golden & Gajendran, 2019). (Bloom et al., 2015) highlight that flexible work arrangements, such as flextime, telecommuting, compressed workweeks, and results-only work environments, improve productivity and job satisfaction.

HYPOTHESIS

The Effect of Adaptive Leadership on Employee Productivity

Previous studies have consistently shown that leadership plays a critical role in improving employee productivity. According to (Sjahrudin et al., 2024), adaptive leaders encourage innovation and collaboration, which positively influence employees' ability to achieve their performance targets. Similarly, (Avolio et al., 2009) found that leaders with adaptive capabilities can mobilize individuals and teams to adjust quickly to changing demands,

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thereby enhancing productivity. Research by (Naim, 2024) also highlights that adaptive leadership fosters creativity and resilience in the workforce, which are essential for achieving productivity in dynamic industries

H1: Adaptive leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee productivity.

The Effect of Adaptive Leadership on Flexible Work

Adaptive leadership is closely associated with the implementation of flexible work arrangements. Leaders who adopt adaptive approaches tend to empower employees with autonomy and discretion over how they manage their tasks (Heifetz et al., 2009). (Nissa & Pujianto, 2024) emphasize that adaptive leaders often facilitate flexible work to strengthen employee engagement and work-life balance. In the Indonesian context, (Siallagan, 2024) found that leadership responsiveness in adopting flexible policies can improve organizational resilience. These findings indicate that adaptive leadership positively influences flexible work practices.

H2: Adaptive leadership has a positive and significant effect on flexible work.

The Mediating Role of Flexible Work

Recent studies have explored flexible work not only as a direct predictor of productivity but also as a mediating mechanism that strengthens the impact of leadership. (Adiyanti & Sari, 2024) showed that flexible work enhances the effectiveness of leadership practices by creating supportive conditions that allow employees to perform optimally. Similarly, (Saputro, 2023) argued that flexible work can partially explain how leadership styles translate into productivity outcomes. This suggests that adaptive leadership may improve productivity more strongly when flexible work is present as a mediator.

H3: Flexible work mediates the relationship between adaptive leadership and employee productivity.

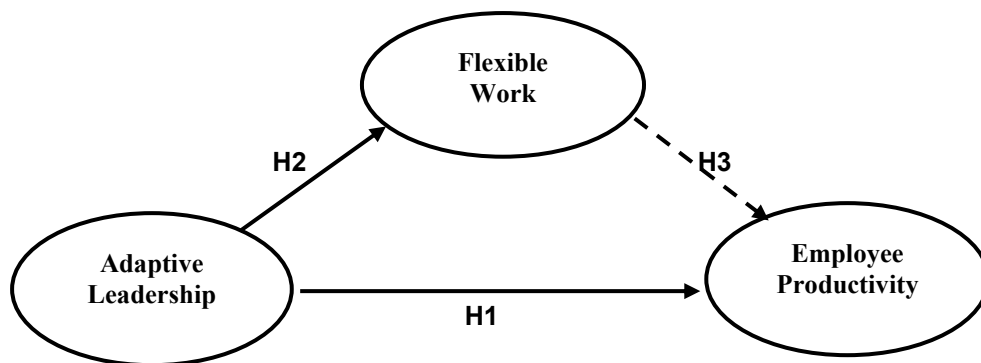


Figure 1. Hypothesis Model
Source: Data processed by researchers (2025)

METHODS

This study applied a quantitative research method with an explanatory approach, conducted at an online media company in Malang City. The research population comprised all 34 employees across various divisions, and because of the relatively small size, a saturated sampling technique was employed, allowing every employee to participate. Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed online, using a five-point Likert scale. The variables measured were adaptive leadership, flexible work, and employee productivity.

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares (PLS) with SmartPLS 3.0 software. PLS was chosen because it is effective for relatively small samples and does not require strict assumptions about data distribution. The analysis was carried out in two stages: evaluation of the measurement model and evaluation of the structural model. This approach made it possible to test both the direct and indirect effects, particularly examining the mediating role of flexible work in the relationship between adaptive leadership and employee productivity.

RESULTS

Outer Model (Validity and Reliability)

The outer model analysis was conducted to ensure that the measurement used in this study was valid and reliable. The structural model of Partial Least Squares (PLS) with SmartPLS 3.0 software comprised three main constructs: Adaptive Leadership, Flexible Work, and Employee Productivity. Evaluation of the measurement model is a crucial step to confirm that each construct is measured accurately through its indicators. Figure 1 presents the tested model. Testing the validity of the reflective model shows that all indicators measuring adaptive leadership, flexible work, and employee productivity have loading factor values above 0.70. This indicates that the indicators are valid and able to explain their respective constructs. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, suggesting that each construct has good convergent validity.

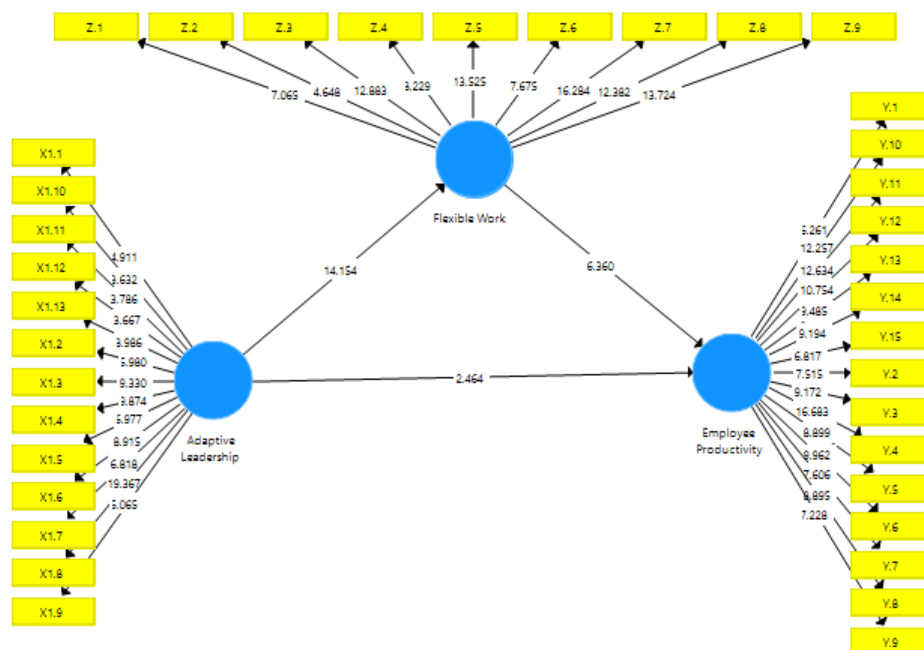


Figure 2. PLS Algorithm Results Display
Source: PLS Application Results (2025)

Table 1. Outer Loading

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor
Adaptive Leadership	X.1	0,746
	X.2	0,778
	X.3	0,854
	X.4	0,755
	X.5	0,776
	X.6	0,880
	X.7	0,817
	X.8	0,843
	X.9	0,713
	X.10	0,738
	X.11	0,734
	X.12	0,749
	X.13	0,729
Employee productivity	Y.1	0,786
	Y.2	0,766
	Y.3	0,794
	Y.4	0,834
	Y.5	0,804
	Y.6	0,796
	Y.7	0,719
	Y.8	0,782
	Y.9	0,737
	Y.10	0,835
	Y.11	0,824
	Y.12	0,850
	Y.13	0,757
	Y.14	0,832
	Y.15	0,737
Flexible Work	Z.1	0,757
	Z.2	0,665
	Z.3	0,846
	Z.4	0,781
	Z.5	0,849
	Z.6	0,804
	Z.7	0,887
	Z.8	0,822
	Z.9	0,846

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Table 1 shows the results of the outer loading test for each indicator of Adaptive Leadership, Flexible Work, and Employee Productivity. Almost all indicators have loading factor values above the threshold of 0.70, which indicates good convergent validity. This means that the indicators used are able to explain the variables measured in this study.

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Adaptive Leadership	0,943	0,959	0,948	0,587
Employee Productivity	0,955	0,957	0,960	0,616
Flexible Work	0,933	0,936	0,944	0,654

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Table 2 presents the construct reliability and validity test. The Cronbach's Alpha values for Adaptive Leadership (0.943), Employee Productivity (0.955), and Flexible Work (0.933) are all above 0.70, indicating excellent internal consistency. Similarly, Composite Reliability values for all constructs exceed 0.90, which is very strong. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are also above 0.50, confirming that the constructs have good convergent validity. Based on these results, the measurement model (outer model) is declared valid and reliable

Inner Model Analysis

After testing the measurement model, the next step is to evaluate the inner model to determine the explanatory power of the research framework and the significance of the hypothesized relationships between variables. The inner model analysis includes testing the coefficient of determination (R-Square) to assess how well the independent variables explain the dependent variables, as well as hypothesis testing through path coefficients and mediation effects. The results of this analysis provide evidence of the direct and indirect effects among Adaptive Leadership, Flexible Work, and Employee Productivity.

Table 3. R-Square

Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Employee Productivity	0,880	0,872
Flexible Work	0,574	0,561

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Table 3 shows the results of the R-Square test, which measures the explanatory power of the model. The R^2 value for Employee Productivity is 0.880, meaning that Adaptive Leadership and Flexible Work together explain 88% of the variance in employee productivity, with the remaining 12% explained by other factors not included in this study. The R^2 value for Flexible Work is 0.574, which means that Adaptive Leadership explains 57.4% of the variance in Flexible Work.

Hypothesis Testing – Direct Effect

Table 4. Direct Effect

Independent	Dependent	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (IO/STDEVI)	P Values
Adaptive Leadership	Employee Productivity	0.285	0.274	0.116	2.464	0.014
Adaptive Leadership	Flexible Work	0.758	0.795	0.054	14.154	0.000

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Table 4 shows the results of hypothesis testing for direct effects. First, Adaptive Leadership has a positive and significant effect on Employee Productivity with a path coefficient of 0.285, T-statistic of 2.464 (>1.96), and p-value of 0.014 (<0.05). This result supports hypothesis H1. Second, Adaptive Leadership has a strong positive and significant effect on Flexible Work with a coefficient of 0.758, T-statistic of 14.154, and p-value of 0.000, supporting hypothesis H2.

Hypothesis Testing – Indirect Effect (Mediation)

Table 5. Indirect Effect

Indepen dent	Media tion	Depen dent	Original Sample (O)	Sampl e Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (IO/STDE VI)	P Values
Adaptive Leadershi p	Flexible Work	Employee Productivity	0.533	0.565	0.107	4.995	0.000

Source: Processed Data (2025)

Table 5 shows the mediating effect of Flexible Work in the relationship between Adaptive Leadership and Employee Productivity. The path coefficient is 0.533, with a T-statistic of 4.995 and a p-value of 0.000. These results indicate that Flexible Work significantly mediates the relationship between Adaptive Leadership and Employee Productivity, thus supporting hypothesis H3. This finding suggests that the influence of leadership on productivity becomes stronger when employees are supported with flexible work arrangements

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that adaptive leadership significantly improves employee productivity, both directly and indirectly through flexible work. Leaders who are able to anticipate change and empower their teams not only strengthen organizational adaptability but also encourage the implementation of flexible work arrangements. In turn, flexible work creates a supportive environment that enhances focus, motivation, and efficiency, thereby reinforcing productivity. The findings confirm that flexible work plays a mediating role, meaning leadership becomes more effective when combined with supportive workplace practices.

Practically, the results suggest that media companies should prioritize developing adaptive leadership skills while institutionalizing flexible work policies to sustain productivity in dynamic environments. Theoretically, this research contributes to leadership and organizational behavior studies by linking adaptive leadership, flexible work, and employee productivity in one model. Future studies are encouraged to include other mediating or moderating variables, such as employee engagement or organizational culture, and extend

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