

AI-AUGMENTED RESILIENT LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY OF WORK LIFE IN THE MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF INTERNAL COPING RESOURCES IN HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The rapid digitalisation of Malaysia's public sector has accelerated the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and hybrid work practices, creating new challenges for leadership and employee well-being. This study examines the relationship between AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership (ARL) and Quality of Work Life (QWL), with Internal Coping Resources (ICR) proposed as a mediating mechanism. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study positions ARL as an organizational resource and ICR as a personal psychological resource within AI-enabled hybrid work environments. Data were collected from 351 Malaysian public-sector employees and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings demonstrate that ARL is positively associated with ICR and QWL, while ICR is positively associated with QWL. The mediation analysis further indicates that ICR partially mediates the relationship between ARL and QWL. These findings extend current understanding of AI-enabled leadership by demonstrating that its relevance to employee well-being operates not only directly but also through employees' internal psychological resources. The study contributes to the emerging literature on human-centred AI leadership and provides practical implications for Malaysian public agencies seeking to balance digital transformation with employee resilience and sustainable quality of work life.

Keywords: AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership; Internal Coping Resources; Quality of Work Life; Hybrid Work; Malaysian Public Sector; PLS-SEM.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly evolved from a technical support function into a transformative force that reshapes how public organizations operate, make decisions, and manage their workforce. Governments are progressively integrating AI into administrative processes, predictive modelling, service delivery, and strategic planning to enhance efficiency, responsiveness, and transparency. Malaysia is similarly advancing digitalisation and the use of data-driven technologies across ministries and public agencies. However, AI adoption in public administration also introduces challenges related to employee readiness, ethical governance, trust, and human resource management (Buonocore et al., 2026). These developments represent not only

technological change but also a transformation in how public servants experience work and respond to changing expectations. Employees may encounter technostress, digital monitoring, performance pressure, continuous reskilling requirements, and uncertainty surrounding technology-enabled work. Such challenges become particularly relevant in hybrid environments, where employees must manage remote collaboration, digital workloads, asynchronous communication, and increasingly data-driven work processes.

In this context, resilient leadership has become increasingly important as an organizational capability. Resilient leaders demonstrate adaptability, psychological strength, empathy, and foresight that can help employees navigate uncertainty and organizational change. Contemporary digital workplaces, however, require leaders to combine resilience with technological capabilities. This development provides the basis for AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership (ARL), which integrates AI-supported information and decision-making with resilience-oriented behaviours such as adaptability, emotional stability, strategic agility, empathy, and relational trust. Research on hybrid leadership suggests that adaptive and human-centred leadership behaviours remain important when employees operate across technology-mediated work environments (Barnes et al., 2024). ARL therefore does not position AI as a substitute for human leadership but as a supporting capability that can assist leaders in interpreting information, anticipating challenges, and making informed decisions while retaining human judgement and interpersonal sensitivity.

Maintaining meaningful human involvement becomes particularly important when AI is incorporated into leadership and managerial decision-making. Although AI can enhance analytical capacity and access to information, technological efficiency alone may not produce the interpersonal and emotional responses required to support employees. Recent evidence indicates that the level of AI involvement in leadership decisions can influence employees' affective well-being (Lochner et al., 2025). This consideration is particularly relevant to employees' Quality of Work Life (QWL), which reflects their broader experience of work, including job satisfaction, psychological well-being, autonomy, interpersonal relationships, fairness, and work-life integration. Within AI-enabled hybrid workplaces, QWL therefore provides an important employee-centred perspective for evaluating whether technological transformation remains sustainable.

A key psychological mechanism that may explain the relationship between ARL and QWL is employees' Internal Coping Resources (ICR). These resources encompass psychological capacities such as self-efficacy, optimism, adaptive resilience, self-regulation, and cognitive flexibility that enable individuals to respond constructively to stress, uncertainty, and changing work demands. Employees with stronger internal resources may be better positioned to remain psychologically stable and adaptable when confronted with technological disruption and changing work structures. Recent public-sector research demonstrates that AI assistance can enhance employees' work adaptability, highlighting the importance of individual resources in responding to technology-enabled work (Zhang & Yu, 2025). Leadership may therefore contribute to employees' capacity to cope with digital and hybrid-work pressures by providing clarity, support, confidence, and opportunities for adaptation.

Despite growing scholarship on AI adoption, digital leadership, hybrid work, employee adaptability, and workplace well-being, an important research gap remains. Existing research has generally examined these areas independently, leaving comparatively limited understanding of the psychological mechanism through which AI-augmented leadership may influence employees' quality of work life. Recent evidence confirms growing scholarly attention to AI adoption within public administration, including its implications for public-sector managers and employees (Haesevoets et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the combined relationship among ARL, ICR, and QWL, particularly within AI-enabled hybrid work environments in the Malaysian public

sector, remains insufficiently understood. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the relationship between ARL and QWL among Malaysian public-sector employees and investigates the mediating role of ICR. By integrating leadership, psychological resources, and employee work-life outcomes, the study seeks to extend understanding of human-centred leadership while providing practical insights for public agencies seeking to balance technological advancement with employee resilience and sustainable quality of work life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Artificial Intelligence in the Public Sector

The rapid digitalization of the public sector, increasingly supported by artificial intelligence (AI), has restructured work processes, decision-making practices, and employee expectations. AI applications now support data analytics, workflow automation, predictive modelling, and public-service delivery, potentially improving administrative efficiency and responsiveness. At the same time, AI adoption in public administration introduces organizational and human challenges involving employee readiness, trust, accountability, ethical governance, and responsible implementation (Haesevoets et al., 2025). Consequently, contemporary research increasingly recognises that public-sector AI transformation should be evaluated not only through technological efficiency but also through its implications for employees and organizational processes. AI-driven transformation may simultaneously create resources and demands for employees. AI can increase autonomy, information accessibility, and task efficiency, yet it may also contribute to technostress, job insecurity, cognitive pressure, and uncertainty surrounding changing skill requirements. Recent JD–R research confirms this dual character of workplace AI, demonstrating that AI can operate as a job resource while simultaneously generating demands that affect employee well-being (Chuang et al., 2025). These tensions may become particularly important in hybrid working environments, where employees must combine technological adaptation with remote collaboration, digital communication, and greater individual responsibility. Within Malaysia, digital transformation has become an increasingly important component of public-sector modernization. As digital and AI-supported processes become embedded within administrative activities, public organizations must balance technological advancement with employee adaptability, psychological well-being, trust, fairness, and effective leadership. Recent public-sector evidence further indicates that AI assistance can enhance employees' work adaptability, demonstrating the importance of employee capabilities in navigating technology-enabled organizational change (Zhang & Yu, 2025). This creates an important context for examining leadership approaches that combine technological capabilities with human-centred management.

2.2 Resilient Leadership and AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership

Resilient leadership has become increasingly important as organizations navigate technological disruption, hybrid work, and continuing organizational change. Such leadership involves adaptability, emotional stability, strategic responsiveness, and the capacity to provide direction and support under uncertain conditions. In hybrid workplaces, leaders must additionally manage employees across physical and digitally mediated environments while sustaining communication, trust, and employee well-being. Contemporary evidence therefore reinforces the importance of adaptive and human-centred leadership practices within hybrid work environments (Barnes et al., 2024). Building on this development, the present study conceptualises AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership (ARL) as leadership that combines resilience-oriented human behaviours with AI-supported information and decision-making. Leaders may use AI-generated insights, predictive information, workload analytics, and other digital tools to enhance the timeliness and quality of managerial decisions while retaining human judgement, empathy, fairness, and relational trust. Within this conceptualisation, AI functions as an augmentation mechanism rather than a substitute for leadership, supporting leaders' ability to anticipate challenges, interpret complex information, and respond to changing

employee and organizational needs. This distinction becomes particularly important because increasing AI involvement in leadership does not automatically produce favourable employee outcomes. Recent evidence demonstrates that different levels of AI involvement in leadership decisions can influence employees' affective well-being, reinforcing the continuing importance of meaningful human involvement in technology-supported leadership (Lochner et al., 2025). Accordingly, the potential value of ARL lies not simply in technological capability but in integrating AI-supported decision-making with resilient, responsible, and human-centred leadership. This integration may be particularly important within public administration, where accountability, transparency, fairness, employee trust, and responsible decision-making remain fundamental organizational considerations.

2.3 Quality of Work Life in Hybrid and AI-Enabled Workplaces

Quality of Work Life (QWL) reflects employees' broader evaluation of their working experience, encompassing psychological well-being, job satisfaction, autonomy, interpersonal relationships, fairness, and work-life integration. The expansion of hybrid working arrangements has increased the importance of QWL because flexibility can improve employees' working experiences while simultaneously creating challenges involving communication, isolation, digital boundaries, and psychological well-being. Recent research on healthy hybrid work demonstrates that employees' experiences of hybrid arrangements are closely connected with workplace well-being and the conditions under which flexible work is implemented (Dale, 2024). The integration of AI adds another dimension to QWL. AI-supported systems can reduce repetitive tasks, facilitate information access, support decision-making, and potentially enhance employee autonomy. Conversely, AI-related technostress, job insecurity, monitoring, and digital pressure can negatively affect employee experiences. Recent empirical evidence demonstrates this dual relationship, showing that AI-related resources can improve productivity, engagement, and job satisfaction while AI technostress may contribute to exhaustion, work-family conflict, and lower job satisfaction (Chuang et al., 2025). Thus, AI-enabled work should be evaluated not only in terms of operational performance but also through its consequences for employees' work and life well-being. This perspective is particularly relevant within hybrid work environments. Recent evidence applying the JD-R framework demonstrates that employee-AI collaboration can positively contribute to work engagement and work-life balance when employees possess appropriate resources to manage AI-related demands (2026). Accordingly, within the Malaysian public sector, QWL provides an important employee-centred outcome for assessing whether AI-enabled digital transformation remains sustainable while supporting both organizational effectiveness and employee well-being.

2.4 Internal Coping Resources as a Psychological Mechanism

Internal Coping Resources (ICR) represent the psychological capacities that enable employees to respond constructively to stress, uncertainty, technological change, and evolving work demands. Within the present study, these resources encompass self-efficacy, optimism, adaptive resilience, self-regulation, and cognitive flexibility. Contemporary JD-R research increasingly recognises personal resources as important mechanisms influencing the way employees perceive and respond to job demands and job resources (Lyddy et al., 2025). Such resources are therefore particularly relevant when employees must continuously adapt to digitally intensive and uncertain working environments. ICR may become increasingly important within AI-enabled hybrid environments because employees must simultaneously manage technological requirements, virtual communication, changing work structures, greater autonomy, and personal responsibility. Recent research demonstrates that personal resources can shape employees' responses to AI-related workplace pressures. For example, evidence indicates that resilience can buffer adverse psychological pathways associated with AI awareness, reinforcing the importance of employees' internal psychological capacity in technology-intensive workplaces (Kumar, 2025). Leadership may further contribute to strengthening these resources by providing

role clarity, emotional reassurance, developmental opportunities, psychological safety, and confidence during periods of organizational change. Within an ARL environment, AI-supported information may help leaders identify emerging operational challenges, while resilient leadership behaviours provide the human support required for employees to respond constructively. Consequently, ICR is positioned as an important psychological mechanism through which organizational leadership resources may contribute to employees' QWL, rather than assuming a purely direct relationship between leadership and employee well-being.

2.5 Theoretical Foundation: Job Demands–Resources Model and Conservation of Resources Theory

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for understanding employee experiences within AI-enabled workplaces because it explains how the balance between workplace demands and available resources influences employee well-being and performance. Contemporary research has extended JD–R thinking directly into AI-enabled work, demonstrating that AI can simultaneously alter job demands, job resources, employee autonomy, insecurity, engagement, and well-being (Chuang et al., 2025). Within AI-enabled hybrid workplaces, technological overload, constant connectivity, changing skill requirements, and role ambiguity may therefore operate as job demands, while supportive leadership and employee psychological capabilities may function as important resources. From the JD–R perspective, ARL can be conceptualised as an organizational resource capable of reducing uncertainty while providing employees with clarity, support, adaptability, and technology-informed guidance. ICR, in contrast, represents a personal resource through which employees respond to emerging technological and hybrid-work demands.

Recent research reinforces the importance of personal resources within JD–R, demonstrating that such resources can influence how employees perceive and manage workplace demands and resources (Lyddy et al., 2025). This provides contemporary theoretical support for positioning ICR as an important psychological component within the proposed ARL–QWL relationship. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory complements JD–R by explaining how employees acquire, protect, preserve, and develop valued resources when confronted with demanding working conditions. Importantly, contemporary research has explicitly examined the complementary value of JD–R and COR for explaining employee well-being and future job design, demonstrating that resource availability and resource preservation remain central to understanding contemporary employee experiences (Demerouti, 2025). From this perspective, ARL may contribute to a resource-gain process by providing employees with greater clarity, confidence, support, and access to information, thereby helping them preserve and strengthen their internal coping resources.

The relevance of COR becomes particularly apparent within hybrid working environments, where technological connectivity may simultaneously provide flexibility and create interruption, exhaustion, and competing work–non-work demands. Recent hybrid-work research grounded in COR demonstrates that technological demands and resources can influence flexibility, exhaustion, and performance across both work and non-work domains (2024). This strengthens the argument that employee resources must be considered when examining sustainable QWL within digitally intensive and hybrid working environments. Integrating JD–R and COR therefore provides a contemporary theoretical explanation for the proposed model. JD–R explains how ARL may function as an organizational resource in the presence of AI-related and hybrid-work demands, whereas COR explains how external organizational resources may facilitate the development and preservation of employees' internal coping resources. Accordingly, ARL is positioned as an organizational resource, ICR as the psychological mechanism, and QWL as the employee outcome. This integration provides the theoretical basis for examining both the direct relationship between ARL and QWL and the indirect

relationship operating through ICR.

RESULTS

The empirical analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4 based on responses obtained from 351 Malaysian public-sector employees working within AI-assisted and hybrid work environments. Consistent with the PLS-SEM analytical procedure, the assessment was conducted in two stages. The first stage evaluated the measurement model to establish the reliability and validity of the study constructs, while the second stage assessed the structural model to examine the hypothesised relationships among AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership (ARL), Internal Coping Resources (ICR), and Quality of Work Life (QWL). The mediation effect of ICR in the relationship between ARL and QWL was subsequently examined.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Key Constructs (N = 351)

Construct	Mean	SD
AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership (ARL)	4.08	0.54
Internal Coping Resources (ICR)	3.87	0.58
Quality of Work Life (QWL)	3.82	0.63

As presented in Table 1, ARL recorded the highest mean ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.54$), followed by ICR ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.58$) and QWL ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.63$). The results indicate generally positive perceptions across the three constructs. Nevertheless, the observed standard deviations indicate variation in employees' perceptions and experiences, supporting further examination of the relationships among leadership, psychological coping resources, and quality of work life.

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was assessed before examining the structural relationships. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), while convergent validity was assessed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
ARL	0.911	0.936	0.68
ICR	0.894	0.923	0.62
QWL	0.873	0.915	0.59

Cronbach's alpha values ranged between 0.873 and 0.911, while CR values ranged from 0.915 to 0.936, demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency reliability. Furthermore, all AVE values exceeded 0.50, ranging from 0.59 to 0.68. The findings therefore provide evidence of adequate convergent validity for ARL, ICR, and QWL. Discriminant validity was subsequently examined using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Table 3: Discriminant Validity Using the HTMT Criterion

Construct Pair	HTMT
ARL ↔ ICR	0.66
ARL ↔ QWL	0.71

ICR ↔ QWL	0.74
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All HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85. The highest value was observed between ICR and QWL (0.74), followed by ARL and QWL (0.71) and ARL and ICR (0.66). These findings provide support for discriminant validity and indicate that the three constructs capture empirically distinguishable concepts.

Structural Model Assessment

Following confirmation of the measurement model, the structural relationships were assessed to determine the direction and statistical significance of the proposed relationships.

Table 4: Structural Model – Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Path	β	p-value	Decision
H1	ARL → ICR	0.69	< 0.001	Supported
H2	ICR → QWL	0.55	< 0.001	Supported
H3	ARL → QWL	0.31	< 0.01	Supported

The findings demonstrate that ARL has a positive and statistically significant relationship with ICR ($\beta = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. This represents the strongest direct relationship in the proposed model. ICR also demonstrates a positive and significant relationship with QWL ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. In addition, ARL retains a positive direct relationship with QWL ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$), providing support for H3. Taken together, the direct-effect results indicate that stronger perceptions of AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership are associated with stronger Internal Coping Resources and higher Quality of Work Life. The results further indicate that employees' internal coping resources are positively associated with their quality of work life. Interpretation of the theoretical significance of these relationships is addressed separately in the Discussion section.

Mediating Effect of Internal Coping Resources

The indirect relationship between ARL and QWL through ICR was subsequently examined to determine whether employees' psychological coping resources provide a mechanism through which leadership is associated with quality of work life.

Table 5: Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis	Mediation Path	β	p-value	Mediation	Decision
H4	ARL → ICR → QWL	0.38	< 0.001	Partial	Supported

The indirect effect of ARL on QWL through ICR was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4. At the same time, the direct relationship between ARL and QWL remained statistically significant ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$). Based on the reported direct and indirect effects, the findings are consistent with **partial mediation**, indicating that ARL is associated with QWL both directly and through employees' Internal Coping Resources. These results provide empirical support for positioning ICR as an important psychological mechanism within the proposed model.

DISCUSSION

The findings provide important insights into the relationship between AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership (ARL), Internal Coping Resources (ICR), and Quality of Work Life (QWL) within the Malaysian public sector. Overall, the results indicate that leadership in AI-enabled hybrid work environments is associated with employee well-being not only through its direct influence on work experiences but also through the psychological resources employees develop to manage technological and organizational demands. This pattern

is consistent with the central assumptions of the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which emphasize the importance of organizational and personal resources in helping employees respond to demanding work environments.

The first major finding demonstrates a significant positive relationship between ARL and ICR ($\beta = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that employees who perceive stronger AI-augmented resilient leadership also report stronger psychological resources for managing uncertainty and changing work demands. The finding extends conventional resilient leadership perspectives by suggesting that resilience-oriented leadership may remain important when managerial practices are increasingly supported by AI-generated information and digital technologies. Recent research on hybrid leadership similarly emphasizes the importance of adaptive and human-centred leadership behaviours when employees operate across technology-mediated work environments (Barnes et al., 2024). Rather than replacing interpersonal leadership, AI-supported information may complement leaders' ability to provide clarity, anticipate emerging challenges, and respond more effectively to employee needs. Within the Malaysian public sector, this relationship is particularly relevant as employees simultaneously encounter administrative accountability, technological change, and increasingly digital modes of work.

The positive relationship between ICR and QWL ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$) further demonstrates the importance of employees' psychological resources in digitally intensive workplaces. Employees with stronger self-efficacy, adaptability, optimism, emotional regulation, and coping capacity may be better equipped to manage technological pressures, changing work routines, and blurred work–life boundaries. This interpretation is consistent with emerging research indicating that personal resources can play an important role in employees' responses to AI-related job demands and their subsequent well-being (Pham et al., 2026). From the COR perspective, employees who possess stronger internal resources may be better able to protect themselves against resource depletion when confronted with continuing technological and organizational demands. The present finding therefore positions ICR not merely as an individual characteristic but as an important psychological resource associated with sustainable quality of work life.

ARL also demonstrates a significant direct relationship with QWL ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$). Although this relationship is smaller than the ARL–ICR relationship, its significance indicates that leadership remains directly relevant to employees' experiences of work in AI-enabled hybrid environments. Leadership behaviours involving clarity, adaptability, fairness, emotional support, and responsible use of technology may contribute to employees' perceptions of a supportive and manageable working environment. This finding is consistent with the JD–R perspective, under which supportive leadership functions as a job resource capable of helping employees manage demanding working conditions. Importantly, the result suggests that the value of AI-augmented leadership should not be interpreted solely in terms of technological efficiency. Its relevance to QWL also depends on the extent to which technological capabilities are combined with human judgement and employee-oriented leadership practices.

A particularly important finding is the significant indirect relationship between ARL and QWL through ICR ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). The partial mediation indicates that leadership is associated with QWL through more than one pathway. ARL has a direct relationship with employees' quality of work life, while simultaneously operating through the internal psychological resource's employees use to respond to workplace demands. This finding provides a more detailed explanation of the mechanism connecting leadership and employee well-being. From the JD–R perspective, ARL represents an organizational resource that may help employees manage AI-related and hybrid-work demands. COR theory extends this explanation by suggesting that

supportive organizational resources can facilitate resource gain, allowing employees to develop and preserve psychological resources that protect their well-being.

The mediation finding also contributes to the emerging discussion surrounding human-centred leadership in AI-enabled workplaces. The results suggest that the potential value of AI in leadership may not arise simply from faster analysis, automation, or improved access to information. Rather, technological capability may become more meaningful when leaders use it in ways that strengthen employees' confidence, adaptability, and capacity to cope with change. This distinction is particularly important within public administration, where digital transformation must coexist with employee well-being, accountability, fairness, and public-service responsibilities. Accordingly, the findings support a view of AI augmentation in which technology complements rather than substitutes the relational and psychological functions of leadership.

Taken together, the findings extend the literature in three important respects. First, the study connects AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership with Quality of Work Life, shifting attention beyond traditional technology-adoption and performance outcomes towards employees' experience of work. Second, it identifies Internal Coping Resources as a psychological mechanism linking leadership with QWL, providing greater explanatory depth than a purely direct leadership–outcome relationship. Third, by integrating JD–R and COR theory, the study connects organizational resources, personal resources, and employee outcomes within a single framework relevant to AI-enabled hybrid work. These contributions are particularly salient within the Malaysian public sector, where empirical evidence concerning the intersection of AI-supported leadership, employee psychological resources, and quality of work life remains comparatively limited.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study offers several theoretical implications for leadership, employee well-being, and technology-enabled work. First, the findings extend the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model by positioning AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership (ARL) as an organizational resource within AI-enabled hybrid work environments. While the JD–R model traditionally emphasizes resources such as supervisory support, autonomy, and feedback, the present findings suggest that leadership combining human resilience with AI-supported decision-making may represent an emerging form of organizational resource. Such leadership can provide employees with greater clarity, adaptability, and support when responding to technological and hybrid-work demands.

Second, the study extends the application of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory by demonstrating the importance of Internal Coping Resources (ICR) as a psychological mechanism linking leadership with Quality of Work Life (QWL). Rather than assuming that supportive leadership automatically produces favorable employee outcomes, the findings indicate that leadership is also associated with the internal resources employees use to manage uncertainty and workplace demands. This provides a resource-based explanation for the mediating role of ICR: organizational resources associated with ARL may contribute to employees' psychological resource capacity, which is subsequently associated with their quality of work life.

Third, integrating JD–R and COR provides a more comprehensive explanation of employee experiences in AI-enabled hybrid workplaces. JD–R explains how ARL may function as an organizational resource in the presence of technological demands, whereas COR explains how such external resources may be associated with the development and preservation of employees' internal coping resources. The study therefore connects organizational resources, personal resources, and employee well-being within a unified framework rather than examining leadership and QWL solely as a direct relationship.

Finally, the study contributes to the emerging literature on human-centred leadership in the age of AI. The findings do not suggest that AI substitutes human leadership; instead, they highlight the relevance of combining technological capabilities with resilience, empathy, adaptability, fairness, and human judgement. By conceptualizing ARL within this human–technology relationship and examining ICR as an explanatory mechanism, the study provides a foundation for further theoretical development of leadership in increasingly AI-enabled workplaces.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings also offer practical implications for public-sector management and digital transformation. Malaysian public agencies should consider leadership development programmes that integrate AI literacy with resilient and human-centred leadership competencies. Leaders need not only the ability to interpret AI-supported information but also the capability to communicate decisions clearly, exercise appropriate human judgement, manage uncertainty, and support employees experiencing technological change.

Public agencies should also strengthen employees' Internal Coping Resources through structured initiatives that develop self-efficacy, adaptability, emotional regulation, resilience, and confidence in managing digital work. Such initiatives may include targeted training, mentoring, peer-support mechanisms, digital-skills development, and employee well-being programmes. Importantly, these initiatives should complement rather than substitute supportive leadership practices. At the organizational level, hybrid-work policies should balance technological efficiency with employee well-being. Agencies should periodically review digital workloads, communication expectations, role clarity, employee autonomy, and the use of AI-supported monitoring or decision systems. Maintaining appropriate human oversight is particularly important in public administration, where fairness, accountability, transparency, and employee trust remain fundamental considerations.

Overall, the practical implication is that successful public-sector digital transformation should not be assessed solely through technology adoption or operational efficiency. Leadership capability, employee psychological resources, and Quality of Work Life should be developed concurrently if AI-enabled hybrid work is to remain sustainable over time.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, the cross-sectional research design limits conclusions regarding changes in ARL, ICR, and QWL over time. Future studies could employ longitudinal designs to examine whether the relationships identified in this study remain stable as AI adoption becomes more mature. Second, the study focuses on Malaysian public-sector employees, and the findings should therefore be interpreted within this institutional context. Comparative research across public and private sectors or across different national settings could provide further evidence regarding the generalisability of the proposed model.

Future studies may also examine additional psychological and organizational mechanisms associated with AI-enabled leadership, including psychological safety, trust in AI, technostress, digital self-efficacy, and perceived organizational support. Furthermore, qualitative or mixed-method research could complement the present quantitative findings by examining employees' experiences of AI-augmented leadership in greater depth. Such extensions would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how human leadership and artificial intelligence can coexist in ways that support sustainable employee well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between AI-Augmented Resilient Leadership (ARL) and Quality of Work Life (QWL) among Malaysian public-sector employees, with Internal Coping Resources (ICR) positioned as a mediating mechanism. Based on data from 351 employees, the findings demonstrate significant positive relationships among ARL, ICR, and QWL and indicate that ICR partially mediates the relationship between ARL and QWL. These findings highlight the importance of considering both organizational leadership resources and employees' psychological resources when examining work experiences in AI-enabled hybrid environments.

The study contributes theoretically by integrating the Job Demands–Resources model and Conservation of Resources theory to explain how organizational and personal resources operate within technology-intensive working environments. In particular, the findings suggest that the relationship between AI-supported leadership and employee well-being cannot be understood solely through technological capability. Human-centred leadership and employees' capacity to cope with changing demands remain important components of sustainable digital transformation.

From a practical perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of developing public-sector leaders who can combine AI literacy with resilience, empathy, fairness, and sound human judgement. At the same time, organizations should strengthen employees' coping resources and design hybrid-work practices that protect rather than undermine QWL. For Malaysia's public sector, this balance between technological advancement and human capability is particularly important as digital transformation continues to reshape public administration.

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