

# THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEES' TECHNOLOGY READINESS ON ADAPTIVE PERFORMANCE IN SMES

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## Article history

**Received date** : 15-1-2024

**Revised date** : 16-1-2024

**Accepted date** : 7-4-2024

**Published date** : 6-6-2024

## To cite this document:

Abdul Malek, S. K., Shahidan, A. N., Mat Nor, N. & Ibrahim, M. I. S. (2024). The Role of Employees' Technology Readiness on Adaptive Performance in SMEs. *International Journal of Accounting, Finance and Business (IJAFB)*, 9 (55), 1 - 10.

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**Abstract:** *The present study aimed to examine the impact of technology readiness on adaptive performance in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A sample of 30 MySTEP employees from various departments in SMEs was chosen for the study. The technology readiness index scale developed by Parasuraman and the adaptive performance survey designed by Pulakos were used. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS v27 through a quantitative approach. The results revealed there was a significant correlation between technology readiness and adaptive performance. Specifically, individuals exhibiting optimistic and innovative traits were more likely to effectively utilize technology, leading to higher adaptive performance in the workplace. Data analysis involved mean calculation, standard deviation, and Pearson's correlation coefficient. These findings suggest that organizations can enhance employee motivation and encourage effective technology use by implementing a flexible job structure. The implications of this research offer valuable insights for organizations aiming to optimize workforce performance and adaptability.*

**Keywords:** *Technology Readiness Index, Adaptive Performance, Optimism, Innovativeness*

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## Introduction

Information technology use could be highly beneficial for organizations in achieving their objectives (Gu et al., 2021). According to Turja et al. (2022), with the use of technology in workplaces, organizations have been able to increase their productivity and efficiency at a rapid pace. Moreover, according to Medium (2023), from managers to workers, everyone uses laptops, and with the help of smartphones, they remain posted with the happenings in and around their workplace. Every job role asks for a tool, service, or cloud to function. From HR professionals to developers to writers to designers, without technology, none of these workers can perform and achieve their goals (Kumar, 2023). This is clearly shown that by incorporating technology in workplace, employees can improve their knowledge, performance and achieve the organization's goals (Kassim et al., 2020). However, failing to adopt digitalization can lead to an organisation exiting the market (Ullah et al., 2021). Not only that, company failed to achieve the desired performance outcomes but also had to deal with serious incidents and reliability issues (Kersten et al., 2023). In other words, digitalization brings new challenges in the context of business ecosystems in developing countries like Malaysia specifically in terms of the nature and structure of companies and markets, raising concerns around jobs and skills, privacy, security, and social and economic interaction (Mubarak et al., 2019). Apart from that, digitalization demands that Small and Midsize Enterprises (SMEs) change their business strategies to adapt to the dynamic changes of the post-pandemic period (Melo et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is typically harder for SMEs to attract and retain skilled employees than it is for large companies due to their limited networks and capacity to identify and access talent as well as their generally lower pay and working conditions (Telukdarie et al., 2022). Hence, SME's facing global challenges need to adopt survival strategies and strategic choices to thrive in the competitive business environment (Gamage et al., 2019). As such, digital advancement is forcing companies to rethink their organizational models as well as their employees to gain a competitive advantage over the market in many industries (Telukdarie et al., 2022).

Transformation towards digitalization requires employees' readiness to adapt to the new job structure (Hutabarat et al., 2021). Employee technology readiness refers to their willingness to use new technology to achieve personal and professional goals (Abdul, 2022). Employees that have adaptable performance are able to think imaginatively about issue solving, successfully manage volatile situations, and cope well with pressure (Shet, 2023). When personnel are ready to adopt the use of digital technology, also known as technology readiness, adaptive performance can be improved (Ahmed et al., 2019). This new environment might alter employees 'vary depending on the underlying mechanism, such as personalities (Manisaligil et al., 2023). Therefore, this study is interested in examining motivator dimension in employees' technology readiness as independent variable and their adaptive performance. According to Luthans et al. (2006), psychological capital is viewed as a "person's positive psychological state of development" and is described as a set of personal resources that include resilience, self-efficacy, optimism, innovative and hope. Individuals with high psychological capital tend to have higher motivation and better working performance (Li et al., 2022). In addition, not many studies have focused on the SMEs technology adoption (Juniarti & Omar, 2021). Based on the problem statement above and existing research gap, this study hypothesized that that technology readiness can contribute to the increase in adaptive performance in facing digitalization and constantly changing working environments especially in SMEs.

## Literature Review

### Technology Readiness Index

Technology in the present world has made life more comfortable and convenient. It is inevitably integral to every modern workplace. An organization cannot survive without technology in this dynamic world, and thus the benefits of technology in the workplace should be properly understood and acknowledged (Newman & Ford, 2021). Parasuraman and Colby (2015) define technology readiness as the people's propensity to embrace and use new technologies for accomplishing goals, both at home and the workplace. According to Nugroho (2015), in discussing the acceptance of new technology the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) gives attention to individual-level factors, with focus on perception as the basis for deciding about the adoption of information technology. Readiness can also be measured using the Technology Readiness Index (TRI) developed by Parasuraman and Colby (2015). In their views, technology readiness is comprised of four dimensions: optimism, innovativeness, discomfort, and insecurity. Optimism and innovativeness contribute positively to technology readiness, while discomfort and insecurity inhibit technology readiness, and individuals can express both positive and negative feelings toward technology simultaneously (Parasuraman, 2000). Regardless of the mechanism used for its measurement, the readiness of the digital technologies that can drive digital transformation is subject to two key factors: availability of the technology and the ability of individuals to use it for improved performance. To shed more light, Technology Readiness (TR) is an individual-level characteristic that does not vary in a short term nor does it change suddenly in response to a stimulus (Ozşeker et al., 2022). Higher TR levels are correlated with higher adoption rates of cutting-edge technology, more intense usage of technology, and greater perceived ease in using technologies (Balakrishnan & Shuib, 2021).

### Optimism

Technological optimism, which indicates the individual's preparedness to use a technology (Chung et al., 2015), is associated with their attitude to use it. Individuals have a positive attitude toward the use of a technology when they believe that it will create positive impacts in relevant aspects, including in their workplace performance. Previous studies have indicated that this aspect can be a consistent predictor for adopting technologies (Gilly et al., 2012). Similarly, technology pioneers rarely consider new technologies as complex or beyond their understanding. Such users are likely to regret losing the opportunity to explore new technologies (Karahanna et al., 1999). Therefore, such individuals have a more favourable attitude toward using a particular technology. A strong level of optimism to increase Information Technology (IT) knowledge and skills is a promising foundation for human thriving in this global-digitalisation era (Mykhailenko et al., 2022). Additionally, technology optimism can impact people's attitudes remarkably (Jeng et al., 2022). People who are ready to explore new technologies are more willing to accept the Internet of Things (IoT) (Tun et al., 2021). New technologies rarely seem complicated or beyond the understanding of technology pioneers. Moreover, users who are denied in terms of opportunity to experiment with new technologies are likely to regret it later (Almaiah et al., 2022). Optimism towards Information Technology (IT) at work is well-aligned with general technology acceptance by Dwivedi et al. (2017) and increasing levels of human-machine interdependence in digitalised work environments (Blayone & Van Oostveen, 2020). Maestre (2019), discovered that active and adaptive coping is positively related to optimism, which contributes to better adjustment. In contrast, they found that avoidance maladaptive

coping is negatively associated with optimism (Dong & Xu, 2022). More recently, Miranda and Cruz (2022) found that optimism directly predicts adaptive coping in incoming college undergraduates. Optimism is a stable and cognitive personality dimension reflecting individuals generalized positive expectations about the future (Carver et al., 2010). It appears that optimists are more inclined to take action during stressful circumstances, making optimism highly relevant to adaptive coping (Demirtas, 2020). Previous research has also demonstrated that optimistic individuals tend to emphasize positive aspects of stressful events, feeling less stressed due to their active and confident approach to challenges (Arslan & Yildirim, 2021).

**Hypothesis 1:** *There is a significant relationship between technology readiness (optimism) and adaptive performance*

### **Innovativeness**

Innovation, technology, and advancements in information and communication technologies have affected every facet of human life as it brings incremental changes to the economy (Setiawan et al., 2021). The general approach conceives innovativeness as a psychological construct or individual characteristic that shapes an individual's disposition toward newness regardless of the kind of innovation (Aldahdouh et al., 2020). Lu et al. (2018) described user innovativeness as the extent to which a person is willing to experiment with new technology. User open innovation can be accelerated by optimizing the use of external knowledge and information. Meanwhile, Hu et al. (2019), describe user innovation as the level of individual acceptance of new products, new technologies, or new services. The readiness to accept the presence of new technology is the main driving factor for technology adoption. The user innovativeness in this research is defined as an intention to try new technologies, to be a pioneer in using the latest technology, and a willingness to experiment with Fintech services. Previous research has explained that user innovativeness has a positive relationship with technology adoption (Usai et al., 2021). In the same line, most people tend to consider digital technologies as a magic ingredient that may amplify the innovation capabilities of firms (Nambisan et al., 2017; Urbinati et al., 2020). Various studies have assessed the relationship between the general innovativeness and actualized innovative behavior (Arts et al., 2011; Bartels & Reinders, 2011; Im et al., 2003; Jin, 2013; van Rijnsoever & Donders, 2009). For instance, the study by Arts et al. (2011), involved the meta-analysis of 77 studies concerning consumer innovativeness and its correlates. Their study confirmed that general innovativeness is a positive predictor of innovative behavior. In the educational context, several studies have showed the positive impact of general innovativeness in terms of predicting technology usage. While study of Subagja et al. (2022), showed positive and significant evidence between the role of social media utilization and innovativeness on SME performance. Based on the previous literature, the hypothesis proposed is as follows:

**Hypothesis 2:** *There is a significant relationship between technology readiness (innovativeness) and adaptive performance*

### **Adaptive Performance**

Individual's adaptive performance is among the prominent behaviours underlined as necessary for an organisation to function effectively (Bienkowska & Tworek, 2020). Research of Pulakos et al. (2000), discuss several dimensions in adaptability that employees go through to face various changes in the workplace. The adaptability dimensions that have

been discussed include: the capability to control emergency situations during crises; the ability to handle work pressure; the ability to engage in creative problem solving; the capacity to deal with volatile and unpredictable work situations; and demonstrable interpersonal adaptation, cultural adaptation and physically-oriented adaptation (Pulakos et al., 2000). The pace of change and social acceleration in society has put continuous pressure on organisations to be agile and efficient (Miceli et al., 2021). Hence, the adoption and use of technology have nowadays become imperative in both society and business in order to remain relevant and competitive. With that, continuous technological developments and digital working have triggered changes in work processes (Machteld et al., 2020). With this regard, it seems essential for organisations and individuals to understand the steps or ways to boost their employees' positive growth and abilities i.e. Adaptive Performance in order to meet the demands of new environments (Marques et al., 2019). Hence, employees' capability to adapt to changes in the high-technology job design requires readiness and willingness of a flexible employee (Kane, 2019). Changes in work environments that are in line with technology changes have initiated the concept of technology adaptability among employees (Okkonen et al., 2019). Past studies have found that employees with a positive perception towards the utilisation of technology can adapt to new technical skills better (Caffaro et al., 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how employee adaptive performance can be improved, especially in such a way that learning new technologies will enable them to relate to their job structure within this digitalisation era.

### **Technology Readiness and Adaptive Performance**

The rapid adoption of digital technology has brought forth new challenges, necessitating adjustments in organizational culture, technology infrastructure, and job structures (Alamsjah & Yunus, 2022). The biggest challenge of SMEs during digitalization is digital skill management and appropriate strategies to deal with dynamic changes so that SMEs adaptive performance can be improved (Rozak et al., 2023). Therefore, in order to succeed the bonding between customers and stakeholders, SMEs must be able to involve themselves and contribute in utilizing social media to access relevant information as much as possible so that they can achieve organizational performance. Technology readiness can be viewed as a mindset overview produced by mental signals that determines the tendencies of an individual's behavior to utilize new technology in their life and work (Parasuraman, 2000). Technology readiness comprises of four components, namely: optimism, innovativeness, discomfort, and insecurity, which are then categorized under a two-dimensional construct, i.e., motivators (innovativeness, optimism) and inhibitors (insecurity, discomfort) (Parasuraman & Colby, 2015). Dimensions that motivate are when individuals feel optimistic and more innovative with the presence of technology. Meanwhile, dimensions that hinder are when individuals feel uncomfortable and unsafe with the use of technology. People that are optimistic tend to think that technology can help them much when it comes to working, whether they are doing it for a living or for a business (Parasuraman, 2000). Optimism can help people create greater trust in technology, perceived ease of use and usefulness (Wang et al., 2016). Although Parasuraman (2002), explained that technology readiness includes the two-dimensional construct, some studies have used multi-dimensional or unidimensional perspectives (Blut & Wang, 2020). Additionally, innovative people want to learn more about new technologies, look at them from the positive side and more easily manage the uncertainties that technology can bring (Hajiyev & Chang, 2017). Innovative people are more willing to adopt and try new technologies, compared to people characterized by a low level of innovativeness (Shin et al., 2021). Therefore, based on the positive dimension of technology readiness, which is to motivate employees'



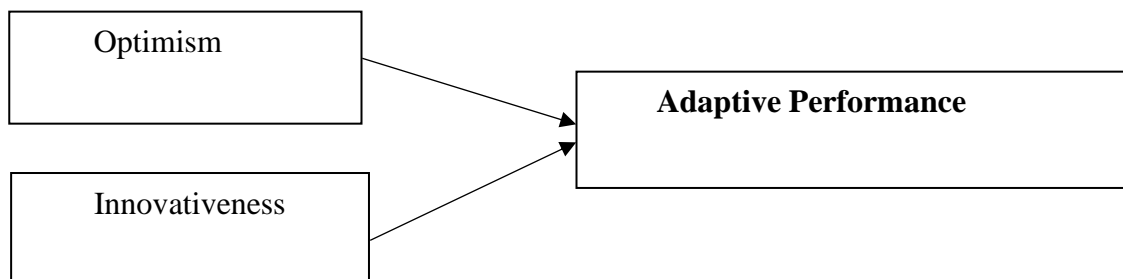
tendency to utilize the latest technology, and a review of past studies about adaptive performance, this study proposes that an empirical study is conducted to test:

**Hypothesis 3:** *There is a significant relationship between technology readiness (motivator) and adaptive performance*

### Proposed Research Framework

A complete model is suggested to investigate the links between the following variables: Technology Readiness Index (TRI) and Adaptive Performance. This model was developed on the basis of a literature review that was carried out. In this model, TRI was viewed as independent variables, whereas Adaptive Performance is the one that is considered to be the dependent variable.

### Technology Readiness Index



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model Proposed Research Propositions**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between the technology readiness index (TRI) and adaptive performance (AP) among MySTEP employees in SMEs. Malaysia's Short-Term Employment Programme (MySTEP) is one of the government initiatives designed to offer short-term employment opportunities (contracts) across various ministries, SMEs, and strategic partners. This program is aimed explicitly at unemployed Malaysians with bachelor's degrees, irrespective of their academic backgrounds, seeking career growth. In essence, MySTEP is one of the Malaysian government's commendable initiatives aimed at increasing job opportunities, providing work experience, and enhancing the marketability of its citizens (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2022). In the fast-transforming field of information technology that exists today, businesses are faced with the difficulty of training newly hired members workforce with the abilities and mentality necessary to effectively adapt to the ever-changing requirements of their jobs. The purpose of this study is to investigate how technology readiness, as evaluated by TRI, affects their adaptive performance in SMEs. The purpose of this study is to provide HR managers and organisational leaders with valuable insights that will allow them to design strategies that foster a technologically savvy and adaptable workforce, which will ultimately lead to improved performance and productivity in SMEs which were using information technology in their operation. On the basis of the discussion following research proposition is proposed:

**Hypothesis 1:** *There is a significant relationship between technology readiness (optimism) and adaptive performance*

**Hypothesis 2:** *There is a significant relationship between technology readiness (innovativeness) and adaptive performance*

**Hypothesis 3:** *There is a significant relationship between technology readiness (motivator) and adaptive performance*

### Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach using Google Forms, an online survey to send questionnaires to respondents. This approach was chosen because it is an online platform that integrates people from different places with flexible time. The population of this study consists of 52 MySTEP employees in SMEs. As many as 50 sets of questionnaires were sent to prospective respondents via Google Form and 42 sets of questionnaires are returned with complete answers and further analyzed which means that the response rate is 84%. After collecting data from the questionnaire that has been distributed, the authors collect the results in Microsoft Excel which will later be transferred to SPSS to process and develop this research. The data analysis used includes descriptive analysis and Pearson correlation.

### Pilot Study

The conceptual framework discussed in this study presents several broad concepts based on existing literature reviews of technology readiness and adaptive performance. In order to gauge the practicality of using the framework to aid researchers in examining adaption of technology among SMEs employees, a pilot study was conducted. Pilot studies are considered an appropriate first step for testing the adequacy of research tools and analysis techniques. The developed questionnaire has been distributed to 52 MySTEP employees in SMEs. This pilot study aims to provide necessary information not only for calculating the sample size, but also for assessment of all other aspects of the main study, minimizing unnecessary effort from the researchers and participants, as well as the dissipation of research resources.

**Table 1: Correlation Test for Technology Readiness and Adaptive Performance**

Hypothesis	Relationship	p-value	Pearson Correlation	Decision
H1	Optimism ->Adaptive Performance	<0.05	0.539	Moderate
H2	Innovativeness ->Adaptive Performance	<0.05	0.746	Strong
H3	Technology Readiness Index (Motivator) ->Adaptive Performance	<0.05	0.679	Moderate

### Results

Result of correlation between variables as shown in table 1 indicated there is a significant relationship in technology readiness index (optimism and innovativeness) and adaptive performance since all the *p-value* perceived are lower than .05. The table also represents Spearman's Rank Order Correlation for H1 at 0.539 (*p-value* <0.05). That was a moderate positive correlation between optimism and adaptive performance. Secondly, result for H2 indicated at 0.746 (*p-value* <0.05). That was a strong positive correlation between innovativeness and adaptive performance. While for H3 is at 0.679 (*p-value* <0.05). That was a moderate positive correlation between technology readiness index (motivator) and adaptive performance.

## Conclusion

In today's rapidly evolving digital transformation landscape, organizations face the challenge of equipping their workforce with the skills and mindset to adapt effectively to technological advancements and dynamic work demands. Understanding how technology readiness and adaptive performance holds significant implications for HR managers and organizational leaders seeking to foster a highly engaged and adaptable workforce. The examination in this study into the connection to technology readiness index and adaptable performance among MySTEP employees' bears promise in terms of its potential to contribute to the knowledge of factors that influence employees' adaptability in the information technology sector. Organisations may empower their workforce to handle uncertainties, innovate, and achieve sustained success in the dynamic and competitive business by developing adopting technological readiness. This is one way that organisations can empower their workforce. It is anticipated that the results of this research study will throw light on the significant role that plays in encouraging adaptive performance among employees. Employers will have a better understanding of how their adaptability to the constantly shifting to digitization landscape is influenced by their employees' positive views towards technology preparedness. These insights can be utilised by HR managers and organisational leaders in order to build targeted interventions and strategies to improve work engagement and enhance the adaptability of their workforce.

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