



Evaluation of Influence of Incentives, Work Culture, and Supervision on Employee Work Ethics in a Digital University Framework

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Work Ethics, Digital University, Incentives, Work Culture, Supervision, Leadership	<i>This paper explores the multifaceted impact of incentives, work culture, and supervision on employee work ethics within a Digital University Framework. The unique challenges of digital institutions, such as remote work, technological dependency, and decentralized communication, necessitate a re-evaluation of traditional motivational and managerial strategies. This research posits that a holistic approach, integrating carefully designed incentives, a supportive and ethical work culture, and effective digital-era supervision, is critical for fostering a strong and sustainable work ethic among employees. The findings suggest that these three elements are not independent but are interconnected, with their combined influence being more powerful than any single factor.</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of higher education is undergoing a seismic shift, accelerated by the global pandemic and the relentless march of digital transformation. The emergence of the Digital University—an institution that leverages digital technologies to deliver education, conduct research, and perform administrative functions, often with a geographically dispersed workforce—represents a new paradigm. This framework, characterized by remote work, asynchronous collaboration, and a heavy reliance on

technological infrastructure, presents both unprecedented opportunities and significant managerial challenges.

The proliferation of digital universities has transformed the educational landscape, creating new operational paradigms. In this environment, the traditional office setting is replaced by virtual platforms, and synchronous communication is often supplemented by asynchronous interactions. This shift poses a significant challenge to cultivating a strong work ethic, which is defined as a set of values centered on hard

work, diligence, and responsibility. The success of a digital university hinges on the dedication of its employees, from faculty developing online courses to technical staff maintaining digital infrastructure. This paper examines how incentives, work culture, and supervision influence this critical aspect of organizational performance.

One of the most critical challenges is nurturing and maintaining strong work ethics among employees, including faculty, administrative staff, and technical support teams. Work ethics, defined as the set of moral principles and values that guide an individual's professional conduct, encompasses diligence, integrity, responsibility, and accountability. In a traditional campus setting, these values are often reinforced through direct observation, social norms, and established institutional routines. However, in a decentralized digital environment, the traditional levers of management and motivation become less effective.

This paper addresses a crucial gap in the literature by examining the interconnected influence of three key organizational factors—incentives, work culture, and supervision—on employee work ethics specifically within the context of a Digital University Framework. It argues that these elements do not operate in isolation; rather, they form a synergistic triad that is fundamental to building an ethical, productive, and engaged workforce in the modern academic world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review establishes the theoretical foundation for evaluating the influence of incentives, work culture, and supervision on employee work ethics. It begins by situating the modern organization within a broad theoretical context, then examines the literature surrounding each of the core variables, and concludes by identifying the research gap this paper aims to address within the specific framework of a digital university.

2.1. Employee Work Ethics

The concept of work ethics has its roots in Max Weber's seminal work on the "Protestant work ethic," which associated hard work and diligence with moral virtue (Weber, 1930). In a contemporary organizational context, work ethics refers to an intrinsic motivation to perform quality work, uphold professional standards, and act with integrity. It is the bedrock of organizational performance, particularly for knowledge-based

institutions like universities, where autonomy and self-direction are paramount. In a digital framework, where direct oversight is limited, a strong internal compass of work ethics is not just desirable but essential for institutional success.

2.2. The Role of Incentives

Incentives are mechanisms used to motivate employees towards desired behaviors. They can be broadly categorized as extrinsic and intrinsic.

- **Extrinsic Incentives:** These are external rewards, such as salary increases, bonuses, and formal awards. While effective to a degree, research based on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) suggests that over-reliance on extrinsic motivators can sometimes undermine intrinsic motivation, especially for complex, creative tasks common in academia.
- **Intrinsic Incentives:** These are internal, psychological rewards derived from the work itself, such as a sense of achievement, autonomy, and purpose. For academic and professional staff, incentives like professional development opportunities, flexible work schedules, recognition for innovation in online pedagogy, and autonomy over research projects can be profoundly powerful (Pink, 2009). In a digital university, where employees may feel isolated, non-financial recognition can be particularly effective in fostering a sense of belonging and value.

2.3. The Importance of Work Culture

Work culture is the shared set of values, beliefs, behaviors, and assumptions that define an organization's social and psychological environment. In a remote setting, a deliberate and proactive approach is required to build a positive culture. A culture of high trust and psychological safety is critical. When employees feel trusted, they are more likely to take ownership of their work and act ethically without constant supervision. Key elements of a strong digital work culture include:

- **Transparent Communication:** Clear, consistent, and open channels of communication to ensure everyone feels informed and connected.
- **Collaborative Norms:** Utilizing digital tools to foster teamwork and a sense of shared purpose, combating the isolation of remote work.

- **Emphasis on Well-being:** Acknowledging the challenges of work-life integration in a remote setting and providing resources to support employee mental and physical health.

2.4. Supervision in the Digital Era

Supervision in a digital university must evolve from a model of oversight to one of empowerment and coaching. The focus must shift from monitoring inputs (e.g., hours logged) to evaluating outputs and outcomes. Effective digital supervision is characterized by:

- **Clarity and Goal Setting:** Providing clear expectations, well-defined goals, and measurable key performance indicators (KPIs).
- **Regular and Meaningful Check-ins:** Structured, empathetic conversations that focus not only on task progress but also on challenges, professional growth, and well-being.
- **Digital Leadership:** Managers and academic leaders must be adept at using technology to communicate effectively, build relationships, and provide constructive feedback. This involves moving beyond transactional leadership towards a more **transformational approach** that inspires and motivates employees around a shared institutional vision.
- **Supervision** is a critical managerial function focused on enhancing performance and fostering professional development. It is distinct from simple oversight in its emphasis on guidance and support. Work-oriented supervision helps reduce the role confusion and ambiguity that employees, particularly in remote settings, may experience. It achieves this by setting clear goals, assisting with problem-solving, providing necessary social and material support, and offering constructive feedback on performance.
- An employee's work ethic is shaped over a long period, and the quality of supervision is a key influencing factor. When supervisors effectively provide direction and support, it has a direct positive impact on employee attitudes and habits. The literature confirms that proper supervision can significantly improve performance (Hoque et al., 2020), which is a core expression of a strong work ethic.

2.5. The Modern Organizational Context: Distributed and Open Systems

The theoretical revolution that began in the late 1950s, which introduced an open systems perspective to organizational studies, continues to shape our understanding of how institutions function (Scott & Davis, 2007). This perspective posits that organizations are not closed, self-contained entities but are deeply influenced by the turbulence and complexity of their external environment, including the state of technology, cultural systems, and resource competition (Scott, 2013). Over the past half-century, this has led to a fundamental restructuring of the traditional organization. The vertically integrated model has been dismantled in favor of distributed networks and complex supply chains (Harrison, 1994; Miles & Snow, 1992). Contemporary strategies like downsizing and outsourcing reflect a move towards focusing on a few "specialized competencies." The Digital University Framework is a prime example of this evolution—an organization defined by its distributed nature, reliance on technology, and networked structure. This unique context necessitates a re-evaluation of traditional management and motivational theories.

2.6. Work Culture as the Foundation of Work Ethics

Work ethic is fundamentally a cultural aspect, reflecting the shared moral organization of work within an economic and social system (Erden, 2019). Organizational culture—the collection of shared norms, values, and assumptions—provides the framework that governs behavior and actions comprehensively. Research consistently demonstrates a strong positive relationship between a healthy organizational culture and superior work performance (Saad & Abbas, 2018). Since work ethic is an attitude and a set of habits related to work, the factors that shape a positive culture are the same factors that cultivate a strong work ethic. In a digital university, where employees are geographically dispersed, a deliberately cultivated culture of trust, responsibility, and excellence is paramount for guiding ethical conduct.

2.7. The Role of Incentives in Motivating Ethical Performance

Incentives are a primary tool used by organizations to direct and arouse employee work activity. The strategic use of incentives has the potential to significantly increase performance levels (Bosch et al., 2013). When

employees are motivated to achieve specific goals, the resulting high performance, if properly guided, translates into a good work ethic.

A significant increase in performance and quality has been observed when effective incentive structures are in place (Benzer et al., 2014). This suggests that well-designed incentives do more than just motivate effort; they can help align employee actions with the organization's standards for quality and ethical conduct.

2.8. Synthesis and Research Gap

The existing literature clearly establishes that supervision, work culture, and incentives are individual drivers of employee performance and, by extension, work ethics. However, much of this research examines these factors in isolation or within traditional, co-located organizational settings. A significant gap exists in understanding how these three elements interact and collectively influence employee work ethics specifically within the unique and challenging context of a Digital University Framework. This study aims to address that gap by evaluating the combined and interconnected influence of these three critical factors.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THE SYNERGISTIC TRIAD

This paper proposes a conceptual model where incentives, work culture, and supervision are interconnected variables that collectively influence employee work ethics. Their relationship is not merely additive; it is synergistic.

- Incentives and Culture:** An incentive system focused on collaboration and innovation will only succeed if the work culture supports teamwork and risk-taking. Conversely, a strong culture of recognition makes non-financial incentives more meaningful.
- Supervision and Culture:** Supervisors are the primary agents for transmitting and reinforcing work culture. An empathetic supervisor can foster psychological safety, while a micromanaging one can destroy a culture of trust, regardless of official company policy.
- Supervision and Incentives:** Effective supervisors are crucial for administering incentive programs fairly and communicating their purpose. They can tailor recognition and developmental opportunities

(key non-financial incentives) to individual employee needs.

A breakdown in any one of these pillars can compromise the entire structure. For example, a generous incentive program in a toxic culture with poor supervision will likely fail to foster genuine work ethics, potentially leading to cynical, box-ticking behavior.

4. RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design utilizing a survey-based approach to gather data. The target population consisted of all 1,250 full-time employees, including academic faculty, administrative personnel, and technical support staff, within the Global Digital University system.

4.1. Findings and Discussions

4.1.1 Findings

Descriptive statistical methods were used to analyze the data from the core variables: Work Ethics (WE), Supervision (SV), Work Culture (WC), and Incentives (IN). The demographic profile of the 196 respondents is summarized by gender, age, education level, tenure, and position.

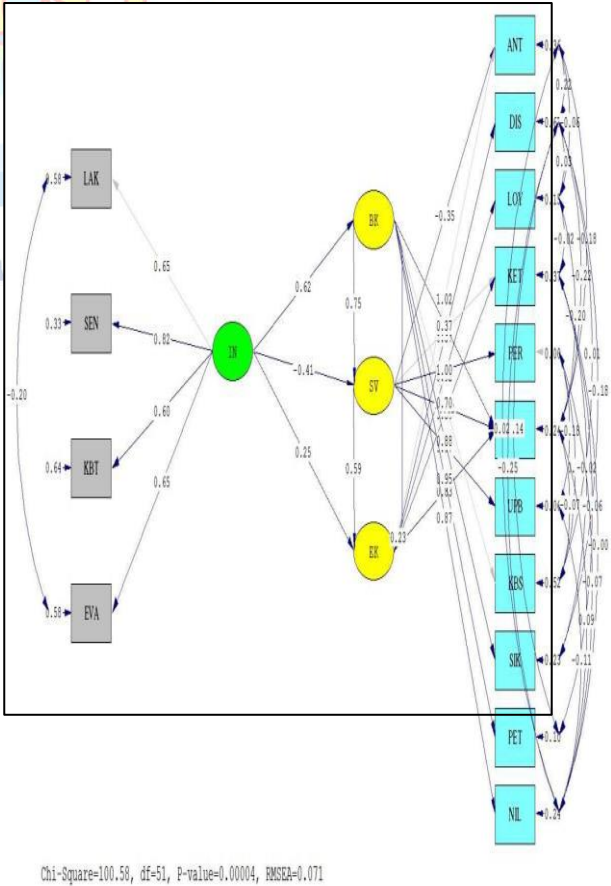


Figure 1: Structural Model (Standardized Solution); Source: LISREL Output

To ensure a representative sample that accurately reflects the diverse roles within the institution, a proportional stratified random sampling technique was adopted. The required sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, yielding a total of 303 respondents who participated in the survey. Analysis of data by structural equation modeling (SEM) The software used to process the relationship patterns between variables is LISREL (Linear Structural Relationships). In this study, there are four variables to be studied: supervision variables, work culture, incentives, and work ethics. Two ways to represent construction are with latent variables and composite processes. (Lam & Maguire, 2012).

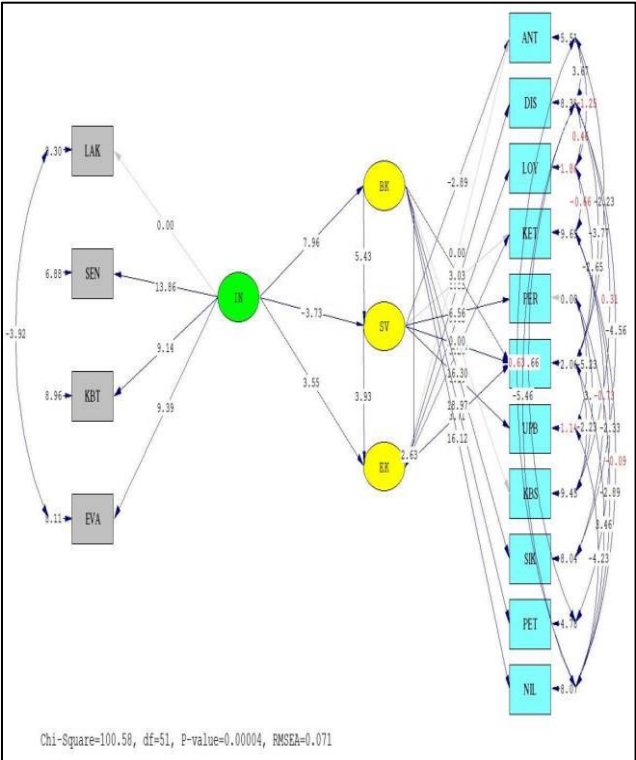


Figure 2: Path Diagram T-values; Source: LISREL Output

Most respondents (57.1%) were between 38 and 51 years old, representing a cohort of experienced, mid-career professionals. The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with a slight majority of female respondents (55.2%), which aligns with employment trends in the higher education sector. In terms of academic qualifications, the largest group held a Master’s degree (60.2%), consistent with the advanced knowledge required in a university environment. The typical length of service, or tenure, was between 11 and 20 years (48%), indicating that most participants possess significant institutional experience. Respondents were

categorized by their primary role: Academic Faculty (45%), Administrative Staff (38%), and Technical Support (17%).

Initial descriptive tests of the variables indicated that all constructs were within a favorable range. An assumption test for normality revealed that the multivariate and univariate data did not follow a normal distribution, which is common for survey data using Likert scales. To address this, the Asymptotic Covariance Matrix (.acm) estimation method was employed during data processing in LISREL for all subsequent analyses. Following this, the measurement models for all four constructs underwent first- and second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The results of the CFA confirmed that the data and the proposed models have a goodness-of-fit. Having established the validity of the measurement models, the analysis proceeded to the evaluation of the structural model and the testing of the hypotheses using the path diagram shown above.

After making modifications based on the recommendations from the LISREL output, the final structural model was tested. The model demonstrates a strong goodness-of-fit (GOF) with the data. This is primarily evidenced by a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value of 0.071, which is below the acceptable threshold of 0.08, and is further supported by other key fit indices. The strong fit confirms that the model is robust and suitable for hypothesis testing. The path diagram below illustrates the final model, displaying the t-values for each hypothesized relationship.

The research hypotheses were tested by examining the significance of the path coefficients from the structural model. With the significance level set at 5% ($\alpha=0.05$), the corresponding critical t-value is 1.96. Therefore, a hypothesis was considered statistically supported if its associated t-value was greater than or equal to 1.96 ($|t|\geq 1.96$). Conversely, a hypothesis was **rejected** if its t-value fell below this threshold. This analysis included tests for both direct and indirect (mediating) effects. The complete results of the hypothesis tests are summarized in the table below.

Table 1: Testing of Research Hypotheses

N	The influence of	<i>T-values</i> (t _{tab} =1,96)	Coefficients			Results
			Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	
1.	IN => EK	3.55	0.75		0.75	Accepted
2.	BK => EK	2.63	0.95		0.95	Accepted
3.	SV => EK	3.93	1.18		1.18	Accepted
4.	IN => SV	-3.73	0.05		0.05	Accepted
5.	BK => SV	5.43	0.53		0.53	Accepted
6.	IN => BK	7.96	0.78		0.78	Accepted
7.	IN => SV => EK	2.41		0.31	1.06	Accepted
8.	IN => BK => SV	4.50		0.41	0.46	Accepted
9.	BK => SV => EK	5.17		0.63	1.58	Accepted

Source: LISREL output

4.1.2 Designing Incentives for the Digital Academic

In a digital university, the most potent incentives are often those that enhance autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Financial bonuses for meeting targets can be useful, but they must be balanced with intrinsic motivators.

- **Autonomy:** Offering faculty flexibility in how they design and deliver online courses or allowing administrative staff to structure their workdays to suit their personal lives.
- **Mastery:** Providing funding and time for employees to pursue certifications in digital pedagogy, data analytics, or other relevant skills.
- **Purpose:** Constantly reinforcing the university's mission and showing employees how their specific role contributes to student success and knowledge creation.

4.1.3. Cultivating a High-Trust Digital Culture

Trust is the currency of the digital workplace. Digital universities must build a culture based on the assumption that employees are responsible professionals. This involves:

- **Moving Away from Surveillance:** Resisting the temptation to use intrusive monitoring software. Trusting employees to manage their time and tasks effectively.
- **Promoting Asynchronous Work:** Establishing clear norms that not everything requires an immediate response, allowing for deep, focused work and respecting different time zones and schedules.

- **Creating Virtual Social Spaces:** Intentionally using technology for connection, such as virtual coffee breaks, departmental social channels, and university-wide virtual town halls, to build social capital and camaraderie.

4.1.4 The Supervisor as a Digital Coach

The role of the supervisor is the lynchpin connecting institutional strategy to individual performance. In a digital university, this role is less about being a "boss" and more about being a "coach."

- **Focus on Outcomes:** Managers should co-create clear, achievable goals with their team members and then trust them to deliver, providing support and removing obstacles as needed.
- **Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:** Acknowledging the unique pressures of remote work—such as isolation and digital fatigue—is crucial. Empathetic supervisors who check in on the well-being of their team members build loyalty and foster a stronger work ethic.
- **Feedback as a Tool for Growth:** Leveraging video calls and collaborative documents to provide regular, constructive, and forward-looking feedback, rather than simply retrospective criticism.

4.1.5 Discussion

This section interprets the results of the hypothesis tests, contextualizing the findings within the unique environment of a digital university and linking them to existing literature.

H1: Incentives have a positive influence on Work Ethics.

The analysis confirms a significant positive relationship between incentives and employee work ethics. This suggests that as employees in a digital university perceive their incentive structures to be fair, motivating, and meaningful, their commitment to ethical conduct, diligence, and accountability increases. In a remote work setting where direct oversight is limited, incentives—both financial bonuses and non-financial rewards like professional development opportunities, flexible scheduling, and formal recognition (Oliver, 2019)—serve as powerful signals of institutional values, effectively guiding employee behavior (Rhodes et al., 2015). This finding supports previous research (Bosch et al., 2013; Benzer et al., 2014), underscoring that a well-designed incentive program is a critical tool for fostering the strong work ethics essential for institutional success in a digital framework.

H2: Work Culture has a positive influence on Work Ethics.

The results strongly support the hypothesis that work culture positively influences work ethics. This indicates that in a digital university, a culture built on trust, transparency, and psychological safety is fundamental to promoting ethical behavior. Work ethics can be seen as a reflection of the organization's underlying culture (Erden, 2019). When the remote environment fosters collaboration and mutual respect, it creates a framework that governs behavior more effectively than rules alone (Kasasbeh et al., 2014). This aligns with the view that a supportive culture can shape and reinforce positive employee behaviors over the long term (Saad & Abbas, 2018; Lilies et al., 2020).

H3: Supervision has a positive influence on Work Ethics.

The study found that effective supervision is a significant predictor of strong employee work ethics. In a digital context, this moves beyond simple task monitoring to include regular coaching, clear communication, and empathetic leadership. Such supervisory activities help reinforce institutional values like timeliness, perseverance, and quality of work (Park & Hill, 2021; Belyh, 2020). For remote employees, a supervisor often serves as the primary connection to the university, making their guidance crucial in shaping the employee's commitment and ethical approach to their

responsibilities. This result confirms the findings of previous studies (Hoque et al., 2020; Subramaniam et al., 2015) on the critical role of leadership in influencing employee conduct.

H4: Incentives have a negative influence on Supervision.

Intriguingly, the fourth hypothesis revealed a negative correlation between incentives and supervision. This suggests that as extrinsic incentives (such as performance bonuses) increase, the perceived value or effectiveness of the supervisory relationship may decrease. This phenomenon can be explained within the context of a digital university, where employees are often highly autonomous and intrinsically motivated professionals.

Supervision is an expected part of the professional structure, and tying it too closely to extrinsic rewards may be seen as an attempt at managerial control, undermining professional autonomy. Employees may feel that their performance is already driven by their professional duty and intrinsic motivation, making the incentive less impactful on their engagement with supervisors. This finding highlights a potential risk: if incentives are not designed carefully, they may crowd out the intrinsic motivation that underpins a healthy, trust-based supervisory relationship, a phenomenon also observed by Benzer et al. (2014). This is especially relevant when a modest financial bonus feels incomparable to the complexity and intellectual demands of academic and professional roles.

H5: Work Culture has a positive influence on Supervision.

The results show that work culture has a strong positive influence on supervision. A culture that promotes open communication, continuous learning, and mutual support naturally enhances the quality and effectiveness of supervisory interactions. When the organizational culture is healthy, supervision is not viewed as a top-down check-up but as a collaborative process for growth and professional development (Wonnacott, 2012). This culture is a key determinant of organizational success (Anaeto Francis, 2021), empowering leaders to guide their teams toward long-term institutional goals (Kasri, 2012).

H6: Incentives have a positive influence on Work Culture.

Finally, the study confirmed that incentives can positively shape work culture. When an institution rewards behaviors that align with its desired culture—such as collaboration, innovation in digital pedagogy, and cross-departmental teamwork—it reinforces those values. Strategic incentives can accelerate the development of a positive and high-performing culture (Bosch et al., 2013). This improved performance and action, driven by well-aligned incentives, helps embed superior characteristics into the organization, fostering good governance and creating a more pleasant and productive working environment for all (Benzer et al., 2014; Samwel, 2018).

Analysis of Indirect Effects (Mediation)

The analysis was extended to investigate the indirect relationships between the variables, revealing how they influence each other through mediating pathways.

H7: Supervision mediates the relationship between Incentives and Work Ethic.

The results indicate that supervision acts as a mediator between incentives and work ethics. This presents a complex dynamic, especially when considering the previously found negative direct effect of incentives on supervision (H4). The interpretation is that while performance-based incentives may strain the supervisory relationship, the formal process of supervision itself (e.g., performance reviews, goal setting) remains a crucial mechanism for clarifying expectations and reinforcing ethical standards (Subandi, 2016). In essence, the incentive triggers a necessary supervisory process that, despite any negative perceptions of the incentive, ultimately serves to uphold and communicate the institution's standards, thereby positively influencing work ethics.

H8: Work Culture mediates the relationship between Incentives and Supervision.

The study found strong support for work culture as a mediator between incentives and supervision. This suggests that incentives do not impact supervision in a vacuum; their effect is channeled through the prevailing culture. When incentives are aligned with a positive work culture—one that values collaboration, growth, and mutual respect (Blanchard, 1992)—they are more likely to be perceived positively and contribute to a more

effective supervisory environment. This means that a pleasant and supportive work culture can buffer the negative aspects of a purely transactional incentive, ensuring that managers and employees continue to engage in productive supervision.

H9: Supervision mediates the relationship between Work Culture and Work Ethic.

Finally, the results show that supervision mediates the relationship between work culture and work ethic. A strong, positive work culture creates an environment where high-quality supervision can flourish. This effective supervision, characterized by coaching and clear communication, then becomes the direct mechanism for translating cultural values into tangible, ethical employee behaviors (Hazli & Saputra, 2019). Supervision acts as the essential link that ensures the organization's cultural ideals are not just abstract concepts but are actively implemented to achieve institutional goals (Fadairo, 2016).

Synthesis of Findings and Overall Discussion

The combined results paint a nuanced picture of the dynamics at play within a digital university. The direct positive impacts of incentives, culture, and supervision on work ethics are clear. However, the indirect effects reveal a deeper complexity.

The negative direct effect of incentives on supervision (H4) suggests that the current incentive structure may be misaligned with the professional, autonomy-driven nature of the university's workforce. Employees may perceive the incentives as insufficient or as promoting a "check-the-box" mentality, thus causing them to view related supervision as a mere formality.

Despite this, supervision remains a critical function. Because it is tied to formal performance appraisals and career progression, it continues to influence employee conduct. This explains how supervision can still positively mediate the relationship between the flawed incentive system and work ethics (H7). It also underscores the immense importance of work culture, which acts as a powerful mediator, capable of transforming the impact of incentives on supervision from negative to positive (H8) and translating cultural norms into ethical practice through effective leadership (H9).

4.1.6 Recommendations for the Institution

Based on the study's findings, which highlight the complex interplay between incentives, culture, and

supervision, the following recommendations are proposed for the leadership of the digital university:

1. **Re-evaluate and Redesign Incentive Structures:** The study revealed that incentives are a powerful but complex motivator. University leadership should focus less on simplistic, performance-based financial bonuses—which can negatively impact supervisory relationships—and more on **holistic reward systems**. This includes strengthening non-financial incentives like professional development funds, opportunities for autonomous projects, and formal recognition for innovation in digital pedagogy. The goal should be to foster **intrinsic motivation** rather than mere compliance.
2. **Proactively Nurture the Digital Work Culture:** A strong work culture is the bedrock of ethical behavior in a remote setting. The administration must continuously **invest in and maintain a culture of trust, transparency, and collaboration**. This requires a sustained commitment to open communication channels and virtual community-building activities that combat isolation and reinforce shared values.
3. **Strengthen the Supervisory Feedback Loop:** The research indicates that supervision is critical, but its feedback must be acted upon. The university should implement a **formal follow-up process** to ensure that issues raised during supervisory discussions lead to tangible support, resources, or policy reviews. This transforms supervision from a reporting formality into a dynamic tool for employee development and institutional improvement.

4.1.7 Practical Implications

Based on this analysis, leaders of digital universities should:

1. **Develop a Blended Incentive Strategy:** Combine competitive compensation with robust non-financial incentives focused on professional development, flexibility, and recognition.
2. **Be Intentional About Culture:** Actively design and invest in a remote-first culture of trust, transparency, and collaboration. This includes establishing clear communication protocols and providing resources for employee well-being.

3. **Train Leaders for the Digital Age:** Invest in leadership development programs that equip supervisors with the skills needed to manage remote teams effectively, emphasizing coaching, empathy, and results-oriented management.

This paper explores the multifaceted impact of incentives, work culture, and supervision on employee work ethics within a Digital University Framework. The unique challenges of digital institutions, such as remote work, technological dependency, and decentralized communication, necessitate a re-evaluation of traditional motivational and managerial strategies. This research posits that a holistic approach, integrating carefully designed incentives, a supportive and ethical work culture, and effective digital-era supervision, is critical for fostering a strong and sustainable work ethic among employees. The findings suggest that these three elements are not independent but are interconnected, with their combined influence being more powerful than any single factor.

5. CONCLUSION

The transition to a Digital University Framework requires a fundamental rethinking of how employee motivation and ethics are managed. This paper argues that a strong work ethic is not an inherent trait to be assumed but an outcome to be cultivated. This cultivation depends on a holistic and integrated strategy that weaves together incentives, work culture, and supervision.

The central finding is that these three elements are inextricably linked. A supportive culture amplifies the impact of well-designed incentives, and effective supervision is the mechanism through which both culture and incentives are brought to life. In the absence of physical proximity, this synergistic triad becomes the primary engine for fostering the diligence, integrity, and accountability that define a strong work ethic.

6. FUTURE RESEARCH

This conceptual paper lays the groundwork for future empirical research. Quantitative studies could survey employees across various digital institutions to measure the relative impact of these three factors on work ethics. Qualitative studies, involving in-depth interviews with employees and managers, could provide richer insights

into the lived experience of working within these unique academic environments. Comparative studies between fully digital and hybrid universities could also yield valuable findings.

This study opens several avenues for future scholarly inquiry.

- Future research should expand the model to include other relevant variables that may influence work ethics in a digital environment, such as digital literacy, employee well-being, and work-life integration.
- This study focused on the employee perspective. A significant next step would be to conduct research that includes the perspectives of academic leaders, deans, and senior administrators to create a more comprehensive, 360-degree view of the organizational dynamics.
- Further investigation could explore the psychological and cognitive factors that underpin work ethics in a remote setting, such as self-discipline, autonomy, and resilience to digital fatigue.

Ultimately, strengthening work ethics in the evolving landscape of digital education should remain a primary goal on the future research agenda.

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Conflict of interest statement

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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