



When Technology is Not Enough: Understanding Employee Trust Formation Through Digital HR Practices and Inclusion Climate

***Luki Rita Mayawati**

Universitas Diponegoro,
Indonesia

Suharnomo

Universitas Diponegoro,
Indonesia

Ahyar Yuniawan

Universitas Diponegoro,
Indonesia

***Corresponding author:**

Luki Rita Mayawati, Universitas Diponegoro,
Indonesia.

✉ programdoctorilmuekonomi@gmail.com

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Abstract

Background: Despite increasing organizational investment in electronic human resource management (EHRM), technological advancement does not necessarily translate into stronger employee trust. This challenge is particularly relevant in multicultural workplaces, where employees' perceptions of fairness, support, and inclusion may shape how digital HR practices are experienced and interpreted.

Objective: This study examines employee trust formation in digitally mediated multicultural organizations by positioning electronic human resource management (EHRM) as an enabling organizational condition. It investigates how perceived organizational support (POS), perceived organizational justice (POJ), EHRM, and inclusion climate (IC) jointly shape employee trust and examines the mediating roles of EHRM and inclusion climate.

Methods: Cross-sectional survey data were collected from 477 academic and administrative employees across international schools in Indonesia and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

Results: POS and POJ were positively associated with EHRM and inclusion climate ($p < 0.001$). Both inclusion climate ($\beta = 0.260$, $p < 0.001$) and EHRM ($\beta = 0.192$, $p < 0.001$) were positively associated with employee trust, with inclusion climate demonstrating the stronger relationship. EHRM also positively predicted inclusion climate ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.001$). All proposed indirect and serial mediation pathways were significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that organizational support and justice are associated with employee trust through complementary digital and social pathways.

Conclusion: This study contributes to the HRM literature by advancing an employee-centered understanding of trust formation in digital workplaces. It shows that the effectiveness of EHRM depends on the broader organizational context within which employees experience and interpret HR practices, highlighting the complementary roles of digital systems and inclusive workplace experiences in shaping trust.

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INTRODUCTION

Building employee trust has never been easy, and the digital era has not made it easier. Disengaged and distrustful employees are associated with higher turnover, reduced performance, and significant losses in organisational productivity (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Kurtessis et al., 2017). In response to these pressures, organisations have rapidly accelerated the adoption of electronic human resource management (EHRM) designed to standardise HR processes, increase

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information accessibility, and foster perceptions of fairness and transparency (Bondarouk et al., 2017; Strohmeier, 2020). Despite these investments, however, employee trust has not always increased at the same pace as technological advancement. Concerns regarding organisational motives, fairness, transparency, and employee voice continue to persist in digital workplaces (Kong et al., 2026; Meijerink et al., 2021; Tenhiälä et al., 2024). This persistent gap presents a fundamental paradox for contemporary HRM: why do increasingly advanced digital HR systems fail to consistently generate employee trust?

Empirical evidence supports the urgency of this inquiry. Only 21% of employees across 28 countries expressed high trust in their organisational leadership, while the adoption of digital workplace platforms grew by over 40% between 2020 and 2023. Within the education sector specifically, international schools in Southeast Asia have experienced rapid digitalisation of HR processes, yet workforce retention remains a persistent challenge, with annual teacher turnover rates in international schools averaging 15–20%. These patterns suggest that the relationship between digital HR capability and employee trust warrants closer empirical examination, particularly in organisationally diverse settings where cultural heterogeneity may amplify interpretive variations in how employees experience digital HR practices.

Trust is a critical organisational resource that shapes how employees interpret organisational actions and respond to workplace experiences. Employees who trust their organisations are more willing to cooperate, share knowledge, and support organisational change (Akhlaq & Kiran, 2022; Men et al., 2022). Research grounded in organisational support and justice perspectives consistently demonstrates that employees are more likely to trust organisations they perceive as supportive and fair (Adamovic, 2023; Eisenberger et al., 2020; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Digital HRM research similarly suggests that EHRM can contribute positively by enhancing procedural consistency and organisational transparency (Bondarouk et al., 2017; Meijerink et al., 2021; Theres & Strohmeier, 2024). Yet these literatures have largely examined EHRM and trust in isolation from the social and organisational contexts in which digital HR practices are actually experienced. Despite growing calls for contextually grounded analyses of digital HRM outcomes (Bondarouk et al., 2017; Bondarouk, 2016; Zha et al., 2025), limited attention has been devoted to understanding how employees interpret EHRM practices when forming trust judgements.

EHRM encompasses the digital platforms, self-service portals, and algorithmic tools through which organisations deliver and communicate HR practices (Bondarouk et al., 2017; Meijerink et al., 2021). Unlike traditional HR delivery, EHRM makes HR processes systematically visible and accessible, enabling employees to evaluate the consistency, transparency, and fairness of organisational action (Meijerink et al., 2021). Yet existing research increasingly recognises that the relationship between EHRM and employee outcomes is not straightforward. The same digital practices may be interpreted as empowering or impersonal depending on the organisational context in which they are encountered (Yuniawan et al., 2025; Zha et al., 2025). This suggests that EHRM functions less as a direct source of trust and more as an enabling organisational condition whose effects on trust are substantially contingent on how employees experience the broader workplace environment.

Inclusion climate defined as employees' shared perceptions that all individuals are valued, respected, treated equitably, and encouraged to participate fully in organisational life (Nishii, 2013) offers a compelling yet underexplored explanation for how employees make sense of digital HR practices. Theoretically, inclusion climate shapes the interpretive lens through which employees evaluate organisational actions: in workplaces where employees feel genuinely included, organisational systems and practices are more likely to be perceived as supportive and trustworthy, whereas in climates characterised by exclusion or marginalisation, the same systems may generate suspicion or disengagement (Alshaabani et al., 2021; Rudnák et al., 2022). Importantly, in multicultural and diverse work settings such as international schools, a context in which inclusion climate takes on heightened significance, employees from varied cultural and professional backgrounds may differ considerably in how they evaluate the fairness and relevance of standardised digital HR processes (Dhanani et al., 2024; Rudnák et al., 2022). Despite the intuitive logic of this relationship, the mediating role of inclusion climate in linking EHRM to employee trust has not been examined. This omission limits understanding of how social environments shape the effects of digital HRM investment on employee outcomes.

To theorise the relationships among EHRM, inclusion climate, and employee trust, this

study draws on Open Systems Theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966). Open Systems Theory views organisations as interconnected systems in which employee outcomes emerge through interactions among organisational structures, processes, and social environments. From this perspective, trust is not viewed as a direct consequence of technological implementation but as an outcome associated with how employees interpret organisational experiences. EHRM therefore represents an organisational system through which HR practices become visible and accessible, whereas inclusion climate represents an important social environment through which those practices are experienced and understood by employees.

International schools provide a unique environment to explore the dynamics of trust among diverse teams. These organisations are characterised by high levels of workforce diversity, bringing together employees from different national, cultural, and professional backgrounds. At the same time, international schools increasingly rely on digital HR platforms to support communication, performance management, administrative processes, and employee services. This combination of extensive EHRM utilisation and workforce diversity creates conditions in which inclusion climate becomes particularly important in shaping employee interpretations of organisational practices. As such, international schools offer a contextually rich environment for understanding how digital HR systems and social workplace conditions jointly contribute to employee trust.

Accordingly, this study examines the direct relationships among perceived organisational support (POS), perceived organisational justice (POJ), electronic human resource management (EHRM), inclusion climate (IC), and employee trust (ET), as well as the independent and sequential mediation mechanisms through which POS and POJ are associated with employee trust via EHRM and inclusion climate, in international schools in Indonesia. Specifically, the study tests thirteen hypotheses encompassing direct associations (H1–H7), single-mediator indirect pathways (H8–H11), and serial mediation pathways through EHRM and inclusion climate (H12–H13), as formalised in the Digital–Inclusion Trust Ecosystem (DITE) integrative conceptual model. By integrating insights from trust research, digital HRM literature, and Open Systems Theory, the study seeks to advance understanding of how employee trust develops in increasingly digital and culturally diverse workplaces. More broadly, it responds to growing calls within HRM research to move beyond technology-centred explanations and develop a deeper understanding of how employees experience and interpret organisational practices in contemporary work environments.

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

Open Systems Theory

Open Systems Theory Katz (1966) views organisations as interdependent systems in which outcomes emerge from the interaction of structural, social, and behavioural elements rather than from any single organisational component. Applied to this study, employee trust is unlikely to be explained by digital HR practices alone but by how employees experience and interpret organisational conditions across multiple organisational subsystems. EHRM represents a formal digital subsystem through which HR practices are delivered, whereas inclusion climate reflects a socio-relational subsystem that shapes employees' workplace experiences. Perceived organisational support (POS) and perceived organisational justice (POJ) function as legitimacy-signalling conditions that influence how employees interpret both organisational practices and organisational intentions. From this perspective, employee trust tends to be positively associated with organisational conditions not simply from organisational arrangements themselves but from the meanings employees attach to those arrangements within a broader organisational context.

Fragmentation of the Literature: Digital HRM, Inclusion, and the Trust Puzzle

Recent research consistently suggests that EHRM enhances efficiency, accessibility, and service quality in HR processes (Hussein & Jaaffar, 2024; Myllymäki, 2021; Strohmeier, 2020). Yet evidence from digital and algorithmic HRM research indicates that similar technologies may be related with markedly different employee responses across organisations (Meijerink et al., 2021; Yuniawan et al., 2025). Inclusion research, meanwhile, reports consistent positive associations between inclusion, belonging, and employee experience Rees et al. (2025), while trust research identifies support and justice as important organisational signals (Adamovic, 2023; Shukla et al., 2026). These streams have largely evolved in parallel, providing limited understanding of how

digital HR practices and inclusive workplace conditions jointly shape employee trust. Table 1 summarises recent evidence and the gaps this study addresses

Table 1.

Recent Evidence on Digital HR, Inclusion and Trust Formation

Research Stream	Representative Studies	What We Know	What Remains Unclear
Digital HRM and EHRM	(Alshibly & Alzubi, 2022; Hussein & Jaaffar, 2024; Myllymäki, 2021; Nyathi & Kekwaletswe, 2024; Strohmeier, 2020)	EHRM enhances efficiency, accessibility, communication quality, HR service delivery, and organisational effectiveness. Digital HR increasingly functions as an organisational infrastructure rather than merely an administrative tool.	Why improvements in digital HR processes do not consistently translate into stronger employee trust and positive employee experiences remains insufficiently explained.
Algorithmic and Digital Management Research	(Meijerink et al., 2021; Yuniawan et al., 2025; Zha et al., 2025)	Digital and algorithmic systems can improve consistency, transparency, and decision quality, yet employee reactions vary considerably across organisations.	How employees interpret digital HR practices and why similar technological systems generate different attitudinal outcomes remains unclear.
Inclusion and Employee Experience Research	(Mor Barak et al., 2016; Nyathi & Kekwaletswe, 2024; Rees et al., 2025)	Inclusion strengthens belonging, participation, fairness perceptions, employee wellbeing, and workplace experience.	Inclusion has rarely been examined as a mechanism through which employees interpret and experience digital HR practices.
Trust and Organisational Signal Research	(Adamovic, 2023; Akhlaq & Kiran, 2022; Shukla et al., 2026)	Employee trust is related with organisational signals such as support, fairness, integrity, benevolence, and organisational intentions.	How organisational signals are translated into trust within digitally mediated and multicultural workplaces remains insufficiently understood.

Assumption Gap (This Study)	(This	Emerging digital and HRM, trust	Digital inclusion organisational support, and justice largely examined separate streams of research.	HRM, climate, and have been as separate streams of research.	How digital and social pathways jointly explain trust formation in multicultural workplaces through organisational support and justice remains unresolved.
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Taken together, existing research provides only a partial explanation of employee trust in contemporary organisations. Although support, justice, digital HR practices, and inclusion have each been associated with positive employee outcomes, considerably less is known about how these organisational conditions operate together when employees form trust judgements. Understanding trust formation therefore requires moving beyond isolated explanations and examining how employees interpret organisational signals across both digital and social workplace experiences.

Organisational Support and Justice as Antecedents of EHRM and Inclusion Climate

Organisational Support Theory suggests that employees develop positive attitudes toward organisational practices when they perceive that the organisation genuinely values their contributions and wellbeing (Eisenberger et al., 1996). Such perceptions shape employees' willingness to engage with EHRM systems: employees who believe that organisational actions are intended to support rather than control them are more likely to view digital HR practices as useful and beneficial (Meijerink et al., 2021; Theres & Strohmeier, 2024). Organisations perceived as supportive are also more likely to foster inclusion by encouraging participation and mutual respect.

Perceived organisational justice (POJ) represents a further important antecedent. When organisational processes are perceived as fair, employees are more likely to view both digital systems and inclusion initiatives as legitimate and trustworthy (Adamovic, 2023; Martins et al., 2023). Conversely, perceptions of unfairness can undermine employee acceptance even when formal systems are technically well-designed. Organisational support and justice thus reflect the broader legitimacy conditions through which employees make sense of organisational practices. Accordingly:

- H1: Perceived organisational support is positively related with EHRM.
- H2: Perceived organisational support is positively related with inclusion climate.
- H3: Perceived organisational justice is positively related with EHRM.
- H4: Perceived organisational justice is positively related with inclusion climate.

EHRM and Inclusion Climate as Organisational Conditions Related to Employee Trust

Employee trust reflects employees' confidence that organisational actions are reliable, fair, and aligned with their interests. In contemporary organisations, trust increasingly develops through employees' everyday experiences with both organisational systems and workplace relationships, making it unlikely to be explained by any single factor in isolation. While Open Systems Theory provides the overarching lens, perceived organisational support and perceived organisational justice function as legitimacy signals through which employees interpret organisational systems and organisational intentions.

EHRM is positively related with trust, in part because digital HR systems are associated with greater transparency, consistency, and accessibility in HR processes. When employees experience HR practices as clear, consistently applied, and easy to navigate, they tend to report stronger confidence in organisational decisions and leadership (Hussein & Jaaffar, 2024; Iqbal et al., 2019). In this sense, digital HR practices provide organisational signals that help employees evaluate the credibility of organisational actions.

At the same time, inclusion climate provides the relational context through which

employees experience belonging, participation, and recognition at work. Employees who feel respected, valued, and genuinely included tend to report more positive organisational attitudes and lower uncertainty regarding organisational intentions (De Simone et al., 2024; Nishii, 2013). Moreover, EHRM may contribute to more inclusive workplace experiences by facilitating equitable access to information, opportunities, and organisational resources. Accordingly, digital and relational experiences are better understood as complementary organisational conditions associated with employee trust. Therefore:

H5: Inclusion climate is positively related with employee trust.

H6: EHRM is positively related with inclusion climate.

H7: EHRM is positively related with employee trust.

Trust Formation Through Complementary Digital and Social Pathways

Based on the Open systems theory Katz (1966), this study argues that employee trust in multicultural digital organisations is unlikely to be adequately explained by any single organisational practice. Organisations function as interconnected systems, and employees' attitudes tend to reflect the overall pattern of structural, digital, and relational signals they encounter, rather than their response to any one isolated factor (Myllymäki, 2021; Strohmeier, 2020). From this perspective, trust may be understood as a construct that emerges in relation to how employees read the broader organisational message, rather than as a straightforward response to technology alone (Kong et al., 2026).

This interpretive dimension becomes particularly salient in multicultural workplaces. Employees from different cultural backgrounds may hold varying expectations regarding organisational relationships, communication styles, and conceptions of fairness (Adamovic, 2023; Rees et al., 2025). As a result, the same digital HR practice may be experienced and interpreted quite differently across a diverse workforce. Trust formation in such contexts is therefore likely to be associated not only with the systems an organisation deploys, but also with the relational environment in which those systems are encountered (De Simone et al., 2024; Nishii, 2013).

Building on these considerations, this study proposes that the relationships between perceived organisational support, perceived organisational justice, and employee trust are not only direct but may also operate indirectly, through employees' perceptions of EHRM and inclusion climate, either independently or in combination. EHRM represents the formal digital channel through which organisations communicate their commitments to support and fairness Hussein (2024) and Theres (2024), while inclusion climate reflects the relational environment within which employees interpret the meaning of those commitments (Mor Barak et al., 2016; Nishii, 2013). Where employees report positive experiences across both dimensions, trust tends to be more strongly present than where only one condition is perceived favourably (Kong et al., 2026; Men et al., 2022). Accordingly:

H8. EHRM mediates the relationship between perceived organisational support and employee trust.

H9. Inclusion climate mediates the relationship between perceived organisational support and employee trust.

H10. EHRM mediates the relationship between perceived organisational justice and employee trust.

H11. Inclusion climate mediates the relationship between perceived organisational justice and employee trust.

Extending this reasoning within the Digital–Inclusion Trust Ecosystem (DITE) integrative conceptual model, this study further proposes that the relationship between organisational legitimacy conditions and employee trust may be explained through serial mediation pathways. When employees perceive support and justice from their organisation, digital HR practices tend to be viewed as more authentic and coherent expressions of organisational intent (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Shukla et al., 2026). Where those EHRM perceptions are also accompanied by a sense of inclusion and equitable treatment, organisational trust appears more strongly present — reflecting the cumulative influence of both procedural and relational legitimacy signals (Meijerink et al., 2021; Nyathi & Kekwaletswa, 2024; Zha et al., 2025). Therefore:

H12 EHRM and inclusion climate serially mediate the positive relationship between perceived

organisational justice and employee trust

H13 EHRM and inclusion climate serially mediate the positive relationship between perceived organisational support and employee trust.

Figure 1. The Digital-Inclusion Trust Ecosystem (DITE): integrative conceptual model of trust formation in multicultural digital workplaces. Solid arrows indicate direct associations; dashed arrows indicate mediation pathways. H1–H13 correspond to hypothesised relationships. Grounded in Open Systems Theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966).

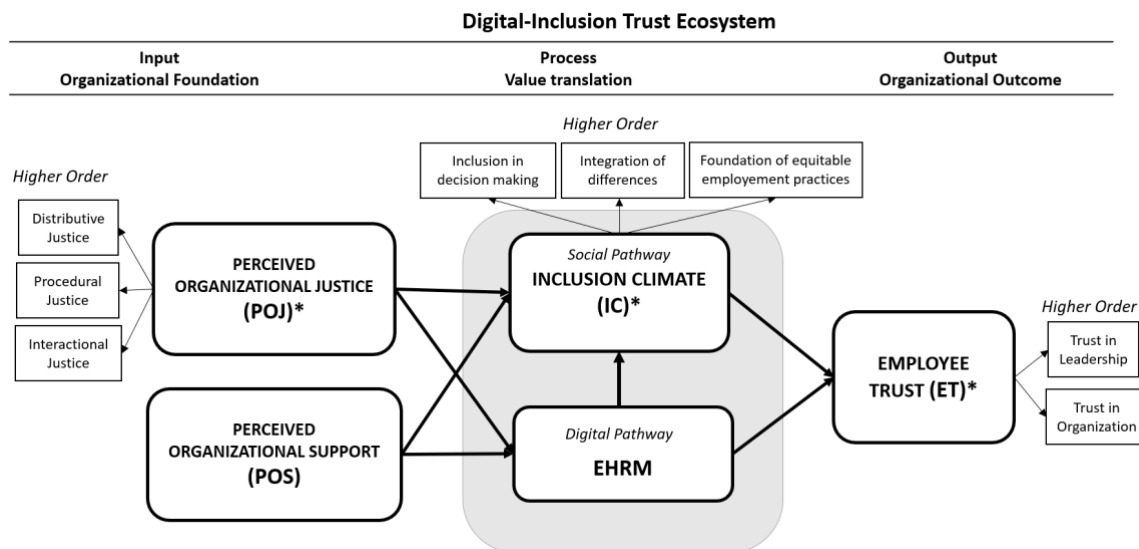


Figure 1. Research Framework

METHOD

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected via an online self-administered questionnaire distributed to employees of K–12 international schools throughout Indonesia through *Satuan Pendidikan Kerjasama* (SPK) professional networks. SPK is the national governmental agency licensing all international schools in Indonesia. Since individual schools treated employee numbers and profiles as internal data, a comprehensive sampling frame could not be constructed, and purposive sampling was employed.

Eligible respondents were required to meet two criteria: a minimum of one year of employment at their current institution and direct experience using the school's digital HR systems. Participation invitations were distributed through SPK-affiliated school principals and HR administrators, who forwarded the survey link to eligible employees, ensuring that all respondents possessed sufficient organisational experience and digital HR familiarity to respond meaningfully to the study constructs. Given that the target population included employees with diverse backgrounds, both English and Indonesian versions of the questionnaire were prepared. The translation into the Indonesian language was conducted through the procedure of back-translation (Beaton et al., 2000). The pilot study involved 30 respondents. The participation in the survey was completely voluntary, and anonymity was maintained throughout the survey.

Sample size adequacy was evaluated using the a priori sample size calculator for structural equation models Soper (2024), which implements the algorithm developed by (Westland, 2010). Based on a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.25$), statistical power of 0.80, five latent variables, 59 observed variables, and a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, the analysis indicated a minimum required sample size of 229 respondents. A total of 477 usable responses were obtained following screening for completeness and eligibility, substantially exceeding this threshold and providing adequate statistical power to examine all structural paths proposed in the model (Hair et al., 2022). Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the sample.

Table 2.

Demographic characteristics of the participants (N=477)

Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	212	44.4
	Female	265	55.6
Age	< 30 years	118	24.7
	30 – 45 years	297	62.3
	≥ 46 years	62	13.0
Position	Teacher / Academic Staff	321	67.3
	Administrative Staff	156	32.7
Years of Work Experience	< 5 years	143	30.0
	5 – 10 years	189	39.6
	≥ 11 years	145	30.4

All constructs were measured using previously validated scales and adapted to the context of international schools. A seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree") was used for all items.

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) was measured using eight items assessing the extent to which employees perceive the organisation as valuing their contributions and caring about their well-being, drawn from a validated scale. Eisenberger et al. (2023) and adapted for an educational context (Chen & Eyoun, 2021). An example item is: "My organisation values my contributions."

Perceived Organisational Justice (POJ) was assessed using 17 items capturing distributive, procedural, and interactional justice dimensions (Colquitt, 2001; Ghaderi et al., 2022; Martins et al., 2023). Example items include: "I feel that my job responsibilities are fair".

Inclusion Climate (IC) was measured using 15 items covering perceptions of equity, appreciation of differences, and collective participation (Adamovic, 2023). Example items include: "In this organisation, all employees are encouraged to contribute to decision-making regardless of their background".

Employee Trust (ET) was assessed using 12 items drawn from established models of organisational and leadership trust (Akhlaq & Kiran, 2022; Joseph & Winston, 2005; Men et al., 2022; Nyhan & Marlowe, 1997). Example items include: "My level of confidence that my supervisor will make well thought out decisions about his/her job is high".

Electronic Human Resource Management (EHRM) was measured using seven items covering employee self-service, electronic performance evaluation, digital payroll, social media recruitment, online training, HR administration, and digital HR communication (Iqbal et al., 2019). Example items include: "My organisation uses e-HRM for online training and learning."

The three higher-order constructs POJ, IC, and ET were estimated using the hierarchical component model (HCM) approach in line with PLS-SEM recommendations (Hair et al., 2022). The results confirmed that all measures met the required thresholds, providing sufficient evidence of reliability and validity to proceed with structural model assessment.

The analysis was conducted using the PLS-SEM approach implemented with SmartPLS 4. Factors influencing the use of the PLS-SEM over the covariance-based SEM included several aspects. *First*, the proposed structure contains higher order reflective constructs that include POJ, IC, and ET which were defined as second-order constructs, and thus the PLS-SEM method is known for its efficiency in latent variable analysis (Hair et al., 2022). *Second*, the PLS-SEM does not have the assumption of multivariate normality, which makes this approach suitable for organisational survey-based studies (Hair et al., 2022). *Third*, PLS-SEM suits well for both explanation and prediction tasks, hence providing the opportunity to assess the predictive relevance and significance of paths at once (Shmueli et al., 2019). *Fourth*, PLS-SEM shows comparable results to CB-SEM when complex mediation models with many mediators are present (Hair et al., 2022).

The research was carried out according to the suggested approach which includes two steps. First, reliability of indicators, internal consistency, convergence and discriminant validity of the measurement model were estimated. In the following step, standardised path coefficients (β), the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2 using PLSpredict), as well as bootstrapping with 5,000 samples to determine the significance of paths and mediation pathways were used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Common method bias

As data were collected from a single self-report source, common method bias (CMB) was assessed as a potential concern. Several procedural remedies were implemented. First, an automated online screening filter ensured that only eligible respondents could proceed to the main questionnaire. Second, demographic items were inserted between the screening section and the main constructs to create psychological separation. Third, the questionnaire followed the theoretical sequence of the proposed model, with antecedent variables (POS and POJ) positioned first, followed by mediating variables (EHRM and IC), and the outcome variable (ET) placed last, thereby reducing evaluative consistency between predictor and outcome items (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Fourth, attention-check filler items were interspersed at two strategic points after the longest predictor section (POJ) and immediately before the outcome variable (ET), to disrupt response set patterns and reduce demand characteristics. Post-hoc assessment using full collinearity variance inflation factor (FCVIF) values Kock (2015) ranged from 1.230 to 1.920, well below the threshold of 3.3, and all HTMT values remained below 0.85. These results suggest that CMB is unlikely to have materially influenced the findings.

Measurement model assessment

All constructs demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties (Table 3). Indicator loadings exceeded 0.70, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.70, and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, confirming indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was supported by the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios below 0.85 (Table 4). All VIF values remained below 5.0, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. Model fit was satisfactory, with SRMR = 0.033 (< 0.08) and NFI = 0.931 (> 0.90) (Table 5).

Table 3.

Measurement Model Assessment for First-Order and Second-Order Constructs

Construct	Dimension	Loading Range	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	VIF
POS	POS (8 items)	0.814–0.910	0.948	0.957	0.734	1.920
EHRM	EHRM (7 items)	0.835–0.914	0.950	0.959	0.770	1.821
POJ	Higher-order construct	0.899–0.918	0.898	0.936	0.830	1.577
	Distributive Justice (DJ-5 items)	0.856–0.908	0.930	0.947	0.781	
	Interactional Justice (IJ -7 items)	0.841–0.922	0.952	0.961	0.778	
	Procedural Justice (PJ - 5 items)	0.867–0.918	0.934	0.950	0.793	
IC	Higher-order construct	0.893–0.911	0.886	0.929	0.814	1.920
	Fair Employment and Equal Practices (FEPP-5 items)	0.868–0.920	0.937	0.952	0.799	
	Inclusive Decision Making (IDM-4 items)	0.871–0.912	0.907	0.935	0.782	
	Inclusive Organisational Diversity (IOD-6 items)	0.815–0.905	0.938	0.951	0.764	
ET	Higher-order construct	0.929–0.931	0.844	0.928	0.865	
	Trust in Leadership (TIL - 8 items)	0.846–0.926	0.960	0.966	0.780	
	Trust in Organisation (TIO- 4 items)	0.876–0.935	0.929	0.950	0.825	

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.

Table 4.*Discriminant Validity (HTMT) ratio*

Construct	EHRM	ET	IC	POJ	POS
Fornell-Larcker Criterion					
EHRM	0.877				
ET	0.596	0.930			
IC	0.582	0.635	0.902		
POJ	0.516	0.612	0.551	0.911	
HTMT Ratio					
ET	0.663	–			
IC	0.633	0.734	–		
POJ	0.557	0.702	0.618	–	
POS	0.584	0.630	0.615	0.469	–

Table 5.*Model Fit Assessment*

Index	Value	Threshold
SRMR	0.033	< 0.08
NFI	0.931	> 0.90

Structural model analysis

The model demonstrated satisfactory explanatory power (Table 6). POS and POJ jointly explained 40.3% of variance in EHRM ($R^2 = 0.403$), while POS, POJ, and EHRM explained 47.9% of variance in inclusion climate ($R^2 = 0.479$). The model explained 56.1% of variance in employee trust ($R^2 = 0.561$), indicating substantial explanatory capability. Effect size analysis revealed that POS exerted the strongest influence on EHRM ($f^2 = 0.230$), followed by POJ ($f^2 = 0.155$). Within the inclusion climate model, POS ($f^2 = 0.104$) and POJ ($f^2 = 0.109$) demonstrated comparable contributions, while EHRM showed a smaller yet meaningful effect ($f^2 = 0.087$). For employee trust, POJ exhibited the largest effect ($f^2 = 0.121$), followed by inclusion climate ($f^2 = 0.080$). Predictive relevance was confirmed via PLSpredict Shmueli et al. (2019), with Q^2 values exceeding zero for all endogenous constructs: EHRM ($Q^2 = 0.306$), inclusion climate ($Q^2 = 0.384$), and employee trust ($Q^2 = 0.477$), indicating adequate predictive relevance beyond a naïve benchmark.

Table 6.*Explained Variance and Predictive Relevance*

Endogenous Variable	Predictor Variable	R^2	R^2 Adjusted	Q^2	f^2	Effect Size
EHRM	POS	0.403	0.401	0.306	0.230	Moderate
	POJ				0.155	Moderate
Inclusion Climate	POS	0.479	0.476	0.384	0.104	Small-moderate
	POJ				0.109	Small-moderate
	EHRM				0.087	Small
Employee Trust	POJ	0.561	0.557	0.477	0.121	Moderate
	POS				0.047	Small
	IC				0.080	Small
	EHRM				0.046	Small

Note. R^2 = coefficient of determination; Q^2 = predictive relevance (PLSpredict); f^2 = effect size. $Q^2 > 0$ indicates adequate predictive relevance. POS and POJ are exogenous constructs and are not subject to Q^2 assessment.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 7 presents the hypothesis testing results. POS was positively related with EHRM (H1: $\beta = 0.411$, $t = 11.620$, $p < 0.001$) and inclusion climate (H2: $\beta = 0.287$, $t = 7.680$, $p < 0.001$). POJ was similarly positively related with EHRM (H3: $\beta = 0.338$, $t = 8.955$, $p < 0.001$) and inclusion climate (H4: $\beta = 0.285$, $t = 7.593$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that employees who experience organisational support and fairness are more likely to perceive digital HR practices and workplace

inclusion positively.

Inclusion climate was positively related with employee trust (H5: $\beta = 0.260$, $t = 6.145$, $p < 0.001$), and EHRM was positively related with both inclusion climate (H6: $\beta = 0.276$, $t = 6.994$, $p < 0.001$) and employee trust (H7: $\beta = 0.192$, $t = 5.045$, $p < 0.001$). Notably, the path coefficient for inclusion climate on employee trust ($\beta = 0.260$) exceeded that of EHRM ($\beta = 0.192$), consistent with DITE's proposition that inclusion climate provides a stronger relational foundation for trust than digital systems alone.

Indirect effects examined via bootstrapping supported all mediation hypotheses. EHRM transmitted the effects of POS (H8: $\beta = 0.079$, $p < 0.001$) and POJ (H10: $\beta = 0.065$, $p < 0.001$) on employee trust. Inclusion climate similarly conveyed the effects of POS (H9: $\beta = 0.074$, $p < 0.001$) and POJ (H11: $\beta = 0.074$, $p < 0.001$). The serial mediation pathways were also significant: POS $\rightarrow$ EHRM $\rightarrow$ IC $\rightarrow$ ET (H13: $\beta = 0.029$, $p < 0.001$) and POJ $\rightarrow$ EHRM $\rightarrow$ IC $\rightarrow$ ET (H12: $\beta = 0.024$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that organisational support and justice contribute to trust through both independent and sequential digital–social pathways.

Table 7.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	STDEV	T statistics	P values	Decision
Direct effects						
H1	POS $\rightarrow$ EHRM	0.411	0.035	11.620	0.000	Supported
H2	POS $\rightarrow$ IC	0.287	0.037	7.680	0.000	Supported
H3	POJ $\rightarrow$ EHRM	0.338	0.038	8.955	0.000	Supported
H4	POJ $\rightarrow$ IC	0.285	0.037	7.593	0.000	Supported
H5	IC $\rightarrow$ ET	0.260	0.042	6.145	0.000	Supported
H6	EHRM $\rightarrow$ IC	0.276	0.039	6.994	0.000	Supported
H7	EHRM $\rightarrow$ ET	0.192	0.038	5.045	0.000	Supported
Indirect effect						
H8	POS $\rightarrow$ EHRM $\rightarrow$ ET	0.079	0.018	4.452	0.000	Supported
H9	POS $\rightarrow$ IC $\rightarrow$ ET	0.074	0.016	4.620	0.000	Supported
H10	POJ $\rightarrow$ EHRM $\rightarrow$ ET	0.065	0.014	4.585	0.000	Supported
H11	POJ $\rightarrow$ IC $\rightarrow$ ET	0.074	0.016	4.634	0.000	Supported
Serial mediation						
H12	POJ $\rightarrow$ EHRM $\rightarrow$ IC $\rightarrow$ ET	0.024	0.006	4.366	0.000	Supported
H13	POS $\rightarrow$ EHRM $\rightarrow$ IC $\rightarrow$ ET	0.029	0.007	4.327	0.000	Supported

Discussion

The findings reveal a pattern that extends beyond simple direct associations among the study variables, suggesting that employee trust in multicultural digital workplaces is shaped through the combined influence of organisational conditions, digital practices, and social experiences.

Understanding Trust Formation Through Digital and Social Experiences

The findings suggest that employee trust in contemporary workplaces cannot be fully understood through digital systems alone. Although EHRM was positively associated with employee trust, inclusion climate demonstrated a stronger relationship, indicating that employees place considerable weight on how organisational practices are experienced socially. This pattern suggests that trust formation depends not only on the presence of digital HR systems but also on the relational environment through which employees interpret those systems.

This finding is consistent with Hussein and Jaaffar (2024), who found that EHRM practices were positively associated with academic staff performance only when mediated by trust, and extends their work by demonstrating that the relational environment—operationalised here as inclusion climate—provides an additional and stronger pathway to employee trust than digital

systems alone. Conversely, whereas Kong et al. (2026) identified support and justice as important antecedents of trust through HR practices in general, the present study specifies the mechanisms through which these antecedents operate in digitally mediated multicultural contexts: through both EHRM perceptions and inclusion climate, independently and sequentially. Employees do not evaluate digital HR practices in isolation; rather, they interpret them through broader experiences of fairness, belonging, and organisational care, consistent with emerging research highlighting the importance of employee experience in shaping responses to digital HRM initiative (Meijerink et al., 2021; Zha et al., 2025).

The stronger association of inclusion climate with trust is particularly meaningful in multicultural workplaces. Inclusion helps employees feel valued and able to participate meaningfully in organisational life regardless of cultural background (De Simone et al., 2024; Nishii, 2013). When employees experience this sense of belonging, organisational practices are more likely to be interpreted as reflecting genuine organisational concern rather than merely administrative efficiency. This finding reinforces an important insight for contemporary HRM: trust does not appear to emerge automatically from technological sophistication but from how employees experience organisational practices within their everyday work environment.

Organisational Support and Organisational Justice as Foundational Conditions

POS and POJ were positively related with both EHRM perceptions and inclusion climate, confirming that employees interpret digital HR practices and inclusive workplace initiatives through their broader assessments of how fairly and supportively the organisation treats its people. Consistent with Organisational Support Theory, perceptions of support and fairness function as legitimacy signals that prime employees' receptiveness to organisational systems (Adamovic, 2023; Eisenberger et al., 2020). Put differently, digital systems earn credibility not through their technical sophistication but through the relational conditions that frame them.

This finding carries a direct implication for digital transformation practice. Organisations that invest in new HR technologies without first attending to the quality of their support and justice climate may find that employees remain sceptical, not because the technology is poorly designed, but because the organisational conditions that make technology meaningful are not yet in place. Support and justice are not background noise in the digital transformation story; they are among its most important preconditions.

Explaining Trust Formation Through Digital and Social Experiences

A central insight emerging from this study is that employee trust develops through the combined influence of digital and social organisational experiences. Rather than functioning as competing explanations, EHRM and inclusion climate appear to represent complementary organisational conditions through which employees interpret organisational intentions. Digital HR practices provide procedural visibility, consistency, and accessibility, whereas inclusion climate provides the social environment through which those practices are experienced and understood. Trust therefore appears to emerge not from technology itself, but from how organisational practices are interpreted within everyday workplace experiences.

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the HRM literature by advancing understanding of how employee trust develops in increasingly digital and multicultural workplaces. Rather than treating trust as a direct consequence of organisational systems, the findings suggest that trust tends to be positively associated with organisational conditions through employees' interpretations of organisational experiences across both digital and social domains.

First, this study refines current understanding of digital HRM by suggesting that EHRM should be viewed primarily as an enabling organisational condition rather than an automatic source of employee trust. This challenges assumptions that improvements in technological capability necessarily translate into positive employee perceptions.

Second, the study extends inclusion research by positioning inclusion climate as an interpretive context through which employees evaluate organisational practices. This shifts attention from inclusion as a desirable organisational outcome toward inclusion as a mechanism that shapes how employees make sense of organisational actions and intentions.

Third, by confirming the serial mediation pathways (H12 and H13), this study advances understanding of how procedural and relational legitimacy conditions are sequentially connected rather than parallel and independent. The findings reveal a coherent pattern in which POS and POJ are associated with more positive EHRM perceptions, which in turn are linked to stronger inclusion climate, which collectively contribute to higher levels of trust. This sequential structure suggests that digital HR practices serve as the formal bridge through which organisational values become relational experiences translating how the organisation signals its commitments into how employees come to feel included and, ultimately, trusting. In doing so, DITE responds to growing calls for HRM research to move beyond direct-effect explanations and attend more closely to the processes through which employees experience and interpret organisational practices (Meijerink et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2026; Yuniawan et al., 2025; Zha et al., 2025).

Practical Implications

The findings carry several implications for organisational leaders, HR professionals, and managers responsible for digital transformation initiatives.

First, digital HR implementation should not be expected to foster employee trust automatically. Digital systems may increase efficiency and consistency, but they are evaluated by employees in the context of the organisation they already know — its norms of fairness, its patterns of support, its culture of inclusion. Organisations that treat digital transformation as a purely technical exercise are likely to underestimate what it actually takes to win employee trust. Technology is a means, not an end.

Second, inclusion climate should be treated as a strategic variable in digital transformation, not merely a cultural aspiration. HR leaders are advised to assess inclusion climate alongside digital HR implementation metrics, recognising that investments in technology are unlikely to generate their full trust-related value when employees do not feel respected, heard, and included. In multicultural workplaces, where employees bring different expectations about fairness and belonging, this consideration becomes especially pressing. Creating structured opportunities for voice, participation, and equitable access is not incidental to digital transformation — it is integral to it.

Third, the study highlights that organisational support and justice need to be established and actively maintained — not just during digital transformation, but before it. Because employees tend to assess organisational intentions prior to and through their engagement with digital systems, the relational groundwork must already be in place. Transparent decision-making, consistent HR practices, respectful communication, and visible organisational support are among the conditions that make digital transformation trustworthy rather than merely efficient.

Fourth, Organisations are therefore encouraged to develop trust-related metrics as part of digital HR implementation reviews, assessing not only user adoption rates and process efficiency, but also employees' reported experiences of inclusion, fairness, and organisational support before, during, and following digital transformation initiatives.

More broadly, the findings affirm that successful digital transformation is a human and organisational challenge as much as a technological one. Technology may deliver efficiency; trust develops when employees experience those digital practices within an environment characterised by fairness, support, and genuine inclusion.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is not without limitations, which future research should take into consideration. First, the data are cross-sectional in nature, which means that causal directionality and temporal ordering among the study variables cannot be established with certainty. The mediation findings should therefore be interpreted as patterns of association that are theoretically consistent with the proposed model, rather than as confirmed causal pathways. Replication of the study using longitudinal or experimental designs would allow firmer conclusions to be drawn about the direction and stability of the observed relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Second, all variables were collected from a single source at a single point in time, raising the possibility of common method bias. Although adequate procedural remedies were applied

during data collection and analysis, future studies would benefit from collecting data from multiple sources or using time-lagged designs to further mitigate this concern.

Third, while the multicultural organisational context of this study is a deliberate and theoretically relevant feature, the generalisability of the findings to other national and sectoral contexts remains to be tested. Future research is encouraged to replicate and extend the DITE integrative conceptual model in different organisational settings, including public sector organisations, non-profit environments, and contexts characterised by different cultural configurations of fairness and trust.

Finally, the current study examined EHRM and inclusion climate as sequential mediators, but other mediating or moderating variables such as leadership style, psychological safety, or organisational culture may also play important roles in shaping the trust formation process. Incorporating these variables into future model specifications would enrich the theoretical picture that DITE offers.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the direct relationships and sequential mediation mechanisms among perceived organisational support, perceived organisational justice, EHRM, inclusion climate, and employee trust in multicultural international schools in Indonesia. The empirical findings provide consistent support for all thirteen hypotheses proposed within the Digital-Inclusion Trust Ecosystem (DITE) integrative conceptual model. Employee trust does not appear to develop simply because organisations implement more sophisticated digital HR systems. Rather, the findings indicate that trust tends to be positively associated with organisational conditions when digital HR practices are experienced within organisational environments characterised by fairness, support, and inclusion.

Organisational support and organisational justice provide the legitimacy foundation through which employees evaluate organisational actions, while digital and social workplace experiences shape how those actions are interpreted. By demonstrating the complementary roles of EHRM and inclusion climate, this study advances understanding of trust formation in multicultural digital workplaces and highlights that the success of digital transformation depends not only on technological capability but also on the quality of the employee experience surrounding it.

The DITE model's principal theoretical contribution lies in demonstrating that EHRM and inclusion climate function as sequential mediators, not merely parallel pathways, through which organisational legitimacy signals are translated into employee trust. Future research should employ longitudinal or time-lagged designs to establish temporal ordering among these constructs, and extend the DITE framework to other organisational sectors and national contexts characterised by different configurations of digital maturity and cultural diversity.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Luki Rita Mayawati and Ahyar Yuniawan contributed to the conceptualisation, methodology, data collection, data analysis, theoretical framework development, manuscript preparation, validation, revision, and final approval of the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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