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THE PROGRESS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN GREECE'S PUBLIC SECTOR, IN HIGHER EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Abstract:
Managing the change of the digital transformation of the Public Sector (Tertiary Education, Health Public Sectors and Municipalities) in Greece constitutes a challenge for the respective leadership, as the one responsible for identifying the appropriate actions and means required to carry it out, with the greatest possible success and the least possible resistance. Human resources of Public Organizations, as recipients of the above change, constitute one of the most critical factors for its outcome, as due to their potential fear of their inadequacy or the uncertainty of the outcome and its consequences, they exhibit emotional resistance. For a smooth and effective transition, it is necessary to develop a structured approach that inspires trust, while ensuring support, participation and α balanced path, which requires careful planning, leadership commitment, a change in mindset regarding the press and its culture, which must shape it, communicate it and monitor it carefully.

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1. Introduction

The digital transformation of the public sector (Higher Education, Health, and Local Government) in Greece involves a structural change that is currently in progress and raises various questions and concerns about the emerging new work environment and the future of employment. The goal of Greece's public sector digital transformation is to help citizens and deliver modern, integrated, and efficient public services (Bousdekis & Kardaras, 2020).

Technology is a critical factor in targeting citizens, as it enables the creation of timely, personalized, and efficient public services. For a country's digital transformation to be successful, it must focus not only on its citizens but also on the digital empowerment and maturity of its human resources. The faster the pace of workforce transformation, the more rewarding the benefits for citizens will be. The use of advanced technologies (data analysis, artificial intelligence, etc.) can only be effective if it is developed by adaptable, intelligent, and skilled workers who are committed to continuous.

Given the above and the fact that digital transformation greatly affects the daily lives of human resources working in the Greek public sector, we proceeded to investigate the views of employees in public bodies (Higher Education, Health, and Local Government) in the Prefecture of Achaia (Region of North-West Greece) on:

1) the progress of digital transformation in the public sector in Greece,
2) the role of leadership in managing the change of digital transformation in the institution they serve,
3) their digital maturity in terms of adopting Digital Transformation,
4) their desire to upgrade their skills to achieve the goals of Digital Transformation &
5) the potential benefits of adopting Digital Transformation.

The above survey aims to record the views of employees in the above questions at the prefecture level and to draw conclusions as to whether the upcoming change is a reason for mobilization and action to upgrade their digital skills so that they can successfully respond to the challenges of the new digital communications landscape, the degree to which the objectives have been achieved, as well as who seems likely to be motivated and in what direction for a smooth, profitable, and beneficial transition.

2. Research Methodology

Primary and secondary sources, scientific articles, Government Gazette publications, reports and research from reputable bodies and organisations, as well as online sources, were used to conduct this research.

The research part of our work was based on quantitative data analysis. To this end, a simple, easy-to-understand, and objective questionnaire was developed, consisting of twenty-five (25) short questions, structured in such a way as to answer the research questions (Battacherjee, 2012:86) and distributed exclusively electronically.

2.1 Checking the Reliability and Internal Consistency of the Survey Data

Before proceeding with data processing and to ensure the reliability of the research conducted, we used the SPSS program and performed a reliability analysis using Cronbach's efficient.

The results showed that our research has a high reliability index, as for the 18 variables of the Likert scale, we obtained a value of 0.872 > 0.7 (threshold for high reliability). Specifically, the value obtained by our research is close to 0.9, which indicates excellent internal consistency. The sample was selected using the probability sampling method, specifically simple random sampling (Andriotis, 2003; Babbie, 2020).

The sample we chose includes employees in the public sector (Higher Education, Health, and Local Government) in Achaea prefecture, with various educational backgrounds and positions in the hierarchy. Our goal was to gather their opinions to create a representative picture of the entire prefecture. Since our sample shares characteristics with the larger population of public sector workers in Greece, it can be considered both representative and targeted. The sample consists of eighty-three (83) civil servants from different departments within Achaea prefecture; 48% work in higher education, while 52% are in healthcare and local government. Data was collected over a period of twenty (20) days.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Conceptual Definition of "Change"

Change is a transition from a state of equilibrium to a new one, which entails changes in practices, thinking, and behavior. It is a prerequisite for survival and progress (Chaanoun et al., 2022; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

When it comes to human resources, change must be implemented with empathy and support to highlight its necessity and benefits, thereby enhancing creative participation (Williams, 2024; Bridges, 1991).

At the organizational level, it stems either from internal factors (e.g., leadership, strategy) or external factors (technology, economic pressures) (Aronsson et al., 2021; Armenakis & Bedeian, 2012).

3.2 Models of Change

For a change to be implemented as smoothly as possible, it is necessary to prepare adequately and avoid disappointment (White, 1958).

For a better understanding of our research on change management, two basic models will be presented:

A. Kurt Lewin's Model, which proposes three stages: Unfreeze (realization of the need for change), Change (introduction of new practices), and Refreeze (consolidation of the new situation) (Cameron & Green, 2009; Papalexandri & Bourantas, 2003)

Figure 1: Kurtlewin Model (Kurt Lewin, 1947)

B. The ADKAR Model, which focuses on the individual and consists of five sequential stages: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement (Ramakrishnan, 2014).

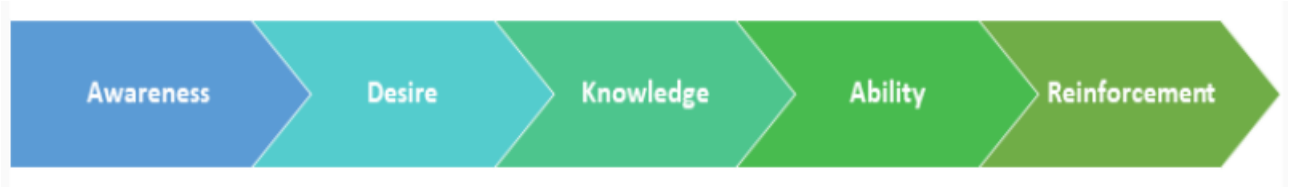

Figure 2: Adkar Model (Mudjisusatyo, *et al.*, 2024)

3.3 Change as an Opportunity

Change can be an opportunity for growth. How we respond to it depends on our education and culture. While cultivation facilitates change, complacency and resistance hinder it (Yang, 2017; Howes & Bishop, 2018).

3.4 What is Defined as "Digital Transformation"

Digital transformation is a modern model of organization and development based on the use of ICT (Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, IoT, cloud computing, etc.), which seeks to modernize the operation and enhance the competitiveness of public and private organizations (Yannopoulos, 2023).

It is a continuation of the industrial revolutions, with the fourth bringing "smart" technologies capable of surpassing human capabilities (Albani et al., 2019). Although it creates opportunities, it overturns established business models and introduces new habits, infrastructures, and ways of thinking.

3.4.1 Organizational Change Management

Organizational change management involves the systematic implementation of a plan for a smooth transition to digital transformation, in our case, in the public sector.
It includes:

1) setting goals,
2) identifying processes and technologies changing,
3) planning actions,
4) actively engaging employees, and
5) monitoring progress with corrective interventions (Hatzimichailidis, 2023).

Its successful outcome requires strategic decisions by senior executives, aligned with the vision of each organization and a clear plan with a timeline, roles, and resources (Bousdekis & Kardaras, 2020). Continuous progress evaluation and data analysis document the achievement of objectives.

This change in digital transformation also depends largely on the existence of digital culture. It requires training, upskilling or reskilling of staff, or even the recruitment of specialized executives (Yang, 2017).

3.4.2 The Three Components of Digital Transformation (3Ps)

The successful implementation of Digital Transformation in the Public Sector requires the synergy of the 3Ps: People, Processes, Platforms.

3.5 The Role of Human Resources

The active participation of employees requires a clear definition of roles, as well as an assessment of skills and the degree of "digital maturity." The organization must determine whether existing staff are adequate or whether new skills are required through training or new hires (Bousdekis & Kardaras, 2020; Mergel, 2019).

3.6 The Role of Leadership in Change Management

Leadership is crucial for the success of any organizational transformation (Weber et al., 2022), as the change process involves significant shifts in strategy, technology, and the nature of work (Verhoef et al., 2021; Kane et al., 2019). To accomplish this, leaders with digital thinking and vision are essential (Tabrizi et al., 2019; Porfírio et al., 2021), along

with a human-centered approach that encourages employees to adapt to the demands of change and see it as an opportunity for both personal and professional growth (Kane et al., 2019).

Waeger & Weber (2019) recognize two basic types of leadership roles:

1) task-oriented (e.g., digital innovation manager), and
2) people-oriented (e.g., mentor, coach).

Effective leadership balances these two approaches, combining managerial and interpersonal skills (Canterino et al., 2020; Casimir, 2001; Blake & Mouton, 1964). The success of any transformation depends on leadership and human resource collaboration, with mutual trust and a shared vision (Tabrizi et al., 2019).

3.7 The Role of Human Resources in the Success of Change

Employee support is essential for success (Islam et al., 2021; Neves et. al., 2018; Agote et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2012). Their reactions can be categorized as emotional (encompassing positive or negative feelings), cognitive (involving assessments and beliefs), and behavior (e.g., intentions to act) (Oreg & Berson, 2011).

Emotional trust in the leader depends on their relationship (Miao et al., 2014), while cognitive trust relies on the leader's reliability and competence (Wang et al., 2010). Conversely, the lack of trust and negative reactions (such as anxiety, doubt, resistance) can weaken transformation (Oreg, 2006; Weber et al., 2022).

3.8 The Role of Strategy in Management Change

Strategy is the set of actions that determine how change is implemented (Whittington, 2023). In the context of digital transformation, it aims to review and optimize business processes to enhance performance, reduce costs, and improve products and services (Pousttchi et al., 2019; Matt et al., 2015). There is no single strategic model; each organisation defines its strategy according to its needs and objectives (Dalaglis, 2024).

3.9 The Role of Infrastructure in Digital Transformation

Strategy is the set of actions that determine how change is implemented (Whittington, 2023). In the context of digital transformation, it aims to review and optimize business processes to enhance performance, reduce costs, and improve products and services (Pousttchi et al., 2019; Matt et al., 2015). There is no single strategic model; each organization defines its strategy according to its needs and objectives (Dalaglis, 2024).

4. Evolution of the Public Administration Management Model over Time and the Role of Digital Governance

The concept of governance refers to the exercise of power by institutional bodies, including both political leadership and entities such as the judiciary and public administration (Wong et al., 2017). Government, on the other hand, defines the political framework within which governance is exercised. E-governance is the combination of

information and communication technologies, organizational changes, and skills development, with the aim of improving public administration and democratic processes (European Commission, 2003; Tabouris & Tarabakis, 2024).

The institutional establishment of e-governance in Greece began with Greek Law No. 3979/2011, which regulated the use of ICT in the public sector. This was followed by Laws 4325/2015 and Greek Law No. 4440/2016, which introduced provisions for electronic identification, data security, and document circulation. Greek Law No. 4389/2016 established the General Secretariat for Digital Policy, institutionally strengthening digital transformation.

The "Digital Transformation Bible 2020–2025" (Government Gazette 2894/B/5-7-2021) sets out the country's strategy and is structured around six (6) pillars: connectivity, digital skills, business transformation, digital public services, innovation, and technology utilization. The digital skills axis is a critical factor, aiming to develop human resources capable of supporting the new digital reality.

The "Digital Transformation 2021–2027" program strengthens the digital transition through interventions related to public administration, connectivity infrastructure, and staff training. Emphasis is placed on upgrading the digital skills of civil servants through the National Digital Competence Framework.

Progress is assessed based on international indicators:

- **DESI (Digital Economy and Society Index): Reflects Progress in Digitization over a Five-year Period**

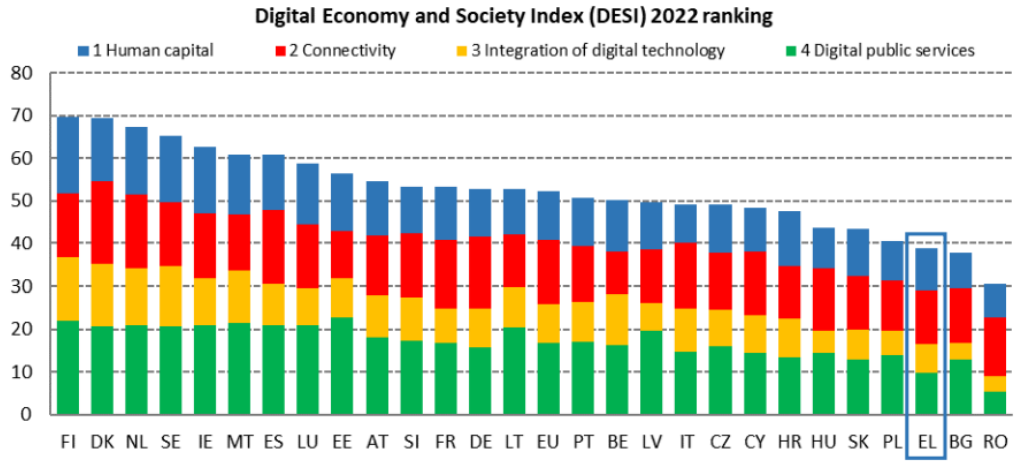

Figure 3: Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) ranking, 2022 (EC, 2022)

In Table 1 above, we can see the rating of Greece in the Indicator DESI 2022 in relation to the average rating of the EU.

Table 1: The rating of Greece in the Indicator DESI 2022

	Greece		EU
	Classification	**Rating**	**Rating**
Indicator DESI 2022	25	38.9	52.3

- **DMI (Digital Maturity Index): Measures Greece's Position Relative to Other EU Countries**

Figure 4: The 7 dimensions of the SEV Digital Maturity Index (DMI) (SEV Observatory, 2019)

- **EGDI (E-Government Development Index): evaluates the development of online services and the strategy of each country.**

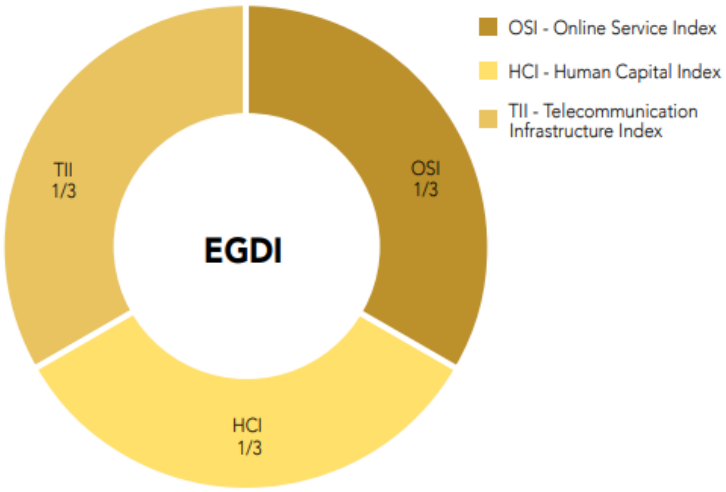

Figure 5: The three (3) dimensions of the E-Government Development Index (United Nations, 2025)

- **ESI (European Skills Index): Assesses Countries' Performance in Training and Skills Policies**

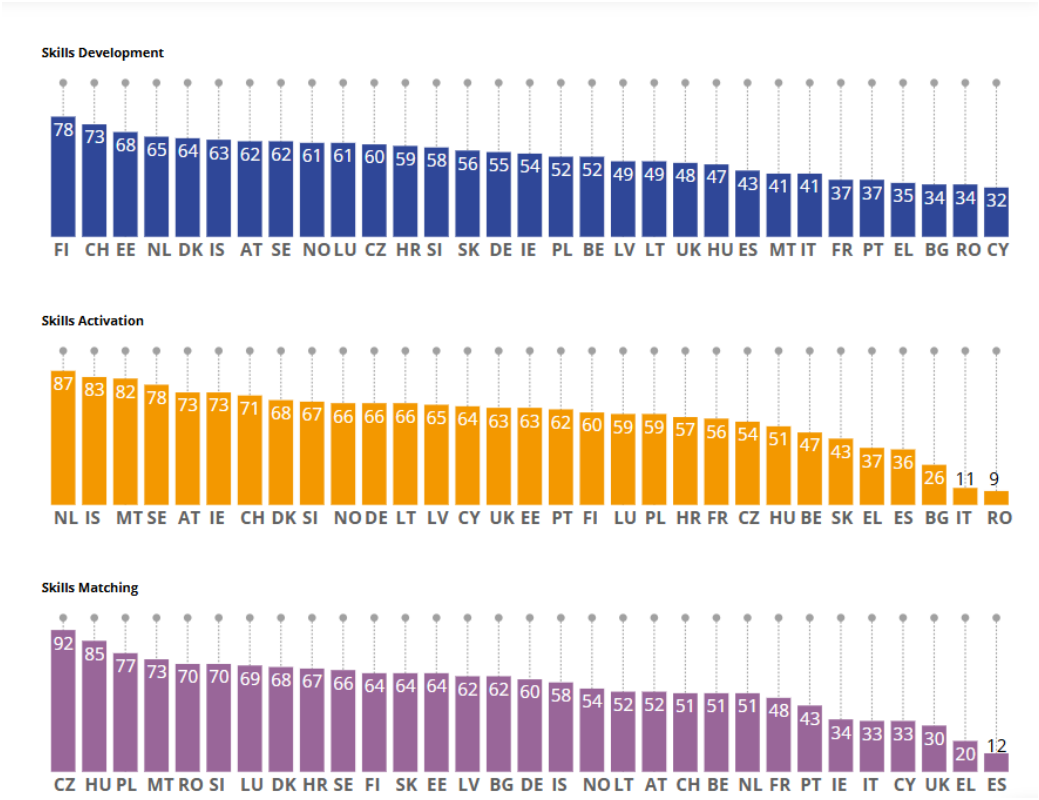

Figure 6: 2024 European Skill Index (Cedefop, 2024)

Finally, the development of digital skills is supported by the ESCO classification, which includes five main categories: data processing, digital communication, content creation, security, and problem solving. These categories are subdivided into 137 individual skills, as described in specific reports (SEV, Special Report, 2020). Training activities are tailored to the needs of civil servants, using synchronous, asynchronous, and blended methods.

4.1 Questionnaire Results

For a clear and illustrative presentation of our results, we provide below tables of descriptive statistics, frequencies, and diagrams related to the demographic and professional data from our questionnaire.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of our demographic and professional data

α/α	Variable		Frequency	Percent
1.	**Gender**	1-men	30	36.1
		2-women	53	63.9
2.	**Age**	18-35	11	13.3
		36-55	58	69.9
		>56	14	16.9
3.	**Training level**	Higher education degree	64	77.1
		Secondary education diploma	19	22.9
4.	**Job position**	Position of responsibility at the level of General Directorate	1	1.2

		Management level position of responsibility	4	4.8
		Department level position of responsibility	22	26.5
		Employee	56	67.5
5.	**Years of service**	**N-Valid**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
		83	19.512	9.8696

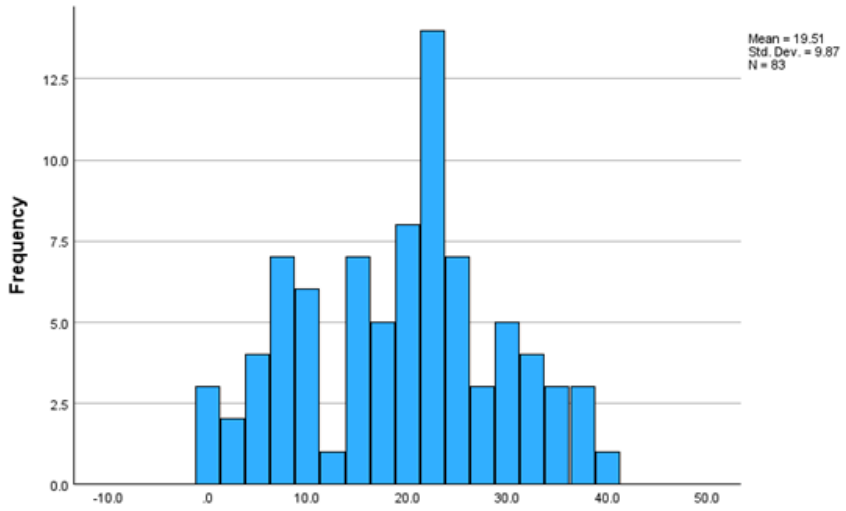

Figure 7: Frequency histogram of the variable "Years of service" (export from SPSS)

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of our demographic and professional data

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Public institution where I work	Health Authorities	14	16.9
	Educational Institutions	40	48.2
	Local Government Organizations	26	31.3
	Other Institutions	3	3.6

5. Summary of Results

Starting with the summary of our results, regarding the demographic and professional data of our questionnaire, it appears that women outnumber men, most respondents are in the 36-55 age group (69.9%), and the majority have a bachelor's or master's degree (77.1%). Additionally, 67.5% of respondents work as subordinates in their departments, while very few hold positions of responsibility such as Director or General Director, which reflects the actual situation. Finally, most respondents have an average of 19.5 years of previous service.

Below are the key research questions (central variables) we posed, which aim to investigate the views of employees in various public bodies in the Prefecture of Achaia (Region of North-West of Greece), so that through our sample, we can gather information on:

1) The progress of digital transformation in the public sector in Greece (MO_H1),

2) The role of leadership in managing the change of digital transformation in the institution they serve (MO_H2),
3) The digital maturity of employees in terms of the skills required for the adoption of Digital Transformation in the public institution they serve (MO_H3),
4) their desire to upgrade their digital skills to achieve the goals of Digital Transformation (MO_H4), &
5) The potential benefits of adopting the change of Digital Transformation (MO_H5)

Each section contains related sub-questions, which provide us with as much information as possible on issues relating to specific aspects.

Therefore, for each research question, we conclude the following results:

a) Regarding the Progress of the Digital Transformation of the Public Sector in Greece (MO_H1)

We find that, on average, respondents believe that the digital transformation of the public sector in the Prefecture of Achaia (Region of North-West Greece) and, by extension, in Greece, is progressing at a moderate pace. Their opinion is also cautious regarding the digital skills of all public sector employees to successfully meet the requirements of digital transformation, as well as the free options available for their digital training. Finally, t-Test/ANOVA checks show that respondents' opinions on the variable under consideration are independent of gender, age group, level of education, position in the hierarchy, and the organization they work for. The above results seem not to be in full agreement with the European Commission's 2022 research, which ranks Greece in the very low 3rd place from the bottom in the DESI index, which reflects the evolution of digitalization in European countries (See Figure 3, p. 6). However, Greece's very low ranking can be explained by the fact that Greece was slow to implement legislative measures for the integration of digital technologies into the public sector.

b) The Role of Leadership in Managing Digital Transformation Change in the Organization They Serve (MO_H2)

The current leadership of public organizations in Greece appears to support and encourage human resources to a moderate degree. There also appears to be a moderate understanding of the benefits of adopting digital transformation, which is reflected in the fact that it has not managed to sufficiently convey the necessity of adopting the practices and tools of digital transformation, the participation of employees in training programs to develop their digital skills, and the provision of the necessary digital tools for as smooth a transition as possible to the new situation. Finally, t-Test/ANOVA checks show that the opinions of respondents regarding the variable under consideration are independent of gender, age group, level of education, position in the hierarchy, and the organization they work for. In addition, there is a significant linear positive correlation between the progress of digital transformation in the public sector in Greece and the way in which the respective leadership manages this change. This finding is fully consistent with the research of Tabrizi et al., 2019 & Porfírio et al., 2021, increasing the reliability of our results. Our findings are consistent with the results of the CEDEFOP 2024 survey

measuring the ESI (European Skills Index) performance in training and skills policies (Figure 6, p. 7), which show Greece to be quite low in the European ranking (27th out of 31). These results show that although efforts appear to be made to develop the digital skills of public sector employees, the expected results have not been achieved. To improve its position, Greece must, in the coming years, pursue more coordinated strategies to strengthen the digital skills of its workers, enhancing the role of those in leadership positions to improve its position in Europe.

c) Employee's Digital Maturity in Terms of the Skills Required for the Adoption of Digital Transformation in the Public Sector Organization in which They Work (MO_H3)

Respondents rate their digital skills as advanced and adequate. Although they have a satisfactory level of the skills required to successfully respond to the demands of their organization's digital transformation, they have not attended enough relevant training programs to upgrade their digital skills. Finally, t-test/ANOVA checks show that the digital maturity of employees is independent of gender, age group, level of education, and the organization they work for, while it appears to be related to their position in the hierarchy.

d) Employees Desire to Upgrade Their Digital Skills to Achieve the Goals of Digital Transformation (MO_H4)

Employees seem to have more experience and a willingness to improve their digital skills. They do not feel worried about what they need to learn to meet the requirements of Digital Transformation. However, we find that the main obstacles preventing them from upgrading their skills are, in order of importance, lack of staff, lack of time, service needs, and their skepticism about the benefits. Lastly, t-test/ANOVA checks show that employees' desire to upgrade their digital skills is independent of gender, age group, education level, and the organization they work for, although it appears related to their position in the hierarchy.

In addition, the regression model shows a linear positive correlation between the progress of digital transformation in the public sector in Greece and employees' desire to upgrade their digital skills.

e) The Potential Benefits of Adopting the Digital Transformation Change (MO_H5)

There is a positive outlook regarding the benefits that the digital transformation of the public sector in Greece will bring, both in terms of employee efficiency and, by extension, public organizations, as well as in terms of serving citizens, in facilitating everyday work and in other personal and operational areas.

The opinions of respondents regarding the central variable under consideration are independent of gender, age group, level of education, position in the hierarchy, and the organization for which they work.

6. General Conclusions

Upon completion of our research, we have reached the following conclusions:

1) The digital transformation of public bodies in the Prefecture of Achaia (Region of North-West of Greece), and by extension in Greece, appears to be progressing at a moderate pace, while the opinions of respondents on this variable are independent of gender, age group, level of education, position in the hierarchy, and the institution in which they work.
2) The contribution and influence of leadership on employees in terms of managing the change of the Digital Transformation of the Public Sector in Greece could also be described as moderate. For this variable, too, the opinions of respondents are independent of gender, age group, level of education, position in the hierarchy, and the organization they work for.
3) The digital maturity of the employees of the public sector organization in which they work is recorded as slightly above average. Respondents' opinions on this variable are independent of gender, age group, level of education, and the organization they work for, while they seem to be related to their position in the hierarchy.
4) The desire of employees in public sector organizations in the Prefecture of Achaia appears to be quite satisfactory in terms of upgrading their digital skills. The opinions of respondents on this variable are independent of gender, age group, level of education, and the organization they work for, but seem to be related to their position in the hierarchy.
5) There is a belief that significant benefits will result from the adoption of the change of Digital Transformation of the Public Sector in Greece, while the opinions of respondents on this variable are independent of gender, age group, level of education, position in the hierarchy, and the organization they work for.

7. Contribution & Limitations of Research

The contribution of our research lies in capturing the perspective of employees in various public bodies in the Prefecture of Achaia (Region of North-West of Greece), on the progress and management of the Digital Transformation of the Public Sector at the local level, to conclude how this transition is being managed and monitor its progress.

We consider the number of participants in the research to be a limitation, as it could have been more extensive. Although our questionnaire was distributed to many more recipients, several of them did not respond for personal reasons. However, given that our sample is more than 50 people, the distribution is considered normal, and therefore our conclusions can be extrapolated to the entire population of the Greek public sector.

8. Suggestions

In light of the above observations, this study could serve as a basis for further investigation, at the regional or national level, to gain a broader understanding of the progress of digital transformation in the public sector in Greece, how this change is being managed, and to obtain more details that could either confirm or refute our findings in whole or in part, or enrich them.

It is important that the state take steps to provide more targeted free training options for public sector employees, in order to facilitate the participation of those who wish and need to participate.

It is equally necessary to take measures to remove the obstacle of understaffing in the public sector, which leads to a heavy workload, with the direct consequence of a lack of time and motivation, which acts as a deterrent to employee participation in training programs and related activities to upgrade their digital skills. The above are expected to help increase the digital maturity of the workforce and, consequently, achieve the goals of the Digital Transformation of the Public Sector in Greece.

Given that the digital maturity of public sector employees, as well as their desire to upgrade their digital skills, seem to be related to their position in the hierarchy, further research could be conducted to identify who is digitally more mature and who is digitally weaker, who wants to upgrade their digital skills, and who needs some encouragement. Furthermore, as employees have expressed an increased desire to upgrade their digital skills, ways could be sought to capitalize on this desire and encourage them in this direction. Appropriate training actions should be implemented, while also taking advantage of digitally mature human capital to stimulate, support, strengthen, and upgrade the weaker ones and, by extension, the public bodies in which they work.

Furthermore, given the correlation between the progress of the digital transformation of the public sector in Greece, the way in which the leadership manages this change and the related performance recorded, we believe that the role of leadership should become more active.

Therefore, we believe that a change is needed in the leadership model of the country's public bodies, through the formation of a new type of leadership, with a digital culture, focus, and purpose, which will take the lead in communicating the necessity and expediency of each transition. First and foremost, those at the top of the hierarchy need to really get the benefits of Digital Transformation so they can convince their staff. They need to be there for their employees, encouraging and supporting them, and providing the right resources, practices, and tools to achieve digital transformation goals in Greece's public sector. This finding is also consistent with what is reported in literature.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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