Change Fatigue in Continuous Digital Transformation

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Abstract

The digital transformation has paved the way modern businesses work by incorporating technology into all areas of management, communication, and processes. This study examines the phenomenon of change fatigue within continuous digital transformation and explores strategies for managing it through a human-centered approach. The study describes how stress and exhaustion arise when digital demands surpass employees' coping resources, drawing on well-known ideas including Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory, Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, and the Job Demands Resources Model. The report highlights that employee engagement, adaptability, and well-being are just as important as technology advancement in ensuring effective transition. To address this issue, the paper introduces the Human-Centered Digital Transformation (HCDT) framework, which centers organizational development around communication, empathy, and psychological sustainability. The framework describes five crucial phases that help organizations manage change while maintaining human resilience: Observe, Understand, Launch, Lift, and Recover. Findings indicate that although fatigue and uncertainty are inherent to change, their impact can be greatly minimized by means of supportive leadership, ongoing learning, and reflective recovery. Eventually, sustainable digital transformation relies on harmonizing technological advancement with human capability. Organizations that prioritize people alongside technology will not only reduce change fatigue but also foster cultures of trust, creativity, and prolonged adaptability.

Keywords:Digital Transformation, Business work, Digital Business, Organizational Development, Sustainability.
Jel Code:Q01, M10, M21

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, digital technology has become deeply lodged in daily life, transforming how we live, work and communicate this board development known as digital transformation (Kagerman et al., 2013) In today's fast evolving business environment, organizations are under constant pressure to embrace digital transformation to maintain competitiveness and operational efficiency (Dmitry Plekhanov, 2023). Organizations are ever more required to become accustomed to new technologies and market demands, as digital transformation has reshaped not only individual behavior but also business activities. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), Automation, cloud computing, data analytics have reshaped traditional business processes, creating a new standard of agility and innovation. Companies now use digital tools to enhance efficiency, connect with people and remain competitive. Considerably this process is interactive while businesses innovate through digitalization, people's hobbits and expectations concurrently affected by technologies evolve (Bharadwaj & Venkatraman, 2013). As a result, employees are demanded to be flexible, resilient as well as continuous learners, which may lead to psychological and emotional exhaustion known as change fatigue. According to Macintosh, Beech, McQueen, & Reid (2007), usually it is a state of both physical and emotional tiredness caused by repeated and rapid organizational changes. For employees it is very hard to keep up the speed with newly introduced systems, processes and technology, especially when they have to obey corporate rules and meet expectations. Moreover, Beaulieu, Seneviratne, & Nowell (2023), consider that change fatigue results in decreased motivation, emotional burnout and growing resistance even to disengagement because they feel overwhelmed by ongoing adjustments in their work environment.

However, change fatigue is not the only actual challenge in organizations across the world, besides that they encounter another difficulty of continuous digital transformation. This is a process which requires persistent innovation, restructuring and digital adaptation (Vial, 2019). It involves integrating digital technologies to reform business processes, enhance efficiency, and create new forms of value delivery (Skog, 2020). When these kinds of changes occur continuously without sufficient recovery time for employees, organizations risk creating cycles of transformation fatigue.

In many cases, similarities appear between the challenges of change fatigue and continuous digital transformation, where both involve uncertainty, loss of control and feeling cognitive overload among employees who are expected to adapt to new systems and procedures (Kuusisto, 2017). Therefore, understanding how continuous digital transformation contributes to change fatigue is essential for developing strategies which sustain organizational innovations. On the other hand, it should protect employee well-being.

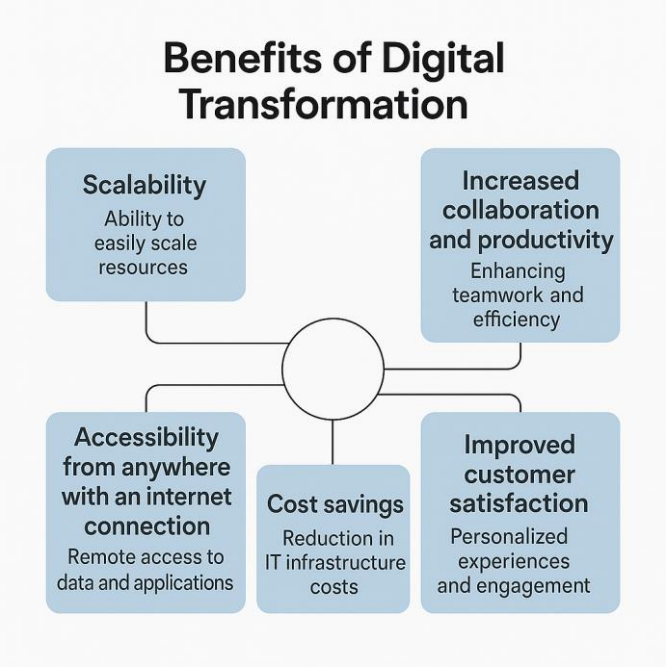
This research intended to identify different forms of change fatigue, such as emotional fatigue, where employees feel mentally drained: cognitive fatigue struggling to process constant changes; and behavioral one, which usually appears as low participation or resistance in change efforts. Furthermore, it explores the connection by examining how public organizations can manage continuous digital transformation at the same time by preventing or at least reducing change fatigue among their personnel.

2. Literature review

2.1. Digital transformation & Benefits and Challenges

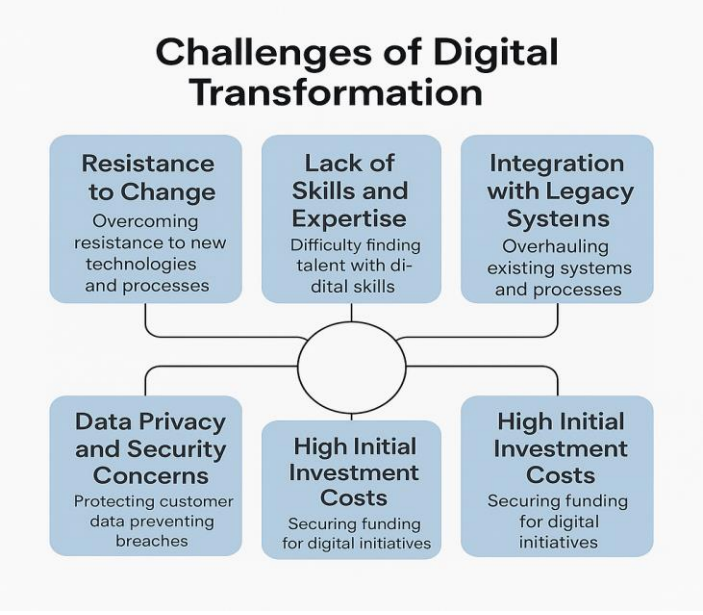
Business has changed entirely over the last few decades by integrating digital technology into all aspects of operations. In a nutshell, it is how an organization fundamentally operates and delivers value to customers through the integration of digital technology across all operational areas. Digital transformation encompasses process automation, information, and data analysis to inform decisions, and new digital products and services. Its major aims include increasing efficiency, competitiveness, and customer experiences. Where digital technology is fully embedded in a company, full-scale digital transformation changes how an organization operates and generates value for its client**s** (Maheshwari, 2025). A major outcome of this transformation is the rise of smart, connected products. Once composed mainly of mechanical and electrical components (Porter & Heppelmann, 2015). This shift has, until recently, been enabled by greater processing power, contraction, and pervasive wireless networks to create a whole new level of product intelligence and functionality. Such innovations drive competition, improving performance by offering real-time monitoring, predictive maintenance, and upgrades that benefit both user experience and business value (Jadertrierveiler et al., 2019).

The digital age encourages more responsible consumption by promoting the longevity of products, sharing underused resources, and updating them constantly rather than replacing them. This decreases waste and increases efficiency in land energy and raw materials for better outputs in more than one aspect. The transformation redefines workspaces as well. Technology integration in work promotes collaboration between humans and intelligent systems to enhance innovation and productivity (Jadertrierveiler et. al., 2019). General lessons from the software industry, such as agile development, service-based business models, and data analytics, are now at the heart of manufacturing and services.But with great development comes great challenges. The interconnection of digital systems requires high investment in cybersecurity and data management. The interconnectivity of products also raises the stakes regarding data breaches and failures. Moreover, companies will need to review their organizational structure in aerospace, healthcare and agriculture will be adopting these gradually, rather than all of a sudden (Kagerman et al., 2013). But that is only achievable through a cultural change to a more conscious and eco-friendly behavior from an over consumptionist one (Porter & Heppelmann, 2015).



Empowerment of employees for data driven decisions empowers innovation but also brings associated challenges in training and job security. Companies will have to invest in work life balance to preserve productivity and worker well-being Basically, digital transformation has enormous potential for growth; how that full potential will be realized really depends on surmounting challenges in cybersecurity and workforce adaptability (Jadertrierveiler et al., 2019). Digital technologies have given the capability to employees to work across levels and boundaries in any organization. By facilitating telework and information about customers from customer relationship data in almost real time, decisions relating to production availability from units within different locations could be speeded up significantly. The term digital transformation has been in common use over recent times as the integration of similar digital technologies into all business processes. These technologies have disrupted conventional business processes, and therefore organizations must change and evolve to keep up with the competition.Companies that aren't on the path of digitization might find themselves lagging behind in this progressively dynamic and technology-driven marketplace.

Fundamentally, the process of Digital transformation changes how an enterprise performs and competes. Digitalization presents new opportunities but also challenges. In the fast-moving and highly competitive environment of today, those who will be able to adopt up-to-date digital approaches, methods, and strategies together with novel technologies are guaranteed to be much more successful and sustain that success (Maheshwari, 2025).



2.2. Change Fatigue: Causes, Signs, and Effects

In the modern age, digital transformation changes job processes, technologies, and structures significantly, having a quite serious impact on the employees. According to Prayag (2018), employee resilience is a form of adaptability and is a capability that can be developed; it is crucial not only for organizational survival but also for its sustainable growth. Digital transformation may influence employees' perceptions and behavioral responses and, thus, their resilience development. Repeated organizational change can disable the employee's ability to support or adapt to further change initiatives (Bernerth et al., 2011). And also might predict future resistance to change (De Vries, 2013). Behavioral symptoms of change fatigue are often characterized by the inability or unwillingness to support new initiatives, diminished confidence in leadership, and less proactive attitude towards organizational goals (Lora et al., 2003). Psychologically, change fatigue represents a desire for stability because continuous organizational changes present uncertainty-an experience people generally want to avoid. Theoretically, change fatigue can be presented as some form of resistance arising when staff disallows further organizational changes despite satisfaction with the present or agreement with the purpose of change (Price, 2019). This resistance is basically psychological since it emanates from previous experiences rather than dissatisfaction with the new reforms. The above arguments have been supported by empirical evidence from a study conducted in a European financial institution. Through a multivariate analysis, it was found that the number of reorganizations the employees had gone through and the degree of change fatigue observed were strongly positively related. Further extended analysis showed this to be almost inevitable, with repeated organizational change inherently leading to employee fatigue. Resistance to change in such a context, therefore, is not a signal of employee inadequacy or unwillingness to reform; rather, it is an unplanned outcome of cumulative organizational change. Change fatigue is a psychological state that arises when employees face either excessive or continuous organizational change, especially if those changes are perceived as unsuccessful or ineffective (McElroy,1996).

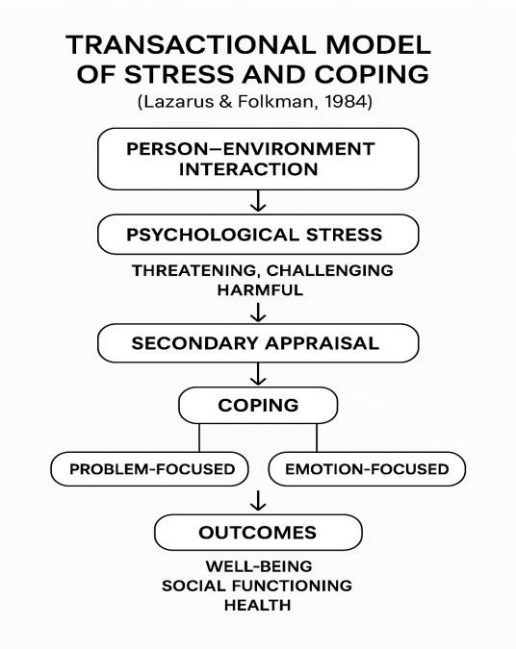
In modern organization, where transformation initiatives happen very often, employees may be overwhelmed and disengaged from them (Bernerth, Walker et al.,2011). People respond to change best when they understand the process of change and expected effects (Velig, 2020). Therefore, employees who can make sense of the rationale and objectives behind change can respond constructively, while without proper understanding, confusion and resistance will arise. Human beings naturally prefer predictability and stability, and this preference might explain the low tolerance most people have for constant change (Velig, 2020). Repeated or disruptive changes are done at the expense of a loss of perceived control of their work by employees and result in frustration or cynicism towards organizational initiatives this often takes the form of emotional exhaustion or the conviction that further changes will also meet with failure (Ace & Parker, 2010; Venkatesh & Bala, 2008). From the point of view of stress, continuous change leads to a generation of negative psychological consequences, including anxiety, burnout, and decreased well-being (Velig, 2020). Bernerth, Walker, and Harris(2011) add that continued organizational change can decrease the adaptive resources of employees, thereby leading to their exhaustion and lack of motivation.

In general, change fatigue reflects the accumulated strain of excessive transformation and denotes the need for organizations to manage the pace and communication of change with due care to retain employee engagement and resilience. There are also warnings that organizational reforms create a number of unplanned effects, particularly by increasing employees' uncertainty. As Bernerth et al. (2011) describe,

psychological uncertainty is a negative by-product of organizational reforms since they may damage the possibility of employees to anticipate how their roles will continue, how they will be perceived in the organizational scheme, and what is expected from them. According to Ashford (1988), organizational change creates uncertainty in at least three ways. For example, when employees do not possess the necessary information regarding the nature of the change, then they become apprehensive with respect to the personal impact of the change. In support of this argument, Frahm and Brown (2007) note that individuals who value stability in their job may experience these forms of uncertainty as particularly devastating. When job security is threatened and the nature of one's job is likely to change, uncertainty becomes more pronounced. In addition, the continuous exposure to multiple, consecutive, or concurrent changes, may exceed the employees' adaptive capacity; the latter may remain uncertain about their ability to respond effectively to the new job demands and eventually experience emotional exhaustion.

2.3. Digital transformation and Change Fatigue

The transactional model of stress and coping, which Lazarus and Folkman (1984) outlined, is based on an interactional process wherein the individual and environment influence each other. By this model, psychological stress arises when an individual believes environmental demands exceed their resources, thereby disrupting the person-environment relationship. According to this model, there are two central cognitive processes: primary appraisal, through which as individual evaluates an ongoing situation as being either threatening, challenging, or harmful; and secondary appraisal, by which one evaluates one’s copingresources and potential responses to a specific situation.coping, according to this model, is problem-focused (how one deals with causes of stress) and emotion-focused (how to regulate emotional response). Over time, these coping efforts affect well-being, social functioning, and health outcomes (Lazarus&Folkman 1984).



According to the Conservation of Resources Theory, by Hobfoll(1989,1998), individuals strive to realize, maintain, and protect valued resources such as time, energy, social support, and material assets which enable them to facilitate their goals and reduce or prevent resource loss. The COR theory postulates that stress is caused by the threat of or loss of important resources, or when resources are insufficient to cope with life demands. Individuals with larger resources can better stand up against stressors and are less likely to experience burnout, while resource loss is often related to negative psychological and organizational results, including exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and performance. It provides a useful framework in regard to understanding how continuous organizational changes and job demands at work deplete resources over time, leading to change fatigue and burnout, and the importance of resource investment and recovery mechanisms in maintaining well-being (Hobfoll,1989).

Continuous digitalization brings in constant organizational and technological demands that are typically beyond the resources of an employee to cope with and could be described as change fatigue (Marsh et al.2022). Emphasize that the digital workplace exposes employees to constant overlapping technologies and system updates, generating stress, overload, and anxiety conditions that are closely aligned with emotional exhaustion typical of change fatigue. The authors also point out that technology-related stress and overload are some of the most commitments to the organization change (Marsh et al.2022). From a theoretical perspective, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) provides an understanding of how employees appraise continuous technological change as threatening once they perceive insufficient coping resources. Similarly, the job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) explains that high digital demands, coupled with low organizational support, increase exhaustion. This mirrors the dynamics of change fatigue identified during transformation processes. Marsh et al. (2022) also discuss that reactions of employees toward digital pressure differ according to such influences as personality, computer self-efficacy, and coping strategies(sec.3,5,1). In the absence of such individual and organizational resources like a lack of digital skills training or minimal involvement in change decisions the emotional depletion will be more intense. This will continue to reinforce toward ongoing transformation. Finally, excessive or maladaptive technology use is recognized as another aspect of the dark side of the digital workplace (Marsh et al.2022). This overexposure to rapid digital initiatives heightens stress, decreases well-being, and ultimately reflects a change fatigue condition where workers become disengaged from and resistant to more change because of sustained psychological overload.

3. Solutions and Recommendations

Building on the challenges, digital transformation cannot succeed without addressing its human aspect. To maintain innovation, organizations must reduce the psychological strain that continuous change creates. The following section introduces strategies and frameworks to achieve this balance (Akbar et al., 2025).

To address these challenges, this article suggests the Human-Centered Digital Transformation (HCDT) framework, which highlights that people are as vital to digital innovation as technology (Nahavandi, 2019). By placing workers at the center of transformation, the framework ensures organizational change aligns with human needs, well-being, and flexibility. It acknowledges that when staff are overburdened or resistant to constant change, digital projects fail. Firms can achieve resilient transformation by including empathy,

communication, and psychological sustainability in every level of adoption. This approach is reinforced by Industry 5.0 and Society 5.0, which emphasize human-centric systems balancing technology with emotional intelligence (Nahavandi, 2019; Akman & Erdirençelebi, 2024).

This study offers several solutions.
Observe. Before any major initiatives, organizations must listen to their workforce. This means evaluating the motivation, readiness, and prior experiences of employees with change. Early detection of weariness or resistance can be aided by surveys, interviews, and feedback mechanisms. Leaders build trust and lay the groundwork for easier adoption through empathy and honest communication (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2016; Armenakis & Harris, 2009). For instance, Microsoft's Viva Pulse platform assesses employee confidence and engagement before introducing new digital tools, supporting more informed, human-centered decision-making (Urrutia de Souza, 2025).

After readiness has been evaluated, the next step is to give employees the knowledge and confidence needed for a successful digital transition. Digital training, mentorship, and ongoing learning opportunities make employees feel competent rather than overwhelmed by new technologies. Research shows that continuous education improves flexibility and reduces resistance to change (Ullrich et al., 2023). For example, a study of Indonesian MSME workers adapting to online business environments found that companies investing in digital training during the Covid-19 outbreak improved engagement and performance (Lumunon, Massie, & Trang, 2021). These strategies show how empowering workers through education reduces change fatigue and builds long-term resilience.

Once staff are trained and engaged, digital transformation should be executed in an organized, manageable way. Organizations can test new systems, gather feedback, and adjust tactics before full-scale adoption by implementing change gradually through pilot projects or phased rollouts. This approach builds confidence while reducing uncertainty and cognitive overload. Research indicates that incremental, agile-style changes increase adoption rates and reduce resistance by allowing employees time to adapt (Stouten, Rousseau, & De Cremer, 2018). For example, Starbucks introduced its mobile ordering and payment system in selected markets before global expansion, enabling continuous feedback and smoother integration across operations (Lee, 2020).

Following the launch phase, ongoing support and recognition are crucial for maintaining motivation and engagement. Employees need not only technical support but also emotional assurance that their contributions are valued. Programs for recognition, open communication, and well-being help maintain morale and reduce burnout during digital transformation. Research indicates that creating psychological safety where individuals feel comfortable sharing thoughts and concerns greatly improves flexibility and innovation (Edmondson, 2019). Continuous support and recognition strengthen dedication and reduce resistance to change. When employees feel valued and supported, organizations can turn digital transformation into a cooperative experience instead of a source of exhaustion.

The final phase of the Human-Centered Digital Transformation framework highlights the need for recovery and reflection before the next cycle of change. Employees benefit from short breaks after major projects, allowing them to consolidate skills, regain balance, and reflect on lessons learned. These recovery periods prevent burnout and build resilience, ensuring innovation remains sustainable. Research on occupational

stress shows that psychological detachment and rest are vital for restoring energy and maintaining well-being (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Organizational learning theories also emphasize post-change reflection to gather insights and improve future strategies (Longenecker, Papp, & Stansfield, 2008). By setting aside time for rest and review, organizations can turn change fatigue into renewed adaptability and growth.

Employees can benefit from adopting the Human-Centered Digital Transformation (HCDT) methodology. This framework reduces psychological stress and the risk of change fatigue by incorporating learning, recovery, and well-being into each stage of transformation (Akbar et al., 2025). When technology progresses at a pace people can follow, change becomes less overwhelming and more of a continuous learning process. The HCDT approach strengthens trust between leaders and staff through communication, empowerment, and acknowledgment, fostering motivation, resilience, and engagement. These factors enhance organizational performance and creativity (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). From an academic standpoint, the HCDT framework redefines how success in transformation is measured by connecting behavioral and technological disciplines. It aligns with Industry and Society 5.0, emphasizing empathy, sustainability, and inclusivity (Akman & Erdirençelebi, 2024; Nahavandi, 2019). Although digital fatigue cannot be eliminated, the HCDT approach helps reduce its effects.

Although the HCDT framework effectively addresses change fatigue in today's digital transformation settings, more research is needed to understand its role in the era of automation and artificial intelligence (AI). As AI technologies become integrated into workplaces, the psychological climate of work is shifting alongside organizational systems. Many employees worry that automation could make their skills less valuable, meaning replacement could be an option. These fears add a new layer to change fatigue, rooted not only in adapting to new tools but also in concerns about long term employability. Because most digital transformation models overlook the emotional strain caused by AI driven restructuring, this gap calls for further attention from scholars. Future studies should explore how human-centered strategies like the HCDT framework might expand to include adaptive skill growth, ethical leadership, and workforce transitions. Balancing automation efficiency with human empowerment will require empathy, continuous learning, and transparent communication. In this context, the HCDT model can serve as a foundation for organizations where technology supports and elevates human potential, ensuring that innovation remains sustainable and humane (Sima, Gheorghe, Subić, & Nancu, 2020)

4. Conclusion

The digital transformation has revolutionized the way businesses work, communicate, and grow. Despite the many opportunities brought by this shift, it also poses serious challenges to people. Employees are often expected to adapt to new systems, tools, and processes more quickly than they can realistically handle. This constant pressure to change wears people down, creating what many researchers call the sense of exhaustion, resentment and loss of control that comes from continuous transformation. Throughout this study, the focus has been on understanding how organizations can manage this tension between technological progress and human well-being in a way that allows both to thrive.

Research has shown that the psychological side of transformation is just as important as the technical side. Lazarus and Folkman explained specifically that stress arises when people find themselves unable to cope with the demands around them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). System updates, overlapping tools, and an "always-active" culture make it difficult for employees to maintain a disconnect between work and personal life. Eventually, this overload drains their motivation, energy, and confidence. Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) adds another layer of understanding. People strive to protect what they value, including time, energy, and social support but every wave of digital change threatens to steal those resources. When employees feel they are losing more than they can regain, fatigue and resistance set in. In Bakker and Demerouti's Job Demands-Resources Model, they demonstrated that an increase in exhaustion is caused by high job demands and low support. People recover faster and are more open to change when organizations invest in training, emotional support, and good communication. This means that successful transformation depends less on technology itself and more on how well leaders help people adapt to it.

To meet this challenge, the Human-Centered Digital Transformation (HCDT) framework offers a balanced path forward. Instead of using technology as a tool for pressure, it places people at the center of change. In this framework, empathy, open communication, and continuous learning are emphasized as core values. By engaging employees early in the process, providing them with training and encouraging them to share their feedback, organizations can reduce anxiety and increase ownership. Movements like Industry 5.0 and Society 5.0 reflect this same idea: technology should enhance human capability, not replace it. In practice, applying the HCDT framework means moving through several stages. The first step is to listen to employees before a major change begins, to understand their readiness, concerns, and prior experiences. Next, is to educate and prepare them through targeted training and mentorship, which build confidence and skills. Change should then be introduced gradually, often through pilot projects or phased rollouts that allow for feedback. After implementation, continual support and recognition keep employees motivated, while recovery and reflection provide time for rest, consolidation of new skills, and preparation for future changes. Together, these stages form a cycle that makes transformation a shared experience rather than a source of burnout. Recovery is especially important. Sonnentag and Fritz have already shown that rest and psychological detachment are essential for maintaining energy and creativity during occupational stress (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). When organizations build short breaks or reflection periods into their transformation process, employees not only recover but also gain insight into what came off and what could improve. This reflective rhythm keeps innovation sustainable instead of exhausting.

With the advancement of artificial intelligence and automation, new opportunities as well as new fears are presented by digital transformation. It is common for workers to fear that automation could reduce the value of human skills or even render their jobs obsolete. These concerns introduce a new dimension of change fatigue, emotional and existential anxiety about relevance and meaning. In most cases, digital transformation models don't fully address this. Research needs to further explore how frameworks can incorporate adaptive skill development, ethical leadership, and fair workforce transitions in the future. The goal should be to balance automation’s efficiency with human empowerment, ensuring that technology supports people instead of replacing them.

For leaders, the fundamental lesson is clear: transformation cannot be treated as a purely technical project. It’s an ongoing cultural process that requires compassion and tolerance. A company that invests in trust,

inclusivity, and collaboration will be better able to handle the speed of change in the future. Building on digital literacy, ensuring psychological safety, and recognizing employee contributions help create workplaces where innovation becomes a natural outcome rather than a forced prerequisite. Yet again, no framework or strategy can completely eliminate the pressures of continuous change. It is inevitable that fatigue, uncertainty, and adaptation struggles will emerge in organizations as long as they continue to innovate. Therefore, the goal is not to remove these challenges but to reduce their impact through empathy, communication, and balance. These frameworks provide a realistic approach to managing this tension, helping organizations support their employees while sustaining innovation over time.

Ultimately, businesses will find success in digital transformation when they realize one simple truth: technology cannot reach its full potential without people. Sustainable innovation starts with human connection, trust, and shared purpose. By acknowledging that progress is as much about caring for people as it is about advancing systems, digital transformation becomes a journey of growth instead of an inconvenience.

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