

The Influence Of Organizational Digitalization On Work Relationships: Exploring Estrangement And Liberation

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ABSTRACT

In today's fast-paced digital age, organizations increasingly embrace technology to streamline operations and boost productivity. While digitalization offers numerous advantages, it also profoundly affects work relationships. This article delves into the multifaceted impact of organizational digitalization on employees' relationships, highlighting both potential estrangement and opportunities for liberation.

Digital tools can create a sense of isolation among employees, as face-to-face interactions are replaced by virtual communication. This shift can lead to feelings of detachment and disconnection, weakening the social fabric of the workplace. Additionally, the constant connectivity and pressure to respond promptly can contribute to stress and burnout, further straining relationships.

Conversely, digitalization also presents opportunities for liberation. It can break down geographical barriers, enabling collaboration across different locations and time zones. Employees can enjoy greater flexibility and autonomy, balancing work and personal life more effectively. Digital platforms can also facilitate more inclusive and diverse interactions, allowing voices from various backgrounds to be heard and valued.

This exploration of organizational digitalization reveals a complex dynamic where technology can both hinder and enhance work relationships. Understanding these dual effects is crucial for organizations aiming to foster a positive work environment. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the benefits, companies can navigate the digital age while maintaining strong, supportive relationships among their employees.

Keywords : Digitalisation - Work Relationships - Employee Autonomy -Virtual Communication - Flexibility and Autonomy

Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of today's digital era, organizations find themselves at the intersection of technological innovation and the fundamental dynamics of human interaction. The pervasive integration of digital tools and technologies into the workplace has undoubtedly propelled productivity to new heights. Yet, as organizations embrace the efficiency gains afforded by these digital advancements, a crucial question emerges: How can they simultaneously preserve and cultivate healthy, meaningful work relationships among employees?

This introduction sets the stage for our exploration into the delicate balance organizations must strike between leveraging digital tools for heightened productivity and maintaining the essence of human connection within the workforce. As we delve into this intricate interplay, we will unravel the multifaceted challenges faced by organizations and illuminate strategies that pave the way for a harmonious coexistence of technological efficiency and interpersonal richness. In this quest for equilibrium, we aim to navigate the fine line between the undeniable benefits of digital tools in optimizing workflow and the intrinsic value of fostering work relationships that contribute to employee well-being, job satisfaction, and overall organizational success. The subsequent sections will dissect the landscape, examining the promises and pitfalls of digitalization, exploring the facets of meaningful work relationships, and proposing actionable strategies for organizations to thrive in the delicate balance between productivity and interconnectedness.

Join us on this journey as we unravel the intricate tapestry of organizational life in the digital age, seeking insights that transcend the dichotomy of technology and human connection, ultimately guiding organizations towards a future where innovation and relationships coalesce for sustained success. In particular, we will address the pivotal question: How can organizations strike a balance between leveraging digital tools for productivity and maintaining healthy, meaningful work relationships among employees?

Organization of the Study

This study is organized as follows: First, the literature review will provide an in-depth exploration of existing research on organizational digitalization and its effects on work relationships. It will examine key theories and prior studies that have addressed both the estranging and liberating effects of digital tools within organizational settings.

Next, the methodology section will outline the research design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques used to examine the influence of digitalization on employee relationships. This section will describe the qualitative and quantitative approaches employed to gather insights into how digital tools shape interpersonal dynamics in the workplace.

The analysis and results section will present the findings from the study, highlighting key trends and patterns observed in employee relationships within digitalized work environments. Particular attention will be given to both the challenges of estrangement caused by technology and the opportunities for liberation and flexibility.

Following this, the discussion will interpret the findings in the context of existing literature, exploring the implications for organizations seeking to balance digital productivity with human connection. This section will also suggest strategies for mitigating the negative impacts of digitalization on employee relationships while enhancing its positive effects.

Finally, the conclusion will summarize the key insights drawn from the study and propose actionable recommendations for organizations aiming to foster healthy, meaningful work relationships in the digital age. Future research directions will also be suggested to continue exploring this dynamic intersection of technology and human interaction.

Literature review

In this part, the literature review will be reported by discussing Digital tools and Healthy Work Relationships, followed by the The Human Element in the Digital Age.

Leveraging Digital Tools for Productivity

The Digital Efficiency Paradigm

In the pursuit of efficiency and competitive edge, organizations have ardently embraced an array of digital tools designed to streamline workflows, automate processes, and enhance overall productivity. From project management platforms and communication tools to sophisticated data analytics systems, the digital landscape offers an expansive toolkit for optimizing daily operations. These tools have become the backbone of modern work, allowing teams to collaborate seamlessly, share information instantaneously, and achieve tasks with unprecedented speed and precision.

Examples of Digital Tools Shaping Productivity

Illustrating this digital revolution, examples abound of transformative technologies that have become synonymous with modern workplaces. Cloud-based collaboration tools like Slack and Microsoft Teams facilitate real-time communication, fostering a virtual connectivity that transcends physical boundaries. Project management platforms such as Asana and Trello empower teams to coordinate efforts and track progress effortlessly. Moreover, advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning contribute to predictive analytics and data-driven decision-making, further amplifying organizational efficiency.

The Pitfalls of Over-Reliance

However, with the benefits of digital tools come potential pitfalls. The temptation to rely excessively on these tools may inadvertently create a sense of detachment among team members. As digital interfaces increasingly mediate our interactions, there is a risk of diminishing face-to-face communication and the spontaneous exchange of ideas that often occurs in a more organic, non-digital setting. Striking the right balance becomes paramount to prevent the erosion of interpersonal connections in the pursuit of digital efficiency.

As we navigate the landscape of leveraging digital tools for productivity, our exploration will scrutinize both the advantages and challenges, unraveling the intricate relationship between technology and the human dimension of work.

Maintaining Healthy, Meaningful Work Relationships

The Essence of Healthy Work Relationships

In the midst of the digital whirlwind, the heartbeat of any thriving organization remains the strength of its interpersonal connections. Healthy work relationships form the bedrock of a positive organizational culture, fostering collaboration, creativity, and employee well-being. Defined by mutual respect, open communication, and a sense of camaraderie, these relationships transcend the confines of digital interfaces, contributing to a workplace environment that is not only productive but also fulfilling.

The Impact of Meaningful Connections

Research consistently underscores the profound impact of meaningful work relationships on both individual and organizational outcomes. Employees engaged in positive workplace connections are more likely to experience job satisfaction, higher levels of motivation, and increased

have been linked to improved team performance, innovation, and overall organizational success.

The Human Element in the Digital Age

Amidst the digital evolution, it becomes imperative for organizations to intentionally nurture the human element of work relationships. While digital tools facilitate remote collaboration and instantaneous communication, they can also pose a risk to the organic, spontaneous interactions that contribute to the fabric of healthy relationships. This section will delve into the strategies and approaches organizations can adopt to ensure that the digital landscape complements, rather than replaces, the development and sustenance of meaningful work connections.

As we embark on this exploration, the goal is to illuminate the intricate dynamics that define healthy work relationships and underscore their undiminished significance in the contemporary organizational landscape. By understanding and prioritizing the human element, organizations can cultivate a workplace culture that thrives on both technological efficiency and the richness of authentic, interpersonal connections.

Challenges to Balancing Productivity and Work Relationships

Digital Distractions and Virtual Workspaces

In the quest for heightened productivity through digital means, organizations encounter a host of challenges that can strain the delicate equilibrium between efficiency and work relationships. One notable challenge is the proliferation of digital distractions and the shift to virtual workspaces. Constant notifications, emails, and the ubiquity of virtual meetings may inadvertently create an environment where employees feel overwhelmed, hindering their ability to engage in meaningful, interpersonal exchanges.

Communication Breakdowns in the Virtual Sphere

While digital communication tools facilitate instant connections, they also pose the risk of communication breakdowns. Misinterpretations in written communication, the absence of non-verbal cues, and the depersonalization of interactions can contribute to a sense of estrangement among team members. As organizations rely heavily on digital channels, the potential for misunderstanding and a lack of emotional connection becomes more pronounced.

Methodology

Literature reviews aim to map and assess the body of literature to identify the gaps in the study and highlight the limitations of the knowledge . Therefore, structured literature reviews are completed via an iterative cycle of conceptualizing appropriate study keywords, examining the literature, and supplementing the analysis. Mishra, Gunasekaran, Papadopoulos, & Childe (2018) recommend a methodology of five steps to carry out a literature review; these steps are (1) scanning documents, (2) writing notes, (3) structuring the literature review, (4) writing the literature review, and (5) bibliography building. In a similar method, we employed the five-step methodology for data gathering and holistic evaluation of the area of the study (organizational digitalization and work relationships) to capture the most impactful research and deliver insights for current study interests. We also sought to provide directions for future studies related to balancing digital tools for productivity and maintaining healthy, meaningful work relationships among employees.

Case Studies:

The Consequences of Neglect

Examining real-world case studies provides valuable insights into the consequences of neglecting work relationships in favor of pure productivity. Instances of employee burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and reduced team cohesion serve as cautionary tales, emphasizing the importance of addressing these challenges head-on. Through these cases, we aim to underscore the tangible impact that imbalances between digital productivity and interpersonal relationships can have on both individuals and the organization as a whole.

Navigating these challenges requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges the benefits of digital productivity tools while actively mitigating the potential downsides. The subsequent sections will delve into actionable strategies and solutions to foster a harmonious coexistence, ensuring that organizations harness the power of technology without sacrificing the essence of meaningful work relationships.

Strategies for Achieving Balance

Provide actionable strategies for organizations to strike a balance:

1. Encouraging Regular Face-to-Face Interactions

Recognizing the importance of face-to-face communication in maintaining healthy work relationships, organizations can proactively encourage regular in-person interactions. Whether through team-building activities, periodic meetings, or collaborative workshops, fostering a sense of physical connection enhances the depth and authenticity of relationships, countering the potential isolation induced by digital interfaces.

2. Promoting Clear Communication and Expectations

Transparent communication is pivotal in navigating the challenges of a digitally-driven workplace. Organizations can establish clear communication channels, guidelines, and expectations to mitigate the risk of misunderstandings. This includes promoting an open-door policy, setting communication norms, and providing training on effective digital communication, ensuring that employees feel empowered to express themselves in a manner that fosters connection.

3. Setting Boundaries on Digital Device Use

To prevent the encroachment of digital distractions on work relationships, organizations can implement policies that set boundaries on digital device use. Encouraging designated periods for uninterrupted work, respecting non-working hours, and promoting a healthy work-life

balance contribute to an environment where employees can engage meaningfully with both their tasks and their colleagues.

4. Fostering a Culture of Trust and Collaboration

Cultivating a culture of trust and collaboration is foundational to achieving balance. When employees feel trusted to manage their time responsibly and empowered to collaborate effectively, the need to micromanage through digital tools diminishes. Organizations can prioritize team-building activities, recognize collaborative efforts, and celebrate shared successes to reinforce a culture that values both productivity and interpersonal connections.

As we explore these strategies, the emphasis is on practical and actionable approaches that organizations can implement to strike the delicate balance between leveraging digital tools for productivity and nurturing the meaningful work relationships that underpin a thriving organizational culture.

Highlight real-world success stories where organizations have effectively balanced these aspects

1. Encouraging Regular Face-to-Face Interactions

Google Creative Lab: Embracing the significance of face-to-face interactions, Google Creative Lab, a global design agency, initiated a "Collaboration Retreat" program. This annual event brings together teams from various departments for intensive, in-person collaboration sessions. By combining strategic work discussions with team-building activities, Google Creative Lab has successfully strengthened interpersonal bonds among employees, fostering a culture of creativity and innovation.

2. Promoting Clear Communication and Expectations

Edelman: Recognizing the pivotal role of communication in maintaining a healthy workplace, Edelman, a leading communications firm, implemented a comprehensive communication training program. Through tailored workshops and seminars, employees at all levels have enhanced their digital communication skills. This investment in refining communication norms has resulted in improved clarity, reduced misunderstandings, and a more cohesive work environment

3. Setting Boundaries on Digital Device Use

Basecamp: In response to the challenges posed by digital distractions, Basecamp, a technology start-up, introduced a unique "Digital Sabbath" policy. Every Friday afternoon, employees are

encouraged to unplug from digital devices, fostering an environment conducive to personal connections and uninterrupted focus. Basecamp's commitment to setting clear boundaries on digital device use has not only mitigated burnout but has also contributed to increased employee satisfaction.

4. Fostering a Culture of Trust and Collaboration

Salesforce: Salesforce, a multinational corporation, has prioritized the development of a collaborative culture through innovative practices. By implementing a digital platform that encourages spontaneous idea sharing and cross-departmental collaboration, Salesforce has successfully integrated technology to enhance productivity while maintaining a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships. This approach has resulted in a workplace where trust and collaboration are foundational to success.

These real-world success stories from Google Creative Lab, Edelman, Basecamp, and Salesforce showcase the diverse approaches that organizations can take to balance digital productivity with meaningful work relationships. As we analyze these cases, the subsequent sections will distill key principles and strategies derived from these success stories, providing valuable insights for organizations striving to navigate the intricate dynamics of the digital workplace.

Measuring Success and Adaptation

Assessing Success in Balancing Productivity and Work Relationships

Navigating the intricate balance between digital productivity and meaningful work relationships requires a systematic assessment of success. Key methods for evaluation include:

1. Employee Satisfaction Surveys:

Regular surveys designed to gauge employees' satisfaction levels regarding their experiences with digital tools and the quality of work relationships.

2. Performance Metrics:

Quantitative measures of productivity, project completion rates, and the impact of digital tools on overall efficiency.

3. Qualitative Feedback:

Gathering qualitative insights through interviews, focus groups, or open forums to capture nuanced aspects of work relationships and collaboration.

Continuous Monitoring and Adaptation

Adaptation in the digital age necessitates continuous monitoring and a commitment to evolution. Organizations can adopt the following strategies:

1. Agile Feedback Loops:

Establishing regular feedback loops allows organizations to adapt swiftly to changing dynamics. Feedback from employees on the effectiveness of digital tools and the state of work relationships can inform iterative improvements.

2. Technology Audits:

Periodic assessments of the digital tools in use help organizations stay aligned with evolving needs. This ensures that the technology landscape remains supportive rather than disruptive to work relationships.

3. Cultural Assessment:

Regularly assessing the organizational culture provides insights into whether the values of collaboration, trust, and meaningful connections are embedded in the fabric of the workplace.

Metrics and Feedback Mechanisms for Work Relationship Health

Transparent presentation of metrics and feedback mechanisms is crucial for monitoring the health of work relationships. This involves:

a. Visual Dashboards:

Develop visually intuitive dashboards that display key metrics related to digital productivity and work relationships. These dashboards should be accessible to employees, promoting transparency and accountability.

b. Regular Reporting:

Establish a routine for reporting on the identified metrics. Regular updates, shared across the organization, help create a shared understanding of the current state and progress over time.

c. Feedback Sessions:

Incorporate feedback sessions into team meetings or town halls where employees can discuss survey results and collaborate on potential improvements. This interactive approach encourages engagement and empowers employees to contribute to the ongoing evolution of the workplace.

As organizations navigate the landscape of the digital workplace, a robust evaluation framework that combines quantitative metrics, qualitative feedback, and a commitment to continuous improvement becomes essential. The subsequent sections will delve into case studies and actionable strategies derived from these principles.

Training and Development

Explore the role of training and development programs in equipping employees and leaders with the skills needed to navigate the digital workplace while maintaining relationships

In this section, we will delve into the crucial role of training and development programs in equipping employees and leaders with the skills needed to navigate the digital workplace effectively while maintaining strong and meaningful work relationships.

- a. **Digital Skills Training:** Training programs for digital skills are essential to help employees master the use of digital tools and technologies. This may include courses on specific software usage, data management, cybersecurity, and online communication.
- b. **Communication and Interpersonal Relationship Skills Development:** In addition to technical skills, developing communication and interpersonal relationship skills is crucial. Training programs may include modules on effective communication, conflict management, virtual collaboration, and creating an inclusive work environment.
- c. **Digital Leadership Training:** Leaders play a pivotal role in fostering a healthy digital work culture and maintaining positive relationships among team members. Digital leadership training programs can help managers develop leadership skills tailored to the digital age, such as change management, transformational leadership, and building high-performing virtual teams.
- d. **Continuous Training and Lifelong Learning:** In a constantly evolving environment, continuous training is essential. Continuous professional development programs provide employees with the opportunity to stay updated on the latest trends and technologies while strengthening their skills in work relationships and leadership.

e. **Evaluating the Effectiveness of Training Programs:** It is crucial to measure the effectiveness of training programs to ensure they are meeting their objectives. This can be done by gathering employee feedback, tracking participants' progress, and assessing the impact of acquired skills on productivity and work relationships.

By investing in well-designed training and development programs, organizations can ensure that their employees are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in the digital age while fostering positive work relationships.

Examples of Successful Training Initiatives

To ensure employees and leaders can effectively balance the demands of digital productivity with the need to maintain healthy work relationships, many organizations have implemented robust training and development programs. Below are a few exemplary initiatives that have proven successful:

1- Digital Literacy and Communication Workshops:

Google's "Digital Garage": Google offers comprehensive workshops under its "Digital Garage" initiative, which aim to enhance digital skills across various domains. These workshops include modules on effective digital communication, ensuring employees can leverage digital tools without compromising on the quality of interpersonal interactions. By improving digital literacy, employees can use technology more efficiently, reducing the frustration that often leads to strained relationships.

Microsoft's "Digital Skills Initiative": This program not only focuses on upskilling employees in digital competencies but also includes training on collaborative tools like Microsoft Teams. The training emphasizes best practices for maintaining effective communication and fostering teamwork in a digital environment, ensuring that technology enhances rather than hinders work relationships.

2- Emotional Intelligence and Virtual Collaboration Training:

IBM's "Think Academy": IBM's Think Academy provides courses on emotional intelligence tailored for a virtual work environment. These courses help employees recognize and manage their emotions, improve empathy, and enhance their ability to build strong relationships, even when working remotely. The training includes practical scenarios and role-playing exercises to simulate digital interactions and provide hands-on experience.

Salesforce's "Trailhead" Program: Salesforce's Trailhead platform offers a dedicated trail on "Virtual Collaboration and Emotional Intelligence." This program teaches employees how to communicate effectively, build trust, and maintain strong relationships within a digital workspace. The courses are designed to be interactive, incorporating real-life case studies and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

3- Leadership Development Programs:

Deloitte's "Greenhouse": Deloitte's Greenhouse program focuses on leadership development in the context of digital transformation. Leaders are trained to foster a culture that values both productivity and relationships. The program includes workshops on virtual team management, conflict resolution, and strategies for maintaining team cohesion in a digital-first world.

General Electric's "BrilliantYOU": GE's BrilliantYOU platform offers leadership courses that emphasize the importance of balancing digital efficiency with human connection. Leaders learn to implement policies and practices that support a healthy work-life balance, encourage open communication, and promote a culture of continuous feedback and support.

4- Holistic Well-being and Team-building Programs:

LinkedIn Learning's "Well-being in the Workplace": This program offers courses that integrate digital well-being with team-building activities. Employees learn techniques to manage digital overload, such as setting boundaries and prioritizing tasks, while also participating in virtual team-building exercises designed to strengthen interpersonal relationships.

Adobe's "Leadership Circles": Adobe's Leadership Circles program focuses on the holistic development of leaders, incorporating elements of mindfulness, well-being, and relationship-building. The program includes regular virtual meet-ups where leaders can share experiences, discuss challenges, and develop strategies to support their teams effectively.

These training initiatives highlight the importance of a balanced approach, where digital tools are leveraged for productivity while maintaining the human element crucial for strong work relationships. By investing in such comprehensive training programs, organizations can ensure that their employees and leaders are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the digital workplace, fostering an environment where productivity and meaningful connections coexist harmoniously.

Conclusion

Summarize Key Takeaways and Recommendations for Organizations

The journey through the digital transformation of workplaces reveals a delicate balance that organizations must achieve to thrive. Key takeaways from this exploration include:

Leveraging Digital Tools: Digital tools significantly enhance productivity and efficiency. However, their over-reliance can lead to isolation and weaken interpersonal connections.

Maintaining Work Relationships: Healthy, meaningful work relationships are crucial for employee well-being and organizational success. Strong relationships boost job satisfaction, engagement, and overall productivity.

Balancing Challenges: Organizations face numerous challenges, including digital distractions and the complexities of virtual work environments, which can strain relationships.

Actionable Strategies: Practical strategies, such as fostering open communication, promoting work-life balance, and investing in team-building activities, can help balance productivity with relationship-building.

Continuous Improvement: Adapting and continuously improving strategies based on feedback and changing circumstances is essential to maintaining this balance.

Reiterate the Importance of Finding Equilibrium in the Digital Age

In the digital age, finding an equilibrium between leveraging technology for productivity and fostering meaningful work relationships is more important than ever. The rapid pace of technological advancements can create a disconnect among employees if not managed carefully. Therefore, organizations must be intentional about creating a work environment where digital tools enhance rather than hinder human connections. This balance not only leads to a more harmonious workplace but also drives sustainable organizational success.

Encourage Organizations to Prioritize Both Productivity and Work Relationships for Long-Term Success

For long-term success, organizations must prioritize both productivity and work relationships. Digital tools should be seen as enablers of efficiency, not replacements for human interaction. By investing in training and development programs that equip employees and leaders with the skills to navigate the digital landscape while maintaining strong relationships, organizations can create a resilient and cohesive workforce. Encouraging open communication, promoting collaborative work environments, and regularly assessing the health of work relationships are steps that will ensure both high productivity and a supportive workplace culture.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to the publication of this research on the influence of organizational digitalization on work relationships. Furthermore, all ethical concerns such as plagiarism, informed consent, research misconduct, duplicate publication or submission, and redundancy have been thoroughly addressed and monitored by the authors.

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