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Digitalization and Employee Well-Being: The Role of Organizational Policy

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Abstract

Purpose:
Digitalization is reshaping workplaces and redefining how organizations manage human resources and support employee well-being. While the relationship between digital transformation and employee well-being is gaining attention, the role of organizational policy in moderating this relationship, especially across different enterprise sizes, remains underexplored in the managerial literature. This paper aims to fill this gap by investigating how enterprises address employee well-being in the context of digitalization, through a systematic mapping of existing research.

Methodology:
The study employs a scoping review methodology, adhering to the PRISMA-ScR guidelines. The Scopus database was used to identify and select relevant peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2025. A total of 300 papers were reviewed and thematically analyzed to uncover major patterns, research trends, and gaps.

Findings: The review identifies three thematic areas: (1) the impact of digitalization on psychological well-being, including digital overload and stress; (2) the role of organizational policies in supporting or neglecting employee needs; and (3) the role of strategic policy implementation.

Research limitations/implications
Limitations include the restriction to English-language, Scopus-indexed publications, and potential subjectivity in thematic interpretation. Findings contribute to the development of tailored organizational policies that promote employee well-being in digital contexts.

Originality/value:
This review presents the first systematic comparison of how enterprise size influences organizational policy responses to digitalization and employee well-being, offering practical insights for scholars, HR professionals, and policymakers navigating digital transformation.

Keywords: Digitalization, Employee Well-Being, Organizational Policy, SMEs, Large Enterprises, Scoping Review

Paper Type: Literature review

1. Introduction

Digitalization plays a significant role in reshaping how organizations operate, communicate, and manage their workforce (Veroehf, 2019). Digitalization is defined as the adoption of digital technologies to enhance organizational processes, communication, and decision-making. It encompasses a wide range of tools, including cloud computing, remote work platforms, artificial intelligence, and digital performance monitoring systems. These tools are increasingly integrated into daily operations across various industries and sectors, impacting both the technical and human aspects of work.

In particular, digitalization influences how employees perform tasks, interact with systems, and experience their work environments. On the one hand, it improves operational efficiency, flexibility, and connectivity. On the other hand, it introduces new risks for employees, such as digital fatigue, technostress, and psychological overload. These risks are associated with prolonged screen exposure, constant connectivity, and the expectation to be continuously available through digital channels. The shift toward hybrid and remote work has intensified these effects, leading to blurred boundaries between professional and personal life and raising concerns about long-term employee well-being.

Organizational policy plays a key role in shaping how employees experience digitalization. Policies related to workload management, digital communication norms, and well-being support can help organizations mitigate the adverse effects of digitalization. However, the design and implementation of such policies vary considerably depending on the size and structure of the enterprise. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) may adopt more informal and reactive approaches, while large enterprises often rely on structured policies supported by greater resources and formal procedures.

Although the relevance of this topic is widely acknowledged, the relationship between digitalization, employee well-being, and organizational policy has not been investigated comprehensively and systematically.

For this purpose, the objective of this scoping review is to map how the literature has addressed the intersection of digitalization, organizational policy, and employee well-being. More specifically, our research question is the following: *How do organizational policy impact on digitalization on employee well-being?*

By synthesizing cross-disciplinary insights, this review contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical guidance on navigating the human dimensions of digital transformation across diverse organizational contexts.

2. Research Method. The scoping review approach

This study adopts a scoping literature review approach, which is particularly suited for mapping key concepts, summarizing available evidence, and identifying research gaps in emerging fields (Moher et al., 2015).
Moreover, by adopting the PRISMA chart, we document the flow of information through the different phases of the scoping review (Table 1). This includes the number of records identified, included, and excluded, and the reasons for exclusions.

Our search strategy involved systematically querying the Scopus database using the following key terms: (digital transformation) AND (wellbeing OR technostress OR burnout). We selected 300 peer-reviewed articles and systematic reviews published in academic journals, considering the period between 2010 and 2025, and limited our selection to those written in English. In addition, the selection strategy considered studies that (a) investigate the effects of digitalization or digital transformation in organizational settings, (b) examine outcomes related to employee well-being, such as digital fatigue, burnout, or technostress, and (c) discuss the presence or absence of organizational policy responses.

Accordingly, 300 articles were analyzed, with a focus on the impact of digitalization on employee well-being, the role of organizational policies in shaping these effects, and the differences in strategic policy implementation. Among the 300 articles considered, 39 met the inclusion criteria and were considered for the review.

Table 1 - Prisma chart

Phase	**Description**	**No. of Records**
Identification	Records identified through database searching	300
	Additional records identified through other sources	3
Screening	Records after duplicates removed	293
	Records screened (title and abstract)	293
	Records excluded based on title and abstract	293
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	54
	Full-text articles excluded (did not meet the inclusion criteria or were not relevant to the three themes)	15
Inclusion	Studies included in qualitative synthesis (scoping review)	**39**

3. Results

The articles examined were categorized according to their typology and methodological approach adopted. These studies were conducted across diverse geographical and organizational contexts, using a variety of methodologies including qualitative interviews, surveys, case studies, mixed methods, and systematic literature reviews as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2 -Studies categorisation

Type of paper	Method/study Design	No. of articles
Theoretical	Theoretical-conceptual synthesis	1
	Theoretical-conceptual piece	1
	Conceptual analysis	1
	Conceptual & case study approach	1
	Bibliometric analysis	1
Empirical	Mixed-methods	7
	Quantitative survey	6
	Qualitative interview	4
	Quantitative (not survey or interviews)	3
	Qualitative case study	2
	Qualitative (not case studies)	1
	Systematic literature review	2
	Unclassified empirical (various designs)	9

4. The impact of digitalization on psychological well-being

4.1. Digital Fatigue and Productivity

Digital fatigue, defined as the persistent cognitive and emotional exhaustion stemming from the extended use of digital tools, has emerged as a key factor influencing both individual productivity and organizational well-being (Christensen et al., 2024; Kutlutürk et al., 2024). Research suggests that this condition is particularly pronounced in remote and hybrid work arrangements, where overlapping digital communications and fragmented task flows increase the likelihood of mental strain (Cassidy et al., 2024).

Among the primary contributors to this fatigue are asynchronous communication channels such as email and messaging platforms. These formats demand sustained cognitive engagement,

often lacking the immediate feedback and shared context that make synchronous tools like video conferencing less taxing (Meyer et al., 2022). Studies indicate that the cumulative effect of switching between platforms and tasks results in diminished attention spans, greater error frequency, and emotional exhaustion. This burden is especially acute in knowledge-intensive sectors such as education and healthcare, where prolonged screen exposure and the scarcity of interpersonal interactions are strongly linked to emotional detachment and job dissatisfaction (Bamel et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2025).

Smaller organizations are particularly vulnerable, as the absence of structured wellness protocols and communication guidelines exacerbates the impact of digital overload (Giacosa et al., 2025). While digital tools have improved flexibility and access to resources, unmoderated usage patterns have been shown to erode concentration and engagement (Cassidy et al., 2024). Still, organizational responses to digital fatigue often lack strategic foresight. Few interventions address how fatigue evolves across job functions or hierarchies, and limited empirical work explores whether techniques such as scheduled "offline windows" or moderated use of synchronous platforms can produce sustainable outcomes (Giacosa et al., 2023).

Furthermore, as noted by Murphy et al. (2024), research has yet to offer conclusive insights into the long-term efficacy of interventions such as communication-free hours, notification control systems, or personalized digital rhythms.

4.2. Technological Overload and Emotional Strain

Closely linked to digital fatigue, technological overload represents a distinct but overlapping stressor, one rooted in the relentless exposure to digital demands and the emotional toll of constant connectivity. This phenomenon has been consistently documented across industries, highlighting a widespread inability to psychologically disengage from work (Kutlutürk et al., 2024). A prominent source of this strain is the normalization of an “always-on” culture, where employees are expected to remain accessible beyond standard working hours.

As Finstad et al. (2024) and Cassidy et al. (2024) emphasize, this expectation blurs personal-professional boundaries and fosters chronic stress. The implicit demand for immediacy leads to hyper-responsiveness, making employees feel digitally tethered and constantly observed. Cioffi et al. (2025) describe this "digital presence imperative" as a cultural norm that undermines mental recovery and diminishes long-term engagement. Employees report heightened anxiety stemming from unending notifications, fear of missing critical updates, and the subtle pressure to maintain visibility in digital spaces.

Technostress, a psychological response to digital saturation, manifests in irritability, fatigue, and declining motivation, particularly when digital environments lack user autonomy (Wirkkala, 2024; Wosny et al., 2024). While small enterprises often face resource constraints that prevent the implementation of structured coping mechanisms, larger organizations confront rigidity in their digital infrastructures, which limits adaptability (Vukelić et al., 2024).

These divergent realities underscore the importance of tailoring interventions to organizational context. However, distinctions between different forms of technological overload, such as cognitive versus emotional, remain under-theorized. Moreover, the extent to which enterprise size, job function, or leadership approach modulates exposure to overload is still an evolving area of inquiry (Bamel et al., 2022).

5. The Role of Organizational Policies in Supporting or Neglecting Employee Needs

5.1. Policy Frameworks and Support Structures

Organizational policies increasingly serve as critical levers in shaping how employees experience and manage digital intensity in the workplace. From formal digital communication guidelines to wellness initiatives and "right to disconnect" mandates, such frameworks aim to moderate the psychological and cognitive demands of technology-driven work environments. Yet, the nature and implementation of these policies vary widely by organization size, digital maturity, and leadership engagement.

Empirical findings from Volderauer et al. (2025) show that in large enterprises, structured digital boundaries such as asynchronous communication rules and email curfews can be particularly effective in mitigating digital interruptions and preserving cognitive bandwidth. These measures enable employees to re-establish intentional work rhythms and reduce stress associated with continuous connectivity.

The success of these frameworks, however, is closely tied to the quality of leadership. As Sharma et al. (2024) note, emotionally intelligent leaders who model balanced digital behavior by respecting boundaries and setting realistic expectations create the psychological conditions necessary for effective policy uptake. Similarly, Al Issa et al. (2024) emphasize the alignment between leadership actions and institutional norms as a determinant of policy impact. Yet, as Weerarathna et al. (2023) caution, a persistent "policy-practice disconnect" undermines many well-intentioned initiatives. This disconnect often results from insufficient buy-in at middle management levels or inadequate monitoring mechanisms, which prevent policies from becoming embedded in everyday routines.

In small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), structural limitations such as the absence of formal human resources (HR) systems often impede the deployment of these frameworks. Malik et al. (2022) and Gyorffy et al. (2024) emphasize that constrained institutional capacity and limited organizational resources significantly heighten employees' vulnerability to unmanaged technostress and digital fatigue, particularly in contexts lacking formalized support systems.

Furthermore, much of the existing evidence is derived from cross-sectional studies, offering limited insight into how policies evolve or sustain their effectiveness over time. Without longitudinal or mixed-method evaluations, the long-term adaptability of digital well-being strategies remains unclear (Mazzei et al., 2023).

Scholars such as Ajith et al. (2024) and Simba et al. (2024) further argue that many digital wellness policies prioritize procedural compliance over addressing the relational and psychological dimensions of well-being. When policies focus predominantly on administrative enforcement rather than relational trust and autonomy, their potential to foster engagement and resilience is diminished.

5.2. Sectoral and Contextual Specificity

The design and implementation of digital well-being policies are also shaped by sector-specific demands and organizational context. Research by Bamel et al. (2022) and Cassidy et al. (2024) underscores the necessity of tailoring such initiatives to reflect the cognitive demands, cultural expectations, and unique relational dynamics of each industry.

In sectors such as healthcare, education, and knowledge-intensive services, employees are particularly susceptible to digital fatigue due to sustained cognitive load, frequent task switching, and emotional labor. Isakov et al. (2024) argue that support mechanisms, such as peer mentoring, psychological safety protocols, and flexible scheduling, are not only beneficial but essential in these environments. However, many organizations continue to implement one-size-fits-all strategies that overlook these nuances.

SMEs, which often lack HR infrastructure or codified digital policies, leave workers vulnerable to unmoderated digital stress (Ye et al., 2024). In contrast, while large enterprises are more likely to formalize wellness policies, they frequently struggle to ensure that these frameworks remain adaptable to operational realities. This disconnect between strategic design and frontline execution reduces the practical relevance of otherwise well-conceived policies. Emerging literature increasingly advocates for participatory policy development as a means of bridging this gap. Studies by Picazo (2024) and Battisti et al. (2022) suggest that employee involvement in shaping digital norms increases relevance, compliance, and ownership. Similarly, Volderauer et al. (2025) show that co-created guidelines are more likely to align with organizational culture and employee expectations, particularly in hybrid and distributed work environments.

Moreover, Christensen et al. (2024) highlight that digital policy effectiveness is enhanced when individual differences in digital engagement, such as cognitive style, communication preferences, and technological proficiency, are considered. Despite growing awareness of these factors, such personalization remains rare in organizational practice.

6. Policy Formalization and Resource Disparity

Organizational scale plays a pivotal role in shaping how digital well-being strategies are formalized and resourced. Large enterprises often benefit from robust institutional infrastructures and dedicated financial capital, enabling the development of comprehensive frameworks that integrate digital communication protocols, right-to-disconnect policies, and wellness initiatives within broader HR systems (Meske et al., 2021). These measures are

generally associated with improved outcomes, including reduced employee burnout, enhanced psychological safety, and increased engagement.

Nevertheless, the implementation of these policies is not without friction. A recurring theme in the literature is the so-called “policy-practice disconnect”, the divergence between well-designed institutional strategies and their actual uptake at the operational level (Derra et al., 2022). This disjunction is frequently attributed to bureaucratic inertia, interdepartmental silos, and limited feedback mechanisms, which collectively undermine policy responsiveness and hinder alignment with evolving employee needs (Kadir et al., 2021). In contrast, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often lack formalized HR infrastructures and rely on ad hoc or reactive approaches to employee well-being. While this leanness may foster agility and allow for more personalized responses, it also limits the scalability and consistency of digital wellness interventions (Cassidy et al., 2024).

The absence of codified policies increases exposure to unmanaged digital stressors, especially in high-demand environments where digital boundaries remain undefined. Despite these contrasts, comparative empirical insights into the effectiveness of digital well-being strategies across organizational sizes remain limited. Cross-sectional studies rarely provide sufficient granularity to understand how enterprise-scale interacts with contextual variables such as industry norms, technological maturity, or employee digital literacy (Bamel et al., 2022). Without longitudinal or mixed-method evaluations, it remains unclear whether policy design in large firms promotes excessive standardization or if SME practices lack the resilience needed for long-term support (Balducci et al., 2025).

7 Managerial Capacity

The success of digital well-being policies is highly contingent on the managerial tier's ability to translate strategic intentions into actionable, empathetic practices. Mid-level and frontline managers serve as crucial intermediaries, and their emotional intelligence, decision-making agility, and engagement levels often determine whether digital wellness protocols are meaningfully implemented (Ertio et al., 2024).

Within large organizations, leadership development initiatives are more prevalent but tend to prioritize administrative compliance over the cultivation of emotional or relational competence (Ertio et al., 2024). This results in managers who may be structurally informed but remain ill-equipped to recognize early signs of digital fatigue, navigate the complexities of remote supervision, or foster a digitally sustainable work culture.

Conversely, managers in SMEs often benefit from closer interpersonal ties with their teams, allowing for greater awareness of employee stress levels. However, these advantages are tempered by a lack of formal training, resource constraints, and limited access to organizational toolkits for structured well-being implementation (Virtanen et al., 2023).

Research increasingly supports the critical value of emotionally intelligent leadership. Attributes such as empathy, adaptability, and boundary-setting not only promote employee

resilience but also increase the uptake of well-being policies (Ertio et al., 2024). Modeling balanced digital behaviors, such as observing communication curfews or encouraging offline detachment, has been shown to foster a culture of psychological safety and sustained engagement.

Practical interventions to support managerial capacity include burnout detection training, digital empathy workshops, and co-designed action plans (Azpíroz-Dorronsoro et al., 2024; Frennert et al., 2023). These approaches are particularly effective in distributed work settings, where trust and clear expectations are critical to team cohesion.

6.1. Organizational Agility

Organizational agility, defined as the capacity to reconfigure structures, routines, and decision-making processes in response to evolving digital demands, has emerged as a pivotal factor in safeguarding employee well-being amid ongoing digital transformation. In contrast to rigid, compliance-oriented policy regimes, agile organizations display characteristics of iterative learning, feedback responsiveness, and cross-functional coordination, enabling them to balance operational efficiency with psychological sustainability (Sanchez-Segura et al., 2023).

Evidence indicates that agile enterprises frequently test digital well-being policies at the team level, iteratively refine them through frontline feedback, and selectively scale interventions that demonstrate contextual efficacy (Kralj et al., 2023). This bottom-up model reduces the "policy-practice disconnect" commonly associated with top-down governance, fostering a stronger alignment between strategy and experience (Kuske et al., 2024). As a result, agile organizations often report enhanced employee satisfaction, increased autonomy, and diminished technostress levels (Wirkkala et al., 2024).

At a micro-organizational level, agility enables dynamic regulation of digital exposure. Teams can adaptively switch between asynchronous and synchronous communication, reassign workflows to minimize digital interruptions, and set boundaries that reflect the intensity and complexity of their tasks (Enstroem et al., 2024; Sherratt et al., 2024). These localized adjustments respect individual differences in digital capacity and engagement thresholds, thereby contributing to sustained well-being across diverse work modalities, whether remote, hybrid, or on-site (Christensen et al., 2024). Leadership serves as the cornerstone of organizational agility. Leaders who foster psychological safety, encourage experimentation, and support bottom-up innovation play a critical role in embedding agile practices into the organizational operational culture. Such leadership marked by emotional intelligence and flexibility cultivates environments where digital well-being policies are both credible and actionable (Battisti et al., 2022).

Agility is further reinforced by cultural values such as transparency, continuous improvement, and shared responsibility. These elements facilitate the ongoing adaptation of well-being strategies in response to technological change and social complexity (Salzmann-Erikson et al., 2024). Rather than treating employee well-being as a static outcome, agile organizations frame

it as a dynamic process requiring continuous calibration, reflection, and stakeholder engagement. Notably, agile approaches are particularly valuable in high-velocity digital environments where static policy frameworks often fail to keep pace. In such settings, adaptability serves as a form of resilience, enabling organizations to mitigate emergent risks while proactively responding to shifts in employee needs. Giacosa et al. (2023) and Alfehaid et al. (2024) demonstrate that the implementation of agile communication protocols significantly supported organizational transitions during post-pandemic workplace reconfigurations, underscoring the strategic advantage of flexibility in navigating volatile and uncertain environments. Likewise, Bamel et al. (2022) emphasize that such responsiveness is instrumental in bridging the gap between digital innovation and human sustainability.

7. Discussion and implications

This scoping review contributes to a growing body of scholarship at the intersection of digitalization, organizational policy, and employee well-being. By systematically analyzing how enterprises respond to the psychosocial effects of digital transformation, the review surfaces nuanced distinctions in strategic priorities, implementation capacities, and organizational cultures. These findings provide a basis for reframing current understandings of digital work and policy design in management studies.

First, the review confirms that digital fatigue and technological overload are not uniformly experienced across organizational settings. Their manifestation is mediated by factors such as communication norms, job design, leadership behavior, and sectoral intensity. In knowledge-driven sectors such as healthcare and education, where emotional labor and cognitive load are inherently high, digitalization compounds existing stressors and elevates burnout risks. Importantly, while digital tools are designed to optimize efficiency, their unregulated use can paradoxically undermine focus, autonomy, and well-being, particularly in the absence of robust institutional safeguards.

Second, the findings underscore that organizational policy plays a crucial moderating role. However, the efficacy of such policies depends not only on their content but also on their implementation, adaptability, and perceived legitimacy. Larger firms are more likely to develop formalized digital well-being policies, yet they often struggle with policy-practice alignment due to structural inertia, hierarchical fragmentation, and inadequate feedback mechanisms. In contrast, SMEs typically lack formal systems but demonstrate greater agility and responsiveness to employee needs. This duality reveals that neither structure nor flexibility alone is sufficient; instead, a hybrid model that leverages both formal frameworks and adaptive processes appears most promising.

Third, leadership emerges as a critical enabler of policy effectiveness. Emotionally intelligent leaders, who are capable of modeling healthy digital behaviors, fostering trust, and responding effectively to team dynamics, are essential to embedding well-being practices into an organization’s culture. Yet, leadership development efforts often prioritize procedural

competence over relational capacity, particularly in large organizations. Managerial capacity-building should therefore emphasize soft skills alongside technical policy literacy to ensure effective implementation.

Perhaps most notably, the review identifies organizational agility as a cross-cutting mechanism that links policy design, leadership, and employee outcomes. Agile organizations that incorporate iterative feedback, cross-functional collaboration, and micro-level experimentation are better positioned to navigate the complexities of digital work. Agility supports not only rapid adaptation to emerging technologies but also the co-creation of well-being norms that align with lived employee experiences. This shift from static policy deployment to dynamic ecosystem management represents a critical evolution in organizational strategy.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support calls for more integrative models of digital transformation that foreground human and relational dimensions alongside technological and economic drivers. While extant models often treat digitalization as a linear or infrastructure-centered process, this review suggests that its success is contingent on contextual fit, participatory governance, and socio-emotional intelligence within organizations. Future theoretical development should seek to embed concepts such as digital resilience, psychological safety, and adaptive capacity within frameworks of organizational change and innovation.

Practically, the review offers actionable insights for organizations of all sizes. It emphasizes the need for tailored, flexible policies that reflect sectoral demands and workforce diversity; the importance of leadership training that goes beyond compliance to include emotional acumen; and the value of agile feedback loops that allow policies to evolve in real-time. These strategies are not only relevant in the context of ongoing remote and hybrid work arrangements but also essential for building future-ready organizations capable of sustaining well-being in the face of continuous technological change.

Finally, the review highlights a need for further empirical research. While cross-sectional studies provide valuable snapshots, longitudinal and mixed-method designs are necessary to capture the evolving dynamics of digital fatigue, policy efficacy, and organizational learning. Comparative analyses across industries, regions, and cultures would further enhance the generalizability and relevance of findings.

8. Conclusion and directions for future research

This scoping review advances scholarly understanding of how digitalization intersects with employee well-being and organizational policy. By synthesizing evidence from 39 peer-reviewed studies across diverse sectors and methodological traditions, the review offers a structured account of the psychosocial risks posed by digital transformation and the mechanisms through which organizational policies mediate these effects.

The analysis reveals that while digitalization enhances operational efficiency and connectivity, it simultaneously introduces complex psychosocial challenges such as digital fatigue,

technostress, and emotional overload that threaten sustained employee engagement and mental health. These challenges are magnified in environments lacking clear communication boundaries, leadership support, and adaptive well-being frameworks.

Crucially, organizational policy emerges not merely as a structural artifact but as a dynamic mediator capable of either mitigating or exacerbating digital strain. Large enterprises often possess the institutional capacity to formalize digital wellness strategies, but implementation gaps and cultural rigidity frequently undermine their effectiveness. Conversely, SMEs display greater adaptability and interpersonal sensitivity, but are hindered by resource constraints and limited institutionalization. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of digital well-being interventions is contingent on both structural support and contextual responsiveness.

Moreover, the review highlights the strategic importance of leadership and organizational agility in translating policy into practice. Leaders who model emotionally intelligent and inclusive behaviors are instrumental in shaping digital norms and promoting psychological safety. Agile organizations capable of iterative learning, cross-functional coordination, and micro-level experimentation are better equipped to reconcile digital innovation with human sustainability.

Theoretically, this review contributes to an evolving paradigm that situates employee well-being as a core dimension of digital transformation. It calls for an expansion of digitalization models to incorporate human-centered design, participatory governance, and adaptive leadership as critical enablers of successful change. Practically, it offers actionable insights for policymakers, HR practitioners, and organizational leaders seeking to craft resilient, inclusive, and future-ready digital strategies.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal and mixed-method investigations to trace the evolution of digital fatigue and policy efficacy over time. Comparative studies across sectors, regions, and organizational sizes will also be essential to develop more contextually attuned frameworks for managing digital well-being.

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