

Digital transformation and well-being at work

Transformation digitale et bien-être au travail

ZENJARI Amine

Enseignant chercheur

Ecole Doctorale Groupe ISCAE

LAREM : Laboratoire de recherche en management

Maroc

azenjari@groupeisca.ma

BOUAYAD Houda

Doctorante

Ecole Doctorale Groupe ISCAE

LAREM : Laboratoire de recherche en management

Maroc

houda.bouayad@gmail.com

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Abstract

The current environment faced by businesses continues to surprise them, with an extremely dynamic context characterized by a digital revolution 4.0, with impacts on economic, political, and technological levels. This context certainly presents challenges, but also opportunities that the most vigilant companies can detect and leverage for their benefit and for the well-being of their employees. Therefore, in this article, we will focus on the issues posed by the digital transformation context and how companies can adapt to it while preserving the well-being of their employees, by several ways including the creation of meaning. Indeed, the latter represents a solid foundation capable of uniting employees around a common cause and is a vector for transmitting values that managers must approach more seriously and conceive a thoughtful strategy for creating and sharing meaning effectively. This article aims to elucidate the concerns of digitalization and investigate meaning as an effective determinant of workplace well-being, especially in a changing context.

Keywords: Digital revolution; digital transformation; well-being at work; meaning of work; sensemaking.

Résumé

L'environnement actuel auquel sont confrontées les entreprises, ne cesse de les surprendre, avec un contexte extrêmement mouvant, caractérisé par une révolution digitale 4.0, avec des impacts aux niveaux économiques, politiques, technologiques... Ce contexte présente certes des défis, mais également des opportunités, que les entreprises les plus alertes peuvent détecter et exploiter à leur profit et au bénéfice de leurs collaborateurs et de leur bien-être au travail. Ainsi, dans cet article, nous nous intéresserons aux enjeux induits par le contexte de transformation digitale et comment les entreprises pourront s'y adapter, tout en préservant le bien-être de leurs collaborateurs et ce, entre autres, grâce à la création de sens. En effet, ce dernier représente un socle solide susceptible de fédérer les collaborateurs autour d'une cause commune et est un vecteur de transmission de valeurs que les managers doivent aborder plus sérieusement et concevoir une stratégie réfléchie pour créer du sens et le partager efficacement. Cet article se propose donc d'exposer les enjeux de la digitalisation et d'investiguer le sens comme un déterminant efficace du bien-être au travail, en particulier dans un contexte de changement.

Mots clés : Révolution digitale ; transformation digitale ; bien-être au travail ; sens du travail ; sensemaking

Introduction

In an ever-evolving environment marked by an unprecedented digital revolution, an increasing number of companies are recognizing the need to adapt and are turning towards digital transformation of their systems, processes, and even their business models. Others, with a more visionary approach, have already initiated this transformation several years ago. At the heart of any organizational change, a crucial element to involve at all stages is the human factor. Therefore, we will focus on the challenges posed by the context of digital transformation and how companies can adjust to it while preserving the well-being of their employees through the creation and sharing of meaning.

In this article, we aim to explore the characteristics of digital change and its implications for businesses before questioning the relevance of meaning as a lever for employee well-being in such a context. To achieve this, we will attempt to address the following research questions:

Research Questions

- What characterizes the current digital change context, and what are its implications for organizations and employees?
- Which levers should be activated to ensure a positive impact on employee well-being?

These research questions lead to the following objectives:

Research Objectives

- Describe the context and present the challenges of digitalization.
- Define meaning as a lever for employee well-being.

Methodology

This article aims to provide theoretical insights into the context of digitalization and the ensuing challenges for organizations and employees.

To achieve the objectives of this article, we conducted a documentary study through a non-exhaustive theoretical review of existing literature.

For that, after briefly conducting a literature review around foundational concepts, we will present the context of digitalization and its organizational and human concerns. Then, based on the theory employed, we will highlight the importance of meaning in preserving employee well-being for a successful digital transformation. This will be followed by a discussion, culminating in an examination of the limitations of our work and the opening of potential avenues for future research as a conclusion.

1. Literature Review and Employed Theories

1.1. Conceptual Framework: Definition of Concepts

1.1.1. Digital Transformation

According to Vial (2019) in their literature review, digital transformation can be defined as a process that aims to enhance an entity by instigating significant changes in its properties through combinations of information technology, computing, communication, and connectivity.

It generally describes the changes in a company's activities, processes, and capabilities brought about by digital technologies (Rym, 2020).

As per Tosheva (2020), among the many trends accelerated by COVID-19 is the adoption of digital business models. Thus, in a few years, it is possible that no one will be talking about "digital transformation" anymore; the term will have become obsolete because non-digital companies will simply not exist. More than ever, organizations must embrace digital transformation now, through aspects such as remote work, multi-channel distribution, electronic payments, e-learning, and more.

1.1.2. Workplace Well-being

The initial sketches of well-being began early, notably with ancient Greek philosophers such as Epicurus, who introduced the concept of happiness (Creusier, 2013).

Two different doctrines of well-being emerged: eudaimonism and hedonism.

Aristotle's eudaimonism involves directing one's actions to achieve one's full potential and live fully. This concept leads to the idea of psychological well-being, embraced by contemporary authors such as Ryff, Keys, and Waterman (Creusier, 2013). This doctrine implies being oneself, feeling a sense of fullness in life, and tackling fundamental challenges (Jovenin, 2021). On the other hand, hedonism, an approach developed by Epicurus and Plato, focuses on the satisfaction of desires, the pursuit of pleasure and enjoyable emotions, resulting in more positive manifestations than negative ones (Creusier, 2013). This refers to subjective well-being, which relates to positive emotional states accompanying the fulfillment of desires (Diener, 1984) as cited by (Jovenin, 2021).

"At present, there is no consensus on the definition of workplace well-being except for the difficulty in defining this concept and the fact that it is a multidimensional, individual, and subjective concept. As mentioned by Richard (2012), well-being is a dynamic concept, an instrument of intellectual stimulation, responding to numerous and diverse social expectations" (Bernard, 2019).

(Biétry and Creusier, 2013) proposed a new scale for measuring workplace well-being by combining both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives. In other words, workplace well-being can be achieved when positive affects outweigh negatives, and individuals derive satisfaction from their work engagement and fulfillment.

1.1.3. Sensemaking

Sensemaking can be defined as the process through which organizational actors develop an understanding of specific issues and implement them in their environment (Jalonen et al., 2018; Weick et al., 2005) as cited by (Desgourdes and Leroy, 2020).

A distinction should be made between the sensemaking process by the manager and the process of transmitting their vision of change to their employees, which leads us to discuss sensegiving.

1.1.4. Sensegiving

According to (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) cited by (Garreau, 2011), Sensegiving can be described as the process of trying to shape the way other individuals perceive and interpret organizational reality in alignment with a preferred redefinition. It allows for communicating a vision and convincing employees of the purpose of strategic change (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) in order to avoid the failure of organizational change (Kotter, 1995) cited by (Desgourdes and Leroy, 2020).

1.1.5. Meaning of Work

The word "meaning" has two roots. From Latin, *sensus* means the faculty to experience impressions, the faculty to know or even judge. It also means the idea or image represented by a sign or an experience. From its Germanic root *sumo*, it signifies the direction or orientation that something takes.

In psychology, sense primarily relates to the experience of coherence, cohesion, balance, or even fullness. Sense is also associated with the reason for being and living, with a vocation (Frankl, 1969) as cited by (Morin, 2008).

An individual needs a story, a belief system that allows them to understand and interpret their experience through the events of their life to find meaning in it. The presence of a purpose or cause that transcends an individual's life is also an important element in finding meaning. Frankl (1969) and Yalom (1980) share the same opinion (Morin, 2008).

(Morin, 2008) defines the meaning of work in three ways:

- (Sensus) the meaning of work, the value of work in the eyes of the individual, and their definition or representation of it.

- (Sumo) the direction or orientation of the individual in their work, what they seek in work, and the purposes that guide their actions.
- (Phenomenology) the effect of coherence between the individual and the work they perform, between their expectations, values, and the daily actions they take in the workplace.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The theory that seems to align with the context of this study is the theory of sensemaking, also known as the theory of sense construction by Karl E. Weick. This theory can be summarized as a managerial learning process in which one creates their signification of work in a context of change (Tahri and Elkadiri, 2016).

It provides a perspective to understand how organizational dynamics influence the way actors interpret the situations they encounter. One of the fundamental principles of this theory is the recognition of the inherent complexity of the world's reality. The actors must then simplify this complexity to grasp the reality and take appropriate actions. In other words, the sensemaking process involves extracting elements from this complexity and organizing them into a representation that brings order and meaning to the situation (Vidaillet, 2003) cited by (Garreau, 2011)

Indeed, when employees are faced with change, the creation of meaning allows them to find reference points, enabling them to accept it and experience it more effectively.

2. Context and Challenges

2.1. Digitalization Context

In the 21st century, we are already witnessing the advent of the 4.0 revolution. Considered the fourth industrial revolution, it is characterized by a combination of technologies spanning the physical, digital, and biological domains and is commonly referred to as the cyber-physical system. This revolution has manifested through technological innovations in various areas, including robotics, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, quantum computing, biotechnology, the Internet of Things (IoT), 3D printing, and autonomous vehicles (Hyun Park et al., 2017) as cited by (Madjid and Bahiroh, 2020).

The paradigm shift toward digitalization occurring in the modern world today is generally linked to the 4.0 revolution. The recent pandemic crisis has only accelerated the development of this model (Tosheva, 2020), (Popova, 2020).

Indeed, more and more companies are initiating the process of digital transformation to automate certain processes, rethink organizational methods, explore new ways of conducting their business, and create value (Chabanet et al., 2021).

Industry 4.0 will change the design, manufacturing, and operation of products and production systems. Digitalization will have a significant impact on productivity and size criteria due to the existence of real-time digital supply chains, digital product definitions, and digitally designed and managed production lines. Currently, This can range from providing a new device to facilitate remote work, using mobile applications to improve internal communication, or adopting a paperless approach through digital data retrieval solutions. (Madjid and Bahiroh, 2020).

Since the advent of Covid-19, many countries have accelerated their transition to the digital economy. The use of digital tools has particularly intensified during lockdowns, enabling synchronous interactions through video conferencing. Telecommuting has become the norm for most offices in both the public and private sectors, and home-based learning via online platforms for students has become common. Examples include Bluejeans, Google Hangout, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Zoom, and others (Meiller, 2020). Additionally, restaurants and retailers have primarily focused on takeout orders and delivery services through online ordering systems (Tosheva, 2020).

2.2. Challenges and Opportunities of Digital Transformation

2.2.1. For Organizations

Undoubtedly, the Covid-19 pandemic has propelled business digitalization and the use of the internet by consumers, causing disruptive effects on business models. Today, more than ever, companies are turning to technology to become agile. Various sectors such as telecommunications, digital media, healthcare, e-commerce, banking, and contactless payments are undergoing radical changes. In this context, digital technology has the potential to transform and maintain a functional economy, allowing people to access essential services for daily life, such as education, healthcare, work, access to information, and communication with authorities during this pandemic. Its application, however, should respect the digital rights of all (CGLU, 2020) as cited by (Tosheva, 2020).

The use of online interviews for recruitment has become widespread during the pandemic for companies that continued hiring. For some companies, this represented a major shift from the traditional face-to-face interview approach. This offers several opportunities to evolve the recruitment process and remote work in the post-Covid-19 economy, attracting more talent,

reducing costs associated with physical offices, and offering work-life balance to employees (Donald, 2020).

Companies that have already embraced innovation as a necessity for survival rather than a desire for novelty will be the most equipped organizations to identify and exploit opportunities in the post-Covid-19 economy. For example, universities (online courses), restaurants (takeout orders), manufacturers (warehouse optimization and automation), and retailers (online sales channels) (Wilson, 2020) as cited by (Donald, 2020).

In an increasingly volatile and uncertain environment, organizations are compelled to adopt agility in their operations and rethink the appropriate leadership style for such circumstances (Attar and Abdul-Kareem, 2020).

It is during times of global crisis and volatility that agility becomes crucial. Strategies are devised and implemented to enhance business operations, develop new ways to adapt to induced changes, and continuously accommodate to the environment to survive. To prevent or minimize the impact of crises, and even to prevent their recurrence, it falls upon business leaders to consider relevant solutions and implement future strategic plans (Mills and Keremah, 2020).

Furthermore, the pandemic has demonstrated that digitalization is essential for business resilience during times of crisis (Tosheva, 2020).

Although digitalization is known to destroy some jobs, it also creates new ones, especially for ICT specialists, not to mention related jobs that are not themselves digital. As a recent example, we can mention the ecosystem emerging around drone manufacturing; hardware suppliers, insurance companies, marketing specialists, event creators, and domain-specific services. Additionally, digitalization reduces the cost of starting a business, creating opportunities for small businesses to innovate and grow further by facilitating product distribution, service marketing, and access to a global audience. On the other hand, the use of robotics to enhance productivity would discourage industrial offshoring (Mignot, 2019).

2.2.2. For Employees

The fourth industrial revolution, especially from an institutional perspective, brings both opportunities and risks. Opportunities are linked to the potential for productivity gains that will open new markets, stimulate economic growth, improve quality of life, allow people to work less and better, and more effectively meet their desires and needs. At the same time, the revolution poses risks related to the possibility of greater inequality, as it has the capacity to disrupt the labor market. Anything that can be digitized and automated will be integrated into intelligent machines. Consequently, all routine jobs will disappear as they will be performed by

robots, exacerbating unemployment rates, and individuals' roles within organizations will become increasingly tied to audit activities and, above all, critical and innovative thinking (Lee et al., 2018).

Industries will tend to prefer highly skilled labor over less skilled labor due to the replacement of the latter by robot automation (Madjid and Bahiroh, 2020).

Technology can also impact the quality of existing and new jobs. Automation could make certain jobs more appealing and improve workers' well-being by replacing humans with robots to perform less appealing, more physical, and less safe tasks, thus sparing humans from health and environmental risks, as well as repetitive jobs associated with average wages. Digitalization also enhances supply and demand in the labor market by helping workers find jobs from a wider variety of offers through various recruitment platforms (Mignot, 2019).

However, it is important to acknowledge that digital disruption in the job market can be destabilizing for individuals. In any organization, for any employee, regardless of their position within the company, the very notion of change can be considered disruptive and unnatural (Mignot, 2019).

Indeed, in the case of change, the ambiguity of the situation becomes a source of divergence and stress for the individual. The introduction of new technologies, the implementation of a new work structure, or the emergence of new competitors can cause discomfort among individuals and, consequently, impact productivity (Tahri and Elkadiri, 2016).

In a globalized context, human capital is now the key to success. Management must have a clear vision of employees' strengths, interests, and knowledge (Lee et al., 2018).

During and after the pandemic, the ability to work online and remotely will be in greater demand by companies. Therefore, it is important to develop time management and unsupervised work skills (Popova, 2020).

The crisis has led to rapid and extensive adoption of technologies which, beyond its positive effects, could lead to negative effects on individuals such as exhaustion, nervousness, irritability, and even burnout caused by working from home (Meiller, 2020).

For better or worse, digital transformation impacts human resource management. Given the often-existing reluctance toward digitalization, a critical issue is how employees can intelligently embrace the tools made available to them (Chabanet et al., 2021).

3. Meaning as a Driver of Well-being at Work in the context of Digital Transformation

According to Seligman (2011), flourishing comes from accomplishing meaningful tasks. The question of meaning thus appears central to the concept of fulfillment (Jovenin, 2021).

For Yalom (1980), humans need meaning to understand and interpret their experiences in the world and to define the values on which they can base their actions. Meaning is necessary for the mental hygiene of human beings. Without it, they would experience a condition of distress (Morin, 2008).

The pursuit of purpose or the resulting sense of accomplishment has a positive effect on well-being (Jovenin, 2021).

Uncertainties related to organizational changes generate tensions for employees (Bordia et al., 2004); the absence of meaning is a source of stress for individuals (Weick, 1979, 1993) as cited by (Desgourdes and Leroy, 2020).

This is where the sensemaking theory, which we are employing in our current research, becomes particularly relevant.

In fact, the sensemaking process involves social exchanges in a discursive manner, and this competence also allows managers to influence their employees (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011) as cited by (Desgourdes and Leroy, 2020).

Digital transformation involves significant changes that need to be anticipated. The immediate challenge is to anticipate barriers to change by preparing individuals to welcome this transformation favorably. Employees buy-in is essential and should be well thought out and structured. To do this, it would be necessary to give meaning to this transformation and communicate it. In fact, the word "digital" has different meanings depending on the companies. Digital transformation is ultimately just a means to achieve a strategic objective (Mignot, 2019).

4. Discussion

The question of introducing technologies into organizations becomes a necessity in all fields, with all the implications it carries for activity and workplace health. We first characterized the context of digital transformation unfolding in companies, then discussed its positive and negative impact on organizations, as well as on employee well-being. Finally, after invoking Weick's sensemaking theory, we demonstrated the importance of meaning in preserving the well-being of employees in such a volatile context, making them key elements in the companies they work for and vectors of a successful digital transition.

Conclusion

The changes brought about by the 4.0 revolution have been accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic, presenting companies and employees with opportunities and risks, the stakes of which are considerable. To make the most of them, companies have no choice but to gear up

for these changes and prepare their teams for them, rallying them around a common purpose, thereby ensuring their well-being at work.

Our modest work does not claim to address all the questions linked to the sensemaking process related to the digitalization of companies but aims to raise awareness of the necessary creation of meaning, which could prove very useful in the face of changes - whatever they may be - and contribute significantly to the resilience of employees and companies.

Through this article, we have not conducted a field study, and many questions about this subject remain unanswered, which further research could investigate closely, such as an analysis of the sensemaking process itself, as well as a survey of the perceptions of managers and employees to identify areas of action and find a common ground for the visions of various stakeholders. Furthermore, contextualizing the creation of meaning would provide more answers on how to approach the issue concretely in our Moroccan structures.

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