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Exploring Strategic Responses to Digital Resistance in Legacy Organizations

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the strategic responses adopted by legacy organizations to manage digital resistance during transformation processes. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 34 participants from legacy organizations across various sectors in Tehran, including finance, healthcare, education, manufacturing, and public administration. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevant experience with digital transformation. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using NVivo software, following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework. The coding process focused on identifying recurring patterns in leadership behaviors, organizational culture, structural adaptations, and cognitive reframing strategies in response to digital resistance. Thematic analysis revealed four main strategic domains: leadership approaches, organizational culture and climate, structural and strategic adaptations, and emotional and cognitive reframing. Within these themes, 24 subcategories emerged. Leadership strategies such as adaptive decision-making, participative governance, and emotional intelligence were linked to reduced resistance. Cultural variables including psychological safety, peer norms, and trust in leadership were also significant. Structural adaptations such as tailored training, incentivization mechanisms, and boundary-spanning roles enhanced engagement. Reframing strategies—especially storytelling and the acknowledgment of legacy attachment—facilitated emotional alignment with transformation goals. Across themes, resistance was found to be relational, collective, and contextually grounded rather than purely individual or irrational. Strategic responses to digital resistance in legacy organizations must be multifaceted, integrating emotional, cultural, and structural dimensions. Resistance should not be viewed as dysfunction but as a diagnostic signal for organizational learning and adaptation. This study contributes a context-sensitive framework that can inform inclusive and sustainable digital transformation strategies in traditional organizational environments.

Keywords: digital resistance, legacy organizations, digital transformation, strategic leadership, organizational culture.

Introduction

The digitalization of organizational processes has become a central feature of modern strategic management, yet its adoption in legacy organizations often encounters entrenched resistance. Unlike digitally native firms that are structurally agile and culturally primed for continuous change, legacy organizations face a distinct set of constraints—ranging from outdated infrastructures to risk-averse cultures—that amplify resistance to digital initiatives [1, 2]. These challenges are compounded by the socio-technical complexity of digital transformation, which demands not only the integration of new technologies but also the reconfiguration of organizational routines, identities, and power structures [3, 4]. In such settings, understanding how strategic actors within these organizations navigate and respond to digital resistance is critical for the sustainability of transformation efforts.

Digital resistance in legacy organizations is neither uniform nor irrational; rather, it emerges from a mix of cognitive, emotional, and structural factors that are often deeply embedded in the organization's historical trajectory. As several scholars have noted, resistance frequently reflects employees' legitimate concerns over loss of control, role ambiguity, perceived obsolescence, and diminished autonomy [5, 6]. These anxieties are especially pronounced in legacy systems where prior change efforts may have failed or been implemented top-down without adequate consultation or support. Consequently, resistance can be seen as a form of voice rather than defiance, signaling the need for more responsive and inclusive strategic leadership [7, 8].

In response to such resistance, organizations have increasingly adopted multidimensional strategies that span leadership behavior, cultural adaptation, structural reconfiguration, and psychological reframing. Recent studies have emphasized the critical role of leadership in reducing employee resistance by promoting transparency, adaptability, and participative governance [9, 10]. Adaptive leadership strategies, including symbolic alignment with digital goals and distributed decision-making, have been shown to mitigate uncertainty and encourage bottom-up innovation [3, 11]. Moreover, leaders who demonstrate emotional intelligence and openly acknowledge resistance as part of the transformation process tend to build stronger relational trust, which is essential for cultural buy-in [4, 12].

At the organizational level, cultural inertia remains a significant barrier to digital adoption. Legacy firms often operate in environments of low psychological safety and high status quo bias, which inhibit experimentation and amplify fear of failure [13, 14]. The transformation of such cultures requires a dual emphasis on trust-building and risk normalization. In practice, this entails not only fostering a climate of open communication but also actively recognizing and rewarding those who take calculated risks or serve as digital change agents. As [15] argues, cultivating an internal culture that values innovation and tolerates ambiguity is a prerequisite for strategic digital renewal.

Structural adaptations also play a pivotal role in mitigating resistance. Process reengineering, incentive alignment, and role redefinition are common interventions used to reduce the perceived disruption caused by digital technologies. For example, redefining performance metrics to include digital competencies and integrating user-friendly training programs have been shown to improve digital fluency and reduce anxiety among staff [2, 10]. Additionally, the formation of boundary-spanning roles—such as digital champions or transformation liaisons—helps bridge the gap between technical teams and frontline workers, ensuring that feedback loops remain active and responsive [16, 17]. These strategic design choices not only address the operational side of resistance but also symbolize an organizational commitment to inclusive and iterative transformation.

Beyond structural and leadership strategies, cognitive and emotional reframing has emerged as a crucial tactic in diffusing digital resistance. Employees are more likely to embrace change when they perceive it as an opportunity for growth, rather than a threat to their established identities. Strategic storytelling—through success narratives, peer testimonials, and metaphorical framing—has proven effective in reshaping mental models around digital transformation [13, 18]. Equally important is the acknowledgment of emotional labor involved in letting go of familiar systems, roles, and routines. Organizations that honor the legacy while making room for the future tend to experience smoother transitions and higher retention of tacit knowledge [12, 19].

The strategic importance of addressing digital resistance is particularly salient in the context of legacy organizations, where failure to adapt often leads to operational inefficiencies, loss of competitive edge, and erosion of stakeholder trust. As

digitalization increasingly becomes a marker of strategic capacity, organizations must move beyond technical solutions and develop more holistic frameworks that integrate emotional, cultural, and political dimensions of transformation [20, 21]. This requires a shift from viewing resistance as a barrier to be eliminated toward understanding it as a source of insight that can inform more inclusive and sustainable change efforts [7, 22].

However, despite a growing body of research on digital transformation strategies, few studies have qualitatively examined how legacy organizations in non-Western and resource-constrained contexts respond to employee resistance on the ground. Much of the existing literature is derived from technologically advanced or platform-based firms, leaving a gap in understanding how traditional organizations with rigid hierarchies and analog legacies experience and strategically manage the resistance phenomenon [4, 11]. Moreover, while frameworks exist for understanding digital readiness and maturity, less is known about the micro-level dynamics of resistance negotiation, especially within middle management and frontline roles who often serve as the translation layer between top-down strategy and bottom-up operations [3, 16].

To address these gaps, this study explores the strategic responses employed by legacy organizations in Tehran to manage and mitigate digital resistance.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design with an interpretive approach to explore how legacy organizations respond strategically to digital resistance. The research was conducted among managerial and operational staff in large, long-established organizations in Tehran, Iran, which had recently undergone or were undergoing digital transformation processes. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants with relevant experience in digital implementation and resistance management. A total of 34 participants were included in the study, comprising middle managers, IT leads, senior executives, and departmental heads from various industries, including finance, manufacturing, healthcare, and education. The sample size was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation, which was reached when new interviews no longer yielded novel insights or categories.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out using semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which allowed for a flexible yet systematic exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to digital resistance. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 75 minutes and was conducted either in participants' workplaces or via secure video calls, depending on availability and preferences. An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed to steer the conversation while allowing room for participants to elaborate on emerging themes. Questions focused on observed resistance behaviors, strategic responses from leadership, organizational culture, and the role of communication, incentives, and legacy systems. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy and richness of data.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. NVivo software (version 12) facilitated the systematic coding and organization of data. Transcripts were first read multiple times to

ensure familiarity with the content. Initial codes were generated inductively, and similar codes were grouped into themes reflecting recurring patterns and meanings in participants' narratives. Constant comparison was used to refine and validate themes across the dataset. To enhance the credibility and dependability of the analysis, coding decisions were reviewed by two independent researchers, and discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. An audit trail was maintained to document analytic decisions and ensure transparency in the research process.

Findings and Results

A total of 34 participants took part in the study, all of whom were professionals working in legacy organizations across various sectors in Tehran, including finance (n = 9), healthcare (n = 7), manufacturing (n = 8), education (n = 6), and public administration (n = 4). The sample included 19 men and 15 women, ranging in age from 29 to 61 years, with an average age of 44.2 years. In terms of organizational role, 12 participants held senior management positions, 14 were middle managers, and 8 were operational staff involved in digital project implementation. Most participants (n = 26) had more than 10 years of work experience, while the remaining 8 had between 5 to 10 years of experience. All participants had been directly involved in at least one digital transformation initiative within their organization in the past three years.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Related to Strategic Responses to Digital Resistance

Category (Theme)	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Leadership Approaches to Resistance	Adaptive Leadership	Responsive decision-making, situational flexibility, balancing control and autonomy, role modeling
	Communicative Transparency	Sharing vision, clarifying digital benefits, ongoing feedback, open-door policy, addressing rumors
	Empowerment-Oriented Strategies	Delegation of responsibility, capacity building, encouraging experimentation, reducing hierarchical barriers
	Symbolic Actions	Leaders using digital tools, public endorsement of transformation, reframing failures as learning moments
	Consistency in Messaging	Repetition of purpose, alignment across departments, unifying vocabulary, leadership alignment
	Participative Decision-Making	Involving frontline staff, bottom-up suggestions, listening sessions, cross-functional task forces
	Emotionally Intelligent Leadership	Recognizing resistance emotions, managing defensiveness, empathic listening, avoiding blame culture
2. Organizational Culture and Climate	Trust in Leadership	Perceived integrity, history of follow-through, leader-employee rapport, consistency in values
	Risk Aversion Culture	Fear of failure, reluctance to adopt untested tools, avoidance of accountability, preference for tradition
	Change Readiness	Attitudes toward innovation, history of successful change, presence of digital advocates
	Psychological Safety	Encouragement of dissent, low fear of punishment, openness to experimentation
	Peer Norms and Influence	Informal resistance groups, team-level compliance pressure, modeling behaviors
	Perceived Organizational Justice	Fairness in workload, transparency in reward, equal access to training
3. Structural and Strategic Adaptations	Tailored Training Programs	Needs-based design, ongoing support, hands-on practice, integration with tasks
	Incentivization Mechanisms	Financial rewards, recognition programs, promotion linkage, gamification
	Process Reengineering	Workflow digitization, reduction of redundancies, integration of legacy systems
	Role Realignment	Job redefinition, new digital roles, updated performance indicators
	Flexibility in Implementation Pace	Phased rollout, pilot testing, adjustable timelines, employee feedback loops
	Boundary Spanning Roles	Digital champions, liaison officers, hybrid team leaders
4. Emotional and Cognitive Reframing	Reframing Digital Transformation as Opportunity	Futureproofing narrative, career development frame, organizational survival messaging
	Reducing Uncertainty through Clarity	Explaining timelines, clarifying expectations, identifying support resources
	Coping Support Mechanisms	Peer mentoring, stress-management workshops, feedback dialogues, adjustment time
	Narrative Control and Storytelling	Success stories, transformation metaphors, storytelling by peers and managers
	Addressing Legacy Attachment	Acknowledging past contributions, memorializing old systems, honoring long-serving employees

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed four overarching categories that captured the strategic responses of legacy organizations to digital resistance: *Leadership Approaches to Resistance*, *Organizational Culture and Climate*, *Structural and Strategic Adaptations*, and *Emotional and Cognitive Reframing*. Within these themes, several distinct subcategories emerged, each illuminating how organizations attempt to understand and manage employee resistance during digital transformation.

Under the category of Leadership Approaches to Resistance, participants emphasized the value of *adaptive leadership*, where managers demonstrated situational flexibility and were responsive to emerging challenges. This leadership style involved quick decision-making, balancing control with empowerment, and being seen as role models in digital practices. One middle manager stated, "Our director changed the course mid-way when the software didn't work for one team—he didn't insist, he adapted, and that made all the difference." Another noted, "We felt less frustrated because the leadership wasn't rigid—they were willing to learn with us."

The subcategory of *communicative transparency* reflected leaders' efforts to clarify the reasons for digital change and keep lines of communication open. Managers who repeatedly shared the vision and benefits of the digital initiatives were perceived as more trustworthy. As one participant explained, "When we were told why we were doing this, not just what to do, it lowered our resistance." Others emphasized the importance of addressing misinformation early: "There were rumors the new system would reduce jobs, but once our CEO clarified that wasn't true, people relaxed."

Empowerment-oriented strategies were frequently mentioned, especially in organizations that encouraged risk-taking and reduced hierarchical barriers. Leaders delegated responsibility, built capacity through training, and gave teams autonomy. "They didn't just hand us a tool and walk away—they let us make some decisions about how we'd use it," explained one operations supervisor. Another participant said, "I felt more confident using the software because we were treated like partners, not subordinates."

Leaders also engaged in *symbolic actions* to demonstrate commitment to digital change. Participants shared that when top executives publicly used digital platforms or framed setbacks as learning opportunities, it positively influenced employee attitudes. "When our VP used the same app we were struggling with, it felt like he was on our side," one interviewee said. These actions were interpreted as genuine support and solidarity.

A further strategy was *consistency in messaging*, where leaders repeated the core transformation message across platforms and departments. Participants described how consistent language helped unify goals and expectations. One respondent reflected, "Hearing the same message from HR, IT, and our manager made it clear that this wasn't optional—it was the new normal." In contrast, inconsistent communication was seen as a source of confusion and resistance.

Another notable subtheme was *participative decision-making*. Organizations that involved employees in the transformation process reported lower levels of resistance. Teams that contributed to pilot projects, user testing, or feedback loops felt more ownership. "They asked us how we'd want the new workflow to look—it wasn't just imposed," said one team lead. This approach built early buy-in and minimized pushback.

Finally, the theme of *emotionally intelligent leadership* emerged in organizations where managers acknowledged emotional reactions to change. Leaders who practiced empathic listening and avoided blame were more successful at de-escalating resistance. As one participant recalled, "My manager didn't tell me to 'get over it'—she said she understood why I was overwhelmed, and we worked through it."

In terms of Organizational Culture and Climate, one central subcategory was *trust in leadership*. Participants emphasized that trust was built over time through consistency, transparency, and shared values. "If our managers had a track record of keeping promises, we were more likely to believe this transformation would benefit us," said an IT analyst. When such trust was absent, even well-designed digital efforts were met with suspicion.

The influence of a *risk-averse culture* was also significant. Organizations with a long history of avoiding failure or punishment for experimentation faced more entrenched resistance. "We've been trained to play it safe for years—suddenly being told to innovate felt like a trap," shared one employee. Such cultures created fear around using unfamiliar digital tools or deviating from legacy processes.

Change readiness varied widely across organizations and departments. Some participants described environments where innovation was encouraged and past changes had succeeded, which fostered a readiness for digital adoption. Others reported fatigue or cynicism due to prior failures. "We've had so many rollouts that didn't stick. People are skeptical by default," said a senior HR officer.

Psychological safety was crucial for allowing employees to voice concerns without fear of reprisal. Interviewees noted that in safe environments, staff could express doubts or report glitches without being blamed. "I told my supervisor the system wasn't intuitive, and she thanked me instead of calling me lazy—that changed everything," said one frontline worker.

The role of *peer norms and influence* also shaped responses to digital initiatives. Resistance or acceptance was often amplified by team dynamics. One participant stated, "When a few vocal team members refused to engage with the system, others followed, even those who were curious at first." Conversely, teams with digital advocates tended to adjust more quickly.

A final subcategory here was *perceived organizational justice*. Participants were more likely to support transformation when resources and opportunities were distributed fairly. One interviewee noted, "Some departments got better training and newer equipment—it created resentment and made people question the whole project."

The theme of Structural and Strategic Adaptations highlighted tangible organizational changes aimed at managing resistance. A key strategy was *tailored training programs*. Participants responded positively to training that addressed specific job needs, provided hands-on support, and was integrated with real tasks. "Generic workshops didn't help, but when they showed us how this software applied to our daily reports, it clicked," one employee shared.

Incentivization mechanisms included both financial and non-financial rewards. Organizations offered bonuses, recognition, and even gamified systems to motivate adoption. "We had a digital leaderboard, and our team really got into it—it made learning fun," one team leader recalled. Others mentioned that promotion opportunities tied to digital fluency helped create urgency.

Process reengineering was mentioned in cases where digital tools required adjustments to established workflows. Participants described efforts to streamline operations, reduce redundancies, and ensure compatibility with legacy systems. "They reworked our reporting process to match the new platform—it wasn't just dumped on top of the old one," said one manager.

Role realignment involved redefining job descriptions, creating new digital roles, and changing performance metrics. As one interviewee stated, "Our KPIs were updated to include digital engagement, so it wasn't just an extra—it became part of how we were evaluated." This helped employees prioritize digital tasks alongside routine responsibilities.

Flexibility in implementation pace was a recurring topic. Organizations that used phased rollouts, pilot programs, and responsive timelines experienced less backlash. "They didn't force it all at once—we tested in small groups, and changes were made based on feedback," explained one participant.

Lastly, *boundary spanning roles* like digital champions or hybrid team leaders helped bridge gaps between departments and drive transformation. "Our digital liaison helped translate tech language into something we could actually use—she made the system approachable," one staff member shared.

The final theme, Emotional and Cognitive Reframing, included efforts to reshape how employees viewed digital change. In the subcategory *reframing digital transformation as opportunity*, organizations used language emphasizing career growth, innovation, and organizational resilience. "They said this would future-proof our skills—and that made me rethink my resistance," noted one respondent.

Reducing uncertainty through clarity involved consistent updates about timelines, expectations, and available support. One interviewee said, "I was nervous until they gave us a clear roadmap and let us know who to call if we got stuck." Providing concrete information helped calm anxiety.

Coping support mechanisms such as mentoring, stress management workshops, and adjustment periods were also important. "They paired us with digital mentors for two weeks—I didn't feel alone in figuring things out," shared a participant. This social support made the change feel manageable.

Narrative control and storytelling referred to using success stories, metaphors, and employee testimonials to shape positive interpretations of the change process. "When I heard someone like me say they had struggled at first but now loved the new system, I felt seen," said a warehouse supervisor.

Finally, *addressing legacy attachment* involved recognizing the emotional bonds employees had with old systems and roles. Organizations that honored past efforts created a smoother path to letting go. "They didn't dismiss what we used to do—they respected it, and that helped us move forward," one participant reflected.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored how legacy organizations in Tehran strategically respond to digital resistance by drawing on the lived experiences of 34 participants across sectors such as finance, healthcare, education, manufacturing, and public administration. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed four overarching strategic categories: leadership approaches, organizational culture and climate, structural and strategic adaptations, and emotional and cognitive reframing. These themes highlight that digital resistance is not merely a matter of individual reluctance but is intricately tied to historical, cultural, and structural dimensions of organizational life. The findings offer insight into the multifaceted nature of strategic response, where leadership behavior, communication styles, cultural readiness, and reframing tactics play pivotal roles in shaping how resistance is experienced and managed.

One of the most prominent findings was the significance of adaptive, emotionally intelligent leadership in reducing resistance. Leaders who demonstrated situational flexibility, listened actively, and framed digital transformation as a shared journey were more successful in fostering trust and commitment. This aligns with previous research that emphasizes the role of strategic leadership in navigating digital complexity through relational competencies and communicative transparency [3,

9]. Moreover, symbolic leadership actions—such as executives using the same digital platforms as their staff—reinforced alignment and credibility, confirming past findings on the value of modeling behaviors to legitimize change efforts [12, 13].

Another key insight was that organizational culture—particularly in terms of trust, psychological safety, and peer influence—substantially influenced how resistance manifested. In organizations where dissent was welcomed and errors were treated as part of the learning process, employees were more likely to engage with digital tools. This echoes research emphasizing the importance of psychological safety and risk tolerance in fostering innovation readiness [2, 4]. Additionally, the data showed how peer norms could either reinforce or counteract resistance, a dynamic that reflects earlier findings on the collective nature of digital adoption behaviors in legacy systems [5, 7]. Informal group dynamics proved just as influential as formal communication channels, suggesting that strategic change efforts must account for both structural and social ecosystems within organizations.

Structural and strategic adaptations also emerged as crucial in reducing friction during digital rollouts. Tailored training, realigned roles, and incentive systems created the conditions necessary for digital engagement. These findings support earlier research highlighting how the redesign of workflows, adjustment of job descriptions, and the integration of digital performance metrics can smooth the path toward transformation [10, 21]. The establishment of boundary-spanning roles—such as digital champions or liaison officers—further facilitated communication between technical experts and frontline staff. This aligns with the work of [16], who emphasized the value of hybrid roles in translating strategy into operational practice in non-digital sectors.

Equally important was the role of emotional and cognitive reframing strategies. When digital transformation was framed as an opportunity for growth, skill development, and future-proofing, employees responded with greater openness. Narrative control—through storytelling and peer-led testimonials—served as a powerful cognitive anchor that shaped perceptions of digital tools not as threats, but as enablers. These strategies are consistent with literature on responsible innovation and the psychological dimensions of change [6, 18]. Furthermore, organizations that acknowledged emotional attachments to legacy systems and recognized past contributions were more successful in easing transitions, validating [17] who argued for emotional acknowledgment as a vital component of strategic transitions in traditional firms.

The findings also extend the work of [19] and [23], who have called for more nuanced understandings of resistance not as dysfunction but as an adaptive reaction to uncertainty. Participants in this study expressed a variety of concerns—from fear of obsolescence to lack of clarity on expectations—that were not rooted in defiance but in ambiguity and perceived risks. This supports the emerging view that resistance is best approached not as a barrier to overcome, but as a feedback mechanism to inform better implementation strategies [1, 15]. Importantly, by creating channels for listening and responding to these concerns, leaders were able to transform initial resistance into constructive engagement.

Moreover, the findings situate digital resistance within the broader strategic orientation of the organization. Legacy organizations that had a history of top-down management and inflexible governance structures were more likely to face higher levels of resistance. This confirms prior work on the link between governance models and employee acceptance of innovation [4, 8]. Conversely, those that had invested in strategic alignment across departments and encouraged participatory governance reported smoother transitions. These findings echo the arguments made by [14] and [2], who identified strategic coherence and change adaptability as critical success factors for transformation in resource-constrained or hierarchical environments.

Interestingly, this study also sheds light on how the interplay between individual agency and institutional structure shapes resistance responses. While structural interventions such as training and incentives were important, their success depended on the organization's ability to frame these tools within a culturally relevant and emotionally resonant narrative. This aligns with [11] who observed that strategic persistence in digital initiatives requires simultaneous attention to human motivation and organizational systems. Similarly, [20] argued that in traditional manufacturing contexts, strategic responses to digital resistance must involve not only system upgrades but also a cultural recalibration—a finding that resonates with the Tehran-based organizations studied here.

Overall, this research provides empirical support for a multidimensional model of digital resistance management, integrating leadership, culture, structure, and cognition. The alignment between this model and existing literature strengthens the validity of the findings and contributes to a growing body of evidence calling for holistic, context-sensitive approaches to digital transformation. In particular, the study offers new insights into how these strategies play out in non-Western, bureaucratic organizational systems, thereby extending the geographical and institutional scope of current scholarship on digital strategy and resistance.

While this study provides rich qualitative insights, it is not without limitations. First, the sample is restricted to legacy organizations in Tehran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or national contexts. Second, as a qualitative study based on self-reported experiences, there may be biases in how participants perceive and articulate their experiences of resistance and strategy. Third, although theoretical saturation was achieved, the diversity of organizations involved means that some sector-specific nuances might not have been fully captured. Future research using triangulation methods or longitudinal designs could help deepen and validate these insights.

Future research should consider comparative studies across different national and organizational cultures to examine how context influences strategic responses to digital resistance. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches could also be employed to test the relationships between specific leadership practices, cultural variables, and resistance outcomes. Moreover, investigating how generational or role-based differences (e.g., between IT staff and operational employees) shape experiences of resistance would add further depth to the literature. Longitudinal research tracking digital transformation over time could also reveal how resistance evolves and how strategic responses are refined.

Organizations undertaking digital transformation should adopt a multifaceted approach to managing resistance, beginning with leadership development focused on emotional intelligence and communicative clarity. Cultural audits can be valuable tools to assess organizational readiness and areas of potential friction. Investing in boundary-spanning roles and creating psychologically safe environments can facilitate smoother transitions. Narrative control through storytelling and peer advocacy can help reframe resistance as part of the change journey. Finally, organizations should embrace resistance as a strategic signal, using it to iteratively adapt their implementation processes and better engage their workforce.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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