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Review

Strategic Internal Communication and Employee Digital Readiness: An Integrated Management Framework for Digital Transformation

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Abstract: Digital transformation depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on employees' ability and willingness to understand, adopt, and purposefully use digital solutions. This conceptual study develops an integrated management framework linking strategic internal communication with employee digital readiness. A conceptual analysis and synthesis of recent theoretical, review and empirical literature were conducted to integrate findings on internal communication, digital capabilities, employee attitudes and participation in digital initiatives. Four dimensions of employee digital readiness were distinguished: cognitive, capability, psychological, and behavioural readiness. Seven interconnected elements of strategic internal communication were also identified: relevance and clarity of content, communication transparency, communication linked to learning and knowledge sharing, two-way communication flows, feedback, managerial communication support, and alignment of digital communication channels. Their predominant and complementary contributions to different readiness dimensions were specified within the framework. Digital culture, organisational trust, learning opportunities, and technical and social support were identified as conditions that may enable or constrain the proposed relationship. Consequently, strategic internal communication should be managed as an integrated system supporting employee understanding, capability development, confidence, and active participation. This framework provides a basis for managerial diagnosis and future empirical testing of the formulated relationships.

Keywords: *Strategic internal communication; employee digital readiness; digital transformation; digital communication channels; organisational conditions; integrated management framework.*

1. Introduction

Digital transformation integrates digital technologies with business strategy, organisational resources and value creation. Its success depends not only on infrastructure and technical solutions, but also on digital competencies, managerial support and employee participation. Technology alone cannot ensure organisational digital readiness [1], while employees' attitudes towards digitalisation shape their willingness to participate in digital initiatives [2]. Expected benefits are therefore more likely to be realised when employees understand the purpose of digital technologies, recognise their own role and feel supported by the organisation. Combining technological advancement with responsible resource use and continuous capability development can also contribute to the organisation's long-term sustainability.

Effective participation in digital initiatives requires employees to possess the knowledge, capabilities, attitudes and confidence needed to adopt and use new technologies purposefully. The interaction of these attributes underpins employee digital readiness, which is shaped by both individual and organisational factors. Employee involvement, digital leadership, digital self-efficacy and psychological resilience have been identified as important antecedents of readiness [3]. Technical competencies remain essential, but collaboration, knowledge sharing and communication skills also enable employees to understand digital initiatives and contribute to their implementation [1]. Digital readiness therefore goes beyond proficiency in individual tools and reflects the ability to apply knowledge and professional experience to the opportunities offered by digitalisation.

Turning employees' knowledge and experience into meaningful participation requires timely, clear and relevant information about the aims of digital initiatives, their implementation and the roles expected of individuals and teams. Strategic internal communication provides this link by aligning message content, communication channels and feedback opportunities with employee needs and organisational priorities. It can support digital capability development and learning while building trust in the use of digital solutions [4]. Symmetrical internal communication has also been found to mediate the relationship between digital transformational leadership and innovation capability, with trust in leadership influencing the strength of this effect [5]. Strategic internal communication therefore translates the direction of digital transformation into employee understanding, involvement and purposeful action.

Research has identified several links between communication, employees and digital transformation, but has generally examined them in isolation. Employee digital readiness is associated with new business models and processes, awareness, managerial support, digital inclusion and digital skills [6]. Relevant communication practices include internal meetings and training [7], as well as clear messages, audience analysis, technology-supported communication and feedback systems [8]. Technical and human capabilities, leadership and digital strategy can also improve internal communication, confirming its interdependence with organisational digital capabilities [9]. However, how these communication elements can be combined to develop different readiness dimensions remains unclear. A management framework is therefore needed to guide their planning, coordination and evaluation within digital transformation.

To address this gap, the study develops an integrated management framework linking strategic internal communication with employee digital readiness. Drawing on conceptual analysis and synthesis, it combines theoretical perspectives with recent empirical findings on internal communication, digital capabilities and employee participation in digital initiatives. The resulting framework connects communication content, flows, channels and feedback with the knowledge, capabilities, confidence and involvement required for digital transformation. By bringing these elements together, the study provides a structured basis for planning, implementing and evaluating communication activities that strengthen employee digital readiness.

2. Strategic Internal Communication in Digital Transformation

Internal communication encompasses vertical and horizontal information flows, formal and informal interactions, and the channels connecting management, organisational units, teams and employees. It assumes a strategic role when communication objectives, content and methods are deliberately aligned with organisational priorities and employee needs. Effective alignment requires an understanding of internal audiences, clear and concise messages, appropriate technological support and accessible feedback mechanisms [8]. Internal meetings and targeted communication training further strengthen this process by helping employees interpret information and engage more effectively in information exchange [7]. Strategic internal communication therefore involves the coordinated management of the entire communication process, rather than the one-way transmission of messages from management to employees.

Within digital transformation, internal communication must translate organisational strategy into information that employees can understand and apply in their work. A contemporary digital internal communication strategy should integrate technical elements, including digital channels,

platforms, usage rules and artificial intelligence, with social elements such as leadership, collaboration, capability development and trust [10]. In AI-supported organisational communication, information provision, message reception, acceptance and response have shown strong positive associations with employee performance, while feedback and persuasion have demonstrated moderate effects [11]. Communication support becomes particularly important when employees use complex digital technologies, as access to relevant information, openness and support from team members can alleviate technology-related strain and difficulties associated with digitally mediated work [12]. Internal communication should therefore provide strategic direction, develop digital capabilities, connect employees and create conditions for the confident, responsible and purposeful use of technology.

Today's business environment requires internal communication to fulfil a broader organisational role. Its purpose now includes not only conveying decisions and operational instructions, but also supporting employee empowerment, professional development and meaningful participation [13]. Messages must therefore be timely, relevant, transparent and adapted to different employee groups, especially when explaining digital priorities, required capabilities and the practical use of new technologies. Transparency relies on accessible, clear and accurate information, although organisational culture, hierarchy, communication practices and leadership may limit its application [14]. Clarity alone, however, is not sufficient. Employees also need opportunities to ask questions, express concerns and seek further explanation so that they can relate information to their tasks, responsibilities and learning needs.

Digital communication channels enable rapid content distribution, connect geographically dispersed employees and support continuous information exchange, but can also increase message volume, information sources and work interruptions. Their selection should reflect not only availability and technical capacity, but also content type, urgency, employee needs and task complexity. Consistent two-way communication, active listening, regular feedback and the effective integration of formal, informal and digital channels are essential to internal communication quality [15]. Information overload can be reduced by prioritising relevant content, presenting it clearly, using appropriate technological support, structuring team collaboration and establishing internal information management rules [16]. Managers are responsible for selecting suitable platforms, establishing rules for their use and preventing unnecessary duplication across communication flows. Effective channel management should balance information accessibility and feedback opportunities with employees' capacity to process and apply content in a timely manner.

Managers do more than communicate digital priorities. They also create space for employees across different organisational levels to seek clarification, share experiences and openly discuss technology use. Alignment between managerial messages and actions shapes information credibility, while open communication and strong employee relationships support organisational trust. Evidence suggests that organisational culture builds trust through communication patterns and employee relationships, whereas the direct effect of leadership behaviour on trust has not been confirmed [17]. During digital transformation, clear, transparent and two-way communication promotes shared understanding, trust and involvement, while transformational and participatory leadership strengthens psychological safety and readiness to use new technologies [18]. Trust is therefore built through credible conduct, open communication and sustained employee involvement rather than managerial authority alone.

Strategically managed internal communication enables employees to connect organisational priorities with their own knowledge, responsibilities and use of technological solutions. Its influence includes both helping employees understand information and strengthening their confidence in applying what they have learned. Technical self-efficacy is one of the psychological mechanisms linking innovative digital leadership with employee performance, highlighting the importance of confidence in one's ability to use digital technologies [19]. Communication alone cannot create digital readiness, but it can connect organisational support with learning, confidence and active employee participation. This relationship provides the basis for examining the dimensions and antecedents of employee digital readiness for sustained participation in organisation-wide digital initiatives.

3. Dimensions of Employee Digital Readiness

At the individual level, readiness for digital transformation encompasses both the ability to work with digital technologies and the psychological capacity to engage with their continued introduction. Organisational digital readiness, by contrast, concerns infrastructure, strategy, processes and resources, while digital competencies constitute only one part of an employee's preparedness. An individual-level perspective also draws attention to awareness of digital priorities, managerial support, digital inclusion and the connection between new technologies and business processes [6]. Competence in using a particular digital tool does not necessarily indicate a capacity for broader and sustained involvement in organisation-wide initiatives. Readiness must therefore be understood through the interaction of knowledge, beliefs, motivation and work behaviour in a technology-driven business environment.

Knowledge and capabilities required for technology use form the operational basis of employee readiness, as they determine whether employees can select, apply and adapt digital solutions to specific job requirements. Beyond operating tools and platforms, this dimension includes understanding data, integrating different systems, assessing the reliability of information and resolving problems that arise during implementation. Requirements vary across sectors and according to the technological complexity of work processes. In agriculture, the transition to Agriculture 4.0 is reshaping business practices, redistributing activities and resources, and increasing demand for skills related to digital platforms, sensor technologies, the Internet of Things and precision agriculture solutions [20]. Research conducted in Serbian ICT companies found that human capital was the component of intellectual capital most strongly associated with business performance, highlighting the importance of systematic knowledge management and employee development [21]. Readiness to work in a technologically shaped environment therefore involves not a fixed set of skills, but the capacity to develop and apply them continuously within a specific professional context.

Beyond practical capability, employees' orientation towards technology is shaped by its perceived usefulness, compatibility with job requirements and their confidence in using it. Digital attitudes influence employees' willingness to engage in digital initiatives and contribute to their implementation [2]. Rather than reflecting individual preferences alone, these attitudes emerge from interconnected factors at the individual, group, leadership and organisational levels and may affect a range of work behaviours and outcomes [22]. Employee attributes do not carry equal weight in every context, as the associations of technological readiness with adaptability, attitudes towards technology, collaboration, coping with pressure and determination varied across the periods examined [23]. Motivation to use technology is consequently shaped by employees' experience, available support and the conditions in which they are expected to develop proficiency. Cognitive and psychological preparedness therefore connects digital skills with their practical application and evolves in response to workplace demands.

Employees' ability to apply their knowledge, capabilities and positive attitudes depends on the conditions provided for technology use. Infrastructure, training, technical support and time for learning help translate individual potential into appropriate work behaviour. Technology-mediated work relies on interconnected technical, social, pragmatic, epistemic, motivational, regulatory and well-being infrastructures operating at the individual, team and organisational levels [24]. Research on artificial intelligence adoption shows that employees' intention to use new technology does not directly improve organisational efficiency, as technological readiness and digital culture shape this relationship [25]. Technological readiness provides the resources and expertise needed to implement digital solutions, while digital culture encourages collaboration, experimentation, continuous learning and data use. In Serbian IT companies, IT agility and organisational-technological agility contributed to business agility, although the effect of organisational learning was not confirmed [26]. Although distinct from individual readiness, these organisational conditions influence its development and expression in everyday work.

Outcomes of digital technology use depend on implementation practices, job characteristics and employees' capacity to meet the demands of technology-mediated work. Meta-analytic evidence indicates improvements in task performance, innovation, engagement, job satisfaction and work-

related self-efficacy, alongside possible increases in burnout, anxiety and employee withdrawal. These relationships vary across industries, technologies and demographic groups [27]. Contrasting effects show that technical skills alone cannot ensure effective and sustainable technology use. Sustainable digital transformation requires a balance between organisational efficiency and employee capabilities, involvement and well-being. Digital readiness supports this balance by enabling responsible and continued technology use rather than initial adoption alone. Accordingly, employee digital readiness comprises the cognitive, capability, psychological and behavioural dimensions presented in Table 1. Their interaction supports understanding, capability, confidence and active technology use, while the surrounding organisational context influences how readiness develops and is sustained.

Table 1. Dimensions, manifestations and organisational conditions of employee digital readiness.

Dimension	Dimension content	Possible indicators	Organisational conditions
Cognitive readiness	Understanding the purpose, benefits, priorities and work-related implications of technology use	Understands the objectives of digital initiatives; recognises the value of technology for work; connects technology with job tasks	Clear and relevant information; explanation of purpose; access to further clarification
Capability readiness	Digital knowledge, practical skills, data use and problem-solving	Uses appropriate tools; assesses information reliability; adapts solutions to job requirements; continuously develops skills	Training; technical support; access to tools and knowledge; time for learning
Psychological readiness	Attitudes, motivation, self-efficacy, adaptability and coping with pressure	Believes in their ability to use technology; demonstrates openness; persists when facing initial difficulties	Managerial and peer support; psychological safety; learning culture; recognition of employee needs
Behavioural readiness	Participation, practical application, collaboration and knowledge sharing	Participates in digital initiatives; applies acquired knowledge; makes suggestions; shares experiences and provides feedback	Two-way communication; opportunities for participation; effective feedback systems; collaborative work practices

Source: Authors' synthesis based on the literature reviewed.

These dimensions do not represent sequential stages and need not develop at the same pace. An employee may understand the purpose of a digital solution and possess the skills to use it, while still lacking confidence or willingness to participate actively. Distinguishing between the dimensions allows organisations to identify more precisely where communication, training, technical or managerial support is needed. Considering them together provides a basis for linking specific strategic internal communication activities with different aspects of employee digital readiness.

4. Methodological Approach to Framework Development

The proposed integrated management framework connects the principal elements of strategic internal communication with four dimensions of employee digital readiness: cognitive, capability, psychological and behavioural readiness. Its central premise is that internal communication is not limited to conveying information about digital initiatives, but also functions as a management mechanism for strengthening employee understanding, learning, confidence and active participation

[4,5]. Digital culture, organisational trust, learning opportunities, and technical and social support shape how effectively these communication mechanisms operate [6,17,25]. Analytically, the framework distinguishes communication activities under organisational control from the individual readiness dimensions they are intended to support and the contextual conditions influencing their contribution. This distinction presents the relationship between strategic internal communication and digital readiness as a coordinated system of mutually reinforcing management mechanisms rather than a simple direct influence of communication on employees.

4.1. Conceptual and methodological basis

Conceptual analysis and synthesis were used to integrate knowledge dispersed across theoretical and empirical research on strategic internal communication and employee digital readiness. Bringing previously separate constructs and relationships into a theoretically grounded structure supports the identification of new research connections [28]. Internal coherence depends on alignment between the theoretical rationale, construct definitions, context of application, methodological choices and intended contributions [29]. Translation of the framework into an empirical research design further requires the proposed relationships to be clearly specified and operationalised [30]. Accordingly, the procedure involved defining each construct, establishing conceptual boundaries and explaining relationships suitable for future empirical testing.

Theoretical, review and empirical studies were selected according to their contribution to construct definition and relationship specification. Evidence on communication strategies, symmetrical communication, transparency, digital channels and feedback supported the identification of the principal elements of strategic internal communication [4,5,8,14,15]. Research addressing digital skills, employee attitudes, self-efficacy, involvement and technology-related behaviour informed the distinction between the cognitive, capability, psychological and behavioural dimensions of digital readiness [3,6,19,22]. The analysis did not seek to provide an exhaustive review of digital transformation research, but to identify the conceptual elements required to explain the proposed relationships. Priority was given to recent theoretical, review and empirical studies that clarified the selected constructs or provided evidence of relationships relevant to their integration. Studies concerned solely with the technical properties of digital solutions, without addressing employees or organisational mechanisms of implementation, were not used as a basis for framework development.

Concepts, relationships and management mechanisms needed to integrate the two areas under examination constituted the units of analysis. Strategic internal communication was conceptualised as a set of organisational activities through which the content, flow and methods of information exchange can be managed. Employee digital readiness was defined as a combination of individual attributes enabling employees to understand, use and actively engage with digital solutions. Digital culture, organisational trust, learning opportunities, and technical and social support were distinguished from individual readiness and treated as contextual conditions within which communication mechanisms operate. Maintaining these boundaries prevents organisational activities from being conflated with employee capabilities and behaviour, allowing their relationships to be explained more precisely.

4.2. Functional alignment of strategic internal communication and employee digital readiness

Functional alignment is based on the premise that elements of strategic internal communication contribute to employee digital readiness in different ways. Clear and relevant information primarily strengthens understanding of digital initiatives, while communication supporting learning and knowledge sharing develops employees' capabilities. Transparent communication and visible managerial support are particularly relevant when employees lack confidence in using new technologies. Two-way exchanges and feedback perform a related function by enabling employees to seek clarification, express concerns, offer suggestions and become involved in digital activities [4,5,15]. In practice, communication elements operate together and their effects may extend across several aspects of readiness. The framework therefore identifies the dimension towards which each

element is primarily directed while recognising that it may also support the development of other dimensions.

Cognitive readiness (CogR) develops when employees understand the purpose and expected benefits of digital initiatives, as well as how technological solutions affect their tasks and responsibilities. Relevant content, message clarity and communication transparency make the strongest contribution to this dimension. Audience analysis and concise message design allow information to be adapted to different employee groups [8], while accessibility, clarity and accuracy determine its transparency [14]. Communication content should connect digital priorities with business processes and everyday tasks, translating broad strategic directions into meaning employees can understand and use. Strategic internal communication thereby strengthens awareness of digital transformation and employees' ability to assess its relevance to their own work.

Capability readiness (CapR) develops not through information alone, but by linking communication with training, knowledge sharing and support during technology use. Internal meetings and communication training can improve information exchange and help employees apply new knowledge in their work [7]. Internal communication also strengthens digital capabilities by providing access to relevant knowledge, expert assistance and opportunities to exchange experiences of using digital solutions [4]. Feedback supports this process by identifying practical difficulties, knowledge gaps and further training needs. Rather than replacing training and experience, communication connects them with specific job requirements and directs support towards employees who need it.

Psychological readiness (PsyR) rests on employees' trust in the information they receive, their sense of security when using technology and their confidence in meeting digital job demands. Open communication and constructive employee relationships foster organisational trust [17], while access to relevant information and team support can ease the strain associated with complex digital solutions [12]. Managerial communication support carries particular weight because consistency between managers' messages and actions affects the credibility of digital initiatives. Technical self-efficacy helps explain how innovative digital leadership translates into stronger employee performance [19]. Strategic internal communication can cultivate this confidence through clear expectations, accessible assistance, recognition of progress and opportunities to express uncertainty or request further support.

Behavioural readiness (BehR) becomes visible when employees actively use digital solutions, participate in digital initiatives, share experiences and propose improvements. Two-way communication and feedback are central to its development because they move employees from passive recipients of information to active contributors to its interpretation and application. Active listening, reciprocal exchange and continuous feedback encourage broader participation in organisational activities [15]. Evidence that symmetrical internal communication mediates the relationship between digital leadership and innovation capability further emphasises the importance of employee voice in technology-enabled processes [5]. Behavioural readiness is thus strengthened when employees can ask questions, clarify how technology should be used, share practical experience and contribute to improving digital practice.

Digital channels play a cross-cutting role because they can support all dimensions of employee readiness, although their contribution depends on how appropriately they are selected and managed. The availability of a platform alone does not guarantee that employees will understand messages, learn effectively or participate actively in digital initiatives. A poor fit between the number of channels, the volume of content and users' actual needs can intensify information overload and make relevant information more difficult to identify. Such risks can be reduced through clear information management rules, content tailored to different employee groups, technological filtering and better coordination of communication within teams [16]. Channel selection should therefore reflect the type and complexity of the message, the need for immediate clarification and the extent to which employees can provide feedback. Rather than acting as an independent driver of readiness, a digital channel provides the infrastructure through which other communication elements can achieve their intended functions.

Table 2 summarises the functional alignment between the elements of strategic internal communication and the four dimensions of employee digital readiness.

Table 2. Functional alignment of strategic internal communication elements and employee digital readiness dimensions.

Strategic Internal Communication Element	CogR	CapR	PsyR	BehR	Primary Management Function
Relevance and clarity of content	PC	CC	CC	CC	Explaining the purpose, benefits and work-related implications of digital initiatives
Communication transparency	PC	CC	PC	CC	Providing accessible, accurate and credible information
Communication linked to learning and knowledge sharing	CC	PC	CC	CC	Connecting information with training, professional support and experiential learning
Two-way communication flows	CC	CC	CC	PC	Enabling questions, consultations, suggestions and active involvement
Feedback	CC	PC	CC	PC	Identifying difficulties, adjusting implementation and improving digital practices
Managerial communication support	CC	CC	PC	CC	Strengthening trust, confidence and persistence in technology use
Alignment of digital communication channels	CC	CC	CC	CC	Ensuring communication accessibility, timeliness and suitability

Note: PC – Predominant Contribution; CC – Complementary Contribution.

Source: Prepared by the authors using the studies included in the analysis.

Distinguishing between predominant and complementary contributions serves a conceptual rather than an empirical purpose and does not indicate the measured strength of the proposed relationships. Each element of strategic internal communication contributes to all four dimensions of employee digital readiness, although its role may be predominant for some dimensions and complementary for others. A predominant contribution identifies the dimensions towards which a communication element is more directly oriented, whereas a complementary contribution reflects its supporting function. Alignment of digital communication channels makes a complementary contribution to every dimension because it provides the infrastructure required for accessible, timely and appropriately tailored communication, without privileging any single dimension. Developing employee digital readiness therefore depends on the alignment and combined operation of communication elements rather than the isolated use of any one element.

4.3. Integrated conceptual model and research propositions

Strategic internal communication is conceptualised in the integrated model as a multidimensional management construct comprising content relevance and clarity, communication transparency, learning and knowledge sharing, two-way communication flows, feedback, managerial communication support and alignment of digital communication channels. Employee digital readiness is defined as an individual-level construct encompassing cognitive, capability, psychological and behavioural dimensions. The proposed directional link suggests that coordinated

communication management can support the development of these dimensions without implying empirically established causality. Digital culture, organisational trust, learning opportunities, and technical and social support are positioned as conditions that may enable or constrain this relationship. Figure 1 presents this structure by separating communication activities under organisational control, individual readiness and contextual conditions, thereby clarifying both the proposed relationship and the setting in which it operates.

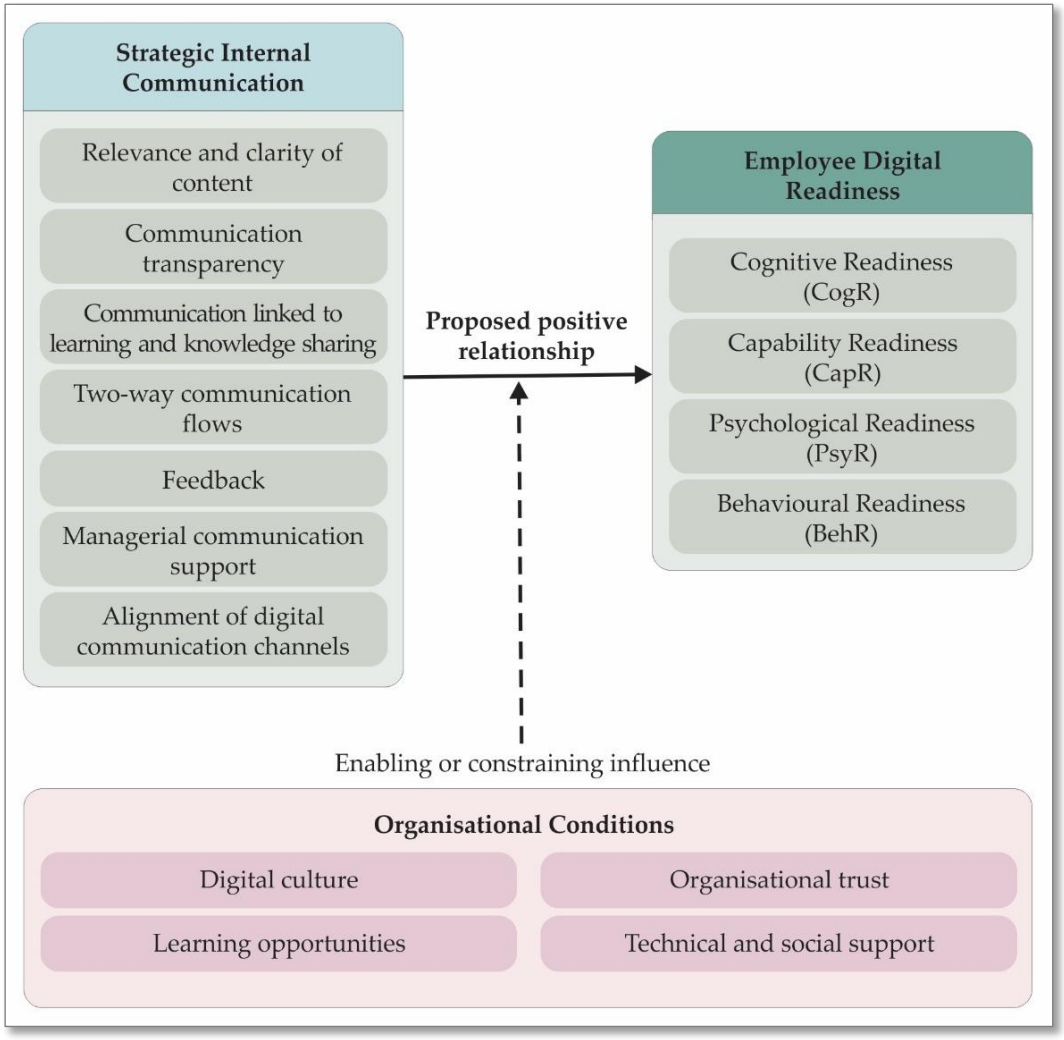

Figure 1. Integrated communication and readiness model.

At the aggregate level, the model represents a relationship between two multidimensional constructs rather than a sequence of isolated effects. Strategic internal communication operates as a coordinated system of content, flows, channels and support, while the four readiness dimensions represent interrelated aspects of employees' capacity to engage with digital transformation. Organisational conditions belong to neither construct but form the context that shapes the strength and sustainability of the proposed relationship. This structure also allows future research to examine the overall association between the constructs alongside the more specific links identified through their functional alignment.

Conceptual relationships presented in the model provide the basis for two research propositions intended to guide future empirical investigation. They do not represent established causal effects, but theoretically grounded expectations concerning the relationships between the constructs and the role of the organisational context.

P1. Strategic internal communication is positively associated with employee digital readiness.

P2. Organisational conditions, reflected in digital culture, organisational trust, learning opportunities, and technical and social support, shape the relationship between strategic internal

communication and employee digital readiness, with more favourable conditions strengthening this relationship.

5. Managerial Implications

Using the proposed framework, managers can direct internal communication towards specific employee needs rather than limiting it to general information about digital initiatives. Implementation begins by identifying the readiness dimension in which a gap is present. Limited understanding of technology requires clearer and more relevant content; insufficient capability calls for communication linked to training and expert support; and employee uncertainty requires transparency and consistent managerial communication. Low participation in digital activities indicates a need for two-way communication flows and accessible feedback systems. Evidence from the adoption of extended reality technologies suggests that internal support capabilities, existing user skills and opportunities to trial a technology are associated with lower expected employee resistance [31]. Configurational findings further show that no single antecedent is sufficient to generate high employee openness to digital transformation, which instead arises from different combinations of communication quality, interpersonal relationships, leadership, and individual and contextual factors [32]. A diagnostic approach therefore allows managers to align communication, training and organisational support with identified employee needs rather than applying the same message and channel to everyone.

Selection of communication channels should be guided by the nature and complexity of the content, its urgency and the need for direct interaction. Digitalisation has transformed how employees connect and exchange information, while also raising questions about its organisational consequences and the quality of internal communication practices [33]. Routine operational messages may be delivered through digital platforms, whereas the introduction of complex technologies requires meetings, demonstrations, training and opportunities to seek additional clarification. Early, clear and transparent communication, supported by practical examples and demonstrations tailored to different employee groups, can improve understanding, reduce resistance and facilitate adjustment to technological change [34]. Operating numerous disconnected channels can make relevant information difficult to locate and increase the information burden on employees, highlighting the need for clear rules governing their purpose and use [16]. Managers should define the content assigned to each channel, the location of documents and guidance, responsibility for updates and the procedures available for requesting clarification. Effective channel governance limits unnecessary message duplication and supports the timely interpretation and application of information.

Communication should be embedded in knowledge development and practical problem-solving throughout technology implementation. Regular internal meetings, targeted training and readily available expert assistance enable employees to resolve uncertainties, exchange experiences and address difficulties as they arise. Feedback provides managers with evidence of which instructions, processes or technological features require further explanation [7]. Evidence from work-integrated learning indicates that digital literacy alone may not generate readiness, whereas practical experience, mentoring and structured reflection build technological adaptability as its more immediate driver [35]. Research in AI-enabled workplaces further shows that participation, peer collaboration and effective joint learning can strengthen employees' psychological and skill-related resources, while perceived organisational support helps reduce technology-related job insecurity [36]. A critical managerial priority is therefore to support employees who possess basic digital skills but lack confidence in applying them independently, since technical self-efficacy helps translate digital leadership into stronger work outcomes [19]. Practical demonstrations, mentoring, access to experienced colleagues and collective reflection on technology use should form part of this support. Making communication part of continuous learning ensures that capability development continues beyond the delivery of instructions or completion of formal training.

Employee readiness cannot be developed or sustained without organisational conditions that encourage open information exchange, learning and experimentation with digital solutions. Digital

culture enables technological knowledge to move across organisational units and allows employee experience to inform improvements in working practices. Organisational trust complements this process by increasing employees' willingness to report difficulties, acknowledge knowledge gaps and seek assistance. Open communication patterns and constructive workplace relationships are particularly important in building such trust [17]. Successful digital transformation further depends on the strength of soft organisational components, especially digital leadership, digital competencies and digital organisational culture [1]. Evidence from food manufacturing SMEs indicates that digital organisational culture and knowledge acquisition support digital transformation through the mediating role of organisational readiness [37]. Technological readiness and digital culture can likewise help translate employees' intention to use technology into more favourable organisational outcomes [25]. Managers should provide sufficient time for learning, access to internal and external knowledge, technical and peer support, and a communication climate in which problems can be raised without hesitation. Combining these conditions enables communication activities to produce practical and sustained improvements in the use of digital solutions.

Applying the communication framework requires indicators tailored to each dimension of employee digital readiness. An individual-level conceptualisation, combined with observable antecedents, allows organisations to assess workforce preparedness for digital transformation more systematically [6]. Evidence linking positive perceptions of digitalisation and regular technology use with a higher quality of work life further supports the joint monitoring of employee attitudes, technology-use patterns and workplace experience [38]. Cognitive readiness can be assessed through employees' understanding of digital priorities and their relevance to job tasks. Training outcomes, independent tool use and problem-solving ability provide evidence of capability readiness, while confidence, perceived support and security when seeking assistance reflect psychological readiness. Behavioural readiness can be observed when employees continue to use digital tools, participate in digital initiatives, exchange practical experience and use available feedback channels. No single source of information is likely to capture all these behaviours. Short surveys and employee discussions can therefore be considered alongside training records and technology-use data, while retaining the distinctions between individual readiness dimensions. Repeated assessment gives managers a practical basis for revising messages, channel choices and forms of support as employee needs and implementation demands change.

Bringing communication, learning, support and readiness assessment into the same management process allows digital initiatives to be adjusted over time instead of being treated as fixed interventions. Evidence from turbulent markets indicates that employee engagement can strengthen organisational resilience when combined with digitally enabled organisational practices [39]. Such coordination supports more sustainable digital transformation by linking organisational adaptability and resilience with continuous capability development and the quality of technology-mediated work.

6. Conclusions

Digital transformation creates lasting organisational value only when technological investment is matched by employees' capacity to understand its purpose, acquire relevant knowledge, develop confidence in its use and apply digital solutions in everyday work. Addressing this requirement, the study positions strategic internal communication as a managerial mechanism linking organisational digital priorities with the cognitive, capability, psychological and behavioural dimensions of employee readiness. The proposed framework brings these communication elements together within a coordinated management system. Rather than treating communication as a means of announcing technological initiatives, it demonstrates how these elements can jointly translate strategic priorities into employee knowledge, beliefs and workplace behaviour. Integrating communication with capability development and sustained employee involvement therefore provides a stronger organisational foundation for implementing digital initiatives and maintaining their value over time.

By clearly separating communication mechanisms under organisational control, the individual readiness dimensions they are intended to strengthen and the contextual conditions shaping their

effectiveness, this study advances conceptual understanding of communication-supported digital readiness. Functional integration of these elements shows that internal communication is more than a channel for delivering information. It can also help managers coordinate learning, support and employee involvement instead of concentrating only on technical skills. In practice, the framework helps identify whether employees need clearer explanations, additional capabilities, greater confidence or more opportunities to participate. Managers can then combine communication, training, guidance and readiness assessment according to the identified need and the stage reached by a digital initiative.

Despite its conceptual contribution, the model has a necessarily limited explanatory reach until its proposed relationships are tested empirically and shown to remain stable across different organisational and technological contexts. Empirical validation will therefore require the operationalisation of strategic internal communication and employee readiness dimensions, rigorous assessment of the measurement model's reliability and validity, and formal testing of both research propositions. Future research should examine not only the relationship between communication and readiness but also the extent to which digital culture, trust, learning opportunities and technical and social support strengthen or constrain that relationship. Testing the model across sectors, organisational sizes and levels of technological maturity would show whether the proposed relationships remain consistent under different conditions. Findings from such studies could then be used to revise individual parts of the framework and develop a reliable instrument for assessing how prepared employees are to participate in digital initiatives.

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