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EMPLOYEE ADAPTABILITY IN THE DIGITAL WORKPLACE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL DETERMINANTS

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Abstract

Digital transformation, remote and hybrid work, and the diffusion of artificial intelligence have made employee adaptability a critical organizational capability, yet research on its antecedents remains fragmented across psychology, information systems, and management. This study aims to synthesize evidence on the individual and organizational determinants of employee adaptability in the digital workplace. A systematic literature review was conducted following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, searching Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and ABI/INFORM for peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2025, and findings were integrated through thematic synthesis. The review shows that adaptability is conceptualized as a multidimensional capability spanning cognitive, behavioral, and emotional responses to technological change. Individual determinants include dispositional traits, self-efficacy and digital competence, career adaptability, and attitudes toward change, whereas organizational determinants include leadership and change communication, psychological safety, training, job and technology design, and flexible work arrangements. The literature suggests that these determinants operate as interacting resources, with supportive organizational conditions amplifying individual capacity. An integrative framework and a research agenda emphasizing longitudinal, multilevel, and emerging-economy studies are proposed. The findings guide managers and human resource practitioners in designing workplaces that support adaptation.

Keywords: *Adaptability; Adaptive Performance; Digital Workplace; Organizational Support; Systematic Literature Review*

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies such as cloud platforms, collaboration tools, data analytics, and, increasingly, artificial intelligence (AI) are reshaping how work is organized, coordinated, and evaluated (Colbert et al., 2016; Vial, 2019). Digital transformation is therefore not only a technical undertaking; it demands changes in work design, leadership, and the skills that employees need (Kane et al., 2015; Schwarzmüller et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift by pushing many organizations toward remote and hybrid arrangements and by requiring employees to adopt unfamiliar tools within a very short time. Meanwhile, algorithmic management and AI-enabled decision support are altering task content, autonomy, and performance monitoring (Kellogg et al., 2020; Parker & Grote, 2022). Under these conditions, the capacity of employees to adjust to new technologies, tasks, and ways of working, that is, their adaptability, largely determines whether digital investments translate into productivity and sustainable careers.

Adaptability has attracted scholarly attention for more than two decades. Pulakos et al. (2000) proposed a taxonomy of adaptive performance containing eight dimensions, including learning new tasks, technologies, and procedures, handling work stress, and dealing with uncertain and unpredictable situations. Subsequent reviews have clarified the construct and its measurement (Baard et al., 2014; Jundt et al., 2015). In parallel, other research streams have examined closely related phenomena under different labels: career adaptability in vocational psychology (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), user adaptation to information technology in information systems research (Bala & Venkatesh, 2016; Beaudry &

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Pinsonneault, 2005), and technostress in the study of technology-related strain (Tarafdar et al., 2019). These streams rarely communicate with one another, which leaves the literature on adaptability in digital workplaces fragmented.

This fragmentation has practical consequences. Studies emphasizing individual attributes tend to imply that adaptability is primarily the employee's responsibility, whereas studies emphasizing organizational conditions focus on implementation quality, leadership, and work design. Few efforts integrate the two levels, so managers receive only partial guidance on whether to select, train, or support employees, or to redesign the work context itself. The question is particularly pressing for organizations in emerging economies, where digital adoption is often rapid and uneven and where employees may differ widely in their access to technology, training, and managerial support.

Accordingly, this study conducts a systematic literature review of the individual and organizational determinants of employee adaptability in the digital workplace. It addresses four research questions: (RQ1) How is employee adaptability conceptualized in digital workplace research? (RQ2) Which individual determinants are associated with adaptability? (RQ3) Which organizational determinants are associated with adaptability? (RQ4) How do these determinants interact, and which gaps remain? The study contributes an integrated multilevel synthesis, a conceptual framework linking the two sets of determinants, and an agenda for future research and managerial practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Employee Adaptability

Adaptability is generally understood as the capacity to change one's cognition, behavior, or affect in response to new or changing situational demands. Griffin and Hesketh (2003) described adaptable behaviors as those that help individuals respond to changes in work and career, while Ployhart and Bliese (2006) defined individual adaptability as an individual's ability, skill, disposition, willingness, and motivation to change or fit different task, social, and environmental features. Griffin et al. (2007) positioned adaptivity, alongside proficiency and proactivity, as one of three components of work role performance relevant at the individual, team, and organizational levels. Two perspectives coexist: adaptability as a relatively stable, trait-like capacity, and adaptation as a process or outcome in which performance is adjusted over time (Baard et al., 2014; Jundt et al., 2015). Career adaptability adds a vocational angle, describing the psychosocial resources of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence that help people manage occupational transitions (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Theoretical Lenses

Several theories explain why some employees adapt more successfully than others. Social cognitive theory holds that self-efficacy shapes the effort, persistence, and learning strategies people bring to new demands (Bandura, 1997). Transactional stress and coping theory suggests that outcomes depend on whether individuals appraise change as a threat or an opportunity and whether they believe they can cope with it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); Beaudry and Pinsonneault (2005) adapted this logic to technology, describing distinct user adaptation strategies that arise from appraisals of opportunity or threat and perceived control. Conservation of resources theory proposes that people strive to protect and build resources and that resource loss is especially potent (Hobfoll, 1989), while the job demands–resources model distinguishes demands that drain energy from resources that sustain motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Technology acceptance research adds that perceived usefulness and ease of use drive adoption intentions (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Finally, work design perspectives emphasize

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that technology affects employees largely by changing job characteristics such as autonomy and demands (Parker & Grote, 2022; Wang et al., 2020).

Debates and Research Gap

Three debates structure the field. The first concerns whether technology-related demands are inherently harmful. Technostress research identifies techno-overload, invasion, complexity, insecurity, and uncertainty as stressors that reduce satisfaction and commitment (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Tarafdar et al., 2007), yet Tarafdar et al. (2019) argue that technology can also generate eustress, depending on appraisal and design. The second concerns the weight of dispositions relative to context. Personality-based accounts show that dispositions matter (Huang et al., 2014; Judge et al., 1999), whereas change research highlights managerial communication, participation, and trust (Oreg et al., 2011). The third concerns research design: reviews note a reliance on cross-sectional, self-reported data and a tendency to study determinants at a single level (Baard et al., 2014; Jundt et al., 2015). The gap that remains is an integrated, multilevel account of how individual and organizational determinants jointly shape adaptability under specifically digital conditions, which this review seeks to provide.

METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review, which seeks to identify, appraise, and synthesize relevant evidence through a transparent and replicable procedure (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). Reporting followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The search protocol and eligibility criteria are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Search protocol and eligibility criteria

Element	Specification
Databases	Scopus; Web of Science Core Collection; PsycINFO; ABI/INFORM Collection; Google Scholar (supplementary)
Search string	("adaptab*" OR "adaptive performance" OR "adaptation") AND ("digital workplace" OR "digital transformation" OR "technostress" OR "remote work" OR "artificial intelligence") AND ("employee*" OR "worker*")
Time window	Empirical studies published 2015–2025; seminal earlier works used for theoretical framing only
Inclusion criteria	Peer-reviewed journal articles in English; samples of employees in organizations; examines at least one individual or organizational determinant of adaptability, adaptive performance, or adaptation to technology
Exclusion criteria	Student-only samples; opinion pieces without evidence; grey literature; studies of organizational (rather than employee) adaptability
Quality appraisal	Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) 2018

The search was run in the four databases and supplemented by backward and forward citation tracking of key articles. We exported records, removed duplicates, and screened titles and abstracts against the eligibility criteria, followed by full-text assessment. A total of records were identified, remained after duplicate removal, and studies were included in the final synthesis. We appraised methodological quality with the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (Hong et al., 2018), and the appraisal informed how much weight we gave each finding in the synthesis.

Data were extracted into a standardized form capturing the study context, sample, design, determinants examined, adaptability construct and measure, and main findings. A thematic synthesis was then conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006): findings were coded inductively, codes were clustered into

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determinants, and determinants were grouped by level of analysis (individual or organizational). The resulting themes were organized around the four research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis shows that the literature treats adaptability as multidimensional, links it to a recognizable set of individual and organizational determinants, and increasingly recognizes that the two levels interact. Table 2 summarizes the determinants identified and the mechanisms through which they are theorized to operate, and Image 1 presents the integrative framework derived from the synthesis.

Table 2. Individual and organizational determinants of employee adaptability

Level	Determinant	Theorized mechanism	Representative sources
Individual	Dispositional traits (emotional stability, openness, ambition)	Lower threat appraisal; greater willingness to try new methods	Huang et al. (2014); Judge et al. (1999)
Individual	Self-efficacy and digital competence	Confidence and skill to learn new systems; reduced complexity strain	Bandura (1997); Bala & Venkatesh (2016)
Individual	Career adaptability	Concern, control, curiosity, and confidence as self-regulatory resources	Savickas & Porfeli (2012); Rudolph et al. (2017)
Individual	Attitudes toward change and proactivity	Interpretation of demands as opportunity or threat; self-initiated experimentation	Oreg (2003); Parker et al. (2010)
Organizational	Leadership and change communication	Reduced uncertainty; participation and trust	Oreg et al. (2011); Schwarzmüller et al. (2018)
Organizational	Psychological safety and learning climate	Safe experimentation and error reporting	Edmondson (1999)
Organizational	Training and technical support	Skill building; technostress inhibition	Ragu-Nathan et al. (2008); Bala & Venkatesh (2016)
Organizational	Job and technology design	Effects on autonomy, demands, and monitoring	Parker & Grote (2022); Wang et al. (2020); Kellogg et al. (2020)
Organizational	Flexible work arrangements	Boundary management, isolation, and support	Charalampous et al. (2019)

Conceptualization and Outcomes of Adaptability (RQ1)

Across the literature, adaptability in digital contexts is treated as multidimensional. Cognitive adaptability involves learning new systems, reframing tasks, and solving novel problems; behavioral adaptability involves modifying work routines, using tools in new ways, and seeking help or feedback; and emotional adaptability involves managing the stress and uncertainty that accompany change (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006; Pulakos et al., 2000). Digital settings add the demand for continuous learning, because the technologies themselves are updated frequently. The literature relates adaptability to adaptive and task performance, job satisfaction and well-being, and career outcomes (Jundt et al., 2015; Rudolph et al., 2017; Zacher, 2014). Conversely, awareness that AI and robotics may substitute for human work has been associated with lower organizational commitment and career satisfaction and higher turnover intentions

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(Brougham & Haar, 2018), which suggests that perceived threat can undermine the adaptive process before it begins. A conceptual implication is that adaptability should be treated both as a capability that employees possess and as a process shaped by what the context offers.

Individual Determinants (RQ2)

Four clusters of individual determinants emerged. First, dispositional characteristics matter: meta-analytic evidence indicates that traits such as emotional stability, openness to experience, and ambition are related to adaptive performance (Huang et al., 2014), and a positive self-concept and risk tolerance help managers cope with organizational change (Judge et al., 1999). Second, self-efficacy and digital competence function as the most proximal enablers. Consistent with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), employees who believe in their capacity to learn tend to appraise new systems as opportunities rather than threats, and competence reduces the complexity that fuels technostress (Beaudry & Pinsonneault, 2005; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008).

Third, career adaptability provides self-regulatory resources. A meta-analysis shows that it is related to adaptivity, adapting responses, and adaptation results (Rudolph et al., 2017), and it predicts career success beyond personality traits (Zacher, 2014); broader employability constructs likewise include personal adaptability as a core dimension (Fugate et al., 2004). Fourth, attitudes toward change and proactive motivation shape how demands are interpreted. Dispositional resistance to change, with its routine-seeking, emotional reaction, short-term focus, and cognitive rigidity components (Oreg, 2003), is associated with reactions to change (Oreg et al., 2011), whereas proactive motivation, driven by being able, having a reason, and feeling energized to act (Parker et al., 2010), encourages employees to experiment with new tools before being required to.

Although these determinants are often studied as stable characteristics, several are malleable. Self-efficacy and digital skills can be developed through training and mastery experiences, which means that individual determinants are not merely selection criteria but also targets for organizational investment.

Organizational Determinants (RQ3)

Five clusters of organizational determinants were identified. Leadership and change communication reduce uncertainty and signal the purpose of digital initiatives; change research associates employee participation, information, and trust in management with more positive reactions to change (Oreg et al., 2011), and leadership is a recurrent theme in studies of digital transformation (Schwarzmüller et al., 2018). Psychological safety and a learning climate allow employees to experiment and admit errors without fear of sanction, which is crucial when new systems are imperfectly understood (Edmondson, 1999).

Training and technical support build the skills and confidence on which adaptation depends. In the technostress literature, literacy facilitation, technical support, and involvement facilitation function as organizational mechanisms that inhibit technostress (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008), and implementation conditions are linked to adaptation behaviors and job outcomes (Bala & Venkatesh, 2016). Job and technology design shapes the demands and resources employees face: technology can enhance or erode autonomy and workload depending on how it is introduced (Parker & Grote, 2022; Wang et al., 2020), and algorithmic systems that intensify monitoring may constrain discretion (Kellogg et al., 2020). Finally, flexible work arrangements influence adaptation indirectly through boundaries, isolation, and support; reviews of remote work report multidimensional effects on well-being (Charalampous et al., 2019), which makes managerial support and adequate infrastructure important for adaptation.

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Interplay of Determinants and an Integrative Framework (RQ4)

The determinants do not operate in isolation. Drawing on the job demands–resources model and conservation of resources theory, individual and organizational factors can be understood as resources that reinforce one another: employees with higher self-efficacy and career adaptability are better positioned to benefit from training and supportive leadership, whereas supportive contexts help build the personal resources that sustain adaptation over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hobfoll, 1989). Conversely, resource-poor contexts, such as high technology demands combined with weak support, may exhaust even capable employees and produce the strain that technostress research documents (Tarafdar et al., 2019). Image 1 summarizes this logic.

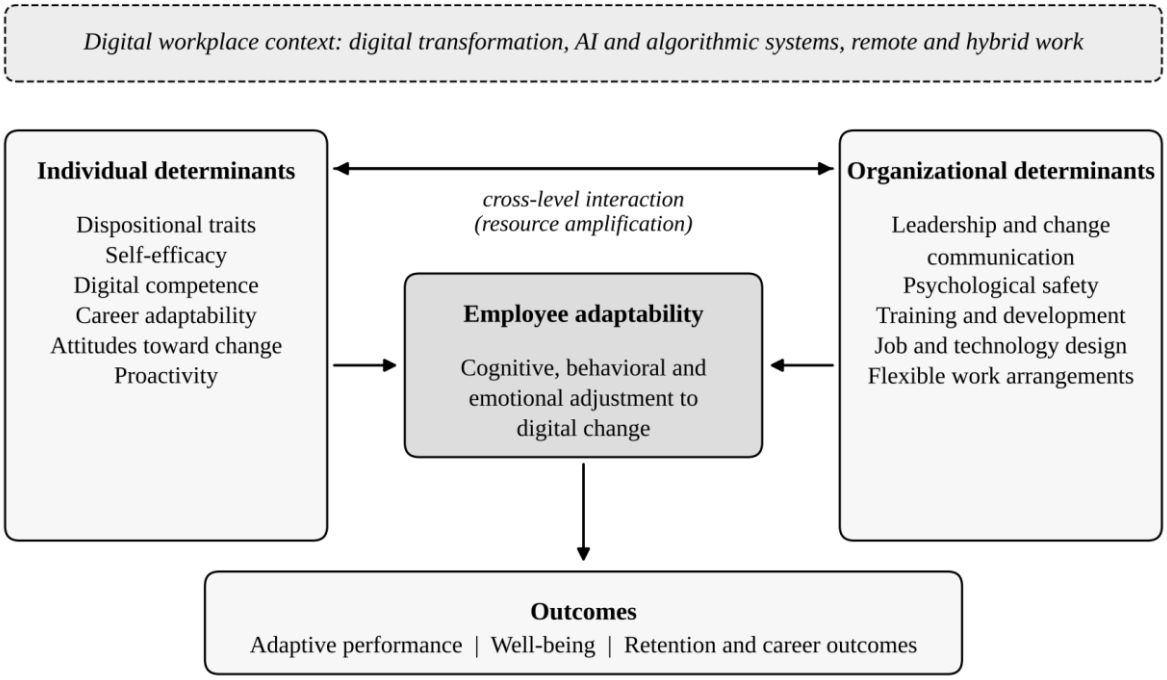

Image 1. Integrative framework of the individual and organizational determinants of employee adaptability in the digital workplace

The framework carries three propositions that future research can test. First, individual and organizational determinants each contribute independently to adaptability. Second, organizational resources moderate the effect of individual characteristics, buffering the disadvantage of lower individual resources and amplifying the advantage of higher ones. Third, adaptability feeds back on both levels over time, because successful adaptation builds self-efficacy and signals to organizations which supports are effective.

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Implications and Research Agenda

For practitioners, the synthesis suggests that organizations should not treat adaptability as a matter of employee attitude alone. Selection and development practices can attend to adaptability-related characteristics, but investment in training, communication, psychological safety, and thoughtful technology and job design is equally necessary. Managers in contexts of uneven digital readiness, such as many emerging economies, should assess whether employees have the resources they need in order to adapt before attributing difficulties to resistance.

For research, five directions are salient. First, longitudinal and experimental designs are needed to establish causal direction and to track adaptation as a process, given the prevalence of cross-sectional, self-report studies (Baard et al., 2014; Jundt et al., 2015). Second, multilevel designs should test the cross-level interactions proposed above. Third, research on AI-enabled and algorithmically managed work remains nascent, and the determinants of adaptation to such systems may differ from those established for earlier information systems (Kellogg et al., 2020; Parker & Grote, 2022). Fourth, evidence from non-Western and emerging-economy contexts appears underrepresented, and cultural and institutional factors may shape both the determinants and their effects. Fifth, researchers should integrate the currently separate streams of adaptive performance, career adaptability, IT adaptation, and technostress by adopting common constructs and measures.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review set out to synthesize what is known about the individual and organizational determinants of employee adaptability in the digital workplace. The synthesis shows that adaptability is a multidimensional capability with cognitive, behavioral, and emotional components; that it is associated with individual determinants such as dispositions, self-efficacy and digital competence, career adaptability, and attitudes toward change; and that it is shaped by organizational determinants such as leadership and change communication, psychological safety, training, job and technology design, and flexible work arrangements. The principal contribution is an integrative framework showing that these determinants operate as interacting resources rather than independent factors.

The review has limitations. Restricting the corpus to English-language, peer-reviewed publications may have excluded relevant work, particularly from non-English-speaking contexts, and the heterogeneity of constructs and measures limited quantitative comparison, so the synthesis is narrative and thematic. The propositions in the framework also require empirical testing. Future studies should apply longitudinal, multilevel, and cross-cultural designs, and practitioners can use the framework to diagnose whether adaptation difficulties originate in individual readiness, organizational support, or both.

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