Organizational Digitalization, Work Stress and Employee Well-Being in an Emerging Economy: A Human-Centered Mediation Analysis

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Abstract– ***Digital transformation is a central driver of innovation, productivity and regional competitiveness, yet in emerging economies it often advances faster than the human and organizational capabilities needed to sustain it. This creates a paradox: organizational digitalization can operate as a resource that strengthens employee well-being, or as a source of demands and psychosocial tension that undermines it. This study examines whether perceived work stress mediates the association between organizational digitalization and employee well-being, treating well-being as a strategic outcome of sustainable digital transformation rather than a peripheral occupational-health concern. Cross-sectional data were collected online from 210 formally employed Honduran workers, mainly in manufacturing and services. The three constructs were modeled as second-order latent variables through structural equation modeling with robust estimation, and the indirect effect was tested with 10,000 bootstrap resamples. The model explained 66.4% of the variance in well-being. Digitalization was positively associated with well-being (β = 0.594, p < 0.001) and weakly, at the threshold of significance, with lower work stress (β = −0.205, p = 0.050); stress was negatively associated with well-being (β = −0.449, p < 0.001), and the indirect effect was small (β = 0.092, 95% CI [0.004, 0.339]). The findings provide rare Central American evidence that human-centered digital transformation is associated with employee well-being mainly through a direct, resource-building pathway, while active management of work stress remains indispensable for sustainable digital innovation in emerging economies.***

Keywords-- ***Digital transformation; organizational digitalization; employee well-being; work stress; emerging economies.***

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation is one of the most consequential drivers of innovation, productivity and regional competitiveness, and it occupies a central place in current debates on capability-based entrepreneurship and technology-led development [1]. In Latin America, access to digital infrastructure has expanded steadily, yet the adoption of advanced technologies remains uneven across sectors and firms, and organizational capabilities often lag behind the pace of technological change [2]. Honduras illustrates this tension: as a Central American emerging economy whose productive base concentrates in manufacturing and services, it is integrating organizational digitalization in workplaces where technical training, process maturity and digital governance are still incipient.

This gap between technological adoption and organizational capability generates a paradox that is directly relevant to sustainable innovation. The same digital tools that streamline operations and expand coordination can, when competences, processes and culture do not keep pace, become an additional source of demands, uncertainty and psychosocial tension for employees [3], [4]. Whether organizational digitalization functions primarily as a resource that builds workforce capability, or as a demand that erodes it, therefore has direct consequences for the sustainability of technology-driven innovation, particularly where digital transformation outpaces workforce readiness.

Employee well-being is increasingly recognized as a strategic capability that sustains talent, operational continuity and innovation, rather than a peripheral occupational-health outcome [5]. Within this view, perceived work stress should be understood as an implementation risk of digital transformation: a signal that the demands introduced by new technologies exceed the resources organizations provide to manage them [6], [7]. Treating stress management as part of the digital transformation agenda, rather than as a separate wellness initiative, is consistent with a human-centered approach to innovation and with the capability-based perspective on entrepreneurship and scaling that motivates this conference track.

This tension is especially salient for conferences on capability-based entrepreneurship, where digital transformation is often framed primarily as a technological or market-scaling challenge. Scaling digital transformation into new sectors and regional economies, however, depends on organizational capabilities that include workforce readiness

and psychosocial sustainability, not only on infrastructure and market access [1], [2]. A human-centered reading of digital transformation therefore treats employee well-being and work stress as indicators of whether an organization's digital transformation capability is being built in a way that can be scaled and sustained, rather than as concerns external to the entrepreneurship and innovation agenda.

Despite growing international literature connecting digitalization, stress and well-being, evidence from Central America remains scarce, and the manufacturing and service sectors that dominate formal employment in countries such as Honduras are largely unexplored [2], [8], [9]. Most available regional evidence is descriptive or bivariate and rarely models digitalization, stress and well-being jointly within an integrated structural framework [10].

This study examines the structural relationships among organizational digitalization, perceived work stress and employee well-being in a sample of 210 Honduran workers, testing work stress as a mediator of the digitalization-well-being relationship. The contribution is threefold: it provides rare structural evidence from an underrepresented Central American context, it models digitalization, stress and well-being as multidimensional second-order capabilities rather than single indicators, and it informs organizational and regional strategies for scaling digital transformation without compromising the human capabilities on which sustainable innovation depends.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

This study draws on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model and conservation of resources (COR) theory to interpret digital transformation as a process that can simultaneously build organizational resources and introduce new demands [6], [7].

A. Organizational Digitalization as a Transformation Capability

Organizational digitalization is understood here not as the acquisition of digital tools, but as an organizational capability comprising the use and integration of digital technology, employees' digital competence, the transformation of organizational processes and a supportive digital culture [11], [12]. This multidimensional view is consistent with technology acceptance frameworks, which emphasize perceived usefulness, ease of use and facilitating conditions as determinants of digital adoption [13], [14]. Conceptualized this way, digitalization is a capability that organizations build progressively, and its contribution to performance and well-being depends on how completely its components are developed rather than on the intensity of tool adoption alone. This capability-based framing implies that organizations at different stages of digital maturity will realize different well-being returns from similar technology investments, since the same tools can be under-utilized, misaligned with existing processes, or poorly supported by digital culture when competence and process components lag behind technology use [11], [12].

B. Work Stress as a Risk in Digital Transformation

Perceived work stress is defined as the strain experienced when job demands exceed the resources available to cope with them [6], [15]. In digital transformation processes, stress functions as a signal of tension between the demands introduced by new technologies, information overload, permanent connectivity and technical complexity, and the resources, competences, processes and support that organizations provide to manage them [3], [16]. In emerging economies, gaps in training, infrastructure and leadership can turn digitalization into an additional demand rather than a resource, making work stress a meaningful indicator of whether digital transformation is being implemented sustainably [2], [17]. Evidence on this relationship is mixed: some studies report that leadership practices and structured digital interventions can offset digitalization-related stress [3], while others find that individual-level digitalization, particularly under permanent connectivity, is associated with elevated technostress even among digitally proficient employees [17]. This inconsistency reinforces the view that stress is not a fixed consequence of digitalization but depends on how organizations manage the transition, making it a meaningful diagnostic of implementation quality rather than of technology itself [16].

C. Employee Well-Being as a Sustainable Organizational Outcome

Employee well-being is conceptualized as a multidimensional state encompassing hedonic, psychological, social and physical components [18]–[20]. Rather than an individual health outcome, well-being is treated here as a strategic outcome linked to talent sustainability, operational continuity and innovation capacity [5], [21]. This integrative view has been extended to organizational settings through flourishing-based frameworks that link well-being to engagement, positive relationships and accomplishment, offering a basis for treating well-being as a measurable organizational asset rather than only an individual experience [18], [21]. From this perspective, digital transformation strategies that fail to protect employee well-being risk undermining the very capabilities they are meant to build.

D. Hypotheses

Building on the JD-R model and COR theory [6], [7], organizational digitalization is expected to relate to well-being through two parallel pathways: a strain-reduction

pathway, in which digital resources ease demands, and a motivational pathway, in which digital resources directly build engagement and flourishing.

H1. Organizational digitalization is negatively associated with perceived work stress.

H2. Perceived work stress is negatively associated with employee well-being.

H3. Organizational digitalization is positively associated with employee well-being.

H4. Perceived work stress mediates the association between organizational digitalization and employee well-being.

Given the cross-sectional design, these hypotheses are interpreted as associations compatible with the proposed model rather than as causal claims.

METHOD

A. *Design and Participants*

An observational, cross-sectional design was used. Data were collected online between March and May 2026 in Honduras through Microsoft Forms, using non-probabilistic convenience sampling. The target population comprised adult workers (18 years or older) in formal employment residing in Honduras; recruitment used social media, professional contacts and academic networks, no incentives were offered, and all participants completed a digital informed consent form guaranteeing anonymity and voluntary participation. The target sample size was set a priori at 300 responses based on a structural equation modeling power calculation ($f^2 = 0.30$, power = 0.80, $\alpha = .05$) [22], anticipating losses during data screening. Screening began with 300 completed questionnaires; cases with atypical response times (below the first quartile, 366 s, n = 64; above Q3 + 1.5×IQR, 1,221 s, n = 24) and two cases with implausible ages were removed, yielding a final analytic sample of N = 210. Table I summarizes sample characteristics: 60.5% women, mean age 35.2 years (SD = 8.80, range 19–67), 90.0% in the private sector, mainly manufacturing (54.3%) and services (22.9%), and 54.8% with more than four years of tenure. The study protocol, including the informed consent procedure and data anonymization safeguards, was reviewed and approved under the institutional research ethics process of the Universidad Tecnológica de Honduras. The online platform required a response to every item before submission, which eliminated item-level missing data, and no personally identifying information was collected, ensuring that responses could not be traced back to individual participants.

TABLE I
Sample Characteristics and Measurement Summary

Characteristic	**Value (N = 210)**
Sex	Women 60.5%; men 39.5%
Age, M (SD); range	35.2 (8.80); 19–67
Employment sector	Private 90.0%
Industry	Manufacturing 54.3%; services 22.9%; education 13.8%; trade 9.0%
Tenure > 4 years	54.8%
Organizational digitalization	$\alpha = .919$; $\omega = .816–.858$; AVE = .593–.673
Perceived work stress	$\alpha = .695–.852$; $\omega = .697–.844$; AVE = .535–.576
Employee well-being	$\alpha = .945$; $\omega = .760–.861$; AVE = .516–.622

B. *Measures*

All constructs were assessed with study-specific five-point Likert items, given the absence of instruments validated for the Honduran workforce; results should therefore be interpreted as preliminary psychometric evidence rather than full-scale validation. Organizational digitalization (17 items) covered technology use, digital competence, process transformation and digital culture [11]–[14]. Perceived work stress retained three dimensions, quantitative demands, qualitative demands and stress responses, drawing on the demand-control tradition and occupational stress research [15], [23]. Employee well-being retained four dimensions, hedonic, psychological, social and physical well-being, based on established well-being frameworks [18]–[20].

C. *Analytical Strategy*

Analyses were conducted in jamovi 2.7.12 with the SEMlj module, implemented on the lavaan package [24]. Each measurement model was evaluated through confirmatory factor analysis with robust (Huber-White, Yuan-Bentler) estimation; fit was assessed with the comparative fit index, Tucker-Lewis index, RMSEA and SRMR, reliability with composite reliability (ω), convergent validity with average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity with the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The integrated structural model estimated the three constructs as second-order latent variables, testing the direct path from digitalization to well-being alongside the indirect path through stress. The indirect effect was tested with 10,000 non-parametric bootstrap resamples. Given the cross-sectional design, all estimates are interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. The structural model also included two theoretically justified residual correlations, between the technology-use and digital-competence dimensions of digitalization and between two closely related quantitative-demand items, both specified prior to estimation on conceptual grounds.

RESULTS

A. *Measurement Models*

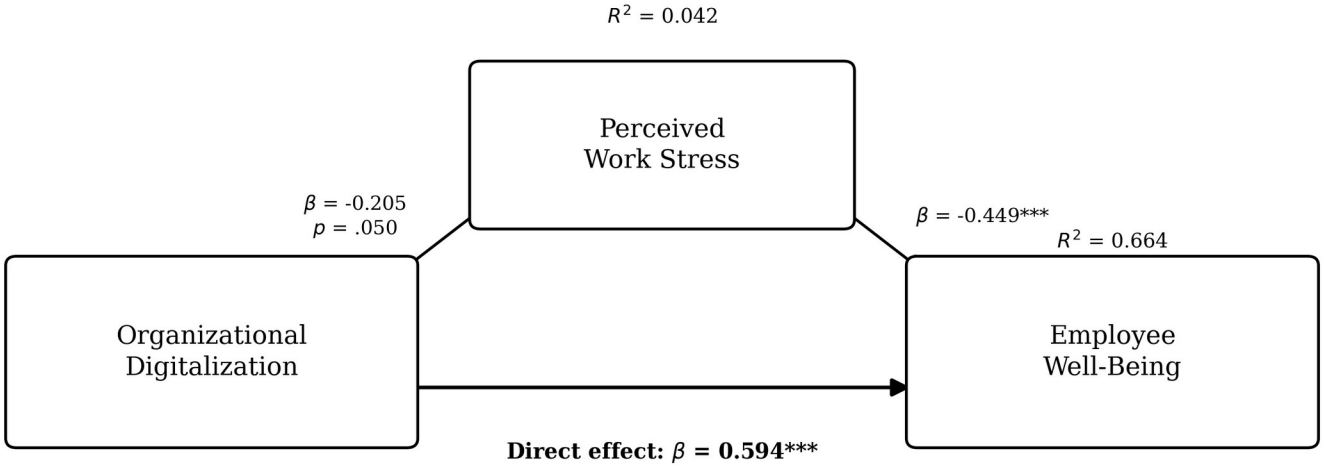
Organizational digitalization (α = .919) showed first-order standardized loadings between .650 and .908, ω between .816 and .858, AVE between .593 and .673, and HTMT values below .827. Employee well-being (α = .945) showed first-order loadings between .617 and .874, ω between .760 and .861 and AVE between .516 and .622; in the integrated model, second-order loadings ranged from .751 to .958 (second-order ω = .697, AVE = .535). Perceived work stress retained three dimensions (α between .695 and .852), with first-order loadings between .672 and .874 and second-order loadings of .932, .845 and .803 (ω between .697 and .844, AVE between .535 and .576). Full reliability and validity indices are summarized in Table I.

B. *Structural Model*

The structural model showed satisfactory robust fit: CFI = .938, TLI = .932, RMSEA = .046, 95% CI [.039, .054], and SRMR = .072. The model explained 66.4% of the variance in well-being and 4.2% of the variance in work stress. Digitalization was negatively, and only marginally, associated with stress (β = −.205, p = .050); stress was negatively associated with well-being (β = −.449, p < .001); and digitalization was positively associated with well-being (β = .594, p < .001), the strongest path in the model (Table II, Fig. 1).

TABLE II
Structural Model Fit, Path Estimates, and Mediation

Path / Effect	**B (SE)**	**β**	**p / 95% CI**
Digitalization → Work stress	−0.306 (0.156)	−.205	p = .050
Work stress → Well-being	−0.413 (0.095)	−.449	p < .001
Digitalization → Well-being (direct)	0.818 (0.176)	.594	p < .001
Indirect effect (bootstrap)	0.126 (0.082)	.092	CI [.004, .339]
Total effect (bootstrap)	0.944	.686	CI [.583, 1.567]
Model fit: CFI = .938; TLI = .932; RMSEA = .046, 95% CI [.039, .054]; SRMR = .072. R^2 well-being = .664; R^2 work stress = .042. Bootstrap: 10,000 resamples; 1,152 inadmissible solutions.			



Indirect effect (Digitalization → Stress → Well-being): β = 0.092, 95% CI [0.004, 0.339]

*Note: Standardized coefficients; robust estimation; N = 210. ***p < .001.*

Fig. 1. Mediation model linking organizational digitalization, perceived work stress and employee well-being.

C. *Mediation Analysis*

The bootstrap procedure (10,000 resamples, of which 1,152 produced inadmissible solutions, reported here for transparency) yielded a small indirect effect of digitalization on well-being through stress (β = .092, 95% CI [.004, .339]), alongside a dominant direct effect (β = .594) and a total effect

of β = .686. This pattern is compatible with a small, complementary partial mediation: digital transformation appears to relate to well-being mainly through a direct, resource-building pathway, with a modest additional contribution from reduced work stress.

DISCUSSION

A. *Digitalization as a Resource-Building Capability*

The strongest and most consistent finding was the direct, positive association between organizational digitalization and employee well-being. This pattern suggests that digitalization may contribute to well-being when it operates as an integrated organizational capability combining technology use, digital competence, process transformation and a supportive culture, rather than as the isolated introduction of new tools. From the JD-R and COR perspectives, these components may expand employees' available resources by reducing unnecessary procedural friction, facilitating access to information, improving coordination and strengthening perceptions of competence and control [6], [7]. These mechanisms are compatible with the autonomy, competence, connectedness and accomplishment associated with flourishing [18], [21], as well as with evidence linking digital skills and human-centered organizational cultures to employee well-being [5], [25].

One plausible interpretation is that digitalization improves the work experience by shortening repetitive procedures, reducing administrative rework and allowing employees to direct more attention toward meaningful or higher-value activities. Greater traceability, faster access to information and more efficient communication may also create operational certainty, particularly in settings where work has traditionally depended on manual records, fragmented processes or multiple approval stages. At the individual level, acquiring transferable digital competencies may reinforce professional self-efficacy and perceptions of employability. Thus, the direct association with well-being may reflect not only convenience, but also the experience of having better resources to perform one's role effectively.

This interpretation reinforces capability-based accounts of entrepreneurship and organizational transformation. Scaling technology adoption without corresponding investment in competence, process redesign and cultural support is unlikely to produce the same human benefits. In the present study, digitalization was assessed as a multidimensional capability, which may help explain why its association with well-being remained substantial even in an emerging-economy context characterized by uneven organizational resources [11], [12].

The magnitude of this direct association is close to that reported in other regions. In a Chinese sample of 382 employees drawn from manufacturing, information technology and finance, workplace digitization predicted workplace well-being with a standardized coefficient of .572 [26], almost identical to the .594 observed here. European evidence points in the same direction from a different methodological angle: an Italian study of employees' attitudes in the digital workplace associated positive appraisals of digital tools with lower work-related stress [3], and a German study of dental professionals reported that well-supported digitalization coincided with higher job satisfaction even where technostress persisted [4]. That an emerging Central American economy with markedly lower digital maturity reproduces a coefficient of this size suggests that the resource-building pathway does not depend on an advanced digital ecosystem; what appears to travel across contexts is the organizational configuration around the technology rather than the technology itself.

B. *Work Stress as a Digital Transformation Risk*

Work stress showed a substantial negative association with well-being, whereas digitalization was only weakly and marginally associated with lower stress. This asymmetry indicates that more developed digitalization may coexist with persistent job demands. Technology can make tasks faster or more organized without necessarily reducing workload, time pressure, role conflict, performance expectations or responsibility. In some organizations, greater technological efficiency may even raise expectations for immediate responses, increase the number of communication channels or weaken boundaries between working and nonworking time.

The limited association between digitalization and stress may also reflect implementation conditions. When new systems are introduced without sufficient training, technical support or role clarification, employees must manage the learning demands of the new technology while continuing to meet existing responsibilities. Similarly, maintaining digital and manual procedures simultaneously may create duplicated work rather than genuine process simplification. Uncertainty about technological competence, fear of occupational obsolescence and inconsistent infrastructure could further weaken the stress-reducing potential of digital tools. These mechanisms should be interpreted as plausible contextual explanations rather than as conditions directly tested in the model.

Accordingly, stress appears to function less as an automatic consequence of technology and more as an indicator of implementation quality. This is consistent with evidence showing that digitalization can either buffer or intensify strain depending on leadership, connectivity norms, workload design and the resources provided during change [3], [16], [17]. Digital transformation should therefore not be expected to resolve psychosocial demands by itself. Organizations may obtain efficiency gains while leaving the underlying sources of strain largely unchanged.

International evidence helps locate this asymmetry. Studies from Asia consistently find that digitalization does not neutralize demands and can amplify them: a three-wave study of 235 employees in three Chinese manufacturing firms showed that technostress eroded work well-being through work exhaustion, buffered only where workplace knowledge diversity was high [27], and research on Chinese information technology remote workers found individual digitalization

associated with higher technostress through information-processing demands and job complexity, even among digitally proficient staff [17]. European findings are similarly qualified. A longitudinal, quasi-experimental study in two German research laboratories tracked the introduction of an electronic laboratory notebook over 17 months using questionnaires, heart rate variability and hair cortisol, and found only limited changes in psychophysiological stress, moderated by employees' attitudes towards digitalization [28]; a United Kingdom study of information overload likewise linked digital workplace demands to burnout and impaired mental health [16]. Read alongside the present results, these studies converge across very different levels of economic development: digitalization reliably changes how work is done, but it does not reliably reduce how demanding work feels.

C. Interpreting the Complementary Indirect Pathway

The small indirect effect through work stress, together with the considerably stronger direct association, suggests complementary partial mediation. Digitalization may relate to well-being primarily by building resources, facilitating task performance and strengthening competence, while contributing only modestly through lower stress. In theoretical terms, the motivational and resource-building pathway appears more prominent than the strain-reduction pathway proposed by the JD-R model [7].

This pattern may occur because many stressors originate outside the technological system itself. Workload allocation, staffing, supervisory practices, role ambiguity, job insecurity and expectations of constant availability cannot be corrected solely through better software or infrastructure. Digitalization may therefore enhance the quality and meaningfulness of work while stress continues to be shaped by broader organizational conditions. The indirect effect should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously because it was small, its confidence interval was close to zero, and the bootstrap procedure produced a notable number of inadmissible solutions. Moreover, the cross-sectional design does not demonstrate a temporal or causal mediation sequence.

The size of the indirect pathway is also comparable across regions. In the Chinese study cited above, the indirect effects of workplace digitization on well-being were $\beta = .096$ through job demands and $\beta = .131$ through digital anxiety, against a direct effect of $\beta = .572$ [26]; the present indirect effect of $\beta = .092$ falls within that range and stands against a comparable direct effect. Evidence from twelve European countries in the 2021 European Working Conditions Telephone Survey points the same way: psychosocial factors, exhaustion above all, dominate the prediction of well-being, while digital work arrangements such as telework intensity relate to well-being in both directions at once, improving work-life balance while contributing to emotional exhaustion [29]. In Europe, Asia and now Central America, stress-mediated pathways are therefore real but secondary, and their modest size reflects the limited reach of technology over the organizational conditions that generate strain.

D. Implications for Emerging Economies and Regional Development

For Honduras and comparable Central American contexts, the findings suggest that digital transformation becomes a sustainable organizational capability when technological investment is accompanied by human and process capabilities [2], [8]. The strong direct pathway indicates that organizations may obtain well-being benefits even before digitalization substantially reduces stress. However, these benefits could be weakened when implementation generates duplicated procedures, unclear responsibilities, unequal access to training or expectations of continuous connectivity.

Because the sample was concentrated in manufacturing and services, sector-specific interpretations remain tentative. In manufacturing, digital systems may improve safety, traceability and process reliability, but they could also intensify time monitoring when used primarily as control mechanisms. In services, digital tools may increase flexibility and information access while simultaneously expanding expectations for rapid responses across multiple channels. These possibilities were not tested through subgroup comparisons and should therefore guide future research rather than be treated as established sector differences.

The findings also qualify a purely infrastructure-centered view of regional digital development. Technology acquisition alone does not constitute digital maturity. Sustainable scaling requires employees who can use, adapt and improve digital systems, as well as organizational processes that allow those capabilities to generate value [11], [30]. In this sense, employee well-being is not external to innovation capacity; it is one of the conditions supporting continuity, learning and effective technology utilization.

E. Practical Implications

Organizations should evaluate digital transformation through both operational and human indicators. Adoption rates and efficiency metrics should be complemented by measures of well-being, workload, role clarity and perceived stress. Before deploying new tools, organizations should review whether existing procedures, responsibilities and supervisory practices require redesign. Otherwise, digitalization may automate inefficient processes or add a technological layer to unchanged workloads.

Implementation should include progressive digital training, accessible technical support, realistic adaptation periods and employee participation in process redesign. Clear responsibility for entering, processing and approving digital information can reduce duplication and uncertainty. Leaders should also establish explicit connectivity and response-time norms, particularly when digital platforms extend communication beyond conventional working hours. Finally, digital monitoring should support coordination and decision-making rather than reproduce excessive control through real-time metrics. These practices are consistent with treating stress management as part of digital transformation

governance and with developing the human-centered capabilities required for sustainable innovation [5], [30], [31].

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations qualify these findings. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and all variables were self-reported by the same respondents, so common method variance may inflate the observed associations. The constructs were assessed with study-specific measures; although each showed preliminary evidence of factorial validity and reliability, full psychometric validation remains pending. The convenience sample overrepresents the private sector, manufacturing and women, and online recruitment carries a digital self-selection bias that limits generalization. The final sample (N = 210) also falls below the recommended threshold for the structural complexity of the model, and 1,152 of 10,000 bootstrap resamples produced inadmissible solutions, so the indirect effect should be interpreted with caution. Replication with larger, longitudinal and cross-country samples is needed to test the robustness of these relationships across Central American economies at different stages of digital maturity. In addition, the study measured digitalization, stress and well-being at a single point in time and within a single country, so it cannot capture how these relationships evolve as organizations move through different stages of digital maturity, nor whether the pattern observed here generalizes to other Central American economies with different institutional and labor-market conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study provides rare structural evidence from a Central American workforce that human-centered digital transformation, one that combines technology, competence, process and cultural change, is associated with employee well-being mainly through a direct, resource-building pathway, with a small additional contribution through reduced work stress. For organizations and policymakers pursuing capability-based entrepreneurship in emerging economies, the implication is that scaling digital transformation sustainably requires managing work stress as an implementation risk alongside technology adoption, treating employee well-being as a strategic capability for innovation and regional development rather than a residual outcome of digitalization.

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