



# Digital Transformation and Sustainability of Healthy Social Interactions: An Overview of the Current Status Quo

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**Purpose:** This paper aims to look at the dynamics regarding the sustainability of healthy social interactions in the digital transformation process of corporate organisations, mainly private organisations in Tanzania. The paper explores the intersection between the digital transformation and the social interactions of corporate organisations, with an overview of the current status quo, to enhance healthy social interactions.

**Study design/methodology/approach:** Qualitative methodology was used, involving 17 interviews determined by purposive sampling, with content analysis employed on the collected data.

**Findings:** Findings show that healthy social interactions for healthy human relations could be maintained sustainably in organisations in the evolving digital transformation phenomenon if the leadership and the management put it as a priority and emphasis in the organisations' pursuits for its objectives, competitiveness, and success. It is acknowledged that healthy social interactions can be sustainably maintained in the digital transformation processes.

**Originality/value:** This study is the original work undertaken by the author to contribute to the sustainable maintenance of healthy social interactions for healthy human relations within and between organisations in the digital transformation processes.

## Introduction

The world today, and hence, is evolving into a digital world through the use of digital technologies, with the phenomenon being recent accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital technologies are changing societies and organisations, impacting both the internal relationships within organisations and the business environment. Basically, digital transformation is causing the increasing digitalisation of more aspects of business and society, thus affecting people, culture, processes, and technology. In affecting people, social interactions are affected in both society and organisations (Kraus et al., 2021, pp.1-18; Parviainen et al., 2017, pp.63-77; Vial, 2019, pp.118-144). In this context, this paper looks into the sustainability of healthy social interactions in the digital transformation phenomenon in corporate organisations at the current status quo in Tanzania.

Indeed, today's world is increasingly accepting the use of digital technology by organisations. In turn, digital technologies are causing or influencing changes in all aspects of human life, including social interactions. It is in this manner that this paper intends to emphasise social interactions as one of the key elements in the digital transformation process in organisations. Rather than seeing digital transformation solely as a technical artefact process in organisations, it seems more appropriate to see it from the social system perspective, carrying social interactions as a key element. The social and technical processes should always be seen as embedded in the digital technologies practice and hence in the digital transformation process, making digital transformation a socio-technical ensemble (Gorensek and Kohont, 2019, pp.93-115; Grgecic and Rosenkranz, 2010, 1-12).

With the increasing digital transformation phenomenon, the human aspect, in this case, the healthy social interaction, remains to be important and needs to be maintained for the

organisations to enhance elements such as sharing, innovation, teamwork, communication, and all such which are essential for the organisation's achievement of objectives, competitive edge and success (Fedorova, Koropets, and Gatti, 2019, pp.1-10). From this perspective, this paper aims to look at the dynamics regarding the sustainability of healthy social interactions in the digital transformation process of corporate organisations. The paper explores the intersection between the digital transformation and the social interactions of corporate organisations, mainly private organisations in Tanzania, with an overview of the current status quo to enhance healthy social interactions.

### ***Literature Review***

Our literature review looks at the connectedness of the digital transformation process characterised by digitalisation, hence digital technologies and social interactions in organisations. Digital transformation is taken as changes in ways of working, roles, and business offerings caused by adopting digital technologies in an organisation or the organisation's operating environment. Generally, it is said that digital transformation aims at improving an entity, which could either be a society or organisation, by triggering significant changes to its properties through combinations of elements such as information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies. As for organisations, digital transformation entails digitalisation, the use of digital technologies and data, which calls for new ways of workplace communication and collaboration for organisations to create revenue, improve business, and transform processes. Furthermore, it integrates digital technology into all aspects and operations of an organisation, in this case, social interactions, which in turn is said to lead to infrastructural changes in how the organisation is operated and delivers value to its customers. Digitalisation covers a wider scope; however, this paper focuses on social interactions (Kraus et al., 2021, pp.1-18; Parviainen et al., 2017, pp.63-77; Vial, 2019, pp.118-144).

It is asserted that digital transformation entails reshaping an organisation from old approaches to new ways of working and thinking through the use of social and emerging digital technologies. It encourages the increased use of digital technology to enhance the user experience of the organisation's employees, customers, suppliers, partners and shareholders (Gorensek and Kohont, 2019, pp.93-115). Generally speaking, digital transformation of society and organisations refers to a process in which humans use digital technologies to reshape the way society and organisations work. The use of digital technologies includes patterns for information and communication, in everyday operations and activities, and in general, everyday life. The issue is maintaining healthy social interactions in an era that underlines society's and organisations' dependence on information and communication technologies. It is argued that reliance on digital technologies modifies our interactions and relationships within an organisation and outside the organisation (Norqvist, 2018, pp.1-30).

Digital technologies are changing how people work within an organisation as they, for instance, learn to work with AI, robots and automation. Similarly, customers are to learn how to interact with robots and automation in buying what the organisations produce and offer (Wilburn and Wilburn, 2018, pp.23-39). Digital technology developments that have led to the machines such as robots, computers, and artificial intelligence taking over human tasks significantly affect human-to-human interactions. However, face-to-face interactions have been and will remain an important communication mode. Digital technologies such as WhatsApp, zoom, teleconferences, and others serve as vital face-to-face communication tools (Grgecic and Rosenkranz, 2010, pp.1-12; Norqvist, 2018, pp.1-30).

Furthermore, while digital transformation is a technical artefact process, it also carries social interactions as a key element from the social system perspective. The social and technological

processes are always embedded in the digital technologies practice and hence in the digital transformation process. This makes digital transformation a socio-technical ensemble, in which the central element is the human agents and their interaction with other human agents (Grgecic and Rosenkranz, 2010, pp.1-12).

The digital transformation process cannot occur without the human element and is a socio-technical process as the human agent is involved in the process. In fact, digital technologies are a product of human action as it is the human that designs, develops, appropriates, and modifies these technologies. On the other hand, these digital technologies are a medium of human actions in that they facilitate and constrain human activity by providing interpretive schemes, facilities, and norms. With social interaction characterising the digital transformation process, it is argued that digital technologies should go hand in hand with social interaction to develop healthy human relations. Indeed, digital technologies should be taken positively as opportunities for improving human knowledge, skills, and relations through meaningful social interactions (Grgecic and Rosenkranz, 2010, pp.1-12; Zaborovskaia, Nadezhina, and Avduevskaya, 2020, pp.1-24).

The digital transformation process encompasses how many social life domains are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructure. Moreover, communication is entailed in social interactions being a vital tool for good interpersonal connections and relationships in organisations, both internally and externally, and thus, an effective tool for the attainment of an organisation's objectives, job satisfaction and productivity. In fact, modern digital technology can facilitate verbal communication effectively hence social interactions, which cater for an important aspect of feelings and attitudes in communication (Bucata and Rizescu, 2017, pp.49-57; Gorensek and Kohont, 2019, pp.93-115).

Digital technologies could be used through modernising human resource functions to facilitate and maintain healthy relations among people through healthy social interactions. Thus, digital transformation and healthy social interactions for healthy relations through an effective communication system could move together to enable organisations to achieve efficiency, relevance, performance, and gain competitive advantage. For example, work situations depend on how people get along with their colleagues, superiors, or subordinates. Hence, social aspects such as social interactions are important in such dynamics and job satisfaction and play a vital role in the performance and wellbeing of the people. (Halid, Yusoff, and Somu, 2020, p.96-99; Lumi, 2020, pp.39-46).

Among the benefits of the use of digital technologies are effective internal and external communications, which are achieved through ongoing interactions. In fact, dynamics such as automating processes of information exchange and reporting, teleconferencing, and comparative data collection are integrated into interactions. Digital technology could serve as a tool to enable employees and employers to communicate and interact, facilitate the culture of sharing through effective interactions, enhance the maintenance of healthy human relations through healthy interactions, and for organisations to connect. Indeed, digital technologies and social interactions should be seen as working together in a synergistic effect that results in the wellbeing of the people and the organisations (Fedorova, Koropets, and Gatti, 2019, pp.1-10; Fenech, Baguant, and Ivanov, 2019, pp.1-10; Halid, Yusoff, and Somu, 2020, pp.96-99).

Social interactions that could exist between people, both formally and informally and in people's personal work lives and the communication of skills, should be maintained to remain healthy in the digital transformation processes. Interactions at work involve task-related interactions, which focus on accomplishing a task and private interactions. Private interactions, typically informal, talk about politics or current events that are not necessarily task-related. Social interactions entail ways in which people relate to each other and work together in groups,

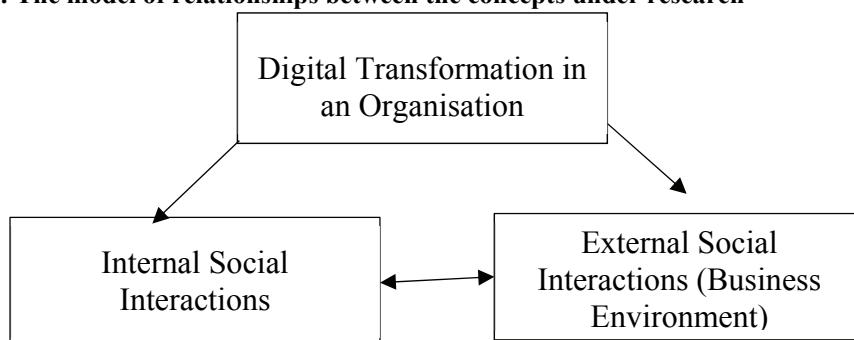
especially at work, satisfying both individual needs and achieving group and organisation objectives. Social relationships are an important aspect of working life and have far-reaching consequences for people in an organisation and the organisation as a whole. Jobs require interactive and collaborative activity by their very nature. The challenge remains to ensure that relationships among people are developed, improved, monitored, and maintained (Lawrence, 2014, pp.53-62).

While it is asserted that social interaction is essential in human life, it is perceived that digital technology, if wrongly handled, could jeopardise it. For instance, the increasing development of sophisticated technology to facilitate people to relate to each other such as via phones, the internet and all such like, is said to be the reason human society is becoming individualistic and contributing to the slowly weakening of the values and norms in the society. It seems that it is becoming difficult for some people to interact physically with others, but easier to interact virtually in a virtual world and even have a community therein. It is argued that people are caught in two lives, that is, living in a world that demands interacting directly with other individuals, but they also find themselves playing an active role in the virtual world (Adhjarso, Utari and Hastjarjo, 2018, pp.35-40).

It is argued that the negative effects of digital technologies could be in the inability to maintain social dialogue with social partners, which could lead to changes in the nature of interpersonal relationships, and in interpersonal communication (Gorensek and Kohont, 2019, pp.93-115). The negative human usage of digital technologies is said to be a downside leading to destructive behaviours that negatively affect human interactions and relationships. Moreover, negative influences could include sharing false information, enhancing negative behaviours, and threatening privacy, confidentiality, safety and security. Therefore, there rises the need to be a readiness for processes and systems that make digital transformation and digital technologies possible in a positive way (Norqvist, 2018, pp.1-30). Despite the concerns about the harmful effects, digital technologies should be taken positively as tools to facilitate interactions in and between organisations, thus enhancing human relations for the wellbeing of individuals and organisations (Fedorova, Koropets, and Gatti, 2019, pp.1-10).

The issue then is on corporate organisations to maintain healthy social interactions as they facilitate digital transformation for their survival, thriving and success. The model of relationships between the concepts under research regarding digital transformation and the sustainability of social interactions with an overview of the current status quo in organisations in Tanzania are presented in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: The model of relationships between the concepts under research**



As pointed out earlier in the introduction, the study aims to look at the dynamics regarding the sustainability of healthy social interactions in the digital transformation of corporate organisations in Tanzania, with an overview of the current status quo in the organisations.

### ***Methodology***

This study aims to analyse the sustainability of healthy social interactions in the digital transformation of corporate organisations in Tanzania with an overview of the current status quo in the organisations. In addition, the study explores the intersection between the digital transformation and social interactions of corporate organisations in Tanzania to enhance healthy social interactions. The primary research method used in this study was the qualitative methodology, using content analysis. The study involved 17 participants determined by purposive sampling from corporate organisations in Tanzania. Participants were officials from middle to top levels of seniority holding key positions in their respective organisations and could give insights appropriate for the study. An in-depth interview was done on 17 participants, and after that, a content analysis was conducted. In the analysis, the interviews were done into transcripts from which categories were identified. Themes were identified from the categories followed by the compilation (Bengtsson, 2016, pp.8-14; Cobern and Adams, 2020, pp.73-79; Mohajan, 2018, pp. 23-51; Palmer and Bolderston, 2006, pp.16-19; Wong, 2014, pp. 130-140).

### ***Findings and Discussion***

It is undeniable that the digital transformation process in organisations cannot take place without the human elements and, thereof, the social interactions. Therefore, it is a fact that digital technologies exercised in organisations need to go hand in hand in a meaningful way with the social interaction aspect to develop and maintain healthy human relations. The study findings support that healthy social interaction for healthy human relations both within and outside organisations can be sustainably maintained for the wellbeing of both people and the organisations. However, three issues resurfaced from the findings.

First is the issue of the current digital technology situation in organisations. All participants pointed out that their organisations are adapting to the global digital transformation processes of using digital technology in running their organisations. Digital technology is being used in the management and operations dynamics, and there seems to be no way to avoid its usage. A participant commented, "The world dynamics as far as technology is concerned have changed and are still changing. We cannot go back to where we were. However, in these change dynamics, digital technology is proving to facilitate our operations, administrative and management matters more effectively. Costs have been reduced, and work is more effective." Another participant commented, "When the covid-19 pandemic situation was tense, we had to work from home and remained effective, and we realised that both office and individual expenses went down. But even when working within the work premises, we nowadays don't need to meet in one room physically together. We conduct meetings using digital video conferencing technology, and we even find it effective."

Indeed, one cannot deny that digital transformation is reshaping organisations from old approaches to new ways of carrying out work through the emerging digital technologies, just as the participants have pointed out. Through digital transformation, digital technology is integrated into aspects of the operations of an organisation. It is a fact that organisations need to hold on to the fact that the world cannot go back to where it was and that the best way is to adapt to the incoming new ways emerging through digital technologies for them to survive and remain on the competitive edge (Gorensek and Kohont, 2019, pp.93-115; Kraus et al., 2021, pp.1-18; Parviainen et al., 2017, pp.63-77; Vial, 2019, pp.118-144).

The second issue is the current adaptation experience pertaining to social interactions. Findings show that people adapt to digital technologies in their social interactions, both within the organisation and externally in the business environment. As one participant commented, "Digital technology is accommodating our long-distance interactions well. For instance, when



it comes to face-to-face verbal communications, visual communications such as video calls or video conferences are being used, and we see them being effective. We can even talk and laugh while seeing each other." Another commented, "Although we are not in touch physically, face-to-face interactions are being facilitated. Although we miss a certain sweetness of meeting physically."

Concerning interaction outside an organisation that is external in the business environment, organisations are adapting to the use of digital technologies. A participant commented, "We nowadays don't need to travel for business deals with another organisation using digital technology. Instead, we use digital technology to interact and strike the business deal we want or do whatever we want to do with it. It is proving to be cost-effective as well as effective in operations."

It can be seen that organisations are adapting to digital technologies not only to run their operations but also to facilitate social interactions, as digital technologies serve to be a vital effective face-to-face communication tool for organisations, both internally and externally. As it is argued, the social and technical processes are embedded in the digital technologies practice, therefore making the digital transformation a socio-technical ensemble. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that digital technologies and meaningful social interactions should go hand in hand for the development, improvement and maintenance of healthy human relations for the wellbeing of the people and the organisations. However, it relies on the leadership and management of organisations to ensure that healthy interactions for healthy relations are maintained (Grgecic and Rosenkranz, 2010, pp.1-12; Norqvist, 2018, pp.1-30; Zaborovskaia, Nadezhina, and Avduevskaya, 2020, pp.1-24).

Findings show that people in organisations are not finding it difficult to adapt to the use of digital technologies in the social interaction aspect and that they feel that communications are maintained to be effective and productive. This is supported by the fact that digital transformation accommodates social interactions that entail communication, which is a vital tool for good interpersonal relationships in organisations, both internally and externally. Verbal face-to-face communications are effectively facilitated (Bucata and Rizescu, 2017, pp.49-57; Gorenssek and Kohont, 2019, pp.93-115).

The third is the issue of the maintenance of the sustainability of the social interactions in the digital transformation processes. The Tanzanian culture is usually characterised by strong social interactions, which are typically physical social interactions. The issue at hand is on maintaining strong social interactions through digital technologies. As one participant pointed out, "We are so used to interacting through meeting or seeing each other physically - sitting together and talking together. We are used to seeing the physical gestures that bring meaning to our communications and conversations. These, I feel, are vital to be maintained even in the usage of the emerging technologies." Findings show that although people in organisations are comfortable with using digital technologies in their operations and interactions, there is a sense of urgency in developing and maintaining healthy relationships needed for the wellbeing of both the people and organisations, which should primarily be facilitated by the leadership and management.

As a matter of fact, one agrees with the notion that social relationships are an important aspect of working life for both people in an organisation and for the organisation itself and that the challenge that remains to be there is to ensure that relationships among people in the organisation are developed, improved, monitored and maintained sustainably (Lawrence, 2014, pp.53-62). In essence, the participants are right in the sense that digital technologies and social interaction should create synergy for the wellbeing of the people and the organisation in a way that healthy interactions for healthy human relations are maintained sustainably (Fedorova,

Koropets, and Gatti, 2019, pp.1-10; Fenech, Baguant, and Ivanov, 2019, pp.1-10; Halid, Yusoff, and Somu, 2020, pp.96-99).

Almost all of the participants were of the perception that the responsibility for ensuring sustainable healthy social interactions remain to be there in an organisation in the ongoing digital transformation processes for everyone, that is, the employee, management and leadership. That is, it should be a priority in the organisation that while enhancement of digital technology is achieved, social interactions should be enhanced for the wellbeing of all. As it is argued, there should be that sense of readiness that makes digital transformation possible in a positive way that maintains the important aspect of social interactions in the organisation (Grgecic and Rosenkranz, 2010, pp.1-12; Norqvist, 2018, pp.1-30).

This study shows that digital transformation through digital technologies and sustainable social interactions can go hand in hand with healthy human relations, as long as it is made to be a priority by everyone in the organisation, with the leadership and management putting a priority and emphasis on it. This fosters a healthy organisation where the wellbeing of both people and the organisation are experienced. Therefore, Digital technologies should positively be taken as tools for enhancing and maintaining sustainably healthy social interaction in organisations.

### **Conclusion**

This study shows healthy social interactions for healthy human relations could be maintained within organisations and between organisations in the digital transformation process if the leadership and the management could prioritise the organisations' pursuits for survival, thriving, success and competitiveness. It is an undeniable fact that today's world is evolving increasingly into a digital transformation phenomenon; therefore, emphasis should be on not watering down the important aspect of social interactions, which bears the significant aspect of human relations, which is needful in the achievement of organisation's objective and competitive edge. Therefore, it is acknowledged that healthy social interactions can be sustainably maintained in the digital transformation processes.

Limitations in this study stem from two areas. First, a limitation is due to the limiting focus on corporate organisations only in Tanzania. Second, a limitation is due to participants being keen on the confidentiality of not sharing the information they felt was sensitive to be transferred out of their organisations, despite all that the needful and appropriate information for the study was collected.

Suggestions are that further research should be done in this area of study to enhance the efforts of maintaining healthy human relations through the maintenance of sustainable healthy social interactions for the organisations to succeed and remain competitive. Therefore, this paper stirs up more research on the subject matter to enable organisations to meet their objectives and stay competitive.

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