

PSYCHOSOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT IN A DIGITAL WORK ENVIRONMENT: A NARRATIVE REVIEW

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Review Article



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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has reshaped both organizational technologies and the social dynamics of work. This structured narrative review examines how technostress, communication asymmetry, role ambiguity, information overload or scarcity, emotional exhaustion, and limited interpersonal cues contribute to conflict in digitally mediated workplaces. Drawing on peer-reviewed studies and institutional documents published mainly between 2000 and 2025, the review focuses on remote and hybrid work, virtual teams, psychosocial risks, digital leadership, and public-sector modernization. A transparent search strategy, thematic synthesis, and source-quality assessment were applied. The findings reveal that digitalization can enhance autonomy, flexibility, learning, and access to information, but may also intensify cognitive demands, weaken work-life boundaries, reduce trust, and heighten sensitivity to conflict. An integrated framework is proposed in which digital work design affects conflict through fatigue, resilience, fairness perceptions, and trust, while leadership, organizational support, digital competence, autonomy, and clear communication moderate these effects. Georgian public-sector reforms are used as institutional illustrations without implying unsupported causality. The review concludes with recommendations for psychosocial risk assessment, communication governance, digital-disconnection policies, participatory change management, managerial development, and early conflict detection.

Keywords: *Organizational Conflict, Digital Work Environment, Psychosocial Risk, Technostress, Emotional Resilience, Public Sector*

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has become a core component of organizational development, enabling coordination through cloud systems, digital platforms, algorithmic tools, and remote work arrangements. However, these technologies also reshape organizational culture, authority, visibility, and interaction, making their social effects inseparable from their operational benefits (Grover et al., 2022).

Digitally mediated work produces mixed outcomes. It may enhance autonomy, flexibility, and concentration, while also weakening social ties, increasing work–family interference, and intensifying stress under high coordination demands (Gajendran et al., 2024; Hill et al., 2024). In conflict settings, fragmented communication, delayed feedback, am-

biguous tone, and limited nonverbal cues may increase misunderstandings and hinder their resolution.

Conflict is not uniformly dysfunctional. Task conflict may support learning and decision quality when trust is present, whereas relationship, status, and prolonged process conflict are more strongly associated with strain and reduced performance (Behfar et al., 2008). Digital environments may blur these distinctions by transforming substantive disagreements into interpersonal tensions.

Technostress is a central mechanism linking digital work to conflict. It arises from overload, constant connectivity, technological complexity, uncertainty, and expectations of continuous availability. Although these demands may generate fatigue and distress, supportive system design, autonomy, training, and organizational resources can reduce their negative effects (Bahamondes-Rosado et al., 2023; Molino et al., 2020; Tarafdar et al., 2019).

Public institutions provide a particularly relevant context because digital modernization occurs within hierarchical, procedural, and politically visible structures. In Georgia, digital government reforms have expanded electronic service delivery and interagency coordination, yet their psychosocial consequences remain underexplored compared with their legal, administrative, and technological dimensions (Common, 2011; Government of Georgia, 2023; Administration of the Government of Georgia, 2023).

This paper synthesizes research on the psychosocial determinants of conflict in digital work environments and explains how digital work design may generate, intensify, or mitigate conflict. It integrates conflict management, technostress, work design, occupational well-being, and digital government literature, distinguishes psychosocial demands from protective resources, proposes a conceptual framework, and derives practical implications for organizations and public-sector policymakers.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE REVIEW

The study adopts a structured narrative review design, suitable for integrating multidisciplinary and methodologically diverse evidence that cannot be meaningfully synthesized through meta-analysis. The approach emphasizes conceptual comparison and interpretation while applying transparent procedures for source identification, selection, and evaluation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The literature search was conducted and updated in 2026 and covered publications from January 2000 to December 2025, with earlier works included only when they provided foundational theories of conflict or stress. Searches were performed in Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar. Institutional documents were retrieved from relevant Georgian authorities and international organizations, including Eurofound, the OECD, UNDP, and the World Health Organization. For the Georgian public-sector context, the review also drew on the Civil Service Bureau of Georgia (2022).

Search terms combined concepts related to digital and virtual work with psychosocial and conflict-related factors, including technostress, communication asymmetry, role ambiguity, information overload, psychological safety, resilience, and conflict management. Georgia-specific searches also included public administration reform, civil service, electronic document management, and digital public services.

Sources were included when they directly addressed relationships between digital work, psychosocial risks, employee well-being, communication, conflict, leadership, organizational support, or public-sector digital transformation. Eligible materials comprised empirical studies, theoretical articles, reviews, meta-analyses, and authoritative institutional reports. Duplicate publications, unsupported opinion pieces, purely technical studies,

and sources with limited workplace relevance were excluded.

Quality appraisal was adapted to the type of evidence. Scholarly studies were assessed for methodological transparency, research design, reporting quality, theoretical contribution, and relevance. Reviews were evaluated according to the transparency of their search and synthesis procedures, while institutional reports were included only when issued by authoritative bodies and directly relevant to public administration, digitalization, work-force capability, or psychosocial policy. No formal risk-of-bias score was calculated.

The final corpus consisted of 31 sources, including 23 scholarly publications and eight institutional or policy documents. The evidence was coded into six themes: the dual effects of digital work; technostress and cognitive fatigue; communication and information problems; role ambiguity, fairness, and resilience; leadership and conflict management; and Georgian public-sector conditions. The synthesis focused on patterns of agreement, divergence, boundary conditions, and research gaps.

The review is limited by the absence of a registered systematic protocol and pooled effect estimates. Much of the empirical evidence also derives from pandemic-era remote work and private-sector settings. Because direct research on employee conflict in Georgian public institutions remains limited, institutional documents are used to illustrate reform conditions rather than establish causal psychosocial effects.

Table 1. Review search, selection, and synthesis protocol

Protocol element	Specification
Review type	Structured narrative review with thematic and comparative synthesis.
Time coverage	January 2000–December 2025; earlier foundational sources retained selectively.
Academic sources	Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar.
Institutional sources	Government of Georgia, Civil Service Bureau of Georgia, Digital Governance Agency, Eurofound, OECD, UNDP, and World Health Organization.
Core concepts	Digital/virtual/remote/hybrid work; organizational conflict; technostress; communication asymmetry; role ambiguity; emotional resilience; leadership; psychosocial risk; public-sector digitalization.
Inclusion	Peer-reviewed empirical and review studies, theoretical papers, and authoritative institutional reports directly relevant to workplace psychosocial or conflict processes.
Exclusion	Duplicates, unsupported opinion pieces, purely technical studies, and studies without relevant workplace or psychosocial outcomes.
Quality appraisal	Methodological clarity, relevance, reporting adequacy, theoretical contribution, review transparency, and authority of institutional source.
Analytical output	Six thematic domains, cross-study comparison, identification of contradictions and gaps, conceptual framework, and actionable recommendations.

Source: Developed by the authors based on the review design and literature search, selection, and synthesis procedures applied in this study

3. CRITICAL SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE

3.1. DIGITAL WORK AS BOTH A RESOURCE AND A DEMAND

The literature consistently presents digital work as a combination of resources and demands. It can increase flexibility, improve access to information, support concentration, and reduce spatial constraints. However, it may also intensify connectivity, coordination complexity, platform fragmentation, isolation, and work–life boundary erosion. Accordingly, remote work is neither inherently beneficial nor harmful; its effects depend on the conditions under which it is organized ([Eurofound, 2023](#); [Gajendran et al., 2024](#); [Hill et al., 2024](#); [Ipsen et al., 2021](#)).

From a job demands–resources perspective, conflict becomes more likely when digital demands exceed available resources. The effects of technology therefore depend on workload, autonomy, organizational support, employee competence, task interdependence, and communication control (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Wang et al., 2021). Digitalization is particularly conflict-prone when expectations increase without corresponding clarification of responsibilities or communication norms.

The literature also identifies an autonomy paradox. After-hours connectivity may provide flexibility, but it can simultaneously normalize constant availability and weaken recovery. Autonomy may reduce the strain associated with connectivity, whereas high work intensity and poorly defined work–life boundaries undermine well-being (Petcu et al., 2023; Van Zoonen, 2023). Its role is therefore conditional: employee-controlled connectivity differs substantially from availability imposed by managerial expectations or organizational culture.

3.2. TECHNOSTRESS, COGNITIVE FATIGUE, AND CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

Technostress is a work-design problem arising from the interaction between technological demands, individual resources, and organizational practices. Its main sources include overload, intrusion into nonwork time, complexity, uncertainty, frequent technological change, and perceived inadequacy. Evidence consistently links techno-overload and techno-invasion to fatigue, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction, particularly where training and organizational support are limited (Bahamondes-Rosado et al., 2023; Molino et al., 2020).

Technostress may also intensify conflict indirectly. Cognitive fatigue impairs attention and interpretation, while emotional exhaustion reduces tolerance for uncertainty and frustration. Employees who feel technologically insecure may perceive routine feedback as criticism or threat. Consequently, technical or procedural disagreements may escalate into perceptions of exclusion, disrespect, or blame.

Not all technology-related demands are harmful. Challenge–hindrance research suggests that demanding tasks can promote learning and performance when they are meaningful, controllable, and adequately supported (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; LePine et al., 2005). Similarly, the distinction between techno-eustress and techno-distress indicates that organizational conditions determine whether digital demands become developmental or harmful (Tarafdar et al., 2019). Organizations should therefore reduce unnecessary complexity, unpredictability, and boundary violations while preserving autonomy and learning opportunities.

3.3. COMMUNICATION ASYMMETRY, REDUCED SOCIAL CUES, AND INFORMATION PROBLEMS

Digital communication alters how employees access and interpret contextual information. Unlike face-to-face interaction, asynchronous communication provides fewer opportunities for immediate clarification and reduces access to tone, gesture, timing, and shared situational awareness. Employees may therefore receive identical formal information while having unequal access to the context in which decisions were made, creating communication asymmetry.

This asymmetry may involve both information overload and information deficit. Overload results from excessive, duplicated, or poorly prioritized communication across multiple platforms, whereas information deficit arises when instructions lack rationale, role clarity, decision history, or feedback. These conditions can coexist, simultaneously reducing attention and increasing uncertainty. Employees may then rely on assumptions, defensive documentation, avoidance, or formal escalation.

Research on virtual teams identifies trust, leadership, knowledge sharing, cultural diversity, and coordination processes as central determinants of conflict (Caputo et al., 2023).

The key issue is therefore not physical distance itself, but the effectiveness of the mechanisms that replace direct interaction. Clear communication protocols, accessible decision records, regular synchronous clarification, and psychologically safe feedback can prevent task disagreements from becoming relationship conflicts.

3.4. ROLE AMBIGUITY, FAIRNESS PERCEPTIONS, AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Digital transformation often redistributes tasks before formal roles, authority structures, and performance criteria are revised. Employees may be uncertain about process ownership, official communication channels, response expectations, or the use of automated indicators in performance evaluation. In interdependent work, such ambiguity can delay workflows and generate reciprocal blame.

Fairness perceptions provide an additional pathway to conflict. Digital monitoring, unequal access to information, inconsistent flexibility, and uneven training opportunities may undermine distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Conflict becomes more likely when digitalization expands managerial control without corresponding employee participation or when implementation failures are attributed to individuals rather than system design. Georgian organizational research similarly associates conflict with insufficient feedback, unclear role allocation, and perceived unfairness ([Paresashvili et al., 2025](#)).

Emotional resilience, self-efficacy, and coping capacity can moderate these pressures, but they should not substitute for effective organizational design. Sustainable prevention requires both individual resources and structural interventions. These include employee participation, supportive leadership, manager training, clear role allocation, and psychologically safe working conditions ([World Health Organization, 2022](#)).

3.5. CONFLICT TYPE, LEADERSHIP, AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Conflict outcomes depend on both conflict type and management approach. Task conflict may support learning when it remains limited, evidence-based, and detached from status or identity threats. Relationship conflict is more damaging because it erodes trust and shapes the interpretation of subsequent interactions. In digital environments, process conflict may be particularly common, arising from disagreements over task ownership, sequencing, communication channels, response expectations, and automated workflows. Leadership plays a central role in determining whether digital friction becomes constructive or dysfunctional. Avoidant leadership permits misunderstandings to accumulate, while authoritarian leadership may suppress employee voice and encourage passive resistance. By contrast, adaptive digital leaders clarify expectations, interpret data cautiously, encourage questions, and intervene before written disagreements become personal. Supportive conflict-management practices are associated with stronger trust and job satisfaction ([Anastasiou, 2020](#); [Behfar et al., 2008](#)).

Organizational support should combine reliable systems, technical assistance, training, temporary workload adjustments, psychosocial resources, and credible conflict-resolution procedures. Although digital competence is important, training alone cannot resolve contradictory instructions or unrealistic demands. Effective prevention therefore requires alignment between technology, work design, communication practices, and managerial behavior.

3.6. PUBLIC-SECTOR SPECIFICITY AND THE GEORGIAN CONTEXT

Public-sector digitalization operates within legal accountability, political oversight, interagency dependence, and formal hierarchy. Although digital systems can strengthen transparency and consistency, they may also increase psychosocial demands by requiring employees to manage legacy procedures, multiple service channels, and reforms extend-

ing across institutional boundaries. Consequently, digital-government frameworks increasingly emphasize workforce capability, human-centered services, and organizational readiness rather than technology acquisition alone (Burtscher et al., 2024; OECD, 2024a).

Georgia's Public Administration Reform Strategy 2023–2026 integrates policy coordination, civil service management, accountability, and public-service delivery (Government of Georgia, 2023). From a psychosocial perspective, this is significant because digital reforms affect not only citizen access but also internal roles, performance expectations, communication patterns, and managerial responsibilities. The Administration of the Government of Georgia (2023) similarly presents modernization as a cross-institutional process rather than an isolated information-technology initiative.

The expansion of the my.gov.ge portal illustrates the scale of this transformation. By 2024, approximately 400 services had been integrated and used more than 13.3 million times (Digital Governance Agency, 2025). These figures do not demonstrate employee stress or conflict, but they indicate substantial coordination, training, and role-clarification requirements. When organizational support fails to match technical expansion, the psychosocial risks identified in the wider literature may become more pronounced.

Earlier research suggests that Georgian public-administration reform is shaped by institutional history, hierarchy, and implementation capacity (Common, 2011). Studies also associate sustainable organizational functioning with effective communication, managerial involvement, job satisfaction, and constructive conflict management (Paresashvili & Avsajanishvili, 2023, 2024; Paresashvili et al., 2020). However, direct institution-level evidence remains limited, highlighting the need for research linking specific digital reforms to employee experiences, conflict patterns, and service outcomes.

Table 2. Critical synthesis: areas of agreement, debate, and research gaps

Theme	Evidence with broad agreement	Important qualification or debate	Research gap
Remote/hybrid work	Can increase flexibility and autonomy but may weaken social connection and boundaries.	Effects depend on work design, intensity, voluntariness, and task interdependence.	More longitudinal evidence outside pandemic conditions.
Technostress	Overload, invasion, complexity, and rapid change are associated with fatigue and lower well-being.	Some digital demands can support learning when employees have control and resources.	Direct tests of technostress as an antecedent of conflict escalation.
Communication	Reduced context and fragmented channels can increase misunderstanding and defensive behavior.	Digital traceability and visibility can also improve accountability and knowledge access.	Comparative evidence on which channel protocols prevent specific conflict types.
Resilience	Self-efficacy and coping resources may buffer stress.	Overemphasis on individual resilience can obscure harmful work design.	Multilevel models combining individual, team, and institutional resources.
Leadership	Supportive, transparent, and responsive leadership improves adaptation and trust.	Leadership training is ineffective without workload, role, and system changes.	Evaluation of digital-leadership interventions in public organizations.
Georgian public sector	Digital service delivery and public administration reform are expanding.	Institutional scale does not itself prove psychosocial harm or benefit.	Employee-level and institution-level empirical studies linking digital reforms, conflict, well-being, and service quality.

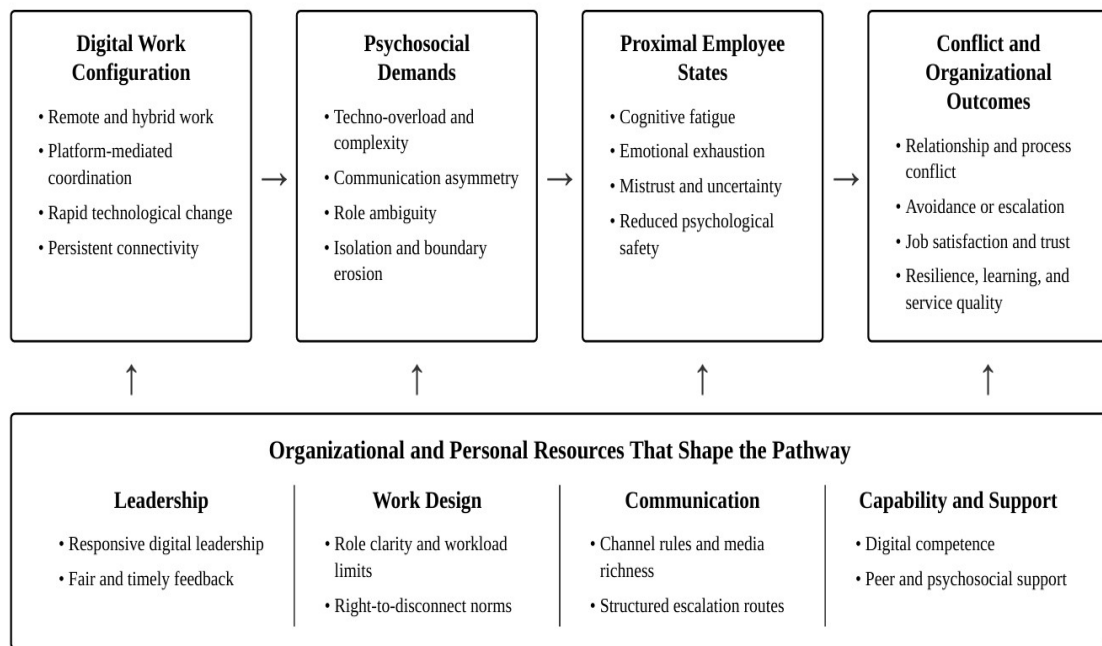
Source: Compiled by the authors through a critical synthesis of the reviewed literature

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: PSYCHOSOCIAL PATHWAYS TO DIGITAL CONFLICT

The literature supports an integrated pathway model rather than a direct causal link between digitalization and conflict. Digital transformation first reshapes work design by altering communication channels, information visibility, task interdependence, monitoring, temporal boundaries, and the pace of change. These shifts generate psychosocial demands such as technostress, information overload or deficit, role ambiguity, reduced social cues, and boundary erosion.

These demands affect conflict through employees' cognitive and emotional states. Cognitive fatigue impairs attention, emotional exhaustion reduces interpersonal tolerance, perceived unfairness heightens threat sensitivity, and declining trust alters the interpretation of ambiguous messages. Consequently, task and process disagreements are more likely to become personalized, avoided, or escalated, with implications for job satisfaction, engagement, performance, turnover intentions, institutional resilience, and service quality. The model also identifies several protective moderators, including adaptive digital leadership, organizational support, digital competence, autonomy, psychological safety, clear communication protocols, participatory change management, and accessible conflict-resolution mechanisms. These resources do not remove disagreement but help ensure that it remains constructive, proportionate, and manageable.

Figure 1. Integrated conceptual framework of psychosocial determinants of organizational conflict in digital work environments



The same digital demand may produce destructive conflict or constructive task debate

Source: Developed by the authors based on the reviewed literature

4.1. ANALYTICAL PROPOSITIONS

Proposition 1. Digital work intensity affects organizational conflict mainly through indirect pathways. Technostress, communication asymmetry, role ambiguity, and emotional exhaustion transmit much of this effect.

Proposition 2. Job autonomy, digital competence, organizational support, and clear communication governance reduce the likelihood that digital demands will develop into conflict.

Proposition 3. Hierarchical rigidity, fragmented responsibility, and low psychological safety strengthen conflict pathways during public-sector digital transformation.

Proposition 4. Constructive conflict management can preserve the learning value of task disagreement. Delayed or avoidant responses make it more likely that digital task and process conflict will develop into relationship conflict.

5. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND POLICYMAKERS

Effective prevention requires coordinated action across technology governance, human resource management, leadership, occupational well-being, and conflict-resolution systems. The conceptual framework suggests the following measures.

- **Assess psychosocial risks before implementation.** Organizations should evaluate expected changes in workload, role ownership, monitoring, information access, response expectations, and work–life boundaries before introducing or modifying digital systems. The assessment should involve employees, managers, IT staff, and occupational well-being specialists.
- **Establish a clear communication architecture.** Official channels should be defined for instructions, urgent matters, routine coordination, and conflict escalation. Response-time expectations, decision records, and contextual information should be standardized, with synchronous communication used for complex or sensitive issues.
- **Protect disconnection and workload boundaries.** Organizations should limit nonessential communication outside working hours and avoid equating online visibility with performance. Where after-hours work is necessary, rotation, compensation, and recovery arrangements should be introduced.
- **Strengthen digital leadership and conflict-management competence.** Managers should be trained to recognize technostress, interpret performance data cautiously, distinguish task from relationship conflict, and transfer emotionally charged exchanges to more appropriate communication channels.
- **Use participatory and staged implementation.** New systems should be piloted with representative users, followed by structured feedback and workflow revision. Transparent communication about resulting changes can strengthen procedural fairness and reveal overlooked interdependencies.
- **Provide accessible early-resolution mechanisms.** Employees should have confidential channels for raising concerns and clear procedures for resolving digital-work conflicts. Neutral facilitators or HR specialists should be involved when internal resolution is unsuccessful.
- **Monitor psychosocial and conflict indicators.** Post-implementation evaluation should combine employee surveys with indicators such as after-hours communication, support requests, unresolved task transfers, absenteeism, turnover intentions, grievances, and recurring workflow errors. These data should support organizational improvement rather than individual surveillance.
- **Integrate employee well-being into digital-government reform.** Public-sector digitalization should include funded workforce development, role and process mapping, interagency coordination, and employee well-being indicators alongside measures of service use and efficiency (Burtscher et al., 2024; OECD, 2024b).

5.1. IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES AND MONITORING

Implementation should follow a phased and coordinated approach. Before acquiring or introducing a digital system, organizations should conduct a psychosocial digital-change assessment involving project sponsors, human resource specialists, IT staff, and occupa-

tional well-being professionals. The process should produce a documented risk register and mitigation plan.

Within the first three months, organizations should establish communication protocols and digital-disconnection policies. Senior and line managers, supported by HR, should clarify official channels, response expectations, task ownership, and after-hours availability. Progress may be assessed through reduced channel duplication, clearer responsibilities, and fewer nonessential after-hours messages.

Within three to six months, organizations should introduce digital leadership training and early conflict-resolution mechanisms. Managers should be trained to recognize technostress, moderate digital conflict, and provide psychologically safe feedback. HR, ethics or compliance units, and neutral facilitators should provide accessible resolution procedures. Relevant indicators include training completion, improved team feedback, shorter resolution times, and fewer recurring disputes.

Employee participation should continue throughout piloting and implementation. Project teams should document feedback and report how it influenced system or workflow design. After implementation, psychosocial and organizational indicators including technostress, role clarity, trust, communication quality, after-hours workload, and conflict frequency should be reviewed quarterly. These measures should support organizational improvement rather than individual surveillance.

6. DISCUSSION

This review demonstrates that organizational conflict in digital work environments is fundamentally a socio-technical phenomenon. Digital technologies do not replace traditional sources of conflict, such as resource dependence, incompatible goals, status differences, or perceived unfairness. Rather, they reshape how employees experience and interpret these conditions by altering communication, coordination, and work boundaries.

The review's main contribution is a framework linking digital work design to conflict through psychosocial mediators. While previous studies have largely examined technostress, remote work, and virtual-team conflict separately, the proposed framework integrates these perspectives by showing how digital demands influence fatigue, trust, resilience, and fairness perceptions, which subsequently affect conflict emergence and escalation. It also highlights organizational resources as key moderators, emphasizing that individual coping alone is insufficient.

The literature reveals important methodological limitations. Most studies rely on cross-sectional self-reports, pandemic-era samples, and private-sector settings, limiting causal inference. Future research should adopt longitudinal, multilevel, and mixed-method designs to distinguish task, process, and relationship conflict while examining both technological demands and organizational resources.

For Georgia, future research should move beyond general discussions of digital modernization toward institution-level evidence. Comparative studies across public organizations with different levels of digital maturity could examine employee experiences before and after digital implementation and relate psychosocial factors to service quality, implementation effectiveness, and citizen outcomes. Such evidence would provide a stronger basis for human-centered public administration reform.

7. CONCLUSION

Digital transformation has reconfigured organizational communication, coordination, and conflict. Although digital work can enhance flexibility, autonomy, learning, and information access, it may also generate technostress, communication fragmentation, role

ambiguity, emotional exhaustion, perceived unfairness, and declining trust. Whether these pressures develop into destructive conflict depends primarily on work design, leadership, organizational support, communication governance, and employee participation. Conflict in digital environments should therefore be addressed through a preventive socio-technical approach. Clear role definitions, communication protocols, realistic work boundaries, digital competence, adaptive leadership, psychologically safe feedback, participatory implementation, and accessible early-resolution mechanisms can reduce conflict escalation. These measures also strengthen organizational sustainability by protecting employee well-being, institutional trust, and adaptive capacity.

In Georgia, the expansion of digital public services and administrative reform highlights the need to integrate workforce capability and psychosocial risk into digital-governance policy. Although current initiatives demonstrate substantial technological progress, direct evidence on employee conflict and well-being remains limited. Future longitudinal and comparative research should test the proposed framework and identify interventions that improve both employee outcomes and public-service performance.

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