

Learning from Pandemic–Accelerated Digital Transformation: A Narrative Inquiry into Employee Adaptation to IT Systems in Alberta, Canada

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented acceleration of digital transformation across public and private sector organizations. In Alberta, Canada, years of technological implementation were compressed into weeks as organizations rapidly adopted remote platforms, cloud-based systems, and digital workflows. While information systems adoption and planned organizational change are well established in stable environments, less is understood about how employees cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally adapted to crisis-driven technological change.

This developmental study examines how employees experienced and responded to pandemic-accelerated IT implementation. The research integrates Institutional Entrepreneurship as a theoretical foundation with Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model and the Coping Model of User Adaptation (CMUA) to develop a multi-level framework of crisis-driven digital transformation. Together, these perspectives enable analysis of institutional disruption, organizational change processes, and individual coping mechanisms.

Using qualitative narrative inquiry embedded within a comparative multi-case design, the study will generate in-depth accounts from twenty employees across public and private sectors in Alberta. Narrative interviews will explore emotional responses, coping strategies, organizational communication, and turning points in adaptation. Cross-case thematic analysis will examine patterns across sectors and assess how formal change processes aligned with lived employee experiences.

The study contributes by extending change management theory into crisis contexts, advancing CMUA in emergency-driven digital environments, and conceptualizing digital resilience as emerging from the interaction between institutional structures, organizational leadership, and employee agency. Practically, the findings will inform crisis-responsive IT implementation strategies and strengthen organizational readiness for future disruptions.

Keywords:

Digital transformation, COVID-19, employee adaptation, organizational change, institutional entrepreneurship, digital resilience, narrative inquiry.