

Wellbeing and Leadership in the Digital Era: A Conceptual View

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Abstract

Leadership in the digital world requires moving beyond traditional ideas. The leader becomes an anchor and driver of change, leading teams virtually, managing new technologies, and developing a strategy. While much of the literature focuses on this change, this paper aims to shift the focus to the leader's perspective. Understanding the need for a leader's psychological wellbeing in a constantly disruptive environment seems apparent. Furthermore, exploring stakeholders and factors such as teams, organizations, and societies, and their influence on a leader's wellbeing. The paper attempts to understand the importance of managing the self, along with the interplay among team, organizational support, and societal impact as multidirectional agents in the real context of leaders' wellbeing.

Keywords: Leadership, Virtual Teams, Psychological Wellbeing, Organization support, Digital Era

1. Introduction

The world is full of complexities, opportunities, and challenges: technological, geopolitical, economic, environmental, and social. Societies across nations are affected by these complications. Technological risks with AI and concerns about it are increasing; environmental risks are a major concern in the coming decades (World Economic Forum, 2026). Experts are recognizing this world as Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, and Incomprehensible (BANI) (Kruse, 2025) and moving from a world that was Volatile Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). The world is now fragile, highly anxious, complex, and ever-changing; therefore, organizations and individuals recognize the need for continuous growth, agility, and change-readiness. Analogous to industrial revolutions that began with the introduction of the steam engine, mass production, industry 2.0 (which brought electricity), and industry 3.0 (which introduced digitalization), industry 4.0 and industry 5.0 are bringing new ways to the world and work (Mahapatra et al., 2025).

Organizations are changing their approach, and employees' perception of work and skills are also changing. Digital transformation, which serves as the center of change, is influencing people and transforming work and interaction (Hai et al., 2021). Shifts in organizations can be seen in their business model and in the integration of technology across levels. Organizations are becoming more resilient and need to create value, thereby evolving the role of a leader (Hai et al., 2021; Schatsky et al., 2021; Grant, 2024). In today's world, the leader stands as a driver of change, leading organizations towards a holistic new era (Sull et al., 2020) and navigating the complexities of digital transformation. The leaders need to upskill while managing personal, organizational, and societal goals, navigating change, and securing employee welfare.

Leadership roles require individuals to deal with stress effectively. Nevertheless, as work evolves, stress, burnout, and wellbeing are gaining the attention of professionals across disciplines. Over the years, research has focused extensively on wellbeing (Karakitsiou et al., 2025; Becker et al., 2022), while wellbeing in the digital workplace is often ignored. Wellbeing is not only beneficial for the individual but also important for employees' wellbeing (Nielsen & Taris, 2019) and the effective functioning of the organization (Roche et al., 2014).

As the world moves towards new ways of work, including hybrid and remote work. Employees, organizations, and leaders from across sectors face both challenges and gain benefits from the scenario (Dong et al., 2025). School principals, physicians, and nurses are under constant pressure from multiple stakeholders, which impacts their wellbeing (Marsh, Dicke, et al., 2022; Niinihuhta & Häggman-Laitila, 2022; Shanafelt et al., 2015). Therefore, understanding wellbeing is not only determined by individuals but also needs to be examined through the eyes of multiple stakeholders.

2.1. Industrial Revolution: Industry 4.0, Industry 5.0, and its impact on wellbeing

The industrial revolution, from the digitalization of industry 4.0 to the human-centric, society-centric approach of industry 5.0, introduces key elements of green manufacturing, collaboration, and mass customization (Adel, 2022; Xu et al., 2021). The Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented Reality, and Smart Sensors are among the technologies driving the revolution. The industrial revolution brings social challenges alongside technological advancement; yet, it places humans at the center, with a shift toward wellbeing and continuous upskilling to empower them alongside technology (Longo et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2021).

2.2. AI and ML in organizations in the digital era and their impact

From making videos to designing programs to monitoring health, Artificial Intelligence and its models impact the world of work. While these changes offer benefits, organizations recognize the need for preparation and the investments required under the new working model (Urbaniec et al., 2022). The commercialization of AI has the potential to shape the workplace, pressuring the fabric of society while increasing accessibility and affordability; it can also displace and create new jobs (World Economic Forum, 2026; Brandao, 2025). Furthermore, according to Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, Artificial Intelligence might become a utility like water and electricity.

In this new reality, AI can make decisions and support individuals. Consequently, the way forward for individuals, including leaders, is augmentation: collaborating with tools to expand their knowledge base and mindset at multiple levels (Davenport & Kirby, 2015). The chaos that new technologies can create is a topic widely studied in research. Leadership roles in the generation of AI are concerned with the extent to which AI-based tools can assist in leadership tasks (Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023b), having the potential to change the way leaders interact with the team, to build a digital platform to advance feedback and analysis of areas of improvement of employees (Petrucci & Rivera, 2018) and changing workflow, models of business and management (World Economic Forum, 2026).

The use of AI comes with societal debates and ethical issues. AI has the potential to create added bias and disparity in society, underscoring the need to filter, monitor, and incorporate human perspectives (Brandao, 2025). With industry changes, leaders may feel an imbalance between their skill set and the demand for new advancements (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012). Leaders need to prepare for this new era by considering social issues, building trust, anticipating multifaceted implications, and designing workflows (World Economic Forum, 2026). To prepare the anchor for this change, wellbeing becomes an important human-centric matter for successful transformation (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012; Zeike et al., 2019).

2.3. Role of Society

Digital transformation is impacting societal sentiments and the environment. Society, regulatory bodies, and policymakers have shown interest in such deliveries to understand their growing importance and to address concerns related to labor relations, autonomy, dignity, privacy, and equality (Brandao, 2025). Industry 5.0 thus moves towards a society-centric industry (Xu et al., 2021). Leaders need to use strategies that are effective, sustainable, transparent, and adaptable (Sahar et al., 2025). The leader's role also includes making a positive impact on society as the world becomes increasingly uncertain (Houmanfar et al., 2015).

2.4. Changes taking place at the workplace/organizations

Research indicates that digital transformation can be observed across sectors, including video conferencing consultations, IT, and more (Greenhalgh et al., 2020). The transition from physical office work to remote work during the pandemic opened multiple opportunities driven by the need for mere survival (Urbaniec et al., 2022), increasing the flexibility and convenience of work (Dong et al., 2025). Amid changes in the world of work, organizations have sensed a need to prioritize digital transformation (Schatsky et al., 2021), and industries need to examine the role of organizational support that anchors this transition, working with novel practices, policies, and procedures to manage this diverse workforce (Sull et al., 2020). The psychological strain that came with this work shift confused and affected multiple employees. HR practitioners need to understand employees' situations and the psychological impact of remote work outside the workplace, which can change their initiatives, meeting styles, and more (Becker et al., 2022). Challenges such as blurred work-life balance, increased isolation, ineffective communication, procrastination, and loneliness can impair the team's wellbeing (Dong et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2021), thereby increasing emotional exhaustion and reducing work-life balance (Becker et al., 2022). Furthermore, work and individual factors, including social support, job autonomy, monitoring, workload, clarity, and self-discipline, improve job effectiveness and perceptions of job wellbeing (Becker et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

Organizational social support thus plays an important role in increasing job satisfaction and reducing psychological strain. Therefore, as hybrid and remote work increase, organizations' support needs must be reflected in their policies and initiatives, including preventive strategies to address psychological strain (Bentley et al., 2016; Karakitsiou et al., 2025). Organizations need to examine the use of digital technologies to prevent negative effects and emotional exhaustion that could undermine alignment with the organization (Marsh et al., 2022). Shifting the perspective on technology from a demand to a resource will be beneficial for thriving in a digitally advanced workplace, where digital skills and other resources are in demand (Marsh et al., 2022). Furthermore, enhanced organizational efficiency could be achieved by individuals balancing

organizational and individual values (Schatsky et al., 2021). Companies changing their way of work in the digital world need to start with people first (Kane, 2019).

2.5. Leadership in the new world

As the geographical barriers between talent fade, the organization brings together a diverse team, and the importance of leading such a virtual team effectively becomes paramount, requiring careful planning and strategy. A leader believes in the wellbeing and engagement of all team members. A leader's role becomes quintessential in creating a successful remote-work culture, respecting employee autonomy, providing resources for independent decision-making, maintaining team spirit and remaining open to further work culture change (Terkamo-Moisio et al., 2021) wellbeing of employees, potential feelings of isolation, job satisfaction, along with maintaining a work-life balance could become a challenge and need to be addressed by a skilled leader creating a supportive environment. Leaders should examine communication style, traditional and innovative solutions, the use of digital means for remote collaboration, and regular check-in conversations (Terkamo-Moisio et al., 2021; Becker et al., 2022). The hybrid arrangement that affects interaction, culture, and innovation requires a balance and strategy that focuses on relationship-building and creative collaborations (Trevor & Holweg, 2022). Leaders in the digital world thus adapt their leadership approaches, being mindful of diverse teams across time zones, considering employee preferences, practicing practical, effective communication, adopting a collaborative mindset, and leveraging technology to coordinate (Mahapatra & Rithani, 2026).

However, with technological advancements, technical issues impact the leader's work effectiveness (Kowalski & Ślebarska, 2022). The rapid changes in the digital world require handling multiple topics simultaneously, with an influx of information through various digital channels, while maintaining the right balance between the old and the new (Klus & Müller, 2021). The changing world of work accelerates the shift to a more technologically advanced approach, which could lead to psychological strains such as anxiety, fatigue, and burnout, as well as physical strain, in individuals adjusting to this change, known as technostress (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Li et al., 2026). The increase in information processing and task complexity in the digitalized era can heighten stress levels among individuals (Marsh et al., 2022). The individual who drives this shift needs both personality traits, such as calmness and organizational skills (Klus & Müller, 2021), and organizational support.

A transformational leadership behavior marked by vigor facilitates wellbeing; it involves high energy and a resilient mindset (Tafvelin et al., 2019). While a leader's job description includes working in stressful situations, the psychological strain this can place on leaders needs further exploration. In terms of wellbeing, a leader's optimal functioning might be reduced (Mironova et al., 2018). Leaders who receive peer support and strengthen their resources are more likely to behave in a transformational way, thereby serving as an important moderator of employee burnout

(Tafvelin et al., 2019). Interpersonal relationships, intimacy, and attachment that are supportive, warm, and trustworthy are essential wellbeing.

Expectations constantly pressure a leader; to navigate external forces, a leader shifts from resilience to agility and effectiveness, concentrating on qualities such as purpose, fulfillment, value orientation, empathy, equilibrium, serenity, and poise (Mahapatra & Rithani, 2026). Leading oneself thus revolves around managing one's emotions, behavior, and actions.

2.6. Wellbeing as a Concept and its role in the above context

Burnout among professionals is a rising concern (Briggs et al., 2024). Burnout can be seen as a state of exhaustion across domains of life, such as physical, mental, and emotional, resulting in fatigue, cynicism, and reduced efficiency. Burnout among executives in complex global contexts is a growing concern, leading to deterioration in physical, mental, and organizational health (Sharma, 2007). International Labor Organization (2026) in the global report *The psychosocial working environment: Global developments and pathways for action* sheds light on the growing deaths related to cardiovascular, stroke, and mental disorders of more than 8,40,00 people due to psychosocial risk in the work environment. The report focuses on psychosocial elements, including the workplace environment, work, and policies, including demand, alignment, clarity, autonomy, and workload, that impact wellbeing and health. Stress, personality, and role-related factors, such as role overload, role stagnation, and resource inadequacy, contribute to burnout among executives (Sharma, 2007).

The World Health Organization (2021, p. 10) describes wellbeing as a positive state influenced by social, economic, and environmental factors, encompassing quality of life and the ability of people and communities to contribute with a sense of meaning. Wellbeing, from a psychological lens, is a complex concept, generally divided into two perspectives: a hedonic and an eudaimonic approach. The hedonic concept views happiness and wellbeing as "pleasure attainment and pain avoidance," and is more closely related to positive states and carefreeness (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Huta & Ryan, 2010). The eudaimonic approach focuses on meaning-making and self-realization (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The most recent work on wellbeing is the work of Diener & Lucas on subjective wellbeing and Ryff & Singer (1998), focusing on autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness. Individuals high in both hedonic and eudaimonic approaches have higher wellbeing, while eudaimonic approaches are associated with long-term happiness and wellbeing (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Leaders driven by purpose act as a protective factor even in high-stress jobs. Interpersonal relationships, intimacy, and attachment that are supportive, warm, and trustworthy are thus essential for wellbeing.

2.7 Efforts towards managing wellbeing

Leaders often handle high-stakes decisions (Lovelace et al., 2007), which is the responsibility of the employee and organization during disruption. Having a challenging environment causing constant strain can thus increase the risk of physical and psychological issues (Lovelace et al., 2007). Therefore, managing stress is an important element in wellbeing. A balance in life becomes key to managing stress, which is often distress.

2.7.1 *Role of Mindfulness*

The stress and pressure of the leaders could impact psychological issues, including burnout, anxiety, and depression. Having a positive mindset and coping mechanism could thus help individuals (Roche et al., 2014). Managing oneself by connecting with feelings is an essential tool (Birk, 2021). Mindfulness practice is one such mechanism for gaining moment-to-moment awareness and attention, which, in turn, can reduce psychological strain and increase resilience (Roche et al., 2014; Mahapatra & Rithani, 2026). The individual's role in attaining a state of positive being can focus on habits that foster self-care, proper sleep, and self-compassion (Shanafelt et al., 2022), as well as on managing stress by responding to new challenges, decompressing, and making meaning. This will help increase the leader's cognitive abilities, including problem-solving, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence (Vaidyanathan & Mahapatra, 2020), making the executive a better leader (George, 2012). Along with mindfulness, yoga has emerged as an integral tool for navigating challenges and enhancing leaders' wellbeing (Acharya et al., 2021).

2.7.2. *Psychological tools*

Leaders who lead the way have developed a self-concept that makes them proactive and inspiring, and therefore need challenges to utilize their skills. However, a situation with fewer challenges could improve the wellbeing of such individuals (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012). The concept of flow can explain: positive affect declines when the individual faces challenges that are either extremely easy or extremely difficult (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). A leader's negative affect, such as distress and negative emotions, is linked with leadership wellbeing and influence on employees (Roche et al., 2014), and positive affect, such as happiness, plays a role in a leader's health and leadership (Little et al., 2007). Self-efficacy can help with the negative actions of developmental challenges and emotional exhaustion (Courtright et al., 2014). Self-leadership that focuses on internal processes exhibits characteristics such as creativity and innovation (Knotts et al., 2021). Consequently, the leader must foster a growth mindset while focusing on culture and strategy (Mihu et al., 2023). Additionally, emotional intelligence among executives is an important tool to manage stress and burnout (Sharma, 2007).

2.7.3. Work Culture & other tools to wellbeing

Being a leader also requires understanding and assessing one's situation, such that a leader must assess their stress level and recognize when they need to step back and take a break. By employing Byrne's (2005) wheel of life, leaders can identify imbalances within the individual's top-priority eight segments of life, which represent a wheel of constant movement, and address them through a deeper understanding of where the individual is at present. Additionally, organizations need to provide leaders with assets, workshops, and tools. Leadership training interventions can also serve to improve professional fulfillment, particularly among clinicians (Briggs et al., 2024). Challenge perceptions of the demand, along with a supportive employee team and their openness to change, are also important for the leader's wellbeing (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012). Lastly, organizational culture needs to shift to prioritize the wellbeing of leaders, sleep health, and personal needs, including work-life balance and rest (Shanafelt et al., 2022; Zucker, 2023). Creating communities and focusing on understanding the feeling of isolation, establishing boundaries, and less micromanaging and delegating work are important tools for wellbeing (Zucker, 2023).

3. Research Method

This paper employs a conceptual narrative review approach to synthesize the existing literature on leadership, psychological wellbeing, digital transformation, organizational support, and emerging workplace trends. We leveraged relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, books, reports. We identified conceptual papers through electronic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect, as well as other credible web-based resources.

The authors selected the literature based on its relevance to leadership in the digital era, leader wellbeing, organizational practices, and societal influences. The study reviewed and synthesized the literature to identify recurring themes, relationships, and gaps in the existing body of knowledge. Based on this synthesis, the researcher developed an integrated conceptual framework to illustrate leader wellbeing as a multidimensional construct shaped by the dynamic interaction among self-management, organizational support, interpersonal relationships, and broader societal influences in the context of digital transformation.

4. Preliminary findings

Leadership in the digital era is challenged, pressured by a complex array of requirements, yet remains a source of support across the organization and team (Roche et al., 2014). Managing self through mindfulness, improved emotional intelligence, and positive affect will help the leader lead more effectively (George, 2012). Thus, the internal processes become a central part of wellbeing.

The shift in working style requires a structural change across layers. The organization's role is to be a supportive, well-regulated entity that focuses on upskilling leaders. Thus, effectively using technologies could increase self-efficacy, which, in turn, could become a protective factor against burnout (Jia et al., 2025). In technologically centered organizations, integrating supportive work practices, AI-enhanced transformational leadership, and AI-based tools can reduce burnout (Jia et al., 2025). Furthermore, the prioritization of wellbeing and mental health in the multigenerational workforce is driving a shift away from solely performance-based leadership toward a health-based approach. Thus, the health mindset among leaders is not only an individual resource but also linked to leaders' behavior toward employees and wellbeing (Kaluza et al., 2021).

Organizational-level policies, interventions, and safeguards designed to safeguard psychological health need to cover leadership roles as well (Kaluza et al., 2020). Lastly, government guidelines could ultimately help improve access to digital resources and improve work-life balance (Karakitsiou et al., 2025), while focusing on the individual aspect and its greater connection with the collective community remains an important area of focus (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

4.1 Proposed Interaction Model

Based on the literature and current trends, the authors propose a framework for leaders to promote wellbeing in the digital world. The current research identified that studies that focus on leaders, with self at the center of achieving wellbeing, might not be enough in a world that constantly impacts leaders (refer to figure 1). However, only organizational responsibility or a community's approach might not be the answer to understanding a leader's wellbeing (refer to figures 2 & 3). Therefore, we propose an integrated approach to understanding wellbeing as an interaction among the team, organization, community, and self in the middle, which, in turn, impacts them (refer to Figure 5).

Figure 1: Wellbeing as a product of managing self

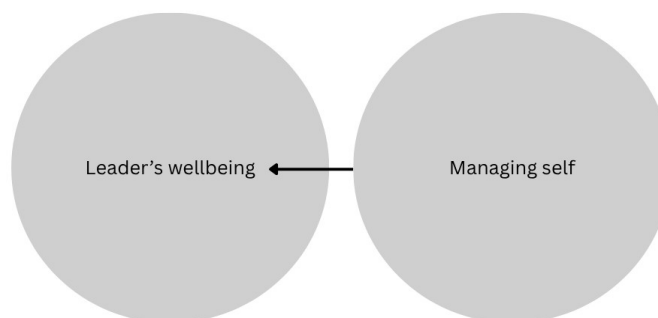


Figure 2: Wellbeing as a product of organizational factors

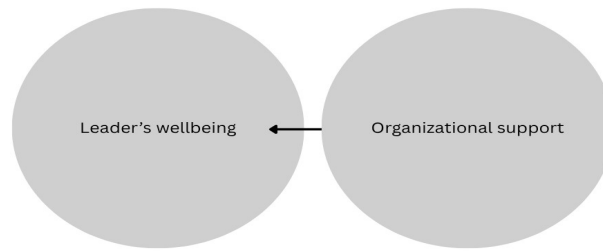


Figure 3: Wellbeing as a product of community influence

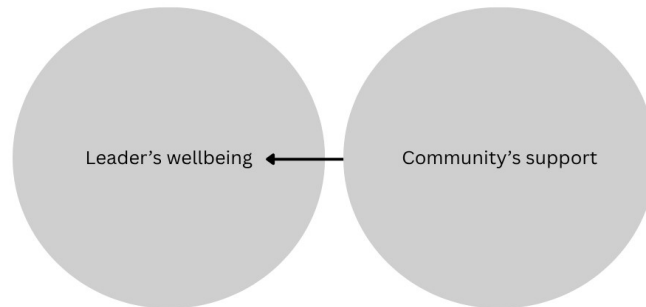
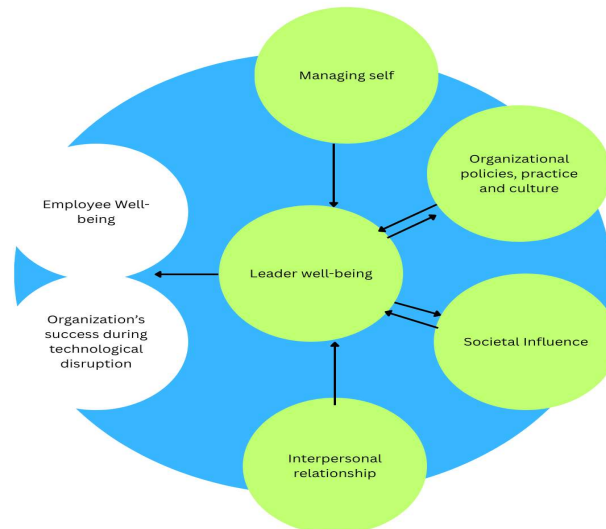


Figure 4: A proposed model of an integrated view of leadwellbeinwellbeing



5. Limitations of the study

The paper lacks a methodologically rigorous approach to the topic. The paper focuses on a conceptual understanding of leaders' wellbeing, an area that warrants further exploration in future studies.

6. Areas for future research

There is a need to explore the context of wellbeing, with a focus on its long-term impact. Furthermore, wellbeing that moves beyond the job description needs to be examined through a socio-cultural lens. Although leaders impact organizations, employees, work stability, and evolution, there is a lack of research on leader wellbeing. Thus, there is a need to understand it through a multidisciplinary, multi-level approach. Individuals can be measured on scales to understand individual differences in psychosocial wellbeing, their connections to burnout, perspectives, and roles in organizations and among employees. The use of such scales will help practitioners curate interventions to support leaders in achieving optimal functioning and wellbeing. Wellbeing is an emerging topic that needs further exploration. Further study could explore factors, including individual traits, gender, and managerial level, and their relationships with the mentioned stakeholders, using a methodologically rigorous approach.

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