Human-Centred Digitalisation in Banking: Balancing Innovation, Inclusion, and Employee Well-Being in South Africa

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SOMMARIO - ABSTRACT

This study investigates the multifaceted impact of digitalisation on employee performance within the rapidly evolving banking sector in South Africa. Responding to the challenge of balancing technological advancements with human capital, this research examines how rapid digitalisation enhances efficiency but also introduces potential drawbacks, such as digital fatigue, skill redundancy, and employee resistance, which consequently affect sustainable performance outcomes. This study, anchored in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Resource-Based View (RBV), and Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory, explores the dynamics of employee adoption, adaptation, and overall impact within a digitalised work environment. Utilising a qualitative research design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 10 intentionally selected employees from a South African bank, representing various branch roles to capture a range of lived experiences. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and nuanced insights. Findings reveal that digitalisation improves operational efficiency, reduces customer query response times, and enhances collaboration through real-time communication platforms. Upskilling initiatives, supported by regular training, fostered adaptability and professional growth, while automation enabled employees to concentrate on engaging with customers in a value-adding manner. Enhanced performance monitoring using dashboards and scorecards has increased transparency and alignment with corporate objectives. However, concerns have emerged about digital fatigue, the potential for deskilling in highly automated roles, and the ethical implications of constant monitoring. Corporate culture, especially the engagement of leadership and support from peers, was identified as a crucial factor in the successful adoption of digital technologies. Additionally, remote and hybrid work arrangements have improved flexibility and reduced commuting stress; however, blurred work-life boundaries have been identified as a challenge. The study concludes that, although digitalisation provides significant performance benefits, its sustainability relies on a balanced implementation that mitigates risks and preserves human value in banking roles. Recommendations include structured wellness initiatives, continuous skills development, participatory change management, and ethical monitoring frameworks to maximise both employee well-being and organisational performance.

Questo studio indaga il molteplice l'impatto della digitalizzazione sulle prestazioni dei dipendenti all'interno del settore bancario in rapida evoluzione in Sudafrica. Rispondendo alla sfida di

bilanciare i progressi tecnologici con il capitale umano, questa ricerca esamina come la rapida digitalizzazione migliori l'efficienza ma introduca anche potenziali svantaggi, come la fatica digitale, la ridondanza delle competenze e la resistenza dei dipendenti, che di conseguenza influenzano risultati di performance sostenibili. Questo studio, ancorato al Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), alla Resource-Based View (RBV) e alla teoria della Diffusion of Innovation (DOI)), esplora le dinamiche dell'adozione, dell'adattamento e dell'impatto complessivo dei dipendenti all'interno di un ambiente di lavoro digitalizzato. Utilizzando un disegno di ricerca qualitativa, i dati sono stati raccolti tramite interviste semi-strutturate con 10 dipendenti selezionati intenzionalmente da una banca sudafricana, rappresentanti vari ruoli di filiale per catturare una gamma di esperienze vissute. L'analisi tematica è stata impiegata per identificare schemi ricorrenti e intuizioni sfumate. I risultati rivelano che la digitalizzazione migliora l'efficienza operativa, riduce i tempi di risposta alle richieste dei clienti e migliora la collaborazione attraverso piattaforme di comunicazione in tempo reale. Le iniziative di aggiornamento delle competenze, supportate da una formazione regolare, favorivano l'adattabilità e la crescita professionale, mentre l'automazione permetteva ai dipendenti di concentrarsi sul coinvolgimento con i clienti in modo aggiuntivo a valore. Il monitoraggio delle prestazioni migliorato tramite dashboard e scorecard ha aumentato la trasparenza e l'allineamento con gli obiettivi aziendali. Tuttavia, sono emerse preoccupazioni riguardo alla fatica digitale, al potenziale di de-qualificazione in ruoli altamente automatizzati e alle implicazioni etiche del monitoraggio costante. La cultura aziendale, in particolare il coinvolgimento della leadership e il supporto dei colleghi, è stata identificata come un fattore cruciale per l'adozione di successo delle tecnologie digitali. Inoltre, le modalità di lavoro da remoto e ibride hanno migliorato la flessibilità e ridotto lo stress del pendolarismo; Tuttavia, i confini sfumati tra lavoro e vita privata sono stati identificati come una sfida. Lo studio conclude che, sebbene la digitalizzazione offra significativi benefici sulle prestazioni, la sua sostenibilità si basa su un'implementazione equilibrata che mitighi i rischi e preservi il valore umano nei ruoli bancari. Le raccomandazioni includono iniziative strutturate di benessere, sviluppo continuo delle competenze, gestione partecipativa del cambiamento e quadri di monitoraggio etico per massimizzare sia il benessere dei dipendenti sia le prestazioni organizzative.

1 – Introduction

An increasing proportion of banking processes are now conducted through digital platforms (Nesindande, Saurombe, & Joseph, 2024). This shift has introduced both opportunities and challenges that are transforming the way employees perform their duties (Rahab, & Shabi, 2023). The adoption of technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, big data, and automation, together with broader digitalization efforts, has the potential to make the banking industry more efficient, productive, and innovative (Buer *et al.*, 2021; Alsufyani & Gill, 2022; Wang, 2024). However, the growing use of AI has also raised concerns about job security, as employees often fear being replaced by technology and are uncertain about the future (Nwaomah, 2025).

To ensure that employees perform optimally in an increasingly digitalised world, it is essential to understand the balance between the positive and negative effects of digitalisation (Bartsch *et al.*, 2021; Ribeiro-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021; Haque & Nishat, 2022). Scholars hold differing views regarding the impact of digitalization on employee performance. For instance, Annisa, Siahaan, & Lumbanraja, (2024) argue that technological advancements in the workplace can enhance productivity by automating repetitive tasks, allowing employees to focus on more meaningful and value-adding activities. Similarly, Chitamba and Mutambara (2023) contend

that digitalisation equips employees with tools that facilitate better decision-making, thereby improving overall performance. Conversely, Ranstad, (2025) caution that excessive reliance on digital tools may diminish employees' skills, motivation, and engagement. This divergence of perspectives highlights the complexity of understanding how digitalisation reshapes work dynamics, particularly in fast-evolving sectors such as banking.

Digitalisation has transformed the way banks operate worldwide and how they offer banking services. For instance, Katema and Hapunda (2024) note that as digital technology advances rapidly, banks are increasingly managing operations, delivering online services, and making data-driven decisions. These systems have significantly streamlined customer interactions. As financial services become more digitalised, bank personnel have been compelled to adapt their work methods, continuously learning and upskilling to manage more complex processes. Digital literacy, adaptability, and innovation have emerged as new measures of success (Chitamba *et al.*, 2024). While digitalisation enhances productivity by speeding up transactions and improving customer satisfaction, its effects on employees' well-being, motivation, and job satisfaction cannot be overlooked.

Several studies have shown that employees who perceive digitalisation as an opportunity for learning and growth tend to perform better (Nageeb, & Saad, 2022; Salju, Junaidi, & Goso, 2022). Conversely, those who experience stress and anxiety about technological change often demonstrate lower performance levels (Katema & Hapunda, 2024). The rapid digital transformation of South Africa's banking sector presents both opportunities and challenges for employee performance. While digitalisation enhances efficiency, customer service, and competitiveness, it also requires employees to continuously adapt to new technologies. Effective and well-supported digitalisation can improve productivity (Haque & Nishat, 2022; Ribeiro-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021). However, without adequate training and emotional support, these technological tools may lead to technostress and digital fatigue, ultimately reducing employee productivity (Tarafdar *et al.*, 2019; Mthuli, 2024). Furthermore, digitalisation has rendered certain job roles obsolete while simultaneously creating demand for new skill sets (Lumi, 2020). Consequently, the banking industry continues to grapple with managing the intersection between digital innovation and human capacity, which adds complexity to maintaining consistent employee performance in an ever-evolving environment. The digitalisation of financial services in South Africa must consider how technological advancements affect employees, particularly within branch networks where direct client interaction remains essential (Ghimire, 2025). While digitalisation enhances competitiveness, research indicates that the human dimensions of this transformation remain underexplored in emerging economies (Buer *et al.*, 2021). Achieving sustainable digital integration therefore requires empowering employees through capacity-building initiatives and continuous professional development (Lumi, 2020).

This study seeks to answer the following two research questions: (i) What forms of digitalisation are currently implemented in modern banking institutions, and how do they influence employee performance and operational efficiency? (ii) What challenges hinder effective digitalisation in the banking sector, and what strategies can be adopted to overcome them, to mitigate negative effects on employees?

While there is an extensive body of literature on digitalisation in banking, three important limitations remain. These are outlined below, together with this study's contribution to addressing each of them. First, much of the empirical research focuses on organisational performance indicators, such as efficiency, cost reduction, or transaction growth (e.g., Alsufyani

& Gill, 2022; Buer *et al.*, 2021), while in comparison, less attention is given to the lived experiences of employees navigating digital transformation in branch-level environments. This study contributes by repositioning digitalisation as a human-centred organisational process rather than purely a technological or efficiency-driven transformation.

Second, several South African studies (Mamela, 2021; Naidoo, 2021; Sibeko, 2023) examine digitalisation, AI adoption, or change management in isolation. However, there is limited research that integrates employee performance, well-being, resistance, digital fatigue, and organisational culture within a single analytical framework, specifically one using a human-centred lens. Previous banking studies often rely on a single theoretical model while this study uniquely integrates the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) – individual perceptions, Resource-Based View (RBV) – organisational capabilities, and Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) – social adoption dynamics. This combined framework allows for a multi-level explanation of digitalisation outcomes that has not been extensively applied in South African banking contexts.

Finally, most empirical work in emerging economies tends to use quantitative survey designs, measuring technology acceptance or performance outcomes statistically. There is a notable scarcity of qualitative, phenomenological studies that capture how employees experience digitalisation in real time, especially within South African branch networks where human interaction remains central. This study provides depth and context that is underrepresented in current digital banking scholarship, strengthening understanding of digital transformation in emerging economies and increasing the geographical diversity of the literature.

2 – Literature review

2.1 – *Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning the Study*

Understanding how digitalisation influences employee performance requires the application of robust theoretical frameworks that integrate behavioural, strategic, and innovation perspectives. This study draws on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Resource-Based View (RBV), and Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory to explain employee adoption, capability, and adaptation in banking contexts. TAM, developed by Davis (1989), emphasises perceived usefulness and ease of use as key determinants of technology acceptance. Within Absa, staff adoption of tools such as biometric verification and mobile banking services depends not only on efficiency gains but also on the user-friendliness of the technology. Complex systems may hinder uptake, even when management strongly encourages adoption (Naidoo, 2021; Masango, 2021), whereas contextual support, training, and peer influence play a critical role in facilitating successful technology integration (Phaila, 2023).

The Resource-Based View (RBV) emphasises employee competencies, digital literacy, and organisational culture as critical resources that shape the success of digital transformation. Viewing digital skills as long-term capital investments, rather than short-term training outcomes, enhances strategic alignment and overall performance (Moyo, 2022; Masheleni, 2022). Disparities in digital confidence between junior and senior staff highlight how uneven resource distribution can hinder organisational agility, underscoring the need for targeted capability development (Sidali, 2022).

Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory, as proposed by Rogers (2003), provides a social lens by categorising adopters into innovators, early adopters, and laggards. Research indicates that

early adopters often serve as mentors, facilitating accelerated uptake among peers (Limo, 2023; Masango, 2021). Conversely, employees who delay adoption may experience marginalisation if tailored support is not provided (Hlongwane, 2022). Managers can leverage DOI by cultivating adoption clusters and empowering change champions to promote effective diffusion (Costa, Venier, & Pugliese, 2025). Together, these theoretical frameworks illustrate that successful digitalisation outcomes depend on the dynamic interaction of individual perceptions, organisational capabilities, and social adoption patterns.

2.2 – Forms of digitalisation in modern banking and how they influence employee performance and operational efficiency

Digitalisation in modern banking has transformed operations, customer service, and internal management. Core banking systems now incorporate automation and AI-driven workflows that replace manual processes, enhancing compliance, transaction speed, and accuracy (Pingili, 2025). Many banks utilise AI-enabled risk engines for fraud detection and robotic process automation (RPA) for repetitive tasks such as reconciliation and authorisation, freeing employees to focus on higher-value activities (Paleti, 2022). Successful automation requires balancing technical innovation with staff readiness and inclusive capacity-building initiatives, as inadequate training, irregular system updates, and generational skill gaps continue to undermine performance (Hlongwane, 2022; Khosa, 2024).

Customer-facing digital platforms—including mobile apps, online banking, ATMs, and chatbots—have streamlined routine services, enabling employees to focus on advisory and value-added roles (Sidali, 2022). Absa's Abby chatbot illustrates how automation can reduce repetitive queries and enhance service efficiency (Masheleni, 2022). However, semi-urban bank branches continue to experience connectivity issues, emphasising the importance of resilient infrastructure and reliable support systems (Moyo, 2022). Sustainable adoption of these platforms requires employee proficiency in digital troubleshooting, targeted training, and robust backup mechanisms to ensure continuity in service delivery.

Internally, enterprise collaboration tools and HR platforms such as Teams, Slack, and SharePoint have revolutionised communication, performance monitoring, and training (Sidali, 2022). While dashboards enhance accountability, they also raise ethical concerns about surveillance and stress. Digital HR systems now facilitate onboarding, compliance training, and e-learning, enabling staff to update their skills flexibly (Mamela, 2021). These platforms promote digital literacy in AI and customer service but may encounter resistance if systems are poorly designed or if change management is inadequate (Akilimalissiga & Sukdeo, 2024).

Employee performance in the banking sector increasingly extends beyond task completion to encompass adaptability, innovation, service quality, and digital fluency. The digital era demands responsiveness to technological change, efficient use of resources, and collaborative problem-solving. Digital proficiency has thus become a critical predictor of performance, as employees must navigate CRM platforms, interpret analytics dashboards, and manage virtual consultations (Mamela, 2021; Naidoo, 2021). Without continuous upskilling, staff risk stagnation or reassignment. Structured e-learning and mentorship initiatives have proven effective in mitigating such disparities, particularly in semi-urban branches (Sibeko, 2023; Phaila, 2023). Empirical evidence from across Africa supports these trends. Banks in Kenya and Nigeria have achieved productivity gains through automation and mobile platforms, which allow staff to engage more directly with clients and accelerate loan processing (Limo, 2023). In

South Africa, AI integration has expedited transactions but introduced uncertainty regarding job roles and system reliability (Hlongwane, 2022). At Absa, dashboards and CRM tools have improved client retention yet also increased stress due to hybrid workloads and unclear performance indicators (Sibeko, 2023; Masheleni, 2022). These findings highlight that digitalisation's success relies as much on human capability and confidence as on technological investment.

2.3 – *Challenges, constraints, and organisational resistance that hinder effective digitalisation in the banking sector, and strategies for overcoming them*

Digitalisation in banking has improved efficiency but heightened job insecurity and concerns about redundancy. AI-driven systems have replaced many administrative tasks, creating anxiety about job stability and career prospects (Akilimalissiga & Sukdeo, 2024; Mamela, 2021). This insecurity can erode motivation, loyalty, and knowledge sharing, as staff may perceive technology as a threat rather than a tool for growth (Naidoo, 2021; Masango, 2021). Workload intensification and "technostress" further compound these issues, as employees face longer hours, frequent task-switching, and information overload (Naidoo, 2021; Mamela, 2021). Digital fatigue and cognitive strain undermine autonomy and focus, particularly when system notifications and performance dashboards increase surveillance pressures (Akilimalissiga & Sukdeo, 2024).

Generational divides also complicate digital adoption. While younger employees adapt quickly to digital tools, older staff often struggle with interfaces and cloud-based systems, leading to inconsistent performance and training bottlenecks (Naidoo, 2021; Akilimalissiga & Sukdeo, 2023). Excluding older employees from advanced digital training can marginalise them and widen skill gaps, whereas inclusive strategies such as bi-directional mentoring and peer-assisted labs promote knowledge exchange and confidence (Khosa, 2024; Hlongwane, 2022).

Resistance to digitalisation is another critical barrier. Organisational resistance often stems from inadequate training, system mistrust, and cultural misalignment rather than defiance (Singun, 2025; Khosa, 2024). Both Lewin's and Kotter's change models emphasise that transformation must address psychological transitions, communication gaps, and leadership engagement to prevent employee disengagement (Hayes, 2022; Phaila, 2023). In practice, banks frequently neglect the "refreezing" phase of change, resulting in instability and regression (Santos *et al.*, 2023). Research indicates that resistance arises when employees perceive change as imposed rather than participatory, highlighting the need for inclusive and phased implementation (Naidoo, 2021; Hlongwane, 2022).

Empirical evidence from regional banks illustrates these dynamics. In Limpopo, digital reluctance following biometric system deployment slowed operations due to uncertainty and lack of peer-led demonstrations (Nhlongwana, 2024). In the Western Cape, AI-assisted client terminals prompted fears of de-skilling and loss of interpersonal value (Masango, 2021). Similar findings in Kenya revealed that inadequate onboarding and unclear performance expectations intensified resistance (Limo, 2023). These studies confirm that resistance often reflects poor change management rather than rejection of technology itself.

To overcome these challenges, banks must implement holistic strategies combining technological innovation with human-centred approaches. Kotter's and ADKAR models, when integrated with Lewin's cultural framework, provide a foundation for sustainable digital transformation (Naidoo, 2021; Phaila, 2023). Inclusive communication is vital; participatory

methods such as town halls, focus groups, and co-creation workshops outperform top-down directives by fostering ownership and dialogue (Sibeko, 2023; Khosa, 2024). Incentivising digital competence through recognition rewards, mentorship, and transparent adoption bonuses further enhances motivation and engagement (Masango, 2021; Limo, 2023; Akilimalissiga & Sukdeo, 2024). Ultimately, the success of digital transformation in banking depends not solely on the adoption of technology, but on aligning innovation with employee well-being, participation, and sustained support.

3 – Methodology

This study adopts an interpretivist stance to elicit participants' narratives about their digital workflows, training experiences, and job satisfaction. Methodological checks, including topic analysis across data sources, member-checking of interpretations, and the development of a reflexive codebook (Reyes *et al.*, 2021), were used to minimise researcher bias and enhance interpretive accuracy.

The target population comprised 245 employees of South African Bank X who engaged directly with digital tools introduced during the bank's transformation strategy. This included branch managers, digital champions, frontline staff, and operational employees whose daily tasks relied on digital platforms. The study employed non-probability, purposive sampling consistent with a qualitative interpretivist approach. Participants were selected based on their experiential knowledge of digital tools and their ability to provide insight into resistance, adaptation, and performance changes. Inclusion criteria required that participants (1) were employed within Bank X during the digital transformation period under review, (2) actively used at least one digital tool in daily work, and (3) occupied roles where performance expectations and client-facing outcomes were directly affected by digital processes. Variation across job roles and levels of responsibility was sought to capture both frontline and supervisory perspectives. Recruitment occurred through branch-level coordination, after which participants were approached individually and participated voluntarily.

Ten participants from five branches formed the final sample. The size was selected for depth rather than breadth, consistent with an interpretivist design aimed at rich explanation rather than statistical representation. Interviews continued until recurring patterns emerged across roles and branches, indicating thematic saturation within the study's scope. The small sample is therefore presented as sufficient for insight generation in a bounded context rather than for generalisation. The study site is referred to as Bank X to maintain confidentiality.

The interview schedule was developed deductively from the two research questions, the theoretical framework (TAM, RBV, DOI), and key constructs identified in the literature, including efficiency, productivity, monitoring, digital fatigue, resistance, leadership, and upskilling. The first section explored the forms of digitalisation used in daily work and their impact on performance. Participants were asked open-ended descriptive and evaluative questions about the digital tools they used, how these tools changed task execution, whether digitalisation improved operational efficiency, how automation affected productivity and accuracy, how dashboards and monitoring systems influenced performance, and how work processes compared before and after digital implementation. The second section of the schedule focused on challenges and improvement mechanisms. Participants reflected on difficulties experienced with digital systems, observed resistance and its causes, adequacy of training and support, experiences of stress or work–life imbalance, and the influence of leadership on digital

adoption. They were also asked to suggest strategies to strengthen digital implementation while protecting employee well-being. Probing questions were used throughout to deepen insights into emotional responses, organisational culture, and adaptation processes.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person or via Teams and lasted 45–60 minutes. Data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process: familiarisation, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. This approach enabled nuanced exploration of digitalisation, adaptation, and resistance in the banking context.

Practical limitations included variations in participant availability and the under-representation of some departments due to scheduling constraints and management gatekeeping (Tomás & Bidet, 2023). As with all qualitative research, analysis involved researcher judgement; despite reflexivity, audit trails, and member validation, interpretive bias remained possible (Reyes *et al.*, 2021; Hameed, 2024). Findings are context-bound to Bank X's Gauteng North branches and are not intended for universal generalisation (Mannheimer, 2024).

4 – Data analysis and discussion

4.1 – *Demographics of Participants*

Table 1 below summarises the demographic characteristics of the participants, providing a clear overview of gender, age, job title, years of service, and educational qualifications. Presenting the data in this format facilitates easier reference and aligns with the small sample size.

Table 1 – Summary of Participant Demographics

Demographic Variable	Category	Number of Participants (N=10)
Gender	Male	6
	Female	4
Age Group	18–25 years	1
	26–35 years	4
	36–45 years	2
	46–55 years	2
	55+ years	1
Job Title	Customer Service Consultant	4
	Relationship Banker	3
	Sales Consultant	2
	Branch Manager	1
Years of Service	Less than 1 year	1
	1 to 3 years	2
	4 to 10 years	5
	More than 10 years	2
Educational Qualifications	Diploma	3
	Bachelor's Degree	5
	Postgraduate Degree	2

The gender distribution shows 6 male and 4 female participants, reflecting a reasonably balanced representation consistent with industry norms. The age profile ranged from early-career employees (1 participant aged 18–25) to senior employees (1 participant aged over 55), with the majority clustered between 26 and 45 years, indicating a predominance of mid-career professionals. Job titles spanned customer-facing roles such as Customer Service Consultants (4 participants) and Relationship Bankers (3 participants), as well as Sales Consultants (2) and one Branch Manager, covering a comprehensive range of operational levels. Regarding tenure, 5 participants reported 4 to 10 years of service, indicating institutional knowledge combined with adaptability to change, while 1 participant was relatively new with less than one year of service. Educational qualifications ranged mainly from diplomas to bachelor's degrees, with 2 participants holding postgraduate qualifications, supporting prior findings that higher education is associated with digital proficiency

4.2 – *Theme 1: Forms of Digitalisation Implemented at Bank X*

4.2.1 – Sub-Theme 1: Enhanced Efficiency and Productivity

Interview findings consistently reveal that digitalisation has significantly enhanced efficiency and productivity among employees. Participants reported that automated banking procedures and rapid access to client information have reduced processing times. Digital platforms enable multitasking without compromising service quality, while automation eliminates routine administrative tasks, allowing employees to focus on client-facing responsibilities and improve throughput. Real-time data access through digital tools facilitates faster decision-making and job completion. Although managing multiple platforms and system upgrades occasionally disrupts workflow continuity, such interruptions have not substantially reduced productivity. Overall, the findings indicate that digitalisation has improved staff output and time management within the branch network.

Illustrative participant quotations:

"Digital tools *have definitely made me more efficient. I can complete transactions and retrieve customer data within seconds, which used to take minutes or longer."* (Participant 01)

"Digitalisation has greatly improved my ability to oversee branch operations efficiently. Real-time dashboards provide timely insights." (Participant 03)

The responses demonstrate a strong consensus that digital platforms have made daily operations faster, more accurate, and less labour-intensive. Real-time information access and automation of repetitive processes emerged as key contributors to productivity improvements. Participants also reported feeling empowered to manage heavier workloads with less stress. Managerial support for digital systems further reinforced the perceived benefits of enhanced operational speed and efficiency. Nevertheless, some employees noted that periodic system updates cause short-term disruptions, underscoring the importance of effective change management and technical support to sustain productivity gains.

These findings are consistent with prior literature on the relationship between digitalisation and employee performance in the banking sector. Akilimalissiga and Sukdeo (2023) found that automation enhances efficiency and reduces operational costs in South African banks. Similarly, Mamela (2021) observed that AI and digital tools allow employees to shift focus from repetitive tasks to value-added customer services, thereby boosting productivity. Sibeko (2023) argues

that real-time data access facilitates informed and timely decision-making, improving task execution. Conversely, Masheleni (2022) cautions that frequent technological changes can disrupt workflows if not supported by adequate organisational systems, while Lumadi (2020) highlights the importance of training and communication to ensure smooth adaptation with minimal productivity loss.

In summary, digitalisation has enhanced efficiency and productivity within Bank X's Gauteng North Branch Network, although sustaining these improvements depends on effective change management, continuous training, and seamless system integration.

4.2.2 – Sub-Theme 2: Improved Workflow Accuracy and Compliance

Interview data indicate that employees believe digitalisation enhances workflow accuracy and regulatory compliance. Participants frequently reported that automating data entry, transaction recording, and audit trail management reduces human error. Digital workflows standardise processes, improving consistency and accuracy. Respondents also highlighted that digital record-keeping enhances transaction traceability, simplifying internal and external audits. Transparency and immediate access to transaction histories were identified as key factors strengthening compliance.

Although some participants mentioned occasional system malfunctions, they viewed these as temporary and manageable through IT support. Overall, digitalisation was found to improve service delivery and compliance monitoring.

Illustrative participant quotations:

"Automation of routine processes reduces human error and supports compliance, especially with better record-keeping and audit trails." (Participant 01)

"Automating many routine tasks speeds up service delivery and reduces mistakes." (Participant 04)

"Accurate digital record-keeping means we don't lose track of customer requests, which helps in compliance." (Participant 05)

The responses demonstrate a shared view that digitalisation ensures task accuracy and regulatory adherence. Participants emphasised that technology introduces structured, consistent processes that reduce human error. The ability to maintain digital audit trails was seen as crucial for internal control and compliance with external regulations. Improved compliance not only mitigates organisational risk but also strengthens customer trust through transparency and traceability. However, the occasional technical disruption highlights the need for robust IT infrastructure and rapid troubleshooting to ensure workflow continuity. Ù

These findings align with previous research confirming that digitalisation enhances both efficiency and compliance. Akilimalissiga and Sukdeo (2023) argue that automation reduces operational errors and supports regulatory adherence in South African banks.

Similarly, Wang, *et al.* (2025) notes that digital transformation improves audit efficiency through better data management and real-time monitoring. Masango (2021) adds that reduced manual intervention minimises errors, while Sibeko (2023) finds that integrated compliance frameworks in digital systems enable quick responses to regulatory changes. Masheleni (2022), however, cautions that system instability can undermine accuracy if not managed through sound IT governance.

4.2.3 Sub-Theme 3: Influence on Job Satisfaction and Motivation

Interview data suggest that digitalisation has a complex but largely positive impact on employee satisfaction and motivation. Participants stated that modern technologies enhance professional competence and workplace satisfaction. Access to efficient digital tools enables staff to address customer issues promptly, improving morale and engagement. The automation of repetitive processes reduces frustration, while data-driven decision-making fosters a sense of empowerment. However, frequent system upgrades and ongoing learning requirements were cited as potential sources of stress, particularly when training or support is insufficient. Thus, maintaining motivation requires balancing technological innovation with continuous employee development and support.

Illustrative participant quotations:

"Using modern technology makes me feel like I'm part of a forward-thinking organisation, which motivates me to perform better." (Participant 01)

"Using digital tools makes the job more interesting and gives me confidence in handling complex tasks." (Participant 04)

"Digitalisation has positively impacted my motivation and job satisfaction, though constant updates can be frustrating." (Participant 07)

Participants generally agreed that digital tools enhance motivation by fostering efficiency, professional growth, and confidence. Being able to meet customer needs quickly and accurately contributes to greater job satisfaction. However, the stress associated with rapid technological change can be demotivating when organisational support is weak. Therefore, employee happiness in digitalised environments depends not only on technology but also on effective training, communication, and emotional support.

These findings are consistent with existing research. Mamela (2021) found a positive link between AI adoption and employee motivation in South African banks, while Lumadi (2020) emphasised that digital communication platforms enhance collaboration and engagement. Sibeko (2023) similarly notes that digital integration strengthens professional identity and belonging. Conversely, Khosa (2024) and Nhlongwana (2024) warn that inadequate training and frequent system changes can lead to stress and burnout.

This study supports these views, highlighting that digitalisation can simultaneously promote satisfaction and induce strain. The results underscore the importance of comprehensive training and support to maximise motivational benefits while minimising psychological pressure.

4.3 – *Theme 2: Strategies for Overcoming Resistance to Digitalisation*

4.3.1 – Sub-Theme 1: Employee Fears and Concerns

Semi-structured interviews reveal that apprehension surrounding job security and technological change hinders digital adoption. Many employees fear job displacement due to automation and feel anxious about mastering complex new systems. Resistance is particularly strong among long-serving employees who are accustomed to manual operations. The rapid pace of change and insufficient adaptation time exacerbate these concerns, reducing motivation to embrace new tools and potentially limiting productivity gains.

Representative participant quotations:

"Some employees, particularly those who have been here longer, are hesitant since they feel the old ways worked fine." (Participant 03)

"There's also anxiety about adapting to constant changes and whether they'll receive enough support." (Participant 04)

"Some people worry that the new tech will replace jobs or make their skills useless." (Participant 05)

The findings show that job insecurity remains the most pressing concern among branch employees. A perceived lack of sufficient training and support amplifies these fears, particularly among less technologically proficient staff. Resistance to change reflects both cultural attachment to traditional practices and uncertainty regarding future employability. Consequently, effective change management, transparent communication, and continuous training are critical to overcoming resistance and fostering digital confidence.

These findings are consistent with broader scholarship on digital transformation challenges. Nhlongwana (2024) identifies job insecurity as a key barrier to engagement in automated environments. Masango (2021) and Lumadi (2020) both highlight insufficient skills development and loyalty to legacy systems as sources of resistance, while Sidali (2022) and Melamane (2023) advocate for transparent communication and targeted upskilling to alleviate fears. The present study supports these insights, underscoring the need for emotionally intelligent change management that builds employee trust and competence.

4.3.2 – Sub-Theme 2: Current Support Mechanisms

The findings indicate that Bank X employs several strategies to support employees in adapting to digital transformation. These include structured training sessions—both online and in-person—designed to improve digital skills and system proficiency. IT helpdesks play a central role in resolving day-to-day issues, while team-based digital champions provide peer-to-peer support and knowledge sharing. Management-led feedback forums enable employees to express challenges and suggest improvements. While these mechanisms are appreciated, participants highlighted inconsistencies in training frequency, content depth, and practical relevance, suggesting room for improvement.

Illustrative participant quotations:

"Bank X provides training sessions whenever new systems are introduced, both in-person and online modules." (Participant 01)

"Management encourages feedback and has digital champions in each team who promote learning." (Participant 06)

"Bank X offers training workshops and online tutorials when new tools are introduced, but sometimes the timing and depth of support vary." (Participant 02)

Participants' views highlight a combination of formal and informal support mechanisms that aid digital transition. Training programmes and IT helpdesks provide structured support, while digital champions foster collaboration and knowledge exchange. Feedback platforms empower employees to participate in digital strategy refinement. However, inconsistencies in training quality and occasional system downtimes hinder full engagement.

These findings align with existing studies emphasising that consistent, context-sensitive support is essential for successful digital transformation. Lumadi (2020) and Masango (2021) stress the importance of digital champions and helpdesks in reducing anxiety and maintaining productivity. Sidali (2022) highlights the value of feedback-driven adaptation, while Sibeko (2023) underscores blended learning approaches combining formal and peer-led support. The evidence here affirms that sustained, structured, and inclusive support systems are key to cultivating employee confidence and engagement in digitally evolving workplaces.

4.3.3 Sub-Theme 3: Recommendations of the Study

(A) – Enhance Digital Training and Upskilling Initiatives

The findings revealed that while most employees recognised the value of digitalisation, many lacked confidence in using new tools effectively. This highlighted the need for ongoing upskilling to sustain productivity in a rapidly evolving financial technology environment. Regular, structured training helps employees adapt more quickly, reduces errors, and improves service delivery (Mamela, 2021). Knowledge gaps, especially among mid-level staff, were found to cause inefficiencies, confirming that training must be both targeted and continuous. Bank X should therefore implement quarterly training tailored to departments and job roles, ensuring that employees remain proficient and adaptable.

(B) – Foster a Culture of Digital Adaptability and Change Readiness

Resistance to digital adoption, particularly among long-serving employees, often stemmed from fear of redundancy or limited knowledge. Organisational culture was identified as a key barrier, with studies noting that fixed workplace mindsets hinder transformation (Naidoo, 2021). Change readiness requires both mental and practical preparation, supported by transparent communication and inclusive participation (Wang, et a. 2023). Bank X should therefore prioritise workshops on digital readiness, supported by peer mentoring and incentive-based adaptation programmes, to build a culture of openness and innovation.

(C) – Improve Internal Communication Platforms and Collaboration Tools

Fragmented communication systems slowed decision-making and inter-branch coordination. Employees noted that outdated intranet platforms created bottlenecks, echoing findings that modern collaboration tools increase efficiency and alignment (Masango, 2021). To address this, Bank X should adopt mobile-accessible platforms such as Teams or Slack for instant messaging, file sharing, and project tracking, backed by IT support for onboarding and maintenance (Mamela, 2021).

(D) – Integrate Performance Monitoring into Digital Platforms

The study found gaps in employees' understanding of digital performance evaluations. Linking KPIs directly to digital dashboards enhances transparency and fairness (Wang, *et al*. 2025). Integrating performance monitoring into existing platforms allows real-time visibility and supports developmental feedback, provided mechanisms for appeals and clarification are included (Moyo, 2022).

(E) – Address Digital Fatigue and Support Work-Life Integration

Constant connectivity often blurred boundaries between work and personal life, leading to fatigue. Previous studies show unmanaged digital demands risk burnout and reduced

productivity (Naidoo, 2021). Bank X should introduce policies for digital downtime, encourage planned breaks, and provide wellness training to raise awareness of healthy digital engagement.

5 – Conclusion and Contributions

This study set out to explore how digitalisation is being implemented in modern banking and how it affects employee performance and day-to-day operations, while also exploring the challenges that may limit its effectiveness. The findings suggest that digital tools such as automation, real-time dashboards, and AI-driven systems have made work faster, more accurate, and more responsive to customer needs. At the same time, the study highlights that digital transformation is not without strain. Employees spoke about digital fatigue, resistance to constant change, uneven skill levels, and concerns about ongoing monitoring—factors that can weaken the long-term benefits of technological improvements if not properly managed.

By placing employee experiences at the centre of the discussion, this study shows that digital transformation is not simply about introducing new systems, but about how people adapt to and experience those systems in their daily work. The findings demonstrate that technology adoption is shaped not only by perceptions of usefulness, but also by organisational culture, leadership support, and opportunities for skills development. Drawing on qualitative evidence from a South African banking context, the study adds a grounded, human perspective to existing research. Ultimately, it suggests that successful digital transformation depends as much on supporting employees as it does on investing in technology.

Contributions

REBECCA KATE REFILWE LEBOGO: conceptualisation, data collection, writing editing.

FARAI NYIKA: conceptualisation, writing, editing.

MIKE MUZEKENY and KHALIDA AKBAR: writing and editing.

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