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Employee Well-Being after Continuous Organizational Transformation and Accelerated Change

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Abstract

Organizational transformation is increasingly experienced not as an isolated transition but as a sequence of overlapping restructurings, technological implementations, work redesigns, shifting priorities, and changing role expectations. This integrative review examines how such conditions may affect employee well-being by connecting evidence that is usually distributed across organizational-change, occupational-health, recovery, meaningful-work, identity, and work-design literatures. The review uses a transparent integrative approach combining longitudinal, multilevel, diary, qualitative, theoretical, meta-analytic, and methodological evidence while preserving differences in design and inferential strength. The synthesis identifies three employee-facing pathways through which continuing transformation may become consequential: cumulative demands and exhaustion, temporal disruption and impaired recovery, and threats to meaning or identity continuity. It further argues that these pathways cannot be understood solely as individual coping problems because workload configuration, change implementation, psychosocial conditions, work design, and organizational governance shape exposure and available resources. Evidence nevertheless remains heterogeneous. Change can be appraised as threatening or challenging, identity can be disrupted or preserved, and the consequences of intensified demands depend on occupational, temporal, and organizational conditions. The article therefore develops an integrative Transformation–Well-Being Process Framework as an organizing synthesis rather than a validated causal model. The framework redirects attention from discrete change events toward accumulation, recovery opportunities, meaning reconstruction, and structural responsibility while identifying the longitudinal, within-person, multilevel, and intervention evidence required for stronger tests.

Keywords: Exhaustion and cumulative demand, Recovery and temporal disruption, Meaning loss and identity strain, Structural responsibility for employee well-being, Well-being, Continuous transformation

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Introduction

Organizational change is conventionally narrated as a bounded movement from one state toward another: a restructuring is announced, a technology is introduced, a merger is completed, or a new operating model is implemented. Employees, however, may experience change less discretely. A restructuring can coincide with digital implementation, staffing adjustment, altered performance expectations, or new coordination arrangements, while earlier transitions remain unresolved. Evidence that perceived frequency and extent of organizational change are associated with employees' responses and well-being makes this accumulation important rather than merely semantic [1]. At the same time, the organizational-change literature does not provide a single settled account of what constitutes effective change or how scholarly findings should be

integrated with enacted change practice [2]. Continuous transformation should therefore be treated as a potential work condition whose consequences require explanation, not as an assumed universal characteristic of contemporary employment. This distinction also prevents the review from equating change exposure with inevitable deterioration. An affect-based account of organizational change emphasizes that recipients interpret change events and that appraisal and affect can generate heterogeneous responses [3]. Prospective multilevel evidence nevertheless indicates that exposure to organizational changes, including multiple changes, can be associated with subsequent clinically relevant mental distress [4]. Such findings make repeated exposure theoretically consequential while remaining observational: baseline health, job insecurity, change type, workload, occupation, and other work characteristics can influence both exposure and outcomes. The relevant question is thus not whether "change is stressful" in the abstract, but how transformation becomes translated into recurring demands, impaired restoration, altered meaning, or resource loss under particular organizational conditions.

Temporal evidence strengthens this process-oriented interpretation. During an organizational merger, work engagement and threat appraisal changed reciprocally across measurement waves rather than following a simple one-way deterioration sequence [5]. Employees may therefore enter subsequent transformation episodes with psychological resources, appraisals, and unresolved demands partly shaped by earlier episodes. This possibility shifts analytical attention from isolated change events toward sequences and feedback.

This integrative review accordingly examines continuous organizational transformation through four connected domains: cumulative demand and exhaustion, recovery and temporal disruption, meaning and identity strain, and structural responsibility for employee well-being. It asks where heterogeneous evidence converges, where it conflicts, and where the proposed cross-domain connections remain untested. The contribution is not a claim that continuous transformation has a uniform causal effect. Rather, the review develops an evidence-bounded explanation of how repeated organizational change may become a chronic work condition when its demands accumulate faster than employees and work systems can restore resources, temporal boundaries, or coherent meaning.

Review method

An integrative-review design was used because the focal problem spans empirical designs and theoretical traditions that cannot legitimately be reduced to a common effect estimate. Integrative reviews require explicit alignment between the review question, search strategy, evaluation logic, and form of synthesis [6]. Their contribution also depends on moving beyond article enumeration toward critical comparison of what is known, how it has been studied, and which conceptual connections remain unresolved [7]. The review therefore combined quantitative, longitudinal, multilevel, diary, qualitative, theoretical, meta-analytic, and methodological evidence while preserving differences in evidential status.

Search concepts combined variants of continuous organizational transformation with organizational change, restructuring, work intensification, exhaustion, recovery, psychological detachment, rumination, meaningful work, organizational identity, identity threat, psychosocial safety climate, work design, job demands and resources, and longitudinal or within-person methodology. Records were identified through targeted publisher, journal-site, and DOI-indexed scholarly searching, PubMed/PMC and institutional research portals, and backward or forward citation chaining. Multiple search routes were retained because scholarly search systems differ materially in retrieval coverage and functionality [8]. Eligibility required peer-reviewed journal publication, DOI verification, direct relevance to a planned review claim or synthesis domain, and sufficient methodological information for bounded interpretation.

Forty-eight records entered the controlled identification ledger. Five DOI duplicates were removed, leaving 43 unique records for title-and-abstract screening. Four were excluded at that stage. Thirty-nine full texts were sought and all were available. Six were excluded after assessment: two for insufficient transformation-specific fit, three because stronger evidence more directly served the same synthesis role, and one because its exceptional context limited the intended cross-domain transferability. Thirty-three sources remained for synthesis. Selection is reported using PRISMA-compatible conventions because standardized flow reporting improves transparency [9], while the underlying design remains an integrative review rather than a systematic effectiveness review.

Figure 1 reports the verified flow of records through identification, duplicate removal, screening, full-text assessment, exclusion, and final inclusion for this integrative review article.

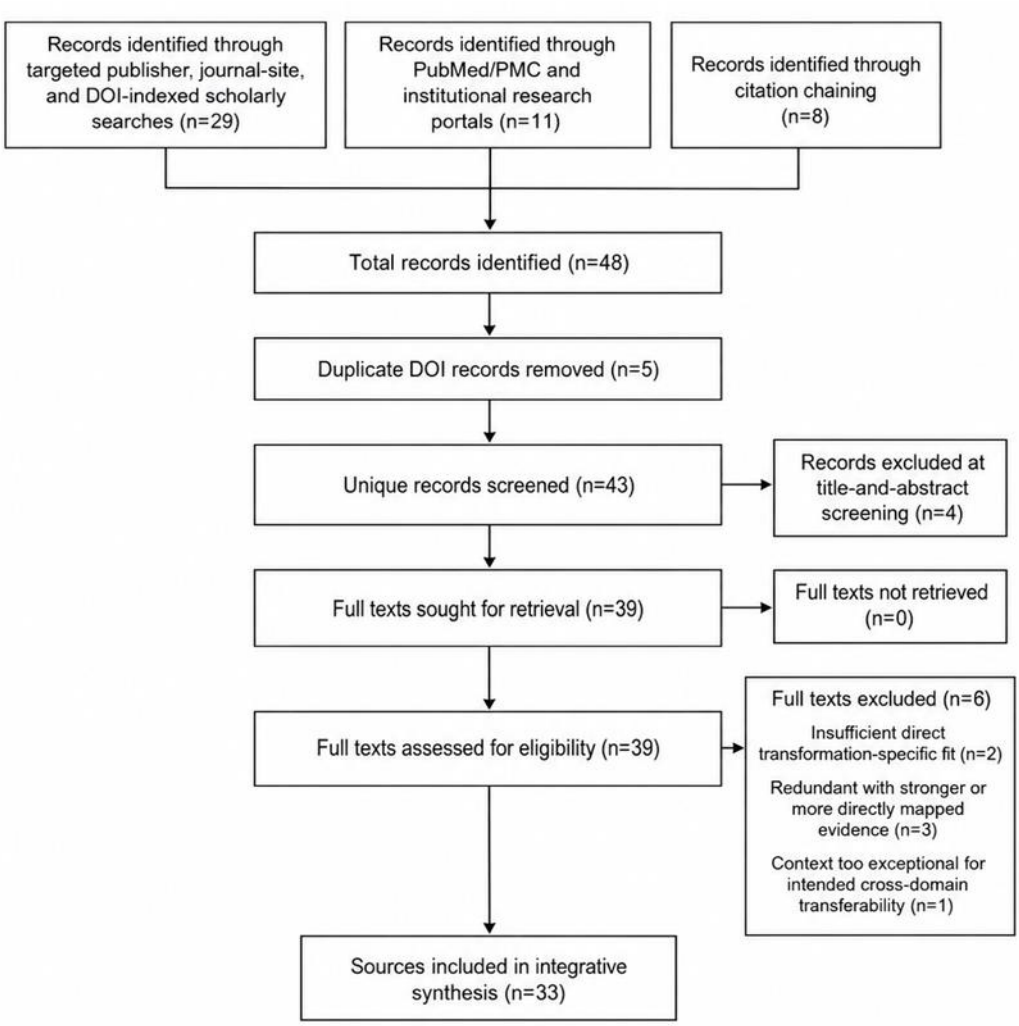

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram for Evidence Identification and Selection

Ensure every transition is arithmetically consistent. Do not add databases, exclusion reasons, numerical values, effect estimates, quality ratings, or methodological claims. Do not use color, grey shading, gradients, icons, logos, decorative imagery, three-dimensional effects, approval symbols, or certification marks. Maintain strong visual hierarchy, journal-column legibility, thin uniform rules, substantial white space, and export quality suitable for professional scholarly publication.

For synthesis, each eligible source was mapped by design, context or unit, focal construct, temporal horizon, reported mechanism, outcome, limitation, transferability boundary, and exact claim permitted. Evidence was compared across domains rather than treated as directly commensurable. Particular attention was given to whether findings reflected cross-sectional association, longitudinal change, within-person process, multilevel context, qualitative interpretation, or theoretical integration. Contradictory and conditional findings were retained rather than averaged conceptually. The resulting synthesis therefore distinguishes reported evidence from cross-domain interpretation and from the original framework proposed later in the article.

Exhaustion and cumulative demand

Exhaustion is frequently treated as an individual endpoint, but under recurring transformation the analytically prior question concerns how organizational change alters the demands that consume energetic and cognitive resources. Evidence from restructuring shows that deteriorating well-being can be linked to increased work intensity and that consultation may buffer some of this relationship [10]. This finding locates part of the burden in how change is enacted rather than in transformation as an abstract event. A broader review of intensified job demands similarly reports predominantly adverse employee outcomes while emphasizing heterogeneity across demand types and contexts [11]. Cumulative demand therefore refers here not to a quantified "dose" of change but to repeated or overlapping demands that employees must accommodate across successive change episodes.

The level of analysis is consequential. In healthcare, intensified demands such as time pressure and multitasking have been examined at both employee and work-unit levels, with unit-level conditions related to exhaustion [12]. Such evidence

challenges interpretations in which strain is explained exclusively by individual resilience or coping style. It also cautions against universalization: healthcare work involves particular staffing, service, and coordination demands, and the same pattern cannot simply be transferred unchanged to other sectors.

Longitudinal evidence from the job demands-resources tradition provides a broader temporal foundation. Across longitudinal studies, job demands and resources show meaningful relationships with later employee well-being, although findings differ by construct, design, lag, and context [13]. The implication for transformation is conditional. Organizational change is likely to matter more when it repeatedly regenerates high demands, reduces resources, or redistributes work before prior demands have stabilized. The literature does not establish a universal transformation threshold above which exhaustion follows automatically.

The convergence is therefore narrower but more defensible: repeated organizational change, restructuring-related intensification, and unit-level intensified demands indicate that transformation may become a cumulative well-being exposure when successive changes repeatedly alter workload and resource conditions [4, 10, 12]. Other explanations remain plausible, including ordinary workload, staffing levels, job insecurity, baseline well-being, occupational context, and employees' appraisal of the change itself. Continuous transformation should consequently be conceptualized as a potential generator or amplifier of demands, not as an independent diagnostic category.

Table 1 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for review design, evidence domains, and extraction framework for employee well-being after continuous organizational transformation and accelerated change.

Table 1. Review design, evidence domains, and extraction framework for Employee Well-Being After Continuous Organizational Transformation and Accelerated Change.

Evidence domain or review construct	Review question	Eligible evidence type	Extraction fields	Synthesis role	Main limitation	Interpretation boundary
Transformation exposure	When does change become recurrent exposure?	Longitudinal, multilevel, change-event studies	Frequency, scope, appraisal, timing	Define exposure	Change types differ	Repetition does not prove cumulative harm
Integrative-review method	How can heterogeneous evidence be combined?	Methodological reviews, reporting guidance	Design, search, selection, synthesis	Structure evidence integration	No common effect metric	Integration is not meta-analysis
Cumulative demand	How is transformation translated into work demands?	Restructuring, intensification, multilevel studies	Work intensity, time pressure, workload, resources	Energetic-strain pathway	Confounding by ordinary workload	No universal change “dose”
Exhaustion	Which demand patterns correspond with strain?	Longitudinal and multilevel evidence	Demand level, exhaustion, resources, context	Well-being consequence	Heterogeneous measures	Association is not deterministic causation
Recovery and temporal disruption	How might demands persist beyond work episodes?	**Proposed extraction domain**	Detachment, rumination, temporal boundaries	Connect effort with restoration	Transformation-specific evidence limited	Pathway remains to be integrated
Meaning and identity	How can transformation alter significance or continuity?	**Proposed extraction domain**	Meaning, identification, identity threat, continuity	Interpretive pathway	Constructs are non-equivalent	No assumption of inevitable identity loss
Structural responsibility	Which organizational conditions shape exposure and resources?	**Proposed extraction domain**	Work design, climate, consultation, governance	Locate responsibility beyond coping	Context dependence	Structural influence is not total control

Note. “Proposed extraction domain” denotes an article-specific review classification rather than a construct validated by the cited studies.

Recovery and temporal disruption

Cumulative demands cannot be evaluated only during working time because employee well-being also depends on what happens after effort expenditure. Recovery refers to processes through which psychophysiological and cognitive systems return toward less activated states following work demands. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that recovery experiences—including psychological detachment and related forms of off-job restoration—are systematically associated with employee well-being [14]. These findings do not establish a transformation-specific effect, but they provide a crucial temporal

mechanism: the consequences of demanding work may depend partly on whether employees can disengage and replenish resources before the next demand episode.

The recovery paradox further complicates the assumption that greater strain automatically produces greater restoration. High job stressors may increase employees' need for recovery while simultaneously making psychological disengagement more difficult [15]. Organizational transformation may intensify this tension when changing priorities, unresolved implementation problems, or continual adaptation requirements keep work psychologically salient outside formal work hours. Temporal disruption can also be technologically mediated. Work-related information and communication technology use outside working hours has been associated with work-to-home conflict, but effects vary with integration preferences, integration norms, and work demands [16]. Technology therefore does not constitute an inherently harmful mechanism; organizational expectations and boundary conditions matter.

Diary evidence illustrates a more proximal process. Unfinished work, job stress, and associated competence-related experiences can contribute to work-related rumination during weekends [17]. Such findings are important because formal cessation of work does not necessarily terminate cognitive engagement with unresolved demands. Across recovery research, demanding work can therefore spill across temporal boundaries through insufficient detachment and persistent cognitive activation [14, 15, 17]. In a transformation context, overlapping initiatives may be consequential when new adaptation demands emerge before earlier ones have been psychologically or practically resolved.

The proposed connection nevertheless exceeds what these recovery studies directly establish. They investigate work stress, recovery, technology use, and rumination rather than a validated construct of "continuous-transformation recovery debt." The evidence supports a plausible temporal pathway, not a measured transformation-specific accumulation coefficient. Baseline workload, personality, home demands, boundary preferences, schedule control, occupational norms, and external shocks may all shape recovery independently of transformation. The integrative implication is therefore bounded: accelerated change may threaten well-being when its organizational enactment repeatedly consumes recovery opportunities, but direct longitudinal tests must distinguish transformation exposure from the broader demand conditions with which it often co-occurs.

Meaning loss and identity strain

Well-being under continuous transformation cannot be reduced to energetic depletion. Work also supplies significance, continuity, and membership, and organizational change can alter each of these. Meaningful work is shaped by factors operating at individual, job, organizational, and societal levels rather than by employee interpretation alone [18]. This multilevel perspective matters because transformation may change task significance, role coherence, valued relationships, or the connection between current work and a previously intelligible organizational purpose. Meaning loss is therefore treated here as a possible change in perceived significance or coherence, not as an inevitable response to change.

Identity processes provide a second route. Research on organizational takeover suggests that responses to change depend partly on whether employees can maintain or reconstruct organizational identification and continuity [19]. Change can thus preserve, strengthen, or destabilize identity; the direction cannot be assumed in advance. Longitudinal qualitative evidence further shows how persistent organizational paradoxes can generate identity threat and reshape the relationship between members and organizations [20]. This evidence is process-rich but context-bound, so it supports mechanism identification rather than prevalence estimates.

Identity strain can also arise when employees must sustain several organizational memberships simultaneously. Multiple-team membership has been associated with identity strain and cognitive depletion, although the pattern is contingent on team and identification conditions [21]. Such evidence is adjacent to, rather than direct evidence of, enterprise transformation. Its relevance lies in showing that repeated demands to answer "where do I belong?" can themselves consume cognitive and psychological resources.

A further distinction concerns whether meaning loss precedes exhaustion or follows from it. The available studies do not permit a single ordering. Reduced resources may make identity work more difficult, while identity threat may itself increase cognitive load and rumination. Conversely, preserved continuity or renewed meaningfulness may coexist with demanding change. The review therefore treats energetic, temporal, and identity pathways as analytically separable but potentially coupled. This prevents a common inferential shortcut in which any report of exhaustion is assumed to indicate lost meaning, or any identity disruption is interpreted as evidence of deteriorating health.

The integrative implication is that accelerated transformation may become consequential when employees repeatedly reconstruct what their work means, which collective they identify with, and whether prior commitments remain recognizable. Yet identity continuity, status, participation, change valence, and pre-existing identification can alter this pathway. Meaning and identity should therefore be analyzed alongside exhaustion and recovery rather than treated as interchangeable indicators of distress.

Table 2 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for cross-study findings, mechanisms, convergence, and conflict in employee well-being after continuous organizational transformation and accelerated change.

Table 2. Cross-study findings, mechanisms, convergence, and conflict in Employee Well-Being After Continuous Organizational Transformation and Accelerated Change.

Construct, mechanism, or relationship	Representative context	Reported finding	Evidence design	Convergent evidence	Conflicting evidence	Methodological concern	Review interpretation
Repeated change exposure	Organizational change	Multiple changes can correspond with later distress	Prospective multilevel	Change perceptions also relate to well-being	Appraisal trajectories can differ	Residual confounding	Accumulation is plausible, not deterministic
Demand intensification	Restructuring and healthcare	Restructuring-related work intensity relates to well-being ; intensified demands relate to exhaustion	Field and multilevel	Longitudinal demand-resource evidence supports temporal strain logic	Effects differ across demand forms	Sector and measure heterogeneity	Transformation may operate through redesigned demands
Recovery disruption	General work and off-job time	Stressors can impede restoration	Review, diary, field	Meta-analytic recovery evidence supports well-being relevance	Boundary effects depend on norms and preferences	Limited transformation-specific testing	Temporal carry-over is a plausible pathway
Meaning and identity	Takeovers, paradox, multi-team work	Identity continuity can affect change responses paradox can generate identity threat multiple memberships can create identity strain	Multi-study and qualitative	Meaningful work has multilevel antecedents	Direction and severity remain context-dependent	Non-equivalent constructs	Identity disruption is possible, not inevitable

Structural responsibility for employee well-being

A transformation-centered well-being account becomes incomplete if responsibility is located mainly in employees' coping capacity. Organizational intervention research shows that effects depend on what is implemented, for whom, and under which contextual and implementation conditions [22]. Structural responsibility therefore refers to organizational responsibility for modifiable conditions of work—such as demand configuration, participation, resources, temporal expectations, and job design—rather than a claim that organizations fully determine employee health.

Psychosocial safety climate illustrates such an upstream condition. Longitudinal evidence links stronger psychosocial safety climate with lower ill-being pathways through psychological need thwarting and burnout-related processes [23]. The study does not establish climate as the sole cause of well-being, but it supports shifting analysis beyond individual resilience toward organizational priorities and practices that shape whether psychological health is protected.

Work design provides a broader structural mechanism. Contemporary work-design scholarship emphasizes that job characteristics can be deliberately shaped through multiple pathways [24]. This is especially relevant when transformation changes tasks, coordination, autonomy, workload, feedback, or responsibility. In digitally mediated work, automation and algorithms affect employees partly through the jobs and work systems organizations construct around technological capabilities [25]. Technological change therefore should not be treated as an autonomous force with a uniform psychological outcome.

Structural responsibility also operates at several levels. Portfolio decisions determine how many initiatives compete for attention; unit-level implementation determines staffing, sequencing, and local participation; job design determines how responsibilities and autonomy are redistributed; and everyday managerial practice influences whether uncertainty is discussable. These levels should not be collapsed into a generic notion of "support." An organization may communicate support while simultaneously increasing incompatible demands, or formally grant autonomy while transferring responsibility without adequate resources. The relevant test is therefore enacted work conditions rather than policy language alone.

The practical implication is bounded: organizations can influence the conditions through which transformation becomes demanding, restorative, meaningful, or destabilizing, but the same formal intervention may be enacted differently across units and occupations. Structural responsibility consequently means designing and governing transformation with attention to

workload, recovery opportunity, participation, psychosocial conditions, and role coherence while recognizing employee agency and contextual variation.

Proposed transformation–well-being framework

The proposed Transformation–Well-Being Process Framework organizes the reviewed evidence around transformation exposure, three employee-facing pathways, and upstream structural conditions. Job demands-resources theory provides one foundation by distinguishing demand-driven health impairment from resource-supported motivational processes [26]. Conservation of resources theory adds a temporal logic in which resource loss and gain can accumulate rather than remain confined to a single episode [27]. Work-design research locates many demands and resources in organizationally shaped task, social, and contextual characteristics [28]. Leadership evidence further indicates that employee well-being can be influenced through multiple behavioral and relational pathways rather than through a single uniformly beneficial style [29].

The framework therefore proposes that overlapping transformation episodes may affect well-being through three analytically distinct but potentially interacting pathways: cumulative demand and exhaustion; temporal disruption and impaired recovery; and meaning or identity strain. Demand-resource dynamics, resource accumulation, and work design provide complementary foundations for this synthesis [26-28]. Structural conditions—including implementation processes, psychosocial climate, participation, leadership, work design, and technology-use expectations—are positioned upstream because they can shape exposure, resources, and interpretation.

The framework also permits recursion. Reduced recovery may leave fewer resources for subsequent change; identity threat may alter appraisal of later initiatives; and supportive redesign may replenish resources or preserve continuity. These feedbacks are proposed integrative relationships, not demonstrated causal loops. No relative pathway weight, safe transformation pace, or universal threshold is established.

The framework additionally separates visibility from performance and formal participation from consequential influence. Transformation programs can generate dashboards, meetings, surveys, or consultation mechanisms without demonstrating that employees have sufficient capacity, recovery opportunity, or influence over workload-producing decisions. Such practices may still be useful, but their presence cannot be treated as evidence that structural risks have been resolved. Governance conditions are therefore represented as moderators and design variables rather than presumed protective interventions.

Table 3 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for evidence limitations, unresolved questions, and future research priorities.

Table 3. Evidence limitations, unresolved questions, and future research priorities.

Context or level	Moderator or boundary condition	Organizational implication	Alternative explanation	Transferability limit	Uncertainty	Research need
Repeated transformation	Change valence and appraisal	Assess portfolios rather than isolated initiatives	Baseline health or job insecurity	Change types differ	Accumulation threshold unknown	Prospective transformation-exposure measures
Work-unit demand	Staffing, occupation, resources	Examine workload produced by implementation	Ordinary workload	Sector dependence	Cross-level mechanisms unclear	Multilevel longitudinal designs
Recovery	Boundary norms and schedule control	Protect credible recovery opportunities	Home demands or preferences	Context-specific temporal norms	Transformation-specific effect uncertain	Transformation-linked diary studies
Meaning and identity	Identification, continuity, status	Support coherent role and membership transitions	Pre-existing identification	Takeover and team contexts	Direction is conditional	Longitudinal qualitative and mixed-method designs
Structural governance	Climate, work design, leadership	Treat work design as a transformation variable [24]	Technology effects depend on enacted design [25]	Organizational context	Intervention transportability uncertain	Context-sensitive intervention studies
Dynamic framework	Time scale and measurement	Avoid static one-time diagnosis	Stable individual differences	Requires repeated measurement	Unified framework remains unvalidated	Within-person, latent-change, and measurement-invariance testing

The framework's central contribution is therefore organizational rather than diagnostic: it changes the unit of inquiry from employee reaction to a single change toward the sequence of exposures, resource conditions, recovery intervals, meaning reconstruction, and governance arrangements through which repeated transformation is experienced.

Organizational implications and future research

Testing this account requires methods capable of observing change as it unfolds. Experience-sampling designs can capture short-timescale fluctuations in appraisal, demands, recovery, and affect while making sampling burden and reactivity explicit [30]. Such designs are particularly useful for distinguishing a difficult day from a recurring within-person pattern. More generally, within-person research asks questions that cannot be answered by comparing employees who simply differ from one another on average [31].

Longer transformation trajectories require multiwave models. Latent change score approaches can evaluate development and reciprocal change under explicit modeling assumptions [32]. However, strong substantive conclusions require evidence that constructs retain comparable meaning over time; simulation evidence shows that measurement noninvariance can bias latent-change interpretation [33]. Future studies should therefore measure transformation exposure directly, distinguish overlapping initiatives from ordinary workload, and combine within-person, multilevel, intervention, and qualitative identity evidence.

Future tests should also establish temporal ordering. Studies could measure transformation episodes, workload shifts, recovery, and identity variables before, during, and after overlapping initiatives while linking employee observations to unit-level implementation data. Quasi-experimental comparisons or staggered organizational rollouts could strengthen inference where randomization is impractical. Qualitative follow-up would remain important because equivalent scale scores may conceal different experiences of continuity, loss, or adaptation.

Organizational implications should remain equally conditional. Rather than prescribing a universally optimal change cadence, the synthesis directs attention to change portfolios, workload capacity, recovery opportunities, identity continuity, psychosocial climate, and enacted work design. Evaluation should examine not merely whether a change was implemented but whether its cumulative demands, temporal spillover, and meaning consequences differed across occupations, units, and employee groups.

Conclusion

Continuous organizational transformation is best understood neither as inherently harmful nor as a sequence of psychologically independent events. The reviewed evidence indicates that organizational change can become relevant to well-being when it repeatedly reshapes demands, interferes with restoration, or destabilizes meaningful and identity-bearing relationships to work. These pathways are conditioned by appraisal, occupational context, resources, work design, psychosocial conditions, leadership, technology-use expectations, and the way change is implemented.

The Transformation–Well-Being Process Framework integrates these domains while deliberately stopping short of causal validation. Its principal contribution is to shift analysis from isolated change events and individual coping toward temporal accumulation and the organizational conditions that structure exposure, recovery, and meaning. The framework does not establish a universal threshold for transformation, a fixed sequence of deterioration, or a single organizational remedy.

Progress therefore depends on research capable of separating within-person change from between-person differences, testing reciprocal processes across adequate time horizons, establishing measurement comparability, and examining implementation at multiple organizational levels. Until such evidence accumulates, the framework should be treated as an organizing synthesis for inquiry: one that makes employee well-being a property of how transformation is designed and experienced, while retaining uncertainty about when, for whom, and through which pathway accelerated change becomes consequential.

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