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Organizational Nostalgia, Identity Protection, and Resistance During Digital Transformation

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Abstract

Digital transformation often changes more than technologies. It can unsettle routines, expertise, relationships, status arrangements, and understandings of what an organization has been and should remain. Such disruptions create conditions in which employees may look backward, yet backward orientation is frequently treated either as resistance or as benign attachment to organizational history. This Original Conceptual Theory Article develops a more conditional account. It proposes the Theory of Transformation Nostalgia, explaining how perceived discontinuity between valued organizational identity and emerging digital arrangements may activate organizational nostalgia and how selective memorialization may subsequently channel that nostalgia toward different responses. Three proposed pathways are distinguished: temporal-bridging nostalgia, in which valued elements of the past are connected to a credible future identity; defensive-restorative nostalgia, in which an idealized past becomes a benchmark for preserving or restoring prior arrangements; and rhetorically mobilized nostalgia, in which organizational actors selectively invoke history to legitimate competing transformation claims. Threat attribution, identification, burnout, job insecurity, perceived technological replacement, future-continuity credibility, institutional legitimacy, and narrative power are proposed as boundary conditions. The theory does not presume that nostalgia obstructs change or improves it. Its contribution is an explicitly non-validated framework linking nostalgia, identity protection, memory selection, resistance, and sensemaking while preserving boundaries between individual and organizational inference, memory and history, association and causation, and conceptual plausibility and empirical validation.

Keywords: Organizational nostalgia, Identity protection, Resistance during digital transformation, Digital change and nostalgia, Nostalgia as resistance and sensemaking, Theory of transformation nostalgia

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Introduction

Digital transformation is typically presented as a forward-looking organizational project involving technologies, data, automation, and redesigned work. Its organizational significance, however, lies partly in what it disrupts. Digital transformation can generate technology-enabled disturbances that provoke strategic responses, structural changes, and altered approaches to organizational value creation [1]. Understanding employees' reactions therefore requires attention not only to new technological capability but also to what emerging arrangements appear to displace.



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This issue becomes especially consequential when transformation reaches organizational identity. Digital transformation may differ from narrower IT-enabled change because it can involve reconsideration of value propositions and organizational identity [2]. Employees may therefore be asked not merely to learn new systems but to reinterpret expertise, roles, status, relationships, and assumptions about what makes their organization recognizable.

Transformation is also rarely a bounded event. Scholarship increasingly characterizes it as continuing adaptation across strategy, structures, and environmental relationships [3]. Repeated change may repeatedly reopen questions about what should remain continuous. Looking backward under these conditions need not represent rejection of the future; it may provide temporal material for interpreting an uncertain present.

Direct evidence on organizational nostalgia makes this distinction critical. Perceived organizational change can evoke organizational nostalgia, and such nostalgia can under some conditions accompany stronger commitment, citizenship behavior, and support for change [4]. Nostalgia therefore cannot be theorized as inherently anti-transformation.

Organizational nostalgia refers to sentimental longing for valued aspects or experiences associated with an organization's past and has been developed as a distinct measurable construct [5]. It should be distinguished from organizational identification, commitment, historical knowledge, dissatisfaction, conservatism, and resistance.

This article develops an original, non-empirical Theory of Transformation Nostalgia (TTN). TTN proposes that nostalgia becomes consequential through interpretations of what the organizational past signifies for an emerging future. Rather than asking whether nostalgia is beneficial or harmful, the theory asks when it becomes a temporal bridge, a defensive reference point, or a rhetorically mobilized resource.

Theoretical foundations of organizational nostalgia

Organizational nostalgia has regulatory potential because it can reconnect employees with valued meanings associated with work. Evidence indicates that organizational nostalgia can reduce turnover intentions through increased work meaning, with burnout moderating this relationship [6]. This mechanism demonstrates that looking backward can restore present significance, although it does not establish that nostalgia facilitates digital transformation.

Contemporary theorizing similarly suggests that threatening organizational circumstances, including change, may activate nostalgia as a resource for restoring meaningfulness or threatened identification [7]. The limitation is directional: the same nostalgic orientation may support attachment, intensify perceived loss, or become incorporated into opposition.

Self-continuity offers one possible explanation. Research on nostalgia indicates that identity narrative can contribute to greater perceived continuity across time [8]. Applied cautiously to organizations, remembered organizational experiences may help employees connect who they were in relation to an organization with who they can remain during change. That organizational application remains proposed rather than established.

Authenticity provides another mechanism. Nostalgia has been shown to increase perceived authenticity, which can contribute to psychological well-being [9]. During transformation, authenticity may become relevant when employees assess whether emerging practices remain compatible with valued organizational or professional principles.

These mechanisms should not be collapsed. Work meaning, continuity, authenticity, positive affect, identification, and commitment are analytically different. TTN therefore treats nostalgia as a potentially restorative orientation while leaving transformation-specific mediation, temporal ordering, collective effects, and causal consequences open to empirical testing.

Organizational identity protection

Digital transformation becomes identity-relevant when organizational members perceive valued attributes as being displaced, delegitimized, or rendered discontinuous. Organizational identity-threat theory indicates that employees need not react uniformly. Threat appraisal and attribution may contribute to defensive identification, rallying around the organization, or distancing from it [10]. Identity protection is therefore broader than resistance.

Organizational identities can also change while retaining continuity. Long-term identity trajectories may involve refinement of existing identity claims or enrichment through incorporation of new elements [11]. Digital transformation should consequently not be framed as a simple contest between preserving an old identity and accepting a new one.

Organizational identification is analytically distinct from organizational identity. Identification reflects how organizational membership contributes to individual self-definition and develops through multiple antecedents [12]. Strong identification may make transformation-related discontinuity more personally consequential, but it neither demonstrates nostalgia nor establishes a shared organizational response.

Change also generates active identity work. Research on planned change demonstrates how organizational members construct distinctions between "us" and relevant others while negotiating change [13]. During digital transformation, equivalent distinctions may emerge around legacy versus digital expertise, professional judgment versus algorithmic decision making, or established versus emerging occupational identities.

Identity-protective responses are therefore better understood as interpretive trajectories shaped by threat appraisal, evolving identity structures, and identification work [10, 11, 13]. TTN proposes that nostalgia can enter these trajectories in several

ways: supporting continuity-preserving adaptation, encouraging defensive restoration, accompanying identity distancing, or contributing to reconstruction. These pathways are proposed rather than empirically established.

Selective memory and idealized pasts

Nostalgia depends on memory, but organizational memory is not a neutral repository of previous events. Organizational remembering and forgetting are socially organized processes through which some experiences become durable while others recede [14]. Transformation may therefore activate different versions of the organizational past across occupational, hierarchical, or demographic groups.

Memory must also be separated from historical reconstruction. Retrospective organizational accounts are not epistemically equivalent to historiographically reconstructed histories [15]. A nostalgic memory may be sincere yet partial; archival evidence may likewise be incomplete. Selectivity therefore should not automatically be interpreted as falsification.

The content of nostalgia matters. Research on collective nostalgia indicates that different representations of a shared past can support different subsequent attitudes and actions [16]. In organizational settings, memories emphasizing adaptation, solidarity, craft, hierarchy, status, stability, or professional autonomy may consequently produce different interpretations of transformation. This organizational application remains proposed.

History may additionally be mobilized strategically. Organizational actors can employ rhetorical history to influence how the present and future are interpreted [17]. Leaders may frame digital transformation as faithful to founding values, while employees may invoke the same history to argue that transformation violates those values.

TTN introduces selective memorialization as a proposed mechanism describing how transformation-relevant elements of the organizational past become differentially retrieved, emphasized, and interpreted. It does not presume deception; selection may be sincere, strategic, unconscious, or collectively produced.

Table 1 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for organizational nostalgia, identity protection, and resistance during digital transformation.

Table 1. Definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for Organizational Nostalgia, Identity Protection, and Resistance During Digital Transformation

Construct or component	Definition	Problem addressed	Evidence basis	Distinction from adjacent concepts	Proposed role	Uncertainty	Boundary statement
Digital transformation	Organization-level reconfiguration enabled by digital technologies and involving changes in work, structures, capabilities, or value creation.	Establishes the change context in which temporal and identity concerns may emerge.	Established digital-transformation scholarship.	Broader than digitization, system implementation, or isolated technology adoption.	Contextual trigger rather than a psychological mechanism.	Transformations differ in depth, pace, participation, and consequences.	Digital change does not inherently produce identity threat or nostalgia.
Organizational nostalgia	Sentimental longing for valued people, practices, experiences, meanings, or conditions associated with an organization's past.	Identifies the focal backward-looking orientation.	Established organizational-nostalgia research.	Distinct from commitment, identification, conservatism, dissatisfaction, and resistance.	Focal affective-cognitive orientation activated under some change conditions.	Intensity, content, and consequences may vary across members.	Nostalgia is neither inherently constructive nor inherently resistant.
Organizational identity	Temporally situated understandings of what members perceive the organization to be and what makes it recognizable or distinctive.	Clarifies what may appear threatened, retained, or reconstructed.	Established organizational-identity research.	Distinct from individual identification with the organization.	Primary continuity referent within the proposed theory.	Organizational identities may be plural or contested.	No fixed organizational essence is assumed.
Organizational identification	Degree to which organizational membership contributes to	Explains why equivalent transformation may matter	Established identification literature.	Not equivalent to organizational identity, loyalty, commitment, or nostalgia.	Potential conditioning factor for identity-	Antecedents and strength vary across employees.	Strong identification does not establish

	individual self-definition.	differently across members.			relevant responses.		nostalgic attachment.
Identity-discontinuity appraisal	Proposed construct: perception that transformation disrupts continuity between valued organizational identity and an emerging organizational future.	Explains why technically similar transformations may provoke different reactions.	Original theoretical synthesis informed by identity-threat and transformation research.	More specific than uncertainty, dissatisfaction, or resistance.	Proposed initiating appraisal in TTN.	Measurement and temporal ordering remain untested.	Discontinuity is an interpretation, not an objective property of technology.
Identity protection	Efforts to preserve, defend, reinterpret, or distance oneself from identity attributes perceived as threatened.	Explains responses to perceived identity disruption.	Established identity-threat and identity-work scholarship.	Broader than resistance and may include adaptation.	Proposed branching condition linking nostalgia to different pathways.	Responses may depend on attribution, status, and context.	Identity protection is not automatically dysfunctional.
Organizational memory	Socially organized processes through which organizational experiences are remembered, reproduced, suppressed, or forgotten.	Explains how organizational pasts remain available during transformation.	Established organizational-memory scholarship.	Distinct from historically verified reconstruction.	Memory reservoir from which nostalgic material may be drawn.	Memory availability differs among groups.	Remembered experience should not be assumed historically complete.
Selective memorialization	Proposed construct: differential retrieval, emphasis, and interpretation of past organizational attributes that become salient for evaluating transformation.	Explains why particular versions of the past become consequential.	Original synthesis informed by memory, nostalgia-content, and rhetorical-history research.	More specific than general remembering and does not necessarily imply distortion.	Proposed mechanism between nostalgic activation and pathway formation.	Content-selection processes require direct study.	Selectivity may be sincere, strategic, unconscious, or collective.
Resistance	Behavioral, discursive, symbolic, or relational opposition to organizational arrangements or change.	Prevents nostalgia from being treated automatically as opposition.	Established resistance scholarship.	Distinct from negative affect, hesitation, nostalgia, or disagreement alone.	Possible downstream consequence of some nostalgic interpretations.	Resistance varies in visibility, intensity, and target.	Nostalgia and resistance cannot be inferred from one another.
Temporal-bridging appraisal	Proposed construct: interpretation that valued organizational identity can continue through altered technologies, practices, or structures.	Explains continuity without preserving prior arrangements intact.	Original synthesis informed by identity-continuity and sensemaking research.	Different from unconditional acceptance of change.	Proposed adaptive pathway connecting past identity with a credible future.	Transformation-specific mediation is untested.	No demonstrated organizational effect is implied.
Defensive-restorative appraisal	Proposed construct: interpretation that valued identity can be protected only by preserving or	Explains when nostalgic attachment may become oppositional.	Original synthesis informed by identity-threat and resistance scholarship.	Distinct from justified concerns about insecurity, fairness, surveillance, or competence.	Proposed pathway toward preservation, withdrawal, or opposition.	Rival explanations require testing.	No causal pathway from nostalgia to resistance is presumed.

	recovering prior arrangements.						
	Proposed construct:						
Rhetorically mobilized nostalgia	strategic or collective invocation of selected organizational pasts to legitimate competing transformation positions.	Introduces power and narrative authority into nostalgia theory.	Original synthesis informed by rhetorical-history research.	Different from ordinary commemoration or reminiscence.	Proposed political pathway shaping which interpretation becomes influential.	Motives and narrative control may vary.	Historical invocation is not automatically manipulation.

Table note. Constructs marked proposed are original components of the Theory of Transformation Nostalgia and require empirical testing. The table distinguishes conceptual plausibility from empirical validation and does not imply causal ordering, effect magnitude, universal applicability, or implementation readiness.

Nostalgia as resistance and sensemaking

Digital transformation unfolds through interpretation as well as implementation. Research on transformation strategy making shows that digital strategies may emerge iteratively through experimentation, learning, and enactment rather than through implementation of a fully specified blueprint [18]. Such ambiguity provides space for organizational members to use memories of earlier practices when judging what emerging arrangements mean.

Resistance must nevertheless remain separate from nostalgic feeling. Organizational resistance encompasses overt and covert, individual and collective responses to power and change [19]. A nostalgic employee is not necessarily resisting, and a resistant employee need not be nostalgic. Within TTN, nostalgia becomes relevant to resistance only when remembered identity is translated into opposition, preservation, withdrawal, or delegitimation.

Algorithmic work demonstrates why this distinction is necessary. Algorithmic systems can reorganize monitoring, evaluation, coordination, and managerial control while producing contested worker responses [20]. Such contestation may arise from autonomy, surveillance, professional judgment, fairness, or control concerns independently of nostalgia.

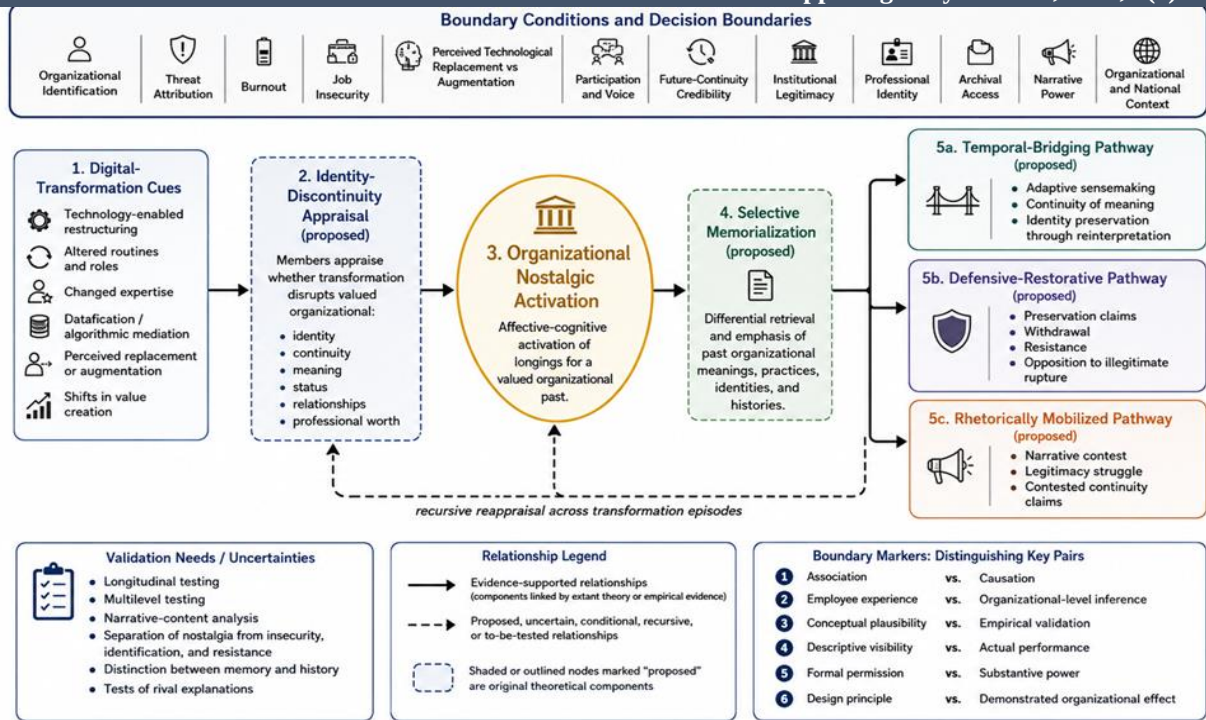
Technology-specific threat can likewise operate through other mechanisms. Experimental evidence indicates that replacement by robots may produce reactions distinct from equivalent replacement by humans [21]. Perceived technological displacement can therefore generate threat even without idealization of the organizational past. Transformation and resistance are enacted through evolving processes in which strategy, control, and opposition can be negotiated rather than simply accepted or rejected [18-20].

TTN consequently distinguishes resistant nostalgia from nostalgic sensemaking. Nostalgia becomes resistant when valued past identity is interpreted as incompatible with emerging arrangements. It may instead support sensemaking when remembered attributes provide continuity cues for interpreting an altered future. Evidence that organizational nostalgia can accompany support for organizational change reinforces this conditional interpretation [4].

Proposed theory of transformation nostalgia

Digital transformation can modify the foundations around which organizational meaning and identity develop. Learning algorithms, for example, can redistribute expertise, coordination, and control [22]. TTN begins when such changes are appraised as disrupting continuity in valued organizational identity, expertise, relationships, status, routines, or meaning. Identity-discontinuity appraisal is therefore proposed as an interpretation rather than a technological property.

Figure 1 presents the original conceptual synthesis for theory of transformation nostalgia, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.



The figure is an original conceptual synthesis developed for 'Organizational Nostalgia, Identity Protection, and Resistance During Digital Transformation.' Arrows and grouping indicate evidence-supported or proposed relationships rather than measured effect sizes. The figure does not represent a validated causal model, universal organizational prescription, regulatory determination, or deployment-ready system.

Figure 1. Theory of Transformation Nostalgia

TTN proposes that nostalgic activation is followed by selective memorialization, after which identity interpretations branch. Research on identity transition suggests that organizational continuity can be negotiated through repeated adaptive sensemaking rather than abrupt replacement of one identity by another [23]. TTN extends this reasoning by proposing that remembered organizational identity can become material for such sensemaking.

Transformation may also involve ongoing strategic renewal rather than one discrete conversion [24]. TTN therefore proposes recursion: members may repeatedly reassess whether an evolving organization remains continuous with valued aspects of its past.

The theory rejects technological determinism. Automation and augmentation can function as interdependent rather than mutually exclusive organizational logics [25]. TTN therefore distinguishes three proposed pathways: temporal-bridging nostalgia, connecting valued past attributes with a future-compatible identity; defensive-restorative nostalgia, treating preservation or restoration as necessary for continuity; and rhetorically mobilized nostalgia, through which actors use selected histories to legitimate competing transformation positions.

Table 2 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in organizational nostalgia, identity protection, and resistance during digital transformation.

Table 2. Proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in Organizational Nostalgia, Identity Protection, and Resistance During Digital Transformation

Mechanism or relationship	Antecedent	Mediator or process	Moderator	Expected consequence	Supporting evidence	Rival explanation	Validation requirement
Transformation → identity-discontinuity appraisal	Changes in technologies, roles, expertise, routines, status, or organizational direction	Proposed: comparison between emerging arrangements and valued identity attributes	Transformation depth, pace, participation, occupational identity	Greater perceived rupture in organizational continuity	Digital transformation can alter structures, expertise, and identity-relevant arrangements.	General change uncertainty, implementation quality, workload, strategic disagreement	Multi-wave measurement before, during, and after transformation
Identity discontinuity → organizational nostalgia	Perceived erosion of valued continuity	Nostalgic activation directed toward organizational	Identification strength, personal relevance of	Increased salience of valued organizational pasts	Organizational change can evoke nostalgia under some conditions.	Negative affect, uncertainty, change fatigue, general attachment	Longitudinal mediation and experimental continuity manipulations

		experiences or attributes	threatened attributes				
Nostalgia → restored work meaning	Nostalgic reflection on valued organizational experiences	Reconnection with meaningful work-related experiences	Burnout and current work conditions	Stronger perceived meaning and potentially reduced withdrawal orientation	Organizational nostalgia has been linked to work meaning.	Positive affect, commitment, supportive leadership	Replication specifically within digital-transformation contexts
Nostalgia → temporal continuity	Retrieval of identity-relevant memories	Identity narrative linking past and present	Proposed: future-continuity credibility	Greater capacity to interpret transformation without abandoning valued identity	Nostalgia can support perceptions of continuity in related psychological research.	Organizational identification, personality, stability preference	Direct organizational mediation tests using validated measures
Selective memorialization → pathway differentiation	Availability of multiple organizational memories	Proposed: selective emphasis on adaptable, idealized, exclusionary, or contested pasts	Narrative authority, group membership, memory accessibility	Different interpretations of what should be preserved or changed	Organizational memory and nostalgia consequences depend on remembered content.	Pre-existing ideology, status interests, professional interests	Longitudinal narrative analysis linked to subsequent attitudes and behavior
Temporal-bridging pathway	Nostalgia combined with credible future continuity	Proposed: translation of valued identity attributes into transformed organizational forms	Participation, trust, legitimacy, perceived augmentation	Adaptive sensemaking and identity continuity without exact restoration	Identity change can involve continuity-preserving reinterpretation.	High-quality change management or favorable outcomes unrelated to nostalgia	Experimental future-continuity framing and longitudinal pathway tests
Defensive-restorative pathway	Nostalgia combined with perceived illegitimate identity rupture	Proposed: idealization of prior arrangements as necessary for identity preservation	Job insecurity, perceived replacement, threat attribution	Preservation claims, withdrawal, opposition, or attempts to reverse change	Identity threat and technological insecurity can generate defensive responses.	Employment insecurity, loss of autonomy, surveillance concerns, procedural injustice	Models separating nostalgia from insecurity, threat, and resistance
Rhetorically mobilized pathway	Competing claims about organizational history	Proposed: strategic narration of selected pasts to legitimate transformation positions	Hierarchical authority, archival access, communication reach	Narrative contest over what transformation should preserve, restore, or abandon	Organizational histories can be used performatively and politically.	Formal authority, communication resources, political interest independent of nostalgia	Comparative discourse, archival, and stakeholder analyses
Institutional moderation	Transformation-related identity and nostalgia processes	Legitimacy evaluation within existing institutional arrangements	Profession, industry, national institutions, regulation, established practices	Stronger or weaker translation of nostalgic claims into organizational action	Digital transformation is embedded in broader institutional structures.	Resource dependence, competitive pressure, strategic fit	Multilevel and cross-organizational comparative research
Recursive reappraisal loop	Experience of transformation over time	Proposed: reinterpretation of continuity, threat, and remembered	Transformation outcomes, leadership response, participation	Changing nostalgic content and pathway movement across	Digital transformation and identity adaptation can unfold iteratively.	General learning, habituation, change fatigue	Intensive longitudinal and process research capable of

pasts after new experiences	transformation episodes	testing pathway change
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Table note. All relationships labelled proposed are components of the original Theory of Transformation Nostalgia rather than established causal mechanisms. “Expected consequence” denotes a theoretical expectation, not a demonstrated organizational outcome. Competing explanations should be tested directly before attributing resistance, adaptation, or identity change to nostalgia.

Theoretical propositions

TTN requires propositions that accommodate heterogeneous responses. Research on organizational paradox suggests that identity threat can condition how members interpret contradictory organizational demands and relate to their organization [26]. Perceived discontinuity should therefore be treated as an appraisal rather than presumed from objective technological change.

Job insecurity is a particularly important alternative explanation. Perceived technological disruption has been associated with job insecurity and turnover intentions across different national settings [27]. Apparent defense of an “old organization” may therefore reflect anticipated employment loss rather than nostalgia. Empirical tests should measure nostalgia, insecurity, affect, identification, and change attitudes separately.

Institutional context creates an additional boundary. Digital innovation unfolds within existing institutional arrangements and legitimacy structures that shape organizational transformation [28]. Individual nostalgia alone cannot therefore explain whether a transformation becomes accepted, contested, or institutionalized.

Proposition 1. Greater perceived discontinuity between valued organizational identity attributes and emerging transformation arrangements is proposed to increase organizational nostalgia when those attributes remain personally or collectively salient.

Proposition 2. Organizational nostalgia is proposed to support continued attachment more strongly when nostalgic reflection restores work meaning or perceived identity continuity than when it predominantly intensifies perceptions of loss.

Proposition 3. Transformation-evoked nostalgia is proposed to follow different pathways depending on remembered content: adaptable and plural pasts should be more compatible with temporal bridging, whereas fixed and normatively superior pasts should be more compatible with defensive restoration.

Proposition 4. Defensive-restorative nostalgia is proposed to become more likely when identity threat, job insecurity, or perceived technological replacement is high and responsibility for that threat is attributed to the transformation or its sponsors.

Proposition 5. Temporal-bridging nostalgia is proposed to become more likely when members perceive a credible future in which valued organizational identity attributes can persist despite changes in technologies, practices, or structures.

Proposition 6. The organizational influence of transformation nostalgia is proposed to depend partly on whose interpretation of the organizational past acquires legitimacy, with institutional position, historical access, and narrative authority conditioning which identity claims become consequential.

The propositions specify testable expectations rather than established effects. Longitudinal, experimental, qualitative, and multilevel designs are required to establish temporal ordering, identify competing mechanisms, and determine whether the proposed relationships survive direct attempts at falsification.

Constructive uses of organizational history

Organizational history may assist transformation when it enables continuity without requiring exact preservation of prior arrangements. Research on organizational identity construction demonstrates that history and material memory can connect past organizational experience with present identity and imagined futures [29]. This supports the possibility of temporal bridging but does not establish that historical invocation improves change outcomes.

History can also perform organizing work. Uses of the past may shape identity, strategy, legitimacy, and contemporary organizational ordering [30]. Constructive engagement with organizational history could therefore involve identifying durable values or capabilities and asking how they might be expressed under altered technologies rather than treating existing routines as inherently authentic.

A further boundary concerns who can define the organizational past. Archival access, stakeholder interests, and power affect which records are preserved and which histories become authoritative [31]. Official continuity narratives may therefore differ substantially from memories held by occupational, regional, demographic, or hierarchical groups.

Organizational history can function as an identity and organizing resource, but its construction remains conditioned by present purposes, stakeholder interests, and unequal access to historical materials [29-31]. TTN consequently proposes historical pluralism as a boundary principle: history should remain contestable rather than being converted into managerial proof that a transformation necessarily continues—or violates—organizational identity.

Constructive use of history also requires avoiding manufactured nostalgia. Leaders may romanticize selected historical periods to legitimize predetermined transformation choices, while employees may invoke similarly selective narratives to defend status or routines that are not essential to identity continuity. Neither possibility should be inferred from rhetoric alone. Research should compare official narratives, employee memories, archival evidence, identity claims, and transformation outcomes before attributing effects to nostalgia.

Conclusion

This article develops the proposed Theory of Transformation Nostalgia to explain why backward-looking sentiment during digital transformation should not be treated as either simple resistance or inherently beneficial attachment. TTN links identity-discontinuity appraisal, nostalgic activation, selective memorialization, identity-protection interpretation, and three proposed pathways: temporal bridging, defensive restoration, and rhetorical mobilization.

Its central contribution is conditional. Nostalgia may help organizational members preserve continuity and meaning while adapting to substantial change, yet it may also become a resource for opposing transformation when an idealized past is treated as the only legitimate organizational form. History can likewise provide constructive temporal orientation or become contested narrative power.

TTN remains non-empirical. Its constructs and propositions do not establish causal ordering, effect magnitude, universal organizational consequences, or implementation readiness. Future research must separate nostalgia from insecurity, identification, negative affect, and resistance; distinguish individual experience from organizational-level inference; investigate remembered content and narrative authority; and specify conditions under which the proposed pathways fail. Transformation nostalgia is therefore best treated as a testable temporal and identity process whose consequences depend on how organizational actors connect what they remember with what they believe the organization can become.

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