Digital Transformation Strategies in the Project Management Office: Navigating Organizational Change

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Abstract

Employee disengagement during organizational change presented challenges for digital transformation by reducing workforce commitment, increasing resistance, and delaying implementation. Some information technology (IT) project managers lacked effective strategies to foster employee engagement during organizational change. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore effective strategies IT project managers used to foster employee engagement during organizational change. Kotter's eight-step change model provided the conceptual framework. Seven U.S. IT project managers with at least 3 years of project management or related leadership experience participated in semistructured interviews. Data was collected through interviews and publicly available organizational and industry documents, and analyzed using a six-phase thematic analysis. Three themes emerged: (a) communication and employee involvement, (b) leadership support and relationship building, and (c) feedback, recognition, and continuous support. The findings highlighted transparent communication, employee participation, individualized leadership support, and continuous feedback as important practices for sustaining engagement. Recommendations included integrating structured communication, coaching, employee recognition, and continuous feedback into organizational change practices. The findings offered practical guidance for IT project managers and organizational leaders responsible for digital transformation. Implications for positive social change included the potential to improve employee well-being, strengthen workforce resilience, and promote supportive workplace environments.

Keywords: digital transformation, employee engagement, organizational change, IT project management, change leadership, Kotter's eight-step change model, qualitative pragmatic inquiry

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

Digital transformation increased pressure on information technology (IT) project managers to implement technological initiatives while maintaining employee engagement during organizational change. Employees encountered emerging technologies, revised workflows, and evolving responsibilities that required adjustments to established workplace practices. Disengagement during these transitions contributed to organizational challenges, including resistance, reduced productivity, and implementation delays. Valtonen and Holopainen (2025) identified structural and psychological barriers associated with employee stress and disrupted transformation efforts. The Project Management Institute (PMI, 2025) reported that 13% of projects failed and 37% delivered only partial results, illustrating broader challenges in project execution. These conditions highlighted the importance of leadership approaches that addressed both technological implementation and workforce needs.

Previous research established relationships among leadership practices, employee engagement, and organizational change. Wei et al. (2024) found that increased performance demands affected engagement when employees received insufficient communication, participation opportunities, and organizational support. Zhang and Deng (2025) identified leadership communication and clarity of expectations as factors influencing employee responses to workplace transitions. Bentahar et al. (2023) demonstrated that technological complexity and cross-functional coordination shaped engagement within project-based environments. Boulton et al. (2025) emphasized trust, shared decision making, and continuous learning as practices that encouraged workforce participation. Although these contributions identified important leadership factors, limited attention was given to how IT project managers translated these principles into practical strategies during sustained digital transformation.

The specific business problem was that some IT project managers lacked effective strategies to foster employee engagement during organizational change. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore effective strategies IT project managers used to address this problem. The research question guiding the project was: What effective strategies do IT project managers use to foster employee engagement during organizational change? Kotter's eight-step change model (Kotter, 1996) provided the conceptual framework for examining communication, empowerment, employee involvement, and reinforcement as leadership practices associated with organizational transitions.

A qualitative pragmatic inquiry design supported the examination of practical leadership experiences within project-based technology environments. Seven U.S. IT project managers with at least 3 years of project management or related leadership experience were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and publicly available organizational and industry documents. A six-phase thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in the strategies participants described. This approach aligned with the research objective by examining how experienced practitioners addressed engagement challenges during organizational change.

The findings identified three themes: communication and employee involvement; leadership support and relationship building; and feedback, recognition, and continuous support. These themes demonstrated how project-level leadership practices reflected principles associated with Kotter's eight-step change model. The project contributed to existing scholarship by extending the examination of employee engagement to the practical responsibilities of IT project managers. The findings provided organizational leaders with evidence-informed approaches to strengthening communication, supporting workforce participation, and reinforcing engagement throughout digital transformation.

1.2 Explore Importance of the Problem

The importance of investigating employee engagement during digital transformation extended beyond the successful implementation of technology. Organizational transitions affected employee responsibilities, workplace relationships, and performance expectations. Thuy and Anh (2024) associated declining engagement with implementation delays, weakened team coordination, and inconsistent project execution. Ling et al. (2024) emphasized that organizational support and opportunities for participation strengthened employee involvement during workplace transitions. These findings indicated that technological initiatives required leadership attention to workforce experiences alongside operational objectives.

Further investigation was warranted because established engagement principles did not fully explain how IT project managers balanced technical responsibilities with employee-centered leadership practices. Project-based environments involved overlapping implementation activities, changing requirements, and coordination across organizational functions. Bentahar et al. (2023) explained that approaches emphasizing technical control could limit attention to the behavioral dimensions of organizational change. Boulton et al. (2025) identified trust, shared decision making, and continuous learning as practices that supported employee involvement. Examining these perspectives provided an opportunity to understand how project managers addressed competing demands while sustaining workforce participation.

The research held theoretical significance by applying Kotter's eight-step change model to project-level leadership practices. Although the model provided established principles for guiding organizational transitions, examining the experiences of IT project managers offered additional insight into how communication, empowerment, and reinforcement were implemented within technology-driven environments. The practical significance involved identifying strategies that organizational leaders could incorporate into change management processes to strengthen employee support, improve coordination, and promote workforce resilience. These potential contributions extended to employee well-being and the development of supportive organizational environments.

1.3 Describe Relevant Scholarship

Recent scholarly literature examined employee engagement as an important component of organizational performance during technological and workplace transitions. Coetzee et al. (2025) described engagement through employee commitment and sustained effort under demanding conditions, while Abhari (2025) emphasized involvement in organizational decision making. Harunavamwe et al. (2025) identified supportive leader–employee interactions as practices associated with continued engagement during changing workplace responsibilities. Hong et al. (2024) demonstrated that leadership responsiveness and communication clarity influenced employee participation. These contributions established a scholarly foundation for examining engagement as an organizational experience shaped by leadership relationships and workplace conditions.

Research addressing digital transformation identified technological and organizational factors that complicated employee participation. Mozaffar and Candi (2025) associated changes in digital infrastructure with increased coordination demands. Haug et al. (2024) found that overlapping implementation requirements increased employee workloads and competing responsibilities. Karppi et al. (2024) identified project governance structures, coordination routines, and responsibility arrangements as factors influencing experiences within project teams. These findings demonstrated that engagement challenges occurred within broader operational environments and required attention to how transformation activities were organized and managed.

Scholarship examining project-level leadership further clarified the relationship between organizational change and workforce engagement. Li et al. (2024) emphasized that interactions among project managers, employees, and organizational stakeholders influenced engagement during transformation initiatives. Musaigwa and Kalitanyi (2026) explained that integrating organizational change management with IT project delivery supported alignment between technical implementation and organizational transition activities. These contributions demonstrated the relevance of leadership coordination within project-based environments while leaving opportunities to examine the specific engagement strategies experienced IT project managers used throughout implementation.

Methodological considerations provided an additional rationale for the present inquiry. Research relying on self-reported employee perceptions could be affected by individual experiences and response biases, while cross-sectional designs offered limited insight into how leadership practices evolved during organizational transitions. These considerations supported further qualitative examination of practitioner experiences, particularly the actions used to maintain engagement under changing organizational conditions. The pragmatic inquiry approach provided an opportunity to examine strategies through the perspectives of IT project managers with direct experience leading employee engagement efforts.

Although previous scholarship addressed employee engagement, leadership support, and technological implementation, a limited understanding remained regarding how IT project managers integrated these elements into sustained organizational change practices. Kotter's eight-step change model (Kotter, 1996) offered a conceptual perspective for examining leadership actions involving communication, empowerment, and reinforcement. The present project extended existing scholarship by exploring how experienced practitioners applied engagement strategies within project-based technology environments. This contribution strengthened the connection between established change leadership principles and the practical experiences of IT project managers responsible for organizational transformation.

1.4 State Hypotheses and Their Correspondence to Research Design

The inquiry was guided by the research question: What effective strategies do IT project managers use to foster employee engagement during organizational change? The qualitative pragmatic inquiry did not test statistical hypotheses. Semistructured interviews and documentary comparisons were used to identify and interpret practical leadership strategies in relation to Kotter's eight-step change model (Kotter, 1996).

2. Method

A qualitative pragmatic inquiry approach was used to explore effective strategies that information technology (IT) project managers employed to foster employee engagement during organizational change. The methodology emphasized practical leadership experiences within technology-driven organizational environments. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and publicly available organizational and industry documents. The research procedures included purposive sampling, systematic data collection, thematic analysis, and measures to strengthen credibility and dependability.

2.1 Participant (Subject) Characteristics

The participants consisted of seven IT project managers working in organizations throughout the United States. Eligibility criteria required participants to possess at least 3 years of project management or related leadership experience and demonstrated experience fostering employee engagement during organizational change. Individuals who did not meet these professional qualifications were excluded from the eligible population. No demographic restrictions involving age, gender, race, or ethnicity were specified in the eligibility criteria. Participants were assigned pseudonyms P1 through P7 to protect confidentiality.

2.2 Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was used to recruit IT project managers with professional experience relevant to the research question. Recruitment occurred through LinkedIn solicitation, professional networks, and direct outreach to

individuals who had participated in organizational change or digital transformation initiatives. Of the 32 individuals approached, seven participated in the project, representing a participation rate of 21.9%. Participation was voluntary, and no specific reasons for nonparticipation were documented.

Individual semistructured interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom, enabling participants from diverse U.S. organizational settings to share their professional experiences. No financial incentives or compensation were provided. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained prior to recruitment and data collection, and informed consent was obtained before each interview.

2.2.1 Sample Size, Power, and Precision

The final sample consisted of seven IT project managers selected for their relevant professional experience. Sample adequacy was evaluated through data saturation rather than statistical power calculations or precision estimates. Saturation was reached after the sixth interview, when additional responses no longer introduced new themes or meaningful conceptual insights. A seventh interview was conducted to confirm the consistency of the emerging patterns.

The sample supported an in-depth examination of leadership strategies within the participating organizational contexts. However, the small purposive sample and variations in organizational environments limited the transferability of the findings to the broader population of IT project managers. No experimental groups or comparison conditions were established.

2.2.2 Measures and Covariates

Employee engagement, leadership strategies, and organizational change were examined as qualitative concepts rather than quantitatively measured variables. Employee engagement referred to workforce participation, commitment, communication, and involvement during organizational transitions. Leadership strategies represented actions IT project managers used to encourage employee participation, address implementation challenges, maintain workplace relationships, and provide ongoing support. Organizational change encompassed technology-driven initiatives involving adjustments to established processes, responsibilities, and workplace practices.

The researcher served as the primary data collection instrument and developed a semistructured interview protocol consisting of six standardized open-ended questions. The questions addressed participants' leadership roles, engagement strategies, implementation challenges, mitigation actions, effectiveness measures, and additional recommendations. Follow-up probes were used to obtain clarification and detailed explanations.

With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The researcher reviewed each transcript for accuracy before analysis. Publicly available organizational and industry documents provided supplementary evidence for comparing participant accounts with established workforce and leadership practices. The consistent interview protocol and multiple sources of evidence supported the credibility of the qualitative inquiry. No standardized psychometric instruments, biometric measurements, quantitative outcome measures, or statistical covariates were used.

2.2.3 Research Design

A qualitative pragmatic inquiry design was selected to examine how experienced IT project managers applied leadership strategies to foster employee engagement during organizational change. The pragmatic approach emphasized practical experiences and actions used to address workforce challenges within technology-driven environments. Kotter's eight-step change model (Kotter, 1996) provided the conceptual framework for examining leadership practices involving communication, empowerment, employee participation, and reinforcement. Participants described their existing professional experiences; no variables were manipulated or experimental conditions assigned.

Data management and analysis followed a structured process involving Microsoft Excel and NVivo 14 qualitative data analysis software. Interview transcripts, supporting documents, and analytic notes were organized using consistent file-naming procedures. Microsoft Excel was used to document verbatim excerpts, preliminary codes, coding revisions, and consolidated categories. All seven interview transcripts were imported into NVivo 14 to organize codes, examine relationships among categories, develop themes, and review coding coverage.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis process: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Interview transcripts were examined to identify recurring leadership practices, and related codes were organized into broader thematic categories. The developed themes were compared with supporting documents,

scholarly literature, and the conceptual framework to inform interpretation.

Research credibility was strengthened through consistent interview procedures, transcript reviews, member checking, triangulation, and an audit trail documenting analytical decisions. Member checking involved providing participants with summaries of their responses and the researcher's interpretations within approximately 72 hours to 5 days following their interviews. Triangulation involved comparing interview accounts with publicly available organizational and industry documents. These procedures supported transparency, consistency, and dependability throughout the inquiry.

The research was conducted under Institutional Review Board approval number 12-18-25-1224453. Participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained using pseudonyms, restricted access to research materials, and secure electronic storage. Research records were retained for at least 5 years in accordance with the approved research procedures. The researcher maintained a professional relationship with participants and exercised no supervisory authority over their employment responsibilities.

3. Results

The analysis of semistructured interviews with seven U.S. information technology (IT) project managers identified three themes associated with fostering employee engagement during organizational change: (a) communication and employee involvement, (b) leadership support and relationship building, and (c) feedback, recognition, and continuous support. Each theme was supported by all seven participants, representing 100% participant coverage. Publicly available organizational and industry documents provided supplementary evidence for examining the consistency of the findings.

3.1 Recruitment

Participant recruitment occurred from April 26, 2026, through June 25, 2026, using LinkedIn solicitations, professional networks, and direct outreach to IT project managers experienced in leading organizational change initiatives. A total of 32 individuals were approached, and seven voluntarily participated, representing a participation rate of 21.9%. No specific reasons for nonparticipation were documented. Individual semistructured interviews were conducted remotely through Zoom, with the final interview completed on June 10, 2026. All seven participants completed the interview process, and their responses were included in the qualitative analysis.

3.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

The qualitative data were examined using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were coded and organized using Microsoft Excel and NVivo 14. Recurring patterns were examined across participant accounts, and related codes were consolidated into three themes. All seven participants contributed evidence supporting each theme, representing 100% participant coverage. These percentages described the representation of themes within the sample and did not constitute inferential statistical findings.

Theme 1: Communication and Employee Involvement

Communication and employee involvement emerged as strategies for maintaining workforce engagement during organizational change. All seven participants described the importance of sharing information, addressing employee uncertainty, and encouraging participation throughout implementation. Participant 5 emphasized the importance of initiating communication early to identify areas of discomfort. Participant 3 described structured meetings, consistent messaging, and follow-up discussions, while Participant 6 emphasized listening to employees and encouraging collaborative discussions.

Participants indicated that transparent communication helped clarify expectations and identify potential implementation challenges. Employee involvement provided opportunities to ask questions, share perspectives, and gain a clearer understanding of organizational changes. These accounts were consistent with the Deloitte (2025) industry report, which emphasized communication, employee participation, and shared accountability during workforce transformation.

Theme 2: Leadership Support and Relationship Building

Leadership support and relationship building were other recurring themes across all seven interviews. Participants described coaching, mentoring, stakeholder guidance, and individualized support as strategies for maintaining employee involvement. Participant 4 emphasized the importance of understanding employees' challenges and identifying how organizational changes affected their responsibilities. Participant 1 described providing ongoing guidance as employees adjusted to new expectations, while Participant 6 highlighted collaborative relationships and attention to employee needs.

The findings indicated that supportive leadership practices helped employees navigate uncertainty and remain involved during organizational transitions. The Gallup (2026) industry report provided supporting evidence concerning manager coaching, meaningful communication, and workplace relationships associated with employee engagement.

Theme 3: Feedback, Recognition, and Continuous Support

Feedback, recognition, and continuous support were identified by all seven participants as practices used to sustain employee engagement during implementation. Participants described regular check-ins, pulse surveys, employee-centered discussions, and recognition of accomplishments. Participants 1, 3, and 5 emphasized gathering feedback to identify challenges and evaluate employee responses to change. Participants 6 and 7 highlighted the recognition of employee contributions and the celebration of project milestones.

The findings indicated that continuous feedback helped project managers identify emerging challenges and adjust leadership support throughout organizational transitions. Employee recognition reinforced participation and acknowledged progress toward implementation objectives. The Society for Human Resource Management (2024) publication provided supplementary evidence concerning regular feedback, recognition, continuous learning, and supportive leadership practices.

3.3 Ancillary Analyses

Supplementary analysis involved comparing participant accounts with publicly available organizational and industry documents. Deloitte (2025), Gallup (2026), and the Society for Human Resource Management (2024) provided supporting evidence related to communication, leadership support, feedback, and employee recognition. The documentary comparison demonstrated consistency between the identified themes and published workforce practices.

The thematic findings were examined in relation to Kotter's eight-step change model (Kotter, 1996). Communication and employee involvement corresponded with communicating a vision of change and empowering employees to participate. Leadership support and relationship building reflected the development of collaborative relationships and support for organizational change. Feedback, recognition, and continuous support corresponded with reinforcing progress and sustaining change initiatives.

These comparisons supported the interpretation of the primary findings. No statistical subgroup comparisons, adjusted analyses, or additional experimental analyses were performed.

3.4 Participant Flow

Thirty-two individuals were approached during recruitment, and seven participated in the project. The remaining 25 individuals did not participate, and no specific reasons were documented. All seven enrolled participants completed the semistructured interview process, and their transcripts were included in the qualitative analysis.

Data saturation was reached after the sixth interview, when no additional themes or meaningful conceptual insights emerged. The seventh interview confirmed the consistency of the identified patterns. No participants were assigned to experimental conditions or excluded from the final thematic analysis.

4. Discussion

The findings addressed the research question concerning effective strategies that information technology (IT) project managers used to foster employee engagement during organizational change. The qualitative pragmatic inquiry did not involve statistical hypotheses; therefore, interpretation focused on the extent to which the identified themes addressed the research question and aligned with the conceptual framework. Three interconnected leadership approaches emerged: communication and employee involvement, leadership support and relationship building, and feedback, recognition, and continuous support. The findings suggested that employee engagement during technology-driven organizational change was supported through leadership practices that promoted understanding, strengthened workplace relationships, and reinforced employee participation throughout implementation.

Communication and employee involvement provided an important foundation for sustaining engagement during organizational transitions. Participants described early communication, consistent messaging, and opportunities for employee input as practices that helped clarify expectations and address uncertainty. These findings were consistent with Serra (2022), who identified transparent communication and employee participation as important elements of organizational change. Wahl et al. (2026) similarly associated effective organizational communication with shared understanding, employee identification, and positive workplace relationships. The findings extended these perspectives by illustrating how IT project managers incorporated communication into project implementation activities to address employee needs and encourage participation. Communication was therefore interpreted as an

ongoing leadership responsibility that supported organizational change beyond the initial announcement of transformation initiatives.

Leadership support and relationship building provided another explanation for how IT project managers encouraged employee commitment during change. Participants described individualized coaching, mentoring, stakeholder guidance, and collaborative interactions that helped employees adjust to changing responsibilities. These findings aligned with Baquero (2023), who associated transparent and supportive leadership with trust and employee engagement. Hammer et al. (2024) identified supportive leadership behaviors as contributors to workplace relationships and employee well-being. Nielsen (2025) further emphasized the importance of relationship-oriented leadership in encouraging engagement through individual consideration, professional development, and shared organizational goals. The findings suggested that effective change leadership involved understanding employees' experiences and providing support appropriate to their responsibilities and implementation challenges.

Feedback, recognition, and continuous support contributed to the interpretation of employee engagement as a process requiring attention throughout organizational change. Participants described regular check-ins, employee feedback, recognition of accomplishments, and continued leadership guidance as practices used to maintain involvement. These findings were consistent with the Society for Human Resource Management (2024), which emphasized feedback, employee recognition, continuous learning, and supportive leadership practices. The findings suggested that feedback helped project managers identify emerging challenges, while recognition reinforced employee contributions and progress toward organizational objectives. These practices highlighted the importance of maintaining employee involvement after initial implementation activities had begun.

The findings were consistent with several constructs of Kotter's eight-step change model (Kotter, 1996). Communication and employee involvement reflected the importance of communicating a clear change vision and empowering employees to participate. Leadership support and relationship building corresponded with developing collaborative relationships and strengthening support for organizational change. Feedback, recognition, and continuous support reflected the importance of recognizing short-term accomplishments, sustaining progress, and reinforcing organizational improvements. The findings provided qualitative support for the relevance of these constructs within IT project management environments. However, the inquiry did not test the model's effectiveness or establish that implementing its eight steps produced measurable improvements in employee engagement.

The findings contributed to professional practice by identifying leadership approaches that IT project managers and organizational leaders could incorporate into digital transformation initiatives. Structured communication practices could have provided employees with timely information regarding organizational changes, implementation expectations, and opportunities for participation. Individualized coaching and stakeholder engagement could have supported employees experiencing changes in responsibilities, workflows, or technology. Regular feedback mechanisms and employee recognition could have helped leaders identify implementation challenges, acknowledge progress, and sustain workforce involvement. These applications offered practical considerations for integrating employee engagement into project governance, leadership development, and organizational change management.

The inquiry further suggested that employee engagement required coordination between project implementation responsibilities and employee-centered leadership practices. IT project managers often operate within environments characterized by technical requirements, implementation schedules, stakeholder expectations, and organizational constraints. The findings indicated that attention to communication, relationships, and employee feedback complemented these responsibilities by addressing the human aspects of organizational change. Integrating these practices into project planning and execution could have supported greater alignment between transformation objectives and workforce needs. However, the project did not directly measure implementation success, productivity, employee retention, or financial performance; therefore, improvements in these outcomes could not be established from the findings.

Several limitations influenced the interpretation and transferability of the results. The purposive sample consisted of seven U.S. IT project managers with relevant organizational change experience. Although data saturation was reached and the seventh interview confirmed the identified patterns, the small sample did not represent the full range of organizational environments, industries, leadership responsibilities, or employee experiences. The recruitment approach may have favored individuals who were willing to discuss successful engagement strategies. Consequently, the findings reflected the perspectives of participating managers and could not be generalized statistically to all IT project managers or organizational leaders.

The reliance on semistructured interviews introduced additional limitations associated with self-reported professional experiences. Participants may have emphasized successful leadership practices or interpreted engagement challenges

differently based on organizational responsibilities and workplace conditions. The researcher served as the primary data collection and analysis instrument, which introduced the possibility of interpretive bias. Member checking, triangulation with publicly available documents, and systematic coding procedures strengthened credibility but did not eliminate these limitations. Publicly available industry documents provided contextual support for the identified themes but did not independently verify the effectiveness of individual participants' leadership strategies.

Alternative explanations were considered when interpreting the findings. Employee engagement during organizational change may have been influenced by organizational culture, executive sponsorship, available resources, workforce readiness, and the nature of the technology being implemented. Leadership practices identified by participants may have operated alongside these organizational conditions. Differences in employee responsibilities, workplace relationships, and implementation environments may have influenced how engagement strategies were experienced. The qualitative design did not establish causal relationships or isolate the independent contribution of specific leadership behaviors. Therefore, the findings were interpreted as experienced practices associated with fostering engagement, not as evidence that any single strategy consistently produced successful organizational outcomes.

The implications for positive social change extended to workplace relationships, employee well-being, and workforce resilience. Participants described leadership practices that encouraged employee participation, strengthened trust, and recognized individual contributions during organizational transitions. Heucher et al. (2024) associated positive social change with improvements in behaviors, relationships, and organizational practices that benefited individuals and communities. Grum and Babnik (2022) identified employee well-being, meaningful work, and supportive organizational practices as contributors to workplace social sustainability. The findings suggested that employee-centered leadership approaches could have contributed to more supportive workplace environments by encouraging participation, collaboration, and recognition. These potential benefits represented implications of the findings rather than independently measured social outcomes.

The limitations and findings identified opportunities for future research involving broader participant representation and varied organizational settings. Including mid-level managers, frontline supervisors, and employees could have provided additional perspectives on the effectiveness of engagement strategies during organizational change. Comparative case studies across organizations of different sizes, structures, and industries could have clarified how organizational conditions influenced leadership practices. Employee focus groups and workplace observations could have complemented managerial interviews by capturing employee experiences and observed leadership behaviors. Mixed-methods research could have examined relationships among leadership strategies, employee engagement, retention, project performance, and implementation outcomes using qualitative and quantitative evidence.

The inquiry contributed to understanding employee engagement during digital transformation by identifying practical leadership strategies employed by experienced IT project managers. The findings supported the relevance of communication, relationship building, and continuous employee support within organizational change practices while acknowledging the influence of organizational context and methodological limitations. For business and organizational leaders, the findings offered evidence-informed approaches for strengthening employee participation during technology-driven transitions. For the research-scholar community, the project provided qualitative evidence that informed further examination of leadership practices and employee engagement. The broader significance of the findings rested in recognizing employee engagement as an important consideration throughout organizational change, with potential implications for supportive workplace environments and sustainable transformation practices.

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Authors' contributions

Dr. LaToya Pierce and Dr. Caitlin Byrd contributed to the study design and manuscript revisions. Dr. LaToya Pierce was responsible for data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and drafting the manuscript. Dr. Caitlin Byrd provided scholarly guidance, critical review, and revisions to the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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