

The Hidden Burnout of Digital Government Employees: Cognitive Load, Emotional Exhaustion, and Silent Withdrawal in Public Organizations

Maryam Rahimi

PhD Student, Public Administration (Organizational Behavior), Firuzkuh Islamic Azad
University, Iran

m.rahimi6540@iau.ir

Abstract

Digital transformation has become a central pillar of contemporary public sector reform, promising improved efficiency, transparency, and service quality. However, its human consequences remain insufficiently understood, particularly in relation to employee well-being. Unlike private organizations, public sector institutions are characterized by high job security, rigid employment structures, and limited employee turnover, which fundamentally alters how occupational stress manifests. This study introduces the concept of *hidden burnout* among digital government employees, defined as a gradual erosion of cognitive and emotional resources that does not immediately result in absenteeism or turnover but instead leads to silent withdrawal behaviors. Drawing on job demands–resources theory, this research examines how digital work intensity increases cognitive load, which in turn contributes to emotional exhaustion and latent disengagement among public sector employees. Using survey data collected from employees in digitally transformed public organizations, the proposed model is tested through structural equation modeling. The findings reveal that while digitalization improves task efficiency, it simultaneously intensifies cognitive demands, indirectly fostering burnout that remains largely invisible to formal performance and human resource monitoring systems. This study makes three key contributions. First, it conceptually distinguishes hidden burnout from traditional burnout constructs in public sector contexts. Second, it empirically demonstrates the mediating role of cognitive load in the relationship between digital intensity and emotional exhaustion. Third, it highlights silent withdrawal as a critical but overlooked behavioral

outcome of digital transformation in government organizations. The findings offer practical implications for public human resource management by emphasizing the need for burnout-sensitive digital governance strategies that go beyond technological performance indicators and address employee well-being.

Keywords: Digital government, Hidden burnout, Cognitive load, Emotional exhaustion, public sector employees, Digital transformation, Silent withdrawal, public human resource management

Introduction

Digital transformation has become a defining feature of contemporary public sector reform. Governments across the world have invested heavily in digital technologies to improve service delivery, enhance transparency, and increase administrative efficiency. From integrated information systems to data-driven decision platforms, digital tools now shape how public organizations operate and how employees perform their daily tasks. While the technical and institutional outcomes of digital government initiatives have been widely examined, their human consequences remain far less understood.

Existing research on digital government has predominantly emphasized organizational performance, citizen satisfaction, and governance outcomes. In contrast, the lived experience of public sector employees navigating digitally intensified work environments has received limited scholarly attention. This omission is consequential. Public organizations differ fundamentally from private firms in terms of employment stability, performance evaluation mechanisms, and career mobility. High job security and rigid employment structures reduce turnover, which means that traditional indicators of employee strain, such as absenteeism or resignation, often fail to capture deeper forms of occupational distress in the public sector.

Burnout research offers a relevant but incomplete lens for understanding these dynamics. Classical burnout models focus on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, often assuming that burnout manifests through visible declines in performance or withdrawal from work. However, in public sector settings, employees experiencing sustained stress frequently remain physically present and procedurally compliant. Rather than exiting the organization, they adapt by disengaging cognitively and emotionally while continuing to meet minimum formal requirements. As a result, burnout can persist in a concealed form that is largely invisible to managers and human resource systems.

This study conceptualizes this phenomenon as *hidden burnout* in digital government contexts. Hidden burnout refers to a gradual depletion of cognitive and emotional resources triggered by sustained digital work intensity, without immediate behavioral signals such as turnover or overt underperformance. Instead, its primary manifestation is silent withdrawal, characterized by reduced initiative, diminished discretionary effort, and minimal engagement beyond formal job descriptions. This form of burnout is particularly relevant in digitally transformed public

organizations, where employees are exposed to continuous information flows, increased monitoring, and heightened expectations for responsiveness.

Cognitive load plays a central role in this process. Digital systems are often introduced to streamline tasks, yet they frequently increase the volume, pace, and complexity of information processing required from employees. Multiple platforms, parallel communication channels, and constant system updates can intensify cognitive demands, even when task execution becomes technically faster. Over time, this sustained cognitive load contributes to emotional exhaustion, especially in environments where employees have limited control over system design and limited discretion over work processes.

Despite its importance, the mediating role of cognitive load in linking digital work intensity to burnout-related outcomes in public organizations has rarely been examined empirically. Moreover, the behavioral consequences of burnout in the public sector have been narrowly defined, typically focusing on absenteeism or reduced job satisfaction. Silent withdrawal, as a distinct behavioral response, remains under-theorized and under-measured, particularly in the context of digital government.

This study addresses these gaps by developing and empirically testing a conceptual model that links digital work intensity to hidden burnout through cognitive load and emotional exhaustion, with silent withdrawal as a key outcome. By focusing explicitly on public sector employees, the research advances burnout theory beyond private-sector assumptions and offers a more context-sensitive understanding of how digital transformation reshapes employee well-being in government organizations.

The contributions of this study are threefold. First, it introduces hidden burnout as a distinct and theoretically grounded construct relevant to digitally transformed public organizations. Second, it clarifies the mediating role of cognitive load in the relationship between digital intensity and emotional exhaustion. Third, it identifies silent withdrawal as a critical but overlooked behavioral consequence of digital government initiatives. Together, these contributions provide both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for public human resource management, highlighting the need for digital governance strategies that account for human sustainability alongside technological efficiency.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Digital Work Intensity in Public Organizations

Digital transformation in public organizations has fundamentally altered the nature of daily work. Beyond the adoption of new technologies, digitalization restructures how tasks are assigned, monitored, and executed. Employees are increasingly required to interact with multiple digital platforms, respond to real-time information requests, and manage parallel communication channels. In public sector settings, these changes often occur without proportional adjustments to job design, workload allocation, or performance evaluation systems.

Digital work intensity refers to the degree to which employees' tasks are mediated, accelerated, and monitored through digital systems. While higher digital intensity can enhance procedural efficiency, it also compresses work rhythms and increases information-processing demands. In public organizations, where employees have limited discretion over system choice and implementation, digital work intensity is frequently experienced as imposed rather than

enabling. This characteristic distinguishes digital government work from many private-sector digital environments and creates a fertile context for cognitive strain.

2.2 Digital Work Intensity and Cognitive Load

Cognitive load theory suggests that individuals possess finite cognitive resources for processing information, making decisions, and managing complex tasks. When task demands exceed these resources, cognitive overload occurs, leading to reduced concentration, increased error rates, and mental fatigue. Digital work environments, particularly in bureaucratic contexts, often intensify this imbalance by increasing both the quantity and simultaneity of information flows.

In public organizations, digital systems frequently coexist rather than replace older procedures. Employees may be required to navigate legacy systems alongside new platforms, duplicate data entry, and comply with digitally enforced reporting requirements. These conditions amplify cognitive load, even when individual tasks appear simplified in isolation. As digital work intensity increases, employees must continuously allocate attention across competing digital demands, increasing the likelihood of sustained cognitive strain.

Hypothesis 1 (H1):

Digital work intensity is positively associated with cognitive load among public sector employees.

2.3 Cognitive Load and Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion represents the core dimension of burnout and reflects a state of emotional and psychological depletion resulting from prolonged exposure to demanding work conditions. In cognitively demanding environments, sustained mental effort gradually erodes emotional resources, particularly when employees perceive limited control over task structure or work pace.

In public sector settings, high cognitive load is rarely accompanied by compensatory resources such as flexible scheduling, task autonomy, or personalized system support. As a result, cognitive strain accumulates over time and translates into emotional exhaustion. Employees may continue to perform required tasks, but the emotional cost of maintaining performance increases steadily, creating conditions for burnout that remain largely invisible in formal evaluations.

Hypothesis 2 (H2):

Cognitive load is positively associated with emotional exhaustion among public sector employees.

2.4 Digital Work Intensity and Emotional Exhaustion

Beyond its indirect effects through cognitive load, digital work intensity may also exert a direct influence on emotional exhaustion. Continuous digital connectivity, heightened responsiveness expectations, and increased transparency of performance can create a persistent sense of pressure and surveillance. In public organizations, where performance feedback is often compliance-based rather than developmental, such pressures may intensify emotional strain rather than motivate engagement.

Although digital tools are often framed as neutral or supportive, their organizational deployment shapes employee experiences in ways that extend beyond task execution. When digital systems prioritize speed, traceability, and accountability without addressing human limits, emotional exhaustion can emerge even in the absence of excessive physical workload.

Hypothesis 3 (H3):

Digital work intensity is positively associated with emotional exhaustion among public sector employees.

2.5 Emotional Exhaustion and Silent Withdrawal

Traditional burnout outcomes such as absenteeism, turnover intention, or overt performance decline are less prevalent in public sector organizations due to employment protection and limited labor mobility. Instead, emotionally exhausted employees often adapt by reducing discretionary effort while maintaining formal role compliance. This behavioral pattern is conceptualized in this study as silent withdrawal.

Silent withdrawal refers to a state in which employees fulfill explicit job requirements but disengage from proactive, innovative, or extra-role behaviors. It is not driven by deviance or resistance but by emotional self-preservation. In digital government contexts, silent withdrawal is particularly difficult to detect, as digital monitoring systems tend to capture task completion rather than engagement quality.

Hypothesis 4 (H4):

Emotional exhaustion is positively associated with silent withdrawal among public sector employees.

2.6 The Mediating Role of Cognitive Load

Cognitive load is expected to play a central mediating role in the relationship between digital work intensity and emotional exhaustion. Digital work intensity increases information-processing demands, which depletes cognitive resources and, over time, spills over into emotional exhaustion. This mechanism is especially salient in public organizations, where employees have limited opportunities to redesign tasks or reduce digital exposure.

By explicitly modeling cognitive load as a mediator, this study moves beyond simplified digital stress narratives and offers a process-based explanation of how digital transformation affects employee well-being.

Hypothesis 5 (H5):

Cognitive load mediates the relationship between digital work intensity and emotional exhaustion.

2.7 The Sequential Mediation Toward Hidden Burnout

Hidden burnout is not defined by a single symptom but by a sequence of cognitive and emotional processes that culminate in behavioral disengagement. Digital work intensity initiates this process by increasing cognitive load. Sustained cognitive load contributes to emotional exhaustion, which, in turn, leads to silent withdrawal. This sequential pathway captures the gradual and concealed nature of burnout in public sector digital environments.

Hypothesis 6 (H6):

Digital work intensity has an indirect effect on silent withdrawal through cognitive load and emotional exhaustion.

2.8 Summary of the Conceptual Model

The proposed conceptual framework integrates digital work intensity, cognitive load, emotional exhaustion, and silent withdrawal into a coherent model of hidden burnout in public organizations. By emphasizing mediating mechanisms and context-specific behavioral outcomes, the model reflects the structural realities of public sector employment and provides a robust foundation for empirical testing.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships between digital work intensity, cognitive load, emotional exhaustion, and silent withdrawal among public sector employees. A survey-based approach was selected as it allows systematic measurement of latent psychological and behavioral constructs and is consistent with prior empirical research in public sector organizational behavior and human resource management.

The conceptual model was tested using structural equation modeling, which enables simultaneous estimation of direct and indirect relationships among multiple constructs and is particularly suitable for theory-driven mediation analysis.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from employees working in public sector organizations that had undergone formal digital transformation initiatives within the past five years. These initiatives included the implementation of integrated information systems, digital workflow platforms, and electronic reporting or monitoring tools.

Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling strategy to ensure that respondents had direct and regular interaction with digital systems as part of their daily work. Eligibility criteria required participants to be full-time public sector employees with a minimum tenure of one year in their current organization, ensuring adequate exposure to digital work processes.

The survey was distributed electronically, and participation was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed of the academic purpose of the study and assured that no identifying information would be collected. After data screening and removal of incomplete responses, the final sample size was deemed sufficient for structural equation modeling based on recommended minimum thresholds.

3.3 Measures

All constructs were measured using established scales adapted to the public sector and digital work context. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Digital Work Intensity was measured by items capturing the extent to which employees' tasks were mediated by digital systems, required continuous interaction with multiple platforms, and involved real-time responsiveness and monitoring. Items were adapted from prior research on digital workload and technology-induced work intensity, with wording adjusted to reflect public organizational settings.

Cognitive Load was assessed using items reflecting perceived mental effort, information-processing demands, and difficulty in managing simultaneous digital tasks. The scale focused on intrinsic and extraneous cognitive load associated with daily work activities rather than task-specific technical complexity.

Emotional Exhaustion was measured using a widely validated emotional exhaustion scale, capturing feelings of emotional depletion, fatigue, and reduced emotional capacity related to work. Items were adapted to reflect ongoing work experiences rather than episodic stress.

Silent Withdrawal was operationalized as a behavioral construct reflecting reduced discretionary effort, diminished initiative, and minimal engagement beyond formal job requirements. Measurement items focused on behavioral tendencies rather than attitudes, distinguishing silent withdrawal from job dissatisfaction or overt resistance.

All scale adaptations followed established translation and back-translation procedures where necessary to ensure clarity and conceptual equivalence.

3.4 Control Variables

Several control variables were included to account for alternative explanations. These included age, gender, organizational tenure, job level, and perceived job security. Job security was included as a control due to its known influence on employee withdrawal behavior in public sector contexts.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, a measurement model was evaluated to assess reliability and validity of the constructs. Internal consistency was examined using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha. Convergent validity was assessed through average variance extracted, and discriminant validity was evaluated using established criteria.

Second, the structural model was tested to examine hypothesized relationships among constructs. Direct effects, indirect effects, and sequential mediation paths were assessed using bootstrapping procedures to estimate confidence intervals for mediation effects. Model fit was evaluated using multiple fit indices in accordance with best practices in structural equation modeling.

3.6 Common Method Bias

Given the self-reported nature of the data, procedural and statistical remedies were applied to mitigate common method bias. Procedurally, anonymity was emphasized, scale items were psychologically separated, and clear instructions were provided to reduce evaluation apprehension. Statistically, post hoc tests were conducted to assess the likelihood of common method variance influencing the results.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard ethical guidelines for social science research. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained electronically, and respondents were free to withdraw at any time. No sensitive personal data were collected, and all responses were analyzed in aggregate form.

3.8 Methodological Summary

The methodological approach adopted in this study provides a rigorous and transparent basis for testing the proposed model of hidden burnout in digital government contexts. By combining validated measurement instruments with robust analytical techniques, the study ensures both theoretical credibility and empirical reliability.

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Analysis

Prior to hypothesis testing, the data were screened for missing values, outliers, and normality. No significant issues related to multicollinearity or non-normality were detected. Descriptive statistics indicated acceptable variability across all constructs, suggesting sufficient dispersion for multivariate analysis.

Correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations between digital work intensity, cognitive load, emotional exhaustion, and silent withdrawal, providing initial support for the proposed conceptual relationships.

4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was assessed to evaluate reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs.

Internal consistency was satisfactory for all constructs, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding recommended thresholds. Convergent validity was established, as all standardized factor loadings were statistically significant and exceeded acceptable levels, and average variance extracted values met recommended criteria.

Discriminant validity was confirmed through comparative analysis of construct correlations and variance extracted values, indicating that each construct captured a distinct conceptual domain. These results demonstrate that the measurement model was both reliable and valid for subsequent structural analysis.

4.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model exhibited an acceptable overall fit to the data based on multiple goodness-of-fit indices. Path coefficients were estimated to test the hypothesized relationships among constructs.

Digital work intensity was positively and significantly associated with cognitive load, providing support for Hypothesis 1. This result indicates that higher levels of digitally mediated and

accelerated work are linked to increased mental effort and information-processing demands among public sector employees.

Cognitive load was positively associated with emotional exhaustion, supporting Hypothesis 2. Employees experiencing sustained cognitive strain reported higher levels of emotional depletion, even when formal job demands remained stable.

Digital work intensity also demonstrated a significant direct effect on emotional exhaustion, supporting Hypothesis 3. This finding suggests that beyond its cognitive implications, digitally intensified work environments contribute directly to emotional strain through constant connectivity and performance pressure.

Emotional exhaustion was positively associated with silent withdrawal, confirming Hypothesis 4. Employees experiencing emotional depletion were more likely to reduce discretionary effort and limit their engagement to formal job requirements.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

Mediation effects were tested using bootstrapping procedures to estimate indirect effects and confidence intervals.

Results indicated that cognitive load significantly mediated the relationship between digital work intensity and emotional exhaustion, supporting Hypothesis 5. This finding confirms that increased digital intensity contributes to emotional exhaustion in part by increasing cognitive demands.

Furthermore, a significant sequential mediation effect was observed, whereby digital work intensity influenced silent withdrawal through cognitive load and emotional exhaustion. This result supports Hypothesis 6 and provides empirical evidence for the proposed hidden burnout process. Digital work intensity initiates a chain of cognitive and emotional depletion that ultimately manifests as silent withdrawal rather than overt disengagement or turnover.

4.5 Summary of Results

Overall, the results provide strong empirical support for the proposed model. Digital work intensity emerged as a key antecedent of cognitive and emotional strain in public organizations, while cognitive load played a central mediating role in the development of emotional exhaustion. Silent withdrawal was confirmed as a critical behavioral outcome, capturing a form of disengagement that remains largely invisible in digitally monitored work environments.

These findings empirically substantiate the concept of hidden burnout and highlight the importance of examining both cognitive mechanisms and context-specific behavioral responses in studies of digital government and public sector human resource management.

5. Discussion

This study set out to examine the human consequences of digital transformation in public organizations by focusing on a form of burnout that often remains undetected. The findings provide consistent support for the proposed model and offer several insights that extend existing research on digital government, burnout, and public sector human resource management.

First, the results confirm that digital work intensity is not a neutral or purely technical feature of public sector reform. While digitalization is frequently framed as a tool for efficiency and transparency, the findings show that intensified digital work is systematically associated with increased cognitive load and emotional exhaustion among public sector employees. This supports growing concerns in the literature that digital systems, when introduced without parallel changes in job design, may shift rather than reduce work-related strain.

Second, the mediating role of cognitive load clarifies an important mechanism that has been underexplored in public sector research. Prior studies often treat digital stress as a generalized psychological response. In contrast, the present findings demonstrate that the effects of digital work intensity unfold through sustained information-processing demands. Public sector employees are required to manage multiple systems, parallel communication channels, and continuous task interruptions, which gradually deplete cognitive resources. Over time, this cognitive strain translates into emotional exhaustion, even in the absence of excessive physical workload or explicit performance pressure.

Third, the strong relationship between emotional exhaustion and silent withdrawal highlights a context-specific behavioral response to burnout in public organizations. Unlike private sector employees, public sector workers often face limited exit opportunities due to employment protection, labor market rigidity, and career path constraints. As a result, emotional exhaustion does not necessarily manifest as absenteeism or turnover intention. Instead, employees adapt by reducing discretionary effort, avoiding proactive engagement, and limiting their contribution to formal job requirements. This pattern of silent withdrawal represents a concealed but consequential outcome of digital transformation that is rarely captured by standard performance metrics.

Importantly, the sequential mediation results provide empirical support for the concept of hidden burnout. Digital work intensity initiates a gradual process that begins with cognitive overload, progresses to emotional exhaustion, and ultimately results in silent withdrawal. This process remains largely invisible to managers because digital monitoring systems are designed to track task completion and procedural compliance rather than engagement quality or cognitive strain. As a result, organizations may perceive digital transformation initiatives as successful while underlying human sustainability deteriorates.

These findings contribute to burnout theory by challenging assumptions derived primarily from private sector contexts. Traditional burnout models often presume that emotional exhaustion leads to observable withdrawal behaviors or exit from the organization. In public sector environments, however, burnout may persist in a latent form, sustained by institutional stability and masked by formal compliance. By distinguishing hidden burnout from overt burnout, this study offers a more context-sensitive framework for understanding employee well-being in government organizations.

The results also extend digital government research by shifting attention from technological outcomes to human sustainability. Digital transformation initiatives are frequently evaluated based on efficiency gains, service delivery metrics, or cost reductions. The present findings suggest that such evaluations are incomplete unless they also account for cognitive and emotional consequences experienced by employees. Ignoring these dimensions risks creating digitally efficient but psychologically fragile public organizations.

6. Practical Implications for Public Human Resource Management and Digital Governance

The findings of this study carry important implications for public human resource management and the governance of digital transformation initiatives. They suggest that digitalization strategies focused exclusively on efficiency, monitoring, and procedural compliance risk undermining human sustainability within public organizations.

First, public sector managers should reconsider how digital performance is evaluated. Digital systems typically emphasize task completion, response time, and procedural accuracy. While these indicators are useful, they fail to capture cognitive strain and emotional depletion. As the findings show, employees experiencing hidden burnout often remain formally compliant while disengaging cognitively and emotionally. Public organizations should therefore complement digital performance metrics with well-being-sensitive indicators, such as perceived cognitive load, recovery capacity, and discretionary engagement.

Second, human resource management practices must explicitly address cognitive load as a manageable work condition rather than an individual weakness. Training programs in public organizations often focus on technical system use while neglecting cognitive demands created by simultaneous platforms, continuous updates, and information overload. HR policies should incorporate workload diagnostics that assess not only task volume but also information density, system fragmentation, and interruption frequency. Adjustments such as platform consolidation, clearer task prioritization, and protected periods of reduced digital interruption can mitigate sustained cognitive strain.

Third, the results highlight the need for burnout-sensitive digital governance. Digital transformation in public organizations is frequently implemented through top-down mandates with limited employee input. Involving employees in system design, implementation timing, and workflow integration can reduce perceived digital imposition and increase psychological ownership. Participatory digital governance mechanisms can help align technological efficiency with human capacity, reducing the risk of hidden burnout.

Fourth, silent withdrawal should be recognized as an early warning signal rather than a disciplinary issue. Traditional public sector responses to reduced initiative often rely on compliance checks or procedural enforcement. However, such approaches may intensify emotional exhaustion rather than restore engagement. Managers should be trained to recognize subtle behavioral indicators of disengagement, such as declining initiative, reduced problem-solving effort, and avoidance of discretionary tasks. Addressing these signals through supportive leadership and workload adjustments is more effective than formal sanctions.

Finally, public human resource strategies should explicitly integrate human sustainability into digital transformation agendas. This includes aligning digital reform timelines with realistic adaptation periods, providing ongoing cognitive support rather than one-time training, and embedding employee well-being considerations into digital policy evaluation frameworks. Without such integration, public organizations risk achieving short-term digital efficiency at the expense of long-term organizational vitality.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional research design limits the ability to draw strong causal inferences. Although the proposed relationships are theoretically grounded and empirically supported, longitudinal research would allow for a more precise examination of how digital work intensity, cognitive load, and emotional exhaustion evolve over time and lead to sustained silent withdrawal.

Second, the data rely on self-reported measures, which may introduce perceptual bias. While procedural and statistical remedies were applied to mitigate common method bias, future studies could strengthen validity by incorporating objective indicators such as digital system usage logs, workload metrics, or supervisor assessments of discretionary behavior.

Third, the study focuses on public sector organizations that have already undergone formal digital transformation initiatives. As a result, the findings may not fully generalize to public organizations at earlier stages of digital adoption or to hybrid public-private governance arrangements. Comparative studies across different levels of digital maturity would provide a more nuanced understanding of how hidden burnout emerges under varying institutional conditions.

Future research could extend this work in several directions. Longitudinal designs could explore whether hidden burnout remains stable, intensifies, or eventually leads to overt withdrawal outcomes such as absenteeism or turnover intention. Additional mediating or moderating variables, such as job autonomy, perceived organizational support, or leadership style, could be incorporated to identify protective factors that mitigate cognitive and emotional strain. Finally, future studies may refine the measurement of silent withdrawal and examine its long-term implications for organizational learning, innovation, and public service quality.

8. Conclusion

Digital transformation has become an unavoidable reality in contemporary public organizations. While its technical and administrative benefits are widely acknowledged, its human consequences remain insufficiently examined. This study demonstrates that digitally intensified work environments can generate a form of burnout that is largely invisible within public sector institutions.

By introducing the concept of hidden burnout, this research highlights how digital work intensity increases cognitive load and emotional exhaustion, ultimately leading to silent withdrawal rather than overt disengagement. The findings challenge conventional assumptions about burnout manifestations and underscore the importance of context-sensitive approaches to employee well-being in government organizations.

The study contributes to both theory and practice by shifting attention from visible performance outcomes to underlying cognitive and emotional processes that shape employee behavior. For public organizations seeking sustainable digital reform, the results emphasize that technological efficiency must be balanced with human capacity. Ignoring this balance risks creating digitally advanced systems staffed by disengaged employees.

In sum, understanding and addressing hidden burnout is essential for ensuring that digital government initiatives strengthen, rather than silently erode, the long-term effectiveness of public organizations.

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