

Managerial Innovation and Digitalization: Drivers of Well-being at Work in Schools in Morocco

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ABSTRACT: Managerial innovation and digitalization are key drivers of well-being at work in schools in Morocco. This study explores how innovative management practices, in a context of increasing digitalization, influence teachers' well-being. Using an exploratory qualitative approach based on 32 semi-structured interviews, we analyze teachers' perceptions of management practices and their connection to well-being. The results show that digitalization acts as a booster for managerial practices but can create tensions if not supported by proper management. Supportive communication (38%), active listening (74%), and recognition of work (60%) are the strongest drivers of well-being, while lack of recognition (26%) and absence of feedback (21%) remain the main obstacles.

KEYWORDS: Managerial innovation, digitalization, well-being at work.

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Introduction

In Morocco, the public education sector is going through an unprecedented modernization phase, driven by strategic initiatives like the National Digitization Plan, the widespread adoption of digital equipment, and the rollout of distance learning platforms in schools (Ministry of National Education, 2022). This digital transition aims to improve learning quality, boost administrative efficiency, and prepare young generations for the challenges of the digital economy.

However, digitalization is not just about rolling out technology. It involves a deep transformation of management practices, communication styles, and hierarchical relationships within organizations. In this context, school leaders are expected to play a key role in supporting this transition by adopting innovative management practices that put teachers at the heart of the transformation process (Panczuk & Point, 2008).

The issue of teacher well-being at work is particularly pressing in Morocco. Education jobs face major structural challenges: teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, lack of material resources, and profound changes due to digitalization and successive educational reforms. As Chainane & Boudi (2024) point out, work well-being in the Moroccan context is closely tied to management practices and recognition. These two areas are still underdeveloped in the public education sector.

Previous research has extensively documented the positive effects of management practices on workplace well-being in private organizations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Grawitch et al., 2015). In the education sector, studies have shown that the quality of supervisory relationships, recognition, and active listening is a major factor in teachers' engagement and satisfaction (Hakanen et al., 2006).

Moreover, digitalization is deeply changing these managerial relationships. It can make communication and feedback easier through digital platforms, but it can also create significant tensions: increased cognitive load, depersonalization of interactions, digital gap between generations, or feelings of being monitored (Chen, 2025; Ehmann et al., 2025). These ambivalent effects of digitalization on employee well-being, well-documented in the Anglo-Saxon literature, remain largely unknown in the specific context of Moroccan schools. Yet, understanding these mechanisms is essential to shed light on the conditions for successful digitalization, that is, generating well-being rather than tension.

The existing literature thus shows a double gap: on the one hand, it has paid little attention to the link between managerial innovation and digitalization in the educational public sector; on the other hand, it has not yet explored in depth how these practices can ease or worsen the effects of digitalization on teachers' well-being in Morocco. This double gap is at the heart of the issue in this research.

Given this situation, the central question guiding this study is the following: how do innovative management practices, in a context of increasing digitalization, influence the work well-being of

teachers in Moroccan schools? This question is scientifically significant in several ways. For example, it helps identify the conditions for digitalization that respect employees' well-being and addresses a pressing operational concern for Moroccan public policymakers, who are keen to modernize the education system while maintaining teachers' mental health and engagement.

To answer this question, we adopt an exploratory qualitative approach, based on semi-structured interviews conducted with school teachers. This methodology provides access to the perceptions and lived experiences of actors in the field, and to identify the explanatory mechanisms linking managerial practices, digitalization and well-being at work. The following section breaks down this general objective into specific research questions.

Research goal and research questions

The main goal of this study is to explore how innovative management practices, in the context of increasing digitalization, affect the well-being of teachers at work in Moroccan schools. To address this goal, we formulate the following three research questions:

Q1: What innovative management practices are seen by teachers as supportive of their well-being at work?

Q2: How does the digitalization of schools affect the perception and implementation of these innovative management practices?

Q3: What are the barriers and obstacles that harm teachers' well-being, and how does digitalization amplify or lessen them?

Search results

Theoretical Framework

Managerial innovation is defined as the introduction and implementation of practices, processes, structures, or management techniques that are perceived as new by the organization and aim to improve its performance and adaptability (Birkinshaw, Hamel & Mol, 2008; Hamel, 2006). According to Birkinshaw et al. (2008), it is "the invention and implementation of a practice, process, structure, or management technique that is new compared to the state of the art and intended to help achieve organizational goals." In the education sector, managerial innovation comes through adopting new ways of organizing work, new ways of running schools, and new approaches to the relationships between leadership teams and teaching staff (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Fullan, 2007). It helps transform management practices and improve how schools operate, responding to today's challenges of performance and well-being at work (Day et al., 2011; Spillane, 2006).

Well-being at work is understood as a multidimensional state arising from an individual's subjective evaluation of their work experience (Grawitch et al., 2015). The job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) provides a useful framework: well-being comes from balancing job

demands with available resources. In the education sector, digitalization can be looked at through this lens: it's both a resource (making communication easier, automating tasks, providing personalized feedback) and an extra demand (information overload, cognitive load, feeling monitored). Recent studies confirm this mixed effect of digitalization on employee well-being (Chen, 2025; Ehmann et al., 2025).

Methodology

The study takes an exploratory qualitative approach, favored for understanding the complexity of social phenomena through the discourse of the actors (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It falls within an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that individuals construct social reality through their interactions and interpretations (Schwandt, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The target population consists of teachers working in pioneering schools in the Moroccan public sector. In total, 32 teachers (21 women, 11 men) participated in the interviews, which amounts to a 75% acceptance rate. Among them, 53% have more than 10 years of experience, and 60% have worked at least once at another school, which enhances their ability to compare management practices.

Empirical Results

The results show that teachers see innovative management practices through several angles: their relationship with the administration, communication and feedback, active listening, recognition and appreciation, as well as the role of digitalization.

Regarding the relationship with management, it is generally positive, built on mutual respect and trust. However, the quality of this relationship still depends on the personality of the head of the institution, as some comments show: 'It depends on their personality' (R7).

When it comes to communication and feedback, perceptions are mixed. While most teachers enjoy clear and accessible communication, a significant number complain that communication is mostly one-way, without any room for back-and-forth (R31). Active listening is widely mentioned as a factor for well-being by 74% of respondents. Teachers feel heard when they raise issues, even though some report vague or delayed responses.

Recognition at work comes across as a major motivation boost (60%). It mostly happens in informal ways, like thanks and encouragement, since formal recognition is almost nonexistent in the public sector. On the flip side, 26% of teachers report feeling unrecognized, which can come across as devaluing.

Finally, digitalization plays a mixed role. It's seen as helpful when it improves access to information and transparency, but it also creates stress with cognitive load, monitoring, and the digital gap between generations.

Managerial practices that are favorable and unfavorable to well-being are shown in [Table 1].

Favorable practice	%	Verbatims	Unfavorable practice	%	Verbatims
Caring/supportive communication	38%	<i>"Communication is clear, regular, and accessible."</i>	Lack of recognition	28%	<i>"Recognition is often absent."</i>
Active listening	74%	<i>"The active listening and availability of the principal."</i>	Lack of feedback	9%	<i>"I receive no feedback."</i>
Recognition	60%	<i>"Recognition of work and appreciation."</i>	Top-down communication	9%	<i>"Communication is top-down."</i>
Organizational justice	13%	<i>"Equality and fairness among teachers."</i>	Favoritism/injustice	14%	<i>"Unfair distribution and favoritism."</i>
Skills development	11%	<i>"Continuous training and coaching."</i>	Lack of resources	22%	<i>"The lack of infrastructure is demeaning."</i>

Source: personal development

The results confirm that digitalization acts as an amplifier of managerial practices (Bondarouk & Ruël, 2009). When paired with supportive communication, it boosts transparency and efficiency. On the other hand, without good managerial practices, it heightens tensions (Chen, 2025). This finding aligns with recent studies on the mixed effects of digitalization on employee well-being.

Structural barriers persist: lack of recognition, no feedback, favoritism, and lack of material resources. These barriers limit the impact of management practices. What's specific about the Moroccan context is the importance of non-financial levers. In a public sector setting where financial levers are almost non-existent, informal recognition becomes a strategic issue (Chainane & Boudi, 2024).

Conclusion

This exploratory study aimed to understand how innovative management practices, in a context of increasing digitalization, affect teachers' well-being at work in Moroccan schools. The analysis of interview data from 32 teachers reveals several significant insights. First, digitalization is neither a resource nor a requirement in itself; it acts as an amplifier of management practices. When paired with caring management and transparent communication, it boosts organizational efficiency and teacher satisfaction. On the other hand, in the absence of quality management practices, it magnifies tensions and creates harmful effects like cognitive overload or feelings of being monitored. This finding suggests moving beyond tech-centered approaches and seeing digitalization as a tool whose effects closely depend on how it is implemented.

Secondly, persistent structural barriers limit the impact of management practices: lack of recognition (26%), absence of feedback (21%), favoritism (9%), and insufficient resources (11%). These obstacles, inherent to the Moroccan public sector, can be exacerbated by poorly supported

digitalization. They call for a reflection on the institutional conditions needed for truly innovative management to emerge.

Thirdly, the Moroccan context is characterized by the importance of non-financial levers. In an environment where formal recognition mechanisms (bonuses, promotions) are almost non-existent, informal recognition such as thanks, verbal praise, and personalized attention becomes a strategic issue for teachers' well-being and, ultimately, for the quality of the education system.

In light of these results, several practical recommendations can be made for the actors in the Moroccan education system.

The institutionalization of recognition and feedback practices is also necessary. Rather than relying solely on directors' individual initiative, these practices should be integrated into institutional management procedures to ensure their sustainability and fairness.

We believe that supporting digitalization should be seen as an overall process, including a continuous training plan to prevent the digital divide between generations of teachers and to avoid the feeling of being monitored.

Finally, improving material working conditions is an essential prerequisite. Managerial practices, no matter how innovative, cannot make up for the lack of basic infrastructure and proper resources.

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