

# JCU ScholarShip

## Digital Transformation in Work Integration Social Enterprises: Leadership Strategies and the Role of Internal Stakeholders

Item Type	Article
Authors	Maiolini, Riccardo;D'Alessandro, Federica;Landoni, Paolo
Citation	Maiolini, Riccardo, Federica D'Alessandro, and Paolo Landoni. "Digital Transformation in Work Integration Social Enterprises: Leadership Strategies and the Role of Internal Stakeholders." Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management. 2026.
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.70552">https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.70552</a>
Rights	Attribution 4.0 International
Download date	2026-05-08 09:39:10
Item License	<a href="http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/1307">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/1307</a>

RESEARCH ARTICLE **OPEN ACCESS**

# Digital Transformation in Work Integration Social Enterprises: Leadership Strategies and the Role of Internal Stakeholders

Riccardo Maiolini<sup>1</sup>  | Federica D'Alessandro<sup>2</sup> | Paolo Landoni<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Frank J. Guarini School of Business, John Cabot University, Rome, Italy | <sup>2</sup>Dipartimento di Ingegneria Gestionale e Della Produzione (DIGEP), Politecnico di Torino, Turin, Italy

**Correspondence:** Riccardo Maiolini ([rmaiolini@johncabot.edu](mailto:rmaiolini@johncabot.edu))

**Received:** 30 May 2025 | **Revised:** 23 February 2026 | **Accepted:** 5 March 2026

**Keywords:** digital transformation | inclusive leadership | leadership strategies | stakeholder personas | WISEs | work integration social enterprises

## ABSTRACT

Digital transformation is increasingly reshaping how social enterprises organize work, engage stakeholders, and pursue social value. While prior research has examined digitalization in hybrid organizations, limited attention has been paid to how responsibility for inclusive digital transformation is enacted internally. Focusing on work integration social enterprises (WISEs), this study conceptualizes digital transformation as a form of responsible and inclusive organizational change, in which technological innovation must be aligned with social responsibility toward vulnerable internal stakeholders. Drawing on 73 qualitative case studies from 13 European countries, we adopt a persona-based analytical approach to examine how different internal actors experience, enable, or constrain digital transformation processes. Our findings identify three strategic capabilities—inclusive leadership for digital change, strategic flexibility for inclusive innovation, and inclusive and accessible human-centered digital strategy—and show how these capabilities are enacted through distinct internal stakeholder personas. By integrating digital transformation research with a human-centered and responsibility-oriented perspective, this study contributes to the literature by explaining how inclusive digital transformation depends on the alignment between leadership strategies and the lived experiences of internal stakeholders in hybrid organizations.

## 1 | Introduction

Digital transformation (DT) is no longer a privilege of profit-focused companies; it is increasingly reshaping how social enterprises organize their operations, engage stakeholders, and provide social value (Akther et al. 2024; Gigauri et al. 2023; Mikołajczak and Skikiewicz 2025). Among them, work integration social enterprises (WISEs) hold a special place: they combine economic activity with the explicit aim of helping individuals facing structural barriers enter the labor market. They involve people experiencing social exclusion, due, for instance, to disability, long-term unemployment, or migration background, not only as beneficiaries but as active contributors to both productive processes and the co-creation of services

that meet their needs (Borzaga and Loss 2006; Petrella and Richez-Battesti 2016). As mission-driven hybrid organizations (Battilana et al. 2015), WISEs face growing pressure to adopt digital technologies, even though they often operate with limited resources and have a workforce with low digital readiness (Kalendzhyan and Kadol 2023; Zhang et al. 2024).

Digital transformation in WISEs introduces not only technical and managerial challenges (Ciulli and Kolk 2023) but also raises important questions about organizational change and inclusion (Loh and Chib 2019; Zhang et al. 2024). Recent studies show that DT in social enterprises affects not only operational efficiency, but also stakeholder engagement, social innovation capacity, and long-term sustainability (He et al. 2022; Gigauri

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2026 The Author(s). *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* published by ERP Environment and John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

et al. 2023; Scuotto et al. 2025). Digital technologies can support efficiency and innovation, but if not managed carefully, they may exacerbate exclusion for the very populations WISEs are meant to empower (Cipriano and Za 2024). This tension is particularly salient in WISEs, given their hybrid nature, in which mission-related goals and operational constraints must be continually negotiated. While prior research has highlighted the importance of leadership and strategic alignment in enabling DT in general (AlNuaimi et al. 2022). Studies are only beginning to explore how these dynamics unfold within social enterprises (Porfirio et al. 2021). Indeed, we still know relatively little about the internal social dynamics that shape these processes, especially regarding how different stakeholders within WISEs perceive, support, resist, or adapt to digital change.

To fill this gap, we propose considering DT in WISEs as a socially embedded organizational change process, primarily shaped by the actions and attitudes of internal stakeholders. Building on this perspective, we adopt the analytical lens of personas—narrative-based archetypes (Nielsen and Hansen 2014; Salminen et al. 2018) that provide a nuanced and human-centered approach (Matthews et al. 2012) to interpret how digital strategies are experienced and enacted by different categories of people within organizations (Prodanov 2018). By examining these differentiated roles, we can move beyond abstract strategic models to understand how transformation unfolds in practice. While prior research has highlighted the opportunities of digitalization in social enterprises, we still lack an understanding of how responsibility for inclusive digital transformation is enacted internally, across different organizational roles and stakeholder groups. This paper addresses the following research question: What roles do different internal stakeholders—characterized through personas—play in enabling or constraining digital transformation processes in WISEs?

To answer this question, we draw on 73 case studies from 13 European countries. We analyze these cases along two complementary dimensions: First, by identifying strategic configurations of DT specific to the WISE context; and second, by classifying stakeholder roles into empirically grounded personas that illustrate their engagement with digital change.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it reframes digital transformation in work integration social enterprises as a process of responsible and inclusive organizational change. Second, it introduces personas as an analytical lens to capture how responsibility for digital transformation is distributed across internal stakeholders. Third, it advances management research by linking leadership strategies, inclusion, and human-centered digital practices in hybrid organizations.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: we start by outlining the theoretical foundations of work integration social enterprises (WISEs), then review the literature on DT in social enterprises, focusing on organizational change and the role of internal stakeholders. Next, we introduce the concept of personas as an analytical tool to interpret how digital change is experienced within WISEs. We then describe

our methodology and the dataset. In the findings section, we identify three strategic capabilities that define DT in WISEs and analyze how different personas either enable or constrain these strategies. We conclude by discussing the theoretical contributions of our work to the literature on DT and hybrid organizations, as well as practical insights for promoting inclusive innovation in social enterprises.

## 2 | Literature Review

### 2.1 | Social Enterprises and WISEs Definition

Social enterprises (SEs) are hybrid organizations (Battilana et al. 2015; Ramus et al. 2018) that pursue social missions through market-based approaches (Arena et al. 2006; Scalvini et al. 2006), blending elements of for-profit and nonprofit logics (Defourny and Nyssens 2010). Among the most structured forms of social enterprises, work integration social enterprises (WISEs) occupy a distinctive position. WISEs are primarily designed to integrate disadvantaged individuals into the labor market, not merely as beneficiaries, but as active participants in both productive activities and in shaping or engaging with services aimed at addressing their specific needs (Borzaga and Loss 2006; Petrella and Richez-Battesti 2016). Early studies framed WISEs as institutional responses to failures in labor market and employment policies, particularly in Southern European contexts (Vidal 2001; Defourny and Nyssens 2010).

The historical origins of WISEs in Europe can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, when rising unemployment, industrial restructuring, and welfare state retrenchment created the need for innovative forms of social inclusion (Besharov and Miner 2024) and labor market integration (Arena et al. 2006; Defourny and Nyssens 2010, 2013). Emerging initially in Italy, France, and Belgium, WISEs originated in cooperative traditions (Scalvini et al. 2006; Spear and Bidet 2005) and in grassroots efforts to reintegrate marginalized groups into the workforce through productive activities (Scalvini et al. 2006). Over time, they became institutionalized within diverse national welfare and labor systems, often supported by public policies and European Union frameworks that emphasized active inclusion (Spear and Bidet 2005). Today, WISEs are recognized across Europe as a distinctive model of social enterprise: they combine economic activity with a strong social mission, reinvesting surpluses into training, mentoring, and tailored pathways to employment for disadvantaged individuals (Borzaga and Santuari 2000). Their main characteristics include integrating marginalized people as workers and co-creators of value, adopting a democratic or participatory governance model, and pursuing both economic sustainability and measurable social impact (Borzaga and Santuari (2000); Defourny and Nyssens 2010; Borzaga and Defourny 2001). In this way, WISEs stand out as a specific subset of social enterprises—rooted in European traditions of solidarity economy—that place inclusive labor market participation at the very core of their organizational identity (Spear and Bidet 2005). These organizations may take on various legal forms—such as cooperatives, nonprofits, foundations, or, in some contexts, benefit corporations—depending on the national legal frameworks (Defourny and Nyssens 2013; Zhou et al. 2020). What

distinguishes WISEs is not their legal status per se, but the centrality of their inclusive mission, that is, their effort to include people marginalized due to disability, long-term unemployment, migration background, or other forms of social exclusion (Spear and Bidet 2005).

## 2.2 | Digital Transformation in Social Enterprises

In recent years, digital transformation (DT) has emerged as a key challenge and opportunity for social enterprises (Gigauri et al. 2023; Zhang et al. 2024). Digital tools offer pathways to improve efficiency, increase impact, and expand access to services (Prodanov 2018). However, the transition toward DT also exposes the tension between technological innovation and social inclusion (Yelland 2013). Recent contributions emphasize that digitalization in social enterprises entails hybrid forms of value creation, where digital capabilities, social mission, and organizational resilience co-evolve (Torres and Augusto 2020; He et al. 2022; Nakpodia et al. 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that digital capabilities and digital innovation mediate social enterprise performance, reinforcing the strategic—not merely technical—nature of DT (Akther et al. 2025). While DT may enhance SEs' visibility and operational capacity, it may also exacerbate existing inequalities if vulnerable stakeholders are excluded or marginalized during the transformation process (Loh and Chib 2019; Robinson et al. 2015). The nonprofit and hybrid nature of SEs requires balancing mission-driven objectives with the need to adopt new technologies (Mair and Hehenberger 2014), often without the same resources or expertise available in the private-sector (Battilana and Dorado 2010). Moreover, this digital adaptation must account for beneficiaries' inclusive involvement, ensuring that technological change supports rather than undermines their social inclusion (Murray et al. 2020). WISEs, in particular, must navigate how digital change affects not only managerial processes but also the employability and agency of their target populations (Guan and Qiu 2024; Sarantou and Pan 2020).

While DT in mainstream firms has been analyzed through organizational change (Teece 2007; Zand and Sorensen 1975), little is known about how these frameworks apply to social enterprises such as WISEs. In these contexts, DT is not simply a technological shift but a profound organizational change process that reshapes governance, stakeholder engagement, and inclusive missions. Indeed, organizational change theory (Dolata 2009; König et al. 2012, 2021) provides a valuable lens for analyzing DT in SEs (Rajpal et al. 2025). Rather than viewing DT as a purely technical shift, it is essential to understand how this change reshapes internal cultures, stakeholder relations, and operational logics (Tilson et al. 2010). Central to this process is leadership (AlNuaimi et al. 2022; Porfirio et al. 2021): leaders must not only initiate technological investments but also mediate between innovation and the values of inclusion, equity, and empowerment (AlNuaimi et al. 2022; Porfirio et al. 2021). Equally critical is the role of internal stakeholders—such as managers, supporters, and frontline workers—who influence how digital strategies are translated into practice and how resistance or enthusiasm is managed across the organization (Oborn et al. 2019; Podsakoff

et al. 2003). A refined understanding of these dynamics is fundamental in WISEs, where beneficiaries' needs and capacities are crucial to success.

## 2.3 | Personas as a Lens to Understand Internal Stakeholders

A promising approach to better understanding the diversity of roles and attitudes within WISEs is the use of personas. As initially introduced by Cooper (1999) personas—narrative-based archetypes—provide a nuanced lens for interpreting how different internal stakeholders experience and respond to organizational processes, such as DT. Originating in user experience research (Matthews et al. 2012), personas offer a structured way to describe recurring behavioral patterns, motivations, and needs within organizations (Salminen et al. 2018). In the context of WISEs, personas can be used to articulate how different categories of actors—including enablers, supporters, and workers with support needs—experience and shape DT. Recent research highlights how individual intentions, identities, and perceptions shape engagement with digital social entrepreneurship, calling for actor-centered lenses to understand digital change in hybrid organizations (Ghatak et al. 2023; Muthukrishnan and Bhattacharyya 2025). This approach moves beyond generic stakeholder mapping by offering empirically grounded, nuanced profiles that reflect how individuals interact with digital tools, respond to change, and contribute to mission-driven innovation (Nielsen and Hansen 2014; Salminen et al. 2018).

Such diversity in digital attitudes requires differentiated strategies, reinforcing the idea that DT in WISEs is a profoundly human, relational, and context-sensitive process. By integrating the persona lens into digital strategy design, SEs can better align technological innovations with their members' lived experiences and aspirations.

## 2.4 | The Role of Leadership in Digital Transformation

Organizations must actively seek leaders with transformational qualities to maintain their competitive edge in digital transformation (DT) (Porfirio et al. 2021). AlNuaimi et al. (2022) developed a strategic framework that conceptualizes DT skills as an interplay between leadership, agility, and digital strategy. Their research revealed that DT leadership and organizational agility positively influence DT, with organizational agility serving as a mediator between leadership and transformation. To achieve agility, organizations must disrupt their conventional processes, structures, and management approaches (AlNuaimi et al. 2022). This study significantly contributes to understanding the role of strategy in DT by positioning digital strategy as a moderating variable between leadership and transformation, as well as between organizational agility and transformation. It suggests that a well-designed digital strategy can enhance the effectiveness of both leadership and agility in promoting successful DT.

In the context of work integration social enterprises (WISEs), additional challenges arise (Gigauri et al. 2023). These organizations face heightened difficulties related to technological

**TABLE 1** | Characteristics of the cases analyzed.

Country #	Country	Number of cases	Average number of employees	Average turnover (€)
1	Austria	10	140	3,454,556
2	Belgium	5	537	12.400.119
3	Bulgaria	3	31	96,667
4	Croatia	3	31	554.963
5	France	4	209	8,700,000
6	Greece	3	103	1,100,000
7	Italy	6	59	2,052,333
8	Latvia	5	11	200,000
9	Netherlands	8	633	15,200,000
10	Poland	3	19	223.135
11	Romania	9	22	497.589
12	Slovenia	7	10	274.019
13	Spain	7	1074	58,375,000

Note: The averages in each country are calculated using the data available (some organizations did not provide all data).

skills and digital literacy, especially given their focus on integrating disadvantaged workers (Cipriano and Za 2024). While technological innovations can benefit social enterprises, they may also exacerbate social inequalities and unemployment (Prodanov 2018). Despite the potential advantages of technology integration, many social enterprises remain hesitant toward digitization due to these significant obstacles (Craig et al. 2021).

DT is increasingly seen not just as the adoption of isolated technologies, but as a comprehensive process of organizational change (Vial 2021; Warner and Wäger 2019). Classic organizational change theories, process view of change, and the dynamic capabilities framework (Teece 2007)—provide valuable perspectives for understanding the cultural resistance, leadership needs, and strategic reconfigurations involved in DT. While these theories have been widely used in for-profit settings, their application to social enterprises remains limited (Hinings et al. 2018). For WISEs, DT is not just a technological shift but a mission-critical transformation that redefines inclusive governance, stakeholder roles, and the integration of marginalized workers. This indicates that DT in WISEs can be effectively analyzed as an organizational change process, in which (digital) leadership is a crucial driver.

### 3 | Methodology

#### 3.1 | Research Context and Case Selection

This study builds upon empirical material collected through an EU-funded project, supported by the EaSI Programme of the European Commission. The project's primary goal was to explore digital skill needs and transformation processes in work

integration social enterprises (WISEs) across Europe. The research consortium, composed of academic institutions and sectoral networks, conducted extensive fieldwork in 2022 across 13 European countries.

The dataset includes 73 detailed case studies, each based on interviews with managers, staff, and workers with support needs (WSNs). These cases represent a highly heterogeneous sample in terms of organizational size, sectoral activity, legal status, and national context. As detailed in Table 1, the dataset covers 13 countries. Their organizations' average number of employees ranges from 10 in Slovenia to over 1000 in Spain. Turnover averages range from €96,667 in Bulgaria up to over €58 million in Spain. This variation provides a solid empirical foundation for examining how DT is perceived, described, and handled across diverse institutional settings within WISEs.

The cases cover a broad range of organizational sizes, legal forms, and sectors, ensuring maximum variation sampling (Eisenhardt 1989) to reflect the diversity of the WISE ecosystem in Europe. Selection criteria aimed to provide both diversity and relevance, focusing on organizations that (a) had begun or planned DT efforts, and (b) were actively involved in work integration. While efforts were made to balance representation across countries, some contexts—such as Spain, Belgium, and the Netherlands—are more heavily represented due to stronger institutional networks and better data availability. This sampling strategy is consistent with case-based approaches to studying collaborative organizations with diverse partners and objectives (Sala et al. 2011). Each case report ranged from 7 to 15 single-spaced pages, totaling over 750 pages of qualitative material. The reports included contextual descriptions, direct interview excerpts, researcher observations, and analytical notes. Detailed steps of the research process are summarized in Table 2:

**TABLE 2** | Overview of research methodology.

Step	Description
Data collection	518 interviews + 175 online questionnaires conducted across 13 European countries as part of the B-WISE Project (2022).
Sample description	73 case studies with high heterogeneity in sector, size, legal/economic context, collected in 2022.
Data coding	Abductive coding to identify themes around digital transformation.
Persona identification	Identified and refined personas into enablers, supporters, and WSNs.
Theoretical integration	Linked empirical data with theoretical insights for framework validation and to outline strategic digital transformation pathways in WISEs.

### 3.2 | Data Analysis

We applied a dual abductive coding strategy to analyze the material (Vila-Henninger et al. 2024). This included two simultaneous but interconnected coding tasks: (1) developing personas and (2) implementing strategic transformation themes.

To examine how individuals within WISEs experience and shape DT processes, we relied on the persona typology developed in the project's final report. These personas were not drawn from existing taxonomies but were instead inductively constructed through fieldwork and interviews conducted during the original EU initiative. Rather than imposing predefined categories, we integrated the personas into our analysis as second-order themes, each reflecting recurring behavioral patterns, digital dispositions, and modes of interaction with technology and organizational change. Each persona was then categorized under one of three broader aggregate dimensions that denote their organizational function: Enablers (including profiles such as the founder, social enabler, and tech enabler), supporters (such as the social-oriented and professional-oriented supporters), and workers with support needs (WSNs), which include personas like the growth-oriented worker, the survivor, and those described as safely here. The validity of these profiles was reinforced through systematic cross-case comparisons and refined via collaborative exchanges with field researchers involved in the primary study. In this study, thus, personas are not used as illustrative or design-oriented tools, but as analytically grounded constructs that capture recurring configurations of agency, capability, and responsibility in digital transformation processes.

In parallel, we applied and adapted the DT framework developed by AlNuaimi et al. (2022), originally formulated for

analyzing private-sector organizations. This framework is structured around three strategic pillars: digital transformational leadership (DTL), organizational agility (OA), and digital strategy (DS). Given the unique mission orientation and multi-stakeholder context of WISEs, we revised and contextualized these pillars to better reflect the realities of WISEs. This process led to the development of three new, context-sensitive aggregate dimensions: inclusive leadership for digital change (derived from DTL), strategic flexibility for inclusive innovation (from OA), and inclusive and accessible human-centered digital strategy (from DS). These adapted dimensions offered a solid framework for studying how WISEs manage DT while maintaining their dedication to social inclusion.

### 3.3 | Coding Procedure

To ensure methodological rigor, we adopted a structured and iterative coding process (Ozanne et al. 1992; Thornberg and Charmaz 2014; Vila-Henninger et al. 2024). All coding activities were conducted using the software Atlas.ti, which facilitated the systematic organization and retrieval of data across the 73 case studies. The research team conducted collaborative coding cycles, with regular peer debriefings to clarify interpretations and refine the boundaries between emerging themes. The shift from first-order concepts to second-order themes was guided by both empirical patterns and theoretical relevance, and was validated across multiple cases to improve analytical validity. For the persona typology, we tested the robustness of each category by re-mapping coded excerpts from the case data to the definitions and characteristics in the original project typology, ensuring internal consistency and empirical grounding. We followed the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al. 2013) to construct our data structure, providing both inductive rigor and conceptual clarity. Our goal was to trace the progression from rich empirical data to theoretical insight, particularly in the context of DT in WISEs and the differentiated roles that internal actors (personas) play in these processes.

The first-order concepts were derived directly from interview excerpts, field notes, and case study reports gathered during the project. We relied on in vivo coding, preserving respondents' language to maintain proximity to the data. These concepts represent specific expressions, behaviors, or concerns raised by organizational actors (e.g., "Founders lack digital strategy experience," "Workers prefer routine and stability," or "Managers focus on tangible outputs"). Each case provided multiple excerpts, which were coded line by line, yielding a vast collection of detailed codes that remained close to participants' original wording.

We then grouped similar first-order concepts into second-order themes, moving toward theoretical abstraction while retaining close links to the data. This process was guided both by patterns that emerged across the cases and by insights from existing literature on DT, social enterprise, and inclusive innovation. For instance, concepts such as "Workers lack basic digital skills" and "Managers and supporters lack digital skills to assist workers" were synthesized into the second-order theme "Competence gaps and upskilling needs." Likewise, persona-related observations

like “Prefer routine and stability” and “Reluctant to adopt digital tools” were clustered under the second-order theme “Safely here (WSN).” For the personas, we drew on the typologies developed in the final report, which emerged inductively from fieldwork. We treated these typologies as second-order themes for our analysis and validated them through coding of the original case material.

At the highest level, we synthesized the second-order themes into three aggregate dimensions, each representing a distinct yet interconnected strategic capability necessary for DT within WISEs. These dimensions also provided a framework for organizing the roles played by different personas throughout the transformation process.

The first aggregate dimension, inclusive leadership for digital change, captures the organizational and cultural enablers or barriers to DT. The second, strategic flexibility for inclusive innovation, reflects how WISEs plan investments and design learning processes to accommodate the diverse needs of their workforce. The third, inclusive and accessible human-centered digital strategy, focuses on the ethical, inclusive, and usability-oriented aspects of digital tool design and implementation. In parallel, the personas were grouped into three overarching categories that align with these strategic capabilities. Enablers represent organizational leaders and change agents responsible for initiating and shaping digital strategies. Supporters are the middle-layer actors who operationalize those strategies, adapting technology to the specific contexts of the workforce. Workers with support needs (WSNs) are those directly impacted by DT, whose lived experiences and varying capacities significantly shape the inclusivity and effectiveness of the transformation process. An illustrative data structure is provided in Figures 1 and 2, showing how raw data fragments were coded, grouped, and abstracted.

To ensure rigor, multiple researchers carried out the coding and discussed it to refine category definitions. Any differences in coding interpretation were resolved through joint workshops with both academic and practitioner members of the DS4TS project. Personas were repeatedly tested against empirical data to assess internal consistency and external validity.

## 4 | Findings

Our findings are structured into two main analytical stages that reflect the study’s dual focus.

First, we examine how WISEs approach DT by analyzing case study data through an adapted version of AlNuaimi et al.’s (2022) digital strategy framework. This process helps us identify three key dimensions: inclusive leadership for digital change, strategic flexibility for inclusive innovation, and inclusive and accessible human-centered digital strategy, each representing a crucial strategic capability for managing DT in hybrid organizations. These capabilities reflect the hybrid logics that WISEs must continually reconcile: achieving technological innovation while staying true to their social mission (Battilana and Lee 2014).

In the second stage, we include the perspectives of individual actors by classifying emergent persona profiles into three groups—enablers, supporters, and workers with support needs (WSNs). These personas offer a human-centered framework for understanding DT as a lived, co-constructed organizational process rather than a top-down initiative (Cooper 1999; Matthews et al. 2012). This view presents digital change not just as technological adoption but as a negotiated process mediated by organizational roles, individual agency, and cultural expectations.

Finally, we combine these two layers to analyze how each strategic capability relates to specific roles within WISEs. Enablers primarily lead and promote inclusive leadership for digital change. Supporters serve as the adaptive link between vision and practice, crucial for enabling strategic flexibility for inclusive innovation. WSNs, far from being passive recipients, co-create human-centered digital strategy through their feedback, resistance, and adaptation.

## 5 | Inclusive Leadership for Digital Change

This dimension shows how leadership style, organizational culture, and strategic vision affect WISEs’ ability to undergo DT. In socially focused hybrid organizations, digital change involves more than just adopting new technology—it also means balancing efficiency with inclusion, innovation with mission, and leadership with care. Because WISEs actively involve marginalized individuals in productive and service activities, DT risks exacerbating exclusion if social dynamics and individual capabilities are not carefully managed (Cipriano and Za 2024; Craig et al. 2021).

DT in WISEs cannot be reduced to managerial decisions—it develops through embedded relational practices shaped by values such as trust, empowerment, and participation. Leaders in these contexts must go beyond simply allocating resources for technological upgrades; they should foster inclusive digital mindsets, navigate internal conflicts between innovation and mission fidelity, and adjust the pace of change to the emotional and cognitive readiness of both staff and workers (AlNuaimi et al. 2022; Porfirio et al. 2021). Our data show that many WISEs face cultural inertia and skepticism about DT, often due to worries about job loss, less human interaction, or weakening their social purpose. Therefore, DT should be based on a leadership approach that recognizes these tensions and promotes collective involvement, especially with those who might feel most vulnerable during change efforts.

Leaders who succeed in driving DT do so not just by issuing strategic directives but by acting as ethical stewards and advocates of inclusive innovation. They understand power dynamics, are willing to decentralize decision-making, and can turn abstract digital goals into values-driven practices. This view of inclusive leadership is critical in WISEs, where the workforce is not only diverse but often bears the burden of structural disadvantages. As our examples show, without intentional leadership to connect digital strategy with lived experience, even well-meaning innovations can stumble.

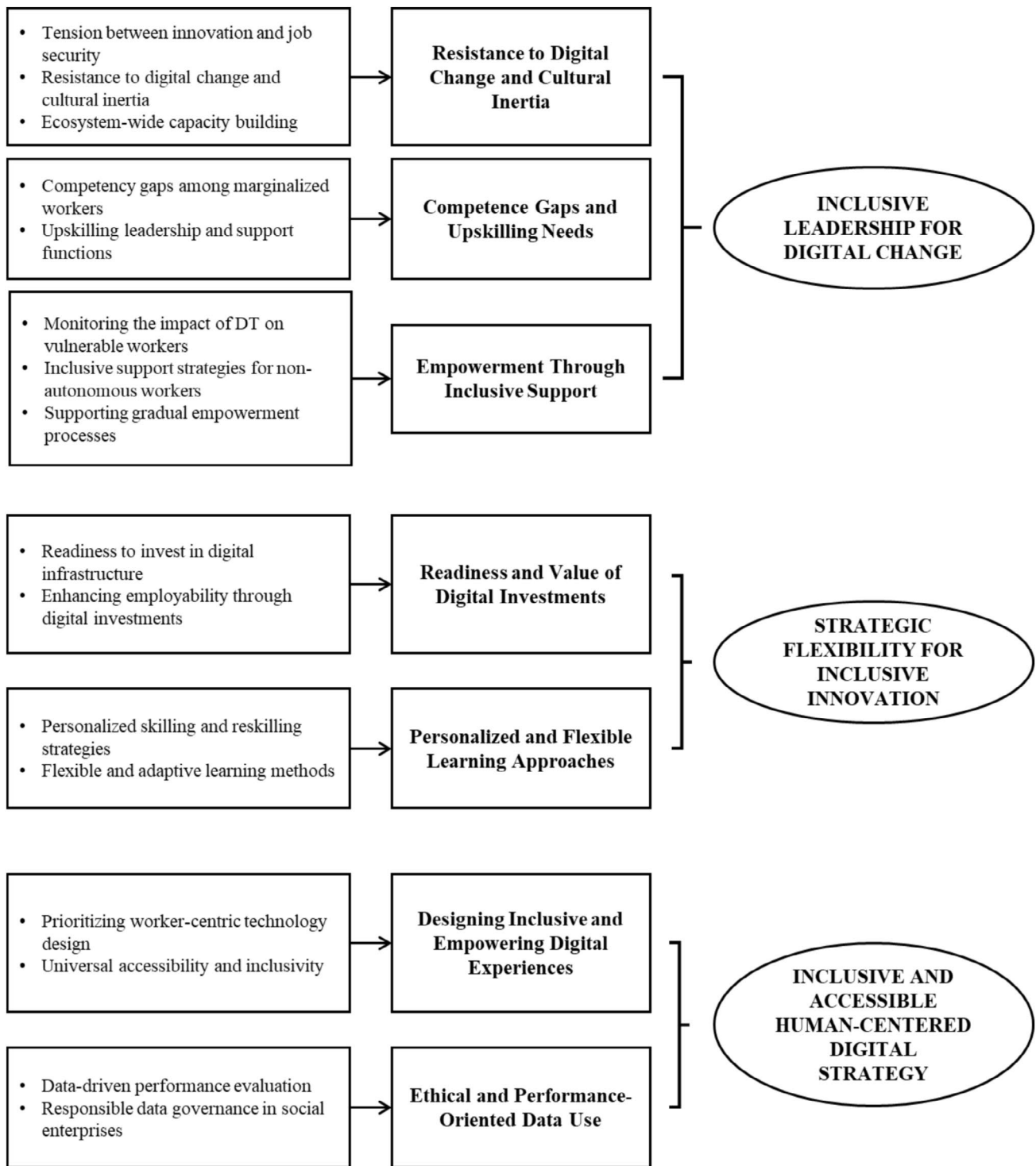


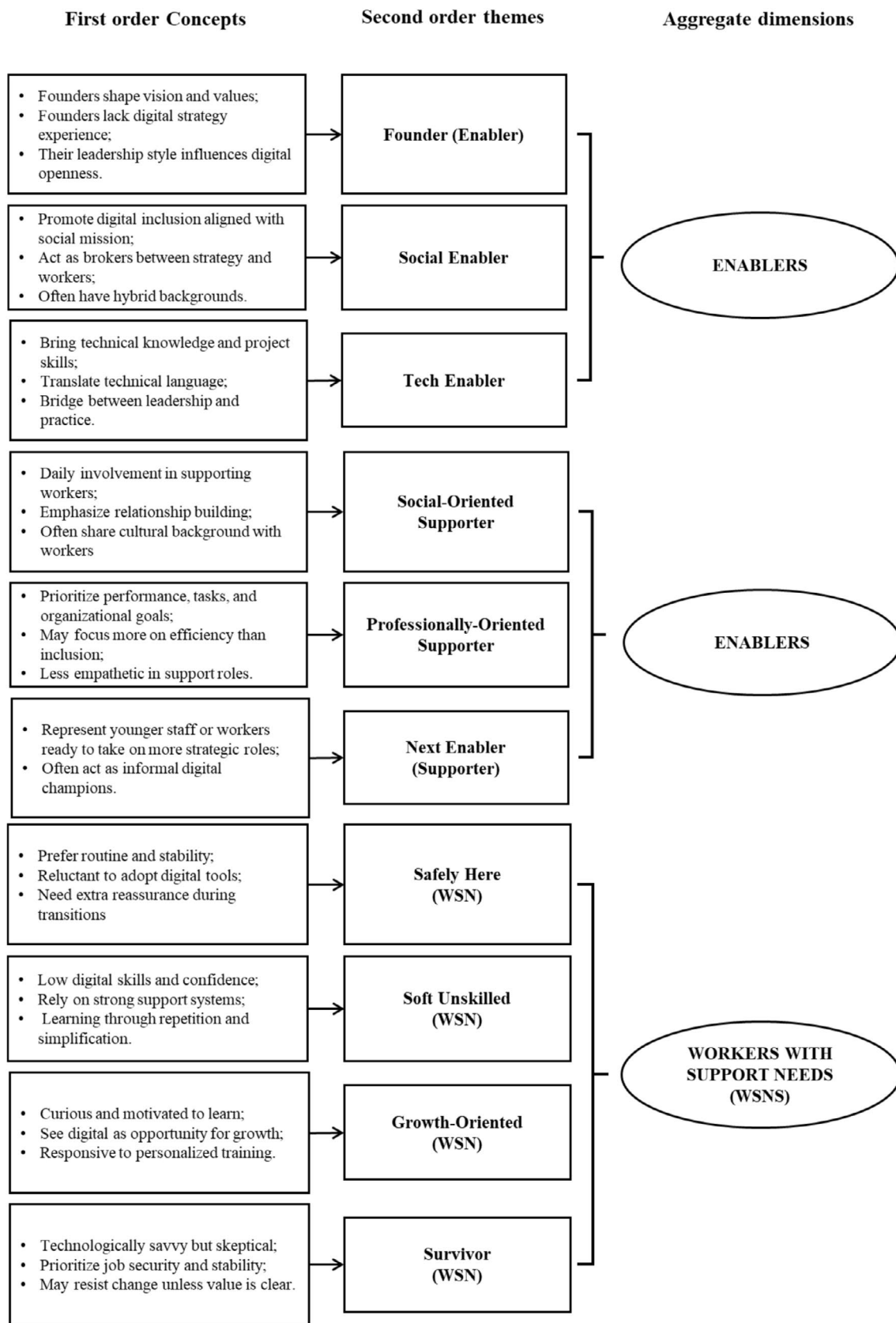
FIGURE 1 | Digital strategy—data structure.

### 5.1 | Resistance to Digital Change and Cultural Inertia

DT in WISEs often encounters resistance rooted not in technical issues but in deeper organizational beliefs, social values, and cultural habits. In hybrid organizations where the social mission is closely tied to daily operations, introducing digital tools may be viewed as a disruption to long-standing relational practices that emphasize human contact, routine, and emotional safety

over efficiency. This type of resistance is not necessarily irrational; rather, it reflects the tension that emerges when new technological rationalities challenge established institutional logics centered on care, inclusion, and empowerment.

Several WISEs in our sample expressed concern that DT, especially automation, could threaten their core mission of labor integration. In one of the Italian cases, for instance, the director explained: “We worry that digital systems will reduce human



**FIGURE 2** | Personas—data structure.

contact, and here it's the relationship that counts." This highlights the importance of relational work to WISES' identity and the fear that technology might replace rather than support it.

Similarly, in a Belgian WISE, a senior manager was clear about the risk of mission drift: "Automation is not always a good thing; our mission is to create jobs, not eliminate them."

These feelings reflect what can be called a values-based inertia—a form of organizational resistance rooted in the perceived gap between technological innovation and social purpose. As scholars have noted, DT is not value-neutral; it involves implicit assumptions about speed, productivity, and standardization, which may conflict with the inclusive and person-centered principles of social enterprises (Battilana et al. 2015; Brunsson et al. 2012). This resistance is even stronger in situations where digital skills are unevenly distributed and leadership lacks experience guiding technology-driven change. In such environments, DT isn't just about providing the right tools—it also involves careful storytelling, inclusive decision-making, and a gradual cultural shift. Without these, digital efforts may seem like they are imposed from outside rather than embraced by the organization's members. Ultimately, overcoming cultural inertia in WISEs isn't about pushing past resistance but about listening to it. It involves reframing digital tools as allies of the mission rather than threats, and ensuring that innovation is grounded in the real-life experiences of the people the enterprise serves.

## 5.2 | Competence Gaps and Upskilling Needs

DT in WISEs cannot advance without addressing significant competence gaps across organizational layers. These gaps are not only technical but also rooted in broader patterns of digital inequality, where structural disadvantages and job roles affect access to and use of technology (Loh and Chib 2019; Yelland 2013). In WISEs, the challenges are heightened by two distinct groups with different needs: professional staff responsible for leading and supporting digital change, and marginalized workers with limited formal education or digital experience.

At the leadership level, several organizations reported that their managers and support staff lacked the digital fluency necessary to conceptualize, implement, and sustain innovation. A Polish manager captured this vulnerability: “I know this is important, but I don't have the skills to lead it.” This reflects what scholars call the “capability trap” in social enterprises, where limited managerial resources prevent turning digital goals into action. Without enough digital leadership, organizations find it difficult to develop strategies that are both inclusive and adaptable.

At the same time, digital illiteracy among beneficiaries—who are also the core workforce in WISEs—emerged as a widespread and restricting issue. A Greek WISE coordinator explained: “Most of our workers don't know how to use email. We start from zero.” This underscores the often-overlooked first step in DT: basic accessibility. For many WISEs, even basic digital tools signify a significant shift in routine, communication, and confidence for workers who experience exclusion not only from the labor market but also from the digital world (Piroșcă et al. 2021). The dual challenge of managerial upskilling and beneficiary digital empowerment calls for a layered capacity-building approach. Instead of viewing training as a one-time event, WISEs should adopt ongoing, customized learning models that cater to the unique paths of staff and workers. As Kalendzhyan and Kadol (2023) highlight, inclusive DT must be relationally sensitive, as also highlighted by a Dutch informant, “not just focusing

on technological trends but also rooted in the daily realities and skills of all organizational members.”

Furthermore, the competence gap is not merely a technical problem—it is a strategic challenge. If ignored, it can deepen dependency and marginalization, weakening the participatory spirit of WISEs. However, when viewed as an opportunity for empowerment, upskilling can be a powerful driver of social inclusion, enabling both staff and marginalized workers to contribute purposefully to their organizations' digital futures.

## 5.3 | Empowerment Through Inclusive Support

The third challenge related to leadership centers on the paradox of empowerment in DT: while new technologies can foster autonomy and skill development, they may also unsettle marginalized workers if introduced without proper support. In hybrid organizations like WISEs—where social inclusion is a core mission—digital change must be coordinated with the emotional and relational dimensions of empowerment (Cipriano and Za 2024).

Many WISEs reported that sudden shifts in digital routines caused disorientation, especially among workers who were gradually gaining independence. A social manager in a Spanish company recounted: “One of our guys was doing well, but the new system confused him. We had to slow down and provide more support.” This highlights an important point: digital empowerment is not a straight line. Even motivated individuals can experience setbacks if change efforts don't align with their capacity, pace, or need for psychological safety.

In response, several organizations adopted phased digital integration strategies. These involved providing workers with opportunities to experiment with new technologies in low-risk environments—such as pilot projects or simplified modules—before implementing them on a full scale. This approach reflects the principles of scaffolding in adult learning and has become increasingly recognized as essential in designing inclusive transformation processes (Porfirio et al. 2021). By allowing trial, error, and reflection, such strategies decrease resistance and create conditions for sustainable change.

Furthermore, these inclusive practices foster a co-productive spirit among WISEs, where beneficiaries are not just service recipients but active participants in shaping them. In this context, digital tools are more than just technical devices; they serve as vehicles of dignity and recognition when used thoughtfully. Leadership, therefore, must not only provide vision and direction but also serve as a buffer and facilitator, adjusting the pace of change to respect individual journeys and sustain organizational unity.

In summary, empowerment through DT isn't just about removing barriers, but about building bridges—emotional, pedagogical, and relational—that allow workers to move at their own pace toward independence. This requires a deep sensitivity to the experiences of those most affected by change and an understanding of empowerment not as a final goal but as an ongoing, adaptable process.

## 6 | Strategic Flexibility for Inclusive Innovation

This dimension concerns how WISEs handle digital investments, structure learning, and adapt innovation practices for a diverse and often marginalized workforce. Unlike private-sector organizations, which usually pursue DT for efficiency, standardization, or scale, WISEs must approach innovation with greater sensitivity to inclusion and social cohesion. Their hybrid nature requires not only balancing economic sustainability with social goals but also adjusting digital strategies to fit different capacities, learning speeds, and contextual limitations (Kalendzhyan and Kadol 2023).

### 6.1 | Readiness and Value of Digital Investments

DT in WISEs is powerfully shaped by strategic decisions on when and how to invest, especially given resource constraints and institutional fragility. Sometimes, DT is viewed as a way to boost human capacity. A logistics manager from a Dutch company said, “DT helps us be more human, not less.” This quote shows how digital investments—when aligned with the WISE mission—can create space for deeper personal connections, letting support staff focus more on social coaching instead of administrative tasks.

In contrast, some WISEs see DT as a risky frontier. A Bulgarian manager said, “We can’t risk large tech investments, so we stick to what we know.” This cautious attitude emphasizes the importance of organizational readiness, not just financially but also in leadership confidence and support systems. Strategic flexibility here isn’t about rushing but about careful innovation—adopting change at a pace and scale that match institutional realities and workforce preparedness.

### 6.2 | Personalized and Flexible Learning Approaches

WISEs also acknowledged that workforce development must be flexible to accommodate different digital literacies, learning styles, and motivation levels. Standardized training methods often proved ineffective, leading to experimentation with blended, modular, and hands-on learning approaches. As a training coordinator in Austria shared: “We use a mix of tablet tutorials, peer support, and repetition. Some need to see it five times, and that’s okay.” This view reflects a commitment to inclusive teaching, where training is seen not as a straight line, but as an ongoing, relational process.

In Slovenia, a WISE team directly collaborated with individuals with disabilities and introduced gamified tools to increase engagement. This initiative boosted motivation and enhanced knowledge retention, demonstrating the value of creative, person-centered learning methods. These examples reflect principles from inclusive education and adult learning theory, emphasizing the importance of agency, repetition, and multimodal delivery in developing lasting skills.

Ultimately, strategic flexibility is not just a passive response to constraints; it is a proactive skill within organizations. It

requires distributed leadership, trust in frontline supporters, and a willingness to adjust strategies based on feedback and observation. By incorporating flexibility into their training programs and investment approaches, WISEs avoid the pitfalls of exclusionary innovation and instead create environments where transformation is inclusive, empowering, and sustainable.

## 7 | Inclusive and Accessible Human-Centered Digital Strategy

This dimension illustrates how WISEs design and implement digital tools and processes that are ethically responsible, universally accessible, and rooted in the lived experiences of their workers. Unlike mainstream approaches that prioritize usability, efficiency, or profit, WISEs incorporate human-centeredness into their digital strategies as a core value—one that links technology to dignity, accessibility, and empowerment (Cipriano and Za 2024).

While DT is often viewed as a neutral upgrade of technology, in WISEs, it presents a challenge for inclusive design. The question is not just how to digitize existing processes, but how to ensure that digitization promotes inclusion rather than creating or worsening exclusion. This requires paying attention to the needs of marginalized users, especially workers with cognitive, physical, or educational barriers, and including their perspectives in technology design and implementation.

### 7.1 | Worker-Centric Technology Design

Many WISEs purposely develop digital tools to align with their workers’ skills, routines, and preferences. For example, in France, a digital reporting tool was redesigned with pictograms and color codes, making it easier for workers with cognitive impairments to understand. As one staff member said: “They don’t need to read text—just recognize symbols that guide them through the task.” This method follows universal design principles tailored to meet the needs of a socially marginalized workforce, ensuring not only ease of use but also psychological safety and independence. Other cases went even further by adopting co-creation practices that placed workers at the center of technological development. In an Italian WISE, the team collaboratively developed a digital dashboard: “They helped us decide what was useful, what wasn’t. That made them feel involved and capable.” This form of participatory design recognizes that inclusion is not a downstream fix—it must be built into digital systems from the start. By engaging workers as co-designers, WISEs increased ownership, relevance, and confidence, reinforcing the principle that technology should adapt to people, not the other way around.

### 7.2 | Responsible Data Governance in Social Enterprises

Alongside tool design, several WISEs faced the ethical implications of data collection and digital monitoring. As digital tools became more integrated into daily routines, new questions emerged about privacy, autonomy, and informed consent. In a

Romanian WISE, management considered using an attendance-tracking app but ultimately decided against it due to ethical concerns: “It could help us with planning, but some workers felt watched. We decided to postpone it.” This choice underscores the moral tensions inherent in DT within social organizations—between managerial control and the relational ethics of care.

In contrast, some organizations have reframed data use as a supportive tool. In the Netherlands, a WISE implemented personalized feedback loops based on performance data, emphasizing empowerment rather than surveillance: “It’s not surveillance—it’s support. We show workers their progress so they can feel proud and improve.” This example indicates that data governance in WISEs is not solely about legal compliance but also about interpretive framing and organizational values. When data is seen as a developmental tool, it can enhance workers’ sense of agency; when viewed as a means of control, it risks fostering fear or distrust.

## 8 | The Role of Internal Stakeholders in Digital Transformation

Understanding how internal stakeholders are categorized into distinct personas can provide insights into how digital strategies may be implemented within WISEs. Each persona—such as managers, supporters, or workers—tends to interact with digital technology in ways influenced by their roles, skills, and challenges. Mapping these differences reveals patterns that influence organizational strategies in digital leadership, skill development, and support mechanisms. The findings highlight how understanding the diverse needs and strengths of the workforce helps WISEs overcome resistance, appreciate existing talents, and better match digital initiatives with real workforce dynamics. The upcoming sections introduce the different personas we identified from the case study data.

The three main types of personas in WISEs are: (a) enablers, (b) supporters, and (c) workers with support needs (WSNs). Enablers are managers who lead the organization and oversee the integration of disadvantaged workers. Supporters offer direct help to WSNs and support their growth. WSNs are individuals facing major employment obstacles, such as disabilities or long-term unemployment. In DT, enablers spearhead organizational innovations while aligning them with social missions; supporters assist WSNs in developing digital skills; and WSNs encounter both opportunities for empowerment and challenges in overcoming the digital divide. These personas collaborate to foster inclusive environments for marginalized workers in the digital workplace.

### 8.1 | Enablers

Three profiles of enablers have been identified in the study. In many WISEs, the founder is closely connected to the organization and often helped start or build it. Founders are usually 45–55 years old and hold postgraduate degrees in social sciences or economics. As parents of beneficiaries, their leadership is driven by a desire to influence society through the WISE while ensuring its economic sustainability. Although they may need additional training to lead technology-driven changes, founders are effective communicators and digital

technologists. Belgium, Latvia, and Austria have several social enablers. These dedicated social justice advocates typically have about 15 years of experience in social work, psychology, or related fields. WISE leaders between 25 and 50 are responsible for managing people and strategic growth. Social enablers work diligently to improve their organizations and promote inclusivity. They support digital transformation but also value human interactions in the workplace. Tech enablers are emerging in Belgium, Italy, and Poland. They are usually highly educated engineers or IT professionals with 15–20 years of experience working with WISEs. Tech enablers believe that digital transformation is vital for workplace productivity and the integration of marginalized groups. Team members may sometimes feel isolated because of their technological expertise. Despite social and communication challenges, they aim to understand and expand their company’s technology. Each of these enablers plays a vital role in guiding WISEs through the complexities of DT, balancing technological innovation with the social mission that defines these enterprises.

### 8.2 | Supporters

We’ve identified three supporter profiles. Among them, social-oriented supporters are pretty standard across European WISEs and are deeply passionate about social work. Many of these supporters, mostly women aged 40–50, started their careers in social work or shifted from other fields like tailoring or plumbing. Interestingly, some of them have experienced vulnerability firsthand, having gone through transformative journeys within WISEs that helped them regain their independence. Their primary motivation is all about prioritizing human well-being, guiding disadvantaged workers to develop both soft skills and digital competencies. Although they have a wide range of technological knowledge, most see digital tools in a positive light, recognizing that these innovations help them support others better and reduce physical effort. They are eager to receive more training in digital skills through blended and practical learning approaches.

Supporters with a professional focus are present in Romania, Belgium, Italy, and Latvia. They often join WISE through personal or work-related connections, bringing a wealth of technical knowledge. Although their formal education may be limited, their extensive hands-on experience in various domains more than makes up for it. Appreciated for their professional skills, they are highly valued by colleagues and WSNs as go-to experts for technical advice. Their natural rapport with WSNs, along with their commitment to social values, makes them excellent leaders for production teams. Skilled in their technical areas, they frequently recommend digital solutions to enhance processes and are eager to develop their management abilities to contribute more strategically.

The most common supporter profiles are enablers, typically aged 35–45, with backgrounds in social work, psychology, or human resources. They often hold advanced educational qualifications and are motivated by a desire to create meaningful social change. Known for their empathy and strong communication skills, they play vital roles in mentoring and overseeing WSNs. As their management responsibilities increase, they sometimes experience conflict between their wish to support

**TABLE 3** | Typologies of internal stakeholders in WISEs: personas and key characteristics.

Personas	Main characteristics
Founder (enabler)	Founder of the WISE, aged 45–55, highly educated, strong communication, needs digital leadership development.
Social enabler	Experienced (15+ years), background in social work/psychology, committed to inclusivity, balances tech and human focus.
Tech enabler	Engineering/IT background, 15–20 years in WISEs, tech-savvy, promotes digital transformation, risks social isolation.
Social-oriented supporter	Often women 40–50, empathetic, with experience in social work or other jobs, tech-positive, desire digital upskilling.
Professionally-oriented supporter	Hands-on experience, low formal education, technical skills, leads teams, suggests digital solutions, seeks management training.
Next enabler (supporter)	Aged 35–45, higher education in social fields, empathetic, torn between support and management, eager to upskill.
Safely here (WSN)	20+ years in WISEs, intellectual/physical challenges, prefers stable roles, low digital literacy, adapted during COVID.
Soft unskilled (WSN)	Socially/physically disadvantaged, limited education, simple tasks, overestimates ability, interested in digital upskilling.
Growth-oriented (WSN)	Aged 30–50, varied work history, life challenges, motivated, seeks growth, open to digital skills development.
Survivor (WSN)	Aged 30–55, long unemployment, legal/health issues, goal-oriented, sees WISE as a recovery path, trains for independence.

WSNs and their emerging leadership duties. Their familiarity with technology varies, but they are enthusiastic about enhancing both their technical and managerial skills to determine their future in WISE leadership better.

### 8.3 | Workers With Support Needs

WSNs personas profiles are not created based on a categorical approach (e.g., people with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, drug addicts, etc.), but rather on competence-building needs. In fact, four profiles were identified using this criterion.

The safely here persona is typical across many European WISEs, representing individuals who have spent over 20 years in their roles, often with no experience outside of WISEs. These individuals face various vulnerabilities, including intellectual, psychological, and physical challenges, which limit their ability to succeed in the open labor market. Their tasks within WISEs are usually repetitive and straightforward, like packaging or cleaning, and they depend on ongoing support. Safely here individuals value the stability and security WISEs provide, often wanting to stay in their roles until retirement. Although their digital skills are limited, mainly used for personal activities like mobile phones and social media, some adapted to digital tools such as Zoom and Skype during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite their emotional attachment to their work, they often struggle with insecurity and limited independence, finding comfort in the structured environment WISEs offer.

The soft unskilled persona includes individuals who, because of significant social or physical challenges, struggle to integrate

into the traditional labor market. Common in countries like Belgium, Croatia, Latvia, and Romania, these individuals often face issues such as disabilities or histories of marginalization. They might possess some vocational skills but lack the personal stability needed for steady employment. Soft unskilled workers perform simple, supervised tasks and often have a pessimistic outlook, overestimating their abilities. Still, many are interested in improving their digital skills, and some already have IT-related skills. Their main goal is usually to maintain stability within WISEs, as the regular job market presents too many barriers for them.

The growth-oriented persona is found in countries like Austria, France, and Poland. It includes individuals with diverse work experiences who have struggled to find employment in the open labor market. They often face challenges such as addiction or imprisonment and see WISEs as a supportive environment for rebuilding their lives. These individuals are typically aged 30–50, with a higher number of women. Many have vocational qualifications or higher education, although some lack formal education due to life disruptions. They are highly motivated, hardworking, and loyal to WISE, with a commitment to personal and professional growth. Their roles vary, from machine operation to marketing communication, and they often regard WISE as a long-term career option. Many are eager to learn new skills, including digital abilities, to improve their roles within WISE.

The survivor persona is typical in countries like Belgium, France, and Slovenia, representing individuals who have faced long-term unemployment and instability due to social issues such as addiction, legal troubles, or health problems. Usually

male and aged 30–55, Survivors have a variety of work experiences but find it hard to keep jobs in the open labor market. They are highly motivated to rebuild their lives and see WISE as a recovery space. Survivors are goal-oriented and eager to learn new skills, including digital skills, to improve their employment prospects. Their main goal is to move from WISE into stable, independent jobs. The following Table 3 summarizes the main traits of these types of personas.

## 9 | Aligning Strategic Capabilities and Personas for Inclusive Digital Transformation

The intersection of strategic capabilities and persona types demonstrates how DT in WISEs occurs through role-specific contributions, challenges, and learning paths. While the three strategic dimensions form the structural foundation of digital change, the personas illustrate how this transformation is experienced, enacted, and shaped within organizations.

Enablers, including founders, social enablers, and tech enablers, play a crucial role in promoting inclusive leadership for digital change. They are the visionaries who see DT not just as a technical upgrade but as a social and ethical responsibility. In a Dutch WISE, the founder explained: “We knew technology had potential, but it had to serve people first. We brought everyone into the conversation from day one.” tech enablers, in particular, ensure that digital strategies align with inclusion goals: “We could have bought ready-made platforms, but we built our own because we needed something intuitive, ethical, and inclusive,” shared a tech enabler from a Belgian case. These actors view technology adoption as a collaborative process rooted in organizational values and foster cultures where DT is not forced but co-owned.

Supporters, such as social-oriented and professional-oriented supporters, serve as a crucial link between strategic vision and daily operations. Their role is vital in strategic flexibility for inclusive innovation, where they craft personalized training plans, turn goals into learning experiences, and adjust the pace of digital adoption based on individual needs. As one supporter in Italy stated, “Some workers had never touched a computer. We started with WhatsApp, not spreadsheets. That was the digital starting point.” Their understanding of workers’ emotional and learning needs enables them to create adaptable training environments that build both skills and confidence. Supporters don’t just implement technology—they interpret and humanize it, transforming strategic objectives into relationally grounded practices.

The third aspect, inclusive and accessible human-centered digital strategy, involves enablers focusing on ethical design and responsible data use, while supporters implement this vision through practical accessibility measures. For example, a social enabler from France shared: “We made the tool speak in their language—icons, reminders, audio instructions. That’s when they began to use it without fear.” Conversely, supporters in Romania assisted workers in navigating digital interfaces during daily tasks: “I stayed with her the first week, just to log in and click. She had to feel she wasn’t alone.” In this area, strategy results in genuine inclusion, with everyday actors influencing how technology is presented, explained, and adopted. Workers with support needs (WSNs)—including growth-oriented, survivor,

safely here, and soft unskilled personas—are not just recipients of digital change but active participants whose responses influence the success of inclusive strategies. Their interactions with DT span all three strategic dimensions. In the context of inclusive leadership, WSNs either resist or embrace change based on the trust they feel. As a growth-oriented worker from Spain noted: “When they explained why we were changing and helped me learn, I felt proud, not scared.” This emphasizes how leadership’s emotional intelligence and relational approach directly influence motivation and engagement.

Under strategic flexibility, workers demonstrate different levels of readiness and learning speeds, requiring customized support. In Croatia, a supporter shared: “We had to explain each step three times. But now he teaches the new ones how to use the scanner.” These learning paths illustrate how adaptive strategies become inclusive when grounded in real experience and individual pace.

When it comes to human-centered digital strategy, WSNs’ experiences offer direct input into UX design and ethical feedback. A “Survivor” profile from Bulgaria described their hesitation: “They said it was easy, but I didn’t even know what logging in meant. I wanted to give up.” This led the supporter to simplify the process and add peer-to-peer help. Conversely, a growth-oriented worker from Slovenia said: “I learned to send emails, do online orders. It makes me feel useful.” These examples show how the final shape of DT is determined locally rather than directed from above.

Overall, this synthesis shows that DT in WISEs is not a straightforward or purely technological process. Instead, it is a profoundly relational, participatory, and adaptable journey. It depends on aligning strategic foresight with the real experiences of those who implement and undergo change. Enablers shape transformation through ethical and inclusive perspectives; supporters connect vision with practice through mentoring and training; and WSNs bring transformation alive through their feedback, resilience, and practical knowledge.

While our findings primarily focus on leadership strategies and internal stakeholder roles, they also suggest that digital transformation in WISEs often entails a partial reconfiguration of core activities and value creation mechanisms. Several cases show that the introduction of digital tools reshaped how services are delivered, how work is organized, and how beneficiaries participate in production and service processes. Rather than representing radical business model pivots, these changes reflect incremental adaptations that adjust the balance between social and economic logics, often mediated by enablers and supporters. This indicates that digital transformation may function as a trigger for business model evolution in WISEs, even when not explicitly framed as such by organizational actors. The final Table 4 offers a synthesis of Personas and Strategy, serving as a framework for operationalizing digital transformation in WISEs.

## 10 | Discussion

This study investigates how digital transformation (DT) occurs within work integration social enterprises (WISEs) by analyzing

the diverse roles of internal stakeholders through persona analysis. This approach enhances a human-centered and relational perspective on digital change in hybrid organizations. Our findings indicate that DT in WISEs is neither straightforward nor purely technical. Instead, it is fundamentally connected to the lived experiences, strategic decisions, and social positions of individuals across the organization. It can be seen as a form of distributed responsibility enacted across internal stakeholder roles. Below, we highlight three key theoretical contributions from this research.

### 10.1 | Digital Transformation as a Multidimensional and Relational Capability

Our main contribution is to define DT in WISEs as a set of interconnected strategic capabilities rather than a single, unified process. Building on and modifying the DT framework by AlNuaimi et al. (2022), we identified three key dimensions— inclusive leadership for digital change, strategic flexibility for Inclusive innovation, and inclusive and accessible human-centered digital strategy—that together shape the DT landscape in WISEs.

These dimensions are interconnected and mutually supportive, not separate or linear. For example, leadership that promotes an inclusive culture enables greater strategic flexibility in digital learning practices, which then influences the design of ethically grounded digital tools. This interdependence demonstrates that DT in WISEs cannot be separated from broader organizational values, stakeholder inclusion, and cultural readiness. From an organizational change perspective (Oborn et al. 2019; Orlikowski and Scott 2008; Tilson et al. 2010), our findings suggest that DT in WISEs is not a simple implementation process but a reflective reconfiguration of routines, meanings, and power relations among actors. Furthermore, this framework responds to recent calls in the literature (Akther et al. 2024; Beckman et al. 2023; Mikołajczak and Skikiewicz 2025) to go beyond viewing DT as merely a technical upgrade and instead see it as a process of organizational change that reshapes internal relationships, power structures, and inclusion conditions. It also connects with studies highlighting the risk that poorly managed digital innovation could deepen inequalities and cause mission drift in hybrid organizations. Our findings extend recent work on digital social innovation by showing how strategic digital capabilities are enacted through differentiated internal roles, rather than being embedded solely in technologies or structures (Scuotto et al. 2025; Maiolini et al. 2025).

### 10.2 | Personas as Anchors for Micro-Level Agency and Differentiation

Our second contribution demonstrates how personas can serve both as a design tool and an analytical lens to examine micro-level differences in DT processes (Zhang et al. 2024). While previous research has recognized the role of internal stakeholders in shaping organizational change (Cipriano and Za 2024; Fitzgerald et al. 2013), our study shows how typologies of personas—enablers, supporters, and workers with support

**TABLE 4** | Personas and strategy: operationalizing digital transformation in WISEs.

	Inclusive leadership for digital change	Strategic flexibility for inclusive innovation	Inclusive and accessible human-centered digital strategy
Enablers	Help establish a clear vision and foster a positive culture for digital transformation, emphasizing inclusivity and ethical values.	Transform strategic goals into flexible practices and create organizational learning systems that help maintain progress, growth, and innovation.	Shape norms of empowerment and trust, influencing whether digital change fosters engagement or resistance.
Supporters	Serve as bridges between leadership and the workforce, facilitating investments and fostering inclusive learning models.	Foster organizational adaptability with flexible training methods and support tailored to the context.	Facilitate differentiated learning pathways, ensuring that various participants can engage in digital implementation.
WSNS	Contribute to a shared understanding of digital change, either supporting or questioning its legitimacy.	Embody the organization's ability for gradual adaptation, influencing how inclusive innovation develops in practice.	Participate in co-design and feedback processes, integrating accessibility and usability into digital system tools.

needs—illustrate the diversity of experiences, attitudes, and contributions within WISEs. Each persona group has a unique yet connected role across the three strategic dimensions. Enablers (e.g., founders, tech advocates) develop and promote inclusive visions for DT. Supporters (e.g., social workers, professional facilitators) implement these visions through adaptive practices and learning systems. WSNs (e.g., survivors, soft-unskilled, growth-oriented workers) demonstrate how digital strategies are received, adapted, or resisted on the front lines.

Using personas to map how different stakeholders enact or resist digital change, we make a new contribution to stakeholder theory in social enterprises. Personas serve as boundary objects that connect organizational strategies with lived, embodied experiences (Matthews et al. 2012; Nielsen and Hansen 2014). This person-centered approach adds detail to the change process. It emphasizes that DT is not only driven from the top (Salminen et al. 2018) but is also co-created across the organizational hierarchy, influenced by individual motivations, skills, and social dynamics. In this way, we address the need for more context-aware and human-centered approaches to digital strategy in hybrid and inclusive environments (Salminen et al. 2018).

### 10.3 | Alignment and Frictions Across Personas and Strategic Capabilities

Ultimately, we show how the alignment—or lack of it—between personas and strategic capabilities affects the success and inclusiveness of DT in WISEs. When enablers, supporters, and WSNs share a common understanding, readiness, and expectations, digital initiatives are more likely to produce inclusive and empowering outcomes (Chen et al. 2022; Tilson et al. 2010). For example, in several cases, co-designing digital tools with workers increased engagement and usability. Conversely, when strategies are implemented without adequate support or when workers' concerns are ignored, resistance and disengagement often develop. In line with recent studies on resilience and crisis-driven digital entrepreneurship, our results suggest that inclusive DT strengthens organizational adaptability precisely by engaging vulnerable actors rather than bypassing them (Nakpodia et al. 2024).

These findings reinforce existing concerns raised by digital inequality scholarship (Loh and Chib 2019; Yelland 2013), which highlight how technology can intensify marginalization when not combined with inclusive design and human-centered practices. Our results suggest that conflicts often arise not from opposition to technology itself, but from unresolved gaps in communication, trust, and perceived inclusion. These tensions are especially evident in WISEs, where DT efforts must balance performance goals with fostering an inclusive, supportive environment for disadvantaged workers (Craig et al. 2021; Petrella and Richez-Battesti 2016). Our persona framework illustrates how WISEs handle this dual challenge.

Therefore, we suggest that successful DT in WISEs depends on achieving strategic-personal alignment—where organizational goals, cultural values, and individual capabilities are aligned across the three persona groups. This demonstrates that an

inclusive digital strategy is not just about top-down planning or bottom-up adaptation but rather an ongoing, negotiated process that relies on continuous learning and relationship building at all levels of the organization. These findings echo Arenas et al.'s (2020) observation that sustainable entrepreneurs who fail to balance adaptation to commercial logics with advancement of sustainability goals experience worse outcomes.

## 11 | Managerial and Policy Implications

This study offers practical insights for different stakeholders involved in the development, management, and support of WISEs undergoing digital transformation (DT). Our findings highlight that DT is not just about adopting new tools but is closely linked to organizational culture, leadership, inclusion, and interpersonal dynamics. These insights are especially crucial in mission-driven settings where digital innovation must align with social empowerment. Future research could further explore how digital tools contribute to empowerment processes for specific groups, such as women or marginalized communities, an emerging but still fragmented research stream in digital social entrepreneurship (Gochhait et al. 2025).

For entrepreneurs and social enterprise founders, our research highlights the importance of integrating DT into a broader inclusive strategy from the start. Entrepreneurs should not only assess technological readiness but also anticipate how different groups of workers—especially those with limited digital skills or marginalized backgrounds—will experience the transition. This involves adopting an inclusive leadership style that focuses on building trust, fostering continuous learning, and promoting ethical innovation. Entrepreneurs should engage in co-design practices to ensure that digital tools meet the needs, languages, and capabilities of their workforce. Furthermore, founders should maintain strategic flexibility, allowing for adaptive training methods and iterative rollouts that match the varying readiness levels of their internal stakeholders. Early-stage digital strategies should focus on solutions that enhance efficiency, participation, autonomy, and job quality.

“Supporters” play a crucial role in translating digital strategies into daily practices. These individuals should act as relational and pedagogical bridges, creating safe, adaptable, and emotionally supportive environments for learning and digital experimentation. Our research shows that supporters need training in digital skills and various teaching methods, such as blended learning and gamification. They should actively gather feedback from workers and use it to improve design and implementation, forming a feedback loop that ensures workers' voices are heard. Organizations should formally recognize and support the strategic role of Supporters. This might include dedicating time to mentoring, offering training in digital ethics and accessibility, and involving supporters in early-stage decision-making. Such recognition also helps prevent burnout and enhances the credibility of inclusive innovation efforts.

Investors and policymakers should go beyond traditional measures of digital maturity and instead support inclusive and participatory digital innovation in WISEs. This involves adopting investment strategies that emphasize incremental, co-created,

and ethically grounded technological improvements rather than imposing uniform platforms. Evaluation frameworks must expand to assess not only technical outcomes but also social empowerment factors, such as worker autonomy, engagement, and digital confidence. Moreover, supportive policy tools, like digital vouchers, should enable WISEs to innovate while staying true to their social missions. Public programs promoting DT in social enterprises should include requirements or incentives for inclusive design, participatory decision-making, and user testing with vulnerable populations. Concurrently, capacity-building efforts should focus on (a) training leaders and supporters in inclusive digital strategies, ethical data practices, and accessible design principles, (b) training workers with support needs in basic digital tools, allowing the wise leaders to not “start from zero”.

Finally, donors and policymakers should understand the gradual, step-by-step nature of DT in WISEs.

## 12 | Limitations and Conclusions

This study provides a detailed, human-centered view of how DT occurs within WISEs, highlighting the interaction between strategic capabilities and the roles of internal stakeholders through the perspective of personas. While our findings offer valuable theoretical and practical insights, several limitations must be recognized, which also present promising opportunities for future research.

First, our empirical focus is limited to European WISEs and data collected within a specific time frame. This geographic and temporal scope might restrict the generalizability of our findings. DT processes are influenced not only by internal organizational dynamics but also by external socio-political and institutional factors. In this context, the legal recognition, policy support, and ecosystem maturity of WISEs vary significantly across countries, potentially impacting how digital innovation is pursued. For example, while some countries have a well-established legal framework for WISEs, others use broader or less formal definitions of social enterprise. Although this legal diversity adds variety and richness to our sample, it also presents challenges for cross-national comparison.

To address this, we employed a comprehensive qualitative coding and synthesis process that focused on common patterns across cases while accounting for contextual differences. However, future research could expand and refine our findings by exploring other regions—such as North America or Latin America—where different institutional frameworks and levels of digital infrastructure may yield distinct transformation paths. Comparative research designs that specifically examine how WISEs change across various welfare systems or digital policies could also be highly beneficial.

Furthermore, although our study included WISEs of different sizes and sectors, the inherent diversity of the sample raises questions about the comparability of digital strategies across organizational types. While this variation helped us identify broad, transferable patterns, future research could focus more on sector-specific or size-specific configurations.

Our findings should be approached cautiously due to potential selection biases. It's possible that WISEs in our dataset, being more willing to participate in a European research project, are also more proactive in experimenting with digital tools and strategies. This suggests that the challenges we identify could be even more significant in organizations with lower initial digital readiness. Additionally, our study aligns with recent critiques on mission drift in hybrid organizations (Battilana et al. 2015; Beckman et al. 2023), highlighting that overemphasizing technological priorities can risk diverting from the core mission of social inclusion. For WISEs, the risk of a techno-centric approach is especially relevant: digital initiatives that focus on efficiency without sufficient attention to equity and inclusion may unintentionally undermine their fundamental purpose. Recognizing these risks underscores the importance of integrating digital transformation within WISEs into a broader commitment to inclusive values, stakeholder trust, and the maintenance of mission integrity.

While our findings highlight meaningful changes in leadership practices, learning arrangements, and service delivery enabled by digital transformation, they do not provide systematic evidence of full business model pivoting in WISEs. Most digital initiatives observed in our cases are incremental and adaptive in nature, aimed at improving inclusion, coordination, and employability rather than redefining core value propositions, revenue models, or target markets. This reflects the specific nature of WISEs as mission-driven organizations, where stability, continuity of support, and protection of vulnerable workers often constrain the scope for radical change. As a result, our study should be interpreted as capturing processes of business model adjustment rather than transformation in the entrepreneurial sense. Nevertheless, these incremental digital adaptations may represent early stages of longer-term business model evolution, suggesting the value of future longitudinal research to explore whether and how repeated digital changes accumulate into more substantial reconfigurations over time, and under what conditions such evolution remains compatible with the social mission of WISEs.

In conclusion, our research emphasizes that DT in WISEs involves more than just technological upgrades; it is a fundamentally relational and inclusive organizational process. The personas we introduce—enablers, supporters, and workers with support needs—serve both as analytical tools and practical guides for implementing fair digital change. Although based in a specific European context, our findings foster a broader conversation about how hybrid, mission-driven enterprises worldwide can incorporate technological innovation alongside inclusive values.

We hope this study provides another element of discussion for ongoing research on how social enterprises can use digital technologies while staying focused on their core mission of inclusion, empowerment, and social impact.

---

### Acknowledgements

This research was made possible through the support of the B Wise Project, funded under the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme

(Grant Agreement: 621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA2-SSA-B). We extend our sincere gratitude to Gianfranco Marocchi, whose vision and leadership were instrumental in shaping this research and advancing our understanding of digital transformation in work integration social enterprises. Special appreciation goes to all the participating WISEs, their staff, and beneficiaries who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights. Their contributions have been invaluable in developing a deeper understanding of how social enterprises navigate digital transformation while maintaining their crucial social mission. The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. In line with the journal's guidelines on transparency, we declare that we used the AI tool Perplexity during the final proofreading phase to support improvements in language clarity and fluency. The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained here. Open access publishing facilitated by Politecnico di Torino, as part of the Wiley - CRUI-CARE agreement.

## Funding

This work was supported by Erasmus+ (621509-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPP KA2-SSA-B).

## References

- Akther, S., M. S. Begum, M. N. Hassan, and M. K. Uddin. 2024. "Digital Capabilities and Social Enterprise Performance: The Mediating Effect of Digital Innovation." *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* 16: 1583–1605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19420676.2024.2306909>.
- Akther, S., M. S. Begum, M. N. Hassan, and M. K. Uddin. 2025. "Digital Capabilities and Social Enterprise Performance: The Mediating Effect of Digital Innovation." *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* 16, no. 3: 1583–1605.
- AlNuaimi, B. K., S. Kumar Singh, S. Ren, P. Budhwar, and D. Vorobyev. 2022. "Mastering Digital Transformation: The Nexus Between Leadership, Agility, and Digital Strategy." *Journal of Business Research* 145: 636–648. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.03.038>.
- Arena, G., G. Barbe, L. Bruni, et al. 2006. "Le Imprese Sociali di Inserimento Lavorativo Nell'unione Europea: I Modelli." *Impresa Sociale* 1: 57–81.
- Arenas, D., M. Struminska-Kutra, and P. Landoni. 2020. "Walking the Tightrope and Stirring Things Up: Exploring the Institutional Work of Sustainable Entrepreneurs." *Business Strategy and the Environment* 29: 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2557>.
- Battilana, J., and S. Dorado. 2010. "Building Sustainable Hybrid Organizations: The Case of Commercial Microfinance Organizations." *Academy of Management Journal* 53, no. 6: 1419–1440. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.57318391>.
- Battilana, J., and M. Lee. 2014. "Advancing Research on Hybrid Organizing—Insights From the Study of Social Enterprises." *Academy of Management Annals* 8, no. 1: 397–441.
- Battilana, J., M. Sengul, A. C. Pache, and J. Model. 2015. "Harnessing Productive Tensions in Hybrid Organizations: The Case of Work Integration Social Enterprises." *Academy of Management Journal* 58, no. 6: 1658–1685. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0903>.
- Beckman, C. M., J. Rosen, J. Estrada-Miller, and G. Painter. 2023. "The Social Innovation Trap: Critical Insights Into an Emerging Field." *Academy of Management Annals* 17, no. 2: 684–709. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2021.0089>.
- Besharov, M., and K. Miner. 2024. "Global Innovation Index 2024. Special Theme: Unlocking the Promise of Social Entrepreneurship."

Borzaga, C., and J. Defourny, eds. 2001. *The Emergence of Social Enterprise*. Routledge.

Borzaga, C., and M. Loss. 2006. *Multiple Goals and Multistakeholder Management in Italian Social Enterprises*. Vol. 9780203946, 72–84. Taylor and Francis Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203946909-13>.

Borzaga, C., and A. Santuari. 2000. "The Innovative Trends in the Non-Profit Sector in Europe: The Emergence of Social Entrepreneurship." In *The Non-Profit Sector in a Changing Economy*, 1–32. OECD.

Brunsson, N., A. Rasche, and D. Seidl. 2012. "The Dynamics of Standardization: Three Perspectives on Standards in Organization Studies." *Organization Studies* 33, no. 5–6: 613–632. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840612450120>.

B-WISE Project. 2022. "Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills: Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) (Final Report)." European Commission. <https://www.bwiseproject.eu>.

Chen, L., T. W. Tong, S. Tang, and N. Han. 2022. "Governance and Design of Digital Platforms: A Review and Future Research Directions on a Meta-Organization." *Journal of Management* 48, no. 1: 147–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063211045023>.

Cipriano, M., and S. Za. 2024. "Non-Profit Organisations in the Digital Age: A Research Agenda for Supporting the Development of a Digital Transformation Strategy." *Journal of Information Technology* 39, no. 4: 732–755. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02683962231219515>.

Ciulli, F., and A. Kolk. 2023. "International Business, Digital Technologies and Sustainable Development: Connecting the Dots." *Journal of World Business* 58, no. 4: 101445. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2023.101445>.

Cooper, A. 1999. "The Inmates Are Running the Asylum." In *Software-Ergonomie 99. Berichte Des German Chapter of the ACM*, edited by A. Udo, E. Edmund, and P. Knut, 17. Vieweg+Teubner Verlag. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-99786-9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-99786-9_1).

Craig, K. J. T., L. C. Morgan, C. H. Chen, et al. 2021. "Systematic Review of Context-Aware Digital Behavior Change Interventions to Improve Health." *Translational Behavioral Medicine* 11, no. 5: 1037–1048. <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibaa099>.

Defourny, J., and M. Nyssens. 2010. "Conceptions of Social Enterprise and Social Entrepreneurship in Europe and the United States: Convergences and Divergences." *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* 1, no. 1: 32–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19420670903442053>.

Defourny, J., and M. Nyssens. 2013. "Social Innovation, Social Economy and Social Enterprise: What Can the European Debate Tell Us?" In *The International Handbook on Social Innovation*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781849809993.00013>.

Dolata, U. 2009. "Technological Innovations and Sectoral Change. Transformative Capacity, Adaptability, Patterns of Change: An Analytical Framework." *Research Policy* 38, no. 6: 1066–1076. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2009.03.006>.

Eisenhardt, K. M. 1989. "Making Fast Strategic Decisions in High-Velocity Environments." *Academy of Management Journal* 32, no. 3: 543–576. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256434>.

Fitzgerald, M., N. Kruschwitz, D. Bonnet, and M. Welch. 2013. *Embracing Digital Technology: A New Strategic Imperative*, 1–12. MIT Sloan Management Review. <https://emergenceweb.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/embracing-digital-technology.pdf>.

Ghatak, A., S. Chatterjee, and B. Bhowmick. 2023. "Intention Towards Digital Social Entrepreneurship: An Integrated Model." *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* 14, no. 2: 131–151.

Gigauri, I., S. A. Apostu, and C. Popescu. 2023. "Digital Transformation: Threats and Opportunities for Social Entrepreneurship." In *Two Faces of Digital Transformation: Technological Opportunities Versus Social*

- Threats, 1–17. Emerald Group Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83753-096-020231001>.
- Gioia, D. A., K. G. Corley, and A. L. Hamilton. 2013. “Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology.” *Organizational Research Methods* 16, no. 1: 15–31.
- Gochhait, S., R. Lenka, and S. Aidin. 2025. “Application of Technology to Empower Women in Social Entrepreneurship: A Review.” *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review (EBER)* 13, no. 2: 123–137.
- Guan, Z., and Y. Qiu. 2024. “Characteristics of Co-Design in the Context of Social Innovation.” *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence and Applications* 383: 595–604. <https://doi.org/10.3233/FAIA231475>.
- He, T., M. J. Liu, C. W. Phang, and J. Luo. 2022. “Toward Social Enterprise Sustainability: The Role of Digital Hybridity.” *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 175: 121360.
- Hinings, B., T. Gegenhuber, and R. Greenwood. 2018. “Digital Innovation and Transformation: An Institutional Perspective.” *Information and Organization* 28, no. 1: 52–61.
- Kalendzhyan, S., and N. Kadol. 2023. “Digitalisation in the Development of Social Entrepreneurship.” *E3S Web of Conferences* 403: 08030. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202340308030>.
- König, A., L. Graf-Vlachy, and M. Schöberl. 2021. “Opportunity/Threat Perception and Inertia in Response to Discontinuous Change: Replicating and Extending Gilbert (2005).” *Journal of Management* 47, no. 3: 771–816. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206320908630>.
- König, A., M. Schulte, and A. Enders. 2012. “Inertia in Response to Non-Paradigmatic Change: The Case of Meta-Organizations.” *Research Policy* 41, no. 8: 1325–1343. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2012.03.006>.
- Loh, Y. A. C., and A. Chib. 2019. “Tackling Social Inequality in Development: Beyond Access to Appropriation of ICTs for Employability.” *Information Technology for Development* 25, no. 3: 532–551. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02681102.2018.1520190>.
- Maiolini, R., F. Capo, and P. Venturi. 2025. “Innovating for Social Good: Digital Transformation and Crisis-Based Entrepreneurial Opportunities.” *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development* 2, no. 4: 981–1000.
- Mair, J., and L. Hehenberger. 2014. “Front-Stage and Backstage Convening: The Transition From Opposition to Mutualistic Coexistence in Organizational Philanthropy.” *Academy of Management Journal* 57, no. 4: 1174–1200. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2012.0305>.
- Matthews, T., T. K. Judge, and S. Whittaker. 2012. “How Do Designers and User Experience Professionals Actually Perceive and Use Personas?” Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems—Proceedings, 1219–1228. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2207676.2208573>.
- Mikołajczak, P., and R. Skikiewicz. 2025. “Is Digitalization a Driver of Social Enterprises’ Revenue Diversification Strategy?” *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*: 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19420676.2025.2526519>.
- Murray, A., S. Kotha, and G. Fisher. 2020. “Community-Based Resource Mobilization: How Entrepreneurs Acquire Resources From Distributed Non-Professionals via Crowdfunding.” *Organization Science* 31, no. 4: 960–989. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2019.1339>.
- Muthukrishnan, U., and S. S. Bhattacharyya. 2025. “Charting the Boundaries of Digital Social Entrepreneurship and Proposing an Outlook.” *Social Enterprise Journal* 21, no. 5: 806–830.
- Nakpodia, F., F. Ashiru, J. J. You, and O. Oni. 2024. “Digital Technologies, Social Entrepreneurship and Resilience During Crisis in Developing Countries: Evidence From Nigeria.” *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research* 30, no. 2/3: 342–368.
- Nielsen, L., and K. S. Hansen. 2014. “Personas Is Applicable—A Study on the Use of Personas in Denmark.” Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems—Proceedings, 1665–1674. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557080>.
- Oborn, E., M. Barrett, W. Orlikowski, and A. Kim. 2019. “Trajectory Dynamics in Innovation: Developing and Transforming a Mobile Money Service Across Time and Place.” *Organization Science* 30, no. 5: 1097–1123. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2018.1281>.
- Orlikowski, W. J., and S. V. Scott. 2008. “10 Sociomateriality: Challenging the Separation of Technology, Work and Organization.” *Academy of Management Annals* 2, no. 1: 433–474. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520802211644>.
- Ozanne, J. L., A. Strauss, and J. Corbin. 1992. “Basics of Qualitative Research.” *Journal of Marketing Research* 29, no. 3: 382. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3172751>.
- Petrella, F., and N. Richez-Battesti. 2016. “Patterns of Evolutions of Social Enterprises in France: A Focus on Work Integration Social Enterprises.” *International Review of Sociology* 26, no. 2: 234–246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2016.1181390>.
- Piroșcă, G. I., G. L. Șerban-Oprescu, L. Badea, M. R. Staneș-Puică, and C. R. Valdebenito. 2021. “Digitalization and Labor Market—A Perspective Within the Framework of Pandemic Crisis.” *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research* 16, no. 7: 2843–2857. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer16070156>.
- Podsakoff, P. M., S. B. MacKenzie, N. P. Podsakoff, and J. Y. Lee. 2003. “The Mismeasure of Man (Agement) and Its Implications for Leadership Research.” *Leadership Quarterly* 14, no. 6: 615–656. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2003.08.002>.
- Porfírio, J. A., T. Carrilho, J. A. Felício, and J. Jardim. 2021. “Leadership Characteristics and Digital Transformation.” *Journal of Business Research* 124: 610–619. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.10.058>.
- Prodanov, H. 2018. “Social Entrepreneurship and Digital Technologies.” *Economic Alternatives* 1: 123–138.
- Rajpal, M., B. Singh, S. Chatterjee, and U. Sivarajah. 2025. “Public Sector Development and Entrepreneurial Initiatives for Improving Circular Economy Performance: Government Policy and Digital Transformation Initiatives as Moderators.” *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Accepted/I.
- Ramus, T., B. La Cara, A. Vaccaro, and S. Brusoni. 2018. “Social or Commercial? Innovation Strategies in Social Enterprises at Times of Turbulence.” *Business Ethics Quarterly* 28, no. 4: 463–492. <https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2017.55>.
- Robinson, L., S. R. Cotten, H. Ono, et al. 2015. “Digital Inequalities and Why They Matter.” *Information, Communication and Society* 18, no. 5: 569–582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1012532>.
- Sala, A., P. Landoni, and R. Verganti. 2011. “R&D Networks: An Evaluation Framework.” *International Journal of Technology Management* 53, no. 1: 19–43.
- Salminen, J., B. J. Jansen, J. An, H. Kwak, and S. Jung. 2018. “Are Personas Done? Evaluating Their Usefulness in the Age of Digital Analytics.” *Persona Studies* 4, no. 2: 47–65. <https://doi.org/10.21153/psj2018vol4no2art737>.
- Sarantou, M., and S. Pan. 2020. “Design for Society: Ageing Communities as Co-Designers in Processes of Social Innovation.” *Journal of Design, Business and Society* 6, no. 1: 129–141. [https://doi.org/10.1386/dbs\\_00007\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/dbs_00007_1).
- Scalvini, F., C. Borzaga, L. Fazzi, et al. 2006. “Il Modello Sociale Europeo: Quali Opportunità Occupazionali Nel Terzo Settore.” *ImpresaSociale*.
- Scuotto, V., E. Di Taranto, and V. Della Corte. 2025. “Social Innovation Capital in the Digital Social Enterprise Context.” *Journal of Intellectual Capital*: 1–16.

- Spear, R., and E. Bidet. 2005. "Social Enterprise for Work Integration in 12 European Countries: A Descriptive Analysis." *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics* 76, no. 2: 195–231. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1370-4788.2005.00276.x>.
- Teece, D. J. 2007. "Explicating Dynamic Capabilities: The Nature and Microfoundations of (Sustainable) Enterprise Performance." *Strategic Management Journal* 28, no. 13: 1319–1350. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.640>.
- Thornberg, R., and K. Charmaz. 2014. "Grounded Theory and Theoretical Coding." In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, 153–169. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243.n11>.
- Tilson, D., K. Lyytinen, and C. Sørensen. 2010. "Digital Infrastructures: The Missing IS Research Agenda." *Information Systems Research* 21, no. 4: 748–759. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.1100.0318>.
- Torres, P., and M. Augusto. 2020. "Digitalisation, Social Entrepreneurship and National Well-Being." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 161: 120279.
- Vial, G. 2021. "Understanding Digital Transformation: A Review and a Research Agenda." *Managing Digital Transformation*: 13–66.
- Vidal, I. 2001. "Spain: Social Enterprises as a Response to Employment Policy Failure I. VI DA L: Social Enterprises as a Response to Employment Policy Failure." In *The Emergence of Social Enterprise*, 215–231. Routledge.
- Vila-Henninger, L., C. Dupuy, V. Van Ingelgom, et al. 2024. "Abductive Coding: Theory Building and Qualitative (Re)analysis." *Sociological Methods and Research* 53, no. 2: 968–1001. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004912412111067508>.
- Warner, K. S., and M. Wäger. 2019. "Building Dynamic Capabilities for Digital Transformation: An Ongoing Process of Strategic Renewal." *Long Range Planning* 52, no. 3: 326–349.
- Yelland, N. 2013. "Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide." In *Engaging the Disengaged: Inclusive Approaches to Teaching the Least Advantaged*, 37–52. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107300910.004>.
- Zand, D. E., and R. E. Sorensen. 1975. "Theory of Change and the Effective Use of Management Science." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 20, no. 4: 532. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2392021>.
- Zhang, G., Q. Xie, H. Gao, J. Lu, and N. Cucari. 2024. "Implementation of Social Responsibility in Digital Transformation: An Opportunity or a Challenge to Corporate Innovation Performance." *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* 32: 1245–1260. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2970>.
- Zhou, J., L. G. Ge, J. Li, and S. P. Chandrashekar. 2020. "Entrepreneurs' Socioeconomic Status and Government Expropriation in an Emerging Economy." *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal* 14, no. 3: 396–418. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.1361>.