



The Rise of Technostress and FOBO (Fear of Becoming Obsolete) Among Employees in Indian MNCs: Causes, Consequences, and Coping Mechanisms

Ms. Amishi Turakhia

Assistant Professor

Smt. P. N. Doshi Women's College

Abstract- The modern workplace has undergone a significant transformation due to advancements in digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), automation, cloud computing, and data analytics. Indian multinational corporations (MNCs) have embraced digital transformation to improve efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness in global markets. Organizations across sectors such as Information Technology, Banking, Manufacturing, Telecommunications, Consulting, and Healthcare increasingly rely on advanced technologies to streamline operations and enhance decision-making. While these technological developments have created numerous opportunities, they have also introduced new challenges for employees. One of the most prominent challenges is **Technostress**, which refers to the stress experienced due to excessive dependence on technology, constant technological change, and difficulties in adapting to new digital systems. Employees often struggle to cope with information overload, continuous connectivity, and increasing expectations regarding technological competence. Another emerging workplace phenomenon is **FOBO (Fear of Becoming Obsolete)**. In the context of modern organizations, FOBO refers to the anxiety employees experience when they fear that their skills, knowledge, or professional expertise may become irrelevant due to technological advancements, automation, and changing industry requirements. The rise of AI and machine learning has intensified these concerns, particularly among employees whose job functions are susceptible to automation. Indian MNCs operate in highly competitive and technology-driven environments where employees are expected to continuously upgrade their skills. As a result, technostress and FOBO have become critical organizational issues affecting employee well-being, productivity, engagement, and retention. Understanding these phenomena is essential for developing effective strategies that support both organizational performance and employee welfare.

Keywords- echnostress; Fear of Becoming Obsolete (FOBO); Employees; Indian Multinational Corporations (MNCs); Workplace Technology; Digital Transformation; Artificial



Intelligence; Job Insecurity; Employee Well-being; Work Stress; Technology Anxiety; Career Adaptability; Digital Skills; Employee Performance; Coping Mechanisms; Organizational Support; Reskilling; Upskilling; Workplace Mental Health; Employee Engagement.

I. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has significantly transformed the modern workplace, particularly within multinational corporations (MNCs). Technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), automation, cloud computing, advanced analytics, and digital collaboration platforms have improved organizational efficiency and created new opportunities for innovation. At the same time, the continuous introduction of new technologies has increased the pressure on employees to acquire new skills and adapt to changing work processes. This environment has contributed to the emergence of technostress, a form of stress associated with the use, adoption, and constant adaptation to technology in the workplace.

Technostress can arise when employees perceive that technological demands exceed their knowledge, skills, or ability to cope. Factors such as excessive digital connectivity, rapid technological change, information overload, increased work expectations, and the need to remain continuously available can negatively affect employees' psychological well-being. In Indian MNCs, where organizations are increasingly adopting digital transformation, automation, and AI-driven systems, employees may experience additional pressure to maintain technological competence while meeting organizational performance expectations.

Closely related to technostress is Fear of Becoming Obsolete (FOBO), which refers to employees' concern that their existing knowledge and skills may become outdated because of technological advancement, automation, or changing job requirements. Unlike conventional job insecurity, FOBO is particularly associated with the fear of losing relevance in a rapidly evolving technological environment. Employees may worry that newer technologies or digitally skilled workers could reduce the demand for their existing expertise. This fear can encourage employees to pursue continuous learning and professional development, but excessive FOBO may also contribute to anxiety, burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and declining confidence.

The Indian MNC environment provides an important context for examining these issues because India has become a major hub for information technology, business-process services, consulting, finance, manufacturing, and other technology-intensive industries. Employees are increasingly expected to develop digital competencies and adapt to



emerging technologies while maintaining productivity. Although technological transformation can create opportunities for career advancement and innovation, unequal access to training, differences in digital literacy, heavy workloads, and uncertainty about future employment may intensify technostress and FOBO among employees.

The consequences of technostress and FOBO extend beyond individual employees and may affect organizational outcomes. Persistent technology-related stress and fear of obsolescence can contribute to emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, absenteeism, lower productivity, employee turnover intentions, and weaker organizational commitment. Conversely, employees who receive adequate training, career-development opportunities, psychological support, and clear communication from management may be better equipped to manage technological change.

Therefore, understanding the causes, consequences, and coping mechanisms of technostress and FOBO among employees in Indian MNCs is increasingly important. This study seeks to examine the factors contributing to these phenomena, assess their effects on employees and organizational performance, and identify effective individual and organizational strategies for coping with technological uncertainty. Such an understanding can help Indian MNCs develop supportive work environments in which technological transformation enhances productivity while also protecting employee well-being and long-term career sustainability.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the concepts of Technostress and Fear of Becoming Obsolete (FOBO).
- To identify the major causes of technostress and FOBO among employees in Indian MNCs.
- To examine the impact of technostress and FOBO on organizations across different domains.
- To analyze the effects of technostress and FOBO on employees' psychological, physical, professional, and social well-being.
- To identify coping mechanisms adopted by employees to manage technological stress and fears of obsolescence.
- To recommend pre-emptive organizational measures for reducing technostress and FOBO.



II. Literature Review

Evolution of Technostress

The concept of technostress was introduced by Brod (1984), who described it as a modern disease resulting from an inability to cope effectively with computer technologies. Over time, the scope of technostress has expanded beyond computers to include smartphones, digital communication platforms, artificial intelligence systems, and cloud-based technologies.

Tarafdar et al. (2007) identified five dimensions of technostress: techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-complexity, techno-insecurity, and techno-uncertainty. These dimensions continue to influence employee experiences in modern workplaces.

Studies indicate that technostress negatively impacts employee well-being, productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The widespread adoption of remote and hybrid work models has further intensified these challenges.

Emergence of FOBO

Fear of Becoming Obsolete (FOBO) has emerged as a significant workplace concern in the era of digital transformation. Unlike traditional job insecurity, FOBO specifically relates to concerns regarding the relevance of one's skills and professional expertise. Technological innovations, particularly AI and automation, have altered skill requirements across industries. Employees increasingly recognize that career success depends on continuous learning and adaptability. Consequently, many professionals experience anxiety about their ability to remain employable in rapidly changing work environments.

Relationship Between Technostress and FOBO

Research suggests that technostress often acts as a precursor to FOBO. Employees who struggle to adapt to technological changes may begin questioning their long-term professional relevance. Continuous exposure to technological complexity can reduce confidence and increase fears regarding future employability.

The relationship between these factors begins with technological change, which triggers technostress. This stress leads to reduced confidence, subsequently fostering a Fear of Becoming Obsolete (FOBO), which ultimately culminates in burnout and reduced performance.



Research Gap

While substantial research exists on technostress and employee well-being, relatively few studies have explored the relationship between technostress and FOBO among employees in Indian MNCs. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining both phenomena together and analyzing their combined impact.

Causes of Technostress and FOBO

Rapid Technological Advancements and Techno-uncertainty

The velocity of technological evolution creates a state of perpetual techno-uncertainty, where the lifespan of technical knowledge is drastically shortened. In Indian MNCs, the shift from legacy systems to cloud-native architectures and agile frameworks forces employees into a cycle of constant unlearning and relearning. This creates a cognitive burden as workers must reconcile their established mental models with new, often divergent, technological paradigms. For instance, a software architect transitioning to a serverless computing environment must master entirely new resource management concepts, leading to significant psychological pressure and a perceived threat to their professional mastery.

Technology evolves at an unprecedented pace, requiring employees to continuously learn new software, tools, and work processes. Frequent technological changes can create uncertainty and pressure, particularly among employees who find adaptation challenging.

Example: An IT professional who previously specialized in traditional software development may feel pressured to learn cloud computing and AI-based technologies to remain relevant.

2. Artificial Intelligence and Automation—Algorithmic Management and AI-Induced Job Insecurity

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) into core business processes introduces "techno-insecurity," a primary driver of FOBO. Beyond simple task replacement, algorithmic management—where AI systems assign tasks, evaluate performance, and optimize workflows—can dehumanize the work experience and create a sense of powerlessness. In the financial services sector, entry-level analysts often fear that generative AI capable of automated financial reporting and risk modeling will render their quantitative skills redundant, leading to deep-seated career anxiety and a lack of long-term organizational commitment.

Example: Customer service representatives may worry that AI-powered chatbots will reduce the need for human intervention.



III. Information Overload–Techno-overload and Cognitive Exhaustion

Techno-overload occurs when the volume of information delivered via digital channels exceeds the individual's information processing capacity. The ubiquitous nature of Slack, Microsoft Teams, and email in Indian MNCs leads to "fragmented work," where constant interruptions prevent employees from entering a "flow state." An HR professional managing complex recruitment cycles across multiple time zones may find that the relentless influx of digital data leads to decision fatigue, where the quality of hiring decisions degrades due to sheer mental exhaustion from processing disparate digital signals.

Example: A project manager handling multiple global projects may struggle to prioritize important communications amid constant digital interruptions.

IV. Continuous Connectivity–Techno-invasion and the Erosion of Work-Life Boundaries

Techno-invasion refers to the "always-on" culture enabled by mobile technologies, which allows work to infiltrate the domestic sphere. For Indian MNC employees, this is often exacerbated by global delivery models requiring synchronization with Western markets. This "availability creep" prevents psychological detachment from work, a critical component of recovery. A consultant regularly responding to client queries on WhatsApp during evening hours experiences a blurring of roles, leading to chronic stress and potentially strained familial relationships, which further reduces overall resilience to workplace stressors.

Skill Obsolescence

The rapid pace of technological change often renders existing skills less valuable. Employees fear that failure to acquire new competencies may limit career growth opportunities.

Example: Employees working on legacy programming systems may worry about declining demand for their expertise.

Digital Performance Monitoring

Organizations increasingly use digital tools to monitor employee productivity and performance. While intended to improve accountability, such monitoring can create feelings of pressure and stress. Example: Remote employees whose activities are



continuously tracked may experience increased anxiety regarding performance evaluation.

Competitive Workplace Culture

Employees frequently compare themselves with colleagues who possess advanced certifications and technological skills. Such comparisons can intensify fears regarding professional relevance. Example: Employees without AI certifications may feel disadvantaged compared to peers who have specialized training.

Effect on Organizations in Different Domains

Productivity and Performance-Impact on Aggregate Productivity and Intellectual Capital

While technology is intended to bolster efficiency, technostress creates a "productivity paradox" where the time gained through automation is lost to managing technological complexity. High FOBO levels can lead to "knowledge hoarding," where employees refrain from sharing expertise to maintain a perceived individual advantage, thus damaging the organization's collective intellectual capital. In R&D departments, this lack of collaborative synergy can stall innovation cycles, as employees prioritize job preservation over the open exchange of ideas necessary for breakthrough discoveries.

Employee Retention and Turnover- Talent Attrition and the Erosion of Employer Brand

Organizations characterized by high techno-pressure face significant challenges in human capital retention. FOBO-driven turnover is particularly costly in specialized tech roles where the loss of tacit knowledge is difficult to quantify. Furthermore, a reputation for being a "high-stress digital sweatshop" can severely damage an MNC's employer brand, making it difficult to attract top-tier talent who increasingly prioritize organizational culture and wellness. This creates a negative feedback loop where high turnover increases the workload—and stress—for remaining staff.

Example: Skilled IT professionals may leave organizations that provide limited opportunities for learning and development.

Innovation and Creativity

Fear often discourages experimentation and risk-taking. Employees who focus on protecting their positions may become less willing to propose innovative ideas. Example: Employees concerned about making mistakes may avoid suggesting AI-driven process improvements.

Organizational Culture



Technostress can negatively affect workplace relationships and trust. Employees may become more competitive and less collaborative when they feel insecure about their future.

Example: Excessive emphasis on performance metrics may create unhealthy workplace competition.

Customer Service Quality

Stress and burnout can reduce employees' ability to provide high-quality customer service. Emotional exhaustion often affects responsiveness and problem-solving capabilities.

Example: Customer support professionals experiencing burnout may struggle to handle customer complaints effectively.

Financial Performance

Reduced productivity, absenteeism, and employee turnover can increase organizational costs and negatively affect profitability. Example: High attrition among technology professionals may require organizations to invest heavily in recruitment and onboarding.

Employer Branding

Organizations known for excessive technological pressure may struggle to attract and retain talented employees. Example: Companies with strong employee well-being programs often enjoy stronger employer reputations.

Effect on Employees in Different Domains

Psychological Domain-Anxiety and Stress

Cognitive Interference and Burnout-

From an organizational psychology perspective, technostress manifests as cognitive interference, where anxious thoughts about technology distract from the task at hand. FOBO triggers a "threat-rigidity" response, causing employees to narrow their focus and rely on outdated but familiar habits rather than exploring more efficient digital workflows. This prolonged state of high-arousal stress eventually culminates in burnout, characterized by cynicism and a sense of reduced professional efficacy, which is particularly prevalent in high-pressure consulting and IT environments.



Burnout

Continuous technological demands and information overload can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout. Example: Employees attending multiple virtual meetings daily may experience mental fatigue and reduced motivation.

Reduced Self-Confidence

Difficulty adapting to technological changes can reduce employees' confidence in their abilities.

Example: An employee struggling to use a newly introduced software platform may feel less competent than colleagues.

Physical Domain

Sleep Disturbances

Constant connectivity often interferes with employees' ability to disconnect from work, affecting sleep quality. Example: Employees regularly checking work emails late at night may experience disrupted sleep patterns.

Fatigue

Extended screen time and digital overload contribute to physical and mental exhaustion.

Example: Employees working continuously on computers may experience eye strain and fatigue.

Health Problems

Chronic stress can contribute to headaches, hypertension, and musculoskeletal disorders.

Example: Professionals working long hours in front of screens frequently report neck and back pain.

Professional Domain

Reduced Job Satisfaction

Employees overwhelmed by technological pressures often report lower levels of job satisfaction. Example: Workers constantly required to learn new systems may feel less enjoyment in their roles.

Career Uncertainty

FOBO creates concerns regarding future employability and career progression.

Example: Employees specializing in outdated technologies may worry about long-term job prospects.



Lower Productivity

Stress and anxiety can impair focus and work quality.

Example: Employees distracted by excessive notifications may struggle to complete tasks efficiently.

Social Domain

Work-Life Imbalance

Technology has made it easier to work remotely but harder to disconnect from work responsibilities. Example: Employees responding to work messages during family time may experience strained relationships.

Workplace Isolation

Remote work can reduce opportunities for social interaction and relationship-building. Example: New employees working remotely may feel disconnected from organizational culture.

Reduced Collaboration

Stress often discourages participation in collaborative activities. Example: Employees under significant pressure may avoid knowledge-sharing initiatives.

Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Employees

Proactive Skill Acquisition and Agentic Learning - Continuous Learning and Upskilling

Employees mitigate FOMO by adopting an "agentic" approach to career management, taking personal responsibility for their skill trajectory. This involves identifying "future-proof" adjacent skills—such as an accountant learning data visualization or a marketer mastering SEO analytics. By shifting from a reactive to a proactive learning stance, employees regain a sense of agency, transforming technology from a perceived threat into a tool for professional empowerment and enhanced employability within the internal and external labor markets.

Digital Literacy Enhancement

Developing technological competence reduces anxiety and increases confidence.

Example: Employees attending training programs often adapt more quickly to new systems.

Time Management and Boundary Setting

Establishing clear work-life boundaries can reduce digital overload and improve well-being.



Example: Turning off non-essential notifications after work hours helps maintain personal time.

Mindfulness and Stress Management

Meditation, exercise, and relaxation techniques can improve resilience and reduce stress.

Example: Employees practicing yoga regularly often report lower stress levels.

Networking and Professional Development

Professional networks provide learning opportunities, mentorship, and career guidance.

Example: Attending industry conferences helps employees stay informed about emerging trends.

Seeking Support

Employees should seek assistance from supervisors, mentors, and counselors when needed.

Example: Utilizing Employee Assistance Programs can improve emotional well-being.

Pre-emptive Measures by Organizations

Continuous Learning, Structural Support for Reskilling and Career Pathing

To address FOBO, organizations must move beyond generic training to provide personalized career pathing that clearly demonstrates how technology will augment rather than replace specific roles. Establishing internal talent marketplaces allows employees to experiment with new technologies in "low-stakes" environments. For example, an MNC might implement a "sabbatical for learning" program, allowing employees to dedicate time to intensive certifications without the pressure of their daily deliverables, thereby signaling a long-term commitment to the employee's professional growth.

Digital Wellness Initiatives

Digital wellness programs encourage healthy technology usage and reduce employee fatigue.

Example: Organizations implementing "No Meeting Fridays" help reduce digital overload.

Transparent Communication

Clear communication regarding technological changes reduces uncertainty and anxiety.

Example: Leaders can conduct town hall meetings explaining how AI will complement rather than replace employees.



Mental Health Support

Organizations should provide counseling services and wellness programs.

Example: Employee Assistance Programs offering confidential counseling can help employees manage stress.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible schedules support work-life balance and reduce burnout.

Example: Hybrid work models allow employees greater control over their work routines.

Human-Centered Technology Implementation

Employees should be involved in technology adoption decisions whenever possible.

Example: Pilot testing new software with employee feedback improves acceptance and usability.

Career Development Planning

Organizations should provide clear pathways for career progression and internal mobility.

Example: Job rotation programs help employees develop diverse skills and remain relevant.

Building a Learning Culture

Organizations should encourage experimentation, innovation, and continuous improvement.

Example: Companies that reward learning and skill development often experience higher employee engagement.

Case Examples from Indian MNCs

Infosys

Infosys has invested heavily in digital transformation and employee reskilling initiatives. Through its learning platforms, employees are encouraged to continuously develop competencies in AI, cloud computing, and emerging technologies. These initiatives help reduce fears regarding skill obsolescence.

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)

TCS promotes continuous learning through digital learning ecosystems and certification programs. The organization recognizes that employee adaptability is critical in a rapidly changing technological environment.



Wipro

Wipro's focus on digital innovation has increased opportunities for employee development. However, employees must continually update their knowledge to remain competitive in evolving technology domains.

Accenture India

Accenture emphasizes AI-driven transformation and innovation. Employees are expected to continuously learn emerging technologies, creating both opportunities and pressures associated with professional relevance.

Deloitte India

Deloitte's increasing focus on analytics, automation, and digital consulting has transformed skill requirements, highlighting the importance of continuous learning and adaptability.

V. Conclusion

Technostress and Fear of Becoming Obsolete have emerged as significant workplace challenges in Indian multinational corporations. The increasing adoption of digital technologies, automation, and artificial intelligence has transformed organizational operations while simultaneously creating new pressures for employees. Continuous technological change, information overload, skill obsolescence, and performance expectations contribute significantly to employee stress and anxiety.

The consequences of technostress and FOBO extend beyond individual employees and influence organizational productivity, innovation, retention, culture, and financial performance. Therefore, organizations must adopt a balanced approach that combines technological advancement with employee well-being. Investments in continuous learning, digital wellness initiatives, mental health support, and transparent communication can help employees adapt successfully to changing work environments.

Employees must also take responsibility for lifelong learning, skill development, and stress management. By embracing a growth mindset and proactively adapting to technological change, employees can transform perceived threats into opportunities for career advancement and professional growth. Ultimately, organizations and employees must work together to create resilient, future-ready workplaces capable of thriving in an increasingly digital world.



References

1. Ayyagari, R., Grover, V., & Purvis, R. (2011). Technostress: Technological antecedents and implications. **MIS Quarterly*, 35*(4), 831–858.
2. Brod, C. (1984). *Technostress: The human cost of the computer revolution*. Addison-Wesley.
3. Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. **MIS Quarterly*, 13*(3), 319–340.
4. Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). **Stress, appraisal, and coping**. Springer.
5. Salanova, M., Llorens, S., & Cifre, E. (2013). The dark side of technologies: Technostress among users of information and communication technologies. *International Journal of Psychology*, 48*(3), 422–436.
6. Tarafdar, M., Tu, Q., Ragu-Nathan, T. S., & Ragu-Nathan, B. S. (2007). The impact of technostress on role stress and productivity. **Journal of Management Information Systems*, 24*(1), 301–328.
7. Tarafdar, M., Cooper, C. L., & Stich, J. F. (2019). The technostress trifecta: Techno-eustress, techno-distress and design. **Information Systems Journal*, 29*(1), 6–42.