



## Reflecting Organisational Change with a Systemic Stance: Employee Constructions during the Introduction of Artificial Intelligence

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### Article Info

ISSN (Online): 2582-7138

Impact Factor (RSIF): 8.04

Volume: 07

Issue: 02

Received: 13-01-2026

Accepted: 14-02-2026

Published: 15-03-2026

Page No: 237-238

### Abstract

This paper explores how employees construct and experience organisational change during the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) in a medium-sized enterprise. Using a systemic-constructivist perspective, the study examines perceived challenges and resources related to AI implementation, based on an anonymous, synchronous, text-based online focus group. The focus group was facilitated in systemic stance, emphasising appreciation, conscious not-knowing, and reflexive dialogue. Findings reveal a general openness toward technological change alongside uncertainties regarding usefulness, reliability, and data protection. Key resources identified include transparent communication, practical examples, early involvement, and opportunities for shared reflection. The study highlights the value of systemic facilitation and anonymous dialogical formats for capturing employee perspectives in complex transformation processes.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2026.7.2.237-238>

**Keywords:** Systemic Stance, Artificial Intelligence, Organisational Change, Employee Constructions, Qualitative Research, Focus Group

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### 1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has become an increasingly influential factor in organisational development (Statista Daily Data, 2025)<sup>[9]</sup>. While its potential benefits are widely discussed, many organisations—particularly medium-sized enterprises—struggle with acceptance, integration, and meaning-making processes among employees (Statista, 2025)<sup>[10]</sup>. Research indicates that technological change often fails not because of technical limitations, but due to insufficient attention to human perceptions and emotional dynamics (Schmitz, 2022)<sup>[8]</sup>.

This paper investigates how employees construct the introduction of AI within their organisational context. Grounded in systemic theory, the study shifts the focus from linear cause–effect explanations to relational and contextual sense-making processes. The guiding research questions explore which challenges employees perceive during AI implementation and which resources they consider supportive for navigating this change.

### 2. Theoretical Foundations

Systemic theory conceptualises organisations as complex social systems characterised by continuous interaction, feedback loops, and self-regulation (Radatz, 2009)<sup>[6]</sup>. Change is understood not as a linear intervention but as an ongoing process of adaptation and reconstruction (Re *et al.*, 2024)<sup>[7]</sup>.

From a constructivist perspective, reality is not discovered but constructed through individual and collective interpretation (Watzlawick, 2021)<sup>[13]</sup>. Employees interpret technological innovations based on prior experiences, expectations, and organisational narratives (Radatz, 2009; Höyng & Lau, 2023)<sup>[6, 2]</sup>. These constructions shape emotional responses such as uncertainty, resistance, or openness (van der Schaft *et al.*, 2024)<sup>[12]</sup>.

Systemic stance plays a central role in facilitating reflective processes within such contexts. It is characterised by appreciation, non-judgement, curiosity, and a belief in the competence and autonomy of individuals. Rather than offering solutions, systemic facilitation invites dialogue and supports participants in articulating their own meanings and resources (Radatz, 2010)<sup>[5]</sup>.

### 3. Methodology

The study followed a qualitative, interpretative research design (Lauri, 2019) <sup>[3]</sup>. Data were collected through an anonymous, synchronous, text-based online focus group (Underhill & Olmsted, 2003) <sup>[11]</sup> conducted within a medium-sized tourism company during the early phase of AI implementation.

The focus group was facilitated in systemic stance to minimise power dynamics and encourage authentic expression (Radatz, 2010) <sup>[5]</sup>. Anonymity was intentionally chosen to reduce group pressure and foster openness (Leask *et al.*, 2001) <sup>[4]</sup>. The discussion centred on perceived challenges and supportive resources related to AI introduction.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach. Codes were developed inductively and clustered into overarching themes aligned with the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022) <sup>[1]</sup>.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Participants expressed a general openness toward AI, viewing it as an inevitable development. At the same time, uncertainties emerged regarding practical usefulness, data security, and reliability of AI-generated outcomes. These concerns were often linked to fragmented information and external narratives rather than direct experience.

As key resources, participants highlighted transparent communication, concrete examples from comparable organisations, and opportunities for shared learning. Early involvement and realistic expectation management were perceived as essential for building trust and reducing emotional strain.

The anonymous, systemic focus group format itself was experienced as supportive, allowing participants to reflect openly without fear of evaluation. This underscores the methodological value of combining systemic facilitation with protected dialogical spaces.

### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings demonstrate that the success of AI implementation depends not only on technical readiness but on how employees construct and emotionally experience the change. A systemic stance enables organisations to access these constructions and address uncertainties in a respectful and participatory manner.

Recommendations include integrating systemic facilitation into change communication, providing transparent, practice-oriented information, creating safe spaces for reflection and dialogue, and involving employees early in experimentation and sense-making processes.

Future research could explore longitudinal developments of employee constructions and compare different dialogical formats in digital transformation contexts.

### 6. Thank-You Note

The authors thank the participating organisation alpetour Touristische GmbH and all employees who contributed their perspectives with openness and reflection. Special thanks go to colleagues who supported the research process and facilitation.

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### How to Cite This Article

Sweet V, Sarter J, Geier N. Reflecting organisational change with a systemic stance: employee constructions during the introduction of artificial intelligence. *Int J Multidiscip Res Growth Eval.* 2026;7(2):237-238. doi:10.54660/IJMRGE.2026.7.2.237-238

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