



## DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS A CREATIVE WORKPLACE WELLNESS INTERVENTION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHER STRESS MANAGEMENT

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### Abstract:

Contemporary workplaces are increasingly shaped by rapid technological transformation, intensified performance accountability, and heightened emotional demands. Within the education sector, these dynamics have significantly amplified occupational stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout among teachers, posing serious challenges to individual well-being, instructional quality, and institutional sustainability. Despite growing awareness of workplace mental health, many existing wellness initiatives remain fragmented, individualistic, and detached from the lived experiences of educators.

This conceptual paper proposes Digital Storytelling (DST) as an innovative, creative, and participatory workplace wellness intervention for teacher stress management. Drawing upon narrative psychology, constructivist learning theory, narrative therapy, and organizational wellness literature, the paper develops a conceptual framework illustrating how digital storytelling can function as a holistic stress-management tool. Through structured narrative creation and sharing, DST enables emotional externalization, cognitive reframing of stressors, peer empathy, technological empowerment, and collective meaning-making.

The paper argues that DST moves beyond deficit-oriented wellness models by recognizing stress as a relational and organizational phenomenon rather than solely an individual problem. By integrating creativity, reflection, and digital literacy, DST offers a scalable, cost-effective, and culturally adaptable approach for fostering psychological well-being and resilient organizational cultures in educational institutions. The paper concludes by outlining implications for policy, leadership, institutional practice, and future research, emphasizing the role of creative narrative-based interventions in promoting humane and sustainable workplaces.

**Keywords:** Digital Storytelling, Workplace Wellness, Teacher Well-being, Creative Stress Management, Narrative Approaches, Organizational Culture

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### Introduction:

The twenty-first-century workplace is increasingly characterized by conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Rapid technological advancements, evolving performance expectations, and intensified accountability frameworks have transformed the nature of work across sectors. Within this context, employee mental health and well-being

have emerged as critical determinants of organizational effectiveness, productivity, employee retention, and long-term sustainability. International organizations such as the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization have emphasized that workplace mental health is not merely an individual concern but a structural and policy issue integral to decent work.

Among professional sectors, education occupies a particularly demanding position. Teaching extends far beyond instructional delivery; it involves sustained emotional engagement, relational labor, ethical responsibility, and continuous adaptation to curricular and technological changes. Educators are expected to manage diverse learner needs, administrative responsibilities, performance evaluations, and digital transitions, often with limited institutional support. These demands place teachers at heightened risk of chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these pressures, accelerating digitalization while blurring boundaries between personal and professional life. Although educational institutions have increasingly acknowledged teacher stress, wellness initiatives often remain peripheral, episodic, or remedial in nature. This paper argues that there is a pressing need to reimagine workplace wellness through creative, participatory, and meaning-centered approaches. In this context, **Digital Storytelling (DST)** is proposed as a powerful and innovative intervention capable of addressing both individual and organizational dimensions of teacher well-being.

### **Teacher Stress and the Need for Creative Wellness Interventions:**

Teaching has long been identified as a high-stress profession. Empirical studies consistently highlight workload intensity, time pressure, emotional labor, classroom management challenges, role ambiguity, and performance evaluation as significant stressors. Emotional labor—the requirement to regulate and display socially appropriate emotions—places teachers under constant psychological strain, often leading to emotional dissonance and exhaustion.

Technological change has emerged as a contemporary stressor of particular significance. While digital tools offer pedagogical opportunities, they also demand continuous upskilling, adaptability, and availability.

For many educators, especially those trained in pre-digital eras, technological expectations contribute to anxiety, reduced self-efficacy, and professional insecurity.

Traditional workplace wellness initiatives in educational institutions tend to focus on individual coping strategies such as stress-management workshops, motivational lectures, or self-care guidelines. While these approaches may raise awareness, they often fail to address the deeper emotional, relational, and meaning-making dimensions of stress. Moreover, such interventions implicitly frame stress as an individual responsibility rather than a shared organizational concern.

Creative wellness interventions offer an alternative paradigm. Creativity facilitates emotional expression, reflection, and reinterpretation of experience. By engaging imagination and narrative, creative practices allow individuals to reclaim agency and generate meaning from adversity. When embedded within organizational contexts, creative interventions also foster empathy, dialogue, and collective resilience—essential components of psychologically healthy workplaces.

### **Digital Storytelling: Conceptual Foundations:**

Digital Storytelling refers to the creation of short, first-person multimedia narratives that integrate voice, images, text, music, and digital media. Originally rooted in community arts and participatory media movements, DST has been widely adopted in education, health care, social work, and organizational development.

The conceptual strength of Digital Storytelling lies in its interdisciplinary theoretical foundations.

#### **1. Narrative Psychology**

Narrative psychology posits that individuals understand their lives through stories. Experiences acquire meaning when they are organized into coherent narratives. Stressful experiences, when left

unarticulated, often remain fragmented and emotionally burdensome. Story construction allows individuals to integrate emotions, events, and interpretations into a meaningful whole, thereby reducing psychological distress and enhancing self-awareness.

## 2. Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist learning theory emphasizes active meaning-making rather than passive reception of information. From this perspective, learning and personal growth occur through reflection, dialogue, and experiential engagement. In Digital Storytelling, participants are not passive recipients of wellness advice but active creators of personal knowledge. This participatory process enhances engagement, ownership, and internalization of coping insights.

## 3. Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapeutic approaches focus on separating individuals from their problems through externalization. By representing stress as a story rather than an identity, individuals gain psychological distance and a sense of agency. Digital storytelling enables educators to view stress as a contextual experience influenced by organizational conditions rather than as a personal inadequacy.

## 4. Digital Storytelling as a Conceptual Workplace Wellness Model

Digital Storytelling can be conceptualized as a multi-layered workplace wellness intervention operating simultaneously at individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels.

### 1. Emotional Externalization and Catharsis:

Educators often suppress emotions in professional settings due to expectations of competence and emotional control. The process of scripting, voicing, and visualizing personal experiences allows for emotional

externalization. This cathartic expression reduces emotional overload and creates space for psychological relief.

### 2. Cognitive Reframing of Stressors:

Transforming lived experiences into narratives encourages reflection and reinterpretation. Educators frequently shift from self-blame to contextual understanding, recognizing systemic contributors to stress. Such cognitive reframing enhances resilience and reduces feelings of helplessness.

### 3. Peer Empathy and Collective Meaning-Making:

When digital stories are shared within trusted professional groups, individual experiences become collective narratives. This sharing process normalizes vulnerability, reduces isolation, and fosters empathy among colleagues. Over time, shared narratives contribute to collective meaning-making and a sense of professional solidarity.

### 4. Technological Empowerment and Self-Efficacy:

While technology is often perceived as a source of stress, Digital Storytelling reframes it as a creative and expressive tool. Acquiring digital skills within a supportive, non-evaluative environment enhances technological self-efficacy and reduces anxiety related to digital demands.

### Implications for Organizational Culture and Leadership:

Workplace wellness cannot be separated from organizational culture. Hierarchical structures, performance-driven climates, and limited psychological safety often discourage open dialogue about stress. Digital Storytelling interventions create structured spaces where emotional expression and reflection are legitimized.

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping such cultures. When institutional leaders actively support or

participate in narrative-based wellness initiatives, they signal that well-being is a shared organizational responsibility. This shift from surveillance-oriented management to empathetic leadership fosters trust, openness, and psychological safety.

Moreover, narrative practices can inform organizational learning. Patterns emerging from shared stories provide valuable insights into systemic stressors, enabling institutions to design more responsive policies and support structures.

### Policy and Practice Implications:

The conceptual framework presented in this paper suggests several implications for educational institutions and policymakers:

1. **Integration into Faculty Development Programmes:** Creative wellness interventions should be embedded within regular faculty development initiatives rather than treated as optional or remedial activities.
2. **Institutionalization of Reflective Spaces:** Educational institutions can establish recurring narrative-sharing forums that support sustained emotional engagement and peer support.
3. **Capacity Building for Facilitators:** Training faculty members and counselors in digital storytelling facilitation ensures ethical, inclusive, and psychologically safe implementation.
4. **Positioning Educational Institutions as Wellness Catalysts:** Teacher education institutions should model holistic wellness practices, equipping future educators with narrative and emotional competencies.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research:

As a conceptual paper, this study does not present empirical data. Future research may empirically

examine the impact of Digital Storytelling interventions on teacher stress, job satisfaction, and organizational climate. Longitudinal studies could explore sustainability and long-term outcomes. Comparative studies across cultural and institutional contexts would further enhance understanding of DST's adaptability and effectiveness.

### Conclusion:

This paper conceptualizes Digital Storytelling as an innovative and meaningful response to the growing challenge of teacher stress in contemporary workplaces. Moving beyond individualistic and deficit-based wellness models, DST offers a participatory framework that integrates creativity, reflection, and community-building. By enabling educators to transform stress into narrative meaning, Digital Storytelling contributes not only to individual well-being but also to healthier and more resilient organizational cultures. In an era of technological acceleration and emotional complexity, creative narrative-based interventions provide a humane and sustainable pathway toward workplace wellness.

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