Extending the Technostress Trifecta to Generative Artificial Intelligence Use in Organizations: A Theoretical Reconceptualization

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INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The rapid advancement and diffusion of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) mark a profound shift in how employees interact with digital technologies in organizations (Benbya et al., 2024). Unlike traditional information systems, which rely on predefined rules and deterministic logic, GenAI generates novel outputs such as text, code, or visual content using probabilistic models trained on large datasets (Feuerriegel et al., 2024). As GenAI becomes embedded in domains such as marketing and sales—where creativity and performance pressures are particularly salient (Tarafdar et al., 2015)—understanding its psychological and behavioral consequences becomes increasingly critical, especially as it reconfigures users' positive and negative experiences as well as the demands they face (Huang & Rust, 2024).

Technostress and Its Origins

Stress is a multifaceted concept defined as a response to external stimuli (stressors) that disrupt an individual's balance and require adaptive responses (McGrath, 1970). These stressors can stem from physical, social, or work environments and trigger physiological, cognitive, and behavioral reactions depending on individual appraisals and coping resources (Kobasa, 1979). In digital environments, this perspective has led to the concept of technostress, which captures the strain arising from interactions with information systems. Originally defined by Brod (1984) as a "modern disease of adaptation," technostress is now broadly understood as stress resulting from the interaction with IS (Tarafdar et al., 2019). Technostress

has become a central lens for examining the individual-level consequences of technology use (e.g., Ayyagari et al., 2011; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). Early research primarily framed it as a negative response to technological demands, emphasizing users' difficulties in coping with ongoing change. This work identified key techno-stressors—such as overload, invasion, complexity, insecurity, and uncertainty—and linked them to adverse outcomes including burnout, anxiety, and reduced job satisfaction (Tarafdar et al., 2007).

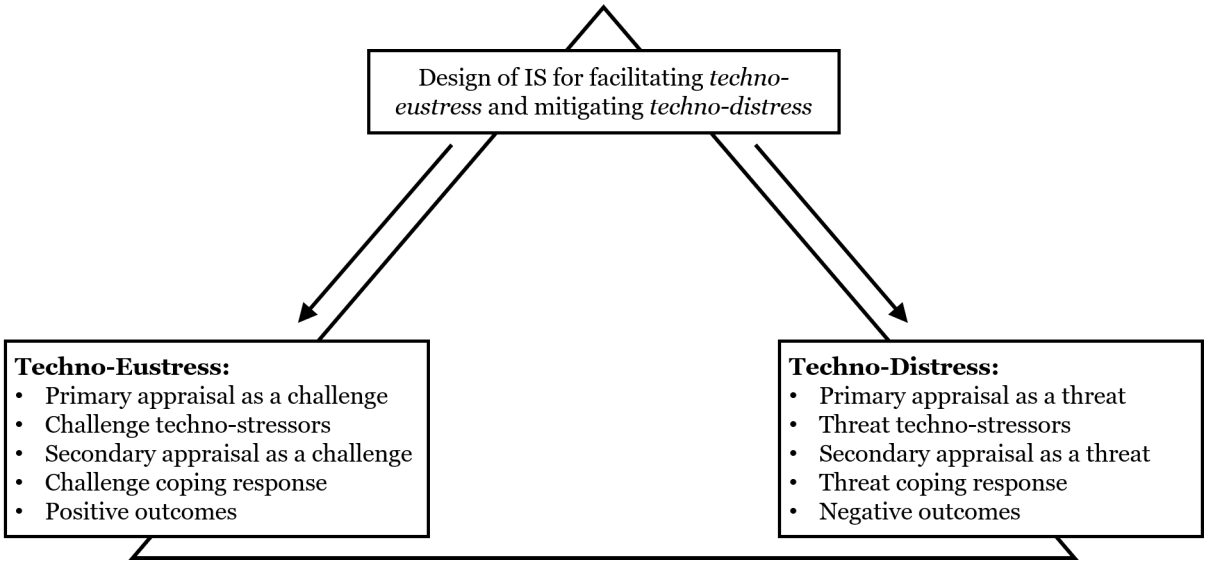
Over time, this taxonomy has been extended to account for emerging digital environments. Recent studies have identified additional techno-stressors such as misinformation (Cadieux et al., 2021), techno-usefulness (Califf et al., 2020), techno-induced role ambiguity (Ayyagari et al., 2011), and techno-unreliability (e.g., system errors or unpredictable outputs; Tarafdar et al., 2019). These developments reflect the increasing complexity and pervasiveness of digital technologies in organizational contexts, positioning technostress as a critical lens for understanding how individuals experience and cope with digital transformation (Berger et al., 2024; Tarafdar et al., 2019).

While this stream of research has generated important insights, it has been criticized for its predominantly negative orientation. Drawing on transactional stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), more recent work adopts a more nuanced perspective by recognizing that technological demands can also be appraised as challenges rather than threats. This shift has led to the introduction of techno-eustress, a positive and energizing form of stress that can foster motivation, engagement, learning, and performance (Califf et al., 2020; Tarafdar et al., 2024).

Integrating these perspectives, the technostress trifecta (Tarafdar et al., 2019; see Figure 1) conceptualizes technostress as a dynamic process comprising (1) the primary appraisal of technological demands as either challenge- or threat-oriented, (2) the secondary appraisal of available coping resources, (3) coping responses, and (4) resulting individual outcomes. This

framework emphasizes that technostress is not inherently harmful or beneficial but depends on how individuals interpret technological demands, as well as the broader contextual conditions in which technology use is embedded.

Figure 1. The Technostress Trifecta (adapted from Tarafdar et al., 2019)



Generative Artificial Intelligence as a Distinct Technology

Despite these advances, prior technostress research has predominantly been conducted in the context of largely deterministic technologies, such as enterprise systems (Adam et al., 2017), and only more recently has begun to consider non-deterministic technologies, such as AI (Califf et al., 2020). However, we argue that GenAI possesses distinctive characteristics that alter how users interact with technology. First, GenAI is inherently generative, producing novel outputs such as text, images, or music (Feuerriegel et al., 2024). Second, GenAI is interactive and iterative, enabling users to engage in ongoing dialogue with the system over time (Heimburg et al., 2025). This lowers the barriers of usage, which leads to many formerly non-technical individuals starting to use such technologies (Huo & Siau, 2023). Third, GenAI is widely accessible to anyone with internet access and can be applied across a broad range of tasks and contexts. This accessibility changes how technology is introduced in organizational settings. Traditionally, technologies, such as earlier forms of AI, were implemented top-down,

with clearly defined use cases for employees. In contrast, GenAI often enters organizations in a more decentralized manner. Some organizations actively support its use and establish guidelines, while others remain ambiguous or refrain from positioning altogether (Tronnier et al., 2025). As a result, employees adopt GenAI in heterogeneous ways, leading to varied patterns of integration within the same organization and also between organizations. We argue that these differences change how technostress is experienced. On the one hand, prior studies showed that GenAI can reduce workload, enhance efficiency, and support creative processes. On the other hand, it introduces new uncertainties, such as unpredictability of outputs and concerns of authorship (Feuerriegel et al., 2024).

Recent research on GenAI and technostress remains largely conceptual or limited in empirical scope. For instance, Huo and Siau (2023) develop a framework to examine technostress induced by ChatGPT in educational settings, emphasizing the experiences of techno-eustress and techno-distress. In a related vein, Caporusso (2023) conceptualizes the emotional implications of GenAI through the notion of "creative displacement anxiety," underscoring concerns about the potential erosion of human creativity. Despite these valuable contributions, empirical evidence on how GenAI reconfigures technostress in organizational contexts remains scarce (Tronnier et al., 2025). In particular, research examining how professionals in domains such as marketing and sales experience GenAI-induced technostress is still limited, especially with regard to the interplay between distress and eustress. This gap is notable given the inherently creative and performance-intensive nature of these roles (Tarafdar et al., 2015), which are increasingly transformed by GenAI systems. Addressing this shortcoming, our study investigates both the positive and negative effects of GenAI, while also examining the coping mechanisms and contextual factors that impact these experiences in practice.

Toward a Reconfiguration of Technostress in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Building on these insights, we argue that GenAI reconfigures how we knew technostress prior to the emergence of GenAI. Rather than being primarily driven by difficulties in using technology, technostress in the context of GenAI increasingly arises from the need to interpret, evaluate, and take responsibility for system outputs. In other words, the locus of stress moves from interaction with the system to *governance of its outputs*. We argue that this alters the types of demands users face. Some established techno-stressors may become less salient or take on a more ambivalent character. For example, techno-complexity and techno-overload may weaken in their traditional form, as GenAI lowers interaction barriers and can reduce efforts in executing tasks, yet simultaneously increases expectations regarding speed, quality, and continuous optimization. At the same time, other stressors are fundamentally transformed. Techno-uncertainty and techno-unreliability, for instance, no longer stem mainly from system changes or errors, but from the fact that GenAI can produce plausible yet incorrect outputs, requiring users to continuously check and validate results. Consequently, technostress in the context of GenAI is less driven by difficulties in using technology and more by the demands of interpreting and governing its outputs.

Consequently, technostress in the GenAI era is characterized by a greater degree of ambiguity. While the technostress trifecta acknowledges that technology can elicit both positive and negative reactions, it remains largely silent on how individuals process these reactions when they occur simultaneously. In the context of GenAI, users are increasingly likely to experience such co-occurring evaluations, giving rise to attitudinal ambivalence (Thompson et al., 1995), defined as holding positive and negative evaluations toward the same object at the same time. Importantly, prior research on attitudinal ambivalence suggests that these conflicting evaluations can create psychological tension, reduce decision confidence, and lead to inconsistent or unstable behavioral responses over time. Translated to the context of

GenAI, this implies that experiencing techno-eustress and techno-distress simultaneously may introduce new dynamics that have not been sufficiently examined in prior technostress research. We frame this under *technostress ambivalence*. Moreover, because GenAI is often adopted in a decentralized manner, organizational context becomes a critical determinant of how such ambivalence is resolved. The presence or absence of guidance, norms, and support structures can impact whether ambivalent evaluations are reconciled toward more positive or more negative outcomes.

Against this backdrop, this study (Study 1: 42 semi-structured interviews, Study 2: cross-sectional survey with a current sample of 311) examines how marketing and sales professionals experience and appraise GenAI-induced technostress and offers three important contributions to the literature. First, we extend the technostress trifecta to the context of GenAI in organizational settings. Second, we reconceptualize the technostress trifecta by introducing the notion of technostress ambivalence, highlighting that GenAI users often experience positive and negative evaluations simultaneously, and we explore the consequences of this ambivalence for how individuals respond to and engage with the technology over time. Third, we demonstrate how established techno-stressors and coping responses shift in the context of GenAI, showing that some traditional stressors become less relevant or are transformed, while new demands emerge. Based on these insights, we derive avenues for future research that advance a more context-sensitive understanding of technostress regarding GenAI.

METHODOLOGY AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Study 1: Semi-Structured Interviews

Sample, Study Process, and Coding

Given the emerging nature of technostress in the context of GenAI, we started off with a qualitative research design to capture how individuals experience and interpret this phenomenon in practice. Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for uncovering novel and

under-theorized dynamics, such as the shifting nature of technostress in interactions with GenAI. We conducted 42 semi-structured interviews with marketing and sales professionals who regularly use GenAI in their work. The interview protocol covered GenAI usage patterns, organizational context, and experiences related to techno-eustress and techno-distress. In particular, questions were designed to capture (1) how GenAI changes the nature of work from system use to the governance of outputs, (2) how established techno-stressors shift and which new stressors emerge, and (3) how individuals experience simultaneous positive and negative reactions toward GenAI use (i.e., technostress ambivalence).

We followed the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) and conducted an inductive coding process using MAXQDA. Two authors independently coded the data and iteratively developed first-order codes, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions. Coding emphasized participants' subjective interpretations of GenAI, particularly how the same experience could be perceived as both enabling and straining. Discrepancies between coders were resolved through discussion, resulting in a high level of agreement (over 90%).

Preliminary Results

Across the 42 interviews, three overarching patterns emerged that show how GenAI reconfigures technostress in organizational settings.

GenAI shifts work from system use to the governance of outputs. A first central finding is that GenAI changes the nature of work from interacting with a system to governing its outputs. Participants described GenAI as easy and intuitive to use ("it's actually very straightforward to get something out of it" [I4]). Strain stemmed less from operating the tool and more from evaluating, verifying, and taking responsibility for AI-generated outputs (I2, I5, I14, I25). Interviewees emphasized checking whether outputs were "accurate" [I7], "appropriate" [I23], and "usable" [I34], suggesting that technostress increasingly arises from governing outputs rather than system use.

Established techno-stressors shift, while new ones emerge. Some traditional stressors became less salient. For example, techno-complexity was reduced by conversational interfaces ("it's much easier than older systems, you just ask it" [I38]), while techno-overload became more ambivalent, as GenAI both reduced effort and increased pressure ("it saves time, but then you're expected to do more" [I17]). Techno-uncertainty and unreliability persisted but were linked less to system instability and more to output plausibility (I8, I19, I21). At the same time, new stressors emerged, including concerns about misinformation (I2, I24), unclear authorship (I10), responsibility for errors (I14, I36), and shifting role expectations (I10). Participants also reported positive counterparts such as techno-security ("I am more sure that I am equipped for the future" [I1]), techno-certainty (I6), techno-support ("it feels like having an assistant" [I15, I17, I28]), and techno-ease (I9, I33). Overall, GenAI both reshapes existing techno-stressors and introduces new ones.

GenAI use is marked by simultaneous positive and negative reactions. Participants frequently reported both at the same time, going beyond the distinction between techno-eustress and techno-distress (Tarafdar et al., 2019). GenAI was described as enhancing efficiency ("it makes me much faster" [I8]), creativity ("it gives me new ideas" [I5]), and learning ("I actually learn from the outputs" [I22]) while simultaneously creating uncertainty (I16, I25), pressure (I6, I7), and concerns about deskilling ("my expertise becomes less relevant" [I10]).

We interpret this pattern as technostress ambivalence as the simultaneous holding of positive and negative evaluations toward GenAI. In our data, this ambivalence became visible in differences in usage patterns, selective reliance on GenAI, and adaption of coping strategies. Participants often embraced GenAI for some tasks while deliberately avoiding it for others, or experienced enthusiasm and concern in parallel. Moreover, organizational context strongly impacted how such ambivalence unfolded. Transparent communication, training, and support

helped participants interpret GenAI more positively, whereas unclear rules, limited access, or weak guidance intensified distress.

Study 2: Cross-Sectional Survey

Sample and Measures

We recruited participants through Prolific and report results from a preliminary sample of 311 respondents. We introduce Study 2 to quantitatively test our findings from Study 1. Eligibility required being at least 18 years old, employed in marketing or sales, and actively using GenAI at work. Participants averaged 40.25 years of age (*SD* = 10.80); 55.95% identified as female, 42.44% as male, and 1.61% as diverse. They reported an average of 21.35 years of work experience, with 82.64% indicating management experience (*M* = 19.40 years). The most commonly used GenAI tools were ChatGPT (85.5%), Gemini (58.5%), and Microsoft Copilot (44.1%).

Participants completed an online questionnaire assessing appraisal, techno-stressors, coping mechanisms, and outcomes, complemented by open-ended questions on emotions, coping strategies, and GenAI design features. All items were measured on 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Frequency of GenAI use. Measured with a single item ranging from "once a month" to "every day."

Eustress techno-stressors. We developed scales for techno-security, techno-certainty, techno-integration, techno-induced role clarity, techno-ease, and techno-transparency (Tronnier et al., 2025). In addition, we included techno-usefulness (Moore & Benbasat, 1991), techno-support (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008), and techno-reliability (Califf et al., 2020).

Distress techno-stressors. We measured techno-insecurity, techno-invasion, techno-overload, and techno-uncertainty using established scales (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008), supplemented with items capturing ethical, legal, and future-related uncertainty (Tronnier et

al., 2025). We further developed measures for fear of misinformation and techno-induced role ambiguity, and included an inverted usefulness scale (Moore & Benbasat, 1991).

Coping mechanisms. For techno-eustress, we assessed social and task coping (self-developed). For techno-distress, we measured IS, affect, task, and cognitive coping based on Tronnier et al. (2025).

Outcomes. Positive outcomes included job satisfaction, job performance, and affective commitment (Pflügener et al., 2024). Negative outcomes included burnout and turnover intention (Hom et al., 1984).

Primary appraisal. Included age, gender, GenAI competence, Big Five traits, and whether GenAI use is allowed in the organization.

Secondary appraisal. Included changes in GenAI competence and attitudes, as well as workplace support and organizational factors (Tronnier et al., 2025).

Analytical Approach

We conducted confirmatory factor analysis to assess measurement validity, followed by structural equation modeling to test the hypothesized relationships. To manage model complexity, we employed second-order constructs for stressors and coping mechanisms. While this approach facilitates interpretation, we acknowledge that it may mask nuanced relationships at the dimension level.

Preliminary Results

Tables 1 and 2 show our SEM results for techno-eustress and -distress respectively (see also Figure 1 for a visualization). For techno-eustress, a higher frequency of GenAI use significantly increased challenge techno-stressors (β = .40, p < .001), which in turn fostered challenge coping (β = .98, p = .001). Challenge coping positively predicted job performance (β = .92, p = .002), job satisfaction (β = .63, p = .001), and affective commitment (β = .61, p =

.001). Among moderators, only neuroticism (β = -.10, p = .047) and whether GenAI use was allowed (β = -.13, p < .001) had effects.

Table 1. Structural Equation Modeling Results for Techno-Eustress Paths

Variables		B	SE	β	p-value
Direct effects	Frequency of GenAI use → Challenge techno-stressors	0.96***	0.07	.40***	< .001
	Challenge techno-stressors → Challenge coping	4.95**	1.44	.98**	.001
	Challenge coping → Job performance	0.46**	0.15	.92**	.002
	Challenge coping → Job satisfaction	0.15**	0.05	.63**	.001
	Challenge coping → Affective commitment	0.14**	0.04	.61**	.001
Moder-ating effects	Perceived GenAI competence	-0.01	0.09	-.01	.879
	Gender	-0.16	0.24	-.05	.520
	Age	0.00	0.01	-.04	.509
	Extraversion	-0.02	0.06	-.01	.801
	Neuroticism	-0.08*	0.04	-.10*	.047
	Agreeableness	-0.10	0.07	-.08	.131
	Conscientiousness	0.11	0.08	.08	.192
	Openness	0.09	0.08	.07	.254
	GenAI is allowed	-1.05***	0.30	-.13***	< .001
	Increase in GenAI competence	-15.41	12.38	-.39	.213
	Change in attitude since start of usage	22.42	17.50	.47	.200
	Work practices support	-6.26	10.48	-.16	.550
	Organizational support	3.67	20.51	.09	.858

Notes. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; GenAI allowed: 0 = no, 1 = yes. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. For the moderators, only the interactions with GenAI and challenge coping were given.

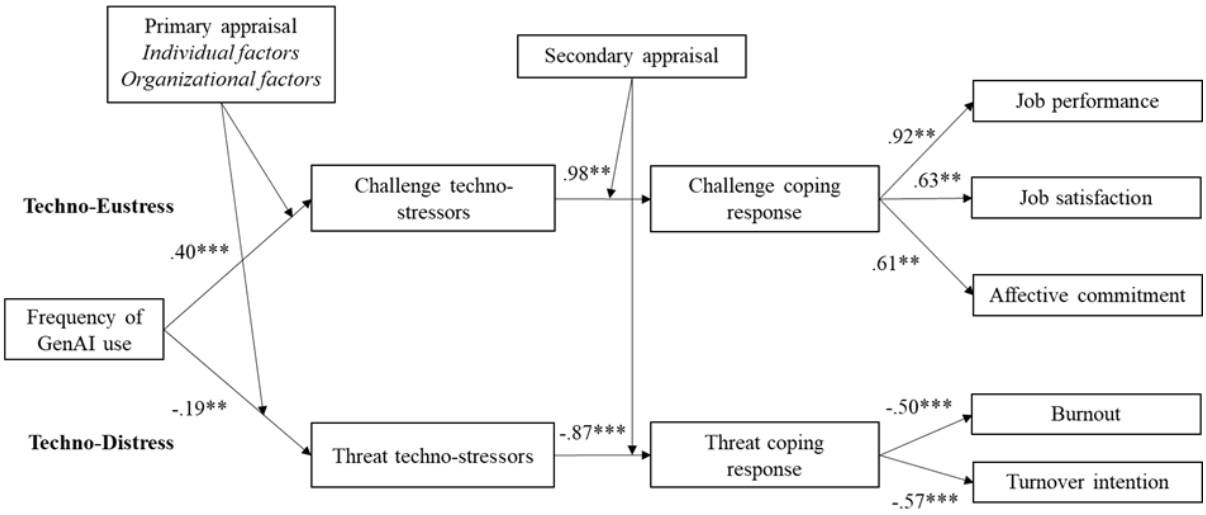
Regarding techno-distress, frequent GenAI use reduced threat techno-stressors (β = -.19, p = .002), which were negatively related to threat coping (β = -.87, p < .001). Threat coping decreased turnover intention (β = -.50, p < .001) and burnout (β = -.57, p < .001). Moderating effects were shown for perceived GenAI competence, gender, and GenAI allowed.

Table 2. Structural Equation Modeling Results for Techno-Distress Paths

Variables		B	SE	β	*p*-value
Direct effects	Frequency of GenAI use →Threat techno-stressors	-0.22**	0.07	-.19**	.002
	Threat techno-stressors → Threat coping	-1.74***	0.42	-.87***	< .001
	Threat coping → Turnover	-0.29***	0.08	-.50***	< .001
	Threat coping → Burnout	-0.34***	0.09	-.57***	< .001
	Perceived GenAI competence	-0.12†	0.06	-.10†	.055
Moder-ating effects	Gender	-0.29†	0.17	-.10†	.097
	Age	0.00	0.01	.01	.890
	Extraversion	0.10†	0.05	.10†	.055
	Neuroticism	0.01	0.04	.01	.809
	Agreeableness	-0.01	0.07	-.01	.865
	Conscientiousness	-0.07	0.08	-.06	.433
	Openness	-0.02	0.07	-.02	.721
	GenAI is allowed	0.67†	0.39	.10†	.086
	Increase in GenAI competence	0.25	1.11	.10	.819
	Change in attitude since start of usage	1.21	0.78	.84	.120
	Work practices support	0.75	0.71	.33	.291
	Organizational support	-1.38	0.96	-.89	.152
	Increase in GenAI competence	0.25	1.11	.10	.819
	Change in attitude since start of usage	1.21	0.78	.84	.120
	Work practices support	0.75	0.71	.33	.291
	Organizational support	-1.38	0.96	-.89	.152

Notes. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female; GenAI is allowed: 0 = no, 1 = yes. † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. For the moderators, only the interactions with GenAI and threat coping were given.

Figure 2. Visualization of SEM Results



DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

This study advances technostress research in three key ways. First, we show that GenAI shifts technostress from system use to the governance of outputs. Second, we introduce the concept of technostress ambivalence, demonstrating that users often experience techno-eustress and techno-distress simultaneously and that this has longer term consequences. Third, we show that established techno-stressors are reconfigured, some weaken (e.g., complexity), others become ambivalent (e.g., overload), and new ones emerge (e.g., misinformation, authorship, responsibility).

Building on these insights, we will extend our analyses in three directions. First, we will conduct more in-depth coding of the interview data to better understand technostress ambivalence, particularly how it is resolved and under which conditions it shifts toward more positive or negative evaluations. Second, we will expand our sample from Study 2 to examine how these ambivalent experiences and their resolution unfold at a larger scale. Third, we will more closely integrate findings from Study 1 and Study 2 as we currently only look at them separately. This will lead us to develop specific future research avenues.

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