THE FUTURE DIGITALISATION OF THE MALAYSIAN EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION

Nasiruddin Ismail
Malaysian Employers Federation
nasir_ismail82@yahoo.com

Ahmad Sabri Yusuff
Asia e University
yassabri@gmail.com

Siti Hadijah Zulkifly
Asia e University
siti.hadijah@aeu.edu.my

Raudhah 'Aqeela Zamiruddin
Asia e University
raudhah.aqeela@aeu.edu.my

Abstract

Digital transformation has become essential for organisational survival, particularly for federations such as the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), which represents a broad constituency of Malaysian employers. This case study investigates the determining factors that affect MEF's usage of technology and digitalisation in a rapidly changing technological landscape. Despite various governmental efforts to encourage digital integration, MEF's transformation progress remains relatively slow. Through a qualitative approach involving eight in-depth interviews with MEF stakeholders, including directors, employees, and government officials, this study identifies key determinants such as availability of technology, awareness levels, cost concerns, skills gaps, infrastructure limitations, and regulatory compliance. The findings reveal that while MEF demonstrates strategic intent to adopt digital systems, challenges remain in digital awareness, resource allocation, and technological infrastructure. Enhanced leadership commitment, employee upskilling, and investment in scalable IT systems are essential for MEF to become a fully digitalised employer organisation.

Keywords: digitalisation, Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), technology adoption, qualitative research, management technology systems, Industry 4.0

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Globally, digitalisation is recognised as an enabler of innovation, efficiency, and stakeholder engagement. Companies that incorporate digital tools gain an edge through process automation, real-time data analytics, and customer-centric service models (Javaid et al., 2022). Employer bodies such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), BusinessEurope, and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) have embraced technology for policy research, communication, and member services (Sheldon et al., 2016).

Digitalisation is broadly defined as the systematic adoption and integration of digital technologies and organizational practices that transform business processes, services, and capabilities to achieve greater operational efficiency, informed decision-making, and enhanced stakeholder engagement (Vial, 2019; Westerman, Bonnet, & McAfee, 2014). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) characterises digitalisation as "the use of digital technologies and data to transform business models, improve processes, and deliver value to customers and stakeholders." In this context, digitalisation extends beyond mere technological implementation; it involves a strategic process of innovation through the integration of cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics, and automation platforms that collectively replace or augment legacy manual systems. Accordingly, digitalisation in this study is conceptualised as both a technological enabler and a strategic capability that fosters organisational efficiency, adaptability, and continuous innovation within employer federations.

The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), established as the national representative body for employers, promotes harmonious industrial relations and provides advisory and policy support. Its digital transformation is therefore vital to Malaysia's broader industrial and labour ecosystem. Thus, understanding MEF's digitalisation journey provides valuable insights into how institutional bodies adapt to national digital transformation agendas.

In Malaysia, sectors such as finance (85% adoption), telecommunications (80%), and retail (75%) lead digital adoption (IDC, 2023). However, federations and non-profit business bodies often lag due to funding constraints, conservative cultures, and lack of digital expertise (Gooberman et al., 2020). A 2023 study by the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research (MIER) reported that 65% of Malaysian enterprises have integrated digital technologies, with higher adoption seen in the services and manufacturing sectors. Employer organisations such as MEF, however, were not included in the survey, highlighting a blind spot in understanding how federations adapt to national digital transformation policies.

As part of Malaysia's broader transformation agenda under MyDIGITAL and Industry4WRD initiatives, all business ecosystems including employer associations—are expected to undergo rapid digital adaptation (MITI, 2022). However, MEF's progress in adopting digital technology has been modest, with significant reliance on traditional, paper-based systems, as noted in its 2022 Annual Report. Despite its significant advocacy role, MEF's internal transformation has not mirrored the digital growth observed in sectors such as finance and telecommunications, raising questions about its readiness and capability to embrace full-scale digitalisation.

As organisations increasingly rely on integrated Management Technology Systems (MTS), MEF faces both opportunities and challenges in aligning with digital expectations from members and national stakeholders. MEF's internal systems remain partially manual, leading to inefficiencies in service delivery and stakeholder engagement. The MEF Annual Report (2022) highlights ongoing struggles with resource constraints, low digital awareness among members, limited infrastructure, and insufficient digital talent. The situation is further compounded by regulatory demands and resistance to change among staff and stakeholders (Mohd Syukri, 2023; Soh Thian Lai, 2023). Failure to address these determinants could undermine MEF's relevance, hamper its ability to support employer members effectively, and diminish its role in national economic policy discourse. Therefore, it is vital to examines the determining factors affecting the usage of technology and digitalisation by the Malaysian Employers Federation, which focuses solely on the Malaysian Employers Federation, using qualitative data derived from interviews with eight informants within the Klang Valley.

1.1 Digitalisation in the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF)

The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), established in 1959, is the principal national organisation representing the collective interests of employers in Malaysia. As of 2022, it comprises over 6,500 member organisations employing more than 1.5 million workers nationwide (MEF, 2022). MEF serves as a key platform for employer engagement in industrial relations, human capital development, policy advocacy, and labour market governance, acting as an intermediary between the private sector, government agencies, and trade unions (ILO, 2021). Through its advocacy and training programs, MEF plays a crucial role in shaping Malaysia's labour policies and promoting sustainable employer-employee relations in alignment with national economic development goals.

In recent years, MEF has embarked on a digital transformation journey through initiatives such as the MEF Digital Integration (MEFDI) Project, aimed at improving coordination and data integration across its membership management, training, accounting, and consultancy functions. This initiative aligns with Malaysia's broader Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) and Public Sector Digitalisation Strategic Plan 2021–2025, which emphasize the integration of digital systems to enhance service delivery, efficiency, and data-driven governance (MDEC, 2023; Ministry of Communications and Digital, 2022).

However, despite these strategic efforts, MEF continues to face operational and organizational challenges that impede full digital integration. Historical reliance on manual documentation, offline training records, and non-centralised HR audit systems has created data silos and inefficiencies in service delivery. The MEF website primarily functions as a static communication tool, lacking interactive features such as analytics dashboards, online registration systems, or digital feedback mechanisms. This limited digital functionality reflects a broader issue identified in employer federations and non-profit organisations; namely, the slow adoption of digital technologies due to cultural resistance, limited digital competencies, and fragmented decision-making structures (Ng, 2022; OECD, 2020; Vial, 2019).

Furthermore, MEF's paper-based operational culture, coupled with decentralised management practices, has constrained progress toward a fully

digitalised, technology-enabled service delivery model. Such challenges are not unique to MEF but are consistent with patterns observed in other employer and professional associations globally, where digitalisation efforts often stall at the implementation stage due to insufficient change management frameworks, legacy systems, and inadequate digital leadership (Westerman et al., 2014; Kane et al., 2019; Davenport & Westerman, 2018). Addressing these gaps requires not only the deployment of digital tools but also a strategic organisational transformation, encompassing culture, governance, and skill development to enable sustainable digital capability within the federation's ecosystem.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the urgent national push toward digital transformation and the clear organisational need to modernise, MEF's adoption of technology remains partial and inconsistent. This creates operational inefficiencies and hampers its ability to remain competitive in a digital-first environment. The MEF Annual Report (2022) acknowledges that many core functions—including consultancy, member training, and documentation—still rely on legacy processes.

Studies show that organisations which fail to digitalise face risks such as declining relevance, inefficiency, and loss of stakeholder trust (Usman et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2022). For MEF, these risks manifest as declining membership engagement, slow service delivery, and missed opportunities in policy influence.

Among the key factors impeding MEF's digital adoption are low internal awareness and readiness among staff and members, lack of financial resources for full system integration, inadequate digital skills among employees, regulatory complexities around data handling and infrastructure gaps in regional operations. If these issues are not addressed, MEF may struggle to fulfil its national mandate and meet future demands for efficiency, transparency, and innovation. Therefore, a focused investigation on the determining factors affecting its technology usage is warranted.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The review is structured around thematic determinants which are technology availability, awareness, cost, skills, infrastructure and regulatory environment. Prior studies conceptualise digitalisation through frameworks such as the Technology–Organisation–Environment (TOE) model (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990) and the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), which jointly emphasise technological capability, organisational readiness, and external pressures. These perspectives guide the present analysis of factors shaping MEF's digital transformation.

2.1 Technology Availability

The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) has acknowledged the increasing significance of technology in enhancing productivity and competitiveness among Malaysian businesses. In response, MEF launched a strategic initiative known as the MEF Digitalisation and Integration Project (MEFDI), which seeks to digitise and integrate various internal processes (MEF, 2023). The objective of this initiative

is to replace manual workflows with systematic, technology-driven procedures, while also creating a unified data infrastructure. The project includes the development of key digital modules such as membership portals, event management systems, and training platforms, all of which aim to deliver seamless and user-friendly services to MEF's member organisations.

Furthermore, MEF has stressed the importance of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics in improving decision-making and operational performance, particularly within sectors like manufacturing (Rahman & Razali, 2023). However, the adoption of such technologies remains a challenge, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often face resource constraints and technical skill gaps (Mohd Syukri, 2023).

To advance its digitalisation agenda, MEF has invited proposals from technology vendors, aiming to build collaborative partnerships for system development and integration (MEF, 2023). In addition, MEF is exploring the use of blockchain and zero-knowledge proofs (ZKPs) in automating service-level agreement (SLA) compliance and protecting user privacy in scalable network-as-a-service (NaaS) platforms (Sage Management, 2023). Despite these advancements, MEF continues to encounter obstacles such as infrastructure limitations, limited digital literacy, and insufficient awareness, all of which must be addressed to fully realise the intended benefits of its digital transformation efforts.

Empirical evidence indicates that organisational size, absorptive capacity, and digital maturity strongly affect technology availability and adoption. Larger entities typically benefit from scale economies and vendor bargaining power, whereas small and mid-sized institutions experience uneven digital access (Kane et al., 2019; Lee, Rahman, & Tan, 2022). This variation often leads to fragmented adoption patterns and partial implementation across departments (Vial, 2019). For federated associations like MEF, such disparities affect the uniform deployment of management systems across branches.

2.2 Awareness

Despite the Malaysian Employers Federation's (MEF) active role in promoting digital transformation, many organisations, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remain unaware of the available digital solutions or fail to grasp the full benefits of adopting such technologies. This limited awareness constitutes a significant barrier to digitalisation. Employers may not fully understand how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, automation, or data analytics can improve operational efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance competitiveness (Azahar, 2021).

One of MEF's key digitalisation efforts is the promotion of Future Work Arrangements (FWAs), including flexible and hybrid work models aimed at enhancing employee well-being and work-life balance (MEF, 2023). Although infrastructure and training have been incorporated to support this transition, adoption remains uneven. Many businesses are either unaware of these programmes or lack the knowledge to implement them effectively (Rahman & Razali, 2023).

In addition, MEF has introduced capacity-building initiatives that include upskilling and reskilling programmes designed to prepare the workforce for the demands of a digitally transformed environment. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of

these initiatives is limited if potential participants are not aware of their availability or relevance (Mohd Syukri, 2023). Without the fundamental tools and knowledge, even well-designed training or digital frameworks cannot yield meaningful results. Therefore, enhancing awareness must become a priority to ensure that MEF's digitalisation strategies are inclusive, scalable, and impactful (Lee et al., 2022).

Research on digital awareness in organisational contexts links successful adoption to ongoing communication, demonstrable use-cases, and peer influence (Kane et al., 2019; Gooberman, Hauptmeier, & Heery, 2020). Low awareness correlates with lower perceived usefulness, which depresses adoption likelihood (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Bala, 2008).

2.3 Cost

The implementation of digital technologies often demands significant financial and human capital investment, which can become a key barrier, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). High initial costs for system acquisition, software licensing, employee training, and infrastructure upgrades can deter businesses from initiating or sustaining digital transformation (Ismail, 2022). This financial burden is further intensified when organisations lack access to supportive funding or governmental incentives.

The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), through its MEF Digitalization & Integration (MEFDI) project, exemplifies a large-scale effort to embed digital solutions within its organisational structure. The MEFDI initiative is composed of integrated modules such as membership, event management, training, and accounting, all connected via a centralised database. Its primary objectives include eliminating manual processes, reducing errors, improving efficiency, and fostering a paperless work environment (MEF, 2023). Although the MEFDI project does not publicly disclose its total expenditure, the level of integration and system development clearly implies substantial costs in software development, content management systems (CMS), security protocols, and data management infrastructure.

For SMEs affiliated with MEF or seeking to emulate its transformation, the cost remains a critical issue. Many lack the capital reserves to invest in custom systems or employ full-scale IT teams (Ali & Jamil, 2021). Without targeted financial support or scalable low-cost alternatives, these enterprises may remain digitally excluded, impeding national aspirations for comprehensive digital integration. Thus, addressing cost-related concerns through funding schemes or subsidised platforms becomes vital to ensure widespread adoption of digital technologies.

Cost remains a recurrent barrier in the literature. Studies of non-profit and SME digitalisation show that capital constraints and unclear ROI projections hinder investments in integrated systems (Ali & Jamil, 2021; Ismail, 2022). Phased, modular rollouts and public co-funding are proposed mitigation strategies in prior research.

2.4 Skills

The successful adoption of digital technologies is heavily reliant on the availability of a workforce equipped with the necessary technical competencies. However, many organisations, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), face a persistent shortage of skilled employees capable of implementing, managing, and maintaining digital systems (Rahman & Wahab, 2021). This skills gap represents a major obstacle in MEF's digitalisation agenda, as employers often struggle to recruit or retain talent with digital proficiency.

The MEF has recognised that digitalisation has significantly altered employee expectations and job functions. To address this, the organisation encourages training initiatives, investment in digital tools, and workplace adjustments to support flexible work arrangements (MEF, 2021). Despite these efforts, resistance to change among employees and middle management remains a challenge. Concerns over job security, disruptions to established workflows, and a general preference for traditional practices contribute to a slower adoption pace (Yusof & Lim, 2022). Overcoming these behavioural and skill-based barriers is crucial to achieving a digitally ready workforce.

Workforce capability is a major determinant: reskilling and role redesign are central to sustaining digitalisation (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Rahman & Wahab, 2021). Evidence suggests that blended learning and on-the-job coaching improve uptake and retention.

2.5 Infrastructure

The successful implementation of digital technologies within organisations often hinges on the availability of strong and reliable infrastructure. In the context of the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), the MEF Digitalisation & Integration (MEFDI) project has set ambitious goals to streamline operations, create a centralised database, reduce manual inefficiencies, and foster a paperless work environment. However, inadequate infrastructure presents a significant barrier, particularly in regions with limited technological development.

Unreliable internet connectivity remains a pressing issue in certain parts of Malaysia, especially rural or semi-urban areas, posing challenges for remote access, real-time data processing, and cloud-based system integration (Mustaffa, Haron, & Wahid, 2022). Additionally, outdated hardware and insufficient IT infrastructure within some MEF member organisations may hinder the adoption of the new digital modules under the MEFDI initiative. Ensuring seamless integration of diverse systems and data across different modules such as membership, training, and events requires not only technical compatibility but also high-speed connectivity and system reliability (MEF, 2022).

Moreover, infrastructure limitations contribute to increased project costs and extended implementation timelines. These constraints often require organisations to prioritise modules or adopt phased rollouts, which may delay the full realisation of digital benefits (Tan & Ramli, 2021). MEF must also address cybersecurity risks, which intensify with expanded digital operations and weak infrastructure. Ensuring adequate safeguards against data breaches is essential to maintain stakeholder trust and operational integrity. Infrastructure constraints, such

as bandwidth, legacy hardware, and regional network stability, have consistently been identified as adoption bottlenecks in developing country contexts (Mustaffa, Haron, & Wahid, 2022; Tan & Ramli, 2021).

2.6 Regulatory Environment

The digital transformation of organisations entails not only technological changes but also strict adherence to regulatory frameworks. As the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) advances its digital agenda through the MEF Digitalization & Integration (MEFDI) initiative, regulatory compliance emerges as a critical component. Businesses must navigate a complex landscape of cybersecurity laws, data protection regulations, and industry standards, which can be costly and operationally demanding.

One of the primary legal obligations for Malaysian organisations is compliance with the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) 2010, which governs the collection, processing, and storage of personal data (Lee & Norhashim, 2022). Additionally, companies handling the data of European Union (EU) citizens must also consider the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which imposes stricter data governance requirements (Abdullah & Wahab, 2021). For MEF, ensuring that its MEFDI platform complies with both domestic and international data protection laws are essential for safeguarding member data and maintaining credibility.

Beyond legal compliance, industry standards also necessitate robust cybersecurity infrastructure to prevent data breaches, ensure data integrity, and maintain system availability (Yusoff, Mohamad, & Rahim, 2022). Measures such as appointing a Data Protection Officer (DPO), implementing a formal data protection policy, and conducting regular employee training are pivotal for sustainable compliance. Furthermore, website design must align with accessibility and usability norms to foster transparency and user trust. Regulatory compliance is not merely a legal necessity but a strategic imperative. MEF must prioritise comprehensive governance frameworks that blend policy development, technological safeguards, and employee engagement to support secure and responsible digital transformation.

Compliance and data-protection frameworks strongly shape digitalisation trajectories. Organisations frequently postpone system upgrades until data-governance clarity is achieved (Abdullah & Wahab, 2021; Yusoff, Mohamad, & Rahim, 2022). Alignment with PDPA 2010 and related legislation is therefore essential for sustainable transformation.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case-study design under an interpretivist paradigm, appropriate for exploring contextualised organisational phenomena such as MEF's digital transition. A qualitative approach is appropriate for investigating complex organizational phenomena, such as digital transformation, where the goal is to gain deep insights into how individuals perceive and experience change (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than pursuing statistical generalization, this study prioritizes understanding the meanings, motivations, and contextual factors that shape stakeholders' engagement with technology. This design enables a nuanced

interpretation of the social and organizational dynamics surrounding MEF's digital agenda.

The primary method of data collection is semi-structured interviews, which allow for both structure and flexibility. Interviews were guided by a predefined set of questions but were open enough to enable participants to express their views freely and elaborate on specific areas of relevance. This method was selected to facilitate the collection of rich, narrative data while allowing the researcher to follow up on emerging themes in real time (Bryman, 2016). Interviewees included MEF directors, employees, affiliated members, and government officials, each providing distinct yet interconnected insights into MEF's digital transition.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure the inclusion of diverse and information-rich perspectives. Eight participants were selected: two MEF directors, two employees, two members, and two officials from the Ministry of Human Resources. These stakeholders were chosen for their direct involvement in MEF's operations or policymaking roles related to digitalization. Despite five potential informants declining participation, those interviewed provided crucial input that shaped the study's findings.

Data were collected within the Klang Valley region, primarily at MEF's headquarters and the Ministry of Human Resources. This location was strategically chosen based on accessibility, relevance, and the researcher's professional familiarity with MEF. The physical setting offered opportunities for contextual observation and increased the authenticity of participants' responses, grounding the study within a real-world organizational environment.

Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data, as it is a well-established method for analyzing patterns within narrative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved iterative coding, theme identification, and refinement to construct a coherent picture of MEF's digital readiness and strategic outlook. Themes were derived inductively, allowing insights to emerge organically from the data rather than being imposed through pre-existing frameworks. This method supports an interpretive understanding of the data, in line with the study's goal to explore varied stakeholder perceptions regarding digital adoption.

The qualitative research design and thematic analysis provided a robust methodological foundation for capturing the complex and evolving digital landscape within MEF. By prioritizing depth over breadth, the study offers context-sensitive insights that inform both theory and practice concerning digital transformation in employer organizations. Based on literature and data synthesis, this study adopts a thematic network approach by Attride-Stirling (2001). This framework enables a multidimensional examination of MEF's digitalisation trajectory from organisational culture to infrastructure and member perceptions.

3.1 Research Paradigm: Constructivism

The present study adopts the constructivist paradigm to understand the digitalisation journey of the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) through the lived experiences and individual perceptions of its stakeholders. Constructivism posits that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals based on social interactions and interpretations of their realities. Within this context, MEF directors, members, employees, and government officials contributed diverse perspectives on

technology adoption and the organisation's future. The paradigm enables a nuanced exploration of how these stakeholders internalise the digital transformation, especially in response to national agendas such as IR4.0. The researcher did not impose pre-conceived categories but allowed insights to emerge from dialogues.

This paradigm was suitable for investigating how individuals construct meaning around challenges in digitalisation, such as system compatibility, service delivery, or institutional culture. The qualitative nature of constructivism also allowed data triangulation through interviews, observations, and reflective notes. Such approaches were pivotal in identifying internal and external factors that influenced MEF's technological shifts. Ultimately, constructivism provided a theoretical lens to deeply engage with themes like perceived ease of use, digital infrastructure gaps, and stakeholder resistance, revealing complex yet authentic insights that would otherwise remain concealed in traditional empirical approaches.

3.2 Research Design: A Qualitative Lens into MEF's Digital Realities

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the lived realities behind MEF's digital transformation journey. The approach was deliberately chosen to uncover nuanced, context-rich insights that quantitative techniques would not capture. Qualitative inquiry is especially suitable when the research seeks to explore how organisational actors perceive, interpret, and respond to complex phenomena—such as digitalisation—within their institutional setting.

The decision to employ this method was anchored in the study's objective: to uncover the underlying factors influencing MEF's digitalisation efforts. Quantitative measures such as technology uptake rates or budget allocations could not capture the full spectrum of experiences, values, and attitudes embedded in MEF's transition process. In contrast, qualitative research allowed for the exploration of constructs like perceived ease of use (PEU), perceived behavioural control (PBC), and stakeholder attitudes (ATT)—critical in understanding organisational readiness for change.

The qualitative case study approach facilitated semi-structured interviews with eight key informants, including senior MEF officials, technical staff, employer-members, and a government representative. These conversations provided flexibility to probe deeper into respondents' statements, clarify inconsistencies, and explore spontaneous themes that arose organically. Many stakeholders expressed both excitement and hesitation about digital adoption, often shaped by internal bureaucracy, limited funding, skills gaps, and regulatory burdens.

In MEF's institutional context, qualitative research provided a strategic advantage. It enabled the exploration of tacit knowledge—those unspoken practices and beliefs embedded in MEF's culture and routines. Participants disclosed concerns over service delays, internal resistance to digital platforms, and perceptions of regulatory red tape—insights that might have been suppressed in survey-based research. Informal conversations and field observations further allowed the researcher to capture emotional and behavioural subtext. For instance, frustration over stalled budgets or cautious remarks about government policies revealed undercurrents of tension, fear, and uncertainty.

The richness of qualitative inquiry also proved valuable in a multicultural setting like Malaysia, where organisational discourse is often shaped by hierarchy and indirect communication styles. Emotional subtleties and non-verbal cues—such as shifts in tone, pauses, or facial expressions—enriched the interview data and deepened understanding. Triangulation with MEF policy documents, meeting minutes, and strategic plans added layers of verification and enhanced credibility.

Moreover, the adaptive nature of qualitative methods allowed the researcher to pursue unexpected leads. During interviews, new themes emerged—peer influence, informal resistance networks, generational divides in tech readiness—that were not originally anticipated. These emergent narratives provided powerful insights into how digitalisation is accepted, delayed, or resisted at different levels of the organisation.

Ultimately, qualitative research was not merely a methodological choice but a necessity. It enabled the researcher to build a grounded thematic framework, one rooted in lived experience rather than abstract theorisation. This method illuminated the behavioural, emotional, and structural dimensions of MEF's digital evolution, offering an authentic, deeply contextual understanding of organisational transformation.

3.3 Validation Strategy: Capturing MEF's Digital Realities

Applying a qualitative research design to uncover the intricate realities shaping the Malaysian Employers Federation's (MEF) journey toward digital transformation. The method was intentionally chosen to explore in-depth perceptions, lived experiences, and institutional dynamics that could not be fully grasped through numerical or structured survey instruments. The aim was to understand how digitalisation is accepted, resisted, or interpreted within MEF's operational, social, and policy landscape.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews served as the core method of data collection, involving eight purposefully selected informants—including MEF directors, technical staff, employer-members, and a representative from a government ministry. These individuals were identified based on their direct engagement with or oversight of MEF's digitalisation efforts. Interview questions were developed based on the research objectives and theoretical framework, with room to adapt based on responses. This adaptability allowed the researcher to probe further into important constructs such as perceived ease of use (PEU), behavioural control (PBC), and stakeholder attitudes (ATT), which emerged as critical to digital adoption.

To add depth and authenticity, the data collection process also included observational notes and informal discussions in natural MEF settings such as internal meetings and casual interactions at R Café. These unstructured moments helped surface subtle emotional cues and cultural dynamics that might otherwise remain hidden—such as hesitance among senior staff, generational divides in digital attitudes, or tacit resistance from departments not yet digitally integrated. Supplementary documents such as MEF's internal memos, annual reports, and strategy briefs were analysed to triangulate data and provide institutional context.

Data analysis followed a rigorous thematic coding process. Interview transcripts were coded manually and via NVivo to identify recurring categories,

patterns, and emergent themes. These were organised using thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001), enabling the researcher to map relationships between basic and organising themes and distil global insights about MEF's digital posture.

To ensure the research met high standards of validity and objectivity, the study employed a comprehensive trustworthiness framework based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria where credibility was established through triangulation of data sources (interviews, documents, field notes), and through member checks, where participants reviewed and validated portions of the findings. Transferability was supported by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the organisational setting and informant roles, allowing readers to determine relevance to their own contexts. Dependability was ensured via an audit trail that documented coding decisions, thematic shifts, and analytical memos. Confirmability was enhanced by using participant quotes to anchor findings, maintaining researcher neutrality through reflexive journaling, and regularly checking interpretations against raw data. The researcher also adhered to ethical protocols by ensuring informed consent, protecting anonymity, and allowing participants to withdraw at any point. Ethical clearance was secured from the relevant academic committee prior to fieldwork.

Ultimately, this qualitative design was not just a methodological choice but an intentional strategy to access the real-world complexities of digital transformation in a federated, multi-stakeholder organisation like MEF. It allowed the research to move beyond surface-level observations and enter the interpretive spaces where decisions are made, hesitations formed, and digital futures envisioned.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was central to this research involving human participants. Prior to conducting interviews, each participant received a consent form outlining the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and how their data would be handled. The form detailed issues of anonymity, confidentiality, and potential risks. Informants were briefed that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without consequence. Informed consent was secured in writing, ensuring participants understood their rights and the research implications. Interviews were conducted in private and safe environments to respect participants' comfort and privacy. Audio recordings were made only with permission, and all identifying information was anonymised.

The ethical approach was guided by principles from Keyton (2015), Wiles (2012), and other authorities on social research ethics, who emphasized the importance of consent, non-coercion, and safeguarding participant welfare. Moreover, the researcher disclosed their professional relationship with MEF to avoid conflicts of interest. The study design also accounted for the ethical implications of collecting data that touched on organizational performance, staff conduct, and digital readiness. By adhering to rigorous ethical standards, the research ensured a respectful, transparent, and morally sound investigation into MEF's digitalisation efforts.

3.5 In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews formed the cornerstone of this study's qualitative inquiry, allowing for comprehensive exploration of participants' insights into MEF's digitalisation journey. These interviews, described as semi-directed conversations, provided flexibility to tailor questions according to each participant's expertise and responses. Unlike structured surveys, in-depth interviews offered an opportunity to capture detailed narratives, emotions, and contextual information that could not be obtained through fixed-response formats.

Each session lasted between one to two hours and was conducted in a comfortable setting that encouraged openness and trust. The questions explored a wide array of themes, including attitudes toward digital change, perceived barriers to adoption, and the role of organizational culture in shaping technology use. Informants included MEF directors, employees, government officials, and member companies. The interviews also facilitated the identification of non-verbal cues and emotional expressions, which provided deeper insight into the participants' real attitudes and concerns. These interviews helped reveal the underlying challenges faced by MEF, such as legacy system integration, budget constraints, and skill gaps. The rich, narrative data collected through these sessions laid the foundation for thematic analysis, ultimately contributing to a holistic understanding of the federation's readiness for digital transformation.

Designing the interview questions was a critical phase in aligning the research objectives with the data collection process. Questions were crafted to be open-ended, allowing participants to express themselves freely while guiding them toward relevant insights about MEF's digital transformation. The interview protocol was informed by literature on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), ensuring theoretical alignment. Themes such as attitude (ATT), subjective norms (SN), perceived behavioural control (PBC), and perceived ease of use (PEU) were incorporated into the question design.

Pilot interviews were conducted to test the clarity, relevance, and flow of the questions. Based on feedback, adjustments were made to ensure the questions were easily understood and culturally appropriate. Questions were organised into thematic areas: digital readiness, current system usability, challenges, member behaviour, and future expectations. Follow-up probes were prepared to delve deeper into significant responses. For example, when participants expressed concerns about usability, further questions explored specific system features that hindered efficiency. This structured yet adaptable approach allowed the interviews to yield rich, targeted data while still giving space for emergent themes. The outcome was a well-rounded understanding of the real-world barriers and enablers of digitalisation within MEF.

3.6 Participant Recruitment

The recruitment of participants for this study was a carefully planned process aimed at ensuring a rich, diverse dataset that reflects the realities within the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF). The researcher employed a purposive sampling technique, specifically targeting individuals who could provide valuable insights into the digitalisation efforts and challenges faced by the MEF. These included MEF

directors, staff, government officials, and representatives of member organisations. The selection was guided by a set of criteria ensuring participants had relevant roles and responsibilities related to digital operations and policy implementation.

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, participants were not selected randomly but based on their ability to provide meaningful, experience-based perspectives. The recruitment process involved initial outreach through professional networks and snowball sampling, where existing participants recommended others within their circles who might be suitable informants. This method ensured that participants had sufficient exposure to both organisational operations and digital transformation experiences. Before participation, each individual was briefed on the study's objectives, ethical standards, and data confidentiality to secure informed consent. The balance of participant types ensured a comprehensive, multi-angled view of MEF's internal and external digital challenges.

3.7 Population and Sample

This study engaged a targeted population comprising eight carefully selected informants associated with MEF. The sample included two MEF directors, two internal employees, two government officials, and two representatives from member companies. The sample was not intended to be statistically representative but was designed to ensure a diversity of perspectives essential to qualitative depth and richness. The participants held roles that exposed them to policy-making, digital strategy execution, or direct experience with MEF's digital services, making them ideal informants for this research.

The selection was framed by both the research objective and the qualitative design that prioritises data saturation over numerical generalisation. The small but rich sample size allowed for a deeper understanding of individual narratives, perceptions, and lived experiences surrounding digitalisation. Informants were based in the Klang Valley region, a practical decision that facilitated easier access and consistent engagement throughout the research process. The sample was representative of different hierarchical levels and functional departments, enhancing the study's internal validity by covering viewpoints from strategic leadership to operational execution. This sample strategy supported the study's goal of offering detailed insights into the qualitative aspects of digital transformation within MEF.

3.8 Gaining Entry

Gaining access to the research setting; MEF and its associated stakeholders was facilitated by the researcher's professional affiliation with the organisation. Having worked in MEF since 2019, the researcher already held established relationships with potential informants. This pre-existing trust was instrumental in obtaining open and candid responses during interviews. However, maintaining objectivity remained a critical focus. The researcher carefully navigated the dual role of insider and investigator by applying reflexivity—being constantly aware of how personal biases or familiarity might influence interactions or interpretations.

Initial entry was negotiated through formal communication, including emails and briefing sessions, explaining the study's purpose and scope. The

researcher adopted a tactful approach in requesting participation, assuring that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research process. In some cases, informal gatherings such as coffee sessions were used to ease participants into deeper conversations. These informal moments often laid the groundwork for more structured follow-ups. The researcher's familiarity with MEF's organisational culture enabled the design of contextually appropriate questions and smoother access to sensitive insights regarding digital adoption challenges. Thus, gaining entry was not just about physical access but building rapport, credibility, and trust for qualitative richness.

3.9 Data Collection

Data collection spanned a two-month period and involved a combination of semi-structured interviews, field observations, and casual dialogues with informants. Each interview was planned meticulously with flexibility in execution, allowing for spontaneous insights to emerge. Audio recordings were supplemented by extensive note-taking that captured informants' emotional tones, body language, and contextual cues. In some cases, follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify or expand on earlier responses. The informal settings—ranging from workplace lounges to casual café meetings—encouraged openness and trust, critical for obtaining authentic narratives. In parallel, field observations were integrated, noting patterns in communication styles, work environment engagement, and digital system interactions. This triangulation of data ensured a more comprehensive understanding of informants' experiences.

Special care was taken to protect participant identities by using pseudonyms and redacting sensitive identifiers in field notes and transcripts. Beyond verbal data, contextual details such as organisational hierarchies, the availability of digital tools, and observable workflows were recorded. This holistic approach to data collection allowed the researcher to embed informant responses within the broader operational culture of MEF, strengthening the credibility and reliability of the findings.

3.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a structured thematic approach rooted in the Attride-Stirling (2001) framework, which involves distilling raw qualitative data into basic, organising, and global themes. Once the interview data were transcribed and field notes compiled, initial coding was conducted manually to identify recurrent patterns and keywords. These codes were then grouped into broader categories aligned with the theoretical framework of the study, particularly focusing on technology adoption within MEF.

The analytical process involved continuous back-and-forth comparisons between interviews, field observations, and the literature review to validate emerging themes. Software was not employed; instead, the researcher relied on systematic manual coding and thematic clustering. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data across different informants and data collection methods to enhance trustworthiness. Key themes such as organisational attitudes, infrastructural limitations, and perceived ease of use surfaced repeatedly and were consolidated into organising themes.

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted between February and March 2024, each session lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview data was obtained from eight purposefully selected informants. These included two MEF directors who are actively involved in strategic planning, two senior operational staff managing digital infrastructure and services, two employer representatives from MEF's membership base—particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—one IT personnel responsible for technical implementation, and one government officer familiar with digitalisation policy in the public sector. The combination of internal and external perspectives provided a robust view of the challenges and opportunities surrounding MEF's digitalisation.

Each interview began with general questions to build rapport and gradually progressed into more focused discussions on digitalisation, organisational barriers, and perceptions of the Member Transformation System (MTS). Field notes were taken alongside audio recordings, capturing not only verbal data but also non-verbal cues and spontaneous reflections. Ethical protocols, including confidentiality and informed consent, were strictly observed. The researcher exercised flexibility, adapting follow-up questions based on responses, which led to valuable narratives about challenges, attitudes, and perceived benefits related to MEF's digital transformation.

Each informant brought valuable insights shaped by their role, institutional exposure, and operational involvement in MEF's digital agenda. For example, directors shared macro-level strategic considerations, while technical staff described implementation gaps. Employer-members articulated usability concerns and communication breakdowns. Their collective narratives informed the thematic findings of this research.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of Key Determinants

The analysis adopts the thematic network analysis framework proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001), which organises emerging insights into basic, organising, and global themes. Data was also triangulated with document analysis and observation notes to enhance validity. The results illuminate multiple, interwoven factors that influence the adoption and utilisation of digital technologies in MEF.

Thematic analysis revealed seven primary factors affecting the digitalisation of MEF; Digital Awareness and Literacy, Financial and Resource Constraints, Technological Infrastructure and Integration Gaps, Regulatory and Compliance Challenges, Organisational Culture and Internal Resistance, Leadership and Strategic Direction and Communication and Marketing Deficiencies. These themes were consistently observed across all interviews and substantiated with supporting evidence from documents and field observations. Each theme is detailed in the sections that follow.

4.3 Digital Awareness and Literacy

Digital awareness and literacy emerged as a fundamental factor influencing MEF's ability to implement digitalisation initiatives. Despite the deployment of the MEF Digitalisation and Integration (MEFDI) platform, a significant number of staff and members remain unfamiliar with its features and benefits. Many rely on manual procedures and show reluctance in adopting new systems. According to the thesis, "the federation has initiated digital platforms, yet the level of awareness and understanding remains low among internal staff and stakeholders". This gap is attributed to a lack of structured digital onboarding and continuous upskilling. Informant 3 highlighted that some staff found digital systems too complex and preferred manual tasks due to familiarity and fear of error. This situation hinders the full optimisation of MEFDI and other digital platforms intended to improve operational efficiency.

This finding aligns with prior studies showing that digital literacy and awareness are central to successful transformation (Vial, 2019; Marques & Ferreira, 2020). Consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), employees' perceived ease of use and usefulness significantly shape their willingness to engage with digital systems. For MEF, this indicates the need for continuous digital training programs, leadership support, and a culture of innovation that encourages experimentation and reduces resistance to change.

The results further reveal that MEF's limited digital awareness is not merely an informational shortfall but a structural issue embedded within existing communication channels, incentive frameworks, and managerial practices. To address this, MEF should implement a multi-tiered awareness strategy comprising: (a) leadership-driven communication campaigns highlighting tangible use cases of digital tools; (b) competency-based micro-learning modules aligned with specific job functions (Kane et al., 2019; Rahman & Wahab, 2021); and (c) a peer-champion network to sustain adoption momentum. Comparative research indicates that organisations combining managerial advocacy with experiential learning approaches achieve significantly higher digital engagement levels (Wilson, Chong, & Halim, 2021). Embedding digital-awareness goals within performance indicators and annual training cycles would institutionalise continuous learning and reinforce digital literacy improvement across MEF departments.

Parallel to this, skills remain a decisive factor in determining MEF's readiness for digital transformation. Respondents consistently reported that limited digital literacy, insufficient reskilling initiatives, and uneven ICT exposure impede the integration of new technologies. These observations correspond with national workforce assessments that identify human-capital readiness as a persistent constraint to Malaysia's digital advancement (Rahman & Wahab, 2021; Yusof & Lim, 2022). Within MEF, reliance on traditional administrative routines perpetuates fragmented learning and inconsistent digital engagement, echoing patterns observed in similar Malaysian institutions.

These findings also resonate with ASEAN and international studies demonstrating that employees' adaptive capabilities and commitment to continuous learning are pivotal for digital transformation (Nguyen & Tran, 2020; Teo et al., 2021). Skill deficiencies diminish organisational agility, slow innovation diffusion, and weaken overall performance outcomes (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). Although MEF's training initiatives have become more technology-focused, they

remain largely reactive rather than strategic—mirroring trends found among Malaysian small and medium-sized enterprises (Mustaffa et al., 2022).

In alignment with the study's objectives, these results affirm that strengthening employees' digital and analytical competencies constitutes a strategic enabler of sustainable performance rather than a peripheral support activity. Without a deliberate, institution-wide skills development framework, digitalisation risks remaining procedural rather than transformative. Therefore, continuous investment in targeted upskilling and digital-leadership programmes is essential to enhance MEF's organisational learning capacity and to align with Malaysia's broader digital-economy aspirations (MDEC, 2023).

4.4 Financial and Resource Constraints

Financial limitations were consistently emerged as one of the major barrier to MEF's digital transformation efforts. As a non-profit entity, MEF depends heavily on fixed budgets, limiting its ability to invest in critical infrastructure upgrades, long-term system maintenance, and digital talent development. Budget constraints were among the primary challenges faced, especially in maintaining system continuity and expanding digital services across all regions.

Moreover, smaller member companies also lack the financial strength to adopt MEF's digital offerings. Informant 2 acknowledged that "financial commitment is hard to secure when returns are uncertain, especially for SMEs operating under economic pressure". This dual constraint, affecting both the provider and the users, results in stalled or fragmented adoption of digital initiatives.

These findings are consistent with Yunis et al. (2018), who observed that financial limitations often slow digital adoption in nonprofit institutions. In line with Ghobakhloo (2020), a phased funding approach, beginning with essential services and progressively scaling digital operations, may ensure sustainability. Furthermore, public-private partnerships could provide technical support and reduce implementation costs, allowing MEF to maintain quality service delivery while advancing digital integration.

Financial constraints within MEF operate on both organisational and member levels. To ensure sustainable digitalisation, a phased investment model should be adopted whereby each deployment stage is evaluated through predefined performance metrics such as cost-per-user, system uptime, and productivity impact (Ali & Jamil, 2021; Ismail, 2022). International evidence indicates that modular and subscription-based implementation can reduce initial expenditure while enhancing scalability. MEF may also explore pooled procurement or co-funding mechanisms with government agencies to lower entry barriers for smaller member firms. Such strategies would balance fiscal prudence with the need for continuous technological advancement.

4.5 Technological Infrastructure and Integration Gaps

The effectiveness of MEF's digitalisation efforts is further limited by outdated or disconnected technological infrastructure. While the organisation has introduced platforms like MEFDI, they often operate in silos. The thesis explains that "different

platforms are not synchronised, resulting in duplication of work, delays in information retrieval, and low user confidence". This lack of integration is particularly problematic for regional and branch-level staff who rely on consistent access to digital services. Informant 5 pointed out that "branches use different tools or sometimes revert to manual processes due to technical incompatibility or slow response times".

The persistence of disconnected systems creates data silos that undermine operational efficiency and organisational agility. This is consistent with Alvarenga et al. (2020), who argue that integrated infrastructures are essential for achieving responsiveness and coordination in digitally transforming institutions. MEF's current configuration—while functional—does not yet enable centralised data management or analytics-driven decision-making. The absence of a unified enterprise architecture results in information redundancies, inconsistent data accuracy, and diminished confidence among users.

To advance its digital transformation, MEF must adopt an enterprise architecture approach that integrates cloud-based services, analytics platforms, and interoperable applications (Verhoef et al., 2021). Establishing a comprehensive IT governance framework—encompassing data standards, interoperability protocols, and cybersecurity safeguards—would enhance transparency, ensure regulatory compliance, and strengthen stakeholder trust. The empirical analysis from this study reinforces that system fragmentation and legacy infrastructure directly erode efficiency and user confidence, echoing best-practice recommendations that advocate for layered, cloud-native architectures with API-driven middleware and central governance layers to maintain data integrity (Vial, 2019; Tan & Ramli, 2021).

From an implementation perspective, MEF should prioritise developing a minimum viable integration blueprint for MEFDI, incorporating API gateways to enable seamless interaction with member systems and establishing a central service catalogue to streamline future rollouts. Comparative studies within ASEAN and Malaysia reveal that inadequate ICT infrastructure often leads to fragmented digital ecosystems and limited service efficiency (Nguyen & Tran, 2020; Azahar, 2021). MEF's internal reports further indicate that frequent network disruptions and outdated hardware have delayed MEFDI's full deployment—validating the link between infrastructure maturity and digital-readiness performance (Rahman & Razali, 2023).

Viewed in relation to the study's objectives, these findings demonstrate that MEF's infrastructural deficiencies not only hinder operational efficiency but also limit stakeholder engagement—two of the organisation's core transformation goals. Overcoming these barriers requires a strategic, phased investment in scalable cloud infrastructure, cybersecurity resilience, and agile IT procurement. Such initiatives would allow MEF to achieve both technical advancement and institutional resilience, aligning with Malaysia's Digital Economy Blueprint (2021) and the National 4IR Policy (Unit Perancang Ekonomi, 2022), which emphasise integrated infrastructure as a prerequisite for sustainable digitalisation.

4.6 Regulatory and Compliance Challenges

Regulatory ambiguity and the absence of clear digital governance policies are identified as obstacles in MEF's digitalisation journey. The thesis notes that "existing regulations concerning data privacy, procurement, and supplier engagement are either outdated or inadequately enforced". This results in hesitancy among decision-makers, particularly when adopting third-party platforms or transitioning from manual to digital recordkeeping. Informant 6 shared concerns that "without clear legal protections or supplier accreditation, it becomes risky to invest in major systems".

Furthermore, the study indicates that compliance uncertainty, particularly regarding data privacy and cybersecurity; slows decision-making. This mirrors findings by Abdullah and Wahab (2021), who note that Malaysian organisations often delay implementation until data-protection clarity improves. Establishing an internal digital-governance framework aligned with the Personal Data Protection Act (2010) and international best practice can reassure members and regulators alike. Integrating legal audits within project lifecycles would institutionalise accountability and strengthen stakeholder trust.

The regulatory environment represents both a safeguard and a structural constraint in MEF's digitalisation efforts. Respondents noted that compliance with Malaysia's Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) 2010 and related labour-regulation standards shapes how digital systems are designed and implemented. In practice, these regulations ensure data integrity and accountability but also introduce procedural rigidity that slows innovation. This finding is consistent with broader observations across Malaysian institutions where overlapping legal mandates create uncertainty in digital decision-making (Abdullah & Wahab, 2021; Lee & Norhashim, 2022).

Comparative studies in the ASEAN region likewise demonstrate that organisations with weak regulatory literacy often experience fragmented digital transitions (Kaur & Chong, 2020; Yusoff et al., 2022). Within MEF, respondents cited a shortage of compliance specialists and cybersecurity professionals as major inhibitors to rapid deployment of integrated digital platforms. This aligns with empirical evidence showing that governance capability—especially data management and privacy compliance—is an essential predictor of digital maturity (Nguyen & Tran, 2020; Rahman & Razali, 2023).

Interpreted in light of the study's research objectives, the findings underscore that regulatory clarity and institutional governance are indispensable to sustainable digitalisation. While MEF's adoption of PDPA-aligned data practices demonstrates progress, the organisation must institutionalise compliance through internal policy frameworks, periodic audits, and staff training. Doing so would not only mitigate legal risks but also strengthen stakeholder trust—an outcome directly linked to MEF's goal of enhancing digital credibility and organisational performance. These insights align with Malaysia's Digital Government Blueprint (MAMPU, 2022), which promotes compliance-by-design principles as the cornerstone of public and semi-public digital governance.

4.7 Organisational Culture and Internal Resistance

The cultural orientation of MEF has traditionally favoured face-to-face interaction, manual documentation, and centralised decision-making, all of which create resistance to digitalisation. The thesis explains that “a longstanding reliance on traditional workflows has fostered a reluctance to change, especially among older staff and regional offices”. This internal resistance is not always overt but manifests as passive disengagement or slow adoption of digital tools. Informant 4 described how “some staff view digital tasks as additional burdens, rather than time-saving solutions”. This mindset undermines transformation initiatives, even when systems are already in place.

To shift the culture, it is recommends embedding digital transformation into MEF’s strategic objectives, introducing change management programmes, and rewarding innovation. Fostering a culture of experimentation and providing psychological safety around digital errors are also cited as necessary to reduce resistance and build digital confidence. Similar resistance patterns have been recorded in non-profit federations and SMEs in Malaysia and Southeast Asia, where cultural inertia and hierarchical decision structures lengthen adoption cycles (Gooberman et al., 2020; Yusof & Lim, 2022)

4.8 Leadership and Strategic Direction

Strong digital leadership is essential to drive transformation, yet MEF has faced challenges in formulating and communicating a unified digital vision. The thesis highlights that “although the digitalisation agenda exists, it is not embedded within departmental KPIs or strategic reviews, limiting accountability”. This leadership gap affects prioritisation and resource mobilisation. Informant 1 admitted that “there’s no specific digital transformation taskforce or officer, so responsibilities are shared loosely”.

As a result, digital initiatives often lack ownership, follow-up, and evaluation. It is suggested that MEF to appoint a dedicated Chief Digital Officer (CDO) or a digital transformation unit to oversee planning, execution, and monitoring. Aligning digital KPIs with departmental goals and ensuring regular progress reviews can institutionalise leadership accountability. Strategic direction must be visible and well-communicated to embed digital priorities across the organisation. Empirical studies underline the importance of a designated digital leader (CDO) in institutionalising digital strategy and accountability (Kane et al., 2019; Westerman et al., 2014).

4.9 Communication and Branding of Digital Services

Poor communication and low visibility of MEF’s digital services emerged as a significant barrier to adoption. Members are often unaware of the available platforms, their functionalities, or the benefits of using them. According to the thesis, “MEF’s digital systems lack a cohesive brand identity, and outreach efforts are insufficient to generate interest or trust”. Informant 7 revealed that “some members still don’t know the difference between MEF’s digital offerings and those from other government-linked platforms like KESUMA”.

This confusion and lack of engagement reduce usage rates and overall return on digital investment. It recommends to launch targeted digital marketing campaigns, improving website user experience, and developing promotional materials tailored to different segments of MEF membership. Clear communication about service updates, success stories, and member testimonials can also build trust and drive platform engagement. The thematic network model by Attride-Stirling (2001) is illustrated in Figure 4.1. Evidence suggests targeted digital marketing and user-centric design significantly increase service uptake among SME constituencies (Wilson et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022)

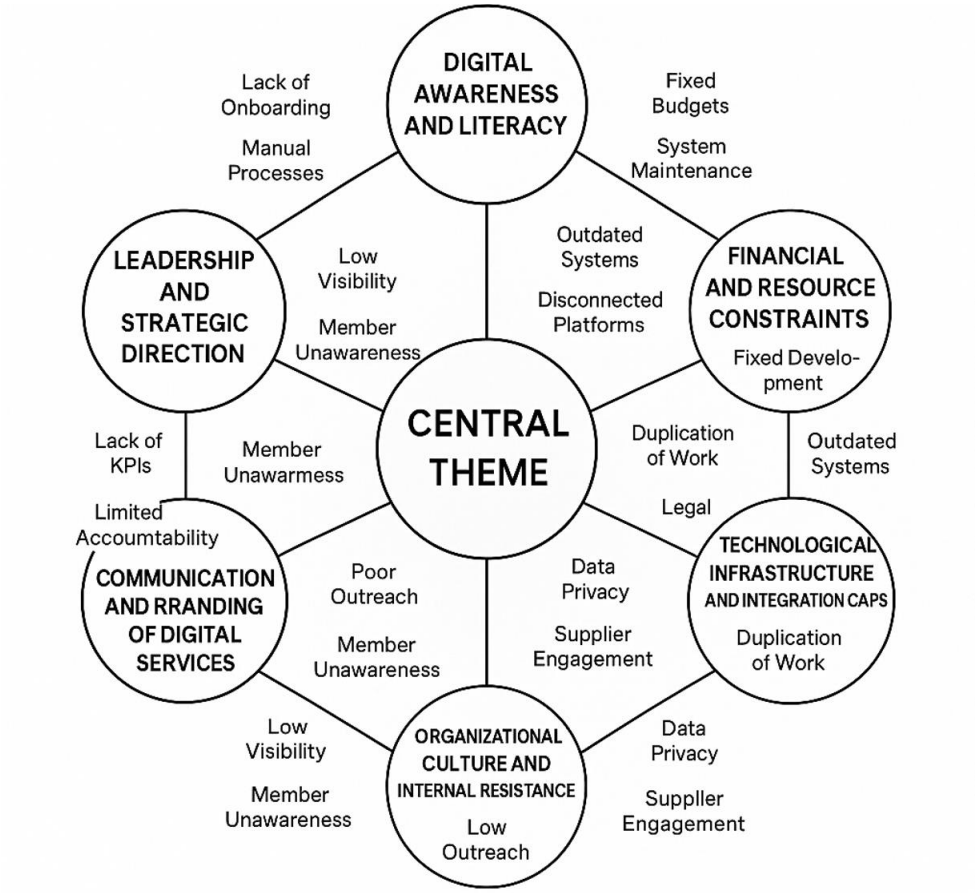


Figure 4.1: Thematic Network Model by Attride-Stirling (2001)

5.0 CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION

This study set out to explore the determining factors affecting the usage of technology and digitalisation within the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF). Through an in-depth qualitative case study involving interviews, document analysis, and field observations, the research uncovered a complex interplay of structural, cultural, strategic, and technical factors that collectively shape the trajectory of MEF's digital transformation.

Key findings revealed that digitalisation at MEF is hindered by several recurring barriers: low digital literacy, constrained financial resources, fragmented infrastructure, regulatory complexity, resistance to change, absence of strategic

leadership, and poor communication. These findings are consistent with the socio-technical systems theory, which argues that successful digital transformation requires concurrent evolution in both the technological and social subsystems of an organisation (Trist & Bamforth, 1951).

While the organisation has taken important first steps, such as implementing the MEFDI system and introducing basic digital services, these initiatives remain insufficiently adopted due to lack of user training, system integration, and leadership enforcement. Importantly, the study surfaced the cultural inertia embedded within MEF's operational environment, illustrating how legacy practices and fear of redundancy impede transformation.

Despite these challenges, the study also identifies practical solutions that could help MEF advance its digital agenda. These include the development of a comprehensive digital strategy, investment in infrastructure and training, better internal communication, and the appointment of a dedicated digital leader. If implemented, these measures could enhance MEF's ability to serve its members more efficiently and align with national digitalisation goals such as those outlined in MyDIGITAL.

In conclusion, the findings of this research offer a grounded, context-specific understanding of MEF's digital readiness. They highlight the importance of addressing not only the technological dimensions but also the cultural and strategic barriers to transformation. These insights can guide future research and practice for similar employer organisations seeking to modernise in an increasingly digital economy.

Although this study provides rich insights into the determining factors affecting the digitalisation of the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study focuses solely on MEF, which inherently restricts the generalisability of findings to other employer federations or sectors. While the themes identified are robust and contextually grounded, they may not be fully transferable to institutions with different governance structures, funding models, or sectoral mandates.

Second, the data collection was limited to eight informants, representing a purposively selected sample of MEF staff, members, and one government official. While this approach allowed for deep, nuanced understanding, the relatively small sample size and its focus on the Klang Valley region may omit perspectives from other branches or regional offices. As such, regional disparities in digital readiness or technological infrastructure could not be fully captured.

Third, the qualitative nature of the study limits the ability to statistically measure the relationships between identified variables, such as the impact of digital literacy on system usage or the effect of financial constraints on adoption rates. While the themes uncovered are insightful, they remain interpretative and would benefit from complementary quantitative validation.

Additionally, the research was conducted during a period of ongoing organisational transition at MEF, which may have influenced participant responses. Some informants may have been cautious in revealing challenges due to organisational loyalty or fear of reputational risk. Though anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, these factors could affect the authenticity of certain narratives.

Finally, the study did not include the perspectives of MEF's external technology providers or vendor partners, whose input could offer a more comprehensive view of system integration and user support challenges. Addressing these limitations in future studies will enhance the depth and breadth of understanding of digitalisation processes in employer organisations.

5.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications of Digitalisation at MEF

The findings of this study offer a dual contribution to both theoretical discourse and practical application in the context of digital transformation within employer federations. From a theoretical perspective, the study extends socio-technical systems theory into the underexplored domain of hybrid institutions, such as MEF. It demonstrates how traditional bureaucratic structures, regulatory obligations, and legacy work cultures intersect with emerging digital imperatives, producing friction points that impede transformation. The socio-technical lens was particularly valuable in unpacking how the social subsystem (e.g., digital literacy, resistance to change, leadership) and technical subsystem (e.g., infrastructure, system integration, budget) must co-evolve to enable effective digitalisation. These insights not only validate existing theory but also lay a foundation for expanding its application to federated, non-profit, and policy-facing organisations in developing contexts. Future research can replicate or adapt the model used in this case study to explore similar dynamics in ASEAN or Commonwealth countries, thereby deepening comparative institutional understanding of digital readiness.

From a practical standpoint, the study identifies key steps that MEF must take to move forward. Chief among them is the urgent need to craft a formal digital strategy, endorsed by senior leadership and communicated clearly across all levels. Without such a roadmap, MEF's digital initiatives will remain fragmented and ineffective. Budget allocation must also be restructured to prioritise IT infrastructure upgrades and secure technical talent capable of maintaining and evolving digital systems. Capacity building is another crucial area—training modules, certifications, and mentorship initiatives must be deployed systematically to close the digital literacy gap, especially among senior staff.

Equally important is leadership commitment. The creation of a Chief Digital Officer role or digital transformation taskforce would ensure strategic oversight, cross-departmental alignment, and accountability. Communication gaps between MEF and its members must be addressed through revamped web platforms, targeted digital outreach, and member education campaigns. By embracing these solutions, MEF can build resilience, enhance member engagement, and future-proof its operations in alignment with Malaysia's broader MyDIGITAL vision. Ultimately, the study's implications reinforce the importance of digitalisation as a strategic, organisation-wide endeavour that must be both planned and nurtured to succeed.

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) and comparable employer organisations navigating the process of digital transformation. First and foremost, it is essential for MEF to establish a formal digital strategy that is clearly communicated across all levels of the organisation. The lack of such a roadmap has led to fragmented efforts and siloed implementation. A centralised, top-down strategy would help align departmental objectives, clarify digital goals, and facilitate coordinated action.

In addition to strategic planning, MEF must allocate specific budgetary resources for technological infrastructure upgrades. As highlighted by informants, current systems are either underutilised or outdated, contributing to inefficiencies and disjointed workflows. Investments in modern digital platforms and integrated systems are critical to enhancing MEF's capacity to serve members more efficiently.

Another important implication is the urgent need for capacity building. Continuous training programmes aimed at improving digital literacy among MEF staff and its members are vital. Many stakeholders expressed a lack of confidence or familiarity with digital tools, especially among older personnel. Tailored workshops, certifications, and hands-on training can bridge this gap and foster a more digitally competent workforce.

Furthermore, the organisation would benefit from the appointment of a Chief Digital Officer (CDO) or equivalent leadership figure dedicated to driving digitalisation. This individual would be responsible for overseeing digital integration, coordinating with external vendors, monitoring performance metrics, and cultivating a digital-first culture.

MEF also needs to significantly improve its communication strategies regarding digital offerings. Informants noted that many members are unaware of available platforms or services. This indicates a gap in outreach efforts. Enhancing the website's usability, launching targeted email campaigns, and deploying interactive channels such as webinars or chatbots can increase member engagement.

In summary, MEF's digital advancement hinges on strategic alignment, resource allocation, skills development, leadership accountability, and improved communication. By addressing these areas proactively, MEF can strengthen its institutional resilience and align more closely with Malaysia's broader digital economy agenda.

This case study focused exclusively on MEF, limiting generalisability. Future studies could use mixed methods or comparative designs across multiple federations to deepen insights. Moreover, interviews were confined to the Klang Valley area and did not include voices from regional offices.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

The findings of this study offer numerous opportunities for future research and practical application in the context of employer federations navigating digital transformation, particularly within Malaysia and other ASEAN countries. Given the limitations of a single case study focused on the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), future research could broaden its scope to include multiple employer associations or comparative case studies between national and regional federations. Such comparative analyses would allow scholars to identify recurring patterns, sector-specific challenges, or policy-based constraints that are shared or unique across different institutional settings.

Moreover, quantitative studies are recommended to validate and measure the prevalence of the themes identified in this qualitative research. For instance, future researchers could develop and distribute structured surveys based on the current study's conceptual framework to gather responses from a larger pool of

MEF members and staff. This would enable statistical testing of the relationships between variables such as perceived ease of use, attitudes towards digitalisation, and organisational readiness. Longitudinal research would also be valuable in tracking MEF's digital evolution over time, especially following the implementation of recommended strategic interventions.

From a practical standpoint, future initiatives should focus on building digital capabilities at both the organisational and individual levels. MEF may consider establishing a formal digital taskforce to oversee system upgrades, user training, and member engagement campaigns. Additional research could be conducted on the effectiveness of these interventions using action research methods, which would enable real-time feedback loops and iterative improvements.

It is also recommended that future research examine how external policy changes such as amendments to the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) or the rollout of MyDIGITAL impact federations like MEF. Understanding how these policies influence digital decision-making will help federations remain compliant while driving innovation. In summary, future research should be interdisciplinary, longitudinal, and comparative in nature, with a focus on theory-building and real-world applicability to ensure a sustained, inclusive digital transformation journey for employer organisations like MEF.

REFERENCES

Abdullah, A., & Wahab, N. A. (2021). Compliance implications of GDPR on Malaysian organisations. Journal of Digital Governance, 8(2), 44–55.

Ali, H., & Jamil, M. (2021). Cost barriers in SME digital transformation: A Malaysian perspective. Asian Journal of Business and Technology, 13(1), 91–104.

Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research. Qualitative Research, 1(3), 385–405. https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100307

Alvarenga, A., Matos, F., Godina, R., & Matias, J. C. O. (2020). Digital transformation and knowledge management in the public sector. Journal of Knowledge Management, 24(8), 1921–1937.

Azahar, N. (2021). Awareness as a determinant in technology adoption among SMEs. Journal of Small Business Innovation, 10(1), 20–35.

Azahar, N. A. (2021). Digital infrastructure and organisational transformation in Malaysian SMEs. Asian Journal of Business Research, 11(3), 78–92.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brynjolfsson, E., & McAfee, A. (2014). The second machine age: Work, progress, and prosperity in a time of brilliant technologies. W. W. Norton & Company.

Bryman, A. (2016). Social research methods (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. MIS Quarterly, 13(3), 319–340.

Gooberman, L., Hauptmeier, M., & Heery, E. (2020). The digitalisation of employers' organisations: A comparative institutional analysis. Industrial Relations Journal, 51(5), 445–464.

Gooberman, L., Hauptmeier, M., & Heery, E. (2020). Institutional determinants of digital transformation in employment relations. British Journal of Industrial Relations, 58(4), 832–857.

IDC. (2023). Malaysia Digital Economy Report. International Data Corporation. Retrieved from https://www.idc.com

Ismail, M. (2022). The financial challenges of digital innovation in Malaysian non-profits. Malaysian Journal of Economics and Management, 9(3), 112–128.

Ismail, Z. (2022). Funding innovation and digitalisation among Malaysian non-profits. International Journal of Social Economics, 49(2), 145–160.

Javaid, M., Haleem, A., Vaishya, R., Bahl, S., & Suman, R. (2022). Industry 4.0 applications in medical field: A brief review. Current Medicine Research and Practice, 12(1), 1–6.

Kane, G. C., Palmer, D., Phillips, A. N., Kiron, D., & Buckley, N. (2019). Accelerating digital innovation inside and out: Agile teams, ecosystems, and ethics. MIT Sloan Management Review, 60(2), 1–9.

Keyton, J. (2015). Communication research: Asking questions, finding answers (4th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Lee, H., & Norhashim, M. (2022). Data governance and organisational compliance in Malaysian industry. Asian Journal of Information Ethics, 5(1), 26–41.

Lee, J. W., Rahman, N. A., & Tan, L. H. (2022). Digital competence in Malaysian SMEs: A systematic review. Journal of Asian Business Research, 12(1), 57–73.

Lee, K. H., Rahman, M., & Tan, Y. C. (2022). Barriers to digital transformation among Malaysian SMEs. Malaysian Journal of Business and Technology, 11(2), 67–83.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. SAGE Publications.

MEF. (2021). Annual report. Malaysian Employers Federation.

MEF. (2022). Annual report. Malaysian Employers Federation.

MEF. (2023). Digitalisation and Integration Project (MEFDI). Malaysian Employers Federation. Retrieved from https://www.mef.org.my

MITI. (2022). Industry4WRD: National policy on Industry 4.0. Ministry of International Trade and Industry. Retrieved from https://www.miti.gov.my

Mohd Syukri, H. (2023). Digital capacity and readiness among Malaysian employers. Journal of Labour and Management Studies, 15(1), 55–73.

Mustaffa, C. S., Haron, H., & Wahid, F. (2022). Internet infrastructure readiness in Malaysian organisations. Telecommunications Policy Review, 18(4), 233–245.

Mustaffa, R., Haron, N., & Wahid, F. (2022). Human capital and infrastructure readiness in Malaysia's digital economy. Journal of Asian Management Studies, 9(2), 100–115.

Mustaffa, S. M., Haron, H., & Wahid, N. (2022). ICT infrastructure readiness and digital inclusion in developing countries. Information Technology for Development, 28(3), 478–497.

Rahman, R. A., & Razali, A. A. (2023). Artificial intelligence and the Malaysian workplace: Challenges and prospects. International Journal of Industrial Innovation, 7(1), 33–48.

Rahman, R. A., & Wahab, M. H. A. (2021). Skills development in digital transformation: Role of Malaysian employers. Journal of Training and Development, 11(1), 88–105.

Rahman, R. A., & Wahab, N. A. (2021). Human capital development in digital transformation initiatives. Asia Pacific Journal of Management, 38(2), 511–530.

Rahman, N. H. A., & Wahab, S. R. A. (2021). Digital readiness and workforce transformation in Malaysia's public sector. Public Sector Innovation Journal, 16(4), 112–128.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Sage Management. (2023). Zero-knowledge proof protocols in enterprise digital systems. Sage Research Briefing. Retrieved from https://www.sagemanagement.com

Sheldon, P., Thornthwaite, L., & Bamber, G. J. (2016). Collective employer representation in an era of digitalisation: Trends and transformation. International Labour Review, 155(4), 469–487.

Soh Thian Lai. (2023). The regulatory burden on federations: An insider's perspective. Industrial Governance Quarterly, 17(2), 21–37.

Tan, L. W., & Ramli, R. (2021). ICT infrastructure challenges in digital transformation of Malaysian organisations. Malaysian Journal of Business and Technology, 8(2), 56–69.

Tan, S. W., & Ramli, A. A. (2021). Digital project management in non-profit institutions: A Malaysian case study. Journal of Public Sector ICT, 6(2), 43–60.

Trist, E. L., & Bamforth, K. W. (1951). Some social and psychological consequences of the longwall method of coal-getting. Human Relations, 4(1), 3–38.

Usman, M., Hassan, N. M., & Farid, M. (2020). Organisational transformation and risk in a digital economy. Asian Journal of Management Studies, 10(3), 51–66.

Venkatesh, V., & Bala, H. (2008). Technology acceptance model 3 and a research agenda on interventions. Decision Sciences, 39(2), 273–315.

Verhoef, P. C., Broekhuizen, T., Bart, Y., Bhattacharya, A., Qi Dong, J., Fabian, N., & Haenlein, M. (2021). Digital transformation: A multidisciplinary reflection and research agenda. Journal of Business Research, 122, 889–901.

Vial, G. (2019). Understanding digital transformation: A review and a research agenda. Journal of Strategic Information Systems, 28(2), 118–144.

Westerman, G., Bonnet, D., & McAfee, A. (2014). Leading digital: Turning technology into business transformation. Harvard Business Review Press.

Wiles, R. (2012). What are qualitative research ethics? Bloomsbury Publishing.

Wilson, M., Chong, S. C., & Halim, H. (2021). Leadership advocacy and digital learning adoption in Malaysian organisations. Journal of Workplace Learning, 33(7), 505–523.

Wilson, T., Chong, Y. L., & Halim, F. (2021). Non-profit digitalisation and sustainability: A Malaysian perspective. Social Enterprise Research Journal, 9(1), 41–59.

Yusof, S. N., & Lim, L. H. (2022). Managing employee resistance during digitalisation. Malaysian HR Management Review, 8(2), 15–30.

Yusof, N., & Lim, S. Y. (2022). Assessing digital skills gaps in Malaysia's workforce: A national perspective. Journal of Southeast Asian Human Capital Development, 10(1), 33–47.

Yusoff, M., Mohamad, H., & Rahim, A. (2022). Legal and ethical dimensions of digital governance in Malaysia. Malaysian Journal of Law and Society, 15(3), 201–218.

Yusof, Z., & Lim, W. S. (2022). Organisational culture and digital transformation resistance in Malaysian non-profits. Asian Management Review, 9(2), 85–99.

Yusoff, S., Mohamad, Z., & Rahim, N. H. (2022). Cybersecurity strategy adoption in Malaysian organisations. Journal of Information Security and Policy, 13(3), 77–95.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guides

Table A1 : Steps for Finding Interviewees

Task	Task requirements
Establish who you want to interview	Need to have a clear idea of research questions and decide on characteristics and geographical locations of interviewees.
Determine information sources	Research the organisations you want to interview.
Find related research to ascertain how researchers in the area have gone about finding interviewees.	This requires a literature review of relevant studies in the area.
Contact relevant individuals who can facilitate access.	Be fully prepared regarding research questions, aims of the research and interview guide prior to making contact.

Source: Rubin & Rubin (2012)

Table A2 : Interview Guide for Management of MEF

Interview guide – Management
Topics Areas: 1. Role of Management in the MEF in Malaysia 2. Limitations or challenges faced MEF 3. System provider in Malaysia 4. Effectiveness of current MEF industry production in Malaysia 5. Limitations or challenges faced by MEF in Malaysia

Table A3 : Interview Guide for Director, Top Management and Authority and Agent of MEF (Topic 1)

Question	Purpose
Topic 1: Role of MEF in system provider in Malaysia	
"In your opinion, what is the role of MEF in Malaysia?"	Engagement question: To understand current happenings
"Is MEF involved in policymaking for Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"Who are the members of MEF	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"Are the roles of MEF as clearly defined?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
Topic 2: Limitations or challenges faced by MEF	
"What do you think of labour industry in Malaysia ?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"What do you think of MEF in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"What are the current happenings of the labour in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"What would the future hold for MEF in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess future happenings
Topic 3: Effectiveness of MEF measurement in Malaysia	
"How effective are the MEF measurement in the Malaysian Economy?"	Exploration question: To assess current beef market measurement model
"How do you think MEF measurement, in this case, for small holder benefits, as the MEF info provider in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"What is the current MEF measurement (report) you get from the government?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"As a provider, what other measurements MEF supplier that you hope to obtain?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"How do you think MEF measurement can be"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings

"Apart from Reach and Frequency, my current readings have suggested that price of MEF services, size of, competitor, importers and ROI be included for an effective provider measurement. In your experience, what are the variables that should or should not be included in the labour industry measurement? Why?"	Exploration question: To assess current measurement
Topic 4: Recommendations and Solutions for labour industry measurement in Malaysia	
"How do you think the challenges of MEF and supply measurement can be solved in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"Way forward, what are your recommendations for MEF system owner as protein provider in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
Exit Questions	
"Do you have anything else to add on in terms of MEF measurement?"	Exit question: To review overall focus group discussion and purpose
"From the brief summary, have we missed anything else?"	Exit question: To acknowledge completion

Table A4 : Interview Guide for Members

Interview guide – members
Topics Areas: 1.Descriptive information such as name, gender age education occupation, experience state of origin marital status and lifestyle 2. MEF in Malaysia 3. The issues faced by the government in MEF in Malaysia 4. Industry guidelines and regulations in the MEF in Malaysia 5. Recommendations and Solutions for MEF measurement in Malaysia

Question	**Purpose**
Topic 1: Informants of MEF	
"Please tell me about your family and work lives with regards to MEF	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
Could you describe the MEF ways you deal with your family member and friends?	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
How your often you use MEF, where, and how much and how many times per month.	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
What do you think of a person's income, and how many percent spend on MEF?	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
Topic 2: lifestyle of informants with regard to MEF services	
"How did you feel about MEF, as well as how you are managing MEF services usage.	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"What did you think are the best ways of MEF usage	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
Topic 3: The impact of social and cultural factors?	
"Did you feel that culture has a role in your ways of MEF"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
Topic 4: MEF in Malaysia	
"What do you think of MEF services as NGO?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"What do you think of the MEF in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"What are the current happenings of the MEF in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"What would the future hold for the MEF in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess future happenings
Topic 5: The issues faced by the government in the MEF in Malaysia	

"What are the limitations or challenges faced by the government of Malaysia?"	Engagement question: To understand current happenings
"Would there be an amicable solution to approach these limitations or challenges?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"MEF in Malaysia face challenges when it comes to providing detailed measurement. What is your opinion?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"What is your recommendation to solve these issues?"	Exploration question: To assess future happenings
Topic 6: MEF and supplying guidelines and regulations in the MEF services industries in Malaysia	
"What are the current guidelines and regulations for MEF services in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current beef market measurement model
"Do you think the guidelines and regulations are effective?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"What are the improvements you would suggest for the guidelines and regulations for MEF services in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
Topic 7: Recommendations and Solutions for MEF services measurement in Malaysia	
"How do you think the challenges of MEF services measurement can be solved in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
"Way forward, what are your recommendations for MEF services as service provider in Malaysia?"	Exploration question: To assess current happenings
Exit Questions	
"Do you have anything else to add on in terms of MEF services measurement?"	Exit question: To review overall focus group discussion and purpose
"From the brief summary, have we missed anything else?"	Exit question: To acknowledge completion

BUSINESS HIGHLIGHT: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

One of the most significant challenges identified is the lack of digital awareness and literacy among MEF staff and members. This is not merely a technical deficiency but a cultural issue rooted in longstanding reliance on manual processes and low perceived usefulness of digital tools. Solution pathways here include structured, recurring digital literacy training tailored for different user segments, particularly focusing on middle and senior management who are typically slower to adopt new technologies.

Financial constraints represent another persistent obstacle. As a non-profit, MEF is often forced to prioritise operational continuity over technology investments. A viable solution would be to allocate specific funds annually for digital transformation initiatives and to explore partnerships with governmental agencies or private-sector collaborators for co-funded digital projects.

Technological infrastructure gaps further weaken the effectiveness of MEF's digital ambitions. Systems like MEFDI are underutilised due to poor integration and limited cross-departmental adoption. An effective solution would include upgrading legacy systems, ensuring inter-platform operability, and embedding user-centric design principles to encourage broader system usage.

Additionally, organisational culture, characterised by resistance to change and lack of top-down digital advocacy, undermines progress. MEF must work on cultural transformation through leadership development, change management programmes, and the appointment of a Chief Digital Officer to lead strategic alignment across departments.

Finally, gaps in communication and outreach have led to poor member engagement with existing digital services. These can be addressed through better marketing, intuitive interface design, and proactive user support mechanisms.

Taken together, these challenges and corresponding solutions reflect a roadmap not only for MEF but for similar institutions seeking to reconcile legacy systems and culture with the demands of a digital economy. Overall, the business highlight of the problems and solutions depicted in the figure below.

