

HOW IS AI SHAPING THE FUTURE OF WORK? EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES, NOT REPLACING THEM

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Abstract: In the modern business world, AI is revolutionizing HR departments around the globe and is becoming an essential part of human resource management.

In this paper we explore the role of AI in Human Resource Management and how it can help organizations to remain competitive and efficient, while improving employee empowerment and engagement. We conducted quantitative research involving employees and HR professionals from various sectors in Romania to explore their perceptions of AI implementation in the workplace. The data explores the extent to which AI chatbots can empower employees and improve their efficiency. Additionally, we analyze employees' perceptions regarding the possibility of being replaced by AI, offering insights into their concerns about job displacement alongside the opportunities AI presents for job enhancement.

The research findings reveal a strong positive correlation between favorable perceptions of AI and increased empowerment, while concerns about job displacement negatively affect empowerment. The study's conclusions have significant implications for HR professionals, who can use AI tools to maximize and enhance organizational performance. Moreover, to satisfy the demands of the workforce of the future, our research also emphasizes how important it is for HR experts to integrate technology advancements into their HR strategy.

JEL classification: O33; M12; M15; J24

Keywords: artificial intelligence (AI), empowerment, Human-AI Collaboration, job displacement concerns, workplace transformation

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1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of technologies, particularly the implementation of AI in companies, is significantly transforming the world of work. As AI becomes more integrated into business operations, it is reshaping various aspects of the workplace, including the role of people in companies, the design of work, the demands on employees, organizational structures, cultures, and leadership. This transformation requires a rethinking of how work is done and must be actively shaped by leaders and organizations.

AI's role in shaping future work environments is significant and wide-ranging. AI has the ability to drastically change how humans work, learn and interact by boosting workplace productivity and creativity. However, realizing AI's full potential in the workplace necessitates careful attention to ethical, societal, and human considerations that will influence how AI is integrated and utilized in these environments.

The intersection of AI and human intelligence is driving the development of a future workplace where collaboration, innovation, and efficiency are key. This convergence is redefining traditional job functions and creating new opportunities for employees and employers to work together in novel ways.

As the opportunities for AI in HR continue to evolve, the focus for HR professionals will move more and more toward strategic functions such as talent management, leadership development, employee wellbeing and positive workplace culture. With AI handling routine tasks, HR teams can now dedicate more time to these high-impact, value-added functions.

The introduction of AI into the workforce presents a dual-edged sword. While AI has the potential to displace many existing jobs, it also creates new opportunities for employment in emerging fields. This shift demands attention to workforce retraining, job creation, and a careful balance between technological progress and human labor.

The rapid advancement of AI has also led to significant changes in work arrangements. Automation and AI technologies have forced many workers to adapt to new work structures and agreements that differ greatly from those of previous generations. These changes are reshaping the traditional employer-employee dynamic and require new approaches to work-life balance, job roles, and collaboration.

Considering all these aspects, we found it useful to explore the use of AI and chatbots in human resource management and its impact on jobs and on human resource management practices.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role and impact of AI chatbots on HR activities, analyzing how they can contribute to streamlining processes and improving employee empowerment and satisfaction. Additionally, it examines employees' perceptions of AI and their concerns about job displacement, providing insights into how these perceptions impact their acceptance and usage of AI-driven tools.

The interest in this research topic is growing, and it is expected that the potential of AI in the workplace will be better understood and implemented.

The main research questions address in this paper can be formulated as following:

- What is employees' general perception of the integration of AI in HR functions, particularly in terms of their involvement and job enhancement?
- How do employees perceive the potential for AI chatbots to empower them within HR processes?

- How do concerns about job displacement relate to perceptions of AI integration in HR?

To address these questions the paper is organized as follows:

In the first part, we presented a review of the specialized literature that provides the foundational context for understanding the current state of AI adoption.

Next, we described the data used as well as the methodology on which the study is based. We use a quantitative method in order to understand both employees and human resources professionals' perceptions of using AI in HRM.

Afterwards, we presented the results, and finally we concluded with reflections on the future of work and AI's impact on jobs and employment. Possible future directions of study were also proposed.

2. Literature review

Artificial Intelligence involves replicating human intelligence within machines, enabling them to perform tasks such as reasoning, learning, perception, planning, and prediction. A notable advancement in AI is Generative AI, which is capable of producing original content like text, images, and audio by learning from existing data. This breakthrough is transforming industries by offering new possibilities for creating relevant and innovative outputs.

In the field of Human Resources (HR), AI is making significant steps by automating recruitment, refining performance assessments, and customizing employee development. These improvements lead to enhanced efficiency and more data-driven decision-making.

The growing adoption of AI in HRM is driven by the increasing volume of data related to workforce management and organizational processes. According to some authors (Chowdhury et al., 2023), the increasing adoption of AI in HRM is driven by its potential to create value for customers, employees and organizations, concurrently.

Impact of AI-powered HRM applications on organizational and employee outcomes

The opportunities and constraints of AI and other automated technologies for HRM were discussed by Budhwar et al. (2022) in their systematic review of the literature. They also looked at how the automated HRM functions can affect organisational and employee results.

AI-enabled HRM adoption gives organisations the chance to achieve the best possible strategic business results, including improved overall business performance (Li et al., 2019), cost-effective service excellence (Wirtz, 2019), operational efficiency, customer engagement and loyalty (Prentice and Nguyen, 2020; Botha, 2019; Tarafdar et al., 2019).

Most importantly is the fact that AI-focused HRM creates favourable employee outcomes such as job satisfaction (Nguyen and Malik, 2022), commitment, employee engagement, and participation, thereby increasing their performance (Castellacci and Viñas-Bardolet, 2019). Employee retention and satisfaction have increased as a result of the deployment of chatbots and virtual assistants driven by AI (Khan et al., 2020).

The AI-HRM literature, however, still lacks a thorough understanding of how AI and related technologies can provide solutions for efficient HRM and sub-functional areas, as well as how AI-enabled HRM functions connect to other operational tasks to improve organisational outcomes (Agrawal et al., 2017).

Makridis and Han Hun (2021) found that employees typically feel more empowered to exploit their abilities at work and have greater levels of well-being, as a reaction to technological change. However, this effect is stronger when employees receive task direction and guidance from their manager and when their organization fosters a culture of trust.

According to research, employees are more likely to be proactive and creative when given the freedom to use their specific and unique competences and abilities, which helps companies innovate (Seibert et al., 2011; Zhang and Bartol, 2010).

Concerns over job displacement for HR roles

Although the positive consequences of advanced technologies are emphasized in the literature, several negative issues have also been identified. There have been significant concerns expressed about AI's potential to eliminate jobs (Malik, 2020). The American Psychological Association's (APA) 2024 Work in America survey reveals that 41% of U.S. workers are worried that AI will eventually make some or all of their job duties obsolete in the future. According to researchers (Brougham and Haar, 2020), AI may eventually replace 57% of OECD employment, and most businesses are under pressure to develop AI data analytics capabilities.

Job displacement due to AI may vary across sectors, with industries like manufacturing and transportation, which involve more routine tasks, experiencing more significant job displacement compared to sectors like healthcare and education.

In their theory of job replacement through AI, Huang and Rust (2018) significantly contributed to the literature concerning this double-edged effect of AI in services. The authors discuss how AI can reshape services, potentially replacing service workers entirely, but also emphasize the need for employees to focus on developing their intuitive and empathetic skills that AI cannot replicate. Only cognitive and analytical jobs requiring little emotional or social complexity can be completed by service robots. In people-intensive services, we still believe that employees are the most important resource.

System level challenges

According to Brougham and Hair (2020), a major obstacle to effectively embracing and integrating cutting-edge technologies in the workplace is employees' unfavourable views towards technological advancements. Therefore, the question of how to reduce employee anxiety around the integration of new technologies into HRM operations must be addressed. In this regard, experts argue that appropriate and significant training is crucial for minimising workers' disapproval of new technological implementations (Brougham and Haar, 2020). Businesses will be better equipped to handle the future of work if they can successfully combine AI technologies with the knowledge and abilities of their employees. According to other writers (Bititci et al., 2016), a suitable organisational culture is necessary for the long-term, successful deployment of automation technology.

Fostering Human-AI collaboration

Finding a balance between automation and human interaction in the workplace is crucial as AI develops. Increased productivity and creativity may result from the mutually beneficial link between AI and human labour.

Nawaz and Gomes (2019) acknowledge that chatbots should not replace human recruiters. They advocate for a collaborative approach, where chatbots enhance the capabilities of HR teams by automating tasks and providing 24/7 assistance, ultimately improving overall efficiency and the candidate experience in the recruitment process.

The future of work is not about AI replacing humans but about fostering effective human-AI collaboration. For instance, AI can help design more efficient work processes, while humans can provide creativity and emotional intelligence.

Companies have to provide training and development initiatives that give staff members the know-how to collaborate with AI in order to optimise the advantages of human-AI cooperation. This covers both soft skills like flexibility, problem-solving and moral decision-making as well as technical abilities like AI and data analysis. Also, HR managers should take into consideration that tasks that individuals will most likely perform in the future will call for advanced emotional and cognitive abilities. When properly implemented, with the correct people employed, HR staff retrained and a culture of internal transparency to avoid AI from being used as a tool of control, using AI to improve organisational performance can be successful (Sakka et al., 2022).

Additionally, given the changing nature of the workplace with its hybrid model and increased emphasis on diversity and inclusion, HR's strategic component - which must make use of AI's capabilities in HR, becomes even more crucial (Kaur and Gandolfi, 2023).

A study conducted by Pan et al., (2022) explored the factors influencing the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in employee recruitment. They found that perceived usefulness, organizational culture, and job requirements significantly affect AI adoption. The study also emphasized the importance of considering organizational and job-related factors when implementing AI in recruitment.

According to Arslan et al. (2022), evaluating performance in teams that include both people and robots is one of the major problems for HRM. They have highlighted the possibilities of drawing on insights from the literature on computer gaming, where performance evaluation models have been built to analyse human performance in the same environment as AI, and have noted to the scarcity of existing frameworks to guide HRM function in this regard.

AI should be leveraged not only for improving economic efficiency, but also for cultivating a more inclusive, dynamic and rewarding work environment that values human contributions. By addressing challenges and fostering collaboration between humans and AI, businesses can stimulate innovation and growth, leading to a future in which both organizations and employees can achieve sustained development.

Therefore, this study proposes three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Employees who perceive AI as a tool for empowerment will have higher satisfaction levels with HR processes.

Hypothesis 2: Concerns about job displacement will negatively affect employees' perception of AI's role in HR.

Hypothesis 3: HR professionals will have a more positive view of AI's potential than employees.

3. Methodology

The use of chatbots driven by generative AI in HR represents a dramatic change towards increased productivity, responsiveness and general employee satisfaction. These chatbots demonstrate their diverse influence on changing HR relations by automating intricate HR processes and streamlining the employee journey.

This paper adopts a mixed-methods design, encompassing both primary and secondary data. This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate employees' and HR professionals' perceptions of AI implementation in HR functions. Data were collected through a structured survey with two distinct respondent groups: HR professionals and employees.

The survey included questions assessing: general perceptions of AI in HR (5 items), job enhancement through AI integration (8 items), employee empowerment through AI (7 items), concerns about job displacement due to AI (7 items), general questions to identify respondents (gender, age, years of experience, company size and job position). Except for demographic data, all the mentioned variables were assessed using a Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

For the variables "General perceptions of AI in HR" and "Employee empowerment through AI", the items were carefully designed based on existing research in the field to capture respondents' perceptions. For "General perceptions of AI in HR", one of the items was: "How likely are you to trust AI-driven HR decisions compared to human-made decisions?". In the case of employee empowerment through AI, one of the items used was: "AI enables employees to make more informed decisions in their roles."

For the other two variables ("Job enhancement through AI Integration" and "Concerns about job displacement due to AI") validated scales were used: the adapted Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) and an adapted version of the Fear of Job Loss Scale (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014).

Data was gathered via online Google forms, and between January 2024 and May 2024, links to the questionnaire were shared via personal contacts and social networking sites such as LinkedIn. Out of all the responses received, only 197 were filled completely and correctly (108 employees and 89 HR professionals).

4. Data Analysis and Results

The first part of analysis focuses on demographic data in terms of gender, age, years of experience, company size, and job position. The study involved 108 employee respondents and 89 HR professionals. Among the employee respondents, a majority were female (51%), with a significant portion (49%) aged 26-35 years. The majority worked in IT, followed by commerce and finance roles. Most had 2-4 years of experience and worked in medium-sized companies (100-500 employees). For the HR professionals, the majority were female (70%) and aged between 36-45 years. A significant proportion (53%) held HR specialist roles, with 4 years of experience and worked in medium-sized companies.

Next, we will analyze the data collected from both HR professionals and employees to understand their perceptions and attitudes of AI implementation in the workplace.

The first part of the analysis focuses on respondents' perceptions of AI-driven chatbots used in HR related activities (not general workplace tasks). Below is a comparison of the views expressed by the two respondent groupings.

The data shows that among HR professionals, 77% agreed or strongly agreed that AI chatbots would positively impact HR departments, with a mean score of 4.03. Employees, in contrast, were slightly less enthusiastic, with 60% expressing openness to AI in HR functions. However, a notable 30% were neutral, suggesting that while many employees see the potential of AI, there is still uncertainty or lack of familiarity with how it would impact their daily work lives.

Regarding the effectiveness of AI chatbots in addressing frequent HR-related inquiries, HR professionals gave a positive assessment (mean score of 3.73), with 60% believing chatbots could handle employee questions as effectively as a human HR representative. However, among employees, 50% felt uncertain about whether AI would meet their needs as effectively as human professionals, with only 30% expressing confidence in its capabilities. This discrepancy highlights a possible gap in the perception of AI's abilities between HR and general employees.

By automating repetitive work and increasing overall efficiency, AI integration in HR aims to *empower HR professionals and employees* alike. Our research indicates that although employee perceptions differ, HR experts view AI as a tool for empowerment.

HR professionals overwhelmingly agreed (93%) that AI chatbots would save time by automating routine tasks, with a mean score of 4.26. This would empower HR teams to focus on HR strategic activities. Among employees, 70% agreed that AI could help streamline HR-related tasks, though some (20%) were concerned that this might reduce human interaction in key HR processes. Despite this, 60% of employees indicated that they would welcome AI assistance for administrative tasks, as long as it doesn't replace the personal touch for more complex issues.

Both HR professionals and employees agreed that AI could enhance autonomy in HR tasks. For instance, 86% of HR professionals believed AI would allow employees to manage HR-related requests independently, with a mean score of 4.20. Among employees, 55% expressed a strong preference for having the ability to handle HR inquiries themselves. This indicates a shared belief that AI can contribute to a more self-sufficient workforce, empowering employees to resolve issues without having to contact HR for every request.

AI's integration in HR aims not only to empower HR professionals but also to *improve the overall employee experience*. The ability of employees to access HR services quickly and efficiently through AI is seen as a major advantage.

HR professionals and employees recognize the potential of AI in improving satisfaction with HR services. HR professionals (83%) agreed that AI would enhance employee satisfaction by providing quicker access to HR services (mean score of 4.03). Similarly, 60% of employees felt that AI would lead to a better overall HR experience. However, 20% of employees expressed concerns about AI potentially reducing personal engagement with HR staff. A percent of 80% of employees believed AI would increase their ability to manage their own HR-related tasks, such as updating personal information or checking leave balances. This aligns with HR professionals' views that AI could contribute to a more empowered workforce.

Despite the fact that AI is widely acknowledged to have the potential to enhance HR practices, concerns over job displacement remain prevalent, particularly among employees. Opinions varied more among employees than among HR specialists.

According to our survey, 40% of HR professionals saw AI as a chance to concentrate on higher-level responsibilities, while only 20% believed it will replace their current roles. Employees were more worried about losing their jobs, though. While 50% of workers thought that AI may merely alter the nature of HR work without resulting in a mass loss of jobs, 40% of workers said it might endanger certain HR job functions.

To understand the relationship between key variables and provide deeper insights into the data, we conducted several statistical analyses, including the calculation of means and correlation coefficients.

Table 1. Means of the studied variable

Variable	HR Professionals Mean	Employees Mean
General perception of AI in HR	4.03	3.96
Job enhancement through AI integration	4.26	4.10
Employee empowerment through AI	4.05	4.03
Concerns about job displacement	3.73	3.87

Both employees and HR professionals view AI in HR-related activities favourably, as shown in Table 1, with HR professionals exhibiting somewhat greater optimism overall. Although both groups agree that AI has the ability to improve jobs and give workers more authority, HR experts give job enhancement a higher rating. However, compared to HR professionals, employees are a little more concerned about the possibility that AI may replace jobs.

Correlations for the studied variables are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Correlations among variables

Variable	General perception of AI in HR	Job enhancement through AI integration	Employee empowerment through AI	Concerns about job displacement
General perception of AI in HR	1.00			
Job enhancement through AI integration	0.682	1.00		
Employee empowerment through AI	0.756	0.835	1.00	
Concerns about job displacement	-0.475	-0.563	-0.452	1.00

p<0.05

The correlation analysis reveals significant relationships among the variables related to AI in HR, employee empowerment and job displacement concerns. A positive correlation was found between the general perception of AI in HR and empowerment ($r = 0.756$), indicating that employees who view AI favorably are more likely to feel empowered in their roles. This finding aligns with research suggesting that perceived organizational support positively influences employee empowerment and performance (Kumar, Liu & Jin, 2022). Additionally, employee empowerment through AI was positively correlated with job enhancement ($r = 0.835$), suggesting that AI can improve job performance and satisfaction, enhancing autonomy.

On the other hand, concerns about job displacement showed a negative correlation with empowerment ($r = -0.452$), supporting the literature that highlights how job insecurity can diminish morale and engagement (Jung et al., 2021). The negative association between displacement concerns and empowerment suggests that while AI can enhance employees' abilities, fears of job loss may mitigate these benefits.

Based on positive correlation between AI perception and empowerment, hypothesis 1 is supported. Employees who view AI favorably are more likely to believe it can enhance their autonomy, thus increasing satisfaction. Also, negative correlation between displacement concerns and empowerment supports hypothesis 2. Employees who worry about job displacement tend to have lower perceptions of AI's empowerment potential. Also, the data supports hypothesis 3, as HR professionals showed a slightly more favorable view of AI in HR functions, with a higher mean score for empowerment and job enhancement.

These findings highlight how critical it is to handle both the advantages and disadvantages of integrating AI in the workplace. To fully realise AI's potential, it is imperative to reduce workers' concerns about job displacement, even while AI offers chances for employment enhancement and increased empowerment.

5. Discussions

The findings of this study highlight several key areas where HR managers can optimize their approach to integrating AI technologies, specifically chatbots, into HR practices. Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The results from our study indicate that while HR professionals generally hold a positive view of AI technologies (mean score of 4.03 for general perceptions), employees exhibit a more cautious stance (with 30% remaining neutral). Given this variance in perspectives, it is advisable for HR managers to implement AI technologies in stages, allowing employees time to familiarize themselves with the tools and gradually integrate them into daily practices. This gradual adoption helps mitigate resistance to change and facilitates smoother transitions. Previous research supports this approach, emphasizing the importance of providing employees with adequate time and training to adjust to new technologies (Huang and Rust, 2021).

2. While HR professionals are confident in AI's potential to automate routine tasks, employees show more hesitation regarding the efficiency of AI-driven tools (50% expressed uncertainty about AI's effectiveness). This discrepancy underscores the importance of training programs. HR managers should invest in educating both HR staff and employees on the capabilities and limitations of AI technologies, ensuring they understand how these tools enhance efficiency without replacing the personal

touch necessary for complex HR matters. Some researchers (Rane, Choudhary & Rane, 2024; Molino, Cortese & Ghislieri, 2020) suggest that comprehensive training not only enhances technology adoption but also increases trust in AI systems. Also the literature highlights that if employees lack any skills, these AI systems help them identify their training needs and complete the required courses (Budhwar, 2022).

3. To bridge the gap in perceptions between HR professionals and employees, it is crucial for HR managers to maintain transparent communication. Many employees are still uncertain about how AI will impact their roles, especially concerning job displacement (mean score of 3.87 for concerns about job displacement). HR managers should proactively communicate the benefits of AI, addressing concerns and clarifying that AI will serve as a tool to enhance, rather than replace human roles. Such transparency has been shown to improve employee engagement and reduce fear of technology-driven job loss (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013).

4. The study reveals that both HR professionals and employees believe AI can enhance autonomy in HR-related tasks, such as managing leave requests and benefits (86% of HR professionals and 55% of employees). To capitalize on this, HR managers should leverage AI tools that empower employees to handle routine HR tasks independently. This not only increases efficiency but also fosters a sense of empowerment among employees, aligning with findings from existing studies that AI-driven autonomy leads to higher job satisfaction and employee engagement (Davenport & Kirby, 2016).

We consider that by putting these suggestions into practice, HR managers may minimise the difficulties and unknowns that come with integrating new technology while successfully utilising AI's potential to improve organisational effectiveness, employee engagement, and general satisfaction.

6. Conclusions

This paper highlights that AI is significantly reshaping HR practices, particularly in areas such as job empowerment, employee engagement and job enhancement. These transformations are expected to accelerate, urging HR professionals to adapt their strategies to leverage AI effectively.

In light of the research findings, it is crucial for HR managers to focus on inclusivity, ensuring that employees feel empowered and supported in their interaction with AI technologies. Engaging employees in discussions about AI's role in enhancing their work, rather than replacing it, is key to fostering trust. Managers should involve employees in shaping AI-driven processes, which could increase trust. This approach not only promotes a positive organizational culture but also aligns with market trends toward transparency and collaboration (Huang and Rust, 2021).

Despite the benefits, concerns regarding job displacement and reduced human interaction remain significant barriers. These concerns must be addressed to ensure that AI adoption adds sustained value to organizations and aligns with workforce expectations. Therefore it is crucial for policymakers and businesses to proactively address this issue to ensure a just transition and minimize the negative effects on employees, and also to understand the broader effects of AI on HRM.

However, as long as businesses adopt this technology, the partnership of artificial intelligence and human knowledge will become a powerful force that not only meets demands but also actively shapes the nature of work in the future. The combination of artificial and human intelligence holds the potential to revolutionise the workplace by boosting output, innovation and general well-being.

Although the path to an AI-enabled workplace is complicated, it offers a future in which companies and workers benefit with careful strategic planning and ethical considerations (Budhwar, 2022). AI supports sustainable business models and improves HR procedures as it is incorporated more and more into HR operations.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for creating effective strategies to manage workforce transitions and ensure that employees have the skills needed to succeed in an AI-driven environment.

Regarding future perspectives, human resource management should prepare for the rise of new roles and job functions in HR, such as AI ethics officers, who will ensure that AI algorithms are applied ethically and fairly. As AI becomes more integrated into HR processes, these roles will become increasingly important, and HR professionals must ensure that AI is used efficiently and fairly.

In conclusion, AI plays an essential role in strengthening HRM functions and activities, providing opportunities for significant advancement in employee management and organizational efficiency.

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