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# Faculty of Business Economics

## Master of Management

***Master's thesis***

***How do Management Consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI Agents and how does this influence their job satisfaction and employee experience?***

**Daan Peeters**

Thesis presented in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management, specialization Strategy and Innovation Management

**SUPERVISOR :**

Prof. dr. Jean-Pierre SEGERS

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# Summary

This master's thesis investigates how management consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI Agents and how this influences their job satisfaction and employee experience. This research is necessitated by the fast-paced digitalization of the workplace, in which growing utilization of advanced AI tools is becoming the default in knowledge-based professions such as management consultancy. While most literature to date highlights the productivity and efficiency benefits of AI, less is known about its impact on the human work experience, specifically in terms of changing professional selves, ethical accountability, and developing competencies. Due to the distinctiveness of consulting work in its intensive use of critical thought, inter-personal communication, and situational judgment, its incorporation offers potential as well as dangers. This study has the intention, thus, of developing a more critical understanding of the contribution of AI in a management consultancy setting.

To explore the question of how management consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI Agents and how this influences their job satisfaction and employee experience, a qualitative research design was applied, and data collected through semi-structured interviews. Eight participants were interviewed, including consultants from various firms and backgrounds, and one AI implementation specialist. The interviews were designed by theoretical frameworks that are discussed in the literature study, including the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, and the Employee Experience (EX) framework. Interview data were coded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed, this allowed for the identification of anticipated and emergent themes and offered a rich, multi-faceted representation of consultants' meanings and experiences.

Five main themes arose from the analysis: perceptions of AI as a colleague, trust and ethics, changes in workflow and autonomy, effects on skill acquisition and learning, and expectations for the future. Overall, respondents described Generative AI Agents as valuable tools which worked like junior colleagues. They saw AI to automate tedious, low-level tasks such as writing reports, text translation, and conducting preliminary research. This, in return, enabled consultants to focus more on higher-level, client-related responsibilities. AI was viewed by the majority of the participants as not a threat but just an addition of their capabilities, emphasizing that human virtues such as empathy, creativity, and contextual intelligence cannot be replaced in consulting.

The consultants, however, also had some concerns. There were fears regarding the reliability and openness of AI outcomes with certain participants mentioning the limitation of AI to understand advanced contexts as well as the risk of creating hallucinated or false information. There were ethical concerns as well, primarily surrounding access to sensitive client data, intellectual property, and responsibility for outputs of AI. There was common consent that while AI could assist consultants, final accountability had to rest with human beings. It also emphasized the importance of a Human-In-The-Loop (HITL) model, which means keeping humans involved in automated systems to maintain control, avoid risks, and ensure ethical decision-making.

From the employee experience point of view, AI deployment was generally associated with increased efficiency and reduced cognitive load. The participants reported that Generative AI simplified processes and made work more interesting by allowing them to concentrate on more higher-order work. However, there was also apprehension about too much reliance on AI. Some experts were concerned that if too many tasks were delegated to computers, critical thinking and analysis would atrophy with the lapse of time. This was particularly the case for junior consultants. By taking routine tasks away from humans, AI might deprive young professionals of the basic experiences that were traditionally seen as the requisites for mastering the craft of consulting. This raised some basic questions regarding how consulting firms would need to adapt their training and mentorship models with regard to integrating AI.

Another concern of the findings are the shifts in the skills required for future consultants. Participants emphasized the growing need for what they called "AI fluency" the ability to understand, interact with, and critically evaluate AI systems. This requires not only technical proficiency, but also the skill to counter AI outputs, recognize limitations, and integrate machine-honed intelligence into more integrated human-driven plans. Participants expected that high-performing consultants in the not-so-distant future would be those capable of effectively orchestrating hybrid workflows, balancing human judgment with algorithmic assistance. This reflects a broader trend within the consulting industry, where information provision is moving away from being the central focus, and creating value through human-machine partnerships

The strength of this research lies in making a human-focused contribution to the study of AI adoption within consultancy. Whereas most discussion thus far has revolved around organizational and technical perspectives, this research puts front and center the experiences, fears, and aspirations of the very individuals most directly affected. It offers evidence that AI can really enhance job satisfaction and workers' engagement, but only under certain conditions. For example, if it is used along with human sensitivities towards capabilities, development needs, and ethical imperatives. By breaking down the nuances of the way consultants adopt AI use, the study offers useful recommendations for consulting firms, HR departments, and technology innovators to use AI in a manner that respects and nurtures human capability.

Furthermore, the results have more than consultancy implications. A number of the dynamics revealed in this study such as the need for human surveillance, the risk of skill loss, and the necessity for ethical guarding can also be applied to other knowledge professions including law, health, and finance. In each of these fields, there is growing consciousness that the complete potential of AI will only be achieved if human staff are empowered to engage with these systems in reflective and critical manner. This study is hence an appeal to more complete implementation strategies considering not only technical feasibility and economic efficiency but also human values and professional development.

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# 1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing how many industries operate, and the consultancy industry is no different. With AI's immense potential in processing data, identifying patterns, and making decisions, it offers exciting opportunities to improve how companies work and come up with new ideas. However, this development also raises concerns that influence the experience of consultants and their job satisfaction.

This thesis explores how management consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI Agents and its influence on their employee experience and job satisfaction. As it inquires into the relationship between human potential and AI, the study aims to shed light on what this technology will mean for individuals working in consultancy and potentially other industries.

As more and more organizations begin to leverage AI to remain competitive, it's essential to understand how these changes affect those who are employed in the field. Consultancy is one such profession that relies heavily on critical thinking, human interaction, and specialist knowledge and is thus most likely to be affected by AI. The introduction of Generative AI Agents is reshaping traditional consulting, altering procedures, and reforming how consultants perceive themselves professionally. AI tools can now perform repetitive tasks, analyze large amounts of data, and assist in decision-making. As much as this may make work more effective and increase creativity, it is worrisome that the place of human judgment and interpersonal relationships is diminishing in a career that has long put a high value on these attributes.

It is critical to make sense of these developments for consulting firms to keep on striking a balance between new AI technologies and a focus on the people who work there. It is not just about investing in AI tools, companies must ensure that consultants feel appreciated and well-supported in adapting to this new tech-enabled landscape. This research aims to provide insight into how to introduce AI into the work environment in manners that consider important human factors like job satisfaction, career growth, and overall employee well-being. With specific focus on the experiences of consultants, the thesis joins current discussions about how AI is transforming professional work and advises on how to create work environments where innovation and human potential can flourish together. The implications of this study reach beyond consultancy, with valuable insights for other knowledge professions like law, finance, and healthcare. In all these professions, a recognition of the human implications of adopting AI is key to developing successful strategies that benefit organizations and workers equally.

To determine how management consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI and its effect on their work experience and job satisfaction, this thesis follows a qualitative approach. It comprises semi-structured interviews with consultants from various firms and backgrounds, providing a detailed perspective on these changing dynamics, including an interview with an AI Agent implementation expert to gain insights and discuss the future of this disruptive technology.

# 2. Literature Study

## 2.1. Introduction to Management Consultancy

Understanding the essential characteristics of management consultancy is necessary in order to situate how Generative AI Agents will affect the profession. The variety of consultancy positions, the diversity of service domains, and the client-consultant relational dynamics influence how consultants are likely to perceive technological change. By examining the organization, intention, and practices of management consultancy, we are able to arrive at a deeper understanding of how likely the effects of Generative AI will be on consultants' professional selves, work processes, and value creation.

### 2.1.1. Defining Management Consultancy

Management consultancy is a very dynamic, diverse profession with many varied definitions and concepts. As explained by O'Mahoney and Markham (2013), management consultancy is the practice of organizations creating value for other organizations through the use of specialist knowledge, techniques, and resources to improve business performance. This profession involves the use of independent and objective advice, sometimes combined with implementation, to address organizational issues. Similarly, Kubr (2002) describes management consultancy as "an independent professional advisory service assisting managers and organizations to achieve organizational purposes and objectives by solving management and business problems, identifying and seizing new opportunities, enhancing learning and implementing changes". Both definitions are consistent with the broader objective of enhancing performance and ensuring organizational change in private and public sectors.

The consultancy industry includes a lot of variety, with different business models, services, and sector-specific specializations. This heterogeneity corresponds to the wide range of clients' needs, technological advancements, and evolving markets. O'Mahoney and Markham (2013) identify several key business models in consultancy.

*Table 1 Consultancy Business Models*

| **Type of Consultancy** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| Pure Consultancies | Provide advice only, without implementation |
| Hybrid Consultancies | Offer both advice and implementation services |
| Internal Consultants | Operate within organizations to support internal projects |
| Body-Shoppers | Provide temporary staff for specific consultancy roles |

*Note. Adapted from Management Consultancy (2nd ed.) by O'Mahoney and Markham (2013).*

Although these categories are still helpful, the lines between them have become more blurred. Most of the traditional advisory firms now integrate implementation services, particularly in areas like digital and operational transformations. This is a response to the growing expectation of consultancies to deliver concrete results, leading to hybrid models combining strategic advice with practical execution, as mentioned by Kipping and Clark (2012).

Management Consulting services, as defined by O'Mahoney and Markham (2013) are generally categorized into different areas.

*Table 2 Management Consultancy services*

| **Management Consulting Services** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| Strategy Consulting | Offered by firms such as Boston Consulting Group (BCG), focusing on high-level corporate strategy, mergers and acquisitions, and competitive analysis. |
| Operations Consulting | Emphasizes process improvement, supply chain management, and efficiency enhancements, often aligning with IT systems and automation. |
| IT Consulting | Involves advising businesses on technology integration, cybersecurity, and digital transformation. |
| Human-Resources Consulting | Focuses on talent management, organizational restructuring, and cultural change initiatives. |
| Financial Services Consulting | Supports institutions with risk management, regulatory compliance, investment strategies, and financial performance optimization. |

*Note. Adapted from Management Consultancy (2nd ed.) by O'Mahoney and Markham (2013).*

O'Mahoney and Markham (2013) point out that Management Consultancy is helping organizations make critical decisions and effecting major change. They suggest companies need to innovate, illuminate strategic choice, and develop intelligent systems which will revolutionize firms. In addition to influencing company policy, their expertise can bring teams together to develop in a changing environment. O'Mahoney and Markham (2013) also mention that innovations are initiated by consultants where they play a role of knowledge brokers through which helpful knowledge and skills in one sector may be transferred to another. In addition, consultants play the role of sources of credible information through which information on issues is provided at times where there is need for quick but quality decisions. According to Eisenhardt (1989), such an outside advisor would make faster decisions and yet wiser. Consultants help firms make strategic decisions in periods of unpredictability by offering an outside perspective on the direction of the market and technology developments.

Apart from knowledge and innovation transfer, management consultants also play a role as standard-setters in the construction and legitimation of business practices and management fashion (Canato & Giangreco, 2011). Through their influence, some management ideas become trendy, sometimes irrespective of whether they have been tested for efficiency, leading to the institutionalization of management fashion (Canato & Giangreco, 2011). Moreover, consultants also typically serve as legitimizers of organizational choices, introducing external justification that allows managers to legitimize strategic choices and provide stakeholder support. As the practice further evolves, incorporating technological, market, and shifting client-related advancements, its influence on organizations and management practices will certainly remain significant, under critical examination and extension to new dilemmas (Sturdy, 2011).

**Strategy Consulting**

One of the key areas within management consulting is strategy consulting. This specialization focuses on providing advice to organizations about important strategic issues such as growth, market positioning, mergers and acquisitions, and maintaining a competitive edge (Lundgren & Blom, 2009). Unlike other management consultants who might concentrate on improving operations, restructuring finances, or implementing technology, strategy consultants are primarily concerned with guiding the long-term direction of companies and helping them adapt to changing environments (Delany, 1995).

Due to the strategic nature of their work, these consultants frequently collaborate with top executives, board members, and other senior leaders. They offer insights that significantly influence corporate strategy at a high level (Lundgren & Blom, 2009).

In addition to offering advice, strategy consultants also play a crucial role in identifying organizational challenges, aiding decision-making among executives, and supporting the execution of strategic initiatives. This shift in their role has blurred the lines between creating strategies and putting them into action. Today's strategy consultants are expected to possess both analytical abilities and practical skills to implement strategies effectively within organizations (Delany, 1995).

**Operations Consulting**

Operations consulting is a specialized field where experts provide guidance to organizations on how to design, implement, and enhance their operational processes. Radnor and O'Mahoney (2013) state that the goal is to improve efficiency, boost productivity, and deliver better services. Consultants in this area often use established principles of operations management, like Lean thinking, Six Sigma, and business process reengineering (BPR), to tackle inefficiencies, simplify workflows, and ensure that operational strategies align with the overall goals of the organization (Radnor & O'Mahoney, 2013).

These consultants work across various sectors, including both public and private organizations, adapting techniques that were originally developed for manufacturing to suit service-oriented and knowledge-intensive environments (Brennan, 2006).

**IT Consulting**

IT consulting is the practice of advising clients on how to utilize information technology (IT) in the most optimal way to make their business processes more efficient, resolve problems, and achieve strategic objectives (Bode, Daneva, & Sinderen, 2022; Kumar, Grover, Kumar, & Pani, 2017). It is a highly interlinked and knowledge-based profession depending on the skill of the consultants and on the collaborative involvement of clients (Bode et al., 2022). IT consulting encompasses a broad range of services, including but not limited to IT training, auditing, project management, knowledge transfer, IT economics, security, competitiveness, and application development (Kumar et al., 2017).

The IT consulting services have undergone changes with digitalization, introducing new aspects to the consulting services in the shape of virtualization, platform-based consulting, and algorithmic consulting (Bode et al., 2022). These are changing the classical one-to-one consulting to digital and automated services, allowing for greater scalability and efficiency (Bode et al., 2022). For instance, the ARIS eConsulting Store and McKinsey Solutions show how IT consulting firms are leveraging technology to provide standardized, reusable, and customizable consulting assets (Bode et al., 2022).

This field will need to address the growing demand for hybrid-competent consultants who have technical competence and business awareness. Lastly, IT consulting is a multidisciplinary, dynamic profession that continues to evolve with technology advances (Bode et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2017).

**Human Resources Consulting**

HR consulting is a specialized profession with a focus on providing professional guidance and solutions for enhancing the human resource (HR) function of an organization. HR Consulting focuses on aligning HR plans and business objectives and increasing organizational performance (Hunter, 1999; Vosburgh, 2007). Its activities include standard HR tasks, like payroll and compliance, along with strategic initiatives, like talent management and organizational change (Vosburgh, 2007).

The work of HR consulting has evolved over time, reflecting greater trends in the HR profession. Previously, HR was exclusively focused on compliance and administrative tasks. Today, modern HR consultants have to deal with more complex matters such as talent deficits, the integration of emerging technologies, and managing a global workforce (Vosburgh, 2007). Vosburgh (2007) comments that HR has to transform itself into something that could be described as an "internal consulting organization," where it should have strong business insight, data-based decision-making, and developing trusted advisor relationships with business leaders. Hunter (1999) also emphasizes the necessity for HR consultants to offer solutions that offer measurable business value, like cost savings or generating revenue, generally through technology implementations, like eHR systems, to improve processes. Finally, HR consulting is an ever-changing profession that combines traditional HR functions with strategic management in business.

**Financial Services Consulting**

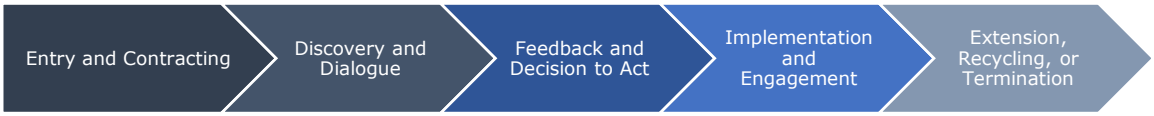
Financial services consultancy involves providing expert advice to individuals and families regarding their finances. It could cover all manner of issues, including money management, investment planning, insurance and risk management, tax planning and retirement planning (Pilote, Boulianne, & Magnan, 2024). Consultants may work in either manner where the client has the final word, or they can be responsible for implementing financial strategies on behalf of the client (Pilote et al., 2024). As financial products continue to become increasingly complex, the rules shift, and the consumer becomes more responsible for their finances, there are increasingly people seeking assistance from financial advisors (Pilote et al., 2024).

This is a particularly important trend for those who cannot understand money concepts or lack the capacity to work on their finances themselves. According to Stolper and Walter (2017), financial guidance is required in helping individuals to expand or substitute their money knowledge, especially when they face complex money choices and are unable to compare different products or services effectively.

### 2.1.2. The Management Consultancy Workflow

The management consultancy workflow has a variety of phases, as shown in Figure 1. It is an interactive and orderly procedure among consultant-client activities executed to simultaneously address organizational issues, build strategy, and make changes. Far from a linear or technical process, consulting is an energetic, relational, and situation-specific practice that requires both analytical and people skills (Block, 2000; Christensen & Klyver, 2006).

*Figure 1 The Consultancy Workflow Phases*




*Note. Data adapted from Block (2000) & Christensen and Klyver (2006).*

**Entry and Contracting**

The start of any consulting relationship is determining in establishing the platform for success. The client and the consultant should here determine if they are compatible enough to have a working relationship (Block, 2000). They should both clarify expectations by delineating their roles and what they wish to achieve. This may involve creating an agreement, either formal or informal, that clarifies their goals and helps build trust and comprehension among them (Block, 2000). A well-negotiated agreement is the first step in ensuring everyone is on the same page and committed to the process.

**Discovery and Dialogue**

Once the foundation is set, exploration becomes the next step. Here, the consultant gathers helpful information to acquaint himself further with the organization (Block, 2000). This involves talking to

people, observing the work arena, and reading relevant documents. The client and consultant together embark on a journey of discovery to determine whether there are underlying problems that may be influencing performance. As Christensen and Klyver (2006) note, in small and medium-sized enterprises, this discovery process must respect the business owner's values because these values can significantly influence how the organization operates.

**Feedback and Decision to Act**

After gathering information, the consultant presents the findings to the client. It is a stage that requires honest and constructive criticism (Christensen & Klyver, 2006). Consultants must address any resistance or discomfort that may arise from the findings because clients may find themselves challenged or threatened. But effective consultants see resistance as a normal part of the change process and interpret it as a request for deeper conversations. The goal, ultimately, is to allow the clients to make the sound decision on what next step they need to take. As Christensen and Klyver (2006) put it, feedback at this juncture can either be an asset or a liability for the consultant-client relationship, since sound feedback has a tendency to reinforce confidence and commitment.

**Implementation and Engagement**

Once the decisions have been made, it's then a question of implementing the solutions agreed. This can be a question of restructuring organizational design, developing staff, reengineering processes, or company culture. Consultants have a range of approaches to implementing these solutions; some will be takeover in nature, and some will be process-based, but will operate in conjunction with the client (Christensen & Klyver, 2006). Its implementation necessitates not just the introduction of the changes but also the employees' participation to trigger commitment, ownership, and behavioral change of the company. As Block (2000) says, the consultants must facilitate learning rather than prescribe solutions.

**Extension, Recycling, or Termination**

Finally, the consulting relationship has come to a phase where results are being measured. This involves testing the success of the intervention and glancing over what has been achieved. Should the results be positive, then the client may decide to pursue their next chances with the consultant (Christensen & Klyver, 2006). Sometimes there may need to be some underlying problems that surface, which require referring back to earlier phases of the consulting process. If initial work is concluded, the relationship can be brought to a conclusion, enabling both sides to review, learn, and capitalize on their achievements (Christensen & Klyver, 2006). Block (2000) is adamant that good consultants seek to leave clients stronger than when they initially started, with not only new systems but also increased self-knowledge and problem-solving skills.

**The Nature of Consulting**

Consulting is, in effect, a collaboration where both the client and the consultant are engaged actively in developing the results. The success of such collaboration is dependent on the expertise and capabilities of the consultant and the inclination of the client to venture into open and reflective dialogue (Block, 2000). Contextual factors such as organizational culture and history can even

influence this relationship. As Sturdy (1997) illustrates, consulting can be an "insecure business" characterized by uncertainty and complicated power relations. Consultants thus need to balance credibility with vulnerability as they navigate these sensitivities. Block (2000) suggests that good consulting is built on authenticity, openness, and ethical collaboration. Instead of exercising control, consultants build collaboration and respect in return, such that consulting is a human-centered, change-making practice.

## 2.2. Digital Transformation of the Workplace

The application of digital technologies such as AI, cloud computing, automation, and IoT has also changed the way organizations conduct business, learn, and compete (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016; Trenerry et al., 2021). These technologies have created networked, data-driven workspaces that facilitate productivity, communication, and innovation but pose challenges such as shifting roles, the need to reskill constantly, and concerns over employee wellbeing (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016; Trenerry et al., 2021).

Hybrid work and AI-enabled automation are redefining office space, emphasizing human capabilities like creativity, emotional intelligence, and teamwork (Worktech Academy, 2025). The shift from task-oriented to relationship-oriented work highlights the growing significance of profound human relationships in digitally enabled environments. It also eliminated the differentiation between physical and virtual workplaces, redesigned conventional organizational structures (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). The "digital everywhere" trend facilitates loose collaboration beyond formal settings, and the "vibrancy metric" aims to measure workplace engagement through an equilibrium between individual focus and collaboration (Worktech Academy, 2025).

While it enhanced efficiency, automation has been displacing many middle-skill occupations, especially in manufacturing and administration. Cascio and Montealegre (2016) highlight HR and organizational psychologists' role in minimizing these effects by upskilling and reskilling workers. Similarly, risks undermining the potential for a "lost generation" of young workers to enter first jobs with insufficient AI skills and upskilling (Worktech Academy, 2025). Table 3 summarizes these contrasting dimensions in critical areas of workplace dynamics.

*Table 3 Benefits and Challenges of Workplace Digitalisation*

| **Dimension** | **Benefits** | **Challenges** |
|---|---|---|
| Productivity & Innovation | Enhanced operational efficiency: faster innovation cycles | Risk of over-automation leading to job displacement |
| Work Structure | Hyrbid work enables flexibility and autonomy | Blurred boundaries between work and personal life; increased digital fatigue |
| Skills & Workforce Dynamics | Demand for creativity, emotional intelligence, collaboration | Continuous need for upskilling and digital literacy; risk of workforce polarization |
| Technology Integration | Data-driven decisions improve accuracy and strategic agility | Complexity in managing interconnected systems; security and privacy concerns |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Well-being & Engagement | Introduction of ergonomic design, biophilic spaces, and digital detox zones | Performance pressure; emotional toll of constant connectivity |

*Note. Data adapted from The World of Work in 2025 report by Worktech Academy (2025).*

### 2.2.1. Hybrid-Work and Return to Office (RTO)

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly accelerated the digitization of the globe's workplace, deranging traditional work habits and promoting hybrid work arrangements. Hybrid work, blending remote and in-office work, is flexible and responsive in meeting both organizational needs and employees' wants. In a typical hybrid setup, employees alternate between remote and in-office workdays, usually based on task requirements (Bloom, Han, & Liang, 2023). For example, collaboration-based activities such as team meetings would be better suited for in-office days, whereas individual tasks such as coding or writing can be performed better remotely (Bloom et al., 2023; Vyas, 2022).

Some of the most notable advantages of hybrid work for workers and organizations are noted by Vyas (2022) as follows:

- Better work-life balance (WLB): Employees enjoy greater flexibility in managing personal and work activities, with work-from-home days saving time through reduced commuting. The time saved can be reserved for self-care or family (Bloom et al., 2023).
- Job satisfaction and reduced attrition: Bloom et al. (2023) found a 33% reduction in turnover in a randomized experiment, demonstrating hybrid work's potential to retain workers.
- Cost savings and productivity boost: Firms have reduced office costs and increased productivity on remote workdays.

Nevertheless, hybrid work is not without its difficulties:

- Maintaining productivity and collaboration: While workers register higher productivity working from home, managers worry about the impact reduced face-to-face interaction will have on innovation (Bloom et al., 2023).
- Risk of burnout: Boundaries between life and work are erased, leading to burnout when workers are required to be digitally available after work (Vyas, 2022).
- Disparity among job types: Hybrid models benefit white-collar employees, while blue-collar and manual workers have fewer flexibility options and health safety measures (Vyas, 2022).

**The Return to Office (RTO) Transition**

The shift back from remote to hybrid or in-office work setups post-pandemic has been a necessary change for businesses worldwide. It has had a significant impact on productivity, employee engagement, and firm performance (Bogosian & Byrd-Poller, 2023). Understanding the forces at work within workforce needs and organizational goals is crucial to orchestrating this transition. Bogosian and Byrd-Poller (2023) argue that effective RTO policies must balance operational effectiveness with employee welfare to deliver a robust and responsive workplace. Gibson, Gilson,

Griffith, and O'Neill (2023) point out that rigid RTO mandates can be counterproductive because they do not take into account changing expectations and differing needs among contemporary workers. Post-pandemic studies, such as Wang et al. (2021) in China, confirm high demand for hybrid work models:

- 69% of knowledge workers expressed a preference for the hybrid model citing increased flexibility and productivity.
- Hybrid staff reported higher job satisfaction compared to full remote or office-based work because the model allowed for improved work-life balance but still allowed for access to office infrastructure for collaboration and networking.

In line with this, Gibson et al. (2023) argue that organizations should not view hybrid work as a disruption but as an opportunity to reimagine organizational culture and collaboration through adaptive, deliberate practices.

Bogosian and Byrd-Poller (2023) highlight that employee engagement and commitment are enhanced when workers feel that their opinions count in decision-making at their workplaces. Directives from above that pay no attention to employee preference, on the other hand, can lead to lower job satisfaction, greater turnover and less organizational unity.

Leadership best practices are integrating employee feedback into RTO policy, including phased return plans and maintaining flexibility to accommodate diverse work demands Gibson et al. (2023) highlights that leaders can build collaboration by making psychological safety possible, encouraging familiarity between co-workers and organizing structured virtual engagements.

Also, hybrid arrangements, such as quarterly face-to-face "leader days" or occasional team-building days, can produce relational and trust-producing benefits typically associated with face-to-face work, without sacrificing the autonomy and flexibility that employees prefer.

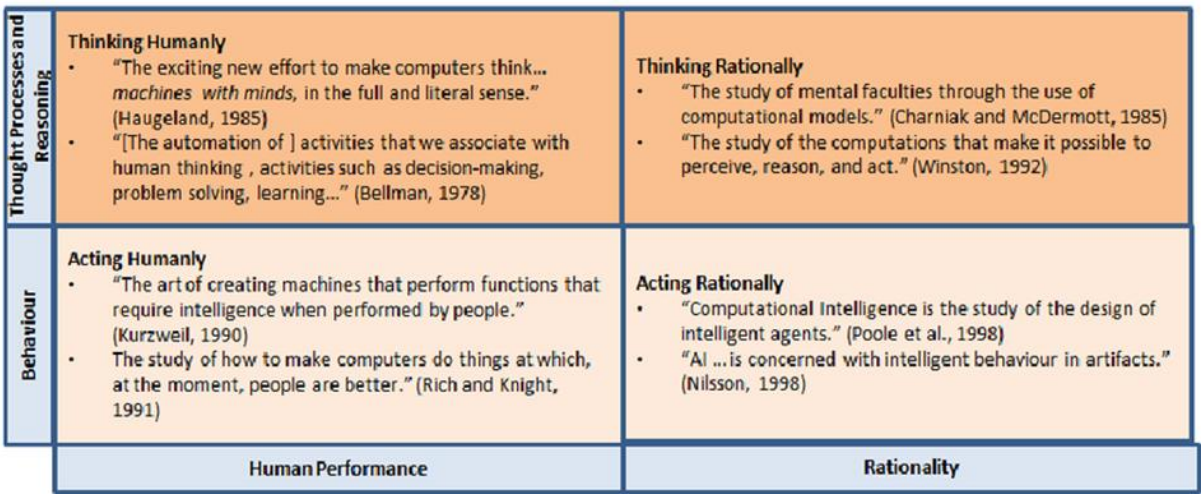
## 2.3. The Introduction of Generative AI Agents

The digital transformation of the workplace not only changes organizational structures and employee experiences but also serves as a foundation pillar to blend in advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). As organizations adopt AI-driven systems to make optimal decisions, automate routine processes, and personalize employee experiences, distinctions between human and machine functions remain eroding as mentioned by Suleyman and Bhaskar (2023). This convergence needs more awareness of the potential, constraints, and evolving shapes of AI, particularly as it moves from use cases to more autonomous, generative systems. Recognizing the trajectory of AI is central to understanding how it enables today's workplace innovation and foresees tomorrow's disruption. Hence, an understanding of AI, its definitions, evolution over time, and future paradigms is vital to leading the next generation of digital workplace transformation (Russell & Norvig, 2016; Suleyman & Bhaskar, 2023)

### 2.3.1. Understanding AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an innovative force reshaping societies, industries, and the international economy. Suleyman and Bhaskar (2023) envision AI as computer programs with the potential to tackle tasks conventionally involving human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, and decision-making. The field stretches from narrow applications to the ambitious project of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), which would be superior to human capacity in all cognitive faculties. AI comprehension is achieved by distinguishing its methods in terms of reasoning processes and behavioral methods. Russell and Norvig (2016) categorize AI into four paradigms as shown in Figure 2.

*Figure 2 AI Four Paradigms*




*Note. Picture reprinted from Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach. by Russell and Norvig (2016, p. 2, Figure 1.1)*

The evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) from the time it began in the mid-20th century up to future expected developments. It begins with the introduction of Early AI in the 1950s, where the

first theories and computer models were developed as put by Russell and Norvig (2016). This was succeeded by the development of Symbolic Artificial Intelligence in the 1970s, focusing on replicating aspects of human intelligence. The 1990s witnessed the development of Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) with the development of systems capable of performing specific tasks with high skill. Subsequent developments include Generative AI, introduced in 2014 which enables machines to create new content, and Agentic AI, introduced in 2023 in which systems possess the capability of making independent choices with minimal human involvement (Suleyman & Bhaskar, 2023). Looking forward, the potential success of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) suggests a revolutionary transformation, in which AI systems would be capable of matching or exceeding human intelligence in all domains (Russell & Norvig, 2016).

**Early AI**

The history of artificial intelligence (AI) can be traced back to mid-20th century explorations into the nature of intelligence and the possibility of replicating it in machines. Turing (1950) reformulated the question "Can machines think? " as a practical challenge, can a machine mimic human answers well enough to fool a human conversational partner? This thought experiment, later named the Turing Test, provided a behavioral criteria for intelligence in terms of linguistic interaction. Without resorting to indefinite philosophical characterizations, Turing (1950) suggested that a digital computer, as a universal machine, would be capable of imitating intelligent behavior.

The formal beginning of AI as a research field commenced with the 1956 Dartmouth Summer Research Project (McCarthy, Minsky, Rochester, & Shannon, 2006). The proposal stated that some aspects of intelligence such as learning, reasoning, and language can be defined clearly enough to be replicated by machines Project (McCarthy et al., 2006). The project suggested a research agenda consisting of, language processing, abstraction, self-improvement, and neural networks.

These early ideas were refined into practical implementations with logic-based agents, as later presented in classic texts. Russell and Norvig (2016) explained that early AI programs used formal logic and inference for knowledge representation and manipulation. These knowledge-based agents were able to make conclusions and act upon symbolic reasoning, setting the foundations for future developments in automated decision-making.

**Symbolic Artificial Intelligence**

Symbolic Artificial Intelligence, also known as traditional AI or GOFAI (Good Old-Fashioned Artificial Intelligence), is a paradigm of symbolic manipulation and logic-based representation of knowledge. Its intellectual heritage is formal logic and mid-century computational theory, and it was greatly influenced by the work of Newell and Simon (1976).

Symbolic AI works by symbolically representing knowledge and reasoning from it through logical rules that simulate human cognition. A classic example is the programming language LISP, initially developed in the late 1950s (Newell & Simon, 1976). LISP supported list processing, a form of symbolic manipulation used to store and retrieve structured information. These mechanisms are employed to perform activities such as: search, inference and problem-solving, by analyzing

prospective symbolic settings in so-called "heuristic search" (Newell & Simon, 1976). Symbolic AI paradigm also plays a significant function in modeling cognitive human behavior.

Its principles have been integrated into theories of psychological information processing (Newell & Simon, 1976). Cognitive models constructed under this framework, particularly problem-solving and memory, have significantly shaped modern cognitive psychology. Such models simulate human thinking by engaging computers in simulating observable behavior through symbol manipulation, thus establishing a link between AI and psychology, according to Newell and Simon (1976).

**Artificial Narrow Intelligence**

Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) are systems that are designed to operate in tightly controlled parameters and exhibit high performance in domains such as language processing, image recognition, recommendation systems, and robot automation. These systems are trained or programmed with special data sets tailored to their domain of operation. As noted by Babu and Banana (2024), ANI lacks self-awareness, consciousness, and real understanding but instead operates on given rules and algorithms. While generally appearing intelligent, these computers are not flexible or generalizable in the way that is customary for human thought (Babu & Banana, 2024).

For example, virtual personal assistants such as Siri and Alexa, while capable of processing and answering well-defined questions such as weather or reminders, falter with abstract or emotional questions. Their inability to learn outside what is programmed into their training is a concretization of the inherent limitation of ANI, that it cannot perform something outside the domain of training explained by Babu and Banana (2024).

The tools forming ANI are multifarious and a representation of its technical nature, these can be viewed within the Table 4 provided by Babu and Banana (2024).

*Table 4 Tools Constituting ANI*

| **Tool** | **Function** |
|---|---|
| Machine Learning Models | Trained on labeled datasets to identify patterns and make predictions |
| Natural Language Processing (NLP) | Analyzes and generates human language |
| Computer Vision | Interprets visual data through pixel analysis and object recognition |
| Speech Recognition Systems | Converts spoken language into textual data |
| Robotic Automation systems | Executes pre-programmed mechanical tasks |

*Note. Data adapted from A Study On Narrow Artificial Intelligence – An Overview, by Babu and Banana (2024)*

On a theoretical level, Russell and Norvig (2016) point out the limitations of existing AI systems, such as ANI, to mimic the dynamic, knowledge-based reasoning observed in human beings. Logical

agents, a theoretical framework outlined in their publication, are AI systems that reason with information through a rigid knowledge base, controlled by formal logic. These agents point to the inflexibility of rule-based reasoning and the need for more generalized mechanisms for learning, which ANI does not possess. They assert that smart action in ANI does not arise as a result of understanding but rather through the manipulation of symbols and pre-coded inference rules within closed domains (Russell & Norvig, 2016).

Virtual personal assistants like Siri and Alexa, for instance, demonstrate ANI's reliance on pre-coded rules and inability to perform intricate or emotionally nuanced activities. Generative AI agents, however, enhance artificial intelligence capability using intricate deep learning architectures like Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) and Large Language Models (LLMs) to create new content and perform multi-step operations (Feuerriegel, Hartmann, Janiesch, & Zschech, 2024). These agents, which are powered by foundation models, represent a step towards autonomous, action-performing AI systems capable of understanding context and conducting complex tasks, hence addressing some of the limitations inherent in ANI's rule-based strict processing (Poole & Mackworth, 2023; Yee, Chui, & Roberts, 2024)

### 2.3.2. Generative AI Agents: Foundations and Characteristics

**Generative AI**

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computational methods enabling machines to generate new, valuable content. For example, text, images, sound, and code using learning from collections of data, as mentioned by Feuerriegel et al. (2024). As opposed to common AI models, which are mostly created for prediction and classification, Generative AI systems utilize complex deep learning models to generate new output mirroring human creativity and reasonableness (Chen, Wu, & Zhao, 2023).

These architectures include:

- Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs)
- Large Language Models (LLMs)

A defining feature of Generative AI, as discussed by Yee et al. (2024), is its use of foundation models, large-scale neural networks trained on diverse and extensive datasets. These models, including OpenAI’s GPT-4 and Google’s Bard, rely on billions of parameters to process information and generate human-like text responses (Feuerriegel et al., 2024).

Due to ongoing advancements in natural language processing (NLP) and deep learning, these models are increasingly capable of understanding linguistic context, making inferences and producing well-formed and contextually appropriate outputs (Chen et al., 2023). These abilities make Generative AI very powerful in areas like content creation, code generation, and decision-making support.

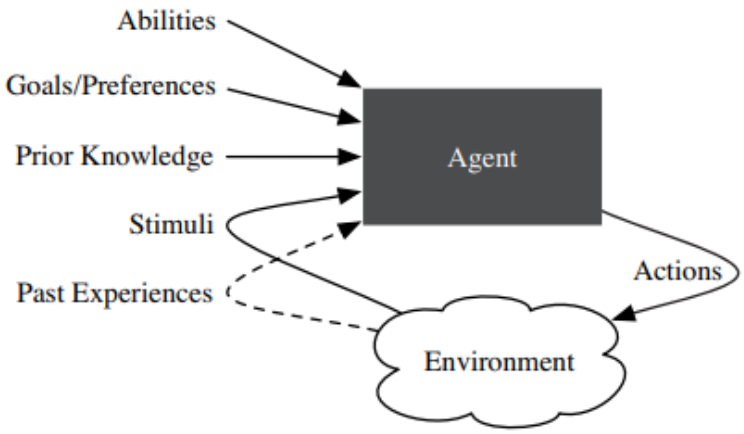
Stacking on top of these foundations, the Generative AI future is in AI agents systems that extend beyond content creation as passive to actively performing complex, multi-step functions. As Yee et al. (2024) note, AI agents leverage foundation models to plan autonomously, coordinate, and

execute in digital realms, acting as "virtual coworkers" that can carry out functions such as loan origination, software modernization, and advertising campaigns.

**Generative AI Agents**

AI Agents represent the next step for artificial intelligence beyond static information-processing systems to autonomous, action-taking agents. Their status as agents is the ability to perceive environments, reason, and take goal-directed actions and display properties that satisfy basic definitions of computational agents as defined by Poole and Mackworth (2023). They are unlike the classic AI tools, which were limited to reacting responses, in that they leverage foundation models to implement sophisticated, multi-step workflows in digital environments.

*Figure 3 An Agent Interacting with an environment*




*Note. Figure reprinted from Artificial Intelligence: Foundations of Computational Agents by Poole and Mackworth (2023)*

Poole and Mackworth (2023), affirm that by making use of natural language processing (NLP), agentic systems can reinterpret user commands into formal plans, distribute subtasks to special-purpose subagents and adapt dynamically to shifting aims and user feedback. Notably, these capabilities function without the need for rigid, rule-based programming.

Multimodal, orchestrated architectures have more advanced Agentic AI. These are characterized by five interlinking capacities. For example: Autonomy, goal-directed behavior, environmental interactivity, adaptive learning and workflow orchestration (PWC, 2025). These combined capabilities enable Agentic AI to act independently, optimize resources, iteratively learn from feedback, and cooperate in complex, multi-agent systems. The primary functional capacities of AI Agents based on Yee et al. (2024) are as follows.

- Natural Language Understanding and Execution: Converts human spoken commands into executing tasks without the need for hardcoded rules or programming.
- Recursive Task Decomposition: Breaks down intricate tasks into simpler subtasks, outsources them to sub-agents, and refines outputs with iterative enhancements.

- Multi-Modal Capabilities: Runs on multiple data types (text, speech, video, structured data), making it suitable for a wide range of applications ranging from content generation to business planning.
- Independent Decision-Making and Tool Use: Integrates with external tools, APIs, and databases to autonomously retrieve data, process information, and perform actions.
- Human and Other Agent Collaboration: Functions as a smart assistant that communicates with users and other AI agents, enabling task coordination and productivity through natural interaction.

According to Poole and Mackworth (2023), computational autonomy falls on a spectrum, depending on agents' ability to: Perceive their environment, decide and act in order to achieve goals. AI agents, especially those built on the foundation of large foundation models, fall on the higher side of the spectrum since they can perform complex instructions, plan processes, and accomplish tasks without human intervention. As Yee et al. (2024) explain, these agents can divide tasks into subtasks, allocate subtasks to subagents and modulate outputs based on feedback or new inputs. They are able to communicate over digital platforms, leverage APIs, and collaborate with other agents or humans and demonstrate high functional independence.

Despite the fact that the terms AI Agents and Agentic AI are used interchangeably at times, they refer to distinct levels of intelligence, autonomy, and capability. AI Agents, as described by Poole and Mackworth (2023), are computer programs that sense and act in their worlds to achieve stated goals. They can range from reactive systems following strict rules to deliberative agents capable of reasoning and planning logically. But they tend to be narrow in function, limited to a small set of tasks, and dependent on explicit user constraints or input. Operating atop root agent frameworks, Generative AI Agents leverage foundation models to achieve record levels of autonomy and creativity. As Table 5 reveals, such agentic systems quantitatively differ from earlier AI agents and also the general Agentic AI paradigm by Poole and Mackworth (2023), Loucks, Crossan, Sarer, and Widener (2024) and Tiwari (2025):

*Table 5 AI Agent Capabilities*

| **Feature** | **AI Agents** | **Generative AI Agents** | **Agentic AI** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Core Architecture | Rule-Based Systems | LLM-Powered | Multi-Agent ecosystems |
| Autonomy level | Low-Moderate | Medium-High | High-Full strategic autonomy |
| Learning mechanism | Supervised training | Continuous adaptation | Meta-learning |
| Output Type | Predefined | Novel generation | Emergent Solutions |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Human Oversights | Required | Minimal | Optional |

*Note. Data adapted from Poole and Mackworth (2023), Loucks et al., (2024) and Tiwari (2025).*

Tiwari (2025) presents a framework to assess the varying degrees of AI autonomy based on OpenAI's agentic levels, ranging from basic task execution to strategic decision-making:

*Table 6 Agentic Autonomy Levels*

| Level | Autonomy | Capabilities | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1-2** | Basic Task Execution | Perform narrow, predefined tasks with minimal autonomy | Drafting emails, generating code snippets, summarizing documents. |
| **3** | Multi-Step Workflows | Coordinate complex workflows across tools/systems with moderate autonomy. | Optimizing ad campaigns, managing customer support pipelines. |
| **4-5** | Strategic Partnership | Make high-impact decisions, manage resources, and act as autonomous collaborators. | Overseeing departments, balancing budgets, negotiating contracts. |

*Note. Data adopted from The Rise Of The One-Person Unicorn: How AI Agents Are Redefining Entrepreneurship, by Tiwari (2025)*

Tiwari (2025) adds that most Generative AI Agents are currently at Levels 2-3 and are doing a good job in structured workflows such as customer service and marketing automation. However, the trend is for greater autonomy, with agents evolving into strategic collaborators. This path is summarized in what Tiwari (2025) describes as the emergence of the "one-person unicorn" where individual entrepreneurs leverage AI agents to replace entire teams, outsourcing tasks such as coding, operations, and content creation to automated programs.

An example of this is in knowledge management within enterprises, where SharePoint agents from Microsoft (Microsoft, 2025) represent another practical example of the application of Generative AI agent technology. These knowledge-based agents, founded upon organizational document repositories, have proven particularly effective for applications in legal compliance. One documented implementation reduced the time to resolve regulatory inquiries by a factor of 2.97 compared to the

utilization of traditional search methods while imposing strict document access permissions and sensitivity policies (Microsoft, 2025). The potential of the system to synthesize data from a number of policy documents and generate compliant recommendations illustrates the potential of Generative AI Agents to enhance organizational productivity while operating within well-defined governance frameworks.

Despite growing competencies, however, such autonomy is not absolute. As Yee et al. (2024) note, human-in-the-loop mechanisms remain essential to validate outputs, ensure fairness and avoid dangers such as bias or errors. Tiwari (2025) agrees with this caution by emphasizing residual issues concerning accountability, regulation, and ethical oversight. Such issues refer to the imperative of sustained human control even as AI agents advance toward greater degrees of independence and agency in organizational environments.

### 2.3.3. Artificial General Intelligence

The future of AI is hinted by the introduction of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) systems with general, human-like mental abilities that generalize over (Everitt, Lea, & Hutter, 2018; Goertzel, 2014; Sonko, Adewusi, Obi, Onwusinkwue, & Atadoga, 2024). In contrast to narrow AI, task-specific, AGI strives for versatile, autonomous problem-solving across a broad spectrum of domains (Goertzel, 2014; Sonko et al., 2024). It is widely seen as an "north star" in AI development, which is expected to exceed its original design intentions (Morris et al., 2024).

Projections differ about when AGI will come, some believe recent large language models show early signs of AGI, while others foresee it a decade or sometime this century (Everitt et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2024). Even a single prediction sees AGI in 2029 in line with technological trends (Morris et al., 2024).

The impact of AGI could be a revolution, changing sectors like health, transportation, and learning through automation, innovation, and productivity gain (Morris et al., 2024; Sonko et al., 2024). AGI could also solve global issues like climate change and pandemics through complex analysis and problem-solving (Sonko et al., 2024). Economically, AGI would have the potential for widespread job displacement and geopolitical benefits, although its development is subject to formidable technical challenges (Morris et al., 2024; Sonko et al., 2024).

*Table 7 Technical Challenges of AGI*

| **Challenge Area** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| Robust Learning Algorithms | Learning across diverse domains with minimal data |
| Transfer Learning | Applying knowledge across tasks and contexts |
| Adaptability | Adjusting to novel situations and environments |

| | |
|---|---|
| Metacognitive Abilities | Self-assessment, task-switching, and knowing when to seek human input |
| Evaluation Metrics | Defining clear tasks/environments to measure AGI progress |

*Note. Data adapted from Morris et al. (2024) and Sonko et al. (2024).*

It is also challenging to specify right tasks and settings for measuring progress to AGI, but measures of the achievement of human-level AGI could be more specified than for measuring intermediate progress (Adams et al., 2012; Goertzel, 2014).

Some researchers indicate that AGI may represent catastrophic or even existential threats, such as deception, manipulation, acquisition of resources, agentic action, and recursive self-improvement (Everitt et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2024; Persson & Hedlund, 2021). Nevertheless, others warn against overemphasizing far-off, fanciful dangers and instead indicate the need to consider current decisions to influence the future of AI (Persson & Hedlund, 2021).

Risk management of AGI requires interdisciplinarity collaboration by technologists, ethicists, policymakers, and the public to develop responsible frameworks (Sonko et al., 2024). This encompasses instilling ethical standards throughout the entire development process and ethical consciousness among developers.

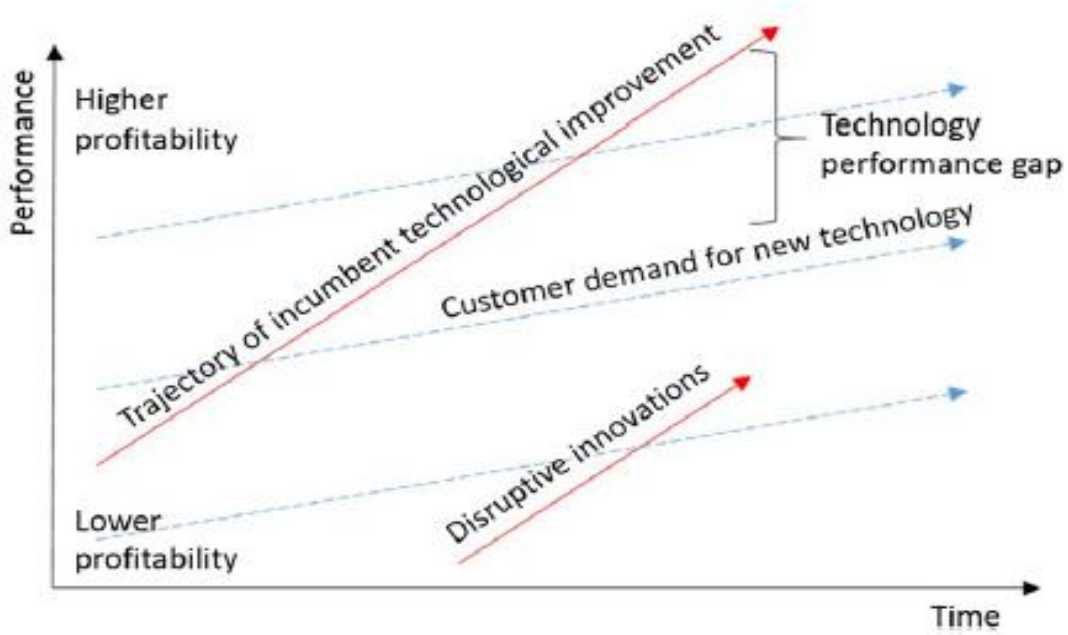
AGI safety and alignment with human values need openness, ethical regulation, and proactive action like early risk assessment and robust control systems. Interruptibility features, for example, allow human intervention at crucial junctures (Orseau & Armstrong, 2016). Human-centric design and well-established milestones for AGI capability equivalent to autonomous driving capability can also enable responsible innovation (Morris et al., 2024; Sonko et al., 2024).

## 2.4. AI's Disruption and Reinvention of Consultancy

### 2.4.1. AI as a Disruptive Force

Disruptive innovation, in the sense of how Christensen conceived it around the mid-1990s, is a process through which a smaller, less resource-scarce company succeeds in disrupting incumbent companies by initially attacking under-served market segments and later expanding up-market (Christensen, Raynor, & McDonald, 2015). This process has served to remake industries by introducing new technologies or business models that are not perceived by incumbents or are structurally incapable of doing. Christensen, McDonald, Altman, and Palmer (2018) explain that, over time, disruptive theory has evolved to be broadened from a descriptive theory based on empirical evidence such as the disk-drive business to a more generalized explanatory theory applicable across various industries, including healthcare, education, and digital services.

*Figure 4 Model of Disruptive Innovation*




*Note. Picture reprinted from Disruptive Innovation: An Intellectuel History and Directions for Future Research by Christensen et al. (2018)*

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a good example of an innovative disruptive technology that is revolutionizing the way industries function. For Păvăloaia and Necula (2023), AI is not only one of the most notable disruptive technologies but also one that crosses over with others, including the Internet of Things (IoT) and blockchain to provide synergistic disruptions in fields such as healthcare, finance, education, and manufacturing. The disruptive power of AI lies in its capability to:

- Automate decision-making
- Optimize complex processes
- Develop novel forms of interaction between users and systems

This dual ability to reduce costs and enhance performance is best aligned with Christensen's disruptive innovation theory, particularly when AI is applied in less served or non-consuming market niches.

### 2.4.2. AI's Disruption of White-Collar Jobs

White-collar jobs, traditionally placed in finance, law, health, and technology, are characterized by mental, administrative, and knowledge work, typically performed in offices and requiring formal training as well as analytical thinking (Georgieff & Hyee, 2022; Peralta, 2024). White-collar jobs used to be relatively resistant to automation since they relied on complex, non-algorithmic mental processes.

This assumption is, however, being proved wrong. Frey and Osborne (2017) assert that recent advances in the field of artificial intelligence, with regard to machine learning and big data analysis, have made it increasingly easier to automate basic white-collar tasks. Legal research, financial modeling, and even certain aspects of medical diagnosis are now under threat from computerization. This transformation is one manifestation of a broader trend in labor market polarization: whereas AI potentially benefits high-skill, innovative, or strategic jobs, routine cognitive jobs, especially middle-level ones, are becoming more and more vulnerable to displacement.

Peralta (2024) also contributes that even those industries considered resistant to automation, such as finance, already experience a reduction in job opportunities. This, however, brings a counterintuitive perspective: AI may democratize white-collar work access by diminishing emphasis on educational credentials. With AI-driven technology, individuals lacking graduate degrees can qualify to do jobs that were previously reserved for more experienced professionals, considering that they are equipped with flexible skills and can access the technological help needed.

This disruption-potential dualism is brought to life through empirical data from Brynjolfsson, Li, and Raymond (2025), who investigated the application of a support tool based on a generative AI in a big customer-support facility. Through their findings, they learned that workers' productivity increased by an average of 15% with AI support exposure, apart from productivity, the AI tool benefited the workplace environment. Customers were more polite, fewer asked to be referred to managers, and newer reps were more apt to stay on the job, suggesting less turnover. Interestingly, the study also found that AI allowed less capable workers to follow high-performing employees' communication patterns, suggestive of a potential for AI to disseminate best practices to more employees (Brynjolfsson et al., 2025).

### 2.4.3. Revolutionizing the Consulting Industry

AI's disruption of white-collar jobs is increasingly mirrored in its transformative impact on the consulting industry, as both domains grapple with the integration of advanced technologies into traditionally human-centric roles. Just as machine learning and generative AI systems are beginning to automate routine cognitive tasks in law, finance, and healthcare (Frey & Osborne, 2017; Peralta, 2024), consulting firms are similarly transitioning from labor-intensive, project-based engagements to AI-augmented service delivery.

For example, leading consulting firms such as McKinsey & Company have begun incorporating proprietary AI platforms directly into client organizations. This is a significant shift from the traditional project-based delivery model to ongoing service engagement (Christensen, Wang, & Bever, 2013). The consulting landscape is no longer defined by human expertise but rather by the integration of advanced technologies.

Krüger and Teuteberg (2018) describe the emergence of hybrid consulting models, which combine machine intelligence and human expertise. Such models have several advantages, for example: Increased scalability and efficiency of operations, improved speed and accuracy of analytics and enhanced capacity to deal with complex data modeling and market trend analysis. Traditional staffing-intensive consulting approaches are thus giving way to leaner, technology-enabled delivery systems.

The competitive dynamics of the industry are also evolving. According to Oarue-Itseuwa (2024), AI's ability to automate core analytical functions has lowered entry barriers, enabling new competitors such as tech giants and AI-native consultancies, direct competition with established firms and a need for traditional consultancies to redefine their value proposition, focusing more on strategic judgment, ethical guidance and human-centered problem-solving. In this case, AI is not just a disruptive force, it is a incentive for professional reinvention.

Nissen (2018) points out that businesses must also rethink their business models. The advent of AI-powered, self-service platforms is driving a shift from hourly billing to asset-based pricing. This is being underpinned by changing client expectations for faster turnaround times, scalable, data-driven insights and on-demand decision support.

Samokhvalov (2024) echoes the same sentiment that while AI will go on to execute more standardized tasks that are data-heavy, the heart of strategic consulting, such as trust building, contextual judgment, and creative interpretation, will remain human. Consultants must become hybrid professionals that leverage AI to improve their decision-making but remain responsible for ethical judgment and human interaction.

## 2.5. The Human-AI Relationship

### 2.5.1. Human-Technology Interaction

As technologies get more and more sophisticated and advanced, so do the experiences of individuals with them. Being usable is no longer sufficient to explain why certain technologies connect more deeply with their users. Design, emotional engagement, and the user experience in general now become central to ensuring how human beings engage with technology, as argued by Thüring and Mahlke (2007). Thüring and Mahlke (2007) explain that, technology has the ability to elicit both negative and positive reactions. Frustrating or alienating designs may be triggered by ill-designed systems, while trust, satisfaction, and even delight can be increased through aesthetic and intuitive system-designs. For example, conversational interfaces such as chatbots try to mimic human interaction by using natural language processing (NLP). Thüring and Mahlke (2007) and Rapp, Curti, and Boldi (2021) explain that the system can build trust and interaction if it is well designed, but when their boundary conditions are unveiled, such as misunderstanding the intention of a user, the system can build disappointment or mistrust.

*Table 8 Positive and Negative Emotional Responses to Technology*

| **Positive Emotional Responses** | **Negative Emotional Responses** |
|---|---|
| **Increased trust**: People are more likely to trust systems that are intuitive, transparent, and well-constructed. | **Frustration**: When systems are confusing or buggy, users feel annoyed or irritated. |
| **Confidence**: Clear, consistent, and easy-to-use interfaces make users feel capable and confident. | **Alienation**: A bad design can make users feel disconnected, as if the technology is not intended for them. |
| **Delight**: Delightful features, such as smooth interactions and aesthetic design, make users feel joy and satisfaction. | **Mistrust**: Systems that don't work properly or that are difficult to navigate can lead to mistrust in the technology. |
| **Sense of accomplishment**: Users feel a sense of achievement when they can easily complete tasks. | **Disappointment**: Expectations are not met when the technology fails to deliver on its promise. |
| **Engagement**: Positive design encourages users to interact more and stay engaged with the technology. | **Confusion**: Overcomplicated interfaces or unclear instructions create confusion and stress. |

*Note. Data adapted from Thüring and Mahlke (2007) & Rapp et al. (2021).*

**Ethical Considerations in Human-Technology Interaction**

Human-technology interaction raises critical ethical concerns. Since human beings are likely to "personify" technologies, for example, chatbots, by attributing to them human-like characteristics, trust and transparency issues come into play (Rapp et al., 2021). Excessive dependence on technology can lead to hazards like loss of privacy or inflated beliefs regarding its capabilities. Personifying conversational agents can lead users to overestimate their intellectual and emotional capacities, resulting in more profound levels of trust and social attachment that are possibly not appropriate (Rapp et al., 2021). This process makes the human-machine boundary more complex, with users finding it more difficult to critically review the conduct and constraints of AI systems. Some of the major risks in personifying technology are:

- Individuals spreading sensitive personal information without awareness of the risks.
- Overdependence on AI capabilities, leading to poor decision-making.
- Less analytical thinking on system limitations.
- Emotional dependency on non-empathetic systems.

Additionally, Diederich, Brendel, Morana, and Kolbe (2022) suggest ethical issues in data collection. While personal information is used to enrich user experiences, it has the possibility to erode user control along with compromising security. They note how modern systems collect vast amounts of information regularly with users' absolute lack of understanding or awareness and use it to build rich behavioral profiles. Such mechanisms have a tendency to violate informational self-determination, where users do not have any say in what is being known about them and how such knowledge is being used. Besides, openness of the majority of data processing methods curbs users from making informed decisions, also adding to autonomy loss and loss of trust in human-technology relationships (Diederich et al., 2022).

### 2.5.2. Understanding Technology Adoption

It is difficult to explain why individuals embrace and use emerging technologies since several aspects come into play, such as: Usability, Emotional responses and Ethical considerations. Most core to this decision are the perceived usefulness rules and ease of use, which have been explained in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis & Granić, 2024). The considerations make a decision about whether the users are going to adopt and use emerging technology.

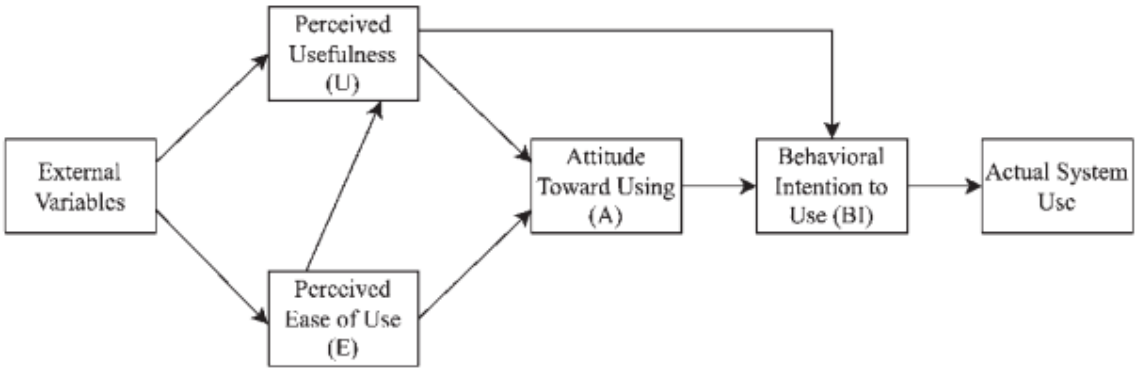
Trenerry et al. (2021) emphasize that employee attitudes towards technology, their acceptance level, and training provision are central to successful implementation. They also contribute that job insecurity issues and skill obsolescence can influence technology acceptance. In addressing these issues, they emphasize upskilling interventions that can enhance resilience and support workers in adapting to the evolving landscape of digital tools.

**Technology Acceptance Model**

Was developed by Fred D. Davis in 1986, is a theoretical framework/model that predicts and explains the user acceptance of new technologies. TAM has become one of the most applied models for technology adoption in many different fields. The model indicates two primary determinants of the

user acceptance: perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. These two elements are hypothesized to influence users' attitudes towards technology, which in turn influence their behavior of use and, ultimately, their usage of the technology. The model has evolved to various forms, for example, TAM2, TAM3, and hybrid models like the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which are constructed based on its fundamental principles as described by Davis and Granić (2024).

*Figure 5 The Technology Acceptance Model*




*Note. Picture reprinted from The Technology Acceptance Model: 30 Years of TAM, by Davis and Granić (2024, p.02, Figure 1.1)*

The basic TAM model identifies two primary determinants that influence the acceptance of the user (PU and PEOU) and three constructs influenced by the two primary determinants (ATU, BI and AU). Table 9 helps illustrate the definitions and roles of each construct as defined by Davis and Granić (2024).

*Table 9 Definition and Roles of TAM Constructs*

| **Construct** | **Definition** | **Influence on Technology Adoption** |
|---|---|---|
| Perceived Usefulness (PU) | The degree to which a user believes using a system enhances job performance. | Strongest predictor of behavioral intention to use technology. |
| Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) | The degree to which a user believes using a system is free of effort. | Affects PU and attitudes toward technology |
| Attitude Toward Use (ATU) | The user's evaluation of the technology, influenced by PU and PEOU. | Positive attitudes increase adoption likelihood |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Behavioral Intention (BI) | The intention to use the system, influenced by ATU | Directly predicts actual usage behavior |
| Actual System Use (AU) | The end behavior: whether the system is actually used, determined by BI | Represents the final step in technology adoption |

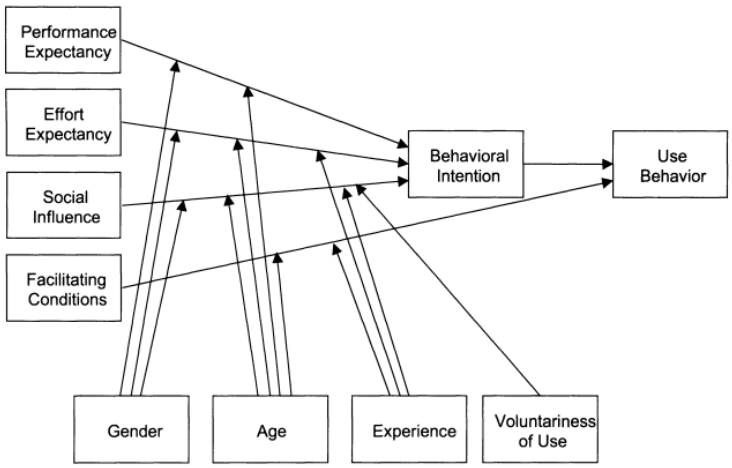
*Note. Data adapted from The Technology Acceptance Model: 30 Years of TAM, by Davis and Granić (2024).*

One distinctive strength of TAM is its ability to predict user acceptance based on initial experiences with technology prototypes, even before their actual use. Davis and Granić (2024) demonstrated that perceptions of usefulness remained stable from initial demonstrations to later hands-on experiences, allowing developers/designers to assess user acceptance at an early part of the development cycle. This stability in perceived usefulness enables its predictive power, even when there is not a fully functional system.

**The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)**

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), proposed by Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, and Davis (2003), represents a framework for understanding and predicting the acceptance and use of technology in various contexts. It combines elements from eight previously validated models, including the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), to give a cohesive view of technology adoption. UTAUT is widely used in the field of Information Systems (IS) and others, offering insights into the behavioral intention and actual technology use of users.

*Figure 6 The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)*




*Note. Figure adapted from USER ACCEPTANCE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: Toward a Unified View by Venkatesh et al. (2023, p. 447, Figure 3).*

Venkatesh et al. (2003) explains that the primary aim of UTAUT is to simplify technology acceptance research through an integration of constructs from several models. The theory identifies four basic determinants of usage behavior and intention:

- Performance Expectancy: Determine the extent to which individuals anticipate using the technology will enhance their work performance or help them achieve certain objectives. In practice, researchers may utilize surveys or semi structured interviews to discover how users perceive the technology to be effective.
- Effort Expectancy: Determines how easy it is to use the technology. Researchers can develop questions regarding ease of use, interface, and learning requirements involved.
- Social Influence: Investigate the impact of social pressures on people's intentions to use the technology. This typically involves assessing perceptions of peer or organizational norms.
- Facilitating Conditions: Assess resources and support that exist to use the technology efficiently, such as infrastructure, training, and support access.

It also consists of four moderators: Experience, Age, Gender, and Voluntariness of use. This model was specifically created to enhance predictive power and to capture a whole understanding of factors influencing technology acceptance in different contexts as outlined by Venkatesh et al. (2003).

Increasing reliance on technology in different spheres has also given a boost to escalating debate around Artificial Intelligence (AI). Because UTAUT presents a structured approach to viewing technology adoption, it is a useful framework for research on the adoption of AI systems in different environments. Venkatesh (2021) suggests that AI technologies face the same adoption challenges as other technologies, such as infrastructure needs, user trust, and training needs. The UTAUT constructs, performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions, are relevant in determining how people and organizations embrace AI systems. By using UTAUT in AI systems, scholars and practitioners are able to:

- Identify barriers and motivators of AI adoption.
- Formulate targeted strategies to enhance adoption.
- Facilitate integration of AI with the workflow and decision-making processes of the users.

With the progress made in AI, dependency on established models like UTAUT remains significant in comprehending its extensive application and solving problems concerning its implementation (Venkatesh, 2021).

### 2.5.3. Human-AI Teams: A Collaborative Partnership

Human-AI collaboration transcends typical human-computer interaction through the creation of interdependence, co-adaptation, and shared decision-making (Zhang, Chong, Kotovsky, & Cagan, 2022) Human-centered AI design aims to align systems with human cognitive and affective requirements (Endsley, 2023), ensuring AI becomes a collaborative companion rather than an instrument.

Trust is a prime determinant of team performance. While collective efficiency is improved by overall trust (Zhang et al., 2022), Endsley (2023) emphasizes the need for "situational trust" in which

humans evaluate AI capabilities in context particularly in light of constraints such as weak causal reasoning.

AI influence also determines team dynamics. Flathmann et al. (2023) illustrate how robust AI control increases cognitive workload for humans and degrades performance, but calibrated influence encourages human engagement and growth. Effective teaming depends on identifying the proper blend of AI assistance to supplement autonomy without assuming decision-making control.

Shared mental models, task-based internalized knowledge of objectives and roles are essential for coordination. Zhang, McNeese, Freeman, and Musick. (2020) state that effective teaming is founded upon a collective ability to forecast and accommodate the behavior of one another.

Further, AI system design should be conducted in such a manner as to satisfy the human need for predictability and simplicity so that the same would not exacerbate the out-of-the-loop phenomenon or dilute human control (Endsley, 2023). This is in line with research by Zhang, McNeese, Freeman, and Musick (2020), who point out that over-personifying the AI could lead to creating unrealistic expectations, which creates frustration and decreased trust. This would indicate that the success of these teams does not depend on technological acumen but rather on the conscious design of human-in-the-loop interactions that acknowledge the cognitive, emotional, and contextual aspects of teamwork.

**Human-In-The-Loop**

Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) refers to the systematic integration of human decision-making into the decision-making of AI systems. Rather than purely autonomous machine behavior, HITL systems retain humans in supervisory or interventionist roles to ensure results in accordance with ethical, legal, and social norms as articulated by Murray-Rust and Tsiakas (2022). This approach is particularly significant in areas where high-stakes decisions such as those of criminal justice, healthcare, or financial services demand responsibility, transparency, and fairness.

By injecting human judgment into AI pipelines, these systems help to capture context and value too frequently lost to statistical models. Constantino (2022) objects to Article 14 of the EU AI Act for lacking adequacy in terms of human oversight clarity, particularly in the public sector, risking superficial review where human agents are utilized as "rubber stamps." This lack of substantive intervention has led to real-world harms, including wrongful arrest in predictive policing (Constantino, 2022).

Effective HITL infrastructures go beyond institutional oversight to include end-user interactive involvement. Nakao, Stumpf, Ahmed, Naseer, and Strapelli (2022) report that, in loan approval cases, users given thorough explanations and control over decision parameters could detect and address biases, such as discrimination against foreigners in the form of "explanatory debugging." Feedback from users alone is not sufficient to guarantee improved fairness, and hence validation and structured monitoring become a must.

Cultural factors also affect the acceptability of HITL systems. Nakao et al. (2022) found that users from high uncertainty-avoidant cultures were more likely to dispute AI responses, while those from

individualistic cultures worried about fairness and equal opportunity. These findings emphasize the need for culturally sensitive HITL designs that are responsive to multiple norms and expectations.

For HITL systems to be effective, some structural requirements have to be fulfilled. As Constantino (2022) highlights.

*Table 10 Structural Prerequisites for Effective HITL*

| **Prerequisite** | **Explanation** |
|---|---|
| Authority | Oversight agents must have the power to override AI decisions |
| Training | Actors need both domain-specific and AI literacy training |
| Discretion | Judgement must not be constrained by rigid rules or bureaucracy |
| Transparency tools | AI Systems should offer interpretable explanations |
| Interactive Design | Interfaces should enable meaningful intervention by users |
| Cultural sensitivity | HITL processes must account for varying fairness norms across societies |

*Note. Data adapted from Exploring Article 14 Of the EU AI Proposal: Human In The Loop Challenges When Overseeing High-Risk AI Systems In Public Service Organisations, by Constantino (2022).*

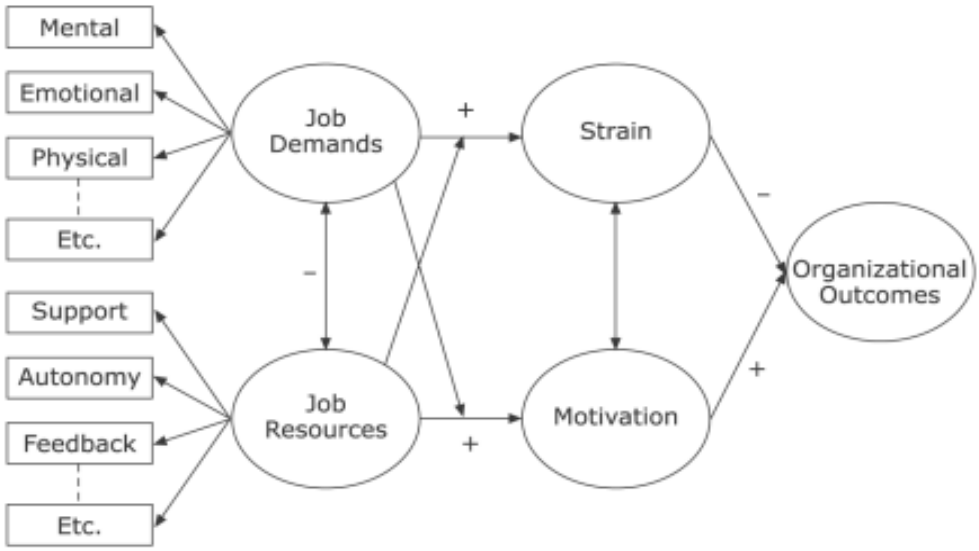
## 2.6. AI's Impact on Employee Experience and Job Satisfaction

### 2.6.1. Frameworks for understanding AI's Impact

**Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model**

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which was initially introduced by Demerouti et al. (2001, as cited in Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), has become a cornerstone to employee well-being, burnout, and work engagement. The model hypothesizes that job characteristics can be grouped into two broad categories, Job demands are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that demand continuous effort and are associated with physiological or psychological costs. Job resources, on the other hand, are job features that facilitate the ability of employees to achieve work goals, reduce job demands, and foster individual growth and development as noted by Bakker and Demerouti (2007). The JD-R model has been applied in a wide range of occupational settings, showcasing its strength and adaptability in the prediction of employee outcomes such as burnout, engagement, and performance.

*Figure 7 The Job Demands-Resources Model*




*Note. Picture reprinted from The Job Demands-Resources mode: state of the art, by Bakker and Demerouti (2007, p. 313, Figure 1)*

The rapid evolution of digital technologies transformed the workplace, accompanied by opportunities and challenges for employees. Scholze and Hecker (2024) add digital job demands (DJD) and digital job resources (DJR) to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model to offer a framework which describes the dual impact of digitization on employees' well-being.

Digital work demands, like continuous availability, workload intensification, and technology dependency tend to increase stress and lead to issues like technostress, burnout, and work-life conflict (Scholze & Hecker, 2024). These are the "dark side" of digitization. On the other hand, digital job resources like greater collaboration, efficiency, and autonomy explain the "bright side," enhancing flexibility, communication, and skills.

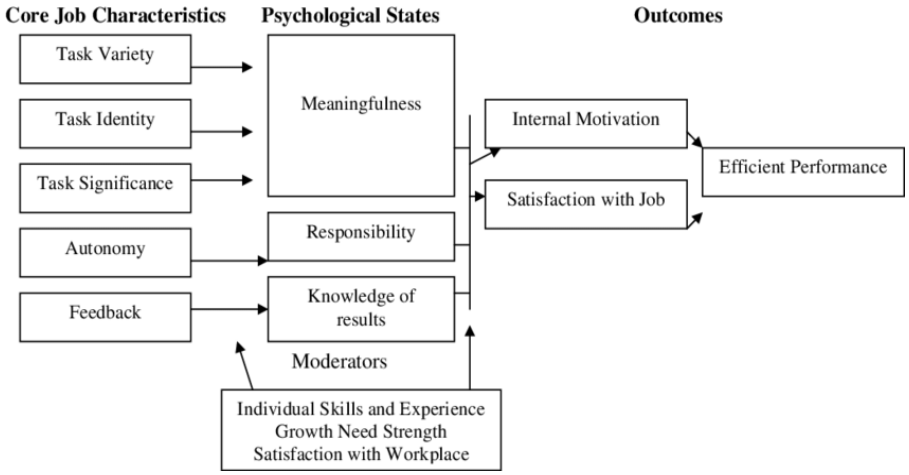
Scholze and Hecker (2024) found that digital demands are related to strain, while digital resources are related to motivation. Crucially, resources can buffer the negative impact of high demands. For instance, autonomy and social support act against burnout when pressured, in accordance with earlier studies by Bakker et al. (2005, as cited by Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The expanded JD-R model thus emphasizes the need for resource balancing and digital demands. Digital tools can be used to boost well-being and performance if complemented by adequate support and autonomy (Scholze & Hecker, 2024).

**Job Characteristics Model (JCM)**

The Job Characteristics Model (JCM) developed by Hackman and Oldham in 1974 is a rich theory for explaining how some job characteristics affect employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance (Sadeghian & Hassenzahl, 2022). This model is of particular importance for the context of AI-driven job transformation, as AI has the capability to replace some of the core job attributes such as autonomy, skill variety, and task significance, as identified by Sadeghian and Hassenzahl (2022). On the other hand, Fried and Ferris (1987) explain that the model verifies five key job dimensions: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback that shape three vital psychological states: experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility, and knowledge of results. The psychological states then affect work outcomes such as motivation, job satisfaction, and performance.

*Figure 8 Job Characteristics Model*




*Note. Picture reprinted from Distributed Leadership as Work Redesign: Retrofitting the Job Characteristics Model by Mayrowetz, Murphy, Louis, and Smylie (2007, p. 72, Figure 1)*

Hemmer et al. (2023); Sadeghian and Hassenzahl (2022) find that excessive dependence on AI automation may reduce skill variety and autonomy, which may lower job satisfaction. However, by eliminating routine work, AI also helps to enhance job significance, allowing employees to focus on more meaningful work. While productivity is maximized through AI-based automation, its impact on satisfaction too is multifaceted and situation-dependent (Bhargava, Bester, & Bolton, 2021).

One consideration is how AI is being applied to the delegation of tasks. Hemmer et al. (2023) concluded that AI delegation to staff in areas of strength enhances performance and satisfaction by enhancing self-efficacy (Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998). Strikingly, whether employees had been made aware of AI's use was irrelevant, so the tasks themselves, rather than employee impressions of AI, seem to be the cause of satisfaction.

The value of work is also equally important. Sadeghian and Hassenzahl (2022) illustrate that employees value activities which are independent, diverse, and socially rich. Even in cases where efficiency is enhanced by AI, individuals still desire working alongside human colleagues, evoking the social nature of work fulfillment. Perceptions of AI have a strong impact on satisfaction. Bhargava et al. (2021) reported that though employees welcome the ability of AI to reduce monotony, threats to job loss and reduced human agency remain. Employees viewing AI as augmenting, rather than displacing, their jobs tend to score higher on satisfaction, highlighting the value of open and empowering integration of AI.

**Herberg's Two-Factor Theory**

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of job satisfaction, first developed in 1959, continues to be impactful in arguments over motivation in the workplace. According to Herzberg et al., (1959, as cited in Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl, & Maude, 2016) the theory identifies two sets of factors that influence employee satisfaction:

1. Hygiene factors: which prevent dissatisfaction but do not necessarily enhance motivation such as company policies, supervision, relationships, work conditions, remuneration, salary and security.
2. Motivators: which drive job satisfaction by fulfilling higher-order psychological needs increases like accomplishment, recognition, work itself, responsibility, growth and advancement (Alshmemri et al., 2016).

Lin (2023) elaborates further with added contribution of the rise of AI at the workplace providing opportunities and challenges to maintaining employee motivation, as AI automation fundamentally alters traditional job forms and expectations.

AI adoption at the workplace has significantly changed hygiene and motivational factors in Herzberg's framework. Lin (2023) outlines how, on the one hand, AI creates job displacement through automation of routine, mechanical tasks, leading to lay-offs and reduced compensation for lower-level workers. This change negatively impacts the hygiene factors of job security and compensation, leading to broader unhappiness among employees vulnerable to automation. On the other hand, AI improves some of the hygiene factors by making managerial decision-making more efficient and cutting down on bureaucratic hassles. AI analytics emphasize educational qualifications

and technical skill as priority criteria for promotions, which enforces the value of skill acquisition and lifelong learning. AI also creates problems for motivational factors. With greater automation, opportunities for significance in work, autonomy, and personal accomplishment, which are fundamental elements of Herzberg's motivators, can be lost. Employees whose careers are reduced to dull AI-monitored work cycles might experience lower job satisfaction because AI destroys traditional avenues for skill learning and professional stature (Lin, 2023).

**Employee experience framework**

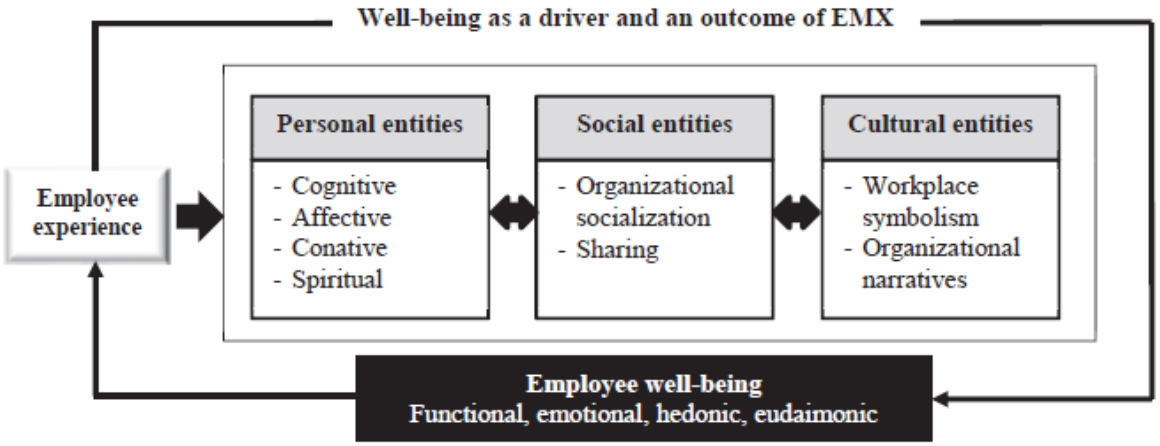
Employee Experience (EX) refers to an employee's complete journey within an organization, from the recruitment process to the offboarding process, encompassing interactions. It includes such aspects as work culture, leadership, career growth opportunities, and communication structures. Luz and Olaoye (2024) further mention that organizations increasingly recognize EX as the underlying driver of employee satisfaction, engagement, and productivity.

AI is transforming EX into a more individualized experience, enhancing HR practices, and developing more dynamic relationships between organizations and workers. AI systems analyze massive amounts of employee data to design personalized experiences, improving communication, learning, performance management, and workforce planning, as put forward by Luz and Olaoye (2024).

Batat (2022) provides a multilevel EX model, which conceptualizes EX as an active construct moderated by three interrelated dimensions:

1. Personal Level: Individual employees' subjective well-being, cognitive and affective responses, and personal judgments.
2. Social Level: Interpersonal relationships at work, team functioning, leadership styles, and organizational culture.
3. Cultural Level: Organizational policies, structures, and values affecting employee judgments about the workplace.

*Figure 9 The Employee Experience Framework*




*Note. Picture reprinted from The Employee Experience (EMX) framework for well-being: an agenda for the future by Batat (2022, Figure 1, p. 1000)*

This framework centers around employee well-being both as driver and result of employee experience (EX). Batat (2022) argues that the design of employee-led experiences in physical, digital, and social spaces can enhance engagement, motivation, and productivity.

AI provides value to EX primarily through personalization (Pillai, Ghanhorkar, Sivathanu, Algharabat, & Rana, 2024). Based on behavior and preferences, AI enables providing personalized interventions. Chatbots and virtual assistants, for example, are providing real-time, personalized support, improving both efficiency and employee engagement. Luz and Olaoye (2024) observe that AI-based learning systems provide adaptive training that is aligned with employees' objectives and learning preferences, in support of ongoing development. Pillai et al. (2024) also point out AI in performance management, where real-time data-driven feedback eliminates bias and enables development focused on areas in need.

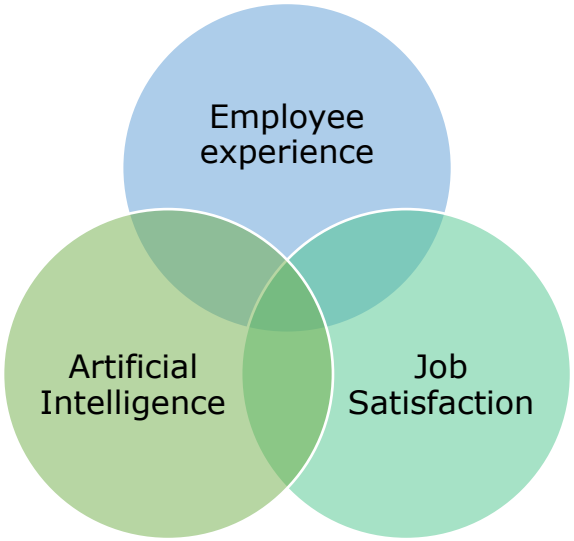
However, AI personalization also raises ethical concerns. Luz and Olaoye (2024) identify risks like data privacy breach, algorithmic discrimination, and excessive dependency on automation. Batat (2022) forecasts that excessive dependency on AI will destroy working human connections. Trust is preserved by keeping AI efficiency in balance with human interference and efficient AI regulation.

### 2.6.2. The important Synergy between AI, Employee Experience and Job satisfaction

While companies strive to optimize workplace environments and employees' involvement, the implementation of AI-facilitated solutions has emerged as a critical factor for modern work habits (Luz & Olaoye, 2024). Job satisfaction and employee experience are crucial elements for driving productivity, creativity, and business growth (Batat, 2022). Meanwhile, Generative AI is able to rewire work processes, minimize workload, and empower employees by delivering better automation and customization (Yee et al., 2024). The following model delineates the synergies between the

three key elements and demonstrates how their combined effect can lead to enhanced workplace efficiency, more resilient organizational culture, and sustained success (Chui, Roberts, & Yee, 2022).

*Figure 10 Synergy Model AI, Employee Experience and Job Satisfaction*




*Note. This figure was created by the author to visualize the model.*

**Enhanced Workflows (Intersection of AI and Employee Experience)**

Employee experience intersecting with AI contributes to enhanced workflows by automating processes, reducing administrative work, and enabling a more personal and responsive work environment. AI solutions such as chatbots, virtual assistants, and adaptive learning platforms support employees throughout the work cycle, including onboarding, developing, and performance management (Luz & Olaoye, 2024; Pillai et al., 2024). Not only do these technologies conserve time and mental resources on routine work but also augment decision-making by offering prompt, factually based recommendations.

Scholze and Hecker (2024) indicate that AI functions as a Digital Job Resource (DJR) in the JD-R model, offering efficiency, cooperation, and autonomy that serve to mitigate the adverse effects of digital job demands. With proper support from leadership and organizational culture, AI-driven interventions increase employee motivation and participation through more flexible and adaptive work provisions (Scholze & Hecker, 2024).

**Empowered Employees (Intersection of AI and Job Satisfaction)**

The intersection of AI and job satisfaction leads to the development of empowered employees who do not fear AI but see it as a tool for enhancing their abilities and boosting their job profiles. Hemmer et al. (2023) identifies that AI can be employed to allocate tasks that engage employees' strengths to improve job performance and satisfaction through increased feelings of competence and self-efficacy. On the basis of the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), AI's ability to restructure tasks impacts core job dimensions of task significance, autonomy, and feedback (Sadeghian & Hassenzahl, 2022). When AI is doing routine or repetitive tasks, it releases employees to perform more meaningful and

meaningful tasks thus improving experienced meaningfulness and responsibility, two psychological states that are essential to satisfaction and motivation (Sadeghian & Hassenzahl, 2022).

**Positive Workplace Culture (Intersection of Employee Experience and Job Satisfaction)**

The combination of employee experience and job satisfaction produces a good health work environment, with recognition, trust, cooperation, and emotional well-being. Job satisfaction is driven by hygiene factors (e.g., policies, working conditions) and motivators (e.g., autonomy, achievement, recognition) based on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Alshmemri et al., 2016). Employee experience initiatives that are aligned with inclusive leadership, effective communication, and development opportunities both cover both types of needs.

Batat (2022) multilevel EX model shows how employee experience is shaped by personal perceptions, social relations, and organizational culture. A good and well-conceived EX strategy can thus foster job satisfaction by fostering a sense of purpose, belongingness, and justice in the workplace. EX also fosters psychological safety one of the leading drivers of sustaining motivation and openness to innovation. Employees who are supported in their professional growth are more likely to feel higher job satisfaction and be loyal to the organization in the long term (Luz & Olaoye, 2024).

**Integrated Impact (Central Intersection of AI, EX, and Job Satisfaction)**

At the core of the model is the convergent impact of the three factors: AI, employee experience, and job satisfaction. This represents the optimal situation where digital transformation is meeting human values and organizational strategy. In this case, AI is not merely a productivity tool, but also a driver of employee empowerment, well-being, and lifelong development.

It is the realization of the extended Job Demands-Resources model with a concentration on balance between digital demands and digital resources. Through the combination of AI potential with thoughtful job design and simultaneously investing in specific and densely cultural employee experiences, organizations build environments that work towards innovation, resilience, and collective victory (Sadeghian & Hassenzahl, 2022; Scholze & Hecker, 2024).

In addition, Herzberg's theory also points out that the existence of motivators particularly opportunities for growth and recognition needs to be maintained even in AI-augmented environments (Alshmemri et al., 2016). This is echoed by Lin (2023), who submits that the role of AI should be empowering and not replacing, with the aim of maintaining employees' sense of autonomy and purpose in work. This interior crossing illustrates a strategic synergy that fosters not only work effectiveness, but organizational culture, adaptability, and employee satisfaction, resulting in long-term business success (Chui et al., 2022; Yee et al., 2024).

## 2.7. Broader Implications: Ethics, AI Governance and Societal Impact

As AI systems take on more cognitive and strategic tasks, they raise questions about autonomy, trust, and the evolving role of human expertise issues that directly affect consultants' job satisfaction and professional identity. This section mentions frameworks of AI governance, ethics, and sustainability. The Responsible Innovation (RI) framework (Stilgoe, Owen, & Macnaghten, 2013) provides a foundation for evaluating AI's societal impact through anticipation, reflexivity, inclusion, and responsiveness. It aligns with growing concerns in the consulting sector about transparency, accountability, and human oversight (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021; Herrmann, 2023).

Regulatory approaches, particularly the EU AI Act, introduce a risk-based governance model that impacts how AI is implemented in firms, shaping consultants' trust and interaction with these systems (Hacker et al., 2023; Chun, De Witt, & Elkins, 2024). Comparative global perspectives from the U.S. and China further contextualize the compliance and ethical challenges faced by multinational consultancies. The sustainability dimension is considered through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work) and SDG 3 (Well-being). While AI may enhance productivity, it also risks increasing job insecurity and stress without careful governance and support systems (Braganza, Chen, Canhoto, & Sap, 2021; Lane, Williams, & Broecke, 2023; Ravirajan & Sundarajan, 2025).

### 2.7.1. Responsible Innovation Framework

The Responsible Innovation (RI) strategy has gained more visibility in the face of challenges and potential harms of new technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI). As AI continues to evolve, arguments over its ethical effects, social consequences, and long-term sustainability are emerging as the central debates in responsible technology innovation (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021; Herrmann, 2023). Integration of the Responsible Innovation framework into AI governance and how the framework can be used to ensure AI development is in agreement with ethical, social, as well as political norms, therefore preventing harmful consequences, there are several dimensions of the Responsible Innovation framework (Stilgoe et al., 2013).

**Dimensions of Anticipation**

This involves the systematic assessment of the potential consequences, risks, and side effects of innovations before they are developed or even deployed to their full extent. Anticipation invokes "what-if?" questions to test potential futures and identify opportunities for developing socially resilient innovations (Stilgoe et al., 2013). For AI, it involves anticipating worries like bias, privacy violations, and dislocation of society (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021).

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity invites stakeholders like policymakers and researchers to think reflectively about their values, assumptions, and broader societal implications of their work. It requires scientists to abandon the traditional dichotomy between technical and ethical responsibilities and engage in public debate

on the ends and means of their innovations (Stilgoe et al., 2013). Reflexivity is essential in AI governance to overcome algorithmic obscurity and introduce accountability (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021).

**Inclusion**

RI encourages diverse stakeholders, including marginalized communities, to be included in the innovation process. Inclusive deliberation helps avoid blind spots and ensures diverse views are employed in informing decisions (Stilgoe et al., 2013). For AI, inclusion entails engaging civil society, media, and affected communities in critically scrutinizing algorithmic systems and their societal consequences (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021).

**Responsiveness**

This dimension is concerned with responsiveness to innovation trajectories in terms of new knowledge, public values, and newly emerged issues. Responsiveness requires institutional flexibility to change direction and address unexpected side effects (Stilgoe et al., 2013). In the case of AI, this translates into iterative governance models that can respond to ethical issues and public feedback (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021).

These aspects guide the creation of more inclusive and ethically responsible AI systems that maximize societal benefit while avoiding risks. For example, the anticipation dimension encourages anticipatory thinking about potential harms or negative impacts on society, if any, before they materialize to provide foresight for long-term implications in AI technologies (Herrmann, 2023). Similarly, reflexivity emphasizes the need for innovators to think reflexively continuously, provoking them to think critically on the ethical, social, and political implications of their projects (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021).

Though AI has the potential to enhance efficiency and decision-making, its premature growth also entails ethical and social concerns like fairness, transparency, and accountability (Herrmann, 2023). Bias in training data in areas like recruitment or credit rating contributes to discrimination, while undecipherable decision processes undermine transparency initiatives (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021).

Responsible AI (RAI) governance, grounded in the Responsible Innovation framework, is required to address these issues. Buhmann and Fieseler (2021) propose a deliberative, multi-stakeholder type of governance that brings together developers, policymakers, civil society, and the broader public to align AI with values and establish trust.

To move towards more responsible AI, the takeaways of Responsible Innovation must be integrated into models of AI governance. This requires a multi-stakeholder approach that does not only include technology and business leaders but also input from the public, ethicists, and policymakers (Herrmann, 2023). It must also have greater emphasis on the transparency of AI systems, particularly on the decision-making mechanism of AI and on ensuring these systems are free from bias (Buhmann & Fieseler, 2021). Further, reflexivity and inclusion will also need to be embedded in AI development processes so that a wide range of voices and concerns are considered across the whole AI technology life cycle.

### 2.7.2. The EU AI Act and International Approaches

The rise of generative AI systems, and particularly large language models (LLMs), prompted regulatory bodies to draft the guidelines for the regulation of their design and deployment (Novelli et al., 2024). The EU was the first to introduce its Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA) of April 2021, which took effect in August 2024, to unify the regulation of AI and protect fundamental rights (Chun et al., 2024).

AIA has a risk-based tiering system, placing obligations upon providers of AI systems, with significant transformation following general-purpose AI (GPAI) like ChatGPT (Chun et al., 2024). AIA includes tiered regulation of different kinds of AI models, like standard, open-licensed, and high-risk GPAI systems. Significant responsibilities of providers are:

- Standard GPAI Providers: Must furnish technical documentation, be transparent and comply with IP laws.
- Openly Licensed GPAI Providers: Need to fulfill technical documentation requirements.
- Systemic Risk GPAI Providers: Must conduct tests, assess risks, report accidents, and possess good cybersecurity.

Transparency is at the core of the principle, specifically to high-risk systems, where attention is on making AI outputs comprehensible (Hacker et al., 2023). The Act also gave birth to the creation of the EU AI Office to ensure compliance and build a common European approach (Chun et al., 2024). Certain loopholes in duties and liabilities still remain in spite of these efforts (Hacker et al., 2023; Novelli et al., 2024).

The effect of the AI Act on open-source AI is substantial in that it grants exemptions to open-source providers but is interested in "open-washing." It also intersects with other legal frameworks like the GDPR, addressing issues such as data processing, AI "hallucinations," and users' rights (Novelli et al., 2024). The Act also impacts intellectual property and cybersecurity, requiring current frameworks like the Cyber Resilience Act (CRA) and NIS2 Directive (Novelli et al., 2024) to be revised.

**Comparative Global AI Regulation: Geographical Policies**

The EU AI Act may be referred to as a distinctive approach in comparison with the other AI regulation efforts of the other great global powers like the United States (US) and China (Chun et al., 2024). These distinctive approaches are a reflection of different cultural, political, and economic visions and different judgments concerning the balance between innovation and safety and cooperation and competition. There is also a divergence regarding trust in centralized authority and trust in a freer, more decentralized marketplace (Chun et al., 2024). To describe the fundamental differences between the EU, US, and Chinese AI governance approaches, Table 11 provides a comparative evaluation of their institutional structure, regulatory philosophy, and enforcement strategies.

*Table 11 Comparison AI Governance Models*

| Aspect | European Union (EU) | United States (US) | China |
|---|---|---|---|
| Governance Model | Centralized, risk-based | Decentralized, market-driven | Hybrid (centralized + local experimentation) |
| Key Institution | EU AI Office | Multiple existing federal/state agencies | Multiple ministries and local authorities |
| Regulatory Style | Precautionary, rights-oriented | Innovation-driven permissive | Sector-specific, top-down |
| Focus Area | Risk tiers, transparency, human rights | Innovation, existing legal frameworks | Social stability, data control |
| Enforcement | Harmonized across EU | Fragmented, state-dependent | Evolving, sometimes inconsistent |

*Note. Data adapted from Chun et al. (2024).*

Although the state-of-the-art generative AI models offer remarkable capability, their unstable and unpredictable nature raises concerns over the adequacy of contemporary legal requirements in particular within the EU (Novelli et al., 2024). The EU AI Act, however, seeks to address these challenges through a comprehensive, risk-based regulation framework with special provisions for general-purpose AI (GPAI) and the creation of a new AI Office, aspiring to establish a worldwide standard (Chun et al., 2024; Novelli et al., 2024). This contrasts with the U.S. model rooted in existing agencies and a decentralized, innovation-driven strategy and China's hybrid system of top-down control complemented by sectoral regulation and regional experimentation (Chun et al., 2024). These various strategies emphasize the global richness of AI regulation that supports innovation while safeguarding legal, ethical, and societal interests (Chun et al., 2024).

### 2.7.3. Ethical Implications of Generative AI in Workplaces

The ethical consequences of work-generated AI are becoming increasingly prominent as the use of AI technologies becomes more widespread. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) offer a critical context for analyzing the broader economic and social importance of AI in the workplace. They state that the rate of advancement of AI technologies, such as generative models, might lead to a "winner-takes-all" scenario in the workforce. As more and more human tasks are automated by AI technologies, especially cognitive and creative tasks, the distribution of wealth and opportunity becomes the central ethical challenge. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) also mention the task of ensuring that the fruits of technological progress reach society at large, and not just a privileged elite. They caution that while technological innovation may be positive in terms of higher productivity, it is not necessarily equivalent to economic benefit as a whole, as history has shown through earlier technological revolutions. The possibility of AI worsening inequality and isolating people against those who won't gain from it creates enormous ethical challenges in how AI-driven innovation can be encouraged to reinforce social equity and economic justice (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).

Binns (2022) discusses the issue of algorithmic decision-making from an ethical perspective and the need for human judgment, particularly when discretion is required. There are some ethical challenges of algorithmic decision-making:

- Individual Justice: Human judgment also becomes a requirement for providing justice and assessing individual cases, which AI systems cannot effectively do without human intervention (Binns, 2022).
- Decision-Making Discretion: AI lacks the ability to reconcile competing moral or legal factors, and therefore, it is necessary for human intervention in complex workplace choices (Binns, 2022).
- Bias and Discrimination: Algorithms perpetuate biases present in the data, which may result in unfair treatment of certain employees based on gender, race, or other characteristics (Binns, 2022).

Leikas, Koivisto, and Gotcheva (2019) stretch this ethical argument further by summarizing a framework for the design of autonomous systems with a focus on the infusion of human values in AI systems, such as depicted in Table 12.

*Table 12 Ethical Principles of Autonomous Systems*

| **Ethical Principle** | **Explanation** |
|---|---|
| Autonomy | Ensuring that employees retain their right to make decisions about their own lives, even in AI-driven environments. |
| Justice | AI systems must be designed to promote fairness and equal treatment in the workplace, avoiding discrimination. |
| Beneficence | AI should enhance the quality of life for employees, rather than simply maximizing efficiency or cutting costs. |
| Non-maleficence | AI systems should avoid causing harm to workers, such as reinforcing harmful biases or leading to job displacement. |

*Note. Data adapted from Leikas et al. (2019).*

Leikas et al. (2019) stress that ethical AI design is a continuous process, demanding integration from the start to maintain the dignity and well-being of employees. Binns (2022) points out the importance of human judgment in AI for being able to ensure transparency, accountability, and avoiding harm, especially in aspects such as hiring or promotion. Without transparency, institutions deploying AI and AI itself may erode trust. Human oversight, Binns (2022) argues, ensures AI complies with the law and ethics, maintaining workplace rights.

As it becomes more integrated into workplaces, ethical implications of AI must occur so that no damage is caused and justice is served:

- Economic Fairness: AI would generate or expand disparities unless rewards are fairly distributed. AI must have policies instituted so that it promotes economic justice (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).

- Human Judgement in Decision-Making: Human judgement has to be added to AI to create just, kind, and context-aware decisions (Binns, 2022).
- Ethical Design: AI systems have to concentrate on fairness, autonomy, and justice, which benefits employees and minimizes harm (Leikas et al., 2019).

The ethical application of AI in workplaces requires the balancing of technological progress and respect for values that protect workers' rights and address AI-driven societal challenges.

### 2.7.4. Effects of AI on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

**SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth**

The employment integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) impacts productivity, job security, and is consistent with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8). Braganza et al. (2021) argue, although AI is likely to improve the efficiency and quality of work, it also raises questions regarding job security, pay, and the erosion of the traditional psychological contracts.

AI facilitates easier repetition but also new jobs, thus displacing and creating new jobs. OECD (Lane et al., 2023) reports that 66% of the employers in finance and 72% of the employers in manufacturing report task automation due to AI while approximately half report new tasks having emerged. Even with rising productivity, employment security is a concern 20% of finance and 15% of manufacturing staff have seen colleagues lose their jobs because of AI (Lane et al., 2023). Braganza et al. (2021) observe that AI primarily replaces mechanical and analytical work but not intuitive and empathetic work. AI also influences salary, as twice the number of employees expect salary reductions than increases based on efficiency-driven headcounts (Lane et al., 2023). This trend undermines SDG 8 by increasing precarious work, for example, gig and temporary employment (Braganza et al., 2021).

However, AI can support SDG 8 when accompanied by inclusive policies. Flexibility increases due to training programs, and over half of the users of AI have been trained by their employers (Lane et al., 2023). Workers' involvement in AI decision-making also fosters trust and job satisfaction, leading to decent work (Lane et al., 2023).

**SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being**

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) aims at delivering healthy lives and well-being to everyone. In ever-complicating health matters, artificial intelligence (AI) has proven to be a significant tool in creating physical and mental well-being. Ravirajan and Sundarajan (2025) present an AI system based on physiological and neurobiological data for monitoring and enhancing workplace well-being. Their system employs AI agents to observe workers' mental and cognitive conditions, adjusting tasks, making motivational remarks, and suggesting micro-interventions like breaks or mindfulness practice. These AI agents are not passive; they are pro-active collaborators that learn and adapt to the requirements of the users to reduce stress and enhance focus. This personalized intervention is also consistent with SDG 3's focus on mental health and non-communicable disease prevention (Ravirajan & Sundarajan, 2025).

But firmer implementation requires more than technology. Dong, Lio, Li, and Lee (2024) take organizational culture into consideration when facilitating worker adaptation to AI, specifically the degree to which workers assume AI will be autonomously controlled, competent, and relevant to them. They find that when employees are asked to provide suggestions for improvement and their suggestions are seriously considered, they engage in more positive interactions with AI, enhancing job satisfaction and happiness.

Parallel to this, the research suggests a double approach: the development of AI systems that are consistent with human needs (Ravirajan & Sundarajan, 2025) and organizational cultures focused on employee empowerment (Dong et al., 2024). Properly scaled up, these AI systems would be able to reduce health disparities by providing affordable assistance in multiversity workplaces and clarify national health system strains by addressing stress-related disease at their source. This practice is in support of SDG 3's vision of universal health promotion through collaboration between AI developers, health professionals, and organizational managers.

# 3. Research Methodology

To explore how management consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI Agents and how this influences their employee experience and job satisfaction, this research began with a literature study aimed at collecting background information. The literature study was followed by a qualitative study, employing a cross-sectional design, capturing consultants' views at a single point in time. The findings were derived from qualitative interviews, and the study used thematic analysis to examine this rich, interview-based data.

## 3.1. Literature study Method

The literature study aimed to put the emergence and adoption of Generative AI Agents in professional service firms, and specifically in management consulting firms in perspective. The aim was to find out about the overall technological development of artificial intelligence (AI), its adoption in the workplace, and its implications for employee experience and job satisfaction.

Literature was accessed primarily through the UHasselt University Library and reputable scholarly databases, including Google Scholar. The keywords "Disruption of Management Consultancy", "Generative AI Agents in consulting", "AI and employee experience", "AI adoption in professional services", "job satisfaction and automation", … were used in searching for the literature. Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and academic textbooks were preferred to ensure relevant and up-to-date perspectives.

The literature review served a number of purposes:

- Contextual Foundation: It provided a historical and theoretical background on AI and its relevance to the consulting industry.
- Instrument Development: The findings instructed the formulation of interview questions to be posed, such that they would be aligned with both existing academic discourse and prevailing field issues.
- Analytical Framing: Conceptual themes in the literature instructed coding and analysis of qualitative data, permitting a theory-informed reading of findings.

This systematic approach ensured the literature study not only informed the research design, but also underpinned the academic rigour of the qualitative research.

## 3.2. Interview Method

The qualitative field knowledge was collected through semi-structured interviews with management consultants who are presently employed with or exposed to AI tools and an AI Agent implementation expert. Interviews were expected to find out in more detail what the consultants perceive about the implementation of Generative AI Agents and how it affects their employee experience, professional identity, and job satisfaction and also investigate the future of AI in consultancy. 9 interviews in total

were conducted, 8 consultant interviews from large global consultancies and small boutique consultancy firms and 1 interview with an AI Agent implementation expert. The consultant interview guide is outlined in Appendix 1 and the interview guide for the AI Agent expert is outlined in Appendix 2, these interview guides were constructed from the literature provided in the literature study. In order to clearly investigate the main research question and sub-questions, the interview guide was structured in clusters of themes as shown in Table 13.

*Table 13 Thematic Clusters Interview Guide*

| **Cluster** | **Type of questions** |
|---|---|
| Background & Context | Questions regarding professional background and experience. |
| Perception of AI in Management Consultancy | Familiarity with AI technologies, attitudes towards AI, and company policies |
| AI's Influence on Work Processes and Decision-Making | Concrete applications of AI in consultancy projects and perceived advantages or risks. |
| The Impact of AI on the Employee Experience | Focus on autonomy, support, workload, collaboration, and work rhythm. |
| AI and Job Satisfaction | How AI influences work meaning, motivation, appreciation, and skill development. |
| Ethical Considerations and AI Governance | Trust in AI, transparency, responsibility, and organizational protocols. |
| The Future of AI in Consulting | Expectations, necessary skills, human-AI collaboration, and visions for the future. |

Each interview began with a contextual discussion before transitioning into a more focused conversation on the role and impact of AI in consultancy. The semi-structured format enabled a balance between guided discussion and flexibility, allowing the researcher to probe deeper into relevant topics as they emerged.

## 3.3. Data Collection

The research was conducted on consultants practicing in the Flemish consultancy market. The participants were selected based on their profession so that the outcome would be applicable to the research problem. The sample consisted of eight management consultants and one AI Agent implementation expert. The respondents were contacted via email or LinkedIn. 8 interviews were conducted online and one face-to-face interview. The medium of the interview was determined based on the preference of the respondent. The interviews lasted about 40 to 55 minutes and were recorded with the prior consent of every participant to be transcribed. The informed consent form is located in Appendix 3, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Table 14 presents the anonymized respondents.

*Table 14 Respondent Overview*

| Code | Function | Years of Experience | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|
| Respondent 1 | Senior Consultant in Experience and Service Design | 3 | Female |
| Respondent 2 | Junior Consultant People and Change Business Transformation | 2 | Female |
| Respondent 3 | Senior Consultant Treasury | 4 | Female |
| Respondent 4 | Junior Management Consultant | 1 | Male |
| Respondent 5 | Senior Consultant Supply Chain & IT | 4 | Male |
| Respondent 6 | Senior Consultant Supply Chain & Network Operations | 5 | Male |
| Respondent 7 | Owner Management Consultancy | 25 | Male |
| Respondent 8 | Partner in Cyber/Technology | 21 | Male |
| Respondent 9 | Functional Analyst / AI Agent Expert | 3 | Female |

## 3.4. Data Processing

The interviews were transcribed after the recording, and data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, using the six-step approach by Braun and Clarke (2006). The transcripts were coded in three stages:

1. Open coding: Initial codes were used to tag significant statements and recurring ideas.
2. Axial coding: Codes were grouped into themes that represented inherent patterns in the data.
3. Selective coding: Selected themes were created that were directly associated with the research questions.

This analytical strategy enabled the identification of themes such as attitudes towards AI, impact on employee experience and job satisfaction, and future expectations and prospects. The iterative coding procedure enabled the themes to be narrowed and ensured that both expected and unexpected insights were captured well. The coding framework is represented by the code tree presented in Appendix 4, portraying a summary of the themes and subthemes utilized for analysis.

# 4. Findings

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the results of a qualitative study that explores how management consultants perceive the integration of Generative AI Agents into their professional practice and how this shapes their employee experience and job satisfaction. As Generative AI Agents become more prevalent in knowledge-intensive sectors, consultancy firms represent a unique context for examining how highly educated professionals navigate both the promises and challenges of AI-enhanced work.

The study employed thematic analysis to examine rich, interview-based qualitative data. This process revealed a wide range of perspectives, some enthusiastic, others cautious, regarding the practical, emotional, ethical, and professional implications of Generative AI. Rather than converging around a single dominant narrative, the data revealed multiple, interwoven themes, each shedding light on how consultants engage with, adapt to, and critically assess the role of AI in their work.

The results are organized around 4 overarching themes, each of which is further subdivided into more specific subthemes that reflect how AI is integrated into consultants' practices and perceptions. These themes are as follows:

*Table 15 Overarching Themes Results*

| Theme | Description |
|---|---|
| Perception of Generative AI Agents | Explores how consultants understand, conceptualize, and describe Generative AI Agents, including the roles, characteristics, and limitations they assign to these tools. This theme captures their cognitive and ethical framing of AI, laying the groundwork for how AI is positioned within professional practice. |
| Influence on employee experience | Examines the ways AI is reshaping the day-to-day experience of consultants, focusing on workflow changes, task delegation, learning opportunities, and interpersonal interactions. It considers how AI integration affects how work is performed, learned, and experienced within teams and organizations. |
| Influence on job satisfaction | Investigates how the introduction of AI impacts consultants' emotional engagement, motivation, and sense of fulfilment at work. This theme considers both the positive and negative effects of AI on how meaningful, enjoyable, or stressful consulting work feels. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Future outlook and expectations | Addresses how consultants envision the long-term impact of AI on the consulting profession, including evolving roles, required skills, and enduring values. It explores both hopes and concerns about how AI will shape future work, career development, and the human dimensions of consulting. |

These themes emerged from the participants' descriptions of their day-to-day interactions with AI tools, their reflections on how AI shapes their role as consultants, and their anticipations about how AI will continue to transform their work and professional identity. The next sections examine each theme in detail, with direct quotations used to highlight how participants articulate their lived experiences and nuanced evaluations of Generative AI Agent technologies.

## 4.2. Perceptions of Generative AI Agents

### 4.2.1. AI as a colleague

This theme explores how management consultants understand and characterize Generative AI Agents. Consultants primarily describe AI as a supportive figure, such as a junior team member or an assistant. This view highlights AI's capacity to enhance workflows while acknowledging its need for oversight and lack of comprehensive human abilities. AI is also likened to a digital secretary or a sparring partner, useful for handling operational tasks or serving as a source of preliminary ideas. As mentioned by respondents: 8, 2 and 5.

> *"That's a very good question. Yes. Um. Yes, I think it would be much more of a supporting role. As a colleague, what type of colleague would it then be? A curious and helpful junior: quick, versatile, but not always completely reliable without supervision. Yes, especially when drafting documents or generating ideas. It works supportively like a colleague who helps prepare. It is a digital secretary for me." (Respondent 8)*

> *"On the one hand, I think mainly in operational terms, to get those little stupid tasks done, such as translations and things like that. But on the other hand, I also think of it as a kind of sparring partner when you're not in a creative mood. It's also useful to take that as a starting point. I use it every day. Even for trivial matters such as this email. Yeah, right. So I would actually consider that a colleague." (Respondent 2)*

> *"An assistant colleague, I think. It's not someone I can ask to do tasks, not yet, but it's very informative and I think you can consider them a bit of an expert." (Respondent 5)*

### 4.2.2. Trust, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

The following theme explores concerns regarding the trustworthiness and reliability of AI outputs, along with ethical implications. Consultants express significant concerns about the reliability and consistency of AI outputs. They note that "AI models are not always correct with an answer" and that getting different answers to the same question "affects your reliability". There is a strong

consensus that AI output "cannot be blindly trusted" and requires manual review, proofreading, and adjustment. As stated by respondents: 8, 3, 6, 7 and 2.

> *"AI models are not always correct with an answer. If you can ask the same question twice and get a different answer, that affects your reliability." (Respondent 8)*

> *"We still need to proofread because there are often certain connections that are not entirely correct." (Respondent 3)*

> *"Often you can ask for an explanation, for the logic behind it, and an additional question that should always be asked is: where does that logic come from?" (Respondent 6)*

> *"I never blindly trust the AI output. Everything is proofread, supplemented, and adjusted." (Respondent 7)*

> *"Um. So yes, I wouldn't put too much trust in it, but it's good for getting ideas that you can then build on yourself." (Respondent 2)*

The lack of transparency in how AI reaches conclusions is a major barrier to trust. Consultants desire insight into the reasoning and data sources. Ethical concerns include data usage and privacy, highlighting the need for "clear guidelines on what kind of information is permissible to input". As described by respondents: 3 and 2.

> *"I might find it difficult to really trust it, because I often find that when I really do. That might even be stupid. For example, describe this company that I can see where it gets the text from. But every now and then I think. You're drawing conclusions that I wouldn't have drawn based on the text that's there, and that aren't 100% correct" (Respondent 3)*

> *"We always try to ask for a source. And then you notice that some of the output isn't really supported or substantiated, or is difficult to find." (Respondent 2)*

> *"With AI, I sometimes find that it's a bit of a black box. I'm not sure where it always draws its conclusions from, so I would always go for the advice you ultimately give." (Respondent 3)*

Accountability for errors is a key concern, with consultants generally believing that ultimate responsibility lies with the human user or project manager, as AI is viewed as a tool rather than a responsible actor. As mentioned by respondents: 8, 3, 7 and 5.

> *"That's a difficult one. A difficult question, but I think if you use a free model somewhere, it seems to me that it's your own responsibility." (Respondent 8)*

> *"Then it is still the responsibility of the consultant in my view, because it is up to you to check that everything is working properly and to read the advice." (Respondent 3)*

> *"The ultimate responsibility remains with humans. AI is a tool, not an actor." (Respondent 7)*

> *"Currently, it's still just the person who uses it. In an ideal situation, where you don't make any mistakes, so to speak. I still think it's the person who uses it because it's a choice. You*

*can also make your own reasoning and calculations, and so on. So I actually think that there still has to be someone responsible because it's not yet a permanent colleague." (Respondent 5)*

Overall, consultants view AI with skepticism regarding reliability and ethical handling. They emphasize the need for human oversight, transparency, and clear accountability. Final decisions and responsibility must remain with humans. Consultants emphasize that human interpretation, expertise, and the ability to consider broader context gained through stakeholder interaction are crucial elements that AI cannot fully replicate. This human touch is seen as vital for quality control and ethical considerations. There is resistance to allowing AI to make final assessments or decisions independently, particularly concerning client interactions, strategic advice, or sensitive data. From the insights of respondents: 8, 2, 3, 6, 4 and 9.

*"So the problem with AI is, if the person doesn't know enough and isn't very sure, it's easy to see in the end result or easier to notice that something might be wrong. When you formulate something, it's usually very nicely worded, and so on and so forth. Was that difficult to recognize afterwards? Or whether it was 100% correct? So there is still a human component and someone who has to check the quality." (Respondent 8)*

*"I think you always tend to miss some of the broader context, which you gain by interacting with stakeholders and with the organization. What do we have?" (Respondent 2)*

*"I don't think it can replace it 100%. I think people still want that market knowledge, as I said." (Respondent 3)*

*"Coming back to Human-in-the-loop, I always think that there has to be a right strategy. And it always works. Yes, there is much more than just text. When you are in the same room with people, you can pick up on certain things that you cannot with technology... So I definitely think that the human aspect will remain in consultancy." (Respondent 6)*

*"But for more complex matters or when it comes to interactions with people and such, that's all a bit more sensitive, and I think it's good if human interaction comes into play there too." (Respondent 4)*

*"Staff need to understand that when they use such an agent to create something, the responsibility remains with them. Human-in-the-loop intervention must be maintained." (Respondent 9)*

The strong emphasis on human oversight and final responsibility indicates that consultants view AI primarily as an augmentation tool. The human element, including experience, critical thinking, and client interaction, is considered indispensable.

## 4.3. Influence on Employee Experience

This theme examines how the integration of Generative AI Agents is changing the day-to-day work experience of consultants, including aspects of efficiency, task management, learning, and interactions.

### 4.3.1. Efficiency, Task delegation and Autonomy

A primary impact of AI is the increase in workflow efficiency through automation and assistance with routine tasks. Consultants use AI for tasks such as drafting documents, summarizing notes and emails, rewriting texts, creating presentations, and handling translations. Automating these routine or "stupid tasks" frees up time for analysis, content reflection, and client conversations. Prep phases, document formatting, and initial drafts provide considerable time savings. As noted by respondents: 6, 2, 3 and 1.

> *"Yes, definitely. Everything from workshops to taking notes again. That's basically meeting minutes. That's one thing. I don't know anyone who likes doing that" (Respondent 6)*

> *"When it comes to communication materials, layout, training materials, these are all things that AI can help with. So mainly writing. Creating lots of visuals, making attractive PowerPoint presentations for work, lots of PowerPoint presentations. Just the layout and formatting alone takes a lot of time. So I think that's it." (Respondent 2)*

> *"I do think it can speed things up. It's very different when you no longer have to look up everything from scratch." (Respondent 3)*

> *"Um, yes. I do think it speeds up the creative process, allowing you to arrive at deliverables more quickly. those tedious tasks like translations. That gives you more time for the substantive, more interesting things and allows you to devote more time to them." (Respondent 2)*

> *"Honestly? I use them in all three analyses, the insights and the foundations. I think they have the most influence. They save the most time in the analysis phase because you simply gain hours." (Respondent 1)*

AI adoption also potentially enhances individual autonomy by automating administrative tasks and offering quick information access. This allows less experienced consultants to work independently sooner. As mentioned by respondents: 7 and 4.

> *"AI takes over repetitive/administrative tasks, allowing me to focus more on analysis and advice." (Respondent 7)*

> *"Because you can acquire that knowledge very quickly, you can get back to working independently much faster, without having to rely on more senior colleagues." (Respondent 4)*

Respondent 3 noted that increased autonomy is also appreciated for its contribution to workplace efficiency and satisfaction.

> *"It's definitely a plus when I can just write down the basics… it will significantly reduce my stupid tasks, so to speak. So there is definitely an advantage to that." (Respondent 3)*

However, despite these benefits, there are growing concerns regarding over-reliance on AI tools. Some participants caution against the risk of reduced critical thinking and diminished skill depth when AI is used as a substitute rather than a complement to human judgment.

> *"I believe that you should always be able to do it yourself, regardless of whether a piece of technology is available or not." (Respondent 6)*

> *"In time, I might become less self-critical about improving my own content. That's something I'm aware of." (Respondent 1)*

The delegation of repetitive tasks to AI demonstrably enhances workflow efficiency and frees up consultant time, redirecting focus towards analytical and client-facing activities potentially enhancing individual autonomy. But there are still key concerns and caution about over-reliance.

### 4.3.2. Skill development and Training

Many consultancy firms recognize the need to systematically introduce AI through structured training programs. These programs aim to increase understanding of AI's functionality, capabilities, and associated risks. As explained by respondent 8 and 9.

> *"Yes, there is definitely training in that first part of the training, the general part. It explains what AI is, but also, what are the dangers of AI misuse?" (Respondent 8)*

> *"Data literacy is fundamental and that companies need to offer prompt engineering training, educating staff on what AI is" (Respondent 9)*

Training formats vary across organizations. Some offer general onboarding courses that are mandatory, while others provide specialized sessions tailored to specific AI functionalities. In certain firms, AI-focused roles have been established to facilitate this transition. For instance, respondent 2 emphasizes that some teams have appointed AI ambassadors who are tasked with monitoring technological trends and training staff accordingly.

> *"Yes, and it's even mandatory. So as part of your onboarding, you have to take certain training courses on AI… These are actually quite simple training courses, but you do need to know a little bit about what it is and what it's for." (Respondent 6)*

> *"They held two sessions with different functionalities in which they explained what it is and what it does… so they did explain it at some point." (Respondent 3)*

> *"An AI ambassador has been appointed who is responsible for monitoring AI trends… then provide training to their teams." (Respondent 2)*

### 4.3.3. Changing Team Dynamics

AI's presence is beginning to alter dynamics of interaction and collaboration. The introduction of AI is perceived by some as potentially leading to fewer interactions among colleagues. This is partly

attributed to AI replacing functions previously handled by offshore staff or serving as a first point of contact for simple questions. However, respondents emphasize that the need for interaction and discussion remains, particularly for complex analyses and conclusions that AI cannot fully provide. As mentioned by respondents: 8, 6, 2, 4 and 5

> *"If there are fewer interactions, it will mainly be in processes that we outsource to our offshore staff, for example. Why? Because you can simply replace a number of people with AI. Yes, you will obviously have less interaction because those people are no longer there". (Respondent 8)*

> *"I think fewer interactions would be necessary. When I look back at an implementation project or something like that, simply because that can actually be a first point of contact for asking questions." (Respondent 6)*

> *"Um, yes, I think you should be less quick to call in help. But on the other hand, when it comes to analyses and conclusions, you can never rely entirely on AI, which means that interaction and discussion are still necessary. But colleagues? Yes" (Respondent 2)*

> *"And because you can acquire that knowledge very quickly, you can get back to working independently much faster, without having to rely on more senior colleagues... If you have to ask a physical colleague instead of just asking someone online, you get your answer straight away and can get back to work immediately." (Respondent 4)*

> *"I think, in any case. You actually have someone who can validate your work... You need one less point of contact, or it's either that people validate it or don't validate it because there's no AI, which simply means lower quality." (Respondent 5)*

The adoption of AI appears to be subtly shifting colleague interactions, potentially reducing reliance on peers for routine tasks and quick queries. However, the need for human discussion and collaboration for complex problem-solving is expected to persist.

## 4.4. Influence on Job Satisfaction

This theme explores how AI impacts overall job satisfaction. The most meaningful aspects highlighted revolve around direct human interaction, problem-solving, and strategic engagement. AI is seen as valuable when it supports these core activities by taking away painful tasks, allowing more focus on the quality of deliverables and the challenging, rewarding aspects. As mentioned by respondents: 8, 6, 4 and 3

> *"Yes, the most meaningful thing is actually communication with both your employees and your customers. So has AI had a big impact? A little bit, but not a huge amount yet." (Respondent 8)*

> *"For me personally, the most meaningful thing is still being in the room with people, helping them to effectively reach that 'aha' moment where they realize, 'OK, now we can see the way forward'... And I don't really see much point in interfering with that" (Respondent 6)*

> *"Yes, I think so, definitely. If you have a problem and you're sitting with people brainstorming about it and you come up with a solution together. That's what gives me the most satisfaction... and I think AI can help with that. Exactly, by taking away those small, very painful tasks, so that you can focus even more on the quality of your deliverables, of your project" (Respondent 4)*

> *"I also think that people generally hire us as consultants because they want to know a lot about how other clients do things and about the experience you gain from being in the market. And I think that knowledge gained from actually working at other companies will never be directly transferable to AI." (Respondent 3)*

The intrinsic value consultants place on human connection, strategic problem-solving, and experiential knowledge highlights areas where they feel their role is distinct and essential, positioning AI as a tool to augment these values rather than diminish them.

### 4.4.1. Positive Impacts

AI contributes positively by taking over less enjoyable tasks, enabling focus on more meaningful aspects. This makes work "more pleasant and easier". Automating tedious tasks like rewriting texts or formatting frees up time for more engaging work. As respondents argue, seeing AI as a "welcome help" contributes to a positive perception and reduces stress from disliked tasks. As mentioned by respondents: 8, 3, 7, 1 and 4.

> *"Their enjoyment and job satisfaction will increase. And that's not just with AI, but I think it's with any change that happens... But AI increases job satisfaction. I think that when I look at my team, many people see it as a welcome help. And that's what it is. Sometimes they use it to perform tasks they don't like doing. That increases their job satisfaction." (Respondent 8)*

> *I do find it a lot of work. I use it for those texts. It's very different when you no longer have to look up everything from scratch. This is a nice synonym for that. And you just say, here's*

*a basic text in English, which is usually the case. Yes, I quickly write this down, like other stupid tasks that I can do much faster than you can. Like taking meeting notes. Or then. Where else but at work would you write out those policies? The fact that you just have to check it and not write it again is a difference" (Respondent 3)*

*"It has become more pleasant: less time wasted, more focus on what I am good at" (Respondent 7)*

*"It definitely improves things. It makes life easier. Yes." (Respondent 1)*

*"Yes. Simply because you can achieve more with more knowledge. Because you had it initially. And yes, because you. For me, they are still fairly limited, but you can outsource repetitive tasks and focus more on the things that are challenging for you and where you learn more yourself. That gives me more pleasure anyway." (Respondent 4)*

The positive impacts of AI on job satisfaction stem primarily from its ability to automate tedious tasks, thereby enhancing efficiency and allowing consultants to dedicate more time and energy to challenging and valuable work.

### 4.4.2. Negative Repercussions

The introduction of AI also elicits negative emotional responses. Some employees experience stress related to fears of job replacement. A significant concern, particularly for junior consultants, is the potential loss of foundational learning experiences. Tasks like taking meeting notes or building slides, if automated, could detract from their learning curve and interaction opportunities. Some worry clients may not pay for junior work that AI can do. As mentioned by respondents: 8, 6, 2, 1 and 9.

*"It certainly doesn't cause me any stress. I do have employees who do get stressed because they start thinking, oh no, this is going to take my job away or who knows what." (Respondent 8)*

*"I don't think it will have a huge impact on me personally... I can certainly imagine that this will be the case in certain types of consultancy, such as UX designers and user experience designers. If you can now have a new app generated by AI in one go, I can imagine that people will quickly start asking why we need them." (Respondent 6)*

*"And to be honest, the remaining tasks, like verifying AI output are typically less engaging. Checking results is simply more tedious than producing them, even if the latter is more effortful. So the learning process not only becomes more difficult, but also potentially more demotivating for new hires." (Respondent 9)*

*"If it turns out that clients are no longer willing to pay for a junior who only takes notes, then I believe that this will detract from your learning experience with us". (Respondent 2)*

*"So I sometimes think about junior profiles who don't necessarily have that interaction with the customer yet. I do see a risk there in the sense that, yes, it would be easier to use an AI tool, whatever. Building slides, conducting interviews, because there are already tools*

*available... So, for senior profiles, you're safe from the juniors. I do see a risk there. So, the first two to three years are crucial" (Respondent 1)*

*"There's a recurring concern, will AI take my job? I don't think that applies to more experienced profiles. But for someone like you, entering the labor market, it might." (Respondent 9)*

The changing nature of work due to AI can also be a source of stress. Frustration arises when AI outputs are inconsistent, incorrect, or require significant effort to prompt effectively. AI "hallucinations" or failure to provide useful results after effort are specific sources of frustration.

*"No stress. Indirect frustration. If, for example, you have to create fairly large prompts and nothing useful comes out of it. Because then, for example, AI started hallucinating." (Respondent 6)*

*"It takes some time and effort to ask the right questions to ChatGPT to get good answers. Of course, there is also doubt about some generated answers" (Respondent 7)*

*"Not much yet, because I only use it for basic things... I know that we also had a module that was supposed to be ready for use, but it was always wrong. But I just gave up on that after three attempts and wasn't frustrated." (Respondent 5)*

The negative repercussions of AI involve emotional strain such as anxiety about job security and frustration with AI's current limitations and inconsistencies. A specific concern is the potential impact on the training and development of junior consultants.

## 4.5. Future Outlook and Expectations

Consultants predict AI will become a fixed part of work. Operational tasks may be automated, potentially decreasing the need for consultants in those areas. However, strategic advising, policy development, and handling complexity will still require human expertise. The role is seen as evolving towards higher-value activities, interpreting AI output, and human interaction. The "human touch" and direct client interaction are viewed as indispensable and irreplaceable. As mentioned by respondents: 7, 3, 1, and 9.

*"For simple questions possible, but for complex contexts, human intervention remains necessary." (Respondent 7)*

*"Very, very hard. Or at least from my perspective. So I think the job will evolve even further from what we are doing now... Human intervention is still needed. But I do think that our role will change even more, for example in implementing AI for customers." (Respondent 3)*

*"AI will become a fixed part of the work process. The challenge will be to combine human expertise with AI efficiency" (Respondent 7)*

*"In many jobs, that could take over part of your job. But I'm thinking in terms of consulting. The only thing I could see 'Jobs' taking over is building reports. Yes, but you always need that human touch to double-check for extra insights. Is everything correct? … I just believe*

*that you need that human aspect, so it will always be a tool and never a replacement. That's how I see it." (Respondent 1)*

*"If an AI agent is integrated into a company, it will naturally feel more authentic and aligned with that company. But you still need to do your job and offer unique contributions." (Respondent 9)*

The consensus view is that consulting will transform rather than be replaced, with AI handling more operational tasks while the uniquely human skills of strategy, complex problem-solving, and interpersonal client engagement remain central.

### 4.5.1. New Skills and Capabilities

The evolving landscape necessitates that consultants acquire new skills. There is strong consensus on the need for AI literacy, digital fluency, and prompt engineering. Consultants need to understand where AI is optimal and how to work effectively with the tools. Analytical skills and the ability to critically evaluate AI output are increasingly important. The focus is on using AI as an asset and taking the synergy between human and AI to a higher level.

*"That. I think that will have a major impact... On the other hand, I also think that we humans will need to acquire certain new types of skills in engineering. It's not as easy as it seems to write the right answer." (Respondent 8)*

*"Um, I think that, in general, we should be more comfortable with it...And I also think that understanding where it can be used optimally is important...So they need to know much better." (Respondent 3)*

*"You need to keep yourself up to date. You need to continue to develop your analytical skills...Analytical skills. What you can do with certain information." (Respondent 6)*

*"Data analysis, AI literacy, critical evaluation, and communication skills to translate AI output well to clients". (Respondent 7)*

*"If that starts to play a major role in consultancy? Yes, just uh. Just knowing how to work with it." (Respondent 2)*

*"For example, that they learn how to use AI as an asset rather than a replacement...They just need to ensure that they can take the synergy between them to a higher level than AI itself is capable of." (Respondent 1)*

*"Firms should start by offering prompt engineering training, educating staff on what AI is, and ensuring their data infrastructure is in place." (Respondent 9)*

Adapting to AI requires a proactive approach to skill development, with a focus on AI literacy, technical interaction skills like prompt engineering, and enhanced critical evaluation capabilities to leverage AI effectively as a tool.

### 4.5.2. Hopes and Concerns

The future view is a mixture of optimism and concerns. Consultants hope AI will enhance productivity, allow them to focus on higher-value problems, and make work more meaningful. There is optimism about "extra added value" once AI is used effectively. Concerns include the potential devaluation of junior roles and loss of interpersonal learning if tasks are automated. Apprehension exists regarding potential over-reliance on AI leading to a decline in critical thinking or foundational skills. Consultants hope for clearer ethical guidelines, particularly for confidential data use. As mentioned by respondents: 5, 3, 4 and 9.

> *"But I do notice that when I solve problems and improve processes, it is greatly appreciated... And I do think that as we get better at solving things faster or tackling bigger problems structurally, or thanks to AI, then it will become even more meaningful, because then a lot more will be solved…"(Respondent 5)*

> *"Yes. I think that it will enable people to work more efficiently and consultants to work more efficiently, and it will be easier for them to offer that extra added value once they learn how to use it, of course." (Respondent 3)*

> *"That there should be certain ethical guidelines, as well as guidelines regarding confidential data. What is allowed and what is not? Because at the moment it's all very vague and not everyone knows to what extent you are allowed to give input, or not." (Respondent 4)*

> *"I think most people underestimate just how advanced the technology already is. So yes, there are real ethical and societal concerns, and I believe we urgently need to confront them." (Respondent 9)*

The future of consulting with AI is viewed with cautious optimism. Consultants anticipate increased efficiency and focus on valuable work, but also harbor concerns regarding the developmental impact on junior staff and the need for careful management of AI's integration to avoid pitfalls like over-reliance and ethical breaches.

# 5. Discussion

## 5.1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to explore how management consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI Agents and how this influences their employee experience and job satisfaction. With the increasing prevalence of artificial intelligence in knowledge-intensive sectors, particularly management consultancy, it has become crucial to understand how consultants view the role of AI in their profession, as well as how it impacts their daily work experiences and overall job satisfaction. The results, derived from qualitative interviews, revealed a complex and multifaceted view of AI in consulting including different key challenges and findings.

## 5.2. Summary of Key Findings

Management consultants think about Generative AI Agents primarily in terms of an assistive colleague or tool, rather than an autonomous agent. They find them similar to a junior colleague, aide, digital secretary, or sparring partner, who would enable one to perform operational work or come up with initial concepts. This perspective reflects AI's capacity to support processes while acknowledging its need for control and lack of full human capabilities.

A significant aspect of this perspective relates to trust, reliability, and ethics issues. Consultants consistently express concerns regarding the reliability and consistency of AI output, stating that AI models are "not always correct" and sometimes give alternate answers to the same question, affecting reliability. A prevalent view was one of consensus that AI output "cannot be blindly trusted" and needs human checking, proofing, augmentation, and adjustment. The lack of transparency regarding how AI reaches its conclusions is a great hindrance to trust, with experts seeking to know about reasoning and sources. The ethical concerns also include the use of data and privacy, with a focus on having clear guidelines for acceptable information input. The essence here is the belief that the final blame for errors lies with the human user or project manager because AI is a tool and not a responsible being. This belief presents AI as an augmentation tool in which human management, experience, and ability to consider the larger context obtained by the involvement of stakeholders are considered as essential elements which can't be replaced by AI. There is resistance to allowing AI to make final decisions or judgments independently, particularly in terms of client interactions, strategic suggestions, or sensitive information.

The creation of Generative AI Agents has a drastic influence on consultants' working life on a day-to-day basis, particularly influencing efficiency and task management. The primary positive influence is the increase in workflow efficiency through automation and assistance with repetitive tasks. Consultants use AIs to perform tasks such as making documents, summarizing emails and notes, paraphrasing materials, making presentations, formatting, and performing translations. By automating all these boring or "stupid tasks," consultants have more time to analyze, reflect content, and chat with the client, meaning lots of time saved on analysis stages, prep work, and initial drafts. Adoption of AI can also enhance personal independence through simplification of administrative work

and instant access to information, allowing junior consultants to be self-sufficient earlier without having to consult senior colleagues. Increased independence is also desired for its effect on office productivity and cheerfulness.

Dependence on AI tools is there, the application of AI is also viewed by some to risk reduced critical thought and more profound skill loss when used as a substitute for human judgment rather than as an adjunct. The application of AI is also viewed as expected to alter teamwork, with less collaboration between coworkers, partly because AI might do work formerly done by offshore employees or serve as a preliminary line of answer for routine questions. Yet consultants point out that the need for discussion and communication continues, particularly for more sophisticated analyses and conclusions that can't be totally provided by AI.

When it comes to job satisfaction, AI assists positively by taking on the less rewarding tasks, allowing consultants to focus on more rewarding aspects of the work, like direct human interaction, problem-solving, and strategic engagement. This renders work "more agreeable and easier" by freeing from drudgery, making time for more challenging work. Considering AI as a "helpful aid" is an attitude and reduces stress from abhorred work. Consultants' inherent value of human touch, strategic problem-solving, and experiential knowledge locates areas where their work is considered distinctive and essential, where AI is to be utilized as a means to amplify these values.

But AI also provokes negative emotional responses. Stress related to anxieties of losing their jobs impacts some of the staff. Frustration by incoherent, incorrect, or uninformative AI outputs, with much effort to obtain useful answers or deal with "hallucinations," are among the issues.

One of the serious issues, particularly raised in the case of junior consultants, relates to loss of early learning experiences. Tasks such as meeting note-taking or creating slides, if automated, might take away from their learning curve and opportunities for engagement. There is concern that clients will not pay for junior work that AI can do, which could negatively affect the learning experience offered by firms. There is concern that the first two to three years will be most critical in acquiring basic skills and customer interactions, which will suffer due to increased use of AI for mundane tasks. The remaining tasks after automation, for example, reviewing AI output, are at times perceived as less exciting or even de-motivating for new staff than creating work from scratch. More experienced consultants feel safer from direct job replacement than the job market entrants.

In the future, consultants project AI as becoming an integral part of work, performing progressively more routine operational tasks. Strategic counsel, policy-making, handling complexity, and the "human touch" including direct client interface are regarded as priceless and non-replaceable. The work will be asked to shift towards the value chain to more valuable activities, deciphering AI output, and staying focused on human interaction, refocusing consulting rather than replacing it. The new context calls for the acquisition of new skills, including AI literacy, digital fluency, prompt engineering, increased analytical capacity, and the ability to critically evaluate AI output. The focus is on leveraging AI as a resource and achieving synergy from human and AI capabilities. The future vision is a combination of optimism for increased productivity and focus on more-value-added matters, and concern regarding the evolving impact on junior staff, potential excessive reliance at the expense of reduced thinking, and a need for even greater ethical guidance.

## 5.3. Link to Existing Literature

This section situates the empirical findings of this study within the broader landscape of existing academic literature on generative AI in professional contexts. As consulting firms increasingly adopt Generative AI Agents, understanding how these technologies are perceived, implemented, and anticipated for future integration becomes crucial for both scholars and practitioners. By linking empirical insights to established theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, this section demonstrates how consultants' experiences with Generative AI both align with and extend the academic discourse on human-AI interaction, technology adoption, and organizational change.

### 5.3.1. Perceptions of Generative AI Agents

Consultants also refer to generative AI agents as supportive collaborators, as junior colleagues, digital secretaries, or sparring partners, but not as autonomous actors. This perspective is consistent with academic characterizations of AI agents as computer programs that operate in defined environments to achieve specific goals. These agents, particularly those enhanced by foundation models, exhibit a high degree of autonomy and task coordination but remain under human control (Poole & Mackworth, 2023; Yee et al., 2024). Thus, consultants' framing of generative AI as a tool that enhances but does not replace strategic decision-making is consistent with the literature's characterization of AI as augmentative rather than substitutive (Tiwari, 2025).

Issues of reliability, consistency, and transparency of AI output reflect existing trust problems in human-technology interaction. Consultants report that generative AI systems can respond differently to identical prompts, thereby undermining their perceived reliability. The same issues are reflected in academic literature, which highlights the necessity of interpretability and behavioral consistency as foundations of user trust (Diederich et al., 2022; Rapp et al., 2021). Rapp et al. (2021) also warn that anthropomorphism of AI systems may lead to users developing unwarranted trust, while transparency and system feedback remain central in order to ensure engagement and accountability.

Furthermore, the need for human involvement, as emphasized by consultants, aligns with the human-in-the-loop (HITL) paradigm advocated in the literature. HITL systems are particularly important in complex, high-stakes domains such as consulting, where decisions involve contextual decision-making, ethical consideration, and stakeholder engagement (Murray-Rust & Tsiakas, 2022). Consultants' claims of ultimate decisional authority lying with humans align with findings by Constantino (2022), in his critique of legislative gaps permitting superficial human supervision of AI systems. These reports affirm the opinion that AI systems must remain accountable to informed and empowered human judgment.

Ethical concerns, specifically regarding data privacy, usage, and boundaries of input, are another prominent concern for consultants. Their desire for boundaries on what information can be safely processed by AI is reflective of broader debates on informational self-determination and algorithmic control (Diederich et al., 2022). With AI solutions accessing proprietary organizational data, the lack of explainability in decision-making increases concerns about fairness, accountability, and regulatory compliance (Yee et al., 2024).

### 5.3.2. Influence on Job Satisfaction and Employee Experience

One of the most prominent strengths of Generative AI Agents is that they assist in attaining task efficiency through automation. Consultants increasingly use AI to prepare reports, summarize communications, and generate presentation content, hence freeing up cognitive ability for more advanced work. This agrees with the research by Brynjolfsson et al. (2025) where they demonstrated a 15% boost in workers utilizing AI tools. Similarly, in the JD-R model structure, such tools of technology come under digital job resources that aid performance by reducing job strain and administrative overload (Scholze & Hecker, 2024). The application of Generative AI tools also enables greater autonomy, particularly for less experienced consultants. By making access to information available and automating repetitive questions, AI allows junior employees to perform tasks on their own, free from constant supervision. This change in perceived control and self-efficacy is a product of the motivational strength of autonomy in the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and supported by Hemmer et al. (2023), which found AI-aided delegation boosts staff satisfaction and performance if framed in terms of individual strengths.

From a technology adoption perspective, the successful adoption of AI tools by consultants as noted aligns with the principles of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Davis and Granić (2024) discuss that perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) are strong predictors of behavioral intention to use technology. Experience such as improved task performance and reduced workload indicates high PU, while seamless integration into everyday routines indicates high PEOU. This is followed by the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) that identifies performance expectancy and effort expectancy as key determinants of technology adoption (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Both organizational culture and peer, which are under social influence in UTAUT, also have an impact on overall acceptance of AI tools in consultancy firms.

Despite the advantages, consultants suffer emotional ambivalence towards Generative AI, including stress induced by hallucinations produced by AI and apprehension over losing their jobs. These are in accordance with Thüring and Mahlke's (2007) model of human-technology interaction, which states that emotional involvement is a variable in determining the user experience. Frustration with unpredictable AI outputs and concerns over the erosion of professional competencies construct negative affective states, while intuitive and esthetically rational interactions generate trustworthiness and satisfaction. Consultants' most outspoken concern is probably the risk of skill degeneration among lower-level staff. Automation of essential tasks, such as taking meeting notes or creating presentations could be limiting learning opportunities vital to professional development. This is supported by Lin (2023), who states that AI can interfere with internal motivators such as task identity and recognition based on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. The Job Characteristics Model also focuses on the importance of skill variety and task significance, automation that strips them away may have a negative impact on job satisfaction and long-term motivation (Sadeghian & Hassenzahl, 2022).

The use of AI agents can actually reduce interpersonal interaction between consulting teams, since employees will rely more on technology for straightforward questions and solutions. The trend is straining the social dimension of worker experience, as Batat (2022) conceptualizes it, where the

emphasis is on the importance of work relationships to bring about well-being and work engagement. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2020) found that successful human-AI collaboration is founded on mutual flexibility and common mental models, which are difficult to attain when AI agents replace rather than complement human collaboration.

### 5.3.3. Future Outlook

The destiny of management consultancy is increasingly being defined by incorporating AI, with experts suggesting that AI will be an embedded part of consulting operations. Routine and operational work is likely to be increasingly automated, optimizing efficiency and minimizing time-consuming manual labor. Yet the literature is invariably consistent in stating that AI will not replace the fundamental human aspects of consultancy. Instead, strategic advice, policymaking, dealing with complexity, and direct client interaction are to be enduring and irreplaceable because they entail contextual judgment, ethical reasoning, and interpersonal trust, abilities which are uniquely human (Oarue-Itseuwa, 2024; Samokhvalov, 2024).

This evolving environment heralds not replacement but remapping of the role of the consultant. Krüger and Teuteberg (2018) note that machine intelligence-driven hybrid consulting models combining machine intelligence with human expertise are no longer exceptional. Such models facilitate consultants to shift their focus from low-value tasks, such as developing AI-generated insights, towards high-value activities, including explanation of AI-generated insights, facilitation of client decision-making, and strategic guidance. In such situations, consultants will have to learn new competencies like AI literacy, digital fluency, prompt engineering, and higher critical thinking (Bode et al., 2022; Poole & Mackworth, 2023). Critical examination of AI outputs and ongoing ethical management will be imperative as AI progresses towards increased autonomy and integration into consulting activities (Yee et al., 2024).

The potential benefit of AI in consultancy is increased productivity, faster decision-making, and liberation of expertise to free less experienced consultants to copy the communication approach and thinking of high performers (Brynjolfsson et al., 2025). The literature, however, also offers essential issues. These are the potential developmental stagnation of junior consultants that could be denied learning opportunities in core skills if AI does too much entry-level work (Worktech Academy, 2025). There is even a risk of too much reliance on AI systems, which could reduce critical thinking and reduce human responsibility (Tiwari, 2025; Yee et al., 2024).

The future of consultancy is one of hope and caution. Although AI holds the promise of significant productivity improvements and knowledge work enhancement, its successful implementation relies on building complementary human capabilities, ethical controls, and continued focus on consulting practice's relational and interpretive aspects. Accordingly, the future consultant will not be replaced by AI but will, rather, become a hybrid professional who utilizes AI as a synergistic tool in an increasingly digital and dynamic consulting landscape (Christensen et al., 2013; Tiwari, 2025).

## 5.4. Implications for Practice

The advent of Generative AI Agents that can perceive, reason, and act independently represents a shift in the consulting workflow. Although currently at levels 2-3 of autonomy (Tiwari, 2025), these systems are moving towards more strategic capabilities. Their deployment holds promise for efficiency benefits but poses fundamental human-centric issues, particularly the developmental path of junior consultants. Young graduates or early-career professionals typically acquire skills through immersion in innovative tasks, client contact, and impromptu mentorship. If these are substituted by automation, the knowledge capital of consulting firms risks being diminished in the future. Thus, all deployment plans must be scrutinized with reference to their impact on early-career learning. The following practices aim at ensuring that AI deployment strengthens, rather than weakens, the professional growth of consultants.

### 5.4.1. Establish a Human-In-The-Loop (HITL) Framework

To maintain the dependability and interpretability of generative AI outputs, consulting firms should adopt an effective Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) framework. This requires ongoing monitoring and testing of AI-generated content with organized feedback systems. Consultants must be equipped with a function to analyze, validate, and adjust AI outputs such that they can prevent known issues like hallucinations, inconsistency, and lack of contextual knowledge. Design of performance measures for AI accuracy, explainability, and moral alignment can support this effort and enhance confidence in hybrid decision-making systems.

Companies also need to make plans to re-architect workflows to make effective collaboration of human and AI possible. Rather than replacing human judgment, generative AI tools need to be employed to augment the capabilities of consultants in activities like content creation, data integration, and knowledge retrieval. Care should be taken to preserve developmental tasks central to junior consultants' learning trajectories such as client interaction, problem definition, and strategic narrative construction. By integrating human judgment and decision-making as a fundamental part of automated processes, organizations are assured that AI integration is aligned with performance as well as professional growth.

### 5.4.2. Human-Centered Culture through Policy, Training, and Talent Development

To use AI tools in a responsible and sustainable way, companies need to create a culture that keeps people at the center. This starts with clear rules about how AI should be used. Policies should explain what kinds of data can be shared with AI, how to protect client privacy, and who is ultimately responsible for decisions made with the help of AI. It should be clear that AI suggestions are just suggestions and that people are still responsible for the final outcomes.

In addition, training programs should teach consultants how to use AI properly. This includes learning how to write effective prompts, how to understand the strengths and weaknesses of AI tools, and how to evaluate AI-generated content. For junior staff especially, this training should be combined

with lessons in basic consulting skills, to make sure that they still build strong foundations for their careers.

Finally, talent development systems should adapt to the new ways of working. Firms should update how they assess performance to include both traditional consulting skills and new digital abilities. Mentoring and learning programs may also need to change. For example, rotating junior consultants through different kinds of projects, some with AI support and some without can help them gain a well-rounded set of experiences and avoid overdependence on AI.

In summary, adopting generative AI in consulting can bring many benefits, but only if done thoughtfully. By keeping humans involved, setting clear guidelines, and supporting continuous learning, consulting firms can make sure AI strengthens rather than weakens the profession’s core values of judgment, trust, and professional growth.

## 5.5. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insight into consultants' perceptions of digital transformation, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and consisted of eight consultants with varying experiences and functional specialism, and one AI Agent Expert. Despite including junior and senior consultants, as well as one partner and one independent owner, the small sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader consulting industry.

Second, the results of the functional areas sampled, such as service design, people and change, treasury, supply chain, and cyber/technology, may not be fully applicable to consultants serving in less represented functional areas such as legal, engineering, or pure strategic advisory, where the nature of client engagement and digital integration would be significantly different. Additionally, the consultants represented various organizational contexts, from large firms to single practices. Whilst this variation adds depth to the data, it also results in contextual variation that could have influenced individual responses. Firm size, internal culture, and degree of digital maturity can shape how digital transformation is conceived and achieved, which restricts the consistency and comparability of participant experience.

Moreover, the study employed a cross-sectional design, reflecting consultants' views at a single point in time. Because of the rapidly changing nature of digital technologies and consultancy practice, the method does not cover change over time. Longitudinal study would be necessary to cover how consultants' roles and digital strategies change in response to future trends and evolving client demands.

Lastly, the study does not capture anything but the voice of consultants, not balanced by the voice of clients, the ultimate recipients of consultancy services. The one-sidedness limits the potential to explore how digital transformation projects are viewed and valued by clients, and could overlook critical aspects of effectiveness, cooperation, and satisfaction in consultancy projects.

## 5.6. Recommendations for Future Research

In light of the findings and limitations of this study, several areas for future research and investigation are proposed, each of which provides opportunities for growth in understanding further the evolving role of the consultant in an increasingly AI-studded world. These topics supplement existing literature and attempt to increase knowledge of the implications for the consulting profession of generative AI.

**Longitudinal Career Impact Studies**

The first area for additional investigation is the long-term impact of generative AI on the careers of consultants. One inquiry is how AI tool integration influences consultants' tasks, roles, and career trajectories in the long term. As AI continues to automate and augment portions of consulting work, knowing the broader implications for careers of specialists in this field is essential. In particular, longitudinal studies are needed that monitor these changes at different stages of a career, from junior consultants through to senior management. In addition, the implications for job satisfaction and professional identity in an AI-enhanced consulting context should be explored. As work evolves, consultants might find that their contribution, autonomy, and value delivered to clients change. Such

studies might uncover the extent to which generative AI affects the sense of fulfillment and professional development of consultants.

**Skills, Learning, and the Future of Junior Consultants**

The ubiquitous deployment of generative AI must have profound consequences for the skills and learning requirements of consultants, especially for junior consultants. With AI tools now doing the initial-level work, such as data collection, analysis, and content creation, there is a need to identify what new skills are emerging as necessary for consultants. These may include skills pertaining to the management of AI tools, interpretation of data, and improved client interaction. In the future, research must examine consultancy firms and how their onboarding and training programs are changing, particularly for junior consultants. The traditional learning paths, with vast on-the-job experience and knowledge accumulation, might no longer hold good in a future where AI technology does most of the routine chores. Observing what companies are doing to mold training practices so that junior consultants acquire the right skills will be crucial for crafting tomorrow's professionals.

**Client Perception and Trust**

With increasing immersion of AI in consulting activities, client attitudes toward AI-produced deliverables are becoming more critical to understand. For this field of study, research can explore how clients assess the quality, reliability, and integrity of AI-driven outputs. It would be insightful to investigate whether clients feel a difference between human-produced and AI-produced content, and in what manner such a feeling could affect their level of confidence in consultants' work. Also, one needs to look into how the use of generative AI in consultancy affects clients' confidence in consultants and value perceived for services rendered. As applications of AI become more capable of producing quality outputs, clients may wonder if they need traditional consultancy services. Understanding the trust dynamics of human-AI collaboration and the probable to-be-changed value perception will be the foundation for best practices in maintaining client relationships in the AI era.

**Regulation, Legal Compliance, and Ethics**

Finally, the ethical, regulatory, and legal aspects of using generative AI in consultancy need closer examination. With increased deployment of AI technologies to handle and analyze confidential client information, it is time to investigate the legal and regulatory concerns generated by it, in particular, regarding data privacy, intellectual property rights, and data ownership. Follow-up studies must assess how consulting firms are dealing with these issues and complying with data protection standards, particularly in global environments where regulations might differ. Also, care will be needed to address the ethical concerns of AI usage, such as issues of algorithmic bias, transparency, and the disclosure of AI use in decision-making. Consultants will need to design ways to address these ethical concerns and ensure that AI tools are used in ways that appeal to professional standards and societal expectations. Research could examine how firms are coping with these issues and what ethical principles are being set in place to govern the use of AI within consulting practice.

# 6. Conclusion

This thesis explores how management consultants perceive the introduction of generative AI agents and how these perceptions influence their job satisfaction and employee experience. The findings indicate that while the consultants overall are open to AI as a useful and streamlining tool, its deployment also has challenging aspects, particularly for new consultants and in terms of ethical considerations.

Generative AI is viewed primarily not as a replacement for human consultants but as a virtual aide or junior partner suitable for repetitive and operational work such as writing, formatting, summarizing, and translation. This contributes positively to the employee experience by preventing mental overload, streamlining processes, and enabling consultants to focus more on strategy, analysis, and client-related responsibilities. Thus, the majority of consultants are more satisfied in their work, spurred by greater control, better time management, and more meaningful contributions to work.

This positivity is, however, negated by severe doubts, especially among junior consultants. As more tasks become routine and automated, starting professionals risk missing out on valuable early career learning opportunities. Tasks like note-taking, slide production, and low-level analysis have traditionally been important benchmarks for skill development, client exposure, and team cohesion. Their removal threatens to lower task value, engagement, and junior role perceived worth. Also, some junior consultants feel they are reduced to verifying AI output rather than generating original content, which diminishes their sense of control and satisfaction in the job. In addition, ethical concerns came into the forefront in every level of experience. Consultants were worried about the reliability and transparency of AI outputs, particularly hallucinations, incomplete answers, and black-box reasoning. Data privacy and responsibility were also brought to light, such as uncertainty over what client information can be safely shared and who will ultimately be held accountable for errors made by AI. These issues emphasize the need for open guidance and regulation for the efficient usage of AI where human oversight is still highly important.

To summarize, consultants seek AI as a long-term element that will change but not replace their work. While automation will handle more mundane work, human abilities such as strategic judgment, ethical reasoning, and client relationship are still essential. Consultants will acquire new skills such as AI literacy and discerning analysis while in transition, while companies require AI to help instead of depleting learning, integrity, and trust. Generative AI agents can enhance job satisfaction and employee experience through optimizing work and enabling greater focus on deep work. That is, though, set against development risks for junior consultants and ongoing ethical issues. The consultancy future depends on attentive, people-sensitive integration that maintains both professional development and ethical norms.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Interview Guide Consultants

My name is Daan Peeters and I am a student at UHasselt, in the Master of Management program. The topic of my thesis explores how management consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI Agents and how this influences their employee experience and job satisfaction. Could you please confirm that you are aware of the topic of the interview, that I have your permission to record the conversation, and that you have signed the informed consent form?

**Cluster 1: Background & Context**

1. Could you briefly describe your role as a consultant and your areas of expertise?
2. How long have you been working in the consultancy field?
3. What do you consider the biggest disadvantages and advantages of consultancy?
4. Have you noticed any trends in consultancy in recent years?
5. What role does technology play in your work?

**Cluster 2: Perception of AI in Management Consultancy**

1. How familiar are you with Generative AI, both in your work and daily life?
2. How familiar are you with the term AI Agents?
3. Has your company established specific guidelines or policies for the use of AI? If yes, how are these communicated to employees? Could you provide examples?
4. If you could describe AI as a colleague, what kind of colleague would it be?
    - Have you ever felt that an AI tool truly functioned as a colleague? Why or why not?
5. Are there internal controls or quality checks in place to ensure that AI tools generate accurate and ethically responsible advice?
6. To what extent do you think AI influences or could influence client expectations of consulting services?

**Cluster 3: AI's Influence on Work Processes and Decision-Making**

1. Could you walk me through a typical consultancy project in your area of expertise?
2. How does or could AI influence this process? Can you provide a specific example?
3. Are there specific tasks in your projects where you explicitly would NOT want to use AI? Why?
4. Have you experienced a situation where AI made a mistake in an analysis or recommendation? How was this noticed and corrected?
5. How do you compare the accuracy of AI analyses to traditional analyses conducted by consultants?
6. When AI draws a conclusion that differs from your own analysis, how do you determine which decision should take precedence?

7. How does AI affect the speed at which you make decisions? Does this impact the thoroughness or nuance of your advice? Do you see risks in relying on AI for decision-making?
8. Has AI influenced your communication with clients?
9. If AI were flawless, would you still find human judgment necessary? Why or why not?

**Cluster 4: The Impact of AI on the Employee Experience**

1. To what extent do you experience more or less autonomy in your work due to the use of AI?
2. Do you feel better supported in your work through AI, or has it led to more pressure to be faster or more productive?
3. How does AI affect your work rhythm and task distribution? Can you provide examples that describe these changes? What has changed since before AI implementation?
4. Has AI changed collaboration with colleagues? Are more or fewer interactions needed? If so, can you provide an example?
5. Are there times when you feel dependent on AI in your work? (How does this affect your work experience?)
6. What experiences have you had with stress or frustration when using AI?
7. How would your workday look if you could use AI without limitations for any task?
8. If AI could give feedback on your work, would you accept it? Why or why not?

**Cluster 5: AI and Job Satisfaction**

1. Which aspects of your work do you find most meaningful? Has AI had an influence on this?
2. Has the introduction/use of AI made you feel more or less valued as a consultant? Why? Can you provide an example or situation when you experienced this?
3. When AI takes over certain tasks, do you see this as support or as an undermining of your expertise?
4. Are there times when you feel less involved in your work because of AI? Can you give an example?
5. Do you think AI affects or could affect opportunities for career or skill development in your field? Why or why not?
6. How would you describe your job satisfaction before and after the integration of AI into your work processes?
7. Do you think AI has/could enhance or diminish the value of human expertise in consultancy? Why?
8. Has the rise of AI affected your motivation to stay in the consultancy field? Why or why not?
9. If you could design an AI system that increases your job satisfaction, what features would it have?

**Cluster 6: Ethical Considerations and AI Governance**

1. To what extent do you trust AI output in your work? What factors influence your trust?

2. Can you describe a situation in which AI gave advice or an analysis you didn't trust? How did you handle it?
3. Do you think AI systems in consultancy are transparent enough about how they arrive at their recommendations? What could be improved?
4. What factors would increase your trust in AI-driven recommendations?
5. In which situations do you think human consultants should always make the final decision, even if AI makes a strong recommendation?
6. Who do you think should be held responsible if an AI system makes a mistake that leads to poor advice or a wrong business decision?
7. Are there clear protocols in your organization regarding who is liable if AI produces an incorrect analysis?
8. Do you think stricter regulations are needed for the use of AI in management consultancy? What could be improved?

**Cluster 7: The Future of AI in Consulting**

1. How do you think AI will impact the future of management consulting in the next 5–10 years? What opportunities and challenges do you foresee?
2. What skills do you think consultants should develop as AI plays a bigger role in consultancy work?
3. What role do you think human consultants will continue to play as AI capabilities evolve?
4. Do you envision a future where AI independently advises clients without human intervention? Why or why not?

**Outro**

Before we conclude, I'd like to give you the opportunity to add anything else. Is there an aspect of AI in consultancy that you consider important but that we haven't discussed yet? Or do you have a final thought you would like to share on this topic? Thank you very much for your time and valuable insights during this conversation!

# Appendix 2: Interview Guide AI Agent Expert

My name is Daan Peeters and I am a student at UHasselt, in the Master of Management program. The topic of my thesis explores how management consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI Agents and how this influences their employee experience and job satisfaction. Could you please confirm that you are aware of the topic of the interview, that I have your permission to record the conversation, and that you have signed the informed consent form?

**Cluster 1: Background & Context**

1. Can you describe your current role at work and any associated responsibilities?
2. To what extent do you encounter AI agent-related applications in your work?
3. In your opinion, what are recent trends in the use of AI in organizations?

**Cluster 2: Implementation**

1. In which business environments or departments have you had experience deploying AI agents?
2. What does the term "AI agent" mean to you? How would you describe it in your own words?
3. What do you see as the main practical applications of AI agents?

**Cluster 3: Practical Approach**

1. How is the integration of AI technology into existing processes typically handled within your organization (or at clients)?
2. Are there standard steps or methods you follow for such implementations?
3. Is there a governance structure around AI within your organization or at the client's? (e.g., guidelines, oversight, responsible parties)
4. Is it determined in advance what the role of human intervention will be in the operation of these AI agents?
5. Are any trainings on AI agents provided to clients?

**Cluster 4: Human Involvement and Collaboration**

1. How does collaboration with clients proceed when you implement AI agents?
2. How is it determined in your implementation practice when an AI agent is allowed to make autonomous decisions and when human intervention is required?
3. To what extent does ethics (such as bias, transparency, explainability) play a role in the development or deployment of AI agents in your projects?
4. Who do you think holds responsibility if an AI agent makes a mistake that affects a client decision?
5. Are there guidelines or protocols within your organization or at clients to anticipate unforeseen or incorrect AI outcomes?
6. Have you observed any changes in workload or deadlines since AI agents have become more popular with clients?

7. Is there a governance structure or set of guidelines regarding the use of confidential data in or the implementation of AI agents?

**Cluster 5: The Future of AI**

1. How do you see the role of AI agents evolving in your field over the next 5 to 10 years
2. What new skills or methodologies do you see as crucial for AI implementers as these systems become more powerful and autonomous?
3. Do you think AI agents will be able to operate fully autonomously in the future, without human oversight?
4. If you could change one thing about the current generation of AI systems to improve your work or that of your clients, what would it be?

**Outro**

Before we wrap up, I'd like to give you the chance to add anything yourself. Is there an aspect of AI agents that you consider important and that we haven't discussed yet? Or do you have a final thought you'd like to share on this topic?

# Appendix 3: Informed Consent

**Informed consent**

**Research:** How do management consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI Agents and how does this influence their employee experience and job satisfaction?

**Name + contact information researcher:**

**Daan Peeters (Daan_peeters@student.uhasselt.be)**

Individual interviews about how management consultants perceive the introduction of Generative AI Agents and how this influences their employee experience and job satisfaction.

1. I understand what is expected of me during this study.

2. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I have been adequately informed that I may discontinue the study at any time without having to give a reason, and that my participation in this study may be discontinued by the investigators at any time.

3. The results of this study may be used for research purposes. My name will not be published, pseudonymization will be used, and confidentiality of the data will be guaranteed at each stage of the research in accordance with the relevant legislation. I understand how my data and the research data will be handled.

4. I know that for questions after the interview I can contact: **Daan Peeters (Daan_peeters@student.uhasselt.be)**

**I give consent to make an audio recording. ☐**

**I consent to participate. ☐**

**I have read and understood the above information and have received answers to all my questions regarding this study.**

Date:

Name and signature of participant Name and signature researcher

# Appendix 4: Code Tree