The Intersection of AI and Employees: Evolutionary Trends in Research

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence has been reshaping the workplace environment for a few years now transforming opportunities for employees globally and introducing significant new challenges. In our paper we conduct a comprehensive literature review to illustrate the main trends in academic research on artificial intelligence and employees, drawing upon a robust dataset of peer-reviewed articles extracted from the Web of Science database. The paper's objective is to undertake a detailed analysis that highlights the key trajectories of evolution in academic discourse surrounding artificial intelligence within organizational contexts and identify critical gaps in knowledge, as well as prospective future research directions. These are relevant both for academic pursuit, but also for practitioners eager to be one step ahead of the AI stormy challenges. To attain this, we performed an analysis of over two thousand papers, employing Vos Viewer software. Results reveal several clear research evolution trajectories and the associated emerging trends on AI related research, from which we derived valuable insights into future directions and interpretations.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, AI, employees, technology acceptance, job stress*

JEL classification: O33, J24

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1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence is considered to be one of the most important things we are working on in the present, surpassing in impact fire and electricity (Pichai and Schwab, 2020). It has seen dramatic progress in recent times and its potential applications and advances raise concerns on their impact on society (Gruetzemacher and Whittlestone, 2022; VASILACHE *et al.*, 2024), education (Surugiu, Grădinaru and Surugiu, 2024), and on organizations (Diab, Isac and Dobrin, 2022). These allegations are supported by recent literature underlining that AI advancements

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transformed the way businesses operate lately (Kumawat *et al.*, 2025). As AI systems continue to advance, the interplay between AI and human employees brings optimism and fear in some cases, creating a fertile ground for academic research and policy debates. This paper explores the impact of AI on employees, providing clear insights from a diverse body of literature to understand its implications on workforce dynamics, employee productivity, and organizational challenges.

Based on these considerations the present research expands the work of (Vidu 2024) and uses a bibliometric analysis based on 2,451 publications between 1986 and 2025, using VOSviewer to identify the evolution of research topics in the aforementioned interval, current trends and future research directions based on research gaps. The purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between AI and employees, based on an extensive review of academic literature. The paper is organized as follows with a comprehensive literature review on artificial intelligence in organizations, research methodology, main findings and results, and finally discussions and conclusions.

2. Literature review on artificial intelligence in organizations

Today organizations are turning to advanced digital solutions (Șișu et al. 2024) as artificial intelligence (AI) has become the most important and disruptive force in organizations across all industries (Benbya, Davenport and Pachidi, 2020) as AI investment and participation relate to domestic economic outcomes (Ioan-Franc and Gâf-Deac, 2024). AI is changing organizational operations fundamentally (Bogers *et al.*, 2022), decision-making processes (De Bruyn *et al.*, 2020) and stakeholder engagement (Kim and Kim, 2022) across all industries, including emerging ones such as e-commerce (Micu *et al.*, 2021), impacting even macroeconomic policies (Pricopoaia 2024). Challenging as it is (Jamal and El Guermai, 2024), the integration of AI technologies enables businesses to enhance operational efficiency (Khanom, 2023), innovation (Feroz and Kwak, 2024) customer interactions (Raffey and Gaikwad, 2022) and human resources activities (Kolbjørnsrud, Amico, and Thomas 2016; Van Esch, Black, and Ferolie 2019). AI contributed through the years to improving team management (Seeber *et al.*, 2020), forecasting future product demands (Kawaguchi, 2021), or even identifying trends, thereby significantly enhancing efficiency (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the integration of AI technologies is reshaping organizational operations, driving innovation, and enhancing efficiency, positioning AI as a key enabler of organization success.

AI's capabilities in data processing and predictive analytics empower organizations to make informed decisions, thereby mitigating operational risks and enhancing strategic planning (Kalogiannidis *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, AI contributes significantly to innovation in business models. The emergence of AI-driven business strategies has prompted organizations to rethink their operational frameworks, adapting to the fast-paced digital landscape (Lee *et al.*, 2019; Farayola *et al.*, 2023). This shift is characterized by a focus on agility and responsiveness, enabling firms to identify new market opportunities and enhance their competitive edge (Tula *et al.*, 2024). The interplay between AI and organizational culture is also critical, as a

supportive culture fosters the successful implementation of AI technologies and fosters continuous innovation (Lee *et al.*, 2019; Olutimehin *et al.*, 2024).

AI's role extends beyond mere automation of repetitive tasks; it also facilitates the optimization of human resource management. The use of AI-driven tools in HR practices, such as recruitment and employee engagement, has been shown to enhance efficiency and create individualized employee experiences (Olutimehin *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, (Allioui and Mourdi, 2023) emphasizes that integrating AI and human potential is key to unlocking higher productivity and innovation, enabling businesses to thrive in the rapidly changing industry and customer landscape.

The implementation of artificial intelligence in organizations presents several managerial challenges that can significantly impact the success of such initiatives. One of the primary challenges is the paradox of automation and augmentation, where organizations must navigate the tension between automating processes and augmenting human capabilities. This paradox can lead to resistance among employees who may fear job displacement or feel threatened by AI technologies (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021). To address this, organizations need to foster a culture that embraces AI as a tool for enhancing human work rather than replacing it, which requires strong managerial capabilities to guide this transition effectively (Odeibat, 2023).

Another critical challenge is the need for organizational readiness and effective change management. Successful AI integration necessitates aligning AI initiatives with overall business strategies, establishing governance structures and promoting a culture that values data-driven decision-making (Aldoseri, Al-Khalifa and Hamouda, 2024). This alignment is essential for ensuring that AI systems are not only technically feasible but also strategically relevant to the organization's goals.

Data management and quality are also significant hurdles in AI implementation. Organizations often struggle with data availability, quality and governance, which are crucial for the successful deployment of AI systems (Rammer (Rammer, Fernández and Czarnitzki, 2022). Without a robust data foundation, AI initiatives may fail to deliver the expected benefits, leading to wasted resources and diminished trust in AI technologies. Therefore, organizations must invest in developing their data management capabilities to support AI applications effectively (Weber *et al.*, 2023).

Additionally, the ethical implications of AI adoption pose challenges for organizations. Concerns regarding data privacy, bias in AI algorithms and the potential for misuse of AI technologies necessitate careful consideration and the establishment of ethical guidelines (Olutimehin *et al.*, 2024). Organizations must ensure that their AI strategies incorporate ethical considerations to maintain stakeholder trust and comply with regulatory requirements.

Finally, the shortage of skilled personnel capable of managing and implementing AI technologies is a significant barrier. Organizations often face difficulties in recruiting and retaining talent with the necessary technical expertise, which can hinder their ability to leverage AI effectively (Reznikov, 2024). To overcome this challenge, organizations should focus on developing internal talent through training and fostering a culture of continuous learning to equip employees

with the skills needed to thrive in an AI-driven environment (Oyekunle and Boohene, 2024).

All in all, AI serves as a catalyst for change within organizations, influencing various aspects of operations, from customer engagement to risk management and business model innovation. The ongoing integration of AI technologies presents both opportunities and challenges. The successful implementation of AI in organizations requires addressing a multitude of managerial challenges, including the automation-augmentation paradox, organizational readiness, data management, ethical considerations, and talent shortages. By proactively tackling these challenges, organizations can harness the full potential of AI technologies to drive innovation and enhance operational efficiency.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Data collection

In this research we opted for a literature review method, based on the ground established by Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003). Our scope was to analyse the current set of research available on artificial intelligence in the organizational context, focused on employees related issues, to identify the evolutionary patterns and future trends. In the identification phase we performed a search in the Web of Science database, using “artificial intelligence” and “employee” in January 2025. In the extracting phase we included 2,451 papers, from all years, starting in 1986 to 2025, allowing all document types available for a clear and compelling picture of the topic.

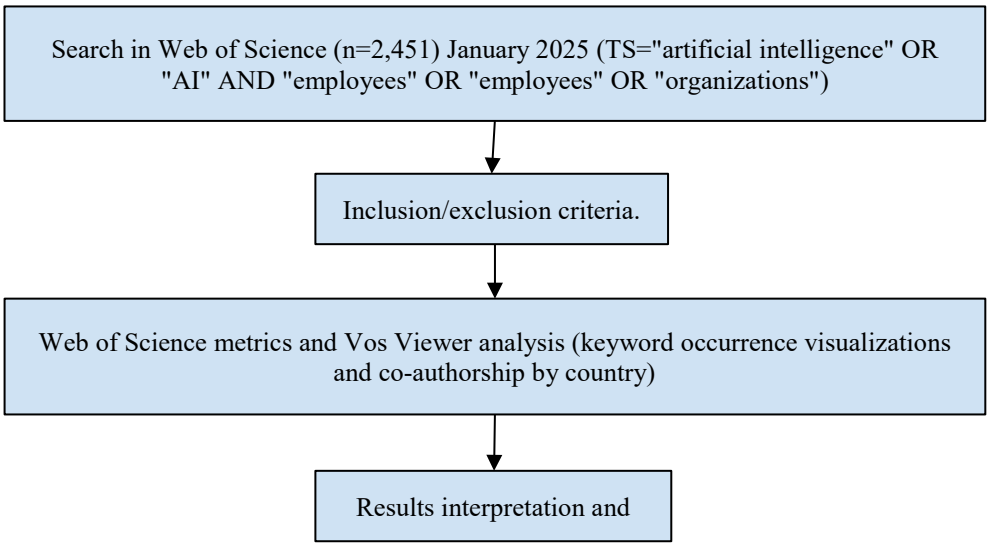

Figure 1. Research framework and design
Source: authors work

3.2 Data extraction and analysis

After applying inclusion/exclusion criteria we introduced the dataset into VOSviewer 1.6.20 version for processing. The software was employed for creating a co-authorship and co-occurrence analysis resulting in the research network visualisation, while the in-built Web of Science tools provided descriptive statistics and publication trends.

Descriptive statistics

According to Web of Science metrics (as seen in Figure 2) the research output on artificial intelligence in the organizational context, focusing employee related issues, emerged timidly in 1986 with 1or 2 publications in the first years and started to become a visible trend around 2018. This evolution in the number of publications is explained through a series of factors, starting with the evolution of technology on AI, machine learning, big data analytics, and natural language processing. Furthermore, the large number of publications starting from 2018 was made possible by including AI research into areas like healthcare (drug discovery, diagnostics), finance (fraud detection, algorithmic trading), transportation (autonomous vehicles), creative industries (art and music generation). Another explanation is that around the same time there were high-profile AI demonstrations capturing the public eye and media attention, with increased focus on ethical issues surrounding the topic.

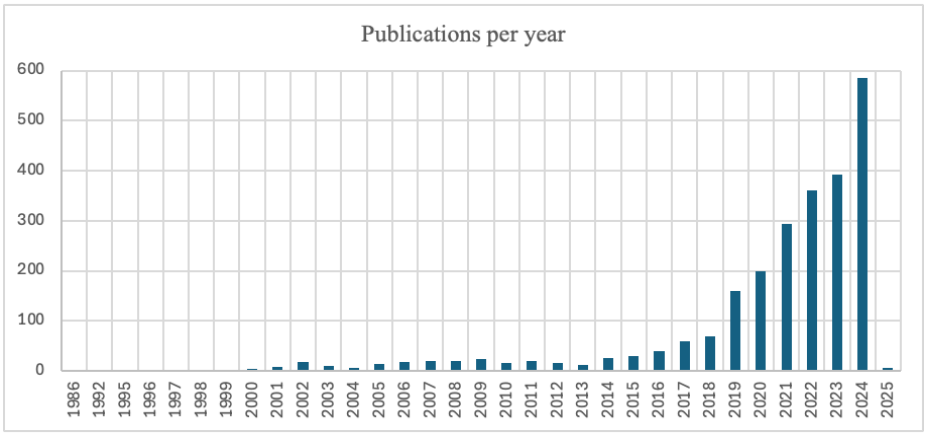

Figure 2. Publications per year

Source: authors work based on Web of Science

4. Findings and discussion

In the network visualization VOS viewer output (Figure 3) we notice 11 main clusters of key-works co-occurrences. The most prominent one is marked in red and centred around 19 keywords such as employee well-being, engagement, and performance in relation to AI and technology. This first cluster exposes a few central themes such as: employee engagement and well-being, workplace stress and

challenges, AI organizational dynamics, individual traits and adaptability, innovation and technology integration. This cluster highlights that AI's integration into the workplace is not just a technical or operational challenge but also deeply human. Organizations must prioritize employee engagement, well-being, and support to ensure AI adoption is successful and sustainable. The cluster's size suggests this is a critical area of focus in the field, underscoring its relevance to researchers and practitioners alike.

The second cluster, equal in key-rods number as the first one, is marked in green and centred around key concepts, such as chatbots, ChatGPT, customer service pointing out the widespread use of conversational AI for an enhanced customer experience. The second topic of the cluster regards generative AI and innovation underlining the connection the productivity and differentiation through an emerging competitive advantage in the hospitality industry, also pointed out by Vlasceanu 2(023). Another topic addressed in the green cluster refers to job performance and management linking to how AI shifted employee performance by providing tools that augmented employee capabilities in routine tasks. These lead naturally towards the topic of technology acceptance, pointing out a main concern on how employees and customers perceive and adopt AI technologies influenced by usefulness, ease of use and trust.

The third big cluster, with 12 keywords, is marked in pink and puts focus on emotions, HRM, organizational performance, sentiment analysis, transparency, trust, workplace and service robots. The topics emerging here are related to emotions in the workplace in relation to AI development, providing the context of using sentiment analysis in an organizational context. Second big topic focuses on human resource management being reshaped through AI in the recruitment, employee engagement, and performance management areas. Organizational performance suggests a broader exploration of how AI driven emotional insights impact business goals, while focusing on trust and transparency matters.

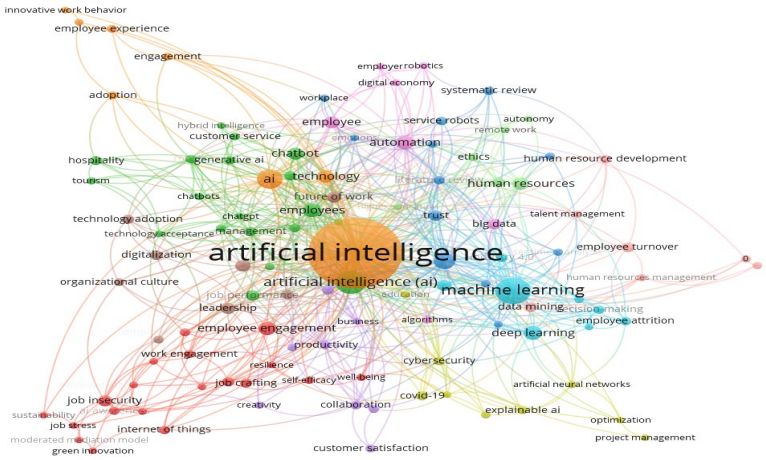

Figure 3. Network visualisation
Source: output from VOS viewer software version 1.6.20

In the overlay visualization VOS viewer output in Figure 4 we can observe the yearly evolution of academic research starting from 2021 to 2024, interval marking the highest number of publications in the Web of Science collection. The overlay visualization in VOS viewer provides a way to interpret the relationships between keywords, topics, or documents in a dataset over time or based on specific attributes frequency of occurrence. Based on this we can understand how research topics evolve over time, contouring emerging ones and underlining the focus in AI and employee related issues over the recent years transitioning from older to newer interests. Keywords that appeared earlier are often in cooler colours such as purple, evolving towards blue and green, while more recent terms are in warmer orange colour, while yellow shows most recent topics. We notice that in 2021 the research focus was on more technical topics such as data mining, artificial neural networks, optimization, robotics, digital economy, robots, but also emotional intelligence, management, employee turnover and human resource management. These topics evolved around 2022 to future of work, automation, employee/employees, chatbots, technology adoption underlining the progress of AI application, use and acceptance. In 2023 research focused on collaboration, cybersecurity, employee engagement, productivity, creativity, trust, ethics, remote work, emotions, hybrid intelligence, and innovative work behaviour, evolving in 2024 towards the yellow areas on human resource development, technology acceptance, job stress, explainable AI, organizational performance.

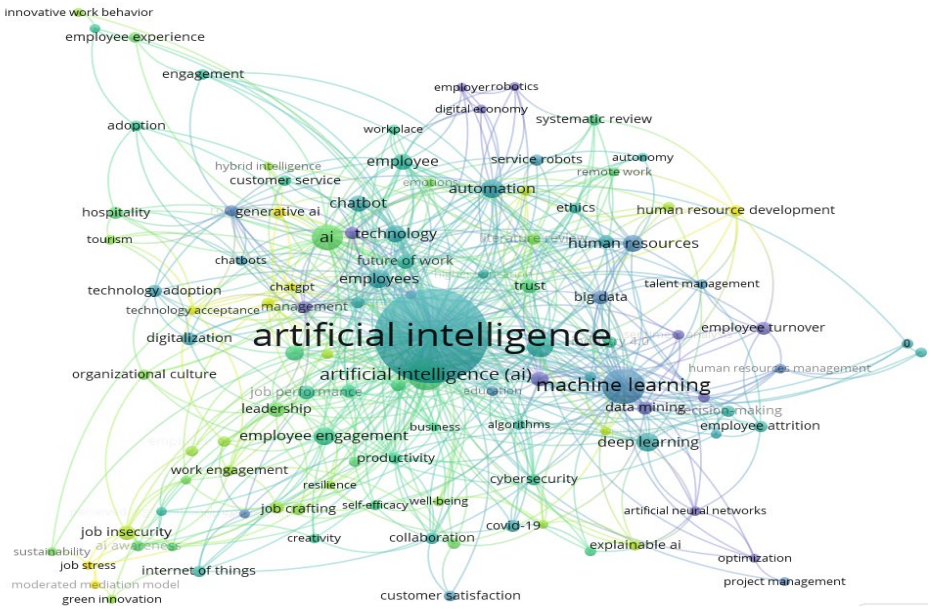

Figure 4. Overlay visualisation

Source: output from VOS viewer software version 1.6.20

Taking a more focused look, in the network visualization VOS viewer output (Figure 4) it can be observed that in 2021, research predominantly centred around the theme of robotics. Studies explored the implications of robotic integration in various sectors, particularly in sectors where physical labour was prevalent. This period was characterized by a growing interest in how AI technologies could augment human capabilities and automate routine tasks, particularly in sectors where physical labour was prevalent. For instance, Dwivedi et al. (2021) highlighted the transformative potential of AI in augmenting human tasks across various industrial applications, emphasizing the pace of change brought about by advancements in machine learning and autonomous decision-making. The year 2022 represented a significant shift toward the adoption of automation, highlighting both its advantages and the challenges it introduced across different sectors. In 2023, the research landscape shifted again, with a pronounced focus on productivity. Scholars investigated how AI applications could optimize employee performance and organizational output. The integration of AI analytics in performance management emerged as a critical area of study, with findings suggesting that personalized feedback and development plans could significantly enhance employee engagement and satisfaction (Wang and Tahir, 2020)

By 2024, the focus of AI research in organizations transitioned towards human resource development. This change reflects a recognition of the critical role that AI plays in shaping workforce capabilities and enhancing employee experiences. Moreover, a closer analysis of the network visualization VOS viewer output (Figure 4) reveals another evolutionary research direction in the field of AI in organizations, with a particular focus on employees. The progression of themes from management in 2021, to human resources in 2022, and then to employee performance and AI in 2023, culminates in a significant focus on work engagement, employee performance, technology acceptance and the integration of tools based on generative artificial intelligence in 2024. In 2021, the research landscape was primarily centred around management practices and the integration of AI technologies. The year 2022 marked a shift towards a more pronounced focus on human resources. By 2023, the focus expanded to include employee performance and the direct impact of AI on workforce capabilities. Research began to explore the implications of AI for HR practices, emphasizing the need for organizations to adapt their HR strategies to incorporate AI technologies. As we move into 2024, the research focus has shifted towards work engagement, technology acceptance and the use of advanced AI tools. Research indicates that generative AI tools are being utilized to enhance various HR functions, including recruitment and selection (Rigotti and Fosch-Villaronga, 2024). Also, the advancement of AI, especially in the domain of generative models, has demonstrated significant potential in enabling the development of creative and transformative solutions for organizations (Sundberg and Holmström, 2024).

5. Conclusions

The last century marked the management of companies in rapidly growing industries with a high degree of repetitiveness, the most representative being electronics and automobiles. Managers must create an AI-friendly environment for people and a people-friendly environment for AI (Pavaloiu, 2016). Technology was the driving force that determined performance outcomes, and employees were subjected to a pattern like today, where AI once again serves as the engine, and repetitiveness of events as an enhancer when it comes to the use of AI. The challenges remain the same for employees: fear of the new, resistance to change, acceptance, and organizational flexibility to new situations by developing norms and values within the organizational culture that empower employees to increase their own and the organization's performance to a higher level.

However, AI is not limited to equipment within a process that generates products for the market; it raises demands for continuous training to address the diverse challenges faced by employees, with significantly greater dynamism and complexity—using generative technologies and acquiring competencies. Although at first glance it may seem that employees are not necessary and could be replaced by AI, reality shows that they are indispensable for the development of companies. Currently, studies focus on specific aspects of human resource development as well as on consciously improving company processes, where employees ultimately contribute to organizational performance. On the other hand, topics of interest include occupational safety, stress caused by new conditions, and cybersecurity, which continue to be of concern to researchers.

Based on our analysis we can determine some clear future research areas, such as balancing AI benefits and employee related challenges in future years. Future studies could explore interventions to minimize job stress while maximizing job satisfaction and employee performance. Another area of research is related to fostering resilience and employee's self-efficacy, with research focusing on building employees' adaptability and confidence through targeted training programs. Furthermore, research is needed to explore strategic awareness and engagement to reduce turnover intentions. Based on the information derived from this literature review we see research topics emerging in areas such as how cultural and regional factors impact AI adoption and implementation in organizations or what are the main long-term implications on job performance and nature of work in service-oriented industries.

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