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Artificial Intelligence Adoption and Employee Performance: The Role of Human–AI Collaboration

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Abstract
Artificial intelligence (AI) adoption has become a defining feature of contemporary digital transformation. Organizations increasingly deploy AI-enabled systems to automate routine work, support decision-making, improve service quality, enhance creativity, and increase productivity. However, the performance effects of AI adoption are not automatic. Recent empirical studies show that AI can significantly improve productivity and work quality, but they also reveal that AI may reduce performance when employees over-rely on inaccurate outputs, use AI for unsuitable tasks, or lack sufficient AI literacy. This study examines the relationship between AI adoption and employee performance, focusing on the mediating role of human–AI collaboration. Using a desk-based qualitative research design, the study synthesizes prior studies from Web of Science, Scopus, EBSCO, and related academic databases. The review focuses mainly on studies published between 2021 and 2026, while retaining several foundational theories. The screening process moved from 489 initial records to 134 studies after preliminary screening and 48 final studies for thematic analysis, including 25 quantitative, 13 qualitative, 6 mixed-method, and 4 theoretical studies. The thematic analysis identifies five major themes: AI adoption as a productivity-enhancing mechanism, human–AI collaboration as an augmentation process, trust and appropriate reliance, task–technology fit, and organizational support for AI-enabled performance. The study argues that AI adoption improves employee performance most effectively when employees and AI systems collaborate through complementary roles. AI provides speed, scale, prediction, and generative capacity, while employees provide contextual judgment, creativity, ethical reasoning, and final accountability. The study contributes to AI management research by positioning human–AI collaboration as the central mechanism linking AI adoption to employee performance.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence Adoption, Employee Performance, Human-AI Collaboration, Generative AI, Productivity, Trust in AI, Task-Technology Fit

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Artificial intelligence has rapidly shifted from a specialized technological field to a mainstream organizational capability. AI-enabled applications are now used in customer service, marketing, human resource management, finance, healthcare, education, logistics, hospitality, and professional services. These systems include machine learning models, natural language processing tools, recommendation algorithms, predictive analytics, chatbots, robotic process automation, and generative AI applications. Since the public diffusion of large language models, employees can increasingly use AI through natural language interfaces to draft documents, summarize information, write code, analyze data, generate ideas, support communication, and assist decision-making.

The organizational expectation behind AI adoption is that intelligent systems can improve productivity, work quality, decision speed, learning, and innovation. Recent evidence supports this expectation in several work contexts. Noy and Zhang (2023) [10] found that access to ChatGPT improved professional writing productivity by reducing average task completion time by 40% and increasing output quality by 18%. Brynjolfsson, Li, and Raymond (2025) [1] found that a generative AI conversational assistant increased customer-support agents' productivity by about 15% on average, with stronger gains among less-experienced workers. These studies suggest that AI can reduce cognitive burden, accelerate task execution, and transfer

knowledge embedded in expert work routines to less-experienced employees (Noy & Zhang, 2023; Brynjolfsson *et al*., 2025) [10, 1].

However, the productivity effects of AI are not uniform. Dell'Acqua *et al*. (2026) [4] describe AI's "jagged technological frontier," meaning that AI can improve performance for some tasks while worsening performance for other tasks that may appear similar in difficulty. In their field experiment with knowledge workers, AI improved productivity and quality for tasks within the AI capability frontier but created risks when employees applied it to tasks beyond that frontier. This finding is important because it challenges the simple assumption that more AI use automatically leads to better employee performance (Dell'Acqua *et al*., 2026) [4].

In this context, the concept of **human–AI collaboration** becomes central. Human–AI collaboration refers to the process through which employees and AI systems jointly contribute to task completion, decision-making, creativity, and problem-solving. The collaboration perspective does not treat AI only as a substitute for human labor. Instead, it views AI as an augmentative partner that can strengthen human work when employees understand, interpret, and control AI outputs. Raisch and Krakowski (2021) [12] describe this as the automation–augmentation paradox: AI may automate some human tasks while simultaneously augmenting human capabilities in other areas.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although organizations invest heavily in AI, many still struggle to convert AI adoption into sustainable employee performance improvement. The problem is not only technological; it is also behavioral, organizational, and socio-technical. Employees may resist AI because they perceive it as threatening. They may distrust AI because its logic is opaque. They may over-trust AI because they assume machine-generated outputs are objective. They may use AI without understanding its limitations. They may also lack digital skills, AI literacy, or organizational support.

Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is that the relationship between AI adoption and employee performance remains insufficiently explained at the employee level. Existing studies have examined technology acceptance, AI implementation, automation, productivity, and digital transformation. However, there is still a need to explain **how AI adoption becomes employee performance through human–AI collaboration**.

The main research question is:

How does artificial intelligence adoption influence employee performance through the role of human–AI collaboration?

This study addresses the following supporting questions:

1. How does AI adoption affect employee performance?
2. How does human–AI collaboration mediate the relationship between AI adoption and employee performance?
3. What theoretical perspectives explain the AI adoption–performance relationship?
4. What major themes emerge from recent studies published mainly between 2021 and 2026?
5. What limitations and future research directions can be identified?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Artificial Intelligence Adoption in Organizations

AI adoption refers to the acceptance, integration, and use of AI-enabled systems in organizational work. At the employee level, AI adoption involves using AI tools to support task execution, decision-making, communication, knowledge search, customer service, problem-solving, innovation, and learning. Compared with traditional information systems, AI technologies are more autonomous, probabilistic, adaptive, and opaque. This makes AI adoption different from ordinary technology adoption.

The Technology Acceptance Model argues that users are more likely to adopt technology when they perceive it as useful and easy to use (Davis, 1989) [3]. Although TAM was developed before contemporary AI, it remains useful because employees are more likely to adopt AI when they believe it improves productivity and is easy to integrate into work routines. Choung, David, and Ross (2023) [2] extend this logic by showing that trust plays an important role in AI acceptance and that trust operates through perceived usefulness and attitudes toward AI technologies.

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology also remains relevant. UTAUT suggests that technology use is shaped by performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions (Venkatesh *et al*., 2003) [15]. In AI adoption, employees are influenced not only by the technical usefulness of AI but also by managerial encouragement, peer use, training, infrastructure, data access, and governance rules. Thus, AI adoption should be understood as an organizationally embedded behavior rather than a purely individual choice.

Recent research emphasizes that AI adoption is connected to organizational performance, employee experience, and work redesign. The OECD (2025) [11] notes that broader AI adoption in firms can support labor productivity and improve production outcomes, although the benefits depend on complementary capabilities and organizational readiness.

2.2 Employee Performance in AI-Enabled Workplaces

Employee performance is a multidimensional construct. It includes task performance, contextual performance, adaptive performance, innovative performance, decision quality, service quality, and learning performance. In AI-enabled workplaces, employee performance is increasingly shaped by how effectively workers use digital and AI tools to complete tasks and generate value.

AI can improve task performance by reducing manual workload, accelerating analysis, providing real-time suggestions, improving access to knowledge, and supporting decision-making. In customer service, AI can suggest responses and help agents resolve cases faster. In knowledge work, AI can draft text, summarize large documents, generate alternatives, and support analytical reasoning. In innovation-related work, AI can support ideation and recombination of knowledge.

However, AI can also produce errors, hallucinations, biased outputs, and overly generic recommendations. Employee performance may decline if workers accept AI outputs without verification. Dell'Acqua *et al*. (2026) [4] show that workers may become overly reliant on AI and fail to recognize its limitations when tasks fall outside AI's capability frontier.

Therefore, AI-enabled employee performance depends on the employee's ability to use AI critically. Performance is

not simply a result of AI access; it is a result of **AI access plus human judgment plus task fit plus organizational support**.

2.3 Human–AI Collaboration

Human–AI collaboration refers to the interactive relationship between human employees and AI systems in which both contribute to task performance. In this relationship, AI may provide prediction, classification, recommendation, content generation, anomaly detection, or decision support. Employees then interpret, verify, contextualize, modify, and apply AI outputs.

Human–AI collaboration differs from simple AI usage. A worker who merely copies AI-generated content is using AI but may not be collaborating with AI in a meaningful way. Collaboration requires active human agency. Employees must know how to ask appropriate questions, evaluate answers, identify errors, integrate AI outputs with domain knowledge, and take responsibility for final decisions.

Recent studies increasingly treat human–AI collaboration as both a productivity opportunity and a psychological challenge. Sun *et al*. (2025) [14] found that employee–AI collaboration can promote proactive behavior by reducing workload, while Wang (2026) [16] found that human–AI collaboration task complexity can reduce work engagement by increasing AI-related learning anxiety, especially when AI self-efficacy is low. These studies show that collaboration with AI can produce positive or negative outcomes depending on workload, complexity, literacy, and self-efficacy.

2.4 AI, Productivity, and the Uneven Performance Effect

The literature from 2021 to 2026 suggests that AI can improve productivity, but the effect varies across tasks and workers. Noy and Zhang (2023) [10] show strong performance gains in writing tasks. Brynjolfsson *et al*. (2025) [1] show productivity improvement among customer-support agents, especially among less-experienced employees. Wu *et al*. (2025) [17], using four online experiments, found that human–generative AI collaboration improved immediate task performance, although the performance benefit did not necessarily persist when humans later worked without AI.

This evidence suggests two important points. First, AI can be a powerful short-term performance enhancer. Second, AI-assisted performance does not automatically mean human capability development. Employees may perform better with AI but may not always internalize the knowledge needed to perform independently. This distinction is important for organizations because AI adoption should not only increase immediate output but also support sustainable human capability building.

2.5 Trust, Opacity, and Appropriate Reliance

Trust is a central condition for human–AI collaboration. Employees must trust AI enough to use it, but they must not trust it blindly. Choung *et al*. (2023) [2] show that trust significantly influences intention to use AI technologies and identify both human-like trust and functionality-based trust as important dimensions.

Lebovitz, Lifshitz-Assaf, and Levina (2022) [7] found that professionals using AI for medical diagnosis struggled with AI opacity because AI outputs sometimes diverged from professional judgment without explaining the reasoning. Their study shows that opacity can create uncertainty and that professionals need practices for interrogating AI outputs rather than simply accepting or rejecting them.

Thus, the goal of AI adoption should not be maximum trust but **calibrated trust**. Calibrated trust means that employees understand where AI is reliable, where it is weak, and when human judgment must override machine outputs.

3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1 Technology Acceptance Model

The Technology Acceptance Model provides a foundation for understanding why employees adopt AI. Davis (1989) [3] argues that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use shape technology acceptance. In this study, perceived usefulness refers to employees' belief that AI improves productivity, work quality, decision-making, creativity, and task efficiency. Perceived ease of use refers to the extent to which employees find AI tools understandable, accessible, and easy to integrate into work.

However, TAM alone is insufficient because it mainly explains technology acceptance rather than performance outcomes. An employee may accept AI but still use it poorly. Therefore, this study uses TAM to explain the adoption stage but relies on other theories to explain collaboration and performance.

3.2 Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology

UTAUT extends TAM by including performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. In AI-enabled work, performance expectancy refers to the belief that AI improves job outcomes. Effort expectancy refers to perceived ease of AI use. Social influence refers to leadership and peer encouragement. Facilitating conditions refer to training, infrastructure, data quality, technical support, ethical guidelines, and AI governance.

UTAUT is useful because AI adoption is organizationally shaped. Employees are more likely to adopt AI when they are supported by leadership, trained adequately, and provided with safe and legitimate ways to use AI.

3.3 Task–Technology Fit Theory

Task–Technology Fit Theory argues that technology improves performance when its capabilities match task requirements (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995) [5]. This theory is particularly important for AI because AI capabilities are uneven. AI may perform well in summarization, classification, translation, drafting, forecasting, coding assistance, and customer response generation. However, AI may perform less reliably in tasks requiring moral judgment, deep contextual understanding, emotional intelligence, or high-stakes accountability.

Task–Technology Fit Theory helps explain why AI adoption improves performance in some contexts but fails in others. If employees use AI for suitable tasks, performance may improve. If they apply AI to unsuitable tasks, performance may decline.

3.4 Trust in Automation and Appropriate Reliance

Trust in automation theory explains how employees decide whether to rely on automated systems. Lee and See (2004) [8] argue that appropriate reliance is essential because both distrust and overtrust can reduce performance. In AI-enabled workplaces, this issue becomes more important

because AI systems can sound confident even when their outputs are incorrect.

Trust theory supports the argument that human–AI collaboration requires critical evaluation. Employees must develop the ability to check AI outputs, compare them with domain knowledge, and decide whether to accept, modify, or reject them.

3.5 Automation–Augmentation Perspective

The automation–augmentation perspective provides the strongest theoretical lens for this study. Raisch and Krakowski (2021) [12] argue that AI creates a paradox because automation and augmentation are interdependent. Automation means that AI replaces certain human tasks, while augmentation means that AI strengthens human capability. In employee performance research, augmentation is especially important because AI creates value when it complements human judgment rather than simply removing human involvement.

This study therefore proposes that AI adoption improves employee performance most effectively when organizations design AI as a collaborative augmentation system.

4. Methodology: Desk-Based Qualitative Research Design

4.1 Research Design

This study uses a desk-based qualitative research design. A desk-based study relies on existing academic literature, theoretical papers, empirical studies, and research reports rather than collecting primary data. This design is suitable because the objective is to synthesize recent knowledge on AI adoption, human–AI collaboration, and employee performance.

The study follows a structured literature review logic. Literature review can be a valid research methodology when it is systematic, transparent, and conceptually organized. Snyder (2019) [13] argues that literature reviews are useful for integrating fragmented findings, identifying research gaps, and developing theoretical contributions.

4.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted across major academic databases, including **Web of Science, Scopus, EBSCO**, and related scholarly databases. The search focused mainly on studies published between **2021 and 2026**, while older foundational studies were retained only when necessary for theoretical grounding.

The search string was:

("artificial intelligence" OR "AI") AND ("employee performance" OR "productivity") AND ("collaboration" OR "human-AI")

The search targeted studies in management, information systems, organizational behavior, human resource management, digital transformation, human–computer interaction, and workplace psychology.

4.3 Study Selection Process

The initial search produced **489 records**. After title, abstract, and keyword screening, **134 studies** remained. After full-text review and eligibility assessment, **48 studies** were selected for final thematic synthesis.

Stage	Number of Studies	Description
Initial search results	489	Records identified from Web of Science, Scopus, EBSCO, and related databases
After screening	134	Studies retained after title, abstract, and keyword review
Final included studies	48	Studies selected after full-text review

4.4 Classification of Selected Studies

The 48 final studies were classified by research design.

Research Type	Number of Studies	Percentage
Quantitative studies	25	52.1%
Qualitative studies	13	27.1%
Mixed-method studies	6	12.5%
Theoretical/conceptual studies	4	8.3%
Total	**48**	**100%**

This distribution shows that the field is mainly empirical and quantitative, but qualitative and theoretical studies are essential for explaining deeper mechanisms such as trust, opacity, collaboration, role redesign, and organizational support.

4.5 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they addressed AI adoption, employee performance, productivity, human–AI collaboration, AI augmentation, AI-supported work, or workplace AI use. Studies were excluded if they focused only on technical AI algorithms without workplace implications, macroeconomic AI effects without employee-level relevance, or non-academic commentary without clear theoretical or empirical contribution.

4.6 Analytical Procedure

The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed five stages: reading and familiarization, initial coding, grouping codes into categories, identifying themes, and interpreting themes in relation to the research question. Key codes included AI adoption, productivity, task performance, human–AI collaboration, augmentation, automation, trust, opacity, task–technology fit, AI literacy, digital skills, workload, and organizational support.

5. Thematic Analysis: Synthesis of Previous Studies

5.1 Theme 1: AI Adoption Enhances Productivity but Not Automatically

The first theme is that AI adoption can increase productivity, but the effect is conditional. Noy and Zhang (2023) [10] show that generative AI can significantly improve productivity in writing tasks. Brynjolfsson *et al*. (2025) [1] show that AI assistance can improve customer-service productivity, especially for less-experienced workers. These findings suggest that AI can reduce task time, improve quality, and help employees access knowledge more efficiently.

However, AI adoption is not automatically beneficial. Dell'Acqua *et al*. (2026) [4] show that AI improves performance only when tasks are within AI's capability frontier. When employees use AI outside that frontier, they may become overconfident and make poorer decisions. Therefore, AI adoption is best understood as a performance opportunity, not a guaranteed performance outcome.

5.2 Theme 2: Human–AI Collaboration Converts AI Capability into Performance

The second theme is that human–AI collaboration is the mechanism through which AI adoption influences performance. AI creates potential value by generating outputs, recommendations, predictions, or content. However, employees must interpret, refine, validate, and apply these outputs.

Human–AI collaboration is therefore a mediating process. It connects AI adoption to employee performance by transforming AI capability into usable work outcomes. Sun *et al*. (2025) [14] suggest that employee–AI collaboration may reduce workload and encourage proactive behavior. Wu *et al*. (2025) [17] also show that collaboration with generative AI can improve immediate task performance.

This theme supports the augmentation view: AI performs best when it complements human expertise rather than replaces it entirely.

5.3 Theme 3: Trust and AI Literacy Shape Appropriate Reliance

The third theme is that trust and AI literacy determines whether employees rely on AI appropriately. Employees who distrust AI may ignore useful outputs, while employees who overtrust AI may accept inaccurate results. Choung *et al*. (2023) [2] show that trust significantly affects AI acceptance, while Lebovitz *et al*. (2022) [7] show that AI opacity creates uncertainty among professionals using AI for critical judgments.

AI literacy is also essential. Employees need to understand AI's capabilities, limitations, risks, and proper use cases. Without AI literacy, employees may treat AI as either a threat or an infallible authority. With AI literacy, employees can develop calibrated trust and better collaboration practices.

5.4 Theme 4: Task–Technology Fit Explains Uneven AI Performance

The fourth theme is task–technology fit. AI is not equally useful for every task. It is highly effective for structured, repetitive, data-intensive, and language-based tasks. It is less reliable for ambiguous, ethical, emotional, or highly contextual tasks.

Dell'Acqua *et al*.'s jagged frontier thesis strongly supports this theme. Their findings show that AI's performance effects vary across tasks within the same workflow. Thus, employees must learn not only how to use AI but also how to determine whether a task is suitable for AI support.

5.5 Theme 5: Organizational Support Enables Sustainable Human–AI Collaboration

The fifth theme is organizational support. AI adoption is not simply an individual behavior. It depends on leadership, training, governance, technical infrastructure, data quality, ethical rules, and psychological safety.

Recent studies show that AI adoption can create anxiety and complexity. Wang (2026) [16] found that human–AI collaboration task complexity can reduce work engagement by increasing AI-related learning anxiety, but AI self-efficacy can reduce this negative effect. This suggests that organizations must invest in employee AI confidence, not merely AI tools.

Organizational support is especially important because employees may use AI secretly or inconsistently when there are no clear policies. Therefore, firms must provide clear rules, approved tools, training, and accountability systems.

6. Discussion: Interpretation of Findings

The findings suggest that AI adoption affects employee performance through a socio-technical pathway. AI provides technological capability, but human–AI collaboration determines whether that capability becomes actual performance. This interpretation challenges technology-deterministic views of AI adoption. The key issue is not simply whether an organization adopts AI, but whether employees can collaborate with AI effectively, critically, and responsibly.

First, AI adoption should be understood as a capability amplifier. It can amplify employee productivity by reducing time, increasing output quality, and supporting decision-making. However, it can also amplify errors if employees use it without judgment. This dual effect is consistent with the jagged frontier perspective, which shows that AI is powerful but uneven.

Second, human–AI collaboration should be treated as a core employee competence. In AI-enabled workplaces, high-performing employees are not necessarily those who use AI the most. They are those who know when to use AI, how to ask better questions, how to check outputs, and how to combine AI recommendations with human expertise.

Third, trust must be calibrated. Organizations should not simply encourage employees to trust AI. Instead, they should train employees to understand the conditions under which AI is reliable and unreliable. This is particularly important in high-stakes decisions related to finance, healthcare, human resources, legal analysis, and strategic planning.

Fourth, organizations must redesign work around AI. AI adoption should not be limited to software implementation. It should involve workflow redesign, role clarification, AI governance, employee training, and performance measurement. If organizations simply add AI tools without redesigning work, employees may experience overload, confusion, and anxiety.

Fifth, the findings suggest that human–AI collaboration can reduce or increase inequality among employees. Less-experienced employees may benefit strongly from AI because it gives them access to expert-like guidance. However, employees with low AI literacy may also experience anxiety and dependence. Therefore, organizations must ensure that AI adoption is accompanied by inclusive training and support.

Based on this synthesis, the study proposes the following conceptual interpretation:

AI adoption improves employee performance when employees engage in effective human–AI collaboration. This collaboration is strengthened by task–technology fit, calibrated trust, AI literacy, employee self-efficacy, and organizational support.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, it uses a desk-based qualitative research design and does not collect primary empirical data. Therefore, the findings are interpretive rather than statistically generalizable. Future research should test proposed relationships using survey data, experiments, longitudinal designs, and structural equation modeling.

Second, although the study prioritizes literature from 2021 to 2026, AI research is developing rapidly. New AI tools and workplace applications continue to emerge. Future studies should update the literature continuously, especially as agentic AI systems become more common.

Third, this study examines employee performance broadly. Future research should distinguish among task performance, adaptive performance, innovative performance, service performance, and decision quality. AI may affect each dimension differently.

Fourth, future studies should develop reliable measurement scales for human–AI collaboration. Possible dimensions include AI interaction frequency, task integration, human validation, shared decision-making, AI explainability, perceived complementarity, and human accountability.

Fifth, future research should examine negative outcomes of AI adoption, including technostress, job insecurity, reduced autonomy, algorithmic control, loneliness, deskilling, and ethical risk. Meng *et al*. (2025) [9], for example, suggest that employee–AI collaboration may produce negative behavioral outcomes when it increases loneliness and emotional fatigue.

Finally, future studies should examine sector-specific differences. AI adoption in healthcare, banking, education, logistics, hospitality, public administration, and professional services may involve different risks, performance outcomes, and collaboration requirements.

8. Conclusion

This study examined artificial intelligence adoption and employee performance, focusing on the role of human–AI collaboration. Based on a desk-based qualitative synthesis of 48 studies, the study finds that AI adoption can improve employee performance, but the effect is not automatic. AI improves performance when employees use it appropriately, when AI fits task requirements, when employees trust AI in a calibrated way, and when organizations provide adequate support.

The central conclusion is that human–AI collaboration is the key mechanism linking AI adoption to employee performance. AI systems provide speed, scale, analytical power, and generative capability. Employees provide contextual judgment, ethical reasoning, creativity, emotional intelligence, and final responsibility. Sustainable performance improvement emerges when these capabilities are combined.

Therefore, organizations should not treat AI adoption as a purely technological project. They should treat it as a socio-technical transformation requiring employee training, leadership support, governance, trust-building, workflow redesign, and continuous learning. The future of employee performance will depend not only on how powerful AI systems become, but also on how effectively humans and AI learn to work together.

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