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Building employee trust in AI-driven workplace transformation: Strategies for enhancing work engagement

Ambrose Barrymore-Sackey, *Ball State University*, ambrose.barrymoresac@bsu.edu

Edward J. Lazaros, *Ball State University*, ejlazaros@bsu.edu

Hesham Allam, *Ball State University*, hesham.allam@bsu.edu

Allen D. Truell, *Ball State University*, atruell@bsu.edu

Abstract

This analysis presents a comprehensive overview of existing research on how integrating artificial intelligence (AI) negatively affects employee trust and work engagement by fostering emotional isolation, increasing psychological stress, and leading to high task substitution. This review identifies critical challenges and outlines human-centered organizational strategies to make AI adoption easier for all stakeholders. These critical challenges include promoting human-AI collaboration, providing empathetic leadership support, continuously monitoring impact, and implementing comprehensive training programs to ensure successful, sustainable AI adoption.

Keywords: AI adoption, work engagement, employee trust, human-AI collaboration, strategies

Introduction

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence into modern workplaces represents a fundamental transformation in how organizations operate and how employees experience their work. While AI technologies promise efficiency and productivity gains, its rapid adoption may create significant challenges for the workforce navigating these changes. Understanding how organizations can build employee trust during AI-driven transitions has emerged as a critical concern. This analysis presents an overview of the challenges employees face with AI adoption which include, but are not limited to, emotional isolation and task substitution. This review further discusses strategies for building employee trust in AI adoption. These trust-building strategies include, but are not limited to, role clarity in human-AI collaboration, assessment of the impact of AI implementation, leadership in AI adoption, and reskilling for AI collaboration.

Methodology

This review follows a Rapid Review approach which streamlines selected steps of the systematic review process while maintaining transparency and predefined criteria (Cartaxo et al., 2018).

Searches were conducted in Web of Science, ACM Digital Library, IEEE Xplore, Google Scholar, and journal platforms such as Issues in Information Systems and Wiley Online Library.

The scope of the review covered peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers and selected industry reports published in English between 2018 and 2025 to capture the rapid growth of AI adoption in workplaces. Search strings combined terms including “artificial intelligence,” “employee trust,” “work engagement,” “human-AI collaboration,” “AI anxiety,” “AI adoption,” and “organizational culture,” using Boolean operators to identify studies focused on AI in organizational and workplace settings.

In the initial stage, records retrieved from the databases were screened by titles, followed by abstract screening and full-text review against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The search identified approximately 70 records; 40 articles were reviewed in full, and 36 studies were retained for synthesis, supplemented by a limited number of practitioner reports used to illustrate emerging organizational practices. Findings from the included studies were then organized descriptively into two main themes: challenges employees face with AI adoption and strategies for building employee trust in AI adoption.

Table 1 Selection Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Published between 2018 and 2025.	Non-English publications
Peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers.	Published before 2018
Full text availability	
Industry reports	

Challenges Employees Face with AI Adoption

Emotional Isolation in AI Adoption

The integration of AI systems into workplace environments introduces significant psychological challenges that can undermine employee well-being and engagement. Research indicates that employee-AI collaboration in the workplace can inadvertently increase feelings of loneliness, which in turn exacerbates emotional fatigue (Meng et al., 2025). The absence of emotional reciprocity in AI interactions compounds these challenges, creating fundamental obstacles to the development of trust. Certain employees might struggle to establish trust with a system or teammate that lacks emotional or empathetic capabilities (Chuang et al., 2025).

When AI systems lack transparency, employees often feel distrustful and perceive them as unfair, further eroding trust in these technologies. Furthermore, a lack of transparency can lead to a sense of losing control over one's work, causing stress and dissatisfaction among employees. This gap in emotional connection becomes particularly problematic in contexts that require human connection, which has traditionally provided both practical and psychological support. Without addressing these emotional dimensions, organizations risk creating work environments in which

AI enhances productivity at the expense of employees' psychological well-being and sustained engagement (Meng et al., 2025; Sadeghi, 2024).

Task Substitution in AI Adoption

Despite the potential benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace, employee attitudes toward AI integration remain marked by significant uncertainty and apprehension. Recent workforce research indicates that many employees are unsure about their ability to adapt to AI-driven workplace changes. A large survey of more than 18,000 U.S. workers found that 53% do not feel prepared to work with AI, and only about 3 in 10 believe AI could benefit their jobs. These findings highlight a significant readiness gap that organizations must address as they continue integrating AI technologies into everyday operations. This widespread uncertainty reflects deeper concerns about job security and relevance, as many workers remain unsure whether AI will help or hurt their jobs. However, employee concerns may stem partly from a misunderstanding of AI's actual scope and limitations, as current AI systems lack qualities such as creativity and strategic thinking, capabilities for which human resources remain essential (Kong et al., 2023).

Research indicates that excessive substitution of core task characteristics can diminish AI's positive effect on psychological usability while increasing work alienation. When AI systems replace, rather than augment, meaningful aspects of work, employees may experience a diminished sense of purpose and contribution, undermining their connection to their roles. While AI can enhance job satisfaction by automating repetitive tasks, there remains a significant risk of job displacement, leading employees to fear that AI will replace their roles, resulting in anxiety and disengagement. Concerns that AI will take jobs and replace human employees continue to erode people's trust in AI as it enhances its capabilities and infiltrates more domains. By implementing AI systems that complement and expand, rather than replace, workers' knowledge and skills, organizations can help reduce anxiety and build employees' trust in the technology (Bankins et al., 2024).

Beyond the nature of task substitution, the speed of AI adoption presents its own set of challenges. Rapid technological transitions can create instability and stress for workers undergoing these changes. When organizations implement AI technologies too quickly, without adequate preparation or support systems, employees may struggle to adapt psychologically, leading to heightened anxiety and resistance. This accelerated pace leaves insufficient time for employees to develop the competencies, confidence, and coping mechanisms necessary to maintain their well-being and engagement (Kim et al., 2025; Soulami et al., 2024).

Strategies for Building Employee Trust in AI Adoption

Role Clarity in Human-AI Collaboration

Successfully integrating AI into the workplace requires a carefully balanced approach to human-AI collaboration that prioritizes psychological availability and employee engagement. Research indicates that AI applications can significantly enhance employee work engagement by increasing psychological availability. However, this positive effect diminishes when AI systems replace core task characteristics that employees find meaningful in excess. This finding underscores the

importance of positioning AI as a tool to enhance human judgment rather than a replacement for it, thereby increasing objectivity while maintaining the empathy essential to workplace duties, particularly in delicate situations. Trust in AI promotes employee-AI collaboration and supports sustainable careers, suggesting that organizations should actively cultivate positive employee attitudes toward AI through structured guidance and supportive implementation practices (Kong et al., 2023).

Investigations suggest that a balanced approach centers on establishing clear boundaries and expectations for both human and AI roles within organizational processes. A clear delineation of responsibilities between humans and machines is crucial for minimizing conflicts arising from ambiguous duties. Both managers and human resources staff are responsible for clearly specifying goals, expected outcomes, and performance evaluation criteria for human-AI teams, while carefully communicating and managing task-fulfillment expectations to maintain a collaborative spirit, as the burden of trust-building in such teams still lies with human workers and organizational leadership. Without such clarity, employees may become confused about their value and contribution to outcomes, potentially eroding trust in both the technology and organizational leadership. To maximize team effectiveness and preserve this clarity, managers should strategically encourage the use of AI tools for time-consuming tasks, allowing team members to focus on areas where AI cannot perform effectively and reinforcing their irreplaceable contributions to organizational outcomes (Arslan et al., 2022; Rožman et al., 2023).

The challenge becomes particularly evident when considering the nuanced nature of work that requires contextual understanding and emotional intelligence. Many workplace tasks demand flexible problem-solving that accounts for the full context of individual experiences to deliver optimal solutions. AI currently lacks the flexibility to fully replicate humanity's capacity for warmth and empathy, and customers can perceive this difference, which affects their loyalty and satisfaction with brands. While AI may assist with certain higher-value, repetitive tasks, it cannot fully replace the human intuition and planning capabilities that enable people to understand and act on complex problems holistically (Spadaccini, 2025). A dedicated AI strategy facilitates navigating the complexities of the AI transformation by identifying and realizing AI use cases and by enhancing the organization's AI maturity to effectively and efficiently identify and realize future AI use cases. Beyond defining strategic targets and AI application fields, the AI strategy should formulate ethical principles and values regarding the development, operation, and use of AI applications (Hofmann et al., 2024).

Assessment of the Impact of AI Implementation

The successful adoption of AI technologies requires leadership to both establish systems that regularly collect employee feedback and assess AI's impact on the work experience, and to foster a culture of ongoing organizational adaptation through regular evaluations of processes, policies, and structures, ensuring that implementation strategies align with employee needs while maximizing the benefits of AI integration in an evolving technological landscape. Measuring AI's productivity impact requires a multifaceted approach that combines rigorous statistical methods, adaptive measurement frameworks, and ethical considerations, enabling organizations to understand the value of their AI investments better and make informed decisions about future AI initiatives. Business leaders should invest in dynamic, outcome-oriented evaluation frameworks

that go beyond traditional metrics to assess the broader impact of AI systems on users, operations, and society, fostering collaboration between technical teams and domain experts to align AI deployment with long-term business goals and ethical standards while providing transparency to stakeholders (Jabbour et al., 2025).

A structured approach to measuring trust can provide leaders with actionable insights for intervention. By breaking trust into measurable components, leaders can identify where confidence is rising or eroding and act accordingly. For instance, if employees report low trust in AI transparency, leaders might respond by increasing communication about how tools make decisions or by involving employees in shaping their use (Reichheld et al., 2025). As AI technologies evolve, organizations must remain flexible in their measurement strategies, continuously adapting to capture new forms of value creation and bridge the gap between AI adoption and demonstrable productivity improvements (Puri, 2024; Reichheld et al., 2025).

Beyond organizational metrics, attention to individual psychological well-being proves essential for maintaining engagement during technological transitions. Regular psychological assessments, whether through surveys or one-on-one meetings, can help identify stressors and gauge psychological capital levels, enabling timely interventions. This proactive monitoring ensures that the psychological toll of adaptation is recognized and addressed before it undermines trust or engagement, creating a supportive environment where employees feel valued throughout the change process (Hou & Fan, 2024; Liu & Li, 2025).

Leadership in AI Adoption

Effective leadership communication is a cornerstone of building employee trust during AI-driven organizational changes. Management should provide clear, concise information on the benefits of adopting AI tools in organizations, such as faster responses and greater accuracy in employees' routine activities, while offering guidance to ensure optimal use and familiarity with these tools and their features to improve contributions (Prasad & De, 2024). Transparency about AI systems and their decision-making processes is key to easing concerns and boosting satisfaction, as it directly increases employees' trust and, by increasing challenge appraisals and reducing threat appraisals, reduces threat appraisals. Enterprises should therefore improve the transparency of AI systems by informing employees about decision-making processes or by designing more transparent systems, while maintaining human oversight of critical decisions to preserve trust (Sadeghi, 2024; Yu et al., 2023). Early demonstration of the benefits and safety of AI applications further builds trust among important stakeholders and demonstrates that AI can be successfully integrated into organizational workflows (Foote et al., 2025).

Beyond technical guidance, organizations should foster a people-centric culture that highlights employees' core values and clearly communicates that AI serves as an auxiliary tool rather than a replacement, helping prevent employees from feeling displaced by technological advancements (Liu & Li, 2025). Implementation within a more authoritarian organizational culture can lead to AI becoming an "algorithmic cage" for workers, where they do not understand its value and view it as impeding their autonomy, heightening resistance, whereas implementation within a more collaborative organizational culture positions AI as an "algorithmic colleague," with the system serving as a tool to support workers' decision-making (Bankins et al., 2024). Organizations must

address initial trust formation at the interface of humans and AI, as the connection between AI and employees is established through the leadership that champions AI integration projects (Xu et al., 2024). While AI adoption correlates with performance gains, viewing AI not merely as a technical upgrade but as part of a broader organizational change process requiring supportive leadership and strategic alignment remains essential for sustainable success (Sharma et al., 2025).

The emotional dimension of leadership support emerges as a crucial protective factor against the anxiety associated with AI integration. Research identifies a crucial positive influence, that when leaders proactively provide emotional support to employees, it serves as an effective protective measure against the adverse emotional effects associated with AI collaboration (Meng et al., 2025). It is advisable to use transformational leadership techniques, including educating leaders to serve as change agents and emphasizing staff reskilling and upskilling initiatives (Sharma et al., 2025). For practitioners, fostering psychological capital and enhancing perceived organizational support help employees adapt to AI-driven changes, recognizing that successful technological adoption depends not only on technical implementation but also on the workforce's psychological readiness and resilience (Hou & Fan, 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

Reskilling for AI Collaboration

In recognition of the need for reskilling, organizations should provide employees with comprehensive training on collaborating with AI that strategically increases their awareness, ability to interact with AI systems, personal capabilities, and work confidence, thereby enabling high-quality employee-AI collaboration (Kong et al., 2023; Liu & Li, 2025). This training should improve employees' understanding of AI and address associated concerns, fears, and uncertainties, while providing support and allowing employees adequate time to adjust to the AI technology being implemented (Khan et al., 2024). For individuals already employed by the organization, targeted training programs can increase their participation and reduce their level of AI anxiety (Suseno et al., 2022).

Effective training strategies extend beyond technical skill development to encompass broader adaptive capabilities and cultural transformation through continuous skill adaptation, restructuring work activities, and fostering a culture of lifelong learning that emphasizes both digital and soft skills necessary for adapting to automation and Industry 4.0 technologies (Babashahi et al., 2024). Organizations should design and implement personalized training programs that account for employees' individual differences, skill levels, and learning needs to enhance technical self-efficacy, promote AI adoption intention, and strengthen overall technological transformation capabilities (Chang et al., 2024). AI-related training should also improve employees' perceived transparency by helping them understand AI operations and decision-making processes, making it easier to interpret and utilize information transmitted by AI systems (Yu & Li, 2022). Identifying and developing these required skillsets is a shared responsibility among multiple stakeholders, with educational institutions and companies investing in learning programs that enhance both general AI literacy and occupation-specific applications (Bankins et al., 2024). Without adequate organizational support, upskilling and reskilling efforts will likely prove unsuccessful, requiring well-planned initiatives supported by both organizations and individual employees (Morandini et al., 2023).

Beyond technical and soft skills, psychological resilience training equips employees with essential tools to navigate the emotional challenges of technological change through targeted programs focused on resilience, stress management, and emotional intelligence (Hou & Fan, 2024). Managers can reinforce this psychological support by providing relevant training, technical guidance, and positive feedback through regular sessions and workshops that familiarize employees with AI tools and demonstrate real-life examples of AI's supportive role in daily work, thereby enhancing employees' confidence and ability to overcome psychological barriers (Han et al., 2025). This holistic approach recognizes that successful adaptation to AI-driven changes requires not only technical competencies but also psychological resources to maintain well-being and engagement throughout the transition (Han et al., 2025; Hou & Fan, 2024).

Summary

AI adoption is reshaping workplaces by boosting efficiency and productivity while also creating adjustment challenges for employees. This review examines the challenges employees face with AI adoption, including emotional isolation and task substitution. It also discusses strategies for building employee trust in AI adoption, including role clarity in human AI collaboration, assessment of the impact of AI implementation, leadership in AI adoption, and reskilling for AI collaboration.

This paper is not without limitations. First, it is limited to a Rapid Review and synthesis of existing literature on employee trust and work engagement in AI adoption rather than the collection of new empirical data. As a result, the manuscript identifies patterns around emotional isolation, task substitution, role clarity in human AI collaboration, assessment of AI implementation impact, leadership in AI adoption, and reskilling for AI collaboration, but it does not directly test the effectiveness of these strategies.

Second, the review focuses on workplace settings and draws primarily on recent studies published between 2018 and 2025. Although this scope captures contemporary AI developments, it may exclude earlier work or evidence from sectors and regions where AI adoption is less mature. Third, while the review highlights organizational elements such as leadership, training, and implementation practices, the analysis remains centered on employee level outcomes rather than a systematic examination of organizational culture, industry sector, job type, AI maturity, or national context. These limitations suggest several directions for future research.

Future studies should empirically test the trust building strategies identified in this review, such as role clarity in human AI collaboration, continuous assessment of AI implementation impact, leadership communication and emotional support, and reskilling for AI collaboration. Researchers can also extend this work by integrating formal theoretical models, for example applying technology acceptance, trust, or job demands–resources perspectives to explain how AI related demands and resources shape employee attitudes and engagement in different organizational contexts. In addition, future research should investigate how organizational and contextual factors, including organizational culture, industry sector, job type, AI maturity, and national cultural

differences, moderate the relationships between AI adoption challenges, trust, and work engagement. Taken together, these studies can build on the present review by providing more rigorous evidence on when and how human centered strategies help employees sustain trust and engagement during AI driven workplace transformation.

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