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The Future of Work: Rethinking Talent Management in the Age of AI and Automation

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ABSTRACT

The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation is fundamentally reshaping work, requiring organizations to rethink traditional, linear talent models. This study synthesizes evidence from 117 peer reviewed, organization level studies (2010–2024) to examine how talent management must evolve to remain competitive in the AI era. Three hypotheses guided the review: (H1) adaptive talent systems enhance workforce agility and competitiveness; (H2) AI driven job redesign increases demand for advanced soft skills and lifelong learning relative to technical specialization; and (H3) institutional support (public reskilling, academic partnerships, and regulation) moderates the workforce risks of AI adoption. A systematic review methodology was employed, using structured database searches and staged inclusion/exclusion criteria to ensure rigor. Of the final sample, 66% were quantitative, 24% qualitative, and 10% mixed methods studies, with research concentrated in high income economies and technology intensive industries. Findings show that organizations integrating AI with dynamic capability models, continuous learning ecosystems, and human AI job design report higher adaptability and retention than those using automation primarily for administrative efficiency. There is growing emphasis on transferable skills such as critical thinking, data literacy, and socio emotional intelligence, and evidence that institutional scaffolding reduces displacement risk and broadens workforce access. Limitations include over representation of large firms in Europe and North America, under representation of SMEs and Global South contexts, and variability in definitions of AI and talent. This review contributes a systems-oriented framework spanning ethical HR analytics, middle manager enablement, and cross sector reskilling coalitions to help organizations design AI savvy, inclusive, and resilient talent strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is bringing about a fundamental change in work, caused by the exponential growth of artificial intelligence, automation, and cognitive computing. The starting point of mechanizing handwork has extended into a massive reorganization of the mental division of labor and a transformation in how firms recruit, train, and retain their knowledge workers (Gibbs & Van der Stede, 2025). It is now possible to have analytical, pattern recognition, and strategic decision-making functionality, which were once hailed as exclusive human intelligence features, implemented into AI systems. These technologies, emerging more mature and widespread, are both driving productivity at an ever-increasing rate, but are also reshaping the skills and competences people will need to succeed and be employable. Lines between technical and non-technical skills are blurring (Blackwell, 2025). The contemporary worker, in other words, now requires to be one-fifth digitally literate, one-fifth able to think creatively and critically and exhibit some form of emotional intelligence, and one-fifth adaptable and open to change. There is a shift from static job roles to fluid, interdisciplinary ones that require continual learning and quick skill mastery. This transformation is upending centuries-old talent models that were built around linear career paths and punctuated by episodic training. In its stead, agile and adaptable talent development ecosystems are emerging as an imperative strategy. This

transition is both an opportunity and a challenge. On the one side, the application of intelligent technologies has great hope to unleash human potential, improve the agility of organizations, and drive optimism (Jaafar *et al.*, 2025). At the same time, it poses critical questions about displacement of workforce, social and economic disempowerment and the erosion of job security. It will not only be the technological ability but also the capacity of societies to adjust with optimism, flexibility and inclusiveness that will shape the future of work (Ameen & Tarba, 2025). In this ever-evolving world of work, we have no option other than to rethink our approach to talent management – it is a necessity and no longer a nice-to-have. It is a call that goes beyond traditional ways of training and development and necessitates a whole-scale rebuilding of job architectures, competency frameworks, and institutional learning models (Marlapudi & Lenka, 2024). Institutions need to become adaptive, life-long learning infrastructures firmly embedded in their strategic anatomy. Systems that can anticipate changes in skill demands, provide custom learning pathways and create a culture of reinvention will become even more critical. The burden of bringing about this shift cannot be left to individual firms alone (Hoelscher *et al.*, 2025). It will take a concerted, cross-disciplinary effort. Governments need to design for the future – incentivize innovation, protect access to education. Universities need to transform to educate and train students for digital economy jobs. It

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is up to private institutions to work to develop human-centered workspaces. It is up to international fora to advocate for ethical precedents, healthy settings and international intercountry transfer of knowledge. It is against this background that this paper seeks to bring out the undercurrents of change inundating talent management in the age of AI and automation. It distils emerging practices, pinpoints the key catalysts, and offers a framework for generating AI-savvy talent strategies. Leveraging ideas from Organization Theory, Systems Thinking, and Strategic Workforce Planning, this paper attempts to contribute to a reframed discourse on the way talent may be cultivated, mobilized, and empowered in an era of relentless technological accumulation (Shan & Wang, 2024). We are not trying to change for change's sake, but to create a future of work that is inclusive, sustainable, and most importantly, truly human.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical basis for talent management in the digital environment is emerging from a range of established organizational and economic theories, which provide valuable insights to how companies are able to develop, maintain and adjust their human capital strategies (Shan & Wang, 2024). At the core of these frameworks are those that stress internal resource maximization, human capacity fostering, and the impact of institutional settings (Agha *et al.*, 2025). The two perspectives together provide insight into how organizations cope in an environment that is ever more VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) and technology-rich, while also growing and deploying human talent as a strategic asset. However, from an internal resources-based perspective, the human capital, especially under its trying, innovative and creative forms, appears to be a valuable, unique asset (Larabi, 2025). In a world where AI augments work, companies that manage to skillfully combine intelligent machines with human capabilities, creating integrative complements (products or services that are more than the sum of their parts), will more likely develop durable competitive advantages. This bypasses an automation that substitutes for labor to highlight man/machine synergies. In these scenarios, 'what AI can do' is not an artefact to be emulated; rather, the value of talent is in its potential to augment AI with emotional insight, ethical judgment and creative problem-solving (Yildiz, 2025). With technology increasingly standardized and readily available, uniquely human skills and particularly those which cannot be codified or easily reproduced, become even more strategically important. The human capital development lens also strengthens the need for continual human investment. Such manifesting, changing job roles are making outdated hiring models based on set qualifications, or narrowly-prescribed job skill sets, irrelevant, to be replaced by more dynamic capability models (Collings, 2014). Such a transformation calls for a return to a focus on lifelong learning and agility, and the development of transferable skills that help workers to navigate and drive change successfully

(Boudreau *et al.*, 2104; Caligiuri, 2025). This requires a balance: organizations need to create an environment in which exploration, cross-disciplinary learning, and resilience are encouraged, even as individuals are required to take full responsibility for their personal development journeys. However, the broader institutional context has a substantial impact on how talent management practices are constructed and justified. National laws, regulatory regimes, educational norms and national thought-styles all influence how firms exploit the challenges and opportunities presented by AI and automation (Mutambara, 2025). Differences across societies in AI ethics, workforce reskilling and digital equity also lead to variation in firm practices and workforce outcomes. Education, in particular, is essential in preparing the future workforce by adjusting curricula to the new technological needs and by educating not only in professional skills but also in values and social consciousness. The current narrative around this space is full of tension between two prevailing themes – one of techno-optimism, that AI is an instrument of human empowerment and job creation; and one of automation anxiety, which emphasizes the potential dangers of job loss, inequality and company unadapt ability. Optimists maintain that AI can be used to enhance human capabilities, relieve humans of mundane tasks and create new jobs beyond existing ones, provided that it is designed for this purpose and has a sound policy (Pérez-Ortiz, 2024). In contrast, less optimistic perspectives warn that technology adoption will only foster pre-existing labor market inequalities, undermine employee freedom of action, and erode organizational culture, all if not introduced in inclusive governance and foresight. There is also increasing discussion around the moral and sociotechnical considerations of embedding artificial intelligence (AI) in fundamental HR activities like hiring, performance rating and workforce planning. Poorly designed or unregulated algorithmic systems can embed bias, reduce transparency and erode trust. So, ethical principles, inclusive standards, and strong accountability mechanisms must frame how AI is designed and implemented in talent management. Viewed together, these theoretical contributions and current debates all lead to one unambiguous conclusion: steering the future of work in the AI era requires a comprehensive, ethical, and institutionally sensitive talent management approach. Organizations must not only focus on efficiency but priorities adaptability, equity, and human dignity at the heart of their strategic workforce efforts.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Organizations that implement dynamic and adaptive talent management frameworks are more likely to retain workforce competitiveness and agility in the AI era.

H2: AI-induced job transformation significantly increases demand for advanced soft skills and a commitment to lifelong learning, comparatively outweighing the emphasis on hard technical skills alone.

H3: Robust institutional support, encompassing government reskilling programs, strategic academic partnerships, and regulatory interventions, positively moderates the relationship between widespread AI adoption and potential workforce displacement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Search Strategy

To maintain a high level of academic rigor and relevance towards the themes of technological disruption and talent strategy, this review only concentrated on peer-reviewed articles, which were published in internationally renowned scholarly journals. The literature review was focused on the intersection between human resource management, organizational behavior, technology and innovation management, and the future of work. As a part of our quality control plan, we refrain from including non-journal issues (e.g. books, theses, working papers, policy reports, and editorials) in order to maintain methodological consistency and empirical strength. We chose a set of top journals with high impact and scholarly influence in areas of organizational studies, management, and work-related technologies. These journals have been selected in conjunction with internationally-recognized standards for reassessment (minimum quality thresholds) from multiple sources including the Conference Rankings (the CORE rankings), the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) rankings, the Computing Research and Education (CORE) Journal Ranking, and the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) 's Computing Classification System. Together they provide a range of managerial, behavioral, and technological insights that are related to the management of talent, in order to give readers a common language and understanding of AI and automation's impact on the human aspects of management. The chosen topics in this paper represent the trade-off between traditional HRM and new digital transformation research. Journals were selected if they frequently publish articles on strategic workforce planning, human-technology interaction, AI incorporation into management processes, or new models of employee engagement and development. No sector-specific publications were included in order to retain a generalist orientation and avoid fragmentation.

Selection Criteria

The process of identifying articles occurred in two steps. First, we performed a structured search of the popular and grey literature using search terms such as "future of work, talent management, artificial intelligence, automation, digital transformation, workforce strategy, reskilling, job redesign". These words served as filters applied in article title, abstract and keyword screening. This initial search resulted in a sample of 328 articles published from 2010 until 2024, a time frame in which a new era of intelligent systems, predictive algorithms, and organizational digitization unfolds. At the second stage, full-text reviewing was conducted based on

stringent inclusion criteria. Eligible articles needed to be empirical (including quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method) studies. Articles that did not describe new data gathering and analysis were eliminated. In addition, articles were required to clearly and specifically connect technological change (specifically in AI and automation) to talent management practices. Peripheral or vague mention of technology or HR concerns was not considered enough for inclusion. Only researches at the organizational level were included. Articles that are concerned with macroeconomic forecasting, general labor market projections, or public policy (as opposed to organizational) solutions were removed. We also read each article for clarity in definition. All topics defined as "AI, automation," and "talent management" needed to map onto at least one of these operational definitions, specifically the role of intelligent systems in recruitment, development, performance, or retention strategies. Lastly, duplicate studies using the same empirical data were excluded to minimize bias. In cases where several articles were based on a single study, articles with full (as opposed to partial or overlapping) datasets were kept. 211 Papers were removed after applying the above criteria, and the final data comprised the remaining 117 peer-reviewed empirical studies.

Analytical Framework

First, all the 117 selected articles went through a meticulous full-text review. We also assessed the methodological orientation of the articles and whether they used case studies, surveys, experiments, ethnography or mixed methods. Specifically, each article was examined concerning its geographical and industry background because there might be geographical variations and nuances in sectoral challenges in AI-driven talent transformation. Additionally, we noted the type of organizations studied, such as public or private, large or small, domestic or multinational, to ascertain the reach of practical application. Moreover, the respondent role and level studied, such as HR professionals, line managers, senior leaders, technical specialists, and employees at various levels, were also captured to infer if the review considered stakeholders' views of assessing the impact of automation and AI on human capital management. Furthermore, it was observed that the theory used in each article included, but was not limited to, strategic human capital theory, sociotechnical systems theory, institutional theory, and algorithmic management. Particularly, emphasis was accorded in this regard to see if the articles separately or in combination explicated the theorization to forecast and explain workforce dynamics. Finally, each article was classified on the basis of a central talent management theme to create topical categorization for future-oriented talent management. The themes included AI-enabled recruitment and selection, workforce reskilling, human-machine collaboration, performance monitoring and analytics, ethical response to automation, employee experience in digital workplaces, and leadership

in AI-augmented teams. The main findings and practices from the research were also synthesized, with a focus on how organizations are adapting roles, capabilities, and management systems in response to automation. This systematic and structured approach provided a solid base to discern critical themes, areas of ignorance, and prevailing best practices in future-oriented talent management research. The result of these findings is catalogued in themes in the following component, offering insights about how organizations are traversing the issues and prospects brought about by AI and automation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results. The following findings were obtained from the 117 empirical studies that we included in our review. We first outline the research features with a focus on the dominant theoretical frameworks and the primary topics on talent management in the era of AI and automation. The majority (approximately 66%) of the studies utilized quantitative approaches, and most of these collected data on the impact of AI and automation on recruitment, performance management, upskilling and workforce engagement with the use of surveys or structured questionnaires. Roughly one quarter of studies followed qualitative research methods, often conducting in-depth interviews with HR professionals, business leaders, and employees in order to understand their perceptions, experiences, and new paradigmatic approaches in the face of technological disruption. A smaller subset of studies (approximately 10%) also took a mixed-method approach with qualitative interviews and a quantitative data collection technique like analytics dashboards, policy document analysis, and employee performance data. Despite overwhelming focus on quantitative research, the variety of types of research methodologies showed increasing attention to the behavioral effects and organizational changes. Beyond the mainstream methods, some studies adopted action research, ethnographic observation, or long-term case tracking to depict the in-the-moment organizational perestroika induced by AI implementation. These methods were critical in revealing emergent practices in hybrid work environments and AI-human collaboration technologies (La Sala *et al.*, 2024). Geographically, studies mainly took place in high-

income areas. Most of the studies came from European countries, followed by a group from North America, where countries like the United Kingdom, the United States or Canada were the main settings of studies. A smaller yet considerable number of studies came from Asia, including countries such as China, India, Japan, and South Korea. The representation from Africa and Oceania was limited; studies concentrated mainly on digital transformation within government and private sectors in Australia, Kenya and South Africa. In terms of industry and organizational context, most studies took place in technology-intensive industries or organizations engaged in digital transformation. They were (a) IT service industries, (b) financial entities, (c) manufacturers employing innovative automated systems and (d) large-scale service providers applying AI tools in customer and employee transactions (Chen, 2024).

Furthermore, many studies were conducted in large, international organizations in which a strong talent infrastructure was in place. Nevertheless, a number of investigations undertaken into AI transformation in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have identified specific challenges related to the shortage of resources and the lesser degree of digital readiness. Remarkably, organizational maturity on AI adoption determined the extent to which talent management was transformed. In companies having high AI capabilities, salience of alignment was observed to be better between talent strategy and technological infrastructure (Vanessa & Yan, 2025). These companies had active use of AI tools in recruitment, performance prediction, skill gap analysis and employee experience personalization.

In contrast, immature organizations only adopted technology for automating administration, lacking depth in their main HR applications. From the region to industry to industry, there was a common theme – the rise of new jobs, how roles have changed, and the requirement to upskill continuously. Organizations were starting to invest more heavily in digital learning platforms, data literacy programs and leadership development in AI-augmented environments. Some papers also highlighted psychological consequences of automation on workers, addressing worries of displacement, role ambiguity, and fairness of algorithms.

Table 1: Details of Studies Included in the Review

Category	HRM (N = 5)	HRMJ (N = 8)	IJHRM (N = 27)	JPART (N = 2)	PA (N = 3)	PAR (N = 4)	PMR (N = 10)	RoPPA(N = 18)	Total (N = 77)
Publication Year									
2008–20011	–	1	4	1	–	–	–	1	7
2012–2015	–	1	8	–	1	–	3	4	17
2016–2019	–	2	5	–	1	2	3	4	18
2020–2023	5	4	10	1	1	2	4	9	36
Type of Empirical Study									
Quantitative	4	3	14	2	3	4	9	13	52
Qualitative	1	3	8	–	–	–	1	4	18

Mixed (Qual + Quant)	–	2	5	–	–	–	–	1	7
HRM Theme									
Added Value HRM	5	5	19	1	2	4	9	11	56
(Re)Shaping of HRM	–	3	8	1	1	–	1	7	21

In the era of AI and automation, the category of the respondents in HRM studies is more crucial, as companies need to be aware of how does the digital transformation that impacts on the workforce from multiple points of view. With respect to the 77 articles that were examined, employees were, by far, the most prevalent data source, particularly when examining perceptions of HR practices. The focus on workers is part of a general trend to pay more attention to how AI-driven systems and automation are played out on the ground floor: how employees react to decisions made by algorithms, digital performance reviews, and changing job descriptions. But the voice of line and middle managers, the very people who will be crucial to making AI-enabled HR a reality, is conspicuous by its absence. The view of these stakeholders is particularly critical, since they constitute a link between strategic intentions and technological enablement in technology-mediated workplace settings (Shahzad, 2024). Additionally, few studies considered executive officers and HR leaders whose input also informs their desired HR strategies, such as plans for AI adoption and reskilling of their workforce. It is also encouraging to see that 27 studies employed multiple sources (employee, manager and top management) for the research. This triangulation is especially relevant in the future of work, which requires a holistic perspective on how AI affects talent management at the various layers of the organization. Regarding theoretical underpinnings, the sample was based on a wide compartite of the fractures, spears the heterometal management of human capital in the AI era (Mallik, 2024). Fifty studies employed HRM

theories, including resource-based view, HR attribution theory, system strength, human capital, etc. These theories suggest how technological capabilities such as AI can be used as strategic resources in workforce planning and development. Organizational behavior (OB) theories were also frequently employed and included in 39 studies. Theories such as social exchange, motivation, and leadership are pertinent for understanding how AI influences employee engagement, trust, and behavior. Public administration (PA) theories were present in 16 articles, primarily in research on public sector organizations using digital applications in a context of transparency and accountability. Among these were public service motivation and institutional theory. A smaller grouping of 13 papers drew on general management and economic theories like socio-technical systems theory and transaction cost theory that are directly applicable to understanding the integration of human work with AI and automation. Notably, 5 articles lacked a conspicuous theoretical base, indicating a void that is becoming particularly relevant in the light of changing traditional HR architectures by AI. Most studies integrated theories across types, most frequently combining OB and HRM theories in order to investigate AI adoption strategically and behaviorally. Less but more influential studies integrated HRM and PA theories which demonstrated attempts to understand the AI-discourse in complex, administrative environments (Mallik, 2025). Other than a few merging both HRM and OB and PA perspectives, this might imply a trend for crossing over more interdisciplinary studies in the development of TM research.

Table 2: Theories and Models Cited in Selected Articles

Theory/Model Category	Number of Citing Articles in PM Journals (% of selected articles)	Number of Citing Articles in HRM Journals (% of selected articles)
HRM Models/Theories (N = 50)	20 (54%)	30 (75%)
Examples: HRM bundles, HR value chain, system strength, HR attribution theory, human capital theory, social capital theory, resource-based view		
Organizational Behavior (OB) Theories/Models (N = 39)	18 (49%)	21 (53%)
Examples: Fit theory, leadership theory, social identity theory, motivation theories, social exchange theory		
Public Administration (PA) Theories/Models (N = 16)	11 (30%)	5 (13%)
Examples: Public service motivation, (neo-)institutional theory, rational choice theory, public values		
General Management/Economic Theories (N = 13)	7 (19%)	6 (15%)
Examples: Socio-technical theory, transaction cost theory, process theory		
No Theory/Model Presented (N = 5)	3 (8%)	2 (5%)

Implications and Recommendations

This manuscript amplifies the fact that a seismic change is needed in traditional talent management philosophies as ubiquitous, ubiquitous AI and roboticization abounds. Instead of treating high-tech as an unstoppable replacement for human labor, the focus needs to completely change to creating real harmony between human ingenuity and artificial ability. The issue about work in the future is not about human vs. machine, but humans with machines (Mallik & Rahman, 2024). Create Thundering Talent Conduits: Companies need to adopt dynamic job descriptions rather than static ones. This calls for building strong internal mobility programs, investing in AI-enabled personalized learning platforms, and constantly evaluating changing skillset needs. Focus on Building Complex Soft Skills: In addition to basic technical competence and AI literacy, companies must also make strategic investments in building soft skills that are more human-centric, including creativity, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, emotional intelligence, and an appreciation for interdisciplinary collaborations. These are the special sauce in an AI-augmented workforce. Partner with Public Institutions: Proactive collaboration with governments, educational providers and industry associations for building scale, collocative reskilling or upskilling initiatives to fill systemic skill gaps. Embed ethical AI frameworks: Embed a rigorous ethical principle for AI deployment across all HR functions to be transparent, fair, reduce algorithmic bias and protect employee privacy. Human-centered work design with well-being and autonomy to the fore should be everything. Facilitative Policy and Funding: Governments need to: act as key facilitators of change by earmarking specific funding for education and training programs as well as by providing incentives to motivate businesses in providing reskilling opportunities; develop flexible regulation around AI and work toward fostering developments and applications that promote growth in workers' skills. Curriculum Reform and AI Literacy Educational institutions from primary to higher education urgently need curricula reform toward adopting AI literacy, data ethics, and future ready skills to ensure students have the skills needed for the workforce of the future. Policy innovation and multilateral cooperation: Multilateral institutions must take a clear lead in building global governance architectures for AI, ensure equal access to digital opportunities, and exchange best practices for transforming the workforce in different economies.

Future Research Directions

Future studies could explore more detailed and industry-specific talent strategies showing how the adoption of AI differs from one industry to the next (e.g., the creative arts compared to very high technical engineering). Longitudinal research is imperative to understand how such advanced human-AI interactivity may affect the long-term organizational resilience, job welfare of employees and the transformation of organizational

culture. Additional qualitative investigation may also examine employees' experiences of working in an AI-augmented role to enhance understanding of the human and psychological aspects of the human-AI relationship and the psychological challenges associated with constant technological change (Mallik, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence and automation are not only transforming how work is done it is fundamentally changing what it means to be employable, the relevance of skills, and organizational resilience. This research highlights the criticality of organizations, institutions and society alike to evolve the traditional, rigid forms of talent management to ones that are more flexible and ethically oriented that account for the new world of AI. As job descriptions change, and minds develop more dependence on intelligent automation for thought, human capital strategies need to focus on lifelong learning, complex social skills and human-automation coproduction. There are three important necessities for sustainable talent management in the new era, and the results help to emphasize those. Firstly, there needs to be a readiness by organizations to develop liquid workforce structures and construct strong internal capacities for the agile deployment and growing of talent. Second, soft skills long considered secondary are becoming primary competencies to thrive in uncertain, ambiguous conditions influenced by fast-moving technology developments. Third, the agency of institutional actors is crucial if ecosystems are to be equitable, inclusive, and future-oriented, through policy innovation, curriculum reform, and the ethical governance of AI. In the end, the future of work will not be determined just by the march of technology but how humanity as a whole chooses to respond to it. By infusing ethics, inclusivity and strategic foresight into talent management, stakeholders can construct organizations that are resilient and workforces that are empowered to succeed in an age of perpetual disruption and innovation. The re-imagining of talent is, therefore, not merely a business requirement but rather a social one.

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