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«Integrating AI into Human Resource Management to Foster Adult Learning in the Workplace»

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to explore the theoretical foundations and policy

implications of integrating artificial intelligence (AI) in human resource management

(HRM) to promote adult learning in the workplace. The article investigates how AI-

enhanced HRM practices can support personalized, inclusive, and continuous learning

pathways for adult employees, while aligning with broader European Union strategies on

upskilling and reskilling.

Methodology – This study adopts a conceptual and literature-based approach. It draws on

interdisciplinary sources in adult learning theory, HRM, and AI applications to construct a

coherent framework that connects AI capabilities with strategic HRM practices and adult

learning needs. Relevant EU policy documents are also reviewed to contextualize the

theoretical discussion within current policy directions.

Findings - The article identifies key conceptual linkages between AI-driven HRM

functions—such as learning management, performance support, and skills forecasting—and

adult learning principles. It highlights how AI can support self-directed and goal-oriented

learning aligned with workplace demands, while also drawing attention to challenges related

to ethics, equity, and data governance. A conceptual framework is proposed to structure

future theoretical and applied research in this area.

Research Implications – This study offers a foundation for future empirical and policy-

oriented research on AI-enabled adult learning through HRM. The conceptual framework

can guide further studies on the design, evaluation, and ethical governance of AI tools used

to promote lifelong learning at work.

Originality/Value - This article provides an original contribution by bridging three

previously disconnected domains—AI, HRM, and adult learning. It responds to a gap in both

academic and policy literature by offering a theory-informed perspective on how

organizations can use AI within HRM to support the professional development of adult

workers in line with contemporary learning and employment strategies.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Human resource management, Adult learning, Lifelong

learning, Skills development, EU skills policy, AI ethics, Personalized learning, Conceptual

framework

Paper type: Conceptual and literature-based paper

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has significantly impacted how organizations operate, manage talent, and foster continuous learning. In particular, the integration of AI into Human Resource Management (HRM) has opened new avenues for enhancing workforce development by automating processes, generating data-driven insights, and enabling personalized employee experiences. At the same time, the growing demand for lifelong learning, especially among adult workers, has become a critical priority in both organizational and policy contexts, driven by digital transformation, demographic shifts, and the evolving nature of work.

Within this landscape, AI holds particular promise in supporting adult learning through HRM systems. AI-enabled platforms can tailor learning pathways to individual needs, identify skill gaps, and recommend targeted development opportunities—all of which align with the strategic goals of modern HR functions. This is particularly relevant in light of recent European Union initiatives such as the European Skills Agenda, Digital Education Action Plan, and Pact for Skills, which emphasize the role of employers in promoting upskilling and reskilling opportunities for adults.

Despite growing interest, academic research at the intersection of AI, HRM, and adult learning remains limited and largely fragmented. While numerous studies explore AI applications in HR functions such as recruitment or performance management, few have examined how these technologies can be systematically leveraged to promote adult learning in the workplace. This paper aims to address this gap by developing a conceptual understanding of how AI-enhanced HRM practices can serve as vehicles for lifelong learning and professional development.

Grounded in an extensive review of literature and current policy frameworks, this conceptual and literature-based article seeks to provide a structured overview of how AI is reshaping learning through HRM processes, particularly for adult workers. The paper also discusses challenges related to ethics, transparency, and digital inclusion, which must be addressed for AI to contribute meaningfully to sustainable workforce development.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant theories and EU-level policy frameworks related to HRM and adult learning. Section 3 outlines current applications of AI in HR functions that support learning. Section 4 discusses practical

mechanisms for integrating adult learning into AI-enhanced HRM. Section 5 addresses key ethical and strategic considerations. The paper concludes with a summary of insights and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical and Policy Background

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in Human Resource Management (HRM) practices has brought about a shift not only in how tasks are executed but also in how organizations conceptualize workforce development and adult learning. This section outlines key theoretical foundations of adult learning and HRM, while also situating the discussion within the context of current European policy frameworks that prioritize upskilling and reskilling.

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Adult Learning

Adult learning is grounded in several established theoretical models that emphasize self-direction, relevance, and experience-based learning. Knowles' Andragogy Theory remains one of the most influential frameworks, asserting that adult learners are autonomous, goal-oriented, and motivated by internal rather than external factors (Knowles, 1980). AI systems align well with this model, as they enable the delivery of adaptive, self-paced learning experiences tailored to individual learning paths.

Another important perspective is Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), which focuses on critical reflection and the re-evaluation of assumptions. AI-enhanced learning tools can support this by providing real-time feedback, diverse learning modalities, and simulation-based environments that challenge learners' perspectives.

The Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as central to motivation, is also relevant. AI-driven HR systems that allow employees to set learning goals, receive personalized feedback, and collaborate with peers can foster the intrinsic motivation necessary for effective adult learning.

2.2 Human Resource Management and Learning

The strategic role of HRM has evolved beyond administrative functions, becoming a critical enabler of learning and development. The Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991) conceptualizes learning and employee development as strategic assets that contribute to sustained competitive advantage. Within this view, AI is not only a tool but also a

resource that enables the efficient identification and deployment of talent.

The Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) Framework (Appelbaum et al., 2000) posits that performance depends on employees' ability, motivation, and opportunity to perform. AI supports this model by identifying skill gaps (ability), personalizing rewards and recognition systems (motivation), and offering relevant learning content (opportunity). Through these mechanisms, AI-enhanced HRM can drive organizational learning ecosystems.

2.3 The Policy Context: Lifelong Learning and Skills Development in the EU

The European Union has established a strong policy framework supporting lifelong learning, particularly in the context of the green and digital transitions. The European Skills Agenda (European Commission, 2020) sets ambitious targets for upskilling and reskilling by 2025, emphasizing the role of employers in facilitating workplace learning.

The Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027 (European Commission, 2021) further reinforces the need for innovation in digital learning environments, calling on organizations to integrate digital technologies—including AI—into education and training systems. AI tools embedded in HR systems can directly contribute to this by fostering adaptive and ondemand learning for adult workers.

Moreover, the Pact for Skills, launched in 2020, promotes public-private partnerships to advance skills development at scale. AI-powered learning management systems (LMS) used by large employers like Siemens and IBM have been identified as practical examples of how digital solutions support the Pact's objectives (OECD, 2023).

At a strategic level, the European Year of Skills 2023 further highlighted the importance of equipping the adult workforce with future-ready skills, emphasizing inclusion, accessibility, and personalized pathways—principles directly aligned with AI-driven learning solutions.

In addition, the recently proposed Union of Skills initiative builds upon these efforts by aiming to create a more coherent governance architecture for skills development across Member States and sectors. As outlined by the European Commission (2025), the Union of Skills seeks to strengthen collaboration between EU-level institutions, national authorities, industry, and education providers. It emphasizes common skills intelligence frameworks, improved interoperability of learning systems, and better use of digital tools like AI to identify and address skill gaps. This policy ambition aligns closely with the broader strategy of integrating AI into HRM to support adult learning at scale (European Commission, 2025).

2.4 Gaps in Literature and Policy Implementation

Despite growing institutional and technological momentum, academic literature has yet to fully explore how AI can serve as a bridge between HRM and adult learning in practice. Existing research tends to treat AI in HRM and adult learning as separate streams, with limited attention to their intersection (Tambe et al., 2019; Min et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is a lack of conceptual clarity regarding the frameworks that can guide the ethical and strategic deployment of AI in support of adult learning.

This gap presents a unique opportunity for theoretical contributions that not only map existing developments but also offer structured perspectives on how AI-enhanced HRM can facilitate inclusive, lifelong learning for the adult workforce.

3. AI in HRM: Current Applications and Trends

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the landscape of human resource management (HRM), offering transformative potential across key functional areas such as recruitment, learning and development, performance management, and workforce planning. While the application of AI in HRM is still emerging, recent developments show a shift from task-level automation to strategic integration, particularly in support of employee learning and skill development.

3.1 Recruitment and Talent Acquisition

AI technologies have become increasingly prominent in recruitment processes, primarily through the automation of candidate sourcing, screening, and initial assessment. Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) such as HireVue and Pymetrics use machine learning and natural language processing to analyze resumes, video interviews, and psychometric data, enabling recruiters to identify high-potential candidates more efficiently (Black & van Esch, 2021; Van Esch et al., 2019). These tools contribute to reducing time-to-hire and improving candidate-job fit by applying predictive algorithms trained on historical hiring data.

Despite their benefits, these systems raise concerns about algorithmic bias and fairness, particularly when trained on biased datasets (Raghavan et al., 2020). Recent advances in

explainable AI aim to address these concerns, offering transparency in algorithmic decision-making and helping organizations comply with data protection and anti-discrimination regulations (Wachter et al., 2017).

3.2 Learning and Development

AI-powered Learning Management Systems (LMS) have introduced new possibilities for personalized and continuous learning in the workplace. Platforms such as Coursera for Business, Degreed, and IBM's Watson Talent can track individual learning behaviors, detect skill gaps, and recommend customized learning pathways (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019; Bersin, 2018). These systems align well with adult learning principles by supporting self-paced, goal-oriented learning experiences.

Furthermore, AI tools can curate learning content dynamically, integrate just-in-time microlearning, and adjust difficulty levels based on learner feedback and performance—key elements in adaptive learning systems. Such features are particularly valuable for adult workers, who often balance learning with other professional and personal responsibilities (Knowles, 1980; Mezirow, 1991).

3.3 Performance Management

The use of AI in performance management is characterized by its ability to generate real-time insights, replacing the traditional annual review with continuous feedback systems. AI can monitor productivity metrics, collaboration patterns, and behavioral indicators across communication and project management platforms (Tambe et al., 2019). These insights support managers in setting personalized goals, identifying early signs of disengagement, and recommending developmental actions.

Companies such as Workday and SAP SuccessFactors have integrated AI into their performance modules to automate goal setting, 360-degree feedback, and succession planning (Guenole et al., 2017). These capabilities not only enhance objectivity but also contribute to fairness by minimizing subjective evaluations and human bias (Binns, 2018).

3.4 Workforce Planning and Skill Forecasting

AI also supports strategic workforce planning through advanced forecasting models. By analyzing labor market trends, internal performance data, and skill demand projections, AI can help HR departments anticipate future talent needs and proactively address skills shortages (OECD, 2021; Davenport, 2018). Tools such as Eightfold and LinkedIn Talent

Insights provide real-time analytics to identify emerging skills and internal mobility opportunities.

In alignment with EU priorities on skills intelligence, these tools facilitate data-driven decision-making that links organizational needs with employee learning trajectories, thereby strengthening the connection between HRM and adult learning.

4. AI to Support Adult Learning in Practice

The application of artificial intelligence (AI) in adult learning through human resource management (HRM) systems has the potential to address many of the persistent challenges that adult learners face in the workplace. These include limited time, varying digital competencies, diverse learning goals, and the need for relevance and personalization. While AI tools are increasingly used for workforce development, their value lies not merely in technological novelty, but in their capacity to create adaptive, inclusive, and human-centered learning environments.

4.1 Personalization and Self-Directed Learning

AI-powered systems excel at analyzing individual learning histories, career trajectories, performance data, and stated preferences to generate personalized learning pathways. This functionality resonates strongly with Knowles' (1980) principles of andragogy, which emphasize self-direction and goal-oriented learning. Adaptive learning platforms such as EdCast, LinkedIn Learning, and Cornerstone OnDemand offer personalized content recommendations based on the learner's profile, thereby enhancing engagement and motivation (Bersin, 2018; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019).

By allowing adult employees to select learning experiences aligned with their professional interests and performance needs, AI fosters a sense of autonomy and relevance—two critical factors in adult learning efficacy (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

4.2 Learning in the Flow of Work

One of the key benefits of AI is its capacity to deliver learning in the flow of work—providing short, contextually relevant resources at the moment of need. Tools such as Microsoft Viva and Salesforce MyTrailhead leverage AI to suggest microlearning modules based on employees' tasks, recent activity, or queries. This "just-in-time" learning is

particularly suited for adults who often juggle multiple responsibilities and may lack time for traditional training formats (Bersin, 2020). Such AI-supported mechanisms reduce cognitive load and make learning more accessible and integrated into daily work routines, improving knowledge retention and transfer (Pan & Hamilton, 2018).

4.3 Inclusion and Accessibility

Adult learners represent a heterogeneous group, often spanning generations, socio-economic backgrounds, and levels of digital literacy. AI can help accommodate this diversity by offering multimodal learning options, adjusting pace and complexity, and identifying learners at risk of disengagement. Voice-based assistants, language adaptation tools, and AI-driven accessibility features (e.g., automated subtitles, visual contrast adjustments) enable more inclusive learning environments (UNESCO, 2021).

Moreover, AI analytics can flag disparities in participation and outcomes, enabling HR departments to intervene early and promote equity in access to learning opportunities (Floridi et al., 2018).

4.4 Career Pathing and Skills Alignment

A central concern for adult learners is career relevance. AI tools can map organizational skill needs against individual capabilities to recommend upskilling or reskilling opportunities. For instance, platforms like Degreed or Eightfold AI use AI to build individualized career maps and align learning paths with projected role transitions (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018; OECD, 2021). This forward-looking approach not only benefits the employee but also supports strategic workforce planning, contributing to organizational agility in response to shifting market demands.

5. Challenges and Ethical Considerations

While the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in human resource management (HRM) holds transformative potential for adult learning in the workplace, it also raises significant ethical and organizational challenges. These concerns are particularly important in a domain as sensitive as learning and development, where trust, fairness, and autonomy are central to

successful outcomes. Without responsible design and implementation, AI systems risk reinforcing inequalities, violating privacy, and undermining employee engagement.

5.1 Algorithmic Bias and Fairness

One of the most widely discussed challenges in AI is the risk of algorithmic bias, particularly when systems are trained on historical data that may reflect discriminatory practices. In the context of adult learning, such biases can result in unequal access to development opportunities or misaligned skill recommendations (Raghavan et al., 2020). For example, if AI systems favor profiles similar to previous high performers, they may systematically exclude diverse or non-traditional learners.

To address this, organizations must implement bias mitigation strategies, including auditing datasets, using fairness-aware algorithms, and ensuring diverse input during system design (Mehrabi et al., 2021). Legal frameworks such as the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the proposed AI Act emphasize transparency, non-discrimination, and human oversight in automated decision-making (Wachter et al., 2017; Floridi et al., 2018).

5.2 Data Privacy and Surveillance

AI-driven learning platforms rely heavily on data collection—including learning patterns, performance metrics, and sometimes biometric or behavioral data. While this enables personalization, it also introduces serious concerns about privacy, surveillance, and consent. Adult employees may feel uncomfortable with the extent to which their behavior is monitored or used to make evaluative judgments (Acquisti et al., 2015).

The concept of informational privacy (Westin, 1967) and the principle of contextual integrity (Nissenbaum, 2004) underscore the importance of using personal data in ways that align with users' expectations. In adult learning, this means that AI systems must provide clear consent mechanisms, data minimization protocols, and accessible explanations of how data is used and protected.

5.3 Transparency and Explainability

Transparency in AI decision-making is essential not only for legal compliance but also for building trust with learners. Adult employees must understand how and why a system recommends a particular course, identifies a skill gap, or assesses performance. Explainable AI (XAI) techniques, including interpretable models and user-friendly dashboards, can support this need (Lipton, 2018).

Organizational trust in AI is closely linked to perceived procedural fairness—the idea that processes are consistent, unbiased, and understandable (Greenberg, 1987). Without explainability, learners may reject AI recommendations, undermining the effectiveness of otherwise well-designed systems.

5.4 Digital Divide and Technological Inequality

AI-enhanced learning systems assume a minimum level of digital literacy and access to devices, platforms, and internet connectivity. However, adult learners—particularly those in low-skilled or underserved sectors—may lack these prerequisites. This raises concerns about the digital divide, exacerbating existing inequalities rather than closing them (UNESCO, 2021). To mitigate this, organizations must ensure that AI systems are designed with inclusivity and accessibility in mind. This includes offering low-bandwidth solutions, multilingual interfaces, and non-digital alternatives when needed.

6. Discussion

This article has explored the conceptual intersections between artificial intelligence (AI), human resource management (HRM), and adult learning in the workplace. The integration of these domains—each with distinct theoretical and operational frameworks—highlights both new opportunities and significant tensions. This discussion section synthesizes the preceding analysis and reflects on its theoretical, organizational, and policy implications.

6.1 Towards a Human-Centered AI Approach in HRM

A central theme emerging from the literature is the tension between automation and human agency. While AI offers unprecedented efficiency in learning management, talent analytics, and personalization, it also risks reducing the human element of development to algorithmic processes. As such, the integration of AI into HRM must prioritize human-centered design principles, ensuring that technological interventions support rather than replace reflective, social, and contextual aspects of adult learning (Floridi et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2021).

HRM professionals must not only adopt AI tools but also cultivate digital literacy and ethical awareness to manage them responsibly. This requires a shift from technical implementation to strategic stewardship, in which HR departments act as mediators between algorithmic logic and human development needs.

6.2 Bridging the Policy-Practice Gap

Despite clear alignment between the objectives of EU skills policies and the capabilities of AI-driven HR systems, a notable gap remains between policy vision and practical implementation. Many organizations struggle to embed AI tools within inclusive learning strategies that reach diverse groups of adult learners. This disconnect is often due to limited organizational readiness, lack of clear ethical guidelines, or insufficient investment in human capital (OECD, 2023).

To address this, stronger multi-level governance mechanisms are needed—linking EU policy instruments with employer-level practices. Public-private partnerships, skills pacts, and targeted incentives for digital training could foster experimentation and scaling of AI-driven adult learning solutions.

6.3 A Holistic Framework for AI-Enhanced Adult Learning

The findings presented across Sections 2–5 support the development of a conceptual framework that situates adult learning as a core function of strategic HRM, enabled by AI. This framework emphasizes three key pillars:

- Personalization: AI-driven systems must support individualized learning paths grounded in adult learning theory.
- Fairness and Inclusivity: Ethical safeguards are necessary to ensure that AI does not reinforce inequality or exclude vulnerable groups.
- Organizational Alignment: AI-enabled learning must align with workforce planning,
 employee goals, and broader skills strategies.

By centering these pillars, the proposed framework offers a pathway for organizations to navigate the complexity of AI adoption in a way that promotes not only operational gains but also meaningful learning and career development for adults.

7. Conclusion

As workplaces evolve in response to digital transformation, demographic change, and shifting skill demands, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into human resource management (HRM) offers significant potential for promoting adult learning. This article has proposed a conceptual and literature-based exploration of how AI-enhanced HRM practices can foster personalized, inclusive, and strategic learning environments for adult workers.

Grounded in foundational theories of adult learning, such as andragogy and transformative learning, and informed by contemporary HRM models like the AMO framework and resource-based view, the paper has illustrated the ways in which AI can align learning with organizational goals. Through current applications in learning management, skills forecasting, and performance support, AI is already shaping the ways adult employees interact with learning opportunities in the workplace.

However, the adoption of AI in this domain is not without its challenges. Concerns about algorithmic bias, data privacy, transparency, and digital exclusion must be addressed through ethical design, responsible governance, and organizational commitment to equity. Policies at the EU level offer valuable direction, but successful implementation requires alignment between high-level strategies and on-the-ground HR practices.

By developing a conceptual framework that connects these diverse dimensions, this article contributes to the growing field of AI in HRM and lifelong learning. It offers a structured foundation for future empirical research, as well as practical insights for organizations aiming to leverage AI not only for efficiency but for human development and inclusive growth.

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