Domain Expertise and AI Adoption: Insights into HR Managers' Unified Perspectives Across Roles and Contexts

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Abstract: The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) offers transformative potential for human resource management (HRM), yet a significant majority of organizations have yet to adopt AI in HRM practices. While much research focuses on individual-level factors in technology adoption, limited attention has been given to the role of domain-specific expertise in shaping HR managers' perceptions of AI. This study addresses this gap by exploring HR managers' attitudes and intentions toward AI adoption and examining whether these perceptions differ by gender, job role, organizational size, or industry. Survey data from 279 HR managers in China, analyzed using ANOVA, reveal a largely positive, uniform view of AI adoption, with no significant differences in demographic or organizational factors. These results suggest that shared expertise within HR may drive a cohesive understanding of AI's benefits, challenging conventional models that emphasize individual or contextual variability in technology adoption. This study contributes to the theoretical framework of technology adoption by highlighting the role of functional expertise in developing uniformity and provides practical insights for designing AI training and implementation strategies that resonate across diverse organizational settings.

1 INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI), defined as the ability of machines to carry out tasks that traditionally require human intelligence, is transforming human resource management (HRM) by streamlining recruitment, enhancing decision-making, and improving employee engagement (e.g. Malik *et al.*, 2023; Prikshat *et al.*, 2023). While advancements in information technology (IT), big data, and analytics have broadened AI's application across industries, HRM is increasingly recognized as a field for AI-driven transformation (Brock & von Wangenheim, 2019). However, despite AI's significant potential, its adoption within HRM remains limited, with approximately 75% of U.S. organizations yet to incorporate AI tools into HRM practices (Maurer, 2024). This low adoption rate underscores the need to better understand factors influencing HR managers' perspectives on AI adoption (e.g. Vrontis *et al.*, 2022; Prikshat *et al.*, 2023).

Research on technology adoption often emphasizes individual characteristics, such as hierarchical position, industry, and gender, as determinants of technology adoption intentions (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2016). Yet, it is unclear if these factors significantly influence HR managers' views on AI. Domain expertise within HR may foster a shared understanding and favorable perception of AI's utility across roles and industries, creating a cohesive outlook within the HR field that differs from established models emphasizing individual variability. This perspective aligns with research suggesting that professional expertise can shape homogenous attitudes toward technology adoption (e.g. Hoffmann & Soyez, 2010). Therefore, exploring whether HR managers' shared expertise leads to uniform AI adoption attitudes, regardless of individual characteristics, could enhance existing technology adoption frameworks.

To address these gaps, this study investigates HR managers' perspectives on AI adoption and examines whether these perceptions vary by demographic and organizational factors, including gender, job level, firm size, and industry. This exploration is guided by two primary questions: (1) *What are HR managers' perspectives on adopting AI in HRM?* And (2) *Do these attitudes and behavioral intentions vary significantly across demographic and organizational factors?*

Drawing on the literature on IT adoption and AI in HRM, this study challenges traditional adoption theories that emphasize hierarchical or sectoral differences. Instead, we examine the potential role of domain-specific expertise in creating a unified perspective on AI within HR, where shared functions, processes, and objectives may foster a common view of AI's benefits. While Prior IT adoption research (e.g. Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003) suggests that adoption intentions are shaped by individual characteristics (e.g. Mathieson, 1991; Karahanna *et al.*, 1999), industry type (Wang *et al.*, 2014), and other demographic factors (Devolder *et al.*, 2012). This study explores whether such factors exert a diminishing influence within a specialized field like HRM.

The findings reveal that HR managers generally hold positive and uniform views on AI adoption, with minimal variation across demographic and organizational factors. These results suggest that HR's domain-specific expertise may create a cohesive understanding of AI's potential, challenging the assumption that individual-level differences always drive technology adoption patterns. This study extends the literature on IT adoption by proposing that functional expertise within specialized domains can lead to a shared perception of technology's value, an insight that warrants further theoretical exploration.

The following sections outline the literature review and hypothesis development, research methods, and empirical results. This study concludes with a discussion of theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and future research directions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

2.1 AI in HRM

AI enables computers to perform tasks traditionally requiring human intelligence, such as autonomous learning and adaptive decision-making (Jarrahi, 2018; Samuel *et al.*, 2022). In HRM, AI's transformative potential is particularly evident in recruitment, training, and skill development, enhancing decision-making in hiring, performance reviews, mobility, and diversity initiatives(Malik *et al.*, 2022b; Vrontis *et al.*, 2022). For instance, AI can analyze job portal data and social media to identify optimal candidates (Tambe *et al.*, 2019), recommend

skill-gap training, and mitigate biases in evaluations (Pereira *et al.*, 2023). In some cases, AI outperforms human capabilities, optimizing recruitment practices and fostering diversity (Pereira *et al.*, 2023).

Studies have explored factors influencing HR professionals' adoption of AI (Suseno *et al.*, 2022) and its role in enhancing employee experiences through AI bots (Malik *et al.*, 2022a). However, effective integration requires a strategic approach that prioritizes transparency, algorithmic fairness, and ethical concerns (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2023). Successful AI adoption in HRM depends on both advanced technology infrastructure and management's capabilities to address ethical and operational challenges.

Generative AI further contributes by creating context-sensitive content that evolves through user interactions (Andrieux *et al.*, 2024; Chowdhury *et al.*, 2024). Achieving productivity gains from AI in HRM requires a balanced approach that maximizes AI's adaptive benefits while mitigating associated risks.

2.2 Research Hypothesis

Research on HR managers' perspectives on AI adoption has gained interest (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2023; Deepa *et al.*, 2024). Widely used theoretical approaches to IT adoption, such as the theory of planned behavior, the theory of reasoned action, the technology acceptance model, and UTAUT, emphasize attitudes and intentions as key factors shaping adoption (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2016). While intention refers to an individual's decision to adopt a technology, it is often influenced by attitude, or "an individual's overall affective reaction to using a system" (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003, p. 455). Although UTAUT originally omitted attitude, recent studies (e.g. Dwivedi *et al.*, 2019) argue that it is central to shaping behavioral intention, reinforcing its relevance in exploring HR managers' adoption of AI in HRM.

Moreover, HR managers' views on AI may vary by job role or decision responsibility. For instance, research indicates that senior managers often possess deeper insights into the strategic implications of emerging technologies (Day, 1994; Savioz & Blum, 2002), while others suggest that AI may be better suited for operational rather than strategic decisions (Edwards *et al.*, 2000b). Therefore, senior HR managers may be more cautious in adopting AI for strategic tasks. Thus, it is proposed:

H1: Attitudes (H1a) and behavioral intentions (H1b) toward using AI differ among HR managers

based on their job roles or decision-making responsibilities.

Additionally, while IT adoption research often considers industry effects (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2016), few studies have examined whether AI perceptions differ by industry. Reports suggest that AI adoption rates vary significantly across sectors, with industries like manufacturing and finance leading adoption, while others, such as construction, lag (Forrester, 2018; Deloitte, 2019). These sectoral differences could influence HR managers' attitudes toward AI. Therefore, it is reasonable to propose that:

H2: The attitudes (H2a) and behavioral intentions (H2b) towards using AI differ among HR managers from different industries.

Firm size also plays a role in IT adoption; larger firms typically have the resources to support AI initiatives, while smaller firms may face resource constraints (e.g. Gillon *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, HR managers from organizations of varying sizes are likely to differ in their AI adoption perspectives. Thus, this study proposes that:

H3: The attitudes (H3a) and behavioral intentions (H3b) towards using AI differ between managers from different sizes of companies.

Finally, prior research on IT adoption has identified gender as a moderating factor, citing social hierarchy and psychological differences (Borghans *et al.*, 2009; Hovav & D'Arcy, 2012). In HRM, gender effects on technology adoption are inconclusive, with some studies noting differences (e.g. Festing *et al.*, 2015; Guillén *et al.*, 2018) and others finding none (e.g. Powell, 1990; Sanders & De Cieri, 2021). Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: The attitudes (H4a) and behavioral intentions (H4b) towards using AI differ among male and female HR managers.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The two constructs, attitude, and intention to use were measured using four and three items respectively, adapted from prior studies (Table 2) (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003; Cao *et al.*, 2021).

A questionnaire survey was used to collect 279 responses from HR managers in China. In line with the research questions, the following data were collected: first, information about the HR manager's profile including the manager's position and gender (Table 1a); second, the company's profile including industry type and company size (Table 1b); third and most importantly, the managers' perspectives on

integrating AI into HRM. As shown in Table 1a, 10% of the respondents were HR directors; 18% were HR managers, 52% were HR specialists, and 20% were HR team leaders. Regarding gender, 51% were male and 49% were female. As indicated in Table 1b, 20% of respondents were from the manufacturing sector, 19% from technology, 17% from services, 12% from the finance and insurance sector, 10% from energy and public sector, and 22% from other nine industry sectors. Of all respondents, 19% were from organizations with 50 to less than 100 employees, 43% having 100 to less than 250 employees, 27% having 250 to less than 500 employees, and 11% having 500 or more employees.

Table 1a: Respondent position and gender (n=279).

Respondent Position	%	Gender	%
HR Director	10	Male	51
HR Manager	18	Female	49
HR Specialist	52		
HR team leader	20		

Table 1b: Industry type and company size (n=279).

Industry type	%	Firm size	%
Manufacturing	20	50 to less than 100	19
Technology	19	100 to less than 250	43
Services	17	250 to less than 500	27
Finance and insurance	12	500 or more	11
Energy & public sector	10		
Other	22		

4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The survey results were analyzed using the SPSS® statistics 29 to examine HR managers' perspectives on adopting AI in HRM. Each question was assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Table 2 provides a summary of the responses. Notably, over 80% of the HR managers surveyed expressed a positive attitude toward using AI in HRM, and more than 84% indicated an intention to use AI in HRM practices.

Table 2: % of respndents' answers (n=279).

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Using AI-enabled HRM systems is a good idea	0	1	12	51	36
Using AI-enabled HRM systems is a foolish idea^	52	29	18	1	0
I like the idea of using AI-enabled HRM systems	0	1	11	62	25
Using AI-enabled HRM systems would be pleasant	0	1	14	50	35
I intend to use AI-enabled HRM systems in the future	0	2	14	44	40
I would use AI-enabled HRM systems in the workplace	0	1	13	55	31
I plan to use AI-enalbed HRM systems for my work	0	1	12	51	36

^-reverse-coded

Interestingly, only up to 18% of HR managers expressed a "neutral" stance on adopting and

intending to use AI in HRM, indicating that relatively few had "no opinion"–a position often associated with neutrality in prior methodological studies (Sturgis *et al.*, 2014; Nadler *et al.*, 2015). This limited neutral response suggests that most HR managers in this study had a clear perspective and likely a solid understanding of AI applications in HRM.

Concerning H1a/b, A one-way ANOVA was performed using latent variables rather than their associated indicators to understand if HR managers' attitudes and intentions differ significantly among managers with different positions. The ANOVA result indicated that while the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated as the two significance values for Levene's test were 0.941 and 0.119 respectively, there were no statistically significant differences at the p<.05 level in the scores of attitude and intention to use for the manager with different positions. As a result, H1a and H1b were rejected.

To test H2/b that positing HJR managers' attitudes and behavioral intentions towards using AI differ among HR managers from different industries, a one-way ANOVA was also conducted to examine if there was a statistically significant difference in scores for the different industry groups. The results indicated all mean scores were not statistically different. Thus, H2a/b was rejected.

To test H3a/b H3 assuming that attitudes (H3a) and behavioral intentions (H3b) towards using AI differ between HR managers from different sizes of companies, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The two variables' significance Levene's scores were 0.232 and 0.597, suggesting the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated. There was a statistically significant difference at the $p<0.05$ level only in attitude scores for the four groups of organizations (Group 1: 50 to less than 100 employees; Group 2: 100 to less than 250; Group 3: 250 to less than 500; and Group 4: 500 or more) [F=2.720, p=0.045]. However, post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that there were no significant differences among the groups. Thus, H3a/b was rejected.

Finally, an independent-sample t-test was performed to compare the intention to use scores for male and female HR managers (H4a/b). There was no significant difference in scores for males (*M*=4.12, *SD*=0.62) and females (*M*=4.21, *SD*=0.50; *t*(277)=-1.278, *p*=0.202). The attitude scores for male and female HR managers also showed no significant difference for males (*M*=3.29, *SD*=0.32) and females (*M*=3.38, *SD*=0.36; *t*(277)=-1.969, *p*=0.066). As a result, H4a/b was rejected.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion

Research suggests that AI can significantly enhance HRM processes and functions (e.g. Malik *et al.*, 2022b; Vrontis *et al.*, 2022), underscoring the need to understand HR managers' perspectives on the adoption of AI within HRM. This study also explores whether notable differences exist in HR managers' attitudes and intentions toward adopting AI based on job role (H1a/b), industry (H2a/b), organizational size (H3a/b), and gender (H4a/b).

Regarding differences in attitudes and intentions across HR roles (H1a/b), the findings reveal no significant variation among HR managers at different organizational levels. This consistency suggests that regardless of position, HR managers share a similar understanding of AI's potential benefits in HRM. This result contrasts with previous research, which suggests that senior management plays a critical role in adopting IT (Jeyaraj *et al.*, 2006; Brock & von Wangenheim, 2019; Duan *et al.*, 2019) and often spearheads responses to major technological trends (e.g. Day, 1994) to maintain competitiveness (Savioz & Blum, 2002). Additionally, it challenges the view that AI is more suited to operational rather than strategic levels (Edwards *et al.*, 2000a) and the belief that individual characteristics heavily influence users' behavioral intentions (e.g. Wang *et al.*, 2014). Unlike these studies, this study's findings focus specifically on HR managers' perspectives on AI in HRM, irrespective of their decision-making responsibilities.

About attitudes toward and intentions to integrate AI into HRM across different industries (H2a/b)- specifically manufacturing, technology, professional services, finance and insurance, energy and public sector, and others study finds no statistically significant differences. This result appears inconsistent with the notion that AI adoption varies widely by industry (Forrester, 2018; Deloitte, 2019). This seeming inconsistency may be due to differences in study scope; previous research examined AI adoption across general industry contexts, whereas this study focuses specifically on AI adoption in HRM. This discrepancy highlights an intriguing area for further research.

Concerning perspectives on AI adoption across organizations of different sizes (H3a/b), this study's findings run counter to expectations and diverge from previous studies (e.g. Gillon *et al.*, 2014). The result suggests no empirical support for significant differences in AI perceptions between managers in

small. Medium, and large organizations, indicate similar outlooks on AI's role in HRM regardless of organizational size.

Lastly, concerning gender-based differences in attitudes toward and intention to use AI in HRM (H4a/b), the study finds no empirical support for such differences. This result aligns with research suggesting no significant gender difference in HRM roles (e.g. Powell, 1990; Sanders & De Cieri, 2021), but contrasts with prior studies suggesting a gender-based difference in technological adoption (Borghans et al., 2009; Hovav & D'Arcy, 2012) and in other HRM research (e.g. Festing et al., 2015; Guillén et al., 2018). This finding contributes new empirical insights in the context of AI in HRM, reinforcing the view of gender neutrality in HRM technology adoption.

The lack of differences in attitudes and behavioral intentions indicates that HR managers, irrespective of job level, industry, organizational size, or gender, generally perceive AI as beneficial for enhancing HR functions. This uniformity likely stems from the specialized nature of the HR field, where managers engage with a consistent set of functions, processes, and objectives. Such shared professional focus may cultivate a collective understanding of tools and technologies that enhance HRM, leading to similar views on the value and applications of AI. Moreover, HR managers' expertise within this specialized domain likely reduces variability in attitudes and intentions toward AI use, aligning their perspective on its practical implications for HR processes. This alignment offers a promising avenue for further research into how domain-specific expertise shapes technology adoption, which is a point reinforced in other sectors (Hoffmann & Soyez, 2010; Kamal et al., 2011; Nakandala et al., 2024). For instance, both Nakandala et al. (2024) and Kamal et al. (2011) highlight the importance of domain-specific knowledge and expertise in facilitating technology adoption across various fields.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study reveals that HR managers' shared expertise may act as a unifying factor in their perceptions of AI's value, regardless of individual differences such as job level, industry, or gender. This suggests that technology adoption frameworks could be refined to account for the effects of domain-specific expertise within specialized fields like HRM. Unlike traditional models, which often prioritize individual differences (Devolder et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2014), this finding underscores the potential for

specialized knowledge to drive homogeneity in technology adoption attitudes, opening the door for frameworks that consider how collective expertise within functional areas may shape uniform perspectives on technology.

The study's finding that HR managers exhibit consistent attitudes toward AI, regardless of seniority, challenge established perspectives (Jeyaraj et al., 2006; Brock & von Wangenheim, 2019; Duan et al., 2019) that often link seniority to adoption likelihood. In specialized domains like HR, where collective expertise appears to guide the perception of AI, hierarchical roles may have less impact on technology-related attitudes. This suggests a need for theoretical frameworks that explore how shared functional expertise can override hierarchical distinctions, thereby offering a fresh lens for studying technology adoption in expertise-driven environments.

Contrary to the widely held view that industry context strongly influences technology adoption levels, this study highlights that in specialized functions such as HRM, industry boundaries may be less relevant to shaping technology perceptions. This points to a theoretical distinction between function-specific and industry-specific technology adoption patterns, suggesting that, within certain specialized domains, functional expertise can lead to homogeneity in technology attitudes. Future studies should explore this distinction, assessing whether a functionally unified view of technology adoption holds across other areas where professional objectives and processes are similarly aligned.

The absence of significant gender-based differences in HR managers' attitudes and intentions toward AI adoption supports the notion of gender neutrality in specialized professional roles (e.g. Powell, 1990; Sanders & De Cieri, 2021). This result implies that, in the HR domain, shared expertise and a cohesive professional culture may promote egalitarian views on technology adoption, diminishing the relevance of gender as a differentiating factor. This calls for further theoretical work on whether similar gender-neutral perceptions of technology exist in other specialized fields, particularly those where shared domain expertise might similarly drive homogeneity in technology-related attitudes.

5.3 Managerial Implications

Given the consistency of AI perceptions among HR managers across job levels, industries, and organizational sizes, organizations can develop

unified, standardized AI training programs in HRM, this uniformity suggests that HR managers would respond positively to a cohesive training framework that covers AI's applications in HRM, thereby reducing the need for highly customized training based on hierarchical or organizational distinctions.

Since HR managers appear to share similar attitudes towards AI's role, regardless of their position or organizational setting, fostering cross-level collaboration in AI initiatives may enhance adoption efforts. Encouraging collaborative efforts among HR professionals can lead to the faster integration of AI technologies and smoother transitions, as professionals are already aligned in their perceptions of AI's benefits.

For AI vendors and consultants working with HR departments, the absence of industry-based differences implies that implementation strategies for HRM AI applications can be broadly applicable across sectors. This allows for more streamlined marketing and deployment strategies that focus on HR-specific needs rather than industry-specific variations, potentially reducing costs and increasing the scalability of AI solutions.

The lack of gender-based differences in attitudes and intentions towards AI adoption suggests that HR departments may be particularly well-suited to equitable AI adoption practices. Managers can leverage this finding to promote inclusive technology policies within HRM, reinforcing gender neutrality in AI initiatives and fostering a supportive environment for all employees engaging with new technologies. Organizations should consider the potential of functional expertise as a unifying factor when implementing new technologies like AI. In HRM, this may mean prioritizing insights from HR professionals with deep functional knowledge over hierarchical decision-making structure, as HR professionals appear to hold a consistent, collective understanding of AI's value in the HR process. This approach may streamline technology adoption and enhance the effectiveness of technology applications in HR functions.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

First, the present study primarily aims to offer a descriptive and exploratory view of HR managers' perspectives on AI adoption and potential perception differences among managerial groups. Future research could expand this work by examining various factors, such as technological readiness, external pressures, and organizational culture (Grover *et al.*, 2020), that may affect HR managers' views on

AI in HRM. Additionally, studies could investigate how domain-specific expertise contributes to homogeneity in AI perceptions within HRM, building on the notion that shared expertise may drive uniform adoption attitudes.

Second, the findings of this study are based on a sample of HR managers in China, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research could test this work in diverse geographic and cultural contexts to explore whether the observed homogeneity in AI perceptions is consistent across different countries and cultural environments. Comparative studies would also help uncover any cultural nuances that may affect how domain expertise shapes technology adoption across regions.

Finally, as an exploratory study using descriptive and traditional statistical analysis methods, this research provides an initial understanding of AI adoption perceptions. Future research could employ structural equation modeling to investigate the relationships among specific factors, such as hierarchical roles, gender, and industry, and their influence on AI attitudes within HR. Additionally, qualitative approaches could deepen insights into the motivations, challenges, and strategic implications of AI adoption in HRM, offering a richer understanding of how specialized expertise and functional alignment shape technology perceptions and behaviors in HR.

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