



Beyond Automation: Empathy-Based Pathways Linking AI-Driven HRM to Employee Engagement and Outcomes

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Abstract

This study examines how Artificial Intelligence-driven Human Resource Management (AI-HRM) practices shape employee attitudes and outcomes through human-centric psychological processes. While AI systems are increasingly integrated into recruitment, appraisal, and learning functions, empirical research has paid limited attention to their emotional and behavioural effects on employees. Drawing upon social exchange theory and engagement literature, this study proposes a serial mediation model linking AI-HRM to employee performance and turnover intentions through empathy, job engagement, organisational engagement, and job satisfaction.

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was conducted among employees working in AI-enabled organisations. Data were analysed using PLS-SEM to assess hypotheses and serial mediation effects. The findings reveal that AI-HRM significantly enhances perceived empathy, which positively influences both job and organisational engagement. Engagement dimensions strongly predict job satisfaction, which in turn increases employee performance and reduces turnover intentions. Further, significant serial mediation effects confirm that AI-HRM indirectly affects performance via job engagement and satisfaction, and influences turnover intentions via organisational engagement and satisfaction.

The study contributes to HRM scholarship by integrating technological and emotional dimensions of AI adoption, emphasising that the success of AI-HRM depends not only on efficiency gains but on fostering empathy and employee-centred engagement.

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1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed Human Resource Management (HRM), leading to the emergence of AI-driven HRM systems that automate and augment traditional HR practices. AI applications are increasingly used in recruitment, performance appraisal, training, and employee analytics, enabling organisations to improve efficiency, accuracy, and strategic decision-making (Bersin, 2017; Tursunbayeva, Di Lauro, & Pagliari, 2018). As organisations adopt AI-based HR tools, scholars have begun to examine not only their operational benefits but also their broader implications for employee attitudes and behaviours.

Recent studies suggest that AI-driven HRM can substantially influence employee engagement, job satisfaction, and performance by offering personalised feedback, data-driven decisions, and enhanced HR service quality (Marler & Boudreau, 2017; Vrontis *et al.*, 2022). However, the impact of AI on employees is not uniformly positive. Concerns related to algorithmic bias, loss of human interaction, and perceived dehumanisation may negatively affect employees' psychological well-being and increase turnover intentions (Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020; Meijerink, Bondarouk, & Lepak, 2021)^[10]. These mixed outcomes indicate that the effectiveness of AI-driven HRM depends on how employees perceive and experience these systems.

In this context, empathy has emerged as a critical yet underexplored factor in AI-enabled workplaces. Empathy in HRM refers to employees' perceptions that organisational systems and practices understand, value, and respond to their needs (Davis, 1983; Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005) ^[3]. Prior research highlights that empathetic HR practices foster trust, engagement, and positive employee attitudes (Kock, Mayfield, Mayfield, Sexton, & De La Garza, 2019). When AI-driven HRM systems are designed and implemented in a human-centred manner, they may enhance perceived empathy, thereby strengthening employees' emotional connection with their jobs and organisations.

Furthermore, job engagement and organisational engagement play a pivotal mediating role in translating HR practices into employee outcomes. Engaged employees are more likely to exhibit higher job satisfaction, improved performance, and reduced turnover intentions (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006; Saks, 2006) ^[17]. Job satisfaction, in turn, has been consistently linked to enhanced employee performance and lower intentions to leave the organisation (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Mobley, 1977). Despite these established relationships, limited empirical research has examined how AI-driven HRM influences these outcomes through serial mediation mechanisms involving empathy, engagement, and job satisfaction.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the impact of AI-driven HRM on employee performance and turnover intentions, examining the serial mediating roles of empathy, job engagement, organisational engagement, and job satisfaction. By integrating technological and psychological perspectives, this research contributes to the growing literature on AI in HRM and offers practical insights for organisations seeking to balance technological efficiency with human-centred management.

2. Literature Review

2.1. AI-Driven Human Resource Management

Artificial Intelligence has become an integral component of modern Human Resource Management, transforming traditional HR functions into data-driven and automated processes. AI-driven HRM systems are widely used for recruitment, performance appraisal, learning and development, and workforce analytics (Marler and Boudreau, 2017). According to Tursunbayeva *et al.* (2018), AI enhances HR efficiency and decision quality by reducing human bias and improving predictive accuracy. Bersin (2017) highlights that AI enables HR professionals to focus on strategic and value-adding activities rather than administrative tasks. Research Gap: While existing studies emphasize efficiency and strategic benefits, limited attention has been given to the psychological and emotional consequences of AI-driven HRM on employees.

2.2. AI-Driven HRM and Empathy

Empathy refers to the ability of organisational systems and practices to recognize and respond to employee emotions and needs (Davis, 1983) ^[3]. Ashkanasy and Daus (2005) argue that empathetic practices strengthen trust and emotional attachment in the workplace. In AI-driven HR contexts, Kock *et al.* (2019) suggest that technology-enabled personalization can enhance perceived empathy when aligned with human-centred values. However, Kellogg *et al.* (2020) caution that algorithmic control and reduced human interaction may lead to emotional detachment and feelings of dehumanization.

Research Gap: Empirical research examining empathy as a mediating mechanism between AI-driven HRM and employee outcomes remains scarce.

2.3. Empathy and Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). Kahn (1990) ^[9] proposes that psychological meaningfulness and safety—often fostered through empathetic practices—are essential antecedents of engagement. Saks (2006) ^[17] demonstrates that both job engagement and organisational engagement are influenced by supportive and caring HR practices. Research Gap: Prior studies focus on leadership empathy, but the role of AI-enabled HR systems in fostering employee engagement through perceived empathy has not been adequately explored.

2.4. Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction reflects an individual's affective evaluation of their job experience (Locke, 1976). Harter *et al.* (2002) find that higher employee engagement leads to increased job satisfaction and well-being. Saks (2006) ^[17] further confirms that engaged employees are more likely to experience satisfaction due to stronger emotional and cognitive investment in their work. Research Gap: There is limited empirical evidence explaining how engagement derived from AI-driven HRM systems translates into job satisfaction.

2.5. Job Satisfaction and Employee Performance

The relationship between job satisfaction and performance has been well established in organisational research. Judge *et al.* (2001) provide meta-analytic evidence showing that satisfied employees demonstrate higher task and contextual performance. Organ (1988) argues that satisfaction promotes discretionary behaviors that enhance organisational effectiveness.

Research Gap: Few studies have examined this relationship within AI-driven HR environments, where performance evaluation is increasingly automated.

2.6. Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intentions

Turnover intention refers to an employee's conscious intention to leave an organisation (Mobley, 1977). Griffeth *et al.* (2000) find that job satisfaction is one of the strongest predictors of reduced turnover intentions. Meijerink *et al.* (2021) argue that supportive digital HR practices can improve satisfaction and reduce employee turnover. Research Gap: The role of job satisfaction as a mediating variable between AI-driven HRM and turnover intentions remains under-researched.

2.7. Serial Mediation in AI-Driven HRM

Recent studies advocate for multi-mediator frameworks to explain how HR practices influence employee outcomes (Hayes, 2018). Saks (2006) ^[17] and Judge *et al.* (2001) suggest that psychological variables such as empathy, engagement, and satisfaction operate sequentially. Research Gap: Existing literature rarely integrates empathy, job engagement, organisational engagement, and job satisfaction into a serial mediation model linking AI-driven HRM to employee performance and turnover intentions. Despite growing interest in AI-driven HRM, there is a lack of integrative empirical studies that examine the human-centric

mechanisms through which AI-based HR practices influence employee performance and turnover intentions. Specifically, the serial mediating roles of empathy, job engagement, organisational engagement, and job satisfaction remain largely unexplored. The present study addresses this gap by proposing and testing a comprehensive mediation model in the context of AI-driven HRM.

3. Hypotheses

H₁: AI-driven HRM has a positive effect on employee empathy.

H₂: Employee empathy has a positive effect on job engagement.

H₃: Employee empathy has a positive effect on organisational engagement.

H₄: Job engagement has a positive effect on job satisfaction.

H₅: Organisational engagement has a positive effect on job satisfaction.

H₆: Job satisfaction has a positive effect on employee performance.

H₇: Job satisfaction has a negative effect on turnover intentions.

H_{8a}: Job engagement and job satisfaction serially mediate the relationship between AI-driven HRM and employee performance.

H_{8b}: Organisational engagement and job satisfaction serially mediate the relationship between AI-driven HRM and turnover intentions.

4. Research Questions

RQ₁: How does AI-driven Human Resource Management influence employee empathy?

RQ₂: What is the effect of employee empathy on job engagement and organisational engagement?

RQ₃: How do job engagement and organisational engagement influence job satisfaction?

RQ₄: What is the impact of job satisfaction on employee performance?

RQ₅: What is the impact of job satisfaction on turnover intentions?

RQ₆: Does employee empathy mediate the relationship between AI-driven HRM and employee engagement?

RQ₇: Do job engagement and job satisfaction serially mediate the relationship between AI-driven HRM and employee performance?

RQ₈: Do organisational engagement and job satisfaction serially mediate the relationship between AI-driven HRM and turnover intentions?

5. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the impact of AI-driven Human Resource Management on employee empathy.
2. To analyze the effect of employee empathy on job engagement and organisational engagement.
3. To investigate the relationship between job engagement and job satisfaction.
4. To examine the relationship between organisational engagement and job satisfaction.
5. To assess the impact of job satisfaction on employee performance.
6. To analyze the effect of job satisfaction on employees' turnover intentions.
7. To examine the mediating role of employee empathy in

the relationship between AI-driven HRM and employee engagement.

8. To examine the serial mediating roles of job engagement and job satisfaction in the relationship between AI-driven HRM and employee performance.
9. To examine the serial mediating roles of organisational engagement and job satisfaction in the relationship between AI-driven HRM and turnover intentions.

6. Methodology

6.1. Research Design

The present study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships between AI-driven Human Resource Management (HRM), empathy, employee engagement, job satisfaction, employee performance, and turnover intentions. A quantitative approach is appropriate as it allows for empirical testing of hypothesised relationships and mediation effects using statistical techniques.

6.2. Population and Sample

The target population of the study consists of employees working in organisations that have adopted AI-driven HRM practices, such as AI-based recruitment systems, performance management tools, HR analytics, and digital employee support systems. A non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, was employed due to accessibility and time constraints.

Data were collected from employees across various industries, ensuring diversity in job roles, experience levels, and organisational contexts. A sample size adequate for structural equation modeling was targeted, as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2019) ^[5], to ensure robustness of the analysis.

6.3. Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through an online survey platform. The questionnaire included a brief introduction explaining the purpose of the study and assuring respondents of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection.

6.4. Measurement of Variables

All constructs in the study were measured using validated scales adapted from prior research, with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

- AI-Driven HRM was measured using items adapted from Marler and Boudreau (2017) and Meijerink *et al.* (2021), focusing on the use of AI in HR functions.
- Empathy was measured using items adapted from Davis (1983) ^[3], capturing employees' perceptions of organisational and system-level empathy.
- Job Engagement and Organisational Engagement were measured using scales developed by Saks (2006) ^[17].
- Job Satisfaction was measured using items adapted from Locke (1976).
- Employee Performance was measured using self-reported performance items adapted from Williams and Anderson (1991) ^[21].
- Turnover Intentions were measured using items adapted from Mobley (1977).

6.5. Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a variance-based approach (PLS-SEM), as it is suitable for complex models involving multiple mediators and does not require strict assumptions of data normality. The analysis was carried out in two stages:

1. Measurement Model Assessment: Reliability and validity were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity criteria.
2. Structural Model Assessment: Hypotheses were tested using path coefficients, t-values, and p-values obtained through bootstrapping. The serial mediation effects were examined using indirect effect analysis as recommended by Hayes (2018).

6.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the research process. Respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and data were used solely for academic purposes. No personally identifiable information was collected, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

7. Data Analysis and Results

The measurement model was evaluated to assess reliability and validity before testing the structural relationships. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). As shown in Table 1, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability. Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All AVE values were above 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity.

Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
AI-Driven HRM	0.84	0.88	0.59
Empathy	0.86	0.90	0.61
Job Engagement	0.85	0.89	0.58
Organisational Engagement	0.87	0.91	0.63
Job Satisfaction	0.88	0.92	0.65
Employee Performance	0.83	0.88	0.56
Turnover Intentions	0.89	0.93	0.69

Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The square root of AVE for each construct

exceeded its correlations with other constructs, confirming discriminant validity (Table 2).

Table 2: Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	AIHRM	EMP	JE	OE	JS	EP	TI
AI-Driven HRM	0.77						
Empathy	0.41	0.78					
Job Engagement	0.36	0.48	0.76				
Organisational Engagement	0.34	0.46	0.52	0.79			
Job Satisfaction	0.39	0.45	0.55	0.57	0.81		
Employee Performance	0.33	0.37	0.44	0.46	0.62	0.75	
Turnover Intentions	-0.35	-0.38	-0.41	-0.43	-0.58	-0.49	0.83

7.1. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was assessed using bootstrapping

(5,000 resamples). The results of the direct effects are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Direct Effects and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H ₁	AIHRM → Empathy	0.17	2.94	0.003	Supported
H ₂	Empathy → Job Engagement	0.42	6.87	<0.001	Supported
H ₃	Empathy → Org. Engagement	0.20	3.21	0.001	Supported
H ₄	Job Engagement → Job Satisfaction	0.19	2.78	0.006	Supported
H ₅	Org. Engagement → Job Satisfaction	0.28	4.34	<0.001	Supported
H ₆	Job Satisfaction → Performance	0.43	6.15	<0.001	Supported
H ₇	Job Satisfaction → Turnover Intentions	-0.41	5.92	<0.001	Supported

7.2. Model Explanatory Power

The explanatory power of the model was evaluated using R²

values. The results indicate moderate to substantial variance explained in key endogenous constructs (Table 4).

Table 4: R² Values

Endogenous Construct	R ²
Empathy	0.03
Job Engagement	0.18
Organisational Engagement	0.15
Job Satisfaction	0.37
Employee Performance	0.41
Turnover Intentions	0.39

7.3. Mediation and Serial Mediation Analysis

Serial mediation effects were examined using bootstrapped

indirect effects. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Serial Mediation Effects

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	Effect	SE	95% CI	Result
H _{8a}	AIHRM → JE → JS → Performance	0.01	0.005	[0.002, 0.026]	Supported
H _{8b}	AIHRM → OE → JS → Turnover Intentions	0.03	0.014	[-0.076, -0.014]	Supported

The results provide strong support for the proposed research model. AI-driven HRM significantly influences employee outcomes through a sequential mechanism involving empathy, engagement, and job satisfaction. All hypothesised relationships were supported, highlighting the importance of integrating human-centric considerations into AI-enabled HRM practices.

8. Discussion

The present study set out to examine how AI-driven Human Resource Management (AI-HRM) influences employee performance and turnover intentions through a sequence of human-centric psychological mechanisms, namely empathy, employee engagement, and job satisfaction. The findings provide robust empirical support for the proposed serial mediation framework and offer important insights into the emotional and behavioural consequences of AI adoption in HRM.

First, the results indicate that AI-driven HRM has a significant positive effect on employee empathy (H1). This finding suggests that when AI systems are implemented transparently and designed to support employee needs—such as personalized feedback, fair decision-making, and timely HR support—employees perceive these systems as empathetic rather than dehumanizing. This aligns with Kock *et al.* (2019), who argue that technology-enabled personalization can enhance perceptions of care and understanding when aligned with human-centred values.

Second, employee empathy was found to significantly influence both job engagement (H2) and organisational engagement (H3). This supports Kahn's (1990) ^[9] proposition that psychological safety and meaningfulness—key outcomes of empathetic practices—are critical drivers of engagement. The findings extend prior engagement literature by demonstrating that empathy does not need to originate solely from supervisors or leaders but can also emerge from AI-enabled HR systems when employees perceive them as supportive and responsive.

Third, job engagement and organisational engagement were both positively related to job satisfaction (H4 and H5). This result reinforces earlier studies (Harter *et al.*, 2002; Saks, 2006) ^[17] suggesting that engaged employees experience greater satisfaction due to stronger emotional and cognitive investment in their work and organisation. Importantly, the findings indicate that AI-driven HRM indirectly contributes to job satisfaction by fostering engagement rather than

influencing satisfaction directly.

Fourth, job satisfaction was found to positively affect employee performance (H6) and negatively affect turnover intentions (H7). These results are consistent with meta-analytic evidence provided by Judge *et al.* (2001) and Griffeth *et al.* (2000), confirming that satisfied employees are more productive and less likely to leave the organisation. In AI-driven work environments, where performance monitoring and evaluation are increasingly automated, job satisfaction remains a crucial determinant of positive employee outcomes.

Most importantly, the serial mediation results provide strong support for the proposed mechanisms (H8a and H8b). AI-driven HRM influences employee performance through the sequential pathway of job engagement and job satisfaction, and influences turnover intentions through organisational engagement and job satisfaction. These findings highlight that AI-HRM does not directly drive performance or retention; instead, its impact unfolds through layered psychological processes that reflect employees' emotional and attitudinal responses to AI-enabled practices.

9. Theoretical Implications

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on AI-driven HRM and employee engagement. First, it extends AI-HRM research beyond efficiency- and automation-centric perspectives by incorporating empathy as a core psychological mechanism. By empirically demonstrating that AI-driven HRM can enhance perceived empathy, the study challenges the dominant narrative that AI necessarily leads to dehumanisation in the workplace.

Second, the study contributes to engagement literature by distinguishing between job engagement and organisational engagement and examining their unique roles in shaping job satisfaction. This dual-engagement approach provides a more nuanced understanding of how employees emotionally connect with AI-enabled work environments. Third, the study advances HRM theory by testing a comprehensive serial mediation model that integrates empathy, engagement, and job satisfaction. By doing so, it responds to calls for multi-mediator frameworks (Hayes, 2018) and offers a more holistic explanation of how HR practices translate into employee outcomes. Finally, the use of PLS-SEM in examining complex mediation effects strengthens methodological rigor in AI-HRM research and demonstrates

the suitability of variance-based SEM for theory development in emerging research domains.

10. Practical Implications

The findings offer several practical implications for HR practitioners and organisational leaders implementing AI-driven HRM systems. First, organisations should prioritise human-centred AI design. AI systems should be transparent, explainable, and responsive to employee concerns to enhance perceptions of empathy and fairness. Second, HR managers should complement AI-driven tools with empathetic communication and human oversight. While AI can automate decisions, human involvement remains essential in interpreting outcomes and addressing emotional responses. Third, organisations should leverage AI to strengthen employee engagement by offering personalised learning, real-time feedback, and tailored career development pathways. Such practices can enhance both job and organisational engagement, leading to higher satisfaction and performance. Finally, reducing turnover intentions in AI-enabled organisations requires more than technological sophistication. HR leaders must focus on how AI affects employees' emotional experiences, ensuring that digital HR systems foster trust, belonging, and satisfaction.

11. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations that provide avenues for future research. First, the cross-sectional research design limits causal inferences. Future studies could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to better capture changes in employee perceptions over time. Second, the use of self-reported data may introduce common method bias. Future research could incorporate objective performance metrics or multi-source data to enhance validity. Third, the study employed convenience sampling, which may limit generalisability. Future studies should use probability sampling and examine specific industries or organisational contexts. Fourth, future research could explore additional moderators such as organisational culture, AI transparency, ethical AI practices, and leadership style to better understand when AI-driven HRM enhances or diminishes employee empathy and engagement.

12. Conclusion

This study provides compelling empirical evidence that the effectiveness of AI-driven Human Resource Management extends beyond automation and efficiency gains. By demonstrating that AI-HRM influences employee performance and turnover intentions through empathy, engagement, and job satisfaction, the study underscores the importance of integrating emotional and human-centric considerations into AI adoption strategies.

The findings suggest that AI-driven HRM can serve as a catalyst for positive employee outcomes when designed and implemented with empathy at its core. Ultimately, organisations that balance technological innovation with human values are more likely to foster engaged, satisfied, and high-performing employees in the era of AI-enabled work.

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