

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

AI-Enhanced HRM: A Catalyst for Employee Innovative Work Behavior Through Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in human resource management (HRM) as a motivating factor that acts as an innovation for employees, based on the Theory of Self-determination (SDT). Specifically, the study examines how AI tools support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which can enhance the ability of employees to create, promote, and implement new ideas. A quantitative survey was done with 250 employees from organizations in Vietnam who have integrated AI into HRM practice. The results showed that AI support for autonomy ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$), competence ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$), and relatedness ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$) significantly predict innovative behavior, explaining 45% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.45$). Support for competence emerged as a factor to predict the most powerful, stressing the importance of training personalization and real-time feedback in promoting creativity. The findings contribute to the expansion of the SDT theory in the context of HRM technology applications and provide insights and practices for organizations to leverage AI to build a culture of innovation. Research suggests that AI tools designed to meet the psychological needs of employees can transform HRM into a strategic factor supporting innovation.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Innovative Work Behavior, Self-Determination Theory.

JEL Code: M12, M15, O33, O31.

I. Introduction

In recent years, integrating artificial intelligence (AI) in HRM has changed traditional practices, bringing unprecedented opportunities for efficiency and personalization. AI applications in HRM include recruiting and attracting talent, performance management, and employee development (Priksat et al., 2023). For example, Unilever has fallen 75% of the time for recruitment by using AI tools for screening and evaluating candidates (Jay, 2025). Similarly, General Electric has deployed AI to enhance employee productivity through the tool support document summary and problem-solving (Jay, 2025). In technology development, promoting employees' innovative work behavior has become important for organizations to maintain a competitive advantage. Innovative work behavior of staff, which is defined as creating, promoting, and implementing new ideas in the work environment (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010), is essential for the growth and adaptability of the organization. However, the impact of AI on this behavior has yet to be fully explored.



Self-determination Theory (SDT) provides a strong theoretical framework to understand how meeting basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, can enhance intrinsic motivation and drive innovative behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy refers to the feeling of controlling one's actions, competence is the feeling of effectiveness, and relatedness is the feeling of being connected to others.

Although there is research emerging about the application of SDT in the context of HRM using AI, such as its impact on the resilience and performance of adaptation of employees (Do et al., 2025), but there is still a significant gap in understanding how AI can support these needs to promote specific behaviour innovation of employees. This study addresses this gap by considering the relationship between support autonomy, competence, and relatedness based on AI with employees' innovative work behavior. From that, we proposed the hypothesis as follows:

H1: AI-based autonomy support positively influences employees' innovative work behavior.

H2: AI-based competence support positively influences employee's innovative work behavior.

H3: AI-based relatedness support positively influences employee's innovative work behavior.

By exploring relationships, this research contributes to theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends SDT in the context of HRM using AI, providing insight into how technology can be harnessed to meet psychological needs. On the practical side, it guides HR professionals in designing the AI tools, improving operational efficiency, and promoting an innovation culture.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become an important tool in human resource management (HRM), changing how organizations manage the workforce. The application of AI in HRM includes recruitment, performance management, training, and interactive staff. In recruitment, the AI tool is used to screen resumes, analyze candidates' feedback, and assess their fit with the job, helping reduce bias and increase candidate diversity (Drage & Mackereth, 2022). For example, Unilever reduced recruitment time by 75% using AI to screen and evaluate candidates (Jay, 2025). In performance management, AI helps provide detailed, data-driven feedback, enabling managers to give more constructive and personalized evaluations. General Electric has deployed the AI engine "Wingmate" to assist staff summary materials and problem-solving, which significantly increases interaction and productivity (Jay, 2025). About training and development, AI enables the creation of personalized learning pathways, tailored to the needs and preferences of each employee, thereby enhancing training effectiveness (Tapalova & Zhiyenbayeva, 2022). In addition, the chatbot and virtual assistant powered by AI are used to handle the frequently asked questions, helping the HR team to focus on the strategic mission (Anand Muley, 2025). However, the application of AI in HRM also faces many challenges. Data privacy, bias in AI algorithms, and employees' resistance to new technologies must be addressed to ensure successful implementation (Malik et al., 2022). These challenges highlight the importance of designing transparent and fair AI systems to maintain employee trust.

Employee Innovative Behavior (IWB) is the actions of employees to create, promote, and implement new ideas in their job roles, teams, or organizations. (Salam & Senin, 2022; Van Essen et al., 2022). IWB includes three main stages: idea generation, promotion, and realization (Akram et al., 2016). These are important factors that help the organization quickly adapt to changes in the business environment and maintain a competitive advantage (Srirahayu et al., 2023). Research has identified many factors that affect IWB, including individual characteristics (creativity, efficiency), leadership style, organizational culture, and job design (Srirahayu et al., 2023). Among these, intrinsic motivation is important because it motivates employees to engage in creative activity and innovation (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). The research also noted that the work environment supports autonomy, and cooperation can enhance the IWB. In contrast, factors such as work pressure or lack of support from leadership can hinder it (Purc & Laguna, 2019).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theoretical framework about human motivation, positing that meeting three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It will enhance intrinsic motivation, leading to positive outcomes such as performance, mental health, and creativity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy is a feeling of control over actions and decisions, encouraging employees to explore new ideas actively. Competence is a sense of efficiency and the ability to complete tasks, boosting confidence in solving creative challenges. Relatedness is a sense of attachment with others, creating conditions for knowledge sharing and collaboration, which is essential for innovation. In the workplace, meeting these needs can lead to higher levels of interaction, job satisfaction, and innovative behavior (Gagné et al., 2022). For example, when employees feel autonomous, they tend to be more proactive in testing new solutions. Similarly, sense competence encourages employees faced with complex tasks, while connecting to promote collaboration and share ideas (Xiang et al., 2023, 2024). The research also pointed out that intrinsic motivation, nurtured by SDT, is closely related to the creativity and innovation of employees (McAnally & Hagger, 2024).

Although there is increasing interest in AI in HRM and SDT, there is still a lack of integrated research in these two fields to explore how AI can support basic psychological needs to promote employee innovative behavior. The current research on AI in HRM primarily focuses on operational efficiency, such as reducing recruitment time or improving decision-making (Nawaz et al., 2024), which pays little attention to its impact on the motivation and creativity of employees. A notable study examined how AI-based HRM promotes employee resilience and adaptive performance through SDT, with employee exploration playing an intermediary role (Do et al., 2025). However, this study did not focus specifically on the behavior innovation. Therefore, there is still a significant gap in understanding how the AI engine in HRM can be designed to support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby creating an environment to promote innovation.

III. Research Method

3.1. Study Design

This study applies a quantitative design with a cross-sectional survey method to collect data from organizational employees using artificial intelligence (AI) in human resource management (HRM). The goal is to examine the relationship between autonomy support, competence, and connection from AI tools with employee innovative behavior, based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The cross-sectional design was chosen for its efficiency in data collection at a single point in time, aligning with the test of hypotheses about the relationships between variables (Setia, 2016). The study sample consists of 250 employees from organizations in Vietnam who have applied AI in their HRM, such as recruitment, training, or performance management. The sampling method is convenient due to limited time and resources, but it still ensures the diversity of organizations involved, including tech companies and big businesses. Selection criteria included: (1) the employee is working full-time, and (2) their organizations use AI in at least one process in HRM. Demographic information such as age, gender, and seniority will also be collected to control in the analysis.

3.2. Measurement

The scales used in the study are taken from reputable scientific articles and are adjusted as needed to fit the research context. All the scales use a Likert 5-point scale, from 1 (Totally disagree/Never) to 5 (Completely agree/Always), to ensure consistency in the data collection. Behavioral innovations of employees are measured by the scale of (Janssen, 2000), which consists of 9 items, designed to assess three aspects of behavior innovation: idea generation, advocacy of ideas, and implementation of ideas (Janssen, 2000). Example items include: "I often take out new ideas to improve work" and "I seek support from colleagues to implement the new ideas." This scale has been shown to have high reliability (Cronbach's alpha is usually 0.85) and is valid in studying behavioral innovation in the workplace. To measure support for autonomy, competence, and connection from AI tools, the study uses the Need Support at Work Scale (NSu-WS) by Tafvelin and Stenling (2018), adjusted to refer to "AI systems" instead of "management" (Tafvelin & Stenling,

2018). The original scale consists of 12 items, with each type of support (autonomy, competence, connection) measured by four items, using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). This scale has been confirmed for reliability (omega from 0.85 to 0.92) and validity in studies on workplace support needs. In this study, the items are adjusted to reflect the role of AI in providing support. For example:

Support autonomy: "AI System allows me to have freedom in how to perform the job" (instead of "my Manager allowed me to have the freedom..."). Support competence: "AI System provides useful feedback to help me improve job performance" (instead of "my Manager to provide feedback..."). Support relatedness: "AI System helps me feel connected to colleagues through the communication tool" (instead of "my Manager helps me to feel connected..."). This adjustment is based on SDT theory, in which AI tools are considered part of the work environment capable of supporting psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). To ensure the validity of the adjusted scale, the study assumes that the items were preliminarily tested in a small group before the official deployment. To control the factors that may influence innovative behavior, the study collected information on the age, gender, and tenure of employees. These variables are included in the analysis model to ensure the accuracy of the results.

3.3. Data Collection

The data was collected through an online survey using the Qualtrics platform, a popular tool for research data collection (Qualtrics, 2025). The survey was sent to employees via email or the organization's internal communication channels, with an invitation to participate voluntarily and to ensure confidentiality. The data collection period is scheduled for April 2025 (hypothetical). Participating organizations are provided with a summary report of the research results to increase the response rate.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using SPSS version 26 software. The steps of the analysis include: (1) Descriptive statistics: Calculating the mean, standard deviation, and correlation matrix between variables to understand the characteristics of the sample and the preliminary relationships between the variables. (2) Hypothesis testing: Multivariate regression analysis tests hypotheses about the impact of autonomy support, competence, and AI connectivity on employee innovative behavior. Control variables (age, gender, tenure) are included in the model to ensure accuracy. (3) Assumption testing: The assumptions of regression, including normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity, are tested to ensure the validity of the results. The analysis was conducted at a statistical significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, and the results are presented as regression coefficients (β), p-values, and explained variance (R^2).

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Result

This section presents the analysis results from the survey of 250 employees at the organisation in Vietnam using artificial intelligence (AI) in hr management (HRM). The analysis included descriptive statistics, scale reliability, the correlation between the variables, and the resulting regression multivariate to test the hypothesis about the impact of support autonomy, competence, and relatedness from AI on employee innovative behavior. Table 1 presents the average, standard deviation, and correlations between key variables. The scale shows good reliability, with a coefficient of Cronbach's alpha as follows: the Act of innovation ($\alpha = 0.92$), Supporting autonomy from AI ($\alpha = 0.85$), Supporting competence from AI ($\alpha = 0.88$), and Supporting relatedness from AI ($\alpha = 0.82$). This value shows the scale with a consistently high value and is suitable for analysis. The average of the variables ranged from 3.7 to 4.0 on a Likert scale of 5 points, showing staff assess the level of support from AI and behavior innovation at a reasonably high level. The standard deviation from 0.7 to 0.9 shows that the dispersion medium must be in the feedback.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
AI autonomy support	3.8	0.9	-			
AI competence support	4.0	0.8	0.50**	-		
AI-relatedness support	3.7	0.7	0.40**	0.60**	-	
Innovative work behavior	3.9	0.8	0.30**	0.40**	0.30**	-

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, **p < 0.01

Table 1 also shows that AI support variables positively correlate with innovative behavior, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.30 to 0.40 ($p < 0.01$). Specifically, AI competence support has the strongest correlation with innovative behavior ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$), followed by autonomy and relatedness support ($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$). The independent variables are also correlated with each other, with coefficients ranging from 0.40 to 0.60 ($p < 0.01$), but not high enough to cause multicollinearity issues ($VIF < 2.0$ for all variables). To test the hypotheses, a multivariate regression analysis was conducted with innovative behavior as the dependent variable and three AI support variables (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) as independent variables. The results are presented in Table 2. The regression model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), explaining 45% of the variance in innovative behavior ($R^2 = 0.45$). All three AI support variables are positive and significant predictors. This result supports all three hypotheses (H1, H2, H3), indicating that AI tools supporting basic psychological needs according to SDT can promote employee innovation behavior.

Table 2. Results of Regression Analysis

Variable	β	SE	t-value	p-value	Decision
AI autonomy support -> IWB	0.25	0.05	5.00	<0.01	Supported
AI competence support -> IWB	0.30	0.06	5.00	<0.01	Supported
AI relatedness support -> IWB	0.20	0.07	2.86	<0.05	Supported

Note: β = Standardized regression coefficient, SE = Standard error of the unstandardized regression coefficient

The results showed that support competence from AI has the most substantial impact on innovation behavior, followed by support for autonomy and relatedness. These findings confirm the role of the AI tool in meeting the basic psychological needs, which promotes creativity and innovation at work.

4.2. Discussion

This section discusses the research results, relating them to Self-determination theory (SDT), and the current research has highlighted the significance of the theory and practice. The limitations of the study and direction of future research are also considered. Research results confirm that support autonomy ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$), competence ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$), and relatedness ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$) from the tool artificial intelligence (AI) in HRM are predicted positive behavior change of staff, explained 45% of variance ($R^2 = 0.45$). These findings are consistent with SDT, in which the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness - enhancing intrinsic motivation lead to positive results such as creativity and innovation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). AI competence support has the most substantial effect ($\beta = 0.30$), emphasizing the AI tools' important role in providing real-time personalized training and feedback. For example, AI platforms like Degreed or Gloat can analyze performance data to recommend suitable courses, enhancing employees' skills and confidence, encouraging them to experiment with new ideas (Abdelmagid et al., 2024). This finding aligns with scholars' research, where AI tools enhance adaptive performance through capability support (Mikalef & Gupta, 2021; Sullivan & Fosso Wamba, 2024; Wamba-Taguimdje et al., 2020). Support autonomy from AI ($\beta = 0.25$) also plays an important role, suggesting that the tools, such as system scheduling flexibility or assistant AI decision-making, can empower people and encourage them to explore creative solutions. This supports the perspective of SDT that autonomy is a key factor promoting behavioral innovation (Gagné et al., 2022). Supports relatedness from AI ($\beta = 0.20$) have a weaker but still meaningful impact. Collaboration platforms like Slack or Microsoft Teams, supported by AI, help employees share ideas and build relationships, fostering

innovation (Jamali et al., 2024; Katmada et al., 2022). The weaker impact of connections may be due to current AI tools focusing more on individual efficiency rather than building social relationships.

This study extended SDT by applying it in the context of HRM using AI, a field that is still relatively new. Previously, SDT was mainly used to study the role of management or organizational culture in meeting psychological needs (Rigby & Ryan, 2018). By demonstrating that AI tools can replace or supplement the role of humans in supporting autonomy, competence, and connection, this research contributes to the literature on motivation in high-tech work environments. It also contributes to research on innovative behavior by identifying specific mechanisms (supporting psychological needs from AI) that drive creativity (Janssen, 2000). In addition, this study sheds light on how technology can be integrated into the theoretical framework, psychologically, and opens new research directions on the intersection between AI and human motivation. For example, future research could explore the role of AI in supporting other types of motivation, such as extrinsic or unconscious motivation. The research results provide specific guidance for HR managers and organizations leveraging AI to drive innovative behavior. First, organizations should prioritize investing in AI tools that support capabilities, such as personalized training platforms or real-time feedback systems, as they significantly impact innovation. For example, implementing tools like EdCast or SAP SuccessFactors can help employees develop the right skills, encouraging innovation (Lobell, 2024). Secondly, autonomy-supporting tools, such as flexible scheduling systems or AI decision-making assistants, should be integrated to empower employees. This is especially important in hybrid work environments, where employees need flexibility to manage tasks. Thirdly, organizations should improve AI-supported connection tools, such as team collaboration platforms or community-building chatbots, to enhance idea sharing and collaboration. Although the impact of connection is weaker, it still plays an important role in creating an innovative culture. Finally, organizations must ensure that AI tools are deployed transparently and fairly to avoid algorithmic bias or privacy concerns, thereby maintaining employee trust (Nawaz et al., 2024).

This study has some limitations to consider. Firstly, the cross-sectional survey design limits the ability to infer causal relationships between AI support variables and innovative behavior. Although the results show a positive relationship, the question of whether AI support causes innovative behavior cannot be determined. Secondly, employee self-reported data may be biased due to social desirability bias or subjective perception. For example, employees may overestimate their level of innovation or the level of support from AI. Thirdly, the study sample is limited to large organizations in Vietnam, which may not be generalizable to other contexts, such as small businesses or countries with lower levels of AI adoption. Cultural or organizational differences may also affect the results. To overcome these limitations, future studies should design a longitudinal study to determine the causality between AI support and behavior innovation. For example, a study lasting several months could track how AI tools influence the development of innovative behavior over time. Secondly, experimental studies, such as testing the deployment of a specific AI tool (like a personalized training platform) in a group of employees and comparing it with a control group, can provide more unmistakable evidence of the impact of AI. Thirdly, future research should explore potential mediating or moderating variables. For example, intrinsic motivation may mediate between AI support and innovative behavior, while employees' technological proficiency could moderate this relationship. Finally, expanding the research sample to other contexts, such as developed countries or different industries, could enhance the generalizability of the findings.

V. Conclusion

This study has explored how artificial intelligence (AI) tools in human resource management (HRM) can promote innovative employee behavior by supporting basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the research results show that all three types of AI support have a positive impact on innovative behavior, with competence support having the most decisive influence ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$). This emphasizes that meeting employees' competence needs

through AI tools, such as personalized training and real-time feedback, is a key factor in encouraging creativity in the workplace.

The significance of this research lies in extending SDT into the context of high-tech HRM and in providing practical guidance for organizations. HR managers can leverage AI to design work environments that enhance operational efficiency and promote sustainable innovation. Specifically, investing in AI tools that support capability and autonomy, such as personalized learning platforms and flexible scheduling systems, should be prioritized. At the same time, organizations need to ensure that the deployment of AI is conducted transparently and fairly to maintain employee trust and avoid issues such as algorithmic bias. In the future, research can be expanded by using longitudinal or experimental designs to identify clearer causal relationships between AI support and innovative behavior. However, this research has laid an important foundation for understanding how technology can be integrated into HRM to manage and inspire employees. By meeting basic psychological needs, AI can become a powerful tool to drive organizational creativity and innovation.

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