AI and professionals: A qualitative investigation on the influence of AI implementation on professionals' job flourishing

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ABSTRACT,
As Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming widely adapted across organisations in different industries, its effects on well-being remain unknown while it continues to grow. This thesis aimed to explore the influence of AI on professionals' identity and job flourishing. Through a qualitative study and semi-structured interviews with professionals from different sectors this study used a thematic analysis, and two core dimensions emerged: Professionals perception of AI and Preserving job flourishing in an AI implemented workplace. Findings indicate that professionals have three views towards AI, positive, negative and neutral. Professionals expressed worries of over-reliance and cognitive concerns. While simultaneously acknowledging how beneficial AI can be. They expressed that their professional identity which is closely linked to their values is at risk. However, they believe that if the AI implemented aligns with their professional values, they are likely to experience reinforced identities. Furthermore, they indicated the importance of AI literacy, training and up-skilling as important factors of preserving their job flourishing and thriving. This study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the importance of considering the internal experiences when implementing AI and possible areas of concern. It suggests practical insights for organisations, managers and HR professional in developing strategies and implementing AI cultures that support the job flourishing of professionals in light of the AI era.

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Artificial Intelligence, Professionals, Job flourishing, Professional Identity, Well-being, Artificial Intelligence Implementation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, humans have always aimed to either improve or change. For instance, the industrial revolution, a shift from manual labour to mechanisation. Or, the digital revolution, where the rise of computers and the Internet changed how we communicate and exchange information in a more efficient manner (Muksin et al., 2024). One of the most prominent advancements in the field of technology has been the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), defined as highly advanced systems and tools that mimic human intelligence to solve problems or make decisions in a way that a person would (Quiroz-Vázquez et al., 2024). Through machine learning, AI can be taught to do more or operate in a specific way. For example, AI used for recruiting can be designed to provide rankings of applicants based on their qualifications and skills or programmed to not be biased towards applicants (Upadhyay & Khandelwal, 2018), or AI enabled nanorobots that deliver drugs to specific body parts (Hamet & Tremblay, 2017). As a result, its development, implementation, use, and adoption have gained serious momentum and wide application in many fields. It is now present in almost every aspect of daily life as societies move towards automation and realise the benefits of operationalizing such technologies (Bhatia, 2024). Benefits range from personal use, such as prompting Chat GPT to find answers faster than searching through Google, to commercial and organisational use, such as detecting fraud in banking, data analysis, or simply replacing humans when it comes to repetitive or high precision tasks (Khang, 2025; Dillion et al., 2023). Given these beneficial factors, AI has become widely accepted and implemented in organisations in different sectors. AI adoption has doubled since 2017 with 50-60% of companies having already incorporated it into their establishment and business processes (Chui et al.,2022). This suggests that organisations are demonstrating a positive attitude towards implementing it, as well as a growing trend in AI deployment and use becoming standard practice across different industries.

By comparing traditional to more AI-enabled and possibly dependent workplaces, implementing AI into the workplace can transform and reshape the nature of work (World Economic Forum, 2023). Indeed, Bankins and Formosa (2023) point out that AI implementation has three main impacts on employees: replacing them completely, creating new tasks for them, or enhancing the way they carry out tasks. Similarly, Zimmer et al. (2020) shed light on how existing workplace practices risk being eliminated so that new ones, such as automation, can emerge. For example, production is moving towards automated assembly lines from skilled labour, supermarkets are replacing cashiers with self-checkout machines, or the deployment of AI chatbots and virtual assistants instead of hiring receptionists.

Especially for professionals, how AI affects their expert work and how they perceive such influence is still unclear (Selenko et al., 2022). Professionals can be defined as individuals with specialised or appropriate knowledge, skills, and training in an organisational or entrepreneurial setting, utilising those abilities to generate income (Macdonald, 1995). According to Pratt et al. (2006) professionals have a strong sense of identity with what they do; they are tied to the career and profession they are pursuing rather than the firm or environment they are working in. For example, someone saying they are a watch maker at Rolex has identified themselves with the organisation, compared to someone who says they make watches and demonstrates a bond between themselves and what they do. Given that AI can reshape what people do and how they do it, its implementation is likely to affect professionals' identity, which can ultimately influence their well-being (Milanez, 2023). Yet, current research has focused more on the skills needed by professionals to make use of AI (Virvou & Tsihrintzis, 2023), on how AI affects professionals' performance while on the job (Chen et al., 2024; Tong et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2024), and how AI influences employees' turnover and stress (Sadeghi, 2024). Only a few studies have focused on the relationship between AI and well-being (Bhargava et al., 2020; Bhojak et al., 2025), and, when they did so, they tended to explore different aspects of well-being such as job satisfaction and not flourishing at work.

Job flourishing can be defined as any sort of activity or behaviour that leads to an individual or experiencing positive levels of well-being and state of mind both in and out of the workplace (Keyes, 2002). It is particularly important since individuals who experience this state of mind not only thrive, but also demonstrate higher levels of performance, motivation, commitment, and purpose in what they do, leading to overall better performance and organisational effectiveness (A'yuninnisa et al., 2024). Additionally, focusing on job flourishing allows better understanding of how AI implementation influences professionals internally, shapes their experience of their profession both short and long term, and what can be done to mitigate negative effects or sustain positive outcomes (Braojos et al., 2024). However, little is still known about the influence of AI implementation on professionals' job flourishing. Therefore, aiming at a more in-depth understanding of the human-system interaction (Lam, 2024), the aim of this thesis is to explore how the implementation of AI technologies in the workplace can influence professionals' identity and job flourishing. Hence, the research question (RQ): **How can AI implementation influence professionals' identity and job flourishing?**

By addressing the above research question, this thesis contributes to the field of AI, identity, and job flourishing in organisational settings in two ways. Firstly, this research is relevant as it sheds light on how technological implementations such as AI on an organisational level can influence the individual frontier. Namely, professionals, their identity and job flourishing. More specifically, it extends current knowledge on the intersection of AI and professionals' identity changes, focusing specifically on the relationship between AI and professionals' job flourishing. Secondly, it provides insights into how professionals of different fields exhibit attitude towards AI implementation and what their experience has been so far.

Furthermore, the findings of this paper offer valuable insights and recommendations with practical implications for stakeholders such as managers, employees and HR departments. Managers can use these findings to be well informed when implementing AI, developing strategies that increase the likelihood of AI acceptance while minimising potential conflict and resistance. Employees also benefit from these findings by realising potential areas of concern and preparing themselves for the change coming to their workplace. HR departments can design interventions mitigating the negative effects of AI and develop a sustainable AI policy. Interventions such as workshops where AI training is offered, professionals can learn how to use AI optimally but also have a better understanding of what its functionality is, reducing susceptibility to AI misconceptions. Also, feedback moments can be arranged where professionals voice concerns or suggest ways of improvement to management. Not only does this build a positive working relationship between management and professionals, but it also allows the AI to be implemented in a way that is suited for the organisation's actual needs, removing extra costs and eliminating inefficiencies. Most importantly, design and developing an AI culture that reflects internal values rather than external norms

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Artificial Intelligence in Organisational Contexts

Depending on the context, definitions of AI vary. For example, Jarrahi (2018) looks at it as tools or strategies leveraged to benefit a firm and its stakeholders. Haenlein and Kaplan (2019) define it as a system's ability to perform tasks successfully, measured by how well it adapts to new information. While Selenko et al. (2022) define it as "A collection of interrelated technologies used to solve problems that would otherwise require human cognition" by quoting Walsh et al. (2019, p.2). What is certain is that AI can be categorised as artificial narrow intelligence and artificial general intelligence. Narrow intelligence are systems designed to excel at executing specific tasks, in a specific domain within specified boundaries, for example: Chatbots or image recognition software (Boden, 2016). On the other hand, artificial general intelligence is a more sophisticated form of AI: it can understand, learn, and perform tasks as good as or even better than humans across a range of activities (Bankins & Formosa, 2023). However, this state of AI has not yet been developed since it translates to a solely independent form of intelligence cable of reasoning, feeling emotions, and comprehending common sense (Goertzel & Pennachin, 2006). With this in mind, in this paper, AI is referred to as "Embedded AI". Like narrow AI, it is also designed to carry out specific tasks, with the main differences being that it is embedded into systems rather than operating from cloud servers, as well as having more freedom in decision-making by learning, analysing and adapting based on the data provided (Anastasi et al., 2021). Once implemented, they bring many opportunities. "Improved performance of decision making, retention of employees" are parts of the benefits AI brings to small and medium-sized businesses (Bhalerao et al. 2022, p.1). Additionally, human decision makers have the benefit of analysing large sums of data with consistent quality, enhancing workplace efficiency (Jarrahi, 2018). Furthermore, AI implementation may require de-skilling, this narrows the scope of innovative thoughts in the workplace which can lower commitment and negatively affect fulfilment and performance overtime (Jarrahi, 2019). Hence, this changes how jobs are structured (Manoharan et al., 2024), what skill requirements and workplace interactions look like, and, ultimately, how individuals, such as professionals, make sense of their jobs (OECD, 2023; Zirar et al., 2023). In an organisational context the implementation of AI would mean embedding it into the processes and operations in way that the functionalities mentioned above are utilised to improve efficiency and decision making so that benefits such as cost reduction, productivity and engagement are yielded while the staff feel supported and enabled by such systems (Lee et al., 2023).

2.2 Professionals and Professional Identity

Professionals are defined as those with enough scientific and systematic knowledge to provide a service to others, while being paid and granted some level of status and authority, as a result of authority and status, professionals have "Power" but expected to be confidential and ethical, as well as making decisions that favour their clients (Dall'Alba, 2009). Similarly, professionals are defined as "Practitioners who work in knowledge-based service occupations" who are qualified, have higher education and formal recognitions while adhering ethical codes (Scanlon 2011, p. 17). Overall, in this thesis, professionals are defined as those with enough knowledge and skills to provide a product or service in return for financial gain for themselves or an organisation.

It is argued that the change brought by AI is not limited solely to the organisational level, but extends to the employees or professionals within, and directly influences the individual level or individual frontiers (Braojos et al., 2024; Hughes et al., 2019). By definition, professional identity is how individuals define themselves within the role they have and who they are within that role in terms of how they behave (Jussupow et al.,2022). If professionals feel that the AI implemented is exceling them in the context of their profession and what they do, they are very likely to be resistant to it as they feel their professional and self-identity are threatened (Jussupow et al., 2022). Indeed, While responses and reactions to AI implementation can vary from person to person, once implemented, AI can significantly influence how professionals view themselves and their work and directly affect their professional identity (Selenko et al., 2022). Hence, the importance of considering professional identity as professionals are recognised by what they do and any changes to their work will change their identity and how they perceive and carry out their work (Pratt et al., 2006). Furthermore, professional identity holds significance as it fosters flourishing (G. Hughes & Smidt, 2022). Professionals worry about loss of status and feel a threat to their identity once AI is implemented and (Mirbabaie et al. 2021). However, If AI is perceived in a positive way, professionals may experience it as beneficial to their work and, ultimately, as an identity opportunity (Bataille & Vough, 2022). Oliveira-Silva and Porto (2021), for instance, found that once professionals sense fulfilment in achieving their career goals, they can also experience flourishing at work. In this sense, AI may prove to be supportive in achieving these goals by enhancing the tasks carried out, and essentially supporting possibilities of job flourishing (Clark & Gevorkyan, 2020).

2.3 Job Flourishing

Job flourishing can be defined as the degree of an individuals' psychological, social and emotional well-being that enables them to be involved in positive work experiences such as proactiveness or engagement that result in overall work and life satisfaction (A'yuninnisa et al. 2023). Experiencing this is associated with greater productivity, satisfaction and reduced counterproductive behaviour or negligence (Burke et al., 2015). Furthermore, professionals are more likely to demonstrate originality and proactiveness in their work (A'yuninnisa et al., 2024), suggesting that one will be more committed and involved with what they do. If the AI implemented is used to replace minor, repetitive tasks that do not require much attention yet require attendance and presence, then the professionals can concentrate on dedicating themselves to higher priority tasks, and experience lower workload with higher levels of autonomy as they are no longer restricted by having to do "unnecessary" tasks (Bankins & Formosa,2023;Tursunbayeva & Renkema, 2023). Building on this, personal beliefs about AI are also likely to influence its implementation outcomes as well since professionals are likely to resist it if they feel it goes against their usual way of doing things, or doesn't allow them to represent their true self, making AI a threat to their identity, while it can be a positive identity outcomes if it supports the professionals in achieving their goals of the ideal "Work-selves"(Selenko et al. 2022, p. 276).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The aim of this paper is to investigate professionals' subjective experiences of AI implementations and how this can influence their professional identity and job flourishing. To address this

goal, an inductive qualitative study is implemented. Since qualitative research focuses on individuals' experiences, meanings, and behaviours, it is a suitable option for this thesis since it aims to investigate how individuals understand and interpret certain phenomena and focus on subjective interpretations (Hammersley, 2012). The general disadvantages associated with this research design are that it tends to be prone to bias due to the subjective and interpretive nature of it, as well as being time-consuming (McLeod, 2024). However, this capturing of lived experiences and meanings can allow a deeper and more holistic understanding of what professionals are experiencing, how they are experiencing it and provides necessary insights regarding their attitudes, perceptions and how they are internalising these experiences (Mwita, 2022). Moreover, the qualitative approach provides real-life context. This ensures critical insights on the psychology of professionals and therefore an easier comprehension of the influence of AI implementation on job flourishing.

3.2 Data Collection & Sampling

To ensure that the participants of the study have the knowledge, skill and profession relevant to the scope of this study purposive sampling was carried out. This included professionals from different fields and occupations and gathered a sample size of 8 or 10 participants; According to Guest et al. (2005) data saturation and emergence of general themes occur when 6 to 12 interviews are conducted. The occupation or position of some professionals is not necessarily technology related but rather one that is seeing a growth in related AI uses, facing challenges from AI implementation or benefiting from the opportunities brought by AI implementation. The main source of participants was the researchers own network. This included professionals from the fields of online business, brick and mortar business, designers, administrative staff and medical. This is relevant for this thesis since the scope of this paper is professionals who own a small business and those hired in medium sized organisations. The inclusion criteria followed was that:

- The participants must have general knowledge of what AI is, how it can be used in their field, have the knowledge for intended use in their field, have the intention of using it for their profession or using be AI already.
- Must be qualified in their field of profession by degrees or certificates and have a minimum of 1 year experience in their career.

Considering that personal network may prove difficult in finding enough or more participants, as well as some participants not willing to take part, snowball sampling was also used to solve this problem and have a sufficient sample size (Parker et al., 2019). Table 1 provides and overview of participants.

Table 1: Overview of participants

No.	Age	Gender	Role	Years of experience
1	29	Female	Receptionist	4
2	26	Male	Software Developer	6
3	22	Male	Web Developer	2.5
4	35	Male	Lawyer/Professor	5
5	24	Male	CEO/Software developer	4
6	27	Female	Design engineer	3
7	24	Male	Full Stack Engineer	3
8	50	Male	Analytical therapist	25

3.3 Research Instruments

For this paper, semi-structured interviews were chosen. This due the fact that they provide a structured yet flexible approach to explore different experiences and ideas that may emerge in course of research (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Flexible and structured in the sense that, the interview is based on a set of related and predefined questions with room for the interviewer to ask further questions and clarify information if necessary, while the interviewee is allowed to elaborate on the information they are providing. This way of interviewing encourages conversation since the participant are allowed to share in their own words and understanding, allowing the exploration of expected and unexpected themes considering the detailed and meaningful information provided by the interviewee (Figalova et al., 2021). The set time frame for each interview was on average 45 minutes, all of which were recorded and transcribed verbatim manually upon participants' consent. The interview guide can be found in Appendices A. Considering that the researcher are some participants are native Farsi speakers, some interviews were carried out in Farsi and translated afterwards. This was to avoid any miscommunication and easy answers in case the interviewee was not comfortable with speaking English. For privacy reasons the participants identities were replaced with codes P1-10. Furthermore, the interviews took place upon approval of ethics and confidentiality by the BMS faculty at University of Twente.

3.4 Data Analysis

A thematic data analysis in combination with the Gioia et al.'s (2012) methodology was used in this paper to analyse the qualitative data gathered from conducting interviews. This method allowed easier organisation of broad qualitative data and identifying patterns of commonality and differences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis followed a six-step process. At first, immersion took place. This is where the researcher became familiar with the data by reading it multiple times to search for patterns and understand every aspect of their data set. In the second step, the researcher generated initial codes and organised data into meaningful categories. This was done by making use of the first-order concept of Gioia et al. (2012). In the third step, researcher began searching for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes identified in the second step were sorted to into potential second-order themes (Gioia et al., 2012). In step four, the themes were reviewed. Meaning that the researcher revised the themes identified in step three to make sure they are relevant, this meant that some themes had to be merged while some were be discarded. This was done to ensure that the extracts of each theme form a coherent pattern and the final aggregated dimensions are valid (Gioia et al., 2012). The fifth step included defining and naming codes by understanding the key concept of each theme and determining its meaning and creating sub-sets of themes if necessary. Lastly, step six was producing the report itself. In this step the researcher presents the findings and analyses them to write the report.

4. RESULTS

In this section, the findings are presented as codes, themes and aggregate dimensions according to the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2012). The first order concepts were derived and grouped from direct quotations that formed the second order themes that were refined to the aggregate dimensions of professionals' perception of AI implementation, AI and professional identity protection and preserving job flourishing under AI. Figure 1 shows the information obtained.

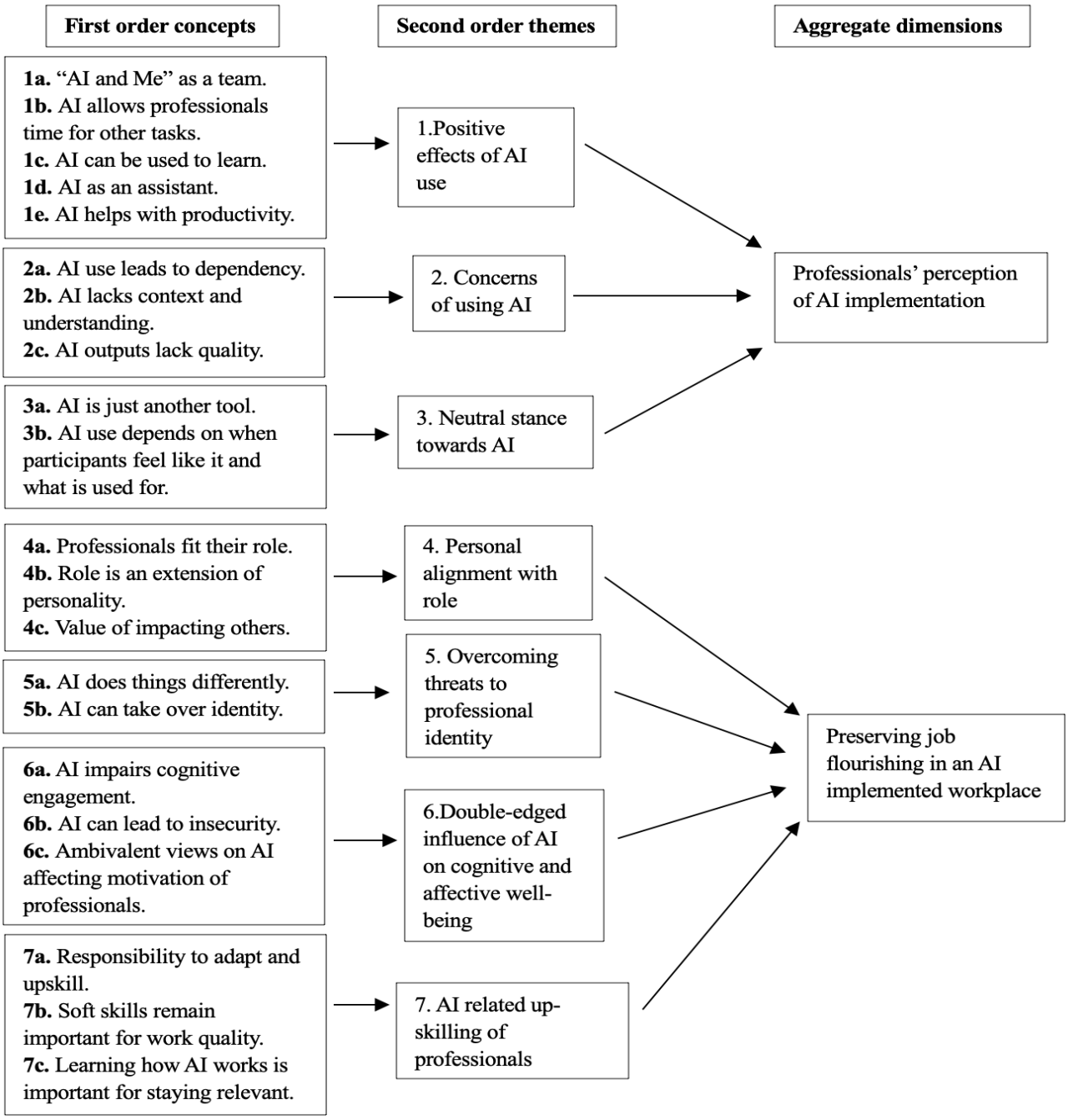

Figure 1: Data structure

4.1 Professionals' Perception of AI Implementation

This aggregate dimension focuses on how professionals view the AI implemented at their work in terms of the effects it has the work they do. Three main themes were discovered. Namely, 'Positive effects of AI use', 'Concerns of using AI', 'Neutral stance towards AI'.

4.1.1 Positive Effects of AI Use

A great majority of professionals indicated that AI is beneficial to them, they use it for often for their work and see it something enabling. For example, P1 stated that *"And I think for me the future, how I see it, I see it as like having an AI as a co-worker. As I mentioned before, it's kind of a teamwork, like me and AI together as a team"*.

P1, P5 and P6 all agreed that AI implemented allows them to dedicate time for tasks that are more important or simply tasks that they did not previously have time for. For

example, P5 states that "*it speeds up this process and makes sure that things that I do not prioritise get to be done*" while P6 says that *"I feel it's giving me more opportunities. Because on a lot of stuff, I can save time, and I can use that time to focus on other things that allow me to grow as a professional".*

Furthermore, P2 argued how AI can help with learning by stating *"And I started, like, you know, asking using AI how to do this. And it did help me and it gave me enough information to carry on the task by myself".*

P5 shared similar views with P1, stating that *"In this case, the AI acts a bit more, I wouldn't say as a supervisor, but as a help. It's more like just to double-check whether something is missing. So, as soon as the process needs to get going, you can ask it whether something is missing, and it will immediately tell you".*

Another benefit of using AI in the workplace was that it made professionals more productive. For example, P3 who stated that *"It increased the productivity and efficiency. And allows me to complete processes much faster*", similar to P4 who mentioned "Again, It made things easier. I can do things faster. Be done with one thing and move on to the other."

4.1.2 Concerns of Using AI

While most agreed that AI has many benefits. They were also aware of the downside AI implementation has on their work. For example, P3 mentions that AI use can lead to dependency by stating *"It's a bit difficult to explain, but you would, at some point, you would probably start depending on AI a lot more than you would depend on yourself".* Demonstrating a negative attitude towards AI while P5 saw it more as something that comes with AI, and you have to accept it by mentioning *"The reason is that it has become more of a codependent journey for some of my employees. So, their process had to change to fit and accustom better the AI workflow".*

One of the more evident downsides was how AI lacks understanding, in the sense of context or human understanding. Especially in the case of P1 where her role revolves around interactions, she mentioned that not only AI cannot mimic this up to a satisfactory level but actually removes the human touch, ultimately leaving a negative effect on the experience of customers and the professional *"And I think if there's only AI, they would feel a bit less human touch".* Similarly, P5 and P6 feel the same way by respectively saying *"So, a lot of the tasks that I need to do take a lot of decisions and context into the realisation of a tangible outcome. And for that, AI currently is still not good enough because the context in which it needs to take into consideration is simply too little or too broad"* and *" And it cannot match the fact that you as a human, if you rely on empathy, you can really dig and find interesting insights in what the user has told you, to find the best solution essentially for your user".*

All emphasising how not only human understanding is important but also common sense which is especially important for quality of AI outputs. P5 argues that this lack of understanding leads to outputs that can have severe consequences *"We recently almost had a vulnerability issue, because one of our engineers decided to trust the AI a bit too much… So, right before pushing to production, we found out that we actually exposed the whole process to an attacker"*

4.1.3 Neutral Stance Towards AI

The neutral stance was rarely mentioned explicitly but hinted at from time to time. The case that they were openly communicated was with the case of P4 who said AI is just another tool and was not hyped or pessimistic about it *"Based on their expertise and the capacity to portray that expertise in a certain way. AI is a mean, a tool, not the main thing. AI is a tool".* Or P5 who said, *"So AI is just a tool in this bigger machine".* P8 felt that his profession is unaffected by AI *"I'm happy; it remains unique and unparalleled even with the advancement of AI".*

This is while P2 argued that it simply depends on what for and when you use it *"It depends on your perspective as well. If you simply just enjoy coding and solving that problem, then it's not good. But if you look at it in a way that you just see it as a way to get to that goal, then it's different"* P4 shares a similar view *"That's the restriction that you impose on yourself. Otherwise, it's very easy to play, to go down the rabbit hole and use it in an unethical way".* Or P3 who said *"AI can still help me and still prove to be useful. I mean it does go against and not. In a sense, half and half. Depends in the way you use it".* P5 also mentions how the effects of AI on work depends on where and when you use it *"So, I just make it do some of the smaller tasks. And I do the main tasks, important tasks myself".* P6 was of the same opinion explaining how it can be both good or bad, but it all depends on who is using it and how they are using it *"But it's like a guide. If you know just how to tweak the lens, because then it just gives you a guide on how to explore things. So to say, a double edge sword depending on the use."*

4.2 Preserving Job Flourishing in an AI Implemented Workplace

This dimension represents the importance of preserving job flourishing in light or the AI era. Professionals reported how they were already experiencing job flourishing prior to AI implementation but are somewhat worried of how AI implementation could affect them. The four themes identified were 'Personal alignment with role', 'Overcoming threats to professional identity', 'Double-edged influence of AI on cognitive and affective well-being' and 'AI related up-skilling of professionals'. The logic behind this was how professionals can continue to thrive despite the identity threats and drawbacks of AI being implemented into their work. By upskilling and mediating the cognitive drawbacks that the implemented AI systems may bring.

4.2.1 Personal Alignment with Role

During the interviews it became evident that many professionals saw themselves aligned with their role. These statements mostly stemmed from sentiments such as 'passion', 'values' and 'goals. For example, when asked what it means to be a software developer P2 replied *"And it is something that brings me value. And it's aligned with my passion".* Or P1 who is an extrovert person that enjoys interacting with others stated *"The person I am is very similar at work as well. Like I fit to the job"*. P4 stated that he pursued his professional career out of passion *"But as a passion like, so it's that I don't know, I just like to write and that's also the way to keep writing, so, I kept doing it. And yeah, I would say so, I wanted to do this so I pursued this career"* and further added how his role is exciting to them and brings them status *"I like being at the edge, cutting edge of research on various topics to establish legacy and ride the wave and make my name as the person who's expert in this field"*. Similar to others , P3 was also believed that who they are as a person fit with what they do *"My personality specifically helps me a lot because I like to think of myself (…) like, very weird way to say it, but media illiterate (…) It's like I try to bring something from somewhere else that I think fits in my job and from anything that I have experienced so far. I think my personality".*

Interestingly, some professionals had the opinion that their role is not just a fit with their personality but their whole identity as an individual, take for example P6 *"I would*

say it's the case that I feel more myself as a designer than just if I try to split them into separate entities, like it's just an extension of my persona (...) And I can't think of myself doing anything else right now, really". Similar to P5 *"Yes. It's pretty much, it closely resembles how I wish to do things and my natural characteristics that I just developed as I grow(...)To me, being in such kind of position is the perfect reflection of who I am.(...) So, it feels more as an extension of what I do and a perfect reflection of it".*

This is while there was a sense of responsibility present. Professionals saw that they have a moral duty towards others through their role and believed in a bigger cause, as mentioned by P5 *"The other thing that I really like about it is that it helps me just help people, support their families and support their needs, realise the life that they want to realise. And the other one, it enables me to support people in general. It enables me to connect with individuals who need help and then allow me to help them".* Or, P7 who looked beyond the monetary incentive of helping others *"You can like with a very simple website, you can really change people's lives because they get access to certain information that they couldn't before. So making an impact besides having the opportunity to make a lot of money is very nice".*

4.2.2 Overcoming Threats to Professional Identity

Since most professionals felt connected to their role, they had their own way or style of carrying out their work. They felt that AI goes against them in the way it does things as mentioned by P5 *"Overall, I would say it tends to go against as a lot of the times it's just missing context"* P3 had a more balanced view but still agreed that it goes against them in certain cases *"So in terms of creativity, it's against it. But in terms of let's say productivity and efficiency of working on something specifically, it can actually help it".* Similar to P1 who added *"So maybe yeah (...) like the human touch. I would rather have that when you're talking about like roles that have humans' interactions. But like that back-office stuff, it's okay".*

A sentiment that was shared with most professionals was that they feel their identity is threatened by AI. Take for example P6 who believes professionals are losing their identity because of overusing AI *"It very much does. The biggest thing, the first thing that came to mind is it can hinder the individual identity (...) Everything is the same. Because the thinking is not the person anymore that does it, but it's very much powered by AI"* and further added that *"As of right now, I would say the biggest challenge is really not to lose your identity in being aided by the tools. So still strive to be in control of the tools and not let the tools control you".* P3 shared the same opinion *"I don't know, what is the point? You kind of lose your personality. Your entire personality becomes the AI".* P2 also had a balanced view but still credited that AI can threaten identity *"I think it will be both to be honest. Okay. Because I can already see that it's how it's helping me and it's helping my career, but I can also imagine how it will maybe affect it in a bad way in the future".* However, P8 believed that AI may mimic certain human "traits" but it cannot replace them so one should not worry about their sense of identity *"Still, I know it cannot replace the unconscious mind of humans — it may imitate Freud and the unconscious like other Neo-Freudians, but cannot replace it".*

4.2.3 Double-edged Influence of AI on Cognitive and Affective Well-being

Professionals agreed to some extent that AI use can lead to adverse cognitive effects. Potential reason for this could be that many of the professionals rely on specialised knowledge they had to obtain over years for their role that AI is now offering. For example, P4 is of the opinion that using AI in a dependant manner can reduce cognitive development *"Because they're using AI as a way to make it do the work for you, which affects the learning process that they need to acquire during the process"* P5 shared the same view with the difference that AI use wont hinder development but rather makes users cognitively lazy if usage is not controlled *"I feel like I'm not going to grow because it's going to do too much things for me. So, just cognitive laziness kicks in and then at that moment, you just don't know what to do*". He further added that people will have a hard time thinking for themselves after constantly using AI *"Disadvantages, it inherently leads to underperformance once you stop using it, and it's not good to replace an entire person, it's just good enough to support it".* This while P3 was more concerned that AI can actually take away and limit cognitive abilities *"But at the same time, it can kill creativity. It can, rather than you thinking for yourself, like rather than you coming up with ideas yourself, the AI can basically give you this and it can maybe limit a bit just how free you think".* P2 was of the same opinion "So you see it more of a, as a kind of a challenge that could go wrong rather than, like, kind of help you flourish. It actually takes away from your sense of, like, working and putting in the effort".

Professionals further added that AI use can lead to doubt in one's abilities and lower self-esteem. For example, P7 demonstrated this by stating *"Yeah, it affects it in a positive way. You know, I'm quicker, stronger, a bit lazier, you know, a bit dumber also".* P1 also shared this sense of insecurity *"Some people might be insecure. Like, as I also said I felt a bit insecure in the beginning like why did AI have this, think of this and I didn't"* P3 stated that once individuals start comparing their abilities with AI they will feel insecure but continue to use it *"You partly think about the fact that, ah, I wasn't able to do this by myself, I had to ask the AI again. And I wasn't able to figure this out, I wasn't able to do this. I think that for some specific people, they start growing an awareness on the fact that they're using AI so much for the work that they need to do, rather than them thinking for themselves and its one that eats you. It's like it's constantly in the back of your head, even though you do these things. It's like an addiction. It's like, you know smoking is bad, you're still going to do it".* P6 also reflected how AI can take a toll on confidence of professionals but reality is different *"To not have like a blow at your self-esteem as a designer that you know all of a sudden you don't feel confidence in your abilities to achieve something because AI exist and seemingly it can do it better if you look close enough it probably can't".*

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of using AI, there was a mix of opinions regarding the effects of AI on motivation. For example, P6 argued that AI is helping her motivation *"So that boosts my motivation again, because I know it's going to be done quickly. It's out of like the boring stuff, it's out of the way very quickly. So in that sense, it does help my motivation. It's like a shortcut through the shit sandwiches, you know?".* Similar to P3 who believed AI motivates him thanks to its efficiency *"Yeah, because of the fact that it's so fast giving information, it also speeds up the productivity of the job in itself. It constantly allows you to do things faster, to complete projects faster, to complete, I don't know, work tasks much faster".* This is while P2 saw that AI use takes away the joy of doing tasks *"I think for, as a programmer, it reduces the motivation. Because I think a big part of that motivation and passion is actually doing the work of like sitting down and thinking about how to solve this problem"* and P5 argued that his motivation is intrinsic and unaffected by AI *"Motivation, at least for me personally, stems*

from achievements or milestones achieved. And with those, AI does not really help directly."

4.2.4 AI Related Upskilling of Professionals

Professionals argued that AI implementation will become more common in the future and saw it as their responsibility to adapt this technological change to stay relevant in their field and keep their job. For example, P3 believed that one should be competent enough to not be replaced *"First of all, you have to be good enough for the AI to not replace you. This is how I see it. If you're a good enough individual and you're very smart and you have the capabilities of the job that you have, then it's going to be very hard for your employer to replace you"*. P7 saw the introduction of AI in workplace as means of increased competition between professionals, hence the importance of adapting *"But when it comes to monetary incentives, so when it's about making money it's quite difficult because it's, yeah, they're eating your bread, you know? So it's competition. Nobody likes competition. It would be amazing if you were the only person in the world who could do it"* P3 further added that professionals must be competent in using AI *"But it gives you some constraint because you have to be specific with the prompt in what you want to do to find for yourself"*. Similar to P5 who mentioned *"So, I need to have this additional constraint in the back of my head which is to make sure to include some form of an audit or a double check."* P4 also argued that AI is still in early stages but can replace professionals if they are not competent *"If you're an expert, you know what you are doing, how to use it, how to be good without it, then you can grow. If you're not an expert, AI will affect you for sure."*

Some believed that one should learn how work with AI to remain relevant. For example, P1 *"But I feel if you start working with it and you learn how to work with it and see it as a team member. You may see more advantages than the disadvantages"*. Similar to P6 *"Yeah but then I started using it. I started understanding the technology also behind like the AI tools a bit better and that's made me more comfortable with it and with the idea of AI existing among us"*. P2 also saw it as his responsibility to adapt and upskill *"Technologies will always come, there's going to be new things (…) because I might have to do things differently or learn new skills because things are changing really fast because of AI"*. Similar to P3, *"Like I have to also have adaptability, because I have to constantly adapt. This is like, the general programming space is constantly expanding (…) I guess. Like from what you believe in yourself. You should expand more, you should constantly expand, you should constantly learn"*. Interestingly, P8 argued that his profession would assist the development of AI *I would say that my profession even helps AI's development and growth path of AI — I am not limited"* and further added that one must learn AI and stay up to date with its advancements *"It leads to the creation of foundational knowledge domains that require learning, examination, and applied research — resulting in both empowerment and limitations, and clearly, new processes with accompanying changes"*.

5. DISCUSSION

During this study several themes were discovered and used to answer the research question: **How can AI implementation influence professionals' identity and job flourishing,** with the aim of exploring the internal experiences of professionals who are somewhat neglected in the sense of being considered when it comes to AI implementation. Specifically, their job flourishing and professional identity. The results represent that professionals interpret AI as a threat, a supportive or neutral tool depending on the extent it was used and deployed. As well as what they can do to preserve their identity and flourishing in an AI implemented workplace considering how AI may disrupt the personal alignment that professionals have with their role. This section compares the different themes discovered with existing literature mentioned in the theoretical background section and explains what the theoretical and practical implication of this research are.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This paper contributes to the current extent of literature by studying how technological implementations such as AI on an organisational level can influence the professional identity and job flourishing of individual frontiers, namely, professionals. Zooming in on the intersection of AI and professionals, it extends current knowledge by specifically focusing on the relationship between job flourishing of professionals and the AI implementation. Moreover, it contributes to current literature by providing insights regarding the experiences of professionals with AI from different fields.

With regards to the findings on AI implemented in an organisational context, many of the findings align with current literature on how AI is supportive and enabling, while some findings are contradicting the views of AI replacing professionals or diminishing their positive states of mental health. Instead, the results indicate how AI affects the work of professionals and how they perceive it can be explained from three stances, positive, concerning and neutral. The results revealed that AI was mostly perceived as an enhancing tool that supports them in carrying out tasks. some reported that AI allows them time to focus on more important tasks, acts as an assistant and increases their productivity. These findings reflect the existing studies suggested by Bankins and Formosa (2023) who argue that AI can enhance the way tasks are carried out, allow time for attending to important tasks as indicated by the participants. Lee et al. (2023) argued that AI implementation brings benefits such as increased productivity and professionals feeling supported by AI, an opinion shared by many participants was that they can now do more thanks to AI and see it as a tool that assists them.

Findings contradict the work of Jarrahi (2019) who argued that AI implementation leads to de-skilling professionals which can lower commitment and negatively affect fulfilment and performance overtime. This is because participants felt that they can even learn more skills thanks to AI. As a result, they are motivated to be proactive in their work and engage more as they realise the benefits of AI. benefits such as experiencing feelings of satisfaction as AI is now carrying out mundane tasks that led to feelings of burnout by professionals. Instead, they are now experiencing higher productivity through efficiency.

However, Jarrahi (2019) suggest that AI implementation can limit creative thinking, but this can be avoided if AI capabilities are deployed beyond simply doing tasks and used for providing information and insights on how to do tasks instead. In this context, the findings of this paper are similar to current literature with the key difference being that professionals argued issues relating to cognition only arise if one starts depending on AI and uses it to simply "Get the work done".

Furthermore, OECD (2023) and Zirar et al. (2023) put forward that AI implementation will most likely change what future skill requirements will look like in the sense of up-skilling. Findings also echo this since professionals agreed and mentioned how they see it as their responsibility to learn how to use AI tools best in order to be able to work with it, as well as continuously growing their skill set and expertise to remain

valuable to the organisations and have more to offer compared to AI. The findings also compliment the work of Virvou and Tsihrintzis (2023), where they discuss the growing need and necessity of AI experts. Professionals from the programming field expressed that they feel no threat from AI since they are the ones developing these systems, maintaining them and ensuring their functionality. Therefore, they feel "Safe".

When it came to concerns of AI implementation, existing literature by Zimmer et al. (2020) suggests that AI implementation will lead to professionals being replaced and the emergence of a more automated workplace. However, professionals interviewed did not seem to be worried about being replaced for two reasons. First, they believe AI is still in the infancy stage. They argued that with the current state of technology, so much computing power and hardware is used for AI to do simple tasks such as processing information or providing answers to questions. For it to reach a level of replacing humans, it is simply not possible with the current state of technology and the required technology for this is years away, as explained by the professionals interviewed; Second, they argued that human control and presence is crucial because AI fails to provide up to standard quality of outputs and lacks contextual understanding. Therefore, there must be human oversight to ensure AI is doing what it is supposed to in the way it is supposed to. One of the main concerns regarding AI in the workplace was that one can become dependent it, or use it to deliver superficial results with minimum effort for certain tasks. Professionals expressed that this leads to lower quality of work and not experiencing meaningful work.

Interestingly, the findings contradict research concerning how AI affects performance (Chen et al., 2024; Tong et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2024) and suggest a new perspective instead. Interviews carried out revealed how some professionals felt indifferent to AI as opposed to viewing it from a black and white perspective of AI being either good or bad. Alternatively, they view AI as just a tool for them to use to do what they already are. Some spoke with confidence that their skills and knowledge are far more valuable than what AI has to offer. When these professionals were asked how AI would affect their job flourishing, some explained how regardless of AI being implemented or not, they are self-motivated and always strive to excel at what they do. However, some reported that AI only affects performance in the long-term depending on how and what it is being used for. Relating to job flourishing, professionals added that when carrying out tasks that have more meaning to them are embedded with AI, they would feel negative effects on Job flourishing in the long term and feel as if the "Joy" of their work is taken away from them.

The findings of this paper strongly complement the findings of Pratt et al. (2006) who found that professionals have a grounded sense of identity with what they do. Throught the interviews, participants expressed how they are not simply there for a job. Rather their role being an extension of their personality. They are deeply connected with what they do and look at the bigger picture. For example, helping others through the work they do. They also correlated with findings of Mirbabaie et al. (2021) that AI implementation can threaten professionals' identity as some participants expressed. However, the findings of this research go beyond surface level opinions that AI undermines autonomy. They demonstrate that opportunities may arise when professionals feel that the AI implemented is aligned with their professional values and views. Especially considering that professionals expressed already experiencing job flourishing prior to AI implementation. This theory of identity opportunity is supported by Bataille and Vough (2022) who argue that such situations allow identity growth and enhancement.

While Jussupow et al. (2022) argue that professional and self-identity are threatened if AI is outperforming professionals in carrying out tasks, the findings of this study found that professionals feel that AI works differently and not necessarily better. If this difference is preferred by management or across the industry, only then their identity is threatened. Suggesting how professionals' reaction to protect their identity is mediated by how they internalise and perceive AI as a benefit or threat to their identity which aligns with findings of Selenko et al. (2022) who found that the way AI influences and in some cases shapes the identity of professionals, is dependent on AI functionalities are implemented.

Furthermore, this paper contributes to better understanding the effects of AI on cognitive and affective well-being. Current studies such as Sadeghi (2024) focus on how AI affects job satisfaction by arguing that the efficiency offered by AI increases satisfaction. Similar to Bhojak et al. (2025) who also found that AI enhances work satisfaction. However, the findings of this paper shed light on a potentially under researched concept, which is cognitive laziness. It is suggested that over relying on AI to the point that one prefers to let it do the thinking for them is at the core of negative influences of AI on job satisfaction as opposed to emerging views of AI lowering job satisfaction through "Technostress" (Chuang et al., 2025). Or, the presence of such systems in the workplace making employees feel irrelevant through "Technology Insecurity" (Leong et al., 2024). Participants expressed that this is why soft skills are important, must remain important, and professionals must take it upon themselves to adapt to an AI environment, develop AI related skills and learn how to work with AI. Calling for a proactive initiative by professionals that helps them maintain their flourishing. Similar to the findings of Braojos et al. (2024) who suggest that soft skills will remain irreplaceable, and employees have to continuously learn and adapt to technology. As well as Bhargava et al. (2020) who also suggest a continuous learning process to mitigate the negative impact of digital transformation.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this paper can provide managers with practical solutions and suggestions to develop strategies that minimise or remove negative effects of AI implementation on the identity and job flourishing of professionals. Furthermore, it will demonstrate what these strategies can look like as opposed to existing literature where such strategies are discussed from a theoretical point of view rather than a practical perspective.

These findings indicate that implementing AI in a professional workspace or into the work of a professional goes beyond technical aspects and traditional views of simply increasing output or efficiency, but rather a process where psychological aspects such as identity and effects of implementation on internal processes of professionals must be considered. For example, professionals' perception of AI implementation can be a source of great value for managers to identify strengths, weaknesses and expected disadvantages and points of improvement when implementing AI. Professionals reported that AI acts as an assistant that not only improves productivity but allows time for attending to other tasks and learning. This is while they had concerns of dependency and AI lacking quality. A solution would be that managers do not overwhelm professionals by constantly suggesting and pushing them to use AI but grant them the autonomy to use it when necessary and put the opinion of professionals before AI solutions, so they do not feel less important that AI but rather

enhanced by it. The neutral stances towards AI suggest a lack of interest by professionals. Managers and HR departments can aim to develop and introduce a "Culture" of AI use in their organisation to not only raise awareness and interest in using AI but to make sure those not using it as often or not wanting to use it do not feel left out. Such a culture can have two-way communication so the professionals' boundaries are considered when it comes to AI used for decision making, way of carrying tasks, where and when it is used.

A significant finding of this paper was how professionals expressed the need to learn AI, adapt to it and upskill accordingly. Some stated that they may be redundant if they cannot perform better that AI, not know how to use it or not leverage it. Referring to introducing a culture, it is important that once implemented managers do not use quantitative metrics to assess professionals' performance and productivity after the implementation of AI. But rather, qualitative aspects in their policy such as considering if the AI implemented is aligned with the professionals and supporting them in meaningful aspects of their work. This can be achieved by allowing feedback moments between managers and professionals. Furthermore, organisations can introduce workshops to familiarise professionals with AI, offer them training and provide them with AI literacy so they are aware of how it works, what it can and cannot do and potential risks of using it. This way not only they know how to use it, but will feel in control of it overtime which can help them feel that their identity is not threatened while lowering stress and potential resistance to use AI and perhaps preparing them for what the future of their workplace will look like.

In conclusion, the findings of this paper indicate that AI should not be simply implemented and thrown into the workplace but must be incorporated through co-designing the implementation process and final looks with the opinion of professionals to ensure their identity is protected while they continue to experience flourishing by feeling involved though training and communication.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into how implementation of AI influences the identity and job flourishing of professionals, it had its own limitations. Limitations that can provide further insights if addressed in future research.

Firstly, a limitation faced was the sample of the study. This was mostly due to a time constraint of finishing the interviews on time and analysing the results to start writing and submitting the thesis by the deadline. The sample size consisted of 8 participants from service fields such as education, healthcare and engineering. While this offers a variety of perspective and experience from different fields future research can focus on one specific field so that the findings are specific to the influences of AI on professionals in that field. Furthermore, a larger sample size can contribute to generalisability of the findings as well as more insights. However, the participants of this study were all experienced and qualified professionals who offered rich and valuable insights to the purpose of this study.

Secondly, the data was analysed by one person. A problem with this is potential bias as well as a single perspective and lens when analysing data. However, the analysing was carried out carefully and strictly followed a specific framework of coding and creating themes while constantly involving the supervisor to ensure the study is headed in the right direction.

Lastly, with respect to the time frame of having to finish this study by a set date; Future research can carry out a longitudinal study since AI and technology are constantly advancing and opinions towards it may change overtime. A longitudinal study will help compare these sentiments in different stages of AI development.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to investigate "How can AI implementation influence professionals' identity and job flourishing?". At first a literature review was carried out to understand the current state and state of knowledge regarding professionals, job flourishing, professional identity, AI and current effects of AI on job flourishing anad professional identity. The literature review revealed that AI is implementation and adaption is growing and there are two views towards this: Optimist stances suggesting that AI will improve efficiency and productivity. Pessimist stances arguing automation and replacement of workforce. However, there was little known about well-being of professionals in the AI and their job flourishing and identity specifically. Once the research gap was identified. Further literature review was carried out to act as theoretical frameworks for the purpose of this study. After which set of interviews questions were developed and carried out. This was followed by a thematic analysis to develop a data structure.

The results showed that professionals' perception towards AI implementation found more benefits and advantages when AI was implemented to their workplace. However, they believed AI can be better in terms of understanding what is expected of it and making less errors. When it came to what it means to be a professional, participants expressed a deep sense of connection with their role, and this was in line with the current state of knowledge. However, they expressed some concerns about their professional identity being threatened which again was in line with current literature with the difference that it will only become a threat if overused. They further added that this over dependency can impair cognitive development and saw AI as a double-edged sword when it came to effects on cognitive and affective well-being with the argument that it does in fact motivate them but there needs to be a limit on how much on uses AI as well as upskilling and adapting to the changing landscapes to preserve their job flourishing.

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Appendices A: Interview Guide

Interview questions to be used: note that for the probing question the letter next to the number means probing question of that number. So for example: question 2 of AI theme has 2A as probing question and so on.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview, Please keep in mind that there is no right or wrong answer here and your opinion is what matters most. So feel free to express yourself as you like.

Theme	Main Question	Probing/Follow up question
Opening questions	1) Please tell me about your role, what is it that you do exactly? How would you describe your role? 2) For how long you have been doing this?	1A) Why did you decide to become a…? Was this something you have always wanted to do? 1B) what kind of expertise or knowledge are central to your role?
Professional Identity	1) What is it that makes you relate to your job? 2) What are some beliefs and identities that characterise what you do? (what is the bigger picture of your role, How you feel about it) 3) How connected are you with your profession (what does it mean to you be a ….?)	1A) How has AI changed this? good or bad. 2A) How has AI implementation influenced how you see yourself fulfilling these? 3A) How would AI support or challenge this? Will it help you to flourish and grow your identity or will it challenge and deteriorate it?
Job Flourishing	1) What do you enjoy most about your job/profession (what is fulfilling about it) 2) With the implementation of AI, how do you feel towards the future of your profession? 3) In what ways and how does AI contribute to your work satisfaction/motivation?	1A) Do you feel that AI can contribute to you feeling this more or it will deteriorate it? 2A) Do you feel that you can continue to grow, or you are now limited? 3A) To what extend does this (AI implementation) affect your well-being?
AI	1) How is AI been implemented/ embedded to your workplace/role? 2) What is your general attitude towards AI in your line of work? And why? 3) What are some advantages and disadvantages of AI in your profession? (As in: does it enable or restrict you)	1A) Has it brought new processes or changed any? 1B) How does it affect what you do? 2A) How does it fit with your professional values and way of doing things at work? (does it go against or with) 3A) Can you give an example of when this happened and how often it happens? 3B) How has your attitude/opinion towards AI changed overtime in respect to your role?