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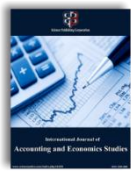

Overcoming Career Plateau: The Role of AI in Shaping Women's Career Paths in Finance

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and career plateaus among women working in corporate finance roles in Istanbul. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven professionals occupying junior, mid-level, and managerial positions. The interviews focused on everyday applications of AI, including performance dashboards, promotion lists, learning recommendations, and financial forecasting and reporting. Perceptions of both opportunities and challenges were examined, together with their influence on feelings of career stagnation or progress. A reflexive thematic analysis was applied.

The findings suggest that AI helps make employee contributions more visible and supports performance discussions with shared evidence. Personalized learning recommendations were described as valuable, particularly for early-career employees seeking direction. However, several difficulties emerged. Some aspects of work, such as coordination, mentoring, and handling crises, were often overlooked by AI metrics. The constant presence of scoring mechanisms was reported to create pressure and anxiety. In addition, decision-making processes sometimes slowed down when AI outputs were mediated by unclear committee structures.

More positive results were observed when AI was used in an advisory role, supported by transparent human review and regular bias checks. Career planning was more effective when personal circumstances such as mobility, language, and caregiving responsibilities were recognized. Although based on a small and non-random sample, the study offers evidence from Istanbul and highlights pathways for broader future research.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Human Resources Management; Career Plateau; Women in Finance; Gender.*

1. Introduction

Today, AI technology is rapidly becoming a permanent part of the business world. The way AI has impacted job content and career opportunities in finance has become quite striking [1], [2]. The impact of such technological transformation changes is quite clear, especially in the daily experiences of women who work in the finance department. These applications of AI can serve the function of improving the strength of businesses, picking up the pace of decision-making cycles as well as minimizing uncertainties. In this context, the automation of conventional functions such as financial reporting, budget and forecast creation, and account project management is driving it to a whole other level with the improved speed and accuracy of algorithms [3]. Through this, staff pressure experienced at the workplace by employees is far less, and it results in an increase in quality of life. While the "career plateau," a widely accepted concept in the management of careers, is made up of the constraining factors that limit employees in their future opportunities, new knowledge and skills can help employees overcome employees' barriers [4]. For instance, AI streamlining repetitive tasks frees up time to focus on more strategic roles. The employees whose jobs the AI is automating may face the risk of being replaced by technology. The variations present throughout the process of women employees are of account when career and family coexistence are to be compared [5], [6]. This study will look into the subject of women employees doing their tasks in the finance divisions of companies falling under Istanbul using a qualitative research method. The study justified the dependence of workers on AI by detailing the integration of AI technology in work practices and the effect it has on the standard of living and advancement of employees. The study is proposed to examine the women finance professionals in both their career journey in the industry and AI challenges, while also giving insight into the opportunities presented by the technology enforced.

2. Purpose and Research Question

The primary objective of this study is to explore the experiences of women employed in the finance and accounting departments of companies operating in Istanbul regarding the integration of AI technologies into their daily work practices. The investigation focuses on how AI is utilized in areas such as financial reporting, bookkeeping, budgeting and forecasting, investment decisions, credit applications, and other related functions. In doing so, the study seeks to examine the impact of these applications on job quality, career advancement

prospects, and perceptions of career plateau. Literature review revealed that there are various studies [7 - 9] but there are limited studies [10], [11] of examine the relationship between AI and career plateaus. Therefore, it was thought that examining these two variables in a qualitative research article would contribute to the literature. By addressing both the opportunities created and the risks introduced by AI, the research aims to contribute to the academic discussion while also offering practical insights for organizations. The study focused specifically on the experiences of women employees because it was thought that identifying the transformation of cultural influence with AI applications could add additional information to the study. Therefore, the main research question guiding this study is: "How does the integration of AI technologies into work processes influence job quality and perceptions of career plateau among women working in finance roles?"

3. Literature Review

This section presents the theoretical framework relevant to the research topic, with particular attention given to ensuring its alignment with the research question.

3.1. The Career Plateau Experience of White-Collar Women Employees

A career plateau is the point at which individuals perceive limited opportunities for career advancement. It's the feeling that they're stuck in a "stagnant" place and that the likelihood of advancement is low [12]. Women employees often assume invisible but systematically expected work responsibilities such as mentoring and team coordination. It is emphasized that these responsibilities arise not from individual desire but from gender-based cultural and organizational norms. It is argued that these efforts are not reflected in performance evaluations and job assignments, indirectly creating a disadvantage in career development [13]. Women employees get more of the cognitive and emotional workload described as the "invisible third shift," such as team coordination, support for colleagues, and emotional management, than men. These responsibilities can provide organizational stability, but they don't grant women the same status or prestige in terms of career advancement. They can create a sense of being trapped in fixed roles, which can lead to women being less likely to be nominated for senior positions overall. Juggling family roles alongside professional responsibilities can further complicate the mental and emotional burden on women, making career development more difficult. [14]. However, when it comes to careers, other nuances emerge. Women's involvement in informal spaces where career development or job development activities occur is limited. In any business, women will be in the minority during closing meetings, projects requiring travel, or external meetings; these situations often translate into opportunities for promotion. Even if some organizations adhere to formal equal opportunity policies, the status of "go-to person," especially among women who have more flexible working hours, diminishes the legitimacy of non-linear career paths. The psychological and behavioral consequences of career stagnation are also significant. Employees who do not progress personally at work often report that they are much more likely to stick to routine tasks [10], [13]. Over time, this type of interaction can reduce the retention of successful individuals and ultimately lead to their departure. At the other end of the spectrum, some women perceive plateaus as a time to deepen their skills, enroll in new courses, or redefine their work patterns in conjunction with their personal strengths, such as a passion for a particular type of work or a need for teamwork. If their organization is sensitive to employees' career pursuits, the plateau experience can catalyze the acquisition of diverse talents. In this case, it's crucial to support a context that allows employees to develop expectations and then, as a business, to ensure the right appointment. Promotions can't simply be achieved by increasing the number of vacancies, as they require a multifaceted approach for employees. Clear criteria for promotion to the highest position, time for coordination and mentoring, and an internal project marketplace are just some of the ways to ensure equal opportunities. In addition to mentoring, it's also important to support critical but often less visible activities, as this will ensure they are seen as influencers in decision-making processes. Emphasizing diversity and inclusion efforts in the workplace is also beneficial in empowering women to overcome invisible barriers and continue their climb up the corporate ladder [15], [16].

3.2. Human Resources Management with The Capabilities of AI

AI has now become an indispensable part of human resource management and provides the most value when it complements professional judgment rather than replaces it. It plays a role in nearly every step of the employee journey. In the recruiting process, AI predicts workforce needs, creates job postings, reviews applications, and schedules interviews. However, taking responsibility for how these tools are introduced, used, and monitored is essential to prevent them from creating similar biases as in the traditional recruiting process. However, fairness checks will need to be considered to ensure transparency, and the final say in interviews still rests with humans [17] [18]. Refactoring is only part of the picture. When it comes to scores, businesses that offer online assessments score much faster than traditional human resources. This partially eliminates cultural bias and ensures reliability. However, techniques for automating personality or cultural fit measurements through audio and video analysis can present risks. A more reliable approach is to use reliable, validated, job-related metrics with pre-defined scoring rules that allow candidates to compete when necessary. AI is a significant aid in the onboarding process after hiring employees. The module defines company rules, provides mentoring, and suggests new roles. While these technologies accelerate transformation and increase engagement, they can also perpetuate gender stereotypes; for example, they can push women into roles that support soft skills [17], [19]. One of the cornerstones that ensures employee control over the platform, and therefore social media, is monitoring and retention. This means personalized training. Businesses offer courses, bring in interactive trainers, and offer simulations for demonstration. These factors increase benefits, but the process needs to be controlled to ensure the results aren't superficial. Performance and promotion decision-making are increasingly influenced by AI. These systems are known to create a focus on achievement, further narrowing compensation structures and identifying high-potential outliers. This can improve career paths. However, employees need to be protected to prevent injustice and bias. Generally, the use of AI in functions such as recruiting, training, evaluation, promotion, and compensation will improve due to its faster, more consistent, and more personalized nature. Key risks include hidden bias, privacy issues, and over-reliance on automation. Organizations that use AI as a decision support mechanism and hold expert humans accountable for final decisions benefit without losing trust [18], [20].

3.3. Women's Perceptions of AI in Human Resources Management

In the human resources field, one of the most significant factors determining women's participation in response to AI lies in the relationship between job market opportunities and the uncertainty of the future. Studies have confirmed AI's association with dehumanization:

recruitment (resumes), salary management (less funding), performance evaluation (arguments), and training (non-interactive). Experiences with AI have frequently highlighted both job loss and privacy concerns. The balance of skepticism and pros in human resources clearly demonstrates how AI can increase both the excitement and anxiety of women in the workplace [21], [22]. This perspective on employee well-being is also reflected in field research in the literature. Framework studies on the interaction between AI and employee well-being reveal that AI applications can have positive productivity dynamics when implemented with fairness, transparency, and security as a priority. Transparent design and open communication are listed as decisive factors that can lead to trust and acceptance [23]. However, beyond these works performed, machine learning algorithms often contain the consequences of systemic bias. One example of an experimental outcome is the experience of gender-based false beliefs in AI-controlled decision-making processes. Even when the AI appears neutral or acts without bias, women managers are negatively discredited. In this case, women cannot be described as either fully optimistic or fully fearful until they consider their reasons for trusting AI. They see AI as a game-changer in certain areas—namely, its effectiveness and potential fairness—but they note that the journey has not been filled with enthusiasm, as bias, visibility, and the risk of losing jobs to the technology are major concerns. Furthermore, to achieve this, AI system design must move beyond mere utility to address fairness, traceability, auditability, and human-centricity, the cornerstones of human-centered AI. In this way, businesses are expected to develop an organizational culture that can increase employee productivity, eliminate unnecessary and routine workloads, and create opportunities for personal development. Furthermore, this will create an environment where employees can achieve all of these with less stress and intensity. What is important in building this culture is to try to establish an understanding that supports innovative, expert opinion and final decisions without relying on biased past statistics [18], [24], [25].

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the women's experience in the areas of operations related to finance and accounting that have AI implemented in organizations, alongside which they experience interruptions of their career growth, thus leading to stagnation. Due to the preliminary nature of this study, which aims to capture lived experiences in detail, qualitative research was seen as the most effective way to represent the complexity of the perspective and the dynamic nature of the career development process. The interview questions were developed after analyzing recent studies [1 - 3], [5], [7], [20], [21], [24] and finalized after sharing them with two PhD faculty members specializing in human resources. Care was taken to ensure that the questions were of a depth that quantitative studies cannot reveal.

The research was conducted in Istanbul, Türkiye, because many international businesses use AI to support financial statement preparation, financial forecasting, and decision-making. Istanbul was selected as the sample area because it accounts for 30% of Turkey's trade and is a leading city in technology adoption. To ensure rich and in-depth data collection, a total of seven female employees working in finance positions were contacted through purposive and snowball sampling. The female interviewees were selected because they were directly involved in finance functions daily and specifically worked with AI tools. Participants were encouraged to use AI not only for their daily tasks but also for making important managerial decisions. This approach was anticipated to provide more in-depth responses from women employees regarding the relationship between AI and career plateaus. A semi-structured interview was conducted to elicit opinions on the adoption of AI, its impact on work-life balance, career development, and opportunities presented as subcomponents of the research question. During the analysis phase, the transcription of the interviews was used as input for the prioritization of the main factors in the decision process. Coding was an iterative process; thus, after conducting the first round of analysis, emergent codes were regrouped into buckets of categories such as career stagnation, AI-powered work responsibilities, work–life balance, and professional identity. Cross-case synthesis was also the main tool used for recognizing common patterns and generating explicit appeals. All interviews were kept confidential to inspire trust and increase the chances of sincerity. After the seventh interview, the coding became a routine and started to be more time-consuming for each extra interview, which led to the end of the study to avoid this kind of confusion [26]. Qualitative analysis, also known as maximizing the quantitative belief, states that the point of saturation results in coded remarks. The duration of an interview was, in turn, on average, ranging from 25 to 30 minutes. The interview questions were coded as IQ–IQ4, and a summary table of participant responses has been presented for each question.

5. Analyzes

Under this heading, the answers given to the interview questions were analyzed by categorizing and coding them. The tables include data from all seven businesses. Before the tables, there are sample statements presented as direct quotations from the responses of three businesses. The table below provides information on the age, sector, job description, position, and interview duration of the women employees interviewed in the study.

İQ: Could you please share your age, the sector you work in, your current position, your total years of work experience, and a brief description of your job responsibilities?

Table 1: Identifying Information About the Interviewed Participants

Age	Sector	Position	Total Years of Experience	Job Description
34	Banking/Finance	Finance Manager	11	Monthly/quarterly reporting, budget control, cash flow management, audit coordination, and presentation of financial analysis to senior management.
29	Retail	Credit Analyst	6	Risk scoring, income-debt analysis, collateral evaluation, and decision file preparation for individual/commercial loan applications.
41	Medicine	Budget Specialist	17	Annual budget, monthly forecast updates, variance analysis, expense control, and scenario-based financial projections.
36	Energy	Chief Accountant	13	Invoice classification, ledger records, closing of financial statements, internal control, and tax process monitoring.
32	Holding (Multi-Sector)	Financial Reporting Specialist	9	Consolidation of group companies, footnotes, analytical comparisons, and management presentations.
38	Technology	Investment Analyst	14	Company/sector analysis, valuation studies, presentation to investment committee, portfolio monitoring, and risk alerts.
40	Production	Risk Management Specialist	15	Operational/financial risk inventory, stress tests, monitoring of insurance and countermeasure plans; reporting and advice.

İQ1: How have AI solutions in your workplace impacted your daily work, your responsibilities, and the visibility of your work?
Participant 1: "Monthly reports used to take a day, but now they're reduced to just a few hours. Because of this speed, more options are requested in the same amount of time, and delivery takes less time… I still have final control; I'm held accountable for any errors. While the time savings are welcome, the visible part of the work is sometimes credited to the AI system, which means I often need to explain my own contribution separately."
Participant 2: "In loan files, the initial evaluation is ready within minutes, and the number of pending applications decreases… As artificially wide ranges become prominent in decision information, my technical contribution is fragmented. Despite this, I must check every line individually to ensure my signature is included. As the process speeds up, I need to collect more clearly to prove professional impact."
Participant 7: Risk calculations and adverse scenario testing can be completed the same day… AI can't always capture market movements based on human behavior, so I make the final assessment. While speed has increased, my checklist hasn't shortened, and my responsibilities haven't changed. When presenting to senior management, I clearly distinguish between decisions based on machine recommendations and those based on expert judgment. I aim to maintain intellectual quality while simultaneously maintaining speed."

Table 2: Experiences Working With AI

Participant No	Outcomes	Challenges	Needs
1	Reporting has accelerated	Expectations have increased, lack of visibility	Workload balance, making contributions visible
2	Credit flow has accelerated	Decision impact has decreased	Balance of human and AI
3	Fast access to forecast reports	Need for continuous control	Rigorous verification
4	Errors have decreased	Need for continuous control	Second, look at the reports
5	Time gain	Expectations have increased	Reasoning for visibility
6	Meeting clarity	Decision impact has decreased	Expert commentary
7	Fast risk analysis	Need for continuous control	Expert commentary

İQ2: How has AI integration impacted your career progression and perception of it?
Participant 2: "Frankly, I feel like processes are becoming much more mechanical with AI. In this situation, it feels like I'm the one compiling and assembling the work, rather than the expert… I think I'm losing my influence over decisions. Naturally, this makes me feel trapped in a kind of approval mechanism role. Even getting the promotion I was hoping for doesn't feel right, and believe me, it doesn't feel good at all. The presentation and discussion spaces where I can demonstrate my expert perspective need to be expanded."
Participant 4: "Being the one in control feels safe, but this alone doesn't guarantee promotion… While numerical output is prioritized in promotion interviews, my invisible contributions, such as coordination and mentoring, don't receive sufficient weight in the portfolio. This imbalance narrows the promotion pipeline and fosters a sense of plateau. I wish my efforts, which aren't reflected in the evaluation set, were credited. In fact, I'm currently considering submitting my request to human resources."
Participant 6: "As AI output becomes more prominent, my evaluations are relegated to the background, limiting my promotion opportunities. My resume appears weak when I'm not involved in projects where I can demonstrate my impact. Therefore, I want employee-sponsor manager matches and projects that showcase my contributions. These projects can serve as showcases for promotions."

Table 3: Experiences, Career Progression, and Perception with AI

Participant No	Outcomes	Challenges	Needs
1	Recognition problem	Invisibility of expertise	Showcase tasks
2	Approval role	Decreased decision influence	Presentation and scope of influence
3	Personal development slowed	Invisibility of expertise	New responsibilities, authority
4	Safe but stagnant	Narrow promotion criteria	Score for Invisible effort
5	Strategic expectations increased	Lack of recognition	Authority-title alignment
6	Approval role	Decreased decision influence	Sponsor manager match, showcase projects
7	Machine recommendations became prominent	Invisibility of expertise	New responsibilities

İQ3: How has the use of AI affected your working schedule and evening and weekend work?
Participant 3: "Thanks to AI, the need for weekend work has significantly decreased, providing immediate relief. However, during the closing weeks, additional revisions generated by the system can arrive around 9 p.m., requiring me to rework and disrupting my sleep schedule… AI accelerates work while shifting the intensity outside of work hours. Therefore, requests should be limited to specific hours, and notifications should be linked to official policy."
Participant 5: "The number of meetings has decreased with AI-powered summary and tracking tools, which is positive. However, critical updates often arrive in reports sent by the system after 7 p.m., after analysis, creating an expectation of quick responses. This directly impacts my family schedule and makes it difficult to focus… Concentrating workload during daytime hours increases efficiency. A clear policy is needed across the organization regarding the sending times of AI reports."
Participant 7: "With AI, my productivity has increased significantly during the day; I can deliver reports before closing. On the other hand, when unexpected system alerts come in, I must make short interventions late into the evening, and this repeatedly becomes exhausting… AI processes speed up work, but they can also leave a burden at the end of the day, straining work-life balance. Predefined backup plans and a rotational system within the team can maintain this balance."

Table 4: Experiences Work-Life Balance with AI

Participant No	Outcomes	Challenges	Needs
1	Weekend workload reduced	Expectation to be online in the evenings	Establishing written policies that clearly define work–life boundaries by hours
2	Meetings in the office decreased	Revisions and notifications shifted to later hours	Linking notification and delivery times to official policy
3	Weekend workload reduced	Expectation to be online in the evenings	Concentrate the work in daytime hours
4	Flexibility in working from home	Evening fatigue due to shorter deadlines	More realistic schedules
5	Meetings in the office decreased	Repeated unexpected evening updates	Establishing written policies that clearly define the AI reports delivery time
6	Daily planning has become clearer and more organized	Expectation to be online in the evenings	Formalizing online availability rules to set boundaries

7	Higher efficiency during the day allows earlier submission of reports	Unexpected interventions until late hours become exhausting when repeated	Rotational duty system and predefined backup plans within the team

İQ4: What are your thoughts on the level of openness in training, mentoring, and promotion processes regarding artificial intelligence?
Participant 1: "There are short training sessions, but without on-the-job testing of different possibilities, learning doesn't stick… Due to a lack of mentoring, it takes time to transfer what I've learned to a real project. In my opinion, small project assignments paired with training accelerate learning. For promotions, truly identifying talent and measuring performance is becoming increasingly difficult. This sometimes makes me feel like I won't be rewarded for my efforts."
Participant 4: "Although there may seem to be criteria in promotion meetings, I don't receive credit for invisible work, and my portfolio remains weak. When team coordination, mentoring, and contributions during crises aren't evaluated, the perception of fairness is damaged. This narrows the promotion pipeline… The scope of criteria should be broadened, and their weightings should be clearly shared."
Participant 5: "Short-term, non-departmental assignments can be a powerful showcase; when announcements aren't made public, the opportunity isn't distributed equally. When internal mobility is limited, it becomes difficult to make progress. A clear task list and clear application requirements mitigate this problem… Furthermore, feedback on results should be provided regularly."

Table 5: Experiences with Training, Mentoring, and Promotion with AI

Participant No	Outcomes	Challenges	Needs
1	Training are ordinary	Learnings not applied in practice	Small project tasks with training
2	Internal postings exist	Selection feels informal	Clear criteria, regular reviews
3	Training not linked to role	Skills unused	Role updates, task alignment
4	Hidden work not recognized	Unfair promotion path	Broader criteria, weight transparency
5	Cross-department tasks limited	Unequal access	Open postings, regular feedback
6	Training without mentoring	Learning fades	Hands-on tasks, visible platforms
7	Unclear scores in reviews	Low trust, weak appeal	Clear guidelines, coaching

6. Interpretation of Findings

Under this heading, the information presented in the analysis will be interpreted and categorized before the closing section to ensure completeness. Before moving on to the interpretations, it is believed that categorizing the questions asked of the participants in the interview and examining which codes were identified under each theme will contribute to the purpose. In this regard, the table below lists IQ1-IQ4, the interview questions, the themes, and the codes revealed in the study.

Table 6: Summary Table of Themes and Codes

Theme	Common Findings	Recurring Challenges	Highlighted Needs
IQ1–Work Processes	Speed and order improved; final control remains with humans	Continuous checking; reduced decision influence; rising expectations; visibility issues	Human and AI balance; reliable validation; realistic deadlines; clear division of responsibility and resources
IQ2–Career and Plateau	Contributions not fully recognized; promotion paths narrow	Expertise not visible; reduced decision influence; narrow criteria	Showcase tasks; transparent and broader criteria; supportive guidance
IQ3– Work–Life Balance	Higher efficiency during work hours; evening demands may increase	Constant online availability expected; pressure from urgent updates	Clear notification and access boundaries; scheduling policy for updates
IQ4– Support and Opportunities	Training exists; mentorship and transparency remain weak	Lack of transparency; limited guidance	Open task list; recognition of invisible work; written guidelines

IQ1 – Work Processes showed that the integration of AI significantly improved both speed and organization. However, participants highlighted that the final responsibility remained with humans, which created a constant need for checking and validation. While AI shortened the time required for routine tasks and enabled earlier delivery, it also raised expectations, with employees expected to produce more within shorter deadlines. The findings emphasized that AI should act as decision support rather than full automation, and a balance between automation and human judgment is essential.
These findings are supported by recent research. Brynjolfsson et al. [27] showed that customer support employees achieved an average of 15% higher productivity and increased learning speed when using AI-powered assistants. Hemmer et al. [28] found that delegating tasks to AI increased human performance and task satisfaction, which in turn strengthened employees' sense of autonomy and self-efficacy. In a more recent study, Valtonen et al. [29] found that while AI may not directly increase employee well-being, it indirectly contributes positively through the optimization of work processes and job security. Furthermore, some studies in non-finance fields reveal different results. For example, a 2024 field study [30] conducted by the University of California, Berkeley found that AI-powered legal aid tools increased lawyers' productivity, with 90% of employees stating that AI made their jobs easier. However, women lawyers were found to use these tools three times less frequently than male lawyers, demonstrating a gender disparity in AI adoption. This finding suggests that the benefits of AI integration are not being felt equally, and that training and access support are particularly critical for women employees. Therefore, the findings within IQ1 are consistent with most findings in the literature. This study suggests that not only efficiency but also inclusiveness and equal access should be considered in AI implementations, such as human and AI balance and a clear division of responsibility and resources.
IQ2 – Career and Plateau findings indicate that while AI increases efficiency in business processes, it also leads to two significant impacts: first, employees' expertise, particularly their invisible labor, such as coordination or mentoring, is overlooked in promotion evaluations; second, this oversight of invisible labor reinforces the perception that promotion channels are narrowing, increasing the risk of career stagnation. Respondents called for transparent evaluation criteria, clear assignment calls, and structured opportunities that make human contributions visible in addition to AI-enabled outcomes as solutions to this problem. This finding is strongly supported by recent studies in the literature. Mäkelä & Stephany [32] observed that competencies such as digital skills and collaboration are prominent in AI-enabled jobs, but these contributions are not recognized if visibility mechanisms are inadequate. Dillon et al. [33] emphasized that while AI tools reduce email time by 25%, the lack of change in meeting times could reduce the scope for social interaction and visible contributions. The women employee perspective is also critical to this analysis. Otis et al.'s [34] study shows that women adopt AI tools at lower rates than men, and that this difference can negatively impact career visibility. Furthermore, Mirbabaie et al. [35] reported that professional identity

is threatened and a sense of invisibility increases when working with AI. Adding bias to these general trends in promotion criteria reveals a more concrete picture. A study by Heilman and Caleo [36] indicated that vague promotion criteria (e.g., definitions of "forward-thinking" or "resilient") disadvantage women in evaluations, thus further invisibly rendering invisible labor.

In conclusion, while most studies [37] focus on general well-being, fairness, or technology adoption, this study's findings demonstrate how the invisible contributions of women employees—coordination, mentoring, and care work—are further diminished with the advent of AI. The Study aligns with the literature; however, it differs significantly. First, it reveals how the invisible contributions of women are systematically neglected within AI systems; second, it clearly demonstrates that career development mechanisms should be designed not only with efficiency but also with equity and visibility. It reveals that the "cultural taxation" and invisible care burdens women already face are being reproduced in organizational processes with the integration of AI. Therefore, not only speed and efficiency but also the design of gender equality, visibility, and fair evaluation mechanisms become critical in AI-based systems. The needs expressed by participants appear critical for making career development more equitable and sustainable in organizations. Showcase roles ensure that employees' contributions are made visible and reflected more clearly in promotion portfolios. Transparent and broad criteria strengthen the perception of fairness by encompassing not only technical output but also invisible contributions such as team coordination, mentoring, and crisis support. Supportive guidance, on the other hand, provides direction that goes beyond training and helps transfer learning to real-world projects. These three elements, combined, reduce the risk of career plateaus and increase employee motivation and commitment.

IQ3 – Work–Work-Life Balance revealed that AI helped reduce the need for weekend work by allowing routine reporting tasks to be completed within office hours. At the same time, however, the presence of AI created a new expectation of constant availability in the evenings, as revisions and notifications frequently arrived after working hours. This situation disrupted personal life, family routines, and rest. The evidence suggests that AI can free up time, but without official limits on communication and online presence, it risks extending working hours. Employees, therefore, emphasized the importance of institutional policies on notification times and boundaries of accessibility. These findings are also supported by current research. Chuang et al. [38] noted the productivity-enhancing effects of AI and emphasized the criticality of clear boundaries and internal policies for employees to maintain a balance between work and private life. Giuntella et al. [39] demonstrated through a longitudinal analysis that AI adoption can have a positive impact on employee well-being, but that this impact must be supported by strong workforce protection mechanisms. As an example of gender-based discrimination, Sahni et al. [40] demonstrated in gender-specific work-life balance studies conducted during the pandemic that women employees struggled more with juggling domestic responsibilities and AI-induced work pressures, increasing levels of indecision and stress. Similarly, the ILO's 2025 report [41] highlighted that female employees are three times more likely to become unemployed due to AI than men, with the risk being particularly high in secretarial and similar positions that typically involve regular tasks. In this context, the study contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, it shows that despite the positive potential of time savings and productivity increases provided by AI, employees still struggle with extended working hours for female employees without formal limitations; second, it draws attention to the need to address these experiences in the context of not only productivity but also inclusivity, gender-sensitive work-life balance, and visibility.

IQ4 – Support and Opportunities showed that while training opportunities were provided, they often did not translate into long-term skill application due to the lack of practical, on-the-job integration. The absence of mentoring reduced the impact of training, and limited transparency in task allocation undermined trust in career advancement. Employees suggested that open task lists, written guidelines, and recognition of non-visible contributions could help create a fairer environment. They also stressed the importance of combining AI integration with human-centered mentoring and clear evaluation processes, ensuring that efficiency gains do not come at the cost of fairness and growth opportunities. These findings are also supported by current academic literature. Kalim et al. [42] emphasized that the lack of mentoring and support networks plays a significant role in women's adoption of AI in education and that this support should be increased. González et al. [11] found that in research settings, women use AI tools 7% less frequently than men, and that lack of training is a significant factor in this difference. Furthermore, Russo's [22] study shows that women have higher rates of AI anxiety and that this anxiety hinders technology use, particularly when training is translated into practice. Finally, Aldasoro et al. (2024) reported that women employ generative AI less frequently than men, and that this difference can negatively impact long-term career visibility. In line with this literature, the study directly demonstrates how women become invisible in AI-enabled training and development processes, and how a lack of mentoring and task distribution affects career plateaus. At this point, the contribution of the study can be expressed as emphasizing that educational opportunities should not only be offered but also designed as a package that includes mentoring, visibility, and justice.

7. Conclusion

This research on the integration of AI into business processes, conducted using qualitative methods, allowed for a deeper exploration of processes and perceptions that often remain superficial in quantitative research. The findings demonstrated increased reporting speed and efficiency but also revealed the emergence of new pressures (time constraints, the dissolution of work-life boundaries, and the devaluation of invisible contributions). These results show that AI is not merely an automation tool but a transformative element that needs to be rethought within the context of organizational justice and gender equality. By focusing specifically on the experiences of women employees, this study's qualitative approach has made visible dimensions not easily measured through numerical data. Factors such as invisible labor, perceived unfairness in promotion processes, and a lack of mentoring are complex dynamics that cannot be fully captured by surveys or statistical models. Participants' narratives clearly demonstrate the risk that AI can reproduce past biases and how this reinforces the perception of career plateaus for women. Therefore, by uncovering causal links through qualitative data, this research provides a basis for developing hypotheses that quantitative studies can test.

Focusing on women employees is a conscious choice from a gender perspective. It's well known that women face more obstacles than men due to cultural norms and industry biases. AI, by drawing on historical data, has the potential to reinforce these biases. The study demonstrates that AI is truly impartial; on the contrary, it often reproduces existing inequalities. Therefore, examining women's career paths and how AI systems operate, and how principles of transparency and fairness can be integrated into these technologies, poses a critical research agenda.

While in the previous time-consuming monthly report tasks can be reduced to a matter of hours, even minutes, by the tenants as customers, automated repetitive chores can be taken care of, allowing staff to get on with the more demanding tasks. Nonetheless, what has been facilitated are the challenges due to the gains: e-time pressure is more, the work-and-private-life border is vanishing, and the individual performance is not easily recognized as part of the group performance. The study is convinced that AI is not a stopgap for human judgment but a contributing factor that aids the final decision and responsibility of humans. This research makes AI-empowered efficiency a part of the human resources perspective and career development, as it makes an important contribution. Existing research, in the main, focuses on things such as productivity and cost, but this research is about how the adoption of AI remodels career pathways, biases regarding job loss,

and promotional opportunities. By extension, the research inspires further examination of the connection between the career plateau phenomenon and AI-based working environments. It broadens both the study area of organizational behavior and the study area of information technology. It also reveals how algorithms might ignore the intricacy of human behavior in a workplace setting, where such processes largely determine the outcome. These are first-hand data that add further empirical support to the concepts of work-life balance, equity, and organizational justice with respect to AI. A very particular implication is about women employees who are probably facing a career plateau. Women tend to encounter multifaceted issues, such as being overlooked for mentoring, unconscious bias in promotions, and being on standby on assignment projects. AI-powered assessment tools may, unless they are created transparently, amplify this tendency by prioritizing quantifiable measurements of performance, such as metrics and outputs, at the expense of the more holistic and less countable elements of job contribution, like management and care roles, which women often carry. There may be a return to cultural standards and gender disparities, which deepens women's belief in the plateau effect for women. For this reason, institutional procedures need to be articulated to address gender equality issues in the AI world of work. This may involve the use of accessible and open call tasks that reach the largest audience group and present the currently many-forgotten contributions. Women need mentorship programs and career development solutions based on these structured programs. They create greater visibility for women and counterbalance career or organization challenges. A person is more likely to feel work–work-life balance policy is important at a workplace where individuals cannot fully comply with all the requirements, since robotic and non-robotic AI systems do not know how to adjust their job expectations beyond their standard operating hours to coincide with the natural limits of human productivity. The current study draws on the empirical data from a specific business context and uses a circumscribed group of respondents. More generalizations demand further research, perhaps involving not just several sectors but also different cultural contexts. Moreover, the study in its entirety was based mainly on the perceptual contributions, which directly entailed the verification of the results by means of more quantitative information. In the future, deeper long-life career aspects in organizations where AI is already an integral part, focusing on the differences between working women and men that may exist and that may reinforce the structural inequalities. Encouraging studies should also examine strategies such as bias audits in AI decision-making systems, mentoring schemes for individuals, and employees' regulation of work–life boundaries in organizations as possible methods to combat the inequalities. Consequently, the findings, leveraging the advantages of qualitative research to reveal causality, offer potential for developing hypotheses and generating scales for quantitative research. New research can be expanded by comparing different sectors and genders. In the financial sector, AI is primarily used for reporting, forecasting, and decision support, and the primary impact on employees is increased time pressure coupled with increased speed and accuracy. In manufacturing and industry, AI is increasingly used for automation and quality control, leading to concerns about job security, delegation, and job loss. In healthcare, the introduction of AI into diagnostic and data analysis processes is impacting the authority of doctors and specialists, while AI-based measurement systems used in education are altering faculty members' perceptions of autonomy and visibility. In technology companies, the rapid integration process triggers pressure on employees to constantly adapt rather than plateau in their careers. Therefore, future studies focusing on different sectors could contribute to the literature due to the varying dynamics of these sectors.

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