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P1: AI, Society, Governance, Education & Working Life

10. The Augmentation Gap: Configuring Human-AI Collaboration for Human Flourishing at Work

Authors: Sirle Lumi¹

Affiliations: 1. Research & Innovation Unit, Estonian Business School, Estonia

Abstract: Artificial intelligence is increasingly framed not only as a technology for automating work but as a means of augmenting human capability (Dellermann et al., 2019; Jarrahi, 2018). Human-AI augmentation denotes arrangements in which humans and AI systems contribute complementary capabilities to a task, rather than AI simply substituting for human labor (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021). Yet the assumption that augmentation necessarily produces better work remains insufficiently examined: a recent meta-analysis of 106 experimental studies found that human-AI combinations typically underperform the best of either humans or AI acting alone, with benefits concentrated in content-creation tasks and losses concentrated in decision tasks (Vaccaro et al., 2024), while a systematic review of the organizational literature finds the field still dominated by conceptual propositions and calls explicitly for case-based, practice-level research (Nguyen & Elbanna, 2025). This study investigates how human-AI augmentation is configured in everyday organizational work and under what conditions these configurations support, rather than erode, human flourishing. Rather than treating AI adoption as the unit of analysis, it introduces the human-AI work configuration – a recurring workflow in which tasks, decision authority, judgment, accountability, and learning are distributed between employees and AI – as its analytic unit. A comparative qualitative multiple-case design across four to six knowledge-intensive organizations will combine approximately 30-40 semi-structured interviews, direct observation of AI-supported work episodes, short diary studies, and analysis of organizational AI policies. Abductive, cross-case thematic analysis will examine task allocation, decision authority, discretion and contestability, learning, and employees' experienced autonomy, competence, and meaningfulness. The study anticipates a central finding it terms the augmentation gap: a divergence between organizational narratives of AI as employee empowerment and employees' lived, enacted experience of human-AI collaboration. By shifting the research question from whether organizations adopt AI toward how augmentation is organizationally produced and experienced, the study connects human-AI augmentation research to the work-design and human-flourishing literatures (Bankins & Formosa, 2023; Kantar & Bynum, 2022; VanderWeele, T. J., 2017) and offers an empirically grounded framework distinguishing capability-enhancing from capability-substituting augmentation.

Keywords: human-AI augmentation, augmentation gap, human-AI work configuration, automation-augmentation paradox, work design, human flourishing, qualitative multiple-case study