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Ethical Aspects of Using AI among Occupational Psychologists: A Pilot Study

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Abstract. Psychologists, specializing in work and organizational psychology (occupational psychologists), play a crucial role in the implementation and development of Human resource management (HRM) processes, which are increasingly affected by artificial intelligence (AI).

This research aims to examine how and why AI is utilized among occupational psychologists, as well as the ethical dilemmas associated with this use in relation to the Code of Professional Ethics for Psychologists (the Code). The empirical part of this pilot study is based on a qualitative research design. 6 semi-structured interviews based on 11 questions regarding the use of AI in occupational psychologists' work were conducted. Participants were selected through purposive sampling.

The study results reveal that AI plays a vital role in automating routine administrative tasks. Participants highlighted its contribution to time efficiency and its utility in language translation. Nonetheless, concerns arise regarding increases in the occupational psychologists' workload, as human oversight is required to ensure the accuracy and reliability of AI. While AI promises objectivity, participants cautioned that algorithms can be biased, potentially leading to discriminatory practices. They also expressed concerns about accountability. This question is pivotal, as the Code mandates the maintenance of professional boundaries and the respect for individuals' rights. Participants also pointed to risks associated with data protection. Despite this awareness, participants admitted they do not rely on the Code in their work with AI, which increases the risk of unethical decision-making.

It is recommended that organizations provide adequate training for AI users, regulate data input, and ensure its use in accordance with ethical guidelines. The Slovenian Psychologists' Association has a pivotal role in the preparation of specific guidelines and advising occupational psychologists on the ethical use of AI.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, AI Integration in HRM, Code of Professional Ethics for Psychologists, Ethics in Human Resource Processes, Occupational Psychologists, Slovenia

1 Introduction

The subject of this pilot study is the role of AI in HRM departments. The research focuses on the changes that AI has brought to the tasks of occupational psychologists working in the field of occupational and organizational psychology in human resources (HR) departments. We are interested in which work tasks and processes psychologists in organizations use AI to assist them, and we investigated the extent to which the use of AI is consistent with the Code.

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1.1 Benefits and risks of using AI in HR processes

AI deals with the development of systems and algorithms capable of mimicking human intelligence. This means that AI understands data, learns from data, and uses it for specific goals and tasks (Haenlein and Kaplan 2019). In recent years, AI technology has made great strides, such as deep learning technology (a branch of machine learning) based on artificial neural networks that mimic the functioning of the human brain.

Recruitment and selection processes involving the use of AI open up numerous opportunities to optimize HR processes (George et al. 2023). The positive aspects of using AI in the workplace are extensive. When used in recruitment processes, AI can be considered non-biased in the selection of candidates, as it communicates and makes decisions without emotion (Zhang 2023). It also does not take personal connections into account in its recruitment strategy (Ferràs-Hernández 2018 in Köchling et al. 2023). However, it is only non-discriminatory if the AI algorithms do not include elements that could have negative consequences for different groups of people (George et al. 2023), as in a well-documented case of Amazon in 2018, when its AI systematically discriminated against women in the hiring processes (Hunkenschroer and Kriebitz 2023). In line with this case, the views of recruitment and selection experts on the implementation of AI into HR selection point to a paradox. Although AI promises to reduce bias, it may pose a risk of exacerbating human bias in machine learning algorithms. This means that the introduction of AI may bring new challenges in terms of bias, as algorithms operate based on data that may already be biased in itself (Ore and Sposato 2022).

AI can further automate the analysis of large amounts of data, quickly review resumes, and identify the most qualified candidates. Advanced analytical functions also make it possible to predict how candidates match expectations and job descriptions. This further improves the process of quick and objective decision-making in the HR selection (Olan et al. 2023; Ramachandran et al. 2022).

Additionally, conversational agents can participate in the selection processes by asking candidates questions and answering any questions related to HR processes (George et al. 2023; Zhang 2023). This approach is time-efficient, but the use of AI in telephone and video interviews can also be problematic. An increased feeling of discomfort among candidates may occur, and an impression of impersonal treatment, which can reduce the perceived attractiveness of the organization (Ferràs-Hernández 2018 in Köchling et al. 2023). On the other hand, some job candidates believe they can express themselves more freely when interacting with AI (Hunkenschroer and Kriebitz 2023) and feel less pressure, thus being able to better present their abilities in front of a "robot" (Zhang 2023).

Given the rapid development of AI, a question arises whether HR professionals who use AI in their work can keep up with its rapid progress. In addition, what kind of, if any, training is being offered by the internal or external experts regarding its (ethical) usage. Given the lack of knowledge about how AI systems actually work, the risks of system errors are greater, in addition to obvious concerns about confidentiality and hacker attacks (Budhwar et al. 2023). Concerns about privacy and the sharing of data online are also growing (Rodgers et al. 2023).

1.2 The ethical aspect of using AI in occupational psychology

Guidelines and standards that ensure algorithm transparency and data privacy are key to the successful implementation of AI in HR processes. The collection, storage, and processing of personal data require compliance with data protection laws such as the GDPR. It is important to develop ethical guidelines and standards, and ensure transparency in the use of AI (George et al. 2023; Mollick 2023).

According to editors Poštuvan and Čerče (2023), in the book entitled Psychologist in a dilemma: ethical content and ethical awareness in practice (chapter: Ethical content in the work of psychologists in work organisations; Poštuvan 2023), we have examined all of the listed articles and sought to predict which articles of the Code (Kodeks poklicne etike psihologov, 2018) could be violated by the use of AI in HR processes.

Algorithms based on AI can contribute to existing biases that are present in society and, consequently, to discrimination based on race, gender, or other characteristics (Resnik and Hosseini 2024). Algorithms must be designed correctly to ensure diversity in the data used to train AI systems, which, in addition to regular testing, is a good way to reduce bias (Upadhyay et al. 2021). In addition, algorithms are often opaque, meaning that it is difficult to understand how these systems make decisions. Deciding who is responsible for errors and the consequences of using AI is therefore a complex problem.

Articles from the Code that address ethical dilemmas in the use of AI focus on privacy protection, ensuring fairness, transparency, and accountability, as these are key values that must be considered in the ethical use of AI (Karimian et al. 2022).

- Principles of respect for human rights (articles under 1.)

The collection and analysis of employee data using AI raises privacy concerns. It is important to ensure that personal data is stored securely and used only in accordance with regulations (Dennis and Aizenberg 2023). On the one hand, AI enables occupational psychologists to make more informed strategic decisions based on the analysis of large amounts of data, contributing to improved efficiency and effectiveness of HR operations. On the other hand, it reduces control over the disclosure of information entered into the system. Transparency is key for AI users to understand how AI receives and processes raw data. Establishing clear accountability for the results produced by algorithms is essential for the ethical use of AI in occupational psychology (Mollick 2023). Diakopoulos also emphasizes the importance of algorithm transparency to enable understanding and verification of decisions. Transparency is key to building trust in these systems. Algorithmic decision-making must include accountability mechanisms that ensure ethical standards are maintained. This includes clearly defined responsible persons (Diakopoulos 2015). In this case, it is the moral responsibility of the occupational psychologists to prevent any discriminatory effects of the use of AI systems.

- Principles of professional competence (Articles under 2.)

Respect for the principles of professional competence is key to ensuring the quality of psychological services. Article 2.2 of the Code requires psychologists to use scientifically based and professionally accepted methods in their work. New technologies, such as AI, are not yet among them. This means that they still require reliability and validity testing. Occupational psychologists must ensure that the methods they use are supported by scientific evidence. Floridi (2019) emphasizes that the use of proven methods is essential to ensure the ethical and effective functioning of AI. The adoption of these technologies must be based on rigorous testing of their usefulness and reliability, which is crucial for maintaining the professional competence of psychologists. A lack of transparency and accountability in the use of AI violates the principles of integrity and responsibility in professional work (Diakopoulos 2015; Pasquale 2015).

Article 2.4 of the Code emphasizes that psychologists must act independently and autonomously when selecting methods for psychological assessment and must follow professional guidelines. However, concerns arise regarding critical evaluation and verification in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the assessment. Floridi (2019) highlights the importance of ethical judgment in the use of new technologies and the need to follow the guidelines and recommendations of the professional community.

Involving independent experts in the evaluation of these tools may increase their reliability and credibility.

Article 2.7 of the Code emphasizes the importance of maintaining orderly, systematic, and complete professional documentation in terms of content and time, which ensures the quality and transparency of professional work and professional conduct. The use of AI can improve the efficiency and accuracy of recordkeeping. Digitization automates the entire process (Rodgers et al. 2023) and thus increases efficiency (Wassan et al. 2021), which also contributes to better traceability and transparency (Dignum 2018). However, there is a risk of interference with individuals' personal data (Floridi 2019) if the information is not entered correctly. Organizations must establish appropriate security mechanisms to protect personal data and ensure that this data is used in accordance with ethical principles and legislation (Dennis and Aizenberg 2023).

- Principles of psychologist responsibility (articles under 3.)

The Slovenian Psychologists' Association does not yet have specific guidelines for advising on the use of AI. Clear guidelines on responsibility for potential errors, and continuous monitoring and adjustment of algorithms are key steps in ensuring fairness and equality in HR processes. Involving employees in discussions about new technological solutions allows their concerns to be taken into account. Continuous education and training of occupational psychologists and whole HR teams are essential to keep pace with the latest trends and best practices in the ethical use of AI technologies (Mollick 2023).

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

Six in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with occupational psychologists working in the field of HRM in Slovenia, who use AI for their professional activities. The participants were between 28 and 48 years old, with an average age of 32 (more information about the participants is provided in Table 1).

We searched for participants through purposeful sampling (occupational psychologists) and accessed them through various social networks and psychological associations (LinkedIn, Facebook (HR groups), and Psychology alumni groups). Seven occupational psychologists agreed to take part in the research, but due to a time restriction, only six of them took part.

Table 1: Basic information about research participants

Participant number	Gender	Title
1	female	HR Business Partner
2	female	HR Specialist (recruitment)
3	male	HR Generalist
4	female	HR Generalist
5	female	HR Specialist (HR development)
6	female	External HR consultant

2.2 Instruments

We opted for qualitative research, which examines everyday situations, processes, and individuals' responses to a particular phenomenon in their natural environment (Flick 2014). Semi-structured interviews were employed as they provide deeper and more accurate insights by adapting questions during the interview. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful when the study aims are exploratory in nature, as in our case (Dovetail 2023; George 2023). The advantages of semi-structured interviews include greater flexibility, the possibility of in-depth answers, building a better relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and more engagement. In addition, they are less formal and more conversational, which may contribute to more open and honest responses (George 2023).

In addition to being time-consuming and requiring a complex analysis, a disadvantage of semi-structured interviews is that their less structured nature can lead to bias on the part of the researcher. This can influence the reformulation of questions and subsequent data analysis (George 2023). Both a voice recorder and notebook notes were used in order to keep track of the interview contents.

2.3 Procedure

Based on the research objectives and existing literature, we designed questions for semi-structured interviews. Then we contacted occupational psychologists from several organizations, explained the purpose and objectives of the study, and had them sign an informed consent form before conducting the interviews. The consent form informed them of the potential risks and benefits of the research and of their rights, such as the option to withdraw from the study at any time during the research and to stay anonymous.

Semi-structured interviews consisted of questions based on research aims. Interviews were between 18 and 22 minutes long. Interview questions were modified when needed based on participants' answers. After each interview, transcripts were made in Microsoft Word. We supplemented the transcripts with observations and destroyed the recordings. We then analyzed and coded the data (recorded the transcripts in electronic form, marked the material, defined sub-themes, and combined related codes into superordinate codes) and interpreted them. We were aware of our own involvement (Saldaña 2016) as one of the authors is also an occupational psychologist working in the field of HRM in the company, who occasionally uses an AI chatbot in her work.

3 Results

This chapter presents the results obtained from the analysis of data. The codes provided in Tables 2-5 are supported by citations from semi-structured interviews. The results are categorized according to content related to study aims, highlighting the challenges, advantages, disadvantages, and ethical aspects of using AI.

3.1 Using the AI chatbots

We investigated the use of AI chatbots by posing questions, "Do you use ChatGPT or another AI chatbot in your work? How often?" and "In which processes and types of tasks do you most often use AI?" The interviews were semi-structured and adapted if needed. We deepened our understanding of this area by asking questions about whether AI is used in selection, staff development, including performance analysis, skills development, knowledge transfer, or other HR processes.

Table 2: Using the AI chatbots

Participant number	Code	Description
1	Frequent use of AI in a small business	Frequently used AI in previous job.
1	Limited use of AI, as there is no official license	Less use of AI because there is no license.
1, 4	Limited use of AI due to mistrust	Less use of AI due to mistrust.
2	AI for employment tasks structure	Use of AI for the structure of employment tasks.
2, 3	AI for translation; for international communication	Use of AI for (faster) translation and communication in a foreign language.
3	AI assistance with data analysis	AI assistance with data analysis and preparation of statistics.
5	AI used for brainstorming and searching for ideas	Use of AI to find ideas and advice.
5	AI used for writing texts and descriptions	Use of AI when writing invitations and workshop descriptions.
5, 6	AI search for information	Use of AI to increase time efficiency when searching for information.

*"Yes, I do. Mainly when I'm looking for ideas, in terms of brainstorming, but also when asking interview questions, for advice, so yes, I do. And sometimes also for texts when I don't know how to write a good invitation or workshop description so that people will understand, and then I ask again."(*Participant 5)

"(I use AI to help me) With every single task. ChatGPT, Gemini, CoPilot./.../ I use it for research. But I really delve into the prompt—how to prepare it. Because if you just tell, "Write this and that for me," you get something too general." (Participant 6)

Table 2 shows that participants use AI for diverse HR activities. Results also show that dispersities exist regarding the frequency of AI usage and trust in AI among the selected occupation psychologists.

3.2 Process automation with the help of AI

The questions we asked were: "Do you think AI has improved the efficiency and accuracy of HR decisions in your organization?" and "How do you think AI contributes to improving productivity in HR practices?"

Table 3: Process automation with the help of AI

Participant number	Code	Description
2	AI helps with structure and guidelines	AI assists with structure and guidelines for writing documents and communication.
2, 3	AI used for translation	AI is used for translation and communication preparation.
3	AI assistance with rapid data analysis	AI assists in data analysis and the preparation of visual representations.
5	AI speeds up information retrieval	AI enables quick retrieval of summaries and key information.

1, 6	Time-consuming preparation of input data	AI requires a lot of instructions and corrections during preparation and translation.

"Yes, I believe that it may not be helpful if you are not skilled at writing and ask AI to write an invitation /.../, or to write a rejection email, but personally, I believe that everything we do, should be meaningful. And in my experience, I gave AI instructions and guidance and then made corrections, so I think I could have done such a routine task three times faster myself, and better. I don't know about more complex things, but where a high degree of caution is required, I am faster at creating something than going after someone to check something. My personal opinion is that if you have things that are not personalized, it's OK, but otherwise, giving instructions takes so much time that I prefer to do it myself." (Participant 1)

"ChatGPT /.../ it helps me the most with how to structure things, I don't know, we had a challenge at work recently with how to write things down, or what to write down when we meet candidates, so that only the main things are recorded, so that's how I helped myself. To write down this structure, what is important, how to approach it./.../ Oh, I forgot the main thing. We collaborate with Serbs and I don't know Serbo-Croatian very well, which is still a big communication issue, so I use it for internal communication for all translations and I learn a lot from it. /.../, you can really express yourself the way you want to express yourself." (Participant 2)

Table 3 shows that participants use AI for various purposes to speed up work processes. While two participants pointed to the useful role of AI tools for translation, another two participants also questioned time savings with AI-assisted automation due to various corrections needed for high-quality outputs.

3.3 Trust in AI and ethics

We explored the topic of trust and ethics with the following questions: "Does your organization follow ethical guidelines when using AI in HR practices?" and "How does your organization prevent potential data misuse that may occur due to the use of AI?"

Table 4: Trust in AI and ethics

Participant number	Code	Description
1	AI reduces creativity	Using AI reduces creativity
1, 2	The need for verification of AI outputs	It is necessary to verify the accuracy of the data obtained.
1	Ethical issues of AI use	Problems with ethical issues and false sources.
3, 5, 4, 6	The necessity of one's own critical judgment and mistrust of AI outputs	You need to use your own judgment when using AI. The interviewee has reservations about the reliability of data from the AI.
1, 3, 6	Careful use of AI with personal data	Cautious use of AI for sensitive topics.

"...And I actually went to look into results, and there were a lot of things that weren't correct, that weren't ethical... I don't know how many things AI just made up. Basically, it artificially recreated sources that didn't exist, and so on. So, from this point of view, caution is really a must." (Participant 1)

"I have some concerns about trusting the data I obtain from AI chatbots. I always check the accuracy of the information, but even so, I don't enter data that I don't want to share with the world. I don't trust it. I don't know, it's too new, too unknown." (Participant 4)

3.4 Experience with the Code

We examined experiences with the Code by asking participants: "How often do you rely on the guidelines from the Code of Professional Ethics for Psychologists in your work?".

Table 5: Experience with the Code

Participant number	Code	Description
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	Non-application of the Code in AI usage	Interviewees did not apply a Code of ethics when working with AI.

"Hahaha, honestly, no. I have it saved, but I haven't read it in detail." (Participant 3)

"*I don't use it. But I would definitely give instructions for use. In the sense that you shouldn't rely on AI 100%, but use it as a support."* (Participant 6)

As Table 5 shows, all participants reported that in their work with AI, they do not consult the Code. However, Participants 4 and 6 welcomed the idea of creating guidelines for ethical usage of AI for occupational psychologists working in Slovenia.

4 Discussion

The purpose of this pilot study was to present the use of AI by occupational psychologists working in HRM in Slovenia and to examine the ethical aspects of this use. The results of the interviews showed in which tasks occupational psychologists in selected companies use AI and how (or how not) this use complies with the Code. Based on the analysis of the results, this chapter highlights key findings that contribute to a better understanding of the topic and support the objectives of the research.

Participants in the study reported that AI reduces bias and increases the objectivity of HR processes, which is consistent with the findings by George et al. (2023). Among other things, the use of AI enables a more structured approach to the selection process. It predicts the suitability of candidates for jobs, which further improves the process of quick and objective decision-making in the HR selection, as demonstrated in studies by Olan et al. (2023) and Ramachandran et al. (2022).

Processes driven by AI enable simplification in HRM, particularly the automation of repetitive HR administrative tasks (Olan et al. 2023; Taguimdje et al. 2020). The study participants emphasized that AI is effective in automating routine administrative tasks, such as preparing invitations or rejection letters, which leads to greater time efficiency. At the same time, some participants expressed concern that increased caution is needed when using AI, as they believe that they themselves are faster and more efficient, and that they have to double-check and correct everything that ChatGPT creates, even for simple tasks such as entering an email address or sending an invitation.

AI takes over the data entry and processing, which leads to lower costs, increased productivity, and increased job satisfaction due to reduced workload, as reported by George et al. (2023) and Ramachandran et al. (2022). This is in line with what for example participant 5 reported: *"/.../ she (my*

colleague) helped herself with AI in the job description and writing the ad. And it saved her a lot of time and nerves."

However, not all participants agreed with the high level of automation. Some questioned the usefulness of AI in more complex tasks where precision and greater control over the process are required. They pointed out that the use of AI can increase the burden on the user, as it requires additional instructions and corrections, which in some cases prolong the time frame for completing the task.

The participants in the study mentioned that they use AI for fast and efficient translation, which saves them time in internal communication, especially when working with international teams. The transcripts also confirm that AI enables quick data analysis and statistics preparation. Participant 3 said: *"It also comes in handy when analyzing data. For example, I recently had to prepare statistics on active and inactive channels in MS Teams, and AI presented it really well in a graph."* This confirms the theoretical assumptions about the capabilities of AI to improve HRM processes. On the other hand, AI could increase the burden on HR professionals in terms of time and effort if they want to accurately understand and adapt the results of AI and monitor it, as pointed out by Budhwar et al. (2023) and Hunkenschroer and Kriebitz (2023). This can lead to inequality and irregularities in the decision-making process.

The use of AI also increases the risk of reduced creativity, as pointed out by several participants in the study. They found that AI takes over tasks that they could otherwise perform themselves. When working with the AI, they may lose some degree of independence and personal judgment. This can lead to an imbalance, where some HR professionals feel less involved or less responsible for their decisions (Hunkenschroer and Kriebitz 2023).

Participants also pointed out the possibility of unethical decisions due to the reductionist nature of AI. This means that it tends to simplify complex situations, which can pose a risk when making complex decisions. Although AI is effective at processing large amounts of data, this simplification can cause it to overlook important details and specific contexts. This can lead to unethical decisions or inappropriate problem-solving, as it does not capture all the aspects that HR professionals would better understand. People are more capable of perceiving subtleties and emotional aspects that AI often overlooks, as Hunkenschroer and Kriebitz (2023) point out.

In addition to practical issues related to the use of AI, participants expressed concerns about security and potential misuse of confidential data, especially in cases where companies do not provide adequate training and do not use licensed versions of AI. This is consistent with authors' warnings about the risks of data misuse and privacy violations in the use of AI (Patel et al. 2022; Budhwar et al. 2023).

One of the key ethical issues highlighted by the study is the question of algorithmic bias (Nuzula and Amri 2023). Some participants pointed out that AI systems can be biased because they rely on historical data that may contain inherent biases related to gender, race, and age, as Dennis and Aizenberg (2022) warn. This is consistent with the literature that emphasizes the need for careful oversight of algorithm use to avoid discriminatory practices (George et al. 2023).

It was found that participants were aware of the ethical dilemmas associated with the use of AI technology, reflecting theoretical warnings about ethical dilemmas (Aamodt 2010; Csillag 2019; Poštuvan 2023). Nevertheless, none of the participants applied the Code in their work with AI, although two of them acknowledged that it should be part of their consideration when implementing this technology. Some participants admitted that they do not rely on the Code in their daily tasks, but they are aware of the potential risks of using AI, especially when it comes to processing sensitive data.

4.1 The conclusions

The study showed that AI brings numerous advantages, such as simplification and automation of HR processes, greater efficiency and time savings, reduced bias in the treatment of job candidates, and overall greater productivity. Nevertheless, participants disagree with the use of complete automation enabled by AI, as AI usage can even increase the time burden due to the greater need for adjustments and. At the same time, it reduces independence at work, especially when it comes to taking responsibility for decision-making. Use of AI is also associated with challenges such as reduced creativity, the need for close monitoring of AI results, and ethical dilemmas arising from the use of this technology.

Although most participants are aware of ethical challenges, research indicates that they do not rely on the Code in their work, even though psychologists operating in Slovenia are obliged to follow the Code in their work. This could potentially increase the risk of unethical conduct.

It is recommended for organizations to provide adequate training for AI users and to regulate data input and ensure use in accordance with ethical guidelines. The Slovenian Psychologists' Association has a crucial role in the preparation of specific guidelines and advising occupational psychologists on the ethical use of AI.

4.2 Research limitations

The limitations of this pilot study are the small number of participants, which makes it impossible to generalize the results. It should also be noted that the study was conducted among Slovenian psychologists who are obliged to follow the Slovenian version of the Code, and it is possible that practices abroad are different. The study focused on general aspects of AI use and did not analyze the different subtypes of AI technologies used in HR processes. This data could be valuable, as it would show which AI chatbots and other AI tools, as well as which AI functionalities, are mostly employed and which pose the greatest ethical challenges.

The qualitative nature of the study, which is based on the subjective experiences of individuals, means that the results do not necessarily reflect the broader practice of using AI in HR processes. In addition, the research participants had limited experience with more advanced forms of AI, which limits insights. At the same time, one of the authors is working in the field of HRM in a company, which could lead to her own (unconscious) bias on the subject.

The findings of the study offer numerous opportunities for further research. The first step would be to conduct more extensive quantitative and qualitative research on a larger sample of companies in order to generalize the findings. Further research could also include longitudinal studies that would monitor the long-term effects of AI use on work processes and the satisfaction with AI in HRM. It would also be useful to explore how organizations can better integrate the Code into occupational psychologists' daily use of AI and what possible solutions exist to prevent bias and ensure data security.

Additionally, it would be worth exploring how AI affects the psychological aspects of HR professionals' work, particularly their autonomy, engagement, and creativity. The participants expressed concerns about reduced creativity and excessive control, which could hinder the wider implementation of AI in HR processes in the future. Research in this area could contribute to the development of strategies for using AI as a tool to support, rather than to replace, human judgment and creativity.

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