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Optimizing Employee Motivation in the Era of Artificial Intelligence: Evidence from MH Raroma, a Digital Creative Enterprise in Vietnam

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Abstract: In the context of Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming not only business operations but also the way employees perceive work, motivation, and value creation. While AI-driven technologies have enabled automation, efficiency, and data-driven decision-making, they also raise concerns about job insecurity, digital stress, and the erosion of intrinsic motivation. This study explores how employee motivation can be optimized within AI-augmented work environments through a qualitative case study at MH Raroma – a digital creative enterprise specializing in manga and webtoon production in Vietnam.

Using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 20 participants (artists, editors, and managers), the research identifies five major determinants of motivation in the AI era: (1) AI integration and work redesign, (2) leadership and organizational culture, (3) compensation and recognition systems, (4) digital skills and professional growth, and (5) psychological well-being under technological stress. The findings reveal that AI adoption simultaneously enhances and threatens motivation — it increases productivity and autonomy but also generates anxiety and burnout when not managed properly.

The study contributes to the literature by conceptualizing the notion of "Work Motivation Optimization" as a dynamic balance between human needs and technological transformation. Practical implications are proposed for managers to foster a human-centered digital culture, align AI implementation with intrinsic motivators, and design sustainable motivation frameworks for creative and knowledge-intensive industries.

Keywords: *Employee Motivation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Digital Transformation, Human Resource Management, Creative Industry, Vietnam, Work Engagement.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

➢ *Background and Rationale*

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has brought unprecedented changes to the global economy, reshaping how organizations create value, compete, and manage human resources. Digital transformation, characterized by the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and data analytics, has redefined the workplace and the nature of motivation itself. While AI enhances decision-making accuracy, reduces repetitive workloads, and improves productivity, it also generates new psychological and organizational challenges — particularly in motivating employees to adapt, innovate, and thrive in increasingly digitalized environments (Kane et al., 2015; Westerman et al., 2014).

Employee motivation has long been recognized as a key determinant of organizational performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Herzberg, 1966). Motivated employees demonstrate greater engagement, creativity, and commitment to organizational goals. However, in the AI era, traditional motivational mechanisms (such as monetary incentives or job stability) may no longer suffice. As work becomes more automated and knowledge-intensive, motivation must be redefined to integrate digital competencies, continuous learning, and psychological resilience (Huang et al., 2021).

In creative industries, this transformation is even more pronounced. Digital content companies, particularly those producing manga, animation, and webtoons, rely heavily on human creativity, emotional intelligence, and team collaboration. At the same time, they face strong pressure to adopt AI-based design tools, content recommendation systems, and data-driven user analytics. This creates a

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paradox: while AI facilitates innovation and efficiency, it also threatens the intrinsic motivation that fuels creative work (Brennen, 2020).

➢ *Research Context: MH Raroma*

MH Raroma is a Vietnamese digital creative enterprise founded in 2015, specializing in the production of manga and webtoon content for international markets. The company employs over 120 staff, including artists, editors, and technical personnel. In recent years, MH Raroma has actively implemented AI in its content creation and management processes. Tools such as AI-assisted drawing, character design suggestions, and intelligent layout algorithms have shortened production cycles and enhanced artistic productivity. Moreover, the company uses AI-driven platforms to personalize reader experiences and optimize content distribution.

However, the integration of AI has also led to emerging human resource challenges. Employees have expressed concerns about job displacement, increased monitoring, and the loss of creative autonomy. Some artists experience stress and fatigue due to the constant need to adapt to new tools and rapid project cycles. These factors highlight a complex motivational landscape that requires deeper understanding.

Therefore, MH Raroma provides an ideal case for exploring how AI adoption impacts employee motivation in creative, knowledge-intensive work environments in Vietnam.

➢ *Research Problem and Questions*

While numerous studies have examined motivation in traditional workplaces, few have investigated motivation optimization in AI-driven environments, particularly within creative digital enterprises. Existing research tends to focus on productivity and efficiency rather than on human experience, engagement, and well-being. This study addresses this gap by exploring:

- What factors influence employee motivation in AI-integrated organizations?
- How does AI adoption affect employees' engagement, creativity, and job satisfaction?
- What strategies can organizations employ to optimize motivation amid digital transformation?

➢ *Research Objectives*

The main objective of this study is to propose an integrative framework for optimizing employee motivation in the AI era. Specific objectives include:

- To examine the effects of AI adoption on employees' motivation and engagement;
- To identify barriers and enablers of motivation in digitally transformed organizations;
- To recommend practical solutions for sustaining motivation and well-being in the creative workforce.

➢ *Research Significance*

- *Scientific Significance:*

This study contributes to the conceptual development of "Work Motivation Optimization" by bridging classical motivation theories (Maslow, Herzberg, Vroom, Deci & Ryan) with contemporary digital management perspectives. It extends the understanding of motivation from a static psychological construct to a dynamic, context-dependent phenomenon shaped by AI and organizational change.

- *Practical Significance:*

The research offers actionable insights for managers, particularly in creative and digital enterprises, to design motivation systems that align with both human values and technological capabilities. By recognizing the dual nature of AI — as both an enabler and disruptor — organizations can build adaptive, people-centered strategies to enhance engagement, innovation, and sustainable performance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

➢ *Conceptualizing Work Motivation*

Work motivation has been one of the most studied topics in organizational behavior and human resource management. It is generally defined as the internal and external forces that initiate, direct, and sustain goal-oriented behavior at work (Pinder, 2008). Motivation is not a static attribute but a dynamic process reflecting the interaction between individual needs, job characteristics, and contextual factors such as leadership, culture, and technology (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

In the era of artificial intelligence (AI), the traditional understanding of motivation is being reshaped. Digitalization has introduced new job structures, work autonomy, and performance monitoring systems, altering how employees perceive fairness, rewards, and self-efficacy. Consequently, motivation can no longer be viewed solely as a psychological construct; it must be understood as an adaptive system influenced by technological, organizational, and social transformations.

➢ *Classical Theories of Work Motivation*

- *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943):*

Maslow proposed that human behavior is driven by a hierarchy of needs — physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. Once lower-level needs are satisfied, higher-order needs become dominant. In modern organizations, self-actualization — the need to realize one's potential — often manifests as the pursuit of creativity, autonomy, and personal growth. In AI-driven environments, these higher-order needs become increasingly relevant as repetitive tasks are automated and cognitive, creative contributions gain prominence (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

- *Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959):*

Herzberg distinguished between hygiene factors (salary, policies, working conditions) and motivators

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(achievement, recognition, responsibility, growth). While hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction, only motivators truly enhance engagement. In digital workplaces, hygiene factors have evolved to include technological infrastructure, digital security, and fair access to AI tools. Meanwhile, motivators may derive from opportunities to master new technologies, participate in digital innovation, and gain recognition for adaptability.

- *Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964):*

Vroom posited that motivation is a function of expectancy (effort leads to performance), instrumentality (performance leads to reward), and valence (value of the reward). In AI-integrated organizations, expectancy is influenced by employees' confidence in using digital tools, while instrumentality depends on transparent performance metrics derived from AI systems. If employees perceive algorithmic evaluation as fair and data-driven rewards as meaningful, motivation increases; otherwise, it declines due to perceived injustice or lack of human recognition.

- *McClelland's Theory of Needs (1985):*

McClelland identified three dominant needs: achievement, affiliation, and power. The digital age emphasizes achievement-oriented motivation, where employees seek mastery of new technologies and creative output. At the same time, affiliation and power needs are reshaped through virtual collaboration and flatter organizational structures facilitated by AI-driven communication platforms.

- *Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985):*

This theory focuses on intrinsic motivation and posits three psychological needs — autonomy, competence, and relatedness — as essential for well-being and engagement. In the context of AI, autonomy can be enhanced through flexible digital work systems, competence is reinforced via continuous digital skill development, and relatedness can be fostered through collaborative digital platforms. However, excessive automation may undermine autonomy and relatedness if employees feel replaced by technology rather than empowered by it (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

- *Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976):*

This model identifies five core job features — skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback — as determinants of motivation and job satisfaction. AI and digital tools can enhance these characteristics by enriching work design (e.g., personalized dashboards, real-time performance feedback). Yet, if technology restricts discretion or introduces surveillance-based control, motivation may diminish (Parker & Grote, 2020).

➢ *Motivation in the Digital and AI Context*

Recent studies have highlighted that AI affects motivation in complex, ambivalent ways. According to Davenport and Harris (2007), data-driven decision-making in HR (HR analytics) increases fairness and transparency, thereby enhancing motivation. However, Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2017) caution that excessive automation may erode intrinsic motivation by replacing meaningful human tasks with mechanical ones.

Kane et al. (2015) argue that digital transformation is not primarily a technological challenge but a cultural and leadership challenge. Successful organizations are those that integrate AI to augment — not substitute — human capabilities. This approach fosters what they call *digital confidence*: the belief that technology empowers rather than threatens one's professional identity.

In the creative sector, AI presents both opportunities and psychological risks. According to Brennan (2020), AI-enabled tools (e.g., generative design, automated coloring, content recommendation) can boost productivity and reduce manual workloads. Yet, they may also cause "creative dissonance" — the perception that one's artistic originality is being replaced by algorithmic suggestions. Therefore, motivation optimization in AI-driven creative industries requires balancing technological efficiency with emotional and cognitive fulfillment.

Furthermore, the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008) provides a modern lens to understand motivation under digital stress. AI can be a *job resource* (enhancing efficiency, feedback, autonomy) but also a *job demand* (increasing cognitive load, complexity, and uncertainty). The balance between demands and resources determines engagement or burnout.

➢ *Empirical Studies on AI, HRM, and Motivation*

Empirical research in both global and Vietnamese contexts provides valuable insights into how AI shapes motivation:

- *Global Studies:*

Westerman, Bonnet, & McAfee (2014) demonstrated that digital leadership and a culture of innovation significantly enhance employee motivation during digital transformation. Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu (2012) extended the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) into UTAUT2, showing that perceived usefulness, ease of use, and social influence are key drivers of technology acceptance and, consequently, motivation.

- *Vietnamese Studies:*

Tran Kim Dung (2015) found that digital HRM tools improved efficiency and employee satisfaction but were hindered by skill gaps and cultural resistance. Le Van Phong (2020) observed that resistance to change and fear of replacement decreased motivation during ERP adoption. Phan Thi Hong Minh (2021) emphasized the critical role of transformational leadership in inspiring motivation and creativity in AI-integrated organizations.

These studies collectively suggest that AI's impact on motivation is contingent on organizational context, leadership style, and employees' digital readiness. A one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective; motivation optimization must be adaptive and human-centric.

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➢ *Toward the Concept of "Work Motivation Optimization"*

Although "motivation enhancement" and "motivation maintenance" have been widely studied, few scholars have explicitly conceptualized "work motivation optimization" as a distinct construct (Gagné et al., 2015; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

- *This Study Defines Work Motivation Optimization as:*

"A dynamic and continuous process of aligning personal drivers, job design, organizational systems, and digital technologies to achieve the highest sustainable level of motivation for both employees and the organization."

This approach recognizes that motivation cannot always be maximized; rather, it must be *optimized* — balanced among individual well-being, organizational performance, and technological adaptation. Excessive pressure to increase motivation (e.g., through constant digital monitoring or competition) may paradoxically cause stress and burnout. Therefore, the goal is to achieve an *optimal fit* among human, task, and technological dimensions.

➢ *Theoretical Framework of the Study*

Drawing upon the literature, this research proposes an integrative framework — the AI–Motivation Fit Model — synthesizing classical theories and contemporary digital perspectives (see Figure 1).

- *Core Assumptions:*

✓ AI adoption transforms work design, job demands, and feedback systems.
✓ Employee motivation is influenced by digital autonomy, competence development, recognition, and fairness.
✓ Engagement mediates the relationship between motivation and job performance.

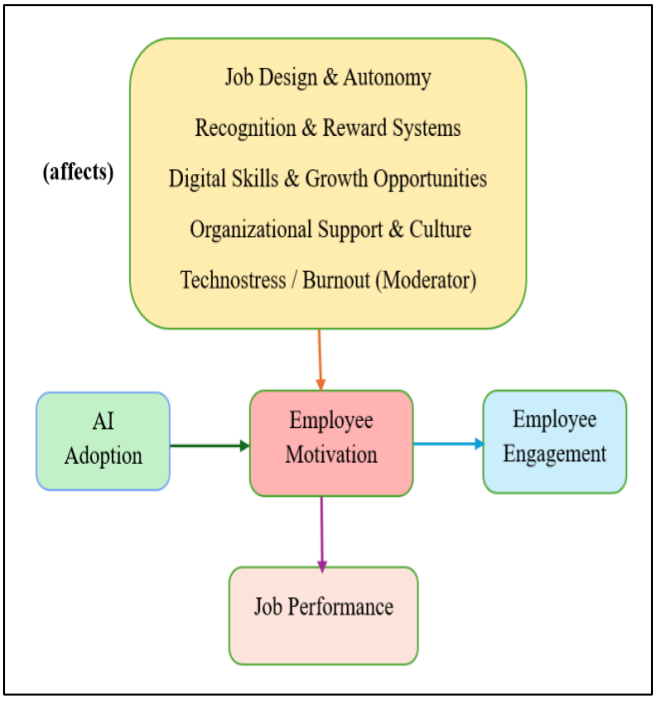

Fig 1 Conceptual Framework: AI–Motivation Fit Model

This framework serves as the analytical lens for the case study of MH Raroma, enabling the identification of contextual drivers and inhibitors of motivation in AI-enhanced creative environments.

In short, this literature review positions *Work Motivation Optimization* as a novel and multidimensional construct that integrates psychological, organizational, and technological perspectives. It bridges classical motivational theories with modern digital realities and provides the foundation for analyzing how AI influences employee motivation at MH Raroma.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

➢ *Research Design*

This study adopts a qualitative research design using a single case study approach, which is suitable for exploring complex social phenomena within real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). The purpose of the research is to understand how employee motivation can be optimized in AI-integrated organizations, with MH Raroma serving as an illustrative case of a digital creative enterprise undergoing technological transformation.

A qualitative case study enables in-depth exploration of employees' lived experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses toward AI adoption — dimensions that are difficult to capture through quantitative surveys. The approach also allows for theoretical generalization, linking empirical findings with broader motivational theories and digital transformation frameworks.

➢ *Research Context*

MH Raroma is a Vietnamese digital content company established in 2015, specializing in the creation and international distribution of manga and webtoon content. The company employs approximately 120 staff members, including artists, editors, IT specialists, and administrative personnel. Over the past five years, MH Raroma has strategically implemented AI-based technologies such as automated illustration tools, character design algorithms, and data-driven content platforms to improve productivity and creativity.

While these initiatives have brought efficiency gains, they have also introduced new human resource challenges. Employees face increased cognitive demands, fears of automation, and a constant need to update digital skills. Consequently, MH Raroma offers an ideal setting to explore the dual impact of AI on motivation — as both an enabler and a stressor within the modern creative workforce.

➢ *Data Collection*

Data were collected from two primary sources:

- In-depth interviews, and
- Focus group discussions.

A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure diversity across roles and experience levels. A total of 20

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participants (P01–P20) were selected, including top managers (3), mid-level supervisors (5), and staff members such as artists, editors, and technical employees (12). This sample captured both managerial and operational perspectives.

✓ *In-Depth Interviews:*

Conducted individually to obtain detailed narratives about personal experiences, perceptions of AI, and changes in motivation. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, either in person or online.

✓ *Focus Group Discussions:*

Two sessions were organized with 6–8 participants each to validate emerging themes and encourage group reflection.

- *Sample Questions Included:*

✓ "How has AI changed your daily work and creative process?"
✓ "What motivates or demotivates you when using AI-assisted tools?"
✓ "How do leadership and company culture influence your adaptation to digital change?"

All sessions were audio-recorded with participant consent, then transcribed verbatim in Vietnamese and translated into English for analysis.

➢ *Data Analysis*

The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process:

- *Familiarization:* Repeated reading of transcripts to identify initial impressions.
- *Generating Initial Codes:* Labeling significant segments related to motivation, AI usage, engagement, and stress.
- *Searching for Themes:* Grouping codes into broader categories (e.g., "digital autonomy," "technostress," "leadership support").
- *Reviewing Themes:* Refining and merging overlapping themes.
- *Defining and Naming Themes:* Finalizing thematic dimensions aligned with the AI–Motivation Fit Framework.
- *Producing the Report:* Integrating quotes and interpretations supported by literature.

NVivo 12 software was used for data management and visualization of relationships among themes. To maintain interpretive validity, coding was peer-reviewed by the research supervisor to ensure consistency and reduce researcher bias.

➢ *Ensuring Research Trustworthiness*

To enhance the rigor of qualitative inquiry, this study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four trustworthiness criteria:

Table 1 Ensuring Research Trustworthiness

Criterion	Description	Application in this study
Credibility	Confidence in the accuracy of findings	Conducted member checking by sharing summary transcripts with participants for confirmation
Transferability	Extent to which results apply to other contexts	Provided thick descriptions of the organizational setting and participant characteristics
Dependability	Stability of data over time	Maintained an audit trail, including interview notes, memos, and coding frameworks
Confirmability	Objectivity and neutrality of findings	Kept a reflexive journal to record researcher biases and decisions

These measures ensured that interpretations reflected participants' authentic experiences rather than researcher preconceptions.

➢ *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical approval was granted by the Graduate Research Committee of Saigon International University (SIU). Participants were informed of the research purpose, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage. All personal identifiers were removed, and pseudonyms (P01–P20) were used throughout the analysis. Data were securely stored in encrypted digital folders accessible only to the research team.

➢ *Summary*

In summary, this study applies a qualitative, exploratory case study design to investigate how AI adoption influences and can optimize employee motivation. The combination of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and thematic analysis enables a rich understanding of emotional and behavioral dynamics within the AI-augmented workplace. This methodological approach provides a solid foundation for interpreting the findings discussed in the next section.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

➢ *Overview of Emerging Themes*

The thematic analysis of interviews and focus group discussions revealed five major themes shaping employee motivation in the AI-integrated environment of MH Raroma:

- *AI as a Dual-Edge Catalyst* – simultaneously enabling and constraining motivation;
- *Digital Autonomy and Skill Empowerment* – autonomy, competence, and mastery as drivers of intrinsic motivation;
- *Recognition, Reward, and Fairness* – the evolution of motivational systems under AI;
- *Leadership and Organizational Support* – the centrality of transformational leadership in the AI era;

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- *Technostress and Emotional Fatigue* – the psychological costs of constant digital adaptation.

Each theme is discussed below with empirical evidence and theoretical interpretation.

➢ *Theme 1: AI as a Dual-Edge Catalyst*

Participants acknowledged that AI tools had significantly enhanced efficiency and creativity in their daily tasks. Artists and editors reported that AI-assisted sketching and layout suggestions reduced repetitive work and allowed more time for conceptual design. As one respondent noted: "AI makes my work faster and more polished. I can try more ideas without wasting hours on technical details." (P07, Artist)

This aligns with Herzberg's "motivator factors" — particularly achievement and personal growth (Herzberg, 1959). When technology acts as an enabler, it satisfies higher-order needs for creativity and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

However, several employees expressed ambivalence. The same tools that empowered creativity also triggered anxiety about job relevance and the perceived devaluation of human talent: "Sometimes I feel like the machine draws better than me… it's helpful but also scary." (P12, Artist)

This duality reflects the paradox of automation (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017): AI enhances performance but can undermine self-worth if employees perceive it as replacing, rather than augmenting, their role. Thus, motivation optimization requires a balanced integration of human creativity and technological efficiency — not substitution.

➢ *Theme 2: Digital Autonomy and Skill Empowerment*

A recurring theme was the strong link between digital autonomy, learning opportunities, and motivation. Employees who received training and had freedom to experiment with new AI tools reported higher engagement and satisfaction.

"Our manager gives us time to explore new software and share what we learn. It makes me feel trusted and motivated." (P04, Editor)

This finding corroborates Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the three pillars of intrinsic motivation. When employees are trusted to make decisions about their digital workflow, they experience ownership and mastery — essential components of motivation optimization.

MH Raroma's approach of "digital learning circles" (peer-led workshops) was particularly effective in enhancing competence motivation. Employees described feelings of excitement and pride when mastering new AI features. As one manager noted:

"When artists see their AI-assisted work go viral online, their confidence and motivation increase tremendously." (P02, Project Manager)

However, not all departments benefited equally. Some administrative staff felt excluded from digital upskilling initiatives, indicating a gap in organizational inclusiveness. This imbalance can create motivational disparities and should be addressed through equitable skill development programs (Kane et al., 2015).

➢ *Theme 3: Recognition, Reward, and Fairness*

Motivation was also influenced by perceptions of recognition and fairness in AI-supported performance evaluation. MH Raroma uses a semi-automated system to track project completion and content popularity metrics. While this system was appreciated for its transparency, several participants expressed concern about "algorithmic unfairness" — situations where creative effort was undervalued because algorithms prioritized quantitative metrics (views, likes) over artistic quality.

"Sometimes the AI system ranks our work by popularity only. It doesn't reflect creativity or teamwork." (P09, Artist)

This observation resonates with Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964): when the perceived link between effort and reward is weakened by algorithmic biases, expectancy and instrumentality decline, reducing motivation.

Nevertheless, many employees acknowledged that instant feedback loops from AI dashboards increased self-awareness and engagement. Real-time analytics created a sense of progress and accountability, satisfying Herzberg's motivator of "recognition."

Thus, while AI-based performance systems enhance transparency, they must be designed with human judgment and qualitative appraisal to preserve fairness and intrinsic motivation.

➢ *Theme 4: Leadership and Organizational Support*

Across all interviews, leadership style emerged as the most influential determinant of motivation. Employees consistently emphasized that empathetic and visionary leaders mitigated the stress of digital transformation.

"Our director always says: 'AI helps you, not replaces you.' That message makes a big difference." (P01, Team Leader)

This illustrates the impact of transformational leadership — characterized by inspiration, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1990). Such leaders frame AI as an opportunity for learning rather than a threat, reinforcing employees' sense of belonging and purpose.

In line with Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), leadership support acts as a *resource* that buffers job demands (e.g., workload, digital

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complexity). MH Raroma's open communication culture, regular feedback meetings, and digital mentoring programs collectively strengthened psychological safety — a prerequisite for sustainable motivation.

Moreover, organizational culture emphasizing innovation and experimentation further reinforced engagement. Employees valued being part of a firm that "dares to try new things" and "encourages sharing ideas," echoing findings by Westerman et al. (2014) on digital culture as a motivational driver.

➢ *Theme 5: Technostress and Emotional Fatigue*

Despite the many benefits of AI, participants reported significant psychological strain. The most common manifestations included constant connectivity, information overload, and the fear of obsolescence. Several employees described feelings of "mental exhaustion" after prolonged exposure to digital interfaces.

"After a whole day switching between AI tools, my brain feels overloaded — even if I'm happy with the results." (P14, Designer)

These experiences correspond to the concept of *technostress*, defined as the stress induced by the inability to cope with new technologies (Tarafdar et al., 2019). When left unaddressed, technostress may lead to *burnout* — characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

In the MH Raroma case, burnout symptoms were particularly evident among senior employees who felt less adaptable to rapid technological change. This highlights the *moderating role of burnout* in the AI–motivation relationship, as proposed in the conceptual framework (Section 2.6).

The company has begun implementing "digital detox" initiatives (scheduled offline hours, mindfulness sessions), which participants described as "helpful for restoring focus." Such interventions align with recent research emphasizing the importance of digital well-being programs in sustaining motivation (Parker & Grote, 2020).

➢ *Integrating Findings with the Theoretical Framework*

Synthesizing the five themes reveals a complex, dynamic relationship between AI adoption and work motivation (see Table 1).

Table 2 Integrating Findings with the Theoretical Framework

Key Theme	Positive Drivers	Negative Drivers	Related Theories
AI as Catalyst	Efficiency, creativity, achievement	Job insecurity, identity threat	Herzberg, Maslow
Digital Autonomy	Learning, mastery, autonomy	Unequal access to training	SDT
Recognition & Fairness	Transparency, feedback	Algorithmic bias, loss of human judgment	Vroom, Equity Theory
Leadership Support	Inspiration, trust, communication	Lack of empathy or over-control	Transformational Leadership, JD–R
Technostress	Productivity pressure as motivator	Burnout, fatigue, detachment	JD–R, Burnout Theory

These findings confirm that AI affects both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, supporting the premise that motivation optimization requires balancing *technological efficiency* with *human meaning*.

AI adoption serves as both a *resource* (enhancing autonomy, feedback, recognition) and a *demand* (causing cognitive load, insecurity). Whether motivation increases or declines depends on how organizational culture and leadership mediate this tension.

Consistent with Self-Determination Theory, motivation optimization at MH Raroma occurs when employees experience autonomy (freedom to use AI creatively), competence (skill mastery), and relatedness (supportive leadership). Conversely, when these psychological needs are unmet — for instance, due to technostress or unfair algorithms — motivation diminishes.

➢ *Discussion Summary*

This study reveals that optimizing motivation in AI-enhanced workplaces is not about maximizing productivity, but about creating an optimal human–technology fit. AI's value lies not merely in automation but in augmenting employees' sense of purpose, growth, and creativity.

- *MH Raroma's Experience Demonstrates that:*

✓ Empowerment and learning are stronger motivators than control and surveillance;
✓ Leadership empathy and digital fairness are critical to sustaining engagement;
✓ Managing technostress is as important as investing in new technologies.

The findings contribute to theory by extending motivation research into the digital transformation domain, emphasizing equilibrium between *digital demands* and *psychological resources*. In practice, they guide managers toward designing human-centered AI strategies that nurture rather than erode intrinsic motivation.

V. SOLUTIONS FOR OPTIMIZING EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION AT MH RAROMA IN THE DIGITAL ERA

➢ *Basis for Proposing Solutions*

The analysis in Chapter 2 indicates that employees at MH Raroma experience both the benefits and the challenges of artificial intelligence (AI) integration. While AI improves productivity, efficiency, and creative performance, it also introduces concerns about job insecurity, continuous learning

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pressure, and mental fatigue caused by constant digital exposure.

- *Therefore, the Proposed Solutions are Built Upon three Foundations:*

✓ *Theoretical Foundation:*

Classical and modern motivation theories (Maslow, Herzberg, Deci & Ryan, Hackman & Oldham, JD–R, and UTAUT2) all confirm that motivation is influenced by personal, technological, and organizational factors.

✓ *Empirical Foundation:*

The qualitative findings reveal that employees need greater autonomy in using AI, transparent recognition systems, continuous digital skill development, and a supportive organizational culture.

✓ *Strategic Orientation of MH Raroma:*

The company aims to become a leading creative digital enterprise in Southeast Asia by 2030, emphasizing *human-centered innovation* as its core vision.

➢ *Objectives and Principles of the Proposed Solutions*

- *General Objective:*

To strengthen and sustain employee motivation in the context of AI adoption, thereby enhancing long-term engagement and performance.

- *Principles:*

✓ *Human-centric principle***:** Technology should serve people, not replace them.
✓ *Systematic principle***:** Motivation must align individual goals, team goals, and organizational strategy.
✓ *Flexibility principle***:** Solutions must fit various job categories (creative, technical, managerial).
✓ *Feasibility principle:* Solutions must match MH Raroma's resources and organizational culture.

➢ *Specific Solution Groups*

- *Solution 1: Enhancing Job Autonomy and Flexible Work Design*

✓ Redesign job descriptions to expand creative autonomy, allowing employees to choose AI tools that best support their work.
✓ Introduce an "AI-assisted autonomy" framework, where employees decide how and when to use AI, with proper guidelines for data security.
✓ Establish two-way feedback mechanisms between managers and employees to balance workload, reduce pressure, and improve ownership.

▪ *Expected Effect:* Strengthens intrinsic motivation through autonomy, competence, and meaningfulness.

- *Solution 2: Improving Recognition, Evaluation, and Reward Systems*

✓ Develop a hybrid performance evaluation model, combining AI-based analytics (quantitative metrics) with human review (qualitative insights).
✓ Include creativity, collaboration, and innovation as key performance indicators (KPIs).
✓ Diversify rewards: beyond financial bonuses, introduce symbolic rewards, internal recognition, and professional growth opportunities.

▪ *Expected Effect:* Builds trust, fairness, and emotional commitment through transparent and meaningful recognition.

- *Solution 3: Developing Digital Competence and Lifelong Learning*

✓ Establish the "Digital Skill Academy – MH Raroma Learning Hub" to provide continuous training in AI, design thinking, and digital project management.
✓ Encourage internal learning communities and peer mentoring to exchange experiences and best practices.
✓ Partner with universities and experts for advanced certifications (Google, Adobe, Coursera, etc.).

▪ *Expected Effect:* Strengthens digital confidence, reduces technostress, and fosters a learning-oriented culture.

- *Solution 4: Building a Human-Centered Organizational Culture*

✓ Reaffirm human values in the company's vision, mission, and core culture statements.
✓ Promote a positive feedback culture that values empathy, creativity, and teamwork.
✓ Implement employee well-being programs such as flexible working hours, "Digital Detox Days," and team bonding activities.

▪ *Expected Effect:* Enhances engagement, loyalty, and psychological well-being while preventing burnout.

- *Solution 5: Strengthening Transformational Leadership*

✓ Train mid-level and senior managers in transformational and digital leadership skills.
✓ Encourage leaders to demonstrate vision, empathy, and adaptability when guiding employees through digital change.
✓ Apply a coaching-style leadership approach—mentoring employees to discover and develop their creative potential.

▪ *Expected Effect:* Increases trust, cohesion, and motivation through inspiration and human connection.

➢ *Implementation Roadmap*

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Table 3 Implementation Roadmap

Phase	Time Frame	Key Focus	Expected Outcome
Short-term (0–6 months)	Redesign job descriptions; pilot hybrid evaluation; hold AI awareness workshops	Higher awareness, reduced fear of AI	
Medium-term (6–12 months)	Launch Digital Skill Academy; train leaders; introduce new reward system	Improved motivation and performance	
Long-term (12–24 months)	Embed human-centered culture; formalize digital learning; expand hybrid performance system	Sustainable engagement and productivity	

VI. CONCLUSION

To summarize, optimizing employee motivation in the digital era requires more than simply implementing technology—it demands a strategic balance between digital advancement and human empowerment.

The proposed solutions for MH Raroma aim to transform its HR management model from *control-based* to *empowerment-based*, and from *performance measurement* to *human development*. Motivation should not be about working harder, but about working with meaning, inspiration, and sustainable well-being.

When technology becomes a partner rather than a rival, and when leadership nurtures trust and growth, motivation becomes self-sustaining — enabling both people and organizations to thrive in the age of artificial intelligence.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the single-case, qualitative design enabled deep contextual insights, it limits generalizability. Future research could employ mixed-method approaches or comparative case studies across industries and countries to validate and refine the *Work Motivation Optimization* framework. Additionally, longitudinal studies may explore how motivation evolves as AI maturity increases and human–machine interaction deepens.

FINAL REMARK

In the AI era, the essence of management lies not in automating human behavior but in re-humanizing technology. Organizations that succeed will be those that treat AI as a partner in nurturing human potential — optimizing motivation, not mechanizing it.

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APPENDICES

➢ *Appendix A. Interview Protocol (Semi-Structured Questions)*

- Purpose: To explore employees' perceptions of AI adoption and its effects on their motivation, engagement, and well-being.

No.	Question	Objective
1	How has AI changed your daily work tasks?	Understand perceived transformation in job design
2	What aspects of AI tools make your work easier or harder?	Identify motivators and demotivators
3	How do you feel when using AI to support creative work?	Capture emotional and psychological reactions
4	What motivates you to continue learning new AI tools?	Assess learning drive and digital readiness
5	How does your manager or team leader support you in adapting to new technologies?	Examine leadership and support systems
6	What factors reduce your motivation at work recently?	Explore barriers and burnout
7	In your opinion, what could the company do to improve motivation in the AI era?	Suggest improvement strategies

➢ *Appendix B. Thematic Coding Framework*

Main Theme	Sub-Themes / Codes	Illustrative Quotes
1. AI as Dual-Edge Catalyst	Efficiency gain, creativity, fear of replacement	"AI helps me create faster but sometimes I feel less needed."
2. Digital Autonomy & Skills	Self-learning, experimentation, confidence	"I'm proud when I master a new AI tool and show it to others."
3. Recognition & Fairness	Algorithmic evaluation, transparent reward, bias	"The system counts likes, but not creativity."
4. Leadership Support	Transformational leadership, empathy, communication	"Our manager always reminds us that AI helps, not replaces."
5. Technostress & Fatigue	Cognitive overload, burnout symptoms, digital detox	"After hours of switching tools, my mind feels tired."

➢ *Appendix C. Summary of Analytical Framework*

Construct	Measurement/Indicators (Qualitative)	Linked Theory
AI Adoption	Perceived usefulness, learning difficulty	UTAUT2, TAM
Job Design & Autonomy	Task significance, creative discretion	JCM, SDT
Recognition & Reward	Fairness, feedback, transparency	Herzberg, Vroom
Digital Skills & Growth	Learning opportunities, competence	SDT, JD–R
Organizational Support	Leadership, culture, empowerment	Transformational Leadership
Technostress / Burnout	Overload, anxiety, fatigue	JD–R, Burnout Theory
Employee Motivation	Intrinsic and extrinsic drivers	Maslow, SDT
Engagement & Performance	Enthusiasm, creativity, quality output	JD–R, Work Engagement Theory