

LEADERSHIP IN AI

**Leadership in the Age of AI: Theoretical Frameworks and Ethical Strategies  
for Organizational Integration**

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### **Abstract**

The use of AI technology continues to grow, both theoretically and practically, affecting all systems throughout organizations. This paper explores the intersection of leadership theories and artificial intelligence within organizational frameworks. It highlights a significant research gap in current leadership research that fails to address the effects of AI integration on organizations, leadership, and ethical considerations. Through a comprehensive literature review, this paper examines leadership theories, such as Upper Echelon Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Strategic Leadership Theory, through the lens of AI integration in organizations. The findings emphasize the need for leaders to adopt AI technology to stay competitive, enhance decision-making, and foster innovation while mitigating ethical concerns. Furthermore, this paper offers policy recommendations for developing AI implementation frameworks, advocating for increase AI literacy among leaders, engagement of stakeholders, and the establishment of governance policies.

*Keywords: AI integration, Leadership theories, Organization, AI literacy, Leadership*

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### **Leadership in the Age of AI: Theoretical Frameworks and Ethical Strategies for Organizational Integration**

The use of technology in organizations continues to develop rapidly, bringing practical and ethical concerns to leaders (Alnamrouti et al., 2022; Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2025). Alnamrouti et al. (2022) define organizations as businesses whose primary goals are to assist society to counteract gaps in services. Artificial intelligence (AI) is gaining traction as a tool within organizations, assisting with decision making and data analysis, providing opportunities and challenges to organizational leaders (Borkovich et al., 2024; Strukelj & Dankova, 2025). According to Huber and Alexy (2025), AI entails all artificial technology that performs actions that were once exclusive to natural intelligence, including machine learning, natural language processing, computer vision, robotics, and expert systems (Balasubramanian et al., 2022; Borkovich et al., 2024; Daniel et al., 2025; Langeveldt, 2024). Going beyond traditional technology by utilizing large-scale data, AI parallels human cognition to search, analyze, and make decisions (Borkovich et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021). AI allows leaders to explore a wide range of opportunities, with the ability to enhance economic resiliency and reshape organizational task division (Huber & Alexy, 2025).

Leadership theories historically focus on emotional intelligence, influence, and decision-making, and often highlight characteristic traits of leadership roles (Frimpong, 2025). With the advancement of AI technology, current leadership theories struggle to account for the impact of technology on organizational processes and often overlook the effects on leadership autonomy related to technological and AI advancement (Frimpong, 2025). As AI has a wide-reaching impact on organizational operations and processes, changes to structure and decision-making offers opportunities for efficiency and raise ethical concerns (Li et al., 2021).

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There is a significant research gap in structured theoretical frameworks to integrate AI systems into organizations to assist with strategic leadership. Much of the existing research examines the improvement of analytical capacity while addressing ethical concerns within businesses and corporations; however, there is limited research surrounding strategic leadership and the successful integration of AI (Alnamrouti et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). In addition, various AI-based research focuses on users, students, and developers, while leaders have often been overlooked in research, despite their critical impact on strategic decision-making within organizations (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Pinski et al., 2024).

Leaders are urged to encourage the adoption of AI to remain competitive, as those who fail to effectively use these systems will have disadvantages in the long term (Pinski et al., 2024). Utilizing AI in organizations can help identify trends that allow leaders to make decisions with deeper understanding, and help empower creativity, innovation, and relationships (Frimpong, 2025; Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2025). The integration of AI in decision making can also raise ethical concerns, highlighting the importance of legality and regulation (Strukelj & Dankova, 2025). When integrating AI into leadership practices, leaders need to ensure that they uphold ethical standards, align technology with organizational values, and support employees' well-being (Frimpong, 2025).

Although AI provides organizations with significant opportunities for task automation, and data-driven decision-making, current research struggles to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework to assist leaders with integrating AI systems that aligns with organizational values, addresses employee well-being, and mitigates ethical concerns (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). This gap leaves organizational leaders without guidance on how to integrate the practical benefits of AI while addressing ethical and human-centered challenges.

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This paper examines various human-centric approaches using leadership theories, addressing ethical challenges, and providing policy recommendations for organizational leaders to introduce and implement AI technology. A literature review of leadership perspectives and AI technology was conducted, identifying Upper Echelon Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Strategic Leadership Theory as consistent in AI research. These four theories will be analyzed to guide organizational recommendations for integrating AI technology. The objective was to better understand how each perspective affects the integration of AI technology within organizations, identify ethical implications and mitigation strategies of AI technology, and recommend policies and procedures to integrate AI into organizational structures. Interpretation of the literature suggests that there are consistent patterns of ethical and strategic AI integration within organizations. Findings indicate that efficient and successful implementation of AI technology includes training and communication with stakeholders to decrease AI aversion and mitigate risks and concerns within the organization (Bigman & Gray, 2018). The paper concludes with several practical recommendations for organizations to implement AI technology strategically and ethically.

### **Literature Review**

#### *AI Systems*

The history of AI began in 1950 when the Turing Machine was introduced to mimic human intelligence, followed by the term artificial intelligence being coined by McCarthy in 1956 after the development of programming language (McCarthy, 1956, as cited in Borkovich et al., 2024; Russell, 2019). The early developments of robotics and cognitive symbolic reasoning by Minsky led to the advancement of AI programming mimicking human problem-solving in the 1970s by Simon and Newell (as cited in Borkovich et al., 2024; Russell, 2019). Furthermore,

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Samuel (1959) developed algorithms for computers to play checkers and advanced machine self-learning, which most recently contributed to breakthroughs in image and speech recognition (as cited in Borkovich et al., 2024; Abada & Lambin, 2023; Russell, 2019). The evolution of AI research in deep learning, large data analysis, and deep fakes, among others, continues to raise societal questions and ethical concerns (Borkovich et al., 2024).

AI systems encompass a variety of technologies that can be utilized by organizations, including “machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, and computer vision” (Li et al., 2021, 1605). Many AI platforms can be identified as generative AI or predictive AI (Daniel et al., 2025). Generative AI uses patterns from large datasets to continually improve the generation of outputs. Predictive AI uses data within an algorithm to adjust variables and achieve pre-defined success measures and maximize rewards through statistical analysis and forecasting (Daniel et al., 2025; Huber & Alexy, 2025; Russell, 2019). Predictive AI has been used for decades, in applications such as autocorrect, spam filtering, fraud detection, and weather forecasting (Daniel et al., 2025). Utilizing AI technology allows strategic leaders to receive recommendations that influence decision-making, automate tasks, and optimize workforce performance (Balasubramanian et al., 2022; Frimpong, 2025; Huber & Alexy, 2025; Li et al., 2021).

Organizations can utilize AI as a tool in various situations. AI systems can provide value to organizations by managing existing inefficiencies (Pinski, Hofmann, & Benlian, 2024). Routine operational decisions, such as customer relationship management, scheduling, document scanning, and data analysis, can enhance leadership effectiveness (Daniel et al., 2025; Frimpong, 2025; Huber & Alexy, 2025). AI allows organizational leaders to evaluate large data sets and can assist leaders in identifying trends and evaluating effectiveness (Daniel et al., 2025; Frimpong,

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2025). AI can help organizations plan events, organize calendars, and enhance marketing and customer service (Daniel et al., 2025). Utilizing AI augmentation to automate sub-tasks can free human leaders up to focus on more productive tasks and decisions (Frimpong, 2025; Huber & Alexy, 2025; Li et al., 2021; Mahajan, 2025).

Furthermore, leaders can employ AI to help make complex strategic decisions that could have long-term implications, such as business planning and market comparison (Daniel et al., 2025; Li et al., 2021; Strukelj & Dankova, 2025). According to Huber & Alexy (2025), using AI for strategic analysis provides the strongest impact on the roles of leadership. Brock and von Wagenheim (2019) documented that organizations successfully implementing AI technology reported a 19% increase in efficiency in operations (as cited in Strukelj & Dankova, 2025). However, these organizations also reported issues with ethical and governance oversight, which will be noted further in this paper.

### ***Leadership Theories***

As AI technology continues to grow in organizations, leaders need to understand the capabilities that organizations need to thrive (Tigre et al., 2025). Leadership theories continue to evolve as the use of AI technology increases (Frimpong, 2025). Traditional theories, such as Upper Echelons Theory, Transformational Leadership, Stakeholder Theory, and Strategic Leadership all provide valuable insights for strategic decision-making (Oancea et al., 2025). However, AI integration highlights the need for reevaluation of leadership theory alignment. As to date, there is not a strong unified theory of implementing AI as a leader (Frimpong, 2025; Tigre et al., 2025).

Tigre et al. (2025) noted that since information technology's emergence in the late 1990s, there has been a need for a new form of leadership. This leadership, known as "e-leadership," is

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utilized by leaders to expand the organizational reach, using digital technology to influence attitudes, behaviors, and performance of individuals and organizations (Tigre et al., 2025). E-leadership has increased the need for organizations to adjust business models, leadership structures and theories to continue to operate and succeed in the digital domain (Tigre et al., 2025).

Upper echelons theory (UET) examines the personal characteristics of leaders and the influence on strategic decision-making (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). C-suite leaders and boards of directors are often considered to be the top management teams (TMT) within organizations, and the characteristics of those leaders are critical to strategic planning and decision-making (Pinski et al., 2024). Decisions within organizations are made depending on how leaders perceive the organizational environment and how leaders allocate their attention to specific resources and tasks (Pinski et al., 2024). These characteristics of leaders include their expertise, values, and skills (Pinski et al., 2024).

Transformational leadership examines the leader's ability to motivate employees through innovation and change to achieve significant goals (Frimpong, 2025). Leaders serve as change agents and build relationships with their employees to achieve organizational success (Frimpong, 2025). Researchers identified factors of intelligence, individual consideration, and motivation for innovation as traits of transformational leaders (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001).

Stakeholder theory, originally noted by Freeman (1984) and expanded in additional research, stresses the relationship between a business and any entity that has a stake in the organization ("Stakeholder Theory", 2025). This theory notes that organizational leaders need to consider all entities affected by any decisions that are made. Organizational stakeholders can

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include board members, staff, clients, suppliers, investors, and the community in which the organization serves (“What is Stakeholder Theory?”, 2024).

Strategic leadership theory is often defined as a framework for how leaders influence organizations through the development and implementation of goals that adapt to changing environments (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Davies & Davies, 2004). Leaders who demonstrate strategic decision-making, proactive behaviors, and adaptability are better able to focus on long-term objectives (Abrudan et al., 2022; Khairullah et al., 2025). Strategic leaders, according to Ali and Anwar (2021), utilize tools and make decisions that not only heighten their current competitive advantages, but also explore new opportunities. Abrudan et al. (2022) note that strategic leaders sense shifts in organizational demands and proactively adjust strategies. Hambrick (1989) presented a framework that highlights the responsibilities of strategic leaders, including organizational management, behavior, and processes (as cited in Huber & Alexy, 2025). Samimi et al. (2022) identified specific tasks for strategic leaders within organizations: strategic decision-making, stakeholder engagement, HR management, employee motivation and influence, information management, operations and administration, social and ethical management, and conflict management.

Frimpong (2025) identified several ways that AI challenges traditional leadership theories and evaluated how to expand upon these theories. “Leaders need to integrate AI-drive insights while preserving the essential human aspects of leadership, such as trust, motivation, and ethical decision-making” (Frimpong, 2025, p. 190). According to traditional leadership theories, leaders make decisions using intuition and experience; however, leaders using augmented AI technology make data-driven decisions supported by AI (Frimpong, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025; Mahajan, 2025). Emerging leadership models are being highlighted in research to expand traditional

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theories and incorporate AI integration into leadership. AI-augmented leadership uses a human-centered approach combined with AI insights to make decisions. This emphasizes the necessity of human interpretation and engagement with utilizing AI insights (Frimpong, 2025; Mahajan, 2025). Algorithmic leadership highlights task delegation, performance monitoring, and evaluations. This may diminish traditional job roles, and this model raises concerns about the future of human managers (Frimpong, 2025). Distributed leadership decentralizes decision-making and decreases the traditional management hierarchy. This model allows for shared leadership among team members throughout the organization and allows staff to adapt quickly when making decisions while fostering a collaborative organizational culture (Frimpong, 2025).

Strukelj and Dankova (2025) identified the MER model of integral governance and management as a comprehensive framework to integrate leadership and AI systems. The MER model examines various levels of management within an organization and the factors within those management levels that assist the long-term success of an organization. Consisting of several elements, including governance, organizational environment, and success, Strukelj and Dankova (2025) identified characteristics to successfully integrate AI technology within organizations. The highest level of strategic leadership includes boards of directors and other entities involved in policies, mission, and vision of an organization. Integration of AI systems can serve as a tool to promote innovation at a macro level. The next level, consisting of senior management and C-Suite leaders, can utilize AI systems to identify, assess, and evaluate development strategies, financial sustainability, and future growth and success. The final level of strategic leadership, tactical, and operational management is responsible for the allocation of resources into structural parts of an organization. The incorporation of AI systems can assist with

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routine decisions and proposed enhancement to services and processes (Strukelj & Dankova, 2025).

### *Implementing AI*

A major determinant in the successful implementation of AI technology in organizations is the technological readiness of the organization (Pinski et al., 2024; Yanamala, 2024b). Not all organizations are prepared for the integration of AI systems (Yanamala, 2024b). Incorporating AI into organizations can affect individual processes and may require framework restructuring throughout (Huber & Alexy, 2025). If employees and other stakeholders do not have a clear understanding of AI technology and systems planning, there may be a greater aversion to the incorporation of AI (Bigman & Gray, 2018; Borkovich et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021). If leaders cannot adequately describe the process of algorithms, this becomes problematic for organizations (Daniel et al., 2025). Leaders need to ensure that all members within the organization are willing to engage with AI, and organizations have prepared and trained them to implement these new systems, to build trust and avoid algorithm aversion (Huber & Alexy, 2025; Tigre et al., 2024).

Li et al. (2021) highlights the importance of gaining support from the board of directors within an organization to implement AI technology. UET suggests that boards can constrain the decision-making processes of leaders within an organization, and having buy-in from board members can assist leaders in implementing AI (Davenport & Mittal, 2023; Li et al., 2021). AI systems may change the dynamics of the organizational system, which should motivate boards to participate in the implementation of AI (Li et al., 2021).

When implementing AI, researchers recommend that an organization create a strategic AI orientation process (Li et al., 2021; Pinski et al., 2024). AI orientation is considered the overall strategic direction associated with implementing AI within organizations (Davenport & Mittal,

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2023; Li et al., 2021; Pinski et al., 2024). This orientation provides a structured framework for leaders to better make decisions regarding AI systems, and guide investment, management, and application within their organization (Li et al., 2021). In addition, Li et al. (2021) recommend developing standard operating procedures to help support the transition to AI technology. As most AI is currently seen as “black box” organizations will need to specify policies and procedures surrounding AI technology, including data evaluation, decision-making, required skills, risk mitigation, and standard operating procedures (Li et al., 2021).

AI technology has the potential for taking on specific leadership and employee tasks, requiring organizations to reevaluate necessary skills and processes without excessive disruption to organizational culture (Frimpong, 2025; Li et al., 2021). UET notes that leaders can play a significant role in the outcomes of AI implementation because it has the capacity to alter the culture of the organization (Li et al., 2021). Leadership should take the initiative to introduce AI positively into workplace systems (Borkovich et al., 2024). Organizations that ensure employees are prepared, and resources are made available, increasing the ease of transition to AI within an organization (Borkovich et al., 2024).

Research has identified that human resource (HR) departments are a critical starting point for the introduction and implementation of AI technology (Pinski et al., 2024). Roughly 83% organizations use some form of AI in hiring processes (Daniel et al., 2025). AI systems enable organizations to examine workforce data, predict future trends about staff acquisition, training, and retention (Khan, 2024; Yanamala, 2024b). Researchers have identified prediction models that examine job transitions and allow leaders to forecast employment flows within and between organizations, enabling proactive resource allocation decisions (Yanamala, 2024b). Frimpong (2025) notes that AI can streamline performance evaluation, leading to increased workforce

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performance, productivity, and employee satisfaction. Analyzing internal skill sets and external market trends allows leaders to identify critical talent gaps and enhance employment decision-making (Khan, 2024; Yanamala, 2024a, 2024b). Furthermore, AI can assist in succession planning within organizations, ensuring that qualified individuals efficiently fill leadership roles. AI systems can identify internal employees most likely to succeed in leadership roles by continuously monitoring performance and learning and recommending strategic development programs to prepare for career advancement (Khan, 2024; Yanamala, 2024b). The integration of AI in hiring practices allows for leaders to hire AI literate employees, thus improving the technology systems (Pinski et al., 2024).

Moreover, leaders are more equipped to tailor management approaches to address needs and concerns, and better engage and motivate employees (Frimpong, 2025; Yanamala, 2024b). Traditional workforce analysis relies heavily on static planning, often resulting in underutilized talent and overworked teams (Yanamala, 2024a, 2024b). AI systems can assign tasks to employees and teams based on real-time organization needs, matching current talent with needed tasks, optimizing organizational resources and human capital, and reducing burnout and turnover (Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2025; Tigre et al., 2025; Yanamala, 2024b). Previous research suggests that leaders consider AI implementation ability within the HR structure of the organization, as it is a critical factor to implement AI capabilities (Pinski et al., 2024).

### ***Organization Impact of AI Implementation***

People are more likely to trust human expertise than AI, leading to algorithm aversion (Bigman & Gray, 2018; Huber & Alexy, 2025). Researchers have emphasized that a lack of transparency in data is a major component of algorithm aversion and further exacerbated by black-box algorithms (Li et al., 2021; Martin, 2019). AI literacy has been identified as a key

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characteristic in the adoption of AI technology within an organization (Pinski et al., 2024). AI literacy is described as one's proficiency in using AI, and the ability to evaluate, communicate, and collaborate with AI technology (Pinski et al., 2024). For organizational leaders, a broad understanding of AI processes can assist in the implementation of AI technology within the organization (Pinski et al., 2024). This allows for leaders to better understand the advantages of engaging AI in the organization and enables the mitigation of risk and costs related to the implementation of these technologies (Pinski et al., 2024).

Additionally, the attitudes of leaders within the organization regarding AI can influence the implementation of this technology (Strukelj & Dankova, 2025). UET discusses the reflection of leaders' characteristics within an organization, including adaptability and innovation (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Previous research suggests that a leader's influence can help to increase organizational buy-in to strategic decisions, including the incorporation of AI technology (Khairullah et al., 2025; Pinski et al., 2024).

As organizational decision-making occurs at various management levels, the implementation of AI can influence the operational, governance, and strategic leadership (Strukelj & Dankova, 2025). Huber and Alexy (2025) noted the importance of identifying the roles of strategic leaders and the implementation of AI technology. Leaders need to display an acceptance of changes within systems, as well as present an active interest in preparing stakeholders for the change (Huber & Alexy, 2025).

Previous research has shown concern that AI may limit human judgment in leadership roles, especially surrounding decision-making (Frimpong, 2025; Langeveldt, 2024). The use of AI technology in for-profit companies raises the possibility that machine learning could replace leadership positions, and that the conventional structure of leadership could potentially become

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obsolete (Balasubramanian et al., 2022; Frimpong, 2025). This also highlights ethical concerns that need attention by leaders and organizations, including transparency, algorithmic bias, decision-making influence, and accountability (Frimpong, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025; Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2025).

Various research suggests that there is a consistent concern regarding the loss of jobs within an organization if AI technology is implemented (Huber & Alexy, 2025). Emerging AI systems may react to environmental changes independently and revise algorithms and logic, which could result in removal of human interaction, including strategic decision-making (Davenport & Mittal, 2023; Huber & Alexy, 2025). “Employees are distressed, troubled, threatened, fearful, and even enraged at the prospect of replacement and job loss; while an overly confident Leadership [sic] is chastised, disparaged, and denigrated by employees” (Borkovich et al., 2024, 206). Russell (2019) has identified several areas in which AI has influenced the workforce. Positions like bank tellers, manufacturing, sales, and clerical workers have experienced a loss in jobs, and may push wages toward the poverty level (Russell, 2019). Despite the substantial increase in AI technology utilization, there is limited research to suggest that there is a significant effect on the labor market (Huber & Alexy, 2025). AI should be utilized as a tool to help support leaders and employees, not replace them (Frimpong, 2025).

The implementation of AI systems can impact how strategic leaders improve existing organizational processes and help to develop new processes (Huber & Alexy, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025). Changes in organizational processes and strategic orientation affect both organizational outcomes and value, but also employees, clients, and communities (Li et al., 2021; Pinski et al., 2024). As strategic leaders have a responsibility for an organization, they hold the

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responsibility to address when to introduce AI technology to the organization and ensure that stakeholders are ready to utilize these systems (Huber & Alexy, 2025).

### Analysis

The literature reviewed regarding the implementation and utilization of AI technology can be used to highlight several themes that examine the impact of AI technology on leadership and organizations. The themes discussed herein are examined through three distinct perspectives: decision making, human capital readiness, and governance implementation, using four foundational leadership theories: Upper Echelon Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Strategic Leadership Theory.

**Table 1**

*Analytical Framework: Leadership Theories and AI Integration*

Organizational Theme	Upper Echelon Theory (UET)	Transformational Leadership Theory	Stakeholder Theory	Strategic Leadership Theory
<b>Decision Making</b>	Top management teams (TMT) are responsible for decision-making regarding technology	Focuses on using AI to make data-driven decisions rather than relying solely on intuition and experience	Highlights the need for boards and other stakeholders to support AI to mitigate AI aversion	Leaders utilize AI to anticipate trends, face challenges, and make proactive strategic decisions
<b>Human Capital and AI Readiness</b>	Focuses on organizations with specific technology-focused roles	Recommends using AI to automate remedial tasks, allowing staff opportunities for more creativity and innovation	Focuses on the role of leaders to ethically communicate AI integration effects and provide training to decrease AI aversion	Highlights the need for leaders to increase their own AI literacy to understand the impact of AI systems and maintain competitiveness
<b>Organizational AI Governance</b>	Responsibility for developing AI orientation policies is often placed on technology-focused roles	Requires leaders to work with staff to create a comprehensive governance approach to build trust and maintain a positive workplace	Urges organizations to consider the diversity of stakeholders and examine AI literacy to keep integration human-centric	Recommends creating policies and procedures for quick responses to threats and opportunities to ensure ethical and successful AI integration

### *Decision Making with AI*

Traditional leadership skills and capabilities are highlighted in Upper Echelon Theory, noting that top level leaders are responsible for decision making regarding AI technology (Tigre et al., 2025). While research on UET has identified the effects of leaders on organizational outcomes, expanded updates to UET have highlighted theoretical limitations (Li et al., 2021). Organizational leaders may face limitations on their decision-making autonomy due to internal and external pressures, including regulations, organizational structures, board power dynamics, and strong societal norms (Li et al., 2021). While UET focuses on the characteristics of top leaders, transformational leadership offers insight into employee engagement when integrating AI systems.

Transformational leadership theory notes that leaders should highlight the ability of AI to be used as a tool within an organization. Using AI technology to speed up processes and automate remedial tasks provides employees with opportunities to focus on strategic and creative work. Promoting new ways of thinking allows staff to buy in to AI implementation and help to reduce AI resistance (Hadley, 2025). Furthermore, when leaders create a culture of continuous learning and experimentation with AI technology, staff are empowered to explore new and unconventional solutions to AI-driven insights. This creates opportunities for professional development for staff, builds trust within the organizational culture, and builds upon the human capital of the organization (Sangar, 2025; “Seven Leadership Practices”, 2025).

Scholars have emphasized boards as being factors in limiting the discretion of leaders; however, boards play a crucial role in shaping AI investments, as highlighted in stakeholder theory research (Li et al., 2021). The responsibilities of boards include assisting organizations in business strategies and monitoring the progress and outcomes of said strategies, and support for

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AI technology will help to mitigate stakeholder AI aversion (Bigman & Gray, 2018; Li et al., 2021).

Traditional planning methods often are limited due to their reliance on reactive approaches and historical data, leading to forecasting challenges in organizational staffing (Yanamala, 2024b). Organizations require data-driven workforce planning, and AI allows organizations to accurately identify skill gaps and manage development and succession planning in real time (Yanamala, 2024b). Strategic leadership theory posits that strategic leaders can utilize AI technology to anticipate trends, face challenges, and make strategic decisions (Tigre et al., 2025). Understanding these trends will allow leaders to guide the vision of the organization in response (Tigre et al., 2025).

### ***Human Capital AI Readiness***

Human capital is one of the largest concerns when implementing AI technology. There is a widely held general idea that with AI technology comes the loss of jobs, and a reduction in human capital. Leaders need to ensure that staff are prepared for the implementation of AI augmentation to help support the human capital within the organization. Tigre et al. (2025) recommend that leaders provide staff with an environment to safely take risks, increase teamwork, build trust, and share ideas while providing learning opportunities to increase AI readiness.

Current AI research using UET focuses on the roles of leaders, often overlooking organizations that do not have roles designed specifically for technology or information systems (Pinski et al., 2024). As many companies have positions specific to technological advances (chief information officers, information systems departments, and other technology-focused roles), much of the AI research that cites UET highlights strategies for these leaders. “Current upper

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echelons research assumes that CIOs are present, and typically focuses on CIO characteristics such as personal attributes, job contents, and reporting structures” (Li et al., 2021, 1606).

Transformational leadership theory recommends that leaders provide opportunities for employees to utilize AI to automate remedial tasks, which will allow for more creativity and innovation in their positions. Huber & Alexy (2025) recommend that leaders consider working with AI as an automation tool within the current organizational structures, as this can increase effectiveness, efficiency, and innovation (Khairullah et al, 2025; Kolbjornsrud et al., 2016). AI systems miss various interpersonal values which can lead to employees becoming disengaged and unmotivated (Huber & Alexy, 2025). Leaders need to ensure that employees feel respected, connected, and that their talents are being utilized, while also gaining efficient and expected organizational performance (Huber & Alexy, 2025; Tigre et al., 2025; Yanamala, 2024a). Integrating AI readiness empowers staff at any organizational level to be heard, participate, and be engaged in the implementation of new technologies (Tigre et al., 2025).

Stakeholder theory highlights the importance of aligning AI-augmented decision making with the interests of stakeholders within the organization (Mahajan, 2025; Strukelj & Dankova, 2025). Within an organization, leaders need to consider stakeholders when identifying value and strategies for implementing AI technology (Pinski et al., 2024). As previously mentioned, AI aversion may be influenced by the fear of job loss within organizations. It is important that leaders ethically communicate the effects of AI integration to employees and other stakeholders, as well as the organizational plans to prepare and train staff, and provide new opportunities for employment within the organization (Borkovich et al., 2024).

Strategic leadership theory and stakeholder theory both suggest that leaders need to understand the impact of AI systems on organizations to keep up with this rapidly evolving

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technology (Huber & Alexy, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025). Increasing the AI literacy of leaders is crucial for effective implementation of AI technology (Pinski et al., 2024). Huber & Alexy (2025) suggest that organizational outputs, structure, and management roles could be affected through the implementation of AI. Borkovich et al. (2024) note that AI literacy and communication build a culture of trust which empowers staff to further invest in organizational success. Leaders need to ensure that AI technology integration aligns with organizational values and staff experience and is used appropriately throughout the organization (Borkovich et al., 2024; Frimpong, 2025). Some research also recommends that organizations consider shifting to AI becoming a core part of an organization, allowing for organizations to become leaders in respective fields (Huber & Alexy, 2025).

Despite the concerns regarding job loss, humans will still be needed for data training and intervention (Balasubramanian et al., 2022; Huber & Alexy, 2025; Tigre et al., 2024). AI systems lack several vital human aspects, including emotional intelligence and moral judgment (Frimpong, 2025). AI technology is vastly dependent on the volume and quality of data provided to the algorithm and will produce flawed or biased results if the human component is not readily available to respond (Huber & Alexy, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025). For example, in 2023, a judge fined two lawyers for using AI technology to cite a case that did not exist, noting that the attorneys had a duty to mitigate the inaccuracies of their filings (Daniel et al., 2025). The human component allows for the anticipation and reaction to various uncertainties within the data (Huber & Alexy, 2025). Huber & Alexy (2025) suggest that AI technology is unlikely to collect enough data training to adequately evaluate and represent the real world. “The reliability of results generated by AI systems will always be contingent on the human experts creating and

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monitoring them” (Huber & Alexy, 2025, p. 19). Ultimately, it will be the decision of an organization’s strategic leaders to decide the best use of AI systems (Huber & Alexy, 2025).

### *Organizational AI Governance*

In Upper Echelon Theory, researchers often put the responsibility of developing AI orientation policies and procedures on technology-focused roles, which can cause concerns for organizations without those employees (Li et al., 2021). Assigning AI to only one role and requiring only that role to be AI-literate hinders the integration of AI (Pinski et al., 2024). Organizational leaders, including boards of directors and other strategically identified staff, are in the best position to identify resources and capabilities that are relevant to AI implementation, connecting to stakeholder and transformational leadership theories (Li et al., 2021).

Transformational leadership theory suggests that implementing AI in organizations will require leaders to work with employees and other stakeholders to create a comprehensive approach. Borkovich et al. (2024) recommend formally adopting policies and procedures, and providing well-defined governance surround controls and audits, while also addressing staff concerns to efficiently implement AI systems. The need for organizational trust, communication, and collaboration can ease the transition and maintain a positive workplace for employees (Borkovich et al., 2024). “When employees feel respected, valued, appreciated, and worthy of new opportunities and training, they will return positive feelings to management” (Borkovich et al., 2024, 211).

Stakeholder theory urges organizations to consider the diversity of the TMT and examine AI literacy throughout leadership (Li et al., 2021; Pinski et al., 2024; Tigre et al., 2025). Investment in skill development programs, such as AI literacy, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal communication, will help leaders to collaborate and engage in relationship-building

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with teams throughout the organization, keeping decision-making human-centric (Frimpong, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025; Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2025; Yanamala, 2024b).

Strategic leadership theory recommends that leaders create policies and procedures to provide quick responses to threats and opportunities will help the organization be more successful when utilizing AI technology (Tigre et al., 2025). Leaders need to take calculated risks and make informed decisions, often in a fast-paced environment, while ethically maintaining the mission and vision of the organization, and guiding the staff to respond accordingly (Tigre et al., 2025).

**Table 2**

*Mapping Emerging Themes to Foundation Leadership Theories*

Emerging Theme	Primary Theoretical Relevance	Key Challenge	Required Action
<b>Decision Making</b>	Strategic Leadership Theory; Upper Echelon Theory	Maintaining human-centered implementation; Ensuring AI literacy; AI augmentation	Formalizing AI orientation; Increasing staff AI literacy
<b>Human Capital and AI Readiness</b>	Transformational Leadership Theory; Stakeholder Theory	AI aversion; Organizational culture	Transparent communication; Professional Development; Human-centered AI implementation
<b>Organizational AI Governance</b>	Stakeholder Theory; Strategic Leadership Theory	Transparency; Reducing algorithmic bias; Ensuring ethical compliance	Developing internal governance frameworks; Regular third-party audits; Defining decision roles

### **Ethical Implications**

Leaders need to understand and consider various ethical concerns when deciding to incorporate AI technology into organizations (Daniel et al., 2025). Data privacy and security, transparency, and human job displacement are all concerns that have been raised in research regarding AI integration (Borkovich et al., 2024; Khairullah et al., 2025; Strukelj & Dankova, 2025; Yanamala, 2024b). AI technology can be easily manipulated and misused in organizations, including unnecessary control and surveillance, extortion, and data manipulation due to text and

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data mining abilities (Daniel et al., 2025; Russell, 2019). Stakeholder privacy is a significant concern when utilizing AI technology. With the increase of AI technology in organizations, leaders need to ensure that these systems are being utilized responsibly and ethically, and pay close attention to bias, transparency, and other concerns in making decisions (Borkovich et al., 2024; Frimpong, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025). Moreover, it is important to note that AI system integration can significantly influence organizational dynamics and create new challenges for leadership ethics (Strukelj & Dankova, 2025).

When considering the implementation of AI systems within organizations, leaders need to ensure that this technology aligns with the goals and vision of the organization (Frimpong, 2025). AI provides extensive and valuable analytics, allowing leaders to make informed, data-driven decisions, instead of relying solely on intuition (Frimpong, 2025). Leaders are tasked with interpreting this data in organizational and ethical contexts, which may raise concerns due to potential biases within AI training data (Frimpong, 2025). “It’s extremely hard to predict what certain AI models will learn, and even harder to solve for biases that are baked in at the front end of their creation” (Daniel et al., 2025, pp. 11-12). AI orientation may affect perceptions of job positions within the organization (Pinski et al., 2024).

While AI technology appears to be neutral on the surface, biased decision-making is considered a significant ethical concern in AI-influenced leadership (Daniel et al., 2025; Frimpong, 2025). Because AI systems rely heavily on the quality of data training to run algorithms, they run the risk of being trained on biased data and may perpetuate inequalities (Daniel et al., 2025; Frimpong, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025; Martin, 2019; Yanamala, 2024b). Daniel et al. (2025) highlights several reports of AI bias against marginalized groups, noting that data and other information that AI uses to train is likely to be biased. “So far, there have been

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credible reports of AI-based discrimination in the domain of hiring, housing, financial services, and facial recognition” (Daniel et al., 2025, p. 7). Examples include Google’s algorithms mistakenly identifying a photo of two Black people as gorillas in 2015; a no-touch soap dispenser not dispensing for darker skin tones in 2017; and the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) program misclassifying Black defendants at a higher risk of recidivism in 2016 (Daniel et al., 2025).

Daniel et al. (2025) note that “information being fed to these programs is a mirror of the ideas that are held by society today” (p. 6). AI-based decision making could amplify challenges surrounding accountability, transparency, and trust (Daniel et al., 2025). For example, biased algorithms may inadvertently lead to hiring discrimination and inaccurate performance evaluations (Frimpong, 2025). It is crucial that leaders evaluate AI training data and implement policies and strategies to minimize the potential for bias (Frimpong, 2025; Tigre et al., 2025).

Leaders need to examine the benefits of AI augmentation and the ethical implications of using AI before instituting organizational changes (Huber & Alexy, 2025; Mahajan, 2025). While AI may remove some human biases, this does not guarantee the elimination of strategic manipulation bias by users (Huber & Alexy, 2025). Strategic leaders need to maintain appropriate levels of human and AI responsibility and utilize AI as a support tool and not a replacement (Daniel et al., 2025; Frimpong, 2025; Huber & Alexy, 2025; Khairullah et al., 2025; Kolbjornsrud et al., 2016). This highlights a need for organizations to develop ethical frameworks and governance policies to ensure that AI technology is fair, organizationally aligned, and accountable in leadership (Frimpong, 2025; Oancea et al., 2025).

Countries have already started to enact laws that mitigate some of these ethical concerns. The European Union passed an AI Act in 2024 to mitigate ethical concerns at a governmental

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level. The comprehensive framework defines and regulates AI systems by risk level and establishes obligations for organizations utilizing AI technology (Oancea et al., 2025; Strukelj & Dankova, 2025). The EU also passed the General Data Protection Regulation in 2018 that forbids granting authority to machines (Russell, 2019). Germany has instituted the Network Enforcement Act, which requires content platforms to remove fake news and hate speech, further advancing the ethical mitigation at a governmental level (Russell, 2019). The US has also created voluntary guidelines for AI implementation through the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights (2022) and the 2023 Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of AI cited in Strukelj & Dankova, 2025). These governance processes combine ethical principles, stakeholder engagement, risk management, and capacity building to provide a framework for the responsible enactment of AI systems (Strukelj & Dankova, 2025).

**Table 3**

*Ethical Challenges and Corresponding Governance Frameworks*

<b>Ethical Challenge</b>	<b>Required Policy</b>	<b>Mitigation Strategy</b>	<b>Theory</b>
Algorithmic bias	Regular internal and external audits; Fairness restrictions	Algorithm screening and retraining; Diverse data incorporation; Diverse AI teams	Stakeholder Theory
Lack of transparency; Black Box algorithms	Explainable standards	Specify policies around data evaluation and decision-making; Clear metrics for ongoing monitoring	Strategic Leadership Theory
Accountability deficit	Ethical oversight committees	Human-centric review for algorithmic recommendations; Establish ethical oversight boards; Maintain escalation pathways for automated alerts	Upper Echelon Theory; Strategic Leadership Theory
Job displacement; AI aversion	Human-centric AI orientation; Training mandates	Transparently communicate AI purpose; Invest in AI literacy	Transformational Leadership

### **Policy Recommendations**

Implementing and integrating AI technology within organizations needs a unified strategic approach from leaders. This approach needs to address organizational decision-making, human capital readiness, and ethical governance. The following policy recommendations incorporate theoretical findings within the three organizational perspectives.

#### ***Establishing Strategic AI Decision Making***

To ensure that essential human qualities are maintained in leadership, organizations should keep human leaders central to decision-making while allowing AI technology to assist in those decisions (Frimpong, 2025; Langeveldt, 2024). When looking to adopt AI technology, leaders within organizations are encouraged to develop a strategic AI orientation to introduce and implement AI technology, highlighting strategic direction and goals, to better prepare organizational stakeholders (Frimpong, 2025; Li et al., 2021; Pinski et al., 2024).

1. **Transparency and Stakeholder Preparedness:** Inform all stakeholders about the purpose and outcomes of AI integration, and clarify AI processes, including data analysis and how decisions are made (Li et al., 2021).
2. **Policies and Procedures:** Establish clear policies and procedures incorporating AI technology augmentation, specifying evaluation and risk mitigations, governance and application, and required skills for AI use (Daniel et al., 2025).
3. **AI Orientation:** AI orientation guides strategic decision-making regarding investments, problem-solving, and communication (Khairullah et al., 2025; Kolbjornsrud et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021).

### *Building AI Literacy and Human Capital*

When implementing AI technology, leaders need to ensure that staff are prepared for the nuances that come. Tigre et al. (2025) suggest that leaders need to ensure that environments are psychologically safe for interpersonal risk taking and coaching the team to integrate AI into their workspaces.

1. **Skill Development and Ongoing Training:** Create a flexible work environment that encourages team coaching and learning, collaborative problem solving, innovation, autonomy, and diversity (Tigre et al., 2025); Evaluate the skills and knowledge of the organizational board, leaders, and other key staff to ensure diversity in decision-making and implementation.
2. **Staff Empowerment:** Implement feedback systems to enable employees to question AI-generated decisions, report ethical concerns and inaccuracies, and hold leaders accountable for the alignment with organizational values (Frimpong, 2025).
3. **Human Resources:** Identify employee skill gaps and manage professional development, aligned with the goals of maximizing human capital (Khan, 2024; Yanamala, 2024b); Conduct regular impact assessments to monitor for unintentional biases against stakeholders (Daniel et al., 2025).

### *Ethical Governance and Accountability*

Leaders should leverage advantages of AI while mitigating ethical concerns that may arise (Frimpong, 2025). To effectively address ethical risks, leaders need to create a comprehensive framework for accountability and oversight.

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1. **Leadership Accountability:** Create a governance framework to mitigate algorithmic biases (Abada & Lambin, 2023; Li et al., 2021); Establish an AI oversight committee to ensure ethical utilization of AI technology.
2. **Risk Management: Maintain** appropriate levels of AI augmentation, using AI only as a support tool; Create standard operation procedures (SOPs) to implement formal governance, to include clear procedures for human response for automatic alerts.
3. **Auditing:** Conduct regular audits of AI systems to identify biases, using both internal teams and external third-party auditors; Include diverse perspectives, requiring collaboration between leaders, employees, and developers to help create inclusive AI systems (Frimpong, 2025).

### Summary

Organizational research on AI is expected to become highly dynamic in the coming years. Future research can examine various avenues surrounding the implementation and utilization of AI systems in organizations. Examining the effects of long-term implementation of AI, examining the impact on traditional leadership understanding, and focusing on how these systems can be strengthened are all research focuses that are needed.

The integration of AI in organizations presents opportunities for leaders to make informed strategic decisions while also posing ethical challenges to be addressed (Khairullah et al., 2025). Strategic leaders should incorporate AI technology as a tool within established organizational processes (Kolbjornsrud et al., 2016). These leaders must also face emerging responsibilities in an increasingly digital world. As leaders navigate the evolution of AI systems, organizations need to adopt holistic human-centered approaches for AI implementation. Strategic leaders should develop a structured plan for the implementation and management of AI

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technology to ensure the highest efficiency yield, while also mitigating risks and concerns that may arise (Li et al., 2021).

This paper examined the integration of AI systems by organizational leaders, highlighting the theoretical frameworks and ethical concerns surrounding the evolution of AI. Additionally, this paper recommended policies and procedures to strategically and ethically incorporate AI systems that align with organizational values and goals. Organizational success is dependent upon top management teams developing a high level of AI literacy, as argued in Upper Echelon Theory. Furthermore, successful implementation requires leaders to foster organizational trust and safety to mitigate AI aversion, rooted in both Transformational Leadership and Stakeholder theories. Strategic Leadership Theory requires leaders to immediately establish formal, auditable governance policies to ensure that AI implementation is ethically aligned with the organizational mission and vision. Leaders who fail to integrate a human-centered approach to AI that integrates efficiency with ethical oversight will hinder an organization's long-term success and competitive advantage.

While the research highlighted strategic benefits of AI integration – including informed decision-making, organizational efficiency, and automation of repetitive tasks – organizations may still face challenges when adopting AI technology. These challenges include AI aversion, organizational preparedness, and ethical concerns surrounding job loss and data bias (Bigman & Gray, 2018; Khairullah et al., 2025). Organizations need to address these concerns transparently, using effective communication and empowering employees to provide feedback surrounding AI implementation. Furthermore, leaders need to create comprehensive training programs to help build AI literacy among staff, enforce governance frameworks to address ethical concerns, and

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foster a culture of collaboration and innovation to effectively incorporate AI systems (Davenport & Mittal, 2023; Khairullah et al., 2025)

Future research is needed to expand AI integration in organizations, as most research is conducted in companies which have different business structures and goals. In addition, research should examine various theoretical frameworks and propose ethical and practical implications for the adoption of AI within organizations. Empirical studies focusing on the development of a practical framework will contribute to best practices and provide organizations with valuable insight into effective AI implementation.

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