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"Ethical Artificial Intelligence in University HRM: Implications for Faculty Mental Satisfaction, Commitment and Retention"

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Abstract: The increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Human Resource Management (HRM) marks a transformative change in how organizations structure, execute, and rationalize people management practices. AI-driven HRM systems now play a pivotal role in recruitment, performance evaluation, workload distribution, and career progression, fundamentally altering the dynamics of employee–organization relationships. Although existing HRM research has primarily highlighted the efficiency and analytical strengths of AI, considerably less focus has been placed on examining its ethical consequences for employees' psychological well-being and workplace experiences.

From a Human Resource Management (HRM) theory perspective, Artificial Intelligence (AI) disrupts foundational assumptions concerning fairness, managerial discretion, and the nature of relational exchanges between organizations and employees. While algorithmic decision-making has the potential to mitigate certain forms of human bias, it simultaneously introduces challenges such as increased opacity, depersonalization, and the risk of perceived injustice. These ethical and psychological concerns are especially pronounced in knowledge-intensive settings like higher education institutions, where professional autonomy, identity, and psychological safety are vital to employee well-being.

Although ethical AI and HRM have been examined independently, conceptual integration explaining *how* ethical AI practices influence employee psychological outcomes and retention remains underdeveloped. Addressing this gap, the present paper adopts a conceptual approach to develop a theory-driven framework linking ethical AI practices in HRM to mental satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention intentions.

By proposing research propositions and a theoretically integrated framework, the paper advances HRM theory by positioning ethical AI as a human-centric and sustainable HRM practice rather than a purely technological tool. The paper concludes by outlining directions for future research and implications for responsible AI governance in HRM.

Keywords: Ethical AI, Human Resource Management, Algorithmic Management, Organizational Justice, Mental Satisfaction, Faculty Retention

Introduction: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a powerful influence in Human Resource Management (HRM). It helps organizations automate processes, make better decisions, and handle large datasets more effectively. In higher education, universities are increasingly using AI-driven HRM systems for recruiting, evaluating performance, and planning their workforce (Úbeda-García et al., 2025). While these technologies provide operational benefits, researchers warn that using AI raises ethical and psychological issues that go beyond just technical performance (Bujold, 2024)

Academic work environments place strong emphasis on professional autonomy. They are also defined by sustained intellectual engagement and a deep sense of identity-based attachment to institutions. Faculty members value discretion in their work. Peer recognition and fairness in organizational processes are equally important. Research increasingly suggests that the growing use of algorithmic decision-making in Human Resource Management can challenge these values when ethical principles are not sufficiently embedded in system design and implementation (Jiang, 2025). In particular, concerns arise when fairness, transparency, and accountability are inadequately addressed. Algorithmic bias remains a key issue. Limited explainability of automated decisions further intensifies apprehension. Practices related to surveillance and the potential misuse of data add to these concerns. Together, these issues can weaken faculty trust in institutional decision-making and negatively influence their mental satisfaction (Nilsson et al., 2025).

Universities represent a distinctive organizational context. Employment relationships within them are rarely transactional in nature. Instead, they are grounded in professional autonomy, peer-based evaluation, and long-term academic identity. In this setting, the introduction of AI-enabled HR systems carries significant implications. Decisions related to performance appraisal, promotion, workload allocation, and contract renewal are particularly sensitive. When such decisions are

supported by algorithmic tools, they directly affect faculty members' perceptions of psychological safety. They also shape how institutional legitimacy is understood and experienced. In practice, the use of AI in these domains may intensify ethical and psychological concerns if contextual judgment and human oversight are insufficiently preserved.

Scholarly interest in AI-enabled HRM has expanded in recent years. However, conceptual clarity remains limited. This is especially true with respect to faculty psychological outcomes and retention intentions in higher education institutions. Existing studies tend to focus on technical efficiency rather than employee experience. Addressing this gap, the present paper adopts a theory-driven approach. It argues that ethical AI practices are central to shaping faculty mental satisfaction. This satisfaction, in turn, influences organizational commitment and intentions to remain with the institution. Accordingly, the paper proposes a conceptual framework linking ethical AI adoption in university HRM with faculty mental satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention intentions.

Ethical AI in Human Resource Management: Ethical Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management is conceptually distinct from traditional HR analytics and people analytics. HR analytics has largely been used as a decision-support function. It assists managers by providing descriptive, diagnostic, and predictive insights. In contrast, ethical AI increasingly performs autonomous or semi-autonomous functions within HR processes. This includes participation in decisions related to recruitment, appraisal, promotion, and contract renewal. As a result, a degree of decision authority shifts from human actors to algorithmic systems. This shift introduces ethical concerns that are not fully addressed by conventional analytics approaches. Issues related to accountability, transparency, fairness, and human oversight become especially salient. Consequently, ethical AI in HRM requires governance mechanisms and theoretical explanations that extend beyond the analytical logic of HR analytics.

Ethical AI in HRM refers to the responsible design, deployment, and governance of AI systems in ways that uphold core ethical principles. These principles include fairness, transparency, accountability, data privacy, and meaningful human oversight (Bujold, 2024). Recent contributions to the HRM literature emphasize that AI systems are not value-neutral tools. Instead, they reflect organizational norms, embedded data biases, and broader governance choices made during system development and implementation (Radanliev, 2025).

Existing studies further argue that ethical governance plays a critical role in shaping employee acceptance of AI-enabled HR decisions. When AI systems are perceived as fair and interpretable, employees are more likely to trust organizational processes and experience a sense of procedural justice (Jabagi et al., 2025). In contrast, opaque or poorly governed AI systems can generate perceptions of injustice. They may also lead to feelings of depersonalization, particularly when applied to high-stakes HR decisions such as performance appraisal and promotion.

Ethical AI, Algorithmic Management, and Employee Well-Being: A growing body of research examines the implications of algorithmic management for employee well-being. Empirical studies consistently show that high levels of algorithmic control, when introduced without adequate ethical safeguards, are associated with adverse psychological outcomes. These include psychological distress, elevated stress levels, and reduced job satisfaction (Nilsson et al., 2025; Bowdler, 2025). Such findings indicate that the effects of AI on employees are not determined solely by technological capability. They are shaped by how AI systems are designed, governed, and implemented within organizations.

Recent organizational research further suggests that ethical AI practices can moderate these negative effects. When AI systems are perceived as fair, transparent, and supportive of employee autonomy, they are more likely to foster positive psychological responses (Valtonen & Chen, 2025). Ethical governance also signals organizational support, which plays a critical role in shaping employee attitudes in AI-mediated work environments. Taken together, this literature positions ethical AI as a key determinant of employee mental satisfaction, particularly in contexts where algorithmic systems exert significant influence over work processes and outcomes.

Faculty Mental Satisfaction in University HRM: Mental satisfaction refers to an employee's sense of psychological comfort, emotional stability, and overall well-being at work. In academic environments, this experience is closely tied to how faculty members interpret institutional practices. Factors such as workload equity, professional autonomy, recognition of academic contributions, and fairness in HR decisions play a particularly important role. Prior research consistently indicates that faculty members who experience higher levels of mental satisfaction are more engaged in their work. They are also more emotionally attached to their institutions (Mollah et al., 2024).

Ethical AI practices have the potential to strengthen faculty mental satisfaction within university HRM systems. By reducing perceptions of bias and increasing transparency, ethically governed AI can contribute to greater psychological comfort in HR decision-making. Meaningful human involvement further reassures faculty that contextual judgment has not been replaced by rigid automation. In contrast, unethical or opaque AI practices may heighten anxiety and undermine psychological safety. These risks are especially pronounced in private universities, where employment security is often perceived as uncertain and HR decisions carry significant personal and professional consequences.

Organizational Commitment and Retention Intentions: Organizational commitment reflects an employee's emotional attachment to the organization and their sense of belonging within it. Retention intention, by contrast, captures an employee's willingness to continue their employment over time. Within the HRM literature, mental satisfaction is widely recognized as a critical antecedent of both commitment and retention-related outcomes. Employees who experience psychological comfort and well-being at work are more likely to develop stronger emotional bonds with their organizations and express lower intentions to leave (Zhu et al., 2022).

In higher education, retaining qualified faculty remains a persistent challenge. This issue is particularly pronounced in private universities, where competitive pressures and employment uncertainty often intensify turnover intentions. Ethical and supportive HRM practices play an important role in addressing this challenge. When HR systems are perceived as fair and caring, organizational commitment is strengthened and the desire to leave is reduced. Ethical AI practices contribute to this process by signaling fairness, consistency, and institutional responsibility in HR decision-making. In doing so, they are likely to play a crucial role in sustaining faculty commitment and long-term retention (Bujold, 2024; Jiang, 2025).

Positioning within HRM Theory: The increasing use of Artificial Intelligence in Human Resource Management challenges several core assumptions underlying traditional HRM theory. Concepts such as fairness, managerial discretion, and relational exchange have historically been examined in contexts dominated by human decision-making. Most established HRM theories were developed with this assumption in mind. As a result, they offer only limited explanatory power when applied to employee responses toward algorithmic HR practices.

Although prior research has examined AI adoption and employee well-being as separate areas of inquiry, HRM theory still lacks an integrated explanation of how ethical AI practices shape psychological and attitudinal outcomes. This theoretical gap becomes particularly evident in people-centric and high-stakes decision contexts. Addressing this limitation, the present paper positions ethical AI not merely as a technological tool, but as a relational HRM practice. By integrating insights from organizational justice theory, social exchange theory, and the sustainable HRM perspective, the paper extends HRM theory by explaining how ethical AI practices influence faculty mental satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention intentions.

Core Theoretical Novelty and Boundary Conditions: This study makes three interrelated theoretical contributions that advance Human Resource Management theory in the context of AI-enabled people management. Collectively, these contributions respond to emerging gaps in HRM scholarship regarding algorithmic decision-making and employee psychological outcomes.

First, the paper re-conceptualizes ethical Artificial Intelligence as a relational HRM practice rather than a purely technological or analytical tool. Much of existing HRM theory, including organizational justice and social exchange perspectives, was developed with the assumption of human-led decision-making. These theories therefore offer limited explanatory power for understanding employee responses to algorithmic HR practices. By positioning ethical AI as an active participant in the employment relationship, this study extends HRM theory to contexts in which decision authority is partially delegated to algorithmic systems. In doing so, the framework directly responds to calls for deeper theorization of fairness, accountability, and relational exchange in technologically mediated HRM environments.

Second, the study introduces faculty mental satisfaction as a distinct and theoretically meaningful psychological construct in AI-enabled workplaces. Unlike established constructs such as job satisfaction, engagement, or general well-being, mental satisfaction captures employees' cognitive comfort, emotional security, and perceived legitimacy of AI-supported HR decisions. This distinction is particularly important in algorithmic management contexts. In such settings, opacity, reduced managerial discretion, and depersonalization can generate psychological strain even when formal outcomes appear equitable. By theorizing mental satisfaction as a central mediating mechanism, the study clarifies how ethical AI practices

influence organizational commitment and retention intentions through employees' psychological experiences rather than through efficiency or performance outcomes alone.

Third, by integrating organizational justice theory, social exchange theory, and the sustainable HRM perspective, the study offers a theoretically integrated explanation of how ethical AI practices contribute to long-term employment sustainability. Prior research has often examined AI adoption, employee well-being, and ethical governance as separate streams of inquiry. This framework connects these strands by demonstrating how ethical AI practices signal fairness and organizational care, foster reciprocal employee commitment, and support retention in knowledge-intensive environments. In doing so, the study extends sustainable HRM theory beyond traditional policy-driven practices and positions ethical AI governance as a strategic mechanism for sustaining human capital in higher education institutions.

The theoretical scope of the proposed framework is subject to important boundary conditions. The model is most applicable to professional and knowledge-intensive organizational contexts, such as universities, where employees place strong value on autonomy, identity-based attachment, and procedural legitimacy. In more routinized or transactional employment settings, the psychological mechanisms outlined may operate differently or with reduced salience. Accordingly, the framework is intended to guide future empirical research in contexts where AI-enabled HRM systems meaningfully shape employee perceptions of fairness, trust, and organizational legitimacy.

Theoretical Foundations and Contributions to HRM Research:

The conceptual framework developed in this paper is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: Organizational Justice Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and the Sustainable Human Resource Management perspective. Together, these theories explain how ethical Artificial Intelligence practices in university HRM shape faculty mental satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention intentions. By integrating these perspectives, the study draws on established HRM theory while extending it into the emerging context of AI-enabled people management.

Organizational Justice Theory emphasizes the role of perceived fairness in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors. Employees evaluate not only outcomes, but also the procedures through which decisions are made. In AI-enabled HRM, ethical AI practices such as transparency, fairness, explainability, and accountability influence perceptions of procedural and distributive justice in algorithmic decisions. When faculty members perceive AI-supported HR processes as fair and unbiased, they are more likely to experience psychological comfort and develop trust in institutional decision-making. By theorizing justice perceptions within algorithmic contexts, this study extends organizational justice theory beyond traditional human-led HR processes and responds to growing calls for greater attention to fairness in technologically mediated HR systems (Jabagi et al., 2025).

Social Exchange Theory offers a relational lens for understanding how ethical AI practices influence employee responses. From this perspective, employment relationships are governed by norms of reciprocity. Favorable organizational treatment encourages positive employee attitudes and behaviours in return. Ethical implementation of AI in HRM signals organizational care, respect, and fairness toward faculty members. These signals foster reciprocal responses, including higher mental satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, and greater intentions to remain with the institution. By positioning faculty mental satisfaction as a key mediating mechanism, the framework extends social exchange logic into AI-mediated employment relationships and clarifies how ethical treatment is translated into commitment and retention outcomes (Mollah et al., 2024).

From a **Sustainable HRM perspective**, the study conceptualizes ethical AI as a long-term people management practice rather than a short-term efficiency tool. Sustainable HRM emphasizes alignment between organizational performance objectives and human-centric values. This alignment is particularly critical in knowledge-intensive contexts such as higher education. Ethical AI practices enable universities to pursue technological efficiency while safeguarding faculty psychological well-being, trust, and engagement. By integrating ethical AI into sustainable HRM theory, the paper shifts the AI–HRM debate beyond immediate productivity gains and toward the sustainability of employment relationships and organizational resilience (Úbeda-García et al., 2025).

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives support the development of an integrative conceptual framework that advances HRM theory in several ways. The framework extends established theories into AI-enabled HRM contexts. It introduces faculty mental satisfaction as a critical psychological mechanism linking ethical AI practices to organizational

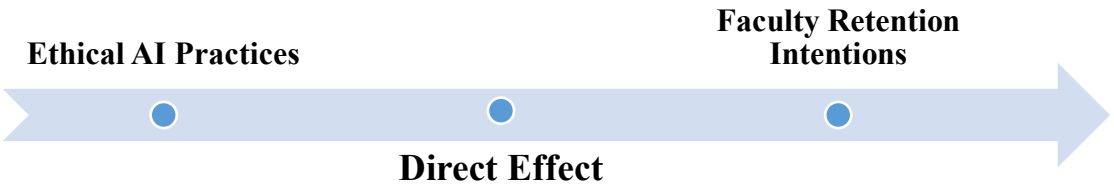
commitment and retention intentions. It also positions ethical AI governance as a strategic and sustainable HRM practice. By offering theory-driven research propositions, the study provides a robust foundation for future empirical research and continued theory development on ethical AI in HRM within higher education and other knowledge-intensive organizational settings.

Conceptual Framework: The conceptual framework developed in this study explains how ethical Artificial Intelligence practices in university Human Resource Management influence faculty retention intentions through key psychological and attitudinal processes. The framework is grounded in Organizational Justice Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and the Sustainable HRM perspective. Together, these theoretical lenses suggest that faculty members' perceptions of ethical AI practices shape their mental satisfaction, which subsequently influences organizational commitment and intentions to remain with the institution.

Ethical AI practices in HRM are characterized by fairness, transparency, accountability, data privacy, and meaningful human oversight. These practices signal procedural justice and organizational care to faculty members. When AI-enabled HR decisions are perceived as ethical and unbiased, faculty members are more likely to experience higher levels of mental satisfaction. This satisfaction is reflected in psychological comfort, reduced stress, and greater trust in institutional decision-making processes. From a social exchange perspective, such positive psychological experiences foster feelings of obligation and reciprocity. Over time, these perceptions strengthen organizational commitment, which in turn enhances faculty retention intentions.

The framework further proposes that faculty mental satisfaction functions as a central mediating mechanism linking ethical AI practices to retention intentions. This emphasis highlights that ethical AI does not influence retention outcomes solely through gains in efficiency or automation. Rather, its impact operates primarily through faculty psychological well-being and perceptions of fairness and legitimacy in HR decision-making.

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Research Propositions of the Study:

Proposition No.	Research Proposition	Theoretical Explanation
P1	Ethical AI practices in university HRM positively influence faculty mental satisfaction.	Ethical AI practices enhance perceptions of fairness, transparency, and trust in HR decisions. These perceptions reduce uncertainty and psychological strain associated with algorithmic decision-making, thereby improving faculty mental satisfaction.
P2	Faculty mental satisfaction positively influences organizational commitment.	Mentally satisfied faculty members are more likely to develop emotional attachment and identification with their institution. Positive psychological experiences strengthen feelings of belonging and loyalty, leading to higher organizational commitment.
P3	Organizational commitment positively influences faculty retention intentions.	Faculty members who are emotionally committed to their institution are more inclined to maintain long-term employment relationships. Organizational commitment therefore serves as a key predictor of faculty retention intentions.
P4	Faculty mental satisfaction mediates the relationship between ethical AI practices and faculty retention intentions.	Ethical AI practices influence retention intentions indirectly by enhancing faculty mental satisfaction. When ethical AI improves psychological well-being, it strengthens organizational commitment and reduces turnover intentions, establishing mental satisfaction as a central mediating mechanism.

Scope of the Study: The scope of the present study is confined to the development of a conceptual and theory-driven framework that explains the role of ethical Artificial Intelligence (AI) practices in university Human Resource Management. The focus is not on measurement or prediction. Instead, the study seeks to clarify how ethical AI adoption in HRM shapes faculty mental satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention intentions. The paper does not involve primary data collection or empirical testing. It is grounded in a systematic and critical synthesis of existing literature on ethical AI, HRM, organizational behavior, and higher education management.

At a conceptual level, the study concentrates on key ethical dimensions of AI adoption in HRM. These include fairness, transparency, accountability, data privacy, and human oversight. The framework examines how these practices influence faculty outcomes through psychological and attitudinal mechanisms. Particular emphasis is placed on faculty mental satisfaction. It is treated as a central mediating construct that links ethical AI practices with organizational commitment and intentions to remain with the institution.

Contextually, the study is situated within higher education institutions. Universities provide a distinctive setting in which HR decisions have direct implications for academic careers, professional autonomy, and long-term employment relationships. The discussion is especially relevant to private universities, where rapid digitalization and competitive pressures have accelerated the adoption of AI-enabled HR systems. At the same time, the conceptual insights developed in this study may be relevant to comparable higher education settings facing similar governance challenges.

The scope of the study is further limited to the perspectives of teaching employees. It does not explicitly address the experiences of administrative or technical staff. Nor does it engage with the technical design or engineering aspects of AI systems. Consequently, the proposed framework is intended to serve as a foundation for future empirical investigation rather than to offer generalizable empirical conclusions.

Implications for Future Research: The conceptual framework developed in this study provides a strong foundation for future empirical research on ethical Artificial Intelligence adoption in university Human Resource Management. While the present paper is conceptual in nature, it opens several avenues for systematic investigation. Future studies may empirically examine the proposed relationships using survey-based, experimental, or mixed-method research designs. Such approaches can help clarify causal mechanisms and deepen understanding of how faculty perceptions evolve in response to AI-enabled HRM practices.

Longitudinal research designs are particularly valuable in this context. Sustained exposure to AI-supported HR systems may shape faculty mental satisfaction in ways that are not immediately observable. Over time, these experiences are also likely to influence organizational commitment and intentions to remain with the institution. Capturing these dynamics would provide richer insight into the psychological processes underlying ethical AI adoption in academic settings.

Future research may also explore important boundary conditions. Variables such as trust in AI, digital readiness, leadership support, and institutional culture are likely to moderate employee responses to ethical AI practices. Comparative studies across public and private universities would further strengthen the explanatory power of the framework. Cross-national investigations could additionally illuminate how regulatory environments and cultural norms shape ethical AI governance in higher education. Finally, scholars may examine specific AI applications, including AI-driven performance appraisal, promotion decisions, and workforce analytics, to develop a more nuanced understanding of how different use cases influence faculty psychological and attitudinal outcomes.

Practical and Policy Implications: From a practical perspective, the proposed framework highlights the importance of embedding ethical AI governance mechanisms within university Human Resource Management systems. The adoption of AI in HRM should not be treated as a purely technical upgrade. It is an organizational and ethical intervention. University leaders and HR professionals are therefore encouraged to prioritize transparency, fairness, data privacy, and meaningful human oversight when implementing AI-enabled HR practices. Clear communication regarding the purpose, functioning, and limitations of AI systems is essential. Equally important is the assurance that final HR decisions remain subject to human judgment. Together, these practices can enhance faculty trust, reduce psychological strain, and strengthen organizational commitment.

At the policy level, the framework offers conceptual guidance for regulators and higher education authorities involved in shaping responsible AI adoption in universities. Policymakers may draw on the proposed model to ensure that AI-driven digital transformation aligns with faculty well-being and ethical accountability. The framework also emphasizes the need for institutional safeguards that protect professional autonomy and psychological safety. By institutionalizing human-centric and ethically grounded AI governance, universities can balance technological innovation with their academic mission. In doing so, they are better positioned to support long-term institutional sustainability while safeguarding the professional and psychological interests of teaching employees.

Conclusion: This conceptual paper advances Human Resource Management scholarship by examining Artificial Intelligence–enabled HRM through ethical and psychological lenses within higher education institutions. Academic environments are not neutral organizational settings. They are characterized by professional autonomy, peer-based evaluation, and strong identity-based attachment to institutions. Against this backdrop, the paper positions ethical AI practices as a critical determinant of how faculty members experience AI-supported HR decisions.

By developing a theory-driven conceptual framework, the study demonstrates that ethical AI practices—encompassing fairness, transparency, accountability, data privacy, and human oversight—play a central role in shaping faculty mental satisfaction. These practices influence how algorithmic HR decisions related to appraisal, promotion, workload allocation, and contract renewal are interpreted by faculty members. When ethical safeguards are perceived to be weak, AI-enabled HRM may undermine trust and psychological safety. Conversely, ethically governed AI systems strengthen organizational commitment and reduce intentions to leave.

The framework further establishes that the value of AI in university HRM extends beyond operational efficiency and automation. In academic settings, faculty responses to AI are shaped less by technical sophistication and more by perceived legitimacy and fairness. Mental satisfaction emerges as a key psychological pathway through which ethical AI governance translates into positive organizational outcomes. In this respect, ethical AI adoption is positioned as a relational and human-centric HRM practice rather than a purely technological intervention.

Overall, the study underscores that responsible AI governance is essential for aligning technological innovation with faculty well-being and long-term institutional sustainability. Ethical considerations are not supplementary to AI adoption in universities. They are foundational to its acceptance and effectiveness. By offering an integrated conceptual framework and clearly articulated research propositions, the paper provides a strong foundation for future empirical research. It also conceptually informs university leaders and policymakers seeking to design AI-enabled HRM systems that balance efficiency with ethical responsibility.

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