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Generation AI: Job Crafting by Entry-Level Professionals in the Age of Generative AI

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Abstract The rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in the workplace is transforming knowledge work in organizations with important implications for professionals and organizations alike. This study focuses on entry-level professionals in knowledge work (ELPs) and highlights how ELPs reshape their work in response to the adoption and integration of GenAI in the workplace. Drawing on the theoretical lens of job crafting and building on insights from a qualitative study in consultancy, this research shows how ELPs use GenAI to proactively (re)craft their work tasks and relationships. Moreover, the study identifies a third behavioral dimension of job crafting that is becoming particularly salient in light of GenAI's novel capabilities: signal crafting, which reflects ELPs' use of GenAI to shape others' perceptions of the distinctiveness and value of ELPs' work. Further, the paper sheds light on the consequences arising from ELPs' job crafting behaviors. This study contributes to the literature on (Gen)AI and knowledge work by providing a nuanced understanding of

GenAI and its implications for ELPs, their work and career prospects.

Keywords Generative Artificial Intelligence · Knowledge work · Entry-level professionals · Job crafting

1 Introduction

The integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) into the workplace is transforming how professionals work across industries. For entry-level professionals in knowledge work (henceforth ELPs) – typically recent graduates navigating the early stages of their careers – GenAI is not only transforming everyday work practices but can also reshape the very nature of skill acquisition and professional growth (Kellogg et al. 2025; Margaryan 2023). ELPs in knowledge work enter the workforce with a combination of academic knowledge and foundational skills (Burkard et al. 2005; O'Reilly et al. 2020). They are expected to acquire domain-specific expertise, analytical abilities, and interpersonal skills through on-the-job learning (McMurtrey et al. 2008), a process traditionally supported by direct mentorship, guided tasks, and hands-on experience in real-world settings (Panwong and Kema-vuthanon 2014). This early career stage is crucial for skill-building, as it allows ELPs to develop competencies in problem-solving, communication, and industry-specific knowledge, which are essential for long-term career advancement (Aasheim et al. 2009; Katz 1993). With the growing adoption of GenAI tools in the workplace and its disruptive capabilities in not only streamlining work processes but also in the support of creative work (Alavi et al. 2024; Mayer et al. 2025; Retkowsky et al. 2024), ELPs are confronted with new questions around how the reliance on

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these tools might influence their work as well as their career prospects and progression.

ELPs can collaborate with GenAI tools to enhance their work in multiple ways (e.g., Anthony et al. 2023; Kellogg et al. 2025; Jarvenpaa and Klein 2024). Unlike earlier AI systems – designed to execute narrow, predefined tasks such as predicting customer creditworthiness or screening job candidates – GenAI can work with text, images, videos, or code to perform a diverse array of complex knowledge-intensive tasks that were once considered the sole domain of human creativity and judgment (Alavi et al. 2024; Benbya et al. 2024; Brynjolfsson et al. 2023; Feuerriegel et al. 2024). Moreover, GenAI represents a radical shift in workplace autonomy; moving away from top-down, management-imposed applications, it supports a more democratic, bottom-up adoption model (Chui 2023; Krakowski 2025). For ELPs, this democratization of expertise may be empowering. For instance, a junior consultant might leverage AI-powered analytics to prepare client reports more efficiently, a junior software developer could use AI-generated code to optimize programming tasks, and a junior financial analyst may rely on AI-driven models for data interpretation (Benbya et al. 2024; Brynjolfsson et al. 2023; Feuerriegel et al. 2024; Peng et al. 2023; Reinhardt et al. 2011; Zhou and Lee 2023).

However, overreliance on GenAI tools can also limit opportunities for developing critical, hands-on skills and expertise (Zhou and Lee 2023). As GenAI systems assume greater responsibility for analytical, creative, and administrative functions, ELPs may face diminishing opportunities to cultivate and hone essential workplace competencies, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and professional communication (Alavi et al. 2024; Kellogg et al. 2025). This reliance on GenAI assistance could then lead to skill stagnation, making it harder for ELPs to differentiate themselves and advance in an increasingly competitive and AI-driven job market. This raises concerns about how ELPs can navigate career progression in an environment where traditional learning pathways – rooted in experience, mentorship, and incremental skill acquisition – are being disrupted. Thus, our research addresses the following question: *How do ELPs reshape their work in response to GenAI adoption and integration in the workplace?*

To explore this research question, we use job crafting as a theoretical lens to understand how GenAI usage reshapes ELPs' work, roles and career prospects. Job crafting refers to professionals' proactive modifications of their job tasks and relationships, as well as how they perceive their own work to better align with their skills, motivations, and career aspirations (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001). Given the growing recognition that GenAI is transforming different aspects of work across several industries (Harder

Fischer et al. 2024; Law and Varanasi 2025), we found this perspective particularly useful for investigating the changes that GenAI usage can bring about in ELPs work and careers. Specifically, the job crafting lens allows to balance the dominant macro-level, techno-deterministic discourse surrounding the impact of GenAI on work with a micro-level, social constructivist sensibilities towards how individuals proactively integrate GenAI into their work (Law and Varanasi 2025).

Building on a qualitative case study at Innovaworld (a pseudonym), a global consulting firm in the Netherlands, including insights from ELPs and senior professionals as well as insights from multiple field observations, this study shows how ELPs at Innovaworld proactively leverage GenAI to (re)craft their job tasks and work relationships with consequences for ELPs' perceived meaningfulness of their job as well as perceived career prospects. Moreover, we found that ELPs engage in a third type of behavioral job crafting that concerns leveraging GenAI to tailor the signals they send to other stakeholders about – the distinctiveness and relevance of – their job. As such, our findings provide a more nuanced understanding of how ELPs respond to the rise of GenAI and thus offer important theoretical and practical contributions to human GenAI collaboration studies.

2 Conceptual Background

2.1 Generative Artificial Intelligence versus Previous Generations of AI in Knowledge Work

AI technologies are increasingly entering various domains of knowledge work, including healthcare (e.g., Lebovitz et al. 2022), recruiting (e.g., Van den Broek et al. 2021) and consulting (e.g., Mayer et al. 2020). GenAI marks the latest generation of artificial intelligence technologies, yet significantly differs from earlier generations, such as rule-based and specialized classification systems. Traditional rule-based AI – often referred to as expert systems – operated on fixed “if-then” rules defined by human experts, rendering them inflexible and unable to manage novel scenarios or unstructured data. These systems were thus limited to narrow domains like diagnostics or financial modeling, where explicit decision trees could be effectively applied. Later, AI evolved into classifier models that used machine learning to identify patterns within vast datasets and to classify new data accordingly (Berente et al. 2021). These systems, still in use today, are designed for specific tasks like selecting job candidates (Van den Broek et al. 2021), classifying medical images (Kim et al. 2024; Jussupow et al. 2021; 2022), predicting crime occurrences

(Waardenburg et al. 2022) or enhancing sales (e.g., Adam et al. 2021, 2023; Gnewuch et al. 2023; Monod et al. 2024).

The recent generation of GenAI tools, on the other hand, employs massive transformer models to synthesize new content based on learned patterns (Krakowski 2025). Foundational models such as LLaMa and DALL-E (Härlin et al. 2023) are central to this breakthrough; they excel at understanding context and performing complex tasks across different modalities – from text and images to code, speech, and video. As a result, GenAI systems for knowledge work are inherently task-agnostic and exceptionally versatile, capable of performing a diverse range of tasks not specifically predefined in advance (Alavi et al. 2024; Krakowski 2025; Mayer et al. 2025). This *task-agnostic versatility* allows knowledge workers to fluidly switch between tasks such as slide design, Structured Query Language (SQL) debugging, writing, or summarization without switching tools or interfaces. In contrast to earlier automation systems that were rigidly scoped, GenAI operates with a kind of domain-fluidity that supports the multitasking nature of modern knowledge work.

In addition, GenAI’s intuitive, conversational interface introduces a different mode of human–computer interaction. Rather than relying on predefined commands or rigid workflows, knowledge workers engage in back-and-forth dialogue with the system – clarifying intentions, critiquing outputs, and iterating on ideas in real time. This *conversational interface* effectively turns GenAI into an on-demand “sparring partner,” enabling a reflective, exploratory process of working that was previously unavailable in automated tools. As a result, GenAI tools are adopted and personalized from the bottom up, allowing professionals to integrate them organically into their workflows, often beyond the reach of managerial oversight or control (Krakowski 2025). Resulting from these unique capabilities, GenAI tools can contribute creatively and interactively to various work processes in knowledge work – a marked departure from AI’s traditional position as just an automation and efficiency tool (Agrawal et al. 2019). As such, the rise of GenAI in various fields and organizations may have far-reaching implications for professionals and their work, particularly in knowledge work that often requires a combination of expertise, judgement, creativity, and problem-solving skills (Cazzaniga et al. 2024; Margaryan 2023). For instance, GenAI notably enhances the analysis of unstructured data like clinical notes and diagnostic images, traditionally challenging radiologists. Tax professionals use GenAI (Georgia 2023) to automate tasks and assist taxpayers by providing real-time responses and tailored advice on how to save taxes. Further, GenAI can support human creativity in fields like design, content development, and strategic planning by providing fresh insights and ideas that improve the quality and productivity

of work (Eloundou et al. 2023; Tong et al. 2021). However, recent research by BCG points out that consultants performed of poorer quality with the use of GenAI for problem-solving tasks (Candelon et al. 2023). This calls into question how professionals – especially ELPs – strike a balance between explicit information produced by GenAI and tacit knowledge gained from interactions with their peers (Alavi et al. 2024).

2.2 Entry-Level Professionals

An entry-level professional role in knowledge work is designed for recent graduates of a given discipline, typically requiring minimal prior professional skills, knowledge, or experience. Nevertheless, ELPs are expected to possess a foundational combination of academic knowledge and adaptable skills, which, according to Burkard et al. (2005), empower them to effectively undertake their responsibilities within a specific field. These professionals are typically marked by the acquisition of high-level qualifications such as university degrees (O’Reilly et al. 2020). However, their limited work experience often requires additional training and support to develop their competencies (McMurtrey et al. 2008), because the transition from student to professional role for ELP is marked by a lack of essential workplace competencies (Katz 1993).

As they make the move to the corporate world, ELPs begin a path of learning guided by experienced professionals. For instance, a junior consulting analyst learns client engagement and analytical skills under senior consultants, much like a junior software developer acquires programming and application development expertise from senior developers (Panwong and Kemavuthanon 2014). Similarly, an entry-level financial analyst undertakes basic financial analysis and modelling to aid organizational decision-making (Murawski et al. 2020). The most crucial tasks, responsibilities, and competencies for ELP’s include project management, knowledge of the industry, expertise in the business domain, and client-facing skills (Abraham et al. 2006). But also, personal, and interpersonal skills such as communication skills and analytical skills are rather important for ELP’s (Aasheim et al. 2009).

The rise of GenAI poses myriad opportunities and challenges to how ELPs navigate their work and career prospects. For instance, ELPs may use GenAI to improve their own work but at the same time, the very tools meant to help them may unintentionally impede their progress by replacing key skills or cause unintended consequences (Benbya et al. 2024). Given the versatility and bottom-up nature of GenAI tools, it stands to reason that many ELPs pro-actively engage in (re)crafting their jobs in response to the opportunities and challenges presented by GenAI integration in their workplace.

2.3 Job Crafting

Job crafting refers to employees' bottom-up and proactive efforts in modifying the contents, relations, and meanings of their jobs to better fit their skills, motivations, and career aspirations (Tims and Bakker 2010; Tims et al. 2012; Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001). It emerged as a response to traditional top-down work design approaches (Parker and Grote 2022), which often led to a one-size-fits-all model of poorly designed jobs by managers that failed to accommodate individual employees' preferences and circumstances (Grant and Parker 2009; Parker et al. 2019). Rather than waiting for the organization or a supervisor to redefine roles, individuals can "craft" their work in ways that align more closely with their personal values and professional goals. They can either broaden their roles by taking on additional tasks, engaging in more social interactions, and increasing their workload, or to streamline their responsibilities by reducing these elements. By taking charge of their own work redesign, employees are more likely to experience positive work-related outcomes (Campion et al. 2005), such as enhanced performance (e.g., Grant et al. 2007), recognition (e.g., Cohen 2013), well-being (e.g., Holman et al. 2010), job satisfaction (e.g., Humphrey et al. 2007), as well as work meaningfulness (e.g., Harder Fischer et al. 2024). Yet, other studies also show that depending on for instance certain personal factors or the context, certain job crafting strategies may also lead to negative consequences, such as stress (e.g., Berg et al. 2010), career marginalization (e.g., Gascoigne and Kelliher 2018) or health problems (e.g., Kossek et al 2016).

In their seminal work, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001:179) defined job crafting as 'the physical [behavioral] and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work' to make their jobs more meaningful and satisfying. They distinguished between two behavioral forms of job crafting: *task crafting* and *relational crafting*, and a third dimension referred to as *cognitive crafting*. Task crafting refers to changing the scope or nature of job tasks. For example, an employee who has a flair for design might volunteer to create visuals for presentations even if their formal job description doesn't require it. Relational crafting refers to changing the nature or extent of interactions with others at work. For example, an employee might seek out a mentor in another department or collaborate more frequently with colleagues who inspire them. Finally, beyond the two behavioral dimensions, job crafting also entails cognitive crafting, which refers to changing how one perceives or frames one's job. For example, an employee might redefine their work as serving a bigger purpose, rather than focusing on mundane tasks. Yet, as cognitive crafting manifests as an internal, largely unobservable mental reframing, it is

usually omitted from empirical studies of job crafting (Ebert et al. 2025). Moreover, cognitive changes arguably take place slower than behavioral adjustments, making it less likely to manifest in the "novelty-phase" of GenAI adoption by ELPs who have not lived long enough with the technology – or their jobs – re-construe the deeper meaning of their jobs. Accordingly, we adopt the same pragmatic boundary for our work and focus on the more readily observable behavioral forms of job crafting.

The introduction of a new technology such as GenAI can serve as a catalyst for job crafting (Li et al 2022; Tarafdar and Saunders 2022). As Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) emphasize, contextual factors such as ICT can shape employees' perceptions of the opportunities to reshape their work environment. Recent studies also support the idea of technology-induced or -enabled job crafting, suggesting that employees use technology to redefine their roles (Mukherjee and Dhar 2023). Specifically, Law and Varanasi (2025) used the lens of job crafting to organize and make sense of "23 studies from the ACM Digital Library that focused on workers' lived experiences and practitioners with GenAI" (p.1). They highlighted how knowledge workers reshape their tasks (from delegating peripheral tasks to GenAI to engaging in "AI managerial labor" to oversee, refine, and validate GenAI outputs), adjust their work relationships (e.g., bypassing peers and subordinates in favor of GenAI assistance), and ultimately shift their perceptions of their roles (e.g., perceiving professional identity crises or opportunities for identity growth). They conclude that despite burgeoning interest in job crafting at large, there is a paucity of research on how (Gen)AI technologies intersect with worker-led transformations of work (Freise et al. 2024).

This is all the more the case, we argue, for ELPs who have to reckon with and integrate GenAI into their work in an environment where traditional growth pathways – rooted in experience, mentorship, and incremental skill acquisition – are increasingly disrupted, leading us to the (reframed) research question: *How do ELPs proactively craft their job in response to GenAI adoption and integration in the workplace?*

3 Method

The study employs an inductive qualitative research design using grounded theory methods (Charmaz 2006; Strauss and Corbin 1990). We conducted an in-depth case study within the DBI (a pseudonym) department of a global consulting firm in the Netherlands from February to September 2024 using both interview data as well as insights from field observations.

3.1 Case Description

InnovaWorld (a pseudonym) is one of the world's largest consultancy firms with a yearly revenue of more than 50 billion, more than 700,000 employees dispersed over more than 200 cities and operating across more than 40 countries. The company serves more than 9000 clients across more than 120 countries worldwide in various industries. The business is split up into five organizational pillars that do business in five different services. The study was conducted at InnovaWorld in the Netherlands, specifically within the consulting pillar, focusing on the DBI department situated in Amsterdam that specializes in technology strategy. The DBI aims to help client leaders establish their technology vision and guide their technology-powered transformations in order to achieve exceptional and sustainable business value. With roughly 75 employees, DBI serves over 50 clients across all industries in the Netherlands. One of the seven internal capability groups of DBI is responsible for GenAI. These groups focus on informing staff members about new GenAI functionalities and serve as the initial point of contact for DBI regarding the GenAI use.

InnovaWorld's general stance towards GenAI is one of openness and strategic integration, viewing it as an opportunity to drive innovation, rather than a threat to be mitigated. For instance, InnovaWorld actively explores the development and fine-tuning of proprietary GenAI models, positioning itself in the AI space. The organization's policies on AI usage are comprehensive, focusing on data privacy, ethical use, and ensuring regulatory standards. In contrast to some companies that restrict their professionals' use of GenAI tools, InnovaWorld adopts a more tolerant approach. This openness has enabled its workforce to exploit free-of-charge GenAI tools and integrate them into their workflows to enhance productivity and service delivery. However, the widespread public access to technologies simulating human intelligence poses a new challenge to the consultancy industry, signaling a shift in the competitive landscape (Samokhvalov 2024). This backdrop makes the consultancy sector an ideal case for study. Consultants typically enjoy greater autonomy and prestige, and occupy a distinctive professional role, reinforced by the social and professional support networks within and outside their organizations (Pratt et al. 2006). In this evolving landscape, it became an interesting phenomenon to study how GenAI impacts the work practices of professionals at InnovaWorld and how these professionals adapt in response.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection took place between February to September 2024. During that time, we collected 27 semi-structured

interviews with ELPs, senior consultants and managers – all working in the DBI. Moreover, multiple field visits (57 days of observations in total) to the DBI department during this time complemented our insights and allowed us to gain an in-depth understanding of the goals, activities and overall responsibility of the department within the company. We also learned about the different positions and roles in the department as well as about the use of GenAI at DBI. In this context, we were also able to observe for which purposes and tasks DBI members used GenAI and which specific tools they made use of.

To gain an in-depth understanding into the implications of GenAI on professionals' and particularly ELPs' work, we conducted semi-structured interviews with ELPs, senior consultants and managers (see Table 1 for an overview of our interviewees). To obtain a wide range of experiences with GenAI and comprehensive grasp of its complex implications for ELPs' work practices, purposeful sampling was used to target various roles within the researched department. This approach ensured the inclusion of individuals across the department, possessing diverse experiences and viewpoints regarding GenAI tools and individuals who could provide valuable insights into the research question. Interviews were conducted using a pre-defined guide to ensure consistency while allowing for the flexibility to explore emerging themes (see Appendix A and Appendix B for an overview of interview questions. The appendices are available via <http://link.springer.com>). Each interview lasted on average 45 min and we audio recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim.

We initially focused on interviewing ELPs to understand how they use GenAI in their work, how they perceived changes as a result of an increasingly GenAI-induced work environment and how the rise of GenAI shaped their roles and career prospects. While these interviews revealed interesting insights into ELPs' activities and actions of crafting core dimensions of their work, we also became interested in how senior consultants and managers perceive these changes. Thus, interviews with senior consultants and managers were conducted to provide important perspectives in how they perceive the use of GenAI by ELPs and how they reflect on long-term implications of GenAI use for ELPs' professional growth and career paths.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis was inspired by grounded theory methods (Strauss and Corbin 1990), which allowed us to go back and forth between our collected data and theoretically emerging concepts. We analyzed our data in three iterative rounds, following Gioia et al. (2013). In the first round, we used open coding to gain a broad overview of how the rise of GenAI at InnovaWorld changed the work of ELPs,

Table 1 Overview of interviewees

No. of interviewees	Position	Average working experience
14	Entry-level professionals	1.5 years
5	Senior consultants	6 years
8	Manager	15 years
Total: 27		

particularly how they used GenAI in their daily work and how they perceived working with GenAI and in a GenAI-induced work environment. In a second step, we categorized our emergent open codes into second-order themes to identify similarities and common topics across codes. For instance, we summarized open codes such as “Using GenAI for slide creation” and “Using GenAI for email correspondence” into the second-order theme “Automating repetitive tasks”. Realizing that many of our themes centered around core aspects of work – such as changes to tasks and relationships – we went to the work and management literature to compare our insights. In this process, we gravitated towards job crafting theory as a lens to make sense of our data. This framework allowed us to organize and make sense of the micro-level actions and perceptions of ELPs as they changed different aspects of their work with and through GenAI. Going back and forth between emerging codes and this framework, in a third step we then aggregated our themes into two behavioral job crafting dimensions of *task crafting* and *relational crafting*.

While many codes related to the traditional dimensions of behavioral job crafting, we recognized codes that did not fit into these concepts and instead revolved around ELPs’ tailoring the visibility of their work and role in the eyes of other stakeholders. We extensively discussed the meaning of the respective codes and eventually labeled this emerging dimension as *signal crafting* – which represents a new type of behavioral job crafting.

Once we had derived a coherent picture of how ELPs (re)crafted their job with GenAI, we followed a similar three step coding process for observing consequences of ELPs’ job (re)crafting activities – both from managers’ and ELPs’ perspective. This was an important perspective which allowed us to dive deeper into the implications of ELPs’ job crafting activities but also identify certain behaviors of managers which in turn shaped ELPs’ activities. For example, we noticed that managers’ perception that ELPs just copy-paste GenAI outputs as well as their challenge to identify high-performers due to the prevalent use of GenAI triggered some ELPs’ to actively tailor their visibility and emphasize that their knowledge or approach to GenAI is unique and valuable to managers and the organization. Notably, although the job crafting literature highlights a wide range of outcomes (as reviewed above), the consequences we identified are not comprehensive, but

rather represent those that emerged from our empirical data. Figures 1 and 2 show our final data structure – including ELPs’ job crafting behaviors and resulting consequences.

4 Findings

The bottom-up rise of GenAI technology in InnovaWorld has created a new work environment in which the use of GenAI tools has become increasingly common, particularly among ELPs. As a result, ELPs have begun (re)crafting their job by adjusting their (1) tasks, (2) relationships, and (3) signals they send to other stakeholders. In the following sections, we present these changes. Further, we elaborate on the consequences of ELPs’ job (re)crafting activities – both from managers’ and ELPs’ perspectives.

4.1 Task Crafting: Changing What an ELP Does

The use of GenAI technologies has allowed ELPs at InnovaWorld to modify the number, scope, and type of tasks they perform in order to enhance their workflows and focus more on tasks that they perceive as meaningful and beneficial for their career prospects. In particular, ELPs leverage GenAI’s task-agnostic versatility to automate repetitive and routine tasks, shifting their focus towards higher-order tasks and developing new skills, in part through interactive engagement with GenAI’s conversational interface. At the same time, the use of GenAI for ELPs tasks presents challenges, including heightened outcome expectations from senior consultants and managers, as well as the risk of skill stagnation and/or loss as well as over-reliance on GenAI.

4.1.1 Automating Repetitive Tasks

Prior to GenAI, project management tasks that ELPs were responsible for involved extensive coordination and administrative duties. For instance, ELPs were responsible for facilitating, hosting, and setting up meetings with clients, as well as preparing meeting agendas, and taking notes to support effective meetings that yield actionable outcomes. Furthermore, ELPs were traditionally involved in content creation, which required producing original

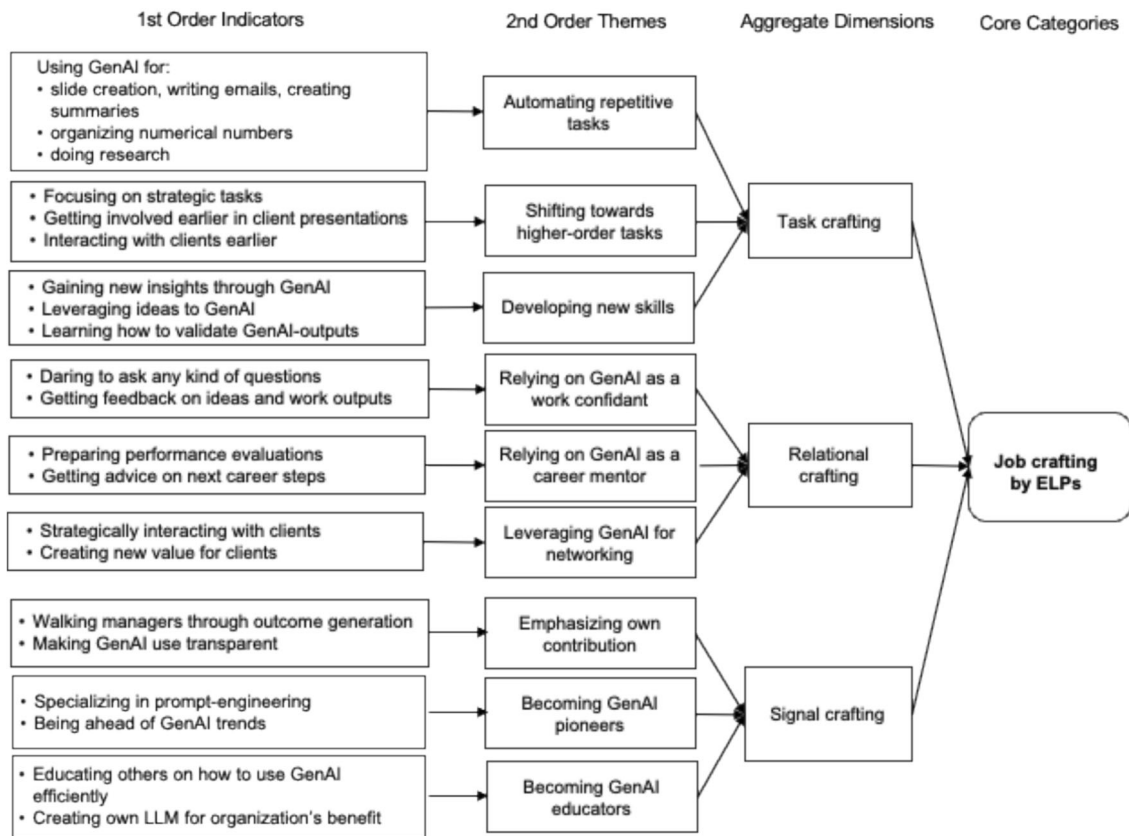


Fig. 1 Data structure (Part I)

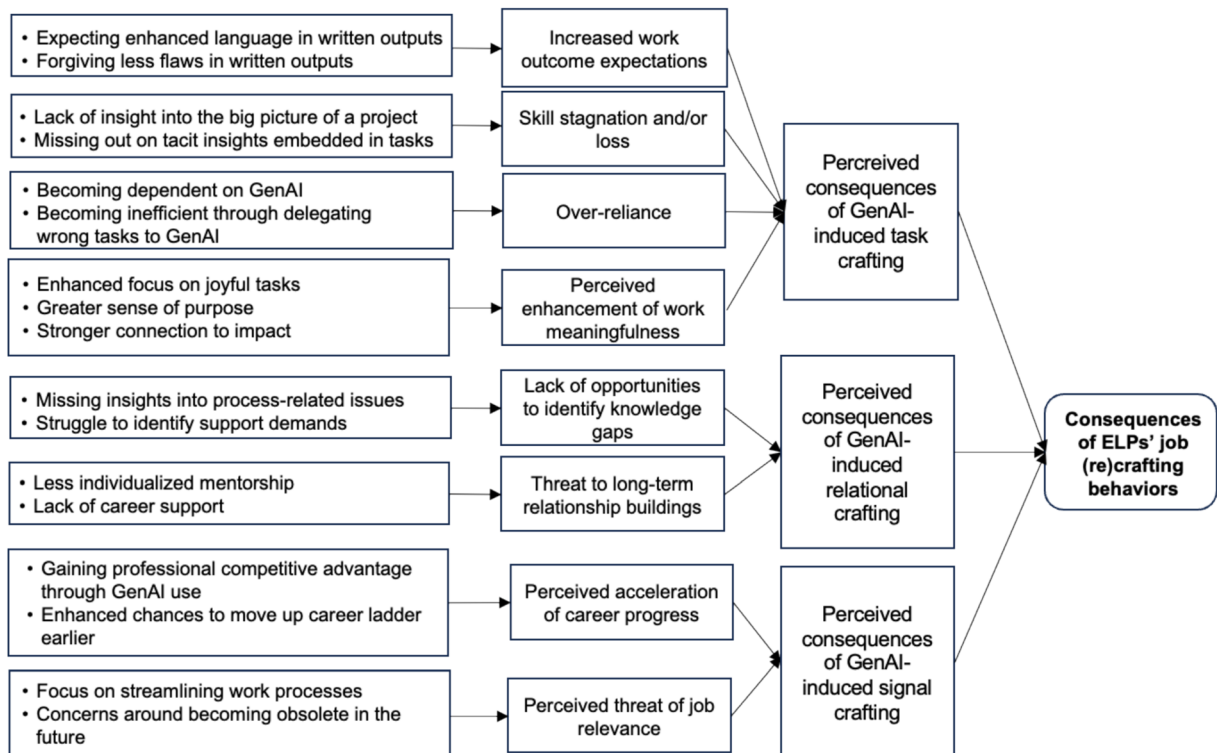


Fig. 2 Data structure (Part II)

material such as presentation slides and concept papers. This process often entailed detailed, granular work, particularly the ability to turn data into insights. Examples include incorporating data or feedback from meetings or interviews into presentation slides to build a storyline or develop workshops or reports based on client information:

So, my main role is to get the input from for example meetings or talks with my manager and then combine that in certain slides so that you have like a storyline in it. Which you eventually will present to the client, so my main role is facilitating those presentation materials. (Interview, ELP 6).

With the rise of GenAI, some ELPs have started automating many of these repetitive and routine tasks, such as creating slides, organizing numerical data or forming interpretations. For instance, some ELPs now write standard and repetitive emails with GenAI to save time and to make the process more efficient:

So some of the dumb work which would typically take me a couple hours. I can now do [it] in maybe one hour or something. (Interview, ELP 2).

Similarly, some ELPs use GenAI to acquire necessary information for their content creation. For instance, whereas ELPs previously searched on the internet or used internal company sources for relevant data, they now turn to GenAI to quickly obtain information on a topic or company. This shift to using GenAI as the starting point to search for and collect data makes their information retrieval more efficient and convenient:

Yeah, I think it changed because in the past you just looked on the internet on different websites or asked people for information or asked the client itself. Now, the first thing I do is to ask ChatGPT to provide information about a topic or company. (Interview, ELP 2).

4.1.2 Shifting to Higher-Order Tasks

Freed from repetitive and routine tasks, ELPs can now focus more on higher-order tasks that entail higher degrees of creativity, innovation and client interaction – such as presenting and pitching reports or concepts to clients. This shift is seen by ELPs as important for their career prospects, as they aspire to take on leadership positions such as team lead or senior consultant more quickly and thus, to be tasked with more interesting work. Previously, ELPs had to prove themselves by completing mundane work that senior consultants preferred to delegate before being entrusted with more sophisticated tasks. With GenAI, however, this transition can take place faster:

It enables you to take on more responsibility because you have already tested a certain layout, in that sense that something is already more mature from the start and actually finalized even before your next checkup with your project lead. (Interview, ELP 1)

They have a better start now with GenAI in the way they perform their work. They have an accelerated way of getting to a certain level of understanding to contribute. (Interview, Manager 2)

4.1.3 Developing New Skills

To facilitate their transition to higher-order tasks and advance more quickly into leadership positions, many ELPs use GenAI to develop new skills, particularly those related to improving their creativity and innovation capabilities. In this context, ELPs specifically value GenAI as a partner that sparks new ideas, provides different perspectives on a topic and confronts them with potentially unusual or unique approaches that they would not have thought of otherwise. ELPs then use these inspirations to improve but also to challenge their own work and thus, to enhance its level of creativity and innovation overall. As one ELP noted:

Uh, I think on one hand it makes me more creative because the output is more tailored to my needs, so therefore instead of having these fixed set of icons, I can really look for an icon that completely fits the situation that I like. (Interview, ELP 3)

Moreover, GenAI's risk of producing hallucinated or biased content leads some ELPs to increasingly focus on learning how to act as content curators to further ensure the quality of work output. This shift includes developing skills around overseeing and refining GenAI-generated output as well as to detect potential issues in advance:

Validation has become a bigger part of our role. (Interview, ELP 9)

I think for the analyst [ELP], it would be doing more like the quality assurance of the output of GenAI. And making sure that it is correct, what is there. (Interview, Manager 1)

4.1.4 Perceived Consequences of GenAI-Induced Task Crafting

Resulting from ELPs' task (re)crafting we found several consequences – both positive and negative – associated with ELPs' behaviors. On the one hand, a positive consequence associated with the way some ELPs use GenAI to (re)craft their job relates to ELPs perceiving their work as more meaningful. A key aspect of this consequence is the

reduction of repetitive, low-engagement tasks, allowing ELPs to focus on activities that are more enjoyable, stimulating, and better aligned with their strengths. For instance, by intentionally offloading mundane responsibilities – such as note summarization or manual document analysis – ELPs reallocate their time to tasks they find intrinsically motivating:

The more mundane task that I mentioned earlier about document analysis and getting all the key information out and especially like meeting notes that are summarised stuff like that, that's that. Although it is definitely part of the role description of an analyst (...) it it's been a fringe activity not a core activity so those fringe activities are becoming less important. (...) and you can focus on the fun stuff. (Interview, ELP 3)

Beyond increasing task enjoyment, some ELPs also mention a heightened sense of purpose in their roles. As some proactively (re)craft their jobs to include more meaningful contributions – such as client-facing preparation, strategic input, or project ideation – they begin to view their work as more consequential to team and organizational success. This is often accompanied by a stronger connection to the broader impact of their efforts and a greater perception of being key contributors to relevant outcomes. As one ELP put it:

You can offer more value to the client and the team yes, because you can focus on the real content and not on polishing your language on slides or yes other minor stuff. And you can think ahead for the client already in advance. That's great. (Interview, ELP 1)

Through this intentional reshaping of their roles, ELPs are not only enhancing their experience of daily work but cultivating a more deeply rooted sense of meaning and impact in their professional journey.

On the other hand, particularly managers at InnovaWorld also point towards rising standards for expected work outcomes resulting from ELPs' use of GenAI for task automation. For instance, managers now expect flawless slides and reports with sophisticated language as they take the use of GenAI for language checks and improvements for granted:

I was talking about an analyst and what they can do and how they can shift their work and attention, but it also probably will change what you expect. Let's say in the short term it will just, you will just expect things faster maybe or expect that there will be answers that it's easier to get. (Interview, Manager 5)

Moreover, managers point towards a potential loss of the bigger picture and essential skills for ELPs in the long-run.

Specifically, as direct managers now also often use GenAI for tasks that they would've previously delegated to ELPs, the latter may miss out on valuable (tacit) insights embedded within those tasks:

I mean, even in the way that I apply GenAI, I might not task an analyst to go and turn those 60 words paragraph into 40 words. I will just do that myself because it will take me 2 min. So, I will no longer pass those things over to the analyst [ELP]. (Interview, Manager 2)

Another potential negative consequence perceived by both managers and ELPs relates to ELPs' over-reliance, and thus increasing dependence, on GenAI. This particularly relates to ELPs who lack the motivation to critically assess and validate AI-generated content and instead simply copy-paste its outputs. As one ELP admits:

But second is that I'll get so lazy that I don't check what the Gen AI generated and that there's something stupid in there. (Interview, ELP 5)

In such cases, if/when the tool collapses or indicates that it cannot help, ELPs become increasingly frustrated:

And I think I now have reached a level that I am also kind of spoiled for it. So, when I do not get the information that I would like to have, then I become also a little bit frustrated about it. (Interview, ELP 5)

While some ELPs would then revert to doing the work manually, others would still try to make it work with GenAI, leading to even more over-reliance. Ironically, this over-reliance can result in increased time consumption and inefficiencies:

And you have a way in your head and then you spend more time on generating it the way you want through the tool, whereas if you've just generated it yourself with your own brain, it would have been quicker. (Interview, ELP 1)

Overall, ELPs use GenAI to (re)craft their tasks, aiming for greater efficiency and accuracy, a stronger focus on meaningful tasks and skills associated with accelerated career progress. However, this approach also carries the risk of over-reliance on GenAI tools, potentially leading to the loss of essential skills and insights that may be important for ELPs' long-term career growth and development.

4.2 Relational Crafting: Changing How an ELP Interacts with Others

Beyond task crafting, the use of GenAI technologies has allowed ELPs at InnovaWorld to change the extent and

nature of their interpersonal interactions with colleagues, clients and other stakeholders in order to make them more meaningful and targeted towards their career prospects. In particular, some ELPs leverage GenAI's task-agnostic versatility to work more independently, while also relying on its conversational interface to gain mentorship-like guidance and create additional opportunities for client interaction. At the same time, this trend reduces interactions with senior colleagues and managers regarding current questions and issues, leaving managers with difficulties in assessing and allocating support to ELPs. Moreover, managers question the overall trustworthiness of ELPs' work due to the use of GenAI and thereby paradoxically demand additional interactions with ELPs to validate their work outcomes.

4.2.1 Relying on GenAI as a Work Confidant

Prior to the rise of GenAI, ELPs relied on the advice and support of senior colleagues and managers when facing questions, issues or unclarity about work-related matters. With GenAI, many ELPs now strive to work more independently, seeing this as an opportunity to enhance their career prospects by demonstrating their ability in independently solving problems and taking on tasks.

By using GenAI as their primary source of information and support, ELPs feel more comfortable in asking as many questions as needed to understand a topic, including questions that they might have feared as self-explanatory to their peers or managers. Consequently, whereas ELPs once carefully considered which questions were appropriate, they now experience fewer barriers in seeking guidance from GenAI:

There are certain tasks that analysts could not pick up themselves. Where they absolutely needed guidance by a consultant or up which are now being. Where now ChatGPT or similar technologies could provide that guidance already, which is basically all the combination of the of the first two use cases that I mentioned, so understanding concepts and being a sparring partner. (Interview, ELP 10)

Moreover, ELPs increasingly acknowledge GenAI as an interaction partner and teammate that helps them in iteratively developing better ideas and concepts. For instance, ELPs use GenAI as a counterpart or opponent when pitching new ideas or concepts to anticipate managers' responses, questions or concerns. In this way, ELPs actively prepare themselves in advance for potential issues or questions in their pitch:

And then you basically input your ideas and then GenAI can basically act as a counterpart who just thinks aloud with you. (Interview, ELP 10)

I use ChatGPT to say: "This is the ultimate goal to get out of the session, what is a good story line of good way to structure this meeting to get the ultimate output". So it helps me as a sort of 'sparring partner'. (Interview, ELP 1)

4.2.2 Relying on GenAI as a Career Mentor

Interestingly, ELPs also use GenAI as a mentor for seeking guidance and advice on career-related questions, reflections and thoughts. For instance, ELPs rely on GenAI to prepare for performance evaluations by identifying key achievements, setting career goals, and crafting compelling self-assessments. Additionally, ELPs use GenAI-generated insights to strategize when and how to request promotions or bonuses, ensuring they present a strong case backed by data and industry benchmarks, as well as persuasive reasoning:

It can help you ideate about the things you think are interesting, but also how you can grow. Maybe in the future you might have smart analysis as a peer-review. It might also help you find work you like and want to progress on. (...) We have [GenAI tool] within our company, which is the personal reflection tool. We have to write a reflection paper. GenAI will help to write, inspire and check to see where I can grow. (Interview, ELP 14)

4.2.3 Leveraging GenAI for Networking

Finally, ELPs use GenAI to enhance client interactions and networking opportunities. For instance, some ELPs leverage GenAI to quickly analyze market trends, generate data-driven insights, and prepare thought-provoking discussion points for client meetings. Further, by using GenAI to stay ahead of emerging industry challenges, some ELPs try to offer fresh perspectives and strategic recommendations that add value to client engagements. In this way, ELPs aim to enhance client satisfaction with their work and encourage clients to share positive feedback about them with their superiors. As one ELP summarized the new focus on the client:

The focus is more on understanding the problem of the client (...) More client facing contact. The generating of the slides will become a side task, while it is now a core task. (...) We are seen as graphic designers at [group name], they give us their ugly slides to make it more beautiful. We will shift from

more graphic designers to really helping the client.
(Interview, ELP 1)

4.2.4 Perceived Consequences of GenAI-induced Relational Crafting

From the perspective of the InnovaWorld managers, ELPs' use of GenAI to (re)craft their interpersonal relations holds the potential for certain negative consequences. While ELPs view their reduced interactions with senior colleagues and managers as an opportunity to showcase their independence, managers worry about the unchecked transfer of potentially inaccurate GenAI-generated content to clients. As a result, ELPs' use of GenAI for tasks such as preparing slides, retrieving information or writing emails and reports has led managers to rethink the timing and purpose of their interactions and collaborations with ELPs. While interactions used to mainly circle around process-related questions and clarifying information before a project or meeting, they now take place after ELPs complete their tasks and with the purpose of validating the trustworthiness of their work outcome.

The uncertainty of whether their input is natural or AI-generated makes it harder to fully trust their contributions. (Interview, Manager 4)

In this context, managers also express concerns that reduced process-related interactions with ELPs' limit the former ability to identify and keep track of whom among the ELPs has certain knowledge deficits and therefore requires additional support:

Now I was used to that same individual not coming to me for help, like just getting on with things, delivering. I didn't check in with him for two days because he didn't tell me he needed help, so I assumed it was going well. He did need help because he couldn't put it into ChatGPT and so it then becomes quite difficult to gauge how somebody's doing. (Interview, Manager 2)

Similarly, managers perceive the increasing use of GenAI as a potential threat to ELPs' long-term relationship building with colleagues, particularly their managers – relationships that serve as an important foundation for ELPs' professional growth and career prospects. As GenAI reduces the need for many interactions, as shown above, opportunities for effective mentorship and tailored guidance diminish:

It takes away the learning development that I have in mind for people and reduces the mentorship side.
(Interview, Manager 3)

So then also that sort of mentorship is different since it doesn't naturally come together because they've got stuck. They went to GenAI and got unstuck.
(Interview, Manager 1)

Overall, ELPs use GenAI to (re)craft their work relationships, striving for greater independence and aligning their interactions with strategic career interests. Yet, this approach also carries the risk of losing individual support and advice from senior colleagues and managers who increasingly struggle to identify ELPs' knowledge gaps or support demands.

4.3 Signal Crafting: Changing How Others See an ELP

Beyond the two behavioral dimensions of job crafting anchored in the literature, we identified a third behavioral dimension that has become particularly salient for ELPs at InnovaWorld in light of the rise of GenAI: signal crafting. Signal crafting refers to tailoring the visibility and image of one's work and job role in the eyes of others. As GenAI increasingly democratizes knowledge and expertise, ELPs engage in signal crafting to distinguish themselves from and stand out amongst their peers, as well as to emphasize to seniors and managers that their role is still relevant and needed. In particular, some ELPs leverage GenAI's task-agnostic versatility to become GenAI champions (e.g., by showcasing their distinct prompt engineering skills), while others may rely on its conversational interface to showcase their own contributions and diligence (e.g., by sharing their GenAI chat-logs with managers). In this way, ELPs who engage in signal crafting hope to convince managers of ELPs' valuable role despite the increasing use of GenAI for various tasks and thus, to sustain their role in the long term. In the following, we first highlight how ELPs' use of GenAI triggers the need for signal crafting, then elaborate on how some ELPs' engage in signal crafting and finally, which consequences arise.

4.3.1 Triggers for Signal Crafting

With the rise of GenAI, managers increasingly struggle to assess which ELPs are truly innovative or creative, as work output no longer solely originates from ELPs but is often (co-)produced with GenAI. This increasing blurring of the boundaries between the actual generator of the work and the recipient of credit for it makes it difficult for managers to evaluate their team members' actual skill levels and competencies in order to recognize high-performing or highly motivated ELPs:

But if it is more generally available when people are starting using throughout the company you know, then I think people also just take it for granted that

this is the baseline. For now, I think it's something where you can shine for an analyst and are one of the early adopters. If it is more generic within consulting, then obviously people will see this is coming from our internal tooling. (Interview, Manager 2)

Moreover, ELPs increasingly face prejudices from senior colleagues and managers, who often assume that many ELPs simply copy-paste GenAI-generated content without validating or reflecting on it. Based on this assumption, some seniors perceive ELPs as too lazy to engage deeply with the material, while others consider ELPs as beginners in the field and therefore less knowledgeable to thoroughly evaluate GenAI-produced content, for instance to detect hallucinated outputs:

They don't know what works and what doesn't because they don't have the experience. (Interview, Senior consultant 1)

4.3.2 Emphasizing One's Own Contribution

In response to these triggers, ELPs at InnovaWorld actively engage in signal crafting. For instance, some ELPs leverage dry-run presentations – which managers have introduced to prevent the unreflected transfer of GenAI-content to clients – to showcase their own knowledge and expertise beyond GenAI-generated outputs. During these meetings, ELPs walk managers through their thought and work processes, explaining how they understood the task, how they approached it, and proactively and openly highlighting how they used GenAI in the process. For example, one such ELP impressed her manager by developing the overall structure and narrative of the presentation on her own but then using GenAI to tailor the storyline to the specific client, including customized icons and visualizations:

So last week I had to prepare a presentation for stakeholders on the client side and I had a lot of text and then I reviewed the presentation with my project lead and then I was like look, I can add these icons here and I can generate an image for this (...) which is super nice because before you were very limited in your options due to ownership or whatever but now (...) instead of having this fixed set of icons, I can really look for an icon that completely fits the situation that I would like. (Interview, ELP 1)

4.3.3 Becoming GenAI Pioneers

Some ELPs actively seek to master GenAI applications, positioning themselves as pioneers and experts in using GenAI. For instance, while simple questions are usually directly understood by GenAI, more complex requests may

often lead to misleading or insufficient answers. As a result, experimenting with and learning how to formulate more effective prompts has become an important selling point allowing ELPs to stand out:

Prior to GenAI, it was more about finding the right documentation, now it is about asking the right questions. (Interview, ELP 14)

ELPs who become known for mastering GenAI – e.g., through showcasing their prompt engineering prowess – are particularly valued and recognized by managers who acknowledge the importance of acting as GenAI leaders and experts:

So if I would maybe gain a certain expertise in Gen AI it simply creates opportunities for careers. You see it as an example with [name ELP colleague] who really has become a certain expert in the subject at least within our team and it gave him a lot of opportunities to do a lot of client work. So that same opportunity would be there for me if I would be more into it. (Interview, ELP 6)

Similarly, some ELPs strive to become more visible in the organization by using their GenAI expertise to create new tools or initiatives. For instance, one ELP noted how another colleague developed a GenAI tool tailored to the project team's needs:

And also have a look around. So, for instance we discussed during the GPT training that some people make their own GPT's, and the perfect thing now is that you can share them, which means you can leverage knowledge of others. For instance, one of our colleagues developed a really nice icon creator for us. (Interview, ELP 1)

4.3.4 Becoming GenAI Educators

In this context, some pioneering ELPs proactively identify and suggest areas for leveraging GenAI solutions that benefit managers and contribute to improving their work:

Bottom-up knowledge sharing [becomes possible] when analysts [ELP] [use GenAI to] come up with solutions that help Managing Directors. (Interview, Senior consultant 1)

Through such initiatives, these ELPs proactively make themselves visible to others, underscoring their (augmented) competence, creativity and innovativeness, which sets them apart from other ELPs who only copy-paste GenAI content. These innovator ELPs are then often invited by managers to join more advanced projects, but also new initiatives such as developing inhouse LLMs. In

these initiatives, these ELPs can further enhance their position by showcasing their competence towards a broader set of colleagues in other teams and projects.

4.3.5 Perceived Consequences of GenAI-induced Signal Crafting

As a result of ELPs' signal crafting activities, managers and ELPs point towards the potential of accelerated career progress for ELPs, particularly if ELPs manage to showcase how valuable their skills and role is for the team but also for the organization. For instance, previously, ELPs primarily considered themselves as assistants to senior colleagues and managers, responsible for creating content that served as the foundation for the seniors' presentations and client interactions. Now, with GenAI, ELPs – particularly those who go beyond simply streamlining their work processes as described above under signal crafting – perceive their role as more advanced and expect a more accelerated career progress. In particular, while those ELPs previously perceived themselves as operational task executors at the lowest level within the organization, they now consider themselves as further ahead in terms of their position and promotion prospects:

Knowing how to use [GenAI], when to use it, when to not use it, can really help you in boosting your career because if it helps you in doing your job better, faster, in a more creative way, then it can really help you. So you can use it to your own career benefit. (Interview, ELP 1)

I think the difference between the levels is a little bit smaller now. Because you can get more responsibilities and more tasks in a certain amount of time, so I can imagine that five years ago when you had to prove that you were ready to make the promotion from analyst to consultant, then you really had big responsibilities on a certain project or did a lot of different things. But maybe now you can get it faster and also provide a better story of yourself to show that you're ready for the promotion. (Interview, ELP 2)

This perception is reinforced by managers who appreciate those ELPs who use GenAI for innovations, creativity and organizational benefits:

If they [analysts] are able to leverage these tools successfully, they will have better results on their daily jobs in the projects they were doing their work. And they will shine more, so they will have a better chance for promotions I would assume. Because they are doing their work efficiently and better, more efficiently and better. (Interview, Manager 3)

It makes the analyst [ELP] more important. They are the most digital savvy. They can become prompt engineers. Even perform algorithmic thinking and guide GenAI. (Interview, Manager 2)

Thus, ELPs who engage in signal crafting are able to emphasize their current and future value as well as the importance of their role despite increasing reliance on GenAI tools.

In contrast, some managers and ELPs also point towards a potential negative consequence: the risk that the future advancement of GenAI technologies could render certain ELP careers and roles obsolete. This is particularly seen as an issue for ELPs who mainly use GenAI to simply streamline their work processes and copy paste GenAI outputs without enriching them with their own thinking or reflections. Those ELPs particularly perceive a threat to their career in the long term:

In other words, sometimes you have a concern, but that's more of a dystopian thing. Like it will take over our job. (Interview, ELP 4)

This perceived negative consequence is reinforced by senior colleagues and managers who often criticize the unreflective use of GenAI, for instance when preparing slides or reports:

I'm afraid that their growth will not be as fast as it used to be because they outsource the work, thinking about the good storyline, thinking about how do you write this on the paper, how do you make good slides. (Interview, Manager 4)

Thus, those ELPs are increasingly worried about on how to differentiate themselves from GenAI's capabilities and how to provide additional value:

GenAI is a tool that everybody can use and it can do so much. And because consultancy is a job where you would almost say, wow, if GenAI becomes good enough, it would almost be able to give me advice, you know, like, why do I even need a consult anymore? (Interview, ELP 6)

Overall, the modifications around ELPs' tasks, relationships and signals holds both positive and negative consequences for ELPs' work and long-term role. Depending on how ELPs consider and use GenAI for (re)crafting their job, some ELPs may ultimately see their daily work becoming more meaningful and beneficial for their career prospects, others may face increased challenges to prove themselves as valuable in the future despite the increasing adoption and advancement of GenAI technologies.

5 Discussion

This research explored how entry-level professionals in knowledge work (ELPs) reshape their work in response to GenAI adoption and integration in the workplace. The findings show how ELPs leverage GenAI's task-agnostic versatility and conversational interface to transform the way they manage tasks, interact with colleagues and superiors, and demonstrate the value of their contributions to other stakeholders. Table 2 summarizes these GenAI-induced job crafting behaviors. Moreover, our study sheds light on the respective consequences that emerge from ELPs' job crafting behaviors. Figure 3 illustrates our overall findings. By combining perspectives of ELPs, senior consultants and managers on how GenAI shapes

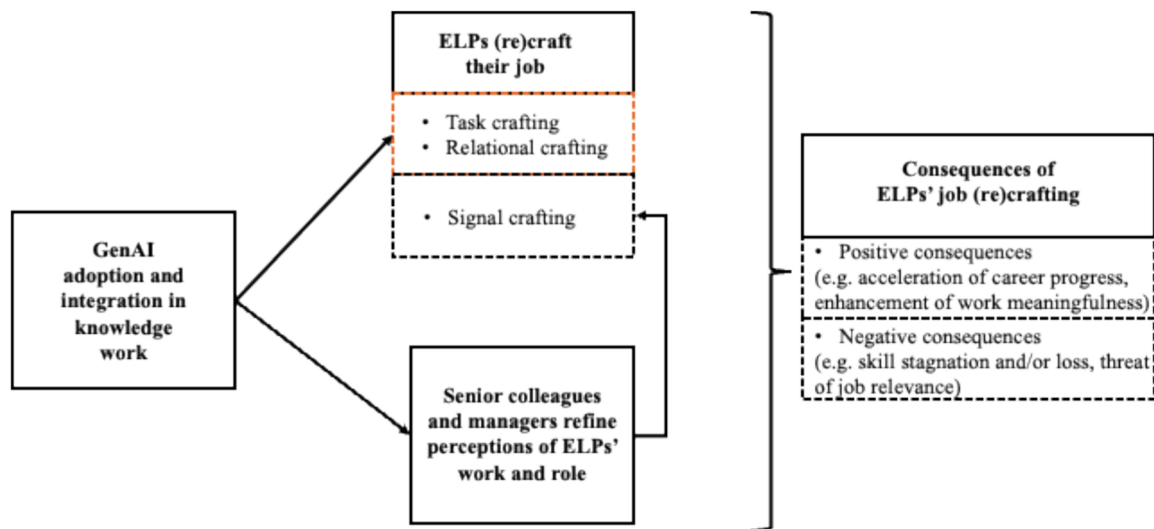
ELPs' work and career prospects, this study yields important theoretical and practical implications for the literature on GenAI and knowledge work.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

First, our study contributes to the literature on (Gen)AI and knowledge work by employing a job crafting lens to explore how ELPs perceive and respond to the adoption of AI technologies. While traditional AI technologies are typically implemented top-down and thus often cause professionals to perceive the new technology as a threat to their work (e.g., Scarbrough et al. 2024; Strich et al. 2021), we show how the bottom-up adoption of GenAI allows ELPs to proactively use the new technology to (re)craft

Table 2 Overview of GenAI characteristics and job crafting dimensions

		GenAI characteristic	
		Task-agnostic versatility	Conversational interface
Job crafting dimensions	Task crafting	Using GenAI to automate a wide range of tasks	Using GenAI as a “sparring partner” to brainstorm and/or refine content
	Relational crafting	Using GenAI to work more independently, with fewer hand-offs and expert consultations	Using GenAI as a no-judgemental mentor to ask “naïve” questions from, or “prep-partner” for client dry-runs
	Signal crafting	Becoming GenAI champions and educators by showcasing distinct prompt engineering skills	Showcasing own contributions and diligence by sharing chat-logs with managers



Job crafting dimensions anchored in the literature

Fig. 3 Visualization of how ELPs reshape their work in response to GenAI adoption and integration in the workplace

their roles in ways that align with their goals, interests, and career aspirations. In doing so, we adapted the job crafting framework in line with Law and Varanasi (2025), who in their review of worker-led transformation of work vis-à-vis GenAI, concluded that, while powerful, the job crafting lens needs to evolve to accommodate the complexities of GenAI-related transformations. Specifically, we point to the relational nature of job crafting – moving beyond its typical portrayal as a one-sided effort by workers to change their tasks, relationships and cognitive perceptions (e.g., Li et al 2022; Tarafdar and Saunders 2022). Instead, we highlight how the behaviors and attitudes of others towards ELPs and their use of GenAI shape the ELPs' job crafting behaviors and perceptions. For instance, signal crafting reflects a relational dimension as managers' behaviors and attitudes towards GenAI prompt ELPs to engage in tailoring the visibility and image of their role in the eyes of those managers. Similarly, while cognitive perceptions are usually linked to one's own considerations and reflections, we highlight how ELPs' modified perceptions of their role are largely shaped as a result of how they use GenAI but also of how others see their role. Thus, our research highlights the relational dynamics that evolve around emerging AI technologies (Barley and Bailey 2020; Pakarinen and Huising 2023).

Second, our study contributes to the literature on (Gen)AI and expertise by highlighting the dual nature of expertise democratization through the rise of GenAI. On the one hand, while some work suggests that particularly less skilled or junior professionals may struggle to compete with GenAI as their tasks can be delegated to the technology (e.g., Alavi et al. 2024; Benbya et al. 2024), this study emphasizes that GenAI can actually help ELPs to take on more sophisticated tasks earlier and thus to positively shape their career prospects. Moreover, our study shows that the bottom-up adoption of GenAI can even empower ELPs by developing unique expertise, contributing to reversed knowledge sharing in the organization and thus to put themselves into more powerful positions. For instance, ELPs who master prompt engineering can leverage GenAI for a variety of tasks, including data analysis, deriving personalized insights, and providing polished presentations, which help managers make informed decisions faster. Further, these ELPs become an important bridge between the technology and managers, similar to knowledge brokers (e.g., Waardenburg et al. 2022). As a result, these ELPs position themselves as adaptable and proactive problem-solvers who are continuously upskilling and adding value through GenAI-enhanced strategies and solutions. Thus, while several studies on AI suggest that the autonomous capabilities of AI technologies are undermining professionals' expertise (e.g., Lebovitz et al. 2022; Scarbrough et al. 2024; Strich

et al. 2021) and even make professionals obsolete (Cazaniga et al. 2024), our research shows how GenAI can contribute to the development of new expertise and skills as well as novel professional and organizational competitive advantages.

On the other hand, we also point towards the risks of expertise democratization for ELPs. As the bottom-up adoption of GenAI allows everyone to use GenAI for their own purposes, it is becoming increasingly difficult for others such as senior colleagues or managers to distinguish between contributions stemming from the technology or from the ELPs. This creates an additional pressure on ELPs to continuously promote their own contributions and highlight the value of their competence towards other stakeholders. This signaling behavior may potentially have negative implications for the organizational culture, including an increased competitiveness among ELPs or a more egoistic team culture. In this regard, our study adds to the literature that has revealed unintended consequences of introducing (Gen)AI technologies, such as the encouragement of selfish behavior (March 2021), as well as the development of negative attitudes towards – human or AI – errors (e.g., Burton et al. 2020; Berger et al. 2021; Jusupow et al. 2020).

Finally, our research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how GenAI impacts ELPs' work by combining the perspectives of ELPs, senior colleagues and managers. While ELPs' motivations to use GenAI for a specific way of (re)crafting their job are often short-term oriented, for instance by making certain tasks faster and easier to perform, senior colleagues and managers point towards potential long-term implications of ELPs' job crafting activities. For instance, in line with scholars suggesting that (Gen)AI technologies may create new dependencies or result in skill stagnation or loss (e.g., Alavi et al. 2024; Mayer et al. 2020; Pakarinen and Huising 2023), senior colleagues and managers in our study emphasize these concerns, particularly for those ELPs who mainly focus on streamlining their work processes with GenAI. Moreover, although the GenAI adoption in the workplace is still a relatively new phenomenon and thus, actual long-term implications are difficult to grasp, our research gives important hints at several long-term changes in ELPs' work and role. In particular, our research indicates that with the advanced capabilities of GenAI technologies, knowledge will be increasingly created in partnership with GenAI instead of with senior colleagues or managers. Moreover, ELPs' role may shift from content creators to content curators, a change that could ask for new skills and training (Mayer et al. 2025) and a rethinking of ELPs' role in the organization. Thus, our research provides early insights into how knowledge work in GenAI-induced work environments undergoes change.

5.2 Practical Implications

While ELPs actively reshape their tasks, relationships, signaling, and role perceptions, organizations should strive to align these bottom-up job crafting efforts with their own top-down work design initiatives. Instead of letting GenAI-driven job crafting happen in an ad-hoc, siloed, and potentially myopic manner, organizations should cultivate environments and best practices for openly integrating GenAI into ELPs workflows in ways that balance efficiency gains with long-term skill development and career progression. Moreover, organizations should create opportunities for ELPs and senior colleagues to engage in dialogue and check-ins in order to bridge the emerging gaps in mentorship and oversight that arise from increased GenAI reliance.

Second, organizations should also adapt their training programs to help ELPs shift from merely generating content with GenAI to actively curating, refining, and critically evaluating AI-generated outputs. These trainings should emphasize analytical skills and critical thinking as well as improving prompting practices and recognizing biases in AI-generated content. This shift should not be left solely to self-motivated ELPs who proactively explore GenAI but should be supported and cultivated by organization-wide initiatives. Indeed, organizations can leverage those motivated GenAI “pioneers” and “champions” to share insights, best practices, and lessons learned – including key do’s and don’ts – to mentor and upskill their peers.

Finally, with the widespread adoption of GenAI, traditional performance evaluation criteria may no longer effectively distinguish individual ELP contributions. Organizations should develop new or complementary metrics that assess ELPs’ ability to leverage GenAI strategically, such as their skill in prompt engineering, content validation, and ability to generate creative, high-value insights using GenAI. Additionally, recognizing ELPs who innovate with GenAI – by creating internal tools or optimizing workflows – can help differentiate proactive contributors from passive users.

5.3 Reflections, Limitations and Future Research

This research has to be considered in light of some limitations that provide a fruitful avenue for future research. First, this study examined the opinions and perceptions of interviewees regarding GenAI technologies at a specific moment in time. Specifically, our study was conducted during the novelty phase of GenAI adoption, roughly 15 months after large-language-model tools had become widely accessible. Therefore, beyond task and relational crafting, signaling has played an outsized role: ELPs actively perform their distinctiveness because neither peers

nor managers have yet agreed on what “good” GenAI use looks like. We see three plausible trajectories as GenAI routines stabilize: First, as organizations codify effective prompting patterns, validation protocols, and model-governance rules, the ad-hoc, performative aspect of signal crafting may be absorbed into default routines. Second, once baseline GenAI fluency becomes default, only frontier uses (e.g., agentic workflows, multi-modal orchestration) will offer differentiation. Drawing on Leonardi’s (2023) point that job tasks and roles may change three or more times a year, we expect signaling to be activated periodically each time a new capability tier diffuses. Third, and alternatively, signaling may remain central if organizations deliberately mine these behaviors to identify emergent best practices (e.g., internal prompt libraries, peer-rating of GenAI playbooks). Longitudinal research can adjudicate which path dominates under which conditions. We invite future studies to (a) follow cohorts of ELPs through multiple model-upgrade cycles; (b) compare signaling practices and intensity across cases with high vs. low GenAI-process formalization; and (c) examine how managers recalibrate evaluation criteria as the signal-to-noise ratio around GenAI-mediated output changes.

Moreover, future research may differentiate between different industries and GenAI tools to further deepen the derived insights. Similarly, the case study of this research has deployed an open policy towards using GenAI in the workplace. However, there may be different potentials or challenges for ELPs that work in organizations with more restrictive GenAI policies. Therefore, considering different work environments and organizational cultures regarding the implementation of emerging technologies can be fruitful.

6 Conclusion

The rise of GenAI becomes an important trigger in reshaping the way work is conducted with implications for professionals and organizations alike. Building on a qualitative study in consultancy, this research shows that ELPs reshape their work in response to GenAI adoption and integration in the workplace by modifying their tasks, relationships, cognitive perceptions about their work as well as their signals they send to other stakeholders about their work. Thereby, we point towards novel opportunities for ELPs’ work and career prospects resulting from their job crafting activities but also to potential long-term. Moreover, we highlight the unique relational dynamics that evolve around GenAI and its use for ELPs’ work. Ultimately, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of GenAI and its implications for ELPs and knowledge work.

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