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## Article

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# The Influence of Leadership Style on the Acceptance of Generative AI in the Workplace - The Role of Organizational Commitment, Job Insecurity and Interaction Frequency

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the influence transformational and transactional leadership styles have on the acceptance of generative AI in the workplace. To account for other factors, I also examine the mediating effect of organizational commitment and the fear of job loss as well as the moderating effect of interaction frequency with the supervisor. Using a sample of 220 full time working participants, I find that technology acceptance does not significantly differ between transformational and transactional leadership. However, the results show that the fear of job loss significantly mediates the relationship between leadership and technology acceptance. While organizational commitment does not mediate the relationship, it does significantly influence technology acceptance. My research extends research incorporating threat rigidity theory by showing that transformational leadership reduces AI-related fear of job loss. Therefore, it highlights the importance of considering additional factors such as prior experience and openness to innovations in AI acceptance. The findings suggest that managers should adopt transformational leadership to decrease the fear of job loss and enhance organizational commitment to effectively increase AI acceptance in the workplace.

**Keywords:** AI acceptance; fear of job loss; Gen AI; leadership style; technology acceptance

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the rapid advancement of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has opened new opportunities for innovation and efficiency in the workplace. AI is becoming a central force in society, transforming industries and societal structures while raising questions about ethics, privacy, and social inequality (Khogali & Mekid, 2023). Generative AI refers to AI systems that can generate unique outputs, such as text, images, or code in a conversational manner. These AI applications (e.g. ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini) are trained on extensive datasets, enabling them to engage users in conversational interactions that yield human-like responses (Casella et al., 2023; Fui-Hoon Nah et al., 2023). The most popular AI 'ChatGPT' can significantly increase productivity in professional writing tasks. It can reduce the average time taken by 40% and enhance output quality by 18% (Noy & Zhang, 2023). A study by KPMG (2024) found that

67% of managers expect generative AI to increase sales and automation and 65% expect efficiency gains to reduce costs. However, 37% expect job losses and employee acceptance issues. According to Deloitte (2023), 43% of employees say that they are worried about losing their jobs due to the increased use of AI programs over the next five years. These statistics show the perceived potential of generative AI to drive progress but also disrupt and change the labor market.

Leadership plays a crucial role in facilitating technology acceptance (Neufeld et al., 2007). Although the influence of leadership style on the acceptance of new technologies has been studied extensively (Aziz et al., 2020; Molino et al., 2021; Schepers et al., 2005), these studies have primarily focused on technologies such as software, web-based applications, and robots. The influence of leadership style on the acceptance of generative AI in the workplace remains underexplored, as existing studies do not address this specific

context. The unique characteristics of AI, such as its creativity, conversational nature, and ability to learn, present distinct challenges. These challenges and opportunities differ significantly from those associated with other technologies. This thesis contains an exploration of the influence of leadership style on the acceptance of generative AI in the workplace. Understanding how different leadership approaches impact AI acceptance can provide valuable insights for managers who want to foster a culture of technology acceptance.

The specific challenges and opportunities presented by AI technologies have not been addressed in studies of organizational commitment and technology acceptance. New technologies like AI can also spark the fear of job losses due to automation (McClure, 2018; Ore & Sposato, 2022). While research shows a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment, and the influence of organizational commitment on technology acceptance or change has been examined, AI technologies as a unique and innovative technology remain a gap in the literature. Avolio et al. (2004) demonstrated the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment, and Vella et al. (2013) and Iverson (1996) explored the influence of organizational commitment on technology acceptance and organizational change, but they did not focus on the opportunities and challenges generative AI technologies present.

The insights obtained in this thesis advances the understanding of generative AI acceptance in the workplace by an examination of the differential influence of transformational and transactional leadership styles. I argue that transformational leadership significantly enhances AI acceptance relative to transactional leadership, primarily through its positive influence on perceived usefulness. My analysis examines two key mediating factors: organizational commitment, which I propose increases technology acceptance, and fear of job loss, which I propose decreases it. I also examine how the frequency of employee-manager interactions moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and AI acceptance. I propose that employees are more likely to accept generative AI technologies when they are led by transformational leaders who effectively communicate the benefits of AI, foster organizational commitment, and mitigate fears of job displacement. This effect is particularly pronounced in contexts where there is frequent interaction between leaders and employees, allowing for greater influence on perceptions and attitudes toward new technologies.

Building on this framework, the goal of this thesis is to contribute to the academic discourse on leadership and technology acceptance by extending theoretical concepts into the emerging context of generative AI in the workplace. By empirically examining how transformational and transactional leadership styles influence AI acceptance, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature. Furthermore, by introducing organizational commitment and fear of job loss as key mediating variables, the research offers new insights into the mechanisms through which leaders can facilitate AI acceptance. These findings not only enhance our theoretical

understanding but also provide a valuable foundation for future research to explore the relationship between leadership, organizational dynamics, and technology acceptance in rapidly evolving environments.

This thesis is structured as follows: First, I review relevant psychological and organizational theories and research on leadership style and develop four hypotheses. This is followed by presenting the chosen method. I then present my empirical results. Following, I discuss my findings, describe my theoretical contributions and managerial implications and state the limitations and future research. I then conclude the thesis with a short summary.

## 2. Theory and Hypotheses

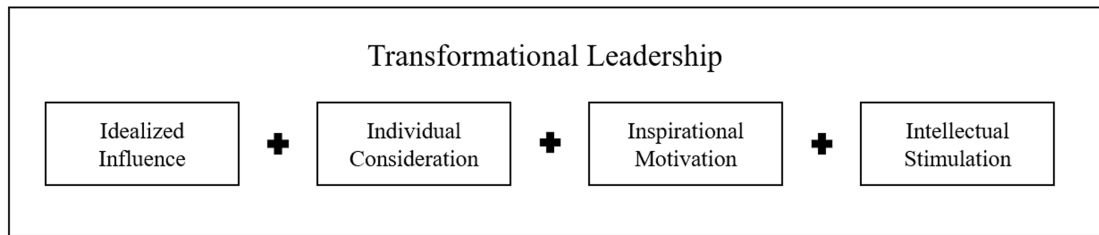
In this section, I present the relevant leadership theories, psychological frameworks, and organizational concepts that form the basis for the subsequent development of my hypotheses.

### 2.1. Leadership Theories

#### 2.1.1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership, initially defined by Burns (1978), has been extensively studied and developed over the years. Burns proposed that transformational leaders motivate and inspire followers to surpass their immediate self-interests by identifying with a broader vision, whereas transactional leaders focus on exchanges and rewards to obtain cooperation (Judge & Bono, 2000). This distinction established the foundation for further investigation into the nature and implications of transformational leadership. One of the most comprehensive expansions on Burns' original concept was provided by Bass (1985), who developed a multidimensional approach for the understanding of transformational leadership. According to Bass, see Figure 1, transformational leadership consists of four key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1999). These dimensions explain how transformational leaders act as role models, inspire with a clear vision, stimulate intellectual challenges, and attend to individual follower needs.

Building on this framework, Bass further elaborated on these dimensions, providing detailed insights into their practical application. Leaders who demonstrate *idealized influence* and *inspirational leadership* visualize and describe a promising and desirable future and clearly articulate the path to get there. They set a strong example for others to follow and demonstrate determination and confidence. When leaders engage in *intellectual stimulation*, they encourage followers (or employees) to be more innovative and to enhance their creativity. *Individualized consideration* is displayed when leaders focus on the followers' developmental needs and provide support and coaching to encourage their growth. As part of this consideration, tasks are delegated as opportunities for personal and professional growth (Bass, 1999).



**Figure 1:** Elements of Transformational Leadership, adapted from Bass and Avolio (1990, p. 231)

Bass (1999) further states that idealized influence and inspirational motivation often merge into what is commonly recognized as charisma, a quality that makes leaders appear visionary and appealing to followers. Intellectual stimulation promotes creativity by questioning assumptions and encouraging innovative thinking, while individualized consideration focuses on the personal development of followers, which is a more in-depth approach compared to traditional leadership models (Judge & Bono, 2000).

Beyond individual and immediate organizational impact, transformational leadership also seeks to incite changes in organizational culture and values (Pawar & Eastman, 1997). Thus transformational leadership can be crucial in guiding organizations through periods of significant change (Eisenbach et al., 1999; Faupel & Süß, 2019; Peng et al., 2021). Herold et al. (2008) demonstrated that transformational leaders play a key role in guiding organizations through change. They enable the alignment of employees with new visions and provide essential support. The ability to adapt is important when markets are frequently disrupted by new technologies or regulations. However, the effectiveness of Transformational leadership can vary significantly depending on organizational, social, and cultural contexts (Pawar & Eastman, 1997). Although the fundamental attributes of transformational leadership remain constant, their implementation must be adapted to align with the distinctive characteristics of each context (Pawar & Eastman, 1997).

Research has also shown that transformational leadership is not only effective but also more satisfying to followers compared to transactional approaches. Leaders who exhibit transformational qualities tend to be viewed as more effective and more satisfying by their followers (Bass, 1999). This effectiveness extends across different demographic groups, with studies indicating that women tend to exhibit more transformational leadership qualities than men, potentially due to overcoming biases and focusing on effective leadership behaviors (Bass, 1999).

While transformational leadership has many strengths, critical perspectives exist. van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) have criticized charismatic-transformational leadership research for its conceptual ambiguity, insufficient causal models, and measurement limitations, recommending a shift to more precisely defined and empirically distinct leadership aspects. Furthermore, ethical concerns arise when transformational leaders exploit their followers for personal gain or non-beneficial goals. Tourish and Pinnington (2002) argued

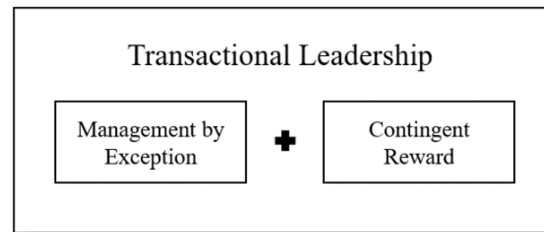
that such leaders may abuse their power, leading to a cult-like following that undermines critical thinking and autonomy, ultimately causing harm to individuals and the organization.

### 2.1.2. Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership places a strong emphasis on the exchange between leaders and followers. It is often contrasted with transformational leadership and is characterized by a focus on the fulfillment of specific tasks and responsibilities through a system of rewards and punishments (Bass, 1985). Transactional leadership defines leadership as a set of exchanges between leaders and followers. In this model, leaders administer rewards contingent on the performance of followers, and correct non-compliance or inadequate performance through penalties or corrective action. This approach, see Figure 2, is supported by two primary mechanisms: management by exception and contingent rewards (Bass, 1985).

Bass (1985, p. 122) states that “both contingent reward and contingent penalization are characteristics of transaction oriented managers because such managers unlike transforming leaders, are more concerned with efficient processes than with substantive ideas”. In a contingent reward system, the leader establishes clear expectations and goals for followers and provides specific rewards when those expectations are met. This type of reward system is based on the premise that followers are motivated to achieve desired outcomes when they are aware of the tangible benefits that will follow their performance. The rewards can include financial incentives or recognition. By aligning rewards with performance, leaders can effectively drive motivation and ensure that followers’ actions are aligned with organizational objectives (Bass, 1985).

Management by exception is a leadership style in which the leader only takes corrective action when followers deviate from established standards or when their performance falls below expectations (Bass, 1985). There are two forms of management by exception: active and passive. In the active form, leaders monitor followers’ performance closely and intervene proactively to correct mistakes or deviations (Bass, 1985). In the passive form, leaders only intervene after problems have become serious or after performance issues have been brought to their attention. This approach allows leaders to direct their attention to significant issues while maintaining a level of supervision to ensure that targets are met (Bass, 1985).



**Figure 2:** Elements of Transactional leadership, adapted from Bass and Avolio (1990, p. 231)

Transactional leadership is effective in fulfilling immediate goals through resource-based exchanges but lacks the capacity to inspire significant changes in followers' beliefs and values (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Compared to transformational leadership, transactional leadership has been found to negatively affect employees' well-being, including higher levels of stress and lower job satisfaction. This can result in a reduction in overall productivity and an increase in turnover rates (Lyons & Schneider, 2009). Nielsen et al. (2019) demonstrated, that transformational leadership and contingent rewards (transactional leadership) are not compatible and rather contradict each other.

### 2.1.3. Leader Member Exchange

The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory was originally developed by George Graen and William J. Haga in the 1970s (G. Graen & Cashman, 1975). It provides a robust framework for understanding the relationships between leaders and their followers in organizations. According to LMX theory, leadership is essentially an interaction process between leaders and followers that is characterized by the quality of their relationship. The central proposition of LMX is that leaders develop unique, individualized relationships with each follower, resulting in differentiated exchange relationships that can be categorized as either high or low quality exchange (G. B. Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Critical perspectives argue that the potential for bias and favoritism inherent in differentiated leader-member relationships can lead to perceptions of unfairness and inequity among followers. In particular for those who are part of low-quality exchanges. Additionally, critics argue that LMX theory places too much emphasis on dyadic relationships at the expense of understanding the broader network of interactions within the organization (Schyns & Day, 2010).

## 2.2. Organizational Theories

### 2.2.1. Organizational Commitment

Mowday, Steers and Porter defined organizational commitment as "(...) the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (1982, p. 27). They posited that organizational commitment involves an active relationship between individuals and the organization. In order to contribute to the organization's benefit, individuals can put their goals second (Mowday et al., 1982). Building on this concept, Meyer

and Allen developed the three component model of organizational commitment. They distinct between affective, continuance and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment is defined as the emotional attachment to the organization. Employees stay within the organization because they want to (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The costs of leaving the organization are associated with continuance commitment which leads to employees staying because they need to stay. Normative commitment refers to the feeling that employees have the feeling that they should stay with the organization due to e.g. rewards in advance (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Participative leadership and leader communication has been found as antecedents of organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Several studies provided evidence for the relationship between Participative and transformational leadership and organizational commitment (Dale & Fox, 2008; Huey Yiing & Zaman Bin Ahmad, 2009; Yousef, 2000). Research has shown that transformational leadership has a stronger positive correlation with organizational commitment than transactional leadership (L. Y. Chen, 2004; Ismael et al., 2011; Limsila & Ogunlana, 2008). Erkutlu (2008) found that transformational leadership is positively correlated with organizational commitment, while management by exception negatively affects it. However, other studies found a positive relationship between transactional leadership and organizational commitment (Ramli et al., 2019). Table 1 summarizes what key studies found about the relationship of leadership style and organizational commitment.

Consequences of organizational commitment such as performance are likely moderated by financial compensation (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Chughtai and Zafar (2006) discovered that commitment negatively related to turnover intentions and positively linked to a self-report measure of job performance. In study of Randall (1990) it was found that while organizational commitment has some positive effects on work outcomes, these effects are generally weak and influenced by various methodological and conceptual factors. Affective and normative commitment play an important role in predicting positive change-related behaviors, while continuance commitment often correlates with mere compliance (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

### 2.2.2. Threat Rigidity Theory

According to Staw et al. (1981) threat rigidity theory posits that when an organization perceives a threat, two pri-



**Table 1:** Studies of the relationship of leadership styles and organizational commitment

| Study                                                                                                                                     | Leadership Type             | Relationship with Organizational Commitment      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| L. Y. Chen, 2004; Dale and Fox, 2008; Huey Yiing and Zaman Bin Ahmad, 2009; Ismael et al., 2011; Limsila and Ogunlana, 2008; Yousef, 2000 | Transformational Leadership | Positive correlation                             |
| Raja and Palanichamy, 2011                                                                                                                | Transactional Leadership    | Less correlated than transformational leadership |
| Erkutlu, 2008                                                                                                                             | Transformational Leadership | Positive correlation                             |
| Erkutlu, 2008                                                                                                                             | Management by Exception     | Negative correlation                             |

mary effects occur. The result of a threat can be a restriction of information processing like a narrowing attention field or a constriction in control like a higher concentration of power and influence. A threat causes changes in a system's information and control processes. These changes in information processing and control reduce the diversity and flexibility of the system's behavior, leading to more rigid and less adaptive responses to the threat, see Figure 3 (Staw et al., 1981).

Structural and technological shifts are redefining work dynamics, causing significant transformations in the economy and market structures. Sanchez-Gomez et al. (2021) demonstrated that economic stress influences innovative work behaviors based on the threat rigidity theory and the conservation of resources theory. In a study from Mariano et al. (2022) it was found that older adults tend to underuse technology due to the threat of confirming ageist stereotypes. Thus (Stereotype) threat may be an important barrier to technology acceptance and usage. Employees may display threat rigidity, strictly adhering to known practices to avoid the risks associated with new technology, which stifles creativity and reduces the potential benefits of the new technology (Koberg et al., 2003). Under the influence of threat rigidity, employees may become resistant to changes (Sarkar & Osiyevskyy, 2018).

## 2.3. Psychological Theories

### 2.3.1. Conservation of Resources Theory

The conservation of resources (COR) theory was developed in 1989 by Stevan E. Hobfoll. It states that individuals are motivated to protect (conserve) their current resources and to acquire new resources. Hobfoll defines resources "(...) as those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies." (1989, p. 516). The value of resources differs from person to person and is closely tied to individual experiences and circumstances. Individuals seek to protect their resources and feel stress when their resources are threatened or lost (Hobfoll, 1989). COR theory further states that individuals must invest resources to protect against resources loss. In the context of resource loss, the

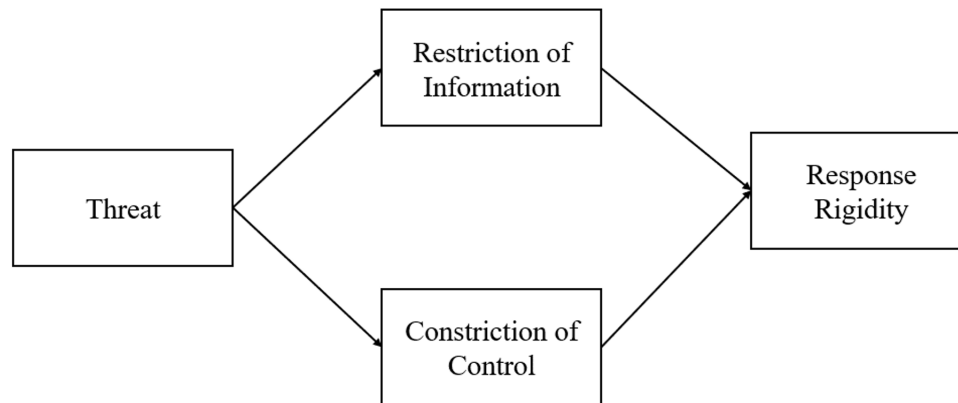
importance of new resource gain increases. This is because when circumstances of resource loss are prevalent, the value of resource gains is enhanced. Furthermore, when resources are depleted, individuals go into a protective state in order to preserve themselves (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Employment can be considered a resource, specifically a condition according to Hobfoll.

According to COR theory, it is more stressful to lose resources than it is satisfying to gain new resources (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999; Hobfoll, 2001). This principle suggests that negative changes (losses) at work, such as a reduction in tasks or responsibilities, have a more significant impact than positive changes, such as increased productivity due to mentioned losses. A study by Toh et al. (2023) linked COVID-19 anxiety to increased technology adoption among academics through the moderating effects outlined in COR theory.

Despite its success, COR theory has faced criticism due to the failure to consider cultural differences regarding the classification of resources. Since cultures perception of resources can substantially differ this potentially limits the cross-cultural applicability of the COR theory (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Morelli & Cunningham, 2012). Additionally, the COR theory has been criticized due to the methodical difficulty in measuring resources and quantifying their value (Ford et al., 2007).

### 2.3.2. Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) belongs to the most discussed paradigms for understanding behavior at work (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The basic concepts were first introduced by George C. Homans in the late 1950s. Homans proposed the idea of "social behavior as exchange" in 1958, emphasizing the psychological aspects and instrumental behavior within social exchanges (Homans, 1958). John Thibaut (1959) contributed to the SET with his concept of "social psychology of groups" by introducing the idea of interdependence, where individuals' outcomes are influenced by others in the group. Thibaut also introduced the concepts of *comparison level* and *comparison level for alternatives*, explaining how individuals evaluate the quality of their relationships and decide whether to stay or leave based on



**Figure 3:** How threats lead to restricted information, centralized control, and rigid responses: Threat Rigidity adapted from Staw et al. (1981, p. 502)

perceived alternatives. Peter Blau (1964) expanded the theory to include concepts of power and economic orientation, emphasizing the economic dimensions and reciprocal nature of social exchange.

The key concepts of the SET is the principle of reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Gouldner (1960) differentiated reciprocity into three distinct categories: transaction, belief, and moral norm. Transactional reciprocity refers to interdependent (both depend on each other) exchanges while reciprocity as a belief is centered around the idea of cultural orientation. Gouldner (1960) also has posited general moral norm principle of reciprocity outlines certain actions and responsibilities in exchange for benefits received.

By adding the concept of psychological transactions and emphasizing implicit (inactive) and explicit (active) exchanges, Cropanzano et al. (2017) redefined SET. Psychological exchanges encompass intangible elements such as feelings, emotions, and mental states that are not always directly observable. Unspoken or non-physical interactions that nevertheless affect the social exchange process are referred to as implicit exchange, also known as inactive exchange. Explicit exchange, or active exchange, involves direct and visible interactions, such as verbal praise, constructive feedback, or direct assistance with tasks (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Homans (1961) associated social exchange with a rewarding or costing, more or less tangible exchange or interaction between individuals. According to Homans costs can be seen as alternative activities or opportunities. Individuals are more likely to remain in a relationship and make investments when the potential rewards outweigh the potential costs. Conversely, if the costs outweigh the rewards, individuals may attempt to alter or terminate the relationship in favor of more fulfilling alternatives (Thibaut, 1959).

## 2.4. Technology Acceptance

### 2.4.1. Theory of Reasoned Action

Fishbein and Ajzen developed the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) in 1975 with the objective of predicting how individuals will behave based on their pre-existing attitudes and

behavioral intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The behavioral intention (BI) is shaped by the attitude (A) towards the behavior and the subjective norm (SN). An individual's attitude toward a behavior is influenced by their positive or negative beliefs about it. These attitudes are the result of a lifetime of accumulated beliefs. Subjective norms are defined as an individual's perceptions of how others view a specific behavior and the perceived social pressure to either perform or abstain from that behavior (Ajzen, 1980). The behavioral intention then predicts the final, voluntary behavior. The TRA can be put into the equation:

$$BI = A + SN \quad (1)$$

It is acknowledged that external factors exist beyond the scope of the model, recognizing that the TRA is not a closed system (Ajzen, 1980). Several Studies have applied the TRA in the field of technology acceptance research (Buabeng-Andoh, 2018; Mishra et al., 2014; Yousafzai et al., 2010). While the TRA has been criticized for its simplicity and broad applicability, these same characteristics are also considered its greatest strengths, as they contribute to its generalizability across different contexts (Davis, 1985; Madden & Ajzen, 1992; Sheppard et al., 1988).

### 2.4.2. Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is an extension of the TRA. By including behavioral control, Ajzen (1991) expanded the TRA to predict behaviors in which individuals have full volitional control. The TPB explains the behavior as predicted by the intention (I). The intention is shaped by three components. Attitude towards the behavior (A) which is influenced by behavioral beliefs, subjective norm (SN) which is influenced by normative beliefs and as a new component in the TPB the perceived behavioral control (PBC) which is influenced by control beliefs (Ajzen, 1991). PBC according to Ajzen (1991) refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform a specific behavior, considering factors that may facilitate or hinder that performance. It

includes both the individual's confidence in their ability and the perceived ease or difficulty of the behavior. The TPB can be translated to the equation:

$$I = A + SN + PBC \quad (2)$$

The TPB has been used to explain decisions regarding the use of educational technology (Lee et al., 2010), consumer adaptation of e-services (S.-C. Chen & Li, 2010), technology adoption of mobile banking (Aboelmaged & Gebba, 2013) and the acceptance of instant messaging (Lu et al., 2009). Recent studies have applied the TPB to the adoption of AI in agriculture (Mohr & Köhl, 2021), higher education (Ivanov et al., 2024) and the workplace (Srivastava et al., 2024). Based on the TPB Ozkan and Kanat (2011) developed and validated by advanced statistical techniques an e-Government adoption model. The results demonstrated that the predictor variables of the TPB can predict e-government adoption behavior to a sufficient degree. The most significant predictor of intentions and perceived behavioral control was attitude. The second most significant predictor was perceived behavioral control. The findings of Shih and Fang (2004) indicate that intention to adopt Internet banking as a new innovation can be explained by attitude while subjective norm did not demonstrate a significant influence on intention.

While examining whether authentic leadership influences organizational change, Bakari et al. (2017) incorporated TPB to explain how leader-follower interaction influence mechanisms. They linked readiness for change and commitment to change to the TPB dimensions which their analysis supported. Gu et al. (2024) conducted a study based on the TPB that investigated the impact of empowering leadership on employee innovation behavior.

#### 2.4.3. Technology Acceptance Model

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), see Figure 4., is built on two related bodies of literature, the TRA and the TPB (Canziani & MacSween, 2021).

The TAM was developed by Davis in 1989 (Davis, 1989). It has been frequently used to understand user adoption and acceptance of new technologies (McLean & Osei-Frimpong, 2019). Davis (1989) states that an individual's willingness to use technology is influenced by their attitude (A) toward it, as well as their perception of its usefulness and ease of use. Perceived usefulness (PU) refers to an individual's perception of how an information system benefits them in an organizational context. Davis et al. (1989) defined perceived ease of use (PEOU) as the user's expectation that the system will be easy to use. The behavioral intention to use (BI) is influenced by A and PU which are influenced by PEOU. Davis et al. (1989) used the following regressions to show the antecedents of BI:

$$BI = A + PU \quad (3)$$

The TAM suggests that, all else being equal, individuals form behavioral intentions based on their positive affect, as

represented by the A - BI relationship. Equation (3) describes the PU - BI relationship as well, which suggests that individuals form intentions for behaviors that they believe will improve job performance, regardless of positive or negative feelings towards the behavior itself.

In Contrast to the TRA the TAM does not include SN as a determinant of BI. SN is according to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) the least understood aspect of the TRA. Davis et al. (1989) did not include SN in the TAM due to uncertain theoretical and psychometric status. The TAM states that A is determined by U and EOU, with relative weights evaluated using linear regression:

$$A = PU + PEOU \quad (4)$$

Davis et al. (1989) hypothesized that PU has a positive influence on A which is consistent with previous information systems research (Barrett et al., 1968; Schultz & Slevin, 1975). Davis et al. further state that PEOU is supposed to have a significant effect on A. The influence PEOU has on A can be distinguished in self-efficacy and instrumentality. Self-efficacy refers to acting independently from instrumental drivers of behavior. Instrumentality means that individuals may be contributing more to a certain target in terms of performance due to increased PEOU (Davis et al., 1989). To account for various external variables like learning based on feedback, objective design or system characteristics Davis et al. (1989) state the following equation:

$$PU = PEOU + \text{External Variables} \quad (5)$$

External variables as in equation (5) "(...) provide the bridge between the internal beliefs, attitudes and intentions represented in TAM and the various individual differences, situational constraints and managerially controllable interventions impinging on behavior" (Davis et al., 1989, p. 988). In studies various external variable have been identified such as enjoyment and computer anxiety (Abdullah et al., 2016; Castiblanco Jimenez et al., 2021), age (Burton-Jones & Hubona, 2006), experience, facilitating conditions, individual innovativeness, system quality and social norm (Castiblanco Jimenez et al., 2021).

Despite its popularity the TAM has faced criticism by several researchers. Bagozzi (2007) posits that the TAM has significant gaps between intentions and behavior, as well as between PEU, PEOU and intention. The emphasis on PU and PEOU has made it difficult to incorporate other relevant beliefs, such as trust and enjoyment, into the model (Barki & Benbasat, 2007; Malatji et al., 2020). Barki and Benbasat have criticized that the TAM neglects other important user behaviors such as reinvention, learning, and adaptation by emphasizing system use as a single, narrow behavior (Barki & Benbasat, 2007). Important aspects such as costs and structural requirements are overlooked by the TAM according to Malatji et al. (2020).



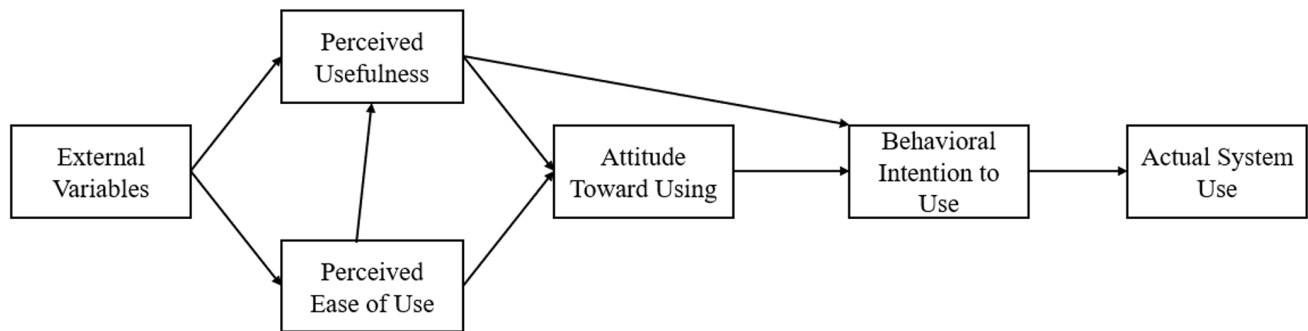


Figure 4: Elements of the Technology Acceptance Model, adapted from Davis et al. (1989, p. 985)

## 2.5. Hypotheses Development

Generative AI like ChatGPT can create content and perform tasks autonomously. It is a significant leap from traditional technologies due to its advanced capabilities and potential for widespread application in various domains (McKinsey, 2024). As generative AI continues to gain popularity, understanding the role of leadership style in its acceptance becomes increasingly critical. Previous studies have shown that transformational leadership as an external variable in the TAM positively influences technology acceptance (Elkhani et al., 2014; Neufeld et al., 2007) while transactional leadership does not significantly affect technology acceptance (Schepers et al., 2005). Unlike traditional technologies that often require extensive user input and learning, generative AI can enhance perceived ease of use by providing intuitive interfaces (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). However, despite these benefits, there is still skepticism and hesitation about the use of such technologies. Studies show that concerns about the reliability, security, and ethical implications of AI applications can hold back many potential users (Kamila & Jasrotia, 2023; Smith & Anderson, 2014).

The distinctive nature of generative AI thus requires leaders who can effectively manage and leverage its potential for innovation. Transformational leadership has been proven to positively influence perceived usefulness while transactional leadership did not show any significant effects (Schepers et al., 2005). Research by Bunjak et al. (2022) indicates that transformational leadership can persuade followers to lead themselves towards achieving digital change, suggesting that this leadership style is particularly suited to environments requiring adaptability and innovation. Similarly, Aziz et al. (2020) and Molino et al. (2021) found that transformational leadership significantly influences the acceptance of new technologies.

Therefore I hypothesize:

*H1: The acceptance of generative AI in the workplace is greater under transformational leadership than under transactional leadership.*

Transformational leadership is proven to enhance organizational commitment (see Table 1). Organizational commitment, particularly affective commitment, is critical to creating positive attitudes toward innovation (Jafri, 2010; Herri

& Brunetto, 2013). Employees with high commitment are therefore more likely to accept the introduction and use of AI in the workplace. Hence, organizational commitment acts as a mediator between leadership style and AI acceptance. Transformational leadership increases commitment and promotes AI acceptance, while transactional leadership does not increase organizational commitment, which in turn does not increase AI acceptance.

Thus, I hypothesize:

*H2: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between leadership style and acceptance of AI in the workplace.*

The threat-rigidity theory suggests that perceived threats lead to rigidity in thinking and behavior. Employees facing the threat of job loss due to AI may experience a narrowing of attention and a constriction in control, leading them to resist changes and innovations. This rigidity can significantly hinder the adoption of new technologies and processes in the workplace. Transformational leadership is characterized by providing a clear vision and direction (Bass & Avolio, 1990), building a trustful and supportive environment (Avolio et al., 2004), encouraging innovative thinking (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Khalili, 2016; Matzler et al., 2008). AI can bring many opportunities to employees but can also spark the fear of job losses due to automation (McClure, 2018; Ore & Sposato, 2022).

According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals are motivated to protect and acquire resources, such as job security. The introduction of AI can be perceived as a threat to this valuable resource, leading to resistance and rigidity in behavior as employees strive to protect what they have. By framing AI as a resource gain (e.g., increased efficiency, new career opportunities) transformational leaders can reduce the perception of threat and promote flexibility and openness among employees which then leads to a reduced fear of job loss. Employees with a lower fear of job loss are more likely to accept and engage in innovative behaviors (J. Chen et al., 2016). High levels of fear of job loss can negatively impact innovative work behavior. Employees facing fear of job loss may perceive innovations as a threat, leading to resistance and decreased acceptance (Van Hootegem et al., 2019). König et

al. (2010) demonstrated that the fear of job loss negatively impacted employees' willingness to accept and adopt new technologies in the workplace. Employees with higher job security and therefore lower fear of job loss are more likely to engage in innovative behaviors and accept organizational changes (Probst et al., 2007).

Consequently, AI acceptance is likely to be higher among employees who are less concerned about job loss due to transformational leadership. Therefore I hypothesize:

*H3: The relationship between leadership style and acceptance of AI in the workplace is mediated by employee's fear of job loss.*

In SET it is stated that relationships are formed through a series of interactions, where individuals weigh the costs and benefits of these interactions. In the context of leadership and organizational change, this theory suggests that employees are more likely to accept and support changes when they perceive a positive exchange relationship with their leaders. Transformational leadership can create a strong positive exchange relationship between leaders and followers. These LMX relationships are characterized by trust, respect, and mutual obligation, which can be fostered and strengthened through frequent interactions (Gajendran & Joshi, 2012; Kacmar et al., 2003).

As hypothesized in H1, transformational leaders can positively influence employees' willingness to accept AI technologies in the workplace. The frequency of interactions between leaders and followers is likely to amplify this effect (Kuvaas et al., 2017). A high interaction frequency can lead to more opportunities for leaders to demonstrate transformational behaviors, increased opportunities for employees to voice concerns and receive support and a stronger sense of trust and rapport between leaders and followers. As interaction frequency increases, the cumulative impact of transformational leadership behaviors becomes more pronounced, thus strengthening the exchange relationship. This increased exposure to positive leadership influences can strengthen the exchange relationship, potentially leading to greater acceptance of organizational changes such as AI implementation. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

*H4: The influence of transformational leadership on the acceptance of AI in the workplace is positively moderated by the frequency of interactions with the supervisor.*

Figure 5 illustrates the proposed conceptual model and highlights the interplay between (transformational) leadership, includes the moderating effect of interaction frequency, and the mediating roles of organizational commitment and the fear of job loss as determinants of AI acceptance.

### 3. Methodology

In this section, I will describe the methods I used, including a thorough description of the steps I took to collect and

examine the data. In order to facilitate the understanding and possible replication of my findings by other researchers, I aim to promote transparency and replicability.

#### 3.1. Research Design

Quantitative research allows the results to be generalized to a larger population and can therefore be used to make statements about the likelihood that observed effects are representative of the overall population (Creswell, 2009). I conducted a 2 x 2 randomized experiment through an online questionnaire which allowed the manipulation of stimulating variables and observe the difference in the results. The research design was chosen because it was possible to apply previous research methodologies to the emerging field of generative AI, addressing the existing research gap. The 2 x 2 design allows a researcher to distinctively examine the different leadership styles as well as the predicted moderating effect of interaction frequency. The survey was conducted online on the Unipark/Tivian platform, had a completion rate of 98% (due to screeners and the use of the online survey platform prolific) and an average completion time of 4m 53s.

The survey started with a consent form followed by a screener question as suggested by Sheatsley (1983). Participants were asked if they had ever heard of ChatGPT. Answering "no" led to the end of the survey, as knowledge of ChatGPT is essential for continuance. If the participants answered "yes", the survey continued with an explanation of a fictional company that the participants were asked to imagine working for. A fictional company called Nexus was chosen instead of a real company to avoid bias. The description of the company did not specify the industry for the same reason.

Next, participants were randomly assigned one of two scenarios. Each scenario described the manager introducing a company-own AI tool like ChatGPT, called NexusGPT, via email. The tonality of the email differed between the scenarios. Half of the participants saw an email with elements of a transformational leadership style (A), while the other half received an email with a more transactional leadership style (B). The participants then had to answer questions about their organizational commitment to the company described. In the next part, participants were again randomly presented with one of two scenarios, completing the 2 x 2 design. The scenarios consisted of participants either communicating and interacting with their manager daily (1) or, in the second scenario, rarely (once or twice a month) (2), see Figure 6.

In the following section, participants were asked to answer questions about their perceived job (in)security. The participants were then asked to answer questions regarding their perceived ease of use and their perceived usefulness of NexusGPT to measure the technology acceptance.

To test whether participants recognized the frequency scenarios presented, they were asked to identify the scenario they had seen as well as rate the realism. Finally, demographic information (age, education, gender) was collected from the participants. After completing the survey, participants did not receive any information about the other email

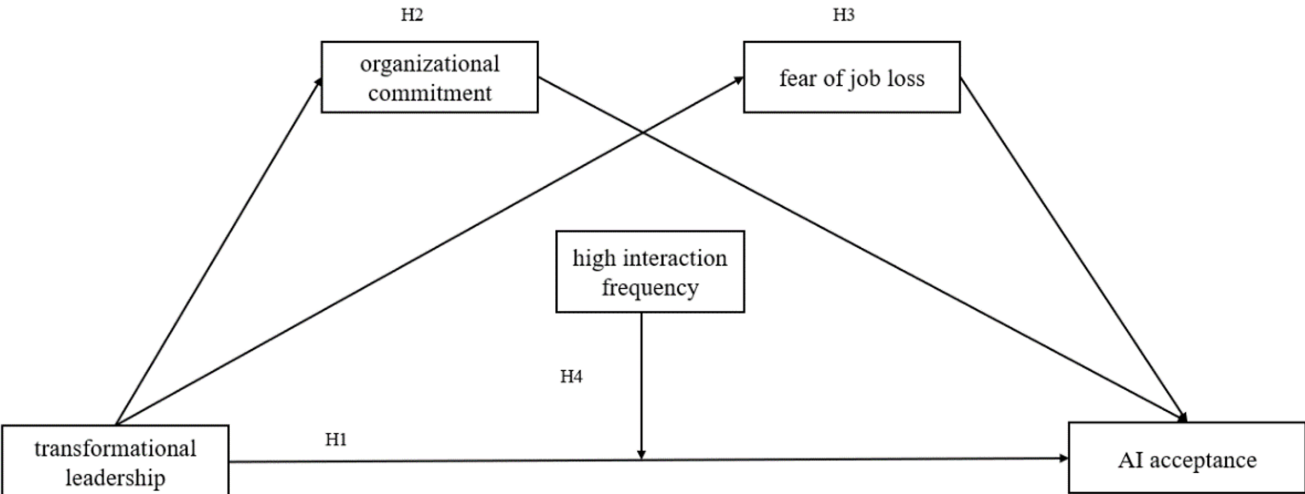


Figure 5: Conceptual model of the hypotheses

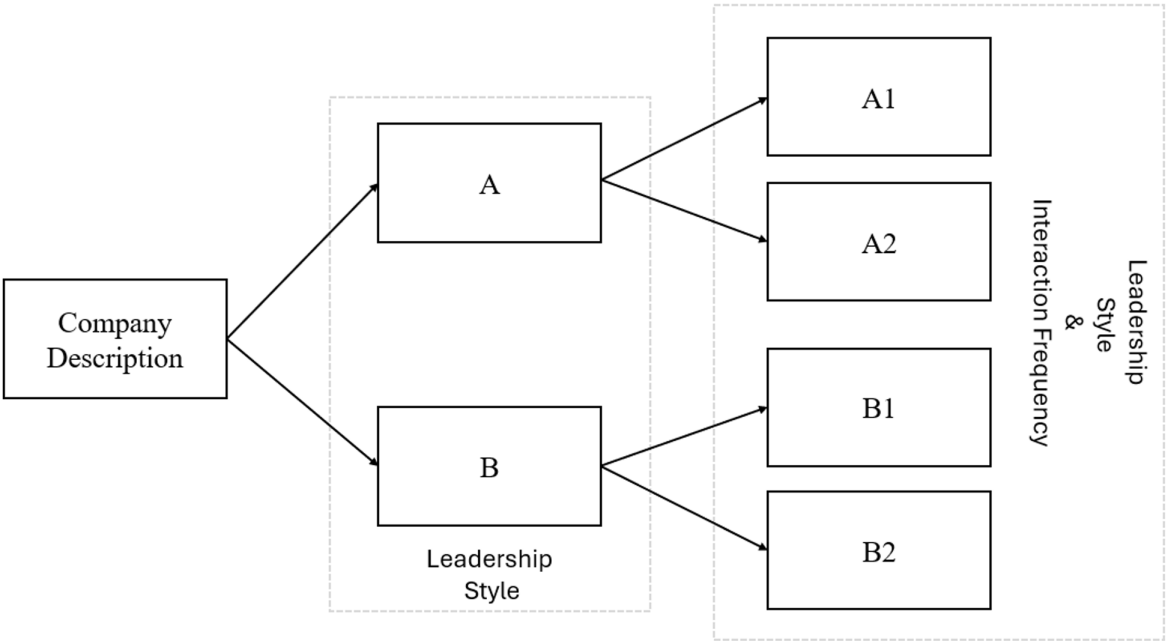


Figure 6: Visualization of the random paths

scenario or the research question. The complete questionnaire with every question can be found in Appendix J.

3.2. Measurements

Scenarios

Each participant was asked to imagine them opening their mailbox and seeing the following text as a mail from their manager. Participants who got the scenario with *transformational leadership* assigned were presented with a manager who framed the introduction of the AI tool NexusGPT as “an exciting opportunity that has the potential to enhance our creativity and efficiency”. The text used phrases like “sup-

port your work and spark innovation”, “sharing experiences” and “Let’s embrace this opportunity to learn and evolve together”. Feedback between the employees and between employees was encouraged. The text mentioned NexusGPT as a tool to drive the company’s mission forward. Participants who got the scenario with transactional leadership read a mail with the focus on the measurable value of NexusGPT. The manager mentioned an “estimated 15% increase in task completion speed” and a “potential 30% reduction in time spent on routine queries”. Employees who demonstrate improved performance using NexusGPT were offered the opportunity to receive a reward or promotion in the future. The text focused on performance and rewards, emphasizing the transactional leadership.

### Organizational commitment

The questions were adapted from Mowday et al. (1979), but reduced from 15 questions to 6 questions in order to keep the survey as short as possible. Questions that could be irritating or confusing due to the fictional nature of the scenario were removed. This approach ensures clarity and relevance by maintaining the integrity of the original scale while adapting it to the specific context of the study. Questions like “*I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help Nexus be successful*” and “*I really care about the fate of this organization*” were kept. The questions have been changed to replace the words “this organization” with the name “Nexus”. All items were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree) see Appendix J.

### Job insecurity

The questions used were taken from Vander Elst et al. (2014), who validated their questionnaire in five European countries. They included statements such as “*I feel insecure about the future of my job.*” or “*I am sure I can keep my job.*” and were not modified. All items were recorded on a five-point likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree), see Appendix J.

### Technology acceptance

The questions were taken from Davis et al. (1989) and slightly modified to account for the in the scenario mentioned “NexusGPT”. They included statements such as “*Using NexusGPT can make it easier to do my job.*” and “*Using NexusGPT can enhance my effectiveness on the job.*” The original seven-point likert scale was changed into a five-point likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree) for consistency. As a last question, an attention test was added to this scale, so that participants were asked to select the corresponding item according to the prompt “*I am attentive and click on completely agree*”.

### Demographics

Demographic questions were included in the questionnaire to assess whether attitudes were influenced by demographic variables. Participants were asked their age (in years), gender (m/f/d), and highest level of education at the end of the survey. These questions were placed at the end to allow participants to build trust, as demographic questions can be considered very personal by some individuals (Sheatsley, 1983).

### Control variables

For control variables, two questions based on previous research on technology acceptance were asked to measure the

participants’ general openness to innovations and new technologies (Karahanna et al., 2006) and their prior experience (Venkatesh et al., 2003) with ChatGPT. The first question, “How open are you to new ideas and innovations in your life?” was rated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “not at all”, 3 is “neutral”, and 5 is “very open”. The second question, “How often do you use ChatGPT in your life?” was also rated on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 = never, 3 = sometimes and 5 = very often).

### Manipulation check and realism check

The manipulation was tested with true/false questions. The manipulation with the scenario was considered successful since with 83 of 104 (79.8%) participants who received the transformational scenario a large majority felt that their leader was inspiring and fostered shared growth. The participants were asked to remember if they were shown a scenario with frequent or rare interactions. The realism (Lienemann, 2021) of the scenario was rated on a Likert scale of one to five, with one being “completely unrealistic” and five being “completely realistic” ( $M = 3.986$ ,  $SD = 0.863$ ). For the entire study, all questions were coded as mandatory and could not be skipped. The composition of the variables from the items is listed in Appendix H.

### 3.3. Pretest

A pretest was conducted before the survey was released which is mandatory according to Porst (2014). The purpose of the pretest was to identify difficulties and obstacles before the actual experiment. The participants in the pretest were 13 students between the ages of 21 and 28. This ensured that each of the four randomized paths (see Figure 6) in the experiment was completed at least two times. The students were familiar with ChatGPT and have worked full-time (in internships) before which generally qualified them for the final survey. This is crucial because the population for the pretest must always be drawn from the same target group or population that has been defined for the final survey (Jacob et al., 2012). Additionally, three other volunteering participants belonging to the same demographic group were observed while filling out the survey and asked about their thoughts throughout the process. Participant engagement was monitored as well to identify any sections where respondents might lose interest. The role that participants were asked to imagine themselves in was afterwards adjusted slightly based on feedback to make it feel more realistic. In general, the students’ perception of the questionnaire was that it was well structured and that they had no major problems understanding it.

### 3.4. Sampling

The data was collected through the online platform Prolific. Platforms such as Prolific or Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) have emerged as a widely used source of participants in the social sciences (Paolacci et al., 2010). Prolific



allowed for pre-screening, meaning that only potential participants who worked full-time and had high acceptance rates from other studies were able to participate. A total of 241 respondents from the U.S. participated in the study for monetary compensation in July 2024. I used screeners like approval ratings from previous participations and tenure to increase data quality (Arndt et al., 2022). 16 Participants who failed the two attention checks were also excluded, as there was no guarantee that they had read and understood the previous questions and descriptions. Two participants (first percentile) sped through the survey and were removed as speeders (Danatzis & Möller-Herm, 2023). Two participants who did not know ChatGPT were screened out as they could not provide appropriate estimates of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Only one participant selected "other" as their gender. They were removed to allow for comparisons between males and females. The data cleaning resulted in a final sample of 220 respondents. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 67 ( $M = 34.61$ ,  $SD = 9.579$ ). 113 (51.36%) were male and 107 (48.64%) were female. Around half of the participants had a bachelor's degree (51.82%) while 17.27% had a master's degree and 22.27% a high school diploma / A-levels as their highest education. The rest (8.64%) reported to have either no degree, an intermediate school leaving certificate, an PhD or other forms of education.

### 3.5. Reliability and Validity

The variables were firstly tested for consistency reliability using Cronbach alphas and composite reliability, both indicators are listed in Table 2. Reliability is crucial for ensuring the validity of the measurement model before proceeding to evaluate the structural model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). A commonly used rule of thumb indicates that Chronbach's alpha should be above .70 to show good internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). For all constructs the Chronbach's alpha values were good (ranging from 0.84 to 0.92 and therefore exceeding 0.7) The analysis showed that Cronbach's alpha does not increase significantly when deleting a specific item. Composite Reliability should be above 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988) which was also met (see Table 3). Therefore, all measured variables could be used.

## 4. Results

In this section, I show descriptive analysis, present the assumption tests and the corresponding results of my analysis. The analysis was conducted using STATA (version 18.0). I employed ANOVA and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses. The STATA code used to generate the results is provided in Appendix I.

### 4.1. Descriptive analysis

Effects were assessed based on the correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) as follows: weak correlation for  $0.1 < r < 0.3$ , moderate correlation for  $0.3 < r < 0.5$ , and strong correlation for  $r >$

0.5 (Cohen, 1988). Age does not show a significant correlation with education level ( $r = -0.0045$ ). This analysis excludes the responses of 5 participants who selected "other" because this response category cannot be logically ordered in the same ordinal ascending order as bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. degrees. An analysis of the relationship between age and organizational commitment reveals no correlation ( $r = 0.076$ ). Age and the fear of job loss show no relationship ( $r = -0.0183$ ). Age and technology acceptance show no correlation as well ( $r = -0.0764$ ). There is a weak negative relationship between age and perceived ease of use ( $r = -0.1460$ ), indicating that the younger the participants are the easier they estimate the use of NexusGPT.

The average age of the male and female participants is similar ( $M_{male} = 35.12$ ,  $M_{female} = 34.07$ ). The most common response among participants (37.73%) is to use ChatGPT sometimes while 5.91% use ChatGPT never and 17.27% use ChatGPT very often. 17.27% indicate a rare use and 21.82% a use frequency between "sometimes" and "very often". Age and the use of ChatGPT do not correlate ( $r = -0.08$ ). The data shows no correlation ( $r = 0.0469$ ) between education (excluding individuals who selected 'other' for statistical reasons, see explanation above) and the use of ChatGPT. Almost half of the participants (47.73%) selected 5 (out of 5) as an answer to the question "How open are you to embracing new ideas and innovations in your life?" with 5 being "very open" and 3 being "neutral" and 1 being "not at all" ( $M = 4.395$ ,  $SD = 0.6432$ ). The correlation between age and openness to innovation is weak ( $r = -0.1025$ ). The control variables openness to innovations have a moderate ( $r = 0.402$ ) and prior experience with ChatGPT a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.5481$ ) with technology acceptance but do not correlate with leadership style. All means, standard deviations and correlations are shown in Table 3.

### 4.2. Inferential analysis

To test hypothesis 1 with a t-test comparing two means, several requirements must be met (Boneau, 1960; Pituch & Stevens, 2016). Each group should have at least 50 participants, which is satisfied with 104 in Group A (transformational) and 116 in Group B (transformational) ( $n_{max}/n_{min} < 1.5$ ;  $116/104 = 1.115$ ). The normal distribution of the dependent variable (technology acceptance) is assumed since  $n > 30$  for both groups. The variances within each group should not be systematically different. The Levene's test for the dependent variable is not significant (technology acceptance:  $p > 0.118$ ) which indicates homogeneity of variance.

To account for control variables (openness to innovations and prior experience) an ANCOVA was conducted to test H1. The overall model is statistically significant,  $F(3, 216) = 37.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and explains 34.17% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.3417$ ). Leadership style is not significant ( $p = 0.664$ ), indicating no significant difference in technology acceptance between the two leadership styles. Therefore, H1 is not supported. However, the control variables showed significant effects: prior experience with ChatGPT ( $p < 0.001$ ) and open-



**Table 2:** Chronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability

| Variable                           | Reference                 | Scale item (selection)                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| organizational commitment          | Mowday et al. (1979)      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel very little loyalty to Nexus.</li> <li>• I am proud to tell others that I am part of Nexus.</li> <li>• I really care about the fate of Nexus.</li> </ul>                      | .8436            | .9352                 |
| fear of job loss                   | Vander Elst et al. (2014) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chances are, I will soon lose my job.</li> <li>• I feel insecure about the future of my job.</li> <li>• I think I might lose my job in the near future.</li> </ul>                   | .8992            | .9419                 |
| technology acceptance<br>PEOU + PU | Davis et al. (1989)       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning to operate Nexus-GPT is easy for me</li> <li>• It is easy for me to become skillful at using NexusGPT</li> <li>• Using NexusGPT can make it easier to do my job.</li> </ul> | .9290            | .9762                 |
| perceived ease of use              | Davis et al. (1989)       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning to operate Nexus-GPT is easy for me</li> <li>• It is easy for me to become skillful at using NexusGPT</li> </ul>                                                            | .9018            | .9677                 |
| perceived usefulness               | Davis et al. (1989)       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using NexusGPT can make it easier to do my job.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                           | .9140            | .9672                 |

ness to innovation ( $p = 0.0003$ ) both significantly positively influence technology acceptance.

Before conducting a mediation analysis, requirements like a direct effect, normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity must be met. A visualization of the normal distribution of technology acceptance and organizational commitment, along with Q-Q Plots (Appendix C, E, F, G), indicates a normal distribution with minor deviations at the upper end. Linearity is demonstrated in Figure 9 and 10 (see Appendix A and B). An analysis of fear of job loss, as shown in the Q-Q plot (see Appendix D) reveals skewness at the lower end and heavier-than-normal tails, indicating deviations from normality. However, Knief and Forstmeier (2021) argue that, contrary to intuition but supported by substantial literature, violations of the normality of residuals assumption are rarely problematic for hypothesis testing and parameter estimation. Commonly recommended solutions may pose greater risks than the issue itself. For this reason, as well as the sample size being rather large, I proceeded with the mediation analysis.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that organizational commitment mediates the relationship between leadership style and acceptance of AI in the workplace. A mediation analyses requires a direct effect between the dependent variable leadership style and the independent variable technology acceptance (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Since the effect is not signifi-

cant a mediation would not have been performed. However, recent research suggests that significant indirect effects can occur even without a significant direct effect (Hayes, 2009; MacKinnon et al., 2002; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Therefore, despite the lack of a significant direct effect, I proceeded with the mediation analysis to explore potential indirect effects.

I used structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the coefficients (Figure 8). The indirect effect of leadership style on organizational commitment is not significant ( $b = 0.0434$ ,  $p = 0.664$ ), while organizational commitment has a significant positive effect on technology acceptance ( $b = 0.2611$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Openness to innovation ( $p < 0.01$ ) and prior experience with ChatGPT ( $p < 0.001$ ) both have a significant positive influence on technology acceptance. The results do not support the hypothesis that organizational commitment mediates the relationship between leadership style and technology acceptance.

Hypothesis 3 which states that the relationship between leadership style and acceptance of AI in the workplace is mediated by employee's fear of job loss was also tested using a mediation analysis. Despite no significant direct effect, a mediation analysis was conducted for the same reasoning as discussed before. SEM analysis (as shown in Figure 7) confirms that leadership style significantly influences fear of job loss ( $b = 0.3507$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). If leadership style switches from 0 (transformational) to 1 (transactional), fear of job loss in-

Table 3: Means, standard deviations, and correlations of variables

| Variables                           | mean   | SD    | (1)           | (2)           | (3)           | (4)           | (5)           | (6)        | (7)    | (8)          | (9)         | (10)        | (11)  |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|------------|--------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| (1)<br>technology<br>acceptance     | 3.993  | .614  | 1.000         |               |               |               |               |            |        |              |             |             |       |
| (2)<br>perceived ease<br>of use     | 4.03   | .660  | 0.810<br>***  | 1.000         |               |               |               |            |        |              |             |             |       |
| (3)<br>perceived<br>usefulness      | 3.974  | .681  | 0.959<br>***  | 0.610<br>***  | 1.000         |               |               |            |        |              |             |             |       |
| (4)<br>organizational<br>commitment | 3.52   | .744  | 0.480<br>***  | 0.353<br>***  | 0.477<br>***  | 1.000         |               |            |        |              |             |             |       |
| (5)<br>Fear of job loss             | 2.399  | .919  | -0.363<br>*** | -0.315<br>*** | -0.338<br>*** | -0.286<br>*** | 1.000         |            |        |              |             |             |       |
| (6)<br>realism                      | 3.986  | .863  | 0.308<br>***  | 0.208<br>**   | 0.316<br>***  | 0.341<br>***  | -0.172<br>*   | 1.000      |        |              |             |             |       |
| (7)<br>age                          | 34.609 | 9.579 | -0.076        | -0.146<br>*   | -0.032        | 0.076         | -0.018        | 0.135<br>* | 1.000  |              |             |             |       |
| (8)<br>gender                       | 1.486  | .501  | -0.058        | -0.083        | -0.038        | -0.036        | 0.130         | -0.069     | -0.055 | 1.000        |             |             |       |
| (9)<br>education                    | 4.05   | .937  | 0.005         | 0.017         | -0.001        | -0.123        | -0.052        | -0.152     | 0.068  | -0.013       | 1.000       |             |       |
| (10)<br>openness to<br>innovation   | 4.395  | .643  | 0.402<br>***  | 0.417<br>***  | 0.341<br>***  | 0.284<br>***  | -0.272<br>*** | 0.141<br>* | -0.105 | -0.132       | 0.179<br>** | 1.000       |       |
| (11)<br>prior ChatGPT<br>use        | 3.273  | 1.118 | 0.548<br>***  | 0.552<br>***  | 0.473<br>***  | 0.304<br>***  | -0.273<br>*** | 0.118      | -0.080 | -0.181<br>** | -0.004      | 0.396<br>** | 1.000 |

\* p &lt; 0.05, \*\* p &lt; 0.01, \*\*\* p &lt; 0.001, n=220

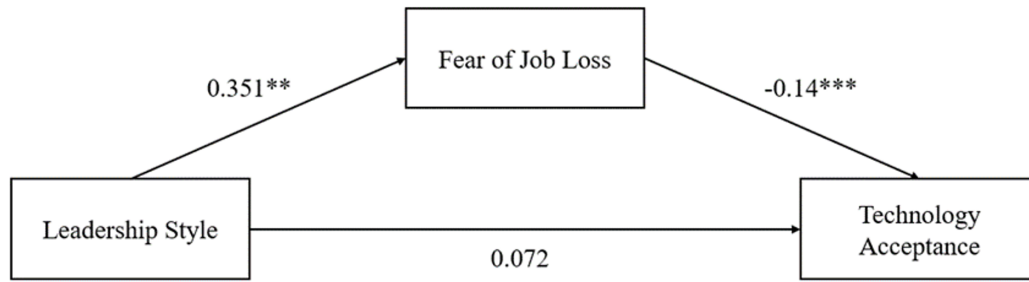


Figure 7: H3 with path coefficients

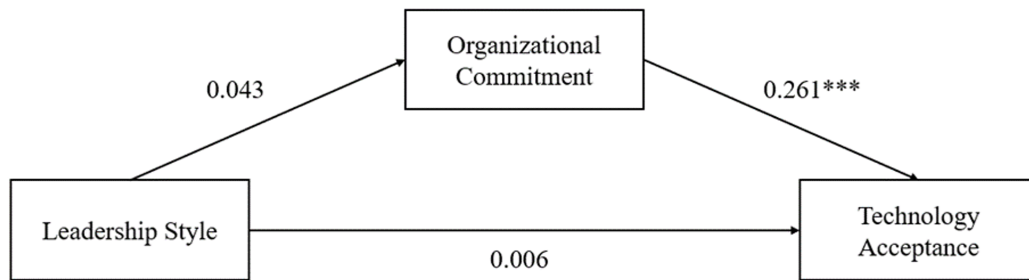
\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ 

Figure 8: H2 with path coefficients

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ 

creases approximately by 0.35. This demonstrates that transformational leadership leads to significantly lower fear of job loss ( $M_{transform} = 2.214$ ,  $SD = 0.083$ ;  $M_{transakt} = 2.565$ ,  $SD = 0.088$ ) while fear of job loss is higher by transactional leadership. Fear of job loss has a significant negative effect on technology acceptance (coefficient =  $-0.14$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). If fear of job loss increases by 1 unit, technology acceptance is reduced by approximately 0.14. Openness to innovation ( $p < 0.01$ ) and prior experience with ChatGPT ( $p < 0.001$ ) significantly influence technology acceptance. Since the indirect effect is significant, H3 is confirmed.

A two factorial ANOVA (each group  $> 50$ ) was conducted to examine the interaction effect of leadership style and interaction frequency on technology acceptance. The overall model is not statistically significant ( $F(3, 216) = 0.93$ ,  $p = 0.4278$ ), indicating that the predictors do not explain a significant portion of the variance in technology acceptance. The interaction between leadership style and interaction frequency (leadership style \* interaction frequency) is not significant ( $F(1, 216) = 1.93$ ,  $p = 0.1664$ ) with an  $R^2$  of 0.0127 explaining only 1.27% of the variance. This leads to the rejection of H4. A post-hoc pairwise analysis was not conducted since the interaction effect is not significant.

To assess the robustness of my findings, a model specification test was carried out to check for the possibility of omitted variables or model misspecification. As outlined by Hosmer et al. (2013) the goodness of link test was used. The results indicate a significant outcome. for the linear predicted value, while the squared predicted value is insignificant. These find-

ings indicate that the model is free from omitted variables and is correctly specified, further supporting its validity.

## 5. Discussion

In this section I discuss my empirical findings and compare them to existing literature. I resort to studies I referenced in chapter 2 (Theory and Hypotheses) and contextualize them with other research when the hypotheses are not confirmed. Additionally, I discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of this thesis, as well as its limitations.

### 5.1. General Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate whether leadership styles differ in their influence on the acceptance of AI in the workplace. Furthermore, the mediating effect of fear of job loss and organizational commitment as well as the moderating effect of interaction frequency were examined.

Based on the previous theoretical contributions and empirical studies, I deduced Hypothesis 1 which proposed that the acceptance of generative AI in the workplace is greater under transformational leadership than under transactional leadership. Conversely, the results did not support H1. This finding is surprising given the extensive literature suggesting that transformational leadership generally promotes higher levels of innovation and change acceptance (Bunjak et al., 2022; Elkhani et al., 2014; Neufeld et al., 2007). A possible explanation is that the inherent novelty and complexity of generative AI may require more than visionary leadership.

Employees might also demand specific technical support and reassurance about the technology's benefits and risks, which are not captured solely by leadership style. Employees may also perceive these technologies as more disruptive than traditional tools, which could diminish the hypothesized positive effect of transformational leadership.

Another explanation is that prior experience with ChatGPT facilitates acceptance in the workplace. The results showed that individuals who regularly use ChatGPT tend to have higher acceptance rates. Familiarity with the introduced technology (generative AI) plays a crucial role in acceptance. This is consistent with the findings on TAM, which indicates that user experience and familiarity with technology positively influence its acceptance (Marangunić & Granić, 2015). Openness to innovation, as a control variable, helped to explain the acceptance of generative AI. Research indicates that personal innovativeness, closely related to openness to innovation, significantly moderates the effects of key factors on the intention to use generative AI technologies. For example, Foroughi et al. (2023) found that personal innovativeness reduces the influence of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions on the intention to use ChatGPT for educational purposes. This suggests that individuals open to innovation are more inclined to experiment with new technologies regardless of other influencing factors (Foroughi et al., 2023).

Hypothesis 2 proposed that organizational commitment would mediate the relationship between leadership style and AI acceptance. The results showed that while transformational leadership did not have a significant effect on organizational commitment, organizational commitment itself had a significant effect on technology acceptance. This finding suggests that organizational commitment is a critical factor in AI acceptance, independent of the direct influence of leadership style. This result can be interpreted in several ways. First, it highlights the importance of organizational commitment as a stand-alone factor in the successful adoption of AI technologies as supported by previous studies (Vella et al., 2013). Employees who are emotionally attached to their organization and identify with its goals are more likely to support and accept new technologies such as AI, regardless of the influence of their leaders. Second, other factors like organizational culture or organizational support could moderate the influence leadership has on organizational commitment. Huey Yiing and Zaman Bin Ahmad (2009) found that innovative and supportive cultures positively influence the relationship between leadership behavior and organizational commitment. A study from Eisenberger et al. (2002) showed that perceived organizational support enhances organizational commitment and influences employees' willingness to embrace new technologies.

Based on the Threat rigidity theory and COR theory Hypothesis 3 posited that fear of job loss mediates the relationship between leadership style and AI acceptance. The findings from the mediation analysis confirmed this hypothesis. Transformational leadership significantly reduced fear of job loss, which in turn increased AI acceptance. This is consis-

tent with threat rigidity theory (Staw et al., 1981) and highlights the importance of addressing employees' fears about job security in the context of AI introduction. By integrating COR theory with threat rigidity theory, this thesis offers a more nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms employees experience when facing potential job loss. It examines how the threat of resource loss, driven by AI-related automation and job displacement, impacts employees' responses. Transformational leaders can mitigate these fears and increase acceptance of new technologies by providing a clear vision and fostering a supportive environment. This aligns with previous research indicating that transformational leaders can mitigate employees' anxiety and resistance to change (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). Other factors, such as job type (Keim et al., 2014) and training (Kalleberg, 2009), may also play a role in further reducing fear of job loss. Longer job tenure can provide employees with a greater sense of stability and organizational commitment, while comprehensive training programs can equip them with the skills they need to feel confident and prepared for new technologies (Venkatesh et al., 2012).

Hypothesis 4 proposed that the frequency of interactions with the supervisor would moderate the influence of transformational leadership on AI acceptance. However, the data did not support this hypothesis. The frequency of interactions with the supervisor did not significantly enhance the assumed positive effects of transformational leadership on AI acceptance. This finding suggests that while frequent interactions may generally benefit leader-follower relationships (Gajendran & Joshi, 2012), they do not necessarily amplify the specific impact of transformational leadership on technology acceptance. One possible explanation is that other factors, such as the length and depth of interactions, play a much more important role than interaction frequency. Therefore, while simply increasing the number of interactions between a leader and their followers might not be sufficient to enhance AI acceptance, focusing on the quality, content, and context of these interactions could potentially yield better results. A second explanation could be that the familiarity gained through frequent interactions does not necessarily translate into increased influence over complex attitudinal changes such as AI acceptance. While frequent interactions may build general rapport and trust, they may not provide the detailed, high-quality exchanges potentially needed to address AI-related concerns.

## 5.2. Theoretical Contributions

This thesis contributes to the existing literature on leadership and technology acceptance in the context of generative AI in several ways. First, it extends the research regarding threat rigidity theory (Staw et al., 1981) by demonstrating how transformational leadership can reduce employees' fears of job loss and thus facilitate the acceptance of AI technologies. Previous studies have focused on the effect of leadership styles without considering the specific threats posed by advanced technologies such as AI. By incorporating these elements, these findings add a new dimension to



the understanding of threat rigidity and leadership. Second, this thesis empirically demonstrates the importance of considering multiple factors, beyond leadership style, in understanding AI acceptance. Specifically, it highlights how factors such as prior experience with AI technologies, organizational commitment, and openness to innovation play important roles in fostering AI acceptance. Third, building on the transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1993), this study clarifies the theory's role in enhancing technology acceptance. While transformational leadership is well-documented for its positive effects on organizational commitment and innovation (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Khalili, 2016), these findings specifically highlight its effectiveness in reducing fear of job loss and consequently improving AI acceptance. This contributes to a better understanding of how transformational leadership can be leveraged to manage technological disruptions in the workplace. Finally, although the findings do not support the proposed relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment, they do identify organizational commitment as a significant predictor of technology acceptance. This enriches the current research of factors influencing the acceptance of AI (Kelly et al., 2023).

### 5.3. Practical Implications

The results of this thesis provide valuable insights for managers planning to implement generative AI in the workplace. Overall, leadership plays a significant role in determining the final AI acceptance. If leadership fails to address the concerns and fears associated with AI, it may lead to significant resistance and low technology acceptance among employees. This can potentially jeopardize the implementation efforts. Managers should consider three key aspects when introducing AI. First, they should aim to adopt a transformational leadership style. Transformational leaders can effectively reduce employees' fear of job loss by providing a clear vision for the future, inspiring confidence, and offering continuous support. The results of this thesis show, that this reduced fear of job loss leads to a higher AI acceptance. Second, managers should look for ways to improve organizational commitment since it has been proven to increase AI acceptance. One way to do this is to develop a better corporate culture (Abdul Rashid et al., 2003; Clugston et al., 2000). Another way is to provide opportunities for professional development and career advancement, which can foster a sense of loyalty and attachment to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Third, Managers should also incorporate the fact that openness to innovation has a significant effect on technology acceptance. Before introducing AI in the workplace, they should foster a culture that encourages curiosity and continuous learning. Managers can achieve this through training programs, open communication and involving employees in the implementation.

### 5.4. Limitations and Future Research

This thesis has some limitations that might be overcome by future research to strengthen the design of this study.

First, the research design relied on self-reported data and a fictional company. Further research could apply the same theoretical model using naturalistic methods such as field experiments in a real company. This could improve the homogeneity of the sample and result in less noisy data. It could also enhance the participants ability to give profound answers regarding their organizational commitment. Second, the experiment used an e-mail as a stimulus to introduce AI to the workplace. The stimulus as an e-mail could have potentially undermined the inspirational effect transformational leaders have. Although corporate changes are often communicated digitally (Ruck & Welch, 2012), it does not necessarily have to be via e-mail. Further research could examine whether the channel (e-mail, online video, voice memo or face-to-face announcement) of AI introduction might moderate the relationship between leadership style and technology acceptance.

Third, the participants in the experiment were all U.S. Americans and not differentiated by industry or company size. Prior personal experiences in a large tech company might significantly differ from experiences gained in the fashion industry, consulting or the public sector. The industry might influence the perceived job security, with sectors like creative industries being more prone to concerns about job displacement due to the rise of generative AI. Further research could explore the role of industry or culture in facilitating technology acceptance, organizational commitment, and reduced fear of job loss. Fourth, since only quantitative methods were used in this thesis, detailed insight into different reasons for individuals' perceptions of fear of job loss cannot be examined. Further research could implement a mixed method approach where quantitative data is used to identify patterns and trends. Qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could then be employed to explore the underlying reasons, personal experiences, and contextual factors that contribute to individuals' perceptions of fear of job loss. It is possible that our current understanding is insufficient to conduct a deductive study like this one. It may be necessary to first revisit the topic with an inductive approach, such as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), to more precisely identify the potential influencing factors.

Finally, I only used transactional and transformational leadership as stimuli. Although these leadership styles are popular, there are several other leadership styles, such as situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) or democratic leadership (Lewin et al., 1939). Further research could broaden the scope of leadership styles to investigate whether other leadership styles might facilitate AI acceptance better.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to shed light on the influence leadership style has on the acceptance of AI in the workplace. Contrary to expectations, transformational leadership does not significantly enhance AI acceptance compared to transactional leadership. This suggests that the complex and

novel nature of generative AI might demand more than visionary leadership. Practical considerations such as the openness to innovations appear crucial. Regular use of ChatGPT is strongly correlated with higher AI acceptance which indicates that user experience plays a vital role in shaping attitudes toward new technologies. Furthermore, my analysis reveals that organizational commitment significantly influences AI acceptance, independent of leadership style. This highlights the importance of fostering a supportive organizational culture that encourages commitment, which then facilitates the integration of advanced technologies like generative AI. Additionally, the reduction of job loss fears through transformational leadership is confirmed as a significant factor in enhancing AI acceptance. This finding underscores the necessity for leaders to address employee anxieties to drive successful technological adoption. While the study contributes to the understanding of leadership's role in technology acceptance, it also opens areas for future research. Specifically, exploring other leadership styles and their impact on AI acceptance could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Moreover, investigating the role of industry context and the influence of different communication channels in AI implementation may offer further insights. These directions could deepen our understanding of the interplay between leadership, organizational dynamics, and the acceptance of generative AI.

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