

Job applicants' perceptions of artificial intelligence tools in recruitment and perceived organizational image

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2025

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Department of: Management and Organization	**Type or work:** Master's thesis
Author: Anni Varjonen	**Date**: 22.12.2025

Title of thesis:
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Abstract:
The purpose of this thesis is to better understand job applicants' perceptions and trust toward recruitment protocols that utilize artificial intelligence (AI) tools. Additionally, the thesis aims to uncover how using AI tools might connect to the organizational image.

AI technologies are increasingly applied in recruitment to enhance efficiency, reduce recruiter workload, screen larger applicant pools, and mitigate human bias. However, their use also introduces concerns related to reliability, algorithmic bias, data privacy, and the potential dehumanization of the recruitment process.

This thesis approaches the topic of AI tools in recruiting from the applicant perspective, since little is known about how job applicants feel being assessed under these new protocols. Theories of trust formation and technology acceptance are used to support and dissect the complex phenomenon. Using a qualitative, inductive approach, data were collected through eight semi-structured interviews with young, university educated current or recent job applicants, who discussed their knowledge, experiences, and attitudes toward AI in recruitment, as well as its connection to organizational image.

Findings indicate that applicants' evaluations of AI recruitment tools vary depending on factors such as human oversight, transparency, purpose of use, and opportunities for feedback. Participants generally preferred assessments conducted by human resource professionals rather than AI. The use of AI was linked to organizational image, with larger companies connected to more negative perceptions when using AI. Pre-existing organizational reputation mitigated negative impacts, while ethical and transparent implementation of AI tools was associated with more positive impact on organizational image.

Keywords:
AI tools, recruiting, organizational image, job applicants

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Companies have consistently incorporated new technologies into their operations, from fax machines and email to customized computer systems, targeted marketing, and remote work solutions. Adapting to new technologies is usually advantageous, as in most cases it offers possibilities for more efficiency and reduced costs, among other benefits. The most recent technological leap forward has been the development of artificial intelligence (AI), the integration of computer processing and intelligence (Khandoze & Sarode, 2020). AI has potential to be integrated in many key organizational tasks, such as marketing, data tracking, strategic decision making, and recruiting. Recruitment is one of the core practices in organizations, with opportunity to achieve competitive advantage by securing the best candidates for open positions. The application of AI based tools in these activities has potential to further optimize the recruitment process, streamlining the steps, and improving the quality of hires.

Computer-based recruitment activities can be traced back to 1990s, when companies started using online job platforms and applicant tracking systems (Albassam, 2023). In the early 2000s, the field evolved into utilizing truly AI-based recruitment strategies, pioneered by companies like Google. The activities involved for example pattern recognition, which was used to predict which candidates would likely perform best in a particular role (Albassam, 2023). Automated tools have long been used in recruitment activities such as resume screening. These systems filter applicants with the use of key words and phrases, ranking the most promising candidates according to predetermined rubrics (Fernández-Martínez & Fernández, 2020). More advanced AI-technology goes beyond these processes, with ability to look for semantic matches, deeper assessment of qualifications, and even making predictions regarding job performance based on previous experience and timelines (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). New AI based tools can extend their use to recruitment activities such as attracting interest, identifying potential candidates, analyzing interviews, and even producing recommendations (Black & Van Esch, 2020). AI tools can help companies to expand their outreach for candidates, and furthermore, they can help to separate active and passive job seekers (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). These tools can also help in persuading the potential applicants to apply for the job opening, by personalized job advertisements and descriptions.

In addition to time efficiency and reducing the burden of operational tasks for human resource (HR) professionals, AI recruitment tools can help minimize cognitive bias and personal preferences which are known to affect recruitment activities when done by human

evaluators (Judge et al., 2000). These tools can also offer advantages for the applicants, as they often make applying for open positions much faster, and final decisions can be delivered sooner (Black & Van Esch, 2020). Decision making within the HR field is challenging, (such as who gets hired and who gets laid off) as the outcomes are hard to measure, and it is difficult to determine if the decision was best from the alternatives, while the consequences are serious for the applicants and employees involved (Tambe et al., 2019).

One of the latest developments in the use of AI in recruiting is its use in the interview process. Entry-level recruiting is costly, which is why tech-driven solutions for effective initial talent screening is crucial for organizations (Chakraborty et al., 2024). Recruiting is done increasingly on campuses, networking events, and other places with homogenous applicant pools, consisting of recent graduates with similar educational backgrounds and experience level. It is also possible candidates tailor their resumes to best fit assessment rubrics used by the screening tools. Either way, this results in decreased effectiveness of automated resume screening in terms of discriminating between different candidates (Chakraborty et al., 2024). AI models can be trained using previous interview recordings and ratings to make assessments on applicant competency. For example, an AI tool can be trained to identify and rank soft skills and sales abilities of people applying for a job in sales (Chakraborty et al., 2024). The aspects under analysis with AI in video interviews commonly include content of the speech, voice analysis (tone, pace, inflection), facial analysis (micro expressions, eye movements), and more general body movement (gestures, posture) (Köchling & Wehner, 2020). This enables the use of AI in assessing structured video interviews already in the first stages of recruiting, reducing costs as the first round of interview assessments can be highly automated. These approaches can also reduce cognitive biases and personal preferences which are often present in interview processes when conducted by HR professionals. Structured interview format and predetermined scoring rubrics have been shown to reduce bias against factors such as gender, race, and disability (Levashina et al., 2014). These structured characteristics are strongly present in AI tools for interview analysis, making a case for even better standardization and bias reduction in initial recruiting stages when using AI.

1.2 Problem statement

Using AI to support decision making in the recruitment process is a complex issue. AI is commonly used to help decision making in a user or customer context. Algorithms are used to make recommendations on things such as movies and tv shows to customers on streaming sites, new music is suggested to users on various music applications, and online stores recommend products based on customer's tracked behavior (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). In this context, inaccurate function of the algorithm presents itself mainly as an

inconvenience to the user, if the recommendations do not resonate with them. In the recruitment context however, poor accuracy of the decision-making tool can produce poor hires and unfair protocols for applicants. The standards held for AI assistance in recruitment are much higher, which is why its integration must be done carefully and with sufficient understanding of its implications.

Professionals have raised several issues related to the use of AI in HR management. These problems are related to limits in the training data, ethical considerations, and the more general acceptance of AI in organizations (Chowdhury et al., 2023; Tambe et al., 2019). Ethical concerns usually relate to biases in algorithms, loss of privacy, lack of transparency on decisions made based on AI recommendations, and accountability, as the responsibility of AI-based decisions should ultimately fall on human professionals (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022).

Another issue HR professionals have raised with the use of AI in recruiting is the potential for dehumanizing the hiring process, resulting in negative impact on the employee-employer relationship (Fritts & Cabrera, 2021). One of the reasons for the potential negative impacts are the differences in the values of human professionals and the algorithms AI tools are based on (Fritts & Cabrera, 2021). Another concern that is often raised is the fact that the algorithm AI tools are based on are built to function under certain rules, which can unknowingly harbor bias and result in discrimination and unfavorable decision making (Dalenberg, 2018).

There is also a lack of understanding on how job applicants perceive and interact with these tools. It is important to understand the perspective of the applicants, and any possible underlying factors influencing their experiences, as issues from the applicant side could potentially dilute the benefits gained from the increased efficiency, standardization, and bias reduction. Even if organizations view the use of AI tools in initial recruiting stages to be more efficient, accurate, and fair, if their use is considered unfair, untrustworthy, or otherwise problematic by the applicants, the company could risk losing high performing candidates to competitors because of negative experiences at the recruiting stage.

Recruitment is one of the key areas organizations must manage to achieve and maintain good performance and competitive advantage, and securing high performing candidates for open positions is crucial. If an organization transitions to new recruiting protocols such as AI analysis for more efficiency, it is crucial to ensure the process does not negatively impact the relationship between the candidate and the employee, resulting in reduced likelihood of the applicant to accept the job, and losing capable applicants to competitors. It is also useful to

understand the potential pitfalls so that the integration of AI tools in recruitment can be done strategically, maximizing benefits and avoiding negative consequences.

Furthermore, negative experience at the recruiting stage can damage the organization's image through word-of-mouth, and could turn high performing candidates to prioritize open positions at competing companies. Also, there are several online platforms that offer the possibility for applicants to rate the company based on recruiting process (Woods et al., 2020). Organization's reputation is a key component for long term success in competitive markets, as image and reputation can increase customer loyalty, secure best job applicants, and even function as type of insurance in case of public crisis (Arroyos-Calvera & Powdthavee, 2022; Krys & Konradt, 2022).

1.3 Research aims

This study aims to explore applicants' perceptions and attitudes about AI tools used in recruitment processes, and to understand the underlying factors shaping these perceptions and experiences. The study also aims to investigate the connection between applicant perceptions about AI and their view of the organization in general. The focus is on young adults with a degree in higher education. Studying different professional groups in the context of AI-based tools in recruitment will allow me to study the applicant perceptions more comprehensively in regard to underlying factors, such as applicant backgrounds and previous knowledge.

1.4 Research questions

1) How do job applicants perceive AI tools used in recruitment?
2) What factors influence their perceptions and trust in these tools?
3) How does the use of AI tools in recruiting connect to the applicants' perception of the organization?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study will help organizations in building a better understanding about the use of AI tools in recruitment from the applicant perspective. AI tools are quickly making their way into HR management and hiring decisions. So far their use is mostly concentrated on simple, first stage processes such as resume screening, but as discussed by Chakraborty et al., (2024), AI based recruitment tools have potential to enter various other recruitment stages, such as the interview process, as it can offer more benefit in discriminating between applicants as opposed to resume screening. Its use in the interview stage would also allow companies to increase the number of applicants in this stage, while reducing costs and bias. Before these tools can be adapted fully in the recruitment processes, organizations should be aware of the way applicants perceive these tools, and if there are any underlying factors that

could influence the perceptions and dilute the benefits that can potentially be gained. The potential connection of the use of AI tools to organizational image should also be better understood, to optimize benefits while accounting for potential drawbacks.

1.6 Structure of the study

This thesis is structured in the following way. Chapter two presents a closer examination of previous literature on the topic and introduces the theoretical framework that shapes the approach used to address the research aim. Chapter three introduces the methodological framework with detailed descriptions of the chosen approach. This chapter also describes how the data for this thesis has been collected, sampled, and analyzed. Chapter four describes the data analysis in detail, and chapter five details the findings from the data analysis. Chapter six discusses the findings together with previous literature and theoretical framework. Chapter seven offers the conclusions of the thesis, with summary of the findings, discussion on practical implications, and suggestions for future research. Finally, the limitations of this thesis are discussed.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 HR decision making processes

The decision-making process in organizations regarding who gets hired for a particular job usually involves the combination of structured procedures and human judgement. Some key evaluation metrics commonly include educational background, previous work experience, social skills, and the applicant's perceived fit into the organization and its internal culture (Highhouse, 2008). Companies want to ensure they make the best choice on the new hire, and the decision process typically includes a multi-stage recruitment process with resume screening, interviews, reference checks, and sometimes written assignments or exams testing the candidate's knowledge and skills on issues relevant for the job. Within the more structured scoring metrics, HR professionals and other people involved in the hiring process often exercise their own judgement on final decisions (Dipboye et al., 2012).

When evaluating the outcome of the recruitment process, focus is not only on employee performance, but also on how fair and consistent the hiring process was, and how it is perceived by both the employer and the applicant (Dipboye et al., 2012). The applicant's perception of the HR decision is important to their experience during the onboarding and overall perception of the organization. Some key features on the recruitment process that have been identified to shape applicant perceptions are transparency, interpersonal treatment, and perception of fairness (Gilliland, 1993). Negative perceptions about the hiring process, such as suspicion of bias or lack of transparency can reduce the likelihood the applicant will accept the job offer. This could also cause issues in the first stages of integrating into the new work environment (Dipboye et al., 2012).

2.2 Applications of AI in hiring: benefits and challenges.

Since recruitment is a multi-step process, it is often demanding in terms of time, people, and workload. Recruiting is a high-cost activity in companies and professionals strive for the best possible outcomes within their limits. AI-based tools can offer many attractive benefits in all stages of recruiting. First, they can be very helpful in reaching a larger pool of potential applicants, identifying qualified people both in the active and passive applicant status (Van Esch et al., 2019). It also has the potential to increase the number of applicants that can be screened. AI tools have been used to screen initial applications based on resumes, in a fraction of a time it would take for human professionals, reducing the workload for recruiters. These same benefits can be achieved with AI in interview screening. They can also improve the accuracy of the decision-making process while minimizing bias, as each interview is assessed by the same metrics, given the same amount of time in each assessment, and there is no previously acquired perceptions, opinions, or prejudice which is possible in human recruiters (Black & Van Esch, 2020).

There are however many challenges identified around the use of AI in hiring. A major challenge is related to the potential bias hidden in the algorithm on which the AI tools are based on. An example of this is the famous case of Amazon in 2015, when the company was forced to abandon their new resume screening system powered by an algorithm, as it was discovered to unintentionally discriminate against women (Mujtaba & Mahapatra, 2019). The source of the bias was the training data on which the tool was learning its pattern recognition. The data was heavily dominated by male candidates, as it was based on the applications submitted to the company over the past 10 years, in a male dominated field of technology industry.

The ethical considerations remain as one of the biggest challenges in the integration of AI in recruitment activities. These include topics such as transparency, data privacy, and accountability. Transparency in AI powered recruitment includes communication to the applicants about updates and feedback throughout the recruitment stages (Van Esch et al., 2019). This element is often lacking in companies, and it is common that the only information provided to candidates is that their application has been received (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). However, if the process is heavily automated, especially in the early stages, companies should be able to generate timely feedback to people, and transparency is often discussed as one of the core elements of ethical use of AI in recruitment (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). Providing information of the bases on which the assessment was made and how the applicant ranked would also ensure that any glaring mistakes or misinterpretations are caught. Unfortunately, the feedback system is not necessarily simple, as some elements are easy to communicate, while other things are vague even for the developers of the algorithm-based tool (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). This is also heavily dependent on the stage in which the tool is used. In resume screening, the data on which decisions are based on is relatively simple. In interview screening however, the assessment can be based on millions of data points driven from speech content, facial expression, tone of voice, and more. AI then uses these variables in ways which is hard to communicate forward, and it is hard to assess which data points were the driving force behind the decision that was made (Simbeck, 2019).

There is also the concern of privacy when using AI in recruiting. There are several laws addressing data privacy, with the European General Data Protection Regulation, coming into effect in 2018, being one of the strictest data privacy laws (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). This law addresses the way in which companies can collect, store, and process data with personal information. Informed consent is required from applicants in cases of using their data for AI assessment. However, this requirement on informed consent is not yet well implemented in the context of AI-regulation (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). Applicants

might be asked to agree or disagree to the use of their personal data, but they are often not offered an alternative in case of rejecting the request on data use. In essence, if they want the opportunity to be considered for a position, they must agree to the terms and conditions on the use of their data. Employers hold more power in this dynamic, and applicants have no real opportunity to consider data privacy without being disadvantaged in the hiring process (Sánchez-Monedero et al., 2020).

Another dilemma in AI-based tools in recruiting is accountability. The use of automated technology in decision making does not release the company from adhering to labor laws (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). However, it can be difficult to determine who is held accountable for the decisions that have been made based on AI recommendations. The issue of accountability becomes even more complicated when considering that companies can use technology that has been developed elsewhere. There can also be cases in which the developer of the recruitment tool is not willing to provide full transparency to the functions of the tool because of intellectual property laws (Tambe et al., 2019). When there is no clear way to assign responsibility on decisions that are made based on AI tools, there is no burden of accountability for morally wrong or otherwise bad decision-making.

Closely related to accountability issues, there is a severe lacking in regulatory and legal frameworks governing AI in recruitment. Many countries have laws designed to protect people from discrimination in recruiting decisions, assigning liability on the employer to ensure fair and legal treatment of the candidates. This makes it the employers' responsibility to ensure that the tools that are used in the process are not systematically discriminatory (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). However, some researchers have argued that in many places including the United States, the current laws are falling behind on current scientific knowledge and business practices (Kim & Scott, 2018). They raise an example of targeted advertising, which can result in exclusion of people that is not addressed in current US law. The problems with unexpected bias in algorithms is also an issue from the regulation perspective, as there is no sufficient liability demand on companies when they disregard consequences of implicit bias in their hiring decisions (Kim & Scott, 2018). In addition to legal responsibilities, there is a lack of regulation on the use of AI in general. Fernández-Martínez & Fernández (2020) argue that there is a need for external and objective auditing of the AI tools and technology that is used in organizations, which could be done for example through software architecture.

Adapting AI in the recruiting processes has attractive benefits and difficult challenges that must be addressed for the most efficient use of these tools (Table 1). To achieve the benefits of AI in all the stages of recruitment, from resume screening to evaluating interview data, organizations must consider all the challenges discussed previously, including transparency,

ethical dilemmas, privacy, and accountability. Furthermore, as in this context AI tools are interacting with people outside of the organization, the job applicants, the perspectives and attitudes of the people applying for the job are central for the functionality of the process. Literature from early on has suggested that user's initial perceptions about technology are what drive the decision to adopt the new machinery (Dervitsiotis, 2006). One of the key factors or technology adaptation and applicant perspectives is trust.

Table 1 Key benefits and challenges of AI tools in recruitment

Benefits	Challenges
Reaches a larger and more diverse applicant pool	Risk of algorithmic bias from training data
Speeds up screening and reduces recruiter workload	Lack of transparency in AI decision-making
Enables consistent and standardized evaluations	Dehumanizaiton of the hiring process
Potential to reduce human bias	Data privacy concerns and weak informed consent
Ability to assess more data points	Accountability issues when errors occur
Can automate updates and communication	Regulatory gaps and insufficient oversight

2.3 Trust in technology

The complex landscape of AI and its use in organizational decision-making invites concerns about trust. Trust is one of the key components in successful adaptation of new technology, as identified in previous literature (Lankton et al., 2015; Li et al., 2008). When discussing trust toward technology, it is important to remember that this is different from trust between two humans. Trust in technology commonly refers to beliefs that the technology in question has the necessary attributes to perform according to expectations, and this belief prevails also in situations in which negative consequences are possible (Lankton et al., 2015).

Trust in the organizational context has been much studied, with empirical evidence suggesting that trust does not develop gradually over time (Berg et al., 1995), rather than is formed at different stages based on differed factors (McKnight et al., 1998). Trust unfolds differently toward technology than toward humans, as there is a common positivity bias favoring new technologies (Parasuraman & Manzey, 2010). The initial stage of trust refers to the trust people have toward an unfamiliar party, with no prior interaction with the trustee (McKnight et al., 2002). This means that the trust is based on second-hand sources and

information, such as contextual factors, previous knowledge, experience with similar systems, and other people's opinions, rather than their own direct experience or first-hand knowledge. As trust is based on different factors at different stages, the investigation of initial trust circumstances and factors related to it is important in the context of AI tools in recruiting, to enhance our knowledge about why or why not applicants trust these systems.

According to Dervitsiosis (2006), trust is the factor that enables the necessary communication, coordination, and cooperation that is needed for organizations to adapt to technological change. The construct of trust can include human-like characteristics, such as integrity and competence, while others have narrowed it to system-like trust constructs, which includes factors like reliability, helpfulness, and functionality (Lankton et al., 2015). Both views are relevant in the context of AI tools. Human-like trust constructs are relevant and reasonable when investigating for example recommendation agents that entail human-like characteristics, such as voice and animation. Still, these tools are also associated with system-like trust constructs. Previous research has identified several factors influencing trust towards technology, including explainability, reliability, and human oversight (Dervitsiotis, 2006). Glikson & Wooley (2020) conducted a review on the determinants of human trust on AI, and revealed several factors that had an important role. Transparency, which reflects the level of which the rules and logic under which the AI tool operates are apparent to the users, was found to be critical for building trust toward this technology (Glikson & Woolley, 2020). Reliability (demonstrating the same behavior over time) is also a key factor in building this trust (Glikson & Woolley, 2020; Hoff & Bashir, 2015), however, its importance varies across different AI representations, such as bot form or invisible AI embedded in the system (Glikson & Woolley, 2020).

One issue with trust and AI is the "black box problem" which refers to the nature of AI in which much of the algorithmic system remains beyond human comprehension, as the system learns and evolves (Von Eschenbach, 2021). The concept of trust is a central question when discussing the function of AI based systems and tools, especially as they are increasingly used in sensitive fields such as healthcare and data security (Von Eschenbach, 2021). The black box phenomenon is in conflict with the central factors influencing trust, such as transparency, reliability, explainability and human oversight, which is why it is reasonable to suspect that trust towards AI tools might not include the same positivity bias connected to new technologies (Parasuraman & Manzey, 2010). Furthermore, since trust has been found to be a key factor in the process of adapting new technology in organizations (Lankton et al., 2015), it is important to explore the trust people have towards AI tools and the factors influencing it at different stages (regardless of how much trust the system actually deserves).

2.4 HR professionals' perspectives

The users of technology include, in the context of AI tools in recruitment, both HR professionals as well as job applicants. Early on as technological advancements started making headway, researchers have tried to explain why and predict how users will react to new technologies. This research yielded various models explaining technological acceptance by users, identifying factors that influence user adaptation, including performance expectancy, social influence (weather others expect the person to use the system), the fit of the technology with the task, and compatibility. Some examples of these models include technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989) and task-technology fit (Dishaw & Strong, 1999). Another line of research has focused on the process of user adaptation, and the effects these processes have on outcomes such as group performance (Beaudry & Pinsonneault, 2005; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). These studies have revealed a complex system of user adaptation, showing how users change their beliefs, skills, knowledge, and communication patterns, and adapt and use technology in unanticipated ways (Kraut et al., 1989).

More recent research has applied these theories to understand the acceptance of new technology specifically in the context of AI. Peisl and Edlmann (2020) studied the technology use and acceptance behavior of hiring managers specifically in the context of adapting predictive human resources analytics in recruitment. They focused on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology to model managers' intention to use and actual use behavior. They found that hiring managers did see value in predictive HR analytics, for example in reducing cognitive bias and improving the fit between candidates and organization. However, they also raised the concern of candidate dishonesty, and the findings suggested that hiring managers were aware that automated systems could incentivize applicants to misrepresent data (Peisl & Edlmann, 2020). Similarly, Langer et al., (2019) found that acceptance of highly automated AI-based interviews depended on factors such as applicants' discomfort with technology and the perceived stakes of the interview, illustrating how user beliefs and contextual factors shape the adoption of AI in recruitment (Langer et al., 2019).

When it comes to using AI in assessing video interviews, a central question is how well do HR professionals and recruiters trust AI tools. The digital transformation in organizations has been long ongoing, and with the fast development of AI, professionals predict that companies will likely automate all repetitive processes except strategic tasks (Bencsik et al., 2022). Research has also shown that one of the most significant barrier in this transformation is staff attitudes and distrust toward new technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Research on the attitudes and trust internal organization members have on AI-based tools in recruiting has been quite positive, however there is a need for more detail in the investigations (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). Bilal and Várallyai (2021) found that HR professionals held positive attitudes about the adaptation of AI in recruitment, viewing it as very advantageous in talent acquisition. The study also found that HR professionals exhibited high trust towards AI in recruitment, which was dependent on how reliable, credible, and technically competent they believed the AI tool to be (Bilal & Várallyai, 2021). Bencsik et al., (2022) investigated employees' trust in technology in organizational digitalization, and found that trust depended on the supportive role of the management, even more so than training provided in the organization.

Literature calls for proper training and redesign of job descriptions in order to successfully utilize AI technology in recruitment (Grønsund & Aanestad, 2020; Larivière et al., 2017). Some research has suggested significant benefits from AI based input on the decision-making in the recruitment processes. For example, Hoffman et al. (2018) showed that managers who made hiring decisions in conflict with AI recommendations would have worse hires. However, varying levels of trust from HR professionals toward AI tools hinders the benefits that could be gained.

2.5 Applicant perspectives

There is limited understanding on the other side of using AI, which is the applicants' experiences in interacting with these tools, and being assessed under these new procedures. Existing studies have some conflicting findings (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). Acikgoz et al. (2020) found in their study that applicants perceived AI interviews to be less fair and more likely to result in less favorable outcomes compared to in-person interviews with human recruiters. In line with these findings, Newman et al. (2020) found that people perceived AI driven personnel decisions to be less fair than decisions made by humans, although the study focused on employees' perceptions about internal personnel decisions, rather than applicants outside of the organization. In their study, the researchers designed two experiments, one in a laboratory setting and one in an organizational setting. In the first study, the researchers formulated an experimental condition where participants (working adults) were asked about fairness perceptions in AI driven personnel decisions, in two conditions where decision was made regarding either a layoff or a promotion. Results showed that participants viewed AI driven decisions significantly less fair than those made by humans. Decisions about promotions were viewed as fairer than decisions about layoffs, when made by AI. In the second study, the researchers assigned employees randomly in an organizational setting to read about new policies in which personnel decisions would be made by either humans or algorithms, in either a quantifying or qualitative manner. The

results indicated that AI based decision conditions were again viewed as significantly less fair than human based, and emphasis on quantitative factors were viewed as less fair.

A study investigating people's trust on AI, designed an experiment where the participants played a computer game against an opponent who was given either a human name (for example "Michael") or a computer-based name (letter and number combination). The researchers found that the names did not have a significant effect on trust toward the opponent. Furthermore, the trust towards the opponent was highly contextual, as participants with prior experience with robots, AI, and related technology, reported higher trust toward them. The researchers also found associations between personality traits and trust, as participants with higher scores on openness to experience demonstrated higher trust toward the computer-opponent, while higher conscientiousness predicted less trust (Oksanen et al., 2020). This study demonstrates that there are various traits and factors that can associate with the experience people have with AI technology.

Satisfaction is another key factor in predicting continued use of various tech-based tools (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Huang & Yu, 2023). Aspects closely related to satisfaction include trust and perceived fairness, which also play a key role in the relationship between the employee and employer (Köchling & Wehner, 2020). Although not directly studying AI in the recruiting context, Huang & Yu, (2023) examined the various factors in relation to people's willingness to watch AI-generated news anchors in China. They also explored how these factors related to user satisfaction and engagement. People in the study were more likely to continue engaging with AI-generated news anchors if they were satisfied with the experience, and it was in fact the most important predictor of continued engagement. The researchers also identified several underlying factors that associated with satisfaction, such as user's perception of human characteristics and information quality.

Other studies directly focusing on job applicants' attitudes and trust towards AI in recruitment activities have suggested that applicants perceive AI assessment agents as less trustworthy, which was also associated with reduced likelihood to accept the job (Deriu et al., 2024). These findings are in conflict with some studies showing HR professionals preference for AI based recommendations (Logg et al., 2019). Deriu et al., (2024) also found personality, specifically avoidant attachment style, to mediate the effect on reduced trust from applicants toward AI assessments. Another study found that subjective perceptions of fairness were lower toward AI driven HR activities than human driven (Köchling & Wehner, 2020).

Most studies assessing applicant perceptions toward AI in recruitment have not explored the underlying factors that could contribute to the existing attitudes, or the different stages in

which AI can be used. As discussed earlier, trust and perceptions are formed differently at different stages, based on different factors (McKnight et al., 1998). It is important to explore if applicant perceptions about AI are driven by some underlying factors, and if these perceptions about AI influence the way they view the organization as a whole.

2.6 Organizational image

Organizational image or reputation is commonly viewed as a collective socially constructed assessment of the organization's actions, performance, and past behavior (Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Organizational image is sometimes considered as a more short-term impression held by stakeholders, while reputation is more stable, typically accumulated over a long period of time with consistent actions. There are variety of key factors systematically cited in literature as components of organizational reputation and image, although they vary in field and context. Some of these factors include trustworthiness, financial performance and service quality, ethical conduct, corporate social responsibility practices, and brand familiarity (Rashid & Mustafa, 2021; Walker et al., 2011). Studies have shown that perceived fairness in organizational processes, including recruitment protocols, reinforces trustworthiness which in turn is linked to organizational reputation (Cho & Ringquist, 2011). Reputation and image are also influenced by the way in which organizations communicate their values and mission, and authentic communication has been shown to shape stakeholder perceptions (Rashid & Mustafa, 2021). Organizational values are communicated through word-of-mouth, and through treatment of employees and clients, including those who participate in the organization's recruitment processes.

Introducing AI tools in recruitment protocols should also be considered from the perspective of organizational image. If applicants have negative perceptions about the recruitment process, this could have negative impact on organizational image. Additionally, it is important to understand the way in which AI use is perceived, and what kind of value message is communicated, to predict the impact on organizational image and reputation. A strong reputation helps to positively differentiate in the competitive markets by attracting high performing employees, strengthening customer loyalty, and helping with crisis resilience, creating competitive advantage which is difficult for competitors to replicate (Barney, 1991).

2.7 Summary of literature

The use of AI in recruitment has many attractive benefits, including improved time efficiency, reduced workload from HR professionals, reduced bias, and potentially more sensitive and reliable assessments across applicants. These new procedures are still burdened by issues such as challenges with transparency, the black box problem, ethical problems, and data privacy issues. In addition to these practical hurdles, the attitudes and

perspectives of HR professionals and job applicants have a key role in successful implementation of these protocols. Trust toward technology has been identified as one of the most important determinants of successful integration of new technology in organizational processes. Findings on the attitudes and trust from HR professionals toward AI tools has been mainly positive. What is known about the applicant perspectives toward AI is less optimistic. Existing studies have conflicting findings, some suggesting applicants have less trust toward AI assessment agents than human professionals.

Studies have identified moderating variables affecting the applicant attitudes, including personality traits, previous experience, and previous knowledge. Characteristics of the AI assessment tools have also been shown to affect applicant trust, such as assessment based on quantitative or qualitative factors. There are various potential uses for AI in recruitment, such as initial interview screening, assessing written materials, and AI based games, however, we lack knowledge on the applicant perceptions for these different uses, as well any conditional factors that influence the perceptions. Furthermore, perceived fairness and trustworthiness in recruitment processes are linked to organizational image. Major changes in recruitment process, which integrating AI assessment tools would be, could impact these factors, and in turn connect with applicants' views of the organization as a whole.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This research study aims to examine trust and perceptions job applicants have about the use of AI in recruitment, and how these perceptions might connect to their views of the organization in general. This is an inductive study, exploring a newly emerged phenomenon and personal perceptions related to it, with the aim to identify patterns and themes which can work as the basis for developing future theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As the study aims to gain in-depth understanding of trust and perceptions and how they have been formed, I will use qualitative research method to address these aims. Qualitative research method utilizes naturalistic inquiry such as observations, interviews, and document reviews (and their combinations), to investigate complex social phenomena (Patton, 2002). While quantitative research methods, focusing on numeric data and statistical analyses, are suitable for testing hypothesis and examining relationships between data points, qualitative methods offer more in-depth understanding of what is behind numeric data, and allows the investigation to include complex phenomenon such as people's perceptions.

3.2 Data collection

The data collection was conducted via semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a form of data collection which includes predetermined set of open-ended interview questions (Patton, 2002). This approach allows one to use the interview time effectively, as the conversation is focused on the aim with the help of predetermined questions. However, the open-ended questions leave room for exploration of different responses and themes further, with the use of probes and follow-up questions. Since I am focusing on individuals' experiences and nuanced attitudes, it is essential to leave room for the interviewee to give responses they feel are relevant and important. Open-ended questions are suitable in exploring new ideas and gaining access to information I as a researcher cannot predict, and so should not limit the participants' answers by using questions with restricted answer options (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The interviews included five sections, first section focusing on background and demographical information, the second part on general experiences with recruitment, the third section addressed the participants' knowledge and experience relating to AI, the fourth section focused on how the participants perceive the use of AI in recruitment, and the fifth section addressed the participants' perceptions about the organizations using AI in recruitment.

3.3 Sample selection

Qualitative research methods do not entail predetermined rules on suitable sample size, and there is no way to test for statistical power as there is in quantitative research (Patton, 2002). The sample size is determined by several factors, including the aims of the research, what

data is available and useful, and what is practical and feasible. For this study, I conducted eight interviews with young adult participants (23–32-year-olds), who had previous experience in job search and recruitment from an applicant perspective, to ensure information rich cases. It was not essential for the participants to have experience in AI tools used in recruitment however, as the study focus is on their initial trust and perceptions about the topic, which do not have to be based on acquired experience (McKnight et al., 2002). The number of interviews was determined by feasibility, as eight interviews provide extensive amount of data which still possible to analyze within the time limitations of this project.

3.4 Units of analysis

The units of analysis refer to the level at which findings will be interpreted and generalized (Patton, 2002). It is important to define the units of analysis before formulating sampling strategies, as they might require different methods or focus during the data collection, analysis, and conclusions. In this study, the primary unit of analysis are the individual participants, who each represent a unique perspective about the use of AI in recruiting. A secondary unit of analysis are the patterns of perceptions and trust (and underlying factors) toward AI in recruiting that might stand out in the data analysis as a collective experience. For this analysis unit, I will group the data into themes that emerge across multiple participants.

3.5 Sampling strategies

It is essential to select relevant samples that represent the phenomenon under study to achieve meaningful results. In quantitative studies the sample size must be large enough to have acceptable statistical power. In qualitative studies however, the sample size can be relatively small, if the sampling strategies are effective and the inquiry is done in depth (Eisenhardt, 1989; Patton, 2002). In this study, I utilized purposeful sampling, selecting information rich cases relating to the aim of the study, to counterbalance the smaller number of cases included in the analyses. There are several strategies in purposeful sampling, from which I have selected typical case sampling, intensity sampling, and opportunistic sampling, as described by Patton (2002).

Typical case sampling refers to the selection of “average-like” cases, which in this study included young-adults who had applied for jobs in the recent past. This sampling strategy is often used when the study aims to provide a qualitative profile of the topic of interest, which in this case was to describe the perceptions participants have about the use of AI in recruiting. Intensity sampling was also used, which involved selecting participants who in some regards have strong experience in the phenomenon of interest, but not to the extent of being an outlier. By selecting people with recent experience in applying for a job, I aimed to ensure that the participants had relevant insights to share in the interviews.

I also employed opportunistic sampling, which refers to the strategy of utilizing opportunities for recruiting participants that emerge during the data collection. Some participants who were in the stage in their careers where they had participated in job search recently, knew other people in similar situations, providing me with leads for potential participants with relevant insights.

By combining these purposeful sampling strategies, I aimed to construct a layered, comprehensive investigation of how educated job applicants perceive AI-based recruitment tools. This approach strengthens the credibility and relevance of the study findings, as I have ensured information rich cases with relevant experiences to share (Patton, 2002). The different units of analysis, sampling strategies, and their justifications are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Units of analysis and sampling strategy

Classification	Unit of Analysis	Sampling Strategy	Justification
People focused	An individual	Typical case sampling	To understand the perceptions and trust, and underlying factors, young adults have about the use of AI in recruitment
Analysis focused	Interview with specific questions assessing trust and perceptions about the use of AI in assessing video interviews	Intensity sampling	Describing an information-rich case in depth, in this case people with recent experience in participating in recruitment processes.
Place based	Individuals with some knowledge and opinions about AI	Opportunistic sampling	To recruit participants who are accessible and relevant at the moment of the study, allowing the researcher to gather insights from people with practical or emerging viewpoints about AI.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of a study is evaluated through measures of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. These measures are used to determine the validity and reliability of qualitative research studies, as they cannot be evaluated in the same way as in quantitative research (Bryman & Bell 2011, p. 43).

Credibility refers to the degree of which the study has utilized sufficient and convincing representations of the constructs which are under study (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). In this research study, the central construct under investigation was the perceptions university educated job applicants have about the use of AI in recruiting. This construct was examined through semi-structured interviews. The interviews included multiple questions addressing

the experiences, opinions, and attitudes the participants had about the topic, and follow-up questions were included to gain deeper understanding of the basis of the participants' answers. The use of the interview guide ensured that the constructs were approached similarly across all interviews. There was no time limit for the participants, so they could answer in as much detail and length as they felt was necessary. The credibility of the study could still be further enhanced by adding more questions to the interview guide. Another method to improve credibility is triangulation (the use of various data collection methods) (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989), which was not used in this study due to time restrictions.

Similarly to the concept of external validity in quantitative research studies, transferability refers to the possibility to transfer the study hypothesis into other contexts (Gioia et al., 2013; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). To enhance transferability, the research questions could have been assessed in different age groups, as this likely affects the experiences and perceptions participants have. The detailed descriptions of methodology used increases the transferability of this study.

Dependability assesses the extent to which the findings from the study can be replicated with the same or similar participants (Wallendorft & Belk, 1989). To evaluate dependability, the study could be repeated using the same participants, as a longitudinal approach, however, this could not be implemented within the time restrictions and study scope.

Confirmability refers to the extent to which we can trace the methods used in the study and the way in which the researcher arrived at their conclusions (Wallendorft & Belk, 1989). Confirmability can be ensured by keeping detailed records throughout the study process, including interview guides, transcripts, notes, and having multiple researchers working on the project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, confirmability is ensured by providing the interview guide (Appendix 1), and a full example of interview categorization (Appendix 2). Audio recordings of the interviews were saved to confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Notes were taken during the interviews to make sure relevant information was kept which was not necessarily captured in audio recordings, such as change in tone or pose, relevant facial expressions, or distractions from the environment. The limits to confirmability include having only one researcher working on the study, as well as the lack of detailed reflective diary during the entire project.

3.7 Ethical considerations

This study complies with the standards of ethical research (Bryman & Bell, 2011) by ensuring the anonymity of the participants and engaging in responsible data handling. Before each interview, the participants are asked for informed consent by signing a consent form, in which they were explained the study protocol before participation, and explained that they

are allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. All data was handled anonymously, with no personal identifiers attached to the data at any time. The interview questions were designed to adhere to ethical standards, with no questions about sensitive information or information unrelated to the research aims. I as a researcher am aware of my personal biases which can influence the study participants and interpretation of the gathered data, and aimed to conduct myself in neutral manner during the interviews to the best of my ability, and adhere to transparency with any conclusions made from the data.

3.8 Interview

I used a semi-structured interview method, which relied on an interview guide prepared in advance (see Appendix 1). The interview questions were categorized into different types based on Patton (2002), according to the question's purpose and the information it was designed to extract. The questions were formulated based on the literature review, focusing on previously identified themes and gaps in literature. The final interview guide consisted of 24 open-ended questions. The question types and their purpose are shown in Table 3. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and in English, depending on the participant's preference.

Table 3 Interview questions, types, and purpose.

Question type	Definition	Questions	Purpose
Background	Certain characteristics of the participants, such as education, occupation, age, nationality etc.	Q1: Could you describe your educational background? Q2: What is your current employment status? Q3: What field do you work in?	To get a sense of the participant's background and current situation in the job market
Experience	Experiences, behaviors, and actions of the participant.	Q4: How did you find your current or previous job? Q5: Can you describe your last application process in detail? Q6: Have you ever encountered AI-driven recruitment tools (such as automated resume screeners, chatbots, or video analysis) in a job application process? Q12: Do you use AI in your work? If so, in what specific tasks? Q13: Do you use AI in your free time (e.g., ChatGPT, recommendation systems, AI-based creative tools)? If so, how?	To get a sense of the past experiences the participant has that are related to the topic
Opinions and values	Thoughts about certain experiences or issues, values, goals, etc.	Q16: Do you think AI systems can fully understand and evaluate human skills and potential? Why or why not? Q17: AI can be used to assess different parts of an application process. In which of these areas would you be most comfortable with AI being used? Why? Q18: If given the choice, would you prefer a human recruiter or AI to assess different parts of your application?	To understand the perceptions the participant has about AI and its use in recruitment

Question type	Definition	Questions	Purpose
Knowledge	Factual information the participant knows.	Q10: How would you rate your familiarity with AI on a scale from 1 (not familiar at all) to 5 (very familiar)? Can you explain why you gave that rating? Q11: Can you explain what artificial intelligence is, in your own words? Q14: How familiar are you with how AI is used in recruitment? Can you give any examples?	To get a sense of the technical knowledge the participant has about AI in general and with AI in the context of recruitment
Feelings	Emotional reactions and emotions associated with experiences and thoughts.	Q7: Have you ever felt that an application process was unfair or biased? If so, what made you feel that way? Q8: Have you ever withdrawn from a job application because of the recruitment process? If yes, what influenced your decision? Q15: How do you feel about AI being used in recruitment processes?	To understand the feeling the participant has associated with AI and recruitment
Perceptions	The views the participant holds about the topic	Q19: Would knowing that AI was used in the hiring process change how you prepare for an application? Q20: Some argue AI can make recruitment fairer by reducing human bias, while others worry AI may introduce new biases. What are your thoughts on this? Q21: What benefits do you see in using AI to assess video interviews? Q22: What challenges or risks do you see with AI assessing video interviews? Q23: Would the use of AI in recruitment affect your perception of an organization?	To understand the current situation in participant's view of the topic

The criteria for study participants were the completion of a university level degree and having either being currently searching for new employment, or having recently completed search for employment (within the past year). This ensured that the participants would have recent experiences with recruitment practices. Potential informants were initially identified via professional social media platform LinkedIn, where the level of education and employment status were available. Those who matched the study criteria were contacted via email or chat, and then scheduled for an in-person interview. The study consists of eight interview participants, each with educational level of a master's degree. Three participants were currently searching for new employment, and five participants had started their current positions within the past year. Participant characteristics are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4 Participant characteristics and interview length.

Participant	Education	Field	Employment status/role	Length of interview
1	MBA	Accounting and finance	Doctoral researcher	45 minutes
2	Master of Science	Biomedicine	Doctoral researcher	40 minutes
3	Master of Science	Economics	Economist	45 minutes
4	Master of Science	Psychology	Psychologist	45 minutes
5	Master of Science	Genetics	Doctoral researcher	40 minutes
6	Master of Science	Pharmacy and genetics	Consultant	1 hour
7	MBA	Strategy and sustainability	Consultant	40 minutes
8	Master of Science	Pharmacology	Doctoral researcher	35 minutes

3.9 Description of the interview protocol

Before the start of the interview, all participants were asked to sign an informed consent form. All of the interviews were recorded using a mobile app (with the permission of the participant) and then a transcript was formulated with the help of an AI based transcription service. After this, the transcripts were manually corrected to match the audio recording. Each interview lasted between 35 minutes to one hour. During the interviews, notes were taken using a computer, to store information about pose, tone, facial expressions, body language, and other factors that would help interpret the interview data. All data, including audio recordings, transcripts, and notes, were stored on a password protected computer drive. No personal identifiers were collected or attached to the data at any point.

4 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was used to examine the language-based data from interviews. This is a common qualitative analysis method which is often used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data (Wall et al., 2015).

The analysis focused on answering the original research questions, listed below.

1) How do job applicants perceive AI tools used in recruitment?
2) What factors influence their perceptions and trust in these tools?
3) How does the use of AI tools in recruiting connect to the applicants' perception of the organization?

First step in the analysis process was structuring the data using color coding. This categorization is often initialized in the interview stage, when the researcher begins to identify reoccurring themes (Gioia, 2013). The final themes were recognized and then identified through coding the transcribed data, with easily identifiable labels using different colors (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Figure 1 shows an example of the first analysis step, in which green highlighted text was identified under the theme "positive feelings," and purple highlighted text was identified under the theme "benefits," from interview 2. Table 5 shows the themes/categories that were identified and the corresponding colors.

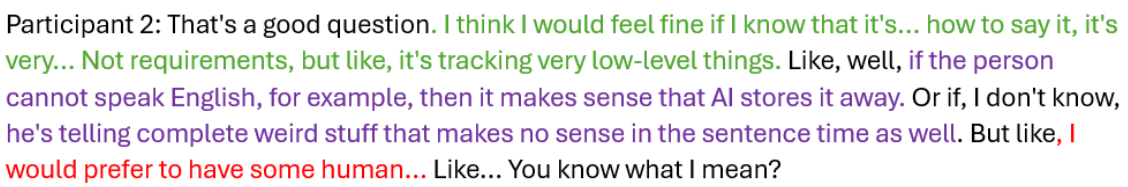


Figure 1 Example of the coding process from interview 2 transcript.

Table 5 Color codes used in coding the transcripts and their meaning.

Color code	Meaning/category	Examples
Maroon	Demographics (education, employment status etc.)	"My master's degree was in bioinformatics"
Green	Positive feelings/ perceptions	"I think AI is definitely great support tool in any sort of human decision making and human gathering of information"
Red	Negative feelings/ perceptions	"I'm a bit of protesting some of AI applications"
Blue	Knowledge	"I work in AI, I develop AI tools in the health space"
Brown	Challenges	"But the question is what are the settings for the AI? I think that would be nice to know, kind of"
Purple	Benefits	"It provides you with much more data points and is able to evaluate them much better"
Orange	Experiences	"I had to play a game. It's a strategic game in a way, and also a little bit quantitative part to that as well"
Yellow	Perceptions about organization	"Shows that they are adaptable to new technology"
Other opinions	Relevant views about the topic that do not fall under the other themes	"They are better than everything we have before simply because we didn't have too much before"

In the second step, the highlighted text from each interview was gathered under each theme, which helped to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what information each identified theme extracted. I then moved forward to a more detailed analysis of the data, in which I interpreted the gathered information under each theme. An example of this step can be seen in Figure 2. An example of a full table can be found in Appendix 2.

Category	Examples	Interpretation
Positive feelings/perceptions	"I think I would feel fine if I know that it's... how to say it, it's very... Not requirements, but like, it's tracking very low-level things." "I think it can be a good decision, but again, like really good, should be really good parameterized."	The participant was open to the benefits of AI tools in recruitment, but it was dependent on the assumption that the tool was well designed and tracking only simple things, rather than making complex conclusions.
Negative feelings/perceptions	"I would prefer to have some human evaluating me." "Well, the final, for sure. I want to talk with people, checking on the eyes." "The AI is kind of not really new thing, but it's new that it gets so much implemented into everyday life recently. And I'm still like, have this old school things inside of me, so I'm a bit of protesting some of AI applications."	The participant prefers human recruiters, and communicated a pre-existing, resisting attitude about AI applications.
Knowledge	"That's what's created for a specific task and was trained on a huge amount of data. So, when you have this task and some small amount of data for yourself, you can use this model to reach tasks." "I have no knowledge about AI in the recruitment."	The participant was able to summarize the meaning of AI confidently, and documented by interview notes this knowledge was communicated with confidence. However, their knowledge about AI in recruitment activities was low.

Figure 2 Example of categorization done for interview 2.

Finally, I compared the findings of the categorization step across the interviews. The comparisons in qualitative research studies must be done systematically and logically to produce useful information that represents the data truthfully (Patton, 2002). I gathered the summaries of the interpretations and analysis from each interview under the categories within the same table, and compared the findings across all interviews. My goal was to identify any repeating patterns across the interviews, or clear differences, and to form a general understanding of what kinds of perceptions the study participants had about the use of AI in recruiting, and perceptions about organizations. An example of this step can be seen in Figure 3. Finally, I abstracted the findings further to form an overarching picture of the data and to see how my findings connected to previous literature.

Category	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
Positive feelings	Confident that they would be evaluated fairly, less stress than in human contact.	Open to the benefits, but dependent on the assumption the tool worked as designed.	Felt they would be evaluated fairly; with human involvement they were less hesitant.
Negative feelings	Had past success with human evaluators would not want to give up that advantage.	Expressed preference for human evaluators and human contact.	Initial reaction was negative. Worries about being misinterpreted.
Knowledge	Felt confident in their knowledge.	Good knowledge on AI, but no knowledge about AI in recruitment context.	Basic knowledge about AI, but no knowledge about AI in recruitment.

Figure 3 Example of comparing of findings across interviews.

5 FINDINGS

The results of the analysis are described in this chapter, with summary of the data using direct quotes and paraphrasing the interview transcripts. All quotes are presented in English, although the original language for some transcripts was Finnish. The identified themes for the interview guide work as a structure for the results. The factors constructing perceptions about AI tool use in recruitment are illustrated in Figure 4.

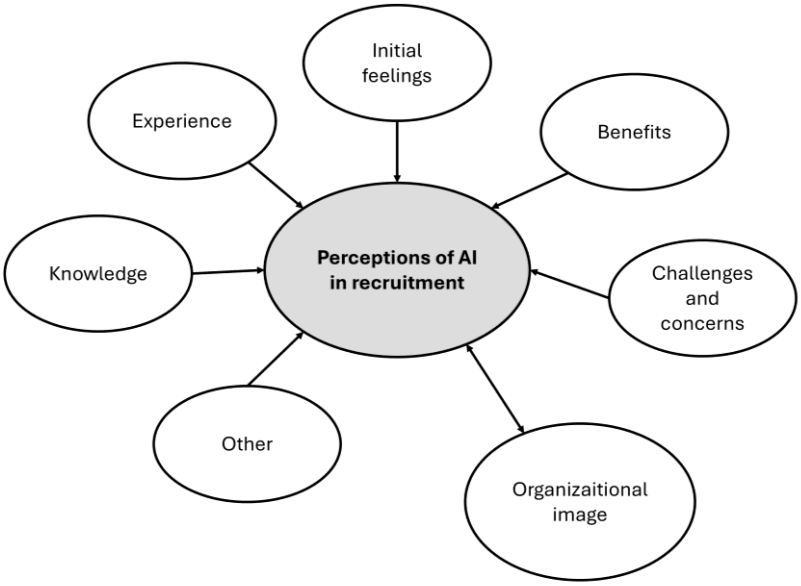


Figure 4 Factors constructing perceptions of AI in recruitment.

5.1 Knowledge

The pre-existing knowledge about AI in general and AI in recruiting by the interviewees was assessed so that I would have a better understanding about their familiarity with the topic, and to have better context for their opinions and perceptions. Most participants rated their level of knowledge as average (2-3 points out of 5). One participant rated their knowledge very high, 4.5 out of 5. Two participants were able to define AI in general terms, and mention key concepts of large language models and learning from data.

”AI is a computer program or model that produces new information independently or under supervision. It is taught with some sort of data and it has a model, which it uses to produce information independently or to organize and draw connections within it. In this way it is not that a person tells a computer directly to do this and this and this, but the computer works independently.” (Interview 5)

Two participants possessed clearly above average knowledge about the topic, as they worked developing AI tools and machine learning algorithms in the field of medicine and neuroscience. Their definitions on what AI is was also more detailed than most others.

"We are trying to use AI models in our imaging analysis. It's not the most complex one, so it's not the one that was used for the Chat GPT for example. I think ours are a bit more, a bit less complex. But yeah, so we basically build some models." (Interview 2)

"Artificial intelligence is a way of us trying to mimic the way we, like the human intelligence, how we think and how we process stuff. Artificial intelligence in its basic form is essentially just taking specific inputs, processing something and returning that. But mostly this is nowadays at least attached to neural networks… trying to mimic also biological features of humans. But if the wider spectrum AI is meant to solve complex tasks… it's just mathematics, a lot of mathematics, that's behind it." (Interview 6)

Two participants were unable to define AI well, and their level of knowledge was very surface level.

"I don't really understand what happens there under the hood." (Interview 4)

"I don't really understand what it is based on, I could probably expand this knowledge." (Interview 7)

5.2 Experience

All of the participants used AI tools such as chat GPT in their own work. The use was diverse, ranging from refining text, summarizing information, and using it for coding. One participant also had experience with the administrative side of AI use at their university, developing guidelines for the transparent use of AI in research.

"I use AI in my research, you can use it to summarize articles. You can use it to help proofread your papers. You can brainstorm with it." (Interview 1)

"…to produce lines of code. Or to debug my code if I cannot find the error." (Interview 5)

Two participants had experience in interacting with AI tools in recruiting. Both interviewees had participated in an AI based computer game, in which their performance was measured not only in points from the game, but also based on timing and movement patterns of their cursor. These games happened in early stages of recruitment, and the participants with these experiences had generally positive reflections on the game, but reported not having gotten any feedback from their performance.

"I had to play a game. It's a strategic game in a way, and also a little bit quantitative part to that as well….They were evaluating not only the final answer essentially that you gave, but also the speed, the type of cursor movements that you made, how often you clicked somewhere, how often you went through the screen, how confident you were…" (Interview 6)

"...there was this one time I got a link to a game and then that was the first round of elimination..." (Interview 7)

The participants also shared experiences in recruiting in general that influenced their trust and views about AI involvement in recruiting. Three participants shared negative experiences in recruiting, in which they observed or experienced questionable assessment approaches, or imperfections in the way the recruiting was done. These included disagreements among the evaluators in who should advance in application process and rejections based on recruiter's unprofessional conduct and issues in personal life.

"I was one of the people going through the applications, and we did not always agree who was the best candidate... so many things affected my decision, like not taking everyone with the same exact educational background..." (Interview 4)

"...my application is valid, and I'm happily still invited to the assessment center and explains...or gives this explanation that the recruiter had a bad day and simply rejected all the applications on that day for this position. Which seemed incredible to me." (Interview 6)

"...we were actively recruiting, and our HR person had eliminated someone after the first stage because they thought their background did not fit, but when we went through the applications, this person was very good and they actually got hired." (Interview 7)

There were also experiences with mistakes in the automated systems, and suspicion that the automatization had affected the negative outcome. These experiences even included direct confirmation that there was some issue with the system, which had negative impact on application process and was not the candidate's fault.

"...but then again, also the fact that the recruitment said I had multiple applications there, whereas I applied only once, it was some bug in their system, which seemed pretty odd to me." (Interview 6)

"I have had these experiences that I felt I fit the job description perfectly with my background and CV, but then did not make it past the first round...I don't know maybe they had some computerized system and I was missing some key word..." (Interview 7)

5.3 Initial feelings about AI tools in recruiting

The participants shared variety of positive feelings about the use of AI in recruiting. However, these views were consistently tied to come conditional variable, such as future development and improvement of the tools, human involvement, and accuracy of the assessment metrics. Participants 1 and 6, who had been successful in their job applications before, felt confident they would be assessed favorably also by AI. Participant 3 also felt that they would not be at a disadvantage if assessed by AI. Others had doubts about how they would be assessed by AI tools, and were concerned their mistakes and nervousness would be interpreted more harshly.

"...as a qualified individual with experience and that I believe is a, I'm a valuable worker or asset, so I would think that AI would be able to pick me out." (Interview 1)

"I think AI is definitely great support tool in any sort of human decision making and human gathering of information" (Interview 6)

"I feel like I would be somewhere in the average, I would not stand out but also not the worst one." (Interview 3)

Many participants also felt that if the AI tools assessment metrics were well designed, they would feel good about its use. The positive feelings were also tied to the assumption that AI is used in the beginning stages of recruitment, and that the assessment metrics were simple and there would be no complex conclusions or final decisions drawn. There were also reflections that during the early stages of recruitment, where there are often large numbers of applicants to compete against and there is the element of luck to get through the first screening, the involvement of AI tools would not bother them in this context. Some participants felt better about the idea of AI doing assessments if the job in question was lower-level employment with large applicant pools, rather than a position in later career stage.

"I think I would feel fine if I know that it's... how to say it, it's very... it's tracking very low-level things." (Interview 2)

"In the beginning stages I would trust it more, because there is already so much luck who goes through the first round." (Interview 4)

"Well, in a way it is fine for me as a thought, as normally there is always some screening going on even when done by humans and it is subjective when one HR person goes through applications. And so, I don't think I would mind if AI was completing this stage instead." (Interview 7)

There was also the mention of human involvement in most interviews. The participants shared a strong consensus that the presence of a human resource professional was important, and many thought the final decision on who gets hired should be made by a human. Participants were more open to the use of AI tools when only used as a complementary analytical tool in the recruiting process. They felt that their trust towards AI tools' assessments would be higher if it was overseen by an HR professional, which seemed to be often rooted on the idea that human oversight provides accountability and moral responsibility that automated systems lack. Participant 5 argued that the AI tools should be tools for a human professional to access more relevant information, but that they should not make judgements based on the information it gathers. Participant 3 said they would have no problems or hesitation about AI tools in recruitment if there was always a human assessor present as well. Participant 7 felt that there were always some imperfections in the recruiting

processes, even when done by human evaluators, and that people make subjective decisions. They felt that including AI in the early stages would reduce some subjectivity. Participants were also aware of the potential to enhance efficiency and provide additional insights, when used transparently and ethically.

"Maybe if there was a human plus AI, I wouldn't have any worries" (Interview 3)

"I do think there should be a human involved in some point of the process, so that it is precisely a tool that is used to to help in decision making." (Interview 4)

"...that a person makes the decision and AI only produces some data to support it, that would in my opinion... I would feel more comfortable with that." (Interview 5)

"I think it would need that step that someone goes through everything, to see if everything makes sense in general." (Interview 7)

Majority of the participants also mentioned the assumed development of AI, and that they expected these tools to be more accurate in the future which would in turn warrant more trust and acceptance from them. Participant 6, who worked developing AI algorithms and possessed above average knowledge on the topic, felt confident in the use of AI in recruitment in the future. However, they stated that in its current state, they would not trust it. The possibility to customize the tools for the specific job was also mentioned, and this customization would increase trust.

"...it will be with its further development able to also capture better characteristics in that are necessary in recruitment... The tools will get better all the time but we're not at that point yet so a lot of flaws probably are happening in this experimental stage" (interview 6)

"...in the future as it develops more then I think AI would maybe be the better option... If it was developed to specifically suit the job at hand I think it would be a good way to do it." (Interview 7)

Some participants also expressed excitement in the possibility of AI introducing some more creative and engaging approaches in recruiting. Participant 7 had experience in AI tools being used in recruitment, and this had been a positive experience in terms of being excited to try something new. They also walked away from the experience with positive feelings.

"In a way I was excited when I got the game invitation because it sounded like a pretty fun way to do it." (Interview 7)

The possibility of receiving more detailed feedback from the recruitment process was also a variable that enhanced people's positive perceptions about AI tools. Some participants felt that they would be more likely to apply to a job if it was expressed that they would receive feedback after the process. Many participants even discussed that feedback would be expected if AI tools were used, as opposed to the current situation where there is essentially

no feedback provided. Participant 8 had experience in receiving feedback in the form of the employer sharing the selected applicant's resume, and viewed the experience positively since they were able to compare their skills and experience with the successful application. They reflected that AI tools would be useful in providing this type of feedback about the selected applicants as well.

"It would definitely encourage me even more to apply if I knew that I could also profit regardless of the outcome." (Interview 6)

"Well yeah feedback would be really good that if I know beforehand that I get it then for sure (encouraged to apply)". (Interview 7)

"…they said that we found a person and this is the CV of the person so when you look at the CV you know compared to them you stand nowhere…and that's so fair." (Interview 8)

At the same time, the use of AI combined with the lack of feedback was viewed very negatively. Participant 6 discussed the unfair dynamic between job applicants and recruiters, as the applicants put a lot of effort in the process even in the early stages, and the rejection might come instantly without explanation. The use of AI tools meant for many participants that they would expect feedback from the process. Participant 7 expressed the feeling of disappointment when automated tools are used, and you get a rejection very quickly. It leaves the applicant feeling disconnected from the process and the organization, and even as if no one truly looked through the application they put effort in. Participant 8 viewed feedback as a way to increase trust toward the tools, since each applicant could evaluate if the feedback on their performance seems reasonable and accurate.

"…a lot of, in a sense efforts going to waste, especially given that there is no feedback and nothing on that… Because you must understand that if you apply, you put as an applicant a lot of effort into an application, an automated tool can quickly send you rejection or whatever, and of course without any feedback" (Interview 6)

"The feeling of unfairness about it, and also I think I would feel a bit like if there is no feedback and I did a lot of work for the application, which then just goes through AI tools, I would feel like really you didn't even bother to look this through…" (Interview 7)

"…because if with the feedback I will be able to evaluate whether the machine is performing properly or not, you know whether the tool is satisfying my requirement or not so, feedback is very important." (Interview 8)

Negative perceptions about AI tools in recruitment were also communicated in all interviews, extending beyond the lack of feedback. Five participants said they would prefer human recruiter over AI tools, and two participants felt neutral and could not clearly decide on one or the other. Some participants expressed preference for human evaluator because of

the possibility to establish a relationship and for them to get a sense of the company and people working there. The interpersonal relationships established in the recruitment process were important for many participants.

"Well, the final, for sure. I want to talk with people, checking on the eyes." (interview 2)

"I was never quite fond of them to be fair, simply because I believe that it's more interesting also to apply or at least go through the path of personal acquaintance." (Interview 6)

The personal relationships and social encounters in job search were factors in some participants' view of AI. Participant 1 preferred traditional recruiting methods because they had been successful in the past, and participant 3 had social anxiety which they felt could be misinterpreted by AI tools, while human evaluators can understand it better. There were also some opposite perspectives pointing out that being evaluated by an automated tool would reduce some stress originating from social anxiety and human contact.

"My preference would be a human again for the same reason just because I would want to play it safe and it's worked in the past so I want to keep doing it that's just kind of how I feel about it." (Interview 1)

"Oh no sounds horrible. I'm already nervous about social situations, so it feels like it could misunderstand me." (Interview 3)

Participant 2 admitted having resistance to the implementation of AI in many things out of principle, and this resistance was not necessarily linked to previous negative experience or knowledge. Participant 4 had very low trust toward AI tools, evident by the many direct mentions of lack of trust toward it. These statements were not paired or further explained with underlying factors, suggesting that the participant had low trust toward AI initially which had not been formed through experience or knowledge.

"The AI is kind of not really new thing, but it's new that it gets so much implemented into everyday life recently. And I'm still like, have this old school things inside of me, so I'm a bit of protesting some of AI applications." (Interview 2)

"I don't always trust it." (Interview 4)

"If it works completely independently, it would be a bit… it would make me suspicious…" (Interview 4)

Many participants expressed lack of trust toward AI, which was paired with some explaining factor. Participants 4, 6, and 7 had concerns about AI's capabilities at the current moment in time, and would want to see better evidence of its accuracy before they could fully trust it. Participant 7 trusted human evaluators more to not miss vital information.

"I would have to see more, how good the AI tools really is at its function before I could fully trust it…" (Interview 4)

“So in that sense they're great stuff but they're still not precise enough not good enough.” (Interview 6)

”Somehow I would feel its more trustworthy and safe (with human evaluators) that nothing is overlooked.” (Interview 7)

Lack of feedback and lack of general knowledge on AI tools from the recruiters’ side was also met with very negative feelings by many participants. Some participants were concerned about recruiters not understanding the underlying risks, and thought there should always be a person with appropriate level of knowledge about AI tools in recruiting to ensure ethical use and practice. The claim of objectivity of AI tools compared to human evaluators was concerning to participant 5, as they were aware of the possible biases embedded within the algorithm. Participant 6 and 7 mentioned lack of feedback and lack of transparency about the criteria that the applicants are being evaluated with, which caused them to feel negatively about AI tools being used in applicant assessment.

”I think there are big risks that people who develop these tools don’t necessarily recognize, and if these tools are being used, there has to be a strong ethical view point also, with some person who understands the possible issues that are involved…but they might present it as if this is more objective. And that is what concerns me about it.”” (Interview 5)

“You have zero feedback. On the website they might say, you should collect more experience, but what type of experience, what do you want to see? It's not being transparently communicated.” (Interview 6)

”…I’ve been left with a feeling like what are the criteria that they are using…just like the feeling of unfairness about it, and that if I don’t receive any feedback and I put in a lot of effort to just go through some AI tool, I could have this feeling like did you not even bother to look through this…” (interview 7)

5.4 Benefits

All participants mentioned benefits that they saw would be positive improvements in applicant evaluations. Improved fairness of the recruiting process was mentioned by four participants, which they saw would result from the more objective evaluation of applicants. The participants said that AI tools would be less affected by human bias and human chemistry.

“AI can be more objective if it's created in a faithful, trustable way.” (Interview 1)

“…I guess there would be the benefit that it can evaluate things more objectively. It’s not only about the interpersonal chemistry.” (Interview 4)

”If they made the model in a way that it aims to correct the biases introduced by human evaluators.” (Interview 5)

“It could reduce that kind of subjectivity.” (Interview 7)

Another benefit most participants mentioned was the reduced workload for the HR personnel, and its time-saving potential. The participants also recognized that this would decrease the time it takes for them to know if they advanced in the application process, or if they are rejected or offered a job. For participant 3, the improved time efficiency for HR professionals was the only benefit they saw.

"I know that AI is like supposed to be used in the situation when we have thousands of applications. And it makes sense, it's reduced the work for the HR and blah, blah, blah." (Interview 2)

"Well, it saves their time, but in addition to that, I don't see many benefits." (Interview 3)

"In a way that low level screening from large amount of applicants, it improves efficiency quite a lot." (Interview 7)

Participants also mentioned the potential to reduce discrimination, which can happen intentionally or unintentionally in many recruiting processes, as one of the benefits of using AI tools. Both participants 6 and 7 mentioned the phenomenon of minority associated last names being associated with less call back in recruitment processes. They recognized that the AI tools could be useful in solving these kinds of issues in recruitment. Participant 5 mentioned that if the effort to reduce discrimination was one of the reasons the organization was using AI tools in recruitment, they would be open to their use as the applicant.

"If they started using AI because for example they noticed they have some discriminatory patterns in their recruitment processes, and they try to use it in a way that corrects these issues." (Interview 5)

"If you have a name sounding from a particular migration background, it might put you in a disadvantageous position. So, an AI can be agnostic to these features, of course, in that sense, it might be advantageous." (Interview 6)

"If we could use AI to execute these fully anonymous recruiting protocols it would be good as we know that certain backgrounds and surnames can be harder to find employment with in Finland, and with AI we could remove this issue." (Interview 7)

Only one person mentioned the benefit that AI tools are not impacted by normal physiological limitations as humans, such as tiredness, poor mood, or other factors.

"….it can remain objective so I would say that as a benefit. And importantly, it is not affected by tiredness for example as humans would be." (Interview 4)

AI tools can measure much more datapoints, and analyze much more datapoints than human evaluators. Participant 6 emphasized this as one of its most important benefits. Participant 2 also saw the benefit of AI tools to be specifically in analyzing the content of the interview or written materials. They brought up the point that even if AI cannot interpret tone or body language as well as a human recruiter, the tool can always dissect the content of

the words. They continued to argue that the content of the words cannot be faked in a video interview, so AI tools could be very useful for analyzing them. Participant 1 also viewed this as a major benefit, and added that accepting rejection would be easier, because you know some other applicant had better answers, rather than non-tangible qualities such as interpersonal chemistry.

"...they must have just liked somebody else more... they looked better, or they you know they held themselves better or you know something kind of non-tangible like that versus oh this person knows what they're talking about." (Interview 1)

"But you don't know the questions, right? You know how to behave, but if your answers make sense, then you're at least worth it... If the person cannot speak English, for example, then it makes sense that AI stores it away." (Interview 2)

"...and there are so many, many features that are, you know, impossible to evaluate as a person... It provides you much more data points or is able to evaluate them much better." (Interview 6)

Participant 6 saw the opportunity for feedback as the biggest benefit for the applicants. They argued that there is no reason for organizations to not provide feedback if as least part of the recruiting process is automated. They saw this as a great benefit for the job applicants, who could use the information to improve their performance.

"It will be definitely helpful if eventually one could implement features as the AI providing feedback. And this will be great for the applicants to improve, for instance, in particular areas...Again, in the human recruitment, it's at least understandable the reason they provide that it's not feasible for them. So many applicants, as they reject each of them to write feedback with AI, it's suddenly feasible." (Interview 6)

5.5 Challenges and concerns

Transparency was a non-negotiable for many participants. They wished to have clear information about the AI tools' role in the process, how the results are used, and what is the state of human involvement. The participants expressed worry about not knowing how the AI works, what it measures, or what criteria it uses to evaluate their performance. Transparency was also tied to perceived fairness. When applicants understand the evaluation criteria and the role of automation, they feel more trust in the process. They would also not have the opportunity to evaluate the results for themselves without knowledge of the assessment metrics. Participant 2 felt this uncertainty creates additional stress and makes it harder to prepare for the recruitment process. Participant 4 was concerned that if the assessment criteria is not clear, they could not assess how fair the recruitment process was.

"The biggest issue is just transparency... know exactly how they're going to be evaluated by the AI." (Interview 1)

"What are the settings for the AI? When you have this mysterious unknown everything, it's stress a lot." (Interview 2)

”Is it fair… what are the assessment criteria?” (Interview 4)

“At its best, maybe having a public source code, so that anyone can assess the logic it is based on.” (Interview 5)

“It would be nice that it was very clear what they are assessing.” (Interview 7)

Tied to the lack of transparency, participants raised concerns about AI reinforcing or hiding unintentional biases (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, personality style). Many had fears that certain personality types such as introverts or monotone speakers would be unfairly penalized. They felt that these attributes could be better handled by a human recruiter, who might be able to better understand these human qualities. Some participants recognized the limitations in human objectivity as well, but this did not take away the need for careful control and validation of AI tools in recruitment. On the other hand, many felt that since they could relate to the flaws and mistakes humans make, they would feel more comfortable with that approach.

"Those who are more extroverted might perform better… unfair for those who don't use a real person." (Interview 1)

"If someone speaks monotonously… it's just minus points." (Interview 3)

”Of course the question about bias is also with humans, but as I am human myself, I have a better idea of what they might be thinking…” (Interview 4)

"It is only as good as the data it was trained on… the AI is often not unbiased." (Interview 6)

Participant 4 also expressed the issue that predetermined assessment criteria enforced strictly by AI tools could lead to the selection of the same type of person, and the organization would lose value embedded in diversity. Related to this issue, participant 8 discussed the problem of how applicant differences in experience and knowledge on using AI tools or understanding how they work would create unfair advantages for those who know how to manipulate the system to their advantage. This would involve for example integrating key words in written or even spoken materials, or using certain template formats in their application documents. Differences in accessibility of AI tools could also create unfair dynamics between job applicants.

”Does it lead to like convergence that they always select the same type of applicants.” (Interview 4)

“I may not have the accessibility, there's only… I think India's only 60% penetration of internet all over India while Finland has like I think 94 or 95%, so that leaves Finland at a better edge.” (Interview 8)

In addition to bias, many participants felt that AI tools could miss nuances in human communication, such as interpersonal chemistry, nonverbal signals, or real-life dynamics with a future manager. The participants felt that the chance to feel out the chemistry between the manager and applicant would be important not only for the organization and the people doing the hiring, but for the applicant as well. When applying for multiple jobs at the same time, assessing interpersonal chemistry with the recruiters could be critical information for the applicants who might be making decisions between different job offers.

"You can't know how well you'll get along with the person… that connection doesn't transmit to AI." (Interview 3)

"How big of a role personal chemistry has… if manager does not get along with their subordinates." (Interview 4)

Another concern that was raised in the interviews was that the AI interview context increases stress, which could lead to unnatural behaviors such as gestures, fast speech, and blanking on words. The participants feared being disadvantaged if their nervousness would be negatively interpreted by AI.

"Anybody who would just talk to a blank screen… at a disadvantage." (Interview 1)

"People can behave differently… AI cannot process too fast… stress a lot." (Interview 2)

"I sometimes forget to say things… if it's only AI screening, then minus points." (Interview 3)

Lastly, participants expressed worries about how personal data, such as voice, video, and written materials, would be collected, stored, and used. Some data could include sensitive personal information, such as illnesses. There were also concerns about the true consent to allowing this data to be used and screened. If this was the only way to advance in the application process, can the applicants really withdraw consent at any point.

"How the data will be used… how it will be stored… protect this data." (Interview 2)

"If other data is collected that reveals illnesses, native language, or ethnicity… legal and ethical problems." (Interview 5)

"You cannot say, please do not screen my CV with AI… no choice of withdrawing consent." (Interview 6)

5.6 Perceptions about the organization

The link between use of AI tools in recruiting and organizational perceptions was apparent in most of the interviews. Some participants emphasized the importance of transparency on the organizational image. Many participants viewed transparency about the use of AI tools as a positive organizational trait which signaled ethical practices and increased trustworthiness.

Simultaneously, the lack of transparency about the use of AI was viewed negatively, and for some participants, it could even reduce the interest in applying for the position.

”The transparency itself, it would have a positive impact for me. And also it would give me a more positive perception about the job itself that if they have a policy for openness, I would also appreciate that. And that there is transparency in the application process.” (Interview 5)

”It would affect me, if they did not openly tell me in what way they are using the AI. In that case I think I would be less likely to apply.” (Interview 5)

Another way the use of AI tools in recruiting connected with organizational image was the message of trendiness and keeping up with latest developments. This on the other hand was further viewed as either negative or positive, depending on the values of the participant in question. For participant 5, negative views seemed to be tied to the idea of superficial use of latest trendy developments, which signaled limitations in critical reflection. The lack of understanding of the risks involved made the organization seem naive or even irresponsible. For those who viewed it positively, this signaled flexibility and adaptability from the organization.

”I think it depends on the why the tool is used and for what… maybe it gives me these overly trendy and enthusiastic vibes, which is not my favorite vibe….It is that they try to be very trendy and quickly jump into modern innovations without much thought. I could even think there is a majority male working environment.” (Interview 5)

”…if without any evidence they say that each applicant is treated the same way, without them understanding…. it sends the message that they don’t understand what AI is and what risks are involved…” (Interview 5)

The negative or positive impact of the use of AI tools on the organizational image was also tied to the size of the organization, and the extent in which AI tools were used. Participants discussed their view that large companies using AI would leave them feeling as if the company does not truly care about their recruiting processes or the applicants involved, and possibly have lack of care for their employees in general. On the other hand, some participants admitted that for smaller companies, the use of AI would possibly communicate innovation and progressiveness. Some participants said that their negative or positive feeling about using these tools would depend on how extensively they were being used to make the final decision.

”I guess it depends, if it is a large corporation that uses AI then I might be left feeling like they are this faceless thing and they are not really interested in recruiting processes or their employees in general.” (Interview 7)

”If it was some small company I could think it’s cute they are using AI and it’s cool they are keeping with the times.” (Interview 7)

“I wouldn't say that simply knowing whether a company uses that makes, decides to have some effect on my decision. It is, in what extent it's using that.” (Interview 6)

For some applicants, the use of AI was a neutral factor, and it did not impact their perception about the organization or the recruiting process in general. It also seems the impact AI use has on the organizational image is tied to the organization’s existing image. More positive image in the beginning connected to better acceptance of AI use from the applicant perspective. Some participants felt that since they formulated their perception about the organization before the application process; by getting to know the company and making the decision to apply, the use of AI would likely not shake this already formulated image.

“I would say I primarily base my decision on these factors (research beforehand) and less on whether the recruitment process was using any AI or not.” (Interview 6)

“Eventually, whether this company is the company that I want to work for, so I first made the decision that I, well the initial decision that I want to work for it by applying to it, then through the recruitment process, I got to know the company to some extent.” (Interview 6)

”Maybe my overall perception about the company from the start would impact the way I feel about them using AI.” (Interview 7)

5.7 Other opinions

Participants’ broader reflections on the use of AI in recruitment revealed a range of opinions that extended beyond these predefined topics. Noteworthy opinions participants had about AI tools are detailed here. One of these included the inevitability of the situation. Many felt that soon the use of AI would be more of a norm than exception, and using automated tools in recruitment was not necessarily a decision as much as a mandatory development and unavoidable progress for organizations. Companies that would not adapt to this development could be seen as falling behind.

“I think anybody who's not using AI these days is going to be quickly falling behind and it's only going to get worse and worse…I'm not sure what HR departments or different organizations are doing these days, but I'm sure if they're not doing anything right now, more than the resume screening, they will be or they are working on it.” (Interview 1)

“Given that the pool of companies is dramatically shrinking of those who do not use AI anymore, if you do not have any other options to go to, if you want particularly in those sectors that we are in… Yeah. You will go through this kind of tools, whether you want or not.” (Interview 6)

Many participants also said that the knowledge about the use of AI would impact their behavior and strategy in the application process. This could include inserting key words in

the resume, and the style of writing in the written application materials. This could potentially lead to the applicants "gaming the system" and losing variation between applications and taking away discriminatory power from the AI tools. It could also encourage for dishonesty in the applications, as some skills are exaggerated, and key words are inserted without proper connection to applicant's background.

"I would play the game if I knew the rules." (Interview 4)

"but the first step is just to overcome these initial screenings, then you would like to optimize your CV as much as possible to get through this. So you will definitely change your approach, for instance, how you write a CV, what kind of information, kind of keywords you put in there for it to be more successful, certainly." (Interview 6)

"It would affect me, if they tell me transparently that materials are screened with AI, I'd insert key words and information I know it's looking for." (Interview 7)

Some participants felt that as there is bias and flaw sin both humans and AI tools, it does not matter which evaluation approach is used. Furthermore, the main issue seemed to be the design of the tool, what it is trying to predict and how accurately it does it, rather than the embedded bias or the road it takes to get to the conclusion.

"I think people care less about how it gets the answer and more about is the answer right." (Interview 1)

"I see it that there are the same problems and benefits, I don't see much of a difference. It depends a lot on, how the tool is developed and trained, what are they trying to predict from the data they are given." (Interview 5)

Some participants expressed optimism about these new developments in recruiting processes. They recognized that these tools are still evolving, and that they have potential for improving the hiring processes for both organizations and the applicants. This future leaning view suggests that technological maturity will likely influence acceptance and ethical evaluation over time. However, at the current moment, most participants were skeptical.

"They are better than everything we have before simply because we didn't have too much before." (Interview 6)

5.8 Summary of the data analysis

The informants communicated both positive and negative perceptions about the use of AI in recruitment. Most participants had some general knowledge about how AI works and how it could be used in this type of context. Many benefits of AI use which have been identified in previous literature were also mentioned by the participants of this study, but not all previously identified benefits were given attention from the applicant perspective. Similarly

for challenges in AI use in recruitment, the applicant perspectives revealed many similarities with previous literature on the topic, but some concerns were more severe than others. Participants also indicated that the use of AI could be tied to the image they held of the organization before recruitment, and many underlying factors that could shape this image were identified during the interviews.

The pre-existing knowledge and experience the participants had with AI was assessed to have better understanding of the context of their perceptions and opinions. Most participants rated their level of knowledge as 2-3 out of 5, and one participant rated their knowledge as a 4. Most participants were able to define AI in general terms and mentioned key concepts in the definition, while two participants were unable to define AI at all. There were two informants who worked with AI models as researchers, and they communicated above average knowledge on the topic. All participants had used AI tools in their work and free time, but only two informants had experience with AI tools in recruiting. Three participants communicated negative experiences with recruiting in general, citing mistakes in the processing of their information and poor communication.

There were mixed feelings about the use of AI tools in recruitment. Positive views were mostly conditional, depending on the level of transparency, if there would be human involvement, opportunity for feedback, and the reasons for AI use (Figure 5). Attitudes were also more accepting for the beginning stages of recruitment. The participants shared reservations about the use of AI tools, and when asked which assessment methods they would prefer, nearly all preferred a human recruiter. The reservations were mainly related to transparency issues on the evaluation metrics, lack of feedback, and low trust. The lack of trust was often cited with poor evidence for accuracy and the recruiters' lack of knowledge of the risks involved (such as hidden biases in algorithm). Some participants felt that human recruiters would be more understanding of nuance in human behavior, such as social anxiety and nervousness. Few participants also expressed increased stress reactions to the idea of being assessed by AI.

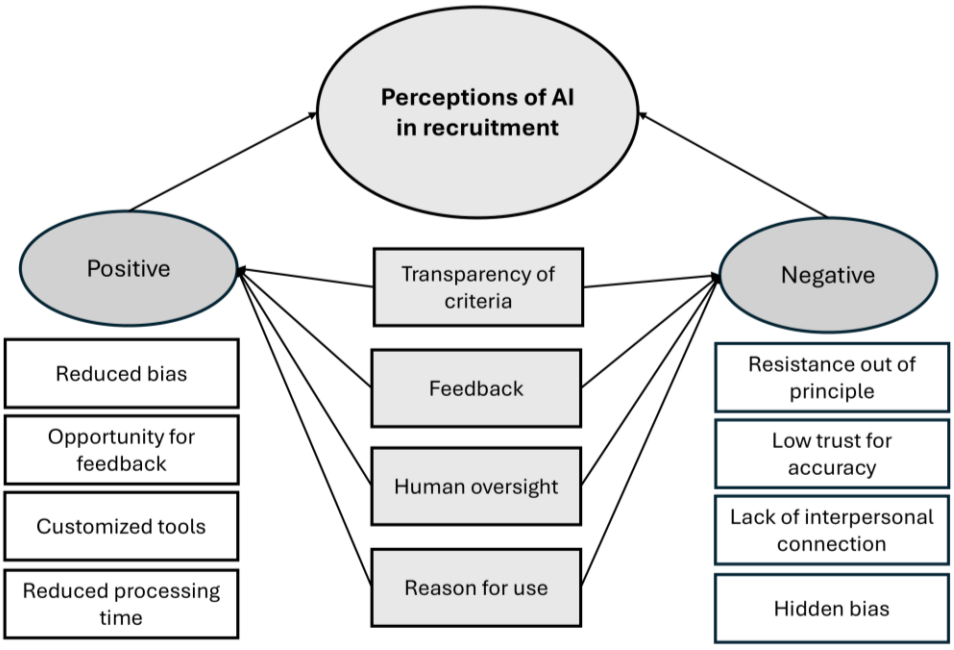


Figure 5 Factors constructing positive and negative perceptions of AI tools in recruitment.

The benefits associated with AI tools were quite consistent across the interviews. Most participants mentioned potential for improved fairness, which would come from the objectivity in the AI tool. This was linked to the idea that tools would lack common cognitive biases present in traditional recruiting. Potential to reduce discrimination was also mentioned, such as eliminating the risk of negative assumptions on ethnicity. Furthermore, if the goal of reducing discrimination was stated as the reason for the AI use, the feelings towards the tools were more positive. Participants also mentioned the reduced workload for the HR professionals, and the possibility to receive a decision faster with improved time efficiency. The AI tools' immunity for physical limitations such as fatigue, which could affect judgement, and the ability to assess more data points were also mentioned, but received considerably less emphasis compared to other benefits. One of the most mentioned benefits was the opportunity to receive feedback from the recruitment process.

The participants shared various concerns they had about AI tools in recruitment, many of which were first mentioned when asked about their initial perceptions about AI use in hiring. The lack of transparency on the evaluation criteria was one of the most frequently mentioned challenges. If the organization was gaining time efficiency and reduced workload, there would be no excuse for the lack of feedback from the assessment, which is currently standard practice. Most informants were also aware of the potential for unintentional bias in the AI algorithms and training data, which caused many to expresses concern over these tools. The complexity in human interactions was also recognized by most as a potential challenge,

because the participants assumed AI tools would likely lack the ability to assess things such as interpersonal chemistry and personality. Even if the tools could assess these aspects, the participants assumed this was not possible or would not be done accurately. Another identified challenge from applicant perspective was the risk of selecting the same type of employees because of rigid selection criteria in the AI tools, losing strength from diversity. There were also mentions of resistance against AI tools in general, which was more based on principle rather than clear reasoning. Lastly, the concerns over data privacy and ethical issues were discussed by many informants. With data privacy, the issue of true consent to being assessed with AI, and the lack of options were discussed.

Most informants stated that the use of AI would impact the image they had of the organization. If AI tools were used transparently, with clear information on what is the assessment criteria, this seemed to improve organizational image for many, and the company was perceived as more ethical and value driven. If transparency were to be poor, this reflected negatively on the organizational image. The use of AI also communicated a message of trendiness, and many informants thought of this as staying current and being able to evolve with time. This however was dependent on the personal values of the participants, and if trendiness was not considered an admirable quality, the use of AI tools reflected negatively on the organizational image. Organizational size was related to the impact AI tools would have on the participants' perceptions. Large corporations using AI tools in recruiting were viewed more negatively, with the AI use communicating lack of care for the recruitment process and the employees of the company. Smaller companies, however, could be seen as liberal and current in a more positive way. These factors and their relationships are illustrated in Figure 6. Some informants did not see the use of AI tools to impact their view of the organization in a way that would overwrite the image they had already formed before entering the recruitment process.

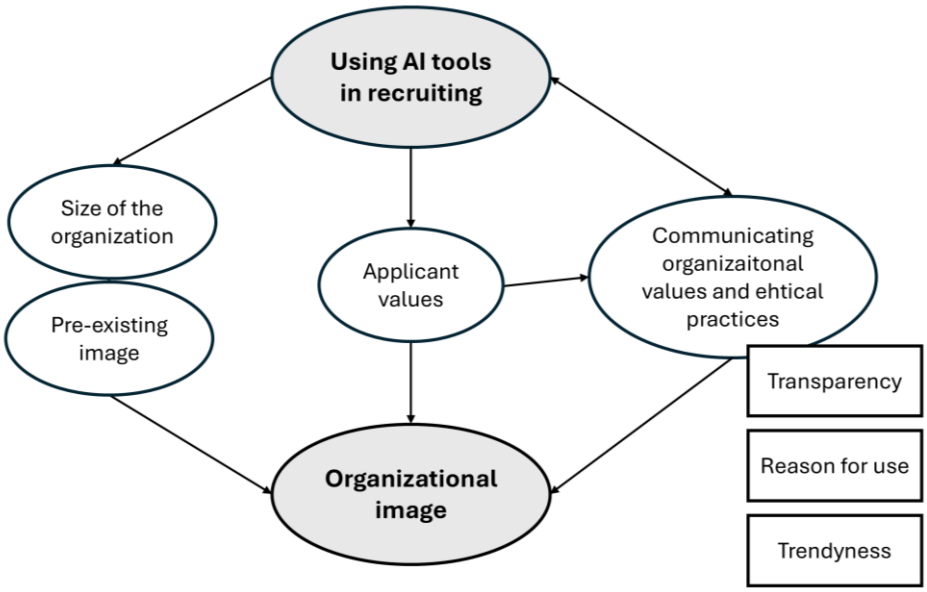


Figure 6 Relationship between AI tool use in recruitment and organizational image.

Some additional opinions about AI recruitment tools were raised during the interviews, which did not fall under the previously identified themes. The use of AI tools was viewed in some ways inevitable. Many reflected that the issues applicants might have with using or not using AI was not necessarily relevant, as these tools would enter recruitment processes regardless. The need for human involvement in recruitment was evident, and nearly all participants felt that the final decision should be made by an HR professional. Many communicated that if there was transparency on the use of AI, they would likely try to "game the system" and adjust their behavior and approach based on how the tool worked and what was being assessed. The need for validation of these tools was reflected upon and this would likely improve the trust the applicants had toward them. If AI tools would be used only as a complementary tool in recruitment, which otherwise would be handled by HR professionals, the participants had more positive attitudes toward their use.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Comparison with previous research

The purpose of this study was to explore how job applicants perceive the use of AI tools in recruitment, and to identify any underlying factors that might influence this perception and how the use of these tools might connect to the organizational image in general. In the following chapter, the results of the data analysis are discussed together with previous research on the topic, examining how the findings from this study align with existing literature. Interpretations and theoretical implication are discussed, which is followed by discussion about practical implications of the findings in organizational context. Finally, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are discussed.

6.2 Knowledge and familiarity with AI

Previous studies have shown that self-assessment of a topic knowledge and technical knowledge correlates fairly well with objectively measured topic knowledge (Cole et al., 2010; Kastorff et al., 2023). In this study, participants' self-assessed knowledge aligned with their experience levels and knowledge demonstration through defining AI in their own words. Two participants worked with AI algorithms, developing and researching machine learning programs in the medical field. This professional background in the technical side of AI manifested in the interviews as concerns over accuracy and model function. Attitudes toward technology have been shown to moderate the behavioral intention to use new technology (Emon & Khan, 2025), making the applicants' pre-existing relationship with AI tools an important factor to consider in recruiting.

The participants' previous experiences with AI are relevant when assessing their perception of AI use in recruiting also because they might be more susceptible to things such as confirmation bias, with increased awareness of embedded risks and observed flaws. A previous study investigating human factors that influence teacher's attitudes toward AI-based technology showed that teachers were more reluctant to accept recommendations made by AI tools if it contradicted their previous knowledge about their students (Nazaretsky et al., 2021), suggesting that pre-existing attitudes impacted their likelihood for technology acceptance. Furthermore, some teachers expected absolute correctness from the AI even in tasks where no absolute truth existed. However, there have also been studies suggesting that previous knowledge and experience with technology associated with increased technological acceptance in the context of computer-based opponent in an online game (Oksanen et al., 2020). The findings from this study contradict this, as those with more experience with the theory behind AI tools were more concerned over accuracy and issues of hidden bias.

6.3 Perceived benefits

The benefits of introducing AI tools in recruitment have been discussed in previous literature, and most prominent factors include the increased time efficiency, reduced workload for recruiters, objectivity, and potentially higher accuracy in decision making (Black & Van Esch, 2020; Van Esch et al., 2019). The participants in this study were aware of these benefits and consistently mentioned them throughout the interviews. There were discussions of increased fairness and the potential to reduce discrimination in recruitment. If these were communicated as the main reasons for integrating AI tools in the process, applicant perspectives were very accepting. However, given that the participants had high awareness of hidden bias in AI algorithms, the potential for higher objectivity was attenuated. In most cases, familiar bias in human interaction was preferred over hidden bias of AI. Faster application processing time and ability to evaluate more data points are often discussed as some of the main benefits of AI tools from the HR professionals' perspective (Black & Van Esch, 2020). Although these benefits were mentioned by the participants in this study, they received little attention as major benefits form the applicant perspective. This highlights the fact that perceived benefits of AI use in recruiting are not directly transferable from the HR professionals' perspective to the applicant perspective.

In this study, the most mentioned benefit from the applicant perspective was the potential to receive more comprehensive feedback form the recruitment process. Currently, it is not common to receive feedback from performance in a recruitment process, especially if the application in unsuccessful (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). Furthermore, the candidates who do receive feedback commonly report it to be very general and unhelpful. Studies have shown that even limited feedback, such as timely communication of rejection, is associated with better candidate satisfaction, fairness perceptions, intentions to reapply, and to recommend the organization to others (Barattucci et al., 2025). Based on this, introducing automated feedback from AI assessments would likely have positive impact. The findings from this study also highlight an increased expectation to receive feedback when engaged in AI based recruitment processes. The feedback would also serve to increase trust toward the AI tools, as the applicants can assess themselves if feedback they receive aligns with their experience of the process. Interestingly, Schinkel et al. (2011), investigated how rejected job applicants feel and think after they are turned down, specifically when they are given some feedback on their performance. The researchers found that applicants who were given performance feedback reported lower well-being after rejection compared to those who did not receive feedback. The authors suspected that feedback made the rejection feel more personal, concrete, and potentially harder to dismiss. They also found that applicants' attribution style, meaning how optimistically or pessimistically they usually explain things, together with feedback explained how people perceived the organization. This means that

while optimists might find honest feedback helpful, pessimists might view feedback negatively and view the organization as unfair. Although the participants in this study communicated high willingness to receive feedback, it seems the literature on feedback and applicant satisfaction is unclear, with studies demonstrating conflicting findings (Barattucci et al., 2025; Schinkel et al., 2011). Better understanding of individual differences in feedback-applicant associations is needed before integrating these protocols in recruitment practices.

Another important finding from the study by Schinkel et al., (2011) was that higher perceived fairness of the process in general was associated with better organizational perceptions afterward even among rejected participants. It is important for organizations to consider the higher expectation for feedback and higher standards for the content of the feedback, if they decide to integrate AI tools in their recruitment processes. Although there are conflicting findings regarding the benefits of feedback in recruitment, the participants in this study reported higher likelihood of applying for the job if there was an opportunity to receive feedback from the process. Simultaneously, applicant dissatisfaction in recruitment can lower the job acceptance rate, negatively impact the applicant's engagement as a customer or as a stakeholder, and potentially cause damage on the employer's image for example through negative commenting on public platforms (Miles & McCamey, 2018).

6.4 Perceived challenges

Many of the concerns regarding AI tools in recruitment which have been raised by HR professionals in previous literature (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022) were also present in the interviews in this study. Ethical concerns, mainly related to biases in the algorithms, loss of privacy, and lack of transparency, were all mentioned by the participants. The dehumanizing problem of the hiring process often cited by HR professionals in this context (Fritts & Cabrera, 2021) was also a major concern from the applicant perspective, and interpersonal treatment was discussed in several interviews as a central issue of AI based automatization. Many participants were concerned of the loss of interpersonal relationships established in the recruitment phase, and furthermore, some applicants perceived AI based evaluation as more stressful than a familiar process involving HR professionals. Researchers have argued that one of the main concerns with dehumanization of recruitment processes is that algorithms can only function under artificial values, which can never truly replicate the values of human recruiters (Fritts & Cabrera, 2021). The relationship between values and relationships are complex and difficult to balance or replicate. It is possible that the pattern observed in this study, with most participants feeling more comfortable with human presence and even preferring human bias, is reflecting people's ability to intuitively understand and predict this human value system, as opposed to algorithms.

The claim that AI tools reduce human bias and increase fairness in recruitment conflicts with the perspectives uncovered in this study. Although many informants were aware of the potential to reduce bias, few participants truly believed AI tools were fairer. Most informants raised the issue of hidden bias in the algorithms, and cited the black box problem (Von Eschenbach, 2021). There were also concerns about decrease in diversity as AI tools would select applicants with very similar backgrounds and characteristics. Furthermore, there were also reflections on applicant differences in the knowledge and experience with AI tools, and how this could impact their experience in recruitment. For example, accessibility of internet varies widely in a global scale, creating unfair dynamics between applicants in recruitment protocols.

The general attitudes about AI tools were skeptical. Many informants also preferred known human bias over unknown and unpredictable hidden bias in AI tools. Any trust that was communicated was heavily dependent on assumptions of transparency and ethical implementation of the tools. This aligns with previous studies which have shown that trust toward automated systems rely on the assumption that the systems produce accurate outcomes (Langer et al., 2023). If job applicants enter recruitment processes with pre-existing knowledge on the risks of hidden bias and concerns about accuracy, trust is hard to establish. The concerns over bias and general skepticism also mirror broader ethical debates about accountability and explainability. Raghavan et al., (2023) examined 18 companies that provided algorithm based recruitment tools and found that the way each company defined and addressed bias was very inconsistent. The study highlights the tensions between the goal of fairness as a statistic and ethical and legal requirements of fairness and anti-discrimination. This means that applying different techniques to de-bias algorithms could make models legally stronger in the eyes of discrimination laws, while potentially reducing model accuracy. The lack of established frameworks in the use of automated tools in recruiting was seen in the applicant reactions in this study, as most participants did not have an expectation of legal protocols or accountability. This was likely reflected in their skepticism toward AI tools in general.

The question of transparency in using AI tools in recruitment was much emphasized by the applicants. However, full transparency can be difficult to achieve in the context of AI based automated tools. The black box problem creates an issue of unknown in crucial areas of the AI tools' use (Von Eschenbach, 2021). One benefit that HR professionals have identified as a key factor in introducing AI tools in early stages of recruitment is the ability to reach a larger pool of applicants, both in active and passive applicant status (Van Esch et al., 2019). This benefit was not mentioned by any of the applicants. Increasing applicants' awareness about this key benefit, which has a positive impact on applicant opportunity as well, would be

useful to maximize the positive impact and perceptions about AI tools. In traditional recruitment, many applicants must be excluded already before or during the resume screening stage, and AI tools can make it possible to include and evaluate more people in these early stages.

6.5 Human oversight

The need for human oversight was communicated throughout all the interviews. This aligns with findings form previous studies which have shown that hybrid models, which include both AI based automatization and human assessments, yield higher applicant acceptance and trust (Newman et al., 2020). It also ties with the earlier discussion on the dehumanization process in recruitment, which has been identified as a major issue by HR professionals (Fritts & Cabrera, 2021), and was also observed in applicant perspectives investigated this study. The participants had more positive attitudes toward AI tools when they were characterized as supportive tools in the recruitment processes, rather than autonomous decision makers. The issue is that currently, the most common use of AI tools is in initial screening of applicants, such as resume screening. In these processes, AI tools often make decisions quite autonomously. This could lead to a potential conflict between the most common use of AI tools in recruitment and the applicant perspectives and acceptance of these new protocols.

The need for human oversight could also be linked to findings on procedural fairness, as applicant reactions are shaped by fairness perceptions (Gilliland, 1993). Human involvement is perceived important because it can act as a safeguard for the rigid AI assessment criteria, as humans can make exceptions and understand context and nuance. The idea that human recruiters would be more understanding of stress, mistakes, and individual differences was strongly present in the interviews conducted in this study. Some participants also discussed the issue of being asked to submit a large amount of application materials in the first stages of the recruitment, and how receiving a negative decision fast had left them feeling as if no one really looked at the materials they had submitted. This reflects the negative impacts of dehumanizing the recruitment process. This type of frustration in recruitment stages has also been shown to negatively impact the organizational image (Schinkel et al., 2011).

6.6 Organizational image

The use of AI tools in recruitment seemed to have a bidirectional relationship with organizational image. This means that the use of these tools impact organizational image for the applicants, as well as the existing image the applicants hold about the organization seems to influence the way applicants view the use of AI tools. Larger corporations using automated processes were viewed more negatively than smaller companies adapting to new technology. Interestingly, research on factors that impact organizational image has previously shown

that large corporations are usually perceived as more stable and opportunity rich (Collins & Stevens, 2002), while smaller organization might suffer from an image of instability in job security and career prospects (Williamson et al., 2010). This points to an expectation that larger corporations enjoy in many aspects a more positive organizational image compared to smaller competitors. However, organizational image for the applicants has been found to be impacted by complex combinations of applicant characteristics such as personalities and recruitment protocols such as feedback, and even information provided in the job description (Schinkel et al., 2011; Williamson et al., 2010). The findings in the present study suggest that larger corporations could face more negative impact for their image when using AI tools in recruitment, while smaller companies could even have an opposite effect. However, as larger corporations have been shown to hold a more positive organizational image in general compared to smaller companies, it is possible the true impact of using AI tools is diluted in this context.

Literature has shown that technological transparency enhances perceptions of fairness and trust (Hilliard et al., 2022). In this study, the lack of openness regarding AI use was harmful for the organizational image, which aligns with these previous findings and theories on procedural justice and trust in technology (Gilliland, 1993; Hilliard et al., 2022). The different level of openness should also be considered, as there could be differences in how they impact organizational image, although these were not directly addressed in the present study. For example, openness is not only related to disclosure of use, but it is also about transparency of assessment criteria, and transparency of algorithmic development. Providing feedback is also often considered a part of transparency (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). Similarities could be drawn between literature on sustainability reporting and greenwashing, as there can be negative impacts of poorly done sustainability reporting on organizational image (Tu et al., 2024). It is possible this type of performative openness about AI use, which discloses very little detail, could be less positively impactful for applicant experience and harmful for organizational image. In general, a careful consideration on how automating recruitment protocols can impact organizational image should not be overlooked. It is known that organizational reputation has an important role in attracting talent, attracting customers and other stakeholders (Krys & Konradt, 2022), and even acting as buffer in cases of public backlash (Arroyos-Calvera & Powdthavee, 2022).

6.7 Theoretical implications of trust and organizational perceptions

Consistent with the theoretical implication that trust develops in different stages based on different factors (McKnight et al., 1998), the trust assessed in this study was conditional on stage of recruitment, with stronger trust in early stages, and influence from factors such as transparency, human oversight, reasons for use, and perceived competence of the AI tools.

As discussed earlier, trust can be constructed on both human-like characteristics and system-based constructs (Lankton et al., 2015). Both views were relevant in the applicant perspectives on trust toward AI, as they called for human characteristics of competence and understanding social nuance, but also system-based constructs of reliability and accuracy. Human oversight was a big factor in the applicants perceived trust toward AI, along with explainability, both of which have been previously identified as factors influencing trust toward technology (Dervitsiotis, 2006). Furthermore, the findings in this study align with Glikson & Wooley's (2020) review on determinants of human trust on AI. Transparency, which was identified as a major factor in building trust, also emerged as a critical topic in the applicant interviews. Reliability on the other hand, which was identified by Glikson & Wooley as a central factor, was not directly discussed by the informants. Hosain et al., (2025) observed that when applicants perceive AI-based hiring procedures as useful, easy to use, and trustworthy, they also viewed the recruitment process as more fair. Interestingly, the use of AI in general increased the applicants' sense of procedural justice. This was not observed in the present study, as positive perceptions on AI use were dependent on mediating factors.

The HR professionals' attitudes toward automatization in recruitment and integration of AI tools has included both positive and negative perceptions. The HR professional's trust toward AI tools was also found to depend on additional factors, such as reliability, credibility, and technical competency (Bilal & Várallyai, 2021). It seems that the factors impacting applicant trust toward AI tools partly align with those associated with HR professionals, although more emphasis is put on transparency issues and human involvement. One previous study found that participants with higher experience with robots, AI, and related technology, exhibited higher trust toward a computer-opponent in an online game (Oksanen et al., 2020). Interestingly, the participants in the present study who had a background in developing AI algorithms and machine learning programs, exhibited higher skepticism toward the accuracy of AI tools. In practice, this observation could impact the way in which AI tools are implemented in recruitment, if the applicant pool were to hold some background in the field of AI development and machine learning. Previous studies have also found personality traits to associate with trust toward AI (Oksanen et al., 2020), but these were not assessed in this study.

Regarding the use of AI tools in connection to organizational image, this study observed a reputation-trust feedback loop. The pre-existing organizational image held by the applicants seems to affect general attitude and trust toward AI powered recruitment protocols, and the use of AI tools impacts the organizational image. Organizational reputation consist of familiarity with the organization, beliefs about the future and what to expect from the organization, and general impression about the organization's favorability (Lange et al.,

2011). In a review on organizational reputation by Lange et al., (2011), the authors argue that organizational reputation is a more complex and dynamic concept than current literature has recognized, and that there is a need for research that models the antecedents of organizational reputation more multidimensionally, as opposed to the typical unidirectional models. In the present study, there were discussions in the interviews indicating that although in general, trust toward AI based assessment tools was poor, the attitudes toward them were more positive if the reason for their use was aligned with the participant's values. Participants were more open toward AI tools if they were implemented to for example reduce bias, increase fairness, or limit discrimination. Theory on value-based trust argues that people trust systems not only because of technical competency, but because of shared values (Lankton et al., 2015). If the organization's values align with the applicant's values, they might be more accepting for these types of changes in the recruiting systems. Mehrotra et al., (2021) observed a similar pattern in their study, where they investigated how human and AI agents' value similarity influences trust in that agent. The researcher found that agents that were rated higher on value similarity also scored higher on trust.

6.8 Ethical and psychological dimensions

The conflict between efficiency and ethical responsibility has been present across many organizational processes throughout history. Although issues with data privacy are commonly cited in literature on AI based tools in recruiting, and HR professionals have also raised concern over the issue, data privacy was only briefly mentioned by the participants in the present study. The lack of consideration for data privacy from the participants could reflect a more general perceived loss of agency from the applicant perspective. The world around us has turned heavily technology and data driven, and although data privacy issues are regularly discussed in public conversations, individuals might feel lack of control over the use of their data. While applicants would recognize data security as an issue in the context of AI tools and recruitment, they rarely expressed a demand for choice or control over the use of their data. Similarly, accountability issues were not considered by the applicants when discussing their concerns over AI tools. It is possible individuals lack general knowledge on their rights over their data, and lack awareness on the connection of AI tools and the laws protecting a right to data privacy, as well as general labor laws (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022). However, it should be acknowledged that there is a severe lack in regulatory and legal frameworks governing AI in recruitment.

The participants' passive attitudes about data privacy and loss of control could also reflect learned helplessness in the face of fast technological advancement. Learned helplessness is a psychological concept describing a state in which an individual stops trying to escape or improve a negative situation after repeated exposure to uncontrollable circumstances (Maier

& Seligman, 1976). Many people experience helplessness in terms of privacy in the internet and often entirely give up on active online privacy management (Cho, 2022). Cho et al. (2022) identified key factors that cause privacy helplessness, including past negative experiences, low view on personal capability, perceived complexity of privacy protection, convenience, and high feeling of vulnerability online. More research is needed around learned helplessness and AI tools, as they continue to be integrated in core functions in companies such as AI based customer service agents, and recruitment.

7 CONCLUSION

This chapter will discuss the conclusions of this thesis. The previous sections will be summarized, reflecting on the framework of this thesis, and how the research aims were fulfilled. The research questions presented in the beginning of the thesis will be answered, and theoretical contributions summarized. The practical implications of the findings of this thesis are discussed, and suggestions for future research are given. Lastly, the limitations of this thesis are discussed.

7.1 Summary of the thesis

This thesis aimed to explore job applicants' perceptions and attitudes about AI tools in recruitment, and to investigate potential underlying factors that could shape these perceptions. Recruitment is one of the core operations in all organizations, and technological innovations have potential for improving these processes, leading to better hires in terms of fit, efficiency, and reach. Using AI to support these decision-making processes is a complex issue, with challenges in terms of accuracy, hidden bias, ethical implementation, and accountability issues. Technological adaptation also involves barriers from users, in this case both HR professionals and job applicants. Understanding the perspectives of the applicants is important to ensure best strategy for implementation of these tools, with awareness of hidden risks and minimizing any negative impacts. Additionally, this thesis uncovered valuable information about the impact AI tools in recruitment could have on organizational image.

A qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews was chosen to examine these questions, as this method allows to uncover in-depth information about broad and complex topics such as personal perceptions, attitudes, and their underlying drivers. The data was collected from eight university educated individuals who were currently or had recently been involved in job application processes in Finland. The interviews were based on an interview guide with semi-structured questions, and they were all conducted in person and recorded with an audio recorder.

1) *How do job applicants perceive AI tools used in recruitment?*
2) *What factors influence their perceptions and trust in these tools?*

The findings of this thesis indicate that the perception of AI tools in recruitment is dependent on different recruitment stages and the way in which the tools are implemented. Previous experience and knowledge also had a role. In early stages of recruitment, the participants were more optimistic about their use and added value. Since automated tools are already used in early stages such as resume screening, the applicant perspective was accepting of AI tools in these processes as well. This acceptance was lessened in cases in

which the participant had a higher general understanding of AI algorithm and tools, and in some cases by previous experience with AI in recruitment. This conflicted with previous studies showing higher knowledge and experience associated with higher technological acceptance (Oksanen et al., 2020).

Attitudes toward the use of AI varied by the ways in which the tools would potentially be used, and how they would be implemented. Perceptions were influenced by the level of transparency that would be provided, and the extent to which the tool was overseen by a human evaluator. Human evaluators were preferred over AI alternatives, and human presence was important for most participants if AI tools would be used. This possibly reflects the fear of dehumanization of the recruitment process, identified as a challenge form the recruiter perspective (Fritts & Cabrera, 2021). Generally, one key benefit of AI tools is cited as reduced bias and increased objectivity (Black & Van Esch, 2020), however, this was not emphasized in the applicant perspectives, reflected also in the preference for human evaluators. Open communication about the use of AI improved perceptions, and transparency of evaluation metrics were important from the applicant perspective.

The potential to receive feedback was a major benefit from the applicant perspective. This factor seemed to influence the general perceptions as well, since the option to not provide feedback while using AI tools was viewed very negatively. It is possible that introducing AI tools should always be paired with feedback protocols. Some participants indicated that they would be more likely to apply for the job if feedback was available. However, this issue should be approached with caution, given that previous studies have indicated that the benefit of providing feedback on applicant satisfaction could depend on individual differences, such as personality (Schinkel et al., 2011).

Several factors shaping trust were identified. Reasons for the implementation of AI tools in recruitment emerged as a central factor, and other factors impacting trust included stage of recruitment (early preferred) and human oversight. The finding that trust was shaped by various components and recruitment stage was consistent with previous theories on trust formation (McKnight et al., 1998). When the reasons for automated tools were considered as ways to reduce bias and eliminate discrimination, and when these reasons aligned with applicant values, the tools received higher trust and were viewed more positively. Communicating reasons for the AI use can be considered a part of transparency in AI use, which was one of the most cited factors by the participants in this study.

While the benefits of introducing AI in recruitment was mainly focused on the opportunity to receive feedback, there was a variety of perceived challenges identified by the participants. Dehumanization of the recruitment process, often referred to by HR professionals as a major

concern, was also one of the major issues from the applicant perspective. Interpersonal relationships established in the recruitment stages were important for the participants in this study. They were also concerned about the nuance in interpersonal communication that could be overlooked or misinterpreted by AI tools. The bias potentially embedded in AI algorithms was viewed more negatively than bias in human assessments.

Applicant perspective did not put as much emphasis on data privacy issues as on the other factors mentioned here. Still, issues with data privacy are a real concern in AI based recruiting processes, and the passive attitudes could reflect phenomenon of learned helplessness and loss of agency in an increasingly data driven world. It is also possible individuals lack general knowledge on legislation and laws regarding data privacy and AI (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022).

3) *How does the use of AI tools in recruiting connect to the applicants' perception of the organization?*

The findings in this thesis indicate that the use of AI in recruiting could impact organizational image. The impact could be negative or positive depending on a variety of associated factors. The relationship between AI use and organizational image seemed to be bidirectional, meaning that the pre-existing organizational image can influence perception of AI use, as well as the use of AI could impact organizational image. One key element in this bidirectional relationship was the size of the organization. Larger companies were more easily viewed as void of human connection and ethical practices, and the use of AI was considered as impersonal and dismissive for the applicants. Smaller companies with less recourses were more often seen positively if AI were to be used in recruitment, signaling forward looking strategy and adaptability with current technological advancements. Previous literature has indicated that larger companies often enjoy a more positive and stable organizational reputation compared to smaller companies (Collins & Stevens, 2002). This could mean that the negative image that comes from using AI tools in recruitment for larger organizations is less damaging as compared to smaller companies. Many participants also expressed that the pre-existing organizational image usually outweighs the image that is formed during the recruitment process.

Another key factor shaping organizational image were the practical elements of AI use. If the tools were implemented ethically and transparently, this signaled overall ethical values and practices from the organization, and participants viewed the AI tools and the organization more positively. Transparent communication on the evaluation metrics and the reasons to use AI tools were connected to more positive organizational image. This was especially true

when the values aligned with applicant values. If AI tools were implemented to reduce bias and discrimination, the organizational image was impacted positively.

7.2 Practical implications

These findings have several implications for organizations in practice. First, if AI based automated tool is used in recruiting, ensuring transparency about the evaluation metrics, human involvement, and algorithm function is crucial. With good transparency, AI tools can have a positive impact on the applicant perceptions about the organization, and increase trust in the recruitment process itself. The lack of transparency could negatively impact the company, as organizational perception and satisfaction with the recruitment process could be damaged.

Second, the involvement of human evaluators continues to be important even with new possibilities for automating recruitment processes. Applicants prefer human evaluators, and the human involvement also increases trust toward any AI based tools that are used. Transparently communicating the decision-making process involving AI tools and HR professionals will improve applicant satisfaction with the process. Another practical implication is the expectation for feedback. If AI tools are used, there is an increased expectation for feedback from the applicant perspective, and feedback is expected to be more comprehensive and in depth. Providing feedback can enhance applicant trust toward the recruitment process, the organization, and could improve likelihood the applicants will participate in recruitment in the future. However, caution should be taken, as the connection between feedback and satisfaction with recruitment process is still unclear.

Although applicant awareness about legal aspects of data privacy and consent were quite low, there were concerns over issues of ethics and data privacy. These factors should be carefully considered when introducing AI tools in recruitment, and clearly communicated to the applicants as well. True option for consent should be provided, meaning that agreeing for free use of applicant data should not be the only option to participate in the recruitment process. Finally, the applicants were more open and accepting to the use of AI in the initial stages of the application, over stages closer to the final decision making. AI tools in recruitment could provide the greatest benefit in initial screening.

7.3 Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations which calls for cautious interpretation of the findings. First, the study sample was small, including only eight interviews, which limits the generalizability of the findings. It is possible findings do not apply in larger samples or different contexts. Sampling methods were also limited due to the time constraints and limited resources. More comprehensive study sample, including larger sample size and

participants from different generations and educational backgrounds would improve the generalizability. The participants were highly educated and tech aware, which might not be representative of all job seeking populations, and the factors identified in this study could look different in other demographics of job applicants. The interviews were conducted in both English and Finnish, and the Finnish interview quotes were translated during the data analysis. This introduced potential translation bias. Furthermore, not all participants spoke English as their native language, introducing bias from a language barrier. Lastly, using AI tools in recruitment is a rapidly evolving field, and both applicant perceptions and the tool applications may change over time.

It is possible there are individual differences in trust formation and technological acceptance that depend on factors beyond those assessed in this study, such as personality traits. For the findings in the present study, it is not possible to differentiate the identified perceptions related to AI tools, from underlying explaining factors connected to individual personalities. More comprehensive understanding of the topic would also be achieved by introducing longitudinal observations and different data collection methods, such as observations and other data sources such as feedback forms and satisfaction questionnaires on recruitment experiences.

Lastly, it is possible there are additional underlying factors impacting perceptions about AI tools in recruitment and their connection to organizational image. This study used an interview guide with pre-determined questions and identified themes. Some concepts and topics outside these themes were possibly left uncovered, and longer and more comprehensive question batteries would provide more in-depth knowledge on the identified factors, and could introduce additional perspectives.

7.4 Suggestions for future research

Future research should focus on different uses of AI tools, and how they connect to applicant perspectives and organizational image. It is possible there is variety in applicant perspectives depending on the type of AI use. It would also be valuable to conduct quantitative studies to test applicant trust factors with different uses of AI tools, and different types of AI tools (customized vs. off-the-shelf). They could also be assessed across different industries or demographics. More research is needed to understand the relationship between feedback and applicant satisfaction in traditional recruitment and with AI based recruitment, as feedback emerged as a key factor in applicant perspectives in this study. Examining HR professional's views together with applicant perspectives would also allow for a deeper, multi-actor view.

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APPENDIX 1 - Interview guide

1. Background

Q1: Could you describe your educational background?

Q2: What is your current employment status?

Q3: What field do you work in?

2. Experiences with Recruitment

Q4: How did you find your current or previous job?

Q5: Can you describe your last application process in detail?

What stages did you go through?

Q6: Have you ever encountered AI-driven recruitment tools (such as automated resume screeners, chatbots, or video analysis) in a job application process?

If yes, what was your experience?

Q7: Have you ever felt that an application process was unfair or biased? If so, what made you feel that way?

Q8: Have you ever withdrawn from a job application because of the recruitment process?

If yes, what influenced your decision?

Q9: Have you ever received feedback from an AI-driven recruitment process?

3. General Knowledge and Experiences with AI

Q10: How would you rate your familiarity with AI on a scale from 1 (not familiar at all) to 5 (very familiar)? (Why?)

Q11: Can you explain what artificial intelligence is, in your own words?

Q12: Do you use AI in your work? If so, in what specific tasks?

Q13: Do you use AI in your free time (e.g., ChatGPT, recommendation systems, AI-based creative tools)? If so, how?

4. Perceptions About AI in Recruitment

Q14: How familiar are you with how AI is used in recruitment? Can you give any examples?

Q15: How do you feel about AI being used in recruitment decisions?

What concerns or benefits come to mind?

Would your feelings change depending on the specific stage of recruitment AI is used in?

Q16: Do you think AI systems can fully understand and evaluate human skills and potential?

Why or why not?

Q17: AI can be used to assess different parts of an application process (resume, written materials, video interviews).

In which of these areas would you be most/least comfortable with AI being used?

Q18: If given the choice, would you prefer a human recruiter or AI to assess different parts of your application?

Why or why not?

Q19: Would knowing that AI was used in the hiring process change how you prepare for an application?

Would you alter your resume, answers, or video behavior based on AI screening criteria?

Q20: Some argue AI can make recruitment fairer by reducing human bias, while others worry AI may introduce new biases. What are your thoughts on this?

Q21: What challenges or risks do you see with AI assessing recruitment materials?

Q22: What challenges or risks do you see with AI assessing recruitment materials?

Would knowing the AI's evaluation criteria affect your confidence in the process?

Would you worry about the AI misunderstanding cultural differences, accents, or body language?

5. Perceptions About Organizations Using AI in Recruitment

Q23: Would the use of AI in recruitment affect your perception of an organization?

Would it make you more or less likely to apply for a job there?

What kind of AI usage would make a company seem more attractive to you?

What kind of AI usage would make you hesitant about applying?

APPENDIX 2 – Categorization of interview 2

Appendix 2 Table 1. Categorization of interview 2.

Category	Examples	Interpretation
Positive feelings/perceptions	"I think I would feel fine if I know that it's... how to say it, it's very... Not requirements, but like, it's tracking very low-level things." "I think it can be a good decision, but again, like really good, should be really good parameterized."	The participant was open to the benefits of AI tools in recruitment, but it was dependent on the assumption that the tool was well designed and tracking only simple things, rather than making complex conclusions.
Negative feelings/perceptions	"I would prefer to have some human evaluating me." "Well, the final, for sure. I want to talk with people, checking on the eyes." "The AI is kind of not really new thing, but it's new that it gets so much implemented into everyday life recently. And I'm still like, have this old school things inside of me, so I'm a bit of protesting some of AI applications."	The participant prefers human recruiters, and communicated a pre-existing, resisting attitude about AI applications.
Knowledge	"That's what's created for a specific task and was trained on a huge amount of data. So, when you have this task and some small amount of data for yourself, you can use this model to reach tasks." "I have no knowledge about AI in the recruitment."	The participant was able to summarize the meaning of AI confidently, and documented by interview notes this knowledge was communicated with confidence. However, their knowledge about AI in recruitment activities was low.
Experience	"I do use Chat GPT too much. I don't use it outside Chat GPT and my work research overall." "Implementation of deep learning algorithms in Alzheimer's disease, or in neurological imaging processing" "We are trying to use AI models in our imaging analysis. It's not the most complex one, so it's not the one that was used for the Chat GPT for example. I think ours are a bit more, a bit less complex. But yeah, so we basically build some models."	The participant had an above average level of experience with the basic principles of AI, as they worked with AI related concepts, developing deep learning algorithms in the medical research field.
Challenges	"But the question is what are the settings for the AI? I think that would be nice to know, kind of. " "And probably there will be somehow, if you integrate this system, then you have to introduce people to what the system expects from you." "But when you go to the interview and you have this mysterious unknown everything, it's stress a lot." "And then people can, because of the stress, they can behave differently and can, you know, show not the best parts	The participants identified challenges of the settings, and the parameters of the AI tools used in recruiting, which would affect her trust on them. They emphasized the importance of transparency by communicating the assessment metrics to the applicants. They identified increased stress as one potential challenge, which could arise from the ambiguity of the AI tools. This could also result in the applicant behaving differently, which could in turn affect the function of the AI tools.

	of them to you. They can start with a lot of hands, gestures, they can forget words. They can start to speak too fast and then AI cannot process too fast or then the words like splitting…" "I think, yeah, maybe the challenge would be that it will stress people." "But I guess you have to notify them that AI will use their data." "And also the question is how the data will be used. How it will be stored in secure because you have basically a visual and the voice of the people. You kind of need to protect this data." "Especially the question is how old are the people. If I have conserved, like if the person like around 45 years old, maybe here she will have more doubts."	The participant also identified the data privacy as one challenge, and the security issues that must be taken into consideration with highly sensitive data which could include voice, video, and personal information. Variation with applicant age was also identified as a challenge, as the participant felt it could affect the receptiveness of the applicants.
Benefits	"If the person cannot speak English, for example, then it makes sense that AI stores it away." "he's telling complete weird stuff that makes no sense in the sentence time as well" "I know that AI is like supposed to be used in the situation when we have thousands of applications. And it makes sense, it's reduced the work for the HR" "But you don't know the questions, right? You know how to behave, but if your answers make sense, then you're at least worth it."	The participant appreciated the ability of AI tools to weed out applicants with obvious shortcomings, such as the lack of necessary language skills, or relevant knowledge. The participant identified the increased efficiency of AI tools as another benefit. They also saw it that no matter what, your answers must make sense for the AI to evaluate you favorably.
Other opinions	"…maybe you don't tell them that AI is processing the media and then don't stress that much." "You will need to tell them at least the bullet points of what's AI looking at." "So reduce the stress somehow from this. Because especially it's a new thing, maybe people are not that aware of it." "I would also say maybe if there is the thing that final decision makes by human, the finalist, I don't know, you can mention that to them."	The participant held the opinion that the organization has to tell the applicants about the use of AI in the evaluation, and that they should take steps to reduce the stress that could results from this. They though the final decision should be made by a human.
Demographics	"I'm a PhD student." "It's mostly in biological sciences and computer sciences."	Currently a doctoral researcher, with a background in biological sciences and computer sciences. Highest education was a master's degree.