Generati/ve AI and Workplace Productivity: A Qualitative Study in Spain

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Abstract. *The growing use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the workplace is undeniable, with varying views on its adoption and impact. This article explores how Generative AI influences employee performance and the role of hedonics and job satisfaction. A qualitative analysis of 16 Spanish managers and employees (April 2024) reveals that AI boosts productivity by enhancing satisfaction, saving time, and improving output quality. Positive employee experiences and the integration of AI into daily routines are essential for maximizing productivity. These findings provide valuable theoretical and practical insights for improving employee satisfaction and performance in the workplace.*

Keywords. Generative Artificial Intelligence, employee productivity, efficiency, hedonics, Job satisfaction, future of work.

1 Introduction

The adoption of generative AI (Gen AI) is expected to boost economic growth (Lal, 2023), yet its implications remain uncertain, as Gen AI is viewed both as a facilitator and inhibitor of human potential (Mäkelä & Stephany, 2024). Its integration in the workplace is reshaping industries, particularly in functional areas, with controversial impacts on employees. Negative effects (Hu & Min, 2023) include reduced demand for low-skilled jobs (Xie et al., 2021), increased job insecurity (Wang et al., 2019), burnout (Möhlmann et al., 2021; Hessari & Daneshmandi, 2024), and a negative competitive climate (Li et al., 2019). However, positive outcomes also exist, such as higher demand for skilled labor (Li et al., 2021), new job opportunities (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2020), improved work performance (Zhou & Wang, 2021), increased job autonomy (Xiaomei et al., 2021) and creativity (Jia et al., 2024, De Smet et al., 2024).

Technology adoption also affects employees' psychological state, intrinsic motivation (Watchravesringkan et al., 2010, Cerasoli et al., 2014; Bernardo et al., 2005), and well-being (Xu et al., 2023). For instance, smartphones increase stress through constant email checks and reduced face-to-face interactions (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013). While technology design can impact emotions (Nguyen et al. 2025), focusing solely on engagement doesn't necessarily lead to greater job satisfaction (Marimon et al., 2025).

This study aims to assess how employees' use of Gen AI affects productivity (Keltanen, 2024) focusing on the role of hedonics and job satisfaction. The key research question is: How does Gen AI integration impact employee performance across various organizational settings? Is improving productivity purely a technical matter, or does it also involve personal aspects? Additionally, we explore how Gen AI influences different aspects of Employee Performance (EP), including hedonics and job satisfaction.

This research addresses two gaps in the literature: the emotional and psychological effects of disruptive technologies like Gen AI on employees, a topic not yet fully explored (Wisskirchen et al., 2017), and how the implementation of Gen AI will shape day-to-day work. Understanding its impact on employee productivity in the context of Gen AI's emergence is essential (Callari & Puppione, 2025).

This study extends existing literature by applying the Self-Determination Theory framework to Gen AI use at work. It focuses on factors influencing employee satisfaction—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—and examines how early Gen AI adoption impacts productivity. This theoretical approach helps explore new ways to adapt human-machine interactions, offering insights into the future of work.

2 Background research

The Technology Acceptance Models, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), are widely used to predict technology adoption behaviors (Alturas, 2021). These models identify key factors that influence the use of technology, including Gen AI, which affects employee motivation, job satisfaction,

and performance. In this context, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains the relationship between intrinsic motivation (hedonics), job satisfaction, and performance. SDT highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in promoting high-quality performance and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). When employees feel autonomous, competent, and connected, they are more motivated and engaged, leading to higher job satisfaction and productivity. Gen AI can enhance these aspects by enabling more efficient task completion, facilitating collaboration, and improving task relevance and utility.

SDT (Deci, 1976, Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2000b) offers a valuable framework for understanding how motivational factors influence Gen AI adoption and performance. It also emphasizes three essential psychological needs: 1) autonomy, or the sense of control over one's actions; 2) competence, reflecting the ability to perform effectively; and 3) relatedness, which involves feeling connected to others. Gen AI can enhance these needs by improving human-computer interactions and fostering a sense of connection at work.

Previous studies have shown that Gen AI enhances efficiency and productivity, especially for developers and knowledge workers (Sira, 2023). For instance, using tools like ChatGPT has improved productivity in professional writing (Noy & Zhang, 2023) and consultancy tasks (Dell'Acqua et al., 2023). Gen AI's ability to automate tasks, provide personalized suggestions, and improve decision-making can boost workplace efficiency (Aishwarya, 2023). Also, it is relevant to identify the internal flow from risk identification to knowledge integration and strategic outlook, highlighting generative AI's role in enhancing decision-making and competitive advantage (Söllner et al., 2025). However, issues like quality control, job displacement, and privacy concerns must be addressed (Wach et al., 2023) to fully capitalize on Gen AI's potential.

This research builds on existing literature by exploring the impact of Gen AI on employee performance, specifically through the lens of SDT. It suggests that the usability of Gen AI positively affects productivity, hedonics, and job satisfaction, as employees are more likely to engage with tools that are enjoyable and effective. Additionally, creating a psychologically safe environment where employees feel supported in using AI tools fosters a culture of experimentation and innovation, ultimately enhancing performance (Coetzee, 2019).

The role of hedonic motivation—pleasure derived from technology use—has been shown to influence technology acceptance and performance (Brown & Venkatesh, 2005). If employees enjoy using Gen AI tools, they are more likely to adopt and utilize them, enhancing productivity. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation and satisfaction, shaped by factors like autonomy and competence, have been linked to better job performance (Deci et al., 2017). This study also explores how hedonic motivation (Tamilmani et al., 2019) impacts job satisfaction and ultimately employee performance, proposing a positive relationship between these factors.

Fostering a work environment that promotes job satisfaction alongside the use of Gen AI is essential for enhancing productivity and well-being. By reducing repetitive tasks and focusing on higher-value work, employees can experience greater satisfaction and contribute more effectively to organizational success (Nazareno & Schiff, 2021; Bankins et al., 2023).

Based on the literature and the proposed theoretical framework, the following propositions are presented to explore the impact of Generative AI (Gen AI) on employee performance, job satisfaction, and motivation. These propositions aim to highlight the key relationships between technology usability, hedonics, and employee outcomes in the workplace.

Proposition 1: The usability of Generative AI (Gen AI) positively impacts employee performance (productivity).

Proposition 2: The usability of Generative AI (Gen AI) positively impacts employees' hedonic motivation.

Proposition 3: Hedonic motivation positively impacts job satisfaction among employees.

Proposition 4: Job satisfaction positively impacts employee performance (productivity).

Proposition 5: The usability of Generative AI (Gen AI) positively impacts job satisfaction among employees.

Proposition 6: Hedonic motivation positively impacts employee performance (productivity).

3 Method (focus groups)

Four focus groups were conducted, involving 16 professionals, with each session consisting of 2 to 6 participants. The sessions lasted between 50 and 60 minutes and took place during April 2024. At least two researchers were present in every session. The focus group discussions were guided by semi-structured questions (see guidelines for more details). These questions were designed based on the literature review.

Participants were selected from Spain using a purposive, non-probabilistic sampling approach. To minimize the influence of cultural factors on participants' perceptions and evaluations (Lobuono et al., 2016), individuals with similar cultural backgrounds were chosen, but with variation in characteristics such as age, gender, area of expertise, and openness to adopting new technologies. Table 1 provides an overview of the focus group composition. The groups continued until the saturation point was reached (Malterud et al., 2016), ensuring comprehensive exploration of the research questions.

To prepare for the sessions, the participants received the questions a few days in advance, and the sessions were held online via Google Meet. All

Table 1. Profile of participants of Focus Groups.

Nº	FC	Gender	Age	Frequency of use	Industry or area of expertise	Main use (personal/professional)
1	FC1	F	36-45	Twice per month	Headhunting	Professional
2	FC1	M	36-45	Daily	Logistics	Personal (The company prohibits employees from using Generative AI)
3	FC1	F	21-25	Intensively every day	Audit firm (Big Four)	Professional
4	FC1	F	21-25	Intensively every day	Consultancy (Big Four)	Professional
5	FC2	F	>55	Once per month	Retail	Personal
6	FC2	M	>55	Weekly	Engineering	Both
7	FC2	M	21-25	Daily	Legal & taxation	Professional
8	FC2	F	46-55	Weekly	Logistics	Personal (low level of digitalization in the organization)
9	FC2	F	36-45	Intensively and advanced daily use	Entrepreneur & software developer	Professional
10	FC3	M	46-55	Weekly	IT industry	Both
11	FC3	M	26-35	Daily	Technological start-up	Both
12	FC3	F	21-25	Twice per month	Digital banking	Professional (but with caution)
13	FC3	M	36-45	Twice per month	International currency transfer	Personal
14	FC3	M	>55	Once per month	Consultant & lecturer	Professional
15	FC4	M	26-35	Daily	Dealer manager system	Both
16	FC4	M	26-35	Daily	Digital marketing	Both

discussions were recorded and transcribed, and the content was analyzed using ATLAS.TI 24. The session durations were as follows: the first focus group (FC1) lasted 53:05 minutes, the second (FC2) lasted 1 hour and 4 minutes the third (FC3) lasted 58:48 minutes, and the fourth (FC4) lasted 46:34 minutes. The analysis and coding were initially done by one researcher, and then cross-validated by the rest of the research team to ensure reliability.

4 Results

The adoption of GenAI is still in its early stages in Spain, but its advantages are already apparent to both employees and managers, although these benefits vary across industries. In some sectors, such as consultancy, auditing, and consumer goods, companies actively promote GenAI usage and provide corresponding training. However, in other sectors, like shipping and logistics, the level of digitalization is low, and GenAI is often viewed as a threat, with its use even prohibited in some cases.

In terms of autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relations, participants consistently reported increased autonomy through the use of GenAI. They noted the ability to independently find answers, reducing their reliance on colleagues or supervisors, which in turn enhanced their knowledge acquisition. One participant shared, "I feel more autonomous and rely less on others for certain information." Another said, "It makes me more independent because I can access knowledge outside my area of expertise using this tool." These findings suggest that GenAI fosters greater individual empowerment.

Competence, however, yielded mixed opinions. Some participants felt GenAI inspired them, helping them uncover new insights and improve their understanding of work-related topics. One participant remarked, "Yes, it enhances my competence because it sometimes reveals things I wasn't aware of." Others appreciated how the tool supported their professional competence, stating, "With GPT chat, it's a new way of learning. The quick, structured responses help me access a lot of information." On the other hand, some participants viewed it merely as a time-saving tool,

depending on the task at hand. As for interpersonal relations, most agreed that GenAI had little effect. One participant noted, "Maintaining conversation and connectivity with teams remains unchanged. AI doesn't disrupt how we interact at work; it's just another way of communicating."

There was unanimous agreement that these tools are easy to use and generally helpful for work (Noy & Zhang, 2023). However, they have not yet been integrated into companies' information systems, meaning their use is not standardized and remains up to individual employees. Some companies encourage the use of GenAI and provide training, while others lack internal policies regarding its adoption. Regardless of frequency or intensity of use, employees tend to trust certain tools over others, depending on their personal experience.

Curiosity is a key factor driving employees to use these tools. One participant shared, "Sometimes it's just curiosity to see what it can do." Additionally, the 'wow effect' often plays a role in initial use, as expressed by one participant: "It's amazing, isn't it? The amount of information it processes and how it can answer anything. If I had this during my university days…" This enthusiasm tends to diminish when GenAI is used in personal contexts, though it is deeply embedded in daily life, often unnoticed.

The majority of participants expressed enjoyment in using these tools (van der Heijden, 2004). One participant commented, "I enjoy seeing how it works, but it also depends on which tools I'm using." In terms of enjoyment, one participant brought up an interesting point about the gamification aspect of using GenAI. She said, "Humans love to play; that's why tools like ChatGPT are so popular—people enjoy using them for entertainment purposes, like generating images or videos." However, despite this enjoyment, participants viewed these tools primarily as work tools, stating, "I see it as a tool, just like any other. It helps me, but I don't use it beyond what's necessary."

When it comes to productivity, most participants confirmed that GenAI does enhance their work performance (Vrinda & Jacob, 2015, Kessler et al., 2020). This was particularly evident in two areas: time savings and improved output quality. Time-saving was frequently mentioned in all four focus groups, with participants noting that it allowed them to focus on more valuable, less repetitive tasks. One participant stated, "Saving time on simpler tasks lets me dedicate more time to things that generate more value." Another added, "It frees up time for more interesting tasks, like research or reflecting on solutions."

Regarding the quality of work, most participants agreed that using GenAI improved their output, especially in tasks like text translation, writing, spelling, code review, and report preparation. One participant mentioned, "The work-time ratio is unmatched. The quality is higher, and I spent less time on it." Another participant added, "For me, it's about ensuring quality when I don't know how to do something—GenAI helps me with tasks I've never done before." In some cases, GenAI expanded employees' capacity and allowed them to broaden the scope of their work.

Moreover, GenAI is viewed as a tool for personal growth and continuous learning. One participant explained, "It helps me organize and learn, and ultimately, it saves me time. Time savings alone improve my well-being." Despite being in its early stages, GenAI's positive impact on employee performance and satisfaction was clear.

Lastly, participants recognized that these technologies will shape the future of work (Valeriya et al., 2024). By streamlining manual and administrative tasks, saving time, and offering new opportunities, GenAI will change how work is done and adapt as new technologies continue to evolve.

5 Discussion and limitations

The results obtained from the focus groups confirm most of the proposed propositions. First, Proposition 1, which states that the usability of Gen AI positively impacts employee performance (productivity), is confirmed, as participants highlighted improvements in work efficiency and the quality of outcomes thanks to the tool. Proposition 2, suggesting that the usability of Gen AI positively impacts hedonic motivation, is also supported, as participants expressed enjoyment in using Gen AI, especially when exploring its capabilities. Proposition 3, linking hedonic motivation with job satisfaction, is reinforced, as the enjoyment derived from using Gen AI translated into higher job satisfaction. Regarding Proposition 4, which posits a positive relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance, participants confirmed that satisfaction from autonomy and the improvement in work quality contributed to increased productivity. Proposition 5, which asserts that the usability of Gen AI positively impacts job satisfaction, is also validated, as participants reported greater satisfaction in their work when using this technology. Finally, Proposition 6, suggesting that hedonic motivation positively impacts performance, was corroborated, as the motivation derived from using Gen AI was reflected in increased employee performance in tasks related to the technology.

The Fig. 1 presents a conceptual framework illustrating the influence of generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) usability on hedonic motivation, job satisfaction, and employee performance. The model posits that higher usability of Gen AI tools enhances users' hedonic motivation—defined as the intrinsic enjoyment derived from using the technology—which subsequently contributes to increased job satisfaction. Both hedonic motivation and job satisfaction are proposed to positively impact employee performance. Furthermore, the model suggests a bidirectional relationship between Gen AI

usability and job satisfaction, indicating that employees who are more satisfied with their work may also perceive the technology as more usable. Overall, the framework underscores that the effective integration of generative AI in the workplace yields not only operational improvements but also psychological and motivational benefits that can foster higher employee performance.

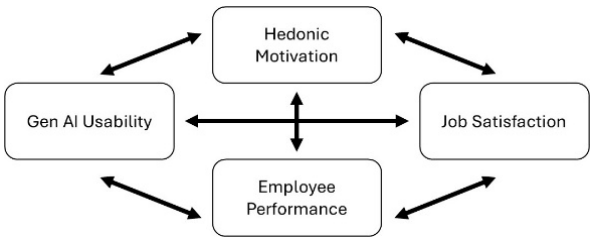

Figure 1. Relations among the analysed variables

This study contributes both theoretically and practically by advancing our understanding of how the usability of Gen AI influences employee performance, job satisfaction, and motivation in the workplace. It also provides valuable insights into the integration of these technologies within organizational settings. However, the study has some limitations, including its focus on a specific geographic region (Spain) and its reliance on qualitative data from a relatively small sample of professionals, which may not fully capture the diverse impacts of Gen AI across different industries and cultures. Future research could expand the sample size and scope to include other regions and sectors, explore the long-term effects of Gen AI on employee motivation and performance, and examine the role of organizational culture in shaping the adoption and effectiveness of these technologies.

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