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How Artificial Intelligence Redistributes Agency Through Work Design

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence is increasingly embedded in task allocation, evaluation, knowledge production, decision support, and employment administration. Its organizational significance therefore extends beyond automation: it changes who may decide, who must justify decisions, what expertise remains consequential, and where responsibility is located. This integrative review examines artificial intelligence as work-design infrastructure by connecting evidence on employee autonomy, skill transformation and dependency, algorithmic control, and accountability across human and artificial actors. A transparent integrative-review approach combines theoretical, qualitative, mixed-method, field, experimental, and methodological scholarship while preserving differences in design, context, and level of analysis. The evidence suggests that artificial intelligence can simultaneously expand and restrict agency. It may increase access to information, flexibility, and task support while narrowing substantive discretion through opaque allocation, monitoring, evaluation, and recommendation systems. Short-term performance gains may coexist with altered learning opportunities, dependence on system-encoded knowledge, and weakened capacity to question outputs. Accountability remains organizational because design, deployment, oversight, and appeal arrangements shape the authority given to artificial systems. The review proposes an Agency-Redistribution Framework that organizes delegation, retained discretion, control exposure, skill development, responsibility transfer, contestability, and feedback over time. The framework is an original synthesis rather than a validated causal model. Its implications are conditional on task uncertainty, worker dependence, expertise, interpretability, institutional context, and implementation practice. Longitudinal, multilevel, comparative, and intervention research is required before general claims about organizational effectiveness or responsible deployment can be sustained.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence as work-design infrastructure, Redistribution of employee autonomy, Skill transformation and dependency, Organizational control through artificial intelligence, Research agenda, Redistributes

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence is often framed as a technology that substitutes for, assists, or accelerates human task performance. That framing is incomplete because organizational adoption also redesigns the conditions under which work is selected, coordinated, interpreted, monitored, and evaluated. Work-design scholarship indicates that digital systems alter task, knowledge, social, and contextual job characteristics; organization scholarship further shows that learning algorithms reshape expertise and organizing processes; and paradox theory explains why automation and augmentation can become mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive choices [1-3]. Artificial intelligence should therefore be treated as work-design infrastructure: an arrangement that distributes opportunities to initiate action, exercise judgment, access information, question recommendations, and influence outcomes.



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This distribution is consequential because agency is not equivalent to nominal permission or technical participation. Workers may retain freedom over timing yet lose influence over allocation, evaluation, or appeal. Managers may remain formally accountable while relying on outputs they cannot adequately interrogate. Professionals may complete tasks faster while becoming dependent on system-encoded practices or losing opportunities to exercise relational judgment. Research on algorithms at work describes direction, evaluation, and discipline as a contested terrain in which control and resistance coexist [4]. Theory on agentic information systems similarly shows that delegation can move both to and from technological artifacts, changing who acts and who becomes dependent on another actor's information or authority [5].

This article develops an integrative review of how artificial intelligence redistributes agency through work design. It connects autonomy, skill, control, and accountability rather than treating them as separate consequences of adoption. The contribution is threefold. First, it distinguishes formal autonomy from consequential influence, immediate assistance from durable skill development, descriptive visibility from valid performance evidence, and technical capability from legitimate authority. Second, it compares heterogeneous evidence without assuming that platform work, professional judgment, laboratory tasks, and organizational deployment are directly commensurable. Third, it proposes an Agency-Redistribution Framework that links work-design choices to enacted mechanisms, worker and organizational consequences, and feedback over time. The framework is a bounded conceptual synthesis; it does not establish causal effects, universal prescriptions, or implementation readiness.

Integrative review method

The review used a problem-driven integrative design appropriate for combining theoretical, qualitative, mixed-method, field, experimental, and methodological evidence. Integrative reviewing requires alignment among the review problem, search logic, evidence appraisal, and form of synthesis rather than treating unlike studies as inputs to a common effect estimate [6]. Search concepts covered artificial intelligence as work-design infrastructure, autonomy redistribution, skill transformation, dependency, algorithmic control, accountability, human–AI agency, competing explanations, measurement, and organizational implications. Information sources comprised publisher and DOI-indexed searches, targeted journal searches, and backward and forward citation chaining.

Eligibility required a peer-reviewed article in a verifiably Q1 journal, a resolvable DOI, direct relevance to a planned construct or claim, and sufficient information about context, design, findings, and limitations. Review architecture and contribution claims were specified before interpretation, consistent with guidance that review scope and synthesis logic should be explicit [7]. Duplicate DOI records were removed before title-and-abstract screening. Full texts were appraised for article-domain fit, evidential distinctiveness, Q1 verifiability, and the risk of forcing claims beyond the source design. Extraction covered study purpose, unit, setting, data source, time horizon, construct, mechanism, outcome, level, limitations, transferability, and the exact claim permitted.

Cross-domain synthesis compared convergence, conflict, boundary conditions, and alternative explanations without quality scoring or vote counting. PRISMA-compatible reporting was used only to make identification and selection transparent [8].

Figure 1 reports the verified flow of records through identification, duplicate removal, screening, full-text assessment, exclusion, and final inclusion for this integrative review article.

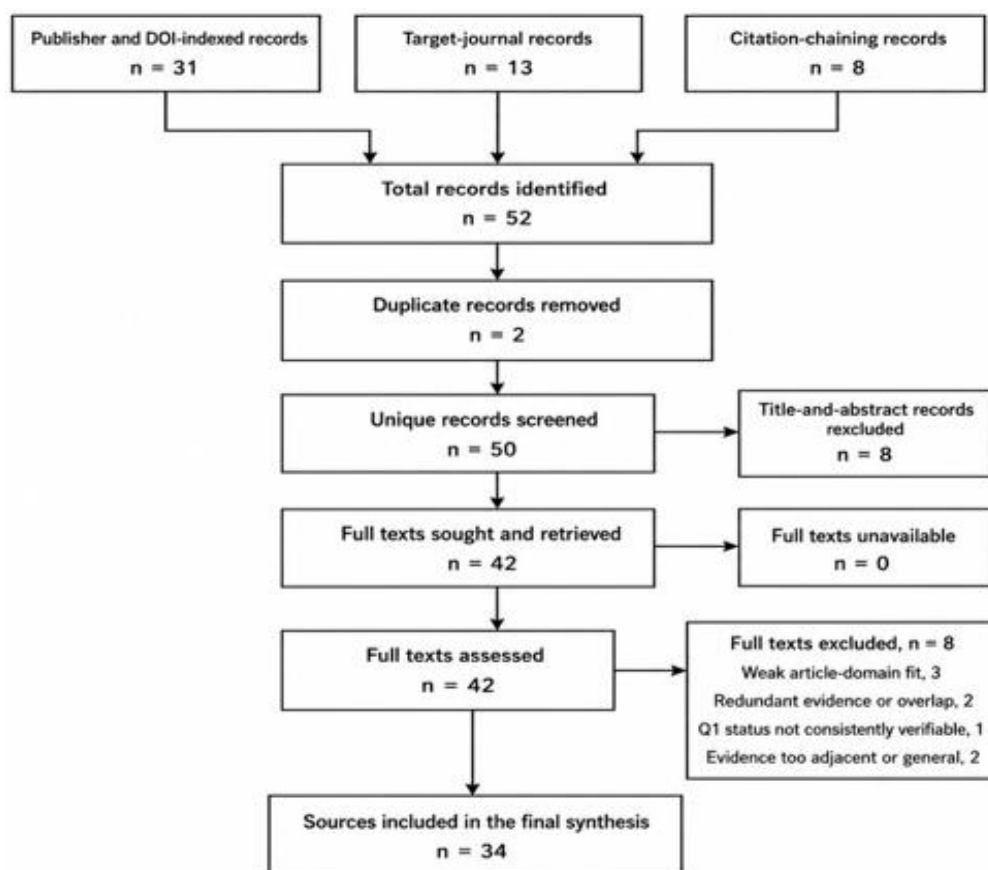


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram for Evidence Identification and Selection

The figure reports the evidence-identification and selection process used for ‘How Artificial Intelligence Redistributes Agency Through Work Design’. Every numerical value and exclusion reason was generated and verified during evidence screening. The diagram is a reporting device and does not change the declared review design or establish exhaustive coverage.

Redistribution of employee autonomy

Employee autonomy concerns consequential discretion over goals, methods, timing, information use, and participation in decisions that affect work. It should not be reduced to schedule flexibility or the ability to choose among options prestructured by a system. Algorithmic management can redesign autonomy by allocating tasks, recommending actions, monitoring behavior, evaluating performance, and controlling communication. Evidence across conceptual work-design analysis, mixed-method platform research, and qualitative studies indicates a recurring duality: digital systems may expand flexibility and informational support while constraining substantive influence through rankings, reputation dependence, opaque rules, and asymmetrical access to opportunities [9-11]. These findings converge on conditional redistribution rather than uniform autonomy gain or loss.

The strongest tensions appear where workers depend on a platform or employer-controlled system for continued access to work. Formal independence can coexist with limited control over task visibility, pricing, evaluation, or appeal. Yet workers are not passive. Qualitative evidence shows that they may arbitrage rules, multi-app, reposition themselves, selectively comply, or develop local knowledge that creates temporary room for action [12]. Such tactics demonstrate retained agency, but they do not eliminate structural asymmetry; their feasibility depends on worker resources, market alternatives, local conditions, and exposure to sanctions. Similar technologies may therefore produce different autonomy experiences across occupations, employment forms, and institutional settings.

For this review, autonomy redistribution is evaluated through four distinctions: formal permission versus enacted influence; flexibility versus control over consequential decisions; voice opportunity versus capacity to change outcomes; and responsibility transfer versus supported discretion. Alternative explanations include worker selection into technology-mediated jobs, organizational restructuring occurring alongside adoption, and differences in managerial implementation. The available evidence does not establish that artificial intelligence inherently centralizes or decentralizes authority. It suggests that agency depends on which decisions are delegated, what information remains accessible, whether recommendations are contestable, and whether workers can refuse, revise, or appeal system-mediated action.

Table 1 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for review design, evidence domains, and extraction framework for how artificial intelligence redistributes agency through work design.

Table 1. Review design, evidence domains, and extraction framework for How Artificial Intelligence Redistributes Agency Through Work Design.

Evidence domain or review construct	Review question	Eligible evidence type	Extraction fields	Appraisal or relevance criterion	Synthesis role	Main limitation	Interpretation boundary
Work-design infrastructure	Which job characteristics and organizing processes are altered?	Theory, review, and field evidence	Task, knowledge, social, and contextual features	Direct connection between AI and work arrangements	Establishes infrastructure framing [1]	Broad conceptual scope	No uniform effect across jobs
Integrative review method	How can heterogeneous evidence be compared transparently?	Methodological guidance	Search, eligibility, extraction, and synthesis	Alignment of question, design, and claim	Preserves design differences [6]	Does not prove exhaustiveness	No pooled causal inference
Employee autonomy	What discretion is expanded, constrained, or relocated?	Conceptual, survey, and qualitative evidence	Timing, methods, allocation, voice, and appeal	Separates flexibility from consequential influence	Identifies conditional autonomy [9]	Concentration in platform settings	No universal gain or loss
Skill and dependency	What knowledge is supported, displaced, or made system-dependent?	Organizational, professional, and experimental evidence	Skill use, learning, verification, and reliance	Distinguishes output from durable learning	Connects assistance to expertise change [2]	Limited long-term evidence	No automatic upskilling or deskilling
Algorithmic control	How are direction, evaluation, and discipline technically enacted?	Review, labor-process, and field evidence	Allocation, monitoring, ratings, and sanctions	Identifies authority-bearing mechanisms	Maps control exposure [4]	Sector and employment-form concentration	Visibility is not valid performance
Accountability	Who must explain, review, and remedy system-mediated decisions?	Ethics, HR, lifecycle, and governance evidence	Design, deployment, oversight, and appeal roles	Tracks responsibility across actors	Prevents responsibility displacement [5]	Legal allocation varies by setting	Capability is not legitimate authority
Agency configuration	How are human and artificial contributions combined?	Theory and integrative synthesis	Delegation, retained discretion, and reversibility	Makes allocation assumptions explicit	Supports the proposed framework [3]	Configuration outcomes are unvalidated	Design principle is not demonstrated effect

Note. Evidence-derived entries are cited. Synthesis-role statements organize the review and do not constitute validated rankings, effect estimates, or universal prescriptions.

Skill transformation and dependency

Skill transformation refers to changes in what workers must know, which forms of expertise are recognized, how learning occurs, and whether performance remains possible without the system. Dependency is narrower than frequent use: it arises when workers cannot adequately perform, verify, explain, or relearn a task without AI-mediated support. Longitudinal organizational evidence shows that algorithms can change a regime of knowing by elevating data-driven representations and prompting professionals to symbolically accommodate, contest, or reconfigure expertise [13]. This process is not simple deskilling; it may devalue some practices while creating new interpretive, verification, and coordination demands.

Professional engagement with opaque AI is correspondingly heterogeneous. Field evidence from diagnostic work identifies different strategies for engaging or disengaging from algorithmic recommendations, with effective interrogation depending on domain knowledge and access to corroborating evidence [14]. Expertise can therefore remain essential even when the system produces technically sophisticated outputs. At the same time, opacity may encourage deference, fragmented checking, or selective reliance. Whether AI augments judgment or displaces it depends on task criticality, error visibility, professional authority, time pressure, and the organization's expectations for explanation.

Recent generative-AI studies provide stronger evidence for immediate task effects than for long-term skill consequences. In customer-support work, assistance improved performance especially among less-experienced workers, consistent with the transmission of practices associated with higher performers [15]. In bounded professional writing tasks, randomized evidence showed faster completion and higher average quality [16]. Neither design establishes durable learning, cross-task transfer, or the absence of dependency. Performance compression may represent learning, temporary scaffolding, standardized output, or reduced opportunity to practice unaided judgment.

The evidence therefore supports a cautious distinction among skill substitution, skill amplification, skill compression, and skill reconstitution. These categories may coexist within one job. Organizations should not infer capability development from short-term productivity alone, nor infer deskilling merely because task execution changes. Longitudinal measures of unaided performance, verification ability, error detection, relational expertise, and adaptation after system withdrawal are required to determine whether redistributed agency strengthens or weakens human competence over time.

Organizational control through artificial intelligence

Organizational control through artificial intelligence refers to the embedding of direction, monitoring, evaluation, recommendation, and sanction within data-driven systems. Platform research shows that matching workers to tasks is not merely coordinative: it can be coupled with ratings, surveillance, restricted information, and automated consequences that shape continued access to work [17]. Control is therefore exercised not only through explicit commands but also through system architecture, default options, visibility rules, and the conditions under which workers may challenge an outcome.

Applications can relocate managerial functions such as allocation, communication, performance management, and termination into technical arrangements [18]. This relocation may increase consistency and speed, but it can also make managerial authority less visible while preserving its organizational effects. Food-delivery evidence illustrates how geolocation, incentives, and performance signals intensify labor-process control despite formal independence [19]. Labor-process theory consequently helps distinguish decentralization of supervision from decentralization of power: workers may be physically dispersed while remaining dependent on centrally designed rules [20].

The evidence is concentrated in platform settings and cannot establish identical effects in standard employment. Control varies with worker dependence, sanction severity, transparency, alternatives, and the ability to appeal. Recommendation systems may support coordination when workers retain discretion, whereas the same interface may become coercive when declining reduces future opportunities. Resistance, workarounds, and selective compliance further show that control is enacted rather than technologically predetermined. Control should also be separated from prediction accuracy. A model may predict behavior adequately while producing an objectionable work arrangement if its score becomes an unreviewable basis for allocation, discipline, or exclusion. Conversely, intensive data collection does not establish that a resulting judgment is valid.

Table 2 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for cross-study findings, mechanisms, convergence, and conflict in how artificial intelligence redistributes agency through work design.

Table 2. Cross-study findings, mechanisms, convergence, and conflict in How Artificial Intelligence Redistributes Agency Through Work Design.

Construct, mechanism, or relationship	Representative context	Reported finding	Evidence design	Convergent evidence	Conflicting evidence	Methodological concern	Review interpretation
Allocation–autonomy	Algorithmic job design	Allocation can support coordination while narrowing discretion [9]	Conceptual review	Control enters task design	Flexibility may remain	Pathways not uniformly tested	Autonomy depends on consequential choice
Flexibility–control duality	Remote platform work	Schedule flexibility coexists with insecurity and reputation dependence [10]	Mixed methods	Formal freedom need not equal power	Some workers value flexibility	Platform selection and context	Treat autonomy as multidimensional
Tactical agency	Online work	Workers interpret and work around opaque rules [11]	Qualitative	Agency persists under asymmetry	Tactics may be sanctionable	No population effect estimate	Resistance modifies but does not remove control
Matching–discipline coupling	Labor platforms	Matching is linked to monitoring, evaluation, and sanctions [17]	Multi-case qualitative	Technical allocation carries authority	Strength varies by platform	Platform–employment boundary	Control is architectural and relational

App-based labor control	Food delivery	Geolocation and incentives intensify performance pressure [19]	Labor-process case analysis	Visibility enables intervention	Visibility may also aid coordination	Sector and country specificity	Visibility is not equivalent to valid performance evidence
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Note. Review interpretations are original synthesis. No row establishes universal prevalence, effect magnitude, or causal superiority.

Accountability across human and artificial actors

Accountability concerns who must explain, review, correct, and remedy decisions shaped by artificial intelligence. Algorithms should not be treated as independent moral or organizational actors because their objectives, data, thresholds, and deployment conditions reflect human and institutional choices. Scholarship on algorithmic ethics, personal integrity in algorithm-based human-resource decisions, and artificial-intelligence-enabled human-resource management converges on a shared concern: quantitative outputs can acquire authority while responsibility becomes dispersed across designers, vendors, managers, and users [21-23]. Nominal human involvement is insufficient when reviewers lack information, time, discretion, or authority to contest the system.

A lifecycle perspective extends accountability beyond the moment of decision. Ethical risks accumulate through data selection, model development, procurement, implementation, use, monitoring, and revision [24]. Responsibility should therefore be allocated to identifiable roles at each stage, with documented escalation and appeal routes. Technical causation must also be distinguished from legitimate authority. A system may generate a recommendation without possessing the standing to define organizational values, make irreversible employment judgments, or answer affected workers.

Evidence remains stronger for identifying accountability problems than for validating particular governance arrangements. Formal policies may differ from enacted review, and transparent explanations may still be unhelpful when workers cannot obtain reconsideration. Organizational implications must consequently be bounded by law, occupation, system criticality, institutional context, and available expertise. Accountability also has several dimensions: answerability for reasons, authority to intervene, traceability of prior choices, responsibility for remedy, and learning after failure. An arrangement may satisfy one dimension while failing another; an explanation without reconsideration, for example, provides information but little consequential recourse.

Table 3 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for contextual moderators, boundary conditions, and organizational implications.

Table 3. Contextual moderators, boundary conditions, and organizational implications.

Context or level	Moderator or boundary condition	Evidence pattern	Organizational implication	Alternative explanation	Transferability limit	Uncertainty	Research need
Worker–system relation	Dependence on system access	High dependence narrows practical refusal [12]	Preserve alternatives and appeal	Labor-market scarcity	Platform evidence	Durability of worker tactics	Compare high- and low-dependence settings
Professional judgment	Domain expertise and opacity	Expertise shapes interrogation of outputs [14]	Protect verification authority	Professional status or resources	Diagnostic context	Which expertise transfers	Longitudinal studies of unaided judgment
Organizational control	Sanction severity and transparency	Matching, ratings, and sanctions operate jointly [17]	Separate advice from penalty	Platform business model	Nonstandard employment	Effects of partial transparency	Comparative system-design studies
Human-resource decision making	Integrity and contextual judgment	Quantification may displace personal judgment [22]	Require reasoned human review	Pre-existing bureaucratization	Human-resource applications	Whether review is substantive	Observe enacted review practices
System lifecycle	Role clarity and contestability	Responsibility accumulates across stages [24]	Assign stage-specific owners	Vendor–client fragmentation	Legal regimes differ	Effective remedy design	Trace failures across lifecycle roles

Note. Organizational implications are bounded proposals derived from the reviewed evidence, not validated compliance rules.

Proposed agency-redistribution framework

Agency redistribution is proposed here as the movement of consequential capacity among workers, managers, organizations, and artificial systems through work-design choices. The framework begins with the decision being redesigned: its uncertainty, reversibility, interpretability, time sensitivity, and dependence on relational knowledge. Decision-structure theory suggests that these characteristics condition whether organizations delegate to artificial intelligence, retain human authority, or create

sequential and aggregated arrangements [25]. Allocation should therefore be analyzed as a configuration rather than a binary choice between automation and human control.

The second component concerns enacted mechanisms: access to information, discretion over methods, monitoring exposure, evaluation rights, responsibility transfer, and opportunities to contest outputs. Trust affects whether people accept or rely on artificial intelligence, but trust is neither proof of accuracy nor evidence that authority has been legitimately transferred [26]. The third component links allocation to outcomes at different levels, including autonomy, skill use, dependency, coordination, control exposure, and accountability clarity. Integrative management scholarship indicates that these outcomes depend on alignment among human contributions, artificial capabilities, task properties, and organizational arrangements [27].

The fourth component is temporal feedback. Human and technological agency may combine in assisting, arresting, augmenting, or automating forms [28]. Repeated use can develop complementary skill, normalize deference, encourage workarounds, or trigger redesign. These paths are proposed and may reverse as systems, tasks, and institutions change. The framework does not rank configurations or assume that increased human intervention is always superior; it asks where consequential agency sits, how it is exercised, and whether the allocation remains visible, contestable, and reversible. Four analytical questions organize its use: what action is delegated, what discretion is retained, what work-design mechanism enacts the allocation, and who can explain or reverse the resulting decision. A fifth temporal question asks how repeated use changes future capability and dependence.

Figure 2 presents the original conceptual synthesis for agency-redistribution framework, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.

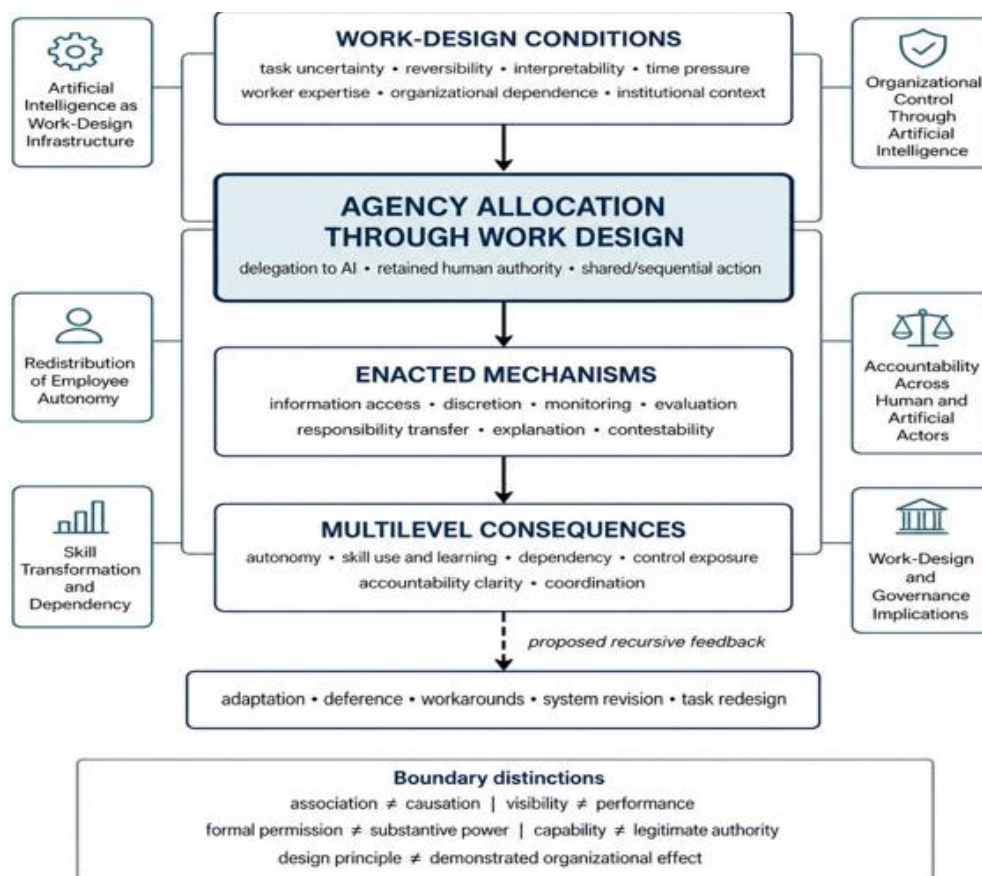


Figure 2. Agency-Redistribution Framework

Work-design and governance implications

Work design should begin with the distribution of judgment rather than the availability of a technical function. Human–artificial-intelligence complementarity is most plausible when machine analytical capacity is combined with contextual, intuitive, social, and ethical judgment that remains consequential [29]. This principle does not require preserving every existing task. It requires identifying which human capabilities must be exercised, learned, and authorized for the work system to remain explainable and adaptable.

Algorithmic management also has a dual character: the same practice may enable information access or flexibility while constraining autonomy through dependence and evaluation [30]. Governance should therefore examine enacted effects rather than label systems as empowering or controlling in advance. Relevant questions include whether recommendations can be

declined without penalty, whether workers can inspect consequential data, whether appeal changes outcomes, and whether system withdrawal leaves workers capable of performing and verifying the task.

Human-resource functions face related tensions among efficiency, fairness, transparency, and contextual judgment [31]. Bounded safeguards include explicit delegation limits, role-specific accountability, meaningful review authority, reversible implementation, worker voice, and monitoring of both technical output and work-design consequences. These are design questions rather than implementation-ready prescriptions. Governance assessment should therefore include workers' experienced discretion, managers' actual capacity to override, changes in unaided competence, correlated errors, and whether appeals alter decisions. Technical monitoring alone cannot reveal these organizational conditions.

Table 4 organizes the evidence, constructs, relationships, uncertainties, and boundary conditions required for evidence limitations, unresolved questions, and future research priorities.

Table 4. Evidence limitations, unresolved questions, and future research priorities.

Evidence gap	Why it matters	Current limitation	Required design	Measurement priority	Comparative context	Interpretation safeguard	Future research question
Durable skill change	Productivity may conceal dependency	Short task horizons [16]	Longitudinal adoption and withdrawal	Unaided performance and verification	Occupations and task complexity	Do not infer learning from output	When does assistance become capability or dependence?
Accountability enactment	Formal oversight may be symbolic	Lifecycle frameworks remain conceptual [24]	Process tracing and audit studies	Review authority and remedy	Vendor, employer, and public systems	Separate policy from practice	Who can reverse a consequential decision?
Trust calibration	Acceptance may exceed warranted reliance	Heterogeneous tasks [26]	Field experiments and incident analysis	Reliance, accuracy, and contestability	High- and low-criticality work	Trust is not correctness	Which cues produce calibrated reliance?
Configuration performance	Human-artificial-intelligence arrangements are not directly comparable	Integrative framework unvalidated [27]	Matched organizational comparisons	Allocation, coordination, and adaptation	Teams, occupations, institutions	Avoid universal rankings	Which configurations fit which decision properties?
Governance dualities	Enabling and constraining effects coexist	Mostly conceptual synthesis [30]	Multilevel mixed methods	Autonomy, dependence, and voice	Employment forms and countries	Test competing explanations	When does flexibility become responsibility transfer?

Note. Research priorities are proposed from identified limitations; the table does not rank gaps by evidence density or policy importance.

Research agenda

Research should move beyond isolated measures of acceptance, productivity, or perceived autonomy. Individual performance gains may coexist with collective homogenization: experimental evidence indicates that generative artificial intelligence can improve evaluations of individual creative output while reducing diversity across outputs [32]. Organizational studies should therefore measure both individual and collective consequences, including idea diversity, coordination, error correlation, and the distribution of learning opportunities.

The framework also requires tests of how human and artificial contributions are allocated, sequenced, and integrated across problem structures [33]. Useful designs include longitudinal adoption studies, ethically bounded field experiments, matched comparisons, multilevel models, and process tracing before and after system revision or withdrawal. Measures should distinguish formal delegation from enacted authority, reliance from calibrated trust, monitoring from valid performance assessment, and flexibility from consequential discretion.

Finally, research must protect forms of expertise that are situated, embodied, and relational. Qualitative scholarship indicates that relational expertise cannot be reduced to codified information available to machines [34]. Comparative studies should examine when artificial intelligence supports such expertise, when it obscures it, and when organizations stop developing it. The proposed framework should be treated as falsifiable: evidence may show that its mechanisms are incomplete, reverse direction, or matter only under narrow occupational and institutional conditions. Research should also compare vendor-provided systems with internally developed systems, voluntary with mandatory use, and stable with rapidly changing models. Such comparisons can reveal whether observed effects arise from artificial-intelligence capability, contracting arrangements, managerial choices, or broader organizational change.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence redistributes agency when work design changes who may initiate action, access information, exercise judgment, evaluate performance, contest decisions, and bear responsibility. The reviewed evidence does not support a uniform narrative of empowerment or displacement. Autonomy may coexist with dependence, assistance with weakened practice opportunities, and formal human oversight with limited authority to intervene.

The article's principal contribution is to integrate these tensions within an Agency-Redistribution Framework linking work-design conditions, allocation choices, enacted mechanisms, multilevel consequences, and temporal feedback. The framework makes visible distinctions that adoption debates often collapse: flexibility and substantive influence, output and learning, visibility and performance, capability and legitimate authority, and technical participation and accountability.

This synthesis remains bounded by heterogeneous designs, platform-heavy control evidence, occupation-specific professional studies, and limited longitudinal research. It is not a validated causal model or universal governance prescription. Its value lies in organizing questions that can be challenged empirically and in directing attention from what artificial intelligence can do toward how organizations redistribute the capacity and responsibility to act.

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