"DEAR APPLICANT, THE AI WILL SEE YOU NOW!" JOB APPLICANTS' REACTIONS TO AI-ENHANCED SELECTION

FLORIS VERHEIJEN, XANDER LUB, RAN ZHANG

HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, the Netherlands floris.verheijen@student.hu.nl, xander.lub@hu.nl, ran.zhang@hu.nl

As artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes hiring, organizations increasingly rely on AI-enhanced selection methods such as chatbot-led interviews and algorithmic resume screening. While AI offers efficiency and scalability, concerns persist regarding fairness, transparency, and trust. This qualitative study applies the Artificially Intelligent Device Use Acceptance (AIDUA) model to examine how job applicants perceive and respond to AI-driven hiring. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 15 professionals, the study explores how social influence, performance expectancy anthropomorphism, and shape applicant acceptance, while concerns about transparency and fairness emerge as key barriers. Participants expressed a strong preference for hybrid AI-human hiring models, emphasizing the importance of explainability and human oversight. The study refines the AIDUA model in the recruitment context and offers practical recommendations for organizations seeking to implement AI ethically and effectively in selection processes.

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1 Introduction

"Congratulations, you've been selected for an interview! Please record your responses, and our AI will evaluate your answers." How would you feel if you were to read this in your job application process? Excited? Discouraged? Skeptical?...

As AI-enhanced hiring processes become more common, job applicants increasingly find themselves engaging with chatbots, asynchronous video interviews, and algorithm-driven assessments instead of human recruiters. While these AI-powered selection tools promise efficiency, scalability, and consistency, they also raise concerns about fairness, transparency, and trust (Ochmann & Laumer, 2020; Zhang & Yencha, 2022). Applicants often question how AI interprets their responses, whether its decisions are truly objective, and what it means for human judgment in hiring. Research has shown that candidates frequently express skepticism toward AI-enhanced selection methods, particularly when they lack transparency or provide limited opportunities for human interaction (Van Esch et al., 2019; Suen et al., 2019).

This study explores these concerns by applying the Artificially Intelligent Device Use Acceptance (AIDUA) model to examine how candidates perceive and evaluate AIenhanced hiring processes. The AIDUA framework provides a structured lens to analyze how applicants cognitively appraise AI in hiring, from initial reactions shaped by social influence and anthropomorphism to assessments of AI's effectiveness, fairness, and usability (Gursoy et al., 2019). Through qualitative insights, this study identifies key psychological mechanisms that determine whether candidates accept or reject AI-enhanced selection methods, while also highlighting critical gaps in transparency and trust that influence AI adoption.

By investigating applicant perceptions across different AI-enhanced hiring scenarios, this study contributes to both theory and practice by addressing three key research gaps. First, while AI-enhanced hiring has gained increasing attention, prior research has primarily focused on organizational adoption rather than candidate perceptions and experiences (Hewage, 2023). Second, the AIDUA model, though widely applied in AI service contexts, has not been extensively tested in HRM and recruitment settings (Gursoy et al., 2019). Third, while fairness in AI-enhanced selection has been widely debated, there is still limited empirical research on how transparency influences applicant trust in AI-enhanced hiring (Suen et al., 2019). This study

addresses these gaps by applying the AIDUA model to hiring, investigating how social influence, anthropomorphism, as well as effort and performance expectancy shape candidate acceptance of AI-enhanced selection, and exploring transparency and fairness as key determinants of trust. In doing so, it refines our understanding of how AI-enhanced selection methods align or clash with applicant expectations, offering actionable insights for organizations seeking to balance automation with human oversight.

2 Research background

AI in hiring and selection processes

AI-enhanced selection is increasingly deployed to boost efficiency and objectivity in recruitment processes. Applications of AI in these processes include AI-assisted interviews, asynchronous video interviews, and chatbot-led interactions, each designed to streamline candidate assessment and selection. AI-assisted interviews utilize algorithms to analyze verbal and non-verbal cues, providing recruiters with data-driven insights (Van Esch et al., 2019). Asynchronous video interviews allow candidates to record responses at their convenience, which are then evaluated by AI systems, offering flexibility and scalability in the hiring process (Van Iddekinge et al., 2023). Chatbot-led interviews involve AI-driven conversations that can handle initial screening and answer candidate queries in real time (Ochmann & Laumer, 2020).

While these AI-enhanced methods offer notable advantages, they also present significant challenges for applicant experience and acceptance. Concerns about transparency arise when candidates are unaware of how AI systems evaluate their responses, leading to potential distrust. Perceived fairness is another critical issue, as AI systems may inadvertently perpetuate existing biases present in their training data, affecting decisions related to hiring and promotions (Açikgoz et al., 2020). Trust deficits can emerge if candidates feel that AI lacks the human judgment necessary to understand contextual nuances, potentially impacting their confidence in the selection process (Zhang & Yencha, 2022). These concerns have led scholars to emphasize the need for human oversight in AI-driven recruitment (Suen et al., 2019). A hybrid approach that integrates algorithmic analysis with human decision-making is increasingly seen as a way to balance the efficiency of AI with the empathy, ethical reasoning, and contextual sensitivity of human recruiters (Suen et al., 2019).

Building on this foundation, recent research has expanded our understanding of how applicants perceive and evaluate AI-driven recruitment tools. Studies have shown that while AI can improve efficiency and reduce bias, it may also introduce concerns around algorithmic opacity, perceived dehumanization, and reduced agency in the hiring process. For example, Binns et al. (2018) emphasize how opaque AI decisionmaking can undermine perceptions of justice and reduce applicant trust. Similarly, Wesche et al. (2024) find that candidates respond more positively to algorithmic decisions when explanations are provided, suggesting that transparency plays a critical role in fostering trust. Other recent work has explored concerns about behavioral control and procedural fairness in AI-based recruitment (Hilliard et al., 2022), while Van Esch et al. (2021) highlight the importance of perceived fairness and trust in shaping applicant reactions to AI-enabled hiring processes. These studies underscore the need for further research into candidate-centered evaluations of AI systems and provide a strong basis for applying models such as AIDUA in the recruitment domain.

Artificially Intelligent Device Use Acceptance Model

To understand how applicants perceive and respond to AI-enhanced hiring, this study applies the Artificially Intelligent Device Use Acceptance (AIDUA) model (Gursoy et al., 2019). This framework evaluates how individuals accept or reject AI-based technologies, structured around three cognitive appraisal stages.

In primary appraisal, users form initial perceptions based on social influence, anthropomorphism, and hedonic motivation (Van Doorn et al., 2017). Social influence reflects societal and peer opinions on AI use, while anthropomorphism refers to how human-like an AI system appears, affecting trust and comfort. Hedonic motivation relates to the enjoyment or engagement derived from AI interactions, influencing acceptance. In secondary appraisal, users assess AI's effectiveness and ease of use. Performance expectancy refers to AI's perceived usefulness in achieving desired outcomes, while effort expectancy concerns how easy or complex AI interaction appears (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The outcome stage implicates users' emotional response towards and behavioral intentions (i.e.: accept or reject) regarding AI-enhanced hiring. Trust in AI's decision-making and concerns about fairness could significantly shape these elements (Wesche et al., 2024).

In sum, this study applies the AIDUA model to examine applicant perceptions of AI-enhanced hiring processes, exploring how acceptance and rejection response varies across different AI-integrated recruitment scenarios.

3 Research method

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore applicant perceptions of AIenhanced hiring processes. Given the complex and subjective nature of human reactions to AI-enhanced selection, qualitative methods allowed for a deeper understanding of how candidates experienced and interpreted these technologies in recruitment settings.

Participants

ID	Interview Date	Duration (hh:mm)	Vignette	Gender	Age	Educational Background	Employ ment Status
1	16-04-2024	01:16	В	Male	48	MSc. Educational Sciences	Full-time
2	17-04-2024	01:13	А	Male	29	MSc. Applied Ethics	Part-time
3	24-04-2024	00:49	А	Male	46	MSc. Industrial & Organizational Psychology	Full-time
4	25-04-2024	01:15	В	Male	40	MSc. International Development & Postdoc Journalism	Full-time
5	30-04-2024	01:15	А	Female	27	BSc. Economic Development and Globalization	Part-time
6	01-05-2024	01:12	В	Male	36	MSc. Cultural Anthropology	Part-time
7	01-05-2024	01:24	А	Male	58	MSc. Civil Engineering & Management & MSc. Business Admin	Full-time
8	02-05-2024	01:44	В	Female	53	MSc. Business Economics	Full-time
9	06-05-2024	01:20	А	Male	35	MSc. Clinical and Industrial & Organizational Psychology	Full-time
10	16-05-2024	01:10	А	Male	46	MSc. Industrial & Organizational Psychology	Full-time
11	17-05-2024	01:14	С	Female	33	MSc. Human Resources	Full-time
12	22-05-2024	01:32	С	Male	56	MSc. Electrical Engineering	Part-time
13	23-05-2024	01:28	С	Female	48	Executive Master of Security and Defense	Full-time
14	28-05-2024	00:48	С	Female	31	MSc. International Business & MSc. Marketing	Part-time
15	28-05-2024	00:49	С	Female	40	Executive Master of Security and Defense	Full-time

Table 1: Sample profile

The study sampled employees primarily from the Dutch Ministry of Defense as they provided a unique perspective on AI-enhanced selection within a structured and professional setting. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure participants had relevant experience with selection procedures and recruitment technologies. A total of 15 participants took part in the study, offering diverse viewpoints on the use of AI in hiring (see Table 1).

Data collection

The study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection instrument. This approach enabled participants to share detailed insights while allowing the researcher to probe further into key themes that emerged. A vignettebased method was incorporated to present participants with three distinct AIenhanced hiring scenarios, encouraging them to reflect on their reactions and decision-making processes in these contexts. The three scenarios were: (A) AIassisted interview -- a human recruiter conducted the interview, but AI provided analysis and decision support; (B) Asynchronous video interview -- candidates recorded their responses to pre-set questions, which were then analyzed by AI; (C) Chatbot-led interview -- the entire interview process was conducted by an AI-driven chatbot without human intervention. Participants were presented with one of the three vignettes and were asked to reflect on their thoughts, emotions, and concerns regarding AI-enhanced hiring. Each vignette was used on five participants, resulting in an even distribution of the three scenarios across the total 15 participants. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses on fairness, transparency, trust, and perceived usability.

Analytical approach

The collected interview data were analyzed using template analysis, a structured yet flexible method that allowed for coding based on predefined themes while accommodating new insights from participant responses. The analysis was guided by the AIDUA model, ensuring that findings were interpreted within the focal theoretical framework.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection and participants provided informed consent before taking part in the study. To protect participant confidentiality, all data were anonymized, and interview transcripts were securely stored. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences.

4 Results

The findings of this study provide insights into applicant perceptions of AIenhanced hiring processes across the three recruitment scenarios: AI-assisted interviews (Vignette A), asynchronous video interviews (Vignette B), and chatbotled interviews (Vignette C). The results section is structured according to key themes from the final coding template framework (see Table 2), reflecting applicants' experiences, evaluations, and outcomes in relation to AI-enhanced selection methods.

Job application processes

Participants acknowledged that AI-enhanced selection processes could potentially speed up recruitment and eliminate human scheduling conflicts, particularly in AIassisted interviews (Vignette A). However, some found AI-enhanced selection misaligned with the purpose of a job interview, which they expected to be an opportunity to engage with recruiters, demonstrate interpersonal skills, and learn about company culture. One participant expressed skepticism about AVIs, stating:

"A job interview... is not only meant for the employer to test whether the applicant fits within the organization, but is also meant for the applicant to see whether the organization fits him or her. And I think it is also a bit about the fit or the match that you feel on both sides." (Interviewee 3)

Others echoed concerns about AI-enhanced hiring replacing the human aspect of evaluation, with one participant saying:

"In a sense, it feels less fair, because you are not necessarily judged on the qualities you need for the job, but on the qualities you need to get through the application procedure." (Interviewee 6)

Familiarity with AI

Most participants were familiar with AI through tools such as ChatGPT and recommendation algorithms but had not considered its role in hiring. Some only realized their reliance on AI when asked. While some saw AI as functional, others doubted its ability to assess skills and personality, especially in chatbot-led interviews. As one participant noted:

"If you think about it, we are actually surrounded by Artificial Intelligence without you perhaps being aware of it. What is it? Facial recognition on your phone, Netflix deciding whether I like the movie or not." (Interviewee 13)

Primary appraisal

Applicants formed initial reactions to AI-enhanced selection based on social influence, hedonic motivation, and anthropomorphism. While some saw AI in hiring as inevitable but undesirable, others were curious about its capabilities. One participant viewed AI interviews as an opportunity to explore the technology firsthand, stating:

"I would really love to have an interview with such an advanced chatbot. Just from my personal interest and how well that works and if you ask questions about more on the emotional, on the emotional axis, how you would respond to that, I would find that very interesting." (Interviewee 11)

Perceptions of anthropomorphism played a major role in applicants' acceptance of AI selection. AI-assisted interviews (Vignette A) were seen as more legitimate due to the presence of a human recruiter, offering oversight and fairness. In contrast, chatbot-led interviews (Vignette C) were widely rejected, as participants struggled to engage with an AI lacking human interaction. One interviewee bluntly summarized their reaction:

"This is a nightmare scenario!" (Interviewee 12)

This strong negative response underscores how the removal of human interaction in chatbot interviews felt unsettling, impersonal, and even dehumanizing.

Secondary appraisal

At this stage, participants evaluated AI's usefulness and fairness, with mixed responses. Some appreciated AI's ability to process large volumes of data efficiently, while others questioned whether AI-based decisions were truly fair and explainable. Regarding Performance Expectancy, participants acknowledged AI could enhance consistency in hiring but worried about over-reliance on algorithms. One participant stated:

"Well, I think it's more honest than doing it with a human. Because you completely remove that subjectivity and that cognitive bias." (Interviewee 15)

Another noted:

"If you take the human factor out of it, you take out a whole bunch of potential ways that it could be unfair. I think there are more opportunities for humans to make an unfair decision than there are for an AI to make an unfair decision." (Interviewee 6)

Regarding Effort Expectancy, several participants found AI-driven processes mentally exhausting due to uncertainty about how responses were interpreted. One participant explained:

"I think I would behave a little differently. [...] It seems there's a lot more gravity behind everything you do and say." (Interviewee 2)

The effort needed to prepare for and adapt to AI-based selection criteria was seen as a disadvantage, particularly in AVI and chatbot scenarios.

Outcome stage

Trust in AI-enhanced selection was key in determining acceptance or rejection. Some participants saw AI as improving fairness in hiring by removing human biases. However, most still preferred human involvement in final decisions, citing AI's lack of judgment in assessing complex skills, emotions, and cultural fit. One participant summarized their stance on fully automated hiring:

			Overarching
Inemes	sub-themes	Descriptive codes	tnemes
Familiarity with Al			
applications	Use of AI	ChatGPT, Regular, daily use, Unconscious use of AI, Functionalities & applications used	
		Computer performs better than humans when processing vast amounts of info, Fast processing of	Familiarity
	Cognitive & algorithmic bias	vast information, Computer or algorithm, Lack of meaningful human control	with Al
Understanding of Al		Mimics human characteristics, Mathematical solution, Automates and accelerates	applications
	Drawbacks	Limits freedom of choice, Not transparent, Undesirable consequences	
	Experiences with interviews within	Job application procedures are valuable, Mismatch between procedure and purpose/ function,	
	application processes	Mismatch between expectations and execution, Time-consuming	
Experience with job		Useful for narrowing a large applicant pool	Experience
application processes		Measuring applicants' KSAO's, Measuring the fit between applicant, the job and the context, Meet	with job
	Expectations regarding the purpose of a	future colleagues, Opportunity to perform	application
	job interview	Receive feedback on performance during the procedure, Consistent treatment in regard to other	processes
		candidates, Procedure should reflect job requirements	
		When I cannot decide, I'll ask relatives or peers, Primary appraisal, With important decisions, I	
Social influence		decide myself	
		Al is not human, Should be able to assess human-like interaction, Should be able to provide	Primary
Self-Insights	Anthropomorphism	human-like interaction	appraisal
		Importance of a having a job, Reason to apply for a job	
		AI-Decisions should be based on clear operationalization of function requirements, AI not yet	
	Accuracy expectations concerning the Al	capable of supporting job interviews on a sufficient level	
Performance	technology used	Depending on the purpose of a job interview, Human involvement necessary in de procedure,	
expectancy		Should be explainable	
	Expectations towards the organization	Fair selection decision, Informs applicants on the use of Al in advance, Provide a fair procedure,	
	providing the Al-assisted procedure	Respectful treatment, Privacy protection GDPR	Secondary
		Trust in improvability of performance of AI in regard to bias, Risk of automation bias	appraisal
	Expected actual use behavior prior to		
Effort expectancy	participation	Searching the internet, Wondering what AI takes into account, Prepare participation	
	Expected effort/drawbacks	No personal connection, Being watched is tiresome, Important to present as good as possible	
Emotions		Stressful, Weird, Impersonal, Scary	
Fairness perceptions		Fair decision, Fair procedure	Outcome
Signaling		(Un-)professional organization. Innovative organization. Impersonal approach	stage

Table 2. Condensed final coding template framework

38th Bled eConference:

"Okay, now you still have that meaningful human control, because it is not yes or no, but it is advice, an extra consideration that you give to the person in the interview. So this would just feel to me like a kind of extra input that the team leader is now getting." (Interviewee 4)

Another explained their strong objection to AI-led hiring:

"What it comes down to is how much I want that job. [...] I wouldn't be jumping for joy, really. It feels impersonal and unbalanced." (Interviewee 8)

Taken together, the results reveal that while AI-enhanced hiring is perceived as efficient and objective, participants remain skeptical about its fairness, trustworthiness, and ability to replace human judgment. AVIs and chatbot interviews were widely criticized for being impersonal and requiring excessive adaptation, while AI-assisted interviews were viewed as more acceptable due to human oversight. The strong preference for hybrid AI-human selection models indicates that organizations should balance technological advancements with human judgment, ensuring AI remains a tool for efficiency rather than a sole decisionmaker.

5 Discussion, conclusions, and implications

Theoretical implications

This study advances research on AI-enhanced selection by extending the Artificially Intelligent Device Use Acceptance (AIDUA) model to the domain of hiring. While AIDUA has primarily been applied to consumer and service contexts (Gursoy et al., 2019), our findings demonstrate its relevance for understanding job applicants' nuanced responses to AI-driven selection methods. In doing so, we not only apply the model to a new context but also enrich the dialogue between technology acceptance and recruitment scholarship.

Our findings complement and extend Gilliland's (1993) procedural justice model, which outlines fairness rules such as consistency, opportunity to perform, and feedback. Applicants' responses to AI selection tools reflected deep concern with these principles—particularly transparency, perceived legitimacy, and interpersonal treatment. The AIDUA model's secondary appraisal components, such as

performance and effort expectancy, help explain how these fairness judgments are cognitively constructed. For instance, perceived fairness was tightly linked to performance expectancy (e.g., whether AI could make accurate decisions) and to effort expectancy (e.g., whether the AI process was mentally taxing or confusing). This suggests that AIDUA provides a valuable theoretical bridge between perceptions of fairness and technology-specific appraisals, offering new explanatory depth for applicant reaction research.

In addition, the study highlights how AI selection methods are interpreted through a signaling lens. According to signaling theory (Spence, 1973), applicants infer organizational values from the recruitment process. Our participants frequently viewed fully automated processes—especially chatbot-led interviews—as signaling impersonality, cost-cutting, or a lack of care for applicants. In contrast, hybrid models with human oversight were interpreted as signals of professionalism, accountability, and respect. Integrating AIDUA with signaling theory strengthens our understanding of how applicants evaluate not only the tool's functionality but also what it reveals about the organization behind it.

Finally, AIDUA offers theoretical value beyond traditional HR frameworks by incorporating constructs such as anthropomorphism and hedonic motivation. These dimensions are not typically addressed in models like procedural justice or signaling theory, yet our findings indicate they play a significant role in shaping applicant acceptance. For example, participants expressed discomfort with AI systems that felt "cold" or dehumanizing—especially when no human contact was present. Emotional reactions such as curiosity, stress, or alienation also influenced how candidates engaged with different hiring formats. These insights suggest that affective and experiential factors—central to AIDUA—are essential in designing AI hiring processes that are not only efficient, but also perceived as fair and human-centered.

In sum, this study refines and extends the AIDUA model by embedding it within core theories of fairness and signaling in recruitment. It positions AIDUA as a useful integrative framework for future research on applicant perceptions of AI, and highlights the need for recruitment scholars to consider both cognitive and emotional dimensions of technology-mediated selection.

Practical implications

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for organizations integrating AI into selection processes, particularly regarding how candidates perceive and respond to AI-enhanced hiring methods. Participants strongly preferred AI-assisted hiring models where human decision-making remained central. Many interviewees raised concerns that fully automated hiring processes, particularly chatbot-led and asynchronous video interviews, lacked the human element necessary for fair and effective candidate evaluation. While AI was seen as useful for pre-screening applications, human involvement was considered essential for making final hiring decisions and assessing soft skills and job fit.

Actionable recommendation: Ensure a human-in-the-loop system, where recruiters review AI-generated insights before making hiring decisions.

Transparency and explainability in AI hiring processes emerged as a key theme. Participants expressed frustration over the opaque nature of AI decision-making, questioning how responses were evaluated and whether AI assessments were fair. A more transparent approach would involve organizations providing candidates with clear explanations of how AI assessments work and the criteria being evaluated. Several participants suggested that receiving feedback on their AI interview performance would improve trust and acceptance of AI-driven selection.

Actionable recommendation: Provide candidates with explainability statements post-interview (e.g., "Your responses were analyzed based on X, Y, Z factors.").

Many participants found AI-driven interviews stressful due to their unfamiliarity with the process. Several interviewees noted that they would have felt more confident if they had been given the opportunity to rehearse before the actual interview. To address this, organizations can implement AI interview practice runs, allowing candidates to familiarize themselves with the format and how AI interprets responses. This would help candidates refine their performance and reduce uncertainty.

Actionable recommendation: Offer candidates a rehearsal or practice-run AI interview before their actual AI-driven application interview.

The candidate experience was another major concern. Many interviewees found chatbot-led and asynchronous video interviews impersonal, negatively impacting

their perception of the hiring process. Several participants expressed a preference for AI-enhanced hiring that included some level of human interaction, such as opportunities to clarify responses or interact with a recruiter at key stages. Designing AI-assisted interviews to include interactive elements could help mitigate candidate stress and improve the overall experience.

Actionable recommendation: Allow candidates to request clarifications, re-record responses, or engage with a human at key decision points.

Participants also highlighted the importance of aligning AI selection processes with organizational values. Several interviewees noted that the use of AI in hiring sent signals about the organization's priorities, and over-reliance on AI risked making companies seem impersonal or overly data-driven. Organizations that emphasize collaboration, innovation, or human-centered leadership should ensure that their hiring practices reflect these values by integrating AI in a way that complements, rather than replaces, meaningful human interaction.

Actionable recommendation: Ensure that AI-enhanced selection methods align with the organization's employer brand and values to enhance the candidate experience.

These insights underscore the need for a thoughtful and candidate-centric approach to AI-enhanced hiring. While AI can enhance efficiency and streamline recruitment, organizations must balance automation with human oversight to ensure fairness, transparency, and trust. By incorporating participant-driven recommendations into AI hiring strategies, companies can foster a more inclusive, engaging, and trustworthy selection process.

Limitations, future research, and conclusions

This study offers valuable insights into applicant perceptions of AI-enhanced selection, but several limitations should be noted. The sample, drawn from the Dutch Ministry of Defense, provides a structured and policy-aware context but may not reflect broader applicant populations. Participants may have heightened concerns around data security and formal procedures. Future research should

examine diverse sectors to explore how organizational culture influences responses to AI in hiring.

The qualitative approach enabled in-depth exploration but limits generalizability. Larger-scale surveys or experiments could test the prevalence of these findings across contexts. Longitudinal research may also clarify whether applicant attitudes shift as AI becomes more integrated into recruitment processes.

Finally, while our practical recommendations aim to improve candidate experience, interventions such as AI rehearsals may lead to unintended effects like overpreparation. Future work should examine how support tools influence fairness and authenticity in AI-driven assessment.

In conclusion, this study extends the AIDUA model to recruitment, highlighting how social influence, anthropomorphism, and performance expectations shape applicant reactions. Concerns about fairness and transparency emerged as central and should be integrated into future models of AI acceptance in hiring.

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