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Take the Bull by the Horns—The Impact of Threat of AI & Avoidance Job Crafting on Job Burnout

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Abstract. As artificial intelligence becomes more common in everyday work, it can improve organizational efficiency while also making employees worry about being replaced or seeing their skills lose value. Even so, less attention has been given to what happens within employees themselves, especially the part a growth mindset may play in shaping reactions to the threat of AI. Using survey data from working adults (N = 228), this study examines whether a growth mindset weakens the link between the threat of AI and job burnout, and whether avoidance job crafting explains that relationship.The relationship. The two main points. When employees have a stronger growth mindset, the negative association between the threat of AI and job burnout is noticeably weaker. Avoidance job crafting also appears to mediate this relationship. By considering both a psychological factor and a behavioral pathway, this study places growth mindset within research on the threat of AI and shows more clearly how work behavior connects to job burnout. In practicaltos, the results suggest that organization may be able to red organizations out by helping employees develop a growth mindset.

Keywords: Threat of AI, Growth mindset, Avoidance job crafting, Job burnout

1. Introduction

AI technology is developing and spreading so quickly that it is already changing,in basic ways,both how organizations operate and how employees do their jobs. By June 2025, generative AI in China had already picked up more than 500 million users,a penetration rate of 36.5%, which means AI was no longer an emerging novelty but an everyday tool many people could use [1]. But the gains from this technology come with both convenience and psychological pressure for employees. At present, only 22% of employees are strongly confident that AI will not take over their jobs; in the Asia-Pacific region,52% of respondents say they worry about losing their jobs to AI,which is higher than the global average of 41%. In China, 19% of knowledge workers agreed strongly that they feared being replaced by AI, reflecting a mix of hope and concern [2]. How to effectively address employees' perceived psychological threat while unlocking AI's productivity potential has become an urgent challenge for managers.

Research on the threat of AI has produced mixed findings. Some studies suggest that feeling threatened can push employees to accept challenges, learn new skills, and improve job performance [3, 4]. More often, though, researchers describe the threat of AI as a resource of pressure that

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triggers negative emotions, increases job burnout [5], and leads to avoidant behavior [6]. This disagreement suggests that the effect of the AI threat may depend partly on how employees interpret it and how they respond. Most existing studies have focused on external conditions such as organizational practices, leadership styles, and some relatively stable individual differences [5-8]. An internal psychological factor has received less attention here.

A growth mindset may be one such factor. Employees who believe their abilities can be developed may adapt more easily when technology changes quickly and existing skills lose value. Based on this point, this study exams whether a growth mindset changes the relationship between the threat of AI and job burnout, and whether avoidance job crafting plays an intermediate role in that process. These questions matter because they speak directly to what organizations can actually do as AI becomes part of daily work routines.

2. Theoretical foundation and research hypotheses

2.1. Threat of AI

Threat of AI refers to employees' risk assessment and concern that AI technology may exert certain negative impacts on their work, specifically including the risk of job substitution, skill devaluation, and loss of work autonomy, as well as professional identity crisis [9]. Although threat of AI may have a positive effect under certain conditions, its mainstream effect is still manifested as a negative impact on employees' work behavior, especially when employees lack enough confidence to face this technological change. Threat of AI is more likely to trigger avoidance behavior and eventually lead to job burnout. It is worth noting that, in exploring the moderating mechanism of threat of AI, existing literature has mainly focused on external situational factors, such as organizational behavior [5] and leadership style [6], or on relatively stable individual differences, such as self-efficacy [7] and organizational self-esteem [8].

Based on this, the study introduces the internal situational factor of Growth Mindset as an adjustment variable, aiming to explore how Growth Mindset, a key employee's personal ability, can carry out a good balance and regulation mechanism in the process of Threat of AI leading to Job burnout.

2.2. Growth mindset

A growth mindset is a person's belief that their abilities, whether intelligence, emotional intelligence, or skills, are not fixed but plastic, and can be built up through effort, study, and practice [10, 11]. Organizational scholars have written a great deal about it. In the management of employees, a growth mindset has been tied to positive work behavior and healthier psychological states, and it appears to color how employees read and react to outside pressure, which makes it especially relevant to the uncertainty that comes with technological change. It does more than promote positive behavior and states directly: as a personal competency that can be cultivated, it shifts how employees perceive and respond to external pressure, and in that sense, it plays a crucial role in dealing with uncertainties such as technological change.

2.3. Job burnout

Job burnout was first described as a chronic stress reaction among people whose work focuses on serving others. It is usually measured in three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization,

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and low personal accomplishment. Burnout lowers work performance, increases absenteeism and the intention to quit,and has also been linked to health problems such as insomnia, depression, and self-harm [5]. As AI becomes more embedded in employees' daily work,role boundaries become less clear,existing skills no longer fully match job demands, and some employees may feel that their professional identity is being challenged. These pressures can contribute to burnout. For that reason, it is necessary to examine how burnout develops in this context and what may help limit it.

2.4. Hypotheses development

Drawing on the literature reviewed above, this study sets up a moderated mediation model to look at how the threat of AI and growth mindset work together in relation to job burnout, with avoidance job crafting as the indirect path between them.

At its core, the threat of AI puts employees' resources on the line, because it raises worries about skills losing value, jobs being taken over, and one's professional identity coming undone. A growth mindset, the belief that abilities can be developed through effort [10, 11], shapes how employees interpret those worries. Employees who hold this belief more strongly are likely to see AI-related change as a challenge they can meet by learning and adapting, whereas those who hold it weakly are more likely to read the very same change as proof that their abilities fall short, which only feeds helplessness and emotional exhaustion. Working on non-routine tasks already shows that a growth mindset can weaken the tie between demanding tasks and negative emotions [12]. Carrying that logic over to AI-related change, this study expects the link between the threat of AI and job burnout to be weaker when growth mindset is high and stronger when it is low. We therefore propose the following:

H1: The interaction between Threat of AI and Growth mindset has an impact on Job burnout.

H1a: The higher the interaction between Threat of AI and Growth mindset, the less obvious the job burnout behavior.

H1b: The lower the interaction between Threat of AI and Growth mindset, the more obvious the job burnout behavior is.

H2: The interaction between Threat of AI and Growth mindset has a negative impact on Avoidance job crafting.

Approach–avoidance motivation theory holds that, when people run into something threatening, they may fall back on avoidant strategies to keep potential losses at bay [13]. Whether they do so depends in part on what they believe about their own abilities. Employees with a stronger growth mindset are more likely to pour their energy into building the skills that AI demands, rather than pulling away from AI-related work, whereas those with a weaker growth mindset are less sure they can adapt, which makes avoidance the more tempting option. In practice, that avoidance can look like cutting back on tasks, handing work off to others, or stepping back from situations tied to the work. On this basis, the study proposes:

H2a: The higher the interaction between Threat of AI and Growth mindset, the less obvious the Avoidance job crafting behavior is.

H2b: The lower the interaction between Threat of AI and Growth mindset, the more obvious the Avoidance job crafting behavior is.

Avoidance job crafting is the effort employees make to ease stress by shrinking their work role, cutting down their involvement in tasks, or putting psychological or physical distance between themselves and their work situation [14]. Such moves may bring relief in the short run, but they also close off chances to build skills, receive social support, and feel a sense of accomplishment. Over time these losses add up, feeding emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. When employees pull

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back from tasks, they lose some of their sense of control and their access to feedback on how they are doing, and when the withdrawal persists it can strain relationships at work [15]. Keeping this pattern going can itself demand continual self-regulation, piling more demands onto employees who are already under pressure.

H3: Avoidance job crafting has a positive impact on job burnout.

If H2 and H3 hold, avoidance job crafting can help explain how the interaction between the threat of AI and growth mindset translates into job burnout. Put simply, the interaction is tied to how much employees fall back on avoidance job crafting, and that behavior is in turn tied to burnout. We expect this indirect path to run stronger when growth mindset is low, since those employees are more inclined to pull back from work when they feel threatened by AI, and weaker when growth mindset is high.

H4: The interaction of threat of AI and growth mindset affects the adjustment behavior of avoidance job crafting and job burnout. The stronger the interaction, the weaker the indirect effect of avoidance job crafting.

Taken together, these hypotheses make up a moderated mediation model in which growth mindset shapes both the direct link from the threat of AI to job burnout and the indirect link that runs through avoidance job crafting. Figure 1 lays out the model.

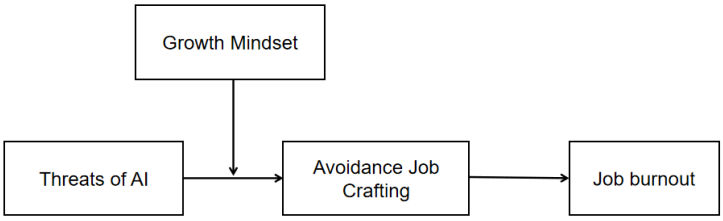


Figure 1. Model

3. Research design

3.1. Data collection and sample

The online questionnaire was administered through the Credamo data platform and was open to respondents across China. Scenario prompts and keywords asked participants to answer with reference to a work environment in which AI tools could be used. The questionnaire stated that responses were anonymous, would be used only for academic research, and would not be disclosed to third parties. Participants who completed the questionnaire received a modest payment in RMB. Attention-check items were included, and IP addresses and device identifiers were used to screen for duplicate submissions.

This study conducted a round of questionnaires, and a total of 275 valid questionnaires were collected. After eliminating invalid questionnaires such as too short answers, repeated answers, missed answers, etc., 228 valid questionnaires were finally recovered, with a retention rate of 82.91%.

Among the valid respondents (N = 228), 123 were male (53.95%) and 105 were female (46.05%). Most participants were aged 30–35 years. Regarding education, 6.14% had a junior high school education or below, 7.02% had a high school or technical secondary school education, 20.18% had a junior college degree, 63.16% held a bachelor's degree, and 7.46% held a master's degree or above. Regarding organizational affiliation, 6.14% were students, 24.12% worked in state-owned

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enterprises, 21.05% in public institutions, 9.65% were civil servants, 25.44% in private enterprises, 4.82% in foreign-funded enterprises, and 8.77% in other organizations. Regarding monthly income, 5.70% earned less than 3,000 yuan, 28.07% earned 3,000–6,000 yuan, 47.37% earned 6,001–10,000 yuan, 14.91% earned 10,001–15,000 yuan, and 3.95% earned above 15,000 yuan. Regarding work experience, 12.28% had 0–3 years, 38.60% had 3–5 years, 33.33% had 5–10 years, and 15.79% had 10 years or more.

3.2. Measures

This study adopted well-established scales published in reputable English-language academic journals.c journals to measure the focal variables. These English-language scales have been validated by Chinese scholars in the Chinese context. A five-point Likert scale was used for measurement, with responses ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree."

Threat of AI was measured using the four-item scale developed by Kieslich et al. [9]. A sample item is "If you now think of the use of AI in [specific context], how threatening do you think computer applications of AI are that..." In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.825.

Growth mindset was measured using the eight-item scale developed by Hermundur et al. [11]. A sample item is "I know that with effort I can improve my skills and knowledge." In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.723.

Avoidance job crafting was measured using the seven-item scale related to avoidance-oriented leadership in the study by Patrick F. et al. [14] on approach-oriented and avoidance-oriented leadership. A sample item is "Find ways to get others to take my place in meetings." In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.863.

Job burnout was measured using the 22-item scale developed by Christina et al. [15]. A sample item is "I feel emotionally drained from my work." In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.900.

4. Data analysis

4.1. Confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in Mplus 8.3 to assess the discriminant validity of threat of AI, growth mindset, avoidance job crafting, and job burnout. As reported in Table 1, the four-factor model fit the data better than the alternative models tested (χ^2 = 2137.197, df = 773, χ^2/df = 2.765, TLI = 0.711, CFI = 0.728, RMSEA = 0.088, SRMR = 0.111). The results indicate that the four constructs were empirically distinguishable.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis

Model	Model Specification	x^2	df	x^2/df	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Four-factor model	TOA, GM, AJC, JB	2137.197	773	2.765***	0.711	0.728	0.088	0.111
Three-factor model	TOA+GM, AJC, JB	2364.806	776	3.047***	0.665	0.683	0.095	0.118
Two-factor model	TOA+GM, AJC+JB	2740.351	778	3.522***	0.587	0.608	0.105	0.126
Single-factor model	TOA+GM+AJC+JB	2903.069	779	3.727***	0.554	0.576	0.109	0.126

Note: TOA = threat of AI; GM = growth mindset; AJC = avoidance job crafting; JB = job burnout. ***p < .001.

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4.2. Common method bias test

Harman's single-factor test was used to assess common method bias. The first factor accounted for 28.05% of the total variance, below the 40% reference threshold. This result suggests that common method bias was not a major concern in this analysis.

4.3. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

SPSS version 27.0 was used to calculate the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the focal variables. As shown in Table 2, threat of AI was significantly negatively correlated with growth mindset ($r = -0.131$, $p < .05$); growth mindset was significantly positively correlated with job burnout ($r = 0.473$, $p < .001$); and avoidance job crafting was significantly negatively correlated with job burnout ($r = -0.439$, $p < .001$). These results provide preliminary support for the hypothesis testing of this study.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Threat of AI	-0.825			
2.Growth mindset	-.131*	-0.723		
3. Avoidance job crafting	.180**	0.027	-0.863	
4. Job burnout	.477**	-0.129	.436**	-0.900
M	3.0395	4.1425	3.1391	3.0482
SD	0.9137	0.4568	0.9743	0.6506

Note: ***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05, unless otherwise indicated; values in parentheses are Cronbach's α coefficients.

4.4. Hypothesis testing

4.4.1. Test of the interaction effect

The interaction effect was tested in SPSS 27.0. Table 3 shows that the interaction between the threat of AI and growth mindset was negatively associated with avoidance job crafting (Model 3: $\beta = -1.81$, $p < .05$), which supports H2.

Table 3. Correlation analysis

Variable	Avoidance job crafting		
	M1	M2	M3
Gender	-0.189***	-0.192***	-0.182***
Age group	0.038	0.04	0.044
Highest education level	-0.183***	-0.164**	-0.131*
Job type	-0.117*	-0.102**	-0.094
Monthly income range	0.021	0.015	-0.005
Years of work	-0.092	-0.076	-0.066

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Table 3. (continued)

Threats of AI		0.187***	1.981**
Growth mindset		0.078	0.641**
Threats of AI × Growth mindset			-1.81**
R^2	0.082	0.118	0.138
ΔR^2	0.057	0.086	0,103
F	3.277	3.660	3.889

To make the interaction easier to see, we tested the simple slopes one standard deviation above and below the mean of the threat of AI. Figure 2 shows that when the threat of AI was high (M + 1 SD), the association between growth mindset and avoidance job crafting did not reach significance, supporting H2a, whereas when the threat of AI was low (M − 1 SD), growth mindset carried a significant negative association with avoidance job crafting, supporting H2b.

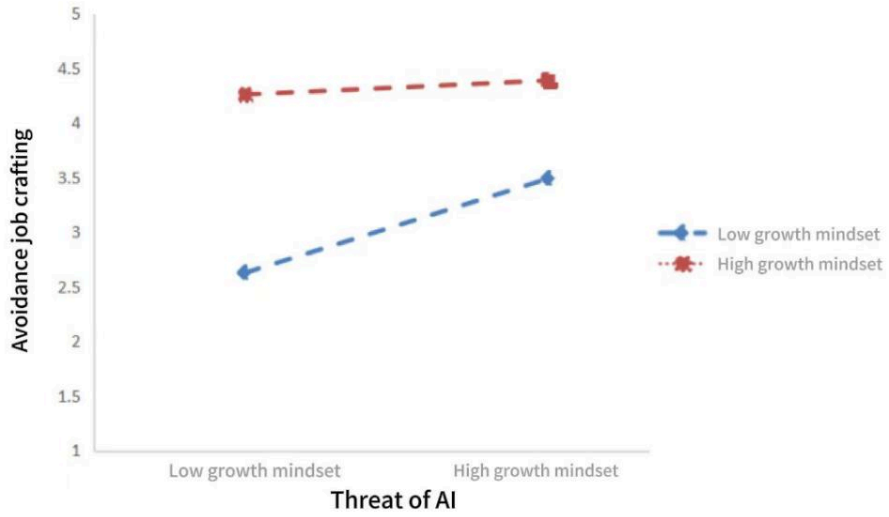


Figure 2. : Simple slope test

4.4.2. Test of the direct effect and moderated mediation effect

The direct effect and the moderated mediation effect were tested in SPSS 27.0. Table 4 shows that avoidance job crafting was positively associated with job burnout (Model 5: $\beta = 0.497$, $p < .001$), supporting H3.

Table 4 shows that the interaction between the threat of AI and growth mindset significantly affected avoidance job crafting. Model 6 then added the threat of AI, growth mindset, and their interaction term on top of Model 4; after the main effects of the threat of AI and growth mindset were controlled, their interaction carried a significant negative effect on job burnout (Model 6: $\beta = -0.535$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. Model 7 went one step further and added avoidance job crafting on top of Model 6, and there avoidance job crafting had a significant positive effect on job burnout (Model 7: $\beta = 0.427$, $p < .001$), supporting H4.

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Table 4. Test of the direct effect and moderated mediation effect

Variable	Job burnout			
	M4	M5	M6	M7
Gender	-0.081	0.004	-0.074	0.005
Age group	-0.072	-0.065	-0.018	-0.015
Highest education level	-0.058	0.019	-0.026	0.03
Job type	0.023	0.064	-0.003	0.024
Monthly income range	0.1	0.095	0.195***	0.195***
Years of work	-0.198**	-0.161**	-0.141**	-0.118**
Avoidance job crafting		0.497***		0.427***
Threat of AI			0.438***	0.335***
Growth mindset			0.259***	0.246***
Threat of AI × Growth mindset			-0.535***	-0.562***
R^2	0.052	0.283	0.469	0.629
ΔR^2	0.027	0.261	0.447	0.612
F	2.057	12.644	21.765	37.394

The moderated mediation effect was also tested with the PROCESS macro (Version 4.2), using 5,000 bootstrap resamples presents in Table 5. When growth mindset was high, the indirect effect of the threat of AI on job burnout through avoidance job crafting was not significant (β = 0.0236, 95% CI = [-0.0317, 0.0909], including zero); when growth mindset was low, that indirect effect turned significant (β = 0.1606, 95% CI = [0.0945, 0.2379], excluding zero); and the difference in the indirect effect between high and low growth mindset was itself significant (β = -0.137, 95% CI = [-0.2416, -0.0414], excluding zero). This gives H4 further support.

Table 5. Mediation effect

Effect Type		Effect	SE	95%CI
Threat of AI × Growth mindset → Avoidance job crafting → Job burnout	High growth mindset (M + 1 SD)	0.0236	0.0313	[-0.0317, 0.0909]
	Low growth mindset (M-1SD)	0.1606	0.0365	[0.0945, 0.2379]
	High-Low	-0.137	0.0504	[-0.2416, -0.0414]

5. Conclusion

Our results bear out the relationships proposed among the threat of AI, growth mindset, avoidance job crafting, and job burnout. The interaction between the threat of AI and growth mindset was negatively tied to both job burnout and avoidance job crafting, while avoidance job crafting was positively tied to job burnout, and its indirect effect showed up when growth mindset was low and disappeared when it was high. Together these results offer support for the moderated mediation model we proposed.

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5.1. Theoretical contributions

The findings carry two implications for theory.

The findings identify growth mindset as a moderator in the relationship between threat of AI and job burnout, adding an internal psychological factor to a literature that has focused largely on organizational practices and leadership [5, 6], self-efficacy [7], and organizational self-esteem [8]. They also carry growth mindset research, much of which has been done in classrooms [10], over into how employees react to AI-driven technological change. Growth mindset, it turns out, matters for how employees appraise a threat and how they respond emotionally, and this widens the reach of implicit theory in organizational management.

The results also place avoidance job crafting on the map as a behavioral route that connects the threat of AI to job burnout. Earlier studies looked mainly at the direct links between the threat of AI and employees' psychological states and work behavior [5, 16], paying less attention to the behaviors in between. What we find is that employees tend to answer AI-related pressure by shrinking their work roles and doing less in their tasks, and that this response cuts off their access to skill development, social support, and a sense of accomplishment, all things employees need to hold on to as resources. This pattern lines up with worries about the consequences of avoidance job crafting [14], and it suggests that conservation of resources theory can help make sense of how employees respond to AI-related pressure.

5.2. Managerial implications

When organizations bring in AI, they can shore up employees' belief that their skills can grow by giving them real chances to learn and to build AI-related capabilities. A growth mindset, then, should show up in training and development, not just sit there as a filter for choosing talent.

Managers can also keep an eye out for signs of avoidance job crafting, such as repeated pullback from tasks, pushing responsibilities onto colleagues, or quietly disengaging. Regular conversations about workload and about what employees are worried about can help sort out what is driving these behaviors and whether the answer lies in more support, a better-designed task, or extra training.

Support ought to continue all the way through an AI rollout. Because employees' concerns can touch on job security, skills, and professional identity, organizations can keep channels open for questions and feedback and keep watch on how employees are adjusting, and where burnout starts to show, more targeted support makes sense.

5.3. Research limitations and future research directions

These findings need to be read against two limitations.

The cross-sectional design is one of them: all variables were measured at a single point in time. The hypotheses lay out a proposed direction of association, but these data cannot pin down causal relationships among the threat of AI, avoidance job crafting, and job burnout. Future work could gather data at several points in time, measuring the predictors, the mediators, and the outcomes separately, so that the proposed sequence can be tested more rigorously.

The other limitation is that every measure came from employees' own reports. The confirmatory factor analysis and Harman's single-factor test do speak to the measurement structure and to common method bias, but they cannot rule out subjective or recall bias, and employees may be reluctant to admit to avoidance job crafting because it looks like a negative behavior. Future research

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could pair employees' responses with supervisor ratings or objective performance indicators, so that these relationships are examined through more than one source.

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