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# Working in the digital era: Industrial/organisational psychologists' perspectives on generative artificial intelligence

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## Declaration

I, Rebecca Matisonn, declare that this research project (MAORG-24-04) is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for this or any other degree or for examination at this or any other university.

Signature:

Date: 29th June 2025

## Abstract

The rapid advancement of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) is transforming workplace practices across industries, including the field of Industrial/Organisational Psychology (IOP). This study explored awareness of, experiences with, and perceived benefits and limitations of GAI among registered Industrial/Organisational psychologists (IOPs) in South Africa. Additionally, it examined their opinions on how GAI will reshape the nature of their daily work and the broader IOP profession. A qualitative research design was employed, utilising reflexive thematic analysis to analyse the data collected through semi-structured online interviews with a purposive sample of nine registered South African IOPs. The sampling strategy used in this study was a non-probability, purposive, and convenience sampling strategy, incorporating volunteer and snowball sampling. The study's design enabled an in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives on the evolving role of GAI in their profession.

The data was analysed using Clarke & Braun's (2017) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis, which included engagement with the data, coding, theme generation, and refinement. Five key themes related to the research questions were identified: GAI usage, GAI perceptions, GAI benefits, GAI limitations, and the future of GAI for IOPs. The findings suggest that while the participants recognised the potential benefits of GAI in enhancing efficiency and streamlining tasks, they also expressed concerns about ethical implications, skills displacement, and the need for professional oversight. They emphasised the importance of balancing GAI integration with human expertise to maintain the profession's integrity. They also highlighted the necessity of developing structured guidelines and training programmes to equip IOPs with the skills required to effectively integrate GAI into their professional practices while maintaining ethical standards. Through this, they felt that IOPs will be able to play an integral role in allowing GAI to be embraced in the workplace while still keeping human employees at the forefront. The study's findings contribute to the emerging discourse on the intersection of artificial intelligence and professional psychology, offering implications for training, policy development, and the future of work in the field of IOP.


**Keywords**: Generative artificial intelligence, Industrial/Organisational psychologists, GAI-related benefits, GAI-related limitations, GAI-related knowledge, acceptance of technology

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Background

In a world undergoing rapid technological advancement, artificial intelligence (AI) has become a driving force of transformation across institutions and organisations (Gado et al., 2022). One of the most transformative advancements within the field of artificial intelligence is generative artificial intelligence (GAI), a subset of AI designed to create new content, solve problems, and assist in decision-making (Ooi et al., 2023). Examples of GAI include widely known platforms such as ChatGPT, Copilot, Bard, Jasper, and Claude, which are revolutionising workplace processes by facilitating content creation, streamlining information processing, and enhancing productivity (Budhwar et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023). GAI is distinct from other AI domains, such as robotics, because of its ability to adapt to and generate human-like outputs, making it a dominant force in reshaping workplace operations and skill requirements (Budhwar et al., 2023). This is particularly evident in professional fields such as human resource management and industrial/organisational psychology, where GAI has begun to influence core functions such as employee recruitment, diversity initiatives, and employee support systems (Budhwar et al., 2023; Daugherty et al., 2019).

As an example of this, GAI-powered tools are being integrated into recruitment processes, automated curriculum vitae (CV) and resume screening, and candidate matching through generative algorithms applied to platforms like LinkedIn (Pan et al., 2022). In addition, registered Industrial/Organisational psychologists (IOPs) may increasingly use GAI tools to facilitate workplace diversity through advanced data analysis or implement AI-driven systems for employee counselling and mental health support (Budhwar et al., 2023). As GAI transforms these practices, it also redefines the roles and skills required of IOPs in the digital age (Budhwar et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023). IOPs will need to develop a nuanced understanding of how to harness GAI technologies effectively while addressing ethical considerations, fostering inclusivity, and balancing the human-centred elements of their work with AI-driven innovations. This transition signals a significant shift in how IOPs will function, both in their job roles and in their broader contributions to organisational development (Budhwar et al., 2023).

**Rationale and problem statement**

While GAI offers significant potential to enhance workplace processes, it also brings complex challenges, particularly for IOPs (Budhwar et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023). The integration of GAI into the workplace has the potential to redefine traditional IOP roles, introducing both benefits and limitations. For example, GAI may improve efficiency and reduce administrative burdens, but it may also lead to skills displacement or raise ethical concerns about equity and data privacy (Brown et al., 2024; Budhwar et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023).

This topic is especially relevant in South Africa, a country with unique socioeconomic dynamics that shape the workplace (Van Zyl, 2024). The adoption of GAI could exacerbate existing inequalities due to disparities in technology access, digital literacy, and training opportunities (Chetty et al., 2023). These challenges highlight the critical role of IOPs in managing organisational change and ensuring that employees, regardless of background, can navigate the transition to digital systems effectively (Budhwar et al., 2023; Daugherty et al., 2019). In the South African context, IOPs face the dual responsibility of adapting to GAI-driven changes within their own profession while also guiding organisations and employees through these transitions. This will require IOPs to develop expertise in leveraging GAI tools while addressing the challenges posed by inequality, limited resources, and organisational resistance to change (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022).

Despite the growing importance of GAI in shaping the future of work, there is a dearth of research examining its specific impact on the roles, skills, and practices of IOPs, both globally and within South Africa. Current studies primarily focus on general workplace implications, leaving a critical gap in understanding how IOPs perceive and respond to the emerging opportunities and challenges of GAI. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by exploring IOPs' perceptions of how GAI will influence their profession and the broader workplace. It will examine how IOPs perceive the advantages and disadvantages of GAI adoption as well as how GAI may reshape IOP job roles, required skill sets, and approaches to their work. The findings will contribute to the limited body of knowledge on this topic, offering valuable insights into how GAI can be integrated into IOP practices and providing a basis for developing guidance for GAI-related training and development strategies for IOPs in South Africa.

By addressing these questions, this research seeks to bridge the gap between emerging technologies and human-centred organisational practices, ensuring that IOPs remain integral to fostering sustainable, inclusive, and innovative workplaces in the digital age.

## Aim

The aim of the study was to explore the participants' awareness of generative artificial intelligence (GAI), experiences with GAI, and perceived benefits and limitations of GAI, as well as their opinions of how GAI will change the nature of daily Industrial/Organisational Psychology (IOP) work and the IOP profession, in a sample of registered Industrial/Organisational psychologists (IOPs) working in South Africa.

## Research Questions

The main research question for the study was:

What are IOPs' perceptions of how GAI will change the nature of their work and the IOP profession?

The sub-questions for this study were:

1. What are IOPs' levels of knowledge about and experiences with using GAI for their work?
2. What are the IOPs' perceived benefits and limitations of using GAI as part of their work?
3. How do IOPs perceive GAI will change IOP as a profession?

## Report Structure

The first chapter has presented a brief background for the study, the rationale and problem statement for the study, the aim and research questions for the study, and a summary of the structure of the report. The second chapter will present the literature review, which will explain what GAI is, how this may affect IOP's daily work and roles, and the theories and research available for understanding acceptance of GAI. How the work that IOPs do and GAI may relate to one another will also be further elaborated on based on previously existing literature. The third chapter will present the study's methodology, and will explain the research

design, sample and sampling strategies, data collection, ethical practices, and analysis of the data used in the study. The fourth chapter will present the findings from the thematic analysis, and the fifth chapter will discuss these findings and place them in the context of the research questions and previous literature. The final chapter will discuss the study's conclusions, strengths and limitations, and directions for future research.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (GAI) is dominating the workforce and is forcing the workplace to transition into the digital era and the fourth industrial revolution (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). Industrial/Organisational psychologists (IOPs) are no exception to this transition. IOPs need to be able to not only adapt to their own job roles and job skills but also to assist in transitioning employees into this digital era (Budhwar et al., 2023; Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022). How these transitions will occur is an important issue to consider when understanding GAI in the workplace. Each core role of an IOP will be affected by GAI in one way or another. This could be in the form of a minor technical change, or it could be transformed entirely (Budhwar et al., 2023). This study aims to explore the perspectives of a sample of working IOPs regarding their awareness of, experiences with, and perceived benefits and limitations of GAI, as well as their opinions of how GAI will change the nature of their work and the IOP profession. This chapter will present background literature relevant to GAI, IOP work, and IOP work in the context of GAI. It will summarise the main themes that will be explored throughout the study and will bring these together to support the research questions developed for the study.

## Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI)

Generative artificial intelligence (GAI) is an emerging technology that is changing the job market and job roles across the globe (Ooi et al., 2023). GAI can be defined as the utilisation of "machine learning, neural networks, and other techniques to generate new content (e.g. text, images, music) by analysing patterns and information from the training data" (Ooi et al., 2023, p.1). In other words, GAI is a combination of machine learning (ML) models that lead to the generation of new or novel content such as images, software simulations and codes, audio material, and text (Budhwar et al., 2023). This is based on significant datasets used to train these models to generate this output, drawn from the internet and other suitable information databases (Budhwar et al., 2023).

GAI can create novel images, texts, audio, and many other forms of media as it is an AI system that generates new content based on data that the software has been previously trained on (Chen et al., 2024; Sengar et al., 2024). GAI therefore gathers data that is already available from a wide range of sources and combines this into what the user is seeking (Sengar

et al., 2024). It is therefore very important that the source data for GAI is rich and accurate in order for this software to be most effective and trustworthy (Patil et al., 2024; Sengar et al., 2024). Various forms occur in GAI technology, including Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) and Transformer-based Models (TRMs), amongst others (Chen et al., 2024; Sengar et al., 2024). There are also many platforms that are emerging for general users to utilise this technology, such as ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, Jasper, Claude, and DALL-E. GAI-based technology is assisting many professions in accuracy, efficiency, and productivity by helping with report-writing, data analysis, personalisation, automation of tasks, and planning and evaluation (Budhwar et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023; Patil et al., 2024; Sengar et al., 2024).

As a result of the development and availability of GAI, the economy and jobs are not only changing, but levels of redundancy are rising (Budhwar et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023). Manyika and Sneader (2018) predicted that 800 million jobs could be displaced by broad artificial intelligence (AI) by the year 2023. Since the rise of various forms of GAI, such as constantly improved versions of ChatGPT, this figure is currently on the rise (Ooi et al., 2023). Unemployment and job redundancies are thus a huge concern associated with the implementation of GAI (Budhwar et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023). Cardon et al. (2023) looked at attitudes toward artificial intelligence (AI) and GAI and the level of redundancy. 52% of participants believed AI would replace more jobs than it would create, 46% felt that AI would do more good compared to harm, and those participants who were ChatGPT users were three times more likely to see GAI in a positive light (Cardon et al., 2023).

There are also ethical and practical concerns about the use of GAI, including its potential to generate false information, possible bias, and copyright and ownership of the material generated (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chenneville et al., 2024; Ooi et al., 2023). However, GAI does not only come with downfalls but also large possible advantages. GAI is creating a new job market and making significantly time-consuming tasks much simpler (Ooi et al., 2023). It is seen as a way in which to increase productivity, save time, and reduce operational costs (Budhwar et al., 2023). Hatzius et al. (2023) suggest that in the United States, GAI is likely to increase productivity in the workplace by just under one and a half percentage points in ten years through a widespread adoption of the technology, as well as increase annual global GDP (gross domestic product) by approximately seven percent.

Generative artificial intelligence (GAI) is therefore currently gaining prominence in the world of work and is leading the workplace transition into the digital era and the fourth industrial revolution (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). Highly available and

accessible real-time information can be extremely beneficial but can be accompanied by many worries and concerns for those unable to use this to their advantage (Brown et al., 2024). Industrial/ Organisational psychologists (IOPs) are no exception to this transition. IOPs need to be able to not only adapt their own job roles and job skills to accommodate GAI but will also need to assist in transitioning employees and organisations into this digital era (Budhwar et al., 2023; Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022).

**The work of IOPs**

According to the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2011), when an IOP is in training they need to develop certain skills that will allow them to carry out the roles and responsibilities expected of them in the workplace (Health Professions Act of 1974, 2011). These roles include: training and development; recruitment and selection; organisational development through culture; leadership and growth; and designing individual, group, and organisational performance to achieve the optimal outcome for the organisation (Health Professions Act of 1974, 2011). IOPs also need to take care of employee wellbeing; job and employee effectiveness; and designing and implementing interventions if needed on an organisational, group, and individual level (Health Professions Act of 1974, 2011). Counselling and coaching are also crucial roles of an IOP which can be in the form of consulting or in-house practice (Health Professions Act of 1974, 2011). Engineering and human factors psychology is another important element of the IOP field. This focuses on the relationship between the human and the system or the human and the machine (Gopher & Kimchi, 1989). This can be done through ergonomics, system and office setups, and using cognition as a tool for effective functioning (Gopher & Kimchi, 1989). This is becoming more prevalent as the world progresses into the fourth industrial revolution. Once registered, IOPs also conduct psychometric testing which can be used in various ways such as during hiring and placement processes (Health Professions Act of 1974, 2011). IOPs are also vital in organisational research which may lead to improving or assisting the organisation to generate more profit and keeping up with modern-day needs (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2019). IOPs also use psychological theory in the workplace context to assist in improving productivity, job satisfaction, and overall organisational success (Health Professions Act of 1974, 2011). They assist employees in the innovation and creativity process, which is a job role that needs to be constantly up-to-date and in tune with the latest technological advancements to be successful (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022). IOPs also ensure that people in the organisation are taken care

of and view the employees as the greatest asset to any organisation or system (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2019). It is thus clear that IOPs can take on a range of unique roles and responsibilities in any organisation and they need to hold a wide range of skills in order to be able to do this effectively (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022).

**IOPs' transition into the digital era**

As the world moves into the digital era and the fourth industrial revolution, IOPs need to adapt and transition to ensure their role is being utilised to the utmost effect as well as to be able to help employees most effectively (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022). IOPs need to make the appropriate shift in mindset to transition into the digital era and also need take their organisation along with them (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). It is proposed that an IOP's job role will now include specific research and implementation of how to integrate people and technology, including in their own work (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). IOPs will also need to work with organisations to train employees to use GAI mindfully, while still having individual tasks that stimulate and challenge (Liu et al., 2025). This will involve blending GAI and human capabilities, which IOPs will need to train, structure, and manage (Liu et al., 2025).

Oosthuizen (2022) unpacks the ideas of STARA- smart technology, artificial intelligence (which includes GAI), robotics, and algorithms and argues that these will play a vital role in changing the skills needed for psychometrics, recruitment and hiring, training and development, and increasing performance as well as other elements of the IOP role (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). IOPs' skills will need to include implementing interventions for digital dexterity among organisational leaders (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022). This means that IOPs themselves will need to understand and familiarise themselves with STARA technology, including GAI. IOPs will need to create, include, and facilitate the use of tools that will help leaders to make the most effective use of technology, including GAI (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022). Changes will also need to occur to move various processes, products, and skills to the virtual environment, for example, virtual change management tools and virtual counselling and coaching (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022). A vital emerging skillset for IOPs is thus digital and STARA know-how, which will play a key role in transitioning into the digital era (Oosthuizen, 2019; 2022). Grappling with the roles and possible contributions

of AI, and specifically GAI, will form a large part of developing this digital know-how, including in IOP work.

IOPs have a hand in managing team dynamics in organisations which create different cultures, workspaces, and organisational design. Brown et al. (2024) discuss using GAI as a team member in the workplace, with IOPs responsible for suggesting ways in which to make this as effective as possible. Brown et al. (2024) also argue that GAI should be incorporated into organisational designs and structures and integrated with human performance; and pose the question of how this can be done in a way that is both powerful and ethical. IOPs will not only need to ensure basic professional ethics but also ensure accessibility and professionalism (Brown et al., 2024; Chenneville et al., 2024).

**IOP work and GAI**

While all STARA elements will have an important impact on work, GAI is especially prominent because of accessibility and the capabilities that it has. GAI may be beneficial for IOP work in many ways, but some elements may be unhelpful or problematic. There is also a worry that GAI may replace IOPs altogether in certain cases. Each role an IOP may hold in an organisation may therefore be impacted by GAI positively or negatively, or in both ways. One of the aims of this study was to explore the perceived positives and negatives of GAI in IOP work from the perspectives of practising IOPs themselves.

Counselling and coaching in the workplace are vital to the IOP job role and are skills that IOPs need (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). One way in which GAI may change this role is through the creation of GAI-driven chatbots, for example, a mental health Woebot like Tess (Oosthuizen, 2022). This technology aims to coach people to gain resilience through communication and talking, just like having a real-life coach or friends (Gower, 2018). It provides a conversation tool to employees which serves as a form of therapy that has been shown to lower levels of depression in the workplace (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). This form of technology will assist IOPs as it can start the counselling process virtually and the IOP will then be able to see if further sessions are needed (Oosthuizen, 2022). This is more cost-effective and can be used on a greater scale because there is no need for an increase in manpower for this to be effective (Gower, 2018). Another struggle in the mental health sphere is finding ways that allow the population to engage with mental health tools and therapy (Habicht et al., 2024; Henson et al., 2019). GAI can help in this aspect because having a GAI-controlled chatbot

allows for 24/7 access and makes mental health tools more accessible by allowing people to engage from their smart devices and a wide range of locations (Henson et al., 2019; Tang & Kreindler, 2017). The ability to access support outside of the office environment may help to address potential privacy concerns and increase general comfort (Henson et al., 2019).

In a study conducted by Habicht et al. (2024), the results showed that AI tools and apps helped improve clinical outcomes in the mental health sphere. This could therefore be a major breakthrough in the IOP counselling role as deeper issues employees are having can be referred and assistance can be provided more efficiently. This could also be a help when collecting mental health data in the workplace because one has digital access to the data which could potentially assist in designing organisational policies related to mental health and employee well-being (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024). In virtual therapy sessions, GAI can help to create virtual therapy assistants which can create personalised psychological interventions (Chen et al., 2024). GAI in this context can be used as a tool to improve patients' mental health (Chen et al., 2024). Incorporating GAI into the counselling role may therefore increase accessibility to mental health tools and identify new ways to increase wellbeing and productivity and improve overall job and employee satisfaction in the workplace (Budhwar et al., 2023; Fitzpatrick et al., 2017; Gower, 2018; Oosthuizen, 2022). However, people may not trust or may resist the technology, may feel they need a personal touch, and may not want to disclose sensitive issues to an impersonal machine (Gower, 2018; Oosthuizen, 2022).

Recruitment and selection are another main feature of IOP work (Health Professions Act of 1974, 2011). There are several elements that can change and arguably improve the recruitment process because of GAI (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). Rathnayake and Gunawardana (2023) indicate that automated candidate screening not only saves time and money but also ensures a fair recruitment process. The screening programme is designed to filter out candidates based on suitability and not to discriminate based on race, gender, or religion which a human may have preconceived biases about. The downside to this is that a candidate can be missed if certain words or phrases are missing from an application but overall, this is likely to improve efficacy in the selection process (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). GAI can also assist organisations to develop more detailed and appealing job descriptions that attract high-quality applicants and thus improve recruitment practices (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). GAI can also generate predictive analytics and hiring data that will help organisations to predict if and when recruitment of new staff is needed and likely candidate

success based on qualifications, skills, and personality traits (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023).

Trupulse (2023) unpacks how GAI will change the recruitment role of an IOP. For example, a virtual assistant could be available at any point in the process to make people feel more connected to the organisation and to help improve their candidate experience. This could pose a threat to the IOP role as there are many recruitment steps that can be fully replaced by GAI tools and virtual assistants. On the other hand, a lack of personalisation could be a hindrance to a recruitment process. There could also be misunderstandings because of the system's programming and complexity, and there may be high costs involved with maintenance. Trupulse (2023) further states that employee resistance will inevitably occur, especially if their job is beginning to feel redundant. Organisations and IOPs need to find the balance that will allow employees to use GAI effectively and willingly, and resources will need to be invested into training employees to embrace GAI.

GAI in the recruitment process may therefore reduce or eliminate biases, increase productivity, and may be more time effective (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023; Trupulse, 2023). However, there may still need to be IOPs monitoring the process and ensuring the process is ethical and successful, and the extent to which human intervention in and oversight of the process will still be needed is an open debate (Trupulse, 2023). GAI in the human resource sector and for recruitment and selection may lead to a more efficient 'onboarding' process as well as more effective candidate screening (Patil et al., 2024). However, concerns about bias and breaches in data privacy could be a factor leading to HR companies or professionals resisting this change (Patil et al., 2024).

Training and development is vital for the success of any organisation. This is a key role that an IOP needs to grow, enhance, and maintain to ensure organisational success, productivity, and efficiency. GAI could assist with creating more effective training through introducing a personalised element because employees often need and benefit from different methods of training (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). GAI could also assist in analysing employee data on training history as well as assessing individual strengths and weaknesses (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). With this, GAI's personalisation of training could also incorporate employees' career growth which will enhance employee satisfaction and be more effective overall (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). Organisations could further benefit from this because it may reduce costs through incorporating digital simulations (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). Rathnayake and Gunawardana (2023) suggest that one of the greatest

advantages GAI could give to an IOP for training is ensuring objectivity. Using the technology, the figures and data will help to ensure that the right resource allocations are given to the right people and not based on friendships or favourites. This will not only improve the role of an IOP but also significantly improve the culture in organisations because of the fairness and equality employees crave. Feedback can also be customised per employee and per department and better predictive performance can help the organisation to identify and predict who will be a risk and who will be a success which helps to smooth out the process (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023).

GAI can also help IOPs to draft performance appraisals which is a key IOP job role (Schmidt, 2023). Schmidt (2023) asked the free version of ChatGPT various questions to see if it understood what an IOP does, how it could help, and if it gave better responses than humans. One task was that ChatGPT was asked to draft a performance appraisal. Whilst the response was acceptable and adequate, Schmidt (2023) found that ChatGPT was better as an assistant to an IOP and not as a replacement. However, using ChatGPT and other forms of GAI may save time with drafting appraisals and compiling information (Schmidt, 2023). Liu et al. (2025) found that performance reviews that GAI assisted in drafting were more analytical, longer, and more detailed as well as generated in a more helpful tone. The GAI also used warmer and more empathetic language, which shows how GAI can help IOPs to create a more engaging performance structure and appraisal system (Liu et al., 2025).

Research is another key job role for an IOP, and GAI's capacity to summarise large amounts of previous research and synthesise previous findings will inevitably change the face of research (Budhwar et al., 2023; TTS Talent, 2023). While GAI may increase research productivity, there may also be ethical issues with using GAI for research purposes, including needing to evaluate whether the information generated is accurate (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chenneville et al., 2024; TTS Talent, 2023). Report writing with GAI could save time and energy when generating ideas and structures, but there are issues when it comes to originality (Budhwar et al., 2023).

Ensuring justice and equality for the people of an organisation is vital to the IOP job role (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). GAI may be able to assist IOPs to create equity and fairness in an organisation because it supports more objective analysis and distribution of resources (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). For example, GAI could be used to create an automated system to equalise pay throughout the organisation, which can increase job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation (Budhwar et al., 2023). However, both the

IOP and those employed in the organisation to implement the system will need to perceive its usefulness and must believe that it will be easy to use and will make their job more productive for it to be effective.

Once registered with the HPCSA, IOPs also take on the role of conducting psychometric testing in the workplace. Psychometric testing is used to assess a person's skills, compatibility with an organisation or team, job promotion prospects, and recruitment potential (Jenkins, 2001). Since psychometrics are so precise and complex, GAI can assist in improving the validity and reliability of the test which will allow IOPs to work more accurately and reliably (Pellert et al., 2023). GAI has also been used to confirm that tests are successful which could allow for further tests to emerge and to be used for more specific purposes and organisations (Pellert et al., 2023). GAI can be used as an assistant to an IOP which ultimately will create successful decisions for organisations. Tests can also be used to assess training and growth needs therefore if tests are enhanced by AI, growth and training enhancement should follow (Jenkins, 2001; Pellert et al., 2023). Although there are advantages, there are also concerns with using GAI for testing. GAI can hallucinate or misunderstand the input, prompt, or data which can limit test results and reports (Chen et al., 2024). The interpretation of psychometric tests requires qualitative as well as quantitative insights and the ability to integrate individual observations and circumstances that GAI may not be able to capture (Pellert et al., 2023). The interpretations may be quite shallow and not sufficiently detailed to distinguish the best candidates which can be limiting and decrease the effectiveness of this process (Pellert et al., 2023).

GAI is advancing the effects of research accuracy (Chen et al., 2024). As technology develops, large text datasets can be sorted and labelled more quickly, which will not only save time and money for researchers, but which may also expose behavioural tendencies and emotional patterns (Chen et al., 2024). GAI personalised research tools can create tailored assessment questionnaires that increase the accuracy and engagement of psychological testing (Chen et al., 2024). Additionally, AI-driven predictive models can significantly enhance data processing capabilities by analysing large datasets to accurately forecast behavioural patterns and mental health concerns (Chen et al., 2024; Sai et al., 2024). However, there are limitations and biases that GAI can have that can be translated into test and research results (Chen et al., 2024). The training data in GAI systems can have inherent biases which can pose challenges in the analysis output (Chen et al., 2024). Privacy and confidentiality concerns need to be taken into consideration, especially when dealing with psychological data and information (Chen et

al., 2024). Therefore, GAI practices need to focus on ethical and privacy concerns and compliance when being used in a psychological or psychometric context (Chen et al., 2024; Chenneville et al., 2024).

Leadership growth and development are another vital aspect of any organisation. The role of an IOP is to foster this growth and to ensure that the team and leader are satisfied. In a study conducted by Shields (2024) on how GAI will alter leadership styles, the results showed that leadership styles for C-level managers are only likely to be fostered by this change and not altered as technology becomes more part of their daily role (Shields, 2024). It will be the role of IOPs to train these leaders and ensure they have the confidence to implement GAI within their individual teams and levels. GAI will bring "evolution" and not "revolution", which is ideal for an IOP (Shields, 2024, p. 42). The most important role of a leader is to connect with people and their team, instil inspiration, and to guide and motivate (Shields, 2024). This can remain in the hands of the human but GAI can be used to assist and foster this role for a leader.

The possibility of using GAI has also sparked the interest of human resources (HR) professionals, which has generated AI engagement (Bedard et al., 2024). Self-service in the HR world has become more common, which is likely to change the way IOPs will need to carry out and manage certain HR-related tasks and functions that fall within their role (Bedard et al., 2024). For example, employees can now have a more personalised HR experience using GAI in the form of individualised onboarding, alerting disengaged teammates, or personalising high-performance culture for each team (Bedard et al., 2024). Employee experiences are also changing because GAI is freeing up time for IOPs and HR professionals to connect, engage, and interact with people, leading to higher levels of satisfaction (Bedard et al., 2024).

There are clearly advantages and disadvantages that follow from using GAI in IOP work. TTS Talent (2023) indicate that three ways in which GAI will change IOP work are: more efficient knowledge management, better collaboration and communication, and more personalised assistance. Van Zyl (2024) also indicates that using GAI in an IOP context will enhance organisational performance, improve employee and customer experiences, and drive better decision-making. Trupulse (2023) lists advantages and disadvantages of GAI in IOP work but emphasises that in all the roles GAI will play, it is the way GAI is used that will really determine if it will help or hinder the IOP profession. According to Trupulse (2023), productivity and efficiency can be enhanced by GAI and GAI is available all hours of the day and whenever it is needed. These are big advantages that show the possible benefits of GAI for IOPs. However redundancy may be problematic for the IOP job role if GAI is adopted

(Budhwar et al., 2023). IOPs will also need to be careful to not become over-reliant on GAI, which could affect their personal skills badly (TTS Talent, 2023). Liu et al. (2025) highlight that as GAI productivity grows, human motivation can decrease and an employee's sense of control can diminish which is vital for high levels of intrinsic motivation (Liu et al., 2025). Overreliance on GAI may also impact psychological safety and well-being in the workplace (Liu et al., 2025). IOPs therefore need to find a way to balance the efficacy of GAI with employee autonomy and to find ways to create a harmonious balance for employees (Liu et al., 2025). One can argue that there needs to be collaboration between IOPs and GAI and that IOPs should not fear GAI or AI in general but should rather embrace it as a value-adder and favour the benefits (Van Zyl, 2024).

Although there are many possibilities for the ways in which GAI may become a part of and change IOP work, there seems to be very little published research available yet that explores specific applications of GAI to IOP work or how IOPs feel about using GAI, including in South Africa.

**Acceptance of GAI**

IOPs working in the digital era will need to both navigate the role of GAI in their own daily work and identify ways in which to help organisations and individual employees with this (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022). The extent to which IOPs embrace or reject GAI as a possible part of their work will depend on their level of acceptance of GAI as a technology.

Davis (1985, 1989) created a model to unpack users' acceptance and rejection of technology, which is known as the Technology Acceptance Model. This model shows that people will choose to use or not use technology based on its perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness (Davis, 1985). Perceived ease of use is the extent to which a technology or system will lack physical, mental, or psychological effort when utilising the system (Davis, 1985). Perceived usefulness is the extent to which using the technology or system is thought to increase productivity and positively assist job performance (Davis, 1985). Ease of use has a big impact on usefulness - should an employee believe that a system increases effectiveness once it is used, it will actually become more useful (Davis, 1985). This may be seen with GAI in the workplace, where the more individuals understand GAI and how to use it in an effective way, the more its use may increase.

The Universal Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) is an extension of the Technology Acceptance Model and combined various constructs from this and other models to understand acceptance of technology on a deeper level (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Performance expectancy, social influence, and effort expectancy are the main factors in this model that impact acceptance (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Performance expectancy can be compared to perceived usefulness in the previous model (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Social influences are the perceived norms that occur, and effort expectancy is the extent of ease of use in the system (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Facilitating conditions are also a key variable to consider (Venkatesh et al., 2003). This is the belief that the technology and the organisation assist in supporting the use of the system in place, thereby enabling its use (Venkatesh et al., 2003). User demographics also play a role in understanding how or when individuals accept technology, including gender, age, experience, and voluntariness of use (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Gado et al. (2022) used these models to understand how AI can be accepted. Their model included perceived social norms, perceived knowledge on AI, perceived ease of use, attitudes towards AI, perceived usefulness, and intention to use AI. Their findings indicated that perceived usefulness and ease of use were important predictors of attitude towards AI, while attitude towards AI, perceived usefulness, perceived social norms, and perceived knowledge on AI were important predictors of intention to use AI (Gado et al., 2022). These models suggest that there are a range of factors that may affect an individual's acceptance and use of GAI as a technology, including: perceptions of how useful GAI is; how much work will be involved in using GAI; the degree to which others encourage or discourage use of GAI; the degree to which infrastructure to support the use of GAI is available; the perceived characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages of GAI; the extent to which GAI adoption is perceived as voluntary; individual characteristics such as age, gender, creativity, and experience; and organisational and cultural influences, including the perceived ethics of using GAI (Budhwar et al., 2023; Gado et al., 2022).

Rane (2023) conducted a study to understand the balance HR managers need between GAI and human intervention. This research argues that human touch is still essential for effective employee management and success (Rane, 2023). ChatGPT and other GAI platforms can enhance the HR world, which in turn may enhance the IOP role, if these professionals can strike a balance between the technology and human ability (Rane, 2023). Aguinis et al. (2024) look at how GAI can be used as an HR assistant which is a big part of the future of the IOP and

GAI profession. This study shows how human interaction and the need for this cannot be eradicated but rather can become more efficient through the integration of GAI (Aguinis et al., 2024).

Gupta (2024) looks at an adoption model for GAI that was developed from empirical evidence from 482 entrepreneurs. In the model, there are three stages of adoption of this technology that occur. The first stage is the pre-perception and perception stage, the second stage is the assessment stage, and the final stage is the outcome (Gupta, 2024). Within each stage there are various factors that can influence whether technology will be adopted or not (Gupta, 2024). The first stage can be influenced by training, system quality, technology and domain experience, social factors, and interaction convenience, as well as other factors (Gupta, 2024). The second stage can be influenced by perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and perceived enjoyment which collectively shape feelings toward the technology, ultimately leading to the outcome stage (Gupta, 2024). The last stage will either lead to technology usage, switching to another system, or simply relying on human capabilities (Gupta, 2024). Should the outcomes of all stages be favourable, adoption of technology will be achieved (Gupta, 2024).

The factors that appear in the acceptance models above show overriding constructs that need to be considered when considering acceptance of technology and its use in occupational and personal settings. Other factors further contribute to technology acceptance. Patil et al. (2024) speak to the affordability of technology, which plays a part in the acceptance of technology. Organisations that are able to afford GAI are more likely to integrate it into their systems (Patil et al., 2024). It is not just the technology that is costly but also the training, integration, and potential redesign that accompany this which can be intimidating and unaffordable for various organisations (Patil et al., 2024).

There are two key elements in a successful GAI system. The first is the correct prompt to generate the right information but this cannot be effective without the second element which is rich accessible data (Patil et al., 2024). If the technology does not have the appropriate data to generate the information from, this cannot be effective (Patil et al., 2024). This also hinders acceptance of GAI because it takes time and financial resources to ensure the system is driven by rich data as well as training to identify and use the correct prompts (Patil et al., 2024). Copyright and data security are also factors which hinder GAI acceptance (Patil et al., 2024). There are also worries about ethics and cyberattacks that prohibit the use of GAI (Patil et al., 2024).

All of these areas may require an IOP to assist in the form of change management, organisational design and structure, as well as assisting employees to embrace this technology. The adoption of proper policies and procedures to integrate GAI into organisations may allow professionals to feel more at ease when using this technology. IOPs may therefore be able to assist on an individual, team, and organisational level to move the process of acceptance along in order to better encourage staying up to date with digital era technology and GAI. This will, however, depend on the degree to which IOPs themselves accept and embrace the use of GAI and STARA.

## The current study

GAI is emerging throughout the world of work and is changing job roles in general. It will also impact the job roles, job skills, and ways in which IOPs work, although the degree to which IOPs accept GAI and choose to implement it as a technology will vary based on a wide range of factors (Gado et al., 2022; Gupta, 2024; Oosthuizen, 2022). IOPs therefore need to be able to function in the digital era that is GAI-dominated; however their own perspectives are important when considering and understanding how GAI will impact and transition IOP job roles and skills (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). IOPs therefore need to be asked directly about their perspectives on the use of GAI as part of their work however research exploring this is very minimal. Very little is yet known about how the impact of GAI on IOP work is perceived or the opinions of the use of GAI as part of IOP work, especially in South Africa. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring IOPs' awareness of, experiences with, and perceived benefits and limitations of generative artificial intelligence (GAI), as well as their opinions of how GAI will change the nature of their work and the IOP profession. Assisting employees with this transition, professional ethics in the workplace, and appropriate tools to make this successful are crucial to understand for this to be effective in practice.

## Research questions

The main research question for the study was:

What are IOPs' perceptions of how GAI will change the nature of their work and the IOP profession?

The sub-questions for the study included:

1. What are IOPs' levels of knowledge about and experiences with using GAI for their work?
2. What are the IOPs' perceived benefits and limitations of using GAI as part of their work?
3. How do IOPs perceive GAI will change IOP as a profession?

## Conclusion

Through unpacking the role of an IOP in the workplace as well as the details of GAI technology, one can begin to understand how the IOP role will fit into a new, digital and GAI-based world. Each key element of IOP work needs to be adapted in various ways due to GAI. This does not necessarily mean that the work will be eradicated, but rather redirected. IOPs themselves need to accept and understand GAI, which can then allow them to move on to help train, develop, and grow employees to embrace this technology. This study aimed to explore the perceptions of working IOPs regarding their awareness of, experiences with, and perceived benefits and limitations of GAI, as well as how GAI may change their daily work. This chapter has presented a theoretical argument to support these research questions. The next chapter will present the methodology that was used in the study, including the research design, sample and sampling, data collection methods, ethical considerations, and data analysis.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will present the research design, sample, and sampling strategy for the study. The demographics of the sample will be unpacked. The chapter will also outline the methods and processes used to collect the data in the study and the key principles that informed this. Ethical considerations in the study and analysis of the data will also be discussed.

## Research Design

The research design for this study was a qualitative design situated in the interpretivist paradigm (Fossy et al., 2002). Qualitative research is a research technique that focuses on participants' emotions, thoughts, life experiences, and behavioural elements without a statistical analysis (Willig & Rogers, 2017). The research shifts the focus to the experiences and opinions of the participants rather than quantifying data (Fossy et al., 2002). It is up to the researcher to ensure that the participants' voices are accurately and authentically portrayed in the data (Fossy et al., 2002). The findings that emerge also need to be situated within the social context of the study (Fossy et al., 2002). The study employed a generic qualitative approach, drawing flexibly on different qualitative methodologies as best suited to the purpose of the study (Kahlke, 2014).

There are various advantages and disadvantages to a qualitative research design (Ramona, 2011; Willig & Rogers, 2017). The advantages are linked to greater detail that can be obtained through this method, as well as flexibility and practicality (Mwita, 2022; Ramona, 2011). The flexibility of a qualitative research design allows for further rationalisation and clarity when needed (Mwita, 2022). There is also the advantage of human interaction between the researcher and participants (Mwita, 2022). The experiences, feelings, and narration of participants can be understood in detail because of this interaction which makes it an advantageous design (Mwita, 2022). Some disadvantages include: researcher subjectivity and bias, a lack of replicability, and complexity (Mwita, 2022; Ramona, 2011). Qualitative design is subjective by nature, this leads to personal biases in the data collection as well as the interpretations (Ramona, 2011). It is therefore important for the researcher to ensure that they do not misinterpret the perspectives of participants or fail to accurately portray these due to their own subjectivity or biases (Ramona, 2011).

The interpretivist paradigm is a common paradigm in qualitative research which places focus on accounting for and understanding the significance of human encounters, behaviours,

and actions (Fossey et al., 2002). This paradigm seeks understanding of the motives behind an individual's actions, such as one's behaviour and interactions within society and various cultures and contexts (Chowdhury, 2014). This was particularly useful for this study's research aim, as the study intends to explore the experiences and perceptions of a sample of registered Industrial psychologists. The ontological assumptions of this paradigm include the understanding that reality is constructed by the human participants in the study (Goduka, 2012). These participants are situated in a particular moment in a social and historical context but there are various meanings that exists between participants (Goduka, 2012). Also, an epistemological assumption is that information is looked at through the lenses of the researcher and participant (Goduka, 2012). This paradigm uses these concepts to uncover subjective knowledge and link this to social critiques (Goduka, 2012).

In line with the qualitative design, the data was collected through semi-structured interviews. These were intended to capture the participant's views and perspectives on the general topic of investigation (Fossey et al., 2002). The data was analysed through reflexive thematic analysis. This drew on interesting and relevant themes that emerged from the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fossey et al., 2002). The interpretation of the data depended on myself as the researcher and my own ability to integrate and present the findings, as well my personal capacity for reflexivity. This played a large role in determining the quality of the study and the potential value of its findings (Fossey et al., 2002; Willig & Rogers, 2017).

**Sample and sampling**

The intended sample for the study was registered South African Industrial psychologists with any level of experience who were working in any field or capacity in this role. The sampling strategy that was used in this study was a non-probability, purposive, and convenience sampling strategy (Robinson, 2014; Suri, 2011). This is because the sample was selected specifically for the needs of the study based on their expertise, availability, and willingness to participate (Robinson, 2014; Suri, 2011). The sample was a volunteer sample as participants provided informed consent to volunteer for the study (Suri, 2011). The sampling strategy could also be considered as a form of snowball sampling as the study requested assistance in locating other potential participants from potential participants who were contacted directly (Suri, 2011).

Registered Industrial psychologists in South Africa were contacted through publicly available contact details on the Internet and social media sites, such as LinkedIn, as well as direct referrals. These psychologists were approached as potential participants and invited to take part in the study. If the potential participant expressed interest in participating, they were asked to contact the researcher to arrange an interview, and the full participant information sheet was sent to them.

The final sample for this study consisted of nine practising South African Industrial psychologists. The participants were all over the age of 18 and were registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) in the category of Industrial Psychologist. Four of the participants identified as male and five identified as female. All of the participants identified as Caucasian except for one participant who identified as Black, and all of the participants spoke English as a home language except for one participant who spoke isiZulu as a home language and one participant who spoke both English and Afrikaans as home languages. The ages of the sample ranged from 27 to 47, with tenure of their Industrial Psychology registration ranging from 2 years to 23 years (see Table 1).

**Table 1**
*Participant age, gender, race, home language, tenure of IOP registration, and generation*

| Participant | Age | Gender | Race | Home language | Tenure of registration | Generation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 | 44 | Male | Black | Isizulu | 11 years | Born between 1965 and 1980 |
| Participant 2 | 39 | Female | White | English | 15 years | Born between 1981 and 2000 |
| Participant 3 | 43 | Male | White | English | 21 years | Born between 1965 and 1980 |
| Participant 4 | 33 | Female | White | English | 6 years | Born between 1981 and 2000 |
| Participant 5 | 47 | Female | White | English/ Afrikaans | 22 years | Born between 1965 and 1980 |
| Participant 6 | 47 | Female | White | English | 23 years | Born between 1965 and 1980 |
| Participant 7 | 27 | Female | White | English | 2 years | Born between 1981 and 2000 |
| Participant 8 | 41 | Male | White | English | 11 years | Born between 1981 and 2000 |
| Participant 9 | 32 | Male | White | English | 6 years | Born between 1981 and 2000 |

The participants worked and specialised in various fields within the profession such as psychometric testing, consulting, counselling and coaching, academia, and organisational development through human resource practices. The participants' level of experience varied from Human Resource director to general consultant. There were some participants in private practice and some in larger organisations. All of the participants' level of comfort with technology was on the higher end of the scale between 7 and 10, with 10 being the most comfortable one can feel with technology. Participants' level of knowledge about technology (with 10 representing the most knowledge) was also mostly on the higher end of the scale between 7 and 10, although one participant scored themselves as a 5 (see Table 2).

**Table 2**
*Participants' current work, previous work, technology comfort rating, and technology knowledge rating*

| Participant | Current work | Previous work | T.C.R | T.K.R |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 | Head of culture, change, and transformation | Talent management, organisational design, psychometrics, learning and development | 10 | 10 |
| Participant 2 | Employee experience | Talent management, leadership, psychometrics, organisational design, change management, HR management and strategy | 9 | 9 |
| Participant 3 | Developing and selling online gamified assessments | Organisational development, coaching, psychometrics, medical-legal work | 10 | 8 |
| Participant 4 | Consulting (career architecture, assessment, remuneration, job analysis and evaluation, organisational development, leadership development) | Consulting (career architecture, assessment, remuneration, job analysis and evaluation, organisational development, leadership development) | 8 | 7 |
| Participant 5 | Personal development and leadership development in coaching, assessments | Psychometrics, coaching and development. | 8 | 7 |
| Participant 6 | HR director | Various elements of HR and IOP work | 8 | 8 |
| Participant 7 | Career counselling and psychometric assessment | HR administration | 7 | 5 |
| Participant 8 | Organisational development consulting with a focus on leadership and team development | Psychometric assessment, consulting | 9 | 7 |
| Participant 9 | Lecturer, career counsellor | Consulting IOP work | 8 | 8 |

Note. T.C.R = technology comfort level; T.K.R = technology knowledge level

**Data Collection**

The first part of the data collection process was to obtain ethical clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) which was granted through protocol number: MAORG-24-04 (Appendix F). This was followed by identifying contact details for registered South African Industrial psychologists using the internet, social media, and direct referrals. Each potential participant was sent an invitation to participate in the study (Appendix C) and was asked to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating to set up a time for an interview. Potential participants were also asked to forward the invitation to any other Industrial psychologists they knew who might have been interested in participating in the study. Psychologists who responded were sent the full participant information sheet (Appendix A) and the consent form (Appendix B), and interview times were set up that were convenient for the participant and researcher. Interviews were offered online on the Microsoft MS Teams or Zoom platforms or could be set up in person on the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand. All nine interviews took place on MS Teams, which was accessed via invitation.

The data was collected using semi-structured interviews that took approximately 25 minutes to 45 minutes (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Semi-structured interviews were a preferred data collection method as they are more sensitive and place the participants' knowledge at the foreground (Fossey et al., 2002). This type of interview is more focused on using the interview schedule as a guide as well as allowing the participant to guide the conversation (Fossey et al., 2002). Semi-structured interviews were advantageous in this study because they allowed the participants' voices to be foregrounded whilst prompting them appropriately and giving them the freedom to follow up on specific ideas if needed (Fossey et al., 2002). The interview schedule (Appendix D) consisted of twenty-one questions that were developed from the literature to address the research questions in the study. These questions aimed to unpack and understand the participants' experiences with and perceptions of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) in their work. The interview schedule included questions about the participants' knowledge of GAI, attitudes towards GAI, intention to use GAI, perceived efficacy of GAI, perceived ease of use of GAI, and social norms around GAI, as well as questions about how the participants thought GAI might directly affect IOP work and training (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Gado et al., 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). The interviews were only audio-recorded as opposed to audio-recorded and video-recorded to assist with anonymity and confidentiality.

When the interview began, participants were given another copy of the participant information sheet and the consent form, and they were asked to sign the form giving consent to participate and for the interview to be audio-recorded (Halai, 2006). They were also asked for permission to use direct quotes. Before the interview began, each participant was asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix E). During the interview, the researcher attempted to create a rapport with the participant and actively listened to all of the information that they provided (Willig & Rogers, 2017). At the end of the interview, the participant was given the opportunity to add any information that they would like to and to ask any questions they had about the research (Willig & Rogers, 2017).

After the interviews were completed, the data was transcribed, and any identifying information was removed (Willig & Rogers, 2017). Participants were assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity during reporting. The data was then analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006; 2019). The first two interviews were used to pilot the interview schedule but were also part of the data for the main study as sufficient information was generated. Based on the pilot interviews, no changes were made to the interview schedule. The pilot interviews also showed that the interviews took less time than anticipated, although there was a time variation between all of the participants.

**Rigour**

Qualitative research requires the process of reflexivity as well as other steps to ensure rigour (Fossey et al., 2002). For reflexivity, the researcher needs to develop an awareness of any preconceptions that they have about the study and also needs to be aware of and consider their role, actions, and understandings throughout the research process and how these impact on the data collected and interpretations made (Fossey et al., 2002). Fossey et al. (2002) explains that reflexive reporting is about providing readers with information about the researcher’s experiences, actions, and interests to enable them to assess the researcher's involvement in the study's execution and the insights gained through interactions with the study participants, environment, and data (Fossey et al., 2002).

As the researcher for the study, I am a current Master’s student who is planning to become a registered Industrial psychologist in South Africa, and I have a strong interest in generative artificial intelligence (GAI). This has meant that throughout the study, I have needed to be careful that my own experiences and understanding of GAI have not overly influenced

my interpretations of the participants' experiences or led to me misinterpreting participants' views on GAI in the context of an IOP role. To keep a record of this and to monitor this throughout the study, I have kept a detailed self-reflexive journal that includes all the steps I have taken in the research process and my feelings about the study.

To ensure rigour in the study, the eight "big-tent" criteria set out by Tracy (2010) were also considered. This included establishing the worthiness and contribution of the study by describing its significance and relevance; ensuring that rich data was collected; ensuring that the sample was a rich source of information on the topic; ensuring that the study was coherent; being self-reflexive; being open about the strengths and limitations of the study; using thick description; supporting the findings with direct quotes; ensuring transferability; and meeting all ethical requirements (Tracy, 2010). Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) also suggest a few ways to ensure rigour. They suggest that the researcher needs to write comprehensive and clear accounts of why phenomena have been categorised in certain ways to demonstrate good fit with the data. The researcher also needs to explain their integration of the data and to acknowledge how the research process shapes the object of inquiry (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). There needs to be a sensitivity to negotiated realities in qualitative research, and the researcher needs to understand how the phenomena are interpreted by the participants (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). The researcher needs to be aware of participants' reactions and should try to explain differences between their own interpretation and those of the participants, which was done in this study. The researcher should also provide an inclusive and detailed account of what was done and why throughout the research process and should report contextual features of the study as fully as possible for transferability (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). This was also enacted throughout the study.

**Ethical considerations**

This study was submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand for primary ethical clearance, protocol number: MAORG-24-04 (Appendix F). Informed consent was ensured through the participant information sheet (Appendix A) and the consent form (Appendix B) that each participant needed to sign prior to the interview being conducted (Halai, 2006). The participant information sheet gave all the required information for the study, including details about the researcher's identity, the aim of the study, the requirements for participation, the voluntary nature of participation, an invitation

to choose to participate in the study or not with no negative consequences, the right to withdraw, anonymity and confidentiality, recording and storage of data, the process for feedback and questions, and contact details for the researcher and research supervisor. This should have provided the participant with enough information to fully understand the research process and give informed consent. However, if participants felt uncomfortable at any point, they were given the right to withdraw at any point throughout the data collection process (Halai, 2006). There were no direct benefits and no foreseeable risks for participating in the study.

The researcher knew the participants' identities but kept these strictly confidential, and only the researcher and research supervisor had access to the recordings of the interviews (Halai, 2006). Any names or personal details that could identify the participants were removed from the interview transcripts and were omitted from any reports of the findings and participants were given pseudonyms. This ensured that the participants were anonymous when reporting the findings (Halai, 2006). Confidentiality was also ensured by keeping the interview recordings stored safely on a password-protected computer or in a locked cupboard; these will be destroyed when the research project is complete (Halai, 2006). The participants were asked for permission to store the transcripts with no identifying information permanently and to possibly use these for future research and teaching purposes. Beneficence and non-maleficence were met in full as there was no harm done to any of the participants throughout the study (Fossy et al., 2002).

Participants will be able to request a copy of a summary of the study's findings from the researcher when the study is complete. They were also given the researcher's and research supervisor's contact details if they had any questions and the contact details for the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) if they had any ethical questions about the study. Findings from the study have been reported in this research report, which has been submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand and may also be reported in journal articles or at conferences.

**Data Analysis**

The data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analysing, and applying core themes and patterns that emerge in qualitative data that will assist in answering the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2017). Thematic analysis describes and organises the details of the data which assists

in interpreting various aspects of the study (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis tells a story from the themes that emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). It also embeds theory into practice and assists the process of interpretation while the codes and themes are developed (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This was done once the interviews were transcribed and in written form.

Reflexive thematic analysis involves theme development later on in the process, with themes stemming from codes; the codes are arrangements of collective significance supported by a central organizing principle (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2019). The process of coding is a less rigid structure and is more of an organic formation of ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this study's analysis, codes were derived from the interview transcripts and were revised several times before organising the main codes and ideas into themes. This allowed for codes to develop and adapt as the researcher gained a deeper insight into the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Coding is acknowledged as inherently subjective, necessitating a reflective researcher who constantly evaluates their assumptions and considers how these may influence and define their coding approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Themes are the topic summaries that have emerged from the data during the coding process and that are then used for the main analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This study used the research sub-questions to organise codes into themes. From the main ideas that were extracted from the data turned into themes, the main ideas were converted into subthemes to support the main themes. The notes and ideas from the reflexive journal were also used to create and unpack the themes and sub-themes.

The data in this study was analysed using Clarke & Braun's (2017) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis. These steps included engaging with the data and highlighting items of interest, which was done during and after the interview process as well as during the transcription of the interviews (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Once the transcripts were complete, a map was created of the main ideas that emerged from the interviews. These were then transferred into working grids for each theme, which were used to create and structure the various subthemes. This process included creating codes based on the main ideas that emerged from the interviews, generating initial themes, and reviewing and reworking these themes and sub-themes a number of times (Clarke & Braun, 2017). It also included identifying direct quotations from the participants' interviews to support each theme and subtheme and the interpretations made for these. Once the first four steps were complete, defining and naming the themes occurred, which led to producing the final findings (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

The final themes that emerged were related directly to the three research questions that guided the study and therefore focused on participants' knowledge and experience with GAI, their perceived benefits and limitations of GAI in IOP work, and their perceptions of how GAI might transform the IOP profession. The five main themes that were identified were: GAI usage, GAI perception, GAI benefits, GAI limitations, and the future of GAI for IOPs.

## Conclusion

This chapter has described the methodology that was used to collect, manage, and analyse the data in the study, including the study's research design, sample, sampling strategies, data collection methods, procedure, ethical considerations, and data analysis. The reflexive thematic analysis that was used to analyse the data generated findings that will be presented in the following chapter.

# Chapter 4: Analysis

This chapter will present the findings from the thematic analysis, including the themes and sub-themes that were identified from the data and direct quotations from the participants to support the interpretations made.

## IOP knowledge and experiences with GAI

The first research question aimed to explore participants' levels of knowledge about and experiences with using GAI for their work. There were two themes that were developed that answered this research question, GAI usage and GAI perceptions. These themes are discussed in more detail below.

### *Theme 1: GAI usage*

The first theme, GAI usage, included participants' experiences with using GAI as part of their work and daily life, as well as perceptions of the training that should occur for using GAI and the importance of knowing how to use this effectively. The sub-themes that were identified and the participants whose perceptions fitted in these sub-themes are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**
*Sub-themes identified for GAI usage*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Personal use** | X | X | X | X | X | | | | X |
| **Workplace use** | | X | X | | | X | X | X | X |
| **Training and prompting correctly** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

#### *Sub-theme 1: Everyday use of GAI*

All of the participants in the study used GAI personally or for work, although three participants (Participants 1, 4, and 5) indicated that they used GAI personally, three participants (Participants 6, 7, and 8) indicated that they used GAI specifically for work, and three participants (Participants 2, 3, and 9) indicated that they used GAI both personally and for work purposes.

Participant 1 indicated that they used GAI for social activities while Participant 4 indicated that they used GAI "…*in a personal setting*". Participant 5 indicated that they did not use GAI on a daily basis at work but that it was used on a daily basis in everyday life:

> "*I don't necessarily use it on a daily basis in my work. But it is, you know, it's obviously all around us and we use it on a daily basis in our life.*" (Participant 5)

Both Participant 4 and Participant 5 seemed hesitant to use GAI in either a personal or a professional context. Participant 4, in particular, expressed a concern about losing their individual way of expressing themselves which created hesitation when using GAI:

> "*So probably I don't use it as often. I mean, I know some people who use it all the time. The only thing I'm really familiar with, I've used ChatGPT once or twice. I generally try to avoid it because I sometimes feel like the way you say it is your personal flair. And if you're getting an AI program set for you, your kind of losing that. So, I don't use it, but I'm quite familiar with the programs out there.*" (Participant 4).

The participants who used GAI for work purposes (Participants 6, 7, and 8) and for both personal and work purposes (Participants 2, 3, and 9) all used GAI for various tasks. Participants 2, 6, 7, 8, and 9 all indicated that GAI could be used as a way to create content, generate initial ideas, or help with writing. Participant 6 especially felt that GAI was useful as a way to generate ideas and draft documents:

> "*What I often do is I pencil my initial thoughts into ChatGPT, and it spews out something and then I'll work with it and mould it into something that I'm happy to send out using my knowledge and skills of words and the legalities and things like that. But it's often like a nice springboard to just get going on something… And also like when I need to, you know, get something out quickly…"* (Participant 6).

Both Participant 6 and Participant 8 indicated that GAI could speed up work and help to produce material more quickly:

> *"I'm using ChatGPT, I'm using image generation software. I'm using, and it's speeding up, I'm creating my own slides…. There is so much technology is helping to professionalize my work. It's helping to speed up certain things."* (Participant 8)

Participants 2, 3, and 9 indicated that GAI was also helpful as a way to answer questions, get information or summaries quickly, and remember basic information. Participant

2 also used GAI for translating content into different languages and Participant 9 used GAI in the context of academia for rubric creation and lesson designs:

> *"…So I use it… for all sorts of things like crafting scripts, like crafting scripts for presentations, for a new podcast that I'm putting together. I use it to kind of ask quick questions, like to understand, like, give me a summary of this company, give me a summary of this, you know, nuances of this, like even translations I use it for because, you know, sometimes I'm in a different country and I'm looking at something in [a different language] and I need a quick translation."* (Participant 2)

Participant 3 used GAI to help recall certain skills that may have been forgotten. They saw this as extremely helpful as previously one would need a manual to read and remember which would take much more time and effort:

> "*…And I use ChatGPT to help me because I don't remember how to do these things. So instead of reading a manual and trying to remember what I did 25 years ago, I can get that ChatGPT to tell me and then I can kind of work, like you see the trend and you kind of work out..."* (Participant 3)

Participant 7 and Participant 9 indicated that they used GAI in the career counselling and assessment space, including to help with writing CVs and to interpret reports:

> "*When it comes to career guidance, helping me to interpret my report, sometimes I get a client whose personality is in the middle and I'm like, okay, what does this mean? Instead of going to read all the personality research, I just asked AI, if that person is an E and I, how do I interpret this? And then it gives me information.*" (Participant 9)

When discussing using GAI, Participant 1 brought up the point that the processes and procedures for how GAI should be incorporated had not yet been defined in their organisation. Participant 3 was the only participant who indicated that their workplace was "*…doing ChatGPT courses internally…*" to improve workplace usage and allow employees to understand how to use the technology better.

***Sub-theme 2: Training and prompting***

All of the participants felt that it was important to formally train both employees and IOPs on how to use GAI, but differed in their perceptions of when this training should occur. Participant 1 and Participant 4 highlighted the need to focus on this training at a Master's level

while Participant 9 felt it should begin during high school. The other participants (Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8) believed that training should occur at the university level, beginning at the undergraduate level and continuing to the Master's level:

> "*And then the skilling up from a, it will have to be from a grassroots level at a university, which will breed a different type of professional that will have different skills.*" (Participant 6)

> "*Yeah, we, we need to create syllabuses or workshops and seminars around capacitating people and making awareness in terms of what this AI or generative AI means for us in the workplace… AI must form part of our ethics training course. It must form part of that. And then also when the new guys are being trained like yourselves now, when you write a board exam, probably one of, one of the trainings must be that."* (Participant 1)

Five of the participants (Participants 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9) also stated that ethics training needed to be integrated with GAI training at either the university level or as part of an internship or for continuous professional development (CPD). Participant 2 also expressed that while formal training for IOPs for using GAI at university was important, it would also be important for training to continue as an ongoing learning process outside of formal training.

> "*Maybe as part of the internship, they should have an AI training criteria. Have you attended a conference? Have you attended a talk? Have you read up on some articles that raise your attention to the ethical dilemmas of using AI? So also, conferences, SIOPSA conference, HPCSA could maybe send out CPD programs to attend, articles to read…"* (Participant 9)

> "*I think it should be, it should start in, in university training… Yes. So, so I think it definitely needs to kind of start at university level. And then I think, I think it's sort of an ongoing learning journey and not all of it necessarily needs to be formalised training.*" (Participant 2)

Several participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9) also emphasised that training for GAI was especially important because GAI is only effective and powerful when the user understands how to prompt it and how to ask the right questions to get useful and rich answers. As Participant 3 emphasized, "…*if you feed it really good information, it tends to give you good information*". Another example was Participant 4, who expressed concern about whether sufficient training could be given to allow IOPs to prompt GAI effectively to carry out certain

tasks such as accurate report-writing. Participant 1 and Participant 9 noted that the type of answers GAI generates depends a lot on what information has been inputted:

> "*...but also, the skill of, of prompting it correctly, because what, if you put in, I mean, it's terrible, terrible stuff in terrible stuff out."* (Participant 8)

> "*…they're using the terminology without necessarily kind of understanding how this engine works. And so, they're not always kind of asking the right questions…*" (Participant 2)

> "*And sometimes you don't get the answers that you're looking for. So, you actually spend a little bit more time changing your prompts*" (Participant 9)

However, even though training was seen as very important by the participants, Participant 3 was the only participant who indicated that they were already receiving formal training for using GAI in their organisation.

### *Theme 2: GAI perceptions*

The second theme, GAI perceptions, included participants' understandings of the uses and directions of GAI in their work and daily life. There were certain concerns that some participants identified as a problem for themselves as well as for employees in general, including fear of the unknown and fear of redundancy. The sub-themes that were identified and the participants whose perceptions fitted in these sub-themes are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**
*Sub-themes identified for GAI perceptions*

| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The role of GAI** | X | | X | X | | X | | X | X |
| **Perceptions of GAI** | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | X |
| **Fear of the unknown** | | X | | X | X | | X | | |
| **Fear of redundancy** | X | X | | | | | X | | |

#### *Sub-theme 1: The role of GAI*

Six of the participants (Participants 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9) spoke of the potential role that GAI might play in their own work or in the world of work generally. Participant 1 indicated that GAI was a new form of technology that would change what was done but not replace jobs altogether. Participant 6 indicated that GAI was not yet automatically a part of their daily work but that its use would become intuitive and that it needed to be built into everyday life by

everyone as a way to "…*maximise what we're able to achieve*…". Participant 3 also felt that GAI was becoming a part of daily work, and that people needed to stay aware of what GAI can do rather than being scared of it:

> "… *so, what it has done is just to redirect, it's not replacing, but it's just redirecting some of what we used to do to do it differently.*" (Participant 1)

> "…*I suspect that as we become more and more accustomed to it, we'll more intuitively use it. You know, like at this stage, I have to remind myself that it exists. It's not intuitively part of my life*..." (Participant 6)

> "… *you can't be scared of it; you have to kind of go with it and I think the thing is it's going to keep you involved and it's going to evolve really quickly.*" (Participant 3)

Participant 6 also indicated that they had a good idea of how to maximise the use of GAI to meet their needs. This was supported by Participant 8 and Participant 9, who felt that GAI was being embraced because of the positive effects it could have for doing work more effectively:

> "…*I understand how it works, and I understand, I think that I've got a good understanding of how to maximise it for my needs.*" (Participant 6)

> "*I think employees are embracing it big time. I think that a lot of them are finding out that there's a way to trick the system and there's a way to do things a lot quicker.*" (Participant 9)

In contrast to the other participants, Participant 4 was unsure of the role GAI would play in industrial psychology because of its limitations:

> "*But I'm not sure, I honestly don't know its place within industrial psychology. Because you need to know the prompt so well that I'm not sure if you could actually manipulate it to an extent where it could write a report for you*…" (Participant 4).

In most of the interviews, there was an underlying understanding from the participants that IOPs would be required to develop some skills and expertise around GAI to stay relevant. For example, Participant 8 expressed that:

> "*There is so much technology is helping to professionalise my work. It's helping to speed up certain things. But it's also important that I keep on my toes…"* (Participant 8)

***Sub-theme 2: Perceptions of GAI***

Participants expressed a wide range of views on how they personally perceived GAI or felt that GAI was being perceived in the workplace. Participant 1 saw GAI as a positive and exciting development, while Participant 3 felt that some people were scared of using GAI. Participant 4 was unsure of how they felt about using GAI for certain aspects of IOP work such as generating assessment reports – "*I'm a little bit on the fence about it…*", although they felt it was a "*…very cool thing*". Participant 7 expressed that they were nervous about using GAI because even though it could save a lot of time, they were not sure about whether it could be trusted or how others would feel if they saw that the work was GAI-generated. This was echoed by Participant 8, who was nervous about being accused of plagiarism or copying.

> "*…you also don't want it to come across as someone, you know, hasn't really done their CV or something like that personally or written something themselves… So, I think AI could definitely help with saving me a lot of time, but I'm also just nervous…"* (Participant 7).

> "*…I'm still nervous to use it in the sense where I don't want to get caught for plagiarizing or anything like that…*" (Participant 8)

Participant 9 was generally positive about the role of GAI and focused on its potential to support IOPs to do their work, indicating that they felt it would help IOPs to work more efficiently rather than replacing them altogether:

> "*I think it's going to play a supportive role. I don't think it's going to necessarily take the work of an industrial psychologist. It'll be more of a supportive role. It'll help the industrial psychologist to do the work more efficiently. It'll help them to come up with strategies that they might not have thought of…"* (Participant 9)

Interestingly, Participant 2 reflected on the types of employees who they felt might be more open to accepting GAI, mentioning that this depended on level of engagement and job level rather than age:

> "*…so, your engaged workforce is much more positive about generative AI and your disengaged workforce is far more negative about generative AI. And I think that's important for most change processes because, you know, when people are engaged, it means they're having, you know, they're motivated, they're giving discretionary effort, they believe in their employer. And so, they're more likely to get on board with these changes…"* (Participant 2)

*"…there's this kind of weird perception that like the younger generations are like super excited about it and the older generations aren't. And actually, we found that's not really, that's not really the case. So there are like some differences, like sometimes Gen Zs are like a little bit less happy about it, depending on which country you're looking at. But actually the much more significant, statistically significant differences are by job level..."* (Participant 2)

The participants in the study thus perceived GAI with a mix of anxiety and excitement, reflecting on both its challenges and potential. They acknowledged the fast-paced and constantly evolving nature of GAI, which, while intimidating due to its unfamiliarity, also sparked curiosity and a desire to understand it better.

***Sub-theme 3: Fear of the unknown***

Four of the participants (Participants 2, 4, 5, and 7) captured a sense of the unknown as a major source of anxiety around GAI. Participant 4 indicated directly that they were not afraid of GAI if they received training on how to use it, while Participant 7 felt that it had the potential to be dangerous but also wanted to know more about it. Participant 5 expressed that people had a fear of AI (including GAI) taking over the world:

"*I think it's kind of something scary, but I think that thing that's like, you know, a little bit dangerous, but you want to kind of delve into it a little bit more*…" (Participant 7).

"*…you know, we all have kind of fear around AI and it's going to take over the world*…" (Participant 5)

Participant 2, especially, highlighted the importance of people perceiving that they had some control over the process and the ability to experiment as a way to manage GAI-related concerns and its integration into their work:

"*I think the number one thing for them is being able to experiment with it first. Because the anxiety often comes from the not knowing, right? Yeah, they want to be able to say, like, be part of a pilot, for example, or be involved in the decision making, be involved in the evaluation of the providers, so that they feel, especially when they work is directly impacted, that, you know, they, they know what they're getting in for into for starters, and that they have some kind of voice and decision making power…"* (Participant 2)

***Sub-theme 4: Fear of redundancy***

Three participants (Participants 1, 2, and 7) indicated that fear of redundancy or job loss was another major source of anxiety around GAI. Participant 7 felt that GAI would change which jobs and careers remained relevant and which were "…*fading away*…", while Participant 1 acknowledged that there would be jobs that disappear as a result of GAI and felt that people were sceptical about GAI adoption because of the fear around this.

> "…*to tell the truth, there are jobs that obviously are going to disappear… …majority I would say it's, it's, they're sceptical…Purely because of the fact that the notion of this thing is going to take our jobs…"* (Participant 1)

Participant 2 also felt that the main thing employees were worried about was job loss, but noted that this fear was unfounded because AI has actually created more jobs than jobs that have been lost:

> "*So, like the IMF recently released a report about how many jobs have been lost to AI and how many jobs have been created. And I think it's like, I think something like 55 million have been lost and 85 million have been created. So, in theory, what we believe is more jobs have been created than lost*…" (Participant 2)

As reported in the role of GAI sub-theme, this interpretation fitted with what Participant 1 expressed about GAI, namely that it is a new form of technology that will change what is done but not replace professionals altogether. This was echoed by Participant 9, who felt that human participation would always be needed for certain aspects of IOP work:

> "*There are so many websites that offer free assessments and people can take it. But I think you still need that human element to be able to provide personalized feedback and to help interpret the report.*" (Participant 9)

Participant 2 also felt that having control over the process of GAI integration and seeing its advantages would help to reduce anxiety around job redundancy:

> "*If we know that action, like, like good action will be taken on the basis, it will make my job more meaningful. And I won't lose my job. And if I'm able to opt out, if I think that this process is, is, you know, not for me.*" (Participant 2)

**Benefits and limitations of GAI in IOP work**

The second research question explored the participants' perceived benefits and limitations of GAI as part of IOP work. There were two themes that were developed that answered this research question, benefits of GAI and limitations of GAI. These themes are discussed in more detail below.

***Theme 3: Benefits of GAI***

The participants felt that there were several advantages of GAI that would change elements of the IOP profession in a beneficial way. The third theme, benefits of GAI, focused on the perceived advantages of GAI in the context of an IOP role and included greater efficiency and saving time and resources; less work; increased affordability and accessibility; more accuracy and consistency; more scope and greater integration of information; and greater opportunity. The sub-themes identified and the participants whose perceptions aligned with these sub-themes are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**
*Sub-themes identified for benefits of GAI*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Efficiency and saving time and resources** | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | X |
| **Reduced daily workload** | | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X |
| **Affordability and accessibility** | X | X | X | | | | | X | X |
| **Accuracy and consistency** | | | X | | | | | X | X |
| **Scope and integration** | X | | | | | X | X | X | X |
| **Opportunity** | | | | | X | | X | X | |

***Sub-theme 1: Efficiency and saving time and resources***

Seven participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9) believed GAI could help IOPs to save time and resources and be more efficient, which would be beneficial for the IOP role:

"*…we'll be saving time and probably also be saving resources and money and human resources and all of that…*" (Participant 1)

"*Well, making things quicker for us is definitely an advantage, saving us time, saving the time, money. I mean, to me that is like the biggest, the biggest advantage is the efficiency of it…"* (Participant 4)

Four participants (Participants 2, 4, 5, and 9) specifically mentioned increased efficiency as an advantage of GAI. Participant 9 felt that GAI would "…*help the industrial psychologist to do the work more efficiently*", while Participant 2 felt that people were excited about GAI being able to make jobs more efficient generally due to its ability to streamline tasks, make processes quicker, and reduce the need for manual effort. Participant 4 and Participant 5 both felt that GAI could make specific aspects of IOP work more efficient:

> "*I think the positive side of it is it might make things quicker or more efficient for us in certain areas…*" (Participant 4).

Participant 4 went on to illustrate this point with two examples, describing how GAI could help with "…*more mundane, high-volume tasks*" such as feedback for large assessment projects to save time and money and could also be used to streamline organisational development processes and designing operating models:

> "…*leveraging technology for that would make that go like 10 times quicker... because you'd be able to map out everything within a minute versus manually doing that*…." (Participant 4).

Participant 8 agreed strongly with this, indicating that GAI would help to speed up processes and accelerate work-heavy tasks such as thematic analysis for a team intervention in a much shorter time and more accurately. Participant 5 felt that GAI input would allow for quicker progress and better monitoring when coaching a client and Participant 9 felt that GAI could help to search for and summarise a lot of resources into a cohesive document quickly:

> *"Yeah, just be able to do things a lot quicker, to consolidate information in rapid time, because we would have to do research and read through so many articles. Nowadays, you can just pop a question, and all the information is consolidated into a single output.*" (Participant 9).

Overall, the seven participants acknowledged that an advantage of GAI is that it has the potential to enhance efficiency across multiple aspects of the IOP role, primarily by speeding up processes, improving accuracy and efficiency, and therefore saving time and resources.

***Sub-theme 2: Reduced daily workload***

There were seven participants (Participants 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9) who felt that certain administrative, clerical, or routine elements of daily IOP work might be able to be eliminated

if GAI was used to assist with these. Participant 2, Participant 4, and Participant 8 especially emphasised that a large advantage of GAI is that it will be able to be used to perform routine or mundane tasks that usually have to be carried out manually:

> "*Like there is, there is a lot of stuff that people do at work that is, that is just lame… that is just like time consuming and boring and repetitive…*" (Participant 2).

Participant 3 agreed with this but also emphasised that it would be important to train GAI correctly at the start to carry out the tasks properly, and that this initial investment would then allow GAI to do a lot of the 'grunt work' effectively from that point onwards:

> "*Now you can get a bunch of people in a room that kind of know what they're doing and you can firstly align on how they're thinking, secondly train an AI engine to make the right decisions. And then you spend your time training the system and once it's trained sufficiently it can do the day-to-day sort of grind work…*" (Participant 3)

Participant 9 gave an example of this, explaining that GAI would help them to understand their clients better and more easily by summarising information from a lot of different resources that they would not have to locate and read individually. Participant 6 and Participant 7 gave similar examples, noting how GAI could help with searching for information and integrating this quickly, answering questions, and reducing administrative tasks:

> "*I mean, things are so different now that at the click of a button, you could ask for a list of any research that exists on a topic, and it can be consolidated and integrated. And so, there's huge, huge advantages in terms of time, in terms of efficiency, in terms of, you know, allowing professionals to focus on their time on stuff that really matters, and administration can be eliminated…*" (Participant 6)

> "*…And I think it definitely does help with giving you a lot of information and knowledge that you can just, you know, easily search and ask questions…*" (Participant 7)

All seven of the participants therefore felt that an advantage of GAI is that if it is used effectively, it has the potential to reduce the daily workload of IOPs by completing routine or repetitive work for them and bringing information together quickly.

### ***Sub-theme 3: Affordability and accessibility***

Participants 1, 2, 3, 8, and 9 highlighted the potential of GAI to improve affordability and accessibility within the IOP field by reducing costs, increasing efficiency, and broadening

access to psychological services. For example, Participant 1 stated that using GAI could lead to "…*saving time and probably also… saving resources and money and human resources and all of that*…"

Participant 8 and Participant 9 reinforced this perspective, noting that GAI makes IOP services cheaper to provide and therefore more accessible and affordable:

> "…*So, it makes things cheaper for, for us, but also more affordable for clients and more affordable for entrepreneurs*…" (Participant 8)

> "*Yeah, I can't really think of anything more than cost saving … and also global reach, accessibility.*" (Participant 9)

In the psychometrics field, Participant 2 anticipated that GAI would drive down costs for traditionally expensive testing services and producing reports; while Participant 3 felt that the reduced time required would decrease the cost of providing IOP services generally.

Overall, five of the participants felt that GAI could enhance the affordability of IOP work and therefore increase accessibility to IOP services based on increased efficiency and reduced time demands.

***Sub-theme 4: Accuracy and consistency***

A further key benefit that was discussed by three participants (Participants 3, 8, and 9) was the ability of GAI processes and outputs to improve accuracy and consistency and increase objectivity when carrying out assessments and evaluations and analysing data.

Participant 3, who had a strong psychometric background, emphasised this benefit of GAI especially strongly, arguing that GAI could create a high level of standardisation and consistency in the assessment process, which would improve fairness, objectivity, and the overall quality of the assessment:

> *"…it's extremely powerful for us because we can give candidates an exact same experience regardless of where they are and how they're doing the assessments…" (Participant 3).*

Participant 3 also noted that fatigue and pressure can impact the quality of human-generated work, leading to inconsistencies. GAI does not have these external factors which is an advantage:

"*There's obviously the, when you get tired or when you're under pressure you might kind of make mistakes. And like I say, your quality of the report can be impacted by who's actually writing it. If you can build a, if you really trust that you've built a really strong engine that can get a lot more consistency, objectivity and fairness in the process.*" (Participant 3).

This was echoed by Participant 8, who felt that GAI functioned well as a way to avoid human error and as a way to increase accuracy, especially when working with quantitative data:

"*It, it allows us to take out human error. So, talking to the accuracy, but taking out human error with maybe leaving out something that, that could be important…*" (Participant 8)

Participant 9 felt that GAI would increase the '*professionalism*' of IOPs, while Participant 3 argued that GAI could greatly enhance the assessment process by moving beyond human capabilities:

"*If you train an engine and it knows what to look for, not just knows what to look for, give you information you can't see yourself because it can pull inferences that you as a human can't see because it's just too much to kind of keep in your mind. So, it enhances the framework that you utilize, it enhances your competencies that you pull out, it gives you more richness in the data that you utilise and it gets objectivity and speed and scalability. So that's what it gives you…*" (Participant 3).

These participants, especially Participant 3 and Participant 8, indicated that greater objectivity, consistency, standardisation, and accuracy could be a key advantage of GAI for certain aspects of IOP work such as assessment and data analysis and interpretation.

***Sub-theme 5: Scope and integration***

Five participants (Participants 1, 6, 7, 8, and 9) believed that an important benefit of GAI is its ability to provide access to a wide range of information from different sources and to integrate this information quickly.

Participant 1 felt that because GAI draws on a wide range of different sources it broadens the scope of accessible information and inputs beyond what individuals might typically find, allowing for deeper insight and making decision-making and analysis more

comprehensive. Participant 7 also spoke about reaching a wider audience and having greater access to information, which can have other benefits as well like efficiency:

> "*I now have access to even the information that I wouldn't necessarily have access to…*" (Participant 1)

> "*I think it definitely does help with giving you a lot of information and knowledge that you can just, you know, easily search and ask questions…*" (Participant 7).

Participant 6, Participant 8, and Participant 9 all emphasised that being able to quickly and easily access large amounts of information and research and then integrate this into a brief, consolidated summary was a huge advantage of GAI for them professionally:

> "*Things are so different now that at the click of a button, you could ask for a list of any research that exists on a topic, and it can be consolidated and integrated.*" (Participant 6)

> "*I think is going to impact us in such a positive way is is being able to take different sources of data and integrate them.*" (Participant 8)

> "*Yeah, just be able to do things a lot quicker, to consolidate information in rapid time… you can just pop a question, and all the information is consolidated into a single output.*" (Participant 9)

Like Participant 7, Participant 9 also linked being able to access and summarise information quickly to other benefits, specifically better job performance:

> "*…help me to understand my clients a lot better. Instead of like searching on Google and all these different websites … I could just pop it into ChatGPT and give you a nice little summary…*" (Participant 9)

All five participants therefore recognised that a large positive effect of GAI could be its role in improving efficiency and performance by broadening access to information and integrating this information quickly and effectively for IOPs to use.

***Sub-theme 6: Opportunity***

Participants 5, 7, and 8 indicated that GAI would enable more opportunities for growth and development. Participant 5 felt that GAI would allow people to learn and grow in different ways, while Participant 7 noted that GAI is creating new career paths and job roles. Participant

8 felt that GAI would completely change doing research and provide new ways in which to generate profit. Participant 8 also emphasised GAI's potential to support economic growth and development, especially in the global South:

> "*…there's huge potential in developing economies and in the global South for real growth because of what this can offer in terms of speed and in terms of cost...*" (Participant 8).

Participant 8, whose work is related to organisational development consulting, was the only participant who raised economic development as a direct possible advantage of GAI, while Participant 5, whose work is focused on coaching, mentioned its potential to support growth and Participant 7, whose work includes career counselling, mentioned new careers.

### *Theme 4: Limitations of GAI*

The fourth theme, limitations of GAI, focused on the participants' perceived disadvantages of GAI in the context of an IOP role. Sub-themes that were identified included concerns about accuracy, disclosure and plagiarism, IOP replacement, over-reliance and laziness, ethical concerns and protection of information, job loss and GAI dominance, and access. The sub-themes that were identified and the participants whose perceptions fitted in these sub-themes are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6**
*Sub-themes identified for limitations of GAI*

| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Accuracy** | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Disclosure and plagiarism** | X | | | X | | | | X | X |
| **IOP replacement** | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Over-reliance and laziness** | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X |
| **Ethical concerns and information protection** | | | X | | X | X | X | X | |
| **Job loss and GAI dominance** | X | X | | | X | X | X | | |
| **Access** | | | X | | | | | X | X |

#### *Sub-theme 1: Accuracy*

Eight of the nine participants (all participants except Participant 4) raised concerns about the accuracy of the information generated by GAI or its reliance on accurate training and prompting to generate appropriate and useful information.

Five participants (Participants 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7) raised concerns that the information generated by GAI might not be accurate, credible, reliable, or validated:

> "*…as much as its information that is easily accessible, but it may not necessarily be correct…*" (Participant 1)

> "*So I think there is a concern out there around like this sort of mass generation of data that people are kind of just blindly buying into that's not verified, that doesn't have the kind of scientific rigour, and it doesn't have that ethical conscience element…*" (Participant 5)

Participant 3 related this to concerns about accurate prompting, suggesting that GAI-generated information might be inaccurate if the prompts used were not appropriate or detailed enough:

> "*…you've got to like know that it has limitations, it makes mistakes, it hallucinates, it gives you very weird things if you don't prompt it correctly and you can't just trust what it says back to you.*" (Participant 3).

Participant 1 echoed Participant 3's concern about accurate prompting, noting that the output generated will depend on "*what you have inputted*", while Participant 9 indicated that sometimes changing prompts could help to generate more sensible or meaningful answers:

> "*And sometimes you don't get the answers that you're looking for. So you actually spend a little bit more time changing your prompts…*" (Participant 9)

Participant 2 also raised a concern about whether people understood how GAI engines worked and whether they asked the right questions; and related this to another concern about companies investing in GAI very quickly without sufficient piloting or considering the long-term outcomes or effects of this. Participant 3 highlighted that GAI can be unpredictable and needs to be managed and trained very carefully:

> "*You know, it doesn't always do things the way you think it's going to do it. It's sometimes misinterpret things… It doesn't have the answers. It can draw inferences for you to give you the answers, but you have to coax it and train it.*" (Participant 3)

Participant 3 also noted that training a GAI engine properly takes a long time and cannot be done quickly or using shortcuts, and emphasised that the quality of the database of knowledge that GAI has access to and the sources that it learns from plays a large role in determining the quality of the answers that it generates:

> "*…theoretically it can be trained, and it can start to give you the answers. But… you can plug it in, and you can see it's trying to think, it's trying to use what it's learned elsewhere but it doesn't always give you the right answer…*" (Participant 3)

Participant 8 raised a very important limitation of GAI related to prompting, noting that GAI often draws on data and knowledge suitable for the developed world and does not sufficiently account for the South African or African context and current events in its answers, raising concerns about relevance:

> "*…and then also I suppose… the being able to prompt things in a way that…that don't just… because of how much data is coming from the developed world… or from the Western world, how do we ensure that what's popping out is also relevant to Africa and relevant to South Africa so that it's so that we're not just… so that we're creating African solutions for African issues and problems.*" (Participant 8)

Overall, almost all of the participants felt that an important limitation of GAI is whether the information it generates can be treated as accurate and credible. This also depends a great deal on how well GAI is prompted to produce the information and the quality of the database it uses and the training it has received.

***Sub-theme 2: Disclosure and plagiarism***

Four participants (Participants 1, 4, 8, and 9) mentioned that failing to disclose the use of GAI or plagiarising work could be limitations of using GAI.

Participant 1 and Participant 9 both expressed concerns that people might take GAI-generated work and pass it off as their own independent work:

> "*…and obviously make sure that you don't use it as though it's your own work, of which I'm envisaging a lot of challenges in that regard, because a lot of people think, okay, I've got this, I'm going to use it as it is, as if it's my own work.*" (Participant 1)

Participant 8 felt that this would be plagiarism – "*people claiming that they did things that they didn't*". This interpretation was shared by Participant 4, who also raised plagiarism as a limitation of GAI. Participant 9 felt that it had become very difficult to authenticate or trust work produced by others because of people using GAI and presenting the output as their own work.

Participant 9 was also worried that using GAI to generate responses might lead to IOPs making inaccurate claims about what they could accomplish or achieve:

> "*I could just foresee industrial psychologists writing up business proposals, promising certain things that they can do, A, B and C, they get AI to write it for them. Meanwhile, they can't do it. They're just over promising and under delivering...*" (Participant 9)

Participant 4 and Participant 8 both felt that it was very important for IOPs to disclose using GAI to clients as part of their work for ethical reasons. Participant 4 gave an example that if an IOP generates a standard solution using GAI for a client, then they should not charge the client for this because they are not doing anything the client could not do themselves:

> "*I mean, ethically, you know, a client is coming to you with this particular problem, and they pay you a lot of money for you to just kind of use AI to give them an off the shelf kind of, to me, that doesn't sit right. You're not really listening to the client because no two clients should have exactly the same issues. So ethically, I don't think you should be charging something that the client can actually do themselves*." (Participant 4)

Participant 8 was also concerned about charging clients for work that was done with the assistance of GAI, especially if this allowed IOPs to finish the work more quickly than they might have done otherwise:

> "*…I think it's something that we all have to worry about is not just work that's not your own, but claiming that you've done the work when it actually has helped you do it faster. So being able, taking advantage of clients or people because stuff doesn't take as long*." (Participant 8)

Participant 8 emphasised that disclosing the use of GAI and obtaining consent for this was an important part of integrity for an IOP.

All four of the participants felt that a limitation of GAI is people representing GAI-generated work as their own, which is a form of plagiarism. Two of the participants also emphasised the importance of disclosing the use of GAI as part of IOP work for ethical reasons.

### ***Sub-theme 3: IOP replacement***

All of the participants except for Participant 4 indicated that a very large limitation of GAI is the assumptions others make that it can be used to replace human expertise and experience, or even the IOP role entirely.

Participant 1 described how people already assumed that they could do the same work that IOPs do without training, and that GAI has made this worse because people can access specialist information that they did not previously have access to, leading to a situation where IOPs might "…*be taken for granted or not be taken seriously*". Participant 1 further questioned what this might mean for professional identity:

> "…*so, what that means for us as professionals, how, how do we now redefine who we are and how do we reclaim that niche that, that we have?*" (Participant 1)

Participant 5 echoed this point, noting that for coaching, the competition is now not only with other people who have completed basic coaching training, but also with technology:

> "…*all of a sudden, you're not just competing with other human beings, you're also competing with, you know, with technology. So, I think from that perspective, I think it does influence your work, and it makes you, you know, really think about what is the value that you can add as a human being and the totality of your skills that you bring to bear*". (Participant 5)

Both Participant 2 and Participant 7 mentioned that the perceived contribution that can be made by GAI has led to expectations from companies that they can become less reliant on experts and incur less costs related to using human consultants and IOPs:

> "*You know, and kind of impacting our role as well, because we're not seen as, I think, that valuable anymore, unfortunately…. So yeah, I think that has definitely compromised my business because people are like, well, if I can just do the assessments out there online, why do I need to come to you? Why do I need to pay you? You know, what is the value that comes from that?* (Participant 7)

Participant 9 directly acknowledged this concern, suggesting that GAI "*could take away potential business*". However, Participant 9 also felt that the human element would remain important, a perspective that was shared by Participants 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8:

> "…*maybe I'm naive, but I don't see AI replacing the role of an industrial psychologist in the world and in the community, because my view is that our currency is people. And what I can do in five minutes of meeting someone, there is no bot or chat GPT or AI that can do it. And the real core of what us as people professionals are about*." (Participant 6)

Participants 6, 7, 8, and 9 all emphasised that switching to using GAI to do the work currently carried out by IOPs would be a big disadvantage because it would take away person to person interaction and the human touch:

> "*I think that because everything can now be kind of done through systems and technology, we're missing that kind of personal touch*…" (Participant 7)

Participants 3, 5, and 6 also mentioned that human IOPs could bring skills and interpretations to various situations that GAI lacked. For example, Participant 3 indicated that human IOPs can critically evaluate the data generated by GAI and discern patterns and inaccuracies, while Participant 5 highlighted that human IOPs have the capacity to know when they are missing information or making mistakes, unlike GAI. Participant 6 emphasised the value of human subjectivity:

> "…*you know, we always speak about objectivity as being such an advantage, but I think subjectivity is also an advantage. And that's also, you know, the ability to discern, the ability to make decisions, that humanness. The loss of that in our profession would be a tragedy*." (Participant 6)

Overall, all of the participants except Participant 4 raised the same concern about organisations and the public seeing GAI as a replacement for human IOPs without recognising the unique skills and expertise that human IOPs can bring to the work that they do.

***Sub-theme 4: Over-reliance and laziness***

All of the participants except Participant 7 raised concerns about becoming over-reliant on GAI and lazy about their work as limitations of using GAI.

Four participants (Participant 1, 4, 6, and 9) raised concerns that if IOPs become over-reliant on GAI, this could be dangerous by reducing their ability to think for themselves, apply their expertise, and use their critical skills:

> "*It's taken away my critical thinking, my ability to think hard about something, to really engage meaningfully with a topic because it's so easily accessible. I'll just quickly pop it in. So it's limited my ability to think for myself in certain circumstances*…" (Participant 9)

"*I think if people over-leverage AI, they might, they might lose that critical or expertise where they might start to give a one size fits all approach to clients. So, every solution looks the same...*" (Participant 4)

Participant 1 highlighted that whilst GAI can speed certain processes up, there are certain aspects of IOP training and skills should not be cut out of the process:

"*…we must be cognizant of the fact that you may lose some skills as well, because if you become too reliant on that, without you also using your knowledge, your background, you're going to be reliant and lose that skill*." (Participant 1)

Participant 8 linked this concern to a similar concern about GAI making IOPs lazy and unwilling to engage fully or offer more than previously because of the advantages created by GAI:

"*…the laziness. Does this make us lazy? Where we actually aren't bringing our full selves to the table because the AI is helping us*." (Participant 8)

This concern was echoed by Participant 3, who worried that if practitioners begin to rely too much on GAI to make individual judgements as part of assessments, they might miss mistakes that GAI has made that they have a responsibility to fix:

"*…the risk is people get lazy, and they start to use it and they let it make a judgment call in their path which is dangerous. I think you need to constantly, like I said, you've got to constantly be training it and you've got to constantly be looking at what it's doing because if it's been something strange you've got to step in and fix it*…" (Participant 3).

Participant 2 emphasised that another related limitation of using GAI is that if it is not well understood, it is more likely that GAI will be allowed to complete analyses and make decisions on behalf of human practitioners, which raises a concern about GAI being allowed to over-rule human professional judgement:

"*The less we, the less we understand these things, the more they're kind of doing thinking and making decisions on our behalf… and they're worried, they're worried that the generative AI is going to overrule their professional opinion*…" (Participant 2)

Most of the participants therefore felt that an important limitation of using GAI as part of IOP work is that IOPs might become over-reliant on the technology and lose the skills and capabilities needed to do their work independently. They might also become lazy or willing to depend too heavily on GAI without monitoring it enough to check it is accurate.

***Sub-theme 5: Ethical concerns and information protection***

Five participants (Participants 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8) saw ethical concerns and protecting information as limitations that need to be considered when GAI is utilised.

Several participants raised concerns about inputting clients' confidential or private information into GAI engines. Participant 8 emphasised that obtaining consent to share personal data with GAI before doing this was very important, while Participant 6 was concerned about confidentiality, especially in the field of psychometrics. Participant 7 was worried about the sensitivity of the information and how this would be protected, and Participant 3 raised cybersecurity as a large potential risk:

> "*I think also, like, ethically, you know, the sensitivity of the information is, it's also been a bit of a worry. Because it's kind of like, like out there. So how protected is your client's information and things like that as well…*" (Participant 7)

> "*We need to make sure that when it's people's personal information that, that we asked that we doing some kind of consent before… I think the consent is important…especially if you're going to be putting their information into your system*" (Participant 8)

Participant 3 and Participant 6 were also worried about the ethical use of GAI when conducting psychometric assessments or counselling. Both participants raised concerns that even if GAI is used as part of the process, IOPs are still ultimately responsible for ensuring that this is carried out in a way that is reliable, valid, fair, and appropriate:

> "*The difference is now it's more complicated to prove that, so if someone was to question you, you need to be able to give them the same proof that what you're doing is fair, valid, unbiased etc…. so ethics don't change, it just gets more complicated because there's a tendency to get a little bit lazy and often it's hard to know what it's actually doing and you actually have to take the time to understand, if you can't work out exactly what it's doing you have to give yourself enough evidence that you're comfortable what it's doing is still fair… ultimately you still have the same responsibility you've always had*." (Participant 3)

Participant 5 raised a related concern, noting that sometimes people expected GAI to be used in a way that was unethical and that it is the IOPs role to explain why this could not be

done and to fully understand the limitations of the GAI engine being used and to educate others about this:

> "*…explain to them how unethical that would be. And, you know, how, um, the limitations also, you know, obviously of, um, of the technology, um, and how much, you know, how much of a, for a person's, um, performance is predicted by a psychometric test, for example, that kind of thing. So, think that, you know, I think that education around what is, what is ethical. What is, um, the limitations of generative AI and, you know, um, how it, how they are, uh, there is, um, the possibility for, for cheating and faking and, you know, and all of that kind of thing*… (Participant 5)

Participant 5 also indicated that IOPs have a responsibility to use GAI appropriately and effectively and to teach others to do the same:

> "*You know, so it's like, yeah, I think from our perspective, it's like, how do you make sure that you are… yourself using it ethically responsibly and effectively. And then how do you teach others … in the organization… to use it like that as well?*" (Participant 5)

Participant 8 echoed this point, mentioning that "*…the other downside...which we always have to mention is the ethics, is how ethical are we with things*…" when using GAI.

Overall, four of the five participants raised concerns about protecting personal information and cybersecurity as a limitation of using GAI. Ethics was also seen as a challenge that needs to be considered when using GAI in the context of the IOP role, including emphasising the responsibility of IOPs to ensure that GAI is used in a suitable and ethical manner.

### ***Sub-theme 6: Job loss and GAI dominance***

Five participants (Participants 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7) mentioned job losses and GAI dominating the future and the job market as limitations of GAI.

Participant 1 noted that "*…there are jobs that obviously are going to disappear*" because of GAI while Participant 7 mentioned the need for research about which careers would continue, and which would fall away as GAI became more prevalent. Both Participant 1 and Participant 2 highlighted job loss as a major risk of using GAI:

> "*Yeah, in terms of the main risks, I think the biggest thing… people are worried about is job loss… And, and can they, can they re-skill quickly enough?*" (Participant 2)

These concerns were connected to a more general anxiety around the changes being created by technology, which was raised by both Participant 5 and Participant 6. Participant 6 also mentioned that because of this anxiety, change management would become an increasingly important role for IOPs to take on:

> "*…there is just to an extent, you know, we all have kind of fear around AI and it's going to take over the world. You know, like my kids have this, um, debate constantly in the, in these classes and where they are fearful about the world of work and you know, where they will find their place in it, you know?*" (Participant 5)

> "*…there's huge anxiety around technology and change. Huge anxiety. And the change management is probably one of the biggest roles that the industrial psychologists can try and play…*" (Participant 6).

Five participants therefore raised the possibility of GAI replacing human beings in the workplace and leading to job losses as a limitation of GAI. An important example of this anxiety is the concerns raised by participants in the third sub-theme of the limitations theme about GAI partly or completely replacing IOPs.

***Sub-theme 7: Access***

Three participants (Participants 3, 8, and 9) raised access to GAI as a possible limitation of using GAI. Participant 9 raised concerns about using GAI in the South African context, where there are quite a lot of electricity outages and difficulties with Internet connectivity. Participant 3 indicated that there might be a digital divide when using GAI based on people's previous exposure to technology and background as well as their age. Participant 8 also raised concerns about access to GAI based on age and level of computer literacy, and highlighted a major ethical concern in terms of access to GAI based on socioeconomic status:

> "*…the other ethical thing, which I think about a lot is access. So those that have access to this and those that don't, you obviously need a smartphone or a computer and internet to have access to. So, so again, it's widening the gap of those that, that have, and those that don't. So from a socioeconomic point of view, I think there's a huge, how do we build a society that's going to bring this as a tool that's open to everyone? So, then there's, and then there's, and then for older generations is, or those that aren't computer literate in younger generations, being able to understand how easy it is and how, how much it can be used… from a disadvantage point of view, access. So, who has access to*

*it and who doesn't? So, we're pushing a certain part of the population forward and even further with more opportunities when others don't have…*" (Participant 8)

Although access to the technology and infrastructure was only raised as a limitation by three participants, it does pose a large challenge in the South African context because of extreme inequality and poverty, limited access to technology, and the digital divide.

## GAI transforming the IOP profession

The final research question asked the IOPs in the sample about how they felt GAI would change industrial psychology as a profession moving forward. There was one theme that was developed to answer this research question, the future of GAI for IOPs, which is discussed in more detail below.

### *Theme 5: The future of GAI for IOPs*

The final theme unpacked how participants felt that GAI would change and shift the IOP role in the future. This included re-directing the work done by IOPs rather than replacing IOPs altogether, shifts in the work roles that IOPs will take on and skills that they will need in the future, embracing GAI as a part of IOP work moving forward, and contributing to the development of GAI-related policies and GAI use in organisations. The sub-themes that were identified and the participants whose perceptions fitted in these sub-themes are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7**
*Sub-themes identified for the future of GAI for IOPs*

| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Redirection rather than replacement** | X | | X | X | | X | X | X | X |
| **Shifting roles and skills** | X | X | | | X | X | | X | |
| **Embracing GAI** | X | | | | X | X | X | X | |
| **Contributing to GAI policy and use** | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

#### *Sub-theme 1: Redirection rather than replacement*

Eight of the participants (all except Participant 4) raised concerns about GAI being seen as a replacement for IOP work and expertise (please refer to theme 4, sub-theme 3). However,

seven participants (all except Participants 2 and 5) believed that the IOP role would not be fully replaced by GAI and would rather be redirected and re-imagined in an organisational context.

> "*We're using technology more often than not. So, what it has done is just to redirect, it's not replacing, but it's just redirecting some of what we used to do to do it differently…*" (Participant 1)

Participant 4 emphasised strongly that GAI would not be able to replace IOP skills and expertise, a view that was echoed by Participant 9 who felt that GAI would play an important supportive role for IOP work but that it would not replace IOP work altogether:

> "*…but I don't think it would ever eradicate the skill, the interpretation that we… we provide, the expertise we provide…*" (Participant 4)

> "*I think it's going to play a supportive role. I don't think it's going to necessarily take the work of an industrial psychologist. It'll be more of a supportive role…*" (Participant 9)

Participant 3 suggested that GAI will change the skills needed by IOPs to function effectively in the workplace, but that this would not change their professional and ethical responsibilities as registered IOPs or the foundations of their knowledge and the way this should be applied, specifically in terms of assessment:

> "*…I think that's how the skillset is changing. I think the foundations of understanding psychometrics and understanding validity, reliability, and those sorts of steps don't go away. And understanding how to give proper feedback and how to utilise data is never going to go away… …I think what's shifting is it doesn't take away your responsibility and it doesn't take away the need to stick to those core foundations I spoke about earlier, fairness, reliability, objectivity, all those sorts of things remain…*" (Participant 3)

Both Participant 7 and Participant 9 also spoke specifically about IOPs not being able to be replaced in the assessment process, highlighting their role in interpreting the findings, answering questions, and providing individual feedback and support to those being assessed:

> "*I think you still need that human element to be able to provide personalised feedback and to help interpret the report…*" (Participant 9)

> "*I think even with the assessments, you know, it can be done online, the feedback can be done online. Well, like, you know, they can just read through the feedback, but without having someone actually kind of explain it and go through it and chat to you*

*about it and let you kind of ask questions or kind of get more information, I think they're losing out on a big chunk of information that comes from having that personal interaction…*" (Participant 7)

In total, six of the participants (Participants 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9) indicated that GAI would not be able to replace the 'human' element of IOP work, with several participants noting the importance of establishing relationships and connecting with people interpersonally and socially as part of IOP work:

"*…work isn't just about delivery. It's about connecting with people and then having meaningful relationships. So it will be a limitation to technology. It's only going to go so far, I think…*" (Participant 3)

"*I don't think that industrial psychology will ever become eradicated field due to AI. And the reason for that is that human element can never be replaced*" (Participant 4)

"*I don't see AI replacing the role of an industrial psychologist in the world and in the community, because my view is that our currency is people. And what I can do in five minutes of meeting someone, there is no bot or chat GPT or AI that can do it. And the real core of what us as people professionals are about…*" (Participant 6)

"*I think the relationship side of things is so important and it needs to be done by us…*" (Participant 8)

Participant 7 agreed with this perspective, noting that it was important to establish the value of IOPs in the workplace because without them "*…people are missing out… on that human engagement*". Participant 6 noted that if GAI were used in place of human IOPs, this would remove the human element from decision-making and limit the use of intuition and emotion, which would be a loss to the profession:

"*…the ability to discern, the ability to make decisions, that humanness. The loss of that in our profession would be a tragedy…*" (Participant 6)

Participant 8 and Participant 9 felt that the inclusion of GAI in IOP work would reduce IOP involvement in analysis of data and report-writing, and that this would therefore shift the work done by IOPs more towards developing interventions and building relationships and establishing interpersonal connections:

> "*So it'll definitely help in compiling written documents, absolutely. But when it comes to verbalizing, I don't think it's going to help all that much. It's not like the computer will be able to talk to the client and sell your services for you…*" (Participant 9)

> "*…being able to focus on the actual relational side and building interventions rather than focusing on analysing…*" (Participant 8)

Participant 4 expanded on this by proposing that specialising in the integration of GAI into everyday work could become a specialised sub-field of IOP practice:

> "*So I think there's definitely a place for almost a sub area of industrial psychology that we could almost call like technology, where we become almost, where the specific industrial psychologists who are technology, like they specialize in technology. So they understand how you can leverage technology to better your organization. So, I think in a way that could almost become an advisory or expertise where industrial psychologists can go into companies and provide training or assess kind of the processes that are happening and where in those processes can technology make it quicker. So, I think there's definitely an opportunity for that where industrial psychology branches out to be more tech focused*" (Participant 4)

Overall, most of the participants felt that GAI would not be able to replace IOPs, especially in terms of the relational and interpersonal elements of IOP work and the assessment process, but that GAI would change the work carried out by IOPs and the skills they need to stay relevant and professional. This included perceptions that the role of IOPs would be redirected to focus more on aspects of the work that GAI cannot do (for example, interpretation and facilitation) and that the work of IOPs would be re-imagined including how to manage the changes that GAI will bring to the workplace.

### ***Sub-theme 2: Shifting roles and skills***

Five of the participants (Participants 1, 2, 5, 6, and 8) indicated that GAI would change the type of work roles traditionally taken on by IOPs, with a stronger focus on oversight, management, and networking.

Three participants (Participants 1, 2, and 5) felt that IOPs would need to take on more of a management and quality assurance role, where their work would shift to overseeing,

verifying, and refining the output produced by GAI and providing human intervention to ensure that details are not missed in the information generated and processes carried out:

> "*…But now it is going to happen with a click of a button, you know, and our role will just be most of the time refining, refining what you will have gotten from the AI. And obviously you're not going to take it as it is, you still have to, you know… you still have to reference it and obviously make sure that you don't use it as though it's your own work*" (Participant 1)

> "*I suspect our role would be more of like a quality assurance of some of these outputs and identifying where there is systemic bias creeping in, in terms of like what suggestions are served up… we've got to make sure like, is this thing working as it should?* (Participant 2)

Related to this, Participant 2 felt that GAI would introduce higher expectations around the input provided by IOPs, with more requirements for this to be "*hyper-tailored*" to particular candidates and situations and less generic or scripted. They also felt that this would change the role of IOPs to one linked more closely with providing oversight of GAI output and quality assurance:

> "*So I think there's sort of going to be an expectation that all of these sort of suggestions that we give, whether it's in a one-to-one coaching session, whether it's to teams or whether it's the whole organizations are, are really hyper tailored. And that our role would be more kind of looking over sort of those reports and tools and making sure that what is coming out is robust and sound… So I think our role will change in terms of that expectation of hyper-tailorism, that expectation of kind of quality assurance…*" (Participant 2)

Participant 6 felt that GAI would allow IOPs to shift to work that is "*…more problem-solving than regurgitative…*", while Participant 8 felt that it would free up time for IOPs to focus on interpretation and intervention rather than basic analysis. A similar perspective was mentioned by Participant 2, who felt that IOP work would shift to focus on interactions and building relationships rather than analysis and report-writing:

> "*So, I imagine that my work is going to be far more in the future about presenting and about networking and about facilitation of in-person or kind of virtual sessions, probably sort of supported by those tools, but a lot less of the kind of like sitting down and say writing documents and things like that…*" (Participant 2)

"*…allows us to focus more on the interpretation and the, and designing further interventions and making recommendations rather than spending the time analysing the same way that we used to…*" (Participant 8)

Participant 2 also felt that GAI would allow IOPs to become more creative by creating a base from which to build ideas:

"*Because now actually there's, if you work sort of together with these tools, you can kind of input something, some more ideas can come back and it's kind of a scaffolding effect when it comes to creativity…*" (Participant 2)

Overall, all five of the participants felt that GAI would change the focus of IOP work and shift their traditional work roles away from more routine administrative-related work such as analysis and report-writing. Participants mentioned providing more oversight, taking greater responsibility for quality assurance, giving more individualised and tailored feedback, building relationships and human connections, and having more opportunities for creativity as some of the ways in which IOP work might shift as a result of GAI.

***Sub-theme 3: Embracing GAI***

Five of the participants (Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8) emphasised the importance of embracing GAI as a part of the future work of IOPs and a necessary tool for professional development. Participant 1 expressed this idea directly, while Participant 6 emphasised that GAI is becoming an inevitable part of everyday life and that it would therefore be beneficial for IOPs to use this to enhance their work as much as possible:

"*We should embrace it and make sure that we, we capacitate ourselves and use it … in our profession*" (Participant 1)

"*It's not going away. It's something that we need to build into the fabric of our lives to maximise what we're able to achieve*" (Participant 6)

Participant 8 felt that it was important that IOPs not be scared of GAI and rather see it as a tool to improve their work, while Participant 7 noted that GAI could be useful as an aid for generating ideas and being productive:

"*Not being scared… To feel like we're becoming redundant but giving, but sharing this as a tool with clients…*" (Participant 8)

> "*But I think just to generate some ideas or just to help, especially if you're stuck, it does come in useful…*" (Participant 7)

Participant 5 also felt that GAI could be seen as a partner or coach in the work process, and emphasised that IOPs have a responsibility to integrate this into their work and to give advice on how to do this to their clients as well:

> "*So I think that's an important role that, um, our psychologists can, can play. Um, but then I think there's also the responsibility of bringing… Um, being on kind of on top of it and like, uh, bringing more, um, choice to your clients. So, um, so that they have access to more, um, and you can provide more value…*" (Participant 5)

Overall, these participants felt that embracing GAI is a necessary step and professional responsibility for IOPs, especially in terms of helping them to carry out their work roles more effectively.

***Sub-theme 4: Contributing to GAI policy and use***

All of the participants indicated that IOPs would play an important role in facilitating the use of GAI in the workplace; helping organisations, leaders, and employees to manage the changes that GAI will create; and developing policies around the use of GAI for work purposes.

Participant 4 felt that there was a need to "*change our understanding of how…solutions can be enabled by technology*" and to find ways to optimise the use of technology to reduce delays and increase productivity. They also felt that IOPs would be best placed to prompt GAI to solve these types of problems and increase efficiency because of their expertise:

> "*So they understand how you can leverage technology to better your organization. So, I think in a way that could almost become an advisory or expertise where industrial psychologists can go into companies and provide training or assess kind of the processes that are happening and where in those processes can technology make it quicker…*" (Participant 4)

Participant 1 and Participant 3 also felt that IOPs could play a key role in training employees to use GAI effectively, including raising awareness about what GAI can do and directly training the GAI engine itself. Participant 3 and Participant 5 both noted that one of the roles IOPs could play would be to ensure that the data entered into the GAI engine was of a high quality and validated, thereby ensuring high quality output:

> "*…we need to create syllabuses or workshops and seminars around capacitating people and making awareness in terms of what this AI or generative AI means for us in the workplace…*" (Participant 1)

> "*Now you can get a bunch of people in a room that kind of know what they're doing and you can firstly align on how they're thinking, secondly train an AI engine to make the right decisions…*" (Participant 3)

> "*…so I think that there's that responsibility that you, you know, you, you provide quality, putting out quality data…*" (Participant 5)

Participant 7 and Participant 9 also highlighted the potential training and development role that IOPs could take on in relation to GAI. Participant 7 focused on IOPs being able to assist employees with soft skills development, while Participant 9 mentioned training employees to use GAI ethically and also helping employees to achieve a good work-life balance around using technology. Participant 9 also indicated that IOPs could use GAI to help groups become more productive and collaborate more effectively as a team:

> "*I think we can definitely go into training and development and how to upskill themselves in relation to using the technology. So, what skills they might need, you know, soft skill like this…*" (Participant 7).

> "*…they can provide interventions to help individuals and organisations deal with technology and the use of AI. So perhaps ethics training is an example to show organisations that they still need to follow copyright and ethical processes when reproducing information and advertising using AI. When it comes to the human individual, so the human technology or human computer interface, I think that the industrial psychologist can help facilitate that process to show them how to use computers, how to use AI…*" (Participant 9)

> "*Teams at a group level, they can help groups work with AI, show them how they could potentially make more sales. You could use it to understand sales and team members' personality, team building exercises as well…*" (Participant 9)

Participant 2 echoed Participant 9's perspective on IOPs contributing to the ethical use of GAI in organisations, specifically suggesting that IOPs could advise about policies to use GAI in a safe and productive way:

> "*…I think we would be expected to play a role in… AI committees in both sort of formulating the principles around it and then continuing to refine it and understand which technologies we're going to use and how in safe ways that don't harm people...*" (Participant 2)

Several participants (Participants 2, 6, 7, and 8) felt that another important role IOPs would need to play would be to help organisations and employees to manage their fear and anxiety around the changes created by GAI. Participant 2 felt that IOPs would need to help organisations to develop a more adaptable and agile organisational culture with a stronger focus on skills, while Participant 6 indicated that IOPs would need to assist leaders to develop the skills required for change management. Participant 8 mentioned the importance of encouraging buy-in for using GAI by both employers and employees, and Participant 7 suggested that IOPs could provide counselling to allow people to express their fears around the introduction of GAI and to find ways to manage this:

> "*…one of the roles of the industrial psychologists to really help with the leadership development… And, you know, that leadership coaching, so that they are also setting the right tone and containing the… anxiety around change…"* (Participant 6)

> "*So actually just doing a few, whether it's group sessions or individual sessions with the person and kind of just letting them express their feelings and kind of navigating that fear and kind of doing it in that, you know, in that sort of sense where they feel that they are still valued and, you know, their fears and all of that is, you know, it's not something that's abnormal or something that, you know, but how to navigate that and how to go about it*…" (Participant 7)

Generally, the participants felt that IOPs would play an important part in facilitating the changes created by bringing GAI into the work environment and that they would be able to assist with managing both practical and emotional concerns created by this. Some of the suggested roles for IOPs included providing counselling and training, helping to develop policies around the use of GAI, and ensuring the most effective and ethical use of GAI to increase productivity.

# Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter will discuss the research findings in relation to the sub-questions, using the themes and sub-themes identified in the results chapter. Each theme was examined by unpacking why participants expressed certain views and linking these insights to relevant literature. The discussion below covers IOPs' knowledge and experiences with GAI (theme 1 and theme 2), their perceived benefits (theme 3), and limitations (theme 4) of GAI in the workplace, as well as their views on how GAI will transform their profession (theme 5).

## Theme 1: GAI usage

This theme highlighted how participants have been using GAI in both personal and professional contexts, as well as their views on training and skill requirements for effective use. The results showed that all participants had some exposure to GAI, though the extent and context of use varied. Understanding why participants used or avoided GAI in certain ways provided insight into their acceptance of technology and perceived needs for skill development both for themselves and for employees generally.

### *Sub-theme 1: Everyday use of GAI*

Participants described a spectrum of GAI usage in daily life, ranging from personal convenience to work-related tasks, which reflected differing levels of technology integration into their routines. Several participants (Participants 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9) actively used tools like ChatGPT for work purposes such as generating content drafts, brainstorming ideas, translating text, or summarising information. They valued GAI as a "springboard" (Participant 6) for writing and idea generation, helping them overcome writer's block or saving time on initial drafts. This fits with literature that indicates that GAI can boost productivity by handling preliminary work, enabling professionals to focus on refinement (Hatzius et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2025). It also resonates with studies forecasting significant efficiency gains from GAI adoption, of the order of 1.5% annual productivity increase and substantial time saved on content creation (Budhwar et al., 2023; Hatzius et al., 2023). The enthusiasm of those participants who were using GAI suggested that when GAI is perceived as useful and easy to use, it can be readily incorporated into IOP work, consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model's core propositions (Davis, 1989; Gado et al., 2022). Perceived usefulness was evident in how participants praised GAI's ability to generate quick answers and summaries, and

perceived ease of use was reflected in their being able to ask a question and receive useful generated output. These perceptions likely explain why most of the participants have embraced GAI as a part of their daily life or work. The tool tangibly makes certain tasks faster or easier, thereby meeting the conditions for technology acceptance (Gado et al., 2022; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Davis' (1989) model is also shown through the participants' use of GAI technology for their more mundane or administrative-related tasks.

On the other hand, a couple of participants were more hesitant or limited in their GAI use, especially in personal contexts. Participants 4 and 5 reported using GAI for personal use cases or for social/non-work purposes but intentionally avoided relying on it for work. They expressed a concern with a loss of personal touch or uniqueness. Research on GAI and creativity suggests that while GAI can aid idea generation, individuals may worry that it could make outputs too generic or less personalised (Chen et al., 2024). There have also been concerns about issues when it comes to originality and plagiarism when using GAI (Budhwar et al., 2023). The participants who felt that GAI might dilute their distinct contributions were more cautious in using it, which emphasises the need for balance between automation and preserving one's expert voice. This finding underscored that perceived threats to professional identity or quality could reduce technology acceptance (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

### *Sub-theme 2: Training and prompting*

All participants strongly agreed that formal training in GAI usage was essential for both current IOP practitioners and future professionals. They differed mainly in when and how this training should occur, reflecting views on integrating GAI literacy into education and ongoing development. The focus on the importance of training stems from a recognition that GAI is only as effective as its users' skill in interacting with it. Several participants stressed that prompt engineering, knowing how to ask the right questions, is crucial. This resonates with literature that indicates that GAI systems' performance can vary dramatically based on how tasks are formulated and the user's level of expertise (Ooi et al., 2023; Patil et al., 2024).

Some participants feared that without training, IOPs or employees might misuse GAI, either by trusting incorrect information or by failing to leverage its full potential. In line with this, research has recorded instances of GAI confidently producing false or biased information when prompts are vague or when the system's knowledge is incomplete (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024). The participants' solution was proactive upskilling and integrating GAI into

the curricula and internship requirements for studying to be an IOP. In the literature, it has been proposed that professional training programmes be updated to include data literacy and GAI competencies (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Van Zyl, 2024). By recommending structured learning at various stages of developing a career as an IOP, participants expressed the belief that confidence and competence in using GAI would come from guided practice and knowledge. In essence, the participants argued that IOPs should not be left to learn GAI by trial-and-error in high-stakes environments, but rather through formal education, which in turn will reduce fear and improve adoption. However, with the rapid nature of GAI changes, this may need to be adapted accordingly (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024).

Moreover, ethics training was frequently mentioned alongside technical training by some of the participants. Participants 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9 specifically noted that any GAI training must incorporate ethical guidelines, for instance, how to avoid plagiarism, ensure client confidentiality, and understand GAI's limitations and biases. This reflects awareness that knowing how to use GAI responsibly is as important as knowing how to use it effectively. This ties into the broader point that IOPs view themselves as custodians of ethical practice. Thus, training the next generation of IOPs on GAI should focus on building both skills and good judgment.

**Theme 2: GAI perceptions**

Theme 2 explored how the participants perceived the emergence of GAI in their field, including their perspectives on GAI's role, general attitude to GAI (positive or ambivalent), and specific anxieties like fear of the unknown and fear of job redundancy.

***Sub-theme 1: The role of GAI***

Most of the participants speculated on the current and future role of GAI in their work and in the wider world of work. A common thread in their responses was the idea that GAI will transform, but not outright replace, human jobs. These views suggested an expectation that GAI could handle certain elements of work and that this would therefore redirect human effort toward different activities. This aligns with the concept of job redirection or augmentation where GAI takes over some responsibilities, allowing humans to focus on tasks that require creativity, interpretation, or complex social interaction (Budhwar et al., 2023; Daugherty & Wilson, 2018). Most of the participants also expressed that GAI would be a necessary part of

their work moving forward and that IOPs would be required to develop some skills and expertise in this technology to stay relevant. This resonates with the idea that IOPs will need to develop digital literacy and integrate technology, including GAI, into their own work and help others to make the same shift as they navigate the transition into the digital era (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022).

It was noteworthy that participants who embraced these views (Participants 1, 3, 6, 8, and 9) tended to be those already familiar with GAI's capabilities, possibly making them more optimistic about a collaborative future. Some participants (Participants 4, 5, and 7) stated that their technology knowledge was lower in comparison to others because of GAI and its newness. This was also industry dependent because the IOPs in tech-savvy organisations ranked their technology use as higher than those who were not in technology-based or focused industries (please see Table 2 in Chapter 3). This can be seen in relation to Davis' (1989) model and the idea that the more one uses technology in one's day-to-day work, the more comfortable one would feel with technology.

Furthermore, Participant 4 provided a contrasting opinion, voicing uncertainty about GAI's place in certain specialised IOP tasks such as crafting detailed reports. This scepticism could have risen from direct knowledge of GAI's current limitations. Present-day GAI sometimes struggles with domain-specific accuracy or complex, multi-step reasoning (Chen et al., 2024). Participant 4's stance can be understood as cautious because GAI's role may be limited by the need for expert prompting and the risk of unsatisfactory outcomes if used beyond its competence. This echoes ideas on GAI's boundaries, for example, the idea that generative models excel at producing content based on learned patterns but sometimes falter when original insight or context-specific judgment is required (Budhwar et al., 2023). Therefore, Participant 4 and others alike stated that GAI's role should be that of an augmentative tool within well-defined parameters, not a standalone expert. This perspective serves as a reminder that while GAI uptake is likely and perhaps inevitable, it must be accompanied by clarity on what it can and cannot do. Rane (2023) noted that professionals will need to supervise GAI outputs and intervene where human intuition and expertise are indispensable.

### *Sub-theme 2: Perceptions of GAI*

The participants' attitudes toward GAI ranged from excited to nervous. These attitudes shed light on their underlying trust in the technology and their comfort levels, or lack of, with

its outputs. The theory suggests that when individuals see tangible advantages and alignment with their goals, they are more likely to have positive attitudes toward new technology (Gado et al., 2022). It appears that some of the participants had internalised the idea that GAI can be a collaborative partner, leading to a generally positive perception. This was possibly because their experiences with GAI so far had not undermined their professional values, and instead, GAI had been an aid that made their jobs more interesting by removing grunt work. This supports a suggestion in the literature by Van Zyl (2024) that IOPs should embrace GAI as a positive addition and source of possible benefits and consider ways to collaborate with it. It also resonates with suggestions that GAI can help to save time and cut costs, leading to greater efficiency (Budhwar et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023; Patil et al., 2024; Sengar et al., 2024).

In contrast, other participants voiced ambivalence based on two main concerns - trust in the quality of GAI's output and fear of external judgment. The trust issue stemmed from uncertainty about GAI's reliability. The wariness about others' perceptions, such as not wanting it to seem like a client's CV was auto-written by GAI, or fearing accusations of plagiarism, as Participant 8 noted, was especially interesting. This showed that some participants were concerned about the social acceptance of GAI use. Even if the participants themselves trusted GAI, they worried stakeholders might view GAI-generated work as less credible or that it might be seen as cheating. Essentially, these participants said they were nervous because GAI introduces unknowns in quality control and professional image. Empirical studies have found that a lack of understanding and transparency in GAI can lead to feelings of anxiety and reduced usage (Zhao et al., 2024). Until they are fully convinced of GAI's trustworthiness and until using GAI becomes more of an accepted practice, these IOPs could remain guarded in their acceptance and use of GAI. This supports ethical and practical concerns about the use of GAI that have been raised in the literature, including its potential to generate false information and concerns about copyright and ownership of the material generated (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chenneville et al., 2024; Ooi et al., 2023). It also highlights the role played by perceived social norms and perceptions of the degree to which others encourage or discourage the use of GAI in accepting GAI as a new technology (Gado et al., 2022; Venkatesh et al., 2003).

### *Sub-theme 3: Fear of the unknown*

A notable sentiment among several participants was a fundamental anxiety about the unknown aspects of GAI. Four participants (Participants 2, 4, 5, and 7) explicitly mentioned

that not knowing exactly how GAI works or what it might do in the future was a source of unease for them. These expressions aligned with findings by Cardon et al. (2023) that about half of the people believe that GAI will do more harm than good, an outlook often driven by worst-case scenarios and a lack of knowledge about GAI's realistic capabilities and limits.

The reasons behind this fear in the participants' context were interesting. One key reason seemed to be a lack of control over the unknown, part of which was procedural and part of which was technical. Both aspects seemed to make the participants feel disempowered. Perceived controllability can reduce technological anxiety. For example, when users can play with and personalise new systems, they gain a sense of mastery that reduces fear (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Gupta, 2024). The participants' suggestions reaffirmed this, as they suggested that to combat the unknown, people should be involved in pilot programmes, training, and phased implementation so that they learn by doing in a safe environment.

The fear of the unknown also tied into concerns beyond the individual level related to organisational uncertainty. Participant 1 noted that one reason for hesitancy is that organisational processes for GAI were not yet defined as people were not sure how GAI "*should be incorporated*" at work. This suggests that when rules and roles for a new technology such as GAI are unclear, employees fear making an error or being caught off-guard, which emphasises the importance of perceived usefulness and perceived knowledge as important predictors of intention to use AI (Gado et al., 2022). This underscores the responsibility of organisations to create clear policies and support structures for GAI integration (Budhwar et al., 2023). Coetzee & Veldsman (2022) argue that clear change management strategies are needed for digital transitions as without this, the unknown grows along with the fear. The participants' discussions implied that once frameworks were in place, much of this fear could be mitigated. Therefore, fear of the unknown can be best tackled by making the unknown known, which can be done through education, policy, transparency, and involvement.

***Sub-theme 4: Fear of redundancy***

A repeated concern was the fear that GAI could leave IOPs or other employees redundant. Three participants raised this explicitly (Participants 1, 2, and 7), and others alluded to it in discussing GAI's role or its disadvantages. This fear mirrors widespread societal concern whenever advanced automation has emerged (Budhwar et al., 2023; Cardon et al., 2023).

These anxieties seemed to grow from observing GAI's capabilities, which encroached on tasks traditionally done by humans, leading to a narrative of replacement. In human resource management and the IOP field, GAI is already being used for screening resumes and CVs, managing basic employee queries, and even elements of coaching or counselling via chatbots (Budhwar et al., 2023; Oosthuizen, 2022). As raised by some of the participants, there is a concern that organisations may start to cut back on human consultants for standard IOP roles that GAI can perform reasonably well, such as conducting surveys, generating reports, or developing training modules. Redundancy is not just theoretical; some of the participants expressed that they were already encountering attitudes that undervalued the human expert in favour of technology. This reflects a perceived erosion of the IOP's unique professional value in the eyes of clients or employers. This resonates with a point by Daugherty et al. (2019), who indicated that as GAI takes on more tasks, professionals need to redefine and prove their value.

However, most of the participants felt that while the job roles of IOPs will change, the IOP profession will not become redundant because people would always need to be managed and understood. A few participants also mentioned that it is very important to bring employees into the conversation when managing GAI in organisations. This could be in the form of including them in policy-making, decisions of how and when they should be trained, or just transparency for the future of their jobs. Organisations need to show the ease of use and why GAI could be effective at making jobs more efficient, as opposed to making employees redundant, to alleviate these fears. This supports shifting IOPs' job roles to include training organisations and employees to use GAI mindfully and managing the integration of humans and technology effectively (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Liu et al., 2025; Oosthuizen, 2022).

**Theme 3: Benefits of GAI**

The participants identified many advantages of integrating GAI into IOP practices. These perceived benefits help to understand why several of the participants were enthusiastic about using GAI and how they envisioned it improving their work. Each benefit is discussed below, along with potential reasons participants highlighted it, and connections to relevant literature that corroborated or contextualised the benefit.

***Sub-theme 1: Efficiency and saving time and resources***

One of the most frequently mentioned benefits was that GAI can make work processes more efficient, saving significant time and resources. Seven participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9) emphasised this and offered concrete examples such as using GAI to draft feedback reports or operating model outlines "*10 times quicker*" than manual effort (Participant 4) or consolidating large amounts of research into a summary in seconds instead of hours of reading (Participant 9). Using GAI was proposed as a way to help cut down on time-wasting and time-intensive tasks, which was seen as a benefit because IOPs often need to juggle multiple clients or projects, and the ability to perform an analysis or create a deliverable faster could increase their spare time for deeper thinking and client interaction.

Ooi et al. (2023) highlighted that GAI can significantly reduce the time needed for information processing and content generation, which aligns with the participants' statements. Hatzius et al. (2023) projected that widespread GAI adoption could raise global GDP by increasing workplace productivity. The participants reflected this by pointing to how tasks like literature reviews or environmental scans that once took days could now be done in minutes. This drastic time-saving seemed to be a key reason behind their positive view of GAI; it directly alleviated common pain points in their workflow (Budhwar et al., 2023).

Participants tied efficiency gains to a cost-savings benefit as well. Automating parts of training or recruitment and selection content development can cut expenditure (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). The participants foresaw these savings, and recruitment is just one example of an area where this might apply. Budhwar et al. (2023) note that GAI can be seen as a way in which to reduce operational costs generally. Many organisations face budget constraints in both the South African and the global context, and an IOP who can leverage GAI to deliver a project at a lower cost might therefore have an edge. Thus, efficiency was seen as not only a technical benefit but also as a strategic one for an IOP's viability and value proposition.

***Sub-theme 2: Reduced daily workload***

In addition to efficiency, participants expressed that GAI has the potential to reduce the labour involved in completing routine administrative and clerical tasks in their daily workload. Seven participants (Participants 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9) highlighted this idea, which was that by offloading repetitive, low-complexity work to GAI, IOPs can concentrate on more meaningful

and rewarding parts of their job. TTS Talent (2023) echoed these sentiments by stating that GAI would take over administrative responsibilities, allowing knowledge workers to focus on creative and strategic activities.

Participants also noted how GAI can swiftly gather and integrate information, which reduced the burden of manual research. Participant 9, for example, explained that with GAI's help of summarising diverse resources, IOPs can understand clients better without individually retrieving sources. Searching literature, benchmarking best practices, or finding relevant psychological theories are tasks that can be quite time-consuming, but some of the participants felt that these could be partially delegated to GAI. This fits with the idea of using GAI as a research assistant due to its capacity to summarise and synthesise large amounts of information and research (Chen et al., 2024; Budhwar et al., 2023; TTS Talent, 2023).

Generally, the participants felt that a large benefit of GAI was that it could be used to reduce both the cognitive load and the workload associated with information retrieval and their routine administrative work, leaving them with the more enjoyable creative and strategic tasks that form part of their workload.

### *Sub-theme 3: Affordability and accessibility*

Five participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 8, and 9) mentioned that GAI could make IOP services more affordable and accessible, by lowering costs and broadening reach. The logic they followed was that because GAI improved efficiency and reduced the need for extensive manual effort, services that once required significant billable hours could be delivered faster and at lower costs. This echoes a point by Trupulse (2023), where an advantage of GAI is that it is available all hours of the day and whenever it is needed.

One reason the participants valued this increased accessibility and affordability was the competitive advantage and inclusion that it was seen as leading to. For example, in a consulting scenario, if an IOP can lower the time needed to conduct an organisational survey analysis via GAI tools, they might charge the client less than traditional methods would require, making their services more attractive, especially to smaller businesses with tight budgets. Lower costs could also democratise access to IOP expertise; organisations or individuals who previously could not afford organisational psychology services might be able to do so once GAI helped to drive prices down. This aligns with emerging uses of GAI chatbots and platforms to deliver services such as coaching or counselling to a wide audience simultaneously at low marginal

cost (Budhwar et al., 2023). Some participants saw a scenario where GAI amplified the impact of one IOP by allowing them to manage more clients or larger groups with GAI support, spreading the cost and making each instance cheaper. Many IOPs are highly aware of how budget constraints limit what they can do; if GAI lowers those constraints, they can extend beneficial programmes to more people (Chetty et al., 2023).

Another aspect is efficiency in expensive processes like psychometric testing or report generation. Participant 2 predicted that GAI would drive down costs of things like psychological assessments or producing reports, which are traditionally costly due to intellectual property costs and personnel time. If GAI can generate a competent assessment report draft or conduct preliminary scoring analyses, this will reduce reliance on costly proprietary software or lengthy manual interpretation, presumably cutting costs for clients requiring those services. The process could be further streamlined and create consistency without requiring extra human resources. This means more frequent or comprehensive use of IOP expertise in organisations, which is a positive outcome for the field as well as for employee well-being (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022). IOPs can shift focus and spend more time with clients and employees (Budhwar et al., 2023; Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022).

***Sub-theme 4: Accuracy and consistency***

A less common but important benefit that some participants noted was that GAI could bring greater accuracy, consistency, and objectivity to certain IOP tasks, particularly assessments and data analysis. Three participants raised this point (Participants 3, 8 and 9). For example, Participant 3, with a psychometric background, was particularly vocal about how GAI could drastically standardise assessment processes, giving every candidate a similar experience and eliminating inconsistencies due to human fatigue or error. The idea was that a GAI system would not get tired or have days where they are not at their best and would be able to apply the same criteria uniformly, which could increase the fairness and reliability of processes like scoring tests or evaluating interview answers. This could be transformative in a field that highly values reliability and validity of assessments and matches with points raised in the literature about GAI being able to assist in improving the validity, reliability, and accuracy of testing and research (Chen et al., 2024; Pellert et al., 2023).

Some of the participants saw GAI as a tool that, once properly trained and calibrated, can transcend human limitations in routine yet precision-critical tasks, removing human error and increasing consistency. GAI models can process vast data without omission and can flag anomalies or patterns with high accuracy (Chen et al., 2024). For IOPs, this means that certain types of analyses could become more thorough and factual if GAI is used, reducing the risk of mistakes in reporting or interpretation that could misinform decisions.

Another aspect of accuracy and consistency is objectivity. With a properly designed GAI system, biases can be somewhat eliminated unless these are present in its training data, and if these are mitigated, it will judge purely on relevant inputs every time (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). This may make outcomes fairer although there is a concern about losing personal insights and more qualitative input as well (Pellert et al., 2023). An example of using GAI in this way positively is an algorithmic scoring of interview responses that might ignore irrelevant demographic factors that sometimes sway humans (Budhwar et al., 2023). IOPs could therefore perhaps create more evidence-based foundations for their recommendations by using GAI as an analytical assistant. One can also view this benefit through a client-centric perspective. If a client feels that decisions and interpretations that are made are consistent and data-backed, trust in the work carried out by IOPs may increase. Many organisations have concerns about subjectivity in human resources (HR) therefore if GAI can help to demonstrate that decisions are based on objective criteria applied evenly, this could increase stakeholder confidence (Budhwar et al., 2023).

### *Sub-theme 5: Scope and integration*

Some participants noted that GAI dramatically increased the scope of information that they could access and allowed them to integrate sources quickly. Five participants (Participants 1, 6, 7, 8, and 9) touched on this benefit and explained that GAI can pull together knowledge from a wide range of databases, articles, and contexts, giving IOPs a broader and deeper insight than they might have achieved on their own. This benefit mattered because IOP work is inherently interdisciplinary and research-intensive. Whether designing an intervention, addressing a workplace problem, or advising on policy, IOPs need to draw on theories and findings from a wide set of fields including psychology, management, sociology, and so forth (Coetzee & Veldsman, 20222; Oosthuizen, 2019). Traditionally, gathering this information has meant conducting extensive literature reviews and consulting multiple sources, which is an

extremely time-consuming effort that may still miss some important information due to human limits in searching. Ooi et al. (2023) noted that GAI is distinct in how it can learn and generate human-like outputs, drawing from vast knowledge; the participants saw this as bringing cutting-edge knowledge to everyday work dynamically and allowing them to access and integrate a large amount of information quickly, making their decisions and outputs more informed.

### *Sub-theme 6: Opportunity*

Participants 5, 7, and 8 stated that GAI ushered in new opportunities for learning, career paths, and even economic development. The participants perceived that, beyond improving existing tasks, GAI opened doors to things that were not possible or prevalent previously. For these participants, GAI was seen not just as a tool to optimise current work, but also as a catalyst for innovation and growth in the IO field and beyond. Coetzee & Veldsman (2022) mentioned IOPs needing STARA–smart tech–skills; those who acquire them might define new subfields of practice, which is reminiscent of earlier technological leaps that have changed the world of work and the job roles and skills required by many professions.

In terms of learning and development opportunities, Participant 5's view was that with GAI, professionals or employees could learn in novel ways, which ties back to the idea that learning journeys can be personalised using GAI (Chen et al., 2024; Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). Employees might have GAI mentors or training programmes that adapt to them, which IOPs could leverage to foster skill growth (Rathnayake & Gunawardana, 2023). That is an opportunity where IOPs can begin to incorporate personalised GAI-based learning tools into their work, making their interventions more effective and modern.

## Theme 4: Limitations of GAI

While participants were excited about the benefits of GAI, they also voiced substantial concerns about, and limitations associated with its use. These limitations tempered their enthusiasm and highlighted areas where caution, additional oversight, or outright avoidance of GAI might be warranted.

***Sub-theme 1: Accuracy***

All participants, except for Participant 4, raised concerns about the accuracy, credibility, and reliability of GAI-generated information. Participants recognised that GAI outputs were not guaranteed to be correct; errors or hallucinations could occur. The comments made by the participants showed an awareness of the paradox that GAI can swiftly provide information or text, but that convenience can mask underlying inaccuracies or a lack of evidence (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chenneville et al., 2024; Patil et al., 2024; TTS Talent, 2023).

As IOPs, making decisions or giving advice based on wrong information could be damaging. The stakes are high; if an IOP uses a GAI-generated insight that turns out to be false, it could lead to flawed interventions or even legal liabilities. There are high ethical and professional risks, which are of great concern when using GAI (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chenneville et al., 2024; Ooi et al., 2023). IOP training emphasises evidence-based practice, so the prospect of basing actions on GAI outputs that have not been validated run counter to the current professional ethos (HPCSA, 2011). This may explain the participants' high levels of caution about trusting GAI without validation.

Additionally, a couple of participants raised concerns about GAI's knowledge base and indicated that the information it produces depends on the quality of the database it uses and the training it has received. Participant 3 pointed out that GAI does not automatically have answers and can misinterpret or make wrong inferences if not carefully guided or if it has not been well-trained on the topic. Participant 8 was especially concerned about the relevance of the data that GAI draws on to Africa rather than the Western world. This is a crucial insight because accuracy is not only about factual correctness in general, but also relevance to context. GAI ethics flags this issue of bias in training data; if models are mostly trained on Western, English sources, their outputs may not account for local cultural differences or recent local developments (Chetty et al., 2023).

***Sub-theme 2: Disclosure and plagiarism***

Another ethical and professional concern that four participants (Participants 1, 4, 8 and 9) raised was the risk of plagiarism or misrepresentation when using GAI, and the importance of disclosing GAI assistance in their work. Their core concern was that they, as IOPs or their clients might take content generated by GAI and present it as their own work without

attribution, which is essentially intellectual dishonesty and a big ethical concern associated with GAI (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chenneville et al., 2024).

IOPs, like other practitioners, are bound by codes of ethics that emphasise honesty and transparency (HPCSA, 2011). If an IOP were to deliver an intervention plan that was largely generated and written by GAI but implied it was fully their own professional analysis, participants felt that would be deceptive, unethical, and unacceptable professional behaviour. This was raised by two participants who felt that it would be unethical to charge clients for expert thought and labour without informing them of the role played by GAI in producing output and adjusting the cost accordingly. This fits with concerns being raised across different fields of professional practice about the originality of GAI-generated work and the duty to disclose GAI usage (Budhwar et al., 2023; Murray, 2024).

One participant (Participant 9) was concerned about practitioners creating unrealistic expectations or over-promising on what they could deliver based on using GAI-generated content, which would create a problem of misrepresentation. This could be an ethical breach under HPCSA guidelines, which would require psychologists to practice within their boundaries of competence and accurately represent their credentials and services (HPCSA, 2011). Another participant was concerned about fully disclosing the use of GAI to clients and obtaining consent for this as an issue of integrity. This fits with ethical concerns raised about the use of GAI, including security around confidential information and possible breaches in data privacy (Chenneville et al., 2024; Patil et al., 2024).

The concerns raised by the participants did include possible issues with the technical failings of GAI, but largely focused on the risk of unethical behaviour or the perception thereof arising from the use of GAI as part of their work. This highlights the importance of perceived social norms as a factor contributing to the acceptance of new technologies such as GAI (Gado et al., 2022; Venkatesh et al., 2003).

### *Sub-theme 3: IOP replacement*

Perhaps the most existential limitation that was raised was the fear or risk of organisations or other people viewing GAI as a replacement for human IOPs or their expertise. This sub-theme is related to the earlier “fear of redundancy”, but here the emphasis was on external perceptions and misuses of GAI, rather than the IOP's own fear. Essentially, the participants worried that if GAI were seen as capable of doing psychology-related work,

stakeholders might undervalue, or bypass trained IOP professionals. This concern was raised by almost all of the participants except for one (Participant 4), which made it a deep concern in the sample. This was also tied to cutting costs by two participants, who raised concerns that organisations might think that they could save money currently spent on consultants or staff by using GAI. These participants were worried that if there was a belief that the type of work IOPs carry out, such as report-writing or analysis can be automated, it would lead to a reduction in hiring or consulting work available to IOPs. This revealed a perceived commodification of expertise, which was a real psychological and economic issue. These concerns fit with the literature that suggests that GAI will change both the world of work generally and specific jobs and types of work, and that its introduction will increase redundancy and lead to job losses (Budhwar et al., 2023; Cardon et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023).

Participants did push back strongly on the notion that GAI could truly replace IOPs. Many of them (Participants 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9) highlighted indispensable human qualities that GAI lacked, such as subjectivity, critical reasoning, ethical reasoning, deep human insight, and the ability to relate to and connect with others. They believed that while GAI can handle data or produce text, it cannot replicate genuine human connection, empathy, or the holistic understanding of context that a trained psychologist brings. The literature also suggests that GAI lacks true empathy and lived experience; it can simulate conversation but does not feel or truly understand nuance and emotion (Zhao et al., 2024). Therefore, participants saw clear disadvantages with trying to use GAI instead of an IOP for things requiring empathy, rapport, or complex ethical judgment. They also mentioned how the misuse of GAI as a replacement could backfire on organisations, for example, by providing only generic solutions that would not fully address the issues the client was experiencing or tailor the solution to their needs or not capturing the specialised training, experience, and expertise represented by registered IOPs. This matches with the view that the use of GAI will need to be balanced with continued human involvement and oversight to form an effective partnership (Brown et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2025; Rane, 2023; Trupulse, 2023; Van Zyl, 2024).

### *Sub-theme 4: Over-reliance and laziness*

All but one participant (Participant 7) mentioned that they fear that if IOPs lean too much on GAI for answers and solutions, they might stop fully engaging their own expertise and skills, which could decline over time. Participants cautioned that easy access to GAI could

lead to over-reliance on GAI and a consequent decline in human critical thinking, creativity, or effort, making practitioners intellectually lazy. This concern is echoed in the literature, which warns that IOPs personal skills, motivation, and sense of control could be badly affected if they become over-reliant on GAI (Liu et al., 2025; TTS Talent, 2023).

One reason the participants seemed to be wary of this was that they felt that the quality of IOP professional judgment and innovation could suffer if there was a move to one-size-fits-all solutions or a failure to customise GAI outputs. For instance, if an IOP always accepted the first solution a GAI engine such as ChatGPT gave for an organisational development intervention without critically evaluating alternatives or tailoring the solution, this might lead to adopting a lowest-common-denominator approach, lacking nuance or creativity (Budhwar et al., 2023). Moreover, participants noted a risk that IOPs might become lazy or trust GAI too much, leading to them not double-checking GAI's suggestions or analyses and allowing errors to go unnoticed. This relates to concerns about accuracy and the possibility of further undermining the IOP's role through poor professional work.

***Sub-theme 5: Ethical concerns and information protection***

Several participants (Participants 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8) expressed strong concerns about ethical issues and the protection of sensitive information when using GAI. These concerns ranged from data privacy and client confidentiality to the ethical use of GAI in assessment or counselling contexts and ensuring that both IOPs and organisations used GAI responsibly and fairly. These concerns echo those raised in the literature about cybersecurity and the ethical use of GAI (Budhwar et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024; Chenneville et al., 2024; Patil et al., 2024).

Several participants were concerned about entering confidential or personal data into GAI systems and issues of data privacy and confidentiality. For IOPs, client data is often highly sensitive, and using GAI could lead to breaches of trust (Chenneville et al., 2024). For example, if an IOP were to paste a client's scenario into a GAI chatbot to get advice, that could inadvertently expose the client's identity or violate their privacy (Chenneville et al., 2024). Beyond privacy, some participants talked about ensuring fairness, validity, and appropriateness when GAI is used for tasks like assessments or recommendations. They stressed that an IOP still retains responsibility for outcomes and that using GAI does not absolve one from the duty to be fair and evidence-based, which aligns with the IOP's scope of practice (HPCSA, 2011).

***Sub-theme 6: Job loss and GAI dominance***

Expanding on the fears discussed in Theme 2, five participants (1, 2, 5, 6, and 7) mentioned that widespread job displacement is a major risk of GAI adoption and framed job loss and the dominance of GAI in the labour market as a concrete limitation or risk factor associated with GAI's rise. While a previous sub-theme captured the participants' direct concerns associated with job replacement for IOPs, in this theme, participants treated job losses and human replacement in the workplace as a foreseeable general outcome of using GAI. This echoed concerns raised in the literature about unemployment and job redundancies as a result of GAI implementation (Budhwar et al., 2023; Cardon et al., 2023; Ooi et al., 2023).

A related concern was fear in the workforce and anxiety about GAI dominance. The limitation was therefore not only about actual job loss, but also the widespread fear of it, which can cause decreased morale, increased resistance, and disengagement (Cardon et al., 2023; Lui et al., 2025; Trupulse, 2023). If employees fear GAI, they may resist its day-to-day implementation, and GAI's impending "dominance" in some work domains is therefore an issue that IOPs might need to mitigate psychologically in organisations in the future. This emphasises the importance of theories and research that predict the likelihood of adopting GAI, such as the model proposed by Gado et al. (2022) and the research carried out by Gupta (2024).

From an organisational perspective, if GAI eliminates jobs, there are likely to also be losses of tacit knowledge and human oversight. Participant 6 mentioned that IOPs need to ensure that leadership sets the right tone and contains anxiety around change, including managing retrenchments or restructuring ethically. Otherwise, massive job losses could harm organisational culture and trust (Budhwar et al., 2023). There is a risk that short-term efficiency gains from GAI-driven retrenchments could lead to long-term damage by demoralising remaining employees and losing human elements that GAI cannot replace (Liu et al., 2025; Trupulse, 2023).

***Sub-theme 7: Access***

A few participants (Participants 3, 8 and 9) also mentioned unequal access to GAI technology as a significant limitation. This concerned who could use GAI, considering factors like digital literacy, socioeconomic status, and infrastructure, particularly in the context of South Africa or similar non-Western environments.

Participant 9 pointed out pragmatic access issues in South Africa, such as frequent electricity outages and spotty internet connectivity, which can severely hamper the use of online GAI tools. This was a clear limitation as the utility of GAI hinges on access to reliable infrastructure. IOPs working in contexts that experience challenges with this face inconsistency, where a GAI-based approach may not be feasible day-to-day. Also, any digital solution rolled out workforce-wide will face difficulties if workers cannot consistently work online or if hardware and accessibility are limited (Chetty et al., 2024).

Another angle to consider was relevance to global and local contexts. Participant 8 previously talked about GAI in the African context and noted that access to relevant data might be a limitation. For example, global GAI might not have training on local languages or norms. Similarly, professionals might have less access to local training data or fine-tuned local GAI solutions, forcing them to rely on global ones that were not suitable for them. Access can therefore also mean access to customised GAI that is suitable for the local context. This fits with the importance of ensuring that the source data for GAI is both accurate and as rich as possible (Patil et al., 2024; Sengar et al., 2024).

The participants mentioned this limitation because they felt it would impact the fairness and success of any GAI interventions that they tried to implement. It might also shape training and investment needs, where to really benefit from GAI, an organisation may have to invest in infrastructure, devices, and digital literacy training, which could be a barrier in the South African context. Also, from an ethical lens, IOPs need to take this into consideration based on their scope of practice (HPCSA, 2011). To mitigate this to some degree, one could argue for the phased implementation of GAI to ensure necessary infrastructure is first in place and to have time to provide training to those less familiar with GAI. Maintaining alternative non-GAI channels for those who cannot access GAI and advocating for corporate social responsibility to improve community access to technology could also be necessary.

**Theme 5: The future of GAI for IOPs**

This theme is where the participants unpacked what they felt GAI will mean for human interaction and experience in the workplace and how it will change the role of IOPs in the future. The participants generally felt that the work done by IOPs will be re-directed rather than them being replaced altogether and that there will be shifts in the work roles that IOPs will take on and the skills they will need in the future. They also mentioned embracing GAI as a part of

IOP work moving forward and discussed the roles of IOPS in contributing to the development of GAI-related policies and GAI use in organisations.

***Sub-theme 1: Redirection rather than replacement***

Almost all the participants (Participants 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9) felt that GAI would redirect or improve the work of an IOP rather than replace an IOP altogether. It was emphasised that while GAI can automate certain IOP activities and functions, it cannot replicate the human element central to IOP practice. This is not an uncommon perspective in the existing literature, as it remains debated whether GAI will cause outright job displacement or simply shift human labour toward new tasks (Budhwar et al., 2023; Oosthuizen, 2022). It has also been proposed that IOPs view GAI as a partner or team member that can contribute to their work (Liu et al., 2025; Shields, 2024; Van Zyl, 2024).

In this study, participants favoured the view that GAI would serve as a supportive tool, allowing IOPs to focus on areas where human insight is irreplaceable. Many noted that core professional activities such as structuring personalised feedback, assessment interpretation, and relationship building require emotional intelligence, context sensitivity, and a 'human' touch that even a well-trained GAI may lack. Research in digital psychology suggests that even advanced GAI cannot fully mimic human empathy or the therapeutic alliance needed in one-on-one interactions (Budhwar et al., 2023). This underscored the participants' contention that "*the currency is people*" (Participant 6). The value an IOP brings lies in ethical decision making, subjective judgment and human connection, none of which can be entirely handed off to machines without consequences (Chenneville et al., 2024).

A Boston Consulting Group analysis noted that in critical "moments that matter" to employees, such as conflict resolution or career coaching, people want to connect with human professionals; GAI could take over routine tasks and give IOPs more free time to engage more deeply in those higher-level interactions (Bedard et al., 2024). In practice, GAI might handle preliminary data analysis or standardised communications, but an IOP would be needed to provide context and interpret GAI outputs as well as check the fairness and accuracy of the content. The participants echoed this, pointing out that GAI could generate suggestions or even assessment reports, but that an IOP is needed to translate those into meaningful insights for clients and answer clients' unique questions with the attention necessary. This perspective resonates with the South African professional guidelines, which mandate that final

responsibility for psychological services lies with a registered practitioner (HPCSA, 2011). The IOP or consulting community is the human element that safeguards appropriate and ethical use of any tools, including those that are GAI-related (HPCSA, 2011). In line with this, six participants explicitly argued that the human element can never be replaced, highlighting the importance of interpersonal skills, intuition, and emotional understanding in IOP work. These perspectives were reinforced by scholarly commentary that GAI, while powerful, lacks true consciousness or genuine social cognition (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Ooi et al., 2023).

Chenneville et al. (2024) note that many ethical dilemmas at the interface between IOP work and GAI stem from the inability of GAI to fully grasp human values and contexts. Therefore, the consensus is that GAI will redirect IOPs' efforts toward activities that leverage uniquely human strengths, such as ethical judgement, critical thinking, and empathy, rather than rendering the entire profession redundant. Global forecasts also anticipate net job creation in the wake of GAI, for example, the World Economic Forum predicts that GAI will create millions of new roles even as it automates others (Oosthuizen 2019; Oosthuizen 2022). These new roles, often focused on the collaboration and management of GAI, indicate that human expertise will remain crucial. The participants' optimism that IOPs' roles will shift rather than be replaced is well-founded, considering such evidence.

GAI can thus be seen as a catalyst for reimagining the IOP role rather than eliminating it (Van Zyl, 2024). Preserving the human element is key to the IOP profession, which was suggested by the participants in the sample and is also suggested in the literature. IOPs are trained to value human factors as they deeply understand the nuances of social interactions, motivations, and behaviour in workplaces. They also have internalised ethical codes which stress human welfare (HPCSA, 2011). As demonstrated by the participants, this is likely to make the profession cautious about any technology that could diminish personalised decision-making. Several participants mentioned foundational concepts such as validity, fairness, and accountability that they felt must remain a priority even when using GAI.

In addition, some participants seemed to be responding to a fear of devaluation of their profession. By framing GAI as augmentative rather than as a replacement, the profession remains valuable. Budhwar et al. (2023) observed that it remained unclear if GAI would replace professional roles and called for research into how human jobs can be enriched alongside GAI. Therefore, the participants, like many experts, anticipated a future of partnering with GAI to handle data-heavy, repetitive tasks, with human beings providing interpretation, oversight, and

personalisation. This synergy leverages the best of both worlds, with increased efficiency from GAI and no loss of the irreplaceable human qualities that drive effective IOP practice.

### *Sub-theme 2: Shifting roles and skills*

Given that GAI is expected to assume routine or analytical tasks, five of the participants predicted a significant shift in the roles that IOPs will fill and skills that they will need in the future. The participants indicated that rather than spending time on administrative duties, IOPs will take on more of a strategist and facilitator role. Several participants also described future IOPs as quality assurers for or refiners of GAI-generated work. This suggests that IOPs will need to have sharp analytical and critical evaluation skills to be able to evaluate and check that GAI recommendations are accurate and contextually relevant. Aguinis et al. (2024) outline a "critical verification process" for using ChatGPT in HR practices. This emphasises that human experts should always check GAI outputs for accuracy and bias (Aguinis et al., 2024). The findings echoed this, specifically that relying on GAI without human verification could lead to discriminatory outcomes and errors, whereas well-trained professionals who check and adjust GAI suggestions could harness the tool effectively (Aguinis et al., 2024; Budhwar et al., 2023). This aligns with the participants' views that future-focused IOPs will need to function as GAI managers or facilitators by ensuring that the technology's contributions are ethical, accurate, and can provide tailored solutions.

As a result of this, it is likely that new competencies will come to the forefront. The participants believed that skills in technical expertise, data validation, and prompt creation will be important, alongside traditional IOP expertise. Coetzee and Veldsman's (2022) study on the "digital-era I/O psychologist" echoes this, as they proposed that IOPs will need to shift toward technology-enabled service roles, "intradigital" skills, and heightened interpersonal skills. Participants in their study emphasized the importance of "digitally dexterous" IOPs who can operate at the forefront of technological change while also maintaining the human-centred focus of the profession (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022). In practice, this means that future IOPs should be as comfortable fine-tuning a GAI engine's parameters or interpreting its analytics as they are conducting an interview or coaching session (Chen et al., 2024; Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022). IOPs could take on the role of translators between GAI systems and organisational stakeholders, which will require understanding both technical output and the organisational context. Daugherty et al. (2019) reviewed and termed new "explainer" and "sustainer" roles

for humans in a GAI-driven world, which would apply directly to IOPs and the relevant organisational stakeholders they would assist. An "explainer" would articulate GAI's decisions to others, and a "sustainer" would ensure that GAI systems continue to function ethically and effectively (Daugherty et al., 2019). Participants in this study already anticipated taking on these kinds of responsibilities, which are likely to shape the future of the IOP profession moving forward in an AI-driven workplace.

Another facet of role evolution was a greater emphasis on problem-solving, creativity, and forming relationships with others. As GAI takes on more grunt work and administrative tasks, IOPs could allocate more time to higher-level activities. Participant 2 imagined spending more time on "*presenting, networking and facilitating in-person sessions*", in other words, engaging with clients and teams to implement solutions, rather than sitting behind a desk. Participant 8 likewise noted that GAI would free them to focus on "*designing interventions and making recommendations*" instead of laborious analysis. Bedard et al. (2024) reported that GAI could automate up to 30% of current HR tasks, which would allow HR professionals to devote that saved time to strategic transformation initiatives. Bedard et al. (2024) described AI as turning HR and IOP work into a more insight-driven, advisory function, whereas routine tasks get automated, human experts can concentrate on more complex decision-making, strategy, and ensuring that GAI-driven processes align with the organisation's goals. The participants' predictions mirrored this trend, and it was foreseen that IOPs would take on more strategic and guiding roles in relation to GAI. For example, it was proposed that IOPs would guide leadership on workforce issues, culture, and change, while leveraging GAI-generated insights as inputs to enhance output.

Some participants highlighted that individualised attention to employees or clients would become a key focus. Where GAI might produce a generic coaching report, the role of the IOP would be to customise and "hyper-tailor" the output to the person's unique situation. This reflects a shift from content generation to content personalisation where GAI can supply a broad analysis, but IOPs would need to add value by fine-tuning advice to ensure relevance and resonance with the individual (Bedard et al., 2024). Venkatesh et al.'s (2003) technology acceptance model (UTAUT) underscores that social influence and facilitating conditions affect technology usage, and this also applies to adopting GAI (Gado et al., 2022). These models suggest that employees are more likely to use and trust GAI outputs if human experts endorse and adapt them within the workflow. In these instances, IOPs could become crucial facilitators

of GAI acceptance in organisations by demonstrating their usefulness and framing GAI insights appropriately.

As their roles shift, the skill sets of IOPs must broaden. Participants noted that leadership and change management skills will gain importance as GAI emerges and evolves. If an IOP is overseeing GAI processes and mentoring others to use GAI, they must be able to manage projects and teams that include GAI components. They will also need to remain vigilant about ethics and data security by ensuring compliance with professional standards and laws. Brown et al. (2024) discuss theory-driven perspectives and integrating GAI into business while maintaining human-centred values. The participants anticipated that embracing GAI will elevate an IOP's role to one that is more consultative, innovation-focused, and managerial. This suggests that routine technical tasks may diminish, but the need for nuanced judgment, interpersonal influence, and oversight could make IOPs even more pivotal in guiding how GAI is deployed and managed in the workplace.

***Sub-theme 3: Embracing GAI***

Five participants felt that GAI will be an essential tool for the future and should be embraced. Rather than resisting or fearing the technology, participants argued that IOPs should proactively learn about and incorporate GAI into their practice. They used phrases like "*we should embrace it and capacitate ourselves*" (Participant 1) and warned against "*being scared*" of GAI (Participant 8). This outlook seemed to reflect a recognition that GAI is rapidly becoming part of everyday work life. By embracing GAI, IOPs can stay current and relevant in a changing professional landscape. This idea is also present in a lot of the literature that is available (Budhwar et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2025; Shields, 2024; TTS Talent, 2023; Van Zyl, 2024). Trupulse (2023) concluded that adopting ChatGPT and GAI in HR functions could improve experiences and enhance efficiency and suggested that IOPs should cautiously but actively integrate such tools into practice. They highlighted benefits such as streamlined workflows and data-driven insights, which the participants in the study also acknowledged (Trupulse, 2023). Evidence from employee surveys shows that those who do adopt AI early tend to report higher perceived benefits (Cardon et al., 2023). Cardon et al. (2023) further found that 82% of early ChatGPT users believed it made them more productive, compared to only 26% of non-users. This suggests that once professionals start to use GAI, they quickly recognise its usefulness, reinforcing the case for overcoming initial hesitation.

It is worth noting that "embracing" did not seem to mean uncritical acceptance for the participants; rather, they advocated using GAI wisely. They indicated that IOPs should become knowledgeable about how GAI works, its limitations, and best practices so that they can leverage the power of GAI while mitigating risks. This balanced embrace is supported by Patil et al. (2024), who discussed key success factors for ChatGPT adoption in business. Aguinis et al. (2024) listed things that should and should not be done by HR professionals when using GAI, reinforcing that proper training in prompt crafting and result verification is needed to truly benefit from GAI technology. Participants in the study similarly stressed this type of capability building. Liu et al. (2025) showed that while GAI collaboration boosted immediate performance, it could also reduce intrinsic motivation if one became over-reliant on GAI. This served as a caution that embracing GAI should be about enhancement rather than letting skills diminish. IOPs will need to create a balance by adopting GAI where it is helpful but also continuing to cultivate their human expertise.

***Sub-theme 4: Contributing to GAI policy and use***

Every participant in the study concurred that IOPs will have a critical role to play in introducing GAI to the workplace that goes beyond their direct service delivery. They envisioned that IOPs would serve as policy advisers, trainers, and change champions in the context of GAI integration to ensure the ethical and effective implementation of GAI in organisations. There was a strong sentiment that IOPs should actively help shape GAI-related policies at work, especially as many employees currently use GAI without clear guidelines, which raises concerns. Cardon et al. (2023) discovered that many early GAI adopters in organisations without GAI policies expressed a desire for more guidance, highlighting that having a formal policy may make employees more comfortable and efficient in using GAI tools. IOPs, with their dual understanding of human behaviour and organisational ecosystems, are well-suited to develop such guidelines (Cardon et al., 2023). They can ensure that policies not only cover legal and technical aspects but also address human factors such as psychological safety, transparency, and fairness. Cardon et al. (2023) note that employees in organisations with GAI policies report higher levels of trust and feel more supported in using GAI. Thus, by contributing to policymaking, IOPs could help create a workplace climate where GAI is used responsibly and with employee buy-in.

Participants also highlighted a training and facilitation role. Several suggested that IOPs could educate employees and leaders on how to use GAI tools effectively and ethically. Training in this context could serve two purposes, reducing employee anxieties and upskilling. The introduction of GAI could provoke fear of making mistakes using an unfamiliar tool and fear of job loss. IOPs can become equipped to offer coaching or counselling to address these emotional responses as well as to create change-management interventions (HPCSA, 2011). Oosthuizen (2022) emphasises that introducing GAI requires paying attention to people's mindsets and adaptability. Leaders should be skilled in change leadership, and employees need to be supported to upskill and adjust (Oosthuizen, 2022). IOPs could guide leaders on how to communicate changes and help build an agile, learning-oriented culture. Oosthuizen (2022) suggests that IOPs can encourage "human readiness" for fourth industrial revolution technologies by helping the workforce to develop resilience and optimism and encouraging them to engage with technologies such as GAI rather than to resist these. This directly corresponds to what the participants described.

In shaping policy and usage, ethical considerations are paramount. Some participants recognised that IOPs must be the guardians of ethics when GAI is deployed in people-related decisions. They spoke of ensuring high-quality data input and preventing GAI misuse. This is consistent with calls in the literature for HR professionals to be involved in auditing AI systems for bias and fairness (Budhwar et al., 2023). GAI systems can inadvertently produce biased recommendations if trained on biased data, which could, for example, disadvantage certain groups in hiring or promotion (Budhwar et al., 2023). IOPs, grounded in fair employment practices and diversity and inclusion principles, could take on the role of monitoring GAI decisions for impact or aligning GAI outputs with organisational values (Budhwar et al., 2023). Pan et al. (2022) note that context influences GAI adoption in recruitment, implying that IOP input is needed to ensure GAI tools conform to the desired context.

Finally, some participants underscored the role of IOPs in addressing the anxiety and fear surrounding GAI, which is essentially the human side of technology adoption. IOPs could serve as change agents for GAI in workplace and could reduce employee resistance by articulating the benefits of GAI and empathising with employees' concerns. This could prevent worst-case scenarios where employees sabotage or refuse new systems and instead cultivate a sense of empowerment. Chetty et al. (2023), in the context of South Africa's GAI uptake, noted that multi-stakeholder collaboration and attention to ethics are necessary to harness GAI's benefits without exacerbating inequalities. IOPs, with their holistic view of organisations, are

well-positioned to mediate between stakeholders, which could ensure that GAI implementations consider employee voices and help leadership craft messages that emphasise augmentation, not replacement. Budhwar et al. (2023) describe a more optimistic outlook on GAI in IOP work, which is focused on augmentation and new opportunities while having safeguards in place.

Overall, the discussion of this theme illustrated that the advent of GAI is prompting IOPs to re-conceptualise their professional identity, in ways like those proposed by Coetzee and Veldsman (2022) and Oosthuizen (2022). Participants saw a future where embracing GAI would not be optional for IOPs but necessary. They felt that IOPs' daily tasks would shift towards oversight and relational work, and that they would assume new responsibilities in training and policymaking around GAI. These insights contribute to the field by outlining a proactive pathway for IOPs; rather than being disrupted by GAI, IOPs could become key drivers of its responsible adoption in the workplace. This perspective could be a valuable addition to the ongoing conversations about GAI and IOP as a profession, underlining that human expertise will remain indispensable even as intelligent machines become common practice. As technology evolves, so too will IOPs need to evolve into tech-savvy guardians of the human element in the future of work, ensuring that organisations reap the benefits of GAI while preserving a meaningful, ethical, and human-centred work environment (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022).

# Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter will provide a summary of the key findings in the study based on the discussion of the research findings. It will also present an analysis of the strengths and limitations of the study, implications of the findings, and future recommendations.

## Summary of key findings

This study explored perceptions of how GAI will change the nature of IOP work in a sample of registered South African IOPs, including their levels of knowledge about and experiences with using GAI for their work, their perceived benefits and limitations of using GAI, and their opinions of how GAI will change IOP as a profession. This was done using a qualitative, interpretive design where the data was collected from nine registered IOPs in South Africa using semi-structured interviews and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

The findings revealed that the participants felt that GAI presented significant possible benefits, such as reducing administrative workloads and enabling IOPs to shift towards more specialised, interpretive, and people-centred roles. They also felt, however, that it would introduce new challenges, particularly in the realm of ethics. Participants reported diverse levels of familiarity with GAI, using it for both professional and personal reasons. While many acknowledged its potential to reduce certain workloads, enhance accuracy and improve efficiency, particularly in administrative tasks and data analysis, some expressed concerns about losing their unique professional voice and the risk of over-reliance on automated tools.

One of the most transformative impacts of GAI that was mentioned is its ability to automate time-consuming administrative tasks, freeing IOPs to focus on strategic, high-value contributions. This shift allowed IOPs to reclaim their expertise, moving from routine operational duties to roles that emphasise human insight, complex problem-solving, and workplace well-being. Moreover, GAI was perceived as a tool that could broaden access to psychological services and support organisational productivity. However, participants also highlighted critical limitations, including concerns about data accuracy, confidentiality, ethical use, and the potential for job displacement. The need for transparency, ethical safeguards, and training emerged as key themes, with participants advocating for the integration of GAI literacy into professional development and academic curricula. This also included the need for training for effective GAI use, which was deemed essential with participants advocating for its inclusion in both the workplace and educational curriculums.

Crucially, the participants felt that IOPs will need to assume a guiding role for employees and organisations in adopting GAI responsibly. They also highlighted the need to see GAI as an opportunity rather than as a threat and the importance of balancing the integration of GAI with the essential human element, ensuring workplaces remain productive, efficient, and ethically sound. The IOPs in the sample emphasised the enduring value of human expertise in interpreting GAI outputs and maintaining ethical standards, especially for the IOP role which they felt would change but could not be replaced. The participants expressed a need for IOPs to adapt their roles to focus more on management, oversight, and personal interaction with clients, and the integration of GAI was seen not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity to redefine professional roles and enhance service delivery in a rapidly modernising workplace. Ultimately, the participants seemed to agree with the view that GAI should not be seen as a fearful opponent but rather as a powerful, possible partner that, when properly leveraged, can enhance both organisational success and employee well-being.

**Strengths**

The study had several strengths related to its potential to contribute to knowledge about the use of GAI in the IOP profession and the rigour of its design, and the methods used. The first important strength was the timeliness and relevance of the study. The topic of GAI is new and therefore highly relevant as many employees and organisations attempt to unpack what this will mean for the world of work generally (Budhwar et al., 2023; Daugherty et al., 2019; Ooi et al., 2023). There is also a need to explore what GAI will mean for IOPs and how it will change the IOP profession, both directly and in terms of helping organisations and employees to adapt to GAI (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). Due to rapid advancements in GAI and its increasing integration into various professional fields, this study has been able to help to fill a major research gap about perceptions of what GAI will mean for the IOP profession, where IOPs are uniquely placed to respond to the changes created by GAI. It has also contributed by capturing the opinions and experiences of practising South African IOPs, which can help to better understand the use and integration of GAI in the South African context.

The qualitative approach and data collection methods used in the study were also a strength as these allowed for in-depth insight into the participants' opinions, experiences, and perspectives and rich and deep findings. The use of semi-structured interviews contributed to the openness of the participants and explored the participants' own voices as practising IOPs

(Fossey et al., 2002). The researcher also took steps to ensure that the study was highly rigorous, including being self-reflexive, ensuring that the sample was a rich source of information and that high quality data was collected, supporting the findings with direct quotes, describing the research process clearly and in detail, and being sensitive to the participants' interpretations (Fossey et al., 2002; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992, Tracy, 2010).

The perspectives obtained from the participants were well-rounded and focused on experiences, awareness, benefits, limitations, and future implications of GAI. This comprehensive coverage captured a holistic understanding of the topic and supported the relevance of the findings for all areas of the IOP field, regardless of which organisational context IOPs are working in. A further strength of this study is the practicality of the findings. There were tangible elements of shifting practice that were discussed, such as enhancing efficiency, training, and ways to broaden clients' access to various psychological services. There was also an emphasis on the importance of ethical frameworks and transparency in the use of GAI. This addressed several GAI-related concerns related to data security, confidentiality, and the potential for job loss and highlighted the topical nature of the research and its potential to contribute to a better understanding of GAI in relation to IOP roles and skills.

Finally, the research anticipated the future role of GAI as part of the IOP profession, highlighting the participants' perspectives that GAI will redirect rather than replace the work of IOPs. This forward-looking perspective provides valuable insights for an evaluation of the professional skills and training that will be required for IOPs in the future. The findings support literature that suggests that while IOPs may not be replaced by GAI, IOPs who do not use GAI or manage its integration in the workplace will be replaced by IOPs that do (Oosthuizen, 2022). This changes the way the profession is viewed and gives insight into how to move forward to keep IOP services relevant and valuable. Overall, the research offered an insightful and well-rounded exploration of GAI's perceived impact on IOP, with practical recommendations that may be crucial for the profession's future development.

**Limitations**

The study had a few limitations which need to be noted for future research. The small sample size of only nine participants limits the transferability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2016). While qualitative research generally aims to explore depth rather than breadth, this

sample may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives about the use and implementation of GAI across regions, industries, or specialities within the IOP field (Fossey et al., 2002). Most of the participants identified as Caucasian, spoke English as a home language, and were in their late thirties or forties, which limits the range of perspectives represented in the sample compared to the diverse nature of South African IOPs more generally. All of the participants were also volunteers, which may indicate a stronger interest in the topic or different circumstances compared to other IOPs who did not choose to take part in the research. As GAI is a new development, there may also have been limitations to the participants' experiences with GAI and their use of it, as well as the degree to which it had been integrated into the work of organisations and employees in South Africa at the time of the study. As time moves on, more research will be needed to identify changes to perspectives as GAI knowledge, experience, and integration increase rapidly.

The reliance on self-reported data collected using semi-structured interviews also presents a possible limitation, as the participants' responses may have been influenced by memory or personal biases or social desirability rather than their direct experiences with GAI (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The depth of information that emerged created challenges for condensing the data as well as identifying the themes that emerged in terms of focusing on what was most relevant and accurately representing the participants' perspectives. Although self-reflexivity was used, it is possible that the findings and interpretations made reflect the researcher's own biases and opinions, especially as it was not possible to approach the participants to check the interpretations made (Fossey et al., 2002).

A further limitation of this study was that there was minimal empirical evidence and theoretical discussion related to the topic available in the published literature at the time the study was conducted, especially literature on GAI and the IOP profession and GAI in the South African context. This made it difficult to contextualise and discuss the findings, especially those related to issues relevant to South Africa. The findings are further constrained by the rapid evolution of GAI technology because the insights gathered during this study could quickly became outdated. The literature in this field is emerging rapidly, which makes it difficult to consolidate and to keep up to date with relevant work.

## Implications

This research underscored the urgency of preparing for and managing the technological transformations that are reshaping the IOP profession (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022). The rapid integration of GAI into workplaces seems very likely, but rather than fostering fear, this shift can be seen as an opportunity, as demonstrated by the participants in this study. To remain relevant and effective, it seems likely that IOPs will need to develop new competencies at multiple levels, and IOP-related university training, internships, and ongoing professional development (CPD) will need to evolve to include a focus on AI literacy and the use of GAI. Learning how to engage effectively with GAI, from crafting optimal prompts to addressing ethical concerns, is likely to be essential for IOPs to thrive in this new landscape.

However, the growing reliance on GAI also poses risks. Overdependence on GAI-driven tools could diminish human judgment in key decision-making processes as well as employee motivation (Lui et al., 2025). To mitigate this, organisations must proactively establish policies and protocols governing the ethical use of GAI. IOPs will play a crucial role in shaping these frameworks, ensuring that GAI augments rather than replaces human expertise.

Moreover, IOPs are in a unique position to help organisations to harness GAI's potential by contributing valuable psychological insights into GAI-driven systems (Bedard et al., 2024; Lui et al, 2025). By embedding psychological principles into GAI models, IOPs can refine how organisations used data, enhance decision-making processes, and create more employee-centric workplaces. In doing so, IOPs will not only sustain their relevance but also redefine their role as strategic partners in an increasingly digital world (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2022).

## Future recommendations

Future research can address the limitations of this study and build on its findings by incorporating larger and more diverse samples, exploring actual practices alongside perceptions, and adopting longitudinal approaches to examine changes related to GAI over time. Additionally, examining the contextual, ethical, and legal challenges associated with GAI adoption could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of GAI on the roles of IOPs.

For sampling, it would be recommended that IOPs working in different fields, types of organisations, types of practice, and areas of specialisation be included to gain varied perspectives on the use of GAI for IOP work. It would also be useful to have different levels of GAI and technological understanding represented in the sample. This was attempted in the current study, but with a larger sample, this could be done to a greater degree, leading to a more diverse level of understanding.

Although the qualitative design worked well to capture participants' perceptions, quantitative studies exploring the factors leading to GAI adoption and the effects of GAI in the workplace would be useful to augment this. Focus groups and other forms of qualitative investigation could also be used to enhance the richness of the data and the range of perspectives captured. It would also be ideal to conduct longitudinal research to track and understand the long-term impact GAI has on the field and professionals' outcomes. This could also be done in specific organisational contexts to assist with tracking sector-specific issues relevant to IOP consulting.

GAI is rapidly changing, and both IOPs and employees will need to be trained on how to use GAI effectively for their work. This will need to be implemented both formally and informally, and in a way that alleviates fear, ensures ethicality, and keeps up to date with technological advancements. Creating skills development programmes could equip IOPs and employees with the necessary GAI and data science knowledge to know when and how to use GAI appropriately and efficiently and to carry on upskilling themselves. IOPs needed to reclaim their specialised expertise in the world of GAI, which will require them to shift their roles and be more creative. Organisations need to understand how to use IOPs to their advantage to maintain job satisfaction and employee well-being during the integration of GAI.

As GAI evolves, IOP roles will need to change to stay relevant and remain focused on the people-oriented view of an organisation while also encouraging the use of technology. The ethics of using GAI will need to be fully understood, and ethical frameworks will need to be established which are context-specific but also suitable for general use. This will allow organisations to use GAI in the most effective way and will help to alleviate challenges and anxieties associated with GAI adoption. Finally, collaboration between academia and industry to foster innovation and ensure industry-based decisions are data-driven and the research is practically applicable will be needed.

## Conclusions

The impact of GAI on the IOP profession is undeniable. While some IOPs possess extensive knowledge and experience with AI tools, others are only beginning to explore its potential. Regardless of their starting point, a transformation is underway. A general perspective in both the literature and the findings of this study is that GAI will not replace IOPs, but it will lead to redefining their purpose and changing the way they work and the skills they need. By eliminating repetitive administrative tasks, GAI will allow IOPs to refocus on fostering workplace well-being, driving employee engagement, and ensuring ethical, human-centred technology and GAI adoption. As the profession adapts, IOPs must embrace continuous learning, reclaim their specialist role and expertise, and position themselves as indispensable navigators of AI-driven change. Ultimately, the future of work is not GAI and AI versus human expertise; it is collaboration. In a world where GAI can generate answers to many tasks, it will be the IOP's role to ask the right questions, interpret the output generated insightfully, and ensure that technological progress does not come at the cost of human connection. The IOP profession stands at a defining moment where those who harness GAI effectively will not only safeguard their relevance but also play a key role in shaping the future of work.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Participant information sheet

[Department letterhead to be inserted]

Date: [to be inserted]

Hello,

My name is Rebecca Matisonn and I am a student currently completing my Masters in Organisational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for my degree, I am conducting research. My research aim is to explore Industrial/ Organisational psychologists' awareness of, experiences with, and perceived benefits and limitations of generative artificial intelligence, as well as their opinions of how generative artificial intelligence will change the nature of their work and the profession of Industrial/ Organisational psychology. The study will be using data obtained from volunteers who are over 18 years old and who are registered Industrial psychologists with the Health Professions Council of South Africa. Participants can be working in any field with any number of years of experience as long as they are a registered Industrial psychologist.

If you meet these criteria, I would like to ask you to please consider participating in my study. Participating will require you to take part in an interview with me that will take place at a time that is convenient for you and that will either take place online or in person depending on your preference. Online interviews will take place on MS Teams or Zoom and in person interviews will take place on the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand. It is expected that the interview will last for about forty-five minutes to an hour and it will be audio-taped with your consent. You will be able to choose whether to answer or not answer any specific questions asked during the interview or to withdraw from the interview if you would like to.

Participation is completely voluntary and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way, whether you choose to participate in the study or not. You will be asked to sign a formal consent form to participate in the study at the start of the interview and signing this form and completing the full interview will be regarded as informed consent to participate in the study. There are no direct benefits or foreseeable risks for participating in the study.

Your identity will be known to me as the interviewer and my supervisor but this will be kept strictly confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone else. Any information that could directly identify you as an individual will be removed from the transcript of the interview; and you will not be asked to disclose any confidential or personal information that you prefer not to disclose. You will be asked for permission to use direct quotes from your interview, but if these contain any information that could identify you as an individual, this information will be removed.

My supervisor and I will be the only ones who will have access to the recording of the interview, and the recording will be stored securely on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked cupboard with strictly limited access. Once analysis of the data and write-up of the research findings is complete, the original recordings will be destroyed. With your permission, we would like to store a copy of your interview transcript that has all identifying information removed permanently on a password-protected computer and to possibly use this for future research projects and/or for teaching purposes. Findings from this study will be reported in a research report submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand and may be reported in academic journals and/or at conferences as well. This research will help to better understand generative artificial intelligence and the impact it has on the work carried out by Industrial/ Organisational psychologists.

Feedback for the study in the form of a general summary of the findings can be provided to you if requested – if you would like to receive this feedback, please email me as per my contact details below. Please also contact me or my supervisor as per the details below if you have any questions or concerns. Ethical queries can also be directed to: The University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical): 011-717-1408; email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Thank you for considering participating in my research,

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Matisonn

Researcher: Rebecca Matisonn (2110981@students.wits.ac.za)

Supervisor: Dr Nicky Israel (Nicky.Israel@wits.ac.za)

**Appendix B: Participant consent form**

I,_____ (full name/s and surname of the potential participant)

do hereby consent to be interviewed by Rebecca Matisonn for her study exploring generative artificial intelligence and the work of Industrial/ Organisational psychologists.

I understand that (please tick each condition in the box provided to indicate agreement)

| | |
|---|---|
| | My participation in this study is completely voluntary and I will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way by choosing to participate or not. |
| | I may elect to not answer any specific questions asked if I do not wish to do so. There are no foreseeable risks or direct benefits associated with participation in this study. |
| | I can withdraw from the interview at any time and can at any time request that my responses not be included in the study until the research is complete. |
| | My identity will be kept strictly confidential, and any information that may directly identify me will be removed from the interview transcript. |
| | My interview will be audio-recorded with my consent. The recording will be transcribed and any information that could directly identify me will be removed from this transcription. |
| | The original recording will be stored in a secure location with restricted access (either a locked cupboard or password-protected computer) and will only be accessible to the researcher and the project supervisor. |
| | Direct quotes from my interview (with any information that could directly identify me removed) may be cited in the research report or other write-ups of the research. If I am referred to it will be using a pseudonym or participant number (for example, Participant A). |
| | Once analysis of the data and write-up is complete, the audio-recording of the interview will be destroyed. The transcript with all information that could directly identify me removed will be stored permanently and may be used for future research and/or teaching. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I do hereby consent to be interviewed for the study | YES | NO |
| I do hereby consent for my interview to be audio-recorded | YES | NO |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

**Signed: _____ (signature of participant)**

**Signed: _____ (signature of the researcher)**

**Date: _____**

**Appendix C: Participant invitation**

Hi,

My name is Rebecca Matisonn and I am a MA Organisational Psychology student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am doing a study to explore Industrial/ Organisational psychologists' awareness of, experiences with, and perceived benefits and limitations of generative artificial intelligence, as well as their opinions of how generative artificial intelligence will change the nature of their work and the profession of Industrial/ Organisational psychology.

In order to get data for the study, I am asking for volunteers who are over 18 years old and who are registered Industrial psychologists with the Health Professions Council of South Africa. Participants can be working in any field with any number of years of experience as long as they are a registered Industrial psychologist. Participating will require taking part in an audio-recorded interview that should take approximately forty-five minutes to an hour. The interview can take place online (on MS Teams or Zoom) or in person (on the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand) as preferred at a time that is convenient.

For this study,

- Participation is completely voluntary.
- Your identity will be known to me as the interviewer but this will be kept strictly confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone else
- Any information that could identify you as an individual will be removed from the transcript of the interview and will not be reported in the findings

If you meet the criteria above, I would really appreciate it if you would please consider participating in my study!

If you are willing to participate, please contact me at 2110981@students.wits.ac.za to organise details for the interview. If you know of anyone else who would fit in the sample and who might be interested in participating in the study, please pass this invitation on to them as well.

Thank you in advance,

Rebecca Matisonn

Researcher: Rebecca Matisonn (2110981@students.wits.ac.za)

Supervisor: Dr Nicky Israel (Nicky.Israel@wits.ac.za)

**Appendix D: Interview schedule**

*Introduction*

Good day,

My name is Rebecca Matisonn. Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study. This interview will take about forty-five minutes to an hour, and I would like to please ask for your consent to audio-record this interview. Please take some time to re-read the participant information sheet and, if you are happy with the conditions for the study, please sign the consent form.

Thank you for signing the consent form. Before beginning the interview, please fill out this brief demographic questionnaire. You can leave out any information if you would prefer to.

Thank you for filling out the demographic questionnaire. We will now start the interview.

*Questions*

1. What type of work do you do as an IOP?
2. What skills do you feel you need to carry this out effectively?
3. Do you feel that the type of work you do and/or the skills you need are changing because of new technology? In what ways?
4. How much do you know about GAI?

[Define GAI for the participant: "machine learning, neural networks, and other techniques to generate new content (e.g. text, images, music) by analysing patterns and information from the training data." (Ooi et al., 2023, p.1). or "Generative AI refers to integration of ML models to generate new content, including text, audio, video, images, software code and simulations, based on large datasets used to train the model." (Budhwar et al., 2023, p. 609).]

5. Have you ever used GAI for any of the work that you carry out? If so, in what ways?
6. Do you think that GAI will play a role in the work you do in the future? Please explain briefly.
7. Are you aware of any experiences that any other IOPs have had with GAI and/or any other ways that other IOPs have used GAI?

8. Do you think GAI will play a role in the work carried out by IOPs in the future? Please explain why you think this may or may not be the case?
9. In what ways do you think GAI will affect the ways you and/or other IOPs carry out [job role]?

[Job roles: assessment; recruitment and selection; counselling and employee wellbeing; training and development; research; performance management; ergonomics; change management; human resource management; etc….]

10. What do you think the advantages of using GAI as part of your work are?
11. What do you think the disadvantages of using GAI as part of your work are?
12. Are there any factors that you feel make it more likely that you will use GAI?
13. Are there any factors that you feel make it less likely that you will use GAI?
14. What do you think about the ethics of using GAI as part of IOP work? Do you have any concerns about the way GAI might be used?
15. What new skills, if any, do you think you and/or other IOPs will need to use GAI as part of your/their work?
16. How do you think IOPs should be trained for using GAI as part of their work? Should this be included in a university curriculum or internship and, if so, in what ways?
17. Do you think employees in the workplace are embracing or rejecting GAI? In what ways?
18. What role do you think IOPs can play in helping employees with managing GAI in the workplace?
19. How do you think GAI might impact [organisational issue]? In what ways, if any, could IOPs help with this?

[Issues: hybrid work, organisational culture, job insecurity, wellbeing, acceptance of technology, etc…]

20. If you had to describe GAI using a metaphor, what would this be? In other words, is there a phrase or an image that you would use to describe GAI to represent what it feels like for you?
21. Do you have anything you would like to add?

**Appendix E: Demographic questionnaire**

Please fill in the information below. You may leave out any questions if you prefer not to answer.

1. What is your age in years? _____

2. What is your gender? _____

3. What is your race? _____

4. What is/are your home languages? _____

5. For how long have you been a registered Industrial psychologist? _____

6. Please describe the work that you do currently as an Industrial psychologist.

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Please describe any work that you have done previously as an Industrial psychologist.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

___

8. Please rate how comfortable you feel using technology on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is extremely uncomfortable and 10 is extremely comfortable:

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | |

9. Please rate how knowledgeable you are about technology on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is not at all knowledgeable and 10 is extremely knowledgeable:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | |

10. Which of the following best describes you (please tick the one that best applies)?

| Born between 1946 and 1964 | Born between 1965 and 1980 | Born between 1981 and 2000 | Born between 2001 and 2020 | Other (please explain): |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

## Appendix F: Ethics clearance certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

**SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE**
**CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: MAORG-24-04** |
| **PROJECT TITLE:** | Working in the digital era: Industrial/ organisational psychologists' perspectives on generative artificial intelligence. |
| **INVESTIGATOR** | Matisonn Rebecca |
| **SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR** | SHCD/Psychology |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 08 July 2024 |
| **DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** | Approved unconditionally |
| **RISK LEVEL** | Minimal Risk |
| **EXPIRY DATE** | 31 December 2026 |

**ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE** 23 July 2024 **CHAIRPERSON** Aline Ferreira Correia
(Prof. Aline Ferreira Correia)

cc: Dr Nicky Israel (Supervisor)

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**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR**

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.

**Signature** **Date** 26 /07 /2024