

# The Impact of Artificial Intelligence Shock Awareness on Workplace Anxiety

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this research was to explore the impact of AI shock awareness on workplace anxiety and to examine the mediating role of job insecurity as well as the moderating role of visionary leadership. Grounded in the conservation of resources theory and the job demands-resources model, data were collected from 223 employees via a survey and analyzed using a moderated mediation model. The results indicated that AI shock awareness significantly increased job insecurity, which fully mediated its effect on workplace anxiety. Moreover, visionary leadership—through clear communication of the organization’s vision and supportive interactions—mitigated these negative effects. These findings provide theoretical support and practical recommendations for organizations seeking to reduce employee anxiety amid digital transformation, and they suggest that future research could consider the moderating effects of individual differences and cultural backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence Shock Awareness; Workplace Anxiety; Visionary Leadership; Job Insecurity.

## 1. Introduction

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) is profoundly transforming workplaces, raising concerns about job security among employees. This perception, known as AI shock awareness, reflected fears of AI replacing human labor<sup>[1]</sup>. Such concerns were linked to reduced job satisfaction, increased turnover intentions, and heightened job insecurity, which fueled workplace anxiety<sup>[2]</sup>. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model explain these dynamics. COR theory suggested that perceived threats to resources, like job security, prompted employees to seek ways to mitigate anxiety, such as learning new skills. The JD-R model viewed technological changes as both stress-inducing demands and opportunities for growth, with the outcome that depended on individual perceptions<sup>[3]</sup>. Job insecurity, defined as the fear of losing one’s job or career stability<sup>[4]</sup>, mediated the relationship between AI shock awareness and workplace anxiety. Employees who felt uncertain about their future roles often experienced greater anxiety, which negatively affected their performance and well-being<sup>[5]</sup>. Visionary leadership played a key role in mitigating these effects by providing a clear organizational vision, boosting employees’ confidence, and reducing fears of job loss. Leaders who aligned organizational goals with employees’ aspirations fostered a sense of belonging and self-efficacy, which helped employees adapt to technological changes<sup>[6][7]</sup>. This study investigated the relationship between AI shock awareness and workplace anxiety, focusing on the mediating role of job insecurity and the moderating effect of visionary leadership. By addressing these questions, it offered theoretical and practical insights into managing employee anxiety during digital transformation.

## 2. Research Hypotheses

### 2.1. The Impact of AI Shock Awareness on Workplace Anxiety

AI shock awareness referred to employees’ perception of the threats posed by AI technology to their job security, career development, and workplace stability. With AI’s rapid adoption across industries, employees faced both opportunities and risks, such as unemployment and skill obsolescence<sup>[8]</sup>. These threats often led to

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anxiety, especially when concerns about job continuity and future uncertainty arose. Workplace anxiety originated from fears of job instability and uncertain career prospects. Employees worried about being replaced by AI or finding their skills outdated, which further exacerbated their anxiety. As a disruptive force, AI directly threatened traditional jobs and intensified workplace stress. According to the COR theory, job insecurity depleted employees' psychological resources, heightening their anxiety. AI adoption not only undermined job stability but also triggered feelings of skill inadequacy, further intensifying anxiety due to perceived resource loss<sup>[3]</sup>. Moreover, the ongoing need to upgrade skills to meet AI-related demands increased pressure, leaving employees fearful of falling behind, which further compounded their anxiety.

The reasons mentioned above lead us to propose the following hypothesis:

H1: AI shock awareness positively impacts employees' workplace anxiety.

## **2.2. The Mediating Role of Job Insecurity**

Job insecurity referred to employees' concerns about job stability and career prospects, including fears of job loss or reduced opportunities. AI adoption was shown to heighten these fears<sup>[9]</sup>, as technological changes challenged employees' adaptability<sup>[10]</sup>. Consequently, AI shock awareness was likely to increase job insecurity by amplifying concerns over resource loss, such as job stability and career opportunities. According to the COR theory, perceived or actual resource loss triggered stress<sup>[11]</sup>. Employees who viewed AI-driven changes as a threat to their stability experienced job insecurity—a psychological reaction to anticipated resource loss<sup>[4]</sup>. It was further confirmed that AI integration exacerbated job insecurity, reflecting the systemic impact of technological change on labor dynamics<sup>[12]</sup>.

Hence, we argue that:

H2: AI shock awareness positively impacts job insecurity.

Job insecurity, stemming from perceived instability or misalignment with job demands, heightened emotional fluctuations and fears of losing resources such as social support, status, and career opportunities, often leading to negative emotions like anxiety, depression, and exhaustion<sup>[13]</sup>. Psychological stress from job insecurity depleted employees' mental resources and lowered motivation, making it a key source of workplace anxiety<sup>[5]</sup>. This study viewed job insecurity as a mediator in the relationship between AI shock awareness and workplace anxiety. AI shock awareness threatened employees' career resources by introducing new technologies that altered job tasks, raised performance standards, or replaced roles<sup>[14]</sup>, which in turn led to increased job insecurity and amplified anxiety due to fears of resource loss and future uncertainty. Research supported this mediating role; for instance, Evidence demonstrates that mindfulness significantly mitigates the adverse effects of AI-induced job insecurity on learning anxiety, while empirical studies consistently confirm the robust correlation between occupational stress and insecurity<sup>[15]</sup>.

Drawing on the above analysis, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H3: Job insecurity mediates the relationship between AI shock awareness and workplace anxiety.

## **2.3. The Moderating Role of Visionary Leadership**

Visionary leadership mitigated workplace anxiety caused by AI shock awareness by providing clear direction and fostering alignment between personal and organizational goals<sup>[16][17]</sup>. Employees fearing job loss and skill obsolescence could view technological changes as opportunities rather than threats when visionary leaders instilled confidence in the organization's ability to manage change and enhanced employees' belief in their own adaptability<sup>[18]</sup>. By reducing uncertainty, boosting self-efficacy, and promoting a sense of belonging, visionary leadership helped employees reframe AI-driven disruptions as opportunities for growth, thereby reducing anxiety and fostering resilience<sup>[19]</sup>.

In light of the evidence discussed, we hypothesize that:

H4: Visionary leadership negatively moderates the relationship between AI shock awareness and workplace anxiety. By conveying a clear vision and a positive future direction, visionary leadership can alleviate the negative impact of AI shock awareness on workplace anxiety.

In the rapidly evolving digital age, the widespread adoption of AI brought significant workplace transformations<sup>[20]</sup>. Employees' AI shock awareness—their concerns about job loss or career instability due to

AI—became a critical factor influencing psychological well-being, often intensifying job insecurity and career uncertainty. Visionary leadership mitigated these challenges by conveying a clear organizational vision that aligned long-term goals with employees’ aspirations, fostering confidence and psychological safety. By outlining strategies for adapting to technological changes, visionary leaders helped employees perceive AI-driven disruptions as opportunities rather than threats, reducing job insecurity and encouraging proactive engagement. Through clear communication and support, visionary leadership provided psychological safety, alleviating fears of job loss and instability. By reframing AI disruptions as growth opportunities, it helped employees maintain a positive outlook, ultimately reducing job insecurity during technological transitions.

Based on the findings presented, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: Visionary leadership negatively moderates the relationship between AI shock awareness and job insecurity. By providing a clear vision and positive organizational support, visionary leadership can reduce the impact of AI shock awareness on job insecurity.

Synthesizing Hypotheses 4 and 5, this study further posited that the mediating effect of job insecurity on the relationship between technology shock awareness and workplace anxiety was influenced by visionary leadership. Conservation of resources theory emphasized that individuals experienced stress and anxiety when faced with the threat of resource loss. AI shock awareness triggered job insecurity, which in turn increased workplace anxiety. However, visionary leadership—by conveying the organization’s future vision and objectives—provided employees with clear direction and support, alleviating their fear and anxiety regarding technological change<sup>[21]</sup>. This leadership style reduced the impact of AI shock awareness on workplace anxiety via job insecurity by enhancing employees’ confidence in the future, boosting self-efficacy, and strengthening their sense of belonging<sup>[22]</sup>. In the context of technological disruptions, visionary leadership facilitated cognitive restructuring that cultivated a mindset adapted to the digital era, transforming AI shocks into growth opportunities. As a result, individuals adapted more effectively to AI-driven changes, thereby reducing workplace anxiety induced by AI shock awareness through job insecurity. Based on the findings presented, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6: In the indirect effect of AI shock awareness on workplace anxiety through job insecurity, visionary leadership plays a moderating role. Specifically, the higher the level of visionary leadership, the weaker the mediating effect of job insecurity in the relationship between AI shock awareness and workplace anxiety.

Based on the above hypotheses, this study constructs a moderated mediation model to analyze the impact of AI shock awareness on employees' workplace anxiety. In this model, job insecurity serves as a mediating variable, while visionary leadership functions as a moderating variable. The theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

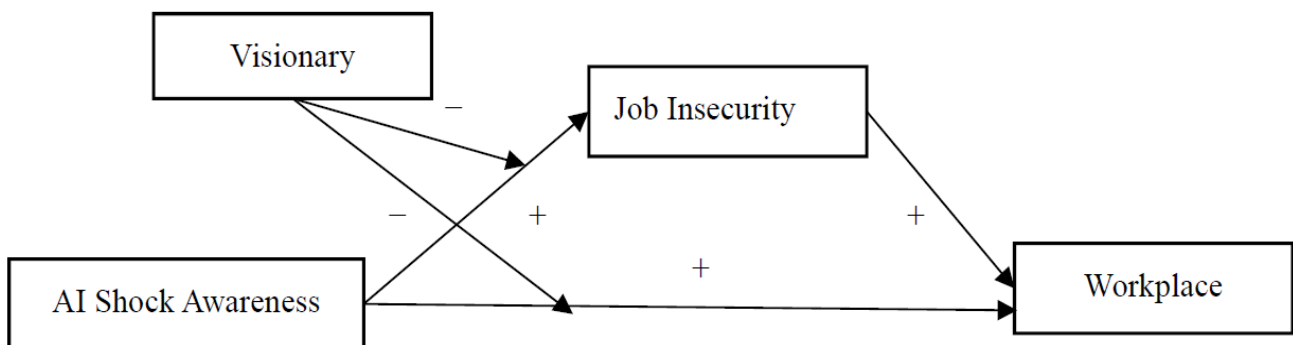


Fig. 1: Research Framework Model of Workplace Anxiety

### 3. Research Design and Methods

#### 3.1. Research Subjects and Data Collection Methods

This study used online surveys via "Wenjuanxing" to test the hypotheses, employing a cross-lagged design to reduce common method bias. Surveys were distributed in two waves, one week apart. The first wave collected demographic data and AI shock awareness measures, while the second wave measured job insecurity, visionary leadership, and workplace anxiety. A total of 253 responses were received, with 223 valid responses retained after excluding those with missing data, patterned answers, or contradictions, resulting in an 88% effective response rate. Among the valid responses, 48% were male and 52% female. Age distribution was as follows: 3% were 20 or younger, 31% were 21-25, 29% were 26-30, 20% were 31-40, 6% were 41-50, 7% were 51-60, and 4% were over 60. In terms of education, 7% had a high school education or below, 15% held a diploma, 57% a bachelor's degree, and 21% a master's or higher. For work experience, 13% had less than one year, 28% had 1-3 years, 21% had 4-6 years, 17% had 7-10 years, and 21% had more than 10 years.

The study utilized SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 27.0 for statistical analysis. Specifically, AMOS 27.0 was used for confirmatory factor analysis and common method bias testing, while SPSS 27.0 was employed for descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and hierarchical regression analysis. The SPSS PROCESS macro was used to test mediation effects and moderated mediation effects.

#### 3.2. Variable Measurement

This study used established 5-point Likert scales (1 = "strongly disagree," 5 = "strongly agree") to measure key variables:

AI Shock Awareness: Measured using Brougham and Haar's (2018) 4-item scale (e.g., "I think my job may be replaced by AI"), Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.869$ .

Job Insecurity: Assessed with Hellgren et al.'s (1999) 3-item scale (e.g., "I feel anxious about losing my job"), Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.86$ .

Visionary Leadership: Measured using the visionary leadership dimension from Li Chaoping and Shi Kan's (2005) transformational leadership scale, based on Van Knippenberg and Sitkin's (2013) framework. It includes 6 items (e.g., "Describes an inspiring blueprint for the future"), Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.97$ .

Workplace Anxiety: Evaluated with McCarthy's (2016) 8-item scale (e.g., "I always worry about not performing well at work"), Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.937$ .

Demographic factors like gender, age, education, and work experience, known to affect workplace emotions, were included as control variables to reduce confounding effects.

### 4. Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

#### 4.1. Common Method Bias and Reliability and Validity Testing

Due to the fact that this study collected data through a questionnaire survey, common method bias may exist. Therefore, the Harman single-factor test was employed to assess common method bias, and exploratory factor analysis was conducted for each item. The analysis revealed that three components had eigenvalues greater than 1, while the first component accounted for only 33.53% of the total variance—below the recommended threshold of 40%. Thus, the variables in this study do not exhibit significant common method bias. Prior to examining the relationships among the study variables, the reliability and validity of the scale data were tested. For reliability, internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and composite reliability (CR) were used for evaluation. The tests showed that the Cronbach's alpha values for all variables exceeded 0.7. In addition, all scales had CR values above 0.70, surpassing the benchmark, which indicates good internal consistency for the variable measurements used in this study. In terms of validity, three types were assessed: content validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. First, all scales employed in this study were established instruments. Moreover, the suitability of the questionnaire was further evaluated by interviewing scholars in the relevant research field, ensuring robust content validity of the measurement tools. Second, convergent validity was determined using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and the calculation of the average variance extracted (AVE). The results demonstrated strong convergent validity, with each item's loading on its corresponding factor exceeding 0.5 and AVE values greater than 0.36. For discriminant validity,

several competing models were examined via CFA, and the discriminant validity test results are presented in Table 1. Compared with other factor models, the four-factor model yielded the best fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 143.181$ ,  $df = 98$ ,  $CFI = 0.97$ ,  $TLI = 0.963$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.046$ ,  $SRMR = 0.049$ ). Clearly, the five variables used in this study exhibit strong discriminant validity.

Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	Description	R <sup>2</sup>	df	Model Comparison	$\Delta R^2 (\Delta df)$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
1	TEC; INS; VL; ANX	143.181	98			0.97	0.963	0.046	0.049
2	TEC; INS + VL; ANX	397.732	101	2 vs 1	254.55 (3) ***	0.801	0.764	0.115	0.132
3	TEC + INS; VL + ANX	562.423	103	3 vs 1	419.24 (5) ***	0.692	0.641	0.142	0.185
4	TEC + INS + VL; ANX	445.200	103	4 vs 1	302.02 (5) ***	0.771	0.733	0.122	0.137
5	TEC + INS + VL+ ANX	787.859	104	5 vs 1	644.68 (6) ***	0.542	0.471	0.172	0.174

Note: TEC = Technological Impact Awareness; INS = Job Insecurity; VL = Visionary Leadership; ANX = Workplace Anxiety; \*\*\* indicates  $p < 0.001$ .

## 4.2. Correlation Analysis

The correlational analysis of the sample revealed a significant positive relationship between AI impact awareness and job insecurity ( $r = 0.465$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), as well as between job insecurity and workplace anxiety ( $r = 0.579$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). All these correlations were statistically significant at the 0.01 level, which provides preliminary support for the direct effect hypotheses in this study. Additionally, visionary leadership demonstrated a discernible correlation with AI impact awareness, with specific details presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis Results

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.52	0.501	1							
2. Age	4.27	1.488	0.156*	1						
3. Years of Work Experience	2.77	1.479	0.064	0.122	1					
4. Education Level	2.2	0.781	0.105	0.163*	-0.047	1				
5. Artificial Intelligence Impact Awareness	3.11	0.96	0.151*	0.352**	0.06	0.191**	1			

Continued Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis Results

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
7. Visionary Leadership	3.39	0.914	-0.039	0.235**	0.046	0.099	0.484**	0.099	1	
8. Workplace Anxiety	2.85	0.81	0.008	-0.095	-0.024	-0.023	0.285**	0.579**	0.019	1

Note: \*\*\* indicates  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* indicates  $p < 0.01$ ; \* indicates  $p < 0.05$ ; all are two-tailed tests.

### 4.3. Hypothesis Testing

#### 4.3.1. Direct Effect Testing

This study employed hierarchical regression analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. All VIF values were below 10 across models, indicating no multicollinearity issues. As shown in Table 3, after controlling for other variables, the analysis of the direct effect of AI impact awareness on workplace anxiety revealed a statistically significant positive relationship ( $b = 0.374, p < 0.001$ ), thereby empirically supporting Hypothesis 1. Furthermore, the empirical test results for the relationship between AI impact awareness and job insecurity are presented in Table 3. After accounting for covariates, AI impact awareness demonstrated a significant positive effect on job insecurity ( $b = 0.521, p < 0.001$ ), which substantiates Hypothesis 2.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Results

Variables	Workplace Anxiety	Job Insecurity	Workplace Anxiety	Job Insecurity	Workplace Anxiety
Model	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Control Variables</b>					
Gender	-0.008	-0.1	0.05	-0.08	0.23
Age	-0.213**	-0.09	-0.162**	-0.03	-0.15*
Years of Work Experience	-0.022	0.11	-0.084	0.11*	-0.02
Education Level	0.06	-0.08	-0.013	-0.07	-0.04
<b>Independent Variable</b>					
Artificial Intelligence Impact Awareness	0.374***	0.521***	0.078	0.58***	0.413***
<b>Mediator Variable</b>					
Job Insecurity			0.567***		
<b>Moderating Variable</b>					
Visionary Leadership				-0.24***	-0.22***
TEC×VL				-0.25***	-0.31***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.129	0.254	0.369	0.33	0.23
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	0.048	0.038	0.033	0.05	0.08
F-value	6.41***	14.75***	21.04***	15.12***	9.1***

Note: \*\*\* indicates  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* indicates  $p < 0.01$ ; \* indicates  $p < 0.05$ .

#### 4.3.2. Mediation Effect Testing

Regarding the mediating effect of job insecurity, this study utilized PROCESS Model 4 with bootstrapping commands to calculate 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for mediation analysis. The bias-corrected bootstrap CIs were computed with 5,000 resamples. The results demonstrated: Total effect of AI impact awareness on workplace anxiety: 0.296, 95% CI [0.213, 0.382]. Direct effect: 0.066, 95% CI [-0.046, 0.178]. Indirect effect through job insecurity: 0.25, 95% CI [0.180, 0.326]. The direct effect's confidence interval included zero, whereas the indirect effect's interval excluded zero. This pattern confirms the significant mediating role of job insecurity in the relationship between AI impact awareness and workplace anxiety, thereby providing empirical support for Hypothesis 3.

#### 4.3.3. Moderating Effect of Visionary Leadership Testing

To examine the moderating role of visionary leadership in the relationships between AI impact awareness and both workplace anxiety and job insecurity, this study constructed interaction terms (AI impact awareness × visionary leadership) for hierarchical regression analysis. As evidenced by Model 4 and Model 5 in Table 3, the interaction term exerted a significant negative effect on workplace anxiety ( $b = -0.31, p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, it showed a significant negative effect on job insecurity ( $b = -0.25, p < 0.001$ ). This pattern indicates that visionary leadership functions as a negative moderator, specifically attenuating the positive effects of AI impact awareness on both workplace anxiety and job insecurity as the level of visionary leadership increases. The empirical findings substantiate Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5. For enhanced interpretability, the moderation effects are visually depicted in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

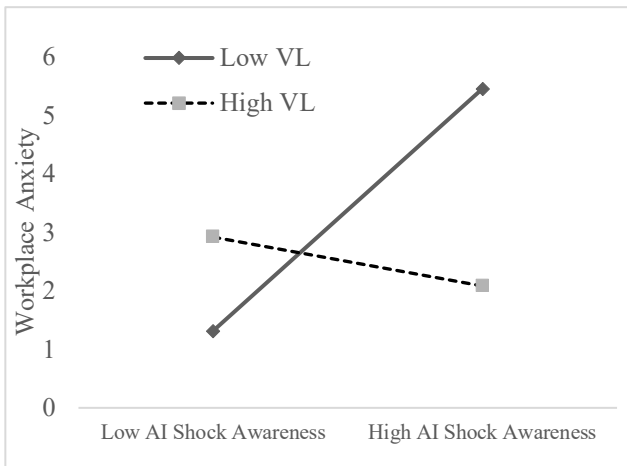


Fig. 2: Moderating Effect of Visionary Leadership on the Relationship Between AI Impact Awareness and Workplace Anxiety

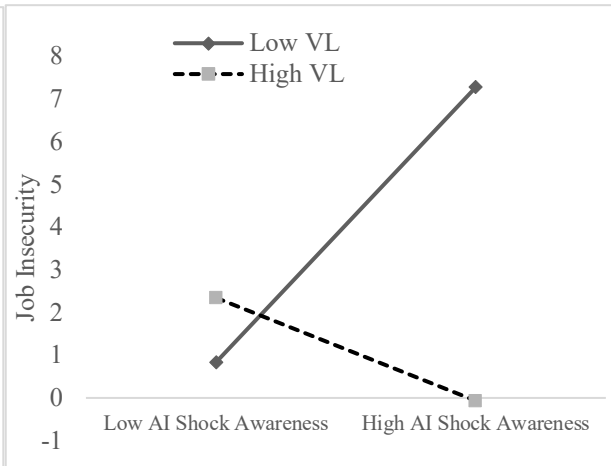


Fig. 3: Moderating Effect of Visionary Leadership on the Relationship Between AI Impact Awareness and Job Insecurity

#### 4.3.4. Moderated Mediation Effect Testing

To examine whether visionary leadership moderates the indirect effect of AI impact awareness on workplace anxiety through job insecurity, this study employed the PROCESS macro to calculate confidence intervals for conditional indirect effects at different levels of visionary leadership. As presented in Table 4: Under low visionary leadership: The indirect effect of AI impact awareness on workplace anxiety through job insecurity was 0.34, 95% CI [0.24, 0.45] (excluding zero), indicating significant mediation. Under high visionary leadership: The corresponding indirect effect reduced to 0.16, 95% CI [0.07, 0.24] (excluding zero), demonstrating persistent but attenuated mediation. Furthermore, the difference between these conditional indirect effects (-0.097, 95% CI [-0.15, -0.05]) was statistically significant. These results reveal that higher levels of visionary leadership significantly weaken the indirect influence of AI impact awareness on workplace anxiety via job insecurity. This finding demonstrates that visionary leadership exerts a negative moderating role in the mediation pathway from AI impact awareness to workplace anxiety through job insecurity, thereby providing empirical support for Hypothesis 6.

Table 4: Moderated Mediation Effect Analysis of Artificial Intelligence Impact Awareness

TEC→INS→ANX			
Level of Visionary Leadership	Effect Size	SE	95% Confidence Interval
			(LLCI, ULCI)
Low (M - SD)	0.34	0.053	[0.24, 0.45]
High (M + SD)	0.16	0.043	[0.07, 0.24]
High-Low Difference	-0.097	0.025	[-0.15, -0.05]

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings demonstrate that AI shock awareness initiates a resource depletion process wherein perceived threats to occupational stability and skill relevance escalate job insecurity, consequently amplifying workplace anxiety. This sequential mediation aligns with COR theory's postulation of threat appraisal cascades while extending the JDR framework by delineating AI-specific mechanisms: unlike conventional technological disruptions, AI shock awareness triggers dual-dimensional resource threats encompassing both position elimination risks and competence devaluation anxieties, particularly pronounced among low-skill workers facing algorithmic displacement vulnerabilities.

Visionary leadership emerges as a critical organizational resource counteracting these effects through two interlocking mechanisms. First, strategic vision articulation recontextualizes AI adoption as an evolutionary rather than substitutive process, mitigating uncertainty through transparent roadmaps aligning technological integration with workforce development trajectories. Second, developmental support interventions transform

perceived AI threats into upskilling opportunities, fostering psychological safety through competency reinforcement. Leaders effectively functioning as uncertainty absorbers enable cognitive reframing of AI challenges, thereby disrupting the AI shock awareness →insecurity→anxiety pathway.

These insights necessitate three evidence-based organizational responses: Implementation of adaptive skill ecosystems combining technical AI literacy programs with resilience training for threat reappraisal. Institutionalization of vision-congruent communication protocols that embed AI transitions within long-term career narratives. Leadership development initiatives emphasizing emotional calibration capacities to address workforce identity crises during digital transformation. Methodological constraints arising from the homogeneous Chinese sample highlight critical research frontiers, particularly cross-cultural variations in leadership efficacy across individualistic versus collectivist work paradigms, and longitudinal investigations tracking anxiety phase transitions from initial AI implementation shock to sustained adaptation patterns. Comparative analyses across industries with differential AI exposure levels could further refine intervention specificity.

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