

Governance Mechanisms for AI Implementation Under Workforce Pressure: Evidence From Hotel Operations

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Abstract: Hospitality organizations are increasingly adopting AI-enabled systems to address workforce shortages, maintain service quality, and manage growing operational complexity. Although previous research has primarily focused on technological characteristics and individual acceptance, comparatively little attention has been given to the governance mechanisms through which AI initiatives are implemented in hotel organizations. This study examines how project governance practices shape employee trust and AI acceptance under conditions of workforce pressure. An explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, integrating qualitative and quantitative evidence. The qualitative phase comprised 25 semi-structured interviews with senior and middle managers involved in AI implementation, while the quantitative phase included survey data collected from 294 hotel employees. To complement the qualitative findings, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied to examine the relationships among trust, perceived safety, job security, fear and anxiety, and AI acceptance. The findings demonstrate that governance practices, which include clear decision accountability, transparent communication, phased implementation, and visible managerial support, play a central role in fostering employee trust. The PLS-SEM results further indicate that trust is the strongest predictor of AI acceptance ($\beta = 0.393$, $p < .001$), followed by perceived safety ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < .001$) and job security ($\beta = 0.130$, $p < .05$), while fear and anxiety show a negative but non-significant effect. Together, these factors explain 54.2% of the variance in employee acceptance. The study contributes to project and engineering management research by positioning governance as the central mechanism linking workforce pressure, trust formation, and AI acceptance. The findings provide practical guidance for managers seeking to implement AI in labor-intensive service environments through transparent, structured, and workforce-sensitive governance practices.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; project governance; AI implementation; employee trust; workforce pressure; PLS-SEM; technology acceptance; hospitality.

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1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is increasingly experiencing persistent workforce shortages, particularly in operational and low-skilled roles, creating major challenges for service delivery, operational efficiency, and long-term sustainability. These challenges have intensified in the post-pandemic period as structural labor market disruptions, demographic shifts, and evolving workforce expectations have reshaped employment patterns across service industries (Baum et al., 2020; Gursoy et al., 2019; Verma et al., 2023). In labor-intensive sectors such as hospitality, workforce shortages are no longer temporary disruptions but represent a structural constraint on organizational performance.

Recent evidence indicates that hospitality organizations face declining labor supply, rising employee turnover, and increasing competition from alternative employment sectors, while employees increasingly seek greater flexibility, higher wages, and improved working conditions (Baum et al., 2020; Farmaki et al., 2022; Goh and Baum, 2021; Karatepe et al., 2021). Together, these developments have intensified workforce instability, particularly in emerging and transitional economies.

In parallel, digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and service robotics, are increasingly viewed as strategic responses to workforce constraints (Ivanov and Webster, 2019; Buhalis and Leung, 2018; Tussyadiah,

2020). AI-enabled systems offer opportunities to improve operational efficiency, reduce costs, and standardize service delivery (Kuo et al., 2017; Ivanov et al., 2017). However, successful AI implementation extends beyond technological deployment and requires coordinated organizational change involving strategic decision-making, stakeholder alignment, resource allocation, and continuous adaptation throughout the implementation process (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; Jarrahi et al., 2023; Loureiro et al., 2021).

Although workforce challenges and AI adoption have both received substantial scholarly attention, these research streams have largely evolved independently. Workforce studies have primarily focused on labor market dynamics and employee retention (Karatepe et al., 2021; Goh and Baum, 2021), whereas AI research has emphasized technological capabilities, customer acceptance, and service innovation (Buhalis and Leung, 2018; Tussyadiah, 2020). Consequently, limited attention has been devoted to understanding how organizations govern AI implementation under persistent workforce pressure and how governance practices shape employee responses during implementation (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Huang and Rust, 2021; Seeber et al., 2020).

From a project and engineering management perspective, this gap is particularly important because AI implementation represents a complex organizational change project rather than a purely technological intervention. Successful implementation requires governance mechanisms that coordinate strategic objectives, operational execution, stakeholder engagement, and workforce adaptation under uncertainty. Project governance, therefore, provides the structures, decision rights, communication mechanisms, and accountability processes necessary to align technological implementation with organizational objectives (Müller and Lecoeuvre, 2014; Too and Weaver, 2014; Bekker and Steyn, 2009).

Despite the growing importance of AI-enabled transformation, empirical evidence remains limited regarding how governance mechanisms operate under sustained workforce pressure. Existing studies frequently examine either technological adoption or workforce challenges in isolation, offering only a limited understanding of how governance links strategic implementation decisions to frontline employees' experiences, particularly in hospitality organizations operating in emerging-market environments (Gursoy et al., 2019; Verma et al., 2023).

To address this gap, the study adopts an explanatory mixed-methods design that integrates qualitative evidence from 25 semi-structured interviews with hospitality managers and quantitative survey data from 294 hotel employees. Combining managerial and employee perspectives enables a multi-level examination of governance mechanisms, trust formation, and employee acceptance during AI implementation under workforce pressure (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018; Eisenhardt, 1989).

The study pursues three objectives: (1) to identify the principal governance challenges associated with AI implementation under workforce pressure. (2) to examine how governance practices influence employee trust throughout implementation. (3) to investigate how governance-driven trust contributes to employee acceptance of AI-enabled systems.

This study makes three principal contributions to project and engineering management research. First, it develops and empirically validates a governance, trust, and acceptance framework that explains how governance mechanisms influence employees' responses during AI implementation under workforce pressure. Second, it extends project governance literature by integrating qualitative evidence with PLS-SEM analysis, thereby connecting governance theory with organizational responses to digital transformation. Third, it provides practical guidance by identifying governance practices that strengthen trust, reduce implementation uncertainty, and support successful AI adoption in labor-constrained service environments.

Overall, the study advances understanding of AI implementation by integrating governance theory, organizational trust, and technology acceptance within a single implementation framework. In doing so, it contributes to both project and engineering management scholarship and the practical governance of AI-enabled organizational transformation in hospitality.

2. Background: Project Governance, Trust, and AI Implementation under Workforce Pressure

2.1. AI Implementation and Project Governance under Workforce Pressure

Artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled systems are increasingly introduced in hospitality organizations as part of broader digital transformation initiatives aimed at sustaining service quality and operational continuity under workforce shortages and rising service expectations (Baum et al., 2020; Verma et al., 2023). Technologies such as service automation, decision-support systems, and intelligent customer interaction platforms are widely viewed as solutions for improving efficiency and addressing labor constraints (Tussyadiah, 2020; Buhalis and Sinarta, 2023; Ivanov and Webster, 2019; Loureiro et al., 2021). However, in labor-intensive service environments such as hotels, AI implementation extends beyond technological deployment and directly affects frontline routines, employee roles, and organizational processes (Faraj et al., 2018; Rai et al., 2022).

In hospitality, where service quality depends heavily on human interaction, the adoption of AI introduces complex operational and managerial challenges. Previous research demonstrates that automation and intelligent systems reshape task structures, redistribute responsibilities, and create new forms of human-technology interaction (Wirtz et al., 2018; Lu et al., 2020; Huang and Rust, 2021). Consequently, AI implementation should be understood as a socio-technical transformation that requires coordination among technological capabilities, organizational objectives, and workforce adaptation (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; Sarker et al., 2019; Jarrahi et al., 2023).

Unlike conventional technology deployment, AI implementation is a complex organizational change project that requires coordination across strategic, managerial, and operational levels. Successful implementation depends on aligning technological capabilities with organizational objectives, stakeholder expectations, resource availability, and workforce adaptation. Accordingly, AI implementation should be viewed as a governance-intensive organizational project in which

managerial coordination, communication, and stakeholder alignment are as important as technological functionality itself (Müller and Lecoivre, 2014; Too and Weaver, 2014; Joslin and Müller, 2015, 2016; Müller et al., 2016).

From a project and engineering management perspective, governance mechanisms, including decision rights, communication structures, stakeholder engagement, monitoring processes, and accountability arrangements, play a central role in shaping implementation outcomes (Bekker and Steyn, 2009; Bryde, 2008; Joslin and Müller, 2015, 2016; Aaltonen and Kujala, 2016; Müller et al., 2016). Effective governance reduces implementation uncertainty by clarifying responsibilities, strengthening stakeholder coordination, and supporting transparent managerial decision-making (Gerald et al., 2023; Müller et al., 2016). Conversely, weak governance, characterized by unclear decision authority, limited frontline involvement, or inconsistent communication, can increase uncertainty, trigger employee resistance, and undermine the legitimacy of AI implementation. These governance challenges become particularly pronounced under persistent workforce shortages, where operational pressure constrains managerial capacity and increases implementation complexity.

2.2. Governance, Trust and Employee Acceptance of AI

Within This Context, Trust Emerges as A Central Mechanism Influencing The Adoption and Effective Use of AI-Enabled Systems. Trust Reflects Employee Confidence Not Only In The Technology Itself But Also In The Organizational Processes And Leadership Structures That Govern Its Implementation (Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 2011). In AI-Enabled Environments, Trust Encompasses Perceptions of Reliability, Transparency, Fairness, Predictability, and Confidence in Managerial Intentions and Governance Practices (Glikson and Woolley, 2020; Rai et al., 2022; Jarrahi et al., 2023; Seeber et al., 2020). Accordingly, Trust is conceptualized as an organizational outcome of governance quality rather than as a response to technological characteristics alone.

The importance of trust becomes even more pronounced under workforce pressure. Staff shortages, increased workload, and role stress reduce employees' capacity to adapt to technological change (Baum et al., 2020; Karatepe et al., 2021). Poorly governed implementation processes may therefore amplify uncertainty, fear, and perceived job insecurity, whereas transparent governance practices reduce implementation uncertainty, strengthen procedural fairness, and increase confidence in organizational decision-making (Joslin and Müller, 2016; Schnackenberg and Tomlinson, 2016).

Although technology acceptance models such as TAM and UTAUT have substantially advanced understanding of AI adoption (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003), they provide only limited explanations for implementation in complex organizational settings because they primarily emphasize individual perceptions while paying comparatively less attention to governance processes through which technologies are introduced and institutionalized (Jasperson et al., 2005; Wang and Siau, 2019). A governance perspective, therefore, complements technology acceptance theories by explaining how implementation practices create the organizational conditions under which employee trust and acceptance develop (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021).

In hospitality organizations, employee acceptance depends not only on perceived technological usefulness but also on whether implementation is experienced as fair, transparent, and aligned with workforce conditions (Gursoy et al., 2019; Huang and Rust, 2021). Governance, therefore, plays a central role in shaping trust formation and long-term AI acceptance.

Despite growing attention to AI adoption and workforce challenges, empirical evidence explaining how hospitality organizations govern AI implementation under persistent labor shortages remains limited. Existing studies have largely examined technological adoption or workforce dynamics in isolation, yielding a limited understanding of how governance mechanisms influence employee trust and, in turn, AI acceptance across organizational levels. This study addresses this gap by positioning governance as the central mechanism linking workforce pressure, trust formation, and AI implementation outcomes.

3. Research Framework

This study adopts an applied project governance perspective to examine how AI-enabled initiatives are structured, coordinated, and implemented within hospitality organizations operating under workforce pressure. Rather than focusing exclusively on abstract theoretical relationships, the study emphasizes the governance mechanisms through which managerial practices shape implementation processes, employee trust, and implementation outcomes in organizational environments (Too and Weaver, 2014; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

In particular, the study examines how governance practices influence employee trust throughout the AI implementation process and how that trust subsequently contributes to employee acceptance of AI-enabled systems. Building on prior research in project governance and technology adoption, the proposed framework also considers employees' perceptions of psychological safety, job security, and fear of AI adoption as complementary factors that influence acceptance outcomes. This perspective aligns with project and engineering management research emphasizing governance structures, decision-making clarity, stakeholder alignment, and organizational support as key determinants of successful organizational transformation (Müller and Lecoivre, 2014; Aaltonen and Kujala, 2016; Joslin and Müller, 2016).

Research questions: To guide the empirical investigation, the study addresses the following three research questions.

- RQ1: Which governance practices do hotel managers use to introduce and oversee AI-enabled initiatives?
- RQ2: How do these governance approaches influence employee trust during implementation?
- RQ3: Which managerial practices strengthen, or undermine, employee willingness to work alongside AI technologies?

These questions are designed to capture implementation dynamics across multiple organizational levels by integrating qualitative evidence from senior executives and department managers with quantitative evidence reflecting frontline employee experiences (Faraj et al., 2018; Raisch and Krakowski, 2021).

Conceptual framework: The study is guided by a governance-based implementation framework in which project governance mechanisms create the organizational conditions that influence employee trust and, ultimately, employee acceptance of AI-enabled systems. In addition to trust, the framework incorporates employees' perceptions of psychological safety, job security, and fear of AI adoption as complementary explanatory constructs examined in the quantitative phase.

Project governance practices are the mechanisms by which AI implementation is directed and coordinated, including decision rights, structured oversight, transparent communication, stakeholder engagement, phased implementation strategies, and visible leadership involvement. Within hospitality organizations, governance also encompasses managerial responses to workforce-related concerns, including job security, workload redistribution, and the integration of human judgment into AI-supported work processes (Müller and Lecoeuvre, 2014; Schnackenberg and Tomlinson, 2016; Jarrahi et al., 2023).

Trust is conceptualized as a dynamic implementation outcome that reflects employees' confidence in both the technological system and the governance processes surrounding its introduction. Rather than viewing trust solely as an individual psychological construct, the study conceptualizes trust as emerging from managerial behavior, communication transparency, procedural fairness, and consistent governance throughout implementation (Mayer et al., 1995; Glikson and Woolley, 2020).

Employee acceptance is defined as employees' willingness to integrate AI into daily work routines and support its sustained operational use. In this study, acceptance refers to the successful organizational embedding of AI-enabled processes, extending beyond initial adoption intentions to continued engagement with AI-supported work practices (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Wang and Siau, 2019).

Fig. 1 presents the conceptual research framework examined in this study and illustrates the hypothesized relationships that are subsequently evaluated through quantitative analysis.

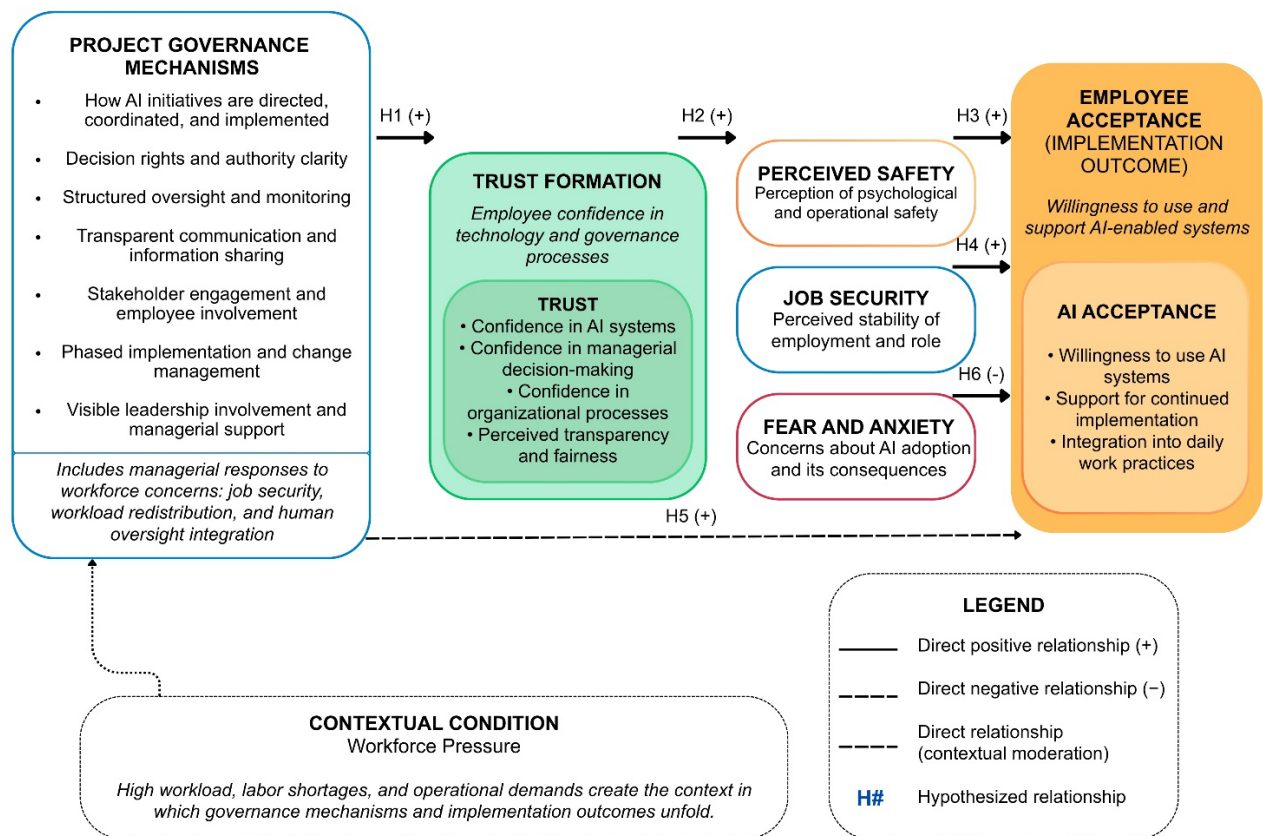


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework linking governance, trust, and AI acceptance

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Approach

This study adopts an explanatory mixed-methods research design to examine how AI-enabled initiatives are governed within hospitality organizations operating under workforce pressure. The research combines qualitative insights from managerial interviews with quantitative evidence from employees, enabling a multi-level analysis of governance practices, workforce

dynamics, and implementation outcomes. The mixed-method design allows managerial perspectives on governance processes to be examined alongside employee perceptions of trust and AI acceptance, providing complementary evidence for understanding implementation in complex organizational settings (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

The use of a mixed-method approach is particularly appropriate in complex organizational contexts where technological implementation intersects with human, operational, and managerial factors (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Qualitative data provide in-depth insights into governance mechanisms, managerial decision-making, and organizational adaptation strategies, while quantitative data capture employee-level perceptions of trust, psychological safety, job security, fear of AI, and acceptance of AI-enabled systems. The integration of both data sources enables methodological triangulation by linking managerial explanations of governance practices with employee assessments of implementation outcomes.

The qualitative component was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring governance mechanisms and implementation practices, whereas the quantitative component was examined using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM was selected because it enables the simultaneous assessment of measurement reliability and validity, as well as the examination of structural relationships among multiple latent constructs, making it particularly suitable for exploratory research involving complex organizational phenomena and relatively moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022).

Rather than focusing solely on hypothesis testing, the study adopts an explanatory and exploratory orientation to identify structured patterns of governance and their practical implications for AI implementation. Accordingly, integrating thematic analysis with PLS-SEM provides a comprehensive understanding of how governance mechanisms shape employee trust and AI acceptance across organizational levels under persistent workforce pressure.

4.2. Qualitative Data: Manager Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with hospitality managers across multiple hierarchical levels and functional areas. The qualitative sample consists of 25 interview participants, including senior executives (e.g., general managers, directors, owners) and middle-level managers (e.g., department heads and supervisors), representing a broad range of operational functions such as Front Office, Food and Beverage, Human Resources, Finance, Engineering, and Housekeeping.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure inclusion of participants with direct experience in organizational decision-making, operational management, and AI-related implementation under conditions of workforce pressure (Eisenhardt, 1989). The sample includes participants from multiple countries and organizational contexts, such as independent hotels and chain-affiliated properties, enabling cross-contextual comparisons and greater analytical depth. Participants were selected because they held managerial responsibility for operational coordination, workforce management, or strategic decision-making related to organizational adaptation and AI implementation.

The inclusion of both strategic and operational management levels enables a multi-level perspective on governance by capturing alignment and potential misalignment between strategic intentions and frontline operational realities. Sample adequacy was determined based on thematic saturation and diversity of managerial perspectives rather than statistical representativeness (Guest et al., 2006). Recruitment continued until no substantially new governance mechanisms or implementation patterns emerged from successive interviews.

Interview questions focused on:

- workforce shortages and operational constraints;
- decision-making structures and governance practices;
- communication and coordination mechanisms;
- trust-related dynamics during implementation;
- managerial adaptation strategies and perceived implementation effectiveness.

The semi-structured interview protocol provided sufficient flexibility for participants to elaborate on organization-specific governance challenges while ensuring consistency across the principal research themes. All interviews were anonymized to ensure confidentiality, and participant identities were removed before analysis. The profile of participants is presented in Table 1, highlighting the diversity of organizational roles, hierarchical levels, and operational contexts represented in the qualitative sample.

4.3. Quantitative Data: Employee Survey

To complement managerial perspectives, survey data were collected from 294 hospitality employees working in environments exposed to AI-supported or technology-enhanced processes. The sample includes employees from multiple operational departments and with varying levels of professional experience, providing a comprehensive view of frontline perceptions of AI implementation under workforce pressure.

The survey instrument was developed to measure employees' perceptions of governance-related implementation processes and their responses to AI-enabled systems. All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Based on the conceptual framework, the questionnaire included five latent constructs are shown below.

- Trust (four items): reflecting employee confidence in AI-enabled systems and organizational implementation processes.
- Perceived Safety (three items): capturing employees' perceptions of psychological and operational safety during AI implementation.
- Job Security (three items): assessing perceived employment stability in AI-supported work environments.
- Fear and Anxiety (four items): measuring concerns associated with AI adoption and its potential consequences for employees.
- AI Acceptance (three items): representing employees' willingness to use and support AI-enabled systems in their daily work.

Table 1. Profile of qualitative interview participants

Code	Country	Hotel	Role	Area	Level
E1	Kazakhstan	4★	General Manager	Operations	Strategic
E2	Croatia	5★	General Manager	Operations	Strategic
E3	Serbia	4★	Hotel Manager	Operations	Strategic
E4	N. Cyprus	5★	General Manager	Operations	Strategic
E5	Turkey	5★	Hotel Director	Operations	Strategic
E6	Montenegro	5★	General Manager	Operations	Strategic
E7	Russia	5★	General Manager	Operations	Strategic
E8	Serbia	4★	Owner / GM	Operations	Strategic
E9	Kazakhstan	4★	Asst. FO Manager	Front Office	Operational
E10	Kazakhstan	4★	FO Manager	Front Office	Operational
E11	Kazakhstan	4★	General Director	Executive	Strategic
E12	Kazakhstan	4★	Housekeeping Manager	Housekeeping	Operational
E13	Kazakhstan	4★	HR Specialist	HR	Operational
E14	Kazakhstan	4★	Restaurant Manager	F and B	Operational
E15	Kazakhstan	4★	Restaurant Supervisor	F and B	Operational
E16	Kazakhstan	4★	Chief Accountant	Finance	Strategic
E17	Kazakhstan	4★	Director of Engineering	Engineering	Strategic
E18	Kazakhstan	4★	Executive Chef	Kitchen	Mixed
E19	Kazakhstan	4★	F and B Manager	F and B	Operational
E20	Kazakhstan	4★	Housekeeping Supervisor	Housekeeping	Operational
E21	Kazakhstan	4★	Housekeeping Supervisor	Housekeeping	Operational
E22	Kazakhstan	4★	HR Manager	HR	Mixed
E23	Kazakhstan	4★	Restaurant Administrator	F and B	Operational
E24	Kazakhstan	4★	Sous Chef	Kitchen	Operational
E25	Kazakhstan	4★	Front Office Manager	Front Office	Operational

Note: The sample includes 25 participants across strategic and operational levels and multiple functional areas, including Front Office, Food and Beverage, Human Resources, Finance, Engineering, Housekeeping, and Kitchen operations. The inclusion of both international and Kazakhstan-based managers enables cross-context and multi-level analysis.

The quantitative data complement the qualitative findings by providing employee-level evidence on how governance practices influence trust formation and AI acceptance across operational settings. Descriptive characteristics of the sample, including gender, age, professional experience, and organizational position, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Profile of survey respondents

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	182	61.9
	Female	112	38.1
Age	Under 24	121	41.2
	25–34	64	21.8
	35–44	61	20.7
	45–54	36	12.2
	55+	12	4.1
Experience	<1 year	75	25.5
	1–3 years	82	27.9
	4–6 years	45	15.3
	7–10 years	47	16.0
	>10 years	45	15.3
Position	Operational staff	139	47.3
	Manager	81	27.6
	Supervisor / senior staff	43	14.6
	Reception	9	3.1
Total		294	100

Note: The survey sample comprises 294 hospitality employees across age groups, experience levels, and organizational roles, providing a comprehensive representation of frontline workforce conditions in AI-supported operational environments.

The quantitative component was not designed as a standalone hypothesis-testing exercise but rather as a complementary analytical layer that supports and extends the qualitative findings. The application of PLS-SEM enabled the empirical assessment of relationships among the proposed latent constructs, while methodological triangulation facilitated the identification of consistent patterns between managerial governance practices and employee perceptions. Together, these complementary analytical approaches strengthen the robustness, validity, and explanatory depth of the overall findings.

4.4. Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved familiarization with the interview transcripts, initial coding, identification of recurring patterns, development and refinement of themes, and final interpretation. Particular attention was given to governance mechanisms, workforce-related constraints, managerial decision-making, and organizational responses associated with AI implementation.

The thematic analysis enabled the identification of higher-order governance themes reflecting implementation practices, operational challenges, and managerial adaptation strategies across organizational settings. Themes were iteratively refined through continuous comparison across interviews to ensure conceptual consistency and analytical coherence.

The quantitative data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) implemented in SmartPLS 4. Descriptive statistics were first calculated to summarize the characteristics of the sample. The measurement model was subsequently evaluated by examining internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability), convergent validity using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). The structural model was assessed through path coefficients (β), coefficients of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), collinearity diagnostics (VIF), and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to determine the statistical significance of the proposed relationships (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022).

The qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated through methodological triangulation, whereby evidence from both datasets was compared and interpreted jointly to identify convergent patterns and complementary insights. This integration strengthened the credibility, robustness, and explanatory power of the study by linking managerial perspectives with employee-level evidence (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

5. Results

This section presents the empirical findings of the study. Consistent with the mixed-method research design, the results are organized around governance-related themes identified through qualitative analysis and complemented by quantitative evidence from the employee survey. Together, the findings illustrate how workforce pressure, governance practices, trust formation, and employee acceptance interact during AI-enabled implementation.

5.1. Workforce Pressure and Operational Constraints

The qualitative findings consistently indicate that workforce shortages represent a structural constraint shaping operational and managerial practices in hospitality organizations. Across interviews, participants reported persistent difficulties in recruiting and retaining employees, particularly in operational and low-skilled roles such as housekeeping, kitchen support, and maintenance.

Managers highlighted that workforce deficits are not temporary fluctuations, but ongoing structural challenges influenced by migration, labor market conditions, and declining interest in hospitality careers. One executive described the situation as:

“We currently have a deficit of around 30 employees, especially in basic operational roles.” (E1)

In addition to recruitment challenges, workforce instability was further intensified by employee migration toward higher-paying industries and larger urban centers. Participants emphasized that hospitality increasingly struggles to compete with alternative employment opportunities, including digital and platform-based work.

As a consequence, workforce shortages led to increased workload intensity, extended working hours, and a heightened risk of employee burnout. Managers frequently reported double shifts, reduced rest periods, and continuous operational pressure:

“Employees often work overtime and take additional shifts, which leads to burnout over time.” (E9)

These conditions were linked to operational risks, including reduced service quality, increased error rates, and declining consistency in service delivery. Across interviews, managers consistently described workforce pressure as the primary organizational condition shaping subsequent governance decisions regarding AI implementation, resource allocation, and operational adaptation. Importantly, these findings position workforce pressure as a key contextual factor shaping how AI initiatives are introduced and governed in practice.

5.2. Governance Mechanisms for AI Implementation

Under conditions of workforce pressure, organizations adopted a range of governance practices to structure and manage AI-enabled initiatives. Qualitative analysis identified several recurring governance mechanisms, including clear decision authority, phased implementation, employee involvement, structured communication, and continuous managerial support.

A consistent pattern across interviews was the separation between strategic decision-making and operational execution. Senior management defined the direction and scope of AI initiatives, while middle managers were responsible for implementation, training, and adaptation at the operational level.

Phased implementation emerged as a critical governance mechanism. Rather than introducing AI systems abruptly, organizations relied on pilot testing, gradual rollout, and iterative adjustments. This approach allowed employees to adapt progressively, reduced perceived implementation risk, and facilitated trust throughout the implementation process.

Another key governance element was the integration of human oversight into AI-supported processes. Managers emphasized that maintaining human judgment and verification was essential for preserving employee trust, professional autonomy, and confidence in AI-supported decision-making.

Table 3 summarizes the principal governance mechanisms identified through qualitative analysis.

5.3 Trust Formation as a Governance Outcome

Survey findings reinforce the qualitative evidence by demonstrating that employee trust is strongly associated with governance clarity and implementation practices. Employees reported higher levels of trust when AI initiatives were perceived as structured, transparent, and supported by visible managerial involvement.

Trust was not limited to perceptions of technological reliability but also reflected confidence in managerial decision-making and organizational processes. Employees expressed greater trust when governance practices reduced uncertainty and provided clear guidance regarding roles, expectations, and system functionality.

Conversely, limited communication, unclear decision authority, and rapid implementation without sufficient preparation were associated with lower levels of trust. As one manager noted:

“When we introduced the system too quickly and without enough explanation, employees assumed it would replace them.” (E11)

These findings suggest that trust develops as a governance outcome shaped by implementation quality rather than as a purely individual attitude toward AI technology. This pattern was consistently observed across both qualitative and quantitative evidence, reinforcing the central role of governance in fostering employee acceptance.

To further examine these relationships, the proposed governance trust acceptance framework was subsequently assessed using PLS-SEM, providing quantitative evidence of the structural relationships among the key constructs.

5.4. Quantitative Evidence: Measurement and Structural Model Assessment

The quantitative component was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships among trust, perceived safety, job security, fear and anxiety, and employee acceptance of AI-enabled systems. Prior to evaluating the structural relationships, the measurement model was assessed to ensure the reliability and validity of the latent constructs.

Table 3. Governance mechanisms identified from qualitative analysis

Governance mechanism	Description	Implementation effect
Decision authority	Clear separation between strategic and operational responsibilities	Reduces ambiguity and role conflict
Phased implementation	Gradual rollout through pilot phases and iterative adjustments	Enables learning and reduces resistance
Communication transparency	Clear explanation of objectives and implementation processes	Enhances perceived fairness and clarity
Employee involvement	Inclusion of staff in testing and feedback processes	Strengthens ownership and engagement
Human oversight	Retention of human judgment in AI-supported decisions	Preserves trust and autonomy
Training and support	Structured onboarding and skill development	Reduces anxiety and increases confidence

Note: Governance mechanisms were identified through thematic analysis of 25 semi-structured interviews with hospitality managers. Implementation effects reflect the integration of qualitative and quantitative findings.

Table 4 presents the results of the measurement model assessment. All constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.722 to 0.920 and Composite Reliability values ranging from 0.815 to 0.949, exceeding recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2022). Convergent validity was also established, as all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50. Furthermore, discriminant validity was confirmed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT), with all values remaining below the recommended cutoff of 0.85, indicating adequate distinction among the latent constructs.

Following confirmation of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. The model explained 54.2% of the variance in employee acceptance of AI-enabled systems ($R^2 = 0.542$), indicating moderate explanatory power.

As presented in Table 5, trust emerged as the strongest predictor of employee acceptance ($\beta = 0.393$, $p < .001$), followed by perceived safety ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < .001$). Job security was also positively and statistically significantly related to employee acceptance ($\beta = 0.130$, $p = .042$). In contrast, although fear and anxiety exhibited a negative association with AI acceptance ($\beta = -0.085$), this relationship was not statistically significant ($p = .096$).

Table 4. Measurement model assessment

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Trust	0.896	0.927	0.762
Perceived Safety	0.817	0.890	0.730
Job Security	0.722	0.815	0.596
Fear and Anxiety	0.827	0.881	0.653
AI Acceptance	0.920	0.949	0.862

Note: Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70 indicate satisfactory internal consistency, while AVE values above 0.50 confirm convergent validity.

Overall, the quantitative findings support the proposed governance–trust–acceptance framework by demonstrating that employee acceptance of AI-enabled systems is primarily influenced by trust and perceived safety, while job security exerts a smaller positive effect. The absence of a significant effect for fear and anxiety suggests that concerns regarding AI implementation may be mitigated when governance processes provide sufficient transparency, communication, and managerial support. These quantitative findings closely align with the qualitative evidence, reinforcing the conclusion that

effective governance practices foster trust and facilitate employee acceptance of AI-enabled systems under workforce pressure.

5.5. Integrated Findings

The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings reveals a consistent governance-based implementation pattern across hospitality organizations operating under conditions of workforce pressure. Qualitative evidence demonstrates that structured governance practices, including transparent communication, phased implementation, employee involvement, leadership support, and human oversight, play a central role in reducing implementation uncertainty and facilitating employee adaptation to AI-enabled systems.

Table 5. Structural model results

Path	β	t	p	f ²
Trust → AI Acceptance	0.393	6.413	<0.001	0.186
Perceived Safety → AI Acceptance	0.342	5.141	<0.001	0.142
Job Security → AI Acceptance	0.130	2.032	0.042	0.026
Fear and Anxiety → AI Acceptance	-0.085	1.664	0.096	0.013

Note: Structural relationships were estimated using PLS-SEM with bootstrapping (5,000 resamples). The model explained 54.2% of the variance in AI Acceptance ($R^2 = 0.542$).

The quantitative findings reinforce these observations by demonstrating that employee trust represents the strongest predictor of AI acceptance, followed by perceived safety and job security. Together, these results indicate that successful AI implementation depends not only on technological capabilities but also on governance processes that foster employee confidence throughout organizational change. Although fear and anxiety were negatively associated with AI acceptance, their effect was not statistically significant, suggesting that effective governance practices may reduce employees' concerns during implementation.

Taken together, the findings suggest that governance influences AI implementation through both organizational and psychological mechanisms. Governance practices establish the organizational conditions that promote trust, strengthen perceptions of safety and job security, and ultimately facilitate employees' acceptance of AI-enabled systems amid workforce pressures.

Fig. 2 presents the empirically supported governance–trust–acceptance framework derived from the integrated qualitative and quantitative findings.

6. Discussion

6.1. Governance Mechanisms and Trust under Workforce Pressure

This study identifies trust as the central governance mechanism shaping employee acceptance of AI-enabled initiatives in hotel environments under workforce pressure. The integrated qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that employees are more willing to engage with AI-supported systems when implementation is transparent, structured, and supported by management. Rather than depending solely on technological performance, trust develops through governance practices that reduce uncertainty, provide procedural clarity, and strengthen organizational legitimacy during technological change (Mayer et al., 1995; Schnackenberg and Tomlinson, 2016; Tyler, 2006; Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000).

A key contribution of the study is the identification of workforce pressure as an important contextual condition shaping AI implementation. Labor shortages, workload intensity, and workforce instability substantially influence how governance practices are interpreted at the frontline level (Baum et al., 2020; Goh and Baum, 2021; Farmaki et al., 2022; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Under these conditions, governance mechanisms become practical tools for reducing uncertainty, strengthening employee confidence, and supporting organizational adaptation.

The qualitative findings further demonstrate that employees respond more positively when AI implementation is gradual, predictable, and supported by visible managerial involvement. As one manager explained:

"When the system was introduced step by step, employees had time to understand and accept it. Sudden changes create resistance." (E5)

Similarly, transparent communication emerged as an important trust-building mechanism:

"If management is present and explains the purpose clearly, employees feel more secure and are more open to new systems." (E2)

These observations are consistent with socio-technical perspectives suggesting that successful AI implementation depends not only on technological capabilities but also on the integration of technologies within organizational processes, governance structures, and managerial decision-making (Faraj et al., 2018; Rai et al., 2022; Jarrahi et al., 2023). They also

reinforce hospitality research demonstrating that employee concerns, including job security, autonomy, and workload redistribution, shape responses to AI-enabled automation (Belanche et al., 2020; Huang and Rust, 2021; Langer et al., 2021).

From a project governance perspective, the findings extend existing literature by demonstrating that governance arrangements influence not only project control and performance but also the relational and behavioral mechanisms underpinning successful AI implementation (Baccarini, 1999; Crawford et al., 2008; Müller and Lecoivre, 2014; Brunet, 2022). Governance mechanisms such as clear decision rights, structured oversight, transparent communication, and human oversight provide employees with interpretive frameworks for evaluating technological change. The findings also highlight the pivotal role of middle managers, who translate strategic AI initiatives into operational practice, manage employee concerns, and maintain alignment between organizational objectives and frontline realities. This extends previous research on middle managers as organizational change agents to AI-enabled hospitality environments operating under persistent workforce pressure (Huy, 2002; Balogun, 2003).

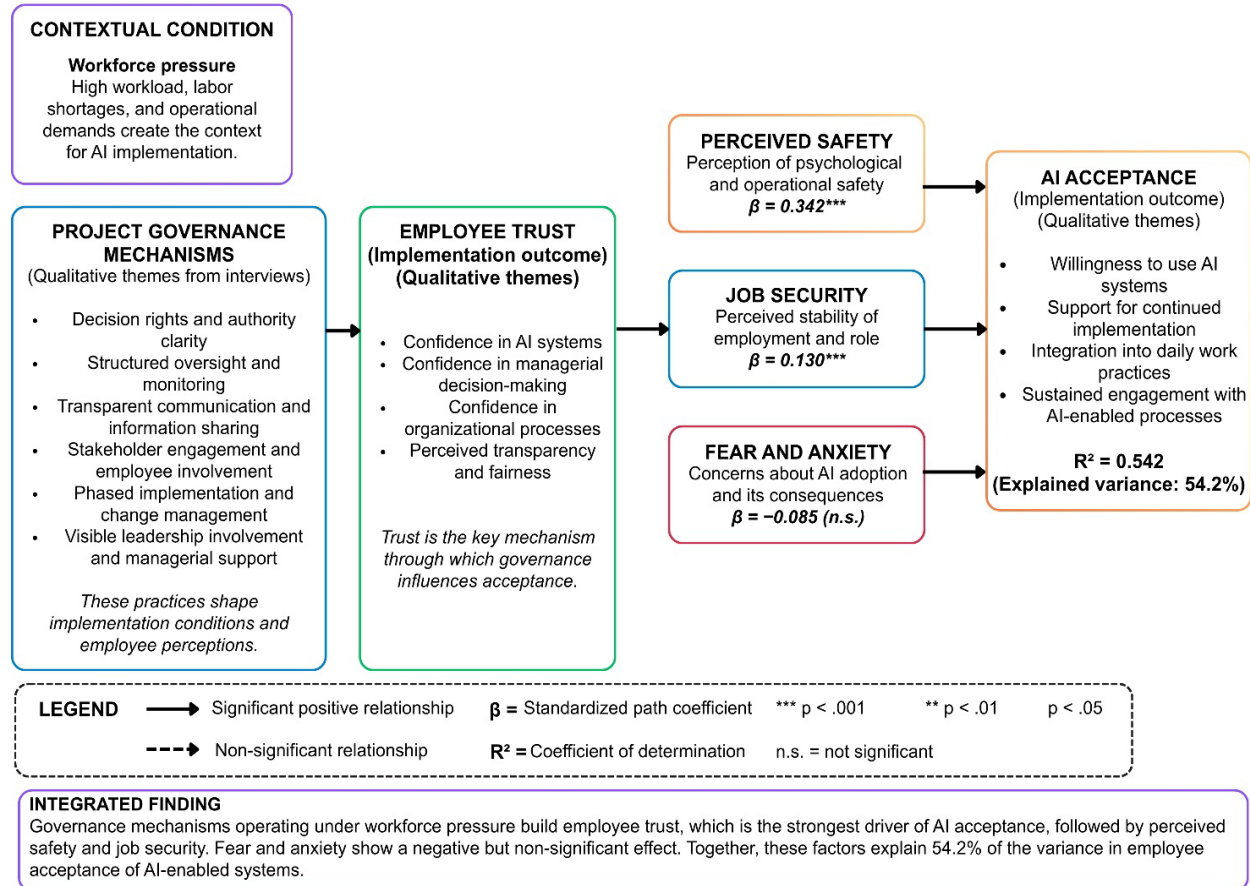


Fig. 2. Integrated governance, trust, and acceptance framework: qualitative findings and PLS-SEM analysis

6.2. Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Evidence

The quantitative findings provide robust empirical support for the governance-based interpretation developed through the qualitative analysis. The PLS-SEM results confirm that trust is the strongest predictor of employee acceptance of AI-enabled systems, followed by perceived safety, while job security exerts a smaller but statistically significant positive effect. In contrast, fear and anxiety do not significantly influence employee acceptance, suggesting that employee responses are shaped more by governance quality than by technology-related concerns alone.

These findings extend technology acceptance research by demonstrating that employee acceptance develops within a broader organizational context characterized by governance practices, managerial support, and workforce conditions rather than individual technology perceptions alone (McKnight et al., 2011; Wang and Siau, 2019; Shin, 2021). Governance, therefore, complements traditional technology acceptance models by explaining how implementation practices create the conditions under which trust and acceptance develop.

The findings further indicate that perceived safety represents an important mechanism linking governance with employee acceptance. Employees who perceive AI implementation as transparent, well-managed, and supported by leadership are more likely to feel psychologically secure and integrate AI into their daily work routines. Although job security has a comparatively smaller effect, it remains relevant under conditions of persistent workforce pressure.

The non-significant effect of fear and anxiety suggests that well-governed implementation processes can substantially reduce uncertainty associated with technological change. When governance provides clear communication, visible

managerial support, and opportunities for employee involvement, fear becomes less influential in shaping acceptance decisions.

Overall, the integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrates that governance operates simultaneously as a structural, managerial, and psychological mechanism that connects workforce pressure to successful AI implementation. By combining qualitative insights with PLS-SEM evidence, the study advances a governance-based explanation of AI implementation in hospitality, emphasizing that successful technological transformation depends not only on AI capabilities but also on how organizational change is governed, communicated, and experienced by employees.

7. Implications: Managerial Lessons for AI Implementation in Hotels

7.1. Practical Contribution

This study demonstrates that successful AI implementation in hospitality depends less on technological capability alone and more on how implementation is governed in practice, particularly under conditions of workforce pressure. The integrated qualitative findings and PLS-SEM results indicate that employee trust represents the primary mechanism through which governance practices facilitate AI acceptance. Accordingly, successful implementation requires not only technological readiness but also transparent communication, clear accountability, visible managerial support, and workforce-sensitive implementation strategies (Too and Weaver, 2014; Baum et al., 2020; Crawford et al., 2008).

By demonstrating that governance arrangements influence employee trust and subsequent acceptance, the study extends project governance literature beyond its traditional emphasis on performance control and organizational efficiency toward a stronger relational and behavioral perspective (Müller and Lecoeuvre, 2014; Brunet, 2022). In AI-enabled hotel projects, governance mechanisms function not only as structural arrangements but also as organizational signals that employees use to evaluate managerial intentions, procedural fairness, and the legitimacy of technological change.

Importantly, the findings suggest that governance practices determine whether AI initiatives are perceived as supportive organizational transformations or as disruptive interventions in everyday hotel operations. Under conditions of workforce pressure, where employees already experience increased workloads and operational uncertainty, governance clarity, transparent communication, and employee involvement become essential managerial mechanisms for maintaining trust, strengthening perceptions of safety, and facilitating long-term AI acceptance (Faraj et al., 2018; Rai et al., 2022; Huang and Rust, 2021).

7.2. Managerial Implications: What Hotel Leaders Should Do

The findings provide several actionable lessons for hospitality executives implementing AI amid workforce pressure.

1) Treat AI adoption as a governance and organizational change challenge

AI initiatives should not be approached as isolated technology investments. Managers should establish clear decision rights, governance structures, and accountability throughout the implementation process. The empirical findings further demonstrate that governance quality directly influences employee trust, which emerged as the strongest predictor of AI acceptance in the quantitative analysis. As several interview participants emphasized, unclear governance arrangements increase operational uncertainty and employee resistance (e.g., E3, E11), whereas transparent governance strengthens implementation effectiveness (Müller and Lecoeuvre, 2014; Galdi et al., 2023).

2) Communicate early, transparently, and continuously

Employee uncertainty increases when AI-related decisions are perceived as opaque or imposed. Regular communication, visible managerial involvement, and open feedback channels help reduce uncertainty and strengthen trust throughout implementation. Interview evidence indicates that communication failures, rather than AI technologies themselves, frequently trigger employee resistance (e.g., E2, E4). Transparent communication, therefore, enhances procedural legitimacy and supports successful organizational change (Schnackenberg and Tomlinson, 2016; Tyler, 2006).

3) Implement AI gradually through phased rollouts

Pilot projects and staged implementation enable employees to adapt progressively, develop confidence in AI-supported processes, and integrate new technologies without disrupting service delivery. Managers consistently emphasized that gradual implementation reduces resistance and facilitates organizational learning (e.g., E1, E5). Incremental implementation, therefore, represents an effective governance mechanism for reducing implementation risk (Jarrahi et al., 2023).

4) Preserve human judgment through human-in-the-loop safeguards

Positioning AI as a decision-support tool rather than a replacement for professional expertise strengthens employee acceptance and reduces concerns about autonomy and job displacement. Maintaining human oversight reinforces confidence in organizational decision-making and supports AI adoption, particularly in service-intensive environments (Raisch and Krakowski, 2021; Jarrahi et al., 2023).

5) Monitor trust and workforce responses as implementation indicators

Managers should monitor employee trust and acceptance alongside technical performance indicators throughout AI implementation. Consistent with the PLS-SEM results, employee trust emerged as the strongest predictor of AI acceptance, suggesting that workforce trust represents an important early indicator of implementation success. Continuous

assessment of employee perceptions enables organizations to identify governance shortcomings and adjust implementation strategies before resistance becomes embedded (McKnight et al., 2011; Wang and Siau, 2019).

To summarize these findings and translate them into actionable managerial guidance, Table 6 presents the principal governance practices together with their expected organizational outcomes during AI implementation.

Table 6. Governance practices and managerial implications for AI implementation

Governance practice	Primary organizational objective	Expected implementation outcome
Decision clarity	Reduce role ambiguity	Stronger implementation consistency
Communication transparency	Reduce uncertainty	Higher employee trust
Phased implementation	Support employee adaptation	Greater AI acceptance
Human oversight	Preserve professional autonomy	Lower implementation resistance
Employee involvement	Strengthen employee ownership	Higher workforce engagement
Training and support	Build AI-related competence	Greater implementation confidence

Note: Governance practices were derived from the integrated qualitative and quantitative findings and translated into actionable managerial recommendations for AI implementation in hospitality organizations.

7.3. Practical Governance Framework for AI Implementation in Hotels

Building on the integrated qualitative and quantitative findings, this study proposes a practical governance framework to support AI implementation amid workforce pressure. The framework emphasizes seven complementary governance practices:

1. Clear decision rights and accountability across managerial levels;
2. Defined escalation paths for operational and workforce-related concerns;
3. Phased implementation supported by continuous learning;
4. Human-in-the-loop safeguards to preserve professional judgment;
5. Transparent communication throughout implementation;
6. Training and workforce adaptation aligned with AI-enabled workflows;
7. Continuous monitoring of employee trust and AI acceptance.

Collectively, these governance practices provide a practical roadmap for implementing AI responsibly and effectively for hospitality organizations. By strengthening governance quality, organizations can reduce implementation uncertainty, foster employee trust, and support the long-term integration of AI-enabled service processes amid workforce pressure.

8. Conclusion

This study examined how AI implementation is governed in hotel environments under workforce pressure and how these governance practices shape employee trust and acceptance. By integrating qualitative evidence with PLS-SEM analysis, the study demonstrates that successful AI implementation depends not only on technological capability but also on how implementation processes are structured, communicated, and experienced at the frontline level (Faraj et al., 2018; Baum et al., 2020).

A central contribution of the study is the identification of trust as the primary mechanism linking governance practices with sustained employee acceptance of AI-enabled systems. The empirical findings indicate that trust represents the strongest predictor of employee acceptance, reinforcing the importance of governance practices that reduce uncertainty, clarify responsibilities, and strengthen organizational legitimacy during technological change. In addition, perceptions of safety and job security positively contribute to AI acceptance, whereas fear and anxiety do not appear to be significant barriers when implementation is governed by transparent communication, phased rollout, and visible managerial support.

The study further contributes to the project and engineering management literature by demonstrating that governance influences not only implementation control and organizational performance but also the behavioral and relational mechanisms that underlie successful technological transformation. Under workforce pressure, governance serves as an adaptive organizational capability that enables employees to interpret AI initiatives as supportive organizational change rather than as a threat to their professional roles.

More broadly, the study advances an integrated governance–trust–acceptance framework linking workforce pressure, governance mechanisms, and employee responses within a single explanatory model. By combining qualitative insights with quantitative validation, the research provides a more comprehensive understanding of AI implementation in hospitality and offers practical guidance for organizations managing technology-enabled transformation in labor-intensive service environments.

Although the study focuses on hospitality organizations, the proposed framework may also be applicable to other service industries experiencing workforce shortages and increasing AI adoption. Future research should examine governance mechanisms longitudinally, compare implementation processes across industries and cultural contexts, and investigate additional organizational factors influencing trust and employee adaptation during AI-enabled transformation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that successful AI implementation depends less on technological sophistication than on the quality of governance. Organizations that approach AI adoption as a structured, transparent, and trust-building organizational process are more likely to achieve sustainable employee acceptance and successful long-term integration of AI-enabled systems.

Author Contributions

Marco Petrovic contributed to the study's conceptualization, research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript drafting. Arso M. Vukicevic contributed to the conceptualization, methodological development, supervision, and critical revision of the manuscript for its important intellectual content. Dinara Aitzhanova contributed to data collection, practical insights from industry context, validation of findings, and manuscript review and editing.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. The research protocol was reviewed by the Institutional Ethics Committee of the Territorial Association of Trade Unions of Pavlodar Region (Republic of Kazakhstan) and was determined to be exempt from full Institutional Review Board (IRB) review due to the anonymous and minimal-risk nature of the study (Ethics Approval/Exemption Statement No. 36, 27 April 2026).

The study involved collecting anonymous survey data and conducting semi-structured interviews with adult participants. No personal, identifiable, or sensitive information was collected. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, their right to decline participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

No ethical concerns were identified during the review process, and the study complies with internationally accepted ethical principles for research involving human participants.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

AI-assisted tools, such as ChatGPT, were used in a limited capacity to support language refinement, improve clarity of expression, and enhance the manuscript's presentation. The research concept, study design, literature review, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and all substantive scientific decisions were developed and performed by the authors. All AI-generated suggestions were critically reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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