

Constructing a Qualitative Model of Psychological Readiness for the Transition From School to an AI-Transformed Labor Market Among Youth

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E d i t o r	R e v i e w e r s
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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The final paragraph of the Introduction states that “A qualitative approach is therefore particularly appropriate because it allows psychological readiness to be examined as an experienced and interpreted process rather than as a predetermined set of variables.” This justification is reasonable, but the choice of grounded theory specifically requires stronger methodological justification. The authors should explain why grounded theory was preferred over phenomenology, thematic analysis, or qualitative content analysis. Since the stated purpose is to construct a model, the manuscript should explicitly demonstrate that the research question concerned social and psychological processes, interactions, conditions, strategies, and consequences, thereby making grounded theory methodologically appropriate rather than simply convenient.

In the Methods section, the Study Design and Participants paragraph reports that “A total of 24 participants were included in the final sample” and that maximum-variation sampling was followed by theoretical sampling. The manuscript should provide a much more transparent description of how theoretical sampling actually occurred. Specifically, the authors should indicate what categories emerged during early analysis, which conceptual gaps subsequently influenced participant recruitment, and what types of participants were intentionally sought to elaborate or challenge those categories. Simply stating that

theoretical sampling was used is not sufficient for a grounded theory study; readers need evidence that sampling decisions were analytically driven by the evolving theory.

The Data Analysis section states that transcripts were analyzed using “open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.” This terminology strongly reflects the Strauss and Corbin tradition of grounded theory, yet the manuscript does not identify the specific grounded theory school adopted. The authors should explicitly specify the methodological orientation used and ensure that the coding procedures, paradigm model, theoretical sampling, and saturation criteria are consistent with that tradition. This is particularly important because different grounded theory approaches differ substantially in epistemological assumptions, coding logic, use of literature, and the role of the researcher in theory construction.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The Methods section indicates that the sample included “five final-year upper-secondary students, nine undergraduate students in the final stages of their degree programs, six recent university graduates who were actively seeking employment, and four who had entered their first substantial employment position within the previous two years.” This diversity is valuable, but the manuscript should explain the analytical rationale for combining participants at substantially different stages of the school-to-work transition. A final-year secondary student may experience AI-related career uncertainty very differently from an employed graduate. The authors should clarify whether transition status emerged as a meaningful source of variation, whether comparisons were conducted across these groups, and whether the final model adequately captures differences in developmental stage.

In the Study Design and Participants section, the manuscript states that theoretical saturation was achieved when “additional interviews no longer generated substantively new categories, properties, or relationships.” This criterion is appropriate but remains declarative. The authors should describe the saturation process more concretely, including approximately when the major categories stabilized, whether the final interviews were used primarily for category refinement and confirmation, and whether saturation was assessed separately for categories and their relationships. A short methodological explanation would substantially increase the credibility of the claim that 24 interviews were sufficient.

The Data Collection Tools section reports that the interview guide was developed after reviewing literature on “school-to-work transition, career adaptability, employability, occupational uncertainty, psychological readiness, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and emerging changes in skill demands.” Because grounded theory generally seeks to avoid imposing an overly predetermined conceptual structure on participants’ accounts, the authors should explain how they prevented the literature-informed interview guide from constraining emergent categories. It would be useful to state which questions were broad and exploratory, how prompts evolved during concurrent analysis, and whether any initially anticipated constructs failed to emerge or were substantially reinterpreted by participants.

The Data Collection Tools section notes that interviews were conducted “in a private setting or through a secure online video-conferencing platform.” The authors should clarify whether interview mode had any observable effect on interview depth, rapport, disclosure, or duration. Because some interviews were apparently face-to-face and others online, methodological consistency should be addressed. The manuscript should also indicate whether the same interviewer conducted all interviews, the interviewer’s academic or professional background, whether prior relationships existed with participants, and how reflexivity was managed, as these details are important for evaluating qualitative rigor.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.