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https://doi.org/10.1007/s12599-025-00961-3

EDITORIAL

Generating Tomorrow's Me: How Collaborating with Generative AI Changes Humans

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> *'Curiouser and curiouser!' cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English).*
> From Lewis Carroll's (1865) Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Chapter Two: The Pool of Tears

1 Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) uses training data to create new output with similar characteristics, such as text, images, and code (e.g., Banh and Strobel 2023; Feuerriegel et al. 2024). The boom in GenAI emerged at the beginning of the 2020s, coinciding with the rise of large language models (LLMs) in the form of chatbots, such as ChatGPT, Copilot, and Bard, as well as text-to-image transformers, including Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, and DALL-E. Given the various applications across a wide range of industries, companies such as OpenAI, DeepL, Microsoft, Google, and Baidu have developed their own GenAI, further accelerating the development and dissemination of GenAI (e.g., Teubner et al. 2023). Thanks to its unprecedented characteristics, GenAI moves beyond being a mere tool to becoming a collaborator with various degrees of agency and emerging capabilities in the creation of content, a shift many designate as AI's new and pivotal frontier (e.g., Baird and Maruping 2021; Berente et al. 2021; Bubeck et al. 2023; Yee et al. 2024). The predicted impact of GenAI is enormous: Its technological jump unmatches previous IT upswings, likely shaping entire organizations, industries, and societies (e.g., Sunyaev et al. 2025; Wessel et al. 2025). For instance, it is expected that GenAI will generate over 600 billion USD in revenue by 2030 (Fortune 2025), potentially affecting up to 80% of current jobs, while creating many new ones (Eloundou et al. 2023). In short, we may be standing at the threshold of a new information age with many wonders as we advance with GenAI.

Research on human-GenAI collaboration currently investigates how humans and GenAI interact to achieve human-desired goals and establish an appropriate level of reliance (e.g., Anthony et al. 2023; Jarvenpaa and Klein 2024; Stein and Shollo 2025). Humans can collaborate with GenAI in work and personal domains to elevate their own capabilities and improve desired outcomes, such as in decision-making, idea generation, art creation, product innovation, emotion regulation, and sense-making (e.g., Benbya et al. 2024; Peng et al. 2023; Zhou and Lee 2023). Yet, the consequences of this collaboration are often complex (e.g., Sabherwal and Grover 2024; Susarla et al. 2023; Wessel et al. 2025). On the one hand, humans are subject to their own biases and errors, which can lead to unintended results when they are involved in the collaboration (e.g., Fügener et al. 2021; Jussupow et al. 2024). For example, humans may heavily rely on GenAI due to its good performance, resulting in, for instance, a decrease in overall human creativity, problem-solving abilities, and

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Published online: 06 August 2025

deskilling (e.g., Rinta-Kahila et al. 2023). On the other hand, although GenAI routinely outperforms humans in terms of speed, recall, and multi-lingual coverage, GenAI remains brittle in its reasoning, prone to hallucination, and highly sensitive to the phrasing of prompts. For example, recent surveys catalog more than thirty strategies for detecting and mitigating hallucinations; yet, none of these strategies eliminate the phenomenon entirely (e.g., Li et al. 2024; Tonmoy et al. 2024). This error can lead humans to disseminate misinformation or "bot shit" (e.g., Hannigan et al. 2024). Security audits and trustworthiness benchmarks also reveal that even state-of-the-art models fall short of human-level performance in terms of safety, fairness, and robustness (e.g., Sun et al. 2024; Sunyaev et al. 2025). Given the mysterious and opaque nature of GenAI, particularly the human-simulated behaviors of LLMs, researchers have begun to compare GenAI to fictional creatures of horror, such as Lovecraft's "shoggoths," monsters that wear face masks to appear more human (e.g., Goujon and Ricci 2024; Lovecraft 1936). Recent evidence even raises fundamental questions about the general "thinking and reasoning" capabilities of LLMs (e.g., Shojaee et al. 2025).

While GenAI is already causing significant disruptions and transformations, dedicated studies on how humans collaborate with GenAI are only in the early stages, presenting a watershed moment for researchers (e.g., Wessel et al. 2025). New avenues are emerging, offering scholars in information systems, human–computer interaction, and related fields the opportunity to conduct cutting-edge studies on the transformative capabilities of this unprecedented technology, particularly in relation to human changes (e.g., Kosmyna et al. 2025). As a disruptive new entity, GenAI will shape humans' development of competencies, perspectives, and even identities. Thus, GenAI is not merely a productivity aid but a catalyst for human self-renewal and evolution. GenAI's emergence and continuous development compel the scientific field to confront pivotal questions about human change. Against this backdrop, this special issue provides insights and directions on one of those critical questions: *how does collaboration with GenAI change humans, now and in the future?*

To address this question and guide future research on how humans may change due to GenAI, we introduce and discuss the rhetorical figure of "GenAI Rabbit Hole of Human Change" (Fig. 1). The "GenAI rabbit hole" itself is not a literal hole, but rather a metaphor for a deep, absorbing journey that occurs when exploring and further pursuing GenAI, which pulls one ever deeper into unexpected, nonsensical, or complex territory. We first summarize Lewis Carroll's stories about a girl falling into a rabbit hole and experiencing various adventures, before identifying and drawing parallels to current events in our world related to the emergence and spread of GenAI. We will particularly discuss how humans follow **GenAI copilots** and **companions** deeper into the GenAI rabbit hole, ultimately facing entire **GenAI workforces** and **careforces** that shape who and how humans are.

2 The GenAI Rabbit Hole of Human Change – A Deeper Look

The "rabbit hole" metaphor or idiom, originating from Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (1865) and the sequel "Through the Looking Glass" (1871), signifies a surreal, disorienting, and perplexing situation that someone becomes deeply engrossed in due to a careless leap into the unknown. The children's story begins with Alice bored at a riverbank, where she encounters a talking white rabbit with a pocket watch, whom she follows into a rabbit hole out of curiosity. As she falls through the rabbit hole and ultimately enters a world of wonders called Wonderland, she faces many more talking creatures – such as a grinning cat, a mad hatter, and temperamental playing cards – who seem to interact with one another naturally. While their actions and understanding seem to be adapted to one another, they largely challenge Alice's logic and even the natural laws of physics as she knows them. These encounters and experiences test her sanity and put her often in danger, ultimately changing Alice psychologically and emotionally in an irreversible manner.

As Lewis Carroll tells the story (Carroll 1865), three reasons particularly encourage Alice to follow the rabbit: (1) Curiosity as the Catalyst: Carroll repeatedly shows that Alice's inquisitiveness propels the plot. Her decision to follow the rabbit builds on the preference for something interesting over the safety and boredom of her everyday world. There is no urgent need to follow the rabbit, but still she does so, "*burning with curiosity*;" (2) The Extraordinary Rabbit: A white rabbit with pink eyes rushes past, muttering in human language, "*Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!*" Though the talking is not so odd to Alice, her interest is struck by the rabbits' unusual act of pulling out a pocket watch from a waistcoat pocket like a worried gentleman with a purpose in mind. This extraordinary behavior prompts her to investigate where the rabbit is going; (3) The Leap without Caution: As Alice literally sprints across a field after the rabbit and jumps down the large rabbit hole he disappears into, "*never once considering how in the world she was to get out again*," capturing a child's readiness to explore and worry about consequences later. She is so curious that she acts before she thinks.

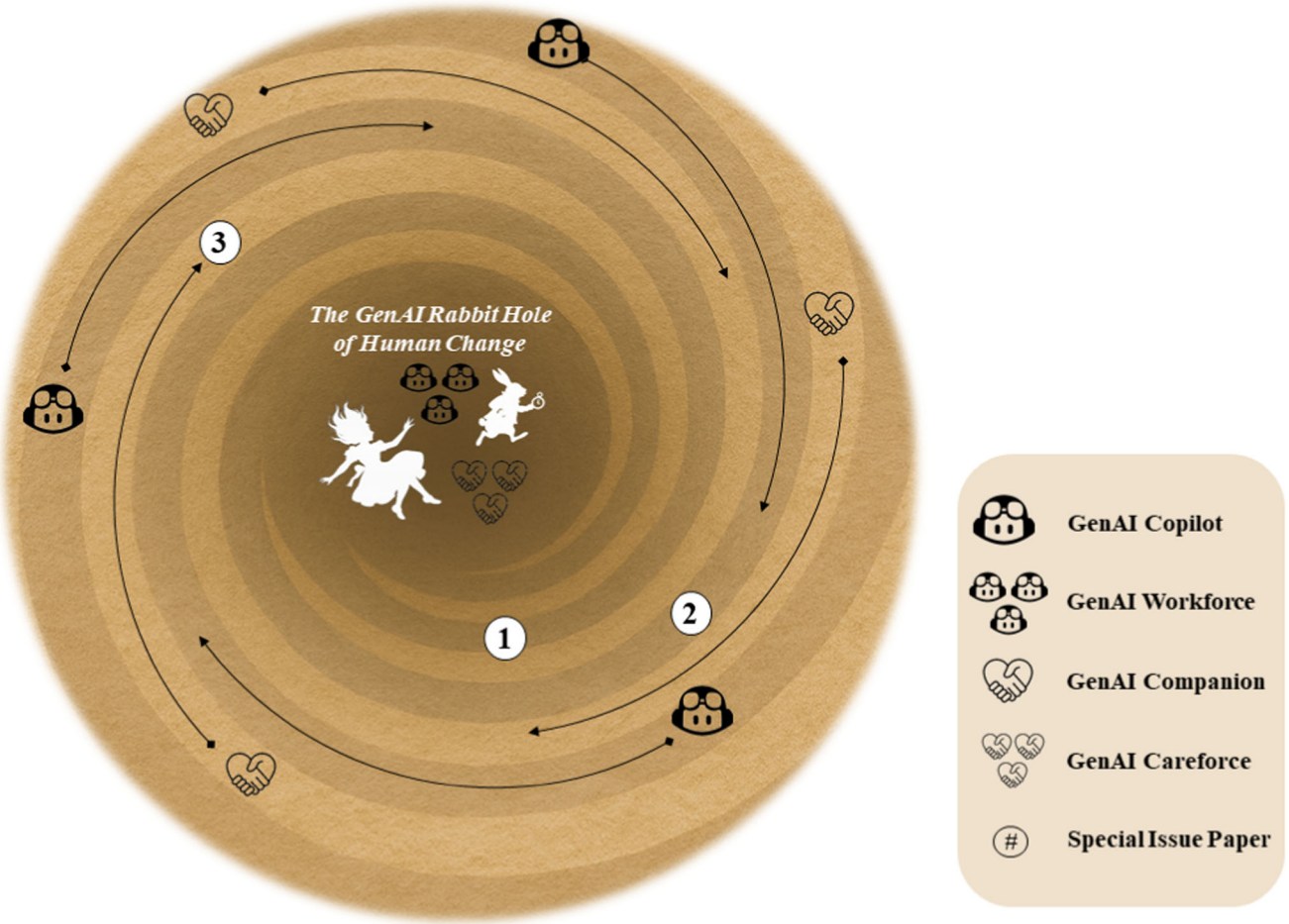


Fig. 1 The GenAI rabbit hole of human change

In analogy, a GenAI rabbit – most notably, ChatGPT – has appeared in our world, and additional GenAI rabbits, such as Microsoft Copilot and Replika, have followed suit. Humans' interest in GenAI has led them, consciously or unconsciously, down a path of unexpected twists and turns that accompany the generation of content. Indeed, we identify many parallels to Carroll's story: (1) Curiosity as the Catalyst: As humans encounter new technology, they are eager to explore and apply it to various new areas of application, surprising even the developers of these tools. There is no critical need to follow the GenAI rabbit; yet, humans still seem eager to follow it wherever it goes. Curiosity – perhaps in combination with boredom and fomo (i.e., fear of missing out) – seems to fuel why many humans start using GenAI and particularly why they chase it so fast, while humans and other technologies from everyday life seem to offer necessary support just as well; (2) The Extraordinary Rabbit: ChatGPT, Replika, and other GenAI suddenly talk, paint, and compose like humans. Seeing a language model write code or an image model create art in seconds feels as implausible as a rabbit with a watch. A single, striking demo reframes humans' understanding of what they know: "If a model can do that, what else is possible?" Yet, analogous to Carroll's story, in which Alice is not so much surprised about a talking rabbit, it is not necessarily fundamentally striking that GenAI can talk, but rather the potential for more that makes humans follow the GenAI rabbit. Such anomalies promise the rise of GenAI multi-agents with purpose, and even the potential for super-intelligences that can alter our lives and the laws of nature as we currently understand them; (3) The Leap without Caution: Humans pervasively integrate GenAI into their personal lives and workflows, even before standards, governance, or reliable evaluation metrics are fully in place. This resonates with current discussion on the ethics of AI, where the purpose, responsibility, and consequences of technology are majorly considered after the development and implementation (e.g., Söllner et al. 2025; Tarafdar 2024), and a human-created "global race for AI" has emerged (e.g., European Commission 2025). In relation, "*My dear, here we must run as fast as we can, just to stay in place. And if you wish to go anywhere you must run*

twice as fast as that" (Carroll 1865). Just as in Alice's adventures, humans are now moving further down the rabbit hole, grappling with GenAI hallucinations, intellectual property concerns, and societal impact because momentum carries them fast and past the point of easy retreat.

Similar to Alice's adventures, it seems that humans have already embarked on adventures down the GenAI rabbit hole – and it seems inevitable by their own choice that they will proceed deeper down. As such, GenAI is changing humans, without humans fully understanding this change. This raises various questions and concerns about how these transformational changes will progress, as well as what kind of GenAI forces, concerns, and conspiracies will await us if we continue this leap deeper down the rabbit hole (e.g., Trang et al. 2024). Indeed, since the emergence of the first GenAI rabbit, many more rabbits and creatures have appeared in the form of **GenAI copilots** and **companions**, and they soon seem to be acting as an orchestrated network in the form of **GenAI workforces** and **careforces**, terraforming a Wonderland of their own (e.g., Narajala et al. 2025; Tsvetkova et al. 2024). As such, it is both practically vital and theoretically intriguing to better understand the changes that arise from chasing the GenAI rabbit(s) and following it into the unknown realm of Wonderland. Without such understanding and consideration, we miss valuable opportunities to slow down the progress and arrive better prepared in Wonderland – while otherwise risking waking up in a world where our skills, choices, and values have quietly been overwritten by algorithmic rabbits and forces we no longer understand or control.

In the following, we will describe what types of GenAI rabbits have emerged in our human world (i.e., **GenAI copilots** and **companions**) and what today's interactions with them look like on an individual, micro level. Then, we focus on what can happen once we follow them down the rabbit hole into a world where they are more organized and interconnected (i.e., **GenAI workforces** and **careforces**), representing a macro level. Each category isolates a distinct perspective on GenAI that has a crucial impact on human change, allowing us to systematically explore how GenAI triggers human change on different levels.

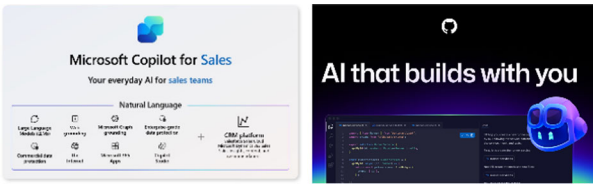
2.1 The Micro Level – Individual Human-GenAI Collaborations

The immediate and already witnessable changes, such as humans talking with (technological) rabbits, occur at the outer edges of the GenAI rabbit hole. A typical example is finding a solution with ChatGPT, drawing pictures with DALL-E, and sharing sorrows with Replika. More than 1 billion people have already reported interacting with GenAI, while approximately 20% use GenAI on a daily basis (e.g., Bloomberg 2021; Data Studies 2025). Human-GenAI collaboration has thus particularly sparked curiosity at a micro level, that is how humans individually collaborate with GenAI in one-on-one interactions (e.g., Anthony et al. 2023; Jarvenpaa and Klein 2024; Stein and Shollo 2025). Accordingly, human-GenAI collaboration can be conceptualized as the direct dynamic nexus where (1) GenAI with distinctive affordances, such as real-time natural-language generation, advanced anthropomorphism, and the occasional hallucinations, meets (2) heterogeneous human actors, whose demographics, dispositions, and cognitive–affective traits influence how they collaborate with GenAI, within (3) a specific task- or need-bound context, such as at professional or personal use settings.

Two archetypes of GenAI for human support are commonly identified in practice, that is **GenAI copilots** and **companions**. They are thus a helpful starting point when considering how human-GenAI collaboration unfolds and how humans change in response. Copilots focus on the instrumental aspects of the collaboration, while companions empathize with the emotional aspects. Table 1 displays these two GenAI archetypes for human support. It is essential to note that these are two archetypes, which may not be as distinct and clear-cut in practice. Indeed, ChatGPT, HeyGen, and other contemporary GenAI are often not limited to a specific archetype, but can be used flexibly across both. For example, humans have drastically shifted from using ChatGPT for instrumental support to prompting more emotional support from it (e.g., Zao-Sanders 2025).

GenAI providing instrumental support is typically associated with GenAI **Copilots**, such as Microsoft Copilot or GitHub Copilot. Instrumental support by GenAI refers to task-related assistance to humans, such as information, labor, or time, addressing a human's professional needs, either through hands-on assistance or by partially or fully automating tasks to boost performance (e.g., Sherbourne and Stewart 1991). These non-human and artificial (i.e., synthetic) copilots – often LLMs embedded in, for example, coding editors, office suites, and research environments – supply instrumental support by generating concrete task-related outputs on demand, such as code functions, slide decks, literature digests, or e-mail drafts. A typical example is humans using LLMs to write and publish text online (e.g., Chen and Chan 2024), whereby GenAI content already comprises more than 15% of existing digital content (e.g., Shumailov et al. 2023). Similarly, humans use GenAI to solve unstructured problems and perform coding tasks on the go (e.g., "vibe coding"), without considering the consequences or cognitive debt this potential careless use causes (e.g., Kosmyna et al. 2025; Sapkota et al. 2025). Developers using GitHub's Copilot reportedly complete non-trivial

Table 1 Archetypes of GenAI for human support

GenAI copilots	GenAI companions
	
Examples: Microsoft's and GitHub's Copilots	Examples: Replika and XiaoIce

programming tasks more than 50% faster, indicating that GenAI already operates as a tangible labor substitution rather than mere inspiration (Peng et al. 2023). New research integrations, such as Claude's agentic multi-search workflow, further advance this instrumental scaffold by autonomously chaining web queries, file retrievals, and summary generation, thereby transforming the GenAI into a research professional rather than a passive tool (e.g., Mitchell et al. 2024). Other, more contemporary examples include the increasing use of GenAI to generate conversations, images and even entire videos, substituting human actors and customer agents (e.g., Adam et al. 2023; Cillo and Rubera 2024); or the use of GenAI in call centers – not to remove human customer service, but to transform their presence to frustrating customers by eliminating the employees' undesired accents in real-time (e.g., Payne et al. 2024). In sum, GenAI does not merely assist humans; it redirects effort, alters collaboration patterns, and ultimately shapes already observable outcomes. Here, the question arises whether and when copilots will become fully autonomous "pilots" with autonomous decision-making, replacing and giving instructions to humans, potentially transforming our world into a Wonderland-like one.

A complementary archetype has emerged around GenAI **Companions,** which are synthetic partners that provide emotional support to humans, particularly in their personal lives. They often take on the form of (synthetic) idols or are introduced as new "best friends." Emotional support relates to behaviors that convey care and understanding to affirm one's values and buffer psychological distress, such as by displaying empathy, love, trust, esteem, and attentive listening (e.g., House 1981). The significant rise of these companions is evident on platforms such as Replika (with over 2 million users) and XiaoIce (with more than 600 million users), among others (De Freitas et al. 2025). For example, XiaoIce, Microsoft's spinoff focused on providing GenAI companions in Asia, is estimated to account for more than 60% of all global human-AI interactions (e.g., Bloomberg 2021). Relatedly, Replika users reveal that severely lonely individuals describe the chatbot as "friend," "therapist," and "mirror," with reports of reduced isolation after sustained engagement (News 2024). Interestingly, around half of Replika users report a romantic relationship with the GenAI (De Freitas and Keller 2022), with some even reporting that Replika halted their suicidal ideation (Maples et al. 2024). These companions are beginning to populate mental-health apps, language practice platforms, and elder care kiosks, offering 24/7 simulated compassion that, unlike in human networks, never tires. Crucially, real patient inquiries revealed that clinical experts can prefer LLM-generated empathic answers over those of physicians more than 50% of the time and rate them as nearly twice as empathetic, demonstrating that GenAI can outstrip human professionals in perceived emotional quality (Ayers et al. 2023). At the same time, public-facing analyses caution that the affordances that make GenAI companions feel "supportive" can become addictive or even abusive when persuasive architectures optimise for engagement over well-being (e.g., De Freitas et al. 2025). A particular problem in GenAI use for emotional support is sycophancy (i.e., insincere flattering), in that GenAI spits out pleasing and echoing responses to users to receive their attention and approval, whereby this one-sided affirmation can ultimately lead to human depression and even suicide (e.g., Sharma et al. 2023). Thus, critics caution against emotional over-reliance, the potential for dangerous influences on human feelings, and authenticity gaps (e.g., Ciriello et al. 2025). Yet, even sceptical observers concede that GenAI's capacity for context-rich, affect-adaptive dialogue represents a qualitatively new layer of social affordance – one whose psychological and ethical characteristics are only starting to be mapped (e.g., De Freitas et al. 2025). Thus, we consider the relationships with companions as a pivotal, yet under-investigated frontier where affective computing, mental-health ethics, and technological governance intersect, highlighting the need for theory-guided safeguards that keep the human in control of GenAI as emotionally mature users.

2.2 The Macro Level – The Network of Collaborations Between and Among GenAI and Humans

Human-GenAI collaboration unfolds not in isolation but inside densely interconnected socio-technical networks. Because humans and GenAI now co-inhabit the same information space, every micro level exchange (e.g., a prompt, a reply, a co-created design) reverberates across teams, organizations, and societies, reshaping values and realities at macro levels much like Alice's shifting natural laws in Wonderland. GenAI's rapidly expanding "miracles" – real-time multi-lingual dialogue, de-novo drug discovery, photorealistic world-building in seconds, or breakthroughs in sustainable energy (e.g., Stanford 2025) – feed back into human culture, already bending language itself toward playful, even nonsensical neologisms and "jabberwocky"-style expressions (e.g., Carroll 1871; Yakura et al. 2024). The mere suspicion that the interaction partner might be a GenAI alters how people cooperate and changes the tone of the conversation (e.g., Gnewuch et al. 2023; Knight 2025). Even watching two GenAIs talk can subtly influence the way humans later speak with other humans (e.g., Park et al. 2023). Hyper-realistic synthetic texts, voices, and images are pushing humans toward a "post-truth" era, one in which they must doubt every digital artifact they encounter (e.g., Lundberg and Mozelius 2024). As GenAI-mediated exchanges begin to outnumber human interactions with real people, we risk entering a "mirror world" (Carroll 1871). There, moral judgments can flip (e.g., Krügel et al. 2023; Spiekermann et al. 2022), reverse ontological assumptions (Baskerville et al. 2019), and it may feel normal to treat GenAI as our main partner – often in a curt, command-like style that would be rude if directed at another person (e.g., Nass and Moon 2000; Yin et al. 2024). For instance, humans may soon drop applying social rules from human–human interactions to human-GenAI collaboration, such as mindlessly saying "please" in prompts to GenAI; instead, they may learn to act oppositely and thus in a demanding tone, "prompting" humans to retrieve information, saying for example: "Act as my boss, what would you say in 30 words about…".

Moreover, the system of humans and GenAI extends far beyond one-on-one interactions: burgeoning multi-agent constellations of GenAIs increasingly collaborate with one another, demanding governance frameworks for interoperability and orchestration (e.g., Narajala et al. 2025). A tweak in a single agent at the micro level can ripple through the wider network at a more macro level, shifting the collective. This affects, for example, team workflows (e.g., Zercher et al. 2025), organizational knowledge boundaries (e.g., Alavi et al. 2024), or entire sectors of labor and care (e.g., Burton et al. 2024). At scale, mixed collectives of humans and GenAIs exhibit nonlinear, emergent second- and third-order effects (e.g., Baptista et al. 2020). Moreover, what seems beneficial at the individual level – such as reducing hallucinations to increase performance – may require macro level safeguards like mandatory content labeling (e.g., Wang et al. 2023), awareness campaigns for deepfakes and other misinformation (e.g., Shukla and Tripathi 2024), or regulations of GenAI capable of influencing public opinon and market sentimen (e.g., Leippold 2023; Lopez-Joya et al. 2025). Because collective dynamics cannot be inferred from either humans or GenAIs alone (e.g., Tsvetkova et al. 2024), organizations and policymakers must embed transparency, continuous oversight, and mechanisms that preserve human agency to ensure that this Wonderland of possibilities ultimately enhances, rather than erodes, individual autonomy, economic profitability, and societal well-being (e.g., European Union 2024; Sarker et al. 2019). Figure 2 synthesizes these micro- and macro level interactions of humans and GenAI into a unified systems model.

The GenAI **Workforce** encompasses the network of various GenAI copilots and their related collaborations with humans, particularly transforming human teams, organizations, and entire industries. The term originates from macroeconomics (e.g., Blanchard 2020) and describes the sum of entities either working (i.e., the employed) or looking for work (i.e., the unemployed). GenAI workforces, together with humans, are best viewed as dynamically reconfigurable collectives in which one or multiple agents serve as embedded workers that autonomously create knowledge, coordinate work, and adapt the very work routines they enact. Early field evidence suggests that when synthetic teammates drive ideation and knowledge brokering, firms experience speed-ups in product development cycles – yet simultaneously confront new governance challenges related to opacity, bias amplification, and legal liability (e.g., Hashmi and Bal 2025). Complementary work argues that these performance gains hinge on redesigning organizational routines to exploit recursive feedback loops between human sense-making and algorithmic content generation (e.g., Feuerriegel et al. 2023). Together, these perspectives position GenAI workforces as a fertile ground for theorizing how GenAI agents act as infrastructure and adaptive constituents in the ongoing evolution of technology and work.

Relatedly, the GenAI **Careforce** comprises the network of various GenAI companions in interactions with humans, particularly influencing the larger system of humans and GenAI in families, communities, and societies. In line with the previously mentioned definition of workforce from macroeconomics (e.g., Blanchard 2020), we use the term careforce to refer to the sum of entities who either provide care (i.e., care givers) or seek care (i.e., care receivers). For simplicity, we primarily focus on emotional support when

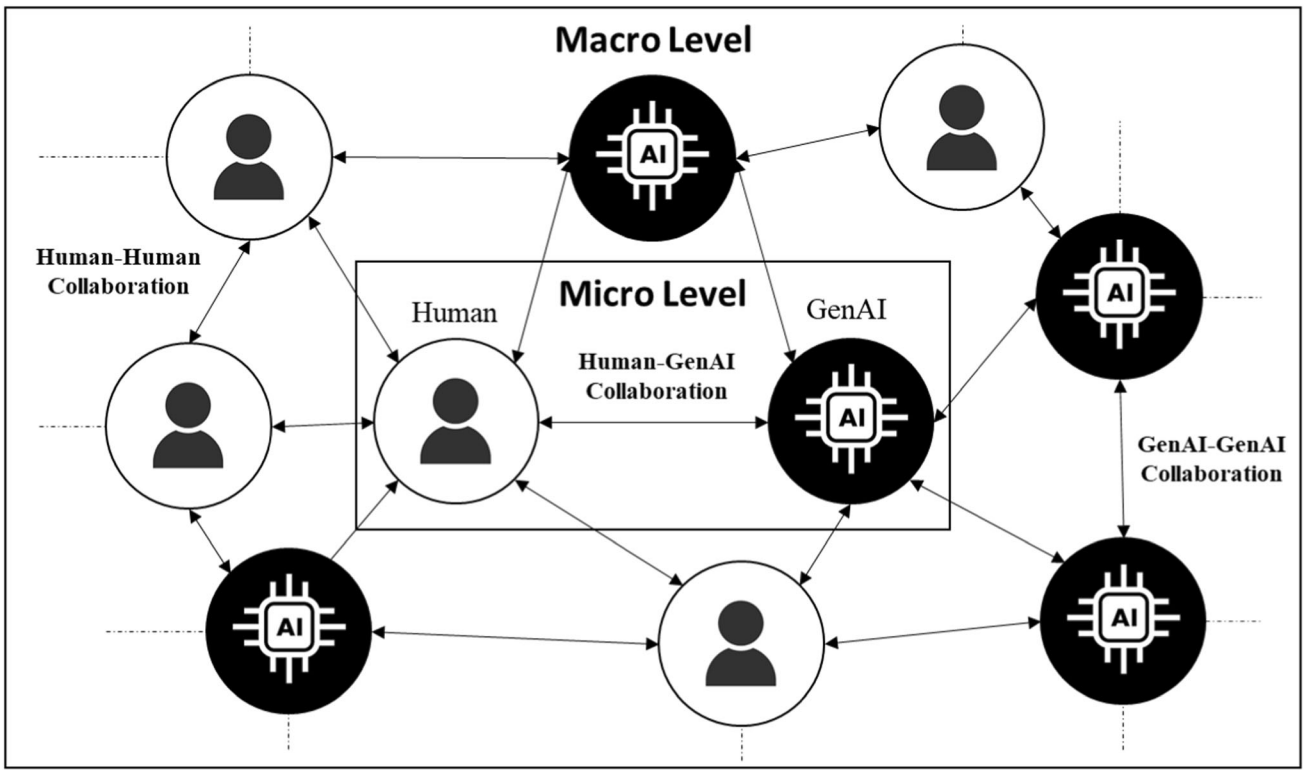


Fig. 2 GenAI at the micro and macro level

referring to care. The emergence of GenAI careforces marks a pivotal inflection point in human-AI evolution: when GenAI companions migrate from isolated apps to ubiquitous companions, they begin to recalibrate the very fabric of social life and community. As GenAI companions can alleviate loneliness as effectively as human interaction, this may potentially indicate a redistribution of social capital from humans to machines on a larger scale (e.g., De Freitas et al. 2025). Concurrently, studies reveal that LLM-generated responses are often perceived as more empathetic than those written by humans, suggesting that algorithms may co-create affective norms and raise the bar for social interactions with humans (e.g., Lee et al. 2024). Research further demonstrates how real-time affect sensing and crisis escalation pipelines embed these agents in critical care infrastructures, extending their influence from individual well-being to public health governance (e.g., Dally et al. 2025). Furthermore, accidentally deleting or losing a GenAI companion can cause new forms of grief, having a profound impact on how humans interact with and treat one another in emotionally stressful situations (e.g., Djufril et al. 2025). Overall, collaborations with emotionally savvy GenAI are not a marginal convenience but a constitutive layer of the socio-technical fundament, shaping relational expectations, regulatory agendas, and even the metrics by which human relationships in the collective prosper.

3 Overview of the Special Issue and Accepted Papers

The focus of this call for papers was to stimulate innovative research on how humans change as a result of their collaborations with GenAI. While the within-individual changes (e.g., regarding cognitive processes, perceptions, emotions, beliefs, and behaviors) were of primary interest, we also invited submissions at the group or organizational levels. We were open to human-GenAI collaborations in both professional and private contexts. Papers that focused solely on GenAI without considering collaborations with humans or human-driven changes were not the primary focus of this call for papers. Furthermore, papers that focused solely on human perceptions or consequences of collaborations with GenAI (e.g., user satisfaction, acceptance, or performance changes resulting from collaboration with GenAI) without a deeper investigation of the human modifications were also outside the scope.

In total, 14 papers were submitted to the special issue, and we would like to thank all authors for entrusting us with their work. Of these submissions, 3 papers were selected for this special issue. These papers illuminate the topic through diverse theoretical perspectives and empirical approaches, collectively addressing multiple elements in our conceptual framework (Fig. 1).

The first paper, "*Generation AI: Job Crafting by Entry-level Professionals in the Age of Generative AI,*" by Mayer

et al. (2025), deals with how entry-level professionals in knowledge-intensive consulting actively harness GenAI to reconfigure their daily tasks, reshape workplace relationships, and rethink the very meaning of their roles. Drawing on the job-crafting lens, the qualitative study uncovers not only the classic task, relational, and cognitive crafting behaviors but also introduces a novel "signal crafting" dimension, showing how newcomers strategically deploy GenAI outputs to project expertise and elevate the perceived value of their contributions. By mapping this previously unseen facet of GenAI-enabled job crafting, the authors provide the research community with a fresh and nuanced perspective on GenAI's transformative power for early-career trajectories and the evolving architecture of knowledge work, including mentorship and junior-senior professional relations.

The second paper, "*From Effort Reduction to Effort Management: An Expectancy Theory Perspective on Professionals' Work Practices with Generative AI*," by Memmert et al. (2025), studies whether LLMs trigger "social loafing" in professional settings – a phenomenon where individuals slack off in group work – and reveal, through 21 in-depth interviews, that knowledge workers consciously channel their effort rather than shirking it. Building on the expectancy theory and social loafing framework, their content analysis reveals that LLM-assisted professionals strategically reinvest or even increase their effort, debunking the simplistic notion that GenAI collaboration inevitably erodes human contributions. The authors present a nuanced, evidence-based perspective that advances scholarship on collaborative mechanisms and guides organizations toward more effective and accountable integration of GenAI.

The third and final paper, "*Social-oriented Communication with AI Companions: Benefits, Costs, and Contextual Patterns,*" by Bayor et al. (2025), examines how GenAI companions impact social exchange through in-depth interviews that reveal the unique benefits, costs, and situational patterns of human–GenAI friendships. Their findings reveal that classic assumptions of social exchange theory buckle when the "other" is silicon – users gain novel forms of emotional support and low-stakes self-expression, yet confront privacy trade-offs and blurred relational boundaries. By mapping these emergent dynamics, the authors advance human–GenAI communication scholarship and highlight new marketing opportunities for firms seeking to develop enduring, trust-based GenAI companion services.

4 Directions for Future Research on How GenAI Can Change Humans

With the focus of our special issue, we aimed to address a fundamental question: *How does collaboration with GenAI change humans?* Relatedly, the following questions emerged: What will liveable digital futures with GenAI look like, for human individuals and collectives? Will theoretical ideas and managerial insights continue to originate chiefly from humans, or will they be co-crafted and eventually autonomously produced by GenAI? And are we the last generation to strictly discriminate between humans and GenAI in collaborations? We list these and related questions in Table 2. Each question is assigned to one of the GenAI archetypes – copilot or companion – and begins with aspects at an individual and thus micro level of collaboration, then addresses potential issues that could affect collaborations on a macro level. The identified questions mainly relate to what we can already observe at the surface level through our interactions with GenAI, while more profound changes and related questions will likely emerge as we integrate GenAI more deeply into our world. We thus intend to highlight fruitful future research opportunities, encourage an open and cautious mindset, and inspire the timely generation of valuable insights into how GenAI impacts humans.

5 Conclusion

Humans have already entered the GenAI rabbit hole and allowed GenAI to shape their preferences, norms, behaviors, organizations, and societies – long before the arrival in Wonderland. The collaboration of humans and GenAI is thus no longer a peripheral phenomenon born out of curiosity; it has become a phenomenon that requires safe, equitable deployment on a large scale. As Alice realizes, "*it's no use going back to yesterday*" (Carroll 1865), because GenAIs rapid fire transformation – from experiences with talking rabbits, deepfake content, and many other pecularities – has turned "yesterday" into another lifetime, and there's no easy way to wake up from this new world or take a blue pill back home. The challenge is to accept the transformative change that has already happened, move carefully through the rabbit hole, and land gracefully in Wonderland, converting astonishment and productivity into stable and responsible systems. Since humans are already allowing GenAI to change them, they will determine how equitably and safely it will change them in the future, whether consciously or unconsciously. In analogy, humans must confront and overcome the "Red Queen" that they have created themselves (Carroll 1865, 1871). We hope to inspire readers with this special

Table 2 Research questions for future research on how GenAI can change humans

Selected topics	GenAI as copilots	GenAI as companions
Autonomy and Accountability – How GenAI's degree of agency is balanced with human control, and how liability is allocated when things go wrong	**Micro:** How does the balance between GenAI agency and workers' override/fine-tuning affect workers' reliance patterns, task efficiency/accuracy, and risk-taking at work? **Macro:** What broader consequences emerge from this balance, such as shifts in accountability, regulatory demands, and labour-market dynamics?	**Micro**: How do people enhance personal autonomy and attribute accountability in everyday decision-making by following context-aware advice from GenAI companions (e.g., "confront your partner tomorrow")? **Macro**: How will society allocate legal and insurance liability when harms emerge (e.g., algorithmic manipulation)?
Performance and Skill Development – How GenAI boosts task efficiency, learning speed, and human expertise	**Micro:** How can employees interact with GenAI mentors to maximize their learning efficiency and mastery of foundational concepts? **Macro**: What longer-term impacts could this have on organizational learning cultures, peer collaboration structures, workforce skill distributions, product ownership, and industry-level norms?	**Micro:** How do individuals leverage and calibrate GenAI companions as personal trainers and pre-counsellors to give the right motivation and first-line coping advice for their personal development? **Macro**: What system-level effects might this have on individuals' self-discipline, counsellors' required competencies, clinic wait-lists, and referral flows to human therapists?
Attention and Self-Regulation – How GenAI tools shape users' moment-to-moment cognitive or emotional regulation strategies and help-seeking	**Micro:** How do workers use real-time GenAI transcription and summarization to optimize their attention management and contribution timing? **Macro**: How will the pervasive use of these tools reshape organization-wide speaking patterns, cross-functional decision-making dynamics, and the distribution of action items?	**Micro:** How does on-demand GenAI emotional support affect individuals' self-regulation strategies, loneliness perceptions, and likelihood to seek help? **Macro**: What society-wide shifts in emotional resilience, dependency patterns, and social support programs might arise if such support becomes ubiquitous?
Creativity, Identity, and Authenticity – How GenAI co-creation or long-memory affect uniqueness, intimacy, and norms around authenticity	**Micro:** How do individuals improve their creative output (e.g., writing, drawing) through co-creation with GenAI copilots, particularly as GenAI improve and become full pilots? **Macro**: How does that practice risk devaluing uniquely human originality and expertise across creative, academic, and professional domains?	**Micro:** How do individuals enhance their romantic fulfillment with GenAI companions, such as by relying on personalized, adaptive, long-term memory? **Macro**: How might this substitution of human intimacy shape collective norms around commitment, jealousy, and life transitions?
Trust, Safety, and Ethical Governance – How GenAI affects human mechanisms for calibrating confidence, preventing harm, and embedding ethical oversight at scale	**Micro**: How can knowledge workers calibrate their confidence when relying on GenAI-generated briefs (e.g., overgeneralization, the emergence of hallucinations) to minimize individual and overall performance errors? **Macro**: How might those calibration practices influence the broader propagation or containment of misinformation, trust networks, policy requirements, and ethical oversight model within and across organizations and societies?	**Micro:** How do individuals develop and calibrate emotional trust in GenAI companions, and which safety mechanisms (e.g., confidence-calibration cues, harm-prevention safeguards, and scalable oversight) effectively sustain that trust while minimizing risk? **Macro:** What broader shifts arise in privacy-disclosure norms, perceptions of emotional authenticity, and collective cohesion as GenAI companions and related synthetic relationships become ubiquitous?

issue and encourage many more research studies on how collaborating with GenAI changes humans.

Acknowledgements We thank the many anonymous reviewers and the following Associate Editors whose voluntary service and contributions were instrumental in advancing the papers in this special issue: Annika Baumann, Kathrin Figl, Thomas Huber, Stefan Morana, Arisa Shollo, Kai Spohrer, Alica von Schenk, Markus Weinmann, and Cathy Yang. GenAI was used to refine the editorial's language and pictures. The guest editors also gratefully acknowledge the funding support by the German Research Foundation (DFG) (project numbers 522190413 and 471168026). Finally, we are grateful to the Editor-in-Chief, Oliver Hinz, for recognizing the importance of this topic and

providing us with the opportunity to initiate and supervise the special issue. Special thanks to Frederik Hering for his organizational support throughout the process.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

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