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BEYOND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: A QUALITATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INCLUSIVE HR RESILIENCE, CHANGE MANAGEMENT, AND TALENT SUSTAINABILITY IN THE AGE OF AI

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Abstract

This study examines how organizations move beyond technology-centered digital transformation toward more human-centered models of HR resilience in the age of AI. Using a qualitative design based on thematic analysis of recent documents, the study synthesizes evidence on inclusive HR governance, change management, talent sustainability, and employee experience in AI-enabled workplaces. The document corpus indicates that AI creates value in HR only when embedded in governance arrangements that preserve human accountability, transparency, bias mitigation, and appeal mechanisms in high-stakes employment decisions. The analysis identifies four themes: inclusive HR governance; change management as a social process; talent sustainability through continuous learning and mobility; and trust, justice, and well-being as mechanisms of resilient transformation. Taken together, the findings suggest that resilient AI transformation depends less on automation alone than on participatory implementation, hybrid human-AI decision models, and sustained investment in employee capability building. The study contributes an integrative framing of inclusive HR resilience as the intersection of governance resilience, adaptive change capacity, and talent resilience.

Keywords: AI governance, Change Management, Inclusive HR Resilience, Talent Sustainability, Thematic Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

AI is increasingly embedded in recruitment, workforce analytics, performance management, and learning systems, reshaping how HR functions make decisions and organize work (Dima et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025). Yet the literature shows that AI in HR cannot be understood only as a tool for efficiency. It also raises concerns about fairness, trust, opacity, worker dignity, and long-term employability, especially where AI systems influence high-stakes employment outcomes (Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa, 2026; Malik et al., 2022; Köchling & Wehner, 2020).

Recent studies emphasize that digital transformation succeeds when organizations combine technology adoption with transparent communication, leadership support, employee participation, and broader operating-model redesign (Alshaikh et al., 2026; Morin, 2026; Hariyani et al., 2025). At the same time, AI-enabled learning and reskilling systems are increasingly presented as essential for sustaining employability, internal mobility, and workforce resilience under changing skill demands (Mattoussi, 2025; Morandini et al., 2023; Surya et al., 2025).

The research gap lies in the lack of an integrated qualitative synthesis that brings together inclusive governance, change management, and talent sustainability within one HR resilience framework (Jingting et al., 2025; Soulami et al., 2024; Köchling & Wehner, 2020). This study addresses that gap through a document-based thematic analysis of recent evidence on AI-enabled HR transformation. It asks: How do

organizations build inclusive HR resilience through governance, change management, and talent sustainability in the age of AI?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three concepts are central to this study. First, inclusive HR governance refers to the structures and controls that make AI-enabled HR decisions transparent, accountable, and fair, including human-in-the-loop review, explainability, audits, and documented override thresholds (Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa, 2026; Laine et al., 2024; Torres et al., 2025). Second, change management in AI adoption is not merely training users on a new system; it involves communication, sensemaking, participation, workflow redesign, and leadership support to reduce fear and build readiness (Chiang & Hong, 2025; Roy et al., 2025; Al Sabbagh & Elgeddawy, 2025). Third, talent sustainability extends beyond retention to the ongoing maintenance of employability through reskilling, adaptive learning, and internal mobility (Gabelaia et al., 2026; Surya et al., 2025; Whysall et al., 2019).

Taken together, these concepts imply that "beyond digital transformation" means shifting from a technology-first model toward a human-centered redesign logic in which AI augments rather than displaces human judgment and capability (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Bankins, 2021; Raisch & Krakowski, 2021).

Inclusive HR Governance and Ethical AI

The literature consistently presents AI-enabled HR as beneficial only when supported by ethical governance and human oversight (Dissanayake et al., 2026; Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa, 2026; Alboré et al., 2025). Across recruitment, talent identification, and performance management, researchers emphasize explainability, auditability, bias testing, compliance controls, and explicit human review in high-stakes decisions (Laine et al., 2024; Torres et al., 2025; Murikah et al., 2024). Transparency is especially important because opaque systems can narrow fairness into formalized thresholds while limiting contextual judgment (van den Broek, 2025).

At the same time, the literature does not present a settled best-practice standard. Reviews repeatedly note the lack of standardized guidance for large-scale implementation of ethical AI governance in HR (Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa, 2026; Alboré et al., 2025; Setiawati et al., 2025). This leaves organizations with a paradox: they seek efficiency from automation but must increase investment in oversight, stewardship, and governance infrastructure to implement AI responsibly (Torres et al., 2025; Madanchian, 2025; Hou & Fan, 2024).

Change Management for AI Adoption

AI adoption is repeatedly described as a change-management challenge rather than a stand-alone technology project (Alshaikh et al., 2026; Morin, 2026; Gupta et al., 2025). Effective implementation practices include transparent communication, awareness-building, upskilling, leadership sponsorship, pilot testing, and alignment with legacy systems (Gupta et al., 2025; Chiang & Hong, 2025; Jia et al., 2025). Studies also emphasize that resistance often arises from fear of job displacement, low AI literacy, and uncertainty about altered roles (Farheen et al., 2025; Barua et al., 2025; Kim & Kim, 2024).

Participatory implementation appears particularly important. Employee involvement, human-in-the-loop design, and culturally competent stakeholder engagement are linked to lower resistance and better trust than poorly supported directive rollout (Welch, 2025; Bouzerda et al., 2025; Franca et al., 2025). Still,

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the evidence base contains few direct comparative studies of participatory versus top-down models in the same context (Al Sabbagh & Elgeddawy, 2025; Welch, 2025; Soulami et al., 2024).

Talent Sustainability and Capability Building

Recent work increasingly defines talent sustainability as the ability to sustain employability rather than simply reduce turnover (Gabelaia et al., 2026; Farrell, 2025; Morandini et al., 2023). AI-enabled learning systems are commonly associated with personalized skills pathways, adaptive content, modular credentials, simulations, mentoring, and competency-based development (Úbeda García et al., 2025; Bevilacqua et al., 2026). These practices are linked to stronger adaptability, AI literacy, learning motivation, and readiness for evolving work roles (Lama & Lastovska, 2025; Liu & Li, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

The positive case for AI in HR is strongest in learning and development. Compared with recruitment-oriented use cases, AI-supported training more consistently yields favorable outcomes such as skill development, engagement, and readiness for internal mobility (Surya et al., 2025; Yang & Yan, 2024; Shahzad et al., 2023). However, long-term evidence on whether these systems improve retention and mobility over time remains limited (Jingting et al., 2025).

Employee Experience, Trust, and Resilience

The literature portrays employee experience under AI as structurally ambivalent. AI can improve flexibility, autonomy, productivity, and engagement, but also generate technostress, surveillance concerns, dehumanization, work-life strain, and job insecurity (Malik et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025; Soulami et al., 2024). Trust, fairness, perceived organizational support, and leadership quality repeatedly emerge as the mechanisms that determine whether outcomes skew positive or negative (Wang et al., 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2022; Cağlar & Taşkın, 2023).

Hybrid human-AI arrangements appear more acceptable than fully automated decision systems. Experimental and review evidence indicates greater trust in hybrid support, especially when explanations and fairness cues are provided (Kares et al., 2023; Cui et al., 2023; Scharowski et al., 2023). This suggests that organizational resilience depends partly on whether AI is framed and designed as augmentation rather than replacement (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021; Makarius et al., 2020).

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative document-based thematic analysis. The design is appropriate because the recent AI-HR field contains substantial review, policy, conceptual, practitioner, and case-based material that can be systematically compared to identify recurring patterns and tensions (Muridzi et al., 2024; Ronra Shimray & A, 2025; von Zahn et al., 2025).

The analysis draws on documents published in the 2020–2025 period that address at least one of four domains: inclusive HR governance, AI-related change management, talent sustainability, or employee experience in AI-enabled work (Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa, 2026; Jones et al., 2025; Tambe et al., 2019). Included materials comprise qualitative studies, mixed-method studies, reviews, governance frameworks, and policy/practice documents discussing AI use in recruitment, performance management, learning, analytics, workforce redesign, or employee support (Roy et al., 2025; Franca et al., 2025; Mattoussi, 2025; Jung et al., 2022).

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The documents were interpreted through iterative thematic coding. First, evidence segments were grouped into descriptive categories such as human oversight, audit and fairness controls, employee resistance, leadership support, reskilling ecosystems, and trust/well-being mechanisms (Hagendorff, 2020; Vial, 2019; Yang & Wibowo, 2022). Second, categories were compared across documents to identify higher-order patterns. Third, these patterns were consolidated into four analytic themes: inclusive governance, social change processes, talent sustainability, and trust-based resilience (Laine et al., 2024; Sharma & Reddy, 2024; Surya et al., 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2022).

To make the analytical procedure transparent and replicable, **Table 1** summarizes the coding framework used in this study, mapping each descriptive category to its example evidence segments and the corresponding analytical theme. This table clarifies how raw evidence from the corpus was progressively abstracted into the four themes that structure the Results section.

Table 1. Coding Framework and Analytical Categories

Descriptive Category	Example Evidence Segments	Analytical Theme
Human oversight, audit trail, explainability, bias testing	Human-in-the-loop review; documented override thresholds; lifecycle monitoring (Laine et al., 2024; Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa, 2026; Madanchian, 2025)	Inclusive HR Governance
Employee resistance, leadership sponsorship, communication, pilot testing	Transparent communication; awareness-building; role reconfiguration (Alshaikh et al., 2026; Chiang & Hong, 2025; Welch, 2025)	Change Management as Social Process
Reskilling, adaptive learning, internal mobility, modular credentials	Personalized skills pathways; simulations; competency-based development (Gabelaia et al., 2026; Surya et al., 2025; Bevilacqua et al., 2026)	Talent Sustainability
Technostress, job insecurity, perceived organizational support, trust	Hybrid human-AI trust; buffering role of perceived organizational support (Malik et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2025; Scharowski et al., 2023)	Trust, Justice, and Well-Being

Source: synthesized from the 2020–2025 document corpus (see References).

As shown in Table 1, each analytical theme is grounded in a distinct cluster of descriptive categories rather than in a single recurring keyword. This indicates that the four themes are not arbitrary labels but empirically derived constructs that reflect separate yet interconnected dimensions of AI-enabled HR transformation. The mapping also reveals that governance-related codes are the most frequently occurring across the corpus, which justifies placing inclusive governance as the first theme in the Results section.

Rigor was pursued through transparency of scope, explicit inclusion logic, cross-document comparison, and reflexive synthesis of both convergent and conflicting evidence (Torres et al., 2025; Jingting et al., 2025; Geiger et al., 2024). A key strength of the design is its suitability for mapping fragmented but conceptually related evidence; a key limitation is that the source base itself remains methodologically uneven (Jingting et al., 2025; Muridzi et al., 2024).

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results with clear descriptions. Results are supplemented with tables that synthesize the key findings across the document corpus. The discussion section interprets these findings logically, links them to relevant reference sources, and elaborates their implications.

Table 2 provides an overview of the key findings, the population or context in which each finding was observed, and the supporting evidence from the corpus. This table serves as a navigational map for the four themes discussed in the following subsections and allows readers to see at a glance how convergent the evidence is across different HR domains.

Table 2. Key Findings, Context, and Supporting Evidence

Key Finding	Population / Context	Supporting Evidence
Inclusive AI-enabled HR depends on human-centered governance (oversight, explainability, audit, bias testing, appeal mechanisms)	HR systems in recruitment, performance management, talent analytics	Dissanayake et al. (2026); Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa (2026); Laine et al. (2024); Setiawati et al. (2025); Torres et al. (2025); Murikah et al. (2024)
AI transformation succeeds more when treated as organizational change rather than technology rollout	Organizations adopting AI across sectors	Alshaikh et al. (2026); Morin (2026); Gupta et al. (2025); Hariyani et al. (2025); Sharma & Reddy (2024); Chiang & Hong (2025)
Participatory implementation, transparent communication, and employee voice reduce resistance	Employees experiencing AI adoption and redesign	Welch (2025); Bouzerda et al. (2025); Franca et al. (2025); Al Sabbagh & Elgeddawy (2025); Patnaik et al. (2026)
Talent sustainability is increasingly defined as continuous employability through reskilling, internal mobility, and adaptive learning	Workforce development, L&D, talent management	Gabelaia et al. (2026); Farrell (2025); Morandini et al. (2023); Úbeda García et al. (2025); Surya et al. (2025); Whysall et al. (2019)
AI-supported learning and development shows the most consistently positive employee outcomes among HR use cases	Employees in learning, training, and capability-building settings	Mattoussi (2025); Surya et al. (2025); Yang & Yan (2024); Shahzad et al. (2023); Kim & Lee (2025)
Employee experience under AI is mixed: autonomy and productivity gains coexist with technostress, insecurity, and surveillance concerns	Employees in AI-enabled workplaces	Malik et al. (2022); Zhang et al. (2025); Jung et al. (2022); Soulami et al. (2024); Kurniawan et al. (2022)
Hybrid human-AI decision models are more trusted than fully automated ones	HR decision-making and personnel contexts	Kares et al. (2023); Cui et al. (2023); Scharowski et al. (2023); Raisch & Krakowski (2021); Glikson & Woolley (2020)

Source: author's thematic synthesis of the 2020–2025 document corpus.

Table 2 shows that the seven key findings are supported by multiple, independent sources, suggesting a high level of convergence across the literature. It is notable that governance-related findings are supported by both systematic reviews and empirical studies, whereas findings on employee experience draw more heavily on employee-level surveys and case studies. This difference in evidence types explains why the governance theme is presented first (it has the broadest and most established evidence base) and why the

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trust theme is positioned last (its evidence, though strong, is more fragmented across methodological traditions).

Theme 1: Inclusive HR Governance in AI-Enabled Systems

The first theme shows that organizations treat AI as acceptable in HR only when human accountability remains intact. Across the corpus, the most common safeguards are human-in-the-loop review, bias testing, explainability, audit trails, lifecycle monitoring, and explicit governance structures for data stewardship and compliance (Madanchian, 2025; Huang & Niyomsilp, 2025; Winfield & Jirotka, 2018; Padmanabhan Poti & Stanton, 2024). These mechanisms are especially emphasized in high-stakes functions such as hiring and performance evaluation, where fully opaque automation is viewed as risky for fairness and legitimacy (Kares et al., 2023; van den Broek, 2025).

The data also indicate that fairness is not a simple technical property. Some systems operationalize fairness through narrow thresholds and standardized outputs, which can reduce overt inconsistency but also suppress contextual judgment (van den Broek, 2025). Thus, inclusive governance involves not only bias control but also role clarity over when humans can review, override, or appeal AI-supported outcomes (Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa, 2026; Torres et al., 2025).

Theme 2: Change Management as a Social and Organizational Process

The second theme shows that AI adoption is mediated by social processes of communication, sensemaking, and participation. Clear communication about benefits and risks, employee involvement, leadership sponsorship, and transition support are repeatedly identified as key factors reducing fear and uncertainty (Chiang & Hong, 2025; Al Sabbagh & Elgeddawy, 2025; Bouzerda et al., 2025; Sundström, 2024). Organizations that invest in awareness-building, sensitization, and capability development appear better able to lower resistance and build adoption readiness (Gupta et al., 2025; Hariyani et al., 2025; Jia et al., 2025).

Evidence from operating-model redesign cases further shows that AI implementation frequently requires role reconfiguration, knowledge-transfer adjustments, and workflow restructuring rather than simple software installation (Roy et al., 2025; Sundström, 2024; Barba et al., 2025). When AI is layered onto old structures without redesign, coordination problems, skill mismatches, and data-management complexity become more likely (Sundström, 2024; Bobitjan et al., 2024).

Theme 3: Talent Sustainability Through Learning and Mobility

The third theme reveals a shift from retention-focused HR toward employability-focused talent systems. Organizations increasingly use AI to support personalized learning, skill-gap detection, modular credentials, competency pathways, and adaptive development programs (Bevilacqua et al., 2026; Bobitjan et al., 2024; Al-Ayed, 2025; Shamaylah et al., 2025). These systems are reported to improve adaptability, AI literacy, confidence, and readiness for AI-integrated roles (Culot et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025).

The strongest evidence favors experiential and personalized learning designs, including simulations, mentoring, bootcamps, and role-specific pathways (Stadnicka et al., 2022; Kim & Lee, 2025; Hoelscher & Pugh, 2025; UI Haq et al., 2025). Retention benefits are most plausible where employees interpret these investments as signals of organizational support and career opportunity (Lopez-Garcia et al., 2024; Al-Ayed, 2025; Kim et al., 2025).

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Theme 4: Employee Trust, Justice, and Well-Being

The fourth theme shows that trust and perceived justice function as the psychological core of resilient AI transformation. Employees report both gains and harms: AI can enhance productivity, flexibility, and autonomy, but can also trigger insecurity, technostress, privacy concerns, and reduced human connection (Yang & Yan, 2024; Jung et al., 2022; Glikson & Woolley, 2020; Kurniawan et al., 2022).

Perceived organizational support is repeatedly identified as a buffer against negative outcomes, including turnover intentions and stress under AI-related job threat (Doan & Nguyen, 2025; Wang et al., 2025; Cağlar & Taşkın, 2023). Trust increases when AI systems are understandable, reliable, and embedded in supportive relational environments (Scharowski et al., 2023; Biswas & Murray, 2025; Lalot & Bertram, 2024). Taken together, these findings suggest that employee resilience is shaped less by AI exposure alone than by the organizational conditions surrounding it.

Discussion

The findings indicate that beyond digital transformation means moving from tool adoption to human-centered organizational redesign. Inclusive HR resilience depends on three mutually reinforcing capacities: governance resilience, adaptive change resilience, and talent resilience (Jarrahi, 2018; Whysall et al., 2019; Hou et al., 2024; Gomez Gandia et al., 2025). Governance without participation may produce compliant but distrusted systems; participation without governance may produce acceptance without fairness protections; and both are weakened if organizations neglect continuous capability building (Sharma & Reddy, 2024; Patnaik et al., 2026; Surya et al., 2025).

Table 3 synthesizes how each analytical theme contributes to a specific resilience capacity, thereby operationalizing the integrative framework proposed in this study. This table is intended to help both researchers and practitioners see which mechanisms belong to which resilience dimension and which references provide the strongest support for each link.

Table 3. Themes and Their Contribution to Inclusive HR Resilience

Analytical Theme	Core Mechanism	Resilience Capacity	Key References
Inclusive HR Governance	Human oversight, auditability, bias control, appeal rights	Governance resilience	Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa (2026); Laine et al. (2024); Torres et al. (2025)
Change Management as Social Process	Communication, participation, sensemaking, workflow redesign	Adaptive change resilience	Alshaikh et al. (2026); Welch (2025); Sundström (2024)
Talent Sustainability	Reskilling, adaptive learning, internal mobility	Talent resilience	Gabelaia et al. (2026); Surya et al. (2025); Morandini et al. (2023)
Trust, Justice, and Well-Being	Perceived organizational support, fairness perception, hybrid trust	Psychological resilience (bridging mechanism)	Wang et al. (2025); Scharowski et al. (2023); Doan & Nguyen (2025)

Source: author's synthesis; the integrative three-capacity framework is adapted from Raisch & Krakowski (2021) and Chowdhury et al. (2022).

Table 3 clarifies that the three resilience capacities are not independent silos but are connected through the fourth theme, trust, justice, and well-being, which functions as a bridging mechanism. This interpretation is consistent with the corpus, in which trust-related constructs appear in governance studies,

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change-management studies, and talent-development studies alike. The table therefore supports the study's central argument that trust is not merely an outcome of AI transformation but a mechanism through which the other three capacities are activated and sustained.

A central integrative insight is that trust bridges all three domains. Transparent and explainable governance strengthens fairness perceptions; participatory change processes reduce fear and increase legitimacy; and learning investment signals organizational support, improving commitment and employability (Cui et al., 2023; Lopez-Garcia et al., 2024; Scharowski et al., 2023). Taken together, these findings suggest that trust is not merely an outcome of AI transformation but a mechanism through which resilience is built.

The evidence also highlights a strategic contradiction. Organizations often pursue AI to automate work and increase efficiency, yet the literature repeatedly shows that successful implementation requires more human investment in oversight, mentoring, communication, and learning (Zhang et al., 2025; Jingting et al., 2025; Barredo-Arrieta et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2025). This pattern implies that resilient AI adoption is best understood as sustainable augmentation rather than extraction through automation alone.

Finally, the review underscores unresolved tensions: bias and fairness remain difficult to standardize, employee surveillance concerns persist, and methodological fragmentation limits certainty about long-term outcomes (Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa, 2026; Alboré et al., 2025; Jingting et al., 2025; Muridzi et al., 2024). To translate these tensions into a forward-looking agenda, **Table 4** maps the identified research gaps to specific directions for future inquiry.

Table 4. Research Gaps and Future Research Directions

Research Gap	Evidence of Gap	Suggested Future Research
Limited longitudinal evidence on reskilling–retention–mobility links	Jingting et al. (2025); Muridzi et al. (2024)	Longitudinal qualitative studies on AI-enabled reskilling outcomes
Few direct comparisons of participatory vs. top-down AI implementation	Welch (2025); Soulami et al. (2024); Al Sabbagh & Elgeddawy (2025)	Comparative case studies within similar organizational contexts
Underrepresentation of developing-economy and Global South contexts	Jingting et al. (2025); Dissanayake et al. (2026)	Context-sensitive studies in emerging economies
Absence of operational governance standards for HR AI	Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa (2026); Alboré et al. (2025)	Framework development for audits, override thresholds, appeal rights
Psychological safety often inferred through trust proxies	Glikson & Woolley (2020); Patnaik et al. (2026)	Direct measurement of psychological safety in AI-enabled HR

Source: synthesized from Jingting et al. (2025), Muridzi et al. (2024), Qadri & Ahmed Moustafa (2026), and Soulami et al. (2024).

Table 4 indicates that the most pressing gap is the lack of longitudinal evidence, because almost all cross-domain claims about retention and mobility rest on cross-sectional or review-based sources. The table also shows that the gap concerning operational governance standards is the most actionable for practitioners, as it can be addressed through applied framework development rather than long-term empirical research. These observations reinforce the study's conclusion that future work should combine methodological strengthening (longitudinal and comparative designs) with practical framework development (audits, override thresholds, appeal rights).

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CONCLUSION

This study concludes that inclusive AI-era HR resilience is achieved not through digital transformation alone, but through the combined presence of responsible governance, participatory change management, and continuous talent development. Human oversight, auditability, fairness controls, and explainability are foundational for legitimate HR AI systems. Transparent communication, employee participation, and redesign of roles and workflows are essential to reduce resistance and support adoption. Talent sustainability is strongest where organizations build adaptive learning ecosystems that support employability, internal mobility, and long-term resilience.

Practically, organizations should prioritize hybrid human-AI decision models, formal audit and appeal systems, role-specific reskilling pathways, and supportive leadership climates that buffer insecurity and technostress. Future research should test these relationships longitudinally and across underrepresented regions and workforce groups.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly Application and QuillBot to improve the clarity, readability, and language accuracy of the text. The authors carefully reviewed and edited output generated by these tools and take full responsibility for the content of this article. The authors made all substantive intellectual contributions, including conceptualization, data analysis, interpretation, and final decisions on content, arguments, and conclusions. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity, originality, and academic quality of this article.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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