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Better Technology, Worse Motivation: GenAI's Mediocrity Trap

4 March 2026 (Wed)
10:00–11:30

WYL314, 3/F, Dorothy Y. L. Wong
Building, Lingnan University



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BIOGRAPHY

Jie Gong is an Associate Professor of Management, Strategy, and Economics at HKU Business School. Dr. Gong's research lies at the intersection of organizational, personnel, and labor economics. She studies how firms design organizations and operations to manage talent and build human capital. Her current projects focus on human-machine complementarities. Her work has been published in leading journals, including *Management Science*, *the Journal of Labor Economics*, and *the Journal of Public Economics*. She currently serves as an Associate Editor at *Management Science*.

ABSTRACT

While generative AI (GenAI) promises productive efficiency, it can paradoxically lead to lower-quality work. We conducted an experiment with professional illustrators and found that AI assistance flattens the quality curve—it accelerates initial gains but sharply diminishes the returns on sustained effort. Faced with this, a significant number of professionals made a strategic choice: they sacrificed the final quality to save time. Our finding highlights a critical challenge for GenAI, which can weaken the motivation required for creative excellence and innovation.