Spectrum of Engineering Sciences
ISSN (e) 3007-3138 (p) 3007-312X
Volume 4, Issue 2, 2026

DECISION-MAKING IN CLOUD SECURITY MANAGEMENT USING AI-BASED ANOMALY DETECTION: A SOCIAL SCIENCES PERSPECTIVE

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18497272

Keywords:
Cloud Security Management; Decision-Making; Artificial Intelligence; Anomaly Detection; Sociotechnical Systems; Organizational Governance; Algorithmic Authority; Sensemaking.

Article History
Received on 10 Jan, 2026
Accepted on 03 Feb, 2026
Published on 05 Feb, 2026

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Abstract

The rapid migration of critical organizational infrastructure to cloud environments has precipitated a fundamental shift in security operations, necessitating a reliance on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) for anomaly detection. As cloud architectures evolve into ephemeral, microservices-based ecosystems, the volume of telemetry data surpasses human cognitive processing capabilities, positioning AI not merely as a tool but as a requisite agent of surveillance. While technical discourse predominantly prioritizes detection accuracy, latency reduction, and computational efficiency, the sociotechnical implications of these systems on human decision-making remain critically under-theorized. This study examines AI-based anomaly detection not as a neutral technical instrument, but as a potent socio-technical influence mechanism that reconfigures organizational judgment, authority, and power. Adopting an interpretive lens grounded in sociotechnical systems theory, sensemaking, and institutional theory, the research investigates how algorithmic outputs shape human interpretation of risk, renegotiate the locus of decision authority, and alter governance structures. The analysis reveals that AI-driven anomaly detection introduces a "black-box" authority that can erode human epistemic confidence, necessitating new frameworks for accountability where decision-making power is shared between human analysts and opaque algorithms. Furthermore, it identifies a phenomenon of "liability shielding," where reliance on algorithmic outputs serves as a defensive mechanism against organizational blame. This article contributes to the information systems and organizational studies literature by conceptualizing the shift from human-centric security management to a hybrid, algorithmically mediated governance model, offering a theoretical roadmap for navigating the paradoxes of automated security.

1. Introduction

The contemporary digital landscape is defined by an unprecedented migration of organizational assets, processes, and data to cloud infrastructures. This transition represents more than a mere relocation of storage; it signifies a fundamental architectural shift towards distributed, ephemeral, and dynamic computing environments. In these hyper-scale ecosystems, characterized by serverless functions, containerization, and multi-cloud dependencies, the traditional perimeter-based security model has been rendered obsolete. The static "firewall" has been replaced by a fluid, identity-centric control plane where the "state" of the system is in constant flux. In response to the sheer volume and velocity of telemetry data generated by these environments—often reaching petabytes of logs per day—organizations increasingly deploy Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) mechanisms for anomaly detection.

These AI systems are designed to ingest vast streams of behavioral data, establish normative baselines, and identify deviations that may signal potential security breaches. Unlike signature-based detection, which relies on known patterns of malicious activity, AI-based anomaly detection operates probabilistically, flagging outliers that deviate from a learned statistical mean. While the technical imperative for such systems is clear—human analysts simply cannot review billions of log lines—the integration of AI into Cloud Security Management (CSM) introduces profound uncertainties regarding the locus of decision-making and the nature of organizational judgment.

A significant critical gap exists in the current literature. The majority of research on AI in cybersecurity remains firmly rooted in computer science and engineering disciplines, predominantly evaluating anomaly detection through performance metrics such as precision, recall, F1-scores, and false-positive rates. This techno-centric view treats the security operations center (SOC) as a deterministic input-output system, obscuring the behavioral and institutional reality: security decisions are complex social processes of interpretation, negotiation, and justification. When an AI system flags a behavioral anomaly—for instance, an "unusual" API call pattern by a privileged user—the subsequent decision to isolate a production server or revoke credentials is not a binary output of the algorithm. It is a high-stakes managerial decision mediated by human analysts who must make sense of probabilistic, often opaque, algorithmic outputs under conditions of extreme time pressure and uncertainty.

The problem addressed in this research is the lack of theoretical understanding regarding how AI-based anomaly detection reconfigures the social fabric of security operations. If security decisions are increasingly informed, framed, and prompted by opaque algorithms, traditional conceptions of accountability, expertise, and authority are challenged. Does the analyst retain agency when the algorithm's complexity exceeds their understanding? How does the organization assign blame when a breach occurs due to a "false negative" from a

neural network? This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing AI-based anomaly detection through a social sciences perspective, specifically utilizing sociotechnical systems theory and sensemaking frameworks to explore the "hidden" work of aligning human judgment with machine logic.

2. Research Questions

To guide this inquiry and ensure structural rigor, three interrelated research questions (RQs) are posed to explore the micro-level cognitive processes, meso-level authority dynamics, and macro-level governance implications:

- **RQ1:** How does AI-based anomaly detection shape sensemaking and judgment in cloud security decision-making processes?
  - *Focus:* Examining the cognitive interplay between probabilistic signals and human interpretation.
- **RQ2:** How are decision authority and accountability negotiated when AI-generated anomaly insights inform cloud security management?
  - *Focus:* Analyzing the shift in epistemic power and the attribution of responsibility.
- **RQ3:** How do organizational structures, norms, and governance arrangements influence the use of AI-based anomaly detection in security decisions?
  - *Focus:* Investigating the institutional pressures and governance rituals that emerge around AI adoption.

3. Theoretical Framing and Contributions

This study is situated at the intersection of information systems (IS) research and organizational studies, drawing upon three complementary theoretical lenses to dissect the phenomenon.

3.1 Sociotechnical Systems (STS) Perspective

The research explicitly rejects technological determinism—the idea that AI inevitably dictates specific organizational outcomes or efficiencies. Instead, it adopts a **Sociotechnical Systems (STS)** perspective [12]. STS theory posits that organizational outcomes are emergent properties resulting from the interplay between social subsystems (people, structures, culture, skills) and technical subsystems (technology, processes, infrastructure). In the context of this study, the AI anomaly detector is viewed not as an isolated tool but as an embedded actor that interacts with the social system of the SOC. The "joint optimization" of these systems is not merely about technical tuning but about aligning the algorithmic logic with the social logic of the organization.

3.2 Sensemaking Theory

The concept of **Sensemaking**, particularly as articulated by Weick [28], is utilized to understand how security analysts construct meaning from ambiguous algorithmic signals. In the context of cloud security, the "anomaly" is not an objective fact but a cue that triggers a narrative construction process. Weick's properties of sensemaking—specifically that it is *enacted*, *social*, and *retrospective*—are critical. Analysts do not just discover threats; they enact them by selecting specific alerts to investigate while ignoring others. The AI system significantly alters this enactment by curating the cues available to the human,

effectively framing the boundaries of the analyst's reality.

3.3 Institutional Theory and Power

Finally, **Institutional Theory** is employed to analyze how governance structures and legitimacy pressures influence the adoption and reliance on these tools. Organizations do not adopt AI solely for efficiency; they adopt it to demonstrate legitimacy and due diligence in an increasingly regulated environment. This lens helps explain why organizations might persist in using AI systems that generate high volumes of false positives. Furthermore, the analysis draws on power and control perspectives [8], [34] to theorize the "Algorithmic Colleague," where the AI system functions as a non-human actor that exerts power within the decision-making hierarchy, shifting the analysis from *performance* to *influence*.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Cloud Security Management Practices: The Shift to Uncertainty

Recent literature on Cloud Security Management (CSM) highlights a paradigm shift from perimeter-based defense to data-centric and zero-trust models [1]. The traditional security model relied on a "castle-and-moat" architecture, where threats were external and trust was internal. However, the ephemeral nature of cloud resources—where containers may exist for seconds and serverless functions execute on demand—renders static monitoring obsolete. Neshenko et al. [1] and Gupta [2] argue that CSM has become a practice of managing continuous uncertainty. The "state" of a cloud environment is never static; therefore, the definition of "secure" is fluid. This fluidity necessitates continuous monitoring, which creates the "volume problem" driving AI adoption. However, scholars like Floridi et al. [3] argue that current CSM frameworks often neglect the human operator's cognitive load, focusing purely on the technical capability to harvest data rather than the social capability to interpret it.

4.2 AI-Based Anomaly Detection: The Interpretability Gap

AI-driven anomaly detection is widely discussed in computer science literature as the only viable solution to the log analysis challenge [4], [17]. Algorithms such as Isolation Forests, Autoencoders, and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) are praised for their ability to detect non-linear patterns. However, organizational research indicates that these tools often function as "black boxes," providing high-dimensional risk scores without interpretable explanations [5]. This lack of Explainable AI (XAI) creates a significant barrier to trust. Bai et al. [5] and Meske et al. [25] identify an "interpretability gap," suggesting that without contextual understanding, technical accuracy does not translate to organizational utility. If an analyst cannot understand *why* the AI flagged a behavior, they are likely to either ignore it (alert fatigue) or blindly follow it (automation bias), both of which are suboptimal for security.

4.3 Human–AI Interaction: Epistemic Authority and Bias

The intersection of AI and human judgment is a fertile ground for IS research. Concepts such as "algorithmic aversion" (distrust of algorithms

after error) and "automation bias" (over-reliance on algorithms) are central to this discourse [7], [19]. In high-stakes environments like cybersecurity, decision-making is often pressurized and time-constrained. Literature suggests that in such contexts, the "epistemic authority" of the algorithm—the perception that the machine "knows" more than the human—can override human intuition [24]. Galsworthy [24] explicitly frames this as a struggle for authority in the Security Operations Center (SOC). Zuboff [8] extends this to a societal level, arguing that this surrender of judgment contributes to a regime of "instrumentarian power," where human behavior is modified to suit algorithmic predictability.

4.4 Accountability and Governance: The Void

Governance in algorithmically mediated work is an emerging concern. Traditional bureaucratic structures rely on hierarchical accountability: a manager is responsible for their subordinate's decisions. However, when a decision is derived from a neural network's probabilistic assessment, the chain of accountability becomes obscured [9]. Who is responsible for a false positive that shuts down a revenue-generating service? The analyst who clicked the button? The engineer who tuned the model? Or the vendor who supplied the algorithm? Veale and Brass [9] and Sareen [26] suggest that current public management frameworks are ill-equipped to handle "administration by algorithm." Theoretical works on "algorithmic governance" suggest that organizations must develop new norms to manage the liability associated with automated decisions, yet empirical frameworks for this in the security domain remain underdeveloped [10].

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Approach (Addressing RQ1–RQ3)

Given the objective to develop a theory-driven perspective rather than to test a specific variance model, an **interpretive conceptual analysis** is employed. This approach allows for the synthesis of disparate theoretical constructs—sociotechnical systems, sensemaking, and institutional theory—to build a cohesive argument regarding AI integration. This method is appropriate for answering **RQ1** (sensemaking), **RQ2** (authority), and **RQ3** (governance) as it permits the exploration of latent structural dynamics that quantitative methods (e.g., surveys on tool usage) might overlook. The research proceeds by mapping the theoretical dimensions to the operational realities of cloud security, identifying isomorphisms between established social theories and the novel phenomena of AI-driven SOCs.

5.2 Decision-Making Contexts in Cloud Security (Addressing RQ1, RQ2)

To ground the abstract analysis in operational reality, the specific decision contexts where AI intersects with human judgment are defined. These contexts represent the "moments of truth" where sociotechnical friction occurs.

Table 1: *Decision Contexts in Cloud Security Management*

Decision Context	Primary Actors	Role of AI-Based Anomaly Detection	Nature of Decision
Incident Response (Triage)	Security Analysts (L1/L2)	**Risk Signaling:** AI filters noise and flags deviations for immediate triage, acting as the primary attention-directing mechanism.	**Operational/Reactive:** Rapid binary choices (Escalate/Close) under high time pressure.
Risk Assessment (Investigation)	Security Managers, Threat Hunters	**Decision Justification:** AI provides historical trend analysis and probability scores used to justify resource allocation or policy changes.	**Tactical/Analytical:** Deep-dive investigation requiring narrative construction and evidence gathering.
Governance (Strategy)	CISO, Risk Committees, Board	**Oversight Support:** AI aggregates high-level posture data, influencing strategic decisions on risk appetite and technology investment.	**Strategic/Political:** Resource allocation and definitions of acceptable risk thresholds.

5.3 Sociotechnical Configuration of AI-Supported Decisions (Addressing RQ1–RQ3)

A sociotechnical model is constructed to visualize the reciprocal influences between human actors, AI artifacts, organizational structures, and governance norms. This visualization is essential for addressing the interconnected nature of the RQs, moving beyond linear cause-and-effect models.

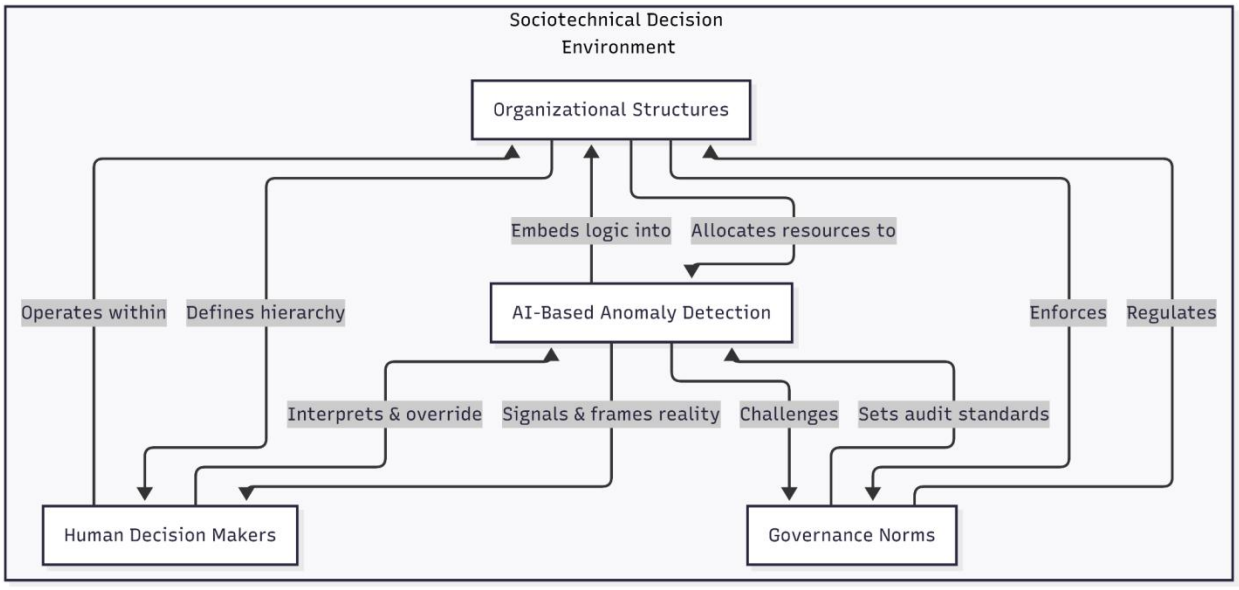

Figure 1. The Sociotechnical Configuration of AI-Supported Cloud Security.

This diagram illustrates the multi-directional influence flow, addressing how AI is not an isolated tool but embedded within the structural and governance fabrics (RQ3).

5.4 Analytical Dimensions (Addressing RQ1–RQ3)

To operationalize the analysis, specific dimensions are isolated. These dimensions serve as the coding framework for the conceptual analysis.

Table 2: ***Analytical Dimensions for Studying AI-Mediated Decisions***

Dimension	Analytical Focus	Relevant RQ	Theoretical Basis
Sensemaking	Interpretation of anomaly signals, reduction of equivocality, and narrative construction around "threats."	RQ1	Weick [28]
Authority	The negotiation of epistemic power between human intuition and algorithmic probability.	RQ2	Zuboff [8]; Galsworthy [24]
Accountability	The attribution of responsibility for false positives (business disruption) or false negatives (breaches).	RQ2	Veale & Brass [9]

Trust/Legitimacy	The organizational reliance on AI-generated insights and the institutional pressures to adopt AI.	RQ3	Institutional Theory

6. Analysis / Findings

6.1 AI-Mediated Sensemaking in Cloud Security (Addressing RQ1)

The introduction of AI-based anomaly detection fundamentally alters the sensemaking process in cloud security. In traditional environments, sensemaking was driven by deterministic rules (e.g., "if traffic > X, then alert"). **RQ1** asks how this changes with AI. The analysis suggests that AI acts as a **"Sensemaking Proxy."**

6.1.1 The Algorithmic Gaze and Alert Fatigue

The AI system processes vast datasets to present a curated reality to the analyst. It does not merely report facts; it interprets patterns based on training data. Consequently, the analyst's role shifts from *finding* the needle in the haystack to *verifying* if the object presented by the AI is indeed a needle. This creates a dependency where human judgment is bounded by the algorithm's interpretive scope. If the AI fails to flag a sophisticated, low-signal attack (a false negative), that event is effectively excluded from the analyst's reality. Thus, sensemaking becomes reactive to algorithmic cues rather than proactive investigation. This phenomenon constitutes a "narrowing of the gaze," where the security team only "sees" what the algorithm is capable of representing.

Furthermore, the prevalence of false positives in anomaly detection generates "alert fatigue," a well-documented psychological phenomenon. However, from a sensemaking perspective, this is not just exhaustion; it is a breakdown of meaning. When an analyst receives 500 "critical" anomalies a day, the signal loses its semantic value. The "anomaly" ceases to be a warning of danger and becomes a routine bureaucratic nuisance to be dismissed. This desensitization represents a failure of the sociotechnical system to sustain the meaningfulness of its own signals.

6.1.2 Interpretive Flexibility and Repair Work

The probabilistic nature of AI outputs (e.g., "85% likelihood of anomaly") introduces new ambiguity. Unlike a firewall block log, which is a definitive statement of an event, an anomaly score is a statistical inference. Analysts must perform "repair work" to bridge the gap between a statistical probability and a binary operational decision (block or allow). This negotiation constitutes a distinct form of hybrid sensemaking where mathematical probability must be translated into organizational risk. Analysts often develop informal heuristics to interpret AI outputs (e.g., "The model always flags the backup server on Tuesdays, ignore it"), effectively creating a "shadow knowledge" that exists outside the formal system logic. This shadow knowledge is crucial for operational continuity but undermines the theoretical efficiency of the AI.

6.2 Shifts in Authority and Accountability (Addressing RQ2)

RQ2 investigates the negotiation of decision authority. A critical finding is the emergence of **"Algorithmic Authority,"** where the AI's output is granted a presumption of truth that is difficult for lower-level analysts to contest.

6.2.1 The Authority-Accountability Paradox

As depicted in Figure 2 below, the decision-making paradigm evolves. In a human-centric model, tools support judgment. In the hybrid model, authority is negotiated. However, as systems become more complex (AI-Dominant), the cognitive cost of disagreeing with the AI increases. An analyst who overrides an AI alert and subsequently permits a breach faces severe accountability pressures. Conversely, following the AI's recommendation provides a "safe harbor" against blame, even if the decision is incorrect.

This creates a paradox: **Authority** shifts to the algorithm (which directs attention and frames the threat), but **Accountability** remains sticky to the human (who is legally and administratively responsible). This decoupling creates intense organizational stress. Analysts may adopt "defensive decision-making," prioritizing actions that are defensible to the algorithm (and thus the organization) rather than actions that are necessarily optimal for security.

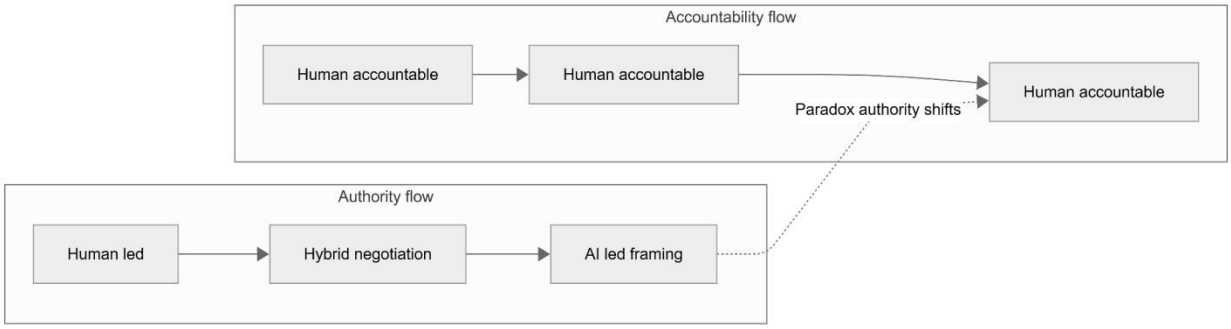

Figure 2. The Shift in Authority. Moving from D1 to D3 represents the gradual cession of epistemic authority to the anomaly detection system, addressing RQ2.

6.2.2 Liability Shielding and the "Black Box" Defense

The opacity of Deep Learning models allows for a new form of organizational defense: "Liability Shielding." When a security incident occurs that was missed by the AI, the "black box" nature of the tool allows management to diffuse blame. The failure can be attributed to "model drift," "unforeseen data patterns," or "vendor limitations," rather than human negligence. The complexity of the technology becomes a veil that obscures specific accountability. This shifts the internal politics of the SOC; the ability to explain *why* an algorithm failed becomes as valuable as the ability to prevent the failure itself.

6.3 Organizational and Governance Consequences

Addressing **RQ3**, the analysis reveals that organizational structures adapt to accommodate the opacity of AI tools. New

governance rituals emerge to rationalize the use of imperfect technology.

6.3.1 Rituals of Tuning and Calibration

Organizations establish recurring "model tuning" meetings, which serve a dual purpose. Technically, they aim to improve model accuracy. Socially, they serve as governance rituals that re-establish human control over the machine. By adjusting thresholds and whitelisting specific behaviors, the organization enacts its authority over the AI. These rituals are crucial for maintaining the legitimacy of the system. Without them, the AI would be perceived as a rogue actor. These meetings become the primary venue where the "sociotechnical contract" is negotiated—determining how much autonomy the AI is granted versus how much oversight is retained.

6.3.2 From Procedural to Predictive Governance

Traditional security governance is procedural (e.g., "Did you review the logs?"). AI introduces "Predictive Governance" (e.g., "Did the model predict this risk?"). This shifts the focus of oversight from verifying human action to verifying model performance. However, because auditors and risk committees often lack the technical depth to audit neural networks, governance becomes "faith-based." Organizations rely on vendor assurances ("Our model is state-of-the-art") and aggregate metrics (dashboards showing "threats blocked") rather than a granular understanding of risk posture. This creates a "governance gap" where the illusion of control provided by the AI's dashboard masks the underlying reality of the security environment.

Table 3: ***Organizational Implications of AI-Based Anomaly Detection***

Aspect	Observed Implication	Sociotechnical Mechanism
Accountability	**Diffused or Renegotiated:** Blame for security failures becomes difficult to pin on individuals when complex, non-deterministic models are involved.	Liability Shielding / Decoupling
Control	**Increased Algorithmic Mediation:** Managerial control over security operations is exercised through the configuration of algorithm thresholds rather than direct supervision of analysts.	Algorithmic Management
Governance	**Need for New Oversight Mechanisms:** Traditional audit trails are insufficient; organizations require "AI Assurance" frameworks to validate the ongoing logic	Institutional Isomorphism

	of the detection models.	
Power Relations	**Shift to Data Science:** Power within the security organization shifts towards those who build and tune the models (data scientists/engineers) and away from frontline analysts.	Epistemic Authority Shift

7. Discussion

This section synthesizes the findings by explicitly revisiting the Research Questions and integrating them into broader theoretical discourse.

Revisiting RQ1 (Sensemaking): The study confirms that AI does not simply automate detection; it restructures the cognitive environment. The "anomaly" is constructed through the interaction of statistical deviation and human context. The danger identified is the potential for **"Sensemaking Atrophy,"** where analysts lose the ability to independently assess the environment without algorithmic scaffolding. As the AI takes over the "discovery" phase of sensemaking, humans are relegated to the "verification" phase, potentially leading to a degradation of deep domain expertise over time. The "shadow knowledge" developed by analysts to cope with false positives represents a form of resistance, a re-assertion of human context against de-contextualized math.

Revisiting RQ2 (Authority): The findings suggest a decoupling of authority and accountability. While the AI increasingly dictates the *focus* of security operations (authority), the human analyst retains the *liability* for the outcome (accountability). This tension creates organizational stress and encourages defensive decision-making. The concept of **"Algorithmic Authority"** is validated not just as a psychological bias, but as a structural reality; the organization configures workflows that make it harder to disagree with the AI than to agree with it.

Revisiting RQ3 (Governance): The integration of AI necessitates a shift from procedural governance to outcome-based governance. However, the "black box" nature of deep learning models used in anomaly detection resists traditional transparency mechanisms. This leads to a form of "faith-based" governance, where organizations rely on vendor assurances and aggregate metrics rather than granular understanding. The rituals of tuning are identified as critical stabilization mechanisms that allow the organization to cope with the inherent uncertainty of probabilistic systems.

Theoretical Implications

From a sociotechnical perspective, the AI-based anomaly detection system acts as a macro-actor that enforces specific behaviors across the organization. It standardizes the definition of "normalcy" in the cloud environment, enforcing a rigid mathematical order on a chaotic socio-technical reality. This

contributes to Institutional Theory by highlighting how AI adoption is driven not just by efficiency, but by the need for legitimacy—appearing to have "cutting-edge" security—even if the actual interpretability of threats is diminished. The study proposes the concept of the **"Algorithmic Colleague"**—an entity that is neither a passive tool nor a human peer, but a distinct socio-technical agent with which humans must negotiate reality.

8. Ethical, Social, and Governance Implications

The reliance on AI for cloud security decision-making raises significant ethical concerns that extend beyond the organization.

1. **Bias and Fairness:** If anomaly detection models are trained on biased datasets (e.g., flagging traffic from certain geographic regions or user behaviors as inherently "anomalous"), this encodes discrimination into the security infrastructure. This "automated suspicion" can marginalize specific user groups within the organization or external customer bases.

2. **The Erosion of Expertise:** Over-reliance on automation may lead to the deskilling of the security workforce. If L1 analysts merely click "approve" on AI suggestions, they fail to develop the mental models required for complex incident response. This creates a long-term vulnerability where organizations lack the human capital to handle novel threats that AI misses (zero-day exploits).

3. **Organizational Legitimacy and "Security Theater":** Organizations must guard against "security theater," where the presence of sophisticated AI tools masks underlying process deficiencies. The dashboard may show "All Systems Green," but if the model has drifted or the analysts are rubber-stamping alerts, the security is illusory.

9. Conclusion and Future Research

This article has examined the integration of AI-based anomaly detection in cloud security management through a social sciences lens. It is argued that these systems are not neutral technical upgrades but are transformative agents that reshape sensemaking, authority, and governance. The transition to AI-mediated security is not merely a change in tooling; it is a change in the ontology of the "threat" and the epistemology of "detection."

Key Contributions

- **Conceptualizing the AI anomaly detector as a socio-technical actor:** It does not just display data; it enacts the environment.
- **Identifying the authority-accountability paradox:** The structural misalignment where influence shifts to the machine while blame remains human.
- **Theorizing "Liability Shielding":** The use of algorithmic complexity as a mechanism to diffuse organizational blame.

Limitations

This study is theoretical and conceptual. It relies on the synthesis of existing theories applied to the domain of cloud security. It does not present primary empirical data, which serves as a limitation to the generalizability of the findings to specific organizational cultures (e.g., startups vs. enterprises).

Directions for Future Research

Future scholarship should focus on empirical validation of these constructs.

1. **Ethnographic Studies:** In-situ observation within Security Operations Centers (SOCs) to capture the micro-interactions and "repair work" performed by analysts.
2. **Longitudinal Analysis:** Examining how organizational trust in AI systems evolves following a significant security failure—does the organization discard the tool, or double down on "better training"?
3. **Cross-Comparative Studies:** Comparing the sociotechnical dynamics of AI adoption in highly regulated industries (Finance, Healthcare) versus unregulated tech sectors to understand the role of institutional pressure.

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