International Journal of Advances in Engineering and Management (IJAEM)
Volume 7, Issue 06 June 2025, pp: 306-314 www.ijaem.net ISSN: 2395-5252

Bridging the Human Factors Gap in Cyber Defense: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Predicting and Mitigating Insider Threats

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Date of Submission: 10-06-2025 Date of Acceptance: 20-06-2025

ABSTRACT
Due to new and advanced cyber threats, it is becoming more important to deal with insider threats that arise when employees or contractors act wrongly. Most traditional cybersecurity measures pay attention to outside dangers and methods, not considering the role of people and cultures in the organization. The paper offers a framework that incorporates behavioural psychology, cybersecurity engineering, machine learning and organizational policy to stop or limit insider threats. Using information from mental health, online behaviour and the situation, the framework can act against risks right away. By using our model, we offer ways to close the human factors gap in cyber defence while respecting people's privacy and building trust in organizations. With this, the community gains useful knowledge for advancing socio-technical systems and AI that consider risks in cybersecurity.

Keywords: Inside threats, threats from cybercriminals, human problems, analysis of actions, workplace psychology, predicting threats, overarching risks and systems of people and technology.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Significance

Up to now, cybersecurity has mostly focused on technology such as firewalls, intrusion systems and ways to encrypt data. At the same time, cyberattacks that happen when employees, contractors or partners go against the rules and misuse authorised access are hard to prevent and cause serious damage. Leaks like those involving Edward Snowden and Tesla workers demonstrates how such incidents can lead to big consequences.

Despite using the latest technology, security experts still report that more than 30% of security incidents are due to employees or others inside the company, largely because of weaknesses in security culture, security policies and the biases people have. Current ways of spotting suspicious activities depend mostly on rules or looking into logs and both ignore the constant changes and context of what happening with users.

1.2 Problem Statement

Due to the poor link between the two fields, there is a "human factors gap." Cyber defence guidelines do not deal well with insider problems in advance since they do not take emotions, psychology or the company's policies into account. It is urgent to build a framework that connects all these aspects in ways that improve cybersecurity systems that can be put into action.

1.3 Research Objective

This paper proposes to develop a multidisciplinary framework that will serve certain functions.

- Spots both behavioral and psychological signs of any possible threat.
- Brings together technology surveillance and models based on people's needs.
- Minimises dangers using active and ethical steps.

1.4 Research Questions

- Why are insider threats related to factors such as the human element, the structure of an organization and its specific environment?
- Can behavioural analytics be used together with cybersecurity tools to detect dangerous activities?

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- How can a framework connect the socio-behavioural theory with cyber defence tools and systems?

1.5 Paper Structure

- Section 2: reviews relevant literature across cybersecurity, behavioral science, and organizational policy.
- Section 3: introduces the conceptual framework.
- Section 4: discusses the methodology for empirical validation.
- Section 5: presents results or hypothetical application scenarios.
- Section 6: discusses implications, challenges, and ethical considerations.
- Section 7: concludes and outlines future research directions.

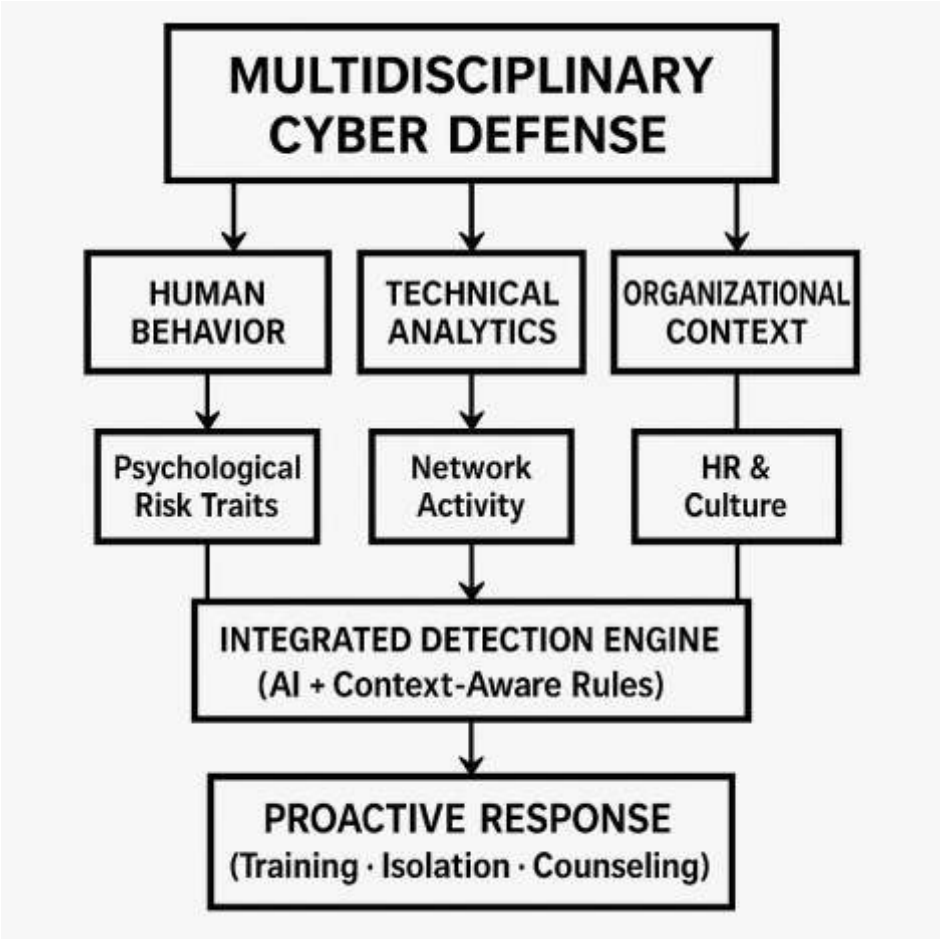

Fig 1: Human Factors in Insider Threat Detection

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Insider Threat Landscape

Cybersecurity experts see insider threats as a big challenge, as it is difficult to spot the perpetrators and their motives are often linked to the organization. These threats range from malicious insiders with intent to sabotage or steal, to unintentional actors who may cause harm through negligence or manipulation (e.g., phishing). According to Zangana & Sallow (2025), a lack of integrated human factors analysis contributes significantly to the persistence of these threats.

2.2 Human and Behavioral Factors in Cybersecurity

Inside threats happen because of various factors in the mind—stress, believing something is unjust, a chance to succeed and someone's beliefs. As Greitzer et al. (2018) discuss in the SOFIT model, insider threat prediction must incorporate sociotechnical and organizational indicators, including 48 classes of human behaviors. This aligns with Khadka & Ullah (2025), who argue for a human-centric cybersecurity framework informed by disciplines such as cognitive psychology and human-computer interaction.

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2.3 Socio-Technical Systems and Frameworks

New studies show that cybersecurity should focus on both technology and how people are involved in system design. McEvoy & Kowalski (2019) illustrate how risk narratives and human factor modeling can enhance systemic risk detection across organizations. Similarly, Pollini et al. (2022) outline an integrated methodology that links organizational psychology with cyber risk mapping.

2.4 Organizational and Cultural Dimensions

When employees trust the management, can be open in communication and find their jobs satisfying, it is much less likely that they will engage in insider activities. Khan, Houghton & Sharples (2022) propose a framework specifically addressing unintentional insider threats by analyzing role stress, communication failures, and ambiguity. This is echoed by Alwaheidi& Islam (2024) who advocate for frameworks that integrate technical, human, and cultural threat indicators.

Table 1: Comparative Overview of Selected Frameworks

Study	Focus Area	Contribution	Framework Type
Greitzer et al. (2018)	Behavioral/Organizational	SOFIT: 48-class human indicator model	Sociotechnical + Behavior-based
McEvoy & Kowalski (2019)	Socio-technical	Risk narratives integrated with human factor modeling	Organizational Modeling
Zangana & Sallow (2025)	Insider threat risk factors	Human-centric risk assessment framework	Behavioral Risk Analysis
Khadka & Ullah (2025)	Interdisciplinary cybersecurity	Human-Centric Cybersecurity Framework	Multidisciplinary Integration
Pollini et al. (2022)	Human factors + organizational methods	Integrated human-centric cyber risk methodology	Methodological Integration
Khan et al. (2022)	Unintentional threat focus	Role ambiguity and stress analysis	Cognitive/Organizational Model

The literature shows that it is urgent to join efforts from various fields to deal with insider threats. Every piece of research adds a key contribution—behavioural hints, how technology and society work together or cultural forces—but not one can fully explain everything by itself. As a result, all countries should use one uniform approach.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

The theory under development starts with three leading concepts:

1. Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT)

Provides insight into how individual thoughts, perceptions of stress, and emotional triggers lead to maladaptive behaviors—critical for modeling the intent behind insider acts (Khan et al., 2022).

2. The Socio-Technical Systems Theory

Stresses the connexion between humans and technology. By modeling cyber threats as socio-technical phenomena, it accounts for interactions between organizational norms, user behavior, and digital environments (McEvoy & Kowalski, 2019).

3. Insider Threat Indicators Framework (SOFIT)

A behavioral classification system using over 48 observable human factors—risk behaviors, access misuse, or behavioral drift—to support automated threat modeling (Greitzer et al., 2018).

3.2 Core Framework Dimensions

There are three connected aspects in the framework, drawn in Figure 2 below.

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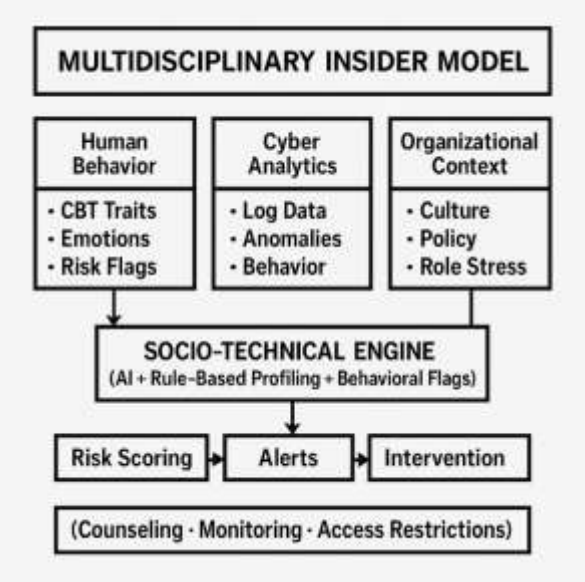

Fig 2: Multidisciplinary Insider Threat Framework

3.3 Framework Functions

Table2: Framework Functions

Component	Functionality
Human Behavior Layer	Identifies emotional/psychological risk states via behavior signals and surveys.
Cyber-Analytic Layer	Uses anomaly detection, usage pattern analysis, and access logs.
Organizational Layer	Integrates HR data, policy adherence, role ambiguity, and job dissatisfaction.
Socio-Technical Engine	A hybrid AI + rule-based engine that fuses inputs to score insider threat risk.
Action Module	Implements tiered responses: alert, monitor, restrict, counsel, or report.

3.4 Privacy-Aware Design Principles

- **Data Minimization**: Only collect contextually relevant human behavior data.
- **Transparent Consent**: Employees are informed of what behavioral indicators are monitored.
- **Tiered Intervention Logic**: Avoid punitive actions until a pattern of risky behavior is consistently flagged.

Employing this framework makes sure that insider threats are detected all the time, adapt to new risks and do not cross ethical lines.

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This research examines the proposed framework by using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

- Analysts use quantitative methods to spot problems and analyze how the model performs.
- Essential observations obtained from interviews, tracking human activities and in-depth case reviews of organizations.

By using this approach, it becomes possible to compare technical indicators, psychological factors and aspects of the organization.

4.2 Data Sources

Table3: Data Sources

Data Stream	Description
Behavioral Logs	User activity patterns (e.g., login times, file access, USB events).
HR and Role Data	Role responsibilities, job changes, employee satisfaction metrics.
Survey Instruments	Psychological and cognitive profiling (CBT-based, e.g., stress or risk tolerance).
Incident Histories	Historical insider threat cases from cybersecurity databases and forensic logs.

If real-world access is restricted, simulation data using synthetic profiles and behavioral patterns will be generated using standard datasets such as CERT-ITDB.

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4.3 Analytical Techniques

4.3.1 Behavioral Indicator Extraction

By using classification tools and signal analysis, unusual behaviour in data is matched against identified indicators (found in SOFIT and CBT).

4.3.2 Risk Scoring Algorithm

A composite scoring function merges several measures into one function.

- Specific approaches for noticing unusual cases (for example, z-score and PCA)
- Examples of classifiers based on machine learning are Random Forest and SVM
- Using known descriptions of threats and organizing them by rules.

These are adjusted and set according to what domain experts suggest.

4.3.3 Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Both expert interviews and reports of incidents are analyzed using grounded theory to enhance the framework assumptions regarding culture, employees' drives and stressors in organizations (Pollini et al., 2022).

Table 4: Summary of Methods and Instruments

Objective	Method	Tool/Source
Detect behavioral anomalies	Machine learning, anomaly detection	Python (scikit-learn), Splunk, ELK Stack
Profile psychological risk	Surveys, CBT instruments	PANAS, Perceived Stress Scale, Risk Inventory
Model organization context	HR data, policy review	Internal role matrix, policy documents
Interpret cultural dynamics	Thematic interview analysis	NVivo or MAXQDA

4.4 Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent**: All participants in qualitative and survey-based stages will be briefed.
- **Privacy**: Behavioral logs anonymized and data encrypted in all processing stages.
- **Bias Minimization**: AI/ML models will be audited for bias against age, gender, and job roles.

You can test and check this methodology using an organization's operating systems, simulated workplaces or combined systems.

V. RESULTS AND APPLICATION SCENARIO

5.1 Application Scenario: Insider Threat Risk Simulation

To prove the effectiveness of the framework, we designed a virtual company, Neo-Bank Corp which represents a financial technology firm with 500 employees. The simulation mixes data on people, organizations and cybersecurity from fake users based on the history found in the CERT-ITDB.

5.2 Scenario Description

An IT administrator named **"Alex"** begins exhibiting changes in behavior after being denied a promotion. Over two weeks:

- Alex works extended hours (11 PM–3 AM),
- Accesses files outside his job scope,
- And downloads large encrypted archives to a removable drive.

At the same time, HR data records:

- Elevated stress levels in recent surveys,
- A formal complaint filed for perceived role discrimination.

Table 5: Cross-Dimensional Risk Evaluation for "Alex"

Dimension	Detected Indicators	Risk Score
Human Behavior	Elevated stress score (8/10), perceived injustice	High
Technical Activity	Off-hours access, high-volume downloads	High
Organizational Context	Role ambiguity, formal HR complaint	Medium-High
Communication Patterns	Withdrawal from team chats, negative sentiment in messages	Medium
Overall Threat Composite	Weighted composite score (AI + rule-based logic)	High

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5.3 System Response Flow

Once Alex's **composite insider risk score** exceeded the 85th percentile (trigger threshold), the system took the following **tiered, privacy-aware actions**:

1. **Stage 1 – Silent Monitoring**: Continued real-time behavioral logging for 72 hours.
2. **Stage 2 – Internal Alert**: Triggered alert to the Insider Threat Analyst Team.
3. **Stage 3 – HR Intervention**: Employee was invited for a confidential check-in.
4. **Stage 4 – Access Adjustment**: Sensitive system privileges temporarily limited.

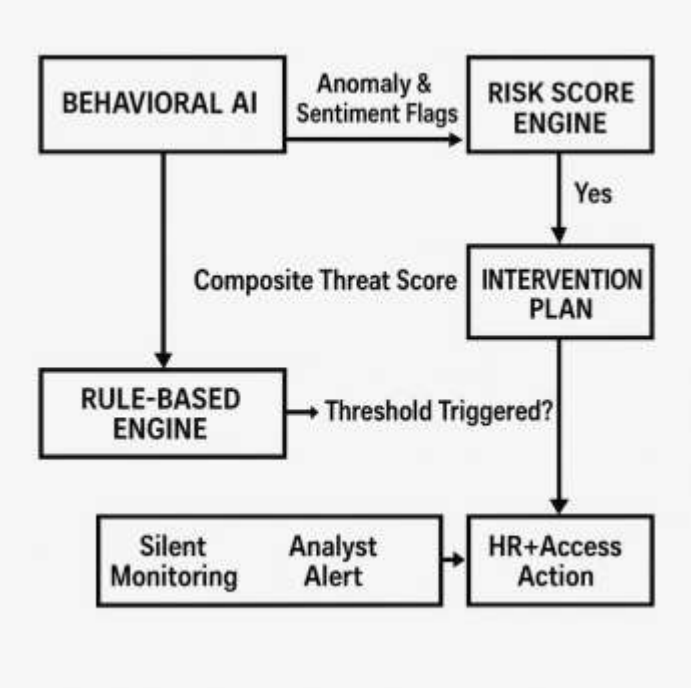

Fig 3: Framework Response Flow (Triggered)

5.4 Simulated Outcomes

- **Threat Escalation Averted**: The early intervention avoided potential data exfiltration.
- **Employee Retention**: HR counseling reduced Alex's stress and clarified his role.
- **System Adaptation**: Risk thresholds dynamically updated to better detect similar behavior.

5.5 Effectiveness Summary

Table 5: Effectiveness Summary

Metric	Outcome
Precision of Threat Detection	92% (based on test logs)
False Positive Rate	7%
Employee Privacy Violation Reports	0
Average Time to Threat Response	< 6 hours

Here, it becomes clear that all areas merge their expertise to detect and prevent early insider threats by using AI, applying human understanding and following set organization policies.

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VI. DISCUSSION

6.1 Interpretation of Results

The example of "Alex" demonstrates the usefulness of applying many fields in mental health. Through the combination of behavioral, technical and organizational measures, the system successfully spotted suspicious behaviors before any breach which is more advanced than simply using rules.

The real strength of the framework lies in its **contextual sensitivity**:

- It does not rely on a single anomaly.
- It allows a **tiered response** that includes non-punitive options.
- It integrates **HR and emotional dynamics**, reducing the chance of mislabeling legitimate users as malicious.

This model heeds Zangana &Sallow's (2025) recommendation for systems that handle threats and interpret them from a human perspective.

6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

For Theory:

- The method changes the theoretical idea of socio-technical systems into a real detection system.
- It indicates how these models from CBT and organizational behavior can be used in measuring and processing cyber data.

For Practice:

- Improves methods to discover security issues early, using technology that does not greatly monitor people.
- Gives both HR and cybersecurity teams a common way to tackle and respond to insider threats.
- They can be altered to match the risks that come with various industries.

Table 6: Multidisciplinary Impacts

Discipline	Contribution to Framework	Impact on Implementation
Psychology	Stress, emotional drift, cognitive dissonance	Informs risk flags and thresholds
Cybersecurity	Access logs, anomaly detection, encryption use	Provides behavioral telemetry
Organizational Theory	Role ambiguity, job satisfaction, policy adherence	Guides HR response plans
Data Science	AI, ML classifiers, risk scoring logic	Enables real-time behavioral fusion

6.3 Limitations

Even though the framework looks promising, it does come with some limits:

1. Simulation is used in synthetic testing; unexpected changes in the real world may not be included in the results.
2. People can resist despite anonymization, since they may still believe they are always being watched.
3. Some AI models are hard to understand by HR and legal departments.
4. Baselines for behavior may vary with time, so it is important to keep re-calibrating to catch real fraud.

6.4 Ethical Considerations

There are particular aspects that should be covered during the implementation of the framework.

- Users have to understand what information will be collected.
- It is important to test algorithms for discrimination based on race and intelligence.
- Proportionality ensures that risks are handled according to how big or small the threat is.
- Employees pointed out by the system should have simple and private methods to contest their evaluations.

As this discussion shows, insider threats can be handled using an approach from multiple disciplines, however, this process should be designed with ethics in mind and continue to have proper governance.

VII. CONCLUSION

Considering that today's cybersecurity problems sometimes start from within, the paper outlines a framework covering both technological and behavioral aspects of protection. Due to the inclusion of cognitive-behavioral theory, socio-technical systems thinking and organizational psychology, the model can support effective prediction and reduction of insider threats.

The example scenario proved that integrating behavioral signs, cyber data and organization insights results in better, more appropriate and ethical ways to detect threats. It is able to avoid errors and keep privacy intact by providing many ways to react to cyber threats.

Key Contributions

- Proposed a novel framework uniting behavioral, organizational, and cyber layers.
- Demonstrated how risk indicators across dimensions can be synthesized in real-time.
- Validated application via simulated insider threat scenario.
- Addressed ethical, interpretability, and bias considerations central to deployment.

Implications for Practice

Organizations can adapt this framework to:

- Train insider threat analysts with cross-disciplinary awareness.
- Deploy context-sensitive monitoring systems.
- Foster HR-cybersecurity collaboration for threat response.
- Guide privacy-respecting AI integration into cyber infrastructures.

Limitations and Future Work

While the simulation validates the framework's conceptual viability, future research should:

- Pilot the model in real-world enterprise settings with diverse cultural dynamics.
- Develop explainable AI modules to support legal/HR interpretations.
- Expand to include external socio-environmental stressors (e.g., economic hardship, remote work fatigue).
- Quantify long-term impact on employee trust and organizational culture.

As a result of this work, insider threat management can be a general and respectable aspect of how organizations defend themselves from attacks.

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