

Member's Quarterly

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Perspective

AI: Can You Trust a Machine with Your Human Resources?

Maximize its benefits



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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reaching into all areas of HR and few of us have been untouched by its invisible hand. As it expands, it is also making many managers nervous. Can we trust AI in the same way that we would a HR expert? The simple answer is no. This doesn't mean that AI cannot assist any manager and HR department with some of their tasks.

The main benefits of AI are in helping us to automate repetitive tasks so that we have more time for our important strategic work. It can help reduce errors since no humans are involved. That also reduces the possibility of introducing our own biases and lets data rather than our personal views drive decision-making.

On the downside, AI costs money, both in software and training to operate and maintain automated systems. The biggest drawback may be that AI cannot translate things like corporate culture and a computer really has no ethics. It only adds and subtracts. Also, AI can only give you back what you put in and make decisions based on the parameters you provide. There's really no value-added.

Let's dig a bit deeper. Here are some pros and cons when it comes to utilizing artificial intelligence in 3 key areas of HR: Staffing, Employee Engagement and Learning and Development.

Staffing

Staffing and recruitment are likely the most popular areas to utilize AI. It helps in sorting, screening and shortlisting qualified applicants for positions. It can also help with searching for specific qualifications or experience, checking social media activity and reference checks once you've made a decision to hire.

Although AI has none of our human bias, it cannot differentiate based on anything related to values or corporate culture. Another possible flaw is that artificial intelligence actually learns from us so it can pick up on our preferences for certain traits and eliminate some good candidates who don't have what it thinks we want.

Employee Engagement

We all want to improve employee engagement. Happier, more involved employees are more loyal and productive. AI can help automate some ways to measure employee satisfaction like surveys and feedback loops. It can even be programmed to give employees a virtual interface in real time where they can ask questions and provide feedback and suggestions to management.

Skeptics of AI believe that using it for employee engagement is over-rated. It may actually hurt employee morale if employees feel that their well-being is being transferred over to a machine. Automated systems may not have enough to deal with individual employees' needs in this area. A "one size fits all" approach using AI may not work. Also, not everyone likes chatbots.

Learning and Staff Development

Developing staff is a major responsibility for both managers and HR. AI can certainly help here. E-learning programs are now available for all aspects of development including onboarding and orientation all the way to career management and leadership training. Training can be done faster, more efficiently and in multiple

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locations. An artificially intelligent tracking system can also monitor progress and help evaluate employee performance with recommendations on training as required.

However, not everyone learns the same way and some employees struggle to learn online. Others miss the personal touch and coaching that comes in real-time learning situations as well as the opportunity to learn with and from others in the same program. There's also a question of employee privacy that gets people nervous about AI in this area. AI is gathering intelligence on employees and on their work habits, preferences and performance.

What's the Bottom Line on AI for HR?

There are definitely some clear advantages. Anything that saves time is a good thing. Keep in mind that it does come with a catch. It is still a machine and no matter how smart they are, computers will never replace people. Think about 'smart' cars. There may eventually be driverless cars on the roads, but they will still need a human to give them directions.

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