

IT'S THE BUZZWORD that is taken over most human resources (HR) conferences. At last year's HR Tech Conference and Expo in Las Vegas, several companies touted the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into their recruiting products. The next conference in September explored AI in the HR landscape through multi-panels, focusing on its role in hiring, eliminating bias, etc. Back home, the 2018 SHRM HR Tech Conference, held in Hyderabad in April, saw key sessions on how AI is driving force in HR functions. Their next conference in Chicago, held in June, had sessions on how to use AI to better understand employees.

AI or the ability of machines to imitate the human mind, is invading the workplace. The aim is to recruit, fill, improve employee engagement, reduce bias and enhance productivity. While the concern of automation taking away jobs continues, what has changed now is the way companies are looking at incorporating AI in day-to-day HR activities. "Firms are looking at replacing manual workers with AI for tasks that are redundant and repetitive. This is done by creating jobs, where people will have to put their cognitive thinking and decision-making skills to use. This will be to shift their focus from tactical work to strategic work," says Arun Pratyap, founder and CEO, EDGE Networks, a Bengaluru-based AI-driven HR technology company. According to a 2017 report published by consulting firm Deloitte, the global Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA), AI is expected to continue as a growing trend in HR activities.

"AI will assist humans who will step in whenever complexity increases," says Anup Vijay, managing director, global research and advisory firm. The report found that 84% of HRPA members believe AI will be a useful tool for human resources and around 34% are already using it in some form to assist with HR workflow in their organisations. "Some of the important roles in talent acquisition, performance management, attrition prediction, identification of unlawful and unethical behaviour of employees, and in their training and development," says Ajay Sharma, a veteran HR professional and founder of Delhi-based Get Me Experts, a company that provides consultants for different organisations on an on-demand basis.

New recruitment manager
Gone are the days when an HR manager browsed through your social media profiles and contacted you. In California-based Panna Technologies (a tech firm) that develops software that searches social media for public posts from specific individuals that meet criteria of interest of hiring managers) has developed a software platform that can search social media background checks, studying a candidate's Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+ profiles. "There is a Param.ai, a Hyderabad-based start-up that uses AI to search and automatically pre-screen resumes for companies and tells them if the candidate is suitable or not, depending on past hiring patterns." Right from sourcing resumes, screening, scheduling meetings and interviews to candidate management, employee development and employee services, AI covers all these areas. Automating the hiring of new users' time can be channelised for more critical tasks," says Hari Krishna, CEO and co-founder, Param.ai.

Organisations are increasingly using AI and systems to build a new recruitment workflow. Recently, Mettl, a Coimbatore-based talent assessment and skill measurement company, launched a personality diagnostic tool called Mettl Personality Inventory (MPI). The tool is designed to be used as a hiring and screening tool to help employers assess candidates to better understand information (such as emotional traits, etc.) about a job applicant through psychometric and aptitude tests. The tool was developed after Mettl conducted a study on the Indian workforce. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), a professional human resources membership association headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, US—where it found that 94% of respon-

MORE "HUMAN" RESOURCES

As artificial intelligence invades the workplace, the bot has also become the new hiring manager. Is this the way companies will hire, manage and train the workforce now?

BOT POINTS

84%

Members of Toronto-based regulatory body Human Resources Professionals Association who believe AI is a useful tool for human resources

33%

Companies globally that are using AI in some form to assist with HR decisions

22%

Companies in India that have leveraged AI to deliver HR solutions

53%

Companies in India that are revamping their HR programmes to deploy digital tools

60%

Jobs in India threatened by automation driven largely by AI

Source: World Bank, Deloitte

dent (hiring managers from across the world) believed that 'data trails' need to be identified at workplaces to avoid distressing incidents.

MPI looks at six traits that could snowball into undesirable behaviours—opportunism, self-obsession, insensitivity, temperamental tendencies, impulsivity and thrill-seeking nature. Explaining the need for such a tool, "Companies that are using COO, Mettl, which it helps organisations identify candidates with dark characteristics that could prodiginate them to engage in counter-productive work behaviour. As a screening tool, it can help an organisation filter out such candidates during the initial stages of recruitment itself," he says.

According to Deloitte's fifth annual *Global Human Capital Trends* report released last year, 39% of surveyed HR teams globally are using some form of AI technology to deliver HR solutions. The India report revealed that over 53% of companies are revamping their HR programmes to deploy digital tools and 22% have already leveraged AI to deliver HR solutions "AI is a boon in the recruitment field. It's still in the nascent stage, but it is a field where risks are less with good return of investment," says Vijay of GetMe.

AI works as a better tool, as it relies more on analytical processing of huge amounts of data instead of individual observations. The initial screening of resumes in an area where AI comes in regularly handy. If recruiters have to read five standard questions to every candidate, it works best to have AI shortlist them by filtering the initial set of predefined questions. It actually saves more than 50% of a recruiter's time," says Parthasarathy NS, executive vice president, a Gurugram-based HR solutions firm.

Many Indian companies, especially large corporates in the technology, banking and IT sectors, have started using AI-based chatbots to screen candidates and manage talent. "This has been used as an AI applications extension in all its verticals, especially HR. AI can help in the initial selection process. It is not about processing large data, but also about finding core areas of application, such as discovering fraudulent resumes," says Parthasarathy NS, executive vice president, a Gurugram-based HR solutions firm. "AI has dramatically changed the way we do things, from selection process and engagement of resumes to answering employee questions in real time," he adds.

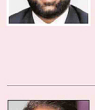
The biggest advantage of technologies like AI... is that these react faster than humans in identifying insights and inferences that might otherwise take plenty of manpower and time or not be identified at all

—ARUN PRATAP, FOUNDER & CEO, EDGE NETWORKS, A BANGALURU-BASED AI-DRIVEN HR TECH SOLUTIONS PROVIDER



AI can play an important role in talent acquisition, performance management, attrition prediction, identification of unlawful and unethical behaviour of employees, and in their training and development.

—AJAY SHARMA, FOUNDER, GET ME EXPERTS, A DELHI-BASED COMPANY THAT PROVIDES CONSULTANTS FOR DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES ON AN ON-DEMAND BASIS



Finding a suitable candidate's profile from a large resume database can be very time-consuming. So we are using an AI-led system that helps in filtering the right profile as per the job description

—HARSHVENDRA SONI, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, TECH MAHINDRA



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—PANKAJ BANSAL, COO & CO-FOUNDER, PEOPLE TREND, A GURUGRAM-BASED HR SOLUTIONS FIRM



ILLUSTRATION: SHRI RAO

and can complete any work-related transaction with ease," says Bansal of PeopleStrong.

Agreeing Parthasarathy of Mindtree: "Our chatbot MACI answers employee queries related to salary, expenses, tax deductions, etc. It also helps in applying for leave and approval," he says.

Experts also say that AI in the future will get mature beyond data analysis. "In fact, each chatbot or robot will have a different level of AI, depending on its interaction with other robots. The level of AI development will soon go out of the hand of man/bots. It may take a few decades, but the day is not very far when AI will not be dependent on human input. Its interaction with the web will give enough input for the machine to decide what data to be used," says Sharma of Get Me Experts.

Most companies, however, like to involve AI only for mundane tasks. In any case, the way the analysis is carried out is very crucial, says experts. "What kind of data to be analysed is also a question. Some companies are trying to fetch data from social media to analyse the behaviour of candidates and linking it to future performance. Apart from the predictive validity of the analysis, this may result in privacy intrusion and other legal issues. So, in my opinion, use AI as a tool for taking decisions rather than 'making decisions'," opines Sharma, adding, "Human touch is important... unexplained over-enthusiasm may result in making the HR process more mechanical in nature... and over-dependence on data will make the workplace very dull."

ALL CROSSROADS

Psychometric analysis has been part of several recruitment drives, especially in the interview process of the Indian Army. An analysis, to a certain extent, has helped recruiters figure out which candidate can survive the rigours of the Indian Army. "The Indian Army has evolved on similar lines, but it is to be used in the interview process of the Indian Army. Getting rid of humans from the equation, however, is of utmost importance. Even though most modern professions can have certain inherent biases that might reflect in their work," says Bansal of PeopleStrong. "Companies that are using COO, Mettl, which these biases and stereotypes in recruitment choices that lead to no return of investment for the organisation. Hence, argue that it's better to use psychometric assessment through AI for initial screening. Some of the key psychological tests would involve on perceptions of different people involved in recruitment. Hence, it is a very important part of bias. Psychometric AI, on the other hand, would run on a single algorithm leading to bias assessments," he says.

Critics, however, argue that bias can creep into an algorithm without the employer's or unknowingly. For instance, if the system has been fed historical data with training bias, it may also pick up bias, creating its own system. "AI systems are only as good as the data we put into them. The better the data, the better the system will get," says Soni.

But some, however, have been optimistic/discriminatory, as historical data can contain implicit racial, gender or ideological bias. "The system will pick up on it, but how they'll use the input data and how they'll craft the underlying algorithms," says Soni of Tech Mahindra.

Some organisations have recognised this problem and are taking corrective measures. "We have tried to get up the steps by making sure that, firstly, our training data is diverse. We also ensure that our development and testing data are diverse. We have people from different backgrounds," says chief people officer Soni.

On the one hand, however, history provides hope. "We have observed in the past that any technology that enhances business performance, eventually, is a rounding noise... the same is true for AI in HR. The classic case of industrial revolution is a good example. It now connects to technological advancement and further ahead in a progressive manner," says Soni.

Parthasarathy of Mindtree believes that it's not a question of AI replacing jobs, but AI and employees together. "AI is a tool that can answer that questions that we as HR have not asked. It has understood, bots can walk hand-in-hand with recruitment managers,