

# Strategic commentary

## Can artificial intelligence make work more human?

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**M**ost of us have interacted with online tools powered by artificial intelligence (AI).

Every time we receive a suggestion about which movie to watch on Netflix or the right product to buy on Amazon, that is AI. When an app such as Waze or Google Maps suggests the fastest way home, that is also AI.

We do not always think about what is powering the daily services that help us with everything from getting from A to B, ordering our groceries or reminding us as we are leaving the house to bring an umbrella, and that is the point. The value of AI, where machines are programmed to automate mundane tasks and augment decision-making, is that it frees up time and allows us to focus on more important matters.

For HR professionals, the combination of eliminating mundane tasks and improving decision-making is incredibly valuable. HR professionals today are under constant pressure to find, hire, develop and retain talent, while balancing ever-changing employee expectations, business demands and regulatory compliance issues. For most, there is barely enough time in the day to complete the basics of their job function – let alone be as personal and strategic in their work as they would like.

AI has the potential to change that and as ironic as it might seem, AI can help HR professionals simplify and humanize the entire candidate and

employee experience by making work more enjoyable, smarter and collaborative.

### Powering recruitment

With the war for talent becoming as fierce as the competition for customers, HR professionals will increasingly need to leverage technologies like AI to identify and attract the right talent.

With AI, recruiting leaders can gain deep insights into talent needs, understand where and how to source the most appropriately skilled candidates, reduce time-consuming activities like manually reviewing resumes, eliminate unconscious bias during candidate screening and ultimately zero in on the right applicant for the role.

AI can also help determine if candidates are a good fit for corporate culture by aggregating and analyzing work samples, social media posts, LinkedIn recommendations and even word choices used across all materials and platforms to understand personality traits. Additionally, AI can help organizations identify traits they are seeking in ideal candidates by analyzing the behaviors and characteristics of existing, high-performing employees.

From a candidate's perspective, AI will help the recruiting experience take on a completely new and more

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personalized feel. According to the Forrester 2018 Predictions Report, by 2020, candidates applying to jobs at the top 20 per cent of large global enterprises will interact with chatbots before they ever speak with a recruiter. These virtual recruiting assistants (think Alexa or Siri) will be powered by natural language processing technology that will instantly engage with applicants, pose contextual questions based on job requirements, and offer personalized updates, feedback and suggestions. This will make the hiring process smoother, more efficient and ultimately much more enjoyable from the candidate's perspective.

### Easing onboarding

AI can also ease the onboarding process for both employers and employees. Imagine walking into an office on your first day and a chatbot presents you with a complete itinerary and personalized list of training designed specifically for your role, background, personality and recommended career development path. Each subsequent class is automatically added to your calendar, which you can view from any connected and authorized device, and over time, since AI learns and adapts, it will sense your preferences and recommend other useful courses.

Furthermore, you will also be given a calendar of meetings to get to know colleagues across the organization in your first few weeks. These meetings have been automatically selected for you based on who your most likely internal stakeholders will be, as well as those who may potentially serve as mentors, collaborators and key stakeholders.

And by the way, if you have any questions, chatbots will be able to provide you with all the new hire information you need, whether it's

where to find an IT support person, how to get a building-access badge, or which employee benefit package you should subscribe to.

Such technology not only makes life easier for new hires, but also benefits the organization by ensuring every employee is set up for maximum success from the outset.

### Improving workplace experience

AI can (and will) also play a central role in managing employee performance and will help make work more fun, fascinating and fulfilling.

According to Gartner, by 2020, 85 per cent of CIOs will be piloting AI. While not all of these programs will be specifically aimed at supporting HR functions, HR professionals will certainly use AI technology to enhance employee experiences. In fact, in a recent study Oracle conducted in partnership with Future Workplace, 79 per cent of HR leaders noted that a failure to adopt AI will have negative consequences on their own careers, colleagues and overall organization.

From a performance standpoint, AI can help managers quickly and easily analyze employee data from multiple sources – proprietary, public and third party – and use it to personalize feedback and guidance. For example, AI can automatically assess how an employee is tracking against various KPIs, how many sales or internal meetings are being taken over a given period, how much training the employee has completed, or a host of other criteria that are relevant performance/success indicators.

At the same time, AI can also review public data that an employee has shared to assess if adjustments need to be made to make the employee's work experience more supportive. For example, after noticing an employee

has carved out time on a calendar to take kids to the school in the morning, AI might suggest their manager offer this individual a more flexible schedule. Similarly, if an employee has recently been promoted, which often inspires recruiters to pursue them, AI might suggest a lineup of incentives and opportunities to keep that employee happy, engaged and feeling excited about their growth trajectory.

AI can also be applied to help HR professionals assess an employee's level of engagement. For example, using future iterations of facial recognition technology, AI will be able to recognize expressions indicating frustration, dissatisfaction or even anger during meetings and alert a manager to a potential problem. Similarly, the system can compare employees' performance and attendance statistics to historical personal data, as well as companywide trends, to identify "at-risk" employees.

The time is now for AI. We are already welcoming it into our personal lives (the same Oracle and Future of Work study found 70 per cent of people are using some form of AI in their personal life) and the potential impact of AI in the workplace is huge. HR professionals have the opportunity to incorporate AI and other emerging technologies in the workplace to enhance the employee experience, thereby leading their organization's digital transformation and making work more human, captivating and inspiring.

### About the author

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