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Tammy Cohen,

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How to leverage artificial intelligence to meet your diversity goals

Tammy Cohen

Abstract

Purpose – *This paper aims to provide insights into how artificial intelligence can be used to eliminate bias in employee screening.*

Design/methodology/approach – *Industry use cases and expert analytics were used in conducting this paper.*

Findings – *Artificial intelligence if used correctly can help to build more diverse and inclusive teams and eliminate bias.*

Originality/value – *This paper shows how leveraging new technologies such as AI can cut down on bias across employee screenings.*

Keywords *Human resource management, Diversity, Talent management, Recruitment, Talent*

Paper type *Viewpoint*

Tammy Cohen is PHR, SHRM-CP Founder and Chief Visionary Officer at the InfoMart, Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

It has become common knowledge in the business world that diversity and inclusion efforts are not just good from an ethical standpoint but from [1] an economic one as well. Companies with diverse staff outperform their more uniform competitors [2] by as much as 35 per cent. When your workforce comes from all walks of life, they bring unique viewpoints and ideas to the table. Unique ideas create unique products and processes, which is always good for business.

However, when it comes to hiring diversely, our own brains are often the enemy. Bias can be insidious and completely unconscious [3]. Studies have shown that we are more likely to be drawn to candidates who look, act, dress or think similarly to ourselves. Although there are steps we can take to overcome this unconscious bias, technology is being developed to create a more balanced hiring process.

Artificial intelligence creates opportunities to make hiring fairer and more equal. Here are some of the latest trends in AI-driven hiring tech.

Eliminating bias from the start

Language within job descriptions can sometimes steer diverse candidates away from a position, even though they are not necessarily unqualified. Gender-coded language, which is language that lends itself toward the ideas and stereotypes surrounding different genders, can subconsciously steer qualified candidates away. For example, a man is less likely to apply for a job ad that describes the ideal candidate as “feisty,” whereas a woman is less likely to apply for a job ad that seeks a “domineering” candidate. When writing job descriptions, the employer may not mean to make these mistakes; everyone, in some ways, uses gender-coded language. That is where artificial intelligence can come into play.

Some AI systems are being used to create inclusive job descriptions and review them for gender-coded language. One such system, Textio, assists employers in a variety of ways. It

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gives their writing a score for inclusivity, uses linguistic data to monitor tone, suggests more effective and inclusive language and integrates with recruiting platforms. With several large corporations embracing this on a company-wide level, it stands to reason that AI-augmented job descriptions are only going to become more common.

Just the fast facts: resume screening

When recruiters are looking for candidates, they can end up discovering a great deal about them. This information may, sometimes, cause them to subconsciously overlook certain candidates because of their name, where they went to school, or resume gaps. Resume screening is also a time-consuming process that takes away from the recruiter's other responsibilities.

Automated artificial intelligence systems can look through resumes faster than a human can and flag the ones that might be of interest. Companies like Ideal use AI that only looks for hard skills and qualifying experience. It determines which candidates will be best suited for the job without once glancing at where they live or determining how old they might be. Another system, Avrio, judges candidates based on their credentials and then gives them a score based on how well they fit the criteria provided.

Going where the talent is

One of the greatest challenges recruiters and employers face when trying to hire is finding diverse candidates. So, instead of ignoring a candidate's identifying information, it searches for it. This aids companies and recruiters when they are actively striving to find diverse talent.

ROIKOL is an artificial intelligence company that helps businesses find diverse candidates through employee referrals. It uses social media to scan employee's networks and see if anyone they know would be a good match for open positions. The more people your employees connect with, the more expansive your potential talent pool becomes.

Interviews with a robot

Interviews have the potential to introduce bias to the hiring process. However, some companies are now conducting preliminary interviews through chatbots.

Chatbots have a couple of advantages: they can interview multiple candidates at once at whatever time they are available, they are quick and they can be used to facilitate the next steps of the process. Although they are not a replacement for in-depth face-to-face conversation, chatbots are one way to streamline the preliminary stages of the interview process. For example, TalkyJobs qualifies potential candidates and flags them for more in-depth interviews. The bot never asks for race, gender or any other information not strictly related to the position. This ensures that candidates make it to the next stage of the process based solely on their credentials.

Chatbots can also be used in recruitment. MeetFrank is an anonymous chatbot that connects talent with companies. Candidates only give their position, skills and information about the type of work they are looking for. MeetFrank then shows their credentials to companies who decide whether they want to pursue them based on skills alone.

AI cannot see color: enhanced video analysis

To reduce unconscious bias and quantify soft skills, some companies are turning to AIs like Knockri to screen and shortlist applicants. Candidates are filmed answering questions given to them by their potential employer. Afterward, the footage is scanned and analyzed by the artificial intelligence to determine the candidate's enthusiasm, empathy, honesty and communication skills. The AI has been specifically programmed to not see race. This helps create a more equitable hiring process while still determining which candidates are the best fit.

There is evidence to suggest that this could be the future of the interview. As candidates can record themselves answering questions, the interview can take place entirely at their earliest convenience. Knockri claims to lead to more diverse hires. Some companies say it has helped them make more quality hires at a faster rate. The AI also has the unintended consequence of[4] creating socioeconomic diversity as well. Larger companies often send recruiters to only the most prestigious universities because of a finite amount of recruiting resources. Owing to the process being streamlined with AI, large companies can now afford to cast a wider net to include less expensive schools.

Things to consider

Artificial intelligence is not without its drawbacks. Amazon recently shut down its AI system for being biased against women. The system reviewed job applications and rated candidates from one to five stars. However, the resume data it was built on came from those already hired at the company – which, at the time, were mostly men. The AI subsequently learned to penalize female applicants.

This demonstrates just how easy it is to be unintentionally biased.

The greatest problem with artificial intelligence, therefore, is still the same core problem: humans can be unreliable and are often bad at spotting subconscious biases. As humans are the ones selecting the data and building these systems, it is very possible that AIs could develop unforeseen and unintended flaws or blind spots. Microsoft is currently developing an AI to check other AIs for potential biases. This, of course, comes with its own set of challenges. It is difficult to build an AI to check for blind spots if its creators themselves are not aware of them already.

There is also a different, though unrelated problem. Although many new AI systems are being developed for a variety of uses, very few people know how to properly use and implement them. This will eventually create an AI skills shortage, where the few people who know how to use these systems will be in very high demand. Some experts predict AI will[5] create 2.3 million jobs by 2020 – but the question remains whether there will be anybody to fill that enormous demand.

There are a variety of causes for the AI skills gap. Some remain unconvinced about artificial intelligence's abilities and future, whereas others think companies will not want to implement new technology because of the amount of time, commitment and money involved. Forbes proposes that most colleges and university programs simply cannot keep up because of the current rapid rate of innovation.

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Some companies, such as Google and Amazon, are investing in educating current employees to effectively use these new systems. Other businesses are following suit. One survey stated that[6] 63 per cent of companies are providing in-house data analytics training. This ultimately lowers cost while reinvesting in and retaining employees. Microsoft is set to begin AI-training programs for business leaders, developers and IT experts in an effort to combat the growing skills shortage.

What the future holds

Technology is not a cure-all for every problem we face. Artificial intelligence is a tool, and like any tool, it can be useful when it is correctly built and applied. Though AIs may have blind spots and unintended flaws, each failure brings about a new lesson that can be learned from in the future. This field of technology is still very new and full of potential; it is expected that there will be bumps in the road.

It may also take some time for universities, companies and the job market to catch up to the current state of tech. Though computers were invented in the 1950s, it took decades for them to hit the mainstream market. However, technology adoption and adaptation tends to speed up as time goes on. The first handheld mobile phone was introduced in 1973[7]; by 2002, more than 60 per cent of Americans own mobile phones. Today, that number is around 95 per cent. AI adoption is going even faster. We already have personal assistants in our phones and houses that can play music, make and check our appointments and call or send messages. Self-driving cars are already in the works.

With each passing day, more and more companies adopt and create new AI systems to make our lives easier and more efficient. The hiring and recruiting systems being created and used today will help great people find jobs where they can excel, no matter who they are or where they come from. If we are strategic going forward, we could create hiring processes that improves not only businesses but people's lives as well.

Notes

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Corresponding author

Tammy Cohen can be contacted at: TammyCohen@infomart-usa.com

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