

How AI is transforming the HR function



Mr Mawande, the CEO of the SABPP mentioned something that hit me hard at the Free State AGM on the 14th of August. In his presentation regarding the “PEOPLE” Factor strategy presentation, he mentioned that instead of competing with the digital era, we should position HR into fitting in the automation era. This made me think about how we can use AI to our advantage, in trying to streamline HR operations with AI, and stop seeing the advancement of technology as a major threat.

We have been hearing about this era for over a couple of years now, how a huge chunk of jobs will be automated by 2030 as well as how South Africans should prepare themselves for this evolution. This whole thing about AI and automation is really a big deal to us young people, some are afraid that AI will dilute the human aspect of HR and that we are going to end up jobless one day.

During our studies, we were thought about about being Proactive and Reactive in HR. Proactive is saying to us, “You are foreseeing a situation and how it is going to result, control it now rather than just responding to it after it has happened”, then reactive is saying, “acting in response to a situation rather than creating or controlling it”. Where am I going with this? I am trying to point out the fact that instead of sitting around and waiting for the robotics era to take over our profession, how about we start being proactive in this whole situation? Let us use this platform revolutionize the HR functions, and HR as a whole.

The role of AI is significant in sorting out objective data and has helped in streamlining many functions of the administrative and talent management process of HR (Shanmugham, 2018). One of the HR primary role is to communicate in order to effectively manage a company workforce, yet it has been evident that communication throughout the workplace is usually a vast challenge for an HR department. PNM, 2019 sated that to drive effective employee efficiencies, employee happiness, reduce costs, and deliver better client or employee experiences, organizations are now adapting Artificial Intelligence and Machine

Learning (ML) as core elements of their digital transformation strategy. So, your answer to the question of whether AI technology will put HR managers and staff to rest, is ***“of course not!”***. One thing we need to understand is that AI is not here to make the HR departments unessential but to assist and modify them for good. Let’s see technology in this perspective: AI-driven tools are helping core HR operations innovate and understand how they are preparing organisations for a hyper-connected future.

Research shows that Industrial psychology and Human resource departments are and will continue benefitting comprehensively from AI supported systems and software throughout their work dominion. It is said that processes such as onboarding, performance review, feedback, training, retention etc. will not only revamp efficiently but will also minimise on a lot of administrative tasks, thereby allowing and giving human resource managers a chance to redirect their thinking into innovative ways to continue improving their departments and give them greater time and energy to focus on mentoring and motivating employees (Bhardwaj, 2019).

The evidence is clear that technology and automation will have a significant impact on a large segment of the work that humans currently perform in HR. Now that we have explored the ways of how AI can be seen an advantage to HR functions, take note that everything boils down to continuous re-skilling of people for the age of automation, because automation is changing the needed workforce skills. Now is the time for HR to act! Few HR departments in organisations do not have a clear understanding of the skills that they have within their organisations and how that compares to the skills that they will need in the future in order to see this whole process

The need to upskill our people arises from the fact that in the near future, we will have intelligent systems that surpass humans in terms of big picture thinking, the execution of spontaneous manual tasks. However, no machine or robot can transcend the human element, the human factor. People with deep interpersonal and technical skills will be needed to work alongside these robotics and intelligent sensors, and the best place to find those people may be within the organization itself, hence we need to strategically navigate our way through this era.

The HR leaders who see people in terms of skills and abilities, instead of job roles, will be in the best position to help determine where and when the business needs the human touch (Zenger, 2018). This is clear indication that AI is set to become a redefining force in HR.

At the end of the day, the human element is the most extraordinary touch!

“It’s not a faith in technology, it’s a faith in people”.

References

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