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Building the future of work together

Artificial Intelligence in recruitment supports the recovery of employment

By Jochem de Boer

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With its White Paper on Artificial Intelligence (AI), the European Commission embraces the potential of AI in the European economy and labour market. Indeed, advances in digitalisation, technology and Artificial Intelligence offer a host of added-value solutions for the employment and recruitment sector. They have the potential to serve applicants, clients and society by enabling better matches and a faster, more efficient process. These improvements will prove essential for the recovery of European labour markets following the drastic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Still, the human touch will remain crucial in the recruitment industry. Leveraging technology in a smart way, allows us to free-up time to focus more on those elements of our work that require human creativity and emotion - traits that technology cannot emulate. The future will be one combining smart tech and human touch.

Technology offers advantages for everyone involved

Repetitive, data-heavy tasks such as gathering CVs and checking candidate profiles against a list of required skills, are ideally suited to automation and can be more effective than manual Boolean keyword searching at matching jobs to candidates and vice versa.

Using technology to screen applicants and draw up a shortlist helps recruitment professionals and accelerates the whole process for candidates and clients. Candidates submitting applications via chatbots report an overwhelmingly positive experience. There is no time-consuming form-filling required and candidates meeting the basic job requirements move straight on to the interview stage and meet with a person. Using technology also avoids the 'black hole' effect where people are left waiting for feedback on the status of their application. The waiting game can make for a bad experience for candidates and leave a negative impression of the hiring company. Technology helps to avoid this by keeping people informed at every stage of the process.

With technology solutions, candidates are also free to apply for work when it suits them. Attending interviews during the day can pose problems for people with standard 9-5 hours, but with chatbots

they can engage on their terms - including in the evening and at weekends. With the ability to undertake multiple interviews at once, AI speeds-up the hiring process, creating a win-win situation for all involved: candidates receive swifter feedback and recruiters and companies can fill positions more quickly.

Technology can also help to mitigate bias in recruiting. As humans, we suffer from unconscious bias and often make decisions based on name, age, nationality, etc. without even realising it. While it is almost impossible to completely eliminate prejudice with humans or machines, computers can be programmed to automatically mask sensitive details, thereby helping to create a more level-playing field.

In sum, digitalisation and technology can benefit talent acquisition in numerous ways. However, they will never be a substitute for humans or for human interaction. Many areas of recruitment will always require a bespoke approach that cannot be automated – such as when seeking a unique set of skills where there is little unemployment.

Trust is key when introducing new technologies

When integrating high tech solutions into service offerings it is important to ensure that proper controls on the collection, storage and use of data are in place. Applicants and clients must be confident that the personal details provided will be used responsibly and in a manner that meets the requirements of relevant legislation.

Different privacy standards are now emerging around the world. The EU enacted far-reaching GDPR legislation in 2018, while in the United States, laws emanating from California and Illinois provide checks and balances to protect data privacy and require notices regarding the use of AI.

Trustworthiness is also a prerequisite for the further uptake of digital technology. The key is to ensure that it is human-centric and the ease with which this can be achieved depends on both the complexity of the technology and how well the user understands it. Rule-based decision making is broadly explainable and so easy to monitor. Challenges can arise with more complex technology approaches such as Deep Learning – a form of AI that leverages neural networks modelled like the human mind and has the ability to learn relationships between multiple data points.

When applied to staffing, more advanced AI can raise issues around transparency in matching – such as favouring one gender over another and demonstrating other similar human biases. Our industry is committed to the ethical and responsible use of AI. We have been cautious and prudent with its application to ensure it serves the best interests of all of our stakeholders and mitigates possible pitfalls associated with the technology.

The Private Employment Services Industry - associated through WEC-Europe - is committed to inclusive and diverse labour markets as well as fighting labour market discrimination, irrespective of the deployment of (AI) technology in its various services such as agency-work, recruitment and career management.

We recognise the Commission's concerns on the application of AI as well as the requirements for addressing those concerns. However, certain proposals such as those to classify all recruitment and workers' rights related AI applications as "high risk" is insufficiently substantiated and specific. As explained in [our response to the Commission's public consultation on the White Paper on AI](#), we need further materialisation and proportionality to tailor a framework that embraces technological opportunities to the benefit of European labour markets.

Digital advances can smooth labour market transitions by supporting our industry in deploying people more quickly and with zero downtime. As such, digitally enhanced labour market matching will prove indispensable for the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and its unprecedented impacts on the European labour market. Yet, new products and services that leverage AI will only be successfully deployed if they are fair and explainable and benefit everyone involved.

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