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De-biased AI-based decision making and employee engagement: Reduced opacity and
increased transparency perspective

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The present study proposes to investigate how artificial intelligence (AI) can be used for effective human resource management (HRM) decision making such that it leads to more positive employee outcomes such as improved engagement, lower intentions to quit, and so on. Both the scholarly literature and anecdotal accounts extol the bright side of AI-HRM decision-making and highlight its dark side in the form of several biases that may reduce the positive outcomes accruing from it. Indeed, recent studies have clearly acknowledged the anticipated gains of implementing AI-HRM in terms of saving time and cost associated with deploying an excessive workforce for many unproductive HR-related tasks (Budhwar et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2021). At the same time, scholars have produced evidence of how to implementing AI-HRM can create scope for biased decision making (Basu et al., 2022). This is largely attributable to the inherently opaque nature of AI algorithms which can create scope for biased inputs and outputs (Rodgers et al., 2022). It is a grave concern, since biased decisions are known to give rise to employee battles and contestation (Tambe et al., 2019), well and truly defeating the very purpose of HRM. The biases associated with AI-HRM decision-making may become even more compounded due to the top management bias arising from factors such as expertise of leadership, attitude towards workplace surveillance, etc. that may impede the adoption of this technology (Basu et al., 2022). Furthermore, there are certain ethical considerations that may be overlooked by AI developers that may produce negative consequences by influencing AI driven HRM practices (Charlwood & Guenole, 2022; Rodgers et al., 2022). AI-HRM technology needs to be given due consideration, given its potential to conserve time and cost resources from an immediate (short-run) perspective and improve employee engagement in the long run (Dutta et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2021).

In this backdrop, the present study processes to examine a model conceptualized to offer **de-biased AI-HRM**, a mechanism anticipated to increase the net positive employee outcomes by reducing the associated biases. Synthesizing the preceding discussion, the present study proposes to address the following research question: How can top-management AI-HRM adoption-related biases and AI-HRM decision-making biases be off-set and traded-off such that a de-biased AI-HRM mechanism supporting positive employee outcomes can be evolved? The study's research question is in concordance with existing calls for empirical investigation of this phenomenon in the extant scholarly literature (Cheng & Hackett, 2021; Langer & König, 2021).

Methodology

The study proposes to use a qualitative research design for data collection. The choice of qualitative approach is grounded in the fact that biases in AI-HRM are an under-explored phenomenon, with an understanding of their various nuances still evolving. For such an emerging and less explored phenomenon, qualitative approach is considered to be an ideal approach to understand and comprehend contemporary work practices and propose solutions to the problems encountered (Conboy et al., 2012). Therefore, this study proposes to use a qualitative inductive research design using Gioia's methodology (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and conducts interviews to analyze the current organizational practices for utilizing AI-HRM and the associated biases.

Findings

This study contends that reducing the opacity of AI-HRM to make it more transparent can potentially reduce the biases associated with the adoption and use of AI-HRM for decision making. Making the system transparent can reduce the inhibitions that the top management has in the adoption of this technology for HRM and improve employee engagement by garnering their trust in AI. However, increase transparency will bring with it the challenge of protecting employees' privacy and data. De-biased AI-HRM mechanism offered as a solution by this study is expected to balance the competing priorities of HR decision-making, guided by ethical guidelines and consideration.

Originality

The present study is the first empirical study that goes beyond the discussion and functional analysis of AI-HRM. It focuses explicitly on de-biased AI-HRM decision making to elevate employee engagement. Hence his study presents a novel framework to elucidate the mechanism for de-biased AI-HRM.

Implications

The framework presented in this study exhibit a road map for prospective exploration and investigation to dig deeper into the extended AI and managerial biases and propose potential strategies to reduce them. The pre-tested framework in this study presents a workflow of de-biased AI-HRM for practical implementation to harness the vantages at its full that this technology brings with itself.

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