

Human Rights and Technology

Australian Human Rights Commission

Sova Assessment – L30, 35 Collins St, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

Response to December 2019 Discussion Paper - 14 April 2020.

Sova Assessment

At Sova Assessment we're proud to be disruptors in the Human Resources (HR) and assessment market. But we're psychologists as well as technologists and we don't do anything that we can't prove works. Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is our enabler, but we don't use technology for technology's sake. And, we can prove the success of our approach:

- Over 85% more precise at identifying high performers
- Helped clients meet 50/50 gender balance
- Reduced assessment completion time from 11 days to 1.5 days
- Increased assessment completion rate by 68%
- Reduced the need for face-to-face assessment by 40%

Success is dependent on the quality of decisions organisations make. We help businesses make better, safer longer-term people decisions that are fair, accurate, objective and transparent and technology enables us to do this.

Technology standards

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is happening and not participating is not a viable option. Australia is dependent on the global economy, so we need to stay competitive and efficient. We concur with the Human Rights Commission that the capacity to innovate is critical for the growth of Australia. Guidelines and clarity on accountability can help ensure a responsible and human-centred approach in the use of technology.

The Human Rights Commission's initiative to formalise industry guidelines for the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the future of work is therefore welcomed. We have already seen headlines where ambition has outstripped expertise and simply served to automate inequality. For example:

REUTERS
BUSINESS NEWS OCTOBER 10, 2018 / 4:12 AM / 7 MONTHS AGO

Amazon scraps secret AI recruiting tool that showed bias against women

TOM SIMONITE BUSINESS 02.06.18 06:21 PM

PHOTO ALGORITHMS ID WHITE MEN FINE—BLACK WOMEN, NOT SO MUCH

Women less likely to be shown ads for high-paid jobs on Google, study shows

Automated testing and analysis of company's advertising system reveals male job seekers are shown far more adverts for high-paying executive jobs

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NewScientist

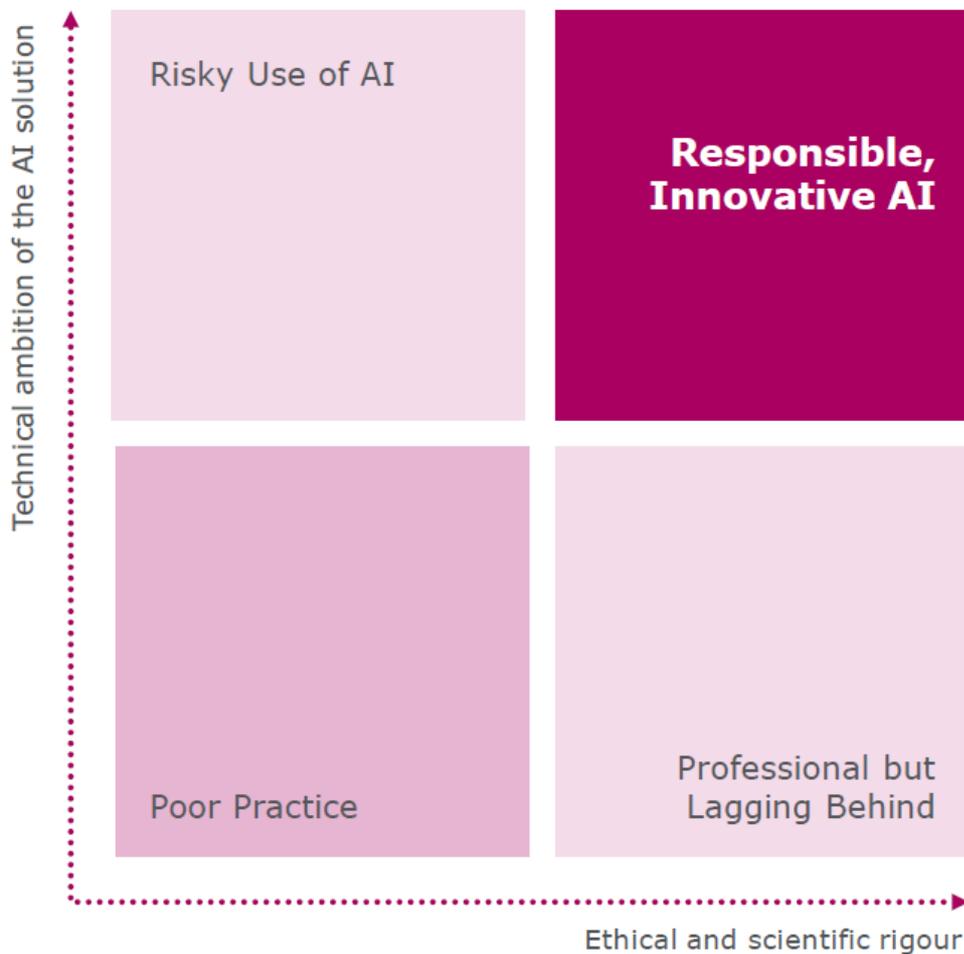
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Lazy coders are training artificial intelligences to be sexist

A collaborative approach to managing risk and seizing opportunity

In 1996 when chess champion Garry Kasparov was first pitched against the IBM super-computer, Deep Blue, he won 13 matches. His tacit knowledge had an edge over pure processing power. Only when another world class chess player taught the algorithm new tactics did Deep Blue defeat Kasparov. Human insight, including the ability to predict an opponent's next move, made Deep Blue more powerful. The same is the case in the world of talent technology; we need psychology, as well as technology and legal guidelines for AI to work at its best.

If you analyse a data set, you'll find some relationships between data points. However, this is not necessarily cause and effect. We must start a question in mind to avoid what could be simply a 'data-fishing expedition'. This is where psychology can add value to the discussion on Human Rights and Technology and help deliver responsible AI in the context of Human Resources and assessment.



The future of work

Whilst data builds a robust picture of the past, human insight is still needed to make a judgement about the future. Think of financial markets where data informs analysts, but forward-thinking human expertise is essential to then predict the future.

The same applies to the future of work in Australia. Automation of jobs means that highly repetitive tasks no longer require a human and can be completed more quickly, efficiently and at a greater scale by robots; for example, automated warehouse picking has been especially advantageous to help stock supermarket sites during the coronavirus pandemic. It is our view that this type of automation does not negate a need or right for humans to work, but rather significantly changes the nature of work for many.

To develop a workforce for the future rather than the past we need both AI and human insight. In some cases, we don't know what organisations will look like in five years' time and the characteristics that predict success now might not drive success in the future. For example, agility, resilience and flexibility may be needed in place of diligence and attention to detail when an organisation goes through change.

AI and the speed of work

The coronavirus pandemic has hit some employment sectors hard, whilst others such as supermarkets, healthcare, policing and call centres are seeing an increase in demand.

The application of technology and artificial intelligence in HR provides speed and scale in identifying, selecting and getting the right workers into these roles, whilst maintaining fairness and diversity in the process. This is critical for organisational effectiveness, and the benefits are clearly evident in the current environment where technology can assist in filling critical roles quickly and getting people into work.

To take one recent example, a supermarket chain received 12,000 applications in one single day yet was able to review and rank every single application, against predictive and objective criteria using technology, thereby giving all applicants a fair opportunity via Sova technology.

The alternative here, would have been to manually review resumés or application forms. The reality is that the resumés may be stack ranked by an Applicant Tracking System – a practice that has been occurring for the last decade without any analysis on the effectiveness of this approach in predicting job performance. Recruiters will then often read enough resumés to interview candidates and fill a role and ignore the rest. In this process, too much emphasis is placed on socio-economic factors, such as an applicant's education and previous work experience. This process hinders social mobility and reinforces existing societal prejudices and discrimination.

Transparency and relevance

Think about how you feel when you receive an unusually big bill, get locked out of an online account, or are held in a call-centre queue. If there is no explanation, transparency or communication, you feel disempowered. This feeling of alienation during a recruitment process, due to a lack of feedback or explanation around selection for example, is bad for candidate experience and also bad for brand.

An organisation must be able to defend and explain any models used for employment decisions, regardless of whether these are based on AI or not. All organisations should also have a process in place to make sure these models remain accurate and relevant over time and AI can assist in this process.

A further consideration for the use of technology in Human Resources and assessment is perceived relevance which, in turn, impacts user perceptions regarding fairness and equity. This relates to the concept known as face validity, which reflects the perceived acceptability of an assessment, i.e. does it look and feel appropriate and fair for the employment setting. - in other words, is it fit for purpose?

Diversity and Inclusion

Creating a process that is, fair, inclusive and free from bias has a high impact on business outcomes. By analysing factors such as performance in role and readiness for promotion, and viewing it alongside demographic data, we can create effective scoring algorithms that maximise positive business outcomes while minimising adverse impact.

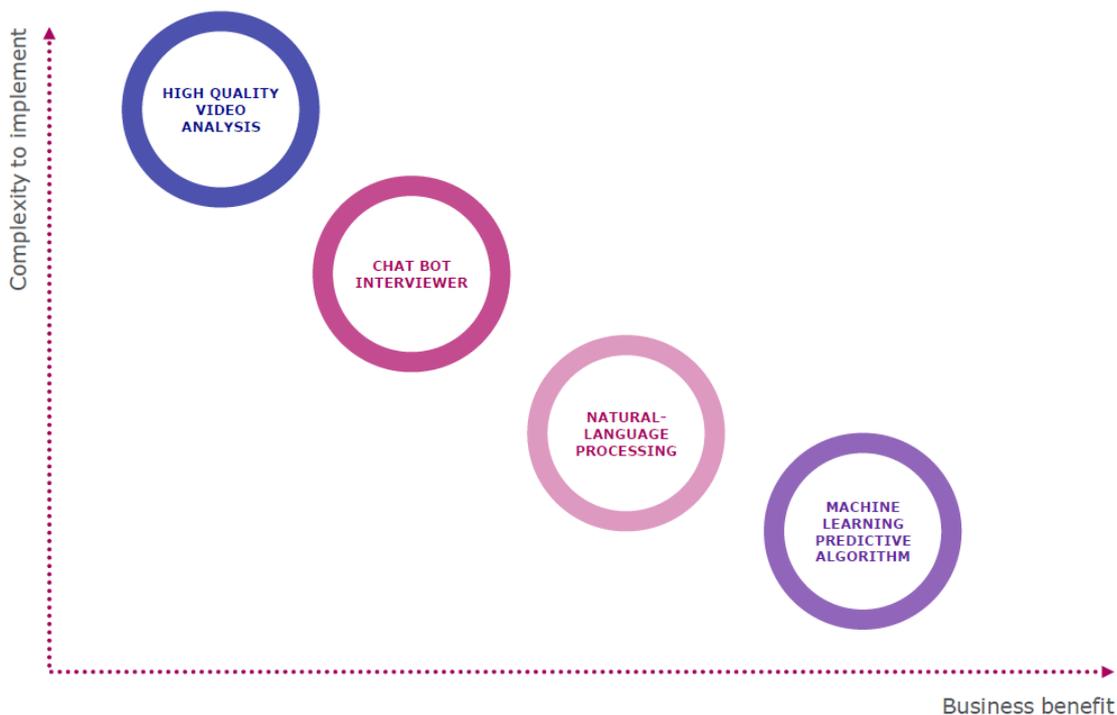
Data gathered about applicants from the first interaction can be used throughout the recruitment process, and later for learning, development and career planning. This type of analysis is possible with traditional methods too, but AI and machine learning make it more accurate and manageable.

There is a broad range of ethical issues associated with the use of AI. One significant risk is that of amplifying adverse impact caused by applying powerful tools to a process that isn't right in the first place. The same principles of fair and objective assessment need to be applied regardless of the tools we use.

Summary on the application of AI for HR and assessment

Machine learning has been trained to mimic what was already wrong with existing human decisions. How can we do better? Success criteria for AI in the context of HR tools and assessment should include whether they:

- Consistently identify high performers and predict future outcomes
- Are fair, inclusive
- Are legally defensible
- Are transparent and acceptable to applicants (including those who are rejected)
- Are future-oriented
- Afford business benefit that outweighs other options



Guardianship of good practice in HR should still sit with the HR function. With the right approach, collaboration and measurement there is huge opportunity.

Additional Resources

[Assessment in the Age of AI Whitepaper](#) – Sovva Assessment

[Assessment in the Age of the Algorithm Webinar](#) – Sovva Assessment