

Monthly Newsletter

November 2023



Dear Reader,

It gives us great pleasure to bring to you the November 2023 edition of the R M Consulting Newsletter that has “**Technology & Society**” as its theme.

The Newsletter focuses on:

- The possibility of Indian companies being willing to undertake a bias audit of their automated employment decision tools (AEDT) in the absence of any legal compulsion to do so,
- The likelihood of greater AI expertise within the government set-up at both federal and state levels leading to better delivery of citizen-centric services, and
- How states stepping up their act on 5G could ensure that the technology can benefit more people.

As always, we would look forward to your comments, feedback, and suggestions on our Newsletter.

Best wishes,

Team R M Consulting

AI-based hiring & bias audit: India Inc's stance merits watch



Synopsis

As several Indian companies attempt to showcase themselves as progressive employers to attract the best talent, the question that remains is how many of these would be willing to undertake a bias audit of their automated employment decision tools (AEDT) in the absence of any legal compulsion to do so.

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The use of automated tools in the hiring process has been a given for some time now, including in India. From simplifying the process of sourcing to handling communications with job aspirants and multiple other functions, automated tools have contributed greatly to making life easier for HR professionals everywhere.

Increasing advancements in artificial intelligence carry the promise of further easing the employee onboarding process for those engaged in talent acquisition. ***Going forward, however, it would be interesting to observe how receptive India Inc is to the idea of having a periodic bias audit done of the algorithmic tools used in the hiring process to ensure that these are fair, are not being discriminatory towards any section or group, and, more importantly, from a company's standpoint, ensuring that an organisation is not losing out on potentially good employees.***

Till date, there is not much information available in the public domain on what the big Indian companies and leading chambers of commerce such as CII, Ficci, and Assocham feel about this issue. Not much has also been heard on this topic from Nasscom that represents the interests of India's software industry, usually perceived as one of the most progressive of employers.

Algorithmic bias has already been flagged by key stakeholders worldwide as one of the biggest challenges that needs to be overcome in the AI sphere to ensure that artificial intelligence benefits all and not a select few.



Addressing the B20 Summit India 2023 that was held in August this year and preceded the September 2023 G20 Leaders' Summit in New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had the following to say regarding algorithmic bias in AI:

"The world is currently brimming with excitement about AI, but within this excitement, there are ethical considerations as well. Concerns are being raised about skilling and re-skilling, algorithmic bias, and the societal impact of AI. We all need to come together to address these issues. Global business communities and governments must collaborate to ensure the expansion of Ethical AI." (<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1952677>)

While, admittedly, there is currently no legal compulsion for Indian companies to undertake a bias audit of automated employment decision tools (AEDT) on the lines of the one in force in New York City (<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dca/downloads/pdf/about/DCWP-AEDT-FAQ.pdf>), it may be noteworthy if some of the more forward-thinking corporate

groups in the country display a willingness to do this voluntarily to showcase their progressive outlook to the top-grade prospective employees that they would like to hire. For, after all, ***not every HR-related step that involves protecting the interests of employees needs to be taken simply to comply with a legal requirement.***

A significant number of leading domestic corporate groups conducting an algorithmic bias audit – with such an exercise monitored at the Board level and through a dedicated Board sub-committee, if so felt – could send out a strong message worldwide of the open-minded approach of Indian organizations. Moreover, it could potentially lead to the development of best practices in this arena tailored to the Indian context.

Now, more than ever before, the quality of the workforce employed can often make that vital difference in the fortunes of companies engaged in the same lines of business and endowed with similar monetary resources. A yearly bias audit of the automated tools used in the recruitment process can ensure organisations do not lose out on any competitive advantage on the people front and one would hope that Indian companies, in the times to come, would, in their own self-interests, evaluate the merits of such a move.



Time for bigger AI talent pool within state governments?



Synopsis

Raising the pool of raising the pool of dedicated AI professionals within the government set-up at both the federal and state levels could ensure that artificial intelligence technologies are leveraged in the most efficient way possible to improve the provision of various citizen-centric services.

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That AI can play a significant role in fast-tracking growth and development and in improving the quality of life of people is beyond dispute.

For a large diverse country like India – home to almost 18 per cent of the global population – with ambitions of emerging as a developed nation by 2047 and committed to the principle of ‘development for all’, smart use of AI technologies can contribute immensely to the shaping of a new Bharat.

Given this backdrop, it may be helpful if authorities could start considering raising the pool of dedicated AI professionals within the government set-up at both the federal and state levels so that artificial intelligence technologies could be leveraged in the most efficient way possible to improve the provision of various citizen-centric services.

Availability of AI experts in sufficient number within the government framework could ensure that technical decisions pertaining to artificial intelligence, including on its responsible use, where and how it can be used, etc., can be taken expeditiously so that the AI-powered rollout of services by various departments and agencies of the government may happen that much quicker.

Having quality AI expertise within the government set-up can also help authorities in deciding on effective safeguards that need to be put in place to ensure that the technology is not misused. Besides, it could prove a big help during discussions related to AI deployment and regulation with companies in the private sector.

At the federal level, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) could take the lead in creating this AI talent pool within the government, in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, etc. A similar arrangement could be followed by state governments, too.

Authorities may also consider roping in outside experts on fixed-term contracts to augment the number of AI professionals within the government. Assessment of the AI manpower requirement at the government level could be undertaken by the NITI Aayog.



To ensure 5G benefits all, states must step up



Synopsis

State governments taking the initiative to facilitate the process of faster 5G rollout in their respective regions can ensure that more people nationwide can leverage the technology to improve their quality of life.

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A year since the launch of 5G services in India on October 1, 2022, there is no denying that while a lot has been achieved since, there remains much that yet remains to be done to ensure that this technological marvel can make a tangible difference in the lives of people everywhere in a country as large and diverse as ours and having multiple unique topographical challenges.

Over the past 12 months, the country's biggest telecom service providers have been busy at work ramping up their 5G infrastructure nationwide. Availability of affordable 5G devices has also increased substantially. These two factors combined have made it possible for many Indian citizens, especially in urban locations, to hop on to the 5G bandwagon to improve their quality of life.

For all these positives, though, as the TRAI Consultation Paper titled “Digital Inclusion in the Era of Emerging Technologies” (https://www.trai.gov.in/sites/default/files/Cons_P_14092023.pdf) released on September 14 has highlighted, there exists a need to find answers to several key questions for ensuring that 5G technology can promote digital inclusion at scale in a country like India, that with its 1.4 billion people, makes up almost

18 percent of the global population. Not least of which being how service providers, keeping commercial viability in mind, would go about the process of deploying 5G networks in remote or rural areas.

While it is expected that the TRAI, once it has gone through the stakeholder consultation process, would thereafter come up with a set of recommendations on how to make 5G deployment more inclusive in India, it would be helpful if, going forward, individual state governments can on their own accord also take the initiative to facilitate the process of faster 5G rollout in their regions. States could, for example, establish dedicated single window cells that 5G service providers could be in touch with for securing the necessary permissions and approvals connected with the 5G rollout. Such single window set-ups could also provide any handholding support that 5G service providers may require, including at the gram panchayat level if so required.

A whole-of-government approach at both the federal and state levels can make a crucial difference in hastening the pace at which the benefits of 5G technology can be made available to all citizens irrespective of their economic and social backgrounds and place of stay. Such a stance could also go a long way in advancing the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* agenda by strengthening each of the five pillars (*infrastructure, technology-driven system, economy, demand, and demography*) on which rests the aspiration of creating a self-reliant India.

In the decades since economic liberalisation, there has been near unanimity that if there is one sector that has come closest to benefitting every Indian citizen it is the telecom sector. Decision-makers at all levels coming together to make 5G a success story in the country could ensure that India's telecom arena continues to be a visible and powerful force for good for all.





India must look beyond legacy educational institutions to establish AI Centres of Excellence

Supporting the establishment of CoEs at newly established facilities, including those set up by the private sector, may ensure that AI emerges as a visible force for good for everyone in the country in keeping with the Sabka Vikas mantra

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<https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/opinion/india-must-look-beyond-legacy-educational-institutions-to-establish-ai-centres-of-excellence-11462411.html>



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