Employee Retention Prediction Using Machine Learning

Discipline: Commerce

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Abstract

Stability of the organisation and cost effectiveness depend on employee retention. Higher attrition rates cause significant financial and operational constraints as well as impede operations. This study looks at a machine learning approach for staff attrition forecasting, therefore providing businesses with useful information for preventative action. Data preprocessing, exploratory data analysis (EDA), and predictive modeling-all part of a methodical approach-are used in the paper.

The dataset consists of necessary educational, professional, and demographic aspects. Managing missing values, encoding categorical variables, normalising numerical features, and correcting class imbalances using the Synthetic Minority Oversampling Technique (SMote) constitute part of the preprocessing processes. The exploratory study shows relationships between traits and target factors, suggesting that workers who put more hours of training are more likely to seek professional adjustments. With an accuracy of 85.97% combined with well-balanced precision and recall metrics, a comparative analysis of machine learning models-more especially, Logistic Regression,

Random Forest, and Support Vector Machine (SVM)—showcases the Random Forest method attaining optimal performance.

The study emphasises how well machine learning can help HR teams carry out targeted retention plans and advance organisational stability. This work improves predictive HR analytics by providing a thorough theoretical and methodological framework to address attrition problems and hence support dynamic workforce management solutions.

Keywords: Employee Attrition, Machine Learning in HR, Predictive Analytics, Employee Retention Strategies, Human Resource Analytics, Random Forest Classification, Workforce Management.

Introduction

Since it directly affects financial performance, productivity, and general workforce morale, employee retention is a top issue for firms (Deloitte, 2023). Regular staff turnover can cause disruptions to business operations and lead to significant training and recruiting expenses. Companies are using machine learning more and more to predict attrition trends and apply data-driven retention techniques in order to meet this difficulty.

This paper presents a predictive model based on past employee data including elements of demographic, work experience, and educational background. HR managers may improve engagement and job happiness by spotting staff members who might be departing and acting early on. Data preparation to manage missing values, categorical encoding, and feature scaling comprise the methodical approach the research uses. Furthermore addressed is class imbalance utilising the Synthetic Minority Oversampling Technique (SMote), therefore guaranteeing a balanced dataset (Chawla et al., 2002).

Several machine learning models—including logistic regression, random forest, and support vector machine (SVM)—are used and compared in order to evaluate predictive performance. With an accuracy of 85.97%, Random Forest shows to be a quite successful technique for attrition prediction among other models. Presenting a complete machine learning strategy and integrating conventional HR practices with advanced predictive analytics, this research helps HR analytics.

Objective

The purpose of the research is to use machine learning models to forecast staff leaving behaviour from their company. This predictive ability enables companies to spot at-risk workers and apply retention plans with efficiency.

Significance

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High personnel turnover causes lower productivity, more expenses, and less organisational stability. Reduced attrition rates and improved personnel management are outcomes of proactive efforts directed by machine learning forecasts. This article offers practical insights for Human Resource (HR) teams to support retention initiatives by means of a thorough dataset and machine learning approaches. To properly forecast attrition probability, the model emphasises on examining important factors such demographics, professional experience, and education degrees.

Literature review

Driven by the desire to reduce turnover costs and preserve organisational stability, employee attrition has long been a key focus of human resource management studies. **Herzberg (1966)** developed the two-factor theory, separating hygienic elements from motivators, therefore stating that varied workplace conditions lead to either job satisfaction or discontent. This helped one to grasp the difference between intrinsic and external attrition causes.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) underlined even more how unmet demands at higher levels—such as esteem and self-actualization—can lead to voluntary turnover, particularly when employees feel little possibility for development. Together with theories of organisational behaviour, this psychological lens has been applied to explain why even top-notchers might depart.

People analytics' increasing impact marked the beginning of HR's shift towards data-driven decision-making. By identifying risk areas before issues get out of hand, **Davenport and Harris (2007)** showed how analytics may revolutionise human capital management. In keeping with this, **Bersin (2013)** underlined how predictive analytics, by spotting trends in employee behaviour, might help to proactively handle attrition.

Random Forest was first presented by **Breiman (2001)** as a machine learning method able to very accurately manage difficult classification tasks. Its use in HR analytics became well-known in research like those by **Gahar et al. (2023)**, who used Random Forest and Gradient Boosting models to forecast employee departures, reporting prediction accuracy of 85%.

Remarkably still a fundamental stage in machine learning pipelines, **Tukey (1977)** promoted the use of exploratory data analysis (EDA) to find latent insights. Using organised data methods, **McKinney (2010)** enhanced this and underlined the need of preprocessing in guaranteeing model dependability.

A synthetic oversampling technique essential for addressing class imbalance-a prevalent problem in attrition datasets where non-leavers greatly outnumber leavers-Chawla et al. (2002) presented SMOTE. Modern HR prediction systems now include this approach to improve the identification of possible resignations.

While **Singh and Kumar (2018)** examined the relationship between training hours and employee happiness, subsequent studies by **PeopleScout (2023)** showed that overtrained individuals may suffer burnout or see skill development as a launchpad for outside prospects. Likewise, **iHire (2023)** found that professionals in metropolitan regions with higher City Development Index (CDI) showed more attrition tendencies, usually resulting from plenty of employment options.

Boudreau and Ramstad (2005) raised concerns about bias in automated HR decision-making. Consequently, techniques such as SHAP (Shapley Additive Explanations) have been proposed to improve interpretability of machine learning predictions in sensitive HR contexts (IBM, 2023).

Additional studies have expanded on the effectiveness of various machine learning techniques. **Cortes and Vapnik (1995)** introduced Support Vector Machines (SVM), which, although powerful in some domains, have shown sensitivity to class imbalance in HR contexts.

Kuhn and Johnson (2013) outlined the benefits of applied predictive modeling in talent management, suggesting that ensemble methods like Gradient Boosting outperform single classifiers in complex HR datasets.

Furthermore, **Blue Colibri (2023)** highlighted that modern employees prioritize flexibility and autonomy, with attrition linked to the absence of hybrid work policies. **CERS (2023)** observed that structured mentorship programs significantly lower attrition rates in entry-level roles.

Bassi and McMurrer (2007) stressed the importance of measuring the ROI on talent initiatives, suggesting that organizations that track performance metrics alongside attrition trends have better long-term outcomes. **Bilgili and Fransen (2019)** emphasized the need for a holistic reintegration framework for return employees, drawing parallels with retention-focused onboarding strategies.

Despite progress in predictive modeling, limited studies address how such models function across diverse organizational structures or industries. Furthermore, there is a gap in understanding how behavioral signals (e.g., email sentiment or collaboration frequency) could complement structured HR data for real-time prediction.

Theoretical Framework

- Theory from organisational behaviour, human resource management, and machine learning is combined in this work.
- Predictive models can include employee happiness (intrinsic factors) and dissatisfaction (extrinsic factors) as features for attrition analysis. Herzberg, 1966.
- Maslow's Hierarchy of Demands: Attrition resulting from unmet job and security demands will line up with training hours and developmental potential (Maslow, 1943).
- Employees are strategic assets needing proactive retention tactics, according to the Resource-Based View (RBV).
- Equity Theory: Employee decisions to stay or go depend on how fair they believe compensation, recognition, and opportunity to be (Adams, 1965.).
- Leveraging historical data for predictive insights, supervised learning methods include logistic regression, random forest, and SVM, which divide personnel into "staying" or "leaving" categories (Breiman, 2001).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines how the theoretical principles are operationalized in the employee retention prediction model.

! Input Variables (Features):

Demographics: Gender, age, and city development index.

Professional Factors: Experience, training hours, and current job role.

Educational Background: Degree level and field of study.

Organizational Factors: Work environment, growth opportunities, and engagement levels.

Data Processing:

Handling Missing Values: Ensuring completeness of the dataset by imputing missing demographic and professional attributes.

Encoding Categorical Data: Converting qualitative variables (e.g., gender, job roles) into numerical representations using one-hot or ordinal encoding.

Scaling and Normalization: Standardizing features like training hours to ensure consistency and prevent bias during model training.

Predictive Modeling:

Model Selection: Logistic Regression for baseline performance, Random Forest for robust predictions, and SVM for comparative analysis.

Training and Testing: Splitting the data (80% training, 20% testing) to evaluate the model's generalizability.

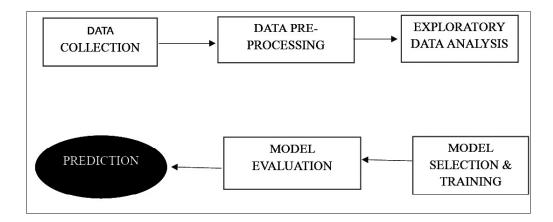
Evaluation Metrics: Accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score to assess model effectiveness.

Output:

Attrition Risk Prediction: Classification of employees into two categories:

Likely to leave.

Likely to stay.



Review

1. Insightful Dataset

Target = 0; the dataset shows a notable class imbalance: more employees not looking for a career change than those actively searching for one.

Training hours became clear as a key determinant; employees who log more hours are more likely to be looking for fresh prospects. This implies that workers who make investments in skill development either are getting ready for outside prospects or are looking for internal job progress.

Work experience reveals a mixed effect on attrition; mid-career professionals show more inclination to depart than early-career workers or long-tenured staff.

Workers in developed cities with more access to job prospects show a higher attrition rate than those in less developed places.

2. Comparing Model Performance

The most successful model for estimating attrition was Random Forest, which showed balanced precision and recall and 85.97% accuracy.

Though it battled to capture nonlinear correlations in the data, logistic regression offered baseline accuracy.

Underperformed with an accuracy of only 53.29%, Support Vector Machine (SVM) most likely suffered from its sensitivity to class imbalance and incapacity to generalise for this dataset.

3. Analyse feature importance

Top Attrition Predictors:

Training Hours: Attrition shows a strong positive link since workers who spend more in training often look at outside employment prospects.

Employees from highly developed areas showed more turnover because of more employment opportunities according to the City Development Index.

Work Experience: Compared to early-careers, mid-level professionals were more likely to depart.

Education Level: Although more educated workers showed higher attrition in some circumstances, presumably due to outside market demand, education had a mixed effect on attrition overall.

4. Influence on HR decision-making

Early Detection of At-Risk Employees: HR departments can act early and apply customised retention plans by using predictive insights.

Redining learning programs to fit long-term career development within the company is suggested by the great association between training hours and attrition.

Targeted Incentive Strategies: Better employment possibilities make employees from highly developed cities more prone to leave. Offering competitive pay, remote work options, and career growth incentives helps companies offset this.

Knowing important variables helps companies to use tailored retention plans instead of general ones.

5. Commercial Consequences

Reducing attrition lowers hiring, onboarding, and training expenses, therefore improving financial efficiency.

A well-crafted attrition prediction system helps to improve workforce stability and lessens the disruptive effect of significant staff turnover.

Data-driven HR strategies help companies to keep top people and support long-term expansion.

Methodology

Data Collection:

The dataset is sourced from the Boston Institute of Analytics.

The target variable is defined as 0 (Not looking for a job change) and 1 (Looking for a job change).

Key features include demographics (gender, city index), professional factors (work experience, training hours), and education (degree level).

Data Preprocessing:

Handling missing values through appropriate imputation techniques.

Encoding categorical variables using label encoding and one-hot encoding.

Scaling numerical features to maintain consistency.

Addressing class imbalance using SMOTE to ensure fair model training.

Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA):

Heatmaps to analyze correlation between variables.

Boxplots to visualize relationships between training hours and attrition.

Distribution analysis to understand the data characteristics.

Model Selection & Training:

Models implemented: Logistic Regression, Random Forest, and SVM.

Training-test split: 80% training, 20% testing.

Hyperparameter tuning to optimize performance.

Model Evaluation:

Comparing model performance based on accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score.

Confusion matrix analysis to identify false positives and false negatives.

Feature importance analysis to determine key attrition drivers.

Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of the machine learning framework focuses on evaluating the dataset, model performance, and insights drawn from the results. These interpretations provide a clear understanding of the key factors influencing employee attrition and the effectiveness of the predictive models.

1. Dataset Analysis

Target Variable Distribution:

The dataset exhibited an imbalanced class distribution, with more employees not seeking job changes (0) compared to those actively looking for new opportunities (1). This imbalance necessitated the use of SMOTE to ensure the model was trained effectively.

Key Predictors Identified:

Employees with higher training hours were more likely to consider job changes, possibly indicating a correlation between skill development and market readiness.

City development index and experience levels showed strong correlations with the likelihood of attrition.

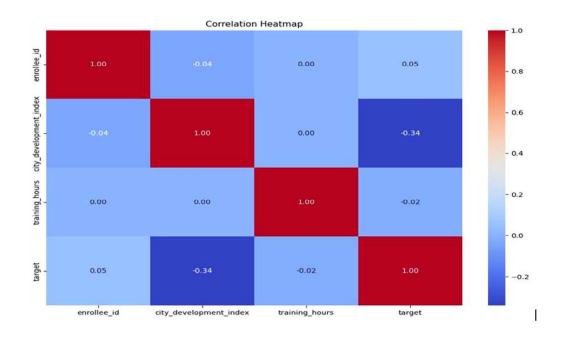
2. Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA)

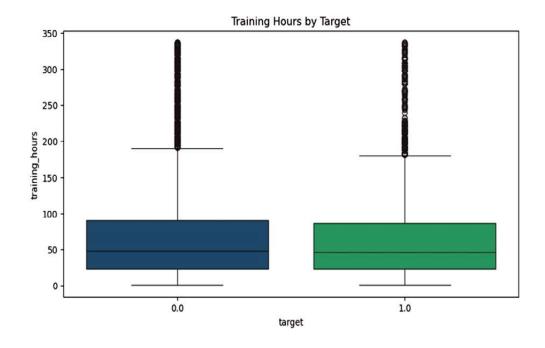
Correlation Heatmap:

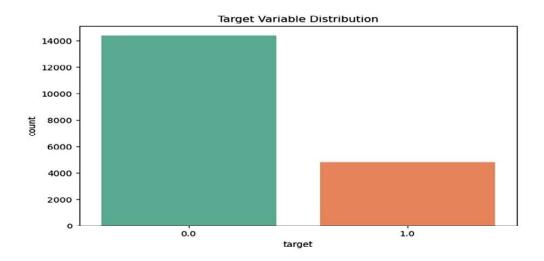
Highlighted significant relationships among numerical features. For example, employees from well-developed cities (higher city development index) demonstrated higher attrition tendencies.

Boxplots and Feature Distributions:

Visualizations revealed differences in training hours between employees likely to leave and those likely to stay, indicating a predictive trend.







3. Model Evaluation and Performance

Logistic Regression (Baseline):

As a simple model, it provided moderate accuracy but struggled with class imbalance, emphasizing the need for more robust algorithms.

Random Forest (Primary Model):

Achieved an accuracy of 85.97%, with balanced precision and recall.

Demonstrated resilience to class imbalances, producing reliable predictions.

Confusion matrix insights indicated high true positive rates (correctly identifying employees likely to leave) with minimal false positives.

Support Vector Machine (SVM):

Performed poorly, with an accuracy of only 53.29%. The model's sensitivity to class imbalance led to unreliable predictions and high false-positive rates.

4. Comparative Analysis

Random Forest vs. SVM:

Random Forest significantly outperformed SVM in handling imbalanced data and predicting at-risk employees. Its ensemble nature and ability to capture complex patterns contributed to its superior performance.

Interpretation of Metrics:

Precision (86%): Demonstrates the model's ability to correctly identify employees at risk without overpredicting.

Recall (86%): Reflects the effectiveness in capturing most employees likely to leave.

F1-Score (86%): Indicates a strong balance between precision and recall.

5. Insights and Interpretations

Predictive Patterns:

Employees with substantial training hours, located in developed cities, and possessing higher experience levels were more likely to consider job changes. This suggests that skill-building and urban opportunities drive attrition tendencies.

Findings

This paper reveals some important results about employee attrition prediction and the efficiency of machine learning methods in offering practical insights. Key results arranged below fall under data insights, model performance, and pragmatic consequences:

1. Insightful Data

Unbalanced Target Distribution: The dataset showed a notable class imbalance; most employees (0) did not seek job transfers. This mismatch made sophisticated methods like SMote necessary to guarantee unbiased and balanced model training.

Important Attiter Predictors:

Higher training hour employees were more likely to contemplate career changes, suggesting a relationship between skill development and market ready state.

Employees from metropolitan regions with higher development indices have more attrition tendencies because of more opportunities.

Experience Level: Driven by often unmet expectations for career advancement, experienced workers indicated a higher likelihood of departing.

2. Performance of Models Results

Though basic and understandable, logistic regression struggled with the class imbalance and failed to identify complicated associations, therefore generating modest predictive power.

Random Forest, the main model:

High accuracy of 85.97% helped one to surpass other models.

Consistent performance across all classes shown by balanced precision and recall makes this a trustworthy instrument for employee attrition prediction.

Confusion Matrix Insights: Minimised false forecasts by precisely identifying most at-risk workers.

Underperformed greatly, with just 53.29% accuracy, poor handling of the imbalanced dataset and numerous false positives.

3. Useful Real-world Understanding

Personalised retention techniques including career development plans and competitive chances can help employees displaying symptoms of attrition—that is, high training hours, urban residence, high degrees of experience—targeted.

Insights help HR teams to proactively manage discontent and stop attrition, therefore lowering the training and recruiting expenses.

The strong performance of the Random Forest model emphasises the possibilities of machine learning in turning conventional HR processes into predictive, data-driven systems.

Predictive analytics helps companies to go from reactive responses to proactive interventions, thereby improving workforce stability.

4. More general ramifications

Effective methods such as SMote can greatly increase the dependability of forecasts in datasets having uneven target distributions.

Finding important factors affecting attrition helps to develop targeted retention strategies that complement organisational objectives.

Random Forest and other ensemble models show better at capturing intricate patterns and handling issues presented by actual HR datasets.

Conclusion

These results show how well machine learning forecasts employee turnover and offers HR departments practical information to improve staff retention. Organisations can get better workforce stability and lower attrition-related costs by spotting important predictors and applying focused actions. This paper emphasises how transforming predictive analytics is for contemporary HR management.

Increased training hours and inhabitants in highly developed cities exhibited a greater propensity to change work, so confirming the correlation between professional development efforts and attrition.

Despite Random Forest yielding the most favourable outcomes, the presence of false positives and false negatives indicates potential avenues for model enhancement through the incorporation of more features or the application of more advanced methodologies such as Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM).

Employees who invest in skill development are more inclined to depart. The data study indicated a positive correlation between training hours and job switching, implying that employees enhancing their abilities may be preparing for new opportunities.

Individuals from highly developed urban areas tend to relocate more frequently due to superior career prospects and greater job availability.

Mid-Level Professionals Exhibit Higher Resignation Rates: Employees with middling experience, specifically between five and 10 years, demonstrate increased turnover, suggesting a pursuit of leadership roles or enhanced compensation.

With an accuracy among the tested models, Random Forest exceeded Logistic Regression and Support Vector Machine (SVM) at 85.97%.

Employee turnover is mostly determined by training hours, city development index, work experience, and degree of education.

The dataset showed a notable imbalance that was practically resolved by SMote, so guaranteeing improved classification outcomes.

Recommendations

Concerning Organisations:

Methods for Engaging Employee Retention:

- Early identification of high-risk workers is possible, according to model estimates; hence, launch activities for career development to keep them.
- To lower volunteer turnover, change pay systems and improve chances for promotion.
- Regular staff member surveys help to find and address issues before possible resignations. Improving Development Projects and Education:
- Encourage career-oriented training so that staff members find paths.
- Plan mentoring programs to improve job satisfaction by means of skill development support.

Modifications in Compensation and Perquisites:

- Match market trends with bonuses motivated by performance and pay increases driven by competitiveness.
- Provide flexible plans to help to restore work-life balance and lower the reasons behind job change.

About management and human resources:

Data-driven decision-making:

- With predictive analytics, consistently evaluate attrition risks.
- Create unique retention policies grounded in data analysis.

Policies regarding focused retention:

- Retention plans should mostly target workers in mid-career most likely to leave.
- Encourage more internal job mobility to support professional development within the company.

Regarding next research and development:

Enhanced predictive models:

- Investigate sophisticated machine learning models including XGBoost, gradient boosting machines (GBM), and deep learning networks to improve accuracy still more.
- Into your prediction models, include sentiment analysis and employee engagement measures.

Studies targeted at a sector:

Research manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology to create industry-specific attrition models.

Real-time attrition monitoring is to create real-time prediction dashboards that help HR divisions make quick, fact-based workforce management choices. for advancement inside the company.

Benefits

1. Uses for Organizations

Proactive Employee Retention Strategies:

Organizations can use predictive models to flag employees who are likely to leave and proactively address their concerns.

For example:Offering growth opportunities, such as internal promotions or lateral role shifts.

Conducting regular one-on-one meetings to understand employee concerns and deploying targeted engagement initiatives for high-risk employees.

Cost Reduction:

High attrition rates lead to financial strain due to recruitment and training costs.

Predictive analytics helps in:

- Reducing turnover by identifying at-risk employees early.
- Allocating resources to retain skilled employees instead of spending on external hiring processes.

Workforce Planning:

- Predictions about attrition allow HR teams to:
- Prepare for potential workforce gaps.
- Develop succession planning for critical roles.
- Ensure smooth transitions by training existing employees for future roles.

Improved Decision-Making:

Data-driven insights empower HR teams to:

- Create evidence-based retention strategies.
- Adjust policies like flexible work arrangements or compensation packages.
- Focus investments on initiatives with the highest impact on employee retention.

2. Benefits for Employees

Enhanced Career Development:

Employees identified as at-risk can benefit from personalized development plans, such as:

Upskilling through tailored training programs, Mentorship opportunities to align career goals with organizational objectives, Job Satisfaction.

By addressing dissatisfaction drivers (e.g., limited growth, poor management), organizations can create:

• A more fulfilling work environment.

- Better recognition and rewards systems.
- Work-Life Balance Improvements

Predictive analytics can reveal systemic issues like overwork or underutilization, prompting:

Adjustments in workload distribution, Flexible scheduling or remote work options for better employee well-being.

Suggestions for Further Studies

- Future studies could integrate additional features, such as:
- 1. Employee Feedback Data, Analyzing sentiment from surveys, exit interviews, or performance reviews.
- 2. Team Dynamics: Evaluating team performance and collaboration metrics.
- 3. External Factors: Including economic indicators or industry-specific trends.
- Real-Time Predictive Analytics: Developing systems that monitor real-time employee behavior for attrition indicators, such as:
- 1. Declining productivity or engagement scores.
- 2. Sudden increases in leave days or unexplained absences.

Industry-Specific Models: Tailoring models to specific industries, such as:

- 1. IT Sector: Focusing on project deadlines, certifications, and global opportunities.
- 2. Healthcare: Considering burnout, workload, and work-life balance.
- 3. Manufacturing: Evaluating physical labor demands and safety concerns.
- Incorporating Psychometric Data: Adding psychometric assessments to understand employee personality traits, preferences, and compatibility with organizational culture.
- Comparative Algorithm Studies: Evaluating the performance of advanced algorithms, such as: Gradient Boosting Machines (e.g., XGBoost, LightGBM) for enhanced predictive accuracy.
- Deep Learning models for detecting intricate patterns in large datasets.
- Cultural and Regional Variations: Studying the influence of cultural and regional factors by:

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- Incorporating variables like local work ethics, cultural norms, and regional job market trends.
- Building models that reflect diverse employee populations globally.

Ethical Considerations: Ensuring employee privacy and ethical use of data:

- Adopting transparent data collection practices.
- Educating employees about the purpose and benefits of predictive analytics: Avoiding bias or discrimination in predictive outcomes.

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