Chapter 2

Employee Engagement in the New Normal: Artificial Intelligence as a Buzzword or a Game Changer?

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Abstract

Introduction: The Covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the organisations in the form of increased job demands which manifested through increased workload, time pressure, etc. Similarly, stress and burnout engulfed the employees. Remote work became the new normal post-pandemic. Remote workers require more engagement. This has brought Artificial Intelligence (AI) to the forefront for engaging employees in the new normal.

Purpose: With limited studies on AI-enabled employee engagement in the new normal, this study investigates and proposes a conceptual framework of employee engagement in the context of AI and its impact on organisations.

Methodology: A systematic review and meta-synthesis method is undertaken. A systematic literature review assisted in critically analysing, synthesising, and mapping the extant literature by identifying the broad themes.

Findings: Since many organisations are turning to remote work post-pandemic and remote work requires more engagement, organisations are investing in AI to boost employee engagement in the new normal. Several antecedents of employee engagement such as quality of work life, diversity and inclusion, and communication are facilitated by AI. AI helps enhance the quality of work life by playing a major role in providing fair compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, immediate opportunity to use

and develop human capacities, continued growth and security, work and total life space, and social relevance of work life. This has led to positive organisational outcomes like increased productivity, employee well-being, and decreased attrition rate. Furthermore, AI helps in measuring employee engagement. The various tools of AI, such as wearable technology, digital biomarker, neural network, data mining, data analytics, machine learning (ML), natural language processing (NLP), etc., have gone a long way in engaging employees in the new normal.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; employee engagement; human resource management; Covid-19; AI and HRM.

Introduction

According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement is

> the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's pre-ferred self in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional), and active role performance.

Employee engagement has become a burning topic post-Covid-19 pandemic as organisations undergo structural changes. Post-pandemic, work from home or remote work is the new normal. Employee engagement in the new normal primarily depends on online interactions, personalisation, and sophisticated systems that can study and gauge employee behaviour and related metrics (Lipson, 2020). According to a survey conducted by Mckinsey, as the employees are returning to in-person work after working remotely for more than a year, half of the employees revealed that they would not get back to jobs that will not allow remote work (Williams, Rachel, & Boginsky, 2021). The pandemic brought a new set of challenges not only for the workforce but also for the businesses. One of the biggest challenges for the business/enterprise was keeping the remote multilocational and multigenerational workforce engaged. While initially, what seemed like a temporary arrangement of work from home for a few weeks, turned out to be a long-term 'new normal or business as usual', requiring the organisations to re-tool at a rapid pace. Therefore, the re-tooling was to enable the employee to work from anywhere and ensure that the employees' well-being was not compromised. After the pandemic, most big organisations will adopt a hybrid model, a combination of onsite work and remote work. In a survey conducted by Mckinsey & Company, pre-Covid-19, 62% of workers indicated their preference to work onsite and post-Covid, only 37% of workers indicated their preference to work on-site (Alexander, Mysore, Smet, Langstaff, & Ravid, 2021). Post-pandemic, more than half of the workers preferred a hybrid virtual-working model (refer Fig. 2.1a and 2.1b).
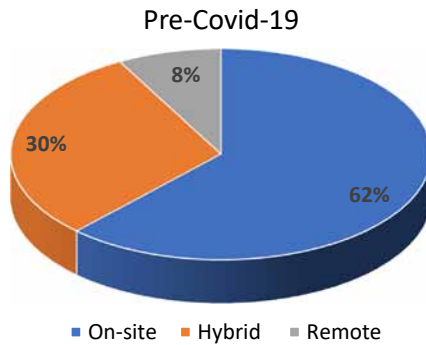
Pre-Covid-19

Fig. 2.1a.   Working Mode Pre-Covid-19. *Source*: Adapted from Mckinsey & Company (2021).
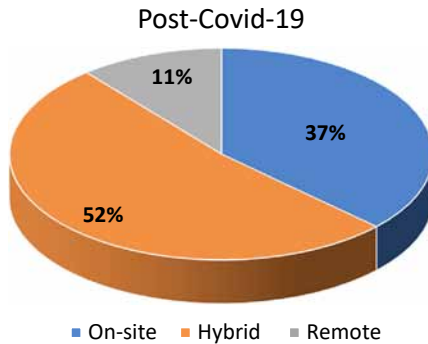
Post-Covid-19

Fig. 2.1b.   Desired Working Mode Post-Covid-19, % Survey Participants. *Source*: Adapted from Mckinsey & Company (2021).

While on the onset, it may seem that a hybrid working model where an employee who has been empowered to work from home has the most congenial environment to function from, the researchers have shown otherwise (Vermes, 2020). The hybrid model will require creating a work culture that leads to stability, social cohesion, and belongingness in remote and in-person work. Thus, mishandling the transition from onsite to remote work will likely reinforce social inequalities and put the organisation's diversity, equity, and inclusion at stake (Williams et al., 2021). The pandemic has led to personal and career upheaval, adversely affecting employee engagement. The pandemic induced heavy job demands on the employees. Studies indicate that employees working in the diversified sector were gripped by stress. Be it social workers (Holmes, Rentrope, Korsch-Williams, & King, 2021), healthcare workers (Prasad et al., 2021), or hotel employees (Wong, Kim, Kim, & Han, 2021). This stress, in turn, adversely impacted employee happiness (Pradhan, Jandu, Panda, Hati, & Mallick, 2021). Besides, the pandemic led to the social isolation of employees. Studies also reveal workplace isolation as a

repercussion of working from home during the pandemic (Toscano & Zappalà, 2020). Social isolation is negatively associated with work from home productivity and work from home engagement (Galanti, Guidetti, Mazzei, Zappalà, & Toscano, 2021). This, in turn, triggers stress associated with remote work pending work completion (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015). The other issue was that employees confronted employee turnover (Mer & Virdi, 2021). The spike in attrition and disengagement is imminent (Lund, Madgavkar, Manyika, & Smit, 2020). Mckinsey & Company's survey reveals how grave the employee attrition issue is: the attrition is happening and is likely to persist in future. The survey revealed that employees are willing to quit even without a job lined up. As shown in Fig. 2.2, 36% of the employees surveyed revealed that they had quit the job in the past six months without having a new job in hand (Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Schaninger, 2021).

In the same line, the survey also revealed that 64% of employees were somewhat likely to quit the job in the coming three to six months (refer Fig. 2.3).

Employee engagement comes as a solution to all these issues as employee engagement decreases the intention to quit the organisation (Mer, Virdi, & Sengupta, 2022) and enhances productivity (Hanshaya, 2016). Employee engagement mitigates burnout (Hussein, 2018). Remote workers require more engagement (Castrillon, 2021). Keeping the employee engaged within the organisation involves understanding what motivates them and keeps them going within the system. Here, AI kicked into high gear with a wider presence in engaging employees in the new normal. Thus, with limited studies on artificial-enabled employee engagement in the new normal, the objectives of the study are:

i.   To investigate the role of AI in engaging employees in the new normal.
ii. To study the drivers of employee engagement and the role of AI in facilitating these drivers in the new normal.
iii. To propose a conceptual framework of employee engagement in the context of AI and its impact on organisations in the new normal.

Share of respondents, %
Employees who have recently quit (n=845)

36%

64%

■ Had another offer   ■ Did not have another offer

Fig. 2.2.   Attrition May Accelerate as People Are Willing to Quit Without Another Job. *Source*: Adapted from Mickency & Company (2021).

Employees who are at least 'somewhat likely' to quit
in next 3-6 months (n=1,960)

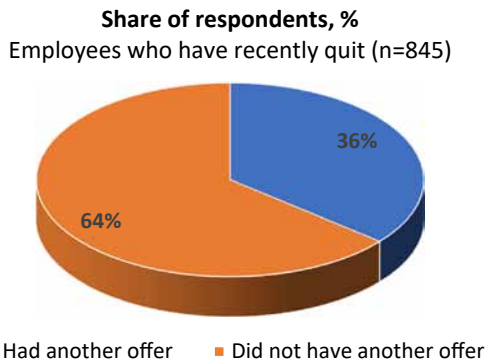- Would leave without a job in hand
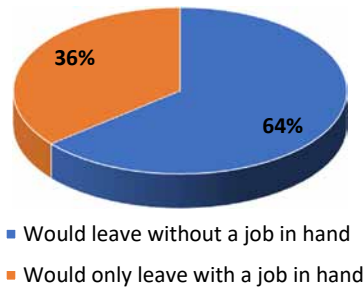- Would only leave with a job in hand

Fig. 2.3.   Attrition May Accelerate as People Are Willing to Quit Without Another Job. *Source*: Adapted from Mckinsey & Company (2021).

The Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework of the study is Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation. According to Kahn, employees are engaged on the job when they fully engross themselves in their job performance physically, cognitively, and emotionally. When employees fail to use their physical, cognitive, and emotional energy while performing their job, they feel disengaged (Kahn, 1990). On the contrary, employees feel disengaged on account of personal self-disconnection from the work roles. Thus, as per Kahn, the three primary factors that are instrumental in engaging the employees are: (i) psychological meaningfulness, that is, 'sense of return on investments of self in role performance'; (ii) psychological safety, that is, 'feeling that one can show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career'; and (iii) psychological availability, that is, 'the sense of possessing the physical, emotional, or psychological resources necessary for investing self in role performances'.

Research Methodology

This study employed a literature review approach, document analysis, and conceptual analysis of secondary data sources, encompassing various journals, reports, magazines, and newspaper articles. The secondary data was sourced from *McKinsey Quarterly*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Forbes Magazine*. A systematic literature review and meta-synthesis method was adhered. Meta-synthesis is a non-statistical literature review technique that combines, assesses, and explains the findings of various qualitative research studies. It is an inductive approach.

A comprehensive literature search was conducted to identify systematic review papers for the current study. A systematic approach was followed because it adds value to the overall quality of the review by employing a transparent and easily reproduced procedure (Tranfield et al., 2003). Thus, in this context, a systematic literature review methodology assists in critically analysing, synthesising, and

mapping the extant literature by identifying the broad themes involved. Precisely, all research papers published till (June 2022) indexed in (ABDC) journal quality list (by Australian Business Deans Council), Scopus, and Web of Science were searched for systematic review papers (Mura & Sharif, 2017). ABDC list was chosen because it is far more comprehensive as compared to other journal ranking lists like the social sciences citation index (SSCI) and association of Business Schools (ABS) (Mura & Sharif, 2015). Even the reports, magazines, and newspaper articles published till January 2022 were considered for the study.

A protocol was made to document the analysis method and inclusion criteria in advance. The authors included those studies that overlap with AI and human resource management (HRM) in the new normal. In the second method, the authors followed the systematic review carried out by Hewett et al. (2018); two significant databases, EBSCO and Science Direct, were used. These two databases were used as the studies associated with technological advancements in AI and HRM are usually published in journals covered by EBSCO and Science Direct. The data have been traced from publishers and online libraries, including Emerald, Sage, Elsevier, Wiley, Taylor & Francis, and Springer. The term 'systematic' was not taken as a search keyword to avoid missing systematic reviews that did not use the word 'systematic' in their titles, abstracts, or keywords. The last search was conducted in the second week of June 2022.

The researchers exported the title, abstract, keywords, name of the authors, affiliations, name of the journal, and publication year to an MS Excel spreadsheet. The academic articles published in renowned journals in the area of HRM and AI were referred (Cooke, Wood, Wang, & Veen, 2019).

To search pertinent articles, the authors used relevant keywords. For this, the authors conducted an initial scoping search of pertinent articles to identify various trends in keyword usage. This led to the identification of various keywords concerning AI. Furthermore, using standard Boolean operators facilitated the creation of a single search algorithm (Pisani et al., 2017). Therefore, these keywords were combined with the Boolean operator 'OR' for finding pertinent articles in top-notch HRM, international business, general management, and information management journals. Both the authors independently screened the titles, abstracts, and papers to include all types of papers ranging from empirical to conceptual were reviewed (Leonidou, Christofi, Vrontis, & Thrassou, 2020). In this process, the authors involved all review papers displayed that the methods used to identify and select the literature were explicit, reproducible, and without a priori assumptions on the importance of the literature selected (Booth, 2016; Piclerind & Bryne, 2014). The research was limited to full length, peer-reviewed publications (Sheehan et al., 2010). The authors found 40 articles focusing on AI, ML, and big data in the context of employee engagement. The keyword search algorithm performed included 'artificial intelligence' OR 'machine learning' OR 'chatbots' OR 'big data' OR 'neural network'.

Regarding the search for IM journals, the authors resorted to a different search approach. Since several researches have been conducted on AI within the IM research field, various HRM search-related terms were added to the keyword search algorithm to exclude studies not associated with HRM. The keywords

related to employee engagement were drawn from prior systematic reviews within the HRM domain (De Kock et al., 2020). Since the study is in the context of the new normal, therefore search words encompassed 'employee engagement in the new normal' OR 'work engagement in the new normal' OR 'employee engagement practices in the new normal' OR 'work engagement practices in the new normal'. The authors then selected search terms of each theme, such as AI and employee engagement, with the Boolean operator 'AND'. The initial database search led to 11,300 articles. Duplicated and triplicated records were removed. Post-reviewing titles and abstracts; the authors omitted the studies unrelated to the research question. This left the authors with a total of 133 articles. Finally, 40 articles passed the screening criterion. The flow diagram is shown in Fig. 2.4.
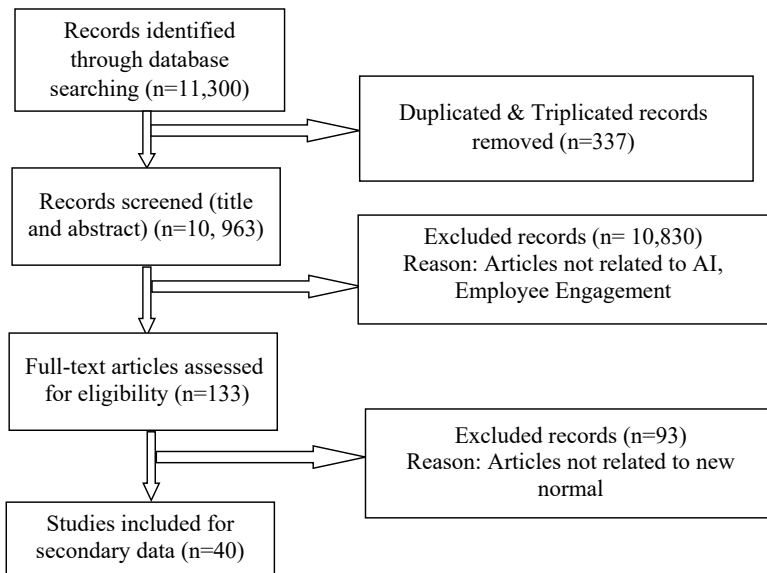
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┌──────────────────────┐
│ Records identified   │
│ through database     │──────────┐
│ searching (n=11,300) │          ▼
└──────────────────────┘   ┌────────────────────────────┐
           │               │ Duplicated & Triplicated    │
           ▼               │ records removed (n=337)      │
┌──────────────────────┐   └────────────────────────────┘
│ Records screened     │
│ (title and abstract) │──────────┐
│ (n=10, 963)          │          ▼
└──────────────────────┘   ┌────────────────────────────┐
           │               │ Excluded records (n= 10,830)│
           ▼               │ Reason: Articles not related │
┌──────────────────────┐   │ to AI, Employee Engagement   │
│ Full-text articles   │   └────────────────────────────┘
│ assessed for         │──────────┐
│ eligibility (n=133)  │          ▼
└──────────────────────┘   ┌────────────────────────────┐
           │               │ Excluded records (n=93)     │
           ▼               │ Reason: Articles not related │
┌──────────────────────┐   │ to new normal               │
│ Studies included for │   └────────────────────────────┘
│ secondary data (n=40)│
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Fig. 2.4.   Process of Selecting Articles. *Source*: Authors.

Drivers of Employee Engagement in the New Normal in the Context of AI

Quality of Work Life

Quality of work life is the direct association of an employee with their work environment and its impact on their overall productivity and performance. The organisational success ultimately depends on its ability to meet its goals. In turn, meeting organisational goals depends on how well an organisation can utilise its resources, including its workforce. Ultimately for the workforce to be leveraged to its full potential, it has to have high engagement levels, that is, at high engagement

levels, the employees identify their own goals with those of the organisational goals. So, the high engagement levels within an organisation are not possible without a good quality of work life (Sumathi & Velmurugan, 2017). According to Walton's (1973) model, the components of quality of work are adequate and fair compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities, the opportunity for continued growth and security, social integration in work organisation, constitutionalism, work and total life space, and the social relevance of work life. Studies indicate that quality of work life is positively associated with employee engagement (Kanten & Sadullah, 2012). As the quality of work directly translates to employee engagement levels, the organisations have employed techniques to maintain high levels of engagement for years. So, in short, the investment into employees' happiness and well-being is a direct investment in the growth and success of the organisation (Upadhe, 2018).

In the new normal, when the workforce is going towards the hybrid model, it is important that the employees feel adequately challenged by undertaking work that adds value to the organisation and their professional and personal growth. This involves removing mundane and repetitive work to focus more on their areas of interest and value. The implementation of superior AI technology such as ML, neural network intelligence, and deep learning increase efficiency and the quality of work by automating processes. AI also helps in providing highly customised services through adaptive experiences based on context and location. Therefore, applying AI to the various organisational processes benefits organisational efficiency and brings about a good work-life balance. Thus, the organisations need to look at their processes again and find opportunities to enhance them through technology and AI (ETHR World Contributor, 2020).

- *Adequate and fair compensation*: Adequate and fair compensation enhances the engagement level of the employees (Kanten & Sadullah, 2012). The dynamic workplace worked well throughout the pandemic such that the organisations decided to transition to the hybrid working model permanently. Tata Consultancy Services has announced that by 2025 it will enable 75% of its workforce to work remotely (Mellam, 2021). A study conducted by Hughes, Robert, Frady and Arroyos (2019) stated that AI helps in engaging the employees by ensuring fair remuneration based on their work. Adequate and fair compensation is ensured by using AI surveillance software, which helps determine employee productivity scores. In the contemporary era, analytics is used to monitor employees' productivity and, therefore, remunerate fairly so that the employees get engaged. The ML component of the system also recommends salary ranges (Sammer, 2019). The adoption of a hybrid workforce is not just a trend among Indian multinationals but also among global corporations. Google's CEO, Sundar Pichai, has shared a vision for a hybrid workplace for Google. This vision involves 60% of the employees coming to the office a few days a week, another 20% of the employees working from new office locations and the remaining 20% working remote. This vision also highlights the option for employees to opt for an arrangement to work remotely permanently if the role and the team allow it. This hybrid work arrangement will directly

impact employee compensation (Kelly, 2021). Facebook, too has taken the lead towards moving to a more hybrid work setup where its CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, mentioned that as much as 50% of his company's workforce could be working remotely in the next 10 years. Then again, this will impact the compensation of the employees who plan to move to a less expensive location or a permanent remote working arrangement.

So clearly hybrid workplace has a direct impact on compensation. The biggest challenge for the organisations moving to this model is to ensure that the employees are fairly compensated. The following indicates the application of AI tools to support fair compensation during the new normal:

Productivity/Performance-based Compensation: Pay for performance has been a critical principle in determining employee compensation (Milkovich & Wigdor, 1991). The traditional performance systems rely on generic suggestions like work experience, level, market condition, etc., to arrive at a compensation. The AI systems to determine compensation are more objective, fair, factual, and focus purely on performance and remove personal prejudices and biases. Rewarding and recognising high employee productivity and performance hold the same weight in a hybrid work environment and need monitoring. AI surveillance software is used to determine the employee productivity score, that is, measuring employee productivity in their task execution, collaboration, and effectiveness. An example of such tools that help measure employee productivity is ISAAK; it is a surveillance tool by a UK-based firm, Status Today. It uses complex analytics to monitor employees' interactions, collaborations, behaviour, and work patterns. It then combines this data with employee personnel files to identify high performing employees (Heaven, 2020).

Skills-based Review: The Gallup Panel survey in 2019 (pre-Covid-19) indicated a direct correlation between the frequency of feedback and the engagement levels of a remote workforce. In a hybrid work model, the organisations keep the employees engaged and invested in their work through regular feedback and frequent performance reviews, emphasising building employee skills that can continue to add value to the business further (Ranjan, 2020). IBM's in-house performance management system focuses on ongoing feedback and linking employee compensation closely to their skills. The ML component of the system can then provide more accurate recommendations for salary ranges, depending on the overall employee performance (Sammer, 2019). Thus, AI helps design customised pay recommendations based on employee skills and relevance.

Rewards and Recognition: Reward and recognition are integral to employee engagement and are often linked to a strong performance and positive reinforcement. With the hybrid workplace, it is important that the employees do not feel left out and feel rewarded for a strong performance. AI-enabled HCM apps not only help in onboarding employees, but the AI and data-based features also help employees make favourable career choices that help in career

progression. Thus, in the new normal, the application of ML to forecast the benefits and rewards that have a greater positive impact on the employee performance and at the same time identifying rewards and recognition's direct relationship with employee productivity is the way forward.

In the hybrid work environment, when the organisations are outbidding each other for capturing the best talent, it is vital for the organisation to continue to retain their top talent. AI based on ML helps organisations identify high flight risk employees. If these employees are critical to the organisation's needs, the organisation can offer specific incentives that can help retain them accordingly. It can also notify the managers of this potential risk and prescribe measures to engage with the employee to explore a possible course of action that helps in retention (Rosenbaum, 2019). IBM HR's AI-based 'predictive attrition program' developed with Walton predicts employee flight risk with an accuracy of 95%.

- *Safe and Healthy Working Conditions*: Safe and healthy working conditions are positively associated with employee engagement (Kanten & Sadullah, 2012). Post-pandemic era is also known as the age of the Great Resignation. Organisations are competing to acquire and retain top talent. According to a study, the top five reasons for employees quitting their jobs post the pandemic are burnout, organisational changes, lack of flexibility, discrimination, contributions, and ideas not being valued (three-way tie), insufficient benefits, and lack of support from the company in terms of well-being (Limeade, 2021) In short, a safe workplace is ideally the workplace where the employees are equipped to perform their routine tasks without impacting their physical and mental well-being. Providing the workforce with a safe and healthy work environment is one of the biggest challenges of the new normal.

The studies have found that the insomnia symptoms observed in the sample group post-pandemic had very high levels of depression, stress, and anxiety during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the insomnia symptoms or no insomnia symptoms before the pandemic. From an international perspective, the post-pandemic insomnia symptoms indicate a decline in overall mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic (Meaklim, Junge, Varma, Finck, & Jackson, 2021). Thus, ensuring sound mental and physical employee well-being is essential for the organisations. A healthy and happy workforce is an engaged and motivated workforce.

A safe workplace means a sanitised and disinfected workplace to minimise the chances of infection and a place where the overall employee well-being is cared for. According to the Oracle AI@Work Study 2020, 75% of the respondents indicated that AI could be used to improve mental health, and technology can be used to facilitate employee mental well-being (Oracle workplace intelligence, 2020). The question lies in how these AI tools and techniques can be implemented effectively for the overall employee wellness and well-being.

Several tools and technologies are available to track the user's fitness levels. The McKinsey and Company report identifies six main digital offerings for

organisations to implement the overall well-being of their employees are: wearable technology, digital biomarker applications, self-help, self-management, mindfulness as part of a holistic approach focused on mental health, generalised virtual practice for mental health, specialised virtual practice, and analytics and remote insights (Jacqueline, Anna, Karina, & Tobias, 2021). In short, frequent employee pulse surveys for gathering the well-being of the employees, initiatives on mindfulness, and employee wellness based on the data received from these surveys coupled with wearable technologies like FitBit, MiFit, Jawbone, etc., can help organisations keep not only track of the mental well-being but also physical fitness levels of the employees. SnackNation, a corporate food delivery services company, provided its employee with the JawBone fitness tracker for a workplace wellness initiative. The employees were rewarded for their performance in these wellness challenges (Murphy, 2021). Thus, employee wellness and well-being can also be incorporated into the company culture as competitions and challenges to keep the employees engaged.

AI is used for well-being assistance. Employee well-being is more than just about employee health. It encompasses all that impacts the employee directly or indirectly. In the new normal just health insurance coverage does not ensure the complete well-being of the employee and their dependents. It has to extend beyond work where the organisation can provide adequate support to the employee at the time of their need and at the same time be able to predict the ups and downs in the employee behaviour patterns and identify its triggers despite being remote. Some other aspects of AI include:

Chatbots: The chatbot can mimic everyday human conversation through various mediums such as instant messaging, telephone assistants, or voice-activated interfaces. It is a form of AI that is powered by NLP. The Oracle global study indicates that 82% of the respondents believe that robots can support them in their challenges regarding mental health better than humans, and 68% of the respondents indicated that they would rather talk to a robot than to their manager about their anxiety at work (Oracle, 2020). An example of this technology is Woebot, an AI-powered chatbot application supporting mental health. Psychologists have developed it at Stanford and AI experts. This chatbot is designed to provide cognitive behaviour therapy to its users. It is beneficial in providing support to the users who engage with it looking for support regarding their mental health. The same app has a program for Covid-19 called perspectives; it provides techniques for guided meditation and enables users to connect with others while maintaining a social distance. Thus, chatbots are a powerful tool for ensuring employee well-being and providing assistance (Team IA, 2021).

Employee Pulse Surveys: An employee pulse survey is a quick survey focused on a single topic; ideally, in the hybrid working environment, a pulse survey should include questions on overall employee well-being and its impact on them. Great Place to Work terms: the employee pulse survey is crucial to the hours needed to survive. The pulse survey is vital because it demonstrates the organisation's commitment to their employee's well-being and helps build trust and credibility.

The data collected from these pulse surveys is beneficial in analysing trends in employee behaviour. These pulse surveys mostly use intelligent analytics at the backend to gather information about the employee pain points, their mood, that is, happy versus unhappy and overall employee engagement levels, to build a workforce with high engagement levels. *Willis Tower Watson* has created several surveys focusing on different aspects of the new reality to help corporates cope with the pandemic and understand the trends in their workforce.

Opportunity for Continued Growth and Security: Career opportunity positively affects employee engagement (Kataria, Garg, & Rastogi, 2019). As AI has advanced, there is a constant fear of jobs becoming redundant and obsolete. However, rather than making jobs obsolete and redundant, AI continues to make innovational advancements, leading to more job creation and sector advancements. AI has been a driving force in automating jobs and reducing job redundancy. Thus, AI is a powerful tool to help employees in career advancement (Mer & Virdi, 2022; Stahl, 2021). In the new normal, AI has proved to be a key tool that has kept the workplace together and connected. Thus, while AI is an effective replacement for redundant and repetitive jobs, it is also essential to tool helping employees find ample opportunities to grow in their careers within the firm to keep them motivated and to feel a sense of job security.

Career Growth: With the hybrid workforce being the new norm, the career growth for employees has to be customised with a higher focus on their market-relevant skills. AI-based performance management systems help identify individual employee value propositions more accurately and accordingly provide relevant suggestions for their growth and learning opportunities:

i.   *Network analysis*: Helps identify how collaborative an employee is by analysing how effectively an employee could solve problems using their specific skills.
ii. *Natural Language Processing*: Helps in analysing and providing a clear snapshot of overall employee skills within the organisation. Based on this analysis, it provides recommendations on the skills the organisation needs to invest in. This portion of AI-enabled career growth becomes the basis of each employee's personalised learning and development (L&D) plan.
iii. *Fair analysis*: AI helps in an unbiased outlook on employee performance based entirely on facts around their job performance and goal accomplishment as compared to their peers using factual data and analytics (Mer et al., 2022).

Developing New Skills: In the new normal, the organisations are looking at automating several jobs. This would mean that AI will provide support in helping the employees better handle complex situations. AI-based automation eliminates repetitive work and enables the employees to focus on learning new skills and performing more value-added work than repetitive tasks (Mer & Virdi, 2022). Thus, integrating AI to work boosts productivity and increases efficiency and task accuracy.

Reskilling: Reskilling is the process of acquiring new skills. It is an effective way of cost reduction and time saving as hiring new talent is far more costly than training an existing employee or relocating them. It is an excellent way of developing and retaining the firm's top talent. An organisation constantly investing in its employees' growth and skills is also attracting new talent. To continue with the employee engagement efforts as the workforce returns to the new normal, this is the time to scale up the employee development efforts. This is the time to provide opportunities for employees to grow and adapt based on their capability rather than their existing skillsets (Volini et al., 2021). Using AI-enabled platforms for developing and enhancing the skills go a long way in providing the employee with the right opportunity to grow their skillset within a safe environment. The following aspects of AI are used:

i.   *Virtual Reality (VR)*: A VR simulation creates a virtual environment to mimic a real-world situation. It is a powerful learning tool that gives a realistic experience to the learner. It allows employees to test their skills and observe their effectiveness without impacting business. The retention in VR training is much higher and leads to higher productivity on the job (Bailenson, 2020).

ii.   *Virtual Assessment Centers (VAC)*: The VAC provides a standardised assessment to the participants where they undergo a set of exercises that mimic the real work situations. The exercises have multiple outcomes, and the participants have multiple opportunities throughout the assessment to display the skills and behaviours needed to succeed in the given role in question. The most significant advantage of the VACs is that they can simulate an on-the-job situation using AI; thus, the participant's interaction with the situation can more accurately help determine their success in the role (ET Spotlight, 2019).

iii. *Augmented Reality (AR)*: AR can blend the elements of the virtual world with the real-world environment. To access the AR simulation, hardware is required, which is usually a smartphone, tablet type physical device, and a head set to interact with the object imposed on the real world. The AR simulations can give the trainee a life-like experience during the training/interaction, which helps in higher retention. AR is fast gaining popularity in several sectors, including medicine, retail, aerospace, and defence (Lorne, 2021).

Learning and Development: The traditional L&D function is one of the best ways to explore new skills and capabilities. During the pandemic, many corporate learnings migrated to online/virtual format. In the new normal, a hybrid approach to learning is fast emerging. This classroom approach is coupled with online/virtual learning powered by analytics and ML. A lot of online learning is happening through the learning experience platforms like LinkedIn Learning. These platforms help personalise learning for individual learners by providing courses that are best suited for them based on their skills, preference, and courses taken by their peers possessing similar skills. They also allow learners to collaborate and share their learning.

● *Immediate Opportunity to Use and Develop Human Capacities*: It refers to lev-
eraging human capabilities immediately. Various skills, training, and develop-
ment are essential aspects of an immediate opportunity to use and develop
human capacities. Training is positively associated with employee engagement
(Kataria et al., 2019; Patil, 2018). Providing employees with the opportuni-
ties to learn and develop themselves keeps them engaged and vested in the
organisation. In an organisation, the most popular ways to develop talent and
skillset are: through peer or collaborative learning, structured L&D training,
internal talent mobility, and hiring new talent. In the new normal, when the
hybrid workforce is distributed across geographies, the organisations need to
be future-ready in terms of technology to develop capacities at the fastest pos-
sible time and ensure its application on the job. Immediate opportunities to use
and develop human capacities are facilitated through.

Peer to Peer/Collaborative Learning: Peer to peer or collaborative learning is
often synonymous with on-the-job training. This is where employees learn from
their peers and immediately apply their knowledge to a given task. In the new
normal, when the interactions between peers are online, AI can augment peer/
collaborative learning and support development. AI systems can analyse large
volumes of data and identify similar profiles. An example of this is LinkedIn,
where, using analytics and ML, the algorithm can identify similar professional
profiles based on their skills, geography, organisation, etc. Thus, similar ML
and analytics application with an organisation's internal employee network
helps create well-represented groups where employees of similar skills can be
clubbed together. Such groups can be customised to form groups with a varied
understanding of the subject to learn collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Structured Learning: Structured learning is the traditional classroom training
that a trainer or an instructor facilitates. It is a traditional learning approach
where the topics are presented in a predefined order, and there are interven-
tions around the learning material to facilitate learning. This is the traditional
training method that is implemented by the organisation's L&D function.

In the new norm, structured learning has transitioned to be more dynamic
and flexible to meet the requirements of the ever-changing market and employee
learning needs. Structured learning has now moved beyond the physical class-
room. It is available to the learner at their convenience and moment of need
through the use of various technologies that understand the learning needs of the
learner and present a tailor-made learning approach:

Identifying Learning Gaps: The use of adaptive AI solutions helps in identify-
ing critical areas for employee performance and their skill levels. AI systems
can go through large datasets and identify employees with skill gaps by using
algorithms to analyse employee performance data and then mapping it to the
organisation's predetermined skill gaps.
Personalised Learning Plans: The next obvious step is to develop a personalised
learning plan. This would involve using AI to collate and extrapolate employee

information and then analyse this information to create a more personalised learning plan. A personalised plan is a plan made to meet the learning needs of a specific learner. It takes care of their skill gaps and knowledge levels to develop a plan to systematically enhance their skills to meet the required benchmarks and knowledge levels. The new normal will place more emphasis on skills and not tasks. Such an AI-based learning plan helps in identifying the learner's learning needs and in bridging the skill gap effectively.

AI-powered Virtual learning Assistants: An AI-based virtual learning assistant aids learning by assisting the learners in addressing their minor queries regarding the subject matter in real time. This allows the learners to focus more on learning and enhance their skills. Virtual learning assistants are applications powered by AI that can take voice commands and execute tasks. The virtual learning assistants have the ML capability that helps answer common doubts and analyse the individual learning process to create a more personalised learning experience (Sabin, 2021). In the new normal, when the workforce is hybrid, the learners may not be able to get in touch with the facilitator directly due to a number of factors. In this case, a virtual learning assistant provides real-time answers to the learner's queries, ensuring that the learning continues without disruption.

Internal Job Mobility: Internal mobility refers to the job movement of employees internally within the firm. Internal job mobility is an excellent way of career advancement and also a way to an opportunity to develop capacity within the firm through a resource shuffle. AI makes internal mobility more seamless and effective. AI-driven performance systems are a good source of information about the potential candidates within the organisation that would fit the role. Key data points like past performances, essential skillset, geographical location, and linguistic capabilities are available for leverage while considering an internal candidate for an internal mobility position.

External Hiring: Hiring a new resource to acquire a new skill set is one of the most popular ways of bringing in talent to develop capacities within the system. It is a sure-shot way of getting the right talent and developing a skillset quickly, but it involves multiple steps. In the new normal, the integration of AI in the recruitment cycle reduces the human effort and reduces the time in getting the right resource onboard considerably. For instance, integrating AI in recruitment helps automate recruitment tasks and provides adequate guidance and support to the candidate throughout the recruitment cycle. AI can personalise the employee experience through the hiring journey, from pre-screening, screening, scheduling interviews, and engaging with candidates through chatbots and automated messaging. ML can identify biases in the recruitment process and remove them. The applicant matching and management systems running on ML and data science help organisations find diverse candidates with high potential to match the job role.

An AI interview system with training data free from conscious, unconscious biases, prejudices on religion, race, gender, etc., can take unbiased interviews and make fair hiring decisions based purely on data and facts. Thus, the introduction

of AI right from the hiring process can introduce diversity in the organisation from the start and continue to further the diversity agenda of the workforce in the new normal by making the right hiring choices (Polli, 2019).

• Work and Total Life Space

During the pandemic, the office came home, and suddenly the lines between work and life blurred. The employees are continuously working more hours on average than they did before the pandemic, and also, they are working more on weekends (Maurer, 2020). Since work and home life are blurring post-Covid pandemic, many employees are confronting the effect of extended work on the employees' health. AI is helping in restoring work-life balance. It allows maintaining balance in using technology for personal and professional life. A good work culture, employee engagement and a healthy work environment boil down to a good work-life balance. This work-life balance is essential to be maintained during the hybrid setup. The employee must have the ability to switch off from work entirely and enjoy their personal space.

Enhancing Productivity: Integration of AI with work improves productivity. Tools like Office 365 not only integrate the entire suite of office like e-mails, chats, calendars, etc., in one place, but it also gives a view into how much uninterrupted time an employee has in his calendar from meetings, e-mails, chats, calls outside of working hours, etc., under the MyAnalytics tab. This tab also provides information about the amount of work an employee has done in quiet with no interruptions and suggests focus time to get more work done during the work hours (Microsoft Reporter, 2019).

Optimising Work Schedule: Schedule optimisation helps ensure every task in a schedule aligns with the ultimate goal. It helps achieve the overall business goals, improves efficiencies, and removes redundancies. Integrating AI in work schedules helps analyse permutations of productivity and suggest the most effective and efficient one. For instance, organisations like Google have facilitated the integration of e-mail, video conferencing, collaboration of documents, and instant messaging. Employees are already accepting AI as an essential tool for their work-life balance and mental health support. In the new normal, when people are working from home, AI-based tools are being used to fix meetings and complete work timely. Besides, many AI-based apps make work easy by automating repetitive tasks and rule-based work. Many such apps even give reminders regarding upcoming meetings, taking breaks and health-related activities like walking, exercising, etc. AI helps in bringing flexibility to work by conducting virtual meetings. Google hangouts and Zoom helps in conducting online and virtual meetings. Thus, it saves time that would otherwise conduct physical meetings. Thus, it can be concluded that AI leaves time for employees for leisure work and makes work easier and faster. The use of AI helps employees find ample time for strategic work. Chatbots act as a sound communication tool and can also act as reminders to employers. The chatbots can pop up with the to-do list of employees, which can assist them in remaining updated with their tasks and reduce the likelihood of increased left-out work and omission of essential tasks.

- The Social Relevance of Work Life

The social relevance of work life shows how the business contributes to society by giving back compared to what it has received. Therefore, it is essential to take initiatives towards social well-being, where traditionally, the organisations took up social causes and assigned employee volunteers. In the new normal, the organisations had to select the initiatives they took up due to various social restrictions. The use of technology helps bring more transparency and prioritise expenditure by aligning it towards the sections that need it the most. Thus, AI has transformed business and its application to corporate social responsibility (CSR), radically improving the CSR processes and effectiveness.

> *Optimisation of the CSR*: Optimisation of CSR means gaining the maximum impact in terms of a social case of a particular social initiative. Tying intelligent systems powered by AI to CSR helps optimum resource utilisation due to the AI's ability to understand the business drivers and drive a productive outcome. These systems recommend the right program strategy going by the business drivers and the CSR goals intended to be achieved.
>
> *Reduce Human Bias*: The value measure and materiality assessment done using AI completely remove human biases by analysing pure facts without preconceived notions and prejudices. A good training and learning dataset help in reducing biases to a great extent in an AI system (Brian, 2020).
>
> *Monitoring Program Effectiveness*: The AI-based program management systems can measure the programs against the country's government and legal framework and globally set standards. It can also pick up loopholes and gaps in the process and make recommendations.
>
> *Transparency*: AI models based on ML can collect and analyse vast data sets. This data can identify anomalies based on the training sets and historical data in the system. Thus, enabling the system to predict the probability of fraud (Al Naqvi, 2018).

Diversity and Inclusion

AI tools help eliminate bias, prejudice, and discrimination, thus paving the way for equal opportunities and greater inclusivity. Studies indicate that respondents' perception of practices related to diversity in the organisations is positively associated with employee engagement (Downey, Van der Werff, Thomas, & Plaut, 2015; Mer & Vijay, 2021). Similarly, workplace inclusion is positively associated with employee engagement (Goswami & Goswami, 2018). Diversity and inclusion (D&I) are two aspects of the same coin. While the diversity of the workforce is a powerful combination of different backgrounds in terms of age, sex, religion, orientation, region, etc., to make an entity. Inclusion is about how fairly these backgrounds' ideas, opinions, and perspectives are valued in the system to foster innovation and creativity. A study by Harvard Business School (HBS) found that candidates who whitened their names could secure more interviews than ones who did not (Gardiman, 2017). This clearly shows how unconscious bias has a

direct impact on organisational diversity. An effective way of overcoming these biases is through new-age technologies like AI that help make fair and objective choices based on real data.

AI overrides unconscious biases and prejudices, eliminating any partiality that may come with a human's preconceived notions that hinder building a diverse and inclusive workplace. In a hybrid workplace, when the workforce is going to be more fluid and dynamic, diversity is the need of the hour to help the organisation continue to be more open to new ideas and perspectives. In the new normal, when the workspaces are going hybrid, D&I are vital to an organisation's success. A workforce functioning in silos with a lack of physical collaboration may lead to a crisis of ideas and innovation. However, a highly diverse and inclusive workforce supported by AI technology leads to tremendous success (Haiyan, Sheri, Louise, & Iain, 2019). D&I are facilitated by:

Creating a Fair Recruitment System: Recruitment is the initiation point of ensuring the organisation's D&I agenda. This is where the organisations need to apply various initiatives to ensure fair hiring (Sans, 2019). As per the McKinsey Quarterly insights, it is all the more important to keep a tight focus on D&I post-pandemic because of the benefits it brings to the work culture and workplace and also the challenges that have come up as a result of the pandemic that can hamper it (Dolan, Vivian Hunt, Prince, & Sancier-Sultan, 2020).

In the new normal, when individuals have faced the pandemic and its aftermath, there is a high probability of them carrying preconceived notions and biases during the recruitment process, impacting the diversity agenda of the organisation. The implementation of AI in recruitment is an effective strategy for gathering a pool of diverse candidates by eliminating these biases (Caprino, 2021). An HBS study pointed out that the candidates who whitened their names had more chances of getting shortlisted than those who did not (Gerdeman, 2017). So that naturally means that the candidates with diverse backgrounds have a lesser probability of getting their resumes shortlisted. The use of AI in the process can ultimately help in overcoming this issue because the software considers only the relevant skills and experience and not cultural/racial background:

- *Sourcing*: Resume sourcing with the help of AI-enabled tools helps find suitable profiles for the initial screening based purely on the requirements of the job role much quicker and easier. Appcast is one such tool used to help screen candidates; it uses AI functions like programmatic bidding, analytics, and real-time data sharing to help source the right candidate without any bias, promoting diversity, and inclusion. The software matches the candidate's relevant skills with the job requirement. Thus, it can create a diverse pool of candidates based purely on their job skill match, without any biases.
- *Screening*: Screening candidates is considered one of the most challenging steps in the recruitment process as it involves carefully determining if the candidate fits the given job role or not. An AI-based screening only focuses on the candidate's skill level and fitment. It does not differentiate the candidates based on their diverse backgrounds. Thus, the screening process is done by AI not only free from biases. It gives a fair opportunity to the deserving candidate

by screening the right candidate and also brings down the time for screening considerably. Some of the AI techniques involved in screening resumes are:

i. Resume parsing is a technology that can provide a structured, standardised form to several unstructured resumes based on the organisation's preferences and job analysis. It is an effective way to match skills and keywords from the existing pool of resumes to the given job requirements, thus identifying the most suited profiles in a shorter period. Tools like Recruiterbox use this functionality to screen resumes.

ii. *Automated screening of resumes*: This is one of the most popular methods used by corporates for screening resumes. When the candidate applies for a job opening, it is stored in the company database. Based on the keyword search, it makes the resumes that match the requirement available, hence helping in the quicker identification of the qualified candidates. The ideal is one such tool; it also considers external factors like assessments, certifications, chatbot interactions, and data that may be critical to identifying the correct fit.

iii. *Resume screening using ML algorithms*: These algorithms can evaluate and rank candidates based on a predefined rating scale identifying high performing candidates. Vervoe is a tool that ranks candidates based on an AI-based skill assessment. The AI-based scheduling tools provide a consistent experience to all the candidates. It does not variate the experience because of a candidate's diverse background or ethnicity. While scheduling, the AI-based tools act as an interface between the candidate and the organisation. They help in scheduling and rescheduling interviews based purely on prioritisation and load balancing despite the diverse status of the candidate; it gives candidate assessments, thereby giving an equal opportunity to all the candidates to test their skills; gathers data from candidate recruitment experience and last but not the least keep a sync between global calendars when scheduling interviews. MyAlly is one such tool that helps in scheduling interviews. These interviews gather the candidate's responses using audio, video, or text. Then they use NLP to evaluate the interview responses. In this process, the system is completely fixed on the candidate's responses and not their gender, name, race, etc. Thus, making the process completely fair by giving the candidates, despite their age, sex, religion, etc., a fair opportunity and providing diverse candidates with an equal chance with the other candidates (Geetha & Bhanu, 2018).

iv. *Creating a Diverse Team Culture Using AI*: Hiring a diverse workforce is the first step to inclusive and open work culture. Creating an environment of transparency and cultural inclusion is just as important. In the new normal, when the teams are working remotely, and the virtual teams have limited opportunities to interact, a diverse workforce brings more fresh perspectives and points of view to the table. Giving employees the opportunities to interact and communicate using superior technology and AI helps in better collaboration and coordination. Providing employees with the opportunity to develop themselves through training

and networking opportunities helps promote a diverse and inclusive culture. The use of VR and AR make the learning programs more effective and immersive. Learning experience platforms help learners collaborate and connect simultaneously as learning, thereby strengthening the collaboration pillar in an organisation's D&I practice (Peopleadmin, 2021).

v.   *Accurate D&I Initiatives*: D&I is an ongoing initiative. It is a key factor in ensuring an organisation's growth trajectory and gathering inclusion sentiments of the employees through employee surveys as a part of the D&I initiative. This data helps the leadership understand the overall employee sentiment and create internal campaigns for furthering the organisation's D&I agenda, such as supporting a working parent, identifying cultural barriers, etc. This data is the most effective in analysing the programs that will work for the organisation based on the cultural distribution and, at the same time, improve employee engagement levels (Mondal, 2021).

Communication

Communication is positively associated with employee engagement (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014; Kataria et al., 2019; Pandita & Bedarkar, 2015). Communication can be enriched with the increasing use of AI to understand the workforce's needs by learning patterns over time. This can assist the workforce in promptly accessing the information, thereby helping achieve organisational objectives. One of the challenges is that the ease of communicating directly with HR has gone down. This requires a solution that would address parallel employee queries instantly and makes the process easy and transparent. A lot of the employee engagement came from in-person interactions with the managers in the pre-pandemic era (Harter & Adkins, 2015). During the pandemic, this has changed, with more than half of the workforce now working remotely. These personal interactions are now fewer, mostly about work and less informal. A survey conducted by Mckinsey from December 2020 to January 2021 revealed that in organisations that communicated vaguely or did not communicate at all regarding the post-pandemic work, 47% of the workforce revealed that it is causing them anxiety or concern (Alexander et al., 2021) (refer Fig. 2.5).

So how can the businesses now gather the employee engagement level with the same precision, and why it is still important to keep a tab on the engagement level of employees just as it was before the pandemic. Thus, re-tooling and connecting employees through AI is essential. AI tools are used for team collaborations. Now, the managers can form effective teams that best suit work together. This is possible with the help of predictive data analytics and ML. AI can also recommend the availability of people that can make effective teams perform on a project by looking into the activity calendar. This helps in evading the prejudice and biases of managers in making teams that are unlikely to perform better. Another challenge that the workforce is facing is the abundance of information and documentation while performing the job. During work from home, employees confront challenges like the abundance of information and documentation

The lack of clear vision or plan for post-pandemic work is
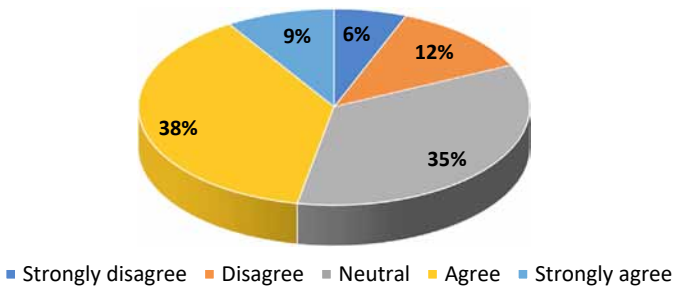causing me concern or anxiety, % survey participants

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Fig. 2.5.   Individuals Who Are Not Being Communicated With Are Feeling
Anxious About the Future. *Source*: Adapted from Mckinsey & Company (2021).

on information and documentation on a specific. Through NLP, the employees
will be able to locate pertinent information by infusing context with the help of
AI-powered chatbots. With the dawn of remote work, several unforeseen chal-
lenges have also come into the picture. Communication between the leaders and
teams is essential for social cohesion in the new normal.

> Avoiding the pitfalls of remote working requires thinking carefully
> about leadership and management in a hybrid virtual world. Inter-
> actions between leaders and teams provide an essential locus for
> creating the social cohesion and the unified hybrid virtual culture
> that organisations need in the next normal. (Alexander, Aaron De,
> Langstaff, & Ravid, 2021)

AI helps organisations offer their employees to connect and communicate in
real time, eliminating distance barriers and time zones. Real-time responses to
frequently asked questions via chatbots help employees type their questions and
get a prompt automated response. It not only saves time but also delivers qual-
ity information. Thus, it improves the total work experience of the workforce.
Organisations can engage employees better through deep data, ML, and neuro-
linguistic language (Garg & Agrawal, 2020). So, keeping the remote employees
as connected as they were before the pandemic is essential. AI tools like chatbots
provide opportunities for making communication collaborative, interactive, and
fun. Virtual work requires many meetings, which leads to much effort. Approach-
ing employees' desks for resolving the issues is not possible in work from home.
Thus, chatbots integration with different tools is being used. Autoschedules are
being used to get common slots between meeting participants.

Feedback has a significant positive effect on employee engagement (Albercht &
Marty, 2020; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). In the
new normal, where employees are working remotely, giving real-time feed-
back is important. A study by Hughes et al. (2019) indicated that employees in

organisations are engaged by using AI to give them feedback. AI tools can automatically capture and provide information during meetings and create dynamic Minutes of Meeting. AIRA, an AI-powered tool virtual meeting assistant, takes and shares meeting notes. AI bot 1Password manages business passwords in a secure hub and avails analytics on usage. Garg et al. (2021) further highlighted that AI algorithms help analyse employee feedback and satisfaction level. This helps the employees to respond to a climate survey on their experiences, analyses the inputs provided by the respondents, and offers valuable insights to the organisation for enhancing employee engagement and retention.

AI judiciously detects the meaningful discussions and conversations of employees. Furthermore, AI taps all the feedback and appreciation from daily conversations of the team and offers real-time feedback. Thus, AI assists employees to correct the issues, if any. Besides, it appreciates the assiduous and productive work of the employees. It also offers solutions to aspects that need improvement. It is also helpful in providing auto-reminders to seniors to offer timely feedback. Besides, it also gives updates associated with improvement in new feedback, engagement level, and performance risk alerts against the past week's performance. Chatbots, through AI, have made feedback more productive and fulfilling.

Outcomes of Employee Engagement in the New Normal in the Context of AI

Decreases Intention to Quit the Organisation

Employee engagement is negatively associated with the intention to quit the organisation (Adekola, 2011; Burke & El-Kot, 2010; Mer, 2022). AI assists management in comprehending what is working and what is not. Through analysing employee communication in real time, organisations can do sentiment analysis to gauge employees' state of mind. When combined with predictive analysis, these insights can help determine engagement levels and thereby reduce the attrition rate.

Increases Productivity

Employee engagement is positively associated with employee performance (Schaufeli, 2013). AI is also being used in businesses and the military to monitor the workforce's brain activity and emotions (Chan, 2018). This is facilitated by placing wireless sensors in the caps or hats of the workforce. The emotions of the workforce, such as happiness, sadness, anxiety, etc., are assessed by combining the data with artificial algorithms. Thus, employers can gain insight into workers' mood shifts. Based on these insights, the employers can take interventions like altering break times nature of tasks allotted or telling them to take off time from work for enhancing productivity and profits (Chan, 2018). Studies indicate that employees do not feel comfortable facing their real emotions at the workplace, which causes employee disengagement. Thus, chatbots play an essential

role by offering the employees a platform for informal conversations to share their thoughts and feelings without being judgemental easily. Since chatbots provide relevant information to employees according to their needs, responsive, and real-time feedback helps employees improve their performance.

Lattice, an AI tool, is used for performance appraisals and people management during work from home. Toggl is another AI tool that keeps track of time spent on a project by an employee for tracking productivity and ensures that all employees are rewarded appropriately. These aspects lead to employee engagement. Employees' measurement of work performance, productivity, and output quality during work from home remain a big challenge for HR. AI and ML-based applications are not only able to measure the productivity of an employee but also capable of delegating tasks and assignments to the employees effectively and efficiently. Thus, AI engages employees and boosts employee productivity. Many organisations like Google, Oracle Sysco, and Best Buy have comprehended the methodology of enhancing employee engagement and leading to high productivity.

Employee Well-being

Employee engagement is positively associated with employee well-being (Adekola, 2011). Employee engagement also ensures psychological well-being, low levels of exhaustion, and low psychosomatic symptoms. In remote working, where social isolation is gripping the employees, well-being has come to the forefront. The use of AI has increased manifold. By monitoring eye contact, facial expressions, and sentiments, AI tools can comprehend the stress and distractions of working from home. Using future iterations of facial recognition technology, AI recognises expressions representing dissatisfaction, frustration, and anger during meetings and alerts managers of potential problems so that they may take necessary actions. The organisations are employing conversational AI solutions. NLP/ML have simplified sentiment analysis of written/spoken language. In the same line, organisations are using voice or video-based AI to determine the mood of the employees while performing the work. Furthermore, pulse surveys have helped in measuring and tracking practices in real time. AI has helped stay fit mentally and physically, preventing burnout from working above the threshold level.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review, the study's findings are conceptualised as the proposed employee engagement model in the new normal (refer Fig. 2.6).

AI is instrumental in enhancing the quality of work life of employees by playing a major role in providing fair compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities, an opportunity for continued growth and security, work and total life space, and social relevance of work life. As shown in Fig. 2.5, various tools of AI, such as surveillance software, wearable technology and digital biomarker, neural network, data mining, data
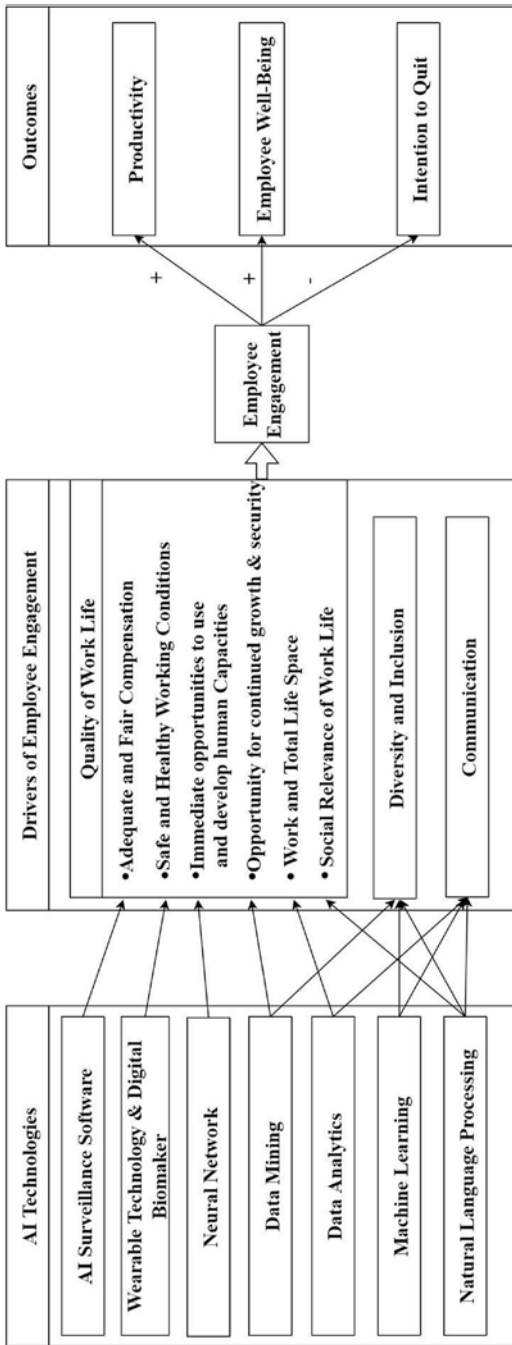
Fig. 2.6.   Conceptual Framework of the Study. *Source:* Authors.

analytics, ML, NLP, etc., are instrumental in boosting the drivers of employee engagement in the new normal. Besides, AI also helps facilitate D&I and communication in the new normal. This has led to positive organisational outcomes like increased productivity, employee well-being, and decreased intention to quit.

Discussion

Since post-pandemic work from home or remote work is the new normal, the authors aim to study the drivers and outcomes of employee engagement in the new normal through the lens of AI. The aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic has induced many organisations to adapt to remote work rapidly. Shifting to remote work has its own challenges, such as increased stress, burnout, and isolation. During the pandemic, employee turnover was also rampant. Another downside of remote work is managing the productivity of the workforce. All this can be managed through AI that immaculately facilitates employee engagement. Employee engagement in the new normal primarily depends on online interactions, personalisation, and sophisticated systems that can study and gauge employee behaviour and related metrics (Lipson, 2020). The study reveals that quality of work life (fair compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities, opportunity for continued growth and security, work and total life space, and social relevance of work life), D&I and communication are the drivers of employee engagement in the new normal. In all the said precursors, AI tools are playing a major role. Consequently, leading to enhanced productivity, employee well-being and decreased intention to quit. It is found that AI is no longer an option for engaging employees in the new normal, where the vast portion of the employees is remote. The pace of AI-driven solutions for engaging employees has increased exponentially. In the new normal, the organisations are re-tooling and upgrading to keep abreast with the changing times. It is essential because an organisation is as good as its people and how they connect with their organisation is decisive in its success. In the new normal, where it is impossible to build physical connections, reliance on these tools and systems is much needed as they can keep the communications channels open and, in time, also predict the outcomes of particular employee trends. Social isolation, which is the biggest lacuna in working from home, opens novel ways for connecting and collaborating virtually from anywhere across the globe. Real-time support and remediation with AI tools such as chatbots are bringing about a drastic change in the workplace by supporting employees when and where they need it the most. In the new normal employee engagement with the help of advanced AI algorithms helps understand employee behaviour through quick engagement surveys. The organisations have onboarded several new employees who have never stepped inside the physical office space within the hybrid work model. As per a survey, most of the workforce do not expect full-time office returns (Jones & Wearn, 2021). Thus, it can conveniently be said that the hybrid work model is here to stay. Therefore, the rules of the game have now changed; thus, completely relying on the traditional engagement methods is not a wise idea for organisations. Hence, they need to understand the changing business and industry requirements

and upgrade and re-tool their engagement practices accordingly. Making it possible for the organisation to provide the requisite support. Thus, AI is helping in overcoming the downsides of remote work by playing a vital role in engaging the employees.

Managerial Implication

Managers can enhance employee engagement in the new normal by using AI to enhance the employees' quality of work life. Since studies show that AI boosts employee engagement by giving adequate and fair compensation (Hughes et al., 2019; Stahl, 2021), analysing feedback enhances employee engagement, and decreases the intention to quit the organisation (Garg et al., 2021). Therefore, the managers can use AI tools to give fair compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities, continued growth and security, enhancing work and total life space, and social relevance of work life. Furthermore, the HR practitioners can engage employees in the new normal by using AI tools such as promoting D&I in the organisation. Furthermore, AI complements human employees' interactions and assists in artificially smart technologies complement human employees' interactions and support employees (Singh, Brady, Arnold, & Brown, 2017).

Thus, organisations should provide a conducive environment for the coexistence of employees and AI technology. In the new normal, where more than half of the workforce is working remotely, these personal interactions are now fewer, mostly about work and less informal. Thus, managers can engage employees to facilitate these interactions by using AI tools such as NLP, data analytics, and ML. Through AI, the management can track the daily workforce's brain activity and employees' emotions (Chan, 2018). This can help managers identify the factors that lead to happiness or stress. Thus, management can then take corrective action. All such initiatives will engage employees and lead to decreased intention to quit the organisation, increased productivity, and employee well-being, which is needed in the new normal.

Conclusion and Future Work

The pandemic brought about a set of challenges like never before. Covid being a major disruptor for businesses, led to personal and career upheaval and social isolation, which adversely affected employee engagement and productivity. The pandemic induced heavy job demands and stress. With the workforce going hybrid, the new normal brought about a degree of reliance on AI-based technology. The current research shows that organisations invest heavily in AI by using surveillance software, wearable technology and digital biomarker, neural network, data mining, data analytics, ML, NLP, etc., for engaging employees. Such tools enhance the quality of work life, facilitating D&I and communication, thereby boosting employee engagement in the new normal. Employee engagement, in turn, has led to positive organisational outcomes like increased productivity, employee well-being, and decreased attrition rate.

This chapter offers pertinent avenues for future research. First, according to Bondarouk et al. (2017), there is a dearth of studies on theory-driven and evidence-based e-HRM studies. Thus, future studies can be conducted on the role of AI on work engagement by considering the JD-R model as a foundation of the study. Thus, considering the role of AI, future studies can be conducted to identify the predictors and consequences of work engagement through the lens of the JD-R model. Second, studies indicate that technological innovation is mainly dependent on context (Van Geffen, Ru€el, & Bondarouk, 2013). Though there are various promising areas for future research, the authors suggest conducting future research in the health sector, as this sector has witnessed many vulnerabilities in the Covid-19 pandemic (Sarker, Jamal, Ahmed, & Irtisam, 2021). The healthcare sector is one of the most promising areas of AI adoption (Sun & Medaglia, 2019). Despite AI's potent usefulness in the healthcare sector (Haleem, Javaid, & Khan, 2019), researchers have investigated its usage in the context of patients (Nadarzynski, Bayley, Llewellyn, Kidsley, & Graham, 2020) and have neglected healthcare practitioners (Wang, Chen, Xiong, & Wang, 2021). Thus, theoretical and empirical studies can be conducted on employee predictors and outcomes of employee engagement among healthcare sector employees.

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