

# The Tayloristic Trap: How Automation in Recruitment Fails to Identify Transformative Leaders?

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## Abstract

This opinion paper examines the growing reliance on automation and AI in recruitment processes, particularly for managerial roles. While these technologies streamline hiring by filtering candidates based on predefined criteria, they often perpetuate a Tayloristic approach that favours standardisation and efficiency over creativity and innovation. As a result, unconventional candidates with diverse experiences and critical soft skills are excluded, leading to leadership homogeneity. The paper argues that organisations must rethink their recruitment strategies, moving away from rigid automation towards a more human-centric approach that values emotional intelligence, adaptability, and diverse perspectives in leadership selection.

## Keywords

Taylorism, Recruitment, Automation, HRM, HRM Challenges, Leader

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In recent years, automation, and particularly AI, has gained prominence in recruitment processes, especially for pre-screening applications. The argument for this approach seems logical: human resources departments, overwhelmed by hundreds of applicants for a single vacancy, cannot efficiently screen all candidates. Consequently, AI-powered technology steps in to assist by filtering and shortlisting the most “suitable” candidates. While this approach undoubtedly enhances efficiency, it introduces significant issues, especially when it comes to selecting managers or leadership roles. This over-reliance on standardisation risks perpetuating a Tayloristic system, one that focuses on replicating past managerial profiles rather than encouraging innovation and diversity in leadership.

The resurgence of Taylorism in recruitment through automation is troubling. Taylorism, rooted in the principles of scientific management, champions efficiency

and standardisation by breaking tasks down into smaller components, which are then optimised for productivity (Braverman, 1998). In recruitment, this manifests in the rigid structuring of job advertisements and the narrow specifications fed into AI systems. By defining fixed criteria—whether specific years of experience, certain qualifications, or particular industry knowledge—the AI prescreens candidates based on their technical proficiency and past experience. However, it is this very standardisation that narrows the candidate pool to “standard” applicants. Those who fit neatly into the predefined box of technical competence are selected, while unconventional candidates, who may offer fresh perspectives and soft skills essential for modern leadership, are excluded.

Gerlich (2023) argues that organisations today require leaders who go beyond technical proficiency. In his study of employee expectations, he highlights that post-pandemic workplaces are now driven by values such as creativity, adaptability, and emotional intelligence—qualities not easily captured by standardised recruitment algorithms. Automation, however, prioritises past performance and measurable traits over potential, leading to the selection of individuals who may be well-suited for maintaining the status quo but not for fostering innovation. This has profound implications for organisations that aspire to thrive in the fast-evolving digital era, where managerial adaptability and forward-thinking are essential.

The focus on efficiency through standardisation means that unconventional candidates, who may have the creative mindset needed to lead companies through the complexities of today’s business environment, are filtered out as unsuitable (Bessen, 2019). AI, by its nature, processes historical data to predict future success, but this leads to an inherent bias: it can only select from past successes and experiences. A candidate who has held the same role for several years in a similar company, meeting traditional success markers, will be favoured over someone with a diverse background who may challenge traditional thinking. The rigidity of these systems fosters managerial homogeneity, with candidates being chosen for their ability to replicate what has already been done, rather than for their capacity to imagine and create what has not yet been conceived (O’Neil, 2016).

Some organisations have pioneered alternative recruitment strategies that prioritise diverse skills and perspectives over conventional metrics of past performance. For example, Accenture’s “job simulations” replicate realistic work environments, allowing candidates to demonstrate critical thinking, adaptability, and creativity. This method has enhanced diversity within their leadership, as candidates from varied backgrounds find more opportunities to showcase their skills in dynamic contexts (Gerlich, 2024). Similarly, Zappos has embraced a culture-first hiring strategy, evaluating candidates on their alignment with the company’s values rather than technical fit alone. This approach has led to a highly engaged workforce with innovative solutions emerging across departments (Bock, 2015).

Another issue tied to the automation of recruitment is the difficulty of capturing the nuances of soft skills, which are increasingly regarded as critical for

leadership positions. Soft skills such as emotional intelligence, empathy, and creativity are highly subjective and difficult to quantify. To counter the Tayloristic standardisation in recruitment, companies can implement assessment tools that prioritise soft skills essential for modern leadership. For instance, structured behavioural interviews can be utilised to gauge competencies such as empathy, adaptability, and ethical judgement (Chamorro-Premuzic & Yearsley, 2017). Situational judgement tests (SJTs), widely used in sectors requiring high levels of interpersonal skills, present candidates with realistic work scenarios, allowing interviewers to assess responses indicative of emotional intelligence and problem-solving ability (Bessen, 2019). Furthermore, companies like Unilever have adopted strengths-based interviews, which focus on intrinsic values and cultural fit rather than technical qualifications, enabling them to identify candidates aligned with their innovative and diverse culture (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2021). Traditional recruitment processes allow for subjective human judgement, where hiring managers may be inspired by a candidate's non-traditional background, charisma, or innovative ideas (Chamorro-Premuzic & Yearsley, 2017). In contrast, AI algorithms lack the capacity to 'see' these qualities, as they rely heavily on pre-defined metrics that prioritise technical skills over emotional or interpersonal strengths. As a result, AI-driven recruitment systems often exclude candidates who may have developed strong leadership qualities in non-traditional settings (Gerlich, 2023).

Indeed, the recruitment process becomes an exercise in identifying what is already known and established, rather than discovering something new and unexpected. The question then arises: how do we identify the characteristics that we didn't know would benefit the organisation? The analogy of shopping for something specific, only to be inspired by an unexpected discovery, is applicable here. When we define narrow requirements in recruitment, we are closing off the possibility of encountering individuals who might bring an entirely new dimension to the role. This undermines the potential for organisational growth and creativity (Bock, 2015).

The problem lies not only in the rigid definitions imposed by AI but also in the overwhelming volume of applications that necessitate this standardisation in the first place. Organisations, in an effort to cast a wide net and attract as many candidates as possible, have inadvertently created a situation where human resources personnel are forced to rely on automated systems to manage the sheer number of applicants. However, instead of addressing this volume issue by relying on automation, companies should reconsider how they position their job advertisements and how they target potential candidates. An alternative strategy would be to narrow the application pool at the outset by making the application process more selective and ensuring that only serious candidates apply. In doing so, companies can focus on quality rather than quantity, allowing for a more personal and subjective approach to recruitment (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2021).

Recruitment should be seen as an opportunity for inspiration, rather than

merely a technical process of matching criteria. Drawing on personal experience, I once sent my CV to a CEO of a major corporation without responding to a vacancy. The CEO invited me for a meeting simply because he found my background interesting. While there was no formal job opening, the interaction led to a valuable three-hour conversation about potential opportunities. This story illustrates the value of non-standard approaches in recruitment, where personal connections and curiosity can lead to unexpected and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Despite its limitations, automation in recruitment does provide certain benefits, especially in the realm of efficiency. For organisations inundated with applications, AI-driven pre-screening tools reduce the time required for initial candidate reviews, allowing human resources teams to focus on later-stage evaluations (Bessen, 2019). Additionally, some AI tools have demonstrated the ability to reduce biases in initial stages by evaluating objective skills uniformly, minimising unconscious human bias (O'Neil, 2016).

However, to prevent over-standardisation, companies can balance technology with human input at key stages. For instance, an AI system can shortlist candidates with necessary technical skills, after which human interviewers conduct behavioural interviews to assess qualities like adaptability, empathy, and leadership potential. Such hybrid approaches enable companies to maintain the advantages of automation without succumbing to the pitfalls of a purely Tayloristic model (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2021).

To extend the discussion, it is necessary to examine the deeper implications of automating recruitment beyond the immediate concern of standardisation. At the heart of the issue lies the growing divide between human intuition and algorithmic decision-making. Algorithms, while efficient, are fundamentally limited by the data upon which they are trained. They lack the contextual understanding and flexibility that humans possess, which is crucial for identifying leadership potential that goes beyond quantitative measures. As Gerlich (2023) emphasised, post-pandemic employee expectations have shifted, prioritising empathy, creativity, and adaptability over mere technical proficiency. These qualities are not easily measurable, and by relying on AI-driven recruitment tools, companies may be systematically excluding candidates who excel in these areas but fall short in traditional, data-driven metrics. The risk is that such algorithms perpetuate past biases and overlook the complex, nuanced qualities necessary for effective leadership in a rapidly changing business environment.

The biases embedded in AI systems present another major issue. These biases often stem from the training data used to inform recruitment algorithms, which tend to reflect historical hiring patterns. If a company's previous recruitment favoured certain demographic groups, the AI will likely reproduce these tendencies, reinforcing a cycle of homogeneity in leadership positions (O'Neil, 2016). Moreover, since AI systems are often trained on large datasets from specific industries, they tend to favour candidates with similar backgrounds and experiences, thereby disadvantaging those from non-traditional or diverse sectors. This not only limits

diversity in the managerial pool but also stifles innovation, as diverse experiences are essential for creative problem-solving and strategic thinking (Bessen, 2019). As organisations seek to navigate the complexities of global markets and technological disruptions, the exclusion of diverse candidates poses a significant strategic risk.

Another crucial element in this discussion is the role of organisational culture and the recruitment process as a reflection of company values. When recruitment is automated, and standardisation becomes the guiding principle, there is a danger that the human element—the values, mission, and vision that define a company—may be lost. Recruitment should be seen as an extension of a company's culture, where hiring managers not only assess candidates for their technical fit but also for their cultural alignment and potential to contribute to the company's long-term goals (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2021). When shifting too much of the process onto AI, organisations may inadvertently reduce recruitment to a transactional, efficiency-driven exercise, at the expense of long-term value creation. Recruitment should inspire both the employer and the potential employee, offering opportunities to discover individuals who may not meet every technical criterion but possess the creative and emotional intelligence to drive the company forward in unexpected ways.

The automation of recruitment processes, while efficient, reinforces a Tayloristic mindset that stifles innovation and creativity in leadership selection. AI-based systems, driven by narrow definitions of success and technical criteria, exclude unconventional candidates who may offer the diverse perspectives necessary for driving organisations forward. As businesses increasingly rely on automation, they risk overlooking the value of soft skills, emotional intelligence, and creative problem-solving, qualities that are critical for modern leadership. To break free from the constraints of standardisation, companies should rethink their recruitment strategies, focusing on attracting fewer, more relevant candidates and fostering an environment that welcomes non-standard applicants.

The implications of AI-driven recruitment extend beyond typical managerial roles, affecting a wide range of industries where non-standardised attributes are crucial. In healthcare, for example, where leadership often demands high levels of empathy and ethical sensitivity, algorithmic selection may overlook candidates who demonstrate these qualities. Similarly, in creative industries, where innovation and divergent thinking drive success, rigid criteria can exclude candidates capable of transformational contributions (Gerlich, 2023). Tailoring recruitment to consider industry-specific requirements can help prevent the exclusion of diverse talent.

Ethical concerns related to AI in recruitment also merit consideration. When AI algorithms use historical data to screen candidates, there is a risk of perpetuating biases from past hiring practices, leading to unfair treatment of certain demographic groups (O'Neil, 2016). Furthermore, transparency and data privacy present significant challenges; candidates often lack understanding of how their

personal information is processed and evaluated. For organisations to address these issues, transparent policies regarding data usage, along with ethical oversight of AI algorithms, are essential to uphold fairness and build trust in recruitment processes (Chamorro-Premuzic & Yearsley, 2017).

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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