Artificial Intelligence for HR: Book Club Guide

The following questions and discussion points are provided as a way to help you think critically about the content in the book and the lessons it presents. This book was developed to help readers understand AI and other technical applications within the field of human resources, talent, and learning. It's not a bunch of theory—it's a handbook for guiding your business into the future as we continue to see more automation and change over time. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did creating it.

Chapter One: A Snapshot of HR Today

1. Consider the story about Uber and Carnegie Mellon (p1). What industries do you think might hold competitors that could challenge your business? Which might have talent that could support your business, if you knew where to look?
2. In the section delving into the employee experience, one comment talks about "Companies don't really exist, people do" (p13). Why do you think those of us that hire, train, and retain the talent in the business allow this to happen? How can we ensure our business never becomes one of those firms that treats people as disposable, especially as we continue to see smarter AI and automation solutions that can approximate human behavior?

Chapter Two: The Basics of Artificial Intelligence

3. If you were challenged to define "intelligence," what would you say (p28-30)? How is it similar to or different from human capabilities?
4. Can you name two or three AI-related applications you've used today? This could be anything from natural language processing to machine learning or anything in between. Examples can be found on p32-36, if you get stuck.

Chapter Three: General Applications Within HCM

5. Guardian Life has taken a bold move to try and help employees cope with technology changes (p45). How might you and/or your organization help your own staff to cope with the impending changes brought on by technology? Do you think different employee groups and demographics will respond in different ways?
6. On p53 an example is provided of a meeting scheduling application, and productivity/efficiency is demonstrated as the value the system provides. Do you think this focus solely on productivity is the right solution long-term? After all, machines are infinitely more productive than people, so where does it end? What's the balance between machine-like productivity and human qualities like compassion, creativity, or collaboration?

7. Wearable devices are seeing some usage, but we expect to see much more in the coming years (p58). What do you think might be some of the value of tracking worker collaborations and interactions with their peers over time? What might be some of the downsides or issues with these kinds of tracking methods?

Chapter Four: Core HR and Workforce Management

8. Scheduling workers and swapping shifts, for those businesses that do it, is a complex process that is often fraught with favoritism and friction from an employee experience perspective (p69-70). Is a scheduling bot the right answer to eliminate bias and favoritism, or does it remove the manager from the process of selecting the right team members that function best together, minimizing their role as a leader?
9. In the Uber pay equity discussion (p73-74), we see that pay inequality can be mitigated to some degree with an algorithmic system. However, in the Uber example men still earned more than their female counterparts. Is this "good enough?" Will we ever get to 100% parity, or will we always have an uneven distribution of compensation?

Chapter Five: Talent Acquisition

10. When the humans beat the machine in the sourcing competition (p85-86), it took significant amounts of time and effort compared to the algorithm's processing time. We want to believe that humans are better at recruiting than machines, but research studies show that humans have dozens of biases affecting our decisions. What would be the value and benefits of totally automating the entire recruiting cycle? What would be the costs, whether for the employer or the candidates themselves? And perhaps the most challenging question, would those costs ever be worthwhile?
11. Chatbots are seeing their most heavy implementations in a recruiting context. These tools create a different experience for candidates, and they also engage more people that may have left the careers page before applying in the past. If you could have a bot that just "handled" the part of your recruiting process that you enjoy the least, what would you outsource to a bot?

Chapter Six: Learning and Development

12. If your firm unleashed an algorithm to find and help identify and fill the skills gap in your organization, what skills do you think it would prioritize? Should you be hiring for those skills or developing them within your internal workforce? (p114)
13. In the Georgia Tech case study (p119), we see that universities (and employers more broadly) can disguise chatbots as humans. Should they? What might be the consequences if it's discovered by candidates or employees that "Cathy the HR Rep" is really a bot?

Chapter Seven: Talent Management

14. The case study on page 139-140 looks at how sentiment analysis technology can understand the emotions and moods behind text content. Would you think this is more accurate than a traditional satisfaction or engagement survey with Likert scales (Very satisfied, not very satisfied, dissatisfied, etc.)? What could you do with the information this type of analysis provides?
15. One of the biggest challenges within talent management for many firms is having a performance management process that actually enables better performance. AI can actually look at comments and ratings to ensure they match. For example, rating someone as a 2 of 5 stars but giving them a positive compliment is misleading. AI can see that mismatch and suggest changes to the comment to ensure accuracy. Would this help managers get better at the process or do you think they would look for ways to game the system to give positive ratings to the people they are already biased towards?
16. The World Bank Group innovation described on page 145 is one that was born out of adversity, but this approach is now being used by many firms. How would this "internal gig economy" look within your own company? What skills would you offer and what skills could you leverage to support your team?

Chapter Eight: Challenges of Adopting AI Technology

17. Algorithmic bias is a real concern, but we are quick to forget that algorithms are biased often because they are fed inaccurate data. If we only hire and promote men, our hiring system will predict male hires. The algorithm isn't smart enough to police itself (yet). Where might be the ideal places within the employee experience to use human judgment to balance out the potential for algorithmic bias?
18. Is the metaphor of self-driving cars and losing our ability to think and make decisions a real concern? If we continue to automate and hand off decisions to algorithms, when does that start to harm our ability to make our own decisions? (p160)
19. Data privacy is increasing in importance today (p166). What might change within HR and talent due to increasing regulation and requirements on this front? Should employers be open and up front with candidates about the fact that they were reviewed by algorithms, potentially even including details or signals the algorithm considered and how the decision was made?

Chapter Nine: Skills of the Future

20. The cancer identification example on page 175 offers one story about how to balance human and machine insights. What are some areas within the human resources spectrum where similar types of balance might occur? Hiring? Development? Analytics? Something else?
21. If AI can equalize the performance between the great and not-so-great employees, leveling the playing field in a variety of professions (p180), will businesses finally be less

tolerant of the top performer with zero emotional intelligence (the all-star jerk, as we like to say on our team)?

22. Pick one of the five skills (creativity, curiosity, compassion, collaboration, critical thinking) and make an argument for why humans are better than machines at that skill. In addition, highlight a handful of jobs that require that skill that could be shielded somewhat from the wave of AI and automation that the future is sure to bring.
23. Perform the same exercise in question 22 on your own job. Which of the five skills does your job require most? How can you emphasize that component while potentially automating some of the more routine tasks?

A Note from the Author

I sincerely hope you enjoyed the book and this discussion guide. If you would be interested in having me speak with your team, at an event, etc. about the topic, please feel free to reach out to my team at any time. In addition to speaking, I lead the research practice at Lighthouse Research & Advisory, which means we offer advisory services to employers, including:

- HR and talent technology landscape and deep dive advisory/strategy meetings, including technology selection support and shortlisting
- HR and talent trend advisory based on our research and expertise in the market, including high-level advisory based on your unique industry, company size, and more
- Vendor advisory and strategy for competitive landscape analysis, buyer preferences, and more

Our mission is to make the lives of HR leaders better, one company at a time. Don't hesitate to contact us if there's ever anything we can do to help.