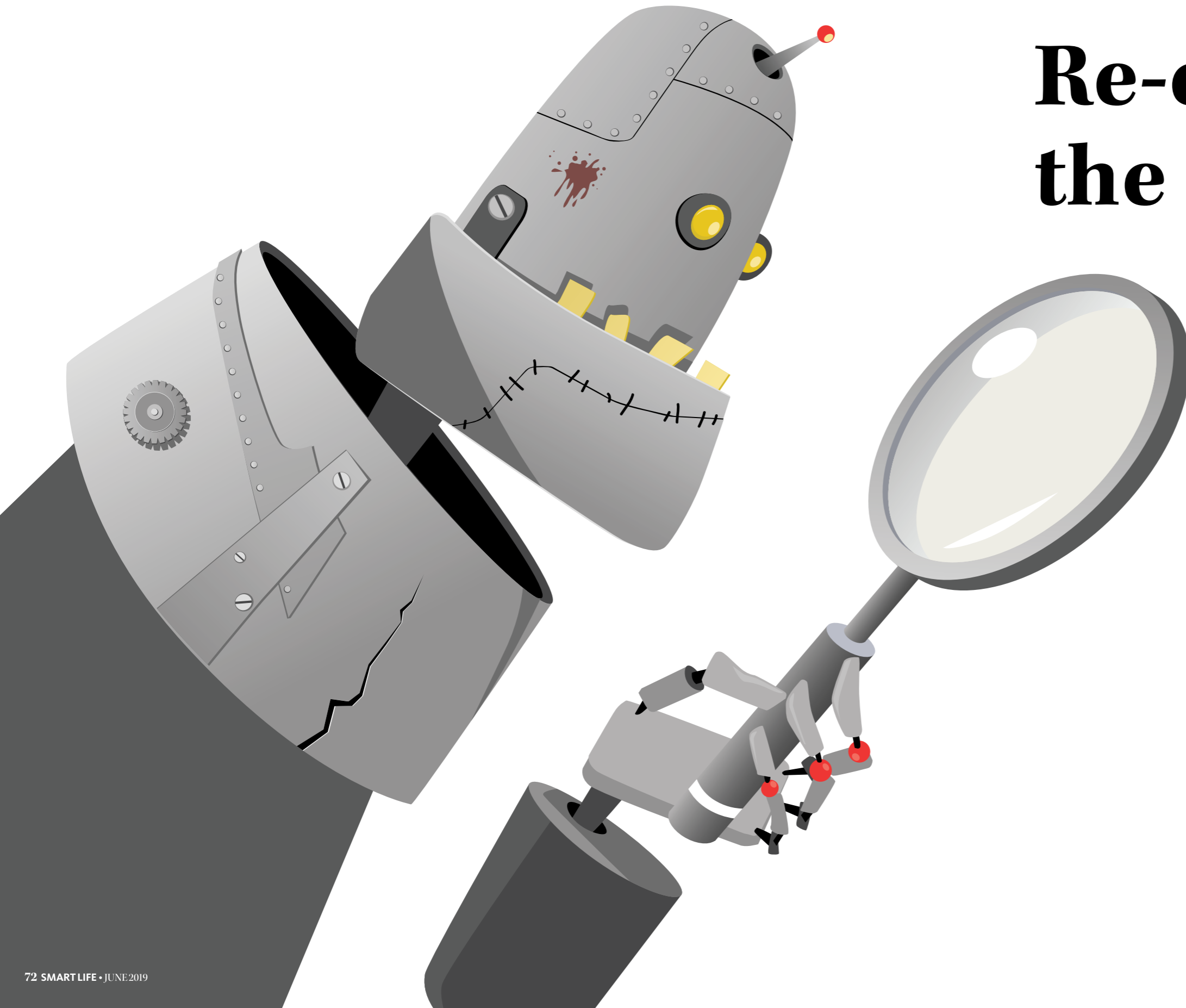


Re-engineering the HR space

New-age technologies like artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain, robotic process automation, augmented reality and virtual reality have brought in a paradigm shift in the way an organisation operates

BY RAJIV DOGRA





With technological innovations at its peak, the conventional job roles in human resources industry and hiring practices have transformed remarkably over the years.

Traditionally, recruitment and employee engagement were considered to be the only key paperwork related to compliance, hiring and employee information. However, the emergence of new age technologies—Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, Blockchain, Robotic Process Automation (RPA), Cyber-security, Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR)—have opened several new opportunities in the human resources (HR) industry.

Real-time data collection and insights provided by AI is making a huge difference in HR practices such as talent hiring, performance management and compensation. More organisations are increasingly looking at aligning people, processes, systems, applications and tools to this new world where connected products and services are at the epicentre of continuous digital transformation. For instance, Tech Mahindra has launched a number of initiatives aimed at providing the workplace of the future under TechMHRNxt, which is a part of its TechMNxt charter. “Under TechMHRNxt, we are continuously looking to develop and invest in futuristic tech-enabled possibilities to enhance the employee experience. We have, for example, introduced the Facial Recognition Attendance System equipped with a Mood-o-meter leveraging AI, which gives employees the freedom of marking their attendance through facial recognition. Similarly, other initiatives include an AI-driven programme, Talent Exchange, by virtue of which we are trying to create a marketplace of talent, by matching the job with the candidate’s profile, and giving a score accordingly,” says Harshvendra Soin, chief people officer, Tech Mahindra.

According to Ajit Menon, group HR head, Dalmia Bharat Group, the company in recent years has taken a core decision to move to digital HR. “The usage of technology and digital space to bring about efficiency in productivity and operations was done and dusted two years ago. Now, we aim to move towards a complete digital cultural shift,” he says.

Similarly, Sun Life Financial Asia Service Center plans to implement several new age systems to improve its HR performance, including AI recruiters, onboarding support as well as data analytics. “We also plan to employ useful applications that provide a mechanised system to answer all critical questions of a new employee,” says Rajeev Bhardwaj, vice-president, human resource, Sun Life Financial Asia Service Center.

Gurugram-based Shiv Mehta, HR manager, Double Tree by Hilton, says, “The growing influence of Big Data in HR management has set new realities for talent acquisition professionals who can now make better hiring decisions based on scientific methods. Our organisation is putting into practice the Big Data tools to recruit people, analyse their skills and talents and even predict future hires.”

The keyword is automation

UK-based Karthik Prasad, founder, Beat My Salary, which is a personalised online recruiting platform that matches candidates with jobs based on their experience and skills, says, “Big Data is helping companies breakdown a huge cluster of information into simpler chunks which they can analyse and make some quick decisions. On the other hand, AI is letting companies apply certain business rules and understand intentions in order to make an informed decision like a human being on that particular small data set.” It is the first portal in the UK to be registered and integrated with the Google Cloud Job Discovery platform.

In fact, AI systems have enabled

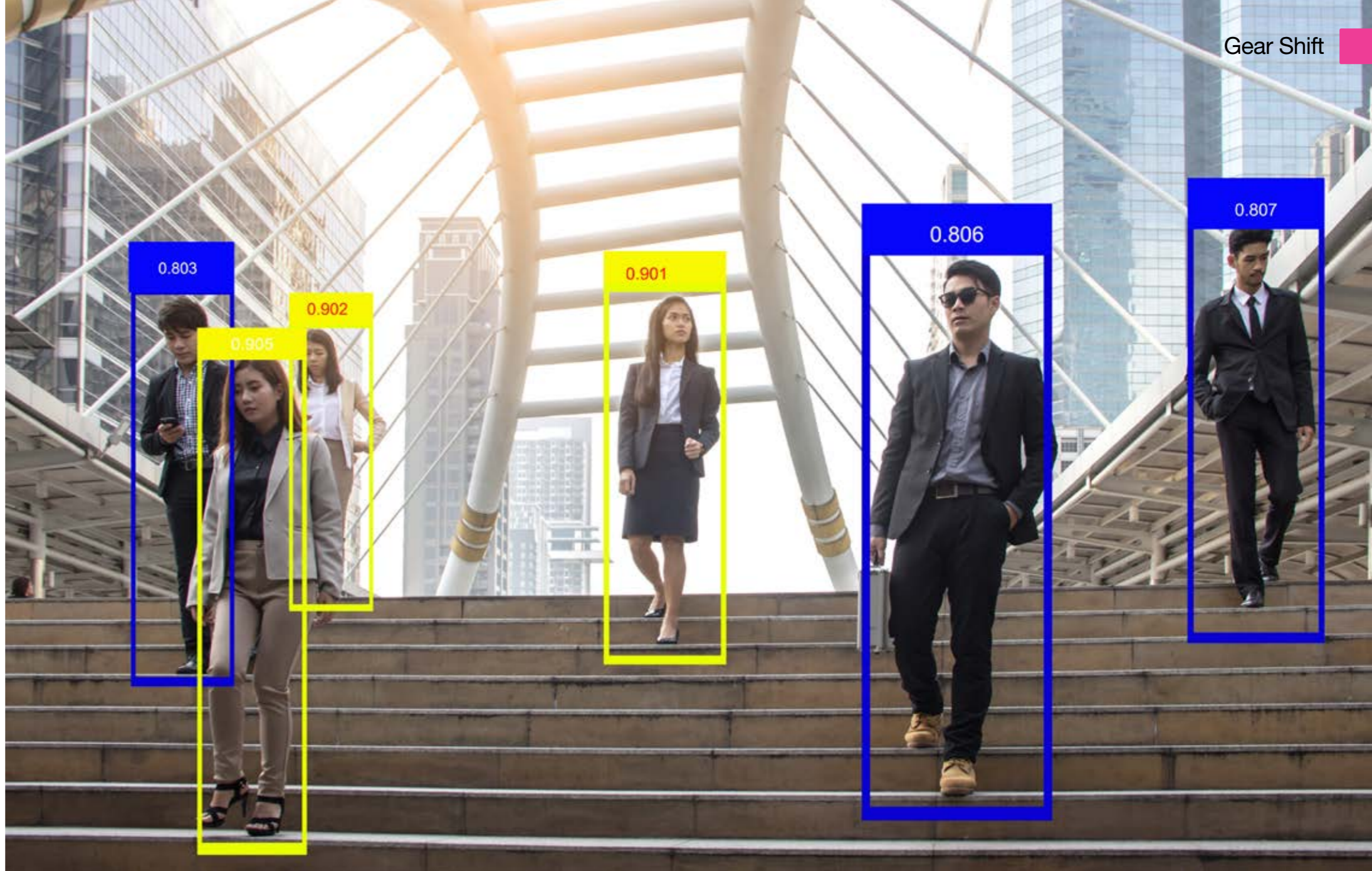
the automation of a series of tasks that were earlier performed manually, thereby improving productivity and efficiency. Be it talent acquisition, onboarding, performance review, feedback, training or retention, automated programs that support these domains have greatly reduced the burden of a lot of administrative tasks, thereby allowing HR managers greater time and energy to focus on mentoring and motivating employees. “A large number of applications are received

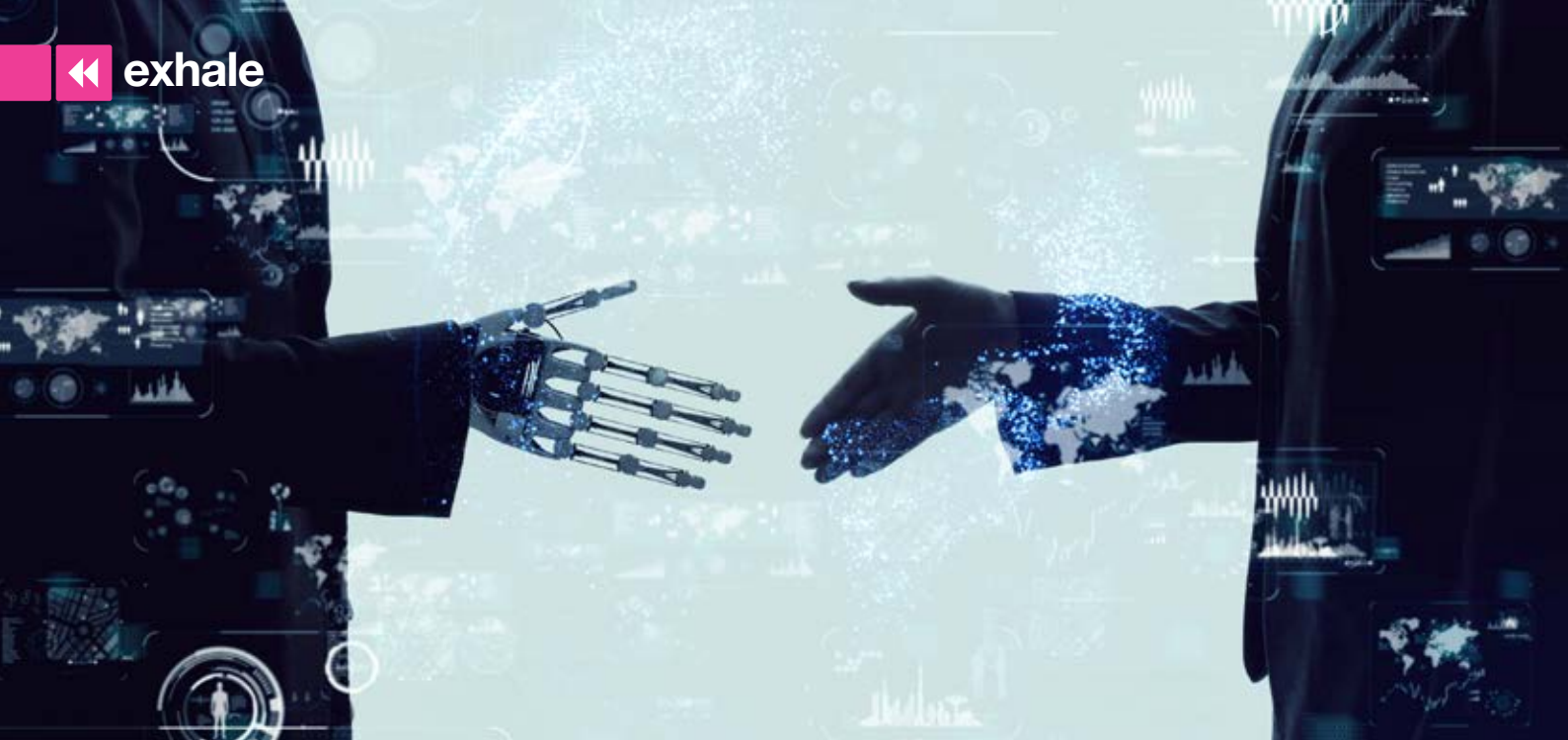
for any opening advertised publicly for an organisation. Typically, a majority of these candidates do not even match the required qualifications and fail to make the first cut. Earlier, all of this screening and short-listing had to be done manually. However, AI-supported advanced recruitment systems today perform these tasks in an automated way. Apart from the resume review, there are a series of essential tasks required to push the candidates through the recruitment process such

as scheduling interviews, sending reminders for reporting. The advent of AI systems has enabled the automation of many such tasks. Mechanising repetitive tasks and helping in people analytics and retention through the use of Big Data are modern advancements that are revolutionising the HR space,” says Bhardwaj.

In the field of talent acquisition, companies are also using various social media platforms for real-time talent acquisition. “In this case, we

define a particular role and not just a job description. This results in a reduction of about 40-50 per cent of expenditure on talent acquisition as we eliminate the effort to deal with job portals or recruitment firms. We then create a database of those who apply for the role. We have an applicant tracking software which helps us to improve talent acquisition in terms of speed based on keyword search. The manual intervention has more or less decreased substantially. We are a quite





paperless organisation now and the hierarchy barriers have been eliminated. Our appraisal system, key result areas (KRAs), evaluation, everything can be tracked online. In short, our key value systems are being met through technology and digital intervention,” says Menon.

“With the help of Big Data and AI, companies are able to capture real-time data at every stage of the employee lifecycle, be it talent acquisition, onboarding experience, flexi-compensation, inter-departmental transfers, learning and development, succession planning, centralised attendance management system and performance management system,” says Jagdip Kumar, chief information officer, Cosmo Films, adding that futuristic technologies like SAP’s Cloud platform are helping companies achieve operational excellence and standout in the market.

The automation of routine processes and efficient data management through technology results in up to 65 per cent gains in time and cost for the HR administration function, says Soin. “AI has enabled us to improve efficiency, increase the speed of delivery and reduce operating expenditure. For example, query resolution, which

would have a service-level agreement (SLA) of eight hours earlier, can now be completed in less than eight seconds through our bot. Similarly, for leave application—the existing HCM (Human Capital Management) system that usually requires around 10 clicks and five inputs, can now be done in one click and two inputs,” he adds.

According to Shubika Bilkha, partner, EdpowerU, which is a millennial employability-focused platform, about 60 per cent of the workplace success is attributed to key skills such as emotional intelligence, people management, teamwork and collaboration, resilience, leadership and decision making, cognitive flexibility and more. “The value of AI and Big Data is really to bring efficiencies in the existing process and elevate the role of the HR manager to a strategic business partner. In this regard, our specially developed Employability Assessment (EA) is deployed across universities, recruitment agencies and corporates to analyse a participant’s competency across key workplace skills. It provides employers with the capacity to assess a candidate’s capabilities across key behavioral skills, gives graduates the ability to actively work on specific behavioral traits and provides organisations with a framework to

assess existing executives towards succession planning and employee development,” she says.

The roadmap ahead

In India, providing learning opportunities for employees to keep them relevant in the constantly changing jobs landscape has been one of the major challenges faced by the industry. However, educational institutions are recognising the gap and trying to fill it. Mumbai-based Professor Debasish Guha, director, Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence at SP Jain School of Global Management, says that the educational institution is making efforts to equip students and other program participants with the latest knowledge. “We are incorporating information about these innovations in many of our programmes. Also, we have started to deploy some of these techniques into our own corporate practices, especially in the use of HR analytics for sales teams,” he says.

Also, upskilling and reskilling will be the key focus areas for HR professionals. While people skills will remain at the heart of all HR roles, managers will need to adopt skills in AI, data analytics, and automation to further augment HR practices. □