



AI, Automation & Algorithmic HR: Bias, Trust, Agentic Systems, and the Transformation of Generalist Roles in the Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence, automation, and algorithmic systems are reshaping human resource management functions—from recruitment and performance appraisal to operational workflows. This paper examines four interconnected dimensions of this transformation, with particular attention to the Indian institutional and organizational context: algorithmic bias in AI-based recruitment and screening tools and the resulting legal exposure under Indian equal-opportunity norms; employee perceptions of trust and fairness in AI-driven performance appraisal; adoption barriers and governance challenges of agentic AI in HR operations within Indian organizations; and the impact of generative AI on HR generalist roles and the consequent skill shifts required. Drawing on constitutional provisions, statutory frameworks (including the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023), empirical studies, industry surveys, and emerging policy guidance, the paper argues that while AI offers efficiency and scale, it simultaneously amplifies risks of discrimination, erodes perceived justice, demands new governance architectures, and necessitates a fundamental reorientation of HR competencies toward judgment, ethics, oversight, and human-centric capabilities. Recommendations emphasize mandatory bias audits, human-in-the-loop designs, robust agentic governance, and deliberate reskilling strategies.

Keywords: Algorithmic bias, AI recruitment, performance appraisal fairness, agentic AI, generative AI, HR generalists, Indian equal opportunity law, DPDP Act 2023

INTRODUCTION

The integration of AI into HRM—commonly termed algorithmic or AI-enabled HR—has moved rapidly from experimentation to operational deployment. In India, high volumes of applications, large workforces in IT/BPM and Global Capability Centres, and competitive pressure to digitize have accelerated adoption of AI screening tools, predictive analytics for performance, generative AI for content and decision support, and, more recently, agentic AI systems capable of autonomous action (Behera, 2025).

Yet these technologies inherit and can amplify historical patterns of discrimination rooted in gender, caste, region, language, disability, and socio-economic background (David et al., 2025). Simultaneously, employees evaluate AI systems through lenses of organizational justice, trust, and fairness (Anisyahrini et al., 2026). Agentic systems introduce novel risks of autonomy without accountability (Hughes et al., 2025), while generative AI is reshaping the daily work of HR generalists (Garcia & Kwok, 2025).

This paper synthesizes doctrinal, empirical, and practitioner evidence across the four focal areas. It highlights India's distinctive regulatory landscape—strong constitutional guarantees of equality alongside limited AI-specific statutory obligations (Agarwal & Nene, 2025)—and derives implications for organizations, policymakers, and HR professionals.

Algorithmic Bias in AI-Based Recruitment/Screening Tools and Legal Exposure under Indian Equal-Opportunity Norms

AI recruitment and screening tools (resume parsers, ranking algorithms, video-interview analytics, large language model-based shortlisting) learn from historical data. When that data reflects past discriminatory

practices, the systems reproduce or amplify bias at scale (Köchling & Wehner, 2020). Empirical work cautions that even highly accurate tools can replicate discriminatory tendencies embedded in training data, systematica -

lly disadvantaging particular subgroups (Köchling et al., 2020). Documented cases include Amazon's abandoned recruiting tool that penalized women's resumes—it downgraded resumes containing the word "women's" (as in "women's chess club captain") and graduates of two all-women's colleges (Dastin, 2022), having been trained on a decade of resumes of top software engineers, roughly 80% of whom were male (Yam & Skorburg, 2021)—systems that downgrade candidates from Tier-3 cities or the Northeast, and LLMs that exhibit systematic, identity-based biases: auditing leading models on ~361,000 randomized resumes, researchers found lower scores for Black male candidates with comparable qualifications, producing ~1–3 percentage-point differences in hiring probabilities, with the direction and magnitude of bias varying across models and social groups (An et al., 2025). Pairwise CV experiments across 70 professions and 22 leading LLMs similarly found consistent gendered-name effects—with all tested models favoring female-named candidates—alongside substantial positional biases in candidate selection (Rozado, 2026).

In the Indian context, additional vectors of bias arise from linguistic and cultural skews, caste and regional proxies embedded in educational or location signals, and under-representation of persons with disabilities in training datasets (Behera, 2025; David et al., 2025). The risks are not hypothetical: an automated phone-interview tool has produced "English competency" scores even for candidates who spoke exclusively in German or Chinese (Rhea et al., 2022), and data-driven systems in Indian workplaces have been shown to invisibly inherit discriminatory properties from past institutions, refracted through opacity and unequal access to supporting infrastructure (P et al., 2022).

Legal exposure rests primarily on constitutional foundations rather than AI-specific statutes.

Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection; arbitrariness in state action (and, increasingly argued, private action with public consequences) is unconstitutional.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.

Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in public employment. These provisions bind the state more directly than private employers. For private sector actors, exposure arises through sectoral statutes: Equal Remuneration Act (gender), Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (reasonable accommodation and non-discrimination), Transgender Persons Act 2019, SC/ST Act, and general labour codes. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 imposes obligations of accuracy, purpose limitation, and accountability, and recognizes a limited right to a summary of processing, but does not grant an explicit "right to explanation" of algorithmic decisions nor mandate bias audits (Mandal, 2026). Scholars have accordingly urged that critical decisions based on personal data undergo human review so that they are not solely the result of automated processing (Tandon & Gupta, 2025).

Comparative analysis underscores the gap: the EU AI Act classifies recruitment AI—alongside systems used for promotion, termination, task allocation, and performance monitoring—as high-risk under Annex III (Moore, 2023) and imposes conformity assessments, transparency, and human oversight (Mökander et al., 2021); Illinois' AI Video Interview Act has since 2020 required companies to disclose the general types of characteristics AI uses to evaluate candidates (Drage & Mackereth, 2022). India currently lacks equivalent binding rules (Agarwal & Nene, 2025). Proposed or draft measures (including discussions around equality impact assessments and workplace AI bills) remain non-binding or incomplete within India's still-evolving governance approach (Harmon et al., 2024). Consequently, legal risk for Indian employers using biased tools is real but largely reactive—grounded in constitutional challenges (especially for public employers), civil claims under existing anti-discrimination statutes, reputational damage, and potential regulatory scrutiny by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology or labour authorities.

Organizations face exposure when automated systems produce disparate impact without legitimate, job-related justification—including where protected characteristics are indirectly captured through proxies such as educational or locational signals (Hunkenschroer & Luetge, 2022)—and when candidates or employees lack

meaningful avenues for challenge. The absence of mandatory audit or disclosure requirements heightens both legal and ethical vulnerability (Yam & Skorburg, 2021).

Employee Perceptions of Trust and Fairness in AI-Driven Performance Appraisal

Employee acceptance of AI in performance management hinges on perceptions of organizational justice—distributive (outcome fairness), procedural (process fairness), and informational (explanation and transparency)—and the resulting trust in the system, managers, and organization (Anisyahrini et al., 2026; Ochmann et al., 2024).

Empirical evidence indicates nuanced patterns:

- In structured, data-intensive evaluation tasks, some field experiments find employees perceive AI as fairer and more accurate than the average human manager, particularly when human managers' interpersonal fairness is low (Shao-jun et al., 2023). In related experiments, employees showed higher trust in AI algorithms than in highly experienced human supervisors when feedback followed a fixed formula—and combined AI–human feedback produced the highest perceptions of all (Biswas et al., 2024).
- Conversely, granting AI high decision-making autonomy without clear human oversight often reduces perceived procedural justice: experimental evidence shows human involvement is key to sustaining procedural fairness (Hermstrüwer & Langenbach, 2023), and employees perceive algorithmic decisions as less fair and trustworthy than human decisions in tasks requiring human skills (Lee, 2018). Employees distrust "black-box" systems and prefer hybrid models in which AI provides input but humans retain final authority (Biswas et al., 2024), consistent with the broader literature on algorithm aversion—persistent reluctance to rely on algorithms even when they outperform humans (Mahmud et al., 2021).
- Features employees regard as fair predictors tend to be job-relevant (work experience, field alignment, performance history, professional development). Demographic or private attributes (gender, marital status, number of children) are widely viewed as unfair—findings from a survey of 306 employees evaluating 31 predictive features (Majrashi, 2025).
- Cross-cultural and gender differences appear: distributive and procedural justice strongly predict trust in AI—with distributive justice exerting the stronger effect—while informational justice influences trust in the organization and managers more than trust in the AI itself; trust in AI, in turn, enhances affective commitment (Tâm & Connolly, 2025). Eastern samples show gender differences in trust-formation pathways not observed in Western samples (Tâm & Connolly, 2025).
- Trust in AI-assisted appraisal is further shaped by explainability, which measurably increases perceived fairness (Tal et al., 2022), and by alignment with psychological contracts (Tâm & Connolly, 2025). Disclosing that AI generated performance feedback can itself trigger negative employee perceptions—an adverse effect that proactive communication about the objectives, benefits, and scope of AI use, and longer employee tenure, mitigate (Tong et al., 2021).
- Low trust correlates with reduced affective commitment (Tâm & Connolly, 2025), increased technostress (Cram et al., 2022), and resistance that erodes well-being and raises turnover intentions (Jianu et al., 2025). High trust, conversely, can enhance commitment when justice perceptions are positive (Tâm & Connolly, 2025).

For Indian organizations—often hierarchical and relationship-oriented (Behera, 2025), operating within a high power-distance culture (Sau & Pal, 2025)—opacity in AI appraisal risks eroding the relational fabric of performance management. Hybrid designs with transparent criteria, human review rights, and clear communication of how AI inputs are weighted are essential to maintain perceived fairness and organizational trust (Ochmann et al., 2024; Tong et al., 2021).

Agentic AI in HR Operations: Adoption Barriers and Governance Challenges in Indian Organizations

Agentic AI refers to systems capable of autonomous goal-directed action, multi-step reasoning, tool use, and interaction with other systems or humans with limited supervision (Acharya et al., 2025; Murugesan, 2025). In HR, potential applications include autonomous candidate screening and outreach, payroll exception handling, benefits administration, onboarding workflows, compliance monitoring, and even preliminary performance or succession recommendations.

Indian enterprises, especially GCCs and large IT/BPM firms, show high interest. EY projects India's GCC market will exceed US\$100 billion by 2030, housing over 2,500 centers and employing more than 4.5 million professionals (Thukral, 2025). Globally, corporate AI investment reached a record US\$252.3 billion in 2024, agentic AI already accounts for 17% of total AI value—projected to reach 29% by 2028 (Korolev, 2026)—and over 77% of Indian start-ups report investing in advanced technologies including AI and machine learning (Khullar et al., 2025). Yet maturity of governance lags, with deployment accompanied by unresolved ethical and legal concerns amid an evolving regulatory environment (Chahar et al., 2025). Key barriers and challenges include:

- **Data quality, readiness, and governance:** Fragmented HRIS landscapes, inconsistent master data, and privacy constraints under the DPDP Act (Mandal, 2026).
- **Accountability and observability:** Difficulty attributing decisions or errors to specific agents, given the autonomy, adaptability, and emergent behaviors of agentic systems (Kumurdjieva et al., 2025).
- **Identity and access management for non-human actors:** Standing access risks, incomplete discovery of autonomous agents.
- **Integration complexity and legacy systems:** Difficulty embedding agents into existing process chains, including compatibility problems with legacy systems that can break compliance or audit trails (Hughes et al., 2025).
- **Regulatory and risk uncertainty:** Absence of employment-specific rules for autonomous decision-making (Agarwal & Nene, 2025); voluntary AI governance guidelines emphasize human oversight but lack enforceability (Harmon et al., 2024).
- **Organizational and cultural factors:** Federated structures with diffused ownership, acute AI skill shortages—a 51% shortage of AI/ML talent has been documented across Indian enterprises (Verma & Chawla, 2025)—resistance to change, and pressure to deploy rapidly at the expense of controls (Dwivedi et al., 2019).

Governance requirements unique to agentic systems in HR include continuous monitoring, clear human-in-the-loop gates for high-stakes decisions (hiring, promotion, termination, compensation), immutable audit logs, purpose limitation, bias testing throughout the agent lifecycle, and mechanisms for employees to contest agent actions (Kumurdjieva et al., 2025; Narayana, 2025). Without these, organizations face amplified legal, operational, and reputational risk (Hughes et al., 2025). Indian firms currently lag global peers in mature agentic governance models despite relatively high pilot activity (Chahar et al., 2025).

Impact of Generative AI Adoption on HR Generalist Roles and Required Skill Shifts

Generative AI automates significant portions of transactional and content-generation work traditionally performed by HR generalists: drafting job descriptions and offer letters, answering routine employee queries, synthesizing policy documents, preparing basic reports, screening support, and learning-content creation (Garcia & Kwok, 2025; Rane, 2024). Studies estimate potential time savings of 25% or more in shared-services and generalist roles (Mittana, 2025), freeing capacity for higher-value activities. The productivity

evidence is direct: in a pre-registered experiment on midlevel professional writing tasks, access to ChatGPT cut average completion time by 40% and raised output quality by 18% (Noy & Zhang, 2023); a field study of 5,172 customer-support agents found AI assistance raised issues resolved per hour by 15%, with the largest gains among less experienced workers (Brynjolfsson et al., 2025); and synthesized estimates place average labor-cost savings for exposed tasks at roughly 27% (Acemoglu, 2024). In HR specifically, a personalised assistant bot at one multinational handled 11,000 questions with 81% accuracy and processed about 19,400 queries per month from 2,100 unique users, generating cost savings through reduced HR headcount (Malik et al., 2020).

Rather than wholesale elimination, roles are transforming (Garcia & Kwok, 2025). Roughly two-thirds of existing occupations are to some degree exposed to automation, yet only 14% of jobs in OECD countries are highly capable of full automation, with another 32% facing substantial change (Orchard & Tasiemski, 2023). Routine execution declines; demand rises for:

- **AI fluency and orchestration:** Prompt engineering, tool selection, workflow design, and interpreting AI outputs (Sudarso, 2026).
- **Judgment and critical oversight:** Evaluating AI recommendations for bias, context, and ethical implications; deciding when to override.
- **Ethical and governance literacy:** Understanding algorithmic bias, data privacy, and responsible AI principles (Sudarso, 2026).
- **Human-centric durable skills:** Empathy, complex employee-relations negotiation, change leadership, business acumen, and relationship management—capabilities AI cannot replicate (Dima et al., 2024).
- **Emerging specialized roles:** HR AI ethicist, HR product manager, people-analytics specialist, digital HR operations lead (Garcia & Kwok, 2025).

Research recommends a balanced approach of approximately 60% reskilling of existing staff and 40% strategic hiring for most HR roles. This aligns with survey evidence that employee reskilling is the most widely preferred AI-talent strategy among large employers, chosen by almost half of surveyed organizations (Pytel-Kopczyńska & Niedbał, 2023), and with analyses recommending that organizations develop existing employees' AI literacy and data skills while selectively hiring specialist expertise (Farhan & Hatem, 2024). HR professionals themselves report needing regular upskilling to cope with AI integration, ideally through hybrid human–AI work designs (Dima et al., 2024). Generalists who remain purely transactional face obsolescence risk as chatbots absorb routine administration (Kutieshat et al., 2025; Mahmood & IQBAL, 2025); those who evolve into multi-skilled professionals who supervise AI systems, translate insights into human decisions, and safeguard fairness and trust become more valuable—with HR professionals across sectors reporting that human–AI collaboration is shifting the field toward strategic, analytical, and human-oriented work (Jabeen et al., 2025).

DISCUSSION AND INTEGRATED IMPLICATIONS

The four themes are mutually reinforcing. Biased recruitment systems undermine trust before employment even begins (Ochmann et al., 2024). Opaque appraisal systems erode justice perceptions and commitment (Tâm & Connolly, 2025). Uncontrolled agentic systems multiply bias and accountability failures across the employee lifecycle (Hughes et al., 2025). Generative AI both amplifies these risks (through hallucinated or biased content) and creates the capacity for more strategic, oversight-oriented HR work—if skills are deliberately developed (Garcia & Kwok, 2025).

India's regulatory posture—strong constitutional equality principles paired with limited AI-specific mandates (Agarwal & Nene, 2025)—creates a window of opportunity and risk within an AI governance approach that remains in formation (Harmon et al., 2024). Organizations that treat compliance as a minimum and proactively implement bias audits, explainability mechanisms, human oversight, and employee voice will reduce legal

exposure and strengthen talent outcomes (Tal et al., 2022; Yam & Skorbarg, 2021). Those that prioritize speed over governance invite disparate impact claims, employee resistance, and eventual regulatory intervention—a risk amplified by India's entrenched social stratifications, which AI systems are documented to perpetuate in the absence of deliberate safeguards (David et al., 2025).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Mandatory or voluntary bias and equality impact assessments** for high-stakes AI HR systems, with public or regulator reporting for large employers—extending the impact-assessment logic developed for hiring algorithms to the full employment lifecycle (Yam & Skorbarg, 2021).
- **Human-in-the-loop requirements** and contestability rights for automated decisions affecting hiring, appraisal, promotion, or termination, given consistent evidence that oversight sustains perceived fairness (Hermstrüwer & Langenbach, 2023) and doctrinal arguments that livelihood-affecting decisions warrant human review and appeal rights in India (Khan, 2026).
- **Agentic AI governance frameworks** covering identity management, continuous monitoring, auditability, and clear accountability chains (Hughes et al., 2025; Kumurdjieva et al., 2025).
- **Reskilling programs** emphasizing AI fluency, ethical judgment, and durable human skills; redesign of generalist roles toward oversight and strategic partnership (Dima et al., 2024; Pytel-Kopczyńska & Niedbał, 2023).
- **Transparency and communication** to employees about AI use, criteria, and appeal mechanisms to build trust—the same communication that mitigates AI-feedback disclosure effects (Tong et al., 2021).
- **Policy development:** India should move toward sectoral AI rules for employment that complement the DPDP Act and constitutional guarantees, drawing lessons from the EU's risk-tiered approach—including fundamental rights impact assessments and stakeholder participation—while remaining context-sensitive (Rigotti et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

AI, automation, and algorithmic systems are not neutral tools; they reconfigure power, opportunity, and accountability in the workplace (Kellogg et al., 2019). In India, the combination of rapid adoption, deep social stratifications (David et al., 2025), and an evolving legal framework (Agarwal & Nene, 2025) makes responsible deployment both urgent and complex. Addressing algorithmic bias under equal-opportunity norms, cultivating employee trust through fair appraisal design, establishing robust governance for agentic systems, and deliberately shifting HR generalist capabilities toward judgment and human-centric value creation are essential for realizing productivity gains without sacrificing equity or legitimacy. Future research should prioritize longitudinal Indian field studies (Anisyahrini et al., 2026), evaluation of emerging regulatory instruments, and measurement of the effectiveness of hybrid human–AI HR models (Biswas et al., 2024).

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