

Case Study 2: AI in Hiring and Promotion Decisions

This case study examines the ethical issues of using AI in hiring and promotion decisions since subtle bias in training materials can lead to perpetuation of racial, ethnic, and gender stereotyping. In this case study, students take on the role of HR managers who are debating whether to use AI in hiring and promotion decisions and, if a decision is made to utilize AI, what will be the safeguards used to ensure against the perpetuation of subtle (and not so subtle) biases.

Goals

- Introduce students to the ethical issues of using AI in hiring and promotion decisions
- Have students test for the own subtle biases

Key Philosophical Questions

- To what extent can we mitigate the problems of subtle bias in training materials?
- Is it sufficient to simply include more diversity when it comes to the training materials themselves or is it necessary to check for subtle biases in order to correct for them?
- What are the ethical issues that using AI can amplify in the hiring process if a concerted effort is not made to address them?
- Should AI be used in the hiring and promotion process?
- If AI is used, how can we address the Montreal Declaration's Respect for Autonomy, Principle of Diversity Inclusion, Principle of Democratic Participation, and Principle of Equity while upholding Virtue Ethics?

Tags

- Respect for Autonomy
- Principle of Diversity Inclusion
- Principle of Democratic Participation
- Principle of Equity
- Virtue Ethics*

Assigned Readings:

[How is AI is being used in the hiring process? | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/articles/2019/04/24/how-is-ai-being-used-in-the-hiring-process/)

[Employment Law Red Flags in the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Hiring \(americanbar.org\)](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/employment/law_red_flags_in_the_use_of_artificial_intelligence_in_hiring/)

[The Legal and Ethical Implications of Using AI in Hiring \(hbr.org\)](https://hbr.org/2019/04/the-legal-and-ethical-implications-of-using-ai-in-hiring/)

[AI in Hiring and Evaluating Workers: What Americans Think | Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org/2019/04/24/ai-in-hiring-and-evaluating-workers-what-americans-think/)

[AI Can Be A Force For Good In Recruiting And Hiring New Employees \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2019/04/24/ai-can-be-a-force-for-good-in-recruiting-and-hiring-new-employees/)

Students will engage in a debate over this topic and will be required to write a paper summarizing their position.

Students will also engage with the Harvard Implicit Association Test to see how we all have subtle biases and begin to think about how those subtle biases the training data that is used.

Implementation and Assessment

This topic will be covered in two days, within one week. Prior to first class for the week, students are to complete the reading assignments and to come in with a written statement that answers the question: “Is it ethical to use AI in promotion and hiring decisions?”

During the first class, students are to break up into small groups on each of the three key philosophical questions:

- To what extent can we mitigate the problems of subtle bias in training materials?
- Is it sufficient to simply include more diversity when it comes to the training materials themselves or is it necessary to check for subtle biases in order to correct for them?
- What are the ethical issues that using AI can amplify in the hiring process if a concerted effort is not made to address them?

Between the first and second classes, students will be asked to take one or more of the Harvard Implicit Association Tests: [Take a Test \(harvard.edu\)](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html)

During the second class, students are to discuss what they learned about themselves with respect to their own implicit associations. This class session is devoted to debating two questions:

- Should AI be used in the hiring and promotion process?
- If AI is used, how can we address the Montreal Declaration’s Respect for Autonomy, Principle of Diversity Inclusion, Principle of Democratic Participation, and Principle of Equity while upholding Virtue Ethics?

Students will then do a short (2 to 4-page) paper answering the five questions that were detailed for themselves with reference to both the debate and class readings that will be due the following week. Note that the fourth question on whether AI should be used in the hiring and promotion process is effectively the same question as the pre-question for this module.