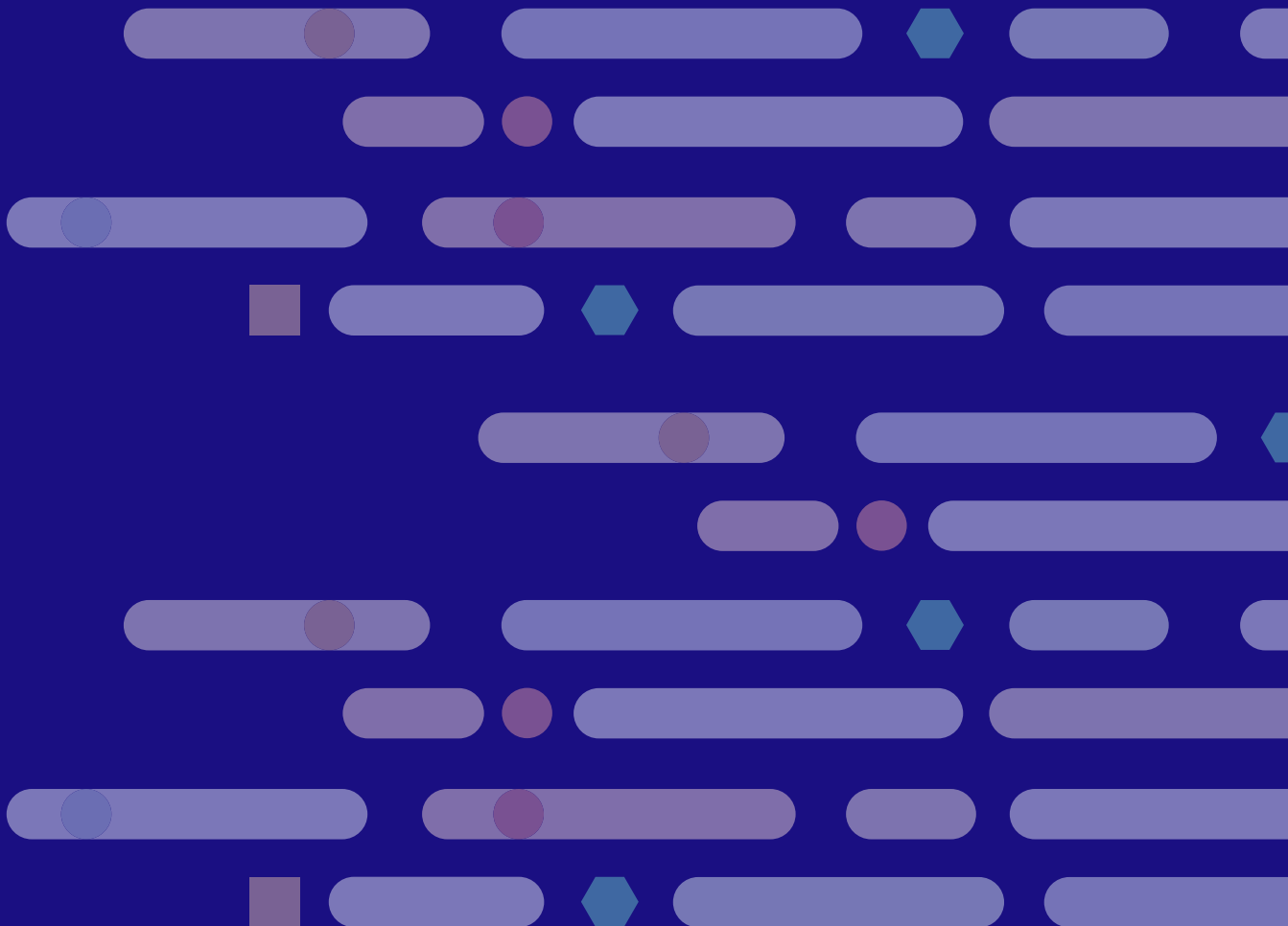welliba

Harness the Power of AI

Uncover People Insights from Existing Data

Discover insights from six industry experts on the future of people analytics, responsible AI, and the untapped power of passive and external data.

Foreword

There are strategic and everyday challenges to working with the sheer volume of people-related data. The challenges are not just about handling the data – they are about figuring out what actually matters, where to find it and how to turn it into something useful. Something that can make a real difference to your organisation and the employee experience.

AI is a game changer, but it is no magic wand. Choosing the right partner is critical. It is important to work with people who can take the available raw data and turn it into meaningful and impactful insights within the context of organisational life.

Structure, method and a validated model are paramount. Without such robustness, data can remain jumbled.

Welliba's Employee Experience Model, which has been researched and constructed by our leading scientific psychometricians, provides a robust framework for making sense of the data. Unlike opaque AI systems, our approach embraces transparency – more 'glass box' than 'black box' – allowing users to trace exactly how each insight is derived from the underlying data.

Our approach leads the way in how talent data is being used, delivering impact to our clients, helping them to reduce the people risk and boost commitment and performance.

In this report, six experts from within and beyond Welliba share their perspectives. We explore the opportunities and go beyond traditional survey methods, examine AI's long-standing role in HR and address the emerging challenges in people analytics – from ethical considerations to managing data overwhelm.

Most importantly, we demonstrate how properly managed and applied talent data can transform both employee experience and business performance. We offer the lessons we have learned and insights gained from our work with clients and propose the next steps you, as an HR leader, may wish to take.

We understand you will have questions about AI and its applications. We continue to ask questions too – and we are keen to share what we have learned.

Our team is scientifically and technically strong with an insatiable curiosity. Above all, we're committed to helping organisations access those insights they need to change their business.

Our passion lies in understanding what really impacts people performance. Let us show you how.

Contents

It's Time to Go Beyond the Survey &
Access the Power of Pre-Existing Data

David Barrett
CEO, Welliba

Survey data has long been the go-to for companies seeking direct feedback from their people on topics of significant importance. But, for far too long, organisations have had to rely solely on, and make do with, this approach to track employee experience, EVP, engagement, culture and behavioural health, and to inform people strategy and how best to optimise performance.

There is no love affair between people and their answering surveys. But there is a love by people in business wanting rapid answers to questions.

With a survey, insight can only be gained within the scope of the questions asked. That is, the value is solely dependent on the quantity and quality of the responses provided. Add to this the time, cost, effort, friction and sometimes complex vendor onboarding and onerous info security requirements, and it's clear why surveys have their limitations.

Take this example. We have a client who knows that by taking their frontline workforce offline for 15 minutes to complete a survey and still be paid, they face a bill running to over €3 million. However, using our methods to take pre-existing public domain data and upcycling readily available in-house data, they are able to reach a better outcome at a fraction of the time and cost – and with a better UX for all.

Our mission at Welliba is to use the power of Gen AI to evolve this space in the same spirit that post, telegrams, phones and wireless internet gradually, and spectacularly, transformed communications between people.

But we work within a shorter timeframe. We want to bring a North Star triumvirate of improved efficiency, UX and productivity to life for our clients!

AI: The Game Changer

AI deals with some of the inherent problems of a survey. It allows us to combine already-collected data from multiple sources. We can reuse and upcycle, unveil multiple perspectives and extract more nuanced insights. It's a strong complement to the specifically-generated internal data gained from a survey alone.

AI also manages the overwhelm. The surge in both the quantity and availability of passive data means we can do things that weren't possible before.

Passive data is the data that has previously been generated or shared for another purpose. It can exist outside of an organisation and within the public domain, and internally (albeit often in separate tech platforms with typically little integration!).

In fact, we find that 80 to 90% of information about companies across the internet is created by people who are working, or have worked for, that company.

Think of the opportunities for insight from this data. Imagine combining social media chatter, company reviews and analyst reports with the internal data you already have, such as the rosters, psychometrics, exit interviews, absence rates and customer satisfaction ratings. It's all already there: it's pre-existing data.

It means, there is little need to design a new survey, trial it, build a comms plan and cajole people into completing it or chase up submissions – only to realise the analysis doesn't give the information or insight needed as a crucial question was omitted or time has moved on and there's a more relevant area to explore.

Why We Do What We Do – and Why Now?

Companies are currently losing out. They cannot access the information they need about the topics that are critical for them in order to manage. We want them to realise productivity and efficiency gains, and create an improved employee experience.

Our primary driver is to help our customers find how AI can work for them to improve what they already do – and to do things differently in order to transform their company.

We believe that the use of GenAI within HR has been, to date, quite limited: 'Write a job description', 'Optimise a job posting for search engines' – GenAI offers so much more.

We know we are ground breakers, market leaders and possibility challengers. We are transforming the way science and technology can do good for people, and for organisations. We are not copycatting something invented a decade ago, but making something that will become the norm in five years' time. It is a journey for us all.

Our psychology, data and technology teams have built the capability to combine pre-existing, real-time data taken from multiple sources with the scientific, legal, data privacy and security rigour required. We know how to combine data and to check for validity, reliability and relevance. Our platform looks at patterns, themes and indicators and flags the most important or high-impact actions to take. We work with our clients from the outset to learn about their business and develop a model, against which we examine the data to reveal what it shows.

We know how important it is for our customers to feel confident in what is being done and to understand the analysis, the provenance of which is critical. We openly share every source of every data set accessed and we understand the ethical considerations and the legal frameworks to navigate.

"We know we are ground breakers, market leaders and possibility challengers.

We are transforming the way science and technology can do good for people, and for organisations. We are not copycatting something invented a decade ago, but making something that will become the norm in five years' time.

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Beyond the Buzz: How AI is Helping to Unlock the Power of Passive Data

Achim Preuß
CIO, Welliba

Conferences, webinars and articles are abuzz with headlines about AI applications in HR and I/O psychology. Setting aside discussions of AI's impact on jobs, roles and the workforce, HR's use of what we now talk about as AI isn't new. Elements of what we now label as AI have been present in HR practice for decades.

AI: The Game Changer

Consider the early days of online personality questionnaires when these tools first began generating narrative reports based on candidate responses; they were already incorporating components of artificial intelligence. Online ability tests needed to be fake-proof so we developed ways to generate a test at runtime. Similarly, video interviewing is scored by expert-taught AI, all of these examples are based on the paradigm of putting the expert in a box.

And this paradigm is still valid. Back then, the term AI was not used – but it could have been.

These HR tools were built around knowledge representation; learning by taking expert knowledge and applying it over and over again. Such tools are now invaluable to HR professionals, saving time and resources, and obtaining information and insight.

While HR leaders don't need to understand how AI works in detail, they do need to understand how to evaluate the quality and validity of the outputs in order to know the questions to ask and what to look for. This is not new. This is the same level of evaluation needed when working with any tool.

While the underlying algorithms of AI have changed only a little, although now based mainly on neural networks, two areas have seen immense change and it is these which have sparked great interest in the application of AI to talent data:

- The availability of data, the sheer amount of it and the reduction in the cost of storing it.

- The accelerated speed of computers to carry out analysis.

How Does the Use of Passive Data Fit Within the History of AI?

Alan Turing, the pioneer of computers, proposed a test of a machine's ability to exhibit intelligent behaviour equivalent to, or indistinguishable from, that of a human, i.e. artificial intelligence. He stated that if a person talks to a machine, and the person cannot tell if it's a person or a machine they are talking to, it passes the Turing Test. It remains the gold standard test today.

In 1950, Turing's groundbreaking paper, Computing Machinery and Intelligence, introduced the concept of the Turing Test, yet is has taken years to get to where we are today. Why so long? And are we finally at the threshold where a system passes this test?

We believe that we are very close to it.

Accessing Passive Data

At Welliba, we talk of three axes of data: active/passive; structured/unstructured; and self/others.

HR teams have tended to focus on active data, gained from responses to prompts and questions. However, with the need for frictionless data collection, passive data (the latent data that we might have from traces we leave online or gathered as a by-product from using various tools) opens up new possibilities to learn about people. It revolutionises our understanding of how people work.

The quest is to uncover these sources of passive data and transform them into what we call 'evidences'. Be warned: this might be a long list.

These evidences can then be translated into characteristics/scores on the Welliba Model and, from this, conclusions drawn and insights unlocked.

A human expert can certainly review and analyse each evidence against a model – and do this time and time again. However, passing it to generative AI enables these insights to come quickly, with little friction and yet still with psychometric precision.

The core principles and bedrock of psychometric measurement, validity and reliability, remain the same. We still need to check that the data used is relevant and dependable, just as we would when validating any personality or ability psychometric instrument.

At Welliba, we compare the AI-generated insight with that of a human expert: the more they align, the better. We also compare the results that come from another data source, be it internal or external, or active data gathered at another time.

"While HR leaders don't need to understand how AI works in detail, they do need to understand how to evaluate the quality and validity of the outputs in order to know the questions to ask and what to look for.

This is not new. This is the same level of evaluation needed when working with any tool."

Our Mission to Understand the Drivers of Employee Experience, Performance and Engagement

At Welliba, our passion lies in working with a client to identify the key factors that drive engagement, productivity and performance in that specific organisation. While performance requires skills, when considered alone they tell an incomplete story. The context in which those skills are played out, and the mindset to deliver those skills, play an increasingly significant role.

The messy combination of mindset, context and skills, and its far-reaching impact, remains a critical blind spot in the broader understanding.

The starting point for us to better understand this was to research and develop a game-changing model of the drivers of employee experience. With such a model in place, the challenge shifts to become one of measurement.

HR leaders are no strangers to the thorny challenges of measurement. They have been navigating this for years and most HR leaders are unlikely to have access to these skills, capabilities and technologies in-house. They might choose to partner with a provider who can directly work with whatever type of data they have – and add to it. They not only get an external, independent team working on it, but also pass on the privacy checks and responsibilities needed.

HR leaders take note: choosing to work with an external partner doesn't mean relinquishing your responsibilities. It means HR leaders need to develop their own expertise in evaluating the quality of the analysis outputs.

The HR lead should see themselves as the conductor of an orchestra. Partners and services are the skilled musicians, but they are in charge and they direct. They need to understand the nuances of each output and how it might fit within the bigger picture.

The Future is Just-In-Time

We see a future where data from diverse sources is accessed, measured and analysed against a single validated model (e.g. employee experience, psychosocial risk) and just-in-time information is delivered to answer specific questions.

A user will simply type in a question and, within minutes, have an answer. This is not a far-off dream. We see this being an integral part of daily working practice in the not-too-distant future.

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People Analytics: How Passive Data is Taking its Rightful Place

Ben Waber
Visiting Professor, MIT

People analytics is evolving – and gaining unprecedented momentum. A growing recognition of its potential power is finding its way into general HR speak and, importantly, into the boardroom. And this is not because of a shift in the analytical methods capable of being used, but because of the immense proliferation of data about 'how work happens'.

We're witnessing an explosion in the volume of data available. Our workplaces now use more digital tools than ever to support our work, which means we are constantly generating data about how we work.

Much of this data is passive data – and it's changing our understanding of organisational dynamics and paving the way for more informed decision making.

People Analytics: Helping to Decode Workplace Success

At its core, people analytics is about leveraging data sources to gain a holistic perspective on how work happens, and how it relates to business outcomes. It's about data collection on a very large scale and it offers a unique perspective that even the most astute individual or team cannot achieve alone.

Take a company with 10,000 employees: how can any single person accurately gauge what is happening across that organisation, identify relevant trends or determine what truly impacts performance? The sheer scale makes it impossible.

This is where people analytics comes into its own, providing quantitative insights into what is happening and showing the relationships between data points.

It means that people across the company can make informed decisions around the likely impact of any change they might make.

Passive Data Alongside Active Data

HR professionals are familiar with the traditional data they can access readily from within their HR systems. They can quickly find out who is located where, who is a member of which team, the length of tenure, their working hours and all the other demographic data collected.

The game-changer is the passive, behavioural data; **information collected automatically through digital interactions, requiring no active input from employees.** Sources include external and internal communications and other digital footprints left during everyday working activities.

The beauty and value of passive data lies in its ability to offer insights into, for example, collaboration patterns, time allocation and other aspects of work life.

And then there is survey data. This is active data obtained from people taking an action, be it giving a response or an opinion, or sharing a perception. Some may be quantitative, others qualitative.

While all data might be useful – and its invaluable to have access to multiple data sources – it's crucial to ensure that the information collected is both robust and reliable. More importantly, this wealth of data only becomes truly meaningful when combined with the thorough contextual knowledge of the organisation and what it is trying to achieve.

Regardless of the amount of information collected or the sophistication of the analytical algorithms employed, without proper context, the data remains abstract and ineffective. It is the combination of contextual understanding and comprehensive data that tells us how work happens.

A Health Warning

While the use of passive data is becoming more widely used and accepted, there is a health warning running alongside.

Without the experience of analysing this kind of data, the sheer volume can be overwhelming and it can be difficult to discern its meaning, utility or validity. There can be a lack of sophistication and understanding around how best to interrogate data sources and, while simple methods can be acceptable in the case of certain analysis, we need the understanding and confidence to know when a more sophisticated analysis is required.

There is also the fundamental challenge of where, within an organisation, this analysis sits, and how those responsible interface with the rest of the business.

We also need to ask the right questions and focus on the right area – and this requires skill and expertise. Decisions based on poor metrics or an incorrect focus may mean that an intervention is less effective. Take the example of a team whose members seem to be overburdened with communication. A training programme might help them better manage their time. But what if the bigger problem is not about communication but about working within silos? What's the opportunity cost of an intervention that doesn't tackle the real issue?

It is not enough to ask a question, however robust, to measure something and to obtain a score. You need to understand the result and know that the analysis is appropriate and valid. And, if you don't have the knowledge, there's a need to learn more – and partner with those that do have the experience in data analysis.

Powering Business Insight

Understanding the power of data and recognising the value of people analytics typically requires a culture shift.

It requires the board and senior team to develop their own deep understanding of what the technology can do and to build these analytics into their thinking and planning.

They need to start to ask the questions. While the analytics can be useful in measuring the impact of a decision already made, it is far more valuable to access and combine the data to properly plan or to test out options in order to really improve the performance of the business.

Looking to the Future

People analytics will move into the area of investor insight. Boards of directors and investors are already starting to use people analytics to evaluate the future prospects of firms.

We already know that increased diversity leads to a workforce performing better. What of key talent, flight risk or weak succession plans? For investors, this should be a critical question to ask – and to have answered reliably. These are knowable things.

Such questions will be the impetus of driving much faster change and a more robust uptake of people analytics within organisations. It will no longer be 'nice to have' to improve performance, but an imperative, with the CEO needing to be able to calculate the metrics that the board asks of them.

All else being equal, if there are two companies with the same profit margin and same amount of revenue, and one of them cannot provide information on how the company is being managed, it raises real concerns about the future prospect of that business.

That's what people analytics does. And businesses should probably be prepared for that.

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Charting a Path for Responsible AI for HR Professionals

Fred Oswald
Professor, Department of Psychological Sciences, Rice University, Texas

AI technologies and tools in the workforce continue to evolve in their sophistication –and in their potential and limitations. HR professionals, in particular, recognise the promise of AI in their work – with some promises already realised by HR early adopters. Whether it is composing emails, summarising meetings, drafting presentations or assisting in interpreting performance appraisals, the use of AI tools can make common tasks of an HR professional, easier, better, more efficient and scalable.

Thus, organisations and HR leaders alike clearly appreciate how AI tools might make them more effective and competitive in today's competitive organisational environment. Yet important and deep concerns linger around AI and HR with respect to data privacy, the proprietary nature of data, which AI tools and technologies to use that manage and mitigate risk and emerging regulations that safeguard the use of AI tools. The balancing act is very real here. It is between the excitement for AI innovation and the desire for the capabilities of HR to progress, and the caution and need for guidance and assurance around the use and outcomes of AI tools in the workplace.

Organisations benefit from evaluating AI tools and systems not in terms of comparing them against an unachievable standard of perfection, but rather whether the implementation of AI makes the current state of affairs better or worse. This serves as an opportunity to re-examine what matters in HR. An example would be to carefully define and measure inputs, processes and outcomes in HR and people practices that might be affected by incorporating AI. This then leads to more specific data-informed discussions of potential sources of biases and inequities that can be better understood and addressed.

Put another way: subjectivity, skewed assessments, personal bias and inequitable practices have long been challenges in organisations. Will the use of AI tools eliminate, reduce or exacerbate these? How and when will we know?

Navigating the Data: Validity and Fairness

Whether data is actively collected or passively obtained from existing data or the internet, AI algorithms can analyse such data. However, just because data can be collected does not mean that it should, and many types of data relevant to organisations can be messy, contradictory and otherwise difficult to use and make sense of. Sophisticated as AI algorithms might be, related substantive and ethical HR questions can be even more challenging. In general, HR leaders using AI with their organisation need to consider two crucial aspects:

Validity: For example, what evidence supports the job relevance of the data being input into an AI tool? Is the data reliable (e.g. does it accurately reflect intended employee characteristics)? Does the data predict appropriate organisational outcomes (e.g. employee performance on the job)?

Fairness: How is fairness defined in your organisation? Are groups of individuals treated equitably, such as groups defined by demographics or disability? What types of data can be collected in a manner that is both ethically and legally responsible?

These two aspects are not specific to AI tools in HR; they reflect fundamental considerations and requirements of all forms of assessments used in organisational settings. However, in the AI context, stronger conceptual and empirical support for the job-relevance of the data collected can lend itself to greater interpretability and trust in AI algorithms and tools.

High Stakes and Low Stakes: The Role of AI in HR

Employee hiring is often considered a high-stakes setting, given that it may significantly impact both the lives of job applicants and the success of businesses. Given this context, candidates and job applicants should be informed and made aware of the data that is being collected and used as input into hiring decisions.

Currently, legislation around the use of AI in hiring contexts has been limited, but it will ramp up in the coming years (for example, with the implementation of the EU AI Act which will prohibit emotion recognition and include obligations of transparency, instructions for use and human oversight of AI tools). Some US states have also instituted laws relevant to informing job applicants about AI tools used in hiring. New York City, for example, currently requires organisations deploying AI tools in selection processes to inform candidates of the use of AI and report hiring rates within particular subgroups protected by the Title VII, as well as intersectional groups, in the service of being transparent. Through such laws, greater responsibilities may be placed on the developers of AI tools as much as their organisations in their use of those tools. When it comes to the responsible use of AI in HR, the reputation and the ethics of AI developers and organisations will play key roles as much as the law.

Low-stakes scenarios involving AI in HR relate to activities, such as employee training and development such as providing real-time coaching and feedback on technical performance or interpersonal interactions.

Although low-stakes settings like this will also require users to submit their data to an AI algorithm, users themselves tend to have more control in how they use the output, taking what they see as the best, and leaving the rest. This iterative process of user engagement and review allows for the customised pacing of training and development. With the assistance of AI tools, individuals get to develop themselves; they are in control.

AI in HR - High Stakes vs. Low stakes

High stakes: Employee hiring is often considered a high-stakes setting, given that it may significantly impact both the lives of job applicants and the success of businesses.

Low stakes: Low-stakes scenarios involving AI in HR relate to activities, such as employee training and development such as providing real-time coaching and feedback on technical performance or interpersonal interactions.

The Equity Challenge in AI Access

Employees might have access to AI tools through their organisation but, if training is lacking and/or some groups of employees tend to use the tools more than others, this can weigh against ensuring an equitable workplace. Moreover, some employees might also have greater access to AI tools that are not endorsed by organisations but are readily and publicly available, such as tools using large language model tools (LLMs) – too many to name here. In this context, equity in AI access and use is also an important concern

Some applicants and employees will have more time and resources to access and use AI tools outside of the organisation, understand the legal

context and reach positive outcomes, potentially gaining an advantage over other employees lacking time and resources. Organisations can usefully investigate how their top-down AI policies, combined with bottom-up use of AI tools by employees, not only affect their bottom line, but how they affect equity in the workplace.

Charting a Path for Responsible AI in HR

As a society, organisations are still in the relative infancy of implementing AI within HR, where across the globe, we already see HR professionals vigorously experimenting with AI tools in their work environment. In those experiments, the media already reports notable examples of how bias can creep into AI – just as it does with human HR decisions (e.g. when interviewing applicants and screening CVs).

Therefore, HR leaders must proactively pursue knowledge in the AI space.

Over many decades, I-O psychologists have grappled with employment testing, job performance and other organisational issues relevant to AI tools. They are eager to share their insights and learn from organisations, helping us to educate and connect the dots around vetting, evaluating and using AI tools within a local organisational context.

"It takes a team, if not a village, to work together and ensure that organisational practices – both in high-stakes and low-stakes settings – are using AI tools in an effective and responsible manner."

Context, Mindset and AI: The New Frontier of Workplace Prediction

Richard Justenhoven
Chief Measurement Strategist, Welliba

The ultimate goal of most I/O psychologists is to predict human behaviour at work. Traditionally, they approach people data from an inferential standpoint; if A happens, then B follows.

However, these conventional methods struggle to process the many data points needed to create a more comprehensive or holistic picture of an individual, their fit for a role, their job satisfaction or their engagement.

We believe that many more insights can be extracted from the increasingly vast array of data now available than is currently being achieved. AI can help in this – with some caveats in place.

The Need to Go Beyond Skills Assessment

HR leaders know that assessment tools generate valuable data points and have transformed the recruitment and selection space. Companies define roles, determine the skills needed, evaluate candidates against these and then recruit the best-fit individuals.

But post-hire, the challenge shifts.

Leaders then need to know what drives their people: to understand their motivations and current state. Everyone has their optimal state and this is influenced by both their mindset and the context.

Consider the world of athletics. Usain Bolt possesses the skills to run 100 metres within a specific range of times. However, his performance, whether he approaches his personal best or the world record, depends on context and mindset.

Factors such as sleep quality, coaching, crowd support, track conditions, wind direction and footwear all impact his results.

When mindset and context align, extraordinary performance becomes possible.

"HR leaders know that assessment tools generate valuable data points and have transformed the recruitment and selection space. But post-hire, the challenge shifts. Leaders then need to know what drives their people."

The Welliba Context and Mindset Model

What shapes how people work and perform? Two things stand out: the environment around them (context); and how they think about their work (mindset). To make sense of all the data that tells us about these factors, we need a solid framework – a real understanding of how everything fits together.

Our measurement team started by mapping out the different mindset and context factors that affect employees across various settings. They then wove these insights into a single, comprehensive model that captures the full picture of workplace experience across various settings, before bringing them together into a single model.

The model is comprehensive enough to work for any organisation, mapping both the data from traditional, direct data collection and also make sense of existing indirect or passively acquired data. When we partner with clients, we analyse all their available data, categorising it as either helping or hindering each factor in our model. The is gives us detailed insights into specific dimensions of the particular company. However, it is the interplay of these different dimensions that reveals the unique success profile for an organisation, department, location or role.

The challenge here is two-fold: accessing and choosing the data to work with; and using AI transparently.

Person Variables

Context Variables
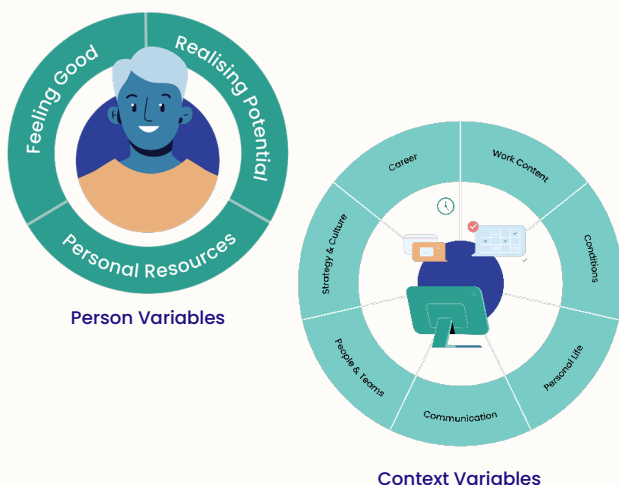
Challenge One: Selecting the Data

From a quality perspective, the best data is active data collected by simply asking someone to do something. But collecting it can be tedious, incur downtime and is not always accurate. The use of already existing, surrounding, passive data gives you an indication of certain things without specific data points.

Back to Usain Bolt. If we know his training schedule, his diet and his training partner, we have a good understanding of how he might perform, even without the actual data point.

And that's what we get with passive data.

One hurdle often faced is that most HR teams are aware of only a fraction of the data available and what they can leverage. And yet, typically, companies possess vast data pools.

The existence of data rarely poses a challenge when working with us. Instead, the task is to work out how best to extract the data and navigate the legal considerations. Relevance and completeness are also important, as well as theoretically underpinning the way the data might be used.

For instance, consider the tracking of interview timing and outcomes. While seemingly irrelevant on its own, studies have shown that interviews conducted at certain times of the day or without adequate breaks may yield varying results. Similarly, clients often want manager ratings to be included within success predictors, and yet are often very unreliable as a data source.

Very good data is often heavily overlooked just because of the complexity of dealing with it. Data tracked and measured may be intriguing but not necessarily theoretically sound. The key lies in identifying data that provides the specific insights you seek, not simply relying on readily available information.

Challenge Two: The Black Box of AI

Before advanced large language models, such as OpenAI's GPT-4, complex data processing often needed the integration of multiple, distinct AI services. For example, an analysis might involve the separate deployments of a natural language classifier, a text mining system and a sentiment analysis tool. The outputs from these discrete tools would then be combined to generate meaningful insights.

The landscape changed with the introduction of large language models (LLMs). These offer the ability to simply input what might be a complex query and receive an output almost instantly.

But with such 'convenience' comes a significant caveat: an increased risk of the 'black box' phenomenon. That is, users are unable to trace the reasoning or foundational source behind a given output.

This opacity presents a substantial risk.

Relying on a tool that generates plausible results without a clear understanding of its internal processes can lead to misguided decisions and unforeseen consequences.

Transparency is critical. And this is why our team has developed and adopted our 'Expert in the Box' approach.

It aims to replicate human expert behaviour and take data understanding beyond traditional AI. It emulates the decision-making of human experts, integrating psychometric principles and prioritising ethical considerations. It means that we get to define the rules governing its functionality and get a crystal clear explanation of how the outputs are determined – without compromising on the power of AI, and still harnessing LLMs or other neural networks.

As such, it produces more transparent, explainable and trustworthy AI solutions. It reduces bias, improves the output reliability and builds user trust.

This paradigm shift helps to address critical concerns surrounding the ethical and practical implementation of AI.

Considerations for AI Data Analytics

Challenge One: Selecting the Data

The best insights come from active, high-quality data—but it's often hard to collect and easy to misinterpret. Meanwhile, companies sit on a goldmine of passive data that, if used thoughtfully, can be just as powerful. The real challenge lies not in data availability, but in knowing what's relevant, how to extract it, and whether it stands up theoretically. Often, overlooked data can be the most valuable, if you know how to use it.

Challenge Two: The Black Box of AI

Large language models offer powerful insights at speed—but they often lack transparency. When you can't explain how an AI came to its conclusion, trust and reliability suffer. That's why we use our 'Expert in the Box' approach: an explainable AI framework built on psychometric principles, designed to mimic expert decision-making while remaining transparent, ethical and robust.

External Data: The Missing Piece in Understanding Employee Experience

Katarina Coppé
Chief Commercial Officer, Welliba

Talent isn't just hard to find: it's also hard to keep. Scarcity of talent is certainly a recruitment challenge, but the real challenge is in creating a fulfilling employee experience that makes people want to stay. As such, employee experience is now high on the agenda for many organisations.

Business leaders know that the organisation's talent is the critical lever for success. They research, design, create, deliver, sell and support whatever product or service is being offered. Improving the employee experience, and all that it impacts, improves business performance.

Designing a strong employee experience is about understanding what makes people tick, how they do their best work and then taking action to meet their needs. And yet, many companies simply don't know where to start. They might have some insight from their annual engagement surveys, but employee experience is far more than employee engagement.

Employee Experience: Going Beyond Employee Engagement

Engagement has received plenty of focus in recent years, now often featuring in a company's annual report and tracked over time.

However, for us, engagement is only one of many possible outcomes of a great employee experience.

When your people have a great employee experience, then productivity, performance, development, engagement and well-being all follow on. Get employee experience right, and the rest can fall into place.

What is Employee Experience

To manage employee experience, you need to understand it. We realised early on that, despite the importance of this concept, there is no shared definition. We've hosted dozens of workshops with clients across many countries and each time a new set of different ideas and priorities rise up.

We see employee experience as the result of the dynamic interaction between people, and the characteristics and mindsets they have, and their environment. Our model and framework are built on this complex and dynamic interaction which sits at the heart of employee experience.

A healthy and meaningful employee experience has many meanings among individuals. Personalisation is key. HR knows this, but struggles to reach good levels of personalisation in a scalable way.

How to Start Embracing AI

Using surveys and questionnaires to gather data to understand the complex interaction between employees and their environment is almost impossible. In most cases, they only help to understand the context factors in an organisation and, typically, by the time the engagement survey has closed, the snapshot taken is already one of the past.

AI is needed to understand the relationship between people and their environment via vast quantities of data, and to then personalise relevant recommendations for employees and people managers to impact future outcomes. Without the use of behavioural science and AI, it would be too time consuming to collect and interpret the data or to come up with actional recommendations that can improve people and business outcomes.

While organisations still offer traditional engagement surveys, it is not always clear what the results of such measures offer. What do the engagement scores mean for an individual? How can people managers improve engagement, and how this might fit within the bigger picture of achieving business success?

Even when managers get survey data, analysis and insight for their own teams, what do they do with this information – and, importantly, how limited is the view? How well do managers understand the drivers of employee experience, the impact on flight risk or absenteeism in their teams and what can they do to improve future people and business outcomes in their unique context?

To understand employees' current perceptions and experiences of work and the workplace, HR leaders need to make better use of the data they already have. This passive data might reside within the company's HR tech, elsewhere within the organisation or outside of the company. AI can now offer a clear view on how the perception of a company's employee experience compares to industry peers and the actions required to leverage strengths or close gaps, without reliance on surveys.

AI has a key role to play in making sense of this.

"Engagement has received plenty of focus in recent years, now often featuring in a company's annual report and tracked over time.

However, for us, engagement is only one of many possible outcomes of a great employee experience.

A healthy and meaningful employee experience has many meanings among individuals. Personalisation is key. HR knows this, but struggles to do this in a scalable way."

Opportunities to View Through Different Lenses

Current approaches to measurement of the employee experience simply cannot give organisations a full picture. Internal, external and forward-looking lenses offer a clearer picture of what's needed to drive positive outcomes in the future.

The Internal Lens

Engagement survey results tell us little. As an example, people might rate the development opportunities offered by the company on a scale of 1 to 5. But what does a score of 4 mean? Should the organisation invest more in development in the organisation – or not? What else is at play here? Perhaps it is a lack of confidence or network to seek out development, or a limited understanding of what is available? The L&D leader could schedule more training courses, put in place a more thorough comms plan or encourage networking across the company.

Without a broader understanding of people's perception of their needs at that time, the L&D or HR leaders are making decisions in a vacuum. There is always a combination of several factors, and a dynamic taking place between them, and without getting underneath and unpacking what is truly going on, HR lacks insight.

The Forward-Looking Lens

A strong employee experience boosts productivity and performance, strengthens belonging, reinforces purpose and bolsters retention. It impacts the forward-looking HR metrics and wider business metrics. We don't have to ask whether someone will leave a company in six months. If we know people don't experience purpose, they lack focus or have a people manager who blocks their experience – we know from the behavioural science that these are leading indicators of flight risk.

Understanding the data and the impact of action of these metrics allows organisations to make choices for relevant action.

The External Lens

An external perspective helps HR leaders to understand the focus and priorities. It helps them to understand who they need to be listening to and allows for comparison with competitors. It enables a benchmark to be made between the 'articulated' and the 'lived experience' of an organisation's Employee Value Proposition (EVP).

Consider the time invested in defining and showcasing the firm's EVP. Is this an authentic representation of working within the company? Employees and former employees might be sharing their experiences outside of the organisation!
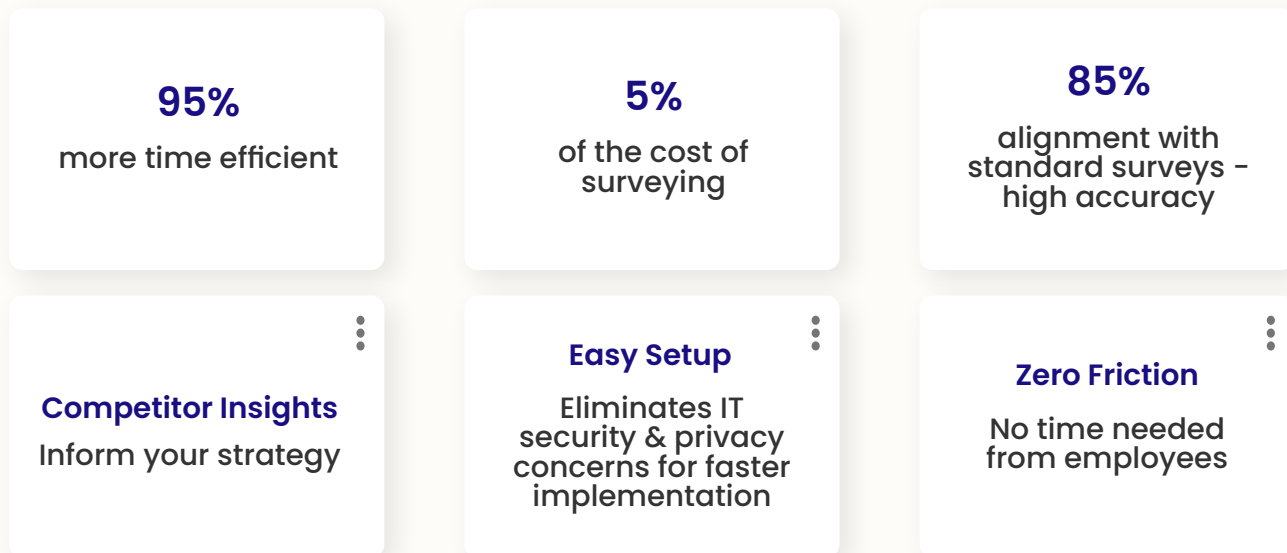
No amount of internal data will enable you to benchmark your company with the competition. Accessing external, passive data from workforce reviews, recruitment sites or customer platforms lets you do this. You will see where you are strong and it will signal where action is needed. And, because you are accessing already-available data, it is superfast, tends to cost less than other projects and requires no effort from your wider workforce.

Tapping into this external data allows for a benchmark: any gaps can be highlighted and action plans formed. External data gives this extra perspective and, when used in a planned and focused way, leads to faster action taking.

Welliba's Impact in Practice

Welliba's EXcelerate delivers deep insight into your people without the need for a costly survey. It does this by harnessing publicly available data through AI. The platform comes complete with actionable recommendations and benchmarks against key competitors.

Through our work with clients so far, we have seen the following impact;

95% more time efficient	**5%** of the cost of surveying	**85%** alignment with standard surveys - high accuracy
Competitor Insights Inform your strategy	**Easy Setup** Eliminates IT security & privacy concerns for faster implementation	**Zero Friction** No time needed from employees

"The insights and recommendations around our internal groups and external peers help us to focus on areas where we can leverage our strengths and increase the employee experience of our people."

Dave Morris, HR Shared Services Lead

Medtronic

"The EXcelerate solution provided us with a wealth of information to further sharpen our Employee Value Proposition messaging. The insights and recommendations we received were clear and detailed, but not to the point of becoming overwhelming."

Dave Kowal, Chief People Officer

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"Welliba's EXcelerate report provided us with relevant insights into which investments and initiatives were paying off. It also helped us see risks and opportunities that we could not yet capture in data.

We have augmented our existing people insights and roadmaps with actionable recommendations, enabling us to continue driving people and business growth.."

Karin Van Roy, CHRO

arvesta
Experts in the field

Lessons From Our Work with Clients

Our work is tailored to each client – different challenges, different data, different desires. However, there are common threads of learning that run throughout our work.

Start small – and make the case for change

Understand where you want to make an immediate impact and focus on a single group, subgroup or division. Use this as a learning sandpit, and to build a business case. Few organisations have the capacity or desire to overhaul HR processes and technology at one time. A business case shows the impact of the information gained from applying the different lenses on employee experience, be they external, internal or forward looking.

Use behavioural science: understand – and define – what needs to be measured

Without a model on which to hang thoughts and ideas, insights are unstructured and chaotic. Use a model that has been validated and shown to have strong coverage of the aspects of employee experience.

Look outside the organisation for data points to supplement your internal perspective

This external perspective is often a missing piece of the puzzle. It gives you an entirely different lens to look through to understand your company. And you can start to understand your employee experience, while comparing it with other companies or other industry peers.

Embrace passive data

The external lens is where passive, or already-available, data resides. It is an untapped pool of information. The wealth of online data that already exists about your organisation, its culture and employee experience add a new dimension to your understanding. Remember the passive data that sits within your company too – even if not within the HR function. There is a lack of friction in accessing this already-collected data. It frees up your time to spend digging deeper into the data, being more strategic and enabling you to be more responsive to those additional, not-yet-thought-about questions asked of you by your board or senior team.

Never lose sight of the goal

Data is everywhere. It is easy to become overwhelmed by the quantity of data, or to opt to use only the easily available data. The key is to remain connected to your goal, remember what you want to achieve and not be sidetracked.

Education and understanding of the potential gains and pitfalls are crucial

We believe that HR leaders need to be educating themselves, asking questions of the experts and building their own critical knowledge bank. They cannot abdicate the responsibility for understanding the data and how the insights have been generated.

Work with a partner with the experience and the know-how

This is your project and your employee group. However, you will benefit from working with a partner who has already developed a scientifically-validated model, the technical know-how, the measurement expertise and the AI capability to help you make decisions and move forward. Seek them out. Challenge them and make sure they can explain exactly what needs to be done, and how the technology works. Educate yourself about what is possible and learn from them to develop your own knowledge.

A Final Reminder

AI opens many new doors. It can support HR leaders in refocusing their time, and in doing what they do best: enabling people to thrive by improving the strategic impact of a stronger employee experience.

And yet, AI cannot (right now) replicate those core human qualities, such as creativity and empathy. We still very much need human resource specialists and experts to understand and critique AI-driven recommendations.

There may be a tension between exploring the exciting opportunities of AI and being wary of the unknown.

While it is too early to develop a definitive guide to using AI effectively and ethically, this should not deter us from exploring its potential.

Businesses should embrace the new possibilities that AI offers, without replacing the critical decision making of seasoned professionals. AI can augment their knowledge with additional data, helping them to see previously unseen connections. It offers an unheard-of level of support to your HR team and, as such, to all the individual employees in your organisation. As HR gains deeper insights into personal workplace needs, employees will thrive.

Your Next Steps

The use of AI to support HR leaders is changing quickly. It is time to explore and embrace its possibilities.

There are pitfalls to avoid and insights to gain.

Our work with clients has helped them to transform their businesses. Is it time we talked about how we might work with you?

Let's start a conversation.

Contact Us Today