

Faster Adoption of Automation and AI Has Been A Game Changer At TATA Power

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The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted organizations and caused human resources professional to think differently about their role as they adjust to social distancing practices and a new work environment that they may never have imagined.

Himal Tewari - Chief, Human Resources Officer at Tata Power is here to discuss on how did the introduction of faster AI and automation at TATA Power brought about a great impact in terms of their staying connected and hiring modules amongst other advantages.

How COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the role of AI in the workplace?

The introduction and traction of AI at workplace has been inevitable. Most organizations have been cognizant of AI's onset and have been trying to control the pace depending on business sensitivities and imperatives. The pandemic, however, has disrupted almost all such plans and in most cases has put them on the fast lane. In a matter of weeks, workspaces teeming with humans were left empty and communication in meeting rooms, water coolers and cafeterias has been replaced by virtual connects. Physical jobs which were slowly being transitioned to robots have been expedited due to manpower dearth and safety concerns.

Most office tools offered by organizations such as Microsoft, Skillsoft, etc. have more and more AI functionalities which are largely being well received.

Offices are being managed remotely and rewards, awards and assessments are being successfully done virtually.

AI tools are gaining traction in today's workplace. What are your views on AI-powered therapy tools? Does Tata Power provide employees with self-monitoring and self-care tools to better their mental health? How have they managed to lay emphasis on this aspect and what was the strategy involved?

AI powered therapy tools are here to stay. In my view, a blended approach to 'AI' and 'Human connect' can go a long way in managing mental wellbeing at large and workspace stress in particular.

Both have something unique which is difficult to offer for the other. AI based therapy apps can help track your mood and stress continuously, something which a human professional cannot do. They also offer techniques like CBT and are backed by a body of knowledge. Many good ones are also free which makes them more accessible. A trained professional can however connect with you personally and offer advice and treatment based on their experience which an app cannot do.

At Tata Power, we considering AI based therapy apps but have not offered them yet. Given the pandemic and expecting a rise in mental health issues, we chose the human connect format and provided access to all our employees to a well reputed Employee Assistance Program. The service has been widely utilized during the pandemic. We have been closely monitoring the data to help our employees in all ways possible and have organized multiple sessions based on the data. As an organization, we are very careful in managing and monitoring aspects of mental and emotional health and consider them as important as physical health.

How has COVID-19 pushed faster adoption of Automation and AI at TATA Power?

As India's largest integrated power company, Tata Power has always been at the forefront of technology adoption. From robotic chimney maintenance to drone-based surveys of transformers and power lines, AI and automation are key tenets of our journey and this was specifically helpful during Covid-19. Many critical activities had already been automated when Covid-19 hit us all and the process of further adoption was definitely expedited. Being an essential service provider, we have become more cognizant of safeguarding our operations and support functions. Automation and AI have definitely ensured that none of our processes, core or support are

adversely effected: be it our control room operations, grid maintenance, financial accounts closing, vendor payments, performance appraisals or salary disbursements.

What are the various benefits employees can gain from AI? How it can help to automate some workplace tasks, identify stress and burnout among workers? Also, how well it impacting the employee base at TATA Power? How have you taken care of the same within your organization?

AI can make humans more human. As employees we are so engrossed in transactions that we forget what we really bring to the table: our 'human-ness'. And as we spend more time in interacting and tailoring solutions, we are bound to be less stressed. Employee Engagement, Performance Management, etc. all quarterly / annual activities will slowly become continuous and more strategic. There are already apps that can alert managers if their team member is appearing stressed or burnt out. The apps themselves may or may not help the employee, but the information can definitely help the manager to sit down with his team and offer help.

At Tata Power, we are using multiple tools to do people analytics. These analytics help us in identifying areas to focus and also provide valuable feedback as to what is working well and what needs to change. For example, our business specific attrition analysis has helped us create focused interventions while our Org Design exercise is helping us foresee our growth path and modulate our talent channels. We are on a path to adopt AI and automation. While we do study the best practices globally, we are confident and adopt interventions suited to our needs.

Are there any growing concerns about the expanding use of technologies?

In my view, invasion of privacy and confidentiality of information will be the biggest concerns to address as technologies expand.

The ever-thinning veil between personal and professional space has almost disappeared as we use the same devices and platforms at work and at home. In fact, for those of working from home, work and home locations are same. Organizations need to be careful while using any personal employee information. It should be done with due approval and should only be used for the stated purpose. Employees should also be encouraged to have their personal time so they can recharge and offer their best at work and home.

How do you see the HR landscape in the next five years?

The HR landscape is of course bound to change. One should expect a drastic increase in the pace at which the percentage of AI and Automation will increase. Many activities operational in nature are bound to be taken up by automation. This will however, open up a gamut of new areas in which human activity will be required. For example, most transactional jobs by HR professionals will be onboarded to bots and the professionals themselves will have much more time to interact personally with employees are business leaders to better understand their problems and to humanize solutions and give a personal touch, something with AI will never be able to.