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# The Role of HR Practices in Higher Education Institutes amidst the Evolution of Digitalization in India

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**Abstract**

The current phase of digital advancement is posing as a threat towards certain sections of the corporate industries and educational sectors. This threat takes the form of automation, menacing the replacement of employees whose work is being taken over by more efficient technology that requires minimal expenditure on maintenance.

Leading Tech companies and Higher Education Institutes are undergoing mass layoffs due to improper Human Resource management practices, further aggravating job insecurity among the youth. Literature is also representing the hazardous possibilities of an unchecked digital revolution through dystopian science fiction works such as, 'Manna' by Marshall Brain and 'The Fun They Had' by Isaac Asimov.

This paper critically analyses the literary works along with a comparative study with multiple researches done on competent Human Resource practices adapted by prominent Industries and HEIs. They managed this problem through re-skilling and encouraging emphases on digital literacy of their employees, creating a balance between technological innovations and improving workforce satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Automation, Digitalisation, Human Resource, Literature.

**Conceptualising Digitalization and its Effects on Employment**

As stated in the IT glossary of Gartner, Inc. website, an American advisory and research firm founded by Gideon Gartner in 1979, "Digitalization", by a more verifiable definition implies "the process of changing from analog to digital form, also known as digital enablement" ("Digitization," n.d.). This change in the form of data makes its accessibility easier and utilization efficient, without altering the data's functionality and objective. The capabilities of digital technologies to produce more efficiency and precision than manual work, streamlines the process of tasks that tend be repetitive and more routine oriented. This shift of manufacturing and administrative work has led to an increase in automation which causes displacements of employees in companies that are restructuring their operating models to capitalize on better technologies and advance in the contemporary competitive market. "Within this context, it is technologies' affordances that allow organizations to alter the quality of goods or services, reduce operational costs, maximize time efficiencies and re-engineer

> business processes to gain competitive advantage" (Eason, 1989; Liere-Netheler et al., 2018; Neumeier et al., 2017; Davenport, 1993, as cited in Antonopoulou et al., 2023, p. 2).

**Job Displacement in the Corporate Sector**

Though digitalization has affected every field of occupation yet, there exists a specific section of workforce in the corporate sector that is witnessing displacement in jobs. These groups include the older employees, blue-collar workers and low-skilled workers. This sudden displacement gives rise to financial instability, negatively affecting their standard of living. Lack of required skills and knowledge surrounding the aspect of digitalization further builds the emotion of job insecurity.

> Also, because of older workers' perceived higher cost, impending retirement, and other related reasons, many employers do not provide older employees with as much on-the-job training as younger employees, putting them at a disadvantage if they want or need to find another job. (Butrica & Mudrazija, 2022, p. 43)

Further, digitalization and automation does not propagate the well established firms to create new jobs for the manual skills. Their focus has now levelled-up towards innovation for which high-skilled and competent employees who could perform as a complementary addition to the technological advancement are more in demand by the recruiters. According to Zhou (2020) "Robot exposure causes notable on-the-job gains in earnings for high-skilled workers, especially in scientific and management positions" (p. 127).

However, India is still struggling with economic division where the youth with less to none affordability of the ever upgrading digital devices and incompetent quality of education on digital literacy, hinders the growth of students competing for the high-skilled positions in most industries.

> Neeti Sharma, CEO of TeamLease Digital, resonated that hiring freezes and rescinded job offers are becoming common, particularly affecting recent graduates. She said 30 per cent of planned hiring for fresh tech graduates in 2024 has been put on hold or cancelled, reflecting a cautious approach amid economic uncertainty. (Sanjana B, 2024, para. 4)

**Research Objectives and Significance**

- This paper presents the critical analysis of the existing research done in the domain of digitalization and its relation with Human Resource. The gaps in HR strategies and managerial styles in educational institutes that cause the disruption of employability of students preparing to enter the new digital industries are studied in contrast with industry demands in the age of digitalization in India.
- Along with finding gaps in the HR strategies, this paper aims to discuss the probable modifications to be implemented by an HR manager in their managing styles that can effectively uplift the individual skill-set of their institutes' teaching staff and providing students with the necessary resources which best suit their personal vision, further aligning with the industry demands in a holistic manner.
- This research is significant for its interdisciplinary approach by opting for a comparative study of pragmatic data with the themes of science fiction works such as, 'Manna' by Marshall Brain and 'The Fun They Had' by Isaac Asimov. These literary works of dystopian science fiction will form a hypothesis for the possible downfall of human labour and autonomy due to the mismanagement practices of the authority in-charge of a nation's economy.
- A desk research format has been employed to conduct this research in order to present a simple yet cogent understanding of the research objectives and find relevant resolutions that an HR manager can take action on at institutional level. This paper also highlights the existing problems encircling the cynical implementation of digitalization in India, considering the economic and educational rift thus far among its people.

**Literature Review**

This paper has been finely curated with global case studies, surveys, interviews and statistics on the panoramic adaptation of digitalization in restructuring industries and the various problems of this revolution in a partially ordered set (poset) on higher education in Indian institutes. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) EY report of 2021 on *Higher education in India: Vision 204*, presents comprehensive insights of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 through graphic representations of the transition in the dealings of Higher Education Institutes across India from pre and post pandemic times. This report also highlights key optimizations made by HIEs on a global scale to adapt to the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic and leverage the mode of traditional teaching methods and administrative tasks to suit the digital evolution in the form of Education 4.0.

The elaborative research conducted by Manali Chakrabarti and Rahul Varman in *Digitalisation of Education: A Dystopian Solution for a Dismal Reality* (2024), highlights the irony of the imposing vision and schemes of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as it falls short to coincide with gaps between India's economy and its necessity to incorporate digitalization in the educational ecosystem. Their paper pragmatically unveils the capitalist models working behind the Ed-Tech companies, where they failed and how non-profit based Ed-tech providers and NGOs are leading the fundamentals of actualizing digitalization of education in India.

Apart from the critical portrayal of the digital shifts and its effect on Higher Education, this paper constitutes of various quantifiable researches that propose novel managerial methods that can be integrated by the Human Resource Management Division in their institutions. Most of these managerial approaches are conceptualized upon understanding the expectancies and focus of industries towards hiring employees that are digitally incompetent and equipped with skills who can yield innovative advancements in their domain of work.

Through critical analysis of the science fiction, *Manna* (2003) by Marshall Brain, this paper studies the recent digital trends observed in the real world that were projected well before in this work of fiction. Upon comparing such evolutions that are currently pacing at rapid rate, the possibility of a dystopian disruption of humanity by the malpractices acted by an autocrat cannot be neglected. The loss of in-person social life due to the digital and AI driven education ecosystem is the core theme of *The Fun They Had* (1951) by Isaac Asimov. This loss of human iteration has been addressed as one of the biggest drawbacks by people impelled to work and study online, "Virtual events, internships, programs and projects significantly reduce social interactions, lessening the expected impact and take away" (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry [FICCI], 2021, p. 62).

This paper attempts to provide a framework for Human Resource Managers to adapt a foundational strategy that first nurtures the requirements of their respective institutes that provides tools and resources to construct a complementary relationship between Institutes' vision and the students' expectations from its curriculum. Once the ground-work has been set, progressing towards a holistic approach for innovation and excellence in the growing age of digital revolution will seem achievable.

**Research Methodology**

This paper comprises a comprehensive study and analysis of secondary sources varying from research articles published peer reviewed journals, research reports, news articles, blog posts

and interviews. The sources selected for this paper cater to evaluate emerging trends in higher education and employment due to the rapid growth of digital market. The desk research approach aligns with the objectives of this paper as the selected sources provide insights, not only into the patters of failing managerial strategies but also demonstrating practical solutions to bridge the gaps between an uncertain fallout in furnishing relevant tools and resources to the students enrolled in HEI and a future that reflects promising stability in employment that is innovatively fulfilling.

The secondary resources to form this research were collected from credible platforms like JSTOR and Google Scholar; news articles were taken from reliable news websites such as The Indian Express, The Hindu and India Today for extensive understanding of the topic, interviews conducted by WIRED, an American magazine.

The referenced sources were thoroughly examined to position the literary themes and concepts about digitalization, parallel to the HR strategies and responsibilities towards their institution in order to formulate a meeting point for both realms, where through collaborative steps and a multidisciplinary approach, India could yield a steady advancement in the global market of digitalization.

**Research Findings**

The necessity of digitalization evolved out of an uncertain time period, the pandemic of 2020. Since every aspect of manual/human labour that included repetitive tasks were atomized, not only to save time and increase efficiency, but also to cease wage distribution for the employees with low-level skills in order to invest that amount to build better technologies that could boost the manufacturing procedures in the industry. Layoffs are on the rise to capitalise more on AI based technologies in the market as companies are investing more on start-ups that focus on digital innovation. However, for these investments to be made these companies are laying off the low-wage employees instead of investing in their re-skilling. The employee displacements reported in the papers highlighted the major termination of older employees.

> Also, because of older workers' perceived higher cost, impending retirement, and other related reasons, many employers do not provide older employees with as much on-the-job training as younger employees, putting them at a disadvantage if they want or need to find another job. (Butrica & Mudrazija, 2022, p. 43)

In chapter three of Science Fiction novel, *Manna* (2003) by Marshall Brain, depicts a true picture of automation displacing low-wage and blue-collared workers in America, when a software termed, 'Manna' far in the future, precisely the year of 2030 (that is not so far in the future as of 2025 already witnessing disruption in the global market) executes the tasks from managing the employees to executing their works through robots. The author through his narration, consciously questions the consequences of such a large scaled tech revolution.

> The switchover to robots was proceeding with remarkable speed, and for some reason it seemed like no one had really thought about the effects of the transition. All of these people being replaced by the robots needed some form of income to survive, but the job pool was shrinking. The American "service economy" was what replaced the "factory economy", and America now had about half of its workers wrapped up in low-paying service sector jobs. These were the jobs perfectly suited for the new robots. The question was, what would happen to the half of the population being displaced from their service sector jobs? (Brain, 2003, p. 14)

Comparing the fiction with today's scenario; Tech companies such as IBM, Cisco, Intel to name a few, and many small-scale start-ups reported to have downsized their workforce accounting to more than 1,36,000 across 422 companies by the second half of 2024 ("Mass layoffs hit tech industry: Over 27,000 jobs cut as Intel, Cisco, IBM, and Apple slash workforce," 2024). The referenced article from The Economic Times mentioned the reason for such a decision through a statement given by Jochen Hanebeck, CEO of Infineon, a German Chip manufacturing company,

> Infineon, a German chipmaker, is also making significant cuts, with plans to reduce 1,400 jobs and relocate another 1,400 to countries with lower labor costs. CEO Jochen Hanebeck explained these measures were necessary due to third-quarter revenue falling short of expectations. "The slow recovery in target markets is due to prolonged weak economic momentum and excess inventory levels," he said, leading to a downgraded forecast for the third time in recent months. ("Mass layoffs hit tech industry: Over 27,000 jobs cut as Intel, Cisco, IBM, and Apple slash workforce," 2022, para. 5)

Following this issue comes the truncated campus hiring, mostly reported in the IT sector due for notable reasons such as the global slowdown in economy and rapidly evolving expectations of skills, ranging from technical, analytical, soft-skills that complement innovation and industry specific skills to compete within the global trajectory undergoing digitalization. In a business article, *Fresher hiring witnessed a decline in 2024, say hiring managers*, Tejaswi (2024) stated that "Aon also reported that campus compensation remained stagnant in 2024 compared with 2023, despite 69% of the 250 organisations it surveyed expecting a high to moderate growth mostly led by financial institutions, life sciences and consumer goods segments" (para. 8).

Yixiao Zhou (2023) in his book chapter, "Automation, The Future of Work and Income Inequality in The Asia-Pacific Region," mentioned the role of global trade and offshoring in the decline of income inequality among countries that further impact the operation of new job creation. According to the statistics presented by business and economic forums, the advent of digitalization will hamper the proceeding employment rate in the jobs automating by the following years, however, this will lead companies to create new and complex jobs to leveraging the net growth in employment.

> Extrapolating from the predictions shared by Future of Jobs Survey respondents, on current trends over the 2025 to 2030 period job creation and destruction due to structural labour-market transformation will amount to 22% of today's total jobs. This is expected to entail the creation of new jobs equivalent to 14% of today's total employment, amounting to 170 million jobs. However, this growth is expected to be offset by the displacement of the equivalent of 8% (or 92 million) of current jobs, resulting in net growth of 7% of total employment, or 78 million jobs. ("The Future of Jobs Report 2025," 2025, para. 6)

Hence, the employment market is transitioning towards jobs that require high-skilled workforce that can produce quality measured results, consistent with the emerging transformational trends in digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence. The companies are looking for graduates who can perform beyond traditional education and train themselves with minimal yet efficient investments made on sustainable production value of their respective companies.

Thus, the Human Resource Department in higher educational institutes have a responsible role in contributing to the up-skilling of their students, re-skilling of their faculty staff, modifying their institute's policies to match with the current trends in education and recruitment; and provide sustainable infrastructure, inculcating well-planned technical support and teaching methods to link the gaps between education and employment in today's digital revolution.

Nevertheless, most of the HEIs in India, whether they are privately owned or private aided colleges; face the hurdle of adequate funding to build their technically advanced infrastructures and provide re-skilling /up-skilling training programs to their teaching staff and students. The FICCI EY report (2021) mentions that "The NEP has highlighted a couple of ambitious tasks such as almost doubling the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in higher education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035…" (p. 24). However, the insufficient funding in extreme cases pose a threat of complete closure of an institute as further stated by the FICCI EY report (2021), "After 174 years of existence, MacMurray College decided there was no viable financial path forward in light of declining enrolments, rising competitive costs, and an insufficient endowment enhanced by the pandemic" (p. 40).

After investigating a set of researches that present global case studies and surveys; this paper aims to list successful pragmatic steps taken by HEIs to resolve the problem of funding and shortage of infrastructure:

1. In Part A of the highlights of The Union Budget (2025-2026), Government of India is investing, "5 National Centres of Excellence for skilling to be set up with global expertise and partnerships to equip our youth with the skills required for "Make for India, Make for the World" manufacturing" ("Press Information Bureau," 2025, Part A, Investment as The 3rd Engine of Development, National Centres of Excellence for Skilling).
2. From highlights of Union Budget 2021 as mentioned in the FICCI EY report (2021), "Special funding has been earmarked to set up an Academic Board of Credit, which could enable credit based education for students, in line with the NEP 2020" (p. 52). Additionally, Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), initiated in 2013 by Ministry of Education, GOI, aims to strategically plan the distribution of economic funding, specifically in HEIs.
3. Collaboration and partnerships with Tech companies can also be beneficial, as the institutes can empower their curriculum with Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to perform repetitive administrative tasks which gives the teaching staff enough time and energy to focus on their re-skilling and upgrading lesson plans. Cloud-based tools have emerged as

a necessity to store huge numbers of data and since the enrolments in HEI from varying places of the country itself are rising, institutes require to build efficient digital platforms and applications accessible for student, even at a distant, and remain updated with the institute's activities and notices. Hence, "There is also a growing need for financial systems to be connected to human resource and student management systems" (Barrett & Shakespeare, 2024, p. 120).

4. Education 4.0 is India's vision to shift the traditional paradigm of education into a more personalised framework that caters to the contemporary digital revolution. According to FICCI EY report (2021), "Only the curriculum framework will be specified by the General Education Council as defined by the NEP while the HEIs would have the freedom to set their own curricula" (p. 74). Hence, the institutes can formulate a curricula that suits best with their needs. Further, the mentioned report cited the case of a prominent Private University of America that launched a "Micro Masters program" in collaboration with an eminent EdX company, "…is a professional and academic credential for online learners from anywhere in the world. To earn the credential, learners must pass an integrated set of graduate level courses on edX, and one or more proctored exams" (FICCI EY report, 2021, p. 69). This initiative enabled the institute to connect with students at a global scale who wanted to upgrade their skills through the institute's Masters Program.

Once the problem of economy with suitable funding is resolved, the next important segment for the HR department is the viable investment of their capital into the "right resources" to avail the best desired outputs. An issue regarding the biased tendencies of online or costumised educational technology is addressed in The India Forum on *The Coming Disruption in Higher Education in India* (2022),

> The much talked up customised education products involves training the user-student with algorithms while continually collecting the latter's data exhaust. Every digital indent, in the form of a like button, an emoji, a quiz, a survey or a click adds to the assembling of the user-student's behavioural-psychological profile, which in the absence of legal protection, can be turned into an exclusively owned raw material to be repurposed by the platform. Abstract automated instructions of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are designed to train and modulate an individual for the passive acquisition of skills, which is in stark contrast to learning as a social activity that involves critical thinking. (D'Souza, 2022, para. 14)

This segment requires the HR's understanding of the differences among the population of their institute. This paper proposes some pragmatic methods that an HR manager can acquire to structure a framework that highlights their respective institutes' position in the educational sector and how they can navigate through the differences to align them with the holistic vision of Education 4.0.

As stated by Matthew Leger (2023) in "Building High-Trust Workplaces: The Role of Employee Resource Groups in Fostering Stronger Employee-Employer Relationships,"

> Employee resource groups (ERGs) have been around for decades and offer a potential solution to emerging workplace challenges by creating alignment and a shared sense of purpose between workers and employers, building trusted employer-employee relationships, and fostering community and inclusion in the workplace. (p. 1)

Similarly, Institutes can form their own Resource Groups that connect its teachers, students and the HR team for constructive discussions and feedbacks on events, curricula and expectancies in an inclusive manner. An Ireland based company, CampusConnect, founded in 2015, aims to offer digital platforms for universities and colleges to build their own customizable community.

With the feedback and statistics received from these groups, the HR department can further look into software, teaching programs, workshops, tech and digital devices which align with the demand of their institute's population. Since, not every online course or training program can be trusted with the credibility and relevancy in its lesson material; HR department can form counselling teams for each department that not only guides the students in career building but also acts as a support when navigating through the plethora of digital content advertised over the web.

However, in order to initiate the up-skilling of students across departments, an HR first has to focus on the re-skilling of its teaching staff who are the pillars of the education sector. This paper evaluates the practical methods of implement the same.

Since the administrative tasks are already being automated, the teachers can invest more time into re-skilling and learning the new technology through the trust and support built by the institutes' HR department. This can be achieved by,

> …hiring educational technology and information technology professionals. As teachers become more proficient in the technical skills required for the new technology, their needs may shift to administrative and peer support to help develop and apply new uses for the technology in their classrooms. (Johnson et al., 2016, p. 10)

According to the findings about the flawed AI recruitment systems as highlighted in *Reducing AI bias in recruitment and selection: an integrative grounded approach* (2025), "The ML model used in AIRS degrades over time due to the lack of continuous updating and retraining with new data. This stagnation can occur if there is no feedback from domain experts" (Soleimani et al., 2025, p. 19). Similarly, an HR manager requires constant feedback to make revisions and refinements in the institute's requirements amidst the uncertain catalysts of change in the age of rapidly evolving digital revolution.

**Conclusion**

The swift evolution of digitalisation scaled the transition of employment and education over measured complicacies of the global pandemic which pushed the visions of both, into Industry 4.0 and Education 4.0. However, there is a certain portion of society who is facing the negative implications of being the stuck in the economy division, allowing them less opportunities in the digital era.

Industries are executing mass layoffs and displacement of manual labour and low-skilled employees. The cost cutting on wages builds job insecurity among the youth. However, investments are made to create new jobs to incorporate the high-skilled workforce yet, HEIs are reporting a slowdown in campus hiring due to the skill gap retained by graduates who are unable to match the current industry trends.

This freeze in campus hiring and ever increasing enrolments in HEIs, the HR department of educational institutes are adopting managerial styles and policies that can enable the students with efficient skill-based training and providing sustainable educational technologies to their teaching staff. This requires well-curated planning and execution of strategies with a scope of constructive feedbacks that facilitates timely refinements in the institutes' infrastructure and managerial methods.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Considering the diversity of India from its geographical vastness, cultural and economic differences along with the nation being the largest democracy; capitalizing on automation comes with varying risks. However, extensive researches need to be conducted to analyse, both, negative and positive aspects of digitalization, specifically in the Indian economy.

As far as the Higher Education sector is concerned, more case studies and surveys conducted in specified regions would be beneficial to form new regulations in education policies in India that can prepare the future professionals who can work in collaboration with Artificial Intelligence and build their own digital brand that connects people globally. Since, digitalization is empowering people with the entire globe's knowledge, right in their handheld digital devices; the possibilities to innovate oneself is endless. What people require is adequate resources and rightly guided direction to utilize them.

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