

Summary of Discussion in Seminar 3 - Big Data and Employee Well-Being: What Data and How?

Discussion on the papers presented included issues relating to what data should be used for analysing employee well-being. People analytics has only recently come onto the HR agenda; one reason for it is to show how people contribute to business outcomes.

Ethical issues were discussed in detail. Participants identified that different monitoring activities can be used in different ways and can be benign or could be intrusive/unethical.

Sentiment analysis of emails, for example, can be used to indicate a person's morale, mood, which in turn might indicate his/her well-being at work. However, is this acceptable from an ethical point of view? Having this type of monitoring may cause employees to shift their behaviour and lower the integrity of the data. There needs to be governance mechanisms in organisations about how to collect and use this data. More transparency is also needed to show employees how their data are used.

Other initiatives, such as providing free FitBits / activity tracker to employees, were also discussed. Employees are more likely to support this type of monitoring because they can directly benefit from having this information. However, a concern about these individualised apps is that they put responsibility on the individual to improve their own wellbeing. There is a concern that individualisation may also mean less collective action. There needs to be some inter-relation between the individual and organisation, such that the organisation recognises a need for change in itself.

Discussions at the seminar also focused around the structure, culture and skills within organisations for using Big Data, as some organisations are distributed and complex. Directions for employee well-being needs to come from the top.

Participants also discussed the challenges in processing Big Data. These data are often noisy and will need to be cleaned prior to analysing them. There is some concern that they may not be the right data to solve a problem. Lastly, the volume of big data is often too big for processing using common analytical tools, such as SPSS. Advanced IT skills are increasingly required to process these data using a distributed computing.