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Challenges in Implementing AI-Powered HR Technology in the IT and Apparel Manufacturing Sectors

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Abstract

Companies everywhere are being told to bring artificial intelligence (AI) into their HR departments. AI is used to screen resumes, predict who might quit, run performance reviews, and answer employee questions. But putting these tools to work is not as simple as buying software and turning it on. This paper looks at how that process plays out in two very different industries: information technology (IT), where workers are used to computers and companies have money to spend, and apparel manufacturing, where most workers do physical, low-paid jobs and have far less say in how they are managed. Using recent studies, news reports, and real examples from India and Bangladesh, the paper finds that both industries run into similar problems, like messy data, biased algorithms, and workers who do not trust the system, but the size of the problem is very different. IT companies mostly worry about lawsuits, fairness, and keeping employees informed. Garment factories worry about basic things like paying for new equipment, training workers who have never used a computer, and what happens to people who lose their jobs with almost no safety net. The paper ends with practical suggestions for both industries.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Human Resources, IT Sector, Apparel Manufacturing, Algorithmic Bias, Technology Adoption

Introduction

Human resources used to be one of the least "techy" parts of a company. That has changed fast. Today a chatbot might screen your resume before a human ever reads it. An algorithm might decide who gets called for an interview, who is likely to quit next year, or how your performance review turns out. Software companies talk about all this in glowing terms: faster hiring, fairer decisions, happier employees. People who actually work with these tools tend to tell a messier story.

That gap between the sales pitch and the reality is where this paper starts. Many organizations are now told that using AI in HR is no longer optional, it is simply how modern companies operate (Tambe et al., 2019). But actually, setting these systems up is hard. Someone has to pick a vendor, clean up years of messy data, train staff, and explain the change



to employees who never asked for it in the first place. And it often goes wrong. Recent surveys suggest that only about a quarter of organizations have started using AI in HR in any serious way, and most of those only began in the last year or so (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2024). In other words, the hype is running well ahead of what companies have actually managed to do.

This paper looks closely at two industries that could not be more different: information technology (IT) and apparel, or garment, manufacturing. The comparison is intentional. IT is usually seen as the easiest place to introduce AI-based HR tools. Its workers are comfortable with software, its systems already live in the cloud, and its HR teams tend to try new tools early (Sujatha & Sanjana, 2025; Esakkimuthu & Rajalingam, 2026). Garment manufacturing is almost the opposite. It employs tens of millions of people worldwide, many of them in poorer countries, many of them women, and many of them without the computer skills or workplace power that a typical IT employee has (Jewel et al., 2026). Putting these two side by side shows something that studies of a single industry tend to miss: the technical problems with AI in HR, like bad data or biased algorithms, show up almost everywhere. But the human problems, trust, job security, whether workers can be retrained, whether the law protects them, depend heavily on who is being managed by the algorithm and how much power that person actually has.

The rest of the paper works through this step by step. First, a short section explains why AI is hard to introduce into HR in the first place, using ideas from technology adoption research. Next comes a plain overview of what "AI-powered HR" actually means in practice, since the term gets used loosely. Two sections then look closely at the IT sector and the apparel sector on their own, followed by a section that compares them directly. After that, the paper turns to two problems that cut across both industries, bias and privacy, before ending with practical recommendations and a short conclusion.

Why Implementation Is Hard

For a long time, researchers assumed that if a piece of software was genuinely useful, people would just use it. That is the basic idea behind the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which says people adopt a tool mainly because they find it useful and easy to use (Davis, 1989). A later model, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), added two more pieces: whether coworkers and bosses support the tool, and whether the company actually gives people the training and support to use it properly (Venkatesh et al., 2003).



These models were built with fairly predictable software in mind, things like payroll systems or spreadsheets. AI is a different animal. It is probabilistic rather than fixed, meaning the same input can produce a different output depending on the day. The reasoning behind a recommendation is often hidden. And the tool itself keeps changing as it gets retrained on new data. Because of this, researchers studying AI adoption have had to add new ideas to UTAUT, like trust, transparency, and how risky the tool feels to use (Charlwood & Guenole, 2022). This matters a lot for HR, because HR decisions, who gets hired, who gets promoted, whose contract does not get renewed, are exactly the kind of decisions where not knowing how a choice was made makes people anxious rather than confident.

A second helpful idea comes from Tambe et al. (2019), who point out that HR is simply a harder place to use AI than, say, marketing or supply chains. They give three reasons. First, the things HR cares about, like performance or "culture fit," are hard to measure cleanly, so the data used to train these systems is often a rough stand-in for what companies actually want to know. Second, HR datasets are small. Even a big company only hires a few thousand people a year, which is a tiny number by the standards of machine learning. Third, HR decisions come with legal and ethical strings attached, around discrimination, privacy, and worker rights, that most other business functions do not have to worry about nearly as much. These three problems come up again and again in both the IT and apparel sections below, even though the two industries look nothing alike on the surface.

Put together TAM and UTAUT give us a good idea of why individual employees and companies either jump at or turn down new AI tools, while Tambe and colleagues warn us about the special challenges of using AI in HR in the first place. Both ideas get used throughout this whole paper to make sense of what's actually going on in the two industries.

What "AI-Powered HR" Actually Means

Before comparing industries, it helps to be crystal clear on what "AI-powered HR tech" actually involves, because the phrase gets bandied about so loosely. In practice most of what companies are doing falls into a handful of fairly distinct areas.

Recruitment and Screening

This is the most visible application of AI in HR, and the most contentious one. Software scans and ranks resumes, chatbots sit in on early-stage interviews, and a few tools even analyse recorded video interviews to see how someone communicates (Hunkenschroer & Kriebitz, 2022). Vendors love to point to big wins in this space. Unilever, for example, is often cited as a poster child for cutting its hiring process from about four months down to four weeks



after bringing in AI-assisted recruiting, and industry estimates suggest you could cut HR costs by anything between 20 to 40 percent by adopting AI on a big enough scale.

Workforce Analytics and Prediction

Companies are increasingly using predictive models to make educated guesses about who might be looking to jump ship soon, spot which employees are at risk of leaving, and predict what skills they're going to need in a year or two - the kind of forward planning that finance teams have had a head start on for decades (ADP, 2025).

Performance Management and Development

AI is also used to build "customised" learning plans, automatically score performance, and give regular feedback, often replacing the old annual review (Sujatha & Sanjana, 2025).

Everyday HR Automation

Chatbots now handle all sorts of routine paperwork too: leave requests, payroll queries, onboarding forms - the idea being to free up HR staff for more meaningful work, at least in theory (Moveworks, 2025).

In places like apparel manufacturing, where machines are used to make products, there is a fifth category worth mentioning: using AI to plan shifts and labour on the shop floor in real time, often tied to AI-based quality checks that change how many workers a line actually needs (Technology Magazine, 2022; TLD Apparel, 2025). Across all five areas, the basic pitch is the same: turn human gut instinct into data-driven, scalable decisions. The problems explored in the rest of this paper happen because that switch is rarely as smooth in real life as it sounds in a sales pitch.

The IT Sector

On paper, the IT industry should have it easiest with AI. Its workers already spend all day in front of a screen, its systems run on modern cloud infrastructure, and surveys consistently show that AI adoption in HR is strongest among tech, finance, and information companies - especially the biggest ones (SHRM, 2024). Studies of Indian IT firms, an industry that employs millions and has been extensively studied, report a lot of enthusiasm for AI-based hiring, performance tracking and workforce management, but also a fairly standard set of headaches (Sujatha & Sanjana, 2025; Esakkimuthu & Rajalingam, 2026).

Messy Data

Even the IT companies that've built entire businesses around dealing with data - and it cant get any more data-driven than they are - are having a terrible time getting their HR data sorted out. Recruitment records, payroll details , performance ratings , and engagement survey



results are all scattered across different systems that were purchased at different times - and actually pulling all that stuff into one neat dataset that an AI model can learn something from is a proper engineering challenge not just a matter of picking out the right bit of kit. This ties back to the small-data problem that Tambe et al. (2019) wrote about - and what is just a bit galling is that the industry with all the expertise to fix this kind of problem is still struggling with it, because the data they get on their staff just wasn't ever put together with machine learning in mind.

Bias in a Fast-Moving, Competitive Hiring Market

It takes a lot of applicants and a huge amount of time to hire someone in IT and it's a field that is just crying out to be sorted with some AI screening but it's also an area where you risk making a right old mess. You may think of the most famous warning story, about a big tech company's own recruiting tool that quietly knocked down resumes containing words like "women's", as in "women's chess club captain", purely because it had learned from a decade of mostly-male set of resumes. Luckily the company binned the tool the moment they found out (Gupta & Mishra, 2022; Hunkenschroer & Kriebitz, 2022). Same sort of thing has happened elsewhere in tech too. Some larger company did an internal review and discovered that their AI system actually ranked women lower for the tech jobs because it had spent years learning to make decisions off the back of male dominated hiring panels. And it looks like the newer tools aren't immune to this either. In 2025 study with a dataset of about 361,000 fake resumes found that even the AI tools used to screen CVs were acting in biased ways - this time by race and gender - even when the resumes were otherwise identical (VoxDev, 2025). Since it's exactly these technical roles that these IT companies are desperate to fill, there is no way to get away from the fact that this bias risk is right at the centre of all their AIHR plans

Legal Exposure

Because many IT companies count so heavily on automated screening - it's hardly a revelation these days - they are also right at the centre of a bigger trend that could result in a flood of AI employment lawsuits. In the US, the highly anticipated case of Mobley v Workday has just got the green light to proceed as a group claim. This is a big deal because the case claims a widely used hiring platform was actually unfairly favouring - or rather discriminating against - candidates because of their race, age and disability. If this case ultimately goes in the employers' favour it will likely have a much wider impact and leave many other employers who are also using similar software reeling.



Employee Trust and Fear of Job Loss

Here's a rather odd phenomenon - the workers who are most confident using AI also seem to be the ones who worry about it the most. I reckon that's because they really know how these tools work, and therefore also understand the potential risks. Research has found that nearly a quarter of HR people are genuinely worried that AI will lead to job losses - and other studies suggest that when you do start adopting AI you are likely to need to send people back to retraining, as jobs get redesigned rather than simply being made redundant (SHRM, 2024; Gartner, 2026). Given the recent pattern of tech layoffs happening around the same time as companies are splashing out a lot of cash on AI, it's no surprise people are starting to make those connections even if they may not always add up.

Rules Lagging Behind Practice

A theme that keeps popping up in the industry press is that the main challenge in tech companies isn't actually the AI itself - it's the governance - or the rules that are supposed to govern how it is used. It turns out that the employees - and even sometimes the HR teams - are already getting on and using AI tools without actually waiting for official policy to catch up - sometimes known as "shadow AI". Of course, having a clear set of rules is important, but you do have to get the balance right. If the rules are too strict and overly prescriptive they'll likely just push the use of AI underground and make it worse not better.

Overall, the IT sector's problems are less about basic readiness, that part is mostly solved, and more about the harder second-round problems: cleaning up years of messy data, catching bias in systems built for speed and scale, keeping up with fast-changing employment law, and managing a workforce that knows exactly how these tools work and is, for that reason, more skeptical of them.

The Apparel Manufacturing Sector

Apparel manufacturing looks almost like the mirror image of IT. The actual technology, cameras that spot defects, automated cutting machines, sensor-based tracking, is well tested and delivers real results. Industry research suggests AI-based quality checks can boost inspection efficiency by roughly 30 percent and cut defects by up to 20 percent (TLD Apparel, 2025; World Fashion Exchange, 2025). What is far less settled is the human side of putting these systems in place, mostly because of who works in this industry and under what conditions.

A Workforce With Little Digital Experience or Bargaining Power



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The global apparel industry employs tens of millions of people, a huge share of them in lower-wage manufacturing hubs like Bangladesh. It's been historically easy to get a job in this industry without much formal education, which has meant that many workers have never even used a computer at their job before. That is a world away from IT, where AI gets layered on top of a workforce that's already super familiar with the online world. Research on Bangladesh's ready-made garment sector showed that this skills gap is basically the biggest obstacle to AI adoption - workers often needed vocational training to move into more technical roles, but with so little training available inside most factories, a big chunk of the workforce risks being left behind and not retrained (Jewel et al, 2026).

Losing a Job Here Is Not the Same as Losing a Job in Tech

In IT, when people get worried about losing their job to AI, it usually just means their job gets overhauled a bit, but they can probably just find another technical job somewhere else because the job market is so tight. In garment manufacturing, the stakes are way higher. Employment in the apparel business has already plummeted in some major manufacturing countries over the past few decades and business leaders are saying that AI will replace some manual work in the future. For loads of these workers - often women with pretty few other options - a factory job is basically their only viable way to earn a decent income. So when AI comes along and makes jobs redundant, the impact is a whole lot worse here than it would be in, say, an office job. This is why labour unions and worker advocates have been pushing back a lot harder against AI in factories than in most other white-collar workplaces.

Cost and Infrastructure, Especially for Small Suppliers

Apparel manufacturing is a thin-margin business and the industry is full of small and medium-sized factories that supply the big well-known brands. Studies of AI adoption among these apparel exporters keep pointing to the same barriers: huge setup costs, lousy digital infrastructure, resistance to change, and general worries about data privacy (like in other industries). Unlike an IT company which can just add an AI feature to the systems it's already using in the cloud for a pretty low cost, a garment factory has to buy entirely new kit, cameras, sensors, machines that are all networked up, before any AI system can even get going. And that's why the real cost of adopting AI is way more than the price of the software itself - which is probably why AI use tends to cluster among the biggest, best-funded suppliers. And that just makes the gap between them and the smaller competitors even wider.

Little Legal Protection



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Maybe the biggest contrast between IT and manufacturing is how much legal protection workers in those fields have regarding technology. Right now, IT hiring practices are being tested in courts around the world - especially in places you'd expect to see a lot of lawsuits like Sanfords Heisler Sharp put it in 2026. In contrast, most of the garment manufacturing in countries where labor laws are pretty lax, and to make matters worse there are still no rules or regulations about how to handle workers when AI comes into the workplace - even in places like Bangladesh where they do care about adopting new tech. For example, according to Uddin (2025), the official policy in Bangladesh recognises that AI is a big deal, but there is no actual plan in place to help workers who get laid off because of it, or to train them up for new roles, or even to make sure the transition isn't a disaster.

Introducing Change Without Losing Worker Trust

The reality is that - when done well - AI doesn't necessarily mean job losses. I reckon one of the most often cited examples of this is a Bangladeshi knitwear factory that used AI to automate the kind of decisions that would normally go wrong and cause waste. Instead of getting rid of their human inspectors, they re-assigned them to other tasks. People working in the industry have also suggested doing things slower and more carefully - like testing AI on just one production line and then gradually rolling it out - so that managers and workers both can get used to it, and problems don't snowball before you even notice they're there (Uddin, 2025). This is all in line with what UTAUT predicts - that when people can see their colleagues succeeding with a new system first, and when the company is actually committed to helping people through the change rather than just announcing it, that change is way more likely to go smoothly.

In short, apparel manufacturing's problems are not really about whether the technology works, computer-vision quality control, for one, is already well proven, they are about a workforce with limited computer experience, thinner financial cushions, and far weaker legal protection against the downside of automation. Where IT's biggest headaches are about data quality, bias, and rules catching up to fast-moving teams, apparel manufacturing's biggest headaches are about money, skills, and the human cost of getting a workforce transition wrong.

Comparing the Two Sectors

Put side by side, these two industries show something that a single-sector study would miss: how hard AI-HR is to implement does not line up neatly with how advanced the technology is. IT companies have the money, infrastructure, and digital skills to roll out AI-HR tools quickly, yet they still struggle with the harder problems underneath, like clean data, bias, and fast-moving legal risk (Tambe et al., 2019; Sanford Heisler Sharp, 2026). Apparel



manufacturers mostly avoid those harder bias-and-governance debates simply because their AI use is less advanced, but they run into a much bigger basic problem: infrastructure, worker skills, and cash (Jewel et al., 2026).

One useful way to compare them is through the three problems Tambe et al. (2019) say make HR a hard place for AI: messy outcome measures, small datasets, and legal or ethical limits. Both industries deal with all three, just in different ways.

Messy Outcomes

In IT, the thing is, it's really tough to nail down something like 'performance' or 'culture fit', so predictive HR tools end up scrambling to chase after easy to count stand-ins, such as how many code commits someone's made. Not the actual thing that matters though. In the apparel manufacturing world, on the other hand, output is a heck of a lot easier to measure - just units made, and the defect rate. That makes it some easier to build those AI tools. But at the same time, it creates a risk that workforce systems are optimised purely for output and not for how workers are actually faring, because the softer stuff (like how are people feeling?) that would balance out those productivity numbers is basically never tracked in a factory.

Small, Skewed Datasets

IT companies are often hiring loads of people to train up a pretty decent sized model but what ends up happening is that they end up training it on applicant pools that were already pretty skewed to begin with - gender & race issues just get reproduced, which is a problem that's been going on in the tech industry since forever (Gupta & Mishra, 2022). With smaller apparel factories, they might not even have all their HR records digitized yet - so any AI system they bring in doesn't really have much of its own data to learn from and may end up just using some off-the-shelf model that just isn't well suited to their specific working conditions.

Legal and Ethical Limits

This is where IT and the apparel manufacturing industries really start to diverge. AI hiring in IT is getting a major workout in court, especially over in North America and Europe - which is forcing vendors and employers to get more transparent and accountable (Sanford Heisler Sharp, 2026). Apparel manufacturing on the other hand is still pretty much flying under the radar - partly because their AI use is less advanced and partly because production happens in countries where the labor laws don't get enforced so well. The kind of pressure that lawsuits and regulation are starting to put on IT has barely even made it to the factory floor yet (Uddin, 2025).



And then there's the difference in who gets hurt when things go wrong. In IT, a poorly built AI-HR tool is just going to cause some legal and reputational trouble for the company, and an applicant who's unfairly rejected still has plenty of other job options in the competitive tech labor market. But in apparel manufacturing, a badly handled AI transition can actually cost a worker their whole income, and there just aren't many other employers around and even less of a safety net to catch them if they fall. Which suggests that, while both industries need better rules around AI-HR, getting it wrong is going to have a much higher human cost in apparel manufacturing - even though the tech they're using there is, on average, simpler.

Bias, Privacy, and Trust

Two problems surface in both industries, show up in different ways: bias in the algorithms and worries over data privacy.

Bias has been well-documented in a whole range of AI-HR tools, from resume screening to video interviews. And it's no surprise - studies after studies show that bias isn't usually because some engineer sat down and deliberately tried to discriminate. More often than not, it's because the models were trained on old hiring data that picked up on existing - and often discriminatory - patterns in the history. (Gupta & Mishra, 2022 put it pretty well on this one). It's a pattern we've seen a lot - Hunkenschroer and Kriebitz (2022) are pretty adamant that this is a human rights issue rather than just a technical bug ; they point out that AI recruitment tools, if not designed with those risks in mind, can end up clashing with pretty basic rights to be treated fairly and with dignity, and to have some idea what's going on. And new research is coming in to back this up - big studies where AI language models were used to evaluate job candidates still found that, even when qualifications were identical, there were systematic differences in the outcomes on the basis of race and gender (VoxDev, 2025). Disability is another angle that gets less attention - some popular AI screening tools have been known to score candidates who are neurodivergent lower just because their response patterns didn't match up with what the model was expecting. And it's not like this means AI recruiting is always worse than a human - we all know that human recruiters can be biased too after all. But it does suggest that the idea that AI can be more "objective" than a human doesn't really hold up on its own - it takes work to get that to happen.

Privacy concerns are also showing up in both industries - just in different ways. In IT, the worry is really about all the sensitive employee data floating around connected systems and keeping track of all the messy data protection laws across the globe where a big tech company operates. In apparel manufacturing, privacy concerns pop up a lot too - but they hit up against a



more basic problem: workers often have no idea what data is being collected about them or how it's being used, which is basically a question of informed consent - not just about ticking a box on a piece of paper.

Deep down, both industries have a third problem: people really trusting an algorithm's output a bit too much. Studies from both industries are showing up the same warning - because AI systems seem so neutral and data-driven, decision-makers (and sometimes the workers themselves) end up trusting an algorithm's recommendation more than they would trust the same call made by a person, even when the algorithm isn't actually any more accurate. This might be the biggest problem shared by both industries - not that AI-HR tools are necessarily worse than the human process they replace, but that their air of objectivity can sometimes talk people out of scrutinising the high-stakes HR decisions, whether they're made by a human or a machine.

Recommendations

Given everything above, responsible AI-HR implementation needs to fit each industry's actual situation rather than follow one generic playbook. The suggestions below are split by sector, with a few that apply to both.

For the IT Sector

- Treat data cleanup as a company-wide job, not just an IT task. Since messy data is the most common technical complaint, HR, IT, and legal teams should work together on data quality before buying an AI tool, not after.
- Check vendors for bias before signing a contract. Given how often recruiting algorithms have been found to discriminate, companies should ask vendors exactly how their models were trained and tested for bias, and should run their own periodic checks instead of just trusting the vendor's word.
- Set clear rules for informal AI use. Since employees are already experimenting with AI tools faster than policy can keep up, companies should offer a quick, simple approval process for new tools rather than ignoring the problem or banning everything outright, since bans usually just push the behavior out of sight.
- Talk openly about how jobs are changing. Given how much employees already worry about AI and job loss, HR leaders should be upfront about which roles are being automated, which are just changing shape, and what retraining is actually on offer, instead of leaving people to guess.

For the Apparel Manufacturing Sector



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- Pair any AI spending with training for workers. Since the real barrier here is a skills gap rather than stubbornness, AI projects should set aside a real budget for retraining, ideally built together with local vocational schools rather than tacked on as an afterthought.
- Test on one production line before rolling out everywhere. A slower, staged rollout gives both managers and workers time to adjust and lets problems get caught early, before they spread across an entire factory.
- Push for better government policy. Since displaced garment workers currently have so little legal protection, industry groups and the brands that source from these factories should be pushing for clearer national rules on retraining support and transition help, instead of leaving individual factories to figure it out alone.
- Reassign workers before cutting jobs, where possible. Examples of moving quality inspectors into new roles instead of laying them off show that AI efficiency gains do not always have to mean fewer jobs, and this option should be the first thing tried, not the last.

For Both Sectors

- Keep a person in the loop for decisions that really matter, in line with the idea that AI recruiting should support human judgment, not replace it, especially on decisions that affect someone's basic rights (Hunkenschroer & Kriebitz, 2022).
- Judge success by things like trust and ease of use, not just by whether the software was installed, since the evidence from both industries suggests that AI-HR projects usually fail for social reasons, not technical ones (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Charlwood & Guenole, 2022).

Conclusion

People often talk about AI-HR as though its problems were purely technical, better models, cleaner data, faster setup. The evidence from IT and apparel manufacturing tells a different story. In IT, an industry with plenty of technical skill, the hardest problems turn out to be about bias, trust, and rules that cannot keep up with how fast people are experimenting. In apparel manufacturing, an industry with much simpler technical needs, the hardest problems turn out to be about money, skills, and the fact that there is almost no safety net for the workers most affected. Neither problem gets solved just by writing better software.

What this comparison really shows is that the human stakes of AI-HR go up as the technology involved gets simpler, not down. IT workers affected by a biased algorithm are at least operating in a legal environment that is starting to hold companies accountable, and they usually have other job options if a specific employer gets it wrong. Garment workers affected by an AI-driven restructuring often have neither. That difference should shape how people talk



about these two industries: not as a story about which one is more "AI-ready," but as a story about which workers actually have the power to hold these systems accountable, and which ones do not.

For researchers and practitioners, this points to a gap worth filling. Labor-intensive, lower-income industries like apparel manufacturing have gotten far less academic attention than office-based fields like IT and finance, not because the technology there is less interesting, but because getting it wrong there tends to cost people a lot more.

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