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Newsletter

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Understanding AI: What SMEs Need to Know from an HR Perspective

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer just a buzzword or a tool for tech giants - it's becoming increasingly relevant for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across the UK. For HR professionals, AI offers opportunities to streamline processes, enhance decision-making, and support smarter workforce planning. But how can SMEs begin to make sense of it?

Start with the Basics

AI in HR can mean anything from automated CV screening and chatbots for candidate queries, to predictive analytics for employee engagement and retention. You don't need a massive IT budget to begin exploring these tools - many are now embedded in everyday HR software used by smaller businesses.

Think Efficiency, Not Replacement

One of the key advantages of AI is saving time on repetitive tasks. This frees up HR teams to focus on strategic activities like employee wellbeing, development, and culture. Importantly, AI should complement, not replace, human decision-making - particularly in sensitive areas like recruitment and performance management.

Ethics and Compliance Matter

As with any technology, there are risks. SMEs must ensure that AI tools are used ethically and in compliance with data protection laws. Transparency is key: employees and candidates should know if AI is involved in decision-making, and HR should be confident that algorithms are not reinforcing bias.

Get Curious, Not Overwhelmed

You don't need to become a tech expert overnight. Start by identifying pain points in your HR processes and exploring whether AI-enabled tools could help. Partnering with suppliers who understand SME needs - and who can provide support and training - is a good first step.

AI isn't about doing everything differently. It's about doing some things smarter, with the right balance of technology and human insight.

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The Employee Lifecycle

Attracting, developing, and retaining talent is an important part of your business. One of the most effective ways to structure your approach is by understanding the **Employee Lifecycle** - a model that maps the stages an employee goes through during their time with an organisation.

This lifecycle is shaped by company policies, employment law, cultural expectations, and best practices. Below we explore each stage of the employee lifecycle and how you can optimise them for a productive and engaged workforce.

1. Attract

What it involves:
Building your employer brand and appealing to potential candidates. It includes everything from developing company reputation and culture, creative and competitive job postings and positive social media presence.

2. Recruit

What it involves:
Actively seeking to hire new talent. This includes writing accurate job descriptions & comprehensive contracts of employment, interviewing candidates with a clear interview process and procedure, and making employment offers.

3. Onboarding

What it involves:
Successfully integrating new hires into your company. Including interactive on-boarding sessions, setting up IT access/ equipment and first-day introductions. It is important to ensure that new hires have everything they need to succeed in your business.

4. Develop

What it involves:
Once your employees are settled, development becomes key. Consider introducing training plans, performance appraisals, mentoring/ coaching sessions, and focus on your employees' professional growth.

5. Retain

What it involves:
Focus on keeping your best people. Engaged employees are more productive, loyal, and committed. Promote wellbeing initiatives, ensure competitive pay and benefits and provide transparent internal career progression opportunities.

6. Offboarding

What it involves:
Handling the end of an employee's time with the business with professionalism and legal compliance. Conduct Exit Interviews to gain valuable feedback, manage the off-boarding process and follow fair procedures.

If you would like more information on the Employee Lifecycle, please contact
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Mid-Year Performance Reviews

Now we're halfway through the year, we believe it's an ideal time to check in with your employees with a mid-year performance review. This touchpoint ensures that individuals and teams remain aligned with evolving business goals and priorities.

Mid-year reviews offer a valuable opportunity to support employee productivity, engagement and retention - helping your workforce stay agile and your business remain competitive.

Here's what a mid-year review can achieve:

Employee progress / realign goals - check in on employee progress and fine-tune objectives to reflect current priorities - keeping expectations clear, achievable and meaningful for both the individual and the business.

Identify development opportunities - recognise growth opportunities and training needs in real time, ensuring employees get the support they need to succeed throughout the year.

Increase accountability and transparency - regular check-ins foster a culture of transparency and ownership. They help clarify expectations and keep performance on track throughout the year.

Boost employee engagement thus enhancing retention - by demonstrating that your business values the achievements and the development of its employees. Employees who have regular feedback, recognition and opportunities for growth will feel more valued and remain loyal to your business.

A mid-year review should help to simplify your end of year review process by addressing issues early, realigning any objectives to evolving business needs and capturing the progress made thus far.

If you would like any support with performance reviews do reach out hils@agilehrconsulting.com