



Amrop

Leaders For What's Next



I Am Not a Robot

AI and Leadership Hiring

Pitfalls, Risks, and Solutions

While AI offers efficiency and scale in executive search, some pitfalls are currently limiting its effectiveness in high-level hiring. None are insurmountable.

In Part 2 of our series examining how AI is transforming executive search and the impact of AI on global executive talent acquisition, senior Amrop Partners unpack the downsides of AI when it comes to data-driven leadership hiring processes. Can they be overcome?

How can AI users get the best of both worlds in executive and board hiring?



Missing information,
errors and
inaccuracies?
Yes, and they're
mostly solveable.

Teething problems
Symbiotic solutions



Amrop

AI and executive search | 4 challenges

1

MISSING INFORMATION, LACK OF SUBTLETY

- + Heavy reliance on online data
- + Difficulty understanding context, nuance & 'silent knowledge'
- + Transcriptions and summaries requiring manual correction.

2

BIAS AND NARROW-MINDEDNESS

- + Rejection of qualified or unconventional candidates due to rigid keyword filtering
- + Historical biases in training data that can perpetuate unfair outcomes.

3

ECHO CHAMBER EFFECT

- + AI models increasingly train on AI-generated data, leading to 'model collapse' — loss of original data and accurate outputs.
- + A self-referential loop: detaches AI from real-world diversity.

4

OPACITY & TRUST ISSUES

- + A lack of transparency and clarity in how AI reaches its conclusions.
- + 'Hallucinations' and cover-up attempts.
- + Automated messaging reduces quality, authenticity and impact.



Amrop

1

Teething problems

AI's still suffer from missing information and lack nuance. They risk bias and narrow-mindedness. And they are increasingly training on AI-generated data, leading to the disturbing phenomenon of 'model collapse.' Executive and board recruiters need to pay acute attention to these issues, all of which may compromise a hire.



AI is missing information, but also silent knowledge about companies, people, environments, owners."
Mikael Norr, Amrop Global Board Member.



"You are an AI. Do you really understand who I am?"
Mia Zhou, Director, Amrop China



"We're not using AI for any kind of automated profiling or predicting of a candidate's suitability, performance, behavior, preferences, and so on."
Costa Tzavaras, Director, Amrop Global Programs



"The rules-based AI system often rejects qualified candidates if their CVs aren't 'SEO-optimized' with the right terms. Experienced recruiters can infer skills from context."
Jamal Khan, Managing Partner, Amrop Carmichael Fisher, Australia



Amrop

For basic executive hiring routines such as primary research into candidates or companies, the scope of AIs seems unparalleled. They majestically sweep through vast fields of data, summarizing their findings at the speed of light. It's hard to fault their rapidity and their reach is impressive. But even here, the true depth and scope of an AI is still limited. To perform reliably, a Large Language Model depends upon publicly available data, mostly from the internet. And the internet is full of holes, blind spots and, quite often, rubbish. Consider the CV, a key instrument in the executive search consultant's control panel.

"When it comes to AI, CV data is possibly more useful for straight skills-based work," explains Jamal Khan, Managing Partner of Amrop in Australia. "But we haven't yet found an AI product that can fully perform the desk-based aspect of the researcher's role." When researching companies, data about listed organizations is openly available. Deeper, qualitative information is not.

Privately-held companies are even more obscure. "AI is missing information," says Amrop Global Board Member Mikael Norr, "but also silent knowledge about companies, people, environments, owners."

As an executive search consultant, "you know by heart which group owns a given company, and that it's impossible to recruit from there. You know that a candidate is successful in one environment, but not another."

Lost nuance

"I recently had three candidates with similar backgrounds," recalls Mikael Norr. "ChatGPT described them in exactly the same way. So you can't rely on AI, you need your own thoughts, opinions and views. We don't find it accurate enough. We want to recruit a CFO with an industrial background for a mid-cap. We ask AI for a long list, looking at listed companies in Sweden according to specific criteria: the client, the background, the brief. If we compare the result with a list created by a researcher and consultant with 10 and 20 years' experience, drawing on our knowledge, previous work and thinking, it takes a bit longer, but it's more accurate."

Mia Zhou is a Director of Amrop China. Candidates may also doubt an AI result, she says, just as they would any quickfire judgment. "*You are an AI. Do you really understand who I am?*" An AI can hallucinate or fabricate and even try to cover its mistakes. One Amrop consultant caught it out. "It started to get things wrong, saying that things were correct when they were not. So it learnt to behave just like a human would if they were made to feel incompetent," recalls Jamal Khan.

Even for basic transcription, he often switches to manual. "An AI still can't decipher some words." A manual post-interview write-up takes an hour. But an AI transcription needs to be painstakingly cleaned of errors and interjections: "It picks up every *um* and *ah*."

An AI can hallucinate, fabricate and even try to cover its mistakes.



Amrop

Outliers often bring innovation and resilience to the table. But AI tends to overlook unconventional candidates.

Narrow-mindedness and bias

Is AI driven executive search a real possibility? Or is it the other way round? “The current reality (it will probably change), is that AI works better on a clear profile with languages, hard skills,” says Mikael Norr. “However, a CEO in a broad role involves softer skills, such as being inspiring. It’s much more difficult to work with AI.”

At senior level, keyword filtering and automation can be misleading, signals Jamal Khan. “The rules-based AI system often rejects qualified candidates if their CVs aren’t ‘SEO-optimized’ with the right terms. Experienced recruiters can infer skills from context. They know that a CFO automatically knows about payroll. I’m sure Gen AI will get there, but I’m not sure it’s there yet.”

It’s tempting to assume that machines think logically. But AIs can fall prey to errors or unfair outcomes. These may be embedded in their training data (reflecting historical stereotypes), or design. Faults can include under-representing certain groups, the subjective judgment of human labelers, or algorithms that favor certain outcomes.

In 2018, Amazon finally abandoned its AI recruiting tool. The problems were rooted in training that drew on (male) job responses received over ten years — reflecting gender imbalance in the tech industry.¹ As the current Workday case demonstrates, AI’s troubles are not over.² Tackling bias requires diverse data, transparent design, and ongoing human oversight.

Interestingly, OpenAI recently announced its own plans to launch a recruitment and jobs platform, rivaling that of LinkedIn.

Innovators missing in action

Outliers often bring innovation and resilience to the table. But AI tends to overlook unconventional candidates.

“Value isn’t created by the leaders with the most polished resumé, but by those who lived through black swan moments, crisis, systemic shocks.” Their resilience and agility is invaluable, argues Amrop Global Board Member Oana Ciornei. “But if you’re using an AI to filter, these people will not match the algorithmic norm.”

Moreover, candidates’ online CVs may omit controversial (and interesting) career moments. She seeks leadership knowledge created “in the space of the unexpected.” Jamal Khan agrees. “We’re trying to push diversity of thinking. Do you want someone that fits, or someone who will challenge your thinking?”

The Amrop testers observed that AI talent sourcing tools stayed inside the box and missed valuable profiles. Like compiling a top-flight soccer team, human scouts are needed, says Job Voorhoeve, Head of Amrop’s global Digital Practice. “Then it’s about trust. *Do I want to talk to you?*” If the headhunter doesn’t have a solid reputation, these people won’t pick up the phone.”

Breaking out of the echo chamber

But another phenomenon is even more concerning. In a recent article,³ IBM writers signaled a problem: AI models increasingly learn from other AI-generated data, weakening the results. “*Model collapse* progresses as errors compound with successive generations.” The problem begins with *early model collapse* — AIs lose information from the tails or extremes of the data distribution. Subsequent model iterations cause *late model collapse*: “the data distribution converged so much that it looked nearly nothing like the original.” AIs risk becoming self-referential, detached from reality—missing the richness of human experience. But as ever, there are answers.

The opacity of AI decisions makes it difficult for recruiters to ‘show their workings’ and demonstrate ‘procedural justice’. “Not being able to see the thought process or structure of how an AI searched makes us trust the output less,” says Costa Tzavaras, Amrop’s Global Programs Director. “If I go into a database or any digital system and select the parameters myself: sectors, functions, education, I know the outcome is based on that. We’re still not quite trusting that black box.”

“I recently tried an AI to analyze and summarize a candidate assessment with insights,” says Jamal Khan. “But it didn’t understand the 0-10 grading system. So it gave incorrect answers. You have to keep refining it so it learns.” Even if an AI can code, and a software can check the coding: “it’s still not necessarily correct. A human has to jump in and tweak the errors.”

All eyes on the control panel

On one occasion, Jamal Khan recalls, LinkedIn’s automated messaging function took off and flew solo. “I wrote a message and didn’t notice before clicking ‘send’ that the AI had rewritten it: a terrible cheesy missive. No-one responded, whereas 40 to 50% normally do. And it kept doing it.”

He quickly realized that the AI setting launched by default and had to be actively turned off. “And then there is an automated response mechanism you can click on: if you send a message out within 3 days, it will send another one if someone doesn’t respond.”

Mikael Norr: “We cannot be totally sure who is talking to us: the next generation can imitate anyone, even when streaming. Fraud is omnipresent. We receive emails with links stating ‘agreement’, ‘offer’, ‘contract’, and ‘click to accept.’ It’s the same for all industries.”

Jamal Khan warns against using automation for outreach in business development. “You can’t mass market and send 200 emails out. You’re lucky if you get 2% response. That’s not the business we’re in.”



2

Symbiotic solutions

To harness the power of AI, human expertise is still essential. Experienced consultants bring lateral thinking, EQ and contextual understanding to the table. Human involvement is critical to counteract bias, interpret complex profiles, and build trust with clients and candidates. When this symbiosis is in play, the potential is immense.



“

Any machine needs maintenance. So do people. They get illnesses and need repairing. So it's nothing new."

Job Voorhoeve, Leader of the Amrop Global Digital Practice.



“

You change your views, incorporate new ideas during your life. You form your principles. You will have a lot of inconsistency as well."

Oana Ciornei, Amrop Global Board Member



Amrop

Best of both worlds

Mapping the AI/human symbiosis in executive and board search



END POINT | GOVERNING

Taking decisions



TASKS

SKILLS

Advising board & leadership on senior hiring strategy
Understanding the client context & stakeholder landscape
Assessing board & management team dynamics
Understanding candidates' inner drive, values & personality
Comparative candidate profiling
Conducting face-to-face interviews
Checking candidate performance under live pressure
Performing a comprehensive check of candidate fit

Apply cognition, judgment & discernment
Anticipate & handle ambiguity & changing variables
Execute non-standard operations
Plan and perform strategic tasks
Compare current & past experience
Build relationships & trust
Gather and assess non-verbal, sensory data
Agile & incisive questioning & listening
Analyze an absence of information
Check AI output



SYSTEM 1 THINKING (FAST, INTUITIVE) +
SYSTEM 2 THINKING (SLOW, DELIBERATE)



SKILLS

TASKS

Rapidly process large, complex datasets
Generate content
Enhance process efficiencies & speed
Support administration & operations
Act as a personal assistant/sparring partner
Enrich & amplify advisorship

Database quality assurance
Text generation, enhancement and translation
Note-taking, transcribing & summarizing
Scheduling interviews and meetings
Compiling an initial longlist
Conducting market/industry research
Identifying the candidate universe
Drafting initial candidate profiles



START POINT | EXPEDITING

Informing decisions



Amrop

Is this person able to engage with several people at once, engage the most passive, and so on? That's impossible to check in a digital meeting.

Harnessing the power of artificial intelligence in leadership recruitment

Misinterpretations, hallucinations, errors. Missed candidates, black boxes. The AI pitfalls are real, especially if its users are not properly trained. But these remain invaluable tools with unprecedented power. The teething problems can be overcome with human oversight and cross comparison — checking and refining an AI's responses.

We have discussed how AIs risk filtering out innovators. One solution is to deliberately prompt the machine to look for atypical profiles, creative thinkers. Another is rigorous scouting and skilled interviewing. This probes beyond 'classic' responses to unearth authentic (and unusual) characteristics and views.

Costa Tzavaras: "We're not using AI for any kind of automated profiling or predicting of a candidate's suitability, performance, behavior, preferences, and so on."

Lateral thinking is another human quality. "That instinct that says, *if not this sector, there's another interesting one with similar challenges; we might find somebody there*," he says. "We still need people to make those leaps of understanding, outside one box into another."

Human connectivity: never more vital in executive search

Algorithms are not enough. "Our work is all around the quality of the people. Trust," says Job Voorhoeve. "And AI doesn't generate trust at the moment: it's designed by humans and biased by default." This leads to the paradoxical conclusion: "To take out the bias you need human involvement."

He calls for realism. "Any machine needs maintenance. So do people. They get illnesses, and need repairing. So it's nothing new." What about the AI who lied? Mikael Norr: "We cover that in our prompts. The ability to prompt properly is vital. We have 4 or 5 proficient researchers who have built up a prompt library." The learning can be shared globally.

Working in teams helps challenge assumptions, reduce bias, and uncover better candidate matches. Job Voorhoeve: "We work in pairs a lot. The PA and researchers are also talking to candidates, seeing them when they come into the office."

C-suite recruitment: science meets art

Human interaction also triggers creative insights that an AI cannot replicate. Costa Tzavaras: "The interplay of experience sparks interesting alternatives, left and right turns to uncover all possibly appropriate candidates, versus just matching a job title with industry, sector and school. Talking around a table: *what about that company, or person? Or, I spoke to someone interesting a few months ago*. That triggering that happens in a team is hugely valuable and AI can't approximate it."

**Working in teams
helps challenge
assumptions, reduce
bias, and uncover
better candidate
matches.**



Let's recall the value of live interviewing. Not only do robust face-to-face interactions reveal innovative minds and core drivers, they also unmask rote answers: "Get out from behind the screen with senior candidates as fast as you can," advises Costa Tzavaras. Going forward, real-world testing will be vital: simulations and live role plays to assess candidates under pressure, revealing traits that AI or digital interviews might miss.

Live *group* interviews offer insights that escape virtual meetings. Mikael Norr: "Our normal drill, especially with CEO recruitments, involves two consultants interviewing together and comparing notes, getting a sense of the atmosphere in the room. I just concluded a big CEO assignment. The final candidates met the whole board on Teams. But you can't sense the dynamics if on one side you have the candidate and on the other, 10 people on screen. It was a monologue and some questions. Now, if you let the candidate into a room with these people and try to evaluate their leadership, you can clearly see what happens. Is this person able to engage with several people at once, engage the most passive, and so on? That's impossible to check in a digital meeting."

The beauty of the unpredictable

"The human being is a volatile animal, moving up and down through life stages," says Job Voorhoeve. "So in terms of predictive analytics for talent acquisition, looking at core data, you can probably see some information, and we use assessments for that. But the cultural dynamics and role context only surface after analysis by specialized executive search professionals."

"We have seen many people. Our instinct also tells us a great deal. But we also have a lot of experience in the traits needed to support key stakeholders: the CEO, management team, the board, owner or shareholder and other stakeholders. There are so many inconstant variables."

Oana Ciornei agrees. "You change your views, incorporate new ideas during your life. You form your principles. You will have a lot of inconsistency as well."

It is in this evolution that human richness lies, and which still escapes the artificial gaze.

**The human being
is a volatile animal,
moving up and down
through life stages.**

In our next article, Amrop takes a helicopter view of AI in leadership recruitment. As AI use rises, what should boards be doing to protect ethics, values and stakeholder interests? And what could the future look like?



About the contributors

This series has been based on in-person interviews with the following Amrop partners and practitioners.



Oana Ciornei

Member of the Amrop Global Board and Digital Practice



Jamal Khan

Managing Partner, Australia



Mikael Norr

Managing Partner, Sweden and Member of the Amrop Global Board



Costa Tzavaras

Director, Amrop Global Programs



Job Voorhoeve

Leader of the Amrop Global Digital Practice



Mia Zhou

Director, China



References

¹ Winick, E., (October 10, 2018). Amazon ditched AI recruitment software because it was biased against women. MIT Technology Review.

² Gassam Asare, J. (June 23, 2025). What The Workday Lawsuit Reveals About AI Bias—And How To Prevent It. Forbes.

³ Gomstyn, A., Jonker, A., (2024). What is model collapse? IBM.

Further reading from the Amrop desk

Digitization on Boards 7th Edition: The Rise of the CAIO. The Amrop Global Digital Practice.

Recruiting the Digital Leaders for What's Next. Job Voorhoeve.

Survival of the Fittest Part 6: the CIO. (2024). Amrop



Amrop



Photography by Adobe Express - generative AI

About Amrop

The Amrop Partnership is a premium leadership and executive search consultancy with 69 offices in 56 countries and a global team of more than 560 professionals.

We help our clients find and develop Leaders For What's Next.

Shaping sustainable success is our mission, craft and passion.

www.amrop.com