

THE ALGORITHM WILL SEE YOU NOW: WHEN AI JOINS THE EXECUTIVE AND MANAGERIAL RECRUITING PROCESS

Short paper, Idea

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to provide an initial exploration of perspectives on Artificial intelligence (AI) in executive and managerial recruitment, in the Swedish context. Drawing on literature and a group interview with trade unions representatives, the study reveals that while AI can be a powerful tool in the recruitment process it is currently largely unregulated and lacks oversight. It is often unclear how and when AI is applied during recruitment, raising questions of transparency, accountability and control. These findings show the importance of further research on the use of AI in managerial recruitment.

Keywords: AI, Executive Recruitment, Managerial Recruitment, Policy Framework, Trade Unions

1 Introduction

The Swedish labor market has long been characterized with trust, cooperation and negotiation, where the heart of what is called *The Swedish model*. The model is a connection between employers and employees, balancing efficiency with social responsibility. Within this model, the trade unions are influential, not only when it comes to the employees' rights, but also with their insight and influence in the recruitment and selection of their managerial or executive positions (Svenskt näringsliv, n.d.). Both executive and managerial recruitment are relevant, as hiring decisions at different leadership levels typically have significant effects on organizational functioning and workplace environment. Therefore, in this study, the term *managerial recruitment* will be used in a broader sense to include both top-level leaders and middle-level managers.

At the same time, the landscape of recruitment is changing fast. Digitalization, tests, screenings and AI-driven processes are reshaping how candidates are evaluated and chosen. The Swedish model is deeply rooted in traditions, agreements, and cooperations, and is now facing the disruption of digital recruitments and fast digitalizing workforce.

While existing research has studied AI in general recruitment processes, there is still limited knowledge about how AI in managerial recruitment is perceived, negotiated, or integrated, especially in context where unions have formal influence, as in Sweden. This gap is shown even more so since AI in recruitment remains largely unregulated, leaving organizations and unions to interpret and navigate the landscape on their own. Given the important role that managerial positions play in organizational leadership and governance, and the balance with the Swedish model, understanding these parts and relations becomes important.

This paper serves as an initial idea to open the way for more comprehensive studies, showing both the research potential of the topic, and multiple directions that future research may take. Furthermore, the position of this paper is within the field of HR and AI, and taking a secondary stance within the field of public sector, and specifically E-Governance for SWEG. The aim is to explore how AI is perceived and potentially used in managerial recruitment within the Swedish labor market. Building on existing research, and relevant laws, as well as the use of AI in general recruitment processes. This, with perspectives of trade unions, aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do trade union representatives perceive the use of AI in managerial recruitment?

- RQ2: What gaps and future directions are seen between trade unions, managerial recruitment, and regulatory frameworks?

2 Method

This study is based on a qualitative research design consisting of two main methodological aspects. 1) a literature review, which was conducted to establish a theoretical framework and to identify central themes and gaps within existing literature. 2) In addition, a group interview with representatives from a trade union was carried out to show initial in-depth insights.

2.1 Literature

All articles were collected based on the model in figure 1. During step 1, a search was conducted in scientific databases, specifically from within the Linköping University library. When the review of papers in step 1 no longer generated relevant information, step 2 was initiated. In step 2, relevant articles were found from reference lists in articles. Throughout the process, this paper also used inspiration from prior research and recommendations, which in the model is called “external input”. The search was sufficiently broad to provide an overview of the field, though not intended to reach completeness.

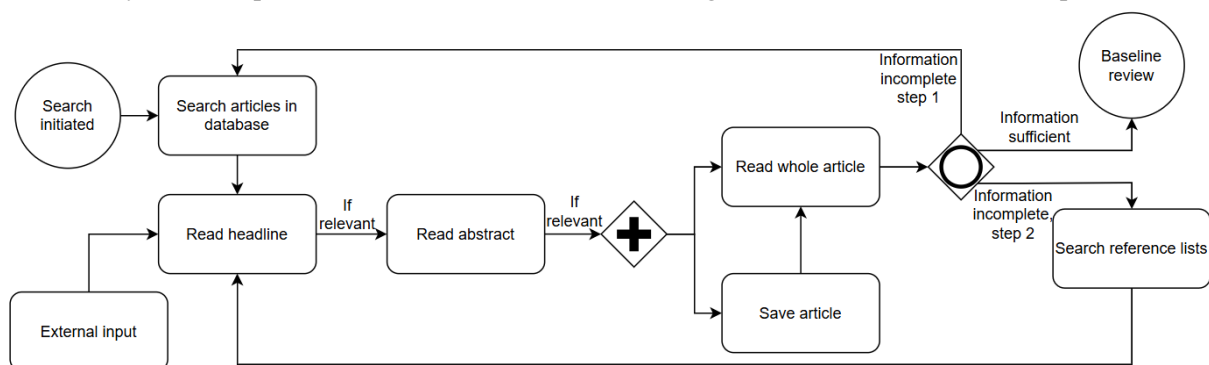


Figure 1. Process model, literature search for this paper

Inclusions: Peer-reviewed, English or Swedish, conference or article, relevant to AI and/or executive/managerial recruitment. Published between 2020–2025, with few exceptions, as to include the newest research within the topic, e.g. recruitment, and development of AI.

Search terms: Artificial intelligence, AI, automat*, recruitment, employment process*, legal, regulat*, Ethic*, Executive, Manag* Sweden, intuitive, challenge, hir*

2.2 Policy Frameworks

The regulatory framework defines the legal boundaries within which managerial recruitment operates in Sweden, as well as data and AI frameworks for the EU, providing a context and understanding of the principles.

2.3 Empirical material

A group interview was conducted with two union representatives, which sparked discussions and diverse viewpoints, going beyond simple answers to questions. The dialogue provided deeper insights than typical one-on-one interviews. This interview serves as a small sample to see what direction future research might find interesting, for a full study this will need more interviews, possible complements by quantitative methods, document analyses or other kinds of methods.

The interview consisted of three discussion points, 1) the representatives were asked to define their roles and how unions are usually involved in managerial recruitment processes, including which stages they have influenced over. 2) The perceptions and experiences related to AI and recruitment. The focus was on how AI was received, how it might affect the union’s role, what concerns it raises, and what type of

influence unions might need. There were also reflections on how unions could contribute to ensure fair and transparent use of AI. 3) The interview ended with an open discussion with additional aspects the representatives considered important but had not yet been addressed.

The interview was transcribed, read through and analyzed thematically. Each relevant quotation or segment was identified and marked. These segments were then assigned initial codes to highlight key features. The codes were grouped into categories to develop themes. Finally, the themes were reviewed to ensure consistency with the original data segment. Resulting in key themes: *Involvement, Justice, Transparency, Risks, Accountability, and Control.*

3 Literature Review

The Swedish model and recruitment process relates to labor and recruitment laws, and is combined with data and AI regulations, as seen below:

Nr	Framework	Translation	Explanation	Context
[1]	Den svenska modellen	The Swedish model	The labor market is mainly regulated through collective agreements between employers and trade unions, not detailed in laws	Recruiters are to understand and respect union corporation and collective agreements when hiring and leading staff
[2]	RF: Kungörelse (1974:152) om beslutad ny regeringsform	Proclamation on the adoption of a new form of government	Constitutional law, requiring authorities to act objectively, fairly, without bias	Public sector manager recruitment is to be merit-based, neutral, free from favoritism and public influence
[3]	MBL: Lag (1976:580) om medbestämmande i arbetslivet	Act on Co-determination work-life	Gives trade unions the right to information and consultation in important workplace decisions	Unions must be informed or consulted before appointing managers (considered “important workforce decision”)
[4]	LAS: Lag (1982:80) om anställningsskydd	Employment Protection Act	Regulates job security, termination rules and notice periods. Some parts can be modified through collective agreements (union agreements)	Can affect contract types, probation periods, exit terms for managers.
[5]	LOA: Lag (1994:260) om offentlig anställning	Public Employment Act	Governs employment in the public sector, emphasizing objectivity, transparency and merit-based recruitments	In managerial recruitment it requires documented, fair, non-discriminatory processes
[6]	DL: Diskrimineringslag (2008:567)	Discrimination Act	Prohibits discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability	Requires unbiased recruitment process, equal treatment of all candidates
[7]	Offentlighets- och sekretesslag (2009:400)	Public access to Information and Secrecy Act	Show what information public sector can/must leave publicly, and what information is classified or confidential	Most employments are considered public access, with confidentiality of private or sensitive information, and safety
[8]	GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation	General Data Protection Regulation	Regulates how personal data may be collected, stored and used within EU	Affects how candidate data, CVs and assessments are handled and stored
[9]	EU AI ACT	EU AI ACT	Regulates use of AI in EU, especially AI systems affecting people’s rights	AI-based screening or assessment tools are considered high-risk, needs transparency and fairness requirements

Table 1. Relevant policies and frameworks explained

3.1 Regulatory framework: Laws regarding the recruitment process

In Sweden, the managerial recruitment process must comply with key regulatory frameworks, and involve trade unions, which is a central part of the Swedish model [1]. MBL [3] is particularly important since recruiting managers is often considered a major organizational change requiring negotiation with unions (11, 19 §§ MBL). Internal recruitments is governed by LAS [4], which regulates promotion, reassignment, and termination, to protect employees against unfounded decisions (7-11 §§ LAS). Some parts of LAS can be modified through collective agreements, allowing organizations and unions to agree on specific rules for hiring or reassigning employees. The recruitment must also comply with DL [6], which prohibits discrimination against gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, and promote equal opportunities in recruitment and promotion (2-4, 15-16 §§ DL). In the public sector, LOA [5] applies, making sure recruitment is merit-based, objective and impartial (3, 4, 7 §§ LOA; 1:9 RF). Public access rules [7] may also influence the process, particularly in government organizations.

3.2 Regulatory framework: Data laws

The data laws that Sweden relies on, have been established by the EU (European Union), which is about protecting those involved through GDPR [8] and EU AI ACT [9], where these frameworks deal with two different parts of data protection.

GDPR is a regulation that describes how personal data may be collected, used and stored to protect individuals' right to privacy. It is based on principles of legality, purpose limitation, data minimization, accuracy, storage limit and security, as well as accountability requirements. Organizations that process personal data need to put both technical and organizational safeguards in place and show that they work properly. The organization must also design their systems so that privacy is built into the technology and make sure it's by default from the beginning. GDPR gives the individuals strong rights about their own data, which means that they can, among other things, see what information organizations have about them, correct if something is wrong, ask for data to be deleted, or object to the processing of their data. People are also protected when it comes to major decision-making made by automated systems. GDPR sets strict conditions for transferring personal data outside of EU, and authorities can order fines if organizations break the laws of GDPR.

EU AI ACT, on the other hand, regulates how AI is used and developed within EU, with the goal of protecting people's safety, rights and freedom while also allowing for innovation. It's built on a risk-based approach, meaning there are different levels in risk classification. 1) Unacceptable risk means it is deemed too harmful, such as social scoring which includes classifying people based on behavior, or biometric identification and categorization of people. 2) High risk is about AI affecting safety or rights negatively, such as employment, worker management, and assistance in legal interpretation and application of the law. All high risk AI needs to have, among others, strict human oversight, risk management, transparency, and cybersecurity. AI must also meet transparency obligations, such as making it clear to users that they are talking to AI, or that content was created using AI, this includes even generative AI.

3.3 Managerial Recruitment

Managerial and executive recruitment is a complex and multidimensional process, where formal methods can be combined with experience and intuitive impressions. More experienced recruiters can use intuition as a complementing tool in more complex recruitments, while less experienced recruiters tend to make riskier, more subjective and less accurate decisions (Vincent et al., 2024). At the same time, studies show that feelings and affective impressions play an important role in the interview process. Gut feeling can be viewed as a professional judgement, even if this could mean a more biased recruitment (Kinnunen & Parvianen, 2016).

Another aspect of managerial recruitment is the choice between internal promotion and external recruitment. Organizations tend to use internal promotion when organizational culture, internal competence and motivation are central dimensions, while external recruitment is preferred when the organization needs new knowledge, experiences and perspectives (DeVaro, 2013). The choice between internal and external recruitment also has direct consequences for the management team, where external recruitment often leads to greater demographic variation, and therefore changed group dynamic and legitimacy (Georgakakis et al., 2021). The process is also influenced by organizational and institutional context, for recruitment of university leaders is network, academic norms and political interests' important aspects (Engwall, 2014), while family businesses often prioritize trust, history and cultural perspectives (Fabel, 2022). In multinational organizations, the focus is on global leadership, cultural intelligence and strategic adaptability important (Liu, 2024), while managerial competencies can be described in seven components (Grenda et al., 2025). The components consist of 1) *role*, that shows that competence can be understood in relation to the specific position, as requirements and responsibilities vary depending on level and function. 2) *Proficiency*, which refers to the skills necessary to perform the tasks effectively. 3) *Disposition* is about personal characteristics and attitudes that influences how the manager acts and interacts, while 4) *capabilities* highlight the potential to grow and deal with new situations. 5) *Action* involves turning competence into decisions and activities, and according to 6) *context*, managerial competence must be considered in relation to environment, culture and external conditions. 7) *Effectiveness* links the competence to outcome, meaning how a manager's actions lead to reaching goals and organizational impact. Combined, the components show a complex structure, where both organizational goals and value, context, personal attributes, knowledge and skills are all important for managerial competencies (Grenda et al., 2025).

Small changes in the selection processes can have a great impact on what candidates reach leadership positions, which can influence gender inequalities and other forms of systematic discrimination (Erkal et al., 2022). Standardized routines for candidate presentations, formulation of requirements and selection order may impact on who gets chosen. By adjusting the defaults in the process, as to what candidates get prioritized, or how recruiters assess qualifications and experience, can make a difference in organizational representation of groups. This shows that small adjustments can create more just recruitments, more transparency and inclusiveness in decision-making within manag recruitment (Erkal et al., 2022)

3.4 AI in the Recruitment Processes

Recruitment plays an important part in attracting and retaining the right competencies and cultural fit in an organization. The recruitment process consists of four main stages (Paramita & Okwir, 2023). First, organizations attract candidates by posting advertisements through different channels. Once the applications are submitted to the organization, the process moves to document screening, where recruiters review resumes, certificates and other important documents to filter out candidates who do not meet the requirements and keep the most suitable candidates. The third stage is selection, which can include interviews and tests, such as IQ tests and personality tests, to find the best qualified candidates for both the job and the organizational culture. The qualified candidates proceed to the hiring decision and job offer, which completes the recruitment process (Paramita & Okwir, 2023).

AI is transforming the recruitment process by automating tasks that used to be managed by human recruiters, such as resume screening, candidate sourcing, and initial assessments (Sýkorová et al., 2024). These technologies, including algorithms, can improve efficiency, optimize job matching, and reduce costs, while also improving faster access to advertisements and faster processes for job seekers (Spadina, 2023; Sýkorová et al., 2024). AI-based recruitment tools, such as chatbots and candidate sourcing, also allow employers to meet candidates from several different platforms (Sýkorová et al., 2024). Despite these positive sides of AI, there are also ethical and legal challenges, regarding bias, transparency, and also the more dehumanization of recruitment (Spadina, 2023; Sýkorová et al., 2024).

In the Swedish context, AI is often used indirectly through third-party recruitment platforms, such as LinkedIn and applicant tracking systems, and not only by employers (Larsson et al., 2024). Swedish

recruiters show low awareness of the extent of the use of AI and automated decision-making (ADM) system in their daily practices, which can lead to more dependency of technology without understanding the limitations and risks. Indirect AI use can complicate accountability, since organizations can underestimate their role and responsibility of the outcome, especially when relying on other providers to manage bias and compliance. Transparency is also a big challenge, since algorithms can be difficult to explain, which can lower the understanding of AI use (Larsson et al., 2024).

Even with these challenges, research shows that AI should complement rather than replace human judgement, especially in the later stages of recruitment, where it is important with skills, cultural fit and qualities of the candidates (Spadina, 2023; Sýkorová et al., 2024). Human oversight can ensure that algorithmic recommendations are interpreted in the specific context, which can minimize the risks with ethical and legal challenges (Spadina, 2023). Regulatory frameworks, such as GDPR and proposed EU AI Act, are important in guiding the implementation of AI in recruitment, with especially transparency and data protection standards (Sýkorová et al., 2024). In Sweden, the combination of indirect AI use, low recruiter awareness and platform dependency, shows a need for more education and monitoring to balance technology efficiency with accountability, fairness and the protection of rights for job applicants (Larsson et al., 2024). AI offers benefits in recruitment but still needs to be regulated and combined with human judgement.

4 Analysis of the interview

Executive recruitment is a high-stake process, where union involvement and uprisings AI technologies raise critical questions about fairness, transparency and accountability.

Union involvement varies depending on local representation. When local representatives are present, they tend to be engaged early in the process, otherwise they often participate at the later stages, sometimes only at the final stages. The union's role is not to exercise veto power, nor do they want it to be, but to act as a collaborative partner, providing insights that might otherwise be overlooked. Another central concern for the union is ensuring that recruitments follow legal frameworks, especially the DL, to prevent selection based on age, gender, or other protected characteristics. The representatives highlight the importance of safeguarding the process to ensure fairness and to minimize legal risks. The introduction of AI into recruitment adds a whole new layer of complexity and shows a need for transparency and oversight. Representatives pointed out how difficult it is to ensure the process is fair and legally correct, especially when they cannot see how candidates are being selected or filtered. Currently, the union cannot intervene on its own, they can only act if a candidate who feels wronged comes forward with an official complaint, meaning there must be a concrete case. To handle any potential issues or risk of bias, there needs to be some kind of oversight function with the authority to step in, to monitor the process and address issues before they escalate. There was also shown a concern that AI could reduce the personal meeting, which is important when evaluating social skills in executive roles. At the same time, the representatives recognize that AI can be helpful for sorting through large numbers of applications, although there is a risk the AI could filter out valuable candidates by mistake. The representatives are not against AI, there are many benefits with using it, but the technology is still new, and there is uncertainty about how, when and why it should be used. Clear guidelines and transparency with job specifications and the selection process are important to make sure no one is excluded unfairly before the first stage even begins.

Responsibility and data handling are issues that cannot be ignored. If AI helps make decisions, there is a risk that accountability could be shifted away from the employer. It is also often unclear how the candidates' data is stored, whether consent has been given, and how bought services or free AI tools are being used. Making the AI process transparent is therefore vital for ensuring recruitment is fair, accountable, and trustworthy.

5 Discussion

AI in recruitment carries both clear possibilities and risks, and this study shows that in its integration into executive recruitment is far from simple. The literature highlights advantages such as efficiency and scalability, but also warns about bias, dehumanization, and a loss of human judgement when decision-making becomes automated. These concerns are shown in the Swedish context as well, where AI can be used indirectly through platforms like LinkedIn or applicant-tracking systems, which makes it difficult for organizations to know when algorithmic filters are applied. This creates low awareness, limited transparency, and unclear responsibility regarding data processing and decision-making.

The reflections of union representatives support many of the theoretical insights, but also extend them by discussing aspects that AI cannot capture, such as social cues, interpersonal dynamics and other impressions important in executive roles, such as the seven components (Grenda et al., 2025). The representatives also expressed uncertainty around how candidate data is handled and whether consent is secured, concerns that align with GDPR and requirements given by EU AI Act for high-risk systems used in employment.

This study highlights both consistencies and gaps between the theoretical framework, legal requirements and the everyday experiences of union representatives. Swedish laws such as MBL, LAS, and DL give formal structures for fairness, union involvement and protection against discrimination. In practice, however, the interview shows that union engagement is uneven, sometimes proactive, while at other times reactive, which can indicate that laws alone are not enough to ensure fair processes. This suggests that legal frameworks set the ideal, but human interpretation, organizational culture and emerging technologies shape how these frameworks play out. The discussion should therefore focus on how these elements interact rather than treating them in isolation.

Both the literature and the interviews identify transparency as a critical issue. AI vendors often provide limited insight into how their system works, and organizations may lack the expertise to evaluate the logic behind AI decisions. The problem is even stronger by the indirect and sometimes unknown use of AI in digital recruitment tools. Union representatives discussed that they rarely know when AI is involved and can only react once a concrete case is raised, showing a reactive rather than preventive model of oversight.

The literature argues for governance structures, accountability, and systematic monitoring to reduce the risk of bias, and to meet requirements. The representatives call for a control function, an independent oversight role with the authority to intervene, aligns closely with these recommendations. Both perspectives point to a shared idea, that without transparency and clear responsibility for AI, neither fairness nor legal compliance can be guaranteed.

When theoretical perspectives, legal frameworks and empirical material are compared, a clear but complex picture can be shown. Theory outlines both opportunities and risks, the law provides formal principles, and the union representatives show how this plays out in reality. AI's potential is widely known, but its benefits depend on how it is implemented, governed and understood. This shows the need for integrating technological tools with human judgement, legal safeguards and organizational routines.

This shows that AI challenges not only recruitment practices, but also the interaction between regulation, culture and roles.

6 Conclusions

The use of AI in recruitment has both benefits and risks, especially within executive and managerial recruitment. While there are considerable risks with AI-driven decision-making, one of the more important questions is not whether organizations should use AI, but rather how they can implement and use it responsibly while making sure they are compliance with existing laws and regulations. This also raises questions of how society can support organizations in this transition, e.g. through legislation, and policy frameworks.

Regarding RQ1, this paper indicates that the trade unions play an important part in ensuring a transparent, and fair recruitment process. From this perspective, access to clear information of the

process and use of AI would seem meaningful. The findings suggest that unions could be more than merely receivers of information, but a potential collaborative partner whose involvement could contribute to the recruitment process.

Regarding RQ2, the paper identifies several paths for future research. These include how organizations can implement AI responsibly while maintaining legal and regulatory frameworks.

Moreover, transparency could be studied both internal within the company, and external to candidates, customers and trade unions, regarding the recruitment process itself, and the use of AI.

In addition, it is shown through this initial paper an opening to a broader discussion about a possible role of oversight in recruitment processes, including the potential need for a dedicated monitoring function, working independently, that could help ensure legal integrity and intervene when necessary.

Perspectives on the public sector are also needed. Research could, for example, investigate differences between public and private sector practices in executive and managerial recruitment, as well as how the public sector relates to the legal framework when using both direct and indirect AI tools during recruitments. It is especially important to clear out responsibilities and accountability, given the stricter regulations and merit-based principles that the public sector must follow.

Therefore, the conclusion of this paper is that further research is needed not only in the use of AI in recruitment, particularly in managerial recruitment, but also on the evolving role of trade unions, and new functions.

6.1 Discussion points for SWEG, examples

- New forms of algorithmic accountability
- Democratic control mechanisms
- Preventing indirect discrimination while using direct and indirect AI

7 Contributions

This paper contributes ideas for discussions on recruitment, particularly managerial, by identifying emerging research directions at the intersection of AI, labor law, and organized governance. It highlights implications for future research on transparency, oversight, and accountability in recruitment processes, and in relation to trade unions.

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