

Book review of Schellmann, H. (2024). *The Algorithm – How AI Decides Who Gets Hired, Monitored, Promoted, and Fired and Why We Need to Fight Back Now*. New York: Hachette Books. 336 pp. ISBN 9780306827365.

Reviewed by


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Hilke Schellmann, an Emmy Award-winning investigative reporter and assistant journalism professor at New York University, is a well-known advocate for accountability and transparency in creating and applying AI technologies. In her research and reporting, she critically examines the moral issues around the creation and application of AI technologies and attempts to educate the public and decision-makers on the challenges and consequences of adopting AI into critical decision-making processes (Burke & Schellmann, 2024; Kapoor et al., 2023; Mauro & Schellmann, 2023; Schellmann, 2023).

In January 2024, Schellmann published her book, *The Algorithm: How AI Decides Who Gets Hired, Monitored, Promoted, and Fired and Why We Need to Fight Back Now*. As Selinger (2024) notes, “Schellmann’s *The Algorithm* is a wake-up call”, an important guide to job seekers and a cautionary tale for anyone who believes AI will eliminate human prejudice (Strauss, 2024). The book critically explores the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in attracting, monitoring and managing employees, emphasizing the ethical, legal, and societal issues raised by unregulated AI systems in the workplace. In this book, Schellmann invites readers to explore how AI tools shape careers, privacy, and human autonomy and advocates transparency, accountability and regulation to safeguard fairness and individual rights in an algorithm-driven society.

The *Algorithm* combines real-world case studies, industry insights, and critical reflections to highlight the unintended consequences of AI in hiring and workplace management. The book begins with a prologue, introducing the overarching theme: AI’s growing influence on workplace dynamics and the risks of biased algorithms, opaque decision-making, and pervasive surveillance. The first chapter examines resume screening tools, highlighting systematic bias. The focus on hiring bias transitions smoothly into Chapter 2, where Schellmann explores AI’s use of social media to evaluate candidates, raising ethical concerns about privacy and the accuracy of personality predictions. In Chapter 3, the narrative expands to gamified hiring assessments, questioning their validity and the psychological toll on candidates. Schellmann critiques these tools for their lack of transparency and potential for discrimination, a theme carried into Chapter 4, which scrutinizes AI’s use of facial and vocal analysis in interviews. Here, the author examines the scientific bias of these tools and explores concerns regarding their potential impact on candidates. Chapter 5 focuses on the pseudoscientific foundations of many AI tools, comparing them to outdated practices like phrenology, a 19th-century theory that claimed the shape and size of a person’s skull could determine their personality, intelligence and character traits. Schellmann critiques AI’s reliance on flawed assumptions, linking these failures to broader systemic issues described in previous chapters. The book then pivots in Chapter 6 to examine how AI marginalizes individuals with disabilities, illustrating the lack of inclusivity in algorithmic design. From hiring and exclusion, the book transitions in Chapter 7 to predictive analytics in talent management. While many AI tools promise efficiency in internal hiring and skill matching, Schellmann highlights their ethical risks, such as privacy violations and reducing employees to data points. This theme of surveillance intensifies in Chapter 8, where workplace monitoring tools are critiqued for fostering distrust and psychological harm under the intent of productivity measurement. Chapter 9 explores the integration of AI in health monitoring, from fitness trackers to mental health assessments, where the author highlights both the potential and the dangers of these tools, balancing their benefits with privacy concerns. Finally, Chapter 10 focuses on algorithmic management and terminations, underlining the human cost of AI-driven decision-making. The epilogue ties the book’s themes together, reflecting on the societal implications of unchecked AI adoption. The book ends with a clear call for action where Schellmann advocates for greater transparency, ethical design, and regulation to protect workplace fairness and autonomy.

One of the many strengths of this book lies in blending investigative rigour with accessible insights, humanizing complex issues through compelling real-world case studies. Lizzie’s wrongful termination in the prologue and Amazon’s discriminatory resume screener (Chapter 1) illustrate AI’s bias and systematic failure. Tools like Humantic AI (Chapter 2) expose privacy risks in social media monitoring, while gamified hiring platforms like

Pymetrics (Chapter 3) highlight transparency and fairness concerns. The book critiques flawed AI methodologies, such as HireVue's facial analysis (Chapter 4) and pseudoscientific practices like the "gaydar detector" (Chapter 5). The psychological harm of workplace surveillance tools, such as Microsoft's Productivity Score (Chapter 8), deepens the critique. The case of Amazon Flex drivers' unjust terminations (Chapter 10) underscores the human cost of algorithmic layoffs. These case studies support the book's persuasive call for transparency, accountability, ethical design and adoption of AI technology in the workplace.

While the book offers a critical and timely analysis of AI's impact on the workplace, some limitations could still be addressed. The book predominantly portrays AI negatively, often overlooking instances where AI has been successfully implemented or mitigated by human bias. For instance, the critique of resume screening tools like Amazon's AI focuses on their flaws but does not address advancements or examples where such tools have improved hiring efficiency or inclusivity. Similarly, exploring gamified hiring tools highlights limitations without exploring research or cases where these tools may have been validated or refined. For instance, research shows that Generation Z values flexibility, collaboration, and digital integration in workplaces, emphasizing the need to design hiring tools that align with their expectations while ensuring fairness and reliability (El Hajal & Losekoot, 2024). The book frequently raises significant ethical concerns yet offers few detailed, actionable solutions to address these issues, leaving the arguments incomplete. The proposed solutions, such as increased regulation or transparency, tend to be abstract and lack clear roadmaps for implementation. This approach can create a sense of urgency but leaves readers limited clarity on actionable steps to address these challenges effectively.

Nevertheless, the book remains highly relevant as it offers a timely and comprehensive exploration of how AI-driven systems, widely adopted across industries, shape hiring, firing, productivity tracking, and talent management decisions. The book is aligned with the human-centric approach of many researchers, such as El Hajal and Yeoman (2024), who highlighted the importance of AI enhancing rather than replacing human interactions, emphasizing a balanced and ethical integration. Equally, the work of Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2024) aligns with the book's focus on the transformative role of technology in the workplace, advocating for balanced, human-centred approaches to integrating technology, stressing the need for strategic planning and ethical oversight to navigate the evolving dynamics of work. Ivanov (2024) highlights the automatability of jobs depending on the nature of the tasks involved, complementing the book's broader exploration of AI's impact on employment practices and stressing the need for transparency, fairness, and ethical considerations in adopting such technologies.

The book serves as a critical and accessible guide for a wide range of audiences to understand the promises and pitfalls of AI in the workplace. The book is valuable for job seekers and employees seeking awareness of AI's impact on their careers, HR professionals and employers aiming to adopt ethical AI practices, and policymakers working to regulate algorithmic tools. It also benefits academic researchers exploring AI ethics, technology developers striving for fair and transparent designs, and advocacy groups championing workers' rights. Finally, the book engages the general public, who may be concerned about the societal implications of AI in the workplace. Schellmann's *The Algorithm* is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand and challenge the algorithms increasingly influencing our personal and professional lives.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the author used GPT-4o to enhance language, clarity and brevity. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the publication's content.

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