

Artificial Intelligence, Biometric Surveillance and the Global Workplace  
A One Day Workshop

AI is rapidly transforming the global workplace, embedding itself in international and local businesses as surrogate decision-makers for human resource management. Legacy companies such as IBM, Softbank, and Amazon now use AI for screening job resumes, background checks, and conducting job interviews but also monitor employees for engagement, wellness, productivity, and compliance. Concomitantly, we are also witnessing the rollout of AI that can sense, monitor, read, and evaluate a worker's emotions. Known by its commercial moniker, 'Emotional AI' (EAI), the technology combines affective computing, biometric devices, natural language processing, big data analytics, and machine learning. For example, UK-based Moodbeam sells DIY wearable 'happiness' trackers as a neoliberal cost alternative to workplace wellness initiatives. Other companies such as Empath (Japan) and Tawny (Germany) have created voice tone analytic software for call centers that allow managers to read employees' moods to monitor their well-being, optimize workplace social dynamics and increase worker efficiency.

Unlike other AI applications that rely on extracting data from a person's corporeal exterior, EAI passes into the interior and highly subjective domain via biometric means. Thus, as a far more invasive manner of automated oversight, the adoption of EAI is problematized by a myriad of ethical, philosophical, legal and cultural issues. For example,

(1) emotion-recognition technology in the workplace may lead to prejudice and/or discrimination against an employee for their lack of 'attitudinal conformity'. In turn, emotion-sensing devices may lead to emotional policing, creating coercive pressure on individuals to always be happy, authentic, and positive.

(2) while emotion-sensing technologies are mainly designed in the West, they are being marketed on a global level. Problematically, as this technology crosses international borders their data sets and algorithms are seldom adjusted for cultural, racial, ethnic, or gender differences.

(3) the globalization of generic AI systems is further complicated by the lack of international consensus on the values and ethics that should be encoded into intelligent machines as well as cross-cultural incongruencies arising from a country's legal understanding of the privacy (Miyashita, 2021).

(4) as AI moves toward greater levels of complexity in automated thinking, many technologists believe that it will not even be clear to the creators of these systems how decisions are reached. This means that the more authority these systems have and the more autonomous they are within a society, the less explainable, and understandable their decision-making will be.

(5) numerous critics debate how can emotions be made computable when the science community cannot agree on exactly what emotions are (Barrett, 2021). Are emotions hard-wired into the psycho-physical makeup of an individual? Or they are culturally and socially contingent?

(6) many EAI companies still rely on the now-discredited 'universality of emotions' theory which mistakenly claims that all cultures express themselves in six identical ways (Crawford, 2021).

This workshop examines the impact of emotional AI (EAI) on the global workplace (on-site, hybrid, gig, and platform), to understand how to create ethical, human-centric, and dignity-enhancing forms of work practices and governance. The workshop has four main goals. First, to understand the determinants of technological trust and risk perception of workers toward a new technologically mediated work situation. Second, to cultivate a nuanced understanding of the importance of cultural diversity in AI ethics by exploring the epistemological and ontological dimensions of emotion-sensing technologies. Third, to flesh out potential best practices so that these systems support rather than exploit workers. Fourth, to

encourage discussion and engagement with PhD students and early career researchers at Catania University.

Some of the attendees:

**Peter Mantello**, is Professor of Media Studies Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan

**Alin Olteanu** is Postdoctoral Researcher and Publications Coordinator at **c:o/re**, Kate Hamburger Kolleg, RWTH Aachen University

**Nader Ghotbi** is a Professor at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU), economist and medical doctor.