



Has AI Killed the Recruiting Star?

Or will it transform talent acquisition into something else entirely?

Today, talent acquisition (TA) is at a crossroads. Rarely static, shifts in hiring have long required TA professionals to transform, and the current market is no exception. However, in today's climate, landing the best candidates is less about modifying tactics and more about changing the role and responsibility of individual recruiters. A driving force behind this is the recent technology advancements, including the rise of artificial intelligence (AI). As a result, TA leaders need to help recruiters develop into talent advisors – assuming a more strategic role that liberates them from mundane tasks and empowers them with modern tools that snag the best candidates.

The Tech Connection

To fully understand the current state, consider that the incorporation of AI and machine learning into the realm of TA comes at the same time as another critical paradigm shift. Over time, the profession has gone through three significant evolutions – from being seen as a staffing function to recruiting to what is currently known as talent acquisition. Back in the staffing days, the most common tools and technologies available were typewriters and Rolodexes. With recruiting, the industry welcomed the applicant tracking system and email, while what is now known as talent acquisition closely aligns with the emergence of social media. With each reinvention, TA took on more responsibilities, demonstrating greater expertise and moving the focus from purely operational and transactional to more strategic. The birth of the talent advisor will correlate with the development of big data, analytics, and the advanced technologies associated with AI.

See, technology has played a significant role throughout each transformation, and AI and machine learning certainly have the potential to

revolutionize TA once again. However, the most profound, most impactful aspects that these technologies will have on the profession will not be procedural components of the workflow. Instead, the real game-changer of these technologies is that they will not only enable TA professionals to get back to what the work has always been about – relationship building – but will also fuel the profession's ability to transform to the next logical step: to truly embrace and become a talent advisor for the organizations and businesses where they operate.

Research from the World Economic Forum describes this moment, stating, “There is a sense that the rise of artificial intelligence, robotics, and other digital developments is upending the primacy of human experience in the economy. The individuals who will succeed in the economy of the future will be those who can complement the work done by mechanical or algorithmic technologies, and “work with the machines.”

Recruiter vs. Talent Advisor

Of course, the title of “talent advisor” is not a wholly new concept. References go back nearly a decade, with industry thought leaders like Dr. John Sullivan² advocating that this approach gives recruiters a way to “shift up a level”² and take on a more strategic, more impactful, and more exciting role. Still, much of the dialogue around the talent advisor title focuses on the relationship building aspects of recruiting, and the problem with this definition is that it sees the position through an existing lens, versus starting fresh and characterizing the role of talent advisor as a separate entity.

The depth of a talent advisor moves beyond the core function of recruiting talent. Yes, this position will still perform the work of its predecessors – staffing, recruiting, and talent acquisition.

tion – including but not limited to sourcing and screening, promoting employer brand, supporting diversity and inclusion initiatives, highlighting the candidate experience, and staying active on social media. However, in addition to these duties, the talent advisor takes on a consultative role as well.

While the talent advisor is concerned with the acquisition of talent, they will also spend a significant amount of their time coaching and advising hiring managers on improving talent management activities to drive business results. This is the fundamental difference between recruiters and talent advisors. Talent advisors are numbers oriented, focused on the outcome of bringing in and developing talent, knowing full well how to find actionable insights from data and translate the value of talent they bring into the organization, both financial and strategic. These individuals rely on data to make decisions and improve their results, consulting the organization on aspects of the business beyond recruiting.

For instance, in the case of retention, talent advisors go beyond the ratio of recruited to retained, sharing KPIs around quality of hire, including the performance level and contributions of those still with the organization; percent of star performers versus those who meet standards versus those underperforming; as well as culture fit and hiring manager satisfaction. Or, in terms of talent management, talent advisors would also provide insights around talent engagement, training, learning and development, or any existing skills gaps.

Simply put, the talent advisor needs to be business savvy and strategy-minded, with a firm understanding of how the company operates. That includes how the company makes and saves money, acquires and retains customers, hires and manages its workforce, with the ability to read, interpret and translate data and analytics into actionable plans, and the skills necessary to build rapport with and influence management. As such, making the move from recruiter to talent advisor means making a conscious decision and evolving alongside the space and its technologies.

AI & the Growing Need for Talent Advisors

While the role's evolution corresponds with a broader shift taking place within TA, in reality, this is no small transition. It re-

quires a total transformation of the function, something that is already starting to crystallize due to the confluence of several issues, including historically low unemployment, the focus on skills over jobs, commoditization of technology tools and the development of new solutions designed to automate and handle the transactional component of recruiting. Of this selection, it is AI that has the potential to reshape the TA function – but not without retaining the human element via the recruiter turned talent advisor.

That's because, no matter the iteration, recruiting has always been about creating relationships. Therefore, the goal of introducing AI into TA is not to replace recruiters, but rather, to assist them in what they do and expand their scope of responsibilities and involvement in driving business results. The philosophy needs to be that to serve both the company and candidates better, AI tools and platforms need to augment the experience for participants and make it easier for practitioners to do their job. Yet, as AI and machine learning take on a more substantial component of TA, maintaining the human touch will become even more critical. The irony being that AI will enable TA professionals to bring more "humanity" to their daily work, making them smarter, more available, and more efficient in the process.

Finding the balance will be key. As Deloitte shared³ in its most recent report on human capital trends, "If anything, humans and their innate skills seem to be growing more important as the need to devise, implement, and validate AI solutions becomes widespread. Understanding the unique capabilities that machines and humans bring to different types of work and tasks will be critical as the focus moves from automation to the redesign of work."

One example would be where the candidate can interact with a digital assistant to discuss the basics of the role and how their skills align with that position. After that, the candidate receives a warm transfer to the talent advisor who is then able to focus on the career goals and personality style of the candidate. This workflow enables the talent advisor to exponentially increase the amount of quality time they spend with each candidate, as opposed to today's world where recruiters are running fast to keep up, unable to provide candidates with the level of atten-

tion they need. By starting the process with the digital assistant, the organization can keep candidates fully and personally engaged, side-stepping the infamous black hole before giving the follow-on attention needed. Through this more interactive experience, the talent advisor can provide increased quality time with both the candidates and the management team.

Endnotes

¹ Towards a Reskilling Revolution – The World Economic Forum – January 2018

² The Future of Recruiting – The Talent Advisor Model Dominates – Dr. John Sullivan – November 2017

³ Deloitte Insights – The Rise of the Social Enterprise – 2018 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends

Making it Happen

The shift to an AI-powered world where the transactional components of recruiting become automated is inevitable – and as a result, the role of TA will evolve too – consciously and unconsciously. The Deloitte report echoes this sentiment, indicating that while organizations know which skills are needed to work side-by-side with machines, nearly half of those surveyed do not have plans to cultivate them. Seeing this as “an urgent human capital challenge,” with the automated future looming just over the horizon, the time has come to start making moves – and there are several ways to facilitate this change – both at the individual and organizational level.

- Develop a clear understanding of how your company generates revenue and learning how to translate the value of the talent they’re recruiting into that language. To become talent advisors, today’s recruiting professionals need to hone their skills in business, marketing, data, consulting, and as always, relationship building.
- Recognize that not everyone involved in TA will have the skills, background, or experience needed to perform these new roles and increased responsibilities. To support growth, companies should train existing team members through learning and development opportunities as well as practical, on the job experience.
- Incorporate AI and automation throughout the recruiting process, from end-to-end. Doing so will help identify new duties

and responsibilities for the current TA team. The expectation being that the humans will be better at what they’re doing, able to increase the human element and the quality time spent in their interactions with candidates and the company.

- Evaluate the metrics and key performance indicators used to measure the effectiveness of the talent function. This includes performance management and financial reward models. The thinking here should emphasize strategic value over transactional reporting. For instance, instead of looking at Cost Per Hire and Time to Fill as many organizations do currently, examine the metrics that reveal business impacts, such as revenue and operational cost, project and company deliverables, and other measures of satisfaction.

There are companies already following this path, sounding the call for talent advisors to join their TA teams, and not just staffing agencies either, but also the Fortune 500 giants such as Unilever. Likewise, certifications exist through HR organizations, promising to educate recruiters on the ways of the talent advisor, helping them develop and strengthen their skills to become strategic and consultative partners.

Of course, unspoken in all of this, but implied, is that recruiters and organizations need to embrace a more holistic and integrated view of acquiring and managing talent. Ask any TA professional in 2019 if they can state with certainty if all of the hires they supported in the previous year are still on board and contributing to the success of the business. Their answers will likely reflect that current processes do not promote this understanding. Without this level of insight, talent advisors cannot adequately advise the organization on acquisition and management practices – something that the rise of AI all but requires from today’s take on recruiting stars.

About the Author

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