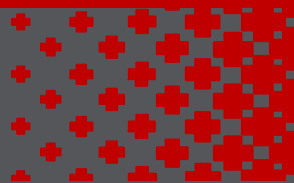




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Context

Just this past year alone, we have seen monumental advances (and challenges) arise with the use of AI in talent acquisition. This CAHRS virtual working group reviewed many of these changes and discussed what is coming next. We covered the different approaches organizations are taking in terms of where (and where not) to implement AI in the hiring process, how candidates are responding to (and some trying to cheat) these new technologies, and what this means for the future of recruiting as a function within HR.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

How Artificial Intelligence (AI) is Being Used in Talent Acquisition (TA)

The session began with a discussion of where in the TA process firms are using AI. The majority of the group has begun to use AI for reviewing resumes in at least some capacity, while about half have used it in some capacity in interviews. Others have found value in using AI to craft personalized outreach to candidates. Only a small number of participants report using AI to conduct or evaluate other types of assessment, though the potential for this application in the near future.

The participants were all very clear that they were not turning over decision-making to AI in any steps of the process. They gave three reasons for this choice. The first reason was legal concerns; participants are facing an uncertain legal landscape regarding how decisions involving the use of AI to evaluate candidates would be treated by the courts if a lawsuit were to be filed. The second reason was lingering uncertainty over the accuracy of AI evaluations. While participants appreciated the efficiency with which AI could review and score resumes and interviews, none had collected enough data to be entirely confident that these were better than human evaluations. The third reason was that all of the participants expressed a commitment to deliver an exceptional candidate experience, and there was some hesitation about the extent to which candidates “liked” these technologies.

The group spent a lot of time discussing a key tension in using AI in TA. If firms are going to use AI to review and evaluate candidates, then candidates are going to use AI to try to game these systems by using AI to craft resumes that perfectly fit job descriptions (even when they do not actually possess those skills) and to game the interview process in myriad ways. One participant referred to the current state as “bots applying to bots”.

There was a real consensus in the call that TA will never be fully automated, despite proclamations from AI thought-leaders such as Perplexity CEO Aravind Srinivas that recruiting will be taken over by AI. In fact, everyone on the call agreed that building personal relationships with candidates was becoming more important than ever, and that their goal with AI was to free up more time for interpersonal interactions.

New Research on AI in TA

Professor Keller provided the group with a summary of recent research on the topic of AI in TA.

The first study, “Voice AI in firms: A Natural Field Experiment on Automated Job Interviews”, used an experimental design to see: (a) whether AI-powered interviews yield better hiring results, and (b) how job seekers responded to automated interviews. Contrary to lots of the headlines about this study on LinkedIn, the results suggest that AI interviews yield very limited benefit. AI was not better than human recruiters at identifying high-scoring applicants, though it was marginally better at identifying “medium” quality applicants that recruiters scored “low”. More importantly, AI did not make the process any more efficient, as human recruiters needed twice as long on average to review AI-led interviews.

Participants who had experimented with AI interviews said that this was fully consistent with their experiences, and why many were actually turning to more in-person interviews than they have done in the past five years.

That same study made headlines by stating the job seekers preferred AI interviews, but we talked about how this assertion was very misleading. First, one reason for the partiality was that the job seekers liked the flexibility in terms of when they could do in the interview, not necessarily the interview mode itself. Second, the job seekers that preferred AI tended to be low scoring applicants, including those with limited language skills, such that they opted for AI because they were worried that human recruiters would pick up on these traits that might disqualify them.

The second study, “Automation with generative AI? Evidence from a teacher hiring pipeline”, compared resume reviews across three conditions: (1) human-only, (2) human with AI assistance, and (3) fully automated screening. A key finding here was that AI assistance neither improved outcomes or productivity; recruiters systematically disregarded AI recommendations in part because they were worried that AI could detect AI-generated content submitted from applicants. Furthermore, adding in AI increased review time by 17%.

Participants who had experimented with AI resume scoring also reported that this was consistent with their experiences. However, several participants mentioned that they thought that recruiters may be more open to embracing AI recommendations over time as models improve and companies get better at linking scores to outcomes.

The third piece of research we discussed was Toby Stuart’s new book, “Anointed: The extraordinary effects of social status in a winner take-most world.” Toby speculates that because recruiters can no longer trust resumes to contain accurate information (because job seekers use AI to customize every application), they will rely more on status markets such as undergraduate institutions than ever before. So while many have extolled AI’s promise to democratize opportunities, the opposite is likely to happen. The group debated this hypothesis for some time, though there was no consensus on whether this would come to fruition.

Current Questions Facing TA in the age of AI

We concluded the meeting with a vibrant discussion about the questions and challenges with which the participants were dealing.

One topic was the explosion of vendors trying to sell AI-powered tools to the TA function. Evaluating these vendors – and their sometimes outlandish claims – takes up an increasing amount of TA leaders’ time. In large organizations, one of the responses has been to simply rely on the new tools being deployed by their Human Resource Information System (HRIS) vendors.

Another topic was increased emphasis on demonstrating the ROI of new TA initiatives. Participants talked about how these new tools were expensive, so justifying their investment was more important than ever. This has pushed the function to collect clear and consistent data on hiring outcomes, though multiple participants mentioned that they were struggling with how to define and measure “quality of hire”.

There was optimism that by using AI to automate and augment more of the high-volume, routinized tasks with the function, TA leaders and their teams would have more bandwidth to engage in and shape conversations about workforce strategy.

Conclusion

We ended on a somewhat surprising topic: the real concern around “fake” candidates. Multiple participants were intensely worried about recent news reports of fake candidates from South Korea and China. Especially at large companies, identifying fake candidates was a top priority. Others were more concerned about poor candidates “sneaking” in the door by gaming interviews. For example, we heard examples of candidate having other people interview on their behalf and candidates use AI to craft answers to interview questions in real time. This was another reason participants were conducting more in-person interviews than in the recent past.



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