The Rise of the Talent Intelligence Platform

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Recruiting is an important and complex function. In a growing economy, your company "becomes the people you hire," so your ability to find, attract, and select the best candidates is critical. Despite the pandemic, recruiting is again becoming a challenge. In January 2021 more than 15 million jobs were open in the U.S., up almost 13% from one year ago. Our pandemic response study showed that companies that hired well in 2020 have significantly outperformed their competition.

If you are the head of recruitment, you know that the tech market is filled with a never-ending parade of new recruiting tools. The head of talent acquisition of a Fortune 50 is contacted by approximately 10 vendors *every single day*, all trying to sell some type of solution to address recruiting challenges. Many of these solutions promise to leverage AI to find perfect applicants by weeding through thousands of resumes to find the needle in the haystack. In fact, candidate matching technology, originally based on scoring candidates for job fit by matching words in their resumes, has evolved out of necessity as resumes become briefer and job descriptions rapidly change.

Internal job mobility is now becoming part of the recruiting function. The pandemic forced as many as 40% of employees to change jobs, managers, or projects, requiring rapid redeployment with little or no time for planning. While one part of a business might be scaling down, another might need to immediately scale up. Retailers such as Target or Sainsbury's had to quickly staff up delivery and online ordering jobs. Sutter Health redeployed 1,900 nurses to critical care areas when elective surgeries were canceled; as COVID hospitalization numbers went down and surgeries could be performed, the company redeployed them back to their original units. The pandemic has taught us how important it is to have the ability to rapidly redeploy people with the assurance that they are moving into the right role.

Inclusivity is also factoring into today's recruiting. The pandemic has disproportionally impacted people of color and created a mass exodus of women from the workforce to handle childcare and home schooling. Social movements have exposed significant social bias and triggered the imperative to apply equity and diversity to all job openings. CEOs of most Fortune 500 companies made strong public statements - promising to do better and pledging billions to various causes benefiting diversity. Diverse hiring practices, long seen as discretional, were catapulted back into the spotlight. And retaining people from underrepresented groups got harder than ever. According to a recent report from the Center for Talent Innovation, more than one-third of Black employees intend to leave their companies within two years. Black professionals are 30% more likely to intend to leave than their white counterparts.

And while all these pressures have grown, companies are even more heavily focused on simplifying the employee experience. Today every CHRO and many CEOs are concerned about crafting a positive experience that fosters productivity, innovation, collaboration and great customer results. This is a complex undertaking, involving HR, IT, legal, and other groups across the organization. One of the building blocks is growth opportunity and what factors into this is the ability to grow and develop, to take on assignments and projects that bring us closer to what we want to accomplish at work.

You could create an initiative around each of these areas – talent acquisition, talent management, diversity, equity and inclusion and employee experience – and find systems for each of them. Or you could find a talent intelligence platform that ties them together with real intelligence and analytics.

The Talent Intelligence Platform, Explained

Let's start by defining what we mean by a talent intelligence platform. Software products are designed to meet specific user requirements. For example, Zoom is a product that connects people on video conferences. It's very targeted in its use and does one thing really well. A platform refers to substantial piece of software, an operating system, or a database that other companies can access for content distribution purposes or use as a foundation on which to build their own products. Platforms are designed to allow third parties to use the platform infrastructure to deliver value to users via data and process integrations. Google, Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple are all examples of platforms.

The pandemic really brought platforms forward in all areas, including HR and talent. Why? Because we learned that things change constantly. One day employees go back to work, the next they work remotely again. One day the business booms, the next day, it has to close again. People are more overwhelmed than ever and integrating talent processes into natural workflows becomes a necessity. Everybody needs flexibility, and so a flexible platform is needed. (See Figure 1.)

Platform plays are where it's at. A talent intelligence platform integrates insights about workers – their skills, capabilities, experiences, career aspirations, performance, demographics, learning needs, development opportunities – and uses this information to help people find the right opportunities for them. In essence, a talent intelligence platform is the backbone of integrated talent management, **matching people to opportunities.** When we talk about opportunities, we don't just mean open positions. Opportunities are also project roles, gig work, development assignments, promotions, mentoring, and learning opportunities.

The Skills Problem

Matching people to opportunities might seem easy, but here's a fundamental question: what's the unit of measure or the currency we should use for matching?

In the 1980s, competency models became the popular way to do this. Organizations first defined all the jobs they needed, and then developed competency models to support these jobs. These models outlined what a person needed to know and the skills required in order to do a specific job. Then, these models were used for assessment, learning, leadership development and promotions. In theory, competency models are a good idea. But in practice, they have never really worked well, especially now.

That's because most jobs are more complex than a job description can ever capture. By the time somebody actually starts working in the job, the job description is already likely obsolete. We all have various roles, work on different teams and on many projects. Companies using competency models came up with thousands of different jobs and tens of thousands of competencies. The models were just too complicated and static to keep up to date and relevant.

So, companies were looking for something to replace competencies. Many HR tech vendors came up with skills ontology frameworks, which offered a way to capture underlying skills needed to do jobs. Of course, there are also thousands of skills. Using Excel, running a test script, or developing a project plan are all skills. Skills are context independent and "under the covers." The big benefit of using technology for skills is that algorithms can develop these skills inventories automatically, identify adjacent skills, and see which skills are growing or dropping in demand.

We see a new architecture emerging. Rather than simply matching people to jobs (which are often ill-defined with descriptions that quickly become out of date), we can decompose jobs into roles, each of which has clear capability needs. Then the system can look for people with relevant capabilities and experiences and find an even better match for

Pre-Pandemic

- Best features and functionality
- Vendor stability and growth
- Ease of Use, ease of implementation
- Scalability and fit with organization
- Customer support and vendor trust

The Right Product

Now

- System fit and **flexibility**
- Vendor stability and **reliability**
- Ease of Use, **flow of work integration**
- Scalability, **configurability**, fit
- Customer support and vendor trust

The Right Platform

Figure 1: The Shift in HR Technology

JOB	ROLE	CAPABILITIES	SKILLS

A Job
Job Title
Job Family
Description
Goals
Level
Pay

A Role
Goals
Activities
Projects
Teams
Outputs

A Role
Goals
Activities
Projects
Teams
Outputs

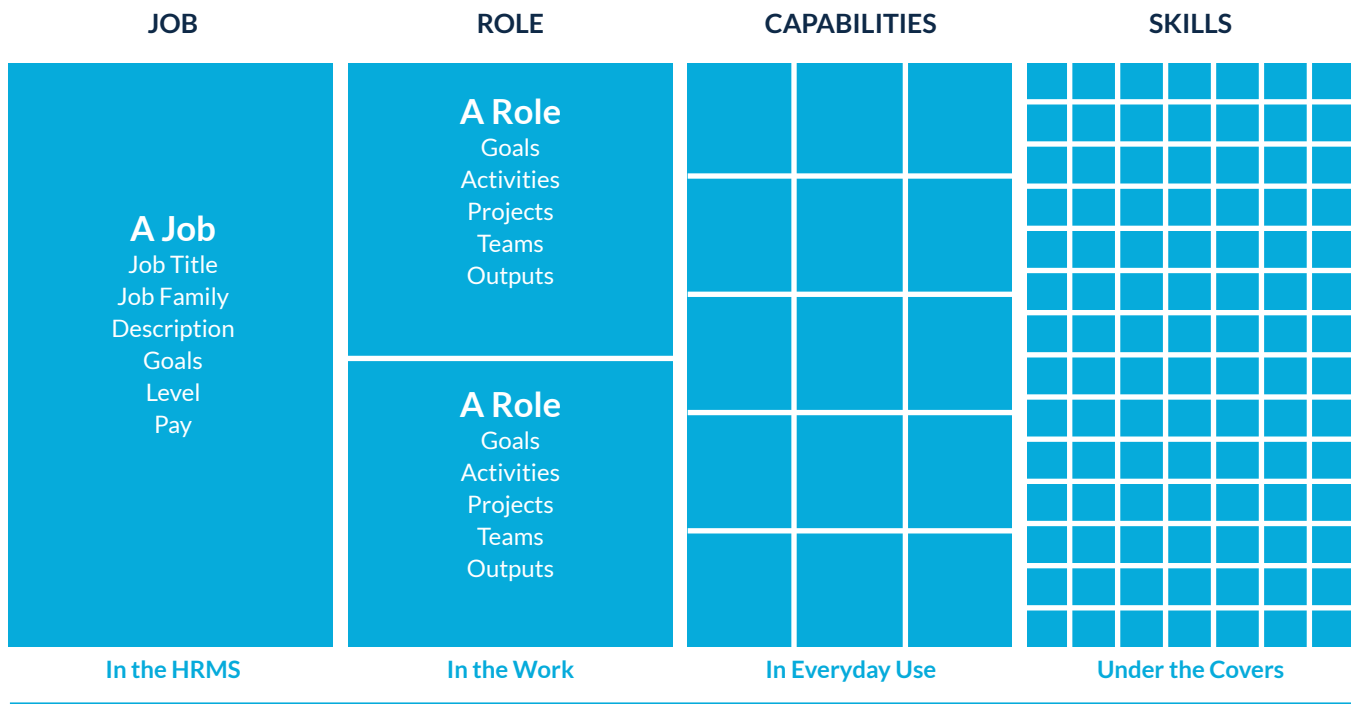**In the HRMS** | **In the Work** | **In Everyday Use** | **Under the Covers**

Figure 2: Jobs, Roles, Capabilities, and Skills

candidates. Consider a job that requires someone to develop and analyze budgets. A candidate's expertise in Excel may be useful, but it's certainly not enough. A capability-driven system would find someone with budget management experience, accounting, and perhaps project staffing capabilities.

Many HCM, learning, and recruiting vendors have developed their own skills taxonomies, proclaiming theirs as the best. But these standalone skills taxonomies can quickly become islands, useful only for limited use. A true talent intelligence platform would bring all these taxonomies together, enabling the company to source, identify, and intelligently move people with a deep reservoir of knowledge. Business capabilities are made up of skills, relationships, and experiences – all of which must be reflected in the platform.

Matching People to Opportunities

Let's say you want to find the right person for a marketing manager job. You could try to fill that job by finding a person who already has that job, either in your organization or outside. Most recruiting systems do that; they collect, index, and

analyze lots of profiles and match them to jobs. That type of matching is easy, but it has some shortcomings. What if the job is newly created? What if we want to give this job to someone as a development opportunity? What if the job needs to be done in a different way than before? Traditionally, you'd need a different system for each of these scenarios. (See Figure 3.)

With a talent intelligence platform, you can tie all of these scenarios together into one platform. Take Eightfold. Originally positioned as a recruitment solution, the Eightfold platform was developed to collect, index, and analyze millions and millions of profiles and use advanced AI to match them to jobs, opportunities, and career paths.

But the solution doesn't stop at profiles. Eightfold looks carefully at adjacent skills, people you know, companies you have worked for, the time spent in various jobs, education, and work locations – all of which provides a more comprehensive view of an individual. For example, if you worked at IBM in 2016, you probably learned about IBM's Watson technology. But if you worked at Google that year, you know all about a different technology stack.

Self-Assessment and Promotion	Job Discovery, Analysis and Skills Matching	Selection, Interviewing, Fit, Onboard, Hire	Measure, Develop, Grow, Reward
• Fill in profile • Assess interests • Identify skills • Categorize experiences	• Infer skills in jobs (AI) • Infer skills from experience (AI) • Assess skills manually • Recommendations	• Post jobs, schedule interview • Pay, salary, grade, growth • Onboarding • Move, relocate	• Fill development gaps • Accommodate missing skills • Set performance goals • Assess success or failure
Employee Profile and HRMS integration	AI and skills identification and matching	Recruiting and assessment features	Performance and development features

Figure 3: Matching People to Opportunities

Eightfold's algorithm aims to infer skills not just from jobs. Sure, you can feed the algorithm hundreds of jobs and it will learn from that – like Bayer did to train the algorithm on specialized pharmaceutical jobs (see case study). But beyond that, you can also train it by using data from successful candidates and then it looks for candidates with similar attributes. Every company we talked with was extremely impressed with the skills algorithm because it learns so quickly and so well.

The real power comes from the integration. Because the talent intelligence platform is built as an integrated platform, it ingests data from a wide variety of sources – from employee profiles and HRMS data, jobs, ATS data, learning systems, performance data – to match across different areas and for many different use cases. And that's why it has so many different uses cases – from recruiting, to talent mobility, succession management, gig work, and career management.

Why does this matter? The right talent intelligence platform helps recruiters get much better at finding the right matches, thereby accelerating hiring and increasing fit. And because recruiters don't need to manually screen so many candidates, they have more time to actually interact with candidates. Instead of the proverbial "post and pray" approach in which recruiters post a job to a job board and then pray somebody will apply, they get deep insights into candidate matches for the job based on the advanced algorithms.

The candidate experience is much improved, too. When candidates go to a site and submit their resumes, they automatically get recommendations for jobs for which they could be a match, including suggestions for jobs the candidates may not have considered. This can build confidence in the application process, which in turn increases applications by women. It's a well-known fact that women only apply if they match 90% of the job requirements, whereas men are much more likely to confidently apply at a mere 50% match. Increased diversity is another benefit.

The same skills architecture can be applied to internal mobility – in talent marketplaces, for example. This is one of the hottest trends in the HR tech market and a talent intelligence platform provides the backbone for this.

The use cases don't stop there. Finding successors, developing future leaders, supporting career development, preparing people for promotions – all supported with learning and mentoring recommendations -- can be accomplished easily with a talent intelligence platform.

Getting Started with a Talent Intelligence Platform

A talent intelligence platform that brings advanced skills inference across different areas to the table can be a great boost of your ability to match people to opportunities. But you need to do the groundwork to make it really work well for your company – because any platform is only as good as the strategy it supports is.

Step 1: Simplify your job architecture.

Most job architectures are hugely complex and often include more jobs than actual human beings in the company. Verizon, P&G and many others are now radically simplifying their job architecture, making job descriptions much broader so they can encompass many different roles. For example, rather than having a separate software engineering job descriptions for each coding language and software product, you have a single job description encompassing all. This is a pretty complex undertaking requiring compensation, recruiting, HR business partners and management to work together closely. But the effort will pay off.

Step 2: Define what skills you need

Before you let the talent intelligence platform loose to infer skills, start with a strategic conversation about what skills you know you need. At Bayer, using Eightfold changed the conversations recruiters had with hiring managers. Rather than focusing the conversation on just the job, recruiters now use the Eightfold skills engine to discuss with the hiring manager what skills the role actually requires, based on the skills managers know are critical. Starting with the vital few skills and then expanding from there helps get the most of the algorithm, and it helps tailor searches to your unique business strategy, customer requirements and situation. This discussion can happen at multiple levels, starting from senior leadership and cascading down to line management. And of course, conversations need to be ongoing because the required skills will change frequently as the environment changes.

Step 3: Start small, establish AI matching, and expand

When you are ready for the talent intelligence platform, don't attempt to immediately use it for all use cases – recruiting, talent management, talent mobility, and development. Define the most urgent use cases first and then gradually expand. Micron initially was aiming to increase talent diversity while improving the candidate experience in recruitment and then found that the AI-based matching could be used for all sourcing. Bayer also started with recruiting and now uses the platform for development, talent mobility, and promotion in 25 countries. A large financial services company started by improving the candidate experience by recommending job matches; it now uses the platform for the employee experience.

Conclusion

Matching people to opportunities is as important today as it has ever been. Your people demand it and the business depends on it. A talent intelligence platform that builds on a solid skills taxonomy will help you scale beyond single point solutions to a framework that accelerates careers, increases diversity, equity and inclusion and sets your company up for people success, now and in the future.

Micron Creates Consumer-grade Candidate Experiences at Scale

Micron Technology, Inc., an American producer of computer memory and computer data storage devices, is headquartered in Boise, Idaho. Approximately 40,000 employees across the globe work for Micron.

In 2020, Micron hired more than 5,000 people for manufacturing and corporate roles. Micron receives a very high volume of applications, and its recruiting team needs to focus attention on those qualified for open positions. "As the volume of applicants increases, the more likely the applicant experience declines, as many are not actually a fit for the roles to which they've applied. Candidate and user experience are important to us, and we recognized the need to utilize a unique and innovative candidate relationship management system.", said Britt Thomas, global director of talent brand and technology innovation.

The company uses Successfactors ATS and was looking for a higher-accuracy, skills identification approach that would proactively advise candidates which jobs are a good fit based on their resumes, while inferring skills, capabilities and experiences from their backgrounds. Eightfold's talent intelligence platform fit the bill.

Eightfold's AI matching enhanced the candidate experience. "Instead of the traditional method of finding a single job posting on LinkedIn or Indeed and applying to that specific job, our candidates can now upload their resume to our career site and instantly be identified for multiple positions," said Thomas.

Candidates are thrilled and so are recruiters. They are seeing more qualified candidates at a much higher speed as they use Eightfold on top of SuccessFactors.

Another useful Eightfold feature has to do with increasing diversity of talent pools. Eightfold's anonymous resume screening helps mitigate bias at the beginning of the hiring process by hiding names, zip codes, schools attended, and even hobbies or volunteer work from resumes. This enables hiring managers and recruiters to focus on qualifications, capabilities and skills, not personalities or demographics. "We have a fantastic diversity dashboard which may be shared with individuals outside of talent acquisition. Normally, the team benefits from our TA technologies and that's where it stops. With the diversity dashboard, you can now schedule reports and share them with your DEI partners, as well as your leadership team," said Thomas.

The TA organization is very satisfied with the Eightfold partnership when it comes to meeting evolving needs. "Eightfold hosts hackathons, and it has proven to be extremely agile and adaptable to our suggestions," said Thomas.

Thomas envisions a future in which job searching is no longer an exhausting hassle but as easy as online shopping. "In the future, similar to when you shop online and an ad pops up, relevant jobs will surface which align to your daily interests, learning behaviors, and experience. Technology will do the job search for you," she said.

Bayer Uses an Integrated Talent Platform for an Integrated Pharma Company

Bayer AG is a German multinational pharmaceutical and life sciences company and one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world. Headquartered in Leverkusen, Bayer's areas of business include human and veterinary pharmaceuticals, consumer healthcare products, and agricultural chemicals, seeds and biotechnology products. Bayer employees more than 100,000 people worldwide.

Bayer is an integrated pharmaceutical company with complex and highly skilled positions to fill in many different areas. Business innovation is key and getting the right people into the right roles is critical.

Two years ago, the HR leadership team at Bayer created a new people strategy around five pillars:

- The employment proposition
- Fit for purpose
- Digitalization and connectivity with the external market
- Leadership
- Speed to market

"We wanted to look at how we could digitize the talent acquisition function. How can we speed up our processes? How can we find better talent? How can we be more connected to the external marketplace?" said Holly Quincey, global head of talent attraction and talent acquisition solutions.

Based on the new people strategy, changes were centered around retaining the best performers, bringing in a more diverse workforce, hiring for potential and skills, helping people plan their careers and get better insights.

"Instead of layering systems over systems, we wanted a system that could integrate the talent management piece. In addition to working for internal candidates, we wanted a solution that could help us attract external candidates based on our employment proposition work, rather than just hiring for specific jobs," Quincey explained.

So Quincey and her team set out to find a platform that provided solutions to all these needs and found Eightfold's integrated talent platform to be a perfect match. Bayer's philosophy to use skills and capabilities as the currency – not jobs and resumes – is reflected in the way Eightfold designed

its algorithms. This algorithm works well for existing positions – those that have already been calibrated based on millions of matches done. But it also does a good job of learning new skills. For example, matching for Bayer's pharmaceutical positions didn't work well at first, but after 60 positions were filled, the algorithm had been trained to find the right match.

"We added another 5,000 very specific skills geared towards pharmaceutical companies and translated these into all different languages," said Quincey.

The way the algorithm learns is through calibration. You feed the algorithm successful people in a specific role, and then it calibrates based on skills, not the job. So rather than finding a clone of the person holding a job (matching on the same experiences, background, and education, the system infers skills and looks for these inferred skills in other candidates.

"We don't see this as a system implementation; we see it as a mindset shift," said Quincey. 'It has completely changed the way that recruiters and managers think about candidates and jobs and who is a good match."

Using Eightfold for the intake meeting between hiring manager and recruiter has transformed the thinking around what the work is really about. Rather than just cloning a job, the platform suggests adjacent skills that could be needed or beneficial for the role. And conversely, people at Bayer can get recommendations on likely career moves based on their experience, background and skills. "For instance, for me, a lot of consumer marketing positions came up as recommendations," explains Quincey.

In the future, Quincey sees many opportunities to help people build their careers through targeted recommendations by moving from jobs to skills as the currency of work and bringing a more diverse workforce in because constraints around education and schools will be left behind.

About Josh Bersin

Josh Bersin is an internationally recognized analyst, educator, and thought leader focusing on the global talent market and the challenges impacting business workforces around the world. He studies the world of work, HR and leadership practices, and the broad talent technology market.

He founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. Over the next ten years, he expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership. He sold the company to Deloitte in 2012, when it became known as Bersin™ by Deloitte. Bersin left Deloitte in 2018..

In 2019, Bersin founded the Josh Bersin Academy, the world's first global development academy for HR and talent professionals and a transformation agent for HR organizations. The Academy offers content-rich online programs, a carefully curated library of tools and resources, and a global community that helps HR and talent professionals stay current on the trends and practices needed to drive organizational success in the modern world of work.

Bersin is frequently featured in talent and business publications such as Forbes, Harvard Business Review, HR Executive, FastCompany, The Wall Street Journal, and CLO Magazine. He is a regular keynote speaker at industry events around the world and a popular blogger with more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.

His education includes a BS in engineering from Cornell University, an MS in engineering from Stanford University, and an MBA from the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley.

About Kathi Enderes

Kathi is the vice president of research at the Josh Bersin Academy; she leads research for all areas of HR, learning, talent and HR technology. Kathi has more than 20 years of experience in management consulting with IBM, PwC, and EY and as a talent leader at McKesson and Kaiser Permanente. Most recently, Kathi led talent and workforce research at Deloitte, where she led many research studies on various topics of HR and talent and frequently spoke at industry conferences. Originally from Austria, Kathi has worked in Vienna, London and Spain and now lives in San Francisco. Kathi holds a doctoral degree and a masters degree in mathematics from the University of Vienna.