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Solving the recruitment efficiency puzzle

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Solving the recruitment efficiency puzzle

If you've been in the Talent Acquisition game for a while, say a couple of decades or so, you've seen a lot of trends come and go and a lot of claims made for "the future of TA / recruitment".

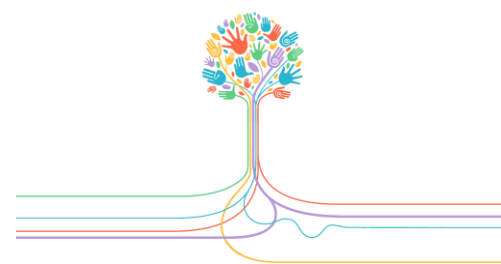
But how much has actually changed in that time?

Assessment has definitely evolved, but perhaps not as radically (or quickly) as it could have done. Sure, situational judgement tests and gamified assessments added much greater richness to traditional psychometrics and reasoning tests, but it's taken AI to drive more rapid change in the assessment space. Now the big driver of innovation in assessment is how to ensure predictive validity in a world where AI can answer the questions better (or at least to a more specific formula) than most humans.

A major positive change has been the rise in EDI initiatives and a far greater understanding within organisations of the need to make sourcing and hiring processes as inclusive as possible. That's a definite, tangible and welcome shift, and despite certain current headwinds when it comes to EDI, the business case has been proven time and again. In short, EDI isn't going away, even if it's choosing to fly a little under the radar right now.

It may be hard to believe now, but the ATS was a relatively new technology in the early part of the 21st century, and that certainly *has* made a massive difference to the talent acquisition landscape. Obviously, the vast majority of medium and large enterprises have one (sometimes more than one!) and while it's easy to knock the common-or-garden ATS, as a robust system of record and a means of funnelling large volumes of applications through a defined assessment and experiential workflow, it's very valuable indeed. Anyone else remember sifting paper application forms? Yeah, we don't want to go back to that.

When your author made the move from in-house talent acquisition to a client management role in recruitment process outsourcing (RPO), one of the many buzz-phrases he first encountered was "talent pools". This was way back in around 2005, so a smidge over 20 years ago, and it was billed as a major change in the way that organisations engaged talent. It was still early-ish days for the ATS, and of course this was way before the entire world became data-obsessed, but even back then TA leaders and tech vendors were beginning to realise that the thousands of applicants



sitting passively (and let's face it, being largely ignored) within the back end of the system might – just *might* – offer some actual value.

The question is: did this new approach really effect significant change in TA?

The underlying argument for talent pools (passive), or talent communities (interactive, at least in theory), is pretty clear. At some point in the not-too-distant past, these people have been interested in a role within your organisation. It's hardly a great leap to assume that they may continue to have an interest, or that their interest could potentially be rekindled in the event that their circumstances change or another suitable role becomes available. In theory, therefore, our shiny new ATS becomes not just a workflow management tool, but a repository of potential applicants who could help us to reduce our advertising budget, improve time-to-hire and "build long-term relationships with passive talent" (© All ATS Vendors and RPO businesses, c.2005).

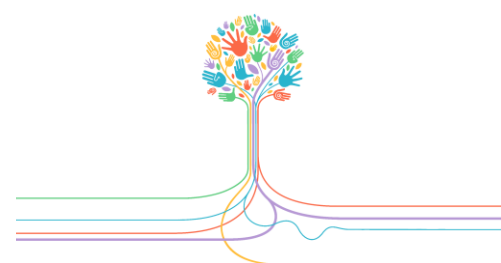
"Think of [the ATS] as a digital filing cabinet"

When seen through the lens of the job seeker, this makes a lot of sense. But is an ATS really just a "digital filing cabinet"? Well, that depends on your point of view. If you are a job seeker, or especially someone who has clicked hopefully on the "Join Our Talent Community" button, there is every reason to believe that this is indeed the full capability of the system. Google "Ghosting in Recruitment" and you'll find myriad articles, Reddit threads and thought pieces² around why it happens and how to deal with it, but fundamentally it comes down to three things:

- 1) Recruiters are too busy / overwhelmed with work
- 2) As a result of 1), recruiters prioritise the candidates who are most important to them, i.e. the ones with an immediate prospect of securing a role and therefore helping to remove a requisition from the ever-increasing pile

¹ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/truth-applicant-tracking-systems-ats-russell-ayles/>

² <https://www.cogencylabs.co.uk/post/let-s-talk-about-ghosting>



- 3) Recruiters – and TA teams in general – simply aren't held accountable for not communicating with people who aren't immediately of interest

So, if you are a candidate who goes through the effort of applying for a role, or joining a talent community, and you never hear anything back, you can be forgiven for imagining that your efforts have simply been logged in the digital equivalent of a dusty filing cabinet, never to see the light of day again.

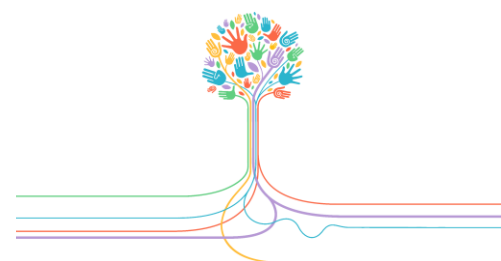
"I've been in one nearly 2 years. Speak to them regularly, same conversation every time. 'Nothing yet, I'm hoping to hear in the next few weeks!'"³

In researching this paper, we've spent a lot of time digging around in candidate forums, and this quote is one of many similar opinions from a Rail-industry site. A crucial issue with talent pools and communities is that expectations are very often not set with the candidates. We're lucky, we work in TA (seriously – we are!) and, therefore, if we were looking for a job, we'd happily click the talent pool / community button and upload our details, knowing that we may not hear anything about specific or relevant roles for a while. It's a numbers game, a waiting game too, and we'll do what we need to do to boost our chances, including joining a couple of dozen talent pools and being sure to watch out for any emails that might come in.

But most candidates haven't ever worked in TA so they don't understand how it works, and employers very often don't tell them what to expect. "Thanks. We'll contact you if any suitable vacancies arise" can mean two very different things depending if you are an employer or a candidate. If it's the former, the undertone is very much "don't call us, we'll call you", while the candidate hears that someone in the TA team is going to actively look for roles for them.

The end result? Frustrated candidates, and a digital filing cabinet that's just getting dustier and more festooned with cobwebs as the months and years go by.

³ <https://www.railforums.co.uk/threads/are-talent-pools-worth-the-paper-theyre-written-on.228287/>



There are of course some great examples of employers using talent pools / communities proactively and with stellar results. Well, we assume there are. The trouble is, finding robust case studies that show the benefits of talent pools is... not easy. So why is that?

A major challenge of talent pools is that they require time for two main activities: engagement and sourcing. We all know the pressure that recruiters are under, but let's think a little about the psychology of the role. You've advertised for this kind of role before, you received applications, most of them weren't suitable, you ignored a lot of them (time pressures etc) and then these are the candidates who are now filling your talent pool.

Do you go digging in the talent pool for the hidden gems? Or do you assume they're still not suitable and, even if they were, that they probably don't want to hear from you 6 or 12 months after their initial application was ghosted?

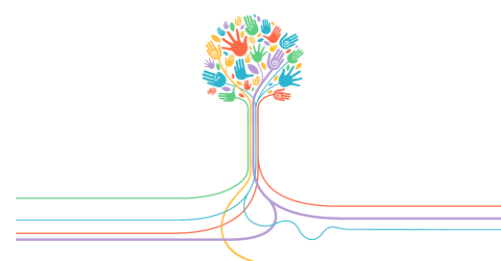
We may be slightly exaggerating to prove the point, and of course there are wonderful recruiters out there who go the extra mile every time – and some great tech tools too, as we'll see – BUT this is a common reality of TA today. And in that reality, it's just easier to post an ad, get some fresh new applications in and start the process from scratch.

All of which is a real problem. And it goes deeper than that.

“The problem... is that talent network applications seldom have enough information about the candidate, their skills and what they're looking for, to make them easily discoverable”⁴

This is a really vital point. When candidates apply for a role, they (entirely correctly) make sure that their application is tailored to the job ad. When they end up in a talent pool or community, their details often either remain tailored to the one ad for which they applied (potentially eliminating them from consideration for other positions) or, worse, are simply registered as the most basic bio-data with perhaps a generic resumé.

⁴ <https://qz.com/talent-network-job-applications-1851055722>



This necessitates work. Someone, the recruiter or the candidate, needs to put the effort in to clarifying the skills, aptitudes and aspirations of that candidate, and again, in a hard-pressed TA team, that doesn't sound like an appealing way to spend your time.

Anyway, have we sold you the concept of talent pools yet? No?

Time to look at the challenge through a different lens...

"Teams using Talent Pools in Pinpoint have seen an average 35% reduction in time to hire in the past 6 months"⁵

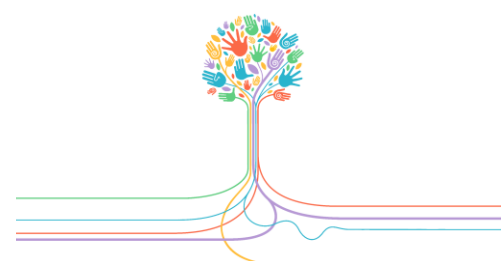
Talent pools do work. Talent communities work even better. The major challenges that face talent acquisition professionals today – not enough resources to manage the workload, plus a mix of skills shortages for specialist roles and torrents of applications for more generic ones – can be significantly reduced by using talent pools / communities more effectively.

The issue is making the leap in the first place, trusting that some time invested at the outset will pay off in time.

And it will. Pinpoint's stat above is powerful enough – reducing time to hire, thus improving time-to-productivity and having a direct impact on the fortunes of your organisation – is a huge win (and the article referenced above is a really good overview of how to set up talent pools to get the best outputs from them). But it goes much deeper than that.

At Hollaroo, we've been providing software that integrates with applicant tracking systems for years. Our platform is focused on automating pipeline management, with the main focus being talent pools, referrals, alumni and internal mobility. Imagine a CRM that does the work for you, and that automatically helps the candidate to maintain their details: that's us.

⁵ <https://www.pinpointhq.com/insights/how-to-set-up-talent-pools>



A few months ago, after onboarding some new clients, we decided to run a longitudinal study of the impact of automating these channels that so often go ignored by TA teams. We understand the value of what we do and, on an individual client basis, we knew the impact. But what we'd never done is take historical data and compare it with what happens when we implement the tool.

Here's how we did it.

Methodology

We used the data from our new Hollaroo clients, looking back over the previous 12-month period (2025). The data came from the clients' ATS platforms and comprised candidate information from more than 60,000 applications. This gave us our baseline data.

We defined our key metrics:

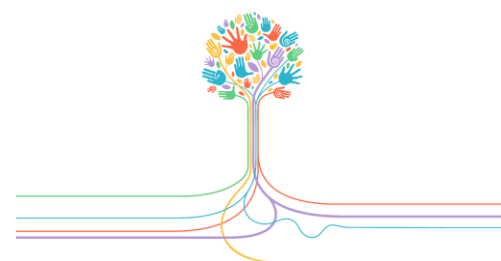
- Percentage of applicants sourced via the talent pool
- Comparison of success of talent pool engagement vs traditional job alerts
- Quality – how do candidates sourced via talent pool engagement compare to new applicants

Then we studied the data in the first four months of the client deployments.

Results

The results were every bit as good as we'd hoped:

- Application volumes from talent pool engagement increased by an average of 300% compared with the 12 months prior to deployment
- Where clients were simply relying on job alerts from their ATS the increase was 500%. Even when the clients had previously used a conventional CRM, responses were still doubled
- Alongside increased volumes, talent pool engagement also improved quality; candidates sourced via talent pool activity were twice as likely to be hired as new applicants



- By saving on marketing costs and “making the most of what you already have” the average *directly attributable* cost savings in the first four months were £132,000 (or £400,000 annualised).

One additional stat really blew us away, though.

Overall, our clients were filling 30% of all roles via talent pool engagement after just four months using the platform.

Yep: 30% of all roles.

Think about that in the context of stretched TA teams. That dusty old filing cabinet, full of data, can be suddenly transformed into an active tool that, without any effort from your recruiters, makes your ATS effectively another member of your sourcing team, not just a system of record. That frees up your team to focus on the things that really matter, while also cutting your external advertising spend.

Is that 30% figure a fluke? No. Naturally it depends on the client, what they do and the types of roles they recruit for, but in our experience this is the kind of impact that active talent pool engagement can have across the board. And we haven’t even mentioned automating the referral and alumni channels and the benefits that can bring...

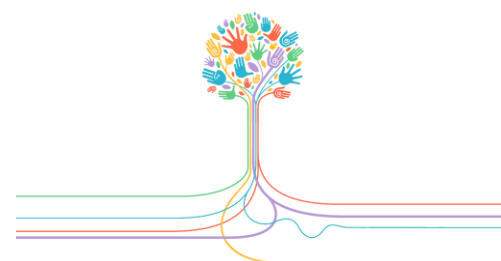
Why does talent pool engagement work?

That’s a great question, but fundamentally it’s simple.

“We’re all drowning in notifications”⁶

There are a lot of statistics out there about how many messages the average person gets every day but, with people being addicted to their phones and still managing their work in-boxes, it’s certainly accurate to say that we receive literally hundreds (the article referenced here suggests

⁶ <https://neilpatel.com/marketing-stats/messages-per-day-by-platform/>



around 220 across email, push notifications, WhatsApp, Slack and LinkedIn – well over 1,000 in a working week).

How many of those actually engage us?

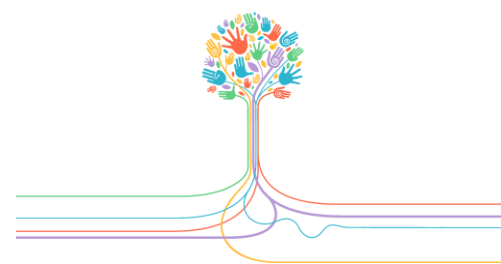
Well, speaking from our own experience, not many. The key in talent pool engagement is that whatever is communicated to the candidates must have three key attributes in order to be successful:

- 1) **Relevance** – if I have applied for a project management role and get sent a job alert for a customer services role, I will be far less likely to ever read another notification from that employer again
- 2) **Value** – do I get something from the message? Or am I left with the sense that it is just a generic push notification to a bunch of random people
- 3) **Interactivity** – can I easily and quickly respond? Can I take control of my profile and my relationship with the business?

In addition, a critical element of the engagement process is continually working to understand the circumstances of each candidate. This is why job alerts alone tend not to bear the richest of fruit – if the candidate isn't looking at that moment, or the jobs being publicised don't align with the skills, experience and aspirations of that candidate (remember: they may have a very different skillset even only a year or so after they originally applied to you), then the alerts won't land and the recruiters will have more "evidence" that the approach doesn't work.

This is a challenge with the traditional CRM approach, which is often driven by marketing principles, rather than the Hollaroo approach which puts the control in the hands of the candidate: what they see, what is promoted to them, when they receive the notifications and how they can ensure that their details accurately reflect at all times their ever-evolving skills, experiences and needs.

This is something we have worked on extensively at Hollaroo; the tool itself requests regular feedback from the candidates, sourcing updated details, skills and resumés to ensure that, when the time is right, they only receive communications and job alerts that are relevant to them. To put it in a nutshell, as long as we know what skills the candidate has, what type of role they are looking for and whether or not they are looking to move imminently, we have everything we need.



Naturally, we can't do anything like this without a robust ATS in the mix, but deep integrations with partners such as Pinpoint make it possible to create outputs that result in huge efficiencies for your teams while also helping to enhance your employer brand through genuine, relevant, targeted engagement with all your candidates. Oh, and our tool guarantees no ghosting too...

The future of talent pools

What does the future hold for TA and talent pools? Well, frankly this stuff *is* the future. The eternal tension in TA teams between hard-to-fill roles where talent shortages abound and more "generic" roles where applications can be measured in the hundreds or even thousands⁷ is not going to change any time soon. That tension necessitates an intelligent approach to sourcing and a much more holistic approach to engagement and employer brand.

It requires us to look at technology, not as a panacea, but as a suite of tools (I can't bring myself to write "ecosystem"...) that address certain talent challenges. The ATS sits at the core, but as hard-pressed TA teams battle with a deluge of applications for some roles and crickets on others, leveraging the gold that sits, untapped, in your talent communities is key.

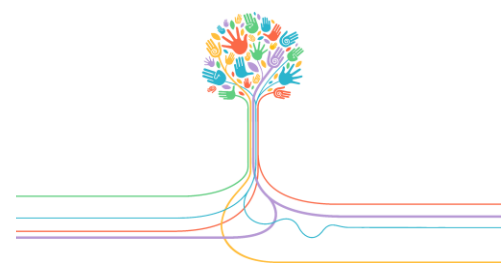
It takes moments on Google to find literally thousands of stories of candidates expressing frustration at the application process and their experiences at the hands of recruiter-centric processes. Our approach, and our advice for addressing this, is to give your candidates agency.

Here's how:

- **Don't see the candidate journey as linear**

Today, it may start with an application or just an expression of interest (signing up to your talent community) and end in a rejection or just quietly gathering dust in the filing cabinet. But in the future, it should be seen as a cycle involving peaks of engagement (including applying, being employed by you, re-applying and even, in the case of alumni, returning)

⁷ https://www.linkedin.com/posts/joshua-mclarty_i-clicked-on-a-job-posting-that-linkedin-share-7379472674747576320-A0PF/



and periods where, far from being “dormant”, there are opportunities to engage, add value, update resums and so on.

- **Integrate engagement tools into this life-cycle**

Your teams can't manage relationships with thousands of candidates – it's just not feasible. But, as we've shown, integrating tools like Hollaroo into your ATS enables automated engagement, built on candidate agency, that mean your database is continuously updating itself.

- **Focus on the three main rules of candidate engagement**

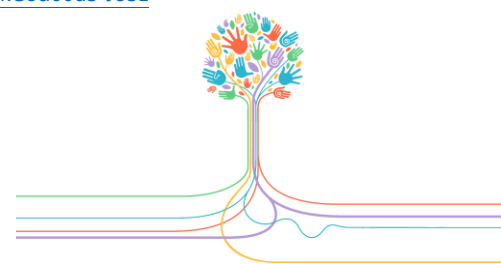
Remember when we talked about Relevance, Value and Interactivity above? Each is critical to candidate engagement and enables you to much more easily devolve the role of maintaining the database to the people who have the most to gain from it: the candidates.

Final thoughts

There is no magic bullet for the challenges facing TA teams today. AI has potential of course, but the rapidly changing legislative landscape⁸ means that some of the more lurid claims from the AI industry have already had cold water poured on them. And that means that most TA teams are – rightly – taking a more cautious approach to the adoption of AI, than they were even a year or so ago. And the fact is that many of the tools that can genuinely help make the recruitment process more efficient for TA teams, and more engaging for candidates, exist today.

We kicked off this paper by talking about change in TA. The fact is that the biggest driver of change in TA today is real-terms shrinkage of budgets, the need to do more with less and generally increasing workloads. This is why AI has struck a chord; it promises to solve these problems.

⁸ https://www.linkedin.com/posts/mredstone_this-week-the-uks-information-commissioners-activity-7445372160333762561--BgT?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAACOYIEBP2LjDJg0p-dE9mkG8d66uS-J8SE



“As more employers integrated AI into recruiting, it soon became clear that it wasn’t the ‘quick fix’ C-suites had hoped for”⁹

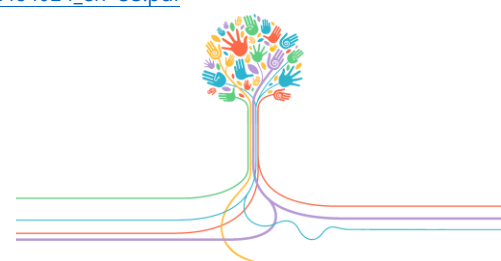
But the fact is that AI’s current biggest impact is efficiency. As Kornferry’s 2025 Talent Acquisition Trends Report notes, *“Many companies are already using generative AI to handle recruiting tasks like job postings, interview scheduling, and candidate sourcing. But as leaders have found, today’s AI isn’t capable of managing high-level TA strategy needs, such as identifying talent gaps and spotting potential”*.

It is these efficiency gains that are critical right now. What we have proved with our research is that there are ways to really drive efficiency that aren’t simply administrative. In fact, they are valuable for both TA teams and candidates. The benefits of developing genuine, long-term relationships with candidates through intelligent talent community engagement are clear:

- Reduce spend on advertising
- Reduce your team’s workload
- Provide a better candidate experience
- Enhance your employer brand

Surely this is the kind of change in TA that we can all get behind.

⁹ https://d3bql97l1ytoxn.cloudfront.net/app_resources/483473/documentation/1463655_1732812484024_en-US.pdf





There's so much more to Hollaroo

Hollaroo provides Talent Engagement Platforms to forward thinking businesses. We're helping to improve the candidate experience, deliver better quality outcomes and measurable savings and efficiencies.

We're a layer that wraps around your people and systems across every stage of the candidate journey. From initial interest, selection, onboarding, internal mobility and alumni engagement, we're proud to transform relationships and deliver value at every stage.

If you'd like to discover how our customers typically source 25-35% of all their hires via the Hollaroo platform, please get in touch.

Take the next steps

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