



Rise of Talent Operations

How talent executives are focusing on operational success
to drive transformation

As a technology provider that specializes in talent, we are invested in seeing the whole talent acquisition industry grow. We work with both practitioners and partners in the space to understand where this talent function is headed, and how it can provide the most value to all stakeholders, from business leaders to candidate communities. We discuss new trends with analysts, we ask executives about their current priorities, and we collaborate with recruiting professionals of all stripes to help them fulfill the potential for impact that comes with their role. The Rise of Talent Operations is a direct result of these explorations.

We observed how some of the world's most competitive talent organizations changed their internal structure in the last few years to be able to scale, unlock new markets, and consistently deliver the absolute best candidates to their organization. We interviewed Talent Acquisition professionals as well as Talent Operations leaders over the past year, and collated their collective wisdom to develop this resource. The time and efforts of these individuals help us all to move forward as an industry, and we are grateful to them.

Eileen Kovalsky, Global Head, Talent Acquisition Operations at Mondelēz International

Nikki Solsona Cochran, Operations Lead at Humans Doing

Michael Newman, Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition Operations at Twilio

Ted Kleber, Manager of Talent Acquisition Operations at Twilio

Lee Andrews, Director, Talent Acquisition - EMEA & APJC at IBM

Kevin Blair, Vice President, Global Talent Acquisition at Celonis

Stefan Premdas, Head of Talent Acquisition Operations at Postmates

And many other professionals who participated in Beamery research around the talent operations function.



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Starting the talent operations conversation

Recruiting as a cost center is a thing of the past in high-performing organizations.

Talent teams are aware of the expectation they must meet in providing the business with a competitive edge. This change has been in the making for a decade, but has now hit its inflection point.

Attracting and retaining top talent, as well as nurturing the next generation of leaders, were at the top of internal issues that concerned CEOs for two consecutive years¹; the challenges brought on by the recent pandemic and the ensuing global layoffs² added another layer of pressure on talent organizations to reinvent themselves, and, in a way, professionalize.

Sales and marketing organizations went through the same changes when the larger part of the customer journey shifted online. In the space of a few years, these functions became far more specialized in their roles, and started separating core marketing and sales functions from enablement activities. They saw that scaling programs or optimizing resources, for example, required a different skill set from that of segmenting markets or designing sales pitches. Talent teams are going through the exact same shift right now.

Today's top-performing talent teams are starting to look like their sales and marketing counterparts. They aim to report on historical metrics related to cost and performance, but also on future-facing metrics, such as coverage or propensity to hire. They are becoming far more specialized, and have started to differentiate between core recruiting, branding, sourcing, executive hiring, and enablement or support activities. They want to follow the rest of the business in large scale digitization initiatives. And they are coming to the realization that they need proper talent operations functions to spearhead all these efforts.

Successful talent transformation requires a team of professionals at the intersection of recruiting, technology, data, and project management. Right now, with businesses coming to the point where talent might be their biggest constraint, it is imperative for TA leaders to make clear-cut decisions around how they will enable this transformation. It will not be enough to have different team members periodically dedicated some of their time to pick up a few projects on the side. To effect lasting and valuable change, a dedicated team of operators is needed, one with the right set of skills and independent goals and incentives.

"Acknowledging the importance of talent is easy. Transforming a company into a talent-first organization is hard."

**R. Charan, D. Barton,
D. Carey**
in Talent Wins

¹Conference Board, C-Suite Challenge 2019 survey, accessed July 2020 <https://www.slideshare.net/meeconstitute/csuite-challenge-2019-the-future-ready-organization>

²CNBC, "Unemployment is falling. But it may be short-lived: 'There's no cause for celebration'", published July 2nd, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/02/the-unemployment-rate-is-falling-heres-why-the-outlook-remains-grim.html#:~:text=President%20Donald%20Trump%20speaks%20to,unemployment%20rate%20fell%20to%2011.1%25.&text=The%20U.S.%20unemployment%20rate%20is,numbers%20of%20jobs%20in%20June.>



OPERATIONS IN THE MODERN TALENT TEAM

For talent teams who are either starting this function from scratch, or formalizing it in its own team for the first time, it's important to take the time to define an appropriate scope. Every talent organization has its own expectations of the operations team, and should ask itself the following questions before creating new roles and defining new agendas.

DRIVING IMPACT

- What is the purpose of Talent Operations and what is its intrinsic value to a TA team?
- What business impact can Talent Operations bring to TA and the larger organization?



SCOPE AND SKILLSET

- What considerations should be taken when building an operations team? What will the initial and longer-term scope of the function be and how will that affect the skills needed in the long term?
- What key skills and competencies are needed to build a successful operations team?



ENABLING SUCCESS

- What change management needs to occur when introducing a newly developed operations function to the TA organization?
- What important messaging and expectations need to be set and by whom?



The rise of a new talent function

A LEVEL-SETTING DEFINITION

Operations as a business function has its roots in manufacturing, and so there is a connotation of streamlining resources and optimizing output associated to it, but that is a traditional—and limited—outlook. In modern teams, the talent operations function goes beyond cost saving or resource optimization. Its real impact comes from making new things possible for the talent team: identifying growth opportunities, finding actionable insights in data, or changing planning to become future-facing as opposed to historical, for example.

Talent Operations is the function, team members, and processes responsible for enabling the overall talent organization to work more effectively, to execute locally and at scale, and to create new value by incorporating more modern practices, deploying more innovative technologies and delivering more consistent outcomes.



WHAT DOES THE TALENT OPERATIONS FUNCTION BRING TO THE BUSINESS?

For the hiring organization: Driving Execution

Designing a bold strategy that has the potential to solve a team's challenges is one thing—bridging the gap from strategy to execution is another. Business leaders know the impact that bad execution can have on the bottom line; teams deliver on average only 63% of the projected financial gains³ of their strategies, most of the time because the execution didn't deliver on the promise of those plans.

Talent leaders are faced with the same challenge. They have to bring to life their talent initiatives, such as implementing new ways of measuring success, optimizing resource utilization in the talent team, or bringing transparency to various aspects of recruiting. The common thread between successful initiatives like these is a willingness to give execution the attention it is due.

Take the common example of enabling cross-functional reporting. Say, for instance, that the engineering department would like to optimize the time that managers spend on hiring to make sure it is used effectively. To help with that, the talent team would need at the very least to keep records of each hiring manager in their talent funnel, to detail their touchpoints in the recruiting process, and to link those touchpoints and activities to recruiting results, such as conversions, event attendance, or employer brand recognition. These pieces of information, if they exist, might live in different systems and in different formats, and need cleaning, deduplication, matching, or other forms of data wrangling. If the data does not exist, then the project lead would have to suggest acceptable proxies, or cobble together a quick way to collect this information.

³M. Mankins, R. Steele, Turning Great Strategy into Great Performance, HBR, accessed July 2020, <https://hbr.org/2005/07/turning-great-strategy-into-great-performance>

This is only a small example; many talent teams are faced with much more complex projects mandated by broader business initiatives, for which an otherwise good recruiter is not prepared. Talent initiatives are informed by imperatives inside and outside of the talent organization, and recruiters or talent coordinators do not always have the right team structure or skills in place to implement these initiatives. This can go from project management, to data analysis, to technical expertise with talent systems.

The talent operations function makes the successful deployment of these initiatives not only possible, but systematic, because this function has a clear grasp of the tools, information, and processes that the team—and the broader business—has to work with.

4 AREAS OF IMPACT ON THE TALENT TEAM'S ABILITY TO EXECUTE

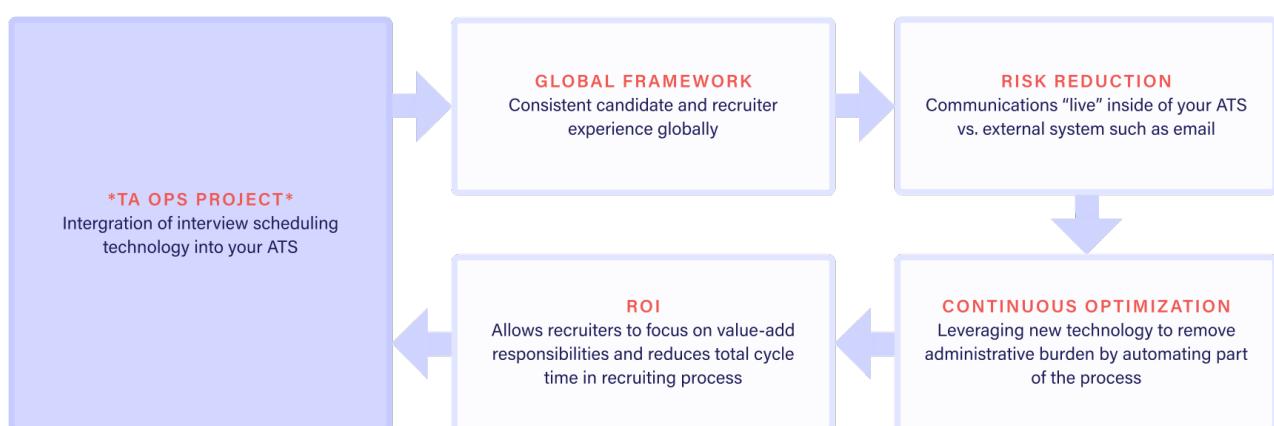


FOR INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR: POWERING ENABLEMENT

One of the most valuable things that a talent operations team can do for the business is ensure that recruiters spend most of their time leveraging their specific expertise, and doing high-value work, instead of putting time into tasks for which they are not best suited. In other words, operations specialists enable individual contributors in the talent team to be more efficient with their time and more impactful.

An example of this impact is identifying and improving pieces of the recruiting process that are slow, inefficient, or a bottlenecks to other operations, such as repeated admin or coordination tasks that could be automated. Every potential improvement for recruiters can be considered by the operations team to ensure it has a positive impact on the business. This means exploring where it falls in the context of a global talent team and whether it can be applied at scale, as well as thoroughly understanding the risks and rewards associated with it.

Below is an example of how such a project might go.



RECRUITER ENABLMENT & MEASURING SUCCESS

The result is a talent team that feels empowered to do its best work. Indirectly, this means that TA leaders are also able to be there for their teams in more effective ways. They have more visibility on the various plans of action and initiatives being deployed, and are therefore able to communicate those to their recruiters. They are also able to ensure that individual contributors have the tools they need for their specific roles, and do not feel overwhelmed by tasks that can be automated, offloaded to someone able to do them better, or simplified. And finally, with clearer reporting and metrics, recruiters are aware at all times of how they are doing against expected norms and KPIs.

What does good look like?

Talent Operations isn't...

- **Reactive problem solving.**

A strong temptation for any TA leaders is to make their new talent operations team the “fix it” people. The operations specialists might be able to step in to address a previously unnoticed compliance issue, or urgently help set up an event page, but they should not be expected to devote most of their time to being reactive. In such circumstances, the operations team does not have the focus to properly plan and launch new initiatives that create value for the people organization.

Talent Operations is...

- A value-creating center for the talent team.
- An enabler of the core recruiting activities.
- A strategic partner that offers insights into past performance and ideas for next steps and growth opportunities to talent leadershiring? What roles can be better served by being brought in house, and which ones should be outsourced?

“Talent Acquisition Operations is a strategic partner that enables Talent Acquisition to deliver top talent to their organization in a unified and consistent approach across the organization.”

Eileen Kovalsky,
Global Head of Talent Acquisition Operations
at Avanade



BUILDING A TALENT OPERATIONS TEAM

The best place to start for talent teams that are building an operations function for the first time is to define a clear scope of action. No matter what initial challenge or event triggered this initiative, the new operations function should be built with an eye to what it can and should do beyond that initial mandate.

What challenges are you initially looking to solve now, in 6 months, in a year or two? Where is the business going, and how will the talent team need to support it? These initial considerations will help you define 3 aspects of the new function

- Scope and expectations
- Skills and competencies
- Governance and change management

Scope of the talent operations team

Talent operations can theoretically expand its scope to support the team on anything that is not a direct recruiting activity, such as making vetting decisions or assessing candidates. In reality, however, most organizations have a limited budget to build out their first operational team, and cannot stretch themselves too thin off the bat. Just like many other parts of business, the talent acquisition leader—or the executive into which the operations team will report—will have to start small with a focused business case, then scale up.

This “pilot” operations project should identify an area of talent operations that has clearly measurable value to the business. The areas of focus suggested below can all be good candidates for this starting project, depending on the company. Once this starting point has been established, the owner of the project will need to clearly communicate success criteria as well as the context in which the pilot project is undertaken.



Skills and competencies needed for talent operations

Many talent operations professionals view their ability to juggle multiple priorities as central to their role, more so than their analytical skills or familiarity with the tools of their trade. To push the agenda of the talent operations team, they need to excel at building relationships with multiple stakeholders at various levels in an organization, and at influencing them to change their behavior.

The ability to skillfully navigate tension and conflict is also a useful attribute in this role, as talent operations will often be called on to challenge the status quo and poke holes in assumptions. A familiarity with how the talent organization works, and what challenges it faces, will be helpful as well.

 ANALYTICAL THINKING

 CREATIVE, OUT SIDE OF THE BOX

 RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

 UNDERSTANDING OF TA ORG

 PROJECT MANAGEMENT

 OTHER TECHNICAL SKILLS

How talent operations relates to the business

The success of a newly created talent operations team relies heavily on the decisions made about how it will relate to the rest of the business. The following questions should all be covered before the team is created:

- Which parts of the people team have objectives that most align with the talent operations team? What teams have conflicting incentives with the talent operations team, and will the tension create better outcomes for the business, or worse ones?
- How will the talent operations team be evaluated? Who is qualified to assess their progress and impact? How will the team maintain accountability?
- How will the talent operations team be integrated with the rest of the talent organization to ensure no us-vs-them culture?
- What expectations will be communicated with the wider business?

Some of these questions will not have clear answers at the start, or the answers will change as the pilot project reveals what works and what doesn't. Either way, they will still be useful to address before launching the new team.

THE IMPACT OF TALENT OPERATIONS

What are some projects that a talent operations team can take on?

During a time where business is contracting, they can focus on supporting the following projects:

- Employer branding: research projects to identify areas of improvement for the employer brand
- Candidate personas: going over historical hiring patterns or conducting new research to update its candidate personas, and map those out to talent marketing campaigns
- Data management: identifying the best sources for candidate data, or providing the tools and training necessary to analyze it

During times where business is more brisk and the talent team can fund larger programs, **internal mobility** is a good candidate⁴ as well. The high-pressure conditions of the current talent market have put even more emphasis on the importance of offering clear growth paths to existing employees and facilitating internal hiring. The talent operations team can diagnose the current state of internal mobility programs, and identify opportunities to improve them, or create one from scratch if they do not already exist.

Reskilling and upskilling the current talent team is another area that can have immediate returns for the business. For example, a talent operations specialist can support the **shift to digital** by documenting relevant use cases for online recruiting programs, helping structure new project teams, and supporting training. They can also set up a self-service system to enable recruiters to easily build digital assets, from job advertisements, to event pages, to online forms.

There are different ways in which an operations team can impact the talent organization:

- Continuous process improvement and iterative innovation
- Optimized systems and integrated technologies
- Proactive planning, dynamic resource management
- Global compliance
- Operational agility

⁴Internal Mobility: Why it Fails and How to Fix it, <https://beamery.com/blog/internal-mobility>

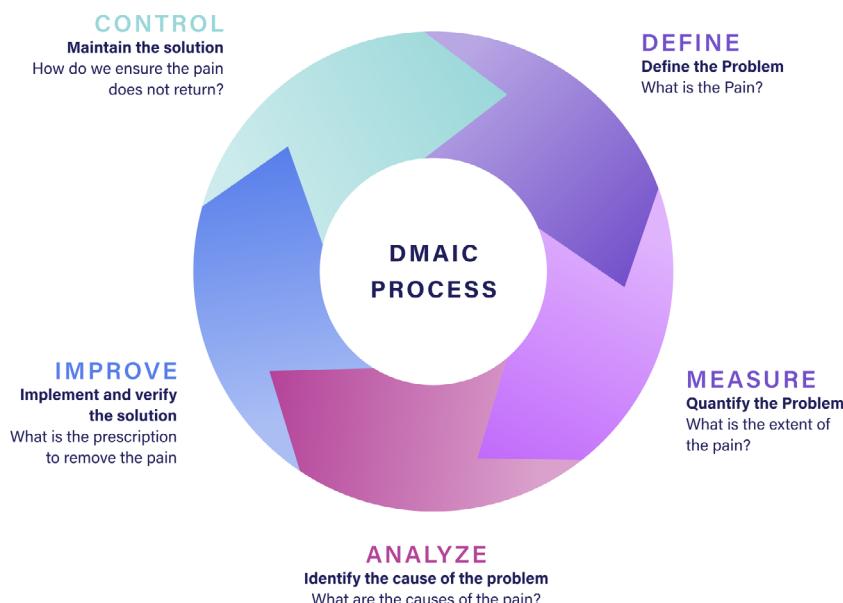
A deep dive into continuous improvement

The two following frameworks are examples of what a Recruiting Operations specialist might need to do to investigate an issue and recommend a course of action for the talent team.

Lean 6σ and DMAIC

The DMAIC process is one of the methodologies of 6σ, which is a widely popular set of strategies and tools originally designed to reduce defects in manufacturing. In the last century, 6σ has been expanded by operations professionals outside of manufacturing to identify and improve processes in other business functions as well.

Put simply, DMAIC is a cycle used to investigate an issue in a methodical manner. It goes like this:



Take the example of an internship or mentoring program that has what the team considers to have abnormally high attrition. By going through the DMAIC process, the Recruiting Operations specialist confirms that those numbers have dropped, and that there are two causes for that drop: the perceived program value, and the lack of hiring managers' buy-in.

However, they also identify that, while their findings improved pipeline and retention due to better promotion and more support, they didn't solve for a new finding, which is the low gender diversity in the program's funnel. As a result, they go through a new cycle, which brings even more improvement to the team's operations.

5 Whys and Root Cause Analysis

The 5 whys analysis is not valuable because of any inherent complexity. It is exactly as straightforward as its name indicates: the operations professional; essentially asks “why” 5 times, or as many times as is needed to hit a wall and start repeating answers.

This tool is valuable because it's almost never used—recruiters are busy with their day job and don't have the time or the resources to go beyond the apparent cause of a problem. It takes someone whose full-time job is to investigate the deeper causes of any challenge to get to the bottom of some issues.

Why are some travel expenses reimbursed late?

Because Accounting approves them late

Why does Accounting approve them late?

Because they approve candidate expenses in batches

Why do they approve them in batches?

Because they receive various expenses for the same candidate from different recruiting coordinators, and for their records prefer to reimburse each candidate once.

Why do they receive them from different coordinators?

Because sometimes multiple coordinators work with the same candidate.

Why do multiple coordinators sometimes work on the same candidate?

Because they don't all know how to book every type of travel or accommodations for candidates, or don't have the right permission levels, and sometimes loop each other in.



EXAMPLE OF PROJECTS FOR TALENT OPERATIONS TEAMS

The list below is far from exhaustive, but it serves to illustrate the breadth of initiatives that can be piloted by talent operations teams.

- Designing and delivering experience surveys to hiring managers, candidates, and new hires
- Vetting and implementing new tools, from pre-hire assessment, to on-demand interview, automated scheduling, AI, contact validation, and sourcing
- Facilitating global buying contracts instead of leaving local teams to negotiate multiple individual regional contracts
- Architecting the right resourcing solution for the business, between full desk sourcer or recruiter and an RPO hybrid
- Develop a recruitment marketing function: assist the team in designing an EVP, launching employer rebrand on relevant career sites, leverage drip campaigns in a CRM, and enabling new specialized recruiters to take on this new function with minimal assistance from the talent operations team moving forward
- Data and Reporting: create recruiter scorecards and leadership dashboards, and deliver operational QBRs back to the business

Beyond this type of projects, the talent operations team creates value simply by interfacing with operational leads from other functions, or with reporting, data analytics, or digital transformation leads. It provides a single point of contact to HR or business operations, for instance, and enables alignment and collaboration with them. This in turn raises the profile of Talent Acquisition within the business, and improves its credibility with senior stakeholders.

How to measure success in the new talent team

For talent teams going through this process of “operationalization”, the old recruiting metrics are limited, and do not capture the full extent of the impact that this transformation can have. This is doubly important for a new function that not only has to prove its value to the rest of the business, but also has to influence stakeholders to change their behaviour based on its recommendations.

We encountered five categories of these new recruiting metrics in our conversations with talent operations professionals across industries. Keep in mind that the following is not an exhaustive list of all metrics that a modern talent team should have, but rather suggestions of new ways of measuring the activities of talent teams that add depth and richness to better reflect the impact they have on the company.

“In situations where you have not yet had the chance to earn trust and to build your credibility, the data doesn’t lie. If a talent operations person can tell an accurate and honest story with data, and lead a stakeholder to connecting the dots, it helps tremendously.”

Nikki Cochran,
Operations Lead at
Humans Doing



CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

These are metrics that reflect the quality and efficiency of the experience that candidates get during the recruiting process. On top of the usual quality and hit rate metrics, they look at the breadth and scope of the candidate experience. These metrics must reflect how well the recruiting team partners with its stakeholder to source active and passive candidates both internally and externally, convert them, or facilitate their onboarding before they are handed over.

- **Net Promoter Score (NPS)**
How likely are candidates to refer the company to others?
- **Referrals**
How many candidates were referred to the company by
 - Employees?
 - Customers?
 - Partners?
- **Internal Candidates**
How efficient are the internal mobility programs at helping fill roles, and how many candidates are internal?
- **Passive Candidates**
What percentage of candidates is passive at the start of the experience?
- **New Hire Onboarding**
How do new hires rate their experience with the company before Day 1?

RECRUITER EXPERIENCE

Recruiters are a direct stakeholder of the talent team, their internal customers, in a way, and so a successful operations team is accountable for the experience of recruiters in its organization.

In modern talent teams, the roles of recruiters are more specialized, and clearly defined in scope, ways of working, and goals. This is necessary to enable the team to scale and use resources efficiently. For that reason, many of the metrics used to measure the recruiter experience look at their role descriptions, their success criteria, or the balance of their various tasks. These metrics come on top of the usual ones, such as satisfaction with the tool stack or communication with hiring managers.

- **New definition of role and success criteria**
 - Complexity of requisitions: How many requisitions coming in are for complex hires, and how many are for simpler, or less business critical ones?
 - Balance of recruiters' list of tasks and hires: How are various team members using their time? What is each one of them spending most of their time on?
 - Shortlist/hire ratio: Are certain teams more efficient than others at finding the right fits? What learnings can be obtained from them and redistributed to the rest of the team?
- **Team oriented goals**
What is the balance between individual and team KPIs for each team, no matter their roles?
- **Solution stack**
How much adoption does each tool have? How much impact is it having on the recruiters' day-to-day activities?



BUSINESS IMPACT

Traditional recruiter productivity metrics have very little correlation with the impact that a talent team can have on the bottom line. With an operations team in place, talent leaders can drill deeper, and link their work back to commercial activities, revenue, profitability, competitiveness, go-to-market speed, and many other measures of the business performance of a company.

- **Productivity metrics viewed through a new lens:**
 - **Time to fill vs. Aging requisitions**
How long do requisitions sit in the pipeline before they are deemed out of date and in need of renewal? How do recruiters collaborate with hiring managers to identify and rework them? How does that affect time-to-fill metrics?
 - **Diversity in pipeline**
Can the team measure the diversity of its pipeline at every stage and identify where diverse candidates leak out? Is the pipeline of candidates equally diverse in all types of roles? How clearly are diversity goals articulated to the team, and do they align with recruiter incentives and KPIs?
 - **Hiring Manager satisfaction**
Are hiring managers satisfied with their working relationship with recruiters, as well as with results achieved?
- **Role value is a driver of business impact:**
 - **Business Value**
What is the Employee Lifetime Value of each role? Are they customer-facing roles? Revenue-generating roles? Are they instrumental in ensuring the success of important business initiatives?
 - **Market Scarcity/Difficulty to Hire**
How hard is it to find candidates for a role? What is the likelihood that an offer from the company will be accepted?



WASTAGE AND LATENCY

Highly data-driven talent operations teams address wastage and latency metrics as separate from generic productivity metrics, so they can recommend more targeted action plans to optimize the overall use of resources of the talent organization. These metrics also offer a valuable lens through which the team can quantify savings for the business.

- **Resourcing & Capacity Management**
What is the utilization of the global workforce? How can spare capacity be used?
- **New types of Sourcing**
How are sourcing resources distributed among recruiters? Is it necessary to have 1-to-1 sourcer-recruiter partnerships or can sourcers be actively moved depending on the complexity or difficulty of the roles that recruiters are addressing?
- **Cancelled Requisitions**
What percentage of requisitions never come to fruition, never get final approval, and therefore take up proactive recruiting resources that could have been used elsewhere?
- **Digital Strategy**
How much of the employer branding, engagement, or interviewing activities can be successfully shifted to digital for a wider reach and lower budgets?
- **Applicant Strategy SOPs and Thrash**
How passive and generalized is the standard operating procedure for application posting and distribution? Can recruiters actively decide to take fewer applications for roles that historically necessitate lower numbers for a good fit? What other areas of the process create thrash for recruiters?



WAYS OF WORKING

This category of metrics might be the one that varies the most from one company to another. It groups the metrics that reflect how the talent team approaches its hiring challenges, and how well it identifies and addresses blockers.

- **Adoption of Systems**

What is the penetration rate of the talent tool stack and the different support processes put in place by the talent operations team?

- **Active Communities vs. Static Databases**

Is the candidate pipeline being engaged with and nurtured? Or is it a passive repository of data that might be getting stale?

- **Agile Methodologies**

Does the talent organization use agile methodologies in managing its activities? Does it work in sprint? Is it proficient at prioritization, both at the group and at the individual levels?

- **Agency Utilization**

How much does the talent team rely on agencies for hiring? What roles can be better served by being brought in house, and which ones should be outsourced?

- **Vendor Partnership**

Does the talent team leverage its vendors to find new strategies, new ways of working, and best practices? Do vendors provide useful market or industry insights?

Conclusion: What's next for talent teams?

Having a talent operations team in place marks the start of a deep change for the talent organization. Among other things, it means that the recruiting function will be equipped with the competencies necessary to actually use the vast amounts of data available to it—and not just candidate data. It will be able to build a centralized operational machine that interfaces both with the People organization and with the rest of the business.

This means multiple agile local teams served by a global support functions to ensure the best of both worlds, a talent tech stack that revolves around one talent data platform and serves up-to-date, intelligent insights to the whole business, and new possibilities in terms of automation, artificial intelligence, and machine-assisted decision making.

The role of talent operations teams will only get more complex as businesses recognize the need to treat talent acquisition like customer acquisition. Keeping the talent attraction machine competitive will require a step up in operational excellence, as a lot of the value delivered by the talent organization will come not only from human touchpoints and human judgement, but also from support teams setting up processes, enabling recruiters, suggesting more efficient workflows, and creating new value for the business.

The next step for People organizations is to build teams and processes that can not only analyze data, but continuously learn how to do it better, and suggest next steps even without direction from above. That can only come through sophisticated talent organizations who are comfortable implementing and running sophisticated talent operating systems and data platforms. For those reasons, the rise and growth of professional talent operations functions can only accelerate.



About Beamery

Beamery's Talent Operating System allows enterprises to attract, engage, and retain top talent, and manage the entire talent journey through one unified platform. Beamery's mission is to help the world's best companies acquire their greatest assets: their people. Founded in 2014, Beamery is trusted by the world's most innovative global organizations to treat their candidates like customers. Beamery has offices in London, Austin, and San Francisco.

For more information, visit the [Beamery website](#), follow [@BeameryHQ](#) on Twitter, or email us at info@beamery.com.

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