

# Managing Talent With the Right Technology

By Debbie McKay, Kenexa

**G**lobally, we are facing economic challenges of a lifetime—challenges that will potentially change the way that business is done. Companies of all sizes are being forced to downsize, restructure and in essence, “retrench” to survive the downturn. Programs that were considered keys to success just last year are being cut or reduced, just to save money.

Many organizations are reporting hiring freezes, but at the same time, a continued need to source and cultivate their talent pools for the future. There is no denying that the labor pool will continue to shrink as the Baby Boomer generation employees retire and there are fewer people to fill available positions, which is why organizations continue developing talent. As a result, many organizations are being asked to do the impossible—do more with less, manage the tsunami of applicants for the few available positions, cultivate existing talent and develop leaders, while at the same time keeping the pipeline and brand strong for the next uptick in the economy.

Although times may seem bleak, this is the opportunity to leverage, maximize and augment the talent management technology that is in place today. Many organizations are asking, “What is the best way to leverage the current talent management system in these challenging economic times, while improving efficiencies and still going after the top talent in the marketplace?”

In response to the challenge, we encourage the examination of five options to capitalize on technology and attain organizational talent management goals during these tricky times.

## Process

To leverage the current technology, organizations should be asking the following questions:

- What does the current recruitment process look like today?
- When was the last time we looked at this process (when the system was implemented?)
- What should the process look like based upon current structure and strategic goals?

With a slowdown in recruitment volume, now may be the perfect time to optimize your technology by re-engineering the current talent management processes and programs. Your primary focus should be on identifying the core processes and efficiencies across all functions that touch the recruitment and hiring process, and the features in the current technology that are either not being used or not being used to their full advantage. Specifically, look at the centralized versus decentralized recruitment process and revisit the original purpose of your talent management portals. Can the processes and portals be repurposed and streamlined? If the answer is yes, then begin the redesign now while your employees have available bandwidth.

## Tapping Into Current Workforce Talent

While revisiting the recruitment process is key to making the most of your talent management technology, it’s imperative to understand:

- How is your internal workforce performing today?
- Are you familiar with the skill sets of your top performers?
- Can these top performers be transitioned into other positions where they can add value rather than be cut?

One of the easiest and most cost effective candidate pools to recruit from is your existing employee population. During any reorganization, it makes good business sense to look at the talent within and “transplant” in areas of the business that are still growing or in need of productive talent. By tapping into existing talent, you can focus on people that are already proven performers and good fits with your corporate culture. Additionally, the cost associated with a typical learning curve of new employees is minimized, as your existing talent should already be familiar with the product/service lines, culture, organizational structure, procedures and overall expectations.

Reduced learning curves translate into minimal downtime, reduced investment cost and faster pace to productivity. A strong performance management system will help you identify strong internal talent, inventory skills and aid you in identifying where this talent would fit in other parts of the organization. When redeploying talent from within, it will not only add value to the overall corporate organization, but it will yield higher productivity through the goodwill efforts of repurposing current top performers.

Alumni candidate portals provide another route for tapping into internal talent when redeployment within is not possible. Such portals are gaining popularity as a way to stay engaged with exiting employees and gain easy access to them once business market conditions resume. Such portals are currently being used in organizations to tap into seasonal rehiring and “project hiring,” but they can also be used to engage strong performers who are eligible for rehire. Additionally, you can utilize system technology to communicate with alumni pools and keep them excited about returning. The goodwill associated with a positive exit can help sustain an active candidate pool as well as keep your brand and cultural strength in the marketplace high. Whether it is a pipefitter, healthcare professional, retail associate, recruiter or a marketing manager, an alumni gateway can be effective. Similar to tapping internal talent for immediate mobility opportunities, you should consider the benefits of networking with past employees. Alumni employees tend to engage faster, onboard and train quicker, and because they are proven cultural fits, result in a reduced hiring cost and quicker return to productivity time.

### External Candidate Surge

Be careful what you wish for. During economic booms, many of us have struggled to find enough qualified top candidates to interview or review. During economic downturns, the availability of talent—both passive and active—often soars. Such a boost in candidate availability can be great for companies in search of talent, but provides a challenge in how to screen through high

volumes of candidates to get to the best, most qualified people. The questions become:

- Where do you want your recruiting team and other resources in the process spending their time?
- How much time do you want them spending on the “bulk screening” of candidates?
- Would you prefer recruiters quickly screen through candidates to find and engage top performers?
- Now is the time to attract and hire that top talent that will augment the internal workforce, which will better position your organization in the future.

Screening a large volume of candidates can be done by front loading, or utilizing tools at the beginning of the process, such as:

- Pre-qualifying questions once a candidate applies for a position.
- Conducting job specific assessments to cull down the candidates to the “best few.”

Both methods leverage technology that is available today and is easily integrated with your current talent management system. For example, some of Kenexa’s leading customers have effectively utilized a set of pre-qualifying or minimum-qualifying questions as part of the online candidate application process. Using real-time scoring, those candidates who meet a certain score are presented immediately with an online assessment. If making the assessment cut, a candidate automatically moves forward in the process and the details are viewable in a recruitment technology system, such as Kenexa Recruiter® BrassRing. There are various options about what is configured and timing of assessments, but the results are clear. Through effective deployment of effective screening and assessment tools, organizations can more quickly and easily hone in on the top talent. And in a candidate rich marketplace, it all comes down to getting to the top talent quicker than your competitors.

### Onboarding

A strong onboarding process drives retention of top talent. According to The Wynhurst Group, new employees who went through a structured onboarding program were 58 percent more likely to be with the organization after three years. The process and time spent enculturating and engaging top talent during the onboarding process is just as important as attracting and hiring this talent. The ultimate goal is to build a stronger workforce, streamline the time to productivity and quickly engage a new employee into the culture, processes and overall organization.

In speaking with various organizations, we have found that many don’t have a standard, consistent onboarding process. For example, one business unit might have a manual system, while another

has one driven through email pushes. In essence, fragmented onboarding processes are common, and they have a direct impact on the new-hire experience. The goal is to enculture the new talent, while providing them the training and information to be productive the minute they walk through the door. Automating the administrative parts of the onboarding process allows every function that is involved in the process, such as HR, IT, Benefits, Facilities and Security, a mechanism to systematically execute its part of the system flawlessly. This will further ensure a new hire has a positive experience, diminish potential turnover and free up valuable internal resources.

Onboarding automation can be tailored to each organization's unique culture and process. This technology should be a tool to better engage and enculture new talent in the organization and drive long-term retention. Here are some of the onboarding tasks that companies have automated:

### Communications

Many organizations under-utilize creative ways to use the automated communications available within the Talent Management System. Increasing the types and frequency of all automated communications triggered through the TMS is another touch point to potential hires and their individual networks. A strategic communication plan to reach internal talent, potential external talent and "boomerangs" can enhance an organization's reputation and entice potential candidates. Communications can also be targeted to specific candidates or pools of candidates to keep them updated on opportunities within the organization.

Communications can range from a referral communication such as, "Do you know of anyone who might be good for this position?" to proactively distributing an article profiling the organization as a "best place to work." Such strategies will communicate a positive marketing message and keep your company and brand name top-of-mind for desired candidates. Some organizations use the technology not only for general employment communications, but to distribute product offerings and discounts to potential clients. By continually engaging and reaching target candidates, it keeps the pipeline fresh, builds loyalty, strengthens interest and keeps the pool of talent engaged.

During slow times, a proactive organization won't stop re-evaluating how to work better, smarter and faster to keep its talent pool alive and improve the utilization of its current

technology. Keep these options in mind as your organization is shifting and changing goals and direction:

- Review and, if needed, re-engineer the current recruitment process. What was put in place five years ago may not meet the needs of the current state.
- Look at the skill sets of existing internal employees to distinguish if talent can be moved around to meet immediate needs.
- Leverage technology to sort through the bulk screening of candidates via pre-qualifying questions, online applications or online assessments.
- Improve the onboarding process to enhance top talent engagement and retention, and free up the time of valuable internal resources.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate and be creative. Use the available online communication tools to keep current employees informed and potential candidates interested in the organization. ■

### About the Author

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Debbie McKay is currently a consultant with the talent management consulting team. She brings 20 years experience in the HR space that includes staffing/recruiting, RPO, Contingent Labor, Vendor Management and VMS/ATS technologies.

She has held a number of roles throughout her career that have spanned Implementation, Client Services, Account Development and Sales and has worked with large global firms in the pharmaceutical, healthcare, media/entertainment, insurance, financial services and retail industries.

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