

[Recruiting Vs. Talent Acquisition -- is there a difference??](#)

By Rolando Lopez

Ever since the McKinsey article on [The War for Talent](#), the concept of Talent Management has become a growing discipline in HR. Much like Sarbanes-Oxley's impact to the finance professional's marketability, Talent Management is the trendy equivalent for HR. Recruiters are also gearing up for alignment - new titles are emerging such as "talent acquisition specialists" or "human capital delivery experts". Unfortunately, recruiting roles are not evolving as quickly, and in some circles, it is merely a title-renaming exercise to keep up with the trend.

[Talent Acquisition - it's not just a fancy new title](#)

In my opinion, there is a significant difference between traditional recruiting and the emerging discipline of Talent Acquisition. Those realigning to this new function need to understand and adapt -- in terms of their strategies, processes and mindset. What do I believe are the high level differences? This article focuses on a few observations.

[Simple definitions: Talent vs. People](#)

For starters, Recruiting is a traditional area of specialization in Human Resources. As a *reactive, transactional* function, it is a commodity-based business of filling job openings with qualified **people**.

In contrast, Talent Acquisition is a *distinct element* of the Talent Management continuum. As a *proactive, strategic* function, it is the focus of **procuring talent as a raw material** for the organization's production of value. As such, it does not operate as a silo HR function, but in collaboration with other specialists from other functional areas within Talent Management.

[Five Comparisons](#)

Knowing the differences between the two disciplines is helpful in shaping the mindset of the evolving recruiter. I have attempted to compare the following 5 characteristics: measures, cost, candidate attraction, candidate assessment and utilization of technology.

1) Measuring Capability

The common measure for recruiting: *Speed and Volume*. Recruiters use "Time to Fill" and "Total number of hires" to demonstrate their capability and value with their hiring managers.

The common measure for Talent Acquisition: *Return on Investment*. Talent Acquisition specialists use measures such as "Time to Productivity" (e.g. the time it takes for a new hire to start contributing to the value chain) and "Volume of Talent Supply" (e.g. Number of existing employees in a targeted talent pool with the similar competencies/skills)

2) The cost factor

Most corporate organizations see recruiting as a cost centre. As such, recruiters justify their existence through cost savings and cost avoidance initiatives. At performance review time, for example, recruiters divulge their annual results in terms of savings gained by Agency Fees averted. Their scorecard has targeted goals toward lowering the overall "cost of hire", and their year-over-year goal for this measure is to show a declining trend.

In contrast, Talent Acquisition offers different angle on the cost factor. Their focus is analyzing *Opportunity Cost* -- of acquiring talent versus developing talent from within. Collaborating with their talent development counterparts, they are accountable for measures such as:

- Cost of acquiring outside talent vs. the cost of developing internal talent
- New revenue streams generated from talent acquired
- Revenue losses averted via output of new talent

3) Strategies for Attracting

Recruiting focuses on the process of *Candidate Sourcing* to identify and attract candidates. Recruiting experts are skilled at mining the Internet, using advanced search strings in their quest to google the “hard to find” candidates. They navigate skillfully through the saturated job-board market, maintain a strong employee referral program, and are quickly mastering the utilization of alternative sourcing providers such as AIRS, ZoomInfo and social networking technology.

Talent Acquisition specialists do all of this and more. They add an additional dimension to Sourcing strategy by not only managing sourcing channels but also maintaining an optimal balance of candidate “type”. These candidate types include: campus recruits, experienced hires, contractors, outsourced employees and offshore talent, to name a few. To ensure that they have the right mix of candidate types, they study workforce demographics and adapt to the labour pool’s evolving perceptions of career types and work status.

Another distinguishing factor is the Talent Acquisition specialist’s use of Employer Branding strategies and CRM tactics to identify and attract talent. Talent Acquisition specialists can articulate the Employer Value Proposition well with their talent prospects, and embed these principles into their marketing strategies.

4) Assessing the product

Recruiters are subject matter experts in candidate assessment. Their focus is on “Candidate Fit”, and the job description is the benchmark for assessing candidates. Using assessment techniques like Behavioural Interviewing, they are experts at creating a consistent approach at filtering out their candidate pipelines.

In comparison, talent acquisition specialists have evolved this subject matter expertise. In addition to the job description, they assess potential talent against the firm’s talent profile, which may include: competency, potential, performance, and ambition. Their assessment methodology is multi-dimensional – beyond Behavioural Interviewing, they possess other techniques in their assessment toolkit, such as competency simulations and tests, and Myers-Briggs type questionnaires. They recognize that different types of talent are diverse, and are nimble in their processes to develop the appropriate combination of assessment techniques to effectively develop their short lists.

5) Leveraging Technology

Technology has become a part of the recruiting function. As a baseline, most recruiting experts have executed a full scale RFP to choose their organization’s ATS. They have strategically created interfaces with their HRMS applications upstream, Job Aggregators midway, and Reporting Solutions downstream. Recruiters have embraced the power of their Applicant Tracking Systems throughout the entire recruiting workflow, saving time, money and building a healthy database of candidates in the process. The savviest of recruiters have found short cuts in functionality that saves them a few clicks, and some have even, unfortunately, found loopholes to manipulate reports.

In contrast, Talent Acquisition specialists are evolving their use of ATS technology. For example, some have enhanced their systems to include conceptual search technology, which uses logic more advanced than Boolean to identify top talent within their well-developed resume database. In addition, they are integrating their ATS with newly acquired Talent Management solutions that includes Competency Management, Performance Management and Career Management modules, to name a few. The savviest of Talent Acquisition specialists have also made their reports more sophisticated, providing more predictive modeling analysis. This makes them indispensable when it comes to identifying future corporate talent supply and talent gaps.

Final thoughts

This article isn't meant to create a negative spin to the Recruiting profession, nor does it imply that it is a declining discipline. Instead, it is to provoke thought and provide groundbreaking new alternatives to corporate recruiters who are looking for more.

My belief is that Talent Acquisition, as part of the Talent Management function, is a greenfield opportunity. Recruiters with the savvy to respond will experience a renaissance to their careers. The "How To's" of transitioning from Recruiter to Talent Acquisition expert requires additional thoughtful discussion - perhaps an appropriate sequel to this article can be spent on this topic.

As a concluding comment, a 'food for thought' to my recruiting colleagues is this: having read this article, recruiting professionals can pursue one of two directions:

- 1) Stay the course and strive to improve current practices, or
- 2) Engage in a new path and evolve into a new discipline.

What is your pursuit?