



Rethinking Recruitment: The Flex of Agile Thinking

By **Amelia Chan**, CPHR

“Agile” has been a bit of a buzz word in recruitment for a while—usually associated with breaking big tasks into smaller projects with assured feedback from stakeholders propelling greater success. While this holds true, there is an argument to be made that even greater agility is called for both personally and in terms of business process.

COMPANIES FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO SOURCE AND RECRUIT the right people is not new. However, top talent has never been more in demand across industries and at all levels. “Talent” isn’t just referencing specialized skills or depth of experience; it is also the raw material itself a.k.a. existing potentials and new hires.

Organizations need to recognize that their nurturing of the employment cycle must begin well before a candidate gets hired to get ahead of its competitors.

Breaking the Mould: Remaking a Mindset

Another factor that impacts modern recruitment is the “gig” economy and change in attitudes to the concept of work. The traditional mould of standardized jobs, work parameters and employer roles have evolved significantly in the last few decades. Flexible work arrangements and non-traditional work schedules have brought a very different set of expectations and requirements from both sides of the hiring desk.

Moreover, with a globally driven economy, the hiring desk itself has become virtual—with opportunity stemming no longer solely from the employer’s place of business, but anywhere and anytime a candidate’s interest is piqued. So while the tools evolve, so too must our mindsets keep pace with the flexible definition and attitudes in the modern workplace.

A New Norm for Approaching Resumes

Consider how out-of-sync our notions of top candidate profiles just might be in a world where economic change has redefined job security and employment terms. For example, with continued automation, fewer companies are building widgets in factories requiring predictable work schedules.

Edgier job postings are applying descriptors like agility, aptitude, and attitude over stability, experience and loyalty. Part-time jobs, short-term contracts and portfolio careers are increasingly common; the new norm paints a very different picture of talent on paper.

That said, the resume, while one-dimensional and the least revealing method of candidate screening, is still the most widely relied upon method of initial selection. This requires the hiring team to see beyond the less-than-perfect work history and probe deeper—early setbacks are often tremendous builders of resilience. As such, character-building experiences and career “hops” should be recognized for adaptability instead of as a flaw.

Sign of the Times: A Realistic Reflection

The greatest challenge facing organizations is, naturally, whatever it was that worked best for them previously—call it the proverbial “Plan A.” Unfortunately “A” is now likely to stand for antiquated and anachronistic, encouraging a change of mindset and exploration of plans B to Z. What is required in a nutshell is greater agility in the recruitment process and our organizations as a whole.

Traditional recruitment is reactive and slow to deploy which makes it out of step with the pace of business. The hiring demands of new business, organizational changes or even a resignation can overwhelm the internal hiring team, leaving hiring departments and existing staff frustrated by the lag time. Responsive hiring must move as fast as the speed of business and external labour market supply.

Agility for the Greater Good

The agile mindset¹ principles of positivity, curiosity, team, pragmatism and resilience are a possible antidote to recruiting frustrations. While this philosophy centres around “the mushy stuff about values and culture,”² it speaks to the mind shift required to work collaboratively for the greater good. This concept was originally created by software developers to help teams be more responsive to project unpredictability and to speed up processes; technical people who truly understood the importance of people in the equation.

Stressing individual accountability, quick feedback loops, and continuous fine-tuning, agile project management is customer-centric. In the case of recruitment, the customer is the internal hiring manager—and arguably the candidate/potential new hire. The recruiter’s short sprints are the checkpoints to validate they are on the right track with the hiring requirements before moving forward. Agility defines the feedback and control process for the stakeholders.

This approach to hiring requires more involvement earlier on in the process by the hiring manager—as all parties must be in agreement at each step rather than waiting until later stages when too many resources have been deployed to start over.

Take Aim at Agile Recruiting

Here are some ways to rethink the hiring process through the lenses of agile principles:

- **Individual accountability:** Everyone who has input into the hiring process owns their part. Just as a “can do” outlook is important for the candidate, this applies equally for the hiring stakeholders tasked with the activity. Every new hire must fit in on many levels, so the internal team must have this in mind every step of the way.
- **Transparency/ open communication:** Constant and ongoing communication between the recruiting and hiring

department keeps everyone updated, provides goal clarity and ensures “buy-in.” Any adjustments or disagreements can be managed faster and through teamwork and positive pragmatism.

- **Team orientation:** Everyone in the organization can be a recruiter or referral source. Tapping into current employees for their knowledge and expertise will help find more successful like-minded individuals. This is a powerful springboard for employee engagement which also contributes to branding. Taking a marketing approach to employer branding helps to launch networks and events which generate interest for filling company vacancies—enthusiasm is built-in when it comes freely from within.
- **Responsiveness:** Innovative recruiting strategy requires great and more timely involvement from hiring managers at the sourcing and engagement stage for forward-thinking outcomes. In a 24/7 world, responding quickly to interested candidates is not enough. Taking the initiative by engaging potential, passive candidates in relevant conversations can generate interest and yield serendipitous outcomes.
- **New avenues:** It isn’t enough to rely on the same old platforms and traditional techniques such as job advertisements. Trying new avenues or less obvious candidate pools can uncover untapped applicant sources.

- **Failure recovery:** Not everything is going to work or run smoothly all the time. Shareholders must be open to shifting gears quickly. The key is to understand the value of the feedback and be willing to adjust without negative judgment. Hiring the best candidate will require a lot of ill-fitted applicants to be reviewed and assessed. The cross-functional hiring team needs to focus on the outcome and trust each other along the way despite setbacks.

Participatory Futures Await

Organizations need to stop seeing the hiring process as purely transactional and recognize that it embodies the leadership principle in action. Applying an agile mindset to recruiting activities makes it participatory and changes the quality of interaction all around.

It returns the “ownership” stake back to its rightful place by providing a modern twist on hiring. After all, an organization cannot buy or outsource the emotional commitment of its most valuable asset, people. 📌

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1. <https://www.agileconnection.com/article/what-does-it-mean-have-agile-mindset?page=0%2C0>
2. <http://agilemanifesto.org/history.html>



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