



Cracking the Hiring Code

Uncovering Innovative Strategies to Attract Top Talent

November 2024

Introduction

Talent Acquisition (TA) has never been more critical to the long-term economic viability and success of organizations. The changing nature of work has intensified the war for talent in new ways. The candidate experience can no longer be an afterthought. New ways of connecting with candidates and engaging them in the hiring process have multiplied in recent years.

There is an art and a science to talent acquisition and crafting an ideal candidate experience that can prove challenging to master. The Brandon Hall Group™ study, *Cracking the Hiring Code*, sheds light on how well organizations are meeting that challenge and where they are struggling. There is a certain sense that TA organizations are going back to basics – clearly defining and communicating an EVP, for example, and engaging hiring managers in a more consistent and effective way while leveraging technology to craft a bespoke candidate experience.

Ultimately, the foundation is strong. The roadmap for success in arguably the most challenging talent market in history can be elusive. Ultimately, the way forward – as is true for most HCM practices – will not be one-size-fits-all. It takes deep knowledge of your organization, broad mastery of critical skills and commitment to rapid deployment and adjustment when needed.

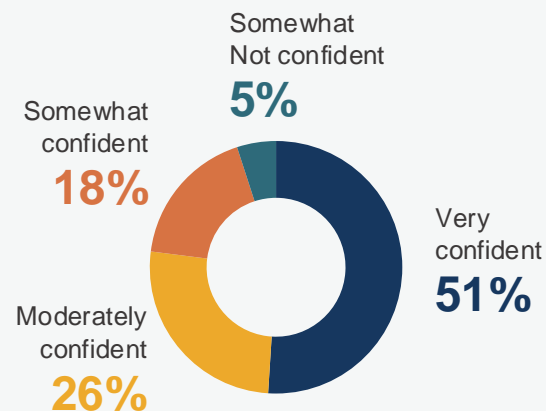


Current State

The foundation of any TA strategy is a compelling Employee Value Proposition (EVP). A strong EVP captures for candidates a clear and powerful answer to the question, “Why would I want to work for this company?” Having a clear and compelling EVP is the first step. It doesn’t translate into quality candidates if the organization can’t communicate it out to employees and prospects alike.

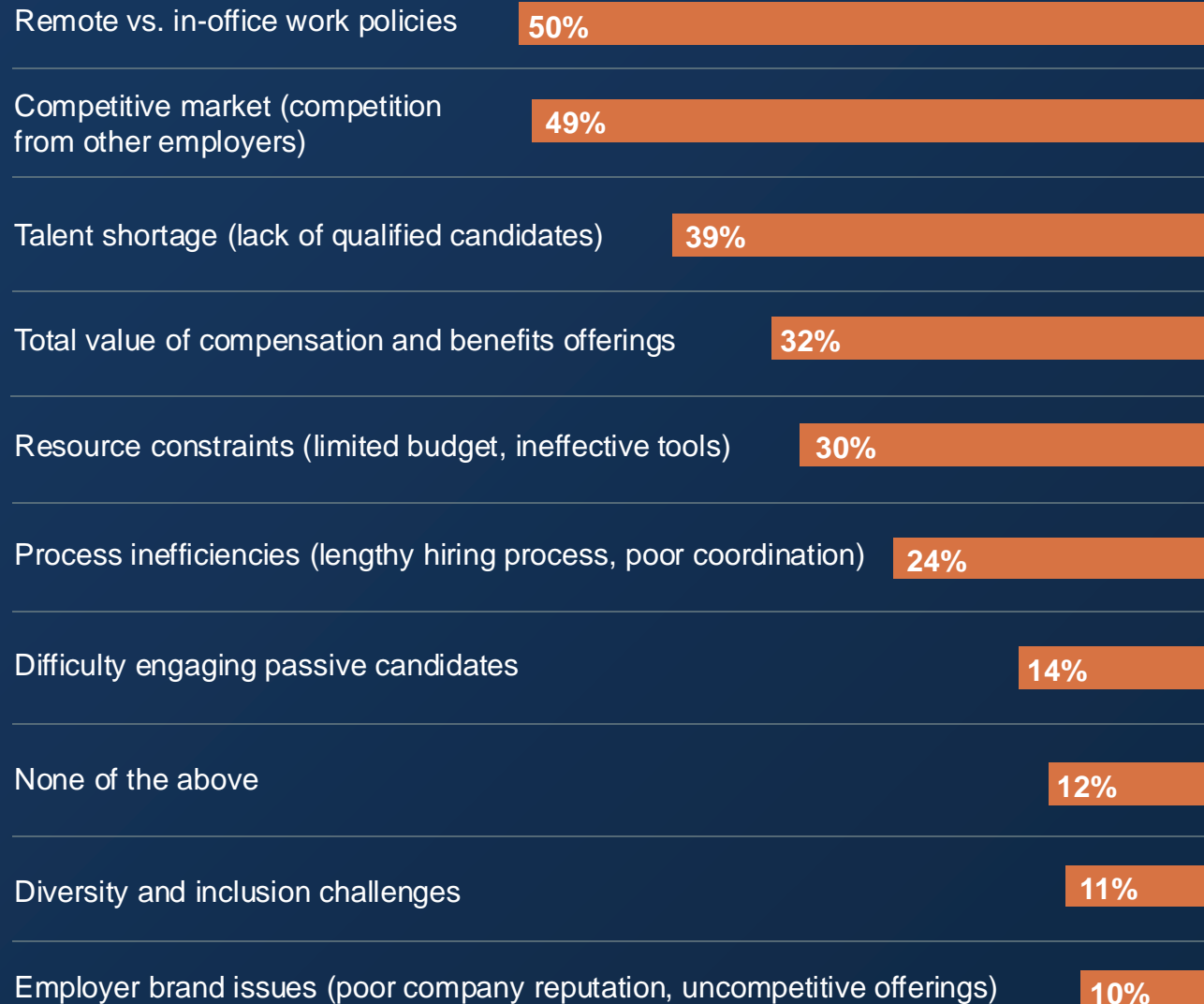
Confidence in Ability to Communicate EVP to Potential Candidates

Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code



An overwhelming 77% of respondents indicated they are moderately or very confident in the ability of their company to communicate its EVP to potential candidates. This tells us that, with very few exceptions, organizations would appear to have their house in order when it comes to knowing what differentiates them as an employer and how to get the word out about those differences. The playing field in the talent marketplace would appear to be quite level in that sense – until you try to understand what challenges teams are facing.

Challenges to Talent Attraction



A quick glance at the biggest challenges to attracting talent that survey respondents identified reveals that many of those should, in fact, be addressed in the EVP. What is challenging the ability of companies to attract their talent are largely internal, policy-driven barriers such as the availability of remote work, the total value of compensation and benefits offerings, resource constraints and (to a lesser extent) employer brand issues.

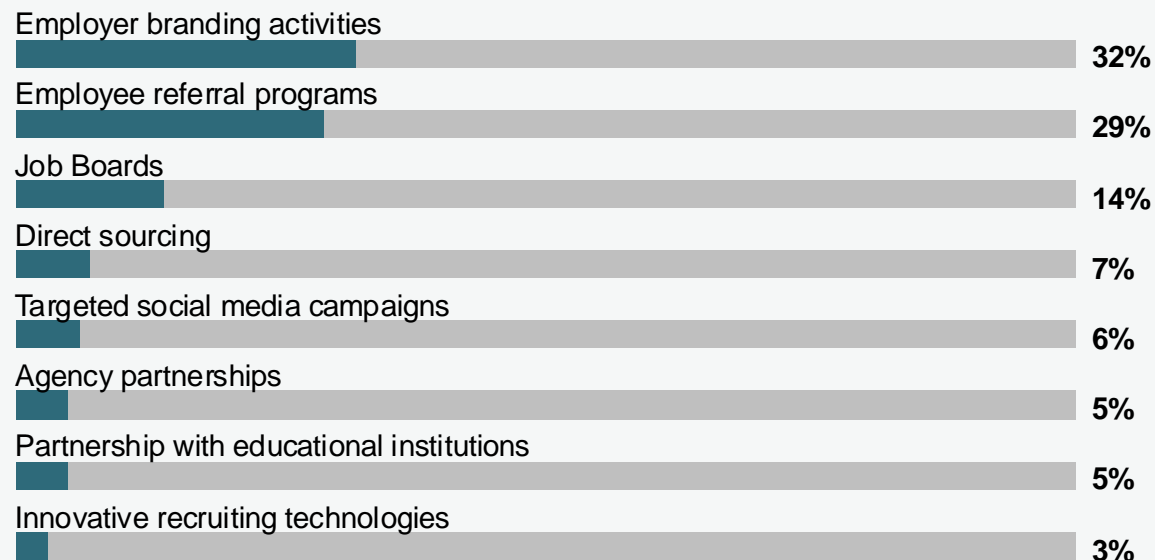
Other challenges highlight that alignment and collaboration internally are critical to success. For example, the shortage of qualified candidates for roles is well documented in most industries. To solve this crisis, TA teams need to be working with their colleagues in L&D and hiring managers to find ways to build the talent pool that is needed.

Resource constraints and process inefficiencies are also conspiring to derail TA effectiveness. Continuous improvement needs to remain a top priority for TA organizations. The way we work, the way we look for work and engage in work are all evolving and changing in near perpetual motion. What worked this year may not work next year. Tracking, measuring and making rapid changes to processes, tools and approaches are critical skills that will differentiate the most effective TA teams in the market.

Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code

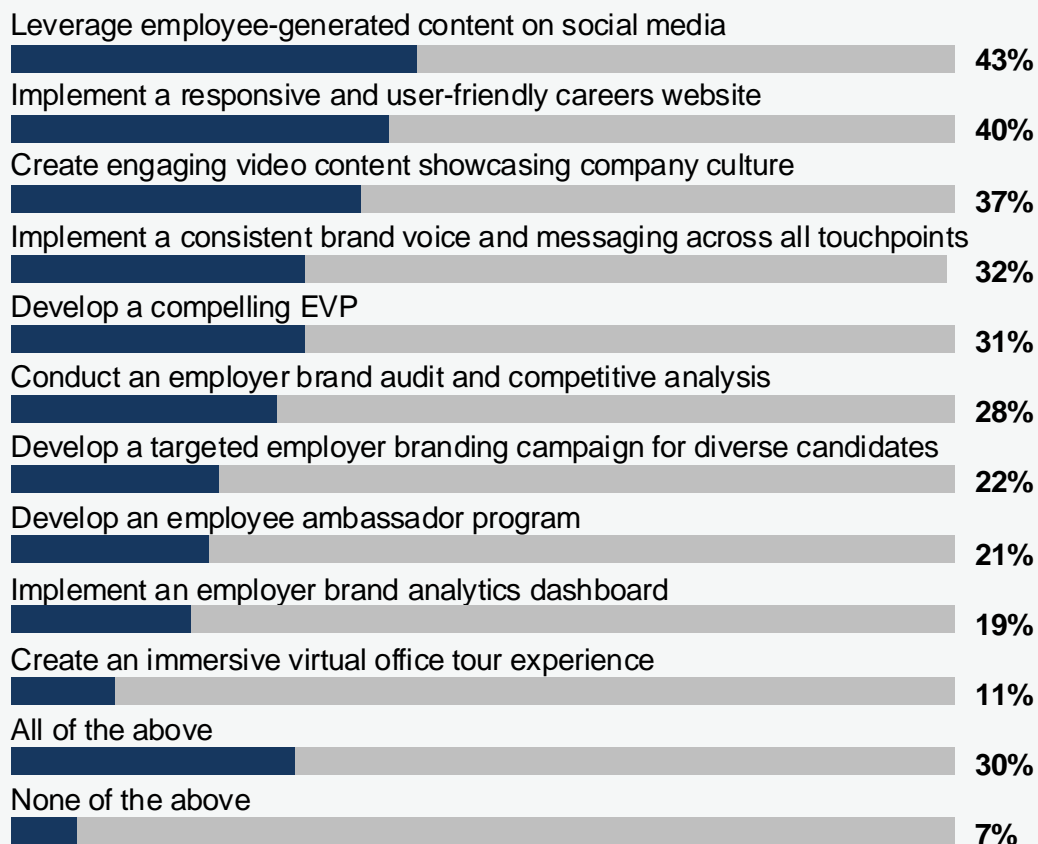
The importance of an effective EVP cannot be overstated. The ability to communicate that EVP effectively only matters if it attracts the talent you want and need. Of all possible strategies for attracting top talent - employer branding and employee referral top the list. Resources invested in shoring up your employer brand will reap benefits.

Importance of Strategies for Attracting Top Talent



Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code

Employer Branding Initiatives Planned over Next 12 Months



Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code

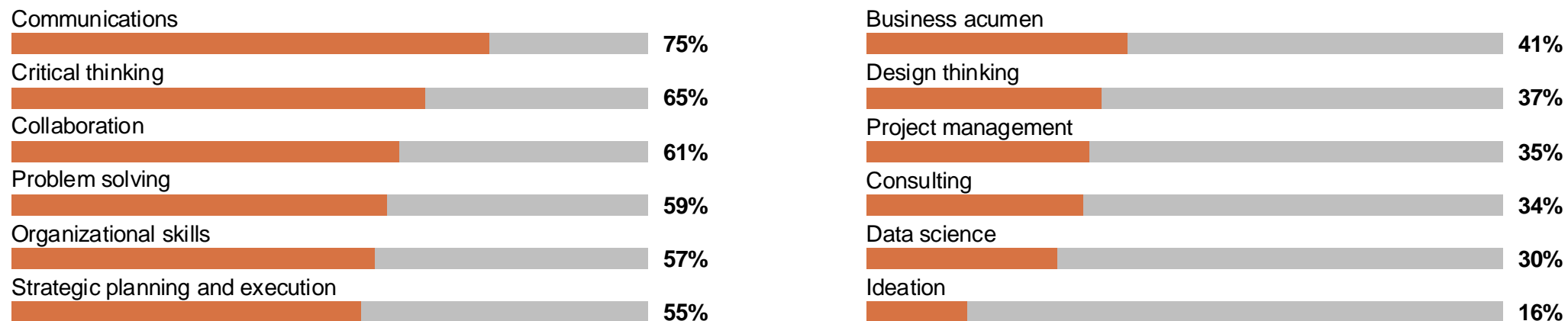
When looking at planned employer branding activities among survey respondents, notice the number of activities and frequency that EVP-related items show up. Steps like deploying a consistent brand voice, developing a compelling EVP and conducting an employer brand audit are directly linked to ensuring the power of the organization's EVP to help attract the right talent.

Other planned activities are wisely relying on the power of current employees to draw in new talent to the organization. By leveraging the voice and perspective of current employees, you open a more effective window into what it's like to work for the company. It demonstrates a high level of trust in your workforce, which is a highly prized aspect of company culture to job seekers.

That 31% of respondents chose "all of the above" is interesting. Companies should proceed with intention and realistic expectations with any activities focused on change and improvement. It is highly unlikely that any TA team can effectively address all of the possible activities in the list. Therefore, deciding to do them all may be counter-productive. Like any people-focused process, always start with what you need and work toward what will bring you the best results based on the unique situation your business is in. A targeted approach will always yield more success than a generic one.

When it comes to the skills and competencies of TA teams and professionals, research respondents indicated they were stronger on strategic and people focused domains. Communication, critical thinking, collaboration and problem solving are the TA professionals' bread and butter. Not surprisingly, these are the skills that can and should be leveraged to address barriers to effective talent attraction as discussed above.

Competencies of the Talent Acquisition Team



Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code

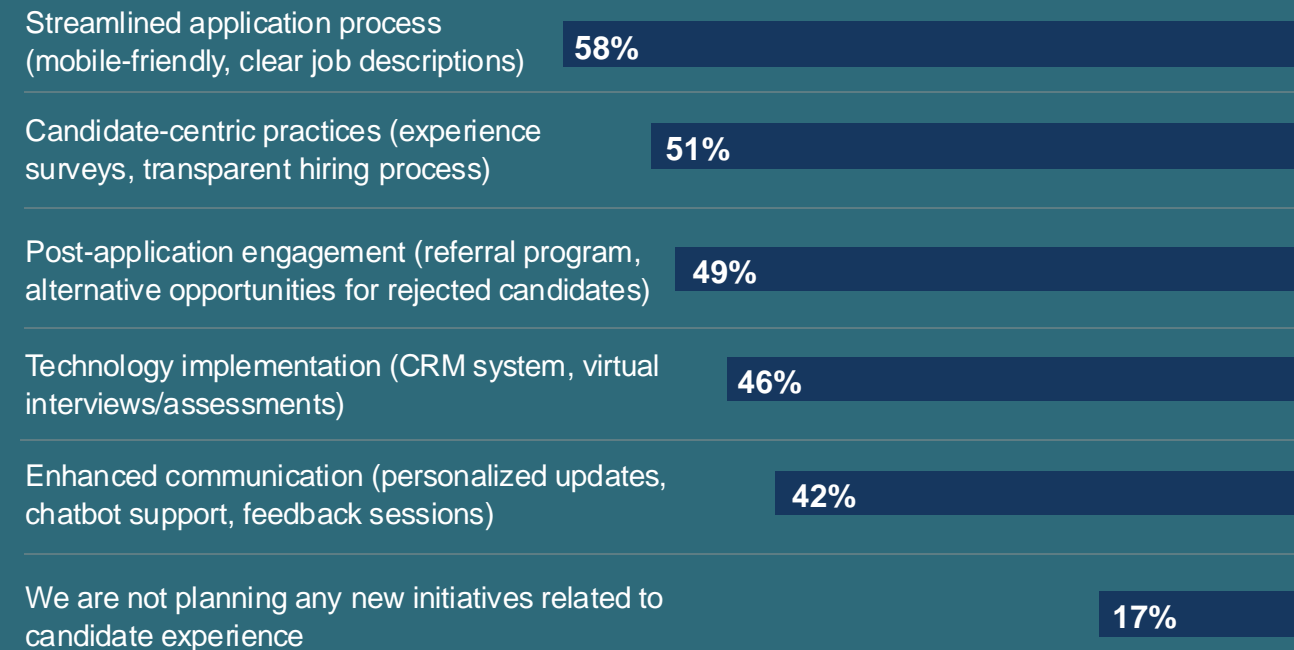
Complexities

How a potential employee experiences the organization through the selection process can have enormous implications for the ongoing success of the company in competing for top talent. For a long time, TA focused on efficiency and speed above most other things – particularly in the selection and implementation of TA technology.

This created the notorious candidate black hole where candidates simply never knew where they stood unless they landed an interview. While strides have been made – inefficiencies and a lack of transparency persist.

The good news is companies are paying attention and are planning significant changes and improvements. By focusing on streamlining application processes and ensuring candidate-centric approaches, TA teams should reap significant rewards in the form of a stronger employer reputation and solidified EVP in the market.

Planned Improvements to the Candidate Experience



Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code

Onboarding

Among the more surprising findings in that in 75% of responding organizations, the onboarding process is managed by the talent acquisition team. Onboarding has long been disputed territories in organizations. Depending on how you define it and which team owns the process, onboarding could be anything from new-hire paperwork to ramp-up plans lasting 90 days or longer. The fact that onboarding is a process largely owned by TA opens a path to finally see onboarding get the attention and focus it deserves.

Companies should leverage the power of TA's relationships with candidates to get them "over the finish line" of starting work and becoming full members of the team quickly and effectively. This should mean moving a lot of training efforts out of the onboarding bucket and into the learning and development bucket. This approach will put pressure on the collaborative capabilities of not just recruiters and TA staff, but L&D staff as well. Teams must stay in lock step on creating the smoothest transition possible.

Implications

Collaboration between talent acquisition and hiring managers is critical. They must operate in lockstep. Hiring managers are not "customers" to TA, as many organizations suggest. Hiring managers are collaborators and colleagues.

Changing the vocabulary around the relationship of TA to the rest of the organization can go a long way toward delivering on a positive EVP and candidate experience – not to mention the ability to be efficient and effective at filling open positions, which has a direct impact on revenue and cost targets.

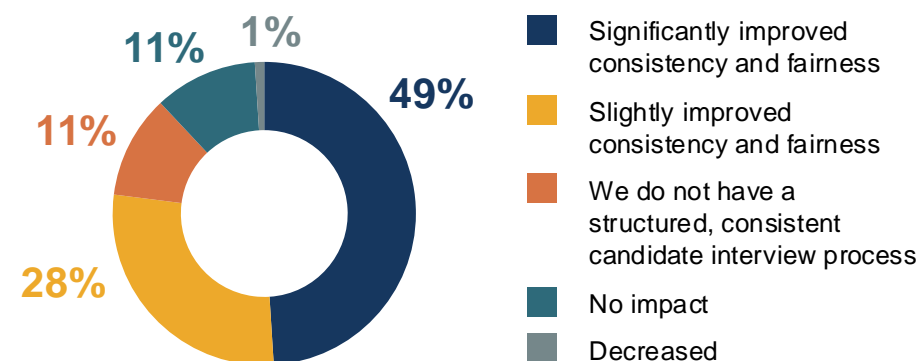
Strategies Used to Improve Hiring Manager Collaboration Now or Within the Next Year



Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code

A case in point is the structured interview process. Structured interviews have a huge positive impact on selection processes and candidate success over the long term when done correctly. This approach to hiring and selection works most effectively in organizations where the relationship with talent acquisition and hiring teams remains collaborative.

Impact of Structured Interviews on Consistency and Fairness of Candidate Evaluation



Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code

The Power of AI and Other Advanced Technologies

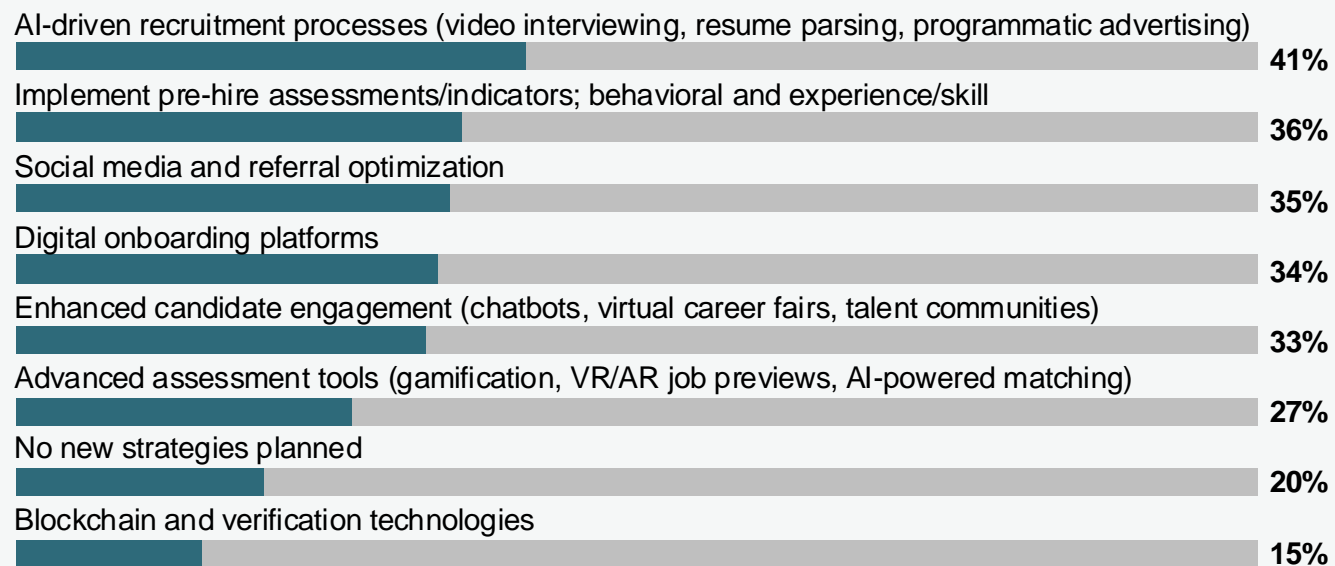
Leveraging technology has long been part of the DNA of the talent acquisition function. It follows then that AI would find a home in TA technology, which it definitely has – long before the current surge of Gen AI capabilities. Maintaining that “early adopter” stance in the segment is critical for ongoing success. More than half say AI has improved candidate screening efficiency to at least some degree, but more than 40% of organizations still don’t use AI.

Impact of AI on Efficiency of Candidate Screen



Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code

Use of Innovative Talent Acquisition Process Now or Within Next 12 Months



Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code

Focusing on bringing recruitment processes forward by leveraging AI capabilities, the power of social media and digital onboarding programs will pay off for the organizations pursuing those avenues. Companies also appear to be exploring the greater utilization of assessments in their candidate screening processes, which can go a long way toward improving success rates. TA teams will need to ensure that the risk of bias – and the legal implications – of using assessments as inputs to the decision-making process are managed effectively.

Use of Data Analytics to Improve Decision Making Now or Within Next 12 Months



Leveraging data analytics to improve hiring processes and decision-making is critically important and many teams are playing catch-up in this arena. Data-driven recommendations can go a long way toward building the collaboration with hiring managers and other leaders. TA teams must be intentional and consistent in the use of data and analytics to drive success.

Source: Brandon Hall Group™ Study, Cracking the Hiring Code

Critical Questions



Is our EVP compelling, effective and attractive to the talent we need to hire?



Are we taking a strategic approach to employer branding?



How well are we leveraging the connection between TA and onboarding?



Are we treating hiring managers as true collaborators rather than customers?



How effectively are we using technology and data analytics to drive continuous improvement in talent acquisition?

Brandon Hall Group™ Point of View

Ensure a Strong, Compelling and Attractive EVP

When it comes to EVP effectiveness, organizations need to move beyond simple communication to active validation and evolution. Rather than conducting annual reviews or relying on static value propositions, successful companies are implementing continuous feedback loops that combine candidate declination insights, exit interview data, new hire sentiment, and competitive analysis. This approach ensures the EVP remains both compelling and relevant, adapting quickly to changing talent expectations and business needs.

Maintain Strategic Focus on the Employer Brand

In the realm of employer branding, the most successful organizations are rejecting the temptation to pursue every possible initiative in favor of a more focused approach. Instead of trying to be everywhere and appeal to everyone, these companies are identifying their most crucial talent segments and developing deeply targeted strategies to reach them. This involves careful research into where these candidates spend time, what influences their career decisions, and how they engage with potential employers. By testing specific approaches, measuring outcomes, and scaling what works while quickly abandoning what doesn't, organizations can build authentic connections with desired talent pools while maximizing their return on investment.

Create Seamless Integration Through New-Hire Onboarding

Leading companies are transforming the traditional handoff between recruiting and onboarding into a strategic advantage by creating integrated success metrics spanning from offer acceptance through the first 90 days. They're developing pre-boarding experiences that maintain engagement during the critical period between acceptance and start date, while using joint dashboards to track candidate-to-employee conversion quality. This connected approach not only reduces new-hire attrition but also provides valuable insights that can be fed back into recruitment strategies and screening criteria.

Treat Hiring Managers Like Partners, Not Customers

Perhaps one of the most transformative shifts organizations can make is in their relationship with hiring managers. Rather than treating them as internal customers to be served, progressive talent acquisition functions are establishing true strategic partnerships. This involves creating joint accountability metrics, conducting regular talent planning sessions, sharing market intelligence, and collaboratively designing interview and assessment approaches. When hiring managers and TA professionals work as partners rather than in a customer-service relationship, the result is better hiring decisions and stronger long-term talent outcomes.

Leverage Data to Drive Continuous Improvement

Organizations must take a more sophisticated approach to technology and analytics in talent acquisition. While many companies are implementing basic AI-powered tools or dashboard reporting, the real opportunity lies in creating a truly data-driven function that enhances human decision-making rather than trying to replace it.

This means developing predictive analytics for candidate success, establishing real-time performance tracking and building integrated data flows across all talent systems. The key is ensuring that technology serves strategy rather than driving it, with a focus on solutions that eliminate administrative burden while enhancing the human elements of recruitment.

Success in implementing these transformations requires careful attention to metrics across multiple dimensions. Organizations should track not only traditional measures like time-to-fill and cost-per-hire, but also more sophisticated indicators such as quality-of-hire, candidate experience scores, new hire retention rates, and EVP resonance through candidate surveys. Regular review of these metrics, coupled with a willingness to adjust strategies based on outcomes, enables organizations to continuously improve their talent acquisition effectiveness.

Contributors



Matt Pittman, Principal Analyst

Matt brings nearly 30 years of experience developing people and teams in a variety of settings and organizations. As a Principal Analyst at Brandon Hall Group™, Matt leverages this in-depth experience and expertise to provide clients and providers with breakthrough insights and ideas to drive their business forward.



Claude Werder, Senior VP and Principal Analyst

Claude Werder runs Brandon Hall Group's Talent Management, Leadership Development and DEI practices, focusing on solving corporate's challenges in developing and retaining talent. He takes a strategic, unified approach, with a keen eye on leveraging technology to drive efficiencies that enable leaders to better engage employees and drive performance.



Michael Rochelle, Chief Strategy Officer and Principal HCM Analyst

Michael has more than 30 years' experience in HR, IT, sales, marketing, business development, and strategic and financial planning in Fortune 500 and venture-backed start-up organizations.



Mike Cooke, Chief Executive Officer and Principal HCM Analyst

Mike has more than 20 years' experience in human capital management and the research, software and technology industries. Before running Brandon Hall Group™, Mike was co-founder of AC Growth, a research and consulting firm, and VP and General Manager of Field Operations at Bersin & Associates, a global analyst and consulting services firm in all areas of HCM.



Rachel Cooke, Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst

As the COO, Rachel oversees client and member advisory services, design strategies, annual awards programs, conferences, and project management functions.



Pat Fitzgerald, Content and Community Coordinator

Prior to joining Brandon Hall Group™, he was an award-winning community journalist for 30 years and recognized for his writing, investigative reporting, editing, photography, design and community service.



Geraldine Fajardo, Graphic Designer

Ger has 8 years of working experience in the design industry. She specializes in branding, illustration, motion graphics, and photography. As a graphic designer at Brandon Hall Group™, she handles all design-related tasks.

About Brandon Hall Group™

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SOME WAYS
WE CAN HELP