THE TALENT RIVER MINDSET

A Technical Guide for Talent Acquisition Practitioners

Part I – Know Thy Talent River

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While reading this paper you will encounter new, repetitive, and perhaps exhausting use of the Talent River metaphor.

Soon after, you will find yourself speaking in Talent River metaphor, like that song you can't get out of your head.

Tim Meehan

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Forward

The central thesis of this series of papers is that Talent Acquisition needs to transform from being an Art to being a Science. The skills need to shift from human-centric, relating and behavioral; to process, analytical and technology.

This first publication is called "First, Know They Talent River", which is an exploration into uncovering the big problem. Later publications will explain solutioning, outsourcing considerations and how to make a business case for transformation.

I start with problem definition because, after working with hundreds of companies, I often was asked to solve the wrong problem. Unfortunately, we didn't realize it until we were in implementation, or in the early stages of program go-live. I want to help my audience avoid this pain.

Talent River is a metaphor for a company's Talent Recruitment Strategy. The water is where talent is found, and the river is the recruitment method. The fishing equipment is the recruitment technology, and the recruitment team are the fisherman. Oh, and of course there is the talent – the fish!

A leading-edge recruitment strategy requires knowing where to look, how to engage, moving quickly, with highly skilled resources trained to use the best equipment to catch our talent. I hope you enjoy your trip down The Talent River.

Thanks,

Tim Meehan

Tim Meehan

Introduction to The Talent River Mindset

Definitions

Talent River: *Begins the moment talent first experiences your employment brand and continues through their journey to become part of your workforce.*

Mindset: *The humble recognition that Talent is swimming ever-quickly past us. We must recognize our paradigms and adapt.*

The Hatching of an Idea

The genesis for the Talent River Mindset came from an uncomfortable meeting with a prospective client. It was an RPO[1] deal, and the client was insistent that a "talent pool"[2] would solve their recruitment problem.

At the time I was leading an Emerging Technology[3] team, so our salesperson invited me to present talent pool technology. Prior to the meeting my team did an analysis which yielded some concerns.

This company had many technology, branding, and process issues which they didn't seem to understand. They were asking us to solve the wrong problem.

I'd often engage with companies for the very reason they came to an RPO – so they could gain access to my expertise. But it was often part of a sales process to fix a struggling program. In this case, the prospective client was convinced we just needed to "put the talent into a talent pool". I'd seen this many times, so I was concerned.

In the heat of the moment, I said "You don't need a talent pool, you need a Talent River". The salesperson took a deep breath, I had just told a prospect they were wrong.

Fortunately, the customer didn't end our meeting, in fact they asked; "*That's an interesting expression, tell us what that means*?". I explained:

We must change our mindset from "Putting talent into pools so we can catch them" to "Accelerating to the speed of talent so they can find us".

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[1] RPO means Recruitment Process Outsourcing, which is when a firm outsources some or all of Talent Acquisition process to an external third party.

[2] Talent Pool in this context refers to the many ways talent can be accumulated for consideration on future job requisitions. It can be tagging in a CRM, pooling requisitions in an ATS, or specialized talent community technology.

[3] In this context, I'm referring to the ecosystem of tools that connect into traditional ATS, VMS and CRM platforms. For example, digital interviewing, programmatic advertising, candidate matching, etc.

The meeting continued but the tone had changed. The metaphor caused them to pause, and allowed me to take a risk.

I explained that everything I observed from the outside led me to conclude, at a minimum, they needed to improve their job advertising, career site performance, job posting language and apply process.

I knew they were using an unfriendly ATS[4], so I took a chance and said, "and I'll bet your team doesn't like your ATS either".

The flood gates opened. The pain flowed out. The meeting had changed.
A Talent River was forming.

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[4] ATS means Applicant Tracking System. I use this term to refer to any technology a customer uses to capture talent for their hiring process. So, while the term ATS refers to platforms like SuccessFactors and SmartRecruiters, it may also refer to platforms or hiring processes that can be configured for hiring purposes.

Part I – First, Know Thy Talent River

Why should we self-assess?

To paraphrase Charles Kettering, *"A well-defined problem is half solved"*. Most people would agree with this statement but in my experience, we often don't invest the necessary amount of time or effort to do it right. This leads to me to suggest another famous quote, this one from Lewis Carroll; *If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there".*

Kettering and Carroll compel us to pause and consider before acting, so we don't end up fixing unimportant problems on the road to nowhere.

Taking the time to assess your talent river is the most important part of the journey to supercharge a talent acquisition recruitment strategy. This investment of time ensures the results meet the expectation, but often there are hidden influences that impede even the most meticulous plan:

Why do people shortchange a Talent River Assessment?

1. **Urgency to improve**: Saying "We need time to understand the problem" will only buy us so much time, and it's seldom enough. Yet it is critical to ensuring we understand, align, and prioritize to maximize ROI. *Urgency to act almost always fails to fix "The big problem" and thus delivers disappointing improvement*.
2. **Tendency to solve**: As we uncover problems, sometimes unexpected and big, we *feel* the need to fix them. But seldom is the first problem(s) also the big problem. We may well be plugging a whole in a fishing net that's been left in the desert. *Fixing problems as they appear almost always slows us down and/or reduces ROI.*
3. **Nonlinear system:** Talent enters from various places, moves through it, pauses, moves forward, goes backwards, circles, ends, exits. This means, as new facts are gathered, we must iterate the whole model, not just append to it. *Failing to iterate as we update the model will later lead to stakeholder dissatisfaction, process issues and unbudgeted costs.*
4. **Difficult to explain:** Assessing the processes, systems, data, organization, and people takes time and can be challenging. But the hard part is not gathering it, it's simplifying it! I've watched brilliant people deliver impassioned presentations nobody understood. *Transformation stalls because those who know can't explain it to those who need to know*.

Given the above, should we wonder; "how will we ever define a problem or not go down the wrong road?"

Here's a case study of a client who got it right:

Case Study 1 - Know Your Big Problem

This global company hired thousands of entry-level resources each year. These resources directly impacted revenue, so they were struggling to meet their sales targets due to unfilled jobs. HR was challenged by the business to provide more applicants but the only "fact" our sponsors knew was that they were losing 40% of their new hires in their first year.

The client asked us to engage to help define the problem and then the solution. During our analysis we discovered many issues including decentralized processes, ineffective and redundant technologies, poor global oversight, and data management, and in a real surprise, too many unprocessed applicants!

Their big problem wasn't applicant flow, it was that they didn't know it wasn't applicant flow. They were a large company that was the merger of many companies over many years. They needed to globalize, simplify, standardize, automate, and optimize. We reimagined their hiring model and among many actions, implemented the below:

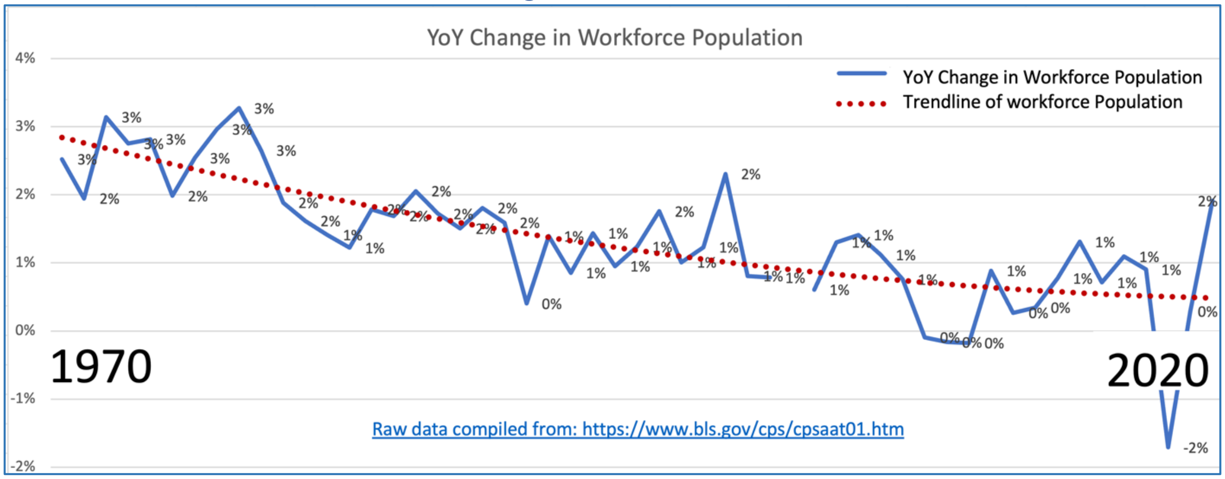
New global tech-stack, which reduced total cost.
Processes tailored to business needs, which improved buy-in from the business.
Centralized data and reporting to drive fact-based improvements over time.
Specialized resources able to use, configure and update the technology.
Hiring personas to target top talent and reduce unnecessary applicant flow.
Video job preview to improve the candidate's understanding of the job prior to applying.
Assessment to aid the manager's hiring decision.

We reduced their hiring process from 45 to 15 days and improved retention by 50%. Making the above changes took time and on-going C-Suite support. Fortunately, our assessment helped our sponsors describe the "big problem" to executive leadership in a way they could understand: each time the pressure grew to act, our sponsors would say "how and on what"?

The Fishing Report

Before we jump into our Talent River it's important to count our fish. The chart below represents the aggregate growth in the U.S. workforce over a 50-year period. It conveys the reality that the fishing is getting harder, and the U.S. is better off than many other developed economies. I realize this is very U.S. centric so, as I explain later, it's important to apply this to your business and your location(s).

Slowing Growth in Fish Count



When looking at the above chart, we can see the steady decline in workforce growth from 1972 thru 2020.

What's my point?

In the past, there were far more new workforce entrants than today. We cannot operate like back then, casting wide nets and hoping we catch enough.

Finally, it's important to not just look at this in the aggregate. During this period of slowing workforce growth, some workforce types might be growing substantially, while others declining.

Thus, the first step in our exploration is to look at the actual workforce growth for the types of jobs we hire for, in the locations we hire.

Now, let's jump into your Talent River and start by swimming upstream.

The Upstream

What if the best fish never entered your Talent River? They saw your river but swam past. Wouldn't you want to know what's happening upstream?

Upstream is where talent interacts with a company's brand but usually there isn't detailed job and candidate data to understand this. The talent/brand interaction almost always occurs before the talent gets into the application process. To be clear, I'm not talking about aggregated data like "X job viewers or Y applicants". I'm talking about tracking individual job post performance, visitor behavior, and understanding the disconnects well enough so you can take action to improve results.

Sure, you might know views and clicks but not at the job level (like you should) and you don't know who the talent is (they're still just a "click").

The upstream demands special attention because it feeds your applicant flow but also requires different skills and technology to optimize than further downstream. Let's take a deeper look.

Upstream is where talent interacts with our brand before we know them. It's the place where talent swims past us, and we don't know they swam past. It's huge, important, and largely ignored.

The challenge is that companies don't always understand, integrate, or measure the upstream appropriately. There are many reasons for this, however I will focus on two:

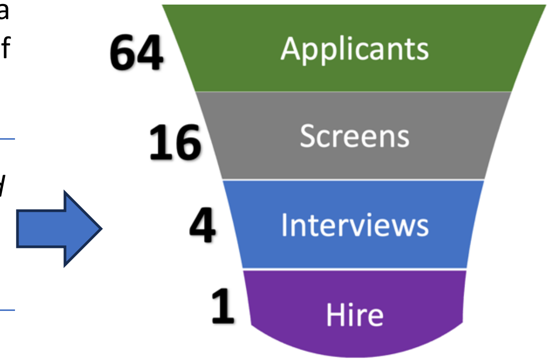
1. The upstream is removed from the daily urgency, pressure, and metrics used to justify and deliver recruiting results.
2. The technical and marketing skills needed to manage the upstream are often unfamiliar. Simply put, the folks who know this stuff are in IT and Marketing.

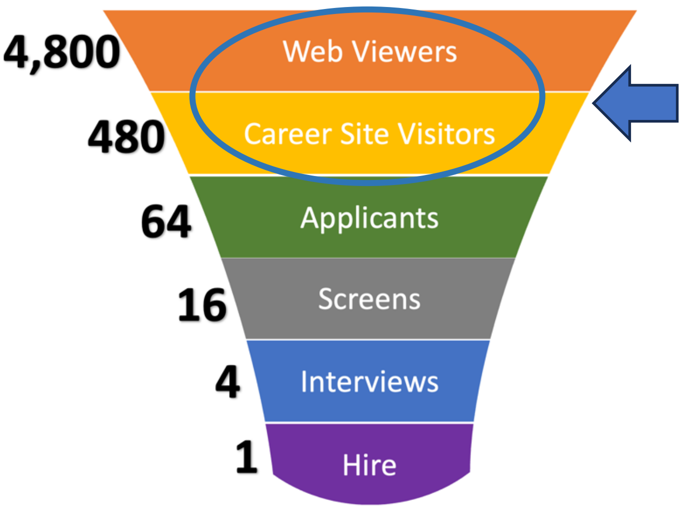
To address this gap, a new KPI is needed, it's called the "Awareness to Hire Ratio". I call it, "The Talent River KPI".

The Funnel Challenge

To understand the importance of your upstream, I've added a typical funnel, with ratios, to the right[5]. If you're a practitioner like me, you know these numbers vary a lot, so don't let my numbers put you off. Use yours if you'd like. Soon, we'll see it's the scale that matters.

The problem with this funnel is it implies we need 64 people to make a hire. ***Nothing could be further from reality.***





The funnel to the left adds the upstream as well as some typical ratios[6]. It includes people that interact with your brand on the web[7]. This includes job-boards, social sites, hybrid sites, search engines and on your career site.

These are the people that interact with your brand: without special focus and technology you won't know how many there are at the job level, nor who they are.

When we add their numbers, we start to understand the scale of your upstream. Again, your ratios might differ, but what won't differ is the huge number of upstream talent.

Pause and consider the possibility that nearly 5,000 people might need to experience your brand in order to make a hire.

The upstream is where talent interacts with your brand, it's hard to measure, even harder to engage, and it's HUGE.

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[5] I have very specific experiences, especially upstream, that support my position.

[6] These vary, but I'm assuming 10 job board views to generate a career site visit and 7.5 career site visitors to generate an applicant! There is a lot of action up there in the upstream.

[7] Yes, there are also analog interactions such as billboards, career events, etc. But my focus is digital.

Consider this: today most KPI's focus on what's inside a system and you might hear something like "my Interview to Hire ratio is 4 to 1". That would reflect a quality metric of 25%, not exactly amazing, but it's typical. It's also grossly misleading.

If we were to instead measure performance using the Talent River KPI we might hear "Our Awareness to Hire Ratio is 4,800 to 1".

So, our actual quality isn't 25%, it's .02%. Yes, our quality is less than 1%.

I'll explain more about this in the next section.

A Talent River Mindset requires us to accept that the entire funnel is measured incorrectly. The quality measure is wrong.

When we correct this, we see the not only the problem, but also the potential to greatly improve the outcomes.

The following case study demonstrates how working with a client to understand their Talent River KPI completely changed our relationship.

This company hired many tens of thousands of people during their peak sales periods each year. Their hiring criteria was not difficult, and the pay was good. The problem was they needed to hire a lot of people, everywhere, in a short period of time. They were using internal resources, staffing agencies and subcontractors, and still failing each year.

When we met with them, they expected us to explain how we could find the talent they needed, when no one else could, including themselves. We had a different plan, which was to create the case for change. To encourage them to reimagine their Talent River.

Our meeting was in London, so we used the UK for our example. **Based on our upstream analysis we estimated that the entire population of the United Kingdom would need to view their jobs, multiple times, for them to achieve their hiring targets.** We also shared that given the wide net they were already casting it was likely much of the talent they sought had already seen their jobs.

We presented the idea that sourcing more talent was not possible, or the right answer. We needed to improve the capture and conversation rates for those who did see their jobs. Our solution included:

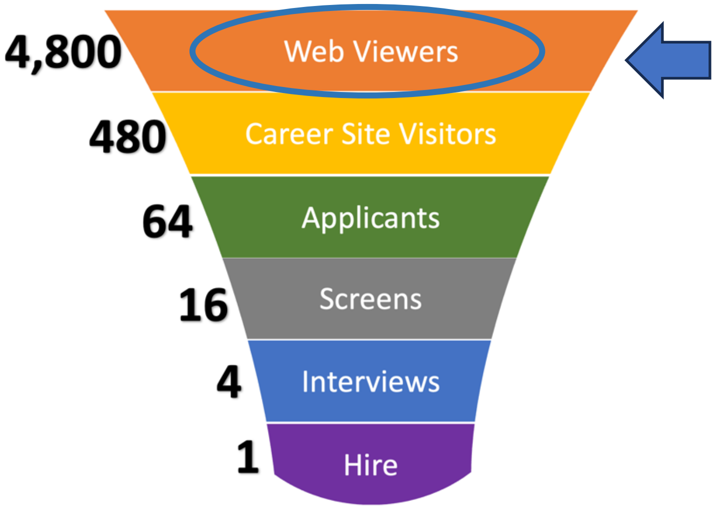
Dedicated career site to convey brand and simplify search.
Programmatic advertising to target recruitment and reduce cost.
Video Job advertising to increase job views.
Screening bot to provide 24x7 applicant processing.
On-Demand Video Interview to enable 24x7 candidate submittal.
Automated routing to hiring managers, to reduce submit to offer time.

The solution delivered so many candidates the first day we knew our new Talent River was the right strategy. Unfortunately, it was so effective it also overwhelmed their hiring managers. They quite literally couldn't process the talent fast enough and became so backlogged we turned it off for awhile.

My learning from this experience was that we were right to reimagine their model, but we needed more time to plan, we underestimated its potential, we did not incorporate change management or give hiring managers the resources they would need to process the talent.

The "Upper Upstream", that place you can't control.

An Upstream has two parts, each with its own unique issues. Let's start by looking at an Upper Upstream.



This is where talent interacts with your employment brand but it's not on a domain you host. Understanding this candidate behavior can be tricky because it's in many places and you many not own the behavioral data. It could be in search engines such as Google or Bing; it could be in job boards like Indeed or ZipRecruiter; or in pureplay social platforms including LinkedIn or Facebook. Or it might be in a hybrid social[8], job boards platforms like Glassdoor.

Your Upper Upstream matters because it's a huge amount of talent interacting with your brand, and in my experience it's pretty murky.

There is a lot of action happening in this place, in a lot of locations, and in the past it was difficult to understand. Sure, data is available from job boards, social platforms, and search engines, but aggregating and connecting it to jobs, let alone talent, was difficult if not impossible.

But this place is also an area your friends in Marketing, down the hall, know very well. Technology has changed their ability to market to your consumers and so too is it impacting your ability to connect with talent.

In the below case study, we explore how using new technology enabled us to uncover an unknown application problem.

[8] This is just my personal term for sites like Glassdoor, which provides very unique content but actually is a job board.

Case Study 3 – The Upper Upstream Problem

This company hired thousands of highly skilled workers to support their energy exploration business. We did a lot of work in this area so our experience and KPI's were well established. The problem was that after implementation they were not performing as expected. Virtually every KPI was underperforming; hiring managers were not happy.

On the surface the issue was clearly applicant flow. These were very hard to fill roles, so we didn't expect a huge applicant pool for each job, however in many instances we had just a few, or zero applicants. The jobs were in rural areas, so we beefed up our local radio and billboard ads (yes, old school!). It had little effect.

We decided to shift our efforts to social and a variety of very niche boards, including micro boards inside of industry publications. This kind of advertising is very complex and expensive, so we decided to use programmatic advertising to manage the distribution and spend.

When we deployed the programmatic, we immediately saw their Upper Upstream issue. There were technical issues with their job feed, some postings had the wrong job description, while others had the wrong location. Literally the upstream talent was swimming past because we wouldn't let them in. We acted quickly:

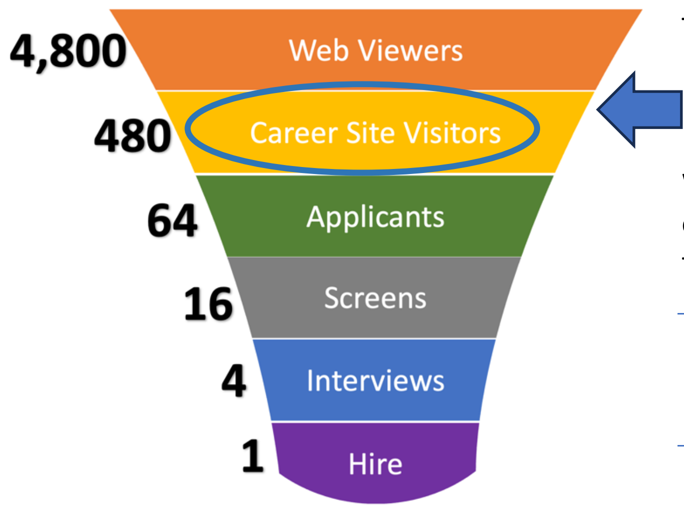
We worked with their IT department to repair their job feed.
We trained our recruiters to ensure job descriptions were accurate.
We centralized programmatic, and monitored click activity daily, looking for more issues.

Within days we saw the impact. Our applicant flow improved, the downstream KPI's all recovered.

Later, in the Solution Part of this series I'll talk about techniques to gain visibility and take action into this part of your upstream challenge. But I'll give you a clue: *Programmatic.*

Our "Lower Upstream" – The place you think you control.

Now let's move to a Lower Upstream, the career site.



The Lower Upstream contains talent that navigated to your career site, but you don't yet know them. The fish has swum to your career site…you got them, right? Well, they are closer, but for many organizations, the fish are still nothing more than an analytical datapoint.

"Our career site is fine; we just need help sourcing some additional talent."

I often hear companies say they have a great career site. Without doubt a career site, with a well-defined value proposition and promoted with a strong marketing campaign, is critical to recruitment success.

The challenge is that there is a lot of action happening on a career site. You know this from site visitor data, right? Yet often we could sail a yacht through the gap between the number of site visitors and the number of applicants. There is a Japanese quality term for this gap: *Muda*. Muda means waste and in a quality sense this gap is waste.

If we relentlessly focus on methods to capture site visitors, we will finally get those fish out of the Upstream and into our Talent River.

A key point I must emphasize is the word "action". What this means is the ability to **(a)** engage with talent that does not apply for the job and **(b)** modify our jobs based on visitor behavior.

Take a look at this case study from one such client.

Case Study 4 – the Lower Upstream Problem

This client retained a marketing firm to build and host their career site. They were a U.S based financial services company struggling to hire credit and collections talent to work in their call centers. The marketing firm embedded the standard google analytics in their site, which contained a wealth of information. This included things like the quantity of site visitors, their demographics, and most visited pages. But those analytics did not provide the job-level insights we needed to ensure success. We lacked the ability to engage with the talent or make meaningful job specific actions.

We proposed new career site technology that would:

Integrate career site, visitor capture and CRM efforts to improve visit-to-apply ratios.
Identify which jobs are underperforming and why.
Re-engage past visitors to build brand loyalty and repeat applications.
Power our programmatic for improved upstream marketing.

After deployment we gained a wealth of insight and the ability to act:

Examining all jobs that had poor view-to-apply ratio (often attributed to posting errors).
Inviting applicants to apply for similar roles.
Reminding applicants to complete their application.
Campaigning to job visitors, with invitations to take a facility tour.
Adding a job-preview video to the job.

The actions we took contributed to filling nearly 30% of the jobs after we implemented. Consider that for a moment. We didn't increase their applicant flow; we reduced the waste in their applicant flow.

Summary

The Upstream is where talent interacts with your employment brand, but you don't know who they are. This place is huge and filled with opportunity to improve the Candidate Experience and reduce waste. New technology enables better engagement with talent outside of your domain to increase directing them to your career sites. It can also power better engagement with talent once they find you, thus increasing the likelihood they will swim further into your Talent River.

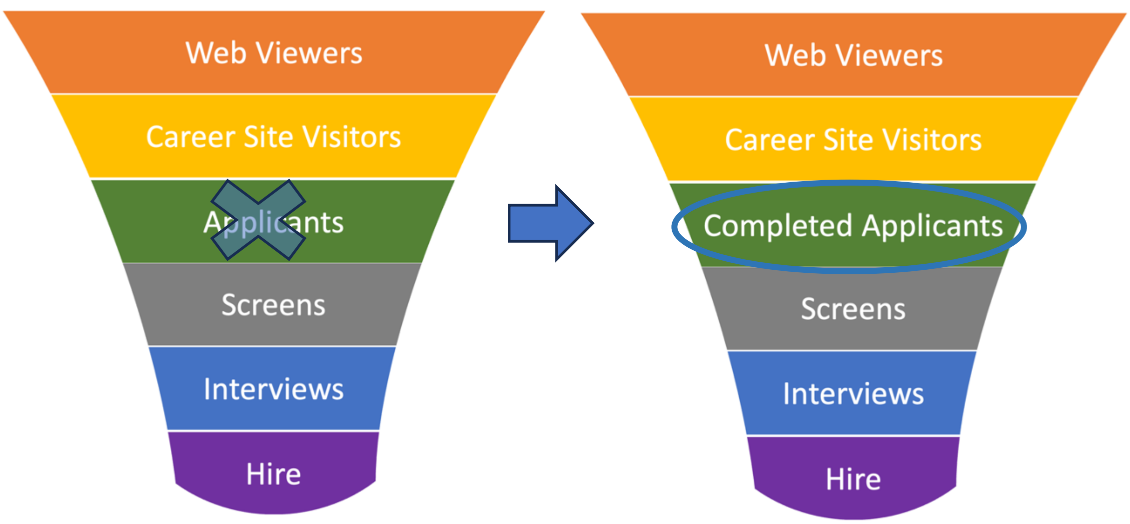
In Part II - Talent River Solutions I'll share information about technologies that can be deployed to gain visibility and also demonstrate how to take action into this part of your Upstream challenge. But I'll give you a clue: *Recruitment Experience Platforms.*

Into The Talent River

This section deals with the Talent Acquisition process most of us are familiar with, which starts when a candidate enters the application process. But there is an immediate problem we must first understand.

Before you look at the applicants, we must explore three problems that may be reducing your applicant volume.

In the below image the funnel is revised to correctly reflect that, in many cases, companies are only measuring the talent that makes it through the application process, (**a.k.a. "completed" applicants**). Ignoring this problem can be a big mistake. These problems are caused by issues within and between the career site technology and the Applicant Tracking technology.



Problem 1 - Poor Career Site Intelligence

In the worst-case scenario, career sites provide misleading information about the candidate's job search experience. There are three important data points we need to capture:

The number of candidates who:

1. Click on a job posting.
2. Click the apply button.
3. Complete the application process.

With this data you can capture and benchmark ratios and cycle time data – which can justify important technology and process improvements.

Too often, important career site data is not available, so we either misinterpret it, or don't know it's missing.

You might be thinking; "well that's only in our ATS". To which I say; "*__yes, and that's a problem__*".

Problem 2 - The Career Site to ATS Gap

A career site is meant to be a marketing platform to attract talent while the ATS is meant to "track" or regulate the hiring process. There is an important moment in the candidate's journey down our Talent River when the two must talk. However, they are Oil and Water.

Often the career site will capture views and clicks but the ATS sees nothing until the application is complete. This handover moment is an important point of failure we must pay attention to. Newer career site technology will capture the apply start and also the completion stratus, but most career site tech doesn't do this.

This means our candidate marketing success can't be effectively measured because we're not tracking all the steps during this handover moment.

Problem 3 - The ATS Falloff

There are two challenges within the process that many ATS systems create:

1. The requirement to create an account to begin the application process
2. The requirement to provide a CV.

If this is your process, which is quite common, please don't assume it's necessary or smart. Believe me, your best talent competitors are eliminating these hurdles. And they are big hurdles to your success.

Challenge: *Right now, go to your career site and apply to a job. If it takes more than 5 minutes (including time to create an account and find and upload your CV), you've got a problem.*

How'd you do? Were you one of the folks who said, "well I don't have that time for a CV so I didn't do it". Well, then don't be surprised if all your applicants are "active" job seekers.

Look at this next case study to understand the importance of addressing issues with your application.

Case Study 5 – Failure to Apply

This very large company hired a wide range of highly skilled resources around the world. Their entire Talent River needed reimagining, but it would take years to fix because of their tech-stack. They were constrained by a career site that provided little job data which was hosted by an antiquated CRM provider.

My role was to design a transformation plan but also solve an immediate issue which was to help increase applicant flow. I was able to get log-in credentials to their systems and extract data, and immediately saw something strange. Their ATS system reported 30% fewer applicants than their career site system reported.

There was a huge number of missing applicants, *something close to 100,000 applicants were missing each month.* The problem was "abandon rate".

At first the client resisted the facts. This was too big to be real. But it also wasn't my first experience with Abandon Rate[9], so we persisted. *What we discovered was that their career site provider was reporting the apply-click as an applicant, not a completed applicant*. The reality was this is an ATS problem, but neither the career site nor ATS vendors made this gap easy to find.

ATS platforms certainly can track applications in process, but to this day I've never received a reminder to complete my application (and I've applied to thousands of jobs as I test each of my client's systems). And what if the candidate gives up before they set up an account?

Working in partnership with this customer, we

> *Reduced the total time to apply from more than 10 minutes to under 5.*
> *We eliminated the CV requirement.*
> *We captured contact information earlier in the apply process.*
> *We reduced the number of required fields.*

Each of the above took time to gain support for and then configure in the ATS, but a year later our abandon rate was cut in half. We literally added 50,000 applicants to their funnel every month without any additional sourcing cost.

Summary

We have explored the upstream challenges, but we must also pay special attention to the moments when talent is trying to enter the part of the Talent River we control. Your career site technology may provide incomplete information and your applicant tracking system likely won't capture the problem. Then, for those who do make it into your ATS, unique issues may cause the talent to not complete their application, which you may also not be aware of. Thus, we must pay attention to the Upstream and these handover moments.

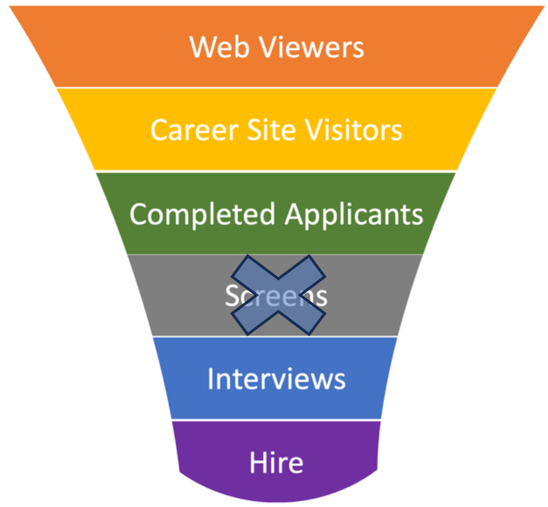
[9] Candidates who begin to apply to a job but don't complete their application.

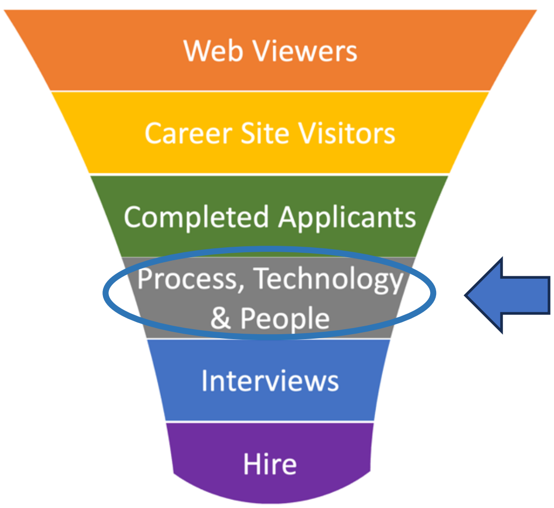
Danger, Waterfall Ahead

Almost every Talent River has at least one waterfall, many have multiple. But the most common one is after a candidate becomes a completed applicant.

A waterfall is wonderful, like an applicant, but waterfalls can also be very dangerous. The churning water at the bottom of a waterfall flows in a circular motion, forming a siphon, and like a swimmer, it's often where our talent gets trapped.

Completed applicants don't just magically move into the screening step as shown in the funnel to the right. This image falsely implies that every applicant is screened and—most of the time--that's just not true. If we have too many applicants our screeners skim: too few and recruiters focus elsewhere. We disposition, rank, and take the FIFOs[10]. And if, as is usual, we're short of staff, we just don't get to them all.





Completed Applicants don't swim in-and-out of our screening step. No, they are pushed into a waterfall. This is where our People, Processes and Technology often mess things up – including our perspective.

Most companies will find their biggest waterfall at the beginning of the screening step because, like their fish, they too are stuck. To suggest the answer to the problem is "just adding more applicants" may not be the answer. We must keep our perspective broad.

Remember, many companies have many waterfalls, which are often less visible. So, while we want to optimize our process, technology, and people in the screening step, we must also look earlier in our process for those hidden problems that influence our screening waterfall performance.

[10] FIFO applicants, or "First in First Out" applicants means our recruiters review the early applicants and then as the list grows, they spend less quality time looking at later (possibly better) applicants.

Escaping the Waterfall

If you happen to go over a waterfall and find yourself stuck in the siphon at the bottom you might think "I'll kick harder and try to swim up to get out". Keep in mind that experts say the secret to exiting safely is to follow the air bubble and swim sideways.

So, when stuck in a waterfall, don't try to get out the same way you got in.

Now, let's assume you're in the Process, Technology and People Waterfall (a.k.a. our screening step) and you don't have enough quality talent to move your job into the interview step.

Should we swim up and try to fight for more applicants? Or should we follow the air bubbles and swim sideways to find a different way out?

Consider the below list of opportunities to swim sideways and increase the number of quality interviews by indirectly improving applicant flow.

1. Hiring Processes that are slow, inconsistent, generic, delayed, ignored, misunderstood, overly manual, broken and often lack a feedback system.

2. Technology that fails to capture data properly, optimize job advertising, candidate marketing, career site engagement, post-apply engagement, past and current applicant match/ranking, generic, manual, or slow screening approaches, manual or overly iterative scheduling systems.

3. Resources that are not flexible or scaled to demand, overly reliant on full life cycle[11] recruiters or not optimized to support the process[12], poorly balanced or trained, or bought-in to the technology.

I would hope, as you read the above list of failure points, you sense the challenge. A lack of quality talent is now visible, but to suggest the answer is to add more applicants is too myopic a perspective. You must look at the entire talent acquisition strategy to ensure the expected results are achieved.

Strategic Talent Acquisition leaders must adopt a more marketing centric approach, where every applicant is treated like a customer (to be acquired). Each fish as a possibility, not a metric to make the ratios we assume are needed to achieve the outcome we expect.

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[11] Process Resources typically include one or more of a combination of recruiting resources based on their place in the recruitment process, skill set and cost. For example, digital marketing, sourcing, candidate care, coordinating. I explain this in more detail in the Solutioning part of this paper.

[12] Full Life Cycle Recruiters typically manage the entire recruitment process, from requisition intake with the hiring manager through to offering the candidate the job, and even managing on-boarding in some cases. These resources are suitable in some situations but usually are more costly and slower.

Are you Part of the Problem?

In the Forward of this paper I wrote; "*The central thesis of this series of papers is that Talent Acquisition needs to transform from being an Art into being a Science".* My personal experience is that for the most part the Talent Acquisition execs I have worked with didn't have science or technology backgrounds; this can be a challenge.

I'm not suggesting "go back to school and get a new degree". I saying; "become aware that like the talent you're hiring, you too must develop new skills to thrive in the future".

Self-Assessment #1 – about you

To see how you're positioned to tackle the future, go through the below statements, and ask yourself how you would respond, Yes or No? You may have delegated this to someone on your team, but I would argue that often these become barriers to transformation that must be argued for at the highest levels (that means you!).

#	**Do you know the answers to the below statement?**	
1	I have process maps, that include all our technology touchpoints, for each process, tailored to the hiring strategy.	Y or N
2	I understand what UTM and retargeting means, I've integrated it into our data tracking systems and know how it can influence our recruitment performance.	Y or N
3	I have optimized our job distribution, keeping Google for Jobs in mind, and know why it's not just about Google.	Y or N
4	I can make the case for placing Java Script and Tracking Pixels on our career site and explain their differences and why they are safe.	Y or N
5	I understand the differences between internally built and third-party career site platforms. I know the major players. I understand the gaps.	Y or N
6	My team is using candidate self-scheduling technology. If anyone asks, I can explain why it's cost effective and safe.	Y or N
7	I know the challenges with our application process and have two or three technology tools that can or will address it.	Y or N
8	I know if our career site, CRM and ATS have matching technology and what its algorithm model is. I can explain why it is safe to the folks in legal and risk.	Y or N
9	If I run into our head of IT, I can quickly make the case for a technical change my team says is very important to our success.	Y or N
10	If I run into the CEO, I can quickly explain the business case for the investments I have requested. I can explain how they connect to company's strategy and will impact our revenue.	Y or N

If you don't know the answers to most of the above that can be a challenge. My experience has been that the battle to transform doesn't take place inside our own departments. We know the pain. It occurs when those who need to sell the transformation (us), can't convince those who need to support it (finance, legal, IT, C-Suite).

Self-Assessment #2 – About your Talent River

This next self-assessment is about your Talent River (strategy). We've covered all of this, in this paper, so take a moment to compare your strategy, to what you've learned.

Have you defined your "big problem"? Can you honestly say you know the root cause of any performance problems in your Talent Acquisition strategy? Or are you treating symptoms?
What's your fish count? Have you assessed the workforce growth in your key hiring areas? Are you competing for tomorrow, or yesterday's new workforce entrants?
What's in your Upstream? Do you measure web and career site job viewers, and integrate them into your recruitment funnel? If so, what's your awareness to hire ratio? (aka the Talent River ratio)
Does your river have a problem? Do you understand any limits to your career site intelligence? How about the Gap? What about ATS falloff?
Do you see the waterfall? How does your process, technology and people influence the outcomes you seek? Can you honestly say you know your danger areas?
Are you swimming sideways? Do you see the disconnects that contribute to the lack of quality interviews? Breakdowns in your process, technology and people approaches?
Are you part of the problem? When you self-assess can you honestly say you are in good shape, or do you need help?

Summary

Talent doesn't magically move from applicant to screening, they instead often get lost in our internal process, technology, and people waterfall. A daunting list of failure points was presented which the reader should consider – each point, a bubble to be explored to help talent exit the waterfall we have created.

We also presented two self-assessments. The first challenges the reader to ask themselves if they can make the case for transformation. Make no mistake, if this list is foreign or unimportant to you, then you are part of the challenge. The second assessment asks you to evaluate your Talent River Strategy. How do you stack up?

Consulting Support

It's a big job to understand a problem, let alone diagnose, solution and make the business case. If you'd like some help, I offer an economical and fast service to help jumpstart your effort:

<u>The Talent River Sprint Project</u>

1. Performed by me, with support if needed.
2. Six-to-eight-week duration
3. Components
    a. Recruitment process audit - do you have, are they suitable.
    b. Performance analysis - KPI audit, benchmark ratios.
    c. Technology audit - what do you have, not have, use.
    d. Stakeholder Interviews - perceptions versus reality.
4. Summary report – usually PowerPoint format
5. Virtual Design Thinking session – align key stakeholders via "how might we" questions.

Thanks for reading,

Tim Meehan

About The Author

I've been in the talent acquisition space for almost 30 years and bring global expertise in process, technology, and people transformation. Working in the Recruitment Process Outsourcing industry taught me how to diagnose root cause, align with the customer and design solutions that worked. I usually implemented and managed the programs, so my designs had to work!

I earned my BS in Economics and Political Science from Seton Hall University. Later, I earned my MBA from the Marshall School of Business at The University of Southern California.

By age 35, I was the VP of Marketing for a $600M printing company. But technology was disrupting the printing industry and soon all the companies I knew and competed against would be gone. This profoundly impacted my world view, I learned no one, no company, is safe from disruption.

I entered the staffing industry in the mid 90's. My responsibilities grew from local to global client management, including an expat assignment in Singapore. Later, my career shifted into RPO Sales, Delivery, Product Management and then Technology roles. These experiences gave me a deep view into the Talent Acquisition value proposition.

Today, I worry about the future of those working in the Recruitment Industry. Technology will reduce cycle time from months to minutes. Recruiting skills will need to change from sourcing people to configuring technology. HR leaders will need to make the business case for better technology, not more people. That's where I come in. I want to help my peers in our industry adapt and thrive.

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Coming Soon

I will release the below information in phases throughout 2024.

Part II – Talent River Solutions (release Q2 2024)

Learn about the techniques, processes, technologies, and people strategies you can execute to optimize your Talent River

Part III – In or Outsource Options (release Q3 2024)

Learn the insider secrets to what RPO really is, its evolution, and when it makes sense to outsource.

Part IV – Making your Talent River Business Case (Release Q4 2024)

Learn how to justify your strategy using my calculators and how to sell the transformation to your leadership.

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