

Automation in HR? Or Conflict: Humans vs. Machines?

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When I first heard about recruitment back in 1994, automation was certainly not the focus. My first week in the recruitment agency was about learning where in the office I could find the hard copy or faxed application forms and CVs. We were exchanging these papers among the recruiters and didn't actually care about effectiveness of this process. Moreover, each of us had a "special" archive of some very competitive candidates that was kept aside, and unless you had a good connection to your peer recruiter, the chances of getting exposure to these names was close to zero. E-mail was still seen as exotics; we rarely communicated with candidates over e-mail, preferring talking over phone. Social networking was about your friends and colleagues, nothing else. This was less than 20 years ago — believe it or not.

Best practice HR will always be about managing your organization so that it stays competitive, motivated, energized and ready to win. The technology itself will not make it. It should always go along with great leaders who create the vision for your company and make sure that the employees share and support this vision by delivering great results. However, technology can help the leaders make this process more effective. I am not surprised that many questions I hear at professional conferences are about automation in HR. Hard copy application forms have now moved aside for electronic CVs, corporate web sites, search in the social networks, communicating with employees over e-mail. Reports ... this word in this country means much more than just a report. I remember seven years ago when my GM in the midst of the performance review asked me for a list of all employees with average merit increase by business unit. The reports were produced in Excel, and the segment review coordinators were submitting them daily to the C&B coordinator with no one able to track the latest version. Today this pain is gone. We can give to our managers great HR systems and set parameters we need, including a range for the merit increase linked to the rating, merit/promo budget, etc. The online tool will provide you, your GM, your finance lead an exposure to the data 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

We value personal touch, face-to-face conversations with the employees, and we take a lot of value from these connections. HR professionals have always been proud to be the guardians of the corporate culture and be at the front line of the human issues. But organizations are getting bigger, and this personal connection is not always easy, sometimes not possible at all. If you have people sitting in various locations, what do you do to make sure that these people have a sense of belonging? You can't bring them to the HQ every week, and you probably shouldn't. But you can connect them via Skype, Lync or other tools so that these people can see you, your leaders or your GM (in case you have a practice of all-hands meetings with the GM in your company).

Can we fully automate HR? Absolutely not. There will be always a component of human connection, but the world is changing, business is getting more international, complex, matrix, and competitive advantage is more and more about how we manage our organizations, how we, as HR professionals, support this evolution by setting great systems and helping our companies win.

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