The purpose of this paper is to capture a recent discussion about the integration of talent acquisition and talent management among more than a dozen senior HR leaders of top global companies—and share our thoughts on related trends and opportunities.

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When a group of senior HR leaders recently gathered to discuss their shared challenges in redefining the future of talent—an immediate focus of conversation was integrating TA and TM. For the leaders in the room, and for leaders all across the globe, it’s a conversation that is marked by urgency. For many, the opportunities for collaboration and synergy are just too great to miss, while for many others the costs of the disconnects are becoming too painful to ignore. The conversation, then, isn’t whether to integrate the functions but how. And the devil, as they say, is in the details.

In many organizations, a wall of separation has existed between the talent acquisition (TA) and talent management (TM) functions for years. TA operates on its own, separate from HR and TM, while bemoaning the fact that no one “gets” what they do. At the same time, HR Business Partners and OD professionals often wonder, “What do those recruiters do? How hard can recruiting be?” Even if they report into the same senior HR leader, it’s not typical for these groups to work together or with the same goals in mind.

But the importance of integrating TA and TM is becoming more evident as the need for—and scarcity of—specialized talent becomes more critical. Today, some of the most influential leaders in human resources are dedicated to kicking this wall down once and for all. They know the old-school approach to keeping the two teams and workstreams separate just doesn’t make sense. And in some organizations, it’s already starting to come apart at the seams as hiring managers demand faster, higher quality talent acquisition and employees demand to know what options exist for them to learn and grow in their career.

Signs that the existing recruiting model are fraying are pervasive: One HR leader recently shared, “Our recruiting efforts tend to break down when we have a highly unique job open. Right now we’re looking for a Social Media guru — and our traditional recruiting model is probably never going to deliver the candidate we need.”

While the need for closer integration is becoming evident, other stars are aligning to drive this trend. Take technology advances and the economic pressure for resource efficiency. For example, social networks like LinkedIn are lifting the veil on the range of available talent on a near-global scale, much like the internet did for retail goods more than a decade ago. Prior to this visibility, organizations often used a two-phased process by which TM scanned the organization for talent to fill higher-level roles, and if it were scarce, TA would begin the lengthier search externally. Now, with skilled TA professionals, it’s possible to respond to needs more quickly with a slate of the best internal and external candidates.

Another driver that enables the integration between TA and TM is pressure for resource efficiency. As companies continue to look for ways to expand leaders’ spans in their quest to reduce expenses, it’s a logical choice to combine TA and TM functions under one chief. The synergies between the two functions are an indirect benefit of this action, but are no less significant.

Most leaders acknowledge the difficulty of bringing together the two functions. It’s not enough to establish a few new processes. Instead, it’s about creating new roles, new behaviors, new mental models, and even new cultures. As organizational transformations go, this is difficult territory.
Based on this discussion and our observations, most agree that the most vexing problems associated with such an integration focus on difficulty in:

- Aligning TA and TM goals in a way that aligns with one another and which directly supports the overall talent strategy
- Developing shared, integrated systems and processes that support TA and TM goals
- Revamping a talent structure that is more likely to deliver on desired results
- Defining roles and responsibilities for evolving talent jobs, identifying/selecting for those roles, and clarifying what “good” looks like
- Expanding or updating systems to manage and track accurate data along the entire talent continuum — from acquisition to retention

Secondary issues surfaced relate to conflict between HR and TA teams, managers who work outside established HR processes, overly-complex or frequently-changing talent processes and tools, and the revolving door of HR leaders, each of whom brings new and different priorities and approaches.

**FIXING THE FOUNDATION WITH COMPETENCIES**

These challenges, along with the complexity of driving change in any size organization, can be daunting. But best-in-class approaches begin with the end in mind by focusing on competencies: specifically, those skills and experiences necessary to get everyone on the HR team — including TM, TA, and HR partners — from here to there.

The group of senior HR leaders echoed what we’ve seen working with and benchmarking a variety of Fortune 1000 companies; there is widespread agreement on what skills are needed to drive success in any HR role:

- Achieve results
- Make data-driven decisions
- Demonstrate personal credibility
- Lead through change
- Demonstrate business acumen
- Select and develop talent
- Demonstrate an understanding of HR functional knowledge (sourcing, interviewing, talent planning, etc.)

If one group of HR professionals within an overall team lacks in these skills, they lose credibility not only with business leaders within the organization, but also among their HR peers. Others begin working around them and excluding them from meetings and decisions. Therefore, the importance of building skills and credibility among all of HR is seen as a critical success factor when integrating TA and TM.

And many organizations would love to empower their recruiters with more resources, skills, and data but the implications of doing so are difficult. For example, when a recruiting team says they need access to performance or succession data to make the best decisions regarding internal talent, the technology-related security challenges can be exasperating, and as a result, put on the back burner.

On the other end of the spectrum though, organizations are seeing success with recruiters who demonstrate strategic thinking. As another talent leader shared, “I love it when a recruiter pushes back on leaders and says, ‘Let me tell you why you shouldn’t hire this person’ or ‘Let me tell you why we should look outside of the organization to fill this role.’ That’s not something you hear from the old recruiter model.” Indeed. Such bold advisements must be informed by deep organizational and market knowledge and advanced with confident leadership.

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THE TALENT ADVISOR: MAN OR MYTH?

Once competencies are defined, roles and goals within HR can be more easily identified and structured. One role that has been the subject of research, and has generated a lot of buzz, is the “Talent Advisor.”

In many ways, this role seems to be one attempt to link TA and TM accountabilities. Traditional recruiters are tactical, reactive and typically overloaded with more job requisitions than they can effectively handle. They don’t usually have the time — or the skills for — influencing, negotiating, identifying longer-term talent needs or advising hiring managers. TM professionals, on the other hand, are typically adept at talent planning, helping managers assess and manage their people and identifying methods for engaging and retaining key talent. But they don’t typically get involved in making individual selection decisions. Although the two functions have the same overall goals — ensuring the organization has the best talent — the two roles just don’t intersect in most organizations.

Enter the Talent Advisor. This role is a talent planning strategist, hiring manager influencer and sourcer extraordinaire. The Talent Advisor finds, sells and closes highly qualified, passive candidates. They counsel hiring managers regarding the best talent decisions for his/her organization. They push back on decisions that don’t meet the longer term talent needs of the business. They scan employee data to identify “ready now” as well as next-gen leaders.

Sounds great. But is it reality? Is it possible to find one (many?) who can manage the spectrum ranging from recruiting for dozens of positions to strategic talent advisor? Can one person do all that?

Possibly. In fact, a few HR leaders in our gathering voiced success with an early trial of a Talent Advisor-type position. In such organizations, they act as high-powered recruiters and also sit in on talent review meetings. They strive to manage internal pipeline and influence decision-making. Their background? Preferably former HR generalists or TM professionals who understand talent acquisition, according to those we asked. Other organizations are using high-performing recruiters to fill the role. At any rate, the need for development is clear, lest the Talent Advisor role suffer the same early fate as HR Business Partners: when that role first came into vogue, many organizations simply changed incumbents’ titles and expected their approach to the role to change simultaneously, too.

The Talent Advisor role, then, clearly requires capabilities beyond eyeballing resumes and scheduling interviews. Skill set aside, there are other challenges in bringing this role to life:

- Identifying the right blend of tactical and strategic talent acquisition skills for the role.
- Paying salaries commensurate with such a unique and valuable skill set.
- Convincing more seasoned HR professionals that this role — which typically has no direct reports — is an important career move nonetheless.
- Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the Talent Advisor vs. HR Business Partners and TM professionals; where does one end and the other begin?
- Managing the complexity associated with a (typically) large number of requisitions and a variety of hiring managers.
- The need for support by a team of researchers and/or sourcers, which may lead to a different org structure and increased resource requirements.
- Hiring managers who don’t trust the recruiting process and who are hesitant to relinquish decision-making throughout the TA cycle (culling candidates, pre-screening, selecting qualified internals, etc.).
## HIGH IMPACT TALENT ADVISOR CAPABILITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruiter Capability Name</th>
<th>Recruiter Role</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Firm-Wide Talent Strategy Knowledge</td>
<td>Strategic Advisor</td>
<td>Awareness and understanding of the organization’s talent strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Hiring Manager Persuasion</td>
<td>Strategic Advisor</td>
<td>Ability to provide value-adding recruiting-related advice to hiring managers and influence talent decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Labor Market Expertise</td>
<td>Pipeline Manager</td>
<td>Knowledge of the labor market(s) in which the recruiter recruits</td>
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<td>4. Lead Generation</td>
<td>Pipeline Manager</td>
<td>Ability to identify a steady stream of prospective talent in anticipation of future talent needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Firm-Specific Business Acumen</td>
<td>Strategic Advisor</td>
<td>Knowledge of the organization’s business model, operations, financial goals, and competitive position</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Candidate Assessment/Selection</td>
<td>Pipeline Manager</td>
<td>Ability to assess applicant/candidate quality, skills, and fit to identify the best candidate for a position</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Needs Definition/Job Intake</td>
<td>Strategic Advisor</td>
<td>Ability to understand the talent needs of hiring managers when opening a requisition</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Understanding Job Requirements</td>
<td>Strategic Advisor</td>
<td>Knowledge of skills and abilities required for different positions</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Strategic Sourcing</td>
<td>Pipeline Manager</td>
<td>Using the right channels and messages to find targeted sources of high-quality candidates</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Candidate Conversion</td>
<td>Pipeline Manager</td>
<td>Ability to influence employment decisions of prospects and candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Web 2.0 Skills</td>
<td>Pipeline Manager</td>
<td>Ability to leverage Web 2.0 technologies to locate, engage, and attract prospective candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Client-Specific Business Acumen</td>
<td>Strategic Advisor</td>
<td>Knowledge of the business and operations for business units or functions the recruiter serves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Candidate Interaction</td>
<td>Pipeline Manager</td>
<td>Ability to maintain effective relationships with candidates through the recruiting process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. General Business Acumen</td>
<td>Strategic Advisor</td>
<td>Knowledge of general business fundamentals, models, finance, and management principles</td>
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DRIVING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE TRAIN

For organizations committed to bridging the gap between TA and TM, the key then seems to lie within expanded skills and role definition. And defining new roles means building new processes, training and tools. Such changes, in turn, impact not only the existing HR team, but also hiring managers, senior leaders and employees in general.

Expect such shifts in process to have widespread effects. And, if unmanaged, they can create anxiety and a lack of support within the organization. For example, one leader confessed that they’ve been in the hot seat, having to justify their approach. “Now that I’ve implemented this skilled talent advisor role, I’m being challenged by others in my organization. People have asked me, ‘Why are your recruiters making so much?’ I tell them they’re not recruiters. They’re advising the business.”

The best approach to managing this proactively? Do for ourselves what we advise others to do — use traditional change management techniques to drive understanding and acceptance:

- Create a stakeholder management plan
- Assess the degree of change that this represents
- Build an event-based communication plan
- Develop and conduct training where necessary
- Create new organization designs where appropriate
- Leverage meaningful, shared metrics to reinforce integration among contributing parties, such as quality of hire
- Recognize and drive related culture change

Yes, it’s a lot of work. But despite the efforts required to drive change effectively, the returns of integrating are compelling — if not necessary.

WHAT’S BEYOND THE BEND IN THE ROAD

Let’s direct our thoughts now beyond a “single role” paradigm and consider the broader implications of integrating talent acquisition and talent management. Where is this all headed — given the state of our global economy, the nature of highly specialized and quickly-evolving talent needs, and the typical challenges associated with recruiting?

Appointing “Talent Advisors” to your TA team is just a drop in the bucket when you consider the pressure HR will face over the next few years. Here are some potential challenges facing the function:

- The need to engage hiring managers to fill jobs through their own networks of specialized talent.
- The pursuit of different recruiting approaches — and perhaps two entirely different TA teams — structured to fill traditional jobs which garner many applicants, versus those that are unique, hard-to-fill and require the sourcing of passive candidates.
- Greater emphasis on creative selection assessments, as the imperfect nature of interviews alone becomes more and more evident and costly.
- Shorter tenure among internal talent, as more employees — disinterested in promises of careers unfolding over the course of many years — leave companies for new and different challenges.
- Leaders with larger, more dispersed teams — some of whom they’ve never met in person.

This potential future-state seems in many ways inevitable — and requires a real plan and significant resources to manage.
Despite what we think may happen in the future, many HR organizations have problems to solve right now in order to help their business deliver on the people-related commitments they’ve made to their shareholders. As guardians of talent into the organization, we urge HR to take a look inward and assess their own “current state” — no matter where they stand on the TA-TM integration issue:

- **What do HR professionals, including recruiters, know about the business?** Think total revenue, profitability, key products or services in the pipeline, hottest growth markets, key skills needed by the business over the next few years, etc. If they don’t know these basics, they’re disconnected in a way that makes influence impossible.

- **How involved are HR Business Partners in selection?** How often do they interview candidates for key roles? For what positions? If HR partners don’t help make selection decisions for mission critical or key leadership positions, they don’t have they right to complain that they don’t have a “seat at the table” or that these new hires aren’t performing down the road.

- **Do recruiters really interview?** Regardless of how involved your HR partners are in the process of selection, how involved are your recruiters? And we’re not talking about ten-minute phone screens. We mean in-depth, probing, explorative interviews in which the skills, organizational fit and potential of the candidate are assessed carefully. Because it’s a “pay now or pay later” game. And your hiring managers are probably assuming that the recruiters are doing this — so may also be skimming through interviews.

- **Are HR professionals selected based on an objective assessment of their skills?** What does the hiring process look like within our own home? Are we finding the best tools to evaluate skills like business acumen, influencing, consulting and ability to drive results? As mentioned earlier in this article, the foundation of many solutions are rooted in competencies among HR professionals — and being able to select for them is key.

- **Do we hold HR accountable for driving results?** Do HR professionals have objective goals that can be tied back to the business? Are we conducting regular performance discussions and reviews to ensure their performance is moving in the right direction in an ongoing way? Are we being honest with feedback related to what they do well and what they need to improve?

- **To what extent is HR continuously learning?** What expectations exist for them to assess their own strengths and needs and drive their own development? Do they have Individual Development Plans that are constantly being worked? Are we ensuring our own team is doing what we’re directing others to do?

If these are issues for your organization, there’s little point in requesting additional HR headcount, driving large-scale organizational change or proposing new technologies to power talent decisions. These are the types of dragons we need to slay first in order to demonstrate our credibility to the business.

So what’s your opinion? Is this change taking place in your organization? Join the conversation at [www.teamtga.com](http://www.teamtga.com) and share your thoughts.

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PARTING THOUGHTS

The talent revolution is just beginning. The world’s greatest brands and most influential organizations have taken their first steps into a new landscape in which the activities of talent acquisition and talent management are aligned to deliver deeper, more sustainable value for the company and for employees. To find their way, talent leaders must establish new models and create new roadmaps for:

- Placing competencies at the heart of talent acquisition and talent management.
- Identifying the business results that will determine whether our TA and TM efforts are successful.
- Leading the inexorable organizational change associated with this evolution.

Talent Growth Advisors, LLC is an Atlanta-based human capital consulting firm that helps companies drive improved results in talent acquisition and talent management.

To learn more, please visit:
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