


Does AI change the game for Executive Search?

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) and new digital solutions are rapidly changing the way search professionals undertake their work and redefine how candidates can be identified and attracted. Traditional methods alone are often not sufficient to find and attract the right talent in an increasingly challenging candidate market. So, will AI find the perfect executive and make the right employment decision?

The answer is no. However, that does not mean clever use of AI cannot improve outcomes. The traditional Executive Search process as we know it includes approaching relevant candidates, selecting candidates after multiple interviews and appointing one of them to fill the open position. The process is implemented when a company finds themselves with the need to fill a position, and if there are not candidates in the pipeline already, the process starts with a new search. You probably recognise the pattern, and agree it can be effective but lacks digital accelerators?

Now pioneering firms like Mercuri Urval are deploying AI to augment their search efforts and seek out relevant candidates through use of big data. Artificial Intelligence in the search process will allow time to be spent on the important activities, such as building genuine relationships with high profile candidates, defining the right business-driven demand profile and making the best final selection.

AI in the recruitment industry today

Artificial Intelligence is the ability of a machine to exhibit learning, perception and problem solving. All over the world, we see new technology used to develop a competitive advantage by making

full use of digitalisation, driving both experience and efficiency. The technique has been around for some years in the staffing and recruitment industry, but it is only quite recently that the Executive Search business started using AI to support their sourcing, improve effectiveness and extend reach to the right candidates.

In recruitment, you can theoretically use AI for anything from scanning resumes to vetting for characteristics. AI can also help you find higher quality people by increasing the accuracy of matching candidates, or re-engaging prior candidates. However, navigating this terrain is challenging and data protection, ethics and good practice demand real care. Moreover, as role complexity and seniority level increase, the prospect of AI solving the problem decreases. So, whilst Mercuri Urval and other pioneers pilot solutions in these areas, taking advantage of them today means you can get access to relevant candidates through AI, reaching the passive candidates that traditional search methods tend to miss.

To that end, the amount of data available to extend search reach has exploded. At the same time, the candidate pool is more narrow and scarce. Augmenting traditional search methods with AI therefore has proven to be the most promising avenue for combining AI with Executive Search with real business impact today, going beyond the tech conferences and research projects.

A changing landscape – but what does not change?

The recruitment trends we can expect to see all relate to technology. As the way we use technology continues to change, we can expect to see shifts in the way of finding, engaging, and hiring new talent. However, before looking into some AI opportunities changing the landscape let us focus on some things that will mostly remain the same.

Power of networks & referrals

Traditional networks have been important and an asset for both the executive looking for their next opportunity and for the organisations or Executive Search consultants maintaining a pool of potential candidates. The needed professionalism in networking has increased over the last few years and building a strong network of key people in your market is vital to succeed as an executive. The importance of networking and a well-composed network is still your most important asset.

Candidate experience

As before, a positive candidate experience is essential, digital or not. It is even more important today because of a candidate-driven job market. The shortage of qualified people in a number of industries requires more focus on candidate's experience in the recruitment process in order to maintain a strong connection between a company and candidates. All interactions with candidates during the recruitment process influence your company brand. Companies are often fighting for the same talent, and if the candidate's experience is bad, you will lose them to other employers.

What might change? The benefits of AI in the recruitment process are there to be realised

One of the simplest, yet the most valuable, applications of using AI today is the possibility to reach the right candidates, at the right moment with digital communications, by using the history of their online activity. Every day the digital footprints we

leave keep growing, enabling AI to analyse browsing history and behaviour which we can then benefit from when directing our message and helps us to attract relevant candidates that have the track record and skills needed for the job. Candidates will therefore only see career opportunities relevant to them. If a candidate is actively considering changing jobs, the AI applications will also capture this, reaching them at the very right moment.

Related Reading:

→ [AI Candidate Sourcing – Finding candidates beyond traditional methods](#)

By Mariana Grip, Head of Recruitment Media

In addition, as more and more companies adopt remote working, AI can help identifying the best candidates regardless of their location. The needed talent might be on the other side of the globe, not within commuting distance from the office.

Therefore, we turn to AI for unlocking the data needed for personalisation and using multiple sources and methods to be able to target and attract the right people. This is also where one might argue that the benefits of AI ends within Executive Search, or at least where it has a limited effect without the benefit of the human touch. Executive candidates in particular will expect a personalised approach in the next step of the process. In the end, it is all about people in one way or the other – before and after the actual attraction phase.

AI does not replace humans, at least not yet

As a business leader, you cannot outsource all your efforts in Executive Search to AI. You have to be on top of your business situation and analyse the relevant demand profile taking into consideration the future needs put on your leaders and

specialists. If the target pool of needed talents is limited you also have to carefully analyse the candidate market to define who to approach and how.

However, if the candidate pool is large enough, modern technology can help you to identify and long-list people with the right background freeing your time for the most important – to select the best possible candidate to your explicit need. That is a strategic decision, not just a task. Therefore, AI will neither replace the human touch in making the final employment decision nor the still important networks, at least not in:

- building relations with candidates
- predicting candidates potential in the future
- measuring interpersonal skills
- matching candidates fit to the organisational culture
- Influencing candidates to accept the employment offer

AI can be a valuable, and in some cases irreplaceable, in augmenting search for today's and tomorrow's talented executives. It reduces manual and routine tasks in the search of candidates in networks, databases and other sources, and it can help making passive candidates aware of open positions.

However, even with the technology solutions available, there are benefits also with traditional methods making hiring more engaging and personalised. On the other hand, everyone will admit that online recruitment makes the process faster, easier, and more cost effective if the situation in a company allows such a search method.

Our advice is not to choose one over the other. Get an Executive Search provider with a mix of both online and offline methods to support each other for best possible results.

For you as an Executive, if you want to be attractive to your next employer in the future it means; keep your social media profile, such as your LinkedIn profile, up to date, and describe your future interest and main competences. Doing so increases your personal chances to be identified, by a human or a machine, for your future career step.



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