

# Connecting the Right Skills With the Right Roles

How AI Helps Companies Meet Today's Top Hiring Challenges



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# How AI Helps Companies Meet Today's Top Hiring Challenges

Nearly two years into a global pandemic, the world faces an unprecedented set of hiring challenges.

- > Skills gaps loom large, leading to significant shortages of qualified job-seekers in a number of industries.
- > Workers are switching jobs in record numbers in order to find work that aligns both with their personal values and their desired career trajectories.

For human resources professionals and recruiters, traditional methods of hiring are showing major flaws. Educational attainment and past job titles are proving to be a poor shorthand for the skills a person needs to succeed in a role, not to mention what traits someone needs to grow over the course of a career.

Add to this a challenge of scale. The digital transformations that organizations have made in the past years have opened up global candidate pools, but the scope of that work can overwhelm incumbent processes for recruiting and hiring.

Artificial intelligence offers solutions to many of these problems. The right AI-based tools can:

- > Help hiring teams refocus on the skills required for job success.
- > Help HR teams and workers predict what they'll need to learn on the job, so both parties can plot out career paths that allow for continuous learning and growth.
- > Allow an organization to use remote work infrastructure to expand its hiring worldwide.

To put these tools to use, organizations will need a new emphasis on skills growth, a commitment to meaningful diversity and inclusion, and an understanding of what makes today's AI-based hiring tools work.

This is the mindset shift that will connect the right talent to the right opportunities going forward.



# The Time To Hire for Skills Is Now

Today, there are about 1.4 job-seekers per 1 job opening in the U.S., according to a [U.S. Chamber of Commerce report](#).

These job-seekers are not evenly distributed among industries. Several sectors, such as education and health services, have fewer qualified applicants than jobs available. In such cases, there simply aren't enough job-seekers with the skills an employer needs.

That challenge is compounded by employers that cling to outdated notions of what constitutes a necessary job skill and how to match skills to roles. Many employers still rely on hiring practices that focus on education, former experience, or team fit, rather than on skills and capabilities.

To discover candidates' true skills profiles, employers need to adapt their hiring practices. The old paradigm of seeing the workforce in terms of discrete job roles and tasks does not serve today's workplace.

By introducing a skills-based approach to cultivating a talent pool, employers can begin this process of adapting.

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## To Hire for Skills, Get Curious

Skills-based hiring demands curiosity and a willingness to step away from old methods of evaluating candidates' qualifications.

Current conversations about workers' skills versus available jobs often focus on the lack of digital and technology-related skills, especially among workers in so-called unskilled work. Employers may assume, for instance, that a worker who formerly unloaded trucks or made deliveries lacks the digital skills for office work or manufacturing.

Employers who get curious about skills, however, may ask the following questions instead:

- > Where does this person use digital tools in their daily lives? Do they have a smartphone or home computer? Are they taking online classes?
- > Where can those digital tool uses translate to the work required?
- > What specifics can be taught on the job?

Skills gained in the switch to digital in workers' personal lives can often be transferred to a work environment. Employers who don't consider worker skills more broadly cannot hope to tap into these existing skill sets when hiring. Instead, they are likely to pass over qualified candidates and waste money on redundant training programs for skills that workers already have.

Using a person's education or past job titles to make assumptions about their skill sets "ignores social dynamics such as race, class, age and gender bias in the hiring process," depriving many workers of a chance for meaningful engagement with jobs they are in fact qualified to do, [write Annelies Goger and Luther Jackson at the Brookings Institute](#).

Getting curious about skills, by contrast, opens the field to these candidates in an unbiased way.

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## What Skills Does Each Role Demand?

Traditionally, job descriptions focus on a role's essential functions. They list what the person holding the role needs to do or produce, but they do not always mention the skills required to reach those goals. Nor do they describe how workers will need to be adaptable, life-long learners in order to grow with the demands of their roles.

To break down skills for better hiring:

- > Think about job expectations as sets of skills, not as tasks or goals.
- > Treat learning as a skill. Consider what workers need to be able to do to learn new job-related skills, and include those abilities in the search.
- > Focus on transferable skills when evaluating both roles and candidates.
- > Emphasize skill application. Ask candidates not only what they have achieved, but how they did so.
- > Use AI to identify and hire people with [adjacent skills](#). "Someone who knows Python, for instance, can more easily learn TensorFlow in order to improve their work with machine learning, or learn Django if they're needed for front-end work", writes Tom Winter, cofounder and chief revenue officer at DevSkiller.

Focus on transferable skills and skill application in order to find qualified candidates whose work histories don't follow traditional paths. In practice, many skills are transferable between roles and even between industries.

"Take the food servers who've lost their jobs due to the pandemic," [writes LinkedIn CEO Ryan Roslansky](#). "They have 70% of the skills needed to be a customer-service specialist, which is one of the most in-demand jobs on LinkedIn. But they don't know that, and the people hiring customer-service specialists don't know that."

Choosing candidates based on their skills, including their learning skills, will help build teams that can handle any challenge in the coming years.

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## See Teams As Sets of Skills, Not Sets of Roles

In order to fully benefit from a skills-based approach to hiring, companies need to think of their own teams as being composed of skill sets rather than discrete roles.

To build skill-based teams:

- > Reassess which skills your teams actually use on a daily basis, and who contributes those skills.
- > Update job descriptions to reflect the skills required for each team member.
- > Ask team members how they'd teach someone to do their job. What skills would the trainee need to have?

Again, emphasize transferable skills which team members can apply to a wide variety of tasks and roles. Look at how team members complete each task or goal.

Calling current hiring hurdles a labor shortage issue, or blaming them on lack of worker skills, misrepresents the nature of the challenge companies face. Thinking of workers in terms of their specific training for specific roles is no longer an option. Instead, companies that build sustainable growth out of the pandemic will do so by thinking about skills in a broader manner.





# How Typical Recruitment Workflows Miss Top Talent

For many HR teams, hiring feels like a well-worn path. Post a job opening, collect applications, screen for promising candidates. Every opening receives the same treatment.

Sticking to these traditional recruiting workflows can often do more harm than good. By repeating outdated language or by emphasizing credentials over skills, companies miss some of the best talent in their applicant pools. Further, they might deter potentially outstanding performers from applying at all.

Revitalizing your applicant pool means updating your recruiting workflows and methods.

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## Bias May Lurk in Your Job Descriptions

Bias pervades ordinary language use, so it's not surprising to find it in job descriptions. Thinking carefully about word choices and the core skills or functions of the role can help reduce bias, which in turn can reduce the number of otherwise qualified candidates who self-select out of the application process.

Examples of hidden bias that may lurk in job descriptions include:

- > Language that reflects gendered stereotypes, such as "Seeking aggressive sales lead" or "Nurturing, caring listener required."
- > Language that describes essential tasks with the most common, but not essential, abilities used to perform them. For instance, a job that requires someone to communicate with customers might be described as "talking" to customers, even if written communication would be equally effective.
- > Terms common to the field that may be meant well but that can feel exclusionary, such as "rockstar developer."

Eliminating examples like these is an essential first step to more inclusive job descriptions. Avoid language that can turn away candidates, as well. For example:

- > A long list of qualifications or requirements can make qualified candidates hesitant to apply, fearing if they don't meet every item they won't be considered at all.
- > Insider language or jargon can drive away applicants who feel like they don't share a common language with the company.

Job-seekers don't spend much time deciding whether they can navigate a qualifications list, either. In one study, researchers used eye-tracking technology to measure how long job-seekers looked at job descriptions, and what they read. The study found that, on average, job-seekers spent less than one minute on a job description before dismissing it as a poor fit, as Lauren Weber [writes in \*The Wall Street Journal\*](#).

To create better job descriptions:

- > Get several perspectives on how the language reads.
- > Curate requirements lists down to their essentials.
- > Use plain explanations of the work and skills required.
- > Update job descriptions regularly.

The most inclusive job descriptions evolve as the job changes. Regular updates give an organization the opportunity to adjust language and ensure the job description accurately communicates the core skills and functions of the role.

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## Prioritize Skills Over Credentials

Many employers like degree requirements because they believe degrees are a convenient shorthand for a number of important job-related skills. Requiring degrees, however, overlooks whether degree-holding applicants actually learned the skills necessary for the role, and pushes away candidates who have the skills but not the credential.

To jumpstart the move from credentials-based hiring to skills-based hiring:

- > Begin by revising the job descriptions to require a specific set of definable skills, rather than any specific credentials.
- > Use clear, unbiased language to describe the skills required.
- > Downplay or omit references to educational attainment as a necessity or preference in hiring.
- > Partner with organizations like [OneTen.org](#) that are helping people without degrees (but with necessary skills) build careers.

**Food servers have 70% of the skills needed to be a customer service specialist. But they don't know that, and the people hiring customer service specialists don't know that.**

To grab candidates' attention, employers will need to rethink their approaches to job descriptions. Clear, unbiased language that focuses on core skills can help employers build an applicant pool full of people with the traits and drive needed to succeed.



# Hire Once, Hire Forever: Keeping the Talent You Have

Employee turnover has been a hot topic for many years, as companies struggle to keep their best talent in-house. With a tighter hiring market, organizations are redoubling their efforts to keep their best people engaged for the long term.

Helping an employee plan their career can seem daunting, full of unpredictable variables and a host of unknowns. But with the help of AI, especially predictive analytics, HR teams can help employees and their mentors map careers that keep those employees [within the company](#) while also unleashing their potential.

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## From Job Hops to Career Paths

Why do workers leave their employers? Currently, the most common reason is because those workers have no opportunities for career development or skills growth in their current positions.

For companies, then, it is essential to identify what those opportunities are to keep and cultivate their best people.

To create those kinds of career paths, companies should do the following:

- > **Understand the company's structure and what career paths exist right now.** It's tough to help an employee understand the terrain if neither of you have a map. Knowing how the company currently supports career growth is essential both for planning careers and for making changes.
- > **Don't let the map limit your vision.** Existing career paths within the organization are a starting point, but they needn't dictate or limit options. Use what you have to start imagining ways for workers to learn skills and grow in their careers.
- > **Use AI-powered tools.** AI can glean meaningful insights from quantities of data too large for the human mind to parse effectively. By using AI in different ways, organizations can gain various insights and even take a peek into the future through the use of predictive analytics.

Offering meaningful career mapping to employees can be an effective way to reduce turnover. A study published in [Management Science Letters](#) found that employees who received regular career guidance were less likely to consider leaving their organizations for opportunities elsewhere.

Today, the traditional upward path through an organization is only one of many options, and it isn't necessarily the best option for every employee. Career mapping and predictive analytics help your employees think, plan, and imagine more broadly when it comes to their own professional futures.





### Three Tips for Using Predictive Analytics in Career Planning

Predictive analytics and career mapping are powerful tools for assessing workers' capabilities and keeping them engaged throughout their careers.

Here are three ways HR teams can ensure they're using these tools effectively:

- > **Review what you do.** Review the results of your predictive analytics use often. Rethink their application, and imagine new ways to use these tools to inform conversations about career growth.
- > **Think big (data).** A strength of AI is its ability to glean insights from massive data sets. When it comes to informing predictive analytics, embrace tools that use ever-larger pools of relevant information.
- > **Diversify your toolkit.** Predictive analytics can illuminate possibilities, but they're only one option when it comes to reimagining career paths. Dream big, and encourage employees to do the same when it comes to skill-building and career development.

By offering insights into promising future options, predictive analytics revitalize career mapping. They allow human resources teams to learn more about their own companies, improve mentorship of employees, and rethink how skills drive retention.





# Choosing the Right Tools To Hire for Skills

Predictive analytics can help companies reduce turnover by building skills and career paths among their teams. Artificial intelligence can improve hiring, as well, but only when it's applied effectively.

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## Are Your Outdated Algorithms Missing Great Talent?

Early attempts to use artificial intelligence to improve hiring decisions were based on a few core assumptions. They assumed, for example, that reviewing the careers of past superstars at a company would reveal which traits these workers had in common. They also assumed that hiring for those traits would automatically result in more superstars.

Today, the best AI-enabled talent management and hiring systems are constantly monitored and updated to help them avoid falling into bias traps. They also have access to much larger data sets, which can help reduce the impact of localized biases, e.g. a company's tendency to hire graduates of the same colleges as its leadership. Early algorithms, however, lack this support, making them more likely to bake in bias.

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## Where Does Tech Obscure Transferable Skills?

Skills-based hiring demands a new emphasis on transferable skills. Outdated algorithms may obscure precisely those transferable skills that matter most to success in a given role.

Transferable skills may be developed in any career position or field, but candidates tend to leave them off resumes unless those skills were developed in a position related to the role for which they're applying. Omitted information about transferable skills is a loss for both the hiring company and the candidate.

The right AI tools can help fill in the gaps, allowing companies to spot candidates whose resumes may be selling their skill sets short.



## Are Your Outdated Hiring Tools Entrenching Old Biases?

In its early years as a hiring tool, artificial intelligence was lauded as the solution to the longstanding problem of bias. Without the cultural and social training of humans, it was believed, AI could recommend candidates based on their qualifications, rather than on traits that did not impact the work itself.

As AI was implemented in hiring software, however, it became clear that the answer wasn't so simple. Early uses of AI began to replicate and entrench certain biases. Some hiring teams found they were not even aware of the biases at play in their hiring processes until they saw early AI repeat those biases back to them.

To address bias issues in the use of AI for hiring, practice the following:

- > **Make unconscious bias conscious.** Unconscious bias is a prime example of a situation in which we don't know what we don't know. To identify unconscious bias in ourselves and in the hiring software we use, the first step is to bring potential biases into conscious awareness. This includes recognizing the fundamental bias most people have in which we believe we are unusually resistant to unconscious biases.
- > **Emphasize an ethical component to hiring.** Including awareness of bias as an ethical issue in the hiring process can help hiring teams make better choices, from the software they use to how they interpret or apply its outputs.
- > **Know what your AI knows.** AI can only spot patterns or make predictions from the data it has. If its data set contains unconscious biases, its results will perpetuate those biases. Use standardized questions and search criteria to spot hidden biases and eliminate them.

When teams understand how unconscious bias affects their decision making, they can make more informed choices about the tools they use. The more perspective human resources professionals and hiring teams gain on bias, the better equipped they are to choose software that is also built to challenge bias.

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# Outward Bound: Hiring Talent Worldwide

Global hiring, or hiring without regard to national borders, offers a wealth of promises. Global reach means an instant, vast expansion of the candidate pool. It also cultivates diversification of the workforce, offering employers access to candidates with a wider range of perspectives and experiences.

In the past, the sheer scale of hiring globally introduced complexities that made a global talent search nearly impossible. Today, artificial intelligence makes it easier to hire for the skills a company needs without limiting the candidate pool to a certain geographic range.

With remote work now a comfortable norm, and with a pressing need to hire for skill growth bearing down on all industries, now is the ideal time to focus on hiring global talent.

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## Remote Work Is Our New Normal

COVID-19 hastened the transformation of work into a remote activity. Granted, it caused some stress and disruption for workers and companies. Now, however, nearly two years into the pandemic, many workers find they have not only adapted to remote work, but have learned to enjoy it.

A recent [Gallup poll](#) found that 56 percent of U.S. employees are engaging in remote work in response to the pandemic. The poll also found that 61 percent of U.S. employees want the option to work from home, and 44 percent prefer working from home.

As part of their willingness to embrace remote work, job-seekers have also begun to apply for jobs in other states or countries. Many are interested in remote work even as offices reopen due to still-present pandemic concerns. Some seek partly or fully remote jobs as a way to realign work with their personal values post-shutdown.

Remote work may never fully supplant in-person work. With many employees in many industries embracing remote work, however, companies can focus on hiring applicants regardless of geographic location.

## Improve Your Team With a Global Reach

Human resources teams and recruiters frequently focus on the importance of a rich applicant pool. With more qualified applicants, hiring teams can focus on the human details that help a new hire succeed in any given role.

A global talent pool could conceivably include every qualified job-seeker on the planet. Technology becomes an essential part of sorting through these millions of individuals in order to find the right addition to your team. Used correctly, AI can help an HR team sound the depths of this vast talent ocean and improve diversity, inclusion, and skill sets.

Here are some of the ways an AI-enabled platform can expand your hiring reach:

- > **A boost to diversity and inclusion efforts.** Global hiring offers an opportunity to embrace perspectives from around the world. The right hiring tools can help companies avoid the comfort of unconscious bias, and instead focus on candidates' skills and abilities.
- > **Finding the skills your team needs.** Skills gaps loom across industries, making today's hiring quest one for skills rather than credentials. AI-enabled digital tools can help your team find the skills it needs anywhere in the world.
- > **Refocusing on core organizational values.** Remote work and global hiring approaches give organizations a chance to reassess what is important to them and what they stand for. Embracing these practices allows companies to re-center themselves in their core values, then find ways to support those values while also supporting their workforce.

The pandemic created a number of challenges, but it also created a number of opportunities, including the opportunity to use advanced AI tools to hire globally. Companies that do so will position themselves to build more diverse, engaged teams with a truly global perspective.

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## Why AI Is Essential to Global Hiring

Conventional methods of sorting resumes become unmanageable at a global scale. To make worldwide hiring possible, artificial intelligence is necessary.

AI offers the following indispensable capabilities to companies seeking to hire globally:

- > AI can analyze massive datasets, including an applicant pool that spans the globe.
- > AI can focus on skills and capabilities, rather than ineffective proxies like educational credentials.
- > AI can provide insights into applicants via predictive analytics, which can suggest how a particular candidate might perform on various career paths.

By analyzing large data sets and providing insights, artificial intelligence can serve as a valuable part of a worldwide talent search.

AI works best when it is used to inform and support human efforts. Understanding how well AI is working means assessing its impact on human endeavors and relationships.

AI's role in a global hiring process is to analyze data, report on patterns in that data, and make predictions. Identifying the best new hire for any given role, however, will always remain the role of the human beings participating in the hiring process.

The best way to incorporate AI into a global hiring process is to do so thoughtfully. As part of that process, consider the following questions:

- > What needs to change to scale our hiring globally? What problems may arise?
- > What tools can be used to solve those problems? Where is AI the right option?
- > How will we implement AI and other tools to scale hiring?
- > How will we oversee, measure, and adjust the use of AI in our hiring process?

Artificial intelligence makes a once-impossible task doable for many companies: Finding top talent on a global talent search. When incorporated with human expertise and other tools, AI can do its best work.



## Meeting Today's Challenges With Today's Technology

**The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world, and many of those changes seem permanent.**

**The pandemic widened the skills gap in many sectors. In others, companies have been scrambling to find and onboard new talent as workers seek new positions in record numbers.**

For some, outdated hiring software complicates these challenges because those tools overlook qualified, skilled candidates. Those tools can also further entrench the unconscious biases reflected in outdated hiring processes.

Fortunately, technology offers opportunities to address these new challenges in new ways.

The growth of remote work tools, and the corresponding development of workers' skills with these tools, makes global hiring a realistic option to fill a number of roles.

New approaches to artificial intelligence are eliminating the biases that lurked in older, limited data sets. This allows HR teams not only to find new talent but to imagine new career paths and new learning opportunities for their existing teams.

Today, the right tools make all the difference.



Eightfold's Career Hub is built on the Eightfold Talent Intelligence Platform™, a purpose-built, deep-learning artificial intelligence technology that is powered by an ever-refreshing global data set of billions of talent data points and over 1.4M unique skills.