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Can Chatbots Streamline HR Service?

Whether you realize it or not, you have probably chatted with a chatbot, online or via phone. Chatbots – sometimes abbreviated to *bots* – are computer programs that can interact with humans via text or voice. Amazon's Echo and Google Home are popular examples of chatbots. When you call a company's general number, you'll often find yourself talking with a chatbot. As the underlying software improves, it's increasingly harder to tell the difference between a human and a chatbot.

Chatbots hold promise for many business settings, potentially aiding many HR professionals.

Potential Applications in HR

Chatbots are particularly good at responding to predictable, frequently asked questions and providing information and resources based on a self-service model. Considering that many common HR-related requests can be predicted, chatbots providing a verbal, email or text response could save time for HR professionals and provide a service for employees.

Best of all, AI-powered chatbots are becoming progressively more adept at handling questions and learning to inter-

act with humans.

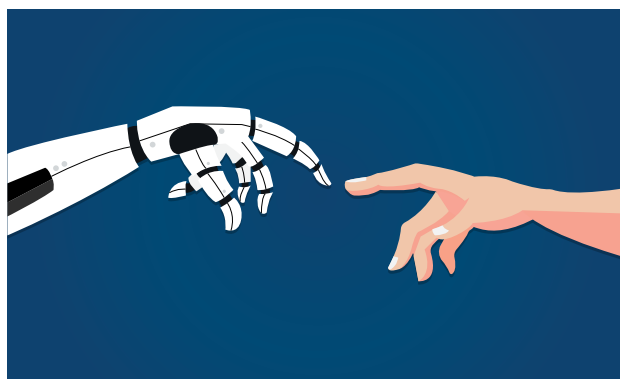
Jessica Miller-Merrell, founder of Workology, outlined seven potential HR applications of bots in a recent blog post:

- Appointment scheduling for job interviews, training, etc.
- Customer service – for example, answering FAQs from job candidates
- Candidate screening, including background checks
- Onboarding
- Benefits enrollment
- Employee communication
- Training and development

HR, she says, is such a transactional type of business service that it lends itself particularly well to using chatbots to meet user needs.

How to Get Started

While you could create a chatbot from scratch, chances are your time is better spent on strategic HR priorities, rather than learning how to create do-it-yourself chatbots. There are a variety of ready-made HR chatbot tools available



and a wide range of developers who can build a custom bot that fit your needs.

Be Careful of Over-automating

Of course, it's possible to "over-automate" responses and start missing the personal touch that is so important in relating to candidates and employees. You'll have to choose carefully just how much you want to automate responses. But, used judiciously, chatbots may free up a lot of your time and still provide employees and candidates the information they need. ▲

For More Information:

Chatbots Magazine: The invasion of chatbots in HR

<https://chatbotsmagazine.com/the-invasion-of-chatbots-in-hr-7b1d7a88f643>

Chatbots Magazine: How to develop a chatbot from scratch

<https://chatbotsmagazine.com/how-to-develop-a-chatbot-from-scratch-62bed1adab8c>

Training Journal: How chatbots make HR departments more human

<https://www.trainingjournal.com/articles/features/how-chatbots-make-hr-departments-more-human>

Hot on the Inside

Losing Best Employees 2

In a time of low unemployment, there is increased danger of losing your best employees. Here are some retention ideas.

How Agile Are You? 3

Agile HR departments have an advantage in rapidly changing times such as these.

No-Poaching Pacts are Out . . . 3

No-Poaching agreements could help you retain your top employees. But the DOJ has just ruled them illegal, even if they're only a shake-hands agreement.

How to Avoid Losing Your Best Employees

In April, the unemployment rate dipped below 4% for the first time since 2000, hitting 3.9%. That's great news for the economy and job seekers, but it represents clear challenges for employers seeking to retain top talent.

Dentists have an old saying: "Ignore your teeth and they'll go away." The same sentiment applies to employee retention: Ignore your best employees and they'll go away. Unfortunately, that's what we often do—leave our best employees to their own devices. Result? Feeling underappreciated and undervalued, they look for opportunities elsewhere.

Love Them or Lose Them

Kerry Alison Wekelo, managing director at Actualize Consulting and author of *Culture Infusion: 9 Principles to Create and Maintain a Thriving Organizational Culture*, points to a 2018 "State of Workplace Empathy" study: While 96% of employees believe it's important for employers to demonstrate empathy, 92% felt that employers undervalue empathy.

A Culture of Engagement

Wekelo offers four recommendations to create an environment that expresses clear value for employees:

HAVE THEIR BACKS Especially when they need time to get away. Assure them that they are covered and can focus on their personal situation.

COMMUNICATE CONSISTENTLY AND SINCERELY That's always a best practice, but is particularly important when employees are experiencing "life events."

SPEND ONE-ON-ONE TIME Employees need to know that they are cared about. Spend time with them personally, and individually.

GIVE THEM A VOICE It's important for employees to feel that their input is valued, and their voices are heard, even if you can't implement all of their ideas.

Gerrit Brouwer, CEO and co-founder of Appical, a Dutch onboarding consultancy, recommends that organizations take the following steps:

- **Roll out a red carpet** for your recruits and new employees well before day one.
- **Share your goals** and your "go-big" plans.
- **Get management involved.**

Finally, Brouwer suggests, create an environment that fosters feedback.

An Important Role for HR

HR must ensure that managers have the information, resources and skills to ensure that employees are

being managed effectively.

"HR should work closely with management and leadership teams, running regular training sessions on how to engage with employees," says Paul Burrin, vice president of Sage Business Cloud People. "Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that employees feel empowered and supported throughout their careers. Don't leave it to chance. Take steps now to ensure that your managers and supervisors have the skills and resources needed to keep top talent on board." ▲

Failing to Staff Appropriately

Every manager wants to build a team of stunning colleagues. However, a number of managers unintentionally make mistakes that lead to disconnect with their team. Failing to staff appropriately is one major cause of disconnect.

When staff levels are too low, it spreads negativity about the company among the employees. Supervisors should re-assess staffing needs periodically to make sure there are suitable resources to meet current and future demands.

If projects are not on schedule or if workloads are fluctuating, it may be best to bring in some temporary help to pick up the slack until it's clear there is a need to make these positions full-time.

Think about that, and ask how we can help you to maintain a strong pipeline of appropriate candidates. **We're real people here, and we're here to help.**



For More Information:

Fortune: How to profit from the ultra-tight job market right now

<http://fortune.com/2018/01/18/job-market-interview-hiring-tips/>

MarketWatch: For the first time ever, there's a job opening for every unemployed worker

<https://www.marketwatch.com/story/for-the-first-time-ever-theres-a-job-opening-for-every-unemployed-worker-2018-05-08>

The Week: America's job-market puzzle

<http://theweek.com/articles/772507/americas-jobmarket-puzzle>

How to Be Agile in Today's HR

According to a recent report from Deloitte, 59% of companies surveyed rate the need for organizational agility as “urgent.” Companies need every type of team throughout an organization to be able to quickly adapt to a fast-changing world. Process efficiency may be less important than the ability to adapt to change.

What Does it Mean to be Agile?

Patric Palm, CEO and cofounder of the Swedish company Hansoft, developer of Favro, an app to help companies be more agile, says being agile means being more nimble at managing processes. It's an approach that moves beyond formal structure and hierarchy to embrace flexible teams who come together to do work through self-organization. Employees may serve on multiple cross-functional teams at the same time with team players managing their own work.

Employers, he says, need to be prepared to make a shift from traditional structures to more agile ones. Employees must organize into small teams, typically around seven people, that are autonomous and have a clear mission.

Second, companies need to rely less on rules and processes and more on values, he says. They need to ensure that the values their employees operate under are clear and understood by everyone.

Finally, organizations need to update their performance processes to focus on teams, rather than individuals.

HR Goes Agile

The principles of agility are finding their ways into other corners of the organization, including HR. Peter Cappelli and Anna Tavis wrote an article on the trend for *Harvard Business Review* earlier this year. HR, they write, is using a form of “agile lite,” using some of the principles, but not all, as the function moves away from its traditional “rules-and-planning-based approach toward a simpler and faster model driven by

feedback from participants.” Examples of these changes:

- Performance appraisals are shifting from an annual, to an episodic, schedule, project-by-project assessment.
- Coaching skills are becoming must haves for managers. Companies are investing in training to help managers improve their coaching skills.
- Employees are working as part of teams rather than as individual contributors, participating on multiple teams where their particular expertise may be required.
- Compensation is moving from an annual merit-based system to using instant rewards and continual wage adjustments.
- Recruiting processes are making more use of technology to identify and screen candidates, to align desired skills to current project needs.
- Learning and development is changing to bring more skills to the workplace more quickly as changing technology and other needs demand new approaches and new knowledge.

Major Workplace Impacts

Deloitte's research reveals that 59% of the companies responding rated the need for agility as “urgent.” The impact of these shifts will be pervasive and not just felt by HR. Deloitte has identified eight specific ways that organizations will be affected by the agile movement:

ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE Hierarchical business functions will become projects, squads, teams and shared services.

TEAMS AND PROJECTS Teams are currently formed slowly over time. In the future, teams will assemble quickly and stop quickly.

JOBS AND ROLES Today, we have job descriptions, levels and titles. Going forward, we will instead have assignments, tasks and expert roles.

MANAGERS Managers “own” teams and people's careers. In the future, man-

agers will manage projects and “sponsor” people.

CAREERS Now jobs are “owned” by the manager and not shared. Going forward, jobs will become open in a transparent marketplace.

FLEXIBILITY AND SPACE People are assigned jobs by management. Tomorrow's employees will be sought out based on skills, and work on multiple projects.

REWARDS No longer will people be rewarded by level, tenure and experience. They'll be rewarded by outcomes, reputation and sponsorship.

CULTURE Today's companies are constantly striving toward inclusion, sustainability and diversity. These values will shift to citizenship, collective thinking and shared values. ▲



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For More Information:

Forbes: Can HR become agile?

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2018/03/11/can-hr-become-agile/>

Harvard Business Review: Embracing agile

<https://hbr.org/2016/05/embracing-agile>

No-Poaching Agreements Now a DOJ No-No

It may seem like a no-brainer and collegial thing to do. You and another company in your industry compete for the same hard-to-find niche talent, so you agree not to hire away talent from each other. Not so fast. These types of agreements, while potentially beneficial for organizations, aren't so great for employees, according to the Department of Justice (DOJ)—and the DOJ is doing something about it.

DOJ Prohibits No-Poaching Pacts

In April, the DOJ issued a news release related to a settlement with Knorr-Bremse AG and Westinghouse Air Brake Technologies Corporate (Wabtec) related to the companies' use of "unlawful agreements not to compete for each other's employees." The concern? These types of agreements, according to the DOJ, serve to constrain competition for employees, limiting their employment potential artificially.

While this ruling is new, the DOJ and Federal Trade Commission actually put the HR profession on notice about antitrust issues related to hiring and com-

pensation issues in 2016. Violations can occur through written documentation or verbal discussions, formal or informal. According to the guidance:

"An individual likely is breaking the antitrust laws if he or she:

"Agrees with individual(s) at another company about employee salary or other terms of compensation, either at a specific level or within a range (so-called wage-fixing agreements), or

"Agrees with individual(s) at another company to refuse to solicit or hire that other company's employees (so-called "no poaching" agreements)."

There is even risk in sharing information related to terms and conditions of employment with competitors.

Penalties Can Be Significant

In January, the DOJ announced that it would pursue not only criminal charges against employers, but also potentially against individual executives who engaged in no-poaching activities. Companies and individuals, therefore, potentially face criminal charges for engaging in no-poaching behaviors, however

informal or casual they may appear.

What steps should you be taking to minimize risk for your company? A communication from the Morgan Lewis law firm offers this advice:

- Evaluate post-October 2016 conduct.
- Expand antitrust compliance training for HR personnel.
- Evaluate any information exchanges with competitors related to sharing of sensitive information for possible violation.
- Distinguish "naked" and legitimate wage-fixing from no-poaching agreements.
- When in doubt, always consult with experienced antitrust counsel.

In a tight labor market, it's understandable that employers are concerned about protecting their talent. No-poaching agreements, however, should be off the table when it comes to identifying strategies to minimize turnover. ▲



For More Information:

DOJ/FTC: Antitrust guidance for human resource professionals

<https://www.justice.gov/atr/file/903511/download>

Federal Antitrust Agencies: Antitrust red flags for employment practices

<https://www.justice.gov/atr/file/903506/download>

Human Resource Executive: Ending 'no-poaching' deals

<http://hrexecutive.com/the-end-of-no-poach-deals/>