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# From customer journey to candidate journey: applying Marketing principles to build a winning hiring culture

## A case study

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<p>The intensifying global war for talent has revealed the strategic role of talent acquisition in enterprises, making it particularly challenging and expensive. Different macroeconomic trends have shifted the power equation more to quality talents' hands and changed their behaviors in their job seeking journey. This has created a pressure on employers to go beyond conventional recruitment practices to a more strategic and long-term approach of Talent Acquisition, which puts candidates in the center of the hiring process and involves a lot of tools and techniques that are similar to what Marketing people do with customers.</p> <p>The objective of this thesis was to deliver a new look at Recruitment from a Marketing perspective and to provide strategic planning tools along with examples through a case study. This aimed at enabling hiring professionals to achieve a comprehensive understanding of modern strategic Talent Acquisition and thus, to have a reliable reference source in building their own hiring framework in action to have an edge on fighting the war for talent.</p> <p>A qualitative approach was used to conduct the case study where empirical data were collected through depth-interviews with key hiring personnel of a tech company faced with typical challenging talent sourcing. The results from literature review and case study revealed the importance of hiring, the changing talent market and applications of a candidate-centric mindset in using Marketing tools in planning strategies and tactics in effective talent acquisition to build a winning hiring culture.</p>	
Keywords	Talent Acquisition, hiring, hiring culture, war for talent

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### **List of Abbreviations**

B2B – B2C: Business to Business – Business to Customer

CRM: Customer Relationship management

HR: Human resources

SaaS: Software as a Service

TOFU – MOFU – BOFU: Top of Funnel - Middle of Funnel – Bottom of Funnel

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The topic of this thesis and its objectives

Quality talent is always scarce. Having the right talent in the right place at the right time is a make-or-break factor for entities of all types and sizes – companies and nations alike. (Stringer and Rueff, 2006)

Hiring is important and expensive. The true cost of employment is much more than real wages (Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2014), so firms are better to do it right. In a typical company of fewer than fifty people, the employment cost for each employee is of more than \$40,165 on average, and if a wrong hiring decision is made which later lead to turnover, the cost incurred is estimated to be around 150% to 250% of such employee's annual salary (Baron and Kreps, 1999: 338; Hesse, 2014). Unfortunately, a large number of companies found themselves ineffective in staffing ability. It was reported that only a disappointing number of 19% of companies were seen to be attracting talented workers (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2001).

'The war for talent' is highlighting the fact that talent is in high demand, which companies have to fight for (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2001). This concept was introduced by a McKinsey seminal research first time in 1998, implying the vital role of hiring capability in business growth. The idea was brought up again and received large attention from the public in Jim Collins' research (2011), stating that no company can grow in revenue faster than its ability to source suitable talent and stay sustainable.

With the fast-changing digital development, especially the rise of social media and job sites, conventional ways of doing recruitment have been critically outpaced by those with a fast, strategic and long-term oriented practices that put candidates in the center (Roche, 2018). This is in line with the proven approach in Marketing that companies, in all their business doing, should put customers in the center. In fact, a lot of tasks a hiring specialist does is similar to a Marketing person, that is, for example, creating compelling contents for (job) ads, outreaching to potential customers/candidates, pooling customers/candidate network, business/employer branding, etc (Randhawa, 2017). This did not use to be the case when recruiters were holding a higher position to job seekers when they had an abundance of candidates in need of employment to choose from, but

it is happening now when an emerging concept of 'Talent Acquisition' is deemed to take place of conventional recruitment (Bugg, 2015).

This thesis' purpose was to academically elaborate such phenomenon of modern hiring. The objective of this thesis was to deliver a new look at recruitment from Marketing perspective and to provide strategic planning tools along with examples through a case study. This aimed at enabling hiring professionals to achieve a comprehensive understanding of modern strategic Talent Acquisition and thus, to have a reliable reference source in building their own hiring framework in action to have an edge on fighting the war for talent.

Accordingly, the thesis tasks are listed below:

1. To analyze the context of Marketing-driven Recruitment or Talent Acquisition.
2. To explore the applications of Marketing principles in Hiring.
3. To feature a case study to illustrate and testify theory in practice.

## 1.2 Scope and structure of this thesis

The scope of this thesis is to conduct an analysis of modern hiring practices applied to find 'talent' - the high-skilled workforce, which focuses on but not solely limited to, the white-collar job seekers with high cognitive ability, relationship management, and leadership skills. This segment of labor is particularly in high demand with the surge of the knowledge economy (Beechler and Woodward, 2009). With the stated purpose and objectives, the thesis studied the context and features of modern hiring in comparison with traditional recruitment techniques, as well as looking at them through the lens of Marketing and illustrating such theory with a real-life case study.

This thesis has five main parts: the introduction, literature review, research methodology, results/case study analysis, and discussion. Chapter 1 – the introduction states the research topic, its significance, and objectives, which is helpful for the readers in determining the level of relevance of this study to their interest. Chapter 2 – the literature review provides a theoretical knowledge from previous relevant research findings, which were collected and structured for the author and readers to achieve a preliminary understanding of the thesis topic and this thesis' research theoretical framework. Chapter 3 – the Research methodology gives insight and argument for the conduct of this

research for readers to have a basis for critical evaluation of this thesis results' reliability. Chapter 4 displays the result of the research in a narrative-based form, which is hiring practices and their results at a fast-growing tech company in high need for talent. This chapter provides readers with real-life illustrations of the theoretical knowledge discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 discusses findings and further evaluation of this thesis, as well as giving recommendations for readers and further possible study.



## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 The strategic role of hiring in business growth

Human resources have been indisputably among the most important and vital sources of growth for any business entity. Thus, hiring, as the gate for human capital sourcing, holds a highly strategic role in the growth of companies.

To highlight the importance of staff sourcing, Jim Collins (2011: 41) stated that the first principle for becoming a great company that can make a leap is to put human factor first and foremost, before any work-related issues, including visions, strategies, etc. In other words, it was suggested that companies think “first who, then what”. In his years of research conducted by match-pairing between great companies which made a big leap and good companies which could not do the same, it was found out that all eleven studied successful companies were very rigorous and patient in their search for the right people to, firstly, build a superior team before figuring out what to do next.

A key principle was repeatedly mentioned in Collins’ research was that a company is eventually made of people; Whether one can become good or great depends a lot on whether its people are good or great. It was also mentioned that, according to a Packard’s law, developed by David Packard from the HP (Hewlett-Packard) company, that the ultimate cap to any company’s ability to grow its business in any form is its ability to hire and retain enough of the right people to make the growth happen (Collins, 2001: 54).

Also supports the importance of hiring or human capital in the growth and sustainability of any company was Mattone and Xavier (2013: 4-5) in their book “Talent leadership – a proven method for identifying and developing high-potential employees”. Mattone, the “guru radar” of Thinkers50, proposed that any organization that has a higher quality of human resources management tend to bear in mind the several traits as followed. First and foremost, the mentality that recognizes a superiority in human capital means a competitive advantage. Second, in terms of manager development, every manager should be responsible for pooling, finding and growing talent, and they should also consider the human resources aspect as a factor guiding their actions. Last but not least, money should be invested seriously in developing the human capital of companies. It was also statistically proven that firms investing in practices that aim at developing its

talent base have a higher tendency to achieve better financial results. In other words, investing in human resources related aspects has a positive correlation with business performance and growth (Salaman, Storey, and Billsberry, 2006: 142).

## 2.2 A glance at modern hiring

### 2.2.1 Recruitment in the new context of Digital Age and Globalisation

The world is changing fast in many aspects of life and business doing environment. Human resource market and its practices have been accordingly evolving fast with the emerging concept that is increasingly bought-in: companies nowadays are being put in a “war for talent”. This concept was first introduced by McKinsey and Company’s seminal research in 1998 and has been cited and discussed in several academic sources across the HR spectrum (Chambers *et al.*, 2007). As argued by Beechler and Woodward (2009), the world economy was increasing in its size and value rapidly within a short time span of five years (2002-2007), enterprises’ directors reasonably got concerned over the problem of staffing. Also cited in the research was statistics from PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2008 stating a figure as high as nearly 90% of all studied CEOs expressed their focus on human resource as among their highest priorities.

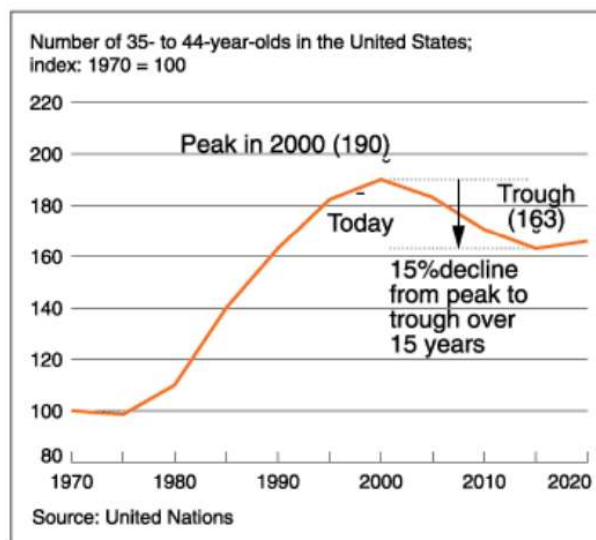


Figure 1. Declining supply of future executives(Chambers et al., 2007)

Chambers et al. (2007) once again asserted the existence of such a war for talent and believed that the war would only continue becoming intensified. The figure above

displayed a dramatic increase in executives supply in the United States during the course of time of thirty years from 1970 to 2000. The authors argued that such peak was contributed by great productivity increases, growth in numbers of women at work, immigration, and executive staying longer in their careers. These factors were predicted to be weakened, making a decline of executives supply by 15% within fifteen years.

The talent war was claimed to have been driven by four trends in the international macro environment, that are (1) the change in economic and demographic characteristics, (2) the growth in mobility of humans and entities, (3) innovative transformation in business doing, cultures and skills, and (4) diversity.

Firstly, the population structure in most countries tends to shift to a trend of aging. People are living longer and fewer babies are born nowadays than in the past. For instance, the ratios of children number born per woman in countries like China, Singapore, Japan, Germany are all below the recommended number of 2.1 so as to be sustainable, according to The United Nations in 2008. This practically means the labor market is decreasing its supply. Meanwhile, the expansion of the global economy fuelled by dynamic direct foreign investment flows has removed a lot of borders between local and global markets. Foreign companies entering the local market tend to gradually hire local employees to take the place of expats executives, which opens up more employment opportunities to the laborers (Chambers et al, 2007). In other words, the demand for labor has increased despite the decreasing supply, consequently making skilled candidates at higher price accordingly as the principle of demand and supply. However, unlike ordinary goods, high-priced labors cannot easily be bought or acquired by the money of firms. Choosing where to work is a choice that ultimately lies in the hand of candidates. If such decision is equal to buying decision, companies rather have to re-position themselves as suppliers and candidates as customers, putting candidates in the center of all hiring practices.

Secondly, with all the advancement in transportation facility locally and internationally, people become more willing to travel and relocate, even abroad. The trend was found significantly high in high-skilled class of labor, which was often referred to as “brain drain”.

Thirdly, the world is witnessing the rise of a knowledge economy in replacement of product-based economy, which created a whole new picture of business doing and its

people. As the service sector now supplies the biggest chunk of employment, compared to agricultural and industrial sectors, business valuation depends a lot on intangible assets, making companies invest more and more in human capital with skills and knowledge. Furthermore, the need for staff for business growth means external hiring, which can lead to a higher turnover rate, putting companies at a constant need for continuous hiring, ensuring adequate human resource for business operations.

Fourthly, diversity at work is increasing in many aspects, ranging from demographic characteristics like gender, age, citizenship, etc., to more employment types rather than regular workers, such as limited contractors, freelancers, remote workers, etc. Such differences are believed to bring about conflict and/or learnings and innovations. Hiring and managing diversity has a great focus on communications. For example, crafting messages to young, fresh graduates should be different from that for middle-aged senior people. It was also noted here the war for talent would get more intensified as “employee consumerism” is popular among the high-skill class of labor who are very well aware of their position, opportunities and market (Chambers et al., 2007).

Table 1. The old and new reality comparison (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2001, p. 6)

The Old Reality	The New Reality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People need companies</li> <li>• Machines, capital and geography are the competitive advantage</li> <li>• Better talent make some difference</li> <li>• Jobs are scarce</li> <li>• Employees are loyal and jobs are secure</li> <li>• People accept the standard package they are offered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Companies need people</li> <li>• Talented people are competitive advantage</li> <li>• Better talent makes a huge difference</li> <li>• Talented people are scarce</li> <li>• People are mobile and their commitment is short term</li> <li>• People demand much more</li> </ul>

Also complemented on the same ideas of “the new reality” as new trends were emerging were Michaels, Handfield-Jones, and Axelrod (2001). It was believed that the old days when people needed companies as employment was not abundant and human resource was not proven as a competitive advantage for firms, were gone. “The new reality” highlighted the fact that companies were in need for people and it was talented people

that were scarce, not jobs. Office workers were aware of their varied career options and their values as a competitive advantage to firms, having the ability and need to ask for more benefits. In other words, in recruitment, the center position used to be taken by employers, now shifting to candidates.

Table 2. The old and new mindset about talent in comparison (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2001)

Old Mindset About People	New Talent Mindset
A vague notion that "people are our most important asset"	A deep conviction that better talent leads to better corporate performance
HR is responsible for people management	All managers are accountable for strengthening their talent pool
We have a two-day succession planning exercise once a year	Talent management is a central part of how we run the company
I work with the people I inherit	I take bold actions to build the talent pool I need

The war for talent is real. But how to get prepared and fight such a war? Michaels et al (2001) suggested hiring professionals to first integrate a new thinking about human capital that was aligned with the new context, which was summarized in Table 2. Only after that could they start rewriting their strategies in recruitment.

## 2.2.2 The shift from traditional Recruitment to Talent Acquisition as a strategy

Holm (2012) gave a concept of recruitment that is a process involved practices aiming at "identifying and attracting potential employees". In her research about traditional recruitment and E-recruitment, Holm formulated and visualized the traditional recruitment process in the following chart.

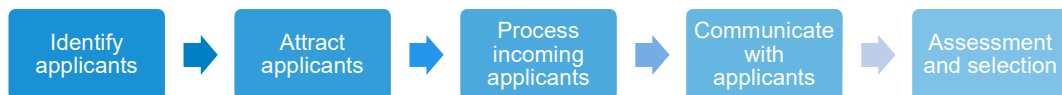


Figure 2. Traditional recruitment process (Holm, 2012)

As illustrated in the figure above, the traditional process starts with a need for employee and based on that need, often through the requesting client's job analysis information, a job description, job specifications, and candidate profile are developed to identify applicants – the first step. When it comes to attracting applicants as the next step,

recruiters are involved in preparing job ad(s) and selecting channels for promoting the job announcement. Common platforms include TV, magazine, the internet sites, etc. Once applications are received, there comes administrative and screening tasks to sort and shortlist potential candidates. Candidates will then be communicated about the next steps in the hiring process to move forward to the selection process if chosen. Selection practices vary but the most common form is interviews. The recruitment process ends once the need is fulfilled by a fit candidate (Holm, 2012).

Particularly, this process is believed to be only capable of fulfilling a job vacancy (Jobvite, 2016) as the process starts with a need and ends with a need fulfilled. This worked well in “the old reality” discussed in part 2.2.1 as in the old context, it was people that need jobs from companies when the demand for such jobs was higher than supply. Sperling (2017) believed this process was reactive and short-term oriented in its nature. Indeed, regarding “the new reality” and “the new talent mindset” discussed above, staff sourcing should be considered as a key competitive advantage of firms where they should invest real money in as a business strategy to win the war for talent as candidates demanding much more rather than simply coming to companies in abundance.

Michaels et al. (2001) when discussing strategies for companies in recruitment noted that:

“Rebuild recruiting strategy. Today you don’t find great employees for lists, you must go out and find them. Focus on hiring at multiple levels, identify intrinsic skills, look for new faces from new places.”

That is why a more strategic, proactive and long-term oriented is sought after in replacement of traditional recruitment. It was proposed that under the changing context of the new labor market’s era, the shift in the relationship between applicants and recruiters changed, making hiring professionals renovate themselves with new skills and techniques. In a study where 100 human resource managers were surveyed, a high number of 85 percent of them agreed that recruitment was similar to sales and Marketing exercises. It was because there was a strong need for good company images, superb Marketing skills to identify and attract candidates, and good sales skills to chase after and persuade the right candidates to join, like deal closing (Randhawa, 2017).

Talent Acquisition is believed to be an emerging strategy for its proactive, strategic, long-term oriented nature and that it employs several sales and Marketing principles in its framework. It is often thought to be a concept that is similar to Recruitment, but it has been argued in several sources of literature to be different. Shah (2017) described Talent Acquisition as an umbrella concept that covers multiple other processes, including recruitment. She also showed that while “recruitment is a linear process” to fill a need, which ends when the vacancy is filled, Talent Acquisition, on the other hand, is an “ongoing continuous cycle”. Also shared the same idea, Bugg (2015: 2) stated that Talent Acquisition is a process that has multiple layers. He stated that companies that want to have the best people cannot just rely on recruiting techniques like screening applications and interviewing candidates but to take on Talent Acquisition strategies that focus on growing the potential candidates continuously, including before and after the point a person gets recruited. In short, Talent Acquisition is defined to be “a strategic approach to identifying, attracting, and onboarding top talent to efficiently and effectively meet dynamic business needs”.

As mentioned above, the general framework of key elements for Talent Acquisition has several similarities in concepts that are common in the field of sales and Marketing. Randhawa (2017) listed six elements of Talent Acquisition, that are (1) Talent Acquisition planning and strategy, (2) workforce segmentation, (3) employer branding, (4) candidate audiences, (5) candidate relationship management, and (6) metrics and analytics.

Table 3. The six-element Talent Acquisition Framework(Randhawa, 2017: 3)

Element	Goal
Talent Acquisition Planning and Strategy	ensure the alignment of business, examines workforce plans, labor market understanding required, and global considerations to be looked at.
Workforce Segmentation	requires knowledge of different workforce segments and the various positions within these segments, as well as skills, competencies, and experience required for success.
Employer Branding	includes activities which would help uncover, articulate and define an organizations image, culture, key differentiators, reputation and the various products and services. This helps advance the market position of organizations and

	helps attract quality candidates and depict what it is to truly to work for that organization.
Candidate Audiences	it is important to understand and define the audiences in which an organization needs to source for specific roles. Based on the understanding of the jobs and where the audiences will come from to fill them, different sourcing strategies should be applied.
Candidate Relationship Management	It is important to be able to build a positive candidate experience, manage candidate communities, and maintain relationship with candidates not selected.
Metrics and Analytics	is the continuous tracking and use of key metrics to improve continuously and to ultimately improve the quality of hires.

As shown in the table, implementing the approach of Talent Acquisition involves a lot of long-term planning, continuous practices before-during-after recruiting, and measurements based on a deep understanding of candidates and a candidate-centric mindset. That is very similar to the way companies' Marketing approaches their customers. This similarity will be discussed in depth in the next part.

## 2.3 Understanding Talent Acquisition from a Marketing point of view

As discussed in the previous part, 85% of HR professionals believed in the similarity between the job of a Hiring Specialist and a Sales/Marketing staff (Bugg, 2015). With an idea that hiring professionals must attract candidates like Marketing people growing customers' interest and manage customer relationship; and convince candidates to join firms like salespeople closing deals, Fyock (1993) proposed that **firms regard candidates as their potential customers** and treat them in a strategic way accordingly (Huang, Huang and Chiu, 2011). The following subsections will discuss relevant Marketing concepts for a holistic understanding of Talent Acquisition framework and its applications in practice.

### 2.3.1 Marketing and Talent Acquisition: the meeting point

In an attempt to argue for the similarity in the nature of the process of Marketing and hiring, Huang et al. (2011) wrote: "Both buyers and sellers in the product market and job



seekers and recruiters in the talent market are looking for a match in order to establish a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship.”

According to the research, Fyock, in as early as 1993, suggested that in the process of finding and sourcing staff for firms effectively, recruiters should integrate relevant Marketing mindset into their work, that is, to consider their employees customers, their candidates as potential customers and job offers as products. Under this framework, the labor market becomes parallel to product market and job seekers were to be considered consumers. The table below listed down core parallel concepts in Marketing and talent management.

Table 4. Concept of integrating marketing in talent management (Fyock, 1993)

Elements in recruitment	Analogy in marketing
Job	Product
Terms and conditions of employment	Product features
Employee	Customer
Recruitment	Marketing and Sales
Retention	Customer service
Human resources	Marketing and customer service

This research also suggested that hiring entities who attempt to look at Talent Acquisition through the lens of Marketing tend to be more outstanding and noticeable than their competitors to candidates in long term. As a result, firms are encouraged to employ Marketing tools in the recruitment process to strategically and continuously promote their employment as they should do with their products so as to acquire high-quality employees and achieve management goals (Huang et al., 2011).

With a regard to Randhawa's Talent Acquisition framework, except for “planning and strategy” and “metrics and analytics”, which are already in use by HR people, each of the rest elements has been more popular as Marketing concepts before introduced in HR practice.

## **Workforce segmentation and Candidate audiences**

As discussed, workforce segmentation and candidate audiences are practices that rose from the need of understanding the talent market and individuals' differences with a regard to the dynamic requirements for different positions for relevant sourcing strategies. Market segmentation, likewise, rose from companies' understanding that consumers have differences in their behaviors, demand, and perceptions. Effective market segmentation enables marketers to tailor their product and service offers to better suit with customers' demand (Kotler *et al.*, 1999: 380-383), understanding workforce segmentation will enable recruiters to be more successful in finding, attracting and matching their job offers with candidates.

## **Employer branding**

In Marketing, brand image is widely believed to be vital in elevating customers' feeling and buying decision. Similarly, in hiring, companies branded as rich in providing learning and growth opportunities are more likely to become an employer of choice with higher acquisition and retention and employee engagement rate (Thorne and Pellant, 2007). Thus, just like a brand image affecting consumers' purchasing decision, employer branding becomes an indicator in the talent market among candidates.

## **Candidate relationship management**

In the competitive talent market, it is important to ensure that candidate experience is positive for a strong relationship with candidate communities, including those that are not accepted, according to Randhawa (2011). In Marketing, a parallel term, customer relationship management (CRM) is a practice used by businesses with a customer-centric culture that focuses on winning and keeping customers by delivering better values and experience to them. The key objective for CRM is to generate desirable business performance by managing customer base to identify, serve and retain them (Buttle, 2004: 4, 16)

All the practices above are important for recruiters to achieve competitive advantage in hiring and thus, successful candidates acquiring. Indeed, in the talent market, candidates, before accepting an offer and start working for a company, tend to weigh up and assess their career options based on a comparison of benefits, company's brand,

career planning outlook, etc. This process is similar to consumers evaluating different products intrinsically (i.e. product features) and extrinsically (i.e. product's brand) before they finally decide to buy such a product (Huang, Huang and Chiu, 2011). Thus, understanding tools for managing such behaviors is a key in integrating Marketing into recruitment for companies to compete in each stage of the whole hiring process.

### 2.3.2 Understanding candidates' decision making through the conversion funnel

Michael Cummings (2017), the head of the consulting company Tate/Cummings proposed that application of Marketing principles in recruitment for companies is crucial in attracting talent; and to be able to do what marketers do, hiring professionals have to first think like marketers.

One of the ideas that have been holding a central place in Marketing literature and practice is the **conversion funnel**. It was shown that this concept was widely applied into practice by Marketing people in their planning and execution. The conversion funnel was born to visualize the way people behave throughout their decision-making journey. It suggests that a customer often moves through different states of mind before any goods or service purchasing, and Marketing communications and techniques can help influence their possibility of moving further down the funnel towards their buying decision as the goal. Understanding the conversion funnel can set the basis for understanding customer's journey and experience through it (Abhishek, Fader and Hosanagar, 2012).

The conversion funnel, as its name suggests, focuses on how well customers are converted from one to another stage down the bottom of the funnel. Conversion rate is, therefore, a common measurement involved in this concept. The conversion funnel has developed through the time and has many variants, but all version can be put down to a funnel's most basic one of three part: Top of funnel (TOFU), Middle of funnel (MOFU) and Bottom of funnel (BOFU) (Sharkey, 2017).

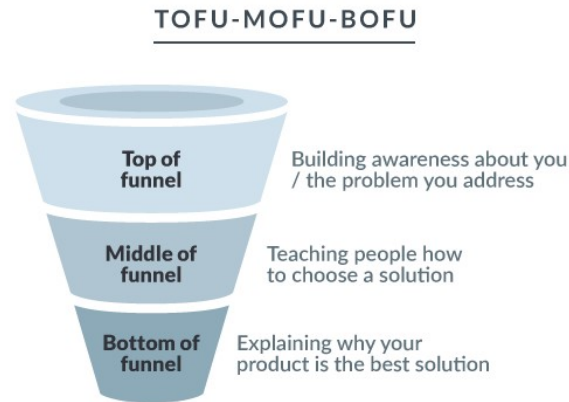


Figure 3. The three-stage conversion funnel (Sharkey, 2017)

The version that is most in use was claimed to be the three-stage model with each stage named Awareness – Consideration – Purchase in order from top to bottom (Abhishek, Fader and Hosanagar, 2012). To illustrate, a customer, who is starting to recognize her need or a brand name X that is linked with that need after seeing an ad, is in the first stage of the funnel of *Awareness* (if she does not have any idea of her need or the brand name, she does not have any awareness or she has not entered the funnel yet). Later, she has decided that the need is important enough that she has to solve it, she would seek for a range of solutions with brand X among them. In other words, she is *Considering* brand X's product(s). At this stage, she can be doing research, reading reviews to make herself better informed. After that, if brand X is compelling enough to push her down the funnel, she would make a *Purchase* (Abhishek, Fader and Hosanagar, 2012). It is important to note that, she, however, can opt out of brand X's funnel at any stage. That is the reason why the conversion funnel has a funnel shape: firms may have a lot of potential customers, but the further down the decision process, the less tend to stay (Sharkey, 2017). Understanding the conversion funnel helps practitioners identify a customer's location in the funnel and base on the understanding of their goals and behaviors, find appropriate techniques to pull her to the next decision-making stage.



Figure 4. Customer funnel and Candidate funnel (Strazzulla and Leger, 2017)

Based on the idea of a conversion funnel for customers, modern hiring institutions have developed a conversion funnel for recruitment, often known as **Recruitment funnel**, or **candidate funnel**. Like a Marketing conversion funnel, a recruitment funnel describes stages of decision-making of candidates when seeking and applying for jobs. Practitioners, instead of moving customers to different stages, move candidates accordingly. It was argued that understanding the decision making of job seekers through a well-built recruitment funnel could boost performance and results of companies' recruitment (Voeller, 2017). Other different forms of recruitment funnel can be found in the picture below.

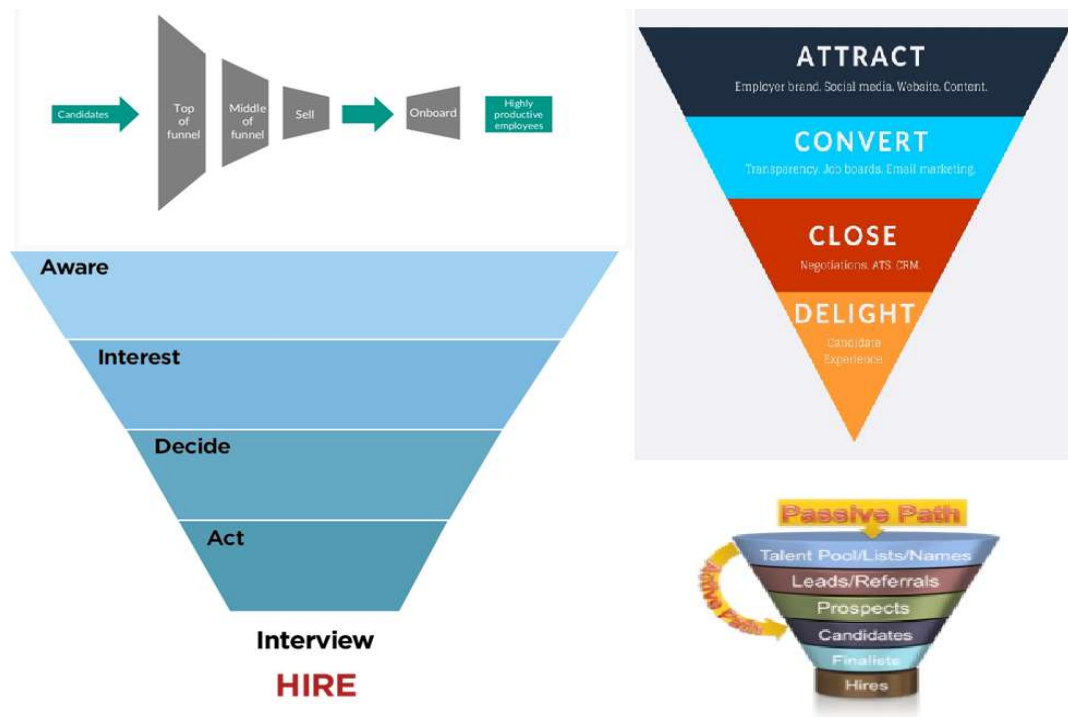


Figure 5. Examples of candidate funnels (Adler, 2012; Dhilon, 2016; Shetelboim, 2015; Ellis, 2018; Showers, 2015; and Martic, 2018)

As illustrated, despite having different number of stages or names of stages, most funnels' top starts with a state where awareness is formed or to be formed, then candidates move to the next part where they consider or get interested in a job. The consideration phase often covers until all selection process and techniques (eg. Interview) before candidates come to the last stage or hiring, which is parallel with "purchasing" in Marketing conversion funnel.

### 2.3.3 Understanding candidate experience from customer journey

Customer experience plays an essential role in business results (Gentile, Spiller and Noci, 2007). To understand customer experience, customer journey map has been employed as a tool to investigate and track changes in the experience of customers so as to evaluate a sales process from the perspective of customers (Mangiaracina *et al.*, no date). Customer journey concept is process-focused, describing the transition in a customer's value as the customer moves further in the process. A customer journey map concerns with people's mental patterns, consideration, interaction flow between customers and suppliers, suggesting touch points (Nenonen *et al.*, no date).

Richardson (2010) suggested that a useful framework for customer journey mapping should include the following elements as listed in the table below, which are consequently mapped with stages in the whole journey.

Table 5. Candidate journey map's elements

Element	Definition
Actions	What the customer is doing at this stage
Motivations	What makes the customer want to go to the next phase
Questions	What is confusing them and preventing them to go to the next stage? What do they want to ask?
Barriers	What is standing in their way of proceeding to the next stage?
Touchpoints	What do companies have to do accordingly?

A customer journey map template for this framework should look like a grid of customer journey's stages, or customer funnel, and related elements involved as the picture below.

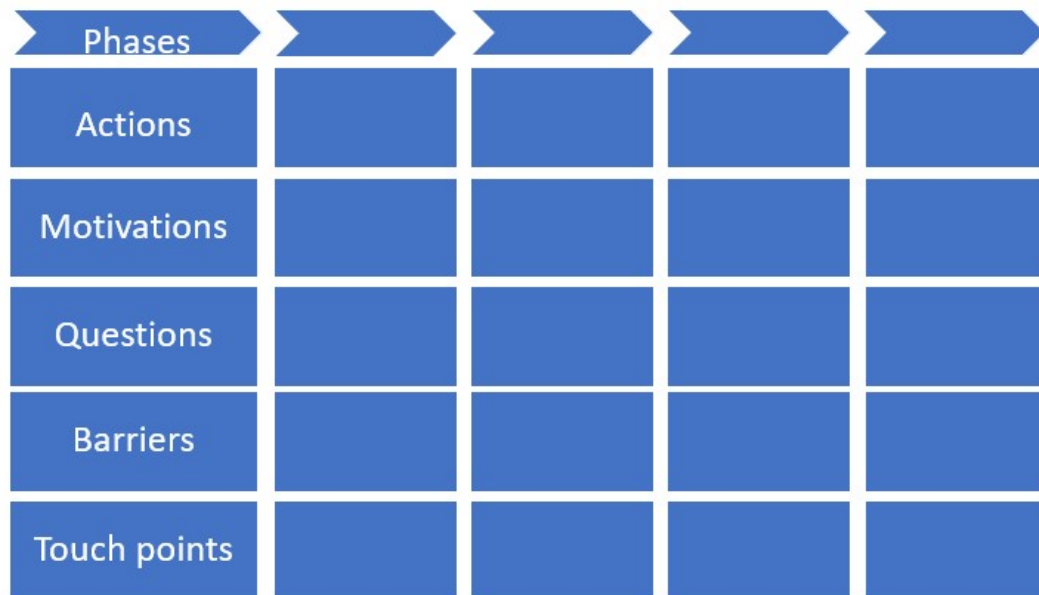


Figure 6. Candidate journey map template. Adapted from: (Ideatheorem, 2018)

As discussed previously, companies, in order to compete in the war for talent, should consider their candidates customers. Thus, candidate experience should be crucial as well. Juntunen (2018) discussed that a positive candidate experience is a key in

candidate relationship management. Negative candidate experience can make an employer off the list of a high-skilled candidate, while positive experience can encourage candidates to apply again even if they fail in their first attempt. Ribuot (2017) proposed that to understand candidates' experience in their whole job seeking process, mapping a candidate journey can be particularly beneficial in finding points where actions can be made to enhance candidates' impression and affection of employers. Similar to customer experience controlled by customer journey map, candidate experience is also described to be a journey of job seekers from passive to seeking for jobs, to the end when they get hired. It includes interactions between companies and candidates throughout the hiring process. Below is a practical example of how a candidate decides to apply for a job as the first phase of a candidate journey.



Figure 7. Example of candidate awareness journey (Martic, 2018)

A candidate can see your job advertisement on a job board, then visit your career site to read your career blogs there. She would later go to companies review sites, such as Glassdoor.com to check your ratings. She would also look for you on Facebook. She gets interested after what she saw, decided to join your talent network. She may also later meet and talk to your representative at a career fair before filling an online application form and come to your interview, etc. (Martic, 2018).

Mapping a visual candidate journey is also similar to a customer journey map with certain elements driving candidate experience mapped with stages of the recruitment process.



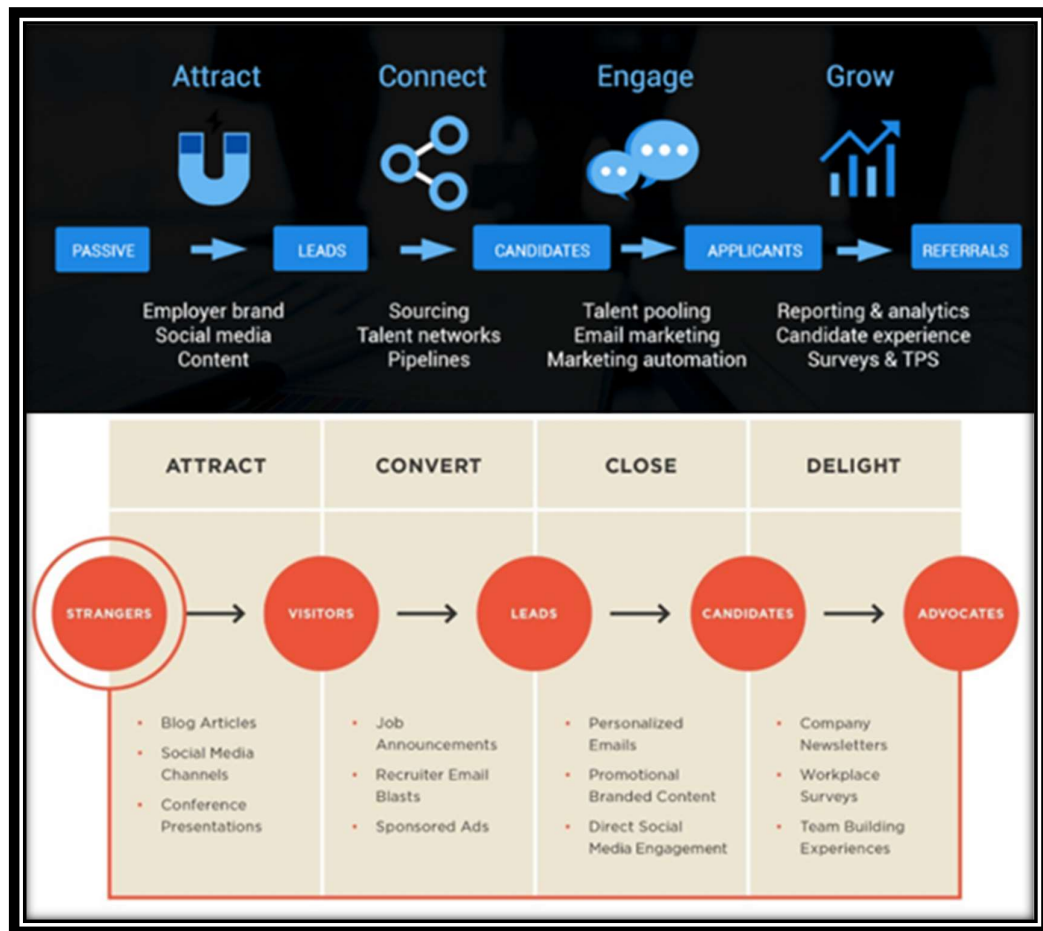


Figure 8. Examples of basic candidate journey maps (Voeller, 2017; Slater, 2017)

As illustrated in the examples above, the basic version of candidate journey map links different stages of candidate funnel with companies' activities (touch points) and channels where touch points are made. For example, to turn passive candidates to leads, companies are placed under the burden of attracting, which can be achieved through employer branding, social media, and content (Slater, 2017).

Sharing the same idea, Martić (2018) introduced a template of candidate journey map as the picture below.



		 <b>Candidate Journey Map Template</b>					
		Awareness	Consideration	Interest	Application	Selection	Hire
<b>About Candidate Persona</b>  Age:  Location:  Profession:  Education:  Skills:  Interests:  Salary:	Thinking						
	Touch-points						
	Channels						

Figure 9. Candidate journey map template (Martic, 2018)

Martic (2018) developed a candidate journey map template of the six-phase funnel: awareness – consideration – interest – application – selection – hire mapped with candidates' thinking, companies' touchpoints and channels aligned, all based on an understanding of the targeted candidates through a candidate persona.

In conclusion, hiring professionals can use the lens of Marketing to better understand and execute Talent Acquisition. As candidates are to be put at the center, like customers, there is a strong need to understand their decision making along the job seeking journey in order to optimize candidate experience for better hiring results. These objectives can be helped achieve with some key Marketing tools, such as conversion funnel and customer/candidate journey map, which are linked together.

### 3 Research methodology

#### 3.1 Research design

The author chose a qualitative approach with a case-study design for this study for the following reasons. First, a qualitative approach, unlike a quantitative one that is often in the form of charts and graphs, tries to show the human factor underlying the findings by its ability to generate rich data. In other words, a qualitative approach attempts to make sense of the findings, making readers of such reports find it easier to understand (Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree, 2014: 46-47).

Second, the case-study design was chosen as this design's philosophy and desired outcomes are aligned with this study's objectives as addressed in Chapter 1. Case study design is often chosen when researchers are more eager to explore insight, discovery, and interpretation than to test hypotheses. Case-study design aims at describing an on-going event in relation to a specific result of interest. It is a good tool for investigating the complexity of a social unit that has many variables that are relevant to a phenomenon, bringing a holistic and comprehensive view of such phenomenon. (Merriam, 1988: 28-29,41 and Brewerton, Paul and Millward, 2001: 62)

In the scope of this study, the author aimed at providing a descriptive elaboration and evaluation on modern hiring strategies and practices through a case study at in order to illustrate and reassess how the theoretical framework of Talent Acquisition, candidate funnel and candidate journey discussed in Chapter 2 works in practice and further to structure and formulate an effective hiring framework that is both strategy-and-tactic-focused as a reference source for hiring professionals, which should be easy to understand and apply.

#### 3.2 Case company and samples

Base Enterprise is a tech company based in Hanoi, Vietnam with a branch office in Ho Chi Minh City and Singapore. The company claims to be "Asia's first open Enterprise platform) and is working towards a vision of becoming the unicorn (market leader) in South East Asia. What Base Enterprise does is to solve companies' operational problems with technological solutions as a SaaS (software as a service) company. By developing an ecosystem/framework/a *base* that allows mini apps to integrate on one single system, Base helps end user enjoying user-friendly and smart business apps that

actually help them execute their job tasks better and faster, while companies at management level secure their data integrity. As a provider of operational technological solutions, the company targets at diversifying its business customers base with different products, ranging from big corporates to SMEs (small and medium enterprises). Base's apps, at the moment, cover a wide range of fields in operations, including hiring, task management, objective management, payrolls, admin, request management, internal social media network, etc.

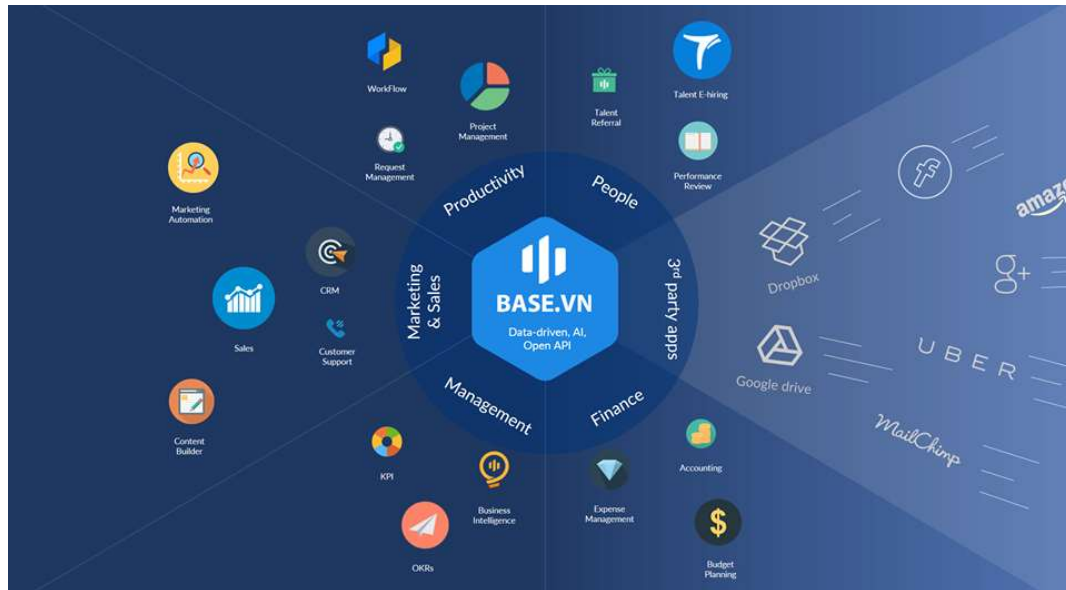


Figure 10. Base Enterprise ecosystem of apps (Base.vn, 2018)

It was revealed by the company's COO that the company was going through a fast growth rate of 50-70% quarterly in terms of revenue in the last five successive quarters (as of October 2018 when the thesis was conducted). During the first half of 2018, the head office in Hanoi alone expanded two times due to rapid growth in headcounts. The company is focusing on Vietnamese market and accelerating to go global in 2019 as planned. Working in the B2B industry, Base claims to put business customers first as their trusted long-term partner that will do anything for a mutual growth (Base.vn, 2018).

Under the Board of Directors, the company has three departments, that are Product development, Business Development, and Operations. Because of such growth pressure, the company is hiring intensively in almost all of its positions across all departments.

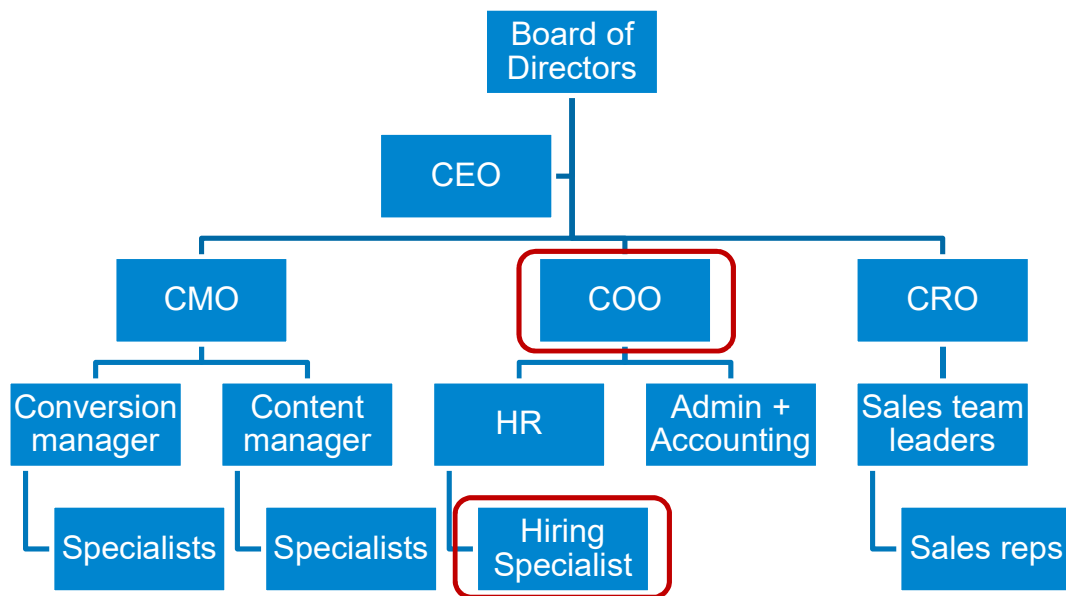


Figure 11. Base Enterprise's organization chart

With a regard to this case study's objective of illustrating and reassessing the Talent Acquisition, candidate funnel, and candidate journey frameworks, the sample of this case study was chosen to be the COO and Hiring Specialist (at the headquarter) out of the population of about a hundred employees at Base. They were chosen for interviews for a comprehensive and practical perspective on both strategy and tactics employed in their hiring process. With a regard to their recruitment, the COO oversaw strategy planning as well as execution results of the hiring specialist team (their relationships can be seen from the organization chart above). In other words, the sample featured the two key agents in strategic planning and execution in order to be able to provide a big and comprehensive picture for readers to grasp why they are doing what they are doing and any possible gaps between planning and real execution or from theory to practice.

### 3.3 Data collection method

Data for this thesis were achieved through in-depth interviews with the chosen samples mentioned previously. Depth interviews are particularly conducted on a one-to-one, ordinary conversation basis, which serves as a base that allows both the interviewer and interviewee to interact, explore matters and unravel theoretical issues at an early stage

(Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree, 2014: 47). Likewise, each of the samples of this case study was interviewed individually. The interview was designed to be semi-structured. This interview design is particularly helpful in calling for sharing and interactions with business experts and leaders. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer can be somewhat flexible but (s)he still needs to focus and keep the discussion close and essential to the study. (S)he can use probing techniques to encourage richer and relevant answers in this kind of interviews (Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree, 2014: 48).

Semi-structured interviews feature a series of themes and open-ended questions that cover the study topics of interest of the researchers (Mathers, Fox, and Hunn, 1998: 2). It is recommended that when structuring and preparing questions for the interview, researchers create a basic checklist or themes list so that all studied matters are well covered. The checklist can help researchers staying close to the core of the study while allowing them to perform in-depth probing for further understanding needed (Alshenqeeti, 2014: 2). The interview checklist for this case study is built based on the theoretical framework of Talent Acquisition, candidate funnel, and candidate journey map. Under these themes, there will be correspondent questions to explore, describe and explain hiring strategies and tactics at the case company. The interview checklist is presented in the table below.

Table 6. Interview themes checklist

1. A big picture of Talent Acquisition at Base: SWOT analysis (Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats)
2. How Base does Talent Acquisition in relation to the Talent Acquisition's six-element metric
3. Base's candidate funnel design and practice (if any)
4. Base's candidate journey management design and practice (if any)

According to Sreejesh et al. (2014: 59-60), in order to gauge accurate and meaningful answers, the vocabulary used should be familiar with interviewees question formatting should mean the same to all. Furthermore, for better decoding and analysis, all interviewees should be asked the same questionnaire. Consequently, based on the checklist above, the questionnaire for both interviewees was developed as shown in the table below.

Table 7. Interview question semi-structured list

Themes	Questions
1. A big picture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the importance of Talent Acquisition to Base?</li> <li>- How do you describe recruitment at Base? Is your approach more of recruitment or Talent Acquisition?</li> <li>- What are your strengths and weaknesses in acquiring talent? What are your opportunities and threats?</li> <li>- What tools and processes are you using in hiring? What kind of personnel involved in the hiring process? What about the decision process?</li> </ul>
2. The six-element Talent Acquisition metric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are your hiring planning and strategy?</li> <li>- Do you perform workforce segmentation? How do you do that?</li> <li>- How do you build your employer branding?</li> <li>- How do you cater for different candidate audiences?</li> <li>- How do you manage candidate relationship?</li> <li>- What are your metrics and analytics?</li> </ul>
3. Candidate funnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you know about candidate funnel?</li> <li>- What is the role of candidate funnel in strategy and practice?</li> </ul>
4. Candidate journey management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you think about candidate experience? Does Base value and prioritize candidate experience?</li> <li>- How do you define the journey of Base's candidates? Do you have any strategy and tactics to improve candidate experience throughout that journey?</li> </ul>

After the author proposed and got approval from the case company about the topic and the sample staff, interview invitations were sent to the sample as discussed, that was the COO and the Hiring Specialist at Base. The invitation included the introduction and objectives of the thesis only. The author deliberately did not give further information on themes and question list in order to achieve prompt answers that tend to reduce bias of interviewees as one of the disadvantages of data collected through interviews is that they can be inaccurate because the interviewees may answer in the way they believe the listeners want to hear (Denscombe, 2010: 173).

Both of the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. As it is the mother tongue of the interviewees and interviewer, it should bring comfort and ease to the interviewees in

answering questions in exactly the way they mean it. This helped encourage interviewees to share their ideas, details, and insights. Meanwhile, the interviewer can also understand their responses more precisely with, for example, use of slangs and proverbs in the language. The two interviews were conducted through video calling in October 2018 with an average length of 45 minutes each. If data generated from that target sample were decided to be not enough for analysis, interviews would be taken with the other two hiring staff at Base. This was decided to be unnecessary after two interviews with the COO and the Hiring Specialist where data generated were recognized to be sufficient.

### 3.4 Data analysis

For the complex nature of qualitative data, collected primary data from interviews needed to be condensed, grouped and structured through a conceptual framework (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 484).

#### Data preparation

The interviews were conducted through video calling and audio recorded. Thus, the first step was to transcribe the audio recording for converting the interview into a written account or word based. When transcribing the interviews, it is important to not only write down the actual words but also the way it was said, for example, the tone of voice, for more accurate interpretation (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 485).

Table 8. Extract of interview transcript

<p>Interviewer: How do you assess your employer branding power at the moment?</p> <p>COO: (<i>normal tone</i>) We are pretty new in the market so I would not say we have a strong employer branding yet. We are on the way of building it, starting from the internal side.</p> <p>Interviewer: How well do you think you are doing with employer branding? Do you actually have ways to measure your employer branding?</p> <p>COO: (<i>long pause</i>) (“<i>Hmm...</i>”) To be honest, I have thought of that, like having some metrics in my mind but I have been busy with other business functions so far so I could not really take care of it. But we are measuring the rate of referrals and word of mouth, which is a part of our employer branding.</p>
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It was suggested that to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, the final transcripts could be sent to interviewees for double checking, but researchers should be careful of the fact that interviewees may want to correct their own languages, like grammar and word choice because spoken and written language use can be very different (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). For that reason, the author of this thesis did not send the final transcripts to the interviewees but double checked herself to make sure transcription was correct and managed to keep the actual meaning of the conversations by proper notes on tone of voice and other non-verbal expressions, and only sent the final draft of findings to the company for approval of data privacy. It is also important to acknowledge that at this stage, the transcripts were not translated into English because it was seen to be unnecessary in analyzing data and by not doing so, the original meaning of the discussion was maintained as much as possible. Only the results and findings of this case study would be later presented in English.

### **Analysis approach**

Qualitative data can be approached either inductively or deductively. While an inductive approach means seeking to build a framework from the data gained and analyzed, deductive approach concerns analyzing data based on an existing framework as a research guide. As this case study aims at describing, exploring and explaining the practices of modern hiring discussed in Chapter 2, data gained from interviews of this thesis were analyzed in a deductive perspective (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The author used existing theoretical frameworks of Talent Acquisition, candidate funnel, and candidate journey to be the backbone of the thesis question and objectives, thus, this case study had three correspondent themes for data analysis, which are Talent Acquisition framework, candidate funnel building and candidate journey management at Base Enterprise.

### **Analysis process**

No standardized analysis process for qualitative data is reported to be official, but there are three common main phases, which are condensing data, categorizing data and structuring data using a narrative (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 490).

After interview transcripts were double checked and ready, long responses in text were summarised to its key point for the convenience of the next step of data categorizing. In other words, the long text was condensed to a fewer amount of words that convey main points of the respondents' while still managed not to lose any possible critically relevant points.

Table 9. Example of data condensing

Original response	Summarized version
Through my years of doing staff sourcing for Base with many good and bad cases, I know that candidate experience is important. So at Base, we do try to have that in mind and enhance it gradually.	Candidate experience valued and prioritized.
<i>(long pause) ("Hmm...")</i> To be honest, I have thought of that <i>(employer branding impact measurement)</i> , like having some metrics in my mind but I have been busy with other business functions so far so I could not really take care of it. But we are measuring the rate of referrals and word of mouth, which is a part of our employer branding.	Employer branding not measured systematically. Only referrals, word of mouth are measured.

Data is then categorized by developing categories and linking suitable data to each. For the purpose of fulfilling the research objectives and because of the deductive approach and the semi-structured interview design, which both derived from the focus on the discussed theoretical framework, themes were the same as stated in Table 6, under which categories were identified mostly based on their theoretical framework's elements. For example, under the theme of "How Base does Talent Acquisition", there were initially six categories in line with the six-element Talent Acquisition framework.

Table 10. Examples of categories

How Base does Talent Acquisition	Strategy and planning
	Candidate segmentation
	Candidate audiences
	Employer branding
	Candidate Relationship Management
	Metrics and Analysis

Relevant data unit would next be placed under their suitable categories (unitizing process) like the example above. During this stage, if a category was later found out to be too broad or too narrow to have enough data-based argument, it would be joined with another category or divided, or dropped suitably. For example, data in “Candidate segmentation” and “Candidate audiences” showed a lot of similarity and a close link between the two initial categories, so they were grouped together. Meanwhile, during the unitizing process, certain categories not directly mentioned in the theoretical framework emerged to be of value in illustrating the case and got adopted.

Lastly, categorized data were structured and ordered in a narrative-based form. A narrative is somewhat like a story that is told in a sequence of events and their outcome that conveys meaning. Narrative structuring, like a story, has a flow that commonly covers what the story is about, events and their agents involved, consequences, significance and final outcome (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The case study narrative of this thesis, likewise, consisted of two parts under which themes and categories of data meaningfully accordingly ordered:

- The talent challenge – context analysis
- The talent solution – strategic planning, execution and results

## **4 Results – Building a winning hiring culture from the early start**

### **4.1 The talent challenge for a B2B SaaS company**

#### **Case introduction**

Base Enterprise is a tech company providing software as a service based in Vietnam. The company's mission is to empower Asian Enterprises with the best software solutions that solve problems across all business functions its vision is to become the unicorn in South East Asia.

As of October 2018, Base Enterprise has been officially running its business for two years, receiving investment from top Funds and Venture Capitalists and priding itself on a proven scalability with impressive growth. Revenue was reported to grow at around 50-70% quarterly in the last five successive quarters. Base's directors faced the burden of quick growth in human resource parallelly to catch up with the rising financial figures. As a self-proclaimed new product-centric company in a newly emerged market of B2B software, also in a newly emerged macro-economic market of Vietnam, the challenge of sourcing for talent in product and business development is real.

#### **The talent challenges**

In terms of the industry, talent attraction is very competitive as there is a shortage of experienced workforce in B2B software and SaaS for the industry only emerged in recent years with not many players. For business development function with key positions in Sales, Marketing and Customer Success, the talent pool in the market is limited as the market has been always dominantly B2C directed. For product development function, Base found it even harder to find technological developers because, (1) Vietnamese developers has been only famous for IT outsourcing service (which is significantly different to the product-centric nature of Base), and (2), many foreign companies are willing to jump in and give offers to developers way higher than the market price. Furthermore, the booming economy in Vietnam has brought more career opportunities to the labor market than ever, giving candidates more options and more power as a whole.

In terms of the company itself, with a short history of two years, despite impressive numbers in investment and growth, Base still appears to candidates as a start-up. This image does not tend to appeal to experienced candidates who usually look for job security in long-term and a professional corporate working environment where everything is standardized, especially to candidates for business development function, even though salary at Base for them is higher than the market. For developers, benefit packages are about market average or slightly lower, which is a key weakness in Base's hiring competitive advantage.

### **The mindset on talent**

Directors at Base understands the strategic position of hiring in their business. First, to them, human resource is the fuel for running 'the whole machine' (the company) and hiring is the key in scaling. At Base, it is believed that when a business grows, its people must grow along at the same pace; if not, either the business will suffer from indigestion (inability to handle growth) or the company machine will be slowed down. Anyone incompetent should be removed. But the classic scenario is companies finding laying-off too hard, mostly because of the barrier in finding a replacement. Second, in B2B, staff is the utmost ambassadors of the company, thus, finding people that match with business branding is important. Business branding and employer branding come hand in hand. In short, hiring comes in as the gate to welcome suitable people to travel the long quest together and the key to HR decision during scaling as for whom to be removed and whom to be developed, running consistently along with Sales and Marketing in strategic growth.

## **4.2 Winning starts from understanding candidates**

### **4.2.1 Building a sustainable hiring framework – the backstage work**

#### **The strategy**

Understanding the company position in the market and its strengths and weaknesses, it was decided that Base could not have it all in terms of talent. Instead of searching for perfect-fit, experienced candidates within the existing limited talent pool, they focused on hiring outstanding young and fresh graduates with competencies in learning and suitable qualities that match with the job characteristics in relation to the B2B software industry. That is a trade-off between candidates' level of experience and internal on-the-job

training capability. In preparation for that, coaching skills of team managers job-specific onboarding process were strengthened and standardized. New hires will go through two months of probation and onboarding process named 'Base Academy' where they rigorously learn and practice necessary know-how on real small projects. The short two-month probation also gives a chance to final candidates experience and grow bonds with the company and their colleagues and the company to further select suitable candidates.

Aiming to play a big global game, strategic Talent Acquisition was combined with timely recruitment parallelly to achieve sufficiency in human resources but not compromise on long-term results. Base wants to build a strong hiring culture from the very early days so as not to let the company fall into a shortage of human resources at any time to enable constant growth. They believe that the best way to sell a business is to turn every employee into a Salesperson; similarly, to achieve effective hiring, every employee should be a recruiter. With such candidate persona, Base implemented 'inbound recruiting' through two main sourcing channels: social recruiting and internal referrals, each with relevant strategies followed. The hiring process for each position is streamlined with candidate funnel model where candidate experience and communications play the key role in optimizing funnel performance, under the help of technology of Applicant Tracking System in coordinating, tracking and reporting.

### **Candidate segmentation and audiences catering**

At Base, three main business functions that drive scaling are Product development, Sales and Marketing. With an understanding of the talent market and the company's own positioning, Base chooses the most potential candidate segments for each position with a model of two axes of 'Level of experience' and 'Closeness of past industries'. The tables below display candidate segments for each business functions.

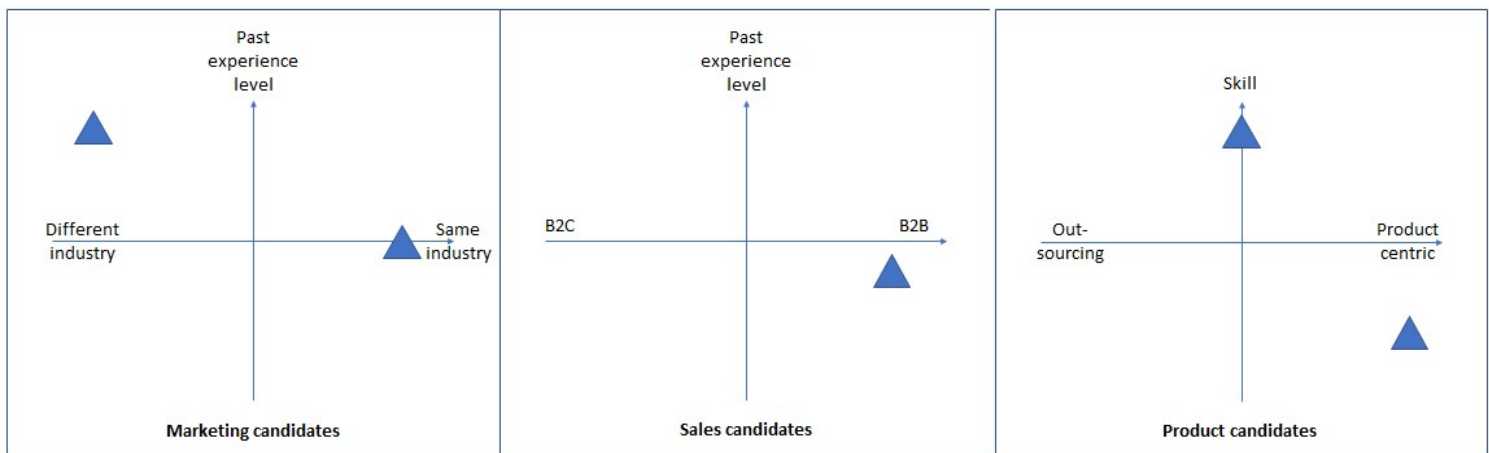


Figure 12. Candidate segmentation by jobs at Base Enterprise

As displayed, most of the segments emphasize the closeness of past industries in the trade-off for experience level. Some jobs in Marketing and Product also accept candidates with little closeness in B2B and product-centric industry if they have a high level of expertise. These segments show consistency in the company's strategy of focusing on freshers with good qualities and coachability.

To attract such talent, it is important to understand three insights of young candidates. Based on these insights, relevant contents will be disseminated through social media and job sites to source candidate leads. Candidate insights and relevant approaches are presented in the table below.

Table 11. Candidate audiences planning at Base Enterprise

Insight	Approach and relevant contents to feed
1. Job seekers tend to be appealed to new and growing industries and companies with high growth potential.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth potential of SaaS industry</li> <li>• News about Base receiving investment from big funds</li> <li>• News of Base on the press</li> </ul>
2. Professional training and learning environment for self-growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise and know-how sharing across job fields</li> <li>• Promotion on Base Academy with a positioning of a Sales Academy specialized in B2B software sales</li> </ul>

3. Open, agile and transparent workplace with clear career planning and promotion track.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Base's culture</li> <li>• "Basers' Gene" – core values</li> <li>• Code of conduct</li> <li>• Real humans of Base images</li> </ul>
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Also, it is important to manage and update a list of different channels in correspondence with each position for precise targeting and optimized cost. For example, a Sales job ad and its content are not to be posted in Facebook groups dedicated for IT jobs, and vice versa. In addition, sourcing channels are to be evaluated on efficiency through tracked results on the ATS to determine which channel to be prioritized and invested, at the same time cutting cost on channels that do not perform well enough.

### **Employer branding**

As discussed, employer branding goes hand in hand with business branding as the company's people are in an important part of the brand. Thus, employer branding at Base starts from the inside. The Marketing and Operations departments work together to implement internal PR programmes with an aim for all staff to understand and take pride in the company's mission, vision, core values, products, and culture. Word-of-mouth from company's employees when they go share about their work through social media and in friends meetups can have a large impact on employer branding and company branding as a whole, generating referral candidate leads.

On the external side, branding messages are delivered through different digital channels and off-line appearance (Direct Marketing). Easy-access experience was ensured for the brand to reach closer to potential talent pools and generate positive recommendations and word-of-mouth. In terms of digital platforms, Base does employer branding through the company website, a career website, career Facebook page, LinkedIn company profile and aggressive seeding across these two social media networks. In terms of direct Marketing, apart from placing booths at big career fairs, the company plans to cooperate with student clubs and organizations at top business and technical universities in Vietnam through student event sponsorship to further increase brand awareness in such student communities. The last element in Base's employer branding to be emphasized is candidate experience. Candidate experience can make or break a referral, and negative messages always travel faster than positive ones. Candidate optimization at Base starts from the point a candidate is interested in B2B, SaaS industry, career option



at Base and begin researching on it, to the point of post recruitment. If a candidate ends up in working at Base, his/her experience continues to be cared with internal employer branding practices. If he/she is rejected at some point of the whole process, recruiters at Base are required to go extra miles to ensure positive feeling and maintain relationship with them, which takes practices of Candidate Relationship Management discussed next.

At the moment, Base knows that they have a long way to go to become an employer of choice to attract thousands of candidates to spare and choose from, so building employer branding early at this stage helps in gradually growing talent pool and improving conversion rate. In other words, more leads to be used more efficiently.

### **Candidate Relationship Management**

Candidate relationship management at Base concerns two types: candidates (anyone who applies and is currently in the selection process) and passive contacts. All of candidate relationship management practices are done through the ATS, which is dubbed as “Recruitment CRM software”.

As for current candidates who are under the selection process, interaction and setting-delivery of expectations are highlighted. The selection process is streamlined to be communicated clearly with candidates once their applications are qualified for the next stage so that they know what to expect. For example, the sourcing specialists are required to give results to candidates within two weeks since applications received, and one week after interviews. Emails to candidates should address them in names, not “Dear Candidate”, and candidates that are rejected after interviews will receive brief feedback on their interview performance and future improvement. Fast personalized interaction enhances candidate experience significantly. Such an amount of personalized interaction cannot be done without the help of technology where automation and templates come in to do most of the work. Base wants candidates to value the career opportunity here so that if they are rejected, they would feel regretful but still willing to refer it to someone else in their network

As for passive contacts, they are sorted and categorized for different proper approaches. For example, if a candidate is potential but lacks necessary competence at the time of the interview and gets rejected, he/she will not be forgotten but remembered in the

database system to be contacted again after, for example, one year when he is supposedly more competent with one year of work experience. Generally, mass (but personalized) email Marketing is used to engage with passive contacts. Depends on their status in the candidate funnel, different contents will be sent in order to convert those leads. For certain highly potential contacts, discovery calls will apply to quickly qualify/disqualify and interact to convert them. The most important part is that all of such interaction history, including calls, email threads, applying history, interviews, recruiter's evaluation, and notes, is linked with candidate's information and all logged on the system for later use.

### **Metrics and analysis**

Base uses the following five metrics to measure hiring performance of each job opening:

1. Overview dashboard with key numbers of candidates, interviews, offer, hired and rejected. This dashboard gives hiring managers a quick overview of performance updates and quickly spotting issues.
2. Time to hire: lead time from the applying date to the date that candidate confirms offer acceptance. This figure measures the speed of hiring for optimization in process and recruiters' efficiency.
3. Hiring cost: total budget and cost-effective result by channels are presented in two key number of 'cost per lead' and 'cost per hired'. This metric identifies the most fruitful talent sourcing channels to be prioritized and other adjustments in cost distribution.
4. Candidate funnel performance: number of candidates, pass rate and average lead time in each stage of the funnel are measured for possible optimization in the hiring process.
5. Team activities: numbers of CV screened, emails sent, interview conducted for each hiring specialist is tracked to measure their personal performance and job delivery.
6. Turn over rate: the rate of employees leaving to retest the qualification process.

As a tech company, Base emphasizes data-driven decisions and actions, as well as smart automation in all process. All of the five metrics are automatically tracked and reported, freeing recruiters time to focus on delivering their jobs rather than spending time on reporting. Base's directors also review these metrics aggressively to act. For example, when it was seen that out of more than a hundred CVs received and 42

interviews conducted, only two were hired. Such a low conversion rate indicates problems in leads qualification in sourcing stage, causing a loss in time and effort of hiring managers in interviewing under-qualified candidates. This forced the hiring team to change their social media contents, phone interview/discovery call scripts to achieve higher sourcing quality and conversion rate. In short, metrics and analysis enable data-driven actions and decisions in hiring, as well as governing the whole Talent Acquisition result.

#### 4.2.2 Fighting in the talent war – Execution in the front

##### **Building a strong-performance conversion funnel the way marketers do**

Base views hiring as Sales and Marketing, organizing team and tactics based on the model of candidate funnel. The ultimate goal of hiring team, just like Marketing team hacking business growth, is to build, grow and sustain a candidate funnel that is large enough to efficiently 'pump' talent into the company as needed. Thus, instead of holding conventional full-stack recruiters to process candidates from the beginning to the end, job design in hiring team follows closely with the objective of growing and optimizing each stage of the funnel. This job design/team organization has exactly the same methodology as the Marketing team at Base. Base defined their main candidate funnel to have three stage: sourcing – recruiting – onboarding. The fourth stage, Delight and Growth is being built to further complete the candidate funnel.

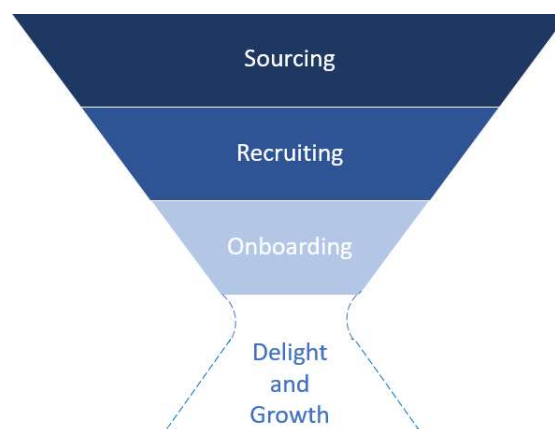


Figure 13. Candidate funnel at Base Enterprise

At the moment, the hiring team has three personnel to take care of parts of the funnel correspondingly: Talent Sourcing Specialist, Hiring Specialist, and Operation Specialist. The table below summarizes the team's job design and each position's objectives and tasks and Key Performance Indicator(s) - KPI(s).

Table 12. Job design and team organization of hiring personnel

Position	Corresponding funnel stage	Objective	Tasks	KPI(s)
Talent Sourcing Specialist	Top of Funnel (TOFU caring) Sourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To source, the funnel with qualified candidate leads</li> <li>To perform Candidate Relationship Management with Contacts (not applicants)</li> <li>(Burden of sourcing and converting - More like Marketing)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Candidate pooling</li> <li>Headhunting through networking via discovery calls, social media, events, and other sources</li> <li>Job ad posting, Content seeding</li> </ul>	Number of qualified leads applying
Hiring Specialist	Middle of Funnel (MOFU caring) Recruiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To hire (close deal with) suitable candidate for the company through the selection process from the point of application received to the result of Hired or Rejected.</li> <li>(Burden of closing - More like Sales)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CVs screening</li> <li>Candidates contacting and interacting</li> <li>Coordinating different personnel involved in the selection process and decision making</li> </ul>	Number of candidates accepting offers
Operations Specialist	Bottom of Funnel (BOFU caring) Onboarding; Delight and Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To prepare candidates on probation ready to integrate and perform their jobs/get officially hired.</li> <li>To foster the code of conduct and positive working experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paperwork preparing for candidates to start</li> <li>Delivering designed training and tests to new hires</li> <li>Following up and evaluation</li> <li>Executing referral programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of candidates officially hired</li> <li>Candidates test score upon finishing probation</li> <li>Number of candidates</li> </ul>

		for development		through internal referrals
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The backbone element in building, growing and sustaining the candidate funnel at Base is defined to be Base Academy. Base Academy is the training center for not only new hires but also all employees at Base. Apart from its very obviously original purpose of providing continuous training for staff, Base aims at developing Base Academy to be a strategic competitive advantage in employer branding, sourcing and selecting, running through all stages of the candidate funnel. At the moment, Base Academy is only open for internal staff, but it is planned to open to external students in the potential talent pools through the organization of Sales and Marketing training courses and IT Hackathon campaigns. According to Base's COO, conventional sourcing channels are reaching the point of saturation, so they needed to find smarter and more cost-effective ways of hiring. Base Academy is a big part of the "hiring machine" for the company as it can target, attract, process, evaluate and eliminate, convert and develop talent at the same time.

### **Managing candidate experience throughout their journey**

Throughout this case study analysis, candidate experience is mentioned and highlighted in almost all of the aspects. The idea of candidate experience is diffused into all practices in each stage of the candidate funnel as Base believes that candidate funnel plays a key role in determining conversion rate and referral rate. In action, hiring team activities have to be mapped and matched with candidates' insight and their job seeking journey.

As discussed, Base defines that the candidate journey starts from the point a candidate searching for information on employment opportunities, B2B, SaaS, and technology industry, applying, going through the selection process to the point of being on probation, getting trained and officially hired. But it does not really end, continuing to develop with their workplace experience manifested through thoughts and feelings shared within their network, either through word-of-mouth or social media and other digital platforms (eg. workplace rating sites). The candidate journey map serves as a mind map, summarizing and visualizing all strategies and tactics of hiring team as discussed. Detailed Base Enterprise's candidate journey map is attached as Appendix 1 of this thesis.

### **A winning hiring culture**

With an attractive referral reward programme, the company encouraged everyone to hire talents for Base, making hiring no longer exclusive to the HR department. To achieve a successful referral culture, there are three issues concerned by employees the most:

1. Applicants referred by me must be precisely and timely recognized to be my referees.
2. I need to know where my referee(s) are in the hiring process
3. I want reward money to be transparent and delivered as promised.

These issues are solved with the help of a Referral Tracking System. Employees who want to, for example, promote a job opening on their social media accounts can quickly get a link of that job ad from the system that has tracking functions. Any candidate applying through that link will be reported to have been sourced by, for example, Employee X. Status of the referees is reported to the referrers in real time and reward if granted, for example, for successfully hiring that referee, will be added to the referrers' account balance in real time as well.

In brief, with strategic Talent Acquisition combined with speedy recruitment, Base Enterprise can pride itself on an unanimously high skilled workforce that is growing non-stop. The consistency in the inbound and customer-centric nature in all business activities across spectrums of Product, Sales, Marketing, Branding, and its own people is claimed to be the strongest competitive advantage. Growth and such consistency are sustained by firing unsuitable associates fast, which can only be done with the fuelling from a strong hiring machine. The Board of Directors has enjoyed the fact that its hiring culture encouraged employees at all level to take pride on the work they do, further fostering faith in company's growth and actively contributing to that growth.

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Findings

The objective of this thesis was to deliver a new look at recruitment from a Marketing perspective and provide strategic planning tools along with examples in real life context. By reviewing relevant literature and analyzing a case study, this thesis aims for hiring professionals to achieve a comprehensive understanding of modern strategic Talent Acquisition and a real-life example for reference, and thus, to be able to build their own hiring framework in action.

It has been shown consistently across different literature that the talent market for highly skilled workers is becoming highly competitive and winning this talent war can arm enterprises a very strong competitive advantage in business performance. In addition, it has been repeatedly argued that reactive, conventional recruitment is lagging behind in the war for talent where the access to information and negotiating power equation is leaning towards candidates rather than employers as it used to be. Companies have to go extra miles in planning strategic long-term talent solutions in order not to be passive when faced with HR shortages and decisions. Talent Acquisition, an emerging concept lately, has been argued to be superior in preparing enterprises hiring strategies. The Talent Acquisition framework features six elements of a thorough talent solution, which might have employed principles and ideas from Marketing field, spinning around the shift from employer-centric to candidate-centric.

This finding is complemented by the result of the case study. Understanding the strategic role of hiring in the business, the case company, when faced with challenging talent problems both internally and externally, has managed to achieve good results in talent sourcing through a candidate-centric mindset, extensive planning, and strategies in combination with agile execution. The company's strategy starts from understanding candidates' insights and its own strategic position in the talent market to choose a suitable candidate segment of young, fresh candidates with high coachability. The trade-off of past experience level for potentials to fit in the B2B SaaS industry is backed up by a high-quality training center – Base Academy. Agile execution of the hiring team at the case company is achieved by, instead of job design of traditional recruiters, assigning personnel to take care of candidates by candidate status in the candidate funnel, which is the same way as they organize their in-house Marketing team. The candidate funnel

and candidate journey map were found to be key tools in visualizing, managing and optimizing the whole hiring process at the case company.

Practices at the case company helped further discover the diversity in candidate funnel development. As discussed in the literature review, different models of candidate funnel were developed by different institutions. They are, however, still similar to the most basic version of the three-stage model of TOFU – MOFU – BOFU with corresponding burdens of sourcing, converting and closing. The candidate funnel at Base was added the fourth stage of 'Delight and Growth' as they believe that the candidate journey continues even after a candidate is officially hired. This fourth stage is the basis for their objective of building a hiring culture through referrals programmes. It was also recommended by the case company that design of candidate funnel depends on different companies, case by case, with their own business strategic position.

The relationship between Talent Acquisition and Recruitment was also an interesting finding emerged from the case study. Far from a trade-off, contradictory nature, Talent Acquisition, and Recruitment were found to complement each other and can be executed parallelly. Recruitment, as discussed in the literature, is under the umbrella of Talent Acquisition. To ensure sufficiency in human resources and timely tackling pop-up shortages, reactive recruitment is still needed while companies should not cease to build a long-term basis for their Talent Acquisition.

Last but not least, another interesting finding was the role of technology in managing the candidate funnel and candidate journey. Apart from smart and strategic planning, execution at the case company would not have been done that well without the help of technology in automating, measuring and reporting to enhance speedy and customized candidate experience, candidate status and referrals tracking, and productivity of hiring specialists. The interviewed Hiring Specialist at the case company noted that she increased her productivity by at least 200%, compared to her performance at former company with no system supported but Excel, by freeing herself from admin and paperwork to just focus on interacting and implementing selection process with candidates, as well as having time to think about how to further optimize her work process.

## 5.2 Reliability and limitations

This section elaborates on the reliability and limitations of this thesis. Research reliability concerns with research quality, in other words, whether or not research readers can trust



the presented findings. It is evaluated under the assumption that if proper methodology and techniques were applied, when they are repeated, consistent results should be yielded. This thesis reliability was assessed against the four-threat-to-reliability model of Robson, that are participant error, participant bias, observer error, and observer bias. Participant error refers to respondents not giving answers that are reflective enough of the studied subject due to, for example, wrong sampling, their own cognitive mistake in answering. Meanwhile, participant bias concerns with biased responses because of the respondents' insecurity, for example, they want to sound good to their boss or the interviewer(s). Similarly, observer error indicates errors made by interviewers for, for example, not following research design consistently and structure. Observer bias, on the other hand, results in possible biased data interpretation that is based on the researchers' pre-assumption (Saunders *et al.*, 2009: 156-157).

Firstly, in terms of tackling participant error, participants were chosen to be the COO and a hiring specialist (at the headquarter) at the case company to take both perspectives of “the thinker” and “the doer”. That sampling strategy, as discussed, was make sure that hiring at the case company would be illustrated both comprehensive and detailed. They were the people who directed and executed Talent Acquisition as their daily job, thus, they should know about the studied subject more than anyone in the company (the population). Furthermore, the author was aware of the possibility of herself asking leading questions in order to support for her pre-assumption, so effort was made to ensure that no leading questions. This is, however, not to eliminate all chances of respondents being unaware in making mistakes in their communicated expressions, for example, a wrong choice of wording. But such errors should be at a minimal level because of the sample's high expertise level in the field. On the other hand, even though this thesis does not aim at formulating a framework for generalization but rather providing illustrations and examples for comprehensive understanding and reference to hiring professionals, it should be acknowledged that one case company study is a rather small sample in the vast area of Talent Acquisition and recruitment. Readers of this thesis are recommended to keep an open mind and be critical in speculating analysis and results of this thesis, especially when attempting to apply discussed strategies and tactics to different scenarios. Further recommendations can be found in section 5.4 of Further research and Recommendations.

Secondly, in terms of participant bias, data generated from interviews are particularly vulnerable to this threat. In addition to unintentional bias, which is difficult to avoid, participant intentional bias can be that (1) interviewees can very often speak the way they think the interviewer might want to hear, (2) they do not want to put some effort and think about a better answer, and (3) they do not want the interviewer to know the correct answer because of their insecurity (Ziniel, no date). In order to reduce such threats, the author tried to make respondents felt comfortable by conversational approach in interviewing and keep them motivated by communicating the importance of the thesis' purpose and professional active listening so that they felt their honest answers were valued highly and they were under no pressure to lie or make up "good" answers. The author also communicated clearly about the privacy options for data from the interviews as their names and company name were not compulsorily visible to the readers of this thesis, but the company was easy and open in sharing their stories and decided to keep the names of the company, which could be an indicator of their willingness in telling the truth.

Thirdly, in terms of observer error, the author as the interviewer did all she could to follow the thesis design and interview plan strictly, as well as being careful in preparing logistics and tools for smooth data collection process. Interview themes and question list were checked carefully for their objectivity, relevance, and wording so as to consistently collect meaningful data and focus on the thesis scope. The question list was also checked and approved by this thesis' supervisor for its validity. As following semi-structured interviewing rules, all of the questions prepared were covered in the planned order in the same way in both conducted interviews. Besides, semi-structured interviewing is a skill that requires interviewer to have relevant knowledge in the field in order to have better probing (Sreejesh et al., 2014). The author had experience working with hiring professionals when she was working as a Sales Representative for an Applicant Tracking System, and further research and preparation prior to the interview was also conducted, thus, during the course of the interviews, the author did not have trouble understanding terminologies and know-how of recruitment and was able to dig deep into certain topics.

Fourthly, regarding observer bias, it is important to acknowledge that the author had a practical impression and experience of the recruitment process at the case company as she was working there for six months as a Sales Representative. That fact was brought to consciousness in the beginning with an aim not to let it incur bias in data collection and data interpretation. In addition, the author would tend to regularly ask the respondents to confirm her understanding of their answers correct at the end of several questions

to further avoid bias. The data analysis process also followed closely with the process of preparing, choosing methodological approach, condensing, categorizing and structuring. However, as discussed in the data preparation section, the interview was conducted and transcribed in Vietnamese and only the findings were translated and presented in English in this thesis. Even though the author tried to transfer the exact meaning, there can be inevitably some gaps and bias in expression formatting regarding the different languages' peculiarities.

Lastly, the author acknowledges that the field of Talent Acquisition and this thesis topic is quite new as their practices have only been seen in recent years, so there is not yet a wide range of official academic textbooks written specializing on it. Thus, the author also had to employ journals and online materials in building the theoretical framework for this thesis. For instance, examples of actual candidate funnel and journey images were taken from professional HR blogs as their source indicates. However, the author only used such material for infrequent examples and illustrations. All of the important concepts and frameworks were retrieved from official academic sources to ensure the reliability of this thesis.

### 5.3 Conclusion

“Great vision without great people is irrelevant”, said Jim Collins.

Hiring sources great people into organizations. Hiring is expensive, and enterprises had better do it right because the war for talent is real and it will intensify, making all vulnerable. Complex and rapid-changing macroeconomic trends have made the power equation lean towards talent more than employers, and complex changing candidate behaviors have required more effort from hiring professionals in both strategy and tactic to attract and source talent into enterprises. Conventional recruitment with the short-term and reactive nature of filling vacancies has been proved to be insufficient in fighting the talent war. Companies should recognize the strategic role of hiring in business growth and sustainability and start from a good understanding of candidates to invest serious resources in long-term Talent Acquisition, which puts candidates in the center of the hiring process. Just like customers are to be put in the center, hiring, rather than something exclusive to HR department, has become more of a science of Sales and Marketing with a lot of ideas, principles, and tools from Marketing diffused into successful governance of talent recruiting.

By looking at candidates the way marketers look at customers, hiring professionals can use candidate funnel and candidate journey map to understand insights and behaviors of candidates for cost-effective strategy and tactics aligned. Applying candidate funnel and candidate journey maps in planning and execution is not limited to an abstract idea of visualizing performance reports but it is rather a basis for measurable objectives, action-focused analysis, result-oriented practices and agile organization of hiring personnel. It was found out from the case study that designing such tools does not have to conform to exact framework available, but rather case-specific, driven by the actual strategic position and general business strategies of every company. For the studied case company, to develop a hiring culture of referrals, understanding the candidate journey does not stop after onboarding and adding the fourth stage of 'Delight and Growth' to the candidate funnel was necessary. It was also discovered that technology can support a lot in enabling such extensive planning and execution of Talent Acquisition.

Since these approaches and practices have only emerged lately, not so much academic sources have exclusively dedicated to cover this thesis topic comprehensively. Thus, this thesis, by collecting, reviewing relevant literature and further exploring theory in practice through a case study, has academically elaborated on this new approach of looking at Recruitment through the lens of Marketing, to provide hiring professionals, business owners and anyone interested in talent management and Marketing a reliable source of reference for more effective strategies and tactics to have an edge on fighting the war for talent.

#### 5.4 Further research and Recommendations

The objective of this thesis was to deliver a new look at recruitment from a Marketing perspective and provide strategic planning tools along with examples through a case study for hiring professionals to achieve a comprehensive understanding of modern strategic Talent Acquisition and thus, to be able to build their own hiring framework in action. For academic researchers, the bird-eye view brought by this thesis can serve as the starting point for further developing study in details of each elements and tools reviewed in their implications, execution framework, causal relationship with performance of other elements within the framework and business functions' performance, etc., such as employer branding's impact on conversion rate of candidates sourcing. For organizations and companies in function, the result of this thesis can be a basis for studying and assessing current internal strategies and tactics to lean towards better talent hiring.

In order to apply the discussed knowledge, tools and techniques successfully (strategic choice and strategy in action), hiring professionals, however, need to combine with a very clear understanding of their own business context and resources (strategic position). One case company study is deemed to be a small sample that may not be representative enough in the vast area of Talent Acquisition and recruitment as a whole. Copying exactly what the case company did shall not guarantee the same results. Every business is different and diverse, even within itself through the course of time, so there cannot be a fixed formula that is applicable to all that ensures success. As the war for talent will persist in such a fast-changing digital era where disrupting innovations can appear anytime, it is important to keep an open mind and watch out for new trends to adapt with the market in time.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that approaches to hiring discussed in this thesis were more long-term oriented, thus, results are not to be quickly recognized. For example, employer branding cannot be built overnight. Just like marketers, hiring professionals are advised to test, measure and optimize options in each stage of the hiring process in order to build a stronger and healthier candidate funnel. This thesis results, however, do not imply that Talent Acquisition should take place of recruitment by ruling it out, but rather include recruitment under the umbrella of long-term practices of Talent Acquisition to tackle different business situations.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning again about the strategic role of talent sourcing in business performance as the cap to sustainable growth. Thus, business directors should acknowledge that, just like all employees should develop a customer-centric mindset and skills, talent pooling should not be viewed as an exclusive task of the HR function department but a part of everyone's job, especially the managerial level.

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## Candidate journey map at Base Enterprise

