



Candidate Experience in times of Artificial Intelligence

Strategies to improve your candidate experience and stay

Executive Summary

In this paper we identify the five different touchpoints of your recruiting process with your candidates (initial job search, *application process*, *job interviews*, *feedback -offer or rejection-* and onboarding), that will critically affect their overall experience with your company. In doing so, we will particularly elaborate on the three middle points.

We argue, that companies who fail to optimize their candidate experience, will ultimately scare away eligible candidates already in the process as well as create bad employer branding. We show how learning more about candidate experience will equip your company for the *war for talent* especially in the tech industry and for the growing workforce of Millennials and Gen Z.

We explain how the use of AI in recruiting will lead to an all-in-all better (simple, personal and mobile) candidate experience by enabling firms to personalize their candidate experience and fit existing hiring processes to digital natives.

Beyond highlighting key levers for optimizing your candidate experience, we present a practical example of action-oriented analysis: A candidate experience survey to gain fundamental insight in your candidates' interaction behavior and preferences.

Finally, we provide detailed instruction about how to inform your candidates about the state of their application -including email templates to:

- Acknowledge applications
- Schedule interview or reject for interview
- Thank for interview and formulate job offer or reject for job

About Retorio

Retorio is a video recruiter that fuses artificial intelligence and machine learning with scientific findings from psychology and organizational research. Even from short application videos Retorio reliably detects the communication behavior and important personality traits of the applicant. Talents can be recognized more effectively and reliably and compared with different job profiles.

CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

Times to reach out to your candidates

ACKNOWLEDGE APPLICATION

- appreciate their interest in your company
- timeframe of the process
- missing required documents
- next approach for scheduling an interview



SCHEDULE INTERVIEW OR REJECT



- Compliments for being selected
- location, participants etc.
- schedule time [using software]
-
- appreciate their interest and time
- clear rejection for given position
- encourage to apply for future jobs
- best wishes for professional future

THANK FOR INTERVIEW AND REJECT

- thank for invested time and interest for your company
- encourage to apply again or ask them to connect (if candidate fits company values)
- clear rejection for given position
- no reason for rejection (risk of discriminating)



THANK FOR INTERVIEW AND MAKE JOB OFFER

- job description and title
- reporting structure
- starting date
- salary, benefits, eligibility
- request for acknowledgment of offer and confirmation of acceptance




1. What is Candidate Experience?

Candidate experience is essentially the perception of a job seeker about an employer, based on the interaction during the complete recruitment process.

This experience shapes candidates' expectations about future interactions with the employer. In a way, this can be compared to customer experience in commerce, where customers likewise, interact with and perceive the company and product.

The overall experience a candidate gains while applying for a job includes:

1. initial job search
2. application process
3. job interviews
4. feedback (job offer or rejection)
5. onboarding of the candidate

These are crucial opportunities to communicate with your candidates. Companies are now awakening to the fact that each contact point is a way to build a positive company brand, gain customer loyalty, and attract the best talent. Evaluating a candidate's experience is rapidly becoming part of standard talent strategy.

If you have a custom for each of these steps, you are already shaping your candidates' experience.

2. Why candidate experience matters - winning the war for talent

Candidate experience matters because it will determine the overall company image; this, in turn, affects their decision to accept the job offer or the way they speak about the company to friends and family.

Leaving candidates with a bad impression has three effects:

- scaring away *eligible candidates* already in the process
- creating bad *employer branding* (negative word-of-mouth/ online reviews on websites like Glassdoor or social media) for future applicants. Indeed, due to statistics from [officevibe](#), 64% of applicants say they would share negative application experiences with friends and family and 27% would actively discourage others from applying. While 74% of candidates who rate their candidate experience as “great” say they’ll definitely apply again and refer others ([Fortune](#))
- scaring away *customers* that are candidates. Indeed, 46% of candidates would sever a business relation due to a poor candidate experience ([Talent Board](#))

On the other side, 73% of job seekers say that the process of looking for a job is one of the most stressful events in life. Thus, by creating a recruitment process that is both enjoyable and exhilarating for the candidate you will stick out from the pool of average employers.

Attracting tech talent

The war for talent is on. Finding candidates for positions -especially in software engineering and tech jobs- is becoming an even harder struggle for hiring managers. The fact that 50% of all software developers plan on switching jobs in the next year -as [Forbes magazine](#) reports-, offers both threat and opportunity.

Creating a candidate experience strategy begins *knowing where to look*. In fact, more than 73% of job seekers today are only passively looking for a job -due to [smallbizgenius](#). Thus, by keeping in contact with top candidates via LinkedIn or Xing and considering initial applications you will manage to stay competitive.

Firstly, there are a few eligible websites where to look for full-stack engineers, data scientists, back-end engineers, or senior software engineers: namely Angellist, Coderbyte, Github, Stack Overflow and many more.

Secondly, knowing what engineers are looking for -beyond compensation- is key to attracting talent:

- Community
- Challenge
- Growth

This means working in a supporting team on an interesting task with the opportunity for personal development. Even if you don't work in a cutting edge industry or your company doesn't get a ton of tech press, highlight what you do offer your technical recruits. Keep it authentic by sitting down with a technical recruit and offering them a vision of where this company intends to go -and how they can be an integral part of shaping it. If this doesn't excite them, share other value-adds for a recruit, like development stipends, the yearly work trip, or the ability to work remotely.

Thirdly, if you are certain to have found a top candidate, be also willing to "change the job" by customizing it. Maybe tasks originally envisaged for the open position can be taken over by in-house employees and others directed to the new candidate. Most important is you stay open for suggestions and alternative ways of applications -as relationship building with tech talent lies at the core of this era's candidate experience strategy.

Attracting Millennials and Gen Z

Because Boomers, Millennials and Gen Zers have varied histories with technology, each generation demands something particular from a recruiting process. Expectations from the recruitment process stems from experiencing technology itself, but it also has to do with changing priorities about the workplace.

Millennials (those born between about 1980 and 2000) are forecast to comprise 75% of the global workforce by 2025 -as [Inc.](#) reports. Gen Z, the generation born between 1995 and the early-to-mid 2000s, depending on the source, is the first generation born into a digital world.

Evidently, these digital natives are a handful -and hold a handful of expectations on how the candidate experience should work. They don't remember the world before the Internet. They expect speed and follow-through on services and products. The interconnectedness of social media, Google, and everything accessible within a few clicks means digital natives are used to playing the comparison game -and they're good at it. Their behavior is similar to that of modern-day consumers -and what they're looking for in their recruiting experience.

Applicants want a rapid, effective, and trusted interview process.

Compared to previous generations, Millennials prefer protecting their own time. Much like how they shop on Amazon -personalized and with only a few clicks- they're demanding a fast and personalized application process. A poor candidate experience invokes the same frustration we feel when we try to make an online purchase: the frustration of making an account, awaiting card approval, or putting in endless personal details. Consumers walk away from such e-commerce sites; qualified candidates would do the same from such a hiring experience.

For **Millennials**, their principal motivations are adaptability, feedback, and a strong sense of purpose. **Gen Z** focuses on privacy, autonomy and meaningful experience.

Therefore, recruiters need to change their strategy in how they attract and identify talent. This includes amping up their hiring process, delivering a solid candidate experience custom-made for these target groups in a multi-generational workplace.

3. How AI will improve your candidate experience

This is where artificial intelligence enters the play: *AI recruitment is the Amazon of candidate experience: rapid, effective, and highly personalized.*

AI may conjure an image of a black box technology, or some sort of futuristic wish. However, major corporations have been using the advanced tech for years for their talent management pipelines. IBM, KPMG, and Disney leverage AI recruitment to find the best and the brightest candidates -nowadays, that means digital natives. Talent acquisition needs to be tailored to what these candidates are looking for.

Millennials and Gen Z want AI-based personalized support

Results stemming from customer experience show that -as customer expectations are increasing- the companies that stand out are those doing three things:

1. *simplify their purchasing experiences*
2. *communicate with digital tools, like a support chat, a bot, or giving rapid feedback*
3. *use analytics to continually improve their own processes*

These parameters also showcase the expectation applicants have of their candidate experience. Digital natives tend to be more communicative with organizations and *view AI as a helpful tool, as it creates a more personalized and rapid interaction.*

Thus, companies and hiring managers have to work to link systems together, from application contact, the interview process, to the follow up. Managing the candidate experience means ensuring every touchpoint is personal and rapid. The candidate experience should be seamless and easy to implement.

Simple and personal process

Applying to a job is a personal decision. Hiring managers can use AI to create a personalized and supportive candidate experience. Understanding a candidate's personality reveals a more holistic view of their potential values, such as the degree to which they value autonomy, team collaboration, the status quo, or originality. Creating an aligned company culture is about finding employees who appreciate and value the same goals as the organization, helping it remain competitive.

AI recruitment evaluates fit at a more rapid pace according to settings tailored by the hiring managers. AI recruitment can also save time inputting information by securely storing applicant data from a previous application. The candidate experience in recruitment should be one that showcases applicants their time matters.

Mobility and ease

Millennials and Gen Z are comfortable -and often prefer- mobile in their candidate experience. Retorio's AI video recruitment delivers to Millennials and Gen Z what they're after: flexibility, ease, and familiarity with their favorite digital tools, mobile and video.

Millennials and Gen Z have become the largest portion of the workforce. Though they may not carry senior-level titles in the workplace just yet, they already possess considerable influence over how the candidate experience and recruitment strategy is being repurposed. They're looking to HR professionals to get it right in terms of mobile ease, rapid feedback and communication, and making it a transparent and personal interaction.

AI technology can be used to identify, address and satisfy group specific customs and needs along the recruiting process. It can for example appear in the form of:

- data processing to form valuable details about job applicants
- AI-powered chatbots to quickly answer candidate's common questions, like IBM does
- a video phone call interview
- a convenient tool like Retorio to have candidates record short video clips of their responses to interview questions, -automatically evaluated by an AI mechanism corrected for human-based bias

Technology could be considered the *back office candidate experience coordinator*. it could exponentially improve the lives of both hiring managers and candidates.

With the increasing amount of this technology being introduced to the market, it is important to choose the right sourcing, assessment and communication technology for your recruitment process that your candidates are comfortable with using.

4. How to optimize your Candidate Experience – ask your candidates

In optimizing their candidate experience, companies should take note of building trust with personable interaction. It could be training the assistant to greet applicants with warmth when they arrive for their in-person interviews; or telling them about the person sitting across the table from them. All these little steps to add in the “human touch” mean plenty to a candidate.

Beyond the essential human touch, there are many key levers for optimizing your candidate experience. In general, it is effective to consider the following:

- Be fast in the recruitment process (short response times)
- Let your candidates know where they stand - giving constant feedback
- Treat candidates like customers (spend 50% of interview time selling)
- Keep the application process simple (removing technical obstacles)
- Choose your job description carefully (considerate of target group’s use of vocabulary)
- Highlight employer benefits (besides payment)

For a more tailor-made road map of your company’s candidate experience it is recommended, however, to conduct a **Candidate Experience Survey**.

Conducting a candidate experience survey will not only help optimize your recruitment process, but also **increase brand value**. Remember how friends and families will ask a candidate about their application experience at your company? A candidate survey increases a candidate’s perception of a company, as it suggests it cares about their personal interaction. Even if a rejection occurs, it still shows that a company values their opinion and wants to meet a candidate’s applications. It tells them about a culture of self-improvement, self-reflection, and being “people led”.

Candidate Experience Survey

Setting up a candidate experience survey will help hiring managers examine the process through the eyes of the candidate, rather than their own good intentions. Candidate experience surveys are outlets for candidates to rate their interactions and an opportunity for employers to correct mistakes. It should follow these 3 general points:

1. Remain anonymous

Making feedback anonymous is a best-practices approach to receiving quality feedback. If a survey is not anonymous, candidates will have little motivation to answer honestly. Be sure to emphasize the anonymity of the survey to reap the fullest benefits.

2. Specify questions

Be specific about questions. Asking both about the overall experience -"Rate your overall application process experience with us"- and specific touchpoints -"Did you find the video interview aspect easy to understand?"- supports a more powerful insight into what's working in your hiring process and what needs to be reviewed.

Mixing up the *types of questions* adds in variety and often makes it more efficient in learning about a particular touchpoint. Questions can be in the form of statements, in Yes/No format or a rating on a number scale. Make sure to use the question and answer format most informative for the touchpoint in evaluation.

3. Strategize structure

The points of interest center on the *process, communication*, and whether the candidate would *recommend* the company.

Creating an application process that delivers value and efficiency remains a priority for hiring managers. For candidates, applying to a position must be rapid, easy-to understand, and give them prompt feedback. A common complaint from candidates is the lengthiness of the application *process* ([Talent Board](#)). While a lot can be done to shorten such -e.g. by using AI tools like Retorio- *communication* stays the fundamental tool to extenuate the waiting effect. By informing your candidates about sequence and duration of the process steps, waiting for feedback will become decisively more tolerable. And will ultimately determine the outward *referral* of your company.

See the exemplary Candidate Experience Survey below that follows this three-part structure:

Process

Communication

Referral

How do you feel about your candidate journey--- from application submission to the last stage? Please elaborate

"There's helpful communication throughout the application process, from beginning to end."

Would you recommend applying here to your friends?

Always - Most of the time - Sometimes - Rarely - Never

Very likely - Likely - Somewhat likely - Not likely - Not at all likely

"I feel the position's requirements were an exact match to my skillset."

"I'm happy with how the results of my application were communicated to me"

Describe what would improve the hiring process for your next hire.

Completely, exact match - Mostly, it was complementary - Less of a match overall

Definitely - Somewhat - Not really

"I found it easy and straightforward to submit my application"

"My phone and email communication with the recruiter was prompt."

What do you think would make our hiring process better?

Completely agree - It should be made easier - It's difficult to submit

Always - Most of the time - Sometimes - Rarely - Never

"It took me the same amount of time to apply here as it does to other companies."

"My interviewers were well-prepared."

How likely are you to apply to another open position with us again? Why?

Definitely - Pretty much - It was much faster

Definitely - Somewhat - Not really

Do you feel welcome, valued and well informed?

You would have performed better in your assignment if you had

Definitely - Somewhat - Not really

Detailed instructions - Clarifications from the hiring manager - More time - I had adequate resources and time

Candidate experience coordinator

To guarantee putting candidate experience standards into their recruitment practice, many companies are creating a new position, that of a *candidate experience coordinator*. This person is in charge of creating and managing the entire interaction and operations in the candidate search funnel. They strategize with marketing to figure out how to reach candidates via social media, email, or other venues. They look to emanate personalization and authenticity to candidates with each and every touchpoint, even the undesired rejection email. A candidate experience coordinator can be a linchpin in securing the “good feeling” a candidate has about a company. Even if candidates are not offered a job, they’ll be able to walk away feeling valued and respected. This kind of trust can pay dividends in the future.

Analytical feedback system for HR

Feedback loops are not only for candidates. Think about instilling processes that will be helpful in optimizing recruiting efforts and improving the candidate experience. It’s time for talent professionals to be able to receive objective data and information about candidates and the candidate journey. Having a centralized place where applicant data like communication behavior, personality insights, and skillset range will be held available is essential.

5. Email templates for the recruitment process

Like we heard before, there are crucial times and opportunities where you should communicate with your candidates.

In order to ***acknowledge their application, invite or reject for an interview, send them a job offer or reject for the job.***

As they spend a lot of time on their application materials and process and therefore deserve an answer appreciative of their effort. Also, once drafted, the process can easily be automated by the recruiter.

An example of how to make an email draft for each of these steps can be seen in the following sections.

1. Email Template: Acknowledge application

After you have received applications from your candidates and preselected them, you will start the interview process in the next step. It is very important, however, that you let all your candidates know whether they have been selected for a personal interview or not.

In practice, candidates are often “ghosted” -left unnotified about the status of their application. However, candidates will be thankful if you inform them about receiving their documents in the first place. This will be the first step to an open and mutual communication between you and your candidates --making their experience with your company worthwhile.

Creating an email template for acknowledging your candidates' application --where you only have to personalize name and position-- will help you save time in the process. Even when you're a small company with a limited HR department, informing all your candidates --by a partly or fully automated response system-- should be a top priority.

In this email you should let your candidates know:

- That you appreciate their interest in your company
- How long the reviewing process will take (timeframe)
- Whether you're missing required documents
- In what way you will approach them for scheduling an interview (phone or email)
- Who they will be contacted by in the next step

An example of how to integrate these steps into an email draft can be seen in the template below.

Subject: Receival of your application for _____ position

Dear Candidate Name,

This email is to let you know that we have received your application. We appreciate your interest in _____ [position] at _____ [company name] for which you applied.

We are currently reviewing applications and expect to schedule interviews in the next couple of weeks. If you are selected for an interview, you can expect an email/phone call from our Human Resources staff shortly [maybe be even more specific about timeframe].

Thank you, again, for your interest in our company. We do appreciate the time that you invested in this application.

Regards,

Hiring Manager

2.1 Email Template: Schedule (Video) Interview

If you decide to invite a candidate to a personal interview, you can tell them so via phone or email --while email is a perfectly suitable format allowing for location- and time-independent recall and response.

In this email, you should include the following:

- Compliments for being selected for an interview
- The position, for which you're interviewing
- the person of the interviewer
- what to bring to the interview
- Contact details of the interviewer
- Schedule time and location of interview [employing self-scheduling software]

If you intend to employ an AI-based interview like Retorio, you should furthermore equip your candidate with information on how such an interview works and why they benefit from it as a candidate.

To create a coherent and positive framework, use these 6 steps when inviting candidates to a video interview:

1. Acknowledge and appreciate the applicant's time to apply
2. Explain why a video interview is necessary
3. Explain how the video interview works
4. Address possible concerns
5. Appeal to the benefits
6. Debrief

An example of how to integrate these steps into an email draft can be seen in the template below.

Hi [Candidate Name],

Thank you for taking the time to apply for the position as [Position Name].

We're big believers in equal-access and seeing people for who they are and what they bring to the table, not their test scores. That's why we'd like to invite you to a video interview.

This is how it works: As any interviewer would do, we try to understand what makes you unique. However, we recognize that we bring our own biases and preconceived notions (we don't mean to, promise) as an interviewer. So we're doing something about it: all you have to do is answer these short, predefined questions.

- 1. You don't need special equipment*
- 2. Try as many takes as you'd like, multiple attempts are fine*
- 3. You don't have to download anything*

By conducting a video interview you're showing us that a fair recruiting process matters to you. Additionally, you'll be able to receive faster feedback from us. Also don't worry about writing a cover letter---these questions help us get to know you in a more personal way.

[Link to the video interview]

Looking forward to hearing from you,

All the best

[Your Name]

2.2 Email Template: Reject for interview

Just like with a high school test you prepared for and took part in you would like to know whether you passed it, candidates want to receive feedback on the state of their application. For a pleasing and smooth candidate experience, you will have to let all candidates know, where they stand --*selected or not*.

In this email you should let your candidates know:

- you appreciate their interest in your company and value the time dedicated to the application
- They are not furthermore considered for the position
- encourage them to apply for future positions
- you would like to keep them in your ATS/connect with them on LinkedIn or similar for future job openings if they agree (for candidates that potentially fit your company culture but are not eligible for this certain position)
- You wish them all the best for their professional future

An example of how to integrate these steps into an email draft can be seen in the template below.

Subject: Rejection for job interview for _____ position at _____ [company name]

Dear Candidate Name,

We appreciate your interest in _____ [company name] and the position of _____ for which you applied. After reviewing the applications received by the deadline, yours was not selected for further consideration.

The selection committee appreciates the time you invested in your application. We encourage you to apply for posted positions in our company, for which you qualify, in the future.

[Also, we would like to keep you in our ATS system/ connect with you on LinkedIn [or other] for future job opportunities if you agree to that.]

We wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors.

Best regards,

Hiring Manager

3.1 Email Template: Job offer

If you have chosen a candidate for the job, you will be letting them know about this decision as a natural next step.

In doing so, you should not leave your candidate guessing but communicate clearly that you're offering them a job.

Also, you should keep in mind, that this offer will have to make the candidate jump up in excitement and make it impossible to decline. Your wording as well as offered benefits (see [HR Daily Advisor](#)) and salary will be considered closely by your candidate before accepting your offer. Thus, you'll have to make it quite a joyous experience!

Consequently, when sending out a job offer email, be sure to include the following:

- Congratulations and excitement about having candidate on team
- Job description and job title
- Reporting structure
- Starting date of employment
- Salary, benefits information and eligibility
- Response date
- Acknowledgment of offer and confirmation of acceptance

An example of how to integrate these steps into an email draft can be seen in the template below.

Subject: [company name] Job Offer

Dear Candidate Name,

We were all very excited to meet and get to know you throughout the past interview(s). We have been impressed with your background and would like to formally offer you the position of ____ [job title]. This is a ____ [mention working days and hours of position.] You will be reporting to the head of the ____ department.

We will be offering you an annual gross salary of ____ and [mention bonus programs, if applicable.] You will also have [mention benefits as per company policy and days of paid vacation per year].

Your expected starting date is _____. You will be asked to sign an employment contract and [mention agreements, like confidentiality, nondisclosure etc.] at the beginning of your employment.

We would like to have your response by _____. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me or [manager name] via email or phone on [provide contact details], should you have any questions.

We are all looking forward to having you on our team.

Best regards,

Hiring Manager

3.2 Email Template: Rejection for Job

Receiving a rejection from your dream employer can be a bitter setback for your candidates. Having that in mind, you can try to make it less so by considering the following in your rejection email:

- Be respectful and professional; thank candidates for the time invested in the process and their interest for your company
- If the candidate might be eligible for other positions and fits the company culture, encourage the person to apply again or ask them if they would like to be kept on file (see Template below)
- Be clear about the rejection and don't use any words open for misinterpretation
- Don't include the reason for rejection (doing so often runs the risk of discriminating)

An example of how to implement these steps into an email draft can be seen in the template below.

Subject: ____ Position

Dear Candidate Name,

Thank you very much for taking the time to interview with us for the ____ position. We appreciate your interest in the company and the job.

I would like to inform you that we have filled the position with the candidate whom we believe most closely matches the job requirements. However, we will keep your application on file for consideration if there is a future opening that may be a fit for you.

Again, thank you for meeting with me.

Best regards,

Hiring Manager

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