

Telco in 20 | Episode 40
New ways to build your future-ready workforce
Released in May 3, 2022

DR 00:00:00 I'm Danielle Royston and this is Telco in 20.

DR 00:00:14 I was thinking about all you telco execs out there, about how you need to hire a bajillion people with cloud skills. Did you know, I used to be an HR executive? I love HR! I ran Trilogy's renowned recruiting department in Austin, Texas. We were featured in Harvard Business Review, Fast Company, and wait for it, even Rolling Stone. We were super cool, but I also spent time as a generalist, supporting an executive and her organization.

I was responsible for helping her with leadership development, succession planning, recruiting, performance management, plus dealing with all the normal employee relations crap that comes up. I'll surprise you. I have some really strong opinions about this topic. But seriously, my HR experience is one of the reasons I totally get that transforming a workforce is super hard. And yet, this is exactly what telcos need to do. Their future depends on their ability to find and onboard workers with the most sought after technical expertise in the job market today: people who know how to code with the public cloud.

DR 00:01:21 The fight for talent is on. For example, Microsoft acquired Meta Switch and Affirmed, not just for the tech, but also for the infusion of telco expertise that they needed to fuel Azure for Operator; Sanyogita Shamsunder left her VP of Product Strategy and Ops role at Verizon to join Google Cloud as its Head of Global Network Edge; and Vodafone is on the hunt for 7,000 software engineers to help them move from being a telco to being a techco.

To move to the cloud, first you need qualified candidates in your recruiting pipeline and a way to screen the talent to find the gems, and you need a strong workforce management program to retain and grow your talent. Turns out there's some new AI-powered recruiting and talent management tools that can help.

Today on the podcast, I'm talking with Kamal Ahluwalia, president of Eightfold.ai, about how CSPs can fill the recruiting funnel and build a killer cloud workforce. So, let's take 20.

DR 00:02:27 Kamal Ahluwalia is president at Eightfold.ai. Hi, Kamal! Welcome to Telco in 20.

Kamal A. 00:02:32 Thanks for having me, DR. Glad to be here.

DR 00:02:35 It's gonna be super fun, and the reason why I'm so excited to talk to you about Eightfold.ai is because I love HR. A lot of people don't know that I was in HR recruiting for 10 years of my career. But the way I do recruiting in talent management is super old school. So when we found out about your company, I was so pumped to talk to you about the innovation in the talent management space. And so when I first heard about Eightfold.ai, I thought it was a recruiting platform to scour the internet and source talent, but it's more than that. It's an end-to-end talent management platform. So Kamal, tell me a little bit about it. How does it work?

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Kamal A. 00:03:11 Absolutely. So, what we have built is a single AI platform for all talent – for candidates, for employees, for contingent workforce – and since you've been doing a lot of work with telcos (they're all large organizations), now, I think with COVID, the focus on employees has never been greater. You have to take care of not only retaining them, but also allowing them to grow in areas that they want to grow and definitely the need for new and different talent, right? So much focus on cybersecurity, AI, big data, 5G – so, all these things require skills evolving at a pace that we've never had to deal with before. So, we are actually bringing our AI expertise and our ability to understand potential. So not just a review and validate what we will have done in the past, but more importantly, what can they do going forward? Those are the things that we are able to solve with our platform.

DR 00:04:06 Yeah, and I think, especially you brought up COVID there, with COVID and the move to really remote workforces. A lot of times some of this stuff with talent management, it happened because you were working side by side with someone. You're literally seeing their work and interacting with them. And with remote, I think that's just gonna get even a little bit more difficult because you're not seeing their work. You obviously feel the impact and the results of someone's output, but you're not watching them work and interacting. So I can only imagine that the need for your platform is only gonna grow.

Kamal A. 00:04:38 Exactly! And the thing that emerged over the last two years was that as you settle into this hybrid mode, do you have the managers who are good at managing a hybrid team? All this communication, collaboration, well-being – and clearly we are not there to find a complete new set of managers. So it all comes down to upscaling and reskilling. What are the missing capabilities? Can we teach those? And I think the other thing that's emerging is... this is a great time to actually look at how can we bring in a more diverse set of folks into our workforce and teach them what they need to know so that they are a good fit? Those are sort of concepts that I think are back, but need to be done at scale for everyone.

DR 00:05:22 And so where is the sweet spot of your product? Is it really good at identifying those passive candidates that maybe are not in the job market and bringing them into the recruiting pipelines and funnels? Or is it really good at maximizing the talent that you have in house, and like you said, starting to upskill and give them new opportunities?

Kamal A. 00:05:43 So it's both, I think when you talk about sweet spot I would phrase it slightly differently where both these issues are important. We are a great fit for organizations that have enough employees. So five to 10,000 employees and above.

DR 00:05:57 Mm-hmm <affirmative>

Kamal A. 00:05:58 Small companies are not as worried about internal mobility and retention because all they want is more warm bodies doing the work. When you get to that stage, then you've run a lot of companies and built a lot of companies, right?

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DR 00:06:10 Yeah.

Kamal A. 00:06:11 As CEO, you sort of, after a few hundred people, you lose track of the individuals in the company and what they are doing, especially in the middle of the organization. So the five questions that we can now answer are: 1) What are my employees capable of doing today? 2) If I need to provide an upskilling thing, just like you are doing with a lot of your organizations, how can that be a very specific learning path tied to the career path? 3) If I have to go outside to bring in new talent, how can I do it with a rifle shot versus just wasting money all over the place? 4) While I'm doing all this, how do I become more diverse and inclusive? Because I will be held responsible. And 5) While I'm doing all this and the business is changing, how can my talent and talent strategy keep up with the business strategy? Which is why both these things are very important.

DR 00:07:01 Yeah. You know, on my podcast, Telco in 20, and in my work, I'm certainly evangelizing the move to the public cloud for the telecom industry. Surprisingly, it's one of the last industries to move, and so the executive team at most large telcos are just beginning to embark on this journey. It's gonna be a huge need of having to attract and train and upskill for cloud skills. And the challenge in that is that everyone's looking for cloud skills, right? These guys are like the last guys at the party, and certainly AWS and Google and Microsoft are obviously trying to attract people to their organizations, with their exciting compensation packages and exciting work to go work on. How are you engaging those candidates to kinda look at maybe a Vodafone or an AT&T in a super hot market around cloud skills, and maybe consider not the obvious places to go, like the hyperscalers, but rather maybe go work on a telecom, help them transform their business?

Kamal A. 00:08:05 Great question. I think some of it actually comes down to the quality and accuracy of our matching engine. That's where the AI comes in. Yeah. So we also wrote this book, What's next for you. And one of the axioms is that people don't leave their current role to do the same thing in the next job. So if you're gonna attract talent, you have to give them something that's new and different than what they're doing already in the past. So that comes from our underlying capability to understand what's next for an individual ... and we have actually at this point probably the largest data set ever assembled of people, their careers, skills, titles, et cetera, at a global scale. That allows us to learn and train our models for, what is someone capable of doing? And whether it's an early stage employee, middle stage, late stage, new business, et cetera.

Kamal A. 00:08:57 If you have enough large data set with our anonymized aggregated learning, we are able to pinpoint who is likely to get hired and succeed in that particular role. So that allows us to identify who would be a great fit, and then the recommendation when we do the outreach. It is about that next recycling thing. That's what gets us about 60, 70% open rates, which is fantastic. Then the second part is, you are now looking to engage and what would get them to pay attention. And there are a number of aspects to it. If you're reaching out to someone

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who is transitioning a veteran, right, who's transitioning to a civilian job and you are interested in them, then maybe your outreach should include that. Hey, we have a lot of veterans who are having successful careers with us. Or you mentioned Stanford. So if I was reaching out to you, I would mention, hey, we have a lot of folks from Stanford who are doing some amazing things, cutting-edge stuff, or doing things at scale that have never been done before. All of us have those touch points. How do you find the one, two or three things that make the message personalized? So if you look at our core technology, it is about matching, relevance and personalization. If you can do all these for everyone, you will get their attention and they will listen.

DR 00:10:13 Yeah. Well, you look at the LinkedIn job matching the jobs that it recommends to me are HR jobs that I haven't done in 12 or 13 years. Like you said, during the past! I mean, not only are they not relevant, but I mean, it's not even close. And then the second thing, I think that personalization piece is so important and it's something that we're actually working on at Totogi. Cause we feel like that personalization piece with marketing plans for mobile users is such a key thing and you guys are using it in recruiting and attracting people, and we're trying to use it with helping telcos to grow their business as well. So that's so awesome. And so now moving into like the talent in house. Like I said, these guys are starting to adopt public cloud, they've never done this before, they have a lot of telco talent obviously, but they don't have a lot of cloud talent. So what's your advice here in terms of upskilling your existing workforce?

Kamal A. 00:11:05 Great question. So one part of it is they do have a lot of folks who actually understand the technology part, right? They have bits and pieces, they have stories, they have compute now how to bring it all together? So with our underlying platform, we understand skills adjacency. That if you've done this, you're also...

DR 00:11:24 You could do this.

Kamal A. 00:11:25 Exactly. And also the learnability. How long will it take you to learn that? And then when we are looking at the current employees, we are saying, okay, what do they know now and can we teach the missing pieces in three to six months or nine months? So that's number one. Second part is just taking a class or two is not enough. You have to actually put it in action. Then we have a number of ways to do that, that you can run on a part-time project, take four, eight hours a week and start working on a team. So you're starting to work with others who are actually good at it. So now you're applying what you've learned. And then the third piece is, how do you inspire them to continue doing this thing? Because clearly they won't become an expert in six months.

Kamal A. 00:12:08 That, okay, this person was recognized by the CEO for doing this breakthrough stuff. And how do I get there? That gives them the stamina to think beyond just the next job that I need to put this together so that I can have a long successful career. All of that, now we can do with our platform. So the career pathing, tying that to learning parts,

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courses, projects, mentors, all of these things and making it all skills-based. The second thing that we do is, the positive reinforcement. Whatever our recommendation is from AI, that you're a good fit for this role because of these reasons, not only should the manager or the hiring manager see it, the candidate or the employee should also see it. They're seeing the same things. If there are gaps, they're seeing the gaps also. So now the conversation is very different on how do I get there? And the positive encouragement that you are a great fit for this role means a lot.

DR 00:13:05 Well, yeah. Again, I was in HR for 10 years and I would have people coming into my office and that's a stereotype, but there would be men in my office saying, how do I get a promotion? And how do I move to the next job? And me, me, me, give me a raise. And I really didn't have that many women pushing. And again, that's super stereotypical, I'm sure I was a pushy person. But, having a dashboard that says, "Hey, we looked at your background and we have this huge data set. You're good at sales. You're a good people-person. You might be good at a HR." You know, my background is super funky. I'd be interested to see, running my experience through your machine because I have a computer science degree from Stanford, and then I'm in sales, and then I'm in HR and then I'm a CEO. What would you recommend for me? It's kind of crazy, but it kind of gives you that confidence of, if I'm not super satisfied in my current role, what are some other things to consider and having a dashboard that gives them the confidence to try something new would be really, really awesome. So that sounds incredible.

Kamal A. 00:14:05 I did run your profiles through our system and what it came back is that, we still don't have a woman president in this country. So what about that?

DR 00:14:15 You think it, I should be president of the United States. That is hilarious. Why not? I probably have to tone down my messaging but...

Kamal A. 00:14:22 It might resonate more.

DR 00:14:24 So funny. So I think a big part of attracting people to an organization is kind of two primary tools that people use, which is, let me tell you about myself, and it's a LinkedIn profile of basically the CV or resume. But then the other thing, let me tell you about the job we're trying to attract you to is the job description. And I read these job descriptions, they're all really terrible copies and they don't really sell the job. They don't like, here's the exciting stuff we're working on, here's what's really important. If you love this kind of work, you're gonna love it here. And then actually do the opposite, here's what's required. And if you don't like that, don't even bother applying. I mean, you guys are scouring over tons of data. That's like kind of really bad input.

Kamal A. 00:15:06 It is! It really is garbage in and garbage out. Right? And both sides are useless. And just like you said, the recommendations that LinkedIn is making to you are nonsense so

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DR 00:15:17 Bad.

Kamal A. 00:15:17 Yeah. So that's the output, right. They don't know how to make sense of the two, by the way, only 5.2 million unique jobs in the world. Everything else is a variation of that. So we have now done enough work globally to actually put together a jobs intelligence engine. So any of our clients can now start typing. Okay. I'm looking for a growth marketer and the system would tell them, okay, these are the skills to include in that job description. And then clearly we understand how to learn that and get into that role. So the whole growth path is also established, that, what are the adjacent marketers who could get into that, who has done it well? We also understand people very well, so we are able to now do a much clearer and concise job of making it skills-based. And the second thing is why this thing was allowed to devolve into a laundry list job description. Is that people keep asking for, I want this also, and this also, and this also, and when you're doing that in our system, we are actually showing you that okay, based on your talent network, if you are clearer with your requirements, that these are required, these are nice to have, which is okay. Now you can see, okay, I have a thousand people or a hundred or ten or two, based on my laundry list.

DR 00:16:34 It's like keyword matching where it tells you how many people have used this hashtag.

Kamal A. 00:16:38 Exactly. Then you are able to adjust very easily that, oh, my talent pool is actually not diverse. There are no women in there. So I need to revisit my requirements now, and within five minutes you can make the adjustments so that you know that you will start with a very good diverse pool. And then you will end up with hiring a more diverse workforce or internal mobility, right? Let me find more women. Or we are also doing a lot of work with one ten now who are focused on black Americans without a four-year college degree. So then you are our veterans, right? All these folks are a lot of talented folks. We just don't know how to identify that potential. So we are able to do that and get that so that the job descriptions are great and concise and provide the ability to grow into your future roles also. And then of course we have a fantastic understanding of people and what they're capable of doing. So that's why our AI matching is far superior than what you've experienced so far in the market.

DR 00:17:34 Do you guys have any telco customers that have started using Eightfold.ai?

Kamal A. 00:17:38 Yeah, in fact, our first one was Data Communications in India, and then Vodafone just went live. Ericsson is live and there are several more that are coming on board. So, yes. And your other point that, you know, how to make it cool again to be working in a telco ... I think a great example I saw a week or two weeks ago, that Ford's new line of EV cars, electric cars, will include Cisco's WebEx facility, so you can actually have a mobile office. So think about the role of the backend carrier that is supporting that kind of capability.

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DR 00:18:14 That's awesome. You know, I do a lot of meetings actually in my car, so I got excited about that. How long does it take to get up and running and deploy and working, you know, Vodafone is super big and I'm sure there are requisitions and workforces. Thousands of people. Is this like a year and a half long project? A year? How long does it take?

Kamal A. 00:18:32 These days, nobody has the patience to wait that long. So Vodafone went live in about six months, with both talent management and talent acquisition and in multiple countries supporting multiple languages. With others, it can be as fast as three to four months. But the main thing is you have to get the matching working, which is generally about 90% plus accurate out of box. And then we tune the stuff for the particular organization. And then after that, turning on the specific use cases and workflows, that's not hard at all.

DR 00:19:05 It's awesome that Telcos are starting to adopt this. I think it's gonna really help them. And so, I think I saw that you guys have an annual talent summit called Cultivate, which is coming up on May 10th and 11th. And so, it's a hybrid event, but the physical part is in Napa, which is awesome. So what else can you tell us about this event?

Kamal A. 00:19:25 Yeah. So one, if your scheduling permits, please come join us. And we thought with all the COVID overhang, it's time to actually celebrate a little bit and have a drink or two.

DR 00:19:36 I mean, you had me at Napa, right? Like it's amazing up there, especially in the middle of the spring. It's gorgeous. So that sounds awesome.

Kamal A. 00:19:43 Yeah. And the other part is when you have had a glass or two, it's all the folks that are coming in, so some of the largest organizations globally who are forward-leaning, who have already done a lot of the work. Morgan Stanley is coming, Vodafone is coming. So a lot of these organizations are coming in to essentially compare notes, so I think we are really looking forward to it.

DR 00:20:02 Well, I can't think of anything more dangerous, which is HR executives together with alcohol cuz they have great stories.

Kamal A. 00:20:10 They do. They hear it all. They hear it all.

DR 00:20:13 I have them for just the 10 years, I mean the stories I could tell. Yep. I wouldn't put it on a podcast, but some of them are super interesting. Well, Kamal, thank you so much for coming on the podcast. This was a great conversation.

Kamal A. 00:20:24 Thanks for having me. Thank you.

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DR 00:20:27 Awesome. Stick around because we're ending each podcast with a Telco in 20 takeaway. I have 20 seconds to tell you something you need to know.

DR 00:20:36 Putting on my HR hat, there's nothing that upskills a workforce more than just making them do the job – hands on, baby! But sometimes you have to start somewhere, and fortunately there are a bunch of ways to get going. First, our friend Forrest Brazeal has a cloud resume challenge. It's a series of real-world tasks with the public cloud designed to give you hands-on experience so you can up-level your skill set. He's also turned it into a book. Log on to Forrest's website and order it. We love Forrest! We also love the courses at A Cloud Guru designed to help you master hyperscaler skills and put your cloud career into motion. They have over 400 amazing courses and 1800 labs to help individuals or teams gain hands-on cloud experience. Finally, all of the big cloud providers – AWS, Google Cloud, and Azure – offer training and certifications.

DR 00:21:27 It doesn't really matter which hyperscaler you pick. Just pick your favorite one and get going. And TelcoDR is joining the cloud training movement. We wanna show our commitment to transforming our industry to the public cloud. So in honor of our 40th episode ... Wow! Can you believe it?... we're giving away \$10,000 to employees of CSPs looking to upskill and build out their cloud resume. I'll pay for one AWS certification and give you access to Totogi's APIs so you can build something super cool. Just DM me on Twitter @TelcoDR, or message me on LinkedIn. And don't forget to register for our Totogi webinar to learn about our awesome charging system. It's on May 17 and it's absolutely free for CSPs. Got a question about cloud? Give me a call or WhatsApp me at 925-TelcoDR. Don't forget to sign up for our awesome newsletter at TelcoDR.com. And if you love this podcast, share it with your colleagues and friends and leave us a review.

Later, nerds!