

# RECRUITING CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

## Executive Summary

*From Chaos to Infrastructure: A Proven Model for Hiring That Compounds*

*The principles in this framework have been validated across organizational contexts ranging from mid-market manufacturing scale-ups to centralized global recruiting functions supporting thousands of hires annually in enterprise technology environments.*

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## The Problem Most Organizations Are Already Living Inside

Before you can fix recruiting, you have to name what is actually broken. Most organizations do not have a hiring problem. They have a system problem - or more precisely, the absence of one.

The evidence is predictable: agencies fill roles that should be filled internally, at 20 to 35 cents on every dollar of base salary. Hiring managers define roles differently than they did in the intake meeting. Candidates disappear between offer and start. Search after search closes slower than expected, costs more than budgeted, and produces hires that underperform or leave within 12 months. Leadership blames recruiting. Recruiting blames the business. Neither is wrong. The system is the problem.

The financial drag is not theoretical. A mid-market company running 50 to 100 hires per year with a 25 percent agency dependency and a 15 to 20 percent mis-hire rate is typically carrying \$1.5M to \$3M in annual avoidable cost - and it does not appear as a line item. It appears as overtime, delayed projects, re-runs, and executive frustration.

**The harder truth:** this is not a recruiter problem. Throwing more recruiters at a broken system produces more of the same outcome, faster. And renegotiating agency fees - or shopping for cheaper vendors - is not a strategy. It is a cost-management reflex that leaves the structural dependency intact. Whether the agency charges 18 percent or 28 percent, the organization is still paying someone else to do what it has not built the capacity to do itself. The fee is not the problem. The dependency is. What organizations need is not more throughput or a better vendor rate - they need a governing architecture. A model that takes the most important decisions a company makes and treats them with the rigor they deserve.

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## The Unimacts Case: What Was Built and What It Produced

In mid-2023, Unimacts Global - a manufacturing company operating facilities across 14 countries including manufacturing operations in the EU, Asia, and North America, and growing through post-acquisition integration - faced a version of this problem in full. North American operations were centered in Las Vegas, NV and Houston, TX. One year post-acquisition, the VP of Talent was running the entire TA function with only a recruiting coordinator in support and no dedicated recruiting infrastructure beneath her. When volume exceeded internal capacity, the default move was agencies. By end of 2022, agency spend had exceeded \$350,000. With new manufacturing plants launching in the USA and a significant increase in hiring volume on the horizon, that number was projected to multiply 2 to 3 times. When the VP of Talent overlaid the current spend against turnover data from agency hires and modeled the forward cost, the financial case was clear and

urgent. A dedicated Talent Acquisition function was approved. The RCoE model came through the door with it. In his first conversation, Unimacts Global Founder Matt Arnold set the mandate directly: "Dennis, it took me 20 years to build out this awesome company and culture based on Core Values. I need you to be a Guardian of Culture." The financial case created the opening. The cultural mandate defined the standard every hire would be held to.

The model was not built in response to the problem. It arrived as a solution to it - drawn from prior implementation experience, adapted to the Unimacts context, and deployed against a clear business objective: eliminate agency dependency, standardize process, and build a hiring machine that could scale with the company.

Five structural pillars went in simultaneously: internal sourcing infrastructure to replace agency dependency; activation of an existing ATS that had been implemented but left without workflows, templates, or adoption - turning shelfware into functioning infrastructure; hiring manager accountability structures with defined SLAs and intake discipline; a Talent Strategy Advisor function positioned to operate at the business level, not the transactional level; and an Employer Branding initiative built in partnership with the Marketing department to establish a consistent, credible talent brand that internal sourcing could actually leverage. Layered across all five was a purpose-built enablement system: SOPs, training videos, and a Hiring Manager Recruiting Toolkit that gave every stakeholder in the process a defined role, a documented standard, and no excuse for improvising.

Within six months, the first proof point was visible. Agency spend did not just drop - it became almost non-existent. That is not a coincidence. Agency spend was the entry wound that started the whole conversation, and it became the first metric to move because it was the most directly addressed by the model. The dependency that had cost \$350,000 in a single year was effectively eliminated.

The harder conversion was with the Plant Managers. Their resistance was not ideological - it was operational. They had built their own informal hiring patterns around agency relationships and they trusted what they knew. The approach was not to override that trust but to replace it with something more compelling: data. The cost impact of agency hiring versus internal recruiting was laid out explicitly. The quality of hire difference was made visible. Labor turnover comparisons between agency-sourced and internally-sourced hires were presented side by side. The gap was too obvious to argue with.

Rather than mandating a full process change, pilots were run. Plant Managers who were willing to test the internal model got to see the results firsthand - retention rates, time to productivity, team stability. When the pilot outcomes were visible, the conversation shifted from resistance to curiosity to adoption. Once buy-in was established, the next step was training: systems, process, and the Hiring Manager Recruiting Toolkit that gave Plant Managers a clear operating standard they could actually use.

The Employer Branding work produced a result that made all of it visible to everyone. Unimacts went from a push strategy - sourcing, chasing, convincing - to a pull strategy. Application volume increased. The candidate pool quality shifted. The right talent started finding Unimacts rather than the other way around. When Plant Managers and hiring managers began seeing the volume and quality of inbound candidates, the remaining skepticism about the model largely dissolved. The numbers did not need a presenter. They made the case themselves.

OPEX Savings	Time to Fill	Offer Acceptance	Total Hires
<b>\$2M+</b> Over 2 Years	<b>18 Days</b> Avg TTF	<b>100%</b> Acceptance Rate	<b>350+</b> Over 2 Years

The financial model is defensible from two angles. On the salaried side: 19 direct hires across roles ranging from Production Manager to CFO, with a combined salary base of \$2.197M. Agency fees on that volume, at standard 20 to 35 percent placement rates, would have run \$440,000 to \$769,000. All-in internal cost - compensation plus LinkedIn Premium over the build period - ran approximately \$156,000. Net savings on salaried alone: \$284,000 to \$613,000. On the direct and hourly side: internal sourcing at \$22/hour versus the agency rate of \$29/hour, across 100-plus direct hires. The \$7/hour spread across that volume, annualized, closes the gap to \$1M in year one and compounds to over \$2M across the full two-year implementation period.

100 percent offer acceptance across salaried and direct hires at both locations - driven by employer brand elevation, hiring teams actively engaged in sourcing activities including LinkedIn headhunting and presence, and pre-brief calibration sessions that aligned expectations before offers were extended. 18-day average time to fill. 350-plus hires completed over two years. These are not projections. They are the output of a model that was built with discipline, held to account, and sustained long enough to compound.

By year two, the same function that eliminated agency dependency on the factory floor was recruiting a CEO, three Presidents, a VP of Finance, and a CHRO - building the full executive architecture of a scaling global company. The model that started with a cost problem became the infrastructure that shaped organizational leadership.

The proof of concept did not stop at Unimacts. The RCoE was scaled across Zetwerk Group for the Executive Recruiting function - the parent company, currently preparing for IPO in summer 2026 - due to its demonstrated best practices and subject matter expertise. Executive function roles across EU and Asia were filled through the same model. When a multi-continent organization preparing for public markets adopts a recruiting framework built inside one of its subsidiaries and deploys it globally, that is not a case study. That is institutional validation.

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## What Almost Broke It: The Candor Section

If you build this model, expect resistance. Not maybe. Not in some organizations. In every organization. The following three friction points surfaced at Unimacts and they will surface for you. The question is not whether you will face them - it is whether you will be prepared for them when you do.

### 1. Hiring Manager Resistance

This was the heaviest friction, and it came in both passive and active forms. Passive: missed feedback SLAs, corners cut on debriefs, candidates evaluated on instinct rather than criteria. Active: pre-selected candidates presented as open searches, direct challenges to hiring decisions without data to support the position, deliberate workarounds to bypass the process when it was inconvenient.

#### The Line That Defined the Resistance:

*"But Dennis, we've been doing it forever this way - why change now? We don't have time - we need to move fast." The answer that framed the entire change management effort: we found our fathers doing it, so we are doing it too. The problem with inherited practice is that it carries inherited failure with it. And the urgency argument - the need to move fast - is precisely how agency dependency sustains itself. Speed becomes the justification for bypassing the very process that would have made hiring faster in the first place.*

The approach to breaking through that resistance was not confrontation. Confrontation with entrenched behavior produces defensiveness and coalition-building against the change. The

approach was architecture: SOPs that formalized what good looked like, socialized before they were enforced, and backed by C-suite alignment that made compliance the path of least resistance. The VP of Talent and the Founder provided the influence levers that no amount of recruiter persuasion could replace.

## 2. Technology Implementation Friction

The ATS was not new. The VP of Talent had already implemented it. What was missing was the operational layer that makes a system usable: configured workflows, templates, stage definitions, and the training that drives adoption. Without that layer, the tool existed but produced nothing. Activating it - building the workflows, creating the templates, producing training videos, and socializing the Hiring Manager Recruiting Toolkit - was not a technical exercise. It was a behavioral one. The resistance was to the accountability that a functioning system creates. When every touchpoint is logged, latency becomes visible. When pipeline stages are defined, shortcuts become documented. The friction was not with the tool. It was with the transparency the tool imposed. And that transparency produced something that had not existed before: data, analytics, and insights that became part of the conversation. Hiring decisions that had previously been made on instinct and urgency were now made with pipeline visibility, candidate quality metrics, and sourcing performance data sitting on the table. That shift - from gut to evidence - is where the function crossed from transactional to strategic.

## 3. Recruiting Team Capability Gaps

Building a recruiting function from minimal infrastructure requires more than process documentation. It requires capability development - teaching the team to operate as strategic advisors, not transactional coordinators. This takes time that implementation timelines rarely budget for. The workaround was progressive: standardize the process first, close capability gaps through SOPs and templates, and build advisory capacity as the model stabilized.

What accelerated that progression at Unimacts was deliberate coaching and mentorship of the existing HR team. The TA function did not operate in isolation - it became a partner to HR, sharing frameworks, transferring capability, and modeling what strategic advisory work actually looks like in practice. That partnership had a compounding effect. As the HR team absorbed the methodology, their own positioning shifted. Functions that had operated as a service desk - reactive, transactional, order-taking - began operating at a business partner level. They stopped waiting to be asked and started bringing insight to the conversation.

This elevation is not incidental to the RCoE model. It is one of its most important outputs. The structural blocker that prevents most HR functions from reaching strategic relevance is not skill - it is positioning. When TA operates as a strategic function and actively develops the team around it, the entire HR organization benefits. The service function label gets replaced not through a title change but through demonstrated capability that leadership begins to rely on. That is how the function earns its seat at the table - and keeps it.

All three friction points were navigated around, not through. That is an honest answer. Sometimes the right move is a workaround that keeps momentum rather than a confrontation that stalls it. The model held because the business case was visible and the executive alignment was real.

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## Who This Blueprint Is For

This blueprint is designed for organizations building or strengthening their Recruiting Center of Excellence. It targets companies in the 25 to 75 percent maturity range - those with structural gaps requiring systematic improvement.

### Foundation Builders (0-49% Maturity)

Organizations with minimal RCoE structure or significant foundational gaps. You need to build strategy, structure, and basic workflows before attempting sophisticated metrics or scaling. This blueprint provides the complete implementation roadmap from crisis or weak state to moderate capability.

### Systematic Improvers (50-74% Maturity)

Organizations with a basic RCoE foundation in place but inconsistent execution or integration gaps. You have structure but need to strengthen weak sections and build tighter connections between components. This blueprint helps you move from moderate to strong capability through targeted improvement.

### Validation Seekers (75-100% Maturity)

Organizations with well-developed RCoE capability. You have already built what this blueprint describes. Your value from this package is different but still real:

- o Validation that your approach aligns with proven models
- o Sustainability frameworks to prevent maturity erosion during organizational change
- o Diagnostic tool to measure variance across business units or geographies
- o Reference architecture for M&A integration or global expansion
- o Language frameworks for communicating RCoE value to executives

If you score Strong (75%+) on the self-diagnostic, this blueprint confirms you are on the right path. Your next evolution requires advanced capabilities beyond this framework's scope: predictive workforce planning, board-level talent strategy, competitive intelligence methodologies, and sophisticated ROI modeling.

#### Honest Assessment:

*This is not a blueprint for optimizing mature RCoEs. It is a blueprint for building them. If you have already built a strong RCoE, use this package as validation and reference, not as your implementation guide. Organizations scoring above 177 points (75%) have outgrown what this framework teaches. Most organizations fall in the 59-176 range where this blueprint delivers maximum value. If you are in the remaining 20% with mature capability, your benefit is confirmation and diagnostic tools, not transformation guidance.*

## Where Do You Start: Organizational Archetype Self-Diagnosis

Every meaningful transformation begins with the same question - not "where are we going" but "where are we right now." Organizations that skip the honest answer to the first question build strategies on assumptions that do not match reality. The self-diagnosis comes before the roadmap. Always.

The question every organization needs to answer before opening Section A is: where are we? The table below maps three organizational archetypes to their primary signal, their most urgent pain, and their implementation entry point.

Archetype	Signal	Primary Pain	Start Here
Startup / High-Growth (<100 employees)	Hiring chaos, every role feels urgent, no repeatable process	Speed without quality; hiring manager is also the recruiter	Section A: Define your Talent Strategy first

Mid-Market Scaling (100-500 employees)	Agency spend growing, inconsistent results across teams, leadership frustrated	Cost control and process standardization	Section B + C: Structure and workflow before metrics
Enterprise Optimization (500+ employees)	Data exists but isn't driving decisions; TA seen as transactional	Strategic credibility and governance	Section D + E: Measurement architecture and transformation sequencing

The Self-Diagnostic Assessment Tool, included in the full blueprint download, produces a scored maturity profile across six domains: strategy alignment, organizational structure, systems integrity, measurement maturity, transformation readiness, and leadership behavioral stability. It takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and outputs a Maturity Score Summary by section, a Structural Risk Summary, and a recommended implementation sequence.

The diagnostic exists because the most common implementation failure is starting in the wrong place. Organizations that attempt enterprise-level measurement architecture before they have process governance in place build dashboards that measure chaos. Organizations that build workflow standardization before they have leadership alignment build processes that get bypassed. Sequence matters as much as the actions within it.

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## What Honest Implementation Actually Requires

The RCoE model works. The Unimacts numbers are real. But it is worth being direct about what the model requires, because organizations that go in with misaligned expectations fail before the results arrive. For context on investment: a mid-market organization building this model should expect to commit one dedicated TA leader, a LinkedIn Premium subscription, and an ATS - total all-in cost typically ranging from \$150,000 to \$250,000 in year one depending on existing infrastructure. Against \$1M+ in annual OPEX savings, the payback period is under 12 months. What makes or breaks the return is not the budget - it is the discipline to implement completely rather than partially.

- o Executive sponsorship is not optional. The model creates short-term friction - process discipline, SLA accountability, structured intake - that will be resisted. Without a VP of Talent or C-level sponsor willing to hold the line, the path of least resistance wins and the model collapses into informal practice within 90 days.
- o The first 6 months produce cost reduction, not culture change. Cost reduction is visible and defensible. Culture change - hiring managers who embrace structured process, leaders who trust the function, executives who use recruiting data in business decisions - comes at 12 to 18 months and only if the foundation holds.
- o The model requires a person who can operate as a Talent Strategy Advisor - not a recruiting coordinator, not a traditional TA partner, and not a conventional recruiting leader. Those roles manage throughput. A Talent Strategy Advisor shapes business decisions, challenges hiring assumptions, and brings market intelligence into rooms where strategy is set. If the most senior TA person in the organization is primarily executing logistics or managing requisition volume, the strategic layer of the model will not have an owner. That gap is the single most common reason RCoE implementations stall at the operational level and never reach strategic impact.
- o SOPs are the change management tool. Not training programs, not communications campaigns - SOPs. Documented, socialized, enforced standards that make the right

behavior the default behavior. Build them early, share them widely, and hold them consistently.

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## The Next Move

The RCoE model is not a concept. It is a system - built, tested, and validated across real hiring conditions with real business consequences. The Unimacts results are not a best-case scenario. They are what disciplined implementation produces when the structural foundation is correct and leadership alignment is real.

For HR and TA leaders introducing this model internally: the framing matters as much as the model itself. This is not a process overhaul imposed on the business - it is a capability investment that makes hiring faster, cheaper, and more predictable for every hiring manager in the organization. Lead with their pain, not your framework. Show them the cost of the current state before presenting the solution. Build allies before you build infrastructure.

For recruiting leaders ready to act now: do not wait for perfect conditions or full executive alignment before starting. Take the self-diagnostic this week. Score your current state honestly across the six domains. Identify the single section where your score is lowest - that is your structural blocker and your starting point. One honest diagnosis, completed before your next leadership meeting, is worth more than six months of planning without a baseline.

What this requires is not a budget approval or a technology investment - at least not initially. What it requires is a decision to treat hiring as a governed function rather than an informal one. That decision, made clearly and held consistently, is what separates organizations that build lasting recruiting capability from those that cycle through the same problems year after year.

Start with the diagnostic. Identify your archetype. Find your entry point. Then build - one pillar at a time, in sequence, with accountability at every stage. The organizations that do this do not look back.

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