

Johnson Controls Accelerates Global Hiring with AI

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A Global Innovator in Building Automation

Johnson Controls International PLC is a world leader in smart buildings, specializing in fire, security, and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. The company, headquartered in Cork, Ireland (with its North American base in Glendale, Wisconsin), has operated for over 140 years.

Following a merger with Tyco in 2016, the company—with more than 105,000 employees in 150 countries—shifted its focus to building-related solutions. It prioritizes sustainability by developing tools to measure and reduce carbon emissions, with a growing emphasis on data-driven solutions in the smart building space.

Johnson Controls International (JCI) was named to the *Forbes*' 2024 list of America's Best Employers for Diversity, included on Ethisphere's list of the World's Most Ethical Companies (17 times including 2024), and recognized as one of *Newsweek*'s America's Greatest Workplaces 2024.¹

Impediments in Hiring for Manufacturing Positions Worldwide

JCI hires in more than 15 languages across dozens of countries. To accommodate 20,000 to 25,000 global hires each year, the company relied on a complex talent acquisition (TA) process that included multiple manual steps and juggling between systems. Moreover, the recruitment team was trying to translate outreach communications manually.

With a goal of reducing time to hire to 45 days across all regions, the TA team lacked solid insights to make informed decisions about recruiting strategies. It was also unclear how long it took job seekers to complete the complex application process, which may have contributed to losing potential manufacturing candidates.

Manufacturing roles were historically challenging to fill because manufacturing talent tends to jump from industry

¹ ["Johnson Controls named to Forbes 2024 List of America's Best Employers for Diversity,"](#) Johnson Controls, 2024.

Summary

Challenge

- Reimagining and implementing a less cumbersome hiring process for all roles across the enterprise.
- Automating systems to record candidate responses and schedule interviews.
- Understanding candidate preferences to identify areas for improvement in the recruitment approach.

Solution

- Implemented "Emma," a conversational AI assistant built by Paradox, to support hiring in multiple languages for manufacturing roles.
- Integrated Emma on top of Workday, greatly simplifying the recruiting process while automatically scheduling interviews.
- Introduced Paradox's "candidate care" tool, allowing candidates to ask Emma general questions about the company, the culture, and the application process.

Results

- Decreased candidate response time to sourcing outreach by 98%, lowering it from 10 hours to 10 minutes.
- Increased total hires by 14%, reporting a 98% candidate satisfaction rate with the hiring process.
- Developed the ability to analyze real-time insights into candidate questions in all languages the company operates in to improve the candidate experience.

to industry and because of the amount of information required on JCI's job application. "There was a feeling that manufacturing candidates didn't engage with technology like some of the other roles would," said Mike Aronson, Johnson Controls' Senior Director of Talent Acquisition Global Operations. "We didn't have any data that said that, so we used to draw conclusions based on assumptions that we're not getting candidates for manufacturing because our application is too robust, too technical to get into, or has too many steps."

Aronson's team focused on simplifying the application process by eliminating redundant steps such as mandatory Workday account creation for all candidates. The team recognized the importance of supporting the capacity of recruiters, who were overwhelmed by the volume of manual tasks and processes. HR leaders were also on board with the need to streamline the candidate experience.

Orchestrating the Adoption of a New AI-Powered Recruitment Solution

To support a faster and more efficient hiring process for all roles, JCI implemented Paradox, which specializes in conversational AI for recruiting. It integrated Paradox with its existing Workday applicant tracking system (ATS) in 3 phases over 18 months.

Phase 1: Introducing Conversational Hiring

Several new features were introduced in Phase 1:

- **Candidate capture** for screening applicants.
- **Candidate care** to provide a smooth, conversational experience.
- **Interview self-scheduling** to manage different calendars, rooms, locations, and interviewers.
- **Chat-to-apply functionality**, added after the TA team created a more manufacturing-friendly application. This allows candidates to complete the application process with help from an AI assistant named Emma (see Figure 1).

"The theory was if we reduce what we're asking in the application and we make it easy with the chatbot, we would be able to increase volume," Aronson said. Emma can converse in more than a dozen languages, further improving the experience for global candidates. Applications can be completed via online chat or SMS/WhatsApp, providing flexibility and options for the company's global candidate population.

Figure 1: Chat-Based Hiring Discussion with Emma



Source: JCI, 2024

Phase 2: Streamlining Candidate Evaluation

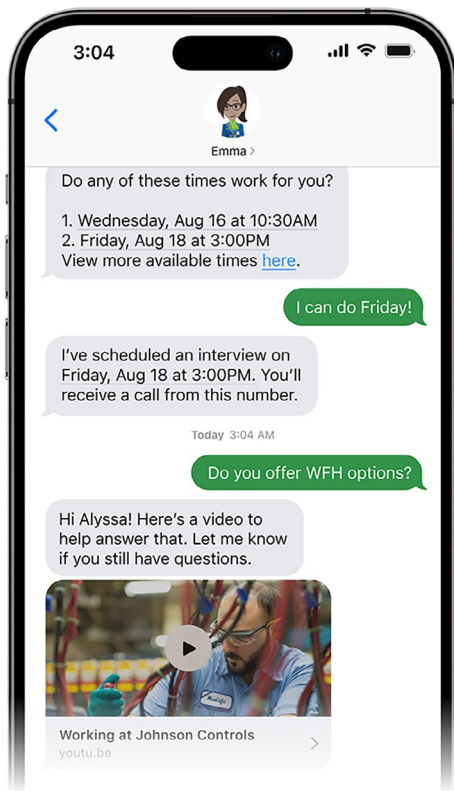
The second phase of the rollout focused on candidate capture, a series of questions candidates answer through Emma to provide recruiters with additional information to determine whether to proceed with interviews. "This allows recruiters to spend less time in conversation because they're getting more than just an application and a resume, and it can narrow candidates down," Aronson said.

“We are able to get from application to a recruiter phone screen without any human interaction, which creates time for the recruiters.”

Mike Aronson, Sr. Director of TA Global Operations, JCI

When a candidate expresses interest in a position and applies through Workday, Emma begins a screening process using straightforward messages to assess their qualifications, matching relevant jobs based on interest and location. If the candidate meets the criteria, Emma automatically provides available interview times based on recruiter schedules (see Figure 2). Reminders, follow-ups, and candidate rescheduling activities are also automated.

Figure 2: Scheduling Interviews with Emma via Text



Source: JCI, 2024

Phase 3: Describing the JCI Workplace Experience

The final phase expanded on candidate care to respond conversationally to more general questions about working at JCI. The TA team compiled a knowledge base about company culture, the application process, and other questions raised during past interviews. Data from Emma's interactions with candidates has helped identify the most common questions and those with no information in the knowledge base, enabling the team to iterate and address gaps.

Results: More Hires, Faster Response Times, New Insights

Adopting conversational AI and customizable recruitment strategies seamlessly facilitated candidate conversations across the globe, significantly reducing application times. The AI-powered solution helped JCI transcend time zones and language barriers, helping the best candidates connect and find the right roles quickly and without friction.

Overall, the AI-powered application flow has led to a 14% increase in hires and a dramatic 98% decrease in candidate response time. "Time savings from automation and the additional information captured by Emma have also allowed recruiters to focus on more strategic tasks," Aronson explained.

Getting Valid Insights around Candidates

The data and insights generated by the AI-powered recruitment solution have challenged longstanding assumptions about how candidates engage with technology. Candidate feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, suggesting that initial assumptions about candidate behaviors (especially manufacturing candidate behaviors) were incorrect. Data has revealed new insights; for example, candidates from India are more likely to engage with Emma than candidates elsewhere in the world.

To ensure TA can leverage even more granular insights from Paradox, the team also built a dashboard that collects key indicators by region to identify barriers to the adoption of Emma.

Next Steps: Establishing Formal Recruiting KPIs

With implementation completed, the TA team is now establishing formal metrics and performance indicators from candidate experience data "to inform what we want to do going forward," Aronson explained. Along with key performance indicators (KPIs), the team now has access to a dashboard that provides real-time insights across every part of the tool. Next on the roadmap is the ability to schedule interviews with hiring managers.

The TA team is also refining the questionnaires used during the candidate capture process, narrowing them from broad skill sets such as sales to more focused roles such as channel and field sales. Creating new role-based questions for niche roles like internships is also in the books. Overall, the company is thinking about using Paradox to connect recruitment with onboarding, with Emma providing on-demand and role-based information to help candidates navigate the process and appropriate policies.

“ *Emma allows us to connect the dots and move further into a more modern talent acquisition function.* ”
Mike Aronson

Lessons Learned

JCI leveraged conversational AI to streamline the recruiting process and capture valuable insights about candidates to inform its hiring strategy. Here are some lessons learned:

- **Create a consistent experience throughout the candidate lifecycle.** Interconnecting hiring steps and related systems throughout the candidate journey ensures everyone (candidates and recruiters alike) interacts with the same virtual assistant, the data is stored in the same place, and insights can be extracted from a single source of truth.
- **Leverage data gained through conversational AI to improve the candidate experience.** Conversational hiring bots are a great way to deliver seamless candidate experiences and rich pools of data that can be leveraged to understand how to best gain their interest and address their needs.
- **Simplify the process.** Following standard workflows, especially in the early stages of AI adoption, leads to software solutions that operate faster and more smoothly. Such an approach also grants organizations the room to figure out what candidates and employees are comfortable with before building in complexity that may not be necessary.

About the Authors



Josh Bersin

Josh founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. He expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership and became a recognized expert in the talent market. Josh sold the company to Deloitte in 2012 and was a partner in Bersin by Deloitte up until 2018.

In 2019, Josh founded the Josh Bersin Academy, a professional development academy that has become the "home for HR." In 2020, he put together a team of analysts and advisors who are now working with him to support and guide HR organizations from around the world under the umbrella of The Josh Bersin Company. He is frequently featured in publications such as *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, *HR Executive*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *CLO Magazine*. He is a popular blogger and has more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.



Stella Ioannidou

Stella is the senior director of research and Global Workforce Intelligence Project leader at The Josh Bersin Company. In this role, she conducts empirical research on a variety of topics related to the skills economy, talent intelligence, and HR technology. Stella has almost 20 years of experience across several industries, including banking. Prior to joining The Josh Bersin Company, Stella was the HR transformation leader for Deloitte, where she led large-scale HCM implementations and designed frameworks for talent acquisition and performance management for the public sector. Stella holds master's degrees in engineering, information systems management, business administration, and lifelong learning. Stella lives and works in Greece and is pursuing her PhD in talent intelligence. She is a certified project manager, change management practitioner, lean six sigma green belt, and ICAgile HR professional.

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