

Avature

Building an Agile HR Function

How Siemens Went Agile to Deliver a New Global ATS Within 14 Months



Legacy?
The reality.

In today's evolving world of work, business is hungry for adaptive culture and speed-to-innovation. Because of this, HR is going Agile.

Agile methodology, popularized by software development, helps teams respond to unpredictability. It uses incremental, iterative work sequences to deliver a product. For complex HR problems, this method for developing a solution can be a game changer.

Siemens—an engineering and digital pioneer focused on the areas of electrification and automation—recently leveraged Agile project management to deliver its new Applicant Tracking System. The company rolled out the ATS across more than 100 different countries in over 20 languages during a period of six months. From purchase to go-live, the entire process lasted 14 months.

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Sebastian Hubert
Siemens, on Avature

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The Role of HR in Advancing Agile Practices

In today's business climate, enterprise organizations are challenged with introducing adaptive cultures and faster problem solving. Typically, companies respond with Agile training, but Siemens took a different track.

“Employees can get to know about the methodology of Agile, but it really comes down to actually doing it,” Dr. Hubert said. “How we try to become Agile in TA—and then in a wider sense, HR—is by running Agile projects.”

Agile project management works best with large-scale, complex projects involving uncertainty and tight timelines. Siemens' first Agile HR project was introducing the Avature Applicant Tracking System: enterprise SaaS technology that can be configured to manage the entire hiring process for candidates, recruiters, and hiring managers.

Dr. Hubert explained how this project was an ideal jumping-off point for its complexity. “We were implementing a global tool. The difficulty is developing a global tool but being locally relevant. So we couldn't just take headquarter's perspective on it,” he said.

For the project, Siemens had a few key requisites:

- Meet a tight implementation timeline of 14 months
- Harness diversity and work in cross-functional and multinational teams
- Develop a differentiated experience fully focused on the end users (recruiters, hiring managers, and candidates)

From the beginning, Siemens and Avature collaborated on how to conduct the project. The ATS project was Siemens' first implementation project using Agile methodology—as it was for Avature together with a client. “It was clear that traditional project management approach wouldn't have taken us to a successful new product,” said Dr. Hubert. “We needed to do something different.”

Creating an Agile Project

According to Dr. Hubert, the success of an Agile project depends on a handful of key factors.

1. **A clear product vision:** Siemens spent time aligning its key players on the product vision, which became a guiding North Star for the smaller development steps. “You need to know when designing these little puzzle pieces how they fit together and where you are heading. Our North Star was to create a tool that would get everyone home earlier—hence get it as intuitive and simple as possible.”
2. **A dynamic core team:** Siemens amassed a core team of 30+ colleagues with different skill sets and areas of expertise. Dr. Hubert suggested critically consider-

ing the mindset of core team members. “You really need people who are flexible in their mindset, who balance different views, and who understand that there are high-priority decisions that need to be made when you develop in sprints.”

3. **A true product owner:** At the center of their project, the Siemens TA colleagues had two “product owners” (project managers in Agile projects) who tied together loose ends. This is a critical function for matters of prioritization, stakeholder management, communication, and keeping everyone on track while working during the sprints.
4. **A horizontally empowered team:** The Siemens colleagues also put horizontal empowerment and decentralized decision-making at the top of their agenda. This created ownership across the multinational and cross-functional team—necessary not only to enjoying the project but also going above and beyond every day. Agile methodology demands adaptability because it is driven by constant feedback. Experts should be able to bring their own experience to the table while also receiving feedback and considering the perspectives of key stakeholders. “It's about making decisions that benefit the whole of the organization,” Dr. Hubert said. “It's almost an altruistic approach.”

For example, an experienced recruiter in a very specific region may not be the best fit. Instead, Siemens selected recruiters who brought expert opinions and also recognized that their recruiting reality is just one of many.

Siemens' core team comprised employees across different teams and regions. Each member provided a different perspective.

- **Strategic thinkers:** Members of the Strategy & Technology Team helped ensure the project aligned with the overall organizational design and technology stack.
- **Subject-matter experts:** Operational recruiters from various business areas made sure the technology could cater to divergent service levels. “We had a clear spread of the different countries we serve because the market dynamics are so different,” Dr. Hubert noted.
- **Cross functional:** Implementation experts and IT/Systems colleagues helped to manage the project and test the system. “The Avature consultants were really understanding of Siemens’ needs, and it was amazing to see how Siemens employees learned to speak the language of software developers,” Dr. Hubert noted.

After establishing the vision and team, Siemens moved forward with the project—meeting the 14-month deadline and completing the launch of Avature ATS on Oct. 1 across the entire globe. With the product now in recruiter’s hands, the ATS project enters its second phase: live iteration.

“It is a minimal viable product versus a 100% finished solution,” Dr. Hubert explained. “People would typically aim for something that is perfect, but this is a development journey.”

Continuing the Product Journey

Traditionally, companies roll out new technology in a pilot country and then reconfigure it. In Agile, a company broadly releases a 1.0 version and then iterates the product throughout rollout. Siemens first rolled out Avature ATS across smaller English-speak-

ing countries and then implemented the tool in more than 20 languages. Countries with more stringent labor laws, such as Germany and China, went live at the end of the six-month rollout.

“We were learning as we were going,” Dr. Hubert said. “The feedback that we had from recruiters and hiring managers was taken seriously, and we worked that in as we were rolling out.”

With the product now live, Siemens is continuing the process through sprints: improvements and tweaks contained to two-week release cycles. Using this method of project management, the process focuses on smaller efforts rather than the entire project. “You’re working on puzzle pieces that are more understandable,” Dr. Hubert explained. “If you’re going in the wrong direction, you’ve laid a few wrong pieces, but you haven’t done something completely wrong.”

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Considering the continuous change, a successful product journey demands good communication with key stakeholders. For example, Siemens' recruiters know how the improvements are progressing and what results they will have. It is extremely beneficial when stakeholders understand and accept the process of creating a minimal viable product, Dr. Hubert emphasized. Transparency encourages adoption, in addition to active participation in the development process. Dr. Hubert considers these individuals to be key players in the process. "Agile calls for creating a wider ecosystem of people who are real ambassadors for the project, not only in TA but also on the business side and in HR," he said.

Building a Customizable Product

Avature ATS enables customized, brand-centric online experiences tailored to key stakeholders. This is particularly critical for multinational organizations with a wide range of privacy protocols and candidate journeys. "We need to provide a global product that is locally relevant," Dr. Hubert explained.

For instance, China is a passive market, so candidates go through a "low friction" application process with as few clicks as possible. This helps ensure reduced drop-off rates. In contrast, candidates in India—an active market—go through a more traditional, multi-layered application process. This weeds out ambivalent applicants.

"You analyze the different user journeys that you need," Dr. Hubert explained. "You have to be flexible to configure your product in a way that you're serving different markets."

Siemens launched Avature ATS two years after implementing Avature CRM, the global market leader for sourcing, recruitment marketing and candidate engagement. Both of the solutions operate from the same platform. So from a user perspective, there is one universal login, one password, and one database of information.

Dr. Hubert said recruiters and hiring managers have readily embraced the new ATS. He credits this in part to three aspects of Agile project management:

- Communication and transparency to a broader group of employees
- Constant feedback to further iterate the product
- Acceptance that the "minimal viable product" is on a development journey

With projects managed in this way, "you start to train your organization that we have a fast way of introducing new technologies," Dr. Hubert said. "They understand that a technology stack is not something that is static but something that needs curating. And I think that's where you see the change over time in actually being an active part of an innovation community."

Leveraging Recruiters' Knowledge

Recruiters play a key role in shaping Siemens' technology stack. To make use of recruiters' knowledge of day-to-day problems and emerging solutions, Siemens created TAventures. This internal brand and process enables Siemens to collect recruiters' insights and requests with the goal of improving the company's TA technology stack. Siemens

tests requested solutions through sandboxing, and when one works well, the TA team starts rolling it out right away.

“This is a grassroots movement versus someone centrally identifying the problems and potential vendors,” Dr. Hubert said. “We use everyone out there—all our subject-matter experts—to see the relevant problems and technology solutions. That’s Agile in itself.”

Traditionally, new technologies enter a corporation through a hierarchical system: Management makes a top-down decision to implement solutions in a linear, sequential manner. “If you work more Agile and you empower your people, there’s no need for these top-down decisions anymore,” Dr. Hubert said. “Through Agile processes, employees own the curation of the technology stack.”

When tackling large-scale projects, Agile methodology works well with the modern workforce. “We’re all used to fast-paced updates and newly available, digestible technology,” Dr. Hubert said. “If we work Agile in introducing new technologies, then we will live up to the expectation that we have in our private lives and bring it to the workplace.”

Through collaborative feedback and continuous improvement, organizations are able to deliver solutions in a way that empowers employees and tackles problems.

“You’re fundamentally changing the culture toward producing faster outcomes that aren’t perfect but carry you a long way,” Dr. Hubert reflected. “I think that’s the way you change your business: You live Agile and not just talk about it. Every technology project we do is a chance to lead by example.”

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