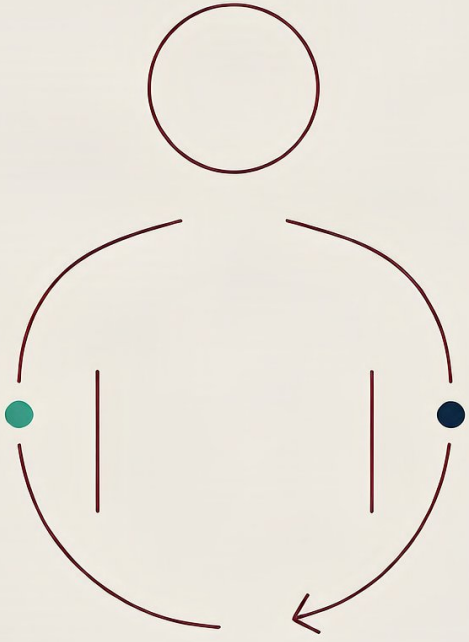
# THE HUMAN-APPROVAL LOOP

Recruitment Automation Without the Black Box



COURAGE GARIKAI

ColdCode Si Labs · Harare

# The Human-Approval Loop

## Recruitment Automation Without the Black Box

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ColdCode Si Labs, Harare, Zimbabwe

First edition, November 2026

ColdCode Si Labs Business Series

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# Dedication

For Panashe, who sent 147 applications and was hired in seven minutes when a human finally read his CV.

For Chipo, who applied by voice note and now runs our most important customer conversations.

For every candidate whose application was rejected by an algorithm before a human saw it.

Hire like a human.

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# Foreword

There are two ways to build hiring software. The first — which has dominated the last fifteen years — starts from the premise that recruiters and hiring managers are overwhelmed, that human judgment is biased and slow, and that the solution is to insert as much automation as possible between the candidate and the hiring decision. Parse the CV with NLP, score the candidate with a model, rank them by an algorithm, and show the recruiter only the top 10 percent. This approach scales. It is easy to sell. And it produces exactly what you would expect: systems that efficiently filter out candidates who do not look like past hires, candidates with non-traditional backgrounds, candidates from outside the expected mould, and candidates in markets the model was never trained on.

The second approach — the one Courage describes in this book — starts from a different premise. It acknowledges the scale problem but refuses to concede the decision to automation. It uses software to organise and present applications, to schedule interviews, to collect feedback, and to make the process manageable — but it insists that a human being look at every application, that every rejection be made by a named person, that interviews be structured and scored against rubrics rather than left to gut feel, and that candidates be treated as people rather than data points. It is called the human-approval loop, and it is the right answer for any company that wants to hire well, especially in markets where the standard tools are misaligned with the talent pool.

I have spent fifteen years building and operating technology teams in Africa. The best engineers I have hired — the ones who built products that millions of people now use — did not come through ATS keyword screening. They came through referrals, through side projects we found online, through WhatsApp messages, through meetups, through one human reading something a candidate had built and saying “this person can do the work.” The worst hires I have made — the ones who looked perfect on paper and failed in practice — were the candidates who checked every box on the ATS, said the right things in unstructured interviews, and turned out to be good at being interviewed rather than good at the work.

This book is practical, specific, and grounded in real experience in the Zimbabwean market — which makes it unusual and valuable. Most hiring books are written by American HR consultants for American companies. Courage writes as an operator who has built teams in Harare, who has made bad hires and great hires, who has seen what ATS systems do to African CVs, and who has built a working alternative. The patterns here work. We use variants of them at my own company. I wish I had this book when I started hiring.

If you hire people, read it. Then turn off the black box and start reading CVs.

— Tariro Masunda, Engineering Director, pan-African fintech, Cape Town / Harare, November 2026

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## About this book

A 26-year-old named Panashe graduated from the University of Zimbabwe in 2023 with a degree in computer science. He sent 147 job applications over fourteen months. He heard back from seven employers. He got two interviews. He got zero offers.

Panashe is not an outlier. He is a competent programmer who taught himself React and Python during his degree, built four side projects (one of them a small-business inventory tool used by seven shops in his hometown of Chinhoyi), and was the top student in his database systems class. He wrote clear, thoughtful cover letters. He formatted his CV according to the templates recommended by every careers blog. He applied to jobs he was qualified for.

The reason he heard back from only seven employers is that most of the 147 applications he sent went through applicant tracking systems (ATS) — automated screening software

that parsed his CV, scored it against the job description, and rejected him before any human being ever looked at his application. He was filtered out because: - His CV did not contain enough of the exact keywords the ATS was programmed to look for (the job description said “AWS” and he had experience with “DigitalOcean” and “self-hosted cloud deployments,” which the algorithm treated as unrelated). - He did not have three years of professional experience, even though he had four years of freelance work and open-source contributions — which the ATS did not count because they did not appear under an “Experience” heading in the expected format. - He did not attend a university the algorithm recognised as a “target school” (the algorithm’s training data was biased toward US and UK universities; UZ appeared nowhere in the target list). - His side projects, which would have been the most interesting part of his application to any human engineer, were buried at the bottom of his CV in a format the ATS’s parser garbled, so they were not scored at all.

Panashe got his first job in April 2025. Not through an ATS or a job board, but because a friend forwarded his CV to the CTO of a fintech startup in Harare, who read it in seven minutes and invited him for an interview. He was hired within two weeks. He is now their most productive backend engineer.

This book is about why that story is not an anomaly — it is the predictable outcome of how recruitment automation is designed, deployed, and sold, particularly in markets like Zimbabwe where the systems were never designed to understand local CVs, local career paths, or local signals of talent. It is about how companies that automate hiring with

black-box screening systems filter out great candidates, bias their pools toward a narrow set of “safe” profiles, and miss the Panashes of the world. And it is about a better way to do recruitment automation: the human-approval loop.

The human-approval loop is a design pattern for hiring systems where automation handles the high-volume, low-judgment work (collecting applications, parsing CVs, scheduling interviews, sending communications, aggregating feedback) but every consequential decision — who moves to interview, who gets an offer, who is rejected — is made by a human being who can see, understand, and override what the algorithm recommended. The loop requires that automation be transparent, that screeners be trained, and that the system be designed to surface promising candidates rather than filter them out.

The thesis of this book has three parts:

1. **Black-box hiring automation is broken.** It filters out non-traditional candidates, it encodes the biases of its training data, it is gamed by candidates who learn to write CVs for algorithms rather than for humans, and it fails at its central task: identifying candidates who will actually perform well in a job.
2. **Human-only hiring is also broken** at scale. Humans have biases of their own, they are slow, they make inconsistent decisions, they fall for charismatic talkers, and they cannot process 400 CVs in a week for an entry-level role. Purely manual hiring produces nepotism, inconsistency, and missed talent just as surely as pure automation does.

3. **The correct model is humans and automation working in a loop.** Automation collects, sorts, and surfaces. Humans review, judge, and decide. The system shows its work, highlights uncertainty, and is designed to flag interesting candidates rather than filter them out. It can process thousands of applications without losing the candidates who do not fit the expected template.

This is a practical book. It includes concrete patterns for designing a human-approval-loop hiring process, templates and checklists for structured interviews, a pattern for scoring CVs without black-box algorithms, guidance on buying or building an ATS that respects the loop, and case studies from African companies that do hiring well. It also includes an extended treatment of WhatsApp-based applications, because in Africa the majority of candidates do not submit PDF CVs through web portals — they send a message on WhatsApp. Any hiring system that ignores this is not designed for African markets.

### Who this book is for

- **Founders and hiring managers** at African startups and SMEs building or redesigning their hiring processes.
- **HR professionals** who know their ATS is filtering out good candidates but do not know what to replace it with.
- **Engineering and product leaders** who are asked to build or buy hiring tools and want to build ones that work for their market.
- **Job seekers** who want to understand why they are not hearing back and how to make their applications survive both automated screening and human screeners.

- **Anyone interested** in how automation can augment rather than replace human judgment in high-stakes decisions.

## Free sample

This is the opening of "The Human-Approval Loop" by Courage Garikai.
The full edition — PDF and EPUB — is at library.coldcode-si-labs.workers.dev

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