ISS North America Accelerates Frontline Hiring with AI and Human-Centered Design

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A Global Facility Management Leader

ISS North America (ISS NAM) is a global leader in facility management, employing over 300,000 people worldwide. From chefs and cleaners to engineers and technical specialists, its workforce is the backbone of its business. The company's mission is simple but powerful: to make workplaces work better for everyone.[1]

In the Americas, ISS NAM serves a wide range of clients across airports, hospitals, corporate campuses, and manufacturing sites. At its core, success depends on having the right people in the right place at the right time. ISS NAM earned two major workplace equality awards at the 2023 Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Tech Awards (DETA).[2]

Meeting Candidates Where They Are

For ISS NAM, every unfilled role represents more than a vacancy—it's a missed opportunity to serve clients, deliver on contracts, and drive revenue. "Our customers need us. Every day that you don't have a person here is one day that we're not going to fulfill the customer demands and expectations," shared Lisa Mitchell-Kastner, ISS NAM's Chief People & Culture Officer for the Americas.

Yet ISS NAM's hiring process was anything but simple. Manual, slow, and often inaccessible, it created friction for both candidates and recruiters alike. "We could see candidates falling off, and our internal teams were getting frustrated," Mitchell-Kastner recalled. The average time-to-hire stretched to 65 days—a critical lag in a business where 80% of employees are frontline, hourly workers.

Summary

Challenge

- Hiring high volumes of frontline staff while facing long time-to-hire and significant candidate drop-off.
- Relying on outdated, manual processes that frustrated candidates and internal teams.
- Supporting a diverse, multilingual workforce with varying levels of technology literacy.

Solution

- Built a deep partnership between HR and IT leadership to drive TA transformation.
- Implemented Paradox's conversational AI to automate and humanize the candidate journey.
- Adopted an agile, hands-on approach focused on accessibility, speed, and candidate belonging.

Results

- Reduced time-to-hire by 85%—from 65 days to fewer than 10 days.
- Achieved a 97% application completion rate, demonstrating a vastly improved candidate experience.
- Saved more than 10,000 recruiter hours by automating administrative tasks.

The challenge was compounded by the diversity of ISS NAM's workforce. Many candidates have limited technology literacy or English proficiency. "If you provide them a candidate experience where it's really clunky, the system's not easy, it's not on mobile, it's not quick, it's not in their preferred language, you put that candidate potentially in a position of shame," explained Alice Fournier, ISS NAM's Chief Information Officer for the Americas. The company needed a hiring process that was fast, accessible, and genuinely welcoming to all.

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1   "Our Story," ISS, February 2026.
2   "ISS secures two major awards in the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Tech Awards," ISS, July 2023.

A Human-Centered, AI-Powered TA Transformation

ISS NAM had previously piloted Paradox's conversational AI on a limited basis, but the real breakthrough came when Fournier and Mitchell-Kastner joined forces. Together, they set out to reimagine the candidate experience from the ground up, guided by a few nonnegotiables:

- **Fast, frictionless applications:** Candidates can apply quickly, from any device.

- **Multilingual, accessible design:** The experience works in candidates' preferred languages and accommodates varying levels of technology comfort.

- **24/7 availability:** Candidates can engage and schedule interviews at their convenience.

The result was a fully integrated end-to-end candidate experience. ISS NAM's conversational AI—"Iris"—became the new face of hiring (see Figure 1). Iris handled everything from screening and scheduling to onboarding paperwork, freeing recruiters to focus on high-value human interactions.

> **"** Once we were aligned, it was just a matter of deciding how deep we were going to integrate.
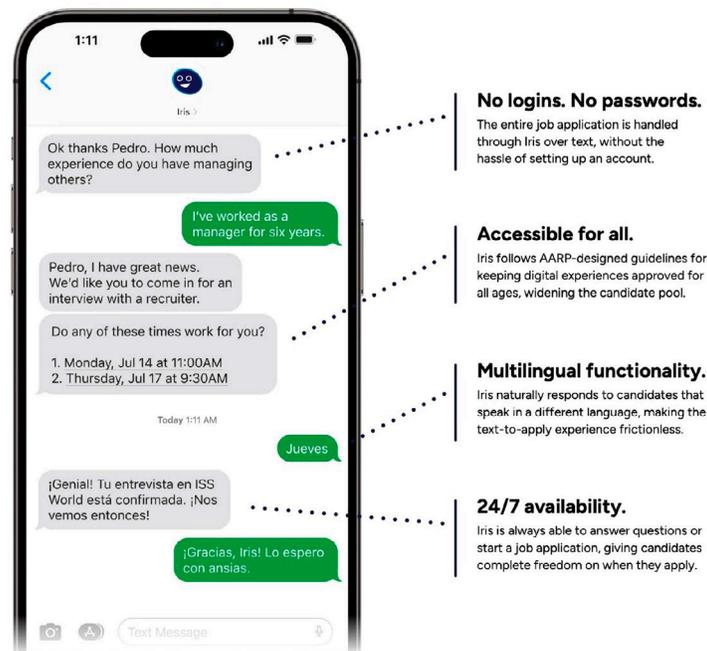>
> **Alice Fournier, Chief Information Officer for the Americas, ISS NAM**

Designing for the Human Experience

At the heart of ISS NAM's transformation was a radical commitment: technology would serve people, not the other way around. From the earliest conversations, the team recognized that the hiring process needed to meet candidates where they were—culturally, linguistically, and technologically. "We are a company of belonging. We care very much about connection with people and honoring and including everyone globally," explained Mitchell-Kastner. This ethos guided every decision, from interface design to workflow automation.

The intentional design process began with deep empathy for the frontline workforce. Many ISS NAM candidates are hourly workers, juggling multiple jobs, family responsibilities, and, in some cases, limited English proficiency or technology literacy. "If you engage with these candidates from the start, you really want to put them in a position to feel like they belong," said Fournier.

Figure 1: AI-Powered Candidate Conversations with Iris

No logins. No passwords.
The entire job application is handled through Iris over text, without the hassle of setting up an account.

Accessible for all.
Iris follows AARP-designed guidelines for keeping digital experiences approved for all ages, widening the candidate pool.

Multilingual functionality.
Iris naturally responds to candidates that speak in a different language, making the text-to-apply experience frictionless.

24/7 availability.
Iris is always able to answer questions or start a job application, giving candidates complete freedom on when they apply.

Source: ISS NAM, 2025

ISS NAM and Paradox codesigned an experience as simple and familiar as texting a friend. Candidates could apply for jobs, answer screening questions, and schedule interviews all via text message—in their preferred language and without needing logins or passwords. "We wanted to create a sense of belonging at ISS NAM, through a technology experience anyway," Fournier shared.

Accessibility was not just a feature—it was a guiding principle. The team ensured that every step of the process was mobile-friendly, available 24/7, and compliant with digital accessibility standards. Iris was designed to respond naturally to candidates in multiple languages, creating a frictionless experience for everyone. "We needed to make sure no one felt left behind," Fournier noted.

This human-centered focus extended to recruiters as well. By automating repetitive administrative tasks—like interview scheduling (see Figure 2), status updates, and onboarding paperwork—the solution freed recruiters to focus on meaningful, high-touch interactions. "We can now shift our resources to more high-touch work," Mitchell-Kastner explained. The result: a process that was not only faster, but also more personal and inclusive.

> " *We considered, what are the moments where we need a human to engage with another human? Let's be intentional about protecting these moments.*
> **Alice Fournier**

An Agile Implementation with Rapid Learning

The journey from concept to reality was anything but linear. ISS NAM's implementation of conversational AI was a masterclass in agile methodology: rapid iterations, daily stand-ups, and continuous feedback loops. "It was very hands-on," Fournier recalled. "We said, what needs to happen is an integration between System A and the new system. Let's start with that and move in an agile fashion."

The core project team was intentionally small but highly committed. It included just 1.5 full-time employees working on implementation, supported by the two executive sponsors from HR and IT. This lean structure enabled rapid decision-making while minimizing bureaucratic delays.

Daily collaboration was the norm. "We would get on the call every day and look at the developers and ask the questions," Fournier said. "When I say engaged and hands-on, I mean it. We were both right there, reengineering use cases for testing based on what we would like. We would change it at 9:00 in the morning and retest at 4:00 in the afternoon."

This agile approach was not without challenges. The team encountered technical hurdles, integration issues with legacy systems, and the inevitable resistance to change. But each

Figure 2: Interview Scheduling Completed by AI

roadblock was met with resilience and creativity. "There's an element of teaching, and there's also the air cover and the comfort to the small team doing the work that we will be there when they fail, because they will, and we'll have learning moments," Fournier reflected. "That's really important because that's how the transformation can happen. People feel psychologically safe to do things differently, to try."

Mitchell-Kastner echoed the sentiment: "If I were going to do this again, I would pick people that I know are going to go in the trenches with us. And we are not going to give up. There were days that we got off the phone, and we were like, okay, bummer. We're going to try again, guys."

The agile process was not just about speed; it was about learning, adapting, and continuously improving. "It's not old-school—pull it off the shelf, plug it in, and it works. That is not how this works," Mitchell-Kastner emphasized.

A Partnership Forged in Purpose

Perhaps the most distinctive element of ISS NAM's solution was the seamless partnership between HR and IT. Too often, technology projects are siloed—driven by either business or technical stakeholders, but rarely both. At ISS NAM, the collaboration between Mitchell-Kastner and Fournier set a new standard.

"What organizations need are technology people that profoundly understand business needs and businesspeople that profoundly understand how technology can serve their function or business," Fournier observed. This mutual respect and shared vision were the glue that held the project together.

The partnership was grounded in humility, grit, and a shared commitment to excellence. "We like to win, like we like to be the best. And we care about people genuinely, at the core of who they are. And so you take those two things, and then you add in a little bit of grit," Mitchell-Kastner said. "Because we had a lot of road bumps. There were a lot of times when we asked, 'Why is this so hard? This should not be this hard.' And we would call each other, 'Are you taking this one? Or am I taking this one? And how do we lock arms?'"

This spirit of cocreation extended to ISS NAM's partnership with Paradox. "We ebbed and flowed and had an agile methodology where we would try something, and if it didn't

work, we changed it. We would try again, and if it didn't work, we would, you know, change it," Mitchell-Kastner explained. "So I think just that from a human perspective, that change in old-school technology rollout versus what does it look like to cocreate, codesign, coauthor agile change?"

The result was a transformation that was not only technologically advanced but also deeply human. "That's how you transform organizations," Fournier concluded. "You need to give air cover to the people in the business doing the work because they'll make mistakes. Everybody will. And our job is to catch them when they fail and celebrate them when they succeed."

Results: Faster, Simpler, More Inclusive Hiring

The impact was immediate and dramatic. Time-to-hire dropped by 85%, from 65 days to fewer than 10 days. Application completion rates soared to 97%. In just the first few months, ISS NAM saved over 10,000 recruiter hours, and 35% of candidate conversations happened after hours, reflecting true accessibility.

The data tells a clear story: ISS NAM was hiring far faster than industry averages, with a time-to-interview of just 2 days and a time-to-hire of 10 days (see Figure 3 on the next page). Posthire surveys sent by Iris provided continuous feedback, with 97% of candidates rating the experience positively. "Our candidates are able to apply in the exact same experience they're used to in their daily lives," said Fournier. "We're not asking them to do anything new or confusing. It's all just texting."

But the impact went beyond the numbers. "Our candidates initially felt marginalized because of their discomfort with our old technology. Now we have the right experience. We have something where candidates feel that they belong," Fournier reflected.

> " *Hiring quality people is our biggest differentiator. The new process is not only faster but also more human.*
>
> **Lisa Mitchell-Kastner, Chief People & Culture Officer for the Americas, ISS NAM**

ISS NAM **Industry Average**
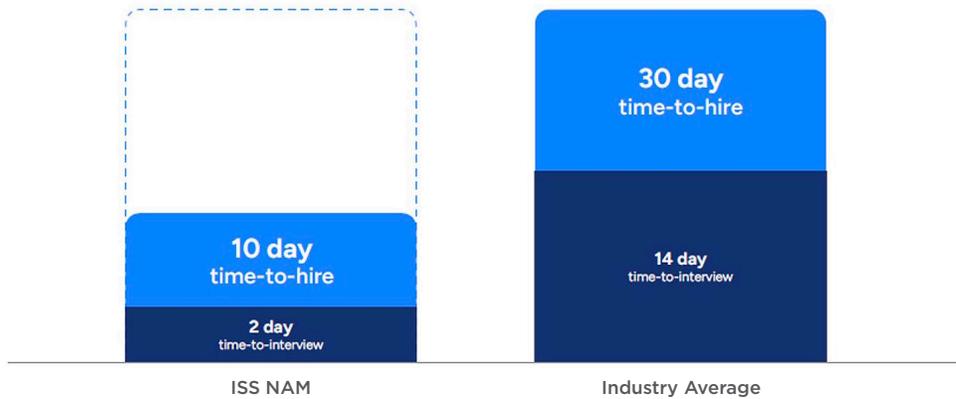
Source: ISS NAM, 2025

Next Steps: Scaling Through AI, Automation, and Data

For ISS NAM, the transformation is just beginning. The team is already exploring new frontiers and asking key questions across several priority areas:

- **Expanding AI to HR support:** "How cool would it be for someone to have an 'Ask HR' bot, available 24/7, answering 80% of HR questions instantly?" Mitchell-Kastner mused.

- **Automating what matters:** "We're looking at every process: what can be automated and what should stay human. That's how we'll scale and grow," Fournier explained.

- **Building a data-driven culture:** Investments in data and insights are empowering better decisions across the business.

The vision is clear: leverage technology to free people to focus on what matters most—serving customers, building relationships, and growing the business (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: A New, AI-Enabled Hiring Process

A hiring process combining human and AI interactions.

Focusing on what matters most.

Source: ISS NAM, 2025

Lessons Learned

ISS NAM demonstrates how a great dynamic between HR and IT can completely transform an organization's approach to adopting high-end technology in the most intentional and human way possible. Here are some lessons learned:

- **Build True HR–IT Partnerships.** Transformation in a complex, global organization like ISS NAM is only possible when business and technology leaders work in lockstep, with mutual respect and shared accountability. The seamless collaboration between HR and IT was not just a project enabler—it was the single most important driver of success. This partnership went beyond formal meetings or project plans; it was about daily engagement, honest conversations, and a willingness to challenge each other's assumptions. The result was a solution that balanced technical rigor with business relevance, ensuring that every decision served both people and process.

- **Automate with intention.** Not every process benefits from automation, and not every human touchpoint should be digitized. ISS NAM focused automation on repetitive, time-consuming tasks while fiercely protecting the moments that require empathy, judgment, and human connection. This approach positioned technology as an enabler, freeing recruiters to focus on coaching, decision-making, and candidate care.

- **Design for accessibility.** Accessibility is not just a compliance exercise—it's a strategic imperative that expands the talent pool and fosters a sense of belonging. ISS NAM's commitment to multilingual, mobile-first, and easy-to-use technology enabled candidates from all backgrounds to participate fully in the hiring process. By removing barriers to entry, ISS NAM increased application rates and sent a powerful message about its employer values.

- **Commit to continuous transformation.** Perhaps the most profound lesson from ISS NAM's experience is that digital transformation is never truly finished. The technologies and processes that power today's success will continue to evolve, requiring a culture of continuous improvement. For ISS NAM, this meant ongoing investment in data and AI-powered solutions and a relentless focus on both business outcomes and human experience. The journey is iterative, requiring curiosity, courage, and a willingness to challenge the status quo.

> *You cannot run organizations strategically without an understanding of how technology impacts them.*
>
> **Alice Fournier**

About the Author

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Stella is 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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