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**EXECUTIVE  
SEARCH**  
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SEARCH**

**SCOUTING  
LEADERS  
BEYOND AI  
ALGORITHMS**

Ida Johansson,  
Founding Partner and CEO

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Photo Credit: Skye Hughes





# I EXECUTIVE SEARCH

## SCOUTING LEADERS BEYOND AI ALGORITHMS

By Summer Gutierrez

**T**he executive search industry has always placed a high value on data—for targeting searches, gaining competitive intelligence, mitigating hiring risks and tracking the performance of placements. The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has only enriched this capacity. AI algorithms scour digital footprints to provide a holistic view of potential candidates, factoring in accomplishments that might not be captured in traditional resumes, and offer speed and cost-effectiveness.

Yet, this technological prowess begs the question—can AI replace human intellect in assessing a candidate’s full potential and identifying potential hiring risks?

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“Certainly not,” says Ida Johansson, founding partner and CEO of **I Executive Search (I)**.

With considerable experience in global management consulting and executive search with SHREK firms—the world’s top head-hunters—Johansson emphasises that a nuanced human touch and a deep, qualitative assessment approach set her company apart—an aspect AI cannot fully replicate. Consider the search for a leader in a company’s most critical growth area. An AI system might analyse factors like candidates’ experiences and contributions to projects and activities. Yet, what **I**’s consultants can offer is an understanding of how strong they are, soft skills and cultural fit essential for the role, which is beyond AI’s reach. They even uncover candidates who haven’t previously held similar titles but have the experiences and competencies needed and demonstrate a strong alignment with the company’s cultural and growth needs.

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**I** is about taking a step back from the AI race, focusing instead on what has always made the difference—human insight and connection.

**CULTIVATING VISIONARY LEADERSHIP TO BRIDGE DIVIDES**

Where most executive recruitment firms follow traditional pathways, **I**’s out-of-the-box thinking is evident in the larger purpose it embeds in its operational fabric—weaving the principles of global citizenship and peacebuilding into its core mission. This commitment reflects a deep-seated belief in the power of visionary leadership to foster global harmony in a more connected business world.

According to Johansson, the cornerstone of success is supporting clients with a clear understanding of their purpose. This is done through a recruitment methodology that prioritises collaboration, building a foundation of trust and mutual respect with both clients and candidates.

The engagement process with clients involves in-depth discussions to comprehensively understand the job requirements and the company’s culture, as well as leadership expectations. This level of discourse extends to candidates, focusing beyond professional achievements to include deeper motivations, such as long-term career goals and leadership philosophies.

Maintaining enduring relationships with both clients and candidates is a fundamental aspect of **I**’s methodology. This is predicated on mutual respect and takes into consideration the importance of privacy and the distinctive features of each engagement. Doing so ensures a bespoke approach that acknowledges and respects the individual nuances of every case.

Clients play an active role throughout the process, offering insights and participating in interviews. **I** evaluates those verbal and non-verbal cues to shortlist candidates.

Johansson explains, “We adeptly navigate the dynamic interplay between the market realities of our clients and candidates. We attract the right talent, even in times of scarcity, and offer a broader selection ensuring the highest quality and staying power when talent is perceived plentiful. Our process, grounded in deep market insight, ensures client satisfaction.”

This is exemplified by how the firm engages with active candidates and taps into the vast potential of passive candidates. The latter, while not seeking new opportunities, often emerge as ideal

matches for critical roles. Leveraging its comprehensive market knowledge and networks, it grants clients access to exceptional talent inaccessible through conventional recruitment methods.

Clients are also aided in identifying and nurturing internal candidates for leadership positions. This proactive strategy minimises risks and lays the groundwork for sustainable growth within the client company, reinforcing its leadership structure for the long term.

The excellence achieved by taking these factors into account, **I** became



Ida Johansson,  
Founding Partner and CEO  
Photo Credit: Arne Hyckenberg



the ‘go-to’ choice for some of the most attractive private equity firms, private family offices, banks and corporations for their C-suite and Board of Directors hires across various sectors, when faced by challenging and strategically important situations, building, replacement or succession planning situations.

By continuously coming with high quality positions and in a most engaging way so that candidates are drawn to them, the very best candidates are typically open to engage, clients and candidates consider this **I**’s greatest achievement.

“We operate in a reciprocal, value-driven and trust-driven manner, emphasising that remarkable recruitment cannot occur in isolation. Similarly, our clients often find that they cannot achieve this alone, but together, we can make it happen. We work as true partners, and we cherish this dynamic. We invest in each other and dedicate time to ensure exceptional recruitments,” says Johansson.

**BLENDING INNOVATION AND INCLUSION INTO EXECUTIVE SEARCH**

Guided by Johansson, **I** navigates many complex business and societal shifts. Its expansion into the U.S. market, highlighted by the launch of the **I Academy**, reaffirms this dedication to employee development.

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The initiative enhances members’ professional skills, ensuring they remain at the forefront of executive search practices.

A strong advocate for diversity and inclusion, it promotes women’s advancement into leadership positions and creates an environment conducive to gender-neutral dialogue and growth.

“When biases are mitigated in the executive search process, more diverse leaders can be hired, and that leads to attracting a more diverse workforce across the organisation. The company is then perceived as a more welcoming place. Diversity becomes a virtuous circle,” says Johansson.

Embracing the spirit of multiculturalism, innovation and resilience, **I** aligns its operations with proactive change management and adaptability values. This strategy was particularly beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing its ability to lead with empathy and strategic foresight despite the odds.

**FORGING A FUTURE OF EXCELLENCE AND BOLDNESS**

**I**’s strategic ambition to forge a connection between Northern Europe—Johansson’s roots—and the U.S. emphasises its dedication to promoting the cross-pollination of best practices and innovative approaches in executive recruitment. This initiative is built upon a solid foundation of expertise in executive search, marrying exceptional service delivery with a deep respect for human potential and the nuanced needs of organisations.

Displaying a culture that values personal development and perceives obstacles as avenues for further growth has positioned the company as a contender amidst established industry behemoths. Years of unwavering commitment have crystallised this capacity to attract unparalleled talent.

As **I Executive Search** embarks on its ambitious journey to penetrate new markets, it does so with a visionary pledge to coalesce European sophistication with American boldness. This deliberate fusion will not only propel the firm into uncharted territories but cement its status as a trailblazer in the executive search arena, setting new benchmarks for excellence and adaptability. **BM**