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Employment: HR Is the Key Driver of an Agile Organization

By Felix Kugel

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The Employment section did not involve the reporting or the editorial staff of The Moscow Times.



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ManpowerGroup's eighth annual Talent Shortage Survey found that 35 percent of employers on average report having difficulty filling jobs due to a lack of proper talent. This is the highest shortage since the start of the global recession.

Globally, the number of employers who believe that talent shortages will negatively impact their business has increased by nearly a third in 2013. In countries where the problem is particularly acute, many employers express even greater levels of concern.

From our point of view, solving this problem is a matter of looking at an HR function as a priority strategic partner instead of a simple functional area, which in turn will allow one to look at the talent shortage through a different lens. We all know that the market has changed completely, and talent acquisition strategies must adapt to this change. That's why HR leaders play a key role in helping business to overcome this talent shortage in the future and create a strong talent acquisition strategy.

The following high-impact strategies will help HR leaders to address the talent shortage and fuel high-performing organizations of the future.

Creating a Culture of Talent Development

Successful companies understand the importance of investing in the development of existing talent. This commitment must exist at all levels of an organization, and include everything from promoting a learning environment where on-the-job training replaces sending people on traditional training courses, to incentivizing efforts to improve collaboration. Working across roles should be an expected method of conducting business, and internal role changes should be rewarded and encouraged. The people who thrive in such an environment are the people who collectively create an adaptable, agile enterprise that is able to respond

to certain uncertainty.

Achieving the Right Cultural Profile

All companies have an organizational culture that their best employees align with naturally. At its most basic level, these are not unlike personality traits. Some businesses are staid and conservative, others casual and irreverent. At a deeper level, organizational culture relates to a company's values and the way employees interact with each other and outside stakeholders. Multinationals must also factor in the numerous country cultures in which the business operates.

An increasingly global economy demands effective leaders in a hyperconnected world and the transfer of corporate culture across markets. While it is unlikely that local culture can be taught within any reasonable sort of timeframe, organizational culture absolutely can.

By way of example, ManpowerGroup regularly places new management-level employees on assignments within operations in other countries — what we have coined as the "Reverse Expat" strategy. In effect, rather than re-locating a Western expat to lead a completely foreign team, culture and mode of operating, the Reverse Expat, who is culturally tuned to the team and emerging market operation he/she is leading, spends a predetermined period of time immersed in and exposed to a mature and established operation by intensely shadowing and role-playing with the local leader there. The Reverse Expat observes and absorbs effective protocols, processes and practices, considering how to quickly adopt and adapt as appropriate in his/her emerging market upon return for immediate and lasting impact. Executed effectively, the Reverse Expat approach altogether results in a dramatically reduced time-to-value for the newly established operation, and ultimately creates a more sustainable organization.

Tapping into New Sources of Talent

According to ManpowerGroup research, 87 percent of companies experiencing a talent shortage are not actively looking for new sources of talent. Women and young people, for example, make up a considerable portion of the world's population and untapped sources of talent, but only a tiny fraction of shortage-affected employers are actively seeking to recruit them.

This makes little sense. Effectively tapping into these "new" sources of talent will place an organization leagues ahead of its competitors.

Another opportunity is to source talent in ways that connect with people where they are today. Technology has been built into talent acquisition strategies by way of websites, online recruiting, social networking, mobile apps, etc. However, the real lever centers on whether a company is being reactive or proactive. For example, does the mobile app do little more than refer people to a website? Is social networking recruitment active or passive? Does the employer expect talent to come to them, or are they actively hunting the best employees?

An example of a best practice in terms of leveraging technology to ease the talent shortage is a start-up called Souktel. This Middle-East-based company connects young people to jobs and support services through text messaging. Their JobMatch tool allows people to upload

a mini-CV via SMS and then matches them to suitable employers who are also registered on the network. The technology has helped employers find IT, sales and support staff at a fraction of their usual recruiting cost. Souktel uses the same technology to connect aid organizations with people who need help — a critical demonstration of the company's innovative thinking and commitment to social responsibility, both of which are important organizational qualities to attract the best young talent.

Driving Agility from the Outside

HR plays a powerful role in driving an agile strategy from the inside. However, long-term change also requires change from the outside. While it is true that individual employers will likely need to solve their near-term talent shortages in-house, businesses have a vested interest in communicating their specific needs to policy makers and advocating for systemic change.

In Australia, for example, changes in labor market dynamics and the input of industry groups led to significant changes in a government funded program designed to boost needed skills. As a result, the government now funds a workplace traineeship program in which candidates can receive nationally recognized certifications in information technology, Customer Contact or Business Administration at no cost. Participating companies are able to invest in candidates that have the potential to acquire necessary skills, while reducing turnover and increasing productivity and morale.

Similarly, corporations in Japan persuaded the government to develop Kosen colleges: 57 state-run technology schools where students as young as 15 engage in applied learning and specializing in everything from skilled trades and sciences to information technology. As further evidence of Japan's talent shortage, Kosen graduates can expect 20-30 job offers upon graduation.

HR executives have the tools and experience to recognize where systems change is needed. Even if it is other C-level executives doing the face-to-face advocacy, it is HR leaders that can develop a meaningful strategy that meets a company's ever-evolving workforce needs.

Improved Collaboration with Educational Institutions

To improve collaboration between business and educational institutions, ManpowerGroup has identified a series of factors that contribute to overall competitiveness. In short, companies and education providers must collaborate effectively on "post-crisis" curricula, targeted skill development and skills matching.

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