



A|M|S



**Virtual Talent
Trends &
Challenges
Discussion**

Focus on DACH: Agility, Visibility & Internal Mobility

How do talent leaders remain agile and responsive in an incredibly volatile and uncertain market? Where does reskilling and upskilling fit in? What about diversity and inclusion?

These were some of the questions considered at the **AMS and TALiNT Partners Virtual Talent Trends & Challenges Discussion on March 11**, attended by a select group of European talent leaders focused on the DACH region of Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Following a AMS and TALiNT virtual event on February 4 for talent leaders in the Netherlands, the highly interactive discussion involved representatives from leading companies across a swathe of industries, including travel, banking, telecommunications, consumer goods and pharmaceuticals, as well as healthcare/life sciences organisations involved in the production of Covid-19 vaccines.

The evening was hosted by four talent leaders from AMS, one of the world's leading talent solutions providers: **Maxine Pillinger**, Regional Managing Director, EMEA; **Jamie Pirie**, Head of Sales; **Brett O'Connor**, Head of Implementation and Project Director; and **Karolina Bushby**, Client Solutions Manager, alongside TALiNT Partners Managing Director **Ken Brotherston** and TALiNT Employer Programme Director **Debra Sparshott**.

Agility: moving fast, pivoting and digitalisation

As hiring accelerated across the DACH region at the start of 2021, companies are increasingly looking for more agile talent acquisition solutions.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a polarising experience: on one hand are companies struggling to keep their core business functioning, and, on the other, are those which have boomed due to heightened demand for their products and services, for example, healthcare companies. A representative of a consumer goods business described the challenge of switching their sales teams from bricks-and-mortar stores to e-commerce, another spoke of rapidly re-purposing staff to deliver products to healthcare workers fighting the pandemic after their extensive international



Dawn Gibson
Writer
TALiNT Partners



Ken Brotherston
Managing Director
TALiNT Partners

events calendar was cancelled virtually overnight. Others spoke of the complexity of adapting hiring programmes at the same time as major restructuring.

One common theme was that companies had been forced to pivot and move swiftly, implementing long talked about changes such as flexible working and virtual onboarding in a matter of weeks.

This was also the case regarding digitalisation, prompting a re-think around skill set requirements. As more companies rapidly digitalised, the competition for tech skills had become even fiercer, as companies such as banks and car manufacturers competed for the same talent pool as the tech sector.

Maxine Pillinger, AMS Regional Managing Director EMEA, said many organisations had already been on the journey of transformation into digitalisation and e-commerce, but the pandemic had expedited this to such an extent that talent leaders were pressured to think more strategically and long-term in a very short space of time. "Every client that I speak to, in every organisation, says the biggest challenge they are facing is around that digital space: How do they get the best quality skills?" she said. "There's a pervasive scarcity of digital skills, not just in Europe, but everywhere, as digitalisation is accelerating at a speed that we did not anticipate at all."

Visibility: internal mobility, D&I and tech tools

Accelerated digitalisation coincides with an increased focus on building rather than buying talent by prioritising internal mobility, diversity and inclusion (D&I) and early talent initiatives. "We have been talking about the future of work for quite a few years before the pandemic hit and then we found ourselves in this future, so one of the things that has changed is that we are putting more emphasis on our internal talent pipelines and succession planning," one talent leader explained.

Another described how D&I had become a key focus. "So much of the talent that we attract looks the same," she said. "We have to really think about how we start to leverage more



diversity through the early careers programmes, because that's something that is not going to change quickly or easily in our industry."

Of course, the pandemic has also ushered in a new raft of challenges. For example, the head of campus recruitment at a major investment bank explained how they had to rapidly adapt a campus events programme to a largely virtual experience. While there had been noticeable advantages – for example, information-rich sessions were recorded so students could listen to them again – students continued to prefer the more interactive, in-office onboarding experience. She believed future on-boarding would combine virtual and in-office experiences.

Overall, organisations are increasingly reliant on analytical tools to get deeper insights into staff and candidate experience. Companies are well aware of the benefits of upskilling and reskilling, but often lack the detailed data required to accurately map who, for example, would be best approached to upskill for new digital requirements.

"From a visibility perspective, we're using talent intelligence tools a lot more to make sure we're advising and consulting managers on the most likely place that they're going to be able to fill roles," one participant explained. "But we are also looking at more of a focus on internal hiring and connectedness across the organisation."

Works Councils: Friend or foe?

Another hot topic at the virtual roundtable was the role of the Works Council (Betriebsrat) in German businesses. While there was respect for the intrinsic part these employee bodies play, there was also plenty of frustration over cultural resistance to change.

At a time when companies must be more agile, a Works Council can be a significant barrier to progress in areas such as virtual and flexible working. "We had to ask each of our Works Councils in our sub departments for agreement on a Virtual Assessment Centre. It resulted in six weeks of delay – and why?" one participant queried.

Another concern was lack of diversity on councils typically peopled with older workers from similar cultural backgrounds.

Guests agreed that the situation varied considerably from business to business – some companies had a collaborative relationship, while others faced a confrontational approach.

Looking forward

European organisations have proven their agility over the past year, accelerating digitalisation and new ways of working. The next challenge is determining how to shape talent acquisition as labour markets continue to adjust to new realities. The only constant we can be certain of is change.

As one talent acquisition leader remarked: "Going forward, I think if any organisation isn't going to change their ways of working then they're going to get left behind pretty quickly".

"Many organisations were on a journey of transformation into digitalisation. The pandemic has certainly accelerated that, so people have had to think much more strategically and long-term in a very short space of time. Every client that I speak to, in every organisation, says the biggest challenge they are facing is around that digital space."

Maxine Pillinger, AMS Regional Managing Director EMEA



Ken Brotherston
Managing Director
TALiNT Partners

✉ ken@talint.co.uk
☎ 07770 400300



Jamie Pirie
Head of Sales
AMS

✉ jamie.pirie@weareams.com
☎ 07795 571709

