



**European
TA Trends –
getting agile**

Virtual Talent Trends & Challenges

There has arguably never been a more exciting and pivotal time for the Talent Acquisition sector. Covid-19 has forced organisations to be more agile than ever before, rapidly upscaling and downscaling operations while simultaneously implementing and managing large-scale remote working.

As companies return to some semblance of business-as-usual, there are a raft of fresh challenges for HR and Talent Acquisition teams.

When considering the options for office-based, remote and hybrid working, what is the best solution to balance employer and employee expectations? How do companies best leverage HR technology and their internal talent pools to address skill gaps?

These were some of the key questions discussed at the AMS and Talint Partners Virtual Talent Trends & Challenges Breakfast on March 25, which focussed on how HR and Talent Acquisition teams are having to develop a more agile approach to resourcing.

One of a series of EMEA round-tables hosted by AMS and Talint Partners in recent months, the event was attended by European talent leaders representing some of the world's leading companies in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, life sciences, healthcare, financial services, luxury fashion and sports footwear.

The event was hosted by Maxine Pillinger – Regional Managing Director, EMEA, at AMS, with Brett O'Connor – Head of Implementation & Project Director, AMS, and Jamie Pirie – Head of Sales, AMS, as well as Ken Brotherston, Managing Director, TALiNT Partners and Debra Sparshott, Employer Programme Director, TALiNT Partners.



Dawn Gibson
Writer
TALiNT Partners



Ken Brotherston
Managing Director
TALiNT Partners

Remote working, wellbeing and productivity

The pandemic has rapidly accelerated several talent trends: namely flexible working, digitalisation and improving internal mobility. As hiring surges in EMEA during the first half of 2021 and companies consider how or indeed if they should re-open their offices, the debate on traditional versus remote working is becoming heated and polarised.

Goldman Sachs boss David Solomon has stirred up a hornet's nest by publicly rejecting remote working as an "aberration", while Citigroup chief executive Jane Fraser has chosen a more conciliatory path, initiating "Zoom-free Fridays" and encouraging staff to avoid scheduling meetings outside of traditional working hours. While many talent leaders see Solomon's view as archaic, the perfect solution remains elusive.

The first challenge is how to balance employer concerns around productivity and accountability with employee demands for flexibility and a degree of autonomy.

The second is how to democratise the process. While remote working has become normalised, there is a divide between more senior staff, who typically have more freedom to work as they want, and junior employees, who may not have the resources to work from home even if they want to. There is also the question of how to ensure equity for staff members whose roles require them to be onsite, for example, workers on a production line.

"Covid has made us realise that talent can work from anywhere, and everywhere, but how do we make that happen, and how do we support our internal talent who are not mobile and give them opportunities?" asked a Talent Acquisition leader with responsibilities across several regions, including EMEA.



There is no 'one size fits all' solution because individual preferences vary depending on factors such as career stage, living circumstances and personality – a single 20-year-old in a cramped Berlin flat-share is more likely to want to return to the office full-time than a 40-year-old parent working from a spacious suburban home around the corner from their children's school.

And while some people have become more productive as remote workers, many are missing the random social and networking opportunities such as water cooler chats and bumping into the CEO in the corridor.

"I have some people who are dynamite superstars and doing their job better than they ever did who have not been into the office in 14 months, and then we have other people who are really struggling," said the Global Director of Talent Acquisition for a German multi-national group. "When we open back up, we'll have probably 85% of the team in a room at a meeting and then those lone superstars who are trying to call in to participate in conference calls, and that doesn't work. How do you keep your team connected when they're broken up?"

A growing number of organisations are looking to incorporate wellbeing initiatives into their offering to combat the isolation of remote working. Initiatives such as free counselling sessions, a home office equipment budget and access to mental health podcasts send a message that the company cares about the wellbeing of its staff beyond their ability to meet KPIs, an important differentiator in sectors riddled with skills shortages.

The pandemic has proven that it no longer matters if a worker is based in Mexico or Madrid, as long as they can get the work done, but it is going to take time for this mindset to be readily accepted among corporate leaders. A more agile

workforce also creates practical challenges for HR and TA teams as they work across multiple tax and legal jurisdictions.

Skills, tech and the talent marketplace


Building talent rather than buying talent is now at the top of the agenda for most companies. There is widespread agreement that integrating internal mobility, reskilling and upskilling into the Talent Acquisition and Talent Management process is the way forward, and the new wave of AI and data-based HR tech provides the tools to enable this to happen by improving visibility of internal talent pools.

To facilitate this, organisations are introducing talent marketplaces, with varying degrees of success and management buy-in.

"We've rewritten our Talent Acquisition policy completely for the globe this year and the focus is internal movement and diversity," said the Global Talent Acquisition chief of a leading life sciences company. "We've also introduced an artificial intelligence platform that does job matching based on skills rather than experiences.

"We're trying to roll that out, and at the same time get our recruiters to be able to do behind the scenes skills matching as well. But we're having pushback from our business partners who say recruiters shouldn't be reaching out to our talent managers, who don't want to let the talent go. We're having a lot of conversations with different cultures and mindsets to try to change."

One EMEA Talent Acquisition director described how his company had introduced 'smart talent discussions' which involved employees presenting their ideas to leadership teams. "It gives them some visibility across the leadership; it's very much about empowering the



“Covid has made us realise that talent can work from anywhere, and everywhere, but how can we make that happen?”

individual,” he explained.

However, a European talent leader for a world-renowned brand said her company had shut down its pilot talent marketplace because it had not gelled with the traditional, headcount-focused approach of the organisation.

As well, while her organisation is keen to embrace a more inclusive approach to hiring, there are concerns that an overly complicated hiring system could jeopardise dynamic processes. “I’m really cautious that we do not install so many mechanisms, to make it such an intellectual task to try and hire talent, that we move away from empowering both the hiring managers and candidates,” she added.

A Talent Acquisition executive for one of the world’s leading luxury fashion labels agreed, saying while they were keen that people did not continue to hire their clones, it was important not to burden recruiters with too many layers of process. “The fine line between keeping a recruitment process smooth and easy, but putting over the guidelines at the same time, is very, very complex - so if anyone has a perfect solution to that, I will take it,” he said.

Conclusion

Companies are starting to view Talent Acquisition and Talent Management as a holistic, integrated concept. As skills are prioritised over experience, internal mobility has become a much greater focus for companies trying to fill chronic talent gaps.

However, while talent teams are increasingly using HR tech and talent marketplaces to get a more in-depth understanding of their internal talent pools, the process is still in its early stages for many companies.

With insight from senior executives from the following organisations:

Aegon

Bayer

Baxter Healthcare

Bekaert

Boehringer Ingelheim

Christian Dior Couture

Hello Fresh

Lego Group

LEO Pharma

Lonza

Nike

Novo Nordisk

Tetra Pak International



Ken Brotherston
Managing Director
TALiNT Partners

✉ ken@talint.co.uk
☎ 07770 400300



Jamie Pirie
Head of Sales
AMS

✉ jamie.pirie@weareams.com
☎ 07795 571709

