

APAC creativity to find scarce talent

With rising demand for new skills and ways of working, talent acquisition (TA) teams are being forced to rethink their recruitment strategies, and their very definition of talent to go beyond their traditional candidate pools. Combining this with a continuing boardroom focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) and pandemic-accelerated digitisation journey, it is no wonder then that talent leaders are looking externally to experts and industry peers for both market comparison and creative input to drive on-going transformation across their organisations.

Against this backdrop, employers are striving to keep up with increasing candidate expectations in a scarce talent market, creating a distinctive and compelling message to potential candidates and delivering an application journey that creates loyalty and aspiration.

How can TA Leaders navigate these challenges to bring in the skills needed by their organisation in a rapidly changing workplace? That was the focus for the latest TALINT Partners Roundtable with AMS and TA, recruitment and HR experts from a variety of sectors in the APAC region.

"The demand explosion for talent this year, in practically all geographical markets, has been unprecedented, with companies globally facing the storm of a huge talent crunch," noted Neil Jones, Head of Asia Pacific at AMS; describing the last 18 months in the TA world as "somewhere between exhilarating and petrifying."

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A key theme to emerge was the rising importance of a strong employer brand and value proposition. "The differentiating factor is candidate experience," highlighted Marisa Liao, Deliveroo's Head of Global Recruitment. "However, we can't rely on the customer brand alone anymore. Even within our smaller markets, candidates are looking at Glassdoor, as well as Google delivery reviews, to get more information on the company culture and



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employee experience. They want to know if the company they're joining has empathy, and if there's that sense of community and connection, especially now with remote and hybrid working. We need the authentic voice of staff, and to use it to tell candidates what it's like to work for Deliveroo."

It's also about differentiating the employee experience from the competition, noted Natalie Tait, Head of HR for Bank of America in Singapore: "It's about looking at why people join us and why they stay with us. And asking what it is that they enjoy about working with us; that always comes back to people and culture."

Tait is spending much time working with the organisations' TA teams, as well as learning and leadership development teams, to look at ways to build their hiring manager capability. "As well as focussing on how we engage with candidates during interviews, we've also been doing a lot of work around early engagement, particularly with junior talent. How do we keep them warm? What's going to keep them engaged? And how do we leverage technology to do that?" she said.

Jess Lo, Regional TA Lead at Scor in Hong Kong, also believes the company proposition is really important, especially during interviews. "It's an opportunity for you to tell your story but not everyone is good at interviewing or presenting the company to candidates," explained Lo. Scor is now training managers to better deliver that message.

Given the scarcity of talent, "TA teams are definitely having to get more creative about finding talent", pointed out Nicholas Wong, Head of TA ASEAN at Siemens-Healthineers, "And it's no longer just about pay either."

Richard Farmer, Head of TA APAC at Environmental Resources Management agreed. He believes candidates are also basing their decision to join a firm on a company's response to issues like climate change, DE&I and ESG. In fact, that's one focus his company is using to



retain workers who are sometimes "offered up to treble their pay by competitors."

That's a focus for Scor too. Scor now has a sustainable investing policy to stop investing in the non-renewable energy sector in order to attract younger generations who care more about social and environmental issues. Lo is also making sure that these messages are included in all marketing and employer branding. "This focus really creates attachment to the brand for these generations. And I'm not just talking about graduates as this is something that is desired also by mid-level experienced hires," she highlighted.

TALiNT Partners' Employer Programme Director Debra Sparshott also noted a real acceleration in the importance of DE&I, climate change and ESG among candidates over the last 12 to 24 months, and "it's definitely increasing", she pointed out.

The value proposition in the post pandemic world has inevitably changed, noted Jones. "It's not just about how you employ people, the way they work and where they work, are becoming increasingly important too." Google's Global Staffing Lead Sanjeev Somasundaram agreed: "Some candidate segments want the value proposition of flexibility. In fact, focussing on that value proposition alone resulted in more applications from women who had taken a career break, as well as more underrepresented people."

All the experts agreed that the market has forced companies, especially in the APAC region, to find more innovative ways to source scarce talent. That has meant hiring from other disciplines – both externally and internally. "We are starting to employ people for HR from consulting backgrounds, and have people with MBAs fresh out of college, with no HR credentials," revealed Somasundaram.

In fact, the majority of attendees confirmed that they are also looking at internal mobility to fill their current recruitment gaps. "That's been a big focus for us at Bank of America," noted Tait. "We're seeing a lot more cross-functional mobility and it's really enabling people to develop their careers. The bank even has a dedicated internal mobility team, tracking over 50% of our internal mobility in the region."

Consumer household brand Electrolux is focussing on career development and internal mobility, confirmed its Director HR, Mansi Argarwal. "We are doing a cross-pollination movement of teams internally. So, for example, I'm about to hire somebody from the marketing team for my HR team. And one of my team members has just moved into after sales," she explained. "Not only do we get to retain talent that is a good fit for our culture, but it also helps to change the DNA of the entire company, and challenges the status quo." She believes it's a great way to bring in fresh thinking and achieve a growth mindset and agility.

However, a big challenge is how to better support staff, who are migrating from other functions (both external and internal), to get them up to speed and effective in their new roles. Deliveroo recently hired a number of consultants and generalists. "Although transferable skills are important, we noted that in some areas, candidates lacked domain knowledge, so we had to look at investing in support systems and resources to fill those knowledge and skills gaps," Liao explained.

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Collaboration and a closer alignment of TA and talent management functions, are key to internal

mobility success, confirmed Tait: "It's really important for TA teams to have lists of people that have been identified for internal moves, for example. Traditionally that information was held tightly by learning and development, but now they're realising the importance of TA to identify talent gaps and create succession plans. So there's been a lot of collaboration to, not only plan where and how we move talent but, also what support is needed for talent when it moves into a role so they can get up to speed and be effective in their roles quickly."

The conversation now "is very much around the use of technology in order to bring the coordination and collaboration of different departments together," Tait added. In fact, technology is not only being used to enhance employee experience, but also to improve collaboration between HR and specialist departments, to better ascertain where the skills gaps are, and how to move talent. It's also being used to remove internal silos to better support internal mobility and retention.

Enabling collaboration can be a challenge, especially when different departments use different tech platforms. "I'm seeing two different schools of thought here," noted Joy Koh, Head of Growth & Advisory at AMS. "Some organisations have gone the single platform route. Despite some limitations, there are benefits to a single system, like getting a better overall picture of talent. But other organisations still prefer specialist platforms for different aspects of HR and recruitment. So there's no, one-size-fits-all solution."

The biggest challenge with tech is "How do you get the balance right with what you automate, what you outsource, who you partner with, what you self service and what you administrate or delegate without putting the business, people and culture at risk?" pointed out Ignatica's Head of HR, Mark McLeish. For him it's about "taking the best of traditional HR and combining it effectively with tech." But that's another long story.







