



Talent Management for the Age of Career Disruption

Companies are still working from a 20th century career playbook. It's time for a new edition.

Most companies are shooting themselves in the foot in the “war for talent”. We discovered a serious misalignment between the priorities of employers and those of sought-after talents while researching our forthcoming book, *Disrupt Your Career: How to Navigate Uncharted Career Transitions and Thrive*. A study from Right Management shows that organisations that provide career development are six times more likely to engage their employees and four times less likely to lose workers. A 2015 LinkedIn survey showed that, when deciding whether to accept a final job offer, candidates considered career advancement as much as the financial and intellectual rewards of the role. Most employees say they would be more engaged at work if career discussions were more regular. But these discussions rarely happen.

Career management is important for employees, but employers are not very good at it. Consequently, many are facing the issue of finding suitable talent to hire. According to a recent Manpower Group survey, 31 percent of employers worldwide are having trouble filling positions due to lack of suitable talent. As a result, “time to fill” statistics have dramatically risen, more than doubling in some cases.

We believe companies can fix the talent mismatch by using the following strategies:

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1. Expand your view of your talent pool

For example, it's in organisations' best interests to hire older workers: aside from the wealth of skills and experience they provide, we are living in an ageing population globally. Likewise, companies can take a different view on job changers. Our message to employers is therefore: expand your labour market opportunity, be open to new sources of talent, value diversity of experience and be flexible about your search criteria.

2. Understand and value career changers' core capabilities

A 2015 LinkedIn survey reported that one in three people had changed jobs or changed careers entirely (new company, different function) in the previous 12 months. These career changers said they are hungry for new challenges and curious to try out a new industry. The 50 exceptional talents we interviewed for our book have similar tales to tell. **Former athletes** bring their energy, passion, focus, discipline and resistance to pressure to the business world. **Former military officers** bring fearlessness, resilience, character, autonomy and caring. Career changes, according to Egon Zehnder's Claudio Fernández-Araúz, often indicate strong leadership potential, with the sort of emotional intelligence-based competencies that enable star performance.

3. Tap neglected sources of talent and craft messages that appeal to them

We see signs of increasing openness, particularly with regard to former employees, or “boomerangs”. More organisations are open to rehiring. It has even become a strategic differentiator for some, like L’Oréal who makes no less than 250 rehires per year at management level. In a similar way, banks such as Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan, as well as PayPal and GoDaddy, are all creating “returnship” programs to provide a bridge **back to work** for those who have taken a break. Their dedicated career websites have enhanced their employer value proposition by showing that these organisations understand the unique skills and motivations of diverse talents.

4. Customise and contextualise your career management

Rather than looking for the exact match in terms of experience and skills requirements, recruiters should ask questions like: *Does this candidate show passion and energy? Does she have the right attitude (vs. the right skills)? Did she already have to adapt to challenging environments? Is she showing the desire and ability to learn and grow?* This requires recruiters to evolve from “sales reps” to “career coaches”. Instead of selling the job, this new breed of recruiter-coach prompts career discussions, focusing on the long term. They adapt to career considerations, showing the full context, and attempting to mitigate individual concerns.

Companies should also consider “job-crafting”, a concept implemented at Google as part of an experiment conducted with Wharton Professor Adam Grant. It introduced employees to the notion that jobs are not static sculptures, but flexible building blocks. By seeing both their skills and jobs as flexible, the Googlers who participated in this exercise were rated happier and more effective by their managers and co-workers.

Finally, the hiring process of talent with disruptive careers should include appropriate on-boarding. Many of the professionals we interviewed faltered at this stage, and could have benefited from well-planned, tailored support, to ensure successful assimilation into the organisation’s culture, shorten the time to productivity, minimise the risk of failure and maximise impact.

5. Create a flexible work environment to accommodate employees’ life changes

The most progressive companies understand the importance of organisational family-friendliness for recruitment and retention. By offering flexible working practices and a supportive work-family culture, they are in an advantageous position to both recruit and retain talent with diverse situations and needs. In 2016, Nike extended its paid family leave

to eight weeks for full-time U.S. employees, well beyond the American norm. Deloitte U.S. also increased paid family leave to up to 16 weeks.

6. Provide “disruptive experiences” to your own talent

While interviewing the 50 career changers for our book, we were impressed by how they all grew both professionally and personally from their transition experience, while being “on their own”. We asked ourselves: Could we get the development outcomes from these transitions – greater awareness, adaptability, resilience, to name a few – *without* the pains and uncertainties that these people had to overcome by themselves? Could companies provide disruptive career experiences to their own talent, with better success outcome and with greater chances of retaining these talents in the long run?

Some companies already have a long history of accelerating talent development through stretch assignments, e.g. through international mobility, or spending time at in-house consulting departments, or by giving special high stakes projects to identified talent. More recently, companies have initiated new kinds of assignments in partnership with external partners. GSK, for example, created the PULSE Volunteer Partnership, a volunteering initiative where employees are matched to an NGO for three or six months, contributing their skills to solve healthcare challenges at home and abroad. In addition to developing their leadership capability, employees bring fresh ideas and new energy back to GSK to activate change in step with global health needs. Microsoft, Becton Dickinson and EY have instituted similar programmes with equal success.

7. Enable frequent, high-quality career discussions

A 2011 study by CRF found that one of the main challenges for employees was finding out about opportunities in other parts of the business. We would urge companies to enable more frequent and better quality career discussions, and improve their career management processes. One of the ways to do this is to increase access to both internal and career coaches.

A glimmer of hope

Our **book** (to be published this autumn) reveals the development benefits of career changes, but also highlights the struggle by companies to create clear career paths and development. Most, frankly, are still lagging way behind and leaving responsibility with the individual. And yet, firms know they need to change in the face of the war for talent. Those organisations who take a truly pro-active stance on career development strategy will see heartening results quickly and consistently.

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