

A high-angle photograph of a diverse group of about seven people sitting around a large, dark wooden table in a meeting. They are engaged in a discussion, with some looking at laptops and tablets. The setting is a bright, modern office space. The table is cluttered with work-related items like laptops, tablets, notebooks, and coffee cups. The overall atmosphere is collaborative and professional.

**Retention and
Internal Mobility:
Staffing the new
Workplace**

Retention and Internal Mobility: Staffing the new Workplace



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Staff retention and internal mobility are some of the biggest challenges facing organisations in 2021.

The market volatility caused by the outbreak of Covid-19 in early 2020 has settled down to some extent – companies are once again hiring, sometimes at a frantic pace, to return to operational normality.

However, business as usual is anything but. The world of work has changed fundamentally. Enforced remote working has paved the way for hybrid work patterns in companies that would not have entertained the idea two years ago. The acceleration of digitalisation has transformed organisations globally, while the relationship between employers and employees has become one of greater equality and mutual reciprocation.

On 31 March, Guidant Global and TALiNT Partners held a virtual cheese and wine evening to gain insights from HR and talent leaders on how the pandemic has impacted the retention and development of the internal talent needed to deliver revised business goals and change programmes.

The interactive round-table discussion was hosted by **Louise West, Director of Client Solutions at Guidant Global**, a leading global talent acquisition and managed workforce solution provider, alongside **Debra Sparshott, Employer Programme Director at TALiNT Partners**, a cutting-edge source of talent acquisition and recruitment business intelligence.

Guests included global and national leaders in HR and talent acquisition from prestigious public and private sector organisations across government, aviation, food manufacturing, consumer products, technology, energy and professional services.

Retention: New roles, more competition

Rapid digitalisation is arguably the most important business transformation to emerge as a result of the pandemic. While many organisations had been pushing a digital agenda for years, Covid-19 upped

the ante in a matter of months, forcing managers who previously hid behind a pile of paperwork to rapidly adapt to online platforms.

This has created not only a raft of new roles, but also the requirement for new skill sets in existing roles, for example, sales staff with an understanding of e-commerce. It has also required talent teams to act nimbly – one HR executive described how she felt they had missed an opportunity in their large, varied workforce by sending staff members home without finding ways to repurpose roles.

To add to the challenge, the competition for talent is incredibly fierce. While many companies experienced low attrition as employees clung to their jobs in 2020, workers have been more confident about changing employers in 2021, exacerbated by the rise of ‘borderless recruitment’. Previously, a company would have considered its competitors to be other companies in the same sector within a certain geographical radius. Now, the same company could face competition from any company offering similar roles anywhere in the country, or indeed, anywhere in the world.

In many cases, staff turnover spikes are linked to employee burnout. Workers are reluctant to take holidays, as they have nowhere to go, and are suffering from an overload of video conferencing and virtual presenteeism.

Becoming an employer of choice

In the new world of work, two factors are essential to differentiate a company:

- An authentic wellbeing agenda driven by effective employee engagement and pro-active people managers
- A nuanced approach to office-based, hybrid and remote working which acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all solution

HR and talent leaders have found their own roles



rewritten. At the coalface of redundancy and furlough programmes, while simultaneously tasked with fostering engagement across newly dispersed workforces, people managers are being required to be much more pro-active and forward-thinking.

One global talent leader described how people managers are under considerable pressure to lead with empathy. “In the last year, our EVP has been very much around caring for and looking after our colleagues,” she explained. “And, yes, that has been great for engagement and retention, but it is a stretch as we are asking our people managers to evolve this skill set overnight.” Recent employee surveys demonstrated they had taken the right approach, as engagement scores rocketed. However, wellbeing scores were low: “We have ramped up various activities around wellbeing in response, but this was already on our radar: we knew people were struggling, and it doesn’t take a survey to know that about your workforce right now.”

“Let’s not differentiate; you’re building both internal and external talent – why should we look at them and hold them so separately?”

Office, remote and hybrid working

For many employees, remote or flexible working is now regarded very much as a ‘hygiene factor’. While working from home two days a week used to be a sought-after perk, organisations which don’t offer flexible options in the new world of work will find themselves overlooked by sought-after talent in preference for employers who do.

However, the challenge of providing a model that meets both employee and employer requirements is complicated, even after acknowledging that a significant proportion of workers cannot work off-site. While many workers are keen to return to a

traditional office routine for at least part of the week, for example, young employees who miss the socialising and are tired of trying to work on their laptop in a cramped flat-share, there are many people who have enthusiastically embraced home working because it fits in better with their lifestyle and are in no hurry to return to long commutes. Talent leaders described how their organisations are rethinking offices; while there was a need for shared space for collaborative activities such as workshops, most companies recognised they did not need to rent space just so people could sit behind a desk and answer emails.

The executive director of a technology company described how her organisation had decided whether workers should be working in the office, remotely, or in a hybrid capacity based on the activities within their role, rather than factors such as title or gender. Workers could opt to be at the office if they wished, but in most cases, did not have to be. “The reason we are doing this is not for retention – we think that is the happy consequence – but because we think people will be more productive and more engaged, and our pulse surveys are proving this,” she said.

Internal Mobility

The case for leveraging internal mobility has never been more compelling. While organisations face an overwhelming number of candidates applying for some vacancies, they are frequently not the right candidates with the right skill sets. As well, employees have a growing appetite for training, education and development tools that can help them forge their own career paths.

The intense competition for talent means organisations which are not yet focused on internal mobility are handicapping themselves, according to Louise West, Director of Client Solutions at Guidant Global. “If you are not making it easy to be mobile within your own organisation, it’s making it easy for people to poach your staff, and making it easy to

“If you are not making it easy to be mobile within your own organisation, it’s making it easy for people to poach your staff and making it easy to leave.”

Louise West, Director of Client Solutions, Guidant Global

leave,” she said. “If you are not prepared to invest in individuals, then there are others who are.”

Poor career progression prospects is one of the key reasons employees left. However, the contrasting scenario of ‘hyper-mobility’ can be equally damaging by destabilising business operations. Other challenges include managing unrealistic expectations, with younger workers more likely to be impatient for a rapid rise through the ranks, as well as gaining buy-in from hiring managers reluctant to support initiatives which would remove talented staff from their sphere of control.

Leveraging HR tech for greater visibility

The increasing availability of ever more sophisticated HR tech tools has enabled talent leaders to rise to the challenge on two fronts; first, by providing training and development platforms for employees to take greater responsibility for their own career development, and, secondly, to enable talent and HR teams to gain greater visibility of internal talent.

Louise West from Guidant Global said visibility was an acute challenge, particularly for companies with thousands of employees. “There’s a lot of clever technology that we see customers using, which helps map your workforce, so they become your first port of call for a talent pool, and also to map your skills sets and what they need to be into the future. So that gives you gap analysis, which in essence creates your recruitment plan”.

“We know that there is no silver bullet. It is not all going to be managed by permanent recruitment or contingent or grad hiring; it’s about understanding what roles look like, heat-mapping them, and then having a pro-active approach, because trying to reactively recruit nowadays is really hard,” she said.

Organisations are experimenting with a plethora of creative ideas to drive internal mobility.

An EMEA talent acquisition executive said her company had created a talent enablement team to take ownership for internal mobility, as well as introducing an internal mobility platform while

implementing a new CRM. Another talent leader explained how they were using a tech platform to better connect internal networks and referrals to external platforms such as LinkedIn, while others described how they had encouraged employees to experiment with alternative roles through facilitated access to project work or learning experiences.

Looking at internal hires through the same lens as external hires is another growing trend. If talent teams assess existing employees on the same criteria and are prepared to offer them the same level of remuneration, they reduce the risk of employees seeking a better deal elsewhere. “In my perfect world, I would have the internal talent side-by-side with external talent, so I can pick the best of the best and look at my whole talent pool,” said the global talent acquisition leader for a food company. “Let’s not differentiate; you’re building both internal and external talent – why should we look at them and hold them so separately?”

A good point, well made.

With insight from senior executives from the following organisations:

CarTrawler
Guidant Global
House of Commons
Kerry Food Group
Kreston Reeves
Lufthansa Group
Mayborn Group
Mercer
Micro Focus
MSCI
NBrown
SSE Energy
Turner & Townsend



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