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The big challenge: deliver the talent to do the job

(Extract)

What are the strengths an outsourcer can offer in the battle to attract the best candidates?

One of the buzz words in recruitment today is talent - as in, it's in short supply and everybody wants it. And not only does everybody want as much talent as they can grab for their particular organisation, they want to be able to put it in the right job at the right time. That's "talent management" in a nutshell.

Dave Ulrich, the American human resources guru, recently devised this formula: "Talent = Competence + Commitment + Contribution". Competence, he says, "deals with the head (being able), commitment with the hands and feet (being there), and contribution with the heart (simply being)".

The stereotypical perception of recruitment outsourcing (RO) is that it gives short shrift to the concept of talent, concentrating instead on bringing large volumes of no- or low-skilled workers into an organisation.

But as the practice of RO hits its stride, a much more sophisticated facet is emerging: employers are looking to RO providers to help their businesses fulfil loftier aspirations, such as capturing and effectively installing the right kinds of talent in the right jobs at the right time in the right organisation - their own.

...if a client is experiencing particular difficulty hiring for a specific role, an RO provider can help to create a so-called 'pipeline' so that there is a ready flow of people with the necessary skills, qualifications or qualities ready to take on such roles in the future...

While much emphasis is placed on external talent pools, a pipeline can offer links to both external and internal sources to fill specific jobs or career paths.

Mapping out a long-term workforce strategy, to include a large-scale talent management programme, is not a complete unknown to some RO providers. Even now, some of the most stratospheric roles within an organisation are being directed towards RO providers to fill, as part of senior-level talent management, also known as executive search outsourcing.

As part of such work, an RO provider might help an employer pinpoint where talent gaps lie within a business and map the external market - in essence helping an organisation to build its own little black book and understand the competition.

"We see our role as building their own capabilities - that's the end game", says Sue Brooks, managing director of RO provider Profiles Resource Management. "We are saying, 'It is in your interest that you build the knowledge and experience to create your own ability to meet your [talent] needs'."

Ultimately, a business must take responsibility for fulfilling its most strategic aims, Brooks adds. "Fundamentally, the outsourcing provider should be an enabler - not a replacement."

Going Global

Talent management is not only about the capabilities and skills that exist inside an organisation. Often it is about keeping an eye on what is going on outside an organisation and can involve finding and attracting outsiders who have special expertise or knowledge.

As an RO provider is allowed to become more engaged in an employer's activities, "they come to know your business," says Ian Dunn, HR director, UK and Ireland, for SAS business intelligence software. "And they understand where your business is heading three, six, 12 months down the line."

Dunn, who is also responsible for the company's pan-European recruitment, is speaking of his firm's three-year relationship with Profiles Resource Management, in which talent management has emerged as a key area of emphasis in the RO programme. "They can also begin to have a close eye on the market, and recognise the risks and the hot spots at the moment, or where there may be potential opportunities. They may know which kinds of people are in demand, or they may be able to say, 'You don't want one of those.'"

With headquarters in Cary, North Carolina, the heart of a high-tech research and development corridor in America. SAS has wanted to become a "much more global organisation", says Dunn, whose office is in Marlow, Buckinghamshire. The desire to become a global presence has meant more than simply planting footprints in diverse locations around the world; Dunn says that the term "global" had to reflect the people working for the company as well.

"We want the team to be diverse and to reflect our customer base," Dunn explains. In this instance, the talent management element of RO service required by SAS meant that Profiles had to ensure its teams managed diverse talent onto candidate short lists for jobs within the company. "My biggest measure of success was: Was I going to see pan-European short lists for seven positions we had to fill?" Dunn says. The approach Profiles took was to put a centralised talent acquisition team on the case to conduct searches for appropriate candidates in each of the 25 European countries in which SAS had a presence. Once potential candidates were found and approached, a single dedicated talent manager created the short list.

And by Dunn's own criteria, the top measure of success was achieved. He says: "There were four, five or six nationalities on the short lists."