



# Thought Leadership

## Mixed Messaging: Employment Branding and the Increasing Talent Gap

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There's something missing in the way we talk about talent acquisition. While technology has changed the face of the recruiting landscape by providing more channels than ever before to identify and attract talent, 81% of European CEOs are confident about their own company's growth prospects, but 70% are concerned about slow or negative growth in developed economies<sup>1</sup>. While unemployment in the UK fell to 6.2%<sup>2</sup> and the media promotes positive messaging around talent availability after a long pause in the market, where's the link? It may come down to the rising talent gap.

### What is the Talent Gap?

The idea that candidates are widely available due to economic recovery is misleading, as highly skilled workers that many organisations are struggling to find are not likely to be unemployed. In the UK, conventional employment must now compete with the high-skilled workers who are already employed, as well as those who are choosing self-employment. With 4.5 million self-employed workers, this form of work is up 8% year-over-year<sup>3</sup>. While plenty of employable candidates exist within the UK market, attracting them to your organisation is likely to be challenging.

As organisations assess their candidate needs, addressing the quality talent shortage will become more increasingly critical. The talent is there, but the methods for attracting top talent must address their needs. Too often, the current methods of finding and attracting candidates are focused on casting the net wide and bringing as much talent into a

talent pool as possible. Whilst effective for some positions, the types of workers required for skilled positions are less likely to be swayed by such strategies.

### Employment Branding

In our increasingly consumer-driven society, a strong employer brand is crucial to ensure your organisation finds the talent it needs to remain competitive, but it is all too frequently overlooked. Creating specific employment branded communication avenues for the highly skilled talent that most organisations struggle to find helps those candidates more easily identify your organisation as an employer of choice. Developing methods for keeping those candidates interested in your organisation is the next step, and talent communities are an important part of that process.

### Employment Branding – Talent Communities

Talent communities became a buzzword as soon as they hit the scene, but for far too many organisations, "talent community" became just another place to store contact information. Oftentimes, the talent was there – but the community wasn't. Some of the issues with ineffective talent communities include a lack of branding, sites that are too general, and a failure to interact with talent. When developing a talent community, it's essential to identify those potential pitfalls and remove them in the design stage. Organisations that build talent communities around the needs of the talent they want will be more successful at attracting candidates.

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## Developing a Talent Community

When used in conjunction with strategic employment branding, talent communities can become a robust tool to help organisations ease their talent gaps. A true talent community will attract high quality candidates while building relationships between individuals and companies. However, a catch-all talent community is no better for finding highly sought-after candidates than a general job posting. The types of people who have the skills companies are interested in are more likely to be highly motivated, and more interested in discussing specific topics than joining a general candidate pool. It's important to design a talent community around the skill areas most essential for your organisation's recruiting purposes. Allow potential candidates to find the niche of their interest, and encourage the development of community along those lines. The connections and referrals created through a targeted and specific group tailored to the interests of those with in-demand skills can produce the best hires.

A talent community requires internal investment as well. A talent community that has no interaction from recruiters or existing employees with desirable skill sets will most likely fail. To attract talent and keep individuals engaged, the talent community has to receive input from the company. Recruiters should contact candidates to thank them for joining and reach out to them about opportunities, and employees should be encouraged to engage talent community members in ongoing discussion. These tactics demonstrate an organisation's human side and investment in talent, and make the talent community and job opportunities attractive to highly skilled candidates.

## Closing the Talent Gap

Employment branding and talent communities are two important steps towards closing the talent gap for many organisations. The market is always changing, and organisations that want to remain competitive must develop the right strategies for connecting with the best talent at the optimal time. •

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#### Sources:

- 1 PwC, 17th Annual CEO Survey, 2014
- 2 BBC, 2014
- 3 BBC, 2014

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