

Battle lines drawn in fight for all-Ireland talent



Ciaran Sheehan, managing partner of executive search and selection professionals, Clarendon Executive Placement (formerly MERC Partners Northern Ireland), claims companies need to be on a war footing if they are to capture the best management talent.

THE war for management talent across the island of Ireland is intensifying dramatically!

As an all-island economy daily becomes more of a reality then so too does the battle for the best management brains around.

And companies throughout Ireland need a secure supply of talent from what remains largely a defined pool in order to protect and grow their economic futures. So the pressure is

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very much on the all-island economy in terms of securing senior management talent.

The good news is that while the England fans at the World Cup may have been singing about 'football coming home' Irish companies can celebrate the return home, both North and South, of highly talented people who now understand that they can enjoy a rewarding career without leaving these shores.

Experienced professional people are returning and while the evidence is more anecdotal than empirical it's clear that the talent pool in Ireland is getting deeper. However that doesn't make the battle for those skills any less intense and likely to heighten as international investors continue to arrive North and South setting up home on an island and within an economy seen as a springboard to Europe and with a highly educated and enthusiastic work force.

These, as the Chinese might say, are interesting times as the economy on this island continues to become more inter-related and growth, particularly in the Republic of Ireland, continues to push on at levels the rest of Europe can only envy.

With major infrastructural capital programmes in place both North and South the island of Ireland will increasingly need new and vigorous senior management if that investment is to be transformed into sustainable growth.

Over the last decade there is clear evidence of skills shortages at all levels and while in many cases the pressure has been relieved at lower level positions thanks to the influx of international workers, at more senior levels it is becoming significantly more difficult to recruit specialist senior managers and directors.

Clearly, in a time of greater awareness of the shortage of talent and increased competition for it, the imperative to manage it effectively is more urgent than ever. Indeed the need to plan ahead for the managers companies will need down the line is a commercial imperative.

All leaders, not just human resources managers, must make talent a priority at all levels of their organisations. They must create reasons for top talent to choose their companies, rebuild their recruiting strategies, create plenty of opportunities for development, and learn to identify their star performers and invest in them appropriately.

Achieving this becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy in that these kinds of organisations are more attractive to top people.

Many people have left the island of Ireland over the years, indeed it became almost a tradition for our young and brightest talent to wander off to GB and the US in search of a career and a decent living.

But with increased prosperity and the growth opportunities that a growing economy can offer, there are plenty of examples of those who today are returning home return in search of the fabled work-life balance.

For many the work-life balance has become something of a cliché as the UK and Ireland continue to rack up some of the longest working hours in western world. But for a growing number it is becoming highly desirable and necessary to achieve and arguably is a major selling point in attracting new managerial talent into Ireland as well as bringing ex-pats home.

So, often the drivers steering people home can be non-work related like marriage, schooling, the leisure scene etc. But for someone to really make the step back, being presented with an exciting career prospect is often the catalyst for change.

The pace of that change is arguably increasing and bringing internationally developed talent back into the economy pays huge dividends.

Many Irish companies have already realised their global ambitions and there are many more in the pipeline who could benefit from people who have been developed through world class companies and are ready

to use that experience for an Irish company.

However tapping into the international talent pool is difficult which is why it is important to partner with a reputable executive search firm with a record of delivery.

Executive search or 'Headhunting' is clearly one of the most effective means of recruiting top people – bringing people back home.

The very best candidates are usually being well looked after by their current employers and are unlikely to be avidly reading the recruitment pages or registered on a recruitment agency database. To find and hire these people requires a professional, proactive and comprehensive process with international reach, which can be delivered within best practice guidelines.

Companies increasingly want individuals who can add value to their organisations, who have the relevant skills, rounded experience and maturity to walk into an organisation and make a difference.

The war is raging in the fight to retain this kind of talent and as the economies on this island inexorably move towards becoming a single economy that war is only going to intensify.

Increasingly people with the desired senior managerial skills want to come home from GB, the US and Europe and so the talent pool is growing.

Make sure though that your company isn't treading water – find someone to help you who knows how to fish in the pool!



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