

i-RECRUIT : YOU RECRUIT

ICT TALENT ACQUISITION
AND RETENTION

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SUMMARY





INTRODUCTION

The working landscape is going through a period of change and it's necessary for all companies, whatever their size, to ensure that they make themselves as attractive as they can to employees and prospective employees.

It's particularly important that organisations that rely on ICT professionals are duly diligent because the predicted dearth of talent (as burgeoning technologies sees demand outstripping supply) will make recruitment and retention more important than ever.

There are two aspects to this – **material** and **philosophical**.

Materially, there is much that any company can do, although logistics and budgetary constraints will obviously have an impact on what is feasible. Philosophically, the playing field is far more even, as policies and the moral outlook of an organisation cost little more than time and effort.

Both require any conscientious employer's time and attention.

Burgeoning technologies will continue to see demand outstripping supply.



PHILOSOPHICAL

Stability and Consistency

None of us have such a grasp of the future that we can guarantee to keep everything on an even keel, but it is essential that we grasp how changes in the workplace make people feel uncertain. It's impossible to keep any ship completely steady, and people understand that, but equally a company without a distinct plan that veers wildly and unnecessarily will make employees more likely to leave when other opportunities come calling. Open communication with workers is a good thing, but make sure what you are choosing to communicate is thought through.

It's one thing being flexible enough to change when it's a necessity (in fact it's very important), but it's a fine line sometimes. Employees need to understand the direction that they are heading in, and if that direction is subject to regular alterations, their belief in the company will waver.

And if you say you are going to do something, then do it. That sounds so apparent that it doesn't need saying, but workplaces everywhere abound with broken promises and poorly formed plans, with employees getting that feeling of *déjà vu* every time the boss makes an announcement.

Think it through and follow through.



PHILOSOPHICAL

Internal Promotion

It's not always easy to dangle this carrot; and indeed it's better not to dangle it at all if the carrot will never be taken off the stick. In smaller companies, it can be difficult to offer much career progression, but when you are looking to expand your team, look within before you look outside. The simpler solution is to keep someone in place and get someone new in, but few things engender loyalty like showing how much someone is valued by offering them a newly made position. It might not be feasible, but consider it.

When salary is the biggest priority, it doesn't auger well.

Pay and the Package

Few things make us view a candidate more negatively than one who puts salary requirements way at the top of their wishlist. Let's not be naïve – we all want to be paid as much as possible – but when it's easily the biggest priority, it doesn't auger well. In saying that, who wouldn't get tempted by the possibility of a large increase in what we take home on a monthly basis?

Asking an employer for an additional benefit or a pay rise is perhaps one of the most difficult conversations an employee can have; it's almost a taboo. It's easy to stay in the mindset that if a worker isn't complaining that they must, therefore, have nothing to complain about. A prudent employer will pay a valued employee what they can, not what they can get away with. By the time someone who doesn't feel valued has seen fit to look elsewhere, it's too late.



PHILOSOPHICAL

Green Policy

We're about to enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, and there is literally no acceptable excuse for any company not to take its environmental responsibilities properly. There's no debate to be had here.

None.

Recycle everything recyclable.
Everything.

Ban single use-plastic in the workplace. Ban non-recyclable everything where conceivably possible. Get some reusable coffee mugs with your logo on and give them out to everyone.

Your employees will notice, and they will appreciate it, and trust me when I tell you that they will be appalled if you don't take this seriously.

Flexibility

Monday to Friday. Nine to five. Tied to a desk. Why?

It doesn't matter how committed an employee is – their life outside their job is more important. Long gone are the days where workers have to accede to their bosses' whims and should feel grateful that they have a job – any job – at all. Allowing flexibility to working hours and the place of work is entirely doable nowadays, and this is one area where smaller companies who are not tied to corporate policies can outdo their bigger competitors. Wages and bonuses – not always so much - but being flexible and understanding the importance of this can go a long way to engendering loyalty.



PHILOSOPHICAL

Culture

Small word, big topic. It's very difficult to define what a company culture should be because it's something that often takes on a life of its own and varies wildly, dependent on a number of factors. Especially if taken for granted. It's a little difficult to define because it's a constantly evolving beast, but, broadly, the culture of any organisation is affected by two main factors: Management and Personalities.

Management: I'm talking about line managers here. Managing people is a skill, and it needs to be learnt. Many employers take this for granted, and the knock-on effects on morale can be devastating. In many workplaces

seniority and time served is a nailed on path to management, and whilst there is an obvious logic in this, time served and seniority do not necessarily a good manager make. People are complex and managing people is difficult. Money spent on managerial training is money well spent.

Personalities: an office is an eco-system, and it doesn't take much for chaos and unhappiness to ensue. This is a recruitment issue. I've lost count of the amount of clients over the years who make hiring decisions based on "gut" instinct. People are on their best behaviour during the interview process – you don't get to see them as they really are. Choosing new employees on instinct is a very dangerous game, yet it is a prevailing tactic, especially in SMEs without the backup of an HR department. Interviews need to be structured and use a variety of



PHILOSOPHICAL

techniques, including behavioural and situational based questions. Put interviewees on the spot and see how they react under a little pressure, because this is an excellent gauge of someone's personality.

Structured, consistent interview processes are an essential part of the plan.

Culture is a maddeningly intangible concept to define in a workplace, and much of it is in the lap of the gods, but having good people-managers and structured, consistent interview processes are not luxuries; they are an essential part of any organisations plan.

The whole point of developing a culture that nurtures and engenders a sense of belonging, ultimately, is to have a happy, motivated workforce that is harmonious and efficient. There are many schools of thought about how to establish such an environment – here are three factors to bear in mind:

1. Boost the sense of ownership
Look at tasks holistically, and encourage team members to have input into a successful outcome by ensuring that they understand their input and responsibility. This is about engendering a sense of collaboration across the team, with every individual understanding how important the role they play is to a fruitful conclusion.

2. Improve skill levels
People want to grow. People want to have a diverse job. People want to upskill. A workforce that is encouraged to improve and increase



PHILOSOPHICAL

its skills is a workforce that will feel valued. Give constructive feedback and offer everyone the chance to get better at what they do. It's that simple.

3. Build a sense of togetherness

You can't throw a disparate bunch of people together and assume that they will get on; the chances are they won't. This is back to encouraging collaboration again. Look for ways of getting people to work together by acknowledging the strengths of the individuals that work for you. Get them to work closely with each other so that they can appreciate who they are working with and in turn be appreciated by those who they are working with.

There is so much that can be done by good managers, but the headline news here is not to take the culture of a workplace for granted. A culture will evolve, regardless of whether a manager is hands-on or has a laissez-faire attitude. But a culture that evolves without managerial input is unlikely to be one that engenders happiness and loyalty – the stronger personalities will dominate, and what will develop is just as likely to be negative than positive.

A culture that evolves without managerial input is unlikely to engender loyalty.

If you are a man-manager or you have man-managers working under you – they have to understand how to develop an effective, efficient and happy workplace culture.



MATERIAL

In contrast to the more philosophical factors that affect morale and staff happiness (and with it, retention), there are plenty of things that employers can do to make them more attractive to employees (and would-be employees!). Invariably, there is a monetary cost, which is why this section is labelled “material”.

These types of perks don't have to cost the earth. There's a principle at play here – the psychology of getting something over and above the norm has a huge impact on the average worker. Whilst some add-ons are expensive, many have an all but negligible costs, especially when weighed against the impact it has on the happiness of your staff. The following section is by no means exhaustive; this is just a little food

for thought.

Private health insurance.

This is, of course, an expensive perk to provide (although not as expensive as might be expected), but it tops the list in many surveys. The real strength here is how much it helps with retention. Walking away from a job that has this perk (especially if it includes spouse and children) to one that doesn't have it is an unlikely decision.

The psychology of getting something above the norm has a huge impact.

Education expenses.

This is another excellent way to help retain staff. Helping with the costs of qualifications ties members of staff to an employer, and of course has the additional benefit of having staff who are more skilled.



MATERIAL

Employee discounts.

It depends on what you do, obviously! It's difficult to offer your staff a discount if you are a plastic moulding manufacturer, but if there is an opportunity to decrease the costs of your employees, why wouldn't you take it? This is almost a freebie, if you're in a position to offer it. It will hit your profit margin slightly, but cost you nothing.

Snacks

This is an increasingly popular option in these health aware times. There is a plethora of organisations that offer a variety of options, but you don't have to use these (although some are excellent!) – a DIY option like a well-stocked bowl of fruit will be very much appreciated.

Gym membership.

File under nowhere near as expensive as you might think. A lot of gyms would be delighted to discuss terms with small companies, and you won't pay off-the-peg prices. The additional benefit here is fitter and healthier staff!

Meditation sessions are on trend right now

Wellness.

Wellness is one of those buzzwords that is becoming more and more normalised. There are so many things that employers can do to help their staff deal with life's rich tapestry. Yoga and Pilates lessons are a great way to get people to relax together, and can be extremely amusing, too. Meditation sessions are completely on trend right now. There are plenty of providers here who would love the chance to get your staff chanting mantras. You might even get the first session for free.



MATERIAL

Shares, stocks, equity.

Not to be taken lightly, obviously. This is a big step for any employer, and cannot be offered to everyone. But if you have a vital member of staff that you know would be all but irreplaceable, few things will secure a long-term collaboration like having a vested interest in the future performance of your company.

Family friendly policies.

Paid parental leave (for mums and dads), contributions to childcare, creche facilities, baby bonuses (a cash amount paid upon the birth of a child)...all of these things demonstrate to an employee that their employer understands the challenges faced by parents in the 21st century. Having kids is a landmark in the life of any person,

and getting a helping hand when you really need it can only help build loyalty.

Commuter/Travel assistance.

As well as offering remote working wherever possible, offering some financial assistance to those using public transport (or those who could be encouraged to use it) has the added advantage of being eco-friendly.

Games room.

Staff rooms are often soulless places. Coffee machines that could be better employed by road surfacers, cheap microwaves splattered with the splashes of a thousand TV dinners, a TV that has less channels than we had in the 70s and a vending machine that always needs filling and contains nothing but unhealthy food on a good day. It doesn't have to be like this, and the trend for pool tables, table tennis and Playstations is very much on the up.



RECRUITMENT

Recruitment. It's not like it was.

Things ebb and flow in business and commerce, and the supply/demand equation for skilled staff makes a huge impact on a company's ability to recruit the right people.

Information and communication technology is a particularly difficult market right now as AI and data comes to the fore. We've only scratched the surface with these fascinating technologies; the impact on everyone – everyone – is still not properly understood, but the only way is up. Skilled people are already in demand and hard to find.

Education and education policies are still playing catch up.

If you rely solely on job boards to fill a vacancy, you are not drawing from the vast majority of prospective employees.

Right now, it's a sellers' market.

Most recruitment is conducted, one way or another, online these days, at least at the start of the process. Job boards are the obvious starting point, and whilst they do work, most people on the job market do not look at them unless they are actively seeking to change employer. This is clearly self-evident, but is worth consideration. If you rely solely on job boards to fill a vacancy, you are



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not drawing from the vast majority of prospective employees.

It's easy, in 2020, to employ other tactics. It's possible to contact skilled people who are not actively looking to change jobs if you know where to look and what to say. So much communication is done electronically these days, and the generations that make up the younger parts of the workforce don't know it any other way. The huge aspect of this change of tack is that the dynamic is not the same.

Someone actively looking to change job will view an employer and a job inherently differently from someone who is not actively looking, but open to new possibilities. This shift in the dynamic is a game changer, and

employers need to understand that whilst an interview is still an audition, these days, both parties are auditioning much of the time.

Whilst an interview is still an audition, these days, both parties are auditioning.

In a jobs market where there is a surplus of viable employees, the employer can pick and choose, and can expect jobseekers to play a more subservient and less particular role in the interview process. In a market where the position is reversed, the employer needs to ensure that they are showcasing their company in the most positive way possible. And a huge part of this is how the recruitment process is conducted.



RECRUITMENT

it's worth taking a step back and looking at the processes you use when you recruit, from top to bottom.

First impressions happen only once.

Good employees need to be wooed, to some degree. It's a balancing act, and needs some consideration. The decision making process is exactly the same; even in a squeezed jobs market, it's really important that employers recruit the right people who are a good match, but someone motivated to change their job is far more likely to accept what is on offer. Someone who is open minded to making a change will probably be a tougher nut to crack, and will, in all likelihood, perceive what is on offer with a more critical eye.

If you want to attract the best candidates for your company, then

Someone actively looking to change job will view an employer and a job inherently differently from someone who is not actively looking, but open to new possibilities. This shift in the dynamic is a game changer.



GIG ECONOMY

Gig Economy – hitting the right notes?

This is one of those buzz-phrases that is starting to crop up everywhere, and it's very telling that it is. Skilled people – especially those in tech – are switching on to the fact that they don't necessarily need to commit to a "permanent" role any more. Putting aside the notion of permanency (who has a job-for-life these days?), this development can work in the favour of the employer as well as the worker.

The notion of working a "gig" in this context is that someone can work in a self-employed, short term role, vaguely (very vaguely, if you ask us!)

like a musician. The advantage to the freelancer is that they get a lot of variation and diversity, and if they're switched on (they generally are!), they can earn more and pay tax more efficiently. There are risks involved – work (and money) can dry up for instance – but more and more ICT professionals are prepared to take this risk.

There are advantages to the employer too. Although the pro-rata rate will almost certainly be higher, the commitment is greatly reduced. Those working in a self-employed capacity don't get paid holidays, sick pay or pension contributions. It's easier to dispense with someone who is not up to the task, too.

The final point there brings up another issue, and returns us back to a familiar theme when recruiting – diligence. It's an unfortunate fact that a proportion of people within tech (albeit a small minority) will not be what they purport to be. It's not



GIG ECONOMY

necessarily that they are being deliberately deceitful, it's often that they are over-estimating their abilities and skills. Within technology, this is a real issue, because often, employers will not have the in-depth tech knowhow to gauge someone's skills and abilities.

However, any freelancer worth their salt will have a portfolio showcasing their skills. Websites like GitHub offer a platform to do exactly that. And as well as this, testimonies and references from satisfied clients should also be happily offered up, preferably with even being asked for.

In addition to this, there are plenty of online tech tests that can be taken

that will accurately gauge an individual's skill. This will need some research, but the advantage here is that the employer will also gain some insight and have a better understanding of the technology involved, which is obviously advantageous.

Any freelancer worth their salt will have a profile showcasing their skills.

Any freelancer who cannot demonstrate that they have the necessary skills and a provable background should not be taken seriously. Any freelancer who is affronted that they should be asked for such information (or to take a test) should be dispensed with immediately. Consider yourself warned.



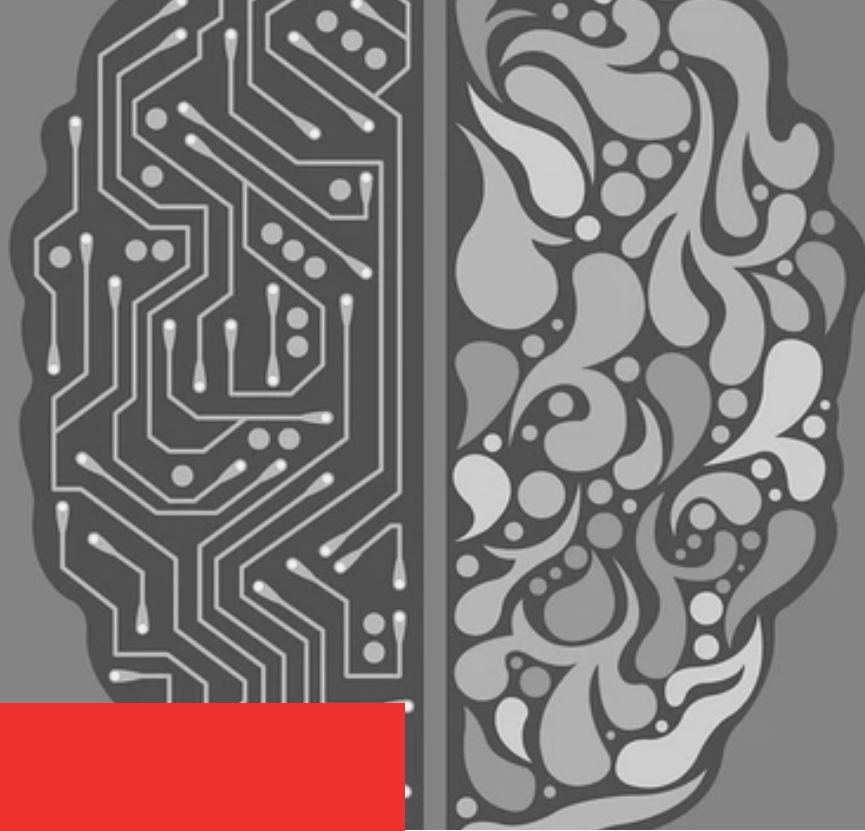
GIG ECONOMY

Putting these concerns to one side, using a freelancer is an interesting option, and if done properly, can be cost effective and far more efficient than taking someone on in a permanent role. And actually, a freelancer becoming an employee is far from unheard of (although a word of caution : if you're using a recruitment agency to find the freelancer, make sure that you know the terms of engagement here at the start of the process, or you might find yourself paying a full fee after paying a fees for a contract. Get something in writing before you make any commitment).

Although the pro-rata rate will almost certainly be higher, the commitment is greatly reduced.

If you have a technological advancement that you need to make, getting in a professional on a short-term basis makes sense on many different levels.

Just. Be. Careful.



SUMMARY

Skilled tech workers are in demand, and they know it. The dynamic has shifted, and this means that employers need to be smart and switched on. The new working generation are determining a different *modus operandi*, and this means that they have specific expectations and requirements. Earning a good salary isn't irrelevant, but it isn't enough.

They'll look beyond this and will want to work for an employer that understands this.

The swift changes in technology mean that a skills dearth is entirely feasible, at least in the next few years. When the jobs market is also a sellers' market, it means that

employers will have to woo talent, and possibly change the way that they operate.

This dynamic shift will also play into the hands of the Walter Mitties of this world, and the big issue with Walter Mitties is that they don't even know what they are. The need to get the right talent in – when a company has a tech issue that needs resolving, it always needs resolving quickly - can lead to unnecessary risks being taken. Mistakes here can be unbelievably costly. Be diligent, and don't allow urgency to be justification for some expensive post error repenting.

Being ahead of the curve can give any company a huge advantage, especially when burgeoning technology is moving so quickly. It's a balancing act though. Proceed with caution.



ABOUT US

We're not big, but we are clever.

Trading since 2018, we have developed some very effective techniques for finding key staff for our portfolio of clients. We're discreet, professional and a cut above.

We treat our candidates with a great deal of respect, and because of this, we develop strong relationships with our ever-increasing database of talent. And being a small, independent company, we are in a position to tailor our service levels to each client.

We're not bogged down in "policies" and intransigent "procedures", and

this means that we can be whatever our clients need us to be. Being bespoke is an integral part of what we provide.

We're mature and seasoned. We don't make the sale and pass our clients on to consultants who lack experience and life skills. The partners in the company are hands-on, accountable and completely committed. We take the time to understand what is required, and don't waste our clients' time with speculative, poorly qualified applicants.

We have a series of inciteful and engaging blogs, covering a range of topics pertaining to life, recruitment and technology, breaking down topics and barriers.

We're very good at what we do, and would love the chance to demonstrate that this isn't just empty sales rhetoric.