

We are often asked by clients and candidates for our thoughts on the HR marketplace. In our view there has been significant change over the past year, driven by a number of factors.

The Market

If you are recruiting, it's a good time. If you are looking for a job, it's less good. Throughout Western Europe, there are some extremely good senior candidates (earning base salaries of £200k plus) looking for opportunities. We are getting many more applications than ever before from Italy, Spain and France and whilst things are tough in the UK, they are much tougher elsewhere!

The situation is different in other parts of the world, with the U.S. recruitment marketplace a little easier than here. The challenge in other parts of the world is more complex, with local skills being in short supply in some emerging markets.

The UK Problem

In the UK the issue is to do with fundamental change in organisational life. Many household name British companies no longer exist. The list is lengthy and includes Cadbury, BAA, British Steel, ICI, Abbey etc. These all had big professional HR functions. At the same time, many of the large American multinationals have a much smaller HR presence in the UK than they once did. As a consequence, there are fewer opportunities at the most senior levels than there once were.

The Recession

The recession has had a strange effect. Undoubtedly it's harder to get a job, but good people always do. It's just that it's all a bit slower, with companies taking longer to decide to recruit and, then again, longer to decide to hire. They do in the end!

Salaries

We have undoubtedly seen downward pressure on salaries as companies are seeing that it is possible to recruit good talent at lower salary levels. However, the situation is compounded when organisations try and downgrade the function and recruit an individual into a more senior job than they are up to. This almost always ends in tears and a number of high profile organisations have reversed previous decisions and subsequently upgraded the role that they had previously downgraded!

Candidates

Despite the shortage of opportunities, good candidates get jobs. We are also quite surprised that, in a number of circumstances, people who are less good get jobs! We still see a shortage of people with real commercial flair and, more to the point, whilst there are many HR professionals with good operational skills those with international ability in the areas of talent, change or performance are very thin on the ground.

Company Response

Whilst companies are enjoying good recruitment times in Western Europe, they don't always avail themselves of this opportunity. Some have ineffective recruitment processes, imprecise recruitment specifications, and they select candidates on acceptability rather than effectiveness. We see it as our role to help improve processes, define the spec and ensure that the best candidate for the job gets appointed.

Strategic Dimensions

We are in our 19th year of operation this year. Our reputation has helped us in difficult times when others have done less well. We are always interested in talking to firms and candidates about how we can help. Our knowledge of the industry is unrivalled.

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