

Below: The team at Signify Technology at The Frames in Shoreditch



THE WAR FOR

Talent isn't just something that Simon Cowell's looking for on *The X Factor*. It's serious business, with companies vying for the best people to gain a competitive edge, but the current squeeze on talent means the search is about to get a lot fiercer. By **Rosalyn Page**



TALENT



Ryan Adams, Founder at talent search firm, Signify Technology

Businesses have been put on notice that a squeeze on talent is on the cards, according to UK employment statistics. January's Labour Force Survey reveals that job openings have climbed to the highest level recorded, while unemployment has shrunk to its lowest level since the 70s. This mismatch means that businesses need to look harder and smarter to find the right people.

AI-driven tools are easing the time-consuming process of vetting candidates, while "social search" – using social media tools like LinkedIn and Twitter – improves the human side of recruitment. However, finding talent is only part of the process. In today's competitive market, businesses need to focus their own efforts on retaining and nurturing the best talent to meet these new challenges. It begins with understanding the importance of human capital in any organisation.

The value of great people

The concept of talent as integral to business success is relatively recent. It was born some 20 years ago through groundbreaking workplace research by McKinsey that defined talent as the human capital of an organisation – the innovative ideas, skills and experience of its people. In the late 90s, the renowned management consultant firm surveyed 13,000 managers from 112 US companies on talent-management practices and beliefs.

This was the first comprehensive workplace survey that delved into the people side of an organisation and set out to measure the value of having the right people. The research showed that the importance of the right talent can't be underestimated – it separates winning companies from the rest. Its conclusion is based on striking differences in companies' bottom lines related to their talent management. It found that companies that placed strategic importance on talent management had returns 22 percentage points higher than the average in their industry.

The research spawned the book *The War for Talent* in 2001, which demonstrated how better talent is worth fighting for in business. Ultimately it gave rise to a new human-resource industry, helping organisations create, inspire and motivate their people to win the war for talent. This begins with the search for the best people.



Shahram Mossayebi,
CEO at Crypto Quantique

Finding your tribe

In 2019, finding the right talent is no longer a case of posting an ad on a generic job site. Increasingly, finding the best people, particularly those who are highly skilled and experienced, is about meeting them in their environments.

Signify Technology, based at Workspace's The Frames in Shoreditch, is a niche recruitment company that finds software engineers who can write in Scala, a complex back-end website programming language. Signify relies on an individual approach to get to know candidates and help them with their careers, not just into their next job. The emphasis on personal engagement means the team is focused on customer service, rather than sales, to find potential candidates for the web businesses that use Signify's recruitment service.

Founder Ryan Adams knows that finding software engineers is a constant challenge because they tend to keep to themselves in certain online platforms.

His recruiters have to engage through social media with the Scala community to build rapport and trust. Adams says, "Software engineers hang out on Twitter. We share links and content, join in on discussions, use relevant hashtags and connect individually through the platform. GitHub and YouTube are also great ways to share expert tips and reach our coders." Signify also hosts meet-ups in city locations through *meetup.com*, so coders can get to know the business and how it works.

Crypto Quantique, based at Metal Box Factory in Southwark, adopts a variety of methods in order to target its search for a very specific type of hire. Crypto Quantique produces cutting-edge Internet of Things (IoT) security technology that embeds a chip in an IoT device, using a cryptography algorithm connected through a cloud service to secure it.

Naturally, the business needs specialised people with an aptitude for deep technological work. "We require highly

skilled, highly educated people such as those with PhDs," say CEO Shahram Mossayebi and CTO Patrick Camilleri.

Crypto Quantique taps into the traditional routes of universities and academic agencies, as well as start-up job sites like AngelList and social media sites like LinkedIn to find STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) candidates, typically post-doctorate students and researchers.

The new smart search

Artificial intelligence (AI) has gained a strong foothold in organisations of all types and sizes in just a few years, according to the 2019 Gartner CIO Survey. It found that around four in 10 organisations have used AI in some form, a staggering 270% increase in just four years. Nowhere is this more observable than in recruitment, where AI is being deployed in everything from crafting job advertisements and analysing CVs, to predicting the suitability and performance of

potential candidates and improving the onboarding of new hires.

Google Hire, the search giant's recruitment platform that helps small to medium-size businesses track candidates and schedule interviews, recently launched a new feature powered by AI. It creates a shortlist of potential candidates for job openings based on previous applications, and integrates with Gmail and Calendar for communicating with candidates and scheduling interviews.

Unlike with search engines, Google does not dominate the recruitment sector. Ideal, based in Ontario, boasts customers including Netflix and Lush; it uses AI to analyse thousands of CVs in seconds, while its online chatbots automatically score potential candidates on suitability. It claims that the platform can slash the number of interviews by up to 40%.

compared to, say, mid-level salespeople that are being recruited pretty much all the time. I also think that people at board level do not want to think that something completely vital to the organisation is handled by a machine rather than a human."

Building value from within

Finding talent is the first step, but how do you nurture your workforce? In its 2018 Global Talent Trends report, HR consultancy Mercer defines nurturing talent as developing someone's connection to the organisation's mission. When that mission is to save lives, the connection is paramount. The National Health Service (NHS) set up a new programme in 2016 to modernise its talent-management plan by developing a pipeline of future leaders and style of leadership that is both compassionate and inclusive.

Martin Hancock, Director of Talent

The NHS came under fire last year when the new Health Secretary slammed its poor diversity record, pointing out that only five NHS chief executives are from a black and minority ethnicity background. The Developing People: Improving Care programme is intended to change this. Hancock says, "In particular, we intend talent management to be an enabler for improved diversity of leadership."

The value of diversity is echoed by Bruce Daisley, Twitter's Vice President for Europe, the Middle East and Africa. He believes bringing new voices into any discussion is integral to better decision-making in the workplace, but it can get overlooked if it's not a key part of the definition of talent.

"When looking for talent, if you're not thinking about the methods in a diverse and inclusive way, you could end up missing that contribution [from diversity]."

"When culture works well it can be an incredible magnetic pull"

Bruce Daisley, VP for EMEA at Twitter



Start-up HireVue has taken it a step further. Its AI-powered recruitment platform analyses speech and facial expressions from video interviews, instead of relying on conventional CVs. It predicts candidate suitability and claims to improve diversity by weeding out unconscious bias and widening the potential talent pool. Hilton, Vodafone and Unilever have signed up.

However, AI has its limits in the recruitment space – the upper echelons remain out of reach. Gordon Montgomery is Head of Executive Search at Ciesco, an advisory firm that connects entrepreneurs and investors. He says that AI becomes less useful as a recruitment tool as you move up the food chain.

"Look at CEOs. They are recruited less frequently and there is less choice and available information in the market,

Management at the NHS Leadership Academy, says the Developing People: Improving Care programme is about both staff and patients.

"From a patient perspective, it is the impact that really good staff engagement has on patient care. If we want staff to be engaged, we need to make sure that they're properly supported to fulfil their potential, to have meaning at work, and to be properly supported in terms of their development and progression. For some, this will be to progress to the most senior levels; for others simply to do a great job where they are."

It's the most comprehensive talent-management plan developed by the NHS to date, says Hancock, but "real success will only come if we see a shift in culture, mindset and behaviour in staff at all levels, especially our most senior leaders".

Daisley has a keen interest in how workplaces function. His new book, *The Joy of Work*, tackles job satisfaction, and his popular podcast, *Eat Sleep Work Repeat*, examines the way we work.

Talent can be summed up as the personal attributes that define someone, such as "attitude, energy, integrity, intelligence", says Daisley. He recommends prioritising a good attitude and qualities like being a powerful team player above set qualifications like an MBA.

Foster the right culture

For a business to get the best out of its talent pool, experts recommend looking beyond compensation and more towards things like role development and even staff wellbeing.

"When culture works well it can be an incredible magnetic pull," says Daisley.

“There’s a lot of debate around the use of the word ‘family’. Some experts like Patty McCord, who wrote the Culture Document for Netflix, which states its core values, say that we shouldn’t claim workplaces have the feeling of being a family, but if you ask employees in good teams they definitely say there is a close-knit family feel to them. When cultures work well we do find ourselves valuing the trust that we feel.”

Personal-development programmes are one way of showing employees that they are part of the family, says business coach, Ramona Da Gama. She says, “These programmes show employees that the company genuinely wants to promote them.”

Da Gama’s advice for employers is to allow employees to become part of the company’s vision for the future, and share its long- and short-term business strategy. She says, “Making them responsible for the success of the company empowers them and makes them feel that they belong.”

Workspace hosted a Business Insight Breakfast at its Fleet Street business centre in January on how to build a game-changing talent strategy; our panel of experts agreed that building the right culture is a huge factor. Sharing company values with staff is paramount, said Ade Akin-Aina, Global Director of Talent Acquisition at rental-management company Hostmaker, based at The Biscuit Factory in Bethnal Green.

Hostmaker is a fast-growing company, and as such it seeks to attract high performers. She said, “We want to be authentic to who we are, so we project a brand that attracts these kinds of people, and if people are driven by the property-technology space, they come to us.”

People want a great place to work, and to feel appreciated, says Jane Bright, Director of People and Talent at florist Bloom & Wild, based in Workspace’s Vox Studios. “It’s about shaping the people experience, making sure that people have a lovely experience, feel really cared about and invested in.”

The days of recruiting top talent solely with the promise of a company car, corner office and impressive salary packets are dying out, says Leanne Spencer, Founder at Bodyshot Performance, based at Workspace’s Parkhall Business Centre in Dulwich. She works with businesspeople to help improve their health.

“Does your company have standing work stations? What about a policy of short meetings? Are there signs on the floor, guiding you to the stairs and not the lift? When people are more energised, productivity goes up.”

Some employees simply want more flexibility in their hours to take care of things like childcare arrangements, says Bright. Trusting staff to manage their own time can generate a strong sense of loyalty,

which means they will stick around and go the extra mile, if needed.

However you go about introducing a wellbeing strategy, keep it authentic. Almost eight in 10 surveyed by Edelman for its 2019 Trust Barometer believe that CEOs should take the lead on change rather than waiting for it. Be the boss who leads from the top.

Signify Technology has a points-based Health League Table for all its staff – to which boss Ryan Adams has signed up – that documents their daily workflow and wellbeing markers, like diet and personal bests. The top three win a day at the spa.

Adams says, “You’ve got to lead from the front. My leadership team has bought into it. Last year, hardly any of us went for jogs. Now people come in earlier and leave earlier to go to the gym; they have more energy. This month, productivity is through the roof.”

Businesses of all shapes and sizes will need to respond to the changing conditions in the labour market throughout 2019 and beyond. Those that thrive will do so by continually developing how they find and retain their valuable talent.

[Check out Bruce Daisley’s top pick of work-related podcasts on page 56](#)

Make time for mothers

Coach **Roomana Hussain** speaks from the heart

Returning mothers are an untapped source of potential talent for businesses, says Roomana Hussain, Talent Coordinator and Executive Coach at Aviva. Working mothers are often overlooked and undervalued but Hussain explains why hiring them is great for business. A mother herself, she specialises in maternity transition coaching at Aviva, which offers support to pregnant women, those planning to adopt and fathers taking paternity leave.

“When I had my second child, maternity transition coaching was really relevant to what I was going through – going out and coming back into an organisation. Once I was back, I started coaching women returning to work after being in their roles for maybe 10–15 years, some up to 20 years. The obstacles and challenges they found were phenomenal. Some went back to the

same roles, others went back part-time and shared their responsibilities with others; some completely lost their responsibilities. When I moved to Aviva, I found that mothers returning to work didn’t have anyone to talk to. In 2016, Aviva launched its maternity-coaching programme.

“People want employers to invest time in them and recognise their skills. They have a hungry appetite to come back to work and are super-efficient because they have developed strong time-management skills. Life changes completely once you have a child, as does your outlook on life. Returning mothers have taken time out specifically to have a child and they will work hard, because they need to support their family! Somebody working four days a week will not necessarily work less efficiently than someone working full-



time. Employers need to work with them rather than against them. They can offer a wellbeing space and provide support via mentors or buddy mothers.”

[Find out more about Hussain’s services at *firmvaluecoaching.com*. For women returning to the workplace, check out *She’s Back*, by Lisa Unwin and Deb Khan at *shesback.co.uk*](#)