HR talent trends

What's next for our senior leaders?

Executive summary
August 2023

1 Introduction

In the post-pandemic environment, factors including geopolitical tensions, inflation and industry change are driving mixed prospects for organisations in Asia-Pacific (APAC). While remote working has created a wider talent pool, companies are facing skills gaps and talent retention challenges due to the rapidly accelerating digital economy and shifting employee expectations. People professionals have been under pressure to reframe their strategies and help organisations adapt to the constant change.

This report shares the views of people practitioners in Asia. It explores current talent trends and career development within the profession, and provides practical guidance for organisations in shaping their talent strategies. Based on initial insights from our APAC pulse survey on people managers' career development, we ran focus groups with managers, directors and senior leaders in the profession in Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei to gain a deeper understanding of the factors affecting their talent retention and development. The views of 100 practitioners in total are captured in this report.

2 Key findings

1 Companies are experiencing talent attraction and retention issues as employees pursue more competitive offerings externally. Meanwhile, cost pressures are challenging people professionals to find creative solutions to strengthen the employee experience.

2 Burnout has become a prevalent issue among people professionals since dealing with heightened pressures, leading to difficulties in retaining talent in this field. Supporting work–life balance and upskilling people teams to build resilience can help to address these problems.

3 Trends in the external environment are elevating the importance of the profession as a strategic business function. People teams can further increase their visibility across the organisation to build credibility as trusted strategic advisers. Demonstrating impact also contributes to practitioners' sense of purpose and motivation to work in the profession.

4 Opportunities for learning and progression are important for enhancing practitioners' job satisfaction. Upskilling through learning and development activities, professional qualifications and networking are valued by people practitioners as ways of increasing their professional credibility and supporting career advancement.

5 To support business transformations and deliver value, both now and in the future, people professionals need to apply strong business acumen alongside soft/human skills such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, problem-solving and leadership. Navigating paradoxes presented by the changing world of work requires practitioners to use situational judgement and evidence-based practices, alongside listening skills and creativity. A growth mindset and analytical capabilities will also help practitioners to lead effective people strategies in the digital environment.

3 Recommendations

To develop their talent and build future-fit people teams, people leaders should prioritise the following areas:

1 Protecting people practitioners' mental health and wellbeing through a holistic approach, including more flexible working, progression opportunities and setting clear boundaries between work and personal needs.

2 Increasing people professionals' exposure to the wider organisation and demonstrating their strategic contribution, through working collaboratively with other departments, being involved in wider business conversations and initiatives and celebrating their purposeful impact.

3 Enabling job mobility across the function and other business areas, as well as bringing in talent from outside the profession, through rotations, secondments and skills-led recruitment practices.

4 Enhancing long-term skills development through continuous learning, professional qualifications and learning from peers, both within and outside the people profession.

5 Building their professional network by fostering external relationships, joining professional communities and engaging in discussion forums.