The Road Ahead for Talent Acquisition in Asia-Pacific

Five Priorities to Guide Transformative Change

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Introduction

The last two years have reaffirmed a recurring narrative: agility is a major workforce management priority. A nimble talent acquisition (TA) function drives greater value to the organisation – from how they utilise data and improve access to talent to how they enable digital transformation and deliver a great candidate experience. And their confidence is rising.

Consider a survey report Allegis Global Solutions (AGS) released called, "The Shape of Talent Acquisition Across Europe 2021." For that study, we partnered with HR Grapevine to poll 405 senior TA and HR practitioners in the UK and Mainland Europe to gather perspectives on strategic transformation, data and analytics, technology use, management of talent communities and more. Unsurprisingly, many trends we uncovered translate to what we see in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region today. Priorities include a need for data-driven intelligence, an appetite for transformation and the desire to foster active, diverse talent communities. These issues shape how TA seeks to engage workers and provide value to the organisations they serve.

For this report, we'll offer perspectives on the European survey with a focus on five TA priorities in the APAC region:

- Transforming the TA function
- Adopting flexible work arrangements
- Connecting data to business outcomes
- Understanding the role of technology and digital demands
- Fostering talent communities

For TA leaders, winning the war for talent means navigating complexities with confidence. And with the right workforce partner as a guide, all of that becomes possible. Let's explore how.

1. Transforming Talent Acquisition

Transforming TA: Key Considerations

Initial Survey
Out of HR and TA leaders surveyed:
- 66% believe their TA function improved year-over-year

APAC Perspective
- **Continued Post-Pandemic Acceleration:** Rapid change in TA is expected to continue among highly competitive talent organizations.
- **A Heightened TA Position:** Stresses of workforce engagement put TA at the centre of business decision-making, forcing a proactive, strategic approach to acquiring talent.
- **Long-Term View:** A rolling strategic roadmap covers customer experience, process, technology and data.

It's impossible to think about the TA function without acknowledging that the pandemic remains the biggest single factor driving change. Over the past few years, COVID-19 prompted talent shortages with borders shut down, demands for new ways of working, increased use of technology and the remote onboarding of talent.

Today, large dips in hiring volumes in the last two years have turned into huge hiring spikes in many APAC countries as economies fight to recover from the pandemic. Further, the offshoring of work from EMEA and North America to APAC continued to rise in 2021, translating into workforce growth today in countries such as India, the Philippines and Malaysia, particularly for professional roles.

So how is the TA function achieving the agility to handle constant change? The answer lies in a strategic mindset.

> *"Companies are reassessing their workforce construct of permanent staff and contingent workers – enabling a more flexible way to get work done," says Vice President of AGS APAC Sarah Wong. "The ability to move with pace and embrace change remotely has proven a radical, positive shift as we guide organisations toward the critical talent they need."*

We saw a similar sentiment around a transformed TA function in the 2021 AGS Europe report, where two-thirds of surveyed TA and HR decision-makers described their function as better-performing than 12 months prior — when almost 50% thought they could improve.

> *"The future success of a company relies on the TA and HR leader who proactively adjusts their strategy to hire and retain the best talent and transform the business outcome of their company," says Wong. "By staying connected to the organisation's strategy and keeping a finger on the market's pulse, TA and HR can reimagine how work gets done and build the future workforce today."*

Wong asserts that TA and HR have generally responded well to pandemic-enforced changes and are more confident in their roles – ones that aren't just about filling open positions. Instead, the global health crisis has accelerated much-needed transformation in the function.

The pandemic forced nearly all parts of the business to rethink its strategic worth and value. For TA, it allowed them to shine. For example, leading organisations can better predict skills and people needs when adopting a strategic workforce planning process. Such action also promotes a better understanding of commercial opportunities, which helps with planning and positively influences their ability to examine talent markets and prepare for acquisition activities proactively rather than reactively.

TA leaders should maintain their focus on transformation as they look beyond pandemic disruptions. And regardless of the unique adaptations needed to continue hiring and onboarding during 2020 and 2021, change shouldn't be a one-time event. Wong encourages TA functions to hold onto a rolling, strategic roadmap that plans for ongoing step changes in customer experience, process enhancements, technology advancements and data optimisation.

2. Adopting Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible Work:
Key Considerations

APAC Perspective

- **Tranformation Over Improvement:** Expect flexible work to be the norm in competing for talent.
- **Physical and Cultural Demands:** Beyond equipment and access, companies are focusing on engagement in a virtual world.
- **Date-Driven Decisions:** Virtual access to talent pools increase the need for data to support decisions about targeting workers.

No matter the industry, market or company size, the people working within a business make the difference. Today, putting people first requires a flexible approach to where and when they work.

Thinking back to the onset of the pandemic, consider how TA had to reimagine how they engage with candidates while also making pragmatic changes (e.g., delivering equipment, laptops and onboarding kits). Beyond those physical and practical adjustments, they had to rethink how to translate their organisations' culture and business values to newly acquired talent.

In fact, digital hiring and a sharp pivot to remote hiring and remote work showcase TA's ability to move beyond incremental improvements to achieve wholesale change. Many forward-thinking organisations even began to embrace flexible and remote work options before the pandemic forced the issue. With roles that did not require onsite presence, they could access broader pools of talent without the limitations of geography. These pools included untapped talent supplies, such as parents, people with disabilities and those caring for loved ones.

"Companies should look to reap the benefits of a 'Team Anywhere' approach as remote work continues to be a mainstay in APAC," says Wong. *"People's reticence to move internationally has grown, but the need to have imported skills is increasing across APAC as many countries lack certain niche skills."*

For example, there's a technology talent crunch in Australia as companies need skilled talent to digitalise their operations, but skilled talent is getting harder to find. On the other hand, India boasts a wealth of raw skilled talent who see a massive demand for their skills domestically.
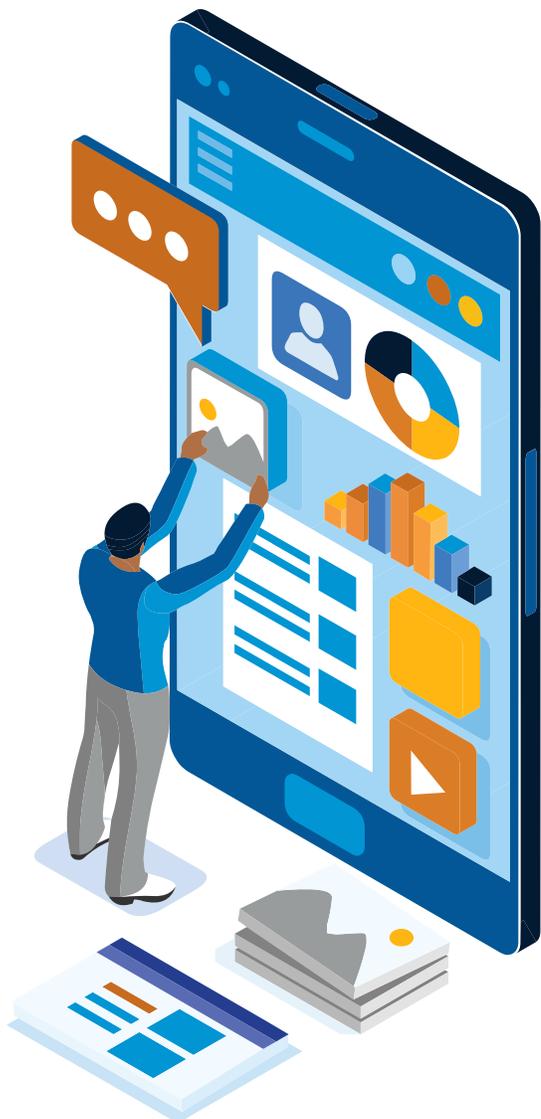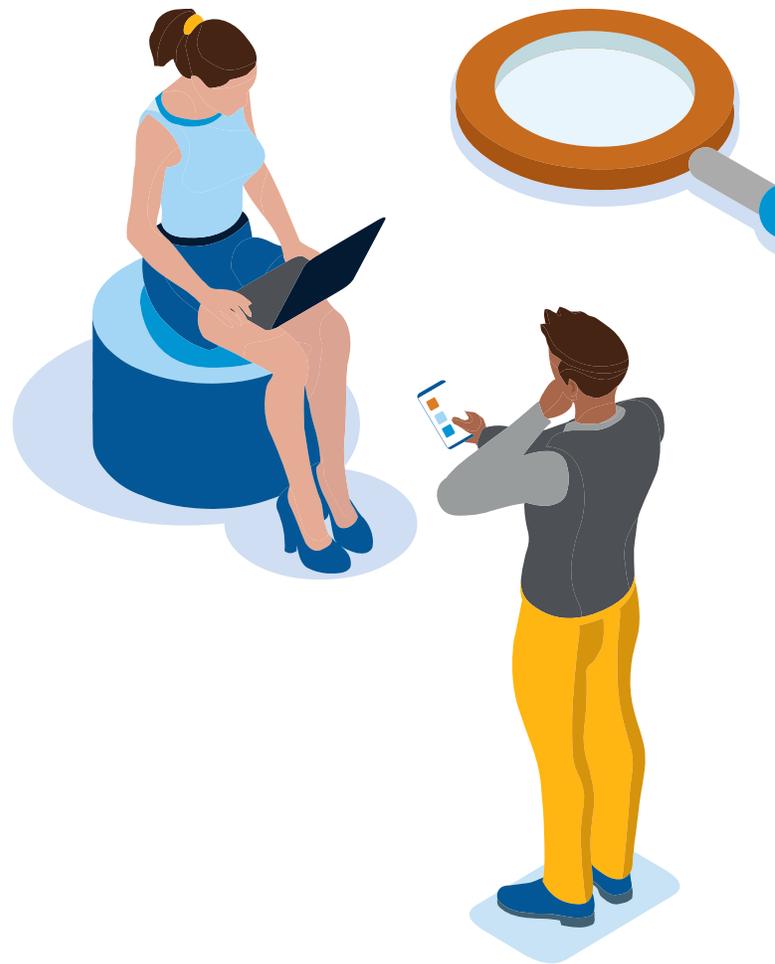
"TA can add value by aligning more closely to drive outcomes for the business strategies and priorities – bringing a more analytical approach to the business and taking the discussion away from tactical," notes Wong. *"But real-time data and market analytics are needed to inform the business on the best way to get work done in their market. The gaps at present are the ability to aggregate all that data into something meaningful and ensure it is constantly updated and used."*

For most industries, the hybrid models of remote work are here to stay, with the case for remote work stronger among highly skilled and educated workers. To engage with this talent, TA should pivot and adapt to a digitised hiring process; leverage data and analytics to form hiring decisions; and find complementary tools to support the candidate experience and overall engagement process.

3. Connecting Data to Positive Business Outcomes

Use of Data: Key Considerations

Initial Survey
Out of HR and TA leaders surveyed:
- 60% believe they could use data to deliver better insight
- 67% don't measure candidate experience
- 40% still do not use data to support where and when to hire

APAC Perspective
- **Multiple Data Points:** Include detailed checks on process efficiency, candidate and hiring manager satisfaction.
- **Quality-of-Hire Metrics:** A complete picture of performance requires integration of data from multiple sources.
- **Presentation Matters:** Data-driven intelligence clearly and visually conveys progress, gaps, or areas of action.

With access to advanced systems, data sources and analytics capabilities, TA can integrate insights, positively impacting processes and practices.

But an effective workforce strategy requires visibility into the employee talent supply, as well as contingent workers and their suppliers that can only be afforded by a strong workforce data and analytics function, actionable intelligence and prescriptive advice. That's why the third priority for organisations today is capitalising on data-driven intelligence.

The AGS Europe report found that six in 10 respondents believe they could use data to deliver better insight. In addition, 67% are not measuring the candidate experience, and over a third do not use data to help drive hiring decisions. Further, companies surveyed realise that data can drive improvements to long-term strategy, allowing predictions about where to hire, when to hire and how much of a specific skill set is needed. However, four in 10 respondents are not yet using data to support when and where they hire, and satisfaction levels are low. Even for those collecting data, fewer than four in 10 say they are extremely satisfied with how they are using data. Approximately 60% believe they could do better.

The world of data can be complex, but TA can begin improving their use of data by simply initiating a review process. By reviewing data alongside specific categories of time, quality and cost, it is possible to get a baseline view of performance and start to identify patterns and trends. How often organisations analyse data will be led by the amount of hiring they do. One way to begin is with a monthly analysis of the data set. From there, establish real-time reporting of hiring activity versus periodic dashboards of trends for deeper analysis.

> *"Data-driven talent acquisition occurs when business analytics lay the foundation for corporations' hiring strategies. The TA function could explore incorporating people analytics to build consistent data definitions, and use reporting and analytical tools and data integration capabilities to track activities and engagements," says Senior Director and Head of Strategic Growth APAC for AGS Gabriel Young.*

Further, while TA functions across APAC face challenges in getting insights from data, Young suggests the tactic of simply expanding what the TA function measures to include:

- Core HR, talent, learning, performance management and compensation systems for new-hire and high-performer demographic information and their influence on talent outcomes
- Skills inventories to identify skill surpluses and shortfalls within roles and geographies
- Candidate relationship management (CRM) systems for talent pool insights
- Social networks for passive candidate and employment brand strength insights
- Employee engagement surveys for evaluating new-hire satisfaction, retention risk and hiring manager success
- Operational and financial systems (e.g., sales, enterprise resource planning for recruiting costs and the impact of hiring activity on team, business unit or corporate results)
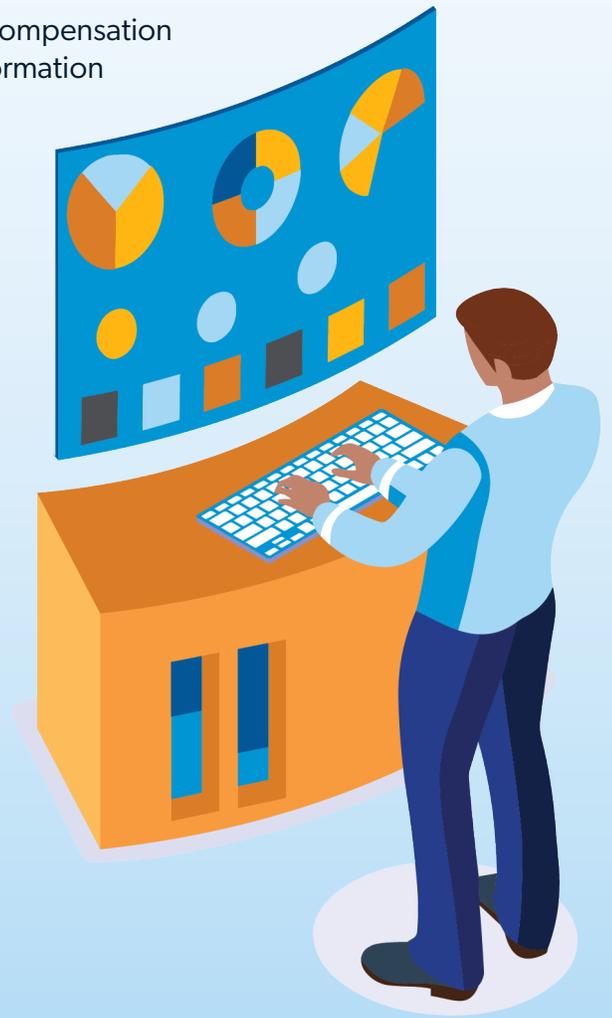
> *"Traditionally, leaders have looked at metrics such as time to hire, cost per hire and source channel with continuous improvements in those metrics being the goal," adds AGS APAC Executive Director Justin McAvoy. "Quality-of-hire metrics are also important to understand if the hires performed in their role and stayed with the organisation, leading to progression in their careers and adding value to the firm. The more traditional metrics are easier to measure as they are typically tracked via an applicant tracking system (ATS). Quality metrics are often harder to access from an ATS alone, and organisations will need to integrate data from other systems to get robust metrics."*

That said, progress is being made in better connecting TA and business outcomes. Some organisations may choose to evaluate their effectiveness by measuring all points of the recruitment process, and candidate and hiring manager satisfaction. Tying such measurements into an overall people strategy allows the TA team to add greater value to the business with quality data that tells a detailed story that can also reflect the current talent technology ecosystem.

> *"By ensuring that big data is presented in an easy-to-consume fashion, it allows for monitoring of current operations, and enables the decision-making process to address any identified issues or potential choke points on a tactical level," says Samuel Ho, a senior manager of technology and analytics at AGS.*

Ho adds that on a strategic level, the availability and application of empirical data provide credibility to a business case. "It allows us, and our stakeholders in turn, to demonstrate ROI of TA to the organisation," he says. "We recommend and adopt a single source of truth approach in servicing clients as it is critical to have full confidence in data that has been aggregated from multiple sources throughout today's talent acquisition lifecycle."

As organisations expand what data TA measures, having the right workforce solutions partner can be a good way to connect the data and deliver tangible improvements to the business, getting better quality, data-derived insights to hiring managers, functional leaders and the C-suite.

4. Understanding Technology and Digital Demands

Technology Demands: Key Considerations

Initial Survey

Out of HR and TA leaders surveyed:
- 70% are still not using best-in-class technology
- 53% say hiring technology needs improvement or causes problems
- 69% are considering new, innovative recruiting methods and technologies

APAC Perspective

Focus on the key drivers of success:
- **Goals:** Apply technology to free your TA team for value-added tasks.
- **Strategy:** Focus on the long-term roadmap instead of stop-gap solutions.
- **Capability:** Integration is not a barrier; plan for rapid change.
- **Human Element:** Improvements must connect to the experience of candidates, TA and other stakeholders.

Moving to the fourth priority, technology, consider that people must play a leading role in acquiring the skills and capabilities to deliver the work. The role of technology is to support those people. Data-based decisions on the best way to get work done are best enabled by technology that can capture, interpret and translate the vast amount of available workforce data. And, ensuring data accuracy, integrity and usefulness requires the right technology.

But there are shortfalls, as seen in the 2021 AGS Europe survey, where despite pandemic-induced changes to digital models, very few functions are enabled by best-in-class technology. The survey found that while dissatisfaction with hiring technology is dropping, 70% of HR and TA leaders are still not using best-in-class technology. Further, while news headlines highlight emerging and expanded uses, 53% of survey respondents say the technology they use for hiring either needs improving or is causing problems. In addition, integration challenges often stand in the way of efficiency and productivity goals.

Ultimately, organisations should view technology as a viable, long-term strategy instead of a stopgap measure during a pandemic. In fact, incorporating a technology roadmap into the organisations' TA strategy can improve the overall effectiveness of the function. And, choosing the right technology tools can create time to focus on more value-add tasks.

Whether considering HR technology, talent management solutions or TA systems, a smart digital foundation brings a great workforce strategy to life. The landscape is complex and ever-changing, but organisations that identify and address their priorities will benefit from workforce engagement capabilities that deliver lasting value – not only for the sake of data outcomes but for the people across TA and HR who drive them.

> *"Digital and technology disruption is not new, but as in the case of most transformations, it has always been less about technology and more about people," says Director of Human Capital Solutions at AGS India Shruthi Rao.*

She believes that while slow progress was being made even before the pandemic, the crisis created a platform to explore faster, more innovative and less expensive ways to accomplish many outcomes.

> *"We will continue to see evolution and innovation, which has cascading effects on the demand for developing new age skill sets. With more and more conversation on the future of work, we will need to reimagine the world of work holistically across both workplace and workforce capabilities," says Rao.*

It's also important for organisations to understand that technology can be an efficiency and productivity driver rather than a "blocker" for the TA/HR function. And integrations are getting easier.
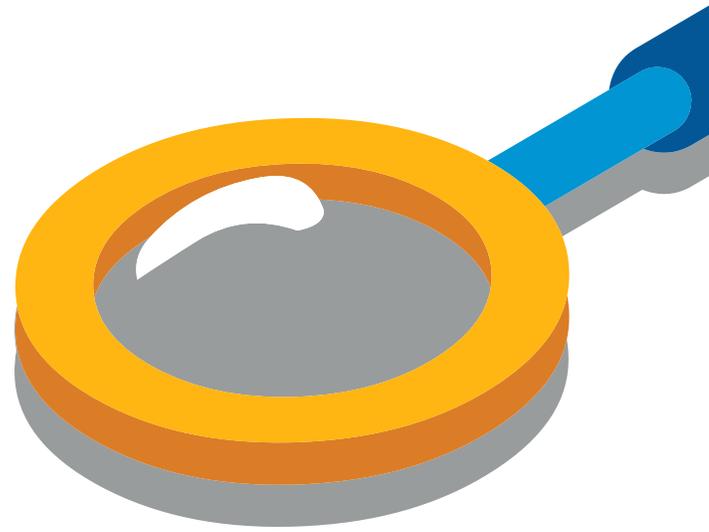
> *"Considering any integrations between applications today has less of a stigma compared to five years ago, when such initiatives were deprioritised due to cost and time/labour investment considerations, particularly for limited-scope technologies that are not enterprise-wide," says AGS' Ho. "We see more partners in the talent acquisition technology space offering APIs and connectors for their products as part of their standard offering today, and not as an add-on. Additionally, the fast evolution of robotic process automation platforms provides a solution to an integration when it is not possible natively."*

According to Ho, the automated data exchange between systems allows for a positive user experience, from candidates and hiring managers to interviewers and TA. For example, candidates can secure an interview in minutes rather than hours by using a self-booking tool. Industry experts project zero slowdowns in technology's continued evolution and impact on all stages of hiring, meaning TA's appetite for change needs to stay strong.

Despite some exceptions, the 2021 AGS Europe survey indicates TA's general interest to improve their technology use. Of those surveyed, 69% are either planning to investigate new and innovative recruiting methods or are already doing so, with technology a likely part of the plan.

And as Rao cautions, using technology should not take away from the human element of hiring. Digital automation and digital solutions are paramount to boosting engagement and nurturing strategy. However, it takes the team and a strategic TA approach to ensure a personalised experience for everyone.

5. Fostering Greater Connection Through Talent Communities

Talent Communities: Key Considerations

Initial Survey
Out of HR and TA leaders surveyed:
- 51% manage, nurture or engage a talent community, a jump just over one-third the prior year

APAC Perspective
Highlights of effective communities:
- **Two-Way Engagement:** Focus on real member interaction, not only on broadcasting company information.
- **Company Participation:** Conversations should come from across the business, not just TA.
- **Talent Connection:** Aim to attract and include employees and prospective talent beyond immediate hiring or pipeline needs.
- **Showcase Your People:** Inclusiveness matters. Give the people involved a voice to share their perspectives.

This leads to the fifth priority for TA: fostering connection and community. Whether engaging with talent digitally to promote work opportunities or provide training, a proactive approach is necessary. As seen in the AGS Europe report, 51% of survey respondents state their organisations manage, nurture and engage a defined talent community to support hiring needs – up from 37% in the prior year.

According to AGS experts, increased use of digital talent engagement is a trend in APAC, too. In the past, talent communities were mostly one-directional, where the company broadcasted messages to multiple people at the same time. Today, digital forums and social media mean communication is no longer one-sided, and there are options for sophisticated engagements between talent and companies.

> *"The current generation communicates with smart devices, belongs to various virtual interest groups and has expectations for instant gratification, so an interactive, digitised talent community serves this purpose very well," says Senior Consultant of AGS China Loy Tong Chia. "In today's world, an effective talent community must support strategic sourcing and pipelining while allowing companies to create a strong brand in the community. It also facilitates targeted messaging and customised content to reach specific profiles within the community."*

Because a talent community is fluid, it requires constant engagement and interaction. Therefore, organizations should provide relevant information, detail and content to specific and targeted talent segments within the community. For organisations that haven't defined their critical talent personas or how to engage them, fostering a community could help build a better understanding of the talent landscape. It could also help sustain connections with passive candidates, which many function heads struggle with as more work goes digital and remote.

So, what are some viable tactics for nurturing a talent community and standing out as an employer of choice? Here are some suggestions:

- Segment communities by skills to ensure optimal connections and targeting.
- Solicit candidates' participation with a regular cadence.
- Engage the business – and not just TA – to drive conversations.
- Provide a facilitator to manage the dialogue.
- Review comments shared and return feedback with follow-up actions.
- Expand beyond job opportunities, broadening messages to include the organisation's mission and vision to promote the employer brand.

"In today's world, talent communities matter, but we should also look beyond the definitions as today's talent are no longer defined in the most traditional sense," adds AGS China General Manager Lily Ye. "Today's talent are not defined or limited by industries and markets, and they may fall through the gaps if companies rely on the conventional definition to access them."

Indeed, online communities are just one piece of the puzzle in a world where competition for workers is stiff, requiring companies to have their own unique selling point to attract them.

"Gone are the days where people are attracted to just career development and progression," adds Ye. "Todays' workers care about meaning and value. They want a meaningful employee experience and dedicated resources to support their mental well-being. The value proposition of a company interests them more than ever. Inclusive language engages talent, and companies should focus on new and creative ways to showcase their value and unique selling points instead of relying on conventional methods."

There's no easy way around it: the battle for talent will remain fierce, and organisations have to meet workers' growing list of expectations to deliver a great experience. Ending the old ways of doing business provides a way forward.

The Wrap Up: Partnering for Success

The COVID-19 pandemic caused indelible changes to the labour market and the world of work. Over the past few years, AGS has seen a profound effect on all industries it supports, from hospitality and healthcare to manufacturing, financial services and everything in between. As organisations continue to lift hiring freezes, we've seen interest shift from enterprise solutions to project-based services that address a part of the business (i.e., sourcing, back-office administration, etc.) or forecasted hiring spikes. AGS has also seen an increased need for companies to embrace digital transformation and technology enablement. We expect these trends to continue.

So, what does this mean for talent acquisition? It means never stop evolving. It's time to turn short-term fixes from the pandemic into long-term transformative value.

> *"The pandemic has taught us that change is constant, and we can never look at the world the same way again," says Wong. "The makeup of the workforce has changed, and if companies insist on talent in-country, they need to look at reskilling or upskilling people, not importing it as they have done in the past. People's expectations and mindsets are different from pre-pandemic days. More than ever, talent acquisition teams need to ensure they are enabling the business with an approach that is designed around business strategy, bringing a diversity of thought and talent into the workplace."*

Indeed, the TA function pivoted quickly and successfully to pandemic-catalysed changes in the structures of work, but this is no time to rest. From utilising data and implementing technology to fostering talent communities and building flexibility in where and how work gets done, there is significant room for improvement in how a strategic TA function partners with the business.

This appetite for change and the ability to see a route forward will be key, and the TA roadmap should be updated and strategically aligned to the changing needs of the business. If you don't have a mindset for continuous improvement, your processes and user experience will stagnate as competitors figure out better ways of engaging the same talent you seek.

Many countries across APAC are in "stop-start" mode. Nevertheless, the movement of people has increased dramatically, driven by people desiring change, better ways of working and expanded benefits, such as flexibility in working hours, remote work and more attention to mental well-being. With these priorities in mind – and with a best-in-class workforce solutions expert like AGS next to them – TA professionals will be well-positioned to further cement themselves as strategic partners to the business.

Allegis Global Solutions (AGS), an Allegis Group company, is the leader in global workforce solutions. We have reimagined the human work experience. Through decades of industry experience, and with services across 100+ countries, we understand what it takes to consult, design and build successful workforce management solutions regardless of the workforce category.

Whether our customers require an MSP, RPO, Services Procurement (SOW), freelance solutions or a combination of services either regionally or globally, AGS has the experience, state-of-the-art technology and sustained investments in innovation to ensure your workforce solutions will make your company better.

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