

HR professionals provide solutions across all sectors

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Talent management has been identified by executives worldwide as the top issue facing organizations for the foreseeable future, according to a new global study on future human resource trends.

The report, *Creating People Advantage: How to Address HR Challenges Worldwide Through 2015*, identified four key human resource issues in Canada: 1) managing talent, 2) improving leadership, 3) demographic shortages and 4) managing work-life balance.

The study was conducted by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), the World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA) and the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations (CCHRA), and it surveyed more than 4,700 executives in 83 countries.

Experts in the field agree that even though there are some differences, the non-profit, private and public sectors across Canada are all faced with the human resource challenges identified by the study.

In the end, people are people and the dynamic of people issues are similar for every organization and they can all benefit from the value added of HR professionals, they say.

Challenges facing each sector across Canada:

In Canada, when it comes to attracting, retaining and developing people, the private sector is doing a better job than the non-profit and public sector, because they are not afraid to invest, says Eldon Emerson, CHRP, Director of Management, Development and Leadership Initiatives at the Muttart Foundation, an Edmonton-based organization that supports Canadian charities, primarily in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

With over 25 years of extensive human resources experience in all three sectors, Mr. Emerson says the public sector is catching up to the private sector, but many non-profit organizations have a harder time. For five years, in his previous position as Manager of the Muttart Foundation's Human Resources Cluster Project, Mr. Emerson provided consulting, educational and advisory services to six Edmonton-based social service charities, helping them address their human resource needs and issues.

In general, "The dominating feature on the landscape of all these sectors right now is finding really good, talented people," he says.

Mr. Emerson describes a few main reasons for this challenge: Western Canada is growing far more rapidly than expected and the changing demographics are causing a gap because of the high number of retirements. Another contributing factor could be the changing work values among younger generations of workers for whom loyalty to employers is often replaced by other priorities, such as work-life balance or a desire to build one's career and portfolio.

Despite all the similarities when it comes to human resource challenges, there are some differences from sector to sector across Canada.

Non-Profit

Many non-profit organizations are faced with the challenges of developing people because their funding is generally time-limited or project based, says Mr. Emerson. It's hard to think about investing in people for more than one year when the funding is only for one year.

Veronica Utton, CHRP, Director of Human Resources at UNICEF Canada, in Toronto, says the non-profit sector faces many similar challenges as other sectors.

"Pay is always going to be an issue no matter how poor or rich an organization is," says Ms. Utton. One difference in the non-profit sector is that pay is not necessarily the most important thing to employees. People seek employment in the non-profit sector because they have an intrinsic drive – feeling satisfied is important.

"They are there for a cause," says Ms. Utton. "For the most part, there is a great sense of pride and satisfaction."

Private

Despite being ahead in developing people, says Mr. Emerson, the private sector still faces many challenges when it comes to human resources.

Susan Borrows, CHRP, is the Assistant Vice President of Human Resources at Alberta Central, a private central banking facility, service bureau and trade association for the credit union system of Alberta. She says some critical human resources challenges in the private sector are leadership development and talent management. But like everyone else, recruitment and retention are the top ranked issues, especially in Alberta.

All the way on the other side of the country, the challenges are slightly different. Alex Mielnik, CHRP, the Director of Human Resources at CTV Television (Atlantic), says they face similar human resource challenges as everyone else, such as an aging workforce, but one difference is that Atlantic-based organizations often do not offer the same pay to employees as those in large urban centers, such as Toronto.

But after being in the human resources field for 19 years in Nova Scotia, Mr. Mielnik says organizations in the Atlantic Provinces have an advantage because pay is not necessarily an issue. The advantages of living in the "Canada's ocean playground" is often a trade-off against higher pay.

Public

Cynthia Binnington, Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources – Civilian) at the Department of National Defence and the Chair of the federal government's Human Resources Council, says the main problem the public sector faces is the lack of awareness of the great opportunities that it can offer new professionals.

"Many Canadians don't have any sense of the range of opportunities in the public service," says Ms. Binnington.

Some reasons behind this issue may be because through the 90s, there was a period of downsizing where the public sector was not doing a lot of hiring; their presence was not visible.

Caroline Dunn, Senior Director, Human Resources Operations with the department of Finance, points out another challenge faced within the public sector: she

says the public sector often does not have as much flexibility as the private sector when it comes to salary, because wages are negotiated with the Unions, and must be abide by.

Even though salary flexibility is limited, Ms. Dunn says the other benefits offered within the public sector should be advertised more to attract and retain talent because they are often great, full compensation packages. It is more than just the based salary, she says, it's about the total compensation value.

Ms. Bennington says the public sector is working hard to attract and retain talent. "The Clerk of the Privy Council has taken a strong leadership role on human resource issues," says Ms. Binnington. "Making certain that we close the gap that has resulted by virtue of the slowed hiring practices in the mid 90s, and really developing a strong public service."

Added value of HR professionals:

Large or small, non-profit, private or public, it is evident that every organization can benefit from HR professionals to help them grow.

"Better human resource management equals a more effective organization," says Mr. Emerson.

"Managers spend an enormous time solving people issues where internal HR support is non existent," says Mr. Emerson. He also mentions that HR professionals can help organizations manage their people challenges more effectively because "they understand".

"Senior management will look to HR professionals to play an increasingly important part in helping address these issues," says Lynn Palmer, CHRP, CEO of the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations. "As attracting and keeping talent become more critical to all organizations, it will be necessary to involve HR professionals at the executive table."

As the human resources profession continues to evolve, HR professionals such as Certified Human Resource Professionals (CHRPs) will increasingly become more vital to organizations.

"The national standards leading to the CHRP designation – the acquired knowledge and skills which cover a wide range of professional capabilities – will prepare HR professionals to support all organizations in tackling their people challenges," says Ms. Palmer. "Organizations of all sectors – public, private, or non-profit – will benefit."