

Now Trending

Technology will continue to develop and play a large role in workforce management in Asia

By Belinda Sharr

Technology and HR process automation are constantly growing and improving across the globe, and this is a main trend that HR executives based in Asia need to be looking at for 2017 and beyond. The impact of tech on workforce management is great— as nearly every type of work-related function is moving to digital—and HR teams have to keep up.

According to Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends 2016, fast-moving global markets and digital disruptions are forcing companies to innovate rapidly. It seems like every day, there is a new product or procedure that can assist HR in recruiting, retaining, and managing employees effectively. HR practitioners are taking note of these new tech trends and using them to improve their business offerings. Wendy Tan, founding partner of Flame Centre, says that thanks to the numerous tech advances of the last few years, she is using more data-driven technology in the HR field than ever before.

"I use social media to engage the market," she says. "We use more technology in our solutions—[like] apps, gamification, mobile learning. Our clients are also moving in the same direction."

Social media is here to stay, and knowing how to leverage it in day-to-day operations can mean a more engaged workforce and a better bottom line. Pip Eastman, managing director for ASEAN at Korn Ferry Futurestep, notes that in Asia, and specifically in China, recruiting increasingly combines mobile and social aspects.

"The concept of social recruitment will reach a new level in 2017 as companies look to new mobile apps to source and secure talent," she says. Social platforms like Tinder will pave the way for similar recruitment channels where both candidates and employers can swipe left or right for desired jobs or candidates. "Due to the rise of social recruitment, usage of outdated recruitment platforms, such as job boards, will continue to decrease in 2017," she says.

The use of social media as an engagement tool is also becoming more mainstream. Three out of four internet users in the APAC region are active users of social media, and 83 per cent of Asia-Pacific social media users are on mobile, finds to Nicole Cook, managing director of Australia and New Zealand for PeopleScout APAC.

"The rise and evolution of WeChat is a perfect example of this growth," she says. The free, cross-platform instant messaging application has more than 700 million active users, and in April 2016, it launched a version called Enterprise We Chat that is designed for work purposes and company

communications. The programme lets businesses and their employees keep track of annual leave days, expenses, and reimbursements, and workers can ask for time off or even clock in.

Technology is playing a part in industry development areas as well. Eastman notes three large areas that demand attention:

- The rise of the gig economy. There has been an ongoing move towards a freelance economy, and workers are increasingly seeking diversity and flexibility, Eastman says. As it continues to rise, technology is enabling more people to work from anywhere. There is, and will be, a rapid increase in this type of workforce.
- Culture as the key to retaining employees and enhancing business performance. “Today’s employees want to work for companies they believe in, both from a vision and development perspective,” Eastman says. A tech-savvy culture only helps retention, as tech-minded companies are seen as being on the cutting edge. Organisations also need to focus on building an employer brand that clearly communicates and articulates their vision and purpose and helps candidates understand the culture and motivations within their workplace.
- Embrace diversity to plug the gaps. With widening skills gaps and HR having a harder time finding talent today, there is a critical need for organisations to broaden their approach to sourcing and hiring talent. Technology can help in this area as well. “The emphasis on casting the net wider is key,” Eastman says. “If we have a skills gap, how do we encourage workers to return to the workforce that may not fit the norm of the full-time employee—can we look at flexible working hours, job sharing, remote working, and freelancers to fill this gap?” Organisations also need to make diversity and inclusion a critical priority, as they could miss out on talent that doesn’t fit traditional organisational work practices.

There is a larger acceptance of automation in the APAC region today, says Sarah Wong, managing director of RPO for Asia Pacific at Allegis Global Solutions. Automation helps HR teams stay organised—managing an entire workforce requires a lot of manpower and paperwork, and automation makes managing seamless and easy by offering automatic documentation and processes in one place.

“Automation is creeping in to all aspects of sourcing and engaging potential candidates,” says Wong. “The ability to effectively segment and target the right candidate is being built into all modern platforms.” HR executives need to ask themselves how they can evaluate and plan for the next wave of Automation and its impact on the workforce, so that they can anticipate future business practices rather than having to react to the automation developments, Wong notes.

Merging talent data from the pre- and post-recruitment process with business process information also helps companies predict how to access talent based on the use of analytical tools and algorithms. “For clients that have been able to capture relevant HR metrics, we are seeing a trend in tying this data to financial results, by being able to predict desired outcomes and modifying processes to get the results they need,” Cook says.

In the past year, new technology has gone from concept to reality. Take, for example, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the HR space. “AI is only beginning to take off in our industry, but I believe there will be uses of AI within HR disciplines in APAC within the next six to nine months,” Cook predicts.

AI gathers data and offers results more efficiently than a human can. The technology is designed to analyse information, identifying patterns and variations that are too intricate or time-consuming to be reached through a manual process. One example is IBM’s AI product Watson, notes Tan. The question-answering computer system allows a company to interpret all of its data, grow subject matter expertise, utilise dialog-based chatbots, and it provides workplace recommendations based on evidence collected to ensure more effective business results.

In Asia, other engagement technologies like gamification—which is applying game elements to other processes—also serve as an assessment tool by allowing managers to tie responses to results. In order to use gamification effectively, HR teams must first pick the right game platform and then identify their goals, understand their users, and determine how to enact the results based on the information gleaned, according to a case study by GamEffective.

Advancements in these assessment and strategic sourcing tools are due to the increase of personal data that is now in the public domain, according to Cook. HR teams need to stay one step ahead of these trends to be able to offer innovative solutions that drive continuous improvement.

Another key trend that will carry through 2017 is the creation of “true intelligence,” according to Eastman.

“Big data has the risk of being too big, too cumbersome, too fragmented,” she says. “To help simplify and get the most out of data, many clients today are moving to one integrated platform for all their HR needs: profile design, sourcing, tracking, interviewing, assessment, on-boarding, employee development, and benefits.” These single platforms will provide a centralised, holistic view of all aspects of HR and management.

Cook agrees that when it comes to workforce management, the easier the better. “Many of our clients are going through a transformation to streamline HR processes, using integrated technology platforms to better engage and retain their employees,” she says.

So how can HR executives recognise and meet the needs these tech trends create? Wong advises a few strategies that make the most of the extensive APAC HR network and provide expertise in navigating the 2017 landscape:

- Partnerships with third parties, advisory firms, and HT executive networks;
- Hiring people from outside the HR industry to gain new capability and thought processes and encouraging the business to do the same; and
- Outsourcing elements such as RPO, MSP, data analytics, user experience platforms, workforce planning, branding, and diversity to experts in the field.

HR teams need to become more innovative as a direct response to the changing world of work. Rapid advancements in technology continue to help HR pioneer new ways to manage and engage their workforce. The key takeaway is that in 2017, HR leaders should already be looking towards 2018 to stay ahead of the tech game. If they don't, there will be a cost: "If HR leaders haven't started to innovate their HR function and instead remain caught in old processes, they will eventually lose out on top talent," Cook says.