

Retention awareness needs to be part of the company DNA



Ian Creamer, HR Director for EMEA at Informatica, a provider of enterprise data integration software, believes awareness of retention issues needs to be part of a company's DNA.

More than 2,600 companies worldwide use Informatica products to manage their enterprise data more efficiently, reducing complexity and ensuring consistency. It employs around 1,000 people in the EMEA region.

Ian is responsible for recruitment, talent management and retention. One of the few HR professionals interviewed for this series given a specific remit for retention, he still believes it should be viewed as integral to the HR process.

Why does he think other companies don't give as much focus to retention as they do to recruitment for example?

"Probably because there is a less obvious and in-your-face cost to it," he answers. "It's often seen as something that companies don't have control over because the biggest bulk of the cost is hidden."

"Recruitment is fairly easy – you know you can negotiate with recruitment companies for instance; you can hire internally. It's a simple black and white cost."

"Training is also something that's fairly easy to budget, although the benefits aren't seen as immediately."


Taking control of retention

By highlighting retention as part of the HR process, Informatica have taken control of the issue.

"There are some external factors that influence it," admits Ian, "but we've taken steps to really tackle our turnover in Informatica, and it's lowered significantly over the last six to nine months."

TalentDrain's employee survey, Talent Pulse, was used to find out what was important to the workforce. But importantly it was the way in which this was followed up that has made the difference.

The survey showed that individual development and personal growth was the biggest issue for most people.



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“It’s very easy to just see money or cash incentives as the way to keep those employees who are doing a great job. Helping employees to develop new skills which benefit them themselves and the organisation could easily get overlooked and if you’re not careful, people become stagnant.”

Ian concedes that mechanisms for career progression weren’t as clearly defined as in larger organisations such as IBM or Microsoft. Developing people is now much more of a priority.

“We’ve put a huge focus on individual development and growth,” explains Ian. *“As well as learning and development mechanisms, such as new career progression initiatives, we have improved training for both our managers and for our individual contributors.”*

Informatica invests a large proportion of its expenditure in its R&D team. Ian believes it is important to keep employees excited about the technology as well as about the company itself.

“It’s about rotating people, giving people time to go away and focus on new technologies that are coming through and spreading that knowledge throughout the team,” he asserts.


“Remuneration is always an important issue. Having listened to our employees, we’ve been very up front in our approach to how we pay people. Pay is now more closely related to performance. And, of course, we make sure that our salaries are as competitive as possible.”

Counting the cost of attrition

As HR Director for a company so dependent on the knowledge and skills of its workforce, Ian acknowledges the huge impact attrition can have on an organisation.

He points out that the impact is several-fold: *“Losing people from our sales team damages customer relationships and has a direct impact on the revenue we are able to generate.”*

“Losing people from the R&D team can slow product development down, with the potential to endanger launch dates. Software companies are all about people: people who have the knowledge and understanding of how our products work. When people leave, their knowledge can be lost to the company forever. If you lose a proportion of that each year, it just makes it incredibly difficult to compete in what is a fairly aggressive marketplace.”



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HR and line managers need to work together. Ian feels that retention can be improved by HR and line managers working better together and by both sides understanding that it's a shared burden.

"There is a temptation to think, mainly with some line managers but also within some HR teams, that retention is something you take out of a box. It's a series of initiatives you get off a shelf every so often and that will help retention for the next six months. Then you put it away again rather than it being an every day approach."

"This is something we have addressed with improvements to management training which includes coaching in retention and recruitment. A great deal of emphasis is placed on getting it right at the recruitment stage."

Focussing on development

Informatica places a strong emphasis on learning and individual development to form the cornerstone of its retention strategy. Ian also recognises that even people who stay in the same job can grow as well as those seeking to move upwards in the organisation.

"We need to think about how we can help people to grow; how we can keep people. You have to acknowledge that you can't have zero turnover, indeed in some cases, a certain level of turnover can be good for the company" he concedes. "But we do try to identify our best people and make sure we look after them properly. We need to talk to our people in the right way each day and consistently give them recognition for things rather than taking a big bang approach every six months."

Internal communication will have a greater role in building a team spirit and bolstering morale. The company has a global meeting for all employees quarterly and a cornerstone of the meeting is a celebration of employee achievements and successes.

"The main focus for us is the shared responsibility between HR and the line," concludes Ian, "and making sure that retention is an everyday thread of what we do rather than a series of initiatives."

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