



NGS GLOBAL

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY PRACTICE

Mapping Executive Talent Requirements for an Uncertain Future

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"The best way to predict the future is to create it."

- Abraham Lincoln

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In Abraham Lincoln's time, disruptive technologies certainly existed - Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, invented shortly after Lincoln's death, is one such example - but major technological changes obviously cycled far less rapidly back then than they do today. While Bell's fixed-line telephone had a nice 120 year run of dominance before cellular telephones entered the marketplace, few tech companies today can enjoy such time resting on their laurels in a world where product development cycles typically run a lot closer to 120 days.

So how do forward-thinking tech companies manage their executive leadership challenges in an environment where change is constant and its impact can render entire product lines (and their attendant revenue streams) worthless almost overnight? In an effort to provide you with valuable information about how some leading companies are addressing many of the same challenges that your organization might be confronted with, either now or in the future, we have collected input on some key issues currently affecting human capital management in tech companies around the world from the members of the NGS Global Advanced Technology Practice.

The starting point for this dialogue lies in the common trends that our clients in the hi-tech world are facing when it comes to technological disruption and its impact on human capital management. Naturally, the specific sources of disruptive technological change vary from sector to sector, but we do see some common trends and key hot-button issues that are in play to varying degrees across different sectors of the tech markets.

“One of the big areas of disruption that we see, particularly in the enterprise software space, is the move to cloud computing and the ‘Software as a Service’ (SaaS) model,” notes Lee Brantingham, Managing Partner of NGS Global serving Greater China. “Another area of growing concern is around security. With the recent, highly-publicized security breaches at Target, Sony and Ashley Madison, we are now hearing from CEOs and board members who are thinking much more urgently about their security-related challenges than they have in the past. These companies are looking at this issue in a new light and seeking senior-level executives who can approach these challenges holistically and make intelligent, cost-effective investments to ensure that their companies are not featured in the wrong kinds of headlines.”

These days, bringing new technologies to market requires an increasingly wide range of core business skills combined with deep subject matter knowledge within specific vertical markets or fields of technical expertise. With the ongoing maturation of the internet from both a marketing and business resource standpoint, never before have so many different companies and individuals had the opportunity to enter the fray with innovative new ideas. In the not-too-distant future we will see everything from self-driven cars to expedited package delivery services via drone aircraft. The companies that intend to lead the charge with these new technologies will face a unique set of challenges with regard to human capital management.

SHIFTING REQUIREMENTS FOR CHANGING TIMES...

The key requirements here are foresight, the ability to deal with ambiguity and the capacity to act with agility. These attributes are some of the fundamental requirements for the development of forward-thinking market positioning strategies and the ability to implement change-adaptive business plans while continuing to operate a successful enterprise. This in turn leads to a rethinking of established business models and, at times, acquisition of other companies or technologies when necessary. Oftentimes this entails some restructuring of the traditional organization chart to include new positions designed to help the company foresee, adapt to and take advantage of various changes in the business environment.

Of course, the dynamics of change differ from place to place around the globe. Usage of mobile search and location-based consumer services in South Korea, for example, significantly outpaces such usage in other areas of the world, which has major implications for the local marketing strategies of hi-tech product manufacturers doing business on a global scale. We typically find that decentralized companies with an orientation towards diversity in the executive suite and an understanding of the future potential of various market trends and early-stage technologies are better able to identify and respond to key market shifts and technological changes on a local/regional level.

“Enterprises are increasingly appointing ‘Chief Digital Officers’ to focus on the development of their consumer-focused digital presence,” says Dr. Marianne Broadbent of NGS Global, Australia. “These CDOs might have a marketing or a technology focus, and often a combination of both. The CDO role might be an additional role alongside the CIO, or it might even subsume the CIO function altogether. This is a relatively new seat at the executive table that never existed in the past, and it carries with it a very wide range of prerequisite skills and professional experience.” A CDO must be convincing and have the gravitas to drive promising new developments throughout the enterprise. He or she should also be highly experienced in change management, as this new role inherently requires deep knowledge of transformational leadership.

So as companies redraw their org charts to make room for new forward-thinking positions in the C-suite, what are they doing to groom internal talent to eventually fill those new roles? And what are these companies doing to retain their top performers and instill an overall culture that encourages everyone to keep a sharp eye on the horizon for emerging trends that have the potential to significantly impact future business?

WHAT ARE THE COMMON TRENDS?

One thing we hear from our tech clients is that they strongly encourage their best and brightest employees to spend time outside of the company participating in technical working groups, standards development committees, think tanks, etc. This inevitably helps those individuals expand their professional networks, which keeps them informed of relevant news and information. With their fingers on the pulse of the market through these “extra-curricular” professional activities, these star players help their companies remain competitive by making more informed decisions about where the market is heading so that they can truly “skate to where the puck is heading” as one unified team.

Another common theme we hear is an emphasis on training, coaching and mentoring that provides promising employees with direct access to more seasoned thought leaders and technical/market visionaries within their companies. And an ongoing rotation of high performers across technology domains and into business unit or operational functions also helps to better solve multifaceted technology problems. Dr. Udo Maier, of NGS Global in Munich, Germany points to these and a number of other programs, activities and policies that leading tech companies are utilizing to develop their talent and retain key personnel. A sense of freedom within the workplace is one prime example of this.

“Freedom over how, where and when work is completed,” is a key motivator, says Maier, citing companies like Google—which ranked number one for the sixth time on Fortune 100’s list of best companies to work for in 2015—as a case study for building a sense of freedom into an extremely busy workload. This helps Google keep their top performers from suffering premature burnout and supports a healthy work-life balance among their staff as a whole; a prescription for enhanced organizational morale that many companies might learn from.

Another issue that our clients report are the challenges associated with modifying their established incentive-based compensation plans during times of strategic business change. When a company’s sales objectives suddenly shift to reflect changes in marketing strategy, comp plans can get out of alignment quickly. This is a critical issue that must be taken into clear account during times of business focus transformation.

According to Brantingham, “We hear from some of our clients that their largest challenges have less to do with addressing the ongoing technological shifts and more to do with changing their existing incentive programs to drive desired behavior throughout their organizations. In the end, those companies that not only master the innovation challenge but also overcome legacy issues related to ongoing realignment of business objectives are the companies that put themselves in the best position to win.”

Ironically, the very same thing that makes life in the high-tech business world so alluring—the theoretical ability to strike it rich overnight with a new technology that changes the world - is also what makes this industry so perilous to every established company that has something to protect. But as we have outlined herein, our clients are acutely aware of this challenge and they aggressively employ a wide variety of strategies and tactics to accomplish their goals.

If your company needs help preparing for an uncertain future, the NGS Global Advanced Technology Practice is here to provide the support you need. We hope you enjoyed this article and we welcome your feedback.

ABOUT NGS GLOBAL

With offices across the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa, NGS Global provides the extensive resources of major global executive search firms along with high-touch service, accelerated completion cycles and superior candidate access made possible by a mid-sized platform without external shareholders. Through our commitment to industry expertise, cultural knowledge and partner-led search execution, we deliver exceptional value to our clients.

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DAVID NOSAL

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David Nosal is Chairman at NGS Global and a member of the firm’s Global Operating Committee. He founded NGS Global’s predecessor firm in the Americas, Nosal Partners, in 2005.

His problem-solving approach and commitment to quality and service are

recognized assets in the industry, as evidenced by his substantial repeat business.

Mr. Nosal was previously with other well-known international recruitment firms, where he held several high-level positions and managed regions across the United States such as San Francisco, Seattle, Denver, Chicago, and Minneapolis. His career also includes tenure as a consultant with the American Consulting Association in Chicago and Abbott Laboratories.



MARIANNE BROADBENT

Managing Partner
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Marianne Broadbent is Managing Partner, South East Asia at NGS Global—Asia, based in Australia. She has been working in the leadership, management and strategy areas for over 20 years. She was previously Senior Partner in EWK International, a business that recently integrated with NGS Global.

Dr. Broadbent’s background includes both executive roles and top level Business School leadership. She previously served in two global senior executive roles at a leading information technology research and advice organization and is a widely published author. Two of her books are Harvard Business School Press best sellers. She is also a sought after speaker and facilitator.



LEE BRANTINGHAM

Managing Partner and Advanced Technology Practice Leader, NGS Global, Asia

Lee Brantingham is Managing Partner, Greater China at NGS Global—Asia. He’s spent the past 24 years based in Asia (Shanghai, Taipei and Hong Kong) and has conducted search assignments across the region.

His background and experience placing high-level candidates for some of Asia’s most well-known firms in digital media, internet search, auctions, and gaming has served our clients well.

Mr. Brantingham’s strength lies in understanding core business issues, regional nuance and advocating on client’s behalf to attract the highest caliber, most suitable leaders.



UDO MAIER

Managing Partner
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Dr. Udo Maier is Managing Partner at NGS Global. He co- founded NGS Global’s operations in Europe.

Dr. Maier specializes in the recruitment of senior executives in the management consulting, IT consulting and advanced technology industries. His areas of focus

include the recruitment of senior executives to develop and lead digital and service companies.

Dr. Maier spent his early career as a strategy consultant for a leading international management consultancy and was subsequently Managing Director at another firm. Before establishing the European operations of NGS Global in 2014, he was Managing Partner at GEMINI Executive Search.



TERRY VEITCH

Managing Partner, NGS Global

Terry Veitch is Managing Partner for the greater Africa region. With over 25 years of experience in the executive search industry, he conducts senior-level searches across a wide variety of areas, with an emphasis on financial services, information communications and technology (ICT), consumer goods, pharmaceutical and manufacturing

sectors. Mr. Veitch has partnered with companies throughout Africa, Europe, Asia and the United States.

Mr. Veitch was previously a managing partner in Africa at another executive search firm, which acquired an executive search firm he founded in 2002. Earlier in his career, Mr. Veitch founded another thriving executive search firm and sold it to another company.