



HOW TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN THE RIGHT TALENT TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS INTERNATIONALLY

A GUIDE FOR ASIAN COMPANIES

**ROBERT WALTERS IS A SPECIALIST
PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT
CONSULTANCY, WORKING WITH
BUSINESSES OF ALL SIZES AS A
TRUSTED RECRUITMENT PARTNER.**

CONTENTS

 About Robert Walters	01	 Part 3 - Motivate and retain your international talent	13
 Introduction	02	 Conclusion	20
 Part 1 - Going global: the Asian business perspective	03	 Contact us	21
 Part 2 - Acquisition strategies to attract international talent	06		



ABOUT ROBERT WALTERS



“ FOR OVER 30 YEARS,
BUSINESSES ACROSS THE GLOBE
HAVE RELIED ON US TO FIND
THE VERY BEST SPECIALIST
PROFESSIONALS. ”

ROBERT WALTERS

Our story begins in 1985 when the Group opened its first office in central London. Since then we have developed into a global specialist professional recruitment group, operating in a diverse range of markets worldwide.

For over 30 years, businesses across the globe have relied on us to find the very best specialist professionals, talented executives have trusted us to help build their careers, and companies have outsourced their recruitment processes to us. It's a success story we're proud of and one that's built on the strength and passion of our people.

As the business continues to expand, we operate with the same commitment to service and quality. Every candidate is treated as an individual with a focus on advising and consulting. It means we continually have the best candidates on the market to offer you.

Although our reach is global we remain committed to hiring local talent so our people have a deep understanding of the local market and culture. It's what makes us unique and helps us remain a trusted recruitment partner of the world's leading firms.



INTRODUCTION

ASIAN COMPANIES ARE GROWING IN INTERNATIONAL STATUS AND CHANGING THE GLOBAL BUSINESS LANDSCAPE. IN FACT, THE REGION IS HOME TO MORE GLOBAL GIANTS THAN ANY OTHER CONTINENT. IN THE LATEST GLOBAL FORTUNE 500 LIST, 40% OF THE COMPANIES NAMED (197) WERE ASIAN, COMPARED TO JUST 24% IN THE 2006 REPORT.

This growth in influence has not yet peaked. Oxford Economics¹ predicts the expansion of Asian businesses as international players will continue steadily over the coming decade, with urban economic power shifting eastwards.

This scenario is not without its challenges, however, not least the need for businesses to recruit and retain the global talent they need to grow their international footprint and keep one step ahead of the competition. Companies that are used only to operating within Asia often struggle when working to expand across borders.

In this whitepaper we identify and analyse the human resources challenges faced by Asian companies looking to grow internationally. We also hear from the talent about their experiences and opinions on working for Asian businesses and recommend measures employers can take to optimise their ability to attract and retain the best people.

We hope the guidelines we provide can serve as a blueprint to help you equip your business to find the talent you need.

TERMINOLOGY

In this report, the term *international talent* refers to home-grown or returning professionals who have worked for Western companies, whether overseas or in their home countries.

Asia refers to eight fast-growing markets in East and South East Asia covered by our research, namely: Mainland China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

Asian companies are defined as companies headquartered in these eight countries or regions.

Western companies are defined as companies headquartered outside Asia.

METHODOLOGY

This whitepaper was published in May 2018 and is based on a survey conducted by Robert Walters. It gathered the views of more than 5,000 HR professionals, hiring managers and candidates working in Asian and Western companies across Mainland China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan and Vietnam. Additional interviews and research were collated to complement the survey findings.

¹ Future trends and market opportunities in the world's largest 750 cities - How the global urban landscape will look in 2030 (Oxford Economics, 2012)



Asian companies continue to press ahead with globalisation, including through mergers and acquisitions. The speed of change is faster than ever.

Of the Asian companies we surveyed, 70% state they plan to internationalise their businesses in the coming three years.

International expansion is an exciting and challenging prospect, but for emerging businesses in Asia it can be a significant undertaking and risks disruption to existing operations.

One of the key issues is how to acquire and retain talent; Asian companies are constantly looking for people with the skills and experience they need to make their global growth strategies a success.

70%

OF ASIAN COMPANIES PLAN TO INTERNATIONALISE THEIR BUSINESSES IN THE COMING THREE YEARS

“

We hire home-grown talent with international working experience for our new geographies because they can offer knowledge of the local market, the laws and regulations; some of them might even offer relationships with potential partner organisations or knowledge of local market opportunities.

Hiring manager,
a Singaporean real estate company

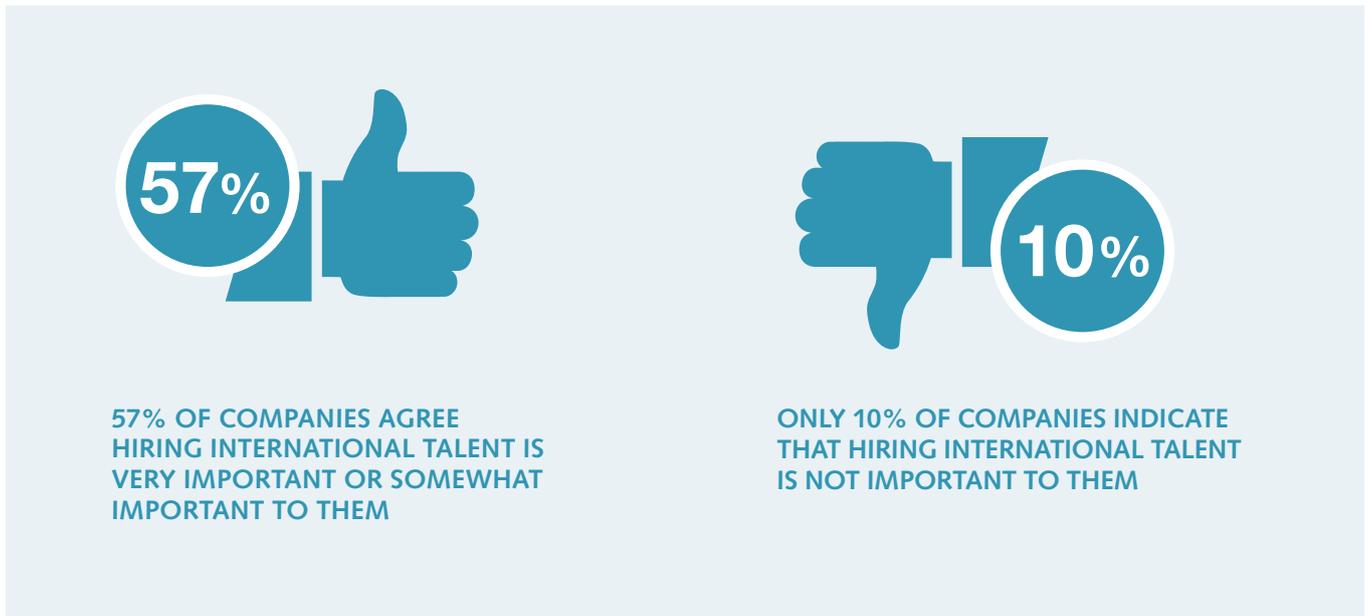
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A CANDIDATE-DRIVEN MARKET

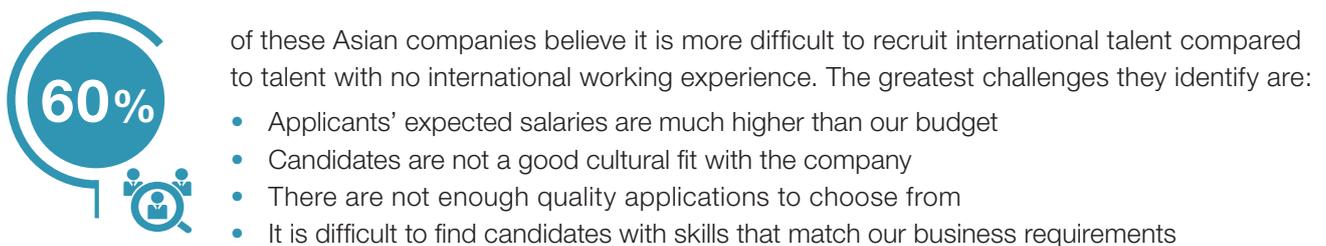
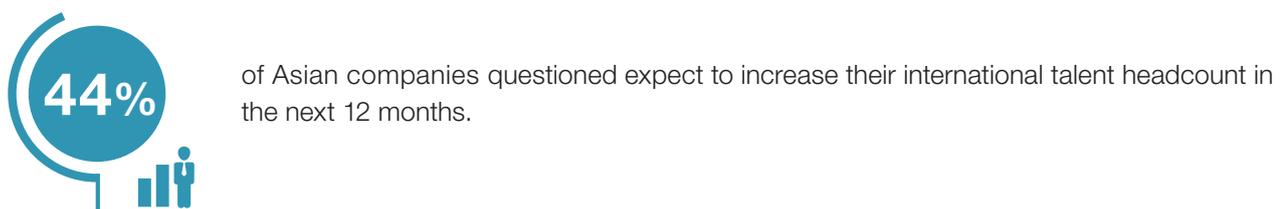
There is a special value in securing the services of returning and home-grown talent who have gained international experience working with Western companies. They can be a crucial asset when your company seeks to globalise, as they can provide an ideal combination of understanding local market and cultural issues and having wider knowledge gained from working in an international environment.

It is not surprising that talent with such capabilities are targeted by foreign multinationals as well as local companies. In this high demand environment, the fight for international talent in Asia is expected to be fierce.



TOP TALENT ACQUISITION/RETENTION CHALLENGES FACED BY ASIAN COMPANIES

Our survey found that:





Professionals who have both local and international experience, whether home-grown or returning to the region, are valuable assets to Asian companies with global expansion plans and can be in high demand. This makes it essential for companies wanting to secure future success to have robust recruitment and talent management strategies in place.



If your business is to succeed in attracting international talent in a highly competitive marketplace, you need to understand the key factors that influence these professionals when considering employment opportunities. This can help your company design a strategy that addresses the expectations of the best candidates.

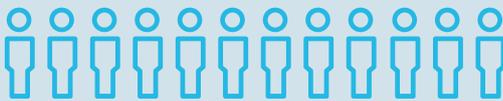
IS INTERNATIONAL TALENT OPEN TO WORKING IN AN ASIAN COMPANY?

It is encouraging that more than half (57%) of the international professionals we surveyed say they are open to work for Asian companies in the future. At the same time, more than one third (37%) of these candidates might consider such opportunity. The challenge is how to motivate these passive candidates (i.e. those not actively searching for a new role in an Asian company) to become active candidates, giving you access to a much wider pool of professionals.

57%
YES



37%
MAYBE



6%
NO



Just because candidates might not be openly looking for a job in Asian company doesn't mean that they are unavailable to you. If you feel you lack the connections you need to tap into this potential talent pool, you might benefit from working with a partner who can help you gain access.

JOANNE CHUA

Regional Client Development Director – South East Asia and Greater China, Robert Walters

UNDERSTANDING THE TOP MOTIVATORS FOR TALENT ATTRACTION

These are the top five factors that our survey found would motivate international professionals to take up a job opportunity with an Asian company.

1	PAY AND BENEFITS	
2	BELIEF IN THE COMPANY'S GROWTH POTENTIAL	
3	BRAND NAME/REPUTATION OF THE COMPANY	
4	CAREER PROSPECTS/PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES	
5	SENSE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP	

DETERMINING SALARY

The majority (68%) of international talent indicate pay and benefits as one of the top motivators. Therefore, offering competitive compensation is key when competing for top talent. If you are recruiting for a role that has not previously existed within your business, it may be difficult to determine what a competitive salary should be.

Market reports such as the Robert Walters Salary Survey accurately track pay scales for professionals around the world, at all levels across a wide range of business sectors, providing valuable data, insights and analysis into local markets.

COMMUNICATE THE SUCCESS AND HIGH POTENTIAL OF YOUR COMPANY

Western companies often impress candidates with a big brand name and opportunities to work overseas. In fact, our research shows that 64% of international talent would consider working in Asian companies that can demonstrate genuine growth potential and help their future career prospects.

That is why it is important for you to identify the strengths and advantages your company has over Western companies and highlight them when designing your employment propositions.

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN OFFER THAT YOUR BUSINESS RIVALS CAN'T

When advertising your roles or brand, focus on the benefits that working for a local business can offer. While there will be some opportunities Western companies can provide that your company might not be able to at present (such as global mobility), it is important to emphasise any unique benefits you can offer, for example:

- Competitive compensation packages that are aligned with market rates
- Your company's expansion/internationalisation strategies for the next five to 10 years
- Fast track career development that comes with being part of an expanding business in a fast-growing economy
- The sense of entrepreneurship from helping a business internationalise its operations and status
- Closer relationship with senior members of staff, including the CEO and board-level directors
- More opportunities to provide feedback and exercise influence over new projects



The benefits and opportunities that Asian companies can offer prospective employees are different from those Western companies can propose, but there are advantages to being a local business. In particular, you can be more flexible and less burdened by the bureaucracy associated with multinational companies. We strongly recommend that these competitive advantages are maximised when you are looking to find and retain the right talent for your business.

TOBY FOWLSTON

Managing Director – South East Asia, Robert Walters

PREFERRED CHANNELS FOR RECRUITING NEW ROLES – WESTERN VS ASIAN COMPANIES

Engaging a recruitment consultancy



Posting on a job board



Posting job adverts on a professional social networking site (e.g. LinkedIn)



Posting job adverts on a personal social media site



Direct advertising on a company website



Seeking referrals from existing professional and personal networks



Others



REACH OUT TO YOUR POTENTIAL CANDIDATES THROUGH EFFECTIVE TALENT ATTRACTION CHANNELS

Although Asian companies tend to follow the example of Western businesses in preferring to use professional recruitment agencies, they are far more likely to source new talent through personal referrals (27%) and other channels (29%), including internal transfers, university recruitment and job fairs. By contrast, those channels were preferred by only 7% and 3% of Western companies respectively.

We found that while only 7% of Western companies favour referrals, the figure for Asian businesses is significantly higher, at 27%. Experience shows that this method of recruitment can be effective for smaller businesses in Asia for staff retention. It's what's known as the "face" concept, in which the employee who makes the recommendation, and the person who takes up the post, feel an obligation to stay with the business, so long as one or other of them is still in the company (A. Manuti)².

Engaging a specialist recruitment agency, in particular one which operates globally, can be a good solution for Asian businesses looking to expand their global footprint. This can help them reach a wider pool of international talent, especially from outside their home country.

Recruitment consultancies can help source international candidates and advise on the best way to attract them, making it more likely that the ideal talent can be found.

At the same time, your existing employees, in particular those with international experience, can be a powerful resource for attracting new people to your company. Offering incentives to encourage members of staff to refer new professionals can be an effective way to attract top talent. This can be especially helpful for businesses that do not yet have a strong public profile. Remember that your employees are already connected to a diverse, qualified pool of candidates.

“

We use MBA graduates and senior staff to refer people from their international network, and make sure we have a referral reward scheme that incentivises staff to refer international colleagues.

Hiring manager,
a Singaporean real estate company

”

²“Why Human Capital is Important for Organizations: People Come First”, 2014, edited by A. Manuti, P. de palma, Pasquale Davide de Palma.

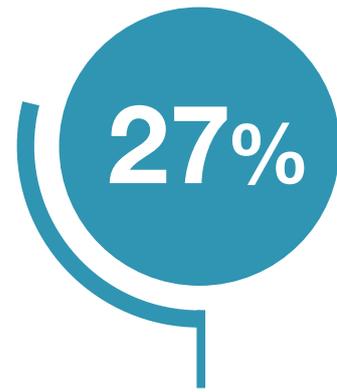
TRAIN YOUR HIRING MANAGERS

Our research found that only 27% of Asian companies have given their hiring managers training in how to attract talent - an area where they face strong competition. These managers also have to deal with the challenge of interacting with diverse domestic and international talent, often from different backgrounds and cultures.

It is important that hiring managers and human resources officers are trained in professional talent acquisition as part of a business's globalisation programme. This will help avoid mis-communication in interview processes and address the risks presented by any shortfall in the talent pipeline.

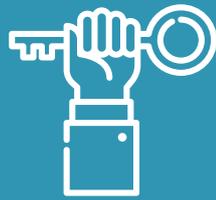
This training might usefully include:

- Interview skills – provide timely feedback on the results of the interviews, keep candidates informed about the status of any offers
- Negotiation skills – clear explanation of the components in an offer package and how to make counter-offers
- Talent selection – how to partner with recruiters on effective hiring, understanding the needs of different candidates
- Effective communication with candidates – clear presentation on company culture and explanation of company growth strategies and structure etc.



of Asian companies
provide training
for hiring managers
in talent attraction





As well as offering competitive salaries, you should also be aware of other factors that can motivate international talent to join your company. Make sure you sell the most interesting elements of the job and any opportunities it might bring to take on new responsibilities or managing duties. With many candidates thinking about their long-term career development, this can really help your company stand out.



PART 3

MOTIVATE AND RETAIN YOUR INTERNATIONAL TALENT

Congratulations if you have met all the challenges and sourced the international talent you need to help your business go global. These people are important assets to your company, but your work does not stop there.

Having found your high calibre recruits, you now need to motivate them to stay with your business, ensuring that they remain productive, engaged and loyal.

WHAT ARE THE MOST REWARDING ASPECTS OF WORKING IN AN ASIAN COMPANY FOR INTERNATIONAL TALENT?

	THE LOCAL CORPORATE CULTURE	62%
	CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH CEO AND MANAGEMENT TEAM	36%
	SENSE OF GIVING BACK TO LOCAL COMMUNITY/OWN COUNTRY	33%
	BELIEF IN THE COMPANY'S GROWTH POTENTIAL	25%
	SENSE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP	24%
	MORE PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES	22%
	BETTER TITLE/MORE FLEXIBILITY ON JOB TITLE	21%
	STRENGTH OF COMPANY BRAND NAME/REPUTATION	17%
	MORE TRANSPARENCY ON COMPANY DECISIONS	13%
	PAY AND BENEFITS	9%



LOOK BEYOND PAY WHEN IT COMES TO TALENT RETENTION

There is a notable difference of opinion on the importance of pay and benefits between international talent with no previous experience of working for Asian companies, and those who have.

For the latter group, only 9% rank pay and benefits in the top three attraction factors, and only 21% select better job titles. This implies that while pay and benefits and titles are important for talent attraction, they are not the most effective tactics when it comes to talent retention.

Paying a premium may not prevent companies from losing employees to competitors if you overlook the things that are really important to international talent in their career. These factors can be the unique brand identifiers that differentiate your business from your Western counterparts.



LEVERAGE YOUR UNIQUE LOCAL CULTURE

The local corporate culture was by far the most popular response to our survey's question on what motivates international talent working in an Asian business, cited by 62%.

Compared to Western companies, which tend to be more multicultural, most employees in Asian businesses have a common cultural background and share similar values, norms and lifestyles. All these things influence the overall morale in the workplace. Our research shows that international talent, despite having worked in Western companies or overseas before, enjoy the sense of belonging and unity that comes with working with people from similar backgrounds. This means local culture and a sense of belonging can give Asian companies a competitive advantage in attracting international talent.

While international talent can bring new ideas to your business, managers should understand that it is important they are integrated with your local employees so that they feel part of the whole team. It is a good idea to arrange corporate events and social activities for co-workers to get together and find out more about each other. This can boost morale and promote a good team spirit.



Every new recruit, in particular those who have worked in a Western company before, undergoes a period of cultural adjustment and employers should provide support during this time. That could include giving new recruits access to colleagues who have been with the organisation for a few years, offering an informal way to seek assurance about why certain things are done differently.

MATTHEW BENNETT

Managing Director - Greater China, Robert Walters



BUILD A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR EMPLOYEES

The next top motivator for international talent is a closer relationship with CEOs, cited by 36%.

There are distinct advantages for local businesses, such as easy access to managers or even the CEO, to talk about ideas or maybe even share a working lunch. It is also easier for employees to get noticed.

It can be challenging to maintain close links between top management and employees when your business is growing beyond your home country and you are recruiting more staff and opening new offices. However, if you want to retain your talent, it is vital to have a relationship that's built on mutual trust and understanding. If your company makes a genuine effort to invest time in communicating with your people, you can build a sense of belonging.

Here are some steps we recommend:

- Set up a schedule to visit each department regularly and talk to all levels of staff
- Confidential information excepted, be transparent in information sharing to show employees that you treat them as partners
- Be visible and show your support by personally recognising high calibre work and achievements
- Attend social activities and mix informally with your employees from time to time
- Show your staff that you are interested in their wellbeing through policies designed to enhance their health and satisfaction at work, such as subsidised gym membership, travel incentives with families, or complimentary healthy food



EMPOWER YOUR EMPLOYEES WITH A CLEAR BUSINESS PURPOSE

According to our research, 33% of international talent consider the sense of giving something back to the local community/their home country to be one of the most rewarding aspects of working in an Asian company.

Any business, local or international, that has a mission and wants to contribute to the greater good for society, will be well-placed to retain and empower talent. As a local company, you can have a direct impact on the development and even the well-being of your local community and this can motivate people who want to come back and make a contribution to their homeland.

Don't just focus on business development when you communicate your expansion plans to employees, make them aware of the positive impact you are making in the local community as well. Make corporate social responsibility part of your business to show that you are not focused only on making profits.



62%

OF INTERNATIONAL TALENT
RANK CORPORATE CULTURE
AS THE TOP REASON
WHY THEY ENJOY WORKING
IN ASIAN COMPANIES

BUT WHY DO THEY LEAVE YOU?

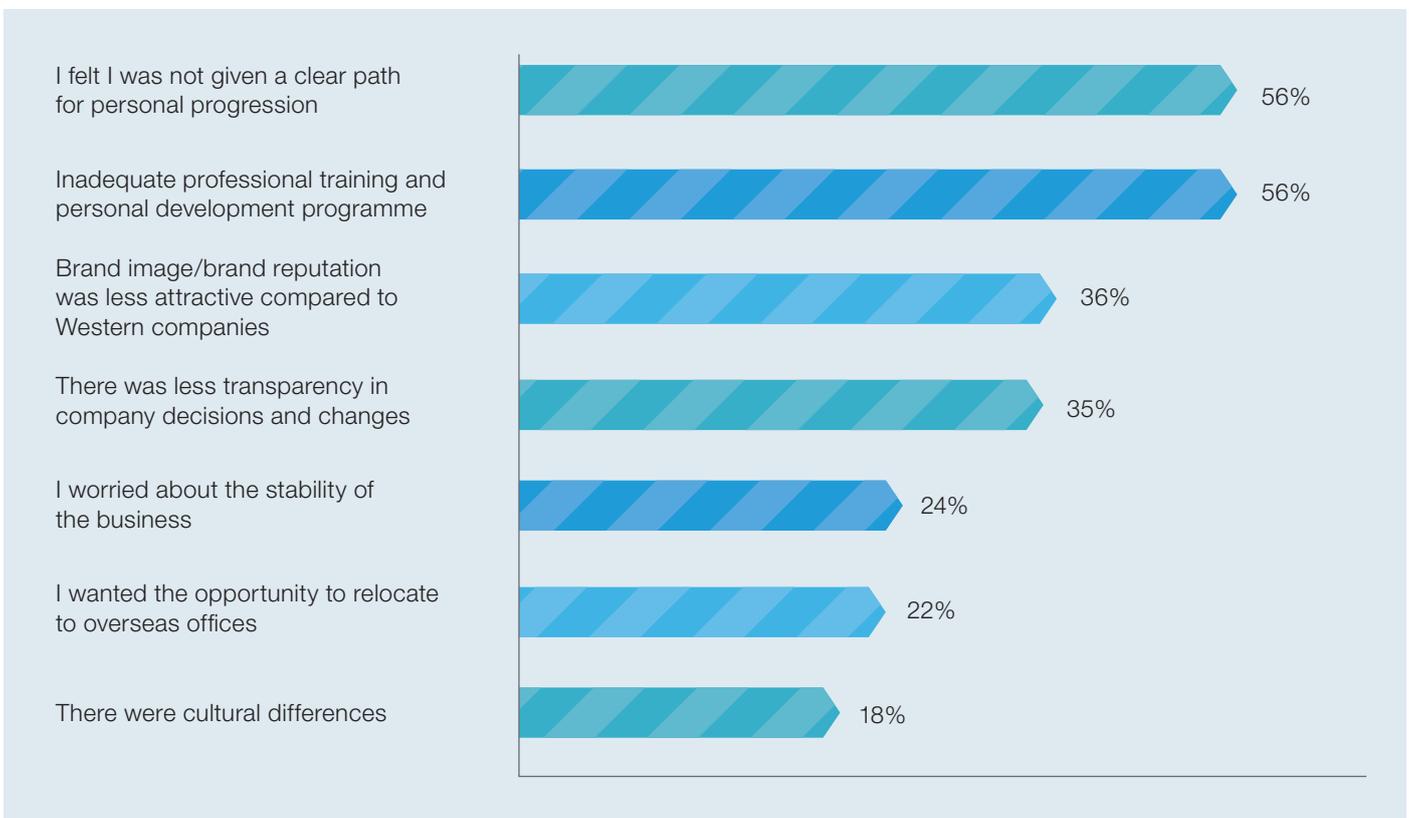
Asian businesses may have some unique competitive advantages that Western companies cannot offer when it comes to keeping international talent, but there are still issues that can make people decide to move on. For some it might be purely a personal matter, but the cost of losing people can be high, particularly international talent who you might have invested much effort in to recruit.

Setting aside factors that can't be controlled, let's look at the major reasons why international talent have left their jobs with Asian companies and explore what might have been done to retain them.



Lack of opportunities for professional training is the top reason for talent leaving Asian companies

REASONS WHY INTERNATIONAL TALENT LEAVE THEIR JOB IN AN ASIAN COMPANY



56%

of international professionals say the main reasons for leaving previous employment with an Asian company were not receiving enough opportunities for professional training and having been given no clear personal career progression path.

18%

of international talent find cultural differences a concern, which is the lowest ranked reason for leaving. This is consistent with the reasons given for enjoying working in an Asian company.

OFFERING PROPER TRAINING AND A DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

According to the Harvard Business Review³, job seekers from entry-level to executives are more concerned about opportunities for learning and development than any other aspect of a prospective job.

To retain the international talent that you have brought to your business, it is important to support their personal growth by offering a structured training and personal development programme.

Challenge:

Professionals may get basic training for new hires when they first arrive, but as time goes by they do not receive regular training to update their skills and knowledge, or personal development programmes for other soft skills.

Response:

When employees join a company, it's advisable to show them a clear path by which they can advance their careers, and to review this from time to time. Senior managers in Asian companies often work more closely with staff, which helps them better understand what training each person might benefit from.

GIVE EMPLOYEES A CLEAR CAREER PROGRESSION PATH

Our survey shows that 56% of international talent left their job with an Asian company because they felt there was no opportunity for career progression, while 22% indicate they want international relocation as part of their career development.

Although Asian companies might not be able to offer opportunities to work overseas, they can identify the strengths they do have for retaining talent if they focus on the career development opportunities that are available in a local business.

Challenge:

Professionals want international placements to give them new and varied experiences. Local companies are less likely to be able to offer these kinds of opportunities until they have set up overseas offices.

Response:

Instead of having rigidly defined job roles, you can offer job rotation opportunities for employees to gain experience outside their specific job areas and departments. This can help them gain useful exposure and experiences within the company.

³Harvard Business Review: "If You're Not Helping People Develop, You're Not Management Material" (<https://hbr.org/2014/01/if-youre-not-helping-people-develop-youre-not-management-material>).



When it comes to talent motivation and retention, cultural fit and career progression matter most to international talent. As a local business, you can be much more flexible in designing personalised retention progression and maintain closer cooperation with your staff. Ensuring that you can take advantage of this opportunity is crucial when it comes to retaining international and high calibre employees.



Nederlands Architectuurinstituut



CONCLUSION

When Asian companies are seeking to globalise, special value and advantages can be gained from securing international talent. This means the competition to secure the best people is keen. It is essential that your recruitment and talent management processes are robust.



BUILD YOUR EMPLOYER PROPOSITION TO ATTRACT TALENT

- When designing job adverts and carrying out interviews, make sure you can provide a competitive salary range and highlight your company's expansion strategies for the next five to 10 years.
- Identify and promote the advantages you can offer over a Western company.
- Consider engaging a recruitment consultancy to gain access to a wider network of international talent and encourage your employees to come up with personal referrals.



MAINTAIN AND BUILD YOUR UNIQUE COMPANY CULTURE

- Asian companies are much better equipped to foster and maintain close relationships between staff at all levels than multinationals. You can gain a unique advantage by making your company culture one of collaboration and team work, rather than bureaucracy and formal structures.
- Create a sociable workplace through company events and make corporate social responsibility part of your business purpose. Give your business a sociable feel with company events that bring people together.



PROVIDE STRUCTURED TRAINING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

- Give your employees a variety of training opportunities and support them in developing their careers.
- Use a job rotation programme so that your staff can gain a good overview of the business and the different skills that make it work.



CONTACT US

To find out how Robert Walters can help you attract talent for your expansion plans beyond your home country, please contact **Joanne Chua - Regional Client Development Director (South East Asia and Greater China)** at joanne.chua@robertwalters.com.sg, call **+65 6228 0292**, or get in touch with one of our offices below:

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