

# BioSpectrum

the business of life sciences

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## BioColumn



Ms Karen Tok is the Founder and Managing Director of ScienTec Consulting, which specializes in the biomedical sciences sector. The company has two divisions: ScienTec Search which handles global executive and specialist search for middle to senior level management positions; and ScienTec Personnel which provides recruitment services for junior- to middle-level positions. ScienTec Consulting has worked with MNCs, Fortune 500 companies, start-ups and governments. The company's international client list includes GlaxoSmithKline, Novartis, Illumina, Applied Biosystems, Servier, Dx Assays, Elsevier, Sigma-Aldrich, Thomson Reuters (Scientific), Wyeth Pharmaceuticals and Nutritionals and Abbott Nutrition.

**Karen Tok**

**DUE TO** the sunrise nature of the biomedical industry and rapid expansion across many fields, there are many challenges faced by the sector's HR departments. Here is an indepth assessment of how to tackle many of these challenges. The article will address:

- Aligning human resource strategy with key business objectives
- Building and sustaining an engaged workforce
- Managing integration
- Managing in the modern workplace
- Winning the global talent war and managing inflation

**Aligning Human Resource Strategy with Key Business Objectives:** A successful business relies on a well formulated and an equally well executed "people strategy" which is aligned with business objectives.

also be key. Last but not least, a key but often neglected human resource strategy is about developing a clear roadmap to succession planning and leadership, which is vital to sustain company longevity in the market.

**Building and Sustaining an Engaged Workforce:** Engaged employees are productive employees. A shared culture and clearly set, shared goals will be the first step to engaging employees. When employees across the organization are clear and are able to move forward toward the same goals, they will deliver exceptional performance that will lead to realization of business goals. A shared culture comes from well-ar-

## Is your HR strategy future ready?



Manage human resource challenges in biomedical sciences

HR leaders today are under more pressure than ever to demonstrate quantifiable results from their workforce practices and policies and at the same time, facilitate transparency for regulatory compliance. Some examples of successful human resource strategies aligned to business objectives include the availability to demonstrate improved recruitment processes; thus decreasing the cost per hire. When making the necessary investments in HR technology to accelerate and streamline HR processes, develop a quantifiable return on investment plan. Putting in place training plans for employee motivation, improving productivity, skills and performance, and subsequently the metrics to measure incremental improvements will

ticated value and beliefs that underpin the principles by which the organization carries out its activities. It also serves as the foundation in which employees interact with one another. The aim of human resources here is to enthuse and immerse the employees so everyone speaks and understands the same "language" and gain camaraderie.

Another aspect of employee engagement is that leaders of organizations have the responsibility to create an energized environment. Human resource department critical in ensuring policies, practices or systems need to be closely scrutinized for potential that can dampen engagement.

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**Managing Integration:** Globalization and mergers and acquisitions are common in the business place today. Strategic issues relating to human resource integration include change management. Managing cultural norms, business behaviour and acceptable business practices will be essential to business expansion and integration success.



HR needs to consider country and company specific cultural issues, impact on employee morale, impact of different corporate cultures, security risks, and environment issues in certain regions. Managing a diverse cultural workforce with varying expectations and attitudes can be a tricky and perilous task.

**Managing in the Modern Workplace:** Expectations are changing in the workplace –mostly in terms of working tools, flexibility and mobility. The rising influence of consumerism has driven the adoption of social networking tools such as MSN, Skype, Facebook, LinkedIn, blogging and Twitter, etc., and use of mobile devices such as iPhones, Blackberries and videos like YouTube. Unless there are guidelines with regard to their usage, these technologies can either enable increased productivity and enhanced connectivity, or decelerate performance, reduce social engagement among team members and create a negative impact on organization's branding and reputation. Effective HR guidelines and policies can better manage such workplace challenges by setting a standard of realistic expectations.

**Winning the global talent war and managing inflation:** With globalization comes the global talent war. Is your HR strategy "future ready" to join this battle? The right candidate is no longer defined by geographic location but by his or her capabilities. Many companies are now sourcing globally for the right talent and in some cases, have placed them in the candidate's choice locations barring any form of restrictions that can impact the performance levels of the candidate, as a means to attract good talents.

In the biomedical sciences sector, the gap between demand and supply is getting wider than before. In addition to a shortage in experienced candidates, the sharp increase of home-grown biomedical businesses has added more challenges to talent competition. This talent competition is particularly intense in Asia as many US and European companies have been moving their research and development, and manufacturing facilities, or setting up new sales and marketing

operations in Asia.

Many of these openings can only be filled by certified professionals or strong technical background either due to governmental regulations or technical competency that is needed to best support the role. Because of supply and demand gap, companies are compelled to pay more for a candidate with three to five years' of experience, at a salary level range of a senior manager with five to eight years' experience. For some critical positions, a 30 to 50 percent jump in salary is not uncommon. This is especially true for candidates from lower cost countries such as China, India, Thailand, and the Philippines.

**Smart Talent Management and Retention:** Candidates' expectations and requirements change over the course of their employment lifecycle. Talent retention involves paying careful attention to the individual's career needs. Matching employment terms with current employee needs will be the key to a successful retention strategy. Human Resources need to invest time in gaining employee insights and planning for their career development and advancement to meet long-term career aspirations.

Other aspects include setting clear and realistic expectations of employee performance, creating personalized career development plans, and working with managers to build opportunities to develop employee skill sets and competencies. Individual and regular performance management planning sessions should be held for feedback and performance measurement. After all, the individual needs to take charge of their own development and identify expectation and skill gaps.

To summarize, these are challenging times for the human resource leaders. The modern workplace is a minefield of issues and challenges that must be addressed in a timely and holistic fashion. HR managers must be leaders and proactive thinkers, able to predict upcoming trends while leveraging past experience. They must have empathetic skills and also able to manage tough negotiations and conflict situations. They must be understanding and yet stand firm on corporate policies. They must be accommodating and yet be strictly aligned to business objectives. Unfortunately, there is not a one size fits all human resources strategy that will work for every company in biomedical sciences. Fortunately, there are ways to successfully manage human resource challenges in the biomedical sciences industry by following the guidelines outlined.

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