Building an Effective In-house Executive Search Team

Created by: in-house Recruitment Network
In partnership with: invenias

powering your search for talent
Introduction

‘Building an Effective In-house Executive Search Team’ was an intimate speaker and round-table networking breakfast event for 30 management-level in-house executive recruitment professionals, with an interest in building and maintaining an effective executive search team. The event focused on a range of issues including gaining executive buy in, setting up a team, and selecting the tools required to get it right. It was a chance for our in-house executive recruiters to share challenges, solutions and best practice in round-table discussions with like-minded peers. Held at the stunning offices of Invenias in Reading, this event was bursting at the seams, just the way we like it! We heard from two specialist guest speakers and benefited from two in-depth conversations on the roundtables. It’s fair to say that everyone who attended got plenty out of the morning.

Who spoke?

Special Guest Speaker: Andy Mountney, Founding Partner at Aspen In-house

Andy has over 15 years’ experience in helping organisations build in-house executive search teams. With a keen interest in aiding companies deliver a great direct hiring experience for the business and candidates alike, he’s built innovative teams that use a wide variety of sourcing tools to engage with strategic talent.

Special Guest Speaker: David Grundy, CEO & Co-founder at Invenias

David is ideally placed to comment on technology trends and their impact on the executive search function, having had 20 years of experience working in the software industry. As Co-founder of Erevena, a London based executive search firm focused on the technology sector, he also has direct experience of working in executive search.
The In-house Recruitment Network

This breakfast event was attended by 30 members of the In-house Recruitment Network. The In-house Recruitment network is the fastest growing community for In-house Recruiters and HR professionals in the industry. Members benefit from helpful and informative online forums, specialist breakfast events, high value conferences and of course the official In-house Recruitment Awards. With almost 10,000 members, the In-house Recruitment Network is the largest, most active professional network of In-house Recruiters in the industry, hosting over 25 high calibre events and meetups a year, the In-house Recruitment Network is the perfect place for intimate peer-to-peer networking and knowledge sharing.

Invenias

Invenias is the world’s leading provider of software solutions to the executive search and strategic recruitment sector. With offices and hosting centres across EMEA, the US and Asia Pacific, Invenias supports thousands of users across fifty countries. Their customers include in-house executive recruiting teams, executive search and executive and strategic recruitment firms, and executive talent organizations within Private Equity and Venture Capital firms. Listed in HR Tech Outlook’s ‘Top 10 Recruitment Software Solution Provider 2017’, an increasing number of in-house strategic hiring teams rely on the Invenias Platform to help identify the best strategic talent.

In this document, you’ll find additional resources from our other specialist events and advice from Invenias on how to build a successful in-house executive search team.
What Is Executive Search?

Executive search (also known as ‘headhunting’) is a specialised recruitment service used to source candidates for senior, executive or other highly specialised positions in organisations. These tend to be positions which historically are more difficult to fill and require a substantial amount of time and devoted attention — something that in-house recruiters don’t always benefit from as part of their day jobs, hence the traditional reliance upon external executive search firms.

Executive search, even for just one candidate, is an exceedingly intense activity that encompasses significant preparation and attention to detail. Typically, an executive search consultant will be searching for a very particular set of skills, and the candidates in question are usually passive and may well be working for a competitor.

Why Do We Need Executive Search?

Executive search is all about those highly specialist/specialised, hard to find candidates. These are the professionals who are set to make a real impact on business direction and help in making some of the most important strategic decisions an organisation can take. A job advert in the local paper for a candidate of this calibre simply will not do. The specifics of their skillset alone will be rare and to achieve this level of detailing in the recruitment process, you need to carry out detailed analysis and gather talent intelligence. In addition, candidates are also unlikely to be actively searching for a new role which is where research of the market and the direct approach becomes vital in the recruitment of high level executives in business.
The Conversation.

We heard 2 specialist speaker presentations and took part in two intimate roundtable discussions. A copy of the presentations, the detailed event notes and some additional resources can be found at the end of this document.

Top Questions Answered.

The following pages provide some valuable insight into the key issues and challenges facing in-house teams. They also discuss some of the advantages you have over external agencies as an in-house team.
How do you maximise your expectations as an in-house team, whilst taking best practices from search firms?

There are distinct advantages you have as an in-house team that external search firms don’t benefit from:

**You have the ‘brand’ behind you**

Liaising with a recruiter who works for the business in question can be a more attractive prospect for candidates. Speaking with in-house recruiters compared to conversing with recruitment agencies conjures a level of trust and control for the candidate. You are the front line and their introduction into the business. The hiring process offers a vision into your organisation and culture. In addition, it is likely that the top candidates will share their experiences and perceptions of your organisation amongst their peers, colleagues and circle of influence. You need to bear candidate experience in mind during each step of the process. This will help make a true difference.

**You can offer a more bespoke service than an external agency**

You’re part of the culture of the business. Working in-house provides you with the opportunity to carve out a genuine impression and the control to adapt aspects of your delivery to suit the hire (something which truly is so important for executive recruits). With the right software and guidance to help you, you can deliver a hiring process that exceeds the expectations of candidates and your key stakeholders. It is important that you consider your process and your employer brand with sensitivity. This is crucial and possibly the greatest tool you have in ensuring that your organisation stands out.

**You have existing employees as a valuable resource**

As an in-house recruiter, you have the added support of the entire team you are hiring for. Hiring senior executives is a very sensitive process and for an external party, it’s even more important to exercise discretion. If you’re already in the business you know who is ‘in the know’. You can introduce people into the recruitment process as and when you see fit enabling extra buy-in both for the candidate that you’re interested in hiring, and from senior leaders within the business, increasing the credibility of your role.
What does an effective in-house executive search team look like?

It’s important to look at examples of success, no matter how great you believe your function might be. Even for the best teams there is room for improvement and you must always believe you can enhance your activity moving forward.

During this breakfast event, we heard from Andy Mountney, Co-founder at Aspen In-house who gave us the key ingredients to building an effective in-house executive search team:

- Organisational buy-in
- Infrastructure
- Investment
- People
- Link between internal and external talent
- Technology
- Time
- Data

These points are vital in building and maintaining a strong and internally credible service. More can be found in Andy’s presentation. We also have a fantastic presentation from Transport for London which was delivered at a previous event on in-house executive search, partnered by Invenias. Transport for London built their in-house executive search function from a standing start with the help of some strategic hires and a lot of faith that this would make a considerable difference to their recruitment operations. Take a look at their presentation below which goes into more detail on how they orchestrated this change:
How can I keep up to speed with best practices?

Knowledge is power no matter what you’re dealing with. One thing worth noting is that executive search in an agency capacity is different to executive search for in-house teams. There is partly a responsibility on your part as an in-house recruiter to make the effort to keep up with changes in best practice by attending specialist events such as this one and through relationships with experts, such as the team at Invenias and businesses like Aspen In-house. Changes in trends aren’t always obvious, but by ensuring you’re connected with the right people, you can keep yourself in the loop. These people live and breathe in-house executive search and will provide valuable insight for you and your peers.

How do we manage this alongside our existing processes?

If you’ve yet to set up these capabilities within your team, we can’t stress enough how important it is that you give this process adequate time and structure. It needs to be well thought out and it’s important that you cover all bases. Consider whether you need to hire an executive search expert and map your ideal process out. Planning ensures that your new capabilities run seamlessly alongside your existing ones. Hopefully these event notes have given you plenty of ideas and the examples we’ve provided are inspiring.

Where does onboarding fit in?

Wherever it fitted in before! Chances are you’ve already hired executives into the business so you should have something in place where onboarding is concerned. We are strong believers that at an executive level this should be thorough and highly bespoke to the hire, so if you don’t have onboarding activities in place it’s important you start. Creating an executive search capability should include all the essential components of a specialised recruitment process and onboarding is a hugely important aspect of this.

How do you get the organisation to understand that you need to invest in different technology?

Build a strong business case for the need for new technology for your executive search function. A specialist function requires specialist tools. Consider the potential savings from reduced agency usage, an improved time to hire due to further control over the process and an increase in the quality of your hires. All businesses are trying to save money and bringing executive search in-house provides the opportunity to save on external agency spend, so what’s the cost of new technology in comparison? Conduct a trial run if that will help you to prove your point.
Summary.

It’s important to understand that change can exist for your function, but it’s unlikely to happen overnight. You’ll find that it’s much easier to facilitate an executive search function with the right expertise internally whether that means expanding your team or investing in new technology. Resource, budget and buy-in are essential whilst protecting your employer brand and the candidate experience.

It seems one of the biggest worries for in-house executive recruiters is gaining crucial buy-in and budget to invest in new technology. Examine all the components you need to make this work for your business and run a smaller pilot. If you can demonstrate how this will benefit the business it makes gaining buy-in and improving your credibility a hundred times easier.

It seems that most in-house recruitment functions have considered building executive search into their roster of services, but so many are yet to plan and implement it. Change doesn’t happen overnight and it requires effort.

We really hope these event notes have helped you consider the issues that may arise when seeking to build an effective in-house executive search function. We’d like to extend a huge thank you to all the attendees and to Invenias for such an inspiring event.

For the presentations, roundtable discussions and more resources to support this event, continue reading.
Specialist Guest Speaker: Andy Mountney, Founding Partner at Aspen In-house

Building an effective In-house Executive Search Team Is challenging

@andymountney andrew@aspeninhouse.com

Specialist Guest Speaker: David Grundy, CEO & Co-founder at Invenias

Strategic Hiring in the Enterprise

David Grundy, CEO & Co-Founder
Roundtable Discussion Notes

What are the main challenges you are experiencing?

We asked our group of in-house recruiters what their biggest challenges were when it came to in-house executive search. Do you identify with any of these issues yourself?

- Reduce agency usage
- Resistance to reducing this number by hiring managers due to an apparent perceived kudos/status of using a big-name business as a resource
- Building relationships with executive level candidates
- Retaining a personal touch with candidates of this level
- The need for quality data and the accompanying insights
- Proving our worth as a function and building credibility
- Using executive search to protect your brand and improve the candidate experience
- Proving your worth takes years not weeks and the business won’t allow for that
- Technology
- ATS is not search related
- Budget
- Time to hire
- Building up credibility
- Balancing relationship with external search
- Accountability
- Buy-in
- Constant moving of the goal posts
- Distractions – too broad or too much activity
- Executive search vs recruitment
- Hiring manager contact
- Hiring manager time
- We currently have no executive search functionality within our team
- Driven by directors instigating to hire
- Buy-in from influential managers
- Time delays due to number of people involved
- What to do in what order that's relevant for the business
What are your short, medium and long term objectives?

- Obtain strong candidates
- Improve our data
- GDPR and consider how this might have impact
- Referrals; putting a proper process in place internally to encourage more candidate recommendations
- Rewarding executives for good referrals but thinking of creative ways to do this. Charitable donations?
- Pipeline hires
- Look at internal talent first
- Succession planning
- Talent mapping
- Getting the balance of resourcers right
- Team growth and expanding existing capabilities within recruitment
- Define accountability clearly
- Capture good data that will end up as valuable insights
- Develop proper communication plans
- Building networks as existing executive search function
- Recruitment team working more effectively
- Buy-in
- Define scope and accountability
- Drive the discussion around who needs to be involved at various stages of the process
- Remove barriers internally to let the people in talent acquisition get time with the people they need to and gain the commitment needed
- Track what’s being spent and analyse it

What are the 3 most important points that have been raised in this round table discussion?

- A good way to build rapport and a true vision of the business is to send candidates a link to Glassdoor post-face-to-face interview. Ask candidates to review company and interviewing experience
- Use survey monkey to send surveys to candidates on candidate experience
- The important of data and how to use it to win discussions
- Proper planning and strategy from the outset
- Support people across the entire process
- The dramatic difference between good and bad experience
- Building long term planning for executive search alongside search firms as a trusted advisor
- Infrastructure
- Senior executive buy-in
- Persuasion. The people concept is different from an external contingent model
- Front ending too much data capture from candidates can be off putting and cause drop off
Which of your questions remain unanswered or do you wish to better understand?

- How can I keep up to speed with best practices?
- How do we manage this alongside our existing processes?
- How do we collaborate with all avenues and coordinate routes to market?
- Where does executive search fit in?
- Do you need specialists or can you use generalists within the executive search function?
- Where does onboarding fit in?
- How do you get the organisation to understand that you need different technology?
- Unconscious bias. How important is diversity in the whole process?

What role does technology play?

- Spreadsheets and generating macros
- LinkedIn and social media. A free and effective marketing tool
- Budget mapping
- Innovation. There is too much technology though, how do we select the right ones?
- Geographical standardisation and global recruiting capabilities
- It requires additional training to understand how to use it and identify what’s useful in the first place
- Range of technology that can be used for roles that are appropriate.

What’s working well for you right now and what tips can you offer your peers?

- Referrals; when roles open discuss with the hiring manager and create mini-campaigns internally to get people talking. A good referral system has proved time and time again to be successful and there is proof that it dramatically improves candidate engagement and employee retention
- LinkedIn network and social media; ask for references from trusted circles as a shortlisting exercise
- Build relationships face to face wherever possible
- Gather data and analyse. Always measure results. Data always comes in very handy no matter what you need it for
- Candidate satisfaction surveys help us to evaluate and critique our function
- Setting boundaries – onboarding needs to be at the same level of service
- Data plays a part in convincing. Always remember this if you’re in need of business buy-in
- Proactively deliver communications on progress for senior executives. Over-communicate
- Candidate packs on shortlisted candidates and market intelligence
What have you learned from this event and what are your next steps?

- Results and numbers can build credibility and respect from HR and senior leaders internally
- Building strong relationships is beneficial for everyone involved from the candidate to the recruiter and hiring manager
- Choose the right technology for the job. This should be an incredibly careful consideration and every possible avenue should be explored
- People who do executive search well have recruited separately to HR before. This is worth noting if we plan on expanding in recruitment
- Instigation of a team must be demand-driven
- Agreed process with infrastructure and the freedom to deliver the role
- Once you have the track record the data convincing is easier
- Leverage your knowledge of the industry and reap the benefits
- Does a launch of the service help? Creating some noise about it draws a line on expectations. Building a communications plan that works from the top down will help to spread the word
- Always remember that 5 years into a new way of doing things, people tend to forget what things were like before. Work on constantly increasing expectations. Managing that requires creativity and it should be enjoyable
- Dedicated expertise should be given the room to focus. Give people the opportunity to commit the right amount of time for such things as building a time and delivering a quality service
- Experience of in-house recruitment is that an executive search function is not expected, but clearly it adds credibility
- Summarise what's needed from the data you analyse and provide
- Where candidates are concerned, think about their potential and attitudes. Often that means more data than a simple CV
- Drive objective decision making
- Test the internal team's perception on candidates. This can be done through workshops, designated lunches and breakfasts or even full-day seminars. These kinds of events can be fantastic for team building and ensuring you’re all on the same page
- Consider generational attitudes towards technology and allow this to drive how you engage with candidates through executive search

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