Essential insights into attracting and retaining talent in a volatile market

By and for Life Sciences

The Life Sciences sector in transition: What does this mean for talent acquisition? //

The Life Sciences sector is evolving rapidly. Artificial Intelligence (AI), stricter regulations, and changing market demands are forcing companies to constantly adapt. At the same time, the labor market is becoming increasingly strained: the ratio between working people and those over 65 years is shifting quickly, giving employees more freedom of choice and making it easier to switch from one employer to another.

These developments have major implications for recruitment: demand for talent is shifting, new skills are becoming crucial, and traditional job profiles are disappearing or transforming. Organizations need to revise their strategies to better support both clients and talent in this dynamic market.

In the past, companies mainly sought specialists with deep subject-matter expertise. Today, there is a growing need for professionals who are flexible and can quickly respond to technological changes and market shifts.

“Besides focusing on specific roles, we could also pay more attention to the qualities and skills we need, rather than just in-depth knowledge.”
- Sabrina Bregten, Culture & People Manager at Centrafarm.

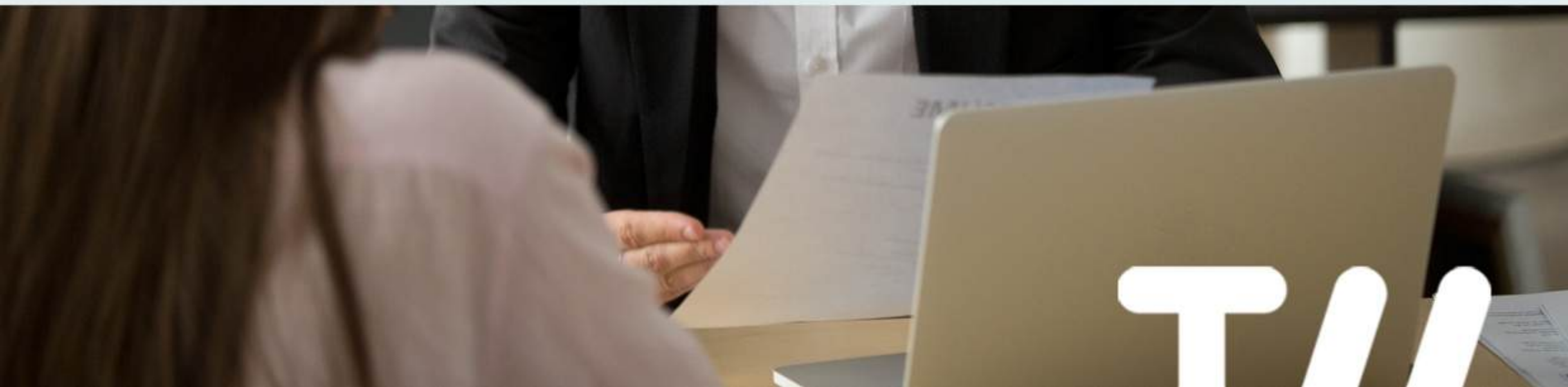
This requires a new way of looking at talent. How can external partners collaborate more effectively with organizations to attract and retain the right people? And how can they anticipate technological, market, and regulatory trends that are shaping the future of talent acquisition?

In this whitepaper, twelve experts from the Life Sciences sector share their insights on the key developments in attracting and retaining talent. These experts represent organizations with a combined workforce of around 16,000 employees, ranging from large pharmaceutical multinationals (60% of interviewed companies) to innovative biotech companies (25%) and players in nutrition, health, and medical technology (15%).

They all face the same challenge: how to remain agile in a rapidly changing job market?

The insights from this research are translated into concrete actions, helping external partners and Life Sciences companies become stronger together in a future where talent acquisition needs to be faster and smarter.

Want to know how to succeed? Read on!



Flexibility and digital expertise: essential competencies for the future //

The changing demand for talent

Technological and market developments are rapidly shifting the requirements for talent. Where deep specialist knowledge once took center stage, flexibility and digital skills are now critical. Many of the experts interviewed cite adaptability and eagerness as the most important traits for future employees.

"Agility, adaptability, the willingness to acquire new skills, adjust strategies, and embrace change are essential competencies for the future."
- Industry expert

This marks a clear shift in how companies view their workforce. There's less focus on rigid job profiles and more attention on employees' potential to continuously adapt to changing conditions.

This flexibility is not only about the ability to learn new skills, but also about using technologies like AI and automation effectively. Innovative companies expect their employees to not just keep up with the market, but to actively leverage technology to optimize processes and seize opportunities. Especially for office-based roles, digital literacy is becoming increasingly important. Field-based roles, on the other hand, now demand a mix of technical expertise and adaptability, as they must respond more rapidly to technological and market changes.

AI and data sciences are mentioned by nearly half of the experts as the most critical competencies of the future.

Technical roles, in particular, are considered hard to fill. Due to structural shortages, it is essential to define what profile is truly necessary and where there's room for growth and development.

In addition to technological expertise, collaboration is becoming more important. Whereas subject-matter expertise used to be the key selection criterion, today employers also look at how well someone can collaborate within multidisciplinary teams. The boundaries between roles are becoming increasingly blurred, and companies expect employees to look beyond their own area of expertise and contribute actively to innovation.

Five critical competencies for future talent:

1. ***Digital and data literacy*** **–** The ability to use AI-driven platforms and technologies;
2. ***Adaptability and agility*** **–** Quickly responding to change and being open to learning new skills;
3. ***Collaboration and communication*** **–** Effective interaction in hybrid teams;
4. ***Problem-solving ability*** **–** Addressing challenges quickly and efficiently;
5. ***Emotional intelligence*** **–** Strong interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, and delivering excellent customer experience.

How can organizations respond?

- ***Prioritize flexibility:*** Select candidates based on their ability to adapt to new technologies and market shifts;
- ***Integrate AI and data sciences into development:*** Ensure that employees not only understand the basics but can also apply these technologies effectively;
- ***Encourage collaboration and leadership:*** Multidisciplinary work and personal leadership are key drivers of innovation.

The impact of Artificial Intelligence on talent management //

The changing demand for talent

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is playing an increasingly significant role in making recruitment and selection more efficient. Several experts indicate that automation supports faster and more accurate talent matching. By automating certain processes, recruitment specialists can work more efficiently and identify suitable candidates more quickly – especially through advanced screening and matching technologies. But does this mean technology is taking over the human side of talent acquisition?

According to the experts, it does not. AI is seen primarily as a powerful tool, not a replacement. Nearly half of the experts emphasize that automation and data analysis can optimize recruitment processes, such as identifying qualified candidates more quickly. Still, human insight remains essential. Personal contact, assessing soft skills, and determining cultural fit are aspects that cannot be replaced by technology.

> **"AI can improve processes like screening and matching, but the human factor remains irreplaceable. Technology should support – not replace – so that talent professionals can focus on deeper, value-added interactions."**
> - Christina K., Talent Acquisition Coordinator, Biotech Sector

What will AI take over in the processes?

- Automation of repetitive tasks like CV screening and job description analysis;
- Data-driven matching to connect candidates to vacancies faster;
- Chatbots and automated communication for fast initial interactions.

And what won't?

- Personal interviews remain essential for in-depth assessment;
- Strategic consulting requires human judgment;
- Cultural fit and soft skills cannot yet be fully evaluated by AI.

How can you respond to this shift?

As AI continues to take on more tasks within talent acquisition, it's important for companies to adapt. But how?

- **Invest in AI tools** to increase process efficiency;
- **Provide training and upskilling opportunities for talent acquisition professionals**, so they can fully leverage AI without losing the human touch;
- **Use predictive analytics to analyze market movements** and proactively respond to future recruitment needs.

In short: according to the experts, AI will become an essential tool in the recruitment and selection of talent in the Life Sciences sector. However, the core of talent acquisition still revolves around human insight, strategic thinking, and strong collaboration between candidates and employers – strengthened by smart use of data and AI. It's exactly this combination that enables companies to find and connect with the right talent faster, more precisely, and more personally.

How external partners can truly support companies //

The days when external partners simply forwarded CVs to companies are over. Companies now expect more. They are not looking for a quick fix, but for a partner who understands them, things along with them, and contributes to their long-term strategy. It's no longer just about filling a vacancy. The key question is not only: what kind of person do you need? But especially: how can we help you achieve your goals? External partners who truly make a difference look beyond the CV. They engage in meaningful conversations, think strategically, and offer support that goes beyond recruitment alone. It's about true partnership: working together towards sustainable growth and future-proof teams.

To meet these expectations, AI and technology are playing an increasingly important role. Through smart data analysis and automated matching, external partners can not only find the right professionals faster but also with greater precision.

However, equally important is the quality of the collaboration itself. What clients appreciate most is a partner who genuinely listens. That means asking the right questions, thinking from the client's needs, and not simply applying a one-size-fits-all approach. Only then can a sustainable partnership emerge, one that not only strengthens trust but also leads to a more efficient recruitment process aligned with an organization's strategic goals.

> **"We value agencies that proactively move with us and truly understand our goals. The best partners go beyond recruitment. They enhance our long-term recruitment strategy."**
> - Christina K., Talent Acquistion Coordinator, Biotech sector

What do companies expect from external partners?

1. **Quality over quantity**

Companies surveyed indicate that finding the right match is more important than speed. An external partner should not only understand the job requirements but also the company culture and market developments. Our research shows that several respondents specifically expect external partners to advise them on future talent needs, rather than focusing solely on filling current vacancies.

2. **Transparency and communication**

The need for transparency is growing. Companies expect openness about costs, selection criteria, and recruitment process updates. Strong collaboration is only possible through clear communication and honest expectations. External partners who embrace this build long-term relationships and earn trust.

How can external partners differentiate themselves?

In-depth market knowledge and real-time insights

Organizations expect external partners to know not only who is available but also which trends and technologies are impacting talent management. Access to up-to-date data on salary trends, talent availability, and competitor strategies gives companies a significant advantage in their recruitment efforts.

Smart use of technology

The best external partners leverage technology to work more efficiently, without losing the personal touch or strategic insights:

- **AI-powered candidate matching** – Smart algorithms assist in finding the perfect match through advanced data analysis, resulting in faster placements;
- **Predictive hiring models** – By combining historical data with AI, external partners can forecast future hiring needs;
- **Personalized candidate journeys** – Using AI and automation, external partners can offer candidates a customized experience, from relevant job recommendations to personalized communication throughout the recruitment process.

Expertise in hybrid and remote work

The labor market is changing, and flexible working is the new standard. External partners experienced in sourcing candidates who excel in hybrid or remote environments add extra value. They can also advise companies on how to effectively integrate hybrid teams.

“Recruitment agencies can only truly support us by remaining transparent, honest, and maintaining good communication.”
- Industry expert

Changing legislation and its impact on talent demand //

In addition to technological developments, regulation, employment contracts, and compliance are playing an increasingly significant role in shaping talent demand. Companies must adapt to stricter requirements regarding privacy, flexible employment, and legal compliance, all of which have direct consequences for their recruitment strategies.

Conversations with experts reveal that the **DBA Act (Deregulation of Assessment of Employment Relationships)** is a major factor influencing how companies view flexible employment. Some organizations see this as a positive development that provides greater clarity, while others express concern about enforcement and the impact on their flexibility. At the same time, privacy and compliance continue to grow as key concerns, particularly in sectors bound by strict regulatory frameworks.

"Privacy and compliance are becoming increasingly significant concerns, with rising regulations potentially leading to internal hesitation and the risk of excessive bureaucracy." - Marco Fossatelli, Country Manager, Biopharmaceutical company

The influence of market trends and legislation on talent demand

Market trends and changing regulations are not only altering how companies operate but also reshaping the types of talent they seek. The growing focus on compliance and digitalization is driving demand for professionals with expertise in regulation, risk management, and data governance. Additionally, uncertainties surrounding the DBA Act and stricter requirements for flexible employment are prompting companies to reconsider their workforce strategies.

Moreover, more and more companies are moving away from rigid diploma requirements and taking a more creative approach to evaluating what is truly needed for the role. Transferable skills and practical experience are playing an increasingly important role in talent selection. This means recruitment is no longer solely about formal qualifications but also about a candidate's actual capabilities. The evolving legislation is also pushing organizations to embrace more flexible forms of employment.

This leads to several key developments:

- **Increased demand for expertise in flexible employment contracts:** Companies seek advice on how to deploy freelancers and temporary workers within the legal frameworks;
- **Growth of hybrid recruitment models:** Uncertainty around freelance (ZZP) arrangements is driving a growing need for permanent contracts, project-based hiring and interim solutions;
- **Emergence of new roles and skill sets:** AI and automation are trends reshaping talent demand. Some roles are disappearing, while the need for digital and analytical skills is rising.

External partners can distinguish themselves by taking on an advisory role, helping companies navigate the changing landscape of market trends and regulations. Those who not only provide candidates but also think strategically about contract structures and workforce planning are increasingly valued as strategic partners. The demand for such strategic partners is growing rapidly.

The new reality of recruitment: from supplier to strategic partner //

Expectations around recruitment are changing. Companies are realizing that traditional recruitment models are no longer sufficient, and that external organizations must take on a more strategic role. Market research shows that organizations are increasingly managing recruitment tasks internally and expect agencies to add more value in specific areas such as training, access to young talent, and other complementary services.

Approximately 40% of the companies interviewed indicated that they are increasingly able to find talent themselves, mainly due to the growth of internal recruitment teams and advanced AI tools. As a result, recruitment agencies must focus more on providing specialized support and advice. This means not just supplying candidates, but also helping companies develop a future-focused talent strategy.

"Agencies that offer innovative solutions or can adapt to our changing needs remain valuable partners."
- Christina K., Talent Acquisition Coordinator, Biotech Sector

What does ideal support from external partners look like, according to experts?

To stay relevant, external organizations must evolve into strategic partners who help companies navigate a shifting labor market. This means:

- **From supplier to advisor:** Companies seek agencies that not only find talent but also offer advice on broader issues such as contract structures;
- **Strategic talent advice:** Agencies are increasingly seen as experts who assist with major changes like AI, automation, and new legislation;
- **Faster and smarter recruitment:** Organizations want efficient recruitment processes without compromising on quality, leveraging technology and market insights;
- **Long-term talent engagement:** It's no longer just about filling vacancies - it's about attracting, retaining, and developing talent for the long term.

The message is clear: companies expect a partner who proactively thinks about the future. External organizations that embrace this role will become essential players in the success of future-proof talent organizations.

The future of attracting and retaining talent: what do companies really expect? //

Recruitment is evolving rapidly. Market trends, regulatory shifts, and technological advances are forcing companies to reevaluate their strategies. But what do companies actually expect from external partners in the future?

1. **More market insight and strategic advice**

Companies no longer want a standard list of candidates – they want a recruitmet partner who understands trends, legislation, and talent needs. Agencies that provide market data and sector-specific insights are becoming increasingly valuable.

2. **Flexible talent solutions**

Due to changing legislation, demand is growing for guidance on hybrid work models, temporary contracts, and freelance arrangements. Recruitment agencies must help companies navigate this complexity.

3. **Smarter use of technology**

AI and automation can make recruitment more efficient, but personal connection remains essential. Beyond speed and efficiency, technology also enables deeper insights into talent trends and market developments. Companies expect recruitment agencies to leverage this data – not only to fill vacancies but to support strategic workforce planning. The best agencies use technology without losing sight of company culture and the importance of personal fit.

4. **Long-term partnerships**

Companies are looking for strategic partners who think along with them on talent development. Recruitment doesn't stop at a single quick placement: it's about building a future-proof team. While the Life Sciences sector and labor market are undergoing major changes, company expectations are clear. They seek strategic partners who provide market insights, flexible solutions, and forward-looking advice. Artificial Intelligence and automation are playing an increasingly important role, but the human side of recruitment remains indispensable. Transparency, collaboration, and strategic thinking are the key differentiations for the agencies of the future.

At the same time, the labor market is under increasing pressure. The ratio between workers and people over 65 is shifting dramatically: in 1957, there were seven working people for every one person over 65. By 2021, that had declined to just three. By 2040, it is expected to drop to only two working individuals per retiree.

This demographic shift directly impacts employee behavior. Workers have more freedom of choice and can more easily switch employers – partly due to the abundance of open vacancies.

In short: the labor market is undergoing a fundamental transformation. To stay relevant, organizations must not only keep up with technological developments, but also invest in long-term relationships, strategic insights, and a deep understanding of what both companies and candidates truly need. The future demands partnership – not just in recruitment, but in vision.