



# Teams That Stay, While on the Go

Career mobility proves key to high retention in Europe.

By Michael Laff

Allowing employees the ability to work from home or take a coveted assignment abroad seems like a win for the employee and a loss for the company. But in Europe, such flexibility provides a clue to overall productivity measures.

Organizations that support a mobile workforce tend to enjoy greater worker productivity and are in a stronger competitive position, according to recent research by the Human Capital Institute and Success Factors.

Sweden rated highest in terms of overall support for mobility. Another indicator of the country's strong support for mobility was the low percentage of top performers who left positions because of an ability to relocate to a new office.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is France, which rated lowest in terms of support for the "work from home" segment because a high percentage of organizations either did not allow it or did not provide support to those working from home.

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Workers in Europe, North America, and Australia were asked to rate their organizations' support for mobility, notably in areas relating to relocation and working from home. Results were published in the report, "Workforce Mobility Drives Productivity and More Agile Cost Structures."

While it should be no surprise that worker productivity is high in Sweden, and GDP ratio is low in France, the data should not be interpreted simply to mean that working conditions in France are poorer. Rather, the ambitions and market demographics of many Western European countries differ from Sweden.

"In Sweden, companies cannot compete if they play hard to get or are perceived as hostile climates. People are working in an international world, and they need to keep up with them," says Erik Berggren, director of research at Success Factors.

Employees in Sweden speak to each other in their native language. Virtually everything else, however, from transcribing documents to phone conversations, is conducted in English. But in France, employees use French exclusively.

"In France, business is built for the French market," Berggren says. "The need for going global is not as important as [in other nations]."

Berggren has a unique perspective on the results because he was born in Sweden and worked in France.

"In Europe, employees aren't treated like assets as they often are in the U.S., U.K., or Australia," he says. "They're not considered to be a production factor like electricity that can just be turned on and off like in Anglo-Saxon culture. It's difficult to fire people in Europe because of labor laws. European employers are looking to drive productivity because there is no easy way out."

Employees in the Netherlands and Sweden in particular have already adapted to an international business climate. They learn to speak English well and early on, and are comfortable conducting business tasks such as preparing documents and dealing

with English-speaking partners or clients. Berggren says such traits make them more marketable internationally, and as a consequence, companies in Sweden and the Netherlands need to provide greater flexibility to attract top performers.

The domestic markets in Sweden and the Netherlands are too small to continue growth by just catering to a domestic base. In contrast, companies in France are geared largely for domestic customers and do not promote or need employees with international contacts.

Other Western European countries, such as Spain and Germany, also moved into global markets slowly, and did not face the prospect of heavy brain drain as Scandinavian companies did.

Contingent workers are a growing segment of the economy, even as organizations struggle to fit them in their plan. These workers cover the entire spectrum from administrative workers who report to staffing agencies

to technical consultants hired for a fixed period. Organizations are doing more outsourcing of nonessential tasks to entities that can perform specific job functions quicker and cheaper.

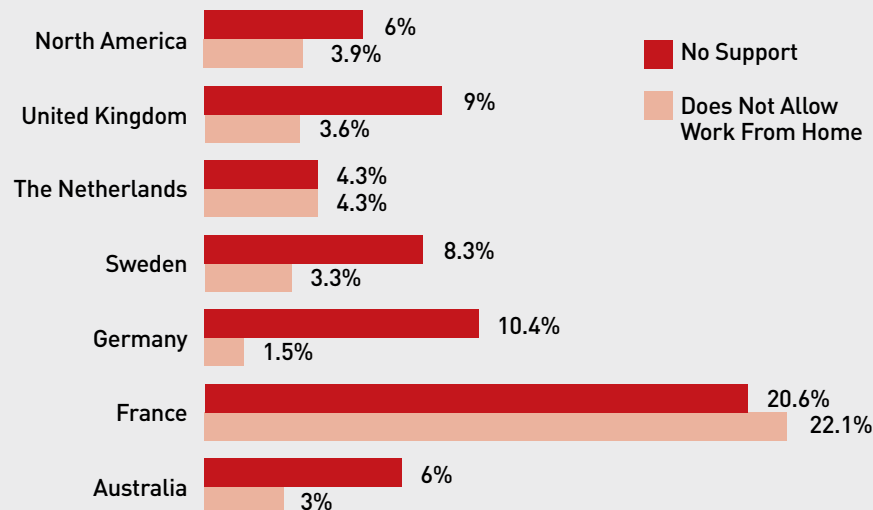
Australia, Germany, and Sweden are leaders in this regard as contingent workers compose a greater percentage of the workforce and are managed in a fashion similar to regular staff. France, the Netherlands, and the U.S. employ less than 10 percent of workers as contingent staff.

Even if they are not officially on the company payroll, organizations should provide performance reviews and set goals for contingent workers. "Every company should include contingent workers in their strategic talent management plan," Berggren says. "For many organizations this is still a weak point."

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### French organizations are significantly more likely to not allow or not support "work from home" than all other countries surveyed.

Each bar represents the total number of respondents, from each country, able to estimate their organization's level of support for working at home.



Source: Human Capital Institute and SuccessFactors Research

# The Great Skills Chase

**Employees today who are not concerned about impending layoffs face a new battle: how to develop job skills and remain valuable members of the workforce when employers fail to deliver sufficient training and support.**

More than 80 percent of employees around the world are concerned that their current skills will not sustain them for more than five years, according to a recent survey by Kelly Services. The survey reflects the views of approximately 100,000 people in 34 countries across North America, Europe, and Asia.

“With new technology and the increased competition for jobs, people are keenly aware that their current skills must be enhanced,” says George Corona, executive vice president and COO of Kelly Services.

When asked if the level of training provided by employers is sufficient for skills development and career progression in the near future, respondents from Europe proved to be the least satisfied, with 55 percent answering “no,” followed by 43 percent from Asia and 37 percent from North America.

“As a whole, Europe has held on to a more traditional classroom style of training, and has been one of the last to embrace web-based learning,” says Allison Kerska, senior director of global learning for Kelly Services. “In this time, the most expensive training programs are being cut so more of Europe’s training programs overall are being cut. Now is a great time to introduce web-based and virtual training to an audience that was hesitant to adopt it in the past.”

Kerska found it surprising that almost half of survey respondents say HR departments have not helped them to achieve their employment goals.

“The reality is that often HR ends up being very reactive in organizations, rather than devoting time to being proactive with employee development,” Kerska says.

One way to encourage this proactive role, Kerska adds, is to create a talent advisor position within the HR department so that one person’s core function is to ensure that employees are getting what they need to grow their skills.

Additionally, the survey reinforces that learning professionals must work to maintain on-the-job training, even in the midst of budget cuts. Kerska suggests the use of web-based, virtual training as an effective and inexpensive re-training method.

Employers can encourage informal reinforcement of previously learned skills through blogs, wikis, social networks, and peer mentoring. Finally, organizations can conduct best practice and success inquiries. By talking to other organizations about how they’ve taken formal training and applied it successfully in the workplace, employees may curtail the expense of implementing new or untested initiatives.

“Many organizations may be tempted to cut back on training in the present climate, but that could be a grave mistake that would adversely impact performance once the economy emerges from the recession,” Corona concludes.

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## What level of re-training will be required to keep pace with advances in the workplace?

	Formal university or college qualifications	Industry professional development courses	On-the-job training	Self-initiated training
North America	12%	31%	39%	19%
Asia Pacific	9%	35%	45%	11%
Europe	9%	46%	34%	11%

Source: Kelly Services



# Sustainable Expectations

**Corporate social responsibility certainly connotes a feel-good intention, but it also sounds deliberately vague—a catch-all phrase that has enough loopholes for companies to easily slide right through them. In fact, many employees expect more than their employers are prepared to deliver when it comes to giving back.**

A report by Krauthammer, a coaching consultancy, measured 16 different CSR practices and found both high employee expectations and gaps in fulfillment of these expectations. Younger, less-experienced employees rated the highest on levels of dissatisfaction.

Ninety-six percent of employees expect externally delivered training though only 78 percent of organizations deliver on it, according to survey respondents. Also, 60 percent believe that the economy and ecology should be treated as a single unit through responsible practices, though only 26 percent of companies achieve this ideal.

In addition, 59 percent of respondents want their company to abide by the credo that “long-term competitive

advantage depends on the efficient use of resources” though only 24 percent of companies actually do so.

“People are individually much more adaptable to climate shifts,” says Ronald Meijers, co-chairman of the Krauthammer board. “Suddenly, ‘green is good’ rather than ‘greed is good.’ But that shift happened only two years ago, and it takes a while for companies to change their preferences and policies today.”

The three categories used to define CSR are people (workforce management practices), planet (ecologically responsible business practices), and profit (socially responsible business practices).

The survey, whose respondent pool consisted of 395 Northwest European employees, found that only 47 percent of companies have an exemplary or operational CSR policy. In addition, companies are most likely to be active in executing practices in the area of people (39 percent), and decidedly less so when it comes to the areas of profit (23 percent) and planet (21 percent).

“There’s a fake tension that many people create between being good people and doing good business,” says Meijers.

Meijers argues that rather than just motivating employees with bonuses, using examples of the positive impact of a company’s services can often engage employees better, if not more.

“Companies rarely show how they’re making people happy with their services,” says Meijers. “People don’t even talk about it anymore. It’s such an obvious omission. It’s related to the stupidity of many management practices today in which people need to be manipulated to do good.”

“If you don’t know how well your company is doing, it might not count,” he adds.

Sixty percent of the employees surveyed worked in manufacturing, and the same amount worked at organizations consisting of between 101 and 5,000 employees. Two-thirds of respondents had 11 years or more of work experience. The gender balance was 75 percent male and 25 percent female. The study was done in partnership with the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University at Rotterdam, and the University of Amsterdam.

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paramount. An employer can teach new tricks. Instead they are looking for someone who can take initiative and transition quickly from one assignment or one team to the next with little or no explanation.

“There may not be a project manager, but the team needs someone to step forward and take it upon themselves to document the work,” Wilmer says.

Recent graduates need to think about which employer they would like to work for and in what field. Choosing the right organization that matches one’s interest is more important than opting for a paid internship or one that offers the highest salary.

Employers need to take a close look at areas of need and place interns where staff need the help and not necessarily in departments where an intern was hired in the past.

There is no need to create a formal internship program. Leaders can simply look for seasonal interns and call it the company’s “summer work program.”

Being adaptable and possessing soft skills are a premium now, according to a survey conducted by the Creative Group, especially as employees are working more often in teams. Interns may not be given the opportunity to give a presentation but they can contribute immediately in valuable ways.

**Michael Laff**

## Intern Premiums Rising

Once considered an expendable body who makes photocopies and kills time, interns are again emerging as a valuable source of talent for companies that are strapped financially.

In the past internships were modeled after apprenticeships whereby an up-start provides assistance in exchange for acquiring mastery of a particular skill.

Now as knowledge is king, the demands are changing. Working in different environments and acquiring soft skills ranked ahead of technical skills, according to a recent survey about the skills value of internships.

“Employers are looking to reduce ramp up time; they’re looking for someone who is familiar with the office environment and their software,” says Dave Wilmer, an executive with the Creative Group, which conducted the survey of advertising and marketing executives.

Interns can fill that gap with short-term, lower-cost labor with the limited commitment that companies are desperately seeking. Their advantages are obvious. As many are recent graduates who are eager to jump into the office environment, if they work out

they can be hired at lower cost than a more seasoned candidate. As employers continue to shed jobs, the work has not gone away even if the number of people available to do it has.

“Because of layoffs a lot of companies are short staffed,” says Wilmer. “They need more from their people.”

Interns should be aware that the benefits identified by managers in the survey are the ones they look for in their next hire. No longer are specific technical skills

### Valued Intern

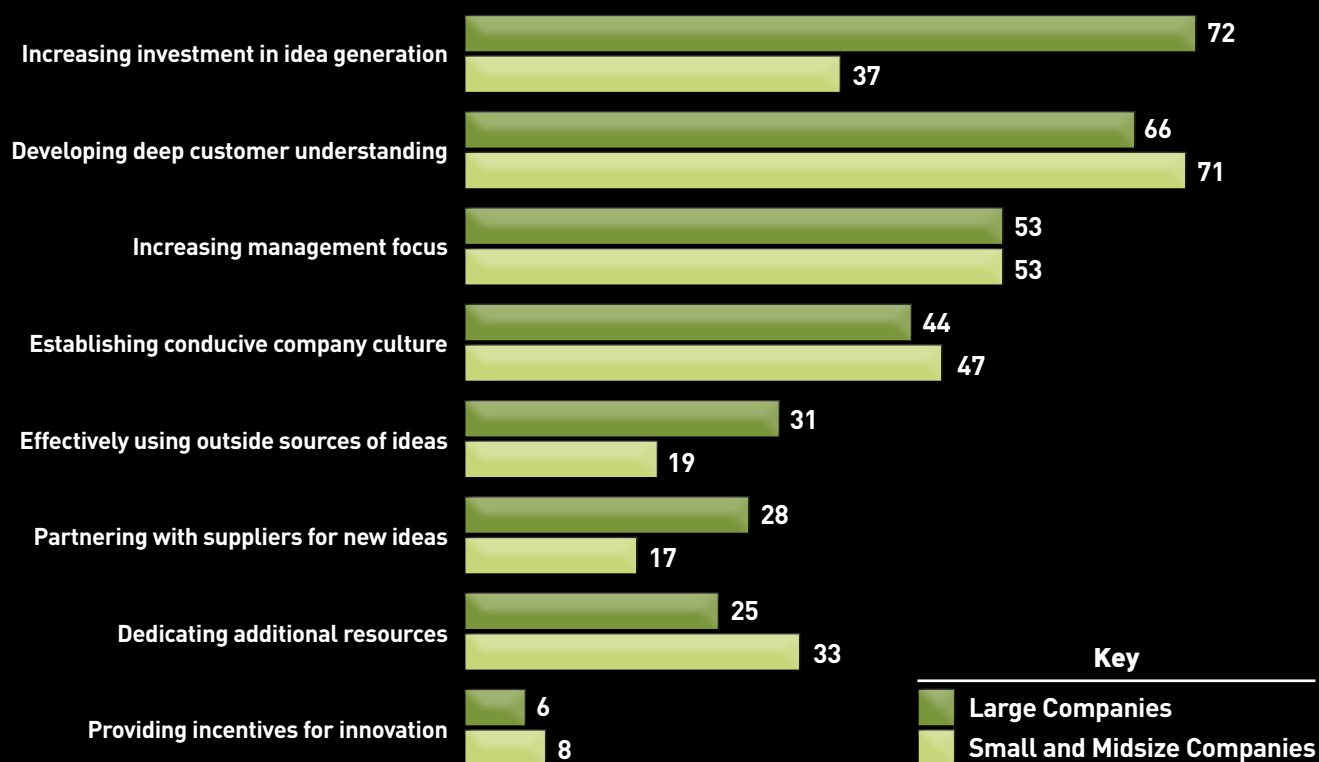
Advertising and marketing executives were asked, “Aside from pay, what do you think is the greatest benefit to students or graduates who participate in an internship program?”

Experiencing different work environments	31%
Improving soft skills	24%
Acquiring technical skills or knowledge	22%
Making industry contacts	12%
Learning about office politics and other workplace issues	9%
Don't know	2%

Source: The Creative Group

## Top innovators use a variety of tools to generate ideas. Some of the main drivers include the following:

Percentage of Respondents



Source: BCG; National Association of Manufacturers; The Manufacturing Institute

## Learning Portals Represent a New Trend

**Expertus and Training Industry Inc. announced the findings from their recent study, “2009 Study on Learning Portals & Informal Learning Technologies.”**

The study uncovered how learning executives’ use of learning portals has gained widespread momentum as a learning technology platform. The study defined a learning portal as, “a website where learners find, buy, or simply get access to training.”

More than 93 percent of respondents’ learning organizations have learning portals. Training organizations that train internal employees are by far the most frequent users of learning portals. However, two-thirds of those who train customers and more than half of those who train channel partners or vendors also use learning portals.

Within the next two years, 45 percent of respondents say they will upgrade their existing learning portal and 14 percent plan to launch a new learning portal.

Most respondents use all of the 12 major learning tools and technologies listed on the survey in their portals. These include blogs, online coaching, polls, self-study programs, communities of practice, and more.

Improving learner and customer satisfaction was cited by 68 percent of respondents as a top benefit of having a learning portal. The other two top benefits are tracking and enabling informal learning and helping to integrate learning technology.

Fifty percent of respondents said that including informal learning technologies in their learning programs was critically important and 39 percent reported that it was somewhat important. Less than 5 percent said that it was not important.



