



# HEADWAY

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM AHEAD  
PART OF THE EUROPEAN EXECUTIVE SEARCH NETWORK



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## ► SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

'It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.'

Charles Darwin



In 2009 we celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth; and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his greatest work *The Origin of Species*. At the time Darwin used the phrase *survival of the fittest* as a synonym for *natural selection*, when *fittest* would have primarily meant *most suitable*. Nowadays it is widely used as a catchphrase for any topic related to evolution including principles of unrestrained competition, which has an uncanny pertinence for both companies and individuals today.

Faced with a downturn, McKinsey<sup>1</sup> argues that smart companies should seize the chance to upgrade their talent, redesigning jobs so that they become 'more engaging for the people undertaking them...thus improving the odds of hiring and retaining key talent'.

Indeed companies with effective performance management processes have a ready mechanism to identify strong employees and to assess which types of talent drive business value today and in three years' time. Some need external help from partners like AHEAD<sup>2</sup> for **management audit** and **spotting exceptional talent** newly available on the market. As McKinsey points out, 'using slowdowns to uncover and hire displaced talent is often fruitful. Studies have shown that although overall levels of recruitment may level off or even fall, the quality of workers hired rises in recessions.'

Some employees are having to evolve particularly quickly in this tougher environment, among them 'Generation Y' or 'Net Geners' born in the eighties. As *The Economist*<sup>3</sup> points out, 'their dissatisfaction is growing as crisis-hit firms adopt more of a command-and control approach to management – the antithesis of the open, collaborative style that young workers prefer.' Besides, Net Geners may be just the kind of employees that companies need to help them weather a downturn: innovative, technology-savvy, hungry and willing to travel.

On the one hand, the younger generation needs to accept that nowadays decisions will be taken more crisply and that workloads will grow. On the other hand, their managers should take care to keep them engaged and motivated or face an exodus of talent once the economy improves.



**AHEAD**

SEARCH FOR HIGH ACHIEVERS

1. 'Upgrading talent', *The McKinsey Quarterly*, Matthew Guthridge, John R. McPherson, and William J. Wolf, December 2008.

2. For more information, call T. + 32 2 223 23 90 or email [brussels@ahead.be](mailto:brussels@ahead.be).

3. 'Generation Y goes to work.' *The Economist* 30 Dec 2008.



## ➤ SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES: USEFUL TO RECRUITERS OR NOT?

Most recruiters are aware of the growth and potential of social networking sites. But how much use are they in reality?

In her recent thesis at HEC-University of Liege, Caroline Reuland<sup>1</sup> found that it is mostly executive search firms and recruitment agencies in the Brussels area using these sites, and, until now, only a limited number of companies. For executive researchers, social networking sites constitute powerful and effective sourcing tools that allow them to identify non-applying candidates with specific profiles and a good level of experience.

‘Whereas the majority of headhunters and recruitment offices seem generally satisfied with the effectiveness of this new tool, many companies remain dubious – at least at present,’ explains Caroline Reuland. ‘The level of satisfaction seems to depend on the conditions of use of these tools,

the time spent on them and the expertise acquired with them. Additionally, IT – and new media-oriented companies experience a higher level of satisfaction. Compared to traditional job offering websites, the use of online social networking sites has the important advantage of reducing the number of non-pertinent candidates.’ She also points out that ‘future evolution might however, due to further mass-adoption of these tools, make its use less personal and thus reduce the advantage of precise targeting and therefore lower cost which online networking tools offer today.’

‘In AHEAD’s experience, some sites can be useful at the research stage’ explains partner Muriel Malak, ‘though our final candidates are most often found through other methods, such as on personal recommendation. Besides, reviewing these sites is time consuming, and the quality of information is not always relevant. Also high calibre candidates certainly prefer first hand contact on referral.’

1. For more information on her thesis, contact Caroline via [c-reuland@hotmail.com](mailto:c-reuland@hotmail.com).

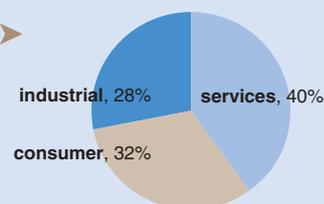
## ➤ FORGING AHEAD IN 2008

‘2008 was a good year for AHEAD,’ says Managing Partner Guy Vereecke. ‘We would like to thank all our clients for their renewed confidence. Two thirds of our assignments came from existing clients and included some very senior appointments at international level. Admittedly 2009 is likely to be a much tougher year for the profession generally, but AHEAD is in fine shape and these results stand us in good stead.’

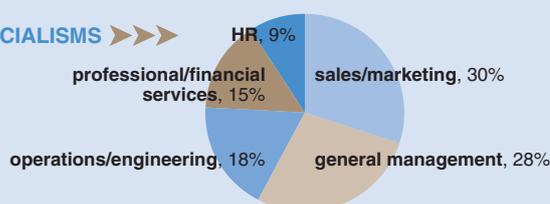
- Revenues were up 7%
- General management assignments rose from 16% to 28%
- Average time per completed assignment was to 2–3 months

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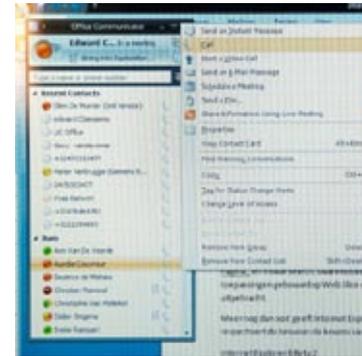
### SECTORS ➤➤➤



### SPECIALISMS ➤➤➤



## ► WELCOME TO THE NEW WORLD OF WORK...



Photos by kind permission of Microsoft

In an era when many companies and individuals are concerned about flexibility as well as the environment, one Brussels based company is pioneering a beneficial new type of framework spanning the physical, practical and human facets of work.



'Our concept will be an important weapon in the battle for the best talent,' claims Phillip Vandervoort, General Manager for Belux at Microsoft, which was voted Best Employer in Belgium 2008.

Indeed you just have to set foot inside Microsoft's new offices in Zaventem's Corporate Village to realise that working life is very different here. Imagine large open spaces with sleek, uncluttered surfaces with no PCs, nor phones, nor wires nor paraphernalia. Add a bank of stylish lockers where you can store your personal belongings until you are next in the office. Scatter a helping of cosy coffee corners, meeting rooms and spaces to congregate. And then brighten this veritable ark with funky décor and rooms named after birds and animals. Welcome to the 21st century workplace...

With 370 employees and just 230 workspaces, Microsoft's ultra modern offices comprise 50% meeting rooms for flexible use. 'Our increased mobility is changing our world already,' explains their General Manager. 'Employees don't need to be physically present in the office any more, which makes life much easier. For instance, if you want to pick up your children from school, that's fine. The only thing that matters is the result at the end of the year. How you get there doesn't matter. In the new economy, the performance of a member of staff is not measured by time they put in but by the results that come out.'



***'Big companies who want to win the war for talent will have to offer a performant multimedia framework like this. The world is one large workspace. It's a market for everyone.'***

Besides enlightened leadership, Microsoft facilitates this performance through their pioneering high tech infrastructure which combines various technologies in a structured and effective way: their software package called Office Communicator is a platform that connects the 370 Microsoft employees. Armed with a laptop, everyone can communicate with everyone else via whatever channel is open – whether telephone, internet, mobile phone, msn, all in real time. When you do not want to be disturbed, you simply register your unavailability. And when that laptop is closed, it becomes a Smartphone.

New hardware enhances working practices further. Microsoft's 'meeting video phone' (see above), is a combination of microphone, tiny cameras, one per person around the table. This allows you to have a meeting with attendees in different locations, even from home, featured like passport photos on the laptop screen. When one talks their face pops up and enlarges centre stage on screen.

It's all very clever and very effective. Internationally, IT specialists in Siberia can communicate with the Seattle HQ as if next door.

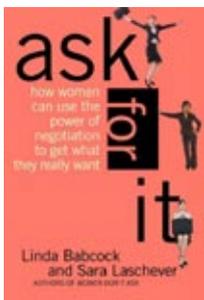
'Someone who has an idea in Antwerp, can get it developed in Milan, made in Beijing, delivered to Budapest, and then distributed across Europe. All this can be coordinated by a few minutes on a laptop,' adds Phillip Vandervoort. 'Mobility has become essential. Location is no longer a limiting factor. Gathering knowledge as well as communicating privately or professionally no longer has to be accompanied by physical movement....nor sitting in a traffic jam for two hours.'

'Today's new entrants to the labour market have been raised with a PC, internet and mobile phones,' explains Phillip Vandervoort. 'These 'digital natives' communicate and function in a completely different way from previous generations. They mail less and chat more.'

'If Microsoft wants to recruit tomorrow's leaders, the company has to work with the tools the young generation use,' adds Elke Jorens, HR director at Microsoft BeLux. 'How young people communicate today is very different from how we used to communicate when we were their age. What matters for this generation is not the company they will have, but the flexibility they will have in their lives to best manage their work/life balance.'

## ► 'ASK FOR IT'<sup>1</sup>: WHY WOMEN DON'T LIKE NEGOTIATING AND WHAT THEY SHOULD DO ABOUT IT

This is a book not about what women do badly, or what is done better by men. Speaking in Brussels in December 2008, Sara Laschever explained that 'Women make great negotiators. Yet taking care of other people is a gender norm for them and it's just when they ask for things for themselves that we run into trouble.' For example, a male graduate negotiating a salary increase of EUR 5,000 at the start of his working life will be over EUR 750,000 better off at the end of his working life if that increase is maintained and invested. 'Extensive research suggests that women are less likely to endure those five minutes of social discomfort to get that higher salary.'



So what constrains women in negotiating? Studies show that men initiate negotiations on their behalf and ask for things for themselves on average 4x as often as women do.

Asked to describe the most recent negotiations that they had initiated themselves, women often recalled events 18 months ago like buying or selling a car. Men spoke most commonly of events in the previous week,

such as asking someone to support a project in return for a favour, or to upgrade to a better office on promotion. 'In other words men saw negotiation as a tool to fine tune their circumstances, to prioritise their goals, to make life more comfortable for themselves,' she argues.

Young women thought that only older women have this problem. Yet data shows that is not the case. Men are more likely to put their hands up. 'I hear that X project is about to start. I would like to work on it.' They say they're ready to do more, ready for promotion. Yet, women assume that if they do good work they will automatically be recognised and rewarded.

In the US there was significant progress in the 1980s and 90s to close the salary gap between men and women but the progress levelled off in the economically buoyant 90s. In the first few years of this century it has risen again but still only to 72-75% of what men earn.

The author argues that the conflicting demands between work and home can also put women's health at risk. On the one hand studies show that professional work is generally good for women's health. However, full time women workers still do 2/3 to 3/4 of housework and childcare. That puts women's health at risk, through the conflicting demands leading to stress. At 5pm when it's time for women

managers to start their second shift of work at home their stress hormone levels are elevated; whereas it goes down with their equivalent male counterparts. So women need to negotiate a more equitable balance to support the choices that they and their partners have made together, eg. to have children together. move to a larger house etc.

There are three main reasons why women don't ask: our socialisation as children; the kind of behaviour we expect and solicit from women as adults; and networks.

Studies show that nurses and parents perceive boys and girls differently from day one. Boys are considered stronger, girls more needy of comfort. In studies, nurses pick up babies with pink hats more often than blue hats even when colours were switched; and they communicate differently and with a different tone of voice.

In school experiments, six year old boys raise their hands in class even when they don't know the answer. In contrast, girls tended to wait to be asked even if they know the answer. The author argues that girls toys – such as dolls and teapots – are about serving the needs of others. Boys toys – such as train sets and construction – are more about setting goals and self expression. Likewise boys chores are more likely to be outside the home washing cars, sweeping paths, and they are more likely to get paid. They quickly learn to work for money; whereas girls work more for love.

In the workplace, colleagues don't like women to be too aggressive. Being bossy, overbearing, difficult, not a team player, high maintenance, can lead to women being punished socially and being excluded from networks.

Women are more likely to be peripheral to or excluded from useful social or professional networks, where they learn to help each other and know when to ask and how to ask.

Men tell younger men things that aren't publicised. Women don't have that advice or know what's out there. Laschever argues that men have more opportunities to make connections, so gain faster professional development.

By the same token men and women demonstrate different feelings about negotiation.

For men, it's fun, about winning. For women, it's more scary like going to the dentist.

'By not negotiating, you may be communicating an underconfidence or something that does not reflect their ability. And that's not a woman's problem,' says Sara Laschever, 'it's society's problem.'

1. 'Ask For It: How women can use the Power of Negotiation to get what they really want' by Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, published by Piatkus Books 2008

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