

Date: 27 August 2013

Source: The Nation website

<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/opinion/The-challenge-of-finding-and-keeping-TALENT-30213522.html>

## **The challenge of finding and keeping TALENT**

Each year, about 300,000 university students in Thailand graduate, but only a few thousand of them can land in organisations known for the best care of their employees.

How can graduates succeed when those organisations are becoming more selective?

Executives of key companies like Siam Cement and Banpu admit that good grades are the first of the criteria when they recruit graduates. GPA is the first tool in screening talent.

At Banpu, the next step, an aptitude test, is a key element.

"We avoid hiring people who tend to extreme individualism. Despite good grades, individuals can disrupt unity in the organisation," Chanin Vongkusolkrit, Banpu CEO, said during a briefing to Nation University's executive MBA students last week.

It is a problem for fresh graduates to get into successful organisations. But ironically, in time, it will be the turn of those organisations' human resources chiefs to scratch their heads. As Generation Y-ers enter the job market, they bring with them notorious "job-hopping" behaviour.

Twenty years ago there were job-hoppers but they hopped mainly for better pay at a new company. As the nature of their work did not change, they gained experience over time. Now, the reasons for job-hopping vary.

Ideally, job-hopping should lead to career advancement and financial gain. Sadly, the majority of job-hoppers now indulge in this practice because they are unable to cope with the hardship and burden they face in their jobs. They also develop an urge to get a new experience with a totally new job.

During an interview, Derek Kidley, chief executive officer of Singapore-based PricewaterhouseCoopers Consulting, said that the international consulting firm has one advantage. Their offices are worldwide and there are lots of opportunities to work in different places, with different people and with different clients, all the time. He himself first gained experience in the United Kingdom and then Sydney, Australia. Now he is based in Singapore and is required to fly frequently to different cities.

Vilaiporn Taweelappontong, a partner at PWC Thailand, agrees. The Thai national was posted to the US for three years, where she was offered the opportunity to travel to many offices throughout the country. "It's a great experience," she said. In the fiercely competitive consulting business new job offers are common, but she has no reason to leave and that's why she has been working with PWC for 10 years, climbing up the career ladder.

Some Thai companies have started to offer opportunities for their staff to broaden their experiences beyond the Thai border. Engineers from PTT Exploration and Production were among the first, being flown to oil rigs overseas.

Siam Cement Group is among these expanding Thai companies. To ensure that all employees have a career path with the company, they are rotated to different departments to improve their skills. Rotation is applied even to top executives. In a video released during the company's centennial conference, young employees from offices located in several countries in ASEAN work together on new innovations.

Of course, working with people from different cultures can expose one to new ideas and provide an inspiring atmosphere. But Chanin of Banpu admits that most Thai employees are reluctant to work abroad. Indeed, a similar situation exists in Indonesia, where some employees don't even like the idea of going to work on an adjacent island, as they prefer staying close to their families.

There are some employees who are willing to be posted overseas, showing dedication to their jobs. But their company has to take good care of them. Allowances in these cases sometimes account for 60 per cent of salary.

Sending Thai employees to overseas offices can also bring problems, Chanin admits. In the first years after a takeover, Indonesians warmly welcomed Thai executives. Now, they prefer promotion for Indonesian executives. "Some of the Thai staff were called back to Bangkok. They are happy now," he said.

At Banpu, three key themes are applied to ensure that employees are happy and stay on board. First, equitable access for all applicants (though some are screened out after the aptitude test). Second, they are assigned according to their competence. Third, the pay is based on performance. On top of that is a variable bonus.

Needless to say, not all companies can offer such a pleasant work environment and it is no surprise that a survey last year showed that one-third of Thai employees are looking for a new job.

Ask yourself if your mindset is positive enough. The power of positive thinking by viewing a glass as half full instead of half empty can do wonders. Sometimes it takes a long time for all the sweat and tears to bear fruit. Bear in mind that it takes a combination of knowledge, skills and loyalty for career advancement.