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RECRUITMENT

WHY IS BRUSSELS A TALENT POOL?

Introduction

When it comes to finding top talent, Brussels is an incredibly diverse pool of internationally minded Mavens. As both the heart of the EU and the capital of a dynamic and well-educated domestic market, Brussels has surprising depth no matter your focus, and represents a political hub that punches consistently above its weight. At the same time, Brussels is an extremely tight-knit community, with professionals from diverse fields, backgrounds, and skill sets maintaining extensive networks that often transcend sectors through both formal and informal channels. A personal touch and an ear for the unique international style of the Brussels Public Affairs scene are crucial for successfully engaging in a legislative and regulatory arena that helps shape an EU community of nearly 500 million people.

Brussels as a talent market

- Within the Public Affairs sector, Associations as a whole are the most represented type of actor, registering more policy officers, consultants, advocates, and operational staff than consultancies, NGOs, or in-house private sector specialists.
- While most speak multiple languages with professional fluency, English, French, and German are the most spoken languages in EU affairs, while trilingual competencies in English, French, and Dutch are the norm in many management and strategy consultancies working on local, national, or Benelux dossiers.
- The "EU Quarter" of Brussels is a particularly dense network of organizations, interests, and professionals, and is a truly international "village" within a city that necessitates a physical presence that allows networks to be built and roots to be put down.

Exceptional Talent

- Candidates in Brussels are particularly competitive. Professionals often speak two or three languages fluently, have experience working or studying in culturally diverse settings, and are exceptionally qualified academically with multiple MA or post-graduate credentials.
- As a political hub and the seat of many EU institutions, agencies, permanent representations and international NGOs, Brussels is a highly competitive market that fosters an ambitious talent pool with hands-on experience that usually crosses public and private sectors: a by-product of this is that turnover can be particularly high, with cross-cutting personal networks and highly transferable skills making talent retention a true art in Brussels.
- While standards are high across the board, there are a few places where Brussels particularly stands out: Public Affairs professionals with strong personal networks, communications professionals, legal consultants and lawyers, regulatory experts, and EU project managers are among the most qualified and experienced here as any in Europe.

Effective Recruitment

- As a city with strong national and international character, Brussels is home to diverse professional, trade, and academic networks, not to mention the dozens of informal communities built around interlocking expat communities, policy forums, and alumni networks.
- A true melting pot, Brussels has developed a unique constellation of customs, practices, and expectations that reflect the competitive but inclusive nature of the city's dynamic talent pool; in such an environment, connecting "like a local" has a very particular meaning.

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- To be most effective, it's crucial to identify the kind of champion you need to advance your agenda, and what resources you can marshal to effectively navigate the deep waters of Brussels:
    - What profile are you looking for? Do you need to prioritize strong networks and access to stakeholders? Leadership experience? Is management of a team or broader organizational transition more important? Policy expertise, or business acumen? Brussels has top contenders for every niche, but clarity of purpose is key for a strong start.
    - What is your budget, and do the resources match the level of seniority necessary to advance organisational objectives? A small, experienced team with senior support might be most effective on a particular campaign, but complicated horizontal issues might need a proportionally broad team of experts and advocates.

In many instances, using an executive search or 'headhunting' agency for recruitment is an ideal solution, whether to hit the ground running or to support a well-established local presence. The extremely close and interlocking relationships and networks within the "village" or the EU Quarter can be difficult to crack, and with many connections happening quickly and quietly at the person-to-person level it can be tricky to react at the speed of relevance.

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