

As the dust of war settles, the civilian companies sitting patiently across the border start to get mobilised. Pitching camp on their new extraction, refinement or distribution projects, they can't ignore the multi-headed political situation they're about to enter. Unable to influence it, the ground rules and parameters within which they'll have to function are not negotiable. The consequences of not playing by the rules can be fatal. So how do companies overcome the challenge of attracting staff to run these projects?

Assume the heart of the matter is the huge proportion of the world's remaining oil and gas reserves sitting under that settling dust. The revenue it generates will fund the reconstruction and social integration programme, among other things. The growing success in resolving conflict around the world in the past decade has



Licence to drill

Economic necessities mean sending employees into volatile regions, but at what cost? asks JIM KAY & KAMRAAN SIDDIQU

resulted in a big increase in the number of companies working in countries affected by conflict. The current price of oil and gas, together with the need to diversify supply, has not only made these projects viable but probably drove the peace process in the first place.

This hasn't resulted in a money-is-no-object situation when it comes to employing staff. High costs, risk and the volatile price of energy all have a commercial impact. Those people working in ex-war zones know the going rate for salaries, benefits and the minimum provision of facilities. Finding the right

combination of incentives to encourage them to change employer is key. For executive staff this is usually a blend of money, promotion, travel/holidays and career prospects. Good, secure living/working accommodation is taken as read. Secure and relatively happy in their current role, executives need to be approached with care if they are to see the benefit in changing employer. Headhunting is the most effective way of achieving this.

With the economic slowdown in the West, there's a potentially larger recruitment pool of relevant talent there today. But as many of the individuals in this pool are

unlikely to have worked in a post-conflict situation, it's important to establish if they have the attributes to succeed. A spirit of adventure, good health, being street wise, ability to live on 'bachelor' status, robust personality, sound technical knowledge, cultural empathy, preparedness to work long hours and bravery are among the traits we'd be looking for. That recruitment pool, however, is being fished extensively by the organisations constructing the many other major projects, in peaceful locations, around the globe.

Our experience in the Middle East, Western Europe, Asia and Africa shows



PICTURE CAPTION

Laying tarmac and a staff briefing at Tarin-Kot Bastion Camp. Nicknamed Camp Helmand. The military base is a sprawling four miles long and two miles wide. The engineering work was completed in four months, under budget and under fire

that having a deep understanding of the geographic location is essential if future employees are to be attracted while having a clear appreciation of the real situation. The challenge is how to win the hearts and minds of candidates; research is the key to success. Before making contact with any senior individuals it's important that the new employer understands all the remuneration elements associated with attracting them and that their expectation can at least be matched.

The personal risks associated with working in a conflict zone must be carefully considered by every employer. Security will be the main concern, whether it's protection getting to and from work or how staff will be evacuated should there be an upsurge in violence. Traditionally provided

by the armed services, the Iraq war saw a large increase in the number of private companies providing security services. Frequent contact with the armed services is essential, to assess the risks and review the associated plans and procedures.

Today, the international community is well co-ordinated. Organisations include the local embassies (that will hold regular co-ordination meetings), UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs) and leading non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Registering with them and attending their briefings is vital. In addition to being a good source of networking they keep everyone up to date with other relevant issues, for instance, health.

With the new staff in place, maintaining

morale in a country where their movements are restricted is important. Usually cooped up for long periods, they should get time off regularly to leave the country for R&R. Even small things, for instance, providing different food and drink, can make a big difference – especially at key times such as Christmas. Facilitating a PX store can pay dividends. Whether peanut butter or Marmite, the vast range of home product they supply makes the expat's life that bit more palatable.

Ensuring every expat is fully briefed on local customs and culture is essential. Having respect for the indigenous population is vital if potentially dangerous situations are to be avoided. In a post-conflict country, the rule of law will be weak and many people may have access to firearms, etc. Interaction with local women is a prime area for concern, as often is blatant consumption of alcohol.

The war, of course, doesn't have to be violent. The threat of a cold one can have just as dramatic impact on the likelihood of attracting and retaining senior-level talent. Most recently, expats contemplating new roles in Russia are thinking twice about what might be in store if the Cold War revisits us. Discussions with them are now focused on 'what ifs' rather than 'how much'. Finding locals prepared to work for a foreign company under this circumstance will also be more of a challenge.

The secret to finding and retaining senior-level talent to work in conflict areas is twofold. Firstly it is devising a complete recruitment solution, from salary to security, and being able to articulate all aspects to potential employees in a way they respond to positively. Secondly, it's the employer creating and maintaining an environment/culture that makes employees feel valued, safe, motivated and as happy and enriched as possible.

The recruitment solution needs to be bespoke for each location and senior role. With forethought, a precise action plan and tightly choreographed interaction between employer and headhunter, there are few strategic recruitment gaps that can't be filled – wherever they are. **ep**

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