> **We're not taking on just anybody. It's about giving a genuine chance to people who are committed to a career in tech**

In the short term it is, he says, a more costly and less efficient process than the traditional route to hire, although people don't earn the same salary as someone fully trained. In many ways, he says, it's comparable to taking on an apprentice.

Ultimately, it's about weighing up the pros and cons and working to ensure success. "You can't just take on an ex-offender and expect it to be hunky-dory. It needs more commitment than that," Watson says.

Despite worldwide skills shortages, the tech industry has a habit of throwing people on the scrap heap, whether it is older workers, women who left to have children or people with chronic illness, Short says. As a result, he decided to take a different tack when evaluating how to supplement the software and service provider's existing UK workforce of around 1,800. Short is chair of trustees of charity Astriid, which was set up by his friend David Shutts following a cancer diagnosis.

It aims to match skilled professionals with long-term health conditions, such as leukaemia, multiple sclerosis and long Covid, with employers willing to accommodate part-time, flexible working arrangements. Once interested parties have registered on the charity's website, an AI-based search service finds suitable matches and the charity makes the introductions.

Advanced has already taken on one employee to handle first-line tech support via this route but intends to take on four more over the next couple of months. The aim is to learn collectively from the experience with a six-month review, Short says, before expanding the approach into other areas of the business.

Key considerations include training managers to support new joiners effectively and hold potentially sensitive conversations to understand not only their capabilities but also their limitations.

"The thing with people with chronic illness is that there aren't necessarily visual markers of diversity, which adds another layer of complexity, especially if they feel anxious about how to manage their day-to-day objectives and goals," Short says. "It's important to create a safe space to ensure people feel supported and can build their confidence and managers have an important role to play here."

At the more junior, 18- to 21-year-old level, meanwhile, the organisation has abandoned the standard entry devices of CVs and graduate entry. Instead, candidates' capabilities and personalities are evaluated via an online cognitive aptitude test before they progress to an internal assessment centre.

"We're trying to attract young talent and raw capability into the workforce for the first time but also to supplement it with more experience, which includes people with chronic illness," he says. "But while, like everyone else, we need skills and labour, the other side of the coin is social justice. We believe a key role of business is to support society and the wider community."

In a world in which demand for skills is outstripping supply using traditional routes, says Stephen Paterson, head of people and technology at AND Digital, it makes sense to give opportunities to people with the right attitude and a genuine passion for tech.

To this end, the digital consultancy has teamed up with charity CodeYourFuture, which trains refugees and other disadvantaged groups to become web developers. After providing the charity's senior technology people with coaching and mentoring on a voluntary basis for a few years, the decision was taken to hire two of its graduates: a steady flow of people every year is expected.

AND Digital employs 1,500 staff but aims to more than triple this figure to 5,000 by 2025. While it anticipates that much of this recruitment activity will take place via traditional sources, it expects a fair number to come through innovative channels, he says. Although no concrete targets exist at this point Paterson says that if they find the right people, they'll hire them. "As a source of talent, we keep our hiring bar high. We're not taking on just anybody. It's about giving a genuine chance to people who are committed to a career in tech and want to make a success of it."

While the recruitment process is similar to conventional agency hiring, providing refugee workers with effective support, particularly initially, is key to success, believes Paterson. After attending AND Digital's training boot camp, which is compulsory for all entrants, each participant is given their own 12-month coaching, mentoring and training plan.

They are also assigned a buddy and allocated to a squad of 12 people, whose leader is their mentor. A full range of wellbeing and mental health services is available, as is professional development training. This includes language support, and help in areas such as understanding what constitutes appropriate dress.

Six of these squads then form a club of 80 people, each of which has its own office space, clients, and social and training calendar. The aim of this organisation-wide structure, Paterson says, is to ensure no one feels alone because everyone knows everyone else and feels invested in – as if they're part of something small, but also something much larger.

The idea is to provide a fully rounded, holistic support that isn't limited to career development but includes people development. That's important because if people feel supported, they'll fly, he explains.
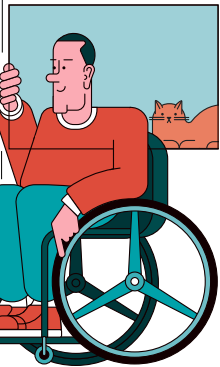
Adopting impact sourcing – hiring candidates from non-traditional and underprivileged backgrounds – as an approach to hiring tech talent is not just a CSR commitment, it's a business model commitment, points out Sandrine Asseraf, group managing director and ESG lead at Webhelp.

The customer experience solutions provider, which has a workforce of 100,000, was granted the Impact Sourcing Provider Award this year for its inclusive employment strategy. More than 4,400 people from non-traditional talent pools were taken on at locations across 25 countries in 2021 and standardised metrics were introduced. In 2022, the aim is to roll out the model in each country hosting a new office.

A further goal is to use the approach to hire 15% of all recruits in each of the supplier's existing 55 global locations by 2025.

But to make the vision a reality, each country is required to commit to annual measurable targets relating to recruitment, retention and tenure. They are also expected to provide joiners with cultural bridge training, ongoing career development and personal support.

To achieve its goals, Webhelp is partnering with governments and business, such as MigraCode in Spain and Harambee in South Africa, to create a holistic system where we all collaborate to identify the broadest talent pool, Asseraf says. Ensuring clients understand and are on board with the approach is also considered vital.

But taking this kind of approach does require planning.

"If you wake up one morning and a client says they want to start their project in two weeks, you'll find it difficult if you want to recruit this way," Asseraf says. "Instead, you need to build networks so you can hit the ground running."

While impact sourcing may be more expensive than conventional recruitment approaches in terms of time, training and resources, Asseraf firmly believes the benefits outweigh the costs. And not just for the individual and local communities concerned.

"It's about creating a sustainable model for the company, as people stay longer and have access to a better future, which means we create a built-to-last model.

"Our clients are becoming more supportive of it. Individuals, the company, our clients and stakeholders all benefit," she says. ●

38%

of CIOs said that current socioeconomic factors have escalated the need to improve talent acquisition and retention strategies

Foundry, 2022

37%

of business leaders report that the depth of tech talent in the UK in December 2021 was worse than in December 2020

Atomico, 2021

> **There aren't enough people in technology, which means we're competing for the same candidates**

TOWARDS A SUCCESSFUL D&I CULTURE

How CIOs have tried boosting D&I in tech teams

● Have not tried ● Tried with limited success ● Tried with success

Having a clear vision for inclusion and transparent reporting
33% | 30% | 36%

Inclusion training/communications
36% | 31% | 33%

Creating employee support networks
42% | 28% | 30%

Have an inclusion steering team with genuine powers
59% | 21% | 20%

Mandatory quotas on shortlists of candidates
75% | 17% | 8%

Mandatory quotas on hiring decisions
79% | 15% | 6%

*Due to rounding, some years do not total 100%

State of the CIO, 2022

Closing the technology skills gap

The need for more skilled employees in technology roles, particularly cybersecurity, has firms re-evaluating their recruitment strategies to attract and retain employees

For many people, hardly a day has passed since the early days of the pandemic that have been free of video calls. Whether at work, at school or at home, screen-based interactions have defined the last two years.

Not only has hybrid working forced companies to think harder about their cybersecurity, but job hopefuls have had to contend with a different working world than has ever been seen before.

"While there will always be a need for mid- and senior-level talent, it's important to also be mindful of how recruitment is handled for junior level roles. Given that many new graduates have spent the last two years of their education behind a screen, some may not feel as prepared to enter the workforce," says Daniele Grassi, chief operating officer at global talent and reskill training provider mthree.

The problem, however, is that while companies may now have the required infrastructure, systems and software in place to support a changed working model, they don't necessarily have the right staff to run them. The great resignation of 2021 resulted in millions of people quitting their jobs because they were dissatisfied with them and wanted to pursue other opportunities. One of the worst hit industries was technology, with 3.6m job openings listed in the US alone in 2021, according to the Computing Technology Industry Association Group. It's predicted that there will be 178,000 new positions created in 2022.

The fact is that there's a huge skills gap in the market and it's widening by the day. That's evidenced in Salesforce's 2022 'Global Digital Skills Index Report,' which found that 76% of respondents didn't feel ready for the future of workplaces and only 14% said they had advanced knowledge in encryption and cybersecurity skills.

Exacerbating the skills gap in digital and technology roles is the lack of diverse candidates both seeking and being employed in those positions. In its 'Diversity in Tech' research, mthree found that '71% of young tech workers have felt uncomfortable in a job because of their gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background or neurodevelopmental condition.'

But the need for talent is seeing companies source candidates from a broader pool than ever before, making the need for equality in technology a greater need in terms of talent attraction and retention.

Grassi says: "The hardest roles to recruit for are mid and senior level talent as everyone is vying for their attention. Roles in cyber security, cloud computing, data analytics and software engineering and development are greatly in demand across all industries."

And because many companies are still relying on outdated hiring practices, they're missing out on people from other backgrounds who have valuable skillsets to bring to the job. Doing so limits them to a narrow talent pool, thereby overlooking a wealth of diverse junior- and entry-level candidates.

mthree helps businesses overcome this challenge. In partnering with them, mthree presents companies with candidates who are ready to learn and join their workforce, backed up with a top-quality training and support system. "Leaders can spend less time training as junior talent are equipped with the knowledge to start contributing to the team early on," says Grassi of the benefits of this strategy.

After analysing the company's needs and employing the graduates on their behalf, mthree supplements their education by training them on technology they are currently using to equip them with the right knowledge and skills to hit the ground running.

Only 8% of companies say they are not planning to recruit entry-level talent at all in the coming year. That means the market for skilled junior tech professionals is incredibly competitive.

Tapping into diverse pools of talent – particularly considering that hybrid working has allowed for greater geographic diversity in the talent pool – can help alleviate this competition. The 'Diversity in Tech' study shows that the talent is out there. There was little discrepancy between ethnic groups as to their exposure to technology careers at school. And, as 37% said this was the main motivator toward digital careers, a more diverse workforce is achievable.

However, one of the common misconceptions still apparent among young people is that technology doesn't offer a future-proof career path. Three-quarters of survey respondents agreed with this assessment. That makes job-based skills development all the more important as learning at work can help combat this misconception.

It's vital that businesses recruit junior employees while continuing to develop their own in-house talent to aspire to more senior roles. Companies need to harness their eagerness to learn and make a difference to enable them to fulfil key positions and progress their careers, thus closing the skills gap.

71%

of young tech workers have felt uncomfortable in a job because of their gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background or neurodevelopmental condition

mthree, 2022

> **Those who don't have adults they look up to in technology or big corporations may have a bit of imposter syndrome and question their lack of ability to perform**

One of the root causes for the lack of diversity in technology is not having received the encouragement to pursue a career in technology from an early age, particularly among women, with only 35% saying they felt encouraged to do so by their school. A further 42% said they weren't given any information or resources to learn about such opportunities. It's a similar story for Asian and Black people, with only 19% and 29% respectively saying they were far more likely to follow a technology career as a result of being encouraged by their school.

"Those who don't have adults they look up to in technology or big corporations may have a bit of imposter syndrome and question their lack of ability to perform," says Grassi. "With mthree, we help remove some of the hesitancy and help them realize how strong their skill sets are and that they can make important contributions within Fortune 500 companies. Sometimes, all it takes is one person expressing that you can do it to help them make the leap."

Other barriers include people's doubts over their own qualifications, skills and expertise, thinking they won't feel welcome, or discrimination in the recruitment process. That suggests many companies are struggling to establish an inclusive working environment.

The solution is for schools and businesses to ensure everyone receives equal opportunities and encouragement to learn about technology as a career path and the qualifications needed, as well as promoting available roles and attending job fairs. Role models can also play a key role in encouraging women and Black people, in particular, to choose a career in technology, while firms need to do more to address problems inherent within their own culture to improve retention rates and put their diversity and inclusion strategies into action to meet their goals.

The Reskill programme offered by mthree trains existing employees and tackles any biases by opening up businesses to a new demographic. Its alumni hire-train-deploy model saw 35% female and 50% black, Asian and minority ethnicity employees placed in 2020.

The benefits of having a diverse workforce are clear. Numerous studies have shown that having a team of people from a wider range of backgrounds, ages, genders and ethnicities drives greater creativity, productivity and profit margins.

And, tackling the skills gap now, will only be a benefit to companies in future. Grassi says: "At the rate that technology is evolving, we only expect the skills gap to widen even further if education doesn't evolve to become more in line with the needs of the industry. That's why we feel that the work we're doing at mthree is so important to ensuring that both companies and junior level talent are able to thrive."

With the rapid rate at which technology is evolving, the skills gap is set to widen even further. But by educating, enabling and empowering junior talent to thrive, this shortage problem can be addressed in the long-term.

For more information about how mthree can help with your technology recruitment needs visit mthree.com

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