

# APPOINTMENTS

## Empowering through people

Amid the current economic upheaval, companies need to invest more in their employees in order to help them adapt to changing processes and become more dynamic, writes **Linda Daly**

THERE has been much bad press about Ireland's economy over the past six months, but we finally received good news this week from the Economic and Social Research Institute. While Ireland may face short-term problems as a result of the global economic slowdown, with appropriate policies, the economy should recover quite rapidly, it says.

It seems that Ireland's economy is not crashing down around us after all, rather it is going through a change. Cathal Divilly, managing director of the Great Place to Work Institute, says during this period of transition, companies should continue to focus on their people.

"When the economy is shifting, what usually happens in organisations is that they cut spending on training and development. We want to deliver a message stating this is the last thing that should be done. When the economy is changing, people are even more important to your organisation. You need them to be more innovative."

Divilly and scores of human resources experts like him agree that a firm's people are even more important during changing economic times. All warn against cutting back on people initiatives.

"The 'Great Place to Work' concept has nothing to do with it's nice to be nice, rather it makes business sense to concentrate on your people. Companies need to be more dynamic and come up with more creative ways of working — that creativity comes from the people within the organisation. It is your staff members



**CATHAL DIVILLY:** managing director of the Great Place to Work Institute

who have the ability to change and be more innovative, so they need more of a focus during changing times."

For the past number of months, the Great Place to Work Institute has been stressing the importance of employee engagement. Its annual conference, which was held this week, also had that theme.

"People who are at the coal-face of your organisation need to be engaged. It is vital," says Divilly. He provides the example of Ulster Bank, which invested heavily in an employee-engagement programme last year. The aim of the bank's 'Journey to One' programme was to boost employee-engagement levels across the whole organisation. It focused on enabling leaders to connect better with employees by having clear goals and

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ideals; establishing a set of values; and creating emotional energy in the business.

The programme was introduced to senior leaders first, but was then run throughout the entire organisation. Over 140 two-day workshops — involving the total workforce of 6,500 — were held. As a result, the bank received 1,100 suggestions from employees and implemented 60pc of them.

It is a well-known fact that the best companies to work for are also the best performers. According to the latest European figures, the top firms receive six times as many job applications as their total number of employees, helping them to attract the right staff. They also save costs on hiring and training. The voluntary employee turnover is low and

the average absenteeism rate minimal. They also experience high annual revenue growth and benefit from high productivity levels.

Says Divilly: "That programme has positively impacted on Ulster Bank's bottom line and on the employees who came up with the suggestions. The sense of involvement and empowerment surrounding a process like this is huge. It gives employees a sense of partnership with management."

He says partnership is important in today's workplace, a point backed up by Patrick Flood, professor of organisational behaviour at Dublin City University and speaker at the Great Place to Work conference this week. Flood believes there is a strong link between high-performance work systems and business metrics. He says creating a sense of partnership in the workplace is a highly positive thing to do for any organisation.

The concept of partnership in the workplace means employees feel united with management and the sense of a 'them and us' divide is reduced. People initiatives foster this sense of partnership, explains Flood.

Divilly says some of the best companies actually increase their people spend during periods of economic change. "They continue to deliver a message that their people are important. The best companies to work for have a dedicated people focus. They're never comfortable with where they're at; they're always looking to improve."

## NEWS ROUNDUP

### Boost for Ulster

THE north-west was given a major boost this week, with news that over 250 jobs are to be created in Donegal and Derry. Clinical diagnostics company Randox Laboratories is to create 135 high-value jobs in Dungloe, Co Donegal over the next three years. The company is investing €7.5m in the establishment of a diagnostic manufacturing and research and development facility. It is being supported by Údaras na Gaeltachta. Meanwhile, information technology company Fujitsu Services is to create 150 jobs in Northern Ireland. Some 120 of these will be

located in Derry, with the rest going to Belfast. The investment — Fujitsu Services' third in the past 18 months — brings its total employment to over 900 in this part of the country.

### Calling all astronauts

A major recruitment drive is now on for astronauts in Europe. The European Space Agency (ESA) is hoping to recruit four astronauts to join its existing corps of 16. Special advisor to the ESA's scientific directorate Leo Hennessy was in Dublin this week to encourage budding Irish

astronauts to take up the task. The agency is expecting over 20,000 people to apply, but the ideal candidates will either be experienced engineers or have degrees in the sciences, especially life sciences, physics or chemistry. Aviation would also be an asset, as would good intelligence, memory, reasoning and concentration, according to Hennessy. "The ESA is moving to exploration and is investing in projects that will eventually lead towards manned space flights to Mars," he explains. That means the successful applicants could see themselves on one of these flights in the future.

## ON THE MOVE



### Banking on it

EOIN Blake (pictured above) has been appointed manager at Paragon Search and Selection. In this role, Blake will have specific responsibility for the development and management of Paragon's banking team; he will also play a key part in the strategic development and growth of the business. Blake joins the firm from Brightwater Selection where he initially specialised in public-practice recruitment before progressing to the role of senior

consultant within the banking division. He graduated from Trinity College Dublin with an honours degree in economics in 2003.

### President elect

The Institute of Certified Public Accountants (CPA) has elected Norman J Adams as its new president. Following a career spanning 25 years with KPMG, Adams now runs an accountancy practice in Malahide, Co Dublin. He is a former chairman of the Leinster CPA Society and represents the institute on the Consultative Committee of Accountancy Bodies Ireland. The CPA is one of Ireland's leading accountancy groups, with over 5,000 members and students around the country. Adams is supported by vice-presidents John B White, principal, JBW Accountants; and Geoffrey Meagher, group finance director, Glanbia.



### Good relations

Gillian D'arcy (pictured above) has been appointed account director with Walsh Public Relations. She first joined the company as an account executive in 2000 and stayed three years. She returned in January 2006, having worked with Weber Shandwick in Dublin and as a freelance account manager in London. Currently, she is supporting clients in the consumer lifestyle, health, food and tourism sectors.

**EDITOR:** Linda Daly **email:** appointments@whitespace.ie

**WHITESPACE:** Top Floor, Block 43B, Yeats Way, Park West Business Park, Nangor Road, Dublin 12. **Telephone:** 01 6251400 **Fax:** 01 6251402