

A|M|S

# Launch now or lose out

How to scale talent acquisition to  
drive pharma and medtech success



There are few industries where speed to market is more critical than life sciences. Delays can have significant human and commercial impacts. Quality of life — if not life itself — hangs in the balance as drug therapies, medicines, and devices move from R&D to drugstore shelf.

In fact, one recent study found that a single, 20-month delay in the approval of a major cancer therapy cost patients more than 14,000 years of collective life — a stark reminder that every day a drug is not available, it can mean lives lost.

Along with the human imperative, pharma and medtech must also contend with enormous revenue losses and diminished brand equity when speed to market is compromised.

Research puts a fine, if not chilling, point on the need for speed. A recent McKinsey study found that a six-month delay in launching a \$2 billion therapy can obliterate more than \$750 million in value.

Further industry analyses reveal that for each month a product launch is delayed, the cost can climb to over \$1.4 million in lost sales for mid-sized drugs. (High-margin therapies suffer proportionally even greater losses.)

When you consider that first-to-market drugs consistently capture a 6% larger market share compared to late entrants, the cost of delays becomes even more striking. But speed to market is no longer just about beating competitors; it's about navigating an increasingly volatile and unpredictable environment.

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# Political and public health forces reshape pharma operations

Politics and public health also play a significant role in reshaping the pharma and life sciences industry. In recent months, tariff announcements have forced pharmaceutical companies to relocate manufacturing operations, sometimes overnight. As supply chains are disrupted, costly compliance hurdles and operational delays also emerge, further straining budgets and timelines.

Long-standing policy is not immune to disruption, either. The Trump administration's recent vaccine and acetaminophen announcements will likely drive increased

demand for regulatory and development (R&D), safety, and medical affairs professionals — intensifying competition for already scarce talent and putting additional pressure on TA teams.

Compounding these challenges is the need for near-immediate mobilization of specialized talent. Whether it's sourcing experts to resolve logistics snarls or regulatory professionals to manage compliance, the pressure on traditional talent acquisition models is immense.

## The solution?

Agile, proactive workforce strategies capable of responding to the daily market shifts that define today's operating environment.

# Talent acquisition leaders do shape market outcomes

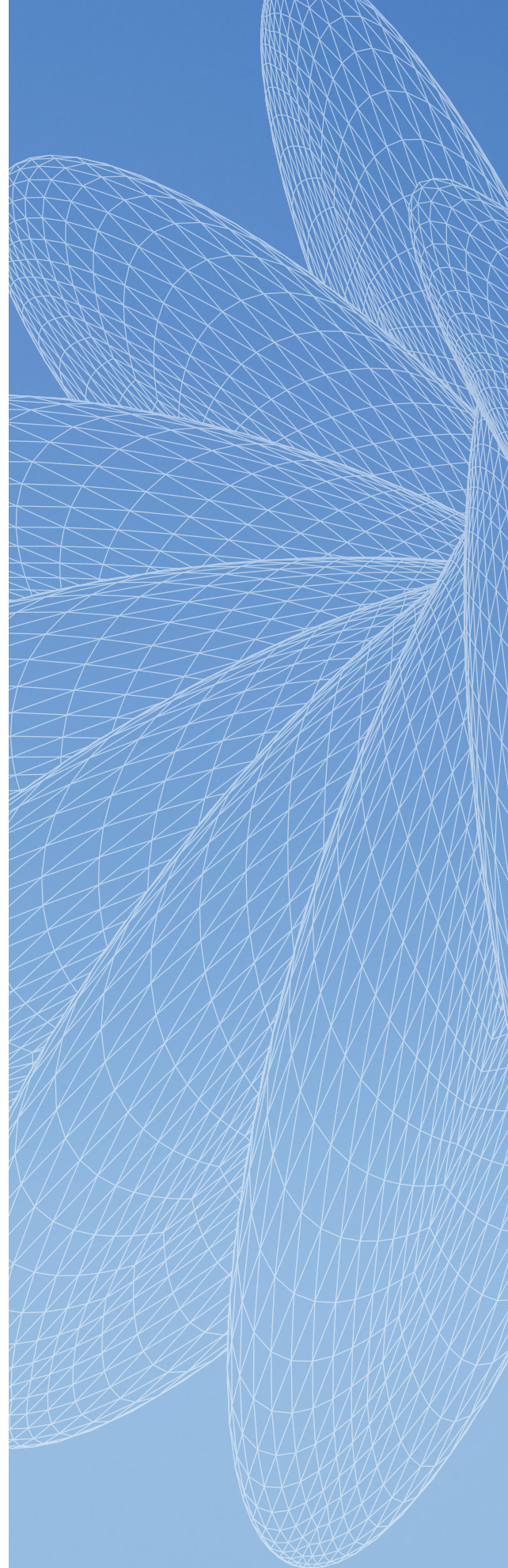
While your counterparts debate budgets and strategies, TA leaders are on the front lines. How and who you hire is so much more nuanced than just role fulfillment. Your ability to find and place the best talent at the right time has a direct impact on how fast science advances, products launch, and patients access critical treatments.

According to Deloitte research, 83% of pharmaceutical companies face challenges finding skilled talent, with 75% expecting the shortage to intensify. In this climate, the TA leader who solves this puzzle is not just valuable — they become indispensable.

This requires a fundamental shift in how executive leadership views talent acquisition. TA leaders must position talent acquisition as a strategic driver of market entry, not a transactional support function.

When policy and science can change direction overnight, TA leaders require more than resilience, they need scalability. Based on AMS' work with pharma, life sciences, and med-tech companies the world over, those organizations best positioned to win are the ones able to flex their existing resources — quickly reallocating internal talent, adapting flexible staffing and hiring models, integrating flexible workforce solutions, and building global talent pipelines.

The following strategies offer practical insights to help you build this adaptability in your organization as you stay ahead of industry shifts.



# Reskilling, upskilling, and workforce agility: unlocking agility and growth with skills-based hiring strategies

Drug launches and market disruptions are constant — which is why so often, TA leaders are forced to scramble to fill roles as they open, in near real time. Yet in the face of a 35% talent shortage across pharma and life sciences, the funnel of qualified talent grows increasingly narrow. This is why agile, forward-looking strategies such as skills-based hiring are so important.

For many organizations, that means looking within. From a strategic point of view, internal mobility makes sense — grow needed skills among existing staff; however, this approach requires dedicating not only ample budgets

but also months if not years to complete. And when the industry can shift quite literally overnight, time is not always on your side.

With mounting pressure to hire rapidly, TA leaders need partners who can orchestrate their talent model—unlocking agility, resilience, and sustainable growth across the entire employee lifecycle.

AMS suggests a multi-prong approach to skills-based hiring, one that can unlock agility, resilience, and sustainable growth throughout the entire employee lifecycle. Here's how:



“

Legacy recruitment models lack the agility and deep talent benches needed to scale specialized teams quickly. A hybrid approach to skills-based hiring can help.”

**Jacqui Horn**  
Managing Director, Pharma,  
Life Sciences & MedTech  
Sector, AMS

# Create skills liquidity within your existing workforce

Often used interchangeably with internal mobility, skills liquidity means treating your internal talent as a dynamic resource that you can flex to meet demand — before defaulting to external hiring. You can view skills liquidity similarly to creating a gig economy inside the organization — you're building the talent pools you need by moving around the people you have today.

In pharma and life sciences, internal mobility rates hover around 25% — higher than many industries, but still nowhere near the potential impact it could deliver, especially given the huge opportunity it presents for driving engagement, loyalty among current employees, and the mutual benefits for upskilling and reskilling.

The case for prioritizing internal mobility is clear:



## Retention and engagement

Employees are 3.5 times more likely to be engaged at work if they see opportunities to move internally.



## Faster deployment of skills

Internal moves are typically filled 2x faster than external hires.



## Cost efficiency

Internal hires cost 50-75% less than external hires when you factor in sourcing, recruiting fees, and onboarding.



## Business resilience

Pharma and medtech face constant disruption. Internal mobility creates a flexible talent bench that can shift with market demands.

Pursuing skills-based liquidity and internal mobility transforms external hiring into a strategic decision — focused on filling true capability gaps rather than reacting to every vacancy. This shift empowers TA leaders to drive their organizations toward a fully skills-based approach.

# From stretch assignments to strategic gigs

When organizations faced skill gaps in the past, employees were often asked to take on 'stretch assignments' — informal side projects that lacked any sort of formal documentation regarding performance or new skills. Today, leading pharma companies have transformed this informal approach into structured internal mobility programs.

Pfizer's "Growth Gigs" program offers employees part-time or temporary project assignments across different functional areas. Employees develop new skills, expand their networks, and gain diverse experiences within the company. The program supports fluid, "zig-zag" career growth rather than traditional linear paths — a method that aligns with the increasing adoption of flexible talent mobility models.

Novartis has embraced a skills-based organization approach with a talent marketplace where employees can view and apply to 'gigs' or project-based work that builds new skills and capabilities. Employees spend part of their time on projects outside their core role, supporting both internal mobility and personalized career development.

The critical difference between these types of programs and stretch projects? These former are tracked. Companies now document who participates, how they perform, and what skills they develop. This transforms project work from a favor ("Can you help out?") into a genuine investment in employee growth — and creates a visible pipeline of upskilled talent for future roles.



# Prioritize internal mobility before defaulting to external hiring

As already mentioned, skills-based hiring is ideal but it can be a major initiative, requiring collaboration between HR and TA functions. But there are other ways to fill skills gaps that don't have to be so overwhelming.

## Start smaller.

Focus on internal mobility pilots that assign employees projects designed to build new capabilities.

## Upskilling and reskilling: your strategic advantage.

- Upskilling develops current employees' existing skill sets to meet evolving role demands.
- Reskilling teaches entirely new skills, enabling employees to transition into different roles or departments.

Companies that adopt this approach benefit from improved retention and close previously unfilled capability gaps. The result is similar to what a full skills-based organization can deliver—without the heavy lift.

## Internal mobility before external hiring.

Before posting another external requisition, ask:

### *Are you fully utilizing the people you already have?*

External hiring involves ramp-up time, sourcing fees, recruiting expenses, and onboarding costs. Internal moves avoid most of these — while boosting employee engagement. People who see clear growth pathways feel valued and stay longer. Through upskilling and reskilling, you fill business gaps while strengthening your workforce.

More than 60% of pharma and life sciences executives view upskilling and AI literacy programs as vital, with about 70% planning to invest in training programs for their broader workforces in 2025.

Clearly, the investment is there. But facilitation isn't. Managers readily support moves within their own departments but resist cross-functional transfers. That resistance leaves skills and adjacencies untapped — people who could fill gaps if internal mobility were truly prioritized.

Making internal mobility work requires deep insight into employees' actual capabilities — not just their job titles. Then, identify adjacent skills that overlap with both internal needs and external market demands. Where can targeted upskilling or reskilling bridge the gap between what someone knows and what you need? These can be among your best opportunities for internal mobility.

# Four pillars of strategic talent acquisition

When regulatory approval comes through or a competitor stumbles, you have weeks — not months — to mobilize the right team. Miss that window, and the market moves on without you.

The pharma, life sciences, and medtech organizations that consistently win these moments share a common trait: they've built talent acquisition capabilities that move as fast as their science does. Not through unlimited budgets, but through the following four fundamental approaches that work together to create speed, flexibility, and precision.

## 1. Pursue internal mobility

Prioritize internal mobility to tap into your existing workforce's potential. Moving employees across roles and departments not only creates a path for filling critical openings faster and saves money, but also boosts employee engagement and retention by providing clear career pathways.

## 2. Balance flexible staffing models

Consider the total talent picture. For instance, if speed is crucial, is it better to hire a contingent worker for six months or leverage internal employees finishing an internal mobility project that equipped them with the necessary skills? Perhaps it's a mixed approach — allowing you to maximize efficiency without long-term workforce overcommitment, with the added bonus of preserving culture and quality.



### 3. Outsource scale to a partner

Once internal mobility, upskilling, and reskilling options have been fully maximized, strategic external hiring becomes necessary. Building this capability internally can be challenging, especially during sudden hiring surges. That's where partnering with an experienced provider and solution, such as AMS PharmaFlex, becomes invaluable. A provider acts as an extension of your team, managing end-to-end hiring — rapidly sourcing, screening, and onboarding talent while providing continuous market insights that feed back into your internal talent strategy.

Whether you need to outsource your entire surge capacity or only administrative tasks, a hybrid model provides the scale, speed, and flexibility needed to keep pace with evolving business demands so TA leaders can maintain focus on other strategic priorities.

### 4. Build global talent pipelines

Develop forward-looking, global talent pipelines that anticipate the impact of emerging therapies and technologies. By forecasting talent needs based on R&D pipelines and market trends, organizations can assume a less reactive posture, instead anticipating future needs and maintaining a steady supply of critical skills.

These four capabilities don't operate in isolation. Internal mobility reduces your external hiring needs. Flexible staffing models buy you time while you upskill. Strategic partners provide surge capacity when market conditions shift overnight. And global pipelines ensure you're never starting from zero when the next launch opportunity emerges.

The organizations capitalizing on breakthrough science and favorable market conditions are the ones that built these capabilities before they needed them. Those still relying on traditional hiring approaches find themselves scrambling to staff yesterday's opportunity while tomorrow's passes them by.



# Skills aren't the future — skills liquidity is

We've all heard the mantra: **"The future of work is skills, not jobs."** It's on every analyst slide deck and every HR conference stage. And yet...most organizations are discovering that building a skills-based model is a lot harder than anticipated.

The organizations that win won't be the ones with the biggest skills databases. They'll be the ones that can move skills at speed — redeploying talent from one problem to another, one product to another, one geography to another.

*That's skills liquidity:  
Not just inventory, but flow.*

Think about COVID-19. The pharma industry didn't have time to build a perfect taxonomy of scientific capability. What mattered was the ability to mobilize scientists across disciplines — shifting virologists, data modelers, and regulatory experts into vaccine development in record time.

*That wasn't taxonomy.  
That was liquidity.*

What matters today isn't just what skills you have, but how fast you can rewire them.



# The reality is brutal: every day of delay costs patients, revenue, and market share.



Launch windows won't wait — and neither should your hiring.

Whether you're a traditional pharmaceutical company developing the next breakthrough therapy or a medtech innovator creating AI-enabled surgical devices, PharmaFlexRPO by AMS gives you immediate access to specialized talent, scalable workforce models, and embedded launch support — all ready to activate within 48 hours.

Schedule a conversation to see how PharmaFlexRPO can solve your launch hiring challenges today.

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