

Version 0.4

Talent Management: Key Questions for Learning and Development

Organisations are increasingly putting emphasis on talent management as a means of delivering long term competitive advantage through their people. In a recent survey, 60 per cent of businesses said talent management was essential to the bottom line. However, this survey from Cranfield School of Management showed a major disconnect between word and deed –it found that only 49 per cent of UK businesses were implementing talent development programmes. This gap presents an opportunity for learning and development professionals to make a real difference to their organisation. It means proactively focusing in on some key questions:

- What does talent management mean?
- Why talent management for your organisation?
- What role should Learning and Development play?
- What role does the talented individual play?
- How do you encourage broad thinking about development?

Integrating talent management into individual and line management responsibilities and business activities will help realise the goal of winning the war for talent.

What does talent management mean?

Talent management is defined as the strategies and practices needed to identify, develop, attract and retain skilled workers of value to an organisation. How this translates for your organisation is not an academic question - you need to debate and agree internally what it means in practice in the organisation, and the consequences of putting this into your workplace- and indeed, of taking little or no action. For example, talent could mean the whole organisation, or a selected few. The individual can be fully involved or have development planned out. The process of selection and development can be transparent or secret.

Why talent management for your organisation?

A growing number of organisations are seeing the sense in adopting a concerted and holistic approach to retaining and developing their key staff, their talent. This means dovetailing:

- Creation of planned development opportunities
- Performance management
- Development and assessment
- Succession planning
- Recruitment

Even if the right talent can be recruited, retention depends on creating a climate where top talent wants to stay and develop and use their skills.

What role should learning and development professionals play?

Development is a vital part of successful talent management and internal and external development assistance is frequently sought. If the skills are right, learning and development professionals can play a critical role in integrating learning and development into a successful total business strategy.

Often the remit for managing talent in organisations lies with Talent Management specialists or the HR department. The learning and development professional has an important role to play in identifying the learning need, in encouraging high potential individuals to take ownership for their own development and for line management to play a full part in the process.

How do we best identify learning needs for this group?

Each organisation has different methods for the identification of talent. In the authors' opinion a key criterion should be the individual's ability to learn and develop.

Many organisations use development centres to help identify strengths and development needs. These help identify individuals key attributes and competencies and areas of the development, whilst giving the individual a sense of inputting into their future.

Whether individuals have talent of a technical nature or whether they are future leaders, using a development centre is a typical starting point for identifying those individuals who do have talent.

In our experience it is essential that each person on a talent management programme has a personal coach to help them

construct and implement their plan. The personal coach can play a key role in this process and help the individual to progress. Three sixty degree feedback can be used on a periodic basis to support individual change and development.

Key questions are, therefore:

What are the individual's current strengths?

What are the individual's personal career aspirations?

What are the individual's current and future areas of development?

What development themes should be a priority?

Our experience in working with high potential individuals leads us to suggest that, just as with all individuals, it is best practice to encourage them to develop an individual development plan that is tailored to their needs. Although it is unwise to generalise, we often find through coaching high potential individuals that their development requirements fall into three key areas: strategic awareness, personal effectiveness and career management.

- **Strategic awareness**

Future business leaders need to be able to set strategic direction and to lead and manage change. There are a range of learning and development interventions that can address these needs from business school programmes through to master classes and prescribed reading.

- **Personal effectiveness**

Although we often find that individuals on talent management programmes have innate leadership skills, often they need help to improve their personal effectiveness. High potential individuals need to communicate, motivate and inspire others. They also need high level of emotional intelligence.

- **Career management**

Making the right career choices is important for those who have talent. Such individuals need to be able to review their career options, what they value and is important to them. Having a coach or sounding board allows them to discuss on a one to one basis potential career paths and choices.

What role does the talented individual play?

Many talented individuals have 'drifted' into positions of influence in the organisation. How do we help the individual to take charge of their own learning? A sound platform for personal ownership of learning is to encourage reflection and discussion. In order to promote such a culture of learning, one method we have found useful is to ask high potential individuals to keep a learning log or diary of what they have learned. This form of reflective practice encourages talented individuals to recognise the value of learning and the opportunities there are to learn and develop.

How do you encourage broad thinking about development?

Unfortunately even with talented individuals there is still a mindset in many organisations that unless they attend a training programme, they have not increased their learning. HR and L&D professionals have a key role to play in encouraging people who have talent to take advantage of the full range of learning and development opportunities available. These can be tailored to suit the individual's learning styles. Learning from the experience of others can provide useful development insights for those with high potential. We worked with a talented technical manager for example who needed to develop his presence in the business. Through personal coaching he was encouraged to co-deliver technical presentations with his colleague. Today he is one of the organisation's acknowledged subject matter experts who speaks successfully at international conferences on his specialist topic.

Shadowing and mentoring

Learning from the experience of others can provide useful development insights for those with high potential. In particular having access to senior management as role models can prove invaluable. Also, talented individuals can usefully undertake secondments, projects and assignments to help them learn more about specific areas. In addition, individuals need to keep up to date with sector specific and business reading, to attend conferences and seminars and to use the intranet and internet to widen their knowledge.

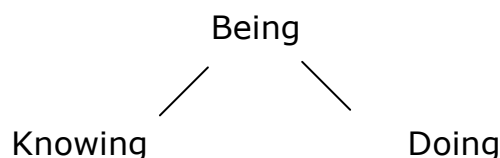
Action Learning Sets

A further approach which we have seen work very well is to encourage action learning sets. Here groups of learners meet on a regular basis to share issues and to help one another to develop. In our experience action learning sets work best when:

- Their membership is drawn from different parts of the organisation
- They are facilitated by a learning and development professional
- They meet on a regular basis (at least once every two months)
- They have an agreed constitution and set of ground rules for working together
- The members share work-related issues and are committed to support and challenge each other

Non-work related learning

Today it has become more recognised that effective business leadership is as much about what leaders are like (their being) as much as their skills (knowing) and behaviours (doing)



In order to develop a learning culture amongst future business and technical leaders, it is invaluable to encourage learning outside work as well as at work. For example the National College for School Leadership encourages Head Teachers and Deputy Heads to undertake voluntary service in schools in Africa to develop their leadership skills. One of the authors' own organisations encourages and pays for any development that individuals wish to undertake from golf to wine tasting.

Company snapshots

The questions we have asked above rightly produce differing approaches from company to company. Here are three snapshots of organisations that have taken talent management seriously:

Electrolux

Training and development are vital aspects of talent management at global electrical and home care manufacturer Electrolux. Electrolux sees talent management as a systematic approach to promoting and developing all the talent within the Electrolux Group. To achieve this, the Group actively manages its talent assets. Its website outlines "through appraisal talks and talent reviews we evaluate our

people and focus on their development. We strive to grow our people through challenging jobs, mobility, coaching, feedback, training, etc.”

Training programmes develop competencies such as information processing, project management and foreign languages. The Electrolux corporate university focuses on leadership training and on nurturing company values and culture through introduction programmes and leadership training at different levels.

Somerfield

High street supermarket Somerfield saw the establishment of new store outlets as an opportunity to establish a wider pool of managers and a talent management development process. The emphasis has been pragmatic and work-based. Those involved were given opportunities to learn and review their own capabilities through one-to-one coaching sessions and customer-listening groups, and by developing business plans and videoed personal-presentations.

HSBC

Banking group HSBC’s global business strategy recognised that it needed aligned people and global talent management strategies. The Chairman and CEO sponsor talent assessment and development as key components of people strategy aimed at developing a strong, diverse business. A Senior Business Manager talent pool has been established for general managers and world class specialists. Instead of applying talent management country by country, in the spirit of global management the Senior Business Manager talent pool was assessed and developed across the board, rather than country-by-country.

Talent pool members were assigned a Talent Relationship Manager who took personal responsibility for engaging the individual by setting up development pathways such as job rotations and international assignments. The underlying principles of the Senior Business Manager talent pool have been extended to developing talent at all levels of the organisation, using global competency models with local modifications. HSBC management conferences reinforce global knowledge-sharing and development of ideas across borders.

Strategic Checklist on Talent Management

Learning and development professionals should be prepared to take an active role in their organisations in forming a talent management strategy and putting it into practice.

- How well is our current approach to talent management formulated and delivered?
- How much do we understand the key drivers that affect development of our talent?
- How well do we develop our talent pipeline?
- How well does talent management link to our overall strategy, including HR strategies such as succession planning?
- How well do we assess talent and potential?
- What development methods are we using?
- What development opportunities should we start or offer more of?
- Where do learning and development specialists fit in?
- What can I do personally to strengthen the development of talent?

Sarah Cook and Steve Macaulay. Sarah Cook is Managing Director of the strategic leadership and customer management specialists, The Stairway Consultancy. Steve Macaulay is a Learning Development Consultant at Cranfield School of Management, Steve can be contacted by email s.macaulay@cranfield.ac.uk; tel. ++(44) 01234 751122. Sarah can be contacted by email on sarah.cook@thestairway.co.uk; tel. ++ (44) 01628526535.