

Talent management versus Critical Personnel development, a leadership choice

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Managing talent needs to start first with a definition of what talent is in a particular organizational context. Definitions of talent vary between organizations however a working definition that I would like to offer is as follows:

Talent may be defines as individuals that achieve high levels of performance in their current role and display good potential in capabilities critical to organizational success.

The talent of an organization may be grouped into three categories: leadership, technical and high potential talent. A description of each of these groups is:

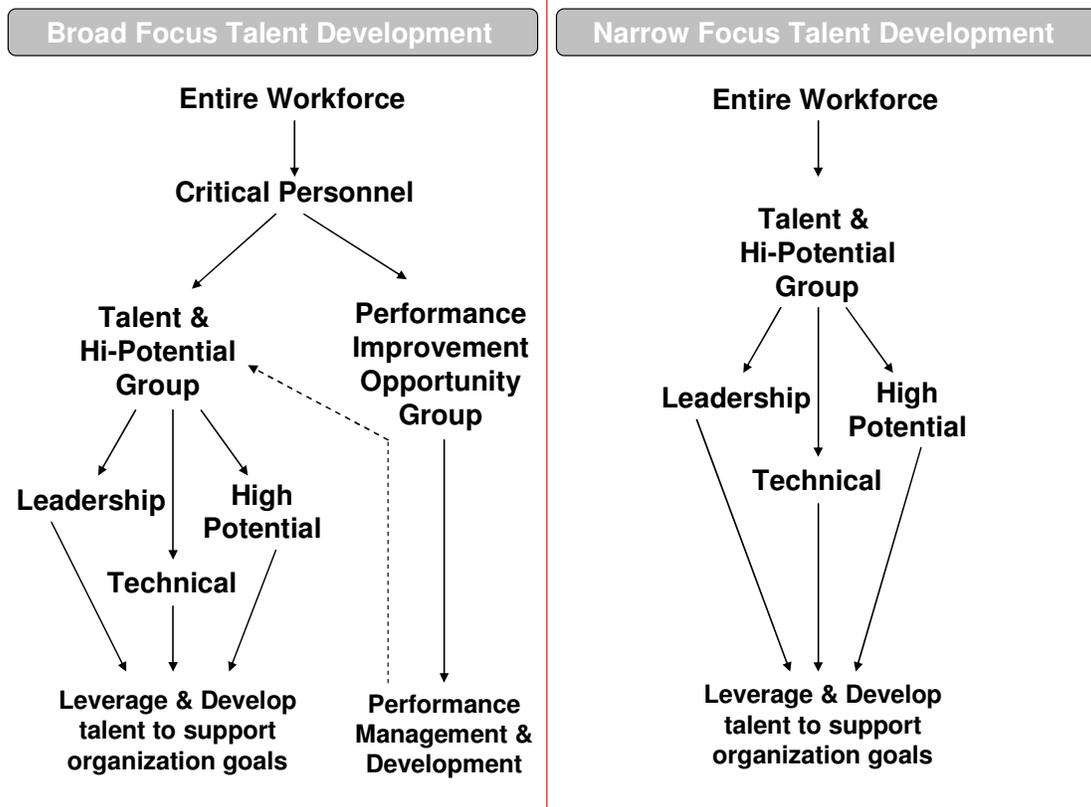
1. **Leadership talent** – groups of talented individuals that currently or in the future and are suited to perform a supervisory role responsible to manage and lead others.
2. **Technical talent** – groups of individuals performing specialized roles & task that are critical to the business and its value creation process.
3. **High potentials** – individuals that display superior performance and/or leadership potential at an early stage in their career that the organization would benefit from if effectively developed at an early stage.

Talent management as a process may be simplified into four major steps of talent identification, assessment, development and talent EMR (Engagement, Motivation & Retention). Each of these four phases will be described in the rest of this article.

Talent Identification – This is the first step of the talent management process. The larger the talent pool identified, the more resources need to be committed by the organization to the assessment, development, engagement, motivation and retention. In general organizations identify their talent along any point of what I describe as the

talent identification continuum (Figure 1). On one end of the continuum is a “narrow definition” of talent and on the other end is a “broad definition”.

Figure 1



When using a broad definition organizations are actually identifying both “talented” individuals and individuals occupying key roles in the organization, with a view to develop them to their best potential. This is where the talent management, performance management and training systems are integrated and focus on improving the overall quality of the workforce (Refer to Table 1). This is based on the recognition that often organizations have to make the best of the human capital they have. When adopting a narrow definition of talent, the talent management system of the organization focus on identifying, developing, engaging, motivating and retaining the “cream” of their workforce.

Table 1 Performance grouping of critical personnel when using a broad approach to talent Identification

Performance Category	Focus	Objectives
Star Performers	Leadership	Continue to motivate, develop and leverage on their talents to support organizational growth.
Room for Improvement	Management + Leadership	Manage – Set clear objectives, monitor & control for achievement. Lead – Direct, develop & motivate to raise current performance levels.
Non-Performers	Management	Manage to Improve current performance levels or Manage Out of the organization.

Talent Assessment – Once the pool of talent has been identified, each individual in the pool needs to be assessed against defined criteria. These criteria should evaluate both their current performance levels and their future potential. Assessments should be there to evaluate technical competence, leadership competence, social competence and learning abilities. The assessment process should be designed to collect data from more than one source. This will enable triangulation of data findings for an accurate and holistic perspective of the individual. For example the first source of data may come from the employee’s self assessment, the second could be from their superior’s assessment and the third source of data could come from an interview with top management. An example of this is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 Example of multiple sources of input during a talent assessment

	Data Input Source 1	Date Input Source 2	Data Input Source 3
Identification	Direct Superior Recommendations	Talent Screening Interviews	Competency & Potential Assessments
Assessment & Development Planning	Current Performance & Competency Assessment	Leadership Potential &/or Technical Competency Assessment	Personality & Values Assessment

Timing of assessments may be conducted at fixed intervals and/or at critical points in an employee’s career. For example when an employee is being considered for promotion, assessments should be done to identify competency gaps that need to be developed. Having completed the talent identification and assessment phases the next phase is the talent development phase.

Talent development – talent gaps within an organization result from many reasons (Table 3) and organizations need to develop strategies to fill these gaps. Talent development strategies may be classified as internal and external development strategies (Table 4). Internal development strategies focus on developing existing talent while external development strategies focus on acquiring new talent or partnering with external stakeholders of the business.

Table 3 Reasons for talent gaps

Reason	Description
Promotions	Employee is promoted leaving a gap in their current role and also creating new competencies that they need to further develop.
Transfers	Employees could be transferred to another role or function leaving a gap in the role that they previously occupied.
Resignations	Employee leaves the organization of their own choice creating a gap in the knowledge, experience and competency they brought to the role.
Other Employment Termination e.g. Death, Retirement.	Similar to resignation, the employee’s exit creates a gap in the knowledge, experience and competency base of the role they performed.
Long Leave	Employee takes long leave for personal reasons creating a gap.

Table 4 Development strategies for talent gaps

	Internal Development	External Development
Medium-Long Term	Mentoring, Promotions, Transfers.	Graduate recruitment, Accelerated development programs, Alliances.
Short Term	Training & Development, Coaching, Job Rotation	Recruitment, Sub-contracting

Talent development is an ongoing process that needs to be owned jointly by the organization’s leadership as a team, the direct of the superior the “talent” and the employee them self. Thus an alternative classification of development strategies emerges, which is development on-the-job, off-the-job and self-initiated (Table 5). This classification has the advantage of identifying the various development opportunities on and off the job, employer, direct superior and employee self initiated that may be used to develop talent an create importantly create a culture of continuously learning that will sustain medium to long term organizational talent development needs.

Table 5 Development strategies classification

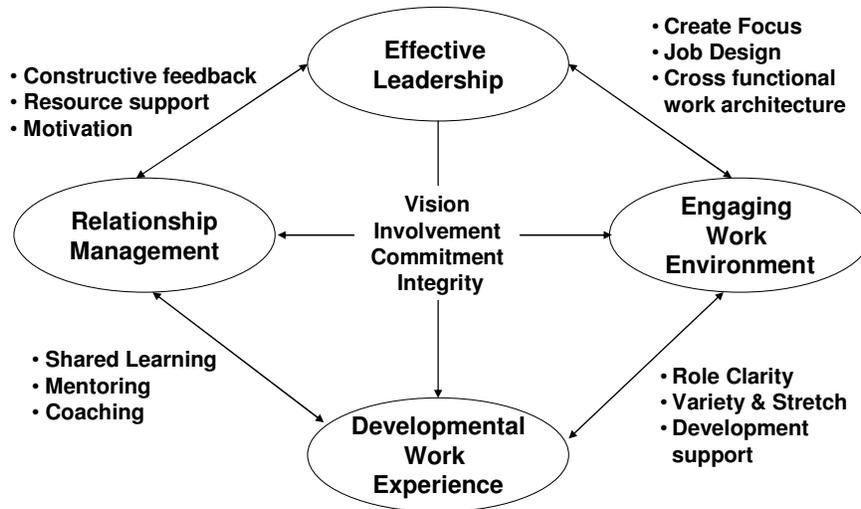
Development Strategies		
On-Job	Off-Job	Self Initiated & Leveraging Professional Networks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-job-training • Coaching • Job rotation • Transfer of training • Special projects • Internal Mentors • Shadowing • Conducting internal training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External seminar / Training programs • Benchmarking trips / visits • Educational upgrading programs • External Mentors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational programs with focus research • Reading • Professional memberships & discussion groups • Action learning groups • Posting of professional blogs. • Participation in community projects

Talent development investments are motivational but need to be integrated with the other employee engagement, motivation and retention mechanisms. This leads us to the last phase of labels as talent EMR.

Talent EMR – the acronym “EMR” represents talent engagement, motivation and retention. The components and how they link to create a pool of talent that is engaged, motivated and retained is summarized in Figure 2. There are four interconnected elements: effective leadership, engaging work environment, development work experiences and relationship management.

Figure 2

Talent EMR Elements
E = Engagement ; M = Motivation ; R= Retention



Effective leadership is at the top of the model and has a direct impact on the other 3 elements. As an effective leader the need to provide a clear and motivational vision that engages and motivates talent is critical. The leadership approach should encourage involvement and build commitment. At a fundamental level the leader needs to perform their role with integrity, creating an ethical and trusting work environment.

Aligning with the vision developmental work experiences, leveraging on tools such as shared learning sessions, stretch assignments, coaching and mentoring programs need to be planned and resourced for. Leaders need to create an engaging work environment by providing their talent clear areas to focus, designing jobs and structures so that work is challenging, require continuous learning and drives the need to work cross functionally to get an understanding of the total business.

Communication is at the core of effective relationship management. Strong relationships are critical to the engagement, motivation and retention of talent. The practice of providing constructive feedback, taking effort to motivate, provide resource support and manage developmental work experiences, combine to build effective workplace relationships that facility talent engagement, motivation and retention.

Conclusion

The article started with a working definition of talent and recommended the classification of talent into three groups: technical, leadership and high potentials. A four step talent management system comprising identification, assessment, development and “EMR” was presented. The identification of talent, may adopt a broad or narrow definition. When a broad definition is used all personnel in critical positions are defined as talent and the organization leverages on its human resource management systems to strengthen the capabilities of these individuals. When this approach is used the organization focus is on developing the performance potential of its critical personnel to make them talent.. When a narrow definition is used to identify talent, the organization chooses to focus on the “cream” or “stars” or “high potentials” of its workforce. This privileged group receives focus talent management efforts. The paper rest of the paper continued to describe the remaining three phases of talent management namely, assessment, development and EMR.

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