

Take Care of Your Talent – Or Someone Else Will

Dr Uwe H Kaufmann and Amy BC Tan

Recently, I had coffee with Edward, an old friend – or better: one of my mentors. He is approaching seventy and yet is in the pink of health. So I asked whether he plays golf 24/7. His response came a bit as a surprise.

“My company still needs me – so I am re-employed. Full time. This means there is not much time for golf,” he said with a sour smile.

I know he loves his job and it certainly tickles his ego knowing that he is still needed. But, I would have expected him to slow down a bit and enjoy what he has been working for all those years.

Edward explained “Well, I guess we did not really think hard enough about my succession. The guy we had in mind left to join a competitor and all the others are not ready yet. And, I am not the only one from the old guard who is facing this predicament. We would be in a much better position if we would have had a system for talent management in place instead of just talking about it from time to time. Not only would we have my designated successor still on board, we would also have made better hiring decisions. The people we hired are good in what they do. However, they don’t seem to have the potential to move up. We have hired for today without having tomorrow in mind.”

Edward’s case is not an exception. It rather re-emphasises a well-known observation across many industries: Talent management and hence succession planning are often underdeveloped. Even if there is a well thought-through system for talent management on paper, lack of leadership and therefore absence of involvement of critical players prevents it from working for the organisation.

Following a research conducted in 2008 by DDI, 55% of executive-level respondents indicated their firms’ performance was likely or very likely to suffer in the near future due to insufficient leadership talent (Development Dimensions International (DDI) in cooperation with The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008).

An IBM study conducted in 2008 found that public companies who have a more effective talent management system in place are more likely to outperform similar sized-companies with less effective talent management (IBM Institute for Business Value, 2008). There are a multitude of studies showing similar patterns: Effective talent management does indeed drive business results!

Effective talent management ensures the availability of staff with the right competencies (knowledge, skills, experience and attitude) to support and respond to an organisation’s present and future requirements in a systematic way. Any organisation that wants to achieve a greater market share must work diligently to find the best people and align the workforce with the strategic goals of the organisation. To do so, it requires an integrated approach to talent management.

Integrated talent management provides an efficient way to manage all the phases of human life-cycle. It helps you to recruit the best people and manage their performance to achieve the specific goals. It focuses on developing and deploying the right people to the right jobs. It enables you to consistently reward performance and retain the top performers. It assists with succession planning to maintain business continuity and it helps in communicating and engaging with employees about benefits to maintain a happy and healthy workforce.

In the case of Edward's organisation, rather than focusing on recruiting and retaining only to ensure having the right persons for the key positions, more emphasis could have been put in to integrate recruitment to developing, deploying and leading employees for the future jobs. It is about managing employees' desire for better work-life balance and meaningful jobs, and building the "muscles" for the organisation. Here are some recommendations for an integrated talent management framework:



Figure 1: Integrated Talent Management

1. Recruit for the Future

For many recruitments, it is advantageous to think beyond the current position you are recruiting for. Which position could this person take on in future? Would this be aligned with the strategy of the organisation? Recruiting the right mind-set is more important than the right skills. Knowledge and skills can be attained if someone has the right mind-set to learning and growing, whereas building the mind-set seems nearly impossible (Tan, 2010).

List of Positions and Potential Successors			
S/N	Position	Incumbent	Successor
1	Assistant Manager, Business Development	Jerome Aloysius Tan at Business Development	-
2	Chief, Consulting Practice	Amy BC Tan at Consulting Practice	Lum May Yee (Apr 2020) Andrew Yeo (Jan 2022)
3	Executive, Customer Service	Rose Wong at Customer Service Wong Hui Fen at Customer Service	-
4	HR Director	-	Lum May Yee (Apr 2017)
5	Manager, Business Development	Gerald Yuen at Business Development Nadya Liu at Business Development	Jerome Aloysius Tan (Jan 2017)
6	Manager, Customer Service	-	Rose Wong (Jan 2019)
7	Manager, Information and Knowledge Management	Bai Zijian at Information & Knowledge Management	Jackson Poh (Jan 2017)
8	Managing Director	Uwe H Kaufmann at MD Office	Amy BC Tan (Jan 2017) Lum May Yee (Apr 2025) Dr Ron Richmond (Jan 2028)
9	Practice Partner	Andrew Yeo at Consulting Practice Dr Ron Richmond at Consulting Practice Hector Ramos at Consulting Practice Jackson Poh at Consulting Practice Jeslynn Lew at None Lum May Yee at Consulting Practice Peter Olfe at Consulting Practice	-

Figure 2: Succession Pipeline Example

When Jack Welch was asked how he ensured best in class products and highest customer satisfaction, he answered he focussed on identifying, attracting, developing and motivating the best people and he would never need to worry about customers and products at all.

2. Build a Succession Pipeline

Effective Succession Planning means having more than one successor for critical positions. Like in Edward's organisation, there will always be changes in the talent pool as well as in the strategy. These changes require a certain degree of flexibility that can only be achieved if the talent pool is larger than the number of positions that need to be filled. This enables you to select the best for the position at hand instead of the only one available (Figure 2).

3. Know the Readiness of Your Talent

Talent Grid			
	Will Master Can master role at current level	Will Grow Can perform role at 1 level above current level	Will Thrive Can perform role at 2 levels above current level
A (Top - 10%) Consistent Rating of 'Far Exceeding'			Amy BC Tan Lum May Yee
B (Exceeds - 10%) Consistent Rating of 'Exceeding'		Rose Wong	Lily Lee Andrew Yeo
C (Meets - 60%) Consistent Rating of 'Competent'	Bai ZiJian	Dr Ron Richmond Jackson Poh	Jerome Aloysius Tan
D (Bottom - 20%) Consistent Rating of 'Needs Development'			

Figure 3: Talent Grid Example

Succession Planning usually involves a customised set of development activities needed to get the successors ready to the new role. These development activities are of a longer-term character than development activities for the current job. Often they spread over a few years. Therefore, it is not easy to track the development of successors by applying the normal training and development framework used by HR professionals. In addition to the current performance and the completion of development activities, information about a person's potential is necessary to give a full picture about the readiness of the talent. This information can be compiled in a talent grid (Figure 3).

4. Instil a Coaching Culture for Career Development

Managers need to be empowered and trained to hold frequent career dialogues with their staff. Firstly, this is what more and more employees demand. They wish to know what their opportunities within the organisation are. An organisation's attractiveness to job seekers and its chance of retaining its employees depends, amongst others, on its ability to show career opportunities and potential career paths. Secondly, career development coaching dialogues build trust on the one hand and they are a sign of trust on the other hand. If this trust exists, less surprising career moves may occur. Thirdly, career development coaching dialogues are an effective way of managing the pool of talent. During these dialogues, managers may receive valuable information about career aspirations of their staff and whether these match with organisational goals. It is a discussion of opportunities without promising too much.

During the coaching dialogue, development needs for current, short-term and long-term positions may be discussed. At the end, personal development actions such as workshops, e-learning, learning through audio/video resources, learning by doing, coaching, mentoring, project work, attachments or committee assignments etc. have to be considered and documented (Figure 4) (Kaufmann, 2014).

Personal Career Development Plan for Nadia Clark			
Name:	Nadia Clark	Name of Supervisor:	Ronny Toh
Organisation:	MyCompany Pte Ltd	Name of Senior Manager:	Maria Joseph
Department:	Programme Department	Reporting Period Ending:	31 Dec 2014
Designation:	Practice Manager	Date of Discussion:	31 Jul 2014
My Gifts and Talents What I Think I Can be Best at	My Passion What I Love and Desire Professionally	My Contribution How I want to Contribute to Society	My Personality My Personal Preferences
I am a people oriented-person and I feel comfortable working with others. I like to focus on the human aspect when executing a task.	Provide guidance and support to others in achieving their goals.	Unleashing the talents in others and developing them into a high performing individual.	My DiSC Profile: Steady, Influential My Career Anchor: Service, Dedication to Cause
Now Current Position	Short-Term Position in 2 to 3 Years	Long-Term Position in 4+ Years	Development Activities
Current Position: Practice Manager	Short-term Aspiration: Manager at Human Resource by Internal Posting Remarks: I wish to grow into HR	Long-term Aspiration: Senior Manager at Human Resource by Promotion Remarks: I see Amy Tan as my role model.	Areas of Strengths C02 - Collaboration (Rating 3.5) C01 - Change Adaptability (Rating 3.0) C04 - Customer-Service Orientation (Rating 3.0)
Areas to Develop C05 - Problem Solving (Rating 2.5) L01 - Strategic Thinking (Rating 2.6) C03 - Communication (Rating 2.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is people-oriented; Is dedicated to job and function; Has some basic HR knowledge and skills; Seeks for more responsibilities; Takes initiative to see to agreed action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has people skills Shows good communication skills 	Development Activities Workshop: Break Through Your Communication Barriers, by Singapore Institute of Management (06 Aug 2014) Workshop: The Nuts and Bolts of Market Research, by Marketing Institute of Singapore (16 Oct 2014 till 17 Oct 2014) Workshop: Strategic HR Management, by COE-Partners (03 Nov 2014 - 13 Jun 2014) Mentoring: 1 year Mentoring Programme by Amy Tan. . (01 Apr 2014 till 31 Mar 2015) Project: Review and develop competency framework for an organisation. (04 Jan 2016 till 30 Jun 2016) Attachment: 3 months Professional Leasing to client organisation. (04 Jul 2016 till 30 Sep 2016)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve and deepen knowledge about Human Resource Development; To produce professional and high quality output. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop capability to translate business strategies into HR priorities Operationalise HR strategy with policies, systems & processes, programmes & services which facilitate and support the execution of business strategy 		

Figure 4: Personal Career Development Plan (Kaufmann, 2014)

Conclusion

The business environment has become more complex and dynamic over the last decade. Emerging technologies are changing the competencies needed for the organisations. Additionally, employees' expectations have shifted towards growing in their profession instead of loyalty to the organisation. And, they are increasingly interested in long-term career planning (Wellins, Smith, & Erker, 2006). These trends force organisations to place more emphasis on talent management strategies. Organisations will lose out in the market if they don't do so.

If Edward's organisation would have done so, he could have sidestepped and made space for the next generation leader whom he could be supporting in an advisory role instead of running operations. Which might also imply that he would be seen more often on the golf course.

About the Authors

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