

## Talking A Good Game

Do you talk to your employees about their future? Talent management happens when an organisation is mapping organisational needs against employee development needs. Talented people want challenging assignments and good leadership. So successful career planning requires employer and employee to have mature conversations about ambitions, aspirations, potential, opportunities and growth.

Talent management supports the organization's overall objectives and investment in human capital can be a significant source of value creation for shareholders.

So why don't we discuss these issues? Why is HR so unsuccessful in running internal mobility initiatives? Can we assume high performers, like cream will rise naturally to the top? Why buy talent if you could be developing a talent pool? If an organization is not effective at developing and retaining talent how can it attract good people and become an employer of choice?

Underpinning this failure of communication is a lack of openness and clarity on both sides.

Employees are reluctant to voice their aspirations and long-term career goals for fear of jeopardising their job security. They don't want their employer to think they are dissatisfied, disloyal or planning to leave. So they don't ask for training or secondments that will allow them to develop the competencies they need to build on as part of their long-term career plan. Instead they leave for a role that they hope will allow them to develop these aspirational competencies.

It's relatively rare for people to leave jobs where they are happy, even if offered higher pay, as most people prefer stability. But the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) research shows lack of training and developmental opportunities are major reasons for staff turnover. If more organizations could get this bit right they'd improve their staff retention with the concomitant savings on recruitment costs and improve staff relations too.

Employers fear making the investment in training and developing people who will then leave. In addition managers don't necessarily advertise the fact that staff are top performers as they don't want to lose their best people to promotion or other departments. This means good staff aren't enabled to fulfil their potential and may move on prematurely because managers aren't committed to and engaged in the career planning and development process.

In an organization that aims to anticipate human capital needs and meet them effectively management needs to encourage dialogue about career paths, choices and opportunities. This sort of interaction can produce a win / win situation. Employees improve their skills and competencies while the organization benefits from an engaged and empowered workforce enabled to realise their potential as well as their

ambitions. The energy, morale and commitment of the workforce are fundamental to the success of an organization.

Ambitious people don't want to wait to for opportunities and often don't have to, they move on. Good employees are looking for work that interests them and to increase their skills base. They want advancement, challenges and control over their careers. So processes and policies that go even part way to helping staff achieve their aspirations and ambitions will pay dividends. Building a talent pool is more efficient, less disruptive and cheaper than buying talent in!

Initiating such conversations may feel risky. Managers may feel that career decisions are best left to HR and management. But balancing the interests of employer and employee is a strategic imperative if you want to protect your investment in development efforts. Employees need to willingly share their view of the future with their employers – and if career planning can help them grow into what they want to be then that's all to the good for both parties.

It is fast becoming a business priority that organizational culture embrace talent management. Well designed development activities can have a positive impact on an organization's bottom line. Does the company offer in-house development programmes; internal secondments; or coaching? Talk to the staff about what they want from their careers. Engaged and motivated employees stay and work hard. They recommend the organization and its products.

Management need to be educated in dealing with these risky conversations. They need to initiate dialogues with employees to address development needs and concerns. This has to be face to face, may be sensitive, challenging and time-consuming. It requires imagination, courage and commitment on the part of the organization.

Openness in discussing career planning allows an organization to improve its capability to spot talent, keeping people motivated, stretched and challenged, while giving them appropriate support and development opportunities. Employees' choices may not dovetail with organizational interests perfectly but preserving the investment made in developing staff is a moveable feast. Meeting the needs of the organization should take account of the preferences of all involved.

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