

# *Talent Assessment*

*A New Strategy for Talent  
Management*

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# *Preface*

Many companies have been involved with the concept of talent management in various forms for many years but without perhaps giving the concept the correct label. After all, nearly all companies have endeavoured to develop its best people through higher management potential programmes or some other means of fast-tracking the top performers. Experience has shown that the 20/80 rule that is applied to so many aspects of business does in the most part apply to the process of talent management. In other words, 80 per cent of a company's results can be attributed to 20 per cent of its employees. There is nothing particularly new in this but it is important to remember that potential top performers need to be selected with great care, thoroughly assessed and trained in accordance with a carefully planned programme with highly demanding requirements for outstanding results. While all this is going on, they need to be motivated, shown that the level of effort required will produce the size of reward promised, and then they need to be appraised very carefully: their motivation and creativity needs to be sustained at a very high level in a consistent manner.

Various reports have shown that very few people in an organization would strongly agree that their companies did an effective job in developing people to the right level. They would, however, support the fact that most companies were quite effective at dealing with people whose performance was below the standards expected.

These issues require careful consideration in order for corporate performance to be improved. The time has come where the best of talent management cannot simply be delegated to just some form of HR function on its own. It also has to involve senior line and staff management right up to CEO level, depending on the structure of the organization and its corporate goals.

In order to drive a talent management programme properly, one of the key factors is thorough performance appraisal. One could go so far as to say that the days of simple feedback between managers and subordinates are, if not over, very limiting and hardly likely to produce the right results. True talent needs to be isolated from its latent state by everybody who is likely to be affected by the capability of the individual concerned. In practice, this means that a number of external influences, in addition to the role of the immediate superior, has to

be considered very carefully. This will be covered in Chapter 4 of this book in more detail but should be recognized as one of the key functions of ensuring that the essence of talent management is correctly addressed.

The way in which this book is structured is to examine each of the most important aspects of talent management, from the concept itself and why it is needed through various methods of assessment, appraisal, training and development and the use of information technology to support the corporate plan, followed by a self-assessment questionnaire designed to highlight the level of the reader's knowledge of talent management. Answers to the questionnaire are provided which will enable the reader, together with guidelines for interpreting the scores, to take a snapshot of their knowledge of the subject. Whether the reader is a senior line manager, a functional staff manager, a consultant or external contractor, this whole subject needs to be understood because of the integrated nature of effective talent management today and in the future.

A great deal of emphasis – in our opinion, correctly – has been placed upon the assessment of people to ensure that the right person is assigned the right job at the right time, to ensure that the risk of making the wrong hiring decision, or promoting the wrong person, is minimized and, hopefully eliminated, by thorough assessment procedures.

It is a known fact that hiring someone who subsequently turns out to be a recruitment error can be a very costly exercise. In the case of a salesperson, it is not just the salary and recruitment fee that is irrecoverable but the lost opportunity cost i.e. no return on the investment made in the assigned sales territory that causes the real loss, and that account for a substantial percentage of the cost of failure.

So what can we learn from these traditional recruitment failures? We need to aim for talent. We will clearly not always achieve our objectives in recruiting and developing a perfect team, but lowering recruitment standards just to provide people who can 'do the job' will inevitably result in a core of personnel who will perpetuate mediocrity. This is something no company needs and must be avoided as much as possible.

Of course, no organization can just hire pure talent that, having been assessed, will grow and adapt to the changing needs of the business indefinitely without proper monitoring. But if the recruitment standards are set at a very high but nevertheless achievable level and continuously reviewed, using

the most rigorous methods of measurement, then surely we can raise the effectiveness of key contributors to support a thriving and developing business for many years to come. Not only that, we can do our best to recognize latent talent for new opportunities within the existing talent base.

Perhaps the most meaningful message that I have ever heard about a really talented high-flyer was made by her manager – ‘Katie never, ever fails to amaze me, even at the earliest stage of a new assignment in which she is involved’.

Tony Davis