



Talent Management

What Really Works

Summary

- Talent management overtook risk as the top CEO priority last year, because of its high future importance and low current capability. Attracting, developing and retaining the people that organisations need remains a remarkably hard nut to crack.
- Does this mean the whole idea that you can actively manage talent is fundamentally misguided? And what have we learnt through experience about what organisations can do to build and deploy a pipeline of people who can deliver the future? Read on to hear the views of our Round Table of leading talent professionals.

Defining the problem

We began our discussion by polling for the most pressing issues in talent management (TM). Our group are currently grappling with:

- Finding the right skills and capabilities for the future
- Identifying rising stars
- Workforce planning and career readiness
- Going beyond process compliance
- Getting buy-in and sponsorship where and when it counts
- Leveraging good informal and local TM practices more widely
- Managing specialist talent
- Making the pipeline work for women
- Joining up TM processes
- Making TM work through managers in the middle

While people are feeling the pinch at different points, all recognised these challenges as real. Above all, the group saw the need when designing TM initiatives to begin by working out what problem you are trying to fix, ideally with your key stakeholders and a close eye on strategy and future direction.

MAKING TALENT MANAGEMENT WORK ROUND TABLE MARCH 2013

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

WHAT ARE WE FIXING?

TALENT SPOTTING

WHAT IS TALENT?
IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL

DEVELOPING TALENT

ECOLOGY & INTIMACY
PROGRAMME COMPONENTS

ADAPTING TO NEW HORIZONS

TEN TALENT COMMANDMENTS

Andrew Wood, formerly of Aegis Media and now Head of People Development for Pearson UK, walked us through his approach to delivering Aegis's future talent needs through the Route 500 Programme. He explained a key insight underpinning this programme: "Move on from attract, retain, develop and start focusing on identifying and enabling talent."

"Focus on identifying and enabling talent...and start by defining what you mean by talent."

Talent Spotting

What is talent?

Andrew reminded us that it's crucial to start by defining what you mean by talent. Is it Hollywood-style stars, people who do good stuff or the senior elite? Aegis landed on a 5% vertical cross-section of people across the business, with the headroom to progress at pace.

Alison Rose, Executive Development Director at Sodexo UK&I, pointed to the need to be realistic about how many people can progress at pace, and let this guide your numbers. In organisations with a tight promotions funnel, which tend to make lateral hires at senior levels, you need to be wary of unfulfillable promises.

Wide inclusivity versus elite stars is a true dilemma for talent managers. Some around the table viewed the notion of an elite cadre as outdated, while others reported that casting a wider and more inclusive talent net impaired both retention and development.

Wide inclusivity versus elite stars is a true dilemma for talent managers.

Identifying potential

A perennial bug-bear of talent programmes is the impact on those excluded. Andrew described how Aegis Media chose an application process over nominations, to give their programme an open-access, meritocratic ethos. This put the onus on anyone in the business to prove they had potential, validated by a light-touch assessment and endorsement process.

Route 500 was positioned as access to fantastic resources and opportunities to develop yourself and fast-track your career, rather than a programme to attend. From 750 applications, Aegis selected 440 people for the first year. Interestingly, they found that metrics like retention were improved for both successful applicants and those who tried, suggesting that an open, fair and well-executed assessment process can be an engaging experience, whatever the outcome.

Andrew also highlighted the need for a clear and shared picture of what potential looks like. When it comes to yardsticks, we discovered that most organisations around the table have converged on an IQ+EQ+MQ or judgement / drive / influence model of potential, tweaked to reflect their culture or strategic aspirations. How you communicate this model is vital, so that potential applicants, their managers and leaders, and your gatekeepers, all have a common understanding of what the organisation needs. Andrew also pointed out that top talent need to recognise and respect each other to make the programme really credible.

There was general agreement that with a little guidance, local line managers are very able to spot potential. This needn't, and indeed shouldn't, be the preserve of Occupational Psychologists or HR professionals. More broadly, local hot-spots of great talent management are really powerful, and fanning these flames is a great opportunity for central talent teams.

Developing talent

ECology and intimacy

Once you've identified your talent, how do you enable them? Jacqueline Davies, Interim HR Director at the Financial Services Authority, and author of *The Truth About Talent*, encouraged the group to think in terms of ecology – the eco-system that enables people to give their best. Twinned with the concept of intimacy – segmenting your talent to get close to and respond to their different needs – this becomes a powerful way to engage talent on their own terms. Andrea Edwards,

Talent Manager at Dixons, gave a great example of specialist engineers at a previous employer, whom she discovered had a distinctive and unexpected set of personal drivers: "Segmenting by factors like career stage or path enables creative thinking about a multi-faceted approach."



Some organisations are starting to use abundant data to understand talent segments. For example, RBS uses biographical, location and flexible benefits choices to target specific groups.

Kathryn Rousin, Global Head of Learning & Development at Freshfields, pinpointed the crucial role of line managers in the talent eco-system. Working with the middle layer to help them enable talented people is vital. Given that people “join companies and leave managers”, the quality of these day-to-day interactions is crucial. CLC’s research backs up this assertion and also points to things that keep people engaged: development opportunities; respect; meritocracy; ethics; and career opportunities.

Garcia Williamson, UK Head of Talent, Learning and Development at KPMG, advocated the power of creating career paths, or even career lattices, to help people map their own way, both within and potentially beyond the organisation. Identifying key experiences to get under your belt can also help individuals plan and drive their own development.

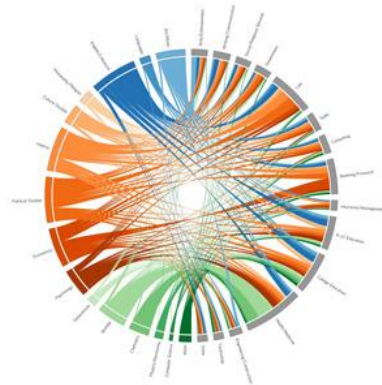
More fundamentally, Rajni Gill, Head of Learning and Development for Capgemini Consulting, reminded us that supplying your best people with meaningful work and great colleagues is what keeps them engaged and intent on the future.

Talent programme components

What does this trend towards more individual tailoring of talent programmes mean in practice? Most organisations, including Aegis, still offer programmatically delivered core experiences and opportunities to their top talent, to meet common learning needs. Examples include workshops or facilitated action learning, targeted at critical skills like commerciality or managing performance. Increasingly, these are being supplemented by individually driven components including:

- Career conversations with more senior people
- Mentoring programmes
- Internal knowledge hubs, connecting people with specialist knowledge and skills
- Personal budgets to spend on events and networking, within guidelines

Garcia noted that “fluid and flexible” are the career watchwords for new generations of talent, and several organisations have found that enthusiastic local managers are well placed to open up “vistas of opportunity”.



Adapting to new horizons

Over the last couple of decades, organisational trends towards connectivity, collaboration and serial careers, together with generational changes in expectations about work, have fundamentally changed the rules of the game. TM techniques have evolved in response to this new landscape, and the challenge for practitioners is to anticipate future shifts.

Finally, Jacqueline challenged organisations to stop “using analogue tools in a digital world” and start using social networking, data mining and knowledge management tools to make TM data real-time. The lever arch file of succession plans has never really served its purpose, but hot, fresh information on your executives’ iPads about who and where their talent is, and what they are capable of, opens up new horizons.

“Fluid and flexible” are the career watchwords for new generations of talent.

Ten Talent commandments

1. KNOW WHAT PROBLEM YOU ARE FIXING
 2. THINK IDENTIFICATION AND ENABLEMENT
 3. BRAND YOUR PROGRAMME AND MAKE IT ASPIRATIONAL
 4. BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT POTENTIAL LOOKS LIKE
 5. LET YOUR TALENT APPLY, PROVE THEIR WORTH AND SHAPE THEIR OWN PATH
 6. SEGMENT YOUR TALENT TO RESPOND TO WHAT INDIVIDUALS REALLY VALUE
 7. INVEST IN IMPROVING VITAL DAY-TO-DAY INTERACTIONS WITH MANAGERS
 8. THINK ABOUT THE TALENT ECO-SYSTEM – WHAT WILL ENABLE FLOURISHING?
 9. HARNESS LOCAL SKILLS AND ENTHUSIASM
 10. SERVE UP SMART, REAL-TIME TALENT DATA
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With grateful thanks to our Round Table contributors:

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Alison Rose - Executive Development Director at Sodexo UK&I

Jacqueline Davies – Interim HR Director at the Financial Services Authority and author of *The Truth About Talent*

Andrea Edwards - Talent Manager at Dixons Retail

Jackie Eaton – Learning and Organisational Development Manager at the Bank of England

Kathryn Rousin - Global Head of Learning & Development at Freshfields

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