
Talent Management A Four-Step Approach

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

A Four-Step Approach to talent management

IES conducted a case-based study of issues and practices in talent management in 23 member organisations of its HR Network. These were in a range of sectors including public, private and third-sector organisations.

These discussions led to a Four-Step model of talent management as shown below.

The Four-Step Approach to Talent Management



Source: IES, 2013

The four steps which need consideration in the development of a talent management approach are:

- **Definition:** What do we mean by talent management in this organisation?
- **Focus:** Which jobs and groups of people will talent management focus on?
- **Process:** How will talent management be done in practice?
- **Action:** What are the practical outcomes of talent management?

As shown in the figure above, each of the four steps also has a set of questions about the specific business which will condition the choices made at each step. We call these 'business moderators' and they go some way to explain why talent management appears to be a highly contextual aspect of people management. They concern the business drivers for talent management, the business risks it is

hoping to address, the capability of managers implementing the processes and the measures the organisation will use to determine the impact of talent management.

While we acknowledge that this model is a simple view of a complex subject, it can help us understand how specific business needs influence talent management in terms of its definition, focus, process and action.

An emergent field

Although talent management has been a hot topic for at least 10 years, it was actually still quite embryonic in many of the organisations involved in this study. Some of the trends and issues included the following:

- There is difficulty with the definition and focus of talent management, with quite a number of organisations sending messages about developing the talent of the whole workforce but only really focusing on talent for the most senior roles. There is also growing interest in talent for senior specialist roles and pipelines for occupations in scarce supply.
- The focus on the top of the organisation is reflected in definitions of 'high potential' which tend to assess individuals against leadership behaviours. Often organisations focus on a 'grow-your-own' approach, where high-potential employees quickly progress to fill senior positions and lead the development of the future workforce.
- Likewise most of the talent programmes are for those with senior management potential, whether in mid career or in an early-career accelerated development or graduate entry scheme. Some organisations are adopting much more individualised approaches to talent development.
- The active development of those with potential takes some time to get established. It does rely on managers having both the capability and motivation to take real responsibility for developing their best people.
- Organisations have ideas about how to track and measure the impact of talent management, but tracking what happens to the individuals identified was not yet well embedded in most of the organisations in this study.

Key learning points

Key learning points from this report include the following:

1. **Adopt clear definitions and transparent processes:** This will help gain trust and build credibility.

2. **Be true to your definition and messages about talent:** If adopting an inclusive 'everyone has talent' approach, ensure that the development review and planning processes for all staff genuinely reflect this.
3. **Build the business case for talent management:** Align talent development approaches to business strategy.
4. **Be aware of changing business priorities:** As business priorities change, we need to address whether our talent management approach is still appropriate.
5. **Balance immediate business need with long-term strategic objectives:** This requires careful consideration of what the key business drivers are.
6. **Mobilise talent where possible:** If an individual is not ready for a promotion, consider development through stretching them in the job or through a lateral move.
7. **Consider low cost methods of talent development:** These might range from experiential learning through target experiences, to coaching and mentoring from senior leaders or specialists.
8. **Showcase talent to senior managers:** This can be done through networking events and is a valuable way of advertising the calibre of internal talent.
9. **Fit approach to culture:** The desired behaviours of leaders and indeed all employees should be communicated clearly and embedded through the talent management processes and practices.
10. **Consider organisational readiness:** Responsibilities for talent management must be clear and managers should be supported in becoming competent at having talent and career conversations.
11. **Engage the HR community across the business:** Organisational Development (OD), HR Business Partners (HRBPs,) Leadership, Learning and Development (L&D) and talent leads should all be involved, to ensure they are working with a non-silo mentality and that approaches are consistent across departments.
12. **Demonstrate that talent practices add real business value:** Workforce information needs to be better analysed, reported and integrated with other measures (eg financial data) to demonstrate the business contribution of talent management.
13. **Ensure Board buy-in:** This is a critical success factor for talent management, just as it is for all people management activities.

This summary is from the IES report: *Talent Management: A Four-Step Approach*, by Victoria Campbell, and Wendy Hirsh. (IES Report 502, 2013).

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