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Predicting Success

Marc Efron - 10/24/11

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Predicting who will move furthest, fastest is the key to a successful talent review process. Unless you do this, it's impossible to differentiate how to invest in strategies to grow talent or to do succession planning. By definition, succession planning predicts who will be able to move into a role or level at a certain point in time. An inaccurate process is not only a significant waste of resources but can jeopardize the company's future.

You can make your talent review process more predictive and effective by improving its simplicity, transparency and level of accountability.

Simplify how you identify high potentials. Elaborate competency models don't often predict which managers succeed. Sometimes they fail because the models are lists of good managerial and leadership behaviors, not the few vital behaviors that differentiate success. Often, they quickly become outdated as the organization's strategy changes. By the time you've developed and implemented a certain type of model, it's only likely to be accurate for a few years at best.

Solve this problem by creating your high potential model during the executive team talent review. After you've completed your calibration discussion, ask the meeting participants which factors differentiate those in the highest potential category from those in the next highest potential category. The two or three factors they identify will be the operation's definition of high potential. Their answers may not align with your desired model and you may not even agree, but they're what your executives consider when they evaluate who has high potential.

Simplify the process by following these steps:

- **Use a performance and potential (PxP) matrix:** Most companies already use this to differentiate their talent. When used properly, it's the most straightforward and accurate way to understand the quality of talent.
- **Keep the PxP simple:** Use nine boxes at the most. For most managerial roles, you can't accurately differentiate people into any greater number of categories.
- **Assess potential to advance:** Predicting success is the purpose of talent reviews. If you're defining potential as alignment to your company values, an individual's ambition or anything else, you've eliminated the process' usefulness to succession planning. Include in your PxP definition of potential a statement defining it as progress through levels over time — for example, one level in three years, two levels in six years — so it feeds into succession planning.

Assign clear accountability for follow-up. Too many organizations destroy the value of talent reviews by failing to execute on the agreed development decisions. This is most often due to a lack of process and accountability. The solution is as simple as this:


- **HR should record every talent action agreed to:** That might include the action, due date and the person accountable for executing each development decision.
- **HR should follow up on every action:** It is HR's responsibility to ensure the successful execution of every talent action identified during reviews. Once a month, the responsible HR leader should call or visit the manager accountable for the action to ensure it's moving forward. If it's not, they need to push for progress and elevate the issue if they meet resistance.
- **The list of agreed-upon actions should be the first agenda item at the next talent review:** It will be obvious who didn't do their job as the status of each item is read.

Turn up the transparency dial. You may not need to be 100 percent transparent about every talent review decision, but more transparency is typically better than less. You should:

- **Increase process transparency:** Let everyone reviewed in the process know that the process occurs and about the tools used, the topics discussed and the types of decisions that are made. The most transparent organizations post this on their intranet.
- **Increase outcome transparency:** At a minimum, anyone reviewed in the process should have a yearly conversation with their manager to discuss their performance and their potential to move forward. This step empowers employees to make the right career decisions.

If you can implement these few enhancements you'll find your talent review process accurately differentiates talent and allows you to make smart talent investments.

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