Six Habits of Highly Effective Talent Managers

A Keith Stopforth Consultancy Limited White Paper, brought to you by Webanywhere

Introduction

After the seminal works on "The War for Talent" there have been many debates and a lot of monetary spend by HR departments to ensure that Talent is managed, retained and attracted across a range of businesses and sectors. Over five years there have been numerous courses, strategies and papers written on how best to approach this.

It now seems that "The War for Talent" is entering a different phase, which has been manifested by organisations trying to retain and attract only the highest performers, whilst cutting budgets for "the average". With this in mind, it seems only right to take a hard look at Talent Management implementation, to ensure it is kept simple but effective.

This paper is designed to help you and your organisation. By proposing six simple habits, it will provide you with the most effective route to get return on your Talent Management investment. It will focus on an implementation strategy that will give you maximum advantage in signing off investment and getting the Senior Managers on board. This will be based upon 11 years experience within the HR sector; five of these being directly involved in Talent Management at the UK's No1 Health Insurer.

Habit One:
Start with the End in Mind

The starting point for any HR Strategy, let alone that of Talent Management is to look at the business need. Unless this can be identified and a clear link made to the strategy of your business, then you may struggle to get it by senior level. It needs to be made very clear that Talent Management will be an enabler rather than a costly distraction from the business. Ideally you need to be able to frame the approach as being an opportunity, a cost saver or one which will manage risk for the business. At present, the final point mentioned, appears to be more critical in regards to a company's most talented people. Even with a recession organisations are even more focused on getting the best talent.

Additionally consider how long it will take to implement your approach and get everyone on board. Make sure it is fit for purpose, relative to need and in turn be realistic about time. Research and personal experience has suggested that large corporates may take 3 years before Talent Management becomes an integral part of the business. With this in mind think about what you are asking the company to invest in and if it can wait for the results?

The future of course management

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Habit Two:
Your Culture is Critical

Implementing Talent Management successfully requires a change of management approach. You need to decide what you are aiming for, communicate it effectively, support people through the transition and then work hard to embed what you have started.

All aspects of the company culture need to be considered. What about mobility and aspiration? Are they openly discussed in your business-what if people joined you on the basis of working in one location with little movement of role?

From personal experience, part of the implementation process must be to work on the Talent Management "story". Educating people about change is key. This includes managers, as they will need to be upskilled to have career conversations, as they often deal with changes to long   standing employee propositions.

One route to failure is for an HR department to introduce a process and then just assume that managers have the skill to implement it.

It would be ideal to look at the performance and feedback aspects of your business culture. If you are beginning to look for higher levels of performance, mobility or ability, how will this sit in your culture?

From experience, it is hard to think of how many people never get accurate and helpful   feedback on their performance.

Habit Three:
Work on Performance first rather than potential

When people first take a look at Talent Management the majority want to define what potential and/or talent is. This is an important factor to consider and define, as employees will also want to know what the company believe these definitions to be.

Experience suggests the best starting point is to look at performance through 'round table' discussions with Senior Teams. This is to identify those who are considered as performers and to discuss actions for those who are not. Whilst past performance is not an absolute guide to the future it is one of a series of indicators of potential.

If someone is performing highly they may display some of the attributes you need for future growth in your business. It won't be an absolute indicator, however it is a good starting point. The one thing you don't want, is someone who performs poorly, taking management time or development spend from those who you would get a greater return on.
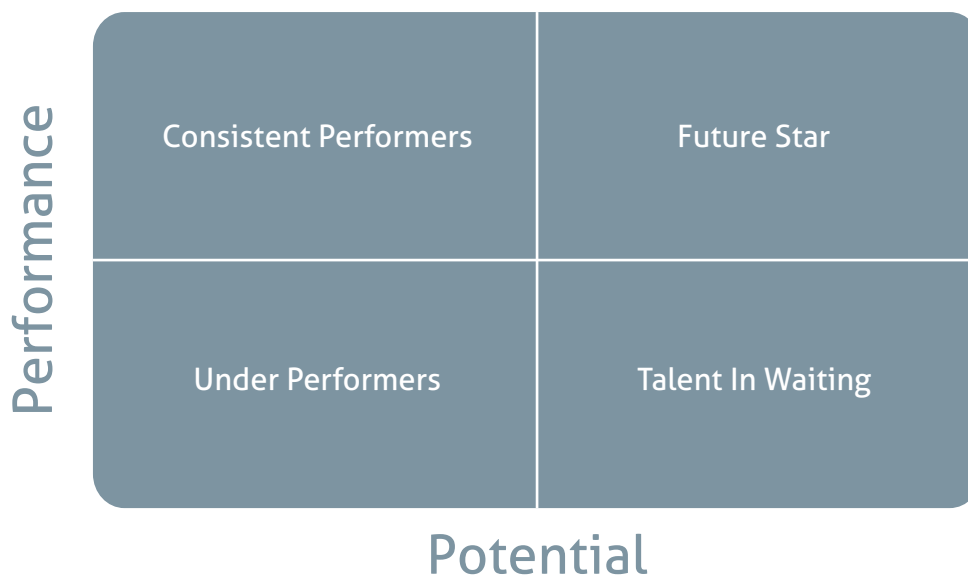
Habit Four:

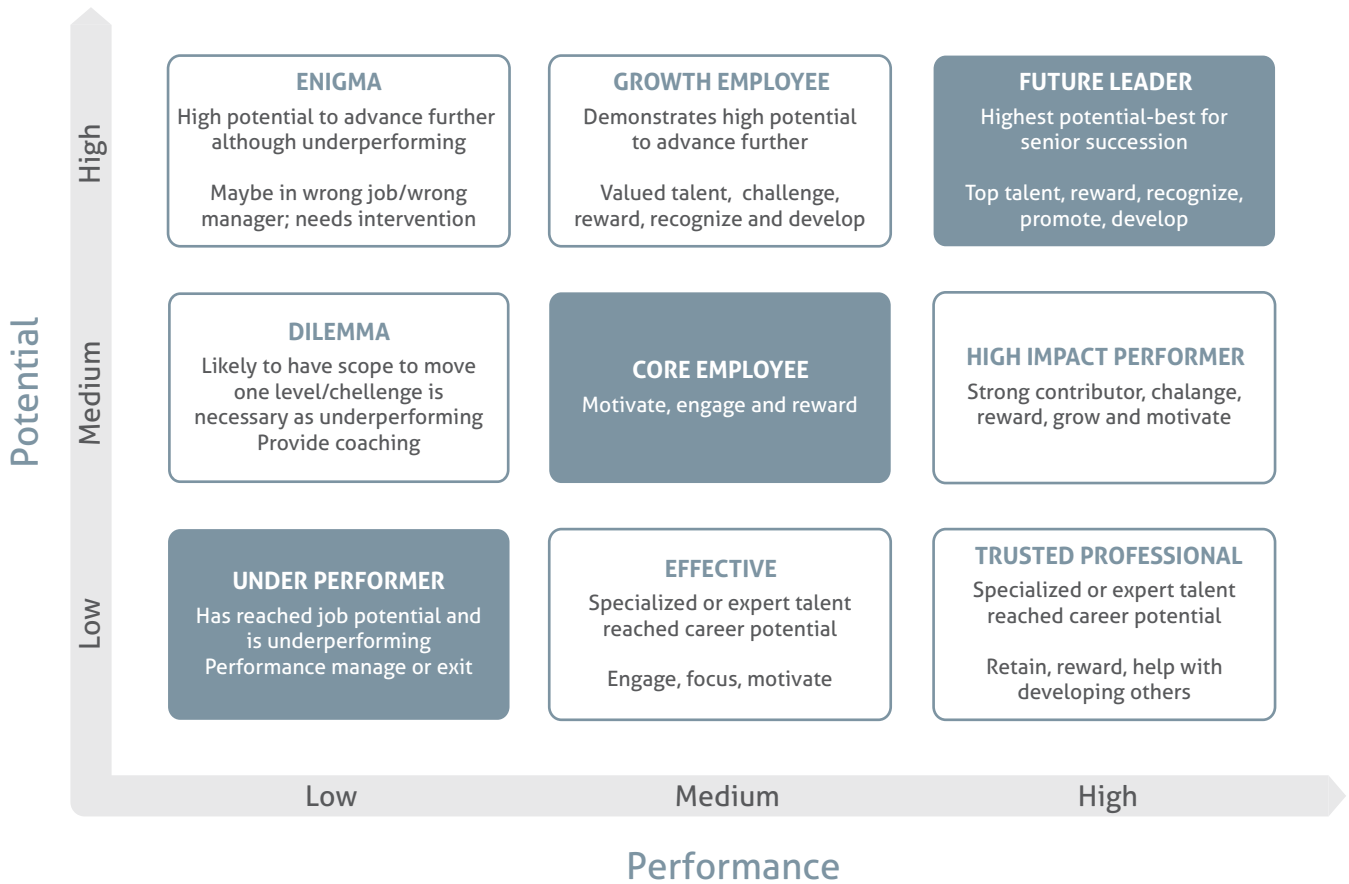# Talent Mapping is not always about the boxes

Boxes, from personal experience, are essential in bringing structure and rigour to the mapping process. However, do not become too hung up on their fundamentals and lose the art of open conversation in regards to Talent.

Initially from personal experience, a four box model was used within an organisation that did not have a feedback culture,but did have performance issues. Whilst a Talent Map had to be produced, the best result was to get Senior Teams openly discussing people, their performance and ultimately career opportunities. As this required a whole new skill set, it was sometimes very challenging having to talk about employees in front of the MD. In some cases, it was too easy to keep discussing " the right box " whilst avoiding the issue of performance.

That said, as skills and knowledge became more developed and the company came to a common ground in regards to the boxes, it was best felt that a nine box model would be more ideal. This journey took a year of mapping experiences to shape, but once affirmed, Talent Management was better established through dialogue, discussion and action.

Examples of Talent Management Box Models

Performance	Consistent Performers	Future Star
	Under Performers	Talent In Waiting

Potential

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Potential — vertical axis (High, Medium, Low)

ENIGMA
High potential to advance further although underperforming

Maybe in wrong job/wrong manager; needs intervention

GROWTH EMPLOYEE
Demonstrates high potential to advance further

Valued talent, challenge, reward, recognize and develop

FUTURE LEADER
Highest potential-best for senior succession

Top talent, reward, recognize, promote, develop

DILEMMA
Likely to have scope to move one level/chellenge is necessary as underperforming Provide coaching

CORE EMPLOYEE
Motivate, engage and reward

HIGH IMPACT PERFORMER
Strong contributor, chalange, reward, grow and motivate

UNDER PERFORMER
Has reached job potential and is underperforming Performance manage or exit

EFFECTIVE
Specialized or expert talent reached career potential

Engage, focus, motivate

TRUSTED PROFESSIONAL
Specialized or expert talent reached career potential

Retain, reward, help with developing others

Performance — horizontal axis (Low, Medium, High)

Habit Five:
Transparency- Think Carefully!

The need for a 'story' is crucial and this is the time when it needs to be reviewed. Organisations need to consider what they are trying to achieve by implementing Talent Management. Is it because everyone else is using it or can it really further the business and help to achieve the company's strategic goals?

Transparency may work in different ways. Some organisations choose to keep the whole approach under wraps for fear of putting the wrong message out, others choose to be very open and specific about box positions and the views of Senior Management.

What you do should be specific to your organisation, but consider the questions below:

1 Is there a risk in me not being/being specific with certain individuals - would they choose to leave if our views did not meet theirs?

2 What is the risk of not having key roles covered- by not telling someone will they choose to leave- thinking that they are not going anywhere?

3 How can you really know if your views on the talented are matched by their aspiration and mobility?

The key is to always consider what the outcomes might be and what impact they have on the organisation.

Usually, the highest star performers in an organisation crave feedback and they want to know their position. It is key to talk to these people and find out their plans, as they could potentially be lost if they don't feel valued.

Habit Six:
Getting the Senior Team on Board

The final habit is dependent upon what you do with the first five. A well thought out Talent Management approach based on the first five habits will provide the best chance of getting Senior Leadership on board. To maximize the opportunity for Talent Management implementation, think about the language used when discussing this topic with your MD/CEO and the Board. The best approach, from personal experience is to speak their language, rather than that of HR.

Instead of Talent Management, talk capability, performance and achieving goals. Always relate what you want to do in relation to strategy and deliverables. This is the only thing that matters to the MD and his/her team. Build numbers around the conversations such as people moving, lower recruitment costs, lower attrition metrics and increases in profitability. If you have access to this data use it, if not, produce it or get access to it as you may be judged on it one day.