



How to Measure your Success in Talent Management

Breakfast Briefing

A culture where talent blooms and flourishes

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PLATEAU

Talent management is one of those fashionable terms open to wide interpretation. Coined in the late 1980s it refers broadly to the process of attracting, developing and retaining skilled workers within a company, recognising that in today's flexible business environment success at the individual level is typically a precondition of success at the company level.

Some argue that talent management is all about identifying and nurturing those few individuals - possibly already high performers - who exhibit high potential. Others feel that such an approach is elitist and divisive and that a company's interests are best served by recognising the wide range of talent which might exist and duly developing company management practices which develop and foster that as widely as possible. Variations on both these themes exist.

Managing talent is an important strategic task. Irrespective of these shades of opinion it's clear that recognising and managing talent within a company is an important strategic task. It's also one where specialist computer systems used by suitably skilled HR professionals can bring new insights and help to manage well what can be a very complex process.

"There are certain sets of capabilities we need in an organisation and which we need to have better than others," explained Andrew Mayo, Professor of Human Capital at Middlesex University Business School, "and for me it's perhaps about managing talents, plural, rather than management of talent." Mayo was speaking at a breakfast briefing, *How to Measure your Success in Talent Management*, held on 26 June 2008 at Lords Cricket Ground, sponsored by Plateau, organised by the **HRDIRECTOR** and chaired by Murdoch Mactaggart.

Using software to improve processes and output, Plateau is a leading provider of talent management software to a very wide range of international organisations and is consistently rated at or near the top of satisfaction lists by analysts such as Gartner or Bersin & Associates. Plateau's on-demand or local applications focus on improving management efficiencies, increasing workforce productivity and on improving employee retention and engagement.

For Mayo, it's necessary to measure in order to understand properly how well talent management is doing and to learn how to improve. "What are our essential core competencies so that we can win at our business?" he asked. "What capabilities do we need to make our specific strategies successful? And what differentiates us from the competition?"

What about the mavericks?

For Judith Germain, MD of Dynamic Transitions Limited and a specialist in improving leadership within organisations, the interesting issue is how to manage what she calls 'troublesome





talent', those maverick employees who ordinarily perform brilliantly, but are a complete law to themselves and often a serious headache for HR managers.

"Troublesome talent is those who are wilfully independent" she explained "and they're those individuals who are so truthful that it hurts. They're visionary individuals who see right into issues and who point out bluntly what's wrong. And maybe the most irritating thing about troublesome talent is that they so often outperform everyone else."

Asset or troublemaker?

Audience reaction was mixed. Some, perhaps recognising themselves in Germain's description, argued the wider benefits of giving such individuals freedom to perform. Others argued strongly that the disruption and mayhem which might follow such a person's activities was good enough reason for getting rid of them as soon as possible in order to calm things down. "Having troublesome talent will lead to conflict," added Germain. "These are highly goal-orientated, often charismatic, individuals. Your clients will love them. Your MD and your Sales Director will love them. They'll get results. But they'll scare your traditional manager and most likely your HR staff will say, 'This guy's a complete nightmare!'"

Germain was certain that troublesome talent is a valuable asset for a company, particularly in today's business environment, and so the important task is to learn how to handle them, treating them in ways tailored appropriately but consistent with how other employees are managed. "You need to learn to manage without managing, to provide them with challenging tasks to stretch them and to gain their confidence and respect so that they will work with you to ensure that your vision is implemented," she explained.

Creating a culture for talent growth

For Mayo, no organisation would develop well unless it worked in ways where people could cross boundaries, where they were valued and not held back artificially, where people became fully engaged and committed. "One of the great strengths of Nokia is that it's so hierarchical. People just move around like amoebas. We need to understand the drivers of people's engagement," he added, "and we need to measure those. Different talented people have different focuses and one size doesn't fit all. We need to understand what the talents are and how to measure these and the results so that we can plan. And we need to understand the processes and how we measure those. I've come to the conclusion," said Mayo, "that the most important bit for any company is creating a culture where talent blooms and flourishes."

This Breakfast Briefing was hosted by theHRDIRECTOR in association with Plateau Systems.

If you are an HR Director and would like further information on attending future Breakfast Briefings, please call Rebecca Daly on 01454 292 067 or email rebecca@thehrdirector.com or visit: www.thehrdirector.com



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