

TALENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Organizations have “strategized” and planned regarding the development of their people for millennia. Before there was “talent management” there were basic strategic approaches to the selection, training, and promotion of people. Most of the best strategies aren’t new. They are, in many instances, the strategies that have led winning sports teams, victorious armies, and high performing private and not-for-profit organizations to the top of their respective competitive landscapes.

For us at The Refinery, talent is all about excellence. Talent management and talent planning is fundamentally about the cultivation of excellence in an organization. What is excellence? It is winning performance in whatever domain your organization happens to compete within. Every organization has pockets of excellence and the potential to win. Our approach to talent management begins with this very important principle:

There is excellence in your organization.

You may not know where it is. You may not even recognize it. And, it is likely that in many instances you aren’t capturing it, promoting it, or acting on it in the right way. There is excellence in every organization because there are people in every organization doing things right. People want to do a good job. It is possible that they feel unrecognized, but they are out there doing excellent work. Not every person will be excellent in all aspects that matter to the organization, but there certainly are individuals who embody what the organization needs.

Given this basic principle, we help organizations develop effective talent strategies by:

1. Defining what the organization requires from its people in order to win

Competitive landscapes change and organizations can never rest comfortably in the confidence that core competencies (excellences) that have yielded competitive advantage still do. Talent strategy must begin with a deep understanding of what the organization needs from its people in order to execute on its strategy.

2. Linking required organizational excellence to individual excellence

The second step in our process links what the organization needs in order to win to individual behaviours, knowledge, and skills. Example: “we need to get serious about business development ... we are falling behind the competition in terms of sales” to “we need people in this organization to take accountability for developing business” or “we need a sales-focused mindset”.

3. Find the pockets of excellence

We see this as our unique offering. We help your organization discover its own “competencies”. In this way, a competency framework or talent planning framework is based on what you already do well. We then compare this to what you need. Where are the gaps? Is there alignment between what you already do well and what you need to do well in order to win?

4. Formulate competency framework and/or performance framework

Competency is a common word in strategic human resource planning. But we encourage our clients to think not so much in terms of what are desired “competencies” but what are desired excellences. After all, “competent” doesn’t often win. We want you to strategize around how to cultivate excellent performance. Since this performance framework is at least partially based on what you do already, it is true to your organization in a way that an externally imposed framework cannot be.

5. Map talent development plans (training, succession, recruitment) to the performance framework

Finally, tactical plans can be designed to encourage the growth of excellence in the organization. Tactical plans include succession decisions, onboarding, selection, and training and development. These plans must be aligned with the excellence you wish to cultivate.

6. Re-do regularly

We do this fast. And, we are happy to help you take our model so you can do it yourself. Talent management need not be a cumbersome enterprise. In fact, it cannot be. The pace of competitive change is fast and increasing in many sectors. Advantages your organization had can vanish in a matter of months. Your excellences must change as the landscape around you changes. It is important to think of your talent strategy in the same way you think of your products and services – it is a key component of what keeps you in front of competition. Regularly ask the question: “Can we win with these excellences?”

We typically begin this process with one layer of the organization and select a management layer that has significant operational responsibilities (e.g., a general manager in a mining organization or a producer in a software development organization). From that layer, we cascade the process both up and down to define the talent strategy for the entire organization.