

GETTING TALENT REVIEW RIGHT

Going beyond traditional HR approaches to really assess your talent's potential

A biotechnology company had grown from one man's college brainstorm to an industry leader with subsidiaries in Europe and across the U.S. The highly charismatic and engaging founder attracted top talent who loved his commitment, drive, vision, and energy. The organization was like a family with strong core values, and proud that they were routinely cited as one of the best companies to work for in both their industry and the region.

As it matured, the executives and HR team rolled out traditional human resource systems and methods--from annual evaluations to leadership development programs to using nine blocks. Each time they launched a new tool, the HR team worked hard and thoughtfully to ensure that it fit the culture by tweaking normally restrictive procedures until they were a perfect match for the growing business's needs as well as the CEO's distinct perspective and personality.

Yet despite doing all the right things, leadership was struggling with the talent review process: Were they hiring the right people to take them from gutsy start up to major player? Were they promoting the right people at the right time into the right roles? How did they determine when someone was *truly* ready? When in doubt, what could they do to get that person ready? And why was it frequently so hard to know? They competed for talent with much larger organizations, so the imperative to get this right felt urgent and essential.

Nancy advised the HR team to stretch their thinking beyond relying exclusively on the standard tools they had relied on, such as competency models. Although a foundational and necessary building block of a robust talent management system, competency models are typically overly general, and don't do much to challenge our thinking about performance and potential. They are descriptive of high level goals, but they are fairly weak at helping leaders make real world

determinations about an individual's capability or the pros and cons of that person in a particular role.

More sophisticated thinking was needed. Nancy developed a list of characteristics that were aligned with the organization's core values and pegged each trait to different titles and levels. Terms such as "grace under pressure," "ego under control," "enterprise mind set," and others were clearly defined to ensure agreement across functions. Questions were identified to encourage open and candid dialogue, so that leaders would engage with each other to more accurately assess talent and potential.

An internal focus group of senior executives further refined the approach, and they are now using this tool for talent conversations across the organization. Having been so successful with an entirely new way of talking about talent, leaders and managers are implementing stage two of this project. Data collected during talent review is now used in performance evaluations to populate highly individualized and action oriented development plans.

Since the same information is used in multiple settings – talent review; performance evaluation; development planning – the organization has found a cost effective way to approach building talent that works just right for them.