

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO TALENT DEVELOPMENT

BY JASON TEOH

Talent development is the new frontier for organisations that have outlasted the limitations of learning, talent management and organisational development. The clarion call for an integrated and holistic approach has been long overdue for organisations that had exhausted the training model with plenty of room left for the 70:20:10 framework to grow or for taking talent management to the next level. Here are some lessons and tips about talent development.

Do some homework

Invest time to look around in the market and see what other organisations have done with regards to talent development; take a look at their target audience, program duration, geographical coverage, tools used, consultants engaged, etc. Narrow your focus to your nearest competitors, the Aon Hewitt Accredited Best Employers (2016) and Best Place to Work (2015). Reach out to their project leads to understand not just how talent development was done, but also how they aligned it with the overall people and business strategy, what were the challenges faced during the implementation and lessons learned from processes. Compare the tools used (eg 360° feedback, psychometric tools, performance evaluation), change management, stakeholder engagement and various facets of the project.

Look at research findings from organisations like Bersin and Corporate Executive Board to tap into their insights on how other organisations have done it, what are the differentiators, common patterns and key success factors. This entire exercise is important as it would provide you with some options on how you can do it in your organisation before you go on to the next step.

Get expectations and goals right

Your HR team may have grand ideas and a clear vision on how talent development will take the organisation ahead by leaps and bounds.

Consider whether this vision is aligned with your organisation's reality. Does your idea fit in with the business culture or environment? Is the usage of resources aligned with the preferences and needs of your leaders?

On the other hand, many HR professionals face the daunting load of KPIs, often with impossible deadlines or metrics for greenfield projects - not always because they are meant to be challenging, but often due to the lack of experience or lack of foresight on the challenges that lie ahead.

Today, talent development is very behaviour and individual focused. For a true talent development project to be successful, must look at putting in place processes and tools that enable the organisation to harness and grow talent. It involves the changing of leadership mindset and behaviours, which in turn should be supported by processes and tools to make it work.

Take the opportunity to work out goals with your stakeholders from the business - clarify that they are not HR's goal, but the business' goal. They need to understand the importance of the talent development strategy towards ensuring the long term sustainability of the business and creating a strategic advantage over their competitors. Goals may differ depending on the maturity of your talent development initiative - at the start, you might be happy measuring the number of development initiatives run, but as you progress, you want programs that can support innovation and allow talents to shine. Kick-starter or action learning projects are some of the common ones that come to mind. Towards the end, what is really important is to show that your program has a positive impact on retention of talent and their progression in the organisation.

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Make needs analysis an organic discussion

Needs analysis is a dynamic and organic process that is tailored to the organisation, industry, geography and people. Determining the vision together ensures that everyone agrees on the desired outcome.

Plan and optimise resources

Resource optimisation is the key in creating true organisational value. Always think several steps ahead with an eye for the future and opportunities for cross-function alignment to support the overall people strategy.

Map out the role of each stakeholder and share this across all leaders in the organisation. Analyse work behaviour and from the aggregated patterns. Identify the time and commitment required from different stakeholders in order to change their personal leadership behaviours as well as to develop their colleagues. Place a huge emphasis on facilitating learning on the job and to coach others.

Unlearn, learn and relearn

Unlearning is the most difficult, but also most necessary component in implementation of talent development. This is especially so when people have been successful through doing things the way they have always been done and trying to convince them to try a new idea.

To enable people to unlearn and learn effectively, you need to consider the total content to be communicated, practised and honed until mastery. Implementing an integrated competency model that's linked to talent, performance and remuneration requires a longer roll out time, many alignment checkpoints and multi-dimensional assessment and measurement strategies to ensure

that the desired impact is tracked and accounted for. There needs to be communication to inform stakeholders on the overview, intent, processes and learning components before moving to the next stage which is on reemphasis and reinforcement of learning.

Measure, acknowledge and scale up

For your project to build momentum and credibility, you need to track the progress; both quantitatively and qualitatively. Be prepared to provide updates for every milestone and checkpoint. Look for opportunities to scale up; it could be the readiness of your team to do more or satisfied stakeholders who are keen to ramp up and accelerate towards the finish line. But most of all, acknowledge your stakeholders' success and contribution across levels at every opportunity because their endorsement is important to your talent management journey.

References

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Jason Teoh (@jayteohkk) is a learning, talent and OD professional for over 12 years across Asia and Australia. He is passionate about creating high impact programs that increase performance, engagement and value. Jason is a Conference Producer with ACEvents. Contact via LinkedIn.