

Why a Talent Strategy

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Overview

Companies spend large amounts of money developing their business strategies, generally with the help of high profile external consultants, and the members of the corporate C-Suite are heavily involved in this process. Once the business strategy is completed, it is cascaded through the organization and used externally as well for such purposes as analyst communications and brand reinforcement. In contrast, almost without exception, companies do not put the same effort into a coherent Talent Strategy to support the business strategy and ensure its execution. Yet, it is clear, in fact above challenge, that every aspect of the business strategy depends in large measure on execution by people – i.e. it depends on Talent.

In discussing this subject with executives involved in the development of business strategies, one consistent theme comes through: the concept of a Talent Strategy to accompany the business strategy was never considered and probably should be. This becomes all the more interesting when the different perspectives on Talent that come from the C Suite are considered:

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- CEOs want the best leadership team and an empowered workforce.
- CFOs want the workforce capacity to achieve the top line and the management of people costs to achieve the bottom line.
- COOs want the right people in place to achieve their operations goals.
- CIOs want the team that will “keep the trains running” and meet the needs of internal customers.
- CSOs want an experienced, trained and properly deployed sales force that can meet quota.
- CMOs want the right team to promote the brand and support the customer-facing teams.

The CHRO is charged with making sure the people demands of these different constituencies are satisfied. The leader of the function driving Talent for the company is on the “hot seat” without the benefit of a coherent Talent Strategy on which the C-Suite has reached agreement.

Developing a Talent Strategy

There are several critical steps to developing a Talent Strategy. Since the Talent Strategy supports the business strategy, the process begins with a clear articulation of the business strategy. Once this is done, the Talent Strategy can be developed as follows:

1. *Interviews with members of the corporate leadership team*

These should be one-on-one meetings to establish each team member's understanding and perspective on the business strategy and the Talent requirements needed for its successful execution. These meetings should be several hours in duration, allowing the time to delve into detail and be thoughtful about Talent needs in a specific and granular fashion.

2. *Talent Strategy Workshop I*

This is a one- or two-day workshop designed to get C-Suite executives on the same page regarding a Talent Strategy, given their likely differing perspectives. It should begin with a presentation of the business strategy delivered either by the CEO or by the head of corporate strategy. The differing perspectives on the business strategy surfaced in the individual interviews should be discussed and

reconciled. Then, the following critical question should be asked: for each key element of the business strategy, what things need to happen and when? The answer to this question will result in a Key Tactics Timeline.

"...the process begins with a clear articulation of the business strategy."

Next, the team will identify the Talent elements required to achieve each milestone on the Key Tactics Timeline.

- In doing this, it's important to be very specific about what has to happen, who needs to do it and what are the dependencies.
- Where there are knowledge gaps, they should be catalogued and assigned for investigation.
 - A complete list should be compiled showing missing information and the person responsible for gathering it.

As a follow-up to the workshop, the team should assemble all the information—both from the workshop and from further investigation—and the list should be circulated to the leadership team for review and validation. The best

practice is to use one-on-one discussions for this purpose rather than email.

3. *“Success Keys Interviews”*

This is a second round of interviews with members of the corporate leadership team to gather the critical success factors, including required behaviors, to accomplish the Talent elements required to accomplish each milestone on the Key Tactics Timeline. The interviews should include members of the leaders’ HR teams and should go deep enough to gain assurance that all Success Keys have been identified.

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4. *Readiness Survey*

This is a survey of a portion of the workforce in key locations based on valid survey sampling principles. The purpose of the survey is to measure the workforce’s perspective on its readiness to achieve the Success Keys. There are three components to the survey:

a. Specific questions designed from the Success Keys. These are targeted to the workforce’s direct

perception of its readiness to achieve the Success Keys.

- b. General questions related to individual competencies. These questions will measure the general adaptability of the workforce to achieve new goals with proper motivation and urgency.
- c. General questions related to the workforce’s relational capabilities. These questions will measure the social and cultural strength of the workforce in relation to executing critical initiatives.
- d. General questions relating to other potential barriers.
 - i. Financial
 - ii. Technology
 - iii. Knowledge Sharing

The results from this survey will provide a very clear picture of additional requirements needed to meet the Key Tactics Timeline.

5. *Talent Strategy Workshop II*

This is a second one- or two-day workshop with the corporate leadership team. It begins with a presentation of the results from the Readiness Survey and a list of risk factors that could prevent achievement of milestones on the Key Tactics Timeline. Potential critical actions to address these risks

are then presented, followed by a detailed discussion and agreement about the critical actions and responsibilities for taking them. The workshop output is a final list of critical actions, owners of these actions, and a timeline for accomplishing the actions.

6. *Talent Strategy Playbook*

The final step in developing an executable Talent Strategy is the development of a playbook that clearly articulates the following:

- a. Detailed description of the Talent Strategy
- b. List of agreed actions to accomplish the Talent Strategy
- c. Responsible party for accomplishing each action
- d. Timeline with milestones related to the agreed actions
- e. Risk and mitigation plan related to each agreed action

of the C-Suite and making sure that it is rigorously followed. The question is often asked: how can the HR function demonstrate its strategic role? The best answer to this question is by driving the development of a real Talent Strategy that will strongly support the business strategy.

In Future Issues

- Assessing an acquisition target for Talent and Culture.
- Real Succession Planning.
- Building the right Culture.
- Creative HR Financial Strategies.
- Matching Personal and Professional Ambitions.
- Integration Planning and the Role of Culture.
- How Leadership Skills Evolve.
- Stepping Back (or to the Side) to Move Ahead.
- Main Messages and Why They Work.

Who Owns This Process?

The benefits from engaging in this approach to Talent Strategy should be obvious. The ownership of the process should also be obvious. The corporate leadership, beginning with the CEO needs to own this process, very visibly. The driver of the process should be the CHRO bringing the agenda to the CEO and the rest

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