

Talent Management Strategies for Attracting and Retaining the Best and the Brightest



Talent Management: Emphasis on Action

BY BARBARA BUTTERFIELD

Recent discussions among HR practitioners in higher education have focused on talent management; specifically, the concept of developing a college or university talent management approach balanced between planning and action. Talent management as a planning tool looks very similar to workforce planning, but where HR will experience a real opportunity for contribution to the organization is in the quality of implementation supporting the plan. This article emphasizes strategic human resource initiatives that can help realize an institution's talent goals and contribute to performance that will build future institutional capacity.

Introduction

Human resources has a compelling mission to provide “value added” services; however, this expectation is often hard to describe. Further, HR leaders are asked to provide “line of sight” plans that support institutional strategy and challenges; again, not an intuitive task. It is, perhaps, more clarifying to examine effective, leading-edge practices that have been or could be put in place that deliver on the promise of excellence in human resource management. Here, some successful strategies are examined in the areas of talent retention, growth and employee engagement.

Developing/Delivering Action Plans Directly Linked to HR Initiatives/Workforce Plans

HR's responsibility related to talent management is to identify investments, design development required to fully deliver on its role in TM, and calculate the return on investment to the organization. With campus business partners, HR should assess the ability of the organization's decentralized leadership to implement local or unit-based actions required to close identified talent gaps. Assume that one initiative will be to retain high performers in strategic and core roles. A decision model may assist both central HR and local leadership to identify actions appropriate to different performance segments.

This decision model is sometimes referred to as the “Can Do/Will Do Matrix.” The model identifies performance quadrants and HR or local leadership talent management initiatives to address each subgroup. The vertical axis represents ability, or “can do;” the horizontal axis represents willingness to contribute, or “will do.” In each quadrant, HR should plan with local leadership how to address and resolve issues of accountability, engagement, competency development, growth and reward.



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Can Do/Will Do Matrix

<p>High Ability and Low Willing</p> <p>Warn, challenge, acknowledge skills, set performance goals, reward conservatively</p>	<p>High Ability and High Willing</p> <p>Recognize, provide leading-edge tools and development, plan career, reward, retain</p>
<p>Low Ability and Low Willing</p> <p>Place on performance plan, review regularly, reserve reward, separate</p>	<p>Low Ability and High Willing</p> <p>Provide training, reconsider assignment fit, assure supervision, give earned rewards</p>

HR Initiatives That Contribute to Organizational Intelligence

The seven initiatives listed below are illustrative of where HR can move beyond traditional functional boundaries to contribute value on the action side of talent management. The intended outcome from such investments would be evidence and measurement of the degree to which the organization is resilient, dynamic and flexible, and that it is optimistic about its fitness for the future.

Retention strategy. HR can assist the organization in identifying its high-achieving strategic and core performers. It can coach local academic and operational leadership in the conduct of retention interviews, which include one-on-one meetings with high performers to assure that the individual understands that his or her performance is highly valued and to discover how the organization can best support the performer's continuing future engagement and success.

Succession planning. Higher education is historically an egalitarian culture resistant to formal identification of heirs apparent. On the other hand, it is clear that organizational succession does occur less formally. HR can consult with decanal leadership to identify performers with potential for advancement. Organizational charts that pictorially reflect performance, loss risk (including retirement eligibility) and promotability will enable planned developmental and experiential investments necessary to enable internal advancement. Roles are critical to driving the organization's long-term competitive advantage. Performances in these roles require specialized skills or knowledge such as teaching, research, fundraising or investment.

Knowledge transfer. HR can assist the organization in identifying orderly means of transferring knowledge to new and advancing faculty and staff. Position overlap, particularly in staff positions, is quite effective in knowledge transfer and often not provided for in higher education. When succession or career path advancement has been planned, multiyear experiences and cross-training can be provided prior to promotion. Career communities based on job families with similar education and experience requirements allow for self-organized knowledge transfer and should be aided by HR in the identification and facilitation at the start-up phase.

Internally driven performers. As institutions of higher education grow in size, interest in and ability to micromanage individual performance diminishes. HR can contribute greater value in attraction and selection processes by identifying candidate characteristics that contribute independently to the academy. One of these characteristics that could be specified as “additional qualifications” is a sense of personal satisfaction coming from within rather than reliance on outside direction and praise of others. What other personal characteristics might be defined that predict individual success within the academy?

High performance teams. HR is often asked to assist in populating task-based committees or to facilitate the performance of such groups. Traditionally, these teams have been appointed on a representative basis so all interests have a voice. HR can encourage and enable appointment to task forces, committees or teams based on competencies required by the task (e.g., knowledge experts, statisticians, writers, researchers, meeting management, nay-sayers and so on). Research has shown that diversity yields high-quality outcomes, therefore contributing to high-performing teams.

Self organizing success. Every organization experiences moments of brilliance. When these moments occur, the people involved share in a sense of success. HR can help the organization repeat these occurrences and create a culture of self-organizing successes. To accomplish repetition, HR could use techniques from Cooperrider’s “Appreciative Inquiry” and assist successful teams in understanding what circumstances enabled high performance so they and other teams can replicate the circumstances. The questions are these: What did people do individually that contributed to success? What was unique about the team’s performance that ensured the result? What about the organization and its policies or culture enables such a success? Can what is learned be put in place to increase the likelihood of future successes? Most importantly, when the organization experiences success, can the same or similar groups be empowered to work further and independently on their own?

Leadership investment, onboarding and transition support. HR can analyze task-based competencies that create success in leadership positions, including personal characteristics that contribute achievement in academe. It can build these into advancement coaching, interview questions, performance feedback and coaching support for members of the academy who are in or destined for leadership roles. HR can assure that onboarding plans include not only introduction to roles and key institutional players, but also to culture and climate.

Scenario Building Creates a Compelling Platform for Action

HR leadership is accountable for helping the organization interpret long-term needs for talent that will assure achievement of the institutionally planned future. Scenario building is an approach to envisioning the desired future. It is a process that utilizes discussion focused on data, discovery, dreams, design and delivery. HR can engage leadership groups and management by asking the following kinds of questions about talent management challenges:

What if we do nothing? What will happen if future needs for talent and current talent gaps remain unaddressed? How will this affect the university’s success? To what degree can planned strategies be achieved? What units and initiatives will be most negatively impacted?

What if we were able to exceed our greatest expectations? What would result from substantial over-achievement? What could be expected in relationships with competitors, in rank, in enrollment, in research and in teaching success? What is the cost benefit?

What is realistic? Given institutional plans, what realistic investments in talent management are advisable? What priorities can be set so the organization’s plans for the future are assured and related talent management goals are met?

Creating and Evaluating Talent Management Success

In order to set and evaluate talent management priorities, begin with how the organization hopes to describe its human performance capabilities and capacity in the future. These descriptions will usually be focused on organizational strengths and areas of distinction both current and developing.

Plan

- Numerically define strategic strengths and competencies needed to achieve organizational expectations.
- Set goals that result in closing gaps in current competencies.
- Set specific targets based on adaptive competencies that must be acquired.
- Determine metrics that will demonstrate “bench” strength needed.
- Provide measureable (cost benefit analysis) business plan proposals that demonstrate the value HR proposes as initiatives to supply and support the performance chain.
- Clarify executive endorsement among the possible HR initiatives.

Set Goals

- Identify specific, measurable goals that will predict success.
- Demonstrate the line of sight established between needed organizational outcomes and HR initiatives.

Invest

- Clarify how HR will realign generalists’ and specialists’ efforts to serve these initiatives.
- Realign HR’s budget to serve talent management initiatives.
- Take responsibility for growth by substitution and seek initiative-based funding.

Perform

- Integrate HR’s initiatives and budget to achieve intended organizational performance.
- Deliver on initiatives as planned, on time and within budget.
- Report progress in annual HR reports and in the human capital plan.

Measure

Compare outcomes to predictions, for instance:

- Core skill areas are experiencing higher retention than the rest of the organization.
- Core skill areas are compensated at or above the target relationship to market.
- Performance in core skill areas excels.
- High performers in core skill areas report higher than average employee commitment.
- Internal promotion rates in key performance areas are higher than average.
- Strong career communities have been established in core competency areas.

CHROs Discuss the Critical Need for Talent Management: Why TM, Why Now?

In closing, some chief human resource officers share their thoughts on talent management and offer some examples of what their institutions are doing in support of TM initiatives.

Carol Carrier (CHRO, University of Minnesota)

In order to meet an ever more challenging future, the University of Minnesota realized that investment in leadership competency modeling, performance feedback (internally developed 360-degree review), development and succession support would be critical to ensuring success. Carrier, in collaboration with university executives, decided to start with competency architecture for top leadership beginning with deans and vice presidents. The logic was “it is

critical to get it right with this audience before expanding the initiative.”

The project began with interviews of 24 deans and is focused on identifying UM-specific leadership and role-based competencies that contribute to organizational success. This talent management initiative will define competency models in UM campus-appropriate language and build these competency expectations into selection and evaluation processes. Carrier points out that UM’s strategy will begin with development investments based on the competency models because of the positive focus and mutual benefit. Following these investments UM will emphasize readiness of internal candidates for promotion. Carrier is predicting and will measure resulting retention and internal advancement rates. By summer 2008, the competency models for deans and vice presidents will be complete and incorporating input. A formalized HR talent management team and advisory group of five deans oversees the project.

Laurita Thomas (CHRO, University of Michigan)

At the University of Michigan, a peak in staff turnover for new employees that used to occur between five and seven years is now being observed at three to five years. These talent losses, according to Thomas, can in part be attributed to lack of opportunity for meaningful contribution and professional growth. The University of Michigan’s planned response and HR initiatives are: (1) to define how knowledge transfer can be more effectively supported and (2) how investment in a portfolio management project to describe effective characteristics and competencies can contribute to success in the academy. Included in the portfolio project is a collection of related success stories telling of different routes to achievement. Project outcomes will focus on success-based competencies rather than job-related tasks.

Jack Heuer (CHRO, University of Pennsylvania)

The University of Pennsylvania faces two convergent talent management forces: (1) the potential loss of retirement-eligible staff and resulting bench strength impact for selected core performance areas and (2) employee perceptions about lack of feedback on performance and a sense that Penn is unaware of or failing to address development and succession to initiate talent management initiatives.

At Penn, talent management for staff is the responsibility of HR and is housed in the Center for Learning and Education, which includes a career center and a cohort of mentors. One of the TM strategies began with a cohort-based program for 25 current or aspiring leaders, many from the student services area. Backers for the program include the provost, president, a board member, an executive vice president and teaching faculty. The program includes three themes: (1) identifying and building on higher education leadership characteristics, including 360-degree evaluation for each participant, (2) the study and presentation of issue-based projects (e.g. onboarding), and (3) providing performance enhancing feedback. Outcomes will focus on employee contribution and engagement (Penn is currently experiencing 99 percent return on evaluations), reduced turnover and increased internal promotion. *Note: Massachusetts Institute of Technology originally designed, piloted, implemented and successfully continues the program as described in this design.*

Clint Davidson (CHRO, Duke University)

Clint Davidson, chief human resource officer at Duke University, says: “Talent management challenges in higher education are formidable. As major employers, higher education is facing an aging population, increased demand for high productivity, demanding skill sets, gaps in the talent portfolio, and increasing costs for retaining skilled and committed faculty and staff — and all at a time of a declining supply. The good news is that within higher education communities, the work culture can be substantially leveraged to attract, develop and retain needed faculty and staff for years to come. Talent management is going to require our investment and relentless action.”