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COMPANIES WITH THE BEST TALENT WIN
How Learning & Development Is Vital to Strategic Talent Management

By Kristina Stiffler

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In today's knowledge driven economy, the most successful companies understand that sustainable advantage comes not from technology or having the right product, but from leveraging the most important asset any company has – the talent of its employees. Now more than ever, companies need their best and brightest to be fully engaged and actively participating in the decisions that will shape their future. Employees and their ability to give discretionary effort, share knowledge, and solve problems are the differentiating force of today's market. Companies who can recruit, train, retain and engage top talent will be the ones that win.

Many companies say that their **"greatest asset is their people."** Yet in a 2005 survey by consultancy Hay Group, a mere 40% of employees commended their companies for retaining high-quality workers. Only 41% agreed that performance evaluations were fair. Slightly more than half rated their job training as favorable. The majority said they had few opportunities to advance, and didn't know what was required to move up. And, unfortunately for companies, only about half the employees below manager level believed their companies had any genuine interest in their well-being. [1]

These survey results summarize the challenge that Human Resource and Learning and Development professionals face today. As HR and L&D struggle to change the perception of them as simple organizational functions toward participating as strategic business partners, both face the challenge of recruiting, retaining, training and optimizing the talent within their organizations. This paper will examine the evolution and implementation of talent management programs, how learning and development fits into those programs, and introduce powerful ways the two must work together to optimize a company's talent pool.

WHO NEEDS TALENT MANAGEMENT?

The Society for Human Resource Management broadly defines talent management as the **"implementation of an integrated strategy or system designed to increase workplace productivity by developing improved processes for attracting, developing, retaining and utilizing people with the required skills and aptitude to meet current and future business needs."** [2] Certainly by this definition, all businesses could benefit from talent management. Who wouldn't want to increase productivity

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[1] Keith H. Hammonds, "Why We Hate HR," Fast Company, Issue 97 (August 2005): 40.

[2] Society for Human Resource Management, Glossary, http://www.shrbrm.org/hrresources/hrglossary_published/t.asp

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and fully utilize the skills of their workforce to successfully meet business needs?   As Jim Collins, author of Good to Great puts it, **"Money is a commodity.   Talent is not. Time and talent can often compensate for lack of money, but money cannot ever compensate for lack of the right people."[3]**

To help HR and L&D professionals manage and improve their talent management processes, a variety of software suites have been brought to market in the last several years. Programs help manage and optimize talent management activities such as recruiting, performance management, goal setting and alignment, compensation management, succession management and learning and development.

However, strategic talent management is more than simply improving existing talent management practices or implementing a new suite of software. Strategic talent management -- the type of talent management that can create dramatic business results -- is driven by the business plan of the enterprise and is individualized to each organization. Strategic talent management addresses the unique business problems each organization faces, understands which positions drive the most value for the enterprise, and creates metrics based on clearly defined goals. In strategic talent management, systems strategy doesn't drive talent management strategy. Rather, software systems are a tool that enables the talent management strategy to be smoothly implemented and managed. [4]

While talent management may seem to be centered on HR, in fact strategic talent management requires both HR and L&D to work together as a high-functioning team. No aspect of talent management, whether it be improving performance evaluations or aligning employees with corporate goals, can be accomplished without effective, focused training efforts. In this respect, L&D functions as a core service which is required for any talent management program to be successful **(see Figure 1.)**

Business Strategy

Talent Management Strategy

Succession Planning

Recruiting

Performance Management

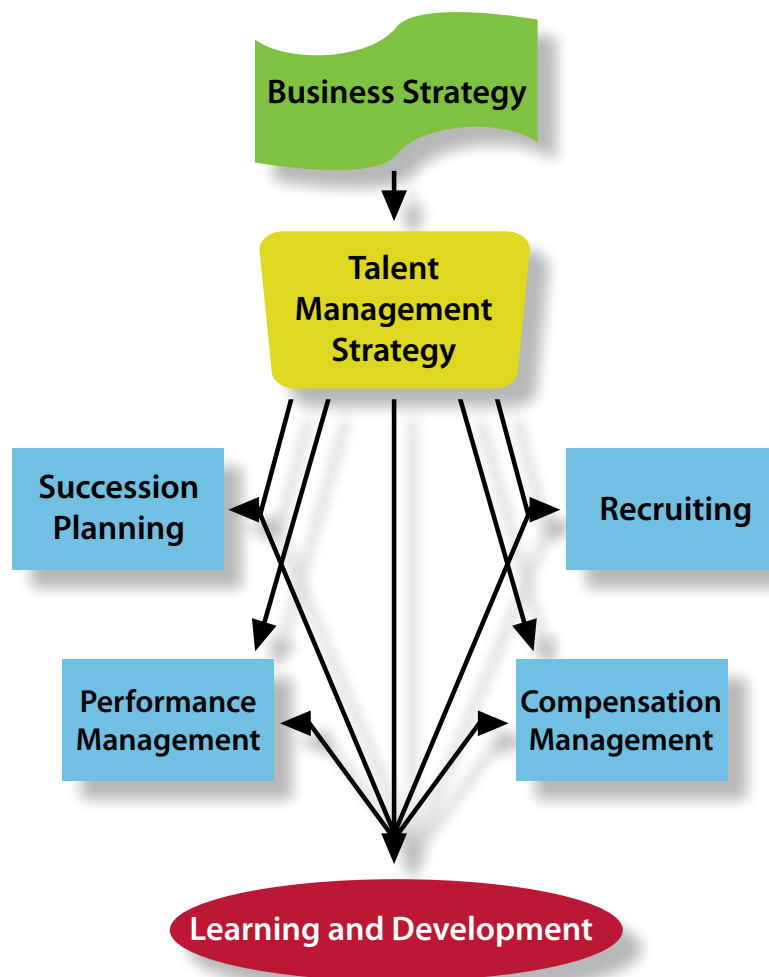Compensation Management

Learning and Development

Figure 1

[3] Jim Collins.com, "Lecture Hall," http://www.jimcollins.com/audio/Money%20is%20a%20commodity:%20talent%20is%20not.mp3

[4] BersinAsscoiates.com, "Developing a High Impact Talent Management Strategy," http://www.bersin.com/research/hitm_top22.asp

FROM PRODUCTS AND TECHNOLOGY TO PEOPLE

Talent management is an important part of creating and sustaining competitive advantage in today's knowledge-driven economy. In the mid-twentieth century, being the first to introduce a great product to the marketplace was often enough to create competitive advantage for years. With the advent of technology, the rate of change and flow of information dramatically increased. It was more difficult to be the first one to market with a new product, and companies who were had shorter periods of time before they were copied. The advantage created by simply having the right product was harder to generate and not as long lasting.

As computers became more central for conducting day to day business, companies realized that technology could give them the edge. Companies such as **Wal-Mart** used technology to manage inventory, tighten the supply chain, and overtook successful and entrenched competition such as **K-Mart**. But the market is once again changing. There is no question that having the right product and well utilized technology are vital business practices. However, it is less and less likely that these things by themselves can create a sustainable competitive advantage. Today, more than ever, employees and their ability to give discretionary effort, share knowledge and solve problems are the differentiating force of the future. It is employees and their skills, optimized to solve specific business problems, which will allow companies to be nimble enough to not just keep up with the rapid pace of today's market, but to succeed in it.

At the same time, companies are being faced with challenges in building and maintaining a skilled workforce more than ever before. A shortage in experienced workers is arriving. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, an estimated 22 million workers will leave the workforce by 2008 due to the leading edge of baby boomer retirements. The following generation isn't large enough to compensate for this loss of skilled workers. What's worse, many companies haven't adequately planned for this loss either in terms of recruitment or development programs which would optimize existing staff to fill in these gaps. Companies often don't even have programs which would assist in the transfer of valuable business information from one generation of workers to the next.

In 2006, **Bersin and Associates** interviewed more than 750 HR and L&D professionals to determine what job shortages their organizations faced. The interview responses showed that most organizations are facing severe to major shortages in everything from line managers **(53%)**, to sales representatives **(39%)**, to customer service professionals **(31%)**[5]. A more recent quarterly survey conducted by Duke University and CFO magazine found that CFOs reported that difficulty in attracting and retaining quality employees is their top concern, even in a downturned economy.[6]

It is this combination of market forces – the need to quickly adapt to increasing rate of change, the business advantage created by discretionary employee efforts, and the workforce shortages that organizations now face – which is creating the pressure for talent management programs that are closely aligned with business strategy **(see Figure 2)**.
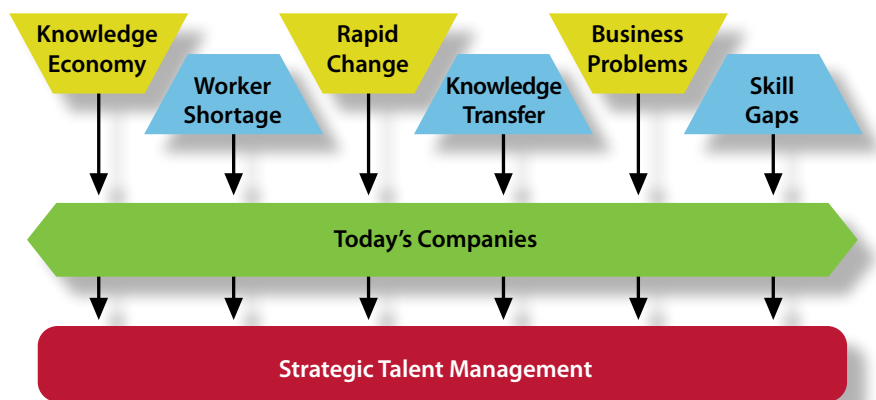

Figure 2

[5] BersinAsscoiates.com, "Developing a High Impact Talent Management Strategy," http://www.bersin.com/research/hitm_top22.asp

[6] CNNMoney.com, "Economic rebound at least a year away," http://money.cnn.com/2008/06/18/news/economy/duke_cfo/index.htm?eref=rss_topstories

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THE CHALLENGES OF STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT

Clearly companies who want to be successful, both today and in the future, must embrace strategic talent management as a fundamental part of doing business. Strategic talent management is not an HR strategy or an L&D program. It is a vital tool for optimizing and engaging a company's workforce. How important is an optimized and engaged workforce? **Top performers out-achieve average performers by 40-50%.**[7] Any organization that is able to convert even a small percentage of their average performers to high performers will see significant business results.

Yet despite acknowledgement that strategic talent management is an important business function, most organizations don't have a comprehensive talent management program, let alone a talent management program that is well-integrated with a clearly articulated business strategy. Talent management programs that are not directly tied to measurably accomplishing stated business goals are not strategic. Implementing talent management software doesn't imply that talent management is in place, nor that any talent management activities managed via that software are strategic. Indeed, strategic talent management programs are rare to find and difficult to implement. Yet, organizations that succeed in creating a strategic talent management program that is directly linked to business goals will create a measurable competitive advantage that is difficult to replicate.

Why is strategic talent management so rare? Some of the most common challenges that strategic talent management programs face is the level of complexity inherent in any talent management program, the perception that simply automating talent management processes is enough, aligning talent management programs to business strategy, and ensuring that L&D is appropriately structured and selected to support the talent management program. Let's take a look at each of these challenges.

LEVEL OF COMPLEXITY

The level of complexity associated with any talent management program presents a substantial challenge to those attempting to implement and/or manage those programs. A robust talent management program consists of goal management, competency management, performance management, compensation management, succession management, and recruiting management. Each of these components is a complex, and often time-consuming, process. Attempting to integrate them with each other adds another layer of complexity. Ensuring each process is aligned not just with each other but also with rapidly changing business strategy adds yet another layer of complexity. In addition, L&D programs which are already in place to service operational business needs must be aligned and equipped to support each talent management process.

Let's look at just performance management. At a minimum, adequate performance management requires a standardized process for providing

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[7] Robert W. Eichinger and Michael M. Lombardo ,"The ROI on People – The 7 Vectors of Research", Lominger Limited, Inc

performance feedback and managing to ensure that performance feedback is appropriately given and followed up on. Ideally performance management would also tie into performance-based compensation adjustments (compensation management) and be a vehicle to not only convey corporate and department goals, but also to assess and develop the goals of the individual employee (goal management). Even at the simplest levels, the component of performance management becomes more and more complex as it is optimized and tied into the other components of talent management.

In addition, L&D must also be tightly integrated into all aspects of the performance management process. Managers and employees may both need training on the process itself. Managers may need training to assist them in appropriately communicating performance feedback to their staff. Staff may need training on how to accept and incorporate constructive feedback. Staff will also need training interventions to assist them in closing identified performance gaps and acquiring new skills needed to create newly identified business results. Managers will need an efficient way to ensure that training is being taken and monitoring the results so timely adjustments can be made.

In fact, most talent management processes are so complex that organizations typically don't have all the components in place. Those that do typically don't have those processes well-integrated with each other or with identified business strategies. The reality is that talent management programs are integrated in stages and choosing to begin with one component, such as performance management, is often the place where companies begin.

AUTOMATION AS A PERCEIVED SOLUTION

According to research by **Bersin & Associates**, talent management was identified as the number one topic for HR and L&D in 2008.[8] As more and more companies place talent management implementation at the top of their "to-do" list, the number of vendors offering software and consulting solutions to help them move forward has literally exploded.

IDC reports that performance management holds the highest level of buyer interest for talent management offerings. The market for workforce performance management software and services alone is expected to reach $2.55 billion by 2012. At the same time, many talent management software and services vendors are reporting interest in integrated solutions, even if companies cannot implement all the functions simultaneously due to the complexity and sheer number of work hours involved.[9]

While there is no question that automating complex talent management processes, such as performance management, can create value within an organization through sheer gains in efficiency, it is important to remember that the high impact value of strategic talent management lies not with more efficient processes, but with processes that are tied to business strategy and drive business results. There is often a perception within organizations that if a talent management software package is implemented, that effective strategic talent management is in place. This is a fallacy. Automation is not the end, but a means for making it easier to manage talent management processes in a way that drives business strategy.

[8] Josh Bersin, "Enterprise Learning and Talent Management 2008: Predictions for the Coming Year", Bersin & Associates Research, December 2007: 3.

[9] AllBusiness.com, "IDC Finds Workforce Performance Management Market Still Maturing and Still Hot with Revenues…", http://www.allbusiness.com/labor-employment/human-resources-personnel-management/10184324-1.html

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INTEGRATION WITH BUSINESS STRATEGY

Perhaps the biggest challenge with implementing strategic talent management is tightly integrating talent management processes with ongoing business strategy. The challenge in this area is two-fold. The first challenge comes on a level having nothing to do with talent management. Rather, it is the need for each company to identify and articulate a unique business strategy. This requires examining the current business issues facing the organization, identifying short and long term goals, and understanding how talent management strategy can help facilitate those goals. Only after a clearly articulated business strategy is in place can determinations be made on which talent management process (or processes) would drive the most business results.

The next level of challenge comes with ensuring that any implemented talent management processes tie directly to business strategy in a measurable way. For example, if **10-20%** of the staff drives **70-80%** of the value in your business, then it would be good talent management strategy to know who those people are, how to develop them, how to retain them, and how to get them to even higher levels of performance.[10] Talent management processes needed to manage to those strategic goals should be the first ones put into place and specific metrics developed to appropriately track if the talent management strategy is on track. The necessary processes and metrics may or may not already line up with what is available in either commercial or already existing proprietary software. Given the level of complexity in both identifying business strategy, and in creating processes and metrics that manage talent in a way that ties into that strategy, it is easy to see why effective strategic talent management is a formidable challenge.

APPROPRIATE L&D SUPPORT

Learning and development must play a key role in any implementation of a strategic talent management system.[11] L&D is vital to, and involved in, all operational and talent management issues. Regardless of which talent management process is considered, L&D is

a key support service which cannot be eliminated from the equation. In any talent management process there is likely to be process training, operational training and career development training – all of which are developed, purchased, or managed through L&D programs.

The challenge for most organizations is offering these L&D services in a centralized way. The trend in L&D organizations has been to provide mostly operational training. This has led to decentralized L&D units working within particular lines of business. For example, sales training is only available to the sales and marketing organization and is managed separately from IT training, which is only available to the IT department. For L&D to be an effective partner in strategic talent management, it may be necessary for L&D to become a more centralized service that provides not only operational training, but also career development training which may be more far-reaching across the organization.

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[10] BersinAsscoiates.com, "Developing a High Impact Talent Management Strategy," http://www.bersin.com/research/hitm_top22.asp

[11] BersinAsscoiates.com, "Developing a High Impact Talent Management Strategy," http://www.bersin.com/research/hitm_top22.asp

WHY TRADITIONAL APPROACHES NO LONGER WORK

Business, and therefore the roles for HR and L&D within organizations, has changed dramatically over the last 15 years. Fifteen years ago, HR was a back office function typically known as "Personnel." The personnel department was created and operated strictly to manage payroll and benefits in a cost-effective way. Initially these tasks were very labor intensive, but as technology arrived and became less expensive to learn and use, these functions shifted to more and more automation. As a result, many different kinds of HR systems, both proprietary and off-the-shelf, emerged and came into common use.

As automation has helped with the burden of administering basic payroll and benefits to large scale companies, HR has moved into other arenas. HR is now an integral player in internal communications, compliance management, compensation management, organizational structure, recruiting and learning and development. Yet even with the additional responsibilities HR has assumed over the last few years, most HR departments continue to struggle to be regarded as a strategic part of corporate operations. Why? The simple answer is that more is needed to best manage a company's employee base. It is no longer enough to shave overhead on benefits, hire quickly or simply minimize turnover – metrics HR has been (and likely still is) being held accountable to. In today's rapidly changing, knowledge driven business climate it is vital to have the right people with optimized skill sets in the appropriate positions to drive desired business results.

For example, it is no longer enough to have standardized pay grades, written job descriptions and long-tenured staff. Driving business results means paying star performers with star salaries and communicating, training, and managing defined competencies that go across lines of business. Experienced staff must be in a system that allows for good transfer of knowledge to less experienced staff and be thoughtfully replaced when the time comes for them to leave.

Many L&D departments face similar challenges. Traditionally, L&D was reserved for select parts of the organization due to the expense and amount of time away from the job. As L&D has taken advantage of technology to both deliver and efficiently manage training, it has become more widely available across the organization. Yet L&D continues to be primarily focused on improving business performance by through training identified skills which are important to a particular job or job class. By staying with lines of business, training departments tend to focus on identifying problems or changes in that business and creating training to meet those particular needs. For example, L&D may develop content for new product training or training to address specific job changes. [12]

L&D departments are often decentralized and struggle to keep their programs aligned with ever-changing business strategies. While automation in the form of Learning Management systems have made learning easier to administer and deploy, less than half are being used to align training to strategy, consolidate training or implement competency management programs. [13] These are areas that are vital to strategic talent management and on which both HR and L&D need to focus. In reality, both HR and

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[12] Josh Bersin, "Enterprise Learning and Talent Management 2008: Predictions for the Coming Year", Bersin & Associates Research, December 2007: 3.

[13] Josh Bersin, "The Convergence of Learning and Performance Management: Has Talent Management Arrived?", Bersin & Associates Research, October 2006: 15.

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L&D systems are in place to facilitate efficiency, not strategy. In spite of the drive to optimize L&D to support talent management, most training departments see themselves as least effective in aligning with HR, allocating their training budget based upon achieved business results and accurately measuring the impact of training within the organization. [14]

Yet both L&D and HR have critical strengths in areas that are important to implementing strategic talent management. Some of those strengths are shared, such as management training and leadership development. But others are strengths that may be in one department but not the other, such as managing to specific competencies. In the end, traditional approaches to managing and training people mostly fail because they do not facilitate the close interaction of both HR and L&D to develop and manage the employee base in a way that capitalizes on the strengths of both, aligns with business strategy, and creates measurable business results **(see table 1)**.

TRADITIONAL HR	TRADITIONAL L&D	STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT
Organization-wide	Line of business	Both organization-wide and line of business
Manage payroll and benefits	Operational job training	Optimize workforce to fit business strategy
Hire quickly; Minimize turnover	Train quickly; minimize time away from job for training	Hire right people for right jobs; Retain high performers
Cost savings	Cost savings	Investment strategy
Standardize performance and compensation criteria	Interventions for specific job related performance issues	Develop staff to meet strategic business goals
Compliance issues	Efficiently administer and deploy training	Metrics to ensure business goals are being affected
Tactical	Tactical	Strategic

Table 1

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[14] BersinAsscoiates.com, "Developing a High Impact Talent Management Strategy," http://www.bersin.com/research/hitm_top22.asp

AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT SOLUTION

By now the potential of effective strategic talent management should be obvious. First, it meets all the definitions of a sustainable competitive advantage. Strategic talent management is unique to the strategy of each business, it leverages the key strengths of each business, and it is something that is extremely difficult for competitors to simply copy and easily obtain the same results. Take the 1,435 firms examined by **Jim Collins** in his book **Good to Great**. Of those, only 11 had exceptional performance, averaging returns 6.9 times greater than the market, over a 15 year timeframe. No stunts. Just plain hard work and starting with the most important thing any company has going for it – its employees. Says Collins, **"In fact, leaders of companies that go from good to great start not with "where" but with "who." They start by getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats."** [15]

The challenges of strategic talent management and the limitations of traditional approaches to both HR and L&D point to a couple of common denominators which must be in place to create an effective strategic talent management solution.

PART OF UNIQUE BUSINESS STRATEGY

For talent management to be strategic, it must directly tie into the business strategy of the organization. Answering the following questions is really the first step of implementing any strategic talent management program.

- What are the goals of the organization this year? In five years?
- How are those goals being communicated to staff?
- What talent management processes are needed to meet those goals?
- What L&D programs are needed to support those talent management processes?

PULL BIGGEST LEVER FIRST

As with any highly complex program which may take years to bring online, a key goal should be to show quick successes. Based upon knowing the business strategy, a short list of which talent management processes are most important to the success of the organization can be generated. Of those, identify which will drive the biggest business results. This is the process which should be implemented (or improved or automated) first. Determine who will own the process, what process improvements or changes will be made, how the process will be monitored, what L&D interventions are needed, and how success will be measured. For many organizations, performance management is one of the key processes that can be implemented or improved to generate big business results.

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[15] FastCompany.com, "Good to Great", http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/51/goodtogreat.html

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MEASUREMENT OVER AUTOMATION

Strategic talent management is not equivalent to implementing or building software to help manage talent management processes. Software can certainly bring results in terms of efficiency, but efficiency will not have long term positive impacts on the business. Software can allow people to focus on higher level strategic questions and more easily track identified metrics which can be used to show program success. However, the strategic talent management program should drive the software, not the other way around.

L&D PLAYS INTEGRAL ROLE

Finally, strategic talent management necessitates an integrated L&D program. Whether L&D is already a part of operational processes or not, L&D is necessary in order to have a successful talent management program. L&D facilitates the rollout of the process itself, instructs people on the tracking and usage of applicable metrics, and allows for interventions which will be needed in order to develop staff to meet the challenges which the business is trying to solve. Without an L&D program that is chosen and implemented to adequately support the talent management strategy that strategy is doomed to fail.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT IN ACTION

Effective strategic talent management affects the entire organization because it is driven by the unique needs and goals of each business. While generation of business strategy largely resides within the purview of upper management, effectively integrating a L&D program to support any talent management processes which are either in place or being implemented is something that most mid-level HR and L&D managers can do to facilitate the impact of a company's talent management program. Consider a typical performance management process.

LACK OF STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT

Rhonda is a new sales manager. She has been in her job for approximately six months, and was promoted into sales management because of her exceptional record in sales. She has received minimal management training, which consisted of learning how internal sales budgets are generated and managed. As part of a new performance management initiative, she has been given a directive by HR that she must complete a performance review for all her direct reports within the next four months.

Failure to complete performance reviews on schedule will now directly affect part of her compensation, and she is eager to prevent any negative consequences.

Rhonda's only experience with performance reviews are those that she received from her previous manager. She worked for her previous manager for six years, but performance reviews were not a high priority for the organization, so she only received three formal performance evaluations during that time. Most of her compensation adjustments came through sales incentives and occasional raises which were recommended (or not) at the discretion of her manager.

Rhonda is anxious about giving performance feedback to her six direct reports because of her lack of experience with a formal performance management process and short tenure as a manager. She has two direct reports in particular that she is worried about. The first is Jose. Rhonda has been receiving complaints that Jose is often overbearing with his customers, belligerent with the sales support staff, and falling behind in submitting his orders to accounting. Rhonda needs to tell him that while she is happy that he is meeting his sales targets, his behavior is unacceptable. On the flip side, Rhonda also has a direct report who is a star performer. Jamie has been letting Rhonda know that she is looking for additional challenges and wants to better understand her career growth options with the company. Rhonda wants to keep Jamie motivated in her current role and bring her to even higher levels of performance, but doesn't have an immediate opportunity to offer her either in terms of job responsibilities or compensation. In both cases, Rhonda doesn't feel she has the experience, training or support to provide adequate coaching to her staff to meet these goals.

In addition, Rhonda's company has introduced a new product line which isn't popular or well-understood amongst the sales staff. Despite heavy compensation incentives, the product isn't selling well and the sales staff is unhappy with the negative impact it is having on their paychecks. She has been receiving a number of questions about how the new product fits into company strategy and what goals the company hopes to achieve by replacing the existing product. Rhonda has herself only received the same product training as her reports and largely agrees with the assessment of the sales staff. She certainly doesn't feel she understands the company's decision well enough to explain it to others.

And finally, the new performance management process itself is new and overwhelming. There is a new form and rating system which have been explained via email. The process for filling out and turning in the forms seems straightforward enough, but there is a goal to keep a certain percentage of staff at each rating level which Rhonda is having difficulty with. The time commitment needed to write the commentary on the forms and hold all the appraisal meetings is also a concern. Her staff has new self-evaluation forms as well. They too were explained via email. Rhonda has been receiving questions on the self-evaluation forms, and has been answering them as best she can or directing them back to HR. In all, the time and confusion around the process itself has been draining.

To comply with the directive to complete all performance reviews in the timeframe allotted, Rhonda works overtime and schedules her performance appraisal meetings. The meeting with Jose goes badly. Rhonda explains that while she is happy his sales figures are good; his overall behavior is unacceptable and must improve. She tries to provide some suggestions, but has no L&D resources to provide to him. Jose is angry and defensive. He sulks for a week and in a month everything is exactly as it was before. Fortunately for Rhonda, the meeting with Jamie goes better. She is much more comfortable providing positive feedback but is still unsure how to coach Jamie to the next level or how to help her develop her career. More than ever, she is afraid that she is going to lose Jamie to another company. She did her best to address the concerns regarding the new product introduction in all of her meetings, but has been unable to get any additional information on how the new product fits into the company's business strategy. The most consistent answer she has been given is that the sales people need to review their product training and the sales will eventually come.

While Rhonda survived this year's performance management process, she has come to dread the time involved and the anxiety of handling so many difficult conversations with no L&D support. She was initially happy that the company was striving to provide more formalized and regular feedback, but feels the meetings themselves did not produce the opportunity for business results that they could have. Rhonda goes back to focusing on sales figures for another year.

INTEGRATED STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT

In an organization with integrated talent management and appropriate L&D support, everyone wins. First, Rhonda and her fellow managers would have been given L&D intervention on the performance management process itself. Why did the company decide after all the years of not doing consistent performance appraisals that they are now important? How does the company see performance appraisals fitting into the business strategy? What business results are expected from incorporating formal performance appraisals? In addition to understanding the answers to all these questions, Rhonda and her fellow managers would have a good understanding of the process itself – how to fill out the forms, how the rating system works, how compensation is tied in, etc.

In addition, Rhonda would have been given L&D support as a new manager. How do you have a difficult conversation with an employee experiencing performance issues? What are the options for career growth and other opportunities for her staff? What skills would best benefit the company today and tomorrow? Rhonda would have been provided the training she needs to have effective performance management conversations with her staff, and be provided L&D interventions which could be used in conjunction with mentoring to bring her staff to even higher levels of performance.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT THAT SUPPORTS INTEGRATED STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT

Finally, in an integrated strategic talent management system the new product rollout would consist of more than basic product training. All staff would be trained not only on how the product is improved from its predecessor, but why it is superior in the marketplace. Staff would understand how the new product fits into the overall business strategy and what the company's goals are in relation to its success. L&D interventions regarding competitors, functionality and key selling points would all have been provided in initial rollout.

When seeking a learning and development company who can aid in the implementation of strategic talent management, many factors should be considered, including:

Length of Experience: Look for providers who have been providing learning and development services for many years and have a good track record for successful programs. Ask about their renewal rates, as customer retention is often a key indicator of past successful implementations.

Applicable Topics: Consider providers who have learning and development interventions in areas that are both universal to most people in the organization, such as communication skills, and also specific to the lines of business that drive most of your organization's value. For example, in a technology company, universal topics needed for strategic talent management might include effective communication skills and working well with people of different personality types. Line of business training might include manager specific topics such as how to have an effective performance appraisal meeting as well as operationally specific training such as improving customer service, sales training or training on specific technology topics.

Easily Distribute Training Interventions: The most easily distributed form of learning and development interventions is e-learning. When looking for an e-learning vendor, consider not only the topics available but how those topics will be delivered. Do you have an LMS in place? If so, does the vendor in question work well with the LMS system you already have? If not, does the vendor have a delivery platform which will meet your organization's distribution and management needs? Be specific about exactly which distribution features your organization really needs. Paying additional dollars for a component to customize off the shelf training is a waste of money unless you have clearly defined needs for which training you would customize and which internal resources would be used to do that work.

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Provide Metrics for Learning and Development Interventions: Look for vendors which can provide learning and development metrics which fit your strategic talent management needs. For example, it may be less interesting that **50%** of staff took 20 hours of training over the last year and more interesting that **90%** of the manager assigned interventions were taken and those business units had measurable performance gains.

Incorporation of Specialized Learning Resources: Ask providers about their ability to create learning and development interventions for specific or niche needs. In addition, most organizations have a lot of internal resources that have already been created which would be helpful for their strategic talent management program, such as white papers, reports, and PowerPoint presentations. Find out how difficult it would be to incorporate these items into your learning and development delivery system.

Easily Gather Training Needs: Seek out providers that have an efficient and effective solution for gathering training needs, both at the individual and departmental level. Effective strategic talent management isn't just about **"assigning down"** learning and development interventions to employees; it is also about helping employees develop their careers and move to the next level.

Ability to Meet Changing Strategic Goals: Ask providers how they handle updating learning and development interventions to meet changing strategic goals. How often is new learning and development released? How easy is it to re-deploy learning and development resources to employees? Can learning plans be created? If so, how does that work and is it personalized to the individual or assigned based upon job description?

Compatibility with Existing Talent Management Processes: Seek out vendors whose learning and development solution can be easily integrated with existing programs or processes, such as performance reviews. For example, a learning and development vendor who can create and manage learning plans to help facilitate performance management conversation may be helpful for a company implementing a new performance management process.

Provide Superior Service: Look for learning and development providers who have a track record of going the extra mile and really servicing their customers' needs. Strategic talent management begins with your business and your business strategy, not that of the vendor. Choose a vendor who is willing to partner with you to meet your strategic talent management goals.

MINDLEADERS

MindLeaders provides products and services that address learning and development challenges, and align training programs with organizational goals. With nearly 25 years of experience in the technology-based, self paced training field, MindLeaders is a key partner in any integrated strategic talent management program.

LARGE LIBRARY OF COURSEWARE

MindLeaders has more than 2,000 interactive courses to give you the learning resources you need. Topics range from universal skills such as communication, presentation, and time management skills to line of business specific topics such as customer service, sales, and technology topics. **MindLeaders** learning is based upon sound principles from research in instructional design, adult learning and information processing. All **MindLeaders** courseware meets **AICC** and **SCORM** industry standards for interoperability with LMS platforms. **MindLeaders** releases new courseware quarterly, which for most organizations is frequently enough to serve changing strategic needs without overwhelming staff with frequently changing learning assignments. Customer satisfaction with **MindLeaders** courseware averages well over **90%**.

DISTRIBUTE YOUR LEARNING WITH MINDLEADERS CENTRAL

MindLeaders Central provides a state-of-the-art system for managing your learning and development program. **MindLeaders Central** allows administration at every level of your organization, whether the learning and development is for everyone or just one person. Track the metrics that matter to you with **MindLeaders Central's** reporting tool, and manage not just e-learning but any instructor-led or company generated learning objects as well. In addition, the **MindLeaders Resource Center** contains tools, reference materials and guides for managing and promoting learning programs to the entire organization. In addition, with website availability averaging over **99%**, there is no need to worry that we won't be there when you need us.

PROVIDE LEARNING SUPPORT WHEN AND HOW THEY NEED IT

MindLeaders provides additional learning and development resources such as instant mentors who are experts available to your employees at any time, an extensive library of online books which can be easily accessed for reference, and labs which give employees the benefit of hands-on experience.

MINDLEADERS PERSONAL LEARNING SERVICE (PLUS)

With **MindLeaders PLuS**, employees receive personalized learning plans created by human Learning Advisors. **MindLeaders PLuS** supports organizational level learning and development needs, as well as the career development needs of the individual. The organization benefits from reduced costs, exceptional content integration, and an accurate view of internal skill gaps through the Organizational Overview.

MindLeaders®
1.800.223.3732

EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE

When you hire **MindLeaders** to provide your learning and development solution, you don't just get a vendor, you get a partner. **MindLeaders** provides an entire support team consisting of your Account Manager, your Educational Services partner, and an excellent technical support team who averages **100%** satisfaction. Many companies claim to have exceptional service, but our customers know from experience that is exactly what **MindLeaders** provides. Our customer retention rates are well above industry averages.

ABOUT MINDLEADERS

MindLeaders has been an innovative learning and development provider for over twenty-five years. To find out more about **MindLeaders**, visit **www.mindleaders.com** or call **1-800-223-3732**.