Some of us in HR would argue that classic talent management has passed its prime. If a decade ago talent calibrations and the nine-box grids were all the rage and high-potentials (HiPos) ruled the management universe, the conversation today has shifted to the more inclusive models of management. Employee engagement, organizational culture, gender and racial equity in the workplace are the themes of today. Implicit biases have been brought to light, performance ratings have been challenged and continuous feedback and “manager as a coach” approaches have aimed at lifting everyone’s performance. Organizations now hire for growth mindset and set up choice architectures for employees to do the right thing without the administrative coercion. Will talent management as a practice survive and what might it look like in the organizations of the future?

To explore these issues, we invited the savant of the talent management practice, Robert Eichinger, to lead our collective reflection on the key tenets of talent management from the vantage point of his more than 50 years in this business. After reviewing 10 classic debates on the nature of individual differences, on performance and potential, Eichinger leads with the foresight of “what is next.” To him, the next frontier in the practice of human behavior lies in the brain science. If the brain science is the future, how does it reconcile with the present protocols of talent management? Our respondents fill in the answers from their own experience and with the view on the organizations they look after.

Michelle Weitzman-Garcia of Regeneron is leaning in on the science and protocols that her mentor Eichinger developed. What she adds is the “art” of applying those scientific principles to the practice of talent management in working with complex organizations.

Kelly Joscelyne, the global chief talent officer of Mastercard, examines the question of how gender differences manifest themselves in talent management, the question Eichinger ostensibly chooses to avoid. To her, it is not a question of whether the differences exist, but why inequities occur. For Joscelyne, talent management is about preventing the biases from overwhelming the integrity of high potential selection.

Lewis Garrad, the growth markets lead for Mercer | Sirota, proposes a timely upgrade to the classical definition of high potential. He insists that in selecting high-potentials we need to look for problem-finders rather than problem-solvers and prioritize effective teams rather than ambitious individuals. He suggests that being high potential in the traditional organization could be a curse and a burden rather than the promoted honor. Garrad suggests that as the digital revolution continues, talent management “will be less about helping a ‘vital few’ who achieve their potential, but more about helping the entire workforce to thrive in their own way.”

Mary-Clare Race, chief creative officer at Mind Gym, shares her organization’s research into the six conditions for the organizational ecosystems that support the achievement of high potential for all. Those conditions are: purpose, challenge, attention, growth, recognition and choice. Everyone’s performance lifts if organizations cultivate those six core values.

Claudio Garcia, the executive vice-president of Strategy and Corporate
By Robert W. Eichinger

I have been in the talent management business for 50 years with PepsiCo, Pillsbury, CCL, Lominger, Korn Ferry, HRPS and NeuroLeadership Institute. Attended hundreds of keynotes and panels. I’ve coached hundreds of executives and written over 50 articles, products and services. Trained and mentored TM talent and studied competencies, engagement, 360, the nine-box, learning agility, 70/20/10 and pool planning.

On my way out (hopefully up), I thought it might be useful to comment on the state of talent management. There are still a number of open debates, like should we tell people they are a high potential? Is it nature or nurture? Performance and potential? My viewpoint on these issues is somewhere in between a practitioner and a scientist melded together by a long time observing. There are still unknowables and some debates will never be settled, but let’s give it a try.

1. Is there such a thing as potential?
It’s real. People are different. Many don’t make a difference in work performance. Many differences that shouldn’t (race, gender and sexual preference, religion, ethnic background) still might. And a few characteristics do make a difference (cognitive skills, motivation, EI/EQ, perspective, learning agility, experiences).

Potential, a combination of x number (lists differ, but are similar) of characteristics, is real, is roughly normally distributed, and is proven to be related to performance and being promoted.

2. Potential for what?
For the most part, it is the potential to manage people and processes in complex changing conditions. There is potential for innovation, product and service creation, technical advances and deep individual excellence (like AI). There is also a special kind of potential for international/global service. But it’s mostly about being an agile strategist and people manager and leader during times of challenge and change. The characteristics that make a difference are mostly about managing the people proposition deployed against a winning strategy.

3. Nature versus Nurture
I think this is settled science mostly due to the many twin studies. What do we know? In general, people characteristics are 50% built in and 50% developed. If you have a list of critical skills and competencies, there will be wide differences in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so in the ratio.

4. Potential versus Performance
They are not the same short term, but are more the same long term. Putting aside the difficulty of how we measure performance, the highest performers today in this job, at this time, at this level, in this set of conditions are not necessarily people who can go on and be exemplars at the next level up. In general, high-potentials don’t stay long enough to be master performers until they get into their last few jobs. They move through roles and jobs faster than others. There are master performers who were there when the high-potentials get to a new job and remain when the high-potentials leave for their next developmental assignment. At the bottom and the middle of the enterprise, the high-potentials should seldom be the best performers. The high-potentials should be the best performers at the top of the organization. I (along with others simultaneously) created the so-called nine-box at PepsiCo because managers confound performance and potential. We created the performance-potential matrix to educate and get a better estimate of potential. It was also designed to defeat the manager’s reluctance to rate people low on anything. For the nine-box to work, it has to be rank ordered estimates, top third, middle third, lowest third on performance and potential. It does not work with absolute placement. That defeats the design. Additionally, managers need a lot of education on how to assess potential. Unfortunately, most organizations do not use the nine-box correctly and therefore, its usefulness is diminished. And since most of the estimating managers are not high-potentials themselves, the estimate process is very spotty.

5. Are men and women different?
Yes. In very important ways. But political correctness does not allow this discussion.
6. What are the critical factors for talent management?
From the viewpoint of the organization, early identification is the key. The earlier you start the better the potential outcome. Making a call on potential is the keystone. There is general agreement that potential includes a cognitive component made up of foundation or power (IQ) and what you do with it (learning agility). How much you have and how you use it. Those two factors, plus diversity and variety of background and experiences, leads to perspective or seeing both the big picture (global) and how things work. There is an EI/EQ component because we are generally preparing high-potentials to manage large numbers of people with the three critical people skills being listening, conflict management and change management. The catch-22 is that many managers, especially at the lower levels, are not very good at assessing potential. There is defendable research based assessment tools available, but most organizations will not get into the messiness of “testing.” We created the annual people reviews where the estimates of performance and potential are discussed and scrubbed. Confirmed or changed. A by-product is education of the managers so that their estimates improve over time. The best of all worlds would be testing, expert support by HR operatives (especially trained in the science of TM and potential) and solid estimates from managers. Once there is consensus identification, the development process can be initiated.

From the viewpoint of the high potential, self-awareness is the keystone. The better you know yourself, the better you can be. Since you can improve anything, the earlier you know what you are missing, the better the chance is that you can enhance it before it causes trouble. The piece of self-awareness that is the most important is how others see your attempts to influence. This information informs your ability to be a change master later in your career. Since managers are notoriously hesitant to give people candid timely actionable critical feedback, we had to create 360 as a workaround. Not a perfect solution, but adds to building self-awareness.

7. What does it take to manage and lead to prepare high-potentials? Do we agree on the list?
There will never be a list because of three findings. First, people do not lead in the same way. There are many paths to success. There are many combinations of skills and competencies that could work. Second, the list varies depending upon the nature of the situation. Start-ups? Turnarounds? New competition? Dying category? Domestic or global? Scandals? Mergers and acquisitions? Different markets? And third, from our work at Lominger, we found that any senior role or job generally has a list that has about 13 to 15 distinguishing skills or competencies. But what we found was that an effective leader only had to be exemplary (top 10%) on about four to seven of the 13 to 15, so there are multiple combinations of winning competencies. Effective leaders used the rest of the team or consultants to fill in the remaining needed skills. To do that well, you must be self-aware, be aware of the skills and competencies of the rest of the team and be willing to delegate. Based on this same research, we found that many high-potentials don’t have to enhance their missing skills if they knew who else had them and delegated those tasks to others. Leaders don’t have to be able to do everything, they just need to make sure everything is managed.

8. Should we tell people they are high-potentials?
This is the one debate that has taken up most of the debate time at conferences. This gets a little complex. If I posted the annual list of high-potentials in the company cafeteria, who am I really informing? For the most part, the people on the list, because they are consensus high-potentials, know they will be on the list. You are really informing those that are not on the list. We know from surveys, that a large portion of the employee population thinks they are high-potentials and think they should be on the list. You would confirm and motivate a few and demotivate many. Are your managers ready when the unlisted employees come in and ask why? And are the lists accurate? What if the high potential list changes each year? How can I be on the list one year and not the next? Although I would love radical transparency, I don’t think many companies could handle telling.

9. How do you develop high-potentials?
This would shift somewhat based upon the answer to the question “develop them for what?” (question 2). We all know the 70/20/10 meme. Not arguing the accuracy of the numbers, people learn best by doing. Since in most cases we are preparing high-potentials for an uncertain future, variety and diversity of experiences works best. Given a more certain list of required skills, perspectives and competencies, you can tailor and shape the experiences to build or enhance the projected skills of the future. This is where learning agility fits in. The higher the learning agility, the more the candidate will be able to learn from variety and diversity of experiences and exposures. A part of the definition of learning agility is being able to do things well that you are doing for the first time. A learning agile person does this by combining the pieces and parts of diverse past experiences into a portfolio of skills for a first time task.

10. Can you develop potential?
Yes, you can. CCL’s studies showed about half of the participants demonstrated significant improvement in learning agility (a stand in for potential) over a one day a month program with homework assignments between meetings. Someone with average potential could, if they are a motivated participant, improve their potential, certainly as much as one standard deviation. It’s like teaching a class on creativity or juggling or drawing. All participants say they are not good at it and at the end of the class some, maybe half are much better than they thought or knew. Part of potential is being open to learn and change. Being excited about diversity of experiences. Thinking in terms of alternatives. Being inclusive and listening. Those kinds of things can be developed. We know learning agility can be developed. We know EI/EQ can be enhanced. We know perspective can be built. We know problem solving
and critical thinking can be taught. So yes, you can develop potential. You can make your potentials better potentials.

11. Is there anything new?
Compared to 50 years ago, everything is more complex and global. And speed has increased and information is digital, including TM. Virtual teams are more prevalent and take a slightly different set of skills to effectively manage. Large enterprises are being disintermediated. Black swan events can disrupt work globally. STEM is beginning to rule the world and there are winners and losers internationally to produce the next generation of STEM workers.

Managing TM has become easier due to digital applications and good assessments of potential are just beginning to be recognized.

The only big new breakthrough is the brain science. For most TM professionals, that was not part of our preparation and training. It’s the (maybe) last individual difference! Up until probably a decade ago, it was not part of the Individual Differences course.

We are just beginning to see how the understanding of how the brain operates relates to the identification and development of high-potentials (and everyone else, as well).

There are five emerging trends that are related to TM:

Neuroplasticity. The brain can and does change over time and more importantly; the owner of the brain can have a hand in the change. Coaching with the brain in mind can be much more powerful than talk therapy. And the owner can become a self coach.

Automaticity. Most of what people do every day is on autopilot. To preserve limited resources, the brain records and stores repetitive sequences so it doesn’t have to make them up each time. Learning agility, in part, is not letting the autopilot run things too much.

Memory and working memory comprehension. We have very limited capacity for problem solving and critical thinking because working memory can only deal with about five to seven chunks of information at one time. The brain does not multi-task well.

Motivated memory and reasoning. Memory is not a HD recorder. Memory takes a sample of an event and distributes it into various parts of memory. What it takes as a sample is biased. Based upon a number of variables, it stores those aspects of the event that support a position. When that event, which is already biased in the first place, is retrieved, it may be further shaped to fit the current position and set of circumstances. That’s why witness testimony is such a mess.

Potential teaching mindfulness benefits, especially for high-potentials. Mindfulness as a movement is moving from a spiritual place in Buddhism to an effective use of brain resources place in the workplace. Executive mindfulness makes using intentional neuroplasticity possible. It helps manage unhelpful automaticity. It helps keep working memory channels clear to enhance problem solving and critical thinking. It helps resist changing the facts of stored and recalled events.

There are brain training techniques and practices emerging every day. They revolve around self-regulation and self-management. They include learning to get yourself into a performance zone more frequently. They include learning to manage unproductive noise and negative self-talk. I see the possibility of brain training for high-potentials that includes the enhanced management of self plus the advanced understanding (part of EI/EQ) of why others do what they do and how I can help them improve. It’s one of the main ways to increase or enhance potential.

In summary, I think the biggest new opportunities at the moment could be found in using assessment tools to help
identify high-potentials and adding executive mindfulness training to our high-potential curriculum.

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COUNTERPOINT: The Art and Science of Talent Management: Lessons Learned

By Michelle Weitzman-Garcia

Nature vs. nurture. Street smarts vs. book smarts. Learning agility vs. performance. EQ vs. IQ. Competencies. These topics and ideas have been studied extensively and the fundamental findings remain the same — people are different because of who they are (nature) and because of their environment (nurture). These differences are normally distributed. People can develop and change, especially when they are motivated. People change the most when they are challenged through real-world tests/hardships/situations (70/20/10 anyone?).

As talent management practitioners, these immutable truths serve us well. They provide the foundation for the leadership development programs we create, the talent review processes we implement, the way we develop our talent, and even the coaching work we do. The underlying science is sound and we can leverage that science to produce consistent and reliable results.

The science matters in expert cultures, but so does the “art.” Having worked in a variety of expert environments for the past 10 years, where expertise is prized and your reputation and credibility are dependent on how well you know your craft, has taught me that not only is the science important, but it is the translation of the science into meaningful concepts that really makes the difference.

Below are some of the lessons I’ve learned about working with and in expert cultures.

Lesson 1: Words matter
What you call concepts matters. Learning agility. Career development. Feedback. Coaching. Try explaining learning agility to a Ph.D. molecular biologist without translating it into something they can understand. It doesn’t go well. They hear it as HR speak. Translating it into something that matters to them (innovatively looking at molecules, solving problems in a different way that move the science forward, questioning and challenging the status quo) is how you get their attention. Words matter.

Lesson 2: Flexibility is key
A thorough understanding of the science can allow for significant flexibility in the way we practice our craft. It can allow us to design processes and approaches to talent management that meet our organizations, managers, and employees where they are while still retaining the underlying truths. Different performance management and talent review processes can all work, even within the same organization, if they are based on the science.

Lesson 3: Experts are more adaptable than you might think
I have been amazed at how quickly some experts pick up on these concepts even when the concept is not intuitive. Taking the time to educate them and help them understand the concepts, sometimes on a case by case basis, is the way to change their thinking. Convert an expert and you will have one of the best advocates you could ever hope for.

The work done by practitioners and researchers such as Bob Eichinger have created a strong foundation on which talent management practitioners can base their practice. Taking the time to understand the science allows us to creatively bring talent management to life within the organizations we serve.

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Breaking the Non-Diverse Leadership Cycle

By Kelly Joscelyne

I am drawn to point #5 in this refreshingly direct and informative piece: “Are men and women different (when it comes to potential)?” I don’t disagree with Robert’s response that this is a potentially thorny question, one that could keep biologists, psychologists, sociologists, statisticians, and the HR community busy for some time. However, I don’t believe it is the right question for today’s corporate talent management community. The more pressing question is, “why do women and other diverse talent lose out in our talent identification processes today and so infrequently reach top leadership ranks?”

Using Robert’s definitions of potential, do women and other diverse talent have the same potential as men to “manage people managing processes in complex changing conditions?” Do they have the same potential for “innovation, product and service creation, technical advances, and deep individual excellence?” Do they have the same potential for being an “agile strategist, people manager, and leader during times of change?” The answer to these questions is a resounding “Yes!”

Even if there are fundamental differences in women and men that could relate to how we think about potential in the corporate world, the differences probably fall somewhere in the fractional percentages of differentiation referenced in point #2: nature vs. nurture. As with most complex topics the answer to this question is likely somewhere along the lines of: “it depends.” It depends on the complex interplay of gender, culture, geography, corporate environment, professional experience, and many other factors.

When it comes to individual potential decisions in the hands of corporate line managers, these are not the right questions to ask. Rather than focusing on the marginal impact of innate, gender-based factors, the energies of the
Rather than focusing on the marginal impact of innate, gender-based factors, the energies of the talent management community would be better spent on disentangling the web of biases that impact diversity in corporate leadership roles. In these important discussions, we can hopefully break out of biased identification cycles and achieve greater parity in leadership. Then, in the 50-year update to this article, we can ask an exciting new set of questions.

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Common Tensions in Talent Management

By Lewis Garrad

There are very few endeavors that are as noble and important as helping people fulfill their potential. Wasted talent isn’t just a travesty for the individual, but also for the organization or society which would benefit from it. HR’s focus on understanding potential then isn’t just a good thing to do for business; it’s also the right thing to do for humanity. When the right leaders find the right jobs, they can make the world a better place.

While the study and practice of talent management has found a number of enduring principles, there are also several tensions that managers and HR functions struggle to resolve as they try to define and identify potential. Here are three important ones to think about as we consider future approaches to talent and potential:

**Problem Solvers and Problem Finders**
The ability to solve novel problems is extremely desirable in a leader — it’s well established that agile learners adapt quickly to new situations and challenges. As a result, they often perform well in a variety of roles and contexts. However, one significant trend that has emerged with the rise of digitization is that access to new information to solve problems is becoming easier because, to some extent, machines learn for us. As Kevin Kelly notes in his book, *The Inevitable*, the availability of fast, cheap and accurate information via the internet, as well as new forms of analytics via digital tools, means that answers to complex questions are increasingly easy to find. The consequence of this is that defining the most meaningful problems to fix becomes an increasingly valuable skill. Indeed, I would argue that the key feature of the most prominent leaders of our time (like Musk, Bezos and even Jobs) is that they have excelled in their ability to identify the right problems to solve, quickly followed by the ability to bring the right team together to solve them. While good problem solvers might tackle a new task or problem well, it’s possible that in the future it will be even more important to be able to define problems more effectively in the first place. Finding the right problem will be what good leaders do; solving them will be a team effort.

**Ambitious Individuals and Effective Teams**
If potential is defined in terms of the future capacity to lead effectively, then the desire to lead must be an important pre-requisite. Those who are ambitious and competitive by nature naturally display this desire and often emerge as leaders if no other selection system is in place. While leadership emergence and effectiveness are not mutually exclusive, in its most extreme forms the competitive desire that ambitious people display can often also be their biggest weakness. Highly ambitious leaders jostle for power with their coworkers, compete for airtime and attention, become more entitled and demanding, and spend more time on their personal agenda than group issues. Indeed, as effective leadership increasingly becomes a function of effective team work and cross functional collaboration, and less about individual brilliance, it becomes even more important that senior leaders put the good of the group ahead of their own personal agenda.

**Knowing your Talent and Being Burdened by it**
While some people flourish under pressure, there are many talented people who find the spotlight overwhelming. As Jennifer Petriglieri and her colleagues at INSEAD have noted, being marked by your company as talented can be as much of a curse as it is a privilege. The result is that some people end up feeling frustrated and disengaged by carrying that additional weight of talent expectations — hardly an approach for helping people realize their potential. Indeed, the problem with this is that we define talent in such broad terms that our process for developing it is inappropriate for some people — who would be better off with a lighter touch approach.

Finally, the most common complaint about talent and potential programs is that they direct a disproportionate amount of resources towards a “vital few.” As our digital footprint grows, perhaps new data streams and cheaper assessments will make talent and potential insights more freely available to all. And then maybe talent management will be less about helping a vital few to achieve their potential and more about helping the entire workforce to thrive in their own way.

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Creating the Conditions for HiPo Emergence

By Mary-Clare Race

Creating the optimum environment for high-potentials to emerge and thrive is arguably the most overlooked talent management issue around boardroom tables and in academic journals.

W. Edwards Deming insisted that the variation in employee performance is 5% down to the individual and 95% down to the conditions in the environment. He argued that organizations should focus on fixing the system rather than “fixing people.” This debate rages on, but there is little doubt that energy spent creating the right psychological conditions for HiPos to flourish will yield dividends.

Mind Gym’s psychologists carried out extensive research to identify what was needed to guarantee the emergence of high potential and identified six “conditions,” which have consistently been found to build an environment where high-potential individuals can emerge and perform at the top of their game. The science doesn’t suggest that any one of these conditions has more impact than any other, but rather points to an ecosystem where the elements are all inter-related — when one is strengthened it automatically strengthens and supports the others.
Purpose
“Why am I doing this?” is a question most of us have asked ourselves. The richer our answer the more likely we are to perform. There are three types of “purpose” that directly affect HiPo performance:

Task Purpose. Knowing our work counts and isn’t futile.
Collective Purpose. Seeing how our work combines with others’ to create something none of us could achieve alone.
Social Purpose. Recognizing that our work makes a worthwhile broader contribution.

Challenge
We perform best when we’re suitably challenged. The question is: how much challenge is reasonable especially for HiPos? And there’s more to challenge than simply setting goals and measuring performance. The most performance-enhancing goals are just out of reach so the goal is perceived as just about possible even if we don’t quite know how we’ll get there. A six-year study of 229 entrepreneur CEOs concluded that business growth was largely driven not just by stretching goals, but by helping high-potential employees believe they could achieve them.

Attention
The feedback that makes the biggest difference is descriptive, informal and informed. The simple act of noticing and saying what you noticed can be the most powerful feedback. The key to paying attention is lightly and often. A quick observation, delivered informally can have more impact than a formal conversation.

Growth
We grow faster when we have a growth mindset, a role that plays to our strengths and sight of better prospects within our reach. We can see that by getting better now, we’re more likely to attain something that matters to us in the future. Those who cannot see progress get stuck. They have lowered aspirations, diminished self-esteem, are less engaged, perform worse and are ultimately more likely to leave. Furthermore, “moving” needs to mean more than moving up the hierarchy. Progress may include new skills, project opportunities, lateral moves, job rotations, secondments, shadowing, leadership opportunities or even a sabbatical outside the company, all of which help people ’unstick’ and get moving.

Recognition
HiPo talent feels most appreciated when recognition is:
Fair. Based on clear criteria and applied consistently across their peers and the business.
About me. Personalized to them and not based on the agenda of the person giving it.
Differentiated. The difference between how the best and worst are
recognized is proportionate and based on objective, performance-related criteria.

One of the largest predictors of satisfaction is social comparison: employees who look around them and perceive they aren’t being recognized fairly don’t perform as well.

Choice
We support the emergence of HiPo when we:

- **Create support networks.** Building a strong network of technical, emotional and practical support.

- **Adopt an optimistic outlook.** Interpreting challenges as short-term, specific and insightful.

- **Focus on what’s in our control.** Drawing on inner strength and grit to maintain effort and interest over time to sustain performance despite setbacks.

  Considering where it’s possible to give people autonomy and ownership to maximize their choices is critical. Managers of HiPos should be open with their teams, sharing mistakes, risks, successes, challenges and opportunities and encouraging learning from all of these areas.

  Finally, a note on who should be responsible. In the traditional world of talent management, primary responsibility lies with the line manager and HR is the chief enforcer of the process. To ensure these six conditions are truly present the HiPo employee must play a far more active part. Manager and employee both have a role to play and they can succeed only by acting in unison. This gives high-potential employees much greater license to influence their chances of success, while managers are prompted to focus on setting their team members up to succeed.

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Why Talent Management is Missing its Target

By Claudio Garcia

Once I was in a meeting with a newly hired HR leader from a large private company who was held accountable for implementing talent management practices in her organization. Looking for trusted advice, she invited to the meeting some of her partner suppliers to discuss a new process to identify and develop high-potential talent in the organization.

She shared with us what seemed to be a fairly basic approach to the topic. A third person in the room, a consultant, upon realizing this, began questioning the approach and talking about how sophisticated high-potential management had become, recommending what the HR leader needs to do. Before the consultant finished laying out his recommendations, the HR leader interrupted him to say that he was missing the mark because her goal was not to initiate a complex system, but to create a framework where executives could effectively begin “learning to think, understand and talk about talents, their impact on the future of the company.” A more complex process could prevent her from achieving the goal, at least at that initial stage.

For me, this situation showed how many times our initial intentions get derailed. In order to ensure good talent management practices, organizations have become saturated with HR planning, compensation, recruitment, development, performance and assessment practices; all of them competing with many other administrative, legal, and finance tasks in increasingly lean and flat organizations. Executives, unable to distinguish HR activities from other demands on their time, often treat HR as cumbersome and counterproductive compliance duties. The bottom line is, talent management practices were not thought out from their end user perspective. As a result, leaders trust their own biased beliefs in managing talent, to the exclusion of the compelling available science and proven practices that could help them be more effective.

Organizations will never leverage talent management to their full potential if they do not accept the need to change taking into consideration the managers of talent themselves. Different from the objectivity of routines related to administrative, financial, legal and other corporate activities, talent management practices often navigate through subjective concepts. Those practices should help leaders broaden their people management worldview or as the HR leader said above, develop them to think, understand and talk more accurately about talent.

The talent management situation today is even more delicate. The advent of new technologies (which have increased the automation of routine tasks), new business models, the adoption of innovation as a business imperative and new collaborative management practices (as agile management) calls for the increased demand for so called soft-skills. What that means is that working in organizations is increasingly becoming more tacit and relationship-based, demanding greater ability of leaders to deal with the people side of the business. Talent management practices as they exist today simply do not meet the need for flexible and adaptive application.

When I speak to HR executives, most say that all those tools they provide are there to enable leaders to better manage their organizations’ talent. The sad fact is that it is not happening.

HR needs to rely less on the technocratic solutions and must retool themselves with smart and intuitive management practices for leaders so they can effectively nurture high potential talents.

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