INSIGHTS

10 Talent Management Activities to Stop Doing Right Now

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You can radically simplify your talent management practices by eliminating activities that don't add value. Here are ten ways to instantly reduce complexity for yourself and your managers.

1 **Eliminate "happy labels" on your performance management scale.** Telling Suzy that she was "highly valued" or Bobby that he was a "Star Performer" provides no valuable information. The quest to create labels that make everyone feel good about their performance rating gets in the way of communicating the essential facts – that they met, exceeded or didn't meet their goals.

2 **Stop setting more than four performance goals.** Performance goals have become an unfocused list of job activities in many companies. Listing ten goals creates a lengthy goal setting and review process that confuses the vital few with the essential many. None of us has more than four truly important things to accomplish next year.

Limit goals to four and don't allow 10 "sub-goals" beneath each. Enable this by teaching managers how to prioritize goals and to combine their list of job activities into an actual objective.

3 **Delete the definitions in your performance and potential grid (P x P).** Your P x P grid already has labels for performance (e.g. high, medium) and potential (ideally levels over time, i.e. 2 levels in 5 years). A manager's role in the talent review discussion is to explain why someone belongs in that box based on those criteria.

Adding a definition in each box doesn't help to more accurately rate someone. It just adds complexity with no additional value. While you're deleting, eliminate any labels in the boxes too (Future Potential, et al).

4 **Don't bring organization charts or employee profiles to the talent review meeting.** You should only need two sheets of paper for your talent review discussion – a P x P chart and a succession chart.

Those meticulously prepared employee profiles are unnecessary unless there are new team members. Managers should be able to

discuss the relevant parts of their employees' backgrounds, strengths and weaknesses without the crutch of a profile. Plus, it's unlikely you'll need to reference where Suzy got her degree or her 2010 performance rating in the talent review meeting. If you do, you can always look it up later.

The same applies to the organization charts with color-coded potential, potential and succession. Don't let the fact that your technology allows you produce this information to convince you that it needs to be produced.

5 **Stop requiring self-reviews in performance management.** Performance reviews aren't negotiations so why require employees to write a carefully crafted argument for their side? The dirty little secret in most companies is that the performance ratings are assigned far before employees write their self-review. They think that it matters; you know it doesn't.

More importantly, there's conclusive science that individuals are the least accurate assessors of their own performance. Lower and average performers assess themselves too generously and top performers too harshly. This sets up the performance discussion as an unpleasant discussion for the vast majority of employees whose self-assessment will always exceed their actual rating.

Be honest with your employees. Make employee reviews voluntary and let them know that the reviews have no impact on their performance rating.

6 **Stop asking employees to complete extensive self-profiles.** A recent client required all 30,000 employees to complete an extensive on-line profile that listed every detail of their career history, career goals, education, etc. They thought that this would enable better movement of people across the company, finding "hidden talent", etc.

Even in an organization of that size, the talent review process – not a database search – was the most effective way to identify internal talent. In addition, the data quickly became stale since employees didn't update it with new experiences, educational achievements, etc. If there isn't a specific, validated reason for having the data, don't gather it.

7 **Eliminate formulaic calculation of performance management scores.** The formula in your performance review to calculate the final score is an exercise in false precision. The typical manager can't tell the difference between someone rated a 3 or a 4, so pretending that 3.68 is an accurate performance rating is ridiculous. Ask managers to use whole numbers based on their overall evaluation of that person's performance.

8 **Combine talent review and succession planning meetings**. There are still some organizations that hold separate talent review and succession planning meetings. These are not separate topics. You have a talent review meeting to predict how far and how fast someone can move in a company. That defines succession.

When discussing anyone in your higher "potential to advance" categories, ask for which jobs they've been listed as a successor. When reviewing your succession chart, make sure that everyone listed is in the higher potential categories on the P x P. Any mismatch between the two suggests that you're either over-rating potential or pulling successors from the "B player" list.

9 **Stop giving lengthy 360 reports**. The standard 50+ page 360 report overwhelms recipients with charts, graphs, icons, lists and other analysis. All they really want to know is the few things they must do to win in their company. Tell your 360 vendor to design a short report that only shows the top three priorities for action (or just use the OPTM360).

10 **Stop setting more than one developmental goal**. The average employee isn't going to complete more than one developmental activity next year so why waste time creating three or more? If you set just one goal it's also much easier to hold managers and employees accountable to achieve it (See *The Delusions of Employee Development*). Realistic expectations help to create superior results.