

“What is Talent Management and Whose Job is it Really?”



Julian C. Chapman & Carla Sandrin

Talent Management leverages the capability and potential of employees to achieve an organization’s strategy. Unfortunately, Talent Management (TM) systems are often overly HR-centric, ignoring or marginalizing the vital roles of an employee’s Manager and Manager-once-Removed (MoR).

“It is a question of focus and balance.” says Julian Chapman, VP Coaching and Facilitation at Forrest & Company Limited. Chapman facilitates HRPA morning round-table sessions on Talent Management, and most recently on Leadership. “Getting it right is doable, but may involve HR and managers adopting different perspectives.” The stakes are high. We all understand that the cost of inadequate Talent Management is losing valuable employees, financing severance packages, scrambling to find new talent, and dealing with internal disruption.

For a Talent Management system to be truly effective, HR must focus solely on the *facilitation* of a Talent Management system – its promotion and maintenance among an organization’s leaders and culture. *Assessment* and *implementation*, on the other hand, are the focus of Managers and MoRs. Underpinning these parallel functions must be an organizational structure populated with clearly defined roles, including managerial

accountability for talent assessment. “HR and Managers are partners in Talent Management,” said Chapman, “but it’s important to understand the terms of that partnership, particularly regarding accountabilities.”

The goal is to have a Talent Management system that includes the following:

- clarity in employee roles
- continual assessment of capability and potential
- a structure whereby an employee could be transferred laterally to positions in which he or she would be better suited
- viable plans for succession

All too often HR feels *responsible* for employee growth. However, HR must look at the system as a whole and recognize that, although they feel *responsible*, they are not *accountable* for the performance and advancement of employees. The onus of accountability lies with Managers – the Manager is the person most able to make objective (quantified) and subjective (qualified) judgments about the people who work for them. Ultimately, it is HR’s accountability to facilitate such a system by building a framework for understanding human capability which reinforces the judgment of the managers and empowers them with accountability for assessment.

Balanced Model of Human Capability

Assessing talent requires a universal model. In some cases, talent manifests organically – the “cream rises to the top” (laws of buoyancy) while the less promising talent is weighed down (like a boulder under water that requires increasing effort to be lifted above the surface). However, when talent potential is not as easily identified, a model allows for assessments that are sufficiently inclusive to ensure accuracy. It is important that assessment incorporates *all* the components in what Chapman refers to as the “balanced model of human capability”:

- **Skills and knowledge** – Has the employee amassed sufficient information and facility regarding the role?
- **Attitude and motivation** – Does the employee value the work? Specifically, does he/she willingly engage his or her skills and knowledge to the task?
- **Temperament** – Specifically, are there issues beyond the employee’s control that would affect his or her capability?
- **Cognitive capacity** – Does the employee have the ability to handle the complexity of the role?

Role Clarity and Structure

Before the model can be effective, the organization must embrace role clarity. Role clarity clearly defines the work and accountabilities of each role at all levels and across all functions of the organization. The results must be articulated and expectations specified. It is important to note that role clarity and its attendant structure are a function of organizational strategy – strategy comes first. The organization must define its goals, and *then* create the structure and the roles needed to achieve them, not vice versa.

Within the context of TM, role clarity provides the means to move employees laterally, keeping them motivated and satisfied in their work. Many employees are more concerned with moving up the ladder than finding a suitable role. Advancement, title, and prestige are generally more sought after than the “proper fit.” At the same time, employees can be found in positions where they are not sufficiently challenged or motivated. Either way, the consequences can be dire. With role clarity, Managers are able to easily identify roles more appropriate to the employee, and, combined with assessment, make lateral career movement to other realms and experiences possible, thereby benefiting both the employee and the organization.

Management System of Accountability

An effective Talent Management System has two people watching over a person's career – a Manager who is nurturing current capability and a Manager-once-Removed who is fully engaged in assessing potential. Both managers are accountable for building individual capability. They must focus on specific staff roles and where their people are headed. This is where “teaching” or “coaching” comes in. Managers must spend time developing Managers who report to them, who will in turn develop their own people. A cascade of accountability needs to be in place to ensure that leaders are held accountable for knowing their people and promoting their growth. When this function is neglected, mistakes are made, people quit or are laid off, and companies end up hiring from the outside, wasting their home-grown potential.

Conclusion

Effective Talent Management requires the participation of both HR and Managers. HR needs to facilitate the understanding of the Talent Management process and managers must embed it into their thinking. Using the model of human capability (skills and knowledge; attitude and motivation; temperament and cognitive capacity), managers will be better equipped to assess talent. Role clarity and structure, and a well-defined system of accountability are essential to a successful outcome. The challenge is to bring the framework into practical application so that an organization and its employees can achieve their potential.

Julian Chapman is President of Forrest & Company Limited. Julian Chapman has over three decades of experience leading and managing teams and organizations ranging in size from a few individuals to thousands. He joined Forrest & Company in 2002 after a career in organizational consulting and building clients' leadership capability. Julian assists Forrest's national and international clients achieve extraordinary results by designing and implementing solutions using the Forrest methodologies. He is one of the world's select few Master Trainers for Effective Intelligence™. Julian recently retired as a Brigadier General in the Canadian army reserve.

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