Distinguishing characteristics of successful organisations are exceptional leadership and the capacity to generate ongoing 'banks' of intellectual capital. This quarterly Insights examines what is needed to provide differentiated tactics that strengthen the talent pipeline. Sustained results will occur with systemic and integrated approaches.

Best practice companies that excel at talent management ensure *internal* fit: that is, consistency, compatibility and reinforcing practices to attract, select, develop, evaluate and retain talent. They also ensure strong *cultural* fit and *strategic* fit to link all of this to business strategy and long-term goals. A high degree of internal, cultural and strategic fit creates a distinctive system of practices for organisational learning and knowledge management but more so for excellence in talent brand capability and reputation.

How often have you been caught off guard by a sudden loss of key talent? Will lack of talent flexibility inhibit your ability to meet future business scenarios? Have you had a star performer who has had derailment issues once promoted? When comparing leadership potential, what is the basis for the comparison? Do your divisional managers look inward when making talent decisions? How diverse in profile, style or thinking is your talent pool? Do you have high-performers who lack the drive and ambition for success at the next level? Do you have high-performers with aspiration and ability but are not fully engaged? What makes your talent competitors attractive? Is diverse talent competitive in the promotion stakes? How diverse is your coaching panel?

DIFFERENTIATED TALENT STRATEGIES

Insight: The war for talent is a never-ending reality. A powerful game plan is needed for the coordination, focus and development of leadership capability. An effective strategy enables the flexibility to leverage the talent pipeline for results both today and in an increasingly unknown future. This talent strategy enhances the company's competitiveness, core competency and distinctiveness.

Insight: Strengthening the leadership bench requires a culture of development characterised by leaders and managers who prioritise and act on employee development needs. C-suite and senior executives acting as good role models for developing talent at all levels is the single most important factor for driving leadership quality. According to Corporate Leadership Council research, excellence here increases an organization's probability of being a top-tier leadership organisation by 84.1%.

Insight: Most effective for realising talent potential relates to interpersonal connections, utilising the importance of professional, information-rich networks as a high-potential development tool. Surrounding talent with high-quality direct managers, colleagues, and direct reports can boost employees' potential to succeed in more senior, critical positions by 20% or more.

Insight: Current performance does not predict future potential. Only 29% of an organisation's current high performers have the potential to rise to and succeed in more senior, critical positions. Current performance should be used as an initial screen, but further assessment of the level of aspiration and engagement is necessary to make an accurate assessment of potential.

Insight: Potential is often not clearly defined by those executives making talent decisions. Predicting long term potential is critical.

The Talent Advisors
growing / capability

Insight: Potential differs from high-performance as the ability to implement one type of strategy may not be the abilities required for another type of strategy: skill sets, behaviours and experiences needed to succeed may be different. Enhance potential by giving experiences that act as catalysts to leadership growth.

Insight: Executives in stretch assignments or transitioning into a new role or an external hire face many challenges. Their inner voice constantly raises questions and doubts. While businesses require more from all their executives, these executives are truly in the spotlight – they face increased pressures, have greater learning needs and receive less help, including lack of coaching.

Insight: Women's corporate identity is based on 'the presence of the absent' – where women are not, who women are not and what women are not. It is a limiting paradigm. It fosters the flawed view that we need to fix the women. It does not value what women offer. It is not empowering, yet it directs the agenda for initiatives and interventions. The risk is that women at the early stages of their careers, having been socialised differently, will disengage from these programs as they believe there is a meritocracy and regard lack of progress to be individual to others. They will then be unprepared when their own career becomes stuck or when they realise that the corporate world is not for them. Increasingly they perceive women's initiatives are 'stuck in a groove' and do not help them deal with the realities of corporate life or the dynamics and tactics needed to take up their power, influence and authority.

Insight: Many 'majority males' want to be effective diversity champions yet do not know how or have not experienced difference at a personal level. The challenge for these executives is to become more aware of attitudes and behaviours that impact systemic bias. They also need a sounding board to help them unpack the many issues encountered in creating inclusive cultures. Men who want to be effective, attentive, fully engaged and accountable diversity leaders and change agents are entering a new journey that lacks tried-and-true methods and direction.

FROM INSIGHTS TO EXECUTION

1.Build both external leadership brand and internal leadership principles **2.** Visible commitments from the C-Suite who take key roles as talent development faculty **3**. Accountability for creating and executing customised and purposeful learning development plans **4.** Relevant cross-divisional peer level interactions and learning **5**. Potential defined and identified based on ability, aspiration, engagement and business critical capabilities **6.** Create processes so that talent flows in the right sequence of roles to fulfil future potential **7.** Align talent competencies to the strategic priorities **8.** Encourage talent sharing **9.** Manage the risks of stretch assignments and new role transitions **10.** Constructive and timely feedback to talent on development progress **11.** Valued initiatives include diverse coaches and champions **12.** Learning is aligned to the client and commercial outcomes **13.** Coach leaders to be diversity champions **14.** Coach diverse talent to take up their authority and increase promotion prospects **15.** Set meaningful metrics for talent development performance.

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