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## **Organizational Leadership, Talent Management & Performance Enhancement – A Practitioner’s Viewpoint**

*Leadership is best built from the bottom up and not restricted only to the middle and top layers. Therefore, talent development is neither a mass market, nor a nice to have engagement training, but a thoughtful, focused and relentless activity with a great impact on the future of the organization, writes stars alumna Dr. **Sanika KERKAR**, Associate Director Human Resources, Teva Pharmaceuticals, Mumbai.*

I take this opportunity to share some of my experiences, challenges and lessons learnt in more than a decade of being a part of Human Resources function. I hope some of these lessons learnt would resonate with yours too.

The single most expectation which all business leaders have today is to “create more leaders for the organization, who can perform more than the expectations set for them”. As one of my earlier managers used to say ‘A manufacturing site can be built in 2 years but an organizational leader takes 20 years to make’; thus we can truly understand the angst of most of the leaders when it comes to creating a leadership pipeline full of capable people.

At an organizational level, the most important mindset which helps management of workforce is ‘Workforce Differentiation’ wherein we consciously segregate our ‘Star employees’ from ‘Solid performers’ and ‘Non-performers’. And for this segregation to be effective, as much as performance ratings are great guiding tools and predictors of future performance; the intent of a person, his or her personal vision and alignment with organizations core values, are equally critical indicators of future performance. With this principle in mind if an organization attempts to segregate their workforce at all levels (succession is best built from early career levels onwards); the apex leaders would have a view of not only a probable future leadership pipeline but also a clear picture on whom should an organization invest their resources of time, energy and money. In my personal experience, this has been the crux of managing, retaining and engaging talent in an organization.

Once identification of the top pool of hi-potential talent is done, it becomes easier for an organization to focus on engaging, retaining, rewarding and developing those few individuals who are ready to take the baton ahead. Of the many ways of engaging top talent, an important one is to have a discussion with them focusing on how the organization can provide wind to their wings so that they can soar higher in their career. In my experience the tool which gives the maximum impact is genuine conversations around ‘Career and Development’. Not all organizational managers/ leaders are adept at having these career dialogues and it makes a lot of sense for an organization to invest in, first developing their leaders/ managers as ‘Career and Talent Managers’. This helps them align not only on the philosophy of career development but also are adept at making genuine and effective career conversations with their hi-potentials.

At this juncture I would like to highlight one very critical insight that I have gained in my current organization. If we compare ‘Career Development’ to a vehicle then the roles that each one plays should be:

1. Driver as the identified hi-potential
2. GPS to be the immediate or skip level manager who sets directions for the driver.
3. The fuel and engine to the vehicle is the leadership commitment of providing learning opportunities and enabling infrastructure for growth.

An identified hi-potential being in the 'Drivers seat' of their development, leads to a stronger engagement and commitment from them and thus better outcomes of their development plans. A manager acting as a GPS gains from this arrangement because being a mentor/ coach is personally an enriching experience. Thus organizations have double benefit to derive out of the above mentioned arrangement. With a committed hi-potential and an enabled manager, it is safe to say that an organization has secured one of the key partnerships in talent management and development. With commitment to enforce this partnership, organizations can observe a steady change in their learning culture leading an organization to become a career factory.

Leadership is best built from bottom onwards and not restricted only to the middle and top layers. This philosophy leads to a traction being created on both the hi-potential and the managers along the organizational pyramid which creates an org wide cultural impact. With Gen Y and millennials forming a larger part of the workforce, especially at entry levels, it becomes so much crucial for any organization to tap and harness their potential especially in traditional organizations like manufacturing, pharmaceuticals etc. It's the need of the times that organizations need to align to the thought process of their future workforce as well as align their young workforce to organizational values with speed for stronger performance.

Anyone who has grown in an organizational hierarchy would identify that realities and issues of leadership development are different at different career levels. The most effective way is to identify these competencies at each career ladders and help build them through learning and training programs. For e.g. at the bottom most level of org pyramid, functional skills enforced with personal effectiveness can help build capability for next level. At middle management, creation of strong 'Talent and people Managers' along with enforcing enterprise management skills, can enable creation of senior leaders for the organization. A series of well laid out learning and development interventions with sharp objectives and outcomes for an accurately identified target audience is a process which sets a precedence for other employees too wanting to be a part of this elite club thus enforcing performance. As I would like to believe, Leadership development is a thoughtful, focused and relentless activity which has impact on future of the organization and not a mass market and nice to have engagement training activity.

Last but not the least; organizational performance enhancement is an item which remains the closest to the core of any organization. There are many tools, methodologies available to achieve the same, with one of the most powerful being 'the way feedback is given' to employees. Many a times I have observed Managers giving feedback to their team members about their work, outcomes and deliverables to enhance their performance. However if one sees objectively, the performance outcomes are determined largely by the way one thinks. Managers who focus on exploring and influencing change of thinking generally would see a more traction in their teams' performance outcomes. Plus many of us are guilty of giving a feedback more strongly towards the year end process and not so much during the year which if changed as a habit can bring better performance outcomes.

Organizational Leaders today have many challenges to deal with. Those leaders who plan and prioritize the activities of building capability and performance of their workforce would definitely see results of future leadership being built thoughtfully over a period of time.

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