

What is this thing called ‘talent’ and what are the do’s and don’ts of bringing it about? The domain of talent recognition and talent development seems to be caught in a web of five unyielding myths. In order to fully appreciate what the evolvement of talent really encompasses we need to extricate the domain from its entanglement with these myths. Let’s have a closer look at the mythical beliefs in question as well as their possible antidotes.

#1 The Makeable Talent Myth

The framework of a job description methodology combined with a competency matrix that many organizations commonly use, does not pay tribute to the intrinsic talents that people naturally possess. The framework assumes that talent is ‘makeable’, or at least malleable. In reality, talent is a fixed given, and only talents that are already available can be further developed. Trying to turn a preservative focus into a pro-change focus on an individual level is absolutely undoable. Not to mention the financial consequence of wasting energy and time on something that can never be accomplished: changing people’s talents.

#2 The Homogeneity Myth

Trying to move the organization from a cost leadership focus to a differentiation focus through ‘re-engineering’ people’s intrinsic talents on an individual level on a big scale is *not* the way to align business goals with talent resources. Moreover, it is a very risky endeavor, since it creates a sense of homogeneity that erodes strategic diversity and will result in loss of focus for specific tasks, and ultimately derailment of performance. The key is not in re-engineering talent within people to fit the purpose, but in configuring talent resources around a purpose. Imposed homogeneity will not drive change, but strategic diversity will: rightsizing teams around a specific purpose within a specific context. Which means allocating talent resources to the challenges with a natural fit to their strong points. Allowing people to be high performers because they can make an optimal contribution by doing what they are good at.

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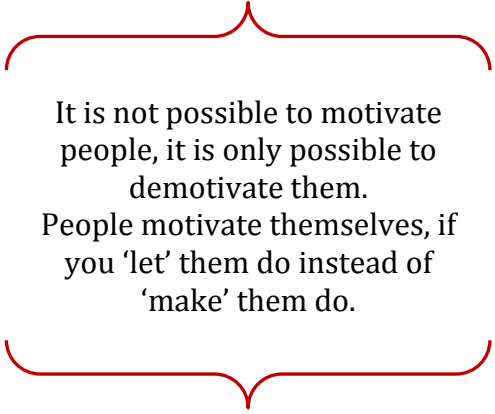
#3 The “Never Change a Winning Team” Myth

Predictable performance is created by matching clear and concise purposes with talent resources, in *that* order. Which is why talent resource development and team configuration are strategic issues and thus leadership responsibilities. Predictable performance needs dynamic recycling of talent resources. This involves (re)assigning people to purposes where they can make an optimal contribution in a sequential way: a logical recycling of talent resources. If the purpose is efficiency, put people on the team that are good at creating efficiency. Don’t try to make an inventor into a good implementer, but

assign an implementer in the first place. Dynamic configuration of teams may also mean that the composition of the team needs to be changed along the way (reconfiguration), aligned with the real-time challenges at hand as the business develops along the lines of a lifecycle. Or even that the team-lead should be replaced halfway through a venture, because the next phase needs a different talent.

#4 The Motivation Myth

Being rigorous about matching purpose and context with natural talent is key to high performance. It will unleash and leverage the talent that is available within an organization through intrinsic motivation, which is the only real source of motivation. It is not possible to motivate people, it is only possible to demotivate them. People motivate themselves, if you 'let' them do instead of 'make' them do. If an organization succeeds to create a framework for individual latitude, clear arrangements and commitments, it can avoid demotivation. Obviously this assumes insight and knowledge about talent resources in a fashion that is accessible for business leaders and their way of thinking about resourcing. Which requires a modus to link business purpose with recognition and matching of talent, by connecting the two through a common 'language' and a database that enables this matching process.



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#5 The Prevailing Weaknesses Myth

One of the most commonly held beliefs in talent development places an over-emphasis on identifying weaknesses. This belief instigates that compensating for, or even correcting, weaknesses is the optimal way to improve individual performance level. Unfortunately this is not true. This balancing tactic will at best deliver an equalized accomplishment, resulting in an average to good level of performance. At worst, however, people may end up spending so much time on sophisticating their proficiency at weakness compensation that they miss out on regularly practicing their strengths, resulting in a lower level of performance altogether. Key strengths are fuelled by passion, because they are genetically encoded. Moreover, good is the enemy of great. In order to excel people need to become experts at finding, describing, applying, practicing and refining their core strengths. Understanding what they have the potential to be very best, not just competent, at and sticking to it. People with many strengths may – and often do – fall into the trap of ending up in occupations or activities they are competent at, but cannot acquire a severe standard of excellence in, never attaining a level of complete mastery and fulfillment. Doing what you are good at will make you good, but focusing on what you can potentially do better than others is the path to greatness.

Making the move ...

From: talent management,


Via: talent resource development,

To: dynamic talent resource configuration


The challenge for every organization is in making practical use of the *brainpower* of every person to move the business forward. We can accomplish this by connecting to people's natural inclination and motivation toward the way they like to engage with and do their work.

In order to move to business-driven talent resource development, and from there onward to dynamic talent resource configuration, we need to start with the recognition that talent required to execute any plan is distributed across organizational levels, across multiple locations, often across multiple geographies and sometimes even across company borders. Formal organizational structures must give way to a focus on individuals and their abilities.

Teams have to be task specific. Expertise is often independent of hierarchy and age. Breaking the tyranny of the hierarchy in the configuration of teams is critical. Bringing people together in teams involves interpersonal and intercultural tensions. For people to work in teams effectively, individuals must be trained to deal with the tensions inherent in ambiguous power and authority relationships, differences in backgrounds, and the newness of tasks.



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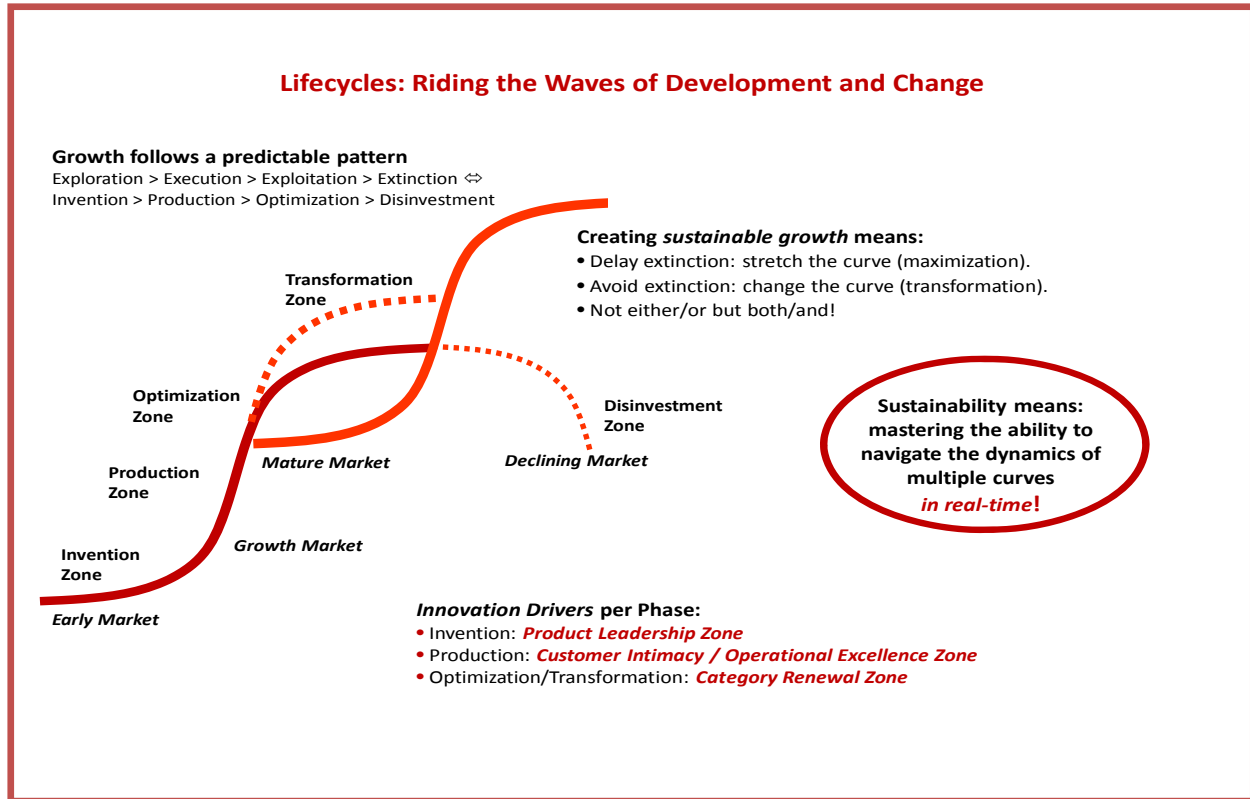


The focus is not only on individuals and their expertise, but also on their capacity to work in multiple teams. Continuous feedback and support help individual contributors become self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses. This is critical for improving the performances of teams by reducing frictional losses. Teams must be put together in real-time and must start functioning effectively in real-time, elaborate *'team-building'* efforts and wasted time are signs of inefficiency. Moreover, normal business cycles do not allow for long 'change-over times'.

Lifecycles: 3 Kinds of Work

A butterfly is not just an improved caterpillar, but an entirely new creature! It is a discontinuity, a transformation, but it still is an evolution. There are various kinds of change and innovation, and there are also various types of tasks that need to be performed in order to successfully create and maintain lifecycles. Leaders should be capable of pacing the change. In order to navigate the dynamics of s-curved lifecycles, organizations need to perform a careful balancing act by mastering the ability to operate on multiple curves

simultaneously: movement along the 1st curve maintaining continuance, creation of the 2nd curve driving renewal and preparing for migration from the 1st to the 2nd curve making incremental improvements.



Change is a continuous journey along the lines of gradualness; a way of life rather than a one-time event that can be lived through; you do it *with* people, not *to* people. The only thing that leaders should be really directive about is participation. Broadly speaking, we need three different strategic roles, or rather talent styles, along the lifecycle to make the organization deliver optimally:

1. **Creating:** done by entrepreneurs, who look into the future, sense what is to be done, and create the driving product or service. Entrepreneurs drive aspiration and create (intellectual) property.
2. **Producing:** done by operators with specific skill-sets, like technical, sales, engineering, accounting. Producers provide focus and make things happen.
3. **Implementing:** done by optimizers, who plan, organize, coordinate and control. Implementers provide structure and create order.

People perform best when they are allowed to do what they are good at most of the time. For predictable performance, talent resources should be dedicated to one of the three development zones. Which means that work follows the curve, but talent resources are recycled along multiple curves. If a part of the growth curve lacks the right talent resources, this will create some kind of execution gap! It does not matter how good the other resources are, requested performance will *not* be delivered. Organizations that only invest

in the future will not get profit. Organizations that only want to squeeze out money will not sustain. Organizations apt at navigating the whole growth curve make profit *and* sustain.

In order to create predictable team performance, three questions need to be addressed:

1. Context: where is the actual organizational reality on the curve?
2. Purpose: where is the optimal preferred contribution of a team on the curve (determined by self-perception)?
3. Talent: where is the team's actual behavior contributing on the curve (determined by feedback-perception)?

Matching context, purpose and talent resources is crucial for optimal execution, which asks for effective talent resource allocation.

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Building a Transparent Talent Management and Development System

Effective talent resource development and allocation needs business connection and transparency. Managers need to know where the talent resources are within the organization and where they can be accessed easily from the outside. They also need to know how to find the right talent, meaning that they are able to translate their goals and purposes into sets of competencies, strengths and expertise, and establish a process for screening for those properties.

The basic unit of analysis of an organization or its basic building block is an individual. The business processes that underlie a system of effective team construction allow for access, transparency, and ability to continually configure talent resources into teams as well as measure their performance. To do this, a transparent system is needed that contains enhanced information on an individual basis.

- Basic credential verification and authentication.
- Personal strengths and weaknesses: key talents, AEM-Cube® performance profile.
- Skills: basic objective measures of skills.
- Knowledge of the domain: expertise tested versus best in class.
- Cultural background: gender, geography, generation cohort, ethnicity.

The new managerial work is focused on the development of new knowledge to address evolving problems. On continuous improvement and innovation. This calls for new metrics for evaluating the performance of individuals and teams, like:

- How well did they address the problem?
- What resources were used?

- How replicable is the approach?
- How creative was the solution?
- Did it get the customers to have a unique co-created experience?
- How well did individuals perform?
- Which roles have they performed?
- What new skills do they have to develop their talents?
- What support do they need to develop their talents?

These are *questions at the heart of a dynamic and continually evolving organization*.

People perform best when they are caught doing something right! An enterprise needs strategic diversity in order to become a sustainable, long-living organization. This also means being able to create different arrangements of people in varying roles at different times in order to deal with specific contexts.

How can the AEM-Cube® help?

The methodology:

- Shows people's optimal contribution to the growth curve.
- Enables configuring high performance teams with the right competencies and connections.
- De-risks execution because it links to the specifics of growth creating team patterns.
- Matches context and purpose with talent resources, providing for strategic diversity and adequate recycling of resources.
- Naturally supports the lifecycle business process, since lifecycle thinking is one of the founding concepts beneath the AEM-Cube®. Combining the s-curve with the AEM-Cube® offers a business model that aligns business growth, sustainability and the talents of people.
- Helps organization define roles, tasks and competencies in such a way that business purposes and talent resources are connected through a shared view and a common language. This alignment will provide the consistency that is needed for high performance, whilst still staying flexible to respond to changes in context and environment.

***) We define talent as: *the recurring pattern of performance that can be productively applied*.** We believe that talents can be further developed through skills and knowledge. Skills not only support but also enhance talent by providing a structure for experiential knowledge.

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