

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.

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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

5 Myths of Talent Advancement

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.