

Introduction

At this meeting, kindly hosted by Transport for London, fourteen CRF Member companies were joined by Guy Lubitsh and Laura Heath from CRF partner Ashridge Business School. These notes capture the essence of our conversation.

Time For A Re-Think

In many senses, the Business School teaching environment has changed little in over 50 years. The consensus amongst the Members present was that, to remain relevant, Business Schools need to shift their methods to reflect the new ways that people learn.

Talented Gen Y employees value informal, social, and collaborative learning. They're open to learning outside their organization and use their networks to access this. Learning through networks, rather than seeing networks as a source of business development connections, seems to be a more difficult concept for senior leaders to grasp.

How open are Gen Y's to feedback ? Certainly we need to help leaders to support younger recruits to reflect, and get the maximum learning from their experiences.

What energises key talent ? The meeting believed that it was about spending time with peers, and with senior leaders...having conversations, rather than being taught. The Ashridge contributors said that they are increasingly focusing their programmes towards helping leaders to make sense of what is happening in their businesses and the external environment. There are also fewer longer programmes.

Some senior management can find it difficult to accept new ways of thinking about management development. For example, the trend away from formal, off-job programmes towards development through planned experience on the job.

This change in style and emphasis is difficult for some older, experienced leaders to accept... they are still focused on traditional programmes with guest speakers, case studies and course binders.

Some key talent also continue to value high status business school programmes, irrespective of their likely learning potential.

How Things Are Changing

Some in-company executive development programmes now involve no classroom-based, Business School delivered input at all. Instead, the delegates immerse themselves in the cultures and strategies of other businesses and have to take responsibility for identifying the information they need to develop themselves by interviewing senior leaders from inside, and outside their organisations. Their interviewees are briefed not to volunteer information, but only to address the questions they are asked.

Increasingly, progressive organisations are seeing the job as the focus of growth, and new roles as the catalyst for transformational learning. Some refer to these as 'crucible roles', providing a high level of stretch, but with support from an experienced mentor.

Likewise big project opportunities open up great opportunities for learning. In this respect, it was suggested that talent and development managers should focus more on mapping and leveraging key experiences and less on off-job skill building. One Member referred to using the workplace as the context for 30 day development challenges, that took the talented employee outside their comfort

zone and introduced them to new problems to be tackled. See the link below for further development of this idea.

<http://talentstrategygroup1.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Delusions-of-Employee-Development.pdf>

This Means Change For Developers Too

What's the role of the specialist developer in this new learning environment ? Members felt that developers of key talent should be helping individuals to get the most from their experiences, not prescribing what the learning should be. In the words of one Member, the facilitator's role is to 'get out of the way, so as not to become an obstacle to the delegate's learning'.

It should be the delegate that decides...

- what they want to learn
- where, and from whom they can get this learning, so
- they approach the development opportunity with a clear purpose, and supporting lines of inquiry in mind...their 'big questions'

By contrast, the developers adds value in the roles of coach, facilitator, and amplifier. Specific examples include:

- introducing and promoting media that can open up new learning opportunities,
- advertising examples of effective learning, and learners, across the organization,
- recognizing great line leader developers with 'manager of the year/month' awards,
- challenging other leaders where poor team performance can be correlated with low engagement scores.

Guy Lubitsh from Ashridge suggested that to reap the benefits from these trends, developers need to challenge the way they view their role. To be change agents, rather than conform to the more traditional roles of designers and deliverers of formal training/processes.

Talent Development , A Strategic Priority

Talent management and development needs to be more fully integrated with strategy making not something separate, and following on behind it....for example when devising strategy as well as resourcing key, new positions.

Related to this, reviewing talent pools to fill key roles needs to be a continuous process, a vital ingredient of strategic planning and implementation...not a process compliance activity that only takes place at set times during the year.

There was a strong view that organizations should not only be focusing on elite talent pools, but also people lower down the hierarchy who could contribute much more to the organization with a development 'jump-start'. HR business partners have a significant role to play in supporting line leaders and individuals so that talent development becomes relevant and mutually beneficial to a larger slice of the employee population.

Talent Development Across Cultures

We talked about the need for companies to adopt a flexible approach to the design of global programmes and processes, in order to accommodate the different values and priorities of Regional cultures. Smart Business Schools are doing the same; insisting on understanding the local country/company context as a critical pre-contracting phase. Working with local facilitators who can act as a guide to Regional norms and expectations can also really help.

Diversity in our Talent Pools

We had a brief discussions about how our talent management interventions could support greater diversity at senior leadership levels. This is a potential area of focus for a future Interest Group meeting. In the meantime, Guy Lubitsh recommended the book reference in the link below...

<http://www.lauraliswood.com/the-loudest-duck.html>

Six Myths of Talent Management

Laura Heath from Ashridge talked about some talent management research she has conducted, which has led to the articulation of Six Talent Management Myths:

Myth 1: Talent Management follows strategy

Myth 2: Talent is a commodity like any other

Myth 3: Focussing on a small elite will give you best return on investment

Myth 4: Current skills and performance give you a good idea of future success

Myth 5: Gen Y will grow up and start behaving like us soon

Myth 6: Formal processes matter more than informal processes.

A series of articles based upon her Findings will be published soon.