TALENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

At a Zoom Interactive Roundtable on 15th December, CRF's Talent, Leadership, and Learning Community came together to discuss using talent pools for managing succession, and the critical success factors of making succession plans work in practice.

This summary shares some of the key insights from the discussion.

HOW ARE TALENT POOLS BEING USED ACROSS DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES?

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS AROUND USING TALENT POOLS FOR SUCCESSION PLANNING? WHAT WORKS IN PRACTICE?

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE? WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

HOW ARE TALENT POOLS BEING USED ACROSS DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES?

- One of the key challenges – which prompted this discussion - is finding ways to make succession planning more agile and flexible. The pace of change within many organisations is accelerating and traditional approaches are not necessarily giving what organisations need in terms of agility and flexibility. Some organisations are finding their traditional structured approaches to succession planning are no longer meeting the needs of the organisation or enabling them to get the best out of their talent pools. Many organisations are moving away from roles-based succession planning (regulatory requirements notwithstanding), towards succession planning based on job families and talent pools.

- One organisation found that talent pools have worked well at a time of reorganisation. In normal circumstances, when planning talent against roles, there is a succession planning exercise where they assess potential and performance and then lay out people in the plan. However, after a regional reorganisation, the same succession planning strategy did not work anymore. The organisation had to assess groups of people who had the potential to take on significantly different roles created as a result of the reorganisation, and used talent pools to identify and place candidates.

- One organisation has tried to make their succession plans broader and therefore more useful. They have moved from having role-by-role succession, to having chunky job family succession plans. For example, taking a single view of finance roles across business units.

- Another organisation has rolled out a graduate pool, with plans to transform it into a leadership first-level programme where they will give exposure to multiple functional areas and development opportunities. They also have an Explorer Programme for mid-level high potential talent where they provide different development opportunities. They are shifting the focus away from succession planning, towards assisting high potential talent, and providing them opportunities to develop into different parts of the business and acquire the multidisciplinary skills that they need to move to the next level. The emphasis is more about having rigorous talent conversations and harnessing the development and growth of high potential talent, than documenting succession plans.

- Developing digital as an enterprise capability is a priority for most organisations today. One organisation is experimenting with a digital talent pool, which will bring

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together people who've got a crossover skillset, appetite and potential to develop these skills, learning agility, but perhaps don't have that digital expertise as yet. The pool is supported by academies which are being created to support development of future skills and wider digital upskilling across the company. The academies make sure those in the talent pool get pulled into a learning pathway that supports them in that particular area.

- One speaker had seen success in developing a talent pool for the top 30 leaders who were in line for future executive positions. The process accelerated making bold career moves for those top 30 leaders, and providing a deeper level of support for their development.

- One organisation took a very different approach to talent pooling. Top talent was put into a talent pool for 12-months and given additional access to executive team members, different networking interventions, training, and a pot of money for their own personal development. It was made clear and explicit at the start of the year, that their continued membership at the end of the year was dependent on them maximising the opportunities for development. Ultimately, while the organisation provided infrastructure, tools and support, the onus was on individuals. The approach was effective, because people were motivated to be in that talent pool and make the most of the opportunities made available to them.

- Another organisation has moved away from a potential model and moved to a readiness model.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS AROUND USING TALENT POOLS FOR SUCCESSION PLANNING? WHAT WORKS IN PRACTICE?

- There's a general lack of transparency around this process. Whether it's letting people know that they are in pools or on succession plans, or, considered as a high potential, being transparent with people can lead to better outcomes in this area.

- You also need good data on what the individuals in the pool want. Managers need to be skilled to explore questions such as: Are you ready for a move? Are you looking to stretch? Are you happy in your role? What do you need to continue developing in that role? Having this information gives organisations an understanding of how they can best support and develop people.

- Some organisations report talent pooling has led to improvements in the transparency of talent across the group and increased internal exchanges of talent. For example, heads of HR of different business units discussing how to give talent experience of digital transformation.

- Aligning talent pools to the strategic capabilities the organisation needs to develop was seen as effective. They help highlight where there are gaps that require the development of internal talent or adopting a buy-versus-build strategy.

- Strategic workforce planning is a vehicle for marrying up the business strategy with future resource planning and identifying future capabilities and critical roles.

- Senior leadership needs to take responsibility. One organisation reported the Chairman and CEO spend two days every year reviewing the top 100 talents and this has led to other senior leaders taking greater responsibility for talent development.

- Use of data and analytics. One organisation said that they are getting better at using people analytics for talent development with easy access dashboards. They are moving towards a single template across the board, for talent discussions. They track KPIs around talent mobility, to monitor who within their senior leadership teams has worked in different parts of the business, and to encourage lateral movement.

- Specialist talent platforms such as Success Factors are helpful but not a silver bullet. Whatever system you use (even one based on Excel and PowerPoint), having a 'single source of truth' is essential.

CRF DIGITAL COMMUNITY EVENT: 15TH DECEMBER
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- While the concept of critical or pivotal roles is widely understood and applied, it's difficult to get senior leaders to agree in practice which roles are critical, as they tend to think roles in their area are the most critical. It's also challenging to get the business to focus on what are critical roles now, versus what may be a critical role in the future.

- There was also discussion about the challenges of talent pooling being a manual process. Many organisations are struggling to find cost-effective technology platforms that provide great quality data and support tracking of progress and outcomes.

FURTHER READING

CRF. 2020. **Talent – Careers, Development and Succession in a Changing Landscape.** Research Report. https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/talent-careers-development-and-succession-in-a-changing-landscape

CRF. 2021. **Talent – Careers, Development and Succession in a Changing Landscape.** Speed Read. https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/speed-read-talent-careers-development-succession

Join the Community WhatsApp Group

Join our Community WhatsApp Group, the purpose of which is to ask questions, seek advice, and exchange views and experiences with your peers. Please **email** your mobile number to sign up.

SAVE THE DATE

The next session of the Talent, Leadership and Learning Community:
Tuesday 22 March at 12.00 GMT
We will share an agenda in the coming weeks.
Register **here**.