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This article explains away the three 'myths' of talent management in the not-for-profit sector.

Growing Talent

3 Myths of Talent Management

Senior Learning and Development Consultant Natasha Okonkwo discusses talent management in not-for-profits

In a sector where equality of opportunity and transparency of process are key, the concept of managing 'talent' can cause many an HR professional to shift uncomfortably in their seat. Questions are often raised such as: "What is talent?" "Who gets to define what it is for us?" And often most significantly: "What happens if we decide someone doesn't have talent?"

1. Talent Management is elitist; it just wouldn't work in the NFP sector

Firstly, talent is a concept which must be defined by each organisation planning to embark on a talent management programme. It should be based upon strategic goals and the key roles needed to get the organisation there. These key roles could include anything from a member of the SMT to an office administrator. Talent is then defined as people who hold the skills or the potential to fill these key roles.

So, in theory, anyone could have talent. And, most importantly, everyone should be given the opportunity to demonstrate talent. Equal ops needn't fall by the wayside in talent management, but it may take a little additional thought to ensure that all members of staff have equal access to any talent management programme.

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Lastly, organisations cannot survive on 'talent' alone. A talent management programme doesn't mean all those without talent have no place in an organisation's future. After all, the reality is that organisational success relies on the solid, dependable contributions of the majority, not just occasional sparks of brilliance from a few.

2. Talent Management isn't worth it in small organisations

The talent management approach for an organisation with 5000 employees is inevitably going to look different from that of a small charity with under 100 staff. But that doesn't make talent management less useful or worthwhile. In fact, small organisations face some very specific challenges that talent management can be useful for:

- Each new member of staff is critical to success

If an organisation has 100 administrators, one very bad or very good hire will have a minimal impact on organisational effectiveness. If an organisation only has 2 administrators, hiring the right (or wrong) person can have a huge effect

- Staff turnover is vital

The smaller the organisation, the larger the impact if someone leaves. For a small charity, the loss of a fundraiser might mean the loss of key donor relationships, and a wealth of information on the history of the role

So attracting the right people and ensuring that staff turnover is managed are two good reasons why a small organisation needs talent management. How do you make it work for you, then?

- Develop a talent culture

For talent management to work in any organisation, but particularly in a small one, developing a culture and mindset around talent is key. Investment in time and resource heavy talent management programmes won't work if the key stakeholders in the organisation haven't bought into it. More effective is encouraging talent into the psyche of staff at all levels of the organisation.

- Collaborate

You are probably not the only small charity struggling to introduce a talent management programme; why not share the load! Speak to local or likeminded organisations; share the cost of training or consultancy; share learning or research; set up a monthly peer support group

- Learn from large organisations

Take succession planning for example: You might not be able to implement large scale succession planning processes on the same scale as larger organisations. Most likely you don't have the pool of internal candidates to make this approach viable. Instead, why not use the underlying principle of this approach? If you can't develop a pool of candidates internally, how can you develop this pool outside of the organisation? Encourage people within the organisation to keep an eye out for potential candidates in their external networks. Have in mind the key roles you might need to fill in the future, and have a list of potential external candidates in mind for this eventuality

3. Talent Management isn't relevant during these tough times

It's easy to believe that when jobs are scarce and money more so, talent management is not a priority. After all, why should we be worrying about staff retention when there's nowhere else for them to go? We mustn't get too comfortable, though. A poll of global high potentials conducted by Talented Psychology Consulting found that 63.5% had left an organisation during a recession due to feeling 'under-challenged or bored'.

There is a temptation when budgets are tight to limit creativity and development opportunities, but the above statistic highlights the risks in this approach. Instead, organisations must look for more cost effective ways of managing and developing talent.

Traditional 'one size fits all' training programmes are often high in expense and low on results, particularly where talent is concerned. Staff with high potential want more personalised development plans, and are likely to move on if they feel their needs aren't being met.

Interventions such as coaching, mentoring and action learning are excellent ways to support growth internally, and have the benefit of being tailored to individual needs but require minimal external investment.