

## PART 4

SEARCH  
FOR A STAR

DAVE STENT completes our series on hiring the right salespeople and – in this feature – holding on to them

**S** This fourth and final article in our series looks at the longer-term needs of the business in ensuring it retains its employees, especially those who are recognised as the talent pool for future growth and development of the organisation.

Retention management is more commonly called talent management, and I will refer to it as talent management hereafter. But do not forget to proactively support and develop those employees who have no desire to be promoted, but perform very well in their current roles. Not everyone wants to be a star.

Talent management is about getting the right people in the right jobs doing the right things. This requires predicting how employees will be required to act in the future and getting them to recognise the requirements of future roles, and perhaps subtly act differently from how they acted in the past. Not easy.

To be effective, talent management processes must take account of the underlying factors that influence employees' decisions and actions. They must be based on how people actually behave, which is often different from how the manager wants them to behave.

These observations can be thought of as 'guiding frameworks' for successful talent management. Keeping these principles in mind will significantly improve the effectiveness of any talent management initiative.

Talent management covers a range of HR functions focusing on recruiting, managing, developing and retaining a high quality workforce. It is integral and builds on performance management, future employee requirements, learning

management, employee development and succession planning.

The value in talent management is its influence and impact on business growth and profitability. It also plays a role in dealing with the shortage of skilled labour (the talent) in the workforce.

As mentioned, the objective of talent management is to get the right people in the right jobs, doing the right things to ensure the business succeeds. Pretty obvious and straightforward, you may think, but it is often extremely difficult to achieve. Why? Because successful talent management processes must predict and inform the day-to-day behaviours of individual employees and meet the challenges of a dynamic workplace.

For talent management to be effective, it must operate as a system of progressive steps in a cycle, each building on the last. The image of the cycle will ensure that managers perceive the development of their people as an ongoing responsibility, not just as a 'once-a-year' isolated activity. The steps are illustrated in the diagram, 'Talent management learning cycle', on page 30.

Being effective at talent management requires a working understanding of how employees' motivations, abilities, and behaviours interact to influence business results. You do not need to be a psychologist, but a working appreciation of a personality/behaviour profile of the individual, mapped to the requirements of the current and potential future roles, is really desirable. A good appreciation of the individual's skills, knowledge and experience is not enough.

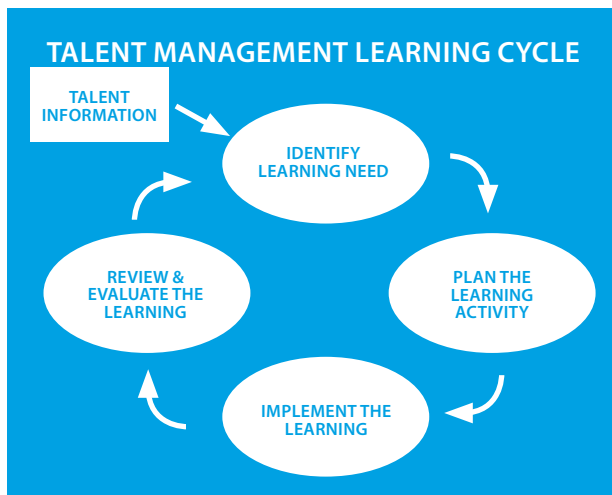
So, what are the 'guiding frameworks' for designing and evaluating talent management methods? ➤





◀ **UNDERSTAND THE WHOLE PERSON**

The ability to influence employee behaviour makes talent management a highly effective method for driving business results. Small changes in employee behaviour can have massive impacts on business performance. But the behaviour of employees can be difficult to understand. Managers often wonder, “Why is that employee acting that way?” While understanding employee behaviour can be confusing, talent management is not as complex as it might seem.



The key is to design and deploy talent management activities with a good understanding of the basic factors that influence employees’ actions at work. This means implementing talent management systems based on how employees truly behave and accepting that this may be quite different from how we might wish they would behave. The easiest way to ensure employees feel respected is to make sure managers regularly talk with them about their jobs and what the company could do to help them achieve their goals.

**ENSURE OBJECTIVES ARE CLEAR**

Clear objectives require defining and communicating the goals employees are expected to achieve in their jobs. It is important also to remember that there is a right way to set goals. Most people do not like simply to be told what to do. They want to be involved in helping determine what goals make the most sense for them, given the company’s strategic objectives and their personal needs and capabilities.

This involves giving employees a sense of participation in the goal-setting process. A manager may well know ‘what’ the team member brings to the role – but may not have much understanding of the ‘way’ in which the individual does the job.

This is where psychometric profiling will give the manager a good insight into the core behaviours the team member will use. Psychometric reports provide an interpretation of the individual’s behaviour and ways to motivate and coach that particular employee based on these profiles. This adds real, tangible value to the relationship between manager and employee. It also increases the motivation and productivity of that employee, ultimately benefiting the bottom line.

**INCREASE SELF-AWARENESS**

Performance improvement in most jobs is primarily a result of learning from on-the-job experience – but such learning cannot occur unless employees understand how their behaviours enable, or disable, their performance.

This requires providing performance feedback that increases employee awareness of what they need to change and why it is important. Providing performance feedback is one of the most critical and most difficult elements of talent management. Feedback can actually lower performance levels if it is not properly delivered.

Providing effective feedback is not about telling people what they are doing wrong. It is about giving employees information that increases their awareness of what they need to change to increase their confidence in their ability to change. Feedback is not simply a matter of telling people how to improve their performance. It must inspire them to become more effective.

The more self-aware we are, the better chance we have of recognising our own strengths and development areas. If we identify personal actions to increase performance we are more likely to succeed. This requires the individual to be able to build their own self-development plan – not only knowledge and skills, but more importantly, their preferred behaviour patterns and those required in their current and future roles. Again, good psychometric tools play an important part by guiding the individual through a series of stages that highlight strengths and encourage action plans to build on them. It will also identify areas for development and encourage the development of action plans for these too.

**LISTEN!**

The greatest development gains tend to occur when employees and managers have sensible conversations around the issues affecting employee performance. These two-way discussions, with the manager listening more than talking, create ‘lightbulb moments’ – when individuals realise what behaviours they need to change to become more effective. They will also identify the resources and support they need to bring about these changes. Having written, agreed action plans centred on the individual’s performance development ensures these discussions are focused, valued and deliverable.

**MAINTAIN ACCOUNTABILITY**

Maintaining accountability improves workforce productivity in two major ways:

It focuses employee behaviours in line with business goals and creates connections between what people do on the job and what they receive from the company. This requires establishing, communicating, and following processes that directly link employee performance to pay, job opportunities, promotions, and other employment decisions.

It increases employee commitment to the company by creating a culture that is felt to be to be more fair and equitable. Employees tend to evaluate ‘company fairness’ based on whether:

- Their job provides them with the rewards they want
- The processes in the company used to determine who receives job rewards are based on performance and are consistently administered across all employees.

## LINK DEVELOPMENT PLANS TO WORK ACTIVITIES

Many talent management processes require employees to create one plan for their job performance and another plan for their career development. The job performance plan contains critical business goals and objectives they need to accomplish over the coming year. The career development plan lists goals and actions focused on improving their personal performance and capabilities.

But this approach often fails to work. Many employees, particularly high performers, focus solely on their job performance plan and give little if any attention to their longer-term career development plan. The career development plan becomes 'something we will do later' – but later never comes. People know that their career development is important, but it is never seen as being more important than the goals and tasks that make up their immediate job. This is reinforced by managers' continuous drive for short-term results.

Development should not be viewed as something done outside a person's day-to-day job. It should be viewed as part of the job itself. The best way to ensure it happens is to give employees work goals that they can only achieve by building new competencies, growing knowledge, enhancing behaviours or learning new skills.

When managers and employees meet to talk through job goals, part of the discussion should include goals that require the employee to develop new capabilities. The company must also demonstrate a commitment to helping the employees learn the new frameworks they will need to achieve these goals. This includes providing coaching support, learning materials and other resources, including behaviour profiles that allow them to develop the capabilities they need to succeed. The behaviour profiles should also reflect the known behaviour maps that deliver success in the individual's current job, and for the roles they may be likely to take on in the future.

## PROVIDE ROLE MODELS AND JOB PROFILES

One of the most powerful ways in which people improve their performance is by watching and emulating the behaviour of others. Role models provide people with a tangible vision of what high performance looks like – especially if the employee personally experiences these 'good' behaviours and can see directly the success it brings. This is not only a task level, but perhaps more importantly, a personal emotional link. I can still remember those 'managers' I came across in my career who I definitely tried to emulate. Of course, I then took those behaviours, skills etc and made them my own.

Stories and other examples of exceptional performance give people a sense of what excellence looks like and inspire them to achieve the same.

Frameworks of high performance should indicate the multi-dimensional nature of job performance. There is always more than one way to succeed or fail in a job. Effective psychometric profiles illustrate the full range of behaviours that 'make or break' success.

This helps avoid problems that occur when employees only focus on certain aspects of a job without paying

enough attention to the full range skills, knowledge and temperament/behaviours that impact job success. For example, the analytical person who excels at solving problems but fails to gain buy-in from the people needed to implement their suggestions. To deliver success the role requires a high degree of interpersonal skills.

These frameworks need to provide a clear description of what effective performance looks like and how it is different from average or ineffective performance.

Job profiles, along with job descriptions, should clearly communicate the behaviours the company wishes to encourage and indicate how these are different from behaviours shown by average or poor performing employees. It is also important for psychometric profiles to be in a language that reflects the workplace – and not the technical language of psychology. They must use words familiar to the employees and reflect a style of guidance and facilitation.

## SUCCEED THROUGH PSYCHOMETRICS

The pace of change in the world of work is steadily increasing. Business models that worked well in the past are quickly becoming outdated as a result of technological innovations, evolving marketplaces, and shifts in the world economy and population.

It seems as if the only constant that can be found in companies is their reliance on people to achieve business goals. While there may be constant building blocks and core business fundamentals that describe how businesses operate, there are several key frameworks about why people do what they do, and what will support and encourage them to 'bring themselves' to work.

Over recent decades the emergence of psychometric profiling has added to the toolkit of the individual, the line manager and the organisation, enabling all parties to describe the key behaviours that deliver success.

These psychometric profiles, alongside the more traditional maps of skill, knowledge and experience, enable a fuller and clearer picture of performance success to be established.

It means we can better manage the risk in attracting, recruiting, managing and retaining the right employees for the organisation.

Not only do we reduce the recognised HR costs of failed recruitments – high staff turnover and low employee morale – but we increase individual employee productivity, effectiveness and commitment. We significantly reduce cost of failure in the business, which results in lower customer complaints, increased customer loyalty, higher levels of referral and an improved reputation. In short, this means increased bottom line profits.

*Development should not be viewed as something done outside a person's day-to-day job'*

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ISMM members are eligible for a free trial of the McQuaig Psychometric System for use on either a new recruit or on existing staff. For more details of this offer, contact the Holst Group on **0845 456 4000** or [info@holstgroup.co.uk](mailto:info@holstgroup.co.uk).