

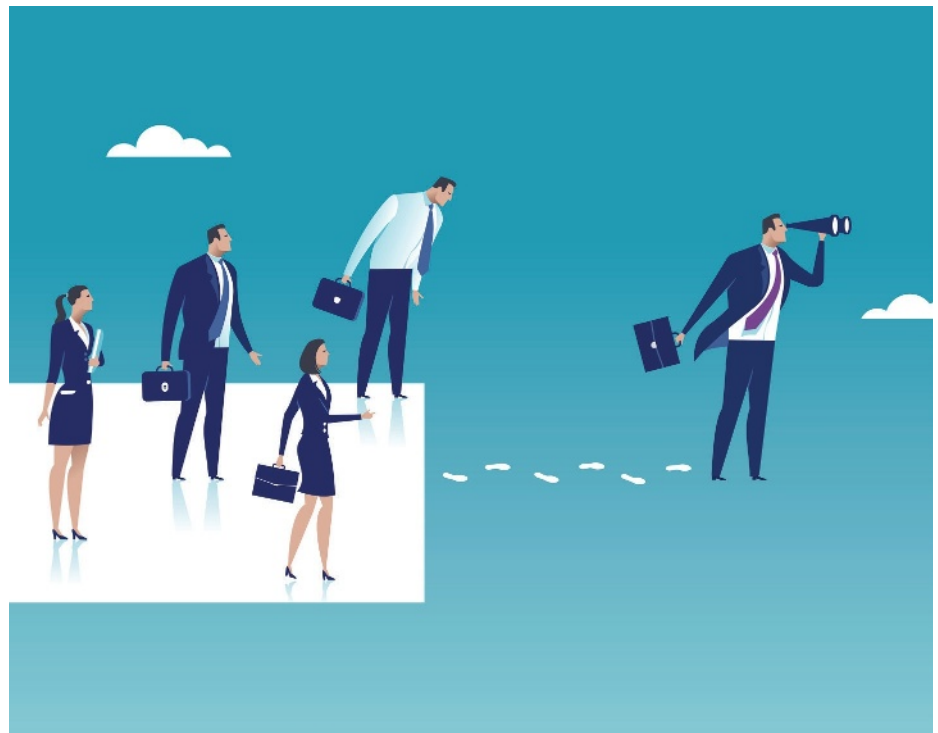
Talent Management: the End of the Era or the Dawn of the New Age?

By Anna Tavis

Some of us in HR would argue that classic talent management has passed its prime. If a decade ago talent calibrations and the nine-box grids were all the rage and high-potentials (HiPos) ruled the management universe, the conversation today has shifted to the more inclusive models of management. Employee engagement, organizational culture, gender and racial equity in the workplace are the themes of today. Implicit biases have been brought to light, performance ratings have been challenged and continuous feedback and “manager as a coach” approaches have aimed at lifting everyone’s performance. Organizations now hire for growth mindset and set up choice architectures for employees to do the right thing without the administrative coercion. Will talent management as a practice survive and what might it look like in the organizations of the future?

To explore these issues, we invited the savant of the talent management practice, **Robert Eichinger**, to lead our collective reflection on the key tenets of talent management from the vantage point of his more than 50 years in this business. After reviewing 10 classic debates on the nature of individual differences, on performance and potential, Eichinger leads with the foresight of “what is next.” To him, the next frontier in the practice of human behavior lies in the brain science. If the brain science is the future, how does it reconcile with the present protocols of talent management? Our respondents fill in the answers from their own experience and with the view on the organizations they look after.

Michelle Weitzman-Garcia of Regen-



eron is leaning in on the science and protocols that her mentor Eichinger developed. What she adds is the “art” of applying those scientific principles to the practice of talent management in working with complex organizations.

Kelly Joscelyne, the global chief talent officer of Mastercard, examines the question of how gender differences manifest themselves in talent management, the question Eichinger ostensibly chooses to avoid. To her, it is not a question of whether the differences exist, but why inequities occur. For Joscelyne, talent management is about preventing the biases from overwhelming the integrity of high potential selection.

Lewis Garrad, the growth markets lead for Mercer | Sirota, proposes a timely upgrade to the classical definition of high potential. He insists that in selecting high-potentials we need to look for problem-finders rather than

problem-solvers and prioritize effective teams rather than ambitious individuals. He suggests that being high potential in the traditional organization could be a curse and a burden rather than the promoted honor. Garrad suggests that as the digital revolution continues, talent management “will be less about helping a ‘vital few’ who achieve their potential, but more about helping the entire workforce to thrive in their own way.”

Mary-Clare Race, chief creative officer at Mind Gym, shares her organization’s research into the six conditions for the organizational ecosystems that support the achievement of high potential for all. Those conditions are: purpose, challenge, attention, growth, recognition and choice. Everyone’s performance lifts if organizations cultivate those six core values.

Claudio Garcia, the executive vice-president of Strategy and Corporate

Development at Lee Hecht Harrison, concludes this selection with the strong defense on behalf of talent management primary users, the managers. Garcia concludes nothing we do will succeed if we do not redesign the existing over-engineered practices with the busy managers reality in mind. The science behind talent management is persuasive, but the application is overdue for an upgrade.

Our opening Perspective is longer than typical for this section. We wanted to acknowledge the 10-year anniversary that passed since Bob Eichinger wrote the very first Perspective for this journal and with 50 years of steady innovative contributions to talent management, our lead author has a lot to offer!

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POINT:

The War for How to do Talent Management or is There Really Anything New?

By Robert W. Eichinger

I have been in the talent management business for 50 years with PepsiCo, Pillsbury, CCL, Lominger, KornFerry, HRPS and NeuroLeadership Institute. Attended hundreds of keynotes and panels. I've coached hundreds of executives and written over 50 articles, products and services. Trained and mentored TM talent and studied competencies, engagement, 360, the nine-box, learning agility, 70/20/10 and pool planning.

On my way out (hopefully up), I thought it might be useful to comment on the state of talent management. There are still a number of open debates, like should we tell people they are

a high potential? Is it nature or nurture? Performance and potential? My viewpoint on these issues is somewhere in between a practitioner and a scientist melded together by a long time observing. There are still unknowables and some debates will never be settled, but let's give it a try.

1. Is there such a thing as potential?

It's real. People are different. Many don't make a difference in work performance. Many differences that shouldn't (race, gender and sexual preference, religion, ethnic background) still might. And a few characteristics do make a difference (cognitive skills, motivation, EI/EQ, perspective, learning agility, experiences).

Potential, a combination of x number (lists differ, but are similar) of characteristics, is real, is roughly normally distributed, and is proven to be related to performance and being promoted.

2. Potential for what?

For the most part, it is the potential to manage people and processes in complex changing conditions. There is potential for innovation, product and service creation, technical advances and deep individual excellence (like AI). There is also a special kind of potential for international/global service. But it's mostly about being an agile strategist and people manager and leader during times of challenge and change. The characteristics that make a difference are mostly about managing the people proposition deployed against a winning strategy.

3. Nature versus Nurture

I think this is settled science mostly due to the many twin studies. What do we know? In general, people characteristics are 50% built in and 50% developed. If you have a list of critical skills and competencies, there will be wide differences in the ratio. IQ may be the most built in. Something like perspective less so with action orientation in the middle. But, it doesn't really matter because everything is able to be enhanced. Given a willing motivated client, a supportive environment and a skilled coach, everything can be improved.

Given self-awareness, a plan and a goal and a boss, mentor or coach to help, mostly everyone can grow and develop anything. Possibly the higher the nature component, the harder the task, but not impossible.

4. Potential versus Performance

They are not the same short term, but are more the same long term. Putting aside the difficulty of how we measure performance, the highest performers today in this job, at this time, at this level, in this set of conditions are not necessarily people who can go on and be exemplars at the next level up. In general, high-potentials don't stay long enough to be master performers until they get into their last few jobs. They move through roles and jobs faster than others. There are master performers who were there when the high-potentials get to a new job and remain when the high-potentials leave for their next developmental assignment. At the bottom and the middle of the enterprise, the high-potentials should seldom be the best performers. The high-potentials should be the best performers at the top of the organization. I (along with others simultaneously) created the so-called nine-box at PepsiCo because managers confound performance and potential. We created the performance-potential matrix to educate and get a better estimate of potential. It was also designed to defeat the manager's reluctance to rate people low on anything. For the nine-box to work, it has to be rank ordered estimates, top third, middle third, lowest third on performance and potential. It does not work with absolute placement. That defeats the design. Additionally, managers need a lot of education on how to assess potential. Unfortunately, most organizations do not use the nine-box correctly and therefore, its usefulness is diminished. And since most of the estimating managers are not high-potentials themselves, the estimate process is very spotty.

5. Are men and women different?

Yes. In very important ways. But political correctness does not allow this discussion.

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