

Leadership Succession: The Importance of Fit

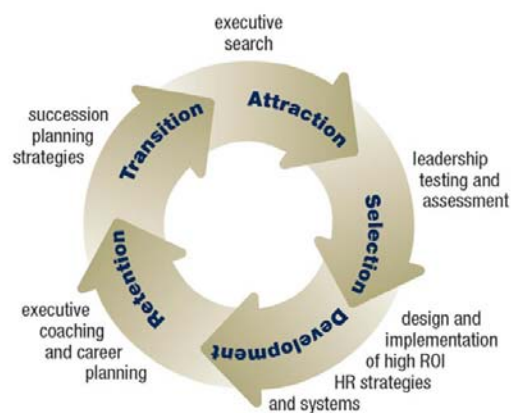
A majority of today's global companies are having difficulty finding individuals who are willing and able to step into leadership roles.

In a recent white paper released by Development Dimensions International Inc., David Whitman, Chairman, President and CEO of Whirlpool Corporation, stated:

“The thing that wakes me up in the middle of the night is not what might happen to the economy or what our competitors might do next; it is worrying about whether we have the leadership capacity and talent to implement the new and more complex global strategies.”

David is not alone; he shares this concern with CEOs globally as one of the top concerns in today's business environment. And it is not a simple one. It is a complex web of intricacies that culminate in one major function in all organizations – the art of planning for succession. The fact is these highly visible positions require individuals to perform at high levels, sometimes under extreme pressure to deliver and to meet tight deadlines.

Now how exactly do we go about determining whether our leadership teams can do that? Let's look briefly at the Leadership Lifecycle...



The Leadership Lifecycle identifies five important functions in any organization that requires a sound strategy to complete. Attracting and selecting the right candidate into a leadership role requires a firm understanding of the attentional, behavioural and interpersonal traits of the candidate and his/her supervisor and/or peers.

Whether developing candidates to be promoted from within or retaining qualified individuals in their current role, it requires the organization to establish and manage individual career paths. In addition, organizational transition requires the importance of matching not only technical, but “intra” and “interpersonal” skills to the appropriate roles within the organization.

So how do we know if individuals are ready for leadership roles? If there is a good “fit” with the new role? If personalities will clash or gel? Whether skills match or they don't? How much and what kind of training or development will they need in order to succeed in the new role?

It's time to take much of the guesswork out of finding the right people to work together, fitting the right people to jobs, developing appropriate learning and development programs and positioning the right personalities necessary for your organization.

Dr. Robert M. Nideffer of Enhanced Performance Systems suggests that:

“Intelligence, the ability to process information, analytical skill, environmental awareness, and decision making skills are all critical determinants of performance. These are "cognitive" or intrapersonal characteristics however, not interpersonal ones. It is these “intra”personal characteristics which relate to a person’s ability to attend to task-relevant cues, and to learn new material. To have a complete understanding of an individual's behaviour, and/or to more accurately predict performance, you need to know something about both “intra” and interpersonal behavior.”

Smart employers know that too often employees are hired based on eligibility, but leave based on suitability. The relationships and interdependencies between selection, hiring, coaching and succession planning programs are critical factors in improving productivity, reducing attrition and succeeding with succession planning. In order to position yourself as an Employer of Choice in today’s global competitive market, you need the support of a good assessment tool at every step of your succession management program to ensure you get a good match.

The answer: Predictive personality assessment. It can be used to select new leaders, identify successors, further develop internal talent and identify the strengths and weaknesses of entire leadership teams, all the while providing employees with greater insight into the future of their careers. Understanding the ‘cognitive’ or ‘intrapersonal’ characteristics of your management team can help you build bench strength, gain insight into your existing talent pools, identify potential gaps, **and** proactively train and groom employees for key positions.

There are many personality assessment tools on the market today that will assist you in identifying skills and interpersonal characteristics, but only a handful that can assist you in identifying the intrapersonal characteristics present to predict performance in new leadership roles.

When you embark on the journey to choose a personality assessment tool (and if you don’t already have one, you should), keep in mind the importance of not only evaluating whether the individual has the personal characteristics to perform the job you are hiring them into, but the importance of ‘predicting’ whether in fact they can deliver in alternative situations as you begin to build your succession plan for the future.

Understanding the leadership capacity in your organization, and developing those individuals based on an accurate assessment tool, will help any organization’s leaders sleep comfortably at night.

Brenda Rebman, BAdmin, MBA, CHRP, is a partner in Executive Source Partners Inc. She is a leader in strategic human resource planning, assisting organizations and individuals through the development of high ROI people practices.