

Talent management - MORE THAN A BUZZWORD

The concept of 'talent management' may seem a buzzword for HR practitioners but is a succinct phrase that sums up what successful companies have understood for years – the finding, recruiting and employing of staff is the beginning of the process, not the end.

BY GWEN WATKINS

Barbara Walsh, the executive coach and strategic coaching consultant at Metaco, states there is no single academic definition of 'talent management'.

"I personally like the definitions provided by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, which also remarks on the wide variations which exist across sectors and organisations. From its research, it has developed simple working definitions for 'talent' and 'talent management':"

- Talent consists of those individuals who can make a difference to organisational performance either through their immediate contribution or, in the longer term, by demonstrating the highest levels of potential.
- Talent management is the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment of those individuals who are of particular value to an organisation, either in view of their 'high potential' for the future or because they are fulfilling business/operation-critical roles.

"From this it can be seen that 'talent management' is more than simply the process of attracting high-potential individuals. It also involves identifying the key roles and planned development of high performers to

fill leadership roles effectively. It provides a focus for investment in human capital. Talent management should ideally form part of the strategic direction of the entire organisation and be integrated through the lines, at all levels."

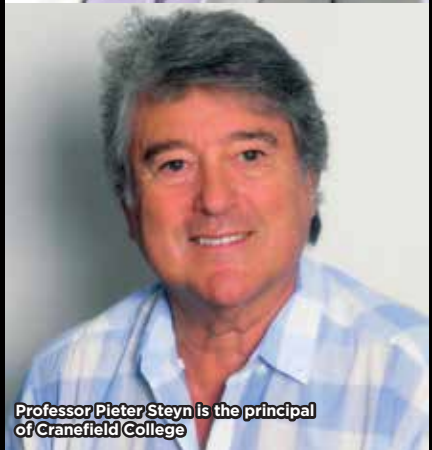
Professor Pieter Steyn, principal of Cranfield College, adds: "Talent management has to create high-performance teams within the organisation and this requires finding that talent. It is no longer good enough just to assess the knowledge and skills that your employees bring to the company. Deeper analysis is needed.

"Critical questions are how do these people reason – what is their cognitive and conative talent? In our teaching, we use and recommend the Myers Briggs-type indicator, which uses four types to provide a 16-factor analysis. These are extraversion/introversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling and judging/perception. To this, we add the Kolbe Conative Index, which identifies four universal human instincts used in creative problem-solving, which are fact finder, follow thru, quick start and implementer. Rounding off with emotional intelligence gives us a better grasp of an individual's ability to contribute effectively to a team, where every role requires a talent.

"One of our masters students applied this in his financial services company and achieved a 30% increase in performance when the



Barbara Walsh is an executive coach and strategic coaching consultant at Metaco



Professor Pieter Steyn is the principal of Cranfield College



Charlotte Middleton is an associate at Arup



Eulodie Burls is the managing director and part owner of Blinktower Media



Vanessa Raath manages talent retention for IS Partners



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required talent was put into the correct role in his team. HR needs to heed this kind of knowledge and embrace modern philosophy and the knowledge of processes. It should analyse every role in terms of the requirements needed to bring excellence to the fore.

“The success of ‘learning’ organisations is largely dependent on the ability of its people to create, acquire and transfer knowledge and, importantly, modify their behaviours to reflect the new requirements of the knowledge economy,” he concludes.

Business embraces talent management

Traditionally in the SME business world, grooming leaders and developing staff is low on the agenda. Owners guard their position and are reluctant to train staff, who may then leave for competitors.

Blinktower Media, a start-up creator of explainer videos in Cape Town, has bucked this trend and has a ‘talent management’ philosophy.

“Managing the people who have promised you their time, skills, expertise and energy, is incredibly important,” explains Eulodie Burls, managing director and part owner of the start-up. “The term is new to me, though self-explanatory, as managing and developing one’s team should be at the core of any business, at any time.

“We see ourselves as a stepping-stone for our team. We hope that whoever joins us will grow within their role and within the company so that if they leave, they are in a better position than they were when they joined. Primarily, however, we try to create an environment where people will want to stay.

“We’ve recently introduced profit share, which we feel is a great way to encourage ownership and also for our team to benefit as the business grows. When we hire, we consult the whole team. We are still very small, so it is important that new team members fit into our culture and the best way to do this is to allow everyone to give their input.

Finally, we also interview, manage and nurture our freelancers, who are critical in our business at its current size.”

Vanessa Raath manages talent retention for IS Partners, a medium-sized company that employs 130 people, in Fourways. “We regard staff retention as critical in our business. To start with, we ensure that candidates match

our culture. Then we ensure that all staff are aware of the career path opportunities. Our consultants have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. We ensure that there are clear measures of performance and opportunities for our consultants to work on projects in a range of industries.


“The second reason why talent retention is critical to our business is that great talent brings in other good talent. High turnover is the norm in the IT industry as good talent is a scarce resource and people are headhunted. If we do not look after them, they will leave for better opportunities. Our retention strategies include investment in ongoing training, clear career path and experience, experience in a variety of clients and the opportunity to become specialists in their field.”

World-leading large firms, such as Arup, match this thinking.

“As a consulting engineering firm, our talent is our offering and an indispensable resource that we look after and nurture. Our understanding of talent management is that it is an intervention process, which involves management, leadership, the HR community and the individual - it is not seen as an HR process in isolation,” says Charlotte Middleton: associate at Arup.

“The various disciplines of engineering are a scarce skill in South Africa and retention and management of our talent is something we take very seriously. We have a well-established and comprehensive graduate and mentorship programme that guides our graduates to their professional registration over five years.

“Added to that, as a global firm we can ensure that our talent is stimulated and challenged. We demonstrate this through interventions/programmes, such as staff mobility opportunities with our local and international offices, programmes specifically targeting our young developing professional population and mentorship for all levels within the firm. Our connectivity and IT platforms are unsurpassed and mobility across the globe is encouraged to enrich and add to the expertise we offer to our clients.”

“Before the movement of any individual into a higher role, a combination of academic development (business school) and soft skills development (coaching, mentoring and volunteer initiatives) makes a significant difference,” concludes Walsh. 

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