

Leading Sustainable Talent Development in Higher Education

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”¹

This definition, used by the Brundtland Commission (1987), has become the core definition of sustainable development used almost universally today as a core principle interpreted by different stakeholder groups to fit their context.²

Introduction

Sustainable talent development may best be defined as the development of talent so that the resource is never depleted. Just as environmental sustainability refers to the importance of supporting our world’s ecological systems to remain diverse and productive, metaphorically, sustainable talent development will ensure the on-going, future well-being of our higher education systems to productively serve our learners, the future of our society.

Although there is widespread knowledge that the shift in demographics in North America will create a “drought” of leadership, research suggests that most academic institutions are struggling to develop and/or implement a sustainable strategy for developing talent within their organizations – a necessity to ensure a strong higher education direction for future generations. According to the Gallup Organization’s workplace research, most employers are deficient in providing development of managers and leaders,³ and it seems higher education employers are no different.

Implementing a talent management strategy requires first and foremost, that all stakeholders within an organization have a common understanding of its meaning prior to beginning the development and implementation journey. Data suggests that most organizations do not have an agreed upon definition of talent management.⁴ “The term ‘talent management’ is such an enigma...never before has a human resources term garnered so much attention and yet been so misunderstood and overly hyped...Ironically, given the many articles, books, presentations and rhetorical efforts that have been devoted to it over the years, talent management remains a mystery to most.”⁵

¹ Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future. 1987. <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>

² Thomas Dyllick & Kai Hockert. “Beyond the Business Case for Corporate Sustainability.” Business Strategy and the Environment. March/April 2002, 11, 130 m- 141. John Wiley & Sons Ltd. and ERP Environment. <http://instruct.uwo.ca/business/bus020-mwf/acs410/reading14.pdf>

³ Tom Rath. The Executive Guide to Integrated Talent Management. 2011. Alexandria, Virginia: ASTD Press. X

⁴ Kevin Oakes & Pat Galgan. Introduction: Too Many Soloists, Not Enough Music. “The Executive Guide to Integrated Talent Management. 2011. Alexandria, Virginia: ASTD Press. 1

⁵ Ibid

According to research conducted in the higher education sector in North America, higher education faces challenges when implementing talent management programs or strategies. Why is this?

“A 2008 survey conducted by education executive search firm Witt/Kiefer found that succession planning was “gaining support” among post-secondary institutions”⁶ but only 6% had actual plans in place in spite of the fact that 25% of incumbents in critical positions were identified as eligible to retire within the next 5 year period.⁷

The term ‘talent management’ must first be defined within an organization and it should come as no surprise that those words have different meanings depending on the context and/or the audience. Perhaps William Rothwell said it best: “Talent management is a term in search of a meaning. For some people, it means the same as succession planning; for others, it means seamlessly-integrated efforts to attract, develop and retain the best people; and, for some people, it means efforts designed to integrate all components of an organization’s human resources system to attract, select, develop, appraise, reward, and retain the best people. The best advice: come up with a definition for talent management that meets your organization’s unique needs.”⁸

This paper will address some of the challenges typically faced by higher education in implementing talent management strategies, the importance of culture and the characteristics of a successful talent management plan for higher education.

Challenges with Advancing a Sustainable Talent Development Strategy

Higher education has become increasingly aware of the need for leadership development but there are still challenges.⁹ “Ironically, colleges create a variety of programs designed to provide students with academic and experiential learning opportunities, to expand their awareness of leadership issues and test their own leadership abilities.”¹⁰ Shouldn’t the same effort be put into leadership development for employees who are, in many cases, delivering this programming to students? Wouldn’t this demonstrate to students the importance of acquiring the skills being taught and start to build a culture of career development within the student body that could be drawn upon by the institution to recruit new employees upon graduation?

For a plan or program to have a chance of success, buy-in is essential and in the case of talent management, the literature advises to start at the top of an organization. A review of existing models for leadership development at the top of educational institutions showed that internal

⁶ Witt/Kiefer. “Succession Planning Takes Hold in Higher Education.” 2008 <http://www.wittkieffer.com/file/thought-leadership/practice/Education%20Succession%20Planning.pdf>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Rothwell, W. “Introducing Talent Management-A Dale Carnegie White Paper”. 2008

⁹ Witt/Kiefer. “Succession Planning Takes Hold in Higher Education.” 2008 <http://www.wittkieffer.com/file/thought-leadership/practice/Education%20Succession%20Planning.pdf>

¹⁰ American Council on Education. “Why Invest in Leadership Development?”.

<http://www.acenet.edu/Programs&Services/CAREER/Preparing Leaders for the Future>, (accessed September 20, 2010), 1

succession was not a common thread. “Colleges and universities are purposefully constructed to be stable, immune to fashion and trend. As a result the only ways they can make quantum progress at the executive level is to bring in leadership from outside the institution. Those occasional opportunities for transfusions of new blood seem to trump the benefits of the known – i.e. the internally designated successor.”¹¹ A related issue that presents challenges for internal candidates is the widely accepted principal in higher education of the need for an ‘open, national, inclusive search’ to replace departing senior leaders.¹² “Constituent involvement in institutional leadership has traditionally focused on the search process.”¹³ Key constituencies include boards, sitting senior administrators and the critical faculty group. The traditions of shared governance make open searches the only generally accepted means of identifying and enfranchising leadership in the eyes of these constituencies.¹⁴

An advantage to bringing in leaders from other institutions is that they “are unbiased by precedent, personal loyalties, or organizational orthodoxy and can inject creativity and energy into a college. Finding those leaders and bringing them on board is frequently one of the only ways to catalyze change within our purposefully slow-to-change campus environments.”¹⁵ This long standing principle, however, “can have the effect of disenfranchising worthy internal candidates. And all too often, when inside candidates do emerge successfully from a search process, the transaction costs to the institution, the costs of the search, the morale issues associated with internal candidacies, and the anxiety and apprehension of the unknown, are considerable.”¹⁶

“The traditions of shared governance make succession planning intrinsically different for colleges and universities.... It will never be acceptable in higher education for any group of leaders, be they board members, sitting senior administrators, or some combination thereof, to handpick one or more successors to an institution’s leadership. Succession planning in academe must be a process that involves every key constituency, none of them more critical to the effort than faculty.”¹⁷

With this in mind, it becomes clearer why talent management has not taken hold in higher education. If buy-in at the top of an organization is needed for successful implementation, and external recruitment of top leaders continues to be the norm, how does an organization create a sustainable corporate culture of leadership development from within?

¹¹ Barden, Dennis M. "The Internal Heir Apparent." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 52, no. 28 (03/17, 2006): C2-C3. (accessed January 14, 2011)

¹² Barden, Dennis M. "Where Will You Find Your Future Leaders?" *Chronicle of Higher Education* 56, no. 17 (01/08, 2010): D20-D20. (accessed November 13, 2011).

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ *Ibid*

Creating a corporate culture for talent development does present a challenge but it is not insurmountable if the right steps are taken. A bigger challenge, in fact a crisis, is that there will be a shrinking talent pool to draw from in the near future. In the 2010 report “People without Jobs, Jobs without People”, Miner identified that, “as the baby boomer generation advances into the age of normal retirement, there will be a significant decline in the proportion of our population in the prime working years (15 to 64). The projected shortfall in the availability of workers is shown to rise to as high as 1.8 million by 2031, depending on population growth. We have to understand that a labour shortage looms.”¹⁸ To address this concern, organizations must develop strategies to attract and retain staff from a shrinking labour force in an increasingly competitive labour market.

Dr. Miner also identified a looming skills shortage at the same time as the labour shortage. “With the emergence of a knowledge economy, the proportion of the labour force requiring post-secondary education will increase dramatically.”¹⁹ As of 2010, approximately 60% of workers had a post-secondary education in Canada and the US. Miner’s findings suggest that by 2031 these economies will need 77% of the workforce to have post-secondary credentials.²⁰

Higher education has the capacity and the resources to overcome these challenges if the right steps are taken and a level of urgency is placed on implementing talent management strategies. The competitive advantage of academe is that the expertise is already in place to develop recruitment and retention strategies to ensure a sustainable pool of talent.

How Important is Culture to the Success or Failure of a Talent Management Strategy?

The literature on talent management consistently emphasizes the importance of creating a plan and a process “specific” to the organization and suggests that it is critical to understand the environment and culture of the organization. The limited literature on talent management in higher education emphasizes that culture and governance structure in higher education is different than that of the corporate sector and because of the complexity and bureaucracy, often creates its own set of challenges. Shared governance and collegial cultures²¹; academics whose loyalty is aligned most closely with their discipline or professional field of knowledge rather than their respective universities or colleges²²; academics who generally do not characteristically see linear “promotion” into management as a promotion; a mission to serve students rather than profit and productivity—require higher education to approach the design and implementation of talent management and succession planning patiently and very differently than the corporate sector.

¹⁸ Miner, Rick. People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People-Ontario’s Labour Market Future. (February 2010), 1.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Berquist, W.H. & Pawlak, K.,2007.

²² Ibid

It is also relevant to recognize that leadership – what leaders do or don't do, what is expected of leaders, the status and influence of leaders – “varies depending on cultural forces...in which leaders function.”²³ Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that talent management plans to develop leadership within an organization must be defined and influenced by the culture of that organization. And in fact, the culture of an organization reaches far beyond the walls of the institution. A study by Project GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness) on Cultural Influences on Leadership and Organizations, examined the interrelationships of societal culture, organizational culture and organizational leadership and found that “cultural differences strongly influence important ways in which people think about leaders and norms...”²⁴ Furthermore, the culture and governance structure present in institutions of higher education is often quite different than that of private businesses. The presence of shared governance and collegial cultures requires academic institutions to think differently about succession planning.

Many definitions of culture are described in the literature. A generally accepted definition of culture, captured by Schein²⁵ and others, equates culture with basic assumptions, values and norms shared by organizational members. In fact, culture is often considered the “personality” of the institution. When an organization constructs change, culture must be central to the design²⁶ because assumptions, values and norms will drive practices and behaviours.

However, attempting to change a culture, and for this discussion, changing culture into one rich in talent development, must be recognized as a complex, large and long term undertaking that requires careful planning if it is to be sustained. In a comment posted to the Forbes website on July 23, 2011, Stephen Denning suggests that “changing an organization’s culture is one of the most difficult leadership challenges.... culture comprises an interlocking set of goals, roles, processes, values, communications practices, attitudes and assumptions...[that] combine to prevent any attempt to change it. That is why single-fix changes... or some new process, may appear to make progress for a while, but eventually the interlocking elements of the organizational culture take over and the change is inexorably drawn back into the existing organizational culture.”

The relationship of work culture that cultivates talent and an organization’s success is underscored by Allen and Doldee²⁷. Because talent is becoming increasingly hard to find, they stress the overarching importance of creating a sustainable, talent-rich culture by investing in human capital citing studies that verify that “a talent-focused, supportive company culture is part

²³ Robert J House, Paul J. Hanges, et al. Cultural Influences on Leadership and Organizations: Project Globe. 1997

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Edgar Schein. Organizational Culture and Leadership. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1985

²⁶ William J. Rothwell; Roland Sullivan; Gary N. McLean. Practicing Organizational Development: A Guide for Consultants. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 1995

²⁷ Elizabeth Allen and Beth Doladee. “Culture: If You Build it (Right), The Talent Will Come (and Stay).” Whitepaper, The Vaya Group. 2011

of what drives individuals to join and stay within an organization which can have a tremendous impact on the bottom line.”²⁸

The risk of losing valuable talent is minimized if organizations regularly examine programs and practices to expose the potential of a negative culture which can quickly erode employee satisfaction, a key to retaining talent.

The literature emphasizes the key role organizational leadership plays in developing a sustainable, positive, talent development culture that retains and develops future leaders. Allen and Doladee²⁹ summarize characteristics of successful companies, including their leaders, and submit key attributes of a talent-rich culture, among them a few relevant to this discussion.

- The personal goals of the individual must be honoured. When an organization develops talent to meet the needs of the organization, the goals of the individual must be respected and matched which in turn will result in personal buy-in, results, and excitement. Leadership authenticity and genuine interest in the individual’s needs must be visible.
- Leaders are held accountable for delivering on the talent plan; for example, talent plans of their direct reports are part of the culture.
- Leaders value development for themselves as well as their employees. Learning is the fabric of the culture.

To develop a sustainable talent management strategy, culture matters. A supportive culture focused on people and continuous learning maximizes retention and development, and authentic leadership support from the top is critical.

Characteristics of a Successful and Sustainable Talent Management Strategy

According to our research and experiences, there is evidence that organizations that intentionally recognize the following factors are more likely to have a successful program than those that do not.

- Understanding your organizational characteristics and culture
 - identify the culture shifts that are required to deliver what is needed
 - determine the risks of doing nothing
 - develop organizational development strategies to ensure talent management becomes part of the culture

²⁸ Elizabeth Allen and Beth Doladee. “Culture: If You Build it (Right), The Talent Will Come (and Stay).” Whitepaper, The Vaya Group. 2011,1

²⁹ Ibid,2

- Commitment and clear objectives
 - ensure leaders and managers own and actually invest time in talent management³⁰
 - verify that Talent Management is not an HR program but rather a CEO program
 - cultivate a definition for talent management that meets your organization's unique needs³¹
 - frame a common understanding of talent management objectives that recognizes the long term impact on the organization
 - develop a program that is systematic and transparent
 - heed the importance of leadership without authority

- Strategic focus and alignment
 - ensure long-term strategic success by aligning the talent management strategy with the strategic objectives of the organization³²
 - align employee engagement, performance management, learning and development, and many other key management practices³³
 - recognize that succession planning and talent management are not isolated programs; they must align with other vital HR systems including recruitment, performance management, onboarding, leadership development, employee development and employee engagement³⁴

- Resources
 - regard talent management as an investment strategy, not a cost line item on the annual budget. Talent management requires a commitment to invest in people³⁵
 - secure the financial and human resources required to support the strategy long term while considering future growth
 - strategize a plan to secure adequate funding for development required throughout the process to ensure the TM program is appropriately tailored to the organization, and is adequately monitored and managed
 - investigate available resources and train HR staff to design, implement, and monitor development solutions³⁶

³⁰ Shlom Ben-Hur, "The Fragile State of Talent Management", *HRProfessional Magazine* (February 2013)

³¹ William J. Rothwell, "Introducing Talent Management-A Dale Carnegie White Paper". 2008

³² PLS Consulting Inc., "Why Succession Planning and Talent Management Fail and What To Do About it."
<http://www.pls.net/resources/lindsay-article-improving-talent-management.pdf>

³³ Harvard Extension Hub., January 18, 2013, "3 Myths of Talent Management."
<http://www.extension.harvard.edu/hub/blog/extension-blog/3-myths-talent-management>

³⁴ PLS Consulting Inc., "Why Succession Planning and Talent Management Fail and What To Do About it."
<http://www.pls.net/resources/lindsay-article-improving-talent-management.pdf>

³⁵ Harvard Extension Hub., January 18, 2013, "3 Myths of Talent Management."
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³⁶ PLS Consulting Inc., "Why Succession Planning and Talent Management Fail and What To Do About it."
<http://www.pls.net/resources/lindsay-article-improving-talent-management.pdf>

- develop/train managers so they understand and are able to support the TM strategy
- Communication
 - ensure that everyone in the organization understands the strategy and “walks the talk;” to accomplish this, the talent management program must be transparent and intentional
 - interlace talent management throughout all communication to and with employees

Summary and Trends in Workforce Development

Talent management strategies are mission critical to the long term viability of higher education. To maximize employee contribution to organizational mission and goals, every higher education employee should be required to have an individual development plan which fosters some self-directed growth and which parallels the organization’s business plans.³⁷ “Lifelong learning is crucial to ensure that the skills and competencies of employees are aligned with the changing needs of business.”³⁸ “If we delay our response, then we will find that when we are ready to grow we will be constrained by a workforce that is out of balance with the needs of our economy.”³⁹ Gaffney advises that all employees become entrepreneurial about their careers;⁴⁰ to accomplish this, they need to gain a solid understanding of the organization’s corporate business plan and the direction the organization is going in the future, assess where they see themselves fitting in, and take the initiative to grow their talent to become essential contributors.

These “careerpreneurs” understand the value they provide to their organization and partner with their institution in the process of developing themselves.⁴¹ However, employers will be increasingly challenged. Predictions foreshadow that “skilled individuals – in increasingly short supply – will dictate their terms to employers, of how, where and when they work. They will naturally gravitate toward industries which offer the best career development options.”⁴²

“Organizations know that leadership is something that they cannot do without, and when it becomes more scarce, they need to get better at finding and developing it internally.”⁴³ Higher

³⁷Gaffney, Sylvia. "Career Development as a Retention and Succession Planning Tool." *Journal For Quality & Participation* 28, no. 3 (Fall2005 2005): 7-10. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 13, 2011), 8-9

³⁸Manpower Group. “Manufacturing” Talent for the Human Age.” (2011) 7

³⁹ Miner, Dr. Rick. “People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People-Ontario’s Labour Market Future.” (February 2010), 19

⁴⁰Gaffney, Sylvia. "Career Development as a Retention and Succession Planning Tool." *Journal For Quality & Participation* 28, no. 3 (Fall2005 2005): 7-10. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 13, 2011), 9

⁴¹Ibid

⁴²Manpower Group. “Entering the Human Age-Thought Leadership Insights” (2011)
<http://files.shareholder.com/downloads/MAN/1783726730x0x485640/515abc89-7c45-481a-bd3b-23054ce74b87/EnteringtheHumanAge.pdf>, 9

⁴³Aberdeen Group and Lombardi, Mollie. “Succession Management-Sustainable Leadership for the Future”. (July 2010)
<http://www.aberdeen.com/Aberdeen-Library/6514/RA-succession-talent-management.aspx>, 5

education can and must take steps to build and sustain talent. As educational institutions, who is in a better position to nurture the potential of their employees?

About the Authors

Nicole Perreault was part of a Human Resources and Organizational Development team that researched and developed the Talent Management Strategy for Niagara College, Canada, which was implemented in 2010. As a Certified Human Resources professional and Manager of Human Resources for the last 18 years, Nicole has responsibility for Talent Management, Recruitment, Employee & Labour Relations, Benefits Administration, Absence Management, Pay Equity, AODA and FOI. She is a graduate of the College and in 2008 was the recipient of the Niagara College "Award of Excellence" presented to Administrators who exemplify excellence.

Erin Holl is the Director, Support Staff at the College Employer Council and serves as a lead management negotiator for the Ontario College sector, Canada. In 2012 she completed a major research paper on a recommended model for succession planning in the Ontario College sector. In addition to acting as bargaining agent for the Ontario College sector, the College Employer Council supports the sector in implementation of leadership development strategies by providing resources created in partnership with Knightsbridge Consulting. Erin is a certified Human Resources professional in the province of Ontario and a graduate of the Master of Business Administration program (HR specialization) at Royal Roads University, Victoria, B.C.

Valerie Grabove is the Chair of organizational and employee development programs and processes at Niagara College Canada and has been an integral member of the talent management research and implementation team at the College. The 2004 recipient of Niagara College's Administration Award of Excellence, Valerie has more than 25 years of college career experience including leadership, teaching, development, facilitation of workshops as well as large group intervention facilitation for organizational change, consulting and writing. Her goal is to support employee and organizational development by integrating transformative learning experiences using a participatory and integrated approach to build successful and engaged employees – an important factor in enhancing student learning in higher education. Valerie is proud to be a member of the Leadership Academy Facilitation Team. Her education includes doctoral studies in Theory & Policy Studies (Higher Education), an M.Ed.; and a B.Ed., Theatre and Communication Arts.

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