The Way to Identify your Future Leaders – Part 2

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Leadership has an effect on the bottom line – not directly, but by shaping the culture within which an organization operates, its climate and through its influence on employee engagement. Identifying and developing leadership is a business critical process. Leadership depends on the type of personality, personal preferences, skills and relevant experiences.

Burning questions for Talent Development are:

* How can we identify these leaders?
* What can we do to improve their leadership skills?
* What creates a leader and which educational experiences, both formal and informal, can shape these experiences?

In Part One of this series, we demonstrated that it is not so simple to detect talent early and objectively. For instance, it will probably always remain a question if actual high performance is also a prediction of growth potential of an employee. In the 'Company Talent Show' as described previously, talent reviews have the tendency to become meetings with buddies and discussions about personal preferences. It continues to be cumbersome to assess the future development of employees. In the past, with a more or less stable market with favorable growth expectations, it was already difficult to make a good estimation; now it has become even more complicated in the current rapidly changing and competitive environment.

With the Company Talent Show we were not complete; there are other means of detecting talent. Labor psychologists often focus of personality types which are known as the NEO Big 5 personality factors to identify leadership capabilities.

The Big 5 traits are:

* **Neuroticism** – a tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression or vulnerability. Low scorers on this trait are called emotionally stable or resilient.

- **Extraversion** – energy, positive emotions, and the tendency to seek stimulation and the company of others. High scorers are favorable, low scorers more reserved.
- **Openness** – appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, imagination, curiosity, and a variety of experiences. High scorers are exploratory. Low scorers tend to be more pragmatic and conservative.
- **Agreeableness** – a tendency to be compassionate and co-operative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others. High scorers tend to adapt to other people. Low scorers are more challenging and abrasive.
- **Conscientiousness** – a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement. High scorers tend to be organized and to plan. Low scorers are more flexible and spontaneous.

We suggest leaving the Big 5 personality factors to the psychologists. Discussing learning agilities can be a more useful and practical approach for talent review discussions.

Learning Agility and Leadership

Mike Lombardo of [Lominger International](#) emphasizes the attention to behavioral competencies which are good predictors for future success. He uses the concept of "learning agility" for identifying talent. Learning agility expresses the determination and the competency to learn. These skills are necessary to solve new and difficult problems, problems and challenges which the managers of today are facing in the continuously changing business environment.

Employees with a high learning agility have a number of skills which distinguish them:

- They are frequently critical thinkers who can analyze in-depth questions by identifying clear links.
- They have a good knowledge of themselves a can deal well with difficult situations.
- They like to experiment with new concepts and can deal with changes in their environment.
- They deliver good results in changing circumstances by means of team development and personal commitment.

Research suggests that learning agility is a critical skill, as it allows for the selection of leaders who are capable of learning new concepts quickly in response to changing business or strategic conditions.

According to Lombardo, learning agility may be characterized by four different underlying factors, as summarized in the following table:

Four Aspects of Learning Agility	
People Agility	- Know themselves well - Learn from experience - Resilient under the pressures of change - Treat others constructively

Results Agility	• Achieve results under difficult conditions • Exhibit the type of presence that builds confidence in • others • Inspire and motivate others to perform beyond normal
Mental Agility	• Are comfortable with complexity, ambiguity, and explaining • their thinking to others • Think through problems with a fresh point of view
Change Agility	• Are curious and passionate about ideas • Engage in skill-building activities • Like to experiment with test cases

With some imagination you can develop a simple checklist with these aspects which can be helpful in talent review discussions.

Here is an example which could help you with identifying talent

- What are the impressive successes which have been achieved in the past?
- Is the initiative and the responsibility taken by the individual to tackle difficult situations?
- Is there an inspiring influence on others and does he stimulate others for better performance?
- Is the confidence of the others obtained in a team?
- Are the priorities correctly set while maintaining a good overview, and does the individual have the ability or capacity to multi-task?
- How are cumbersome and difficult situations handled, such as moments when everything goes wrong?
- Does the employee learn sufficiently from earlier experiences, and do they spend sufficient time taken for reflection?
- Do the people around him know of the individual's personal objectives and ambitions?

A talent is different from performance. Someone can achieve something without having an associated talent for it. This means, however, that some persons must compensate the lack of required talent with harder work and with more commitment. If this is the case, it seems that that person is suitable for the function, but in the long run the individual will be demotivated or become exhausted. Both talent and passions can change and can be developed.

Conclusion

The credit crisis takes its toll. To remain profitable, companies have to reduce costs and this will have also its effect on Human Resources development and Management Development expenditures.

Employers face a dilemma: do they have to invest more in talent development (long-term focus) or invest little in development of talent brio (short term focus). One could reason that with a

short-term focus, good managers and leaders emerge anyway. Synergy between both investment in talent development and paying attention to costs might be the best option. Only leadership programs with the highest added value for development of talent are organized. The "nice to have" programs are eliminated.

Low investments in talent development could cost the employer a lot of money in the long run. It will always be more difficult to find and attract talented employees who can fill important positions in the company in an increasing healthier economy and with an ageing population. To retain and develop talent will play an increasingly important role.

Postscript from Lex
You might have noticed that in my last 2 articles, I 'drift off' the subject of leadership development on the African continent, which is my specialty. The content of these articles is also applicable for companies operating successfully in any county of Africa.

*For those companies who have a footprint in Africa have a look at the **Africa Business Challenge**, which I will organize in September this year. Teams from companies in Africa will show that world-class performance is not exclusively reserved for western teams when the finals of this internet-based tournament take place! Check my website for up-to-date information.*