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Leadership in the Human Age

By Felix Kugel

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Felix Kugel
Vice-president & Managing Director
ManpowerGroup Russia & CIS

A new era is upon us — the Human Age. It will be the human potential that will be the catalyst for change and the global driving force behind economic, political and social developments. Talentism is the new Capitalism.

In the changing world of work, the one constant is the need for an exceptional workforce. This is true regardless of the economic environment, industry, geography, organization's size or earnings. At the heart of workforce strategy is the need for exceptional leadership. And in today's borderless marketplace, this means leaders with global mindsets and competencies.

There's a growing body of research helping to shape leadership development into more of a science than an art. ManpowerGroup, among others, recently surveyed over 1,400 CEOs and human resource professionals from 707 organizations across the globe to learn more about their companies' leadership development practices. We gained insight into the traits that global leaders need to be successful, as well as the factors that most likely lead to their derailment.

C-Suite Executive Competencies Required For Success

We asked respondents to rate which of the most commonly suggested competencies were the four most critical for several typical C-level positions. The top four competencies for CEO roles were Creating a Strategic Vision (91.7%), Inspiring Others and Maintaining Leadership Responsibility (62.3%), Developing an Accurate and Comprehensive Overview of the Business (56.9%) and Decision Making (54.5%).

Human resource professionals can directly contribute by building and implementing relevant and accelerated development opportunities for high potential leaders so that they receive the requisite exposure to the real-world experiences of strategic leaders while also gaining an introduction to executive stakeholders at the most senior levels of the business. Today, leadership development needs to be grounded in real work and focused on the top competencies required for success in different C-level roles.

Human resource professionals need to partner with line leaders in such a way as to ensure the application and integration of development activities, supported by stretch assignments, mentoring opportunities and action learning efforts. Real-life work situations need to be carefully selected in order to develop the right parts of the success profile for high potentials. It also necessitates human resources to create predictive and validated criteria, supported with consistent metrics, to better evaluate the performance of high potentials in real-life situations.

Factors That Lead To Derailment

Leadership turnover for non-performance or other leadership dissatisfaction issues continues to be higher than planned, especially since choices regarding senior leadership could be considered some of the most important corporate decisions a company can make.

To gain some insight into possible sources of succession risk factors, we asked for the perspective of the senior human resource executives who responded to our survey. Arguably, they have a unique vantage point as insiders, though they are still somewhat removed from the risk factors they may observe.

We were surprised to see that human resource executives across the board identified a lack of company support as a leading new leader risk factor regardless of where that individual was recruited or promoted from. This may suggest a "sink or swim" approach, or that some organizations assume that selecting the right individual is sufficient. They may assume that if they made the right selection, the individual will immediately assume responsibility for his or her own success. It may also mean that the selection criteria were inadequate and focused too much on experience and job knowledge with too limited a concern for readiness from the people management side of the leader's new responsibilities.

Consequences For The Business

The costs associated with failure (at worst) or ineffective executive transitions are high, and the lack of adequate support for talent during crucial periods can have a long-term negative impact for both leaders and the organization. This data only hints at what is to come. When considering the evolving workforce and the increasing importance of engagement on organizational transformation, high performance and productivity, the leader's role becomes the organization's greatest catalyst for success. Leaders need to be supported to fully understand the impact of their efforts and, in some cases, lack thereof. Leadership behaviors directly influence employee engagement levels. Continued lower levels of success for internal promotions can have a two-pronged negative effect on the organization:

1. Dissuade high potentials from believing in their ability to succeed in an organization that fails to support their succession.

2. Build discontent with internal talent as a result of increasing promotions of external candidates.

A Word Of Advice For Human Resourse Professionals

Human resources must continuously build the business case for a strategy that appropriately blends and ensures success for internal succession and also integrates external talent. Providing needed support (in partnership with senior operational leaders) for emerging talent during succession is essential to transitions, which can be both emotionally and physically challenging for new executives. Knowing the leadership competencies required for success today and in the future, as well as a sound understanding of the factors that most likely lead to derailment, will provide for a formidable talent development strategy that can deliver on growth and business transformation.

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