



Unleashing Leadership Potential: Difficulties in Recognizing, Evaluating, and Cultivating



Written By: Craig Weaver, MCC, ACTC(c), LSP
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www.cwcoaching.ca

Introduction

It is widely recognized by organizations that a solid leadership pool is crucial for future success. However, the process of identifying, evaluating, and nurturing leadership potential remains a highly intricate challenge in talent management. In today's rapidly changing and unpredictable environment, the conventional indicators of "high potential" often prove inadequate.

Key Obstacles

- **Defining Potential:**
 - Uncertainty in understanding what leadership potential entails beyond performance.
 - The risk of confusing present achievements with future capabilities.
 - The challenge of aligning definitions of potential with evolving business strategies.



- **Bias and Fairness:**
 - Unconscious biases in identifying high-potential employees hinder their entry into leadership pipelines.
 - Relying excessively on subjective assessments risks overlooking talented individuals from marginalized groups.
 - The necessity for equitable, transparent, and inclusive procedures that broaden opportunities.
- **Accurate Assessment:**
 - Conventional performance evaluations are insufficient indicators of leadership readiness.
 - Difficulty in measuring traits like learning agility, resilience, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.
 - Limited utilization of data analytics and scientifically backed assessments in decision-making.
- **Developing Future Leaders:**
 - Stretch assignments and exposure to cross-functional roles are often restricted to a select few individuals.
 - Leadership development initiatives do not always align with organizational strategies.
 - Inconsistent coaching and feedback can leave high-potential employees feeling disengaged or unprepared.

Moving Forward: Best Practices

- **Establish a Clear Leadership Potential Framework** — Define potential using quantifiable competencies and forward-looking skills.
- **Utilize Science & Analytics** — Integrate psychometrics, simulations, and behavioral assessments with qualitative feedback.
- **Prioritize Development Opportunities** — Offer fair chances for coaching, mentoring, and challenging roles.
- **Link to Succession Planning** — Ensure that potential identification directly relates to critical leadership positions within the organization.

Potential Research-Based Opportunities

In 2024, Scott Hines, Justin O'Neal, Chris Huynh, and John H. Golden III conducted a study aimed at developing and evaluating a behavioral framework for assessing an individual's suitability for specific roles. They argue that many existing models for identifying high-potential talent lack the empirical basis required to guide the measurement and application of potential. The authors emphasize that traditional models of potential often focus narrowly on



vertical career progression, overlooking the benefits of lateral moves and forward-looking criteria that enhance leadership capabilities and organizational agility. Their research shows that incorporating multiple theoretical concepts into a high-potential model, along with behavioral assessments to predict readiness, can lead to a more effective approach for identifying individuals with growth potential. Identifying, evaluating, and nurturing leadership potential remains a significant challenge for organizations today. This article presents compelling and practical insights for leaders looking for a more refined, evidence-based path forward.

Call to Action: As you enhance your succession planning strategies, consider whether your high-potential frameworks are adaptable enough to acknowledge growth beyond upward promotions or restricted solely to managerial roles. Developing models that recognize diverse career paths may uncover hidden talent and position your organization for long-term success.

Conclusion

Recognizing, evaluating, and developing leadership potential is no longer optional — it is a strategic necessity. Organizations that master this process will not only build strong talent pipelines but also create inclusive, forward-thinking leadership capable of thriving in uncertain times. Such organizations are likely to benefit from a more cost-effective approach to identifying, evaluating, and developing their future leaders.

References

Hines, Scott, et al. "An Alternative Path to Unlocking High-Potential Talent: Universal Models Beware." Consulting Psychology Journal, 30 Dec. 2024.