

High Potentials

Researchers and organizations have focused on the methods, tools, and processes of individual assessment for decades, and there are endless resources available to guide both research and practice in this domain³. Only relatively recently has there been an emphasis on identifying high potentials as a unique talent pool, which has emerged as one of the hottest areas of business performance. However, research and practice were slow to develop together and a common error for businesses was, and for many still is, defining high potential as the ability of an individual to advance up the ranks – i.e. the “two level jump”². This narrow lens fails to recognize that someone who can ascend the career ladder doesn’t necessarily translate to someone who can make a significant contribution to the organization overall. In fact, estimates suggest that at least 1 in 2 leaders - with demonstrated individual success - cannot engage employees and fail to develop their teams or organizations into high performers¹. Fortunately, some progress has been made and both research and applied settings agree that high potential interventions should focus on predicting who is likely to develop into a champion of organizational not individual performance.

Science demonstrates that these future stars tend to share a range of measurable qualities regardless of context, industry, or role, which can be identified early in the process. The three general markers of high potentials include ability, social skills, and drive¹. Ability shows that an individual is able to do the job in question. The best predictor of job performance is a work sample test, however, when determining potential to excel in a more complex future role, the best predictor is IQ or cognitive ability. Social skills reflect the ubiquitous significance of teamwork and collaboration in the modern world of work. This involves two fundamental abilities: the ability to manage yourself and the ability to manage others (relationships). Finally, drive represents the grit and motivation to work hard, achieve, and do what needs to be done to finish the job. Drive can be evaluated by assessments that measure conscientiousness, achievement motivation, and ambition. Or it is seen behaviorally, for example, willingness to take on extra duties, eagerness for more responsibility, and readiness to sacrifice for organizational success.

Now equipped with a framework for effectively identifying high potentials, talent management professionals can focus on these 5 empirically supported tips for effectively developing those high potentials: 1. Emphasis individual performance only within the context of teams and organizations in which it unfolds³ 2. Communicate transparently about the procedures and criteria used to identify and develop high potentials as well as the expectations⁴ 3. Focus on increasing commitment to leadership competence development and fulfillment as perceived by employees⁴ 4. Use objective and reliable methods to assess performance and be transparent about everybody’s output² 5. Provide developmental support for those who struggle to meet targets despite clear efforts—potential can be trained and boosted³.

1 Kaiser, T. C. (2017, October 03). What Science Says About Identifying High-Potential Employees. <https://hbr.org/2017/10/what-science-says-about-identifying-high-potential-employees>.

2 Rotolo, Christopher, Allan Church, Seymour Adler, James Smither, Alan Colquitt, Amanda Shull, Karen Paul, and Garrett Foster. "Putting an End to Bad Talent Management: A Call to Action for the Field of Industrial and Organizational Psychology." *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* 11.2 (2018): 176-219. Web.

3 McDonnell, A., Collings, D. G., Mellahi, K., & Schuler, R. (2017). Talent management: a systematic review and future prospects. *European Journal of International Management*, 11(1), 86-128.

4 Violetta Khoreva, Vlad Vaiman, Maarten Van Zalk, (2017) "Talent management practice effectiveness: investigating employee perspective", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 39 Issue: 1, pp.19-33, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-01-2016-0005>

