

Identifying the Path to Leadership – The Role of Talent Management

The Level Project



Accelerate Equality. Accelerate Success.

What's included?

This document provides an overview of the process of managing your talent as a way to identify the path to leadership. It will help with identifying how people become leaders in your business and noticing where women may not be taking advantage of the right development opportunities – or where they may not have access to the same networks as their male counterparts.

Introduction

Talent management is a proactive approach to developing and advancing people into and then up and through your organisation. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) define the terms “talent” and “talent management” this way:

Talent refers to individuals who can make a significant difference to organisational performance. This may either be through their immediate contribution or, in the longer term, by reaching their highest levels of potential.

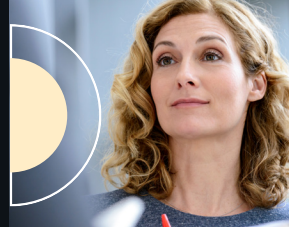
Talent management is the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment of those individuals who are of particular value to an organisation. This may be through their high potential or because they fulfil critical roles.¹

For the purposes of this document, we will exclude consideration of attraction. This has been covered extensively elsewhere in the toolkit, for example, in “Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process”.

¹ www.cipd.co.uk: knowledge fundamentals people development coaching mentoring factsheet

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While traditional talent management programmes focus on identifying “future leaders” in an organisation, more inclusive approaches to talent acknowledge that all employees have talent. More exclusive approaches are potentially harmful to the organisation and may result in you not leveraging the full potential of your colleagues.

Identifying the path to leadership

The path to leadership varies for each organisation. For some, it is a transparent set of criteria and portfolio of experiences that they need to meet and complete. However, for most, the progression to senior leadership is still unclear and not discussed. In order to successfully eliminate bias in the progression of women and men in your organisation, it is necessary first to determine what drives progression. Typically executive positions are filled after a career of development. But, how does someone gather this portfolio of experience and what does it look like for your business?

Begin with the end in mind

There are three primary ways in which roles are filled at the senior level:

1. **External recruitment** – recruitment from the external market
2. **Internal recruitment** – recruitment from your own executive ranks through a hiring process
3. **Promotion process** – promotion to senior roles

External recruitment

Having followed the guidance in [“Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process”](#), what are the additional elements to consider when recruiting to the leadership level? Be aware of the role of senior leaders in attracting and recruiting leaders into the business. Be aware of how narrow networks filled with people like you – also referred to as your “in-group” – can lead to you referring someone like yourself for an open role. To manage this bias implication, broaden your networks to include senior leaders whose skills and/or characteristics are different to those already included in your senior management team.

Internal recruitment

Where an internal hiring process is used to fill senior roles, be proactive about approaching women to apply for these positions (additional guidance on this and other ways to eliminate bias are detailed in [“Eliminating Bias in the Hiring Process”](#)) In addition, there are steps which you can take to ensure that there is a balanced slate of candidates for open leadership roles by being proactive in identifying the experiences required for leadership in your organisation.

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Steps to take:

- 1. Analyse the existing job descriptions for senior roles** – are they realistic in their detail? What experiences and development do you expect of senior executives? Is this transparent to those at more junior levels that might form your “leadership pipeline”². Often it is not clear in organisations how exactly one might progress to senior levels, this uncertainty and lack of clarity can deter women from applying.
- 2. Review the portfolio of experience of existing leadership team members** – what development experience was most critical in getting them to senior leadership? Do the teams have experiences in common? What do these tell you about the requirements – stated and implied – of senior leadership in your organisation? Are these expectations all feasible for men and women to fulfil? For example, in some organisations, a completed overseas assignment might be a requirement of leadership, or leading a large team of individuals. If women in your organisation do not have access to the type of opportunities that provide those experiences, ask if those criteria are real requirements or just “the way things have always been done”. For example, overseas assignments are less likely to be offered to women but can be a key development experience for leadership.



LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

What does the term “leadership pipeline” refer to? Typically, this term describes your existing employees who have the potential to be future leaders of your organisation. The identification and development of this group of employees can be formal or informal. A formal process involves capturing a list of candidates and actively developing and progressing them through the organisation, monitoring their progress. An informal process is where existing leadership identify candidates for progression, but this is not discussed, captured or managed in any centralised way. An informal process is more likely to lead to bias as a leader’s confirmation bias results in them identifying and mentoring someone that is similar to themselves. However, a formal process can also include bias unless a review of representation is conducted when the list is compiled.

² See leadership pipeline and www.shrm.org

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“Only about 17% of women take international assignments compared to 28% of men, according to a 2012 report from Catalyst that studied high-potential employees from top business schools. Despite having the same willingness to take on a global role as their male counterparts, 64% of women say they were never offered a move abroad, compared with just 55% of men, the report showed.”³

Of course, for your organisation, the key experience may not be overseas⁴ – it may be leading a large team. However, if the women in your organisation are more likely to be in subject matter expert roles rather than in operations positions managing large groups, then leadership might be closed to them. Identifying these explicit and implied criteria will allow you to test if these are creating barriers to women progressing to leadership level. Keep in mind that women are less likely than men to be identified and asked to take on high-visibility projects, so highlighting what these experiences are for leadership in your organisation will help to make the path more visible.

3. Review your competency framework – if a competency framework is in place, have you clearly articulated how the role of the leader varies from those below them? Do you, for example, expect that someone has led a large project or a large section of your business before applying for leadership roles? If you have not made these determinations then as stated in

step 2 above, review the experience sets of existing executives and determine what elements are requirements and what might be added to the existing team.

4. Communicate – having determined the criteria required for internal candidates communicate this clearly to those at a more junior level. Transparency is key and can be supported by encouraging senior leadership to share their progression stories to staff in your communication channels as role models. More information on role models is available in the tool [“Developing Gender Balance Champions: The Importance of Role Models”](#).

Promotion process

Actions identified under internal hiring process can also apply to the promotion process. It is critical to be clear about what makes someone “ready for” the next step up. If this is not clear, then, as for internal promotions, spend some time understanding the criteria for advancement and clearly communicate it to women who have the potential and the interest in taking on leadership roles.

Where a formal promotion process exists it may be possible to more closely monitor the gender balance on the list of those put up for promotion – the promotion slate. The representation of women on this list should match the representation of women in the level that candidates are coming from. For example, if you are promoting from a supervisor to manager level and 40% of supervisors are women, then the promotion slate should be at least 40% women.

³ www.bbc.com: where are all the expat women

⁴ Examples of additional experiences invaluable to leaders are provided in the appendix below.

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Where the slate for promotion is not representative, ask:

1. What candidates are not being considered?
2. What is the reason for their exclusion?
3. Has their manager presented specific examples of how they are not ready compared to other candidates?
4. What development has been put in place to bridge the development gap for those candidates?

Where someone requires development in order to be ready, put in place a monitoring facility to ensure this development takes place and to ensure that the candidates do make the list in the next applicable round. Where they do not make the list, expect managers to explain why this is not the case.



WATCH FOR ASSUMPTIONS

Where a line manager has identified that someone is not ready for promotion, require specific examples as to why this is the case and watch for assumptions being made by the line manager. For example, have they assumed that someone would not want a promotion as they have just become a parent? Is there an assumption being made that someone is not ambitious for progression without a discussion happening with the candidate? In these circumstances, unconscious bias can lead to these assumptions and avoiding bias can be as simple as requiring specific examples and challenging assumptions.

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Appendix

Qualifications for leadership include a broad range of experiences as well as industry experience and formal education. Here are some of the experiences that your existing senior leaders may identify as critical for your future leaders. Use this list, and add to it, to be transparent to men and women at more junior levels about the pathway to leadership in your organisation.

- Leading through a crisis situation
- Demonstrating cross-cultural leadership
- Leading a difficult or challenging unit or division
- Agility in horizontal moves across the organisation
- Successfully taking on an increase in job scope
- Leading a turnaround situation
- Leading multiple divisions or departments
- Demonstrating adaptability to change and crisis
- Developing and launching a new product or service to clients
- Managing the closing of a line of business or service
- Identifying and onboarding a new client segment
- Involvement in an acquisition or merger
- Taking on stretch assignments outside of their area of expertise