



**Head
Light**

How to get started with Talent Management

part of our series of Tools

Talent **Cloud®**. Breakthrough **software**. Raise **expectations**.



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Your people – or your talent – are the life blood of your business regardless of sector or size of company, and Talent Management means different things to different people.

For some it is about identifying the people to succeed those currently in post. For others, it centres on the creation of a pool of people earmarked for the roles of the future. For others still, Talent Management is about looking at the development needs across the entire workforce. But, however it is viewed in your organisation, Talent Management must be about understanding the skills and talent your business needs to fulfil its plans.

The impact on business performance of Talent Management

You will have heard of or read about a number of studies which focus on and articulate the business benefits of a robust and 'joined up' approach to Talent Management.

1. **Integrated talent management practices leads to significantly higher levels of organisational performance**, measured by an increase in market value per employee¹
2. **People management practices are a better predictor of company performance** (productivity and profitability) than strategy, technology or research and development and accounts for 20% of the variation in the financial performance indicators²
3. **Aligning Talent Management with business strategy delivers**, on average, 20% higher return on equity than those without alignment and those that integrate their talent management programmes deliver 38% greater returns.³

You will no doubt also be aware of the business impact of adopting, or improving, specific Talent Management activities be they around performance management, employee development or engagement.

4. **Better performing companies, have a more highly engaged workforce.** Those with engagement scores in the top quartile averaged 18% higher productivity and 12% higher profitability than those in the bottom quartile.⁴
5. **Lower engagement is associated with higher staff turnover, and more workplace accidents.** Companies with engagement scores in the bottom quartile average 31 – 51% higher attrition rate, 51% more inventory shrinkage and 62% more accidents than those in the top quartile.⁴
6. **Higher engagement aligns with higher customer advocacy, higher productivity and higher profitability.** Those with engagement scores in the top 25% averaged 12% higher customer advocacy, 18% higher productivity and 12% higher profitability.⁴
7. **Engaged employees in the UK take less sick days.** The engaged worker takes an average of 2.69 sick days per year; the disengaged take 6.19 days. The CBI (2007) reported that sickness absence costs the UK economy £13.4bn a year.⁵
8. Business leaders cite **improvement in their leadership pipeline** as one of their three critical obstacles to growth⁶
9. Seven key practices which differentiated the top 20 companies relate to succession planning:⁷

Continuous Performance Management – where to start?

Performance Management is often now seen as an outdated, time-consuming process that is no longer fit for purpose. There's been a move away from forced rankings and bell-curves, with a number of large organisations being quite vocal in their move away from this towards a more agile, conversational and continuous approach to the setting of goals and the checking on progress.

Many organisations now are looking to create more flexible, employee-centred practices which focus on helping people perform at their best – rather than filling in endless forms. There's a need to be more flexible and continuous in their approach to managing performance, and there's a drive to increase ownership and engagement.

The benefits of this new approach

Typically for small and medium sized businesses, this more on-going approach to performance review works well. And this is because it;

- can be **easily supported by great online systems** that give always available access to record, update and check on progress;
- encourages line managers to build their **role as a 'coach' into their working patterns** so that the time-intensive, annual, tick-box review is no longer a hassle;
- **frees up HR spent chasing completion rates** – and, if you choose to deploy a managed Talent Management system such as Head Light's Advanced Plan, takes away all the administrative burden;
- encourages employees to **fully understand their role** in achieving the overall business goals.

The 9 essentials for Continuous Performance Management

Setting out to create and embed a more conversational, informal, continuous form of Performance Management, needs some fundamentals to be in place: we see these as the 9 'essentials'. Given your interest in Talent Management, you may already made progress in some of these areas. If so, then great; if not, then let's work together to build these for you.

#1 – Leadership from people that matter

Obvious but crucial; you need the most influential to be supporting this change. It could be the most senior people – and certainly you need their backing – but you do need those who will be championing the move.

In today's society, workplace influence is not as top down as it once was. What we need from leaders is a clear vision of a future state backed up by sustainable and durable reasoning for the change. Examples and story-telling work more persuasively than financials facts, especially when those stories relate to internally influential people.

Leadership here is to promote the course for a process of change that might take more than the current fiscal quarter. In this context it would be a description of how managers should be, the conversations they are expected to have and the outcomes. In an organisation need to genuinely support and demonstrate that they are fully behind the change in the performance management process.

In our work, we often find that initial agreement and apparent buy-in at senior levels does not translate to the C-suite being the first to trial and role-model the new approach – or that there's a change of heart when the full implications of not having the old ranking system start to become apparent.

It's important to have champions at the highest level, who:



- are involved in creating the new performance management practices;
- will pave the way by doing it with their own teams and
- fully understand the implications of the shift.

The Leadership team must not allow managers 'off the hook' for not adopting this new approach and be especially robust with any 'I'm too busy/not enough time' excuses.

#2 – Involve others in the change

There is a marketing technique that involves segmenting target audiences. And this technique may also be useful to apply to employee groups. By better understanding each of your employee groups, you'll be able to tailor communication and engagement activities to them.

You'll want to consult with employees and include them as you start to map out your new performance management approach. Creating a win-win for employees and managers will be particularly important in managing this culture shift. Ask them about what they want from performance management and listen to what they say.

We have observed a situation in which HR has not consulted - or rather involved people late in the process. HR needs to let go of the process early to gain control of it later on. You can get people involved in a number of ways:

- Look to run Focus Groups – whereby you seek to get structured input from people across the business, at all levels, as to how the process could work more effectively for them, and what needs to change.
- Set up an area on the Intranet site – work with your IT team to include a feature on your intranet site which encourages people to share their suggestions on how the performance management process could be improved.
- Establish a Working Group – consider setting up a cross-functional, non-managerial working group and task them with putting a proposal together for creating a better performance management world.
- Build senior-level champions and role models – these are the leaders and managers who really do performance management well – and get their support in spreading the word or gathering views and feedback.

Let people come up with ideas and stay true to the message about a future vision. If your organisation embraces concepts such as 'hackathons', set up an HR Hackathon opening up the floor to all ideas. Most well-networked HR people know what are the key influencers - so make sure they are in the room and contributing!

#3 – Effective communications

This is where you bring together the leadership vision, examples and stories, together with the outputs from the previous phase, and any tailoring needed for different employee segments. If you can, lean on your internal comms team and think carefully how your position this change activity. Branding and naming may seem trivial, but we've seen some great implementations which have had great energy and drive behind them.

This needs to go beyond a set of FAQs and 'How To' guides, and needs to engage people at a number of levels. Try out your messages with your key influencers and plan when and how to deliver them. Think about:

- Finding teams to trial the new approach;
- Ensuring you have your branding and internal communication experts involved;
- Building resources on your intranet;

- Running interactive workshops and engagement sessions;
- Getting people to share their stories and feedback.

#4 – Make the ‘little and often’, quick and easy

One of the biggest gripes we hear about is to do with how time consuming it is to ‘do’ performance management. This is often because it has become a ‘large end-of year task’. Very rarely are there significant gripes relating to doing things ‘little and often’ – and this is the essence of continuous performance management.

With your HR role, you can help by implementing an agile, flexible performance management tool or app that is easy to access and update, to store information and to collect feedback on objectives, progress, achievements and evidence, making the ‘little and often’, quick and easy.

We don’t think that it’s any secret that if you do regular, short updates throughout the year, it becomes less of a chore and less of a feat of memory. We all know that little and often and while it’s fresh in your memory, is more conducive to an accurate picture of what you’ve achieved in a year.

Your software also needs to be:

- highly flexible in how it reports and presents information for leaders and HR;
- able to **monitor the progress** of the organisation, teams and individuals against agreed objectives, engagement with the process and development activity;
- **responsive and flexible**, able to produce real-time data and to fit with people’s working patterns and varying preferences and demands;
- **quick, intuitive and easy** – or it just won’t get used!
- **managed by an external partner** to help save you the hassle.

#5 – Shift ownership of performance review from HR to employees

The quickest way to make this shift is to build a process, pilot it, tear it down, build, pilot, tear down, build, pilot, tear down. This is about being agile, responsive and collaborative with stakeholders. Remember though to add an extra month to any timeline though to manage expectations!

By adopting this approach, you refrain from guessing what is going to work and get to proving which ideas from the stakeholders work the best.

You’ll need to make sure that the tool you have chosen to use, allows this flexibility. This is where you can close the loop with the consultation phase and demonstrate that views and ideas have been taken on-board.

#6 – Be ready to change and upskill in HR

The transition to continuous/conversational/agile performance management will change your focus in HR. It is a cultural shift across the business. Today your organisation may be concerned with ‘return’ or ‘completion’ rates for PDR forms. Now you will need to think about how you add value to the performance review. In short, HR will change its responsibilities from policing completion to:

- ensuring alignment of objectives;
- responding to real time Training Needs Analysis feedback;
- supporting managers with team performance and engagement issues;
- providing real-time information to the Leadership team around objective achievement, L&D focus, competence gaps, high performers.

#7 – A clear but simple policy on performance management

Do not update your current policies. Instead, review them critically and from the perspective that we should be concerning ourselves only with compliance of the law and the 80% of the people not trying to 'game' the system. If we write our policies aimed at catching out the very few 'game players' then this does nothing for a culture of trust, values and innovation.

Performance management practices also need to have really clear and direct links to other talent processes. For instance, do you have 360 degree feedback programmes and, if so, how do these relate to the discussions people have about their performance? And what of training and development activities? How do actions agreed as a result of performance conversations contribute to people's growth and learning? And succession planning?

All too often we see these practices operated as discrete and independent processes, on multiple spreadsheets, with different owners, and little real use being made of the data that is being generated.

Simplifying your processes may also include removing forced ranking and decoupling the reward system from the performance management system. Taking away the risk of having too many top rank employees needing a pay rise means that organisations can have more honest conversations about where someone is and what they can do to be even better. Rather than directly linking ratings and salary increases or bonuses, compensation decisions should be based on the critical nature of an employee's skills, the cost of replacing them, their value to customers, and the external labour market.

#8 – Focus on enhancing managers' skills

There's also a whole raft of skills that need to be sharpened if performance management is to move on to a more agile plane. Having difficult conversations about performance, creating clear expectations and goals, giving feedback, coaching, motivating people; these will all become more important.

This is about helping them making accurate and fair assessments of performance, so train and up-skill your line managers to be more effective assessors. Help them to understand how their biases and decision-making processes can impact on performance assessments and give them tools and strategies to manage and minimise their personal biases. If you decide to retain the rating element of performance management, you may need to train and up-skill your managers to be more effective assessors. Help them to understand how their biases and decision-making process can impact on performance reviews and give them the tools and strategies to manage and minimise their personal biases.

#9 – Build-in an audit of the quality of conversations

We have heard some companies talk about surveying the population to see if they like the new continuous performance management approach - and if they are using it. You should, at least, be able to tell how many objectives any group of people have, when they last checked-in, when their career conversation was and if the updates on goals have any real substance behind them. The proof will be there for you - and you'll be able to provide answers such as:

- x% of people have used the system in the last 30 days.
- over y% have had a check-in last month.
- over z% of Joe Bloggs' team have objectives aligned with the company objective A.

You'll be able to find out the good news and also be able to find out where great performance review is not happening as you would expect. You can then choose to help - or not. There are tools available from Head Light that can help you identify that good quality conversations are happening. Find out more from us about our Continuous Performance Index (CPM) and how it can help this change be sustained.

360 degree feedback – where to start?

Whether you are embarking on 360 for the first time in your organisation or updating a current process, spending time at the start with the right people leads to good engagement, strong buy-in and solid support amongst the important line manager population.

360 should be approached as an evolutionary way to capture feedback. If there is no historical approach to feedback being a fundamental and accepted part of the culture it may encounter significant obstacles. It may be that a formalised review processes and one to one feedback needs to be introduced to lay the foundations for the full 360 and help to realise the value it can add to an open, honest culture with a genuine desire to improve performance.

#1 – Gain the buy-in and deal with any ‘emotional’ objections

As with introducing performance management, invest time in identifying the key stakeholders, explaining the process, building the case for 360 and outlining the outcomes and impact on the business.

When positioning the 360 with those who are taking part and being reviewed, make sure that a clear purpose is defined. Is the overall outcome designed to support skills or behavioural development, or coaching, or career development?

Explain how the 360 will be administered, who will ensure it happens, who will collate the results and how, when will they receive the feedback and who from? Ensure that the process is transparent and all can see what the desired outcomes are. It is useful to show at this stage that the 360 process will be revisited to allow individuals to see how they have improved based on feedback captured over time.

#2 – Start small – and decide with whom

Good practice suggests that your journey to adopt a 360 approach is smoother when you run an initial pilot study. This becomes even more beneficial if you use this as an opportunity to obtain buy-in from senior managers and focus the pilot around them.

It is also a useful exercise to test and confirm the validity of your assessment.

It's also useful to establish how often you will carry out a 360 review, with whom and a clear rationale for its purpose. Research what other organisations do, discuss with your team internally and take external advice if necessary. Typically, 360 reviews are carried out no more frequently than every two years unless you are looking at benchmarking and change.

To get the maximum value from an online 360 tool, consider the groups with which it can be used. The management and leadership population is usually the main target, but also consider your talent pools, key successors, customer-facing staff, graduates and business support groups.

Make sure that you design a timeline with key dates so that everyone understands the schedule.

#3 – Set the ground rules

Some of today's businesses are obsessed with 'big data', so the fact that 360 degree feedback generates data is often attractive and tempting for secondary stakeholders. For example, your colleagues in reward or selection - who are trying to make decisions about people - might be interested in the 360 degree results.

HR must avoid the temptation to allow 360-degree feedback results to be used by others for analysis and interpretation. This is not only unethical and inappropriate, but it's also an abuse of trust. Don't let others hijack the result.

If you need to provide feedback for five people, there are some 360 degree tools on the market that put all five of them on the screen at the same time. The idea is that this makes the process quicker and



easier for you, as you don't have to complete five separate reviews. However, the problem with this is that, in the resultant feedback, you're not really providing an objective measure of each person, you end up rating each of them in relation to the others.

Quick and easy shortcuts such as this may seem seductive, especially in our 'immediate gratification society', but they're an illusion that undermines success. If you really want to provide 360 degree feedback that is objective, considered and constructive, then ranking everyone together on the same page isn't going to help. The answer is to treat everyone individually and to use a 360 degree tool that lets you provide considered feedback for one person at a time.

#4 – Design a 360 for your business

Plenty has been written about designing a good assessment for 360 reviews. Crucially you need to make sure that the 360 questionnaire is fit for purpose and considered relevant.

Where possible ensure that the questions ask reflect your competencies – or use language that is common across the business.

It is often useful, if you choose not to adopt a standard questionnaire but to create your own, to discuss the design of the questions and format with a pilot group of differing levels of employees to ensure your format will deliver what is required and provide one clear consistent message of its worth.

With Head Light you can choose to either use our standard questionnaire or customise this and build your own. Think about what you want to do in your timeframe. Perhaps start with the standard questionnaire and then look to develop your own in the future.

In our experience, good practice suggests that you will want to consider at some point:

- **The length of the assessment** – in your assessment design, aim for it to be completed within 15-20 minutes. If you want to encourage the provision of qualitative feedback, then consider keeping the number of 'rated' questions to a minimum so the whole assessment does not become overly long.
- **The language used** – reflect the language of your organisation and minimise the use of acronyms and jargon.
- **The competencies reflected and their relation to your own organisation's competency framework** – if you have your own competency framework look to use this as the basis for the assessment, and again ensure that the system you chose is able to include this. Work with an internal or external consultant to map competencies to roles if this has not yet been done.
- **Whether to include specific questions designed by the participant** for specific reviewer groups – including question items written by the participant, which can increase ownership of the process. Before considering this, make sure that your on-line system offers this functionality.
- **How those with high potential will be highlighted** – to strengthen the return you may see from your investment in a 360 programme, look to use the information to reach beyond creating development plans and use it to identify those with 'high potential'. Check that the online system you are using can be tailored to flag (to the Administrator and not the participant) the items which predict potential specifically in your organisation. The Talent Cloud® for SMEs is one such system.
- **The rating scales used** – much has been written about the most effective rating scales for 360, and you need to consider the scale to be used and the ability of your software to incorporate this – and the skill of your partner to manage this.
- The use of **negatively phrased indicators** against the scales – in our experience, examples such as 'Relies on one influencing style or tactic' or 'Disregards feedback from others' can often

provide some of the greatest insight.

- The use of **free text fields** – and phrasing them as you wish them to be answered. For example, “Please provide an example to justify your ratings” asks the reviewer for evidence to support the scores given in the assessment. Whereas “Please provide a specific example” may suggest that the reviewer needs to detail only a specific situation rather than it being in general support of the ratings given – and he or she may tend to give an interesting rather than relevant example.
- Avoid asking about **‘should’**. Some 360 degree feedback tools ask you to rate not just how frequently an individual does something but also how frequently you think they ‘should’ do it. This is a mistake because it introduces a judgemental element into the process. Having individuals rate their work colleagues on what they ‘should’ do isn’t the purpose of 360-degree feedback. It blurs the lines between feedback, which should be about information that’s helpful for an individual, and ‘old-school’ appraisal which offers a judgement about their behaviour. It can be especially toxic when direct reports, who may not understand their manager’s role fully, are asked these questions.

#5 – Prepare all those taking part

Making sure that both the participants (i.e. those who are the focus of the 360) and the reviewers are aware of their respective responsibilities is critical to the success of a 360.

We have plenty of proforma emails and checklists that we can share with you so you can communicate across your business.

They include:

- how to plan the timeline, and the follow-ups;
- who to invite to review a person – and how to brief them;
- how to prepare for the feedback session using the report;
- how to structure and manage the session, obtain buy-in and action planning.

Part of this is about positioning the 360 questionnaire.

One of the most common mistakes we see in 360 degree feedback implementation is that although the objective of a 360 degree process is to provide individuals with constructive and actionable feedback to help them develop themselves and improve their performance, if the approach is positioned as “*filling in a questionnaire*”, the whole initiative descends into a tick-box, compliance-driven exercise. It fundamentally diminishes the importance of the process - and it changes the context of your project into something that can be dismissed as a low-priority.

So, be careful about the terminology that you use when you describe your 360 degree process. Never ask people to go and fill in a questionnaire. Ask for people’s contribution: “*We’d like you to go online to a website to provide constructive, structured feedback*”.

Stay output-focussed, not input-focused, and keep the bigger picture in mind about what you’re trying to achieve. Make sure everything you do – and how you describe the process – is aligned with that overall objective.

Succession planning – where to start?

Succession Planning is essentially the process by which you identify people to fill key positions.

We are being asked, increasingly, by customers to help them look at how they identify, manage and promote key talent within their organisation. It's an essential part of any business' Talent Management to ensure that you have the right people in the right place at the right time.

As a starting point, you may want to look at what succession planning can give your business.

Consider the questions below in relation to your organisation.

- Do you know who are your High Potential individuals?
- Where are they in the organisation and how are they being managed?
- Which of your High Potential individuals have an increasing risk of leaving you?
- Which of your Succession Plans – if you have any - are at greatest risk of failing to deliver?
- On which high performers should the organisation be focusing its retention efforts?
- Who, for example, speaks Spanish, wishes to move internationally, has high level commercial skills and experience in the past of working with the community?
- Can you provide succession plans for specific managers or critical posts, or for high-risk individuals that are likely to leave or retire in the next 12-24 months?
- Do you have a list of those who are immediately ready to take on new challenges in specific business areas or roles?
- Are you able to look at potential new team members, matched to deliver a specific programme such as a merger?

As you answered these questions, think about how you accessed this information? Were you able to answer them? Most businesses cannot answer these questions easily – although think of the value this could add to the business?

In small or medium sized companies – and even in some large organisations - it is not practical to line up a successor for each and every position. So most organisations need to determine which positions are 'critical'.

#1 – Determine the critical positions

For most organisations, having a successor identified and developed for each and every role would be beyond their reach, and not a productive use of HR resources. It is probably the role of all managers to be readying their second-in-command, but, as HR, it is important to focus your efforts on talent planning for those roles which are most critical to the company's immediate performance and future success.

But how do you identify these roles? We suggest looking at seven areas.

Review and align with business strategy

This should be your first port of call. Gather together any strategy documents, reports and presentations. What are the key elements for the delivery of the strategy in the next 2-5 years? Do any departments, teams or roles come to the fore when you consider what the company is prioritising in the near future? This may identify skills or role gaps which the organisation needs to fill and then subsequently create succession plans for, but looking at the strategic priorities is a good way to identify critical positions, skills and functions. You will need buy-in from the business and its managers, so being able to demonstrate relevance to the organisation's strategy can prevent your work here being seen as a 'pet HR' project.

Survey the market

What are the market conditions currently like? Are there any professions, skills or specialisms which are in short supply at the moment? Which positions are you currently finding it hard to fill due to a lack of available external talent? Which positions are difficult to fill generally – either externally or internally? Examining the current supply of talent to your industry – and even from outside it – is a useful way of highlighting those roles which create a recruitment nightmare if they became vacant.

Take the pulse of Learning & Development

What training and development gaps are more frequently addressed than others? Are these critical or base skills? If they are critical skills, where do they feature in an organisation and does that imply a critical role? See if you can find a Consolidated Development Goals Analytic that shows the most commonly developed areas (it should also show you where in the organisation these gaps reside).

Examine your organisational chart and structure

They're not always up-to-date, and they may not always make sense, but if you have a workable organisation chart you can take a closer look at it. Are there posts at which multiple reporting lines converge? What dependencies are there on the roles shown? Are there lots of dotted lines which might indicate subject-matter expertise, professional leadership or critical project management? Cover a role up and ask yourself what the impact on performance and strategy delivery would be if this role was left vacant for more than a couple of weeks. When considering this impact, try to identify different levels of 'criticality' as it will help you agree terminology and gain buy-in from the organisation.

Look beyond your leaders

It's not all about reporting lines. The nature of the roles which will be most critical will be largely informed by the strategy, but ask yourself broader questions such as:

"Where are the important touch points within the business for our customers?"

"Who is responsible for managing and representing our brand to the market?"

"Who is crucial to our product development activities?"

"Who within our corporate functions are the key enablers of performance, helping the business to deliver against the strategy?"

Don't overlook roles in CSM, customer-facing environments, sales, marketing, R&D and central services.

It's good to talk!

Consulting with the departments or business units in your organisation is likely to be an equally accurate and informative source of intelligence. Ask business heads who they see as being essential to performance. Get them to identify key roles and flight risk profiles.

Skill combinations. a clue?

Once you believe you have identified critical roles, take a look at the skills typically deployed in those skills and look for common combinations across these critical roles. Then see if you can find other roles or even people that have the same combination. Do any of their roles also belong on the Critical list? Use skill databases and search tools to find these hidden gems.

#2 – Identify the successors

Once these issues have been agreed and the critical roles identified, the next logical step is to develop the means by which you identify 'successors'. This might involve:

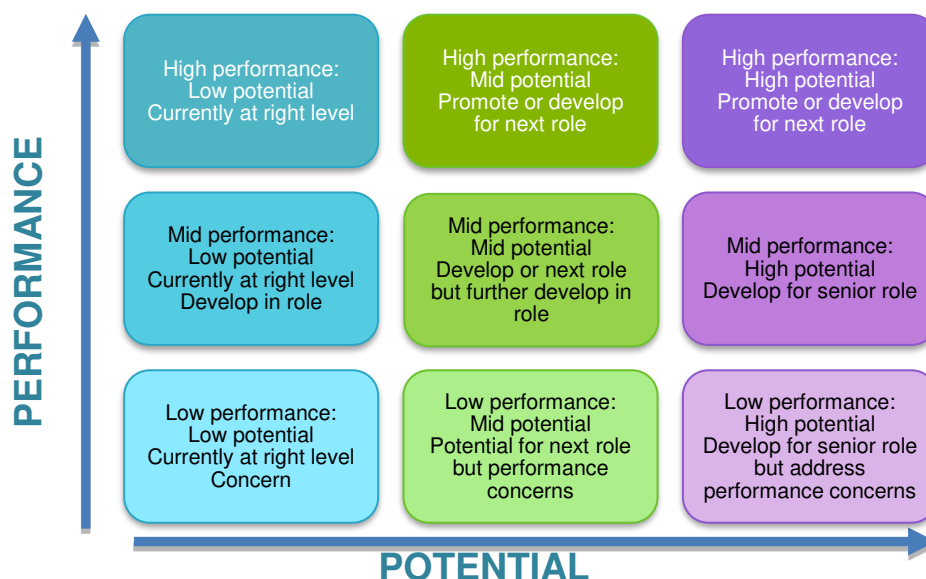
- **Analysing the target roles** to determine the requisite knowledge, skills, behaviours, experience and competencies necessary for success in the role.
- **Determining the early markers of potential for success** in these roles – what could individuals reasonably show at earlier stages within their career that would indicate potential for the target position? Increasingly, we are seeing a focus on 'learning agility' (see our blog on this subject) as being a characteristic that high potentials tend to possess.
- Developing an assessment process aimed at **determining who currently demonstrates the 'potential criteria'**.
- **People who see themselves in the role** – or where their manager believes that a future role is achievable and right for the individual.
- After identifying these people (and those that did not meet the criteria have been carefully managed), the **'successors' are often allocated to a talent pool**.

#3 – Create the talent pool – and track performance and development

Entry into a talent pool is often accompanied by a structured development process. The progress of these individuals then needs to be tracked – as we said above, it becomes clear that an effective HR metrics system needs to be in place in order to manage, administer and evaluate the effectiveness of succession planning activities.

#4 – Target when a position is available

If we look at the Performance/Potential grid below, many organisations use a variation of the 9-Box Grid for tracking talent and making decisions about who to promote when a target position becomes available. A common approach is to have 'Talent Review Boards', where managers and key stakeholders get together to review the performance of their talent pools and plot individuals on the grid with regards to their current performance, level of potential and readiness for promotion. The Figure below shows an example of how the 9-Box Grid might be used in succession planning. The objective here is to determine who, within the talent pool, has demonstrated that they have developed in the specified areas and who shows the closest match to the requirements of the role.



Employee engagement – where to start?

'The fundamental element required for an organisation to thrive and grow is having employees who are committed, motivated and engaged'.

That was the conclusion of the UK government's review on employee engagement. This and other research studies champion the transformational possibilities of engagement and seduce us with the promise of increased productivity, improved financial performance, lower attrition and absenteeism and higher levels of customer satisfaction and innovation.

If you make an effort to measure and address engagement and get no reward for it, that's bad enough but there's a cruel irony here that creates a far bigger problem. The 'curse' of employee engagement is that the process of trying to achieve something positive and beneficial for your employees can actually end up disengaging them. In other words, you can create exactly the opposite of what you intended.

This is because organisations ask questions in their engagement surveys about how employees feel about their work. Answering these questions brings 'problem areas' to the front of people's minds. If no action is then taken to address these issues, employees are left feeling worse than they did before, as you've falsely raised their expectations with an unspoken promise that you'll do something as a result.

#1 – Decide how you want to run your engagement survey

You may choose to run a survey once a year, and within a specific month. Or, have an on-going, open survey which runs throughout the year into which you can dip and take a view on how engagement is within the business. This plays very much to the 'continual listening' to employees approach that many businesses are looking at.

#2 – Ask the right questions in your survey

At Head Light, we've carried out a systematic review of published sources, and engagement offerings, to uncover the factors that really influence engagement. We've identified 12 universal areas that fundamentally effect how people feel about their work and their employer. These are the key areas that you need to ask about in your engagement survey: wellbeing; motivation; reward and recognition; involvement; autonomy; teamwork and collaboration; purpose and meaning; relationships; trust; career/personal development; communication and performance management. Ask: To what extent do you experience this at work? And: How important is that to the way you feel? The correlation between those two questions will pinpoint where your priorities should lie.

#3 – Decide that you will take practical action at all levels

The challenge with engagement actions is to make them stick. That means people have to commit to the process. By prioritising a small number of personalised, 'easy-to-implement' actions in critical areas at the level of the senior team, the line manager and the individual contributor, you can create a more conducive work environment and improve any areas of disengagement. Even small changes can make a noticeable difference.

#4 – Devolve the responsibility for engagement to everyone in the company

Engagement should be driven by leaders and managers, with HR providing support, but ultimately it's everyone's responsibility. The way you feel about your work is largely down to you. Line managers have an influence but employees need to recognise that they choose their own attitude and they can implement their own 'engagement actions'. Engagement may be a concept that builds on commitment, motivation, job satisfaction and the psychological contract. One thing's for sure though: it can pay dividends. Ultimately, the key to breaking the curse of engagement is to ask the right questions and to prioritise specific, practical, manageable actions that senior executives, line managers and individuals can take to drive engagement levels higher.



The questions to ask of your Talent Management partner

When you're ready to look for a Talent Management software partner, you'll find the market awash with online performance management systems, 360 review questionnaires and employee engagement surveys.

But very few offer an integrated approach.

Even fewer offer you a managed service which sets up the system using your corporate colours and logo, upload employee data, sets the processes up with your timings and offers the helpdesk support you may need.

And only Head Light gives you the opportunity to do all this and define your own system and what it includes, letting you add functionality as you need it.

But we know you'll want to review the market and so have included some of the most basic questions you really need to be asking potential partners.

We're looking to introduce Talent Management Software but how can we make sure that as we progress, the software can continue to support us?

Typically organisations start their Talent Management journey by focussing on, and implementing, perhaps in one area such as 360 degree feedback or performance management. Then, as the value is witnessed by the business and the information is used, move on to incorporate a further area such as succession planning or employee engagement.

Why be forced to buy a full suite of all singing all dancing functionality that you won't simply be using. Perhaps you only want to start off with the essentials of Talent Management and grow over time.

Is the software supplier or partner's offer commercially flexible enough to enable you to do this, or do you have to buy it all and let half of it sit on the shelf – or worse, require you to implement more than you need just to get the part you really want working? Challenge the sales folk on this. The key is to look at the broader offering of the supplier and not to sign up with a single 'specialist' which then cannot support you as your needs change. It's about making sustainable change.

The Head Light Talent Cloud® for SMEs system offers 3 core plans with functionality you can add to and plans are modular and customisable with means it can grow as your organisation does and you don't need to buy or implement it all at once when you or your managers and employees just aren't ready for it.

We've fallen foul before to limited availability or uptime of software. What should I be looking for?

To make talent management embedded within your organisation, you need to have your Talent Management software available when it's needed by your people. Head Light's Talent® system is typically available 99.999% of the time in a year. Check how other suppliers compare and check their SLA to see if they are prepared to give credits or refunds if things aren't up to scratch.

How much will it cost?

All suppliers will need to talk through with you their own specific pricing models. At Head Light, we like to be transparent and put you firmly in control of your budget. Our Talent Cloud® for SMEs Calculator lets you see instantly, what is included as part of each of three standard Packages or Plans, and then you can add further functionality as you wish and see the price per person per month. It means you can tweak your software package to meet your budget – and be confident that there are no hidden costs. Beware of the huge upfront fees some vendors try to charge – is this because they need you to fund their development to meet your needs, or is it because if you leave after a year due to poor service, then



they aren't out of pocket on a short contract!?

How often will the software be updated and what do I need to budget for this?

With some suppliers, you will definitely need to budget for on-going costs of upgrades.

Alternatively choose to work with a supplier which provides upgrades as part of the fee. At Head Light, we provide updates and upgrades usually two or three times a year – at no additional fee; your system will just reflect the enhancements and we'll make sure you know about these.

Is there a guarantee with Talent Management software?

You may be asked this internally by your own team, so ask it of the supplier.

Head Light guarantees its service availability and, if you adopt the Talent Performance module and providing that you work with us to calculate the expected ROI, we guarantee a return on your investment.

To what extent are we able to self-sufficient in the day-to-day usage and customisation of the software – or pass this on to someone else to do for us?

This will be important to you – so ask it of your supplier. For us at Head Light, depending on the Plan or Package purchased, we'll take the administrative hassle from you and give you a site to reflect your business. Or, you can choose to do this for yourself and we'll train you. We have clients who either choose to be self-sufficient, or choose to outsource it all to us. You decide – and make sure your Partner can adapt to fit with you and your process.

And when we do have problems, how are we supported?

At the outset you should expect implementation support and training so that you are able to meet the immediate needs of your people. And that is what we, at Head Light, do for all our clients. It's from our UK-based support team and you'll have access to web-based sessions as well as our Helpdesk.

Security is a real concern for us. What safeguards do you have?

In addition to our data centre being secure, we also encrypt all data and doubly encrypt passwords. Backups are also encrypted and remain on site in Europe in a secure facility and mirrored to a standby facility. Our Helpdesk Staff are security vetted, our data handling procedures and policies Government audited and our software both penetration tested and cyber-vulnerability assessed and validated. Your data could well be more secure in our hands than in your own IT Department!

And what about GDPR?

GDPR is one of the most important pieces of data privacy legislation in recent years and without a doubt has significant impacts on HR teams in terms of employee contracts, and how employee data is used.

It is critical that you check on your chosen supplier's ability to meet the conditions of the GDPR and provide the evidence you may need should you be challenged because of the significant possible fines that would be levied at your business.

Head Light has this covered. We can demonstrate how our Talent Cloud® system can help you meet the terms of GDPR, from data storage to employee data management.

How can I influence product development?

You'll have great ideas for how your own use of talent management software can develop in your organisation – and many of these may also be beneficial for other organisations. You may be able to customise or adapt the system yourself if you have chosen a flexible system but there will always be other ideas you have.

At Head Light we hold client consultation periods once a year during which we ask for comment and feedback on our proposals which we have developed from the feedback and suggestions come to us via our support desk and from our conversations with our User Group which are held twice a year and are free to attend.

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Next steps

Why not get in touch to talk about how you can get started with Talent Management in your business.

About Head Light

Head Light is an award-winning talent management software and consulting firm that works with clients to define and implement impactful talent management strategies.

Talent Cloud® is our cloud-based portfolio of integrated talent management software tools designed for those who expect the maximum return from talent management processes. Our training and consulting services uniquely complement our breakthrough software that engages employees, managers and senior leaders in the selection, development and progression of people in their businesses.

Companies in the FTSE 350, public sector, large and small, from retailers to high tech innovators have all benefitted from our tools, techniques and expertise. Founded in 2004, we are headquartered in the UK.

Head Light has attained the ISO27001 standard for Information Security.
Certificate No 217613.





How do I...

transition to Continuous Performance Management

How do I...

introduce robust Succession Planning

How do I...

spot High Potentials and Future Leaders

How do I...

drive Engagement through Career Conversations and Development

How do I...

embed new values and improve culture

How do I...

conduct Skills Assessments and a Gap Analysis

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