

Chapter 15

Building Great Talent and Effective Teams

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ABSTRACT

A successful IT organization demands having the right talent that works effectively and efficiently together. IT managers must focus on identifying the right people and then continuously build and develop the respective talent, while ensuring the cohesiveness of the team dynamics. The valuable vignettes illustrate the “know and grow” focus of this important chapter.

GREAT CIOS NEED GREAT TEAMS

The era of the ‘hero CEO’ has now passed, and so should the era of the ‘hero CIO’. Great leaders lead great teams. They don’t do it on their own. They work with their team, their peer colleagues, and the rest of the executives and CEO to set the vision and identify what it takes to get there. They are dependent on their team members for follow through and dependent on their broader team to exercise leadership that is consistent with the desired culture and values of their organization.

Two areas enable CIOs to build the ‘bench strength’ that they need. The first is spending time and energy on building their talent; on getting the

right people and developing them well. The second is a genuine focus on improving how those people work together – on taking into account and building real teams, not just a group of direct reports.

This chapter focuses on these two areas. They are interrelated in that great teams are enabled by effective management of talent, as well as focusing on team dynamics and mutual accountabilities.

So what is Talent Management? Why does it matter? How does it help build great teams?

EFFECTIVE TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT IS NOW A ‘MUST DO’

Conscientious talent management and succession planning is now a mainstream expectation for all

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executives. Focusing on talent management is no longer something to do when things slow down, but a ‘must do’ so that you can deal effectively with growth, with changing or shifting demands, be they to contain costs, develop innovative ways to delight customers or integrate a newly acquired business.

But too many executives—and organizations generally—continue to underestimate the risk they place themselves and their organizations in by thinking of talent management, succession planning, and team dynamics as something to focus on next week, next month or next year.

WHAT IF YOU WANT TO TAKE ON A LINE OF BUSINESS ROLE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

In conversation with a CIO recently (let’s call her Debra) we were discussing her future career options. Debra had terrific experience as an IT professional and manager, including three years working for a respected consulting firm (largely in the IT area), and was now concluding her third year as CIO. While her performance was well regarded in the company, we agreed that if she really wanted to be considered as a potential CEO she needed to have relevant and recent experience managing a line of business and delivering on a P/L. She became very interested in the option of taking on the position of General Manager of one of the company’s business lines, a position which was becoming available due to an impending retirement.

My immediate question to Debra was what was the strength of her IT Leadership team? How many potential internal candidates would there be for her CIO position? The question was really about the potential risk she was proposing to her CEO in departing her current position. To what extent could she honestly indicate that the risk was low because she had a very good team

with one or more individuals whom the CEO and his executive peers would be comfortable about seeing ‘step up’ into the CIO position?

Debra blanched somewhat indicating that she was always going to get around to some serious focus on the whole matter of succession planning, but there were always more urgent priorities. While she had a good team, perhaps she hadn’t put the time and effort into careful talent development and management. Two on the team could potentially ‘step up’, but not just yet. And then there was the problem of the next layer down – the pipeline into the IT Leadership team, which was a bit thin.

The immediate outcome was that Debra did not indicate an interest in the forthcoming business division GM role to her CEO. Instead she indicated that she would be keen to take on such a role in about two years, when her team had the ‘bench strength’ it needed so that several of her team could be in the candidate pool for a search for a new CIO if she transferred to another position in the company.

GOOD TALENT AND TEAM MANAGEMENT MAXIMIZES ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND MINIMIZES RISK

Debra’s experience is not uncommon. If you are a well regarded executive, your CEO and peers want to know that you have managed the company’s risk if you want an internal transfer, or if you are unfortunate enough to be in an accident, suffer serious illness or just decide it’s time for a ‘seachange’. The best compliment any executive can receive is that they have built a sustainable team that is not dependent for its success on one person – you as the leader.

Great talent will go to where it is appreciated, valued, and encouraged to thrive. If you want that talent to be part of your team—and remain part of

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