

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE PIPELINE OF QUALIFIED LEADERS

Numerous studies have concluded that one of the scarcest corporate resources is leadership talent

by Kent Janasen, Global CEO, LPI

Introduction

Numerous studies have concluded that one of the scarcest corporate resources is leadership talent. A common conclusion is that the search for the best and the brightest will be a constant, costly battle with no final victory.

However, there need not be a war for talent. Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter and Jim Noel, authors of “The Leadership Pipeline”, suggest that if companies tap into the potential that already exists and commit to grow their own leaders and support them in making their leadership transitions, there is more than enough talent to go around.

The key does not lie “out there” based on the assumption

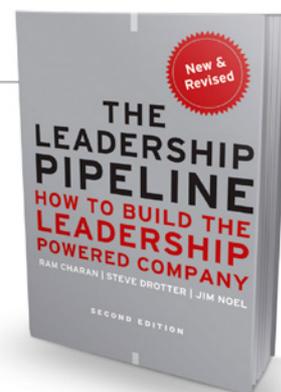
that the talent is best assured by headhunting from other companies. On the contrary, Ram, Stephen and Jim suggest that the key lies within. Every organization has the choice of committing to the talent that is already there, going about their development in a structured and consistent way. The way to unlock this trapped potential is by assembling your organization’s leadership pipeline in the right way.

If the pipeline is clear and consistent, every organization has the potential to become a leadership talent factory. However, it requires that the leadership pipeline is assembled in a structured and committed manner and it requires that leadership development is organized around the job that has to be done at each leadership level.

The Leadership Pipeline Book

With Stephen Drotter, the author of The Leadership Pipeline book, as Chairman, Leadership Pipeline Institute is the official research institute and the leading global provider of solutions based on the book, which have sold more than 250,000 copies around the world.

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So how do you recognize that your organization's leadership pipeline needs an examination?

The typical signs of leadership pipeline issues are:

- Many leaders consider leadership to be something “on top” of their job rather than an integral part of their job
- The annual performance appraisal of leaders is primarily based on their functional capabilities/deliverables rather than their leadership achievements
- Leaders with leaders reporting to them primarily focus on developing their direct reports' functional capabilities rather than their leadership capabilities

Leadership Pipeline characteristics





Focus on the person

- Personality
- Charisma
- Intelligence
- Strategic mindset
- Energising
- ...and more

Focus on the job

- Work values
- Time application
- Skills
- Levels of leadership
- Job to get done
- ...and more

The Leadership Pipeline approach

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Characteristics of the Leadership Pipeline concept

One traditional approach towards building a leadership pipeline focuses on the leader as a person. This approach has strong merits and a long tradition. It involves search and selection on the basis of personality, charisma, intelligence, strategic mindset, and on other personal characteristics of a leader. In other words, it looks only at what kind of person is needed to do the job. Or, it presupposes that only certain kinds of people have the

abilities to be leaders. This focus is what has led to the so-called “war for talent”.

The Leadership Pipeline approach involves a shift of focus from the person to the job. It asks not “who are you”. It asks “what is the job that needs to be done”. It looks at what work actually needs to be done at each leadership level.

Leaders are not created at business schools and leadership programs, but rather through the work experiences and developments they go through

The kind of work you do at one level also determines what you learn at that level. As such, your work and your learning is one. This is recognizing the fact that leaders are through their work experience and development.

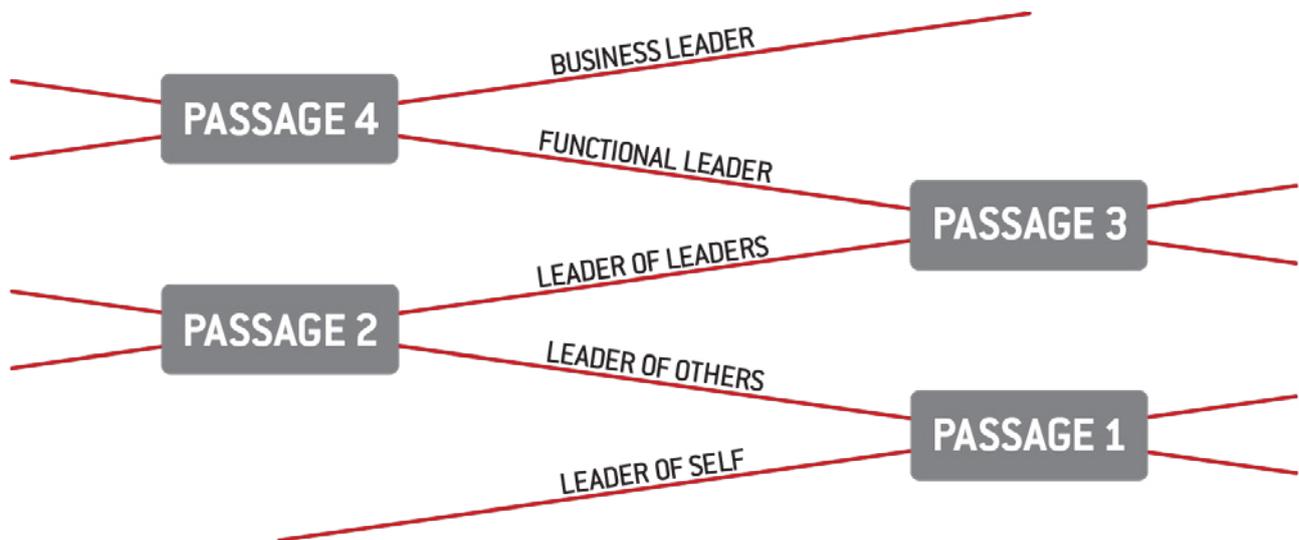
It is important to recognize that there are different leadership levels. Leadership is not just leadership. Every leadership level is a completely new job. Each level represents a significant change in what has to be achieved.

In general, leaders will benefit from remaining at their level until they master the learning available there. This underlines the importance for organizations to have a structured approach for advancing through the leadership levels. Too many leaders with good talent have failed at higher levels because of too hasty

advancement. They simply did not get sufficient experience at one level before moving on to the next. Skipping a level completely can also create a significant challenge for the leader both in the short and long term.

But would it not be an advantage if a leader also has charisma and is energizing by nature? Indeed it would, but even a less charismatic leader, leading at the right level, is better than a charismatic one leading at the wrong level; for the direct reports, for the Leader of Leader and for the organization as a whole.

The main point is that a leader may have specific qualities, such as charisma, or not; but as long as the leader does what she/she is supposed to do, he/she can still be a successful leader and this is true for every level.





The transition

Moving into a new leadership level requires a significant change in work values, time application and skills. This change is called “leadership transition”.

It is critical that a leader acknowledges every such transition as a new job or a new reality.

The renewal process means letting go of old things and starting to do new things. It also means identifying what to continue doing.

Work values

Every level in the leadership pipeline is associated with a range of subjects or assignments that a leader needs to value while working at that level. When one values something it increases the probability that time will be spent on it and, as a result, one will be successful with it.

A leader can hardly get by if he/she does not value what he/she is doing. Since work values guide what one tends to spend time on, it is likely that time will be spent on the wrong things if the leader does not appreciate the job or does not consider it important as it is. Without truly appreciating and understanding the work of a leader, it becomes a challenge to function optimally in that role.

There are different levels within the leadership pipeline with each level being unique and it is important to

be aware that moving on to a new level, any new level, involves time for adjustment. To facilitate this adjustment you should be conscious of what your transition involves. What does the transition call for in terms of shifting your work values? What needs to be developed? Or continued? What needs to be let go of?

If you continue to value something that belongs at a lower level more than the level you are at, you will have a tendency to lead at too low a level. Thus, it will be difficult for you to let go of that reality and move forward in the pipeline.

Time application

The concept of time application relates to how leaders should spend their time on an everyday basis.

One role of a leader is to truly understand and appreciate the importance of making time to actually perform the leadership role; this involves identifying what to stop doing, start doing and continue doing after every transition.

The leaders will need to prepare themselves for letting go of earlier sources of success, especially if they had very good Individual Contributor skills, and prepare to gain success in new ways. The sales leader may have to cut significantly down on spending time on going to the sales meetings that the leader used to enjoy so

much and was good at. Instead, the sales leader needs to look forward to his/her good customers becoming someone else's good customers or coaching his/her direct reports to have the same level of success that he/she used to have.

Skills

Every transition involves developing new skills pertaining to the nature of the level of leadership. An example of this could be that at the level of Individual Contributor one did the work oneself, but at the level of a leader of others one needs to delegate and coach others on how to do their work.

Another example could be that at the level of individual contributor one received an annual performance review; but at the level of leading others, they also have to give annual performance reviews. Doing something oneself and supporting others in doing their work are two entirely different things. There are completely new skills at every level that you need to master in order to be successful. It is important to emphasize that mere skills training will not help someone fulfil their role unless these skills are paired with the right work values and the appropriate time application.

Interdependence of the concepts

It is important to recognize that the concepts of work values, time application and skills are somewhat interdependent. A leader cannot just adjust one and not

the others and still master his/her transition.

For instance, the work values guide how time is spent because one will tend to do the things that are most interesting first. The leaders' skill level will also guide how they spend their time. People like doing what they are good at and what they previously reaped recognition for. So one of the keys in successful transitions lies in the dedication to become good at what is required of the new leadership level. This will shift the impact of the leaders' work values and they will start to appreciate what needs to be done and find it easier to spend time on these activities.

Leadership transitions not mastered

When the transitions are not mastered the typical risk is that the leader starts leading below the appropriate level: competing with direct reports, not delegating, getting caught up in the details. The leader risks taking assignments out of the hands of direct reports or being too detailed in his/her follow up instead of leading direct reports to success.

If the leaders lead below their level, who is then supposed to do their work? This will be left for the leader above to do then. They will then be dragging their leader down to do their job. And so on. This is an extremely important aspect of the leadership pipeline concept. If one leader falls out of his/her level, it means that everyone will be pulled out of their level

Your work values are what you believe is important and so become the focus of your efforts



Time application is how you spend your time available



Skills are the ability to utilize the appropriate means at the right time and in the right place



How do you recognize that a Leader of Others not yet masters the Leader of Others level?

- Micromanages direct reports instead of delegating responsibility and authority
- Competes with own direct reports about knowing best
- Avoids tough conversations with direct reports on lack of performance
- Takes direct ownership of direct reports' work rather than coaching direct reports on doing it themselves
- Feels disturbed by questions from direct reports instead of viewing these questions as a possibility to coach and develop them.

How do you recognize that a Leader of Leaders not yet masters the Leader of Leaders level?

- Values completing tasks higher than the leadership role
- Considers leadership as something “on top” of the job rather than the actual job
- Fails to develop direct reports into effective leaders
- Holds direct reports responsible only for technical proficiency rather than also their leadership capabilities
- Follows up directly on Individual Contributors

instead of following up through the Leader of Others

How do you recognize that a Functional Leader not yet masters the Functional Leader level?

- Focuses only on own function instead of being truly interested in peer functions
- Prefers spending time with people from own function rather than with peer Functional Leaders and the Business Leader
- Fails to contribute actively to the business strategy in general
- Considers only well-known areas of the function important
- Takes care of today (short-term results) without preparing for tomorrow (long-term results)

How do you recognize that a Business Leader not yet masters the Business Leader level?

- Faces difficulties in selecting highly capable direct reports and making them function as a team
- Prefers spending time with people from own functional background rather than with people from other functions
- Does not spend much time on internal and external communication
- Takes care of today (short-term results) without preparing for tomorrow (long-term results)
- Does not spend time on own development (participates in networks, boards, etc.)



Kent Jonasen is Global CEO and co-founder of LPI and is mainly focused on managing large international clients and building the international business.

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