

Building Organizational Capability through Naturally Effective Talent Development

By Gayla Hodges

Internal or external events which require quick responses by an organization's leadership can compromise the ability of a company to achieve strategic goals and retain competitiveness in their primary markets. Making speedy decisions in response to changing conditions that compromise organizational capability are often the result of failure to

- plan for future market changes,
- develop talent to meet new challenges, and
- recognize and support key talent appropriately.



The IBM Global Human Capital Study of 2008 revealed that more than 50 percent of executives interviewed indicated “inability to rapidly develop skills to address current/future business needs” and almost 40 percent indicated “employee skills not aligned with current organizational priorities” as the primary workforce-related issues facing their organizations. These executives and their companies are clearly concerned about their ability to meet predictable market changes and talent needs. Naturally effective talent development could give these companies the flexibility and depth they need to succeed.

As recent events have amply demonstrated, there are also unpredictable and unforeseen pressures that force organizations to make rapid changes in order to survive. These changes might mean consolidating staff or products and services offered. They might require a change of direction to meet unpredictable changes in market demand, or they might require other changes due to mergers and acquisitions. In most urgent sweeping responses to unexpected internal or external events, mistakes are inevitably made. A comprehensive talent development initiative that is part of the strategic plan and grounded in understanding and building upon the natural effectiveness™ of the workforce can effectively prevent rushed decisions about how the company should recalibrate in order to succeed in the future.

Natural Effectiveness™ is an approach to personal success that begins with the inherent strengths of the individual, combines those strengths with the environment, pace and level of autonomy within which individuals are most efficient and comfortable, and predicts the context in which individuals are most likely to grow, learn and produce work that contributes to the strategic goals of the employing organization. When Natural Effectiveness™ is the basis of talent development programs the company knows where

the needed talent is located within the organization and which individuals can be rapidly redeployed in response to changing needs.

According to surveys conducted by the Gallup organization over the past ten years, people who have the opportunity to focus on their strengths every day are six times as likely to be engaged in their jobs and more than three times as likely to report having an excellent quality of life in general. The research also shows that having a manager who primarily focuses on your strengths increases the chances of you being actively engaged to 99 percent. Imagine what you could accomplish in your organization with 99 percent of the workforce actively engaged! Building naturally effective performance development plans is a quantum leap in this direction.

The starting point of building an employee development plan is the dialog between a leader and the employee around what should be included in the plan. Without this dialogue, the critics of employee development plans are correct in finding the plans often irrelevant to the real requirements and opportunities for the individual in daily work within the organization.

The dialogue should begin with an assessment of the employee's strengths. This can be done through observation, the use of assessment tools, feedback from others and by simply talking about what energizes the employee about their job. One of my clients asks employees this question: "When you leave work and feel like you've had a great day, what have you been doing?" The answer to that question reveals a lot about that employee's strengths. Whatever method is used to identify strengths, gaining agreement on what those strengths are and how they can be used to meet organizational goals should be the focus of all employee development plans.

The dialogue should also include an opportunity for the employee to openly share personal goals for growth and thoughts about the ways in which s/he would most like to contribute to the future and success of the organization. The conversation should attempt to discern whether the employee is properly assigned within the organization in a role that allows the employee to contribute optimally or if the individual's skills and strengths would be more effectively utilized in another role.

Clarifying and understanding the employee's key motivators is another essential element of the dialog. Only some people are truly motivated by money alone. Most studies have demonstrated, rather, that more people are motivated by recognition and a sense of belonging. Being valued is a critical motivator for most people. Unfortunately, it is the motivator most companies are not able to respond to effectively. Simply acknowledging a person's contribution to the organization on a regular basis provides enormous payback in productivity.

The next point in building an employee development plan is recognizing that the plan should focus on the employee's *strengths*. Traditionally, we have focused on people's weaknesses and tried to bolster those weaknesses through development. But research shows that we get much more bang for the buck by focusing on people's strengths. So, if a person has strong organizing skills, developing their planning skills by assigning projects to manage might be a good development opportunity. If a person has strong people skills, giving him/her opportunities to facilitate groups might be a way to leverage those strengths and expand the skills.

The third point in building an employee development plan is including the employee in building the plan. This is critical. All too often, however, employees are told they are being placed in development programs that will achieve stated goals in specific ways. These strategies might not be aligned with the way the employee learns most effectively. The strategies might not be of any real interest to the employee. When this happens, the effort is wasted.

Studies and human experience have repeatedly demonstrated that “people support what they help to create.” We simply perform better when we are working for goals (and rewards) that we understand and that are meaningful to us. Creating goals that help employees to use and develop their natural strengths increases their level of engagement. We could then speak of *naturally effective goals*.

Finally, building an employee development plan should balance *developing a talented individual* with *developing the talent needed to move into the future with confidence*. The dialogue between leader and employee should always keep in view the fact that the employee is being developed by the organization because s/he is valued and an important part of the organizational community. The dialogue should also keep in view the fact that the employee is being developed by the organization to enable the individual to become a more important element in the success of the company. Ensuring a fit between individual goals and corporate needs will justify the investment in the employee and justify the employee’s investment in the goals of the development plan.

Naturally effective talent development honors both the needs of the individual and the needs of the organization. It recognizes a mutual value and respect between company and individual and tacitly states a commitment to move toward the future together. Above all, naturally effective talent development brings the very best in the employee to bear on the greatest needs of the organization by recognizing that people are different yet in spite of differences have equally valid and valuable contributions to make to the present and future success of the company.

About Gayla Hodges



Gayla Hodges is the President and Principal Consultant of Change Agents, Inc., a company that uses their powerful Natural Effectiveness™ Coaching and Teaming process to help corporate team leaders achieve personal, team and corporate goals. She has extensive experience in instituting corporate transformational change. She coaches executives and managers on leading corporate change, facilitating the development and implementation of organizational effectiveness strategies and leadership skills. Change Agents, Inc. is certified by the Women’s Business Enterprise National Council as a woman-owned business. She is Vice-Chair of WBENC-Arizona. For more information, visit www.changeagentsinc.com or call 623-362-3876.