



Learning Agility: Another Lens

2015 Fall Update

In This Issue:

- Depth versus Breadth
- It isn't Just about Your People
- The Right People in the Right Role

Depth (High Professionals) versus Breadth (High Potentials)

In our last [Newsletter](#) we wrote about the subject of Learning Agility and what this behavioral characteristic means for both an individual and the organization. While Learning Agility is a critical factor in evaluating the potential leadership abilities of employees, we have found that businesses heavily focus their attention on their “high potentials” as the source of talent to address short and long term key business objectives. This is only half of the talent potential picture...

To effectively understand the “potential” of your organization’s talent it is essential to look at people from 2 succinct perspectives, **those that bring:**

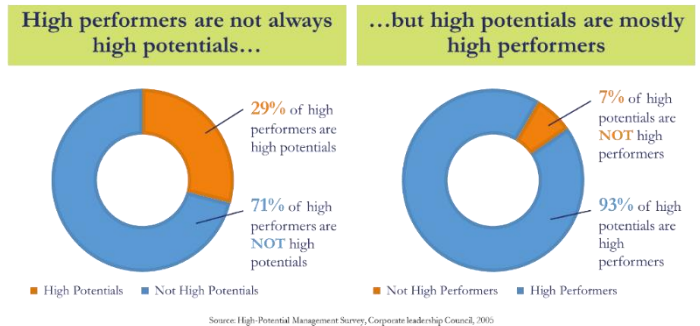
1. **DEPTH** – those typically referred to as **High Professionals**
2. **BREADTH** – those typically referred to as **High Potentials**

Human nature is such that it is typical for managers to want their employee’s to be evaluated [seen as] as High Potential; it is a reflection on their prowess in developing talent! All too often we have heard during succession planning conversations “I want all my people in the upper left (or right) box” of our 9-cell. May sound great in theory, but in reality this is not the true honest picture of the organizations talent. The reality is that for the organization and you as a manager, you need both. And you will find [and need] more of those with **Depth** than those with **Breadth**; however the optimal balance will be unique for each business.

Regrettably we encounter situations where these titles are used interchangeably and it is also not uncommon to hear how organizations consider the identification of **High**

Performers as the sole key criteria for identifying future potential. It should never be forgotten that performance is only a future predictor of success if nothing changes going forward!

HIGH PERFORMER ERGO HIGH POTENTIAL, but according to the High-Potential Management Survey by the Corporate Leadership Council, 2005, **only 29% of High Performers are High Potential**. Do not fall into the trap of believing that because someone is a high performer means they bring more breadth than depth – this is not necessarily the case.



ARE THEY HIGH-PROFESSIONAL OR HIGH-POTENTIAL THAT IS THE QUESTION?

In the talent management world there seems to be multiple and confusing definitions of “potential”. Is it:

- Performance
- Intelligence
- Learning Agility
- Adaptability
- Promotability
- Some or all of the above?

There continues to be much debate on this topic, this search for that “something” that defines the leadership and potential quotient.

When looking at talent it is critical to focus on 2 perspectives of **Depth** and **Breadth** – traditionally known as High Potentials and High Professionals. In our experience this often causes all sorts of angst as everyone wants their employees to be seen as “high potential”. The reality is that in any given population only a small number of employees truly possess what it takes to lead at the top and this will be true to your organization too.



Those with a **MASTERY ORIENTATION** are superior performers who are in similar jobs/functions year after year

Those with high **LEARNING AGILITY** are those who perform well in **first time, challenging** situations – often in very different jobs

So, instead of classifying employees as either a high potential or a high professional, we think that is much more effective to look at what each offers up to the business.

BOTH:

- **ADD IMMENSE VALUE**
- **ARE NEEDED**
- **NEED TO BE IDENTIFIED APPROPRIATELY**

And despite where the placement is on your organizations succession planning map, both are critical to your business, but in different and important ways.

The typical scenario isn’t new to any of you – an organization takes it highest performing sales representative and promotes him/her to a Sales Manager. Sales drop, performance drops, retention drops and the organization blames the Sales Manager instead of asking the basic question – did he/she have the potential/desire to take on a management role.

The error was in the assumption that the high performing sales representative could make that transition. If the organization had invested time to better understand the individual’s future potential, i.e. **Depth** vs. **Breadth**, then they would have been in a much stronger position to understand the risks involved in making the promotion [and mitigating for them].

There are many similarities between high professionals (**Depth**) and high potentials (**Breadth**).

BOTH:

- **ARE ENGAGED AND PASSIONATE ABOUT THEIR WORK**
- **WANT TO ADVANCE THEIR CAREERS**
- **KNOW THE NEED TO CONTINUOUSLY LEARN**

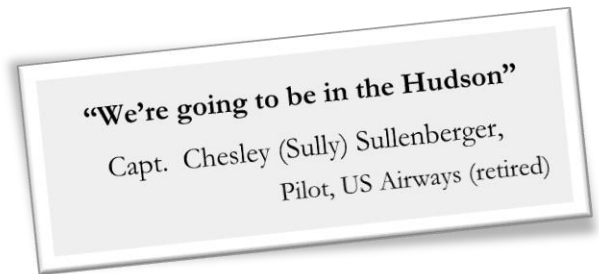
However, there are unique differences, critical distinctions between them:

- **HIGH PROFESSIONALS** want to **grow and develop deep in their area of expertise**
- **HIGH POTENTIALS** want to **build breadth and perspective and take on broader responsibilities**

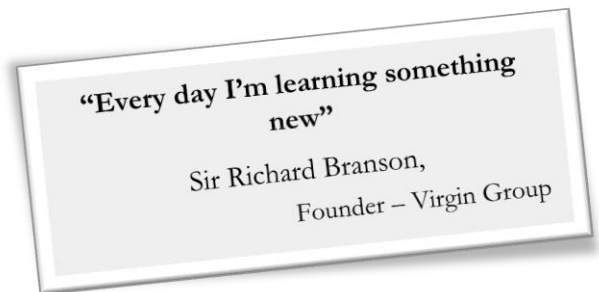
AN ALTERNATIVE TERMINOLOGY

We think it is better for organizations to think about these 2 types as those who bring **Functional Expertise** (i.e. depth) and those who bring **Enterprise Leadership** (i.e. breadth). Both need to be correctly identified then developed and deployed...AND BOTH CAN TAKE ON LEADERSHIP ROLES.

- **FUNCTIONAL EXPERTS (DEPTH):** Superior performers who are in similar jobs/functions year after year



- **ENTERPRISE LEADERSHIP (BREADTH):** Perform well in first time, challenging situations – often, in very different jobs.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND AND DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THESE 2 CRITICAL TYPES OF TALENT?

- We need to develop and promote them differently.
- Too much of one and not enough of the other can cause an organization to derail – you need to determine what is the right balance between your experts and your generalists.
- The right mix depends on your business and your strategy – are you in a start-up or growth mode or is the business more stable and requires long-term focus on goals, objectives, products or services.

Knowing and understanding the difference between those that bring **Breadth** and those that bring **Depth** is critical to the success of the team, the individual and the business

It Isn't Just About Differentiating Your People: Understanding What Is Needed in a Role is Just as Important

While it's important to understand the depth versus breadth of your employees, it is just as important to understand the level of **depth** or **breadth required for the roles** in your business. Optimizing talent not only requires the understanding of your employee capabilities and aspirations, but ensuring the right placement of that talent based on their potential and development needs.

To start, you need to identify the jobs that are critical to your business. Once you know which jobs are key to achieving the business objectives then you need to understand what those jobs require in terms of:

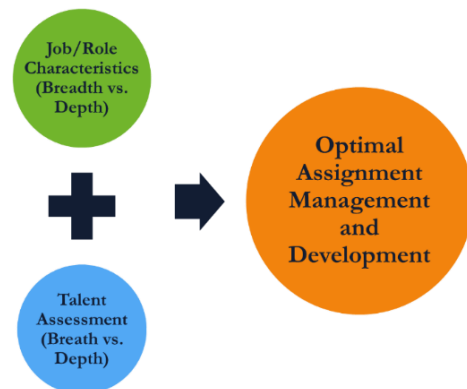
- **DEPTH:** Deep understanding of the function, long-term implementation, stability
- **BREADTH:** Fresh ideas, strategic thinking, ability to adapt and change

From a basic perspective, if the role requires the employee to manage difficult, ambiguous and uncertain conditions, you want to staff that role with the individual that can already manage those type of conditions or an employee who would benefit from that type of developmental assignment. Staffing that role with someone who specializes in depth of expertise would be a disservice not only to the person but will be also be disruptive to the team and the business. They will struggle to adapt and could eventually derail.

The same theory applies if you put an employee who specializes in breadth in a role that requires an individual to manage a long term, stable project. That person will likely get bored and restless and potentially derail the project.

Taking the time to understand your talent and what their future potential is only gets you part way there. To ensure the most appropriate placement and/or development of that talent you need to understand what is needed in a role. Once that is understood you will have the optimal match between role and employee.

This all sounds straightforward in principle and the research has been consistent in that Jobs/Assignments provide the best opportunity to develop people. However placing people in a developmental assignment isn't arbitrary, there needs to be thought and consideration into the opportunities that are most appropriate, and to their detriment it seems that many organizations still pass on this.



PLACING PEOPLE IN ROLES THAT THEY ARE NOT SUITED FOR WILL CREATE UNNECESSARY TURMOIL FOR YOUR BUSINESS

The Right People in the Right Role

In our [Summer 2015 Newsletter](#) we introduced the concept of **LEARNING AGILITY**, now we have discussed the importance of ensuring that when you review your talent and roles/jobs you take into consideration both dimensions of **DEPTH** and **BREADTH**.

Looking at the **5 Factors of Learning Agility** and the need for **Depth versus Breadth**, BettSolutions LLC can work with you and your business to differentiate your roles and your talent. We do this through a knowledge transfer based consultative process and the use of robust, research based assessment and development tools as appropriate to meet your objectives.

A typical engagement would entail using **Learning Agility Architect™** to understand the complexities of your organizations roles/jobs and the characteristics that are needed to ensure business success in each. Once those have been identified, we can then use this tool to assess your talent and then make the most appropriate role/job match.

Learning Agility Architect™ is a research based solution that effectively identifies and differentiates an organizations talent and then targets both development and placement of individuals into appropriate roles. The focus of the assessment and development centers on the **5 Factors of Learning Agility**.

Taking a step back and better understanding what you need for a role/job, team, or assignment provides the foundation to ensure you are hiring and promoting [moving] the most appropriate people based on their ability [fit] and your organizations business needs. Once you have placed the talent in the right role/job then you can focus on developing and/or enhancing them through a variety of development options.



©KORN FERRY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS THESE TOPICS FURTHER PLEASE CONTACT US USING THE INFORMATION GIVEN BELOW

WE WILL DISCUSS SUCCESSION MANAGEMENT AND THE USE OF A TALENT MATRIX/MAPS IN OUR NEXT NEWSLETTER

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR ASSISTANCE WITH DEVELOPING AND ENHANCING YOUR TALENT MANAGEMENT PROCESSES AND PROTOCOLS PLEASE CONTACT US AT:

508.529.6184

www.bettsolutions.com

kate@bettsolutions.com

chris@bettsolutions.com

Click or scan to visit the Korn Ferry Product Store

<http://assoctrack.lominger.com/z/9/18262/>



**Bett
Solutions**