

Has Thailand Really Got Talent?

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With 'Thailand's Got Talent' currently the talk of the town, this article asks whether now is the time for companies to identify their people's talent more closely, and looks at how they can expect to enhance business performance in so doing.

Being a judge in Thailand can be a thankless job, so it's no surprise that when a show like Thailand's Got Talent goes live, the social media networks light up with viewers in their thousands disagreeing with decisions made at the top.

This process goes on week-in, week-out in Thai companies yet the process for determining what 'Talent' is, whether for a promotion, new hire, board or team selection decision, remains murky.

Given that we have been making these kind of decisions easier for years now, we thought that this article might help managers avoid the scourge of social media brickbats, if not improve the performance of their company and teams!

What Talents Are... and Are Not

First it may be useful to get clear on what talents are – and are not.

Your talents (or natural abilities – the two terms are interchangeable) are the synaptic connections your brain makes as you grow from childhood to youth.

They are not the knowledge or skills you may acquire on the way of that journey. Instead your talents are how your brain naturally processes the stimuli from the outside world and your inner world (your own body and its components) and makes sense of that unconsciously. Your talents, in other words, are your instincts – they are what makes you different and unique.

When we say someone is 'gifted' or 'talented' in a certain area, what we usually mean is that performing for that person is almost natural or effortless – and that would be a fair description of a person working in the area of their talents.

Yet, so often in companies, we see people clearly struggling in their roles. The classic example of this is when someone excels in one role (say as an engineer) and then is promoted. His or her role suddenly becomes that of a manager.

This is more than just a transition to be 'adapted' to. Because the talents of an effective manager are usually greatly different to that of an engineer (research

indicates that the most effective managers are generalists who are also 'low' in spatial relations – which is the talent most engineers are 'high' in) the transition might, in many cases, not be worth making.

What often follows from such transitions is a sudden increase of staff turnover as the new subordinates are disengaged and eventually leave.

Note that in this whole process skills and qualifications (gained through school and university) are almost entirely irrelevant. Yet this continues to be the key criterion HR departments in Thailand and globally continue to hire on.

Research conducted by Gallup in the US indicates that only 13 percent of the workforce say they have the 'opportunity to do what they do best' every day. Loosely translated, this means that only 13 percent are in roles that play to their talents. And it's this one factor which the same organisation has identified as being critical to enhanced business performance criteria such as low absenteeism, safety, productivity, and customer engagement.

Understanding, hiring and using talent is, in other words, not a nice-to-have but an essential component of employee engagement and, through it, business performance.

How to Identify Talent

We always recommend companies that are making selection decisions of any kind to place its largest weighting on talent. Past performance is of course important – but the key focus needs to be on where the candidate is going next. If businesses want to progress, it's always tomorrow's performance that matters more than yesterday's, in the same way that, when making an investment in a company's stock, a fund manager will usually focus his judgement towards future prospects.

Yet the talent management systems of today's companies are terribly backward-looking. This is largely because

Oxygen?



Trust is like the air we breathe.

When trust is present, no one notices, but when it's absent, everyone notices.

most HR practitioners do not understand talent or cannot articulate it (instead many companies fall back on the bag of spanners they call competencies which, to paraphrase Drucker, is the wrong answer), and also because they are not aware of the one tool that objectively identifies an individual's talents – the Highlands Ability Battery.

The Highlands Ability Battery is a tool built from 90 years of research largely from the Johnson O'Connor Institute in the USA based on thousands of MRI studies on the use of individuals' talents linked to certain tasks. For a more in-depth introduction into the talents we are talking of, you may be interested in seeing the slides of the presentation I gave to AustCham, which can be downloaded from the AustCham homepage or Reports page.

The Highlands Ability Battery is the only tool that identifies talent objectively, giving answers to questions such as:

- Which career path will give me the greatest satisfaction?
- Which role will let me perform to my strengths?
- In a team, which two functions should I concentrate on?
- What kind of complementary talents that I lack should I look for in a new hire?
- How can I resolve clashes in working style with my colleagues?

How to Make Sure Your Company's Got Talent – and Performance!

The benefits of following this process are manifold. Brass tacks, identifying each individual's talents clearly and precisely helps you, as manager, play your team to its strengths.

This is the one essential difference between great managers and mediocre ones. A great manager will have a clear idea of his team members' talents and set the team up around those wherever possible. Again citing Peter Drucker, he will enhance the strengths and make the weaknesses irrelevant.

Contrast this with the modern competency-based form of talent management, where the emphasis so often is on fixing weaknesses – a subtle difference that, as Gallup and Corporate Leadership Coun-

A man should never be appointed to a managerial position if his vision focuses on people's weaknesses rather than on their strengths. The man who always knows what people cannot do, but never sees what they can do, will undermine the spirit of the organisation. – *Peter Drucker*

cil studies of 100,000s of employees worldwide have shown, is a major disengager. Making sure you and your team can reach peak performance at work is helped by this three-step process:

First, identify each team members' talents (using Highlands is in our opinion the best way of doing this). Next, work out the roles each of you are strongest in. From the research, it's highly unlikely that any one person is amazing at every role. So find out each members' strongest two or three roles, and get them in those seats. Finally, set up longer range plans if necessary, such as career paths and personal growth plans, with a focus on each member's strengths.

As the connection to our work is the most important engagement driver, it's essential that companies begin to pay more attention to this crucial intangible.

On Why Not Being the Judge is Sometimes an Advantage...

As we are seeing with game shows such as Thailand's Got Talent and the unfortu-

nate story of the Thai referee who was trapped inside the stadium last month because both sets of fans wanted to lynch him, being a judge sometimes does have its disadvantages.

Using an objective process, such as the Highlands Ability Battery with its 90 years of empirical research, removes the risk of brickbats and recriminations from purely subjective decisions.

We are at a stage of economic development where individuals are giving more time than ever before and place of work, and we owe it to them – and ourselves – to make sure we get it right. For everyone's health, it's essential to play to our strengths. Discovering our talents is the starting point of that journey and one that can seriously help teams perform. ■

About Talent Technologies

Talent Technologies (Asia) Co. Ltd helps companies reach their potential by fully engaging their Talent. For more information, contact: nick@talent-technologies.com

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