

The Strategic Development of Mid-Level Talent

(A Project on MakemyTrip.com)

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Abstract. Organisations are made up of people creating value through proven business processes, innovation, customer service, sales and many other important activities. As an organization strives to meet its business goals, it must make sure that it has a continuous and integrated process for recruiting, training, managing, supporting and compensating these people. HR ability to align human capital resources with its business strategy and improve workforce skills through strategic training and development is paramount for any organisational success.

MakemyTrip (MakemyTrip.com) provides insights into some of the successful ways on how they are developing and managing talent which is directly aligned with the company's overall business goals. But creating a leadership talent pipeline is equally important for sustainability and continuous flow of leaders who can execute strategies effectively. Hence today's imperative is not only to enhance talent or create leadership pipeline but to also align it to the long-term business strategy in order to execute strategy today and tomorrow for the organization.

This paper provides insights, in the era of e-commerce, the strategy used by Make My Trip for identification and development of mid-level talent who demonstrate "high potential". Additionally, the paper also recommends methods for development of mid-level talent pipeline for a better tomorrow for e-commerce enterprises.

Keywords: Talent pipeline, Talent Management, Strategic Development

1. Introduction

MakemyTrip.com, India's leading online travel company was founded in the year 2000 by Deep Kalra, an alumnus of Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India. It aims to offer a range of best-value products and services along with cutting-edge technology and dedicated round-the-clock customer support.

The people philosophy of Make My Trip is capsulated in the fact that its rise has been dedicated and believed to be led by the vision and the spirit of each one of its employees, for whom no idea was too big and no problem too difficult. With untiring innovation and determination, Make My Trip proactively began to diversify its product offering, adding a variety of online and offline products and services. MakemyTrip also stayed ahead of the curve by continually evolving its technology to meet the ever changing demands of the rapidly developing global travel market.

2. Objectives

To understand and suggest methods for creating a mid-level talent pipeline for managerial positions in an e-commerce enterprise.

3. Methodology

A Descriptive Research was carried out through this paper to understand the detailed information about the strategies used for building the Mid-Level pipeline and Talent Management for sustainability of MakemyTrip. Also an observational study has been conducted that has helped to explore, describe the uniqueness in the talent management practices and recommend how talent can be further explored and utilised to the fullest for the future growth of the organization. Great Place to Work© Institute India has been

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instrumental in conducting this research. Interview with Deep Kalra, the founder and CEO of Make My Trip gave a better understanding on the challenges faced by the organization in Talent Management. Suggestions on how to further build and develop on Mid-level Talent in an e-commerce enterprise have also been offered.

3.1. Building Mid-Level Talent Pipeline

At MakemyTrip, people resources are considered as a ‘sustained competitive advantage’. Success factors for this resource thus have been scientifically identified. The success factors to build & manage strong performers as well as provide the necessary impetus/ avenues for growth to employees demonstrating ‘high-potential’. Make My Trip has implemented a strategic initiative in this regards called as the Talking Talent Process. The term ‘Talking Talent’ refers to the essence of demonstrated talent identification and development. The process is transparent, well integrated to the business context of MakemyTrip and dynamic.

The purpose of the Talking Talent process is to have:

- A diverse supply of talented leaders ready, willing and able to take on new and different challenges
- A common framework to differentiate performance and the predictive indicators of future potential
- A talent pipeline which is full and flowing
- No delay in project delivery or losing business opportunities due to critical positions being vacant

To achieve the above objectives the Talking Talent process is divided into:

Strategic alignment

Developing a competency framework

Talent assessment

Talking Talent session

Creation of Individual Development Plans

Special assignments

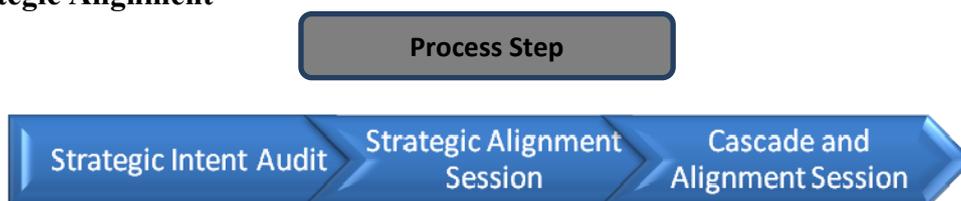
Coaching sessions

Training Interventions

3.2. Developing Talent Pipeline

Of the above people development modules, the below six modules are specifically targeted towards further development of hi-potentials thus creating a talent pipeline at Make My Trip

3.2.1. Strategic Alignment



Strategic Intent Audit - this process involves conducting an e-survey with all Senate members, interviews with Leadership Team members and studying the business strategy documents.

Strategic Alignment Session - based on the results of the e-survey, a one day strategic alignment session is conducted with all Leadership Team members. This helps in aligning organisational capabilities and people practices in support of business.

Cascade and Alignment Session - this session is conducted with the HR team to understand and fine tune the framework for people development.

3.2.2. Developing a Competency Framework



Mapping of Strategic Capabilities to Competencies –The output from the alignment session is collated and translated into individual behavioural competencies

Validation of Competency Model - Focus Group Discussions are conducted with employees at different levels/ functions to validate the competencies. This enables buy in from employees on the performance competencies

Leadership Success Profiles –after the collation of Focus Group Discussions and based on the final output, success leadership profiles are created which helped in embedding the language of competencies in the Talking Talent process

The unique characteristics of the above two stages in people development modules at MakeMyTrip is that there is high level of engagement of the employee at the formation stage of competencies. Thus it refrains from being a senior management level activity which is cascaded down to the employees.

3.3. Talent Management

3.3.1. Talent Assessment

All employees at managers and above level go through a 360 degree assessment process on the competencies identified and the learning agility which is a predictor for potential. Apart from the performance appraisal and exceeding the key results areas, a 360 degree assessment is also another data point at MakemyTrip to identify high potentials. Since the competencies assessed are not only job related but also based on the competencies that the organization needs to current and future leadership, it serves as an excellent tool to align hi-potentials in the talent pipeline.

3.3.2. Talking Talent Session

The appraisal discussion also known as the talking talent session at Make My Trip and involves a series of exhaustive discussion amongst all the Leadership Team members and an external consultant about each candidate on performance and potential. Assessing potential is thus as important element in the appraisal activity at Makemy Trip.

Performance is reviewed for:-

- Consistency of the performance over a period of time
- Significant/ notable achievements
- Any performance related problems
- Perception within and outside the function
- Level of functional/ technical expertise

Potential is reviewed by quoting questions, in terms of Learning agility scores which includes Results agility, Mental agility, People agility and Change agility. The various agility criteria are given individual weightage and a percentile score is provided to the employee.

The Learning agility scores are also supported through a discussion on degree of readiness of the candidate to take on new/ more challenging role.

The above four modules complete the assessment and identification of talent within the organization. The following modules are examples of how the identified talent is further developed and prepared to embark on future roles.

3.3.3. Special Assignments

Each assignment at MakemyTrip is so designed that it focuses on certain developmental needs (competency, learning agility or career stallers and stoppers). Each assignment is assigned to a set of 3-4 individuals and is mentored by a Leadership team member. The assignments are live projects which were in line with MakemyTrip strategy. The projects are based on varied areas such as marketing, customer service, analytics, products, B2B etc. The allocation is such that the individual can learn both from the assignment as well as the other team members. Continuous feedback is given to the participants of each assignment by respective mentors and regular project review meetings held.

3.3.4. Coaching Sessions

The objective of the coaching sessions is to enable the participant to excel in his learning journey. Apart from the above, particular needs through these structured 5 month coaching sessions are addressed. The coaching sessions give insights to the employees about their strengths and weaknesses and how to develop the same.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

The study on Make My Trip leads to the proven importance of two mediums of talent pipeline creation especially when developing mid-level line managers:

Knowledge Management and Sharing

Stretch Projects and blended learning

As the 'knowledge' generation or baby boomers tend to retire or move on to other pastures to fulfil their level 5 self-actualization needs, harnessing the knowledge and containing them so as to pass them on to the second line is becoming increasingly important even in under industries such as the e-commerce industry. Make My Trip does harness on this wealth by involving the leadership team in strategic alignment and competency framework development stages. This is thus not just a human resource activity focussed on employee development. It is a well thought out strategic module to initiate talent pipeline building activity.

One of the best practices that have been witnessed in other infrastructure intensive industry is dedicated knowledge sharing mechanism. For eg. New Delhi Power Limited, a joint venture between Government of India and Tata Power, has implemented *Seekh*, a KM (Knowledge Management) channel which is based on the principles of 'community of practices (CoP)', wherein team members of a Group/Department/District meet to share knowledge. *Seekh* is periodically organized at organization level on key themes, e.g. AT&C loss reduction, safety, quality circle, operational excellence, etc. to involve wider workforce from various work units. The knowledge of retiring people is shared & captured through knowledge capturing form as per the exit process. Learning shared in *Seekh* sessions are captured and stored in KM portal called *Sanchay*. Thus a KM tool can be as simple as an online intranet portal where senior managers can record and capture their business skills and acumen learnt through the years. Such a tool is easier managed at an e-commerce company where technology is a business driver.

Stretch project allow hi-potentials to use and test their relevant experience, KM tools and embark on an innovation task thus enriching their job and preparing them to handle future business challenges. For implementing stretch project an organization should have a culture of learning and an inbuilt resilience to absorb possible failures arising from such assignments. In an organization where honest mistakes are pardoned and positioned as learning milestones, hi-potentials will find it encouraging to innovate and more over take on such stretch assignments. Stretch assignment should also be made visible within the organization. This enables acceptance of future leaders in the pipeline by the employee population.

Although the output of very organisation is important, a well-developed talent pipeline is the need of the hour. The success of the organisation depends on some of the key positions in operations and they are the drivers for business goals and achievements. Understanding its importance, MakemyTrip believes in consistency leadership, challenging opportunities and creating a brand name even during volatile times. This has been possible because of its strategy 'Talking Talent' that has helped assess high potentials within the organisation and also align them with the business goals for future success.

This paper concludes stating that Knowledge Management being a simple tool can embark innovation and create a talent pool by capturing the business acumen and skills of the senior managers for future learning. Stretch projects can be used to test these high potential employees in challenging environment thus creating and developing a talent pipeline for the future of the organisation.

Just as the Chinese Proverb says "Give a man a fish and you feed for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed for lifetime". Future growth and sustainability of every organisation does not only depend on managing talent but also building and injecting new talent into its pipeline in alignment with the ultimate goal for which it's imperative for the employees to learn to fish to emerge as winners!

5. References

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