Building an ITM Blueprint
An Approach to Achieving Integrated Talent Management

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The Blind Men and The Elephant

Several blind men are asked by a king to describe what an elephant looks like by feeling a different body part of the elephant. The first blind man touches the leg and suggests an elephant is like a pillar, another touches the trunk and suggests the elephant is more like a tree trunk. The man touching the tusk disagrees and instead describes the elephant as a pipe, and the man grabbing the tail argues the elephant is like a rope. The descriptions are dramatically different yet all are convincing to the beholder.

The story of the blind men and the elephant is a great metaphor for traditional talent management (TM). Talent process owners – or HR Centers of Excellence (COE) leaders, like the blind men, attempt to describe the company's talent (the elephant) from myopic, and sometimes competing perspectives. The Training and Development Manager sees talent in terms of skills gaps, the Director of Compensation sees talent in terms of costs, and the Director of Leadership sees talent in terms of leadership potential and bench strength. An Integrated Talent Management (ITM) Blueprint is a proven approach to help HR COEs see beyond their immediate process silos and operate as part of a more integrated and coordinated TM team or function. In this way, the company benefits from a more holistic understanding of its talent. It sees the whole "elephant," and can make more informed decisions and investments.

Talent Management is the sub-discipline of Human Resources (HR) that focuses on the attraction, development, remuneration and retention of talent--as required by the business to execute corporate strategy and goals. Figure 1 illustrates TM as a process lifecycle.

Traditional TM separates the processes into COEs – each with its own 'process owner', a set of templates, standards and procedures, and often a stand-alone system and data set. Traditional COEs are often criticized for operating as 'HR Silos'each operating independently in its attempt to get a read and act upon some aspect of the organization's talent. Unfortunately, just like in the story of the blind men and the elephant, the COEs often fail to communicate or share information. A complete and accurate picture of the company's talent is thus difficult to garner. Without a common set of standards, a shared understanding of available talent, or coordination of interventions, many casualties result.

Integrated Talent Management: Connecting the Dots between Strategy, Talent and Technology

Figure 1. The Talent Management Lifecycle

The stories are common:

- *A retained search for $100 000 is initiated for a position that had a star succession candidate identified. The search results with an inferior external candidate, the star performer is discovered looking for another job, and the 'hire from within' mandate is undermined.*

- *A critical competency gap identified during the recruiting process is nowhere to be seen on the new hire's development plan.*

- *A top performer receives the same merit increase and bonus as the average performer because the performance rating did not inform the compensation planning process.*

- *Stalled system implementations due to undisciplined position management or data quality and availability issues.*

In an era in which the 'war for talent' is rampant and the need for operational efficiencies is paramount, these stories literally constitute HR-based failures and are no longer sustainable. Without deliberate integration talent programs may have separate teams, data, standards and technologies. This can lead to serious problems with failed implementations, uncommunicative systems and administrative burnout. Misinformed decision making, misdirected talent investments, and out of control total cost of ownership (TCO) are other hazards. In the end, the company fails to attract, engage, develop and retain the right talent for business execution.

Integrated Talent Management (ITM): What It Is, What It Isn't, and Why It Matters

Once the blind men are allowed to share their perspectives with one another and can eventually piece together the true and complete picture of the elephant, there is resolution. Similarly, when a company's HR COEs are able to collaborate and find better ways to share talent information they too will be able to generate a more complete and accurate picture of the company's talent. ITM is a coordinated effort, led by the HR COEs, to connect strategy, process, people (or roles) and technology – in that order. These in turn drive better insight, alignment, coordination and efficiencies across its talent management programming. ITM is not going out and buying an integrated talent management suite. Yes, technology is a critical component of an ITM program and does the heavy lifting to enable ITM, but it is just that – an enabler.

HR leaders often look to their ITM systems investment as the panacea that will finally help their organizations leapfrog their way up the ITM maturity curve – that all processes, roles and end-user buy-in pieces will simply fall into place. Too many HR leaders have staked their careers on this assumption and have since reconsidered just how much trust and faith they put into a technology that knows nothing of their business. And yet it is more common than not that HR teams continue to defer process design and configuration responsibilities to the 'experts' – the technology vendor and/

or their in-house IT teams. That might be fine if there were only one or two ways to configure these systems. Instead there are thousands of ways to configure them – precisely because every company is unique with unique strategies, business drivers, threats, opportunities, cultures, and degrees of process maturity. Add to this the reality that all these factors change as a function of time. This is why companies need an ongoing and flexible ITM program management strategy to design, and continue to redesign, their ITM programs (process, people, content and technology requirements). With designs in hand companies then enable them, and re-enable them, through technology.

The following integration perspectives help companies design their ITM programs:

Strategic Integration - What are the talent management implications of our company's strategic plan and initiatives? What information insights are needed to better understand how each talent process reinforces the business agenda?

Process Integration – How can we break down process silos? How should we define our processes to ensure better insight, alignment and efficiency? How should these processes connect in order to share common data like ratings and worker attributes?

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People/Role Integration – How can we improve collaboration and sharing across the HR COEs? What impact will desired process changes have on our HR Business Partners and end-users, and what training and support will they need to be successful?

Technology Integration – How can systems and content be better leveraged to support the talent agenda? What system and data integration challenges are expected?

By taking a more integrated approach to designing their talent management programs companies can be better positioned to realize many benefits as shown below (see Figure 2).

execute its strategy. A talent-based competitive advantage is a real opportunity for companies. An ITM Blueprint is one way to help make it happen. An ITM Blueprint is an HR-led initiative to design an integrated, yet technology-neutral, desired state of the talent management program. Whether a company is looking for its first ITM system, is struggling through a system implementation, or is looking to take its program and system to the next level of maturity, an ITM Blueprint is a consistent and scalable solution.

Integration

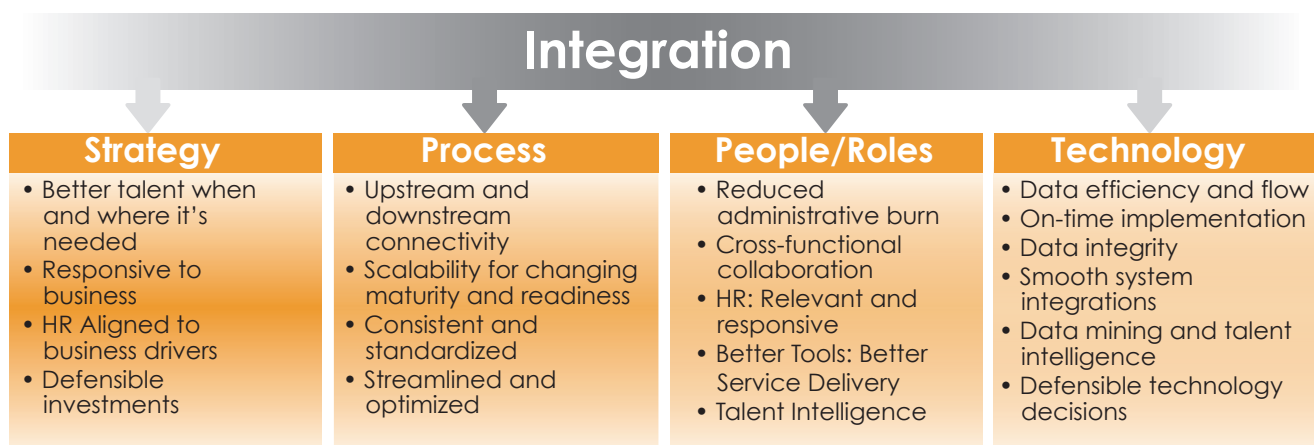| Strategy	Process	People/Roles	Technology
• Better talent when and where it's needed • Responsive to business • HR Aligned to business drivers • Defensible investments	• Upstream and downstream connectivity • Scalability for changing maturity and readiness • Consistent and standardized • Streamlined and optimized	• Reduced administrative burn • Cross-functional collaboration • HR: Relevant and responsive • Better Tools: Better Service Delivery • Talent Intelligence	• Data efficiency and flow • On-time implementation • Data integrity • Smooth system integrations • Data mining and talent intelligence • Defensible technology decisions

Figure 2. Benefits of Integrating Talent Management Programs

What Is An ITM Blueprint?

Just as the body parts of the elephant are connected to one another through a skeletal system, connective tissue and the flow of blood, the talent management processes can be connected to one another through collaboration, technology and the flow of data. HR COEs' challenge is to make those connections and deliver cost-effective and coordinated talent management programming in order for its customers (e.g. HR Business partners and leaders) to better understand and manage talent. If successful, not only will those companies make more informed and higher value HR investments, but they will also reduce a multitude of talent-related risks and costs that threaten a company's ability to

An ITM Blueprint achieves the following:

- *Integrates strategy, processes, people (roles) and data.*

- *Provides a complete, technology-neutral 'Source of Truth' for your ITM program.*

- *Ensures collaboration between HR COE teams.*

- *Provides a central repository for all ITM process artifacts.*

- *Ensures IT investments are aligned to business priorities.*

An ITM Blueprint consists of one or more conceptual frameworks, a series of process maps and data connections. It should also include functional requirements to help drive software evaluation, selection, configuration and testing.

The ITM Blueprint helps ensure each talent process is:

- *Aligned with, and reinforces, strategy and business drivers.*

- *Efficient and effective (based on key business requirements, leading practices, and what is possible with the capabilities of today's software solutions).*

- *Designed to their organization's level of process readiness or maturity.*

- *Designed to generate accurate and relevant information or data about company talent.*

- *Designed to interconnect with other processes to receive essential data from upstream processes (suppliers) and to send essential data to downstream processes (consumers).*

Building Your ITM Blueprint

An *ITM Blueprint* requires a combination of talent management and process improvement expertise as well as a quality management tool known as SIPOC (Sources, Inputs, Process, Outputs and Consumers) that summarizes the inputs and outputs of one or more processes in table form. See Figure 3 for an example. Depending on the number and complexity of sub-processes there may be one or more associated process maps for any given talent process. As it can take several months to complete a full ITM Blueprint many companies elect to start with one or two processes and build upon the blueprint with the additional processes over time.

What Results To Expect From Implementing Your ITM Blueprint?

In 2010 Bersin & Associates conducted research with 725 HR managers and executives from a wide cross section of US-based companies. They discovered a direct relationship between organizational performance on virtually all talent management measures of success and the degree of integration between talent processes and systems (2010 Talent
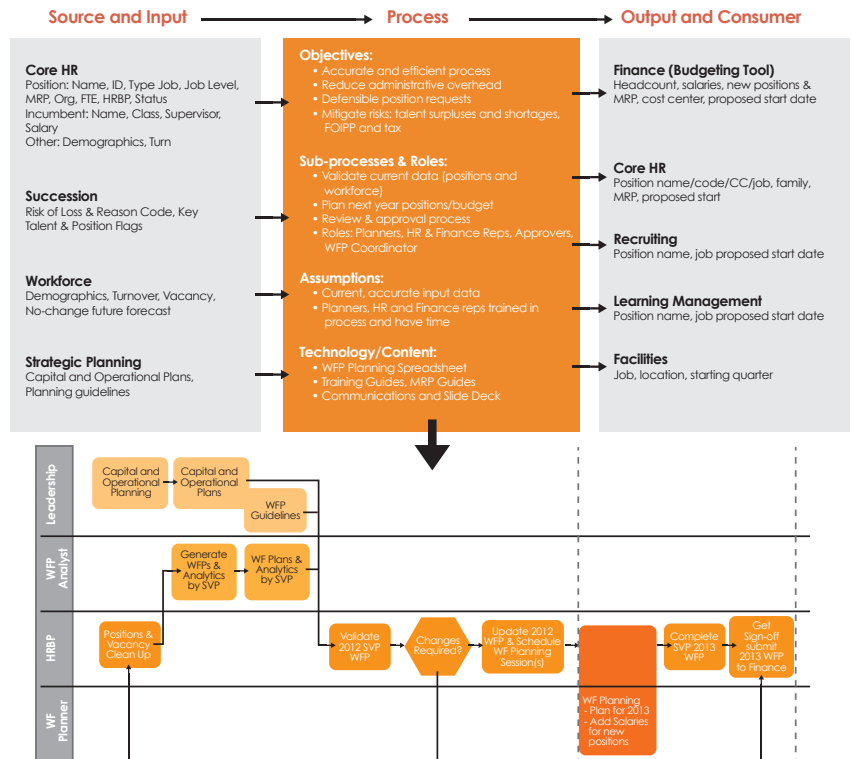

Figure 3. Sample SIPOC Map – Operational Workforce Planning

Management Factbook). From this they devised a Talent Management Maturity Model which describes the most mature organizations (Level 4) as having "(f)ully integrated processes and systems used to make business decisions; talent management is business-driven." When compared to average companies, Level 4 organizations were 156% more likely to develop top leaders, 94% more likely to have the right people in the right jobs, and generated 26% more revenue per employee.

Given its focus on both vertical integration (spanning strategy, process, people and technology) and lateral integration (across processes) the ITM Blueprint is a powerful tool to design and implement truly integrated and scalable talent management programs. In addition, because the ITM Blueprint is technology neutral it lends itself well to companies at any level program maturity. For companies with inconsistent paper-based processes the ITM Blueprint helps establish a technology strategy and requirements to source and select technology to standardize and automate talent processes. For companies with more sophisticated processes and integrated technology platforms the ITM Blueprint helps ensure that strategy and process are driving the solution design (as opposed to technology dictating it) and that a business-focused design rather than a technology-driven design is implemented.

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A well-designed and executed ITM Blueprint can help ensure:

- *HR services are 'designed to align' to the business and reinforce corporate strategy.*

- *Increased transparency and collaboration across HR and across the functions.*

- *Talent processes integrated and streamlined and optimized for the business.*

- *Increased administrative and reporting efficiencies.*

- *Data integrity/parity across HR processes, driving increased user-confidence and defensible decision making.*

Where To Go From Here?

As obvious as integrated talent management may sound, designing and implementing an ITM Blueprint takes work. Legacy is the challenge and will often take as much or more effort to overcome as the ITM program itself.

Examples of legacy challenges include:

- *Entrenched functional silos*

- *Change averse culture*

- *'IT takes care of that stuff' deference*

- *Over-investment/commitment to ERP platforms (talent modules yet to be installed)*

- *Lack of executive-level sponsorship*

These challenges are surmountable but require a strong change management strategy. Here are some suggestions to help get things moving in the right direction:

1. **Build a Vision and Accountability.** How will an ITM program help the business in 5 years? Determine why ITM is a corporate strategic priority and establish executive sponsorship. If having the right talent to execute strategy is a top corporate priority (it should be) it must have an executive level sponsor who is ultimately accountable for delivering it.

2. **Take Control and Build Capacity.** HR must own all things talent including technology! Systems are an integral part of talent management today so it is no longer acceptable to defer to IT departments or to vendors for such mission critical capability. If HR is not equipped to make technology decisions on its own its time to augment the team with this critical skill set. IT does not have the functional expertise to play this role – nor should they.

3. **Build a Business Case.** Without ITM what is the impact to the business from a financial perspective (e.g., administrative, people costs, total cost of systems ownership) and a risk management perspective (e.g. business disruptions from talent shortages, compliance, bench strength for critical roles)? What business benefits are expected with ITM in place?

4. **Determine the Right Approach.** A complete ITM Blueprint can take several months to develop. If the goal is to evaluate talent management suites then a complete ITM Blueprint is necessary. If the need is more immediate, such as finding and implementing a critical recruiting solution, the ITM Blueprint can be developed a process at a time.

5. **An Integral Part of HR Program Management.** By definition an ITM Blueprint is a desired future state of your talent management program. As such it is a key input to HR program planning and should be reviewed and renewed during annual strategic planning.

Imagine giving sight back to the blind men how quickly they would see and understand what body part they were attempting to describe and how it contributed to the overall make up of the elephant. An ITM Blueprint provides HR COEs a special lens that allows them see how their respective pieces of the talent management puzzle fit together and contribute to the overall make up and health of the company's talent.

The ITM Blueprint:

- *Provides a common language from which to describe talent (inputs, processes, outputs).*

- *Instills in HR COEs a clear and transparent appreciation of the interdependencies between theirs and the other processes.*

- *Compels and shows HR COEs how to work together and breakdown the functional silos.*

- *Helps HR COEs take charge and accountability for their processes, roles, technologies and information.*

- *Helps HR COEs keep focused on what matters most.*

A company without the right talent is simply strategy without execution. An ITM Blueprint can change that as it provides direction on how best to find, engage and keep the right talent. An HR Program Management philosophy that includes keeping and maintaining an ITM Blueprint will continue to improve and adapt, to stay responsive and relevant, and to better serve its customers – the business.

About the author:

With 20 years experience in the talent management field, Kevin Copithorne has been implementing programs which align strategy, people, processes and technology to help companies bridge the strategy - execution gap and realize true business value. He has broad human capital management experience as a consultant and leader of HR professionals. He has worked in both corporate and consulting environments with a consistent focus on developing best-of-breed HCM centers of excellence. He has published articles and presented on career, competency and talent management topics at a number of conferences.

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