Integrated Talent Management Practices-Transforming Human Potentiality into Performance

Abstract

The performance of companies depends mostly on the quality of their human resource. For obvious economic and business reasons, organizations have always been concerned about the growth, competence and retention of its people. Hence employee development and talent management are essential elements of any strategic human capital management program. Thus the focus has shifted from 'numbers' to 'quality' and from 'recruitment' to 'retention'. Many organizational human resource practices play dominant role in building employee competence and commitment. Out of the plentiful, the training and development practices in the organization facilitates the talent management in the organization. This paper discusses the role of the corporate talent management strategies in developing the skills of the employees and satisfying the needs of the organization based on the study conducted by IBM Institute for Business Value/ Human Capital Institute.

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Introduction

Talent management refers to identify the employee talent and utilizing it effectively and retaining the same talent to compete with similar organizations. Talent is a competitive advantage. A talent management strategy will improve organizational performance through better identifying, sourcing, developing, rewarding, motivating and retaining the talent that keeps the firm ahead of competitors. The core competence of a company today is not manufacturing or services, but the recruiting and nurturing of the best people and the cultivation in them of an insatiable desire to learn, to stretch and to do things better every day (Ramani & GuruSwami, 2003).

As organizations seek to overcome challenge associated with globalization, changing workforce demographics and the emergence of new business model, they are looking to their employees as the critical source of differentiation in the market. However, the search continues for guidance regarding the value of investing in talent management, and where organizations should place such investments.

Today, we see many organizations wrestling with talent related issues. Should they spend precious time and resources in upgrading their learning capabilities, or focus their attention on attracting new employees from the outside? Do they invest in developing the ability to connect employees around the globe, or on a system that allocates human capital across the organization? How these practices can work together in a more seamless

and integrated fashion? To better understand, how organizations are addressing talent management, IBM provides a unique window into the current state of talent management practices within the organization, the gaps that exist today and recommendations for bolstering this capability.

"Talent management is not an end in itself. It is not about developing employees or creating succession plans, nor is it about achieving specific turnover rates or any other tactical outcome. It exists to support the organization's overall objectives which in business essentially amount to making money" (Cappelli, 2008).

What are effective talent management practices? Given the well-documented increase in global competition for skilled workers, changing workforce demographics and a shift towards more knowledge-intensive work, one answer may be that they are the practices that make for a happier, engaged and ultimately and more productive workforce

However, no organization in today's economic climate can afford to invest in talent management practices without a demonstrable and significant return on investment. Lacking this, senior leaders will not support the process and, most importantly, the process will not support organization goals.

The objective of this paper is to highlight the talent management practices- talent acquisition, talent development, talent utilization and talent retention in IBM and other multinational companies.

This paper is based on secondary data only through reference to the study by IBM institute for Business value/ Human Capital Institute.

Workforce and Talent Solutions at IBM

The objectives of the workforce talent solutions at IBM are to Improve performance, optimize workforce costs, and increase profit per employee to secure a competitive advantage.

IBM's Workforce and Talent Solutions (WTS) is a boon in the talent management marketplace that addresses every stage of the employee lifecycle. It is designed to leverage the synergy created when all stages of the employee lifecycle are optimized, and help the organization achieve a competitive advantage from its workforce. The solution provides a complete, integrated approach to the employee life cycle that merges consulting services with Lotus collaborative technologies, Cognos Workforce Analytics, and best of breed Talent Management applications, including SuccessFactors and Saba. Additionally, IBM's own Workforce Management Initiative provides a unique set of assets and best practices that are leveraged to accelerate the transformation of any organization.

To achieve innovation and growth in today's business environment, it requires focus on the workforce and talent capabilities. The ability to manage costs, drive productivity and gaining a competitive advantage from the workforce is growing in importance and focus.

Today's workforce is increasingly globally dispersed, multigenerational and multicultural. Effective management of today's dynamic workforce requires an integrated and consistent approach. This can drive cost savings, efficiency, retention, quality, customer satisfaction and innovation.

According to a recent study by IBM and the Human Capital Management Institute, companies that apply effective and integrated workforce and talent management strategy and practices demonstrate significantly better financial performance compared to their industry peers.

Additionally, during the time of economic uncertainty require even more focus on specific areas of the workforce strategy. Specifically, in order to position the organization for future success, one must differentiate high and low performers, stimulate social networking to create and leverage organizational knowledge of the globally dispersed workforce, promote the development of institutional knowledge, embrace flexible work environments, and enable leadership to guide individuals through the change.

Increasingly, companies are recognizing that their workforce is a key asset that needs to be managed, improved and optimized to ensure the greatest return on investment. IBM Workforce and Talent Solutions offer an integrated approach that can help the organization increase shareholder value and build an Enterprise of the Future.

Business Challenges

- Aligning the workforce strategy to the business strategy to maintain and increase the competitive advantage

- Quickly adapting the workforce to changes in volatile market forces, rapidly shifting skills and newly emerging technology

- Enable wide-scale collaboration of a dynamic and geographically disperse workforce

- Delivering new products and services quicker than the competitors

Fig. 1
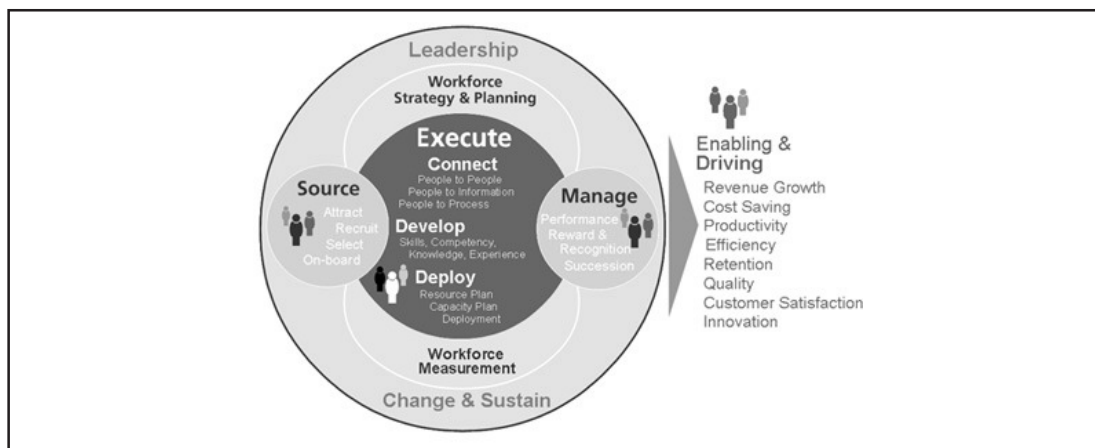
Source: IBM Institute for Business Value/Human Capital Institute.
http: www.ibm.com

Six Dimensions of Talent Management

- **Develop Strategy:** Establishing the optimal long-term strategy for attracting, developing, connecting and deploying the workforce.

- **Attract and Retain:** Sourcing, recruiting and holding onto the appropriate skills and capabilities, according to business needs.

- **Motivate and Develop:** Verifying that people's capabilities are understood and developed to match business requirements, while also meeting people's needs for motivation, development and job satisfaction.

- **Deploy and Manage:** Providing effective resource deployment, scheduling and work management that matches skills and experience with organizational needs.

- **Connect and Enable:** Identifying individuals with relevant skills, collaborating and sharing knowledge, and working effectively in virtual settings.

- **Transform and Sustain:** Achieving clear, measurable and sustainable change within the organization, while maintaining the day-to-day continuity of operations.

Each of the six dimensions contains many distinct practices that, when linked within and across categories, form an integrated talent management process. In this section, the connection between these integrated practices and organizational performance through a two-step process is explored:

- Clustering organizations in the survey by their size and the effectiveness of the talent management practices they have put into place.

- Determining if these same clusters vary by "organizational performance." For this analysis, within each cluster, the financial performance is compared – specifically, the *change in operating profit from 2003 to 2006* – of U.S. publicly traded companies as the indicator of organizational performance.

Survey Methodology (Conducted by IBM)

The research findings are based on the results of a Web-based survey conducted between February and April 2008. E-Mailed invitations were sent to those who wanted to participate in the survey to the Human Capital Institute membership and received 1,900 completed responses. In-depth follow-up interviews were conducted with 49 respondents, representing a cross-section of the complete sample, to explore specific topics in more depth.

While 67 percent were from the United States and Canada, approximately 30 percent were relatively evenly divided among Europe (primarily the United Kingdom), and Asia and the Pacific (predominately India and Australia). Although our sample included respondents from 56 different countries, 93 percent were from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, India and Canada

In addition to the regional variation, respondents represented a well-distributed range of organizational size – including Smaller (<1000 employees), Mid-size (1,000 to 10,000), Larger (10,000 to 50,000) and Enterprise (>50,000); as well as relative position in the organizational hierarchy, from Board/President level to Practitioner. Finally, the sample included a wide range of organizations from small and large business involved in many types of commercial activities, to public service organizations such as colleges, government agencies, and public health facilities.

The link between improved talent management and organizational performance (Based on IBM's Survey)

The organizations were divided into six clusters, based on their relative effectiveness at applying talent management practices. Then these six clusters are recombined into two major "Super groups" that differ significantly in the average number of employees within their organizations.

Both Super groups contain the full range of organizational sizes. Super group 1, the first group of four clusters, has a larger proportion of "Enterprise" organizations (with >50,000 employees). Super group 2, the second group of two clusters, has a larger proportion of smaller and mid-size organizations (those with <1,000 employees and 1,000 to 10,000 employees, respectively). organizations of different sizes have different talent management needs and capabilities. Hence the clusters are divided into the two Supergroups, more accurate comparisons can be made within each.

Super group 1 contains four clusters: *Optimizers, Talent Managers, Magnets* and *Engineers*. *Optimizers* scored higher than all other clusters in all six dimensions of talent management – these are the organizations that implemented the most practices and used them most effectively. *Talent Managers* ranked second in all categories, while *Magnets* and *Engineers* ranked third and fourth, respectively, for all six categories.

While ranking behind *Optimizers* and *Talent Managers*, *Magnets* and *Engineers* revealed some interesting differences in *which* talent management practices they emphasized. *Engineers* were better than average in creating an effective infrastructure for their workers – for example, connecting them with fellow workers, empowering them with the resources to do their job better, and deploying and managing them in a way that best meets organizational goals. However, when it comes to some of the "soft skills" of development and motivation, these organizations were only average at best. On the other hand, *Magnets* focused most on attracting and retaining employees – and much less on developing, motivating or connecting these employees once onboard.

Supergroup 2 contains two clusters that differ from each other by how many, and how well they apply the various talent management practices. *Early Investors* scored near the average in our survey for all six dimensions of practices.

In contrast**,** *Observers* scored at the bottom among all six clusters identified in Figure 2, for *all* dimensions. These are organizations that either have not implemented most integrated talent management practices or have not done so effectively.

Fig.2

Overview of talent management clusters ranked in order of application of talent management practices

Name	Description	Relative Organization Size	Application Of Talent Management Practices
Optimizers	Heavily apply talent management practices across the board	Larger	Very High
Talent Managers	Focus their human capital investment in attraction, retention, motivation and development	Larger	High
Magnets	Direct attention towards attraction and retention, with less investment towards motivation and development	Larger	Medium High
Engineers	Build infrastructure to support employee population	Larger	Medium High
Early Investors	Moderately use talent management practices across the board	Smaller	Medium
Observers	Have little or no use of talent management practices	Smaller	Low

Source: IBM Institute for Business Value/Human Capital Institute.
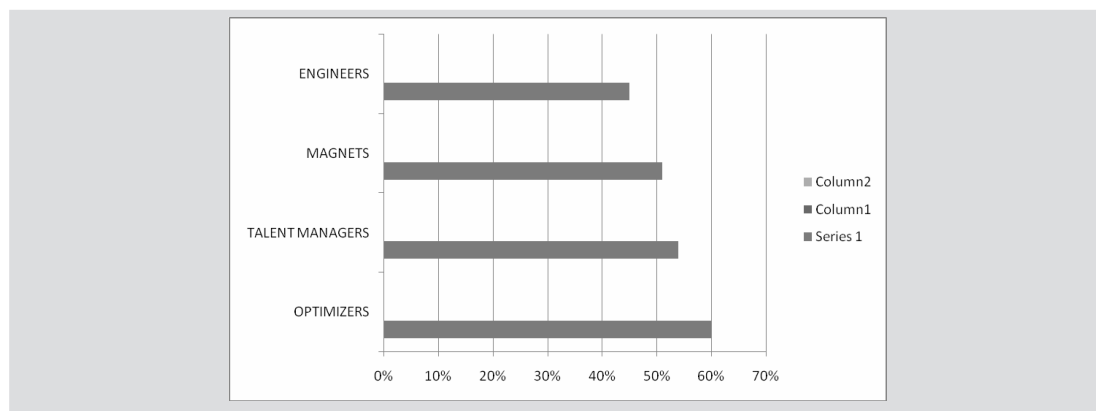   http: www.ibm.com

The above results were based on the secondary data analysis. IBM also collected primary data and found similar conclusions through 49 in-depth follow-up interviews. The employees were asked to describe their own organization's strengths and weaknesses. Their answers depended greatly on which of the six clusters their organization belonged to. However, the same question stands still – does using talent management practices effectively lead to better organizational performance? To answer this question, they calculated the reported *change in operating profit* from 2003 to 2006 for each of the U.S. publicly traded companies in all six talent management clusters (289 companies in total).

Figure 3 shows the percentage of publicly traded companies in Super group 1 that had greater than average profitability compared to their industry peers ("financial outperformers"). The key finding here is that the two clusters with the highest scores across all six categories, *Optimizers* and *Talent Managers*, also had the largest proportion of financial outperformers. In contrast, fewer of the U.S. public companies in *Magnets* and *Engineers*, those two clusters that do only some practices better than average, were financial outperformers.

Within Supergroup 2, *Early Investors*, those who have implemented talent management practices at least as well as many mid- to larger-size organizations, did quite well – with over 60 percent of public companies in this cluster categorized as financial outperformers (Figure 4). *Observers*, those organizations with the lowest scores in our survey, also had the worst organizational performance – only 38 percent of the public companies in this group were financial outperformers during this period. From the sample, it is seen that public companies that are more effective at talent management had higher percentages of financial outperformers than groups of similar sized companies with less effective talent management. The public companies for which they collected financial information represent a subset of all organizations in our survey. However, the results are consistent with other recent studies that have shown that organizations with more effective talent management also tend to score higher on some measure of organizational performance.
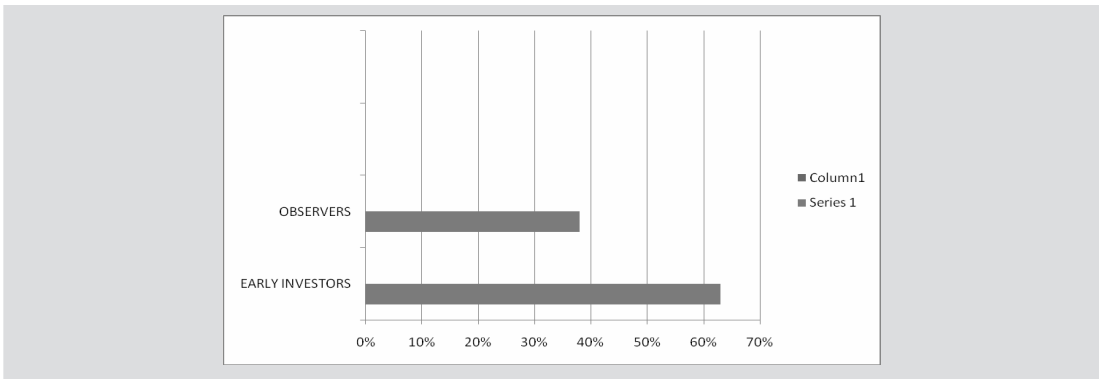
Fig. 3

Percentile of Financial Outperformers in Supergroup-1

Note: percentage of companies that exceeded the sample's median percent profit increase, by industry, 2003-2006.

Source: IBM Institute for Business Value/Human Capital Institute.
    http: www.ibm.com

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Finally, the in-depth study of specific management practices allows delving into even more detail and asking, "What specific talent management practices *most distinguished* financial outperformers from other organizations?" To explore this question, the results are compared for each specific practice, among all six talent management clusters (from *Optimizers* to *Observers*), of financially outperforming and underperforming companies. Figure 5 shows that among all the practices studied, two stood out as being used significantly more often by financial outperformers: Organization understands and addresses workforce attitudes and engagement levels.

Employee and workgroup incentives are aligned with appropriate business goals. Compared to underperforming companies, approximately twice as many respondents from financially outperforming companies *strongly agreed* that their organizations were focusing on these two key motivation and development practices.

Fig. 5

Financial outperformers are more likely to address employee engagement issues and align incentives.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Organization understands and addresses workforce attitudes and engagement levels (Percent)					
Out performers	19	37	25	12	7
Underperformers	10	31	25	26	7
Employee and workgroup incentives are aligned with appropriate business goals (Percent)					
Out performers	16	48	22	7	7
Underperformers	7	51	25	14	2

Source: IBM Institute for Business Value/Human Capital Institute.
        http: www.ibm.com

The current trends in the knowledge economy have proven that while capital is now an easily available commodity, people are not. Therefore, organizations need to put in focused effort for talent acquisition, skill gap analysis, and training to fill the gaps in skills and competencies, gear up to newer challenges and grow rapidly (www.excelindia.com).Unfortunately, most companies don't manage talent well. They need to fundamentally change the way they do this by accelerating development and making it happen every day. It means creating a better, more deliberate match between people and their jobs to optimize both development and performance. It means encouraging frequent and candid feedback and mentoring. Perhaps most importantly, it means conducting manager training (Jain, 2009).

In 2002, the International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) was ranked fourth by the Training magazine on "The 2002 Training Top 100". The magazine ranked companies based on their commitment towards workforce development and training imparted to employees even during periods of financial uncertainty.

Training and Development Practices at IBM

Since IBM was established, IBM had always focused greatly on all the HRD function. The company considered education and training of its employees as an essential component of their development. Earlier during the mid 1990s, IBM used to spend huge amount of capital in training its employees at about $1billion. But they started cost cutting measures in their training modules during the late 1990s. Hence, they started the e-learning programs to train its employees which was initially started to train IBMs newly recruited managers. This e-learning program estimated an annual growth of from $2.1 billion in 2001 to $33.6billion in 2005 representing a 100 percent compounded annual growth rate (CAGR).

Since the inception of IBM, its top management laid great emphasis on respecting every employee. It felt that every employee's contribution was important for the organization. Thomas J. Watson Sr. (Watson Sr.), the father of modern IBM had once said, "By the simple beliefs that if they respected their people and helped them respect themselves, the company would certainly profit."The HR policies at IBM were employee-friendly. Employees were compensated well as they were paid above the industry average in terms of wages. The company followed a 'no layoff' policy. Even during financially troubled periods, employees were relocated from the plants, labs and headquarters, and were retrained for careers in sales, customer engineering, field administration and programming.

In 1933, IBM constructed the 'IBM Schoolhouse' to impart training and development to all its employees at regular intervals. The building had Watson Sr.'s 'Five Steps of Knowledge' carved on the front entrance. The five steps included 'Read, Listen, Discuss, Observe and Think'. To widen their knowledge base and broaden their perspectives, managers were also sent for educational programs to Harvard, the London School of Economics, MIT and Stanford. Those who excelled in these programs were sent to the Advanced Mangers School, a program offered in about forty colleges including some in Harvard, Columbia, Virginia, Georgia and Indiana. IBM's highest-ranking executives were sent to executive seminars, organized at the Brookings Institutions. This program typically covered a broad range of subjects including, international and domestic, political and economic affairs. IBM executives were exposed to topical events with a special emphasis on their implications for the company.

In 1997, Louis Gerstner, the then CEO of IBM, in order to improve the managers' training skills, adopted a coaching methodology of Sir John Whitmore, which was taught to the managers through training workshops. But these workshops were not that effective because it was not

'just-in-time'. Managers had to wait for a long time for their turn to come. And as a result, the new managers were not able to possess the knowledge of critical aspects of the job like team building.

Then IBM trained about 5000 new managers in a year. There was a five day training program for all the new managers, where they were familiarized with the basic culture, strategy and management of IBM. However, as the jobs became more complex, the five day program turned out to be insufficient for the managers to train them effectively. The company felt that the training process had to be continuous and not a one-time event.

Gerstner started looking for new ways of training Manager Company specifically wanted its management training initiatives to address the following issues.

- Management of people across geographic borders
- Management of remote and mobile employees
- Digital collaboration issues
- Reductions in management development resources
- Limited management time for training and development
- Management's low comfort level in accessing and searching online HR resources

The company required a continuous training program, without the costs and time associated with bringing together 5000 managers from all over the world. After conducting a research, IBM felt that online training would be an ideal solution to this problem. The company planned to utilize the services of IBM Mindspan Solutions to design and support the company's manager training program. This was IBM's first e-learning project on International Training.

Online Training at IBM

In 1999, IBM launched an in-house training program named as 'Basic Blue' for new managers which imparted 75% of the training online and the remaining 25% through the traditional classroom mode. The e- Learning part included articles, simulations, job aids and short courses. Basic Blue was based on a '4-Tier' blended learning model'. The first three tiers were delivered online and the fourth tier included one-week long traditional classroom training. The program offered basic skills and knowledge to managers so that they can become effective leaders and people-oriented managers

In the first tier, the managers were provided access to a lot of information including a database of questions, answers and sample scenarios called Manager QuickViews. This information addressed the issues like evaluation, retention, and conflict resolution and so on, which managers came across. A manager who faced a problem could either access the relevant topic directly, or find the relevant information using a search engine. He/she had direct access to materials on the computer's desktop for online reading. The material also highlighted other important web sites to be browsed for further information. IBM believed that its managers should be aware of practices and policies followed in different countries. Hence, the groups were foremen virtually by videoconferencing with team members from all over the world".

In the second tier, the managers were provided with simulated situations. Senior managers trained the managers online. The simulations enabled the managers to learn about employee skill-building, compensation and benefits, multicultural issues, work/life balance- issues and business conduct in an interactive manner. Some of the content for this tier was offered by Harvard Business School and the simulations were created by Cognitive Arts of Chicago. The

online Coaching Simulator offered eight scenarios with 5000 scenes of actions, decision points and branching results. IBM Management Development's web site, 'Going Global' offered as many as 300 interactive scenarios on culture clashes.

In the third tier, the members of the group started interacting with each other online. This tier used IBM's collaboration tools such as chats, and team rooms including IBM e-Learning products like the Team-Room, Customer-Room and Lotus Learning Space. Using these tools, employees could interact online with the instructors as well as with peers in their groups. This tier also used virtual team exercises and included advanced technologies like application sharing, live virtual classrooms and interactive presentation: on the web. In this tier, the members of the group had to solve problems as a team by forming virtual groups, using these products. Hence, this tier focused more on developing the collaborative skills of the learners.

Though training through e-Learning was very successful, IBM believed that classroom training was also essential to develop people skills. Therefore, the fourth tier comprised a classroom training program, own as 'Learning Lab'. By the time the managers reached this tire, they all reached a similar level of knowledge by mastering the content provided in the above three tiers, before entering the fourth tier. In the fourth tier, the managers had to master the information acquired in the above three tiers and develop a deeper understanding and a broader skills set. There were no lecturers in these sessions, and the managers had to learn by doing and by coordinating directly with others in the classroom.

The tremendous success of the Basic Blue initiative encouraged IBM to extend training through e-Learning to its sales personnel and experienced managers as well. The e-Learning program for the sales personnel was known was as 'Sales Compass',and the one for the experienced managers, as 'Managing@IBM'. Prior to the implementation of the Sales Compass e-Learning program, the sales personnel underwent live training at the company's headquarters and training campuses. They also attended field training program, national sales conferences and other traditional methods of training. However, in most of the cases these methods proved too expensive, ineffective and time-consuming. Apart from this, coordination problems also cropped up, as the sales team was spread across the world. Moreover, in a highly competitive market, IBM could not afford to keep its sales team away from work for weeks together.

IBM also launched an e-Learning program called 'Managing @IBM' for its experienced managers, in late 2001. The program provided content related to leadership and people management skills, and enabled the managers to meet their specific needs. Unlike the Basic blue program, this program enabled managers to choose information based on their requirements. The program included the face-to-face Learning lab, e-Learning, and Edvisor, a sophisticated Intelligent Web Agent. Edvisor offered three tracks offering various types of information.

Table - I

IBM's cost savings through e-Learning

Program	Saving in 2000 (US $ million)
Basic Blue	16.0
Going global	0.6
Coaching simulators	0.8
Manager Quick-Views	6.6
Customer-Room	0.5
Sales Compass	21.0

The e-Learning projects of IBM had been successful right from the initial stages of their implementation. These programs were appreciated by HR experts of IDM, and other companies. The Basic Blue program bagged three awards of 'Excellence in Practice' from the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) in March 2000. It was also included among the ten best 'world-class implementations of corporate learning' initiatives by the "e-Learning across the Enterprise: The Benchmarking Study of Best Practices" (Brandon Hall) in September 2000.

IBM also started exploring the evolving area of 'mobile learning'. Analysts felt that for mobile sales force of IBM, M-Learning was the next ideal step (after e-Learning). IBM leveraged many new communication channels for offering its courses to employees. IBM also started offering the courses to its customers and to the general public. In early 2002, American Airlines (AA) used IBM's e-Learning package, which enabled its flight attendants to log on to AA's website and complete the 'safety and security training' from any place, at any time. The content included instruction clips, graphics, flash animation, and so on. This made the airlines annual safety training certification program guides more effective. Shanta Hudson-Fields, AA's manger for line training and special projects, commented, "The full service package that IBM offers has allowed us to develop an effective online course for our large group of busy attendants. In addition to providing a flexible training certification experience for our attendants, American has also brought efficiency and cost savings to our training processes using IBM's e-Learning solution. The company had trained 24,000 flight attendants by November 2002.

Identifying one's Own Talent Management Priorities

For organizations that are looking to quickly develop their talent management agendas, the following questions can serve as an important guide:

- To what extent does the organization have a talent management strategy that is focused on the key positions or roles that can differentiate it in the marketplace?
- How clearly defined and easy to understand are the processes of the organization related to attracting and retaining, motivating and developing, connecting and enabling, and managing and deploying the workforce?
- Are resources dedicated to addressing talent management issues that cross functional, geographic or business unit divisions within the organization?
- What types of metrics allow the organization to quickly ascertain the current state of talent supply and demand within the organization?
- How effective are the existing human capital applications in supporting talent management processes, as well as in providing information and enabling decisions about the current and future talent pools?

Conclusion

Today organizations are recognizing the importance of an effective talent management they strategies. They also realize this fact that if they align the talent management with the organizational strategies and most importantly training and development, then the organizations can attain a competitive advantage over its competitors. Further, most employees are looking for ways to improve their own performance – whether through enhanced collaboration or greater opportunities for skill development. Indeed, many organizations believe they are already making progress in developing their talent management strategies and making investments in this area.

From the above study, it was found that,

- Employee development encourages employee engagement which is essential to a high performance workplace

- Strategic talent management improves the skills and talents of your team members and increases the performance of your team
- Team members enjoy the feeling of personal growth and satisfaction that comes from the opportunity to develop their skills and better contribute to their team
- Employee development can have a dramatic effect on the level of employee retention in your firm. Simply put, engaged employees with the opportunity for personal and professional growth are more likely to stay with your organization
- Employee Training and development is an investment in your organization that can provide a significant Return on Investment when tailored to the unique needs of your individual team members
- Talent management is an essential part of any effective succession plan designed to ensure the health and vitality of your organization for years to come.

However, execution and integration still challenge many of those who participated in IBMs survey. In terms of their abilities to understand the skills composition of the workforce, and to deploy resources, foster collaboration and provide developmental opportunities, their records remain spotty. While the data shows that higher performing companies are investing in their overall ability to manage talent, for many organizations, the ability to take their workforce to the next level of performance continues to be a work in progress.

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