

Why Do Talent Programs Fail?

Peter Freeth



To Begin... A Question

- ★ Think back over your own career...
- ★ What do you feel is the personal quality, skill or ability which got you to where you are today?

Why?

- ★ This all started with a question...
- ★ “We spend \$000s a year on talent programs. How can we be so bad at predicting potential?”
- ★ Is it even possible to predict potential?

Objective

- ★ How can people professionals add value to a business by making accurate and informed recommendations, leading to relevant and impactful talent development programs?

1985 1991 2002 2016 2018 **2019**



CIPD
People Management
Awards 2019

FINALIST

Research



Why are we so bad at predicting potential?

A research project that investigates the unpredictable nature of today's talent management programs, and provides recommendations for increasing program effectiveness and return on investment.

Peter Freeth

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v1

wherein the minimum and engaged participants, and the quarterly financial reporting

5 participants (28%) almost lit quarterly targets, and the remaining 10 participants did not. Two participants were underperforming. These figures are

types of talent program



Consistently high levels of engagement, regardless of external pressures. High level of achievement of career progress. High level of achievement by role KPIs.

Research Findings 8

or talent programs, with the



recommendations, used by 60% of participants, has some overlap as shown in the following pie chart

from managers

or objectives

41%

59%

significant risk of bias into the

Research Findings 13



Research

- ★ Four stages of data:
- ★ 1: Observation of talent programs
- ★ 2: Direct interviews of career decision makers
- ★ 3: Background survey
- ★ 4: Detailed survey



What Did I Find?

- ★ Decision makers value the leadership traits you'd imagine...
 - ★ Team player
 - ★ Accountable
 - ★ Customer focused
 - ★ Persistent
 - ★ Flexible
 - ★ Decisive
 - ★ Good communicator

So what?

What Did I Find?

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Behaviours?

What Did I Find?

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 - ★ Flexible
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 - ★ Good communicator

Judgements!

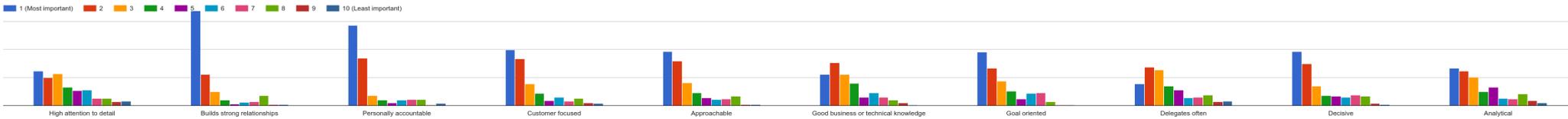
Finally...

- ★ Online survey, 316 respondents
- ★ Q1: Rank the qualities that you think are most important for a future leader (listed by the 76 original interviewees)
- ★ Q2-8: Background, role, location etc
 - ★ Actually... irrelevant
 - ★ Designed only to get the respondent to *forget question 1*
- ★ Q9: Rank the qualities *that got you where you are today*

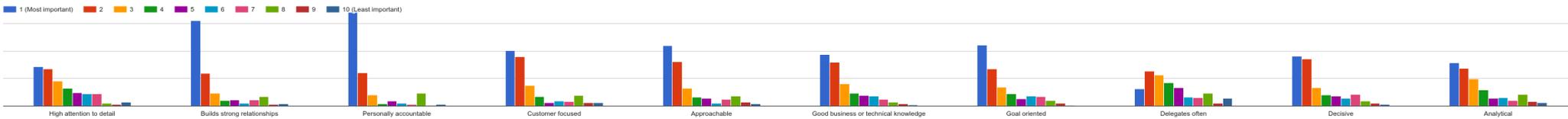
Which Means...

- ★ The qualities that respondents sought in future leaders...
- ★ Were the same qualities that they saw in themselves

Imagine you're selecting a successor for your current role. Look through this list of leadership qualities and rate them in the order of most to least important for your decision.



Thinking back over your own career, what skills have enabled you to reach your current position? Please rate these from most to least important.



The Decision Maker's Thought Process

- ★ Observe a 'hipo' candidate
- ★ Do they show the behaviours that I admire in myself?
- ★ Can I imagine them in a future leadership position...
- ★ *Doing what I would do?*
- ★ If yes, support them...

It's a Match!

You and Peter have liked each other.



What Really Happens

- ★ Decision makers recommend 'hipos' who share their own traits
- ★ Decision makers then defend this selection, despite evidence
- ★ *Because they are actually defending themselves*
- ★ Anecdotal evidence proves the success of the talent program
- ★ The hipos become the next generation of decision makers...



“I didn't get where I am today without knowing a good leader when I see me”

CIPD Profession Map



★ Principles led

- ★ Subjectivity is the human condition (Descartes, Covey)
- ★ Fair, equitable, open opportunities for anyone to grow and develop

★ Evidence based

- ★ Conclusions are not revolutionary
- ★ Subjectivity drives corporate culture → evidence based decisions

★ Outcomes driven

- ★ Value your talent → cultural impact → not just for 'hipos'
- ★ Enable people professionals to add tangible value

The Fundamental Question

- ★ Do we want cultures or cults?
- ★ Do we want to dictate how our leaders lead?
- ★ Leadership based on trust
- ★ 'Hipos' are *teams* not individuals
- ★ Why *not* allow a leader to build a team in his/her image?
- ★ Succession planning
- ★ Resilience
- ★ Diversity...

The Fundamental Question

- ★ A team built around the leader's personality...
- ★ Is a team built around the leader's blind spots
- ★ Leadership based on trust
- ★ 'Hipos' are *teams* not individuals
- ★ The real issue isn't like-mindedness
- ★ The real issue is how the leader handles conflict
- ★ An effective leader encourages constructive conflict
- ★ Diversity... means being able to say "I disagree"

The Real Challenge

- ★ Creating leaders and teams who align to organisational values is the easy part
- ★ The hard part is getting leaders to select 'hipos' or teams against their 'gut instinct'
- ★ Evidence based selection? (Leaders will find a way)
- ★ Psychometrics? (Validity?)
- ★ Sameness or difference makes no difference
- ★ The leader must create space for constructive conflict

The Answer?

- ★ When you look at what your organisation **really** measures and values, does it matter whether you have culture or cult?
- ★ When cults work, they work amazingly well
- ★ When cults fail, they can take the whole organisation down
- ★ Start with what you measure - what you **really** measure
- ★ Bite the bullet - don't be afraid to disagree
- ★ Support constructive conflict
- ★ Don't count on recruitment to solve the problem

The Recruitment Myth

- ★ Recruiters and dating services create the same myth...
- ★ The 'one' is out there waiting to be found
- ★ In dating, you have to know yourself before you can find the right person for you
- ★ In recruitment, you have to know your culture before you can find the right person for you
- ★ In both instances, honesty is in short supply
- ★ **This person is great, but not for us**



Our Struggle

- ★ What principles are you using to select and develop?
- ★ What evidence are these decisions based on?
- ★ Are you measuring outcomes?
- ★ We have to start somewhere



To Begin... A Question

- ★ Think back over your own career...
- ★ What do you feel is the personal quality, skill or ability which got you to where you are today?
- ★ Is this the quality that you look for when you're judging potential?
- ★ Have you attracted people who show this quality?
- ★ What could you do differently?
- ★ Should you even do anything differently?

So Why *Do* Talent Programs Fail?

- ★ 'High Potential' is badly defined
- ★ Potential doesn't exist anyway - only performance
- ★ Subjective selection of candidates
- ★ Programs focus on development, not selection
- ★ Candidates are not deselected
- ★ The culture perpetuates

What To Do Instead?

- ★ Opportunities for all
- ★ Rotate delegation within and across teams
- ★ Select based on performance
- ★ Develop based on engagement
- ★ Support constructive conflict to drive diversity in thinking
- ★ Be honest about the real organisational culture
- ★ Align programs with the desired culture

Remember

★ Impact

- ★ Research has tangible value for the whole organisation
- ★ Enable people professionals to deliver real impact

★ [genius.coach](https://www.genius.coach)

★ [cpd.works](https://www.cpd.works)



