

# Developing a comprehensive pipeline strategy

## More than recruiting and retention

Today's global marketplace is competitive, lightning fast and driven by innovation—the ability to push new and developing technologies to the limit to improve the way people live. It is also cutthroat, motivated by the need to trim costs and meet revenue goals. To keep up and stay ahead, companies are chasing after a talented, diverse workforce. They know that business is only a vehicle for innovation, that people, with all their passion and brilliance, are the true drivers of progress.

While many organizations have put in place some of the

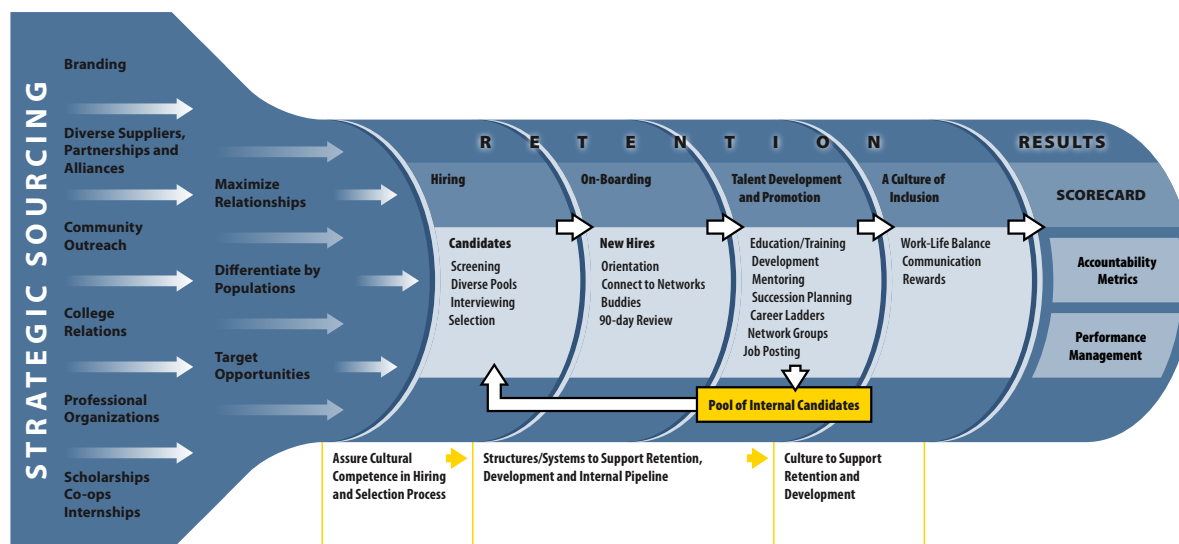
components of a pipeline strategy (hiring, mentoring and development), few are conceiving of it as a comprehensive structure with critically connected pieces. All too often diversity efforts to attract and retain talent are segmented and underleveraged. Each element of the process remains disconnected from the whole and is defined as the purview of human resources (HR) rather than being owned and accounted for by all elements of the business. What is missing is the development of a clear and comprehensive approach to hiring and developing a diverse workforce, as

well as the creation of a culture in which people can contribute and do their best work. This article identifies the key elements of such a strategy, as well as the key competencies and accountabilities needed for its successful implementation (see diagram A).

### STRATEGIC SOURCING: LEVERAGING YOUR BRAND AND PARTNERSHIPS

For many organizations, sourcing of candidates starts when a position opens and HR is called upon to deliver an initial slate of candidates. In a comprehensive pipeline strategy this

**Diagram A. Pipeline strategy: Creating a high-performing, talented and diverse workforce**



process begins before a specific position opens up, and it is usually triggered by an organization asking: “how are we positioned in the marketplace, and why is having a diverse workforce important to our success?” The answers to these questions set the foundation for a strong business case in which the comprehensive pipeline strategy reflects everything the organization does—from branding its services and products to the way it does business.

This leads to other questions. Do collateral materials, advertising and other elements of the brand appeal to a diverse pool of talent? Is the organization known as a good place to work for various demographic groups? Does the organization have a presence in communities of color and other communities from which the organization is seeking to hire talent? Is this also true with its relationships with colleges, professional organizations, diverse suppliers and business partners? Reputation, not surprisingly, matters. It is a critical component of sourcing, and it should be invested in proactively and with purpose.

For example, in one organization the CEO of a utility company decided that it was important to be more actively involved with their diverse suppliers. He saw the company had an opportunity to invest in and support their suppliers in sustaining long-term growth. He made it an expectation that each of his direct reports assist in the development and growth of a diverse supplier so that the supplier could learn from the organization and strengthen their abilities and grow their

business. By taking this proactive stance, the company has provided more jobs to the community within these suppliers, strengthened the base of local diverse suppliers for other organizations and enhanced how the utility was known to their customers and potential talent. This in turn not only supported the suppliers’ ability to attract talent but also supported the utility’s ability to attract greater diversity within the community.

As organizations develop a strategic approach to sourcing, a robust plan must be in place that assures:

- relationships with the community, customers, partners and suppliers are maximized;
- population needs are differentiated, which means developing different strategies for different populations;
- prospects are diverse and the organization hires for talent (using networks, relationships with professional organizations, etc); and,
- individual talents are recognized.

#### **HIRING: A PROCESS NOT AN EVENT**

Just as important as developing a diverse talent pool is an organization’s ability to identify and secure talent. So it is vital that the person responsible for screening candidates have the cultural competence to effectively review resumes and see the value of candidates with different backgrounds and experiences. Otherwise what might be a diverse flow of talent can quickly turn into a traditional homogenous flood. The same

is true of the interview process. The more diverse and culturally competent the panel of interviewers, the more thorough the review and the more valued a prospective employee will feel.

Today’s organizations are undergoing a revolution in terms of thinking about talent and qualifications. As organizations work globally and as the workforce continues to be more diverse, organizations can no longer hire individuals who only have technical abilities. A core competency that must be considered is an individual’s ability to work effectively on teams and, more important, to work with people with different perspectives, backgrounds and abilities. Unfortunately, many organizations only seek skills sets related to a specific job as opposed to looking for people with talent and the ability to engage and work with a workforce that is diverse. This is why organizations must shift from hiring for a position to hiring talent—because individuals, high-performing individuals, can not be squeezed into traditional roles and will move to different positions over time. They are living, breathing corporate assets, and they have a wide range of skills. So the hiring manager needs to be skilled in mentoring and coaching diverse talent, and she or he must be held accountable for developing the competency to support new hires in succeeding.

It is also worth noting that though the expectations of today’s employees have changed and jobs are viewed as stepping stones to better opportunities, a 30-year career with one company, while prehistoric, is not extinct.

Thinking of your best talent as long-term corporate assets—10, 15, 20 years—is still a forward-thinking strategy.

#### **ON-BOARDING: BUILDING LOYALTY**

So what determines how long a person will stay with an employer? Money and advancement opportunities may seem like the obvious answers, but what makes an individual fulfilled in their career is often more subtle and can be measured by the extent to which they feel valued and able to contribute. While the interview and selection process is the first opportunity for a prospect to experience a company's brand, how an organization introduces a person to their work, colleagues and company (the process known as on-boarding) is the real first impression.

Effective on-boarding begins with an orientation that sets realistic and tangible expectations about the employee-work relationship, as well as provides an introduction to corporate benefits and policies. It also includes offering employee access to a wide range of internal and external networks—and providing the time and space for individuals to fully engage in those networks, which helps extend the brand.

Buddies are also a great way to support new employees. By providing insight into the nuances of the company, buddies can help facilitate a quick acclimation to the work culture for new people. The system can be even more effective by pairing new employees with both a recent hire and a veteran, which provides a broader perspective. It is impor-

tant that buddies be given the room to spend time with the new hire and, when appropriate, be provided with proper training.

Finally, all new employees should be subject to a 90-day review. The intention of the review is not to measure job performance but to assess what is going well and, more important, identify what the company can do better throughout the on-boarding process. If done effectively, this 90-day review can be a valuable learning tool for the organization.

#### **TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION: TREATING PEOPLE LIKE ASSETS**

Arguably the greatest measure of an organization's successful commitment to diversity and inclusion is its ability to promote from within. Like sourcing, this is part of the strategic effort that focuses on developing a diverse pool of talent. Unlike sourcing, this effort is internal and hinges on providing a structure where career development is available to everyone, high performers are identified and nurtured and managers are rewarded for mentoring and coaching the next generation of leaders.

As is the case with every stage of the Pipeline Strategy, diversity is a key factor in talent development and promotion. It is not good enough to have a diverse pool of internal talent, there must also be diversity among the high performers and the opportunities afforded to them. If there is not, the lack of desired result is more likely attributable to a breakdown in systems and structures than to a lack of diverse, high-performing individuals.

#### **CULTURE IS KEY: DEVELOPING PROCESSES AND A WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT ENABLES PEOPLE TO DO THEIR BEST WORK**

“In skating over thin ice our safety is our speed.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Whether it is fair to say today's businesses are skating on thin ice is debatable. However, it is fair to say that any organization that does not create a culture of inclusion—an environment where people feel fully respected, valued and seen for who they are, where they have the supportive energy to do their best work—will have difficulty performing and getting long-term results.

Foundational to an inclusive environment is a culture of respect and fairness. Respect means that people feel valued for their unique talents and perspectives and that they feel included in conversations about the direction of the team, especially in regard to their work, and the company. Fairness means that people of all backgrounds and identity groups are afforded the same opportunities as their colleagues, from access to career development to flexible work schedules, promotional opportunities, rewards and coaching, among others. And respect and fairness start at the top. Leadership must clearly articulate the organization's mission, values and core business objectives throughout every level of the enterprise, and they must do so in a way that connects with the people.

### **KEEPING SCORE: MEASURING WHAT MATTERS**

If the Pipeline is seen as the artery of the organization, in terms of channeling talent throughout all levels of the organization, then new measures must be created to assess its effectiveness. A scorecard can be developed to track how well managers hire and develop individuals of diverse backgrounds for their work teams, and to what extent managers treat these individuals as corporate assets. For example, how well do managers retain new talent? We know from recent studies by the Society for Human Resource Management that it costs at least two times an individual's salary to recruit someone. Therefore it is critical to measure how well managers retain new hires from all backgrounds and how well they coach, develop and promote that talent.

If people and talent are a company's core assets, then measuring the effectiveness of leaders to manage these core assets becomes critically important. This requires a new definition of accountability that drives bottom-line business performance. Accountability must be expanded to include how well managers create a work environment in which all people at all levels can do their best work and feel engaged and valued for their contributions, whether it be through employee surveys or tracking the productivity and innovation level of work teams.

The Key is to remember that measurements and accountability are only tools for gauging

organizational effectiveness. They identify areas of weakness that can be addressed and improved upon. This is particularly true in regard to the Pipeline Strategy, where the emphasis is not on keeping up in today's global economy but getting ahead through sourcing, high retention, leadership development and building a culture of inclusion that enables people to contribute their best work—a strategy that not only meets the challenges of today and tomorrow but also does it in a way that returns people to where they belong...in the driver's seat of progress.

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