

'Involving the business in talent management'

Jo Dunne, Head of Strategic Talent Management at Tate & Lyle

Managing and developing the talent within an organisation is a strategic focus. However, there still exists the real challenge of how to involve the organisation and senior managers to champion initiatives. At Tate & Lyle we have taken an innovative approach.

Tate & Lyle is one of the oldest brands in food, but our markets and customers are changing. This resulted in a sharp focus on Talent Management and the systematic re-evaluation, identification and development of specific capabilities. It was a comparatively new departure for quite a traditional company and as a result required managers to embrace new approaches in people development. A range of consultation approaches were used to ensure managers have a clear understanding of the new People Strategy and their role in it, however, to ensure it is truly embedded, I recognised that more needed to be done to directly engage the managers.

A Steering team was formed comprising of senior managers from most functions and regions globally. Their remit was to design, develop and implement specific aspects of the Talent Management strategy. In the eighteen months since the team of ten has been working together, we have redesigned our recruitment process for graduates ensuring global consistency; implemented a development route map for a segment of our high potential population; ran an international knowledge exchange conference involving the CEO; and, revamped some core training for specific functions to ensure they are globally aligned and meets our capability requirements.

The Steering team managers already had a vested interest in improving how their people are recruited and developed – but this has been the 'hook' to get them really involved. Before this point few were drawn into the mechanics of how to deliver these activities. It has required some 'steering with a light touch' to ensure the sub-teams working on each project take ownership, whilst having sufficient access to expert input and resources to meet their goals.

The outcomes have been of the highest quality and has progressed our Talent agenda. A surprise side benefit has also been the development of the team members themselves. For many it was their first time working collaboratively across functions and geographies, and on a subject matter in which they were not proficient. It has developed their understanding of Talent Management as well as how to work through ambiguity, find solutions and sell them to their colleagues. Overall its success has been based on the fact that it is a tangible project, with clear deliverables and measures.

One of the most rewarding aspects is when managers have come up with new and innovative ways to improve what we're currently doing and their enthusiasm in ensuring their idea gets implemented. That's when we've really got active buy-in.

But one of the most interesting comments was from one of the team members who said, "For the first time I've gained an insight into what HR really does."