CDF as a Talent Finder and Work Design Methodology

Otto Laske, Interdevelopmental Institute (IDM), Gloucester, MA, USA

In this short article, I highlight the resources of the *Constructive Developmental Framework* (CDF) for finding and retaining organizational talent and designing a work environment that supports shared leadership.

Introduction

Managers typically are not schooled in recognizing talent since, just like the Human Resources Department, they are thinking in terms of competence models. This means they are foremost thinking about skills. But no amount of skills ever equals talent, and so they are looking in the wrong place. If managers knew more about CDF, *the Constructive Developmental Framework,* their situation would be different. In fact, Human Resource Departments would be living on a different planet if they understood levels of adult development.

Let me spell this out a little further. (Have a look at
https://en/wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructive_Developmental_Framework).

CDF Naturally Points to Talent

Talent is a resource different people have to different degrees, competences and skills aside. Talent defines what somebody "is", not what somebody "has", such as competences or skills. As E. Jaques used to say, you can always decide not to use what you have or be hindered from doing so, but you can't decide not to be who you are.

In CDF, what you "are", appears in the form of three different, but strongly related, profiles called "psychological", "social-emotional", and "cognitive". The first is strictly behavioral and speaks about social and other skills a person has, regarding approach to tasks, communication and empathy, and "self concept" -- how sure one is of oneself, how much power one needs, etc.

All of these "psychological" traits and skills are under development over the life span. This means that while your psychological profile changes very little over your lifespan (giving a nod to astrology), the way you *work with* your personal profile changes dramatically as you continue maturing over the life span. And that is what really matters because your "talent" lies precisely in working with what is psychologically not always comfortable or easy to do, or even counter-productive (such as having to win every battle).

You own little personality is a double sword, actually even if you are "good" boy or girl. For instance, if you are a deferential person and have great communication skills, that will not

necessarily help your career or help you bring out your talent. To be true to your talent you need to show mental growth (maturity), not only in the way you handle emotions but in how you think. At work, your talent shows up in what I call your *internal work place*: how you think about the work you do, and at what level of complexity. And regarding this internal work place, it is situated in the social world, and is both social-emotionally and cognitively determined.

It is in regard to developing a manager's eye for the maturity of emotions and of thinking, both of him- or herself or that of reports and colleagues, that CDF is most useful. CDF comprises tools you can learn and master, and actually bring about a revolution of how you think about the real world, and not only the social world.

On the basis of a 1-hr interview, one social-emotional and 1 cognitive, managers can actually find out about their reports' "talent". The structured interview on which feedback can be given by an expert CDF user will look into the level on which your reports make meaning in relationship to others, and will also inform you of the structure of their present thinking (such as lack of complexity of thinking). If the term *talent* has any meaning at all, it lies very close to how adventurously and complexly an individual thinks, -- how far s(he) can think off the beaten track of logical thinking.

How so?

Because to be talented means that you are not only fearless in using your developmental resources, but also able to use forms of thinking that open up a large number of perspectives on things that matter to you, including issues at the work place, whatever your present organizational function may be.

What makes CDF so relevant to finding and growing talent, then?

CDF is a holistic instrument. It looks at "the whole person in his/her environment", not just this or that competence or skill. Rather, CDF looks at HOW YOU ACTUALLY USE YOUR COMPETENCE AND SKILLS. And that is really what matters in most organizations.

Related to talent is the issue of Potential. What potential does somebody actually have? Here, too, CDF is right there to answer the relevant questions. This methodology lets a a third party (such as a coach or mentor) tell you where your largest talent resources lie, and what it will take to develop them. A good manager will need the capabilities to discern talent and coach for talent, which also means to coach for complexity of thinking.

But CDF does not stop here. CDF moves right on to help you with designing work environments in which talent can be fostered.

Configuring Organizational Talent

Now that the fixed hierarchies of levels of accountability in organizations are a thing of the past, people become increasingly aware that talent cannot be appointed but needs to be grown from the bottom up, as startups do. Levels of responsibility, rather than being pre-ordained, make their appearance during the work teams do. There is a natural emergence that transforms both the external and internal workplace of contributors. (As said, the internal workplace determines how people think about and deliver work, and is something that defines their identity.)

When you don't start out with pre-ordained responsibility levels in pre-ordained silos, what happens?

Since skills are no longer the absolute measure of level of responsibility and work assignment but unfolding potential is, managers must learn to develop a better understanding of the developmental resources of their reports, and management as a whole needs to develop ways of assessing developmental potential from the start, as part of designing business (not just "HR") strategy. Rather than being an afterthought, developmental potential becomes as important as "skills" once were assumed to be. Such potential is really what ultimately defines talent.

It seems, then, that new universes of discourse about talent and work design for talent need to be created. Such universes are equivalent to what used to be called "corporate culture". Tell me how management thinks about talent, how able it is to recognize talent in the first place, and I'll tell you what its corporate culture is like.

In this organizational process, one of the most important things that need to happen is that managers – NOT only those who are "talent managers" -- acquire new ideas and concepts of what talent is, how it can be discerned, and how it can be measured holistically by new developmental tools such as CDF. Understanding the "hidden" causes of sub-optimal productivity becomes impossible without such tools. These tools derive from developmental research. Companies neglect them at their peril. Action plans built without insight into a company's talent pool will go nowhere.

This is not easy to do since a company's talent is increasingly embodied in teams, rather than individuals. Therefore, the hidden dimension of talent is deepened beyond the individual. Here the following issues arise:

1. What is the adult-developmental maturity of a team, social-emotional and cognitively speaking?

2. Is this team upwardly or downwardly divided in terms of the majority of members working from higher levels of maturity? (If the majority of team members is at developmental levels, the team will fail.)

3. If a team is composed such that lower maturity levels predominate, how can personal process and task process be brought into balance without the former smothering the latter (so that desired results are never obtained)?

4. Is the team leader mature enough (in developmental terms, regardless of skills and competences) to hold a team together and make it thrive?

5. How mature are teams that need to cooperate closely? Can their ego-centrism be used productively rather than leading to unfruitful competition and blame?

And so forth.

Here, too, CDF is the tool of choice since beyond helping to think about, and assess, developmental potential it also helps think about how to design work from the start in such a way that teams will chime with one another. Clearly, this is a systemic issue, not one of individual skills.

But even recognizing individual and team talent is not enough. The proof of the pudding lies in whether management can *reform itself* in the sense of what E. Jaques called "requisite organization", meaning an organization of work which is based on a match of individual and tem capability and responsibility so that every team member is "in the right place at the right time".

This is probably the hardest issue to handle. But thinking about what is requisite in terms of individuals' and teams' developmental resources makes it much easier than to think in terms of competence models, however well defined the skills they feature may be. (This is the biggest drawback of the balanced score card which is developmentally quite unbalanced.)

For further input into these issues, you are invited to address yourself to The Director, Interdevelopmental Institute, at otto@interdevelopmentals.org and www.interdevelopmentals.org. Our international team has the experience you need and are looking for.