Important Considerations in Creating a Leadership Development Strategy

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A leadership development strategy that is in sync with the organizational strategy helps groom leaders who have the necessary skills to achieve the organization's mission. Such a development strategy needs to utilize all the opportunities available within the organization to prepare leaders fully for their key roles. By incorporating the following aspects within a leadership development strategy, organizations can create a sustainable pipeline of leaders who understand the organization's vision, mission, values, and culture and tie their result-oriented efforts accordingly.

Specify Learning and Development Efforts within the Strategy: The leadership development strategy specifies how learning and development should occur for leaders. This detail is important because it shows the importance of leadership development within the organization, provides clarity about leadership development efforts, and makes the necessary connection that all development needs to be in line with the organizational strategy.

Define Leadership Practices that are Essential to Leadership Strategy: Leadership practices are the observable, shared behaviors that shape and ultimately define the leadership culture. According to Ed Schein, a preeminent author on the topic of organizational culture, culture can be discerned by listening to the stories that people tell one another about the organization. The same is probably true for the leadership culture. The leadership culture can be discerned by listening to what people say about leaders in the organization. The stories people tell will be based on behaviors they observe, especially during unusual times that "test" the true nature of the leadership culture. When results aren't achieved, what happens? Do leaders start looking for scapegoats, or do they engage people in problem solving? When strategies are not implemented, do leaders finger point, or do they pull together across units and levels to figure out what's happening and try something new? What's interesting and important for leaders to note is that speeches do not determine how people view the leadership culture. People listen to speeches, but then they watch closely to see what really happens. That's why defining the leadership practices that are essential to implementing the leadership strategy is so important.

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Make Work Assignments and Career Moves Count: Too often, opportunities to make the most of these assignments are missed. People spend time in a new location, but fail to learn the language or interact with those who could help them understand the local culture. A cross functional assignment may be carried out by learning the minimum possible to do the work, rather than immersing oneself in the content of the job to take full advantage of the expertise of others. A career move is a precious thing to waste.

Capture Organizational Knowledge for Deeper Insights: Knowledge management systems can greatly simplify learning and also capture important information that might otherwise disappear as talented individuals retire or move on to other assignments. They are critical for organizations to help leaders fit into their new roles or understand reasons behind the steps the organization takes. Knowledge of history within the organization can help in the onboarding process as well as the leader understands the cultural references as to why the organizations does what it does.

Align Reward and Recognition with Learning Objectives: When rewards are not tied to the content of the learning development strategy, the strategy takes a back seat to work or other priorities that are perceived to be more important to one's pay or future. Failure to align rewards and recognition with learning objectives is perhaps the most common and easily corrected mistake in executive development efforts.

Design Performance Management to Motivate Individuals to Deliver Results: Rewards and recognition are blunt instruments for changing behavior. Performance management should be more continuous, more targeted and more individualized.

Complement Individual Focus with Team and Organizational Learning: Competencies provide helpful directional guidance to executives who are looking for signposts that explain what they are expected to do. However, in many organizations, too much emphasis has been placed on competencies relative to other elements in leadership development strategies. Even if one receives a thorough 360 assessment and advice on what to do about gaps between current and desired behavior, the information can at best only help one be in the learning journey, not end it. Moreover, competencies are static and individually oriented, making them less useful in dynamic environments where collective actions are required to adapt to change. In most organizations, more emphasis should be placed on team and organizational learning to complement the individual focus that accompanies the use of competency models.

Distinguish between Leaders Needed vs. Leaders the Organization Has: It makes sense, when possible, to begin leadership development with people who are already inclined to do what the organization needs them to do. Some organizations, like Goldman Sachs and McKinsey and Company, believe that their highly selective sourcing strategies are the key to their continued success. If there are leadership positions in your organization that don't require the best talent available, those positions are probably candidates for outsourcing. As organizations adopt new business models, expand into new territories or adopt bold new strategies, they often try to get there with the leadership they already have, instead of getting the leadership they need.

These factors can help an organization implement its business strategy with greater success. When organizations consider a range of elements in creating a leadership development strategy, they can make a dramatic shift in in meeting the challenges of the future because their leaders understand what is expected of them and are skilled and motivated in fulfilling those expectations.

Question: How do you develop your leaders? Please write your answers in the chat box on the social media link.

Additional information: If you are interested in pursuing a professional certification in Leadership Development, we can help you. Please click on registration.instituteod.com to learn more and register for our upcoming Leadership Development Certification Program. We look forward to hearing from you.