

How do you know who has potential?

Every organisation is looking for people with potential but the problem is that they often don't ask the question "potential for what?" Talking about potential in general is not very helpful; everyone has potential of one kind or another.

One of the outstanding characteristics of human beings is their ability to adjust to changing circumstances. It's what has allowed the species to survive and become dominant. But some people are less flexible than others, and different people are interested in doing different things. Defining potential has two sides: what the organisation wants done and what the individual wants to do.

There are a variety of ways to identify potential, but all start with answering the "for what?" question, and in organisational terms that can generally be thought of as a job or series of jobs. Starting at the "what" end – what tasks, jobs, roles, functions, levels, responsibilities, etc. – opens up the opportunity to use a very simple but very powerful technique: self nomination. If you want to find out who has potential for something, one of the first things you need to do is find out who thinks they have that potential. That means that you have to ask them.

We can see flags coming up immediately. Are we saying that people know more about their potential to do something than their managers do? Most of the time, yes. Are we saying that people understand themselves – their strengths, weaknesses and abilities – better than their managers do? Most of the time, yes. And are we saying that people know better than their managers do whether they want to do something? Yes, all of the time.

The more structured an organisation – processes, systems, rules, regulations – the more "comfortable" it is for its people, and the less room/need there is for independent action and decision making. The more the structure makes decisions for people, the less involved and committed they become. The *lesser*

the structure the more challenging it is and the more it demands, supports and develops independent action and risk taking.

One of the best ways to identify who have potential for something is to set up a process of self-nomination. People who volunteer to do something are demonstrating their commitment. It's a matter of commitment and motivation.

The great majority of programmes and systems for identifying potential are based on judgements and decisions by third parties. In most cases the individuals who have been identified as "having potential" remain unaware of the fact. Lists of fast track people, potential leaders, and "talent pool" people are created by various processes and are often based on performance appraisals. But we know that the appraisal system has a number of shortcomings, one of which is that managers sometimes hold back people they don't want to lose, and sometimes inflate their assessments of people they want to get rid of. Nor is it uncommon to see managers who have favourites whom they support and sponsor over people who have greater talent or potential.

Sometimes people who are put on high potential lists don't want to be there. Sometimes they're quite happy doing what they are doing, and if they're doing it well, what's wrong with that? If you want to find out who is up for change, for career advancement, for challenge and for performance improvement – i.e. who has a decent probability of having potential – the best way is to ask them to identify and nominate themselves. Once they've done that they've passed the first test; they've shown interest and some level of commitment.

A large organisation with approximately 120,000 employees uses, as part of its training and development for supervisory and non-supervisory employees, an on-line learning system which offers a variety of training/learning "modules". Participation in any and all of the elements of the system is purely voluntary and the entire menu of training and development modules is available to all employees. The training modules are structured around core skill and knowledge areas which build on one another. Upon completion of a module, the successful employee receives a certificate and the organisation is informed of the accomplishment. Rewards are linked to successful completion of the various modules, but more importantly the system flags for the organisation the people in its workforce who demonstrate energy, desire for improvement, motivation, commitment, and ability – i.e. *potential*.

By and large people have a much wider range of capability than we, and they, believe. It's not so much that people hide their light under a bushel, it's more that organisations provide bushel baskets for everyone and keep them covered, lifting the baskets in a semi-random fashion to see if there is light beneath. The unfortunate result of this process is that a lot of people finally get tired of waiting for their basket to be lifted and extinguish their lights themselves.

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strategy people performance

Penumbra is a strategic business consultancy. We bring clarity by using research to drive understanding and direction. We deliver success by balancing experience and innovative thinking.

Whatever your aspiration, we'll provide the tools, information and analysis to turn your strategy into operational reality, in a way that motivates your people to outperform the market.

Overview

As a strategic business consultancy, our expertise is in helping our clients executing strategies and delivering results.

We achieve this by combining a robust management planning system with a focus on people which drives alignment and commitment

We work in partnership with talented and committed leadership teams to help organisations build corporate value with a wide range of customised, cross-functional advisory programmes and services delivered from four complementary service groups:

Strategy

(Development, formulation, implementation and alignment)

Our innovative **Penumbra Balance** approach creates dynamism, drives and sustains momentum and makes strategy real for stakeholders

Organisational Development

(Behavioural issues)

We call our holistic approach **Balanced Motivation** which encompasses activities that improve performance both for the organisation and the individual

Research and Insight

Our stimulating **Clarity** approach draws on our business consulting skills to deliver a mix of business analysis and market research which

provides compelling insights for winning decisions.

Operations

The Operations practice brings all of our hands-on practical experience to bear on execution and delivery of results.

Our technology enabling approach called **Totality** facilitates business focussed services and solutions, aligned to business needs, for people, processes and tools.

Why Us?

Organisations turn to us when they:

- Want to find a new strategic direction
- Have created a strategy and now need to execute it
- Need to drive more value from existing initiatives
- Have a big issue to resolve, usually dependent on lasting employee buy-in
- Need to explore new ways to drive value
- Need a breakthrough result
- Are seeking measurable results

Our Experience

We have real world experience spanning 20 years with our clients. This includes working with:

BP, Citibank, Morgan Chase, WestLB, RBS, UBS, Bankers Trust, Kleinwort Benson, Coutts, Natwest, Intel, Nokia, Adobe, Kall-Kwik, Glaxo Smith Kline,

Dupont, Pfizer, Savills, British Council, Clifford Chance, British Airways, Gillette, Unilever, Shell, Volvo, Vauxhall, British Gas, TradeStation, MWB Business Exchange, Investors in People, University of Cambridge

On projects such as:

Strategic Planning, Strategy development and implementation, Culture change, Post-Merger Integration, Vision, Purpose and Values, Current State Analysis, Organisation Re-design, Transformational Change, Client Focus Strategies, Perception Studies, Client and Staff Engagement surveys, Global Rebranding, Know your Customer, Market Forecasting, Consumer Insight, Market Segmentation, Process optimisation, Lean/Six Sigma, Project Management, ERP Systems Roll-out, Market Research, Financial Modelling, Franchise Start-up Evaluation models, Cost Benefit Analysis, Implementation Alignment, Strategic Alignment, Complex Database development, Custom Application development, Supply Chain Optimisation

Covering diverse sectors such as:

Financial Services, Pharmaceuticals, Manufacturing, Energy, Mobile Telecoms, Travel and Tourism, Aviation, Property, Hi-tech and Business Services