

Talent Planning for Successful Performance

BY LAUREN OLSEN

The saying “the only constant is change” is as true in co-ops as it is elsewhere. One of the best ways to deal with change is to plan for it.

Most co-ops have a business plan, a marketing plan, and hopefully a growth plan. But how many co-ops have a plan for changes in staff?

Who leads and works at the co-op will change, whether that is due to people leaving to work for a competitor, retirement, or other turnover. Creating a plan for how to fill important positions when they become vacant will make those personnel changes less disruptive to the co-op.

The people who work at the co-op are the co-op’s “talent”—their behaviors, skills, and abilities enable the organization to perform. When creating a talent plan, many co-ops only work on identifying an interim general manager (GM). While the GM role is critical, co-ops would benefit from planning for other key roles as well.

To identify such positions, think about how the co-op would perform if a position were unexpectedly vacated. A key role is one where:

- the co-op would experience difficulty when the position became vacant
- it would take a significant amount of time to develop unready staff to assume the responsibilities of that role
- it would be difficult to find someone from outside the co-op to successfully fill the position

The leaders of the co-op probably fall into this category, but there may be other positions requiring a specific skillset that would also be key roles.

Success profiles

Identifying key roles is the first step. Next comes documenting what it takes to be successful in those roles by creating a success profile. A success profile is not a job description. Whereas job descriptions describe the tasks, duties, and minimum requirements for a role, a success profile describes the behaviors, attitudes, skills,



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knowledge, and prior work experiences needed to be truly successful in the role. A success profile will highlight what to look for in a potential candidate.

After creating a success profile for key roles comes determining if there are people in the organization who meet the profile. Performance evaluations are a good place to begin looking for this information, but most evaluations focus on the skills and abilities needed for employees’ current positions, not their ability to fill future roles. Understanding an employee’s fit with a success profile will require conversations with supervisors and among the co-op’s leadership team. As these conversations occur, areas where no employees currently meet the success profile will be discovered. These areas are the gaps on which to focus employee-development efforts.

Once key roles are identified, success profiles created, employees assessed against those profiles, and talent gaps where employees need development recognized, then a talent plan has been created. Now it’s time to put it into action.

70–20–10 model

The Center for Creative Leadership created a model for employee development based on 30 years of research, called the 70–20–10 model. This model says that 70 percent of development comes on the job: lateral moves, special projects, leading a team, and cross-functional teamwork. The 20 percent refers to learning from others and includes feedback, coaching,

networking, and job shadowing. The 10 percent is formal learning, such as attending training.

The 70–20–10 model indicates that, with a little forethought, most employee development can occur on the job. As gaps are identified against success profiles, consider how the employee might benefit from a special project, a lateral move to another department, or exposure to another co-op’s operations. When employees are given on-the-job development opportunities, their development will not occur automatically. On-the-job development is accelerated and most effective when accompanied by regular feedback and coaching. Communicate with the employee about why this opportunity exists and what the job expectations are.

The National Cooperative Grocers Association is committed to helping our co-ops develop the talent in their organizations. With the addition of a Talent Development department, we are refining our existing training programs and have new programs in the works. In early 2014, we will be able to offer self-paced, online learning to our co-ops for the first time. We will also create tools to help co-ops create talent plans and make their 70 percent and 20 percent development efforts more effective.

Co-ops are great places to work, but turnover in staff and leadership will happen whether or not it has been planned for. Creating and acting upon a talent plan are effective ways of smoothing these personnel transitions and minimizing any disruption to operations. ■