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In a previous article, I discussed the role of leaders in identifying and nurturing talent. On a similar theme, the Consultancy team at The Work Foundation is working with the idea of managing “hidden talent”. This concept assumes that most organisations have large amounts of talent that they never discover or exploit, whilst still thinking they lack talent.

To tackle this problem, we have developed the “Good Work Principles of Talent Management”. We use these to help organisations address their talent management issues holistically. The principles are as follows:

#### **Talent management should be owned by business leaders and line managers as part of normal activity**

Too many talent programmes place too much reliance on HR or external consultants to be wholly responsible for talent identification, when those closest to the talent are the managers. Talent spotting should not be a “one-off” event, but a process of continuous evaluation. In order for this to happen, all employees need to be given the opportunity to shine.

#### **Talent management must comprise consistent and transparent approaches to promotion and succession planning**

A major breaker of psychological contracts is the inconsistent and opaque approaches some organisations take to promotion and succession planning. When the organisation damages the employee’s psychological contract, the employee’s response is often to withdraw goodwill and effort – they choose to keep their talent to themselves, or worse, to offer it to another organisation.

#### **Employees should play an active role in the management of their own talent**

It is easy for employers to make paternalistic assumptions about what individual staff members want in terms of fulfilling their potential. Individuals need to be encouraged to explore their potential and have opportunities to consider how this can be used to the mutual benefit of both themselves and the organisation.

#### **A clear distinction should be made between assessment and development**

In order to develop, people need to take risks, and this may involve temporary failure – it’s how we learn. It’s unfair (and in some cases unethical) to assess people in the context of a learning experience. It’s all too tempting for organisations to seek information about talent potential from development activities, but these assessments need to be made either in a formal arena (e.g. interview or assessment centre) or, better still, on a day-to-day basis.

#### **The content of “talent pools” should be regularly reviewed – no employee should be “written off”**

Where organisations have ear-marked a group of individuals as “talented”, it is essential that these decisions be reviewed regularly. People’s performance and

motivation changes. If those not in the talent pool feel they have been written off, you will lose much of the potential they have to offer through demotivation.

**Organisations should maintain an open mind about sources of talent to encourage diversity**

Look for talent in the less obvious places – in the introverts as well as the extroverts, the older as well as the younger, those who are less politically skilled as well as those who know how to play the game, those who don't have the formal qualifications as well as those with the fantastic MBA.... So much potential is hidden through personality, prejudice and lack of opportunity.