EAGLE'S FLIGHT™

Using the HR Cycle to Unlock the Potential Within the Organization

Table of Contents

Introduction

Just as the careful crafting of a work of art or architecture takes the right amount of time, tools, and commitment, the development of a high-performance, future-looking organization and culture requires the same focus.
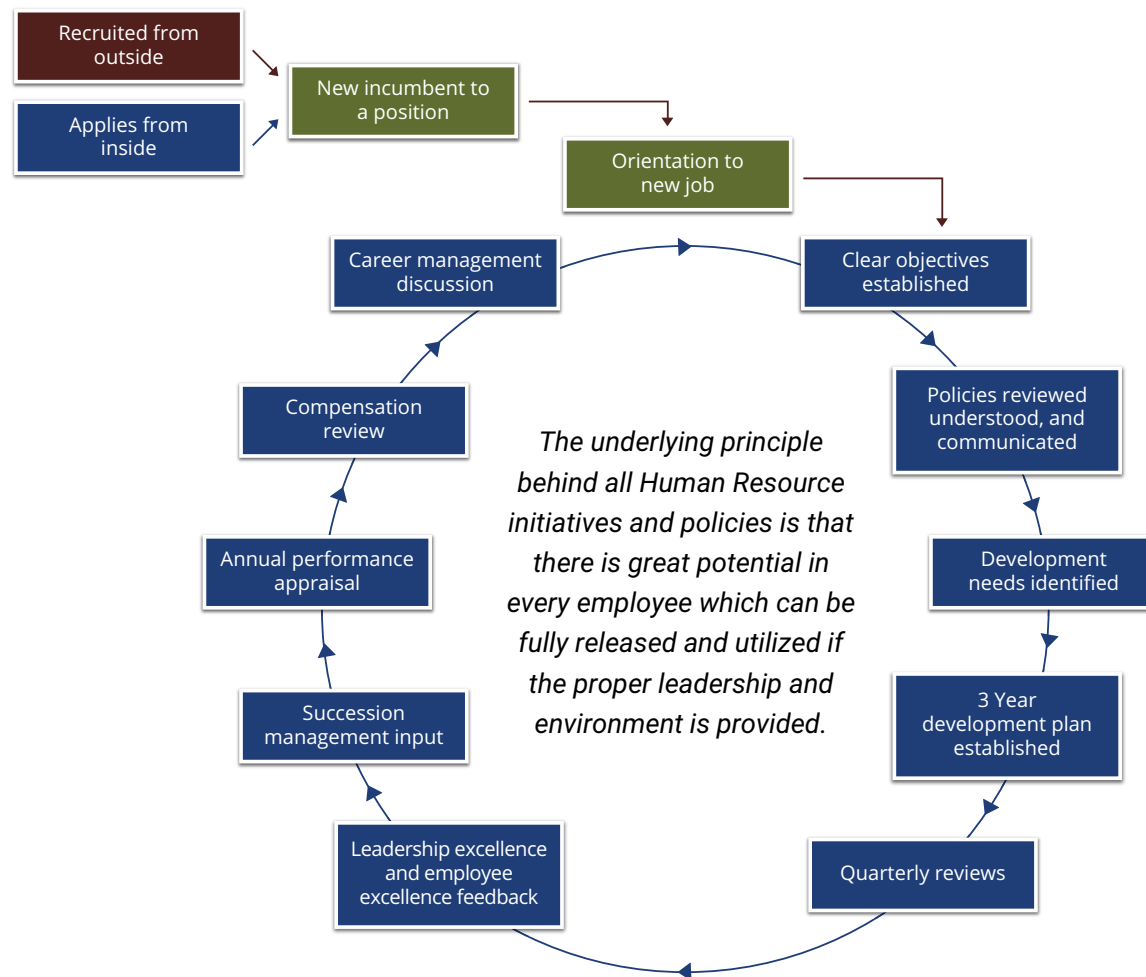
Michelangelo took nearly three years to sculpt the famous statue of David, and it still draws admirers some 500 years after being erected. Similarly, HR professionals can rely on the right mix of tools, timing, and training to help build an organization and culture that will both optimize performance today and be well-equipped to grow and develop talent for years to come.

The HR cycle illustrates the key ways in which HR supports the business and its employees, from recruitment and onboarding to performance management and career development. Whether the cycle you're most familiar with is composed of many stages or is condensed into three or four stages, there are many opportunities for HR to optimize the various stages of an employee's journey through their career within the organization. In fact, the underlying principle behind all HR activities along the cycle is that employee potential can be fully released and utilized when the proper leadership and environment are present.[1] So how do you leverage the right tools and training to help maximize HR's value throughout the cycle and unlock each employee's potential?

The HR Cycle

An HR cycle that covers all the bases and showcases step-by-step opportunities for you to leverage the company's leadership and culture is an effective framework for leveraging each employee's potential for long-term value.

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Recruited from outside
Applies from inside
New incumbent to a position
Orientation to new job
Clear objectives established
Policies reviewed understood, and communicated
Development needs identified
3 Year development plan established
Quarterly reviews
Leadership excellence and employee excellence feedback
Succession management input
Annual performance appraisal
Compensation review
Career management discussion
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The underlying principle behind all Human Resource initiatives and policies is that there is great potential in every employee which can be fully released and utilized if the proper leadership and environment is provided.

Recruitment and Onboarding

> The ultimate goal of successful employee recruitment is finding the right people for the right roles.

Once you understand the role to be filled and which recruitment partners to use, you need strong communication and teamwork with the hiring manager and each person who will be involved in the hiring and onboarding process. HR has a valuable role to play in arming leaders with the tools they need to ensure that new hires understand expectations and have a clear way forward for success in the early days, weeks, and months in a new role.

During the recruiting and onboarding phases, pay close attention to the following considerations:

1. Stress the value of cultural fit during orientation

A recent study found that new hires who reported a poor onboarding experience were eight times likelier to be disengaged in their work.[2] In today's economy, as the war for talent rages on, providing a strong cultural orientation is as important to new hires as the actual job orientation. This is because new hires, and internal hires, need the proper chance to become acclimated to the culture of their new business unit. Rather than an obstacle to their long-term success, acclimating to corporate culture becomes a catalyst for it.

HR has a unique role to play in ensuring new hires are aligned with the culture of their new role. For example, if an individual's past experience favored structure over casual brainstorming, it is the responsibility of HR and the new hire's leader to guide the transition that will need to occur for a new hire to become an

effective cultural fit, which will take time. In order to be truly effective in a new cultural construct, it takes understanding that often can only come with time spent living in the culture. In the meantime, it is the responsibility of HR to provide these hires with resources, support, and tools that will help fill the gaps until time and experience can.

2. Leverage goal-setting and objectives

It is very difficult to dispute the benefits of goal-setting, for new and existing employees alike. Goals and objectives provide clear focus, purpose, and the conviction employees need to deliver the results for which they are accountable. But the excuses still happen all the same—many employees lament the lack of clarity or feel they are not well-informed enough to develop individual goals. Your organization of the future will thank you if you set up a dynamic goal-setting process now that teaches employees how to create goals and objectives they not only commit to, but act and deliver on and that ultimately support organizational goals and objectives.

Once you've identified the tool that fits your company and its culture, make sure you have set aside the resources to train managers in effective goal-setting, feedback delivery, and overall performance management. It is valuable for HR to help managers realize that goal-setting involves much more than providing employees with a list of S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound) goals. People managers need to work with their direct reports to establish clear objectives but also need to play the part of cheerleader, coach, and supportive team member as they work to meet these objectives. Once managers have the skills and understanding, and are trained to use them, goal-setting becomes a dynamic leadership tool rather than a check-the-box managerial task.

> **"Goals and objectives provide clear focus, purpose, and the conviction employees need to deliver the results for which they are accountable."**

3. Identify development needs and craft a development plan

New hires and their managers have a strong desire to start off a new job on the right foot, often by avoiding many of the pitfalls that may have tripped up their predecessors. Remember that every new hire has potential within them to excel; it just needs to be unleashed. An American Management Association survey of companies found that the majority of senior managers bear primary responsibility for identifying and developing high-potentials.[3] That's a strong reason to start the development process in the early stages of the HR cycle, by understanding an employee's development needs and supporting managers as they craft a three-year plan to unlock this potential.

Why a three-year development plan? Competency development is a long-term process. The development plan should include skills, behaviors, and experiences an employee must have to grow in the organization, as well as outline the clear milestones that indicate this growth is happening.

" **Remember that every new hire has potential within them to excel.** "

Performance Management

Finding and implementing the right performance management framework is nothing new for HR professionals. However, the effectiveness of your performance management process is measured not only by the degree to which it is adhered to internally but also by the value that leaders and employees place on the process and tool itself.

Do your employees receive consistent formal and informal feedback that tells them if they're on track with their performance objectives? If not, are they waiting until mid-year—or worse, year's end—to know where they stand? Conventional wisdom has led most companies to the conclusion that more regular (weekly, monthly, or quarterly) feedback trumps the stand-alone annual performance review.[4]

Here are four strategies that will help you leverage the performance management stages of the HR cycle and shape a future-thinking, high-performing organization.

1. Practice quarterly reviews alongside annual performance appraisals

Millennials aren't the only ones who crave consistent feedback. All employees value feedback delivered in bite-size chunks rather than a walloping process-heavy review at year's end. Managers and employees alike lament the overwhelming amount of time it takes to conduct traditional performance reviews, as well as the diminishing value they see in the process itself. In fact, a Gallup workforce engagement poll found that employees who receive more regular feedback perform better and have a more productive appraisal experience.[5] Examples abound of organizations like Google, Microsoft, and GE moving to a model that provides weekly or quarterly check-ins and reviews, making it easier for managers to give, and employees to receive, the feedback that will propel them toward performance excellence.

2. Develop strong leaders and inspire employees

Companies like Disney and Arvig Communications practice performance management that begins with leadership excellence. The Chain of Excellence model they follow suggests that strong leaders build strong teams of employees, thereby leading to a better customer experience and excellent financial results.[6] The model explains that if your performance management system focuses on developing leadership competencies, then you are implicitly building and promoting excellence through each step of the HR cycle.

If your organization has strong leaders at its core, you are demonstrating to the rest of the employee base which behaviors are being rewarded and promoted. Assess your leadership development plan to be sure you have the right resources in place to build excellent organizational leaders. Targeting high-potential employees for leadership development is always a reliable place to start.

3. Build a high-performance culture

No one wants, or benefits from, a mediocre corporate culture, especially today. That's why a high-performance culture remains the chief (and sometimes elusive) goal for companies large and small, no matter the industry. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, there are a handful of characteristics that high-performance cultures share.[7]

They focus on building strong leaders who engage employees to achieve their performance potential

They implement processes that empower continuous improvement and performance excellence

They view talent as moldable, trainable, and capable of being developed over time

They infuse fun into the work life of employees, thereby building engagement and loyalty to the organization

If your organization seems to be lacking any one of these areas, consider assessing your current culture through the use of an engagement survey or targeted focus groups. From there, you will be able to develop a plan of action that trains employees to embrace the behaviors and skills you need most to make a high-performance culture a reality.

> " That's why a high-performance culture remains the chief (and sometimes elusive) goal for companies large and small. "

4. Have an uncompromising focus on high-potentials

The progression of leadership excellence is building an organization that identifies high-potentials early and, consistently develops their skills through an established leadership journey, which in turn strengthens your leadership pipeline for future success. In this stage of the cycle, HR must take a significant role in an organization's development of a strategy for leadership development and succession planning.

You may already have a process in place for identifying high-potentials and have a succession plan in place that supports the deployment of leaders as opportunities arise. But in the meantime, are you developing and training the leaders your organization will need in the future? Individuals positioned for future leadership roles and responsibilities will do significantly better when the time comes if they are prepared with training in all areas of leadership development, in advance, including:

Coaching to improve performance

Mastering world-class communication

Developing strategy and tactics that promote executional excellence

Rewards and Recognition

As employee management morphs into strategic talent management, the compensation discussion must address overall rewards and recognition.

In addition to fair pay, individuals thrive on the recognition that their work has value, is purposeful, and contributes to an organization's success. How you offer value during this phase of the HR cycle can impact all the other stages of the cycle. Are high-potentials rewarded to reflect their valuable position to the future success of the organization? Do performance messages align with short- and long-term rewards? When HR addresses these issues, the results show in your retention figures for high-potentials and employee engagement measures.

Compensation review. Those two words—compensation aligned with performance review—should always go hand-in-hand. Of all the elements of work life that employees value most, a *Harvard Business Review* survey found that rewards and recognition represented the lion's share of the list.[8] For high-performers, who can find great-paying opportunities elsewhere, there is an even greater imperative to ensure compensation fairly recognizes their contributions and potential.

There are many strategies that HR can pursue in support of a rewards and recognition program that bolsters the organization's long-term success. Among them are:

- Recognize employees in a way that is personal and timely[9]

- Reward employee actions that support your corporate values—this demonstrates to other employees just what kind of behavior is most valued in the culture

- Utilize a robust compensation toolkit by rewarding employees with a mix of salary, bonus, and other incentives that tie their performance to pay

- Reward behaviors that represent the desired future state of your culture

- Train managers to have compensation discussions that stress the link to performance rather than budget

Long-Term Career Paths and Development

The last stage of the HR cycle—the discussion about career management—brings all the other stages of the cycle together, forming a plan for how an individual's career will progress.

When you've hired the right person, invested in onboarding them, and provided the right mix of performance feedback and rewards, ultimately your goal is to unleash their potential and support their growth to positively impact your organization.

HR can help leaders and their employees ask the right questions about career development, by taking into account not only the needs of the company but also individual career aspirations. Based on the individual's performance and their recognized potential for growth, you'll be equipped to determine readiness for career growth.

HR's role in this cycle stage is to keep a close eye on building the manager's toolkit. Does each leader know how to have a career management discussion with their employees that offers clarity and options to meet career goals? The difference between having the right career discussion, especially with a high-potential, and not having the right career discussion impacts your company's competitive edge and long-term success.

There are some specific actions that HR can take to ensure leaders are well-positioned for effective career development discussions.

Develop checklists, sample scripts, and scenarios that will support managers as they host career management discussions

Consistently review your organization for new career-path opportunities that will positively impact the organization

Incorporate career development discussions into your succession planning process

Provide people managers with training experiences that transform them into expert communicators and cultivators of talent

Optimize the HR Cycle With a Trusted and Expert Partner

At Eagle's Flight, we've built a strong track record over nearly 30 years of partnering with leaders like you who want to expand their organization's leadership capabilities, undergo a culture transformation, or help prepare high-potentials for their next role. As you navigate the various stages of the HR cycle, we can partner with you to provide your organization's talent with training and development experiences that inspire long-term performance excellence. We also know that skills and behaviors need to be honed and reinforced throughout the HR cycle and will succeed in the right conditions. Like the careful construction of Michelangelo's David, you need the right combination of tools, timing, and training to shape a future-looking organization that stands the test of time. We can provide the training support and assessment tools to help get you there.

EAGLE'S FLIGHT™

When you've identified an area of your business that you want to improve, one key to success is changing behaviors through training and development. Whether your goal lies in reducing turnover, succession planning, increasing sales, improving customer satisfaction, or transforming the culture across your organization, an Eagle's Flight expert can match you with the right program.

LET'S CONNECT

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