

**CHAIRMAN: Paul Croney:** Let's start by discussing what we actually believe to be talent management. How would you define talent management in your organisation?

**Barbara Simpson:** The definition of talent at HSBC is very much about future leadership. That is, individuals who have the capability to reach the very top of the organisation – consistently high performers and those believed to have potential. Mobility is a firm requirement.

There's much more emphasis now on creating a diverse pipeline of talent through the organisation, whether that's at the top of the business, or at the top of a particular function.

**Claire Thompson:** We do this at all levels of the organisation – it's just as important for us to have a pipeline for a good call centre manager as someone who will reach the top of the organisation. The way I see this evolving is through a focus on more junior groups of jobs and through applying talent management more widely.

It's also about building greater transparency about the career development opportunities available to staff. That's not there in all organisations; there's a lot of fog.

**Margaret Cheshire:** In an engineering environment you need to identify people who don't necessarily show leadership qualities but are talented specialists. You need to give them a variety of development opportunities – it's not just about them going for a general management position.

**Ali Gill:** There is a fear about talent management becoming elitist. But if you take that perspective you're dumbing down the fact that you're looking for something that's

missing. To succeed, especially in very senior roles, is actually very difficult.

**Alison French:** One of the challenges is managing talent across the organisation. You can focus on one group of specialists where you need capable people, but once you spread out across the organisation it becomes more difficult.

**Alistair McIntosh:** The British Library has some challenges in finding specialists. For example, there may only be a few people in the world who know about western Chinese manuscripts, so where are we going to find our next expert? Yet we have the same need for general managers as any other organisation.

**Simpson:** It's about setting up a system where you can cross over your pool of specialists with those who have general leadership qualities.

**Croney:** Is there a link between talent management and performance management? As someone in a talent management function, how do you quantify or justify your existence?

**McIntosh:** In the public sector, money is precious, so we have to justify what we have done with it more perhaps than in other organisations. But you can end up turning measurement into a cottage industry all of its own. We track back on successful appointments or talent programmes and ask 'how did we get that positive impact?'

**Thompson:** We looked at our succession pipeline and how successful it had been. Half of our top 250 senior managers were in the succession plan. I want that to get better. We also use staff surveys to see how we have made or can make improvements. At least four of the questions in the survey focus on performance management and how people feel performance is dealt with.

**Alison Oliver:** There are lots of parallels in measuring the success of talent management with the world of sport. Since the arrival of lottery funding and with the 2012 Olympics on the horizon, UK Sport has had to introduce a process called 'Talent Confirmation', which all awarding bodies have to go through.

**Croney:** Does technology have a role to play in talent management?

**Simpson:** Business heads want to see a return on investment [on talent programmes]. But if talent management strategies are to receive continued business sponsorship, you have to have some basic metrics [measurements].

**Croney:** This is the issue. There's such a multiplicity of different factors in HR that we could measure, it's like a quest for the Holy Grail. But you do need to generate some hard metrics.

**Cheshire:** As a relatively small business employing around 4,000 people, we tend to know our employees personally and what motivates them. [Bentley's parent company] Volkswagen has technology that enables it to look across the company

# Talent at the table

Talent management is now a well-established function in HR, but what does the future hold? We asked nine HR specialists to share their wisdom.



globally to see what talent is available.

**Gill:** Talent management is a bit like customer relationship management, except there you're managing knowledge about your customer base rather than your staff. You can record facts and figures electronically about what people do and call up that data, but if you're not putting in the right data or using the right metrics in the first place then technology's useless.

**Simpson:** If the chief executive picks up the telephone and wants you to find a candidate for a general manager role, for a certain location, who can start in a month's time, then technology can be very useful.


**Croney:** How far do your talent pipelines extend?


**Thompson:** Our talent pipeline starts at age nine, when we go into schools in a bid to turn children on to the STEM subjects we need in the utilities sector. We then see them again at 13 or 14, before they choose their GCSE subjects, and we'll talk to teachers about, for example, how maths is used at work, so they can give real examples in the classroom.


**Cheshire:** If we can say that 25% of our work experience cohort comes to work for us then we've been successful. If you put the effort in, then you get it back out.


**Croney:** Employers are now asking institutions such as ours to offer bespoke courses to their organisations so they get the right skills.

## THE PANEL


 **Chairman: Paul Croney**, dean, Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University

 **Margaret Cheshire**, head of people and organisational development, Bentley Motors


 **Sarah Clark**, group director, leadership development, global, Laing O'Rourke


 **Alison French**, director general, civilian personnel, Ministry of Defence

 **Ali Gill**, director and co-founder, Getfeedback

 **Alistair McIntosh**, organisational development director, British Library

 **Alison Oliver**, director of sport, Youth Sport Trust

 **Barbara Simpson**, head of talent management and international resourcing, HSBC

 **Claire Thompson**, head of talent management, RWE npower





**Croney:** Does the size of your organisation matter? If you are in a big company your pool of talent is certainly bigger, but is it better?

**Simpson:** Just because of our size it doesn't mean we don't have the same problems as smaller companies. We still have to deal with issues around people taking time out at certain stages in their lives, so they wouldn't move around the business as much as they would like.

And, like other organisations, we have to ensure our 'generation Y' employees are getting as much variety as possible.

Graduates see us as a global organisation, so if we don't deliver overseas assignments then we run the risk of losing them. One of the ways we can overcome the challenges is through alumni schemes. I think you need to be more comfortable with people of this generation leaving earlier – we keep the contact going and may then be able to bring people back as mid-career hires.

**Thompson:** You also have to be mindful of local talent when it comes to international assignments. If you're too culturally diverse then you will never build up enough local expertise.

**Croney:** Does this raise the stakes at the recruitment stages then?

**Gill:** If you've only got a short period of time to identify your talent then it's easy to see who's confident. It's also interesting

to see that we're focusing on the pipeline of younger talent coming into the organisation, since from 2010 onwards, the number of young people reaching working age will begin to fall by 60,000 every year, fundamentally changing the shape of the workforce.

**Croney:** Where should talent management sit in the organisation?

**Clark:** I don't think it matters. In my business 'leadership development' reports into strategy and our talent management team processes reside in HR.

What matters is that anyone who has input into someone's reputation and performance registers it in one place so full pictures of people are done and this is then shared with the individual so they know how they are viewed.

'Talent management' sounds more interesting than 'performance management', but really it is only excellent performance management which, quite frankly, is what we should be doing for all employees – and we certainly aim to do so.

**Croney:** Are we saying the future of talent management is dependent on the effectiveness of HR in an organisation?

**French:** You could simply define talent management as good people management.

**Thompson:** But that's easier said than done. I don't see myself as being in any way

separate to the HR management team.

**McIntosh:** Performance management doesn't always include succession planning, so it needs to be elevated somewhere where it can be looked at – that's why you need talent management.

**Croney:** What are the challenges we face going forward with regards to talent management?

**Gill:** I think talent management has a role to play in sustainability, in giving people a sense of purpose at work. How do you capitalise on that? Your most talented people should be driving sustainability initiatives.

**Thompson:** What we do is in the headlines every day, whether it's carbon emissions or energy prices. We have to ensure that our key talent lead projects in conservation or are involved in speaking to schools about careers in energy.

**Simpson:** At HSBC, the CEO has made it clear that every senior executive must have a sustainability programme in their sights and that they will be measured against it. We send our management prospects out to projects in emerging markets – they bring a business perspective to these areas, they have drive, and it also provides them with valuable experience.

**Croney:** So where does all this leave talent management as a function?

**Clark:** My role is about what legacy I leave in two or three years' time. If I do what the business needs then potentially my role shouldn't need to exist, because talent management will be embedded in the business leadership behaviours and will be evident through impactful HR processes.

Ideally, people will understand it, take accountability and see how it benefits their own lines of business.

**Simpson:** My vision when I started [in 2002] was that I would do myself out of a job in five years, but I'm still here.

I've worked for three different CEOs and they all had a different idea of what talent management should be. I see talent management becoming more of a strategic resourcing role and a skill that both HR and managers will need to have.

**Thompson:** My business is in two halves and neither half believes the other understands how it works. Until we get a greater meeting of minds then I'm in the middle, banging heads together.

**Gill:** The role of the talent manager is to be a catalyst for the future, to keep an eye on skills shortages and what people need to be doing differently to keep the organisation competitive.

**Oliver:** In schools, every teacher is on the lookout for talent. But talented people are exceptional by nature, so you need someone not just to identify talent, but to nurture it carefully. This applies equally to a business environment.

For a copy of Getfeedback's White Paper on talent management, *The Getfeedback 3T: A Guide to Talent Management for now and 2010*, go to [personneltoday.com/44093.article](http://personneltoday.com/44093.article)