

IAG a 21st century talent management makeover



IAG New Zealand Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of Insurance Australia Group, and is the country's largest general insurer, trading under the State and NZI insurance brands.

The insurance industry doesn't tend to play with risk or experimental behaviour, but IAG has broken the mould by shaking up their approach to talent management, albeit carefully, while keeping both baby AND bathwater intact!

Talent Manager Monica Ayers discusses how Sonar6 has helped IAG improve their existing talent management approach – not by reinventing the wheel, but by giving it a 21st century online makeover.

Environmental Factors

With more than 2000 people at various locations across the country, talent and performance management is a huge task for people managers at IAG.

For Monica Ayers and her team the big question was how to identify potential leaders, and how to provide the right training and coaching to help those people take the next step in their career.

"IAG had developed and was operating a proprietary talent identification and management system, based in part on Excel spreadsheets, Microsoft Access database and whiteboard sessions.

"While the system was effective it was also quite cumbersome, making it difficult for us to get real time access to information," Ayers says.

In short, there was good data available through the robust processes IAG had spent considerable time and effort developing, but they needed the information to be available in a useable form in real time. They were looking for ways to mechanise and replicate their existing approach...

Requirements

When it came to talent management software, IAG was very clear that the solution had to be compatible with their current talent management approach. The search was an interesting exercise; some so-called 'solutions' were in fact more difficult and time consuming than IAG's existing paper-based approach!

Ayers continues: "We simply weren't prepared to impose a different talent review process on the business. We had an existing system, it worked well and we were very comfortable with it."

IAG's ideal solution also needed to:

- Provide real time access to information – "When you work in the financial sector, people want the data to support ideas so it's important to get quick access to that."
- Be able to report on factors and cut data in multiple ways and at multiple levels – "There's a distinct difference between team leaders and senior level management, while they may want to view the same factors they have very different needs."
- Be cost effective.

Results

Sonar6 has blended seamlessly into IAG and has met with an enthusiastic welcome by supposedly 'conservative' insurance personnel. Here's a snapshot of IAG's experience with Sonar6...

On one size not fitting all:

"One of the best things about Sonar6 is its ability to complement our existing practices. The software has been designed to suit our systems rather than asking us to fit into a box to suit their software."

On listening to what a client wants:

"Sonar6 never told us that we had issues and needed to implement wholesale changes to our existing approach. In fact, we only changed one thing, our talent management grid, and that was a minor alteration."

Even though the transition was easy, IAG was quite nervous about reception and uptake among some staff. However, Sonar6 has been quickly adopted by people managers at IAG and, despite some initial reservations among some members of staff, is proving to be a very popular tool.

Sonar6 Solution

Sonar6 ticked all the boxes and was keen to work with IAG to define the 'factors' or attributes it wished to assess, and to find the most effective and efficient way of measuring these.

"Defining the factors was the toughest challenge we faced. Initially we tried replicating the factors used in our paper based approach, but we discovered these weren't quite right."

Ayers says this forced IAG to initiate a wide-ranging internal discussion about leadership and the sorts of attributes the company was looking for in current and future leaders.

"Sonar6 encouraged our management team to engage with the process, talk about the issues and identify what we expected from our people managers."

Despite the potential difficulty of involving a third party in this discussion, the process went very smoothly.

"The Sonar6 team were down to earth, flexible and fast. They facilitated our internal conversations, challenged us to consider alternatives and were incredibly responsive."

Once the factors were finalised, the transition to using

On learning to use the system:

"Some of our managers are not particularly IT savvy, but they love Sonar6 and they see they're getting real value out of using it. The intuitiveness of Sonar6 is one of the best things about it. They're able to open it up and use it without any difficulty at all."

On being embraced across the business:

"The best thing about Sonar6 is that it's seen as a business tool rather than just an 'HR thing'. The people using Sonar6 love it. Because it's so easy to use, members of our Senior Leadership Team find out about its features without me having to teach them how to use the system."

On speeding up talent management processes:

"Sonar6 is one of the HR tools our senior managers love using themselves. It's enabled them to focus on talent development which has sped the process up significantly."

On talent identification:

"Sonar6 has already helped identify several exceptional candidates within IAG. Our previous CEO had such confidence in the talent management process; it became a key part of his approach to appointing senior leaders."

Sonar6 was simple.

"It was a no brainer really. We managed to maintain our existing system while adding a new set of software tools to streamline it."

Summary

It's not always necessary, or indeed appropriate to reinvent the wheel when it comes to talent management. Many companies have perfectly formed talent and performance management approaches that work well for them. The desire is simply to formalise or 'mechanise' the system, rather than throwing the baby out with the bathwater!

In IAG's case, Sonar6 has made talent management 'cool' and much more accessible to people managers. Most importantly, it has provided them with a set of tools that they achieve demonstrable value from using.

The proof is always in the pudding ... the system has been so successful to date, IAG is now investigating how to use Sonar6 to strengthen the links between talent management, performance reviews and employee self assessment.