



Talent Management Drives Growth at The Warehouse

The country's largest general merchandiser has a powerful framework for tailored staff development thanks to Sonar6...

Attracting and retaining quality employees is a challenge for every business. It's almost a cliché for organisations to say: "our staff is our greatest asset," yet very few companies have the systems in place to actually identify the skill sets that each key employee possesses, track their performances over time and help them develop to their fullest potential.

The Warehouse, the largest general merchandiser in New Zealand, recognised its shortfalls in this area and developed a world-class "talent management" programme that is helping the company maximise the career development for more than 1200 of its staff. At the heart of The Warehouse's programme is the graphics-based performance management system from Kiwi company Sonar6. The Warehouse was one of Sonar6's first customers.

"By enabling us to analyse the performance of key staff members in a standardised, intuitive yet scientific manner," says Jane Davis, head of talent manage-

ment at The Warehouse, "Sonar6 has provided a framework for our tailored development plans for individual staff members. This will in turn help us increase our retention rates, identify leadership potential, improve employee morale and have a significant positive impact on customer service."

A Need For Improvement

While there is no question that people have always been valued at The Warehouse, like many other businesses, talent management practices tended to be inconsistent.

"In the past, it's fair to say that performance management was inconsistently applied across the business," says Paul Walsh, general manager (HR) at The Warehouse. "As our business matured, it became increasingly important to identify the key competencies required to successfully nurture each facet of our operation and to measure our talent against them."

“Within 18 months we have gone from knowing very little about our organisational talent, to having a clear and accurate view about whether we have the people in our business with the capability to drive the organisation forward.”

“Internally we were able to agree on a key competency model,” continues Walsh. “However, we recognised we needed a talent management (TM) tool that could provide us with objective insight when it came to making appropriate and visionary ‘people’ decisions. We looked at a variety of TM tools during our research phase. Sonar6 was head and shoulders above any of the competition in terms of fulfilling both our ‘must have’ and ‘want’ requirements. As a result, the decision to get Sonar6 on board was a no-brainer.”

Visual Approach Wins User Acceptance

“Investment in Sonar6 proved to be an inspired choice,” says Davis, who is a qualified industrial psychologist. “Sonar6’s visual approach moved talent management away from a compliance-based human resource (HR) system, to a fun and interesting process for managers. In our first six months, we assessed the performance and potential of 1,200 managers and support staff team members across the business.”

“While we really liked the look and feel of the system,” notes Davis, “we all had underestimated the importance of the ‘fun’ aspect. Managers reported that the way the data is presented made them want to explore further to see what the system could do. Once they tried it, they were hooked, so much so that many managers went on to include team members not previously involved in the talent review process just because they enjoyed using it so much and could see the value it added.”

“They love Sonar6’s simplicity,” continues Davis, “and the way it helps them have conversations with staff about behavioural areas they had traditionally found quite difficult to discuss. This was a major breakthrough and helped raise the profile of HR in the business.”

“While this was an exciting opportunity for The Warehouse,” explains Davis, “there were occasions when the system did not work as expected or planned and this impacted on both the managers doing the assessments and the team managing the process. However, Sonar6 has been very forthcoming about helping us work through any issues and we are happy with their service.”

Retention And Leadership

Retention and leadership potential are a key issue for The Warehouse. “We have developed an integrated retention strategy in the realisation that our competitive advantage rests in our ability to develop and retain the best talent in the market,” explains Davis. “We recognise that it is vital to focus on building leadership as an organisational capability to increase retention and to keep ahead of the competition.”

“Managers in our business need to become better skilled at creating engaging workplaces where people are treated with respect, are inspired by the future vision

and direction of the company, are building their skills for the future and have their potential realised. Without the right leaders at all levels, it would be difficult for us to deliver on what we promise to customers, shareholders and employees.”

“As a result of the talent identification process, we have identified high potential managers who are now moving into accelerated development programmes. This provides a very strong message to the business – we are serious about leadership development. We are committed to tailoring our approach to organisational needs, and are investing significantly in people who are highly engaged and have the desire and ability to succeed,” she says.

A Clear And Accurate View

“Within 18 months we have gone from knowing very little about our organisational talent,” says Davis, “to having a clear and accurate view about whether we have the people in our business with the capability to drive the organisation forward – and with a plan to address the issues we have uncovered. We are investing heavily in building our organisation’s leadership capabilities in the belief that this will provide us with a significant advantage over the ever increasing competition. Growing our own leaders sends a positive message to the business and should improve morale. It should also help us attract higher quality people as they are more likely to join and stay with a company that develops its own people.”

“As a mature business,” concludes Paul Walsh, “we know we need to do things smarter and more cost-efficiently to successfully continue to grow and develop our brand. From a talent management perspective, Sonar6 is helping us do just that. Finally, the hard TM decisions can be based on facts, not perceptions. Understanding and recognising specific competencies enables us to make robust and valid management decisions that underpin the company’s growth.”



CASE STUDY

> The Warehouse

AT A GLANCE

Business Objective

> A talent management solution capable of maximising the career development potential of more than 1200 staff.

Solution

> Sonar6

Business Benefits

> Graphical depiction of talent management data has helped identify high-potential managers who are now moving into accelerated development programmes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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