A Picture is Worth 1000 Words: How an Innovative Visualization Tool Helped a 40-Year-Old Startup find its Fast-Track

Setting the scene.

In late 2012, Vantiv was in the midst of an upheaval of change. Earlier in the year, the credit card processor had spun off from the much larger Fifth Third Bank and undergone an IPO. This left them in a unique and challenging position –what they fondly called a ‘40 year old startup’. On one hand, they had long-established systems to manage employees. On the other, they had a new aggressive strategic direction that required fresh ways of thinking, new capabilities, and new talent.

Busy with the fast pace of change in the company, they were mostly concerned with the multiple pain points of badly-fitting HR systems. Legacies from the larger Fifth Third Bank, the systems were not meeting their expectations for their current workforce and didn’t seem scalable to meet the needs of the growing company. In fact, there were so many issues with the outsourced vendor that they had to create an internal shadow team to fill the gaps.

Enter PeopleFirm. Originally, Vantiv’s HR leadership hired the Seattle-based consultancy for a simple vendor evaluation project to replace those broken systems. But very early on, Vantiv and PeopleFirm began to realize that the problem was larger than a mere software selection issue. The real crux of the matter was that the 40-year old startup needed to develop a solid talent strategy to support that aggressive market plan. As Sarah Pfleghaar, Vantiv’s head of talent management, puts it, “We were technically a 40 year old company trying to create a new start up. We were so focused on delivering the basics (like getting people paid) that we never stopped to plan for the growth ahead of us. I believe PeopleFirm helped us sum up: we had been on a really long trip, trying to function out of a suitcase someone else had packed for us!” The two teams then decided to look “at everything holistically. It wasn’t just about improving systems, tech or processes. It was about how does this all work together and support the business strategy? PeopleFirm always went back to how it drives the business.”

Getting to the Solution.

In order to build that talent strategy, Vantiv needed to identify where their current talent management practices were already supporting the business objectives, as well as what changes they needed to make in order to drive their future strategic plans. It was the perfect use of PeopleFirm’s Strategic Talent Accelerator. Through a series of facilitated Strategic Talent Accelerator workshops with Vantiv’s HR and business leaders, PeopleFirm helped to build, quite literally, a big picture of Vantiv’s current talent state and future ‘could be’ states.

The PF Strategic Talent Accelerator is built from an exhaustive series of more than 600 best practices across eleven talent management disciplines (technology, talent analytics, competencies, talent planning, talent acquisition, performance management, career planning, learning, total rewards, employment brand, and the overarching talent strategy.) Stakeholders assess the current and could-be states of their organization against those best practices, in the process getting a thorough grounding in the latest research. They also develop an idea of which principles matter most to their organization. “We looked at every single system that HR was involved in”, Sarah says. The results are then presented in a highly graphic ‘picture’ that visually shows the current state, the could-be state, and – most importantly – the gaps between the two.

The two teams were able to:

✓ Define the current and could-be states of a young HR department; help to address the short term needs while building a long term HR strategy. As Sarah says, Vantiv “put together a simplified HR strategy that we think will really drive the business results. It was about taking a deep dive into how we were going to operate as an HR function.”

✓ Drive the discussion between HR and the business, and build a common and aligned vision.

✓ Create an understanding of commonalities and disparities across the business units. This exposed not only the differences, but also the pockets of greater process maturity, success, and similarities.
Accelerator Results.

The Strategic Talent Accelerator helped Vantiv produce a clear gap analysis of their talent systems, and a clear picture of their current talent challenges and the key decisions that needed to be made to support the business goals. And, as a vehicle for dialogue across business units, they got a level of discussion not usually reached during normal day to day business. In fact, the conversations were so engaging that at one point the business leaders needed to be dragged out of the room because they were way over their two-hour time slot.

This clear view also helped them make necessary prioritizations. Remember, Vantiv was in many ways a very young company. Every area of their talent management portfolio needed some development in order to reach their agreed-upon ‘could-be’ state. The results gave the business leaders a clear idea of which systems should be updated immediately (rather than scrambling after all of them) – as well as the information to make a good business case as to why. As Sarah puts it, “One of the biggest impacts is that we have data to support what we want to do moving forward. Role framework (competencies) was one of our top priorities and [although it] has not been implemented yet, the business case we developed has sold that body of work to the business. [The Strategic Talent Accelerator] allowed us to position it in a way where people understand that we need this.”

Where are they now?

At this point in their journey, Vantiv has received executive sponsorship of the roadmap, and created an implementation plan with support from the business stakeholders. They have gone through the technology system selection process and are working on the comprehensive implementation of the HR and talent modules. Some key initiatives are also under way, sponsored by the business, to improve the talent management programs.

“Vantiv would never have been able to do this with any other firm... I didn’t think of [PeopleFirm] as a consulting group who just came in and left. They were really trying to get you to think differently... [It was] honestly one of the best experiences I have been through... learning, insights, how to think about things differently, different tools, how to couch opinions, how to sell ideas. The experience is just a phenomenal journey that you go on with them.”

— Sarah Pfeagher, Senior Manager, Organizational Development