

Nurturing Procurement Leaders

Keeping alive a spirit of nurturing is key to successful succession planning, says Rebecca Howard

A recent survey revealed that almost half of respondents believed future procurement leadership roles within their companies would be filled by internal candidates. So it seems clear that investment in these resources is essential. Working with emerging economies is growing the supply management function, and organisations around the world are struggling to develop the number and quality of leaders they need to thrive.

Organisations must grow their internal talent or lose them to competitors, resulting in further expensive recruitment costs. But individual training alone is not enough to ensure that organisations can recruit the best procurement managers from internal candidates. A process is required that identifies and nurtures talent. This helps to retain staff by demonstrating to them that their potential is being recognised. A formal and supportive channel is required to build the necessary capabilities they need to evolve into leaders.

First, there is a need for a process of competence assessment. Technically expert purchasing professionals are sometimes disappointed that they are not progressing in the organisation, and this is often because they lack the awareness or the support to develop leadership skills. Competence assessment is designed to address this.

It involves measuring staff against the skills and behaviours required of procurement leaders. The skills and behaviours required depend on expenditure profile, location or organisational maturity, and competence assessment ensures that potential leaders know what skills relevant to them, what level of attainment they need in these skills, and how they are going to get that through a mixture of organisation and self-supported learning. This ensures that they are dedicating their continuous professional development activity to improving leadership, as well as procurement skills.

Providing a “what next?” vision for each purchasing professional’s career is also key. It not only keeps people in your organisation, it keeps them motivated and challenged. Succession planning ensures that there is an adequate pipeline of future procurement leaders.

It is quite common to see procurement management team roles lying empty or resourced with interims for long periods because an organisation has no a global succession plan. HR is unlikely to have the industry insights or personal network to keep you constantly supplied with fresh thinking from inside and outside your team, therefore this is the responsibility of the head of procurement.

Procurement managers who provide direction, motivation and coaching to their staff help to grow further leaders. Many of these managers do so because of intuition and personal style rather than any special guidance they have been given.

To address this, learning how to perform as a personal coach and mentor is an important personal development area for procurement managers. Coaching and mentoring are ideal for those leaders who have a succession plan framework and need inspiration and techniques to help populate their leadership pipeline.

These activities are becoming more prevalent in organisations seeking to retain and grow their procurement talent. This spirit of nurture enables

successful internal recruitment, and this will be enhanced as they pass on their coaching and succession planning experiences to the next generation.

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