



Play Like a TEAM

Why effective Talent Supply Chain Management is essential for the pharma company of the future

Glenn Edward “Bo” Schembechler was the head football coach at the University of Michigan for 20 years, winning 13 Big Ten conference titles during his wildly successful career. Not surprisingly, he knew a thing or two about reaching goals — and about winning. He also knew a heck of a lot about Talent Supply Chain Management (TSCM) — a critical business operational strategy for today’s pharmaceutical companies — though he may not have necessarily been aware of it.

Why? Because Schembechler understood at the deepest level that talent and team go hand in hand. When recruiting for his college team, he knew that any one person’s talent wouldn’t really mean anything unless it was accompanied by a full roster of complementary players of all skill levels. He was an impeccable steward of this philosophy, realizing that we can all be more powerful as individuals when we are able to work with others toward a common goal.

“No individual is more important than the team,” Schembechler used to tell the students who played for him. “No coach is more important than the team. The team, the team, the team.”

In many ways, the perspective with which any company should approach its need for “talent” when applying TSCM should mirror how Schembechler approached his “team.”

Today, Life Science companies must realize that, with the continual evolution of their business model, this “team of talent” really is the basis of all their business functions. Think about it: even in the research and development supply chain of your company, which operates in a vast world of complicated scientific processes, aren’t the people, or the “talent,” the main factor that determines the outcome?

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Lean-Thinking

Efforts to bolster your R&D pipeline, or to reduce operational costs, or to accomplish any other bottom-line goal, then, can no longer exist in a vacuum as it once did. Lean-thinking and just-in-time supply efforts must finally move out of the manufacturing plants and into the HR and talent acquisition offices. Talent Supply Chain Management must become a more wide-spread methodology because your competitive advantage will lie in your access to human capital, its availability, and its quality for the essential roles you need to fulfill.

TSCM Critical for Long-Term Health

But why, exactly, is TSCM truly critical for the long-term health of your organization? There are many reasons, starting first with the drastically changing business conditions in the life sciences. Time is one of the most crucial factors given that life-sciences organizations can lose \$8 million a day when drug development is delayed and only 6% of clinical trials finish on time. Selecting the right talent to accurately complete projects has never been more important.

Candidates of all levels and categories within the life-sciences industry, of course, have come to this realization as they seek employment opportunities. They are keenly aware that there is a war for their skills and talent. They’re embracing freelancing and flexibility, a powerful trend that’s changing the landscape of the modern workplace. In the process, they’re demanding the “re-humanization” of the work that they do.

Pharma companies are starting to realize

Contributed by



MARK A. LANFEAR

Global Practice Leader, Life Science
Kelly Services

that they need to provide flexible careers for individuals to work the way they want and have the benefits of imparting their knowledge from any location they choose — a trend Silicone Valley embraced long ago.

The dynamics of talent supply and demand in the life sciences are becoming similarly complex, making a well-oiled TSCM plan a major advantage for organizations willing to invest time and money to analyze their existing workforce.

Workforce analytics is the new drug devel-

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opment method. Let's consider the current workforce needs in the life-sciences industry, which is continuing to experience great skill-demand with a particularly strong need for experienced, knowledge-based, and degreed professionals, with a limited supply of talent. For these highly specialized roles like biostatistics, regulatory affairs, and clinical data managers, the need is particularly high for organizations needing to quickly scale up complex R&D programs.

Additionally, the increasing complexity of knowledge and skills that's required to meet the demands of the life-sciences industry today can often mean that the professional you are looking for must have a range of capabilities.

For example, a "scientist" is not only a research operational expert but also a project manager. Often he or she must have multiple skill sets to be effective. Companies are often looking for candidates who can apply their scientific knowledge to real-world situations through the ability to effectively translate the bench, the lab, or the clinic into something that is understandable to both internal and external stakeholders. This type of engagement and availability of resources and multifaceted human capital skill sets within an organization is arguably only available through an embedded TSCM methodology.

The reality is that many organizations have talent delivery models that are inefficient and complex, which has led to capability gaps, and, in turn, the enduring shortage of quality human capital to meet businesses goals.

And it's why now, more than ever, an action plan based on an effective Talent Supply Chain Management strategy is required in order for companies to meet their talent needs.

This comprehensive strategy analyzes operations, human resources, and procurement, giving organizations a "big picture" view of all their workforce needs in order to efficiently tackle challenges and provide cost-effective solutions.

We are finding that truly forward-thinking organizations are moving toward using this single talent strategy.

The Talent Factor

However, when organizations typically talk about "supply chain," they tend to focus on cost of producing a product or service that is manufactured or created, delivered on time and meets quality specifications. In turn, they tend to fail to account for the importance of talent in that very supply chain, not realizing how that oversight can impact the overall goal. Regardless of your advanced technology, precise lab process, and well-drawn protocols for R&D, if you don't have access to the tenured professionals to complete the critical tasks all the way through the development process, the goal will not be met. And without the fit-for-purpose talent supplied in the most efficient manner, costly delays will continue to occur.

A highly integrated Talent Supply Chain Management strategy is the best defense to this not occurring in your organization, no matter what project or process is on the line. It is a proactive approach to securing and optimizing talent supply and services through all available channels to meet the human capital needs of your company, enabling you to better produce, distribute, and deliver the goods and services to meet your strategic objectives.

TSCM is not about always hiring the best of the best — just as Coach Schembechler's goal wasn't always necessarily to go out and recruit the No. 1 rated high school player in the nation. The most effective talent supply chain can discern the types of talent needed at different times, taking into consideration the scope of the project and the best value in order to get to the best solution.


These things must always be evaluated carefully and consistently, whether you're looking to make a single hire or when ramping up hundreds to stack against a new product development and launch.

Creating a Strategic Plan

Ultimately, optimizing your talent supply chain is about setting clear priorities and developing a strategic workforce plan to carry those priorities out. You'll need a supply line of all types, levels and location of talent, which range

between full-time employees, temporary staff, independent contractors, project-based workers, and even alumni retirees reentering your workforce. Your internal corporate partners, from procurement and human resources to R&D operations, all benefit greatly when efficient and effective talent supply chain methodologies have been aligned with your corporation's financial and development goals.

Effective organizational strategy should always lead us to the results and impacts that

we're looking for. And as I've contended throughout my career, the essential tollgate between organizational strategy and results is an innovative human capital strategy. How a company plans, acquires, engages, develops, deploys, retains, and leads talent will determine its results and survival. And as we can all probably agree, what your people do — or do not do — is what drives our corporate results. Like Coach Schembechler alluded to in his "The Team" speech, collectively knowing your talent will assist you in always putting your best team on the field. 

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