



## Accelerating Talent Development and Succession Planning through Technology

By Nancy Johnson, DeVry Education Group

### The Challenge

For the last six years, senior leaders at DeVry Education Group, a leading global provider of educational solutions, have been engaged in the assessment and development of talent through the annual talent review and succession planning process. The foundational elements of how to define colleague growth potential, assess talent, and build robust succession plans are securely in place and viewed as important elements to both the talent and business strategies.

The opportunity at hand was to continually improve the effectiveness of the assessment of colleagues and identify key talent from which to build strong and reliable succession plans that are credibly actioned against when a mission critical role becomes available. For example, when a mission critical role becomes vacant, are the near-term successors on the plan considered for the role? Are they ready to step into the role? If yes, are they successful? The organization was interested in measuring the effectiveness of these efforts. In 2013, the DeVry Group HR team, under the leadership of Nancy Johnson, VP Talent, and Deb Maher, senior director of HRIS and Analytics, set out to address these challenges.

### The Context

Each year, DeVry Education Group and its eight insti-

tutions assess the top 1,000 leadership colleagues, which represent approximately 10 percent of the workforce. The process, while well-defined and understood, had been conducted and tracked manually – not captured in a system along with critical talent metrics such as performance, engagement, leadership effectiveness, or colleague turnover. Talent profiles, the 9-box matrix (a growth potential rating tool that evaluates colleagues based on historical performance and future potential) and other information, were provided in binders to participants in talent review discussions. All tracking and documentation occurred via Excel spreadsheets and Word forms. Finally, talent profiles were completed by colleagues, but not housed in a central database and not updated year over year.

Colleague data such as engagement survey results, colleague compensation, historical growth potential ratings, and individual development plans were not readily available for reference during talent review discussions, impacting the quality of the calibration conversation. Additionally, talent review meetings were historically conducted in person with the leader and their direct reports, facilitated by an HR consultant. This proved to be logistically challenging for DeVry University, Carrington Colleges, Chamberlain College of Nursing, and Becker Professional Education given that the combination of these institutions represented well over 100 locations nationally. It was also financially challenging as the organization was looking for ways to reduce operating costs.

Because there was no online HRIS tool, mining internal talent proved to be difficult. It involved looking up names on Excel spreadsheets and searching for the other data points in the HRIS. Aligning colleague information with the other important talent data to report on outcomes was time consuming and cumbersome.

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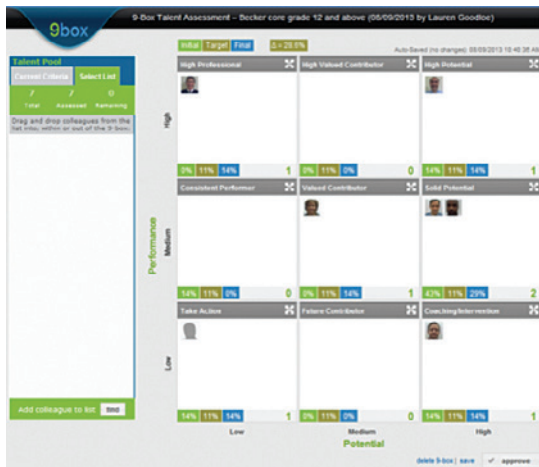
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### The Solution

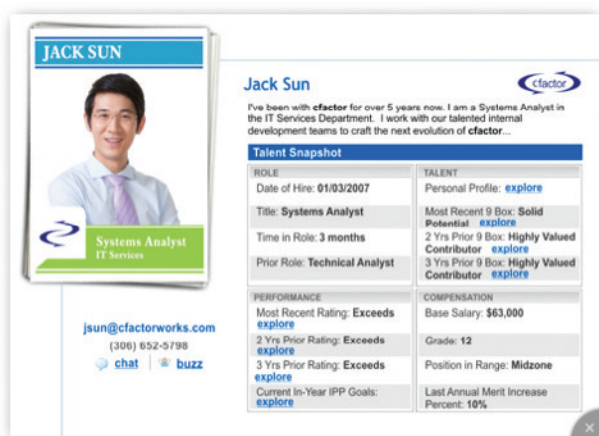
DeVry Group partnered with cFactor Works to build a highly configurable Talent Review Process (TRP) Tool. CFactor is the organization that DeVry Group has worked with to create its HRIS and colleague portal. The desire for a highly tailored approach to the TRP tool was critical so that DeVry Group could get the functionality it needed

without other distracting or complicated features that an off-the-shelf technology would provide.

- cFactor created an online TRP tool that enabled a robust talent calibration discussion supported by a 9-box evaluation matrix that could be modified in real time, provided access to top line colleague information via talent cards, detailed talent profiles, and organization charts with a variety of meaningful “views.” The features of the TRP tool in more detail include:
  - Talent profiles (including work history, career aspirations, education, and relocation preferences) created and stored on-line enabling, easy year-over-year updates; data on talent profiles is pulled from other parts of HRIS requiring minimal manual updates; and,
  - 9-box created with drag and drop feature to build real-time and in a customized fashion in a talent review discussion.



- Talent cards (a quick reference tool like a baseball card) created for each colleague with top-line data on performance, potential, engagement, compensation, direct reports, turnover, etc. with drill down capabilities into the colleague’s full talent profile, performance plan and individual development plan. The talent card appears on the screen when hovering over the person on the 9-box.



- Organization “talent” charts built with different “views” around topics like performance, potential, and turnover to see a full picture of an organization (and a colleague’s role in it) through different lenses.

The final 9-box placement each year and all colleague related talent information can be accessed by HR, including Talent Acquisition, throughout the year to enable the right talent decisions.

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## The Implementation

During fiscal year 2014, all DeVry Group institutions and the home office used the new technology to run the annual TRP. This involved assessing over 1,500 leadership colleagues (sitting in over 100 locations) and identifying “key talent” (for whom extra individual development planning support and coaching was provided) to create succession depth for mission critical roles.

For large, dispersed institutions such as DeVry University, almost all of the talent review discussions occurred virtually. As a result of the new technology, facilitators had robust and accurate colleague data at their fingertips during talent review meetings and were able to toggle to reference real-time colleague data to make better talent assessment decisions and build meaningful succession plans.

Lori Davis, VP of Human Resources for DeVry University, commented that “This new tool was invaluable to me in running a high quality talent review process in my organization. The outcomes were better and we delivered this process to the organization in a streamlined and cost effective manner.”

## The Outcome

Among other positive outcomes, in the last calendar year, 250 key talent colleagues were identified with confidence and DeVry Group is accelerating the investment in their development through participation in leadership development programs, development plan creation, and short-term coaching. The organization has begun tracking engagement, retention, and placement of these individuals into mission critical roles.

Other benefits include comprehensive talent information (centrally located and easily accessible) now available to inform 9-box placement/growth potential rating identification resulting in a more accurate ratings on poten-

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tial. Because meetings were almost completely virtual, printing and paper costs were nearly eliminated. Travel expenses for HR and leaders to attend in-person meetings were dramatically reduced. For example, DeVry University conducted 55 talent review meetings using this new tool, Adobe Connect, and Lync (online meetings). In previous years, the leader and participants would have had to travel to attend approximately half of these meetings. As a result of the new technology, travel expenses have decreased and HR consultants and meeting participants can now devote more time to other value-added activities.

The new technology tools have enabled DeVry Group to continue to improve the promotions from within target, which is one of its talent strategy measurements. Talent is regularly mined by HR leaders and the Talent Acquisition team as they access colleague historical information in this tool when considering internal talent for open positions. In January 2013, the promotion from within rate for mid-level leaders and above was 65 percent and in January 2014, it was 74 percent. While this tool was not the exclusive reason why DeVry Group beat its target of 70 percent promotions from within, Nancy Johnson and the team are confident that it will continue to have an important impact.

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DeVry Group made a significant and positive step in the right direction with this work toward achieving its talent strategy. Given the great success of this new tool, the team will be broadening the application to include an online succession planning tool. That tool will include automating its manual succession planning process by pulling additional data (much of it housed in the HRIS that can be reported on along with the TRP data) such as engagement ratings,

leadership effectiveness ratings, leadership competency assessments, and business/functional performance, and then using that information to identify ready successors for mission critical roles. Having the added succession planning tool online will round out this application and enable DeVry Group to track the effectiveness of its talent decisions in a more accurate and expeditious manner.

### About the Author



Nancy A. Johnson, VP, Talent Acquisition and Development, DeVry Education Group joined DeVry Education Group in November 2007. She led the design and implementation of the DeVry Talent Development Strategy including the approach to performance management, succession planning, general learning and development and accelerated leadership development. She launched The DeVry Leadership Center, which includes a 30-course curriculum in addition to consulting and colleague resources all designed to improve individual and team performance. She is responsible for DeVry's FlexWork initiative and leads the enterprise-wide Talent Acquisition team with a focus on hiring the right colleagues who fit the DeVry Group culture. Under her leadership, the Talent Acquisition function has been centralized to facilitate the hiring of several thousand colleagues per year with strong hiring manager and candidate feedback on the quality of the experience. Prior to DeVry Group, Johnson was director of Global Talent Management for Sara Lee Corporation where she developed and implemented the Sara Lee Talent Management Strategy. She has more than 25 years of business experience with a broad background in Human Resources having worked in the areas of Talent Development, Organization Effectiveness, Learning, Staffing, Compensation and Business Partner roles. The Fortune 500 organizations she has worked for include Baxter, Caremark, RR Donnelley and Sara Lee. She holds a BS in Business Management with a Minor in American Studies from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio and an MBA from DePaul University in Chicago.