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Where's Waldo? Using HR Technology to Find Hidden Talent

By Cary Schuler, cfactor Works, Inc.

As a father of three young children, I get to play my fair share of kids' games. A perennial favorite around the house is what the kids affectionately refer to as "find games" – those cleverly constructed books that have them (and me) pouring over the pages for hours trying to locate hidden items, clues and characters. The Graeme Base book titled *Enigma* is a perfect example: a magical adventure with hidden codes and clues featuring such notable characters as Bertie Badger, Gadzooks the Great and the Mystic Maharaja. Of course, there is also that classic series of Martin Handford books that has made "Waldo" a household name. Wherein, readers are challenged to find a character named Waldo, with his distinctive red-and-white-striped shirt, bobble hat and glasses, hidden within a crowd of people.

As part of my day job, I regularly get to speak with HR practitioners from a wide range of companies operating in vastly different industries. A talent management challenge that routinely comes to the forefront during these dialog sessions is: *How do I find, engage and promote hidden talent already resident within my diverse workforce?* Despite

widespread consensus that people are a company's most important asset, HR and senior leadership often do not have ready access to the tools and analytics they need to easily find and promote the best internal talent – leaving them to play out their own version of *Where's Waldo?* on a much bigger corporate stage.

What do you really know about the people who work for you?

It always fascinates me how often I am in meetings operating on the assumption that everyone across the table knows each other, only to find out that despite working for the same company, they have never met and really know nothing about one another. This situation is typically a microcosm for the overall organization. People are acquainted with employees within their immediate work location or department, but rarely have visibility to colleagues across the broader organization.

Historically, HR systems have done little to remedy this situation, providing only very basic information about the workforce. *For the typical employee*, the depth of visibility they get to colleagues across the organization might be an online phone directory. If they are lucky, there might be an org chart (likely out-of-date) that shows basic reporting relationships. *For employees in managerial, HR or executive roles*, they might get access to additional employment data, but it is often limited in scope and likely resident in a wide range of systems making access and usability difficult.

Information about an employee is typically limited to basic employment data, such as:

- **Name:** Waldo
- **ID #:** F1NDM3
- **Age:** 27
- **Current Role:** Chief Concealment Officer
- **Previous Role:** Sr. Director, Covert Projects
- **Hire Date:** 1986
- **Salary/Grade/Position In Range:** \$65,000, Grade 12, Max
- **Previous Performance Rating:** Exceeds.

This type of information really doesn't tell you much about the people who work at your organization. How useful is it? To actually get to know the people behind the data, your talent information needs to be much more robust. Just as Waldo is a unique character, as evidenced by his distinctive red-and-white-striped shirt and accessories, your workforce is made of very diverse people with a wide range of skills, background experiences, career aspirations, etc. Are you effectively engaging them in internal opportunities?

From a strategic talent management perspective, lack of access to robust talent information has bottom-line impact. As HR and leadership are making strategic workforce decisions, what talent information is available? What if your organization is:

- Considering expanding geographically;

- Planning a new product innovation initiative;
- Launching a new customer services project; or,
- Assessing talent for 9-box placement to support succession planning?

Do you know whether you have the internal talent available to execute against these plans? Do you have access to comprehensive talent data at the point-in-time you are making these pivotal decisions?

A New Model for Talent Management and Workforce Analytics

New HR technologies and talent management approaches are making it possible to better understand the unique characteristics of your workforce. Prolific advances in Internet technologies, mobile devices, and social applications are changing the way enterprises engage with and manage their workforce.

A Role for Social-infused HR Technology

We all know the importance of “real-life” experiences. Technology will never replace those. However, the latest social technologies are connecting people in ways never before possible. In fact, I often hear people comment on how many great relationships started exclusively online, only to connect with the person face-to-face at some point in the future. Leveraging integrated social technologies, i.e., talent profiles, online work groups, social networks, user generated content, within a broader HR technology environment sets the stage for organizations to develop a much deeper understanding of the people behind the names on their org chart, while at the same time, fostering deeper connections between employees across the workforce.

It would be much more impactful/useful if the basic employment information available was augmented with the following kinds of talent information:

- Career aspirations;
- Subject matter expertise;
- Online work community contributions;
- User contribution ratings/comments/views;
- Endorsements from peers;
- Mentorship expertise;
- Unique skills, memberships, courses, certifications, languages spoken;
- Prior experience, projects; and,
- Willingness to relocate.

With these kinds of metrics, you gain perspective on the unique talents of your workforce. Using our Waldo example, would it surprise you to know that there is much more to him than his spectacles and red and white striped shirt?

- **Name:** Waldo (also known as Wally)
- **Tagline:** Long time no see
- **ID #:** F1NDM3
- **Career Aspirations:** CEO (chief entertainment officer)
- **Age:** 27
- **Current Role:** chief concealment officer
- **Previous Role:** sr. director, covert projects

- **Languages:** 28
- **Subject Matter Expertise:** Translation, merchandising, original creative works, arts and entertainment, marketing, graphic design, TV commercials
- **Contributions:** 7 primary books, 16 activity books, 8 collections, magazine, TV show, comic strip, video game
- **Endorsements:** New York Times Bestsellers List (93 weeks)
- **Previous Work Locations:** Hollywood, the deep sea, African safari, ski slopes and a pirate ship
- **Hire Date:** 1986
- **Salary/Grade/Position In Range:** \$65,000, grade 12, max
- **Previous Performance Rating:** Exceeds
- **Willingness to Travel:** Yes
- **Hobbies:** World-wide hikes;
- **Personal Network:** Wizard whitebeard, Wilma, Wenda, Woof, Odlaw, The “Secret Person,” The Wally Watchers
- **Special Skills:** Hide and seek

Although obviously a “tongue-in-cheek” example, the above illustrates how combining traditional HR data with profile and social contribution data delivers much deeper insight into the uniqueness and diversity of your talent.

Key Considerations Underpinning This New Model Unify

At the most fundamental level for HR technology to truly deliver on the promise of driving better efficiency, communications, employee connections and talent/workforce analytics, it needs to be widely adopted on a sustained basis.

A common complaint I hear from companies regarding their HR technology is that employees don’t use it much. Why? Often, it is too complicated/fragmented – too many URLs, user Ids, passwords, etc. Employees are not sure what system does what. Employees are busy. For the HR system to be valuable, it must simplify their lives – not add to the complexity.

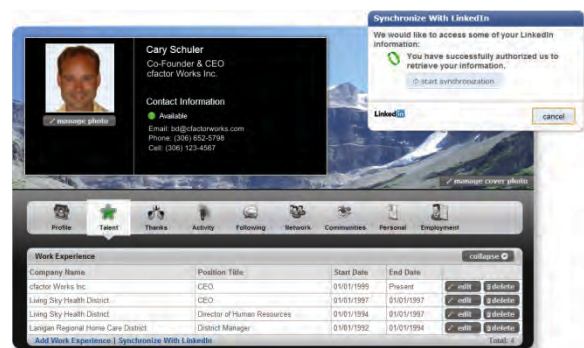
Truth is, if the system isn’t used, return-on-investment (ROI) suffers. Data and processes are inconsistent and knowledge is lost as it is tracked outside the system. Inefficiencies arise and the whole promise of integration isn’t fulfilled.

Take the guess work out of it.

You can do this by deploying a unified employee gateway that delivers the right information, analytics, metrics, processes, and consultation from within one consolidated Web-based environment – one URL, one set of login credentials, regardless of what role, location or type of employee, i.e., permanent or contingent. When you leverage this unified environment, you can deliver the essentials an employee needs, such as access to self-service tools, i.e., pay statements, income verification letters, schedules, company communications, key performance metrics, employee social networks and real-time collaboration.

When you take this unification approach, the value companies derive is significant. The functionality builds upon itself – once you have employees going there, they not only

start receiving more up-to-date information from the company, they also start contributing to conversations, answer questions from peers, etc.



Connect

Introduce yourself.

Provide employees with an easy-to-use tool for populating information about them. Make it easy for them by deploying advanced features like automated synchronization with LinkedIn and applicant tracking systems. Provide rich personalization features – after all, isn't this about helping your employees showcase their uniqueness? Introduce profiles early on during preboarding and onboarding as a means to support employees' socialization into your organization. Combine user-generated profile information, i.e., personal information, skills, education, languages, prior roles, with contributions, activities, and traditional HR data to deliver deep talent profiles.

Get acquainted.

Deliver multiple ways for employees to connect with their peers. For example:

- Find colleagues with expertise/interests aligned with a project they are working on;
- Learn about the person behind the name by viewing profiles;
- Start a conversation with someone they haven't met before;
- Build a personal network;
- Recognize a peer for a job well done; and
- Find previously unknown experts that are currently available, on-shift, and consult with them in real-time.

Contribute

Give all employees a voice. By deploying sophisticated online work communities/groups, social networks, and employee endorsement types of functionality in an integrated manner within the overall HR technology environment, employees are provided with a means to contribute expertise on an ongoing basis. These activity stream/contribution metrics are available for other employees to leverage when they are looking for peers that share similar interests, or for finding experts on certain topics and initiatives. With the right system, all of these contributions are also accessible by managers and HR to leverage within the broader talent management perspective. For example, HR leaders can use these analytics to ensure that social contributions

and peer endorsements are considered during more formal performance review, compensation management and talent assessment periods.

Visualize

Upon successfully creating this unified, highly adopted technology environment, you have the basis for significantly enhancing your talent management activities by leveraging innovative talent mining and visualization technologies.

Mine your talent.

Today's powerful talent mining tools are making it so that you can instantly analyze a wide variety of information to create comprehensive views of your workforce. This includes marrying traditional HR data with unstructured, contribution-based social data. For example, when searching for talent, include unstructured data from personal profiles, online work community contributions, social networks, and peer endorsements with traditional data from skills inventories, certifications, performance ratings, merit increases, 9-box assessments and learning management system courses. Using this targeted approach, you now have a much better chance of finding those hidden gems that are uniquely qualified for a particular project team, geographic expansion or new product launch.

Use visualization tools.

In addition to powerful talent mining tools, visualization solutions are also changing the game. Advancements in user design now make it much easier to explore and manage your workforce using impactful visualization tools. Talent charts and talent cards are examples that illustrate this point.



Utilize talent charts.

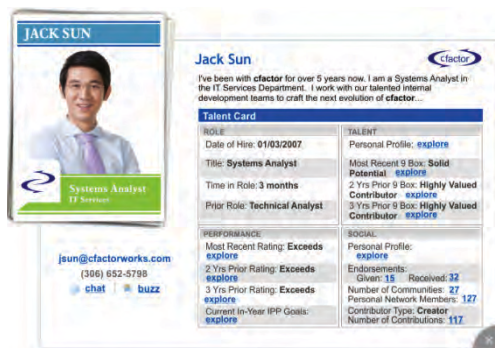
Traditional static organizational charts are giving way to dynamic talent charts, an intuitive way for HR and managers to visualize their workforce at a glance – from top to bottom. When you apply various “lenses” to your talent charts, you can assess your talent in real-time on topics ranging from:

- Performance;
- Engagement;
- 9-box and succession;
- Compensation;
- Span of control;
- Diversity;
- Regrettable turnover; and
- Social Contributions.

Dynamically identify where there are gaps or obstacles that need to be addressed within the overall corporate hierarchy.

Use talent cards.

Generate employee talent cards to get a snapshot view of key talent metrics at a specific employee level. Talent cards can span indicators such as: performance, succession, 9-box, compensation and social contributions.



Visualization tools like talent charts and talent cards can definitely play a pivotal role in those boardroom discussions where you and your colleagues are deciding on 9-box placements, succession plans, and resourcing new strategic corporate initiatives.

Manage

Traditional talent management practices relied heavily on formal hierarchical structures and job posting procedures to hopefully identify and promote the best and brightest candidates. However, this was *often a hit-and-miss premise* – typically as good as the employee's manager was at identifying and developing talent and relying heavily on the best candidates happening to see the particular posting. How many times are external candidates brought in because we didn't know about a high-potential internal candidate?

Given the rich talent information available in these next generation HR systems, you now have unparalleled visibility into your talent. Using these advanced tools to mine and visualize data about your workforce across a wide variety of criteria, you are in a position to do three big things:

1. Proactively locate internal talent ideally suited to internal opportunities. Reach out and virtually “tap your employee on the shoulder” for the new opportunity. What better way to be proactive in finding, engaging, and retaining your high-potential talent?
2. Find, assemble, and reward employee teams based on specialized knowledge, internal social media contributions, self-declared career interests and endorsements from peers.
3. Intervene in cases where your employees are at risk because they have been stuck in a role and haven't been promoted for a period of three or four years.

Utilize employee engagement data.

In addition to leveraging workforce data for talent management purposes, HR can analyze overall system contribu-

tion data to track social interactions across the organization to spot trends in topics. The data can be analyzed by topic, by type of contribution, by role and by location/department. Determine what topics and issues are of greatest interest to various groups, and then deliver personalized employee communications using the HR system. Correlate system contribution and interactions with employee engagement survey data to create action plans specific to identified areas of concern.

Embrace informed decision-making.

Leverage the unique combination of HR management, talent, and social contributions data to deliver real-time key performance indicator dashboards out to the field. Pull in data from other line of business applications, (i.e., financial, operations, sales and marketing) to provide a unified view of your key business data. By leveraging roles, data (at the right access levels) can be placed directly in the hands of managers and local HR to impact day-to-day decisions. In addition, by providing linkages from metrics dashboards to more detailed drill-down reports, the organization is in a position to conduct real-time assessment, trending and root-cause analysis. By providing direct access to comprehensive data combined with the flexibility to run multiple dynamic views in the system, gone are the days of requesting ad-hoc reports from the HRIS/IT department.

As with other aspects of an organization's enterprise technology environment, adoption of these next-generation HR technologies needs to align with your corporate culture and overall business objectives. Notwithstanding, they deliver powerful tools that support your strategic pursuit of finding and retaining the best of your internal talent.

Instead of spending a lot of time and energy scouring your organization to find a suitable candidate for your next big project, or unknowingly passing over internal talent to post the job externally, consider deploying the latest in HR technologies to better find, engage and reward your internal talent.

You may find your perfect “Waldo.”

About the Author



Cary Schuler, co-founder and CEO of cfactor Works Inc., is a thought leader who is passionate about transforming how companies interact with and enrich the potential of its talent. At the age of 22, he was named CEO of Living Sky Health District, a division of a large provincial health management organization. Since then, he has received recognition for his entrepreneurial successes year over year. Schuler has an MBA from the University of British Columbia/Rotterdam School of Management and a Bachelor of Commerce degree from the University of Saskatchewan. He can be reached at cschuler@cfactorworks.com.