

Talent Development: Looking Outside the Education Sector

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“Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds.”
– Colin Powell

At the turn of the millennium, venerated management consulting firm McKinsey & Company sounded the alarm bell that there was a “war for talent” in its landmark study of almost 13,000 executives in 120 large U.S. companies across a wide range of industries.¹ “Talent” in this context has been defined as “smart, sophisticated businesspeople who are technologically literate, globally astute, and operationally agile.”² The war for talent is still raging and many argue that it is more intense than ever.

According to the authors of that pathbreaking study, “At a time when the need for superior talent is increasing, big U.S. companies are finding it difficult to attract and retain good people. Executives and experts point to a severe and worsening shortage of the people needed to run divisions and manage critical functions, let alone lead companies.”³ Meanwhile, a link was being made between talent and organizational performance. In an update to the original study, the authors write, “the companies doing the best job of managing their talent deliver far better results for shareholders. Companies scoring in the top quintile of talent-management practices outperform their industry’s mean return to shareholders by a remarkable 22 percentage points. Talent management is not the only driver of such performance, but it is clearly a powerful one.”⁴

Do such analyses have anything to contribute to the field of K-12 education? Some might suggest that schooling is a specialized endeavor with utterly exceptional and non-transferable talent dynamics. Others might suggest that the motivations and rewards that attract people to teaching—or that attract individuals to a given school, district, or education service provider—are unlike those at work in other industries and sectors. While recognizing numerous important differences, we submit that a fair review of the issues in talent development within and outside the K-12 education sector yields more similarities than differences—and that education

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professionals and leaders have much to learn from their colleagues outside the sector. In a talent-starved sector, it is shortsighted to overlook or ignore approaches that are bearing fruit elsewhere.

Examples of cross-sector talent approaches abound. Some might be surprised to learn that West Point consistently generates impressively successful cohorts of leaders suited not only for military roles but also for business, government, education, and other fields. The 900 men and women who graduate each year are commissioned as second lieutenants in the U.S. Army and soon sent to places like Germany and Kosovo and, increasingly, Afghanistan and Iraq and are entrusted with waging war, keeping peace, deploying the world's most powerful arsenal, and more—all as 21 year-olds. In a telling example, a Lieutenant Colonel at West Point took his young charges to an elementary schoolyard playground with the simple mission of overseeing seven minutes of recess. The lesson? Command-and-control approaches do not always work, and sometimes the best way to influence complex, chaotic systems is simply by setting the starting conditions and boundaries and then managing on the fly.⁵ If the U.S. military can draw leadership lessons from the world of education, why can education not do the same? Too often, educational leadership is addressed without the larger context of leadership generally and effective leadership in other sectors. According to a 2004 review of 496 education-administration programs, leading business leadership thinkers such as Jim Collins (*Good to Great*), Michael Porter (Harvard Business School), Clayton Christensen (*The Innovator's Dilemma*), and Tom Peters (*In Search of Excellence*) were entirely absent from the courses in the study sample.⁶

Though leaders from fields as disparate as the military, business, government, and sports frequently emphasize the primary importance of talent, we must be careful not to overstate the

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case. Various observers from best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell to the late management guru Peter Drucker have emphasized the importance not of talent but of the *systems* in which people work. Drucker writes, “No institution can possibly survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organized in such a way as to be able to get along under a leadership composed of average human beings.” We do not seek to resolve this longstanding debate here except to posit that quality talent and smart systems are perhaps two sides of the same coin, utterly lacking value without their “other half.”

In their quest to “win the war,” forward-thinking organizations the world over are recognizing the critical importance of talent and investing in bold initiatives to attract, develop, and retain the best and brightest. Talent has become widely accepted as a critical driver of organizational performance and a powerful source of competitive advantage. One of the most important findings from Jim Collins’ best-seller, *Good to Great*, was that every great company profiled had “Level 5 leadership” during its pivotal transition from being a good company to becoming great. These are people who, through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will, built a culture of greatness in their organizations—by defining and measuring success, hiring and retaining the best talent (“getting the right people on the bus”), demanding focus and discipline (the “hedgehog concept”), and getting the “flywheel” spinning in the right direction, thereby attracting more exceptional talent and building momentum toward great performance.⁷

Building a culture where exceptional leaders can grow and shine is not easy. There is much to learn from organizations that have cracked this code. In this chapter, we tease out these lessons from three vantage points. First, we map the talent landscape, including seven leading trends that are shaping its contours. Second, we address the question of how forward-looking

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organizations outside the education sector have successfully addressed these trends and challenges. Third, we identify several key talent strategies worth deploying in the K-12 education sector (focusing on education leaders and entrepreneurs but also relevant to some degree to teachers), with concrete suggestions for how they can be imported.

For a host of reasons, the K-12 education sector must compete for talent in a way that it traditionally did not have to. Globalization, shifting demographics, and the increasing demands of the work force have put human-resource strains on education institutions and organizations. Of course, the days of the sector enjoying a quasi-monopoly on professional women flocking to teaching are long gone. For these reasons, it is essential that organizations inside the K-12 education sector understand talent practices being deployed elsewhere—and that they respond vigorously to the challenges with fresh thinking and bold approaches.

Mapping the Talent Landscape

As we surveyed the talent landscape outside the education sector, we spotted seven leading trends worth further analysis. First is the arsenal of weapons deployed by organizations across sectors and industries in the war for talent itself. Though there has been some debate about the size and extent of the battle front,⁸ the war for talent is now almost universally accepted and has led to dramatic responses from leading organizations worldwide, as we will see in the pages that follow. Examples include aggressive and creative recruiting tactics, robust investments in development and empowerment programs, and sophisticated tracking systems and retention efforts. This has been driven by greater recognition of the importance of talent and its correlation with performance, leading to a significant shift in the balance of power from employers to employees.

Second, the rise of “knowledge workers” that Peter Drucker identified in the 1960s has gained momentum in the wake of the Internet boom, profoundly affecting our economy and this balance of power. In the 1930s, information workers comprised a third of the workforce. Today, estimates put them between two-thirds and four-fifths of the workforce.⁹ Furthermore, the performance differential between a talented knowledge worker and an unexceptional one is significant. As a result, the demand for the most talented performers is exceptionally intense.

Third, just as demand for skilled knowledge workers is increasing, we have witnessed dramatic increases in job mobility—with corresponding decreases in organizational loyalty. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median tenure for employed wage and salary workers is just four years, and 23 percent of them have been with their current employer for 12 months or less.

Fourth, workers are experiencing the “flattening” of the global economy, with its propensity for outsourcing, offshoring, and other disruptive competitive practices. In this environment, there is increasing commoditization of certain services (think call centers), ratcheting up the need for innovation and entrepreneurial activity. This in turn fuels the talent wars and challenges organizations to provide their talent with room to collaborate, experiment, and innovate across boundaries.

Fifth, we are experiencing a boom in entrepreneurship and related phenomena of “intrapreneurship,” self-employment, and free agency. For evidence, we need only look to the darlings of the economy: the founders of Google, YouTube, Facebook, Skype, MySpace, and other examples of enterprising energy. “At any given time,” according to Carl Schramm, president of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, “15 percent of the [U.S.] population is running their own companies.... These entrepreneurs, people who now create more than half the

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new jobs in America, are defining the new economy not just here but around the world.... We now live in the most entrepreneurial time in history.”¹⁰ Consider the following: nearly half a million new businesses are created each month in the U.S., the creation of a new firm is now more widespread than the creation of a new household or the birth of a baby, and more than a third of U.S. households include someone who has founded, tried to start, or helped fund a small business.¹¹

Sixth, we are on the cusp of a tectonic demographic shift. Just as the demand for skilled knowledge workers is increasing, the supply of foot soldiers is shrinking. In the U.S., eight to ten thousand Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964) turn sixty every day. By 2010, the number of “prime age workers”—between the ages of 35 and 45, from whom organizations draw most of their mid-level managers—will decrease by 10 percent. As Boomers retire, this puts a double-bind on the talent markets. According to one recent estimate, for every two experienced workers leaving the workforce, only one (relatively inexperienced) worker joins it.¹² These demographic trends do not yield to industry boundaries, and the education industry is no exception.

Seventh, we are experiencing profound changes in societal values and perceptions of work. This shows up in two ways. First, there is a louder call for “work/life balance” among rising generations of leaders. As can be seen in Table 1, younger generations have different priorities than their older counterparts when it comes to work and family.

Table 1: Relative Priority Placed on Work versus Family across Generations¹³

Relative Priority Placed on Work vs. Family	Gen-Y (under 23) N=250	Gen-X (23-37) N=855	Boomer (38-57) N=404	Mature (58+) N=276
Work-centric (higher priority work than family)	13%	13%	22%	12%
Dual-centric (equal priority work and family)	37%	35%	37%	54%
Family-centric (higher priority family than work)	50%	52%	41%	34%

Beyond seeking more flexibility and balance in their lives, new generations of leaders also appear to be more inclined to seek work of significance and impact, as reflected in increasing interest in “socially responsible business” and the “triple bottom line” of people, profits, and planet. There is a surge of voluntarism and social consciousness of rising generations, especially Generation Y (born 1978 to 1994). These shifting values can also be found among what Richard Florida has called “the creative class,” a rapidly growing, highly educated and well paid segment of society that values creativity, individuality, difference, and merit. According to Florida, the creative class includes 38 million Americans, nearly a third of the workforce (up from just 10 percent at the turn of the 20th century).¹⁴

In short, rising generations of leaders, sensing the premium on highly skilled talent and how demographics are working in their favor, are being more selective in where they work. Many are starting their own organizations, creating further demand for talent. The war is on, and it knows no boundaries. The question is how to win it.

Creating a Winning Talent Strategy

Recognizing the implications of these trends, forward-thinking organizations are prioritizing talent management—focusing on talent attraction, development, retention, and measurement. The best of them weave all of this together into a dynamic entrepreneurial leadership culture in their organizations, with exceptional results.

A “Talent Mindset”

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Too often, organizations are caught up with putting out fires and emphasizing short-term results that are more public-relations flash than substantive victories. In these short-sighted organizations, talent recruitment and management are relegated to human resources checklists and managers make do with the talent they inherit. In high-performing organizations, by contrast, talent management is a top priority throughout the organization. McKinsey & Company calls this a “talent mindset—the passionate belief that to achieve your aspirations for the business, you must have great talent.”¹⁵ This mindset is captured in Table 2 below.

Table 2: New Ways of Thinking about Talent¹⁶

	The Old Way	The New Way
Talent Mindset	HR is responsible for people management.	All managers—starting with the CEO—are accountable for strengthening their talent pool.
Employee Value Proposition	We provide good pay and benefits.	We shape our company, even our strategy, to appeal to talented people.
Recruiting	Recruiting is like purchasing.	Recruiting is like marketing.
Growing Leaders	We think development happens in training programs.	We fuel development through stretch jobs, coaching, and mentoring.
Differentiation	We treat everyone the same, and like to think that everyone is equally capable.	We affirm all our people, but invest differentially in our A, B, and C players.

This talent mindset must be championed by the top leadership. When Larry Bossidy became CEO of global conglomerate Allied Signal in 1991, he quickly recognized that he had to improve the quality of his manufacturing leaders. After defining what an exceptional leader looks like, his executive team then used this “gold standard” to evaluate each of the manufacturing managers (all 400 of them). Those who met the standard were given additional responsibilities. Those who showed promise were coached and evaluated to see if they could reach the standard. Others were counseled out. Meanwhile, the company went into talent recruitment overdrive, replacing half of its 400 managers within two years. The resulting talent upgrade was a significant contributor to the company’s remarkable turnaround. According to Bossidy, finding and developing great leaders is “the job no CEO should delegate.”¹⁷

Talent Attraction

In a 2000 McKinsey & Company survey, 99 percent of corporate officers said their management talent pools needed to be much stronger and only 20 percent believed that they had enough talent to pursue most of their business opportunities.¹⁸ What have organizations done to attract the talent they need?

The first step is determining what talent is needed and then being smart about where and how to find it. Many organizations deploy traditional recruitment tactics such as on-campus recruiting at higher education institutions, where they offer attractive financial incentives and multifaceted compensation packages that address salary, bonus, relocation, stock options, cost of living, and more. Organizations utilize executive search firms and “headhunters,” particularly for their tougher searches. (Since 1992, the executive recruiting industry has enjoyed 12 years of double-digit revenue growth and only two years of loss.¹⁹)

As the above approaches become commonplace, however, organizations are being forced to dig deeper to attract talent. Many are now appealing to the heartstrings and values of their top recruits. This has alternately been called creating an “employee value proposition” and “branding for talent.” According to a recent report,

Traditional recruiting focuses on functional employment benefits such as job security, opportunities for creativity and individual growth, and compensation. But an employer’s intangible, emotional associations—‘it is fun to work at this company,’ ‘we have a passionate and intelligent culture,’ ‘there is a strong team feeling here’—are just as important to recruits....²⁰

To be successful, twenty-first century organizations must differentiate themselves. Many do this by communicating what makes their firm unique through what is being called a “signature experience”—a clear message to potential recruits about the unique values of the organization and what it is like to work there.²¹ An example is Clif Bar, a leading producer of

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organic nutrition bars. Its leaders developed “five aspirations” for the company, centered on sustaining their brands, business, people, community, and planet. They offer profit-sharing for employees, sabbaticals, and a remarkable wellness program, including an in-house gym, three full-time trainers, and 20 fitness classes per week—during working hours. Employees take a three-day weekend every other week through an organized form of flex-time and are invited to Thursday-night jam sessions in the company theater at headquarters. Clif Bar also has a robust community service program, including 20 paid hours per person per year allocated for community service work, and it donates one percent of annual sales to charities. Furthermore, the company appeals to its California-based workforce by being “green,” with a robust sustainability initiative led by a staff ecologist.²² These initiatives serve as a powerful enticement for potential recruits—and strong glue for retaining them.

One of the biggest attracters of talent into an organization (or sector) is the prevalence of talent already there. Talent begets talent, and so it is with mediocrity. In any organization, there are “A players” (exceptional performers who inspire others), “B players” (solid performers who show potential), and “C players” (who under-perform and undermine teamwork).²³ “A players” should be promoted, “B players” should be developed, and “C players” should be shown the door. Once an organization earns a reputation as one that rewards excellence and shuns mediocrity, it will become a magnet for talent.

Take Google, for example. Through a massive recruitment campaign, it has been able to nab the crème de la crème of the math and science community, including an award-winning physician, an Internet pioneer, and top executives and engineers from Microsoft, Apple, eBay, and Amazon.²⁴ The company’s highly selective hiring process has been called “grueling.” One of Google’s core principles is that “Great just isn’t good enough.” It values not only intelligence

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and aptitude but nonconformity as well, with preference given to recruits with unconventional experiences and world views. Each year, the company hands out multi-million dollar “Founders’ Awards” to honor teams that have made extraordinary contributions to the company.²⁵ Together, these approaches have sealed the company’s reputation as “the place to work” for today’s tech-savvy creative class.

Talent Development

Once talented people are on board, they must be trained and developed. Executives are increasingly realizing that training and leadership development programs must go beyond being an afterthought and become an integral part of a company’s competitiveness initiatives. General Electric, for instance, invests over \$1 billion a year (out of \$163 billion in annual sales) in training and developing its employees. At the center of this investment strategy is the John F. Welch Leadership Center at Crotonville (recently renamed for legendary former CEO Jack Welch). Crotonville sprawls across 53 acres in New York’s Hudson valley and trains and connects thousands of managers every year. It promotes GE’s talent development mission to “create, identify, and transfer organizational learning to enhance GE growth and competitiveness worldwide” by offering courses in leadership development and creating opportunities for collaboration and shared learning.²⁶

While few organizations have these kinds of training resources, forward-looking organizations are placing similar emphasis on leadership development, knowledge-sharing, cross-functional team development, creativity, and network creation. Trilogy Software, a high-growth technology company based in Austin, Texas, has created a three-month “boot camp” for new employees overseen by the company’s CEO. In the first month, teams of twenty participate in fast-paced creative exercises coached by an experienced executive (a “section leader”). In the

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second month, smaller “breakthrough teams” are created and charged with developing new product and service ideas, creating business models, building prototypes, and developing marketing plans. In the third month, an emphasis is placed on personal initiative, allowing employees to continue working in breakthrough teams or to find a company sponsor to support a new project they will lead. At the end of the boot camp, each employee receives a comprehensive performance evaluation, including rigorous feedback from colleagues, section leaders, and senior management. The results are impressive: more than \$100 million in new business has been generated as the result of the recruits’ projects. The company also credits the program with intangible benefits such as enhanced camaraderie and motivation among new recruits and better insight into their strengths, weaknesses, and developmental needs.²⁷

At the Container Store, the retail company specializing in storage and organization products and services, all new hires (whether full-time or seasonal) go through what is called “Foundation Week,” an intensive orientation and training program that in many cases leads into apprenticing with high performers. All employees receive at least 235 hours of formal training in their first year (versus an average of about seven hours in the retail industry overall). Employees work in different functional areas to gain a broader perspective, a process designed to enhance their overall effectiveness and customer-service sensibilities. (Here we pause to note that a container retailer devotes far more time to employee talent development than does almost any school, district, or education service provider, even though schools are in the knowledge business.) The results of this systematic approach include employee turnover rates significantly lower than the industry average and high rates of new employees sourced through internal recommendations, a significant cost-saver.²⁸

These talent-minded organizations have learned that talent development requires talent empowerment. Authors and leadership experts James O’Toole and Edward Lawler III point to “the existence of high-involvement, high-wage, high-profit companies in almost every industry”—from Southwest Airlines to Harley-Davidson to UPS and Costco: “Because these companies involve their workers in decision-making, reward them fairly for their efforts, and provide them with good training and career opportunities, their employees reciprocate the favor in terms of much higher productivity.”²⁹ In addition to empowering their employees, talent-minded organizations are increasingly sending emerging leaders to dynamic retreats and hiring leadership development firms or coaches to work with both established *and* emerging leaders. In 2002, there were an estimated 10,000 executive coaches worldwide, a number expected to rise to 50,000 within five years.³⁰

These investments should be made within the context of a clear blueprint for talent development in the organization. Organizations that provide thoughtful and engaging career paths for their team members, with specifically delineated advancement opportunities and milestones for qualifying for them, are likely to fare better in the talent wars. Forward-thinking employers invest in helping employees achieve these goals, in part by giving young talent exposure to multiple functional areas and different managers. In those cases, job rotation—in which employees rotate through different functional areas on a structured basis to gain exposure and experience—can provide not only clarity and motivation but also a breadth of experience that ultimately boosts performance.

At global financial services firm HSBC, individuals seeking to reach the upper echelons of management must work in at least two very different cultural environments within the corporation. The firm invests heavily in making sure its top talent gets this exposure by offering

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attractive transfers into “stretch” jobs in other parts of the world. As HSBC Chairman Stephen Green acknowledges, this approach is more expensive than filling positions locally, but he deems it critical to achieving the firm’s goals. Additionally, this approach facilitates knowledge transfers across regions, provides exciting growth opportunities for employees, and creates chances for more cross-border collaboration.³¹

At Google, there is a company-wide rule allowing developers to devote 20 percent of their time—essentially a day a week—to any project they choose. This policy has the twin benefit of letting talented people push their limits while also providing a robust pipeline of innovative products and services. Recently, more than half of Google’s new products could trace their origins to “20 percent rule” projects.³²

This practice is becoming increasingly common, and Google was not the first to try it. At Intuit, the company behind personal finance software and tax-preparation programs such as Quicken and TurboTax, engineers have “unstructured time” to devote to projects and initiatives of their choosing.³³ Linden Lab, the company behind the hugely popular “Second Life” (a new form of virtual shared experience now being used in 200 countries worldwide), lets its employees figure out which projects are needed instead of assigning them tasks.

Another example of a company that successfully empowers its charges is the natural foods grocery store chain Whole Foods, where each department in each store is comprised of a small, decentralized team whose members decide who joins the group—with new hires being considered in four-week trial periods. High-performing teams are then rewarded through profit-sharing. The firm’s core values of decentralization and collaboration have placed it on *Fortune’s* list of “the 100 best companies to work for” nine years in a row.³⁴

The larger point here is that talent development cannot remain merely a function of an active human resources department or the domain of a single executive charged with overseeing this process. For talent to thrive, talent development must be an explicit priority across the board, and the organizational culture, structures, systems, and investments must be aligned with leadership growth plans. Moreover, these lessons from talent development are not relegated to specific sectors but can be adopted in creative ways by highly innovative organizations across sectors, including education, as we will explore at the end of this chapter.

Talent Retention

Proactive organizations are recognizing the importance not only of getting talent in the door but also of keeping it through effective retention efforts. Not only does retention help build and sustain an organization's culture and enhance its chances for long-term success, it yields significant savings in time and money. For example, it has been estimated that attrition costs companies eighteen months' of salary for each manager or professional who leaves, and six months' pay for hourly employees.³⁵

Of course, there is no magic formula for maximizing retention. Much of what keeps people in jobs has to do with best practices in leadership, governance, and organizational systems, including a healthy focus on developing people and creating a dynamic culture and workplace.

When Internet advertising firm DoubleClick was started in 1996, the founders invested in all the dot-com accoutrements, including an espresso bar in the lobby and free salsa lessons for employees. Most important, though, is the opportunity it provides all employees to shape their own careers and create a dynamic place to work. Employees are encouraged to switch jobs internally, learn new skills, and take risks. Workers are given a high degree of both autonomy

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and accountability, with performance-based bonuses. Talent is emphasized throughout the organization. According to CEO Kevin Ryan, “I judge my people on two people leadership questions: are the people in their group happy working for them? And do they bring in great people? If managers cannot help us attract and retain the best people, they are not doing a good job.” This approach has served DoubleClick well. In the wake of the dot-com crash in 2000, the company did not lose any of its top 100 people even after its stock price dropped 80 percent, helping it to rebound and position itself for a \$3.1 billion acquisition by Google earlier this year.

Many organizations offer benefits, such as flex-time and telecommuting, that address hectic schedules and stressed-out workers. In 2004, 28 percent of the full-time wage and salary workforce (excluding self-employed persons) worked on a flexible schedule, and 15 percent of the U.S. workforce worked at home at least once per week as part of their primary job, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Today, 9.5 million Americans work from home.³⁶ According to a recent Families and Work Institute survey, 31 percent of organizations allow employees to work from home or off-site on a regular basis, and 73 percent allow extended career breaks for family responsibilities. By January 2005, 19 percent of the federal government workforce “teleworked”—almost double the 2001 number.³⁷

Other companies offer job-sharing, in which two or more part-time workers can share a full-time job in order to manage family or other obligations. Firms such as The Business Talent Group and Mindfarm are helping organizations tap into talented executives not interested in full-time employment. Meanwhile, sabbaticals are becoming increasingly common outside of academia. According to a recent Society for Human Resource Management survey, 18 percent of corporate respondents offer unpaid sabbaticals and 5 percent offer paid sabbaticals.³⁸ Again, these trends are not confined to a few maverick organizations in specific sectors. These

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innovative approaches are being embraced by leadership teams across sectors that are serious about harnessing and retaining top talent—and measuring their progress along the way.

Talent Measurement

Having a sophisticated approach toward talent attraction, development, and retention requires that talent be measured systematically, reflecting the old business adage that “you don’t get what you don’t measure.” The best talent shops develop a sophisticated array of metrics, including employee performance, satisfaction, retention, and more, and they deploy smart technology systems to track these metrics.

An interesting example comes from the world of baseball. In *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game*, author Michael Lewis documented how Oakland Athletics upended the conventional wisdom about which baseball players to recruit to help teams win. He draws a distinction between big-market teams that have ample funds to pay hefty salaries to free agents and small-market teams with tight payrolls. Despite being one of the poorest teams in baseball, the A’s won their division and made the playoffs regularly even as their bigger-name talent fled to cash-flush teams. Their secret: statistical analysis that led to a better sense of which types and mix of players lead to winning games. They discovered that it is not the traditional measures of batting average, home runs, runs batted in, stolen bases, and the like that win games but rather on-base percentage (including walks) and total bases.³⁹ Once they figured this out, they started winning—a lot.

A talent development strategy is incomplete without the accountability made possible by measurement. This brings us to a weakness in the education sector: our limited ability to gather, analyze, synthesize, and report data in user-friendly and helpful ways. What we have is a collection of mostly crude output measures or problematic growth measures of some teachers for

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only a slice of their jobs. Schools, districts, and providers generally lack the metrics, systems, processes, and expertise necessary for excellence in talent development and measurement, forcing them to “wing it” when they could be constantly improving their practices based on hard data about what works.

Getting Talent Right

Across our economy, there are organizations that have defined themselves not only through market share, innovation, and bottom-line results but also through their continuous cohorts of effective leaders. These all-star “talent factories” are worthy of further study.

One exemplar of this approach is consumer products giant Procter & Gamble, based in Cincinnati, Ohio. Its approach to attracting, developing, and retaining talent is as comprehensive as it is legendary.⁴⁰ The company has instituted a global talent review in which every country, function, and business is rigorously assessed for its capacity to find, attract, engage, develop, and retain great people—and all leaders are held accountable for this. With a commitment to hire at entry level and build talent from within, P&G begins with a robust college internship program (led by senior managers) that allows new recruits to assume significant responsibility on important projects, often multi-million-dollar initiatives that are presented to the company’s top leadership. Not surprisingly, the company converts interns into employees at rates well above its competition. And 90 percent of its entry-level managers come straight from universities, including CEO A.G. Lafley.

P&G managers help new recruits plot professional moves to build their “career development currency,” and it engages employees in sophisticated career development paths. For high-potential employees, P&G’s leadership helps them develop “destination jobs” early in their career that are attainable only if they continue to perform and capitalize on their potential.

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The company also offers robust training and development programs, both in-house and outsourced. Lafley joins with other senior executives to personally sponsor and teach all the leadership development courses for the company's most senior 300 leaders. How many superintendents, principals, or heads of education organizations can be found making a comparable investment of time and resources?

Procter & Gamble deploys a talent management system that tracks its more than 135,000 employees, with a special focus on 13,000 management employees. The system captures information about individual capabilities, educational background, community affiliations, developmental needs, diversity, career histories, and succession planning. It makes in-house talent visible to company leaders worldwide. P&G also systematically evaluates the success rate of the people it promotes, using a series of qualitative and quantitative measures longitudinally. All this has allowed it to maintain a low attrition rate of 7.5 percent (including retirements) and create 23 different billion-dollar brands despite being headquartered in the American heartland, far from the "creative class" hot spots, and selling detergents, soap, and toothbrushes, as opposed to the latest Internet or biotechnology breakthroughs.⁴¹ P&G is a "talent factory" not because of some inherent competitive advantage but rather because it has invested strategically in talent.

Importing Talent Strategies into the Education Sector

"Great schools have great leaders.... Yet finding effective leaders is not easy. As with many things, when it comes to principals, the central issue isn't quantity, it's quality.... Leadership matters—a lot. Simply stated, it takes an effective principal to make a successful school."

– *Innovative Pathways to School Leadership*, U.S. Department of Education, 2004

Our review of promising talent approaches outside the K-12 education sector naturally begs the question: which ones can be imported into education, and how would that work?

Answering that question, of course, requires understanding the context. K-12 education is comprised of 6 million employees, including 3 million public school teachers and 250,000 administrators, not to mention all the people working for education service providers, professional development shops, online content development providers, textbook companies, assessment firms, research and policy organizations, foundations, and consulting firms, plus freelancers.

Within this construct, the kind of talent needed in education has changed, as have the realities of recruiting talent in the sector. Workers have more choices. Organizational and industry loyalty are down. Employees are more likely to expect growth opportunities and dynamic work environments that provide not only steady income but also opportunities for creativity and fulfillment. Schools and education organizations cannot sit back and wait for talent to come their way, nor can they count on retaining their best people without getting creative. Indeed, they must become more aggressive about creating magnetic work environments that cause people to grow and motivate them to stay.

Yes, the war for talent is being waged in K-12 education. An estimated 200,000 teachers are hired each year. According to a 2005 report, more than 40 percent of U.S. principals—and an even higher percentage of superintendents—are expected to leave their jobs over the next decade.⁴²

Fortunately, the education sector enjoys a powerful “secret weapon” in the talent war. Education organizations begin with an inherent advantage: the mission of education is closely aligned with the values of rising generations of professionals and emerging leaders eager to engage in meaningful work and make a difference. In that sense, talent recruitment teams in education are beginning on the “fifty-yard line.” Evidence of this is abundant. Teach for

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America ranked in the top ten of *Business Week's* 2007 "Best Places to Launch a Career" rankings (ahead of Goldman Sachs) and on *Fortune's* 2007 list of "Twenty Great Employers for New Grads," and it has become so popular that it accepted fewer than one in six applicants this year. New Leaders for New Schools has earned a prestigious Fast Company/Monitor Group Social Capitalist Award three years in a row and has accepted only about 7 percent of its applicants as of 2007. The New Teacher Project has been selected as one of the nation's best organizations for college graduates to launch their careers, according to a Princeton Review book. And perhaps there is no better indication of the growing attractiveness of these kinds of organizations than the fact that the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) was featured on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" last year.

Though helpful, this inherent advantage is not nearly enough. (Notice that the above examples are rising entrepreneurial stars, not old-style textbook companies or standard school districts.) To carry the ball further downfield, sector leaders must adopt a talent mindset and buttress it with a comprehensive array of attraction, development, retention, and measurement approaches. Below we outline several recommendations for doing just that in each area.

In terms of *talent attraction*, there is currently a large void. According to an Institute for Educational Leadership report, "Recruitment is uneven, spotty, and poorly organized in many places.... In a 1998 survey, only 27 percent of school districts reported having a program to recruit or prepare aspiring principals."⁴³

To fill that void, sector leaders should create a major new talent recruitment engine focused on aggressively courting the "best and brightest" from all sectors, segments, and quarters of our society. Imagine a national (or regional) initiative with targeted geographic recruitment zones selected for their potential entrepreneurial talent yield (think Silicon Valley, Chicago,

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Austin, the North Carolina “Research Triangle,” and the Pacific Northwest). These recruitment and development efforts could be focused on “proof of concept” cities already infused with innovation or sizable reform efforts (such as New Orleans, Dayton, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Albany, Washington, D.C., Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles). To be successful, the initiative would have to work effectively with willing local partners, and any local recruitment campaigns must bear the signature of top brass. Imagine New Orleans Superintendent Paul Vallas or New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein keynoting high-profile industry conferences and hammering home the opportunity to be part of an education revolution, with aggressive recruitment follow-up that is well designed, amply resourced, and smartly staffed. Taking a page out of Teach for America’s playbook, this initiative could prioritize developing partnerships with leading universities, graduate programs (including the promotion of MBAs paired with an education concentration, minor, or joint degree), and employers, and it could be staffed by “campus coordinators”—young recruitment ambassadors who evangelize the industry and spread the word about exciting opportunities.

Of course, this effort should leverage the strengths of the industry, appealing to the values of recent graduates and current professionals by highlighting the opportunities for positive social impact. While tugging these heartstrings, such recruitment campaigns should also appeal to recruits’ pocketbooks by offering competitive, multifaceted compensation packages that include signing bonuses, salary premiums for positions in shortage, performance bonuses, and a variable array of flexible benefits that can be negotiated to meet individual needs. In instances where this is not feasible, attractive and prestigious fellowships and internships can serve as cost-effective substitutes, not to mention incubation funds for aspiring (and committed) education entrepreneurs, such as The Mind Trust in Indianapolis.

In addition, recruitment efforts should be more expansive in the constellations of talent that they pursue—and more creative in where and how this talent is deployed. For example, they could creatively harness the energy and talents of parents eager to roll up their sleeves in meaningful ways, as well as recent retirees eager to redeploy their experience toward rewarding service opportunities. How often do we hear about over-stressed educators burdened by reporting requirements, lunch and recess duty, and other “administrivia”? Why not distinguish between essential instructional duties and other functions and then set up much more robust and flexible systems and processes that effectively tap into community resources (including parents and retirees as well as corporate “adopt a school” volunteers and community groups) in a highly leveraged way. By reconfiguring the way that schools and organizations harness and deploy talent (such as creating flexible work environments or creating collaborative, shared-resource work environments among education organizations working in the same community) education organizations stand to recruit a higher caliber of talent excited about working in a dynamic, fluid, challenging work environment.

In terms of *talent development*, we should throw out the current manual on how we develop talent in the industry and start over. What we have now has recently been called a “scattershot approach,” with change in the works but only “at the margins.”⁴⁴ Consider the following: according to a Public Agenda report, 96 percent of practicing principals indicated that their colleagues were more helpful than their graduate studies in preparing them for the job, and two-thirds reported that “leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch” with what they need to know. A separate study by Arthur Levine, former president of Teachers College, concluded that “the majority of [educational administration] programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country’s leading universities.”⁴⁵ High-quality

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leadership training programs, fellowships, and internships that combine rigor and depth with practicality and prestige are all too rare in the realm of K-12 education.

To escape the current swamp, education needs its own Crotonville—a world-class training institution for emerging leaders or, better yet, a national educational leaders training “hub” with regional “spokes.” These could be stand-alone entities, partnerships with existing institutions, or roving programs that serve multiple regions through coalitions of like-minded institutions, and indeed this leadership development initiative could be married to the recruitment initiative outlined above. (A coalition of organizations and leaders in the Midwest led by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation is currently considering such an approach.)

The education sector needs a leadership apprenticeship track closer to the “teaching hospital” model that would contain several key components. First, it would maintain selective criteria and high standards, seeking candidates with a broad array of skill sets and capabilities. Second, it would focus heavily on practice, including on-the-job-training and real-world case studies. According to Darlene Meery, chief academic officer of New Leaders for New Schools, “You can’t just give people the information and assume they know how to go and apply it. Probably the magic of the whole process is in supporting them as they practice the application.” Third, it would provide intensive supports, including mentoring and coaching by successful practitioners from inside and outside the field and opportunities for close collaboration and networking among peers. Finally, it would systematically track the performance of its cohorts of leaders, as is the practice at New Leaders for New Schools. We have some examples of promising approaches, including the KIPP Fellows program and the Broad Foundation’s Urban Superintendents Academy, but they are drops in a bucket full of need.

One interesting model that may harbor lessons for education is the “corporate university,” defined as a centralized hub for the education and development of employees—often addressing job skills, leadership, and/or organizational culture. In 1993, such corporate universities existed in 400 companies, rising to 2,000 in 2001. They are expected to exceed 3,700 by 2010.⁴⁶ Examples are legion. Southwest Airlines operates what it calls the “University for the People,” a structured training program staffed with 32 employees that includes new-employee orientation, leadership, technology, customer service, and more for up to 15,000 employees per year.⁴⁷ Other examples include Motorola University (one of the first organizations worldwide to deploy virtual reality in manufacturing training), the Boeing Company’s Leadership Center (focused on executive learning, including performance management, organizational structure, and core leadership courses), the University of Disneyland, Federal Express Quality University, Oracle University, Ford Motor Company’s “FORDSTAR,” Dell University, and more. In education, such endeavors might be cost-prohibitive for a typical school district (save the largest) or education service provider but could be developed by a consortium of districts or providers in collaboration with universities and/or private companies.

The sector could also benefit from an aggressive push for individual empowerment as a leading driver of talent development. According to an Institute for Educational Leadership report, “the principalship generally is constructed as a position not so much for leadership... as for middle management,”⁴⁸ and micromanagement is as common in the sector as it is deadening—from school boards debating garbage clean-up after Friday night football to lunchroom duties and fundraisers that are carefully scripted by district policy. Principals and their executive teams should be treated as the leaders they are, with wide-ranging autonomy for how things get done (process) and accountability for ensuring that things do in fact get done

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(outcomes). Similarly, governing boards and their organization’s senior leaders—whether the superintendent of a district or the president of an education non-profit—need a clearer understanding of the “division of labor” across their respective roles—where their purviews differ and where they converge. This push for empowerment and role clarity would also include more refined and explicit career paths that give people a sense of what is possible if they hone their skills and advance. (A promising example is the Teacher Advancement Program, which provides multiple career paths, market-driven compensation, performance-based accountability, and ongoing professional growth opportunities.) And there is no reason that policies like Google’s “20 percent rule” cannot be imported into education to foster autonomy and innovation. If forward-thinking online content houses, education service providers, and assessment firms adopted this practice (or a variant of it), schools and districts might find ways to follow suit.

In terms of *talent retention*, what the sector needs most is a healthy infusion of best practices in leadership, including creating high-performing teams and a culture of success. That tends to follow from clear expectations, rewards for performance, innovation, and risk-taking, and leaders focused on eliminating barriers encountered by their teams. (This could all be fostered through the Crotonville initiative referenced above.) Another driver of retention would be rewards for performance, through enhanced responsibility and compensation. It is estimated that half of salaried employees nationwide work in jobs with some performance pay, but the education sector is woefully behind on this front.⁴⁹

In addition, flexible work arrangements can go a long way toward both retention and attraction of talent otherwise deemed unavailable. For example, long-time education entrepreneur Stacey Boyd recently launched Savvy Source for Parents, an information hub and network for parents looking for quality early childhood education options. Stacey built a

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“virtual” company comprised of 100 part-time working moms across the country, with all employees and contractors working from home. Together, they created a Web-based guide to nearly all the pre-schools in the U.S. that is now expanding into providing consumer ratings for camps, educational games, learning activities, and more. According to Boyd, “I would say 95 percent of our work is done in the morning before the kids wake up, in the afternoon when they take naps, and at night when they go to bed.... Everything gets done faster and better. It’s extraordinary.”⁵⁰

Of course, all of the above talent approaches, to be effective, must be measured, starting with clear metrics and supported by smart systems that facilitate maximum transparency. Education leaders would be wise to import existing talent measurement systems into education to avoid reinventing the wheel.

Finally, we also need an operating environment conducive to talent attraction, development, retention, and measurement. The sector needs proper incentives to entice exceptional entrepreneurs to enter the field. That means helping entrepreneurial trailblazers crack open the market and “get to scale.” This will require policy environments that are dramatically more conducive to innovation and excellence, including a policy embrace of choice and competition, full funding for charter schools and other innovative models, astute deregulation, and results-based accountability. On the latter front, public policy could be much more aggressive in promulgating standards for information exchange and transparency and commonality of data across school systems. This must be accompanied by public-private funds that provide seed and early-stage capital to entrepreneurs with promising ideas. There are early examples, but these efforts are all too rare.

Next, sector leaders need to change policies and mindsets that prevent the inflow of talent and the outflow of mediocrity. These are the kinds of policies and procedures that prevent leaders from enticing more A players into the sector while simultaneously helping C players find gainful employment elsewhere. The kinds of protections that some education workers enjoy are unheard of in many other industries. While designed with good intentions and serving some useful purposes, too often they result in bizarre inefficiencies that are terribly frustrating to well intentioned people trying to work within the system. Consider, for example, collectively bargained transfer, seniority, and “excess teacher” rules that regulate the movement of teachers among schools and that cause painful hiring delays in situations where educators are in dire need. Consider also the complex array of credentialing requirements that vary across states. People inside the system are regularly confronted with these challenges and dilemmas, and too often it leads them to exit the field altogether or resign themselves to just “getting by”—not exactly a formula for excellence.

Of course, there are lots of others things that could be done in addition to the ideas above. But we believe that these recommendations get to the heart of the talent challenge and address core issues that prevent education leaders and organizations from effectively competing in the war for talent—and reaching their potential.

The larger picture here is that we are now in a period of profound transformation, including significant economic, technological, and demographic shifts; a steady infusion of entrepreneurship; and a hunger among rising generations for work of significance and impact. This presents a major opportunity for the education sector in addressing its talent woes. Unfortunately, it appears as though much of the education sector is content to turn a blind eye to the war for talent and maintain the status quo—falling back on outmoded practices that have

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yielded alarming achievement gaps, disconcerting numbers of students achieving below grade level, and declining international competitiveness. If we have any hope of achieving our broader objectives and offering an education worthy of our children and their full range of possibilities, we must dramatically ratchet up the supply of quality talent in the sector at all levels.

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