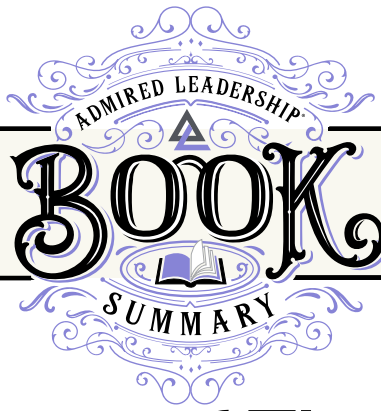




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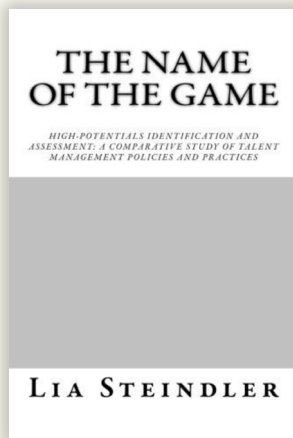
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# The Name of The Game

High Potentials Identification and Assessment:  
A Comparative Study of Talent Management Policies and Practices

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**The *Name of the Game* compares the various ways companies find and keep outstanding employees in their organization. A dissertation written and published by Lia Steindler, the book pulls from the work of highly regarded academics and a field study of 15 senior HR professionals. Steindler grapples with how to define “high potentials” and includes ways to retain them once you have identified them. The theories Steindler presents are designed to provide different types of organizations with the approach that best fits their needs.**

## Key Quote

“The most common issue with high-potential in organizations is that, as a concept, it is poorly defined” (Introduction). — *Lia Steindler*

## KEY POINTS

**The Name of the Game.** Finding talent requires first discerning what the true markers of talent are for your organization. Consider using an integrated model for identifying talent, measuring more than one marker of aptitude. The right assessment of high-potential employees in your company can and should lead to fostering a culture that both attracts and keeps the right people.

**The Nine Box Grid and Its Implications.** In this chapter, Steindler addresses the fact that while often high potential and high performance are linked, it is important not to infer too much about this relationship. Adopting a growth-oriented mindset (citing Carol Dweck’s work) is a more “mature” organizational approach that takes a long view towards a company’s success.

**Cognitive Potential: Why We Waste Talent.** “Fluid intelligence” is represented by things like memory and problem-solving. “Learning agility” is described as the ability to learn “new competencies in order to perform under first-time, tough” conditions. These are both aspects to consider measuring when assessing talent.

**Potential What For?** An Integrated Model. Scholars have developed models which seek to measure a broad range of factors or themes: cognitive, personality, learning, leadership, motivation, and performance. They seek to more holistically assess the very different factors which combine to indicate talent. One model presented measures three “dimensions” of a person – leadership, growth, and foundational. The author concludes with the finding that people most find satisfaction at work when they enjoy “creative challenges” and the “chance to keep learning” (pp. 116, 118).

**Potential in Different Games: A Comparative Study.** “There are two very different approaches to potential identification and assessment. The first assumes that potential can change over time.” This approach considers the assessment of potential to be a continual process over a broad pool of talent. The second “assumes that potential is a fixed quality, the tendency in this case is to have a restricted high-potential talent pool that will vary little over time” (p. 186). The author explains that there are implications to both approaches and warns against the negative consequences of the latter – a “fixed-mindset approach” – in organizations.

## KEY CONCEPTS:

### “Born Stars” and The Myth of Talent

One large study of analysts in the financial services sector found three underrated factors in the success of star employees:

- A “company’s resources and capabilities (company’s reputation, financial means and its human resources) that enabled the employee to do the things that really mattered”
- The “Systems and Processes that give a framework and procedures that contribute to the individual’s success”
- Leadership, meaning that in most companies bosses give talented employees the resources and support they need in order to become stars” (pp. 11-12).

However, performance can be stalled by others if a star does not fit culturally.

The author points out the logical fallacy of inferring potential from high performance (p. 36).

### What Are We Assessing For?

Throughout history, people have sought to find a measurement to assess the potential of candidates and employees.

Harvard’s David McClelland was the first scholar, in 1973, to argue for hiring based on the competencies required for a role, rather than general intelligence. His analysis of the skills of top performers yields “not just the threshold abilities for the position (the basic skills everyone must have to do the job) but, more importantly, the **distinguishing** competencies: abilities that the stars exhibited and the average performers did not” (pp. 39-40).



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He also argued that “**empathy, self-discipline (self-control) and initiative** distinguished the most successful if compared to those who were merely good” (p. 92).

Different definitions of high potential can include workers who can grow in “scale” or “scope” in their role, those who are ready to move up two organizational levels in 3-5 years, or those who are “best bets” for succession planning (p. 47).

There is a split between HR people who prefer looking for potential and those who look for expertise and find potential to be secondary (or even problematic), but there are models that seek to arrive at an integrated understanding of employee potential

**One such model is three-dimensional.** “Silzer and Church’s model proposes a three-dimensional integrated model that includes: a) foundational dimension; b) growth dimension; c) career dimensions” (p. 51). The foundational dimension is a factor of crystallized intelligence, the growth dimension is about learning capacity, and the career dimension has to do with the ambition to improve and advance.

**Another model focuses on “agility.”** The Center for Creative Leadership is a fourfold model that divides learning agility into “people agility” (they are self-aware and resilient), “result agility” (they effectively drive performance), “mental agility” (they are problem solvers), and “change agility” (they are curious and value learning) (p. 87).

#### **Implicit Theories and Mindset**

Carol Dweck’s research on implicit theories shows that traditional methods for measuring intelligence do not give a complete picture of an employee’s capacity, as their true capacity is demonstrated by their willingness to improve (p. 21).

With respect to **communicating** potential to star employees, there is disagreement over whether it is best practice to let high-potential employees know that they are considered as such. Transparency helps in the retention and development of high potentials, but can also create an awareness of status that causes the motivational problems of a “fixed mindset,” which Dweck warns against fostering (p. 55).

Howard Gardner concluded that exceptional individuals have “a special talent for identifying their own strengths and weaknesses.” Dweck’s research also showed that growth-minded individuals were more likely to have that talent (p. 57).

Whichever approach you take, shifting the high-potential conversation between a “promotability” framework (as in a company that is “validation” and “label oriented”) and a “future performance focus” (as in a “development-oriented” company) can cause learning to stall. In this back-and-forth scenario, employees are shifting between external versus intrinsic motivation and fixed vs. growth mindsets (p. 151).



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The performance of employees depends strongly on the amount of coaching a manager is willing to provide. Early performance is a poor predictor of potential, and so managers who tend to have a fixed mindset tend to withdraw coaching too soon, derailing employees who might have improved (p. 178).

### **Self-Awareness and Feedback**

Be specific with both. “In motivation as in praise, we should avoid being generic, as it’s a recipe for mediocrity. The alternative is to set specific, difficult goals” (p. 27).

Asking “how” and asking “why” are factors in goal-setting and motivation, respectively. “When you need to achieve a difficult, unfamiliar, complex goal, research shows that you should concentrate on the how, on the concrete nitty-gritty steps, on specific questions: what am I literally doing? On the other hand, when people think in ‘why’ terms, they are thinking about the bigger picture, what motivates them to achieve that goal. To get motivated, to enhance your self-control, research suggests thinking about ‘why’” (p. 27).

Furthermore, studies show that two-way feedback (both down and up the hierarchy) is a successful practice in organizations. But in practice, the higher you go in an organization, the less feedback you get (p. 154).


### **Deliberate Practice and Development**

We learn from failures and setbacks and become better. According to psychologist Robert Bjork, “We think of effortless performance as desirable, but it’s really a terrible way to learn” (p. 75).


Learning is how we improve performance. Futsal is a Brazilian version of soccer played with a heavy ball in a basketball court-sized field. It “compresses soccer’s essential skills into a small box; it places players inside the deep practice zone, making and correcting errors, constantly generating solutions to vivid problems. Players touching the ball six-hundred [times] more often learn far faster, without realizing it, than they would in the vast, bouncy expanse of the outdoor game” (p. 76).

In fact, studies show that promotion seems to correlate more with a preoccupation with learning than a preoccupation with advancement. “It’s not the young over-achievers and over-performers that went up higher in the organization. It’s not the first in class that stepped up higher, rather than those who have a vision, who were able to engage and motivate others. I would say those that almost ascended despite themselves.” People who were “ambitious in terms of learning” were more successful than people fixed on being promoted (p. 139).

“Until recently there were different ways to prepare [key talent] for future complexity. The ‘classic approach’ has been [stretch assignments], international experiences, special projects, changing functions, transversal assignments, and so forth. This approach however doesn’t seem to be enough, and it doesn’t correspond to our present needs” (p. 175).



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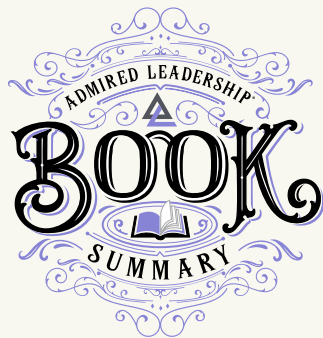


## Engagement of Stars

What motivates high performers? When high performers were surveyed on what caused them the most work satisfaction, they answered that “the most rewarding thing was the creative challenge and stimulation of the work itself, and the chance to keep learning. Much lower in this list came status, or pride, and even lower was financial gain. What organizations should think about is maintaining their employees, and in particular their top talent, in a constant ‘learning mode’” (pp. 118-119).

Companies are split on whether it is better to tell high potentials of their status to help retain them, or to keep their status confidential to avoid creating disappointment with those who lose their status or don't immediately see promotions or other external validation.

Steindler, L. (2013). **The Name of the Game: High-potentials Identification and Assessment: A Comparative Study of Talent Management Policies and Practices.** Essec Business School, Masters in Human Resources Management.



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