

Born to Grow

Alignment. Most learning leaders strive for it. Some actually achieve it. The Just Born People Development System (PDS) is designed to ensure that learning and development not only align with corporate strategy but actually drive business results while equipping associates with the skills to excel in their current and future roles.

The PDS is based on corporate strategy as well as the mission of the organization. It is the vehicle through which Just Born ensures that employees, or “associates” as Just Born calls them, understand performance requirements, are clear about expected results, have opportunities to learn skills necessary to achieve their performance objectives, and are able to identify and prepare for future opportunities. The PDS also is geared to help leaders develop high-performance leadership skills. The PDS includes Just Born’s performance management process (PMP), associate learning process, career development process (CDP), and the succession planning process (SPP). Each of these components aligns to ensure Just Born associates are growing to be the best they can be.

Performance management process

Most companies have some sort of performance appraisal process to provide a “rear view mirror” look at employee performance. In most cases, supervisors determine how well the associate has performed during the last 12 months and give a final rating based on a feeling. Just Born’s PMP system is designed as a forward view of performance. The process starts with a planning meeting between an associate and his supervisor. At this meeting, the associate learns (or is reminded of) the strategic initiatives of the department along with his specific role.

The associate and supervisor agree upon up to four personal objectives that will drive the achievement of the departmental initiatives as well as key job deliverables reflected in the job description. Next, they identify two competencies the associate needs to deliver or improve the personal objectives. A corporate competency dictionary is available on the company’s intranet as a resource for these discussions. Once two competencies are identified, the associate and supervisor team develop a simple learning plan that the associate can follow to gain the needed competencies. These learning plans are collected and compiled in a corporate learning matrix along with several other elements to build the corporate learning plan.

During the year, the associate and the supervisor monitor the progress against the identified PMP milestones, as well as the achievement of the learning plans and other performance related criteria. Learning plans are flexible. If needs change during the course of the year, the learning plan is adjusted to reflect the new requirements. When merit decisions are made at the end of the fiscal year, the achievement of the performance objectives plays a key role, as well as the achievement of learning plans. Those who complete their learning plans are eligible for a higher merit award than those who don’t.

**Just Born
takes pride
in staff
development.**

By Meloney J. Sallie-Dosunmu

Wow ... Now Improvement Process



Career development plans

Businesses often lose their highest performers because they don't provide growth opportunities. Just Born's CDP program is the vehicle through which high-performing associates are given the opportunity to map their career at the company and position themselves for their next job. With the career development plan, associates identify their short-term career goals as well as long-term goals. With these goals in mind, two objectives are developed to help the employee progress in his career path. Again, the corporate competency dictionary is a resource for identifying development needs.

The CDP is a simple process initiated by the associate who defines his future job interests, the work he has done to move toward that future job, and a long-term career goal. The CDP is confirmed or changed by the supervisor. If the future job is in another department or area, the manager of that area also is informed of the associate's future interests.

The CDP process provides an opportunity for future-oriented dialogue between the supervisor and the associate. In most cases, the supervisor provides support for the CDP. In other cases, the dialogue becomes a reality check for raising expectations and setting higher standards for lower performers.

Associates have one year to complete their two developmental activities. Development plans and PMP learning goals are added to the associate learning matrix to compile the corporate learning plan.

Succession planning

The survival of any organization depends on a steady stream of talent in key positions. The succession planning process is Just Born's tool to identify key positions, determine potential successors, and prepare the successors by providing the necessary development. The SPP is in direct alignment with the career development process.

While the career development plan is owned by the associate and monitored by the supervisor, the succession plan is owned by the co-CEOs, the president, and the executive team. The SPP for each functional area is developed by the department's executive team member along with an HR business partner.

The organizational plan is then monitored on a quarterly basis by the CEOs and the president. Quarterly reviews and yearly updates ensure that the plan is valid and effective.

Employee learning and development

All portions of the people development system feed the company's learning and development activities. Learning plans are collected from the performance plans, and development plans are collected from career development plans to create the associate learning plan each year. Since each plan reflects the strategic goals or mission of Just Born, all learning activities are in alignment. More than 50 internal trainers offer customized training to meet the learning needs of associates on all levels of the organization.

In addition to these specific learning opportunities, Just Born offers a comprehensive, foundational leadership program called the High Performance Leadership Development Program. In this program, all members of management learn fundamental leadership skills, including communication skills, coaching, and situational leadership. In addition, they learn to use the Wow ... Now Improvement Process (see chart above), Just Born's customized "Kaizen" process to make process improvements and deliver business results. The Wow ... Now Improvement Process teaches a systematic way to approach processes, collect data, identify improvement opportunities, and make effective improvements using a step-by-step approach. To successfully complete the program, each participant uses data collection, decision analysis, and process analysis tools to complete two action learning projects—an individual and a group project. All action learning pro-

jects are designed to impact business results through cost avoidance or profitability. Each individual project must deliver at least \$1,500 in business results and group projects must yield at least \$10,000.

Participant learning has been intensified by having program graduates deliver the training. When the program was in its infancy, it was presented by a team of consultants who were experts in their particular topic areas. Since that time, program graduates have been trained as trainers and have upgraded the materials so that they are more customized to Just Born's culture and processes.

At the end of the training, which is offered once a month for six months, the executive team and trainers join the participants in the final session. At this session, participants conduct presentations to share the results of their action learning projects. The presentations focus on what they learned and what tools they used, as well as the business results they delivered. Since 2003, five participant groups have completed projects, resulting in more than \$2 million in cost savings or profitability.

HR business partners

The structure of the HR team plays a key role in the success of people development at Just Born. The manager of organizational effectiveness and talent, whose primary role is workplace learning, teams up with other HR team members to serve as HR business partners. All HR business partners have a secondary role that includes talent acquisition and compensation management, labor relations, benefits management, and rewards and recognition management. By aligning the team in this manner, HR has a finger on the pulse of all areas of the company. This structure enables the HR team to provide aligned and robust service, including the identification and implementation of focused learning and performance interventions.

Since each HRBP is aligned with a customer area, he understands the needs of the business and feeds the employee learning plan on an ongoing basis. In addition, the HRBP is the primary facilitator of all the plans for each department. HR business partners assist in identifying competency gaps, developing learning, and creating development plans. The HRBP often participates in the delivery of learning and performance interventions as well.

Alignment is the key to having a learning system that drives business results and contributes to corporate strategy. It is only possible when you build systems to align all activities around the strategy and encourage the employees to support it. When you have the right structure, the right processes, and the right tools, alignment can easily be achieved. **TD**

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