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Power Management for Talent Retention

How can a company fully develop its talent to ensure ongoing organizational success?

A commitment to leader development and employee retention led Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation to seek an automated solution that would change and improve its business processes, while strengthening its commitment to employees. Brown & Williamson's HR administrators feel strongly that there's no substitute for an enterprise performance management solution that maximizes employee performance.

Brown & Williamson Tobacco, the third largest cigarette manufacturer in the United States—whose brands include Kool, Lucky Strike, and Pall Mall—for many years prioritized initiatives on employee development and retention for 2600 salaried U.S. employees within its total employee population of 4400.

As part of that commitment, Brown & Williamson created an internal database where employees could track their development accomplishments and goals. That database worked sufficiently for about five years, but it was cost-prohibitive and progressively becoming time-consuming to use and maintain. By 2001, the company's focus on all aspects of talent management had expanded to the point at which it was no longer practical to manually manage the process via the internal database. Brown & Williamson needed an enterprise-wide "power management" approach. Improving the company's infrastructure and processes would be the next steps in employee development.

Initially, Brown & Williamson searched for a provider that could offer an automated multirater feedback tool to replace the increasingly burdensome in-house, paper-based process. "After looking at a lot of vendors, we went with Kenexa, one of the few providers that didn't try to force us into a cookie-cutter application," says Ken Russell, senior manager of HR systems for Brown & Williamson. "Kenexa used its pre-existing survey and still accommodated many of the preset functions we already had and were specific to our industry. We ended up with a high-quality survey that lets us obtain deeper information than previously. It's also a survey that our people are more inclined to participate in and complete on a timely basis, because it's online and offers coaching."

Because the automated multirater feedback tool is easy to use and understand, more employees complete the process and the quality of the survey increased. Previously, HR administrators had to get the correct group of raters to fill out the survey by hand. Then, those surveys were manually keyed into the system. After that, the resulting report was generated. Brown & Williamson found that Kenexa was able to aggregate the online feedback from all participants and accurately report back with speed.

Brown & Williamson next searched for a partner to provide a single-source solution, including performance management, leadership development, and succession planning. Growing a stronger organization was the main driver, as the company wanted to aggregate various measures of an individual's

performance and facilitate workforce alignment with critical business metrics. Again, Kenexa appeared the obvious choice.

“Kenexa was completely on board with our cultural change goals,” says Russell, “and its people were always available for brainstorming. We felt confident that we’d benefit greatly from the comprehensive Kenexa Career Tracker solution.”

Higher levels, higher goals

Kenexa Career Tracker, a single solution that maximizes employee performance and reduces hiring costs and turnover, aims to provide a better understanding of an organization’s current talent pool. Aiding employees in setting and aligning their personal goals with organizational objectives was a clear benefit. Russell notes that the company was able to tie employees’ step-by-step development plans to organizational achievements. “We’re asking employees to reach higher levels and set higher goals,” explains Russell. “To successfully do that, they need to know that we’re there to help them in that process.”

The previous paper-based solution didn’t mesh individual development with corporate goals. The automated solution, however, enables the tying together of all of the elements in one center for growth and to help employees understand their competencies. “Individual performance and development is tied to Key Results Areas,” says Russell. “KRAs are detailed for the organization and for each department, manager, and employee. Employees now view all of the KRAs from the top down, a process Brown & Williamson calls “Line of Sight,” to ensure that they’re not in conflict. Everyone understands the big picture;

everything is aligned so there is no danger of working at cross purposes.”

Understanding the big picture also helps employees work as a team by sharing goals and having better comprehension of their role in a particular project. Russell notes that the solution eliminates conflicts and fosters a greater level of support of company goals. Kenexa Career Tracker also replaced Brown & Williamson’s paper-based performance review process. The old system took time to complete, which prevented employees from focusing on core business functions. With an automated solution, information is updated and stored in a central location and can be easily accessed across the organization.

Says Russell, “Kenexa Career Tracker allows us to offer ongoing feedback throughout the year.” Employees are also provided with a clear vision of the benefits to them and how their growth can be affected through goal setting and performance reviews. Employees can take ownership of and maximize their potential within the organization.

When employees seek further development, Kenexa helps them to create a customized development plan from a vast selection of training materials available through an online database. “Before Kenexa, we had an internal

library of resources categorized by medium, including videos, books, and audio books,” says Russell. “Maintaining something like that and adding the most current materials are difficult. Kenexa took the materials we have and put them into its own library database that’s searchable by the type of material. Employees can create a personalized curriculum, which complements their individual learning styles, from a vast selection on every relevant topic.”

Brown & Williamson is now using nearly every aspect of Kenexa Career Tracker, including Succession Planning and Kenexa Insight Interviews, which generates effective interview questions based on the feedback that Brown & Williamson seeks to solicit and helps identify outstanding potential hires.

Russell added that every part of Kenexa Career Tracker that had been adopted has been met with internal enthusiasm. “The solutions are cost-effective, efficient, and very easy to use, which is important when the solution is being implemented across the organization. Each one includes a coaching function, which explains what you’re trying to accomplish at any given step.

“Most of all, we’re delighted with our overall, ongoing relationship with Kenexa.”

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