

Enhancing the Strategic Value of HR at Hilton Hotels' International Operations

With more than 2,800 hotels and 480,000 rooms in more than 80 countries and territories, Hilton Hotels Corporation is one of the world's leading hospitality organizations.

The company owns, manages or franchises a hotel portfolio of some of the most well-known and highly regarded hospitality brands worldwide, including Hilton®, Conrad® Hotels & Resorts, Doubletree®, Embassy Suites Hotels®, Hampton Inn®, Hampton Inn & Suites®, Hilton Garden Inn®, Hilton Grand Vacations, Homewood Suites by Hilton® and The Waldorf Astoria Collection®.

Over the next 10 years, the company is looking to add another 1,000 properties to its international division. "We are continuing to grow at an amazing pace, and we are moving into areas such as Russia, where we have never been before," said Tea Colaianni, Hilton's Vice President for Human Resources in Europe. Such rapid growth brings its inevitable challenges. One such challenge for Hilton Hotels was to foster recognition and appreciation for the true value of its Human Resources team from a wider audience.

"When I joined the organization, the Human Resources department was considered a very administrative function," said Colaianni. "There was also a huge resistance to change. I wanted everyone in HR to be more strategically aligned and to be considered the 'best in class' within our industry."

As the organization expands, Colaianni admits that one of her biggest challenges will be resourcing: "We will need to identify and develop the right people quickly and our HR teams will need to be switched on."

Developing HR Talent @ Hilton

Hilton commissioned Kenexa® to develop a program—HR Talent @ Hilton—that would be aligned to the organization's HR vision. "I had worked with Kenexa previously, and it did an outstanding

job tailoring its solutions to my exact needs," said Colaianni. "There were other organizations we considered, but the talent and passion shown to me by Kenexa in past projects made the decision to appoint it an easy one."

In order to identify essential HR talents and formulate a success model, Kenexa utilized talent focus groups, job analysis and critical incident questionnaires with existing HR talent and general managers across the business.

"We sat down with 15–20 HR managers and directors from across the UK and Europe," said Colaianni. "We also spoke with general managers and asked them what they thought made an HR director a talented individual, what they would expect from HR in the future, and how we could help them."

A Web-Based Solution

From its extensive research, Kenexa designed a web-based solution that measures HR candidates against the trait clusters associated with four different types of HR talent—aligned to the Professor David Ulrich model that outlines the four roles of HR—defined as Technical Expert, Team Member Champion, Change Agent and Strategic Partner.

"Every HR person at Hilton must be a Technical Expert who is proficient in the basic HR prophecies and well versed in all of the necessary legislation," said Colaianni. "When they have that proficiency, we are looking for them to demonstrate that they are able to develop, coach and mentor others—making them Team Member Champions. The next stage is to become a Change Agent. This is where we need individuals to be able to critically look at what they are doing and think of how they can improve that further. We then want them to ultimately become Strategic Partners—people who can fit comfortably at the senior table and will contribute to discussions with a general manager, head of finance, head of business development and head of operations."

Candidates have to answer detailed questions and are scored on each trait and a situational judgement component. In their feedback report, candidates are given a comparison of their scores against the Hilton HR exemplar population.

The web-based solution is now being used for the selection of all internal and external candidates and also for developmental purposes.

"We use the tool as part of the selection process for both external recruitment and internal promotion, as it gives us more information about candidates," said Colaianni. "We also use it for all developmental processes to see where people are now on the talent curve and if they are ready to step up into a cluster or regional HR role."

Top Gear Developmental Program

HR Talent @ Hilton has become a fundamental part of the Top Gear program—Hilton's developmental program for HR professionals. Each year, 15–20 HR professionals are required to attend four modules aimed at enhancing their competencies on the four blocks of the talent curve, with the aim of promoting them to a bigger role, a cluster or a regional HR position.

Benefits of HR Talent @ Hilton

The HR Talent @ Hilton program has helped the organization attract, retain and develop talented HR people. "The program has shown we are investing in HR," said Colaianni. "We are helping HR professionals within Hilton to develop a clear career path. In doing so, people know where they are today and what is expected of them in the future, which was never the case before."

The introduction of the program has also helped Colaianni overcome the challenge of promoting HR's value to the organization, as she adds: "As an HR function we are now delivering high quality HR services in a proactive, cost effective and business-driven way—contributing to our company's profitability."

Ongoing Development

To enhance the program further, Kenexa regularly delivers workshops with the HR community at Hilton to help them further explore their talent profiles. "The ratings we get from these sessions are always very high," said Colaianni, who concluded, "throughout this project, Kenexa has been very professional and has delivered what it said it would deliver. We continue to be very pleased with the ongoing service we receive."

As the organization expands further over the coming years, the HR Talent @ Hilton program will play a fundamental role in the recruitment and development of the brightest stars within the HR community.

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About Hilton Hotels

Hilton Hotels Corporation (NYSE:HLT) is one of the world's leading hospitality organizations, with more than 2,800 hotels and 480,000 rooms in 80 countries and territories, including 100,000 team members worldwide. Website: www.hiltonworldwide.com