The Executive Catalyst Checklist

Executive Guide to Leading Catalysts | Chapter 2

Is the Talent Department Helping the Business Become More Capable?

The best Talent leaders do more than deliver programs and processes. They help leaders see what may need attention, help the business solve problems and recognize possibilities, and strengthen the organization's ability to learn and adapt.

Think about the Talent leaders you work with most closely. How often can you say the following?

Usually | Sometimes | Rarely | Don't Know

UNDERSTANDS THE BUSINESS

1. They stay close enough to the business to understand what we are trying to accomplish—and where our ability to accomplish it may be at risk.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

2. They help us distinguish a people problem from a process, organization, technology, leadership, or other business problem.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

3. They bring emerging issues, changes, and possibilities to our attention when they see implications for what the business may need to be able to do.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

HELPS US SEE WHAT NEEDS ATTENTION

4. They raise questions that help us see problems—or opportunities—we may not yet have recognized.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

5. They are willing to challenge our assumptions—including whether we are paying attention to the right issue—rather than automatically accepting the problem as we have framed it.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

6. They help us find the smallest, useful action or experiment rather than automatically proposing a major initiative.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

CONNECTS WHAT THE BUSINESS ALREADY HAS

7. They bring together people whose different perspectives can help us see an issue or opportunity more completely.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

8. They help useful ideas and practices move from one part of the organization to another.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

9. They surface expertise, experience, ideas, and promising practices from elsewhere in the business that leaders might otherwise never see.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

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BUILDS CAPABILITY THROUGH THE WORK

10. They look for ways people can become better by doing important work—not only by attending training.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

11. They notice what the business may be learning from successes, failures, experiments, and unexpected results—and bring important lessons to the attention of others who can use them.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

12. They help us preserve and reuse what we learn so that other people do not have to discover it again.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

LEAVES THE BUSINESS STRONGER

13. They judge success by what the business can now do better—not by how much the Talent department delivered.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

14. They help managers and teams become better at solving people and capability problems themselves.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

15. Their work leaves us less dependent on the Talent department to solve the same kind of problem next time.
Usually ___ Sometimes ___ Rarely ___ Don't Know ___

YOUR EXECUTIVE VIEW:

Don't total the answers. Look at the pattern.

Where does the Talent department already add value in these ways?

_____

_____

What are our Talent people bringing to leadership's attention that we might otherwise miss?

_____

_____

Where are we still relying primarily on the Talent department to respond to requests or provide an answer, program, or process?

_____

_____

Which one change in how Talent professionals work with us would create the most business value?

_____

_____

Together, these behaviors describe what I mean by a Catalyst.

Catalysts don't stop providing expertise, programs, or solutions when those are needed. But they don't wait for leadership to identify every issue worth addressing, and they don't assume that providing something is always the answer.

They help leaders see issues and possibilities earlier, use what the organization already knows, learn from the work it is doing, build what it needs to be able to do, and become better able to respond the next time something changes.

The goal is not merely to identify a few people who behave this way—or to ask the Talent function to do more for the business.

It is to make Catalyst behavior part of how the Talent function creates value, so that the organization itself becomes better able to see, learn, connect, and build capability.

What Did You See?

I don't know what your answers looked like. But I invite you to notice one thing before we move on. Some of the statements on the checklist describe what the Talent department does. Others describe a relationship between that function and leadership.

For example, a Talent leader cannot easily challenge the way a problem has been framed if executives have little interest in hearing the challenge. It is difficult to bring emerging issues to leadership if the Talent department is not included in the conversations that would allow its people to see them. And it is difficult to leave capability behind if the business continues to hand responsibility back to the Talent department.

That suggests that recognizing a Catalyst is only part of the issue.

There is another question: What are we doing as executives that makes this kind of Talent department contribution more—or less—likely?

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