

The Golden Few

Lessons in talent management
from the worlds of entertainment,
sport, arts and academia



Key findings



You've either got it, or you haven't...

There are some organisations who work exclusively with people who have 'it' – whether that 'it' is a perfect set of cheekbones (model agencies) a sublime left foot (football academies) or a computer-like mathematical brain (top schools). They know that no amount of will, effort or even dreams can take the place of an innate gift. You've either got it, or you haven't.

These organisations – we call them enterprise organisations – deal daily in the currency of gifts. They understand what it means to be part of an elite group, and understand that for organisations to truly nurture those gifts, individual needs and dreams have to be taken into account.

Life is not like that in most mainstream organisations where those with unique gifts are rarely recognised, and the particularly gifted, mould-breaking thinkers or trend-setters are more likely to feel excluded than included in organisational life.

This research is all about unpicking how enterprise organisations identify and nurture the truly gifted in their field. It is not about understanding how to bring out the best in all of us, but instead, how you find the elite, the really special 'Golden Few' who have the potential to get to the pinnacle of a highly competitive field.

From talking to these enterprise organisations we have learnt several lessons on how to find, nurture, develop and manage the rare few who have 'it'. Lessons which mainstream organisations would be wise to pay attention to.

With thanks to:

Arts Educational
Schools London

BBC Vision

Lawn Tennis Association

Manchester City
Football Academy

Royal College of Music

St Paul's School, London

SonyBMG Music
Entertainment, UK & Ireland

Storm Model Management

**“The stars have something
that no-one else has.**

They have charisma.”

Simon Chambers, Storm
Model Management

“Talent is only the beginning.”

Susan Sturrock, Royal College
of Music

**“The boys are here for
what they might be, not for
what they are.”** Jim Cassell,

Manchester City Football
Academy

Lessons learned

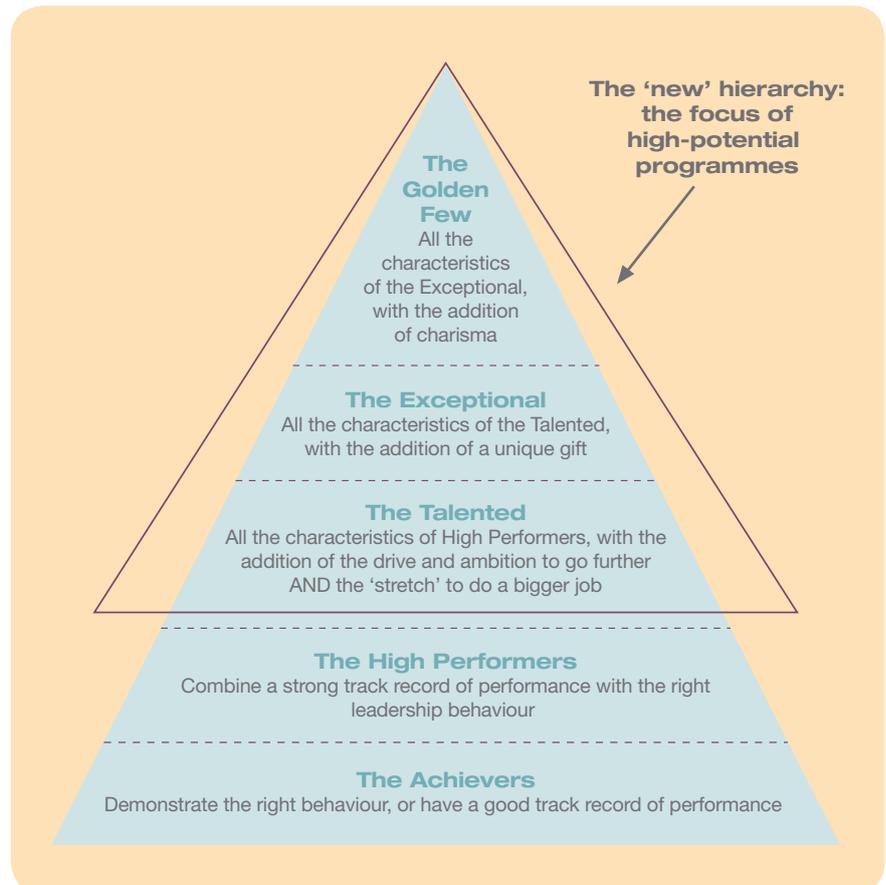
“This is an elite programme in an elite sport with a high failure rate.” Jim Cassell, Manchester City Football Academy



A new word for 'talent'

Admit it, you know them when you see them. Those people who are more than just 'talented'. They are uniquely gifted, captivatingly charismatic, and downright driven and persistent when it comes to achieving success. These people are the Golden Few.

- ▶ Not everyone has been gifted to the same degree
- ▶ Within elite or 'high-potential' programmes, there are grades of 'elite'
- ▶ At the very pinnacle are the Golden Few
- ▶ These individuals can have a huge impact on their organisations, both commercially and strategically
- ▶ You cannot scientifically define their every characteristic in order to spot them, but need to value the judgement and intuition of experienced 'talent spotters'
- ▶ Critically, organisations must know who these people are, and treat them with great care



'Elite' is not a swear word

Not everyone has the same amount of talent. Not everyone has a talent that will make a real difference to an organisation's success. Those who are elite in this way need special attention – and that's not a bad thing.

- ▶ Used to describe a sporting, arts, entertainment or even military programme, the word 'elite' represents something aspirational

- ▶ However, attach the notion of 'elite' to an educational, academic, professional or industry/work-related programme and suddenly it implies a negative tone of 'elitist' rather than the positive tone of 'elite'
- ▶ Mainstream organisations need to recognise that those destined to be or who are at the pinnacle of their chosen profession need bespoke and personal attention just as much as those who are less able





We've lost the art of pastoral care

Taking a genuine interest in the person, not the person in the job, is critical when you seek to engage and nurture your most talented individuals. But human resources doesn't fill this role any more, and nor does the line.

- ▶ Where is the friendly, independent voice of someone who really knows you, and can offer support on a range of things to do with the work environment?
- ▶ When large organisations ask employees to venture into uncharted territory, to take all of the risks with their

development themselves, those employees feel increasingly abandoned by the organisation

- ▶ This engenders anxiety and insecurity that undermines an employee's ability to deploy their talents to the best advantage

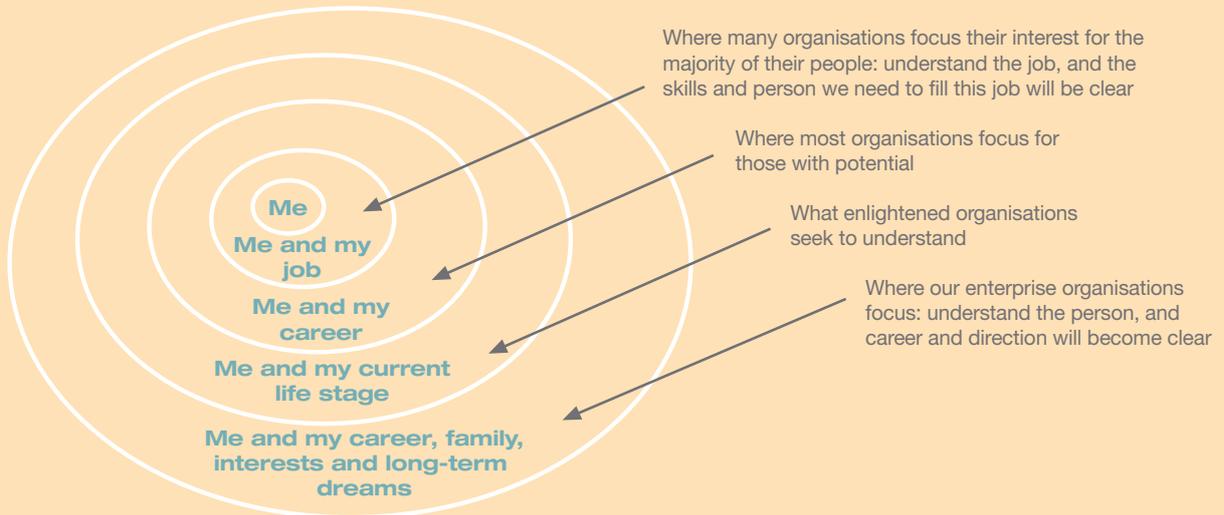


24/7 talent spotting

Talent spotting is a talent. If you want to get the best, you've got to hunt like the best. And that doesn't mean plodding through your talent and recruitment processes as and when HR instructs you to. You've got to be looking 24/7.

- ▶ Most mainstream organisations run annual or bi-annual talent identification processes
- ▶ Enterprise organisations are ALWAYS on the look out for talent
- ▶ Regardless of current needs, they will go anywhere, at any time to unearth it, acquire it and then accommodate it
- ▶ Talent spotting has a long-term focus – to set trends or meet future needs
- ▶ Judgement of those who spot talent is highly respected and valued, and is viewed as a unique gift in itself

What organisations understand about their people





It's not a career, it's a set of scenarios

Careers are no longer completely linear but take many shapes and forms. Couple that with the fact that we cannot predict the future and you're left wondering – why do we only ever plan for one career?

- ▶ The Golden Few in enterprise organisations have achieved success through spending substantial amounts of time discussing an individual's unique selling points (USPs) and pursuing a number of career paths that build on them
- ▶ Elite programmes carry with them a high risk. The possibility that one might NOT succeed is discussed in enterprise organisations as openly as the likelihood of success
- ▶ Development is about constant feedback. In enterprise organisations conversations happen daily to gently steer career progress in the most rewarding direction



The HR function has lost its way

In its rush to become more commercially relevant – to be 'strategic business partners' – the HR function has abandoned the well-being of employees. Bring back Personnel! Well, some of it.

- ▶ The degree of personal attention inherent in enterprise organisations, has been all but lost in mainstream organisations
- ▶ Look back 40 years or so, and the HR function used to fulfil this role
- ▶ As the HR function has evolved it has lost the role of employee champion/employee advocate. Line managers have often

been expected to fill this gap, but lack the capacity, and without some stewardship from somewhere, employee advocacy has become fragmented

- ▶ The employee champion/advocate role is the one that dominates in enterprise organisations, not the strategic business partner
- ▶ Mainstream organisations need to redress the balance between the individual and the organisation and make the emphasis more equitable
- ▶ To do this, the HR function of the future needs to recapture its leading role as the voice of the employee and incorporate the following roles:



“Equality of opportunity has been confused with the notion that everyone is equal.” Dr Martin Stephen, St Paul's School

Source: adapted from Ulrich, D and Brockbank, W; Lawler, E; Corporate Leadership Council; David H Maister

The next chapter

It's all very well to talk about the interesting lessons that mainstream organisations can learn from enterprise organisations, and all the exciting things that they can do to improve their approach to talent management, but we know that just tinkering with a few new processes is not going to deliver an organisation that is truly committed to the talent management agenda.

Our earlier research showed that there are three key areas that organisations need to pay attention to in order to ensure that talent management is more than just a compliance exercise:

- ▶ **Infrastructure**
- ▶ **Messages**
- ▶ **Mindsets**

Interestingly, the lessons from enterprise organisations also cross these three key areas, and looking at them this way can help us to see the way forward for mainstream organisations.

Our enterprise organisations are 'full of soul' and people are confident and relaxed talking about intangibles such as wishes, dreams, hopes and desires. They seek to identify, celebrate and enhance individual differences rather than crush them in the efficiency of conforming to a corporate process.

Perhaps the way of the future for mainstream organisations lies in the lessons that can be learned from enterprise organisations (see page seven), and in getting the conditions right for individual excellence to shine.

To find out more

About 'The Golden Few'

For a copy of our full 63-page report covering our lessons learned in more detail, as well as tips on what mainstream organisations can do in response, plus our contributors' stories, please contact us at the website below.

About us

A specialist consulting and executive search firm, Jackson Samuel was established in 2004 to provide a unique blend of expertise in talent management. With an impressive track record of working with international blue chip firms, from a wide variety of sectors, we help bring talent management to life for our clients through consulting, research and search.

Contact us

To find out more about our research and the work that we do, contact us at:

www.jacksonsamuel.com

"The challenge is not always finding the geniuses, but managing them and making sure they are in the right hands." Steven Martens, Lawn Tennis Association

Lessons that can be learned from enterprise organisations

Enterprise organisation	Implications for mainstream organisations
Arts Educational Schools London	<p>Get them when they're young: By identifying and developing talent early on, get young people engaged and skilled before they can be lost to other professions</p> <p>Keep in touch when they move on: Invite <i>alumni</i> to talk, coach or run master classes in specialist areas</p> <p>Support the whole person: Provide pastoral care as a key part to nurturing, developing and supporting talent</p>
The BBC	<p>Think creatively with your recruitment methods: Rather than relying on traditional processes – what would work for your industry, eg networking events across the functions/business/industry?</p> <p>Encourage development outside your organisation: Keeping the door open and relationships alive so that they can one day return</p> <p>Assign individuals an agent: A person responsible for promoting their talents and brokering their deployments</p>
Lawn Tennis Association	<p>Promote your industry: Particularly important for rare or highly demanded skills, there is a lot organisations could do to attract talent to their industry from a young age</p> <p>Utilise your talent data: Collate all your assessment data in a database, analyse the information and use it to learn more about identifying and developing talent in your business</p>
Manchester City Football Academy	<p>Reward talent developers: Utilising the notion of the transfer fee within and between organisations would incentivise managers to nurture their stars</p> <p>Relentlessly scout for talent: Any time, anywhere</p> <p>Work with the god-given gifts: Find a talent's unique ability and work with it rather than manufacturing generic capabilities</p>
Royal College of Music	<p>Get networking: Build strong relationships with feeder institutions so that it is your company to whom they recommend their <i>crème de la crème</i></p> <p>Make the most of everyone's USP: In developing others, encourage them to think through: what their unique selling point is; how they can build on it; and what roles/career direction will leverage it to the maximum</p> <p>Recognise external development: Encourage talented individuals to experience other environments to stretch their learning</p>
St Paul's School	<p>Work with individual passions: Be flexible and creative when developing talent. Rather than putting everyone through a rigid development programme, work with individual strengths and passions</p> <p>Cushion the challenging side of a talent: Recognise that with the gift that a highly talented person can bring, may also come a difficult side. Rather than fighting it, acknowledge it and find a way to manage around it</p> <p>Create networks that span organisational levels: A person can learn a lot from peers and senior colleagues, so rather than have everyone walk around in their silos, break down the barriers by setting up a forum in which they can network</p>
SonyBMG Music Entertainment UK & Ireland	<p>Move with the times: Be innovative with your methods for spotting talent, both internally and externally. What characteristics are you really looking for and through what vehicle can they best be seen?</p> <p>Value the talent spotters: Recognise the talent that lies in spotting talent (including spotting the spotters of talent!), value and reward it</p>
Storm Model Management	<p>Be the leaders of the pack when it comes to trends: Look for shifts in the industry to spot early, then buy or grow the talent that is needed</p> <p>Buddy up complementary skills: Like with the photographers and models, think creatively about how you can use and share skills, eg what could finance teach HR and vice versa?</p> <p>Constantly talk about and to your talent: What do they want, what are they good at, when do they shine, what impact do they have, what do they need to do to grow?</p>

