

How to build a sustainable talent pool for Consumer Goods companies



Tallinn, Estonia – Talent is a hot topic – at the national level, in business ventures from global corporations to start-ups, and everywhere else, it seems. Everybody knows that "talent" is important for their own business or country, and feels obliged to mention it frequently. But what is actually behind these words? **Does your organisation have a clear talent strategy and an action plan, and has it defined what exactly it wants to achieve?** Most importantly, does the strategy exist only on paper, or is there clear follow-up on progress and measured outcomes?

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Unfortunately, my experience is that many companies are unable to answer these questions affirmatively. Companies may have a great written talent strategy, but in reality little is happening. "We know it is important," they may say, "But we need to focus on other more important areas to secure our business." We need to understand that **even if talent seems to be an area that can be postponed, business success is directly impacted by whether or not your employees can grow your business and move forward.** For this reason, there needs to be consistency and a non-stop focus on talent, otherwise companies limit their own success and do not use their full potential.

As with any other organisation, FMCG companies know that the talented people in their business need to be kept motivated, engaged and developed continuously, and that these people are the ones on whom their current and future business success depends. **The internal talent programmes in global FMCG companies are usually quite solid, and often form a benchmark for other industries and businesses.** At the same time, established FMCG talent is often in high demand from other businesses (I will omit start-ups from this discussion, as they require an entirely different skill set) and they are very often headhunted outside the FMCG sector as well as within it. However, it is often challenging for FMCG companies to attract suitable talent from outside the sector, increasing the pressure to focus consistently on retaining and developing their talent. What is the reason for this situation, and what solutions are there to foster a constant talent pathway in FMCG organisations?

FMCG talent is proactive, business-driven, and used to a fast-changing environment. They are tough multilingual negotiators, versatile and adaptable, collaborative team players with world-class training.

The reason is simple: the **FMCG skill set fits many businesses, and is highly valued in general.** These people are proactive, business-driven, used to a dynamic and fast-changing environment, tough negotiators used to achieving goals with tough retailers, multilingual, versatile and adaptable, collaborative team players with world-class training. No wonder that local businesses and other industries love to get these talents on board, often luring them with higher-level positions. At the same time, the pool of potential recruits outside the FMCG sector is smaller – companies usually don't want to hire people outside of the sector, as they will be unable to keep up without the above skill set. The sector is named FAST moving consumer goods for a reason!

There is always plenty of interest in FMCG positions, as they are frequently well-known brands that everybody wants to associate with, and the pay and benefits are comparatively high compared with other sectors (except finance, of course). However, people who are unfamiliar with this sector may not realise that the competitive pay goes hand in hand with constant hard work. To be successful in this business, your personality must fit, and you must love challenges and changes.



So, how can FMCG companies lay a talent pipeline for their successors? Of course, their **talent programmes must prioritise internal growth and development so that their people do not want to leave**, but there are still times when you need to hire externally. Usually the first port of call is to search within the sector. However, this is not enough – other organisations will also be working on retention, keeping their own talent motivated and engaged so they are not looking to leave – so FMCG companies will need to look at employees who feel they are stagnating in the same position and are motivated by money, or young people with potential who will grow in the role.

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But is this limited pool enough? How can you be sure that the talent is the best available in the market? I encourage FMCG companies to spend more time on finding a great successor, and to look beyond titles and specific experience, identifying a candidate's skills, experience with the required competences, and fast learning agility. Spending more time on finding the right skill set and paying close attention to onboarding will pay off handsomely in the end. After all, **business specifics can be learned, but not attitude or capabilities**. These people will challenge your business, bring in new ways of thinking and experience from outside the sector, and implement new things – you may well realise you were lucky to find them before your competitor did! I know that it takes extra effort to think outside the box in this way, but if the selection is made through very solid and tough recruitment processes, this could be a positive advantage.

Another challenge of the status quo is limiting recruitment to a single country: for example, if your business will operate throughout the Baltics, you should search across all Baltic states for middle or top-level Baltic positions, not just within the specific country where the position is based. Again, this takes extra effort but it can be your best option as FMCG is a very unique and demanding sector – assuming, of course, that the language requirements are not an issue. Nowadays, people are becoming more and more mobile, and willing to move countries if it is a positive career move. So, if you need a strong candidate but cannot find one within your budget in Estonia, you may do better searching in Lithuania where salaries are lower – or if the talent in Latvia is reluctant to change jobs, then there might be more possibilities in Estonia. **Expanding the options beyond your home country or sector can help you to fill your pipeline while broadening your talent scope.**



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