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## ***Kenexa HR Thought Leadership®:*** **ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE**

By Ed Hurst

**HOST:** Welcome to the Kenexa HR Thought Leadership Podcast series. This series was created to educate, inspire, and fuel the evolution of leadership in our organizations, our communities, and our world.

I'm your host Jace Bonsall.

In today's episode we will listen to a presentation entitled "Engagement and Performance." This episode is being presented by Ed Hurst. Mr. Hurst serves as a Kenexa consultant and has extensive experience as an assessment development practitioner, focusing on achieving tangible business results. This discussion will illustrate the importance of linking individual performance to business outcomes. It will also highlight the connection between engagement and talent. How do you hire the right person who is both, able to do the job, and willing to do the job. Many people often think these are separate issues. Actually the opposite is quite true. An organization that links individual performance to organizational performance will be successful in multiplying business outcomes and the human contribution.

**MR. HURST:** In an organization, one of the things that we most frequently get involved in is linking people issues to business outcomes. And really for our client organizations, the most important thing is that when handling people all the way from selection to engagement, to development, and to performance management, it is absolutely vital that it actually links not just to the performance of individuals and the well-being and happiness of individuals, but also to the performance of businesses. We focus very much on that and have a lot of methodologies that link it.

This is actually achieved in quite of a variety of ways. Engagement focuses on the idea that individuals will be effective and be fulfilled if they are engaged. We focus on that quite a lot initially by survey work to understand exactly how engaged individuals are, and what we leave as drivers of engagement might be in a particular organization. We also approach that from a talent angle, very much to the performance and well-being of individuals is linked to assessing people for selection to understand the attributes that they have and understanding the attributes that are required for effectiveness in a particular role, matching those two up so the process directly pinpoints the qualities that will make people effective. Also that can be linked to development of individuals, to management, to coaching, to performance management, to succession planning, and building a talent pipeline. However, what's interesting about all of that is that the engaging of individuals in an organization and the understanding of talent of individuals is often done as two entirely separate unlinked processes. So even though we often work with exactly the same organizations to achieve all of those things, the joining up of those things is something that is not always done.

Now one of the most exciting fields for us as an organization is the emerging frequency with which all of these things are actually being examined as a single entity, as a single challenge, particularly in the current economic environment. For example, organizations are telling us that they're not obviously recruiting as much as they were, but when they do, it's absolutely vital that you get the best individual. We can't afford to waste a vacancy, waste an opportunity. Equally of course, for each vacancy, there are far more people applying in the current environment, so there's a need to be more selective, to be more efficient, and of course, to understand amongst that big a pool who is exactly the right individual. Now that's a challenge in certain terms, but it's also an opportunity in that if you can understand not just who's going to be the right individual for a particular job in terms of tasks and skills and knowledge, but also understand who might be most engaged, who might fit most into that environment and culture. If you like, how can you recruit and assess for engage-ability rather than purely sole ability and talent? And so it becomes as much of a person environment match as a person job match. So that's

one sense in which understanding engagement, culture and environment, in parallel with or very much linked to, talent and assessment, is a huge opportunity. The other area is for organizations right now who are not hiring as much or not hiring at all. The challenge shifts to how do you actually extract, if you like, or capitalize on the performance and talent and opportunities of the individuals you already have? It becomes a development challenge, a motivational challenge, a cultural challenge, and that is another area where linking talent to engagement in a single process can be extremely powerful. For example, if you imagine us as individuals, if you understand as people what motivates them, what stimulates them, what they are good at, what they enjoy, that can be extremely useful information to have in how you develop and coach.

So this podcast is really looking at how do you join together what initially seemed to be quite separate issues of engagement and talent. Just one further point prior to going into detail of this, is a lot of our client organizations also tell us this isn't just theoretically a separate issue, it often seems practically a separate issue. The individuals, the departments, the decision-makers who own engagement as a process and culture as an issue are often very different people from those who run recruitments, developments, operational HR. So, if you like, there are structural qualities for the separateness in our client organizations as much as there are differences in content. However, if all of those things can be joined up, be tied up, there is a tremendous opportunity to get them a lot more value than doing each of them individually and independently. So I would encourage you to reflect in your organization about what it is that engages people, what it is that stimulates people to be effective and motivated and thinking about if you've ever hired a person that's got absolutely the right skills, absolutely the right knowledge. They seem also in terms of their style, they are perfect for the job, but they don't last. They don't appear to be happy or thrive, and they leave, or they stay and they underachieve. How much of that might be an engagement issue? How much of that might be about how well they fit into the environment and the culture rather than just person-job matching? And is there an opportunity if you can genuinely understand engagement and culture with assessment and talent to actually approach that issue in a positive and an exciting way?

One of the areas in which this issue most seems to emerge is the information that we find from surveys, engagement surveys, with our clients. The most frequently occurring themes which emerge from surveys as a challenge in an organization is the effectiveness of managers, the effectiveness of leaders, communication, how frequently people develop. Those four areas are the most common themes that emerge in engagement surveys. Now all of those obviously are issues and themes which can be addressed and approached positively from a talent angle, from an assessment and a development angle if only those dots joined up.

Now one of the things which we started to develop is what we're calling the Kenexa Engagement Architects, which is effectively saying if you're gathering information on jobs and talent and skills, which are required in jobs for assessment purposes, simultaneously you're gathering engagement information about what it is that engages people in your environment and culture. Can that information be unlike as one process and joined up? Is it possible, for example, to find out whether people with particular, individual attributes and traits and talents are more or less likely to be engaged and effective? If you can identify individuals who are high performers and actually understand their individual attributes, but also how they link to an environment, that can be hugely powerful. We've increasingly been doing that, and finding out that there are individual attributes that we can identify which make people more or less likely to actually be engaged; and therefore to last, to endure, to be motivated, and be inspired by being part of an organization. So the first piece is an analysis piece, if you like, in your organization, what are the things that link individuals to engagement in a culture?

The next part is basically saying, once we've understood all of that, how do we build a performance map, how do we build a competency framework or behavioral model, that encapsulates not just the behaviors that are required to deliver the practical outcomes of the particular job, but how do we then tie that through to the motivators, the values, the personality traits, the individual styles that will make people fit and be engaged? And this can absolutely be built into a profile for individual jobs and a map that varies across an organization or by job families. And once that work is done, it becomes possible to tie it then to assessment methods which then enables people to be recruited or developed and managed, much more effectively and in a much more rounded way.

The next important part is manager profiling, which effectively is a gap analysis of existing managers, again, the performance map which we built in the previous stage. So it is effectively a stock take in saying, Do we have the individual attribute? Do we have the talent? And do we have the style that link engagement and talent to performance outcomes? And that's done very much in a positive way, not to identify areas of blame or areas of issue, but instead to say once we can see gaps, we can understand how to develop and coach and fill those gaps by understanding the unique requirements and talents of each individual, individual stockholders, individual managers, and ultimately individual leaders.

And that links us through to the next part, which is leadership building, which is taking a similar approach and saying once we've understood the levers of engagement, the levers of performance, from a talent and engagement angle, we can then say, do we have the

leadership style and talents and traits which actually enable you to drive all of that forward? And if not, how do we link that through to one-on-one coaching, 360 feedback, diagnostic events, development processes, all of those areas, which can absolutely hone in and pinpoint individual areas which will lead leaders to be much more effective? It's also possible to pinpoint the communication angle and say, let's run a workshop whereby we directly try and understand and move forward the communication styles of individuals and their abilities and skills. That is a very common area that we find that links to engagement to individuals. Do they feel that communication is happening effectively around them, and of course involving them? We are increasingly organizing events whereby they start off by each individual sharing their individual style. Possibly we can link that to a psychometric assessment so we can actually see in detail the details of the person's personality and how that can link to their motivation. And then how that links to how they tend to relate with other people and interact with them, give them feedback and conduct a number of exercises intended to actually build the effectiveness of that team from a communication angle. That can be done with leadership teams, management teams, and functional teams at all levels of the organization so that we're directly understanding they link between the communication, the effectiveness, the performance, and ultimately, engagement as well.

Similarly that can also be applied to working with and on teams so that the uniqueness of each individual is understood first of all, and then blended with the overall team to drive forward the dynamics, the performance, and the effectiveness of an individual team. And that's very much about working with the team as an entity, as well as working with individuals within it. And that encompasses everything from feedback, to team exercises, to challenges, to understanding the climate of each team, and the unique contribution of each individual. But the most important thing is to drive forward the performance of that team rather than simply seeking to understand the style of each individual within it. We also do an awful lot of work to develop individuals at a personal level all the way from 360 feedback to developing insights to each person, coaching each person, helping each person to build a development action plan around their aspirations in their existing role, and their aspirations in the future for their life and their career in ways which directly link to what engages them and motivates them rather than just what their job is now, what the organization says they should do, or what their actual skill set is, much more in-depth and much more rounded. And if the benefits of that are multiplied across all individuals in an organization, you can suddenly achieve much bigger outcomes from a performance angle as well as from a human angle of engagement, motivation and well-being. All of those things can very much go hand in hand. So in effect, what we find is that if you understand engagement alongside talent, rather than as a separate issue, look at survey information alongside the requirements of jobs, assessment, recruitment, development, that can achieve a much bigger outcome than doing any one of those things individually, or even doing all of them independently. If the combination that makes the total much bigger than the sum of the parts, and that encompasses what we call the Kenexa Engagement Architect, understanding exactly what the attributes are, of talent, of engagement, the levers, how they link, what are the individual traits that lead people to be engaged and effective, and building that into a performance map, so that you've got a behavioral model, a competency model. It isn't just about ability or just about job fit, but is absolutely about engaging environment fit, thinking that through to the profiling of managers and leaders, building that through to assessing individuals and developing individuals, coaching, building a communication workshop team, workshops that can work on individual teams so that they can become a lot more effective, and ultimately tying all of that through to clear performance outcomes and metrics across an organization. We are finding if you do all of those things in combination, the outcomes can be truly remarkable in terms of business and human outcomes.

**HOST:** Thank you for joining us today for the Kenexa HR Thought Leadership Podcast series, where we seek to educate, inspire, and fuel the evolution of leadership in our organizations, our communities, and our world. If you have questions regarding today's episode, please feel free to email Mr. Hurst at [Ed.Hurst@kenexa.com](mailto:Ed.Hurst@kenexa.com). We also invite you to visit our website at [Kenexapods.com](http://Kenexapods.com) to find the original transcripts of this episode, that's K-E-N-E-X-A pods.com. This episode was brought to you by Kenexa, a leader in multiplying business success for organizations worldwide.

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