

## Insights and Outcomes

### Case study: talent management in Continental Travel

#### Questions

**1. What are Alex's priorities in developing a more proactive TM strategy?**

The key requirement is to develop a TM strategy that reflects changes in business. As this is expected to continue to grow, he needs to ensure that his HR capabilities—which mean both numbers and skills—are in tune with what the business requires. It is also clear that he needs to introduce a more focused development and succession strategy: in fact at the moment there doesn't seem to be one. Jenny Harper's role as operations is critical but at the moment has neither a deputy nor anyone being trained to cover her temporary absence or replace her if she left.

**2. What kind of career development policy would make sense in the context of the company's size and opportunities?**

It's important not to try to introduce overly formalized or complicated development activities; making sure that what is introduced is understood, isn't too intrusive, and what works is what counts. The organization is relatively small and has a flat hierarchy so the idea of creating promotion paths and succession planning activities is unrealistic. Currently little is known about either the career aspirations of staff or their views about what short-term opportunities they might be interested in. Movement upward is limited but movement across existing work areas offers real opportunities to provide new experiences and develop new skills.

**3. If anything happened to Alex, what might the company need to have in place?**

The problem with owner-managed businesses is that of succession: if the owner decides to leave, retire, or becomes incapacitated. The current situation in Continental Travel is that there is no internal replacement that could take over in such circumstances. Growing the business, developing new tours/holidays, and negotiating deals with suppliers require particular skills and knowledge of the industry. In the short term, Jenny and the company secretary could keep the business going but the reality is that a new external CEO would be needed. There is no obvious family member to step in or step up. The options are to use a firm of headhunters to find a replacement, or use existing contacts to find one. An interim CEO position might be considered a possibility but would be less preferable than a permanent replacement. The business could of course be sold!

**4. What can be done to alleviate the pressure Jenny is working under?**

Jenny's situation, if nothing changes, is only going to get more difficult as the business grows. There are several options available. One would be to reorganize the operations part of the business and create two managers with their own teams. This would involve hiring an experienced person or appointing from within someone with potential and the right skills set. The second would be to upskill existing section heads and their staff and devolve some of Jenny's current responsibilities to them. In this sense it is important to look at the way work is currently organized and capacity and capabilities recognized. The third is to create a deputy for Jenny, selecting an appropriate person from the section heads, over time increasing the responsibilities of that role. An external appointment is a possibility but is a riskier option.

**5. How can those staff with real potential be identified and nurtured?**

Recognizing potential abilities and interest comes from knowledge, and communication is at the heart of knowing. Traditional performance appraisals would not be an appropriate intervention for this company, but the introduction of weekly or monthly 'learning and feedback sessions' that allowed staff to discuss experiences, pass on valuable lessons, and indicate areas for improvement would allow those with potential to be identified. Second, informal one-to-one conversations between managers and their staff would allow the issue of career interests to be established, development needs identified, and development activities agreed upon.