

Jérôme Julia: Do you develop ‘craft pots’ as much as high pots?

Are high pots over? Make way for craft pots!

In 2007, Laguiole’s foundry almost went bankrupt. Under pressure from low-cost competition and counterfeiting, the centenary cutlery company reinvented its future by changing its business model: destroying plans, making production less mechanical, getting back to manual know-how to make vintage objects that are now fought over on global markets.

The new heroes of this recovery aren’t high potentials with comfortable earnings but cutlers with a passion for the right gesture, who share a know-how that is constantly evolving.

Who are ‘craft pots’¹? They are individuals who express their personality through their work, thus making it available for the company’s personality. They have a “hand turn,” a special know-how, an intimate knowledge of their products, of the manufacturing process and of their production ecosystem. For instance, they are machinery fitters, workers/craftsmen, stylists’ assistants who decipher their boss’ sketches, employees who “embody” the company’s values, consumers/ambassadors of the brand, and so on.

Each ‘craft pot’ conveys part of the company’s intangible capital, regardless of his/her status and of the nature of his/her link with the company. They can be employees or volunteers, just like the volunteers providing advice and assistance to tourists during the Olympics, in Apple Stores, or in the Puy-du-Fou amusement park². When will you have volunteers in your company? How much value do you put on someone who represents the ‘home culture’? Someone who has special relations with some partners? Do they hold less value than a future CEO of BU at global level?

Objective 100%

In businesses, talent management is often limited to a) a list of high potentials and b) collective (not individual) trade management. It’s as if the company’s development is fictitiously a) carried by a ‘happy few’ destined to ensure management and b) based on a disembodied model building of its trades, reduced to their technical component.

Talent management is often partial, focused on “the best” – 10/20% of the staff? – neglecting the interdependency of contributions and teams’ cooperation. And yet, 100% of workers and stakeholders need to grow.

A comparison is possible with deindustrialization in the 90s, made possible by outsourcing production activities. For a long time, businesses thought they had to focus on their core business

¹ As opposed to ‘high potential resources’

² 32,000 volunteers, 1,000 seasonal workers and 130 permanent employees (source: “Le Puy du Fou, une réussite à la française” – Le Puy du Fou, a French success – in Le Figaro, June 14, 2013).

and outsource key skills to links of the value chain deemed less strategic. But one never comes out of outsourcing key skills unscathed.

Without ‘craft pots’, there can’t be any ‘high pots’, for several reasons:

- A learning effect is created between research, development and production activities. Dialogue and cooperation between them are necessary to adjust and develop the company’s offer
- Craft pots are the custodians of the link between the company and its sectoral/local ecosystem
- An unrecognized craft pot is a rising rival.

Not taking enough care of craft pots means risking losing experiences, local integration, innovation ability and a vigorous ecosystem.

Transfer via craft pots, the alternative to globalizing high posts

Developing skills via international mobility mostly focuses on high potentials. Age is *de facto* a decisive factor. The notion of high potential implies that, after a certain age, the individual no longer has the required potential to get jobs with a high level of responsibility. Thus, maybe it would be more reasonable to replace the notion of high-potential mobility (the means) with the development of know-how and singularities (the purpose). Beyond the semantic change, it’s a real revolution that opens international mobility to all employees, regardless of their age and of the possibility that they might get a managing position.

Managing high potential is a form of delegation of sovereign powers to workers chosen by managers via procedures that create conformity. International mobility and expatriation are two of these procedures. But this procedure isn’t the cure-all anymore, as the following are so important:

- belonging in local, sectoral and practical ecosystems,
- the diversity and symbiosis of know-how,
- the transfer of the company’s competitive advantages.

Let us work on the transfer of the company’s know-how and intangible strengths as much as we work on managing and globalizing its high potentials.