

Elevating Talent as a Competitive Business Advantage

To the outside world, Minnesota-based Polaris is one of the world's leading providers of power sports equipment, such as all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles, motorcycles and boats, plus related services.

Within Polaris, however, its leaders might say they're really running a talent management company, whose employees happen to offer industry-leading power sports equipment and services. That's how passionately Polaris senior leadership believes in the competitive difference-making power and potential of its talent management efforts, in partnership with MDA Leadership.

A VIEW FROM THE TOP



What Did Polaris Value?

“First and foremost, talent is really your biggest differentiator. We believe the best team, the best people win.”

- Jim Williams

Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Polaris

THE SITUATION

What was once in 2010 a successful but much smaller Polaris of 3,000 employees and \$2 billion in revenue transformed itself, organically and through two dozen brand acquisitions, into a global powerhouse with 16,000+ employees, sales in 120+ countries, and \$8.8 billion in revenue as of year-end 2022.

As Polaris has rapidly grown, its senior leaders credit part of its business success to its strategic approach to HR and talent management, including MDA's expertise in assessing, identifying, and developing the top-tier talent needed to run a company whose size has more than quadrupled within the past 15 years. Polaris knew its talent management strategy and processes needed to evolve to meet its growing domestic and international business requirements, yet it needed a partner that could go the distance.

THE MDA SOLUTION

Recognizing the transformative power of talent management, Polaris partnered with MDA Leadership over the past decade to revolutionize its business through **strategic talent assessment, development, and succession planning**.

First Polaris focused on identifying and developing its next generation of leaders. Carrie Guthrie, Vice President of Corporate Human Resources for Polaris, said, “We leverage assessments at all levels to help us determine who will innovate, deliver for our customers, and contribute to our talent development culture. The strength of our talent has been instrumental in our success.” The assessment process provides trusted insights into selection, development, and succession decisions across the organization.



A VIEW FROM THE TOP



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- Joe Wollan, Director of Talent Acquisition

From an executive perspective, “it all starts with the business agenda and then we work on the human capital agenda where we spend an inordinate amount of time and energy,” said Jim Williams, Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Polaris. “It’s not just an HR responsibility—it’s the CEO’s and executive team’s responsibility. They have the same inherent responsibility and accountability for our human capital and talent management practices as their financial performance with respect to being a publicly traded company.”

In 2021, Polaris took an innovative approach to succession planning by partnering with MDA to assess and support a select group of high-potential leaders. Polaris’ C-suite executives used powerful insights from MDA readiness assessments to complement performance data and enrich learnings from their one-on-one interviews with target leaders. This program proved so effective that it has become a regular part of the annual executive succession planning process, aiming to spotlight and accelerate the growth of Polaris’ future leaders to fulfill its strategic business objectives.

As Williams said, “We’re accountable for succession planning and development of our talent because we want people to stay and grow with the company. We must figure out who’s going to run the company and the different businesses and functions. With respect to succession mapping, we want to have a better understanding of who these folks are and what the requirements are to do these big jobs someday. We use the MDA assessment process to identify what people are good at, what they need to be better at, and try to figure out what information we can garner to be in a better position to confidently develop people for these next steps in their careers and future succession planning for the company.”

At the early career leadership levels, Polaris sought to enhance the speed, consistency, and standardization of its hiring process to meet the growing demand for talent. As part of this evolution, Polaris worked with MDA to identify five different role-specific job families, listing the success requirements for each, to create a more customized assessment approach for each family.

“These additional datapoints help us to understand a person’s likelihood of success within the role and their development areas upon joining,” said Joe Wollan, Director of Talent Acquisition. “As a result, the company has been able to predict more efficiently and accurately who will be most successful.”

As Wollan explained, these were not simply tactical improvements, but rather an upgrade of Polaris’ entire hiring process. “MDA was with us every step of the way, in terms of how we were preparing materials and delivery, as well as educating our recruiting team, HR business partners, and senior leadership about the predictive potential of this approach.”

THE IMPACT

Polaris’s partnership with MDA transformed its talent strategies, leading to remarkable business success. The use of assessments for selection and development has helped Polaris HR and organizational leaders promote a world-class leadership culture focused on exponential growth.

Across the Polaris enterprise, the results of these collective efforts have increased confidence in the talent management strategy, particularly relative to key selection, development, and succession decisions. Polaris’ journey showcases the power of talent management as a key driver of business excellence.