



The Right People

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As association executives navigate the modern day constraints that currently define their operational challenges (i.e. revenue levels, strategic relevance to the stakeholders they serve, tightening of leadership availability, operating budgets), many are desperate for an advantage that can give them an edge in getting ahead of the curve, rather than becoming a victim of it.

Perhaps that very advantage rests within your organization as you read this. Yes, it probably does and further more, it's readily available for you to control. The number one strategic edge at your disposal is the wide variety of people in your office that you currently lead.

Now before you avert your gaze to the next article, or cut this piece out as an "FYI" to your office manager or HR people, consider this:

Associations that derive revenues from dues paying members, value added fee for service programs, philanthropic benefactors, and /or any level of government grants, will need to revisit their total economic value proposition to their members.

As of mid-October, before this article went to press, global markets rebounded at historic levels: for one day. The next day, two thirds of those gains were wiped out.

Economic analysts all agree that the timeline for the desired stabilization of the economy is impossible to determine at this point. All are unanimous that we will be in a period of stagnation for some and devastating pain for many others. Until such time as your members, benefactors, and governments know how much money they really have, and decide where and how to spend it, revenue and budgets will be more challenging than ever before.

What's the secret sauce? By having the right kind of person in a job that demands the kinds of behaviors which come naturally to them. Industrial psychology has long held that innate motivating drives are like DNA building blocks of behaviors that make up one's personality.

The concept that "getting the right people in the right seats on the right bus" (Jim Collins – Good To Great) as a prerequisite to sustainable success may have struck CSAE readers as a lofty ideal more suited to the complex HR machinery of the private sector, but somewhat unattainable, in a systemic way, to the resource challenged not-for-profit executive reader of this magazine.

The fact is, the global economy gets it, and Jim Collins prescient concept of "fit-to role" has direct implications on the very survival of your organization and your future role within it.



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Good leaders matter. They inspire, persuade, motivate and energize. They develop strategies, balance priorities and set goals. They enable organizations and their employees to accomplish objectives they never thought possible. Good leaders look and feel like that “great boss you had early in your career”. The one that everybody respected, wanted to work for, and came out better for the experience. That boss also had an uncanny knack for recognizing the person behind the employee and somehow getting the best work from them.

A Practical Approach

As you think about your own organization, do you have confidence that your future leaders and people in critical positions are, or will be, from the inside? Yes? How do you know? No? How do you know?

As organizations continue to search for ways to make their leadership identification and development efforts more successful, many are increasingly turning to well-developed and well-validated measures of personality.

Personality traits have a direct impact on job performance. Research indicates between 20 percent and 25 percent of an individual’s effectiveness on the job is attributable to his or her personality.

In a recent study of large US not-for-profit social services agencies, 10 out of 36 presidents whose own personalities fit the validated behavioral profile enjoyed tenure in the position of at least 12 years, far above the sector average. Additionally, those that fit the job profile significantly outperformed their peers in both results and role-modeling behaviors.

The data speak clearly: the assessment of common personality attributes is extremely valuable in understanding and predicting supervisory, managerial and executive job performance across a wide range of key metrics.

In today’s increasingly customer/member-focused, service-based and team-oriented association environment, organizations are discovering that understanding the personality attributes of their key performers can be a significant advantage.

In the definition of the “right person” Collins writes, “Whether someone is the ‘right person’ has more to do with character traits and innate capabilities than with specific knowledge, background, or skills.” The reason, according to the “good to great executives,” is that knowledge and skills are learnable. Innate capabilities are not.



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Strategies, by necessity, change. The ability to execute on such change is another story. The question “who have I got?” is just as important as “what do I need”? in terms of both potential leaders and key roles essential to the survival of the association.

Scouts Canada

At Scouts Canada, Rob Stewart was given a series of strategic challenges when he arrived in the CEO position over 6 years ago. Among them was a mandate to plan for the continuity of the organization through a succession planning process. Scouts Canada has been in operation since 1908 and its noble mission: *“To contribute to the education of young people, through a value system based on the Scout Promise and Law, to help build a better world where people are self-fulfilled as individuals and play a constructive role in society”*, remains unchanged. What has changed is the crowded field of developmental and recreational options for kids today.

While Stewart is an example of one who came from the inside after a long and successful career in ascending leadership roles at Scouts Canada, the world he sees for Scouts will continue to change at an increasing rate.

“Shortly after I arrived in the CEO role, hard realities dictated a restructuring of the organization that got in the way of turning our focus to a succession plan that included personal fit-to-role data in critical roles across the organization.”

“My National Director of Human Resources, Bill Palamar, had been experimenting with a tool that accurately captures the personality traits we believe are critical for success in a given role. This particular tool was part of a system we eventually licensed that also captures, quite quickly and easily, the inner drives of an individual that motivate the way they naturally act on the job.”

“His evaluation of this process was validated by our top executive in Alberta who noted that the tools finally measured the equation of fit to a key role that is front facing to the lifeblood of the scouting movement – its 30,000 community volunteers.”

It’s not as though Scouts was unfamiliar to the value of assessment tools. According to Palamar, “Shortly after the restructuring, we had consultants in to support better interpersonal relations as we moved forward. Understanding each other better was important, but good as that intervention was, we still could not measure fit to role on the same ruler.”

Today Scouts Canada is committed to understanding both the behavioral requirements for success in their position profiles and the motivating drives of each current employee and individual they hire to ensure that what comes naturally to them is in line with the wide variety of behaviors they need to be successful now, and in the future.



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The implications are significant. By understanding behavioral requirements by position, Scouts is better equipped to provide realistic career path options for those seeking to grow within the organization. Further, Scouts now has the capability to determine its own inventory of potential leaders to feed the organization's succession plan.

Canadian Dental Association

The Canadian Dental Association (CDA) has been the active voice for dentistry in Canada since 1902.

The CDA runs a lean operation with a staff compliment of over 40 people delivering almost as many separate programs for, and on behalf of, their stakeholders. Operationally, the organization is flat with most directors and managers running programs in addition to supervising program coordinators who also deliver critical programs to members and stakeholders.

Even though staff turnover at CDA runs at a normal level for comparator groups, when people do leave the organization on their own, or at the association's request, the financial impact is real and measurable. The indirect impact is also felt by those having to manage the remaining workload until enough time and money pass to find capable replacements, where necessary, while they get to expected productivity levels.

HR management initially saw the benefit of getting an additional data point on how otherwise qualified applicants would bring their skill sets to the job, matrixed teams, members and other stakeholders of the CDA.

Until then, CDA had relied on staffing agencies and search firms to provide candidates which were then qualified through resumes, behavioral and technical interviews, and reference checks by CDA's hiring managers and HR.

According to CDA's Manager of HR, Janet Banting, "The new employee we hired on Friday showed up to work as a person on Monday, and though they passed our hiring process successfully, it wasn't until they were well into the job that we really knew the person we hired."

"We needed to get a better read on the person we were hiring, not the employee we thought we were hiring. Moreover, we wanted some basis to know how the job opportunity would serve the natural drives of the candidates we were considering."

"Since our association provides service to a scientifically-credentialed professional membership, I felt we needed a statistically proven methodology that could capture predictable work behaviors of an individual and map them to an equally validated position profile in an efficient and scalable way."



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The system we selected in 2007 allows the capability to reside with our managers and HR function. We don't need outside consultants involved in assessing our opportunities or applicants as we have been trained to administer, interpret and understand the data for ourselves. Not only has this approach proven to be cost efficient, it allows our managers and support staff to get 'on the same page' in a common language when considering fit to new roles."

"By profiling both the individual and the job, and looking for best fit, we believe we have an above average chance of retaining people by improving the fit between people and jobs at the point of selection, by providing more rewarding work experiences, and by developing managers to more effectively lead and motivate. Especially when our managers understand which motivational buttons to push, and not push, in order to have our people delivering what we want – their best efforts."

"Personally, what I value is the capability that resides within my team to map out behavioral profiles to new roles we may need as a result of new strategies and changing programs. In a few cases, we revisited old position profiles that had changed slightly since we last used them."

Banting believes that when people are naturally suited to their roles, the work of her managerial colleagues at CDA becomes easier. "People feel better about themselves, their place in the organization. They enjoy the challenge of their role, and we can responsibly guide and motivate them to do things, individually and collectively that serves our constituency beyond expectations."

"At the end of the day, these are the things that make an organization a desirable place to work and a desirable place to be. When we can create that kind of an environment, there is no challenge we can't meet."

Gary Brown is Managing Principal for Predictive Success, Ottawa and a member of the PI Worldwide network. For more information, go to www.predictivesuccess.com or gbrown@predictivesuccess.com