



Assessments' Role in Team Building

Todd Harris
November 2009

Using assessments to evaluate employees' work and learning styles can facilitate team building and help managers capitalize on their individual strengths. Blending the right mixture of personalities and behaviors can accelerate team performance.

As the economy recovers, many organizations are working with newly formed groups and teams as a result of corporate downsizings, mergers and restructurings. Other organizations throughout the world have deliberately adopted team-based work structures to meet their business objectives, and many models of the organization of the future are premised on teams surpassing individuals as the primary performance unit in the company.

Behavioral assessments can not only give an individual a clear understanding of his or her strengths, but also they can give managers and teammates an objective way to discuss differences in work styles. Companies can open lines of communication, understand how to overcome differences and ensure they have people in place who complement each other.

Team Member Identification and Selection

Flynn Canada Ltd., one of Canada's largest contractors for combined roofing, glazing and curtain wall services, was founded in 1978. The company has grown to 3,000 employees, serves the entire Canadian commercial and industrial construction marketplace and has been named one of Canada's 50 best managed companies since 1999.

The company has seen a dramatic annual growth rate of 10 to 15 percent over the past 10 years, and this level of growth has brought challenges as well as benefits.

'As the company grows, we want to preserve our culture," said Gerard Montocchio, vice president of HR at Flynn Canada Ltd. "The company's teamwork and commitment to building genuine relationships is what gives Flynn its competitive edge - whether with its employees, customers, business partners or the environment. Each member of the team has an integral role in the company's success."

Flynn uses personality assessments to ensure strong job fit by establishing internal benchmarks to determine the key job elements for roles within the organization. When employees seek redeployment to another role within the company, their profiles are examined in relation to the behavioral requirements of the new job prior to placement. Another example of how assessments can work in this way comes from Genesis Rehabilitation Services, a division of Genesis HealthCare. With \$500 million in revenue,

the company is one of the largest long-term care rehabilitation organizations in the United States. Genesis Rehab employs 8,000 therapists and serves more than 850 locations in 23 states, including nursing centers, assisted living facilities, hospitals, home health companies and outpatient clinics, and is both patient-centered and employee-focused, with a commitment to clinical excellence and staff development.

Four years ago, Dan Hirschfeld rejoined the company as president. He quickly realized the executive team needed to address several challenges, including the need to gain a better understanding of the key role therapists play in growing and retaining the company's work-force; improving communication and group interaction to create a culture built around cohesive and effective work teams; and installing a new clinical system to better manage operations, which included selection of a strong team to lead the implementation effort.

To stabilize its workforce, Genesis Rehab applied the insight it gained from assessments to ensure employees were aligned with job opportunities that best fit their particular behavioral styles. To launch the new clinical system, Genesis Rehab had to identify therapists who could step into the role of system champion, where high attention to detail was necessary. Using insight from data-based assessments, therapists were identified with an area-expert skill set and the ability to make change happen. Because this team was selected with the aid of a validated personality assessment – as opposed to being thrown together in an ad hoc manner as is often the case in team formation - team members experienced greater role clarity, and the organization's senior leaders gained a more accurate understanding of individual and team challenges. For example, the vast majority of team members scored high on measures of conscientiousness and self-discipline. Thus, executives understood that for the team to function well, team members would need a work environment characterized by certainty and stability, a deep understanding of the rules, and an exact description of the desired team outcome. Senior executives also were able to communicate and reinforce the team's mission using language that had more meaning for the team.

Team Member Training

Vanamatic Co., located in Delphos, Ohio, is a manufacturer and global supplier of precision machine products serving the automotive, aerospace, refrigeration, electrical and fluid power systems industries. The company has been in operation for 55 years, boasts \$10.5 million in annual sales and currently has just 62 employees.

Vanamatic has built a successful business based on unity, empowerment and employee teamwork. "Vanamatic has created a highly flexible work environment," said Scott Wiltsie, HR manager at Vanamatic. "The company is centrally focused around its employees and what works for them. We try to create a work-life balance that's beneficial for the employees and the company. Employees schedule their own hours, are empowered to make their own departmental decisions and alternate shifts and personnel based on overall company requirements."

In 2003, Vanamatic built a new manufacturing facility to accommodate growth and made the decision to move from a traditional manufacturing operation to a more flexible, cellular-based approach. To accommodate the new structure, the company needed to enhance its product training programs to improve ramp-up time, build effective work

teams for peak performance and bridge the communication gap between management and staff.

Wiltsie said employee development is a key aspect of any business. Vanamatic began using behavioral assessments to identify employee learning styles in an effort to improve product training and to develop well balanced teams.

"Realizing that an individual's personality also impacts his or her learning style, we adjusted our training and delivery methods to accommodate those individual styles, providing a unique opportunity to tap into a person's natural strengths," Wiltsie said. "This fast-track training program is heads above our previous program. We have seen significant improvement in total training time, but the most impressive benefit has been the training program's effectiveness. Employees who complete the training have a much quicker impact on productivity, and using the insight from the assessments, Vanamatic can combine individual strengths to build dynamic work teams throughout the organization."

Flynn Canada also uses assessments to identify gaps or areas where employees may need additional job training or coaching to ensure long-term success. Using assessment tools, employees can take ownership of their own development by creating behavioral awareness, focusing on communication and decision-making styles and the effect these behaviors will have on their future career development at the company.

Flynn expects to double in size in the next five to seven years in response to market opportunities. The CEO and his team have built a high-performance business by focusing on employees as individuals and addressing their unique workplace needs - they understand the relationship between helping employees reach their goals and building the trust and confidence it takes to achieve outstanding results.

Communication Among Team Members

Vanamatic also wanted to improve communication from the company's management. The senior management team had started their careers on the shop floor, where assessments showed employees have a tendency to be less social and more detailed. To improve communication and build a more unified workforce, the company introduced a new program to open up dialogue between staff and managers and to build a culture of unity and empowerment. The program, Gain Sharing, is a weekly meeting for all employees to openly discuss issues that affect the business, including monetary incentives for employees. If Vanamatic hits its sales targets, the entire company shares in the gain.

Massage Envy, a franchise business that provides massage services to a broad base of consumers, also has found value in using assessments to facilitate team communications. With 565 clinics in 40 states, more than 100 Massage Envy clinics currently use assessments, including Amy Berderich's six co-owned locations. Berderich is able to communicate more effectively, define roles more clearly and measure her team's long-term performance.

She has 12 managers who use assessment results as a common language during management meetings to discuss morale and communication among the teams. In a recent team-building workshop, managers openly discussed their assessment results and

realized they had similar profiles. This insight allowed them to openly discuss how to improve employee retention through better communication.

Year Up: Using Assessments to Resolve Team Conflict

Todd Harris

Year Up, a nonprofit organization founded in October 2000 by CEO Gerald Chertavian, is a one-year intensive education and apprenticeship program for urban young adults ages 18 to 24. The organization's mission is to prepare them for higher education and successful careers in corporate environments.

Currently, there are about 130 employees in six office locations across the U.S., as well as a national office in Boston, and the company is growing rapidly. Further, a significant portion of its workforce is comprised of young adults, and it is important for the leadership team to mentor, coach and provide development opportunities for them.

Chertavian said he is committed to running the organization as efficiently and as effectively as possible. During a conversation with Sue Meehan, national director of finance and operations, she shared that at her previous job she was introduced to a behavioral assessment tool used for talent management. Meehan said the tool is essential "for hiring, team building, professional development, leadership development, coaching and conflict resolution."

In order to work through the rapid growth challenges Year Up faced, Meehan identified individual employees' behavioral styles and worked to create a common language among them, allowing team members to develop strong communication

and resulting in more effective relationships. Meehan said the tools she used also play a role in annual bench review meetings where executive directors analyze how their teams are structured and developed, as well as team dynamics.

Team dynamics can be troublesome if members don't get along, but assessments can be used to resolve conflicts. When members of the executive leadership team for Executive Director Lisette Nieves in Year Up's New York City office weren't communicating well together, she used assessment data to share their workplace behaviors in a non-confrontational way, build an awareness of communication styles and provide strategies to improve team members' interactions. Nieves said she was able to promote and support self-awareness, allow people to talk about conflict and provide another lexicon to manage and communicate effectively with staff.

According to Meehan, this approach can help resolve conflicts between employees and make a difficult situation less personal. It also provides insight to create an awareness and understanding of how different individuals approach work.

Year Up plans to open another office in 2010. Meehan said assessment tools are "part of our business strategy and corporate culture. As a growing organization, we need to ensure that each new manager is aligned with the senior management team. Working in an entrepreneurial environment where growth and change come very quickly, the assessments save us time, keep our teams aligned and leverage our most important resource- our people."

In addition to hiring, Berderich uses assessment insights for coaching and employee development. She highlighted a case in which two colleagues were experiencing work conflict due to different communication and work styles. Berderich used assessment data

as a non confrontational way for them to better understand each other's behavioral differences. The first colleague was intuitive and more abrupt in her work style. The second was more patient, detailed and methodical in her approach. By identifying and discussing their assessment results, they gained a better understanding of how best to work together.

Managers can use assessments to understand staff needs and motivators so they can communicate more effectively and better manage their teams. "The assessment tool we use reinforces Flynn's deep belief in the value of our people and has been a great foundational tool for building the HR function," Montocchio said. "It provides a common language we use to better understand individual and team dynamics and gain a deeper insight into our employees. It is our employees who represent the key to our past, present and future success."