

RECRUITING AND SELECTING LEADERS FOR INNOVATION: HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT LEADER

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Recruiting and selecting effective leaders can often be a difficult challenge, especially in today's strained economic environment. In fact, May, Chan, Hodges and Avolio (2003) argued that when an economy is doing well, nearly any type of leader can emerge and be perceived as successful. In truth, strong, innovative organizational leaders are rare, and identifying a leader likely to be a fit for an organization can be a time-consuming and expensive process. Even so, as organizations struggle to stay competitive in their industries and markets, innovative leadership is a key component to success. Targeted organizational innovation during times of economic difficulty, especially when competitors are struggling to stay relevant, can mean the difference between significant growth and gain in market share—or cutbacks. With these high stakes, competing for innovative leadership talent becomes a crucial differentiator for organizations.

Recent research suggests the sophistication of the HR management practices used to recruit and select leaders, especially into an innovative organizational culture, can predict organizational success in regard to innovation of products and technology (Sarros, Cooper, & Santora, 2008; Shipton, Fay, West, Patterson, & Birdi, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to further explore the importance and implications of hiring innovative leaders, and propose several strategies for recruiting and selecting organizational leaders to create an innovative, learning-oriented culture. Specifically, we review several strategies related to recruitment as well as selection tools such as behavioral/psychological assessments and behavioral interviews. Finally, we review succession planning.

IMPORTANCE OF INNOVATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERS

The value of great leaders in organizations today is no less important than in previous years, and some organizational researchers would argue that with the increase in competition among organizations due to market and economic struggles, great leaders are even more important today. Innovative

leaders potentially can touch many areas of an organization by inspiring creativity in others and ultimately initiating innovations that advance an organization to the next level. As a result, HR professionals have a great responsibility to recruit and select these individuals effectively. In fact, effectiveness of the HR team in attaining this goal can have a significant impact on the motivation and performance of other people in the organization.

Recently, leadership research has been guided by a model illustrating that authentic and innovative leadership behavior results in followers who more personally identify with their leader and organization. This type of leadership allows followers to experience confidence, optimism and resiliency, as well as obtaining a sense of shared values with their leader (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May 2004).

The leader's first task is to build confidence or increase the self-efficacy of subordinates. Another task of authentic and innovative leaders is to advocate realistic optimism in subordinates through training and development. Employees high in optimism have been shown to perform at a higher level and have fewer intentions to quit than employees low in optimism (Luthans, 2002). Additionally, and arguably most importantly, great leaders strengthen resilience and encourage innovation and creativity by ensuring subordinates have the strength to recover from adversity and thrive when faced with high levels of change (Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2004). This encouragement can be critical, because subordinates need to recover quickly from past failures in order to identify new potential and risk in future opportunities. Also, given high unemployment rates, innovative leaders offer hope and resiliency to employees experiencing a decreased sense of job security and engagement. Overall, successful innovative leaders have a direct effect on the ability of an organization to recover and continue innovating to stay competitive (Sarros et al., 2008; Shipton et al., 2005). Without this critical type of leadership, organizations are likely to struggle.

RECRUITING INNOVATIVE LEADERS

Identifying a stream of authentic and innovative leaders in the talent pool during the recruitment process is one of the most difficult responsibilities of HR professionals. Many successful leaders are currently employed and are not actively looking for a new position. If individuals at the leadership level are actively seeking a position, they often only circulate through private social networks or headhunting firms. Furthermore, as difficult as it is to find an effective leader with a track record of success, it's an even greater challenge to find candidates when you couple success with innovation as requirements.

Some of the most effective and advanced recruiting options available to HR professionals for identifying leaders include peer referrals, professional societies or alumni lists, and social media networking. Specifically, pairing technology with any of these efforts is likely to result in more fruitful candidates for leadership positions.

Peer referrals are one successful method of initiating searches for an organizational leader. This is especially true when successful mid- to upper-level leaders in your organization forward the referrals. These leaders likely have a strong knowledge of the type of skills, leadership style and background that fit a department or business unit (Torrissi-Mokwa, 2006). This also includes helping identify candidates likely to be a fit for the organizational culture. Input from successful mid- and upper-level organizational leaders is especially significant when looking for innovative leaders, because different organizations have different appetites for risk and error when it comes to innovation. Successful leaders in an organization often understand this well as it applies to their organizations. A good fit between a candidate and a job can be highly dependent on organizational culture (McLean, 2005).

Although peer referrals are likely to be a more productive source for identifying these types of candidates than other recruiting strategies, it's easy to put too much weight on the referral. Peer referrals should be explored and are likely to result in great candidates; however, these candidates need to be fully vetted through the selection process before choosing them as future organizational leaders. It is critical to ensure they truly are a fit for the role and the organization.

Depending on the organizational function for which a new leader is needed, professional societies can be another productive source for identifying candidates for leadership positions. The more unique the functional area in which the leader is needed, the more a professional society is likely to be helpful. When an organization needs specialists and/or scientists, such as research and development professionals, to meet the needs of a business function, this is often the best time to use professional societies for recruiting. These groups usually are relatively small and close-knit. Leaders who are involved in their fields and have had success as innovators are typically active in professional societies, from attending and contributing at meetings to providing thought leadership. They are also typically actively involved in networking. This makes it much simpler for recruiters and HR professionals to identify key leaders, track their history and activity within the field, and learn which individuals are likely to be aligned with areas open for innovation within their organizations.

Social networking mediums and websites are such new recruiting techniques, we lack existing research demonstrating the return on investment of this approach as a recruitment strategy, though many recruiters and other HR professionals anecdotally indicate its value (Doherty, 2010). Social media shows great potential to be a fruitful approach for identifying top-quality leaders, but in these early stages of use it can be a tricky and highly time-consuming effort (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Leader-Chivée & Cowan, 2008). However, there are a few suggestions to make social networking websites a productive recruitment tool.

- Use existing social networks of current employees as a starting point
- Look for key experiences with innovation in organizations similar to yours
- Convert the lead to a peer referral from inside your organization when possible (see Clark and Roberts, 2010, for specific organizational tips on how to use social networking sites when selecting applicants)

Whenever possible, HR professionals and recruiters responsible for identifying organizational leaders should become members of the social networks frequented by mid- to high-level organizational employees. These networks are a great starting point for identifying individuals in similar industries or with similar backgrounds to the organization's current successful leaders. One can use this information to gain initial information about a particular candidate's experience with innovation in your industry or similar industries (Jolink & Dankbaar, 2010). Also, it is important to frequently communicate with internal employees to ensure the individuals in their networks are appropriate for consideration. Typically, it is a best practice to work with these potential candidates more as if they had come to you through a peer referral from a current employee rather than as a lead through social networking (see Bloemer, 2010, for more information about employee referrals). This best practice is likely to mean the recruitment effort will be perceived more favorably by the candidate and result in a more effective recruiting experience for HR professionals.

BEHAVIORAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS

With the strong scientific basis for behavioral assessments and the influx of technology-based HR solutions in the last decade, HR professionals have a host of selection tools available to them for use in identifying and selecting leaders who support an innovative culture. These tools take many forms, but some of the most popular forms among HR professionals are behavioral assessments. For example, the Innovation Potential Indicator (IPI) actually assesses one's capability for implementing innovative ideas in a particular environment (Burch, Pavelis, & Port, 2008). Other selection assessments include measures of personality, motivation, experiences/biographical data, and situational judgment. They also provide an online, unproctored environment and audiovisual interactions with the candidate.

“ IN SELECTING FOR LEADERS, COGNITIVE ABILITY TENDS TO BE THE MOST POWERFUL PREDICTOR OF JOB PERFORMANCE. ”

As one might assume, individual differences are the reason for administering assessments in selection. The purpose of any assessment is to capitalize on these individual differences and assure those applicants with stronger characteristics are identified as having the potential to be more successful on the job (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005). In selecting for leaders, cognitive ability tends to be the most powerful predictor of job performance. In fact, the utility of using a cognitive ability test when selecting candidates at the management level and above far outweighs any other type of assessment (e.g., skills and personality assessments). When selecting for innovation, cognitive ability tests assessing space visualization, word fluency and symbolic reasoning are likely to be most appropriate. Specifically, these particular tests can help distinguish top performers from average performers as managers (see Cascio & Aguinis, 2005).

Additionally, personality tests have been used for selection with much more enthusiasm since Costa and McCrae (1988) published their "Big Five" taxonomy for classifying personality. With measurements of personality, HR personnel can determine whether meaningful relationships exist between specific personality constructs (i.e.,

innovation, in our case) and job performance at the leadership level. In selecting for innovation, we can use personality constructs, such as novelty, creativity and initiative, to tap into how likely a candidate is to be innovative on the job.

Furthermore, in a selection context, we can use biographical information assessing one's approach to innovation in past jobs or educational situations. Biographical information (biodata for short) can tell recruiters or hiring managers if particular abilities or attributes needed for success on the job have been emphasized in past contexts. A biodata inventory used to assess leaders' innovation might include questions such as the following: "As compared to others I know, I would rate my creativity in the top (x-percent)" or "The amount of experience I have had starting a project from scratch is..." Using assessment items like these with help HR personnel or hiring managers gain a better understanding of leaders' past innovative experiences.

Much like the biodata, situational judgment tests (SJTs) can assess one's innovative approach to various situations (see Motowidlo, Dunnette, & Carter, 1990). An SJT consists of a series of situations a candidate is likely to encounter on the job. The test can be presented in written, verbal or visual form, and candidates typically are asked to indicate which response they feel is the best and which is the worst (Weekley & Jones, 1999). Using critical incidences encountered on the job, researchers or test writers can create a situation to present to applicants; of the responses to this situation, options can vary in terms of creativity level or innovation. Researchers then should use a pool of subject matter experts to indicate which response option (all assessing a varying degree of innovation) would be best and worst for the given situation. Traditionally, SJTs are inexpensive to develop, administer and score; although, with the increased use of technology in the selection realm, SJTs now can be delivered via video or even through simulations, making the costs of such tests likely to increase, along with their versatility and appeal to applicants.

In addition to using behavior based assessments, recruiters and hiring managers can implement an assessment center in their selection process (Arthur, Day, McNelly, & Edens, 2003; Chen, 2006). Assessment centers vary widely in terms of duration and size, with mid- to upper-management centers typically running from two to three days with 12 potential managers (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005). Within assessment centers, we use simulations, such as in-basket exercises, group discussions, team exercises, and mock presentations (just to name a few), to measure a set of key dimensions related to leadership capability and performance. We can use simulations and exercises that specifically assess leader characteristics, such as authenticity, subordinate development and innovation, to identify leaders likely to thrive in and promote an innovative culture (Melancon & Williams, 2006).

PERSON-ORGANIZATION FIT ASSESSMENTS

For an organization, identifying a match between a potential leader and the organization's culture is a critical first step on the road to future innovation. In theory, selecting the right leader for the organization is congruent with selecting for Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit; see Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Brown, 2005). P-O Fit assesses the compatibility between an individual and the organization, or culture, in which he or she works. Early research examining P-O Fit focused on the degree of equivalence between employees' personality and the organizational climate in which they worked (see Tom, 1971). However,

the seminal work of Chatman (1989) operationalized P–O Fit as the congruence between employee and organizational values. In accordance with this operationalization, Chatman and colleagues developed the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP), which is a values-based instrument organizations can use in a selection setting to see if applicants' values are compatible with organizational values (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). In selecting for innovation, organizations can use the OCP or another values-based assessment to test whether the values of creativity and innovation are as important to a particular candidate as they are to the organization.

Considering how P–O Fit relates to employee attitudes, research has found a significant relationship between P–O Fit with job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In using meta-analytic techniques, Verquer, Beehr, and Wagner (2003) found, across 21 P–O Fit studies, when P–O Fit was operationalized as the congruence between an individual's values and organizational values, P–O Fit was more strongly related to employee satisfaction and organizational commitment than it was when P–O Fit was operationalized as non-value congruence (e.g., personality or goal congruence). Based on this finding, one can conclude the more closely aligned an innovative leader is to an innovative culture, the more satisfied and committed to the organization the leader will be. Concerning the outcomes of Person–Organization misfit within the occupational health field, strain is one of the largest correlates found with a lack of P–O Fit. Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll (2001) have defined strain as "an individual's psychological, physical, and behavioral responses to stressors" (p. 14). Van Harrison (1985) has argued that individuals can experience psychological, physiological and behavioral strain when a poor fit is perceived. Van Harrison (1978, 1985) argued: just as an insufficient goal supplies increase for a particular motive (i.e., a poor fit), so should strain. Thus, if a leader's goal is to be creative and innovative in the workplace, yet the culture doesn't allow for that or the organization lacks the resources to allow innovation, the leader is likely to exhibit some source of strain on the job.

BEHAVIOR BASED INTERVIEWS

Many have argued assessing past performance through behavior based, structured interviews successfully predicts future performance (see Pulakos & Schmitt, 1995). HR personnel can customize interviews to specific organizations and jobs, and candidates consider this one of the most fair and appropriate selection procedures (Moscose, 2000; Salgado & Moscoso, 2002). We use behavior based interviews to discover how the applicant performed in particular employment situations in the past and, as a result of their behavior, what the outcome was. We can use behavior based interviews to assess candidates' leadership skills in prior situations, as well as their innovative capability in past situations. This is a strong selection tool for candidates in a variety of positions, because we can tailor questions to a competency specific for the job.

Many organizations have developed both leadership and functional competency models to use in selection, training and development contexts. These competency models often contain levels to target individuals with different levels of skill, from novices through experts, in a particular job family. For organizations in which innovation is a key driver, competency models should reflect this directly. Map these competencies to behavior based interview questions appropriate for the level of job for which the organization is hiring. Specifically, interviews targeting mid-level leaders should focus on questions assessing previous experience innovating on a particular project or in a particular area. Interviews targeting

upper level or executive leadership should focus on strategy, organizational vision, large scale innovation or managing other leaders for innovation.

The interview questions should guide the interviewee to discuss the situation or context in which they demonstrated the competency, the actions they took, and the result of their actions. Ideally, these interviews are conducted in panel form, with from two to four interviewers who can evaluate the candidate on each competency. If it's not feasible to conduct a panel interview, each interviewer should have significant overlap in experience with the competencies (i.e., the panel would ask different questions that assess the same competencies). Each interviewer should have covered all the competencies that will be discussed in the consensus meeting and should have identified behavioral ratings for each candidate on each competency. This is more likely to lead to a fair evaluation of the candidate's skill and background.

SUCCESSION PLANNING

Luckily, many organizations are realizing they can find leadership potential under their own roofs. The art of succession planning has become much more popular in the last few decades, as organizations strive to fill spots of leaders who have retired or who have left the organization for other reasons. Recent economic downturn and hiring freezes also have caused organizations to look within to develop existing talent (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Bower, 2007; Brant, Dooley, & Iman, 2008; Citrin & Ogden, 2010). Though some organizations are not able to develop or execute an internal succession plan throughout their entire organization due to reduced resources, low headcount or rapid growth, this approach still is highly valuable, even in small measures (Rothwell, 2011).

Using traditional methods, it can take years to establish an effective succession plan throughout an organization. However, organizations of any size and budget can use this approach for targeting future innovative leaders—with a few slight modifications. Here, we review an approach for an organization with little succession planning in place. First, it is important to begin succession planning efforts by targeting a specific department or business area where innovation is critical to

survival. Specifically, organizational leaders should identify one or two areas in the company where the loss of a successful innovative leader would be detrimental to overall company performance. This is the area where an organization should initially target the majority of efforts for succession planning.

“FOR SUCCESSION PLANNING TO BE EFFECTIVE, SIGNIFICANT TIME AND ENERGY MUST BE SPENT SLATING INDIVIDUALS FOR KEY PROJECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS. ”

Next, HR professionals should begin to build a profile of a successful innovative leader within this area, using available leadership and functional competency models, as well as key experiences the ideal leader will likely encounter throughout his or her career. Conducting informational interviews and focus groups with mid- and top-level leaders within the targeted job function will help populate this profile. The resulting profile should include background information, including the general education and job history expected of the leader, key competencies most important for a leader in that function (including the level of performance needed at each competency), and a set of critical developmental experiences likely to aid the individual in growing leadership and innovation skills. The profile can also include these elements: a personality profile and a culture-fit profile obtained through psychological or behavioral assessments.

Once an organization creates a profile for a leader in the functional area, it can use the profile to create an overall succession plan for the business function and individualized development plans for internal candidates. HR professionals should identify a set of individuals best suited to move into a new leadership position, or current leaders best suited to advance as leaders in the organization. Then HR should begin to create an individualized plan in conjunction with the candidate's manager. All available performance-management data, previous performance ratings and objectives should be used to create the plan. To help create a list of potential successors, it will help to gain insight into each individual's current level of

achievement in important leadership and functional competencies for a future leadership role and identify any gaps between their current experiences and the key developmental experiences in the profile.

After the HR professional has this gap analysis for each high-potential successor in hand, the difficult work can begin. Unfortunately for many organizations, this is where the succession planning work often stalls. Many organizations do not take the time needed to develop these potential successors by creating opportunities for them to develop the skills and experiences necessary to fill a future role. For succession planning to be effective, significant time and energy must be spent slating individuals for key projects and opportunities to develop their skills. Typically, organizational leaders assign these critical roles to more experienced leaders to avoid risk and potential failure. It is true that careful consideration should be made when determining which individuals and which opportunities will be assigned, but without gaining these critical experiences, a successor is not likely to emerge, especially in the case where there is a high need for innovation.

In the event that providing opportunities for organizational innovation is not possible, we propose a few approaches for gaining critical experiences that involve less risk (Greer & Virick, 2008).

- Use mentoring programs to partner successors with organizational leaders so they can discuss experiences and ideas and learn from the mentor's experiences
- Parse important projects into more manageable pieces that can be delegated to less senior leaders for development while under supervision of a higher level leader
- Allow the potential successor to shadow a current leader on a project or initiative critical to the leadership role and participate in any planning or strategic discussions as a part of the project

CONCLUSIONS

Experts in recruitment and selection agree that identifying authentic leaders for selection into an innovative organizational culture is a highly specialized and difficult practice, but by applying the most recent advances in recruitment and selection research, recruiters can greatly increase their potential for success. In this document, we offer best practices and recommendations for recruiting, selecting and building innovative leaders for your organization.

Promoting and implementing a specialized recruitment strategy that includes elements of concentrated sourcing for external candidates will allow organizations to discover high-potential leaders. More specifically, we recommend that you:

- Rely on your current leaders to refer their peers when possible. These leaders are likely to have a strong knowledge of the type of skills, leadership style and background likely to be a fit for your organization.
- Albeit a new approach, use social networking media and websites to find innovative leaders and assist in the recruitment process. Look for key innovation experiences in organizations similar to yours.
- When possible, HR professionals and recruiters responsible for identifying organizational leaders should become members of the social networks of mid- to high-level organizational employees to expand one's network of potential innovative leaders.

Investing in targeted assessment tools to further refine the recruited group assists HR in capitalizing on individual differences that can distinguish between unsuccessful and successful innovative leaders. More specifically, we recommend that you:

- Use behavior or psychology based assessments, such as cognitive ability, personality, biographical data and/or situational judgment tests to assist hiring managers in making better hiring decisions for innovative leaders.
- Use P–O Fit assessments to assist in finding leaders who are likely to be a fit for your culture and who can lead the organization to achieve success through innovation.
- For applicants who have passed a behavior based assessment and a P–O Fit assessment, we then recommend using a behavior based interview. You can customize these interviews to specific organizations and jobs. They are considered to be one of the most fair and valid selection procedures available.

Although the above techniques and methods can provide recruiters and hiring managers with the most success in finding external candidates, we also recommend using succession planning as a method for identifying innovative leaders already within your organization. Although succession planning is likely to be the most challenging to execute, it will result in the most likely return on investment for an organization. Investing in existing talent within your organization has continually proven to be a fruitful investment, especially in terms of developing future leaders (Groves, 2007; Hempel & Brady, 2006; Roshto, 1997). Below are recommendations for implementing a successful succession plan:

- Assist mid- to high-level managers in developing profiles of successful organizational leaders, and help lower level managers and high-potential successors implement individualized development plans based on these profiles.
- An effective succession plan can take several years to fully execute, but a great starting point for HR professionals is concentrating efforts on critical areas within the organization—either with the largest gap of successors to innovative leaders or those areas likely to have the most detrimental impact to organizational success.
- Gain buy-in from executive levels for this type of HR initiative. Once a business case is built to demonstrate the potential loss to the organization in the event that an innovative leader parts with the organization or retires, executive leaders are more likely to buy into the need for succession planning at lower levels.

Identifying innovative leaders can be one of the most challenging tasks HR professionals face in recruitment and selection. However, this challenging task is possible if you stay in close contact with current organizational leaders about future innovative leadership needs and implement HR-management practices that distinguish innovative leaders from other types of leaders or successful individual contributors. To yield a high return on investment and produce optimal conditions for identifying innovative leaders, drive the process through external recruiting, use assessments and interviews, and engage in succession planning.

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