

MHEDA Article: Organizational and People Capability – How?

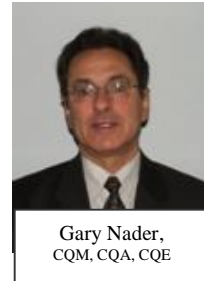
Getting the Right People in the Right Seat on the Bus

Author: Gary Nader, Principal Consultant – Total Quality Associates

How many times have you heard, or even said, “People are our most important asset”? Well, that is not quite correct ... “The RIGHT people are our most important asset.”

Right people, right seat

“Good to Great” author, Jim Collins, strongly feels that a company MUST get the right people on the bus (your organization) and the wrong people off the bus. In fact, he makes it clear that the “who”, i.e., the right people in the right positions, comes before the “what” or the strategies for successfully becoming a great company. In other words, it is an imperative to achieve people capability before any significant, *long-term* organizational accomplishment can occur. The key question is: How does a company get the right people, in the right seats?



Each company faces four different scenarios, usually in some combination:

- Sometimes you have the right people in the right positions.
- Sometimes you have people who are close to being right but require development.
- Sometimes you have the right people but in the wrong position.
- Sometime s you have the wrong people – period.

The best way to have the right people is to be diligent during the *recruiting and hiring process*. First, it is important to have the key requirements clear in mind. Interestingly, for leadership positions, particular technical skills are usually far less important than innate capabilities and character. Individuals can learn job specific knowledge but the latter qualities are difficult to acquire, especially later in life. Depending on the desired company culture and vision, typical core qualities include integrity, passion for excellence, teamwork, determination to succeed and the ability to help motivate company associates to achieve results. Using position assessment tools, a good interview process, independent personality profiling and rigorous reference checking will substantially improve the chances of getting the right person. Collins makes the compelling point that patience is critical; even finding interim ways to keep things afloat rather than hire the wrong person.

Position Assessment Matrix

This is a simple but highly effective tool to evaluate potential employees, or even current employees. This requires thoughtful discussion and articulation of the key job criteria and the degree of importance. The criteria list can often exceed 15 or 20 line items.

This tool helps in at least four ways. It:

- Forces those involved in the hiring process to clearly define essential criteria for the position and the relative degree of importance of these.
- Provides an easy-to-use and consistent worksheet to evaluate candidates/current employees in a semi-quantitative way.
- Makes discrepancies in evaluations among interviewers more apparent so these can be rationalized.
- Creates a clear picture of comparative strengths or lack thereof.

The best use of this assessment tool is when initially filling a position so that the chances are increased for getting the right person in the right “bus seat”. Nevertheless, it should be applied, even after the fact, when serious doubts exist about a current employee who is occupying a seat on the bus. *Leaving a bad fit in a key seat can have disastrous impact on the business, especially in smaller companies.*

Utilizing these assessment tools can provide decision makers with:

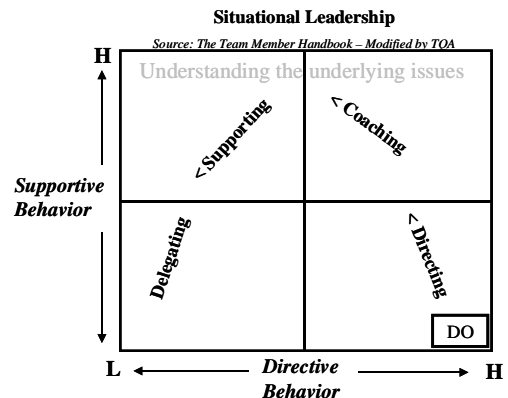
- Clarity around hiring decisions, including more easily identifying the best relative candidates.
- Specific areas for performance development plans with current employees (where closeable gaps exist).
- Practical evaluation methods to identify more suitable positions for an employee currently in the wrong seat on the bus.
- Better sense of fairness and confidence when having to make those long overdue, tough decisions to replace a chronically underperforming employee.

Creating a “win-win”:

Consider the situation where an *existing* employee is a problem. The individual is not performing well and hasn’t been for some time. Before you hastily dismiss the individual, ask yourself two questions:

- With effective coaching and support, could this person be a real asset in this position?
- If not, could he or she be a strong contributor in another position?

The powerful concept of “situational leadership”, authored by Ken Blanchard, can often help associates who are struggling to achieve a high level of performance. If the appropriate *style* of leadership is used in various work situations, a marginally performing associate can often be helped to be “the right person” in their current job — assuming that they possess the basic aptitude.



Quite often, however, the person isn’t right for the job but is a good fit for another position. A common situation is where a sales person, technician or customer service representative was promoted to be a supervisor or department manager as a reward for doing a “good job”. However, the required competencies for a supervisor or manager are usually quite different than for sales, technical or customer service positions. In the new position, despite considerable developmental and coaching efforts, the individual may do a poor job. When this happens, the important thing is to act and *act quickly*. Otherwise, this type of situation can drag on for years and cause significant morale and financial damage. Companies that go from good to great don’t shy away from moving people to the right seat. In the long run, the company will be more successful, you will be happier and so will the associate!

Wrong person, no seat

In the case where there is no right seat on the bus, action must be taken. Reluctance to admit that a mistake was made or fear of potential unpleasantness may hinder action. However, failure to act drains management’s energy, frustrates other associates in the company and steals valuable

alternate career-building time from the poor performer. How do you know that the person is on the wrong bus? Here are some checklist items to consider:

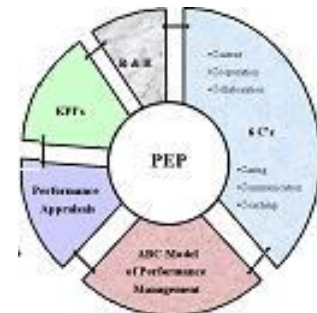
- Would I hire this individual again, knowing what I know now?
- Do I find myself giving this associate one “chance” after another?
- Would the organization breathe a collective sigh of relief if this associate left or was let go?
- Do I invest excessive time and energy dealing with this associate or the side effects?
- Are little systems built around this associate to compensate for shortcomings?
- Is it necessary to add people or restructure the organization to get the job done with this particular associate?

Really, just one checkmark should require a serious reassessment. If there are multiple checkmarks, the person is probably on the wrong bus, especially if other seats have been tried without success.

Performance excellence through people

Once a company has most of the right people, in the right seats, there are ways to maximize the performance of the workforce. There are many competing theories and considerable disagreement on what works and what does not. The **Performance Excellence through People Model (PEP Model)** presented here combines many of the tools and concepts, which can help companies excel. This includes the use of:

- Key Performance Indicators
- Rewards and Recognition
- Effective and consistent Performance Appraisals
- The ABC Model, which emphasizes clear expectations, regular coaching, ongoing feedback and appropriate reinforcement.
- The 6 Cs, which foster the desire to use discretionary or extra effort. This involves leadership’s understanding and application of motivational theory and practices.



In the author’s opinion, the “6 Cs” (content, cooperation, collaboration, caring, communication and coaching) are *most effective* in fostering the desire to use discretionary or extra effort.

Putting it all together

Remember, the *right people in the right seats* are a company’s most important asset. To achieve this, get the right people on the bus through good recruiting and hiring practices; move people to the right seat when appropriate; use situational leadership to develop associates with positive potential; get the wrong people off the bus and utilize the PEP Model to help enhance people’s performance.

Training is available in all or a portion of this material. Training can range from awareness sessions through full workshops. There are also provisions for assessments and one-on-one or group *in-situ applications* training. Contact information is included in the footer below.

The emphasis is always on RESULTS so the return on investment will be substantial!