

## Information: The Under-used Resource in Human Resource Management

By Markku Kauppinen

Human resources professionals know a lot about measuring and predicting employee behavior. The bigger HR challenge, however, is to match employee behavior with the company culture or style. This requires more robust information - knowing what drives the company, what the behavioral expectations are and how decisions are made. HR departments can make a key contribution to management in this area by providing the executive team with more in-depth analyses. One way to accomplish this is through the use of good scientific assessments that match worker behavior with company style.

### Four Corporate Styles

It is now possible to identify four styles of company behavior and use that information as a recruiting and training tool. The four corporate styles are:

**1. *Established companies.*** These are the “brick and mortar” companies that have been around for decades. They value stability and high production. Procedures *rule*. The workforce reflects this mindset. Employees are attuned to well-established, slow, predictable and consistent patterns of very high output. Such companies include GM, Ford, 3M and large governmental agencies like the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

Take 3M for example. They were the first wholly owned foreign venture on Chinese soil. Marketing consultants Michael Czinkota and Ilkka Ronkainen explain, “For ten years, company officials visited Beijing and invited Chinese leaders to 3M headquarters in St. Paul, building contacts and trust along the way.” 3M values employees who can think long term, who can plod on creatively while complex transactions are underway. When HR professionals can measure

these traits with more holistic assessment data, there is a payoff in avoiding needless rehiring and reducing damage control crisis situations.

**2. *Opportunistic companies.*** Meet the diametric opposite to the big business monoliths. These firms live by their drive, their wits and their cell phones. Think of real estate companies, wholesalers and rapidly expanding outlets. In the words of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, their success depends on “getting there firstest with the mostest.”

These companies value high levels of sociability and gregariousness from their employees. If this is the company style, then HR needs to be scouting for people who, unlike Dilbert in his cubicle, can change quickly and often “on the fly.” Assessment data should measure high levels of flexibility, the ability to think on the spot, the zest to thrive on organizational change. Assessments that probe this deeply offer HR managers a winning edge.

**3. *Customer loyalists.*** Here people-oriented workers are in demand (similar to opportunistic companies) but without that “driven” quality. Customer service, customer stabilization are highly valued skills. Dependability and professionalism are prerequisites. Think of financial services companies or even Wal-Mart, America’s leading company, where customer service is more than a slogan. Ecolab, Inc., the world’s leading supplier of detergents and sanitizing products, also falls in this category.

Typically, the company recruits among college graduates with majors in hospitality, marketing, education or liberal arts. But, adds Judy Sigauw of Cornell’s Department of Marketing, “Once hired, Ecolab’s new sales reps can spend as much as a year in training.” Companies with a customer loyalist culture need to know: Will candidates be willing to tough it out? How strong is their level of motivation, their sheer tenacity? Holistic assessment services that measure these

behaviors in advance provide this valuable information.

4. *“Carpe Diem” companies.* Often these are young companies, offspring of the Information Age. IT is their mantra, though more traditional advertising agencies also fit the bill. The workforce likes to travel, interact with other enterprises. Connectivity is a given. These companies can present the hardest challenges for the HR staff. The March 16, 1998 *Fortune*, for example, features a 29-year-old computer worker in an open neck shirt with a parrot perched on his head. The caption? “I want a fat salary, a signing bonus, and a cappuccino machine — oh, and I’m bringing my bird to work.”

There are increasing numbers of these types of individuals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s workforce, and HR professionals need to know their idiosyncrasies. Says business writer Nina Munk, “Impatience and self-confidence define today’s young worker, and everywhere employers are having to adapt.” In this business culture, HR’s ability to get it right the first time around heads off “damage control” down the pike.

### Avoid Square Pegs in Round Holes

It’s an old adage: don’t put square pegs in round corporate holes. In a world of diverse and diverging corporate entities, scientific assessments that match individual traits with company style represent a strategic edge in the talent wars. Employee behavior and company culture can be measured and matched before trouble strikes. When HR professionals provide such information to C-level management, the benefits in manpower risk reduction speak for themselves.

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### Questions That Make a Difference – Every Day!

Marshall Goldsmith

What if you could implement a process that costs almost nothing, takes about three minutes a day, and – if you stick with it – will help you achieve your full potential? Would you try it out? Let me tell you more!

My colleague, Andrew Thorn, taught me this fascinating ‘daily questions’ process – and tried it out on me. Since then, I have been doing it with my good friend, Jim Moore, (former CLO of Sun Microsystems, Nortel and BellSouth). Both Jim and I have been amazed at how well this works!

Every day Jim asks me the same 24 questions. Every day I ask Jim the same 17 questions. A key to the success of the process is that each person writes his or her own questions. Each one of our questions can be answered by ‘yes’, ‘no’ or a number. This keeps the process moving quickly. We send each other weekly results from an Excel spreadsheet.

One rule – no negative feedback! No matter what the other person has done, we say nothing that may produce guilt. On the other hand, we make positive comments that reinforce success. Recently, I asked Jim how much he weighed. Since we began, he had lost 20 pounds. I said, ‘Great job! That’s a new record!’

Jim and I live miles apart and both travel extensively. We are still able to connect by phone on about 80% of the days. When we miss a day or two, we simply ‘catch up’ later.

For the sake of example, I will share some of the questions that I have written for Jim to ask me. Please remember my questions reflect my values – and may not work for you.

Jim’s first question for me is, ‘How happy were you today?’ I answer on a 1-10 scale with ten

being the highest score. Being a Buddhist, one of my life philosophies is very simple – *be happy now*. I have a great life – wonderful wife and kids, good health, don't have to work, love my job and don't have a boss. If I wasn't happy today, someone made a big mistake – that would be me! In spite of all my blessings, I can still sometimes get caught up in day-to-day stress, forget how lucky I am and act like an idiot! It helps to get a daily reminder of the importance of happiness and gratitude.

Jim then asks, 'How many minutes did you spend writing?' This is harder for me. I am an extrovert who loves teaching, coaching and just being with people. It is sometimes hard for me to sit by myself and write. Yet, writing is a critically important part of my life. Through my writing I have reached over a million people that have never heard me speak. Writing is how I am communicating with you now.

Some of my questions are about health, such as, 'How many sit-ups did you do?' (This works! Today I did 400 sit-ups at once. Not bad for a 57 year old guy!)

Disciplined follow-up is the key to the success of my teaching and coaching. One question is 'With how many clients are you current on your follow-up?'

My relationship questions include, 'Did you say or do something nice for your wife? Your son? Your daughter? I am certainly not a perfect husband or Dad, but this process is helping me get better!

Why does this process work so well? For one, it forces Jim and me to confront how we actually live our values - every day. We either believe that something matters or we don't. If we believe it, we can 'put it on the list' and do it! If we really don't really want to do it, we can face reality and quit kidding ourselves.

I asked my wife Lyda (also a psychologist) if she thought this process would work as well with a computer-generated list of questions – instead of a friend. She said, 'No! It is a lot easier to ignore a computer – than a friend.'

Imagine if a friend of yours – or your peer coach - was going to call you every day and ask you questions about your life - what questions would you want this person to ask you? In the past several months, I have had over a thousand participants in my training programs 'write their own questions'. The results are very revealing and sometimes even profound.

Try it out! Write the questions that you would want a friend to ask you every day. Even the process of writing questions will help you better understand your own values – and how you 'live' or 'don't live' them on a daily basis. If you really have courage – recruit a friend and start asking daily questions to each other. You may be as amazed at the results as I have been!

**Dr. Marshall Goldsmith** recently been named by the American Management Association as one of 50 great thinkers and business leaders who have impacted the field of management. His 18 books include the Business Week best-seller, *The Leader of the Future* and *Global Leadership: The Next Generation*. Marshall is a world authority in helping successful leaders achieve positive change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams.