

MASS TRANSIT AUTHORITY FILLS LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

Agency fills their leadership pipeline by integrating Zenger Folkman's Core Competencies across the talent management lifecycle.

THE CHALLENGE

A large Mass Transit Authority (TA) that oversees bus and rail service, as well as freeways, road improvements, vanpools, ride-sharing, taxi administration, and long-range transportation planning is a complex organization. Competing goals and limited resources require focused skills and knowledge in everything the organization does.

The employees tend to have a long length of service which means a lot of continuity and deep experience. Because of this, the American Public Transportation Association named their organization America's Best Public Transportation System.

Extensive length of service, however, can also mean that leadership bench strength is not very deep. Within the next five years, they anticipated that 75–80 percent of their Transit managers would be retirement eligible. The organization needed a leadership succession plan. While the transit authority wanted to hire from within, it needed to base hiring decisions on more than just technical abilities.

According to their Manager of Training and Development, this proved unsuccessful several times when the technical person didn't have the leadership skills needed to advance to a supervisory position. As a result, they faced the possibility of bringing in new leaders from outside. "If you bring in one or two from the outside, that's fine, but you bring in 15 new people, cultures change, and we didn't want that," she said. "Hiring from the inside builds pride and increases morale. They know our culture, how things run, and their ramp-up time is much shorter. Many of our supervisors want to fill that leadership pipeline. We want to do all we can to make that possible."

THE SOLUTION

Training and Development decided to implement skill development and metrics-based training. This included finding a 360-degree assessment program to evaluate and further develop the leadership skills within the organization.

While researching third-party leadership programs, they turned the focus on core competencies. As a team, they began looking for a program that would offer the "optimal" number of competencies. Zenger Folkman's confidential, customizable 360-degree assessment, part of its *Extraordinary Leader* experience, was

AT A GLANCE

The Challenge

- A large mass transit authority faced dramatic retirement across the organizations. It needed to develop a strong pipeline of leaders and advance its ability to develop the skills of each employee in hopes of promoting from within.

The Solution

- The organization implemented Zenger Folkman's 16 core competencies (based on its *Extraordinary Leader* program) throughout the organization.

The Results

- The core competencies language is now the lexicon of the entire organization, from bus driver to CEO. The organization is developing strong leaders from within and is beginning to see greater retention, more engaged employees, and stronger leaders in every position.

the only one that met the criteria. Its 16 core competencies nicely aligned with the organization's goals. They also felt it was important for a third party to handle all of the data, be objective, and maintain anonymity. Zenger Folkman also had the normative data with which to compare results.

The TA entered into an intellectual property agreement with Zenger Folkman that allowed them to implement *The Extraordinary Leader* competencies throughout the organization. They started implementing the core competencies in one division with mid-level managers and then branched out throughout the entire organization.

"Our goal is to integrate the core competencies into our employees' work from the first day on the job, whether a manager or bus driver or mechanic—and then implement them into their development training. Each employee learns to understand where they are right now and what competencies will be needed to succeed in the next position. The scores also allow the

management team to assess who should be moving up the pipeline and who would succeed in cross-divisional assignments.”

The management team also uses the core competencies in the initial hiring process. In fact, the TA developed an algorithm tool based on the core competencies to help managers determine the 1–3 key core competencies each job requires. They used the tool to determine the three competencies they wanted in the deputy CEO—Strategic Thinking, Champions Change, and Networking—and were then able to find the right person to fill the role.

THE RESULTS

The 16 competencies are now a part of the TA’s culture, increasingly so at a higher level within the organization.

“It’s been a six-year cultural move to embed core competencies as the foundational element at every level of the organizations. And if it’s working. We now have a repeatable, sustainable, and well-documented process of selecting high potentials (by ranking them on the core competencies).

Further, using competencies at the beginning of the talent management life cycle by integrating them into the recruitment and selection process allows us to make a better hire from the start. Thanks to this partnership with Zenger Folkman, our employees are learning how to inspire, motivate, reach out to others, develop their subordinates, stretch goals, and solve problems,” the manager of training and development said.

“We know that these skills can be taught and developed. By combining Zenger Folkman’s 16 core competencies across our talent management life cycle, coupled with *The Extraordinary Leader* development experience for our management teams, we are seeing these skills put into practice every day.”

GROUNDING IN RESEARCH. BUILT ON STRENGTHS.

Zenger Folkman’s approach makes more of people development, transforming the process into a new, strengths-focused lifestyle that brings science to the art of leadership.