



How benchmarking can identify those vital skills

Recruitment consultancies have traditionally maintained that they add value to clients. They unearth candidates with appropriate skills and experience, and help organisations to secure competent people.

But how can we be sure that candidates match up to the very best in the areas of leadership, judgement, capacity to deliver and skills in working with others? A recent innovation from Wickland Westcott makes it easier for organizations to identify the best talent in the marketplace - they have developed a proprietary database enabling the benchmarking of job candidates applying to key posts. This is also used to measure the depth and richness of talent within existing teams.

Most people will be familiar with the concept of benchmarking, where organisations or divisions are compared to identify relevant strengths and areas for improvement. For example, 'families' of FE colleges regularly compare their data on a number of defined criteria to identify where they stand in relation to the performance of comparable institutions, and how they can improve.

The essential elements of this process are that the groups to be compared should be of similar size and have comparable characteristics, that the indicators selected should be relevant and that the measurements taken are accurate.

Wickland Westcott has applied this approach to the evaluation of candidates. To this end, over the last eighteen months, we have developed a database profiling the compe-

tencies of over 1000 executives, allowing candidates to be benchmarked against other executives across a range of sectors and levels.

Combining the expertise of experienced occupational psychologists with our sector-based search and selection teams, this

enables us to answer some genuinely interesting questions which frequently exercise HR decision-makers.

For example:
 ● Do we have a clear appreciation of how the job-critical competencies will vary at different levels - as for example between top executives and sen-

ior managers?
 ● Can we say with confidence whether there are significant differences between disciplines: for instance in what respect is a successful director of environment likely to differ from someone leading adult services or heading up corpo-

Of course, the anonymous database becomes increasingly powerful as it grows, enabling us to stay up to date with the marketplace.

Analysis of the database is very revealing. The numbers are still building, but already some clear themes are starting

to emerge concerning what it takes to be successful. Our findings suggest that to succeed at the very top level, chief executives tend to be particularly strong in communication, but may put less focus on teamwork. This supports work from Harvard Business School* indicating that teamwork is over-

rated as a requirement for leaders. Yes, ideas should be gathered from peers and considered, but a business needs a single coherent vision from the leader, not a mushy amalgam of everyone's views.
 With regard to functional heads, finance directors are typically strongest in the area of commercial appreciation, whilst their weakest area is leadership. The best FDs stand out a mile here, differentiating themselves through demonstrating the classic leadership elements of motivation, empowerment and inspiring teams. Anyone looking to appoint a new FD should attend to these aspects when evaluating candidates.

HR directors are typically strongest in teamwork, suggesting they take seriously their role as steward of the organisation's values and culture. They also tend to score quite highly in commercial appreciation, which challenges the dated stereotype of HR as disconnected from the business.

In short, this powerful database enables us to cut the data to suit any permutation of sectors, functions and levels of seniority. Our early experience in using this new tool indicates that it provides a remarkably powerful insight into how potential candidates match up against the marketplace. ■

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**Are you picking the right leaders? M. Sorcher and J. Brant, Harvard Business Review 2002*



Laurence Jackson says benchmarking job candidates can help match them to the right posts

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For example:
 ● Do we have a clear appreciation of how the job-critical competencies will vary at different levels - as for example between top executives and sen-

ior managers?
 ● What are the essential differences between public and private sector executives? Are the skills transferable? Some might even ask 'who is best?'

A genuine differentiator, this service is now offered to clients as part of our standard recruitment and assessment package.

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		5th	Special focus on Finance Whitehall Supplement
		12th	Special focus on Adult Care & Health Efficiency Supplement

