

PREPARATION OF NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS FOR THE JOB: LESSONS FOR POTENTIAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Study

In Michigan, a state facing severe economic challenges, the nonprofit sector has grown faster than the state's overall economy between the period of 1995-2001 (Public Sector Consultants, Inc., 2004), increased 14 percent since 2001 and 25 percent since 1997—with nearly 10,000 new organizations since 1997 (Public Sector Consultants, Inc., 2009). The sector employs directly more than 440,000 people (an increase of 40 percent from 315,000 in 2001), or ten percent of the Michigan workforce (Public Sector Consultants, Inc., 2009).

This growth in the number of nonprofit organizations has raised interest in understanding leadership and various leadership related issue. The Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) sponsored this study to better understand the issues related to executive transitions in the nonprofit sector and how to prepare an adequate pool of leadership talent in the face of the impending retirement of many Baby Boomers. The ultimate goals of this study were to provide the information that would serve as the basis for development of the next generation of education, training and support services for boards and Executive Directors facing this significant, often critical, organizational change.

This article focuses on one part of that larger study and presents key findings on what Executive

Director's feel prepared them for that job and the role that generational characteristics play.

BACKGROUND

Literature review

The number of transitions is increasing. The expected retirement of Baby Boomers raises questions about their succession (Teegarden, 2004; Bell, Moyers and Wolfred, 2006). The pace of executive transitions in the nonprofit sector can be anticipated to accelerate in the next few years. The existing research on executive transitions illustrates the importance and challenges of executive transitions for the nonprofit sector. Teegarden (2004) found that nationally 63% of organizations will face executive transitioning in the next five years and 23% within the next two years. The Midwest follows the national trends: 63% of executives will be transitioning in the next five years and 26% in the next two years. The Bridgespan Group estimated in 2006 that 640,000 new senior managers would be needed in the nonprofit sector over the next decade (Tierney, 2006). In an updated study (2009), the Bridgespan Group confirms that “the leadership deficit has become more pronounced in the past few years” (The Bridgespan Group, 2009, 1). Johnson (2009), after examining the nonprofit leadership deficit based on demand and supply of the labor market, supports Bridgespan's finding: “The age demographics of CEOs presented here, based on census data, suggest that a leadership deficit in the nonprofit sector may not be as imminent as in the government sector, but that it looms closer than in the for-profit sector” (Johnson, 2009, 300).

The next generation of nonprofit leaders will be different from the current generation of leaders. Paul Light found that the nonprofit

workforce experiences high levels of stress, that “organizations do not provide enough training and staff to succeed,” and that the majority of the new Executive Directors (60%) are in their positions for the first time (Teegarden, 2004). Kunreuther (2003) argues that when the younger generation takes on the leading positions in nonprofit organizations, they have a different approach to organizational life and view the social-change sector differently than the older generation. Allison (2002) found that being a nonprofit Executive Director is a job that most people do once, therefore raising the question of “whether something is wrong with the way nonprofits typically construct the job” (Allison, 2002, 342). Although the US population is growing more diverse and the Census projects a greater growth in the minority population vs. the white population, the present composition of Executive Directors who are 84% white, 10% African American and 4% Latino (Teegarden, 2004), does not reflect the population’s diversity trends.

Another aspect of the changing context for executive transitions is the generational and cultural change that can be anticipated. The Pew Research Center (2009) found that there are big differences between young and old today in terms of moral values, attitudes, work ethics and behavior which suggest generations “have found a way to disagree without being disagreeable” (Taylor et al. 2009, 3). The 2005 “Up Next: Generation Change and the Leadership of Nonprofit Organizations” Kunreuther study funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, found that there is a big gap – even tensions – between the Baby Boomers and the Generation Xers in terms of each generation’s frame of reference: how work, motivation and challenges are perceived; work and payment expectations; balance between job and personal life; their values and preferences around organizational decision making; views on effective organizational structure; and their preferred modes of preparation for an Executive Director position.

Challenges in Recruitment of Executive Directors. Where to get the new leaders from is a very

important topic. Bridgespan’s 2006 study “The Non-profit Sector’s Leadership Deficit” emphasized the importance of investing in infrastructure to support the recruitment, hiring and retention of qualified leaders (Bridgespan, 2009). A recent follow-up of this study found that half of trailing-edge Boomers – today’s 44- to 55-year olds – are interested in moving into the social sector, that there is strong competition among nonprofits for the same in-sector pool, and that there is a lack of resources to find and cultivate new leaders from within nonprofit organizations (Bridgespan Group, 2009). However, Johnson (2009) reviewing the labor market for nonprofit executive positions found that issues such as skill development through education, succession planning or lack of it, resources and funding of overhead costs, are factors contributing to the challenges of recruiting the next leaders. The Annie E. Casey Foundation found that several Executive Transition Management (ETM) providers emerged in the last decade, but they are “relatively few and far between, without the capacity to meet the needs of the nonprofit sector as a whole” (Teegarden, 2004).

Research Questions:

Given the challenges presented in the literature, what prepares a professional to become Executive Director in a nonprofit organization? Are there generational differences when it comes to this preparedness? We define Traditionalists as those born prior to 1946, Baby Boomers as those born from 1946 to 1962 and GenX as those born between 1965 and 1975.

Research Methods: Data Collection

The data was collected through web-based surveys. The surveys were sent to 88 nonprofit Executive Directors in Michigan, who were identified as interested participants through an accountability study conducted by one of the authors, Claudia Petrescu. In compiling the initial database through which the respondents to this study were identified, help was received from the Michigan Nonprofit Association and Eastern Michigan University.

To identify the participants in this study, the accountability survey asked two questions and invited organizations that went through an executive transition in the last five years to participate in the present study. Those interested in participating in the executive transition survey provided their e-mail address and contact information.

The questions used to identify the participants were:

- 1) When was the last time that your organization experienced an executive transition?
- 2) Did the organization use this time of transition in executive leadership to conduct a reassessment of its strategy?

The responses to the first question indicated the targeted population of this study. The second question allowed us to focus on the testing of the assumption that this type of reassessment determines the success of the transition and enhances the organization's strategic position.

Data collection from the Executive Directors

Out of the 381 participants in the accountability study who answered the above questions, 40% of respondent's organizations went through an executive transition process within the last 2-5 years and 12.6% went through an executive transition process in the last 5-10 years. This finding in itself is quite relevant: 52% of the surveyed organizations experienced an executive transition in the last 10 years. In response to the invitation to participate in this present study, 121 organization showed interest in this research, however a much lower number provided valid e-mail addresses and contact information. In the end 88 organizations participated in this study and 36 organizations completed the web based survey. This gives us a return rate of 41%.

Data collection from the Board Members

Each of the respondents in the Executive Director survey was asked to provide the name, email address and phone number of both the chair of

their board and a member of their board of directors who was active during the entire period of the executive transition. An online survey was sent to each of the chairs and identified board members of the 36 organizations who participated in the Executive Director survey. The board member survey covered many of the same issues, particularly those having to do with succession planning and strategic reassessment – and its impact on the organization's priorities, direction, services and selection of new Executive Director. While the board survey also explored issues of fit between the Executive Director and the board and issues that arose in the transition, it did not delve into the issues of generational differences or transition issues experienced by the executive and the staff. Twenty board members responded and completed the online survey for a response rate of 28%.

Focus Group with the Executive Directors

Following completion of both surveys we invited the Executive Director respondents to a focus group to discuss some of the survey results and to provide us with a richer understanding of the transition and the context in which their organizations are now operating, which may have influenced the transition. Six Executive Directors participated in the focus group.

RESULTS

Descriptions of Survey Respondents

Several questions were asked to identify the characteristics of the Executive Directors who participated in this research project. What we found was:

- Gender: 79% are females and 21% males.
- Marital Status: 74% are married, 10% single, and 16% divorced.
- Ethnicity: the majority are white/Caucasian (90%).
- Generations: out of 34 respondents who reported their age, 15% (5) are Traditionalists, 59% (20) are Baby-Boomers and 20% (9) are Gen X.

- Education: the majority are highly educated with 63% having a Masters and 16% a Bachelors degree. Their educational background is varied: social work, arts administration, business, psychology, law, public health but most of the respondents (11%) reported as having their highest degree in social work.
- For 74% of respondents this was their first Executive Director job.
- Professional background: 33% reported experience in the nonprofit sector, 19% in private sector and 20% in the public sector. While a respondent might have reported experience in two or more sectors, this information still tells us that the majority of Executive Directors have more nonprofit experience than other-sector experience.
- Volunteering activities: Almost all respondents (89%) indicated that they served as volunteers in the nonprofit sector.
- When applying for the ED job, 63% were internal candidates and 37% external candidates.

PREPARATION OF THE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS FOR THE JOB

One of the topics that both we and this study’s sponsor are concerned about is how well prepared Executive Directors feel in assuming a new position

and what helped them feel prepared. The Executive Directors were asked, “When I first started this job, I felt that I was well prepared for it.” **Table 1** shows that on the whole most of the respondents felt prepared for the job, while a small minority (14%) were much less sure of their readiness and either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

While this result indicates that the new directors aren’t overwhelming in their confidence in their preparation and readiness for the job, they are confident. This doesn’t change significantly when comparing those who are entering their first Executive Director job (70%) with those who have already served in this capacity (*see Table 2*).

While a much larger proportion of those who have been Executive Directors previously rate their confidence in their preparedness at the top end, and essentially no one from this experience group “disagrees,” overall there is no statistical difference. It is worth noting that the percent of first time Executive Directors is slightly higher for this Michigan sample (at 69%) but comparable to what Teegarden (2004) found (60%) in his study. More interesting was what the respondents said prepared them for the job. The survey asked, “What types of experiences do you feel particularly prepared you for an Executive Director position?” Respondents had the opportunity to check as many of the four alternatives presented (see the table below) and an opportunity to tell us about other experiences or training.

Table 1. New ED preparation for the job

I Felt Well Prepared When Starting the Job		
	Number	Percent
Strongly Agree	10	27.8%
Agree	21	58.3%
Disagree	4	11.1%
Strongly Disagree	1	2.8%
Total	36	100.0%

Table 2: Preparedness for Job by First Time Executive Director Job

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	TOTALS
First time ED	6	15	3	1	25
	24.0%	60.0%	12.0%	4.0%	100.0%
Not first time ED	4	6	1	0	11
	36.4%	54.5%	9.1%	0.0%	100.0%
Totals	10	21	4	1	36
	27.8%	58.3%	11.1%	2.8%	100.0%

Chi Sq.=.958, Sig: .812

Table 3. Activities that Prepare for the ED Job

What Prepared You for the Executive Director Job						
	Total EDs	Total EDs (%)	First Time ED	First Time ED (%)	Not First Time ED	Not First Time ED (%)
Mentoring (by another Exec)	13	37.10%	8	33.00%	5	46.00%
Special Leadership Assignments	21	60.10%	16	67%	5	45%
Professional Development/Ed	24	68.60%	15	63%	9	37%
Completion of Grad Degree	13	37.10%	7	54%	6	46%
Total (respondents)	36					

The first thing that strikes one from this table is the low proportion (37.1%) that identified mentoring by another Executive Director as a particularly important part of their preparation. This ranks at the bottom with completion of a graduate degree program (also at 37.1%). What is preparing them for this type of responsibility are, first of all, opportunities for education/professional development (68.6%), and secondly, special leadership assignments (60%). This is consistent with the Cornelius, Corvington, Ruesga (2008, 10) study which found that potential Executive Directors have a desire for professional development activities and when engaged in this type of activities they take them seriously.

The pattern here is the on-the-job training, hands on experience and focused professional development. When we asked about prior jobs in the nonprofit sector direct service positions (75%) were the most common, with 78% also having experience in non-executive management positions. Only 13% had ever held an “administrative support” position. The route to these non-profit executive positions is up through the ranks, on the direct services side of the operation. This becomes important later when we asked questions about what skills and knowledge they wished they had coming into the job. Administrative skills rank high. The most frequent responses to this question were: financial

management (38.9%), human resources (33.3%), and marketing (27.8%).

Garman and Tyler (2007) in their survey of hospital executives also asked about the kinds of activities in which successors (people being groomed as potential successors for top management positions) were involved. In hospitals 68% reported mentoring as a development activity and 59% mentioned “developmental (stretch) assignments.” Formal education and training were mentioned by only 34%. While this matches our respondents’ evaluation of the importance of special leadership assignments, it does not match on the use of mentoring. From the experience of the two investigators on this study, formal mentoring programs are not common in nonprofit organizations. Some of this absence is due to the typical size of the organization. Some of the absence is due to the lack of knowledge among nonprofit leaders on what goes into effective mentoring, or how it can be used to develop future executives.

A look at generational membership by their feeling of preparedness shows a promising (that is, with a larger sample we might likely find a statistically significant result) but statistically non-significant difference. But it is interesting to note that GenX members indicate that they feel the most prepared of the three groups.

The 14 open-ended responses to this question – what particularly prepared you for the Executive Director position – confirms these closed-ended responses in that only two mentioned anything about a degree program (and one of those was a mention of a scholarship). One mentioned workshops from the NEW Center (a southeast Michigan nonprofit training and development organization), and others mentioned a variety of jobs, board membership, personal

experiences and self-directed study of management literature, and peer networking.

When we look across generational groups (see **Tables 5** through **9**) we find distinct differences in what contributed to their preparation for the Executive Director job. While mentoring is not particularly strongly valued overall, this is clearly not the case for Baby Boomers or GenX where

Table 4. Preparedness for the job by generational group

Were You Well Prepared When Starting the Job by Generational Group				
		Tradits.	Baby Boomers	GenX
Strongly Agree	<i>Number</i>	2	7	1
	<i>Percent</i>	40.0%	33.3%	11.1%
Agree	<i>Number</i>	2	11	7
	<i>Percent</i>	40.0%	52.4%	77.8%
Disagree	<i>Number</i>	1	3	0
	<i>Percent</i>	20.0%	14.3%	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	<i>Number</i>	0	0	1
	<i>Percent</i>	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%
Totals	<i>Number</i>	5	21	9
	<i>Percent</i>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi Sq.=6.756, Sig: .344

Table 5. Importance of mentoring activities for each generational group

Were You Well Prepared When Starting the Job by Generational Group						
	Yes		No		Total	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Traditionalists	0	0.0%	5	100.0%	5	100.0%
Baby Boomers	9	45.0%	11	55.0%	20	100.0%
GenX	4	44.4%	5	55.6%	9	100.0%
Total	13		21		34	

Chi Sq = 3.630; Sig: .163

45% and 44% respectively identify this of value. By contrast none of the Traditionalists saw this as part of their professional development. Some of this is simply historical in that only in the past decade or so has mentorship become a hot topic in essentially every realm – business, education, non-profits, etc. Still, we must keep in mind that this is less than half of the respondents in each of these two generational peer groups. Of much greater importance is the opportunity for “special leadership assignments” (*Table 6*) with a steady increase across the three generation groups (40% to 60% to 78%, going from oldest to youngest), although

with our small sample these differences do not rise to statistical significance. As *Table 7* shows, 80% of Baby Boomers and 60% of Traditionalists identified opportunities for professional development as particularly useful. *Table 8* indicates that Baby Boomers and GenX view completion of a graduate degree very useful.

Table 9 provides a summary comparison of sources of job preparedness by generation. The data shows a clear and substantively significant difference across generations in terms of what prepared these Executive Directors for the job. These generational

Table 6. Importance of leadership assignments activities for each generational group

What Prepared the Exec for the Job by Generational Group: Given Special Leadership Assignments						
	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Traditionalists	2	40.0%	3	60.0%	5	100.0%
Baby Boomers	12	60.0%	8	40.0%	20	100.0%
GenX	7	77.8%	2	22.2%	9	100.0%
Total	21		13		34	

Chi Sq = 2.007; Sig: .367

Table 7. Importance of professional development activities for each generational group

What Prepared the Exec for the Job by Generational Group: Professional Development/Education						
	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Traditionalists	3	60.0%	2	40.0%	5	100.0%
Baby Boomers	16	80.0%	4	20.0%	20	100.0%
GenX	4	44.4%	5	55.6%	9	100.0%
Total	23		11		34	

Chi Sq = 3.630; Sig: .163

differences represent, in part, a change in the thinking of academics studying leadership and also in the behavior of practitioners of leadership. It may also be a result, as Taylor et. al (2009) discovered, of the fact that one of the major differences between young and older adults is the use of technology, which impacts how people think and work. Or the fact that “GenXers work better in an informal environment where they can consult with their peers” (Kunreuther, 2003).

Some of the earliest research that reflects this shift in thinking about preparation for leadership positions was done by McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988). In their research they focused on the question of how successful executives develop on the job. Their key finding was that the most important developments came from on-the-job learning; from job challenge. Not all experiences were equally valuable. Some packed more “developmental wallop” than others. Although the companies they studied

used a variety of training and development activities, challenging stretch assignments were at the core of what led to the greatest development of leadership abilities and performance.

They also found that mentoring was rare or nonexistent among the successful senior executives they studied (McCall et al. 1988, 12). One of the facts explaining this is that most of these executives were not in positions long enough (nor were their superiors) to establish close relationships. This certainly matches our finding for the Traditionalist generation (0.0% reported mentoring as one of the things that prepared them for the executive job), who on average would have been 52 years old when McCall and her colleagues were doing their studies.

McCall, working later with Hollenbeck (1999) to study the effectiveness of leadership training curricula, concluded that careful attention needed to be paid to the link between the content of the

Table 8. Importance of having a degree for each generational group

What Prepared the Exec for the Job by Generational Group: Completion of a Graduate Degree						
	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Traditionalists	0	0.0%	5	100.0%	5	100.0%
Baby Boomers	9	45.0%	11	55.0%	20	100.0%
GenX	4	44.4%	5	55.6%	9	100.0%
Total	13		21		34	

Chi Sq = 2.007; Sig: .367

Table 9. What Prepared You for the Exec Director Job by Generation

	Mentoring	Special Assignments	Prof. Dev. Education	Graduate Degree
Traditionalists	0%	40%	60%	0%
Baby Boomers	45%	60%	80%	45%
GenX	44%	78%	44%	44%

development program and the strategic vision of the organization. However the nonprofit organizations who participated in our study (as represented by surveys of both board chairs and new Executive Directors), responded overwhelmingly that they were not making this linkage to strategy. Only 32% of the board members and 25% of the executives said that their organization engaged in succession planning and only 21% of board members and 17% of the executives said that the organization engaged in strategic reassessment prior to conducting the search for a new Executive Director. Effective succession planning is a process by which an organization assesses its challenges and opportunities (strategic assessment), and assesses the preparedness of their current stock of leaders and their organization's leadership capacity to respond to future challenges. These two types of assessment together determine the match or mismatch of their leadership with the environment and further conditions the process for selection of the next Executive Director. That this level of assessment is not happening widely indicates that nonprofit boards do not understand that effective succession planning is grounded in ongoing activities of and commitment to leadership development. This observation is included here because we would expect to see much broader occurrence of this kind of leadership development activity in nonprofit organizations if boards (and Executive Directors) could see the full context of succession planning; recognizing it as an ongoing organizational development activity rather than a form of reaction when an Executive Director announces his/her resignation.

Heernez-Broom and Hughes (2004) in reviewing twenty years of leadership development methods found that the long standing dominance of formal training is "now complemented (if not supplanted) by activities as diverse as high ropes courses or reflective journaling." Classroom training, they say, may be the least critical part of leadership development. They also observe that, "Challenging job assignments are a potent form of leadership development and provide many of the developmental opportunities in organizations today." They go

on to say that challenging job assignments, "provide benefits that go beyond getting the job done and may even result in competitive advantages for the organization" (Heernez-Broom *et al*, 2004, 25). Again the leadership development literature demonstrates the increasing dominance of this perspective, and also ties it to the development of competitive advantage.

Entengoff (2007) in reporting on the training and management development experience of OHEL – a community nonprofit providing a range of mental health and social services training – concludes, "The Academy experience [their management development program], though challenging and exciting to the participants, had one major weakness. Post-program questionnaires and interviews revealed the need for more hands-on learning experiences.... Middle-level managers, in particular, stressed the need for follow-up activities to help them apply the didactic experience to their current management responsibilities and challenges" (2007, 53). Again, this conclusion matches the findings of our study where the youngest cohort of new executives (the Gen X group), most of whom were selected from the ranks of direct service supervisor or middle-management staff (as opposed to the business or management side of the organization) valued the hands-on experience of special assignments to best prepare them for the job of Executive Director. Van Velsor and her colleagues at the Center for Creative Leadership (2004) have concluded from their research that experiential learning is the most powerful form of leadership development. But people don't just learn from experience: they learn from reflecting on experience and tying a long sequence of experiences together. This is not an automatic, easy or common process. People need to overcome an array of personal and organizational factors that militate against learning from experience.

Genis (2008, 6) emphasizes the importance of reflection but notes that, "Most leaders are so focused on being action-oriented they fail to learn from their actions or the outcomes that result." Van Velsor's research shows that the ability to learn

from experience involves the confluence of the following: recognizing that new behaviors, skills or attitudes are called for; accepting responsibility for one's own development; ability and willingness to go against one's grain in terms of behavior or attitudes; being able to reflect on day-to-day life events and process with an eye toward examining how one is attempting to learn (meta-cognition); persisting with attempts to learn and change in the face of mistakes and failure and temporary decrements in performance; and using a variety of learning tactics to facilitate the development of new capacities (Van Velsor, et al., 210).

One point worth emphasizing from Van Velsor's list is accepting responsibility for one's own development. This kind of responsibility is more characteristic of Gen X, who see themselves as less "organization men" than either Baby Boomers or Traditionalists, and more "on their own" with a greater emphasis on the cause or mission than on the organization per se while embracing a willingness to try new approaches. This was noted in the focus group phase of our research by several Executive Directors, discussing intergenerational issues and challenges that arose when trying to establish themselves in the new position.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS ON GENERATIONAL ISSUES FROM THE FOCUS GROUP

The participants in the focus group reinforced several of the themes generated by the survey in terms of generational issues. Technology savvy and the use of technology was an obvious issue; the consequences are less obvious. One participant observed from his organization, "The young people contact each other with Facebook before they call each other. They have a lack of face time and face-to-face communications." Another executive noted, "I have to be mindful of communications and use checks and balances when communicating with younger members. I have to do more follow-up and find ways to relate to people." These kinds of sentiments were shared, in terms of the older (Baby-Boomers and Traditionalists) executives having to

adjust their communication styles – which didn't seem that serious of an issue for them. But there also was concern that some important communications skills were not being developed. Also, face-to-face communications skills are essential in building relationships and trust. These in turn are critical to many human resource tasks, supervision and operational efficiency, and fundraising.

Another executive noted that when she came into the job, older staff members (a generation older than her) were more accepting and adaptable to her new management style (compared to the Traditionalist former Executive Director). The younger members of the staff did not feel as mentored as they wanted to be. This may reflect a larger generational gap between Boomers and GenX, than between Boomers and Traditionalists.

The major issue that essentially all of them had experienced is the desire of the GenX group to have a more balanced life between work, family and their other interests. Part of this is wanting more flexibility with their time. This has multiple sides to it. One executive referred to this younger group as having a "sense of entitlement" and a different "work ethic" which impact decisions on who you may want to advance. Many of them (younger staff in their 20's and 30's) feel there shouldn't be a hierarchy. Giving an example, she told about how the younger staffs in her organization were "stunned" when she eliminated a couple of key positions. (Another of the executives experienced the same situation of elimination of positions creating real issues for the organization.) It is, the first executive said, important to give these young people voice in the organization, and to be as transparent as you can be, but someone has to be there for them to answer to. Helping staff develop connections to the organization is critical, particularly in nonprofit organizations where commitment is based more on buy-in to the mission than on compensation and instrumental reinforcement. Accountability and the necessary authority that is tied to it may be less "obvious" to this younger generation than to the Boomers and Traditionalists. Clearly it means that executives need to have the

relationship and management skills to deal with a wider set of staff expectations, which don't fit neatly into the old categories of "motivation," but now extend to organizational structure, processes and communications.

Also from the focus groups: Support organizations and the seminars, workshops, and materials they provide in regard to executive transitions is valued by the Executive Directors in terms of assisting the transition process. However, much more valuable is a transition consultant who knows the organization well, is sensitive to its unique qualities and situation, and can help the board craft an individualized process. Logically this also is likely to produce a transition process that engages important strategic issues, and engages them in a deeper and authentic way.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – PREPARING FOR THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOB

- 1) The new Executive Directors, overall, are feeling prepared for their jobs, and this is true for both those in their first ED position and more seasoned "veterans." Interestingly, the GenX group tended to feel more prepared than their older counterparts.
- 2) What they say prepares them for the job puts a strong emphasis on focused professional development education and special leadership assignments that stretch their current capabilities. Mentoring, the current predominant theme in the development of managers, is a distant third along with completion of a graduate degree. The benefits of mentoring are either not recognized in the nonprofit sector in Michigan or the current leadership does not feel they have the skills to implement such programs. The fact that three-quarters of these executives emerge from the ranks of direct service positions can help to explain why special leadership assignments and focused education are so valued. Mentoring could be an important addition to this. Organized mentoring can also be part of a

conscious succession planning process, or even lead to the institution of such a process.

- 3) There are some distinct differences across the three generation groups in what these executives say prepared them for the job. Mentoring is much more valued by Boomers and GenXers than for Traditionalists (where none saw this as valuable). Baby Boomers were much more likely to see professional development opportunities (e.g. training) as more valuable than the other two groups. Only the Traditionalists saw completion of a graduate degree program as particularly significant to their preparation.
- 4) The generational differences in terms of what prepared them for the job reflect, in part, new findings by academic researchers on leadership development, which puts much greater emphasis on the importance and efficacy of learning from experience through challenge or stretch assignments coupled with a matching set of opportunities to consolidate the learning through mentoring or other supportive activities.

THE PORTRAIT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The picture emerging today is that Executive Directors of nonprofits must have a "full complement of skills" which include business knowledge in management, fundraising, training and human resources, in addition to holding a masters degree.

Given the uncertain economic environment Executive Directors should be knowledgeable in fundraising; they have to be creative in identifying new venues for raising money and providing services; and they must be able to cooperate/ collaborate with other organizations. They feel that special leadership assignments and professional development opportunities are the best ways to prepare a person for the ED job. The new EDs are not overwhelming in their confidence in their preparation and readiness for the job, but they are confident that they can do the job well. ■

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