

Kolbe System as subject of academic research on leadership

Frank Novakowski, a professor of management at Davenport University, recently researched the leader selection and development methods used by various organizations that employ cross-functional teams to a significant extent. The research is part of a doctoral dissertation and was completed during 2007.

Recognizing the problems cross-functional teams often encounter, most notably a lack of effective leadership and individual performance, Novakowski focused on the leader selection process as he believes this is central to the success of the team. His inquiry into leader selection process addressed the criteria, processes and methods used and included questions regarding the use of conative assessments. According to Novakowski, adding the conative dimension to the knowledge, skills and abilities selection criteria commonly used added the perspectives that made a more integrated and holistic leader selection decision.

Novakowski discovered Performance Strategies Group and their long-term relationship with the Kolbe Systems organization. PSG introduced the conative model and, after explaining its use in individual and organizational performance development, it became clear that it was to become a key component of the research. PSG provided essential background information about the Kolbe System, the interpretation of the Kolbe indexes and how this information relates to the selection and development process. That enabled research questions to be developed which complimented those concerned with KSAs. The research included firms that were PSG clients and active users of the Kolbe System as well as firms which were not familiar with it.

Research results indicate that few organizations take the time to consider the “fit” of the leader to the team leadership role and mission. He found that selections in most organizations are done by senior management’s intuitive judgment and decisions are generally based on personal knowledge of the individuals. In the organizations that went beyond considering a leader’s required knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) and used a conative assessment to help determine the best “fit”, there was a greater degree of confidence in the individual selected and a better understanding of how leadership affected team performance.

Organizations using the Kolbe System seemed to place a greater value on their human resources and appeared to be very willing to take the time and make the investments to know their people better. Having the knowledge of the individual’s natural operating style and being able to predict how they will approach a given assignment was central to leader as well as team member selection. Many firms used the Kolbe System more for team and leader development and performance improvement. They understood that aligning people according to their natural strengths and work preferences only made good “people sense”.

My comments re PSG:

The Kolbe System and PSG's mastery of it was vital to the success of my research. I was looking for the "missing part" of the leader assessment model— the part that offered a rational explanation of why teams of people with the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities still failed to perform well together. I knew there had to be a dimension of the human performance I had not been considering. Then PSG introduced the concept of a conative assessment and it became clear that this was the missing element.

I consider PSG's help to be an invaluable asset to the research. Without their expert knowledge of the Kolbe System, I would not have been able to develop the necessary understanding and formulate the research questions that integrated so well into the remainder of the study. Their unbiased help in leading me to firms that use the Kolbe System as part of their human resources assessments provided a sampling that included several different industries, non-profit and governmental organizations.

I genuinely look forward to continuing research on the use of the Kolbe System in leader and team development.