



# Why Employees Succeed, Fail, and Leave

*By Markku Kauppinen*

**M**ost services organizations consider their people to be their most valuable asset, which makes employee turnover and mediocre employee performance a profoundly serious and expensive problem for nearly every service manager and executive. This begs the question: Why do some employees succeed while others fail, quit, or stay without producing? Some think inadequate training is to blame or attribute the problem to poor business planning or incompetent managers. Others point the finger at hiring professionals or simply bad employees. These elements may be a part of the problem, but they generally are not the root cause. Often, when employees fail, it's because companies and their managers do not know how to provide the right circumstances or environment for specific individuals to succeed or because certain employees were simply in the wrong jobs altogether.



*Markku Kauppinen is president of Extended DISC North America, Inc. Extended DISC is a proprietary system that helps companies make better hiring decisions, reduce staff turnover, increase productivity, better utilize individual strengths, enhance communication, improve sales results, develop more efficient teamwork, boost effectiveness, and help management make better decisions, develop better business plans, and generate better business results. For more information, call 800-257-7481 or visit [www.extendeddisc.com/north\\_america](http://www.extendeddisc.com/north_america).*

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## Personnel Management: Trial and Error

Navigating without a map or a clear idea of where one is going may have worked for Lewis and Clark, but it's a poor way to run a business. Yet most corporations essentially do this in the way they recruit, hire, and manage their employees.

Oftentimes, companies have an excellent idea of what the skill requirements of a job are but no idea about what type of person is best suited for the particular role. Yet, it is an individual's basic personality or behavioral makeup that can have a greater impact on one's ability to succeed in a given job than his or her skill set.

- **The recruitment problem.** The hiring process may begin with a recruitment ad in the paper that describes the job from a "skills needed" basis, which is only a small part of what is required for success in the job—and certainly not the most important. The problem is often compounded by the company's desire to find a type of person who actually doesn't exist in the real world—a "super" person who can live up to impossible criteria. Nearly every recruitment ad clamors for people who are competitive yet flexible, great team players, able to work independently, extroverted, analytical, introspective, good with numbers, excellent with people...and so on. No one person can be all of these things!

The world is composed of people who fall into several basic, identifiable behavioral categories. Each behavioral style is unique and includes specific strengths and weaknesses. None are

intrinsically or qualitatively better or worse than another.

- **The job interview.** This is like a first date. Everybody is on his or her best behavior,

hoping to impress the other person. Prospective employees, knowing that they can't live up to the impossible criteria, will say just about anything to get hired and then hope for the best.

If the hiring organization does not know for certain what type of person is best suited behaviorally for any given position, then they lack the right information to make an intelligent hiring decision. They also lack the tools to ask the right questions. Many managers end up relying on their gut instincts to make hiring decisions. Much like their prospective employees, they go through the motions and hope for the best.

- **Reality sets in.** After several weeks in a new position, some employees may discover that the job description they were given bears little resemblance to the job they are actually performing, which might make them puzzled, unhappy, and ineffective. Anyone who has worked in a position for which they were not suited knows what a deeply miserable experience this is. Managers are similarly perplexed, wondering why new employees do not seem like the individuals they interviewed only a few weeks ago.

## A Glimpse

Sadly, some of today's businesses do not fully know who they have working for them in terms of behavioral types, nor have they fully analyzed the behavioral requirements of each job. Until they do, they risk making the same hiring mistakes, with the same results, over and over again.

How costly and widespread a

problem is this? Very, according to Brent Strehlow, president of TMI, a training firm in Southlake, Texas. He has worked with many high-tech, service-oriented businesses in his career, and he offers the following glimpse of the scale of the problem. "One of my clients was spending \$48 million a year to recruit people for a specific position in their company," says Strehlow. "The \$48 million was actually \$28 million more than what was budgeted for this purpose. At the time, there were 1,600 employees in that particular position in four regions. Employee turnover was a huge, costly problem, and no one knew what was causing it. When we assessed 120 employees in one region, we found that the people being hired were not the same behavioral type as those who were succeeding and staying at the job," he concludes. "Hire and hope for the best" strikes again.

The problem can exist at every level of an organization. Ask the CEO and the supervisor of a call center in the same company to describe the behavioral style of the people who are most successful in a given position, and you likely will get the same response: a blank stare, followed by the question, "What does that have to do with it?" Such ignorance about one's employees would be unforgivable in a professional sports team, where pre-draft scrutiny of star athletes goes into minute detail. And yet comparable ignorance goes completely unrecognized in the business world. Until now.

## Mapping Behavioral Preferences

People generally gravitate to jobs and careers that fit their individual preferences and personality styles. Certain individual styles match comfortably with specific jobs. Accounting posi-

tions, for example, generally attract detail-oriented, organized people, whereas extroverted, people-oriented individuals often do well in sales positions.

Assessing different behavioral types is not difficult, nor is it a new science. Companies have been using personality assessment tools for years when making hiring decisions. These tools are generally quite accurate. After employees are hired, however, most companies rarely, if ever, look at the assessment results again.

There are tools available today that allow companies to find out precisely who their employees really are and to make better hiring choices and management decisions after people are hired. Typically the process begins with the assessment and identification of the preferred behavioral styles of each individual within a company. Keep in mind that there is no “good” or “bad” behavioral style. Everybody has a style, and each one comes with its own strengths and weaknesses. Once the assessment has taken place, a database of the information is created.

At the same time, each job in the company is analyzed in terms of its behavioral requirements. Most companies never have attempted to analyze jobs from the perspective of what type of person performs best in the job. Specifically, a company needs to study who has done well in each position historically and analyze what their behavioral type was. Who succeeded and stayed? Who tended to be frustrated, non-productive, or otherwise ill-suited for it? What type of person quit or just quit trying?

The magic occurs when visual representations of the two databases are combined, revealing exactly how well or how poorly the styles of individuals

have been matched to the behavioral requirements of the positions they hold.

### **Managing Employees More Effectively**

Clearly, mapping is a powerful tool for hiring the right employees and placing them in jobs where they are best suited behaviorally for success. But mapping is equally powerful when used by managers to increase the performance of their employees on a day-to-day basis. Most companies operate with an established management paradigm in which employees are expected to change to suit the requirements of their jobs. Repeated studies, however, have shown that the best way to boost an employee’s performance is to change the environment to suit the individual’s behavioral preferences.

Jeanine Stroud is the learning and development manager in Adelphia Cable’s National Sales Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. Adelphia is one of the largest cable television companies in the U.S., serving customers in 31 states. Stroud has been using mapping as a management tool for over six years. The insight it provides has completely changed the way she views herself and the way she manages people.

To Stroud, a big part of a manager’s job is to accelerate the performance and professional growth of individuals working under him and to create a work environment for each person that nurtures and encourages success. Sometimes it means helping employees determine why they’re not happy in their work and finding a solution. The solution may be relatively simple. It might involve a

job change within the company, or the person perhaps may decide to pursue a different career path altogether. “Employees often don’t know or can’t figure it out on their own,” Stroud says. “It’s great to have the tools to help them find out what’s wrong and to try to change things for the better.”

Stroud cites this recent example: “Not long ago, we applied the assessment and mapping process to a team of people who report to me, and we found out that one individual was being stretched way beyond her preferred behavioral style—to an extreme degree.” While a little bit of stretching is good, and while people can and do often depart from their preferred behavioral styles, the work-related assignment in question was overwhelming this person. “I had no idea what we were asking her to do until I saw the mapping results with my own eyes,” says Stroud. As it turned out, the assignment would have been a much bet-



ter fit for a different employee on the team. “After you’ve experienced the insights into yourself and other people that mapping provides, there’s no going back to the old ways of doing things,” Stroud adds.

Knowledge about one’s own self? Absolutely. For TMI’s Brent Strehlow, the first rule of a good leader is to know oneself. “If you know yourself well, you’ll understand how and why people perceive you the way they do. This requires understanding your own behavioral style and the type of person you are emotionally. I am very comfortable talking to employees about my style

and their style. It’s not about “bad” or “good”... it’s about *different*,” says Strehlow.

In order to be effective, a leader must understand, relate to, and motivate every kind of person, on the employee’s level. “That doesn’t mean a manager must become a different style of person,” Strehlow says. “Rather, it’s about learning the skills to *lead* different styles. Mapping is a tool that helps us work better as a team.”

The best way to reduce employee turnover is to create an environment that fits each individual’s natural style and provides the fuel each person needs

for success. This requires finding out who one’s employees are, matching the right person with the right job, and finally, modifying one’s own behavior as a manager. The process starts with a decision to try something new and the willingness to get some outside help for the initial assessment and start-up phases. Once this approach takes hold, the changes become permanent. Why? Because everyone, from hourly employee to senior executive, wants the same thing: to become a more successful and effective person. Mapping is a powerfully direct set of tools that points the way there. ▼

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