

Data Point: Employee Development a Weakness in Many Nonprofits

The Bridgespan Group surveys many of its nonprofit clients to help them assess their organizational strengths and weaknesses. To date 131 organizations have taken Bridgespan’s Organization Diagnostic survey, which contains 73 statements across five categories of organizational effectiveness: leadership; decision-making and structure; people; work processes and systems; and culture. Respondents can “strongly agree” (4), “agree” (3), “disagree” (2), or “strongly disagree” (1) with each statement.

The average score across all statements is 2.92. Overall nonprofit organizations exhibit important strengths: leadership’s vision, having skilled and effective staff, and having an inspiring culture that promotes values and produces results. However, those very strengths are often undermined by what they consider to be their organizational weaknesses, which include their nonprofits’ ability to develop and build staff skills over time.

Specifically, three categories within the “People” section of the survey are among the top five organizational weaknesses noted by survey respondents (See chart, Top 5 Organizational Strengths and Weaknesses). When asked to consider the statement, “We help individuals develop to their full potential and provide opportunities for growth,” nonprofit organizations scored, on average, 2.78, suggesting that the nonprofit leaders and employees who took our survey saw their organizations as weak in their ability to develop employees and provide growth opportunities. Only 30 percent of the organizations surveyed considered it a relative strength (i.e., scored it higher than their overall average on the entire survey).

Similarly, when asked to consider the statement, “We have development plans for current and future leaders in our organization,” the average score was 2.40¹, almost 18 percent lower than the overall average, suggesting that respondents considered this a great weakness within their organizations. Only 6 percent of respondents felt it was an organizational strength.

As the survey responses suggest, nonprofit organizations feel that they have skilled and effective staff members; however, they feel challenged in their ability to offer development opportunities that could help ensure staff members’ successful futures within their organizations. Nonprofits that find ways to develop individuals’ skills are able to build on the strength of their people, and thereby strengthen the organization as a whole.

¹ N=66; this statement was only recently introduced to the Organization Diagnostic survey referenced in this article.

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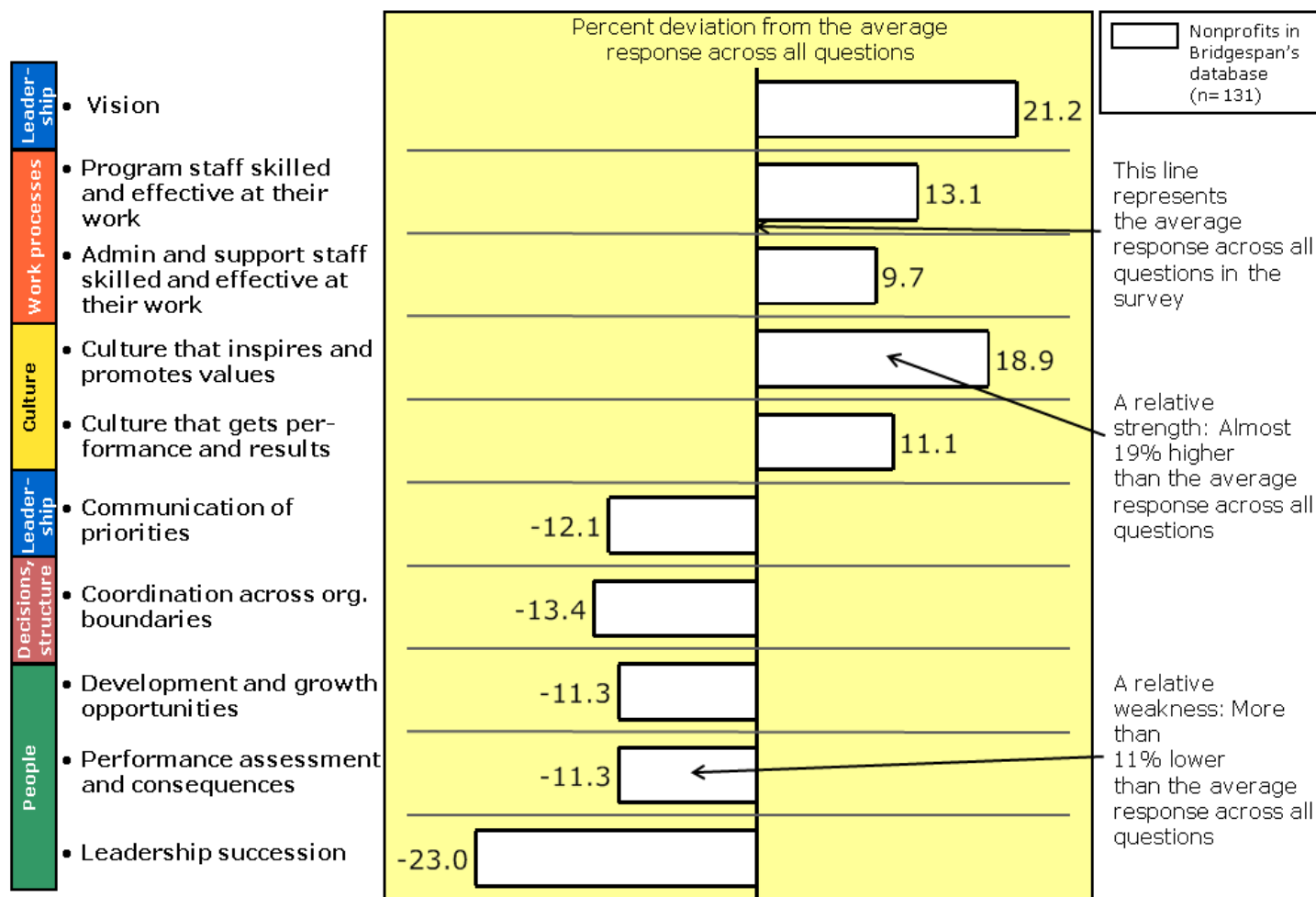
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Top 5 Organizational Strengths and Weaknesses



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