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Overcoming the Glass Ceiling through Leadership MASK Modeling

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ABSTRACT
In today’s global business environment, companies are seeking ways to evaluate the strengths and abilities of management candidates that can succeed in managing diverse workforces. Executives and senior managers recognize the problematic issue of women and minority’s inability to reach and maintain high level management and executive positions. This barrier commonly termed “The glass ceiling effect” systematically hinders the best and brightest from achieving top level positions while simultaneously lowers expectations of management candidates. This research establishes the Motivation, Attributes, Skills, Knowledge (MASK) model as the framework for baselining leadership behaviors and competencies for assessment. The MASK model provides companies leadership behavior indicators as predictors of potential leader performance. Additionally, the researchers validate how the MASK model allows organizations to break through the glass ceiling by identifying areas of training and improvement for potential management candidates.

Key Words: Leadership, Glass Ceiling, Motivation, Attribute, Skills, Knowledge
Introduction

Evidence suggests business leaders are seeking ways to staff their organizations with high quality leaders. However, little research exists concerning the effective assessment of high-potential leaders, and as a result little is known of the factors that influence their success. Identifying and developing high-potential leaders can present many challenges. This study consolidates and integrates existing literature on the assessment of leader behavior factors influencing the successful advancement of organizational leaders in order to establish a comprehensive assessment model. The Motivations, Attributes, Skills, Knowledge (MASK) model can be used as a criterion for selecting areas for training and development for future leaders, as it is aligned towards the realization of leader potential, thereby setting the stage for future research. This article postulates assessing the moral and negligent components associated with behavior awareness can enhance organizational success in selecting future leaders.

Need for the Study

In many organizations, it is difficult to determine which lower level employees or existing managers possess the ability to lead the organization in the future. Executives and senior managers struggle when attempting to hire new managers from outside the organization and are faced with difficult hiring or promotion decisions from inside the company. Although, lower level contenders display behaviors and leader competencies
that positively motivate other employees or coworkers in the establishment of an
attributive environment, hiring managers often overlook their potential by focusing solely
on what their resume tells them concerning the abilities these employees bring to the
organization. Muna (2011) argues companies that want to hire and develop people who
will become great multicultural leaders need to understand how to select, hire and
develop such people (90). It is safe to say that a complete and diverse understanding of
potential leaders is required as a baseline in the development of leaders.

Knowing the motivations, attributes, skills and knowledge of the individual would
help hiring managers make informed and confident decisions about leaders they would
like to advance and employ in leadership roles in the organization. Developing managers
from within is considerably less risky than bringing in managers from the outside. Solid
performers, which demonstrate leadership potential, require assessment to ensure they are
the right fit in positions of increased responsibility. Essentially, many good performers
find themselves promotion capped at a glass ceiling resultant from inadequate
performance assessments. Clearly then, a more accurate assessment will examine
conscious and unconscious behaviors that are potentially harmful to individuals as well as
the organization. The MASK model is designed to help organizations plan, measure,
improve, and increase accountability for the articulating leadership selection outcomes,
collecting data about these outcomes, and using the data to make and implement
informed operating decisions.
Background of the Problem

This study argues high-potential contenders often find moving up in the organization is limited due to glass ceilings created at top levels within the business. Since the early 1990s a great deal of literature has been devoted to understanding how the discriminatory barrier termed the “glass ceiling” affects individual advancement and organizational effectiveness. The U. S. Department of Labor’s Glass Ceiling Commission is generally credited with establishing glass ceiling research. The term “glass ceiling” is commonly used to describe the barriers preventing individuals from advancing into senior-level positions in organization (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001). Given a leader’s position of influence, it is equally important to understand the impact of leader behavior on glass ceiling effects within an organization. In order to improve leader behavior and advancement opportunities for all qualified employees, it is imperative to assess the current state of potential and existing leaders in the organization.

Businesses seeking to capitalize from its leadership outcomes and organizational goals must identify leaders most suitable for nurturing an attributive work environment. Accomplishing such tasks will require strategic assessment of destructive leader behaviors (DLB) that negatively affect leader value and constrain the advancement of high potentials, thereby creating a glass ceiling. Leaders play a significant role in transforming the workforce and increasing an organization’s competitive advantage. Today, more than ever before, businesses must take the necessary steps to increase their understanding of what high-potential leaders in the organization need to assist them as
they strive to ascend upper leadership ranks within the organization.

One means to achieving this is to assess whether their immediate supervisors or managers unfairly value the individual contributions of high-potential leaders (Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, & Jacobs, 2012). This research advocates the MASK model as an effective tool for assessing negative leader behavior indicators. Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad (2007) note:

Destructive leadership behavior is defined as the systemic and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization’s goals, task, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation , well-being or job satisfaction of his/her subordinates. (p. 207)

As indicated above, there is no question negative leader behaviors can lead to damaging individual and organizational outcomes. A major challenge for businesses is to find ways to build upon the contributions, skills, and abilities of high-potential individuals and existing leaders in the organization.

Building upon the motivations, attributes, skills, and abilities of high-potential leaders should begin with reviewing current organizational policies, practices, and systems. Doing so can help uncover elements in an organization’s culture and structure that result with intentional and unintentional exclusionary leader behavior. Stated differently, culture influences the behavior of members in an organization.
Economic uncertainty on both a national and global scale, competition, and a changing
demographic

workforce are forcing organizations to reconsider current organizational
strategies. In the current business environment, it is not enough for organizational
leaders to recognize and adapt to changing conditions. Leaders must be able to identify
and support the development of new leader talent in order to maximize the organizations
profitability.

Revered, is the highly esteemed nature of an attributive culture. Attributive
cultures can stimulate the behaviors needed to create extraordinarily integrative,
innovative, and harmonious organizations. The significance of exploring the glass ceiling
phenomenon within the contexts of organizational culture and leader behavior is
therefore vital to the removal of barriers constraining the advancement of high-potential
leaders in organizations. Hence, it is of significant importance to review the concept of
the MASK model framework.

Therefore, hiring managers in organizations should strive to position individuals
in leadership roles for success. By understanding the individual attributes that define each
employees leadership philosophy and style, the decision to differentiate between which of
the managers should be promoted to lead the organization would become much easier.
The main problem is that executives and other senior leaders find there are no assessment
tools available that accurately demonstrate performance based on individual attributes.
There are also no assessment models that leaders can turn to which helps hiring managers
or senior leaders determine if the managers have the potential for increased leadership positions and responsibility levels. By accurately assessing the potential leader, organizations can strategically place the manager to improve operational performance. This would also help leaders meet the emerging challenges of global organizations.

**Significance of the Study**

Why would any organization want to spend the time or money to measure leadership performance through some kind of assessment model? The answer is relatively simple; there is a direct correlation between leadership performance and performance indicators that serve as predictors of future leader performance. In particular, the MASK model developed by Stevens (2003) and further expanded on by Bellamy (2013) presents a model, which provides the ideal theoretical framework for adaptability of leadership behavior indicators relative to assessment of leadership performance. Additionally, the balanced scorecard (BSC) first introduced by Kaplan (1992) provides the principle measurement model to capture current or potential leader’s performance. It is best applied in organizations that are strategically focused.

Moreover, the development of a new approach to leadership assessment through the development of the Leadership Assessment Balanced Scorecard (LABSC) model provides motives attribute, skills, and knowledge based leadership assessment measured through a hybrid BSC model. By focusing on the MASK to provide assessment elements, the scorecard model provides behavior characteristics that other leadership measurement
tools do not consider. The LABSC assesses a leader’s knowledge base and behavior attributes. The scorecard also measures the potential manager’s skill base and motivations. The four MASK assessment areas provide hiring managers with a more comprehensive view of a potential leader’s overall capabilities. In addition, the MASK sub-elements provide for objective assessment and analysis of a leader’s competency level where other assessment tools do not.

**Purpose of Measuring Leadership Performance**

The MASK model is designed to measure individual performance within a whole person purview. Research into the assessment of personal leadership motives, attributes, skills and knowledge that contributes to building a leadership assessment is a balanced approach. It is balanced because it takes into account variables related to individual, organizational, social, business environment, global business, and day-to-day operational experience and personal leadership. In addition, the model targets organizations that are strategically focused (Bellamy, 2013, p. 96). The MASK is ideal for assessment to help leaders break through the glass ceiling as it identifies the qualities individuals bring to the organization. Eddy and Sears (2012) argue that both transactional and transformational leadership styles may be associated with a leader’s moral and ethical orientation (42). MASK model assessment identifies moral and ethical foundations within a leader’s character and forty eight other behavior elements.
Data Comparison

In (2000) Connelly, Gilbert, Zaccaro, Threlfall, Marks and Mumford explored the relationship of leadership skills and knowledge to leader performance. They found that the relationship of exogenous sets of variables related to problem solving, solution construction, knowledge structure and social judgment to leader achievement partially mediates the influence of cognitive ability, personality and motivational variables (p. 79). The results of Connelly et al, 2000 parallels results of Stevens (2003) and Bellamy (2013) using individual variables related to knowledge, skills, motivation and personal attributes. For example, Stevens (2013) demonstrated that environmental and cultural levels are important sequential to motivations-attribute-skills-knowledge competency cluster validation modeling (p. 82). Bellamy concludes that by targeting MASK elements that directly influence business performance, leaders can develop the skill and knowledge base strategically aligned to business strategies (p. 110).

Methodology

This study investigates the correlation of leadership performance indicators as predictors of future performance. Emphasis on leadership performance assessment and measurement is important to distinguish, therefore; for this study, the written survey provided a format that was suited for a series of close-ended questions that provided linkage to the relationship between leadership motivations, attributes, skills, and
knowledge. This survey was designed to capture the elements of Stevens’ (2003) model and performance improvement elements. The fundamental design issues that are applicable to the survey instrument are consistent with business and academic best practices for data reduction errors, cost reduction, timeliness for respondents, and timeliness for results analysis. The survey instrument in keeping with best practices includes using electronic distribution and delivery of surveys, deadlines for respondents to complete and return surveys, and milestones for data analysis completion. The written survey utilized to collect data addressed research questions.

This method was chosen to collect information for the study to allow for statistical comparison of leadership performance indicators. The survey instrument was based on criteria developed from literature review analysis. This analysis provided information for the research questions and hypothesis formation. Substantive research question inquiry provided consistent response data that tended to be uniform. The framework for the survey instrument was drawn from designs gleaned from other survey instruments using Likert scales. This best practice assisted with developing a survey instrument, with professional design, formatting, and content.

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**Summary of Findings**

The correlation analysis in this study clearly demonstrates that each of the MASK elements provides the correct evaluation of performance. Every element has sub-elements that are flexible, fitting each organization and business environment. When correlated with leadership improvement elements, a leader’s opinion concerning the motives, personal attributes, skill set and knowledge requirements become clear.
Assessment of these individual sub-elements is important to establish which behaviors drive performance of managers in organizations. Within the context of measuring individual performance, respondents differentiate the exact MASK sub-elements that clearly demonstrate ranking of those which are closely aligns to leadership performance. Correlation testing demonstrated, measuring managers’ opinions concerning what they believe is required for managers’ helps to establish a new approach to leadership assessment.

Testing revealed that each sub-element under the MASK model primary element and sub-elements under the leadership performance improvement primary element correlated to a 1. These correlations are very strong indicators of the linear relationships which align all of these sub-elements. Considering the positive strength of these relationships, it follows that each of these variables has maximum correlation to each other. This fact is important to forming a new assessment model. The product of this study, a Leadership Assessment Balanced Scorecard (LABSC) takes advantage of the magnitude of these correlation strengths by assessing a leader’s performance utilizing these sub-elements. The motives, attributes, skills and knowledge sections below outline specific conclusions, discussion and implications of the findings.

Conclusion

One conclusion that demonstrates the effectiveness of the MASK model in supporting leaders as they work to break through the glass ceiling their organization is the adaptability of the model. The MASK supports all organizational structures because it is
a common tool for assessing “whole person” performance.

The model can be adapted for all employees’ not just organizational leaders. In today’s business environment it is important that all employees sharpen their global business awareness. Understanding a company’s business model, customer needs, financial relationships and comprehending the business sustainability practices all rated valuable as predictors of future leader performance (Bellamy, 2013, p. 126). Lower level employees and especially business leaders require assessment of their knowledge and skills in their area.

Useem (2010) contends that businesses need to build a culture of readiness and commitment. Business leaders need just such a culture to survive and succeed, given that they, too, face unprecedented uncertainty-and new types of competitors (p. 87). Leaders that want to break through the glass ceiling must arm themselves with the correct motivation, personal attributes, skills and knowledge to help their company build a culture of readiness. A part of a culture of readiness is assessing performance skills in areas such as strategic thinking. Useem (2010) argues that leader’s sharpen their strategic thinking by witnessing how others exercised theirs during moments of great significance (p. 90). Overall, assessing performance using the MASK model provides leaders measurement over 50 performance elements.

Leaders can work to improve the areas that require development and continue to strengthen areas that serve as individual strengths. Taking the whole person purview,
business leaders must be cognizant of behavior factors whether intentional or
unintentional that guide leader behavior in the organization that alternatively affect
others. Increased focus should be given in assessing unfavorable work-related behaviors.

According to Einarsen et al, (2007) research on destructive leader behaviors, there
are several forms of leader behavior destructive to individuals and the organization. In a
related study, Thoroughgood et al, (2012) found at the personal level, destructive leader
behaviors range from ignoring, excluding, belittling, undermining integrity, questioning
judgment, public humiliation, ridiculing or insulting, threatening, attacking beliefs,
attitudes, lifestyle, and appearance, to displays of persistent public criticism, intimidation,
and condescending others.

In the same way, intruding on ones privacy, making inaccurate accusations,
encouraging guilt and verbally abusing others carry comparable harmful benefits for all
involved stakeholders. In that case, measuring work related leader behaviors detrimental
to the advancement of high-potential leaders is vital to leader behavior assessment. In this
right, particular interest should be given to uncovering behaviors that pose significant
challenges to the overall effectiveness of staff members such as undervaluing the
contributions of others. These actions tend to create environments conducive to failure
and unmerited glass ceiling.
References


