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IMPROVING YOUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PERFORMANCE THROUGH A SKILLS INVENTORY AND SKILLS MATRIX©

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Economic Developers, whether recruiting new companies or supporting existing companies, understand the importance of the presence of a skilled workforce. Certainly, Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) hire staff with the skills and proficiency commensurate with the requirements of their positions and job descriptions. This also assures that an EDO has all of the assets it needs to successfully carry out its responsibilities. But do EDOs dig as deeply into identifying and understanding “hidden” skills and talents of their team members as they would in identifying workforce strengths and weaknesses in their area? Assessing these skills provides a measure of effectiveness and proficiency in the EDO staff, identifies areas in need of improvement, and highlights opportunities to expand the effectiveness and efficiency of the EDO and its collective and individual staff. An effective tool for gaining this valuable knowledge is performing a skills inventory and developing a Skills Matrix©.

A skills inventory with accompanying Skills Matrix© is a great tool for those leading an EDO. A Skills Matrix© is a tool that helps assess your team’s ability to perform its duties.

An Effective Skills Matrix©:

- **Is simple to use and apply**
- **Is periodically updated (Every 1 – 2 years)**
- **Rates the skill levels of each employee across various job parameters**
- **Provides guidelines for what it takes to reach the next level**

- **Clearly identifies your team's strengths and where there are weaknesses or gaps**
- **Helps identify areas where development or training may be needed**
- **Assists in assigning work based on the criticality of the task**
- **Helps you make employee development decisions**

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Members of staff are usually hired for specific positions with specific duties and responsibilities requiring knowledge, experience and skills applicable to those positions. BUT! What if you could not only assess the skills held by each person in your team possessed germane to their title and duties; but could also identify and assess "hidden" skills that might strengthen and improve the EDO and its efforts?

The Skills Matrix© is intended to show trends against a common evaluation scale so that completely unbiased scoring of each skill is less important than uncovering trends, strengths and weaknesses within and across the team. The overriding goal of the skills inventory and matrix is to more effectively improve overall team and individual staff member "output" through the skills they possess.

Methodology

SHEDC developed a four-step method and process for the identifying skills possessed within the team, scoring levels of skills expertise for each individual, evaluating those skills individually and across the team, confirming accuracy and validity of input from individuals and reporting through a Skills Matrix© format. The process is highly collaborative with each member of staff contributing to their individual skills inventory and evaluation. The steps are:

1. Collection and review of resumes provided by each team member. The review intended to do preliminary skills evaluation and to define skills categories and individual skills to be included in a draft matrix.
2. Request that each individual team member score individual skills from the draft matrix against a standard ranking system;

Ranking System:		
Score	Skill Level	Description
5	Expert	- Fully capable and experienced - Sought for help by other departments - Needs no assistance to complete tasks - Demonstrated ability to lead and train others - Seen as a Subject Matter Expert
4	Proficient	- Capable and experienced - Demonstrated proficiency - Able to work independently with little help - Will be Expert with more time
3	Demonstrating	- Able to perform at a basic level - Has some direct experience - Needs help from time to time
2	Basic	- Limited in ability or knowledge - Cannot perform for critical tasks - Needs significant help from others
1	None/Low	- Unable to perform - Little to no experience

3. Create and administer an on-line survey to uncover hidden skills not on the draft matrix as well as background history on previous employment and experiences which may have provided with the individual with additional skills valuable to the team.
4. Conduct interviews with team members in order to probe deeper into responses, to validate that responses accurately reflect the levels of skills and expertise as well as to clarify other information provided from Steps 1-3.

There are 4 main groupings of skills that these steps are intended to uncover:

- **Professional Skills**
- **Software/Web/Social Media Skills**
- **Creative Skills**
- **Miscellaneous Skills** (as identified and defined from Methodology Steps 1 and 2)

Assessment of more detailed individual skills which fall under these category headings provide a deep understanding of how individuals contribute to the overall team now and how they might provide further value to the EDO through utilization of their "hidden" skills. For example, in a recent skills inventory/matrix evaluation for a large municipal EDO, it was identified that the staff member responsible for BRE, under the "Creative Skills" category, was a talented amateur photographer. The level of her skill and expertise in this area was not known or fully appreciated by the EDO management. Knowing that this skill existed and allowing that staff member to provide photographic services within the context of her employment created a winning situation for the EDO and the employee. Allowing revealed talents and skills to be provided by team members does wonders for staff morale and the effectiveness of an organization's economic development efforts.

Understanding the skills of the EDO team, individually and collectively, through a simple but effective methodology provides for continuous improvement of the team and its members and results in a more effective organization. Consider employing a skills inventory and Skills Matrix© for your EDO; it's a great way to boost effectiveness and morale and to become a true model of how economic development is delivered.

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