

The Performance Conundrum: Getting the Right People On the Bus through Performance Forecasting

by Michael Lombardo and Mari Martin

“We must reject the idea—well intentioned, but dead wrong—that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become more like a business.”

—JIM COLLINS, AUTHOR, *GOOD TO GREAT AND THE SOCIAL SECTORS: A MONOGRAPH TO ACCOMPANY GOOD TO GREAT*

For those who attended the plenary session at ICMA’s 2006 annual conference in San Antonio, Texas, these words from conference keynoter and author Jim Collins provided solemn comfort in an era of beleaguered budgets and the hue and cry to run your city “more like a business.” In fact, it may not be correct to presume a strong correlation between business and local government practices and that businesses by and large are run effectively. As Collins points out, “many widely practiced business norms turn out to correlate with mediocrity, not greatness.”

The primary purpose of this article is to focus on one key principle of Collins’s that distinguishes great from good organizations—getting the right people on the bus and in the right seats on the bus. Leadership is more than developing annual business objectives and getting your people to buy in to those. Collins determined that *Good to Great* executives did not focus first on where to drive the bus and then get people to take it there, but rather they “first got the right people

on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) . . . a very simple idea to grasp, but a very difficult idea to do—and most don't do it well.”

Why don't we do it well? There are several reasons, but a significant reason is found in the hiring process itself. Many, if not most, managers make their final hiring decision based on the interview. During the interview, you internalize how a potential candidate relates to you, how the candidate responds under pressure to the various situations you present, and the overall response that you want or don't want to hear to the interview questions.

This statistic may be startling to some, but research shows us that the interview predicts performance only 14 percent of the time. Essentially, based on the interview alone, you have a low probability of selecting an employee who will become competent and productive in the position for which the employee was hired.

All managers would love to find the secret to always making the right hiring decisions and team assignments. Obviously, there is no silver bullet, and most managers have the scars to prove it. So, what could help improve that percentage? Some psychological testing tools can be helpful. But historically, these tools have focused on measuring only two of the three parts of the mind, the affective (feeling) and the cognitive (thinking) aspects, and only moderately raise the likelihood of a successful hire.

In small companies and most local governments, each new hire makes a significant impact on the organization as a whole. The adage “you become who you hire” should ring loudly for managers seeking to fill key positions. Although no perfect method exists for hiring the right person, additional tools can be used in conjunction with other traditional methods to improve the likelihood of finding the right person for the job. What has been missing is a tool that measures the third, and perhaps the most elusive, component of the mind—the conative (pronounced *kōn ə tiv*), or instinctive, part.

In its simplest form, conation is our purposeful intention to act. It

Best Predictors of Job Performance

Kolbe A index	.82
Psychological testing score	.53
Biographical data	.37
Reference checks	.26
Education	.22
Interviews	.14
College grades	.11
Interest	.10
Age	-.01

Source: John E. Hunter and Ronda F. Hunter, “Validity and Utility of Alternative Predictors of Job Performance,” *Psychological Bulletin* 96, no. 1 (1984): 90. (Note: Source does not include data on Kolbe A index.)

is the innate mode and method by which we strive toward a goal and our intrinsic knack for getting things done. It is separate from a person's intelligence or personality type. Now there is a valid and reliable way to measure this missing dimension.

Kathy Kolbe of Kolbe Corporation developed the Kolbe Method of performance forecasting. The Kolbe Method is a statistically valid process to provide reliable information on how people will take action and become engaged in their work. Job performance predictions based on using Kolbe A Index with the Kolbe Right-Fit™ selection system have a high correlation, 82 percent, with actual on-the-job success. This is based on a meta-analysis conducted by Dr. Ryan Thomas, president, College of Eastern Utah, of the cross-industry studies conducted by Kolbe Corporation.

The foundation of the system comprises three Kolbe indexes: the Kolbe A™ index, the Kolbe B™ index, and the Kolbe C™ index. It is called the A/B/C approach.

The Kolbe A assessment is taken by an individual and provides a common vocabulary for understanding, using, and managing a person's striving instincts. It describes the person's innate or instinctive method of operation and approach to creative problem solving. It is an index, not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Each of the results provides for contributions that are essential for organizations to succeed and establishes a common language to communicate with others more effectively.

Affective or emotional IQ tools will describe the adjectives about a person, for instance, sincere, kind, social, and sensitive. Kolbe A, in contrast,

Kolbe A index	An assessment instrument designed by Kathy Kolbe that quantifies the degree of natural talent an individual possesses in each of four Action Modes™ and three Zones of Operation.
Kolbe B index	An assessment instrument that measures self perceptions of job requirements.
Kolbe C index	An assessment instrument that indicates the conative requirements for success in a job as described by any third party, frequently a supervisor.

describes the *verbs* about a person. To understand how an individual engages in work, you must know that individual's instincts.

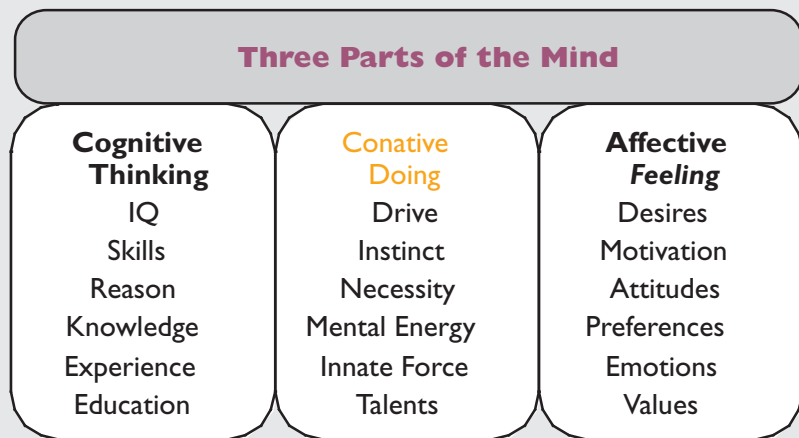
Assessing and understanding the striving instincts of all employees will create a less stressful work environment in which the manager and the employee are more satisfied and more productive. It will maximize the talents of the team members, and it provides for higher levels of enthusiasm and personal job satisfaction.

Such an assessment predicts how team members will engage in projects, assignments, teamwork, and required tasks, so a manager has an understanding of why a project worked or not. By using Kolbe, you will also understand who should work together on specific projects and when a combination could predict disaster.

Unlike cognitive and social style instruments, which vary over time, the Kolbe A provides the individual and the organization with reliable information about what is innate and, therefore, unlikely to change. This gives us new insight into individual and team performance because it is a measure of consistent, authentic, and sustainable talents.

When people get the results back, they are amazed at the accuracy. As Kolbe results are shared with individuals and organizations, three things are commonly heard:

Figure 1. Divisions of the Mind.



1. This is an extremely accurate representation of the way I operate. You have nailed it!
2. I always knew this about myself, but I didn't have this vocabulary for sharing my talents with others.
3. This is extremely relevant to my work. This describes exactly the situations we deal with in our organization. You've simplified our issues, and now we know how to manage them.

So what is Kolbe A? It is a series of simple questions and answers condensed in a Microsoft Windows®-based software program that captures and isolates the conative part of the mind into four Action Modes and

three Zones of Operation. The Action Modes are:

Each person has levels (rated on a 1 to 10 scale) at which they will use each of the four Action Modes. These Zones of Operation indicate the perspective through which a person naturally uses a zone. They are:

- **Prevent** (1 to 3 on the index): how you won't act or how you will prevent problems.
- **Respond** (4 to 6): how you are willing to act or respond to opportunities.
- **Initiate** (7 to 10): how you will act or initiate solutions.

Using the Kolbe Method, people are often referred to by their Action Mode numbers; each of us has four numbers—one in each Action Mode—that allow us to do our best and most creative work. The four modes together form a specific mode of operation called your Natural Advantage.™ There is no "can't" in conation. We can solve problems using any of the 12 methods. Acting in line with your Natural Advantage, however, allows you to do your most creative and productive work.

We will instinctively begin the creative problem-solving process using our most insistent mode of initiation. If your results were 7-2-8-3, for instance, your Natural Advantage is referred to as Entrepreneur, which means you initiate in Fact Finding

Fact Finder	Measures the probing instinct—the way we gather information—leads to actions where we will research, analyze, review, justify, study, debate, assess, prove, detail, and document.
Follow Thru	The patterning instinct—the way we organize—leads to actions where we will create a sense of order, develop structure, organize, plan, coordinate, arrange, and complete.
Quick Start	The innovating instinct—the way we deal with time and uncertainty—leads to actions where we will experiment, deviate, change, invent, risk, short cut, originate, brainstorm, challenge, and transform.
Implementor	The demonstrating instinct—the way we seek tangible solutions—leads to actions where we will fix, repair, transport, display, show, build, construct, practice, put together, and use physical effort.

	Fact Finder	Follow Thru	Quick Start	Implementor
Prevent	Simplify	Adapt	Stabilize	Imagine
Respond	Explain	Maintain	Modify	Restore
Initiate	Specify	Classify	Improvise	Build

Kolbe A Index Results Summary



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(7), you prevent in Follow Thru (2), initiate in Quick Start (8), and prevent in Implementor (3). This entrepreneur leads with the innovating instinct strongly influenced by the probing instinct.

A person with the Natural Advantage of entrepreneur prevents getting boxed in by staying open to alternatives. This person's ability to adapt to plans helps take advantage of opportunities. This person is challenged by immediate deadlines, thrives on suspenseful situations, and runs toward complex perplexities. The Fact Finder strength makes sure that time is not being wasted on low-priority tasks.

This is a person who fits best in a role where brainstorming is the norm, initiating change is expected, calculating risks a daily proposition, and data and research expected. The entrepreneur works best when it's not necessary to follow a routine, when the day is sporadic and varied, and when the person can work outside of stringent guidelines.

The Kolbe A results include 14 pages of detailed analysis on a particular profile designed to enlighten the individual and allow managers to better understand employees both individually and in working with others in a team environment.

The Kolbe B assessment is taken by the individual and defines what that person perceives as current demands of the job. This tool helps the individual, the manager, and the team member or coworkers understand the perceived talents necessary to do the job. Again, there are no right or wrong answers.

The A result and the B result can be compared and the similarities and differences can be immediately identified. When differences occur, it helps to recognize when job demands are counter to the instinctive talent of the job holder, and the level of stress this can cause. Kolbe, in this regard, is a coaching system and provides prescriptions and recommendations to relieve this stress.

The Kolbe C index is an assessment that is taken by the immediate manager but can also be completed by others

who have the knowledge and understanding of the requirements of the job role. This tool helps the immediate manager fully understand the requirements for successful performance in a certain job. It identifies the characteristics needed for success from the point of view of the manager.





The Kolbe A result and C result are compared to identify the similarities and differences in how the person is instinctively performing and how close those results are to the manager's requirements. Here too, large differences between the Kolbe A results and Kolbe C results can lead to points of stress, frustration, and lost productivity. The B and C results are compared to identify whether the individual and the manager are viewing the role in the same way.

Contemplate for a moment the following results from a human resources director.

Notice that in two of the four Action Modes the employee is experiencing stress (a difference of four or more in any mode indicates real stress on the job). The employee—the director of human resources who is developing a policies and procedures manual for the human resources department—knows that right now the task is to build some consistencies and structure within the organization. The HR director must be consistent in dealing with employee issues, but the director's personal instincts prevent that. So this specific task is antithetical to the instincts of the director.

Natural Strengths

You have a natural strength in each Action Mode that helps you make better decisions

Action Modes	Best way of gathering/sharing information	Best way of sorting/storing information	Best way of dealing with risks/unknowns	Best way of handling space/tangibles
Fact Finder 	Specifying. For instance, you might: Research in-depth Establish specific priorities Quantify/rank order particulars Define objectives Assess probabilities Define terms with exactness Determine appropriateness Provide historical evidence Create analogies Develop complex strategies	Adapting. For instance, you might: Create shortcuts Revise approaches Thrive on interruptions Diversify Switch tasks frequently Be flexible Decentralize efforts Vary approaches Do several things at once Keep everything accessible Find ways around problems	Improvising. For instance, you might: Create a sense of urgency Initiate change Improvise solutions Promote experimentation Negotiate shortcuts Initiate innovation Originate options Generate slogans Defy the odds Ad lib stories and presentations	Imagining. For instance, you might: Create abstract images Conceptualize solutions Envision circumstances Capture the essence Symbolically portray Find intangible methods Create temporary files Mass produce Deal with abstractions Concoct out of thin air
Follow Thru 				
Quick Start 				
Implementor 				

Learned behaviors can mask natural strengths

This director currently is not making a best effort, and in fact, the director senses that best efforts are not required now. The project is also taking much longer to complete than it should (one of the symptoms of

someone working against the grain is procrastination.) This HR director thus seeks to prevent changes, new approaches, and innovative ideas, not initiate them.

Now compare the results of Kolbe B and Kolbe C. The HR director and the director's manager have similar expectations regarding the requirements of the position, so there would not be stressors related to a difference of expectations. However, the HR director's talents and instincts do not line up well with the requirements of the position, and both the HR director and the director's manager know this. Actually, the role has shifted over time, and new expectations have been focused around creating policies and procedures for a consistent human resources operating system.

This is not to say that the HR director was incapable of doing the job. In-



Case Study: Allegan County, Michigan

As Allegan County administrator, I realized that each of the 12 department directors had natural strengths and abilities that contributed to their personal success and to the success of the organization as a whole. Silo mentalities cropped up from time to time, however, and tension between departments and among the department directors proved to be a stumbling block to policy and procedural changes and creating a fluid work environment. There also was mounting frustration between me and members of the management team that was difficult to diagnose. That is, until we discovered and completed the Kolbe A index.

The results of the assessments revealed that seven members of the team had a Natural Advantage profile of strategic planner—they initiated with the probing instinct (red) followed by a strong patterning instinct (blue). These individuals were accustomed to collecting a lot of data and information, with a high degree of precision and detail. They asked questions frequently and thoroughly and made certain that errors were kept to an absolute minimum.

Their strength in Follow Thru meant that they expected to develop detailed, step-by-step plans for problem solving, worked best when handling tasks one at a time with few revisions to the process, and expected to follow standard methods to complete tasks. Needless to say, these department directors were on the same page a majority of the time. Let me also point out that six out of seven of these individuals had a prevent (1 to 3) Action Mode for Quick Start (green).

The rest of the team rounded out with two researchers (they were initiating Fact Finders [all red]) and either response or prevent Action Mode for the other three categories. Two team members were mediators; they were in response mode to all four Action Modes.

And, finally, there was one systems analyst, similar in many ways to the strategic planners in the group but more prone to initiate with Follow Thru than Fact Finding. This individual also had a prevent Action Mode in Quick Start. Oh, and my Natural Advantage profile was that of entrepreneur (described in the article).

Once the results of our individual assessments were complete and the results were in, we held a day-long retreat where we had the opportunity to learn each others' profiles and talk about what this meant in terms of self-evaluation as well as team dynamics. With 11 of 13 of us initiating Fact Finders, collecting data and information and expectation for accuracy were not much of a problem, although one individual was extremely long (9) in red and at times required significantly more data and facts as part of the problem-solving process than other members of the team.

Another revelation was that eight of the department directors were short (1 to 3) in green (Quick Start) and long in blue (Follow Thru). With an initiating Quick Start of 8, I was willing to experiment and welcomed midcourse corrections as soon as we realized something was not working as expected.

Most of my staff, however, was more resistant to sudden changes and reluctant to abandon a plan or process until it was followed through to the end. One of the biggest "aha" moments came when we were discussing a recent project on which several of the department directors and their staff had been working. There came a point in implementation where I and many of the team members realized that the process was not heading in the direction we had hoped for and that we needed to shift direction. A few took this to mean that I did not trust their work and was being critical, although this was very far from the truth.

Using a cooking analogy and providing a common ground outside of a work example for dialogue, I asked them to take a moment to describe the process they use to cook. It didn't take a lot of thinking for them to launch into a detailed explanation about measuring the ingredients and following the recipe step by step. Satisfied that the meal was on the table, they looked back at me as if to say "okay mister . . . how do you do it?" I smiled and said, "For me, there is no recipe!" They looked on in astonishment as I explained that for me the recipe was a guideline; the quantity of a particular ingredient was based on individual taste and preference and to varying degrees many ingredients were interchangeable (if you didn't have broccoli maybe green beans would do).

The important discovery was that each of us takes a different set of instincts and innate traits with them to the workplace. These instincts and traits influence job satisfaction and create differences in problem solving that influence team dynamics and cause potential communication problems. Kolbe A provided a deeper understanding of our distinct modes of operations and common vocabulary for understanding the differences. As a result, project planning became more fluid, communication problems diminished, and a more cooperative work environment ensued. When Kolbe A is matched with Kolbe B and Kolbe C, even greater progress can be made.

As an aside, Kolbe A also provides the same type of "aha" discoveries in the home environment.

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stead, in attempting to meet job expectations, the HR director was working against personal, natural advantages. The stress and frustration would not likely diminish unless the demands of the job changed or certain tasks could be delegated to someone else.

These comparisons provide an objective tool to enhance dialog, provide clear expectations for performance, and make giving and receiving feedback a more useful way to ultimately improve performance. In the prior example, the HR director used the Kolbe A index to identify other professions that were innately more suitable, and changed careers. (The former HR director currently is a success as the executive director in a large continuum of care organization.) In addition, the manager of the HR director was able to use Kolbe as part of the recruitment process to identify candidates whose natural advantage was well suited to the current role expectations.

It's no secret that our organizations are going through dramatic changes, and the jobs that people do are constantly evolving. More often, we move people from project to project and create teams to tackle increasingly complex issues. Because budgets are tight and our customers demand more innovation, higher quality of service, and shorter cycle times at lower costs, individuals and teams must complete their work and meet expectations in a compressed time line.

Getting the right people on the bus and in the right seats has become mission critical to effective service delivery. Collectively, the Kolbe Method provides simple, easy-to-use tools to build a workforce that is engaged and energized. Most organizations spend their time and resources training employees to do what they instinctively will not do.

A far better strategy is to identify what people will or would be willing to do and then make certain they spend a considerable portion of their time doing those things. With a validity of 82 percent in predicting job performance, perhaps this is the elusive missing link in "getting the right people on the bus and in the right seats!" **PM**

The Ottawa County Experience

When Al Vanderberg became county administrator of Ottawa County, Michigan, in December 2003, he inherited an executive team of seven. Some of these individuals embraced change and others were reluctant, claiming that the executive team had already looked at all possible ways to deliver services. Noting disconnects with staff and a chasm between the change and nonchange elements, Vanderberg hired Performance Strategies Group, Inc., to evaluate the executive team.

Not surprisingly, the results indicated that four members of the group have strong green or Quick Start characteristics and the other four members had very low green characteristics. That explained the inclination for change for some and the aversion to change for others. In fact, an average difference of four gradations between the change and nonchange elements showed that the nonchange elements are instinctually wired to resist change.

All eight members of the team have strong Fact-Finding scores, and that became the safe zone for communication among team members. If facts warrant that change should be pursued, the nonchange element acquiesces. If facts dictate that the current state should be maintained, the change agents stay put.

Within departments, Kolbe has provided managers with a management tool and valuable insights into the innate communication and work styles of employees, which has allowed for tailoring and customization of communications, coaching, and work directives. The county has experienced reduced turnover, improved workflow, and enhanced setting of expectations between manager and employees in one department.

Kolbe has also been used in the hiring process for four executive-level positions during the past year and a half. Using the Kolbe system in conjunction with typical hiring procedures and psychological testing has provided valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of candidates as well as refined the projection as to their fit with the management team and the organization. Each of these hires has resulted in successful transitions for the county.

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