

2010 Singapore Non-Profit Capability Survey



Singapore's NPO leaders rate their organizations as "average to good" but seek the help of corporations in a key "weak" area of cultivating talent

Singapore's non-profit leaders give themselves good marks over a range of performance-effectiveness indicators—especially those involving the clarity of their vision and the value of the metric systems by which they measure success. Yet their self-perceptions significantly lag behind those of heads of other non-profit organizations (NPOs) worldwide in such other key elements as leadership, organizational structure, decision-making processes and culture. Singapore's NPO leaders rank their performance in these areas as "average," compared with a self-assessment of "strong" by peers in other nations. But they are the most self-critical about their ability to attract, develop and retain talent, viewing those capabilities as borderline "weak."

Indeed, most respondents in a recent sector survey—95 percent of whom were either NPO board members or executives—indicate that fixing talent problems is paramount for their future success: 50 percent of respondents say that they cannot attract high-quality talent, 40 percent say that they cannot retain talent and 50 percent say that they don't have a succession plan for key leadership positions.

These findings emerged from a survey of Singapore NPO leaders run jointly by three entities closely involved in assisting this growing sector: Bain Cares, the Singapore non-profit arm of worldwide consultancy Bain & Company; the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC); and the Centre for Non Profit Leadership (CNPL), whose mission is to nurture leadership capability in the non-profit sector.

Called the 2010 Singapore Non-Profit Capability Survey, this fact-finding effort aims to understand how Singapore NPOs can improve their efficiency in meeting some of the nation's most pressing social needs. The comparisons come against a similar opinion survey of 235 NPO leaders conducted by The Bridgespan Group, the independent worldwide non-profit consultancy founded by Bain a decade ago.

Here are the highlights of the Singapore survey results:

In acknowledging their talent issues, Singapore's NPO leaders were also explicit about where they could find help and support. As one survey respondent commented, "Corporations can help

non-profits by offering training workshops and personnel with specific and relevant expertise in managing talent.” Another wrote, “Companies should provide scholarships for staff development on specialized areas of study to help non-profits.”

Matching qualified talent with a growing need

How pervasive is this feeling of a significant lack of talent-management skills? As would be ex-

pected, fully 70 percent of respondents say “funding” is their Number One problem. But just beneath that ranking was “Organization Talent and Capabilities.” Sixty-four percent of Singapore’s NPO leaders checked this off as their most pressing need.

“Today’s talent situation among NPOs could be a reflection of two different challenges,” commented NVPC CEO Laurence Lien. “On the supply side, you have generations of Singaporeans

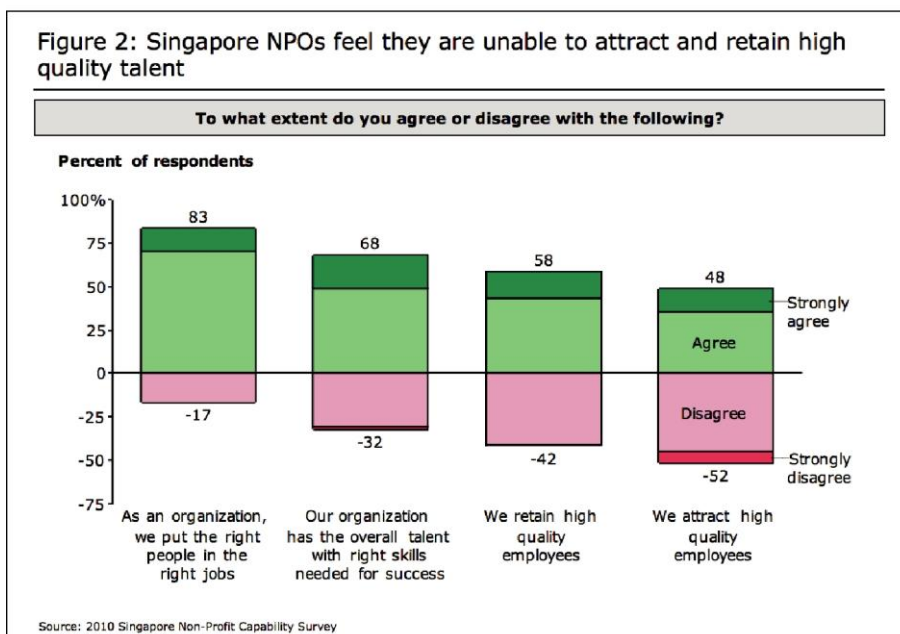
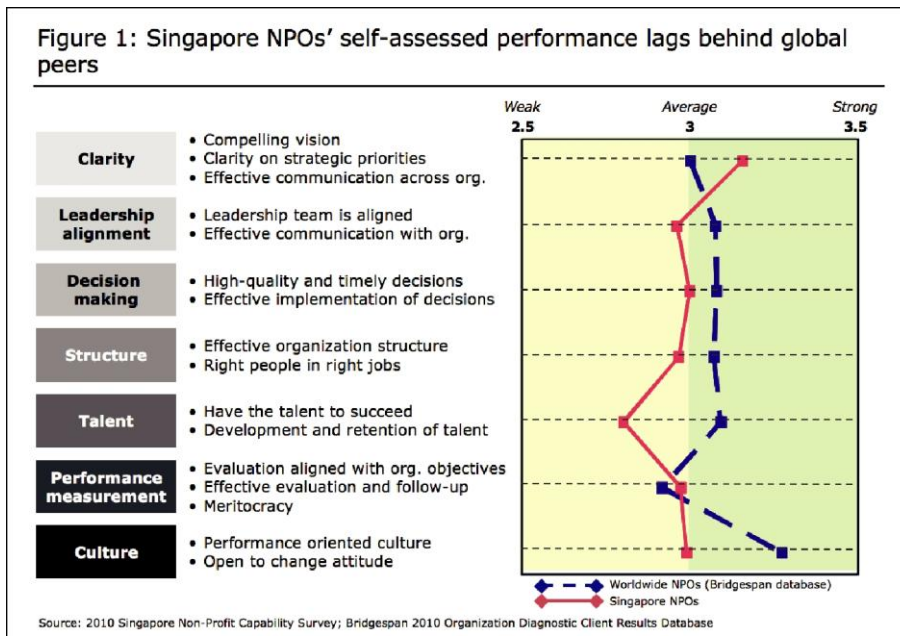
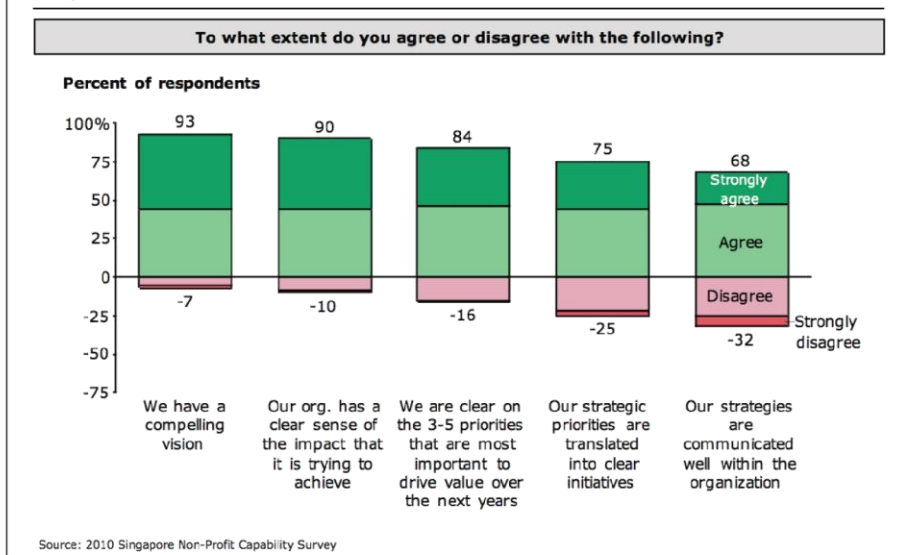


Figure 3: NPOs say that their vision is compelling, but they can use some help in communication skills



in the early post-independence years of the nation who had plenty of opportunities in the private and public sectors, and saw their careers there. NPOs ranked quite low in their choice of employers. On the demand side, there's a sense that NPOs can do a better job of communicating their vision and providing a compelling proposition for young talent to join their ranks. But with the country's standard of living significantly higher now, we're seeing younger Singaporeans saying they want to have a deeper impact for good on the community."

Most Singapore NPO leaders say they fall short in the areas of attracting and retaining high-quality talent. The survey responses reflect this view, with 52 percent indicating they cannot interest the best talent and 42 percent saying they can't keep it. Nevertheless, 83 percent of respondents agree with the statement that "as an organization, we put the right people in the right jobs."

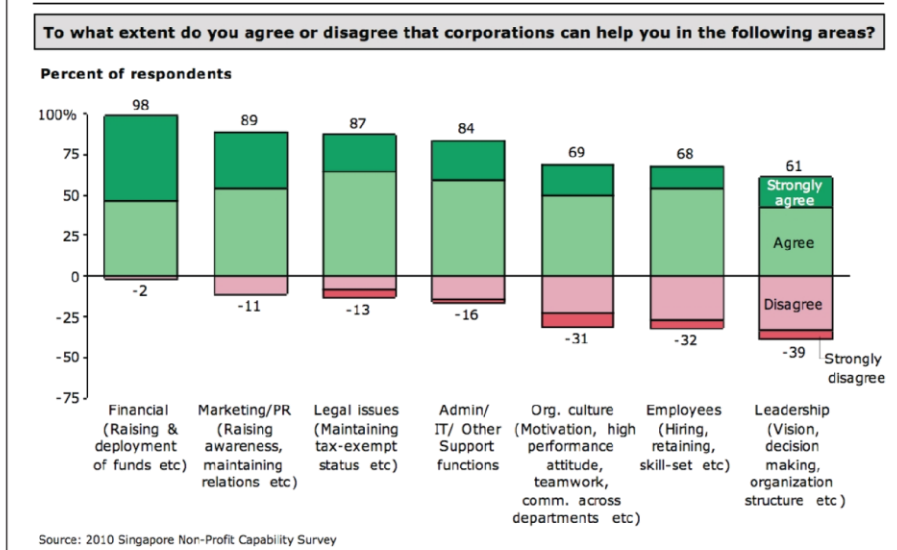
This perceived talent-management weakness, however, was more than balanced by leaders' strong ratings of their capabilities under the heading of "clarity," which was actually significantly greater than their global peers. In other words, Singapore's NPOs are confident in and crystal clear about their mission.

Indeed, they give themselves their only assessment of "strong" in their abilities to articulate a compelling vision, consolidate agreement on strategic priorities and broadcast effective communications across the organization. And in specific findings, the overwhelming majority of respondents feel their organizations have both a compelling vision and a clear sense of the impact they are trying to achieve—93 percent and 90 percent, respectively.

But once again, NPO leaders report they can use the help of corporations in making things happen—not only to hone their communications capabilities but improve their fund-raising and strategy expertise.

It is in just this arena that Bain Cares and CNPL—Centre for Non-Profit Leadership—play a role. CNPL, with its focus on advocating planned leadership and nurturing leadership capability, has brought together expertise and leadership experience from the corporate world to the non-profit sector. Through Board Match, CNPL has since matched 84 qualified individuals—23 in 2009 and 61 last year—to the boards of various non-profit bodies.

Figure 4: NPOs feel that corporations can help in funding and developing functional skills



Bain Cares is entering its third year of serving the Singapore community through such activities as executive training seminars for non-profit organizations, pro bono work and officewide volunteering. This past October, it concluded a year-long series of executive training workshops for CNPL to help leaders of such NPOs as the Red Cross Society and Lien Centre for Social Innovation in thinking strategically, improving their decision-making processes and boosting their organizational effectiveness.

“The Bain Cares-CNPL Executive Training Series reaches some 100 non-profit leaders annually,” notes Seow-Chien Chew, Bain partner and leader of Bain Cares in Southeast Asia. “And it has the capacity to grow. This program creates a ‘mul-

tiplier effect’ in the non-profit community—we are able to equip many NPO leaders with the key leadership and management tools that we hope will help them manage their organizations more effectively.”

“There is clearly a great opportunity to better match companies’ desire to contribute to our community with NPOs’ call for help in solving their leadership and talent challenges,” said Francis Wong, CEO of CNPL. “Bain’s facilitation of the executive training workshops is just one example of an effective way to bridge companies and non-profit organizations. But we are hoping that this survey will help lead to even greater collaboration between the non-profit and private sectors.”

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