

Selection – the Obama effect

Before he makes a single policy decision as President, Barack Obama has already influenced the world stage. His “soaring poetry” and “inspirational speeches” as critics have described them, have brought a new angle to debates around political leadership style and quality. Assuming he is successful in office, the “How he does it” and the “Do it the Obama way” books look sure to follow.

So why is this relevant to selection? Well business has a strong record of following trends and looking for qualities in its own leaders that reflect current success stories in the media: remember the Jack Welch approach and Level 5 leadership? Whilst this is not entirely wrong, it is somewhat simplistic in implying that the success profile of one individual or type of individual can be effective across every sector, market, lifecycle and business. Nonetheless, companies often promote a certain set of ideals and reflect the “new” way of doing things in development programmes and leadership team ways of working. This invariably trickles down into an amended view of “what good should look like around here” which forms the backdrop to any new resourcing decisions.

That is where good selection comes in. Getting the decision right for the long term, means first understanding the unique challenges, people and culture facing each situation. This may dictate that a different leadership style from the generally accepted wisdom is actually required. Of course, another Obama may be the right choice but we shouldn't assume this, just because that is what leadership looks like at the moment. A good selection process should uncover this from the start and then hold true in whatever methods are employed to find the right candidate. The key ingredients that deliver success are the quality of selection process itself and the capabilities of the recruiting managers who deliver it.

At Point of Difference, we have just completed a full research project into the selection process, including one of its most utilised tools; the selection interview. Not surprisingly, one of the components that emerges as a key success predictor is the extent to which the process itself simulates the actual role. One size apparently does not fit all. Within the interview, elements such as structure and rapport are linked to both better success predictors and the likelihood that candidates will accept positions if offered: two strong reasons to get the interview right.

To help companies bring more objectivity into selection and help them interview more effectively, we have recently developed a new programme called “Real Insight”. “Real” as it is based on recordings of real interviews that managers perform and “Insight” as we use our research-based framework to analyse the discussion and bring a new perspective on how it might deliver better predictive value for performance in the role in question. It's about helping managers to make better use of their judgement rather than telling them to ignore it and simply look for the next Obama.

