

Change-Ready Organizations

Should someone with for-profit experience work in a nonprofit organization? The answer depends both on the skills and values of the individual in question and on the culture and developmental stage of the nonprofit organization. Nonprofits at any stage of development may benefit from a leader with business experience, but not all nonprofit organizations are going to welcome that experience. In many nonprofit organizations, a business person enters as an “alien life form” with distinct linguistic and cultural norms. For the match to work, each side is going to have to meet the other halfway. Language and culture will change for both the organization and the individual, and fundamental organizational practices will ultimately be affected.

Our interviews with 48 nonprofit leaders who successfully bridged the sectors indicated that nonprofit organizations that were most ready to effectively integrate the skills and perspectives of people with business experience shared characteristics that we term “change-ready:”

- The start-up
 - Little culture and process has been established allowing organizational practices and culture to be influenced by a bridger.
- The turn-around
 - The crisis at hand opens the culture and processes to new approaches and individuals who bring a new perspective.
- A defining moment in an organization’s development—an inflection point
 - Being positioned at the brink of something new with great potential serves to open minds and culture. There may be an acceptance that a new set of skills or approaches is required to move forward.
- Organizations with a for-profit element
 - Embedded in the service model are practices commonly associated with the private sector—e.g., micro-finance organizations or venture philanthropy models.
- Organizations with a history of hiring private sector employees
 - People with MBAs or private sector backgrounds have been hired and are in many cases responsible for the hiring. There may be a better understanding of the transferable skills of a potential bridger, as well as an appreciation of the qualities that they bring to bear.

About Bridgestar: Bridgestar is a nonprofit organization. Our mission is to support and strengthen nonprofit organizations by enhancing the flow and effectiveness of passionate and highly skilled leaders into and within the nonprofit sector. Learn more about Bridgestar and join our vibrant community (free) at www.bridgestar.org.