Survey suggests Tampa Bay area entrepreneurs break conformity

BY JO-LYNN BROWN
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Tampa Bay entrepreneurs tend to break the mold more than entrepreneurs from other areas, new survey findings suggest.

The Leadership Development Institute at Eckerd College has been collecting Entrepreneurialism Dimensions Profiles from business people for the past few years, some from as far as Southeast Asia.

"About two years ago, we wanted to find a good, valid 360-degree, and self-reported assessment of the entrepreneurial mindset to incorporate into a customized program we developed on leading for growth," said Jennifer Hall, director of coaching and feedback for the Leadership Development Institute.

Once the EDI is available and on the market, people can take and pay for the assessment online and then incorporate the results into their own businesses and business persona, Hall said.

The Institute, a network affiliate of the Center for Creative Leadership, will also use the information to develop and strengthen its own leadership programs.

"You get so much feedback on how you’re affecting others," Hall said. "Our philosophy is any given interaction between two people contains an intent and an impact."

Finding unique markers

All told, the Institute collected more than 700 responses, with about 170 meeting the specific criteria for inclusion for the two norm groups, entrepreneurs and corporate managers.

Compared with a larger group of entrepreneurs, local entrepreneurs tend to view themselves as less self-confident and more nonconforming, according to results from the report.

In contrast, surveyors in the corporate management norm group tend to view themselves as much more conforming and less self-confident than entrepreneurs in general, the report shows.

Corporate managers appear to prefer more structure, less independence and less risk acceptance.

Corporate managers also tend to rate higher than entrepreneurs on social skills.

"The one dimension we decided to measure even though we had no reason to believe entrepreneurs would be higher on it—social skills—was the one scale to show the opposite pattern, that it’s the only dimension on which entrepreneurs actually scored significantly lower," Hall said. "That suggests that their higher scores on all the other dimensions aren’t simply a reflection of inflated self-confidence in general, but that they are truly specific and unique ‘markers’ if you will, of the entrepreneurial mindset."

Tampa Bay entrepreneurs appeared to be nearly identical to the general entrepreneur group on preferring a less limited structure and independence, level of social skills, maintaining a future focus and risk acceptance.

FAMILY TIES

John Sykes and his son Charles “Chuck” Sykes, spoke of the entrepreneurial character at a recent event at the University of Tampa.

"Entrepreneurs have to be willing to take a risk," said John Sykes.


Taking questions from the audience, he spoke about the decision to move his company to Tampa.

"In Tampa you were welcome and you could do some things," John Sykes said.

"This is a great city!"

Chuck Sykes initially turned down the offer to step in as CEO for the company. He didn’t feel ready, he said.

After a few years, when the company was again looking for new leadership in 2004, Chuck Sykes felt ready, had the courage, and made the decision to pursue the position.

Making decisions, having courage and taking risks similarly scored high for the entrepreneur norm group on the Leadership Development Institute profile results.

"None of our programs are prescriptive," Hall said.

The Institute gives assessments to individuals and teams, to better find out who has natural strength in what categories, with the idea of utilizing one’s strength rather than focusing on improving one’s weaknesses.

The findings can result in better understanding of one’s natural abilities, and, in a team assessment setting, what members of a staff are better suited for specific assignments.

The Institute feels that the numbers they have now are stable enough and the norms are good enough, but will keep collecting surveys and updating the norms as they receive new information.

The software with the data is expected to be for sale by February, Hall said.

“It’s a product that we can sell and it advances science,” Hall said.