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1-25-2023

An Effective Nonprofit Board-Executive Relationship Starts With Defined Roles

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Recommended Citation

Didericksen, Jaxon, "An Effective Nonprofit Board-Executive Relationship Starts With Defined Roles" (2023). *Research on Capitol Hill*. Paper 133.

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Consistent communication and **supportive management** foster effective working relationships.



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The relationship

Nonprofit executive directors have three, seven, and sometimes over 15 bosses. Their relationship with the board is complex to navigate, but it is crucial to organizational success.

When boards and executives know how to enhance this relationship, they can increase organizational success.

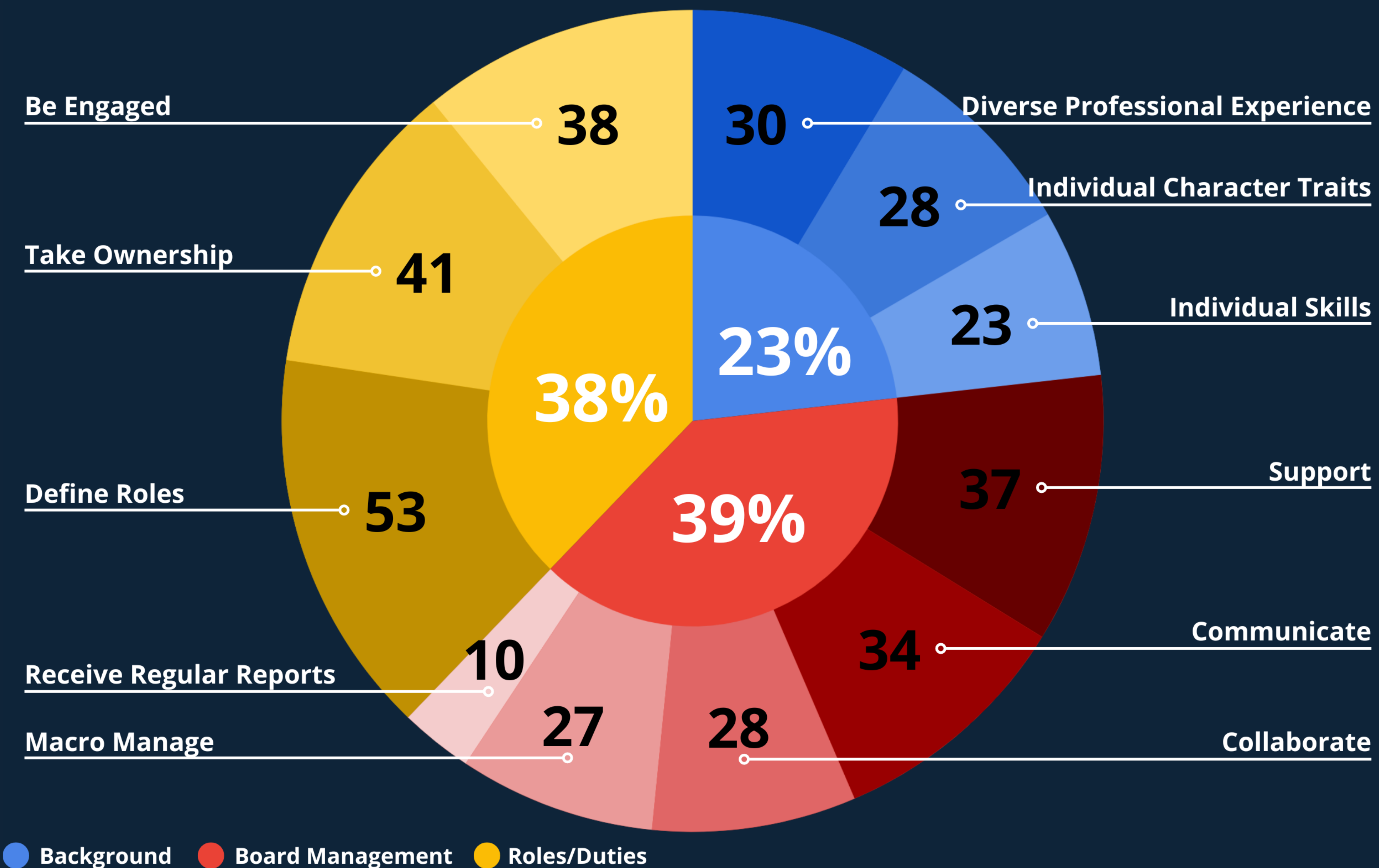
Who we talked to

We talked to pairs of executive directors and board chairs from six organizations serving children and youth in Utah. Each participant completed a survey and an interview.

We asked questions like “What is the role of the board?” and “Describe why you are satisfied with your relationship to the board.”

We recorded and transcribed the interviews and used shorthand descriptions to identify themes and patterns in the responses.

An effective nonprofit board-executive relationship starts with defined roles.



The inside of the pie chart shows the prevalence of three major themes; the outer ring shows the number of responses that mentioned the corresponding pattern

Three major factors

The data from our interviews shows that the three major factors influencing the Nonprofit Board-Executive relationship are **individual backgrounds, board management style, and roles.**

Background was prevalent in 23% of responses, board management in 39% of responses, and roles and duties in 38% of responses.

From the data we infer that diverse professional experience, supportive management, and defined roles contribute to an effective nonprofit Board-Executive relationship.

So what?

Though we focused on nonprofit organizations, the findings apply to any boss-employee working relationship.

Nonprofits (employers) should ensure that they hire executives (employees) who have skill sets and character traits that complement the organizations mission.

Nonprofit boards must support the executive and allow them freedom to run the organization. Additionally, executives and boards should regularly communicate, collaborate, and report to each other.

Finally, nonprofit boards and executives should define roles as best as they can. With defined roles, boards and executives must be engaged in their roles and be accountable for results. Both the board and executive must take ownership for the successes and shortcomings of the organization.