RESEARCH PROCESS

The framework and insights in Impact Players are the result of a two-year research project conducted by The Wiseman Group. The following outlines the research objectives, contributors, and process.

Research Question

The research sought to find the dividing line that separates impact players from other smart, capable, hardworking professionals. The research set out to answer three fundamental questions:

> 1) What are the impact players doing differently than their peers that make them so valuable to their organizations?

> 2) Why do some people get tapped for the most important assignments while other equally smart, capable people struggle to be seen?

> 3) Can others learn to think and operate like these impact players? If so, could we raise the contribution level of an entire team?

Additional research questions included: What are the behaviors and practices of the professionals that are most valued by their leadership? What practices are value enhancers vs. value detractors?   What behaviors are most and least coachable? How can an individual maximize their impact and value in an organization?

In order to understand what sets impact players apart from their colleagues, we needed to study not only impact players, but their less impactful colleagues as well. For our research purposes, we designated three groups of contributors:

> 1) High: individuals doing work of exceptional value

> 2) Typical: individuals who are smart and capable doing really good work

> 3) Low: individuals who are smart and capable but who weren't delivering to expectations or potential

All three groups of individuals we studied consisted of fundamentally smart and capable people. We planned to analyze the differences between high contributors and typical contributors to find the mindsets and behaviors that separated good contributors from those who were truly impactful; likewise, we planned to analyze the differences between typical contributors and low contributors and the similarities across all three groups to understand the mindsets and behaviors that employers and managers viewed as necessary to maintain employment, but not sufficient to create impact.

Additionally, we chose to focus on good companies and good managers. We were looking for a prescription, not a description or a global average.

Research Team

The research team included Karina Wilhelms, the research director at The Wiseman Group, who managed the process, and Lauren Hancock, a behavioral economist and data scientist, who led our analytical efforts. The interview team consisted of Alyssa Gallagher and Judy Jung and Karina Wilhems, from The Wiseman Group, and Ben Putterman, a long-time colleague of mine. Kobie Barker assisted with aggregating interview and survey data and Amanda Wiseman conducted additional surveys.

Research Partners

We identified nine organizations in which to conduct management interviews: Adobe, Google, LinkedIn, NASA, Salesforce, SAP, Splunk, Stanford Health, and Target. Each was known as a top employer with strong management practices and top talent. We interviewed over 170 managers from these companies. The managers we interviewed were located all across the globe and represented a wide variety of ages, industries, and roles.

The Research

Manager Interviews and Surveys

To best identify the practices that differentiated the most valuable players from their colleagues and to understand what prevented otherwise talented individuals from contributing at high levels, we interviewed over 170 managers from our nine research partner organizations (I conducted 67 of the interviews with the rest of the interview team conducting 103 collectively). We asked each manager to identify contributors in three categories: 1) High-value: someone doing work of exceptional value, 2) Typical-value: someone smart and capable doing really good work, and 3) Low-value: someone smart and capable but who wasn't delivering to expectations. Note that each person identified by the managers was considered smart and capable.

In half of interviews, managers were asked to elaborate on and contrast their identified high-value and typical-value contributors; in the other half of interviews, managers were asked to contrast their identified high-value and low-value contributors. In a loosely structured interview, we asked managers about what their employees did and how they seemed to think about their role, probed for examples of ways employees generated outsized impact, and asked managers to estimate the value of each employee's contribution relative to his or her typical colleagues. We also asked managers questions designed to help us understand their own preferences, including which behaviors they most appreciated and most disliked. We aggregated and codified these interviews to allow for both qualitative and quantitative trend analysis.

Additionally, each manager was surveyed about the behavior of their high-, typical-, and low-value contributors. This survey was created and administered using Qualtrics. We developed a list of 50 recommended workplace behaviors, drawn from the following four sources:

1) *Success literature:* a review of published academic research and popular success literature and collected behaviors recommended to employees as ways to succeed in the workplace.

2) *Corporate values statements:* I conducted an analysis of publicly-available corporate values statements from a wide variety of global businesses and collected behaviors recommended by employers to employees as ways to succeed in their specific organization.

3) *Exploratory manager interviews:* We conducted a round of exploratory interviews with experienced people in managerial positions and collected behaviors they said make an employee particularly valuable.

4) *Personal observations:* I drew upon my personal experience, both in the corporate world and in professional development, and noted some behaviors that I suspected might be important difference-makers.

Survey respondents were asked to rate the frequency with which their identified employees performed each behavior along a Likert scale. We also surveyed an additional 180 managers from a wider group of organizations and industries.

We analyzed survey data to find out which behaviors were most important in setting apart high-contributors from their colleagues. In our analysis, we controlled for race and ethnicity, gender, age, organization, role, and level of leadership. The quantitative and qualitative research from the managerial interviews and surveys was summarized in a 36-page document, known affectionately by the research team as "The Boring Book."

Impact Player Interviews

We then conducted in-depth interviews with 25 of the high contributors identified by managers. We asked them questions designed to help us understand what they think and how they do, as well as how they came to work the way they do and how it has affected their career trajectory. We aggregated and codified these interviews to allow for both qualitative and quantitative trend analysis.

We conducted additional surveys and interviews as needed to complement our model and provide more detail. These research inquiries included the following:

1. Workplace Needs Survey: We surveyed 115 employed individuals on what they most need from their bosses or stakeholders to be successful in their work. Respondents were given a list of things a boss or stakeholder may provide to help them in their work, including the following:

- *Time:* Thought partnership at crucial junctions

- *Credibility:* A strong introduction that establishes respect or trust

- *Access:* Inclusion in important meetings or with key people

- *Action:* Commitment to turn around requests or make decisions in a timely manner

- *Information:* Input and feedback to make good decisions

- *Guidance:* Coaching and mentoring

- *Resources:* Budget or headcount

- *Other*

Respondents were asked to rank the aforementioned assets from most important to least important to them in their work.

2. Coach-ability Survey: We surveyed members of the Marshall Goldsmith 100 (MG100) Coaching Group about their experiences coaching 11 mindsets and 12 behaviors drawn from our developed model. We received 50 responses. Respondents were presented with each mindset and behavior and asked about their level of experience coaching the mindset or behavior. Coaches with experience coaching the given mindset or behavior were then asked about the frequency with which learners have successfully adopted the mindset or behavior, the frequency with which learners have made radical change with regard to the mindset or behavior, and the frequency with which they've observed learners successfully sustain the mindset or behavior over time.

3. Attributes Trade-offs Survey: We surveyed over 275 people managers about their preferences regarding employees when faced with trade-offs. Respondents were presented with 10 pairs of positive employee attributes (i.e., "More helpful with teammates" vs. "More capable") and asked to select which relative employee strength they would prefer to add to their team. They were asked additional questions about their preferences regarding employee strengths. Finally, they were given a pair of hypothetical employee descriptions and asked to select which employee would be more valuable to the team, which employee they would prefer to work with, and to which employee they would be more likely to offer extra bonus money.