



Associations 2024:

The Next Generation of Associations & Leaders 2015 FSAE Foundation Think Tank

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The 2015 FSAE Foundation Think Tank **Associations 2024: The Next Generation of Associations and Leaders** examined current social trends and how they could potentially impact and disrupt association business practices. The top 20 social trends for 2015 as identified by TrendHunter.com included responsive retail, competitive rewards, tiny indulgences, social exclusivity and much more. These essentially point towards extreme customization and personalization of consumer experiences on the horizon. As overall consumer behavior changes, the expectations of our members and their customers will also change.

This white paper examines two of the key areas we discussed during Think Tank: **Adult Learning**, and **Diversity**. Association executives in attendance were able to explore these societal trends and discuss how they are impacting the nonprofit sector. The following is a brief summary of those discussions.

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About the FSAE Foundation

Philanthropy and education are among the most powerful influences working to shape the future of society. The FSAE Foundation integrates these in a unique way to help shape altruism and excellence in association professionals and to promote best practices in the association management industry in Florida.

The FSAE Foundation was founded in December 1984 with the purpose of enhancing the FSAE's programs and services through education, research, scholarship and certification initiatives.

What is Think Tank?

- An opportunity for key Florida association executives to look at complex issues from a different perspective
- A discussion that has no "right answer"
- A discussion that does not lead to a vote, decision, position or commitment
- A challenging, stimulating intellectual exercise
- Choices associations must make
- Challenges which will need to be overcome
- Opportunities to be seized



Adult Learning

One of the fastest changing areas of service for associations is education. The nonprofit sector has long been a leader in providing adult education. Today, the development and delivery of educational programs are rapidly evolving – as are the expectations of participants enrolling in educational programs provided by associations. Driven by technology, as well as generational and demographic changes, individuals enrolling in educational programs expect much more than the traditional, face-to-face, thought leader-led programs that served the nonprofit sector well in the past.

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ONLINE LEARNING

It almost goes without saying that online learning platforms are changing the face of education. However, many association leaders do not yet fully understand the impact this is having – and will increasingly have – on the nonprofit sector and its ability to effectively compete for the time and dollars of those seeking continuing education.

Take Coursera for example. The company is built on the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) model, with a goal of providing “universal access to the world’s best education, partnering with top universities and organizations to offer courses online.” Coursera also provides the vast majority of its education for free.

This may sound like a high-minded and lofty goal, but take a look at Coursera’s results: they currently provide nearly 1,470 unique courses, with 135 higher education partners, to an enrollment of nearly 16 million and growing. And they achieved these results in less than four years.

Furthermore, Coursera learning is not passive. Many courses integrate peer assessments, virtual networking, and competency-based application of the learning objectives. What will happen when association members and other stakeholders can obtain the continuing education they need, any time, from anywhere, for free, from highly respected providers? The fact is, many already can. Look at the nonprofit sector as an example: during the FSAE Think Tank, Coursera offered just one nonprofit course. Less than two months later, they were providing five, through a partnership with The State University of New York.

Coursera is just one of a growing list of providers challenging the traditional model for the development and delivery of education. Association leaders, however, shouldn’t fear these models, but rather should embrace the opportunity to learn from them and to think strategically about the impact they could have on educational services and business models.



These changes in education can also provide great opportunities for associations to:

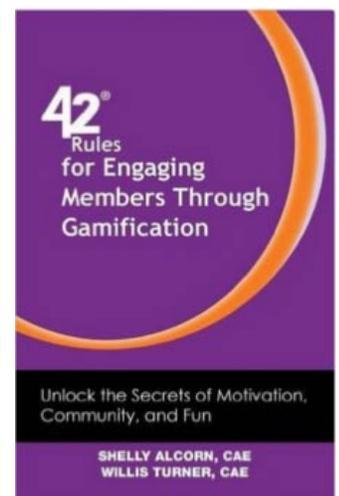
- Explore online delivery platforms
- Integrate knowledge and competency level testing into online and in-person training
- Test new business models that provide participant value and association revenue
- Develop blended learning opportunities in which participants engage in a hybrid of in-person and online learning and networking

GAMIFICATION OF LEARNING

A second educational trend identified during the FSAE Think Tank is the gamification of learning. Based on video game design, this trend pushes organizations to integrate elements of interactivity with fun, game-like, or even competitive experiences as part of their educational programs.

The Entertainment Software Association says 58% of Americans play video games, and the average gamer spends 13 hours a week playing video games. This isn't just time spent having fun either – it provides gamers with transferrable skills like problem solving, multitasking, resource management and perseverance. Interactive online games in particular help to enhance communication and community building skills.

With this level of engagement, and considering the benefits derived from gaming, it is no wonder that curriculum design in adult learning is being impacted. This provides tremendous opportunities for associations to rethink how they develop and deliver education. There's even an authoritative book tailored to the nonprofit sector on this subject: *42 Rules for Engaging Members Through Gamification*, written by Shelly Alcorn, CAE and Willis Turner, CAE and published by Super Star Press, and available on Amazon.



Diversity

Associations have a tremendous opportunity to better understand and embrace diversity and to create truly inclusive organizations. Understanding and embracing diversity has a wide range of implications and applications. Think Tank participants were encouraged to expand the idea of diversity beyond traditional markers of race and gender to be able to adequately address the needs of members and their industries. Planning for and embracing the needs of young professionals in the workplace, for example, is just one facet of a larger whole. Leaders today realize that diversity encompasses four dimensions: inborn human characteristics, personal experiences, organizational dimensions, and styles and tendencies.

“Association leaders need to **find ways to create new access points for future leaders**, to ensure the organization is inclusive of all dimensions of diversity.”

◆ **INBORN HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS**

The first dimension of diversity involves inborn human characteristics. These include demographic attributes such as race, gender, ethnicity, age, country of origin, physical ability, sexual orientation and the like. Frequently, an association will seek to achieve an informal balance of these characteristics through its board selection process. This dimension of diversity is critical for boards of directors, as it enables an organization’s leadership to consider multiple perspectives when making decisions. However, it should not be seen as the only attribute to achieving diversity of thought.

◆ **PERSONAL EXPERIENCES**

Another dimension of diversity is personal experiences. Each individual’s experiences shape, to some degree, their world view. Personal experiences include educational background, family, geographic location, income level, and religious beliefs, among others. This also includes an individual’s experiences within an organization, including volunteer activities, service as a committee member or other leadership roles. Collectively, these experiences help to shape how an individual might view issues in their role as a board member.

◆ **ORGANIZATIONAL DIMENSIONS**

The third type of diversity is organizational dimensions, which describes an individual’s role within an industry or profession. Individuals who are at an entry-level, management level or senior level of a profession will view issues differently. The same is true among various segments of industries and professions. Boards with diversity of organizational dimensions can achieve a well-rounded perspective of the profession or industry that they serve.



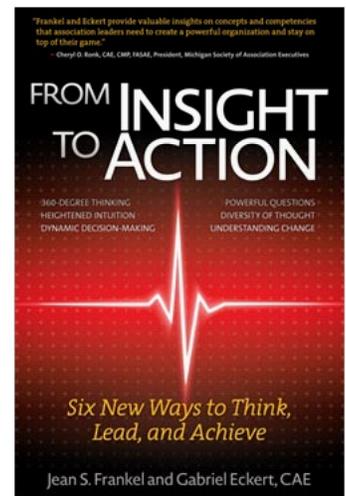
◆ STYLE AND TENDENCIES

The fourth dimension of diversity is style and tendencies, and it includes the individual’s learning style, thinking style, conflict-resolution style, decision-making style, and if they are an introvert or extrovert. This has historically been the dimension least considered by organizations. These styles and tendencies are often discovered through assessment tools such as the Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, Conscientiousness Indicator (DISC), Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) or Neethling Brain Instrument (NBI). Incorporating diversity of style and tendencies into boards of directors ensures there is a mix of right- and left-brain thinkers, as well as a variety of behavioral styles represented on a board. This enables the board to analyze issues from multiple perspectives and to leverage the power of whole-brain thinking. This dimension will contribute significantly to achieving diversity of thought.

◆ VALUE OF DIVERSITY

The most successful boards are those that understand and engage all four dimensions of diversity. They are able to truly analyze issues from a 360-degree perspective. They are representative of the industry or profession they serve. They respond thoughtfully to change. These boards make decisions conscientiously, because of the diverse perspectives engaged in the process. These are truly diverse boards – and they produce diversity of thought.

This model of diversity is explored in greater detail in the book *From Insight to Action: Six New Ways to Think, Lead, and Achieve*, by Jean Frankel and Gabriel Eckert, CAE, published by the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). It is available from ASAE.



Creating a Culture of Inclusion

There are some very effective strategies that association leaders can use to build diversity in the organizational leadership:

- Understand your own dimensions of diversity
- Help board members to better understand their dimensions of diversity, and identify gaps that are underrepresented
- Utilize tools such as the DISC, MBTI and NBI assessments to help board members understand their natural styles and tendencies (many tools can also generate a report to provide a composite of the entire board's styles and tendencies)
- Construct a board selection process in which the four dimensions of diversity are understood and appreciated
- Design a nominations policy that encourages diversity of thought by seeking a mix of the four dimensions of diversity

Beyond the board of directors, association leaders need to find ways to create new access points for future leaders, to further ensure the organization is inclusive of all dimensions of diversity.

Looking Ahead

Adult learning and diversity are two specific areas in which association leaders should focus to ensure continued growth and success. To remain relevant, the most effective leaders will also continually monitor macro trends at the societal level that can have an impact on the organizations they serve.

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