

Bringing it to Life: Organizational Performance Engineer



BILL & MELINDA
GATES foundation

Industry: *Philanthropy*

Ownership: *Non-Profit*

Foundation Trust Endowment: *\$39.6B*

of Employees: *1,376*

Description: *Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger.*



“We are going through a large scale organizational transformation to move from a centralized, hierarchical model to networks of trust. We are doing this to help us achieve our business goals which are inherently interdependent and cross-boundaries.” Chris Ernst, Director, Learning, Leadership & Organization Development

Summary

Diverse forms of “employment” and new ways of organizing and collaborating will challenge the traditional ways of working and require expertise in how organizations align, enable, inspire, and reward people to accomplish shared goals and deliver results. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is already building several capabilities required in the Organizational Performance Engineer role of the future including creating new ways of working, facilitating cross-boundary collaboration with virtual teams, analyzing social networks and driving performance.



Links

[Lead Your Culture Whitepaper](#)

[Gates Digital Foundation Post](#)

[Gates Parental Leave Policy](#)

[Gates Performance Partnership Program](#)

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Organizational Performance Engineer Profile (CONTINUED)



New Ways of Working

- The organization is going through a large scale transformation that will align its internal ways of working with its ambitious external aspirations for the world. During the first 15 years, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was focused more on independent ways to work on unique strategies, but now it is moving more towards interdependence, characterized by smart partnerships, radical thinking and an energizing work environment. The same approach the organization takes when solving for interdependent, cross-boundary challenges such as abolishing poverty. They are striving to engage people, get more participatory leadership so together they can execute against their strategy. They are doing this through a top-down and middle-out approach. By including middle-out, they try to prevent transformation from being stuck somewhere in the organization if change only moved from the CEO and down. They are also adopting the See-Own-Solve-Evolve model where employees are encouraged to see the currently reality, own and internalize their role, solve it and then evolve the solution to fit changing needs. Read the [Lead Your Culture Whitepaper](#) for more information.
- The Gates Foundation is undergoing a space redesign, informed in part by incorporating feedback gathered from a social network analysis and employee surveys. The new design seeks to drive more innovation, productivity and collaboration across silos. The redesign is based on the philosophy "***If you change the interaction of relationships, you change behavior, and that leads to a change in culture.***" With this in mind they are seeking to create "Hot" spaces, which are designed for maximum interaction to create collisions and interactions. There are "warm" spaces, designed to be open, but allow people

to work on their computers. Finally, there are “cool” spaces, designed for breakouts or privacy. Prototypes are already live where executives sit in an open environment with their teams, and many people have no assigned space.

- **Facilitating Cross-Boundary Collaboration with Physical and Virtual Teams** The Gates Foundation engages with over 5,500 external contacts that are critical to the work being done, so there is a need for a better understanding of how Gates Foundation employees connect with external partners they need to collaborate with to solve common problems. They are very focused on ensuring external partners are knowledgeable about the various points of contact they may need to better facilitate collaboration. In addition, their Chief Digital Officer is very involved in creating a digital foundation that will connect the Foundation with other Not-for-Profits to help accelerate and reduce friction in philanthropic investment (both investments and procurement). [This article](#) shares a bit more about how their ideas of how to use technology to expand their impact as an organization

Understanding and Creating Value from Social Networks

- The Gates Foundation did a Social Network Analysis at the organization level including interviewing leadership and conducting focus groups with employees. From this data they were able to create a robust picture of the organization that would have been difficult to capture through a regular Employee Opinion Survey. What they saw was transactional leadership is happening in the organization hierarchy and transformational leadership is happening in informal networks. Managers were provided reports so they could understand the micro-climates they are creating to manage trust and transparency. And all employees were provided access to their Personal Network Analysis to better understand their unique network attributes and steps they could take to strengthen and diversify the productivity of their relationships.

Segmentation and Mass Customization – Driving Performance

- With a strong external focus on creating healthy families and children, the foundation has made a strong statement on what it stands for via its leave

policies. The foundation has recently announced they will provide **1-year off for maternity or paternity leave**. Additionally, the foundation scrapped its traditional leave policy for one in which employees can take unlimited time-off, returning to work focused and energized. These changes will result in teams having to work more fluidly so they can achieve their desired impact while someone is out on periods of prolonged leave.

- Performance Partnership- The Gates Foundation has moved away from ratings-based review structure to a conversation-driven, no-ratings approach that puts the employee back in the center of performance management. Conversations will focus on career, capabilities, connections and contributions. **This link** provides an overview of the process which is designed to help build capability in the organization.