



Gaining executive insight

By Michael Sherlock
Co-author of *Jumpshift!*

Since my book *Jumpshift!* was released in late April 2011, I have been engaged to give a number of presentations around Australia. In preparing for these presentations, I have reflected on some of the watershed moments that contributed to business success and the sale of ASX-listed Brumby's Bakeries.

One of the more significant watershed moments concerned the unexpected consequences of personality profiling the executive team members. As we approached the first anniversary of our strategic planning workshop, the executive team decided that at our regular quarterly meeting we would undertake a team-building activity in addition to reviewing progress towards achieving our strategic goals.

My *Jumpshift!* co-author Alan Anderson, the consultant who had facilitated the initial planning meeting, was also responsible for organising the quarterly meeting. Alan chose the team management systems (TMS) approach to individual and team profiling as the vehicle for team building. The idea of undertaking the profiling exercise appealed to me as a bit of fun that might enhance team building. Little did I realise what this exercise would lead to.

Each member of the Brumby's team completed the TMS online questionnaire, which uncovers the type of work they prefer to do and how they prefer to do it. Their responses generated a report, which explained in detail their leadership strengths, decision-making approach, interpersonal skills, preferred team-building role and work preferences.

Of significant practical value in the report is the section on an individual's preferred communication style, and how to optimise understanding through specific behavioural communication strategies. Initially I refused to accept my profile. "That's not me", was my refrain. Alan suggested that I ask my colleagues to review my profile and provide feedback. It wasn't too long before my colleagues were telling me, "That's you to a tee!" It took two weeks for me to finally admit that the profile was a true reflection of my preferred working style.

So TMS had challenged my belief that I was a "thruster organiser", and not the creative person the TMS assessment revealed. When the team affirmed that I was a creative person, it gave me the confidence to be more creative in the business, especially with respect to marketing, so the creative side became more



of a core trait than a side issue. I backed my own judgements more, especially on branding, for example, insisting on, in spite of opposition from the marketing and advertising 'experts', the addition of the word 'Bakery' after Brumby's, because I didn't want any confusion about the name. I wanted it to be "blatantly obvious".

Reflecting on this now, TMS helped me identify my own and others' strengths and work preferences, and I reorganised our team around those strengths and preferences. This reorganisation meant that my general manager Steve Brown was given the responsibility for the operations of the company in line with his TMS profile and I focused on the marketing and we really delegated more effectively. This accelerated our growth because we had the right people in the right seats on the bus.

The TMS team-building exercise gave the management team insights into each other's preferred behaviours at work, and provided the basis for some frank and necessary conversations that might not otherwise have happened. So no matter how big or small your

workplace is I would recommend that you find out everyone's skill set, natural talent, and work preferences. Take the helicopter view – find out work team members preferences and really delegate.

My key suggestion is to undertake some work preference profiling and take actions in accordance with those insights. Your team will have a better culture; more people will be effective, as they will be playing to their strengths.

You may find that your first-year apprentice has a talent for sales and should be encouraged to sell to your customers or that your sales manager has great ideas for new products that your customers will love, find your team's skills and make your store the best it can be.

Michael Sherlock, former CEO of Brumby's Bakeries and co-author of the recently published *Jumpshift!*, has suggestions for bakers on delivering exceptional customer service in these tough economic times. ■