



**Dober Partners**  
Executive Search  
& Consultancy

# — High Performance Secretariats 2021

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# — Author's Introduction, Mark Dober

In Europe there are literally tens of thousands of associations geared towards achieving policy successes and improving their sector's reputation. The success (or failure) of an association's outreach can have an enormous impact on the prospects and employees of the sector that it represents.

Our experience indicates that successful associations stand out from their peers and add a great deal of value to their members. Nearly all members say that good leadership is the single most important factor for successful associations. Typically the best associations have excellent people within the leadership teams of their secretariats, at the level of Secretary General, Director of Communications, and Head of Regulatory or Public Affairs. Working together they communicate effectively internally and externally, and deliver favourable policy outcomes for their members. Behind every great leadership team is a high performance secretariat, supported by a solid back office delivering smooth financial administration and support.

We base our findings on hundreds of face-to-face interviews and numerous online surveys, combined with our own insights and experience. The charts, word clouds and quotes in this report reflect the views of the many interviews in the course of my interviews and research. We talked to global, European and national associations, especially in the key markets where we operate in Brussels and Geneva. Not surprisingly there is consistency across Europe on what constitutes a high performance secretariat as the challenges of membership-based associations are similar everywhere.

Dober Partners is committed to improving the professionalisation of association leadership through our work, and our investment in pioneering research and educational activities. Through these insights and engagement, we hope to contribute to the pool of knowledge that helps association leaders run high-performing organisations and pursue rewarding careers.

We hope you enjoy this report, and welcome your feedback to [mark@doberpartners.com](mailto:mark@doberpartners.com)

Best wishes,



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P.S. You might wonder why I have chosen a few mountaineering images for this report. Well I have scaled peaks in the Andes, the Alps, the Atlas and the Himalayas and learned the hard way what high performance requires. The summit is what drives us, but the climb itself is what matters. As it has been said, you don't climb mountains without a team, you don't climb mountains without being fit, you don't climb mountains without being prepared and you don't climb mountains without balancing the risks and rewards. And you never climb a mountain by accident - it has to be intentional.



# — The High Performance Secretariat Team

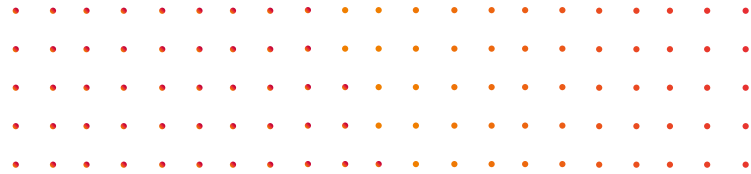


A high performance team is like a football team – if they don't play together they cannot win.

According to management textbooks a high performance team can be defined as a group of people with specific roles and complementary talents and skills, aligned with and committed to a common purpose, who consistently show high levels of collaboration and innovation that produce superior results. According to Ronald Riggio, Professor of Organizational Psychology and Author of 'Transformational Leadership': "High performance teams create a Learning Environment and emphasize the development of the team, learning through successes, but particularly through mistakes. A team with a culture of continuous improvement and where members are motivated to develop their skills and knowledge are high performance teams." The high performance team is regarded as a tight-knit group, focused on their goals and little else. Team members are so devoted to their purpose that they will surmount any barrier to achieve the team's goals. How many secretariats of associations can be described in this way?

In the course of our research, we encountered many high performance secretariats typically led by participative minded association leaders where results and open communications are valued. We found that those secretariats that engage in open debate are more likely to address critical issues, find solutions to problems, and develop innovative ideas.

Real Madrid: The most successful team in the world. We can all learn from Real Madrid's pursuit of excellence, the standards the players and management set of everyone at the club: it's this environment that breeds success.



"A high performance secretariat needs to be a flat organization, working as a team and composed of a diverse group of individuals which shares some core values: proactive, driven, service-minded, competent and accountable."

Stephan Loerke, CEO at World Federation of Advertisers (WFA).





However, we also came across some associations with quite negative working atmospheres which were typically led by overly authoritarian leaders who stifled debate, creating an environment where mistrust, criticism and poor results prevailed.

As Patrick Lencioni points out in "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team", a key aspect of a high performance team is creating an environment where each team member trusts one another which enables them to engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas; commit to decisions and plans of actions; hold one another accountable for delivering against those plans; and focus on the achievement of collective results. Hence, where there is an absence of trust, secretariat members conceal their weaknesses and mistakes from one another; hesitate to ask for help or offer help outside their own areas of responsibility; and even hold grudges and find reasons to avoid spending time together. According to Lencioni, the five dysfunctions are:

- 1. Absence of trust—unwilling to be vulnerable within the group
- 2. Fear of conflict—seeking artificial harmony over constructive passionate debate
- 3. Lack of commitment—feigning buy-in for group decisions creates ambiguity throughout the organization
- 4. Avoidance of accountability—ducking the responsibility to call peers on counterproductive behaviour which sets low standards
- 5. Inattention to results—focusing on personal success, status and ego before team success

Great teamwork - United States Carli Lloyd (10) celebrated a hat-trick goal during the FIFA Women's World Cup. The USA has won more FIFA Women's World Cups than any other team.

"The foundation of every great team is a direction that energizes, orients, and engages its members. Teams cannot be inspired if they don't know what they're working toward and don't have explicit goals. Those goals should be challenging (modest ones don't motivate) but not so difficult that the team becomes dispirited. They also must be consequential: People have to care about achieving a goal, whether because they stand to gain extrinsic rewards, like recognition, pay, and promotions; or intrinsic rewards, such as satisfaction and a sense of meaning."

Harvard Business Review - The Secrets of Great Teamwork.

**Harvard  
Business  
Review**



# — The Seven Key Attributes of a High Performance Secretariat

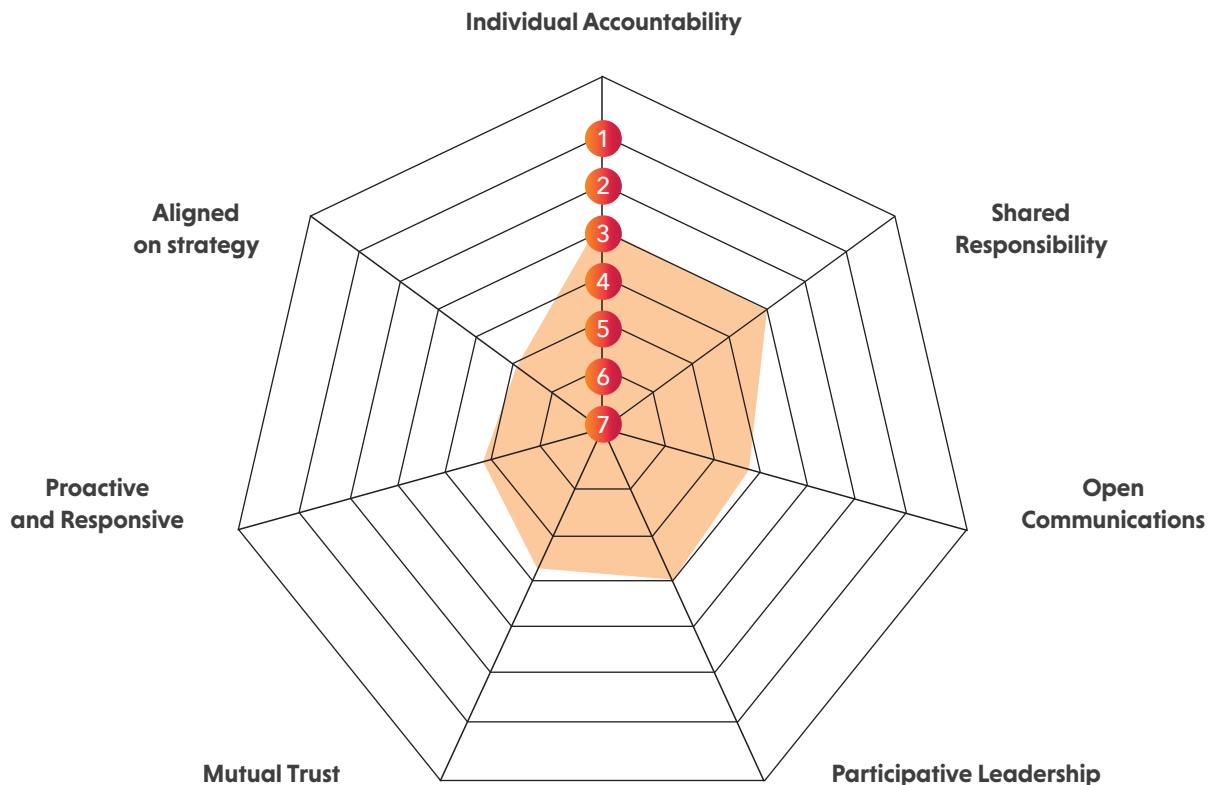
Following a literature review, research and practical experience we first put forward in 'Key Success Factors for European Associations' seven key attributes of a high performance secretariat.

We knew each attribute was a key ingredient in the overall successful recipe for an association secretariat but we did not know how important they were relative to each other. So using a randomized survey methodology to avoid order biased we asked association staff and leaders to rank the most important attributes. In order of importance with 1 being the most important respondents ranked the seven attributes as follows:

- 1. Individual accountability
- 2. Shared responsibility
- 3. Open communications
- 4. Participative leadership
- 5. Mutual trust
- 6. Proactive and responsive
- 7. Aligned on strategy

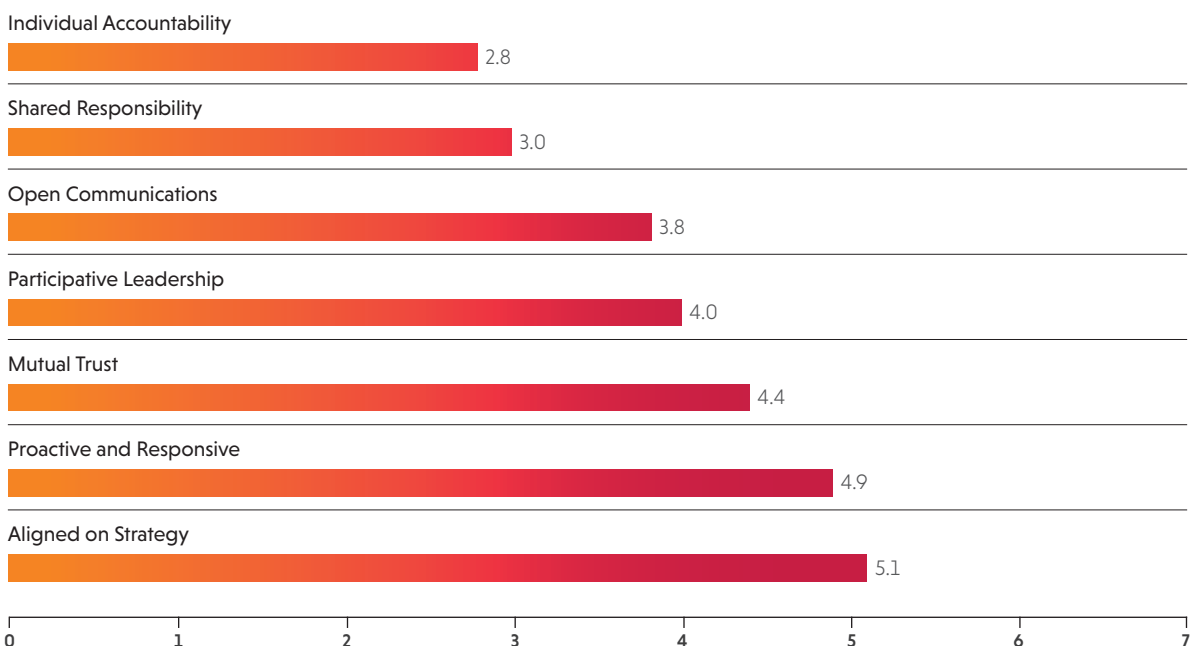
## – Key Attributes Of A High Performance Secretariat

The star chart below maps the attributes graphically, as a useful tool for associations to analyse an association's culture and performance.





**- Team Attributes - Please rank the following attributes of a high performing secretariat in order of importance (with 1 being the most important and 7 the least important)**



**Individual accountability** is all about the principle that individuals be held accountable for their actions. If your mind-set is that you're at least 80% responsible for your success and that just 20% depends on the way the wind blows you are likely to be successful. If you blame your problems and failures, big or small, personal or professional, on other people, circumstances beyond your control, or just plain bad luck, you may be doomed to fail. The good news is that Accountability is not just a mind-set—it's also a skill-set that everyone in an association can learn.

**Shared responsibility** is about the feeling of ownership. A sense of shared responsibility at work is important to an association's success as a whole. Every member of staff, no matter what level of seniority is equally responsible for aiding in the success of the secretariat and association. In order to achieve the goals of the association, long and short term, it is important that all people within the association work together and share responsibility. Hoarding power and not sharing responsibility leads to micromanaging, fiefdom building, silos and information suppression, none of which a healthy organization can afford in this era of lean speed and agility.

"In a world marked by fast flows of information and high-paced policy debates, the individual proactivity and accountability of team members is, more than ever, the key for small trade association secretariats to deal successfully with the wide range of – often highly complex – issues they are tasked to cover, influence and steer on behalf of, and together with, their members. To make such an approach work, it's essential to have a common strategic vision and – as is clearly the case for spiritsEUROPE – a truly shared passion for the sector one works for."

Ulrich Adam, Director General at spiritsEUROPE



"We used to have a very hierarchical DG who barely let the staff engage with the outside world but our new leader has given everybody a sense of responsibility and power over the success of the association."

Policy Officer

Being able to contribute to a group task with complete support from all team members is just one of the definite benefits that we can get from shared responsibility. Mutual support from all members is the key to be able to establish great teamwork. The tasks done by the team are mostly interdependent and the quality of output is usually affected by each member's work. For greater results, we need the help from each member.

**Open communication** occurs when everybody is able to express ideas to one another, such as in a conversation or debate. On the other hand, closed communication occurs when only one person is actively communicating, like a lecture. Communication affects teamwork in positive and negative ways. The quantity and quality of communication within a team and from leadership affects teamwork. Open communication is associated with high performance secretariats.

**Participative leadership** rests on the idea that things can be achieved more easily if everyone works together and is involved in making decisions. Participatory management typically requires greater sharing of information, rewards, and power with secretariat staff. The traditional view of association leadership supported a more hierarchal style. While not without challenges, a more participatory form of leadership can provide tangible benefits, such as improvements in productivity, staff turnover and absenteeism; and intangible benefits such as improved employee motivation, job satisfaction and enhanced work morale. In the course of Dober Partners work we have observed participative leadership styles can work really well, while more autocratic styles are often disastrous in an association context.

"Shared responsibility in an Association is so much more than a nice to have. We just wouldn't be able to function without applying it both in principle and in practice. We're too large an organisation for every detail to be micro-managed from the top. At the same time, we're not big enough to be able to carry disengaged passengers. The only way this works is to get a group of passionate people who are committed to our goals and to each other. Knowing you can really count on the person beside you makes everything better and a lot more fun."

Paul Voss, Managing Director at Euroheat & Power



"I like to say to there are no bad ideas or stupid questions...which is (mostly) true!"

Director General

"For a trade association to be successful, you need to create an overall atmosphere of open and transparent communications. By listening actively and inviting disrupting ideas, leaders bolster team motivation and foster creativity. Leaving your office door open, encouraging informal interactions or scheduling cross-team meetings are all good ways to stimulate such an environment. Your association will only achieve great results if all team members work towards a common goal and feel that their contributions are valued. This is also true for your communications with members. If they are informed and involved, you ensure your organisation delivers for them and remains relevant."

Susan Danger, CEO, American Chamber of Commerce to the EU (AmCham EU)



"Even our receptionist could recite our association's mission to you."

Association Chief Operating Officer

"A trade association is a service provider, with a very high level of exposure to its members and to the outside world. Over the years I have learned that performance in a trade association is enhanced when all members of the secretariat share the same vision, mission and values and where possible develop these together. I strongly believe that every single person in an organisation has an important role to play in the success and enjoyment of what that organisation tries to achieve and therefore that including all members of staff in jointly developing and working towards the goals and ambitions of that organisation will lead to success."

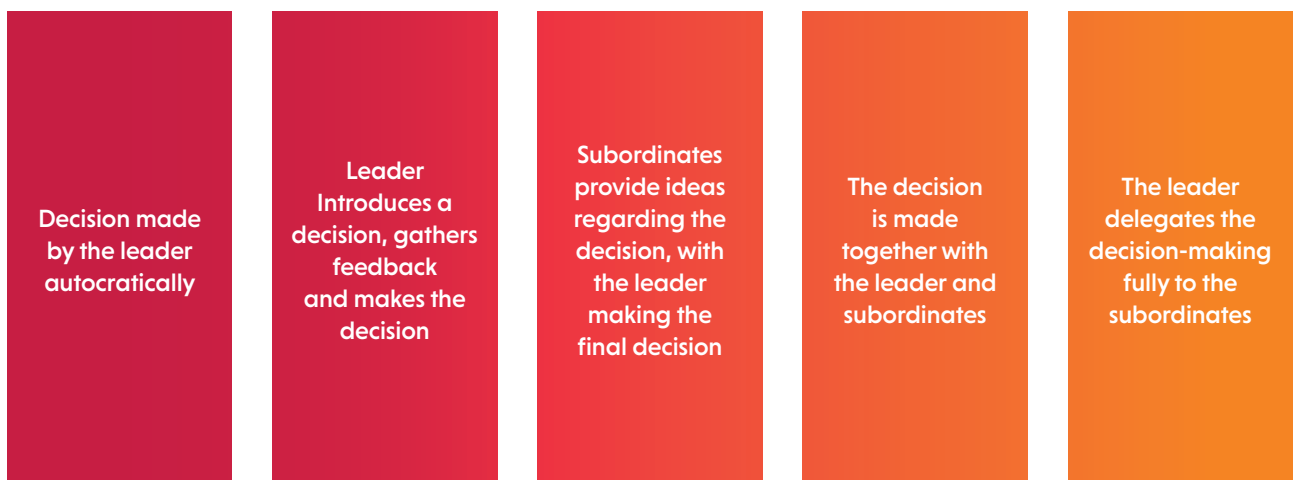
Nathalie Moll, Director General,  
European Federation of Pharmaceutical  
Industries and Associations (EFPIA)



## – Spectrum of Participation

No Participation

High Participation





**Mutual trust** is a key factor in team building and an enabler for cooperation. In general, trust building is a slow process, but it can be accelerated with open interaction and good communication skills. Trust is a complicated aspect of the relationships between persons, but trust on the team level is even more complex. Trust increases communication, commitment, and loyalty between team members. Trust can be considered as a foundation that enables people to work together, and it is an enabler for social interactions. It can also improve team performance and increase the probability of creating successful organisations. Even at Dober Partners we have engendered a 'One Team' mutual trust philosophy that supersedes internal competition.

## – Proactive and responsive

Successful associations require their secretariats to be both proactive in advancing their goals, but also responsive in meeting their members' expectations. Unresponsive secretariats can frustrate everyone. Responsiveness and proactivity can be cultural and often set by the Secretary General's example but also innate in the personality of secretariat staff. One of the questions we often ask when interviewing is this: "Do you consider yourself a responsive person?" People with a proactive personality have a tendency to take action to change things, show initiative, and persevere until the desired change has occurred. They seek out opportunities and enact change. Those with less proactive personalities patiently wait for circumstances to improve, or passively adapt to the existing situation. So there are a number of questions that can be asked in interviews and personality assessments like 'Do you enjoy promoting new ideas, even when others dismiss them'; Are you very good at discovering new opportunities; and are you constantly on the lookout for ways to do things better?

"You cannot be a good lobbyist or communicator if you are only reactive. Success comes down to quick thinking and engagement."

Director of Communications

"Associations are coalitions of interests among, generally, competing entities. Much Association work involves brokering positions and solutions in the common interest. This is a complex, sometimes messy business. But I think trust among Secretariat team members is a key element in making this happen. A fractured, mutually suspicious team will just make the job of building a common front more difficult. A low trust Secretariat is not only less effective because communication falls short, and teamwork is weak– distrust will be also exploited by those who do not necessarily have the common interest at heart."

John Chave, Director General at Cosmetics Europe - The Personal Care Association



"Although our corporate members would probably eat each other for breakfast, we have to trust our colleagues in the secretariat - our issues are too big to fail."

Director Trade Policy

"Demands from industry for more proactivity in their associations are a common theme for association leaders. Much of course depends on the association's secretariat itself. But there is an additional critical element: the recognition by the association's members that a more proactive lobbying approach also means a greater risk of unintended consequences. When an effective, proactive secretariat culture is combined with an embrace by the membership of this inherent uncertainty, the ultimate measure of association proactivity can be realised: being able to set the policy agenda."

Malte Lohan, Director General at Orgalim, representing Europe's technology industries



## – Aligned on strategy

The foundation of every great secretariat is a compelling direction that energizes, orients, engages and aligns everyone around a common strategy. The Director General's job is to not only set the strategic direction of the association with the board but to align the secretariat around a common mission, vision and strategy. Secretariats cannot be inspired if they don't know what they're working toward and don't have explicit goals and means on how to get there. Those goals should be challenging but not so difficult that the team becomes dispirited. They also must be consequential: People have to care about achieving a goal, whether because they stand to gain extrinsic rewards, like recognition, pay, and promotions; or intrinsic rewards, such as satisfaction and a sense of meaning.

"We are only six people but seek the whole team's input into the annual strategy – we buy into it and go for it together."

Head of Finance

"Our team really works hard to align on strategy so that everyone contributes to shaping priorities and engaging in advocacy. This strengthens our ability to monitor complex government agendas and to better understand which stakeholders agree with our position. Of course strategic alignment is a permanent work-in-progress because team members look at issues from their own angle but this is all part of a healthy dialogue within associations and helps build team spirit."

Adrian van den Hoven, Director  
General of Medicines for Europe



# — The Seven Key Attributes of a Successful Association Leader

It is perhaps obvious but important to be very clear that the most important person in any High Performance Secretariat is the association leader. Indeed, our research confirms that the single most distinguishing factor between high performance and underperformance for an association is its leadership, or simply put the qualities of the person in charge on a daily basis. We also found meeting members' expectations, strategic planning and goal setting are by far the greatest challenges for association leaders. Hence, associations need strong leaders to set strategy and help find consensus between corporate members who compete with each other for market share, and member associations with very different cultures.

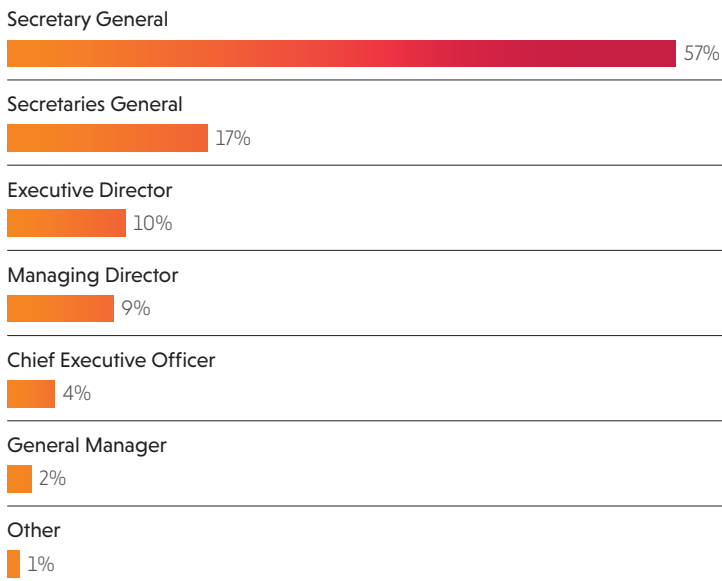
According to our recently analysis of 536 European Trade Associations in Brussels the five most popular titles for the top job are in order of popularity are: Secretary-General (or in a few cases General Secretary); Director General; Executive Director; Managing Director; Chief Executive Officer (or CEO or Chief Executive) and General Manager. There are literally just a handful of a few other titles that can be observed in Brussels; notably Executive Manager, Manager and Director.

"There is increased professionalism in the management of many trade associations. The days are ending when a technical manager, or an end-of career company representative, with little or no public affairs, communications, or management experience, or network, was parachuted in to manage a trade association. Instead, there is a new generation of PA professionals starting to lead associations. This new generation better understands the tools and needs of modern interest representation."

Carel du Marchie Sarvaas, Executive Director,  
Global Animal Medicines Association.



### – Most Popular Titles for European Association Leaders



In the same way that shareholders, management and employees expect exceptional qualities in their CEOs, so it seems that members and secretariats of associations expect (sometimes unreasonably) their leaders to be outstanding in all aspects of association management. Unlike CEOs, however, association leaders need extra skills of persuasion and diplomacy to broker compromises between multiple individuals and interest groups, as well as being good lobbyists and strong communicators. Many of our interviewees talked about the importance of 'balance' for a Secretaries General, whether referring to balancing strategic planning with attention to detail, or to balancing the competing interests of association members.

Size does matter for associations. In smaller associations a Secretary General has to be an all-rounder and engage intensively in the everyday detail of running the association, from delivering the adopted lobbying message to deciding HR policies for the secretariat. Larger associations usually have dedicated administrators, as well as regulatory and communications specialists, to spread the workload. However, it seems important that the Secretary General can articulate and promote a vision for at least the association, if not the entire sector. Our research shows that there are diverging views on whether it is more important to be a political insider or industry expert, but there are many examples of excellent Secretaries Generals that have developed both attributes. At the same time the Secretary General needs to have the ability to manage people and a budget as well as operating within the prescribed legal parameters.

"Today's association leader needs to have a portfolio of skills, and although pre-existing knowledge of an industry sector can be useful, it is rarely a necessity."

Alisdair Gray, Executive Director,  
European Franchise Federation





Irrespective of size, the key leadership body of any association is the Board. In the words of one Director General, "my boss is the Board not the President". Board members should focus on the association's strategy and decision-making. The association leader needs to be empowered to run daily operations and set the agenda, so that the Board or its members do not start micromanaging. Board members are by nature volunteers and generally have a passion for what they do. Hence, the Secretary General has to keep the Board focused and drive them towards a long term future and not a short term two year mandate perspective.

Given the central importance of association leaders to an entire industry's representation and reputation, a key question is when is the right moment to replace them? We note that many incoming Presidents of boards of European Associations start with a desire to 'shake things up' and replace the longstanding Secretary General, only to find that firing the incumbent destabilises the staff and would put a significant hole in the annual budget. Many of our interviewees note a tendency for Secretaries General to stay too long, and it is interesting to note parallels with corporate leadership. For instance, Booz Allen Hamilton found that all CEOs, and especially those CEOs who stay longer

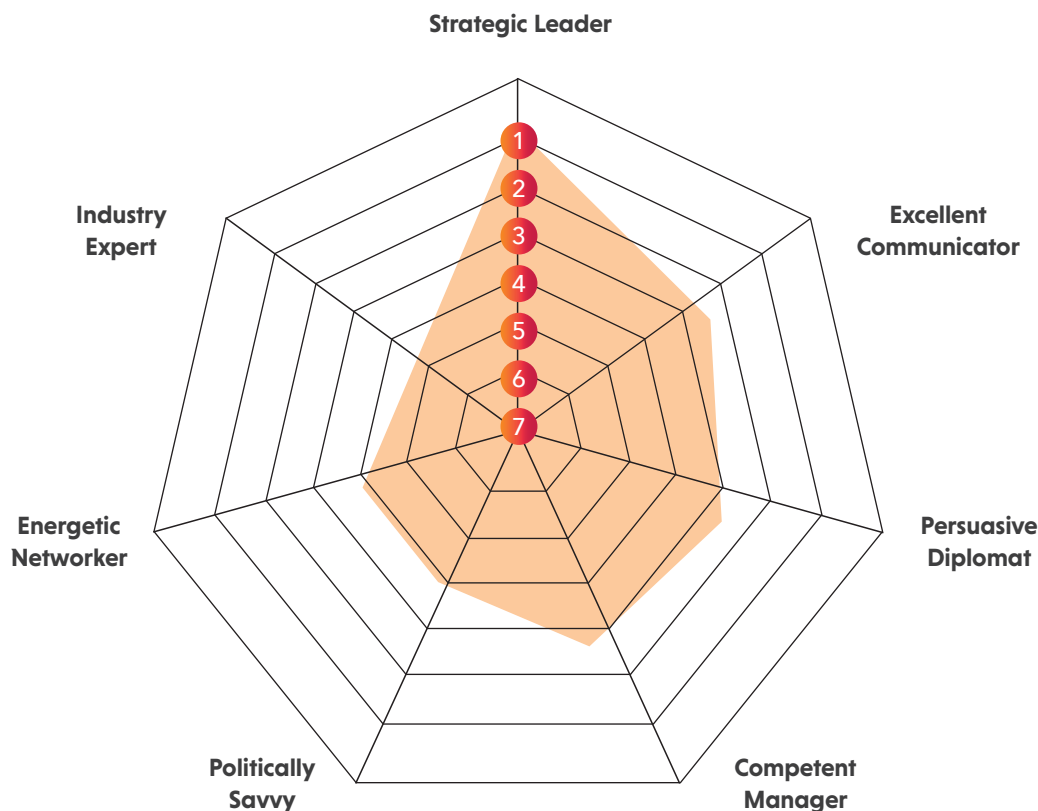
than 10 years, display a dramatic negative difference in performance between the first and second halves of their tenure. According to our research the majority of corporate and association members believe 10 years is too long for a Secretary General to stay in their position.

Choosing a Secretary General can be complicated and can have huge negative consequences for an association if undertaken for the wrong reasons and using poorly developed processes. Buy-in of the remaining leadership for the appointment of the new Secretary General is essential. There are, however, huge benefits if a new 'Super Secretary General' is appointed with full organisational support, complementing the existing skill sets within the secretariat. Specialist recruitment firms like Dober Partners are uniquely positioned to guide the Board through agreeing the selection process, optimising the governance structures and defining the key skills required in order to appoint the best person for the job from an outstanding shortlist of qualified candidates.

Seven key attributes of a successful Association leader emerged from our research (summarized below) which we are now using to agree job descriptions and rate candidates.

## – The Seven Key Attributes Of A Successful Association Leader

Through our research, we have developed a methodology to assess Secretary General candidates for European associations based on the seven attributes.



Associations will give different weighting to these seven attributes depending on their culture, history and other specificities. However, we were interested to find there is surprising commonality across industry sectors on what is expected of the Secretary General. Therefore, we went deeper in our original Association Leadership Survey to find out how relatively important these attributes are to members. Please note in the spider chart 1 denotes the most important of the seven; so strategic leadership is most important; while industry expertise is also important it is the least important of the attributes.

The results summarized above reflect our own experience that Boards tend to look first for strategic thinkers, then for first class communicators and managers who can set strategy rather than industry experts, because such knowledge can be acquired on the job and already exists in the secretariat and membership.

## — Evaluating Your Secretariat

As the saying goes, if it's not measured, it's not truly managed. Associations must add measurable value to the sectors they represent or face the consequences. Corporate members increasingly analyse the return on investment of all their association memberships: regional, national, and global. As one interviewee told us: "Ever since the financial crisis, associations have been forced to demonstrate more clearly their added value and what contributions planned activities will have in terms of outcomes in order to justify their funding".

There are many ways to measure the success of a secretariat which is after all a reflection of the success of the association, and sometimes even of the reputation of the sector itself. However, as this

report is focused on secretariats let us discuss specific measures for them. Many survey respondents cited a mix of methods – for instance one association leader told us they use "High customer satisfaction scores, low membership churn rate, sustained association growth, increased sectoral visibility, and ultimately sectoral growth". Another told us: "Multiple ways: achieving objectives fixed by the Board, reputation with its "client" base, reputation with its members, stability of senior staff, motivation of all staff."

However, using text analysis and grouping hundreds of survey responses we see three main measurement methods used by associations; membership satisfaction; policy and communication achievements; and KPIs.

### – Measurement Word Cloud

Measurement Word Cloud summarizing hundreds of responses from association secretariat leaders and staff to our survey question: How would you measure the overall performance of an association secretariat?



## – Membership Satisfaction

By definition, membership associations exist to serve their members – so ensuring members are satisfied and engaged is a key strategic priority for every association. Moreover each association needs to understand what makes their members happy. Understanding the relationship between members' satisfaction with what secretariats are doing and what members value most is critical to develop a strategy to improve member satisfaction and engagement. Indeed there are a number of indicators that can be used to infer member satisfaction and engagement; membership renewal rates; new member growth; and participation rates.

Some experts told us about the importance not just of meeting members' expectations, but going beyond what is expected of the Secretariat. The majority (i.e. more than 50% of survey respondents) highlighted membership metrics particularly around membership satisfaction.

Overall five main areas for measurement were highlighted in our survey:

- 1. Membership satisfaction surveys and scores
- 2. Measuring the value and benefit of membership.
- 3. Membership retention and growth.
- 4. Membership participation and engagement.
- 5. General evaluation by the Board

“Membership satisfaction is a permanent challenge for trade associations which need to be more and more visible not only with their members but also with potential members. It is important for organisations and their secretariat to spend more time listening to members and understanding their expectations. They also need to spend time telling members about what the association is doing and promote membership benefits, and not simply take it for granted that members value what the association is doing. In this respect, the measurement of membership satisfaction is information of paramount importance to validate (or adapt if needed) the strategic direction of the organisation and achieve greater visibility and thus secure membership retention, growth and engagement.”

Olivier de Matos, Director General  
at CropLife Europe





## – Policy and Communication Outcomes

**Successful Policy Outcomes.** Having the right spokespersons and efficient teamwork between members and secretariat are very important but timing is critical. Our survey shows that ensuring effective process to make timely decisions and positions is the most important success factor for associations' lobbying efforts. Being too late in the process is the main criticism of associations. Business cannot afford to wait for governments to come up with a legislative proposal, associations have to put down what they want ahead of time to have the most impact. Indeed, our research proves that associations should measure their public affairs activities by being consulted on policies before they are drafted and real achievements against a strategic plan; rather than traditional analysis based on cost savings or additional revenues for the industry.

**Enhancing Reputation.** There are many definitions of reputation but in the context of an association, we like to talk about meeting stakeholder expectations. In other words a good or bad reputation is all about the degree to which an association or sector meets the expectations of its stakeholders. For example, if the banking sector disappoints its stakeholders, the reputational and regulatory fall-out will be considerable. It is also important to note the reputation of a sector and the association that represents it are distinct, if interlinked variables. In a recent Dober Partners survey we found improving the reputation of the sector is either the primary (or second after successful lobbying) expectation of association members.

Although members seem generally quite happy with the ability of European associations to deliver favourable policy outcomes, they seem less happy about their communications capabilities. There are high expectations and big disappointments around what associations can do to improve industry reputation. In our experience, particularly at the pan-European/EU level it is rare that an association has sufficient budget, or headcount, or even the mandate to deliver against the ambitious expectation to improve the reputation of an entire sector. Only half of European associations regularly measure the reputation of their sector among policy-makers, mainly due to lack of budget.

Overall four main areas for policy and communication measurement were highlighted in our survey:

- **1. Lobbying wins and long term change in policy agenda**
- **2. Improvement in Reputation of the Association and Sector**
- **3. Outputs such as Quantity and Quality of Meetings**
- **4. Outcomes versus Expectations set by Members.**

"Associations often are put in a difficult situation by their members. They are asked to manage reputation and deliver policy outcomes, but not given adequate tools or support needed to do the job. Member companies are better resourced and more experienced at strategic communications. The sooner they realise that their associations can "scratch itches they can't reach" when it comes to engaging effectively with government - and provide them with the support they need - the sooner associations can deliver better outcomes for their sector. Key to success is better use of measurement to understand and influence debates. Our experience shows that those associations that take a more data-driven approach are more focused and effective."

Phil Riggins, Founder and CEO,  
the Brand & Reputation Collective



## – Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are a type of performance measurement, and can measure the success of a secretariat or of a particular activity in which it engages. Although around half of secretariat staff typically do not receive bonuses, we find that increasingly association leaders are recruited with the promise of bonuses linked to clear KPIs. Therefore, choosing the right KPIs and categories for measurement relies upon a good understanding of what is important to the association. There are two categories of measurements for KPIs.

- **1. Quantitative objective facts without distortion from personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations presented with a specific value preferably numeric, for instance association revenue and headcount.**
- **2. Qualitative values based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions and presented as any numeric or textual value that represents an interpretation of these elements, such as membership satisfaction or reputation among stakeholders.**

In practice, overseeing KPIs can prove expensive or time intensive for associations. Some indicators such as staff morale may be difficult to quantify. Therefore, dubious KPIs can be adopted that can be used as a rough guide rather than a precise benchmark, or lead to unintended consequences. For instance, focussing on KPIs on new membership acquisition rates might lead to satisfaction levels dropping among existing members. Nevertheless, the use of KPIs are prevalent. As one association leader told us: "Performance is usually measured annually based on the agreed action plan. The Action plan typically includes several SMART goals and Key Performance Indicators which can be assessed with some kind of rating or percentage at the end of each year."

Overall two main areas for KPI measurement were highlighted in our survey:

- **1. Internal and External KPIs**
- **2. Strategic KPIs set by the Board**





# — Recruiting Great People for your Secretariat

Often the people in the secretariat are the greatest asset of any association, so there are three fundamental responsibilities of a manager or leader in an association:

- 1. Hiring great employees
- 2. Developing great employees
- 3. Retaining great employees

If you don't get number one right, the rest becomes almost impossible. It is an obvious point but the best people do the best work. According to McKinsey superior talent is up to eight times more productive. Conversely the potential damage of a bad hire can be enormous. Different research on the cost of a single bad hire in a company put the cost typically at anywhere from €20,000 to €200,000, however, the cost of a bad hire in an association can be much greater. In the course of our research, we uncovered horror stories of rogue DGs and bad association lobbyists who incurred the wrath of European Commissioners and Members of Parliament which ended up costing their industry literally millions through vengeful new proposals or amended legislation. Typically, the costs of a bad hire for an association include:

- Recruitment fees, advertising and staff time.
- On-boarding time and expenses for replacement hires.
- The negative impact on secretariat team performance.
- The disruption to incomplete projects.
- Upset association members and external stakeholders.
- Outplacement services.
- Weakened association and employer brand.
- Legal fees.

So the case for spending the time (and sometimes money) for recruiting great secretariat staff is clear!

"Go after the cream of the cream. A small team of A+ players can run circles around a giant team of B and C players."

Steve Jobs, former CEO of Apple.



"Our team is undoubtedly one of our association's most important assets so when a gap needs to be filled, it is very important to have someone help you who not only can do discreet searches in the small village that is Brussels but who will search out the 'right fit' in terms of people. The right mix of expertise but also of personalities in the secretariat and also with members is of crucial importance and a good head-hunter will follow-up well beyond the actual hire and continue to advise on how to help the new recruit reach his/her full potential the best. Being able to understand the 'full picture' and really knowing the client is essential."

Catherine Van Reeth, Director General at Toy Industries of Europe



"The effective collective action required of Associations depends very much on ensuring a maximum level of mutual trust – not just from external stakeholders to the Association itself and from the Association's members to its Secretariat, but also among the Secretariat team members themselves. Trust must work in both directions. Association leaders must trust and thereby help empower their staff to carry out the work required. Staff members must be able to have trust in their managers' abilities. Mutual trust within an Association Secretariat results in higher levels of optimum performance."

Robert Wright, Consultant and former Secretary General of several European trade associations





Teams need the right mix and number of members, optimally designed tasks and processes, and norms that discourage destructive behaviour and promote positive dynamics. High performance secretariats include members with a balance of personalities, skills and knowledge. Every individual doesn't have to possess superlative technical and social skills, but the team overall needs a healthy dose of both. Diversity in knowledge, views, and perspectives, as well as in age, gender, and race, can help teams be more creative and avoid groupthink.

When hiring staff it is important to validate their reputation, and the relevance of previous experience. Often lacking in HR departments, associations sometimes struggle to carry out adequate background checks for key recruits. Hiring a specialist recruitment firm like Dober Partners ensures that first class candidates are identified and validated through a thorough search process.

For business associations in particular where the members themselves are direct market competitors, the appointment of an association leader presents a delicate political challenge of balance of interests. The procedure needs to be agreed in advance with clear milestones such as drawing up and presenting the short list. The actors (such as selection panel members) or decision makers (such as Board members) should be mandated by the general assembly, and the procedure must be transparent whilst necessarily protecting the confidentiality required for candidates. The process of easing in, and presenting the new appointee must be planned from both an internal and external perspective. As an experienced neutral third party, headhunters are best placed to advise on and participate in these steps.

Maori All Blacks perform the Haka before the Tour match at the Rotorua International Stadium.

"The art of the good executive search firm is not only to know all the potential candidates but more importantly to know their motivations, what sort of position might attract them and to be able to assess if the fit is right. Headhunters generally know a broad range of people, and if a search is being conducted discretely, a third party such as a headhunter is essential."

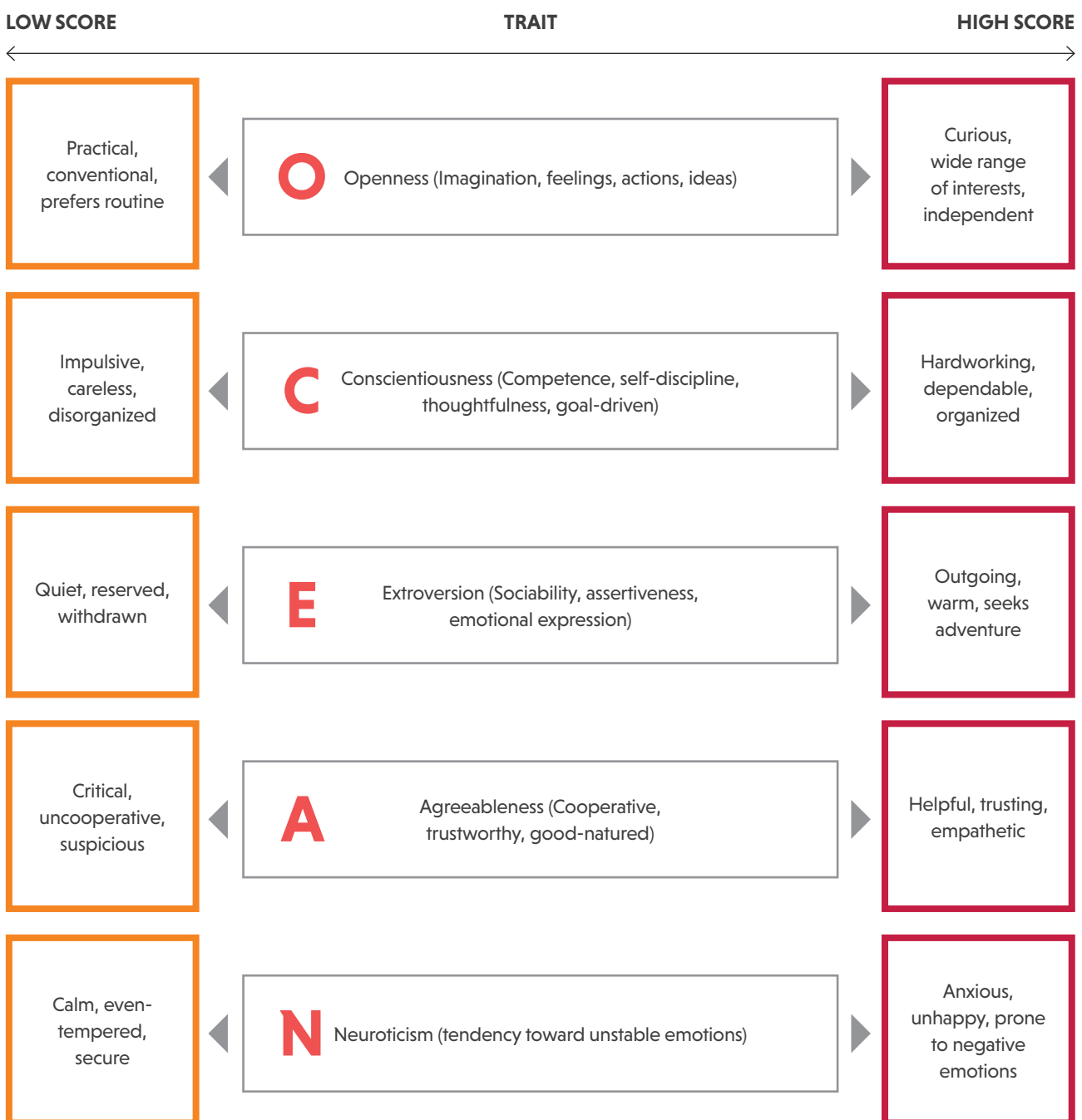
The Economist: Headhunters and how to use them.

**The  
Economist**



# — Personality Assessment for Optimising Recruitment and Team Performance

Psychologists tend to break personality traits down into five categories: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. They are sometimes referred to collectively by the acronyms OCEAN. Each of the big 5 personality traits is made up of facets or sub traits which can be assessed independently of the trait that they belong to.



"As a manager, getting to know the professional personality of my team is very important. In the recruitment phase, it allows me to assess whether a candidate fits the profile I am looking for: is she a starter or a finisher? Does he thrive in social interaction or working on his own? Will she challenge the status quo or be compliant? These aspects of a character are as important as the sector experience that a candidate brings to the job. And they are hard to identify in a CV, or in an interview. That's when a professional personality assessment comes in. As a human capital "management tool", I use it as a personality "decoder". It allows me to create the synergies in my team, which will improve performance; to identify what motivates different people; to anticipate the areas of potential clash and deal with them."

Federica Sabbati, Secretary General  
at European Heating Industry



The Big Five model is helpful for describing personality differences. People who have high agreeableness, for example, are more likely to cooperate and go along with group decisions, whereas those low in this trait would be more competitive and go against the grain. If you're high in conscientiousness, you're likely organized and have good impulse control, as opposed to those who do things last minute.

These are our core traits which aren't affected by moods, and various studies suggest they're genetic. When we're maturing, however, these traits are still forming. By the age of 30, the majority of people have reached maturity. Using a questionnaire-based testing, psychologists measure the degree to which each of these traits is individually expressed. Having a good sense of your own personality, styles and aptitudes can lead to better collaboration and communication in work and beyond.

As we have discovered over many years, the key success factor for recruitment is personality fit for any given role. Knowledge and skills can be acquired and strengthened but personality is deep-rooted. Hence, personality assessment is an additional tool alongside interviews, role playing, written exercises and verbal presentations to decide whether a candidate is really suitable for a particular job. Indeed at Dober Partners we sometimes use personality assessment techniques before candidates are given a final offer to analyse potential strengths and weaknesses for a given role, and as a predictor of social interaction within a team.





It is clear some personality types are better suited for some types of jobs. For instance, unsympathetic personalities should not be in HR roles, and highly sensitive personalities should seek out quiet workplaces because they don't like overstimulation. The larger the association, the more types of roles available, and indeed personality types that can be accommodated in a high performance team.

To support team effectiveness within high performance teams, understanding of individual working styles is important. This can be done by applying DISC assessment and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to understand behaviour, personalities and thinking styles of team members. Many associations use these indicators for personality type assessment, helping people to become more appreciative and tolerant of other preferred styles of communication and patterns of behaviour.

When teams work together, each individual brings a unique set of knowledge, skills, and personality traits to the group. Research has shown that different combinations of traits affect how teams interact and how productive they are. When we think about diversity in an association context, we often think about age, gender, race and cultural background but there is far more to creating a diverse workplace than hiring people who fit into different age brackets, or creating the perfect male to female ratio.

Though we may share things in common with other individuals, at the end of the day, everyone is their own person and can bring different things to the table,

which is why diversity is so important among a high performance secretariat. By hiring people with different personalities, creativity, delivery and performance can be enhanced. Whereas one person may be great at generating exciting, out of the box ideas, another may have the patience and necessary experience to execute it; so it is essential to play on each individual's strengths and collaborate with others in the team.

Researchers looked at the personalities of teams and found that including variations of personalities also had a balancing effect during team projects. For example, during stressful situations when negative feelings are festering, team members with more social and agreeable attitudes were able to help mitigate conflict and maintain team optimism, boost morale and encourage involvement. Aggressiveness and conscientious behaviours helped keep the team on track and hit deadlines. The lesson is that if you are assembling a team, no matter what tool or assessment you use, make sure you have balance, with varying strengths and aptitudes represented.

"Teamwork requires some sacrifice up front; people who work as a team have to put the collective needs of the group ahead of their individual interests."

Patrick Lencioni



# — Key Personality Traits for Advocacy Roles

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Advocacy is all about influencing decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions. Most associations exist to achieve specific advocacy goals. Indeed advocacy is the business and lifeblood of most associations.

When we ask association leaders and members how they measure advocacy success the top three responses are; being consulted on policies before they are drafted; achievements versus planned/agreed actions; and reputation among high-level decision makers. For advocates to secure a place in the room having a trusted conversation with policy-makers requires special personality traits. In our experience people who are able to bring about change at a very high level commonly share three important personality attributes; trustworthiness; proactivity and resilience.

## Trustworthiness

Trust is a particularly important commodity in an association context – it is the glue that holds associations and competing members together. Individuals who score high on trust generally believe others' intentions to be benevolent. Those scoring low on this facet tend to be cynical and view others as suspicious, dishonest, or dangerous. The best association advocates are trusted not only by their members and colleagues but most importantly by the people they aim to influence. As a Member of the European Parliament once told me: "I need to know I can trust a lobbyist and that I am not being set-up for a fall."

"The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them."

Ernest Hemingway



## Proactivity

People with a proactive personality have a tendency to take action to change things, show initiative, and persevere until the desired change has occurred. Proactive behaviour involves acting in advance of a future situation, rather than just reacting or waiting for something to happen. Proactive advocates do not need to be asked to act, nor do they require detailed instructions. They know that if the association does not engage with policy-makers early, then the rules will be written for them, without them.

"The future depends on what you do today."

Mahatma Gandhi



## Resilience

Psychological resilience is defined as an individual's ability to successfully cope with adversity. People who demonstrate resilience tend to have optimistic attitudes and positive emotionality; they are, in practice, able to effectively counter negative emotions and situations with positive emotions. Not everybody has the inner toughness or determination to handle being rejected or slapped down by policy-makers. Resilient advocates persevere and can maintain passion for long-term goals, working persistently towards challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite negative feedback, adversity, plateaus in progress, or failure. The tougher the sector's policy and communication challenges, the more resilience is required from its advocates.

"Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again."

Nelson Mandela





# — Rewarding Staff

It should be no surprise that salaries in European associations sector are generally quite high given their strategic importance. European associations have always fulfilled a critical role in shaping the policies and regulations affecting the sectors they represent - as well as defending and enhancing their reputations. As I write these words during the coronavirus crisis, never have businesses and associations needed to engage with European governments and the EU more than now.

At Dober Partners we specialise in the recruitment of European association staff who typically either lead the association or work in key policy, communication, operations or regulatory roles. Through regular contacts with clients and candidates we have amassed considerable knowledge on compensation packages in Brussels, across sectors and seniority levels. We recently published the European Trade Association Compensation & Benefits Report.

This report is a product of a decade of knowledge and experience combined with the largest ever Brussels association remuneration survey completed in summer 2020. Our report can be downloaded for free from [www.doberpartners.com](http://www.doberpartners.com) where you will also find a webinar recording on this subject aimed at association leaders.

The key finding of our remuneration analysis is that salaries in associations vary enormously, not just between sectors but between organizations in the same sector. Some of these variations are easy to explain by relative size, burden of regulation, wealth and importance of the organizations their staff represent, other times 'Lady Luck' seems to have played more than her fair part.

Although the gender pay gap is a significant issue in companies, our general experience with associations is that women are considered equally alongside male candidates in salary negotiations, and that the sector is relatively balanced compared to other white collar sectors. However, there is still room for improvement particularly on Secretary General pay, and some way to go toward achieving greater diversity, particularly among association boards.



"A woman who wants to go places needs to bring her own ladder."

Margrethe Vestager, Danish politician and European Commissioner





## – European Associations in Brussels

Overall European association salaries are considerably higher than those found in the general Belgian economy, reflecting the premium paid for European affairs positions, which attract high calibre staff from around the European Union. The vast majority of association leaders earn substantially above €100,000, with around one third earning more than €200,000 in base salary alone, and some even enjoy salaries above €400,000. Although highly taxed there are a number of perks and benefits available to association staff in Belgium, which are less common elsewhere. For instance, cars in Belgium with the free use of fuel are fairly common for senior staff due to their relatively favourable tax treatment. According to our research, meal vouchers, group pension plans, phones and private healthcare insurance are available to the majority of mid to senior salaried employee secretariat staff across all functions and roles. The clear majority of all association staff (57%) receive an annual bonus, and around one quarter receive a really meaningful bonus of 5% to 12% of annual salary.

## – Associations around Europe

Obviously association salaries around Europe reflect local salary levels. In the EU association salaries tend to be highest in the highest GDP per capita countries, notably Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium and Luxembourg. Some of the lowest association salaries are in Eastern Europe, in countries like Romania and Bulgaria, where compensation is often only 10% to 20% of what might be expected in the richest European countries. Secretariat staff can also earn very high salaries in other jurisdictions where we operate especially when running international organisations in Geneva. Indeed, Swiss employees are the best paid in Europe. According to a recent study, employees in certain roles in Switzerland are paid around 50% more than those second-placed Luxembourg.

## – Associations in Washington DC.

While some European association salaries may seem high, they are not the highest in the world. On a recent visit to meet our Washington DC headhunter associates at Lochlin Partners we discovered that the average DG/CEO of a US trade association earns in excess of US \$650,000. The majority of senior association staff receive an annual bonus on top.

## – Job Titles and Functions

We also looked at the structure of the largest associations where there are typically up to 12 key functions listed below, with one, two or three levels of hierarchy. For instance, in the Policy department there may be a Head of Policy (also called Public Affairs or Advocacy) who manages Senior Policy Officers and less experienced Policy Officers. In some associations there are even other departments with specialists ranging from statisticians to economists which are not covered here. However, the majority of associations in Brussels have less than six staff and can only dream of having such resources in depth.

### – European Trade Association Job Titles & Function

Function	Most common job titles
<b>Association Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Person leading the association secretariat i.e. Secretary General, Director General, Executive Director, Managing Director or CEO</li> <li>– Deputy Director General or Deputy Secretary General or Deputy Executive Director or Deputy CEO or Deputy MD</li> <li>– Head or Director of Public Affairs AND Communications</li> </ul>
<b>Policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Head/Director of Policy or Public Affairs or EU Affairs or Advocacy across the Association</li> <li>– Senior Policy Officer or Senior Public Affairs Manager or Senior Adviser</li> <li>– Policy Officer or Adviser or Public Affairs Manager</li> </ul>
<b>Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Head or Director of Communications</li> <li>– (Senior) Communications Manager</li> </ul>
<b>Sector Group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Director, Chief, Head, Executive Director or MD of specific Sector Group (specific Business or Policy Area)</li> <li>– Sector Group Manager</li> </ul>
<b>Regulatory Affairs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Director or Head of Regulatory Affairs and/or Technical &amp; Scientific Affairs</li> <li>– (Senior) Regulatory Affairs Manager or Technical Manager or Scientific Affairs Manager</li> </ul>
<b>Legal Affairs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Head or Director of Legal Affairs</li> <li>– (Senior) Legal Affairs Adviser or Legal Counsel</li> </ul>
<b>Trade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Head/Director of Trade Policy</li> <li>– (Senior) Manager, Trade Policy</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Director, Sustainability or Environment and/or Climate Change</li> <li>– (Senior) Manager, Sustainability or Environment and/or Climate Change</li> </ul>
<b>Operations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Chief Operations Officer (COO) or Head of Operations or Head of Finance &amp; Operations working closely with or in the Association Leadership Group</li> <li>– Office Manager</li> <li>– Finance/Administration/HR/IT Managers</li> <li>– Secretaries/Receptionists</li> </ul>
<b>Membership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Head of Membership Services</li> <li>– Membership Manager or Marketing Manager or Sales Manager</li> </ul>
<b>Events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Head of Events &amp; Conferences</li> <li>– Events &amp; Conference Manager</li> </ul>
<b>Projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– (Senior) Project Manager</li> </ul>



# — Motivating High Performance in Association Staff

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Generally secretariats in Brussels are filled with happy people, as our research shows. There are many reasons and interesting personal examples behind this data. In our one-to-one interviews we do find tremendous satisfaction amongst association leaders which is often explained by a strong sense of freedom to operate, and long term thinking, especially compared to corporate environments.

Nevertheless, some pressured association members or leaders complain that although secretariat staff might be happy, they are complacent and do not convey the requisite sense of urgency.

There is no 'I' in TEAM as the saying goes but individual motivation is key to the success of the collective. So the question is how do you motivate happy people to become high performers and go well beyond minimum expectations? We looked at this issue recently and found some interesting results, as summarized in the table below.





**– The key factors in rewarding individuals for high performance in association secretariats (in order of importance)**

Flexible work schedule



New responsibilities



Good annual salary raises



Special recognition (e.g. awards, public praise etc.)



Flexible work location



Extra training opportunities



Performance related financial bonuses



Title change



Extra vacation time



0

1. VERY IMPORTANT

2. IMPORTANT

3. NOT SO IMPORTANT



# — Flexitime & Financial V Non-Financial Rewards

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My research confirms that flexible working is rated the number one reward in European associations. According to research by the OECD, the majority of European employees (3 out of 4 on average) have access to some work-schedule flexibility, but this proportion varies from 50% in Greece to 90% in the Netherlands and Nordic countries.

Indeed the European Commission has proposed new rules for the extension of the right to request flexible working arrangements (reduced working hours, flexible working hours and flexibility in place of work) to all working parents of children up to 12 and carers with dependent relatives.

Studies in companies have shown that typically flexible workers achieved more; were off sick less often; worked longer hours and were happier in their work. With flexible work schedules, associations might experience these benefits:

- **Increased employee morale, engagement, and commitment to the association.**
- **Reduced absenteeism and tardiness.**
- **Increased ability to recruit outstanding employees.**
- **Reduced turnover of valued staff.**
- **Allows people to work when they accomplish most, feel freshest, and enjoy working e.g. mornings.**
- **Extended hours of operation for departments such as IT.**
- **Develops image as a caring employer with family-friendly flexible work schedule.**

However, the degree of flexible working advisable in any particular association will depend on many factors, not least on the size of the association, and demands of important duties during the year such as AGMs and lobbying on key dossiers. Staff who thrive in an office environment may find it difficult to work when their colleagues don't hold the same schedule. This is why many associations require core

days and core hours during which everyone is in the office. In team-oriented departments, teams still need to meet, which requires some set guidelines.

Flexitime goes hand in hand with flexible work locations. In an era of easy travel, where people actually choose live is increasingly seen as less relevant to performance. For instance, we know leaders of some successful European associations who 'live' in their home cities (on short or long weekends) as far away as 1,500 km from Brussels.

What would you rather have: more money or more time? It is interesting to note that flexitime beats money for many association staff, as flexibility overall scores more highly than financial rewards. If time is our primary and perhaps only commodity, then we want it as much as possible. Once, we saved money; now, we save time. Perhaps secretariat staff's priorities reflect their relatively high earnings and secure employment versus other sectors, however interestingly, extra vacation time is not considered as important as other factors.

Giving new responsibilities is a top way to motivate staff while on the other hand hoarding power can be very demotivating in an association context. From the staff member's perspective though it can be useful to clarify expectations on what the new responsibility will result in, such as better assignments in the future, a move toward a promotion, or a mention at the board meeting—so that they don't end up in a dead-end situation where there is more work and responsibility but no reward. Learning to say yes to the right types

"Flexitime generally incorporates core hours that employees are required to work, but outside of these hours employees can come and go as they please. Flexitime will suit those employees who work better at certain times of the day, while also helping to maintain a better work life balance. Another popular flexible working arrangement is "Remote Working" or "Working from Home". Similar to Flexitime, Working from home grants employees to have a better work/life balance. Other types of flexible working include Job sharing, part time, annualised hours and staggered hours."

The HR Director Magazine

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of opportunities—and say no to others—is an exercise in setting healthy boundaries at work which doesn't necessarily show a lack of drive or ambition but rather a valued employee who prioritizes doing the job at hand.

Interviewees identified other key factors to ensure high performers join associations. In the words of one senior staffer: "The strategy and goals of the association, and the individual responsibilities, must be clear from the start, to ensure that the high-performer knows exactly what to expect. False expectations easily lead to low motivation and, hence, poor performance. The strategy defines the profile of desired people to hire, so this will attract those who are in line with the strategy and consider that can add value to it."

Another told us about the importance of clear communications during the recruitment process: "A firm and clear definition of the strategy and direction of the association, its value and relevance to the membership and the role the individual is expected to play in delivering this, as part of the team. There must also be a clear understanding of what could, in the right circumstances, be the career opportunities and options for the future."

**– Word Cloud from Survey Responses to other key factors rewarding individuals for high performance in association secretariats.**

Grow Pride Rewards Motivation Autonomy Development  
Association Trips Recognition Inspiring  
Sense of Purpose Empowerment  
Individual Interest in the Work Team Industry  
Achievement Success Levels Alignment  
Appreciation Leadership Sector Package Positive  
Relationship Staff Strategy



# — Retaining The Best People

The staffing company Randstad says that 40% of employees are planning to look for a new job within the next six months.

Another survey notes that almost 70% of employees are already at least passively shopping for new job opportunities via social media especially LinkedIn. Job hopping has been described as the "new normal," and millennials are expected to hold 15 to 20 positions over the course of their working lives. However, associations are different. In comparison with other work environments where we operate such as in corporate affairs or consultancy, associations tend to offer the most stable work environments. Associations are there for the long term.

Employee retention matters. Retention of an association's best staff is critical to its long term health and success. Retaining the best employees ensures member satisfaction, stable membership income, happy secretariat staff, deeply imbedded organizational knowledge and learning, maintaining reputation with key stakeholders and even positive policy outcomes. Clearly, for employees to make a long-term commitment to an association, the leadership will need to give them good reasons to stay.

Management thinkers agree that a satisfied employee knows clearly what is expected from him or her every day at work. Changing expectations keep people on edge and create unhealthy stress. Also, the quality of the supervision an employee receives is critical to employee retention. The number one reason people leave organizations is a disagreement in values between the employer and employee. Top talent leave an association when they're badly managed and it is confusing and uninspiring.

Association staff leave bosses and immediate supervisors more often than they leave associations or jobs. It is not enough that the boss is well-liked or a nice person; he or she has a critical role to play in retention. Anything the leadership does to make an employee feel unvalued will contribute to turnover.

"In order to retain your best staff show you trust them by giving them responsibilities that allow them to grow. Encourage them to gain new skills. Provide ample continuing education opportunities. The rewards you give your employees should speak to their emotional needs and should go beyond their monetary compensation."

Harvard Business Review

"The best staff do the best and the most work, so retaining them is a key priority for association leaders. I have learned not to ignore complaints from good employees. These people are your early warning system. However, bad employees do second-rate work and bring others down with them, including the high performers. So a difficult but necessary duty of association leaders is to let them go. While they may not be a good fit for your association, they may thrive in a different environment."

Brian Ager, Senior Adviser to Dober Partners and Covington, former Secretary General at the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT)



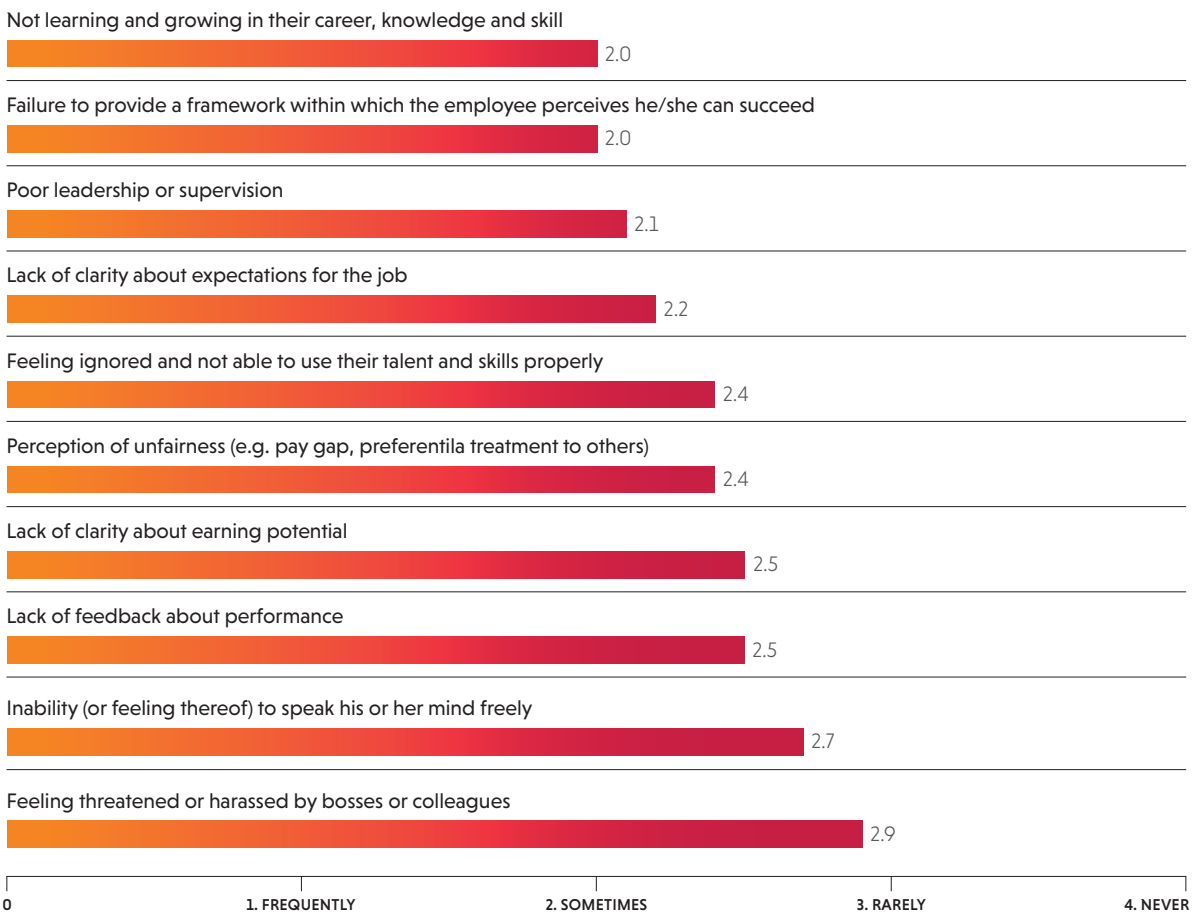
According to Research from LinkedIn the #1 reason employees say they are not engaging in workplace learning is because they don't have the time. Executives and people managers agree that getting employees to make time for learning is the #1 challenge for talent development.



**– Word Cloud on why people stay in their association jobs.**



**– Secretariat Assessment of the reasons other staff cite in wanting to leave their association in terms of frequency.**





## — About Dober Partners

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Dober Partners is the Brussels executive search specialist for European corporate affairs and association leadership roles. We advise on all aspects of the search process from defining the desired skillset and background of shortlisted candidates, through to assisting with the details of local employment law.

The senior team of Dober Partners includes Mark Dober, Natalia Kurop, Brian Ager, Christophe Lécureuil, Frédéric Goffard, Michele Saverese, Florence Ranson and Helen Dunnett. Our entire team has first-hand experience of leading associations and not-for-profits as well as recruiting association roles across functions and seniorities. Unusually the entire Brussels Leadership Team has served on European Association Boards in different roles, including as Director General, Treasurer, COO and Director of Communications and Public Affairs. Hence, the major difference with our competitors is that in addition to our headhunting specialism, we are also practitioners who really understand the association sector.

We bring our specialists' understanding to every assignment, every search, and every interview, finding exceptional candidates that fit demanding briefs. Our end goal is always loyalty and satisfaction. We do this by honestly representing our clients in the market and ensuring that we support and continually advise our candidates during assignments. We have a very strong record of recruiting leaders for diverse and important European associations. All of our association placements have been successful.



**Dober Partners**  
Executive Search  
& Consultancy

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## – The Dober Partners Team



### **Mark Dober**

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Mark has recruited many senior communication, public affairs and association leaders in Brussels and around Europe through Dober Partners since 2010. He has also been a shareholder in Ellwood Atfield and led their international operations until April 2020. He has consulted with over 100 European association leaders, right up to the President of BUSINESSEUROPE and DG of the European Roundtable of Industry. He has also led a number of associations, coalitions and not for profit organisations at EU level. He was formerly the first employee of the public affairs consultancy APCO in Europe and set up their Brussels office in 1995, acting as Managing Director in various roles until 2010. Prior to APCO, he joined the London office of Hill & Knowlton and left its Brussels office as Associate Director. Mark has twice been voted 'European Consultant of the Year' by 'Public Affairs News' and members of 'The European Public Affairs Directory'. He has authored numerous reports on public affairs and communications including 'Key Success Factors for European Associations', 'EU Media Relations', 'High Performance Secretariats', 'European Association Remuneration' and 'European Corporate Affairs Remuneration'. Mark has taught semesters for Masters in Strategic Communications at Brussels IHECS University, and has been an occasional lecturer with a number of Universities including Maastricht. He has a Masters in Political Science from the PUC University of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Mark speaks English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.



### **Natalia Kurop**

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Natalia is a headhunter and consultant, working with Dober Partners since 2013. She was also a Senior Advisor with recruitment firm Ellwood Atfield from 2015 until April 2020. Natalia has been active in communications and public affairs for over 20 years. Previously she served in a number of senior roles including Director of Communications at DIGITALEUROPE, the leading European digital technology association, the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB Europe), and the European Technology and Travel Services Association (ETTSA). Natalia started her career as a broadcast journalist with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and has produced numerous radio documentaries and TV programmes, and co-authored 'EU Media Relations'. She is a former Treasurer and Board Member of the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD). Educated at Sydney and Monash Universities, Natalia speaks English and French.



### **Brian Ager**

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Brian Ager is a Senior Adviser with Dober Partners. He is also Senior Advisor to the law firm Covington and serves as a Board Member of Iberdrola Energia International. He served as the Secretary General of the European Round Table of Industrialists, a forum bringing together CEOs and Chairmen of major European multinationals from 2011 until 2019. He was previously the Director General of the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) from 1995 to 2011. He also served as Secretary General of EuropaBio the leading biotech association from 1990 until 1995. He first came to Brussels as an Expert National D tach  with the European Commission. Educated at Essex University, Brian speaks English and French.





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Christophe is a Senior Adviser providing particular support in Switzerland, France and Brussels. He also serves as the Executive Director of the European Centre for Public Affairs and is Founder of CLC Consultant. Christophe's career highlights include heading up European Government Relations for McDonald's and managing International Communications & Public Affairs for Yum! brands (KFC, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell) across 100 countries. As a consultant with Leidar in Geneva, Fleishman-Hillard in Brussels and Golin/Harris in London, he had the opportunity to work in multiple sectors and industries. He also enjoyed his stint in the NGO world as Head of Corporate Communications at the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in Geneva. Christophe started his career as an expert at the European Parliament. He is a French national and holds Master's degrees in Political Science and International Affairs. Christophe spends his time between Geneva and Brussels. He also regularly lectures at the Graduate Institute in Geneva on international advocacy.



**Frédéric Goffard**

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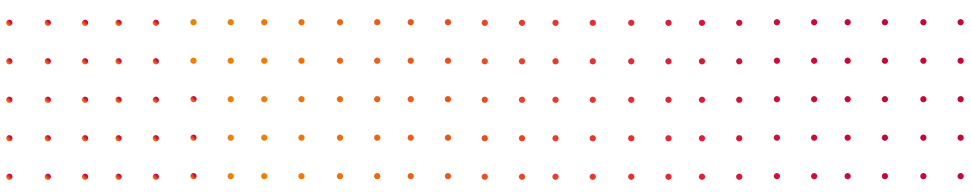
Frédéric is a financial, technology and legal expert with particular experience in helping trade associations and not-for-profit organisations. Frédéric joined the Dober Partners team in 2020 but has worked closely with team members previously. Since 2012 Frédéric has fulfilled the legal, tax and annual account obligations for EUFIC, the European Food Information Council. Prior to EUFIC he worked for DIGITALEUROPE and a number of other sector groups in the energy field. Frédéric has a BSc in Accounting from the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes Commerciales (EPHEC – Brussels) and studied tax law and IT. Frédéric's accounting, legal and IT skills have helped association leaders make the right decisions, at the right time. Frédéric speaks English and French.



**Michele Savarese**

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Michele joined the Dober Partners team in 2020 to cooperate on executive search activities with a focus on Southern Europe. Michele is an EU funding and public affairs specialist based between Rome and Brussels with fifteen years of experience working with clients from various sectors. Since 2010 he works at Schuman Associates on the implementation of funding strategies and market assessments as well as public affairs and advocacy campaigns. Prior to this he worked in the international division of a large Italian IT company managing international projects as well as developing new partnerships. Michele has a BA in Political Science from John Cabot University in Rome and a graduate certificate in International Relations from Boston University. Michele speaks, English, Italian and French.





**Florence Ranson**

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Florence has been active in European communications circles for some 30 years. She started her career as Project Manager for the European Commission, (1990 to 1997), setting up and running Team Europe for the Directorate General Communications. As Secretary General of the European Advertising Tripartite (1997 to 2001), Florence was in charge of the communications strategy and spokesperson of the organisation, on behalf of the European advertising sector.

She then was Head of Communications at the European Banking Federation for 12 years, 5 of which were crisis years. She managed the communications portfolio and was spokesperson of the organisation, as well as devising the strategic developments of communications for the sector. Florence became Director of Communications for FoodDrinkEurope in 2014, until 2018. There she defined and managed the communications strategy, as well as coordinated the various campaigns launched by the organisation.

Florence has been Chair of the Jury of the European Excellence Awards in communications for over 10 years and is a founding member of the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD), where she was Managing VP for 10 years. She was awarded a 2018 ProPR Award for her contribution to the European communication profession. She regularly speaks at and moderates events throughout Europe and is a mentor to young professionals.



**Helen Dunnett**

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Helen has worked for over 25 years in Belgium and the UK with a diverse range of organisations from start-ups and federations to multinationals and consultancies.

Helen is an ICF accredited coach who works with organisations to develop their teams. She is also a certified Harrison Assessments talent development coach.

She has a wealth of experience in moderation and the 'Art of Conversation', together with deep expertise in digital and social media platforms having previously worked with Microsoft, APCO and ZN Network.

Today, Helen provides coaching and moderation training services to enhance team work and team leadership.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this report, and we hope you find it useful.** We are grateful to everybody who contributed their time to our surveys, and to all our clients and candidates without whom we would not be able to give back to the association community through our knowledge-sharing endeavours.

**Dober Partners**

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