

# Philosophy of Assessment and Selection: Systems vs. Tools

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## Select International's Philosophy of Assessment and Selection

Select International designs assessment systems that are used for purposes of selection, promotion and development. These systems are built upon several fundamental beliefs:

**Belief 1:** No single factor consistently predicts job performance best. Jobs, positions and work are complex and multifaceted. Any comprehensive assessment system must account for this multidimensionality.

**Belief 2:** No single assessment method is acceptable for measuring all dimensions. Some assessment methods, e.g. social intelligence tests, personality inventories, in-baskets, problem solving tests, interviews or simulations, are better at measuring different competencies than are others.

**Belief 3:** Different companies require different employee profiles. Companies differ in the level of empowerment, self-directedness, problem solving, teamwork, leadership styles, spans of control and work environment. This needs to be accounted for in a comprehensive assessment system.

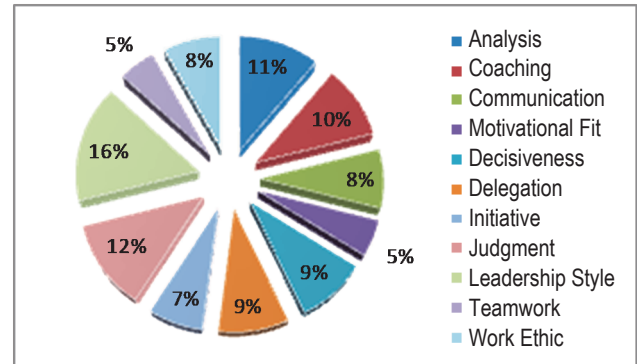
The combination of these beliefs leads to a guiding philosophy about the appropriate means of designing and configuring assessment systems. As will become apparent in the following pages, these beliefs lead to a clear need to approach assessment as a system and not simply an assembly of individual tools.

The following sections describe each of these three beliefs in more detail and also explain their impact of assessment system design. A discussion of the difference between System and Tools is also provided.

## BELIEF 1: Jobs, Positions & Work are Complex and Multifaceted

Consider the position of a first level leader in an organization. The factors which influence that person's success in that role can be represented by the following figure:

**FIRST-LEVEL LEADER COMPETENCY PROFILE**



As you can see from this figure, there are a number of different competencies that constitute an effective leader. This is often referred to as a “**success profile**”. One can clearly see from this success profile that to be effective in this position requires a variety of competencies.

### **What are the implications of this multidimensional profile?**

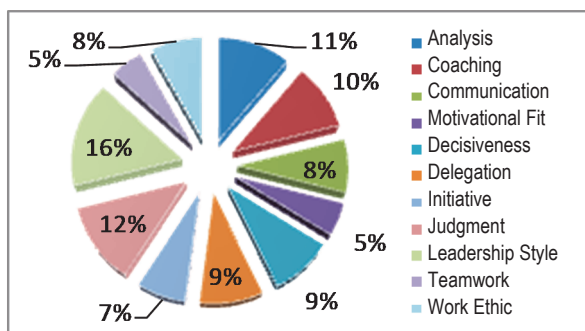
The first clear implication is that someone who is a very good leader but who has poor decision making skills (analysis and judgment) is likely to have problems in the position. This is because leadership, although perhaps the most important factor for this position, still accounts for only about 16% of the entire profile.

A second implication is that there are multiple ways of being successful. One criticism of some selection approaches is that they seem to select or promote one-dimensional clones. For instance, they seem to promote people who are extremely bright but have overly directive, un-empowering styles of leadership. By viewing the position as a combination of various competencies we can take into account various combinations of competency levels and not overly emphasize or de-emphasize one competency at the expense of another.

## BELIEF 2: No Single Assessment Approach is Sufficient at Evaluating a Particular Competency

Once you've identified the multiple competencies of interest for a particular position, it is time to measure them through an assessment. There are many types of assessments that can be used. When we talk about assessment approaches, we're talking about the type of question or item that is used to measure a particular competency (e.g., personality, situational judgment, cognitive ability, simulations, interviews). Our research and experience have shown that using just one assessment approach is not sufficient.

The concept of the need for multiple assessment approaches is explained in more detail using Leadership as an example. The following figure represents the same success profile introduced in the previous section. The table shows some appropriate assessment approaches for measuring five of the success competencies. Each of the assessment tools mentioned (logical reasoning, simulations, personal belief inventories, and structured interviews) have their own strengths and weaknesses. Used in combination they provide a powerful means of assessing the full-range of a competency.



Recommended Assessment Approaches by Competency

<b>Analysis</b>	Logical Reasoning Exercise Structured Interview
<b>Motivational Fit</b>	Structured Interview Personal Preference Questionnaire
<b>Judgment</b>	Situational Judgment Simulations (role play & in-basket)
<b>Leadership Style</b>	Simulations (role play & in-basket) Situational Judgment Personal Beliefs
<b>Teamwork</b>	Personal Beliefs Group Exercise Structured Interview
<b>Work Ethic</b>	Personal Beliefs Structured Interview

Using multiple tools for evaluating a competency not only increases the reliability or consistency of the assessment but also increases the validity or accuracy of the assessment. A person may do poorly or may do well on one particular assessment tool due to a variety of reasons, some related to their actual skill level and some not related to skill level. The pattern of their scores across a variety of well developed tools is going to provide the best and fairest assessment of that competency.

## BELIEF 3: Different Companies Require Different Profiles

When companies start designing their success profiles they need to take into account factors such as the following:

- Corporate Culture
- Organizational Goals
- Current/Future Needs for the Position

These factors will influence such things as the style of leadership that will best fits the company, the level and criticality of decision making skills, the level of initiative and creativity available in the position, etc. These factors will inevitably affect two critical design characteristics:

- The relative weight of one competency in relation to another (the size of the slice of pie in our example).
- Potential minimum levels of acceptability for a particular competency.

See the figure below regarding minimally acceptable levels for a leader in a particular organization:



Minimally acceptable levels usually come into effect from a selection point of view. From this perspective, if there are certain "minimum standards", then a person must be well-rounded with regard to the success profile. For example, an individual may be outstanding in a variety of competencies but if s/he fails to meet a minimum standard in one competency area then that person would be considered an unacceptable candidate. Thus, if a candidate's score in Analysis is less than 5, then that candidate would be unacceptable regardless of scores on other competencies.

One can clearly see that minimum standards have potentially dramatic effects on recruitment and selection ratios required for selecting qualified candidates. In many cases, however, establishing minimum standards is essential for hiring the right people for the position. This is often seen in organizations that are starting new operations “start-ups” or are undergoing dramatic internal changes. In the case of many start-ups, the ability and motivation to work effectively with others on a team “teamwork” is such an important ingredient for their success that it is established as a key “knock out” factor with a fixed minimally acceptable level. This underscores the importance of establishing the right, meaning different, success profile(s) for each and every organization that uses one of Select International’s assessment tools.

### Systems vs. Tools

By now it should be clear that comprehensive, accurate assessment involves more than putting together a series of tests and coming up with a final score. Tests, interviews, simulations, etc. are assessment tools. They represent methods for obtaining certain pieces of information. They don’t, however, represent a complete system for coming up with and interpreting a competency profile.

In fact, as any student of tests and measures quickly learns, there is no such thing as a valid test (great trick question on the first exam). The reason is that tests, in and of themselves, are neither valid nor invalid. Rather, the *interpretations* of test scores are what can be evaluated as valid or invalid. In order to ensure that the interpretations are valid, one must first develop a comprehensive, internally cohesive and carefully thought out system for using those individual tools.

### In Summary

Three underlying beliefs regarding assessment system design have led us to a focus on developing integrated systems as opposed to focusing on the development and marketing of individual tools. Indeed, to be effective, our systems are composed of tools. Those tools have been and continue to be developed, researched and validated. The true value of assessment, however, is not obtained until these tools are configured into a system that takes into account each tool’s strengths and limitations, the complex nature of the position, and also each company’s individual needs and success profiles.