

# Executive Assessment: Is One Test Enough?

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## Introduction

There has been a lot of discussion and, quite frankly, confusion lately around selecting the best tests to use for predicting success and advancement at the senior management ranks. In the popular press and in professional discussion groups, there have been many single tests or approaches touted as the best “one” for these purposes. Consultants, human resources professionals and hiring managers seem to have their preferences based on their experiences. Some specific instruments that are currently quite popular include:

- ASSESS
- *The Guilford Zimmerman Temperament Survey*
- *The Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal*
- *The Edwards Personal Preference Schedule*
- *The Predictive Index*
- *The Profile XT*
- *The Activity Vector Analysis*
- *The Myers Brigg Type Indicator*
- *In-basket Exercise*
- *The Wonderlich General Aptitude Assessment*
- *The Employee Aptitude Survey*
- *The Professional Employment Test*
- *The Personnel Research Form*
- *The Devine Inventory*
- *Caliper*

While all of these measures are well researched and are very effective in certain applications, each one, by itself, only reveals a part of the overall picture for a given person. Just as a physician would never give one test to understand your entire health profile, we cannot expect that any one psychological test will reveal complex human potential and “derailers.”

At Select International, our experience has clearly demonstrated that it is the **interaction** between various intellectual abilities, personality and decision-making style that reveals one’s true performance profile. We obtain this profile by administering numerous psychological tests that reveal pieces of the human potential puzzle. Trained psychologists find patterns in the test results that allow them to make hypotheses about the participant’s behavior.

These hypotheses are confirmed or disconfirmed in a psychological interview. There are simply no “single test” short-cuts.

At a more detailed level, individual tests are wonderful for providing normative data across large samples of participants. However, as stated above, individual tests are not very good at predicting complex human behavior (performance success). This is especially true at the executive level. While research shows that general cognitive ability - versus personality - is the best single predictor of success at the senior levels, there are other factors, in addition to “gray matter” that can make the difference between achieving results and failure.

As an example, we recently assessed a candidate for a CEO position. This person was extremely bright, very assertive and deeply experienced. However, he lacked the ability to deeply analyze situations to identify the most important factors, as well as the ability to identify subtleties and nuances. His approach of focusing on one way of doing things would not have been a good fit for the organization for whom he was being assessed.

Additionally, we often see senior executives with the opposite decision-making profile. Though bright and analytical, they will tend to make decisions very quickly without an appropriate analysis of the facts at hand. In these cases, they get very little “mileage” out of their strong intellectual gifts and can, even worse, behave recklessly.

Finally, it is common to see executives who have wonderfully balanced personality profiles and tremendous communication skills but are not cognitively able to handle the next higher level job. These individuals are often promoted because their impressive personalities and strong communication skills camouflage their cognitive limitations. Other important factors that interact with executive abilities are interpersonal insight and emotional intelligence, as well as authenticity and servant leadership.

## Summary

At Select International, we approach the assessment of executives through an in-depth battery of testing that typically includes multiple personality assessments, multiple cognitive assessments, as well as leadership measurements and strategic analysis exercises. Following the testing, which is generally completed online, an experienced Ph.D. level assessor conducts an in-depth interview to gain a context for the assessments and probe into key areas of both strength and potential concern. Key “derailers” and important interactions between the variables are addressed. The assessor then writes an in-depth report that describes how the executive will function on a day-to-day basis, under stress, and when dealing with different types of personalities. The report focuses on both their short-term and long-term potential for success and, especially, how they will lead and manage others. Select International assessors also provide graphic ratings and compare executives on key traits to others who have been assessed at this level to allow for effective benchmarking.

Therefore, while all of the measures listed above are very good tools to measure specific competencies, our experience clearly demonstrates that any single test does not provide enough data for critical executive decisions. By using a process that includes multiple psychological tests interpreted by a trained psychologist and elaborated upon through a psychological interview, we can provide organizations with the important information they need in an easy-to-read format that allows for effective decision making. To do any less is considered risky, given the potential impact that a single executive can have on an organization’s current and future success.