

Executive Assessment Division: Philosophy and Approach

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Introduction

This document describes Select International's approach to executive assessment, developmental planning and feedback, assessment reporting, as well as team development and coaching. It outlines the processes and steps involved in successfully setting up and conducting an executive assessment and development process, as well as differentiate Select International's approach to assessment in comparison to PDI and DDI.

Job and Organizational Analysis

During this phase, Select International's senior psychologists gain an in depth understanding of the client organization's mission, values, critical success factors, as well as its core competencies. The goal of this process is to delineate the competencies that are essential for success within the client organization. The competency models that are created, confirmed and/or refined are essential for determining the measurement targets for the assessment process. The assessment process itself has many uses and, as such, it is essential that the job and organizational analysis sets a strong foundation for the process. Executive assessment is a key component for the following organizational processes:

- Recruitment and selection
- High potential evaluation
- Individual development
- Promotion
- Succession planning
- Team development
- On boarding/performance management

Communication Process

Following a determination of the key competencies measured and the purposes for the assessment, it is essential that the organization, with support from Select International, communicate the purpose and importance of the process to the participants. As, in addition to the participant, multiple raters may be

involved, it is important to communicate to everyone why the data is being gathered, who will have access to the data, and both the short and long-term uses of the information. The appropriate maintenance of confidentiality and strong assurances that the information will not be used to sever anyone from the organization are key components of the communication process. In addition, logistical issues around the location of the assessment, technical issues, timing and scheduling of feedback, as well as a process summary are all key components of this phase. By setting up the assessment for success within an effective communication process, it is made much more likely that the results will be accurate and that those providing input will share openly and candidly.

Traditional Behavioral Executive Assessment Centers (e.g., DDI/PDI)

The traditional assessment process typically requires executive participants to travel to a specific location to participate in the assessment center. While at the assessment center, executives are asked to interact with various role players and handle situations that are designed to be representative of those that they would face in their role as current or future executives. In addition, significant preparation work in terms of completing in baskets, presentations and other materials is often required prior to traveling to the assessment center. The basic premises of this approach is that by measuring behaviors in realistic situations, that statements can be made about executives' abilities to handle various circumstances. It also gives, based on behaviors exhibited in the assessment, an indication of individual development needs.

This is a very process-oriented approach that has much less to do with the assessor than the process itself. In fact, assessors typically either do not have a Ph.D.-level degree and/or are less experienced than senior assessors in psychological oriented approaches. The data analysis and reporting is also very process-oriented and somewhat mechanical versus interpretative. Reports are typically lengthy and focus on specific behaviors observed, and those not exhibited. The reports may take weeks, or possibly longer, to complete. However, all of the competencies assessed typically tie into specific training programs offered by the delivering consulting organization that are designed to develop these areas.

Feedback is delivered to the individuals either individually or in groups, and data may be aggregated to help with various organizational initiatives. In addition, most approaches now include some level of testing though this is not extensive. The processes are typically set for certain organizational levels and/or industries. There is typically little flexibility in terms of process, outputs and data gathering.

In-Depth (Whole Person) Assessment

Select International's Executive Assessment Division (EAD) is an evolution of a well-researched process that can trace its roots back to the early 1940s. The approach is based on having an in depth understanding of an individual based on standardized testing, in depth interviews, and a trained and experienced assessor's interpretation of that information in relation to organizational needs, climate and culture. There is a tremendous amount of research that goes into selecting the tests. It is also a very flexible process, as the test battery and interview protocols can be adjusted based on organization, industry level and position within the company.

While this process was historically widely used by smaller and regional firms of psychologists, it had not historically been available to a broad array of organizations, geographies (and languages) through a single provider. Select International has taken this in depth process and brought it to scale through the use of Internet technology and basic telephony. Select International EAD assessors go through an extensive training and certification process that ensures that each have the "gift" of assessment interpretation, the executive impact and the ability to deliver meaningful results in a collaborative fashion to client organizations and individuals. Assessors, prior to being considered for hire, must have obtained a relevant Ph.D. degree and have at least 10 years of assessment experience working with managers and executives. Many EAD assessors have much more experience and many have additional skills including coaching and executive facilitation.

Select International's approach is much more focused on the assessor and his or her ability to interpret information within the context of organizational needs and culture. While the process itself is very robust, it is the reporting and decision-making that comes as the result of the assessment, which is key to the success of the implementations.

The assessment process has three distinct phases:

1. In Depth Psychological Testing

Select International's Senior Psychologists select an in-depth test battery, typically four to six hours, that has multiple measures of:

- Cognitive skills, Behavioral styles
- Motivations
- Career derailers
- Decision-making style and ability
- Strategic analysis capabilities
- Sales, negotiating and other job specific skills

The testing can be administered in person at a Select International Assessment Center or, preferably, on-site at the client location where the participant can complete the testing based on his/her schedule without interruption. In some cases, though, the testing can be completed off site in an unproctored environment, though this is not recommended for external applicants for hire. The testing itself is presented in several easy to follow steps and, with the greater acceptance of Internet technology, is being very well received by participants in a variety of contexts.

2. In Depth Psychological Interview

Following the testing, an experienced, trained Ph.D. level assessor conducts an in depth background interview verifying the participants:

- Motivations and goals
- Self-perceptions
- Key events and formative experiences
- Key accomplishments/disappointments
- Short and long-term career goals
- Leadership style and experiences
- Other relevant factors

This interview, though in depth, is very conversational and is not a threatening or challenging experience for the participant. It is very targeted and focused as the psychologist has access to a great deal of data beforehand, which will allow him or her to focus in on key areas that are most relevant to the organizational goals for the assessment. This interview is often conducted via the telephone, and assessors are available outside normal business hours to accommodate those in other times zones and

countries, as well as individuals who can only participate on a weekend. Feedback is typically given to external candidates during the interview. However, internal participants are more likely to receive a developmental report, including targeted suggestions for development improvement. As a result, feedback is typically not given to internal participants during the interview.

Narrative 360 Degree Perceptual Feedback

Versus making numerical ratings of behaviors and providing general comments, the Select International narrative 360 process gathers meaningful perceptual data from those observing behavior on a daily basis. This is versus collecting behavioral data in an assessment center context. Assessment center data can be very artificial and only captures the participant's ability while on their best behavior. What is likely of much more value is how a person interacts on a day-to-day basis and how that behavior is perceived. Experienced assessors determine the appropriate questions, tying back to key competencies that will elicit the most meaningful feedback. Effective communication up front along with targeted questioning typically elicits candid and helpful feedback from participants. This feedback is separated into that from the participant, his or her supervisor, peers and direct reports.

Reporting

Select International views the depth of reporting and the flexibility of format as a major differentiator between itself and other assessment firms. The interpretative assessment data is completed and compiled by experienced Ph.D.-level assessor. This certified assessor with the "gift of assessment" integrates the testing interview data and makes definitive statements about the participant in terms of strengths, areas for development, as well as short and long-term potential within the organization. In addition to the in depth interpretative assessment, the perceptual data is fed back to the participant in a "sanitized" form, which takes out inappropriate comments and/or those that can be attributed to specific individuals. The interpretive aspect of the report is not selected from a menu, computer generated or done with any other automated process. Each report is an original document that combines the assessor's understanding of the individual relative to the organizational needs and goals. The old adage that this process allows the assessor to know the individual "better than their spouse," though likely an overstatement, is not far from the truth. This is a well-researched, documented and valid process and one that should be selected when an organization absolutely cannot afford to make a mistake in terms of hiring, promotion or developmental focus.

Reporting and Feedback to Management about Participants

Individual Management Report

The individual report that is written for management is written about the person. This report highlights strengths and weaknesses, as well as key areas for development, the person's short and long-term potential, as well as the "derailers" that may limit his or her effectiveness. Key areas of focus are interpersonal skills, leadership skills, cognitive abilities and thinking style, and personal effectiveness/work style. The data is interpretative and integrated. Rather than dealing with specific competencies in a sequential fashion, the assessor integrates the data to make statements about how the person will exhibit behaviors in various key situations. In addition, ratings are provided on a five-point scale for each of the key competencies that were identified in early stages of the process. The report format can be tailored to the organizational competencies or any other style or format that is most impactful for the organization. In addition, specific suggestions for more effectively managing and coaching the participant are provided. In the case of outside candidates, specific interview probes and reference checking questions can be provided based on the assessment results.

Group Management Reporting and Planning Sessions

When assessing a group of managers or executives, Select International can put together summary data that allows managers to view their organizational talent from a top down perspective. A facilitated session discussing the overall group, its developmental needs, as well as specific individuals and their potential for advancement within the organization can be quite valuable. During this discussion, a picture of an organizational "talent inventory" will appear. It is likely that there will be those within the group that are overachievers, underachievers and those that are struggling significantly. Appropriate decisions can be made as to the future and degree of focus appropriate for each participant falling within these categories. This discussion then becomes a tool for succession planning, as well as one for forcing discussions around hard decisions where developable talent does not exist within the organization. It is seen as a key component into making data driven decisions, as well as in avoiding the "Peter Principle." Finally, this assessment data allows managers to focus their developmental efforts with those who have the highest potential for success. It also helps to target training and development activities, to leverage the organization's training investment, to specific developmental needs as identified by the assessment. This is analogous to a physician making a diagnosis prior to prescribing a treatment. Their results then of course can be tied into performance management to focus individuals on a development plan.

Feedback to Participants

Participants are typically furnished with an in depth report that is written to them. This report is written in a developmental context and, though providing the same type of information as the management report, does so in a way that is not threatening or detrimental to an individual's motivation. This report covers the same major headings, including leadership, interpersonal, thinking style and personal effectiveness. In addition to the interpretive data, perceptual data can be provided to the participant to help with his or her development. A developmental planning guide, targeted developmental suggestions, based on the assessment results, and a development planning worksheet are also given to the participant.

While this is a stand-alone document that can be of great value to the individual, it is strongly suggested that individuals are given the opportunity to discuss the results with the assessor. This process is described in the next section.

Individual Developmental Feedback Session

Individuals are typically sent their developmental report in advance of their developmental feedback session. This allows them chance to react to the information provided, and to gain some perspective into the positives and negatives, as well as begin their thought processes around development. During the feedback session, the assessor who conducted the interview, will, in person or on the telephone, discuss the feedback, its implications and help the individual begin the development planning process. During this step, the individual is asked to make some commitments around development, as well as to begin drafting an outline of a development plan. Discussions linked to training, performance management and coaching, if available, are also conducted during this phase. This discussion typically lasts one hour and follow-up sessions are available upon client requests.

Group Feedback Sessions (2-4 hours)

As an alternative to the individual feedback session, feedback can be delivered in groups of up to six. During this session, a senior assessor will review the reports, discuss developmental planning, the developmental suggestions and other available resources. Individuals are typically given a copy of *The Successful Manager's Handbook* and are asked to share, if comfortable, their reactions and plans regarding the data. Time is allowed to begin drafting developmental plans and, again, links are made to available training programs, performance management processes and coaching programs and resources.

Management/Executive Developmental Retreat (Day-long session)

The most impactful way to deliver feedback and ensure that it is used to its maximum benefit for development, is to block off time with executive, management or work teams to fully understand the assessment results both as individuals and as a team. In order to set this process up for success, it is essential that each individual is provided feedback prior to the session and has an opportunity to respond to the information provided.

The individual sessions can be scheduled in person the day before the retreat, or beforehand over the telephone. During the discussion with the facilitator beforehand, the day is set up in terms of goals, ground rules, and objectives. Participants are furnished an agenda and asked to formulate thoughts around what they want to share in the context of the team.

These steps beforehand are designed to ensure a high trust environment where everyone is comfortable sharing and also one that is developmental. One of the key ground rules during the session is that enough feedback has been already provided to participants and that the focus is on how to work with the data that the individuals and group has.

The morning of the Executive Retreat is focused on individual feedback and development planning. Following a brief review of the process, reporting and developmental tools, individuals are asked to share their expectations for the day. (Example goals are: a targeted individual development plan, a team development plan, team profile (strengths and weaknesses), gaining a commitment to development, and greater communication.) Individuals then, at their option, are asked to share a "aha" experiences from the assessment, as well as how they will conduct themselves differently as a team member and as a family and as a community member.

Following this discussion, time is allotted for individual development planning. A copy of *The Successful Executive's Handbook* along with developmental planning worksheets is distributed as well as a template for identifying a personal mission statement, and short and long-term career goals. The facilitator assists individuals as appropriate and, by the end of the morning each participant will have a draft development plan with specific goals, objectives, action steps and target dates.

The afternoon part of the session is focused on team development. Using their own results as input, the team creates a profile of itself identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Discussion around how the team can interact differently, opportunities for development, as well as the creation of a team development plan with the same goals, objectives and timelines as the individual plan. This impactful session can springboard a team into the development phase.

Coaching

As a follow-up to individual feedback, group feedback and/or an Executive Retreat, individual executive coaching is a valuable step. The coach will help the participant finalize his or her plan and help hold the person accountable by setting regular meetings by establishing a coaching “contract.” By making this process focused, time-based and a priority, the individual and/or team will be much more likely to gain full benefit from the feedback and limit the risk of having the feedback data be filed away or de-emphasized based on other priorities.

Follow-up Team Sessions

If helpful, Select International will conduct follow-up team sessions on a semi-annual or annual basis to help track progress and outline opportunities for further individual and team development.

Summary and Conclusions

Select International’s Executive Assessment Division is a growing practice that combines in depth psychological assessment by experienced assessors along with extreme meaningful, competency-based narrative feedback to provide individuals and teams with targeted feedback to aid them as individuals. In addition, the data collected is very helpful to organizations in terms of making better hiring, promotion and succession planning decisions. There are key links to performance management and training that maximize the organizations significant investment in these programs and processes. In contrast to its competitors, Select International Executive Assessment Division is a flexible, client-focused and cost effective process that combines proven scientific processes with modern technology to get organizations and individuals the data they need when they need it.

While this document serves as a good summary of our overall assessment philosophy and various applications and approaches, it is far from exhaustive. In fact, Select International will be happy to speak with any client organization to discuss how we might tailor and customize our approach to your specific needs in order to help support your business objectives.

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