



Assessing Candidates For Executive-Level Roles

As the business environment continually changes and adapts to the economy and other external factors, recruitment demands well-defined strategies for employees of all levels.

Attracting and securing senior-level talent is especially critical as organizations seek executives who have strong technical aptitudes, financial savvy, change agent mindsets, high emotional intelligence, and inclusive and empowering management styles to lead their entities through challenges as well as opportunities.

The objective of this eBook is to provide a reference on how to evaluate prospective candidates for executive roles that are instrumental to an organization's success.

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Questions to Consider Prior to Initiating the Recruitment Process

During the assessment of prospective candidates, it is important to remember the core factors of your executive need, such as:

- What are the objectives of the role?
- How does the role fit within the organization and what part does it play in overall goals?
- Are there ideal traits that would enhance the new executive's performance and/or effectiveness?
- What qualities and attributes does the executive team, as a whole, expect in the new hire?

While there may be no exact answers to the above questions, they will help you gain insight on an individual's skills, professional traits, and management style, and how well he/she will fit within the role and organization.

Aspects of Candidate Assessment

Cognitive &
Strategic Skills

Emotional
Intelligence

Cultural
Fit

Career
Motivations

Analyzing Cognitive & Strategic Skills

While there can be numerous intellectual skill sets critical to an executive's performance, there are primary concepts that should be discussed in explicit detail as they pertain to your organization with articulate answers provided on behalf of the candidate.

These concepts include:

- Leadership capabilities
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Solid business acumen with financial management and analysis skills
- Adaptability to changing business environments and strategies
- Knowledge and understanding of advanced technologies and applications
- Knowledge transfer
- Innovation/creative thinking
- Ability to hire, train, and motivate staff
- Multicultural awareness

Other suggested topics to address are:

- Ask candidates to describe issues they would expect to encounter in the role and how they would handle them.
- Ask candidates for their ideas about 30, 60, and 90-day milestones.

Understanding Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence, often referred to as EQ, generally refers to a person's ability to perceive, understand, and manage his/her emotions in positive ways as well as understanding others' emotions, perspectives, and behaviors.

Why is EQ important in the assessment of executive candidates?

Multiple research studies have shown that EQ correlates to an individual's attitude, management style, interpersonal skills, and his/her ability to adapt to changing business environments. It has also been proven that professionals with enhanced levels of EQ are typically high performers and have increased potential to manage teams and lead organizations.

Core Traits of EQ

Self-Awareness

- Understanding of one's own emotions and reasons for actions, and how they affect others.
- Emotionally balanced and resilient.
- Independent and self-reliant.
- Responds positively to constructive criticism.

Self-Regulation

- Makes sound decisions; does not compromise values and beliefs.
- Remains calm and in control.
- Adaptable and flexible.
- Accepts responsibility for actions.

Self-Motivation

- Works consistently toward goals and has high standards for own performance.
- Optimistic and resilient.
- Ambitious with strong inner drive.

Empathy

- Puts him/herself in others' situations.
- Respects others and listens intently.
- Adept at leading teams and organizations.

Social Skills

- Communicates effectively and builds rapport.
- Develops and maintains solid relationships.
- Manages change and resolves conflicts.
- Participative management style.

Prospective Questions & Topics to Discuss for Evaluating EQ

Self-Awareness:

- In comparison to colleagues, would you be considered a high or low energy person?
- Describe your strengths and how you leverage them.
- Describe your weaknesses and how you improve upon them.
- How would your colleagues describe you?

Self Regulation:

- What are your techniques for managing your own stress and the stress of others?
- Describe a challenging business situation and how you handled it.
- In what ways does your mood affect your performance and productivity?

Self Motivation:

- What motivates you professionally and personally?
- What type of work environment and structure motivates you?

Prospective Questions & Topics to Discuss for Evaluating EQ

Empathy:

- Describe your relationships with your colleagues, direct reports, bosses, and customers.
- How do you build rapport?
- How would others describe your reaction to their emotions and behaviors?

Social Skills:

- What is your preferred method of communicating with colleagues, direct reports, bosses, and customers?
- What are examples of behaviors, actions, or attitudes you are most likely to relate to professionally? Conflict with?
- How do you leverage your influence and persuasiveness to achieve results?

Other observations:

- Is the candidate passionate about your organization, the role, and its objectives? Does the candidate model the values of your organization?
- Does the candidate listen intently before responding to questions?
- Does the candidate's non-verbal cues match the content of their words?

Considering Cultural Fit

"Cultural fit" is defined as the level of similarity between a candidate's professional attitude, management style, and personal values and an organization's structure and environment. Regardless of a candidate's technical abilities, professional experiences, and level of EQ, it is often his/her cultural fit with an organization that determines long-term success.

The majority of executives understand that a strong culture fit can result in a smoother transition, reduced time to productivity, increased engagement, enhanced opportunity to become a high performer, and lengthened tenure. It is therefore a leading indicator of whether or not they will be successful within an organization.

While all of the aspects of assessing executives described in this eBook relate to cultural fit, there are particular questions that can also reveal beneficial insight:

- How would you describe your ideal corporate structure and culture? (i.e. entrepreneurial, top-down leadership, flat / informal)
- How do you prefer to be managed? How would you describe your management style?
- What attributes of a corporate culture do you appreciate the most? What attributes do you feel are negative?
- What type of structure do you work best within?

Determining Career Motivations

An important point to consider when evaluating a candidate is determining why s/he is willing to leave a current employer to explore new career opportunities. While the question can be asked outright, related questions can reveal unrehearsed responses and more truthful information.

Such questions include:

- What are the responsibilities and/or challenges of your current role that you dislike?
- Are there aspects of your current employer that you dislike?
- What is the opportunity for career progression in your current role and what differences do you hope to see in our organization and role?
- How would you describe your current supervisor's management style? What do you like and dislike about it?
- If you could change one thing about your current role and situation, what would it be?
- What are your short-and long-term career goals?
- Why is our organization and its role attractive to you?
- What results do you expect to achieve in the prospective role within 3 months, 6 months, and 1 year?

Closely review the individual's resume and inquire why s/he left past positions and organizations. Question lapses in employment, if applicable.

By discussing the above, you can discern whether or not your organization and its role are a match for a candidate's aspirations.

Leveraging Professional References

Conducting professional references can provide a better perspective of a candidate's actual professional behavior and character traits. It is an effective way to address any lingering questions and concerns about a candidate's personality, leadership style, experience, and capabilities.

When performing professional references, it is most effective to ask open-ended questions, and some that are similar to those asked of the candidate so that a comparison can be made between the candidate's own responses and that of the person providing a reference.

Suggestions for questions include:

- What is/was your working relationship with [candidate]? How long have you known them?
- Can you describe [candidate's] abilities and experience in the following areas:
 - Leadership capabilities
 - Technical knowledge
 - Professional relationships
 - Judgment / Problem solving
- How would you describe [candidate's] interpersonal and leadership styles?
- What is [candidate's] reputation with superiors, clients, peers, and subordinates,

and in the marketplace?

- How does [candidate] motivate and develop team members?
- How does [candidate] impact the bottom line?
- How does [candidate] handle pressure and/or criticism?
- Can you recall a situation in which [candidate] was in a difficult professional position and how s/he handled it?

Describe the role that the candidate is being considered for and ask:

- How do you feel [candidate] would perform in this role?
- What concerns would you have?
- How does [candidate] compare to others in a similar role?

While there is no accurate predictor of how well a professional will fit into your organization, its culture and role, conducting references can provide a clearer picture of how well s/he will meet your expectations.



ZRG provides full-scale talent expertise to unlock the untapped potential within your organization.

With our range of business consulting and talent services, we can help you take your team to the next level and achieve your objectives.