15 REASONS WHY ASSESSMENT IS KEY IN EXECUTIVE SELECTION
In the Fall of 2015, Matteson Partners and TalentQuest, two highly revered names in the Executive Search industry, announced a formal partnership after a 20-year working relationship. As part of this partnership, Matteson Partners, the premier Executive Search firm, now offers TalentQuest’s cloud-based talent management suite of solutions to their client base. Additionally, Matteson Partners now provides executive search services for TalentQuest.

This new industry alliance allows clients to interface with Executive Search experts while gaining access to the highest quality talent management software solutions in the industry. This includes the use of highly powerful assessments pre- and post-hire to ensure the most effective hiring process possible.

We sat down with Adrianne McVeigh, the Executive Director of Assessment Solutions at TalentQuest, to compile a list of the top reasons why assessments like those offered through this partnership are key in the executive selection process.
BUSINESS PROBLEM:
When business leaders are seeking to make key hires, how do they predict who will best fit into the culture of the hiring company?

ANSWER:
Business leaders need to be able to accurately assess and read their own culture. Sometimes what top leaders think is their culture is not what actually plays out at all levels. Do they have processes in place to ensure that their culture is a purposeful and meaningful thing rather than an accident? What processes do they have in place to ensure that employees are conducting themselves in alignment with cultural values?

Business leaders also need to be able to define their culture and values in simple and powerful terms so they appeal to those who are aligned with it and so that we can effectively evaluate for culture fit.

Assessments can help organizations undergo this process with more purpose. These days, company culture is a huge selling point for new employees, potential partners, and customers. Candidates want to work for and with organizations where they share similar values and priorities. It's not just a feel-good, sound-good issue anymore. Millennials and others are making job decisions based on company culture.

BUSINESS PROBLEM:
Is the assessment key to both pre-hire and post-hire? Why?

ANSWER:
Assessment is most definitely key to both pre- and post-hire. With regard to pre-hire, the assessment is critical to determining culture fit and whether or not the candidate has the necessary competencies and capabilities to succeed in the role. It adds a layer of critical information that can be used to compare candidates and improve the selection process.

Post-hire, the results of the assessment are best used to inform the onboarding process. They help the manager better understand how to communicate with and support the selected candidate so that they can get up to speed (and stay there) as fast as possible. Assessment results and recommendations can also serve as the foundation for an individual development plan. This helps ensure the individual is maximizing their strengths and developing/minimizing their areas of weakness. It also helps the individual maintain momentum and encourages growth in their career, which in turn keeps the employee engaged and can lead to increased retention.
BUSINESS PROBLEM:

When you are hiring, how do you predict and measure top performers? Do you validate performance post-hire versus pre-hire? Additionally, how do you then adjust your ideal candidate profile?

ANSWER:

We look at both high and low performers in a role and seek out factors and key traits that differentiate them. We then seek candidates that possess the traits of those high performers. This success profile should be reassessed on a consistent basis to account for shifts in the role, the organization, and success drivers.

Alternatively, when you’re looking at a role with few incumbents and not enough people with which to preform a strong analysis, you must take time to truly understand the role, the culture, and the competencies and personality traits that are going to drive success.
BUSINESS PROBLEM:

What are three success factors in attracting and retaining top executive talent?

ANSWER:

- **Understand the organization:** Get down to the nitty gritty. Figure out what really works and how change happens. Analyze who is successful at the organization and why.

- **Understand the candidate:** We all have our strengths, quirks, and faults. How will these play out if this candidate is placed into this culture? Is it a recipe for success or a disaster waiting to happen?

- **You’re not done when they sign on the dotted line:** If you want to ensure a candidate’s successful integration into a culture, understand that it takes time and a significant effort. Create a plan and provide the necessary support and communication to ensure that you’re dealing with any hiccups and issues before they grow and solidify. The onboarding process in reality is closer to 18 months, yet many organizations feel that once they’ve given the candidate a laptop, ID badge, and updated the org chart, their job is done!
**MATCHING A CANDIDATE’S CORE VALUES WITH THOSE OF THE ORGANIZATION**

**BUSINESS PROBLEM:**
What measures should be taken to match the executive candidate’s core values with those of the organization?

**ANSWER:**
At TalentQuest, we use the TQ16 Assessment. It evaluates 16 different personality factors and we look for alignment between these factors and the values that are at the core of an organization (i.e., creativity aligned with innovation, conscientiousness in a risk-averse and process-oriented organization.) In addition to the TQ16, you should look at emotional intelligence, communication skills, and conflict style. There are many factors that can trip executives up if they are mismatched with the values and culture of an organization, including how they manage problems, communicate with colleagues/clients, and how aware they are of themselves and others.

**ASSESSING AND LEVERAGING A CANDIDATE’S EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

**BUSINESS PROBLEM:**
How do you assess a candidate’s Emotional Intelligence, meaning how the personal will get along and interact with people?

**ANSWER:**
There are various measures that can be taken to evaluate emotional intelligence. One example is a comprehensive interview during which targeted behavioral questions are asked. It’s important to understand how the person has built relationships and navigated challenging interpersonal relationships in the past. How have they influenced others? What is their management style and how adaptive and flexible is it when required?
**BUSINESS PROBLEM:**

Motivation is key to keeping any employee active and engaged. How do you assess the unique qualities that drive one’s behavior (i.e., passions, motivations, etc.)?

**ANSWER:**

Much of this is accomplished through behavioral interviewing and by understanding the process by which the candidate has made critical decisions about their life and career path. Don’t simply evaluate whether the candidate has a strong work ethic. Instead, understand why they work hard and what people, situations, and contexts have energized them and helped elevate them to the next level of their career.
B U S I N E S S  P R O B L E M:

Executive onboarding is often a key to accelerating success and reducing hiring risk. What best practices do you recommend incorporating into the candidate vetting process that will improve onboarding and speed the successful integration of a new executive into the existing leadership team?

A N S W E R:

• Truly get to know the candidate via a comprehensive executive assessment.
  - How has the candidate assimilated in past companies and new roles?
  - How have they handled situations where they had to “drink from the fire hose?”
  - How supportive is the organization likely to be and will this match with the candidate’s needs for support, structure, self-sufficiency, etc.?

• Leverage this assessment to create an individual development plan for them.

• Help the manager understand the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate clearly so they can support them, communicate with them, and motivate them effectively.

• Allow the candidate to be an equal part of the process. Open up lines of communication so they can interact with leaders and employees and independently explore the culture and values.

• Allow them to meet and interview with multiple people at the organization.

• Be realistic about the challenges they will face and the expectations that will be placed upon them.

• Be clear on the support and resources that will be available to help them adjust, overcome challenges, and be successful.

• Assign them a buddy or mentor to help them learn and navigate the politics and culture when they arrive.

• Through coaching and mentoring, help the candidate understand the personalities and dynamics on the team and how to best navigate them.
09 MITIGATING THE RISK OF TURNOVER EARLY ON IN THE SEARCH PROCESS

BUSINESS PROBLEM:

Forty percent of senior executives leave organizations or are fired/pushed out within 18 months. Oftentimes, this is a result of culture mismatch among the senior leadership team. What measures can be implemented early in the search process to mitigate this turnover risk?

ANSWER:

We recommend using a comprehensive measure of personality (like the TQ16) early on in the search process. The results of this measure will indicate which candidates are more and less of a fit for the role and culture. This assessment will also identify possible red flags that you can then explore in more depth during the interview process.

10 ASSESSING AN ORGANIZATION’S CULTURE

BUSINESS PROBLEM:

At the executive level, there is emphasis placed on the cultural fit of the executive to the organization. How can you assess or predict if an executive will be the “right” cultural fit?

ANSWER:

First, get to know the culture. The real culture. To do that, you should:

- Look at collateral that describe the organization, its culture, and values.
- Interview the key leaders in the organization to understand how that culture actually comes to life.
- Get a firm understanding of what traits and issues have created the most friction in past hires. Evaluate where the culture may be shifting.
- Take a look at the broad culture, but also the subcultures of the key teams and customers that the executive will be working with.
- Critically analyze the personality traits and styles that will fit within these cultures and those that will cause problems and frustration for both the candidate and the organization.

Second, get to know the candidate. Assessments will help you dive deep into their personality, their history and their goals to understand how they will fit and where the pain points may lie. You can also assess the severity of these pain points and how likely they are to change with effort and focus.
BUSINESS PROBLEM:

Let’s say an organization is seeking a cultural change or shift – how would you measure if an executive will be a good “change-agent” in a role?

ANSWER:

You must first understand what this shift is and what the reactions may be from employees and customers. What is the history this organization is saddled with that could influence this change and the receptivity to it? Who is supporting this change and who isn’t?

When evaluating the candidate, look at how they have led and managed through change in the past. What strategies have they used to influence and unite others around a common vision and goal? How did they leverage relationships, political savviness and self- and other-awareness techniques (EQ) to approach change in an effective manner?

Successful change is often associated with successful communication, so you should assess their style and use of communication during dynamic and challenging situations. In terms of personality, you should look at the individual’s receptivity to change, their passion for change, and their ability to moderate and adjust this based on what WORKS within an organization. What you don’t want is a candidate so enthusiastic and impatient for change that they can’t slow down long enough to get others excited and on board.

It’s important to note. Just because they’ve been a successful change agent or turnaround person at other companies does not mean it will work in this culture. Each organization is as unique as the individuals that comprise it!
USING SPECIFIC INTERVIEWING TACTICS TO PREDICT FUTURE SUCCESS

BUSINESS PROBLEM:

At the executive search level, behavioral interviewing (past success predicts future behavior and success) seems to be on the rise. From an assessment perspective, is there any truth to this notion in an anecdotal way? Are there elements of assessment (psychological, academic, or other) that are predictive for future success?

ANSWER:

Studies do show that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior, which is why behavioral interviewing is used so often. It’s easy for candidates to tell how they would handle a certain situation and sometimes that provides valid and useful information, but it is even more valuable to understand how they already did handle a certain situation. From an assessment perspective, you can typically see patterns in how an individual approaches certain situations, problem solving, etc. These patterns are quite ingrained by the time these candidates are being considered for executive level positions.

In terms of future success, there are a few factors that tend to be most predictive of success overall:

• Smarts (do they have the horsepower) and conscientiousness (an aspect of personality.) Also, an increasing number of studies are pointing to the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ) as a predictor of success, especially at the executive level.

• There is no single test that is the best predictor. It is, in fact, the combination of tests and tools that best predicts job performance.

• The highest correlation is between multi-measure tests (cognitive and personality and interests) and job performance.
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REDUCING THE CHANCE OF A HIRING MISTAKE

BUSINESS PROBLEM:

Has there ever been a time when an executive assessment was completely off, or wrong? What happened in this scenario?

ANSWER:

Not to brag or anything, but it’s pretty rare due to the comprehensive nature of the assessments and the training of the consultants who conduct them. Having said that, it’s not an exact science. There are always people who are very good at being who you want them to be during the interview process. Luckily, additional testing used during the assessment process is much harder to fake.

Problems typically arise when:

• The key leaders within an organization are not realistic or honest about what they expect a candidate to do and their willingness to support the candidate’s success in doing so; e.g., we want the candidate to change X but in reality, we are going to do things that make this hard.

• The candidate needs support in order to integrate into the culture but little exists. They are left to flounder and find their own way.
EVALUATING THE FACTS IN AN UNBIASED WAY

BUSINESS PROBLEM:

There are some individuals, even at the executive level, that think assessment is not an important factor for selection. What information can be given to change their opinion?

ANSWER:

Consider how many times you’ve hired someone based on gut and have gotten burned. Does that lead to turnover? In reality, your gut can be fooled. Tests and trained assessors are much harder to fool. When you’re comparing a candidate to a success profile, it is virtually impossible for them to understand the complexity of the profile and try to answer questions in order to look favorable.

Next, look at statistics on interviewing. Many managers think they are good interviewers but the numbers say otherwise. Interviews are the most common component of the hiring process but should be taken with a grain of salt. A study completed in 2000 out of the University of Toledo shows that judgments made in the first ten seconds of an interview can predict the outcome of an interview. Herein lies the problem: the first ten seconds are useless and the average interviewer spends the remaining time confirming what they think of someone rather than truly assessing them.

Finally, assess the true costs of making the wrong hire (usually about $80,000.) The cost of using an assessment and getting professional help (comprehensive executive assessment) is worth it and is increasingly worthwhile as you enter the top ranks of an organization.
BUSINESS PROBLEM:

Over the past few years, much has been published on the success of executives who may have an impressive academic background, but never graduated from higher education, i.e., Richard Branson, Mark Zuckerberg, Michael Dell, Barry Diller. Is there a common personality trait or aptitude among these individuals?

ANSWER:

• **Intelligence**: Whether they completed degrees or not, these are people who think quickly, learn quickly, recognize patterns, and demonstrate a genuine curiosity in the world around them.

• **Drive**: They have an innate need to make things happen. They are impatient when progress stalls. They convey a sense of urgency and excitement to others. They hold themselves and others to a higher standard.

• **They think big and they think broad**: They have a creative mindset and a willingness to imagine “what if?” They can generate a compelling vision that others can get behind and feel part of. They don’t let status quo or history limit their ideas and creativity.

• **They build teams and people**: They didn’t get there alone. They used interpersonal, communication, and leadership skills to bring the best out in others and create a synergy from others’ efforts and skills. They were quick to see potential and strength and put it to work. They helped mitigate weaknesses in direct reports through coaching and support rather than writing them off.
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Adrianne McVeigh is an organizational psychologist and talent management professional with over nine years of executive-level experience. She currently serves as the Executive Director of Assessment Solutions for Atlanta-based TalentQuest, a firm that provides comprehensive talent management solutions. Highly skilled in human capital assessment to inform selection and leadership development, Adrianne enjoys coaching and developing senior executives, as well as innovating products and managing broad-scope initiatives that build talent throughout the employee lifecycle (select, manage, develop, retain.) Her passions lie in enhancing senior team effectiveness, designing assessment approaches to determine competency- and culture-fit, and consulting with leaders in the areas of people management and succession planning. Adrianne’s clients range from startups to Fortune 50 with industries served including: financial services, healthcare, retail, manufacturing, utilities, technology, professional services, insurance, and pharmaceuticals. She holds a Ph.D. in Clinical-Community Psychology from the University of South Carolina.

Sarah Walpert is Co-founder and Chief Marketing Officer at Ingenium Marketing, the sister company of Matteson Partners and ExactSource. Her primary role includes developing branding, communications, and inbound strategies for Ingenium clients. She also directs the creative department. Sarah’s passion lies in developing personal connections with her clients, getting to know their businesses from the inside out, understanding their pain points, and devising creative solutions with measurable results, all while staying true to their brand and core values. Sarah speaks regularly at conferences and industry events across the country. Sarah is founder and director of the Ingenium intern program through which she and her team trains and mentors the next generation of marketers. She graduated with honors from the University of Georgia with a degree in Journalism from the Grady College.