

# Disconnected Data | The Case for Wisdom in Leadership Assessment

**Leadership assessment sits at the heart of talent management. It is extensively (and enthusiastically) deployed by executive search firms and organizations. Yet it is here that shortfalls in leadership talent strategy are most starkly reflected. How can we 'wise up' Leadership Assessment?**

The need for 'wise' leadership in business has never been stronger. Today a more ethical, responsible and sustainable approach is in universal demand; not only by shareholders (for example, when it comes to meeting ESG criteria or SDGs), but by the wider stakeholder community.

Smart leaders become wise when they address the dilemmas of modern business in a holistic way. Not only do wise leaders create and capture vital economic value, they also build more diverse and legitimate organizations.

## TALENT MANAGEMENT NEEDS MORE ETHICAL, RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE THINKING

We believe that the whole talent life cycle needs this shift in approach. From hiring, performance management, coaching/development and succession planning. And in the case of re-structuring, downsizing, mergers and acquisitions, in making tough decisions about the leader's future.

Ethical, responsible and sustainable assessment practice demands clarity on the 'why' and 'how'. You need a highly-attuned human awareness throughout, discernment about where the output goes and the manner in which it is shared with stakeholders – in particular with the person assessed.

## WIRING ASSESSMENT IN

Who is being assessed, on what points and with what purpose? A clear leadership model and competency framework enable organizations to pin down and evaluate

the specific behaviours that matter when it comes to making a business (more) profitable and sustainable. However, these frameworks are all too often absent or undercooked. At the highest level, we observe the problem of 'disconnected data' in many organizations. Firstly, assessment initiatives operate in silos, isolated from organizational strategy and objectives. Secondly, there is a widespread failure to properly wire leadership assessment into other elements of talent strategy.

Establishing these critical connections is a major opportunity for organizations to create results that will benefit executive and organizational performance in the short, medium, and long term. In other words, sustainably.

## ASSESSING THE 'WISDOM INCLINATION' | OPENING THE BOX

Leadership assessment typically covers four dimensions: career progression, over-arching leadership competencies, content-related technical skills or domain knowledge, as well as personal and social aptitude. However, the 'sustainability' of an executive's leadership approach is rarely addressed. Considering the journey to wise leadership as a lifetime quest, the purpose is to understand not only a leader's current tendencies and preferences, but also his or her level of openness to wise decision-making, self-awareness regarding his or her current position, and aspiration (if different).

Wise leadership needs better

integration in the way in which key executives are assessed – high-stakes intervention in recruiting, development, and career progression. We believe that it's high time for leadership talent strategy to raise its game from 'smart' to 'wise'.



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## 9 Management Messages

- 1. The need for wise leadership has never been stronger:** A more ethical, responsible and sustainable approach is in demand by shareholders (for example, meeting ESG criteria or SDGs), and the wider stakeholder community.
- 2. Wise leadership needs better integration in leadership assessment:** Leadership assessment is a high-stakes intervention in decisions related to recruitment, development and career progression. It requires elevation.
- 3. There is always an imbalance of power in an assessment:** One party exposes much more of his/her personality than the other and there is usually more at stake for the candidate than for the organization.
- 4. Wise assessment has high awareness:** Wise assessments are clear on the 'why' and 'how', with highly-attuned human awareness, discernment about the use and sharing of output – particularly its sharing with assesses.
- 5. Assessments are too often an isolated panacea:** They are run on the sidelines, limited to a diagnostic process, rather than used as one of several inputs to assess a current situation and build leadership competencies. Quantitative tools are particularly misused.
- 6. Assessments are never the whole truth and nothing but the truth:** The results should generate hypotheses to feed a deeper discussion with a candidate. They are neither the whole truth, nor a watertight prediction of future performance.
- 7. Seen as a convenient fix, assessments can be risky:** An assessment can mislead decision-making if poorly designed or assessors lack training. If participant care is neglected, it can affect self-esteem and performance.
- 8. Assessment needs a clear leadership model and competency framework:** These enable organizations to identify and evaluate the competencies that will lead to higher profitability and sustainability. Yet they are too often missing or undercooked.
- 9. Assessments should be wired in to 3 talent strategy dimensions:** Assessments truly add value when connected to 1) diversity and inclusion, 2) organizational design, and 3) leadership development and coaching.

