

HOW ARE TOP COMPANIES DESIGNING AND MANAGING THEIR HIGH-POTENTIAL PROGRAMS? A FOLLOW-UP TALENT MANAGEMENT BENCHMARK STUDY

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The assessment and development of leadership potential in organizations is a critical factor in an effective talent management strategy. Given the business environment, war for talent, and greater involvement from Boards of Directors on succession planning many organizations have prioritized their high-potential identification practices over other human capital goals. Although much has been written about theories and tools in the area of high-potential assessment, there remains little independent guidance for practitioners looking to compare practices across organizational settings. This article represents a follow-up study to Church and Rotolo (2013) based on responses from 80 top leadership development companies on their high-potential and senior executive talent programs and assessment practices. The results of this more in-depth study focus on how organizations define leadership potential, content domains being assessed today, and various other design elements including degree of transparency of high-potential labels, shelf-life of assessments, talent distributions, and access to results. Attitudes toward assessments, including performance impact, are also discussed. The article concludes with summary observations and implications for industrial–organizational psychologists, consulting psychologists, and talent management professionals.

Keywords: individual assessment, high-potential identification, senior executive development, succession planning, talent management benchmark

The assessment and development of current and future leaders in organizations is one of the most critical components of an effective talent management (TM) strategy. Given the hypercompetitive business environment, constant war for talent, and greater interest and involvement from Boards of Directors on senior succession bench strength, it is not surprising that only 18% of HR professionals rate their organization as strong in available leadership bench (Hanson, 2011). In response to these

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issues, many organizations have prioritized high-potential identification processes among their top talent management goals (Silzer & Church, 2010). Although much has been written about specific theories and applications in this area, focusing on, for example, particular assessment methodologies (e.g., Groth-Marnat, 2009; Scott & Reynolds, 2010; Thornton, Hollenbeck, & Johnson, 2010), the role of experiences and learning (e.g., Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000; McCauley & McCall, 2014) and defining models of leadership potential (Church & Silzer, 2014; Ready, Conger & Hill, 2010; Silzer & Church, 2009), there remains little independent guidance for practitioners looking to compare detailed practices.

Although some interesting research does exist (e.g., AMA Enterprise, 2011; Campbell & Smith, 2010; Church & Rotolo, 2013; De Meuse, Dai, Hallenbeck & Tang, 2008; Hagemann & Mattone, 2011; Ready et al., 2010; Silzer & Church, 2010), much of it is limited in generalizability because it has been based on either convenience samples (e.g., program attendees), and/or sponsored and published by organizations supporting a specific product, tool or agenda (e.g., white papers and research reports). In addition, many questions remain unanswered and merit research to further guide practice. Some of the more significant questions include the types of content domains that are used for assessments, how transparent companies are with their high-potential designations, as well as other design and process elements (Church & Rotolo, 2013).

Although talent management practitioners share information informally among each other at professional networks, conferences and groups such as the Conference Board's *Council of Talent Management Executives*, this informal, undocumented approach to benchmarking does not always meet the needs of senior leaders in corporate settings or provide visibility to other practitioners and researchers in the field. Therefore, in response to this need, we conducted a follow-up benchmark study to Church and Rotolo (2013), one of the few studies conducted with a large independent sample of organizations ($n = 84$). The follow-up survey used an almost identical methodology to shed light on topics unexamined in the first benchmarking study that are pressing issues for talent management practitioners. Specifically, we focused on three key areas: (a) general characteristics of high-potential talent programs, (b) assessment practices for high-potentials and senior executives, and (c) assessment program outcomes.

We begin with a brief summary of key components of high-potential programs in organizations highlighting important but unanswered questions from practitioners regarding the use of these processes. Next, we will discuss the range of criteria used in practice today to classify high-potentials including various content domains in the context of the Leadership Potential *BluePrint* (Church & Silzer, 2014; Silzer & Church, 2009), a new framework of potential. Survey results of the current benchmark study are then presented.

Unanswered Questions About High-Potential Programs in Organizations

In general, it would be difficult to argue that there is a single best way to design a high-potential talent process or program. Although guidance from theory and practice exists for many specific components, given the unique dynamics of organizations it is generally accepted that one size does not fit all. The most successful talent processes are those which are customized and fully integrated with the business strategy (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007; Cappelli, 2008; Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Thus, the design and execution of a high-potential program should be approached from the same systems perspective (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Katz & Kahn, 1978) as any other organizational change intervention, taking into account such factors as strategy, senior leader behaviors, reward systems, structure, and employee needs. Although many executives and TM practitioners would prefer to approach their high-potential initiatives in the simplest manner possible, this may not result in the best solution long-term. It is important that the design of these talent systems balance impact and simplicity with science and data (Church, 2014; Efron & Ort, 2010).

As a consequence of this tension, there are a number of key questions that have been raised repeatedly by practitioners with respect to the design and execution of high-potential talent programs. Some of these are quite strategic such as what are the underlying components of future leadership potential?; or How many companies are using assessment results for development only

versus decision-making? Other questions are more tactical in nature such as what is the average shelf-life of an assessment process, or what percentages are targeted annually? Unfortunately, despite the popularity of these topics there is little research or benchmarking data available for practitioners. Therefore, we sought to provide answers to both strategic and tactical key questions, presented in a list in [Table 1](#).

What we do know from the literature is that different types of companies are using a wide variety of criteria to define their high-potential future leaders (e.g., [AMA Enterprise, 2011](#); [Campbell & Smith, 2010](#); [Hagemann & Mattone, 2011](#); [Ready et al., 2010](#); [Silzer & Church, 2010](#)). Some of these approaches focus on contextual variables such as prior performance, others rely on judgment factors such as ability to move a certain number of levels, and still others reflect content domains used for assessment (see [Figure 1](#) for a summary).

In fact, theory and practice in this area are so dispersed and inconsistent that it prompted [Silzer and Church \(2009\)](#) to conduct a comprehensive review and introduce a new integrating framework called the Leadership Potential *BluePrint* ([Church & Silzer, 2014](#)). Although the underpinnings and constructs of the *BluePrint* are grounded in theory and research, and the framework has been well received in practice, to date there is no focused research on its application in practice. Our study aimed to fill this gap.

Another topic with limited research is the area of transparency. Perhaps one of the most interesting questions for TM leaders, chief human resource officers (CHROs) and senior executives is whether or not organizations should be transparent and tell employees their high-potential status. While the sharing of this information has been hotly debated in the trade literature, there is little data on how organizations address the issue today in practice. [Ready et al., \(2010\)](#), for example, referred to this as an “evergreen question” and reported that approximately 85% of companies tell employees their status today. Similarly, [Silzer and Church \(2010\)](#) reported that most of the 20 companies in their study inform individuals. Neither studies focused specifically on the topic, however, nor were the samples large enough to be considered generalizable. The only study that addressed the issue directly is [Campbell and Smith \(2010\)](#) which interestingly did so from the participants’ point of view. Based on leadership program attendee self-report data, 91% indicated they know their own status (53% had been told they were high-potentials, 7% had been told they were not, and 31% figured it out on their own). While intriguing, because these data are from program participants rather than unique companies, it is difficult to draw conclusions for practice. Thus, we included transparency as a topic in the survey.

Table 1
Research Questions Regarding High-Potential Programs

| Strategic Questions | Tactical Questions |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the underlying components of future leadership potential? • What is the range and optimal percentage of high-potentials to have in a company? • What is the best way to evaluate the maturity level of a high-potential program? • How transparent are organizations with employees about their high-potential status? • Are assessments being using for development only or talent management related decision-making or both? • What is the impact of assessment on individual performance? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the most commonly used tools and measures to assess employees? • What percentage of a given target population should be assessed each year? • What is the average shelf-life of an assessment program? • What depth of assessment results should each stakeholder be allowed to review? • Do members of the Board of Directors see assessment results and if so what type? • Are employees anxious about assessment programs, and what is the level of interest in seeing their data? |

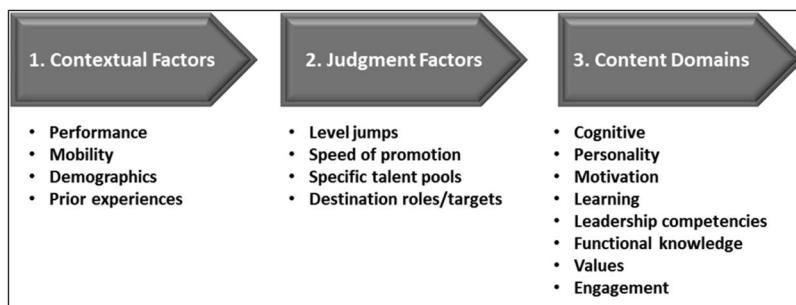


Figure 1. Sample variables used to classify and identify high potentials.

What Is Known and Unknown About Assessment Practices

The study by Church and Rotolo (2013) presented a useful overview of assessment practices in the field today using data collected from 84 companies with well-established talent management functions. Table 2 summarizes the key findings from that study. While these trends are useful, several other key questions were not addressed. One of the most important of these, and of particular interest to us, were the specific content domains being assessed in the field today. Although the prior study provided some insight into content areas (e.g., cognitive skills), the data was largely focused on tools versus constructs. Given the level of effort directed at defining and measuring future leadership potential in corporations today, we wanted to better understand practices across specific domains as well.

To do this we used the Leadership Potential *BluePrint* (Church & Silzer, 2014; Silzer & Church, 2009) as a starting point for the dimensions to be measured. As noted above, the *BluePrint* is an integrative conceptual model for defining high-potentials based on a comprehensive review of theory, research, internal, and external practice materials in the field. The model identifies a set of key dimensions (i.e., capabilities, attributes, and skills) that holistically define a leader's future potential to be successful in more senior leadership roles over time. These dimensions or content

Table 2

Summary of Assessment Practices Survey by Church and Rotolo (2013)

| Summary |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, 70% of the 84 top development companies responding to the survey were actively using assessments in their organization. • Of those companies conducting assessments, 90% were targeting senior executives, and 75% were targeting high-potentials. • Development was the single most frequently cited purpose of assessments at 82% for high-potentials and 74% for senior executives. • Overall, however, assessments were used for both development and decision-making approximately 60% of the time, followed by development only strategies (30% to 40%). • Assessments were more commonly used with high-potentials for talent identification (50%), while for senior executives there was a greater emphasis on the use of assessments for succession planning (47%). • The three most commonly used assessment tools for both high-potentials and senior executives were 360-feedback, personality inventories, and interviews (at approximately 60% each). • Biodata, simulations, cognitive ability tests, career inventors, and assessment centers all ranged from about 30% to 40% in utilization. • Most companies employed more than one type of tool ($M = 4.54$) in their high-potential assessment suite. • Companies reported using a mix of internal and external resources for their assessment efforts with an even mix for high-potentials, but a greater reliance on externals only versus internals (47% versus 11%) for senior executives. |

domains (see Figure 1) are both additive (they can impact each other) and independent (an individual can be strong on one and less so in another). The *BluePrint* does not include judgment factors such as a specific number of levels, speed of promotion, type of end-state talent pool, or singular construct as many other definitions and models do today. Nor are contextual factors such as performance or mobility included in this definition of potential either.

In summary, the model posits that future leadership (or high-) potential is comprised of three core dimensions: (a) Foundational: personality & cognitive skills, (b) Growth: learning ability and motivation, and (c) Career: leadership and functional capabilities. These dimensions differ progressively in both their ability to be developed (Church, 2014), and their relevance to answering the “potential for what” question. The *BluePrint* is currently in use in talent management programs at several large organizations including Citibank, Eli Lilly, and PepsiCo (Church & Silzer, 2014). Because there is as yet no empirical research testing the viability of the *BluePrint* in practice, we sought to contribute in this area.

The final topic of interest concerned outcomes of the process. How do participants and others feel about assessments? Is there pull for the data? Who gets access to what types of results? Aside from the scant guidance provided by the Joint Committee on Testing Practices’ (2000) *Rights and Responsibilities of Test Takers*, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (1987) *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures*, and similar testing guidelines, there is little applicable guidance surrounding who else should see the data or what companies are doing today. This issue is also of particular interest to those talent management practitioners with Board level c-suite succession accountabilities, as sharing assessment data with this group could have significant financial and career related consequences for senior leaders. Thus we added this component to the survey.

Assessment Practices and High Potential Benchmark Study

In sum, this study was designed to contribute new and independently gathered benchmark knowledge regarding the state of high-potential programs and assessment practices in top development companies. It was intended to be an extension of the findings collected from the original assessment practices benchmark survey conducted by Church and Rotolo (2013). The survey administration occurred in the early part of 2014. As in the prior study the research was initiated and sponsored by the authors without affiliation to any consulting services, assessment tool, or TM related product offering. In general, survey questions targeted three areas: (1) characteristics of high-potential programs in general; (2) new details on assessment processes, including content domains assessed; and (3) perceptions of the assessment process from various constituent groups. The remainder of the items focused on either high-potential programs or specific assessment applications and processes.

Method

Sample

As in the prior study this research was intended to provide an overview of the current state of talent practices among major corporations that place a premium on leadership development efforts. It was not intended to represent trends across all types of organizations. Given this objective, a targeted sampling approach was used for data collection identical to that employed in 2013. This meant inviting the membership roster of a senior talent management professional council with fixed criteria for entry, augmented by other select senior leaders in TM, Organization Development (OD), industrial–organizational (I-O) psychology, and internal consulting positions in other well-respected organizations. The latter were selected based on external presence at conferences and publications, as well as recognition in top company lists. Collectively and for discussion purposes we have labeled this population as “top development companies” to distinguish them from other types of organizations. Individuals in this sample are directly responsible at the senior most levels for their high-potential and executive talent practices, ensuring the data obtained are credible.

In total, individuals from 111 unique companies were invited to participate in the benchmark study. In terms of comparability, 95 of the companies invited were the same from the prior survey, and 87 of the individuals contacted (92%) appeared to be in the same roles. The remaining 16 companies were newly invited either because they were now members of the professional organization sourced or because they were identified in our scan of the industry as meeting the criteria. Because the questionnaire for this second study was somewhat longer than the first, we also anticipated a lower response rate, thus the slightly larger sample was helpful. Given the sample characteristics, results from this study can be considered an extension of those reported by Church and Rotolo (2013), facilitating comparisons and the ability to check consistency of trends previously reported.

Because of the sensitivity of the information being requested in the survey, we pursued an anonymous methodology as in 2013. This approach was taken to maximize response rates and honesty in the data. Demographic data from publically available sources is listed in Table 3 for the total number of organizations invited to participate. These demographics are almost identical to the sample invited in 2013.

Survey Questionnaire

An online survey consisting of 15 items was used to gather the data (which is approximately three times longer than the first questionnaire). In addition, many of the items had multiple parts to them, making the response burden somewhat greater. One write-in question was included as well (see Appendix A for the full item set).

Following the introductory text, the first question asked about the respondent's use of assessments with high potentials and with senior executives. This question was positioned at the start of the survey to allow us to directly compare responses with the prior study. Standard definitions of senior executives, high-potentials and assessments were provided that were identical to those used in the prior survey to ensure consistent terminology (see Appendix B).

Next, and regardless of responses to the initial assessment question, the content moved into a section on high-potential practices (e.g., population percentages, maturity levels, transparency policy). Items for this section were based largely on the practice literature (e.g., Carey & Ogden, 2004; Church & Waclawski, 2010; Effron & Ort, 2010; Grubs, 2004; Silzer & Dowell, 2010) and personal experience designing and leading these types of programs in corporate settings.

The survey then focused on definitions of potential, and on specific domains being measured. Item content was based on prior theory, research, and experience with high-potential assessments as noted earlier (e.g., Church & Silzer, 2014; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000; Ready et al., 2010; Silzer & Church, 2009, 2010; Stamoulis, 2009). Because we did not want to prime respondents to the *BluePrint*, we did not sort items accordingly, nor did we provide dimension labels. In addition, other content domains were included in the list for comparison purposes even though some are arguably less well defined conceptually. These included resilience, engagement, values, communication skills, executive presence, and self-awareness.

The final section of the survey focused on post-assessment outcomes, including access to reports, attitudes about the process, and perceptions of the impact of assessment efforts on performance. The results and discussion below are based on this item clustering.

Results and Discussion

In total, survey responses were obtained from 80 individuals (each representing a unique organization) yielding a 72% response rate. Though this response was somewhat lower than the prior study (88%), it is still quite high for a survey of this nature and was anticipated because of the longer instrument. In addition, because the number of companies invited to participate had been increased somewhat, the resulting count of 80 respondents is quite comparable to the 84 obtained in the last

Table 3
Organizational Characteristics of Invited Survey Sample

| Characteristic | Option | 2013 | 2014 |
|------------------------|--|-------------------|-------|
| Type of organization | Public | 88.4% | 89.2% |
| | Private | 7.5% | 7.2% |
| | Other | 4.1% ^a | 3.6% |
| Number of employees | 150,000+ | 28.4% | 27.9% |
| | 100,000–149,999 | 8.4% | 7.2% |
| | 50,000–99,999 | 24.2% | 25.2% |
| | 10,000–49,999 | 31.6% | 32.4% |
| | 1–9,999 | 7.4% | 7.2% |
| Headquartered | U.S. | 92.6% | 91.0% |
| | Outside U.S. | 7.4% | 9.0% |
| Countries w/operations | 100+ | 19.2% | 25.5% |
| | 50–99 | 22.3% | 20.9% |
| | 10–49 | 28.7% | 29.1% |
| | 2–9 | 16.0% | 12.7% |
| Industry group | 1 | 13.8% | 11.8% |
| | Automotive, transportation | 5.3% | 6.3% |
| | Chemical, materials | 0.0% | 2.7% |
| | Construction | 3.2% | 2.7% |
| | Consumer products, apparel | 9.5% | 8.1% |
| | E-commerce, Internet | 3.2% | 2.7% |
| | Energy | 3.2% | 3.6% |
| | Entertainment, media | 2.1% | 2.7% |
| | Financial, professional services | 14.7% | 15.3% |
| | Food, restaurant | 8.4% | 9.9% |
| | Hospitality | 2.1% | 2.7% |
| | Insurance | 8.4% | 7.2% |
| | Manufacturing | 11.5% | 10.8% |
| | Pharmaceuticals, health care | 9.4% | 8.1% |
| | Retail | 7.4% | 6.3% |
| Technology, software | 8.4% | 8.1% | |
| Telecom | 3.2% | 2.7% | |
| Annual revenue | <i>M</i> = 42.8 Billion <i>Mdn</i> = 25.9 Billion | | |

Note. Data for this table obtained from publically available sources for those organizations invited to participate in the survey.

^a Data in 2013 chart contained a slight reporting error on Type of Organization, which has been corrected here.

survey.¹ As with the prior study, given the nature of the data obtained, the analysis consisted of standard paired comparison *t* tests and correlations to test for significant differences and relationships where appropriate.

Use of Assessments

In order to examine the state of assessments today and possible changes since the prior survey, we queried respondents regarding their use of assessments for high-potentials and senior executives. Overall, 80% of companies responding to the survey (*n* = 64) indicated that they use assessments

¹ It is important to remember, however, that because of the anonymity of the survey it is impossible to exactly match survey respondents from Survey 1 to Survey 2.

today with either one or both of these populations. This is 10 percentage points higher than responses obtained from the 2013 study (at 70% usage) with a very similar sample. Further, if we adjust the responses for only those using assessments to directly compare with calculations from the prior study, both utilization rates are slightly higher with 92% using assessments for senior executives (vs. 90%) and 81% for high-potentials (vs. 75%). Thus there appears to be a modest upward trend in the utilization rates.

Although the variability in survey results over the two studies might be because of changes in the respondent pool or simple response variability, it is also possible that assessment practices are being more broadly adopted in top development companies given that the studies were conducted a year apart. Additional support for this latter possibility is provided by responses to the newly added “no” category response options. Specifically, 15% of respondents indicated they are developing assessments for high-potentials, 9% are doing so for their senior executives and others are actively considering it (see Table 4). Taken together these data suggest an important trend.

In examining the combined responses, there was a significant relationship between the overall use of assessments with both targets, $\chi^2(1, 80) = 21.24, p < .001$. Specifically 59% indicated they assess both groups, although 15% assess their executives only and 6% assess their high-potentials only (thus totaling the 80% cited above). Within the group not currently assessing candidates, 15% are either actively developing processes or considering doing so. Only 5% indicated that they do not assess either of these two target populations today and have no plans to do so in the future. In sum, when combined, of these 80 top development companies, 95% are now assessing or are planning to assess their critical leadership talent. This is important information and the type of guidance practitioners are seeking for their clients.

Characteristics of High-Potential Programs

The next set of questions in the survey concerned broader high-potential and talent management practices in these top development companies. These items focused on definitions and indicators of potential, distributions of the high-potential classification, program maturity, and transparency of labeling/classification of potential.

Indicators of high-potential. Given the importance and energy focused on identifying future leadership potential in organizations, we asked two separate questions regarding variables used today to identify and define high-potential employees. Given that past research (e.g., Silzer & Church, 2010) has indicated companies employ more than one approach, respondents were allowed to select all that applied. The first question contained five basic types of contextual factors or data that may be available about an individual (e.g., current and past performance, mobility, demographics, assessments, and a write-in comment). Figure 2 provides the results of this item.

In general, the most commonly cited contextual criteria for identifying high-potentials in these top development companies is performance. Specifically, 75% rely on past performance, and 73% use current performance. The correlation between the use of these two measures was very strong at $r(64) = .80, p < .001$, and the use of both of these as indicators was significantly higher than any

Table 4

Use of Assessments: Do You Have Some Form of Assessment Program or Process in Place for the Following Two Talent Groups?

| Response Option | High-Potentials | Senior Executives |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Yes | 65% | 74% |
| No, but under development | 15% | 9% |
| No, but considering | 9% | 6% |
| No, but used to assess | 2% | 1% |
| No | 9% | 10% |

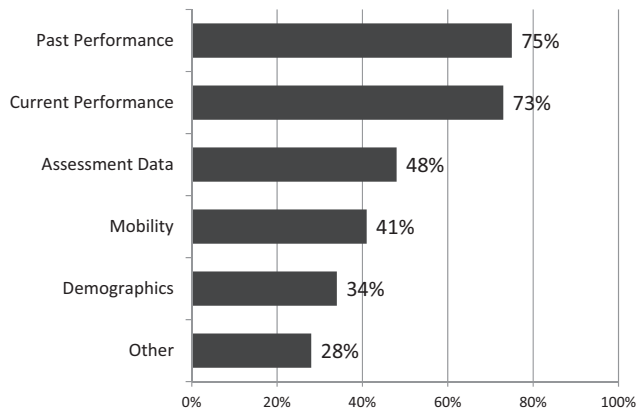


Figure 2. Indicators of high potential: Which of the following are included in your criteria for identifying high-potential employees? (Select all that apply.) Past performance and current performance were significantly higher than assessment data at $t(63) = 3.92, p < .001$ and $t(63) = 3.55, p < .001$, respectively, as well as all other options following. None of the remaining options significantly differed from each other.

other method employed. None of the remaining options significantly differed from each other, with all being used about equally 30% to 40% of the time. Although 28% cited other factors, based on the write-in responses the topics mentioned were already included in the content domains later in the survey (e.g., leadership, learning). As expected, when examined across the set of responses for multiple use of indicators the mean was 3.28 ($SD = 1.20$) for identifying potential. Thus, companies tended to use several indicators for identifying potential.

In general, the heavy reliance on performance data is not that surprising given prior survey work in this area. Performance reviews have been reportedly used at rates of 51% in a diverse mix of organizations (Hagemann & Mattone, 2011), and 75% to 100% in large company samples (AMA Enterprise, 2011; Silzer & Church, 2010). This trend does raise some concerns, however. Specifically, although we know that past performance is a significant predictor of future performance (Gatewood, Feild, & Barrick, 2010), predicting future potential is a different construct. There are many examples of high-performing leaders at a given current level in an organization that when promoted are no longer able to perform effectively. This is reflective of the Peter Principle (Peter & Hull, 1969) and is a primary reason for the design of the popular 9-box performance by potential grid. The grid is used today by many organizations as a core tool in their TM process (e.g., Effron & Ort, 2010; Hanson, 2011; Ruddy & Anand, 2010), and is intended to help organizations overcome the dangers associated with thinking that performance is synonymous with potential (also known as the *performance-potential paradox*; see Church & Waclawski, 2010). Commingling the two concepts in TM efforts can lead to a host of problems and damage long-term leadership bench strength if not balanced with other types of formal assessment data. While performance is an important contextual variable, it should not be treated as *the* indicator of future potential or overweighted as others have noted (e.g., Church & Silzer, 2014; Hanson, 2011).

In terms of the other variables, assessment data is used by about half of the organizations in the sample specifically for identifying potential (if use for decision-making purposes is added the percentage increases significantly). This is very consistent with the prior study (Church & Rotolo, 2013) which reported that 50% of the companies who conduct assessments use them for high-potential identification and 48% use them for confirmation. Although AMA Enterprise (2011) reported a usage rate at 35%, their sample was more diverse and not comprised solely of companies with strong talent management functions.

The fact that 41% of these companies, however, rely on mobility (or the extent to which employees are willing to relocate for new roles) and another 34% use background information of

some sort to classify potential is highly concerning. These should be considered as contextual variables not indicators of future potential (Church & Silzer, 2014), as they can artificially put limits on a succession pool. Moreover, although mobility is within an individual's control and often life-stage dependent (e.g., based on age of children, dual career, sick parent, etc.), making future leadership potential determinations based on demographics such as gender, age, ethnicity, culture, national origin, and so forth is dangerous and possibly illegal depending on how the variables are used and/or employment laws in a given country. The concept of "runway" for senior roles is a particularly delicate topic as many organizations are concerned with their talent's career progress and timing to c-suite readiness, yet effectively measuring that in a nondiscriminatory way is a challenge. These issues warrant careful thought and consideration as they have potential serious consequences depending on the approach taken.

Definitions of high-potential. Along with basic contextual criteria for identifying future leaders, most organizations with robust talent management functions also have formal in-house definitions of high-potentials. Many of these are based on judgment factors (see Figure 1) which are used in annual talent review processes (see, e.g., Church & Waclawski, 2010). Thus, the next survey question contained five different judgment-based definition elements of potential.

Overall, the organizations responding were significantly more likely to use level-based definitions of potential at 64% than any other type of category including role-based at 41%, general talent pools (e.g., marketing) at 39%, targeted talent pools (e.g., treasury) at 33%, or even accelerated promotion rates at 27% (see Figure 3).

The latter trend is somewhat surprising given perceptions of high-potentials as being significantly younger than their peers. Consistent with the survey selection criteria as top development companies, only two organizations (3%) reported that they did not have a formal definition of potential. Once again, the data were examined for the use of multiple judgment components and the mean response was 2.54 ($SD = 1.39$). This suggests that most companies use level jump and another factor (e.g., a talent pool or destination role) together in their formal definition of potential.

Although not entirely surprising given Hanson's (2011) observations about the use of such estimates, considering the highly subjective nature of a "two-level jump" judgment made about someone this is concerning. It is even more troubling given its use in organizations appears to have increased significantly from the 25% reported by Silzer and Church (2010). Specifically, what data and factors are executives using to make these judgments about someone's ability to jump two levels? One could argue that using a two-level jump criteria to define high-potential is in effect

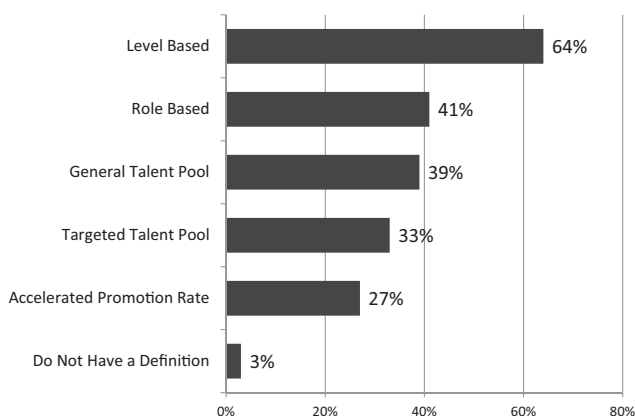


Figure 3. Definitions of high potential: How would you characterize your organization's definition of a high-potential employee? (Select all that apply.) Level-based definitions of potential were rated significantly higher than role based $t(63) = 2.95, p < .01$, or either of the talent pool-based options at $t(63) = 3.00, p < .01$, and $t(63) = 4.26, p < .001$, respectively. None of the remaining options significantly differed from one another other.

avoiding taking a conceptual stance of future potential in general. We would recommend using a more theoretically grounded approach instead such as the Leadership Potential *BluePrint* measured via some form of assessment data.

Fortunately, when these data are combined with responses from the prior question, the results suggest a more positive alternative. That is, the average number of indicators of potential becomes incremental in nature. Specifically, the mean number of different criteria for defining future potential from both lists was 5.74 ($SD = 1.89$). Moreover, when examined together it was evident that 56% of respondents using both level-jump and performance were also using formal assessment data. Thus, even when contextual and judgment criteria are in place, over half of these top development companies are actively working to augment their identification processes with more robust methods of defining future potential based on actual predictive constructs. This trend should be encouraging to I-O practitioners and consulting psychologists as it supports our guidance regarding the use of more rigorous tools and assessments to help organizations better understand the strengths and opportunities of their talent, and ultimately make better talent management decisions.

High-potential proportion. Although organizations can in theory apply their definition across an entire target population and identify as many high-potentials as fit the given criteria, in practice most classify and monitor potential status through some form of segmentation framework. These are generally represented by straightforward categories used for talent planning purposes such as high-potentials, promotables, key contributors, valued professionals, and so forth (e.g., Church & Waclawski, 2010). Although there has been some debate among practitioners regarding the appropriateness of having a forced distribution of high-potential rankings (Church & Waclawski, 2010), questions remain about the right proportion or percentage of high-potentials that an organization should have at any point in time. Although one could consider potential to be normally distributed, most companies do not operationalize potential in that manner. In order to explore this issue further we asked about proportions or percentages.

A significant percentage of respondents (42%) indicated that high-potentials represent between 1% and 9% of the total population; 35% indicated the percentage was higher, at 10% to 15%; and 20% noted it was still higher, at between 16% and 25%. Only 3% selected the 26% to 50% category, and no respondents indicated the percentage was higher than 50%. Thus, over three quarters of these top companies have their percentage of high-potential classifications at or below 15%. Though this might be a little higher than some estimates, such as those of Ready et al., (2010; 3% to 5%), it is consistent with the common guideline of 10% reported by Silzer and Church (2010). The important point here is that the majority of these top companies do not appear to be falling into the trap of significantly overestimating the potential of their future leaders. Only 23% of respondents are classifying talent above 25%, and none are classifying the percentage of high-potentials over 50%. The question remains as to whether they have identified the right high-potentials, those possessing the characteristics, attributes, or capabilities (i.e., content domains), that research has shown are necessary for future success of the organization.

High-potential program maturity. As organizations design, implement, and evolve their talent management programs, it is often of interest to know how their efforts compare with other companies along some level of maturity. This concept has been applied to different areas of organizational psychology and management theory in the past (Curtis, Hefley, & Miller, 2002), as well as broader talent management efforts (e.g., Garr, 2012). Thus, we adapted a five point scale anchored in descriptions from Garr (2012) and other sources (e.g., Cappelli, 2008; Silzer & Dowell, 2010), and asked respondents to rate the level of maturity of their program using this revised scale. Figure 4 provides the detailed breakdown of results for this item.

Overall, about half of all survey respondents (53%) indicated that their process was at “3-standard” and defined by consistent implementation, some level of integration and executive engagement, but inconsistency in transparency of outcomes to employees. Another 24% selected the more mature indicators of “4-transparent” or “5-business integrated,” and 21% indicated their processes were “2-inconsistent” (see Figure 4 for additional scale details). Only 2% selected the lowest category of “1-reactive” which further validates the criteria of top development companies used for this sample.

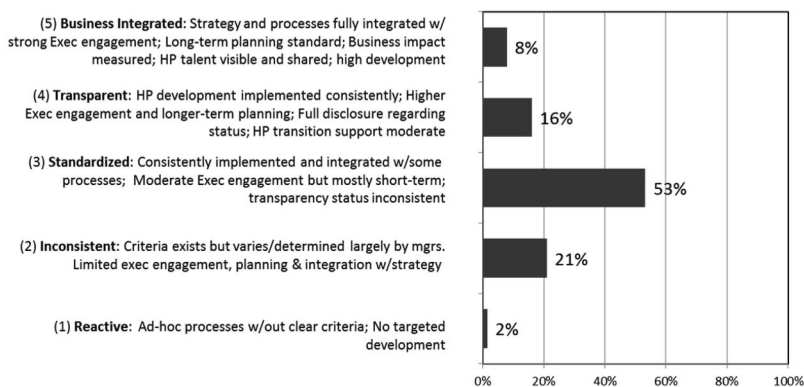


Figure 4. Maturity of high-potential programs: Which of the following statements best characterizes your high-potential program and practices?

It is interesting to note that in comparing data across responses, it became evident that assessments were significantly more likely to be in use in those organizations with more mature high-potential programs, $\chi^2(4, 62) = 13.07, p < .01$. Specifically, 87% of organizations that rated their high-potential programs as being either “4-transparent” or “5-business integrated” (i.e., representing higher maturity) are currently using assessments compared with only 43% of those with either “2-inconsistent” or “1-reactive” high-potential programs. Furthermore the remaining 57% in the less mature categories all indicated they were either developing or considering assessments. This supports the argument, at least for these companies, that integrating formal assessments is linked to having a more mature high-potential program.

High-potential label transparency. One of the significant debates in talent management efforts today is whether or not to share an individual’s potential status following a talent review process (Scott & Reynolds, 2010; Silzer & Church, 2010). While some research has reported that most or all companies share “talent calls” or high-potential status (Ready et al., 2010; Silzer & Church, 2010), other experience suggests a more balanced distribution. The current survey data highlight some distinctions between formal and informal transparency which could partially account for this discrepancy.

Specifically, results from the survey indicate that only 34% of the responding companies are fully transparent or formally share high-potential status with employees. Sixty-six percent do not actively tell their employees what level of potential they have been designated as having based on the corporation’s talent review process. This finding is considerably lower than some have suggested. It most likely reflects concerns voiced by practitioners and senior leaders over disenfranchising the vast majority of the “B players” (DeLong & Vijayaraghavan, 2003), who may not be seen as having significant future leadership potential, yet keep the corporation in business. After all, if only 15% of the population is identified as high-potential, the remaining 85% may respond negatively to the information, if shared, that they are not in a special talent pool or deserving of accelerated development or promotion. Moreover, many of these mainstream employees are also likely to be in pivotal roles (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007) that would be problematic to ignore for other strategic reasons. Similarly, there are potential challenges with individuals being seen by their peers as being the “anointed ones,” causing potential friction between employees (although this can also happen through the informal methods of transparency). In addition, there are concerns about how formal designation affects high-potentials, such as subsequent increases in pressure to perform (Campbell & Smith, 2010) or unrealistic expectations of fast advancement. Thus, management fear that transparency may lead to negative outcomes for the organization including turnover, and declines in engagement, productivity, revenue, and profit.

These are real concerns, but there is more to consider. Another reason for this study’s lower rates of formal transparency may be that prior studies did not differentiate between formal and

informal sharing methods in their data. In order to test these more informal methods we provided response options which provide further insight. Specifically, of the 66% of companies that do not actively share talent calls, there is a large percentage that does engage in behaviors that reveal employee potential status one way or another. Figure 5 provides the details of these results.

In short, regardless of whether the process is formal, between managers sharing talent calls informally at 18% and employees determining their status on their own at 33% (e.g., via invitations to leadership programs, being offered special assignments, or receiving greater exposure to senior executives), one could argue that only 15% of employees do not know their own “talent call” or high-potential status in these top companies. Thus, although this informal status sharing exists, it may be seen as being less risky than officially sanctioned designations in terms of their impact on “B players.”

The data from Campbell and Smith (2010), which reflect the employee point-of-view, confirm this trend with 91% of that sample indicating they know their own status (positive or negative). It is important to note that this 91% includes 31% who were told informally of their high potential status. Thus, we can conclude then that despite concerns expressed about being fully transparent, the dynamics of organizations make it difficult to keep this information withheld regardless of the policy. In addition, recent research in this area supports an argument for formal transparency as well. Specifically, Bjorkman, Ehrnrooth, Makela, Smale, and Sumelius (2013) found in their study with several European companies that employees who believed they were high-potentials were the most committed to the organization. Moreover, there were no differences between those who perceived that they were not high-potentials and those who were completely unaware of their standing. Similarly, Campbell and Smith (2010) found higher organizational commitment from formally identified high potentials, with only 14% seeking other employment compared with 33% of those informally identified. Thus transparency may not be a negative.

Another interesting data point here concerns the relationship between transparency and high-potential program maturity. Specifically, there was a significant relationship at $\chi^2(2, 61) = 9.54, p < .01$ such that when combined, 69% of those firms with “2-inconsistent” or “1-reactive” programs did not share information, although 67% with “4-transparent” and “5-business integrated” high-programs did share high-potential status with employees. Though this might be expected given that transparency is one aspect (of many) of the definition of later stages in the maturity model, it also supports the maturity construct overall and internal consistency of the data.

In sum, given the amount of energy that is spent on the topic of transparency in most organizations today, the results would suggest that efforts could be better directed elsewhere. The vast majority of employees know their status regardless of whether they are formally told or not, and being told only has a positive or neutral impact on commitment. Since transparency is a core value that the new generation of talent entering the workforce embraces (Meister & Willyerd, 2010), perhaps organizations should move beyond the “black box” TM practices of the past and share information more openly.

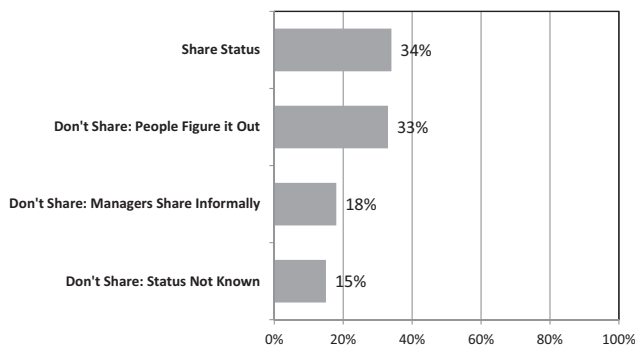


Figure 5. Transparency of high-potential status: Do you have a formal policy about sharing talent call/classification with high-potential employees?

Assessment Practices

The next section in the survey focused on assessment practices and included questions on program tenure, purpose/usage, frequency of assessments, and the shelf-life of the results obtained. This section also queried about the specific content domains assessed today in practice based on the components of the Leadership Potential *BluePrint* (Church & Silzer, 2014; Silzer & Church, 2009).

Assessment program tenure. As noted earlier, data from both the prior survey and the current results indicate that assessments are prevalent in these top development companies and may be increasing. To further examine assessment trends, we asked respondents to select from five options regarding the tenure of their assessment program ranging from “not yet launched” to “in place for five or more years.” Overall, results indicated a very consistent pattern of having moderate to well established assessment efforts across both target groups $r(52) = .45, p < .001$. Specifically, in companies actively engaged in high-potential assessments, approximately 70% of programs have been in place for two or more years. Similarly, of those organizations with programs assessing senior executives, 67% have been in place for more than two years (See Table 5). Clearly many of the processes in these top companies are well established.

It is interesting to note that for the remaining 30% of programs that have been implemented in the last two years, it appears that the emphasis has shifted somewhat from designing new programs for senior executives (24%) to developing new programs for high-potentials (17%). Although these differences are not statistically significant, they are consistent with the utilization data provided earlier (92% vs. 81%) and in the 2013 study (91% vs. 75%). This suggests that although assessments are currently more frequently used with senior executive populations than high-potentials among top development companies, the use of assessment for high-potentials is indeed increasing.

Along with this general trend, it was also interesting to note the absence of significant relationships between high-potential program maturity and assessment program tenure. Although a maturity model would posit that assessment programs naturally evolve over time, this was not the case in this sample. In other words, although more mature processes are those which incorporate assessments and tend toward more transparency per the findings earlier, they do not necessarily require a long history of implementation to be established as such. Thus, an organization’s high-potential program maturity may be more reflective of an initial set of design decisions at launch, than an evolutionary eventuality. If this assertion is true, it has significant implications for practice. The general guidance given to professionals introducing new programs is to start simply and develop more advanced approaches over time (e.g., Rotolo & Church, 2012). Although further research is required, these data might indicate a more deliberate initial design if a robust approach is desired.

Purpose of assessment. Consistent with the prior study, when asked about the purpose of assessments, individual development was by far the most commonly cited at 85% for high-potentials and 76% for senior executives, and significantly higher than other options. Similarly, the most significant gap between groups was in utilizing assessments for the identification of potential, with 52% for high-potentials versus 36% for senior executives. The only significantly greater use of

Table 5
Assessment Program Tenure: How Long Has Your Current Assessment Program/Process Been In place?

| Response Option | High-Potentials | Senior Executives |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1–12 Months | 17% | 10% |
| 1–2 Years | 13% | 24% |
| 2–5 Years | 41% | 39% |
| 5+ Years | 28% | 27% |

Note. Data for this table reflect only those organizations that already have assessment programs in place.

assessments with senior executives was for external selection at 31% versus high-potentials at 10% (see Figure 6).

Although the same trend was present in the 2013 results (25% vs. 14%), it did not achieve significance at the time. Taken together, it appears that top development companies recognize the highly visible and financial costs associated with poor decisions made at the top of the house (e.g., Cappelli, 2008; Paese, 2008), and are investing more in assessment efforts on external hires at those levels. The same general tendency toward emphasizing assessment for the identification and development of emerging talent in high-potentials and for succession planning for senior executives was also evident. Finally, when summarized into development versus decision-making categories, the pattern was very similar to 2013. The majority of these organizations are pursuing assessments for both development and decision-making simultaneously, and the trend appears to be more pronounced at 64% for high-potentials and 79% for senior executives versus 57% and 64% in the prior study. Thus, fewer organizations are assessing people for development only (36% and 21% for high-potentials and senior executives here vs. 41% and 30%), which indicates a trend toward further utilization of the results for TM purposes.

As noted earlier, transparency of high-potential status is a major topic of interest in practice. Interestingly, however, when tested we found no relationship between the purpose of high-potential assessments (e.g., development only vs. decision-making) and many other practices measured including transparency of high-potential status, program maturity level, or high-potential and senior executives program tenure.² In short, it appears that companies made choices regarding the use of assessment results regardless of transparency or maturity level of their process. Moreover this does not appear to change over time. Consistent with the observations above, it suggests that program purpose, transparency and maturity all appear to represent separate strategic design choices for the TM professional when building a system. Thus, and somewhat surprisingly, process evolution may not be the norm with formal assessment programs.

Percentage of population assessed annually. The next question inquired about the percentage of target populations assessed annually. Of those top companies currently assessing high-potentials and senior executives, the majority reported assessing less than 25% each year. In looking at the results (see Table 6) there is a similar pattern overall at $r(49) = .66, p < .001$, but a modest trend exists toward assessing more senior executives at 11–25% than high-potentials.

This could be the case for a variety of reasons but is probably driven by the increasing emphasis on the use of assessments for both development and decision-making purposes (e.g., succession planning and external staffing) with senior executives as noted earlier at 79%. In summary, most senior executive and high potential programs assess a modest percentage of their target populations annually. It appears that the majority of these top development companies follow a more strategic talent management model and tactically assess targets based on organizational and individual needs.

Assessment shelf-life. We were also interested in how long these top companies consider their assessment results defined here as the suite of tools to be valid, (i.e., their official shelf-life). In response to this question, the most commonly cited timeframe for the shelf-life of assessment results was 2 to 3 years at 55% for high-potentials and 59% for senior executives. The remaining responses were evenly dispersed across shorter and longer windows. Overall, the pattern across responses was strong and significant at $r(44) = .66, p < .001$ indicating little difference between how assessments are treated for these two groups (see Table 7) which is useful guidance.

From a development perspective, the fact that half or more of these top companies have a 2 to 3 year assessment shelf-life makes sense. This is likely enough time for sufficient development to have taken place to show a demonstrable impact on results. It also takes into account pragmatic constraints of program administration such as cost and complexity of assessment, feedback and follow-up efforts. Finally, some of the tools in a typical assessment suite are likely to be founda-

² Purpose and transparency at $\chi^2(1, 45) = .98, ns$; purpose and maturity level at $\chi^2(3, 45) = .79, ns$, purpose and tenure of high-potential or senior executive programs at $\chi^2(3, 45) = .54, ns$ and $\chi^2(3, 48) = 4.64, ns$, respectively.

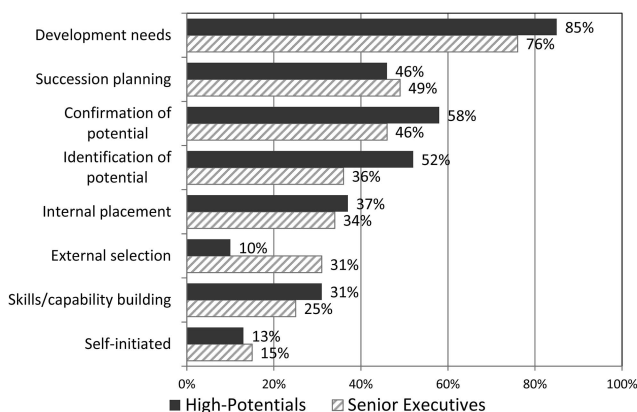


Figure 6. Purpose of assessments: For what purpose(s) are assessments used? (Select all that apply.) Development needs were rated significantly higher than the next closest option chosen for both groups, that is, confirmation of high-potentials at 58% $t(51) = 3.96, p < .001$, and succession planning for senior executives at 49%, $t(58) = 4.01, p < .001$. The use of assessments for the identification of potential with high-potentials was significantly higher than for senior executives at $t(63) = 3.01, p < .001$. The use of assessments for external selection of senior executives was significantly higher than for high-potentials at $t(63) = 3.62, p < .001$.

tional in nature per the *BluePrint* (e.g., personality, cognitive tests), and are less likely to show change (Church, 2014).

Somewhat disconcerting, however, was the fact that 11% to 14% of assessments had no stated time limits on their shelf-life. In short, the data could reside somewhere with no “expiration date.” While this finding may reflect an inherent philosophy in the design in some of these programs regarding the very same fixed nature of the foundational dimensions, it still raises potential issues. All assessment data should have a time limit as it can become incorrect, irrelevant, or invalid over time. In fact, if the primary use of assessment is for development then in all fairness to participants the results should be refreshed at some point to evaluate progress.

Moreover, given the dual usage of assessments for decision-making, we would advocate strongly for practitioners to impose some standard timeframe for all assessment results even if on the longer side of 4 to 5 years. Overall, the optimal solution may be to have various tools in an assessment suite linked to different shelf-lives based on the developmental nature of the domains they measure.

Assessment content domains. As noted earlier, one of the primary objectives of this study was to determine which content domains are being assessed in these top development companies and the extent to which these are reflected by the core dimensions of the Leadership Potential *BluePrint* (Church & Silzer, 2014; Silzer & Church, 2009). To this end, we asked respondents to indicate all

Table 6

Annual Assessment Rates: Approximately What Percentage of Each Population Below Do You Assess Annually?

| Response Option | High-Potentials | Senior Executives |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 5–10% | 45% | 33% |
| 11–25% | 16% | 38% |
| 25–50% | 8% | 5% |
| 51–75% | 6% | 4% |
| >75% | 25% | 20% |

Table 7

Assessment Shelf-Life: What Is the Approximate Shelf-Life of Your Assessment Results (the Suite in General)?

| Response Option | High-Potentials | Senior Executives |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Annual | 19% | 13% |
| 2–3 years | 55% | 59% |
| 4 years or more | 12% | 17% |
| No time limit | 14% | 11% |

of the content domains utilized in their assessment suites for both target populations from a list of 12 in total based on the *BluePrint* and other literature (e.g., [Corporate Leadership Council, 2010](#); [De Meuse, et al., 2008](#); [Hanson, 2011](#)). A write-in category for other domains was also provided (for details and significance tests see [Figure 7](#)).

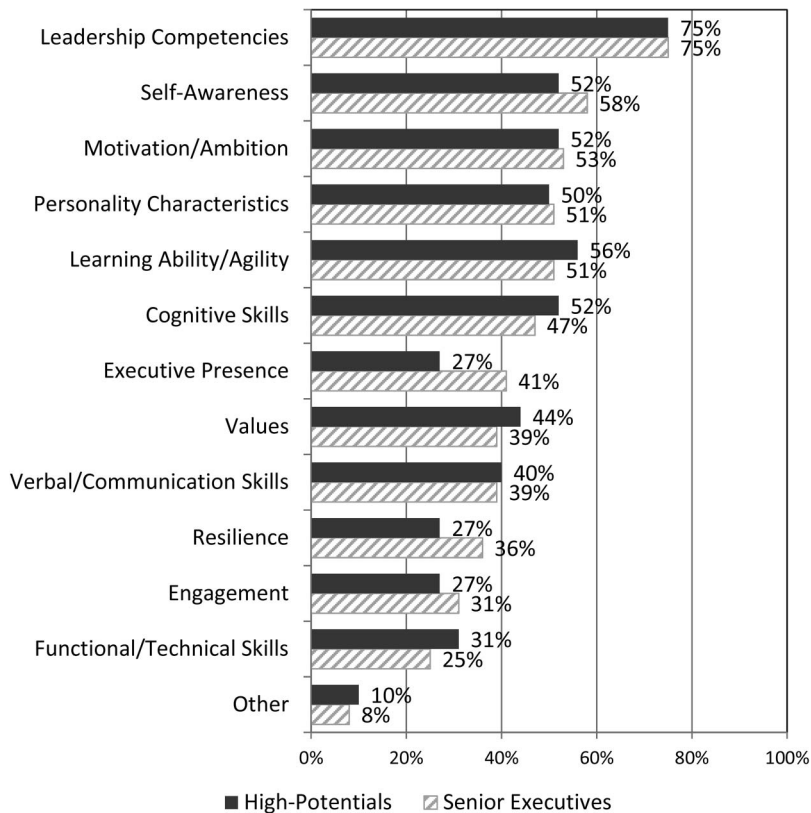


Figure 7. Content domains covered in assessments: Which of the following factors are measured in your assessment suite? (Select all that apply.) Leadership competencies were assessed at significantly higher rates than the next highest respective domains of learning ability/agility for high potentials at $t(51) = 3.12, p < .01$, and self-awareness for senior executives at $t(58) = 2.83, p < .01$. Subsequent significant effects hold for all comparisons with domains at lower rates than leadership competencies. The only significant difference between groups was on the dimension of executive presence at $t(63) = 2.86, p < .01$.

Overall, leadership competencies are by far the most commonly assessed content domain for both high-potentials and senior executives at 75% for both groups, and significantly higher than the next highest cluster of categories (all about equally cited) including self-awareness, motivation, personality, learning ability or cognitive skills. The finding that leadership skills are the most frequently measured is consistent with previous research (Silzer & Church, 2010), and supports the finding that 360-feedback is one of the most commonly used tools in assessments (Church & Rotolo, 2013). Given that leadership competencies represent one of the two Career dimensions of the *BluePrint* at the top of the pyramid, and are conceptualized to be most readily influenced by typical leadership and OD efforts (Church, 2014; Church & Silzer, 2014), the frequency of their usage makes sense for TM programs emphasizing development and succession planning.

The second tier or cluster of domains assessed consistently by half of the top companies for both high-potentials and senior executives includes the *BluePrint*'s Foundational dimensions of personality and cognitive skills, and Growth dimensions of motivation and learning ability. Both of these are being assessed about 50% of the time or more. The only other content area in this second cluster was self-awareness. None of the utilization rates for domains in this second tier were significantly different from each other.

Next there is a third tier of less frequently assessed domains, many of which show similar patterns for high-potential and senior executives as well. These include values, verbal communications, resilience, engagement, and functional/technical skills (the latter of which reflects the second Career dimension of the *BluePrint*). Although not all rankings are significantly different from one another, there were a few interesting differences. In particular, executive presence was significantly more likely to be used in senior executive assessments than high-potential efforts by almost 14 points. While a similar trend was evident for resilience (nine-point difference) it did not reach significance, nor did any of the others in Tier 3. Finally, only a small number of organizations selected the other category ($n = 5$) and no convergent additional themes were evident.

When combined, the data reported here provide empirical support for the utility of the Leadership Potential *BluePrint* as a way of framing content with respect to assessing high-potentials and senior executives. When categorized across assessment domains into the Foundational, Growth and Career dimensions, all were well represented (see Table 8). A few additional points stood out as well.

First, although it was not surprising to see the career dimension of leadership as the most frequently assessed, given the prevalence of 360-feedback (D Group, 2013; Bracken & Church, 2013; Lepsinger & Lucia, 2004; Nowack & Mashihi, 2012) and leadership development programs in general, the significantly lower rate of focus on functional and technical skills particularly for high-potentials is interesting. Given these skills are easily developed through corporate learning and

Table 8
Assessment Domains Classified by the Leadership Potential BluePrint

| Dimensions | Sub-Factors | High-Potentials | Senior Executives |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Career | Leadership Competencies | 75% | 75% |
| | Functional/Technical Skills | 31% | 25% |
| | Either Used | 79% | 77% |
| | Both Used | 27% | 25% |
| Growth | Learning Ability | 56% | 51% |
| | Motivation & Drive | 52% | 53% |
| | Either Used | 65% | 61% |
| | Both Used | 42% | 44% |
| Foundational | Cognitive Capabilities | 52% | 47% |
| | Personality Characteristics | 50% | 51% |
| | Either Used | 67% | 64% |
| | Both Used | 35% | 36% |

functional university programs one might expect them to be assessed more frequently. If we consider, however, that functional talent pools and destination roles were less commonly used in definitions of potential (as noted earlier), then it makes more sense. Perhaps functional capability is simply something that resides outside of TM and succession planning efforts because it is less about long-term potential and more about short-term role fit. In other words organizations may be less likely to use functional skills as the focus of an assessment program for development and decision-making compared with domains reflective of long-term leadership potential. Further, it may simply be that functional and technical skills have less importance as you move up the career ladder into more senior leadership roles (Thornton & Byham, 1982).

Second and also noteworthy was the consistency in utilization of the other dimensions of the *BluePrint*. While having both Foundational and Growth dimensions assessed at 50% or better supports the use of the model as a classification framework, we might have expected to see Foundational components more heavily weighted with the high-potential population given they are earlier in their career. The data do not support that hypothesis. It is important to note, however, that the high-potential population in this study is not comprised of truly junior employees which is where Church and Silzer (2014) suggest a difference in emphasis might be most meaningful.

Finally, although the other content areas included were utilized in some companies, they were not as frequently included as those of the *BluePrint* dimensions. Aside from self-awareness, the other domains were in the Tier 3 category and show more variability in use (e.g., executive maturity). Further, the majority of these additions (e.g., resilience, communications, and engagement) could arguably be collapsed into one of the three dimensions of the *BluePrint*.

Assessment Program Outcomes

The third and final set of survey items concerned a number of different outcomes of the assessment process. In particular, we were interested in communications, access to results, attitudes and perceptions about the process, and the impact it has on participants' business effectiveness. Results are described below.

Communication strategy. Given that assessment processes can be complex and target only certain groups, we asked respondents to indicate their strategies for communicating their assessment programs. Overall, the vast majority of companies (78%) report that they communicate their programs to participants and their managers and human resources support. Of the remaining organizations, a small group communicates to the whole organization (12%), and only a few (6%) communicate to the participant only, or report an inconsistent or complete absence of a strategy (4%). Given these are top development companies it is not surprising that 96% have some type of formal communication strategy. Thus, most companies are open but targeted about their processes, which is important guidance.

Access to assessment results. Focusing now on access to the results of the assessment process, we inquired about the level of reporting detail provided to various audiences and potential end-users including participants, managers, c-suite leaders, and given the importance of succession plans, the Board of Directors (see Table 9).

In general, participants themselves were significantly more likely to receive the complete set of results (e.g., individual reports for each measure) at 55% compared with any other group including their manager at 17%, senior leadership at 8% or the board of directors at only 3%. Conversely, managers were more likely to have access to integrated summaries, and senior leaders (c-suite) were most likely to receive topline results. Taken together these data suggest a trend toward providing more specific results to the individual and less detailed and sensitive information to higher levels in the organization. Interestingly and critical for practice, however, is the fact that 29% of companies are providing some type of assessment data directly to their Boards. This suggests it is critical for I-O practitioners and consulting psychologists to play an active role in ensuring these results are

Table 9

Access to Assessment Results: Who has Access to the Results of the Assessment Program/Process?

| | Complete Results (e.g., individual reports for each measure/tool) | Integrated Summary (e.g., blended across dimensions/factors) | Topline Summary (e.g., strengths, and opportunities only) |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Only the individual being assessed | 55% | 19% | 9% |
| Individual and manager or supervisor | 17% | 39% | 33% |
| Senior-most leadership Team, c-suite | 8% | 22% | 41% |
| Board of Directors | 3% | 3% | 23% |

Note. Significant differences were evident in access to complete reports between participants and all other groups including their manager at $t(63) = 4.42, p < .001$; senior leadership at $t(63) = 6.08, p < .001$; and the Board of Directors at $t(63) = 7.72, p < .001$. Managers were significantly more likely to get an integrated summary than were individuals themselves at $t(63) = 3.01, p < .05$; senior leaders at $t(63) = 2.38, p < .05$; or the Board of Directors at $t(63) = 5.58, p < .001$. Senior leaders were significantly more likely to receive top line results than individuals at $t(63) = 4.71, p < .001$ or board members at $t(63) = 2.41, p < .05$.

delivered with appropriate context setting and interpretation given the impact they may have at this level.

Perceptions of assessments. Attitudes toward a given process or program will play a role in its short and long term effectiveness. We were interested in specific attitudes toward assessment practices, as well as potential differences between those assessed and not assessed.³ Overall reactions to assessments were reported to be quite favorable, with 53% to 62% of respondents indicating there was significant interest and “pull” for the data in their organizations across all constituent groups (i.e., high-potential program participants, senior executive participants, or c-suite leaders; see Figure 8 for details).

General acceptance of the assessment process was reported at similarly high levels as well (e.g., 53%–58%). Moreover, there were no significant differences on these two items between ratings of perceptions held. Interestingly, however, ratings of attitudes did differ significantly by group on whether the assessment was seen by participants as a special opportunity, with high-potentials being much higher than others at 58% for those assessed.

Regarding areas of concern with assessments, results indicated less of an issue overall than many practitioners might expect. Specifically, only 27% said their high-potential participants were anxious about the assessment process, and only 21% rated them as having concerns over use of the data. Further, just 20% rated their c-suite leaders (i.e., those not assessed but recipients of the data) as questioning the value of the process. Finally, and somewhat surprisingly, when tested with other survey items there were no significant differences in attitudes for either purpose of the assessments or level of transparency of the high-potentials.

Taken together, these are very encouraging trends overall. The highly favorable perceptions from all three of these groups suggest a very positive picture of organization wide reactions to assessment, from the top of the house to the leaders being assessed. The fact that senior executives who do not participate in assessments value the results, and those who do participate value it even more, all with limited anxiety, suggest it is possible to design and implement an assessment program that has credibility in large organizations.

Estimating the impact of assessments. Determining the ROI for TM interventions is a challenging task given the myriad of variables and length of time required to see long-term impact (Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Although research does exist on the effectiveness of tools such as

³ Though these different sets of attitudes were all measured via ratings from the same survey respondent, and therefore have potential biases incorporated, the results did show considerable variability in ratings.

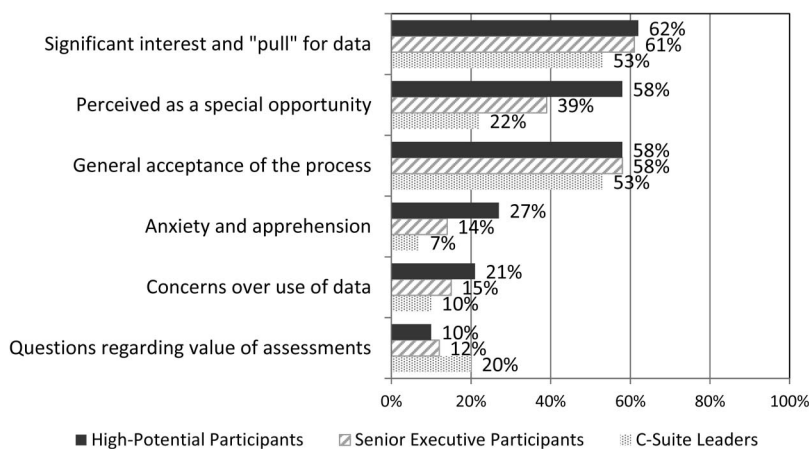


Figure 8. Attitudes and perceptions of assessments: How would you describe the general attitudes and perceptions toward assessment in your organization for each of the audiences below? (Select all that apply.) Ratings of assessments as a special opportunity were significantly higher for high-potential participants compared with either senior executive participants at $t(51) = 2.64, p < .01$, or c-suite leaders at $t(51) = 4.49, p < .001$. Anxiety level and perceptions of the value of assessments between high-potential participants and c-suite leaders were also significantly different at $t(51) = 2.64, p < .01$, $t(51) = 2.06, p < .05$, respectively.

360-degree feedback on behavior change (e.g., Bracken, Timmreck & Church, 2001), the impact of integrated assessment programs on high-potentials and senior executives from a performance standpoint is less clear. Thus, we asked respondents to rate the impact of assessments on the performance of participants within 12 to 18 months.

Overall, the data were very encouraging. Approximately 65% of respondents indicated that their assessment and development processes had a "moderate" or "significant" impact on the business performance of high-potentials and senior executive participants (see Table 10).

These scale points were defined by a perceived 5% to 9% or 10% to 20% improvement in business performance. About 9% for each target group were reported as having a "minor" impact, but perhaps most importantly, only 2% to 3% reported "no noticeable impact" of their assessment processes. Not surprisingly given the limited tenure of some of the programs noted earlier 19% reported that it was "too soon to tell" the outcome of their assessments.

Overall, the pattern was very consistent between the two target populations with a significant correlation of $r(43) = .44, p < .01$. In addition, and providing some measure of validity to the results, correlations between assessment program tenure and impact were significant between the

Table 10

Impact of Assessments: What Would You Say Has Been the Impact of the Assessment and Development Process on the Performance of Participants Within 12–18 Months of Assessment?

| Response Option | High-Potentials | Senior Executives |
|--|-----------------|-------------------|
| No real noticeable impact (0% improvement) | 3% | 2% |
| Minor impact (1–4% improvement) | 10% | 9% |
| Moderate impact (5–9% improvement) | 40% | 37% |
| Significant impact (10–20% improvement) | 28% | 28% |
| Dramatic impact (21%+ improvement) | 0% | 5% |
| Too Soon to Tell | 19% | 19% |

corresponding target groups (i.e., high-potential program tenure with impact on high-potentials) at $r(47) = .52, p < .001$ and $r(44) = .33, p < .05$ (parallel relationship for senior executive items). These estimations, although subjective and likely biased to some extent by the respondents' program ownership versus hard measurement, provide support for the use of assessment and development for both high-potentials and senior executives. They also support the belief in practice that programs take time to have a significant impact. These data would suggest that the longer the processes have been in place the greater the impact on participants.

Themes From Write-In Comments

The final question on the survey was a write-in that inquired about the most important issues being faced by the respondents' talent assessment programs. Overall 41 companies responded to the question, and answers were content coded to reveal several key themes. In general, there were a variety of issues mentioned many of which were consistent with the findings addressed in the survey. A few represented new and unique areas to consider for discussion and future research (see Table 11 for details and sample comments).

The theme most frequently mentioned (25%) was enhancing the overall assessment strategy and ensuring better integration of the information collected. The second most common theme (20%) concerned appropriate judgment and use assessment data. With 95% of these companies either having a program in place already or in consideration in some form, there is a clear need to ensure

Table 11
Content Analysis From Write-In Comments

| Theme | No. of Mentions | % of Comments | Sample Comments ^a |
|--|-----------------|---------------|---|
| Enhancing Strategy & System Integration | 14 | 25% | We now have good assessment information, but need to better utilize [it] in strategic, long-term workforce planning |
| Improving Judgment & Use of Results | 11 | 20% | The consistent use of the information in development and potential assessments and using it as a guiding factor, not as a determining factor. In other words, recognizing that it is a piece of data to be leveraged and compared and contrasted with other information and knowledge about an individual's development needs and ultimate potential. |
| Ensuring Development Happens | 8 | 15% | How to determine real development needs go guide planned experiences; Developing the talent (based on the results) quickly enough to meet the pipeline needs. |
| Securing Funding & Resources Needed | 7 | 13% | Funding—Human Resources wants to do more of these assessments, but overall budgets are a constraint so we have to delay some assessments for some individuals. It's always about prioritization. |
| Developing Better Definitions of Potential | 6 | 11% | Assessment that measures true rather than perceived potential (high potentials) and leadership capabilities and gaps for senior execs. |
| Increasing Transparency to Organization | 4 | 7% | Complete transparency across the organization; Greater transparency in the talent process and talent ratings in general. |
| Managing Culture Change in Use of Data | 4 | 7% | Assessment is a new concept to the firm that has a rich history of being ultra-conservative in all aspects of HR and business philosophy. Immense amount of communication and explanation has been required. |

^a Comments have been edited for clarity, grammar, and to prevent identification.

that assessments are not another “flavor of the month.” Thus a focus on strategy, integration and appropriate use of data is key. One poor decision can destroy trust in a process for years. Related to this point, a smaller group of respondents mentioned the importance of managing through the culture change of introducing and using assessment data (7%), which is an important point particularly in organizations where this a newer concept. Given that a number of companies are introducing or considering new assessment processes, treating these efforts as an OD intervention (e.g., with a culture change component) is probably a useful perspective to have. The remaining themes were relatively dispersed and spanned a variety of topics such as ensuring development occurs, funding, definitions, and so forth.

Summary and Implications for Practice

In sum, this study covered a wide range of topics that have been largely unexplored in terms of how they manifest in companies today. Based on the findings, we believe the following are the most significant implications that I-O and consulting psychologists should use to help their clients in understanding the assessment landscape.

Top development companies use assessment, and they use it well. On the basis of these findings and those of a previous study (Church & Rotolo, 2013), we can conclude that these top development companies earn their reputation quite well. They utilize assessment tools and processes extensively for both high-potentials and senior leader populations (80% use assessments currently, and another 15% plan to do so). Further, they utilize a multimethod and multitrait approach. They share results with participants as well as managers and HR, although they tend to provide more detail to the participant to allow him or her to have some control over the content. They also keep the assessment results fresh by maintaining a shelf-life of approximately 2 to 3 years before reassessing.

Perceived impact of assessment practices is high. As a result of the practices described above, these top development companies enjoy a high level of organizational impact and broad participant (and nonparticipant) support. Two-thirds of the companies view assessment as having a moderate to heavy impact on organizational results (only 9% reported a minor impact). They also report high levels of acceptance from participants (both high-potentials and senior leaders). Undoubtedly this is facilitated by their robust communication strategies, with 78% of companies communicating results to the manager and HR support in addition to participants. Although inconclusive, we would like to infer from these encouraging results that individuals (both participants and nonparticipants alike) are beginning to understand the role of assessment in organizations, even when there is a dual purpose of the assessment for both development and decision making.

Best practices for high-potential assessment are emerging. On the basis of this study, which contributes to a growing body of research, we are beginning to see some common practices in terms of high-potential assessment. Although we would clearly consider some of these as “best practice,” other practices are further away from where we expected these industry-leading companies to be. For example, on the positive side, the majority of these top development companies assesses their high-potential talent, and utilize the assessment results for both development and decision-making purposes (i.e., for either identification or confirmation). Most also have a formal definition of potential (64% used a job level-based definition) and use multiple indicators to identify high-potential talent. On the other hand, the vast majority of companies still use past and current performance as primary indicators of potential. And many companies continue to incorporate contextual factors such as mobility (41% of companies) and other background information (34%). Further, although we were encouraged to see that most companies follow the *BluePrint* framework when it comes to assessing high-potential talent, we believe that companies still have more progress to make in terms of leveraging the correct content domains for high-potential identification. Last, we are encouraged by the 34% of companies reporting full transparency relative to sharing high-potential designation. The additional 18% of companies that indicate their managers share the talent calls informally may indicate that transparency is on an upward trend. The 33% that indicate participants figure out their talent call on their own made us wonder about the difference between sharing such calls and the participant knowing their call. Although the end result may be the same,

the perceived organizational support is clearly different (Eisenberger, etc. 1986), and the effects on employee commitment, engagement, performance, and other outcomes remain largely unknown in this context. Extending theory and research on engagement (e.g., Macey & Schneider, 2008) and high-potential transparency would be an interesting area for further research.

Build assessment practices with the end state in mind. As noted in the preceding paragraphs, it is quite common for I-O and consulting psychologists implementing major talent management programs for their clients to evolve a program over time to allow the organization to adapt to new practices, policies and behaviors. One of the more interesting and surprising findings from this study was the lack of a strong and significant relationship between high-potential program tenure and program maturity. Certainly, we found strong support for our maturity scale: Those companies at the more mature end of the continuum (Levels 4 and 5) were more likely to report using assessments as well as more likely to share high-potential talent calls than those at the lower end of the continuum (Levels 1 and 2). However, we also expected the more mature companies to report that their programs have been in place longer than less mature companies. Although there was a trend in this direction for high potential programs, there was not significant support for this hypothesis. This suggests that what we and others (Garr, 2012) might define as “mature” components of a high-potential program (e.g., transparent identification, sharing of talent calls, integrated with business strategy) may not need significant time for organizational adoption, and may not be easily instituted as the program ages if not part of the initial design and implementation. In short, this suggests that practitioners should consider all the relevant design elements of a high-potential program at the outset and make the correct strategic decisions, rather than start with an overly simplified or constrained process and rely on that to evolve over time.

Finally, although this study has moved us closer to understanding the high-potential and senior leader assessment landscape, there remain a variety of open questions that we would like to see addressed. One area that neither this study nor the previous addressed is how assessment programs integrate with the larger talent management systems and processes - for example, how the assessment information integrates with succession planning systems. We would also like to know more about the development planning processes that typically follow assessment practices and how the Learning & Development function supports an assessment practice (e.g., in what context is an assessment participant provided a leadership coach; what is the extent of development resources provided; and what are the decision criteria for determining these, etc.). Further, we think it would be interesting to know more about the key drivers of effective high-potential and senior leader assessment practices. For example, are such practices related to extensive use of assessment at other levels or functions within the company (e.g., general management vs. finance or marketing talent pools)? Does the level of expertise of the program owners impact the practices used? Finally, although the present study reflects practices of a sample defined as top development companies, it may be that smaller, more nimble organizations are actually engaged in more cutting edge and innovative TM and assessment programs. Future research should be directed at identifying and collecting similar types of data from smaller and/or more local organizations as well to explore possible learnings from their efforts.

Limitations

The present benchmark survey study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research design employed a targeted sample of large organizations with strong TM and OD functions based on several different factors. Therefore, although the findings reported in this article are reflective of the population surveyed (given the 80% response rate), they may not be generalizable to all types of organizations. As noted previously, future research should be directed at examining processes and practices in other contexts such as family businesses, government agencies, religious organizations, nonprofit activist groups, and start-up companies to determine key differences, similarities, as well as identify possible innovative practices being developed in those contexts. Although the current sampling limitations do not mean that the findings are not applicable to other types of situations where assessments and high-potential programs are being considered, the data may not represent the full range of interventions in practice today.

It is also important to recognize that data reflect the perceptions of the respondents in each organization (e.g., a senior leader in the TM function) not the broader pool of employees. Although they are arguably the best source within the organization to answer survey questions of this nature, we have no way of gauging their level of knowledge about their processes. In addition, in making comparisons with Church and Rotolo (2013), although the samples surveyed are quite similar, they are not exactly the same. Thus, some differences between studies may be because of sample variations.

A second limitation concerns the anonymous survey methodology used and its impact on the ability to examine demographic relationships. As in the prior study this decision was made to maximize response rates by protecting respondents from revealing sensitive company information. While this is a common approach in survey research of this nature, it does limit the ability to test for demographic effects on assessment practices. Future research could attempt to address this issue by significantly expanding the survey pool and including appropriate coverage of demographic variables to ensure anonymity of responses. This approach would necessitate a different sampling frame. As noted above, this could also be useful in expanding the level of insights on innovative assessment practices in other types of smaller or midlevel organizations.

Finally, we acknowledge that perceptions of impact and performance of any process are inherently flawed. Future research should be directed at more objective measures of return on investment (ROI) of assessment techniques with high-potentials and senior executives. Some of the possible outcomes might include performance in future roles, bench strength, and measurable financial returns. Understanding the organizational impact of talent assessment practices through such metrics would be of significant value to the field.

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(Appendices follow)

Appendix A

Assessment & High-Potential Practices Benchmark Survey

Assessment Practices Benchmark Survey II

Q1 Do You Have Some Form of Assessment Program or Process In Place For The Following Two Talent groups?

| | Yes | No | Currently under development | We used to, but not currently | Not currently, but considering |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| High Potentials (below Vice President level) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Senior executives (mid to upper level leaders e.g., Vice President and above whether high-potential or not) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q2 Approximately what percentage of the total population does your high-potential pool represent currently?

- 1–9%
- 10–15%
- 16–25%
- 26–50%
- 50% +

Q3 Approximately what percentage of each population below do you assess annually?

| | 5–10% | 11–25% | 26–50% | 51–75% | >75% |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| High-Potentials | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Senior Executives | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q4 How long has your current assessment program/process been in place?

| | Not yet launched/ 0 Months | 1–12 Months | 1 to 2 yrs | >2 but less than 5 yrs | More than 5 yrs |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| High-Potentials | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Senior Executives | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

(Appendices continue)

Q5 For what purpose(s) are the assessments used? (Select all that apply; leave blank if none)

| | High-Potentials | Senior Executives |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Internal job placement & staffing | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| External recruitment/selection | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Identification of potential | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Confirmation of potential | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Succession planning | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Identification of development needs | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Confirmation of skill acquisition/capability development | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Self-initiated/Ad hoc | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q6 How would you describe the general attitudes and perceptions towards assessment in your organization for each of the four audiences below (select if yes; select all that apply)?

| | High-Potentials (Participants) | Senior Executives (Participants) | Senior Most Leadership Team/c-Suite |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Anxiety/apprehension | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Concern over inappropriate use of data | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Questioning the value/impact | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| General acceptance of the process | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Perceived as a special opportunity | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Significant interest in the results/data | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other attitudes (Please Specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q7 Which of the following statements best characterizes your high-potential program and practices?

- Reactive: HP employees identified via ad hoc processes and without clear criteria. No targeted HP development. (1)
- Inconsistent: HP identification criteria exist but inconsistently implemented; HP development varies and is determined largely by managers. Limited executive engagement and planning for critical positions. No integration of HP strategy with other talent processes. (2)
- Standardized: HP identification consistently implemented. HP strategy integrated with select talent processes. Moderate executive engagement. Short-term planning for critical positions. Transparency of HP status is inconsistent. (3)
- Transparent: HP development implemented consistently across enterprise. Longer-term planning for critical positions. Full disclosure to HPs regarding their status. HP transition support is moderate. (4)
- Business-Integrated: Full executive engagement. Long-term planning for critical positions. HP strategy fully integrated with all talent processes. Business impact of program measured. HP talent visible and shared across enterprise. HiPo transition support is prevalent. (5)

Q8 Which of the following are included in your criteria for identifying high-potential employees? (Select all that apply)

- Current performance
- Past performance
- Mobility (willingness to relocate)
- Background demographics
- Assessment data
- Other _____

(Appendices continue)

Q9 How would you characterize your organization's definition of a high-potential employee? (Select all that apply).

- Employee demonstrates an accelerated promotion rate (e.g., faster than peers)
- Employee can reach a certain level of promotion (e.g., 2 level jump, ultimate job level designation)
- Designation to a general talent pool (e.g., GM bench, senior leadership bench)
- Designation to a specific talent pool (e.g., senior sales, finance, marketing)
- Pipeline for a target role (e.g., CEO, CFO, CMO, COO)
- Do not have a definition of high potential

Q10 Do you have a formal policy about sharing talent call/classification with high-potential employees?

- Yes, Our Policy Is to Share High Potential Status With the Employee
- No, our policy is to not communicate high potential status, and status is generally not known
- No, our policy is not to communicate status, but is often communicated informally by the manager
- No, but individuals can often determine their category through other company actions (e.g., leadership program invitations, special projects, greater access to senior leaders, etc.)
- Other _____

Q11 Which of the following factors are measured in your assessment suite? (Select all that apply)

| | High Potentials | Senior Executives |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Cognitive skills (e.g., strategic thinking, complexity) (1) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Engagement (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Executive Presence (12) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Functional/Technical Skills (including business knowledge) (3) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Leadership Competencies (e.g., inspiring and developing others) (4) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Learning (e.g., ability, agility, orientation) (5) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Motivation (e.g., career ambition, drive, risk taking) (6) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personality (e.g., conscientiousness, extraversion) (7) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Resilience (22) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Self-awareness (8) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Values Demonstration (9) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Verbal/Communication Skills (10) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Factors (11) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q12 What is your communication strategy for informing people about your assessment programs?

- Participants Only
- Participant & manager/HR support
- Full organization-wide communication
- Inconsistent/No strategy

(Appendices continue)

Q13 Who has access to the results of the assessment program/process? (Select all that apply)

| | Complete Results (e.g., individual reports for each measure/ tool) | Integrated Summary (e.g., blended across dimensions/ factors) | Topline Summary (e.g., strengths, and opportunities only) |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Only the individual being assessed | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Individual + Manager/Supervisor | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Senior Most Leadership Team/c-Suite | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Board of Directors | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q14 Generally speaking, what would you say has been the impact of the assessment and development process on the performance of participants within 12–18 months of assessment:

| | No real noticeable impact (0% improvement) | Minor impact (1–4% improvement) | Moderate impact (5–9% improvement) | Significant impact (10–20% improvement) | Dramatic impact (21%+ improvement) | Too Soon to Tell |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|-----------------------|
| High-Potentials | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Senior Executives | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q15 What is the approximate shelf-life of your assessment results (the suite in general):

| | No time limit | Annual | 2–3 yrs | 4 yrs or more |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| High-Potentials | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Senior Executives | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q16 What is the most important issue you are facing regarding your talent assessment program/processes?

Appendix B

Definition of Terms

- **High-potential**—someone below the VP level who is seen as having the capability to progress into leadership positions two or more levels beyond their current role.
- **Senior Executives**—leaders in the mid- to upper leadership levels in the organization (e.g., Vice President and above), regardless of whether they are considered high-potential or not.
- **Assessment**—use of standardized tools and methods to evaluate an individual's capabilities and/or behaviors to make personnel decisions and/or provide development feedback.

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