

How to Drive Elite C-Suite Performance

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IN SEARCH OF EXECUTIVE SUCCESS

A recent Wall Street Journal article entitled “[How To Tell If You Are a Jerk in the Office](#)” (C-Suite Strategies, Journal Report, February 23, 2015) highlights the importance of feedback for executives. Not only are leaders and co-workers affected adversely by dysfunctional behavior, but business performance and customer service are damaged, often permanently.

Feedback is the **only** way for executives to know change is required. Often, team members know what the leader and other members need to hear but executives are rarely inclined or trained to prepare and administer constructive feedback. The result is that teams underperform relative to their potential.

This article outlines an approach any executive team can easily and quickly follow to provide feedback that has high odds of driving improved performance individually and for the team as a whole.



TRADITIONAL APPROACH IS OBSOLETE

In a traditional performance evaluation, someone is assigned to compile and review with each executive a summary of her/his strengths, contributions, growth, and opportunities for improvement. The reviewer and executive then meet to discuss these with emphasis on opportunities to improve. The traditional process has many weaknesses:

- Compiling a quality performance assessment is difficult; consequently it often gets put off to be done at the last minute but it also takes time to do a good job and time runs out.
- Assessment content tends to be arbitrary based on ability, skills, and perspective of the reviewer and may not represent the best thinking or interests of the team.
- Reviewers tend to avoid raising and dealing with tough matters that should be addressed aggressively because it is uncomfortable and they are not trained or motivated to do otherwise.
- The process can be demoralizing.



- It is easy to dismiss or ignore important feedback that is judged to be misguided perception of the reviewer and not a reflection of reality or a point of view held by many.
- Reviewers may overly rely on input from self-evaluations.

IntelliVen, an organization improvement firm based in San Francisco, addresses these issues head-on. Earlier this year, IntelliVen worked with a fast growing, early stage firm that provides financial data analytics and modeling for the U.S. Treasury, Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae, and large financial institutions. An innovative approach was used to assess the most senior executives and to identify their team and individual learning and development opportunities.

WHY IT WORKS

The IntelliVen executive assessment process engages senior executive teams in a talent due diligence process that identifies development and/or hiring needs which, when addressed, increase the odds of success as the organization matures. The objective is to use the experience and knowledge of the entire team to uncover skill strengths



and learning opportunities which will drive the team's success now and in future evolutionary stages.

There are two underlying tenets to the approach. The first is that executives are in an ideal position to provide each other with honest feedback on performance and growth that, once revealed, increase their odds of individual and group success. Second, is that assessment and alignment of executive talent to organization maturity promotes organization success.^{i,ii}

HOW IT WORKS

Phase 1: Executives each complete a 75-minute, face-to-face confidential interview with a highly trained interviewer to collect their self-assessment of competencies on nine core dimensions. The interaction is based on a structured instrument developed from over 30-years studying leaders of organization that have successfully matured through evolutionary stages ^{i, ii}.

Phase 2: A multi-rater behavioral survey instrument (that can be used without outside help by following steps in [this IntelliVen post](#)) is used to



collect data from stakeholders (self, peers, manager, direct reports, etc.) for each executive. The objective is to prepare the executive team's assessment of individual strengths, contributions, growth, and growth opportunities.

Phase 3: Consolidated assessments are peer-reviewed in a facilitated Executive Session. Refinements based on this group's input are made and then reported back to each executive in a real-time, one-on-one consultation. A summary assessment and an outline of team and individual learning and development opportunities are compiled and discussed with the leader and the team.

WHO DOES WHAT

The leader:

- Assigns a coordinator to administer the process internally.
- Provides time and makes it a priority for each executive to: attend a 75-minute one-on-one interview; fill out and submit input forms for those being assessed; fill out a self-assessment; and prepare



for, attend, and participate in the Executive Session to refine consolidated assessments.

- Meets with IntelliVen upon completion to review how the process went, what was learned, and identify opportunities for improvement.

IntelliVen:

- Works with the coordinator to explain, set up, manage, administer, support, internalize, and institutionalize the evaluation process.
- Prepares, administers, and records interviews.
- Anonymizes, consolidates, and prioritizes multi-rater input.
- Facilitates peer-review Executive Session.
- Prepares for and administers results to each executive and debriefs the leader and leadership team.

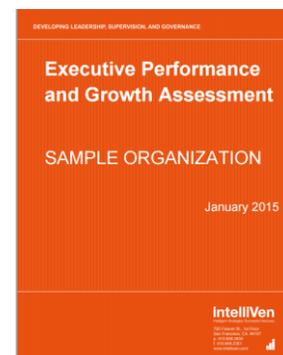


CASE EXAMPLE

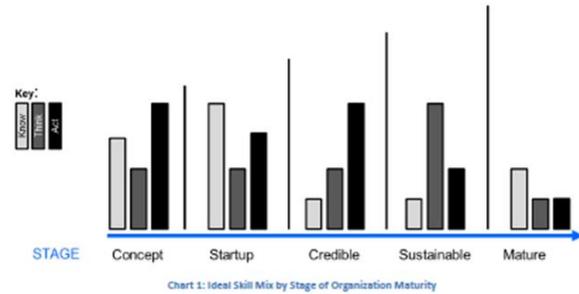
IntelliVen consultants conducted the two-part performance assessment process with the early stage, financial analytics and modeling firm mentioned above. Phase 1 consisted of in-depth interviews with the top executives, followed by a 42-item multi-rater questionnaire completed by each on her/himself and on one-another. Phase 2 consisted of an open-ended, five-question survey distributed to each executive (for a self-report), and also distributed to stakeholders (i.e., direct reports, peers, and others s/he worked with closely).

In Phase 3 IntelliVen consultants consolidated Phase 1 and 2 inputs and reviewed with executive peers to crystalize key messages, and concluded with face-to-face review sessions with each executive.

The summary report (click the figure at right for a sample) aligns executive competencies with organization evolution stages. Based on a data bank of successful organization teams and their skill sets as they matured¹, each stage ideally has a specific



mix of nine skills, organized into three broad categories: Knowledge, Thinking, and Action, for the organization to succeed at that stage and a different skill mix to prepare for the next stage as depicted below in Chart 1 (the model) and Chart 2 (our client's assessed results).



Executive Team				
Skill	Depth	Score	Max	Ratio
Know	Technology/Function	9	12	75%
	Industry	8	12	67%
	Organization	12	18	69%
Think	Analytic	12	15	80%
	Creativity/Innovation	6	9	70%
	Strategy	8	12	69%
Act	Planning	8	15	51%
	Communication/Influence	13	18	72%
	Bias for Action	10	15	69%

Executive Team				
Depth	Score	Max	Ratio	
Know	29	42	70%	
Think	27	36	74%	
Act	31	48	65%	

Chart 2: Case Example Team Skill Mix

Our example client's current maturity is in the advanced Start-Up phase (see [Manage to Lead: Seven Truths to Help You Change the World](#) for defining characteristics by stage of maturity). The C-Suite's combined skills are adequate in Know and Think competencies but need more in the Action (or execution) areas to operate successfully in the next stage of evolution.

Based on this data, executive hiring, coaching, and learning-development plans for the team as a whole and for each member have been put in place and are currently being carried out. Candidates to join



the team are considered in terms of how they will impact the overall competency mix relative to targets aligned with what is required for success in the current and next stages of maturity.

OUR CLIENT SPEAKS

While it is premature to assess long term impact in this one example, actions taken to develop, and add to, the top team are clearly moving the company in the right direction. Specific comments from executives are also positive:

- We got good information, we got it from multiple angles, *and* those of us who were reviewed felt good about the process.
- The process was simple and lightweight. It took a lot **less time and resources to implement than expected.**
- We liked the process so much that **we rolled it out to the next layer** down in our company.
- Now **we know what we need to do** to increase our odds of success in the next phase of our organization's evolution.



Visit www.intelliven.com to learn more about how the IntelliVen approach to executive performance assessment and development can help your organization be successful in its transition to the next stage of organization maturity, or contact IntelliVen at 415-848-2634; 795 Folsom Street, San Francisco, CA, 94107.

ⁱ Vicino, F. & Green, B. "The Conduct of Due Diligence on Leader Talent". Organization Development Practitioner, Journal of the Organization Development Network, 2000.

ⁱⁱ Green, B. "Listening To Leaders: Feedback on 360-Degree Feedback One Year Later", Organization Development Journal, Global Organization Development Network, 2002.

About the Authors

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