DEVELOPING PHYSICIAN LEADERS FOR SUCCESSFUL CLINICAL INTEGRATION

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How to Assess and Select Physician Leaders

They just can't say, "I'm a physician; therefore I am a leader." But the fact is some physicians really believe they can.
   —*Physician CEO*

For some reason, when it comes to making selection decisions when hiring physicians into leadership roles, what I do with other executive hiring does not work, and the whole process of trying to hire a physician leader just comes apart. There just doesn't seem to be any logical approach to the task.
   —*Healthcare CEO*

My experience has been that the best clinicians get selected for management and leadership positions, and I really don't think that is always best for the organization.
   —*Seasoned health system CEO*

Assessing and Selecting Physician Leaders

Assessment and selection of leaders can be improved through a process that injects as much objectivity as possible. Hiring physicians for administrative positions can be particularly challenging.

An effective process requires

◆ a thorough understanding of leadership,
◆ a well-thought-out model of selection to better understand the decision steps taken,

(continued)

- the use of leadership competencies to assess leadership skills,
- the use of solid, leadership-related personality principles, and
- a structured decision-making process for assessment and selection.

Although this chapter is a companion to Chapter 4 ("Identification of Physician Leaders"), that chapter focused on how to identify those physicians who had high potential to become effective leaders. This chapter addresses the process of assessing and selecting individuals for specific leadership positions. This may be a hiring decision involving the selection of an outside candidate for a full-time or part-time physician management or leadership position. Alternatively, the principles could be used when picking a physician to lead a task force, a committee, or another voluntary leadership role in the organization.

This chapter is founded on the belief that ample research exists to support more scientific ways of selecting leaders. The authors aim to provide a single chapter that serves as a usable and practical guide to selection.

It may be obvious to readers, but the selection of physician leaders is not that different from the selection of any other leaders; the suggestions presented in this chapter are equally applicable to all hiring situations.

Before continuing this chapter, readers are encouraged to reflect on the following questions:

- How should I assess candidates for leadership and management positions?
- How should I make a final hiring decision?
- What factors do I consider when choosing any leader for any task?

We believe that the selection "hit rate" or success outcome will be improved through having a deeper understanding of leadership, using a formalized selection model to guide the assessment process, using precise definitions of leadership competencies when assessing individuals, understanding the role of personality in leadership selection, and using a structured decision-making process when assessing and selecting leaders.

LEADERSHIP DEFINED

Although many books and articles expound on leadership, for the purposes of this chapter, *leadership* will be defined as follows:

A process that occurs when individuals, driven by their inborn traits (personality), practice certain behaviors (leadership competencies) that cause others to follow them in the pursuit of a vision and goals.

Leadership is a process—essentially a group of actions, operations, and functions—that brings about a result. The process involves an individual persuading others to move toward a certain goal. The process is also futuristic—it contemplates change that is designed to bring improvement. This ability to anticipate the future and prepare to make the changes needed to be successful is a hallmark of effective leadership. This concept is discussed in Chapter 5, which contrasts management and leadership. Recall that the practice of management deals mostly with day-to-day matters, while leadership involves transformation and focus on the future. When making a selection decision, hiring decision makers who understand leadership from this perspective will enhance their ability to compare and contrast candidates. While the practice of management and the practice of leadership will often overlap, the areas of assessment for positions that concern mostly day-to-day management are different from those for positions that are more leadership focused.

Leaders lead through a combination of the following factors.

Values and traits (inborn characteristics or tendencies) that shape an individual's thoughts and feelings and drive behavior. The final section of this chapter presents a personality theory (the Five Factor Model) and a psychological instrument (Hogan Assessments) to show some of the key personality traits of effective leaders—traits that form the basis of an individual's style or how an individual typically and naturally approaches people and situations. Heredity and early upbringing strongly influence these traits. Each of the five factors in the model is viewed on a continuum so that different people fall somewhere in between the extreme ends of each factor. These deep-seated characteristics guide leadership behavior.

Leadership competencies (behavioral practices) or skills that are used in leadership situations. Katz (1995) suggests that *skills* imply what leaders can accomplish, whereas *traits* imply who leaders are (their innate characteristics). Traits are mostly inborn, but skills can be learned.

Situations (contingencies) that require the behavior of leaders to match the events and the types of followers that exist. Usually called contingency leadership, this skill describes how effective leaders use different competencies in different situations. For example, an organization in a financial turnaround requires a leader with different competencies than does an organization experiencing significant growth. A chief medical officer accustomed to a fully employed physician group in a formal setting will likely have to modify his approach in a more laid-back setting with all independent physician practitioners. Goleman (2000) writes that the leaders with

the best results do not rely on only one leadership style; they use multiple styles and approaches—sometimes several in a given week, seamlessly and in different measure. In addition, they are able to "switch between styles seamlessly and can also use a combination of styles depending on the business situation."

SELECTION MODEL

Logically speaking, a grounded understanding of the principles of selection leads to better hiring decisions. Exhibit 12.1 provides a useful model of the key factors that drive selection decisions. When reviewing the model, readers should ask the following questions:

- What is the mental progression that ultimately results in a hiring choice—precisely how do I make selection decisions?
- What factors drive these all-important decisions, and how do they fit into the process?

Nine key factors drive hiring decisions. These factors represent the judgments, thoughts, and feelings—some objective and some subjective—that go through

Exhibit 12.1: Selection Assessment Model
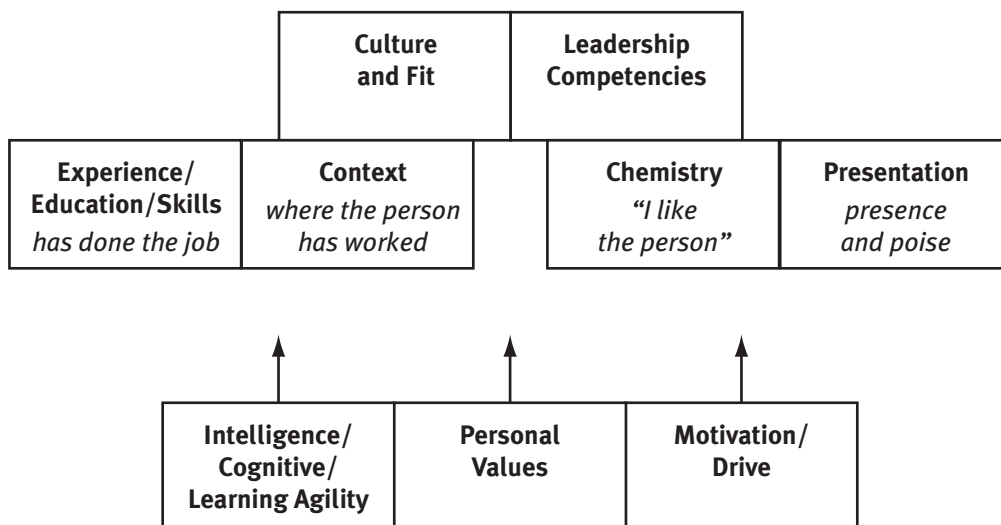
the hiring manager's mind when making the decision to hire a candidate. When reviewing these factors, consider the significant amount of subjectivity and risk of bias involved in their evaluation.

1. **Intelligence or cognitive ability.** Intelligence and cognitive ability, whether measured or assumed, play a role in selection. Hiring decision makers make assumptions about the intelligence levels of candidates, often making comments such as "She is pretty smart" or "He is a quick learner."
2. **Personal values.** Values are those primary, deep-seated beliefs and principles that individuals consider meaningful and desirable. Individuals' values are often well developed by the time they reach their early 20s and guide their behaviors and actions.

    Values are difficult to assess and cannot be easily measured. Yet those who make hiring decisions often form strong opinions of the values of their candidates with comments such as "He is a good fit with our mission" or "Her values just fit well with us."
3. **Motivation or drive.** Motivation guides and controls behavior. In a hiring setting, it usually refers to the degree of enthusiasm, passion, or drive to perform the function of the job ("She has that 'fire in the belly' that will make her a great hire" or "He is driven to excel and achieve").

These first three factors form a person's foundation. These factors are typically innate and do not change much after age 20. They are also difficult to measure and rarely get deliberate consideration in a hiring situation. Yet taking them into account in the assessment process is important.

4. **Experience, education, and skills.** These factors are combined because typically in leadership positions, education is not considered in as much depth as experience is (e.g., a person may have a master's degree, but several years may have passed since she earned the degree or she may lack specific leadership experience). The candidate's experience is therefore weighed more heavily—especially if the candidate is already performing the job duties—and can become one of the most important factors in the hiring decision.

    Ultimately, the hiring authority concludes, "I really like what this person has done and I believe that means she can do the same for us." The authors call this the "accomplishment screen."

5. **Context.** Significant consideration is also given to where candidates have done their work—the type of organization (for-profit versus not-for-profit or academic versus community), the culture (formal versus informal or collaborative versus top-down), or the competitiveness of the market may be evaluated.

    The hiring authority may think, "I really like where this person has worked—their situation is similar to ours" or "I like the team with whom this person has worked" or "She has worked for ABC Organization, truly one of the best organizations in our industry."

6. **Chemistry.** This factor often takes the center stage in hiring decisions (see "The Role of Chemistry in Selection"), especially after meeting the candidates in person. Often this happens because the person comes from a similar background as the hiring manager (or went to the same graduate school, likes the same things, or has the same hobbies). This effect is often described as the "halo" or "similar-to-me" effect.

    Hiring authorities may conclude, "I really like her" or "I could get along quite well with this person."

7. **Presentation.** Similar to chemistry, this factor is often called *charisma* and may include a great sense of humor, positive body language, strong listening skills, a display of empathy, or good communication and interpersonal skills in general. One of the most powerful charisma factors is the ability to connect with others by getting them to identify with you. Although connectedness can be a good criterion in hiring, readers are cautioned to avoid letting this become the major factor influencing the hiring decision.

    Hiring authorities may note, "He has great presentation and speaking skills" or "She just looks like a leader" or "She has a poise about her that just shouts 'executive.'" One CEO follows this rule in hiring: "I always give them the 'restaurant test' (taking a candidate to a meal to see if he gets too relaxed) to see how they perform in that setting." (The validity of this test may be up for serious challenge.)

8. **Culture and fit.** This important factor is often overlooked because quantifying it is not easy or because most leaders are not totally forthright about descriptions of their own culture (e.g., they may describe it as collaborative when it is really more autocratic).

    Sample comments from those who make hiring decisions would be "I think she would be a great fit in our organization" or "He has the set of values that goes well in our organization."

    Note the obvious similarity of culture with the second factor, values. Values are *personal* while culture is *organizational.* But the two overlap in that

individuals ideally must match their personal values with an organizational culture that embraces those values.

9. **Leadership competencies.** This factor is one of the most important and yet is shortchanged in most organizations.

    Interestingly, few hiring authorities comment specifically on leadership competencies unless their organization uses some type of formalized competency assessment tool. The descriptions rarely provide any more detail than "She is a good leader."

The Role of Chemistry in Selection

"Gut feel is used far too much in hiring decisions."

"We picked the person we all liked the best, and that was a big mistake."

"I never really thought about selection methodically until I hired some mistakes because I let chemistry drive the decision."

Chemistry and Presentation in the Hiring Process

The sad reality is that in typical hiring scenarios, factors 6 (chemistry) and 7 (presentation) take on far greater importance and weight than they should. Conversely, factors 8 (culture and fit) and 9 (leadership competencies) do not receive enough attention and focus. Despite being important and worthy of consideration, chemistry and presentation often drive the hiring decision to the exclusion of the other factors.

Readers will probably recognize this as the "halo effect," the phenomenon that occurs when an interviewer makes a generalized assumption about a candidate on the basis of chemistry and presentation—such as likability, physical looks, congeniality, dress, or deportment. Put simply, first impressions often spill over and compromise judgments about other factors.

Although chemistry and presentation do have some value, to minimize the negative impact of the halo effect, leaders should

- be aware of the power of chemistry and presentations in making judgments,
- use structured questions that are based on all of the factors in the job specification,

- use behavioral questions that require discussion of specific past job performance,
- use leadership competencies to assess candidates,
- prepare in advance for the interview, and
- involve multiple interviewers and follow-up interviews.

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES IN SELECTION

The 16 critical competencies (see Exhibit 12.2) set truly exceptional leaders apart from all others (Dye and Garman 2006). Whether a hiring authority uses this competency model or another one, the use of one unquestionably enhances and expands the validity and efficacy of assessing leadership in hiring.

Ranking leadership competencies relative to the leadership role in question is useful when using a competency model in selection assessment. Consider how the ranking of competencies using the Dye and Garman (2006) model might differ with regard to the following disparate vice president of medical affairs (VPMA) positions.

Position One: Medium-sized hospital in a noncompetitive market; mostly independent medical staff still organized in a fairly traditional manner. The VPMA serves mostly as a liaison with the medical staff (essentially a go-between) and manages the medical staff office functions of credentialing and medical staff affairs.

The leadership competencies that would likely have a heavier emphasis in this position would be *listening like you mean it*, *earning loyalty and trust*, and *building consensus*. While certainly all of the competencies would likely be desired, *being visionary*, *communicating vision*, or *driving results* would not likely rank as high for this type of VPMA position.

Position Two: Healthcare system composed of six hospitals in two highly competitive markets, several hundred employed physicians, and immediate plans for significant clinical integration. The leadership competencies that would have a heavier emphasis in this position would be opposite of those in position one. The higher-ranked skills would likely include *being visionary*, *communicating vision*, *cultivating adaptability*, and *building consensus*.

Position Three: Small rural hospital, the only acute care facility in a 50-mile radius; all medical staff members are employed and most are under the age of 45. The VPMA for this organization would likely need a stronger emphasis on the following leadership competencies: *listening like you mean it*, *giving feedback*, *mentoring others*, *developing teams*, *energizing staff*, *generating informal power*, *building consensus*, and *making decisions effectively*.

Exhibit 12.2: The 16 Exceptional Leadership Competencies Defined

Living by Personal Conviction

You know and are in touch with your values and beliefs, are not afraid to take a lonely or unpopular stance if necessary, are comfortable in tough situations, can be relied on in tense circumstances, are clear about where you stand, and will face difficult challenges with poise and self-assurance.

Possessing Emotional Intelligence

You recognize personal strengths and weaknesses; see the links between feelings and behaviors; manage impulsive feelings and distressing emotions; are attentive to emotional cues; show sensitivity and respect for others; challenge bias and intolerance; collaborate and share; are an open communicator; and can handle conflict, difficult people, and tense situations effectively. Emotional intelligence may often be labeled EQ, or emotional intelligence quotient.

Being Visionary

You see the future clearly, anticipate large-scale and local changes that will affect the organization and its environment, are able to project the organization into the future and envision multiple potential scenarios/outcomes, have a broad way of looking at trends, and are able to design competitive strategies and plans based on future possibilities.

Communicating Vision

You distill complex strategies into a compelling call to march, inspire and help others see a core reason for the organization to make change, talk beyond the day-to-day tactical matters that face the organization, show confidence and optimism about the future state of the organization, and engage others to join in.

Earning Loyalty and Trust

You are a direct and truthful person; are willing to admit mistakes, are sincerely interested in the concerns and dreams of others, show empathy and a generally helpful orientation toward others, follow promises with actions, maintain confidences and disclose information ethically and appropriately, and conduct work in open, transparent ways.

Listening Like You Mean It

You maintain a calm, easy-to-approach demeanor; are patient, open minded, and willing to hear people out; understand others and pick up the meaning of their messages; are warm, gracious, and inviting; build strong rapport; see through the words that others express to the real meaning (i.e., cut to the heart of the issue); and maintain formal and informal channels of communication.

(continued)

Exhibit 12.2: The 16 Exceptional Leadership Competencies Defined (continued)

Giving Feedback

You set clear expectations, bring important issues to the table in a way that helps others hear them, show an openness to facing difficult topics and sources of conflict, deal with problems and difficult people directly and frankly, provide timely criticism when needed, and provide feedback that is clear and unambiguous.

Mentoring Others

You invest the time to understand the career aspirations of your direct reports, work with direct reports to create engaging mentoring plans, support staff in developing their skills, support career development in a nonpossessive way (will support staff moving up and out as necessary for their advancement), find stretch assignments and other delegation opportunities that support skill development, and model professional development by advancing your own skills.

Developing Teams

You select executives who will be strong team players, actively support the concept of teaming, develop open discourse and encourage healthy debate on important issues, create compelling reasons and incentives for team members to work together, effectively set limits on the political activity that takes place outside the team framework, celebrate successes together as a unit, and commiserate as a group over disappointments.

Energizing Staff

You set a personal example of good work ethic and motivation; talk and act enthusiastically and optimistically about the future; enjoy rising to new challenges; take on your work with energy, passion, and drive to finish successfully; help others recognize the importance of their work; are enjoyable to work for; and have a goal-oriented, ambitious, and determined working style.

Generating Informal Power

You understand the roles of power and influence in organizations; develop compelling arguments or points of view based on knowledge of others' priorities; develop and sustain useful networks up, down, and sideways in the organization; develop a reputation as a go-to person; and effectively affect the thoughts and opinions of others, both directly and indirectly, through others.

Building Consensus

You frame issues in ways that facilitate clarity from multiple perspectives, keep issues separated from personalities, skillfully use group decision techniques, ensure that quieter group members are drawn into discussions, find shared values and common adversaries, and facilitate discussions rather than guide them.

(continued)

Exhibit 12.2: The 16 Exceptional Leadership Competencies Defined (continued)

Making Decisions Effectively

You make decisions based on an optimal mix of ethics, values, goals, facts, alternatives, and judgments; use decision tools effectively and at appropriate times; and show a good sense of timing related to decision making.

Driving Results

You mobilize people toward greater commitment to a vision, challenge people to set higher standards and goals, keep people focused on achieving goals, give direct and complete feedback that keeps teams and individuals on track, quickly take corrective action as necessary to keep everyone moving forward, show a bias toward action, and proactively work through performance barriers.

Stimulating Creativity

You see broadly outside of the typical, are constantly open to new ideas, are effective with creativity group processes (e.g., brainstorming, scenario building), see future trends and craft responses to them, are knowledgeable in business and societal trends, are aware of how strategies play out in the field, are well read, and make connections between industries and unrelated trends.

Cultivating Adaptability

You quickly see the essence of issues and problems, effectively bring clarity to situations of ambiguity, approach work using a variety of leadership styles and techniques, track changing priorities and readily interpret their implications, balance consistency of focus against the ability to adjust course as needed, balance multiple tasks and priorities such that each gets appropriate attention, and work effectively with a broad range of people.

SOURCE: Adapted from Dye and Garman (2006).

Position Four. Successful health system that has had no turnover in its senior levels of leadership for many years, but has never had a physician in the senior ranks. The VPMA is a newly created position, and there is no consensus about the role of the job. The successful VPMA candidates for this organization would likely need a stronger emphasis on the following leadership competencies: *being visionary, communicating vision, earning loyalty and trust, mentoring others,* and *stimulating creativity.*

To make the assessment analysis more in-depth, take into account what shifts might occur with the organization over the next few years (e.g., a significant movement toward employed physicians or the full development of a clinical integration organization) to determine how adding new talent or behavior (through added leadership competencies) might shore up current deficiencies in the executive

team and to try to screen out what has not worked, such as with a prior VPMA. Also, engaging in this type of analysis helps the hiring authority keep an eye on unintended side effects of asking for new capabilities (because when we ask for more strength in driving results we may also get overconfidence, unnecessary risk-taking, and arrogance). Factoring in existing team personalities and capabilities when weighting competency needs is also important. Obviously, this exercise can be taken so far that the entire process becomes cumbersome and unmanageable. But careful reflection and some form of ranking will be helpful in the final assessment of candidates.

Finally, the screening and interview process mandates that the required leadership competencies be well defined and that an assessment of each candidate's skills in those competencies be performed. These steps can be achieved through interviews, references, assessments, simulations, or a combination of all.

A note is in order regarding two of the leadership competencies in Exhibit 12.2: *living by personal conviction* and *possessing emotional intelligence*. Simply stated, these competencies are critical for *all* leaders; they always carry a high ranking. Leaders with personal conviction will be consistent in their behavior, unwavering in their drive to improve performance, and focused in their efforts. Employees are comfortable knowing their leaders will be consistent. Leaders also must have an excellent sense of who they are and how they are perceived by others. Those who are emotionally intelligent will have a keen ability to control their emotions and be socially mature. Deficiencies in these competencies also frequently cause derailment in leaders, a problem that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 15.

USING PERSONALITY IN SELECTION: THE FIVE FACTOR MODEL

Many volumes have been written about personality, and covering personality theories is beyond the scope of this book. However, one theory does prove useful in selection. The Five Factor Model suggests that five major dimensions compose personality and form the core of people in their social interactions with others.

Openness. Openness refers to how receptive a person is to different thoughts and experiences. People who have a high degree of openness are interested in learning new things; like to know how things work; have natural curiosity; and are insightful, sophisticated, and thoughtful. They are not restricted by boundaries and are strong problem solvers. They also embrace diversity, which is becoming increasingly important to today's leader.

Conscientiousness. Conscientiousness refers to a person's degree of motivation and perseverance. People who score high in this factor tend to be self-disciplined, responsible, and well organized. They face adversity well and are dependable and thorough.

Extraversion. Extraversion indicates how sociable and outgoing a person is. Persons who score high in this factor like to interact with others, are talkative and demonstrative, and reach out to others. They get along well in teams and are expressive.

Agreeableness. This factor refers to how caring for others a person is and is indicative of the degree of sensitivity shown to others. Those high in this area are cooperative and collaborative, work well with teams, and are optimistic and good-natured.

Neuroticism. Neuroticism relates to how a person reacts to pressure or difficulty. A highly neurotic person will frequently be nervous and uncertain, especially in unfamiliar situations. Those with low neurotic tendencies are calm under pressure, confident, and provide a stable presence for those around.

The Five Factors—easily remembered with the acronym OCEAN—can guide the selection of highly effective leaders in the following ways:

- **High on openness.** They come up with new and unique ideas, are adept at connecting the dots and seeing connections between events, and anticipate future trends accurately.
- **High on conscientiousness.** They approach life with a plan, present structure and reason in their work, and enjoy improving organizational performance.
- **High on extraversion.** They exhibit high energy and are comfortable being around people (even if they might have an inner feeling of introversion). They seek to be in charge and are comfortable taking unpopular stands if necessary. Others look to them for direction in a crisis.
- **High on agreeableness.** They get along with others, and they cooperate and collaborate. They see the positive in others and are not skeptical or aloof.
- **Low on neuroticism.** They are not typically tense, irritable, or moody and serve as positive and optimistic role models.

Where candidates fall on these scales can be determined through a combination of carefully crafted interviews, targeted reference discussions with former colleagues, and validated assessment tools such as the Hogan Personality Inventory. When assessing leaders, consider using the Five Factor Model as a guide but not a completely definitive indicator. The model should shape analysis as candidates are reviewed and considered, but the theory is not invincible. For example, many

people who are naturally introverted are able to behaviorally exhibit strong extraverted skills that allow them to function as effective leaders.

Physician to Physician

A well-thought-out screening and selection process may be your best defense against physicians who want to armchair quarterback your selection of physician leaders.
—*Jacque Sokolov, MD*

USING A STRUCTURED DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Once the recruiting process nears the end, typically two final candidates stand in the wings awaiting a decision. Often there is no clear-cut choice. To best reach the decision, hiring managers should consider the following:

1. Be certain that the process has been followed. Ensure that no part of it is given short shrift.
2. Guard against allowing chemistry and presentation to weigh too heavily.
3. Review the specific requirements set forth at the beginning of the recruitment process.
4. Review the factors in the selection model. Consider developing a scorecard (sample provided in Appendix D) to rate the two finalists.
5. Be certain the selection success factors have been covered (through behavior-based interviews, references, work samples, assessments, simulations, and input from others).

POSITION ANALYSIS

In-depth planning and analysis of the position, its role, and the required qualifications must be done before any candidate is ever interviewed. A position analysis entails breaking down a job into its component activities: its objectives and how those objectives are translated into practice, the various interrelationships within the job, the type of culture in which the job will be done, the processes involved in doing the job effectively, and the requirements needed to do the job.

The ideal selection process is circular. When the interviews are completed, the person making the final hiring decision should go back to the position analysis done at the beginning of the recruitment. The following considerations play a role in shaping the final assessment:

◆ What is the ultimate purpose of the position?
◆ What specific objectives do you want the person to accomplish?
◆ What activities will lead to accomplishing those objectives?

The final assessment requires that these questions be woven into the assessment of potential leaders.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most important and riskiest decision any leader makes is in hiring. A mistake can be disastrous and will certainly be expensive. While this determination will always carry some measure of subjectivity, the odds can be improved with a more methodical approach, the use of a well-developed assessment and selection process, and a commitment to using the tools available to help make the final evaluation.

Thoughts for Consideration

How objective are your selection processes?

Does your organization have a validated leadership competency model? If so, is it used in assessment and selection processes?

To what extent is there a methodical approach to the assessment of leaders?

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