



Assessing Critical Competencies for Senior Managers and Executives

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■ *Research and Development Branch*

- *Responsible for enhancing the quality of the INS workforce through the development, validation, and implementation of assessments that measure critical employee competencies*
- *Located organizationally in the Office of Human Resources and Development*
- *Total of 20 staff members*
 - *Sixteen staff members hold a Ph.D. or Master's degree in Industrial/Organizational psychology*

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■ *Project Initiation*

- *INS had comprehensive, well-validated, competency-based assessments for entry-level selection and for promotion into supervisory and managerial positions*
- *INS Commissioner asked for competency-based assessment to be part of the process for making selections for senior manager and executive positions*

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■ *Identification of Competencies*

- *Began with OPM's Leadership Effectiveness competencies, which are competencies identified as critical for executive positions throughout the Federal government*
- *Tailored OPM's competencies to fit INS' senior manager and executive jobs*
 - *Conducted background work*
 - *Interviewed senior managers and executives across the agency*
 - *Collected written materials used on the job*
- *Identified INS' senior manager and executive competencies*

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■ *INS' Senior Manager and Executive Competencies*

- *Thinking Skills*
 - *Strategic Thinking, Decision-Making, Innovation*
- *Leadership Skills*
 - *Vision, Teaming, Leading Others*
- *Communication Skills*
 - *Presentation Skills, Influencing/Negotiating, Interpersonal Skills*
- *Management Skills*
 - *Developing and Executing Plans, Financial Management, Technology Management*

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■ *Purpose of Executive Assessments*

- *To provide the Executive Resources Board (ERB) with information about the strengths and weaknesses of finalists for senior manager and executive vacancies*
- *To provide candidates with comprehensive developmental feedback about their areas of strength and weakness*

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■ *Process*

- *The Selecting Official (e.g., Commissioner, Executive Associate Commissioner) selects the finalists to be interviewed for the position*
- *Each candidate comes to the offices of the R&D Branch to participate in a full day of assessments*
- *R&D prepares a one page summary of the candidate's strengths and weaknesses in each of the four competency areas*
- *The following day, the candidate participates in a competency-based structured interview with the ERB*

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■ *Process (continued)*

- *After all ERB interviews for the vacancy are completed, the Director of R&D provides the ERB with information about the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate*
- *The ERB makes a final selection based on all available information (i.e., work history, accomplishments, answers to interview questions, strengths and weaknesses) about the candidates*
- *The ERB uses the information appropriately -- the candidates' work history, accomplishments, answers to the interview questions, and strengths and weaknesses are given weight according to the reliability of the information*

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■ *Process (continued)*

- *The R&D Branch forwards comprehensive, individualized, developmental feedback to each candidate*
 - *The feedback includes all of the information provided to the ERB, plus much more, for each of the four competency areas*
 - *This feedback is provided **only** to the candidate*
 - *Candidates are invited to contact the R&D Branch if they would like to discuss their feedback*
 - *Candidates are free to use the developmental feedback as they see fit*

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■ *The Assessments*

- *Executive Thinking Skills Exercise (Written Assessment)*
 - *The candidate is presented with written materials similar to those that flow through a senior manager's or executive's in-basket on a regular basis*
 - *The candidate has to read the information and evaluate conclusions that may or may not be true based on the materials*
- *Executive Judgment Exercise (Oral Job Simulation Exercise)*
 - *The candidate receives material that describes his or her role as a senior manager or executive in a private or public sector organization, background information about the organization, and issues that are being faced by the organization*

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- *Executive Judgment Exercise (continued)*
 - *The candidate prepares a briefing (for example, to the Board of Directors of the private sector organization or to all employees of the public sector organization) discussing how he or she plans to deal with the issues being faced by the organization*
 - *The briefing is presented to three trained R&D psychologists, who play the role of the “audience,” but who do not ask questions to ensure standardization across candidates*
- *The psychologists use detailed benchmarks to construct the list of strengths and weaknesses for the ERB and the comprehensive feedback provided to the candidate*

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■ *Validation*

- *Content and construct validity of the assessments are documented thoroughly*

■ *Other Uses of the Competencies*

- *Development of training courses at INS' Leadership Development Center*
- *Construction of career paths to assist employees in career planning and career development*