



The 4 pillars

of great executive search processes.

Global volatility is placing more stretching demands on leadership teams in organisations. Recruiting senior leaders today is increasingly complex and demands a higher level of strategic consideration. Successful recruiting means not just hiring what has worked in the past, but understanding and seeking out the competencies and intrinsic qualities that are essential to your organisation's future. To achieve this, every executive search process should consist of four distinct essential stages.

Writing in HBR in September 2025, Ron Carucci, author and managing partner at leadership consultants Navalent, talks about the inner battles that are a constant presence in the minds of transformational leaders. Rather than seek to quell this tension, Carucci describes how if properly harnessed, the best ideas are borne from it. Does your organisation consider how a candidate manages this tension for good when hiring a new executive? The likelihood is you consider functional experience every time, organisational fit regularly and stretch potential occasionally. However do you consider the level of adaptability the leader must demonstrate - a prerequisite to leading change today - and central to assessing future leadership behavioural needs?



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DISCOVERY

The first stage in an effective search process is **Discovery**, the bedrock of executive hiring. Discovery determines not just how well the search process goes, but also the extent to which a new leader when they land, can have immediate impact, as well as longer term success. It considers the emotional capacity and individual strengths that are required to deliver in your organisation and against current and future performance expectations. Our own Discovery process begins with a structured client debriefing, designed to prompt a range of attributes you may need to consider in building out the hiring objective. This encourages a strategic perspective from stakeholders, necessary to ensure longer term value for both the appointee and your organisation.

The July 2025 edition of McKinsey's HR Monitor lists five trends identified across Europe which HR functions in many firms will want to address as business expectations, employee needs and HR Rol demands change in the face of new and mounting challenges. The first of these is the need to address workforce planning more strategically. McKinsey's second observation is that talent acquisition is becoming more complex, thereby requiring a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to sourcing new executive talent.

2

REACH

Building on the Discovery process, the second cornerstone of a search process is the depth of research and **Reach** undertaken by the search firm. Our research group devotes all its time to identifying high performing leaders in organisations with innovative processes, market-leading performance and highly-valued work cultures. While this team supports all our executive search and interim contractor assignments, much of their activity is undertaken through Talent Intelligence, our insights solutions offering, working with clients to extract data from specific talent markets to support talent planning for potential leadership needs in the near future.



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ASSESSMENT

Once a collaboratively created long-list has been developed, short-listing should happen without delay, undertaking comprehensive **Assessment**, the third stage of effective search. Assessment design should draw on the output from **Discovery** delay, undertaking comprehensive Assessment, the third stage of effective search. Assessment design should draw on the output from Discovery and involve a variety of methods to create a clear and objective picture of the candidate's likely future behaviour and performance in the role.

Many firms hiring today face a different set of challenges. In an article entitled 'Five leadership skills for the future', Herminia Ibarra, Charles Handy Professor of Organisational Behaviour at London Business School, identifies the many changes companies must address and how leaders need to become more adaptive, instilling adaptability within their organisation culture. Ibarra's five skills critical to making this happen are:

1. **Cross cutting** – the capacity to build reach and diversity by constructing cross-cutting human networks. This enables the leader to develop a diverse array of knowledge and expertise, prompting more effective challenging of assumptions and engendering new ways of thinking in the face of reoccurring or unexpected challenges.
2. **Collaborative** – collaboration aligns and activates the value of diverse and divergent thinking.
3. **Coaching** – employee empowerment is essential for organisational shift from "know it all" to "learn it all". Ibarra explains that this helps employees to bring their own creativity, innovative thinking and solutions.
4. **Culture shaping** – sometimes, Ibarra indicates, you need to take a wrecking ball to those things that are no longer adding value. This necessitates having the courage to shed hallowed processes and systems in favour of new ones and making that an organisation value in itself.
5. **Connecting** – valuable connections are built by leaders through their authenticity, ability to build trust, transparency and willingness to show vulnerability. Connecting fully with employees enables leaders to bring them on a shared journey, ensuring they buy in to the leaders vision and align their efforts accordingly.

IMPACT

The fourth and final stage of a strong search process is **Impact**. A true search partner wants to know if their candidate is making a difference. Is the appointee delivering at the level the Discovery output specified and in the manner required? Have they brought additional value to the organisation? How well are they aligning to culture and what are the implications from that for long term contribution? Meeting to discuss the candidate in this manner, to provide feedback on the process and to discuss other future talent challenges is essential to you maximising the value from the relationship with your search partner.

The world has changed significantly in the last few years and we now operate in a permanent, albeit volatile, new economy with much yet to be defined. Uncertain times cry out for stable leadership. Through great market knowledge, extensive networking and developing technology, a strong search partner will help ensure you have the talent pool data and market reach you need to address competitive demands, technology shifts, economic shocks and generational influences on organisation cultures.

References:

www.lonfon.edu
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