



ASSESSMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The key challenge facing Middle Eastern companies is how to identify and empower the next generation of leaders who can make their businesses compete on the global stage. The purpose of this paper is to pinpoint some of the factors preventing this generational change from happening and to recommend how companies can use the powerful tool of assessment to identify and develop their future leadership talent.

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About Spencer Stuart

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■ Fostering localisation

In developing markets, skills are sometimes inconsistently distributed throughout an organisation. Rigorous objective assessment can provide a highly valuable insight into where skill levels need to be elevated, and how to do so in a way that complies with accelerated localisation programmes.

Our experience of advising companies in developing markets shows that certain skills are at a premium — for example, strategic thinking, commercial acumen, competitive awareness, executing effective change processes and leading functional teams. What's more, challenging growth environments call for 'soft skills' which help executives prosper and have the right kind of impact on the business. Technical skills are often a less important component of successful leadership than an ability to influence, interact and collaborate with others.

In today's increasingly competitive environment, companies in the Middle East need to form a realistic picture of the capability and potential among their leadership teams. For a business to become best-in-class at a regional or global level it needs to identify where the skills gaps lie and invest in bridging those gaps.

Our recent assessment experience has shown us that often executives in Middle Eastern companies lack some of the characteristics found in the most successful international executives. These include:

- > International exposure
- > Commercial bottom-line accountability (full P&L responsibility)
- > Ability to change a company's positioning to gain advantage over competitors
- > Positive attitude towards risk (traditional and often hierarchical leadership models often lead to risk aversion)
- > Individual assertiveness
- > Leadership impact

By identifying where executives lack depth of experience, where international exposure is limited, or where an aversion to risk may be holding the business back, a company can take positive action to close the gaps. Assessment plays a crucial role in this process. Failure to address the skills deficit among the present generation of senior leadership teams will mean losing ground to international competitors with more experienced and capable teams.

■ The value of assessment

The key to maximizing an organisation's value is understanding its most critical asset and competitive advantage — its leaders. At the heart of identifying the next generation of management talent lies thorough and objective assessment.

While most organisations have their own system of appraisals for executives, they are increasingly turning to specialist third parties to conduct executive assessments. They value the objectivity, sound judgment and fresh perspective provided by an experienced assessor,

who can determine how suitable individuals are in their current roles, where they need to develop and what additional responsibilities they are ready to take on.

Over the past decade, Spencer Stuart has developed world-class assessment tools which have brought significant benefits to a wide range of clients globally, including in the Middle East. These tools enable us to make astute judgments about executives and teams and to assess the potential of future leaders.

■ How our assessment improves your business — and your people

Spencer Stuart's suite of assessment services offers clear benefits to clients. Two outcomes are guaranteed: First, our rigorous assessment work results in improved company performance as a result of more insightful assessment of leaders' abilities and potential. Second, your executives will be set on a development path that will improve the contribution they can make to the business and enhance their career prospects.

A professionally managed assessment process should not only uncover relevant and specific insights into an individual's strengths, but identify areas to focus on as well. Every

executive benefits from knowing where to focus their development and one of the most important aspects of our assessment work is providing employers and executives with constructive suggestions on how individuals can become more effective in their roles.

Executives who are put through our assessment programme have a wonderful personal development tool at their disposal. We believe that pinpointing an individual's development needs as well as their strengths is hugely powerful if handled in a sensitive manner and accompanied by practical steps that the individual can take to overcome any deficits.

The assessment process is often a catalyst for change, resulting in positive outcomes and transformed careers. We provide personalised

development advice and employees come away with a strong feeling that they are benefiting from the experience.

■ When assessment works best

Companies in the Middle East face a wide range of “trigger” events — such as acquisitions, competitive pressures, disruptive technologies and changes in strategy — which result in the need for a thorough assessment of management capability.

Examples of recent assessment projects we have undertaken for clients in the region include:

A LARGE REGIONAL COMPANY needed to audit the talent that it had acquired over a period of time. The objective was to determine the coherence of the top team and the value that each of the individuals brought to it.

A LARGE STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISE was in the process of re-evaluating its position in the market. It had grown quickly and needed a better understanding of the quality of talent inside the organisation, to identify strengths and development opportunities, and identify where they needed to supplement senior talent.

A LARGE FAMILY-OWNED GROUP was in the process of restructuring its operating model. It needed to assess the effectiveness and fit of its top team in the context of a new business model.

■ Serving the Middle East — our tailored model

We have conducted many large and small assessment projects for a variety of commercial organisations across the region, including government-owned enterprises and family-controlled businesses. Although our clients benefit from our world-class assessment techniques, we always remain sensitive to

the specific characteristics and culture of the market. For example:

- > We assess future potential based on an individual’s intrinsic qualities rather than their track record only.

- > We help companies identify the development needs of high-potential talent
- > We recognise the importance of managing the dynamics between expatriates and indigenous executives.
- > We believe that proper assessment provides a framework for preparing high-potential executives for more demanding roles — while helping companies to avoid promoting executives before they are ready.
- > Accelerated promotion for indigenous talent can be overwhelming and damaging to their careers, as well as being costly for the company.
- > If the right solution is to look outside your organisation for new talent, we can assess who has the right capabilities, executive potential and cultural fit — in short, who is most likely to succeed.

■ Questions that assessment can help you answer

The trigger events described above force companies to consider a host of critical questions, for example:

- > Do we have the right management capabilities?
- > Do we have the right people in the right roles?
- > Who are the strategic enablers?
- > How can we support the development of our leaders?
- > How do we retain our most critical leaders?
- > Are we prepared for senior executive succession?
How can we improve team effectiveness?
- > How do we attract the best talent?

The answers to these questions require the right information on which to base critical decisions about people. Our advanced assessment tools are capable of:

- > Distinguishing between executives' past achievement and their future potential
- > Identifying developmental gaps
- > Helping create the right plans to close the gaps.

■ Our Executive Assessment Service (EAS) — An overview

Our top-end assessments are carried out by assessment experts only. Our approach is not web-based or impersonal. Instead, it is dynamic, interactive and extremely comprehensive.

All of our work is undertaken by assessment experts in close collaboration with consultants who live and work in the Middle East and who have a deep understanding of the nuances of the region and of your industry. We believe that the personal touch offered by our approach is one of several elements that make our assessment methodology stand out. Other distinguishing features are as follows:

- > EAS is a structured and time-efficient tool which offers precise and accurate evaluation.
- > Unlike any other tool in the market, EAS can assess the long-term potential of an executive.
- > EAS also makes informed judgments based on an individual's underlying aptitudes, and does not place emphasis on the extent of a person's experience.
- > It provides hard evidence that an individual has the ability to grow into a more demanding role, reducing the risk of investing in that individual.
- > The unique ExI™ interview is precise and culturally sensitive. It takes a person's current ability as the starting point and explicitly evaluates their analytical capability, social intelligence and self-awareness: each of which contributes to their agility, executive intelligence and capacity to think ahead and handle complex situations.

We use highly trained assessment specialists with significant Middle East and international experience.

■ About the authors

MARCO BONI



Based in Dubai, Marco Boni is responsible for business in the Middle East, providing advisory and board services to multinational and regional companies. He specialises in recruiting chief executive officers, chief financial officers and other senior-level executives for general management and key corporate roles. He is an active member of the firm's Technology, Media & Telecommunications, Consumer, Financial Services and Industrial practices. Marco has participated in several large Executive Assessment projects across the Middle East and brings a rich perspective of assessing senior executives in the region.

Marco is a graduate of the University of Cape Town and the University of Stellenbosch. He speaks English, Italian, French and Afrikaans.

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Gerhard Resch-Fingerlos is a member of Spencer Stuart's Leadership Advisory Services and focuses on executive assessments across industries. With more than 15 years of executive advisory experience, he consults with international clients across a range of industry sectors and geographies. In recent years, Gerhard has led a number of Executive Assessment projects in the Middle East specializing in providing talent insight and development advice to clients in the region.

Gerhard studied business administration at the WU (Vienna University of Business and Economics) and earned his M.B.A. from the University of Cincinnati.

■ About Spencer Stuart

Spencer Stuart is one of the world's leading executive search consulting firms. Privately held since 1956, Spencer Stuart applies its extensive knowledge of industries, functions and talent to advise select clients — ranging from major multinationals to emerging companies to nonprofit organizations — and address their leadership requirements. Through 55 offices in 30 countries and a broad range of practice groups, Spencer Stuart consultants focus on senior-level executive search, board director appointments, succession planning and in-depth senior executive management assessments. For more information on Spencer Stuart, please visit www.spencerstuart.com.

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