



EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

THE THREE DIMENSIONS



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INTRODUCTION

There's a lot of buzz going around about what it takes to be a great leader. More specifically, what does it take to make it to the top (e.g., promotion to leadership positions)? What characteristics do great leaders possess? Largely we are focused on specific personality traits and abilities such as communication, providing feedback, and influencing others. But what about executive presence?

Executive presence is difficult to describe but is easily recognized in a room full of people. Executive presence essentially is a leader's "wow" factor. When a leader walks into a room they instantly attract intense, positive attention. Some have broadly defined executive presence as a blending of temperament, competencies, and skills. Others have described it as gravitas- the ability of the leader to engage, align, inspire, and move people to act. It's widely acknowledged that leaders with executive presence have the capacity to influence or inspire others as a must-have quality.

Research on successful leaders have shown how essential executive presence actually is. A survey of senior executives reported that executive presence counts for 26% of what it takes to get promoted (Center for Talent Innovation, 2012). In a separate survey of CIOs it was second on the list of the top 20 leadership traits that make a difference (Gartner, 2012). The lack of executive presence can make it harder for others to trust them to lead.

26% OF WHAT IT TAKES
TO GET PROMOTED

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20 LEADERSHIP TRAITS

The definition of executive presence is not limited to just having gravitas, or having a "wow-factor." Executive presence can be further defined into three dimensions (<https://www.bates-communications.com/bates-model-of-executive-presence-white-paper>)

STYLE

- This what people see and experience quickly.
- The first impression based on image, mannerisms, and interpersonal behavior.
- Specific traits associated with style are appearance, Intentionality, interactivity, inclusiveness, and assertiveness.

SUBSTANCE

- This is made up of social presences, demeanor, and gravitates in leadership situations.
- Leader with substance have confidence, composure, resonance, vision and practical wisdom.

CHARACTER

- A leader's personality traits and values.
- Observable traits consist of authenticity, integrity, concern, restraint and humility.

Leaders do not have executive presence if there is a lack of one of the three dimensions. Many times leaders look the part, and can even appear to have substance (i.e., confidence, composure) but it's essential to ensure that they also have character and integrity. All three dimensions are important, but a leader's character is the foundation. We can differentiate between effective and ineffective leaders by targeting leaders who possess these traits and values.

HOW TO MEASURE EXECUTIVE PRESENCE

To measure executive presence, start from the bottom up. Character is thought to be the foundation of executive presence, so again, measuring those important traits is key, such as authenticity, integrity, concern, restraint, and humility. Although those are all components to target, humility is an especially important characteristic for leader effectiveness. Humility has been cited to be one of the traits most likely to guarantee success in the 21st century workplace (<http://www.industryweek.com/leadership/humility-your-no-1-leadership-asset-2016>). Additionally, Owens et al. (2013) found that leaders who scored high on expressed humility fostered learning oriented teams and had subordinates with higher engagement, job satisfaction, and retention. Humble leaders are effective because they are trusted, respected, and are influential because of these characteristics. A lack of humility can lead to negative consequences, such as turnover.

When selecting for executive presence there are a wide range of options to use. Each dimension (i.e., style, substance, character) can be targeted in different assessment methods. There are structured interviews, simulations, work samples, and personality assessments. A personality measure aimed at determining the applicant's inherent tendencies towards these types of behaviors and traits is one of the most effective methods. Additionally, in-depth skills assessments designed to measure a leader's actual ability could be useful, by providing information about their style.

Just because a leader may only possess one or two of the dimensions of executive presence doesn't mean they will never be able to develop it. It's important to take the effort and investment into developing leaders not only on executive presence, but other leadership qualities as well (i.e., emotional intelligence, self-awareness). Provide individuals with the opportunities and experiences that they need; provide constant feedback and offer developmental coaching. More specifically, developmental coaching uses assessments, feedback, and past experiences to consider which stage of development a person is in. This process helps to identify which dimensions should be focused on in more depth and targeted.

CONCLUSION

In the end, there's no argument that organizations rely on their leaders to engage, align, inspire, and move people to act so that the organization thrives. Assess leaders on executive presence and steer away from only focusing on inferences; they may look the part, but does it align with the appropriate character and substance that is most effective? It is important that executive presence is not ignored after an assessment. Continual growth and development is essential for leaders to reach their highest potential and be effective within their organization.