

Industry Snapshot

Institute of Professional Development

Using an Evidence Based Talent
Strategy to Smash the Glass Ceiling.

**The Institute
In Professional Development**

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Summary

In Professional Development are committed to supporting equality in the workplace. A review of UK statistics in relation to gender breakdown in organisations indicates that the 'glass ceiling' is still intact. One cause of this is an over reliance on subjective and intuitive decision making in relation to talent management. In this snapshot we make the case for using Development Centres to:

- Increase employee self-awareness, give detailed feedback on strengths and areas for development, and targeted action plans.
- Increase employee motivation to progress in their career and have the tools and support to take the next step.
- Increase the number of underrepresented colleagues putting themselves forward for promotion to senior levels.
- Gain detailed, objective data on individuals' performance, to inform evidence-based promotion decisions.

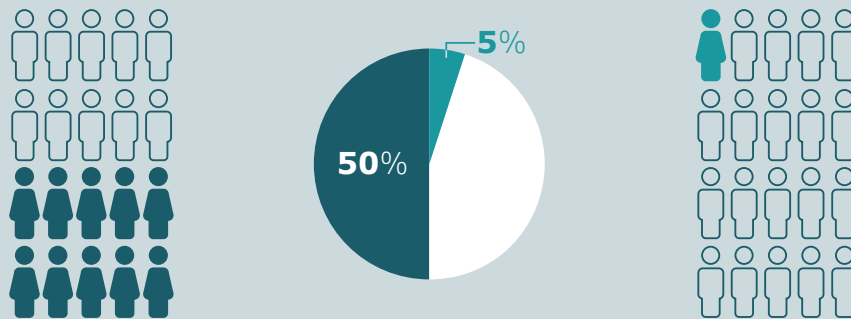


The Glass Ceiling in 2022

The International Labour Organisation indicate that while women hold 50% of middle management positions, they only hold 5% of Chief Executive positions in listed companies (2.8% in the EU). The UK's Chartered Management Institute echoes this finding, presenting a pyramid with women holding 50% of professional positions, yet 20% at a senior level.

The 'glass ceiling' may have a wide variety of causes, including:

- A lack of support and encouragement in the workplace (Gneezy, Niederle, & Rustichini, 2003).
- Some organisation's competency frameworks contribute to an imbalance in leadership positions. This can include a focus on leadership traits that reflect the current leadership team, thus reinforcing the existing culture (Warren, 2009).
- Reynolds (2022) suggests that women are less likely to self-promote and draw attention to their achievements than male counterparts; this results in the best people for the job being overlooked.



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The International Labour Organisation

Subjective Decision Making

Exley and Kessler (2019) suggest the gender gap is to some extent related to how confidently individuals evaluate their own performance, with the difference going deep into our culture, and appearing at school age. Evidence suggests that self-evaluation should be deemphasised, and more objective metrics should be used to inform promotion decisions; *initiatives such as assessment and development centres enable organisation to gather and present objective data on leadership potential, and make evidence-based, rather than subjective, talent management decisions.*

Development Centres to Identify and Support Leadership Potential

Assessment and development centres have gained increasing recognition for identifying capabilities and behaviours for the purposes of promotion. Benefits include increased fairness, a method of assessment that predicts work performance, increased legal defensibility and an enhanced image of the organisation amongst participants (British Psychological Society, 2016).

Development Centre Methodology

Role Analysis and Development of Competency Frameworks

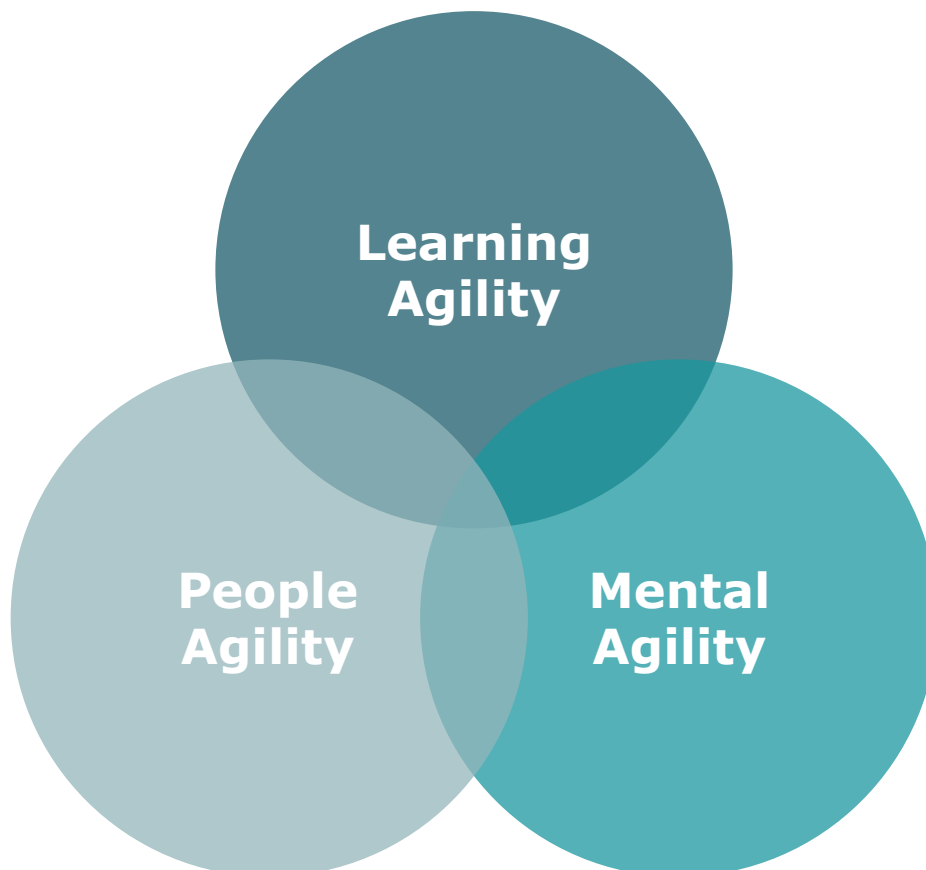
A job role analysis will establish the behaviours leaders in the organisation are expected to demonstrate so they can perform their roles competently (Biddle, 1986). In line with British Psychological Society (2016) guidelines, we would seek to establish 10 areas to evaluate and develop.

Indicators of Leadership Potential

The aim of a development centre is not to assess the ability to undertake a more senior position immediately, but to identify potential. The development centre won't seek to establish competency, as the notion that 'the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour' (Smith, 1989) suggests that people cannot develop capabilities, and it would be unreasonable to discount participants in junior positions who haven't had the opportunity to demonstrate competencies yet. Competencies may support performance management, but they do not provide the best possible gauge of development potential.

Evidence Based Indicators of Leadership Potential

Based on our extensive research we recommend developing criteria on the following three factors that indicate success in leadership roles:



Learning Agility. Hollenbeck (2016) defines this as 'the ability to adapt and synthesise existing knowledge and experience, to enable you to handle novel or fast changing situations' (p.9). Johansen (2009) indicates that business is becoming increasingly 'VUCA' (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous), and that leaders need to have the resilience and agility to cope with rapid change, and the unexpected. Hollenbeck states that learning agility is related to Dweck's (2006) 'growth mindset'; the perspective that setbacks are opportunities to learn, and that improvement can be fostered through effort. These traits indicate the ability to respond effectively to inevitable change, and leadership potential.

People Agility. Charan and Colvin (1999) identify that people acumen is a significant success factor for senior leaders, while conversely, McCall and Lombardo (1983) identified that traits such as aloofness and arrogance are derailers and disengage colleagues and clients. Goleman (1998) identifies emotional intelligence as being more important than general intelligence in senior leadership positions, where engaging with people becomes a more dominant aspect of the role than solving technical problems. Senior leaders set the tone of the organisation (Landry, 2019), and thus the Participants ability to manage their own emotions, and engage with others, are important indicators of future leadership potential. People agility will incorporate cultural intelligence, and concept that includes knowledge of different cultures, demonstrating culturally sensitive behaviour, and a willingness to learn about 'operating in culturally diverse situations' (Rockstuhl et al, 2011, p.827).

Mental Agility. General intelligence ('g') remains highly relevant to a wide range of situations that require analytical problem solving (Prati et al., 2003). Mumford et al. (2000) state that effective leaders need to be able to solve complex technical problems, as well as social ones, and Judge, Colbert, & Ilies (2004) link general intelligence to leadership effectiveness. Rockstuhl et al (2011) identify a significant relationship between g and both general leadership, and cross-cultural leadership, and the authors recommend that intelligence should be used to predict leadership potential. Therefore, a high level of general intelligence in participants is likely to be a significant indicator of the potential to be successful in a leadership role, when balanced with the other dimensions presented here.

Coaching and Follow-Up Support

The development centre will introduce new ways of thinking, although to ensure learning is integrated, and results in behavioural, and ultimately cultural change, longer term support may be required. Garvin (1993) defines a learning organisation as one which is able to 'modify its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights' (p.4). Executive coaching can support the integration and application of knowledge and has a strong track record of supporting leaders at points of career transition (Reynolds, 2011). Newly promoted leaders can experience unexpected challenges that may impact personal and organisational performance, and the support provided by a coach may increase their likelihood of success during a career transition.

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