



**Assessing Leadership Ability  
Defining A, B, C, and D Leadership Levels**



**Increase Your Odds  
of Success with  
Leadership Alignment**

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## Assessing Leadership Ability

Countless books and articles have been published about the definition of leadership ability and whether it is a talent people are born with or a skill they develop over time. Our position is that it is most likely a combination of both - nature *and* nurture. Certainly, the evidence supports this view. Rather than waste time on the debate, we should focus on answering this question: Do people actually demonstrate **leadership ability** or not? In other words, do they consistently demonstrate it with both their behavior and results?

Leadership is similar to swimming, you cannot assess competency with a written test.

Based on our research, the answer is that people do, in fact, demonstrate consistent levels of leadership ability over time, and that the levels can be reliably assessed. Over time, we have uncovered seven valid and reliable attributes that successful leaders have in common. The Success Profiles “Top Down” assessment process examines these seven attributes and provides a structure for accurately ranking managers and leaders.

Demonstrated leadership attributes:

1. **Has an optimistic and forward-looking orientation.**
2. **Has a high emotional intelligence** (demonstrates good communication and people skills).
3. **Has an open minded perspective** (is willing to change, promote change and is seen as a "change agent").
4. **Is respected by others** (leaders, peers, physicians, and staff).
5. **Is focused on results and outcomes** (is achievement oriented, and is wired to set goals).
6. **Has a high capacity to perform in a fast-paced work environment** (manages complexity well).
7. **Is humble, maintains composure, emotions and behavior** (the ability to handle high levels of stress very well).

Each attribute is assigned a score, with 0 being “Not at all” and 4 being “Consistently”. The scores are added up to provide the Leadership Index Score. The higher the Leadership Index Score, the higher the talent level of the manager being rated. The point levels are:

- 22-28 **A - Level Leader – Top Performing**
- 15-21 **B - Level – Good and Consistent**
- 9-14 **C - Level – Struggling and Inconsistent**
- 0-8 **D - Level – Failing and Subtracting Value**

**The characteristics of each of the talent levels are:**

**“A” Level  
High - Top  
Performing**

Leader/manager is a high-achieving and talented performer who consistently exceeds expectations, brings out the best performance in others, is respected as a true champion with a contagious positive attitude, and is a change agent who drives results. The culture that they influence both within and outside their span of control is both healthy and fit. **A** level leadership ability usually represents approximately **25%** of the total number of leaders.

**“B” Level  
Good and  
Consistent**

Leader/manager is a good and consistent performer who consistently meets expectations, brings out a good performance in others, is viewed as a true supporter with an optimistic positive attitude, and is a change agent that achieves good results. The culture that they create within their span of control is both healthy and fit. **B** level leadership ability usually represents approximately **50%** of the total number of leaders.

**“C” Level  
Struggling &  
Inconsistent**

Leader/manager is an inconsistent performer who sometimes meets expectations, struggles to bring out a good performance in others, is often negative or pessimistic, and usually requires high-maintenance coaching or assistance to achieve desired results. The culture that they create within their span of control is usually unhealthy or poor. **C** level leadership ability usually represents approximately **15%** of the total number of leaders.

**“D” Level  
Failing (takes  
away value)**

Leader/manager rarely meets expectations, fails to bring out a good performance in others, is consistently negative or pessimistic, and usually requires high-maintenance coaching or “partnering” assistance to achieve desired results. They are usually a drain on resources. The culture that they create within their span of control is usually unhealthy to dysfunctional. **D** level leadership ability usually represents approximately **5%** of the total number of leaders.

It should be noted, that there is often an aversion/reluctance to evaluate leadership ability with a letter grade (**A, B, C, or D**). While we respect this reluctance and recognize that “grading” can cause anxiety or become a distraction, executives must have an objective way to differentiate performance. Adjectives or descriptions can be used in lieu of a letter grade if that makes the process easier.

Determining talent with an evidence-based system will contribute to better appointment practices and improved performance over time.



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