

MID-LEVEL LEADERS:

Critical Competencies, Strengths
and Development Needs



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OUR RICH DATASET FOR MID-LEVEL LEADERS

The PROFILOR® 360 degree feedback instrument has been in use by organizations across the world for decades now, yielding a rich database of over 750,000 leaders who have completed The PROFILOR®.

These leaders have completed one of our nine standard PROFILOR® 360s representing the following levels and functions: Senior Executive, Business Unit Leader, Mid-Level Leader, First-Level Leader, Individual Contributor, Internal Consultant, IT Manager, Sales Manager, Key Account Manager.

The research gathered across this time has yielded many important answers for leaders in all of these roles. This specific research focuses on Mid-Level Leaders based on the most recent data from 6,245 leaders who completed The PROFILOR® for Mid-Level Leaders (2017 through 2025).

We asked the following questions:

1

What competencies are most critical for Mid-Level Leader success? Has this changed over time?

2

What competencies represent strengths and development needs for Mid-Level Leaders? Has this changed over time?

3

What competencies are most related to assessments of current performance, long-term advancement potential, and likelihood of derailing?

MID-LEVEL LEADER COMPETENCIES

The PROFILOR® for Mid-Level Leaders has 16 competencies grouped into four super-factors as shown below:



THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

- Make Sound Decisions
- Act Strategically
- Think Creatively
- Use Financial Data



PEOPLE LEADERSHIP

- Build Support
- Motivate Others
- Develop Others
- Promote Teamwork
- Foster Open Communication
- Establish Relationships



RESULTS LEADERSHIP

- Meet Customer Needs
- Build Realistic Plans
- Manage Execution
- Show Drive and Initiative



PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

- Establish Trust
- Show Adaptability

Each competency is made up of a number of behaviors. The behaviors are rated by multiple perspectives - Self, Manager(s), Peers, Direct Reports, and Others - on a 5-point extent scale (i.e., to what extent have they observed the behavior from Not at All to a Very Great Extent).

MOST IMPORTANT COMPETENCIES

When Mid-Level Leaders and their Primary Managers were asked which competencies were most critical to success in their current role, they agreed on the most critical and three of the top five most important.

PRIMARY MANAGER	SELF
1. Make Sound Decisions (M=5.40)	1. Make Sound Decisions (M=5.54)
2. Manage Execution (M=5.27)	2. Establish Trust (M=5.43)
3. Meet Customer Needs (M=5.21)	3. Meet Customer Needs (M=5.13)
4. Establish Trust (M=5.10)	4. Act Strategically (M=5.03)
5. Show Drive & Initiative (M=4.92)	5. Promote Teamwork (M=5.03)

Make Sound Decisions is the most important competency for Mid-Level Leader success, as assessed by both the Mid-Level Leaders and their Managers. *Establish Trust* and *Meet Customer Needs* are also extremely important regardless of perspective.

In addition, assessments of what was most critical for Mid-Level Leader success did not change over the timeframe included in this data regardless of perspective (in almost all cases, year accounted for less than 2% of the variance in assessments).

“*Make Sound Decisions*’ is the most important competency for Mid-Level Leader success.

CRITICAL COMPETENCIES, STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

It is the Primary Manager's assessment of importance that generally takes precedence for a person receiving PROFILOR® feedback. Therefore, the most critical competencies according to the Primary Manager are the focus in this section.

For the five competencies rated highest in importance by the Primary Manager, the "Average Others" competency ratings are shown below (average of all other perspectives, except self). Generally, it is the "Average Others" rating that is used to assess a person's strength in particular competencies.

COMPETENCY	AVERAGE OTHERS RATING
Make Sound Decisions	4.06 (moderate)
Manage Execution	3.98 (clear development area)
Meet Customer Needs	4.19 (moderate/moderate strength)
Establish Trust	4.27 (clear strength)
Show Drive & Initiative	4.25 (clear strength)

Establish Trust and *Establish Relationships* are the highest rated competencies across all 16 competencies. *Show Drive and Initiative* is the next highest rated competency. Two of the three highest rated competencies - *Establish Trust* and *Show Drive and Initiative* - are also considered the most important competencies by Primary Managers. Another of the most important competencies - *Meet Customer Needs* - was also rated higher for Mid-Level Leaders, but not in the top three.

Manage Execution is the third lowest rated competency across all 16 competencies. This is the one competency considered most important by the Primary Manager that is a clear development area for Mid-Level Leaders.

Make Sound Decisions is not among the top five or the bottom five rated competencies across all 16 competencies. Eight competencies are rated higher and seven competencies are rated lower than *Make Sound Decisions*.



Mid-Level Leaders have strengths in two areas most critical for their success - *Establish Trust* and *Show Drive and Initiative* - and a clear development need in another - *Manage Execution*.

The table below shows the competencies ranked from most to least important based on the Primary Managers' assessments, and the Average Others (all except Self) rating for each of these competencies. For the Mid-Level Leaders, the majority of the competencies are rated above 4.0, with only two below 4.0. In this table, the four highest rated competencies are shown in dark blue; the five (there is a tie) lowest are shown in light blue; the remainder are shown in gray.

	Make Sound Decisions	Manage Execution	Meet Customer Needs	Establish Trust	Show Drive & Initiative	Promote Teamwork	Establish Relationships	Motivate Others	Act Strategically	Build Realistic Plans	Foster Open Communication	Develop Others	Build Support	Show Adaptability	Think Creatively	Use Financial Data
Average Others Rating	4.06	3.98	4.19	4.27	4.25	4.13	4.27	4.03	4.10	4.03	4.09	4.08	3.96	4.04	4.01	4.07

Ratings in competency effectiveness did not change over time (year accounts for less than 1% of the variance for all competencies). Competency effectiveness ratings are essentially stable over time.

COMPETENCIES MOST

RELATED TO PERFORMANCE, ADVANCEMENT POTENTIAL, AND CAREER DIFFICULTY

PERFORMANCE

In a portion of this sample (N = 1412 - 1556), data exists for the Primary Manager's assessment of a person's competence in current role on the following scale: Outstanding; Clearly One of the Best; Somewhat Above Average; Average; Somewhat Below Average; Clearly Below Average; and Very Weak. The Primary Manager's average competency ratings for all 16 competencies are significantly related to these assessments of competence, with correlations ranging from -.384 (competence ratings are reverse scored) to -.575. **The competencies most related to assessments of competence in current role are: Show Drive and Initiative (-.575), Build Realistic Plans (-.552), Make Sound Decisions (-.538), and Show Adaptability (-.521).**

There is also a Performance Composite scale based on the following behaviors/items: Accomplishes a great deal; Gets the job done; Gets work done on time; Is an effective manager overall; and Produces high quality work. The correlation between this composite rating and the Primary Manager's average competency rating, depending on the competency ranges from .460 - .789 (N= 4993-5389; the performance composite is not reverse scored). **The competencies most related to average ratings on the Performance Composite scale are: Show Drive and Initiative (.789), Build Realistic Plans (.733), Make Sound Decisions (.708), and Manage Execution (.681).**

ADVANCEMENT POTENTIAL

In a portion of this sample (N = 1403-1543), data exists for the Primary Manager's assessment of a person's long-range advancement potential: CEO or President; Senior Executive; Executive; Upper Middle Management; Middle Management; First-line Management; Not Suited for Management. The Primary Manager's average competency ratings for all 16 competencies are significantly related to these assessments of potential, with correlations ranging from $-.290$ (advancement potential ratings are reverse scored) to $-.385$. **The competencies most related to assessments of long-range advancement potential are: Make Sound Decisions ($-.385$), Act Strategically ($-.377$), and Show Adaptability ($-.370$).**

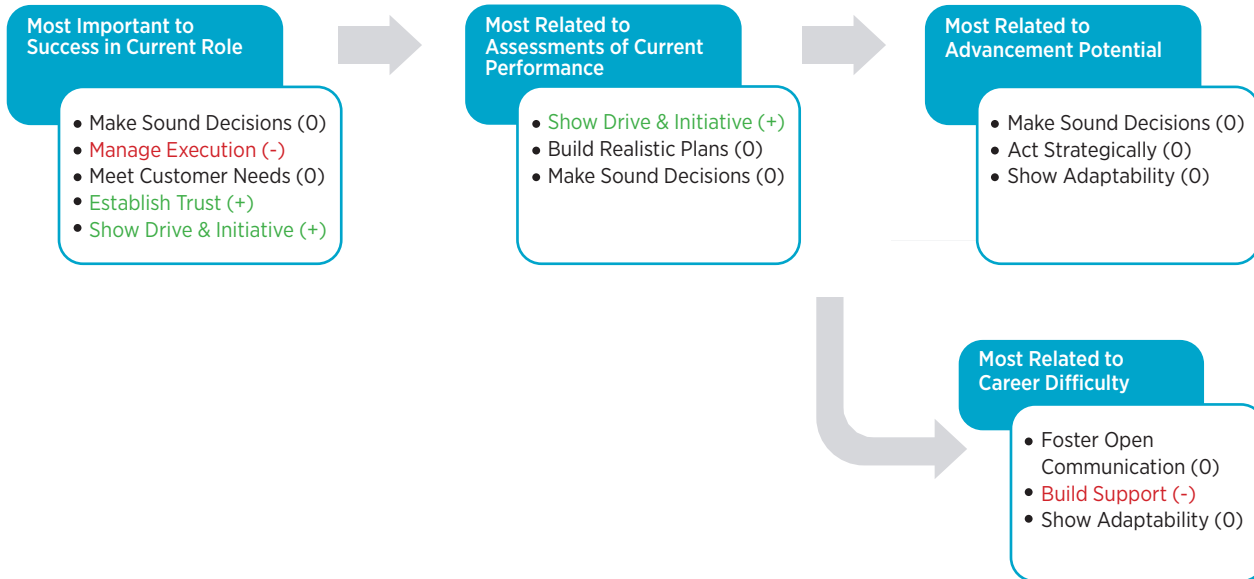
“ *Make Sound Decisions, Act Strategically, and Show Adaptability* are most related to long-range advancement potential for Mid-Level Leaders.

CAREER DIFFICULTY

Primary Managers were also asked to assess an individual's risk of experiencing career difficulty due to factors under their personal control on the following scale: Very High Risk; High Risk; Moderate Risk; Slight Risk; Little to No Risk. Correlations between competency ratings and assessments of career difficulty are available for 1414 - 1556 leaders, depending on the competency. The correlations range from $-.228$ to $-.490$ (career difficulty ratings are reverse scored). **The competencies most related to career difficulty assessments are: Foster Open Communication ($-.490$), Build Support ($-.487$), and Show Adaptability ($-.476$).**

SUMMARY

The following graphic summarizes the results of this research for Mid-Level Leaders.



Note: Competencies in red (-) represent development needs for Mid-Level Leaders; in green (+), represent strengths; in black (0), represent moderate areas.

Mid-Level Leaders are strongest at Establishing Relationships, Establishing Trust, and Showing Drive and Initiative, and weakest at Managing Execution and Building Support. Make Sound Decisions was noted as the most critical competency for success in current role, and it is not a relative strength for this group.

Mid-Level Leaders need to up their game related to Making Sound Decisions not only for success in current role but also for their advancement potential.

Thought Leadership (Make Sound Decisions, Act Strategically) is much more important for advancing one's career, as is Showing Adaptability. Mid-Level Leaders at threat of having career difficulties are likely struggling now with some of the People Leadership and Personal Leadership areas. Most related to threat of career difficulty are Foster Open Communication, Build Support, and Show Adaptability. Of these, Mid-Level Leaders have the most work to do related to Building Support (a current development need).