

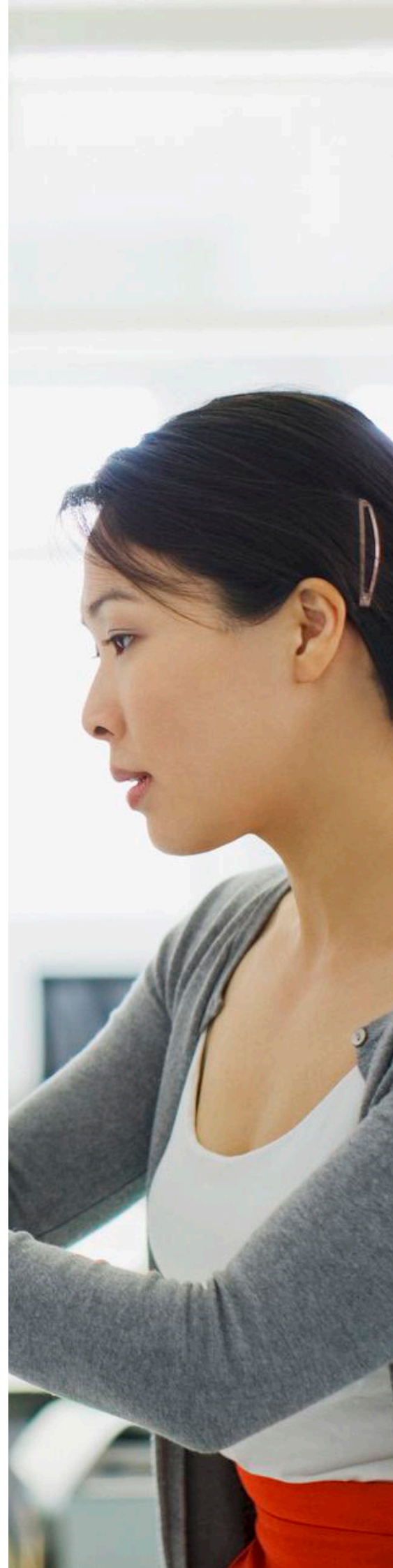
Behavioral assessments: the what, why and how



welcome to brighter

Contents

- 01 / What are behavioral assessments?
- 02 / Behavioral assessments in the workplace
- 03 / Why is behavioral assessment important?
- 04 / What are the different types of behavioral evaluation tools available?
- 05 / How to conduct a behavioral assessment?
- 06 / Advantages and disadvantages of behavioral assessments
- 07 / What are behavioral competencies?
- 08 / What are core behavioral competencies?
- 09 / Why should you assess behavioral competencies?
- 10 / How Mercer | Mettl can help



What are behavioral assessments?

Behavioral assessments capture individual behavior in a simulated environment. They are extensively used in psychology to observe, characterize, explain and even predict behavior. Behavioral assessments are now applied beyond the psychological study. Education and workplace settings widely use behavioral assessments to make critical people decisions.



Behavioral assessments in the workplace

What are behavioral assessments in the workplace context?

Behavioral assessments refer to new-age tools to measure behavioral competencies in a simulated work environment. These assessments require individuals to demonstrate behavioral competencies in one or more activities relevant to their job role and resemble an actual organizational situation. Candidates are presented with a series of realistic work-related scenarios with possible actions to be taken. They have to select either the best option or rank the possible actions based on their effectiveness. Behavioral assessments are commonly used for recruitment and development initiatives to measure critical competencies required to perform on the job.

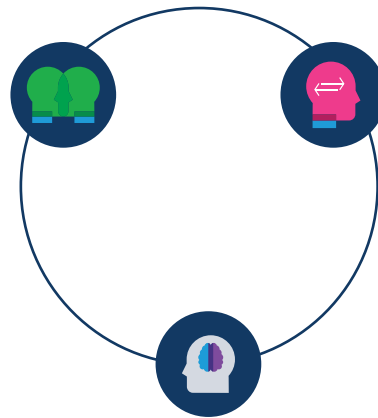
What do behavioral tests measure?

Behavioral tests measure behavioral competencies. The combination of skills, knowledge and traits in an individual cumulatively form behavioral competencies. Behavioral competencies are a job's components that reflect in behavior and are observable in the workplace.

Behavioral competencies often vary across job levels and job roles. Having a comprehensive list of important behavioral competencies for your organization's culture can help you choose the right behavioral assessment test for better workforce planning.

How are behavioral assessments different from personality and cognitive tests?

1. Behavioral assessments
Used to measure candidate behavior on the job, using simulated scenarios modeled after the workplace.



2. Personality Tests
Used to understand inherent thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

3. Cognitive tests
Used to assess job-specific abilities required to perform the job effectively.



A behavioral assessment is more active and better at showing how people react to certain situations, whereas a personality or cognitive test evaluates how they think about things in an intellectual or emotional way. A behavioral assessment is also more likely to be based on observation of actions, as opposed to personality tests, which usually rely on how employees answer a list of questions.

Jon Hill

Chairman & CEO, The Energists



Why is behavioral assessment important?

The workplace is continually evolving, and the ongoing pandemic has fastened its pace. Most employees find it challenging to remain motivated or manage their stress levels, which affects their productivity. Conversely, some employees have performed exceedingly well by demonstrating an exceptional drive to ensure growth.

Imagine being a manager of a remote team during the early days of the lockdown. Your team needs a more streamlined process to accomplish specific tasks. Having a fair idea of who has the propensity to lead can help you push the right team member to take the initiative.

Behavioral assessments help recognize the 'how' and 'what' behind a behavior, enabling you to hire the right candidates, develop the right employees and make informed decisions about your organization's future leaders. Behavioral evaluations are outcome-oriented and match an individual's behavioral tendencies with job demands, leading to extended associations and contented employees.



Knowing how your employees respond to specific triggers and behave in certain situations is a boon. Your employees' behavior can profoundly impact your business's trajectory. Therefore, it is implied that understanding their behavior from the onset safeguards your organization from potential losses, simultaneously boosting the development process by identifying growth opportunities.



A behavioral assessment measures how people perform and act both emotionally and professionally in common, everyday situations and interactions with others... It is important to identify the work culture behavior you want to track. For example, if you are looking for a collaborative work culture suite of behaviors as opposed to an internally competitive work culture, how people behave within these distinct work culture personalities is important.

Dianne Crampton
President, TIGERS Success Series, Inc.



Behavioral assessment tests for recruitment

Traditional recruitment practices often make it difficult to gauge or predict candidates' ability to fit into the organization's culture and/or fulfill job responsibilities as required. Employees are one of the most significant assets of an organization. A bad hire can often create challenging circumstances for an organization, economically and culturally. Traditional recruitment tools are neither objective nor reliable, and often prolong the time-to-hire.

Behavioral evaluation is a powerful tool to match candidates to job roles. It accelerates the hiring process by cutting down the time-to-hire while ensuring that decisions are grounded in data and are not instinctive. Behavioral assessment tests safeguard your organization from bad hires.

Traditional recruitment often incorporates some form of behavioral interviewing. However, the interview questions are often based on resumes, which simply don't provide the necessary information to make objective hiring decisions or even to ask the right questions. Individuals applying for a job will be different. They will communicate differently; respond to situations differently; thrive in different environments; react to various stimuli, and respond differently to distinct management styles. A candidate who is a right fit for the job and the organization will flourish and grow, while an unsuitable candidate might feel disengaged and frustrated. These things are difficult to measure through a simple interview.

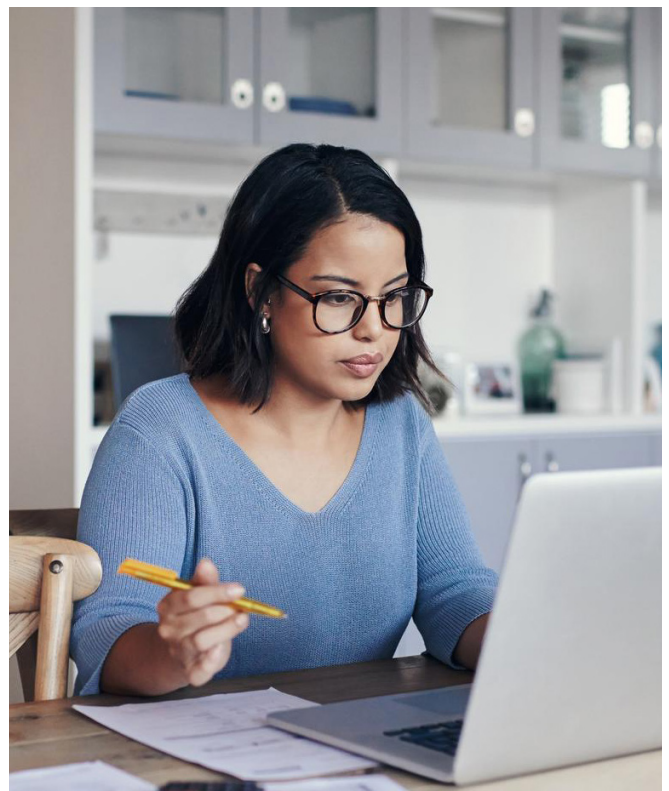
This is where behavioral assessments make their mark. They provide an in-depth understanding of the candidate's preferences to easily predict the right fit. Behavioral assessment tests help in screening and selecting the right candidates, thereby delivering excellent user experience. Since behavioral assessment tests closely emulate the job-role and organization setting, they empower candidates to make the right choice, while marketing the organization's culture and serving as an excellent branding tool. Combined with behavioral event interviews or competency-based interviews, behavioral assessments lead to a much more accurate representation of the candidate.

The success of any organization largely depends on its people. If you put the right people in the right jobs, they are more likely to perform well and propel the organization towards success.

Behavioral assessments for L&D

While domain skills are essential consideration factors at the time of recruitment, apart from cultural fitment, there is a more extensive application of behavioral assessment tests in L&D initiatives. Behavioral assessments provide an in-depth understanding of your employees' strengths and weaknesses. This enables organizations and employees to collectively identify a roadmap for growth that caters to organizational needs and employees' career plans.

Behavioral assessments can also play a critical role in leadership development and succession planning. They provide a brilliant opportunity for organizations to reiterate their vision and values and identify employees who share them. The organization's shared culture and goal are the foundation for building your behavioral assessment tests for employee development.



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Behavioral assessments can measure your organization's core competencies, identify skill gaps, and create a training plan, contributing to workforce optimization for future success.

Behavioral evaluation helps identify high-potential employees who can be groomed to assume critical roles and create a pipeline of future leaders. An organization's keen interest in its employees' development reduces turnover and improves its efficiency because of objective alignment.



I see behavioral assessments as being most valuable when you're filling leadership positions, especially in the development of first-time leaders from within the company. I especially like in-box exercises for new leaders because they serve two purposes. First, to see how they'll respond in certain situations and can give feedback accordingly. Second, they get a feel for situations they may encounter as a leader, which can be a valuable training tool.

Jon Hill

Chairman & CEO, The Energists



What are the different tools available for behavioral evaluation?

Behavioral evaluation tools are often used cumulatively to assess the role fitment. Often customized to emulate organizational setting and role challenges, these tools are an engaging way to choose the right people for the right job.



Online behavioral evaluation tools



Offline behavioral evaluation tools

Situational judgment test to analyze, rate, rank, or select the most effective response in role-specific scenarios.

Group activities to assess the ability to influence, communicate and work in a group

Caselets to solve the problems highlighted in the backdrop of a business scenario

Behavioral event interviews or Competency-based Interviews to devise a detailed description of a candidate's understanding of a business situation.

Case study simulators to find relevant information, diagnose issues and recommend actions.

Role-plays to place the candidates within a business constraint where they are asked to play specific roles.

In-box exercise to gauge prioritizing ability and take actions accordingly.

Case presentations to assess a candidate's business understanding, problem-solving, confidence and communication skills in front of an audience.

Behavioral assessments are an indispensable way to determine fit for the role, high-potential, promotability, and developmental needs. Best practices recommend that practitioners use multiple assessments to help triangulate and identify key strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and potential derailers since these tools are all different, each with their own pros and cons.

Robert C. Satterwhite

Ph.D., Partner & Head of the Leadership Advisory Practice, Odgers Berndtson

How to conduct a behavioral assessment?

Behavioral assessment tests can measure a plethora of behavioral tendencies. They include result orientation, teamwork, conflict management, establishing trust and work delegation, etc. A behavioral test probes specific behavioral dispositions with an understanding that behaviors can change easily. Behavior is adaptable and can be observed, meaning it responds and changes according to an external environment.

Here is how organizations can use behavioral tests in their hiring and L&D processes:



Competency-tool mapping

Competency-tool mapping involves creating an organization-specific competency framework or using an available framework to identify relevant indicators of behaviors and map them on available tools. Two or more tools are typically combined for a reliable and holistic overview of the test-taker. Competency-tool mapping considers job compatibility with the workplace behaviors required to succeed on the job and in the organization. For instance, caselets can assess business acumen and prompt decision-making, while a case study simulator may better evaluate an analytical and innovative mindset.



Test administering & report generation

For online behavioral tests, organizations can opt for virtual assessment centers. They are easy to roll out, highly time and cost-effective, easily scalable and generate instant reports. Conversely, offline tools often involve one or more assessors observing the candidates at a physical or blended assessment center. The reports typically take longer because the assessors need to cull the results together.



Tool creation

Tools and questions are created based on specific job functions. They emulate the job's realities, posing questions that reflect actual workplace situations.



Data analysis & individual development plans

The reports should provide a detailed behavioral profile of the test-taker, other than actionable insights and plans for recruiters and L&D experts. Data analysis can help organizations understand the key skill gaps and training needs at a group level. Individual development plans are customized for each test-taker to help them understand and work on their development areas.

These are industry best practices and should ideally be employed for the most effective outcomes.



Content validation

Multiple iterations of the content in consultation with subject matter experts and the organization are the best practice to reflect the organizational environment's real essence.

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Advantages and disadvantages of behavioral assessments

Advantages

- Behavioral tests are **strong predictors of job performance**.
- Behavioral tests have high **face validity** because test content is based on a real job environment, providing practical insights into the applicants' fitment.
- Using **realistic content** in behavioral tests evokes a favorable reaction from the test-takers.
- The potential for adverse impact in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity is lowest in behavioral assessments, because of job-relevant content.
- Behavioral evaluation tools are based on fictitious but real-life scenarios relating to the job and organization. Therefore, they are **customizable as per requirement**.
- Behavioral assessments offer candidates **rich insights into the organization and the role** for which they are applying. They offer candidates a '**realistic preview**' that can be used to better understand their likely experience at the organization and the organization's attractiveness.

It could also **reduce turnover in the longer run**, as the

- candidates are likely to have more precise and more realistic expectations about their role.

Disadvantages

- Given their context-specific nature and in-depth analysis, they are **more time-consuming** than generic assessments. Developing bespoke behavioral assessments requires job analysis, identifying critical incidents, developing the test content and establishing content validity, etc. However, online behavioral assessment tests are comparatively quicker than offline tools as the latter requires multiple stakeholders, while the former can be easily conducted virtually.
- Due to the same reason, behavioral assessment tests may incur a **greater expense**, although they are often associated with higher ROIs.



What are behavioral competencies?

Behavioral competencies are a combination of skills, knowledge, and traits required to perform effectively in an organization, irrespective of the job role. Behavioral competencies are a set of personality traits and behavioral attributes that align an organization's vision or objectives with measurable actions that can help achieve organizational success. They are the foundation that drives the organization's success by facilitating better talent decisions. They help decision-makers look beyond domain skills and consider work-related behavior and soft skills.

Behavioral competencies are how you perform, in relation to other people, that contribute to trust, interdependence, genuineness, empathy, risk resolution and success in your relationships so that your relationships are constructive, productive and supportive. Each of these principles can be isolated in group behavior, (and) they could also prescribe the direction an organization could take to improve work culture and workgroup behavior at the root cause in a measurable and targeted way.

Dianne Crampton
President, TIGERS Success Series, Inc.

Types of behavioral competencies

There are four types of behavioral competencies:



Personality attributes are a combination of an individual's thoughts, characteristics, behavior, attitudes, ideas, and habits concerning their surroundings. Personality attributes encompass accountability, self-confidence, self-awareness, enthusiasm, etc. They are crucial in determining an employee's cultural fitment.

Interpersonal skills are used by a person to interact with a clarity of purpose. It refers to an employee's ability to get along with coworkers and efficiently work in a group to fulfill their responsibilities. Interpersonal skills include effective communication, active listening, teamwork, conflict management, etc. Excellent interpersonal skills are a prerequisite for many positions in an organization.

Analytical ability is the aptitude to visualize patterns, trends, inconsistent information, and draw meaningful conclusions based on the given information. If one possesses the skill, they can devise solutions by following methodological approaches or using creativity to comprehensively visualize the problem. Problem-solving abilities, critical thinking and logical reasoning are all clubbed under analytical ability. These strengths can help solve a company's challenges and improve its overall productivity and success. Employers want candidates who can investigate a problem and find a timely and efficient solution.

Leadership skills can be related to any situation required to take the lead, professionally and socially. A good leader keeps their team organized, takes calculated risks, motivates peers, and encourages them to perform to the best of their abilities. Excellent leadership skills give impetus to steady organizational growth.

What are core behavioral competencies?

Core behavioral competencies are the fundamental values of an organization expected to be embodied by its employees. They are akin to a blueprint of an organization on which the workforce is built. For a customer-facing organization, the core behavioral competency could be customer-centricity. Core behavioral competencies are different across industries, organization size, type, function, etc.

Core behavioral competencies by job level

Behavioral competencies vary based on job level because of the scope of the work. A fresher is expected to be an avid listener and learner, but someone in a managerial role needs good analytical skills. Here is a list of behavioral competencies that can be employed to develop a competency framework, identify employees' behavioral indicators, structure the hiring process, and ask the right questions to measure their competencies. The list covers behavioral competencies for managers, freshers, and senior leaders.

Behavioral competencies	Levels		
Leadership skills	Motivating peers, developing people, change agent, visionary perspective, entrepreneurial mindset, influence		
	Entry level	Mid-senior level	Senior level
Interpersonal skills	Effective communication, active listening, teamwork	Networking, delegation, establish trust, effective presentation, negotiation, empathy	Openness to diversity, conflict management
Analytical ability	Attention to detail	Critical thinking, problem solving, planning and organization	Decision-making, strategic thinking, ambiguity management, innovative thinking
Personality attributes	Curiosity, adaptability, discipline, self-confidence, optimism, enthusiasm, loyalty, open-mindedness, temperamental, self-obsession	Accountability, focus, resilience, self-awareness, result orientation, perseverance, ambitious, opportunist, insensitive, thrill-seeking	Proactive, stress management, impulsive

Why should you assess behavioral competencies?

Behavioral competencies should form the basis for human resource development and significantly contribute to competency frameworks when making important talent decisions. All organizations, irrespective of their type, size, and function, can benefit from using behavioral competencies in the following ways:



Common language: Behavioral competencies can lay the foundation for everything critical to an organization. They can dictate expected workplace behavior, a precise and shared understanding of performance standards, and an organization's values and objectives.



Objective recruitment: Analyzing and improving the existing hiring strategy is the first step towards improving employees' quality. Behavioral competencies provide an objective platform to evaluate the screening process and promote a better organizational culture. Behavioral competencies assessed through interviews, assessments, exercises, and tasks eliminate interviewer bias, enable filtering the right talent, and set them on a trajectory to success from the very beginning.

Behavioral competencies can be a great way to tell if someone will be successful in their job or not. A lot of people do not know how the link between personality and skill can be able to tell how well they will work in a job or not, but this is really a thing and something that more people should think about. Being able to have that professionalism and knowledge is great, but if you do not have a care and compassion, as well as support and a willingness to learn, you will not succeed in that job as much as you would like to. When hiring, think about these factors. When looking for a job, working on those areas that you may be weaker at.

Dr. Giuseppe Aragona
General Practitioner & Family Doctor
Prescription Doctor



Employee development: Once an organization has identified behavioral competencies pertinent to a particular role and level, they can benchmark their workforce against those competencies and initiate individual developmental plans accordingly. Behavioral competencies can also enable employees to identify transferable skills for career progression.



Organizational planning: Behavioral competencies are the bedrock of all organizational planning initiatives, such as high-potential identification, succession planning, leadership development, etc.



“Behavioral competencies lie at the core of work culture and department behavior.

They make an organization’s values, mission and vision more achievable. They form the core of an organization’s behavior norms.

Since every group is different, it is vital to conduct an organization-wide exercise of nailing down behavior that employees know to be important that support the six principles – trust, interdependence, genuineness, empathy, risk resolution and success. In this way, hiring, succession planning, training and development, high-potential identification, appraisals, and promotion align.

When an organization has determined its group behavior norms, it can be put into performance reviews, performance-related hiring questions and the onboarding process. They can also be used to build skills so that people who demonstrate these behaviors also demonstrate the skills needed to lead people.

If Gallup’s research is true, organizations promote the wrong people into leadership positions more than 82% of the time. One must look to behavior as a root cause.”

Dianne Crampton
President, TIGERS Success Series, Inc.

How do you measure behavioral competencies?

Behavioral competencies are essential indicators of future workplace success and crucial for workforce planning, recruitment, training and development. Many organizations may already have a process to observe or assess employees' behavioral competencies without realizing it. For instance, interview questions in the hiring process are inadvertently directed at measuring personality attributes and interpersonal skills.

Behavioral competency assessments are new-age digital tools to measure behavioral competencies in a simulated work environment. These assessments require candidates to demonstrate their behavioral skills in an activity that resembles an actual organizational situation.

You can also conduct psychometric assessments to measure candidates against particular competencies and predict job performance with detailed scores of different competencies. Else, you can opt for role-based behavioral tests that can help you save time in your hiring decisions while allowing you to gain insight into the candidate's real personality.

How Mercer | Mettl can help

Mercer | Mettl helps you:

- Identify core behavioral competencies vital to your organizational success
- Create a detailed competency framework for different job roles and levels
- Customize assessments and exercises that can measure critical competencies

Mercer | Mettl's suite of behavioral assessments and tools can be used in isolation or combination in any phase of the employee life cycle, including selection, promotion, employee development, leadership development, team development, and leadership effectiveness.

Job levels	Online assessments				Offline assessments			
	Situational judgment tests	Case-lets sets	Case study simulators	In-box exercises	Group discussion	Group activities	Behavioral event interviews	Role-plays
Executive Officers (CXO)			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Senior managers/directors (CXO-1)		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Managers/supervisors (CXO-2)	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Non-management/individual contributor	✓	✓			✓		✓	

*This is a suggestive representation. Competency-tool mapping is done on a case-by-case basis.

Mercer | Mettl's behavioral assessments are recognized for their:

- **Validation:** Strong correlation with on the job performance
- **Reliability:** Highly reliable results as assessments are based on realistic job scenarios
- **Customization:** Customized as per your organizational requirements
- **Extensive Repository:** A vast array of content for each job role, job-level and industry

About us

At Mercer | Mettl, our mission is to enable organizations to make better people decisions by making credible people decisions across two key areas: Acquisition and Development. Since our inception in 2010, we have partnered with 2900+ corporates, 31 sector skill councils/ government departments, and 15+ educational institutions across 90+ countries.

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