



Executive Presence: A Model of Highly Effective Leadership

About the Bates ExPI™



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Summary

What is executive presence, and why does it matter?

Intuitively, leaders know it's important to their success. Sometimes we hear it described as presentation skill, polish, charisma, or professional image. However, these fall short of capturing deeper-level qualities that great leaders exhibit. Lacking a clear definition of executive presence, or a compelling reason it matters, leaders may not be motivated to develop it. They don't know how to cultivate these qualities, and those who advise leaders have no standard or common language for helping them to develop it.

This is where the Bates ExPI™ comes in.

We conducted the first, science-based research into executive presence to uncover the specific behaviors behind what people mean by executive presence. The results of our research led us to build a leadership model and assessment, the Bates Executive Presence Index, that:

- Defines the 15 different sets of observable behaviors that influence a leader's ability to engage, inspire, and align people to drive team and organizational performance.
- Gives leaders a comprehensive, research-based, actionable framework for understanding the observable behaviors that make leaders effective and pinpointing the specific levers to improve leadership performance within their business context.

The Bates ExPI™ is a ground-breaking, unique, research-based, valid assessment that provides leaders with actionable data they can't get anywhere else to understand their strengths and development needs in the context of their business situation.

The ExPI™ is unique in several ways. Unlike many assessments, we assume the **leader's adaptability**, in other words, that these qualities are ones that can be (and are) developed. The data is also interpreted **in the context of the business** giving them reason to care beyond their own development. It guides leaders to appreciate the difference between **their intentions and others' perceptions** in qualities often thought of as difficult to measure. And, it is **multi-disciplinary in its construction and depth** – a valid survey based on rigorous research in a wide variety of disciplines.



Thousands of global leaders at the world's largest companies have tapped into the data and insights that came out of their ExPI™ profile to engage and inspire their teams, and deliver on big growth goals, critical market-making moves, transformational reorganizations, game-changing acquisitions, and other important bets.

Continue reading to learn more about this powerful leadership tool.

Introduction

Tapping into the Power of Executive Presence

The recognition of the importance of Executive Presence in leadership development has been growing over the years. A study by the Center of Talent Innovation found that executive presence accounts for 26% of what it takes for a leader to get promoted. A Harvard Business Review study found that 52% of men and 45% of women surveyed said being perceived as having executive presence was more important to being promoted than having specific qualifications. And several studies have found that developing executive presence was one of the top two reasons executives received coaching.

Yet, when we first began to research executive presence in 2011, there was no clear definition of it. While senior executives would say they want their leaders to have “it,” they could not tell you exactly what they were looking for.

When we asked leaders what they meant by executive presence, even those with expertise in executive talent development would offer vague descriptors such as “gravitas,” “inspiring,” and “great communicator.” Executives would tell us they wanted more executive presence in their leaders, but how do you develop more of something when you can’t describe the specific behaviors you are looking for? “I know it when I see it” is not helpful to guide leaders on what to do differently.

As a result, we decided to find the specific behaviors behind what people mean by executive presence. To do that, we conducted the first, science-based research into executive presence. We performed an extensive review of relevant theory and empirical studies in management, communications, psychology, and social action theory by authorities in these fields. We interviewed senior line executives and HR executives to understand their reasons for caring about executive presence. Finally, we conducted in-depth discussions with experienced consultants whose work focused on helping senior leaders enhance their executive presence skills and abilities.

As we got into the research, we came to two major insights:

1. Executive presence is much more than gravitas, image, or presentation skills. It consists of 15 different sets of observable behaviors that influence a leader’s ability to engage, inspire, and align people to drive team and organizational performance. Executive presence is not just a nice thing to have. It is a critical element to be a successful business leader and deliver on strategic outcomes.

Our first insight was that we created a model and assessment that measures leadership effectiveness by looking through the lens of executive presence. We went looking for a definition of executive presence and found what makes for successful leadership.

2. While it is important for leaders to display these behaviors, the key is how *others perceive* the leader's behavior. For example, while a leader may think they are open and listen to others, they may be unaware some people perceive them as closed-minded and not listening. Effective executive presence is based on how leaders are perceived. As the saying goes, "Perception is reality." A leader does not have executive presence unless others "see it." Presence is something others bestow upon you.

This is where the Bates ExPI™ (Executive Presence Index) comes in. **We define executive presence as the ability to engage, align, inspire, and move people to act.** Effective leaders with high levels of executive presence are able to influence others to collaborate to meet business targets and achieve bottom line results.

The ExPI™ model gives leaders a comprehensive, research-based framework for understanding the observable behaviors that make leaders effective. The ExPI™ Assessment, based on the model, gathers data on how the leader as well as those who work with the leader rate the leader's ability to display those behaviors.

"Executive presence is the ability to engage, align, inspire, and move people to act."

The ExPI™ doesn't measure tendencies or a leader's personality, but how the leader's behaviors are showing up – right now. It reveals how the leader is *actually showing up*, not how they *might* show up, nor how they *intend* to show. The assessment provides the leader with actionable data and insights into how their behaviors are currently impacting others. The data allows the leader to determine which specific behaviors are helping and which are getting in the way of their performance and achieving their strategic vision. Then, the leader can decide what behaviors to continue, and which need to be modified to become even more effective.

The Foundation of Executive Presence and Effective Leadership

We organize the model into three dimensions (Character, Substance and Style) and 15 facets that our research tells us are important to both presence and leadership.

The Bates ExPI™ Model

| Character | Substance | Style |
|--|---|---|
| Authenticity Real, transparent | Practical Wisdom Insightful, relevant | Demeanor Engaging, tactful |
| Integrity Ethical, reliable | Confidence Decisive, open to dissent | Intentionality Tactical, focused |
| Concern Caring, development | Composure Steady in a crisis | Inclusiveness Involving, empowering |
| Restraint Deliberate, calm | Resonance Attuned to others | Interactivity Accessible, attentive |
| Humility Open, self-aware | Vision Strategic, inspiring | Assertiveness Vocal, constructive |

Character is composed of those behaviors that are at the core of who we are from the standpoint of our values, beliefs, and emotional disposition. Character, then, is the most foundational level of the leader as a person. **We define Character as the qualities we learn early in life that are key to building trust.** The dimension of Character includes five facets:

1. Authenticity (Being genuine and transparent, sharing relevant personal experiences)
2. Integrity (Doing the right thing, walking the talk, and keeping promises)
3. Concern (Caring for others, actively engaging, and developing others)
4. Restraint (Being calm and deliberate, avoiding emotional extremes)
5. Humility (Self-aware, open, and curious toward others)

Character = the qualities we learn early in life that are key to building trust

The **Substance** dimension is composed of behaviors that leaders tend to develop over time, unlike Character behaviors that tend to be primarily formed as children and young adults. Substance behaviors such as asking the right questions, having good business judgement and an ability to inspire others usually are developed over time through our experiences as leaders. **We define Substance as qualities that leaders develop as adults and that are important for establishing credibility.** So, while Character is about being perceived as being trustworthy, Substance is about being perceived as a credible leader. Substance is also composed of five facets that include:

Substance =
qualities that leaders develop as adults and that are important for establishing credibility

1. Practical Wisdom (Sharing relevant insights, getting to the heart of issues)
2. Confidence (Self-assured and decisive, accountable, and biased toward action)
3. Composure (Steady in a crisis, able to calm and focus others)
4. Resonance (Fully present and attentive, attuned to others' thoughts and feelings)
5. Vision (Strategic thinking and Enterprise-wide view, good at inspiring others)

The third dimension is **Style**. Style is composed of those behaviors that engage others in meaningful two-way communication. Style focuses on both the quantity and quality of the conversations needed for the collaboration required to get business results. Style then is about the leader's ability to drive execution. **We define Style as the qualities used in two-way communication to get people aligned and drive execution.** The facets of Style include:

1. Demeanor (Showing up prepared and energetic, acting like you belong)
2. Intentionality (Keeping actions aligned and on track through good dialogue)
3. Inclusiveness (Getting others involved in decisions, empowering others to have a voice)
4. Interactivity (Ensuring quantity and quality of two-way communications)
5. Assertiveness (Speaking up without shutting others down, making conflict constructive)



Style = *the qualities used in two-way communication to get people aligned and drive execution*

What's New about the Bates ExPI™

Our Approach to Leadership Effectiveness and Presence

Four features set apart our model from other leadership assessments:

- 1. Leader Adaptability:** Our assumption is that leaders can adapt their behavior and are not limited to a certain or single personality style. Once a leader appreciates how they show up in a situation, they can adapt or respond by dialing up the most effective behaviors for the situation. Unlike other personality style assessments that assume people will tend to act the same way in all situations, we recognize that leaders can and should make the active choice to adjust their behaviors to meet the demands of each circumstance.
- 2. Business Context:** The behaviors that make a leader effective in one situation may be different from the behaviors they need in a different context. Someone tasked to turn around a losing business unit will need to show up differently than someone charged with leading a merger integration. Therefore, there is no one perfect leadership profile – it depends upon the business context. We help leaders focus on meeting their current business challenges, not strive to become some vague ideal one-size-fits-all leader.
- 3. Intentions and Perceptions:** Our model and assessment help leaders develop insights into possible gaps between their intentions and other people's perceptions. The people they are trying to influence can only observe the leader's behaviors, not what the leader is thinking. Leaders are often unaware of this intentions-perceptions gap and underappreciate the impact of their behavior on others. Highlighting the gap provides tangible, actionable information about what may be getting in the way of influencing others effectively.
- 4. Multi-Disciplinary Depth:** The ExPI™ is a valid survey based on rigorous research in a wide variety of disciplines including leadership, management, communications, psychology, philosophy, ethics, and social action theory. This richness gives the assessment a comprehensive look at behavior and leadership effectiveness not available in most surveys.

Let's look at each of these factors.

Leader Adaptability

Factor 1

Most other leadership assessments assume people's style is fixed, or stable. For instance, you are an Introvert, or you are a Dominant, or you're Prudent. We do not assume leaders always behave the same way in every situation, which opens up the possibility for leaders to evolve and adjust as the business requires.

For example, research shows that 68% of people are Ambiverts – people who show up as an Introvert in some situations and as Extroverts in others. Someone may act shyly with when they are in a group where they do not feel psychologically safe and in the next meeting with people that make them feel they belong, they act differently. They are more outspoken and engaging. Think of your own experiences. You act differently in different situations.



The ExPI™ assumes that leaders have a range of behaviors on which they can draw and are not limited to a narrowly defined style or type. While people do behave somewhat predictably, they can also adapt their behavior to the immediate circumstance. And this assumption makes a significant difference in how we advise and help leaders become more effective, as this example of Margot, a leader seeming to lack Humility, demonstrates.

Lacking humility, or trying to impress and reassure?

A leader we advised, Margot, would admit to us that sometimes she was not absolutely sure that a recommendation would work when she shared it with her boss. She needed more information and insight to be more confident in the path forward. But, when she talked to her direct reports, instead of asking for input, she would boast about how great the idea was and how it would absolutely work because it was successful in a previous situation. This quickly shut down the conversation.

Margot wanted to come across as confident and reassuring, and instead came across as arrogant and closed minded, which meant she was missing valuable information that her team was reluctant and unable to share. This was a consistent pattern and Humility (one of the 15 ExPI™ facets) was one of her lowest rated facets.

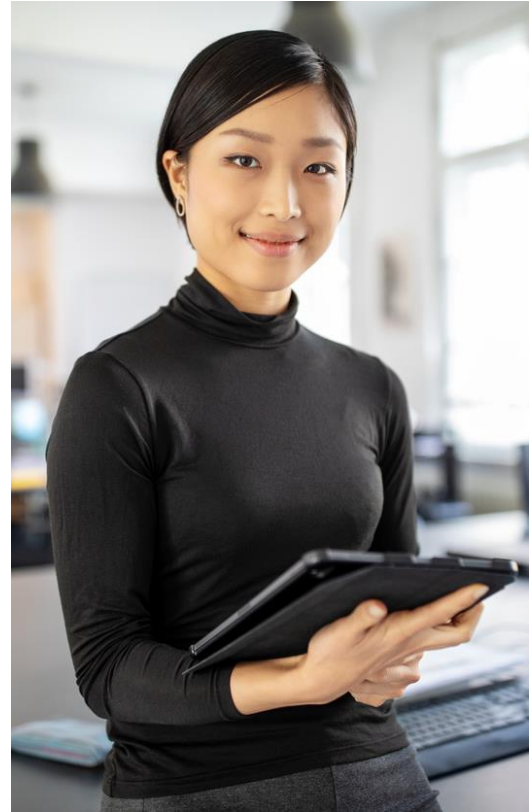
In spending time with Margot, it was clear she was capable of being humble. It was just not apparent in the way she interacted with her direct reports. She was concerned that they would be unsettled by her questioning or uncertainty and didn't make the connection to how she was shutting down her key information pipeline. Once she realized how her actions were translating for her team, it was not that hard to get her to be more transparent about her concerns and to actively seek input from them.

Business Context

Factor 2

The behaviors that make a leader effective in one situation may be different from the behaviors they need in a different context. The ExPI™ is designed to help leaders assess and understand which behaviors of theirs are required to meet their specific, current business goals, allowing them to connect their behaviors to the business outcomes that they seek.

Let's take the example of Jane. Jane had been an extremely successful leader. She had led significant revenue growth for several different divisions. Because of her record of success of turning around poorly run business units, she had been promoted several times and was now being considered to lead a critical merger integration team tasked with accelerating the pace to achieve aggressive combined revenue targets. Similar to Margot, she had relatively low Humility scores, but this behavior was not problematic in the past. In fact, she was rewarded for her action bias and getting improved financial results quickly. She had no need to seek input or connect with others before charging ahead on the changes needed. Her take-charge attitude served her well in the eyes of the CEO.



But now, her CEO was aware that her take-charge approach would not be appropriate when she had to get buy-in from the acquired company executives, whose involvement and engagement was core to collectively meeting the post-acquisition revenue targets. Jane was quick to realize that she had to show up differently and was able to tap into other behaviors to ensure the merger integration team could meet their aggressive revenue targets.

This is why we start with the business context when we work with leaders with the ExPI™. We seek to understand their business challenges up front: their strategic goals, objectives, and bottom line accountability. We use this insight to help them evaluate how their strengths are helping them meet their challenges and how their development needs might be getting in the way of key objectives and outcomes. It helps leaders make the clear and critical link between good leadership and creating business value.

There is no one perfect leadership profile. It depends upon the business context in which the leader is operating. The power of the ExPI™ is that it is not a one-size-fits-all framework but enables the leader to dial up the behaviors that matter most to their ability to influence others and deliver value now.

Intentions and Perceptions

Factor 3

“Perception is reality.” This statement is especially true when someone needs to understand how effective they are as leaders. People see and react to behaviors, not the intention someone may have in mind. People make judgments and assumptions based on our behaviors. And, these assumptions, these judgments, become mindsets we create about the leader. “He is a caring person.” “She has sound business judgment.” “He likes to avoid conflict.” “She is a humble leader.” These mindsets, based on observed behaviors, shape how others respond to us as leaders.

Jane, our example above, was completely shocked to discover Humility was one of her lowest rated facets. She considered herself to be a humble person. Her intention was to be humble. But this was not how she was perceived because of her behaviors.

We call this the intentions-perceptions gap, and it is often the biggest insight and the biggest opportunity for growth in a leader. The ability to reveal this gap is one of the unique and powerful aspects of the ExPI™.

Jane was confused. How could she be perceived as lacking humility when she saw herself as a humble person? We asked her to think of any unintentional messages she may be sending that could create an impression she thinks she knows all the answers, does not listen, or is not open to hearing other people’s ideas.

What she realized is that when she is facing a big deadline and time is of the essence she tends to retreat and work by herself. So, when others try to give her ideas to help her, she gets impatient and does not want to hear what they have to say. She suddenly realized that she gives people the impression she is not open and wants to do things her way. She was unintentionally coming across as a closed know-it-all who doesn’t care about others.

Because the ExPI™ revealed to Jane the specific behaviors that were causing this gap, she could easily alter a few of them and change how she was perceived. She was quite capable of being a humble leader, but a few changeable behaviors were blocking the ability of others to see it.

By showing leaders the specific behaviors that are creating the intentions-perceptions gap, the ExPI™ helps leaders identify what actions they need to take to close the gap.



The intentions-perceptions gap is often the biggest insight and biggest opportunity for growth in a leader.

Multi-Disciplinary Depth

Factor 4

The Bates ExPI™ Model is based on more than 100 research studies from a wide range of disciplines. The assessment dimensions, facets and questions are informed by leading research conducted by authorities in disciplines including:



- Leadership
- Management
- Communications
- Social Action Theory
- Philosophy
- Ethics
- Psychology

As a result, the ExPI™ is not narrowly focused on a past model, or a single theory, but encompasses a wide range of state-of-the-practice thinking about leadership, presence, and influence. That is why our approach to executive presence is a rich, robust, and nuanced, science-based approach to leadership that cannot be found in other assessments.

Reliability and Validation

To make sure the survey is valid and reliable, we used two different approaches.

First, we measured its reliability. Reliability is a measure of a survey's internal consistency. For the ExPI™, a reliability analysis answers the question, "Are the items in a facet measuring the same thing?" To test for reliability, we used Cronbach's Alpha, a widely accepted measure of internal consistency and content validity. The analysis showed that users of the survey can be assured that the items in each facet all measure the same quality or set of behaviors.

We also tested for what is called "face validity." The survey facets and items were reviewed by a group of international, independent Ph.Ds. and experts in the fields of leadership and organizational behavior who concluded that the ExPI™ measures "the right things." They confirmed that the items were representative of the key behaviors that make up executive presence and effective leadership.

The ExPI™ is not narrowly focused on a past model, or a single theory, but encompasses a wide range of state-of-the-practice thinking about leadership, presence, and influence.

Assessing Your Executive Presence

The ExPI™ Approach

It is important for leaders to get actionable feedback about how they are showing up. Just as important is giving leaders an opportunity to explore their feedback with an experienced coach who can help them interpret the data and determine what actions they may want to take to become even more effective.

The 360° data collection process begins by working with the leader to determine their raters. In addition to completing the survey themselves, typical rater groups include their manager, direct reports, and peers. We encourage leaders to think about others who can provide them with valuable feedback such as other key internal stakeholders and even customers. The goal is to help the leader understand how they are perceived by the people they work with and need to influence. It takes raters about 15-20 minutes to complete a survey.

Once the feedback is collected the leader receives a feedback report. Below is a sample item from the Restraint facet taken from someone's feedback report.



This item was one of the lowest rated items for this leader. The data raises the question, what may be causing this relatively low score? It could be that the leader is too busy putting out fires and doesn't feel they have the time to slow down and explain things clearly. Maybe the leader assumes that since no one asked any questions about the proposal in the meeting that everyone understands what to do next.

The data also raises the question of why some people strongly agree that this leader helps clarify their thinking (at least one peer and one direct report rated the leader a "5"), while at the same time others rate the leader a "3"? Perhaps some people have few or no questions because they have worked on something similar for this leader many times before.



The point is that it is helpful to have an objective coach who can provide leaders with a safe environment to explore their data and what it means for their effectiveness as a leader. The goal of the coach is to use inquiry to help generate insight for the leader to leverage to influence others more effectively and deliver results.

Unleashing the Power of Executive Presence to Create Value

In summary, the Bates ExPI™ is a ground-breaking, unique, research-based, valid assessment that provides leaders with actionable data they can't get anywhere else, to understand their strengths and development needs in the context of their business situation.

Thousands of global leaders at the world's largest companies have tapped into the data and insights that came out of their ExPI™ profile to engage and inspire their teams, and deliver on big growth goals, critical market-making moves, transformational reorganizations, game-changing acquisitions, and other important bets. Leadership teams have used the aggregated insights to determine whether they have the collective strengths they need to steer the company together on the path they currently seek and achieve the results for which they are accountable.

Perhaps even more important to understanding the business value of executive presence is what we have learned about the connection between the behaviors identified in the ExPI™ leadership model and creating business value through growth and innovation. Leveraging several years of data collected from over 14,000 ExPI™ surveys, we found to a high degree of statistical reliability which specific leadership qualities and behaviors are characteristic of leaders of high growth companies, and leaders of innovation. In both cases, the findings were counterintuitive to the common leadership wisdom, while also providing actionable insight for leaders to map their company's path to growth and competitive advantage. This compelling research underscores the importance of a data-driven model like the ExPI™ to unleash the power of executive presence in your company.



To learn more about the Bates ExPI™, contact us at info@bates-communications.com.