

ASSESSING CHARACTER & RESILIENCE FOR STAFF SELECTION & DEVELOPMENT



Character Assessment & Selection Tool

Sense of Purpose
Perseverance
Ownership (Responsibility)
Growth v Fixed Mindsets
Supportive/Demanding Scales

Patrick Tomlinson (2021, revised 2024)

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“A handful of talented individuals without personal discipline will lead to final failure.
Character triumphs over talent.”
(James Kerr)

Introduction

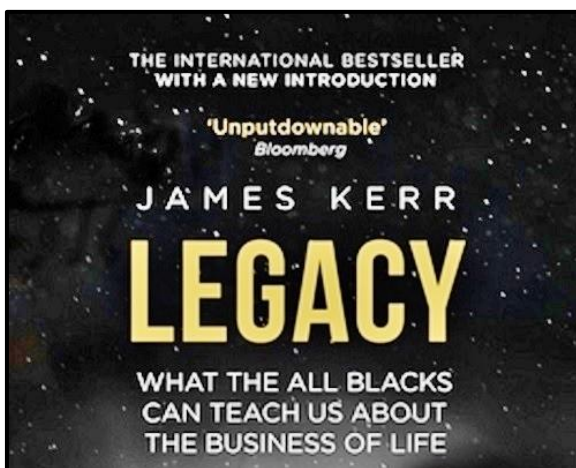
The Character Assessment & Selection Tool (CAST) was created by Patrick Tomlinson. It was designed to find a new and innovative way of identifying suitability for different roles and development needs. It is the result of many years of professional experience and research into the personal qualities and mindsets that are most associated with successful performance and development. We recognize that effective performance is influenced by many factors, such as quality of leadership, support, and culture. However, each person's unique qualities, capacity, and developmental needs play a vital part.

Many existing professional assessments focus on a person's job-specific skills, processing ability, or general personality. CAST focuses on the mindset, character, and development potential of individuals. It looks at the fit of an individual to specific roles. It does this by assessing how that individual sees the world, approaches problems, and relates to others. It is particularly successful in determining fit for roles that require a high level of resilience, drive, and determination to be successful.

The Purpose of CAST is to assist, **1.** organizations in achieving excellent outcomes in staff selection, retention, and development, and **2.** professionals in identifying their developmental needs and objectives to fulfill their personal and professional ambitions. It can be used in any profession, at any level, - from entry to CEO. It is especially relevant to those involved in demanding and challenging work.

Procedure:

The assessment is carried out through a one-to-one online interview, taking approximately 75 minutes. The interview consists of many short questions, some with a simple scoring system. After the interview, a detailed report is provided, summarizing the individual's strengths and vulnerabilities with recommendations for development.



Why Character?

*"The 1st step in developing a high-performance culture – select on character."
(Owen Eastwood, Leadership Consultant)*

While an individual's skills give you a good idea of how he or she may accomplish a task, character will tell you more about how that person approaches their life and work, and how they will apply themselves over time. A high level of talent is not the same as a high level of application. This is especially relevant in any team setting. An

exceptionally talented person who is not perceived to be 'pulling his or her weight' for the team can even have a demoralizing influence. Talent on its own does not predict future development. Application, discipline, and deliberate practice are necessary. This is captured well, by Rowdy Gaines, the swimmer who won a Gold Medal in the 100m freestyle at the 1984 Olympics. Referring to his 8 years of focused practice preparing for the event, he said,

I swam around the world for a race that lasted 90 seconds. (Duckworth, 2016, p.132)

Character rather than talent is more likely to influence someone's development in the medium to long term. A simple online test can tell you how quickly and accurately an individual may solve a

problem but will not tell you how they generally approach problems, or how they overcome hurdles.

What is Resilience?

Resilience is often referred to as the ability to 'bounce back'. A resilient person is not someone invulnerable and without setbacks, but someone who can work through them. Resilient people tend to learn from setbacks, difficulties, and failures. Failure is not a huge problem and is necessary for development. The ability to bounce back will be determined by the level of difficulty in the situation, the individual's character, and the quality of relationships around them.

While we may talk about a resilient person, resilience should not be seen as a static and fixed quality. We should be careful to avoid labeling people in a fixed way as either being resilient or not. Our resilience varies according to our circumstances and times in our lives. Resilience is related to several factors. **1)** The demands of a particular situation. **2)** The individual's characteristics and skills. **3)** The quality of support available. Understanding all three of these factors and the relationship between them can make a big difference in resilience. Getting the combination right can greatly improve a person's resilience.

In stressful work which can have a huge psychological impact on the worker, their psychological resilience will be a major factor in determining survival and effectiveness. However, it is not just whether a person can keep going or not, it is also a question of *how* the person keeps going. Jobs with important levels of responsibility usually require a level of steadiness and reliability. They also require a level of sensitivity and an accurate perception of what is happening in complex situations. This means that the person's 'defence mechanisms will also have a major influence.

Defence Mechanisms

Defence mechanisms develop during our formative years and may be modified over time. Because of constitutional factors and formative experiences, we all differ in our ability to tolerate and manage stress (Khaleelee, 2007). Defence mechanisms are how we react internally and often unconsciously to perceived threats. They protect us from being overwhelmed but also make reality more bearable by distorting our perception of it. Commonly used terms such as 'laughing in the face of adversity', denial and repression give a clear sense of this. Too much of a defence mechanism(s) can seriously undermine our ability to function effectively, though it may help us to 'keep going'. Too little and we may be overwhelmed and unable to function well. So, our defence mechanisms, or how 'thick or thin-skinned' we are, influence the nature of our resilience.

Defence mechanisms in a healthy sense are like the 'shock absorbers' of the mind. As defence mechanisms operate beneath the surface, while we may be able to notice patterns and tendencies, they are not easy to identify in any routine interview or assessment process. In the 1950s Kragh developed the Defence Mechanism Test, specifically for this purpose. First, it was used in the selection of fighter pilots. It helped identify responses to threats, which were not picked up in the usual selection process. This helped reduce costly mistakes in combat situations. Since then, it has been used for selection in other physically dangerous jobs, such as deep-sea diving. In more recent years it has been used for executive selection and development. Senior management and leadership positions, whilst usually not physically dangerous, can carry huge psychological threats. These threats can also feel like a matter of life and death. Other powerful and potentially disturbing projections such as abandonment, attack, rejection, denigration, and dependency, are often involved.

CAST examines how a person's character is influenced by their sense of purpose, perseverance, ownership (their outlook and responsibility for themselves), and growth mindset. Each of these

overlaps. While the person's views on these distinct aspects are explicit the connection between them may not be. He or she may not be consciously aware of how their views and beliefs combine to have a powerful influence on their progress in life and work. While these are more conscious aspects of personality compared with Defence Mechanisms, they can also give us a good insight into how a person is likely to respond to challenging and threatening situations.

Together these four qualities of character contribute to the level of responsibility and demand that a person may be capable of now and how they may develop. For instance, a growth mindset means that when faced with an obstacle, the person may see it as a challenge to find a way around rather than give up. A powerful sense of purpose will further reinforce this. The ability to persevere and take responsibility for oneself is also important. Each of these qualities can feed into each other negatively or positively. Identifying them and the relationship between them can help assess suitability for a specific role and what will help the person develop.

Character, Resilience, and Development

Character rather than technical ability is intricately connected to resilience. Sarah Dowzell (2020), COO and co-founder of [Natural HR](#) says,

Resilience is the most important soft skill to have and will continue to be crucial

It determines not only a person's ability to survive but also to thrive in challenging situations. Effective resilience combines sensitivity and emotional intelligence with coping abilities. Character and resilience shape a person's attitude towards life, work, and development. Kerr (2013) advises that one of the first steps in developing a high-performance culture is to select based on a person's character.

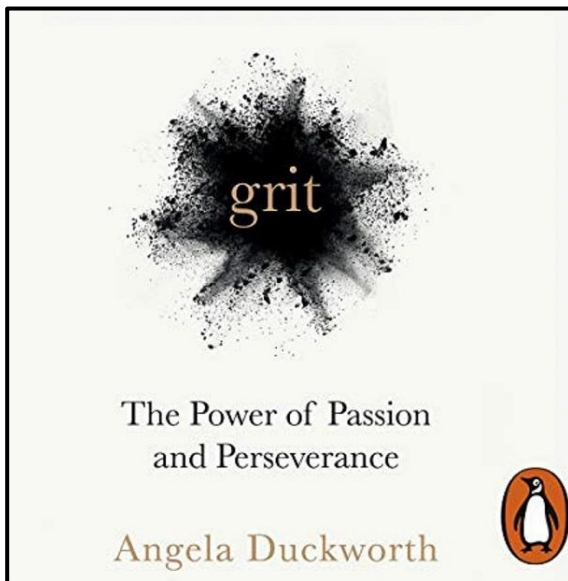
CAST can be used to inform decision-making on the selection of new staff, as well as the promotion or change of role for existing staff. By identifying development needs CAST can also be used in general to promote professional development. It assesses:

- The personal qualities and mindsets that are linked with resilience, positive performance, and development.
- Where a person is now in their development.
- A person's resilience and development needs, in highly challenging situations. This includes roles as far-ranging as senior management to being a foster carer. Resilience is related to the environment as well as the individual. Therefore, identifying development needs can improve resilience.
- The level of demand and responsibility that an individual is currently capable of.
- Whether a person is suited to working on their own as well as in a team. Some people are most effective when working as part of a group and others can manage the more isolated type of roles. Identifying this may be especially helpful when it comes to remote working, which will suit some people well, but others will struggle with it.
- Potential for growth and development in the short to long term.

Results from the assessment provide important information to consider an applicant's suitability for a role and potential for development. This can also be used to help create an Individual Development Plan. It is anticipated that the consistent use of the assessment in organizations will contribute to significant improvements in,

- ✓ retention
- ✓ reduced absence from work

- ✓ engagement
- ✓ quality of performance
- ✓ development



In addition to purpose, perseverance, ownership, and growth mindsets, CAST looks at two additional important development qualities – supportiveness and demandingness. Angela Duckworth (2016) in her influential book, *Grit: The Power and Passion of Perseverance*, explains how these qualities are the foundation for achievement. Referring to a vast amount of research she shows how they are vitally important in any profession, from a teacher to a marine, student, athlete, and firefighter, among others.

The biggest resource in any organization is its people. There can hardly be a more important task than selecting the right people for the right job and then helping them develop. The benefits of fulfilled potential are immense. On the other hand, not achieving potential is wasteful and sometimes damaging. High staff turnover on its own can have a substantial impact on performance. An unstable workforce inevitably challenges quality. In some fields of work, predictability, reliability, and familiarity are vital to the service. For example, where the relationships between those involved are central to the task. Fallout and breakdown in these relationships can seriously undermine progress. The costs can be huge on many levels – for example, the financial cost of continuous recruitment, organizational cost, personal cost, and societal cost. While there are various contributing factors involved in staff retention and development, effective staff selection and development are always an important part. The same principles apply in all fields of work and industry.

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APPENDIX 1 - GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Personal Development - The way someone has developed over time and his/her/their potential development. Each person's development is unique with different development styles. Different personal qualities may either promote or hinder development. Personal development is a lifelong process. The development during the formative years has a considerable influence on professional development.

Professional Development – The way someone develops and progresses over time in work. Professional development is influenced by personal development and vice-versa. For this assessment, the individual's general qualities rather than technical skills are assessed. These qualities are highly relevant to how a person progresses professionally in any field of work.

Sense of Purpose – Having a clear view of one's life purpose and commitment to it. A powerful sense of purpose is like a vocation or calling. A job or occupation is seen as contributing to a bigger cause that benefits others. Having a clear sense of purpose is strongly linked with resilience and development.

Perseverance - The ability to carry out continuous deliberate practice, to persist and overcome obstacles. Each person's capacity is unique. It can change, grow, and develop. Perseverance is strongly linked to resilience and development.

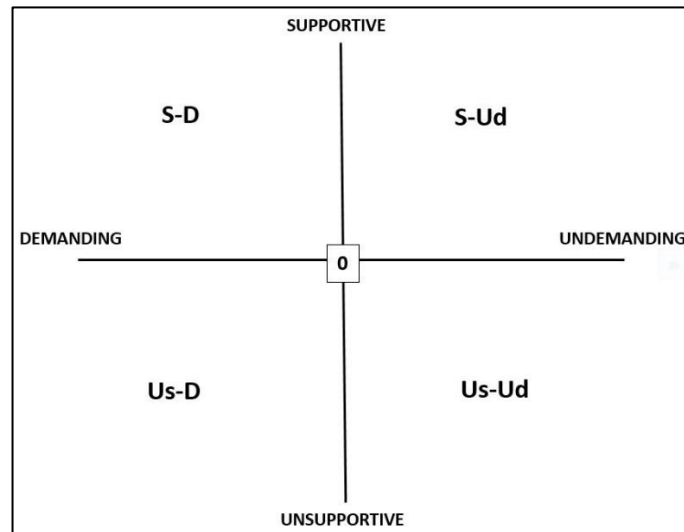
Ownership (Responsibility) – The capacity to take ownership of one's life, challenges, and development. People with strong ownership take responsibility for themselves in all aspects of life. They also tend to have a positive outlook.

Growth v Fixed Mindsets – A person's outlook on change and development can be categorized into growth and fixed mindsets. People with growth mindsets tend to believe in the possibility of change at the micro and macro levels – from self to society. They tend to see difficulty as an opportunity. People with fixed mindsets, tend to believe that change is not so likely. People with growth mindsets are more likely to persevere and work through difficulties rather than give up. Growth mindsets are like having an open mind and fixed mindsets are like a closed mind.

Resilience - The capacity to sustain oneself in challenging situations. The ability to keep on a positive pathway following setbacks. Resilience is important to continuous positive development. Sense of Purpose, Perseverance, Ownership, and Growth Mindsets all contribute to resilience and development. Resilience is not simply a fixed individual quality. It varies throughout life, according to personal circumstances and the relationship with one's environment. Therefore, the CAST assessment can potentially improve resilience by heightening the awareness of an individual and their professional context.

Supportive – Demanding Scales - Development is spurred both by demands and support. Demands push, focus, and stretch a person, while support encourages and enables. It is the balance of the two that leads to optimal development.

Our first experiences of development are as an infant. They are significantly influenced by our parents and other caregivers. This continues throughout childhood and into adulthood. The word parent derives from the Latin verb 'parere' – 'to bring forth, develop or educate'. Therefore, parenting style has general relevance – to the work with clients, colleagues, and teams. A person often has a similar approach to other people's development as they do to their own. By using a horizontal demanding scale and a vertical supportive scale, four quadrants are created.



- Supportive-Demanding – **S-D**
- Supportive-Undemanding – **S-Ud**
- Unsupportive-Undemanding **Us-Ud**
- Unsupportive-Demanding – **Us-D**

Referring to parenting Duckworth (2016) refers to these same quadrants as,

- Wise Parenting
- Permissive Parenting
- Neglectful Parenting
- Authoritarian Parenting

Supportive means the quality of nurturing development, through encouragement, concern, empathy, and positive reinforcement. Demanding means having clear expectations, goal-setting, constructive criticism, challenging, holding accountable, and a focus on improvement. Research has shown (Duckworth, 2016) that those who are in the S-D quadrant are likely to achieve the most positive development outcomes. Through experience and practice, it is possible to improve one's development style.

'Parenting' Style, Personal Development – This scale focuses on how a person is likely to approach the development of themselves and others. It is especially relevant to 'parenting' and to work with clients. Developing a prominent level of competence in this area can support professional development and people management. The two scales often overlap.

Professional Development Style, People Management – This scale focuses on how a person is likely to approach the management and development of colleagues or team members at work. It may also reflect a person's approach to their development. It is especially relevant to progress into management and senior positions. This area of development can be challenging and should always be considered a part of continuous development.

Potential Development - This is the pathway a person may aim for. Each person's pathway is different, both in terms of direction and pace. However, everyone has the potential to develop and grow. The starting point is knowing where one is and where one would like to get to. Potential

development is usually helped by the support, encouragement, and expectations of others. One's commitment to development and ongoing perseverance is also key.

Development Plan - An individual's development plan is a way of capturing developmental needs and turning them into focused goals. The goals need to be relevant to the individual's development and the role that he/she is in. Individual and organizational goals need to be aligned. The plan is agreed between the individual and their supervisor/mentor. Usually, a plan looks at the year ahead and progress is reviewed regularly. At the end of the year, it is fully reviewed, and a new plan is created.

APPENDIX 2 – CAST REPORT EXAMPLE

This assessment can be used to consider the suitability of the candidate for different professional roles. It focuses on the candidate's character and development in terms of,

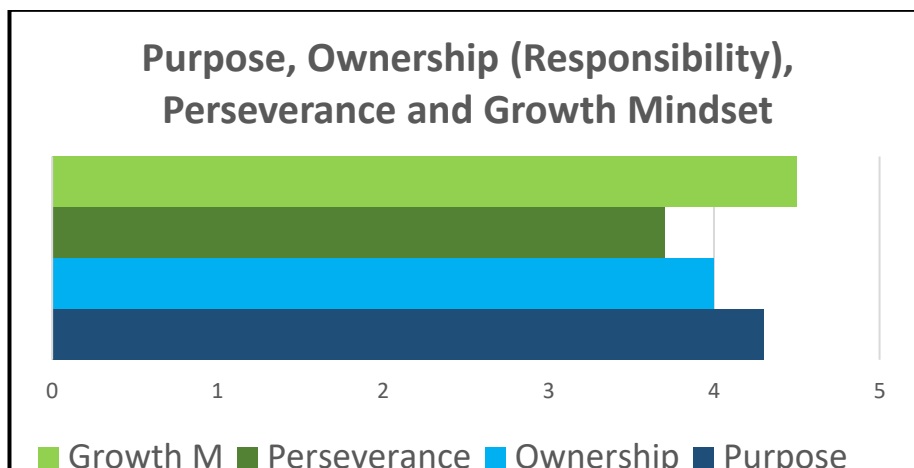
- Sense of purpose
- Perseverance
- Ownership (Responsibility)
- Growth v Fixed Mindset
- Supportive-Demanding scales - approach to the development of self and others

The assessment focuses on characteristics that are associated with successful performance and positive development. It can also be used to inform the candidate's development plan. For a full picture of the candidate's present capability and potential - this assessment should be considered alongside an assessment of the candidate's professional skill set and capability.

Candidate: Alex
Organization:

Assessor:
Date:

Assessment Results

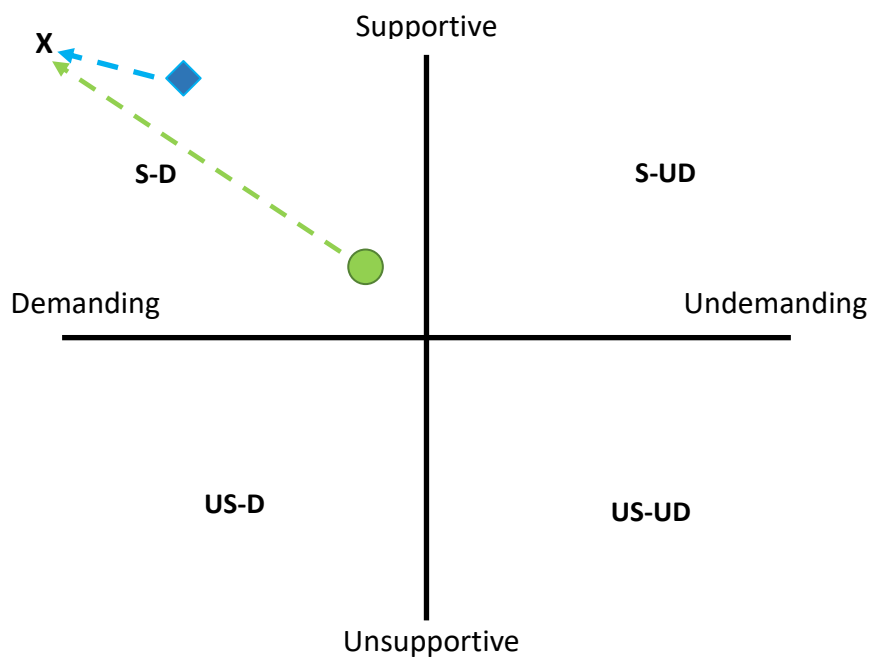


Summary: Alex has a strong sense of purpose supported by a positive change mindset. Her sense of purpose and belief in the possibility of change are connected. This positive philosophy is reflected in her development, responsibility, and willingness to take on new challenges. Alex's perseverance is not so strong, and she may lose her focus especially when she feels unsupported. On these occasions, she may appear to take less responsibility for herself.

SUPPORTIVE-DEMANDING SCALES

The quadrant that is most associated with positive development is the supportive-demanding quadrant (S-D). The letter X represents the ideal position within the quadrant. The ◆ & ● indicates where the candidate is now. The dashed lines are the developmental pathways to optimize potential development (X).

- ◆ = 'Parenting'/Personal Development Style
- = Professional Development/People Management Style
- X = Optimal score Supportive-Demanding Scale



- ◆ = 'Parenting'/Personal Development Style

Alex has a strong style, which is well-balanced between a supportive and demanding approach. This means that she understands the need for nurture as well as clear expectations. She is likely to be highly competent in this area and her work with clients. This may be due to life and work experiences.

- = Professional Development/People Management Style

Alex has a good balance between supportive and demanding styles. However, there is room for development in both. She tends to be more supportive than demanding. Colleagues and direct reports are likely to find her supportive but may not be fully stretched by her. A focus on this area helps develop the skills to become a successful manager in a challenging environment. Because Alex has developed a positive level of overall competency but is not so high on the adult demanding scale there could be a tendency to stay within a comfort zone.

Overall Summary: Alex's assessment results suggest she is a resilient person with a strong sense of purpose. She has a change mindset and a positive level of perseverance. However, there may be a tendency to lose focus. There may be an avoidance of highly demanding situations especially where she perceives that conflict could be involved. With her keen sense of purpose, she may try to solve

problems on her own and overwork. So, there is a risk of excessive tiredness coupled with frustration.

Alex has achieved positive development and a proficient level of competency. However, in a management role, she may struggle to have consistent expectations of others, to keep task-orientated, and to hold people accountable.

Alex's assessment results suggest she has the potential to become effective in a management position in the next year or so.

Recommendations for Development

- 1.** To further develop Alex will need stretching in her work. She will benefit from a supportive manager who will keep her on task. Without this, there will be a tendency to drift in her work and development.
- 2.** As Alex tends to be more supportive than demanding in her work with colleagues, this should be explored in supervision with her manager. It will be helpful for her to identify her concerns and find ways of overcoming her anxiety.
- 3.** Monitor the 'dips' in Alex's perseverance and explore what they may be about. Discuss what kind of support is most helpful and how she might manage herself more consistently. Consider whether a mentoring/coaching process might be helpful.
- 4.** It will also be helpful to monitor and regularly review her tendency to over-work and take too much on herself.
- 5.** As part of Alex's development plan, it will help to identify a project where she takes a lead role with her colleagues. Her progress in this can then be regularly reviewed and worked on. A supportive approach, but also holding her to account will be important.
- 6.** Clarifying her medium to long-term direction will further strengthen her sense of purpose. She is competent in working with clients and could develop as a specialist in this. On the other hand, she also has management potential. Her preferred direction is not clear.

ENDORSEMENTS

‘ The CAST Assessment tool is brilliantly insightful and delivered in a careful, thoughtful, and affirming way that encourages self-care and self-challenge. It's different from other assessment tools in that it examines aspects of 'character' (as opposed to personality), to understand individuals' potential for leadership, resilience, and undertaking high-level responsibility. I'd really recommend CAST for recruiting to board or high-level roles, and when promoting individuals in-house. It's an exceptional analysis. **Juliet Allan - Development Lead, Marketing Director, England**

‘ CAST is a very, very smart tool indeed. I was thoroughly impressed with the process too, it's very personable and sincerely accurate. If you are serious about your personal/professional development and the development of others, then look no further.

The assessment is extremely thorough. The results are very revealing and provide clarity and awareness of what and where to improve. CAST has had a genuine impact and focus on the adaptations needed and resilience required to adopt them. As a direct consequence, I would highly recommend this tool. **Wayne Okell MBE - Director of Talent & Performance, UK**

‘ We have commissioned over 15 CAST assessments during the past two years - mainly to focus on the development of managers and senior staff, and for selection purposes. The assessments in our experience are an accurate indicator of a person's current mindset and abilities. They also highlight the areas of development to focus on what would enable an individual not only to develop professionally but also personally.

There are several examples I can recall where the CAST assessment identified strengths and areas of development in an individual early on in their employment with our organisation that became uncannily and highly accurate once the individual/s became embedded in their role.

I believe in the CAST assessment to the point that the report generated from an assessment of a candidate for a key role in our organisation would have a big part to play in the decision-making process on appointments and professional development plans. **Mark McSherry - Director, Attuned Programmes Ireland, Ireland**

‘ The relational approach utilized to complete the CAST I felt set it superior to other tools as within that relational exchange Patrick was able to ascertain more about my personal qualities but more importantly my values. The assessment process, written report, and feedback were exceptional. **Edel Walsh - Assistant Commissioner, N. Ireland**

‘ Engaged to support the company's understanding of staff development and the needs of our employees, several staff assessments were carried out. From Owner/Director to entry-level, almost a fifth of our workforce was assessed to help us better understand their needs and how they fit into the company's overall mission.

The results could not be more positive. Through a simple question and answer process, completed over a 75-minute session, we gained insight into employees' strengths and challenges, appropriate methods of support, and current and future role suitability.

For any company wanting to gain a greater understanding of their employees and how they and you can best support the task, I would highly recommend this assessment. **Sean Dunne - Operations Manager, Total Care Matters, England**

I thoroughly enjoyed this Assessment. It was relaxed, friendly, and informative and I was put at ease throughout the assessment process. The various parts of the assessment and the research supporting each part were explained. The feedback was excellent and informative. I could identify with the strengths and areas for development that the assessment highlighted. It helped me reflect on my current abilities and highlighted the areas I need to focus on to help my development in the future. This has helped me understand myself better and my behaviour in organizations.

CAST was especially helpful as I recently made the transition to managing people. It has helped give me a clearer sense of purpose and direction and supported me to be more comfortable using and setting boundaries. The development plan suggested was useful and I am now using this in supervision with my manager. I have set clearer and more focused goals in the shorter and longer term to help my career development.

I would highly recommend CAST for anyone seeking to understand their strengths and areas for development and to help them set clear development goals for the future. **Andrew Davies - Senior Fieldwork Manager, UK**

I am a senior social worker within a Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland. My current role is as a team leader in a children's home. Recently, Patrick carried out the Assessment for me, and for two of my colleagues who I supervise.

As an individual, having the assessment done has enabled me to think about the risk of burnout and what I would need to focus on to reach my potential as a practitioner. It has also made me think more about the type of work I am suited to and could retain resilience. From a supervisor's point of view, having feedback about my colleagues has allowed me to be more focused during their supervision on the aspects of their professional character that would impede development and resilience.

For one it is her flight response. For another, her capacity to identify her limits and achieve better by being more goal-orientated, given she would tend to just plod along. I think seeing the assessment has improved their confidence and ability. They accept themselves as versatile practitioners, given they felt seen and understood. The reports are written carefully in a way that is not negative or shaming, hence their ability to accept their professional selves and move forward. I would recommend CAST for any manager who wants to focus on selecting the appropriate staff for positions and/or identifying ways of developing resilience. **Darlene Lyons - Team Leader, Northern Trust, N. Ireland**

I found CAST extremely helpful in providing me with an understanding of my strengths and areas of future work. Having a greater awareness of areas requiring development gives me an understanding of where my focus should be.

I would highly recommend this assessment as a tool for staff appointment and retention. It would be advisable to use it for a workforce in terms of staff development. This assessment not only identifies the right people for an organization but continues as a management tool. Thanks, I believe I have made improvements in my performance following my assessment. **Tanushree Handoo - Founder, i-being, India**

I found the assessment process straightforward, engaging, and thought-provoking. The outcomes of the assessment were representative of my approach to work and family life. The value of the process was that it raised to conscious awareness, ideas, and values that influence my approach to life and relationships on a mostly subconscious level. This allowed me to engage in thoughtful reflection and decision-making about my approach to personal and professional matters going forward. In this sense, the Assessment supported valuable insights and a sense of empowerment. **Colby Pearce - Clinical Psychologist, Adelaide, Australia**

I valued the one-to-one approach used for the assessment, and the personal brief given of the results, opening a conversation for further developments. I found the assessment able to catch and describe aspects of my personal development that were, up to that time, a feeling about myself, while they are now clear and convertible to measurable goals. Other aspects emerged that I could recognise as accurate about myself, but that I never acknowledged existed before. I found the whole assessment process educational and actionable. Thank you again. **Giulia Prence - Health & Safety Visiting Lecturer at Middlesex University, UK**

Through the assessment interview, I was helped to identify the main characteristics associated with my leadership abilities and skills. The results and, most of all, the way they were presented to me, gave me important information to set goals for professional development. I highly recommend any professional working in the childcare field take the assessment for its usefulness as a tool for improving relationships with young people, co-workers, and organizations. **Rui Lopes - Director de Casa de Acolhimento Residencial, Lisbon Area, Portugal**

CAST is a highly practical tool that complements standard recruitment procedures, offering a great benefit to individuals and organizations alike. The considered approach to staff recruitment and development encompasses a true understanding of the qualities most relevant to professionals working with people across the lifespan. Throughout my participation in the interview process, I was honoured to recognise that my life experience has contributed infinitely to my purposeful work with adolescents. The results of the assessment process were consistent with feedback I have received both personally, and professionally. Verbal and written feedback gave me valuable insight into my strengths and areas for development that enabled me to position my career goals effectively. **Luci Klendo - Therapeutic Specialist, MacKillop Family Services, Melbourne, Australia**

CAST has been very helpful in assisting with my professional development. It has had a positive impact on my working skills and personal development, as it provided me with valuable knowledge and guidance. **Stavroula Marifi - Family Early Help Key Worker at Southwark Council, London, UK**



Patrick Tomlinson Brief Biography: The primary goal of Patrick's work is the development of people and organizations. Development is the driving force related to positive outcomes in all areas of life and work. It is strongly associated with happiness and fulfillment, which underpins achievement.

His experience spans from 1985, mainly in the field of developing mental health and care services. Beginning as a residential care worker, his roles have included senior leadership positions, consultant, and mentor. He is a qualified clinician and author of numerous publications. Patrick has vast experience in the selection, training, and development of individuals, teams, and organizations. He has carried out longitudinal studies and research on staff retention. He has helped organizations significantly reduce the costs of ineffective staff selection and development. In 2008 Patrick Tomlinson Associates was founded to provide development services for people and organizations globally.

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