

The Golden Thread: Aligning Competency-Based Hiring, Selection, & Evaluation for Administrators and Executive Directors

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Sara Taylor is a seasoned education leader with expertise in professional learning, talent acquisition, and data-driven decision-making. She is passionate about creating inclusive systems that promote equity, belonging, and success for all students and educators. With advanced degrees in business administration, education, and non-profit management, and a deep commitment to educational excellence, Sara empowers schools and organizations to thrive through innovative strategies and compassionate leadership.



Why this session?

Hiring and supporting senior leaders is one of the highest-stakes decisions a school or network makes.

Misalignment across hiring, selection, and evaluation quietly undermines even strong leaders.

Alignment creates clarity, equity, and sustainability.

**Choose
one
leadership
role to use
throughout
today's
session.**

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Executive Director
- Senior Director or
Network Leader

The Golden Thread Concept



What we hire for

How we will
evaluate

What we CAN
support & coach

What we CAN'T
support & coach

When the Thread Breaks

**Misaligned
onboarding &
expectations**

**Surprise during
evaluations**

**Coaching that feels
disconnected from
expectations**

**Subjective /
Inconsistent
hiring decisions**

A coherent leadership system includes:



Role purpose & context



Core leadership competencies



Hiring and selection signals



Coaching & development supports

Competency Examples

instructional
leadership

inspirational
leadership

strategic
leadership

finance &
budgeting

recruitment
and hiring

culture
building

storytelling

conflict
resolution

analytic
thinking

detail-
orientation

Achievement Orientation

DRIVE RESULTS: Achievement Orientation

Band 1 & 2

Tenacious and strive for efficiency as individual contributors.

Pushes projects forward despite obstacles and remains focused.

Depicts a sense of urgency for solving problems and getting work done in the most efficient manner.

Completes work assignments promptly and efficiently.

Encourages everyone to be professional at all times, i.e., accurate, punctual and reliable.

Seeks feedback from stakeholders to help improve performance.

Band 3 & 4

Promote alignment across the organization to achieve individual and team goals.

Infuses clarity in team structure, accountability and goals.

Eliminates unnecessary bureaucracy and inefficiency in work processes and procedures.

Involves employees in planning, problem solving and decision-making on matters that affect team performance.

Clearly explains to others when their expectations are at odds with the goals of the project or program.

Establishes methods for open communication and decision making to support team cohesion and performance.

Band 5

Improve team performance towards achieving team and organizational goals.

Helps others generate breakthrough ideas, fresh perspectives and new approaches.

Creates a safe and positive environment for self and others to try and learn new ways of doing things.

Empowers all employees to be effective and to champion continuous improvement.

Empowers team members to propose approaches to increase performance and deliver results in shorter timeframe (or at lower cost, etc.).

Does not rest on past successes; establishes new "stretch" goals for the team that accelerate the the organization.

Band 6 & 7

Champion broad initiatives to improve organizational performance and deliver on organizational goals.

Champions initiatives across organizational boundaries to achieve a new operational efficiency.

Seeks to expand the acceptable boundaries of risk in order to position the organization for success.

Creates an environment in which all systems and processes support high levels of efficiency.

Develops and executes organizational plans and budgets to surpass or leverage targets.

Seeks new opportunities to improve outcomes using approaches to overcome obstacles and surpass performance.

Band 8

Optimize systems, processes, and development to maximize broad organizational success.

Makes significant, lasting changes in climate, culture or focus of the organization to improve operational and academic excellence and organizational success.

Creates new systems or structures to support long-term strategy and requisite supporting behaviors.

Recognizes employees, teams and groups who exemplify organizational excellence.

Champions the ongoing spirit of improvement and professional growth across the organization.

Articulates a vision for academic and operational excellence, including the strategic, long-term management of finances and people.

Leadership Competency Mapping

List 10 to 15 competencies that might determine success in your selected role.

Focus on observable leadership capabilities, not personality traits.

**Compare
your lists
with a
partner:**

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- **Which competencies could you coach or develop?**
 - **Which does the person need to have on Day One?**
 - **Circle the three competencies that, if missing, would cause real harm.**

What patterns did you notice?

Which competencies consistently surfaced as essential?

What

What does this competency actually look like when someone is doing it well?

Where

Where does this competency explicitly show up in the job description, role expectations, and hiring process?

When

When do candidates have opportunities during the hiring process to demonstrate this competency?

How

How do we currently determine whether a candidate is strong in this area, and is that evidence-based or intuitive?

Watch for Gaps

**Vague Job
Descriptions**

**Unaligned
Interview
Questions**

**Failing to
Assess
Experience**

**Decisions based on
intuition rather than
evidence**

Executive Director



**Instructional
Leadership**



**Team
Leadership**



**Decision
Making**



**Impact &
Influence**

**Mission & values-alignment are
competencies for every position.**

Impact and Influence

Articulates a clear, values-aligned vision; builds trust and shared ownership across diverse stakeholders; inspires confidence through message and action, especially during moments of change/uncertainty.

Exceeds Expectations

Consistently inspires confidence and shared purpose, demonstrates deep alignment to community values, and shows clear evidence of trust-building across stakeholders.

Meets Expectations

Communicates a clear and values-aligned message, demonstrates awareness of audience and context, and shows credible potential to inspire others.

Below Expectations

Message lacks clarity, authenticity, or alignment; relies on generic leadership language; or shows limited awareness of audience or impact.

Hiring Process

01

Application

Questions aligned to: mission, values, & influence.

02

Video Screening

Questions aligned to: mission, values, & team leadership.

03

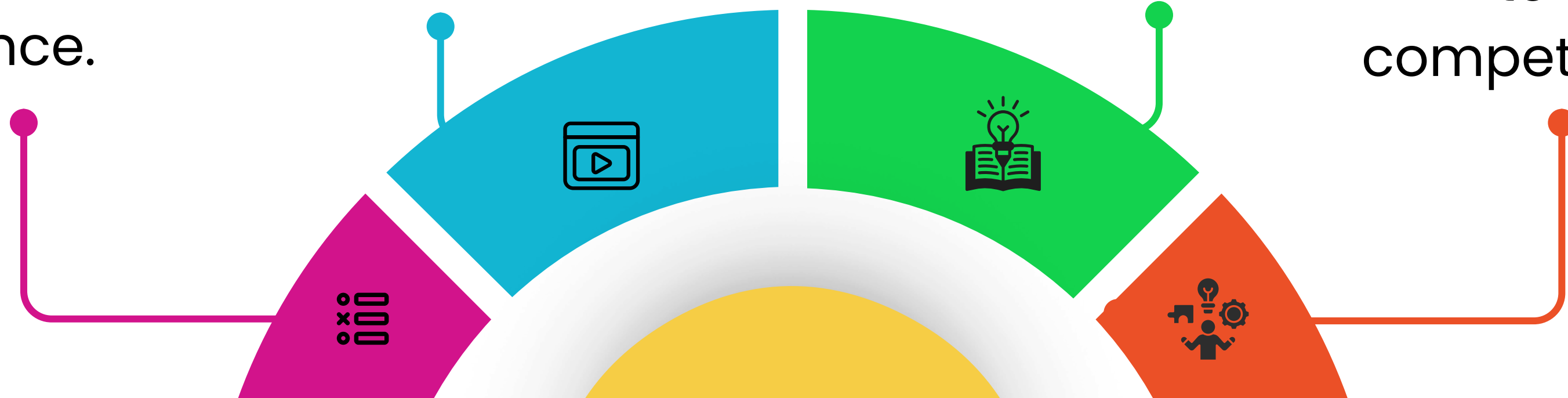
Performance Task

Questions aligned to: instructional leadership, decision making, & influence.

04

Final Interview

Questions aligned to all competencies.



Application Process Tips

01

Application

Questions aligned to: mission, values, & influence.

- Anchor to competencies, not credentials
- Do not repeat the resume
- Replace the cover letter with 2–3 pointed prompts
- Signal how responses will be used
- Standardize review criteria
- Offer alternative response formats (recordings, etc.)



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Application Question

01

Tell us why you are interested in the role of Executive Director at _____ School. What draws you to our community and to the role of Executive Director?

Application

Questions aligned to: mission, values, & influence.



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Application Look Fors

01

Application

Questions aligned to: mission, values, & influence.

- Clear articulation of why this specific school and community matter to the candidate
- Alignment between personal leadership values and the school's mission, context, and needs
- Language that reflects respect for the community and its history



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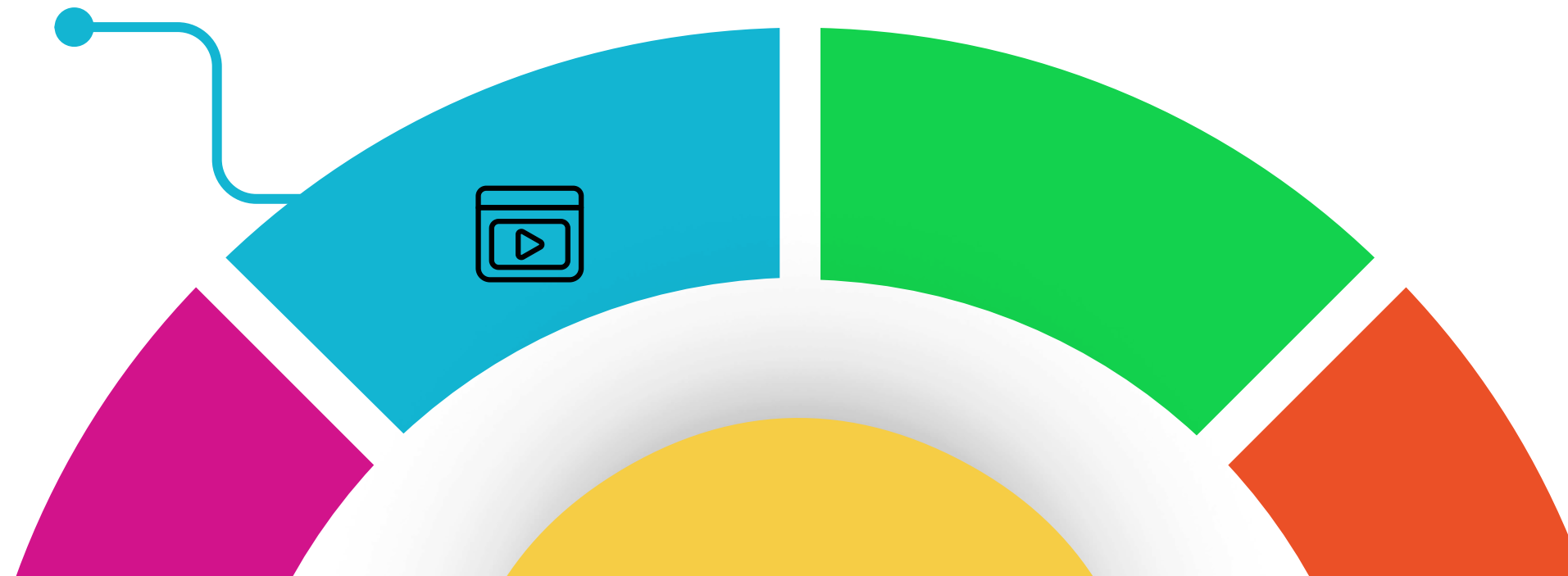
Video Screening Tips

02

Video Screening

Questions aligned to: mission, values, & team leadership.

- Screen for competencies, not culture fit
- Use 3–4 structured, competency-linked prompts for every candidate and avoid resume walkthroughs
- Keep the screen focused and time-bound
- Listen for indicators, not answers
- Score in real time using shared language
- Close with clarity



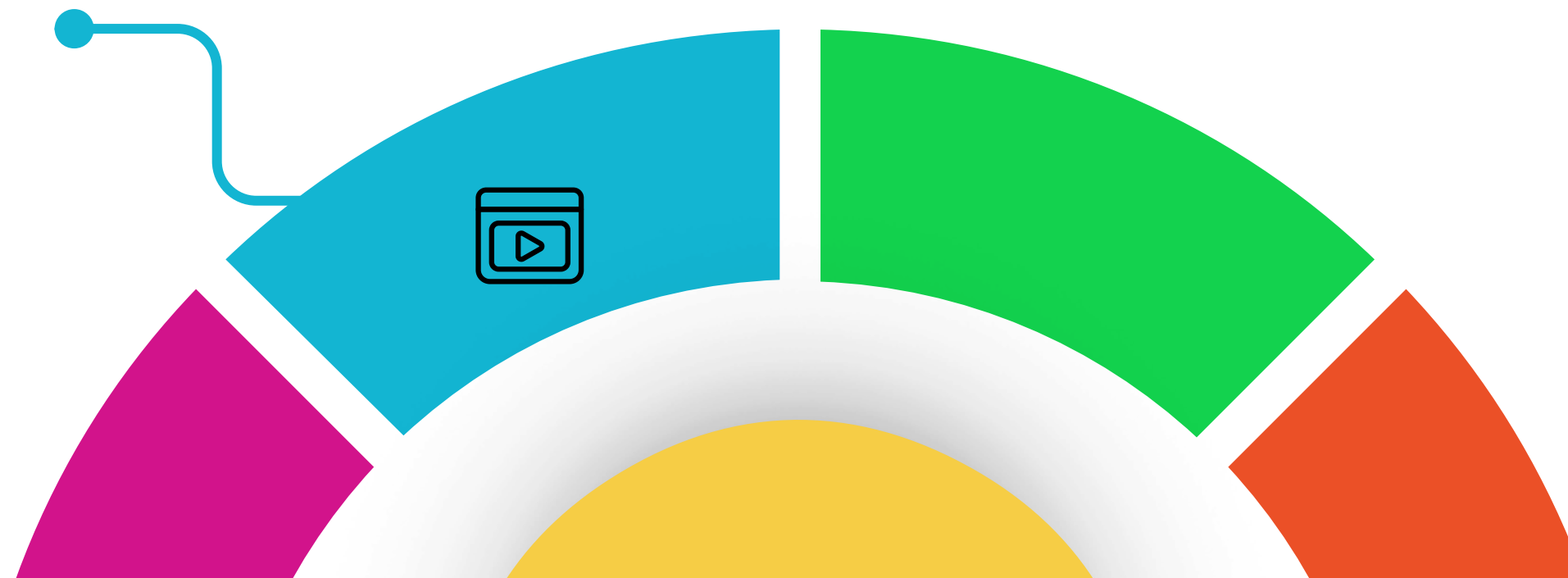
Screening Question

02

Video Screening

Questions aligned to: mission, values, & team leadership.

Think about a time when your leadership vision was not immediately embraced by staff, families, or the board. How did you adjust your approach to build shared ownership without compromising core values?



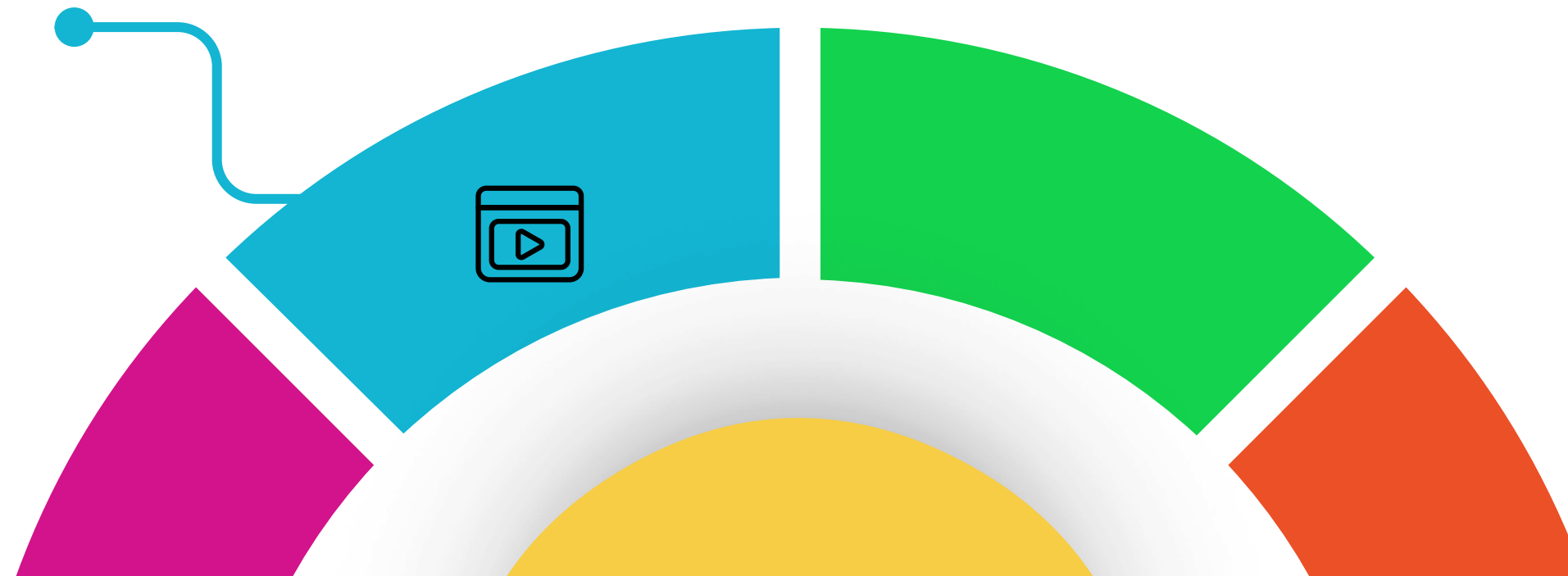
Screening Question Look Fors

02

Video Screening

Questions aligned to: mission, values, & team leadership.

- Ability to reflect on resistance without defensiveness
- Thoughtful adjustment of approach while maintaining core values
- Evidence of listening, learning, and relational leadership



Performance Task Tips

- Design directly from competencies
- Use real work, not hypothetical busywork
- Be explicit about what is being assessed
- Limit scope and time
- Focus on thinking and judgment, not polish
- Use consistent prompts and materials
- Score using competency-based indicators
- Debrief during interviews

03

Performance Task

Questions aligned to: instructional leadership, decision making, & influence.



Performance Task Question

It's your first 90 days in the role of Executive Director. Design an intro to yourself for a set of funders that have supported the school for years and may be nervous about a new ED.

Format: written, slides, or recorded

Time: 10-15 minutes

03

Performance Task
Questions aligned
to: instructional
leadership,
decision making,
& influence.



Performance Task Look Fors

- Clear, steady leadership presence that balances confidence and humility
- Ability to acknowledge continuity and change without creating fear
- Attention to funder perspective without centering funders over mission

03

Performance Task
Questions aligned
to: instructional
leadership,
decision making,
& influence.



Final Interview Tips

- Calibrate interviewers in advance and train interviewers to close the loop
- Use structured, role-specific prompts
- Integrate prior evidence intentionally
- Focus on judgment, not storytelling
- Limit evaluator bias
- Score independently before discussion and debrief by competency, not by person

04

Final Interview

Questions aligned to all competencies.



Final Interview Question

You prepared a presentation to introduce yourself to a group of funders that have supported the school for years. Please do that presentation now.

04

Final Interview

Questions aligned
to all
competencies.



Final Interview Look Fors

- Authentic, compelling delivery without relying on charisma alone
- Ability to adapt in real-time based on audience cues
- Consistent alignment with prior stages in message and values

04

Final Interview

Questions aligned to all competencies.



Your *leaderscript* Toolkit



Golden-
Thread Map

Interview
Question
Bank

Indicator
Checklist

AI
Prompting



Thank you!

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