

# Executive Search

## Destination Boardroom

Seeking and Finding the Leaders For What's Next

Chapter 2  
The Talent Radar

With  
Eelco van Eijck

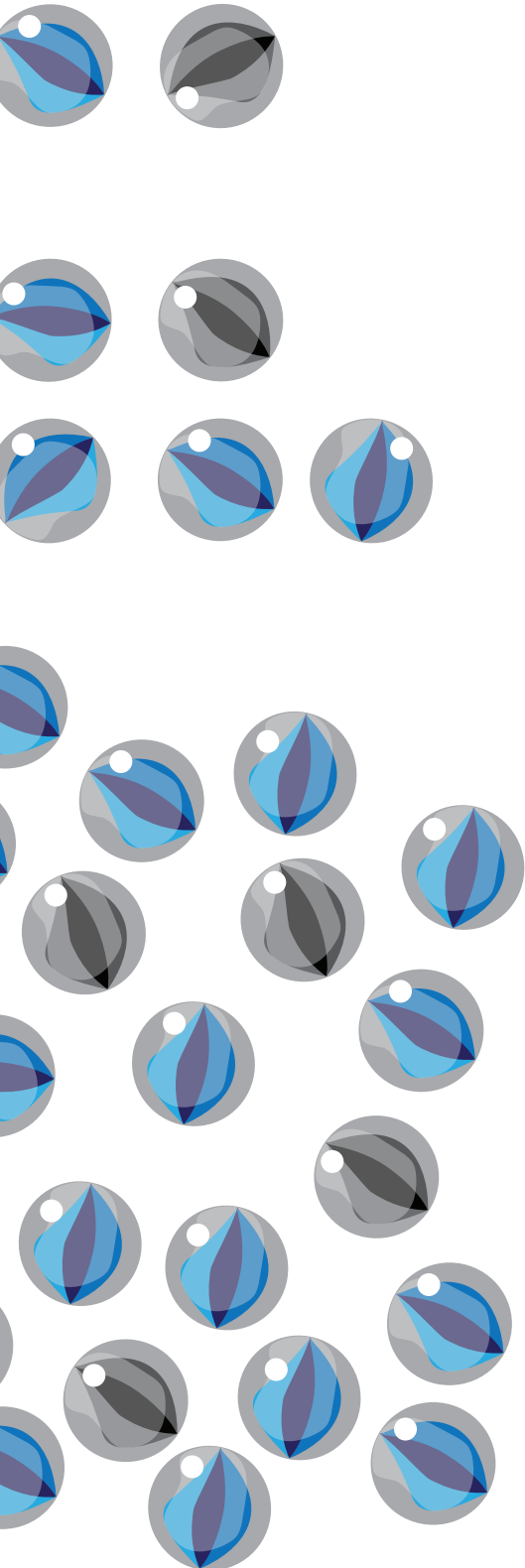


**Amrop**

Leaders For What's Next

# Destination Boardroom Chapter 2 | The Talent Radar

## Executive Summary



In Chapter 2 of our series exploring the journey to the boardroom, we focus on discovering early-stage talent — the leaders for what's next. How can hiring organizations build a more sensitive talent radar? What do upcoming leaders need to do to appear on it? What kind of search strategy is needed to find the exceptional candidate?

- 1** The search for the perfect candidate must be thoroughly prepared and plotted across a wide terrain. The stakes are high: these are invariably responsible positions and no-one is waiting for expensive and pointless mismatches. We present a case in point.
- 2** To succeed in the war for talent means spotting the signals of leadership potential from the outset of a candidate's life and career. Based on interviews with dozens of talent development strategists, we list 11 key early stage 'talent indicators'.
- 3** Is talent alone a guarantee for success? American psychologist Angela Duckworth asked why talented people often struggle to achieve their goals, while less talented people sometimes perform amazing feats without a struggle. Her research led her to the 'grit factor'; a mix of complete surrender and the determination to work towards long-term goals.

## 1 - Searching

Executive search follows a certain strategy and structure. Before we break this down (in a later chapter), let's look at a concrete case that shows how such a search strategy worked for a top position at a multinational. So, a look in the headhunter's kitchen.

A global decorative materials player was seeking a Global Head of Color who could develop a vision for all business units: from research and development to marketing and sales. Van Eijck: "My colleague and I spoke to some stakeholders to get a feel for the company. Then we linked back to the client. Our proposal set out that we wanted to find suitable candidates from other leading companies where color is an important part of the product experience."

Van Eijck started the search within the world of 'experience and creation'. Color was just one part of it. He focused on the automotive industry, cosmetics, lifestyle/decoration and fast-moving consumer goods, where packaging and color are important. Based on ninety scanned candidate profiles, a longlist of more than twenty people was created. In the end, he presented his client with a shortlist of four candidates, whose competencies he recorded on a 'scorecard'.

Van Eijck approached the Strategy Manager of Color, Accessory and Design of a Japanese car manufacturer in the US. A French national working in California, he had been one of the project leaders in the tender for the new New York Taxi, introduced as the standard yellow cab from 2013. The new taxis not only had to meet technical criteria such as emission requirements, the yellow color had to look the same on Fifth Avenue with its high-rise buildings and lack of sunlight, as in Brooklyn, with its low-rise buildings and lots of sun.

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The search continued with the Swiss branch of a fast-moving consumer goods organization. There, Van Eijck met a manager with worldwide responsibility for cosmetic product packaging design. Based on her knowledge and skills, she had written a book on 'the effect of colour perception'.

The hunt now led to a major lighting manufacturer, where Van Eijck met an expert in the light spectrum field. He was one of the leaders of a project focused on advanced, wireless atmospheric lighting. At the final presentation of the candidates to the hiring organization, this expert stood out.

Van Eijck also consulted an executive from outside the world of color; the head of the sound lab for a major German automotive manufacturer. The company employs six psychologists who carry out ongoing research into 'sound perception'. If, for example, you buy an electric Coupé and miss the roar of an engine, you can take out the option of the sound of an Aston Martin, Ferrari or Maserati.

### **Finding candidates for top positions requires a strategy.**

The hunt for the perfect candidate (m/f) is thoroughly prepared and plotted across a wide terrain. The stakes are high: these are invariably responsible positions and no-one is waiting for expensive and pointless mismatches. As a 'side-catch', the executive search firm can usually add a dozen new profiles of candidates to the database. This method prevents the same lists from circulating when nominating candidates.



A major cause of mismatches is when the talent management of organizations adopts a narrow-minded scope.



## 2 - Being Found



International research shows that many organizations have great difficulty in recruiting suitable talent for senior positions. A major cause of these mismatches is when the talent management of organizations adopts a narrow-minded scope. It's time for a new playbook. Business school INSEAD gives some tips, ranging from showing more understanding and appreciation for the core qualities of job hoppers, to re-hiring former managers for strategic positions.

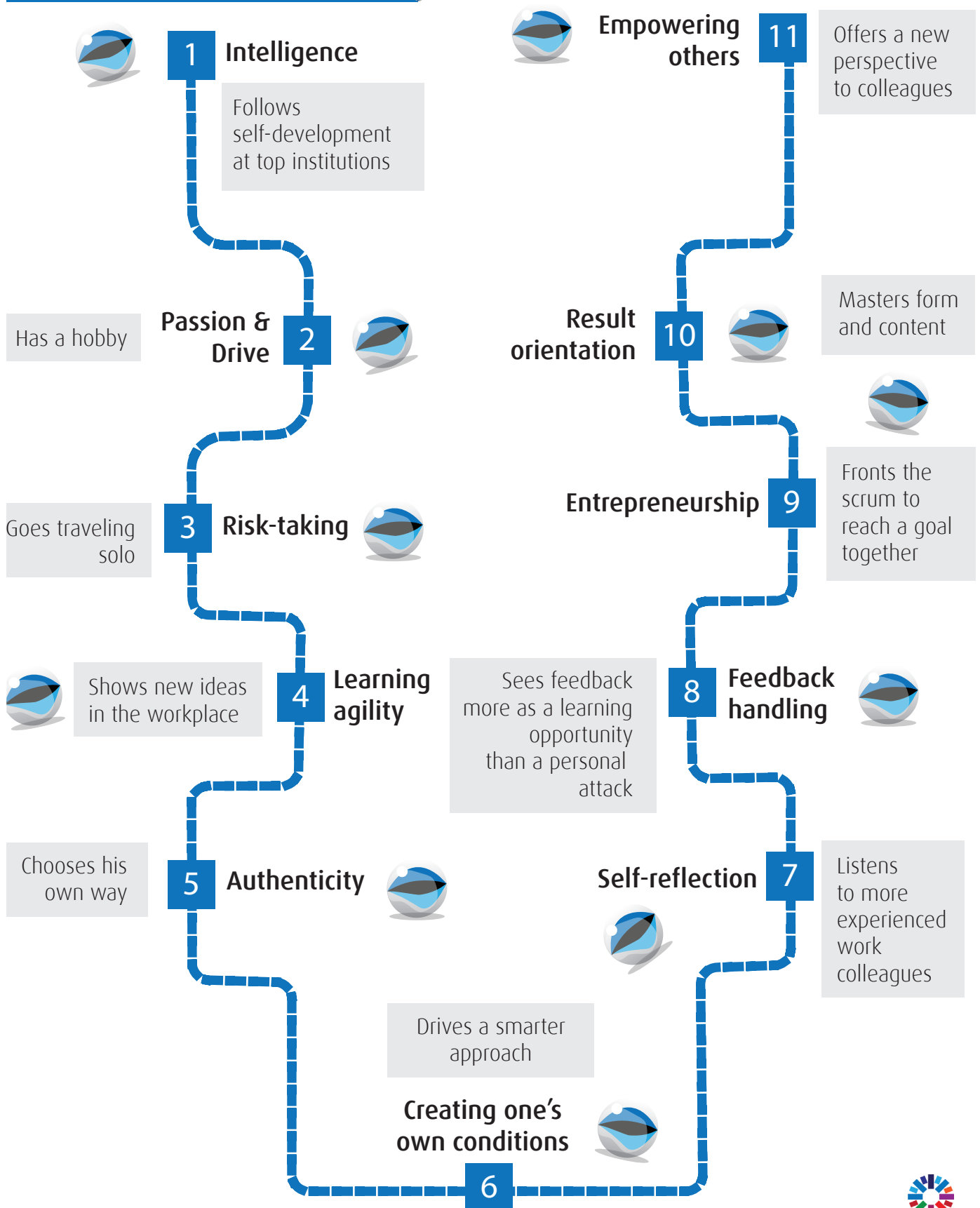
Organizations who want to succeed in the war for talent must ensure that companies and executive search consultants identify key 'talent indicators' at an early stage. Based on interviews with dozens of talent development strategists, Van Eijck drew up a list of eleven factors. These can be adapted, shortened or expanded. Overleaf, an overview.



# Recognizing Talent



Winning the war for talent means that headhunters recognize and deploy early-stage talent indicators.





1

## Intelligence

Libraries are full of intelligence. This is a complex, rather elusive phenomenon, made up of a blend of factors. We are interested in how a candidate develops his intelligence. Which courses were completed at which business schools or universities? If you are smart, you go to top institutions to challenge yourself. Those who are less smart develop their strengths and weaker points through a series of auxiliary fields. Additional jobs during study also help. Ultimately, it's about getting the most out of intelligence. Here's a mix:

AQ: Adaptability Quotient — Flex, suppleness

BQ: Business Acumen — business sense or savvy

CQ: Cultural intelligence — an eye for diversity, intercultural sensitivity

EQ: Emotional Quotient — emotional intelligence

IQ: Intelligence Quotient — rational thinking and purposeful action

2

## Passion and Drive

This indicator can be easily discovered via performance in sports or other side activities or hobbies. Think of a student at a technical university who is an active hang glider in his spare time. A boring sport? Not if you were president of the flying club on behalf of your sorority and spent five years with colleagues organizing hang gliding trips to the most beautiful places in the world. Then you take your passion for your hobby to a higher level and give it a different meaning than a passive hang glider.

3

## Risk-taking

This quality can surface in several ways. Think, for example, of an incoming student who, after high school graduation, goes solo camping abroad for three weeks. This means stepping out of the comfort zone, adapting to new conditions, surviving in nature, et cetera.

4

## Learning Agility

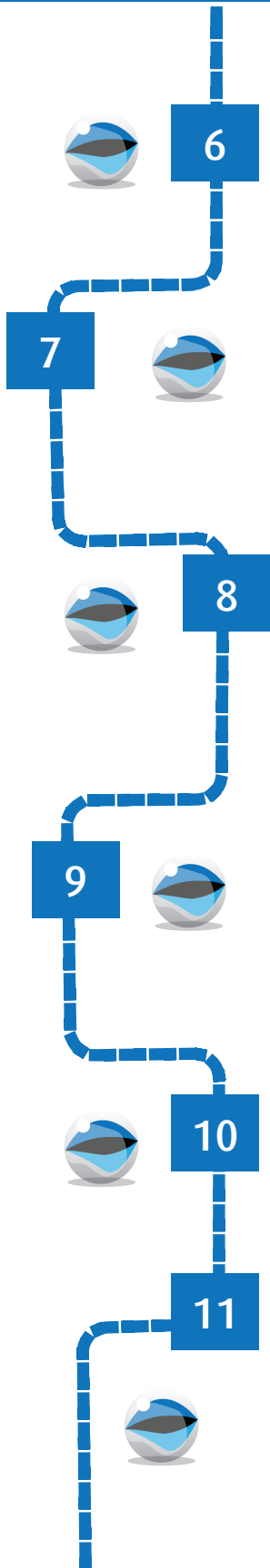
This talent indicator comes out well in a department where employees perform the same routine actions for years and take this for granted. A young talent can move into a new functional area with proven new ideas that make the work process more effective, so more efficient, more productive. With that, he shows rapid results.

5

## Authenticity

Clients, heads of personnel and executive search consultants sometimes get despondent in the face of young people who look alike, develop similar activities, wear similar designer clothes, attend similar pop concerts and are slaves to their tablets and smartphones. Daring to be who you are and occasionally saying 'no' are qualities that employers like to see. People who set their own course stand out and command respect.





## Creating One's Own Conditions

A graduate winds up in a company's support department. He discovers that existing processes are difficult: "I have an idea to do things differently and better." Creating your own conditions is not only about points of improvement, but also about the initiative and the actions that lead to a smarter approach.

## Self-reflection

This trait is not handed to everyone. Candidates with poor listening ability, or are opinionated, quickly fall by the wayside. Self-reflection means listening to the insights of a more experienced generation in the workplace. Respecting more seasoned colleagues. The trick is to be able to draw on their lessons and then translate them into a new working method. This leads to 'added value'.

## Feedback-handling

Feedback is a form of communication that provides information about the effect of one's behavior on others. Good feedback prevents communication 'noise'. It is useful to consider feedback as an opportunity to learn rather than as a (personal) attack. If the other person gives harsher, or more, feedback than is reasonable, it makes sense to ask for clarification. Feedback often says as much about the giver as it does about the receiver.

## Entrepreneurship

There are *entrepreneurs* and there are *enterprising entrepreneurs*. True entrepreneurs are found in the latter group. They are tackling new issues within existing frameworks. Multinationals dream of candidates like these. After all, they can work well together and respond quickly to changing circumstances. A key word is 'scrum', a rugby term. The intention is to achieve one goal together: winning the match.

## Result-orientation

A young talent must also be aware that there is a need to deliver. Working is ultimately about achieving tangible results. Showing initiative is expected; completing launched initiatives and getting a clear outcome.

## Empowering Others

Many companies test this trait by giving potential talent responsibility for a small department at an early stage. In this role, he or she must lead five or six people who have been in situ for years and are likely to stay until retirement. Anyone who manages to command respect in this environment as a boss is accepted. The person who pulls it together within six months has the ability to actively engage others. This brings out leadership talent at a young age.

## A Clinical Eye

In the first years post-university, these are the elements that hiring organizations, headhunters and HR departments pay particular attention to. Van Eijck: "Scanning talent is my job. My clinical eye as a medical graduate helps. Good executive search firms constantly spot talents and then coach them. They're trying to create the right match by putting a talented young manager forward for a serious role."

But sometimes small flaws or 'external bumps' can complicate a full career step. Van Eijck refers to poor dentition, messy clothing or a strong body odor. Discussing these kinds of imperfections is taboo. Van Eijck: "The art is to surface this in a subtle way and propose solutions. Out of compassion and a deep interest in people."

A human resources responsible from a multinational (over 50,000 employees) regularly gives presentations to universities about what a leader does. He sums up the essence in five bullets:

1. Setting boundary lines
2. Prioritizing
3. Delegating
4. Motivating and inspiring
5. Deciding

Prioritization, for example, is often underestimated; leaders do too much themselves. So, "delegating too little can be a pitfall for someone who has been very operationally active himself." Responding to the increasing use of English in the lecture hall, he summarizes his presentation in a single sentence: "Leadership is what happens between people to create results through compelling direction, engaging people, excellent execution and continuous learning."

## The Grit Factor

Finally, to what extent is talent alone a guarantee for success? American psychologist Angela Duckworth wondered why talented people often struggle to achieve their goals, while less talented people sometimes perform amazing feats without a struggle. According to her, real success is achieved through a mix of complete surrender and the determination to work towards long-term goals: *grit*.

Yet another management buzzword?

Researching, among others, a military academy, salespeople, Chicago Public Schools, the Army Special Operations Forces (Green Berets) and a national games contest, she arrived at her theory of the *grit factor*. This falls into six core indicators: *hope, effort, precision, passion, rituals and priorities*. In the long run, Duckworth says, perseverance and passion may be more important than talent.

Duckworth was mesmerized by the strict regime of the United States Military Academy at West Point and by the fact that one in five cadets admitted did not make it to the end of training. This often involved cadets who were top athletes at their university, and team captains. A significant number dropped out in the first summer during an intensive seven-week training: 'Beast Barracks'

### A Typical Day at Beast Barracks



05.00	Getting up
05.30	Apple
05.30-06.55	Physical exercise
06.55-07.25	Personal care
07.30-08.15	Breakfast
08.30-12.45	Training/lectures
13:00-13.45	Lunch
14.00-15.45	Training/lectures
16.00-17.30	Sports
17.30-17.55	Personal care
18.00-18.45	Dinner
19.00-21.00	Training/lectures
21.00-22.00	Commander's time
22.00:	Lights out



The cadets who fell by the wayside rarely did so because of a lack of ability.

What was crucial to keep going was a 'never give up' attitude. Duckworth describes the real stars as paragons of perseverance, not only were they unusually keen and diligent, they also knew what they wanted from an intrinsic motivation perspective.

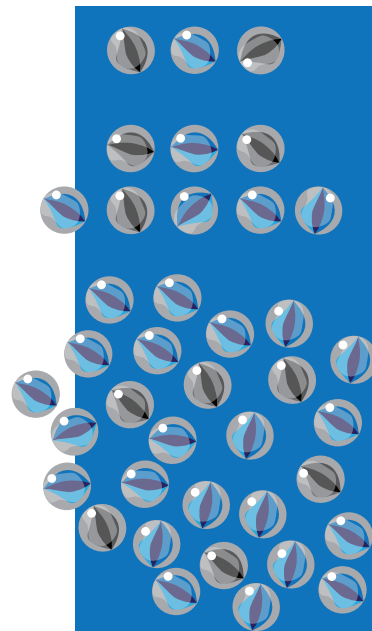
In other words, they possessed determination and a sense of direction.

According to Duckworth, it's a mystery why talent alone is no guarantee of grit. The power of passion and perseverance proved a reliable predictor of endurance under extremely harsh conditions. This was also true outside West Point: in the case of the salespeople, the public schools in Chicago, the Green Berets and the final of the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

What — besides the grit factor — predicts success in the military, education and business? Duckworth comes to the following conclusions: *experience* was important for salespeople, since inexperienced salespeople dropped out first. In Chicago's public schools, an *enthusiastic* teacher was indispensable to success. And for the Green Berets, in addition to the grit factor, a *good physical condition* was essential.

In summary: talent is a necessary condition for success, but passion and perseverance should not be missed.

*In the next Chapter we open the box on the executive search industry, and find out why the journey to the boardroom is a spartan marathon.*



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He is recognized in the Dutch and wider European market as one of the leading FMCG and retail experts in executive search. He combines 15 years senior management experience with 15 years in executive search. FMCG and retail companies seek Eelco's advice in seeking talented (international) executives, from CEO/GM, Marketing and Sales, to Finance, Supply Chain and Digital positions. In Life Sciences, Eelco supports industry-leading globals in their search for management, commercial and specialized leaders.



## About Amrop

With offices in all world regions, Amrop is a trusted advisor in Executive Search, Board and Leadership Services.

Amrop advises the world's most dynamic organizations on finding and positioning Leaders For What's Next: top talent, adept at working across borders in markets around the world.

Amrop's mission: shaping sustainable success through inspiring leaders.

[www.amrop.com/offices](http://www.amrop.com/offices)

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