

EXECUTIVE SKILLS PROFILE

RICHARD GUARE, PH.D., D-BCBA

CGUARE@COMCAST.NET

PART ONE

What Are Executive Skills
and Why Do they Matter?

What Are Executive Skills And Why Do We Need Them?

Executive skills are a set of brain-based abilities that:

1. Make it possible for us to choose our goals and then guide our behavior in a way that makes it likely that we will reach our goals
2. Help us to avoid the behaviors that will derail our progress

Thus, they are essential for self-regulation of behavior and hence goal attainment

What Do We Know About Executive Skills?

1. They begin developing shortly after birth and continue developing at least through our mid-twenties.
2. They can be strengthened throughout life, even after the usual development period.
3. Stress and poverty, among other factors, can hinder their development.
4. In adulthood, stress and fatigue can degrade their functioning.
5. We all have strengths and weaknesses in our skills.

Not One, But Multiple Skills: A Shorthand to Keep Track of Them

1. Skills we use to get things done
2. Skills we use to organize and plan
3. Skills that determine how we react to things

Executive Skill Definitions:

Skills we use to get things done

Sustained Attention (SA): The capacity to maintain attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.

Task Initiation (TI): The ability to begin projects without undue procrastination, in an efficient or timely fashion.

Goal-directed persistence (GDP): The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of the goal and not be put off or distracted by competing interests.

Working Memory (WM): The ability to hold information in memory while performing complex tasks. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experience to apply to the situation at hand or to project into the future.

Stress Tolerance (ST): The ability to deal with stressful situations and do well even when faced with uncertainty, change and high demands.

Executive Skill Definitions

Skills we use to organize and plan

Organization (O): The ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials.

Time Management (TM): The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important.

Planning/Prioritization (P/P): The ability to create a roadmap to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions about what's important to focus on and what's not important.

Executive Skill Definitions:

Skills that determine how we react to things

Response Inhibition (RI): The capacity to think before you act – this ability to resist the urge to say or do something allows us the time to evaluate a situation and how our behavior might impact it.

Emotional Control (EC): The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior.

Flexibility (F): The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information or mistakes. It relates to an adaptability to changing conditions.

Metacognition (M): The ability to stand back and take a birds-eye view of oneself in a situation. It is an ability to observe how you problem solve. It also includes self-monitoring and self-evaluative skills (e.g., asking yourself, “How am I doing? or How did I do?”).

Two Dimensions of Executive Skills: Thinking and Doing

Executive Skills Involving **Thinking** (Cognition)

Working Memory

Planning/Prioritization

Organization

Time Management

Metacognition

Executive Skills Involving **Doing** (Behavior)

Response Inhibition

Emotional Control

Sustained Attention

Task Initiation

Goal Directed Persistence

Flexibility

Stress Tolerance

Why are There 12 Executive Skills?

- We first observed children and adults who presented with and without difficulty regulating their behavior.
- Following this, we reviewed the research and clinical work and then defined, separately, those skills that appeared to be involved in helping to regulate behavior.

The Relationship of Executive Skills To Goals: Goodness of Fit

- The executive skills required to attain particular goals depend on the goals that the person has chosen and the environment where those skills will be employed.
- If a person has strengths in the executive skills most required to meet the goal in the target environment, there is a “good fit” with the goal.
- On the other hand, if the person has weaknesses in the executive skills required to attain the goal, there is a mismatch, and the weak executive skills may be an obstacle to goal attainment.
- Reaching one’s goal is more likely if there is a reasonably “good fit” between the person’s goal and their executive skills profile.
- If there is a mismatch, the viability of the goal, and hence the person’s motivation, is at risk.

Example of Goodness of Fit in Employment

- If my employment goal is a job that involves scheduling and keeping track of materials, then time management and organization are key. However, if the job environment is stressful due to high production demands, and I have a weakness in stress tolerance, then stress can lead to a breakdown in my executive skill strengths.
- In a different context, a job that involves high demands from customers requires response inhibition and emotional control and perhaps stress tolerance.

PART TWO

Introduction to the Executive
Skills Profile:

Description, Rationale, and
Administration

What is the Executive Skills Profile (ESP)?

- The executive skills profile is a self-administered tool that can be used to provide individuals with information on their executive skill strengths and weaknesses.
- It is **not** a clinical or diagnostic tool.
- It is **not** a research tool – it is not designed to measure change in executive skills over time.

Why Administer the Executive Skills Profile?

- **Enhance goal attainment:**

- Goals serve the role of motivating an individual to action, so long as the individual values the goal and the probability of success is high.

- **Enhance program outcome:**

- The desired outcome is that participants set and attain goals that will increase their self-sufficiency. (Goodness-of-fit is a significant component in determining the probability of success).

What is the Structure of the Executive Skills Profile?

- The executive skills profile contains 36 statements, 3 statements for each of the 12 executive skills.
- The individual is asked to rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 6 to indicate how well the statement describes him or her: 1 indicates that the item doesn't describe you at all; 6 indicates it describes you extremely well.
- The scores for each skill are summed to provide a profile of an individual's strengths or weaknesses.

An Example from the LS Profile: Response Inhibition (Impulsive vs. Reflective)

Item	SECTION D	1 Strongly dis- agree	2 Dis- agree	3 Tend to dis- agree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree
1.	I listen before I draw conclusions.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	I think before I speak.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	I get all the facts before I take action.	1	2	3	4	5	6

How Do We Use the ESP to Assess Executive Skills?

- By having the client **self-administer** the ESP, or by working with the client to complete the ESP.
- By **discussing the results** with the client to determine how these executive skills manifest themselves in the day-to-day behaviors they engage in.
- By **observing the client's behaviors** in the context of the program and comparing these with the client's ESP profile.

Understanding How the Executive Skill Profile Works and Interpreting What It Means: An Example

- To get you comfortable with the ESP and to help you start to understand what you can learn from it, we're going to go through examples
- The following three slides will show sections of the executive skills assessment
- Read the statement and record your scores, then add these scores together to get the total which will range from 3 to 18
- When the poll appears on your screen, record the range in which your score fell
- Be honest – no one will know your score!

Example #1 from the Profile

Item	SECTION B	1 Strongly dis- agree	2 Dis- agree	3 Tend to dis- agree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree
1.	I finish what I set out to do by the end of the day.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	I am good at guessing how long it takes to do something.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	I am on time for appointments and activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Record and total your scores, then answer the poll question on your webinar screen

Example #2 from the Profile

Item	SECTION E	1 Strongly dis- agree	2 Dis- agree	3 Tend to dis- agree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree
1.	I respond well to unexpected events.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	I easily adjust when plans change.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	I like to try new ways of doing things.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Record and total your scores, then answer the poll question on your webinar screen

Example #3 from the Profile

Item	SECTION F	1 Strongly dis- agree	2 Dis- agree	3 Tend to dis- agree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree
1.	I keep doing what I am supposed to do, even if I get upset.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	I keep my cool, even if my feelings are hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	I hold onto my temper.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Record and total your scores, then answer the poll question on your webinar screen

Some Examples from the Field

- Client #1:

Strengths: Metacognition, Sustained Attention, Stress Tolerance

Weaknesses: Time management, Planning/Prioritization, Response Inhibition

- *A bit of ready, fire aim plus impatience. Judges effectiveness after the fact*

- Clients #2:

Strengths: Working Memory, Stress Tolerance, Planning/Prioritization

Weaknesses: Time management, Emotional Control, Sustained Attention

- *Stays with the task but doesn't estimate time needed and gets upset it doesn't occur as anticipated.*

How Do I Introduce the ESP To Program Participants?

- **Explain what executive skills are:**
 - Skills that help us set and achieve our goals
 - Skills that help us avoid doing things that will derail us
- **Explain the purpose of the ESP – this is why we do it and what it can tell you:**
 - It will help you to assess and become more aware of your strengths and weaknesses
 - Everyone has strengths and weaknesses
 - No pattern of strengths and weaknesses is “better” or “worse” than any other
 - The results can help you decide what jobs and situations you might be more comfortable with
 - The results can help you know how to be successful and improve the weak skills that get in the way. We’ll talk about this after you’re done.
 - The results can help us work together to figure out how to make sure that your weak skills don’t get in the way of achieving your goals

How Do We Increase the Chance of Accurate Results?

- Open and accurate completion of the ESP by the counselor/coach of his/her own executive skills
- Identification by the counselor/coach of specific behaviors associated with her/his strong and weak executive skills
- Sharing these results – strengths weaknesses and associated behaviors – with the client

What Next?

- In upcoming webinars, we will discuss in more detail how to use the results to help increase clients' chances of being successful in achieving their goals
- This will include how you can provide support to reduce the chance that weak skills will derail a client from achieving their goals and how to capitalize on their strengths
- Guiding a client to success often is not about improving weak skills, but often is about finding the right job match, putting environmental modifications in place to reduce the need to rely on a weak skill, or reducing the level of effort by breaking tasks into small manageable steps