

SEVEN QUESTIONS SIOP SAYS YOU SHOULD ASK EVERY TEST PUBLISHER

**HOW KORN FERRY'S COMPETENCIES,
TRAITS, AND DRIVERS (KFCTD)
ASSESSMENTS DELIVER**



INTRODUCTION

Organizations increasingly rely on assessments to inform high-stakes talent decisions, yet the growing number of tools in the marketplace has made it harder to distinguish those grounded in rigorous science from those that rely on surface-level insights or marketing claims. The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) provides a practical framework for addressing this challenge: seven essential questions that organizations should ask any test publisher before adopting an assessment (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology n.d.). Many assessments in the marketplace do not meet well-established professional standards, and as SIOP notes, employers should be wary of vendors that cannot or will not answer these basic questions. The following sections address each question directly as it applies to Korn Ferry's self-assessments of competencies, traits, and drivers (KFCTD).¹

QUESTION 1:

What does the test measure?

The KFCTD measures a clearly defined, theoretically grounded, and relevant set of constructs across competencies, traits, and drivers, providing a comprehensive and transparent picture of self-perceptions relevant for informing talent management decisions.

The KFCTD integrates three empirically grounded domains (Lewis et al. 2021):

- **Competencies** – self-efficacy for competencies aligned with observable workplace behaviors reflecting how individuals demonstrate effectiveness on the job.
- **Traits** – relatively stable personality tendencies that shape how people approach situations, interact with others, and manage challenges.
- **Drivers** – motivational priorities and values that determine what energizes individuals and sustains their engagement.

¹ KFCTD, originally known as KF4D, are core assessments delivered through the KF Assess™ portfolio of solutions, including the Korn Ferry Leadership Solution (KFLS).

QUESTION 2:

What research and process was used to develop the test?

The KFCTD is built on one of the largest, most comprehensive leadership datasets in the world, developed through a rigorous empirical process that connects assessment design to real-world leadership demands across global organizations.

The development process draws on Korn Ferry's global database, spanning millions of assessments across industries, job levels, functions, and regions. From a psychometric standpoint, the KFCTD incorporates forced-choice item formats and item response theory (IRT)-based normative scoring specifically designed to reduce response distortion and faking while improving score precision and comparability. A defining feature of the development process is the construction of role-specific success profiles, which model the characteristics associated with effectiveness in particular roles rather than applying uniform benchmarks across all positions.

QUESTION 3:

What experience and qualifications do the test developers have?

The KFCTD was developed and is maintained by teams of scientists and applied researchers within the Korn Ferry Institute (KFI), Korn Ferry's dedicated research and development function. This team has included professionals with master's and doctoral-level training in measurement, statistics, quantitative psychology, educational psychology, and I-O psychology.

The KFI has produced extensive thought leadership in areas central to the KFCTD framework, including research on learning agility, leadership potential, and competency modeling. Korn Ferry also emphasizes qualified use of assessment results through structured interpretation support and, in many cases, formal certification processes, ensuring that assessment findings are applied consistently and in alignment with best practices.

QUESTION 4:

What evidence supports the reliability of the test?

The KFCTD produces consistent, dependable results through standardized administration and advanced scoring methods, with stable trait and driver scores suitable for selection and succession decisions, and appropriately dynamic competency scores that support development applications.

The KFCTD enhances measurement precision through IRT-based scoring, which provides more accurate differentiation between individuals compared to traditional sum-score approaches. Across competency scales, internal consistency coefficients average approximately .80, with most scales ranging from the low .70s through .90 (Lewis et al. 2021). In a two-week test-retest study using intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs), the average stability coefficient across all scales was approximately .70, with nearly 90% of scales classified as demonstrating good or excellent stability (Lewis 2024).

QUESTION 5:

What evidence supports the validity of the test?

The KFCTD demonstrates robust validity evidence across individual engagement, job performance, leadership effectiveness, team climate, and longitudinal prediction, making it a scientifically supported and impactful tool for selection, succession, and development decisions. Validity evidence spans multiple studies and organizational contexts.

For example, KFI research demonstrates the following across a range of study designs, sample sizes, and outcome types (Korn Ferry Institute 2026):

- Among 750+ applicants evaluated against success profiles, higher-fit candidates were 5.37 times more likely to achieve strong performance ratings.
- Across 120,000+ professionals in eleven global regions, high-fit individuals were typically 7.5 to 8 times more likely to be highly engaged than low-fit peers.
- In a study of nearly 3,000 employees across 500+ teams, stronger leadership alignment produced 30 percentile-point gains in team climate. Stronger team climate was linked to team engagement improvement of up to 42 percentile points.
- A longitudinal study confirmed baseline KFCTD results predict engagement (6 months later) and performance (12 months later).
- In a study of over 350 managers, those whose profiles closely matched role requirements were nearly twice as likely to be identified as top performers.

QUESTION 6:

What evidence is there that the test is fair and unbiased?

The KFCTD was designed and is maintained for fairness through rigorous statistical monitoring, modern item formats that reduce faking and distortion, and global norming, supporting legally defensible use across diverse and global workforces.

Forced-choice formats and IRT-based scoring reduce susceptibility to response distortion and improve score comparability across individuals from different backgrounds.

Korn Ferry also develops norms across regions and cultures, ensuring that benchmarks reflect the relevant reference population rather than applying a single cultural standard universally.

Korn Ferry carefully monitors and evaluates scales within KFCTD for the potential for adverse impact. The results of these analyses support the fairness of KFCTD (Lewis et al. 2021).

QUESTION 7:

What data aids in the interpretation and use of test scores?

The KFCTD provides rich, multi-layered interpretive context through norms, role-specific success profiles, and probability-based outcome reporting, moving beyond scores to deliver actionable insights that directly support hiring, promotion, and development decisions.

At the broadest level, KFCTD results are interpreted against normative data categorized by global region, function/job natures, and career level. The most distinctive interpretive feature is the use of role-specific success profiles (Korn Ferry 2025), which model the specific competency, trait, and driver patterns associated with effectiveness in a given role. Rather than asking "How does this candidate score?", the success profile framework asks, "How well does this candidate's profile align with what this role requires?" This is a more decision-relevant question for organizations focused on placing the right people in the right roles.

CONCLUSION

SIOP's Employment Testing Guide (SIOP n.d.) provides a clear and practical framework for evaluating assessment providers, helping organizations distinguish between tools that are merely descriptive from those that are predictive, defensible, and aligned with professional standards. Across all seven criteria, the KFCTD demonstrates strong alignment with these standards (Korn Ferry Institute 2026). Its integrated model of performance, rigorous development process, advanced psychometric methodology, and extensive validation evidence reflect a modern and comprehensive approach to assessment.

KFCTD delivers the science and the insights needed by organizations where talent decisions matter.

AUTHORS

James Lewis, PhD

Senior Director and Senior Scientist
Korn Ferry Institute

Jeff Foster, PhD

Associate
Korn Ferry

Sarah Hezlett, PhD

Vice President
Korn Ferry Institute

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