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## How Executive Search Differs from Contingent Recruiters

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When hiring executive level talent a business may keep the search in-house, leveraging their own networks and processes, or they may look outside their organization for help, and choose either an executive search consulting firm or contingent recruiter. This document focuses on the difference between executive search consulting and contingent recruiters.

### DEFINITIONS

**Executive search** consulting firms are specialized management consultants retained on an exclusive basis by clients in an advisory capacity. An executive search consulting firm typically partners with a client to identify, assess and select the very best possible candidate.

**Contingent recruiters** are hired to present a pool of candidates that fit certain criteria. A contingent recruiter generally works the front-end of the process, leaving the assessment and selection work to the client.

### BUSINESS MODEL

**Executive search** consulting firms operate on an exclusive, client-centered basis and work on a limited number of assignments at one time. Executive search firms often find candidates with diverse backgrounds and have access to candidates who are not actively seeking a new position. They are engaged in all aspects of the process, from defining the search through candidate integration. They charge a consulting fee (retainer) for the assignment, consistent with their in-depth advisory work. Executive search consultants deliver high-quality service, a slate of highly qualified candidates, and develop long-term relationships built on trust.

**Contingent recruiters** seek to place as many candidates as possible in the shortest possible time. They tend to work with many assignments concurrently. If a particular assignment is not getting traction, contingency recruiters have little incentive to continue. Contingent recruiters offer their service with no money up front, and they get paid for candidates who are hired from resumes they present. Fees are generally lower, reflecting their limited scope of work. Contingent recruiters deliver broad access to “ready to move candidates” and a quick presentation of a large number of resumes.

### METHODOLOGIES

**Executive search** consultants begin by understanding their client’s industry, business strategy, and unique needs. They employ highly sophisticated methodologies including competency-based interviewing, 360 degree referencing and due diligence processes that may be augmented by psychometric testing and broader assessments. They identify a slate of the most qualified candidates that fit

well with the client's culture and have the right background and experience for the specific opportunity. Their success is defined by the long-term commitment and impact of the person hired, therefore they are motivated to help secure a lasting, successful executive hire for their client.

**Contingent recruiters** leverage networks, advertising and online databases to identify a large number of resumes of candidates who likely fit the client's criteria. Resumes are shared with the client who then takes a more hands-on approach to reviewing and evaluating the candidates. By virtue of the payment upon placement nature of this business model, contingent recruiters are motivated to get many resumes in front of many clients, as quickly as possible.

## TARGET ASSIGNMENT

**Executive search** consulting firms are typically used for senior-level executive positions and board directors. Assignments are generally for positions where the best candidate is harder to find and harder to persuade to make a move, and where the potential impact of success or failure is greatest.

**Contingent recruiters** are most often used for mid-level positions or positions where there are a large number of qualified candidates. They focus on candidates actively looking for a new role, and positions that are of lower potential impact within the client organization.

## CANDIDATE PERSPECTIVE

**Executive search** consultants often access senior executives who may not be actively seeking a new position, and treat their potential interest with a high degree of confidentiality. They can help these hidden candidates see the potential advantages of making a move for the right opportunity.

**Contingent recruiters** access candidates more likely to be in mid-management roles, most of whom are actively looking for a new position. They have a strong sales orientation and focus on working with a lot of clients and candidates, which can be an advantage to the mid-level candidates looking to make a move.

## CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, executive search consulting and contingent recruiting are often thought of interchangeably, when they are indeed completely different professions. When it comes to the most important executive talent needs, choose an AESC member executive search consulting firm.