

The background of the slide is a dark blue field filled with various sizes and shades of gears, some in lighter blue and some in a darker, almost black, color. On the left side, there is a vertical strip with a colorful, abstract, and somewhat pixelated texture in shades of orange, yellow, and brown.

Where the assessment centre may not reach: Assessing candidates for the top levels in a UK Government context

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Paper presented to the 33rd International Congress on
Assessment Centre Methods



Three elements in this presentation:

- ★ Account of a system for assessing high potential amongst an already highly-selected group
- ★ A description of the process for making top level appointments in UK Government departments
- ★ An outline of some of the conclusions from a research review of top level assessment, and a discussion of the issues arising from it




Some constraints on AC use at more senior levels

- ✦ Over-exposure – AC fatigue!
- ✦ Cost of one-off AC applications
- ✦ Acceptability to top managers
- ✦ Difficulty in coordination and timing



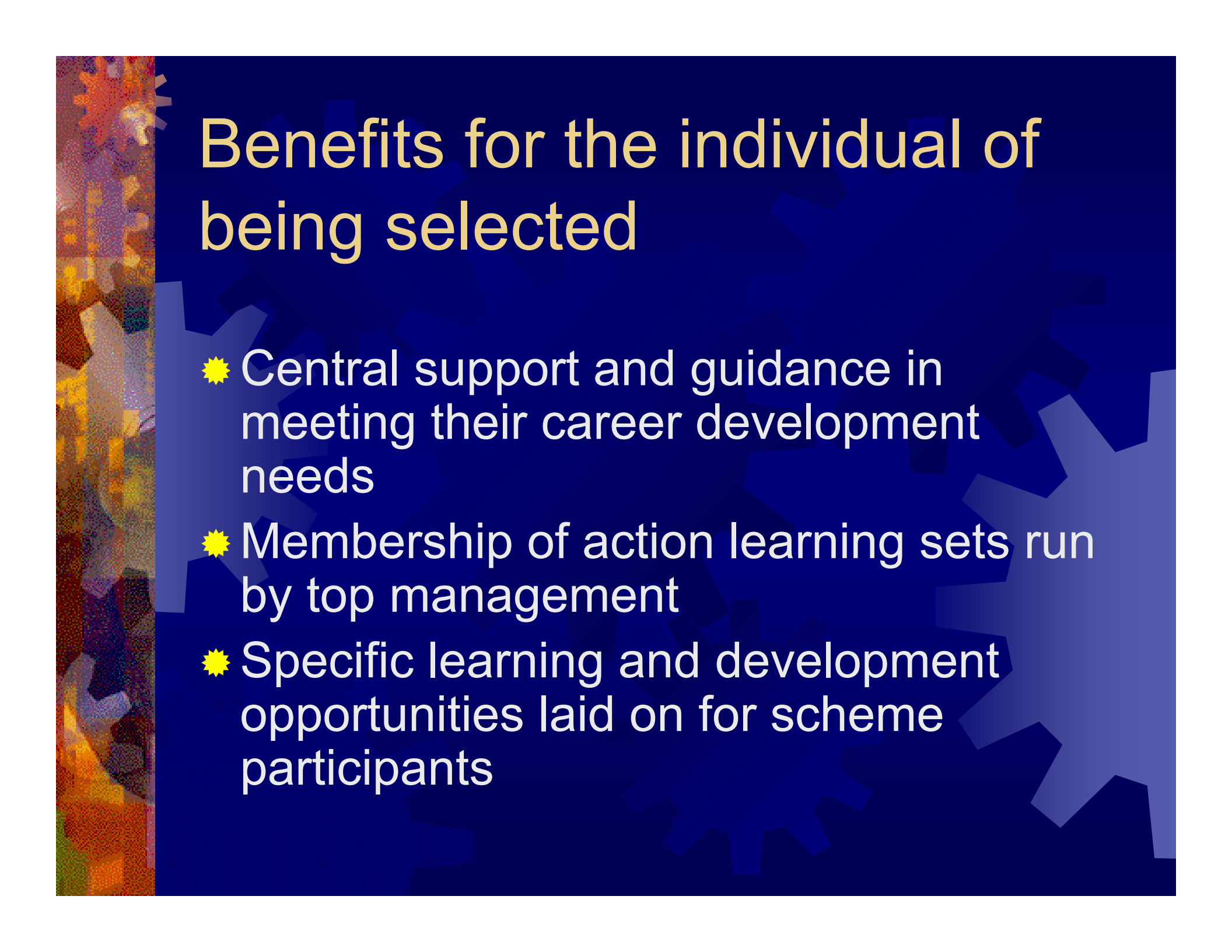
The High Potential Development Scheme





Identifying high potential within a fast-track group

- ✦ Need to reflect the changes in what the organisation now requires – focus on delivery
- ✦ Developing a corporate leadership resource of the highest quality



Benefits for the individual of being selected

- ✦ Central support and guidance in meeting their career development needs
- ✦ Membership of action learning sets run by top management
- ✦ Specific learning and development opportunities laid on for scheme participants



The Key Competencies for High Potential

- ★ **Learning and Improving** - seeking learning opportunities, showing self awareness, engaging with change, open to new ideas and challenges
- ★ **Achieving Outcomes Through Relationships** – building alliances, working in partnership, demonstrating political awareness in handling relationships



The Selection Process

- ✦ Internal assessment within each department
- ✦ Nominated candidates come forward to Corporate assessment process with a portfolio of evidence
- ✦ Candidates complete two psychometric measures (NEO, LDQ)
- ✦ Interview lasting up to an hour; panel consisting of a CEO, a Non-Executive Director and a Psychologist
- ✦ Candidates assessed against competencies and a “Yes/Maybe/No” judgement made



The role of the Psychologist: Some changes made in Yr2

- ✦ Candidates complete psychometrics
- ✦ Have one hour interview with psychologist
- ✦ Psychologist writes brief assessment report for interview panel
- ✦ Interview panel as before but without the psychologist



Some outcomes...

- ✦ Just over 100 attended Corporate selection process in year one, and nearly half were selected to go on the scheme; similar ratio in year 2
- ✦ Greater diversity in selected group than in candidate pool overall
- ✦ Spin-off effects; impact on development activity within departments and at top levels



At the end of three years -

- ✦ Some will have 'fallen off' the scheme, some will have been promoted beyond it
- ✦ For those remaining, intention is that they attend a 'Career Assessment Centre'




Making CEO/Board Level Appointments in UK Government Service

The role of the Civil Service
Commissioners

The typical selection process

- ✦ Executive Search company engaged (if position is open to external candidates)
- ✦ Specification drawn up, using senior civil service competency framework
- ✦ Long list – references – short list
- ✦ Individual Psychological Assessment for short listed candidates (not all positions)
- ✦ Presentation and Panel Interview




Review of literature and practice in top management selection



Organisations consulted

- ✦ Institute of Directors – Policy Research Unit and Information Services
- ✦ Society of Chief Personnel Officers (SOCPO)
- ✦ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
- ✦ Centre for Board Effectiveness, Henley Management College
- ✦ Odgers Ray & Berndtson (Executive Search Company)
- ✦ Various organisations in finance, manufacturing, media and service sectors



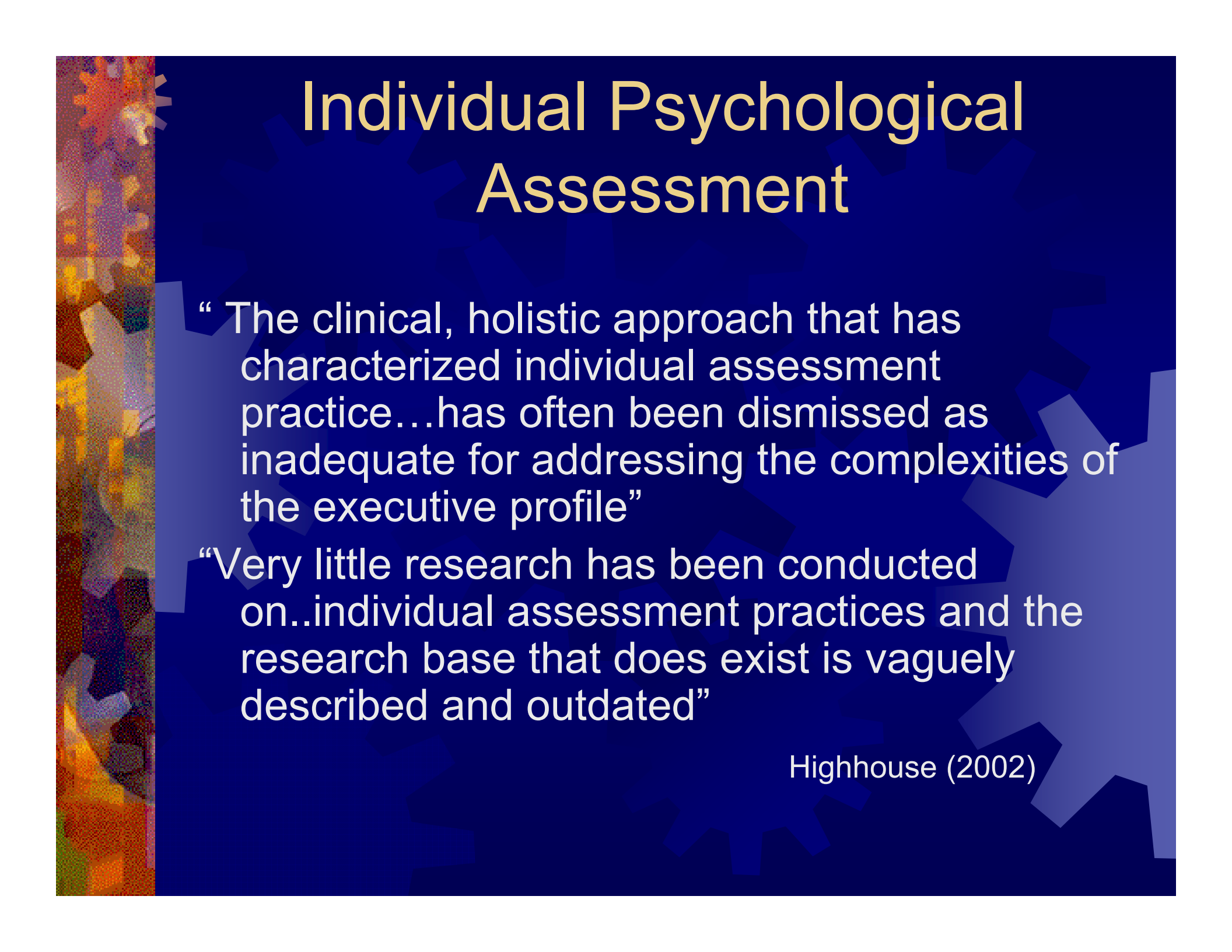
Some observations on differences in practice.....

- ✦ Private sector “still rely solely on interviews and references” for most top appointments – but there may be 6-7 lengthy interviews over a period of time
- ✦ Issue of ‘fit’ with fellow board members seems to be the key determining factor
- ✦ Contrast with public sector emphasis on fairness and independent chairing of selection process
- ✦ An example of innovative practice – involving the team’s leadership coaches in selection



Some observations on the research literature

- ✦ Lack of published validity data on selection at the very top
- ✦ Lack of research based papers – but no shortage of opinion pieces
- ✦ Wider participation in assessment produces better results (Sessa & Taylor, 2000)
- ✦ The problems of validating high level, individual assessment processes



Individual Psychological Assessment

“The clinical, holistic approach that has characterized individual assessment practice...has often been dismissed as inadequate for addressing the complexities of the executive profile”

“Very little research has been conducted on..individual assessment practices and the research base that does exist is vaguely described and outdated”

Highhouse (2002)

Conclusions

- ★ Assessment Centres may not be easily applied at the top of the organisation – which calls for the development and use of alternative approaches
- ★ Selection and assessment at the highest levels is crucial, yet neglected in research
- ★ Need to devise (non-traditional?) validation methodologies
- ★ QA of individual psychological assessment is of great importance