EXECUTIVE SOLUTIONS

2026 Executive *Interview* Prep Pack

Preparation for leaders competing in a global market, in a process that is no longer read by people alone.

ELITE EXECUTIVE
CAREER SOLUTIONS

FOR C-SUITE, VP AND DIRECTOR LEVEL
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SECTION 01

Introduction: The Executive *Advantage*

Why executive interviews demand a fundamentally different approach

Securing a C-suite, vice president or director-level role is one of the most competitive endeavours in modern professional life. Yet many highly accomplished leaders enter these interviews under-prepared, relying on career momentum rather than intentional strategy.

Something else has changed since the last edition of this pack, and it is worth stating plainly at the outset. More of the process now happens before a human being reads anything about you. Applications are sorted, ranked and summarised by software. Your answers in a live interview are increasingly transcribed and mapped to a scorecard. Your CV, your profile and what you say in the room are cross-referenced as a single record rather than assessed as separate impressions.

None of this replaces the judgement of the people who decide. It changes what reaches them, and in what shape. Preparation that addresses only the room is now incomplete.

This pack is written for senior leaders ready to move beyond the standard interview playbook. Whether you are targeting a chief executive seat, a CFO role at a global enterprise or a vice president position in a new geography, the principles here will help you:

- Articulate a credible leadership narrative that survives cross-referencing
- Navigate multi-round and board-level processes, including the automated stages
- Address the competencies that matter most in 2026: AI fluency, ESG leadership and cross-cultural agility
- Negotiate a package that reflects your market value, in your market
- Project executive presence in virtual, in-person and hybrid settings, across any culture

> *The executive interview is not a test of what you know. It is a test of who you are, how you think, and whether you are the leader this organisation needs right now.*

How to use this pack

Work through each section sequentially for full preparation. If time is limited, prioritise Sections 03, 04, 06 and 07 for immediate impact. The Master Checklist in Section 14 consolidates every action into a practical pre-interview workflow.

A note on evidence

Every figure in this pack carries its publisher and the date its data was collected, either in the text or in the appendix. Where reliable evidence does not exist, this pack says so rather than filling the gap. You are being asked to prepare on the basis of what follows, and you are entitled to know how firm the ground is under each claim.

SECTION 02

The 2026 Interview *Landscape*

What has changed, and what it means for you

Three shifts define executive hiring in 2026. Each is documented. Each changes something concrete about how you prepare.

One: artificial intelligence has moved from the questions into the process

The previous edition of this pack treated AI as a subject you would be asked about. It still is, and Section 11 covers it. But AI is now also the machinery you move through.

Nearly two-thirds of job seekers, 63%, have now been interviewed by an AI, up 13 percentage points in six months. That figure comes from Greenhouse, surveying 2,950 job seekers across the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and Ireland, published 1 May 2026.

Read that figure carefully, because this pack will not overstate it. The sample is job seekers at every level, weighted towards high-volume applicants. It is not an executive figure, and no executive figure exists. Section 03 sets out where an executive actually encounters automation, which is not where most assume.

Two: verification is replacing detection

Employers spent two years trying to detect AI-written applications. That effort has largely been abandoned, for a good reason: the tools do not work.

Two peer-reviewed studies in the *International Journal for Educational Integrity* tested detection software directly. The first, published December 2023, examined 14 tools and concluded they were neither accurate nor reliable. The second, published 2 February 2026, found Turnitin accurate in 61% of cases and Originality in 69%, with near-zero recall on hybrid text written partly by a human and partly by a machine, which is what most applications now are.

Both studies tested academic prose rather than CVs, and no peer-reviewed study has yet tested detectors on career documents. The direction of travel is nonetheless clear, and employers have drawn the obvious conclusion. If you cannot detect fabrication, you verify instead. Skills assessments, work samples, structured screens and consistency checks across a candidate's own materials are all rising for the same reason.

The practical consequence for you is in Section 04.

Three: almost nobody is being told

The same Greenhouse survey found that 70% of candidates were never clearly informed that AI would evaluate them, and that 21% of all respondents, a subset of that 70%, found out only when the interview began. Some 57% believe disclosure should be legally mandated.

Rights exist in some jurisdictions and are covered in Section 03. They are thin, they vary by market, and they are barely enforced. For now, the practical position is that you should assume automation is present unless you are told otherwise, and that asking about it is reasonable.

Key shifts: 2023 to 2026

DIMENSION	2023 APPROACH	2026 IMPERATIVE
Interview focus	Competency and track record	Judgement, AI fluency, stakeholder capitalism
Assessment methods	Behavioural interviews	Panel, board, assessment centres, psychometrics, AI scoring
Record keeping	Interviewer notes and recall	Transcription, summarisation, cross-referencing
Consistency	Checked informally, if at all	Systematically compared across CV, profile and interview
Virtual format	Emerging, secondary	Fully embedded. Virtual presence is a leadership signal
Compensation	Salary and bonus	Full package: equity, LTI, severance, change of control
Disclosure	Not an issue	Automation frequently undisclosed. Ask

SECTION 03

The *Machine* Layer

What is automated, what it cannot do, and what you are entitled to know

Executives tend to picture the wrong thing when they hear that AI is involved in hiring. The image is usually a robot interviewer. The reality, at your level, is quieter and more consequential.

You will meet automation at three points. Knowing which is which tells you where preparation actually pays.

Before the interview: how you are found and ranked

The largest effect of AI on an executive career is on whether you surface at all.

LinkedIn states that recruiters using its Hiring Assistant view 81% fewer profiles to find qualified candidates. That is LinkedIn's own figure, drawn from its platform data in January 2026. The company has not published a methodology or a comparison group for it, so treat the direction as reliable and the precision as marketing. Directionally it describes something real: the shortlist is assembled by a system that decides which profiles a person ever opens.

Search itself is changing shape. Recruiter platforms are moving towards semantic matching, weighing the substance of what you have run against the substance of a brief rather than counting keywords. Loading a profile with terms is a strategy built for a system that is being retired.

What this means for you. Visibility is now upstream of everything in this pack. The best interview preparation in the world is inert if the shortlist is assembled without you. Section 05 covers what to do about it.

Around the interview: what happens to your answers

This is the part that matters most at executive level, and the part almost nobody prepares for.

AI notetakers are now a standard feature of mainstream applicant tracking systems. They transcribe what is said, summarise it, and map answers against a structured scorecard. Greenhouse shipped both a Notetaker and a Candidate Insights Agent in its third quarter 2026 release, and it is not alone.

The consequence is precise. What you say in round two is transcribed, summarised, and available for comparison against your CV, your public profile, and what you said in round one. Whether an interviewer remembers a detail three weeks later is no longer the question. The record remembers.

For a candidate whose account of their career is accurate and consistent, this is neutral or helpful. For anyone whose story shifts to suit the room, it is a new and serious exposure. Section 04 deals with it directly.

Instead of the interview: AI-scored and one-way formats

Here this pack must be honest about the limits of the evidence.

There is no reliable data on how often AI conducts or scores interviews at C-suite level. Every published dataset samples job seekers or hiring professionals in aggregate, weighted towards volume and early-career hiring. None publishes a breakdown by seniority. The vendors in this category position their products explicitly for high-volume recruitment.

On the evidence available, the position appears to be this. In retained executive search, AI-scored interviewing is effectively absent. The search consultant's assessment is the product being sold, and firms do not outsource it. The further you sit from the board, the more likely you are to meet it: divisional director and senior manager appointments in large corporates with centralised talent functions, and first-round screening for advertised roles, are where it appears.

If you are applying to an advertised role at a large organisation, prepare for the possibility. If you are in a retained search, you are almost certainly being assessed by people.

What the machine cannot do

It cannot reliably tell whether text was written by a person or a model. That is the finding in Section 02, and it is worth restating here because it explains employer behaviour that would otherwise look arbitrary. When an employer asks for a work sample, sets a skills assessment, or probes an achievement in unusual detail, they are not being difficult. They are substituting verification for a detection capability that does not exist.

Prepare accordingly. Every significant claim on your CV should be one you can discuss for five minutes under questioning, with the numbers, the constraints and the parts that did not work.

What you are entitled to know

Rights vary sharply by market. Most are thinner than they sound.

South Africa. POPIA section 71, enforceable since 1 July 2021, is the strongest instrument most South African executives hold. It provides that you may not be subject to a decision based *solely* on automated processing where that decision has legal consequences or substantially affects you, including profiling of your work performance, reliability or conduct. Where the exception applies, because the decision relates to a contract you requested, the responsible party must take appropriate measures to protect your interests. Those measures must include an opportunity for you to make representations about the decision, and sufficient information about the underlying logic of the processing.

Two practical notes. The word "solely" is the whole battleground, and most employers can point to a human somewhere in the chain. And the route runs through a written request to the responsible party, then a complaint to the Information Regulator, which is a slow instrument to reach for mid-process.

The useful application is not litigation. It is that you are on firm ground asking, early and pleasantly: *will any part of this assessment be automated, and who makes the final decision?* Asking signals governance literacy. Demanding signals difficulty.

New York City. Local Law 144 requires employers using an automated employment decision tool to have it independently bias-audited within the preceding year, publish a summary of the results, and notify candidates at least 10 business days before use. Two caveats matter. It creates no right to human review. And enforcement is close to nominal: the New York State Comptroller's audit of 2 December 2025 found two complaints in two years, alongside 17 instances of potential non-compliance the enforcing agency had not identified.

Colorado. If you have read that Colorado SB 24-205 governs this, that information is out of date. The Act was delayed and then repealed before it ever took effect, replaced by SB 26-189, signed 14 May 2026 and effective 1 January 2027. The replacement is, for candidates, the strongest instrument in the United States: pre-use notice, a plain-language explanation of an adverse decision and the AI's role in it within 30 days, and the right to request meaningful human review by a person with authority to overturn the outcome. None of it applies until 2027.

European Union. Recruitment systems that filter applications and evaluate candidates are high-risk under Annex III of the AI Act, and Article 86 gives affected persons a right to a clear explanation of the AI's role in a decision. The timing has moved. Those obligations were due to apply from 2 August 2026 and have been deferred to 2 December 2027 under the Digital Omnibus agreed in May 2026. There is therefore no operative AI Act right today. GDPR Article 22, which addresses solely automated decisions, continues to apply and is the architecture POPIA section 71 was drawn from.

United Kingdom, UAE and wider Africa. No dedicated statute. The UK position rests on UK GDPR Article 22 and the Equality Act.

A note on all of the above. The legal position is stated as at 12 August 2026 and this area is moving quickly, as Colorado's repealed statute and the European Union's deferral both show. Confirm the current position before relying on any provision. This is general information about your rights as a candidate, not legal advice. Where a decision matters, take advice in the relevant jurisdiction.

> **Elite tip.** Ask the disclosure question at the point you agree the process, not after a rejection. Framed as interest in how the organisation makes decisions, it is a governance question from a governance-literate candidate. Framed after an adverse outcome, it reads as a grievance.

SECTION 04

Consistency: Your Single Data *Trail*

Your CV, your profile, your application and your answers are now one record

For most of the history of executive hiring, small inconsistencies between what a candidate wrote and what they said were absorbed without consequence. A date approximated on a profile, a team size rounded up in conversation, a title given as the one the job actually was rather than the one on the payroll. Nobody was comparing.

Somebody is comparing now, and it is not a person with an imperfect memory.

The honest position on being caught

You will read, in a great deal of career advice published this year, that employers now catch fabrication within minutes. That claim is not supported by evidence, and this pack will not repeat it.

The best available measurement says close to the opposite. GCheck, a background screening company, surveyed 1,500 employed United States professionals who had applied for a role within the previous 18 months, with fieldwork in February 2026. It found that 93% admitted at least one form of embellishment: 61% had exaggerated a skill, 59% had inflated the scope of a role, and 25% had claimed credentials they never earned. Yet of those who embellished, only 26% said an employer had verified a claim and found it misleading. Asked separately, 28% said an exaggeration had been discovered in a way that cost them the role.

Read that with the publisher in mind. GCheck sells the verification service that would catch what its report says is going undetected, and the finding is the most commercially convenient one it could have reported. The direction is nonetheless consistent with everything else in this section, and the figures are candidates reporting on themselves rather than the vendor asserting a catch rate.

So the argument for accuracy is not that you will certainly be caught. It is the asymmetry of what happens if you are.

Most embellishment currently passes. The minority that does not passes instead into a referencing conversation, a psychometric result that does not fit the claimed profile, or a board member who knows someone at your former employer. It surfaces late, after you have invested three months and the organisation has invested a shortlist. It costs you the role outright, and it costs you standing with people whose opinion you will need again in a market where the senior population is small.

The expected value of a rounded-up number is poor. That is the whole argument, and it is sufficient.

What is compared, and against what

YOUR MATERIAL	COMPARED AGAINST
CV	LinkedIn profile, application form, interview transcript
LinkedIn profile	CV, public record, referees' recollection
Application form fields	CV dates, titles, remuneration history where lawfully requested
Round one answers	Round two and three answers, via transcription
Any claimed qualification	The awarding institution, at verification stage

The reconciliation audit

Before your first conversation, put your CV and your profile side by side and confirm that every one of the following agrees exactly.

— Dates. Month and year of every start and end. If a gap exists, it exists in both documents and you can account for it.

— Titles. The title on the payroll. Where an internal title is opaque, the recognisable equivalent sits alongside it, never in place of it.

— Employers. Legal entity names, and the same treatment of acquisitions, mergers and rebrands in both.

— Scope. Team size, budget, revenue responsibility, geographies, reporting line. These are the figures most often inflated in conversation and most easily contradicted.

— Qualifications and registrations. Awarding body, year, and registration numbers where you hold them.

— Board and committee appointments. Dates of appointment and resignation, and whether the seat was executive, non-executive or an observer role.

One document may say more than another. Neither may say something different.

This is the distinction to hold. Your CV will properly carry commercially sensitive metrics that have no place on a public profile. That is a difference of emphasis and disclosure, and it is entirely legitimate. What neither document may do is state a different fact from the other.

Preparing to speak the same figures aloud

Read your own CV as though preparing to be examined on it, because you are. For each significant achievement, be able to state the number as written, the period it covers, the baseline it improved on, and what you would say if someone asked how it was measured.

If you cannot defend a figure to that depth, the figure is wrong on the document, not merely unmemorised. Correct the document.

When the record is genuinely difficult

Not every inconsistency is an inflation. Careers contain interruptions, contested exits, restructures that left a title behind, and periods where the job was materially bigger or smaller than what it was called. These are common at senior level and are handled by preparation, not by concealment.

- **An interrupted tenure.** State the period accurately and give the one-sentence reason without elaboration or apology. Rehearse it until it is unremarkable, because it is.
- **A contested exit.** Agree in advance the form of words you and your former employer can both live with, and use exactly that. Never characterise the other party.
- **A title that understated the job.** Give the title, then the scope. "Group Financial Manager, running a finance function of 40 across four countries" is accurate and self-correcting.
- **A title that overstated it.** Correct it now, on both documents, before anyone else does.

SECTION 05

Executive Presence and Digital *Standing*

Your brand is being evaluated before the first interview is offered

Search firms and hiring committees routinely review a candidate's digital presence before a shortlist is settled. Your profile, your public writing and what a search returns on your name are read before anyone speaks to you.

That is the qualitative position, and it is well established. This pack has removed a widely quoted percentage that used to appear here, because no publisher stands behind it.

The four pillars of executive presence

Authority. A clear track record, quantified impact, industry recognition. Your story must answer one question: what scale of problem have you solved?

Authenticity. Genuine personality, intellectual honesty, and candour about lessons learned. Boards are adept at detecting polish without substance.

Relatability. Demonstrated empathy for employees, customers and stakeholders, and the ability to connect across functions, levels and cultures.

Visibility. Thought leadership, speaking, advisory roles and media presence signal that you are recognised in your domain, not only within one organisation.

LinkedIn for executives in 2026

The advice in this section has changed materially from previous editions, because the platform has.

Position for meaning, not for keywords. Recruiter search is moving towards semantic matching: the substance of what you have run, weighed against the substance of a brief. Write the scope plainly and specifically. A profile that names the size of the organisation, the nature of the mandate and the outcome will be matched more accurately than one carrying a list of terms.

Headline. Not your title alone. Industry, mandate and value: "Chief Revenue Officer, SaaS scale-up, GTM strategy, board advisor".

About. Lead with the problem you solve and the scale at which you solve it. First person. Two or three quantified achievements. No jargon.

Experience. Every major role carries three or four accomplishments with metrics: revenue impact, team size, efficiency, growth.

Verification. Complete LinkedIn's identity and workplace verification. LinkedIn states that verified members receive up to 60% more profile views, reported at its 100 million verified members milestone in December 2025. That is the platform's own marketing claim, it is correlational, and members who verify are likely to be more active in any case. The reason to do it is not the number. It is that verification is a small, checkable signal of exactly the consistency this pack is about.

Open To Work fields. Complete the salary expectation and notice period fields accurately. Doing so makes you findable to searches that use those parameters.

Alignment with your CV. Every fact identical. See Section 04.

Thought leadership. Publish original insight several times a year and comment substantively on your industry. Being known is upstream of being shortlisted.

> **Elite tip.** Search your own full name before every process, and set an alert on it. Know exactly what the hiring team will find, and if something requires context, put that context into your narrative before they ask.

Pre-interview audit checklist

— LinkedIn profile complete, with an executive-grade headline and About section

— Identity and workplace verification completed

— Professional photograph updated within the last 18 months

— Every experience entry carries quantified accomplishments

— Two or three current, credible recommendations visible

— Thought leadership visible: articles, speaking, media

— First-page search results on your name reflect your professional standing

— Personal website or digital portfolio current, if you maintain one

— Social media activity consistent with your professional standing

— Display name and photograph on video platforms formal and correct

SECTION 06

Pre-Interview *Research* Framework

Executive preparation goes far beyond reading the company website

Superficial research is one of the most common and costly mistakes senior candidates make. Boards and chief executives expect you to arrive with a strategic perspective on their business, not familiarity with their products. Use the framework below as your research protocol.

Before you invest: qualify the process

This is new to this edition, and it belongs at the front of the research chapter, because 20 hours of preparation spent on a process that was never real is 20 hours taken from one that is.

Roles that are advertised but not genuinely open are common enough to be worth checking for. In the United Kingdom, Employment Hero reported in January 2026 that one in four workers had applied for a ghost job. No South African data exists on this, and this pack will not extrapolate one market onto another.

You will also see figures claiming that a fifth to a quarter of all listings are fake. Those numbers come from candidates being asked to estimate prevalence, reported as though they were measurements. Treat them as sentiment, not evidence.

What to check before committing your preparation time:

- **Reposting history.** Has this role been listed repeatedly over months without an appointment?
- **Replacement or new.** If a replacement, has the incumbent left? If a new role, what strategic need created it?
- **Is the incumbent still in post?** A profile that still shows the role as current is worth understanding before you invest.
- **Retained or contingent.** A retained search has a client paying for it. That is a materially different signal.
- **Can anyone name the decision-maker?** A process where nobody will say who decides is a process to approach with care.
- **Response to a direct question.** Ask what stage the search is at and how many candidates are in the process. A real search answers.

Company deep dive

- Annual reports for the last three years: financial trajectory, stated priorities, risk factors
- Regulatory filings for public companies: segment performance, risk disclosures
- Recent earnings call transcripts: management tone, analyst concerns
- Funding rounds, investors and valuation signals for private companies
- Recent press releases, acquisitions and strategic announcements
- Employee review platforms and profile activity for culture and retention signals

Competitive landscape

- Three to five key competitors and their market positioning
- Recent competitive moves: product launches, mergers and acquisitions, pricing changes
- Analyst reports and industry publications on sector dynamics
- Regulatory and macroeconomic factors affecting the industry
- White space the company may not yet be pursuing

Leadership team intelligence

- Detailed profiles of the chief executive, your prospective manager and key peers
- Speeches, interviews and published articles by each
- Their stated leadership philosophy, priorities and communication style
- Tenure and track record: is this a stable team or a transitioning one?
- Any board members involved in the hiring decision

The role itself

- If a replacement: what happened to the previous incumbent?
- If new: what strategic need does it address?
- Current team composition, open roles, recent hires and departures
- The metrics that define success for this function
- How the role interfaces with the board and with C-suite peers

Developing your three to five strategic talking points

Distil your research into three to five focused points connecting your track record directly to the company's current challenges. Each should be quantified, specific and tied to a business outcome. Write them on a single card. These are the threads you weave through every conversation in the process.

Elite tip. Prepare a written strategic perspective on the company, no more than one page, covering your assessment of their top two or three challenges and your initial hypotheses on how you would address them. Share it as a follow-up after a first round. It remains among the most effective moves available to a senior candidate.

SECTION 07

Your Leadership *Narrative*: The SOAR Method

Elite Executive's storytelling framework for executive interviews

The STAR method, Situation, Task, Action, Result, is familiar at every career level and is taught to graduates. It was designed to establish that a candidate has done a thing.

At executive level, that is rarely the question. Boards and chief executives assume you have done the thing. What they are assessing is your judgement when the thing was difficult.

SOAR is the firm's house method, chosen for exactly that assessment. It replaces STAR's Task with Obstacle, which moves the centre of the story from what you were asked to do towards what made it hard and what you decided.

A note on the name. Other renderings of SOAR exist, most commonly using Objective in the second position. There is no canonical definition and no research establishing one framework as superior to another. We use Obstacle deliberately, because the obstacle is where executive judgement becomes visible, and because a board that wanted to hear your objectives could have read the job description.

The framework

S: Situation. Set the strategic context. What was the scale, complexity or stakes? Establish credibility with specifics.

O: Obstacle. What made this genuinely difficult? Competing pressures, resource constraints, stakeholder conflict, incomplete information. This is where your judgement is tested and where most candidates skip ahead.

A: Action. What specific decisions did you make? Avoid "we". Boards are evaluating your leadership. Show how you led through ambiguity.

R: Result. Quantify the outcome. Revenue, growth, cost, culture. Connect it to business or stakeholder value.

Building your executive story bank

Identify 10 to 12 core stories from your career covering the full range of executive competencies. Structure each in SOAR format. Practise delivering each in two to three minutes. The goal is not memorisation but internalisation, so that you can adapt fluidly to any question.

STORY CATEGORY	WHAT IT DEMONSTRATES
Crisis leadership	High-stakes decisions under uncertainty and time pressure
Strategic transformation	A business or function you significantly changed: market entry, restructure, digital transformation
People leadership at scale	Building, aligning or transforming a large team or organisation
Stakeholder navigation	A complex landscape: board, investors, regulators, public
Failure and recovery	A significant failure, what you did, and what you learned. Boards respect candour here
Innovation and growth	A new product, market or business model that delivered measurable value
Cross-cultural leadership	Leading across geographies, cultures or diverse teams
Change management	Driving adoption across a resistant organisation

Common mistake. Using "we" throughout. Boards know leadership is collaborative. They are evaluating your specific judgement and contribution. Use "I" deliberately: I decided, I restructured, I persuaded the board.

A 2026 addition. Every figure in every story should match your CV exactly. Where interviews are transcribed and compared, a number that moves between rounds is now visible. See Section 04.

SECTION 08

Executive Interview *Formats*

Know the format, and the intent behind it

Executive processes commonly run to several rounds, and each format evaluates a different dimension of your leadership. Understanding the intent behind each allows you to calibrate.

Competency panel interview

What it is. The most common format. Multiple interviewers: HR, future peers, direct reports, external consultants. Structured questions targeting specific competencies. Typically 45 to 60 minutes.

How to excel. Use SOAR stories. Maintain consistent energy across all panel members. Reference earlier comments to demonstrate active listening.

New in 2026. Assume the session is being transcribed and mapped to a scorecard, whether or not a notetaker is announced. Two consequences. Your figures must match what you said in earlier rounds, and a structured answer with a clear opening claim survives summarisation better than one that builds slowly to its point.

Board-level interview

What it is. For C-suite roles. Board directors, non-executive directors, major investors. Focus on strategic leadership, governance, risk and cultural alignment.

How to excel. Speak in peer-level language. Strategic vision, not operational detail. Be direct, even provocative. Boards respect decisive, intellectually honest thinking.

Assessment centre

What it is. A half or full day. Group exercises, individual case studies, role-plays, psychometric testing and structured interviews. Used for managing director and C-suite appointments.

How to excel. Collaborate visibly but lead when appropriate. Show structured thinking in case studies. Do not dismiss psychometric instruments; engage with genuine self-awareness.

Business case or strategic presentation

What it is. A real or hypothetical business challenge, presented back to the hiring team with your recommendations.

How to excel. Frame the problem before solving it. Show analytical rigour. State your assumptions. Acknowledge trade-offs. End with a clear recommendation and an implementation roadmap.

Strength-based interview

What it is. Focused on what you genuinely enjoy, what energises you, and where you do your best work. Growing in use for senior appointments.

How to excel. Be honest and specific. This format is designed to detect inconsistency. Know your energisers and your areas of growth.

Informal or lunch interview

What it is. Appears casual, is fully evaluative. Assesses emotional intelligence, interpersonal style, cultural fit and behaviour outside formal settings.

How to excel. Your warmth and curiosity are under observation. Ask good questions. Listen more than you speak.

Verification and work sample

What it is. A skills assessment, a written strategic exercise, a financial modelling task or a request for a work sample, set before or between interview rounds. Rising for the reason set out in Section 02: employers cannot detect fabrication, so they verify capability directly.

How to excel. Treat it as a real deliverable, because it is the closest thing to evidence in the whole process. Ask what format and length are expected, ask what business context you should assume, and state your assumptions in the work itself. Do not over-produce: a tight, well-reasoned 2 pages beats 20.

On confidentiality. Never submit work product belonging to a former employer. Build a comparable example on public or invented data and say that you have done so. A candidate who explains why they will not hand over a previous employer's material has just demonstrated something valuable about themselves.

Asynchronous or AI-scored interview

What it is. A one-way recorded interview, with questions presented on screen and answers recorded to time, evaluated by software before any person watches, if any person watches at all.

Where you will meet it. Rarely in retained executive search. More commonly at divisional director and senior manager level in large organisations with centralised talent functions, and in first-round screening for advertised roles. If you are in a retained search, you are almost certainly being assessed by people. If you have applied to an advertised role at a large corporate, prepare for the possibility.

How to excel. The technique differs from a live conversation, and Section 12 sets out the differences in full. In short: answer the question in your first sentence, use the full time allowed without padding, name things consistently rather than varying your vocabulary, and speak at a measured pace with clear articulation.

Before you decide whether to proceed. You are entitled to ask what part of the assessment is automated and who makes the final decision. Section 03 covers the position in your market.

SECTION 09

The Core *Question* Bank

The questions you will be asked, and how to answer them at executive level

The following covers six categories of question you will be asked, and a seventh set you should ask. For each, the intent behind it and guidance for an executive-calibre response.

Leadership and vision

What is your leadership philosophy, and how has it evolved? Do not give a textbook answer. Share a specific moment that changed how you lead. Boards want a philosophy that has been tested by adversity.

What would your direct reports say is your greatest strength and your greatest blind spot? This tests self-awareness. The strength should be specific and evidenced. The blind spot should be real, and accompanied by what you are actively doing about it.

Tell me about a time you led a team through a significant crisis. Use SOAR. Focus on your decision-making process, not only the outcome. Show how you held team performance and stakeholder trust simultaneously.

How do you approach succession planning and developing future leaders? Boards think long term. Show deliberate investment in talent, with examples of people you have promoted or prepared for bigger roles.

Strategic thinking and business acumen

What is your 100-day plan for this role? Three phases: listen and learn, days 1 to 30; diagnose and build, days 31 to 60; act and align, days 61 to 100. Show that you will not act before understanding the context, and that you will move decisively once you do.

How do you balance short-term performance pressure with long-term value creation? Name the tension explicitly. Use a specific example where you held a strategic position under short-term pressure and the outcome justified it.

What market opportunities do you see that we are currently missing? This requires genuine research and demonstrates intellectual courage. A strong answer positions you as a peer rather than a candidate.

How would you approach a significant downturn in the business? Hold the financial reality and the human dimension simultaneously. Boards want leaders who make hard decisions without losing the culture.

People, culture and organisational health

How do you build a high-performing executive team? Talent assessment, complementary strengths, psychological safety, clarity of ownership. Use a specific example.

Describe an organisational change that met significant resistance. Treat resistance as a signal rather than an obstacle. Describe your stakeholder engagement and how you built a coalition.

How do you approach diversity, equity and inclusion at leadership level? Specific actions, not principles. What appointments have you made? What structural barriers have you removed? Boards see through performative language.

Failure, accountability and learning agility

Tell me about your most significant professional failure. Choose a real, material failure rather than a disguised strength. Show ownership, what you would do differently, and how the lesson is integrated into how you lead now.

Describe a decision that was unpopular but that you still believe was right. This tests moral courage. Show the reasoning, how you communicated it, and the outcome. Do not choose a trivial example.

Values, ethics and ESG

How do you define and model the values of an organisation? Show how you have made values visible through specific decisions, particularly where the easier path was to compromise them.

What have you done to embed ESG principles into strategy rather than reporting? Show how sustainability thinking has influenced product decisions, capital allocation or talent strategy.

Artificial intelligence and judgement

How does generative AI change value creation in this function? Answer at the level of the business model, not the tool. Where does it compress cost, where does it change what customers expect, and where is it currently oversold?

Describe your experience overseeing an AI implementation. Two or three specific cases you personally oversaw. What you decided, what it cost, what it returned, and what did not work.

How would you approach reskilling a workforce for an AI-augmented environment? Sequence and honesty. Which roles change, which disappear, what you owe the people in them, and how you would communicate it.

What ethical considerations do you weigh when adopting AI at scale? Data provenance, bias in decisions affecting people, explainability where decisions are contested, and where you would decline to automate.

Questions to ask about the process itself

New to this edition. Asking these signals governance literacy and gives you information you need.

— Will any part of this assessment be automated, and who makes the final decision?

— What does your verification process involve, and at what stage does it happen?

— What is the realistic timeline to a decision, and who else is in the process?

— Is this a retained search, and who is the ultimate decision-maker?

— What happened to the previous incumbent, and what is the board's view of why?

SECTION 10

Role-Specific *Preparation*

Question themes and success metrics by function

While many themes are universal at executive level, each function carries its own evaluation lens.

Chief Executive Officer

Competencies assessed. Strategic vision, stakeholder governance, culture stewardship, external representation, board management.

— How do you manage the relationship between the board's expectations and day-to-day execution?

— What is your philosophy on stakeholder capitalism versus shareholder primacy?

— How do you stay connected to the culture and ground truth of the organisation at scale?

— What would you do in the first 30 days if you discovered a significant cultural or ethical problem?

— How do you think about the chief executive's role in external positioning: customers, media, government?

Chief Financial Officer

Competencies assessed. Capital allocation, risk management, financial storytelling, strategic partnership, investor relations.

— How do you balance financial discipline with the need for strategic investment?

— Describe your experience with enterprise risk management and capital structure decisions.

— How have you used financial strategy to drive transformation rather than measure it?

— Tell me about a time you had to deliver difficult financial news to the board.

— How do you develop financial literacy and business partnership capability in your team?

Chief Operating Officer

Competencies assessed. Operational excellence, scalability, systems thinking, execution discipline, cross-functional alignment.

— How do you scale operations across multiple geographies with speed and consistency?

— How do you identify and eliminate bottlenecks that are invisible to leadership?

— How do you maintain culture and performance during rapid growth or integration?

- Describe your experience linking operational metrics directly to strategic outcomes.
- Tell me about a major operational transformation you led end to end.

Chief Marketing Officer and Chief Growth Officer

Competencies assessed. Brand strategy, revenue growth, data-driven decision-making, customer centricity, global marketing.

- How do you approach brand positioning in a competitive and noisy market?
- How do you balance brand investment with performance marketing under constraint?
- How do you measure the return on brand and trust, not only campaigns?
- How do you integrate customer insight into product strategy and board decisions?
- What is your approach to global brand localisation?

Chief Technology Officer and Chief Information Officer

Competencies assessed. Technology and business alignment, digital transformation, cybersecurity governance, technical talent, AI and data strategy.

- How do you develop a technology strategy aligned to business objectives rather than innovation for its own sake?
- How have you led a major digital transformation, and what did you learn?
- How do you approach cybersecurity as a board-level governance responsibility?
- How do you build technology leadership capability under constant talent pressure?
- What is your framework for build, buy or partner decisions?

Chief People Officer and CHRO

Competencies assessed. Culture and values, talent strategy, organisational design, HR as a business driver, the future workforce.

- How do you lead a culture transformation where legacy behaviours are entrenched?
- How do you measure human capital return in a way that resonates with the CFO and the board?
- Describe your experience building scalable HR infrastructure during rapid growth.
- How do you approach executive succession with rigour and transparency?
- How do you ensure your people strategy anticipates the impact of AI on workforce design?
- **New for 2026.** Your function now owns the hiring machinery described in Section 03. How do you govern automated decision-making in recruitment, and what is your position on disclosure to candidates?

SECTION 11

AI Fluency, ESG and Global *Leadership*

Three dimensions of executive readiness

Artificial intelligence fluency

You do not need to be a data scientist. You must be able to speak with conviction about what AI does to value creation in your function and your industry, and to distinguish what it has actually delivered from what it has been promised to deliver.

The most useful single fact you can carry into a board conversation on this subject is how little has landed. PwC's 29th Global CEO Survey, *Leading through uncertainty in the age of AI*, published 19 January 2026 and drawn from 4,454 chief executives across 95 countries, found that 56% report neither revenue nor cost benefit from AI over the past year. Only 12% had both grown revenue and reduced cost using it. In the same survey, 42% of chief executives named failure to transform quickly enough to keep pace with technological change as their principal concern, ahead of innovation capability and long-term viability at 29% each.

That is a more interesting position than enthusiasm. A candidate who can explain why most implementations have not paid, and what they would do differently, is a candidate who has been close to one.

Questions you will be asked are in Section 09 under Artificial intelligence and judgement.

> **Preparation.** Be specific about two or three AI use cases you personally oversaw: a workflow automation, a predictive analytics initiative, a generative implementation. Carry the cost, the return and the failure mode. Strategic decision-making, not technical detail.

ESG leadership

Boards continue to embed environmental, social and governance competencies into executive scorecards, and candidates who can evidence a track record on sustainability, inclusion and stakeholder accountability retain an advantage.

This edition carries no percentage on ESG sentiment. The figures that appeared in previous editions could not be traced to a publisher, and ESG is politically contested in the United States market in a way that makes an unsourced number a liability rather than an asset. The coaching below does not depend on one.

What boards are actually assessing is whether sustainability thinking has changed a decision you made, or whether it lives in a report. Prepare one initiative you championed where the ESG consideration altered the commercial answer, and be ready to say what it cost.

Questions you will be asked

— How have you embedded sustainability into strategy rather than compliance reporting?

— Tell me about an ESG initiative you championed that had measurable business impact.

— How do you balance profit obligations with purpose and stakeholder accountability?

— How do you hold your leadership team accountable for inclusion metrics?

— What is your approach to climate risk as a board-level governance matter?

Global and cross-cultural leadership

For executives competing in global markets, cross-cultural competency is evaluated explicitly.

McKinsey's *Diversity Matters Even More*, published December 2023 and drawn from 1,265 companies across 23 countries using 2022 financial data, found that companies in the top quartile for ethnic diversity on executive teams were 39% more likely to outperform financially than those in the bottom quartile. The figure for gender diversity on executive teams was also 39%.

Two notes on using this. The measure is likelihood of above-median profitability against industry and regional peers, not a claim that diverse companies are 39% more profitable. And the finding is academically contested: a 2024 replication attempt on S&P 500 data did not reproduce it. Attribute it to McKinsey in the room rather than asserting it as settled fact. A director who knows the dispute will respect the candidate who knew it too.

Questions you will be asked

— Describe your experience leading across multiple geographies and cultures. What did you learn?

— How do you adapt your leadership style in cultures very different from your own?

— Tell me about a cross-cultural conflict you navigated. What was the outcome?

— How do you build psychological safety and trust in distributed teams?

— How do you approach governance and compliance across different regulatory jurisdictions?

> The executives who succeed in global markets are not those who ignore cultural difference. They are the ones who treat it as a source of advantage.

SECTION 12

Virtual, AI-Scored and Cross-Cultural *Excellence*

Commanding presence across a screen, across borders, and across a scoring model

Virtual interviews are standard at every stage of executive hiring. For global roles, your ability to project confidence, warmth and authority on video is itself a proxy for your ability to lead distributed teams.

Technical setup: non-negotiable

- Test camera, microphone and speakers 24 to 48 hours beforehand, not five minutes before
- Minimum 10Mbps download. Run a speed test and have a mobile hotspot as backup
- Camera at eye level. Use a stand or adjust your screen height
- Lighting in front of your face, never behind. No window backlighting
- Clean, uncluttered background. A bookshelf or plain wall is ideal
- Log in 10 minutes early. Have the dial-in number saved
- Close all notifications: email, messaging, calendar
- Water within reach. Phone silenced completely

Presence and communication on camera

Eye contact. Look into the lens when speaking, not at your own image. When listening, you may look at the interviewer's face. Practise this; it feels unnatural at first.

Vocal energy. Video compresses presence. Speak with slightly more energy and variation than you would in person.

Pause deliberately. A brief pause before a complex answer signals confidence and thought.

Body language. Sit upright. Measured gestures. Smile naturally; it reads more strongly on camera than in person.

Dress fully. Not just from the waist up. Your mindset shifts when you are dressed for the room.

When the evaluator is a model

If you are in an asynchronous or AI-scored format, several of the instincts above work against you. This is the part almost nobody prepares for, and the differences are simple once named.

	A HUMAN PANEL	AN AI EVALUATOR
Pausing before you answer	Signals confidence and thought	Reads as silence. Begin promptly
Warmth and rapport	Carries real weight	Nothing is measuring it. Do not perform it
Answer shape	You may build towards your point	Front-load the point, then evidence it
Vocabulary	Vary it for interest	Name things consistently. Synonyms fragment the match
Time allowed	Read the room and stop	Use the time. A short answer reads as a thin one
Articulation	Accent and pace rarely matter	Speak clearly and at a measured pace. Transcription drives the score
Recovery from a stumble	Acknowledge it and move on	Restart the sentence cleanly if the format allows a retake

On the substance, nothing changes. Specificity, scale and consequence are what a scorecard is looking for, and they are what a board is looking for. You are not writing for a machine. You are making the same argument in a form the machine can transmit intact.

If you are told mid-process. You are entitled to ask what is automated and who decides. See Section 03. You are also entitled to decline. In the Greenhouse survey cited in Section 02, 38% of respondents withdrew from a process because of an AI interview. That is a legitimate commercial judgement about an employer, not a failure of nerve.

Cross-cultural interview protocols

When interviewing for roles in cultures different from your own, small adaptations materially change how authority, warmth and credibility are perceived.

DIMENSION	LOWER-CONTEXT CULTURES (US, UK, AUSTRALIA)	HIGHER-CONTEXT CULTURES (JAPAN, KOREA, MIDDLE EAST, PARTS OF EUROPE)
Communication style	Direct, explicit, speed valued	Indirect, layered, considered pacing valued
Showing authority	First-person assertion. Share opinions early	Demonstrate through credibility and patience
Questions to the panel	Direct and challenging questions respected	Frame respectfully. Avoid public challenge
Silence	Fill pauses quickly	Allow silence. It signals contemplation
Hierarchy	Downplay rank. Appear accessible	Acknowledge seniority. Formal address expected

Global best practice. Research the communication norms of the hiring country before every international interview. 20 minutes on the cultural profile of your target market signals the cross-cultural attentiveness the role is testing for.

SECTION 13

Compensation *Negotiation* Playbook

Negotiating a package that reflects your market value, in your market

Executive compensation negotiation is different in kind from salary negotiation earlier in a career. The package is multi-dimensional, the stakes are high, and how you negotiate signals your commercial judgement.

Previous editions of this pack gave a single set of ranges. That was a mistake, because executive compensation is structured differently in each of the markets our clients work in, and the norms most widely published are American. This edition separates the principles, which travel, from the components, which do not.

The principles

1. **Let them go first.** If asked your expectations, respond: what is the budgeted range for this role? Anchoring early limits your upside.
2. **Use market data, not personal need.** Frame your counter around benchmarks, never your current salary or your circumstances.
3. **Negotiate the whole package.** A modest base increase alongside improved long-term incentives, a sign-on and better severance terms is frequently worth more than a larger base.
4. **Request 24 to 48 hours.** Expected and respected at executive level. Never accept verbally on the spot.
5. **Get everything in writing.** Do not start without a signed offer letter covering every component.

> **Critical warning.** Restraint of trade, non-compete and non-solicitation clauses can materially limit your future options. Have a specialist employment lawyer review the full agreement before signing. The cost is almost always worth it.

South Africa

Structure. South African executive packages are typically expressed as a single total cost to company figure, with retirement funding, medical aid and allowances carved out of that figure rather than added to it. Negotiating a percentage retirement contribution as though it were an addition to base salary misunderstands the structure and will not land.

Severance and notice. This is where imported advice does the most damage. The statutory floor on retrenchment is one week's remuneration for each completed year of continuous service, under section 41(2) of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Executive protection in South Africa comes not from a multi-year severance provision but from contractual notice, typically three or six months and usually paid in lieu, on an indefinite-term contract carrying a restraint of trade. If you have read that one to two years' base salary is standard for C-suite severance, that is a United States construction and it is not the South African position.

What to negotiate instead. Notice period and whether it is payable in lieu. The restraint: its duration, geographic scope and whether it is paid. Good leaver and bad leaver definitions. Treatment of unvested incentives on a change of control. Garden leave. Reference obligations.

The change you need to know about. Sections 30A and 30B of the Companies Act, inserted by the Companies Amendment Act 16 of 2024, came into force on 22 May 2026. Public and state-owned companies must now put a forward-looking remuneration policy to an ordinary shareholder vote, publish an implementation report naming each individual director's and prescribed officer's remuneration, and disclose the ratio of the total remuneration of the top 5% of employees to that of the bottom 5%. A two-strike rule bars remuneration committee members from that committee after two consecutive rejections of the policy.

For you as a candidate, three consequences follow. Your package will be published against your name. It will be visible alongside a pay ratio that invites comparison with your own workforce. And the remuneration committee negotiating with you now has a shareholder vote to defend, which makes structure more negotiable than headline quantum. Argue for the shape of the package rather than the size of the number, and you are arguing with the grain of their problem rather than against it.

Benchmarks. PwC South Africa's Directors Remuneration and Trends Report of 15 October 2025 reported median total remuneration among JSE Top 200 companies rising 8% for chief executives and 19% for chief financial officers, with non-executive board fees up 12%. Remuneration data ages quickly. Confirm the current edition before relying on these figures.

United Kingdom

Long-term incentives dominate senior packages and are where negotiation pays. Deloitte reported on 20 April 2026 that median FTSE 100 chief executive pay rose 18% to £5.89m in the 2025 financial year, with median bonuses paying out at 76% of maximum, and that 29% of companies analysed were seeking increases to maximum incentive opportunity, at a median uplift of 200% of salary. Notice periods of 12 months are common at board level. Remuneration committee governance and shareholder consultation shape what is available.

United States

The package is equity-led. Median total direct compensation for S&P 500 chief executives was approximately $17m for 2024, the most recent full year reported, with long-term incentives rather than salary or bonus the dominant component. Negotiate grant quantum, vesting schedule, performance conditions and acceleration on change of control before you negotiate base. Severance and change-of-control protections are more developed than in other markets and are genuinely negotiable.

Components to negotiate, in any market

COMPONENT	WHAT TO NEGOTIATE
Base salary	Benchmark against industry, geography and company size. Usually the least flexible component
Annual bonus	Target percentage and, more importantly, clarity and achievability of the performance criteria
Long-term incentives	Grant quantum, vesting schedule, performance conditions, acceleration on change of control
Sign-on	To offset unvested compensation forfeited on leaving. Frequently the most negotiable single item
Severance and leaver terms	What constitutes a good leaver, notice, payment in lieu, garden leave, reference obligations
Change of control	What happens to your equity and your employment if the company is acquired. Often overlooked
Benefits	Health cover, retirement funding, professional development, relocation. Note the structural difference in South Africa above
Flexibility	Additional leave, working arrangements, sabbatical provisions. Increasingly negotiable at executive level

SECTION 14

The Executive Interview Master *Checklist*

Your preparation protocol, from research to follow-up

Personal brand and digital standing

- Search your own full name and know what the hiring team will find
- LinkedIn profile complete: executive headline, strong About section, quantified experience
- Identity and workplace verification completed
- Professional photograph updated within 18 months
- Thought leadership visible
- Personal website or digital profile current
- Social media reviewed for anything inconsistent with your professional standing

Consistency across your record

- Every date reconciled between CV, profile and application form
- Every title reconciled, with recognisable equivalents where internal titles are opaque
- Every scope figure reconciled: team size, budget, revenue, geographies, reporting line
- Every qualification, registration and board appointment reconciled and evidenced
- You can defend every figure on your CV to the depth of how it was measured
- Any interruption, contested exit or mis-sized title has a prepared, unremarkable form of words

Qualifying the process

- Reposting history checked
- Replacement or new role established, and the incumbent's status understood
- Retained or contingent search established
- Decision-maker identifiable
- Stage of the search and number of candidates asked and answered

Company and role research

- Annual reports for three years reviewed and annotated
- Three to five competitors and their positioning understood
- Recent press releases, earnings calls and announcements reviewed
- Profiles of the chief executive, your prospective manager and relevant board members reviewed
- Employee sentiment data reviewed
- Context of the role understood: new, replacement or restructured
- Three to five strategic talking points developed and written on a single card

Story bank and narrative

- SOAR internalised, practised aloud
- 10 to 12 stories drafted and practised at two to three minutes each
- Coverage across crisis, transformation, people leadership, failure, cross-cultural and ESG
- Quantified results confirmed and matching your CV exactly
- "I" language throughout
- Career arc deliverable confidently in three to four minutes

The machine layer

- Disclosure question prepared: what is automated, and who decides
- Your position clear on proceeding with an AI-scored round if one appears
- Verification readiness confirmed: you can evidence or discuss in depth every significant claim
- Work sample approach decided, using public or constructed data rather than a former employer's material
- Asynchronous technique rehearsed if the format is likely

Interview-specific preparation

- Format confirmed: panel, board, assessment centre, case, informal, verification or asynchronous
- Interviewers researched individually where names are known
- 20 to 30 questions prepared across all rounds
- 100-day plan drafted
- Compensation response prepared: market data researched for the correct market, ask-first strategy ready
- AI story prepared: two or three specific implementations with cost, return and failure mode
- ESG story prepared: one initiative where the consideration changed the commercial answer
- Cross-cultural example prepared for global roles

Logistics: virtual

— Platform downloaded, tested and account verified 48 hours before

— Camera, microphone, lighting and background tested

— Dial-in number saved as backup

— Notifications disabled on all devices

— Full interview outfit prepared and worn

— Logging in 10 minutes early

Logistics: in person

— Location confirmed and route mapped or dry-run completed

— Departure time set to arrive 15 minutes early

— Copies of CV and supporting materials prepared

— Portfolio or strategic document prepared if relevant

— Outfit prepared, pressed and appropriate to the company's culture

— Phone silenced before entering the building

After the interview

— Personalised note to each interviewer within 24 hours

— Key themes, pain points and opportunities recorded immediately

— Strategic one-page perspective or 100-day plan offered as follow-up collateral

— Follow-up timeline confirmed and noted

— Figures you quoted recorded, so that later rounds match

— Reflections captured on what to adjust for the next round

SECTION 15

Elite Executive Career Solutions

Helping senior leaders present with the precision their career deserves

Elite Executive Career Solutions has worked with executives and senior leaders since 2017, positioning more than 10,000 professionals across 38 countries and five continents. Every executive engagement is written by experienced writers working to the evidence set out in this pack.

Written to be read by machines and decided on by people.

That is the whole of the Executive Career Positioning Suite™ in one line. Your documents are structured for clean machine parsing, and written so that a search consultant and a board read the same case. Structure so it parses. Write so it persuades. In that order, and never the reverse.

Executive CV & Cover Letter

Board-ready and machine-readable. Structured for clean machine parsing, written so a search consultant and a board read the same case. Written by an experienced writer and tailored to role, sector and market, with the conventions of your target market applied rather than a single template imposed. Includes localisation for South Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, the Middle East and wider Africa, with the correct term and format applied for each: in American usage the document is a résumé, and a CV is the academic record.

Executive LinkedIn Optimisation

Positioned for the way recruiter search is moving, towards scope and capability rather than keyword matching, and aligned exactly with your CV so the two agree on every fact. Includes identity and workplace verification guidance, the Open To Work fields, and an activity approach designed to sustain your visibility over time.

Executive Positioning Strategy

The argument before the documents. Where you are credible, which roles you should be pursuing, what your record supports and what it does not, and the case that follows from it. Commissioned on its own or as the foundation of a full engagement.

Executive Interview Preparation

A written preparation brief for one named role, built from your CV, the job description and the organisation you are targeting. It covers the themes and questions that role is likely to turn on, how to structure your responses around your own achievements, and value proposition, salary and negotiation guidance for that market. You complete a structured questionnaire in your own time and the brief is returned within three to five business days in Word and PDF, with revisions open for 30 days. There is nothing to schedule across time zones. A telephone consultation is available on request.

Executive Biography

A designed career narrative for board introductions, speaking engagements, investor meetings and executive search processes.

How we work

Complete confidentiality. Clients are attributed by role and sector only, and a non-disclosure agreement is available on request. For document engagements, a first draft follows within two business days of your consultation, revisions run within a 30-day window, and final delivery is in Word and PDF. Fees are confirmed at consultation.

We guarantee no interview, no offer, no role and no salary outcome. Anyone who does is selling something they do not control.

Contact. info@elite-cv.com | +27 63 607 1660 | elite-cv.com

APPENDIX

Appendix: *Sources* and Data Notes

Every figure in this pack, with its publisher, its date and its limits

This appendix exists because a document that asks a chief executive to make decisions should show its working. Where a figure is a vendor's own marketing claim, it says so. Where a figure describes job seekers generally rather than executives, it says so. Where the evidence does not exist, this pack states that rather than estimating.

Artificial intelligence in the hiring process

63% of job seekers have been interviewed by an AI, up 13 percentage points in six months. 70% were never clearly told AI would evaluate them, and 21% of all respondents, being a subset of that 70%, found out only when the interview began. 57% believe disclosure should be mandated. 38% withdrew from a process because of an AI interview. Greenhouse, published 1 May 2026. Sample 2,950 job seekers: 1,200 in the United States, remainder United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and Ireland. Fieldwork dates not disclosed by the publisher. *Limit: all levels of seniority, weighted towards high-volume applicants. Not an executive figure.*

Recruiters using LinkedIn Hiring Assistant view 81% fewer profiles to find qualified candidates. LinkedIn, product documentation, stated basis LinkedIn platform data January 2026. *Limit: the vendor's own claim about its own product. No published methodology, sample or comparison group. A lower bound of 62% circulates in secondary coverage; it has no traceable publisher and is not used here.*

Verified LinkedIn members receive up to 60% more profile views. LinkedIn, reported at its 100 million verified members milestone, December 2025. *Limit: the platform's own marketing claim. Correlational, with no control for the likelihood that members who verify are more active in any case. The words "up to" are load-bearing.*

AI notetaking and candidate insight agents in mainstream applicant tracking systems. Greenhouse product releases, third quarter 2026.

Frequency of AI-conducted or AI-scored interviews at C-suite level: no reliable data exists. No published survey segments AI interview exposure by seniority, salary band or role level. Vendors in the category position their products for high-volume recruitment. This pack states the absence rather than substituting a general figure.

Detection and verification

AI text detectors are not accurate or reliable enough to be relied on. Weber-Wulff, Anohina-Naumeca et al., *Testing of detection tools for AI-generated text*, International Journal for Educational Integrity 19:26, December 2023. 14 tools tested. Hadra, Cambridge and Mesbah, *Evaluating the accuracy and reliability of AI content detectors in academic contexts*, International Journal for Educational Integrity 22:4, 2 February 2026. Turnitin accuracy 0.61, Originality 0.69, near-zero recall on hybrid human and AI text. *Limit: both studies tested academic prose. No peer-reviewed study has tested detectors on CVs.*

93% of recent applicants admitted at least one form of embellishment during hiring. 61% exaggerated a skill, 59% inflated role scope, 25% claimed credentials never earned. Of those who embellished, 26% said an employer verified a claim and found it misleading. Asked separately, 28% said an exaggeration had been discovered in a way that cost them the role. GCheck, *2026 Trust in Hiring Report*, released 24 March 2026. Sample 1,500 full-time employed United States professionals who had applied within the previous 18 months. Fieldwork 14 to 22 February 2026. Margin of error ±2.5% at 95% confidence. *Limit: published by a background screening vendor, which sells the verification service the finding implies a need for. Self-reported behaviour, United States sample only. The 93% covers a spectrum from exaggerating a skill to fabricating a credential and should not be compressed into a claim that 93% lie on their CV.*

The candidate's legal position

Stated as at 12 August 2026. This area is moving quickly. Confirm the current position before relying on any provision.

South Africa. Protection of Personal Information Act, section 71. The Act commenced 1 July 2020 and became enforceable from 1 July 2021. Automated decision-making, the right to make representations and to be given sufficient information about the underlying logic. Enforcement through the Information Regulator.

New York City. Local Law 144. Annual independent bias audit, published summary, 10 business days' notice. Enforcement from 5 July 2023. New York State Comptroller audit, 2 December 2025: two complaints in two years, 17 instances of potential non-compliance identified that the enforcing agency had not.

Colorado. SB 24-205 delayed and then repealed before taking effect. Replaced by SB 26-189, signed 14 May 2026, effective 1 January 2027. Pre-use notice, plain-language explanation of an adverse decision within 30 days, right to request meaningful human review by a person with authority to override.

European Union. AI Act Annex III point 4 classifies recruitment filtering and candidate evaluation as high-risk. Article 86 gives a right to explanation. High-risk obligations deferred from 2 August 2026 to 2 December 2027 under the Digital Omnibus, agreed May 2026. GDPR Article 22 continues to apply.

United Kingdom, UAE, wider Africa. No dedicated statute. UK position rests on UK GDPR Article 22 and the Equality Act.

Process integrity

One in four United Kingdom workers have applied for a ghost job. Employment Hero, January 2026. Sample size and fieldwork window not published.

No South African data exists on ghost jobs. Figures claiming that 18% to 27% of listings are fake derive from candidates estimating prevalence, not from measurement, and are not used in this pack.

Leadership and organisational evidence

56% of chief executives report neither revenue nor cost benefit from AI in the past year; 12% both grew revenue and reduced cost using it; 42% name failure to transform quickly enough to keep pace with technological change as their principal concern, against 29% each for innovation capability and long-term viability. PwC, *Leading through uncertainty in the age of AI: PwC's 29th Global CEO Survey*, published 19 January 2026. Sample 4,454 chief executives across 95 countries. Fieldwork 30 September to 10 November 2025.

Companies in the top quartile for ethnic diversity on executive teams are 39% more likely to outperform financially than those in the bottom quartile. The figure for gender diversity is also 39%. McKinsey & Company, *Diversity Matters Even More*, December 2023. Sample 1,265 companies across 23 countries, 2022 financial data. *Limit: the measure is likelihood of above-median profitability against industry and regional peers, not a difference in profit. The finding is contested; a 2024 replication attempt on S&P 500 data did not reproduce it.*

Compensation

South Africa. Basic Conditions of Employment Act section 41(2): severance of one week's remuneration per completed year of continuous service on retrenchment. Companies Act sections 30A and 30B, inserted by the Companies Amendment Act 16 of 2024, in force 22 May 2026: shareholder vote on remuneration policy, individual disclosure of director and prescribed officer remuneration, top 5% to bottom 5% pay ratio disclosure, two-strike rule on remuneration committee membership.

South African benchmarks. PwC South Africa, *Directors Remuneration and Trends Report*, 15 October 2025. JSE Top 200 median total remuneration: chief executives up 8%, chief financial officers up 19%, non-executive board fees up 12%. *Limit: remuneration data ages within 12 months. Confirm the current edition before relying on it.*

United Kingdom. Deloitte, published 20 April 2026. FTSE 100 median chief executive package up 18% to £5.89m in the 2025 financial year; median bonus payout 76% of maximum; 29% of companies analysed seeking increases to maximum incentive opportunity at a median uplift of 200% of salary.

United States. Pay Governance, via the Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance, 4 February 2026. Median S&P 500 chief executive total direct compensation approximately $17m for 2024, long-term incentives the dominant component.

Figures removed from previous editions

The following appeared in version 4 and have been removed because no publisher stands behind them. They are listed here so that any reader working from an older copy knows not to rely on them: that AI-related interview questions had tripled since 2023; that only 11% of leaders feel prepared for the AI transition; that over 75% of executives say ESG leadership affects resilience; that 89% of white-collar executives work in globally dispersed teams; that more than 50% of organisations use pre-employment assessments for executive roles; that 65% of executive candidates are researched online before an interview invitation; that 65% of senior candidates research a company's ESG standing; and that SOAR-structured stories are 40% more memorable than STAR responses.

This pack is reviewed and reissued as the evidence changes, not on a fixed annual cycle. Version 5, 12 August 2026. For bespoke interview preparation and career strategy, contact our team directly.

Elite Executive Career Solutions | elite-cv.com | info@elite-cv.com | +27 63 607 1660

ELITE EXECUTIVE
CAREER SOLUTIONS

Written to be read by machines and *decided on* by people.

elite-cv.com
info@elite-cv.com
+27 63 607 1660

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