



Assessing Your Leadership Capabilities

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“Leadership seems to be the marshaling of skills possessed by a majority but used by a minority. But it’s something that can be learned by anyone, taught to everyone, denied to no one.”

—Warren Bennis, *Leaders* (1997)

It is an oft-held truism of leadership that one must be a “Born Leader” to be a great motivator, planner, director, mover, and shaker. Like many truisms, this one falls somewhere between myth and misconception. Leadership is a goal to be pursued, not a gift bestowed only upon a lucky few. The best leaders make a personal choice to continually assess and constantly develop their leadership capabilities.

Recognizing that development begins with definitions, many organizations have set themselves the daunting task of quantifying, qualifying, and specifying the attributes of an effective leader. These attributes frequently take the form of competencies, a combination of skills, knowledge, and characteristics that have been behaviorally defined. Using a model of these leadership competencies, individuals can assess how well or how often they demonstrate these behaviors. One validated model of leadership competencies is incorporated in the Linkage Leadership Assessment Instrument (LAI™). Building on research completed by Linkage, Inc. in conjunction with Warren Bennis, the LAI focuses on the five competencies essential to effective leadership, as well as eight additional critical areas of leadership knowledge and skills.





The Leadership Knowledge Areas—Definitions

- ◆ *Marketing/Sales*: The knowledge required to market and sell your organization's products, services, and programs.
- ◆ *Running the Business*: The knowledge required to coordinate the efforts and subparts of your organization (operationally and otherwise).
- ◆ *Finance*: The knowledge required to interpret financial and economic trends (and take appropriate action in response).
- ◆ *Human Capital*: The knowledge required to employ, deploy, and maximize the talents of the people within your organization.
- ◆ *Strategic Planning*: The knowledge required to set long-term and short-term yardsticks for your organization.

The Leadership Skills—Definitions

- ◆ *Communication*: The skill of communicating with and relating to a broad range of people internally and externally.
- ◆ *Negotiation*: The skill of arriving at and reaching understandings and agreements with a broad range of people, internally and externally.
- ◆ *Problem-Solving*: The skill of employing analytical abilities, pragmatism, and other tools to resolve complex problems in a variety of contexts.
- ◆ *Change Management*: The skill of adapting to and thriving in times of internal or external change.
- ◆ *Coaching and Mentoring*: The skill of mastering a comfortable coaching style and using it strategically to improve performance.

The Leadership Competencies—Definitions

- ◆ *Focused Drive*: The competency of focusing on a goal and harnessing your energy in order to meet that goal—a balance of focus and drive.

Focus: The ability to identify an important goal or vision and to channel efforts at specific targets that support that goal/vision.

Drive: The ability to persevere, sacrifice (when necessary), and expend high degrees of energy to reach high levels of performance.

- ◆ *Emotional Intelligence*: The competency of understanding and mastering your emotions (and those of others) in a way that instills confidence—a balance of perception and emotional maturity.

Perception: The ability to read the emotions and thoughts of others through the use of insight and analytical skills.

Emotional Maturity: The ability to master emotions and cope with stress in a way that instills confidence, motivates, and enhances group effectiveness.
- ◆ *Trusted Influence*: The competency of evoking trust from others and placing trust in others to enable them to succeed—a balance of commitment and empowerment.

Commitment: The ability to evoke trust from others by keeping commitments, adhering to high ethical standards and principles, and building shared goals/values.

Empowerment: The ability to help others reach higher levels of performance through trust, delegation, participation, and coaching.
- ◆ *Conceptual Thinking*: The competency of conceiving and selecting innovative strategies and ideas for your organization—a balance of innovation and big picture thinking.

Innovation: The ability to create and enhance ideas, products, and services that lead to bottom-line success.

Big Picture Thinking: The ability to see all of the forces, events, entities, and people involved in the situation at hand.
- ◆ *Systems Thinking*: The competency of connecting processes, events, and structures—a balance of process orientation and mental discipline.

Process Orientation: The ability to increase overall learning and performance by designing, implementing, and/or connecting processes.

Mental Discipline: The ability to sort through ambiguity and alternatives in a way that crystallizes and puts ideas into action.

Self-assessment is the core of self-development. As you prepare to build on your inherent talent for leadership, assessment offers you a benchmark, a starting point, an opportunity to determine where you stand and where to go. By pausing for a momentary snapshot of your leadership competencies, you can develop a picture of the leader you want and need to become.



Tool: The Leadership Assessment Instrument (LAI™)

What It Is

A concise self-assessment version of the 360° LAI.

What It Can Do

- ◆ Capture your current perspective on your leadership behaviors.
- ◆ Analyze that perspective to determine your leadership strengths and gaps.
- ◆ Define a development plan that outlines action steps to increase the effectiveness of your leadership.

How It Works

Step 1. Read each of the 20 items and rate yourself according to the scale below.

Rating Scale

1	2	3	4	5
Almost Never demonstrate behavior	Occasionally demonstrate behavior	Sometimes demonstrate behavior	Frequently demonstrate behavior	Almost Always demonstrate behavior

Step 2. On the scoring sheet provided after the assessment, enter your answers for each question. Then add your ratings across each row to produce an overall score for each (A to E). The reference page on interpretation will help you understand what your score means.

Worksheet: Assessment

- _____ 1. I create a view of the future that motivates others.
- _____ 2. I ask "What if?" questions to test assumptions and challenge the status quo.
- _____ 3. I strive to set and achieve ambitious goals rather than settling for the safety of achievable results.
- _____ 4. I crystallize thoughts by deliberately and systematically steering through ambiguity and information clutter.
- _____ 5. I consider the impact of my own behavior or decisions on other people.
- _____ 6. I display single-mindedness in directing my energy at key targets.
- _____ 7. I display a strong commitment to the success of others by providing clear feedback on issues or behavior.
- _____ 8. I seek better solutions to problems instead of falling back on obvious answers.
- _____ 9. I create a positive environment by being sincere and optimistic.
- _____ 10. I maintain focus when disruptions might detract from my energy for key objectives and issues.
- _____ 11. I provide whatever is needed to help others take charge of their work and successfully produce results.
- _____ 12. I adhere to processes to make sure that the right people are involved in a project.
- _____ 13. I make connections between and among information, events, etc. that reveal key issues or opportunities.
- _____ 14. I model how to handle failure by accepting setbacks with grace and renewed determination.
- _____ 15. I overcome potential stumbling blocks to achieve an objective.
- _____ 16. I take steps to make sure new ideas are integrated with established procedures or processes.
- _____ 17. I search for and conceptualize the underlying systematic causes that drive a problem.
- _____ 18. I thoughtfully reach decisions by reviewing ideas and assumptions with key individuals within the organization.
- _____ 19. I set a clear example for others by following through on important commitments.
- _____ 20. I treat each person differently according to his or her unique makeup.



Worksheet: Scoring

Directions

Add your ratings across each row to produce an overall score for each (4 to 20).

Focused Drive	3 ____	+	6 ____	+	10 ____	+	15 ____	Sum = ____
Emotional Intelligence	5 ____	+	9 ____	+	14 ____	+	20 ____	Sum = ____
Trusted Influence	1 ____	+	7 ____	+	11 ____	+	19 ____	Sum = ____
Conceptual Thinking	2 ____	+	8 ____	+	13 ____	+	17 ____	Sum = ____
Systems Thinking	4 ____	+	12 ____	+	16 ____	+	18 ____	Sum = ____

Reference: Interpreting Your Assessment Results

Examine your total scores for each of the five leadership competencies. Remember that each score falls between 4 and 20.

- ◆ Which competency has the highest total? This likely constitutes one of your strongest leadership capabilities.
- ◆ Which competency has the lowest total? This likely comprises a developmental need as you continue to build your leadership capabilities.

By highlighting a potential strength and weakness among the leadership competencies, this self-assessment suggests a possible focus for your own individual development plan. As you go forward in building your effectiveness as a leader, ask yourself:

- ◆ How can I leverage my leadership strengths?
- ◆ How can I develop needed leadership capabilities?

Example

John had always thought of himself as a born leader, a guy people trusted and relied on. Hoping to confirm his intuition with quantifiable data, John completed the abridged Leadership Assessment Instrument.

Focused Drive	3	<u>5</u>	+	6	<u>4</u>	+	10	<u>3</u>	+	15	<u>5</u>	Sum =	<u>17</u>
Emotional Intelligence	5	<u>3</u>	+	9	<u>4</u>	+	14	<u>4</u>	+	20	<u>3</u>	Sum =	<u>14</u>
Trusted Influence	1	<u>5</u>	+	7	<u>5</u>	+	11	<u>5</u>	+	19	<u>3</u>	Sum =	<u>18</u>
Conceptual Thinking	2	<u>4</u>	+	8	<u>5</u>	+	13	<u>4</u>	+	17	<u>3</u>	Sum =	<u>16</u>
Systems Thinking	4	<u>3</u>	+	12	<u>2</u>	+	16	<u>3</u>	+	18	<u>4</u>	Sum =	<u>12</u>

John found that his gut instincts were correct, but incomplete. Trusted Influence did indeed play a key role in his leadership, and John knew that he could continue to build on the mutual exchange of trust as he led his employees to greater heights. On the other hand, he now realized that his free-wheeling, seat-of-the-pants style—reflected in his relatively low Systems Thinking score—might explain why his employees and colleagues so often seemed frustrated, and why he spent so much time reinventing the wheel. John resolved to put his unsystematic ways behind him, and find a place for process and discipline in his development as a leader.

Trying It Out

You may want to consider giving this assessment to a number of people who work with you in order to get their perceptions of your leadership capabilities. Note however that because this data would not be anonymous, there needs to be a high level of trust between you and the individuals whom you ask to do this. Bear in mind that this assessment tool offers you a quick snapshot of your potential leadership strengths and development opportunities. In order to get a more complete picture of your leadership capabilities, consider completing a full 360° LAI assessment that elicits feedback from your manager, peers, and direct reports. Alternatively, you can hold informal one-on-one discussions with a mix of individuals about the behaviors encapsulated in these leadership competencies, in order to gain quick and valuable insights on your leadership capabilities.

