

The Value of Assessments in Leadership Development

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As part of my work as a consultant in leadership development in the AEC (Architectural, Engineering, and Construction) industry I interview five or six companies per quarter to determine how they are approaching leadership development. One response that was consistently mentioned in 2021 is the use of assessments.

There are various types of assessments an organization can use. Some assess leadership potential by assessing such things as how one handles conflict or what criteria they might use to identify when they should delegate. Others assess for business acumen which would help you to determine if an individual has the competencies needed to lead a business/department. Many organizations use what are known as 360-degree assessments which ask an individual's boss, peers, and subordinates to "grade" them on the same criteria – this allows someone to get a full picture of how they interact with or come across to others.

While some assessments are used as a screening tool for hiring, they are most often used to identify "potential" and areas where someone could improve their performance with some training or coaching.

Types of Assessments

Other than the 360-degree assessments, all assessments



are completed by the individual being assessed and the quality of the output is dependent on how thoughtfully and honestly they respond to a question or prompt. For instance, the CliftonStrengths Assessment (owned by Gallup) can help to eliminate unhelpful behaviors by enabling a manager or potential manager to realize he or she has a bent toward competition rather than a bent toward maximizing outcomes. In the former, the manager might stick to his guns because he doesn't want to "lose," whereas a maximizer would focus more on the outcome that would be most beneficial to the organization and not to himself. The CliftonStrengths Assessment is the only assessment that focuses on a person's strongpoints, rather than areas for development. The perspective of the creator Don Clifton (based on 50 years of research) is that we can achieve more by maximizing our

strengths than trying to overcome our weaknesses.

Note: Gallup also has a book, StrengthsFinder 2.0 which explains the four “domains” and 34 “themes,” and includes an access code to take the StrengthsFinder assessment online.

Assessments can be either conative (how one behaves) or affective (beliefs or attitudes). A DISC assessment is affective and measures “dimensions of personality,” including dominance, influence, steadiness, and conscientiousness (hence DISC). The KolbeA assessment (there are also KolbeB and KolbeC) is conative and measures instinct and action in particular situations – someone might be labeled a Quick Starter or an Implementor, for instance. The KolbeA is intended to help individuals align their natural talents with job requirements.

How Assessments Build Leadership Skills


Many coaches, who work with individuals one-on-one, won't proceed without at least one assessment so that they have some insight into how to guide their coachee and what types of development would bring about the most benefit. For instance, it was suggested to one manager that when he was conducting problem-solving meetings with his team, he should hold his ideas until the end. Not only would that enable him to hear ideas he may not have thought of himself, but it also helped in eliminating “yes men” who would wait for direction from the manager and then simply endorse whatever he suggested as the solution.

An assessment focused on business acumen would help an organization with long-term planning by identifying skill areas its managers or future managers might need to enhance.

The important thing to remember is that there are no right or wrong answers to assessments, they are simply data gathering tools. Much like you might ask a colleague if they want cream in their coffee or not, based on the response/output, you know how to proceed. In the case of assessments, the outputs help a coach or a professional development department to know how to proceed.

How to Use Assessments

Because there are a myriad of assessments available – in a wide price range – it's best to engage a consultant or coach who regularly uses assessments in their work, to help you to identify the best assessment(s) for your needs. It may be that different assessments will be used for different populations in your organization. Such as a Myers Briggs assessment for the senior leadership team to help them to work together more cohesively, and a CliftonStrengths assessment for front-line leaders to help them maximize their natural abilities.

Lee Eisensteadt, a Chicago-based leadership development expert says, “Self-assessments are among the most valuable tools for helping leaders and managers gain initial, confidential, and quick insights into their strengths and development needs. Most of us are hesitant to ask others ‘how am I doing?’ or ‘what can I do better?’, but so long as we fill out the self-assessments honestly, these tools can provide windows into many facets of our leadership skills. To take self-assessments to the next level, consider doing a 360-assessment, to learn how others perceive you, which is really what matters much more than how one sees oneself.” 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is a leadership development and workplace-learning strategy consultant. Through her firm, [The Training Doctor](#), she has revolutionized the way that individuals are prepared for leadership roles in their organizations. Rather than a chosen few, her process is aimed at ensuring everyone in the company has the skills and business acumen of a leader. This approach ensures both immediate and long-term return-on-investment (ROI) for an organization.

She has written articles for *Chief Learning Office magazine*, *Forbes*, and *MBA World* and is a frequent guest on workplace training and career podcasts and talk radio such as *Inc. Radio* and *America's Workforce Radio*.

Nanette regularly speaks at industry conferences and corporate learning events on how to integrate leadership capabilities throughout an organization. An author of eight books, her most recent is *Future-Proofing Your Organization*.

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