Module 17

Read Ahead

Leadership Effectiveness Evaluation
Module 17: Leadership Effectiveness Evaluation

Objectives

After attending the training in Module 17, participants will be able to:

- identify the need for evaluating their leadership effectiveness.
- understand the purpose of evaluating their leadership techniques.
- recognize the benefits of evaluation.
- utilize methods for personal evaluation.

Introduction

New leaders and those who have been leading for some time realize that evaluation is helpful in establishing the direction of their leadership and staying on course. Sometimes informal feedback can be gathered from supervisors, friends, and employees by simply asking, “How did we do?” after a big change of course. However, it is difficult to know whether the gathered input is accurate. While informal feedback is useful, a deeper level of evaluation is often needed to move forward.

Reasons to Neglect Evaluation of Leadership

There are many reasons why supervisors, managers, and executives do not conduct evaluations of their own leadership effectiveness. Some reasons might even be excuses. One of the most difficult actions leaders take is allowing or even inviting feedback from others—especially employees.

Something about human nature resists and resents criticism. Very few of us enjoy having others in our face telling us what to do, especially if they do not practice the lifestyle to which they are holding us. Receiving a critique from someone else can be intimidating. Some managers handle this by withdrawing (snails), some handle it by attacking those who offer even well-intended criticism (bears), and some blame their shortcomings on others (whiners), but some use such criticism to measure their ability to influence others (leaders). Here are a few reasons some managers shrink away from assessment.

Fragile egos
Lack of self-confidence, often driven by insecurity and low self-esteem, is a major barrier that keeps many leaders from conducting honest and objective assessments of their leadership effectiveness. The question is, “How can we ever mature our egos if we do not find out our strengths and weaknesses?” At least knowing what to work on is making progress.
Excessive pride
At times, some supervisors actually think they are “great” as they are and do not need to change or become more effective. When this is the case, these are usually the exact people who need evaluation so they can change into true leaders. Comments such as the following are indicative of people with exaggerated pride: “Why should employees give me feedback? They don’t know anything.” or “It will not matter because it is my way or the highway. I am not changing.”

Apathy
Especially in situations where people have been in positions of authority for a long time, they may not see the need for evaluation. Here are some familiar excuses: “I am about to retire in a few years.” “It won’t make a difference because I am not going to change.” “It is not about what employees need. They just need to focus on work.” “This is a waste of time anyway.”

Distrust
Some supervisors do not trust the use of the feedback. They wonder: Will management use it to “come down on me” unfairly? Will employees use the feedback assessment to “get back at me”? These are reasons for an organization to take care when creating and implementing feedback tools. Organizations must gain the trust of the supervisors prior to implementing a successful leadership effectiveness tool.

Disbelief
Assessment tools are not always chosen with professional input. When receiving feedback, some supervisors believe the input is based more on personality than performance. Supervisors may be viewed as less effective because they are introverts or are more reflective than gregarious. Supervisors being measured may believe there is a lack of context for the comments or ratings from others. Of course, the right assessment tool ensures that these reactions do not occur.

Thoughts on Leadership Effectiveness Evaluations

Future Leaders Are Needed
Organizations select candidates for leadership development by evaluating their current managers’ abilities to lead. This consists of identifying and assessing the core values of candidates and the underlying character factors that cause or inhibit their behaviors. Evaluations usually involve interviews and the application of standard personality/lifestyle measurement instruments. Care is used to ensure that the instruments match the core values of the organization and the base elements of leadership in that environment.

Coping with Constant Change
Today’s fast-paced world is ever-changing, and organizations that do not change face dissatisfied stakeholders and obsolescence. Maxwell (April 19, 2004) says real leaders know this and evaluate themselves to keep on top of the changing situation. “With so much at stake, today’s cutting-edge leaders don’t wait for failure before appraising their leadership skills. They continuously and diligently work on, hone and evaluate those skills.”
He suggests that leaders can self-assess by asking questions aimed at the core of leadership, like, “How and where do I have influence?” and “How can I improve my people skills?” Sometimes this type of evaluation is more structured.

**True Picture of Self**

Ken Blanchard (April 9, 2011) argues that most leaders think more highly of themselves than those they are leading. In effect, they lull themselves into thinking they are superior leaders and drift through their job, while the people they supervise feel that they are no better than “OK” to adequate. Blanchard emphasizes “…it is necessary for you as a supervisor to honestly determine how your employees perceive your leadership style.” He also views their honest feedback as “they’re really giving you a gift.” In other words, the first time you receive feedback from this type of evaluation might be like a jolt of cold water in your face, but you can use that feedback, supported by leadership training and development, to become an effective, admired leader. That will not happen without the candid, sincere feedback of those around you.

**Benefits of Evaluation**

By now it should be clear that an evaluation of leadership effectiveness is needed for multiple reasons.

- An evaluation identifies strong and weak points, allowing leaders to grow confident by concentrating on and fixing their weaknesses while enhancing their strengths.
- Without evaluation, leaders do not realize whether their favorite characteristics and skills are strong or weak. This leads to a blend of weak/strong decisions and actions that limit their effectiveness in steering an organization.
- On a personal level, leaders have a natural desire to be respected, valued, and admired by those they serve.
- Sometimes they realize they have leadership weaknesses because they cannot achieve the desired results, but they have no way to know what the weaknesses are or how limiting they might be.
- Performing an objective assessment is the only way to identify the changes in habits, behaviors, and actions that will cause others to view them as credible and trustworthy leaders.

**How to Improve Individual Leadership Effectiveness**

Evaluation of leadership effectiveness is not optional for organizations that wish to create an environment in which people are supported and encouraged to grow as leaders. Very few organizations establish excellence as the benchmark for those in key leadership roles. Most overlook a key method of enhancing the entire organization, an ongoing process for evaluating and sharpening leaders.

An evaluation and improvement cycle does not have to be painful. It can be simple and self-motivated. Indeed, a few top-level managers look forward to feedback that allows them to avoid pitfalls and hone their strong points. The following three-step process is reliable and proven and can be followed to transition to leadership effectiveness:
**Step 1: Determine reality.**

An evaluation accomplishes this first step, preferably by multiple individuals familiar with the leader’s work and character. A measuring tool, typically a questionnaire, is needed so that all feedback is in a similar format and addresses the same issues. To assist ALDOT leaders with this process, a sample leadership evaluation questionnaire was developed while compiling this Module. The questionnaire is patterned around the key leadership characteristics and the core management practices in this organization.

A leader can start with a self-assessment, using the sample self-assessment questionnaire, but the introduction to this Module points out that self-assessment is not sufficient by itself. Leaders need assessment from others willing to provide objective and honest feedback. A growing trend is the use of multi-level peer feedback, otherwise known as 360-degree feedback, in which the leader’s superior, peers, employees, and stakeholders conduct the evaluation. Currently, about two-thirds of businesses with more than 100 employees use this type of feedback process. The 360-degree process, along with a questionnaire for administering it, can be found in the Toolbox section of this Module.

**Step 2: Determine the gaps.**

Those who aspire to reach the highest level of leadership (called a Level V Leader by Maxwell in Module 2) can assess their strengths and weaknesses by reviewing the summarized results of the objective feedback. Traits, characteristics, and core practices with the highest scores are strengths, so the leader can exercise them confidently and frequently. Lower scores indicate leadership gaps, suggesting a need to seek improvement in the form of training, mentoring, and coaching from a highly-effective leader.

**Step 3: Develop a personal Growth Action Plan.**

The evaluation process is completed by preparing a plan to fully utilize strengths and overcome gaps. This is a personal Growth Action Plan to help lay out a good plan and set up checkpoints to determine progress. The best situation is to develop the plan collaboratively with your organizational supervisor or accountability partner and to involve that person in your periodic evaluations of progress.

The three-step process is a continuous activity, with periodic evaluations to check progress. It becomes one of the tools good leaders use to become better at their jobs.

**Other Types of Evaluation**

This Module was prepared to assist leaders in reaching their highest leadership potential. However, the same concepts can be applied to evaluating groups, agencies, and other entities.
Quotes

“Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfils the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.” --Winston Churchill

“We can’t just sit back and wait for feedback to be offered, particularly when we’re in a leadership role. If we want feedback to take root in the culture, we need to explicitly ask for it.” --Ed Batista

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” --John F. Kennedy

References


