Chapter 25
Identifying Blind Spots in Leadership Development

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ABSTRACT

A plethora of market available 360-degree assessment tools add value to the work of organizational leadership and management professionals. This chapter examines 360-degree assessments in terms of leadership development, training, and coaching. Multi-rater assessment use is reviewed in the context of emotional intelligence competencies. Leadership development is enhanced when benchmarks are established for leaders in the area of emotional intelligence. Organizations can identify keys to leader development by recognizing specific competencies in "star performers" (high performers). Self-report assessment instruments are generally useful in identifying key leadership competencies, but are limited by an individual's self-awareness. 360-degree multi-rater assessments enhance and support the recognition of these specific competencies but more so serve to identify blind spots or gaps in competency areas. Any divergence is often between a leader's self-reporting and observations gleaned from a 360-degree perspective by peers, subordinates, managers, family members, friends, and others.

INTRODUCTION

The leadership literature in diverse fields as business, history, higher education, political science, and others abounds with various tools, questionnaires, and assessment instruments designed to allow individuals to understand their own personal traits, characteristics, skills, behaviors, competencies, talents, and styles when it comes to leadership. This abundance of assessment tools is no different from a similar abundance of leadership definitions that have filled the social science literature for years. A foundational challenge for any student of leadership includes how to define leadership. Further, how does one come to an understanding through assessment, of the cognitive as well as conceptual skills and traits

related to self-development of leadership? This chapter examines the underlying foundational theories of transactional and transformational leadership, leading to a specific focus on the role of competencies in leadership as well as emotional intelligence development. Successful leadership development can be enhanced when behavioral benchmarks are established for leaders using competency based 360-degree assessments related to emotional intelligence (EI). Acceptance of this premise will lead to a review of an assessment method of evaluating proficiencies, attributes, and competencies related to leadership.

The examination will suggest self-report psychometric assessment instruments are generally useful in helping identify leadership competencies related to emotional intelligence. Further, the examination will identify that 360-degree multi-rater assessments enhance and support the recognition of specific EI competencies and behaviors, but more so, serve to help identify blind spots or gaps in competency areas that are valuable to a leader's development. Despite a number of different models of emotional and social intelligence that have emerged in the literature since the early 1980s, three primary models (Bar-On, 1997, Goleman, 1995, and Salovey and Mayer, 1990) will be discussed. More specifically, the examination will address the advantages gained in the identification of leadership competencies as well as blind spots using the Bar-On EQ-i (1997) instrument when paired with the EQ-360 instrument—Bar-On's multi-rater version of the EQ-i).

FOUNDATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORIES: BACKGROUND

Interest in and fascination with leadership and all that it entails is not a new development. Social scientists, academicians, and intellectuals have been intrigued by the study of leadership since the times of Plato, Freud, Einstein, Gandhi, Churchill, Roosevelt, Kennedy, King, and others (Burns, 1978). The study of leadership is often viewed as a broad and generic discipline with applicability across multiple fields, including academia, politics, military, and business. This popularity seems to have transcended more than academia and the corporate world and has become of general interest socially as well. Despite its popularity, the leadership field can also be complex to understand. Where does one begin focused and worthwhile research in the leadership arena? Are people simply born with natural leadership traits? If not, can leadership traits, competencies, and skills be learned through training and education? Because leadership means different things to different people, it is understandable that myriad definitions have been coined following the evolution of leadership studies over a long period of time. In an early 1970's work, Stogdill (1974) posited that a review of leadership literature indicated there are as many definitions for the term, as there are people who have attempted to define it.

In its evolution, the leadership field has also developed its own nomenclature with various sub-fields, styles, terms, and traits. Burns (1978) suggested society in general has both a "desire and hunger for leaders who are both compelling and creative," (p.1). As a part of this hunger, leadership definitions have primarily focused on the characteristics and dynamics that make one person perceived as a more effective leader than someone else. Burns' book *Leadership* remains the classic benchmark text that introduced *transformational* leadership, which takes place when one or more persons "engage" with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of "motivation and morality." (p.19). This concept of transformation is contrasted to transactional leadership, a more traditional view holding that followers are led by managers who supervise by offering rewards and punishments in order to accomplish group goals (Northouse, 2013, Wren, 2006).

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