Tool 9
Evaluate Your Leadership Development Effort

Quick guide

Define success, considering six general evaluation approaches against the context, strategy and set-up of your leadership development work. Compile a set of measures and indicators to evaluate and communicate your LD effort on an ongoing basis.

Purpose

Develop an understanding of how success would look like of your leadership development effort and link this understanding to your context, strategy and approach towards leadership development.

Six approaches to evaluating and measuring leadership development work

In order to define your customized leadership development evaluation, consider six distinct approaches for measuring, assessing and communicating your effort. Those approaches combine qualitative with quantitative perspectives. Which of those approaches are most relevant and appropriate will depend on the scope, set-up and goals of your leadership development work as well as the context and strategy of your organization.

The six basic evaluation approaches are the following:

1. **Program charting:** Track the activities, experiences and practical learnings facilitated by your leadership development initiative

2. **Leader stories:** Evaluate leadership development based on (individual) leader stories

3. **Business performance:** Set your leadership development work in the context of general business performance

4. **Key milestones:** Relate leadership development activities to the outcomes of key strategic initiatives and projects

5. **Skill and behavior assessment:** Measure the effectiveness of leadership development in terms of quantified skill and competency development

6. **Employee surveys:** Leverage existing employee surveys to show effects of leadership development with those being led

Approach 1: Program Charting

A basis for any evaluation is to capture what the leadership development initiative actually entailed and what happened as part of the effort. This has a quantitative side to it, in terms of number of participants, resources deployed, events held, etc. Qualitatively, you can showcase the contents and the feedback received on the LD interventions. Both the quantitative and the qualitative charting can serve to facilitate a collective sensemaking with stakeholders, e.g. senior management or sponsors, on how to assess the work. While such a leadership development 'success theater' is limited in terms of showing impact, it can be important to communicate the approach of the work and support a joint understanding of what the initiative entailed.

Example measures and Indicators within this approach include:

→ Number of leaders engaged in the leadership development effort

→ Number of training sessions and events given, and outputs produced

→ Feedback given by participants on leadership development resources, coaching, and trainings

Approach 2: Leader Stories

This approach toward assessing development activities highlights the individual progress of leaders who were part of the LD initiative both in terms of their personal perspective – what did they learn and practice as a result of their experiences and reflection – and in terms of their careers and achievements.

Example measures, indicators and data within this approach include:

→ Personal accounts and stories of leaders and their insights, progress and achievements related to the LD engagement

→ Career progress of leaders who have attended the program (e.g. number of promotions)

→ Increases of responsibilities and roles of leaders in the LD program

Approach 3: Business Performance

You can leverage measurable business performance – e.g. sales growth or project success – for assessing leadership development, if a direct causal connection can be established. For example, if a certain cohort of leaders took part in leadership development efforts and another did not, the difference in business performance or productivity of the respective teams compared to the average may be attributed to leadership development. This approach is plausible in focused leadership development interventions which e.g. may be tied to a certain strategic initiative and the respective leader cohort.

Example measures, indicators and data within this approach include:

→ Classical business metrics e.g. revenue, cost-savings, time to market or successful completion of projects

Approach 4: Key Milestones

A more qualitative variation of the third approach is to highlight the specific success of a business initiative or major project, and to emphasize the contribution of leadership development work in pulling it off. For example, telling the story of a successful project could show how the team learned and engrained certain leadership behaviors in action and how they were crucial in achieving results.

Example measures, indicators and data within this approach include:

→ A mini case study of a successful project and how leadership action learning was integrated into the project team's routine, and with which outcomes

Approach 5: Skill and Behavior Assessment

If your organization has a 360-degree assessment in place that quantifies and ranks individuals against a set of competencies and behaviors, you can use this to evaluate the effectiveness of

leadership development programs in terms of skill increase and behavior change of participants. If the same assessment is strongly tied to performance management, however, such a measurement may diminish people's learning orientation and inhibit experimentation with leadership activities.

Example measures, indicators and data within this approach include:

→ Improvement in skills against a pre-defined leadership competency model, for example ranking competencies such as result orientation, collaboration, change leadership and strategic skills on a scale of 1–5

Approach 6: Employee Surveys

A sixth approach would look at the team-level outcomes of leadership development, in terms of effects on followers: how do team members fare under the leadership of an individual that was part of the development program and is there a measurable change over time? What is the level of satisfaction with their employee experience? Do they perceive their bosses as role models for their own development?

Example measures, indicators and data within this approach include:

→ Employee engagement and satisfaction surveys and how employees rate leadership over time and in context of LD interventions
→ Retention and employee turnover

Tool in action

Convene a core team tasked with defining a leadership development intervention, be it stand-alone or as part of a larger business project. Introduce the session with a lead question 'How would success look like of our Leadership Development effort'. Collect an initial set of thoughts in brainstorming mode. Then introduce the six approaches of measuring outcomes, including examples, to the team. Working from the initial set of ideas, ask the team to detail and operationalize the ideas into measurable outcomes and allocate the measures along one or several of the approaches. In a final step, define when and how to gather the respective data, e.g. through surveys, interviews or regular assessments.

Output

A customized evaluation approach for assessing the impact of the leadership development effort.

Common issues ...	... and how to deal with them
The evaluation approach is only defined once the program, its objectives and the agenda have been defined.	Put evaluation on the agenda in the early stages of discussing a leadership development effort. Explicate how you would recognize a positive impact for your leaders and the overall organization as early as considering your context and your strategic objectives.