

The Three Levels of Leadership

Self-Assessment Exercise: Technical Knowledge & Skills

The purpose of this exercise is to help you decide on your technical knowledge and skills learning priorities as a leader. It draws on the material in chapter 6 of ***The Three Levels of Leadership: How to Develop Your Leadership Presence, Knowhow and Skill*** by James Scouller.

Note: this exercise excludes the domain-specific knowhow discussed at the start of chapter 6. If there is knowledge you need as a leader that is specific to your sector (e.g. business, military, healthcare, government, charity, education) or specialisation (e.g. finance, marketing), you will have to consider this in addition to what you will learn from this exercise.

Instructions: You have three sections to consider – *Technical Knowledge*, *Public Leadership Skills* and *Private Leadership Skills*. Read the questions in each section and note your answers in the boxes and, in sections two and three, the tables provided. When you have completed the evaluation, you will have a list of your leadership skills learning priorities and ideas on how to work on them. The question then is, what are you going to work on first and when?

Technical Knowledge

1. How much do you understand about **individual psychology and motivation**? How did you gain your present level of knowledge? Do you sense you need more understanding? What could you do to learn more? What practical steps could you take? So what will you do?

Answers:

2. What steps have you taken to expand your understanding of **group psychology**? Do you feel you understand enough on this subject? If not, what could you do to learn more? So what are you going to do?

Answers:

3. On **time management**, do you have a clear sense of what it is important to achieve each week and month? Is what you focus on truly important or is it merely urgent? Have you set clear goals for yourself? Do these guide your view on what is important? If not, what steps will you take to improve your time management?

Answers:

Public Leadership Skills

All four questions in this section use the same five-point rating scale: (A) Poor, but my colleagues cover my weakness on this one, so it's not a learning priority for me... (B) Poor and I need to get better... (C) Okay... (D) Okay, but I want to be better... (E) Good.

(1) Rate yourself (or ask a colleague to rate you) on each of the seven key **problem solving and planning skills** by ticking the box (A, B, C, D or E) that best describes your skill level:

	A	B	C	D	E
1. Agreeing a common definition of the problem and its negative effects – which leaders often neglect as a step. <i>(If the group doesn't have a shared understanding of the problem or share the view there is a problem, it will find it hard to agree on a solution and, of course, on the need for any change.)</i>					
2. Defining and agreeing an outcome that everyone wants and supports.					
3. Uncovering the facts and root causes plus the positive and negative forces pulling for and against change.					
4. Surfacing and questioning hidden – often false or out-of-date – assumptions and conventional wisdoms.					
5. Thinking creatively and imagining different options together.					
6. Assessing the pros and cons of each option tactfully and dispassionately.					
7. Agreeing a practical action plan with realistic timescales and resources having considered what (a) could go wrong or get in the way and (b) is genuinely actionable amid other day-to-day pressures.					

Where you scored B or D, what could you do about it? Which of the learning options suggested in chapter 6 do you prefer? Can you think of anything else you could do? So what will you do?

Answers:

(2) Now rate yourself (or again, ask a colleague to rate you) on each of the ten key **decision making skills** using the same five-point scale:

	A	B	C	D	E
1. Ensuring the group hears the views of less vocal members.					
2. Sensing information gaps and making sure the group gathers the necessary data in the time available.					
3. Exposing and testing unspoken assumptions (a skill shared with problem solving).					
4. Drawing out different opinions and unspoken disagreement and, where necessary, allowing conflict to get the truth out to (a) remove the corrosive effect of hidden, opposing motives and b) reduce the chance of poor buy-in and implementation.					
5. Building on or combining others' ideas.					
6. Ensuring during contentious issues that everyone listens hard to what each other is saying and, where necessary, that arguing colleagues can explain the other person's point to their satisfaction.					
7. Uncovering group members' underlying needs when polarised positions threaten a stalemate.					
8. Mediating between members whose disagreement oversteps the line and becomes personal.					
9. Reaching a strong enough accord to enable action follow-through.					
10. Assessing quickly which of the many decision-making options and techniques to use in the circumstances. <i>(To remind you, these are explained in chapter 6 and endnote 29.)</i>					

Looking at where you scored B and D, what could you do about those skills (chapter 6 has some suggestions)? So what will you do next?

Answers:

(3) Next rate yourself (or ask a colleague to rate you) on each of the eleven key **interpersonal skills** using the same five-point scale, placing a tick in the box that best describes your level of skill:

	A	B	C	D	E
1. Knowing your intent and desired outcome (and why it matters) at the start and, ideally, at each moment.					
2. Creating a gap between an outer event and your reaction – amid the dialogue – allowing you to choose your response instead of blindly reacting.					
3. Being aware of your own feelings and body sensations and what they may be telling you.					
4. Concentrated “clean” listening to the other person’s words and the intent and feelings behind them. <i>(This means: (1) Centring your attention on the speaker and only the speaker. (2) Not letting your inner dialogue distract you, e.g. figuring out what you are going to say next or wondering what you’d like for lunch. (3) Taking in the person’s body language and tone of voice (the way they are saying what they are saying) to receive the underlying emotional “call” in the message. (4) Not filtering the other’s message by superimposing your beliefs, values or prejudgements.)</i>					
5. Putting yourself in the other person’s shoes and knowing what they are feeling (empathy).					
6. Asking open questions that don’t trigger unintended defensive reactions.					
7. Putting forward a persuasive case that appeals intellectually and emotionally (includes presentation skills).					
8. Giving effective feedback – one of the most difficult skills of all and crucial if colleagues are to engage honestly and effectively without avoiding helpful conflict of opinion.					
9. Responding openly and non-defensively to others’ opinions and feedback to you, accepting that the other person’s feelings and way of looking at a situation may not be the same as yours.					
10. Identifying and testing assumptions about – and psychological projections on to – the other person.					
11. Expressing your true thoughts, opinions and emotions, allowing others to see your limitations and encouraging colleagues to do the same to (a) ensure openness and trust and (b) draw out hidden, opposing motives.					

Looking at where you scored B and D, which of the learning options suggested in chapter 6 interest you most? What will your next step be?

Answers:

(4) Finally, rate yourself (or ask a colleague to rate you) on each of the three key **group process skills** using the same five-point scale, placing a tick in the box that best describes your level of skill:

	A	B	C	D	E
1. Paying attention to the “process”, that is, <i>how</i> it is happening, and considering what may be going on below the surface (in parallel with following the “content”, that is, <i>what</i> others are saying and doing). <i>(This means, for example, noticing others’ behaviour; what is said and unsaid; people’s degree of comfort with their roles; noting people’s interpersonal sensitivity (or lack of it); sensing the degree of trust and openness in the room and what individuals may be feeling when they are together.)</i>					
2. Learning to comment – not hold back – on what you (and they) are seeing, without judging.					
3. Asking questions – for instance, when the group is going round in circles – to help them examine how you and they are working together, without making anyone a scapegoat.					

Looking at the skills where you scored B or D, which of the two learning options suggested in chapter 6 appeal to you more? Can you think of other options? What is your next step?

Answers:

Private Leadership Skills

This section uses only a four-point rating scale: (A) Poor... (B) Okay... (C) Okay, but I want to be better... (D) Good. As before, rate yourself – or ask a colleague to rate you – on the two extra private leadership skills and then consider the questions that follow, noting your answers in the grey box.

	A	B	C	D
1. Assertiveness: putting your point across firmly and honestly, in a way that communicates fully and successfully what you want and feel, while respecting the rights of the other person.				
2. Goal setting: agreeing clear, specific performance goals that connect with a person's values (that is, what motivates them) and strike the right balance between stretch and achievability.				

Where you scored A or C, what could you do to work on these skills? What will you do?

Answers:

Overall

Now you have completed the evaluation, you have a list of skills learning priorities and ideas on how to work on them. The question is, what are you going to work on first and when? Use the space below to note down your overall action plan. Make sure it is doable in the light of everything else you have to accomplish.

Your action plan:

