

ASSESSING LEADER QUALITY IN HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

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The purpose of this document is to describe a process for assessing leader quality in human service organizations. It is important to be able to do this because the quality of leadership is associated with the quality of services provided to clients of human service organizations. The reason why this is a challenge is because effective leadership in the human services field is a complex dynamic, informed by a multitude of leadership theories primarily derived from research conducted in for-profit organizations. We propose the following as a useful possible solution to this challenge because it is based on feedback from Executive Directors identified by both MSW students and faculty in one academic institution as being ethical and effective human service organization leaders in the community.

Principles You Should Adhere to When Assessing Leader Quality in Human Service Organizations:

- Contain the assessment process
 - Focus the assessment on the performance of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director
 - Obtain feedback from the Board of Directors and senior level staff on Executive Director performance
 - Conduct the assessment once
- Conduct the assessment when the organization is stable and not facing a crisis (e.g., COVID-19)
- In the assessment process, ask respondents if any particular issue facing the organization may be impacting their responses to the assessment

Steps of the Leadership Assessment Process:

- Ask the board to self-assess themselves using the Quick Board Assessment
- Ask the board to assess the Executive Director using the Executive Director Evaluation Form
- Ask the senior leadership team to assess the Executive Director using the Executive Director Evaluation Form, using the quantitative questions they believe they can answer, and shortened transformational leadership instrument

Tools to use during the process:

- Quick Board Assessment <https://www.nonprofnetwork.org/Sys/Store/Products/5018>
- Executive Director Evaluation Form <https://blueavocado.org/board-of-directors/executive-director-evaluation-survey-form/>
- Carless, S. A., Wearing, A. J., & Mann, L. (2000). A short measure of transformational leadership. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 14(3), 389-405. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1022991115523>
- Add one open-ended question in the survey to participants if there is any particular issue facing the organization that may be impacting their responses to the assessment

The assessment of any leader, or leadership group, is a challenging task given the multiple dimensions associated with best leadership practice. Nevertheless, in support of leadership development, organizational health, and organizational performance in the human services field, there are benefits to measuring the quality of leadership in a systematic way to inform funding and impact investing, and to maximize the quality of services delivered to deserving clients.