

# Creating Leadership Success: The LAI™ Demystified

*By John S. Mattone*

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Multi-rater surveys (or 360-degree surveys) are one of the most widely used leadership assessments today. Their popularity has increased dramatically as the growth of the internet has made implementation easier, cheaper and faster. Linkage's Leadership Assessment Instrument (LAI)<sup>TM</sup>, is one of the most widely respected and utilized leadership multi-rater assessments in existence with a database of 60,000 leaders representing leading organizations across the Globe. The LAI was developed in conjunction with Warren Bennis, a pioneer in the contemporary field of leadership studies. The LAI is based on the High Performance Leadership Model (see below), which isolates the competencies, skills and responsibilities of high performing leaders.



## Why Use the LAI?

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In a knowledge-based economy, it is increasingly important for organizations to understand the competencies required for leadership success and then develop those critical competencies on an on-going basis. Accurate assessment data is vital to being able to do that well. The LAI has

proven to have a number of advantages over other multi-rater surveys and other assessment methods:

- ◆ **Accurate:** Typically, an organization relies on individual leaders evaluating the capabilities of their direct reports. The LAI is more accurate for the following reasons: (1) multiple ratings are more accurate than a single person’s view, as long as the correct raters are selected; (2) ratings from different perspectives (self, manager, peers, and direct reports) provide a more comprehensive picture; and (3) the anonymity assured peers and direct reports results in more honest feedback and accuracy.
- ◆ **Acceptance:** Research clearly shows that LAI feedback is more accepted by participants than leader evaluations alone, and is more likely to lead to specific development actions. No matter how accurate the feedback is, it is critical the leader have the “will” and “desire” to act on the feedback and make positive changes.
- ◆ **Open Communication:** The LAI will open up communications about performance because the process involves giving and receiving feedback from all directions. The sharing of feedback eventually becomes an accepted norm. The LAI Process provides an excellent forum for leaders and their managers/coaches to talk openly about performance and plan ways participants can further develop their capabilities.
- ◆ **Promotes Organization Values:** The LAI process: (1) communicates the competencies, skills and responsibilities required of outstanding leaders; (2) will hold leaders accountable for developing competencies; and (3) sends a powerful message to everyone that assessing and developing talent is important.
- ◆ **Easy and Fast:** The LAI is easy to implement and cost effective. Compared to assessment centers—which do have their place—the LAI is far less complicated to implement and measures skills that are actually demonstrated on the job as opposed to skills one is capable of performing in a job simulation.
- ◆ **Leader Development:** The LAI feedback report summarizes strengths and development needs and provides granular feedback on how leaders are perceived by different groups. In addition, the Report and on-line “Action Planner” enables the participant to actually use the feedback they have received. Participants can select development goals, identify action steps, set target dates and email their customized plan to their manager/coach. The LAI also has an associated “Development Guide” that details for each competency and skill suggested development actions, such as, on-the-job recommendations, self-study and training programs.
- ◆ **Executive Coaching:** The LAI Process can be implemented very successfully by internal and external coaches through the Linkage *LAI On-Line Certification Workshop*. This program enables internal and external resources to administer and manage the LAI Process as well as work with participants as an executive coach in understanding their reports, setting development plans, and coaching for improvement.
- ◆ **Team Gap Analysis:** Aggregate results from the LAI can help leaders understand their “bench strength”—what the team’s strengths and overall development needs are and this information can drive overall training plans.

- ◆ **Measure Development Impact:** The LAI can be used (should be used) to baseline leader capability and performance prior to development initiatives and then as a basis for determining improvement either through a re-administration of the LAI or more likely a “mini-survey” containing only feedback on each participants development items they selected after the initial administration.

In conclusion, we have identified the many reasons why an organization should use the LAI. Indeed, the LAI is much more than a multi-rater survey—there is the unique opportunity for on-line development planning (and built-in accountability) and the opportunity for internal/external coaches to become certified to administer and manage the entire LAI Process. Ultimately, the LAI Process is the foundation for leaders to unlock and unleash their true capability so they become the absolute best they can be—which can only benefit themselves and their organization.



# Linkage

Linkage is a global organizational development company that specializes in leadership development. We provide clients around the globe with integrated solutions that include strategic consulting services, customized leadership development and training experiences, tailored assessment services, and benchmark research. Linkage's mission is to connect high-performing leaders and organizations to the futures they want to create.

With a relentless commitment to learning, Linkage also offers conferences, institutes, summits, open-enrollment workshops, and distance learning programs on leading-edge topics in leadership, management, human resources, and organizational development. More than 200,000 leaders and managers have attended Linkage programs since 1988.

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