

DOES MY ORGANIZATION NEED ASSESSMENT?

How Sound Assessment Creates Sustainable Bottom-Line Results

Nearly every organization is engaged in some type of assessment on a daily basis. In this sense, assessment refers to diagnosing the current state of performance. A simple question at a staff meeting about why something has happened is, in fact, assessment. Even at this basic level, the challenge lies in the quality of the response. Are the answers correct? Are the answers provided from a neutral perspective? Is there enough information to understand the problem? When the assessment task is larger, organizations often struggle to find the answers they need to move forward. Organizations that use their own staff to accomplish an objective integration of perspectives across the enterprise are hindered because internal parties are biased. Thus, improvement plans are stalled.

How Assessment Can Help

Busy organizations do not have the time or resources to conduct a comprehensive assessment effort every time a new performance question emerges. Because of this, many organizations employ external experts to implement structured assessment programs. The goal of a structured program is to use assessment for problem prevention. In these situations, assessments are conducted regularly based on internal priorities and available resources.

Secrets of Assessment Magic

Each assessment effort is uniquely designed to fit the objective. For example, an assessment effort associated with strategic planning will include the external environment. Efforts that focus on employees are likely to use sur-

veys and focus groups. Beyond the variety of specific tools and approaches, four fundamental principles should guide sound assessment:

1. Assess Before the Crisis

Organizations that approach formal assessment proactively are better able to take advantage of opportunities to improve performance. For example, through comprehensive assessment, the cosmetic company Alberto-Culver discovered in the 1990s that VO5 Shampoo, their flagship product, was their least profitable product. The revelation sent shock waves throughout the company and exposed the organization's lethargic state. Fortunately, these revelations became the basis of positive change within that organization. Alberto-Culver is just one of many examples of organizations that were able to avoid crisis through early assessment.

2. Ensure the Review is 'Balanced'

By formally incorporating a balanced approach, one can better determine the real source of the problem. When organizations examine poor performance, there is an immediate tendency to blame lack of resources. While resources are critical, there are many other factors to consider. A balanced approach forces a broader effort by focusing in four key performance areas: 1) financial and other resources; 2) internal processes; 3) people, learning, and growth; and 4) customer and partner relations. Full exploration of these variables requires considerable sophistication.

3. Use a Broad Information Spectrum

Data is at the core of any successful assessment project, and it can be collected in many ways. In addition to quantitative information that gives concrete numbers to support the case in question, qualitative findings are often helpful. Thus, opinion can be a critical component of assessment. However, bad information going in means bad information coming out. Because of this, it is important to understand how opinion is collected to ensure its validity. Whether the vehicle is interview, focus group, or survey, the questions and environment must ensure the highest quality of response.

4. Ensure the Effort is 'Neutral'

The principles of sound assessment are dependent on the ability to guarantee that analysis is neutral. Assessment efforts can lose their validity if conclusions are based on limited views or assumptions. To maximize neutrality, two safeguards can be deployed. First, there must be an environment that makes it easy for people to share their views and for those views to be properly weighed. The best approach is to work on the side of caution and address the issue even if it does not exist. Second, ensure the right people are part of the effort. Even if it means engaging individuals outside the organization, sound assessment ensures that information is complete.

Who Are the Assessment Experts

At TSI, we define assessment as the science of problem prevention and solving. Our proven track record suggests the four principles discussed can help you achieve the results you want. We help leaders shed the perception of pain so often associated with assessment. We create an environment that recognizes the need to drive change based on sound information gathering and analysis.

At TSI, We're Committed to Results

We provide elevation, which is a key to unbiased assessment of large-scale systems. Through comprehensive assessment, we identify and prioritize improvement opportunities so resources can be focused more effectively. We help provide a complete understanding of where the organization is today and the choices for future paths that can lead to performance improvement. Our objective reviews lend credibility and insight to improvement planning.

TSI's Assessment Team Delivers

TSI's assessment professionals use a systems approach to objectively analyze the organization's current state. Through a blend of interviews, observation, data collection, and focus groups, our team assesses the following sub-systems: planning, measurement, motivation, culture, leadership, relationships, technology, infrastructure, learning, and communication.

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