

## A Method for Improving Leader Evaluations in the Homeowner Association Industry

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**[Abstract]** No matter the industry, the foundation of organizational success relies on experienced, well-trained leaders. For an organization's senior leadership, which in this case study is the Community Manager of a large-scale homeowner's association, to develop subordinate leaders, there needs to be an effective performance evaluation process to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of those being evaluated. The evaluation process results can be used to drive the creation of professional development programs. To grow leaders, periodic performance evaluations can provide such input. Further, developing an evaluation form that will complement the process by ensuring that the appropriate criteria are evaluated is essential.

By introducing the leadership competency framework to this case study, particularly the Leadership Competency Framework – DRENICA, it can be shown that leadership competencies are an effective way of evaluating organizational leaders. To aid in illustrating the importance of leader evaluations based on leadership competencies, this study was conducted to review the organization's current leader evaluation form and educate the Community Manager on leadership competencies. Then, by discussing the importance of leadership competencies and which could be selected from the leadership competency framework, introduce a new form that facilitates the evaluations<sup>1</sup> to determine if the Community Manager's perception of subordinate leaders changed due to this new form. Lastly, the ability to illustrate the impact the research can have on practical use and future research is critical for homeowners' associations to better prepare and educate leaders for their role.

**[Keywords]** leadership, leadership competency, leadership competency framework, leader evaluation

### Introduction

In today's business world, organization leaders need to understand the importance of subordinates' professional development and how to identify their personnel's strengths and weaknesses. It is widely accepted that leader development programs are based on the needs of an organization, with the focus being given to deficiencies identified through periodic evaluations. The evaluation tool utilized in organizations is one of the critical tools that assist leaders in determining the performance levels of staff members and providing input to leadership development programs. By evaluating a homeowner's association Community Manager's leadership evaluation tool, consideration can be given to a new form to provide the Community Manager with a better illustration of leaders' strengths and weaknesses. This can then drive a leadership development program to increase the company's success rate in the future.

### Problem Overview

Leader development in homeowners' associations is not different from that of any other corporation of a

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<sup>1</sup> If you would like a copy of the evaluation form, contact Eric Usbeck at [eric.h.usbeck@gmail.com](mailto:eric.h.usbeck@gmail.com) to request a copy.

larger size. Tremaine (2022) explained that leader development is critical in attaining the company's goals. What is often observed in association staff is a lack of adequate structure and leadership. Identifying and developing leaders to build an effective organization capable of achieving community goals is critical, especially when the leaders need to plan for expansion to meet community needs adequately. Developing leaders to remain relevant in our ever-changing world is critical to organizational success (Tremaine, 2022). In any organization, conducting employee evaluations is a method to identify issues and concerns with employee performance (Rodriguez & Walters, 2017).

Attaining goals through positive employee performance is critical and is laid out and discussed during employee evaluations (Rodriguez & Walters, 2017). Rodriguez and Walters (2017) explained that leadership development programs are built effectively when performance evaluations cover evaluation criteria synchronized with the company's strategic goals. Hence, the employee's performance complements the attainment of goals and positive behaviors. The identified behaviors minimize negative employee performance issues in the workplace (Rodriguez & Walters, 2017) and assist in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of employees that drive the leadership development program needs. To create an effective leader training program, an organization needs evaluation forms focusing on leader competencies to provide the senior leader (in this case, the Community Manager) with a tool to evaluate leader competencies.

### Literature Review

Leadership, and the competencies that are found to be most effective, have been the interest of many researchers in recent years (Meerits & Kivipold, 2020). Leadership competencies as a specific topic have been subject to various debates on whether they are behavior-based, trait-based, or an approach (Meerits & Kivipold, 2020). Additionally, leadership competencies are often identified as the foundation of the best leaders (Aitken & von Treuer, 2021). This is an important point as the professional development of leaders relies on identifying strengths and weaknesses in performance and utilizing that information to build a leader development program. By identifying relevant competencies using the Leadership Competency Framework, a company can look forward to a successful future (Aitken & von Treuer, 2021).

When leaders want to identify how and what to assess in a subordinate leader's performance, developing a set of competencies for varied levels of leadership to guide an assessment is proper. Competencies are the attributes that form the foundation of behavior that supports competency and results in competence (Riaz et al., 2021). The literature had many mentions of management competencies. It is necessary to note that there is a difference between management and leadership competencies so the two are not confused, although they are often used interchangeably in literature.

### *Leadership Competency Framework*

Whereas a group of behaviors or attributes form competencies, a group of competencies results in a competency model (Ross & Titov, 2022). For an organization to place the right person into a leadership role, there must be a framework to drive the selection and development process to ensure that an individual has the skill set to lead others. Ross and Titov's (2022) work suggest that framework drives focus on assigned tasks, responsibilities, and organizational structure to allow leaders to succeed and grow, a never-ending endeavor. In Puspalatha and Rajeswari's (2021) work, they comment that focusing on evaluating a set, or framework, of competencies for leaders provides an organization's leadership with the ability to continue growth and goal attainment. This is important as leader competence will always influence subordinates to achieve the best results possible (Puspalatha & Rajeswari, 2021).

The business operating environment for all industries is ever-changing, and a leadership competency framework ensures that organizational leaders focus on the right areas of a leader for selection and needs to be aligned with the organization's mission, vision, and strategic goals (Puspalatha & Rajeswari, 2021). Meerits and Kivipold (2020) explained in their study that leadership competency frameworks need to have the right competencies so that evaluations of the selected competencies accurately illustrate desired leader performance. As a leadership competency framework is being developed for an organization, with all previously outlined points considered, it is critical to point out that it provides a roadmap for its leaders

as they move forward. In the leadership competency framework developed by Citaku et al. (2012), you find many competencies to focus an organization's effort to provide its leaders with a framework to drive leader performance evaluation and development. This framework is called DRENICA.

### ***Leadership Competency Framework – DRENICA***

In 2012, Citaku et al.'s seminal work identified key competencies needed by leaders in the medical education industry. The researchers intended to provide this information due to the need for leaders within that industry to better face the challenges of the modern world (Citaku et al., 2012). The study provided information on leadership theories and the importance of effective leadership, which provided the researchers with a mechanism to construct a list of 67 characteristics key to leadership (Citaku et al., 2012). This list was sent out via questionnaire to 229 leaders in six countries (Citaku & Ramadani, 2020). The questionnaire instructed the participants to assign a score, from 1-5, on this list of characteristics (Citaku et al., 2012), providing the researchers with a list of 25 of the top scoring most often observed.

These characteristics were then grouped to support five leadership competencies commonly found in leadership discussions and identified by this group as core competencies (Citaku et al., 2012). The five identified are social responsibility, innovation, self-management, task management, and justice orientation (Citaku et al., 2012). The research group explained that these five competencies are found and reinforced in other studies, which suggest that if leaders utilize them, they will better lead people in any industry (Citaku et al., 2012). In a 2020 study by Citaku and Ramadani, the 25 characteristics were broken down into seven categories, all supporting the five competencies into a leadership competency framework named DRENICA. The study was driven by data collected through internet research to gauge the number of times the leadership competencies appeared. It was confirmed through the study that the competencies developed in 2012 were still relevant in 2020 (Citaku & Ramadani, 2020).

**Table 1**  
*Leadership Competency Framework DRENICA*

DRENICA Element	Leadership Competency
D	Dignity and Respect Distributing rewards fairly Decision Making
R	Reflection Relationship Building Responsibility for Others Reinforcing Change
E	Ethics Enhancing Task Knowledge Eliminating Barriers to Performance Evaluating Consequences Explaining Decisions with Respect Empowerment
N	Nurturing Relationships
I	Integrity and Honesty Identifying Problems Intelligent Risk-taking
C	Communication, Internal/External Continuous Learning Critical Thinking Creative Problem Solving Collaborating
A	Active Listening Adaptability Achieving Goals

*Note.* Adapted from “Leadership Competency Model-Drenica: Generalizability of Leadership Competencies,” by F. Citaku and H. Ramadani, 2020, *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 9(2020), p. 160.

The competencies in DRENICA represent the foundation of the competencies discussed in the literature reviewed (Ross & Titov, 2022; Puspalatha & Rajeswari, 2021; Meerits & Kivipold, 2020; Zivkovic, 2022). It is not the intent to assume that any organization needs to include all listed, nor ignore the need to find other competencies specific to their organization. Instead, it is intended to illustrate that throughout all literature presented that the definition of leadership is understood, that the concept of leadership competencies is clearly defined, and that the leadership competency framework ideology is provided so that the present case study is built on a solid foundation and easily transferable from one industry to another.

## Methods

A case study approach was utilized to guide research for this article. In preparing for the case study, two assumptions were made to guide the research. First, is that the organization used in the case study has an effective organizational structure, and second, the Community Manager understood the importance of identifying the right leadership competencies for effective leader evaluation. This IRB-approved case study included three phases, each lasting two weeks with the participant. Breaking down the analysis into research phases was the most effective way to collect and analyze data to answer the research questions.

The first phase allowed the participant to review the leadership competencies to gain an understanding of the 25 competencies that are included in the leadership competency framework DRENICA. Concurrently, the researcher assessed the current leader evaluation form and created interview questions that aided in gaining a complete understanding of how the current form was selected and used. The second research phase was the first interview to collect detailed data regarding the leader evaluation form and the participant's thoughts on the leadership competency table. Also included in the second phase, after the first interview, the researcher utilized information gained from the participant to develop and issue a new leader evaluation form that utilized the participants' selected leader competencies. Subsequently, the participant evaluated three department directors of her choice utilizing the new form to assess leadership competencies. The final phase of research (Phase III) centered on a second interview to collect information focused on the participants learning from using the new form based on evaluating leadership competencies.

The participant's organization is a large-scale homeowners association. The Community Associations Institute (CAI) categorizes large-scale communities as having the following characteristics: a single, contiguous association with an on-site, full-time manager; minimum of 1,000 units or a minimum of 1,000 acres; provides municipal-type services; and possesses a minimum annual operating budget of 2 million dollars (Community Associations Institute, n.d.). The participant in this study manages a large-scale community with the following characteristics: 132 personnel are required throughout the year, with 83 being year-round employees (Full-time and Part-time) and 49 seasonal employees supporting Summer-only activities; depth of experience of the subordinate are five leaders with 0-3 years (many with <1-year service), one with 4-8 years, and the Community Manager has 9+ years of service. This information drove the participants' interest in this case study to ensure the newer leaders to the organization receive the proper initial evaluations and leader development and that the senior, longer-tenured leaders are provided with sustained professional development opportunities to ensure mission success.

## Results and Findings

The identified themes of the research are illustrated to provide insight into the findings and how the Community Manager of a homeowners' association perception changed after evaluating subordinate leaders with the new form.

## Research Phrases

### *Phase I – Introduction to Leadership Competency Framework DRENICA*

The first research phase began with the researcher providing the participant with the DRENICA leadership competencies to ensure that the participant understood each one. This was an essential task, and the participant was provided adequate time to review and develop a concept of how these competencies could assist in leader evaluations and professional development. This is key to note, as the primary purpose of Phase I was to give the participant time to prepare for the interview in Phase II. Concurrently, while the participant reviewed the table, the researcher received the organization's current leader evaluation form for analysis. The information gained from this assessment illustrated that the organization had a generalized, task-based form used for all employees that did not provide the participant with a holistic snapshot of a subordinate leader's strengths and weaknesses. This lack of leader competency evaluation criteria is why this research is so essential, introducing a leadership competency framework, such as DRENICA, that can better allow a leader to evaluate performance.

### *Phase II – Interview and Discussion Regarding Leadership Competencies*

This phase of research was vital in accomplishing two key points, which are 1) gaining an appreciation of the participant's thoughts on what leadership competencies are essential to her and the organization's mission and 2) collecting data on her thoughts on the use of an evaluation tool that focuses on the desired competencies instead of generalized task-based evaluation criteria. The participant was quick to point out how the organization was trying to develop a new form because she felt the current form was not working, essentially failing her as the senior leader in the organization. Her ability to provide her subordinate leaders with a clear picture of where she wanted them to focus energy for professional development needed improvement due to the current form's lack of focus. The participant thoroughly understood the importance of aligning organizational goals to leader competencies to strengthen the evaluation process and provide the subordinate leader with a better understanding of where to focus energy to perform at a higher level. It was evident during the conversation that the participant had grown frustrated with how the current form needed to assist the development of subordinate leaders. She stated, "It does not give them that motivation to continue to excel." Over time, using the current form had turned evaluations into a finger drill, not a valuable experience to discuss successes and create plans to improve weaknesses through professional development. The participant explained that she needed a better tool to provide more substantial conversation points for her subordinate leaders to understand the process better.

### *Selected Leadership Competencies*

During the interview, the participant quickly pointed out that the current evaluation tool was failing the organization and her. She provided candid feedback on which competencies were essential to her and supported the organization's goals and mission. The participant stated that the current form "does not provide the opportunity to delve into problem areas, so it ends up going into corrective action planning," and majorly impacted her ability to better focus evaluations on leadership abilities. After reviewing the DRENICA table, seven competencies were selected by the participant: Active Listening, Ethics, Communication (Internal/External), Relationship Building, Eliminating Barriers to Performance, Critical Thinking, and Creative Problem Solving.

The one valued the most by the participant is Active Listening. The participant pointed out that active listening is vital in any leader performing their duties in the homeowner's association industry due to the complexity of the organization's mission. All leaders answer to a Board of Directors, the Community Manager, and in an informal manner, the association's members. If a leader does not demonstrate active listening, there is an increased chance of failure, another point of emphasis made by the participant. The second most important competency that the participant focused considerable discussion on is Ethics. The participant explained that without ethics, leaders cannot lead by example. She felt that there was a considerable gap in today's workplace when considering ethics as a competency, which is the main reason she wanted to include this competency in the new evaluation form. From Ethics, the discussion moved on to Communication. The participant provided insight into how important communication is in her industry and that it is both internal and external, which then drove some discussion on how she enjoyed exploring the DRENICA model and how the selected competencies aligned with her organization's mission and goals. The discussion continued and focused on the last four competencies selected to be included in the new form.

The selection of Relationship Building, Eliminating Barriers to Performance, Critical Thinking, and Creative Problem Solving were due to her understanding of how these particular competencies focus her subordinate leaders on the critical aspects of their job. Building relationships impacts many support functions and shows the Board of Directors and members that the leaders care about them. Eliminating Barriers to Performance is critical because homeowners' associations experience many challenges to daily operations. By illustrating to her subordinate leaders, the importance of removing barriers, the participant felt that evaluating this competency could provide leaders with better insights into what they are doing right and wrong when attempting to mitigate daily challenges.

The competencies of Critical Thinking and Creative Problem Solving were key to the participant because she felt that these two competencies show maturity. The participant stated that she believes that as



a leader develops over time, their ability to exhibit these two competencies provides an avenue for continued upward movement and builds trust with her and the Board of Directors. As a result of the points made by the participant, the seven identified competencies were included on the new evaluation form to facilitate the use of the form to provide feedback for phase III.

### ***Phase III – New Form Issuance and Utilization and Interview with Discussion Regarding Leader Evaluations***

This final phase started with issuing a new evaluation form focused on leadership competencies. The selected competencies were the result of Phase II findings. This phase of research provided the researcher with essential views from the participant on how much an evaluation tool based on leadership competencies can improve the evaluation process and inform subordinate leaders of their strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, utilizing leadership competencies specifically selected that align with the organization's mission provided the subordinate with a better discussion on where the participant needed to sustain excellence and improve weaknesses. Several times in the second interview, the participant commented on how introducing the new tool, focused on the leadership competencies selected in Phase II, has improved her ability to understand her subordinate leaders in a more holistic manner. She commented, "Rather than evaluating them on the mechanics of how they are an employee being evaluated, it provided the opportunity for me to evaluate them based on their leadership qualities and actions." Finally, the participant confirmed that the previous form was weak, never painted the picture she wanted during evaluation discussions, and failed to provide backup to her desired improvements in the subordinate's performance.

Leadership development was high on the list of importance of the participants. She echoed that when she commented that the new form could better focus on professional development. "This new form provides to the leader how they could teach their team, influence them, and develop stronger evaluation parameters for them to know if they succeeded at that goal while meeting my expectations," was the comment when asked if the new form can assist in guiding the professional development of subordinate leaders. She closed with stating that "a high-quality leadership assessment provides to the leaders the type of leader that they are perceived to be." This is important to point out and drives another critical point made in the discussion: effective performance evaluations assist leaders in understanding their mission to become the best they can be for themselves and their team.

### **Discussion**

This case study illustrates the impact of effective leadership performance evaluations based on leadership competencies. SHRM (n.d.) explained that providing evaluations that do not have buy-in from leaders and being tied to strategic goals and objectives decreases the effectiveness of evaluations and increases the perception of them being of little to no value. Assessing the leadership ability of leaders at all levels of an organization against leadership competencies is, therefore, a key piece of leader awareness and development (SHRM, n.d.). A senior leader can better evaluate subordinate performance and provide constructive feedback by utilizing leadership competencies as focus areas for evaluation. Jantti and Greenhalgh (2012) commented that competencies provide a more measurable description of an individual and how it relates to their ability to succeed in the workplace. Using the Leadership Competency Framework DRENICA, any leader can gain that understanding and select competencies from the framework that align with their organization's mission and goals (Citaku & Ramadani, 2020).

Once leadership competencies are understood and the best aligned are selected, the focus shifts to a form that can provide the leader with a tool to evaluate said competencies effectively. The form does not need to be grossly overengineered; rather, it can be a simple form with the competencies listed, accompanied by a definition to complement its need for evaluation. Evaluation criteria can be as simple as a scale that easily allows the evaluator to select a level of performance, such as excellent, success, or needs improvement, and contains an area where the evaluator can provide some narrative to support the performance level. Again, this form is a mere formality as the vital ingredient to the process is the selection of the right leadership competencies to drive discussion for the senior leader when conducting performance

evaluations with subordinate leaders.

## Implications of Research

### *Practical Implications*

The results of this case study can provide leaders in the homeowners' association management industry with several key points to consider when conducting performance evaluations of subordinate leadership. The first is that the DRENICA framework can assist leaders in improving their understanding of what leadership competencies are best suited to evaluate performance within their organization. This is important so that HOA leaders can focus on improving leadership evaluations based on organization-aligned values in the form of competencies that will complement a leader's abilities and thus improve the performance of themselves and their subordinates in the future.

Another point of consideration is using an evaluation form that is simple in design, with clear and concise evaluation criteria that allow a leader to assess better-selected leadership competencies effectively. As much as the leadership competencies included on a form are of great importance, the rating scale needs to be as straightforward as possible to not muddy the waters as an evaluation is conducted. By pairing these two points together, a community manager of any size community can directly and immediately benefit from the results of this case study.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

Due to this case study's limitations, future research can expand on the knowledge gained by incorporating a qualitative research approach to include more community managers. The homeowner's association industry is vast in numbers and contains communities from several dozen homes to thousands. By expanding the pool of participants, a researcher could further validate this case study's results or discover different trends. Additionally, by expanding the research pool of participants, future research within the HOA industry could determine if the leadership framework DRENICA is favorable across the industry or if the framework could be altered to represent better leadership competencies needed within the industry. Lastly, the results of this case study can assist in expanding research on the influence leadership competency-based evaluations can have on organization leader development programs.

## Conclusion

Leader evaluations are one of the most critical responsibilities of a community manager in a homeowners' association. Using leadership competencies for leader evaluations can enhance the ability of a community manager to conduct more thorough assessments of subordinate leaders. By focusing efforts on leadership competencies, the community manager can assess subordinate leaders on competencies selected from the framework aligned with the organization's mission and goals. Additionally, the community manager can improve individual leader development plans by utilizing an evaluation form that includes the selected competencies, which adds more relevance to an evaluation period discussion. Through this case study, it has been shown that these are relevant points to improve for community association leaders and can apply to many other industries.

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