

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE **research**

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- TITLE** Accountability and Professional Development: Use of the 360-Degree Feedback Appraisal
- RESEARCHER** Roberta (Sue) Parrigin
Department of Leadership, Foundations, and Human Resource Education
University of Louisville
and
College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Western Kentucky University
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- OBJECTIVE** The purpose of this study is to investigate whether perceived accountability for the use of data from a 360-degree feedback appraisal program will increase the participants' engagement in goal setting and professional development activities.
- METHODOLOGY** This study utilized a two-stage design with purposive sampling and random assignment of participants to one of two groups. All participants participated in a one-hour orientation session where the 360-degree feedback appraisal process was introduced and discussed. Following common orientation and feedback sessions with the participants, the researcher randomly assigned them to two groups: accountable (notified of a follow-up call in advance) and non-accountable (not notified of a follow-up phone call). Both groups were subsequently contacted twenty-one days following the program feedback. Completion of the Leadership Practices Inventory (Self and Observers) was used as the feedback appraisal form. Participants for this study were mid-level directors (N=62) working in a variety of departments within a local city government (e.g., parks and recreation, public works, information technology, human resources, public information, police, fire, legal, and finance) of a medium-sized community located in the

southern portion of the United States. Thirty-three eventually participated in all aspects of the study (53% response rate).

KEY FINDINGS

Participants in the accountability group performed significantly more developmental activities than those in the non-accountability group. The accountability group reported performing nearly 2.5 times more developmental activities ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.22$) than the non-accountability group ($M = 1.35$, $SD = .79$) connect with their feedback on the Leadership Practices Inventory. The author reports:

Results from the study showed that the accountability group (those participants who had received an e-mail concerning a follow-up from the researcher based on developmental activities pursued) participated in a significantly greater number of developmental activities subsequent to receiving data from a LPI 360-degree appraisal program. These participants had received identical information on the program, identical instructions on how to distribute and collect the surveys, and identical feedback on the results (i.e., instructions on how to interpret the findings and set professional development goals). The only difference between this group and the non-accountable group was that the accountable group received an email that they would be receiving a follow-up phone call concerning the number of professional development activities they had pursued. There were no threats of consequences of any sort: no publishing of who did or did not pursue activities, no sharing of results with administrators, or no administrative sanctions for not pursuing activities. Apparently, these individuals were motivated solely by the fact that they would receive a call from the researcher to find out if they had pursued professional development activities. The mere expectation that *someone* was going to follow up on this event “pushed” them to accomplish more activities than the non-accountable group.

This finding suggests that when organizations hold individuals accountable for performance standards – even in minimal ways – they will work harder to meet stated goals by participating in more developmental activities than those not held accountable. The findings from this study suggest that those leaders who had a perception of accountability from the process and the researcher pursued significantly more developmental activities than those who held no perception of accountability for the use of the data from the LPI 360-degree feedback appraisal program (pp. 127-28).

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There were no significant correlations among the demographic variables of age or gender and in the study variables of usefulness of the (a) 360-degree process, (b) number of professional development activities performed, and (c) accountability.