

Global Executive Leadership Inventory

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Manfred Kets de Vries

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Why use 360-degree feedback surveys for leadership development?

Given their natural reluctance to seek and receive honest feedback, it is not surprising that roughly 70 percent of executives believe they are in the top 25 percent of their profession in terms of performance. Many of them are truly unaware of the way in which their behavior impedes functioning—their own and others’—in their organizations. The result is a serious gap between what many leaders *say* they do and what they *really* do, that is, between their self-perception and the perceptions others have of them. Although many of them say that they want feedback to enable them to learn and develop, it is human nature to accept feedback that is consistent with the way we see ourselves and reject feedback that is inconsistent with our self-perceptions. Introspection can be, after all, a journey into a dark and frightening place.

Why should I choose the Global Executive Leadership Inventory when so many other leadership questionnaires are available?

The purpose of the Global Executive Leadership Inventory (GELI) is to investigate what it means to be a world-class leader. Although many 360-degree leadership survey instruments exist, there are no others, to our knowledge, that have a global and clinical orientation. Also, based on our exploratory interviews, we have discovered that emotional intelligence, resilience to stress, and life balance are little-explored, yet critical themes in discussions with executives about their concerns. An important objective of the GELI, therefore, is to combine an exploration of these essential dimensions in one 360-degree questionnaire.

What is the GELI designed to achieve?

A number of so-called diagnostic tests are available, but their value is debatable. It is not enough to label someone as, for example, “timid,” “controlling,” or “honest.”

Simply declaring that the results of the survey show that she is “not the best candidate for CFO” is not enough. The unanswered questions are: “What exactly are her strengths and weaknesses?” and “How can she become an even better leader?”

The GELI is based on a clinical orientation to the study of leadership. This approach provides not only insight about leaders’ manifest behavior but also a more complete analysis of their driving forces. The clinically oriented GELI feedback process (as explained in detail in the GELI Facilitator’s Guide), which includes the specially designed 360-degree survey instrument, face-to-face presentation, and discussion of results (often in a group setting), and resolution through the development and follow-up of action plans, can have a significant behavioral impact and will certainly have action implications. The process, facilitated by discussing an individual’s GELI feedback report, is rather like peeling an onion: as the outer, superficial layers come away, our core life experiences are steadily revealed. With this new insight, the test-taker can design action plans for development and ask his or her family, friends, and colleagues for support as he or she implements these changes.

What specific skills or knowledge does the GELI include?

The goal of the GELI is to help participants in leadership development programs identify personal strengths and weaknesses and then consider action plans to “fill in the gaps” through personal development or, in other cases, by creating well-balanced executive teams whose members complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses in specific areas. In sum, the GELI is designed to help people:

- Accept and understand their strengths and weaknesses
- Expand their behavioral repertoire and discover more creative ways of solving difficult interpersonal problems
- Become more effective at career management and professional advancement
- Become more effective at operating in teams and organizations
- Acquire a greater capacity to cope with stress
- Better manage the tensions between their professional and private lives
- Draft a developmental agenda and a program for change

The GELI allows the test-taker to rate his or her own leadership ability on twelve dimensions and compare his or her personal rating with that of a group of observers. Observers—who typically are *superiors*, *direct reports*, *co-workers*, or *others*—respond to the questionnaire anonymously, excepting the test-taker’s superior(s). The GELI includes the following twelve dimensions:

Visioning: articulating a compelling vision, mission, and strategy with a multi-country, multi-environment, multi-function, and multi-gender perspective that connects employees, shareholders, suppliers, and customers on a global scale.

Empowering: giving workers at all levels a voice by empowering them through the sharing of information and the delegation of decisions to the people most competent to execute them.

Energizing: motivating employees to actualize the organization's specific vision of the future.

Designing and aligning: creating the proper organizational design and control systems to make the guiding vision a reality and using those systems to align the behavior of the employees with the organization's values and goals.

Rewarding and giving feedback: setting up the appropriate reward structures and giving constructive feedback to encourage the kind of behavior that is expected from employees.

Team building: creating team players and focusing on team effectiveness by instilling a cooperative atmosphere, building collaborative interaction, and encouraging constructive conflict.

Outside stakeholder orientation: making employees aware of their outside constituencies, emphasizing particularly the need to respond to the requirements of customers, suppliers, shareholders, and other interest groups, such as local communities affected by the organization.

Global mindset: inculcating a global mentality in the ranks, that is, instilling values that act as a sort of glue between the regional and/or national cultures represented in the organization.

Tenacity: encouraging tenacity and courage in employees by setting a personal example in following through on reasonable risks.

Emotional intelligence: fostering trust in the organization by creating, primarily through example, an emotionally intelligent workforce whose members know themselves and know how to deal respectfully and understandingly with others.

Life balance: articulating and modeling the importance of the need for life balance for the long-term welfare of employees.

Resilience to stress: paying attention to work, career, life, and health stress issues and balancing appropriately the various kinds of pressures that life brings.

What individual components does the GELI package include?

The GELI program includes a Facilitator's Guide, Participant Workbook, and access to online completion of the questionnaire. It is also possible to print individual feedback reports using the Pfeiffer online option, or alternatively, by using the software included on the CD in every Facilitator's Guide.

What components do I need to purchase to begin?

All of the above.

Who is the GELI designed for?

The GELI is most effective as part of a leadership development program that includes an executive coaching module. Leaders who choose to participate in this type of program are typically at the top of their career ladders (for example, CEOs, general managers, and other members of executive committees or boards). They come to the program with the intention to take some time to reflect on their life goals, both professional and personal. The GELI can also be used with MBA students at world-class business schools or with young high-potential executives who are interested in comparing their own leadership characteristics with those of the high-level executives from which the GELI norms are derived.

How long does the program take to complete?

It takes an individual about thirty minutes to answer the one hundred questions. If the GELI is used as part of a leadership development program, we recommend that feedback reports be given to the individuals in a 1?-day module, with reports handed out the night before so that participants can "sleep on them" and then discuss their results with their colleagues in small groups of five or six people, with a facilitator, the next day.

How much preparation time will it take to facilitate?

We recommend that the facilitator read the GELI Facilitator's Guide carefully before beginning the workshop. The Facilitator's Guide gives a step-by-step agenda for exploring GELI feedback reports with participants in small groups. In addition, we include advice on details such as room set-up, and working with participants to create individual action plans. The facilitator should also look carefully at the participants' feedback reports before the first feedback session begins.

Do I need any special skills to facilitate the program?

It is helpful to have a familiarity with psychological concepts and experience helping participants to decipher 360-degree feedback reports.

What's unique or different about the GELI?

Given a target audience of executives from around the world, our objective was to construct a simple, conceptually sound diagnostic instrument with a psychodynamic focus. The GELI is aimed at a “normal” population (that is, our norms and standard deviations are constructed using our database of high-achieving business leaders from many national cultures), and is to be used as the basis for a discussion about individual behavior. The GELI is easy to complete, easy to understand and interpret, and easy to translate into action aimed at improvement.

What insights do participants gain from their GELI feedback reports?

The GELI is designed to measure effectiveness in dimensions that reflect the successful global leader's two main roles: the charismatic role and the architectural role. The first role involves envisioning, empowering, and energizing—behaviors that direct, inspire, and motivate their followers. The second role involves the implementation of processes to improve organizational design and to control and reward employee behavior appropriately. The most successful leaders appear to be extremely talented at aligning their charismatic role with their architectural role. In addition, they are emotionally intelligent, have work-life balance, and are resilient to stress. Therefore, the GELI provides material for discussion and reflection about the test-taker's current and desired level of skill in the following areas:

- Articulating a compelling vision, mission, and strategy with a multi-country, multi-environment, multi-function, and multi-gender perspective that connects employees, shareholders, suppliers, and customers on a global scale
- Giving workers at all levels a voice by empowering them through the sharing of information and the delegation of decisions to the people most competent to execute them
- Energizing and motivating employees to actualize the organization's specific vision of the future
- Creating the proper organizational design and control systems to make the guiding vision a reality, and using those systems to align the behavior of the employees with the organization's values and goals
- Setting up the appropriate reward structures and giving constructive feedback to encourage the kind of behavior that is expected from employees

- Creating team players and focusing on team effectiveness by instilling a cooperative atmosphere, building collaborative interaction, and encouraging constructive conflict
- Making employees aware of their outside constituencies, emphasizing particularly the need to respond to the requirements of customers, suppliers, shareholders, and other interest groups, such as local communities affected by the organization
- Inculcating a global mentality in the ranks—that is, instilling values that act as a sort of glue between the regional and/or national cultures represented in the organization
- Encouraging tenacity and courage in employees by setting a personal example in taking reasonable risks
- Fostering trust in the organization by creating, primarily through example, an emotionally intelligent workforce whose members know themselves and know how to deal respectfully and understandingly with others
- Articulating and modeling the importance of the need for life balance for the long-term welfare of employees
- Paying attention to work, career, life, and health stress issues and balancing appropriately the various kinds of pressures that life brings

Note: Although the GELI measures leadership characteristics in these areas, *we strongly discourage people from using the feedback reports as a basis for performance review.* Using this type of 360-degree instrument can be a delicate proposition, as many people fear that the information gathered will be used as fodder for demotion, unwanted lateral moves, or other unpleasant consequences. Therefore, we recommend that the feedback report be given only to the individual concerned; he or she should decide with whom to share the information. We also recommend that the feedback reports be discussed in small groups.

How many and what type of questions are in the assessment?

There are one hundred questions in GELI. Test-takers are asked to select the most appropriate answer on a scale of 1 to 7, from “does not describe me at all” to “describes me very well.”

How has the assessment been verified and tested?

We are extremely rigorous when it comes to the psychometric properties of our instruments. In fact, we created the GELI because we were unable to find similar 360-degree instruments that were robust enough, or comprehensive enough, to meet the needs we perceived among the executives we work with. Our development team consists of Professor Manfred Kets de Vries, Professor Pierre Vriegnaud, and several

other colleagues with psychometric and psychological training. We use specific psychometric analysis and methods that respect the data structure (dependency between observers who are observing the same individual) of the 360-degree process, and the psychometric properties of the GELI have been published in *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15(3): 475-492.

In designing the GELI, we began by studying top executives from all over the world who have participated in leadership programs at INSEAD. Leaders who participate in these seminars are typically at a very senior level of the career ladder. They come to the program with the intention of taking some time to reflect on their life goals, both professional and personal. Therefore, this group of leaders was the ideal place to begin testing our theories on leadership behavior and to distil the theories into measurable dimensions.

Identifying the dimensions. To identify the dimensions we wished to measure in the GELI, we interviewed hundreds of senior executives to uncover what issues were most important to them in their day-to-day work and what kind of behavior contributed to their effectiveness. In some cases, they were also asked to discuss concerns about life balance and stress. The concerns, themes, and other constructs that emerged from the in-depth interviews with top executives were content-analyzed by our research team and then grouped in terms of themes relevant to leadership.

Writing the questions. We then designed the survey instrument itself. We devised a series of statements that reflected the constituent constructs in each dimension. These statements were triangulated during group discussions.

Developing a pilot questionnaire. In order to turn the statements about leadership into a questionnaire with a minimal amount of ambiguity about each of the items, the GELI was pre-tested. The initial pilot questionnaires were distributed to a large group of CEOs who commented on the clarity and the face validity of the questions. After two subsequent pre-tests with other top executives and MBA students (for a total of at least two hundred respondents), the number of questionnaire items was narrowed down.

Validating a new questionnaire. The psychometric reliability and validity of the GELI was studied in three stages: (1) by checking the internal consistency within each dimension using a classic psychometric approach; (2) by evaluating the structure of the questionnaire through confirmatory factor analysis at both the item level and the dimension level; and (3) by conducting a study of the effects of the characteristics of subject groups (gender, nationality, age, and experience, among others).

Once the GELI passed these stringent tests, norms and standard deviations were calculated. Feedback pages were designed using graphs that show percentile rankings, allowing the test-taker to compare his or her scores with those of the large group of high-achievers from all over the world in our database. Finally, the questionnaire was approved for use in executive seminars and courses and by leadership coaches and consultants in companies. The GELI was also adapted for web-based, online use.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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