

Leadership Recovery Self-Check Companion Guide

Understanding the Signals in the Recovery Window

How to Use This Guide

Leadership situations are rarely experienced the same way by everyone involved.

A leader may notice increased scrutiny or changing feedback without knowing what is being discussed elsewhere in the organization. A boss or HR leader may see growing concern among stakeholders without fully understanding what the leader is experiencing. Both perspectives can contain important information. The differences between those perspectives can also be important information.

This guide provides additional context for the 12 signals in the Recovery Self-Check. It is designed to help you recognize what a signal might look like from different perspectives and distinguish an isolated event from a developing pattern.

No single signal establishes that a leader is in a Leadership Recovery Window. Look for patterns, changes over time, and combinations of signals.

The purpose is not to diagnose the cause of the problem. It is to help determine whether the situation deserves closer examination.

A. Signals About Confidence and Perception

1. Feedback themes are repeating without visible, sustained change

What this means

The same concern has surfaced more than once, but there is limited evidence that the issue has been resolved or that improvement has been sustained.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

Feedback that seems familiar from previous conversations; being told again to work on the same behaviour or issue; making changes but finding that others do not seem to recognize the improvement.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

The boss, HR, peers or employees raising similar concerns over time; previous feedback or development efforts producing limited observable change; recurring themes appearing through different channels.

Keep in mind:

Repeated feedback does not necessarily mean the leader has failed to respond. Expectations may be unclear, different stakeholders may be looking for different things, or the behaviour being requested may not address the underlying problem.

2. Concerns about credibility, leadership style or effectiveness appear to be increasing.

What this means

Questions about the leader are becoming more frequent, broader or more consequential. What may have begun as an isolated concern is starting to affect how others view the leader's overall effectiveness.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

Feedback feels more critical than it once did. Behaviours that were previously accepted are being questioned. You may sense that others are interpreting your actions differently or that your leadership approach is no longer producing the response it once did.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

Concerns are no longer limited to one incident or one relationship. Different stakeholders may be raising questions about judgement, communication, leadership style, credibility or effectiveness.

Keep in mind:

Increasing concern does not automatically mean the leader has become less capable. The role, expectations, stakeholders or organizational environment may have changed, making a previously successful leadership approach less effective.

3. Results may still be acceptable, but confidence in the leader appears less certain.

What this means

The concern may not yet be about measurable performance. Stakeholders may instead be questioning whether current performance can be sustained, whether the leader can meet changing demands, or whether they remain comfortable relying on her.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

You are still delivering results, but they no longer seem to carry the same weight. Your decisions may receive more questions, your autonomy may be reduced, or you may sense hesitation about giving you additional responsibility.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

Results remain acceptable, yet there is increasing discussion about leadership effectiveness, future capability, relationships, judgement or whether the current trajectory is sustainable.

Keep in mind:

Performance and confidence do not always decline at the same time. A leader can continue producing acceptable results while confidence around her is beginning to change.

4. Decisions, behaviours or results are receiving more scrutiny than they once did.

What this means

The leader's work is being examined more closely. Decisions or behaviours that once would have attracted little attention now generate questions, requests for explanation or additional oversight.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

You are being asked for more detail, justification or updates. Decisions that you previously made independently may now require consultation or approval. Small mistakes may seem to receive more attention than they once did.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

The boss, HR or other stakeholders are requesting more information, checking progress more frequently, questioning decisions or looking more closely at how results are being achieved.

Keep in mind:

Increased scrutiny can occur for many reasons, including a new boss, a larger role, restructuring, increased organizational risk or changing expectations. The important signal is the **change from the previous level of trust or oversight**.

B. Signals About Support and Expectations

5. Support for the leader feels more cautious or conditional than it once did.

What this means

People who previously advocated for, trusted or supported the leader may still be supportive, but their support now appears to come with reservations.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

A boss or sponsor seems less decisive in supporting you. Encouragement may now be accompanied by warnings, conditions or expectations for improvement. You may sense that people who once advocated strongly for you are becoming more careful.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

Sponsors or senior leaders still see value in the leader but are becoming less willing to defend problems indefinitely. Support may increasingly depend on visible improvement or resolution of particular concerns.

Keep in mind:

Cautious support is not the same as withdrawal of support. In fact, it may indicate that a meaningful Recovery Window still exists. The organization may still want the leader to succeed, but confidence can no longer be assumed.

6. The leader is receiving feedback, coaching or support, but expectations for improvement are not completely clear.

What this means

Effort is being made to help, but there may be uncertainty about exactly what needs to change, how improvement will be recognized, or what outcome is expected.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

You have been told to improve your communication, executive presence, relationships, strategic thinking or another aspect of your leadership, but you are not entirely sure what different behaviour would look like or how success will be judged.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

The leader has received feedback, coaching, mentoring or development support, but stakeholders have not clearly defined the specific changes they need to see or the evidence that would restore confidence.

Keep in mind:

More development does not necessarily solve an unclear problem. If expectations are vague or stakeholders disagree about what needs to change, additional effort may produce activity without resolving the underlying concern.

7. More people are becoming involved in discussions about the situation.

What this means

The situation is attracting attention beyond the people who would normally be involved in the leader's development or day-to-day performance.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

HR becomes involved. Meetings begin to include people who were not previously part of the conversation. Feedback starts coming through multiple channels, or more stakeholders begin asking questions about your work or leadership.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

Concerns are being discussed beyond the immediate manager. HR, senior leadership or other stakeholders are asked for input, observations are being compared, or the situation is receiving broader organizational attention.

Keep in mind:

Broader involvement does not necessarily mean a negative decision has been made. It may mean the organization is trying to understand or support the situation. The important questions are **why involvement is increasing and whether everyone is working from the same understanding of the problem.**

8. Time, patience or tolerance for mistakes appears to be narrowing.

What this means

The leader may still have an opportunity to recover, but the amount of time available to demonstrate meaningful change appears to be decreasing.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

Feedback feels more urgent. Mistakes that once would have been treated as normal are receiving stronger reactions. You may hear language about needing to see progress, demonstrating change or addressing concerns quickly.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

Stakeholders remain willing to support the leader, but they are becoming less willing to tolerate repeated problems, missed expectations or slow progress. There may be increasing pressure to see evidence that the situation is improving.

Keep in mind:

This is an important timing signal. Leadership Recovery depends not only on whether change is possible, but also on whether there is still enough time and organizational willingness for meaningful change to occur.

C. Signals That the Situation Is Becoming More Serious

9. Conversations are increasingly focused on whether the current situation can continue.

What this means

The conversation is beginning to move beyond how the leader can improve toward whether the present situation is sustainable.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

Discussions feel less developmental and more consequential. Questions may arise about your role, responsibilities, fit, performance or what will happen if things do not improve.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

Stakeholders are beginning to ask whether the leader can continue successfully in the role, whether the situation is sustainable, or whether other options may eventually need to be considered.

Keep in mind:

Questioning whether a situation can continue does not mean a decision has already been made. But it does suggest that the situation has moved beyond ordinary leadership development and that time may matter.

10. The language around the situation has shifted from development and growth toward risk, viability or consequences.

What this means

The purpose and tone of conversations about the leader are changing. The organization may be moving from helping the leader become stronger toward determining whether current concerns can be resolved.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

Conversations that once focused on development now include language such as "need to see improvement," "concern," "confidence," "not sustainable," "what needs to change," or "what happens next."

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

Discussions increasingly focus on organizational risk, confidence, consequences, timing, sustainability or whether the current arrangement can continue.

Keep in mind:

This is more consequential than ordinary developmental feedback. Pay attention not only to the words being used, but to whether the **purpose of the conversation itself has changed**.

11. Coaching, development or another intervention has been suggested, but the problem it is intended to solve, or what success would look like, remains unclear.

What this means

There is agreement that something needs attention, but there may not yet be agreement about the problem being solved or what meaningful improvement would look like.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

You are being encouraged to get coaching, take training, find a mentor or work on your leadership, but you do not have a clear picture of what specifically needs to be different at the end of that process.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

There is pressure to "do something" to help the leader, but stakeholders have not clearly identified the underlying issue, the required changes or the evidence that would demonstrate recovery.

Keep in mind:

An intervention is only as useful as the problem it is intended to solve. Starting coaching, training or development before understanding what is actually driving the concern can consume valuable recovery time without addressing the right issue.

12. The situation feels increasingly urgent, but there is still no shared understanding of the real problem.

What this means

Concern is increasing faster than clarity. People may agree that something is wrong without agreeing on what has changed, why it is happening or what needs to be addressed.

From the leader's perspective, this might look like:

You know the situation is becoming serious, but the feedback you receive feels inconsistent, incomplete or difficult to translate into action. Different people may appear to have different concerns about you or your leadership.

From the organization's perspective, this might look like:

The boss, HR, peers, employees or other stakeholders have different explanations for what is happening. Some may see a performance problem, others a behaviour problem, relationship problem, role-fit issue or response to changing organizational conditions.

Keep in mind:

Urgency without clarity creates risk. Acting quickly on the wrong explanation can make the situation worse. When the stakes are increasing but the cause remains uncertain, **clarification becomes part of the intervention.**

Look for Patterns, Not Individual Checkmarks

No single signal establishes that a leader is in a Leadership Recovery Window. The signals become more meaningful when they cluster or intensify over time.

A repeated feedback issue alone may simply indicate a development need.

Repeated feedback combined with increased scrutiny, cautious support, broader stakeholder involvement and narrowing patience suggests something different.

Similarly, one difficult relationship may be a relationship problem. But deteriorating relationships combined with changing expectations, increased organizational involvement and questions about whether the situation can continue may indicate that the leadership situation itself has become more serious.

Also pay attention to change over time. A condition that has existed for years may mean something different from one that has emerged or intensified over the past three or six months.

The Self-Check is designed to help you notice that distinction.

What the Self-Check Cannot Tell You

The Self-Check can help identify whether warning signals are accumulating. It cannot determine why they are occurring.

Similar symptoms can have very different causes. A leadership situation may involve capability, behaviour, transition to a more demanding role, changes in organizational context, relationship dynamics, or several factors at once.

Determining what has actually changed, what is driving the problem, the risks involved, and whether recovery is viable requires a broader diagnostic process.

What to Do With What You Notice

Do not treat your score as a verdict.

Instead, consider:

1. Which signals represent a meaningful change from six or twelve months ago?
2. Which signals appear to be connected?
3. Where do the leader and the organization appear to see the situation differently?
4. Is confidence changing faster than performance?
5. If nothing changes in the next 90 days, what is likely to happen?
6. Is there still enough time, trust and organizational willingness to address the situation?

What Happens Next?

The Self-Check helps identify whether a leadership situation may be moving into a Recovery Window. It does not determine what is causing the problem or what intervention is appropriate.

If the signals are limited and the situation remains primarily developmental, normal leadership development may be enough.

If several signals are present, confidence is changing, or you are unsure what is actually driving the situation, the **Athena Leadership Recovery Assessment™** provides a focused diagnostic process to determine what has changed, the risks involved, and whether recovery is viable.

If the situation is already serious, the organization still believes in the leader, and there is a realistic window in which to act, the **Athena Leadership Recovery Sprint™** provides a focused 90-day intervention.

If you're unsure where to begin, discuss the situation confidentially with Dawn.