360 degree feedback best practices guidelines

Author: Carl Tapi . December 2020

What has happened in companies traditionally is that feedback is a one-way street. It cascades down from supervisors to subordinates but hardly ever the other way around. Feedback from co-workers and subordinates is something that one at times hears through the office grapevine. More and more companies have started to realize the importance of all-round feedback through formal channels. According to Forbes, 85% of Fortune 500 companies are now implementing 360 Feedback - otherwise known as 360 Degree or Multi-rater Feedback. This article will be looking at 360 Degree feedback assessments and recommended best practices.

What is 360 Degree Feedback

360 Degree Feedback is a system or process in which employees receive confidential, anonymous feedback from the people who work around them. The earliest recorded use of 360-degree assessments is from the 1950s. 360 feedback grew out of the use of a training method called "T-groups" or training groups. Participants met with their peers who were encouraged to share feedback in an open session facilitated by a trained moderator. Notably, before the technological era, 360 - degree feedback was a difficult process to administer. The time and effort needed to collect paper forms, collate the data, and produce a summary report was extensive and a significant barrier.

These technological breakthroughs and automation in the process have meant that there has been a significant uptake of the process. The data is collected via respondents that include the reporting manager, colleagues, and subordinates, and in some cases, clients too. The opinion and ratings from the participants are then fed into the system to churn out comprehensible, actionable development reports.

360-degree feedback program aims at solving multi-dimensional problems in an organization ranging from employee engagement and attrition to development and succession planning. Just like the full angle, 360-degree feedback software gives an all-round report of an employee's journey in the organization, his strengths, challenges, roadblocks, or any latent leadership potential that can be polished with little training and effort. Single sourced feedback is rarely comprehensive enough to be regarded as reliable. 360-degree feedback tool has evolved into a very effective management tool in employee development.

Some advantages that come with 360 Degree feedback are that it;

- Gives anonymity to junior employees to speak freely
- Provides feedback to employees from a variety of sources
- Develops and strengthens teamwork and accountability
- Uncovers procedural issues that can hinder employee growth
- Reveals specific career development areas

- Reduces rater bias and discrimination tendencies
- Offers constructive feedback to improve employee outputs
- Supplies insight on training needs

The disadvantages that may come with 360 Degree feedback are that it;

- Can be time-consuming if the number of required appraisals is a lot
- Causes organizational issues if implemented in a hasty or incomplete fashion
- Prevents recipients from getting more information because the process is anonymous
- Focuses on employee weaknesses and shortcomings instead of strengths

Executing a 360-degree assessment successfully requires buy-in from all stakeholders to ensure maximum participation. Sensitizing members on what the process entails is just one of the aspects that need to be addressed. Questions that should be expected in the assessments by participants have to be tailored to the purpose of the assessments. Are the assessments being done for evaluating problem-solving skills? Leadership capabilities? Soft skills set? Current Management? These are some of the aims that should be addressed beforehand.

Some typical questions that can be found in 360-degree assessments as provided by careers site Indeed.com are;

- Does this employee take the initiative to seek clarification on things they don't understand?
- Does this employee proactively seek to understand the views and opinions of others?
- Is this employee open to receiving feedback from supervisors and peers?
- Do you believe this employee is honest, ethical, and trustworthy?
- Is this employee a good active listener?
- Do the actions of this manager Inspire growth and development in others?
- Is this manager able to resolve conflict appropriately?
- Do you receive constructive and helpful feedback from this manager?
- Has this employee shown the initiative to take the lead on team projects or assignments?
- Do you believe this employee knows and represents our company's goals and values?
- Does this employee follow instructions to achieve the desired results?
- Does this employee help create a culture that fosters and values collaboration?
- Does this employee seek to improve by learning new skills and techniques?

Best practice would also be to add an extra section to accommodate any other comments that a rater might need to put out, whether positive or negative. Most 360-degree assessment templates come with rating scales. The respondent can answer any of the questions about how well an individual ranging from unsatisfactory to excellent.

There are many benefits to 360 - degree feedback. However, a lot of 360 feedback projects can go wrong, which results in poor ROI and can give a bad impression of 360 feedback. The Harvard Business Review acknowledges that 360-degree assessments are as relevant to the work world as ever. However, for them to be a success some of the aspects that need to be handled correctly are:

- They begin by measuring the right skills, relying on empirical research to determine which leadership competencies make a difference to the performance of their firm, rather than on some senior executive's beliefs about what makes a good manager.
- They take the time to properly explain, both to participants and to the people giving feedback about those participants, why they're going through the exercise and how the data will be used for the participant's development.
- They make certain and make it known, that there will be no breaches of confidentiality.
- They create a survey that requires just 15 to 20 minutes to complete, to avoid the survey fatigue that tortuously long instruments cause.
- They focus primarily on discovering strengths rather than use the process to uncover deficiencies. Yes, the process sometimes identifies major weaknesses that need to be taken seriously, but in our experience, these have been in the minority of cases.
- They tailor the results to each individual and his or her position. Everyone doesn't need to be good at the same things.
- They present each person's results in a way that enables them to digest them constructively and use the data to create a personal plan of development. They make the feedback report itself simple to read, presenting data in a graphical format that is easy to absorb.
- They design a final report to help participants see how they compare to those in the top quartile and the top 10%. This elevates everyone's aspirations. No one leaves feeling complacent about being slightly above average.
- They include a mini-employee survey that shows managers the impact of their behavior on their subordinates.

A 360-degree feedback program can be a powerful way of helping employees grow within their organization. Used successfully, it's a tool that increases engagement, identifies training opportunities, and helps employees develop in their role and go on to succeed in a leadership role.

Carl Tapi is a Consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, a management and human resources consulting firm. https://www.linkedin.com/in/carl-tapi-45776482/ Phone +263 (242) 481946-48/481950 or cell number +263 772 469 680 or email: carl@ipcconsultants.com or visit our website at www.ipcconsultants.com

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