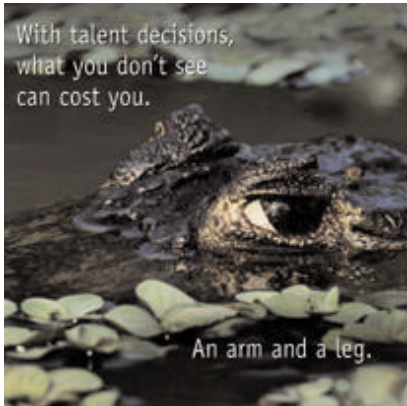




Effective Use of 360 Degree Feedback

RIGHT'S POINT OF VIEW



*BY MARY MARCUS—
MANAGING CONSULTANT,
ORGANIZATIONAL CONSULTING*

There was a time when 360° feedback was a trend-- a trend that died relatively quickly. This demise was due primarily to two reasons: nothing was done with the actual information or, conversely, data was misused with negative ramifications.

However, 360° feedback is having a resurgence-- and for good reason. These assessments, if handled correctly, are one of the most dependable ways to get developmental feedback for managers and executives.

But first, a little background... 360° feedback is a methodology that enables managers, leaders and others to gain insight and input

from multiple contributors on performance in their current role. More than any other developmental tool, 360° feedback can prompt real, measurable changes in behavior in the feedback receiver. This happens when they receive honest, specific feedback from their bosses, colleagues and subordinates.

One thing that has contributed to 360's 'bad rap' is rater bias. Most 360° feedback tools ask responders to rate the feedback receiver on how well they do certain things -- things that have been determined as critical success factors. This leads to a concern on the part of the rater that they are judging an individual using their perception only. Some of the better assessment tools are shifting the rating scales away from "level of excellence" to frequency rating scales. Our experience is that people feel less judgmental if they are responding to how frequently an individual does or does not do something, rather than how well they do it.

Another factor that has grayed the landscape for 360° feedback is the actual validity of data gathered. When responders are forced to give a numeric rating to each question, this increases anxiety, especially when the

question is related to something the responder has not observed. Our advice? When you are looking at various options, select a tool that allows respondents to opt out of responding to any particular question. This gives the responder a sense of comfort and keeps the data clean.

There are many 360° feedback tools on the market with varying requirements for feedback. Our advice? Choose a tool that requires face-to-face or one-on-one feedback from a trained feedback provider. 360° feedback can be an intense experience. If not handled professionally, the organization runs the risk of having the receiver misinterpret the results, react too harshly to the results or, even worse, totally discount the feedback. The best tools have a certification requirement or offer coaching support to provide and interpret the feedback.

Another important consideration is whether you should customize or use an off-the-shelf tool. The decision will be based on your answer to the following questions:

- How important it is for you to benchmark your leaders

World Headquarters:

1818 Market Street, Thirty-third Floor, Philadelphia PA, 19103,
1.800.237.4448

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against an external database?

- How well does the off-the-shelf tool support the leadership profile of your organization?
- What are the statistical validity and reliability factors of the tool? You want to have solid face validity, test/retest reliability and internal consistency.

Finally and, most importantly, there must be a follow-up process and a requirement to do something with the feedback. Unless the feedback is built into the organization's leadership development, performance planning, and other human resource systems, there is no motivation or support for the receiver to act on the feedback results. This is the single most significant reason why 360° feedback initiatives fail or backfire.

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