



360-DEGREE FEEDBACK: CROSSING THE BRIDGE FROM EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE TO DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The performance appraisal is the process of measuring and evaluating employees' performance, against the pre-decided and agreed set performance targets and standards. Organizations have historically been challenged by the issue of finding right ways of measuring performance of employees in a just and equitable way. In this journey, HRM has come a long way in trying to ascertain the right ways that can be used to make the performance appraisal process as error free as possible in the context of measuring individual performance, especially, in group contexts. In this direction, along with many other experimentations with various methods, 360-degree feedback has been employed as a popular method. 360-degree feedback process would include feedback from an employee's peer and subordinates (colleagues), and supervisor(s), as well as individual's self -assessment by himself/ herself. Such feedback system based on multi-rater assessment may be used for a variety of purposes like performance appraisal, promotions, pay increase, etc. it may also be used as a developmental tool for career progression and identify and segregating talent in the context of succession planning in organization. The present paper makes an attempt to throw some lights on the issues related to 360-degree feedback.

Key Words: 360-degree feedback, performance appraisal, leadership, employee development

INTRODUCTION

The performance appraisal is the process of measuring and evaluating employees' performance, against the pre-decided and agreed set performance targets and standards. Organizations have historically been challenged by the issue of finding right ways of measuring performance of employees in a just and equitable way. In this journey, HRM has come a long way in trying to ascertain the right ways that can be used to make the performance appraisal process as error free as possible in the context of measuring individual performance, especially, in group contexts. In this direction, along with many other experimentations with various methods, 360-degree feedback has been employed as a popular method, particularly for measuring individual's performance in groups, departments or project teams. Typically, in such cross-functional teams, where a number of individuals work together to achieve a common goal or task, a lot of adjustments are required to be made on the part of individuals to work together and achieve the given tasks / goals, consensually in a given timeframe.



In the above work context, 360-degree feedback has been one of the most popular method, in last ten years, employed in organizations to measure the individual's contribution and effectiveness in achieving, not only his / her individuals allocated goals, but, also, the group goals as a whole (CIPD, 2003; Kearns, 2004). Typically, the members of the group would rate one another on certain parameters, which are used as common parameters across the group to capture the performance of individuals. The parameters contain both behavioral and non-behavioral elements which are used as the common parameters of performance measurement. Along with peer rating in the group, normally in 360-degree feedback, self-appraisal by each group member also forms part of the assessment.

Hence, 360-degree feedback process would include feedback from an employee's peer and subordinates (colleagues), and supervisor(s), as well as individual's self -assessment by himself/herself. In other variants of this method, stakeholders such as, customers, suppliers or other relevant stakeholders may be included, if deemed fit by the organization. Such feedback system, based on multi-rater assessment, may be used for a variety of purposes like performance appraisal, promotions, pay increase, etc. it may also be used as a developmental tool for career progression and identify and segregating talent in the context of succession planning in organization.

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/360-degree-feedback>, accessed on 14.9.17)

HISTORICAL USAGE OF 360- DEGREE FEEDBACK

In both World War I and II, 360-dergee feedback method was used by the US and German military for the purpose of performance of soldiers. In the case of German military, the concept was used more widely, as soldiers were not only evaluated by peers, supervisors and subordinates, but the feedback was also used as a part of recommendation to improve performance. These feedbacks were also used as merit ratings for the purpose determining the compensation and promotion of soldiers in the given system.

Esso Research and Engineering (currently under the umbrage of Exxon Mobile) was one of the pioneering organizations in 1950 which used this system. The company was able to achieve increased efficiency and financial success from the usage of this method.

The usage of this method gained increased popularity due to the usage of typewriters and computers, which made giving and receiving feedback a more anonymous process, replacing hand written feedback where such complete anonymity was hard to achieve. . This method was widely used by Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric to increase shareholder value every year (along with the concept of six sigma quality program), wherein, merit ratings were used to determine the bottom 10% of employees each year, who were fired from their jobs. In recent times the 360-dgree method is widely used and more than 90% of Fortune 500 companies use a variant of multi-rater feedback system in order to serve their stakeholders better.

(<https://www.appraisal360.co.uk/about/what-is-360-degree-feedback/>, accessed on 14.9.17)



DECIPHERING THE 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK- WHAT DOESIT REALLY MEAN

As mentioned earlier, it is both a method and a tool, which helps individuals to obtain performance feedback from his peers and subordinates and supervisors and in some cases, co-workers and customers. Along with this, the individual also conducts a self-appraisal about his / her own performance, as he / she sees it on certain given parameters in line with organizational tasks/ goal objectives, in accordance with set mission and vision of the organization. All this is in line with fulfillment of stakeholder expectations, that are laid out for each of the functional roles, in which, individuals are engaged in a given organizational context.

The raters are normally chosen from among those who regularly interact with the person who is subjected to this kind of feedback process.

This method is essentially used as a process for individuals to understand their own strengths and weaknesses so that they can develop themselves into a more effective performance through professional development.

(<https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-a-360-review-1917541>, accessed on 14.9.2017)

Evaluating the effectiveness of a 360-degree feedback system is imperative at the initial stages of implantation of such system. Issues that need to be considered are as follows:

- Whether the feedback was too positive
- Whether the developmental actions were stimulated
- Whether ratings were done efficiently
- Whether the raters had sufficient time
- Whether the feedback process was functional
- Whether the receivers were comfortable with the feedback given.

BENEFITS OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

Studies have proved that, organizations who implement the 360degree feedback, found it to be useful (Warr and Ainsworth, 1999). Maurer et al. (2002) found that 360-degree feedback act as an instrument in developing a work culture, which encourages skill development. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) also identified a significant performance difference between groups who were receiving 360-degree feedback and groups who were not.

The following may be the key benefits that may be accrued through the use of this system, from the point of view of organizations as well as individuals:

For organizations:

- by supporting a culture of performance, it helps in reinforcing the link between competencies, behaviors and values needed for effectively performing on a job

- it helps in generation of comparative picture of performance (both qualitative and quantitative) on a departmental basis



- by providing insights into an individual's strengths and weaknesses, it serves as a basis for planning the development of individuals for better performance
- it helps in creating open culture in organizations where feedback is taken seriously and positively as a developmental tool and not as a fault-finding mission
- it helps in identifying top talent and thereby helps in the talent management and succession-planning process

(<https://www.decision-wise.com/benefits-of-360-degree-feedback/>, accessed on 14.9.2107)

Certain other benefits from the usage of this system which may be gained in the organizational context are:

- promoting the process of dialogue within organizations
- improving working relationships
- encouraging personal development and growth
- increasing accountability and
- enhancing performance

(<https://careertrend.com/about-5163489-history-degree-feedback.html>, accessed on 14.9.2017)

For Individuals:

- increases self-awareness and clarifies the needed behaviors for effective job performance
- helps in refining personal opinions about themselves and their work-related behaviors by knowing the viewpoint of others with whom the individual work in the organization through the effective feedback process
- feedback increases the credibility of the feedback in the eyes of individual receiving it, and helps him/ her to use the same, as a basis for improving themselves, in their specific work contexts
- helps in increasing self-awareness and focus on personal development
- may result in enhanced job satisfaction as a consequence of feeling more valued by the organization
- helps in better team work by raising the awareness of the individuals about how others perceive them in teams
- may lead to leveraging of individuals' strengths and better use of training budget for increased developmental proposes, linked to succession planning and talent development within organizations



(<http://www.getfeedback.net/hrmanagers/Benefits-of-360>; <https://explorance.com/2013/07/5-employee-benefits-of-360-degree-feedback-2/>, accessed on 14.9.17)

INTENTIONS TO ACT ON 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

Success of the 360-degree feedback process heavily depends on the extent to which receivers of the performance feedback accept the feedback and act upon it. There are number of factors, which may influence a receiver's decision, in this context. They are as follows:

According to Gray (2001), receivers value their feedback, based on the degree of the trustworthiness of the feedback and the degree to which the feedback was constructive.

Goodge and Burr (1999) found that receivers are more motivated to act on the feedback, if the feedback process is perceived worthwhile by them.

Personality of the receivers also plays an important role. Receivers, who are high on extraversion and openness to change were less motivated to change as a result of feedback. However, older employees and employees with more work experience were as motivated to change as their younger colleagues (Gray,2001).

Also, the receivers, who had the option to choose their own raters were significantly more motivated to change their performance input. Also, it was reported that, those receivers who perceived their organisation to be supportive, were significantly more motivated to change (Gray, 2001).

Cawley etal (1998) found that receivers were willing to act upon the feedback depending on the degree of positivity, fairness, accuracy and usefulness of the feedback, provided to them.

APPLYING 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK IN APPRAISAL

The original intention in introducing the 360-degree feedback was to use it as a developmental tool for the receivers of the feedback. However, at a later state, organizations have started to use the 360-degree feedback, as an important part of the performance management process (Fletcher and Baldry, 1999). Studies found that organizations have been adopting 360-degree feedback as a part of the performance appraisal process, with varying intentions, such as, for individual development, as a performance appraisal tool, and for determining performance related pay (Warr and Ainsworth,1999).

Goodge (2002) has proposed a number of reasons to integrate 360-degree feedback with performance appraisal:

Less subjectivity of opinion – 360-degree feedback helps to provide an all-round perspective of employee's performance, keeping all the stakeholders' views into consideration. Hence, possibility of objectivity among rater increases.

Broader assessment of performance – In the era of multi-tasking, 360-degree feedback becomes a tool to identify, acknowledge, and assess accomplishments of an individual, perceived by a number of stakeholders, associated with the task of the individual.



A possible tool to acknowledge an individual's contribution in a team –in a team, it becomes very difficult to recognize an individual's contribution towards team's achievement. 360-degree feedback helps the individual employee in getting the due recognition, which results into appropriate appraisal of the performance.

Greater acceptance by the employees –Since 360-degree feedback is provided by multiple stakeholders, possibility of acceptance by employees of such feedback increases.

THE PITFALLS OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK SYSTEM

360-degree feedback may have several negative impacts on individuals and organizations, if not used with due care. There is a certain responsibility which must be taken by organizational members when they subject themselves to this kind of a feedback system. On the one hand, the tool is a very powerful and can lead to many positive gains for individuals and organizations. On the other hand, wrongly or irresponsible use such tools can have damaging and irreversible effects in organizations. In this context, many researchers (Pollack and Pollack, 1996; London et al. 1990; Bettenhausen and Fedor, 1997) have argued that 360-degree feedback is more effectively implemented for developmental purpose, rather than appraisal.

The following may be some of the negatives consequences which may be faced by organizations in the above context:

- Wrongly used, it can lead to mistrust among organizational and team members damaging the morale of members and generation of emotions like fear and anger
- If colleagues want to play the political game of being nice or vindictive and rate others accordingly, it can lead to inaccurate assessment of an individual's competencies, behaviours and contributions, thereby defeating the very essence of 360-degree feedback process
- If the leaders in the team or the assessors are unaware of political game, which may be played in the feedback process, their assessments based on such feedback may be detrimental to the process of creating bias-free appraisal / performance systems in organizations. This can lead to mistrust and increase high levels of attrition in organizations as the victimized individuals may look for greener pastures and alternatives and may quit the organization. This can lead to loss of talent retention in the organization.
- Too much of focus on weaknesses rather than strength can lead to unpopularity of this tool as a means for generating feedback in organizations.
- Only relevant stakeholders, connected with day to day concerns with individuals in question (who is being subjected this process), must be used as raters in 360 –degree feedback process. This would ensure that the feedback is coming from the right people who are in a position to rightfully rate the individual's contributions. Focussing on isolated pieces of information rather than broad themes may lead to bias and make the process appear persecutory in nature.



360-degree approach to be successful requires commitment from the top management capable of laying down a culture clear communication and trust.

(<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/360degreeperformance.aspx>, accessed on 14.9.17)

THE IMPORTANCE OF USING RELEVANT SOURCES IN 360- DEGREE FEEDBACK

Since, not all stakeholders are necessarily required to be involved for providing feedback to an individual, relevancy of the source gains importance in such a system of collecting feedback about an individual's job performance. Only those stakeholders who are connected to an individual's work role(s) directly, should be considered as a viable source for providing performance feedback. In this section, the relevancy of sources in terms of their required contribution, as a feedback provider, and the cautions to be addressed in each case of using such sources would be discussed.

The relevant sources may be considered as follows in the context of organizations in which they may be involved as a feedback provider: First-line Supervisor/ Senior Manager, peers, subordinates, and the person in question himself/ herself (self-assessment).

First-line Supervisor/ Senior Manager: In most organizations supervisors play a key role in providing feedback about people who report to them. They are in a position to judge the performance of the people reporting to them, as they are involved in day-to-day interactions with them in work-related situations. They are ideally placed to complete the full circle of providing guidance in improving performance of their subordinates reporting to them by way of carrying out the full circle of performance management: planning, monitoring, developing, appraising and rewarding.

The caution that needs to be taken while using this source have been documented well through studies. Research shows that depending solely on ratings of supervisors for performance feedback without the use of other sources in conjunction are less reliable. A holistic approach with multiple sources give a more balanced approach and may be better predictors of individual's assessment of performance. Also, if a large number of people are reporting to a supervisor, and in case, the supervisor does not have the full control or knowledge of the job of the individual(s) and their complete activities, bias may occur in judgement. Needless to say in this context, supervisors must be trained in the techniques of appraisal, along with having adequate



competence and training to coach and develop their subordinates, in addition to planning and evaluating their performance.

Supervisors may make transition to the coaching role from the judging-role, on the basis of additional inputs obtained from peer feedback. However, like other sources, care and caution needs to be taken.

Peers: Rating one another as a concept is acceptable largely by most groups of employees in today's flat and team-based organizations. Peers are in a unique position to provide feedback about one another about effectiveness of job performance and contributions being made by their colleagues. Peer ratings can be used as a valid performance measurement and feedback instrument, when the employee's expertise is known and when performance and results are observable. Peer evaluations should be used for developmental purposes rather than as tools determining pay, promotion or job retention purposes. It can also be used for recognition and awards. It is a time-consuming activity and employees and representatives need to be involved in all aspects of the design of the appraisal systems involving peer ratings.

Subordinates: Feedback from subordinates can create a feeling of insecurity among supervisors, who may tend to feel their authority being undermined with the need for inclusion of the former's feedback in the appraisal process. Also, subordinates, working for a sufficient length of time, should be included as assessors and those involved in a disciplinary action etc., clearly need to be excluded from this process.

(<https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/performance-management/performance-management-cycle/rating/360assessment.pdf>, accessed on 24.9.17)

KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING 360-DEGREE RATING

Following are the factors, which determine the effectiveness of 360-degree rating:

Confidentiality: Raters (especially those, who rate their superiors and peers), feel more comfortable, if anonymity is maintained (Kettley, 1997; Meyer 1980). However, this may not be the case, when a manager rates the subordinate.

Competency of raters: Raters feel more comfortable and competent, if they are provided with sufficient data points about the performance of the individuals, whose performance, they are to rate.

Timeliness of feedback: 360-degree feedback systems should be designed so that the receiver is given feedback as soon as possible after the ratings are obtained. The less time that elapses



between feedback collection and feedback facilitation, the more likely it is that the momentum of the system will be maintained in addition to motivation for the receiver.

Performance indicators: Rating needs to be done, keeping the pre-decided performance indicators in mind. This helps the employees and raters feel the feedback system more accurate and fair.

360-DEGREE FEEDBACK IN ACTION: CORPORATE INITIATIVES

In this section, we shall look at an example of a company which have successfully designed and implemented 360-degree feedback and have been benefitted in terms of people development through measurable action oriented feedback and data.

NIIT

NIIT is an Indian global IT solutions company which has multiple business lines, products, services including e-commerce products and solutions. Nearly 50% of the NIIT's comes from the software businesses and more than half of the revenue come from the international operations. When the employees move from one company to another they bring the culture and expectation of their own. To bring homogeneity in the culture, keeping the above in mind, the 360-degree feedback is designed at NIIT. In the year 1996 this 360-degree feedback process was started. The company was driven by MBO and had a forced distribution method and the difference between the salaries was large but there were some borderline cases. In order to solve these borderline cases the company used 360-degree feedback. The 360-degree tool in NIIT is referred as Individual Effectiveness Feedback (IEF).

It seeks to measure the individual effectiveness and the five most desirable attributes are:

- Contribution to creating high performance teams
- Communication
- Values
- Encouraging personal responsibility and relationship
- Ability to build shared purpose

At NIIT, 360-degree feedback involves self, peers, team members, supervisors. In NIIT, the feedback may also be called as 270-degree, as the external customer feedback is not considered.

At NIIT, the IEF is promoted as a product and all HR initiatives are well promoted and a lot of education and facilitation is carried out for every HR initiative. The user initiative includes Videos,



Coaching, Class room training, Website. The IEF at NIIT is web enabled and the entire system is IT-driven and are connected worldwide. There is a site for HR department called HRO.com where the screen refers to the policies, formats, and details about IEF. A questionnaire is to be filled in the internet, where the system logically integrates the responses and generates a report/scorecard. Graphical representations are also present in the report.

The performance appraisal is done annually and quarterly. Employee need to carry the 360-degree scorecard along with them, during the performance appraisal.

(Chandrashekhar, 2003)

Wipro

Wipro, the Indian multinational Company, began its journey witnessing tremendous growth. It had diversified into engineering, IT, and healthcare. WIPRO had an internal promotion policy. They wish to promote people in leadership positions from within, aiming to promote work culture of career advancement and encouragement. In order to do so, a policy was implemented to promote even 60% ready employees from within, compared to an external candidate, who may be ready 100%, to carry out a job, in question. The main problem with such policy was insufficiency of time and absence of proof on guaranteed return on investment.

Wipro initiated the 360-degree feedback process in 1993. A few cultural enablers were already in place and managers were trained to encourage openness and learning at workplace. With steady inflow of fresh graduates from colleges, the open learning environment created a possible ground for accepting feedback. Some of the steps adopted in this regard, was:

- The reason of introducing the 360-degree feedback was clearly defined.
- The next step was to decide what constituted the leadership qualities, after a lot of efforts a set of qualities were listed and they were known as Wipro leadership qualities (WLQ).
- Each quality was described in 4-5 observable behaviours so that it was easy to understand
- A scale had to be decided to observe the behaviour. At first, it was a five-point scale, later the scale was converted into a frequency scale.
- For qualitative comments, three points were assessed: the strengths, weaknesses and how the respondent could help the leader improve further.
- The respondents were then decided upon, they were the supervisors, peers, juniors.
- The format of the report was decided next.
- It was decided to outsource the entire process to maintain confidentiality and the entire process should be co-ordinated at the corporate level.
- In the initial years the implementation was restricted to the top management but later the scope was increased.

In Wipro it was a part of the Appraisal process, the report went to the supervisor and if the person is at the General Manager position, the report went to the Chairman. The development part and the evaluative part was separated. The feedback was kept confidential. To maintain credibility all the qualitative comments have been reproduced verbatim. To prevent the feedback system from being used as a political tool, steps have been taken.



(Acharya, 2003)

Motorola

Motorola, the American multinational Telecom Company, has a unique concept called the Totality of leadership. The 360-degree feedback is associated to this concept. In Motorola, leadership has 4 different aspects.

- The organization exists on their core values which are whatever they do they keep their people in mind and maintain highest level of integrity.
- Leadership of individual dignity.
- The third aspect is the implementation.
- The last part is the leadership renewal.

When Motorola started this concept of 360-degree in 1993-94, it was mandatory for every employee to subscribe this concept, in totality. Totality of Motorola Leadership Score (TOML) was developed and it was used extensively for both assessment and coaching. Both confidentiality and technical savvy part were the advantages of using this instrument. Feedback sharing by coaches was non-threatening and was a value addition. The whole process of 360-degree feedback at Motorola was to use it as a development tool. They included the peers, subordinates and also their external customers. Employees needed to cross the score to be promoted to the next level. There have been instances where people have been turned down because their scores were low. 360-degree feedback was tailor-made and was made to focus on the totality of this leadership.

Motorola spent a lot of time in providing specialized training to feedback specialist and coaches. They had 60 questions based on TOML and they had a flexibility of 20 more questions depending upon the business relationship of the person. A few highlights of the survey, conducted in Motorola, in this regard, are:

- One co-ordination point across the globe: This was done to maintain confidentiality and to ensure feedback does not get misused or get diluted.
- Review group across the members: Self, Peers, Manager, Direct reporters, Other managers, Internal customers, Other staff.
- End use of the reports generated: The report goes to the participant and how it has to be used depends on the individual. The reports were easy to understand and also comparative ratings were incorporated in it. Training programmes were organised as to how to interpret these statistical results.

(Busrai, 2003)

Gati

Gati is an Indian company, pioneering in Express Distribution and Supply Chain Solutions. It was founded in the year 1989. It is a one window solution for all the transportation needs of customers and is positioned as a global player. It is a pioneer in logistics and supply chain management services in the country. It is innovating new services continuously to better serve



the customer. Gati faced immense competition due to imitation and local players, Global players were also entering into the local markets and there was a need for continuous upgrading of organizational and people competencies.

Organizational Interventions at Gati:

- High degree of customer-orientation
- Overall responsiveness through state of the art technology
- Service excellence
- New products introduced for cost economy and customer satisfaction

People interventions at Gati:

- Position Gati as solution integrator
- Changing the face of the customer/market
- Development as the core value
- Feedback mechanism as the basis for development.
- Performance-driven culture.
- 360-degree feedback process.
- Assessment centre.

360-degree feedback@ Gati:

- Feedback mechanisms drive service oriented industries, hence the need to start the process within the organization at the individual level.
- It covered the senior management team (54 employees)
- 60% of the employees improved on their scores
- 25% of the people had little/no improvement on their scores
- 15% employees had declining scores.
- Need for improvement in technology was another finding
- Leadership moving from benevolent style to developmental style.
- Improved transparency and openness in all aspects of management working was another benefit.

360-degree feedback: Future plans

- Include all the managers for the 360-degree feedback
- Identify the common gaps of the groups and give focussed developmental inputs to bridge the gaps.
- Senior level managers selectively to take up the role of mentorship.

(Agarwal, 2005)

CONCLUSION

This paper clearly brings out the point that, if designed and implemented appropriately, 360-Degree feedback system can help a company in a number of ways to identify its areas of strengths and weaknesses, as far as its people quadrant is concerned. It is an example of what



companies can achieve, as its strategic HR goal, based on measurable and actionable feedback and data points, which can be integrate with the strategic business objectives of the company, making its talent management robust and sustainable.

Given the current trend and the emphasis in industries across sectors, on measuring the impact of human endeavour in the organizational context, HR Departments are continuously under pressure to ascertain the cost-benefit to be accrued, before making any investments on its employees. A tool like 360-degree appraisal serves an important purpose, as it provides measurable data on performance gaps of employees, which need to be augmented through training and development initiatives. In this manner, the organizations are able to better utilize their training budget, based on performance appraisal data, regarding the current performance standards, which may be needed to be addressed and augmented through remedial training, or, identify the super-keepers or star performers of the organizations, to develop them through managerial training, as a part of their succession planning process. As seen in the corporate illustrations, stated earlier, it may be said that not all companies aim to implement 360-degree feedback in equal measure, in the context of development of employees and performance appraisal. Doing so, can make a company sustainable in the long-run, as the differentiator lies in nurturing and developing unique and talented employees, capable of bringing innovation and change within organizations to take it to its next level of growth, each time it reaches its plateau of peak performance.

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