



### **A 360° review of a 360°:**

#### **An overview of the 360° Feedback Tool in Today' Organisations**

Like all fields, organisational psychology continues to evolve in everything from the tools to the theories. One of the most significant tools in the field being a 360° review which has proved its value to organisations time and time again. Subsequently, similarly valuable to organisations is keeping up to date with the current literature on the 360° tool to help inform discussions regarding its implementation within the organisation. Additionally, staying up to date with the most recent research on a tool will provide essential knowledge on current themes and recommendations in modern performance management research. This article aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the 360° feedback tool as well as emphasise the necessity of remaining informed on relevant research on it. To achieve this, we will begin by defining the practice area in general, discussing its value, effectiveness, and recent literature developments which include the challenges that come with the process.

#### **Defining Things:**

The 360° feedback is a process of collecting, quantifying and reporting co-worker observations about an individual that facilitates or enables three specific data-driven outcomes namely: a) collection of Rater perceptions of the degree to which specific behaviours are exhibited b) the analysis of meaningful comparisons of Rater perceptions across multiple ratees, between specific groups of raters for an individual ratee, and for the ratees' changes over time c) the creation of sustainable individual, group, and/or organisational changes in behaviours valued by the organisation (Bhattacharya & Sharma, 2020). According to Mutrya and Singh (2018) 360° feedback, also known as multi-source feedback, is the most comprehensive performance appraisal as the valuable insights, information and feedback about employees is taken from all sources which come in contact with the employee in their job. This replaces the traditional performance reviews reliant on the top-down performance appraisal with a subjective

viewpoint from a single Rater. While these traditional reviews arguably have compromised validity, reliability, acceptance, and execution, the 360° feedback tool is considered robust in these areas (Bracken, Rose, & Church, 2016).

### **The Value of 360° Feedback:**

In addition to its general higher robustness in comparison to other feedback tools, the 360° is characterised by its Multi-source feedback, which is adapted towards improving teamwork and communication. The most prevalent uses of 360° feedback according to Bhattacharya and Sharma (2020) are in that of career development through organisational cultural changes, wherein organisations use this process to accelerate shift to teamwork, promote employee empowerment and make gradual shifts in the workplace culture. Further, performance evaluation has significant potential in enhancing team effectiveness, and this has been depicted by organisations tending to develop customized 360° feedback models which focus on effective teamwork.

The traditional performance review, where one boss assesses a subordinate, is no longer seen as an effective means of obtaining accurate feedback for employees. With traditional reviews, employees are rated by a single person, who may be biased or have an incomplete view of their work. The 360° feedback is viewed as more accurate because, by nature of the process, it offers feedback on observed behaviours and performance from a circle of evaluators, as opposed to subjective viewpoints from a single individual. Multiple raters offering similar feedback will send a reinforced message to the recipient about what is working well and what needs to be improved. Feedback is more difficult to ignore when it is repeatedly offered by multiple sources (Mutrya & Singh, 2018).

### **Effectiveness of 360° Feedback**

While it is clear that in comparison to other feedback and review mechanisms, the 360° review tool proves itself superior, in the interest of remaining up to date with the tool, it is important to evaluate the flaws within it too. One of the most significant causes for concern in the 360° feedback tool is that though feedback recipients prefer qualitative feedback through interviews, often the raters are not very active when it comes to giving comments on their ratings and leave the section empty. The comment section in 360° feedback questionnaire is meant to aid the development of the feedback recipient but it has not been proved fruitful (Bhattacharya & Sharma, 2020). Moreover, if the 360° process is not anonymous, it would result in superficial feedback that does not help the feedback recipient much (Bhattacharya & Sharma, 2020). In a hierarchical organisation, anonymous feedback works the best because sub-ordinates are not comfortable sharing their views with the manager. There is some apprehensiveness in the minds of sub-ordinates and anonymity is a must to ensure that genuine feedback is given. Even in a direct culture, anonymity holds value as managers consider themselves powerful people and knowing who the feedback comes from might potentially have dangerous consequences for power dynamics. (Bhattacharya & Sharma, 2020).

## **Looking at the Advancing Theory, Research, and Practice of 360° Feedback:**

Different forms of feedback have emerged originating from 360° feedback over the years, namely 360° personality measures, 360° interview approaches, 360° pulse surveys, 360° customer surveys, etc (Bracken, et al., 2016). 360° feedback has also evolved by moving beyond individual-level data, e.g. I-O psychologists don't solely assess the results on the individual level, the tool is a highly valuable asset for evaluating, driving, and shaping organisational change (Bracken, et al., 2016). The content in 360° feedback has been used to express the strategically aligned and aspirational goals throughout leadership teams, and then utilized for evaluating and developing leaders towards those strategically aligned goals (Bracken, et al., 2016). The gap between research and practice is no longer wide in terms of the extent that practitioners are implementing advancements from research literature, this is depicted by some organisations that have implemented some type of Rater training as it has remained one of the more robust interventions for improving the accuracy of ratings (Gorman, et al., 2017). There has also been an improvement in ratee accountability to implement their feedback by consolidating it into human resources practices (Bracken, et al., 2016).

There are numerous factors relevant to how performance management practices are designed, delivered, and utilised in organisation, including the purpose and focus of the process. (Gorman, Meriac, Roch, Ray, & Gamble, 2017). Specific purposes for the 360° feedback process may vary at the broadest level including assessment only, development only, assessment and development, organisational change and program evaluation (Bracken, Rose, & Church, 2016). There has been a consistent finding in the literature that ratings used for administrative purposes tend to be higher than those used for developmental purposes (Gorman, et al., 2017), in a survey of performance management practices in 101 U.S. organisations, 25% of them reported that the function of their performance management practices are primarily administrative, 14% primarily developmental, and 61% reported that their practices serves both functions (Gorman, et al., 2017). Studies have shown that the purpose of ratings affect the way raters contemplate and integrate information (Gorman, et al., 2017). Moreover, there is relatively smaller behavioural change associated with 360° reviews that are used for administrative purposes, for example, using them as part of annual formal appraisal process (Gorman, et al., 2017). Therefore, if the purpose is creating behavioural change that is valued by the organisation, the design of the 360° feedback process must align with the organisation's behavioural requirements (Bracken, et al., 2016).

## **The Small Few who Don't Employ the 360° Tool and Why:**

Gorman, et al. (2017) reported that a relatively small percentage (23%) of organisations do not use the 360° feedback process despite the abundance of academic research on multisource performance management systems. The key criticism of performance ratings is that they often fail to provide useful feedback that ratees can use to improve their performance, yet the core purpose of 360° feedback is to provide useful information for developmental purposes. Many challenges that occur around the 360° feedback process today and in the past, can be linked to

a lack of clarity as to the purpose which often results to misunderstandings among everyone involved (Bracken, et al., 2016). To enhance understanding and effectiveness of 360° feedback going forward, practitioners should be clear about the purpose and recognise the impact of each design choice on the intended uses and outcomes, purpose clarification goes beyond just design, it starts with engaging stakeholders and communicating to raters, ratees, and users to create clarity and commitment (Bracken, et al., 2016). Further, the value of remaining informed about the 360° tool is emphasised here as its clear that organisations that do so, tend to use it and those which do not, tend to not use it. The lack of follow-through or lack of accountability is another challenge that is a common reason for the failure of the 360° feedback process, practitioners should hold leaders accountable for change and the feedback providers should also be accountable for accuracy (Bracken, et al., 2016).

### **Concluding Thoughts:**

Overall, for effective implementation of 360° reviews organisations must have a clear understanding of what they want to achieve through the feedback and communicate that, ensuring anonymity as much as possible. Practitioners must design the 360° feedback process in alignment with the requirements of the organisation, subsequently, accountability must be taken in organisational and behavioural changes as per the purpose of the process. Ultimately, the only way to ensure best practice of the 360° is to stay up to date with the most relevant and recent literature on the product.

## References

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