Maximizing the Impact of 360° Feedback

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Get your managers to embrace their feedback, build an ongoing development dialogue with their supervisors, and foster a development culture throughout the organization.

Introduction

Research on the impact of multi-rater (i.e. 180° or 360°) feedback assessment on behavior change boils down to two themes: follow-up and accountability. Real change occurs when attention is paid to creating action plans for development and checking up on progress in a systematic fashion; and where there are consequences related to progress (or lack thereof) on the development plan.

There are many options available for companies to facilitate follow-up and accountability among their 360° feedback assessment participants. Depending on the developmental objectives, available resources, and program requirements of the 360° initiative, there are three major forms of approach, each with its own range of options:

- Self-Driven Development
- Technology-Facilitated Development
- Coach-Facilitated Development

Approach 1: Self-Driven Development

This basic approach to following up on a 360° assessment puts the interpretation and development planning squarely on the shoulders of the feedback recipients themselves. Program coordinators provide tools to the participants (e.g., feedback report interpretation guides, development planning forms and instructions, guidelines for managers and employees on how to have effective development conversations, and resource guides that offer options to participants for assistance in achieving their development goals), but leave the responsibility for action planning and development progress in the hands of participants and their managers.

The options for this approach include the range of possible tools to provide, and different methods for designing and delivering those tools. More companies are now choosing to put their development resources online, which increases accessibility as well as gives tool developers the ability to further enhance the tools using the latest functionality and design technology. Companies also frequently choose to implement 360° feedback interpretation workshops in support of the initiative as a way to ensure that 360° participants understand and can make effective use of the assessment.

Approach 2: Technology-Facilitated Development

As interactive technology has improved over the last few years, the options available to companies that want to offer employees a scalable, on-demand solution for planning and managing their development have greatly expanded. By web-enabling many of the tools

referred to above, companies have found a way to more effectively and efficiently facilitate and support a coaching and development culture throughout the organization.

Some of the options available for leveraging technology include an online development planning process linked to a customized resource guide and/or LMS application, as well as a dynamic multimedia e-learning tutorial for participants and their managers teaching them how to interpret 360° feedback reports and prepare for a development discussion.

Approach 3: Coach-Facilitated Development

This higher-touch approach to following-up a 360° assessment is arguably the most effective way for companies to ensure the greatest individual development progress resulting from the process. However, this approach typically comes with the greatest cost (in both development dollars and time commitment from program organizers), and so is often reserved for the more senior-level participants in the process.

Coach-facilitated development can occur in a number of formats, and so actually presents a range of options for companies to select from according to their needs and available resources. One end of the spectrum is an extension of the 360° feedback interpretation workshop described above. It involves having a 360° debrief coach speak one-on-one with participants to review their individual reports. This option can leverage internal HR generalists or external 360° feedback experts, can be conducted in person or by telephone, and can include between one and three hours over one to two sessions. Sessions can involve individualized assessment interpretation, iden-

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Case in Point

WACHOVIA

In 2002, following its merger with First Union, Wachovia came to Cambria seeking a competency model to reflect its new business environment and the culture it was building across the organization.

After working with Wachovia to develop a custom behavioral model, Cambria incorporated the competencies and behaviors into an online 360° assessment, which was rolled out to all senior managers and above across the company.

To support the 360° process, Cambria developed an extensive online development planning and resource guide for all participants. Once they receive their feedback report, within the structured setting of a workshop, participants are encouraged to log into the system, confirm their development focal areas, select from the development resources made available through the system, and put an action plan together.

We also worked with Wachovia to design and build an internal coaching practice—staffed by Wachovia's own HR generalists from across the company—that included an in-depth training program and a thorough support structure. These internal coaches now work one-on-one with senior managers in structured, time-bound engagements to ensure they get full value from their 360° feedback experience.

At the top of the house, Cambria also provides Wachovia's senior executives with external, professional executive coaches in longer-term coaching engagements. These external coaches provide the level of expertise and confidentiality required by a large organization's most senior talent.

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tification of development implications, and some limited coaching around how to operationalize the findings.

The other end of the coach-facilitated development spectrum is longer-term professional executive coaching. Coaching engagements can involve between 3 and 12 months of periodic, purposeful, business-focused coaching sessions. These engagements, when best implemented, are part of a coordinated, programmatic intervention that is managed and supported by a central coordinator. They help executives not only understand the meaning and implications of their feedback, but enable them to put action steps in place, implement those action steps, and maintain progress on-the-job over the longer-term—sufficient to give senior managers traction and momentum in a way that no off-site executive education program or one-time workshop can.

Which is the Right Approach?

There are few companies with the resources to provide every employee with a 6-month executive coaching engagement, even by

training and leveraging internal coaches. Similarly, most would agree that senior executives gain little long-term development traction from a one-time 360° feedback workshop—it is just too hard for them to keep focused on their own development. Because of these realities, most companies that implement 360° assessments choose a blended approach that provides different follow-up options dependent on the levels and/or situations of participants.

Whatever your circumstances, the important point to take away from this discussion is that simply conducting a 360° assessment and distributing reports to participants is not enough to ensure effective development. A disciplined approach to follow-up is essential, and the particular blend of approaches to take requires thoughtful analysis of the situation, consideration of the available resources, and identification of the appropriate follow-up options based on the organization's requirements.

Derek Steinbrenner specializes in job analysis, performance appraisal systems, and the design and development of web-enabled HR processes. His work in that area has included an online performance management tutorial, a web-enabled succession planning system, and an on-line coaching management system. Derek has also been integral in the development of Cambria's Strategic Executive Coaching practice area and its implementation in such clients as National Semiconductor, Credit Suisse First Boston, MetLife, NASA and Wachovia. Derek received his BA in psychology from Tufts University, graduating magna cum laude with a minor in computer science, an MA in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Bowling Green State University, and an MBA from Columbus State University. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, the American Psychological Association, and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology.