Chapter 12
Delivering 360-Degree Feedback

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Providing feedback to leaders is a critical concern for organizations today as they seek to create and maintain high-performing cultures. Feedback provides corrective information for both leaders and the organization as a whole (Katz & Kahn, 1978). An important tool for supporting organizational feedback is 360-degree feedback. Over the past 30 years, 360 feedback (also known as multisource or multirater feedback) has gained increasing popularity and importance in organizations (Silzer & Church, 2009).

A primary purpose of 360 feedback is to provide accurate and relevant feedback on leadership effectiveness for leaders and their organizations (Fleenor & Brutus, 2001). The 360 feedback process involves collecting and reporting of quantitative ratings of a leader's effectiveness that are provided by coworkers (i.e., raters). The process includes providing facilitated feedback and coaching for each individual leader, thus creating behavior change that is valued by the organization (Bracken, Rose, & Church, 2016). Research has found that implementing 360 feedback can improve the financial performance of organizations. Kim, Atwater, Patel, and Smither (2016) reported that 360-degree feedback has a positive effect on organizational financial performance through increased employee effectiveness.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide evidence-based, practical recommendations for delivering 360 feedback in a leadership development context. These recommendations are organized around a model of 360 feedback characteristics presented in Bracken and Rotolo (2019, p. 258) (see Fig. 12.1). This model has been refined over the years by Bracken and his colleagues (Bracken & Rose, 2011; Bracken & Timmreck, 2001). The model focuses on the quality and nature of 360 feedback provided to recipients and their organizations. Unlike assessments where the test taker generates the data (e.g., cognitive tests, personality tests), 360 feedback falls into a class of methods that includes assessment centers and performance

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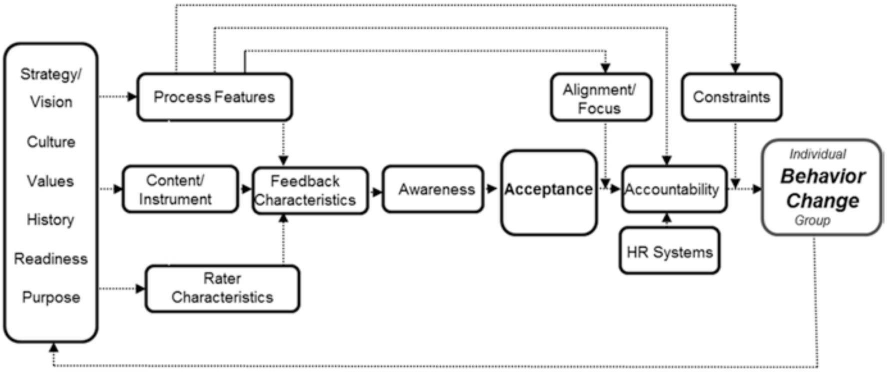

Fig. 12.1 Characteristics of 360 feedback. (Adapted from Bracken and Rotolo (2019))

appraisals, where the feedback is produced by raters who add additional sources of measurement error to the process. Feedback characteristics, therefore, are an interactive product of both the 360 instrument and the raters (Bracken & Rose, 2011).

This chapter discusses the implications of a new process model for delivering 360 feedback, focusing on central components of Bracken and Rotolo's (2019) model: (a) characteristics of the feedback; (b) awareness of the feedback (e.g., reactions and receptivity); (c) acceptance of the feedback; and (d) accountability for acting on the feedback.

The 360 Feedback Process

Most 360-degree feedback processes share the following characteristics (Fleenor & Taylor, 2018):

- Multiple raters (manager, peers, direct reports, the recipie1t himself or herself, and others such as customers) provide ratings of the recipient's effectiveness using a numerical rating scale. These ratings are collected anonymously and reported in the aggregate, so the recipient does not know who provided specific ratings. Because most employees have only one direct manager, however, it is usually not possible to keep the ratings of managers anonymous.
- A feedback report is provided to recipients that summarizes the results of their assessment. With the assistance of feedback coaches, the recipients examine their high ratings (strengths) and low ratings (development needs), as well as differences between their own and others' perceptions of their effectiveness.
- Recipients create a development plan and work with feedback coaches on a strategy to act on the feedback to improve their effectiveness.

The Validity of 360 Feedback

In 2001, Bracken, Timmreck, Fleenor, and Summers proposed a comprehensive model of components that affect the validity of 360 feedback. This model, which was recently updated by Fleenor (2019), identifies a number of key factors that influence the validity and therefore the success of a 360 implementation. The factors in this model are directly related to the characteristics of a successful 360 process: (a) the content is derived from the organization's strategy and values, (b) the ratings collected in process are sufficiently valid and reliable, (c) the feedback is integrated into development systems, and (d) participation is inclusive.

In Bracken, Timmreck, Fleenor, and Summers's (2001) model, the success of a 360 process is determined by the validity of the feedback that is produced. The validity of a 360 process, however, is much more complex than the traditional notions of validity associated with standardized assessment, such as employment testing. These traditional definitions do not address the factors that affect the validity of a process that depends on multiple sources of data (i.e., raters). A supposedly valid 360 process may be become invalid if it is implemented poorly (e.g., raters are not sufficiently familiar with the feedback recipient's behavior; the resulting feedback is not used appropriately).

Using 360 Feedback for Leader Development

The success of 360 feedback for leadership development stems from its ability to create desired changes in leaders' behaviors based on the resulting feedback. There is an extensive body of research (e.g., Bracken et al., 2001; Bracken & Rose, 2011; Fleenor, 2019; McCauley & Brutus, 2019) describing the processes for designing and implementing 360 feedback for leader development. Many of these processes are targeted at providing feedback to leaders on the specific changes they need to make to increase their effectiveness and motivate them to pursue these changes.

To maximize its developmental impact, 360 feedback should be implemented within a broader leadership development system (McCauley & Brutus, 2019). For example, feedback from a 360 process can be integrated into the organization's development and succession planning systems to identify developmental goals that will enable leaders to contribute better to the success of the organization. This process includes creating situations where feedback recipients receive ongoing feedback along with novel job assignments that stretch their current skillsets. Additionally, mentors can be provided who can assist the feedback recipients in working on their targeted skills. The implementation of these plans and monitoring of progress should be jointly owned by the recipient, the manager, and the 360 process owners (McCauley & Brutus, 2019).

Developing a Competency Model for 360 Feedback

The first component of the Bracken and Rotolo (2019) model (Fig. 12.1) includes consideration of the organization's strategy and culture before implementing 360 feedback. When creating a customized 360 feedback instrument, the first step is to develop a competency model specifically for that particular organization (Byham, 2004). A competency model articulates the competencies that are critical for effectiveness in the organization. Once created, the competency model is implemented in various talent management processes across the organization including 360 feedback. This ensures the competencies considered important by the organization are measured by the 360 process, and recipients receive feedback on relevant competencies.

A successful leadership competency model requires considerable detail. Using evidence-based practice, organizations develop clearly articulated, well-implemented, and widely accepted models of effective leadership by involving numerous stakeholder groups that decide what the most important competencies are for that organization. The goal is to arrive at an integrated set of competencies that are relevant, meaningful, and understood across the organization (Fleenor & Taylor, 2018).

Characteristics of 360 Feedback

Several critical characteristics of 360 feedback affect its acceptance by the recipient. First, the feedback must be credible—credibility is derived from characteristics that include accuracy, clarity, timeliness, rater characteristics, awareness, and acceptance (Bracken et al., 2001). Each of these characteristics is discussed individually below, and presented in Table 12.1 with design considerations for improving the factors.

Accuracy This includes the accurate collecting/processing of the data and reporting of the feedback. Errors in the feedback reports will negatively affect the recipient's confidence in the results and acceptance of the feedback. Design factors that will increase accuracy include scoring systems capable of handling high volumes with secure reporting, quality control to eliminate errors, and prepopulating important information such as demographic data (especially the rater's relationship to the feedback recipient).

Clarity Raters must be given clear information on how to fulfill the role of a feedback provider (e.g., carefully completing the instrument and returning it in a timely manner). Other errors that raters may commit include miscoding (or misunderstanding) who they are rating, misusing the response scale, and providing inappropriate write-in comments. Raters must simply understand what they are supposed to do.

Table 12.1 360 feedback characteristics with design recommendations

Characteristic	Design Recommendations
Accuracy	Capacity to do high-volume and secure reporting. Processes to ensure zero errors. Precode important information (e.g., demographics).
Clarity	Clear instructions and readability. Conduct training sessions to provide rating instructions. Test understanding of participants.
Timeliness	Administer as frequently as is reasonable/needed. Train raters to avoid recency error. Deliver results as soon as possible.
Rater characteristics	Keep instrument short (40–60 items). Implement policy on rater overload (limit number of surveys). Provide rater training.
Reliability	Write items that are clear, specific, behavioral, relevant, actionable. Conduct reliability analyses. Use clearly defined anchors. Select raters with opportunity to observe. Train on proper use of rating scale. Report rater groups separately.
Awareness	Communicate the importance of full participation in the 360 process. Provide feedback reports that capture the interest of recipients. Integrate feedback with important talent management processes. Be aware of individual differences in feedback receptivity.
Acceptance	Require participation. Allow recipient to select raters; agreed to by the organization. Administer consistently across the organization. Treat process as a business priority. Content clearly tied to strategy and goals. Train on how to use feedback for development. Provide support for development (workshops, coaches, etc.).
Feedback recipient accountability	Communicate expectations of feedback recipient. Set consequences for noncompliance. Require meeting with raters.
Rater accountability	Communicate expectations of raters. Require raters to meet with recipient to discuss feedback. Use system that provides real-time feedback to raters.

Adapted from Fleenor (2019)

Clear instructions, good communications, and rater training can go a long way toward a successful implementation (Fleenor, 2019).

Timeliness Timeliness in providing feedback is important both for accuracy and acceptance by the recipients. According to Bracken et al. (2001), delays in gathering feedback can increase rating error, particularly when evaluating specific behaviors. Many 360 feedback processes are administered on an annual basis; therefore, raters are likely to exhibit recency error in their ratings. One method that attempts to mitigate this particular type of rating error involves collecting feedback at the completion of each project during the year. At the end of the year, recipients receive cumulative feedback on all projects worked on during that period. While this addresses the timeliness issues leading to rater error, it does not solve the problem of delayed feedback to the recipient and the implications for acceptance of the feedback.

Rater characteristics The quality of feedback is dependent on the motivation of the raters to participate, as reflected in response rates and in the quality of their responses. Process factors such as survey length and the number of surveys a given rater must complete will affect the quality of the responses. Symptoms of poor quality include unreturned surveys, incomplete surveys, and the effects of rater fatigue on the feedback.

Reliability While raters can be reliable observers of behavior, the challenge is to motivate them to do so in the context of a 360 feedback process in an organization (Pulakos & Rose, 2019). For example, there may be forces in the organization, such as cultural factors, which discourage accurate ratings (e.g., a culture of providing inflated ratings).

Related issues include the importance of reliability in the 360 context, how it should be measured, and what level of reliability is acceptable. Some common reliability indices, such as test-retest reliability, are not appropriate for 360 ratings. These reliabilities may be affected by changes in a feedback recipient's behavior in the intervening time, practice effects, and changes in the raters themselves (e.g., attitudes and opportunity to observe). For these and other reasons, it is not recommended that test-retest reliability be used for 360 feedback (Fleenor, 2019).

Measures of internal consistency, such as coefficient alpha, provide evidence that items on a scale (i.e., a dimension or competency) are internally reliable. The internal consistency reliability of 360 ratings may be threatened by poorly written items. The use of "double-barreled" items in an attempt to shorten the length of questionnaires can reduce the reliabilities of the instrument. Low reliabilities may obscure meaningful interpretation of the results, further reducing the validity of the feedback (Bracken et al., 2001).

Other factors affecting the reliability of 360 feedback include the type of response scale used, and how raters interpret the response scale (Bracken & Rotolo, 2019). For example, frequency rating scales may interact with opportunity to observe to create unreliable measures (Bracken & Paul, 1993). More systematic research on response scales is needed, including accepted standards of reliability.

With 360 feedback, interrater reliability is often used to determine the level of agreement between and within rater groups. Moderate levels of interrater reliability have typically been found within groups, although direct reports are often found to have the lowest reliabilities. To increase the reliabilities within rater groups, all available raters should be used (particularly direct reports)—more raters will result in more reliable ratings (Fleenor, 2019).

The feedback should be broken out by rater group (e.g., self, manager, peers, direct reports, etc.). While breaking out the results by rater group may be questioned because of low interrater agreement, these groups represent an important reality in the organization. Meaningful comparisons between rating groups is an essential element of the 360 feedback process (Bracken et al., 2016). Feedback recipients expect to see separate rater groups in their feedback reports. During the feedback sessions, recipients should be made fully aware of the implications of the differences between rating sources, especially when manager ratings differ from the other rating sources. Peers have a unique position in the organization and often have a perspective of a feedback recipient's behavior that other raters are not aware of. This is likely the reason peers have been found to provide the most valid 360 ratings (Braddy, Gooty, Fleenor, & Yammarino, 2014).

Typically, the agreement between rating sources is low. One reason for conducting 360 feedback is to provide insights into the ratings from the various rater groups that bring different perspectives to the feedback process (Bracken & Church, 2013). While the rating groups may disagree, each group has a valid perspective of a recipient's performance. For 360 feedback, it is expected that rater groups will differ and these differences provide valuable feedback for the recipients.

Often in 360 feedback, self-ratings are found to differ from the ratings of others. For this reason, the use of self-ratings in isolation is not recommended. The level of agreement between self- and others' ratings, however, can provide important and useful information (Furnham, 2019). Self-other rating agreement can potentially be used as a measure of self-awareness. While the accurate measurement of self-awareness can be problematic, self-other agreement shows promise as a measure of this construct. Additionally, there appears to be a relationship between self-other agreement and leader effectiveness. In general, leaders who rate themselves similarly to others (in-agreement raters) appear to be more effective than leaders who rate themselves differently (Fleenor, Smither, Atwater, Braddy, & Sturm, 2010). The relationship between self-other rating agreement and leader effectiveness is nonlinear however, and more complex than originally thought. For example, leaders who underrate themselves appear to be more effective than those who overrate themselves (Braddy et al., 2014). For 360 feedback, the challenge is to develop a relatively simple index of self-other rating agreement that recipients can easily understand in their feedback reports.

To increase the reliability of 360 feedback, the following design factors are recommended (Bracken et al., 2001):

- Items are clearly written, behavioral, and actionable.
- Reliability analyses of the ratings are conducted (e.g., interrater reliability).
- Clearly defined anchors on the response scale are used.
- Raters are selected who have opportunities to observe the feedback recipient.
- Raters are trained on using the rating scale.
- Rater groups are reported separately.

In summary, there are several process factors related to raters that will affect the quality of their feedback: (a) having a sufficient number of raters, (b) selecting raters who have sufficient opportunity to observe the recipient, (c) having the recipient choose the raters with manager approval, (d) providing a 360 instrument that is scientifically developed with clear behavioral items, (e) using a rating scale that is relevant, clear, and reduces rating errors (e.g., leniency and halo), and (f) providing rater training (Bracken & Rose, 2011).

Awareness of the Feedback

Awareness is a precursor to the acceptance of 360 feedback. Recipients cannot act on feedback they are not aware of. Awareness is the process of bringing the information to the attention of the recipients. Awareness of their 360 feedback can result in recipients recognizing their weaknesses and taking action to correct them. According to Bracken and Timmreck (2001), 360 feedback can be a unique, novel experience for recipients that captures their attention and increases their awareness of development needs they were previously oblivious to.

Related to awareness is receptivity to the feedback. Because recipients play an active role in the feedback process, individual differences in their orientations and reactions to the feedback are crucial. One important difference is an individual's receptivity to feedback, which London and Smither (2002) define as feedback orientation. Dahling, Chau, and O'Malley (2012) found that feedback orientation has positive relationships with both emotional intelligence and perceptions of the feedback environment. Additionally, Braddy, Sturm, Atwater, Smither, and Fleenor (2013) found that feedback orientation is related to implicit person theory and achievement motivation, and predicted recipients' reactions to their 360 feedback. As noted by Dahling et al., however, relationships between feedback orientation and performance outcomes may be indirect, operating through mediating variables such as feedback-seeking behavior.

Acceptance of the Feedback

Acceptance is the recipients' belief that the feedback represents an accurate representation of their behavior (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Acceptance is crucial to Bracken and Rotolo's (2019) model, because when the feedback is not accepted, no behavior change will result. Acceptance is the keystone event in the model—when the recipient decides to accept the feedback as valid and useful information (Bracken & Rose, 2011).

Recipients must accept the feedback before they can act on it in a manner consistent with individual and organizational goals. First-time feedback recipients may experience shock, anger, and rejection of the feedback before finally accepting it

(Brett & Atwater, 2001). To help ensure acceptance of the feedback, resources for helping recipients work through these stages should be implemented by the organization. For example, many organizations provide experienced coaches to help the recipients deal with their feedback. Often these coaches are external consultants who have an unbiased view of the recipients and their feedback. Some organizations provide workshops to help prepare the participants to receive and accept their feedback. The bottom line is to provide an environment where the recipients feel safe in openly and honestly discussing their feedback and the associated emotional reactions.

To increase acceptance of the feedback: (a) all leaders in the organization should be required to participate in the 360 process, (b) recipients should select their raters with input from their managers, (c) assessment content should be tied to business strategy and goals, and (d) developmental support should be provided by the organization (Fleenor, 2019).

A factor related to acceptance is the recipients' reactions to the feedback. Reactions may range from being pleased with the feedback to experiencing hurt and resentment (Nowack, 2019). The recipients' feedback orientation and personality will affect their openness to and acceptance of the feedback (Joo, 2005). Receiving undesirable feedback may negatively affect a recipients' job performance, health, and psychological well-being. Feedback coaches play an important role in determining recipients' readiness to receive feedback, and in helping them work through any emotional reactions to the feedback. For these reasons, organizations may want to assess the feedback orientation (London & Smither, 2002) of the recipients during the 360 processes and make this information available to coaches prior to the feedback sessions (Nowack, 2019).

Accountability for Acting on the Feedback

Accountability is required for a sustainable 360 process. In Bracken and Rotolo's (2019) feedback model (Fig. 12.1), accountability is an important component in moving from awareness/acceptance to sustainable behavior change. It can be increased by establishing (a) recipient accountability to act on the feedback, (b) rater accountability for accuracy and usefulness of the feedback, and (c) organizational accountability for providing resources to support behavior change (London, Smither, & Adsit, 1997).

The accountability of the recipients to act on the feedback is essential for a successful 360 process. In some systems, recipients decide what to do with their feedback; they are not required to share the feedback with their raters or with their manager. Under such conditions, less behavior change is likely to occur (Goldsmith & Morgan, 2004). When recipients meet with their manager and raters to discuss the feedback, it increases their responsibility to help the recipients carry out development plans. Recipients who consistently hold sessions to clarify their feedback with direct reports have been found to improve their effectiveness compared to others.

There is a likelihood of increased behavior change when feedback is shared with the recipients' raters, thus holding the recipients more accountable for taking action based on the feedback (Goldsmith & Underhill, 2001; Walker & Smither, 1999).

A successful 360 feedback process, however, requires full accountability, not only from the recipients, but also from other primary groups involved: raters, managers, and the organization as a whole (London et al., 1997). If raters believe recipients are not being held accountable for acting on their feedback, they will be less likely to provide honest feedback in future 360 administrations. On the other hand, when raters see their feedback is being used productively, they can be expected to continue to provide accurate, honest feedback.

A critical issue is how to motivate raters to provide accurate ratings. The importance of providing honest feedback must be communicated to the raters, and further encouraged by the feedback recipient. Some 360 systems provide raters with immediate feedback on their ratings by identifying clearly invalid rating patterns (e.g., all ratings are the same value) and missing ratings.

Establishing direct rater accountability by sacrificing anonymity and requiring raters to justify their ratings is not recommended. It has been found that raters are less honest when their ratings are not anonymous (Antonioni, 1994; London & Wohlers, 1991). A better means of creating accountability is to invite raters to participate in a discussion of the feedback with the recipient (Bracken et al., 2001).

Organizations must create mechanisms to ensure that recipients will act on the feedback. Some of the primary accountability mechanisms include access to developmental resources such as job assignments, and the full support of the recipient's manager for such developmental opportunities (London, 2003). Managers need to be accountable for the "how" of performance by linking the 360 feedback to positive and negative consequences (Bracken & Church, 2013). Additionally, organizations must hold managers accountable for supporting the development of their direct reports. One method for making managers accountable is to include developmental support as a factor in the performance management system.

Accountability is difficult to observe and measure and has been identified as the "Achilles' heel" of 360 feedback by London et al. (1997). It is often seen as being primarily affected by the design of the 360 process; however, there are many other forces at work. Little research has attempted to relate the accountability created by design features to outcomes such as behavior change and development planning (Bracken & Rose, 2011). More research, therefore, is needed to fully understand the factors that affect accountability in 360 feedback.

Recommendations for Delivering 360 Feedback

This section provides recommendations for delivering 360 feedback in a leadership development context. These recommendations are based on evidence-based practice developed by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) over the past 25 years, using a broad base of its clients. CCL's 360 practices have been fully documented in

Fleenor, Taylor, and Chappelow (2008). Emphasized in these practices are recommendations that (a) a facilitated coaching session should be conducted to help the leader understand and accept the feedback, (b) clear expectations must be set for what leaders are responsible for doing after they receive the feedback, and (c) leaders should meet with their managers to discuss their feedback and decide on next steps.

Additionally, a supportive organization culture is critical to the success of a 360 feedback process. For example, there must be full senior management buy-in and support (Fleenor & Taylor, 2018). Cultural factors should be considered when developing a 360 process for the organization. For example, the 360 instrument should measure competencies that are important for success in the culture specific to that organization. It should be recognized that leaders need different kinds of feedback at different points in their careers. Early on, they may use 360 feedback to define the specific skills that are important for their jobs. Later, they may use the feedback to assess their capacity for creating a vision for the organization (Fleenor et al., 2008).

A private consultation should be held between the recipient and an experienced feedback coach. The coach provides an introduction to the 360 instrument, an interpretive session of the individual's feedback, and assists with developmental planning based on the feedback. Many providers of 360 assessments, including CCL, require that one-on-one feedback sessions be held when using their instruments. One-on-one feedback sessions are particularly important for recipients receiving 360 feedback for the first time. They usually appreciate the opportunity to discuss their feedback with a neutral and knowledgeable third party. It is important that the coach helps the recipient understand that conflicting ratings may be valid, and comparisons between the different rating sources are a key consideration.

The feedback experience will be significantly enhanced by a coach who has experience in giving feedback on the 360 instrument used by the organization. Some providers require that coaches be certified in the use of their assessments. If internal resources are used, the coach should not be in the recipient's chain of command. Many organizations use independent consultants to deliver 360 feedback in their leadership development programs. External coaches provide additional credibility and reinforce the confidential nature of the process when no one in the organization sees the recipients' feedback reports. Organizations benefit from using the same consultants over time, who become familiar with organizations' culture and goals.

It is important to give recipients sufficient time to digest their feedback before scheduling the one-on-one session. In some cases, organizations distribute the reports to recipients and give them only a few minutes to look over their results before attending their feedback session. When this happens, recipients arrive for their session without fully understanding their feedback. Without time to reflect on their report, recipients may not be ready to fully accept the implications of the feedback. Before distributing the feedback reports, some organizations conduct a group session to provide recipients with guidance on reading their reports prior to their one-on-one sessions.

When recipients receive negative feedback, they must deal with their emotional reactions to the report. Under these circumstances, it is difficult for the feedback coach to move beyond the emotions and help the recipient closely analyze the feedback. After receiving their reports, it is suggested that recipients be given at least a day to digest their feedback before the session with their coach. Experienced feedback coaches believe this will allow recipients to understand their feedback better, deal with their emotional reactions, and be more open and accepting of the feedback. However, there may be individual differences in recipients' reactions to the feedback. Feedback coaches should focus on helping recipients from becoming too entrenched in their initial emotional reactions. While it is recommended that recipients be given some time to digest their results, feedback does have a short shelf life, so coaching sessions should be held within 4 days of receiving the report.

Feedback sessions should be held in a private office or room. The coach should prepare for the session in advance by thoroughly going through the feedback report and taking notes. Feedback coaches should allow recipients to audio-record the session so they will be fully engaged rather than focusing on note taking. The recording will also serve as a useful resource for reviewing progress on the recipients' development plans.

The coach should have a good understanding of the work context for each individual recipient. To better understand the recipient's context, the coach should ask the following questions at the beginning of the feedback session:

- How do you want to use the feedback? Individuals seeking a promotion to the next level in the organization have a different context for feedback than those who are satisfied in their current roles and wish to improve their relationships with direct reports.
- What is happening in your present job? There may be issues within the organization that are having an impact on the recipient's feedback.
- Were you surprised by any of your feedback? Disappointed? Pleased? These questions alone may be enough to get recipients talking about their reactions to the feedback.
- What overarching themes do you see emerging from your feedback? Perhaps the most valuable thing experienced coaches can do is help recipients make connections in the feedback that they do not initially see.
- How would you summarize your feedback? What are the key strengths? What are the key areas for development? Helping the recipient summarize and focus the feedback is critical. The session should progress from the general to the specific.
- What changes are you motivated to make right now? In the future? The most critical decision the recipient makes about the feedback is choosing the areas on which to focus and work.

While feedback coaches should leverage their expertise on the 360 instrument, they should not represent themselves as an expert on an individual's feedback. The recipients are the experts—they must decide for themselves what to pay attention to and how to make meaning of the feedback. Additionally, recipients often ask coaches for an interpretation of their raters' responses. While coaches can make educated guesses, there are no definitive answers to these types of questions. Effective feedback coaches see themselves as guides to the feedback, asking helpful questions and helping the recipients see connections in the information they have received. The result of these sessions will be a developmental plan that outlines a set of goals for the recipient based on the 360 feedback.

Group Feedback Sessions

Conducting a group session before the one-on-one feedback sessions provides the optimal process for 360 feedback delivery. When 360 feedback is administered to a large number of employees at the same time, it is usually more efficient to have recipients go through the introduction to the feedback process in a group setting. In this setting, an overview of the 360 instrument is provided, the individual feedback reports are distributed to the recipients, and developmental planning is introduced.

Group feedback sessions are intended to prepare recipients to receive and understand their individual feedback reports. Ideally, this session is introduced by a senior leader from the organization. A basic outline of steps in a group feedback session follows:

- Clarify purpose, goals, and expectations of the feedback process.
- Briefly discuss the research that supports the 360 feedback instrument being used.
- Provide a context for receiving feedback, including the following:
  - Feedback cannot make decisions for the recipients. They, with the help of their coaches, must make decisions about the feedback.
  - The feedback is just a snapshot of the recipient. It does not define them as a person. It is important that they consider the feedback along with other related information (e.g., their work context) to see what patterns emerge.
  - Recipients often make one of two common mistakes when they receive 360 feedback—they accept the feedback too quickly, or they reject it too quickly.
  - Recipients are the experts about themselves. They know which raters were invited to provide feedback and what their specific work contexts were. Coaches will help the recipients understand the feedback, but they must decide how their feedback is relevant to their particular situation.
- Explain how to read and interpret the report using a sample feedback report.

Group sessions are less staff-intensive and provide the opportunity to employ small-group activities to enhance the developmental experiences of the recipients. The value of this session is greatly enhanced if the recipients have substantial time to review and reflect on their feedback before their one-on-one session. Facilitators of group sessions should be available to respond to the immediate concerns of the recipients and to answer questions about their reports.

After the group session, recipients meet one-on-one with their coaches to discuss their feedback privately. Coaches are able to focus exclusively on the feedback reports, because the preliminaries have been taken care of in the group session.

What Makes 360 Feedback Successful?

There are number of factors that are common to successful 360 feedback processes. Many of these factors can be implemented through careful design and planning. A summary of the critical factors follows (Fleenor et al., 2008):

Clarity of Purpose

Organizations should consider how their business goals align with the purpose of 360 feedback—the needs of the organization should drive the process (Campion, Campion, & Campion, 2019). The purpose of assessment should be clearly defined and an appropriate instrument selected for that purpose. For example, will the feedback be used for talent identification, or is the purpose for development only?

Organizational Readiness

Senior leadership must publicly support the feedback process. A supportive organizational culture is necessary for 360 feedback to be successful. All senior leaders should participate in the process as feedback recipients. The 360 assessment should be appropriate for the organizational context—it should be based on the organization's leadership model and reinforce the behaviors that the organization wishes to encourage in its employees. Finally, the organization should create realistic expectations for the 360 process. The expected outcomes of the process should be clearly communicated (e.g., the identification of strengths and weaknesses for developmental planning).

The 360 Feedback Instrument

The organization should develop a leadership model (i.e., a competency model) that specifies what competencies are important for success in the organization. If the purpose of the assessment is to measure competencies specific to the organization, then a customized instrument that directly measures the relevant competencies should be used, rather than an off-the-shelf assessment (Conger, 2019).

The instrument must be appropriate for the level of the recipients (e.g., first level, middle level, executive, etc.). Recipients need different kinds of feedback at different points in their careers. Early on, they may use the feedback to determine what basic competencies are important for their current jobs (e.g., resourcefulness). Later in their careers, recipients may use the feedback to determine their capability for higher-level competencies such as creating a vision for the organization.

Instrument Vendor

In most cases, an external provider of 360 feedback services should be used to implement the process (Macey & Barbara, 2019). The external provider should have expertise in developing customized, research-based instruments. The primary reason for using an external provider is to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the feedback, especially the raters' individual ratings of their managers. If internal consultants are used, steps must be taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the results, and these steps must be communicated with the raters and the recipients.

Logistics

Conducting 360 feedback in an organization is a complex undertaking. It is critical to have a thorough communication plan in place, particularly for those in directly involved in the process (e.g., recipients, managers, and other raters). The communication plan should address three critical issues: (a) why is the organization conducting the 360 process? (b) why is it being done now? and (c) who is included in the process?

An external vendor can help the organization identify the various roles needed in a 360 process, particularly the internal administrative roles. A point person will be needed to be responsible for coordination, including scheduling, monitoring returns, and communication with the vendor.

Large 360 processes should begin with a pilot group of senior leaders. A pilot study will introduce the senior leaders to the 360 process and engage their raters to provide feedback. This will demonstrate that senior leaders are taking the process seriously, which will increase perceptions that this is an important initiative for the organization.

Feedback Recipient Preparation

Recipients should be informed why they have been selected to participate, how the process works, and the degree of confidentiality and anonymity that can be expected. Raters (e.g., peers and direct reports) should be informed their feedback is important and their ratings will remain anonymous.

Managers who provide ratings should be informed that their feedback will not be anonymous. Because most recipients have only one direct manager, manager ratings will not be aggregated with the ratings of others, as are peer and direct report ratings. Managers need to know what to expect after the feedback reports are distributed, and how to respond to recipients who wish to follow up with developmental planning.

It should be made clear who "owns" the data—the recipient, the organization, or both. In a development-only 360 process, recipients are considered to be the owners of their data. Therefore, only the recipients themselves and their feedback coaches see the data. In "development plus" 360 processes (McCauley & Brutus, 2019), organizations are able to use the 360 data to make decisions on promotions, succession planning, etc.

Rater Selection

Research suggests that raters who frequently observe the recipient provide the most accurate feedback. Raters must have sufficient time to observe the behaviors they are rating. For most feedback recipients, the best raters are the coworkers with whom they have frequent and in-person interaction (Bracken & Rotolo, 2019).

A minimum of three raters is recommended for each rating group (peers, direct reports, etc.). A sufficient number of raters must be selected to ensure each recipient has sufficient data to permit breakouts by rater group. The average ratings for each rater group are presented in the feedback report. Research suggests that raters provide more honest feedback when their anonymity is ensured. (Bracken et al., 2001).

Although it is recommended that recipients select their raters, organizations should have the option to require specific raters for each recipient. For example, all direct reports should provide feedback. If the organization unilaterally assigns raters, recipients may discount any negative feedback, believing the raters who know them best were not selected.

In summary, while an official communication plan is necessary, the feedback recipients' initial communication with their raters is essential. Recipients should notify their raters that they have been selected to provide feedback and encourage the raters to complete the 360 assessment. This will have many benefits, including motivating the raters and thus increasing survey return rates.

Postassessment Actions

The feedback recipients must have clear expectations of what they are responsible for after they receive the feedback. Feedback coaches should assist recipients in interpreting their feedback reports and creating plans for development. Recipients should meet with their managers to discuss their feedback and determine next steps in their development plan.

The 360 feedback must be tied to development planning and to an implementation and feedback loop by the recipient. Development is what happens after recipients have seen their feedback reports, come to terms with it, and decided what they are motivated to change. This involves conversations with their managers about working on developing the right competencies and what kind of support they need for development. There must be accountability and a way to evaluate behavior change, so the organization will know if the 360 feedback process is a success (Bracken & Rose, 2011).

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are not trivial issues in 360 feedback. Rater anonymity and confidentiality must be maintained during the feedback process. Anonymity ensures the identity of the raters and the feedback they provide are protected (not known by the recipients). Raters will provide more accurate feedback when they know their ratings will remain anonymous (Macey & Barbara, 2019). Anonymity is critical for certain rater groups (i.e., direct reports and peers) to ensure honest ratings. Confidentiality ensures only certain individuals who have been approved by the organization in advance are allowed to see the recipients' feedback.

The Future of 360 Feedback

An emerging theme in 360 feedback is the effect that technology will have on the process in the future (Church, Bracken, Fleenor, & Rose, 2019). Several of these factors are already affecting its implementation. For example, technology exists that can help maintain rater anonymity, prevent rater fatigue, and generate interactive feedback reports with automated developmental recommendations (Hunt, Sherwood, & Pytel, 2019). Another effect is the application of data analytics to 360 feedback, which involves integrating 360 data with additional data sources, storing these data so that they are easily accessible, and exporting the data to various predictive analytic applications (Fink & Sinar, 2019). Using data analytics, integrated data will be leveraged to better predict what organizations need to do to accelerate development and drive business impact at both the individual and organizational levels. Additionally, the integration of 360 feedback with external data (e.g., social network data) enables the system to become more intelligent over time. For instance, this data integration could be involved in the development of a model to better predict which feedback sources will have the most impact on leader development outcomes.

The issue of integrating data sources is very relevant for 360 feedback. A first step will be to focus on key sources of feedback that are generated within the leader development context. For example, in addition to 360 feedback, an initial integrated dataset will include engagement survey data, data from the enterprise learning platform, and pulse survey data. Pulse surveys are a potentially useful technology for collecting on-demand feedback from leaders' direct reports. This feedback is useful, for example, for assessing how well leaders are meeting the goals they have set in their development plans. For example, using data analytic methods, it is possible to predict which developmental experiences would be most effective for a particular leader. Additionally, using a dataset of 360 data, personality measures, and scores on simulations such as situational judgment tests, it may be possible to add incremental validity to our predictions of leader effectiveness.

Over time, other sources of data, such as physiological measures, could be integrated with the 360 feedback, allowing for even better prediction of developmental assignments and more relevant development resources. For example, the most relevant developmental activities could be identified for recipients who show high levels of stress, yet receive positive 360 feedback.

In the near-future, machine learning analytics will be used to interpret recipients' 360 feedback. Based on their feedback, recipients will be directed to the most relevant developmental assignments. These assignments will be linked, for example, to developmental resources such as user-driven tools for providing feedback on demand (e.g., pulse surveys). Another technology that shows a lot of promise is the use of artificial intelligence (AI; machine learning) for interpreting feedback reports and making developmental recommendations to recipients. Currently, AI is being used to analyze qualitative feedback collected in the 360 process, such as open-ended comments (Church et al., 2019).

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to leverage the extant research to improve 360 feedback processes in organizations. To this end, a comprehensive model of the factors that affect the success of 360 feedback (Bracken et al., 2001) is presented in the chapter. These factors with the related design recommendations can be found in Table 12.1. A 360 feedback system that is poorly designed, and thus invalid, will not be sustainable, because it will not create sustained behavior change desired by the organization (Bracken & Rotolo, 2019).

This chapter describes evidence-based practice for implementing successful 360 feedback processes in organizations (Fleenor et al., 2008). In summary, the probability of success of the implementation will be greatly increased by

- Making a full investment of both time and resources in the process
- Aligning the 360 feedback process with business needs from the beginning
- Getting senior leader buy-in
- Planning carefully and communicating widely early in the process
- Selecting a vendor that is a good match with the organization as well as a known quantity
- Measuring relevant competencies using a competency model developed for the organization
- Using the 360 process to leverage developmental activities that bring about sustainable behavior change

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