

WE WANT M-RF (MULTI-RATER FEEDBACK)

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Abstract *The case looks at how the organisational best practice (360 degree feedback) is not a magic solution; how it does not fit in an organisation which does not have its culture; and how application of such a practise can lead to a difficult process which may not be fruitful for people who get it. The case also gives an insight about processes which need to be taken care for implementing such practises. The case talks about the best practice and the problems one can have with its implementation. Multiple rural organisations are being lured in to implementing ERP systems, HRM systems which are infeasible. Many of the rural organisations, like husk power systems and other SMEs, are using consultants and ad-hoc human resource management for their companies. The consulting firms give out the same old solutions; the best practice is one of them. The case clearly indicates that how an organisation's fascination with best practice can lead to unrealistic expectations which even experts won't be able to take up.*

Keywords: Best Practise, 360 Feedback, Organisational Process

“We want multi-rater feedback or 360 degree feedback as you say, for both batches, it is necessary, we have indicated earlier,” said Mr Shekhar, HR (Human Resource) Department representative from the organisation, 20 days before the programme was to start, and all Professors and Saket were looking at him in shock. 2 days before, the whole management development programme was postponed, and today they suddenly declare “We want everything”. That day all of us (Prof. Revti, Prof. Jaico, and Saket) agreed to push for this, it is doable, but Prof Jaico and Saket knew that this is like opening the Pandora's box as M-RF (Multi-Rater Feedback) or 360 feedback, as it is popularly known, is a complex process and it is not easy as it appears to be, and they were so true.

INTRODUCTION TO 360 DEGREE FEEDBACK

360 degree feedback is one of the most popular performance appraisal tools these days, a tool which is used in all Fortune 500 organisations generally along with Forced Distribution method. 360 degree feedback is defined as the “the systematic collection and feedback of performance data on the individual or group derived from a number of stakeholders in their performance. The technique measures in detail the behaviours and competencies shown by the individual or group in achieving goals. Participants can be confidentially assessed by themselves, their boss, there

staff, team members, internal/external customers suppliers, family and friends. Raters or respondents judge what they perceive as behaviour, not the intentions behind it. The feedback data have many uses, including developmental, appraisal, team building, validation of training, organisation development and remuneration (although less preferred). The technique presents feedback in a powerful way, and can leave impact on the quantity and quality of performance data, communications and staff motivation and the roles of those involved. Everyone's results are a mixture of strengths and areas for development, some expected and some unexpected. 360 degree is not a quick process. There are important stages after feedback has been collected and reported which are essential changing behaviour. 360 degree feedback has become popular recently because of changes in what organisations expect of their employees, increasing emphasis on performance measurement, changing management concepts and more receptive attitudes.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

The organisation is a highly R&D-based organisation, with hierarchical structure, and various centres throughout India (23 centres). All centres have specialisation in developing indigenous technology for the nation. Employees are recruited through entrance exams or handpicked from IITs and NITs. They are technically competent, where

expertise in area of the centre is almost mandatory. All centres are divided in programme units which are headed by directors who can be named as centre directors, project directors or group directors. The organisations has won various accolades internationally and has high success rate in executing its projects, It has given many visionaries to India, and is pioneer in various technologies as well. The organisation structure is hierarchical and has most of its human resource practises which are old and traditional. Senior management is taken by people who have remained with the organisation for long time and experts in their area of interest.

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES(MDPs)

In March 2013, the organisation had sent a proposal to Prof. Revti for a management development programme to be conducted. Prof. Revti is one the leading faculty in a top Business school of India. The B – School is famous for its management development programmes and customisation they provide for each organisation. They were asking for two batches of MDPs, each batch having 25 participants, constituting of director level people. During initial proposal they had indicated about 360 feedback, but not mandatory, as they were not sure how much it will fit in. Prof. Revti, after discussing with her colleagues who will be taking the MDP sessions, agreed and completed the formalities. Proposal regarding sessions for MDP was sent and at that time too, no discussion regarding 360 feedback was there. Prof. Jaico was also one of the faculty who was planning to take session in the MDP, as he was associated with the same nature of MDP conducted 10 years back. So the organisation had asked him specifically. After this, Prof. Revti left for a 2 month break and was in touch only through emails.

The First Indicator

First email: In June first week, Saket was moving around in Library and suddenly Prof. Jaico called and asked, “Have you seen the email?” Saket was astonished, “Which Email?” Prof. Jaico said, “Check email and call me.” The email talked about need of a 360 degree feedback. Saket was very happy as it was his research area and thought one more opportunity to do it, it will be fun. He said to Prof Jaico, “Ya, it is fine Sir. We will be able to do it.” He was happy and informed Prof. Revti that Saket would be able to do it, let us give a go ahead.

Second Email: A day later, an email followed that the MDP needs to be postponed, as the organisation has an important task in hand, and the directors can’t leave the centres. Prof. Revti was furious and she snapped a strong email stating that we will scrap the complete MDP as we can’t keep altering

dates. The institution had to allot resources accordingly and couldn’t keep changing dates.

Two days later, Prof. Revti received a conformation, that they would stick to original dates and were requesting a meeting in a day or two.

Meeting

The meeting took place at the local centre. Prof. Revti, Prof. Jaico and Saket were present in the meeting, as professors were planning to tell them regarding the infeasibility of 360 in such a short notice, but the statement came out that 360 is an essential requisite for the MDP to take place and they won’t budge. Professors agreed at that time, and asked for a day to think about how to roll out the process in such a short duration.

360 Feedback Collection Process(See Exhibit 1 in Appendix)

The process included meeting with various members of the organisations, debriefing them, developing a questionnaire and implementing it, getting results and analysing the qualitative and quantitative data, presenting it to the various participants and helping them develop a corrective action plan.

Meeting with Participants

Prof. Jaico, who is an expert in 360 feedback, and Saket, who was working under him for past 3 years and had experience of conducting 360 feedback for multiple organisations, went to meet few of the participants, as they wanted to get the idea regarding expectations from 360 feedback and to get views on a tentative questionnaire. What followed was something odd. During the interaction they came to know that participants were not aware about the fact that they will be undergoing a 360 feedback, that too 16 days before the MDP. They were also not sure about how many of them would attend MDP due to important project nearby. Prof. Jaico asked Mr Shekhar (Human Resource Coordinator of the centre) regarding it, and he said, “Yes, we have not mailed them yet regarding it, but will do once the process starts.” Participants too, during the interaction, gave some vague suggestions regarding questionnaire and were not very much involved. In the end one of the participants suggested that the organisation has been using a form made 10 years back for 360 by Prof. Jaico for self-appraisal in 360 programmes, which was basically infringement of copyright, but Prof. Jaico had allowed it to go.

Problems with Implementation of Questionnaire

Coming back to the institution, Prof. Jaico told Saket to develop a questionnaire with open ended questions for qualitative analysis. In a day it was ready and Saket asked for email ids of participants to whom the questionnaire was to be mailed. The shock came that the organisation had yet not finalised the list of participants for first MDP, so they did not have email ids. With 15 days to go for MDP, it was a disaster waiting to happen. Next day they got the email ids, and confirmed regarding intimation to participants about process which was not done.

Prof. Jaico was furious and wrote a strong worded email to Mr Shekhar asking to convey to all the participants regarding the process, marking a copy to himself and Saket. Only then they would send the emails. Next day the notification was sent, and Saket mailed to all the participants the standardised questionnaire with instructions regarding confidentiality. One more minute thing happened that three of the emails were not working as the recipients had changed the department and the email ids no longer existed. Mr Shekhar passed on the new email ids.

Collection of Questionnaires

13 days before the process was rolled out and we had given 10 days as deadline. Saket knew it would take a minimum of three days to complete the analysis and recheck it, if done properly. Prof. Jaico was travelling during that time and he had left the complete responsibility with Saket. So Saket had to be extra careful. Another set of trouble began when participants mailed email ids to Saket asking him to email it to evaluators, which was totally against the 360 feedback process. He mailed back informing them that it could not be done and they themselves had to mail it. Few of the participants got furious on this, but it was later insisted by Prof. Jaico, so they relented.

Few of the respondents mailed that they would send only a hard copy and not a soft copy, as it was confidential, which ensured that major chunk of analysis would take place in last 3 to 4 days of the process, but there was no alternative.

As a part of the process, the facilitator (Saket) had to keep informing the participants regarding number of responses received after every three days. When he informed them the first time, one of the participants replied that he should not be bothered as he was not interested in MDP and he would not be coming to the programme. Saket informed this to Prof. Revti. She said, "Leave it, we will conform." Few of the participants wanted to know the identity of the people

who had responded, which was not possible as it was against the basic principles of 360 feedback. Few of the respondents wrote back that they were not used to such questionnaire as to CR (Confidential Reports) scales and they were finding it difficult.

After second email regarding number of responses, sent 5 days before the deadline, Saket received good number of responses and he started inserting the data for analysis, which was going on smoothly till he realised that many of the people had sent blank questionnaires and had not stated their relation with the person to be assessed. This led to the issue of how to classify the feedback. Saket mailed back to people who had sent a blank questionnaire asking them to respond back in 2 days (interestingly he never received the filled-up responses).

Third email followed, just a day before the deadline, and Saket had to inform people as well that because of which of the participants, a 360 feedback was not possible due to lack of responses. The list included a Director for one of the centres. After 30 minutes of sending the email, the Secretary to the Director (one HO had nil responses) called and was furious how Saket could say that the Director had not received a single response. Saket tried to point out that he was not responsible for that and the person to be assessed had to look into it. The Secretary just asked to send the questionnaire again on his email id. Saket, after taking Prof. Jaico's permission, sent it. Within 30 minutes, ten responses came, which was shocking as it raised serious doubts about the credibility of responses (the data also looked ambiguous).

The Deadline

On the last day of the deadline, Saket had received adequate number of responses for only 22 out of 25 participants. He received mails from the remaining three participants criticising the questionnaire, and he, just for respect, thanked them for pointing that out.

Analysis

When analysis started he was shocked seeing the responses. Few of them had variable comments. There were lots of nasty and personal comments in the open-ended questions. Many of the responses were half filled, or filled just for the sake of formality. Many responses were as if buttering the person to be assessed. Saket and Prof. Jaico were shocked looking at the final analysis and wondered what would happen in debriefing session which was scheduled the next day. They just kept all the raw data ready, in case any ambiguity arises and waited for the Pandora's box to be opened the next day.

QUESTIONS TO BE LOOKED UPON

1. What are the necessary aspects to look when you want a best practice to initiate in organisations?
2. What went wrong with the 360 feedback implementation here?
3. What roles does the organisation play in using such an advanced tool to be used for its top management?

REFERENCE

Ward, P. (2005). What is 360 – Degree Feedback . In *Encyclopaedia of Training and Development- 360 degree feedback*, 3-25(10)

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Process of 360 Degree Feedback



Table 1: Timeline for the 360 Feedback

Proposal Came from organisation	3 months before MDP (March)
1st week of March	Prof.Revticonforms
Request for change in dates of MDP	June (First week)
June Second week	Dates conformed
Compulsion regarding 360 degree feedback	20 days before MDP
16 days before MDP	Meeting regarding 360 feedback
360 feedback imitated	15 days before MDP
10 days before MDP	First email sent regarding responses
Second email sent regarding responses	6 Days before MDP
1 4 days before MDP	Third email sent, and people informed regarding feedback
Analysis	3 days before MDP
	Debriefing