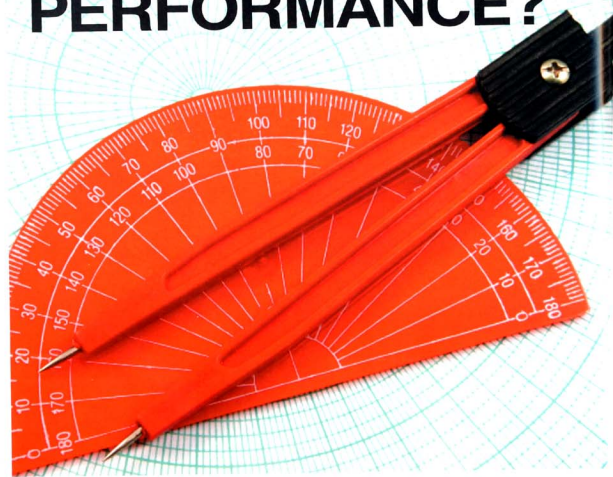


360° ASSESSMENT:

BOON OR BANE FOR BUSINESS PERFORMANCE?



Are 360° assessments harming our business performance by encouraging us to focus on ourselves and show how hard we are working, rather than focusing on how we can help the organisation to get results? Senthil S asks

Traditional 360° assessments are designed to help us learn by showing us how others see us. This is misleading – we learn most from how we see others – but we rarely measure this. In developing people and improving the organisational climate many organisations use surveys and profiling. One commonly used approach is 360°

feedback. Organisations have been using this tool with varying degrees of success. So, what is the philosophy behind 360° feedback and is there an alternative approach?

We are revealed most completely by what others think of us. This is the philosophy behind 360° feedback where employees are scored/evaluated by their peers, subordinates and superiors.

This approach then allows the person who is assessed to consider an action plan to address some of the compelling areas identified in the 360° survey.

There may be a problem here What if most of the solutions identified as a result of this approach are addressing the symptoms (and therefore not sustainable) rather than

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the cause? What if, instead of enhancing accountability and empowerment, 360° assessments are actually reducing or not helping increase feelings of accountability and empowerment? For one particular company, a key finding of an organisational climate survey was that the leadership intent was not clear, and that change occurred at too fast a rate.

The leadership team said they would address this by "putting in place a better communications system (focus groups, leadership dialogue, briefings,

problems (and often actively resist any notion that they are responsible). Consequently, no one feels responsible, and individuals and organisations seem doomed to live with problems no one seems willing or able to solve.

This is known, by scholars, as the problem of 'resistance or self-deception', and it devours organisational resources. All of the common 'people problems' relating to leadership, communication, conflict resolution, teambuilding, morale, initiative, merging of organisational cultures, alignment, labour relations,

Consider this: as a function of the 'resistance or self-deception' problem, most people do not realise or cannot begin to imagine the extent to which they are failing to focus on results. Secondly, the technologies required to attain the higher levels of performance depend on the 'resistance or self-deception' solution. Simply put, without a systematic understanding of this problem and its concrete, practical implications, these higher levels remain for the most part, beyond reach. The solutions to the 'resistance or self-deception' problem therefore offer us another more effective approach to understanding oneself. The philosophy being that we are revealed most completely by how we think of others. To grow human capital the first step needs to be to create a way of working and put in place tools and applications that enables individuals to look at themselves on their own and see how they are contributing to problems and issues within the company. This approach would invite minimal resistance compared to 360° type assessments where individuals are assessed by others.

This alternative approach has multiple advantages. One of the main advantages being that it creates a desire and invites leaders/individuals to take ownership and feel accountable for their contributions to the challenges they face in the workplace. Organisations therefore need to rethink their strategies. We need to explore tools and processes that we can put in place to enable individuals to look within themselves more and recognise their own contributions to some of the very challenges they complain about. **HRM**

Senthil S heads the South East Asia office of The Arbinger Institute

"Most people feel that others cause problems (and often actively resist any notion that they are responsible). Consequently, no one feels responsible, and individuals and organisations seem doomed to live with problems no one seems willing or able to solve"

Senthil S, head, South East Asia, The Arbinger Institute

leadership visits, newsletters, etc)]. The leadership team had taken on the responsibility to solve the problem.

The leaders found, however, that those employees who felt that the leadership intent was not clear did not then attempt to find clarity from the leaders. The leaders were then asked if their objective to ensure "leadership intent was clear among staff" would succeed simply with a better communications system. They realised that they would not succeed until and unless those complaining were also interested in searching for the solutions and answers they felt they needed.

This may be the case because of a little known problem in the heart of the human sciences. It also happens to be the most costly problem in many organisations. Most people feel that others cause

frustration, and so on, are manifestations of self-deception. Problems in these areas remain pervasive because attempts to solve the underlying problem have consistently failed.

Resistance or self-deception

Understanding the enormity of the issue, scholars working at the deepest levels of the human sciences have been searching for a solution to the 'resistance or self-deception' problem for over a hundred years. In ground breaking work, an international team of scholars have finally identified how 'resistance or self-deception' happens, why we put up with it, and what to do about it. Hailed as a major development, this solution has profound implications for personal and organisational performance – implications that turn conventional wisdom on its head.

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