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Learning in industrial organizations - a multisource feedback study

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Abstract

This paper is a result of one year research in a two industrial facility in West of Romania. The main objective was to regarding the management skills and soft skills of the management personnel. We choose to operate with a 360° paradigm of interest and involvement, vertically up and down, as well as horizontally across, the organizational compass. The Training Diagnostic strategy relies on the following methodological design of the program:

Due to the fact that any organizational analysis relies on the sincere and competent participation of the co-workers, any relevant analysis has to insure that the acquired information is valid, relevant and accurate. In this regard, our program uses 2 different types of methods & tools:

- Assessment tools (direct methodology): like the 360° Analysis and the Focus Groups, for the direct acquisition of relevant information in respect to the program objectives.
- Redundancy tools (indirect methodology): like the Indirect Data Collection and the Semi-Structured Interviews, for the validation of the acquired information and the accuracy assessment of the direct methodology.

The results of the program will be described in 2 separate sections:

- Quantitative outputs: measured results of the 360 Degree Analysis, represented separately for each analyzed department.
- Qualitative outputs: the results of the qualitative methods, as well as the accuracy ranking of the quantitative outcomes.

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1. Introduction

This paper is a result of one year research in an industrial facility in West of Romania. The main objective was to assess training needs regarding the management skills and soft skills of the management personnel. We choose to operate with a 360° paradigm of interest and involvement, vertically up and down, as well as horizontally across, the organizational compass. Sources of learning in industrial organizations are mixed and matched depending upon the objectives of the initiative. At times, organizations use single sources of learning as the mechanism for leadership development. In reality, a combination of sources of learning likely yield the best results (McCauley, et al, 1998). Examples of sources of learning include: job rotation, job enlargement, job enrichment, developmental assignments, games, simulations, e-learning, 360-degree feedback, assessment centres, instruments, feedback-intensive programs,

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equine leadership development, fellowships, service learning, sabbaticals, hardships, personal development plans, action learning, coaching, outdoor education, classroom-based education and developmental relationships (Allen, Hartman, 2008).

Multisource or 360-degree feedback is an increasingly popular process by which managers receive various ratings from a variety of sources. These sources include managers, peers (co-workers), direct reports, and sometimes, even customers (thus the term 360 degrees). Information gathered from this technique can be used for both developmental (helping to identify strengths and performance gaps) and administrative (training evaluation, performance appraisal, promotion, etc.) purposes. The past decade has seen a tremendous increase in the use of this approach for a variety of reasons. One is that the jobs of today are increasingly complex, and the traditional method of having a supervisor rate a direct report's performance falls well short in giving adequate amounts of quality information in order to improve performance. Another reason is that the trend towards empowerment and downsizing has shifted the burden for personal development to the employee (Tornow and London, 1998). Typically, organizations fall short of providing managers with a clear, long-term career path. This forces individual manager to assess their own strengths and weaknesses through perceptions based on little or no objective feedback.

There are many different methods, surveys, and implementation techniques used in multisource programs (Bracken et al, 2001). We first provide the conceptual background for 360 programs in general and then describe the development and implementation of our proposed program for evaluating training needs for personal from an industrial facility.

Another area in which 360-degree feedback has strong conceptual roots is in the performance appraisal literature. Again, today's business climate has forced organizations to provide much more information than the traditional performance review provides, thus spawning such creative efforts as 360-degree feedback. It is now recognized that managers can improve their performance through increased information. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998a), in particular the dimension of self-awareness, can be used to explain. This theory states that humans have the ability to assess their own capabilities and skills, and they often evaluate themselves quite differently than others do. Therefore, the 360-degree process provides managers with an external source of information designed to increase their self-awareness. This enhanced self-awareness may improve managerial effectiveness by providing individuals with another source of outside information regarding what others expect of him/her (Fletcher and Baldry, 2000). This seems particularly important for helping to develop training programs.

Although surveys have found that the majority of US firms have implemented some form of 360-degree feedback (Edwards and Ewen, 1996), they are not that common in other countries. Part of the reason can be explained by the fact that most of the instruments and implementation techniques have been developed in the USA. Initially we applied this assessment methodology for the reason that the organization has US roots. Multinational organizations struggle between implementing standardized processes, focusing on product and service uniformity, developing consistent leadership, and recognizing cultural uniqueness. Some study (Gillespie, 2005) suggests that the assumption of a U.S.-developed survey retaining its meaning across cultures may be faulty. For international human resources management (IHRM), cultural issues associated with both the design of the 360 instruments and the interpretation of the results must be considered.

The use of 360 deg feedback cannot "fix" an appraisal system that isn't working, whether the failing is due to structural or administrative problems with the appraisal system or larger problems within the underlying corporate culture (Lepsinger, Lucia, 1997). For instance, if the only thing the company really cares about is whether a manager made his numbers last year, it's rather pointless for his boss to rate his skills as a coach or team builder. When used appropriately, however, multisource feedback can improve an already effective appraisal system in several ways: by helping to gain agreement on expectations, by using a broader range of information, and by facilitating open discussion.

The use of 360 deg feedback provides a more objective measure of a person's performance. Incorporating the perspective of multiple sources results in a broader view of the employee's performance and helps minimize biases that result from limited views of behavior. Also the multisource methodology encourages open discussion. Studies have shown that people are more likely to modify their self-perceptions in the face of multisource feedback (Lepsinger, Lucia, 1997). Multiple views of a person's behavior also increase the likelihood that important elements of performance will not be overlooked or minimized, which increases the likelihood of a well-run appraisal meeting in which the boss provides balanced feedback in a constructive manner. This in turn reduces the employee's

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