

# ***Beyond 360 . . . Adding Suitability to the Mix***

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## **What is 360 Degree Feedback, Anyway?**

360 degree feedback (360) is a method of collecting, summarizing and reporting confidential information on a variety of job-related factors from an individual's immediate work contacts (i.e. supervisors, direct reports, peers, and in some cases, customers / clients). Everyone, including the participant him or herself, completes a questionnaire (often done on-line) that is scored and compiled by a neutral third party. A series of reports and/or graphs are produced that the participant then reviews privately with a "debrief"er, usually an HR professional, or consultant. The point of a 360 is for the participating individual to gain insight into his or her own strengths and weaknesses as viewed by the people with whom he or she works. Those included in the sample can be separated out by group (e.g. peers, subs, etc.) so that the participant gets a good "read" on how he or she is perceived by different groups, including self, on different factors.

## **Benefits of a 360: What Does It Buy You?**

360's are increasingly popular these days, perhaps due in part to the current emphasis on continuous development (development planning following a 360 is a natural). Some senior managers especially favor the use of a 360 because trouble, or "blind" spots readily surface, and since the input is anonymous (attributable only to a group, rather than a specific individual), no one person can be blamed. Thus, a 360 can take some of the burden off the boss in getting through to the employee who badly needs to change in order to be effective. Additionally, there can be great value in examining the differences between one's self-perception, and the perceptions of others. That is, to what extent do I see myself similarly, or differently, to how other people see me? Insight can result from examination of these differences, and behavioral change can be planned and implemented. In this way, the participant may choose to increase his or her work effectiveness by deliberate, planned action.

## **Limitations of a 360 Degree Instrument: What Can Go Wrong?**

Because 360 data is perception-based, the participant can, and often times will, choose to reject, ignore or discount the data ("*they don't really know me*", "*my boss doesn't like me*", "*my peers are jealous of me*", etc.). After all, there is no real "truth" to the 360; it is all about how one is viewed by others at work -- even with the most sophisticated 360 instrument. The participant must be willing to

“hear” the data – especially less than positive data – in order to derive benefit, and people vary greatly in their degree of defensiveness with respect to their own shortcomings. Some people rebound well from the shock of negative information; some do not. A skilled consultant delivering the data definitely helps; even so, some participants aren’t motivated to change their behavior as a result of the data, but are traumatized and/or angry for awhile and then go back to the same comfortable behavioral patterns. Others simply listen quietly without engaging, but don’t really accept the data, and therefore do not change.

### **If 360 Feedback is the Effect, Why Not Look at the Cause?**

A 360 looks at the “effect” of one’s behavior and ways of interacting with other people; it does not explain the “cause” of one’s behavior. Though we intuitively know that such causes exist, we cannot address causation when conducting a 360; that is, **why** did the participant behave the way he/she did to cause others to see them in a particular way? Looking at cause-and-effect relationships deepens the 360 experience -- it completes the picture, and helps to raise the participant’s awareness level and acceptance of the data. Enter InnerView . . .

### **Suitability as “Cause”**

The Harrison InnerView profiling tool is a self-report, forced-ranking system that outlines individuals’ preferences, work styles, traits, and personality factors. InnerView is built upon “enjoyment theory” (i.e. we tend to be good at what we enjoy doing), and the Yin-Yang philosophy of balance and imbalance as important moderators of individual well-being and work success. InnerView is the perfect complement to a 360 tool in presenting the participant with suitability information that can help explain the “why” behind the “what”.

### **How are Suitability Results Communicated?**

An InnerView questionnaire is completed by the participant at the same time as the self-rating portion of the 360 (25 – 30 minutes to complete). The completed questionnaire is scored and a report is produced. The report can simply be presented as an “add-on” to the 360 reports, reviewed by the participant at the time of the one-on-one debriefing. The report is centered around how the participant prefers to work; for example, “Jim prefers a role in which he can be direct and to the point in his communications with others”, or “Jim is extremely optimistic in his outlook”. InnerView results reflect how a person is most comfortable operating at work – how they are “built”, or “wired”; that is, it is descriptive of each person’s unique operating style (results are individual; no type-casting).

## **What Should I Go Over First – the 360 or InnerView?**

The de-briefing session should begin with an explanation of the two instruments and how they can be used together to explore both cause and effect. The factors measured by the two tools are not identical, but sufficiently similar and overlapping. The review of results can begin with either tool. What is most important is that both tools are used to examine the “what” and “why” of behavior so that insight is maximized, and with it, commitment to development ensues.

## **Example of How to Weave the Two Tools Together in De-Briefing**

Let’s say that Ms. Y’s 360 results show her to be low (a problem area) in Planning for the Future, Visioning and Strategic Thinking. She is shocked, and doesn’t accept the data, saying that her co-workers have no idea of what she is working on and that she considers herself to be a top-notch planner and strategist. In fact, she was recently recognized for a white paper she wrote on “The Future of Our Industry”. Examining her InnerView data yields some clues. Ms. Y was indeed low in Planning and Analyzes Pitfalls as measured by InnerView, as well – both factors strongly related to strategizing, anticipating possible problems / outcomes and long-term planning. On the other hand, Ms. Y was very high on Analytical, meaning that she enjoys research and analytical work in general. In this case, Ms. Y is confusing analytical skills with strategic planning skills. Upon further discussion we discover that the paper she wrote was more of an analytical assignment than a strategic or planning project; thus, she excelled and was proud of her effort. Unfortunately, as Ms. Y has advanced as a manager she has been called upon for more strategic work, which she attempts to avoid. Since she is uncomfortable with the strategic role, she is reluctant to seek out others for their help and guidance in this area and continues to make strategic errors that others cannot help but notice. An excellent question for the debriefer to ask might be: *“Tell me about the type of feedback you’ve received in the past for your strategic planning efforts.”* Upon further discussion, Ms. Y is able to accept that this is a problem area that she has neglected to address. Using InnerView can make it easier to point to strengths that may have compensated for a weakness. This way a weakness can be described in terms that are more easily “swallowed” by the participant.

## **Its All in the Presentation!**

There is significant art involved with pulling in the right data from one tool to support findings from the other tool. Thorough preparation for the de-briefing is critical to identify trends and patterns in advance. Cross-referencing this way adds credibility to the results and increases the chances of acceptance and subsequent commitment to behavioral change. Also, InnerView results tend to be presented less dramatically than 360 results, and can moderate the potential

devastation of negative feedback. Adding InnerView to a 360 can also add an element of choice. This might be one way for a participant to view the experience:

*The 360 shows that I'm having X negative effect on people. InnerView shows that my problem is most likely due to the fact that I'm not naturally strong in X, even though I am strong in many other areas. That means that I can choose to increase my skills in X, thus changing my behavior, if I see sufficient advantage in doing so. I guess it's up to me . . .*

### **Always Set Goals**

Ideally, the 360 should conclude with the participant starting to target specific areas for development. It is unlikely that the participant will be ready to start formalizing a development plan at this point. Time is needed to digest the data and deal with the emotions raised. However, another meeting or series of meetings can be set up to continue work and perhaps formalize a development plan. Often, people need some time to think about what will be involved with such a plan and whether they are truly willing to commit the time and energy needed; behavioral change is very difficult, but a 360 can often provide the impetus needed to put in the hard work.

## Case Study: Mr. R

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### Background

The participant is a senior vice-president with a large market research company in the United States. Mr. R has an MBA, and 15+ years work experience of progressively increasing responsibility. Mr. R's boss recommended the 360; she sees Mr. R as a "high potential" with great skills, tremendous drive, but some problems getting along with others in the company.

### Process

The participant was e-mailed the Harrison Inner View and 360 questionnaires to complete and return. He was also asked to supply the names of work contacts to include in the 360 exercise. Those individuals were notified of the project, their role, and how to complete the 360 questionnaire on-line. The 360 tool used in this case was *LeaderView/360*, produced by Advanced Teamware. Completed questionnaires numbered:

- Self (1)
- Superior (1)
- Peers (6)
- Subordinates (5)

Mr. R was debriefed by an independent human resources consultant (the author of this paper) with prior experience interpreting both tools (LeaderView and InnerView). Mr. R alone received copies of all the reports.

### Reports

Attachments 1 – 3 are main graphs for both LeaderView and InnerView, and summarize the data. More detailed graphs and reports were also produced, but are too voluminous to include as attachments to this article.

### LeaderView 360

LeaderView/360 displays the results in Standardized Score format. This means that the scores for each behavior are compared against a norm for each rater group. This allows participants to compare their ratings with the average score received by people in the LeaderView/360 database. The database is

substantial and represents results from over 1000 people who rated themselves and have been rated by multiple peers, supervisors and direct reports.

Participants clearly see which behaviors receive higher or lower scores than the norm for each rater group. One also can determine how far the scores depart from norm. The higher the score, the more effective the behavior. The lower the score, the less effective the behavior. Four lines appear on the graph; each represents the average rating of the respondent group. At first glance one can see that R. generally thinks very highly of his own abilities, with the exception of the area, "Managing relationships". On the whole, R's boss and his direct reports view his skills positively, except that his boss sees trouble spots in "Managing relationships", and "Managing self". R's peers, on the other hand, view R's performance much more critically. In fact, four areas are quite low (about 1 standard deviation below the mean): "Controlling", "Managing self", "Managing relationships", and "Leading". Graphs exist for each of the seven performance factors on the main graph that yield insight into the problem areas within each performance factor. However, just from examining the main graph one can see that R. has some significant issues with his peers. Why?

## **InnerView**

The InnerView main graph has nine quadrants, each with four traits within each quadrant. Trait scores can be interpreted as: 1 – 3 low, 4 – 6 moderate, 7 – 10 high. Traits within each quadrant often balance one another, representing opposite ends of the same spectrum, for example, Open/Reflective vs. Certain in one's outlook on life. Scanning R.'s main graph we see several imbalances right away: Authoritative/Collaborative (he prefers to do things his own way without involving others), Frank/Diplomatic (he is direct to the point of being blunt), Assertive/Helpful (me first), Self-Motivated/Stress Management (strong drive; tense); Warmth & Empathy/Wants Recognition (not "warm and fuzzy"; likes the spotlight). Already we begin to put the pieces together . . .

## **Preparation: Cross-referencing the Two Tools**

The first step in the preparation phase was simply to read and study the reports and graphs from both tools. The second time through, notes were made on the consultant's copies. A list of questions were drawn up for possible later discussion in the debriefing; for example,

- *Typical peer interaction?*
- *Political climate at the company (how does one "get ahead"?)*
- *Access to the boss?*

Make notes about the cross-references from the two sets of reports; for example, Managing relationships related to Frankness? Managing-self related to Stress Management?

## **The Debriefing**

The one-on-one interview began with R. summarizing his background: jobs held/dates, types of companies, career progression, education, goals, etc. A thorough background summary is important to obtain to set the context for the discussion to follow.

The interviewer then asked R. about feedback he had received on previous performance evaluations. This sets the stage for receiving feedback in general, and making connections between prior feedback and the current 360 feedback.

The next step was to explain the purpose of the 360 exercise for him, personally, as well as an overview of the two tools used.

Then the reports were given to R. and the consultant and R. went through the material together. The graphs guided the discussion. When a rating was discussed on the 360, InnerView was brought into the discussion. For example, R. was rated highly by all groups on the 360 on all of the factors having to do with Problem Solving. This makes sense considering R.'s InnerView profile in the area of Decisions; he is well balanced and moderately high in Problem Solving (analytical skills), as well as Intuitive (using one's "gut" to aid in the decision-making process). On the other hand, under Managing Relationships on the 360, R. was rated very low in Cooperating. InnerView explains why this may be so. R. is very assertive and not inclined to be helpful unless there is a good business reason for doing so. Further, he tends to be blunt, tense, and not very warm. This causes others to be rather afraid of him. He is not inclined to collaborate, and others pick this up and view his behavior as uncooperative.

Through this back-and-forth process, R. came to the realization that he needs to involve others more in his decision-making, rather than always doing what he thinks is best. He also identified his low diplomatic score as one that he wants to improve, retaining his primary frank style where it is appropriate, but adding another "tool to his toolbox" with additional diplomacy skills for other times. Along with this area, R. identified wanting to exhibit more warmth at times to improve his peer relationships.

## **Conclusion**

Using InnerView along with the 360 added depth and meaning to this experience for R. He was able to see the genesis of the problem areas identified by the 360,

rather than simply guessing at which parts were intrinsic vs. extrinsic to his make-up. By combining the power of both tools, R. was accepting of the feedback and has planned development to augment his skill set and increase his overall work effectiveness.