The Paradox of the 360-degree Performance Management: An Evaluation

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Abstract

Companies and governments worldwide have tried many types of performance management systems as they evolved, but new ones surfaced. The article reviews performance management as a sub-field of the human resource management literature. This article traces the history of performance management in organisations but later focuses on the 360-degree type of performance management. The article addresses the problem of performance management within an organisational setting, specifically the 360-degree performance Management system and how it is applied within an organisational setting. Managing performance in an organisation is a noble exercise. Still, the introduction of the 360-degree performance evaluation has its strengths and weaknesses that those in management should be aware of and have some mitigation strategies to control. The literature review reveals that performance management is a valuable practice in an organisation as a performance measurement tool. On the contrary, 360-degree performance management can be exploited by colleagues to get at each other or collude for some sinister motives. The adoption and use of the 360-degree performance management in an organisation can improve performance of both the organisations and the employees. Feedback will be coming from different sources such as the employees, customer and management. The study adopted the integrative literature review methodology where the previous literature was synthesised and evaluated to identify the benefits that could be accrued to organisations.

Keywords: *Human Resource Management, Performance*

Appraisal, Multi-Rater Feedback, 360-Degree Appraisal Feedback,

Introduction

There is a general understanding that performance feedback is crucial in organisations (Nadler et al.,2013;Aguinis et al., 2012; Drouvelis & Piardini, 2021). Though this may be the case, managing performance in an organisation is not as easy as it is being portrayed.

Organisations used to carry out one-on-one performance management system between the supervisors and the subordinates. This type of performance appraisal had its own challenges. Lyubykh et al. (2021) examined the role of supervisors' attributions about employees' performance and found that "supervisors over-attribute lower levels of performance to employees' internal factors (i.e., conscientiousness), which then triggers higher levels of abusive supervision" (p.3).They found that employees were often abused by their supervisors in a supervisor-supervisee performance appraisal. Therefore, organisations should be in a position to guard against such abuse and act on any issues related to it as a matter of urgency.

The 360-degree performance management confounds the situation as there are different actors involved in the process. Some of these actors are the employee's subordinates and supervisors. This scenario on its own raises issues of the knowledge of how to conduct this type of appraisal, fairness and revenge. The objective of this study was to review literature on the 360-degree performance management system and how it has been implemented by organisations. The synthesised literature indicates areas of good practice that need to be followed by organisations that need to fit within the new dispensation of organisational improvement and good practices.

Alexander (2006) defines a 360-degree performance management as "a formalised process whereby an individual receives feedback from multiple individuals or "raters" who regularly interact with the person being reviewed" (p. 2). Garavan, et al. (1997) posits that 360-degree feedback; multi-rater feedback; upward appraisal; co-worker feedback; multi-perspective ratings and full-circle feedback are just a few of the names used to describe this type of feedback. All these terms convey the same meaning (Ward, 2004). Its major objective should be to improve team and organisational performance. The focus of this article is to evaluate 360-degree feedback in organisations and the employee. The review addresses the following issues: the functions of the feedback within the organisation; the benefits of the feedback to both the organisation and the employees; the processes used to obtain feedback and problems of 360-degree feedback and implementation.

Review of literature on performance management

The 360- degree Performance appraisal started in Germany (Cooper, 1998) and it has evolved in method and perspective. Scholars have given different viewpoints in support or against the 360-degree performance management. The last three decades have been characterised by the adoption of the 360-degree performance appraisal feedback also known as peer appraisal

(Peiperl, 2001). According to Peiperl (2001) the 360-degree feedback consistently frustrates executives and can exacerbate bureaucracy, heighten political tensions, and consume lots of time. Peiperl (2001) argues that "360-degree feedback is unique in its ability to help leaders understand their impact on others" (p. 142). Peiperl (2001) commented on the360-degree performance management ability to improve performance, why it sometimes works or fails, and how executives can use it without causing anxiety to the participants. Participants in this case included both the person being appraised and those appraising him/her. Some of the reasons for implementing the 360-degree feedback are: self-development, highlighting training needs, team building, strategic development and remuneration (Carter et al, 2005). Some research indicates that 360-degree feedback provides benefits when used for the evaluation of performance (Ward, 2004;Kanaslan et al., 2016;Ugwoke et al., 2023;Gupta, & Sharma, 2022).

It is worth noting that even though this article focuses on the 360 multi-rater performance management system, the world has now moved to the 720-degree performance feedback that focuses on the review of an employee by multiple stakeholders including clients of the organisation to improve customer service. Chrisos (2019) postulates that the 720-degree performance management entails seven critical stages that include: pre-appraisal feedback, self-appraisal, co-workers/colleagues' appraisal, direct report and subordinates' appraisals, manager or supervisor appraisal and post-appraisal feedback. Some of the benefits of this type of performance appraisal to the organisation include a more holistic and comprehensive feedback, multi-dimensional feedback, reduction of appraisal barriers and greater transparency.

The functions of 360-degree feedback in the organisation

The argument for support of the 360-degree performance feedback has been espoused by different authors -- Campion,et al, (nd) and Pulakos et al. (2015) -- who have recommended that performance management systems should be changed to that of the 360 degrees. The 360-degree performance management system reduces bias and increases reliability. When several employees assess their supervisor, interrater reliability increases if there is correlation among the ratings (Shrout et al., 1979, Antonakis et al., 2022, Bracken et al., 2022, Kopsidas, 2023). Campion et al. (nd,) postulates that 360-degree performance management and evaluation "may provide a more effective means of identifying and defining new knowledge, skills and abilities(KSA)"(p. 87). Furthermore, Campion et al. (nd) argue that 360-degree performance management systems "may provide an effective means through which a firm can weave new behaviours' into daily work"(p.87). Alexander (2006,) lists the following as the functions of the 360-degree performancemanagement system in the organisation.

- Translate department/organisation's mission into specific achievable goals.
- Manage performance rather than react to it.
- Reduce overlap of job duties and ineffective, inefficient use of employee skills.
- Provide written acknowledgment of completed work.
- Gain new information and ideas from staff.
- Discuss skill and career development.
- Protect organisation from unfounded charges of discrimination.

- Reduce stress *for the supervisor* -- managing rather than reacting.
- Reduce stress *for the employee* – what is expected is made clear (p.1).

The benefits of the 360-degree feedback to both the organisation and the employees

Several authors have identified the benefits of the 360-degree performance management systems on an organisation. Brett et al. (2001) argue that 360-degree performance management system are invaluable to some degree when used as an evaluation system rather than just as a personal development technique to both the organisation and employees. The benefits for employees are that they can be able to give constructive feedback to each other and their supervisors. According to Lelavijit et al. (2020,p. 450), 360-degree performance management feedback tools are important in conducting fair performance reviews). From the organisational perspective, the 360-degreefeedback can be used for facilitating cultural change in the organisation as it accelerates a shift to teamwork and employee empowerment. It also gives employees a voice when they appraise their supervisors' skills and behaviours, developmental purposes, succession planning systems, executive development, reinforcement of organisational core values and business strategies, and to provide feedback to managers (Garavan et al., 1997, p.3). In terms of the employees, the 360-degree performance management helps employees to improve their performance, understand their weaknesses, highlight their strengths, give negative feedback and give employees understanding of the abilities.

The processes used to obtain feedback

In terms of implementation, the 360-degree performance management feedback is a systematic collection of performance data on an individual or group, derived from several stakeholders -- the stakeholders being the immediate supervisors, team members, customers, peers and self (Lelavijit et al., 2020, p. 452). This allows the organisation to get feedback about an employee from different levels of employees and even external people like customers or people that an individual may have interacted with during the period of review (external partners). Lelavijit et al, (2020) concur with Peiperl (2001) that an effective performance appraisal programme should do more than set salary and promotion decisions on past employe e performance by the organisation.

Kaplan (1993) pushes the bar high by calling for family, spouses and friends to be included in the 360-degree performance management feedback. According to Kaplan (1993), the employee should agree to the 360-degree performance management feedback and they should also be allowed to choose their own raters. However, this type of 360-degree performance management feedback could be seen as unfair by those in the leadership of the organisation as employees will not honestly assess their strengths and weaknesses.

Challenges of 360-degree feedback and implementation

The 360- degree performance management feedback, according to Alexander (2006, p. 6), is a stress-inducing process and can cause several emotions like fear, joy, anger, frustration, anxiety, excitement, guilt, sorrow and boredom. These need to be managed during the 360-degree performance management feedback and the Emotional Intelligence theory becomes more applicable. The theory deals with employee's felt emotions that can easily trigger a negative response in employees, therefore, supervisors should be aware of these kinds of behaviours. Walters (1995) pointed out that performance management feedback is inundated with challenges such as determining the evaluation criteria, lack of competence, errors in rating and evaluation, and resistance. People holding managerial positions have always dreaded giving feedback to their employees in terms of performance management. The 360-degree performance management feedback should be applied to all levels, that is top down and bottom up. Peiperl (2001) observed that 360-degree performance management feedback increases bureaucracy, brings tension in the organisation and consumes a lot of time. Peiperl (2001) discusses the four paradoxes of the 360-degree performance management feedback that can be used by managers to improve their organisations. These and their explanations are depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Paradoxes of 360 performance management feedback

Paradox	Explanation
1. Paradox of Roles	Colleagues juggle being both peer and judge.
2. Paradox of Group Performance	Navigates between assessing individual feedback and the reality that much of today's work is done by groups.
3. Paradox of Measurement	Arises because simple, straightforward rating systems would seem to generate the most useful appraisals-but they don't.More difficult and time consuming to generate, is more helpful in improving performance.
4. Paradox of Rewards	Most people focus almost exclusively on reward outcomes and ignore the constructive feedback generated by peer appraisal.

Source: Peiperl (2001). *Getting 360-degrees feedback right.*

According to Peiperl (2001). The paradox of roles indicates that peers can sometimes be used for both judging their own colleagues which can bring in some confusion and favouritism at times. The paradox of group performance shows that there is still need to assess each individual staff member's work while being aware of the fact that work is nowadays performed by different group members and not necessarily a single person. The paradox of measurement indicates that one to one appraisal can look simple but the reality is that it consumes a lot of time for mainly the supervisors who may have many people reporting to them. The paradox of rewards indicates that employees may be interested more in the monetary rewards at the expense of the feedback given by their peers which can be very crucial for their development and progression.

According to Bernardin et al. (1993), 360-dgree performance management feedback has the following shortcomings:

- Managers may focus on pleasing subordinates in an effort to get higher appraisals;
- The authority of the manager could be undermined by the pressure of upward appraisals and the implications of low evaluations for a manager's status within the organisation;
- Subordinates may lack the ability, aptitude, training or necessary job information to provide valid ratings;
- Subordinates may be reluctant to be candid about their boss for fear of repercussions, or they may inflate ratings in order to score points with the manager;
- Employees who are being pushed hardest by their supervisors may rate those supervisors more harshly;
- Managers may also be confused about how to interpret subordinate appraisal relative to ratings from other sources, such as their bosses.

Therefore, the appraisal may most of the time be either biased against either manager's non favourites or they may not want to destroy their relationships with their subordinates. Upwards appraisal by subordinates may also put their managers in an uncomfortable position as they fear that their subordinates may rate them low when it's their time to do so. Lelavijit,et al. (2020, p. 456) argue that performance management feedback can create a negative culture, might not be accurate and is too focused on the weaknesses but not on the positive side as it is a more complete assessment, creates better teamwork and gives more feedback.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study was the integrative literature review. Integrative literature review is a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated. According to Torraco (2005, p. 356) an integrative review aim is to synthesize, assess, and critique, the literature on a research topic. Integrative literature reviews mature and new emerging topics. The current study reviewed a topic that has spanned over two decades, and the debates continues. Accordingly, Torraco (2006,) contends that "an integrative literature review of a mature topic addresses the need for a review, critique, and the potential reconceptualisation of the expanding and more diversified knowledge base of the topic as it continues to develop" (p. 357). Snyder (2019) compares the different types of literature reviews such a systematic, semi-systematic and integrative or consolidative. Accordingly, integrative literature review can be conducted as follows:

Table 2. Integrative literature review

Approach	Purpose
Typical purpose	Critique and synthesize
Research questions	Narrow or broad
Search strategy	Usually not systematic
Sample characteristics	Research articles, books, and other published texts
Analysis and evaluation	Qualitative
Examples of contribution	Taxonomy or classification Theoretical model or framework

Adapted from Snyder (2019:104) Approaches to literature reviews.

Potential biases and limitations of the methodology

Integrative literature review depends on the collation of the information that has been provided by the previous authors. This methodology selects a few articles from previous authors. The biases include using the readily accessible information while other information from other sources may be missed. The methodology also does not use firsthand information collected from informants.

Discussion

The review of the 360- degree performance management systems has indicated that several organisations carry out the review for reasons such as improvement of organisational performance at organisational and individual employee levels. In conducting this type of performance management review, organisations should have a strong administration process that handle the feedback (Romano, 1994, DecisionWise, nd). The benefits of the 360-degrees outweigh the tedious process that organisations undertake to get the best results of processes involved. The fact that a supervisor can be appraised anonymously by their juniors avoids the potential for unexpected conflicts and a reason to get back at your supervisor, thereby affecting the organisational performance. Therefore, feedback from this type of performance management can at times be viewed as a source of conflict in the organisation. Aquinis et al.'s (2012) study found that the 360-degree feedback was devastating, waste of time and a conflict meeting. Bouskila-Yam et al., (2011) found that ''the process was a waste of time,'' and ''feedback equals criticism and it is not nice''(p. 106). Bouskila-Yam et al. (2011, p. 108) tabulated their recommendations on delivering effective performance feedback focusing on a strengths-based approach as shown below in Table 3.

Table 3: Recommendations for delivering effective Performance Feedback focusing on a strengths-Based Approach

1.	Adopt the strengths-based approach as the primary means of providing feedback.	• Identify employees' strengths. • Provide positive feedback on how employees are using their strengths to exhibit desirable behaviours and achieve beneficial results. • Ask employees to maintain or improve their behaviours or results by making continued or more intensive use of their strengths
2.	Closely link any negative feedback to employees' knowledge and skills rather than talents.	• Focus weaknesses-based feedback on knowledge and skills (which are more changeable) rather than talents (which are more difficult to acquire).
3.	Adopt a strengths-based approach to managing employees' talent weaknesses.	• Help employees improve a bit on the desired talents with an understanding that employees are unlikely to substantially improve the talents that they lack. • Create a support system that will serve as a crutch for a talent weakness. • Encourage employees to see how their strongest talents can compensate for their talent weaknesses. • Make it easier for employees to work with partners who possess the talents that they lack. • Re-design jobs for employees who are deficient in certain talentsand give other employees the responsibilities that require talents that certain employees lack.

Source: Bouskila-Yam et al. (2011, p. 108)

The major learning point in these recommendations are that the person reviewing an employee must be their supervisor and should be sensitive the employees' feelings and vulnerability (Aldrich, 2021). Aldrich (2021) contends that in giving feedback to their subordinates, supervisors should consider the following issuesstarting small, creating conditions for privacy and honesty, building accountability for supervisor, riding in the emotional waves and committing to learning, not agreeing. Westerman and Rosse (1997) found that participants who participated in the upward 360 review felt more confident that they could rate accurately those that they were rating. Toegeland Conger, (2003) indicates that when 360-feedabck is used, there should be accuracy from the raters. Additionally, Toegel and Conger (2003) posit that the 360-degree performance management "can be an empowering mechanism that gives direct reports and peers a real say in how effective their boss or peer is as a leader"(p. 3). This implies that all members of the organisation can be given a chance to have a say in how all employees are performing and that it is not only the preserve of their superiors. It is a good mechanism that allows for checks and balances at all levels of the organisation.

Problems that can be associated to the 360-degree performance management can lead to

disengaged and bitter employees as critical feedback is not easily accepted (Mohan, 2022). Employees can also feel very vulnerable (Firaz, 2021).Görün, et al. (2018) postulate that the 360-degree performance management system is one of the most controversial aspects of human resource management.The results will hit the companies bottom-line in terms of low productivity, stressed employees and development of occupational diseases that can affect the profit margins of an affected organisation or company.

Theoretical and Practical Implications of the study

The 360-degree performance management system has been scrutinised and assessed by the study. The difficulties with the 360-degree performance management method have been mentioned. Organisations that have been using other performance management systems can utilise the study to see if this is a viable alternative that they should take into consideration for their own organisation. Because of the system's comprehensive coverage, everyone, including subordinates, can be evaluated by a variety of people.

Recommendations of the Study

i. *Put in place Thorough Training Programmes:* Teach all participants, managers, peers, and subordinates how to give constructive criticism. This will guarantee that the feedback is fair and helpful while lowering biases.

ii. *Guarantee Anonymity and Confidentiality:* Preserve the identity of those offering comments to promote truthful and open replies. This can support transparency and lessen the fear of retaliation.

iii. *Use Feedback for Development, Not Just Evaluation:* Stress the value of using feedback for professional and personal growth rather than only performance reviews. This may inspire workers to advance and develop.

iv. *Consistent Follow-Up and Support:* Following feedback sessions, offer ongoing assistance and follow-up. This entails establishing precise objectives and planning the next steps considering the input obtained.

v. *Establish a Culture of Positive Feedback:* Promote an environment in the workplace where receiving feedback is valued and essential to both individual and group development. Emphasise the advantages and promote receptivity to criticism.

vi. *Recognise and Reduce Potential Biases*: Establish systems to find and lessen feedback process biases. This entails standardising feedback forms and utilising a wide variety of raters.

vii. *Merge with Additional HR Procedures:* Verify that the 360-degree feedback system is in line with other HR procedures including performance reviews, succession planning, and training and development initiatives.

viii. *Pay Attention to Your Strengths and Development Areas:* Give constructive criticism while emphasising your areas of strength and growth. This strategy can promote ongoing development and raise staff morale.

ix. *Explicit Expectations and Communication*: Clearly explain to every employee the goal,

procedure, and expectations of the 360-degree feedback system. Transparency increases the likelihood of support and participation from all stakeholders.

Implications of the 360-Degree Performance Management System

i. Enhanced Employee Development: By offering insights from various perspectives and assisting employees in identifying and addressing their strengths and weaknesses, the 360-degree feedback system can result in comprehensive employee development.

ii. Enhanced Performance of the Organisation: By encouraging accountability, continual development, and alignment with corporate goals, a well-implemented feedback system can increase performance at the individual and organizational levels.

iii. Enhanced Motivation and Engagement of Workers: Getting input from a range of sources helps boost workers' motivation and engagement since they feel appreciated and acknowledged by the company.

iv. Potential for Bias and Conflict: If the system is not effectively managed, employee disputes and prejudices may arise. Ensuring confidentiality, standardising procedures, and providing training are essential ways to overcome these problems.

v. Extensive in Resources: Implementing a 360-degree feedback system requires a substantial investment of time, money, and labour. Businesses must be ready to spend money on software, training, and aftercare initiatives.

vi. Cultural Shift: The organization's culture may need to change to implement this feedback system. It requires creating an atmosphere in which candid criticism is welcomed and encouraged.

Conclusion

The review discussed the 360-degree performance management system used in an organisation. The findings indicate that there are both advantages and disadvantages of the system. When used appropriately, the 360-degree performance management system can be beneficial to an organisation. The system can be used to evaluate both managers and the subordinates. The 360-degree performance management needs those involved in the process to be fair, but cases of unfairness and favouritism can occur in any organisation. Due to the volume of information collected, 360-feedback system can become a tedious process that needs the organisations to have resources for analysis of the information collected. The major message for the reader is that performance management is applicable to all who are in the organisation and the 360-feedback gives all concerned a chance to be evaluated by their superiors and that managers are also evaluated by their subordinates. As such, 360-degree evaluation is feasible to be implemented across all levels of the organisations. As already alluded to, like any other system, this type of evaluation has its own flaws that can be avoided if it is implemented fairly across the organisation. Finally, the 360-degree performance evaluation is supported as it gives all in the organisation to have feedback from their peers, supervisors and even across departments in an organisation. For 360-degree performance valuation to work efficiently in any organisation, there is need to be training of all concerned so that they understand their role

and avoid potential biases.

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