"Natural" Reactions to 360° Feedback

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During the nanosecond nineties, one of the most significant and controversial movements in the field of performance appraisals was the implementation of 360° evaluations. The concept of the 360° evaluation is for the individual being evaluated to rate him/herself on a series of competencies and for that person's boss and direct reports (and sometimes peers) to rate the person on the same competencies. A comparison can then be made of how well the person performs the competencies from various perspectives: self, boss, direct reports and/or peers. This type of rating allows for a more complete perspective on the leader's performance, after all, the people being led are in the best position to see how they are led.

A 360° evaluation tends to evoke anxiety—or down-right fear—in the hearts of those being evaluated. I hear leaders say, "Allowing people who work for me to rate my performance gives them a chance to 'get even' if they don't like me." The more leaders give reasons why they should not be rated by their direct reports, the more one wonders what might be going on within the team.

An obvious question arises, "Does having the additional performance perspectives result in any greater incentive to improve performance in the competency areas?" This is still open for debate.

Another, perhaps more interesting question might be, "Does Type influence the 360° evaluation and learning process?" I have been using 360° evaluations as part of our leader development (coaching and/or training) program since 1989. In many cases, I also use the MBTI® as part of the training. The resulting database has provided an opportunity to look at the influence of Type in the evaluation and change process. The data collection and analyses are ongoing, and my colleague, Marion Kriwanek, will present some of the results at the APT International Conference in July. What follows is a sketch of some of the preliminary findings and implications on a macro level.

The 360° evaluation used in this study was the Assessment of Basic Leader Effectiveness® (ABLE), which evaluates the leader on nine critical skill areas: *motivation, decisionmaking, stress management, goalsetting, performance counseling, delegation, communication, team development* and *conflict resolution*. The evaluation process involves doing a 360° for the leader, providing a training program and conducting a post assessment using the same 360° instrument and procedure. This process allows us to determine the degree of change in the leader's behavior.

"Natural" Reactions

On an anecdotal level, observation of people receiving 360° feedback indicates trends in their "natural" reactions that appear to be related to Type preferences. If the feedback giver is aware that these reactions may occur, he/she can tailor the timing and format of the session so as to enhance the effectiveness of the feedback process.

I have grouped the reactions to *negative* feedback by *dominant Function-Attitude* (F-A) to save space. Keep in mind that what follows are "trends" that appear to be associated with the F-A and may vary somewhat from one person to another and the degree of perceived negativity of the feedback. Very often the "natural" reactions to negative feedback are not "positive." For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to describe the reactions by the F-A Types that we have observed even if they sound negative. In no way do I mean to imply that any Type is better than another. I have not found any Types who enjoy receiving negative feedback.

The extraverted Function-Attitudes (Se, Ne, Te, Fe), seem to require an opportunity to "talk" about the results with the feedback giver as well as others to help them own the results. It is also important to remember that there will be a small latent reaction driven by their introverted auxiliary function that usually manifests the following day.

Se: The Se Types tend to give an immediate response to the feedback and need recent, specific examples to help them accept the validity of the feedback. They need an opportunity to talk about the results but do not want a "long" drawn-out session. Above all, they do not want to be sent away to write an action plan or sort through numerous pages of statistical data. Constant reference to the past tends to irritate them.

Ne: The Ne Types react quickly to the feedback, are bored by details, but may want to explore possibilities about the process. They seem to be willing to generate ideas about how they might improve. The process must be flexible, fast moving and allow for the generation of ideas.

Te: The Te Types tend to give a quick reaction to the feedback in the form of excuses, rationale or dismissal and may challenge the feedback giver's authority. The Te does not want to appear incompetent. Negative feedback in particular tends to evoke a strong defensive reaction. They may become critical of the instrument and/or data collection process and react strongly to the feedback giver (or management) deciding for them what action they should take (action plan).

Fe: The Fe Types tend to take feedback as an attack on them as a person. After quickly internalizing the information, they often make comments attacking the boss, direct reports or peers. Strong emotions may accompany their response. If the feedback is very negative, they may require a long time to recover. They tend to have little desire to wade through a lot of statistical data.

The introverted F-As (Si, Ni, Ti, Fi) will have a small initial reaction driven by their extraverted auxiliary function and a strong latent response the next day driven by their introverted dominant function. The introverted preference requires "reflection" time for ownership to occur and for the full reaction to manifest. The overt emotion that might occur in the extraverted F-As shows up in this group on the second day.

Si: The Si Types tend to give an outward response of relative calmness followed the next day by a much stronger reaction which may be defensive or attacking. Feedback needs to tie specific events from the past to the present. They tend to like a short session, often giving minimal verbal responses. Use of the person's name— even with "Ts"—seems to be important. They may want to examine, on their own, the statistics surrounding their feedback. They also tend to "hold on" to the experience and are slow to let go and move forward.

Ni: The Ni Types listen intently to the feedback, but tend to provide little verbal response beyond acknowledging that they hear what you are saying. If they respond verbally, they may criticize the instrument or attack the process. The more visual the feedback, the better. Their "real" reaction comes the next day and may be much more accepting of the feedback having had time to think about it.

Ti: The initial response of the Ti Types tends to be reserved and/or critical of the process. He/she may begin "splitting hairs" or debating the statistics. They may become philosophical and long winded in their discussion of the process with the feedback giver. The bulk of their reaction will come the next day in the form of critiquing the process or telling you how it could have been done better.

Fi: The Fi Types tend to withhold verbal reaction, but non-verbals often give away the rapidly escalating emotional response on the inside. By the next day they will be verbalizing their reaction to the feedback. Negative feedback is internalized and may require days or weeks for recovery.

Changes as a Result of Feedback

Even more important than how Types react to the initial feedback is how they change their leader behavior as a result of the feedback when combined with a training intervention. In general, the preliminary analysis of our data suggests that:

- The most improved F-A on the Boss score was Ne followed by Se, Fi, Si, Ti, Te, Fe and Ni
- The most improved F-A on Direct Report score was Se followed by Ti, Fi, Ni, Te, Si, Fe and Ne
- The results also suggest that it may be easier to change the Boss' score than the Direct Reports' score

Implications

Our experience and preliminary data analyses suggest that Type plays a significant role in how 360° feedback is received and also in how Types change as a result of the feedback. Our initial analyses did not take into account the Type of the Boss, Direct Reports, feedback giver or the trainers. From a systems view each of these people (and their Type preferences) would be expected to have a significant impact on the overall process. A more elaborate presentation on the results will be made at the International APT conference this summer.

Type practitioners who use 360° feedback might want to review two articles in *TypeWorks* and Van Velsor and Fleenor's chapter in *Developing Leaders*. Incorporating Type into the feedback process makes it much more complex, but greatly increases the probability of success.

References

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Dr. Thompson's Abbreviated Bio

Henry L. (Dick) Thompson, Ph.D., M.S., M.A., is president and CEO of High Performing Systems Inc., an international management consulting and training firm he founded in 1984 to help leaders, teams, and organizations achieve high performance. He is an internationally recognized consultant, educator, speaker, and author. Emotional intelligence, FIRO, and psychological type theory are integral parts of Dr. Thompson's work and ongoing research. The Leadership Potential Equation™ and The CommunicationWheel® are just two of many tools he developed to facilitate leader and organizational development. He is a recipient of the Mary McCaulley Lifetime Achievement Award for work with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator instrument. (Expanded bio)

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