

Circle of judgement

Do not just judge but be prepared to be judged. This is the moral of 360 degree appraisals, says Aneeta Madhok

THE latest buzz in performance appraisals is about getting performance feedback from your subordinates and peers in addition to the superior's evaluation. It's called the 360 degree appraisal because it comes from all around.

A role reversal of sorts is taking place. What are some of the implications of this new trend?

First of all, the 360 degree feedback is the one mirror image consisting of realistic perceptions of those who matter the most. The average manager spends most of his time with subordinates and only a fraction of the time with his bosses. It is one way of promoting the spirit of internal customer service which is so critical to building learning organisations. When an individual receives the honest perceptions of those he relates to, he is in a better position to confront his mistakes and chart meaningful courses for change and growth.

With the increasing openness, the system will experience a greater flexibility of its stances. There will be less entrenchment of the powerful elements in the network, resulting in quicker responses to changes in the environment and economy. This is certainly a competitive edge whose advantage no one can deny.

One of the changing values in our society is the need for hierarchy and its effects. Hierarchical barriers that separated the powers that be and the elders and holders of the systems are fast getting eroded. People are now treated as equals in a structure that is getting flatter and flatter, with communications systems that support diminishing differentials of status.

Discovery of scope for improvement is the only way for developing the capability of the organisation. There are two things we can do: look at our strengths and enhance them, and look at our shortcomings and overcome them. In the first case, the scope for dramatic and noticeable growth is limited, whereas if we look at our shortcomings, the relatively larger arena, we have immense scope for improvement. 360 degree feedback is one way of making quantum jumps in performance and excellence.

One of the realities of groups is the emergence of the 'pecking order' which determines the relative social standing of the individual members

comprising the group. There was a legitimate hierarchy which supported the pecking order. With the advent of the networked organisation, the legitimate use of power and authority of position has weakened. This makes it imperative for organisations to be prepared for the kind of openness that would ensure that the organisation does not get politicised in the absence of legitimate hierarchical boundaries of power and authority.

Another simple pitfall is the misconception that subordinates have an accurate perception of the boss. In many cases, subordinates do not really know the boss as well as the system presupposes. This is so because the nature of the working relationship calls for the drawing of appropriate and balanced boundaries between boss and subordinates. The subordinate gets a small keyhole view of the boss, often with his own prejudices against authority figures.

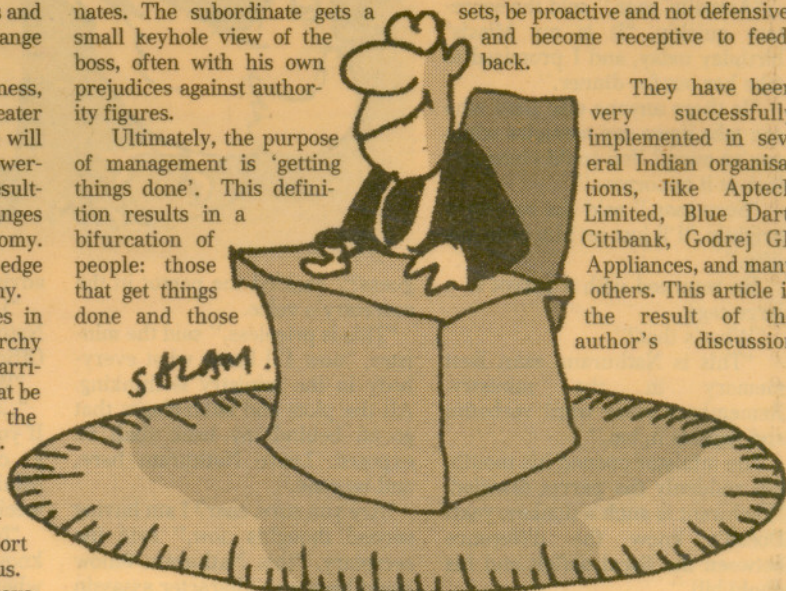
Ultimately, the purpose of management is 'getting things done'. This definition results in a bifurcation of people: those that get things done and those

system would seed it with the acorns of failure like so many other HRD initiatives. A preparation would include inculcating a culture of openness, receptivity to the idea and to feedback in general, a direct linkage with business missions and corporate values, visible support of the top management which is ready to 'walk the talk'.

The HRD manager needs to believe in the system, and advocate it at all levels in the organisation, playing a supporting role to line managers, though he has to play God at times.

He must not politicise the situation, while retaining his political agility, and most of all, he must never get caught in the crossfire between boss and subordinate, but must retain his outsider status. Line managers need to change their mindsets, be proactive and not defensive, and become receptive to feedback.

They have been very successfully implemented in several Indian organisations, like Aptech Limited, Blue Dart, Citibank, Godrej GE Appliances, and many others. This article is the result of the author's discussion



that do things, thus naturally resulting in some form of hierarchy, however rudimentary.

It also gives rise to the drawing of appropriate boundaries of behaviour that would determine the optimum level of openness. This is different for different organisations.

The design of 360 degrees appraisals should take into consideration the appropriate levels of openness that would work for the organisation. The pitfall here could be that this delicate balance may not be achieved, and a 'free for all' might result, thereby affecting the achievement orientation of the group.

A premature introduction of the

with HRD managers and line managers from such organisations as well as with HRD managers who believe that this kind of a system will not work well in their cultures.

If the preconditions are not met, it is probably better not to introduce such a system as otherwise it will not really live in spirit. It must be remembered that such systems are not a universal cure-all for organisational diseases arising out of bureaucracy, hierarchy, authority and the 'pecking order'.

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