

Should CEOs partake in 360 degree feedback?

360 degree feedback has been a popular tool for management and leadership development for the past decade. Though many CEOs have agreed to implement this process in their organisation, not many have taken part in the process themselves. Perhaps they have not realised the power of the tool for themselves. However, as leadership guru Peter Drucker has said “successful executives continue to ask what is the most important contribution I can make to the performance of this organisation?” With change continuing to occur at a rapid pace the leadership skills, knowledge and behaviours required to respond effectively to resultant challenges can only be accomplished through continual professional development. 360 feedback allows the CEO to gain a clear picture of how he or she is functioning overall in a challenging environment and in specific areas of leadership. The results provide a structured and systematic way of thinking about behaviour in specific leadership areas. It can help prioritise where specific effort should be focused for both the CEO and their direct reports. It can also promote how effective the CEO is in specific areas.

When considering using a 360 diagnostic a good tip is for the CEO in conjunction with the Chair to tailor the questionnaire to ensure that the feedback is targeted on relevant and useful areas of leadership. In addition, when implementing the process ensure that raters are briefed on the purpose and know how the information will be used to avoid them feeling anxious about being honest. The CEO can collect feedback: Upwards from the Chair; Sideways from other CEOs (known through membership and networking groups), suppliers, customers/clients; and downwards from direct reports and selection of other staff in the organisation.

Once the feedback report has been received, the CEO should make space and time to reflect on it. It's not the results per se that are important but what is done with them. The CEO should ask him/herself the following questions:

- Has the feedback confirmed what I already know or brought something new to light?
- Is the feedback consistent amongst the rater groups or am I perceived more highly by some groups? Do I want to change any group's perception? How could I? Note: Possibilities for discrepancies include: some or all of the raters may have had limited opportunity to observe the CEO in one or more aspects of their leadership behaviour; a CEO may behave differently in the presence of different groups; raters may be operating from different frames of reference eg. some

might rate harshly or leniently; and the CEO may not be displaying the behaviours they think they are.

- Is there one specific area that stands out as my best? How can I capitalise on this?
- Is there a specific area/s that stands out for development? In the scheme of things, how important is this area to my goals - do I really need to spend time and effort developing in this?

Some find it useful to discuss and analyse their feedback with a coach, mentor, or peer. Some find it useful to discuss findings with specific feedback groups in relation to things that are working well and things that need development and how they intend to address them. One study (Goldsmith & Underhill, 2001) found that those who follow up on their formal feedback sessions with raters show significant improvement in their effectiveness as a leader.

From the results a CEO will be able to identify strengths and development needs. These can be prioritised in terms of usefulness to their current job and or future aspirations. Learning how to exploit strengths is one attribute of a successful leader. If a development plan only deals with developing weaknesses, the leader may never reach full potential. After developing and implementing an action plan, the 360 process can be repeated again in 12 months time to validate changes. This information can be used to confirm and reinforce the CEOs desirable behaviours and promote him/herself to the Chair, Board, Trustees and others.

CEOs who continue to change will impact ROI, extend their career and help develop the next generation of leaders thus preparing their organisation for success in the future. For more information on the 360 process and development for CEOs see the acevo website www.acevo.org.uk or contact Jenny Berry

References

- Drucker, P.F (1993), *The Effective Executive*, Harper & Row, New York, NY
- Goldsmith, M. & Underhill, B. 2001. *Multisource feedback for executive development*. In D. Bracken, C. Timmreck & A, Church (Eds.), *The handbook of multi-source feedback*, Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.