360FEEDBACK FOR LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

It has been what feels like ages when I learnt about the uses, benefits and perils of the **360Feedback process and tool**. Instinctively I thought it was a very good idea, and I embraced the utilization of the tool as the best opportunity I had to enhance my own understanding of how others saw me and the impact my behaviours had in how they perceived me as a leader. However, not everyone turned out to be so optimistic about the benefits of the tool. To the contrary, many felt 360feedback was a very "dangerous weapon" that could be used by those who didn't like us to anonymously say bad things about us and our leadership style. That is when I realized, that perhaps the most important **pre-conditions of introducing 360feedback in any organization**, were as follows:

1. Ensuring there is top leadership support for the introduction of 360feedback, clearly determining and articulating how the results will be used, and as much as possible de-linking them with compensation and career progression, at least for a start;

2. Empowering employees by involving them in the selection of the feedback providers. This does not mean they will unilaterally choose who gives feedback on them, but they should have the possibility of suggesting some of the feedback providers;

3. Deploying a communication strategy that clearly articulates the benefits that each individual will derive from receiving feedback and how these benefits out-weight any potential negative implication they may fear or are apprehensive about.

Once these pre-conditions have been established, the next most important critical success factor for any 360Feedback deployment is the **disciplined development of the questionnaire**. Following are the most salient guiding principles I believe should be considered to put any organization on the right path to succeed when they deploy 360Feedback efforts:

1. **Start with a clear mind around what is being evaluated**. When we start with the end in mind, i.e. capability development, performance improvement, enhanced self-awareness, we will be in a better position to develop questions which will enable us to gather the right information and make relevant analysis, so that we can ultimately build the right interventions to support the development and growth of our employees.

2. **Describe observable behaviours**. Each question needs to describe in a concise and clear manner observable behaviours that can change / improve with the deployment of capability development interventions.

3. **Avoid describing values / beliefs** . This is tricky and a subject of debate. In my opinion, it is imperative that we avoid including questions around values / beliefs, as these are a set of inherent traits that in most cases will not change, and which we can't train people on, unless we plan to subject individuals to "brain-washing" initiatives, which of course I don't advocate. Overarching organizational values like **building trust and ethics** are considered a given, and we can always explain that these values / beliefs are embedded and expected in every behaviour and interaction of the employee with all stakeholders.

4. **Eliminate behavioural "Qualifiers".** At times we embellish sentences unnecessarily with adjectives that don't contribute in making the descriptor any clearer for those evaluating the behaviour. Descriptors of knowledge / skills / behaviours like "Have SOLID understanding of...", "Have COMPREHENSIVE knowledge of" don't make the descriptor any clearer to evaluate and may instead confuse the measurable aspect of the behaviour.

5**. Describe outputs instead of inputs.** Knowledge and skills are inputs that are used to produce or do something. Outputs are easier to observe and their impact easier to assess.

6. **Include an easy-to-understand rating scale**. The scale needs to help the feedback provider select the correct rating. There are many options. My preferred alternative relates to consistency or frequency with which the behaviours are demonstrated.

7. **Decide in advance how you will use data gathered through qualitative questions**. The temptation of putting qualitative questions must be dealt with resolve around what we intend to do with the answers that we collect. Unless we plan to compile the answers, generate common themes and share the information with the employee, it is best not to waste anyone's time giving people the sense that they are able to write down things they felt they could not say while selecting a particular rating scale for each statement.

Equipped with these guiding principles, you can proceed to draft the 360feedback questions of your choice. If you or your organization want support around drafting the most impactful and useful 360feedback questions, and the deployment of the 360feedback process, please contact me at claudia@thread-advisory.com and I will be glad to provide you with a proposal on how I can partner with your organization to ensure 360feedback has a positive impact for your employees.