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Leadership Blind Spots: Promoting Accurate Self-Perception and Leadership Success through 360° Feedback



Self-perception is never a perfect image. How individuals evaluate themselves is often quite different from how others see them.

Everyone, at one time or another, has worked with someone who had a blind spot—whether in skills, knowledge, behavior, or attitude. While it is often very easy to see these blind spots in others, most of us simply do not have that same clarity when it comes to our own self-perception. One executive participant in our 360° assessment rated himself highest in ‘Acts with Humility and puts others first’ while his feedback providers (managers, peers, and subordinates) rated this item as the lowest in the report. As a successful mid-career, upper-level manager, this lack of self-awareness was creating a performance gap in his leadership – which fortunately was addressed with coaching and development following the 360° report.

While some of these blind spots are easy fixes, others can be much more serious and tougher to get rid of. No matter the issue, the first step in personal and professional development is a realistic self-perception. We know of no better tool than 360° feedback to help developing leaders identify their blind spots, obtain suggestions for improvement, and ultimately be more successful.

A recent study by The Hay Group suggests that senior level leaders are the most likely to see themselves incorrectly. As individuals climb the corporate ladder, the less likely they are to accurately perceive themselves. These leaders tend to over-rate themselves and lose touch with those they lead.





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This inconsistency often results in serious leadership problems. A recent university study found that leaders who over-estimated their own leadership ability had subordinates with significantly lower levels of both job satisfaction and productivity.

While 360° feedback is critical for senior executives, those serious about developing themselves at any level can benefit from these reports. Also, while 360° feedback is most prevalent among leaders in business, individuals in private, public, and non-profit sectors can all receive valuable insight from the experience of a 360° report. Anyone who works with people – isn't that everyone? – will increase his or her effectiveness with improved self-perception.

Organizations that adopt a process of 360° feedback send a significant message to their employees about the importance of personal and professional development. In addition, aggregate ratings for managers across an organization aid in identifying enterprise-wide strengths and weaknesses, enabling human resource professionals to focus training and development efforts in the most appropriate areas.

As you consider implementing 360° assessments in your organizations, remember that a tool is only helpful if used correctly. This is also true of 360° feedback. If 360° feedback is not solicited amidst a supporting organizational culture, if responses are not taken seriously, and if appropriate coaching and follow-up are not done, the potential benefits will not be realized.

