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## Fine-tuning leadership

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# Deeper insight into 360-degree feedback

**“T**his must be a mistake!” “I can’t believe my team said this about me.” “I know who made that comment – he is referring to a one-off situation.” Comments like these are sometimes heard in connection with 360-degree feedback engagements, and typically from key talent who have been selected as the beneficiaries of this form of advanced development experience. Unfortunately, an advanced development experience is not what is necessarily delivered. The issues generally lie in program design and in the need for an appreciation of cultivating personal insight.

## The importance of design

Indeed, the use of 360-degree feedback instruments can be of tremendous value in support of employee development engagements. When implemented well, individuals can appreciate the tangible behavioural insights gained from receiving feedback from managers, peers, direct reports and other key stakeholders.

However, when 360-degree feedback initiatives are not implemented well, individuals can suffer. Experienced managers may choose to reject the feedback and the exercise will represent a waste of time and money; whereas less experienced high potential employees may have their confidence shattered and career trajectory derailed through receiving their first dose of candid feedback, without appropriate support mechanisms put in place. In each of these cases, the individuals may not have been sufficiently prepared with the requisite self-awareness to openly accept the feedback – an issue which can be addressed through the design of the development experience. Fortunately, such preparation can be facilitated through a layering of psychometric instruments supported by focused development activities such as coaching.

## Layering psychometric instruments

So what is meant by layering psychometric instruments? This involves a process of structured administration and feedback of relevant personality, behavioural, and/or intelligence assessments, in order to help an individual build their self-awareness.

When designing a layered process to psychometric assessments, it can be useful to administer and debrief the instruments in order of how confrontational they are: from lowest to highest. That is, to first provide feedback from instruments that may be answered by the individual without strain

or judgment. Ipsative instruments are an example of this, where the individual is asked to simply select the option that they most prefer from a series of choices. There is no right or wrong response. From ipsative instruments, normative instruments may then be considered. These are typically trait or capability-based assessments which compare and rate an individual’s response against a normative population. This form of assessment is more evaluative, hence may be received by individuals with less comfort than ipsative measures. Finally, a form of assessment which can be particularly confrontational is one which incorporates the perceptions of others; for instance a 360-degree feedback instrument. Overall, the goal of this process is to increase an individual’s self-awareness in an appropriately paced and constructive manner.

While there are a number of instruments which could be considered for building a foundation for receiving 360-degree feedback, two which are often teamed together are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) and the FIRO-B® instruments. The MBTI® instrument will provide individuals with increased insight into understanding differences in communication style, processing of information, decision making and managing commitments, whereas the FIRO-B® instrument is focused on wanted and expressed needs such as inclusion, control and affection.

## Appreciation of difference

Together, these instruments can provide the individual with increased self-awareness of their intrapersonal and interpersonal orientation, as well as areas for personal growth. Perhaps of equal benefit is that they are also provided with a model and a language for appreciating individual differences, leading to an acceptance of areas they have in common with their colleagues, and importantly, where there may be areas of potential conflict or tension.

Armed with deep personal insight through having received feedback on the results of self-report assessments, individuals become much better prepared to receive and accept the findings from a 360-degree feedback engagement. We cannot, however, rely just upon selecting the right tools for the job. An individual’s engagement, understanding and their application derived from the development process will be enhanced through being supported by a qualified and experienced practitioner.



### About the author

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