Human Resources Organizational Development Unit

360Feedback Pilot Evaluation

Submitted for Consideration on April 3, 2024

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Program Background

In 2021, the City of Madison implemented an annual Executive Check-In Process involving 26 Department/Division Heads. The Mayor appoints and Common Council confirms many of the individuals who are Department/Division heads. Their terms are typically 5-year contractual terms. It's important to note that the City's Police and Fire Commission appoint the Police Chief and Fire Chief.

The Check-In Process includes the compilation of an "At a Glance" dashboard by the Human Resources (HR) Data Analyst. Department/Division Heads respond in writing to questions posed and submit work plans before engaging in a 90-minute discussion with the Mayor.

In 2023, we launched a transformative initiative to introduce a multi-source feedback tool into the process. This marks a significant change from the organization's previous absence of 360- or other feedback tools. The HR department contracted with a vendor to develop a multi-rater feedback tool. Commonly known as 360-feedback, this replaces a section of the Executive Check-In Process. This tool facilitates continuous improvement in leadership behaviors through data-driven insights.

Goal and Objectives

The goal is to provide a development tool for Department/Division Heads and the Mayor. This will help individuals work towards sustained positive behaviors that align with City of Madison values and priorities. The primary objectives of incorporating the 360-feedback tool into the Executive Check-In Process are as follows:

1. **Development:** Use feedback as a developmental tool for City of Madison Department/Division Heads. This will foster sustainable and positive behaviors aligned with organizational values.
2. **Reinforcement and Recognition:** Reinforce positive behaviors and competencies while identifying areas for improvement among Department/Division Heads.
3. **Comprehensive Feedback for Mayor:** Support City operations by providing the Mayor with feedback on Department/Division Head from many perspectives. This includes perspectives of Alders, peers, and direct reports.
4. **Alignment:** Live the City's values of equity, inclusion, stewardship, shared prosperity, and well-being by fostering a feedback culture and continuous improvement in leadership.
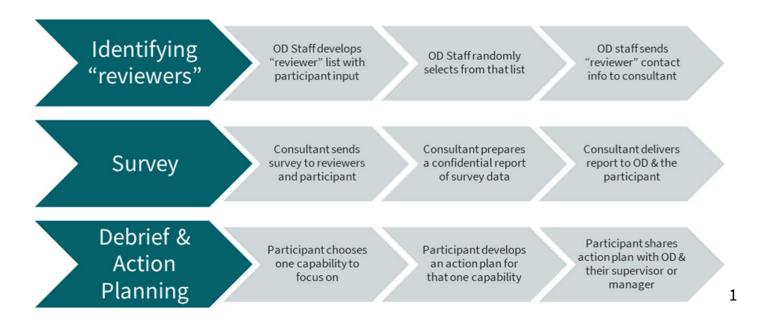
Benefits

1. **Overcoming Cognitive Bias:** Human cognitive biases can hinder self-awareness. The 360-feedback tool helps leaders recognize their strengths and address blind spots by providing insights from various perspectives.

2. **Increases Accuracy of Self-Awareness:** The 360Feedback tool can increase the accuracy of one's awareness by helping them to better understand themselves through the experiences and perception of others. While the 360Feedback tool isn't perfect for measuring performance alone, this self-awareness boost can improve performance in the long run.

3. **Building a Feedback Culture:** Department/Division Heads are often the least likely to receive upward feedback. The 360Feedback tool contributes to building a healthy culture by encouraging feedback from all directions; upward, downward, and sideways. In doing so, we take active steps to create a culture of safety and

trust and cultivate a healthy workplace culture that thrives on feedback; which is essential for inclusion and innovation.

4. **Demonstrating Leadership**: The introduction of the 360-feedback tool sends a clear message that upward feedback is valued, encouraging leaders to be open to feedback conversations and continuous improvement.

5. **Mitigating Executive Blind Spots:** Blind spots at the executive level can have significant consequences. The 360Feedback tool acts as a preventive measure by bringing these blind spots to light, enabling leaders to address potential blocks proactively.

6. **Values-Based Leadership Models:** Department/Division Heads serve as models for Values-Based Leadership, embodying self-reflection, balance and perspective, humility, and self-confidence The feedback tool supports these leadership qualities, creating a ripple effect throughout the organization.

Program Overview

Identifying "reviewers"	OD Staff develops "reviewer" list with participant input	OD Staff randomly selects from that list	OD staff sends "reviewer" contact info to consultant
Survey	Consultant sends survey to reviewers and participant	Consultant prepares a confidential report of survey data	Consultant delivers report to OD & the participant
Debrief & Action Planning	Participant chooses one capability to focus on	Participant develops an action plan for that one capability	Participant shares action plan with OD & their supervisor or manager [1]

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[1] Due to personnel changes in HR, the 360Feedback pilot process was obstructed and therefore, the debrief and action planning did not take place. Alternatives actions will be outlined in the following sections.

Evaluation Findings

These findings were a result of evaluating participants and raters survey responses at the end of the program pilot.

- Eight high-level managers from the Mayor's Management Team participated in the pilot.

- A total of 104 raters provided feedback for these 8 participants via the 360-Feedback tool.

- The response rate for the rater evaluation was 44%, with 46 raters completing the assessment.

- The response rate for the participant evaluation was 100%, with all 8 participants completing the assessment.

Raters

- Of the respondents, 85% displayed varying levels of satisfaction, while only 15% expressed levels of dissatisfaction.

- Majority of all participants expressed a willingness to serve as raters again.

- Of the respondents, 90% of respondents displayed varying levels of comfort with providing anonymous feedback. Only 10% expressed levels of discomfort in providing anonymous feedback.

- In conducting a thematic analysis of open-ended responses to respondent's comfort levels, confidentiality emerged as the most significant concern (50%), followed by issues related to the relationship between raters and participants (30%).

- Although 88% of respondents perceived the process as confidential there was still expressed discomfort in being identified due to writing style, size of a given team, the lack of communication, visibility, and follow up from participants throughout the process.

- In conducting a thematic analysis of open-ended responses to respondents proposed changes and/or additions to the questions enclosed in the 360-feedback survey, the following themes and implications were identified:

  - **Lack of Neutral/Not Applicable Option:** Respondents expressed a desire for a more explicit "neutral" or "not applicable" response option. They emphasized the importance of having a choice that communicates a lack of experience rather than negative feedback and to acknowledge situations where they might not feel qualified to provide feedback.

    - **Implications:** The absence of such an option may lead to respondents providing feedback on topics where they feel less knowledgeable, potentially skewing the accuracy of the feedback. Respondents may also feel compelled to provide feedback on areas outside their expertise, potentially affecting the authenticity and relevance of the feedback.

  - **Inappropriateness of Always/Never Scale:** Participants expressed reservations about the scale that includes terms like "always" and "never," noting that such absolutes are inappropriate. They suggested that a more nuanced scale would better capture the variability in behaviors and actions.

    - **Implications:** The current scale might limit the accuracy of feedback by not allowing respondents to express the variability inherent in certain behaviors and actions.

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- **Desire for Positive Feedback Presentation:** Some respondents wished for a more positive presentation of feedback. They suggested a focus on strengths rather than weaknesses, particularly for leaders who might have already received extensive feedback on their areas for improvement.

  - **Implications:** This suggests a need for a more balanced approach to feedback, ensuring that leaders feel encouraged and motivated to build on their strengths

Participants

- The response rate for the participant evaluation was 100%, with all 8 participants completing the assessment.
- As a result of the 360-Feedback process, all participants expressed varying degrees of reflection while 87% of participants' reflection led to the identification of three instances of improvement in the following areas: performance management, conflict resolution, communication, process improvement, change management, morale, inclusive workplace, workload management, learning and development, and being present.

- Of the 87% of participants who identified areas of improvement, 71% outlined *how* they plan to track progress.

- Although 62% of participants believe they would *not* benefit from additional training, 88% of participants expressed willingness to participate in 1:1 and/or small group coaching sessions.

- 87% of participants were able to identify the impact of 360-feedback to their personal growth and development journey.

Recommendations for Future State

These recommendations are tailored to address the specific needs and desires voiced by the participants and raters of the 360-feedback process. In response to the feedback gathered the following recommendations are being proposed.

1. Conduct a thorough review of the assessment questions to ensure relevance and applicability.

    a) Decrease the number of questions included in the assessment.

    b) Ensure the questions are aligned with city wide Employee Core Expectations and values-based leadership framework.
    c) Clearly define the rating scale for accurate and consistent ratings for participants and raters.

2. Increase communication and guidelines to mitigate discomfort, increase visibility, and reinforce confidentiality.

    a) Strengthen communication on the entire 360-feedback process to raters and participants by providing clear guidelines on the entire 360-feedback process, including expectations, purpose, timelines, and example reports.

    b) Establish a structured follow-up mechanism to increase visibility throughout the 360-feedback process and keep participants and raters informed about the progress and outcomes.

3. Increase leadership support to ensure engagement and continuity.

    a) Ensure ongoing support and buy-in from executive leadership to reinforce the importance of the 360-feedback process.

    b) Continue to provide and require team based 360-Feedback opportunities to agencies partaking in Executive Team Development.

    c) Communicate the value of feedback as a tool for growth and development at all levels of the organization.

4. Build in mechanisms for continued reflection, accountability, and reinforcement that supports active continual development for participants.
    a) Incorporate the 360 reflections into the Executive Check In process for reinforcement and accountability from the mayor. [2] This could look like integrating 360 reflections within Agency head contract renewal discussions within the 5-year contract plan.

    b) Provide resources to support participants in ongoing and effective self-reflection.

    c) Promote 1:1 and/or small group coaching sessions as a valuable opportunity for personalized development.

5. Establish and maintain Feedback Collection and Process Improvement

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[2] * Acknowledgment that debriefs and action planning did not occur for the pilot participants. I propose that self-reflection be completed and discussed with the mayor during the next Executive Check-In.

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a) Continue to gather feedback from participants and raters to adapt and refine the 360-feedback process based on participant and rater experiences.