With increased use of upward and 360-degree assessment comes a greater need to understand what the data imply for people and the organization.

Do Managers See Themselves As Others See Them?
Implications of Self-Other Rating Agreement for Human Resources Management

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When it comes to providing managers and leaders with feedback information to help them develop their skills, an increasing number of organizations are inverting the pyramid—asking those at the top to look to those in the middle and lower echelons, or elsewhere, for guidance. The feedback may come from the manager's staff or direct reports (a process called upward feedback), or from a broader base of individuals with whom the leader interacts—bosses, peers and co-workers, and even customers or clients (360-degree feedback).

Estimates are that between 10 and 15 percent of today's organizations use either upward or 360-degree feedback for developmental learning and, in a growing number of instances, for performance evaluation purposes as well. In 1994, of Fortune's 32 most admired companies, 20 were using upward or 360-degree appraisal and two others were beginning to. More recent information (1996) suggests that these programs are nearly universal among Fortune 500 firms and that, across all organizations, hundreds of millions of dollars are spent annually to support the efforts. Exhibit 1 emphasizes how widespread these systems have become by listing a small sample of the organizations, large and small, public and private, profit and not-for-profit, that now use upward or 360-degree feedback.

Most upward and 360-degree feedback programs obtain self-ratings from leaders or managers as well as ratings from others with whom they interact. Determining the degree of agreement or consensus between self-ratings and the other assessments becomes a key component of the system. Our primary focus here is on the self-other rating agreement process and the implications for human resources management (HRM).
EXHIBIT 1
SOME ORGANIZATIONS USING UPWARD AND 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

- IBM
- FAA
- Tenneco
- Pacific Gas and Electric
- Wells Fargo Bank
- General Mills
- GTE
- Procter and Gamble
- Syntex
- UPS
- Heller Financial
- Texaco
- Deloitte & Touche
- Northern Telecom
- Libby-Owens Ford
- AT&T
- Lockheed
- Bank of America
- Dupont
- World Bank
- Merck
- Ford Motor Company
- 3M
- Ball InCon
- Kaiser Permanente
- MassMutual Life Insurance
- Limited Credit Services
- Fiat
- Bell South
- Ben & Jerry's
- Amoco
- Alcoa
- Exxon
- Hewlett Packard
- Johnson & Johnson
- Levi Strauss
- Motorola
- Shell Oil
- Acuson
- Scottsdale Insurance
- Federal Express
- LORAL

FEEDBACK GOALS AND RATIONALE

Clearly, human resource professionals, specialists, trainers, and consultants, among others, are finding that upward and 360-degree feedback programs provide valuable information to support the organization's performance appraisal and evaluation systems as well as goals related to self-development.

If, for example, the goal is to enhance executives' leadership abilities and skills, HRM professionals will typically obtain and then feed back both self-ratings of leadership as well as leadership ratings from "significant others," including direct reports, co-workers, and superiors. The same framework, but with a different rating instrument, can be used in a specific function—for example, to help a salesperson increase his or her selling skills. In this case, the other raters might include sales managers as well as customers or clients.

Upward and 360-degree feedback processes usually involve the following steps.

First, human resource professionals identify a number of observable managerial and leadership behaviors the organization believes are important for its success. Second, other individuals in the company rate the manager/leader on some type of scale that reflects the traits identified as important, usually via anonymous survey. Third, the manager/leader receives some type of feedback report based on the survey responses. Often scores are averaged across rater groups, thus protecting rater anonymity.

Numerous variations exist regarding length and type of survey, how anonymity is assured, whether leaders provide self-reports or self-ratings, how reports are prepared, how feedback is provided, how subsequent managerial training and follow-up are managed, and so forth. However, the primary goal in all cases is generally the same—that is, to improve leadership or management skills.

The rationale that supports this goal rests with the notion of self-perception. Research suggests that feedback increases the accuracy of self-perceptions and informs the leader or manager about the need for behavior change. Those who never receive feedback will tend to retain inaccurate self-perceptions and remain ignorant regarding perceptions from others.

A long history of research, dating from the 1920s, has demonstrated the problematic nature of self-evaluations. This research documents that self-ratings (be they of behaviors, personality, or skills) suffer from inflation, unreliability, and bias. In general, self-ratings are inaccurate when compared with ratings pro-
vided by others or with objective measures (e.g., production counts, sales numbers, product rejection rates, and the like). In other words, we are not very good at evaluating ourselves or seeing ourselves as others see us. Generally, though not always, our self-perceptions reflect a positive bias!

This bias may be psychologically healthy if, for example, it results in fewer negative thoughts and in higher expectancies of success in new endeavors. Although a modest self-enhancement bias may be characteristic of healthy adjustment, modesty may not always rule. Moreover, if the positive bias causes someone to ignore or discount criticism or failure, it may negatively impact performance. The individual will see no need to make improvements.

At what point is this self-deception so severe that it becomes egotistical and arrogant? Few would argue that arrogance is a characteristic of a healthy adjustment or conducive to the positive interpersonal relationships required for successful performance in most jobs. Indeed, a number of recent studies suggest that individuals who provide inflated self-ratings relative to the ratings of others are poorer performers and less effective than individuals whose self-ratings are in greater agreement with others’ ratings.

UNDERSTANDING AND USING FEEDBACK DATA

While the methods of upward and 360-degree feedback are not necessarily new, they are not well understood. There is much that remains
to be learned about how the processes work. For example, we know little about the factors that influence or determine ratings of oneself or others. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to determine what constitutes agreement or disagreement in self-other rating data, nor do we fully understand the implications of disagreement for individuals and organizations in terms of relevant HRM outcomes. Finally, we need a clearer view of how HRM professionals can use this self-other information in training and development programs.

Our purpose here is to address these issues by describing a model (see Exhibit 2) of the self-other rating process and discussing its implications for individual and organizational HRM outcomes. Exhibits 3 and 4 expand this model by looking, respectively, at two components: (1) influences on self-ratings and other ratings and (2) the HRM outcomes expected to result from various self-other rating types.

SELF-OTHER RATING MODEL
As Exhibit 2 shows, we believe that the relative agreement or disagreement between self-ratings and other ratings is the core issue for determining the implications for HRM. Self-ratings and other ratings can be about literally anything that is relevant to HRM, such as personality characteristics, individual KSAs (knowledge, skills, and abilities), training needs assessments, job analysis ratings, performance appraisals, or leadership behaviors. The model uses self-ratings as a generic term that includes self-assessments, self-appraisals, and self-reports. Other ratings can be from any or all of the individuals in the relevant 360-degree range, as cited earlier.

Influences on Ratings
It seems reasonable to ask what influences or determines the ratings of oneself and others. Clearly, an individual’s self-perception is, or at least should be, linked to self-rating. Likewise, it would be logical to assume that another person’s perception of the individual being rated should determine the rater’s response. Although these points may seem obvious, there appear to be several key precur-
sors to the formation of these perceptions. As Exhibit 3 shows, we suggest five categories of influence.

- **Biodata.** Various biographical characteristics such as age, sex, education level, tenure in the job or with the organization, organizational position, and membership in a minority group can influence self-perceptions and perceptions of others. For example, females tend to have more accurate self-perceptions than males. Also, an individual’s perceptions of minority group members may be affected by stereotyping, attributions, higher visibility of minority members, and exaggeration of differences between members of minority and majority groups.

- **Individual Characteristics.** Included here are elements such as intelligence, achievement status, analytic ability, cognitive complexity, memory, locus of control, and interpersonal orientation. Generally, we would expect those with higher levels of intelligence, greater cognitive complexity, and better memories to store and process more information, and to do so with greater accuracy; this in turn would yield more accurate ratings of oneself and others. Likewise, levels of self-esteem, self-awareness, self-consciousness, and the ability to self-monitor one’s behavior influence ratings.

  Also, the raters’ general mental states (e.g., depression, elation), the extent to which they believe things are controlled by themselves or by outside factors, and their tendency to be internally or externally oriented all have an influence. For example, those with an internal focus are more likely than those with an external focus to be interested in and responsive to feedback about themselves and are thus more likely to provide accurate self-ratings.

- **Job-Relevant Experiences.** Past successes or failures on the job as well as prior feedback (directly or indirectly) can influence an individual’s ratings of self and others. Theoretically, more feedback should lead to more accurate ratings, but frequency of feedback is itself related to the type of work an individual does. To use an extreme example, a stand-up comedian receives much more direct and frequent feedback on job performance than does a librarian. Clearly, an individual’s job experiences can affect self-perception and, in turn, self-rating.

- **Cognitive Processes.** How people gather, process, store, retrieve, and use information, as well as their personal schemas, beliefs, expectations, and attitudes, can influence their ratings. For example, persons who are defined as “sensing types” on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) tend to be data-based in their judgments of self and others, whereas “intuitives” rely much less on data. To ignore these cognitive factors would prevent a full understanding of self-ratings and other ratings.

- **Context/Situation.** Beyond the raters themselves, many factors in the job context or organizational situation can influence ratings. These factors include job pressures, political processes, prior rating experiences, familiarity with (and similarity to) the individual being rated, and the availability and specificity of information on which to base the ratings.

  In summary, there are a number of situational or contextual factors that influence the ways individuals rate themselves and others, and these factors may result in differences between self-perceptions and self-ratings as well as between self-ratings and other ratings.

### Self-Other Agreement

Knowing what influences ratings can tell us something about their accuracy. But a more complete way to determine their accuracy comes from examining the extent to which ratings from different sources are in agreement. In particular, for us, **accurate** ratings are self-ratings and other ratings that are in agreement, as determined by a direct comparison of the two. This does not mean that, in cases of disagreement, self-ratings are always “false” and other ratings are always “true”; nor is the opposite statement appropriate. Rather, self-ratings and other ratings provide **different** perspectives on the **same** phenomena. The overlap or degree of consensus...
or agreement among the ratings is valuable information in itself.

**SELF-OTHER RATING TYPES**

A comparison of self-ratings and other ratings yields four different self-other agreement categories, as shown in Exhibit 4. Each category, we believe, has different consequences for individual and organizational HRM outcomes. Specifically, these agreement categories are as follows.

- **Over-Estimators.** Persons in this category produce self-ratings that are significantly higher than other ratings on the dimensions of interest. ("Significantly" is used here to mean more than one-half of a standard deviation above the average self-other difference.) Self-ratings are often inflated due an individual's ignorance of how he or she is seen by others, aided by raters' tendencies to withhold negative feedback during daily business. It is well documented that most individuals do not enjoy giving negative feedback and thus avoid it. As a consequence, most of us receive less negative feedback than is realistic, and the little that we do receive is often sugar-coated. This shortcoming contributes to a tendency for individuals to see themselves in an unrealistically positive light.

  Inaccurate self-perception also can result because individuals tend to discount or rationalize negative feedback, while generally accepting positive feedback as more accurate and informational. This tendency may occur because positive information is more consistent with our self-perception. As such, in the case of the over-estimator, there is considerable evidence that HRM outcomes, for both the focal individual and the organization, will be very negative.

- **In-Agreement/Good.** In the in-agreement/good category, self-ratings and other ratings are both favorable and in agreement (i.e., self-ratings are high and "similar to" ratings from others, in the sense that the differences are not statistically significant.) Self-raters in this category are the "ideal employees," "good managers," and "effective leaders" we encounter all too rarely in organizations. In this case, the evidence is that individual and organizational HRM outcomes will be very positive.

- **In-Agreement/Poor.** In the in-agreement/poor category, self-ratings are low and similar to other ratings, which also are low. ("Similar to" is used here as above.) In other words, this self-rater recognizes personal weaknesses or acknowledges being perceived negatively by others. While the self-perception may be accurate, the behaviors and performance are not necessarily those labeled "ideal or desirable." In this case, there is evidence that HRM outcomes, for both the focal individual and the organization, will be negative, but perhaps not as negative as in the case of the over-estimator.
Under-Estimators. In this case, self-ratings are significantly lower than other ratings on the dimensions of interest. ("Significantly" here means more than one-half of a standard deviation below the average self-other difference.) In other words, the self-rater either does not recognize his or her strengths or is being overly modest.

The good news is that with continued positive feedback from others, there is the potential for improvement. In this case, the evidence suggests that the individual and organizational HRM outcomes will be mixed; some being positive, others negative.

HRM OUTCOMES

In general, accurate self-raters (those whose ratings are in agreement with other ratings) are of two types. First, there are the "good performers" who see themselves favorably and are evaluated favorably by others. Organizations never seem to have enough of this type of employee, manager, or leader. Second, there are the "poor performers" who see themselves unfavorably and who are evaluated unfavorably by others. Interestingly, research has demonstrated that these self-raters show little improvement when provided with negative feedback from others. Rather, the self-rater seems to have acknowledged that he/she is not performing well, but has little motivation to change.

Likewise, inaccurate self-raters are of two types. First, there are the over-estimators, individuals who "think" they are good performers but whom others see as performing less favorably. To use a popular line from a movie, they are "legends in their own minds." Second, we find the under-estimators, individuals who "think" they are poor or average performers, but whom others see as performing more favorably. Organizations can benefit from developing these high-potential (albeit modest) employees, managers, and leaders.

In terms of specific HRM outcomes, the research evidence suggests that each of these four self-other rating types demonstrate certain tendencies.

Over-Estimators tend to:
- misdiagnose their strengths and weaknesses;
- make less effective job-relevant decisions;
- have negative attitudes, including hostility and resentment;
- suffer from career derailment;
- not see the need for training and development;
- have high absenteeism, low commitment, high turnover, and frequent conflicts with supervisors and co-workers; and
- improve their performance and lower their self-evaluations when feedback from others is provided.

Under-Estimators tend to:
- be somewhat successful and effective;
- misdiagnose their strengths and weaknesses;
- make ineffective job-relevant decisions;
- set low aspiration levels and underachieve;
- have emotional highs and lows;
- display low self-worth, yet are pleasant to be around;
- not pursue leadership positions or realize their full potential; and
- maintain their performance and raise their self-evaluations when feedback from others is provided.

In-Agreement/Good individuals tend to:
- be successful and the best performers;
- make effective job-relevant decisions;
- develop favorable efficacy expectations and commensurate achievement;
- have the most promotability;
- have very positive job attitudes;
- be more successful and effective leaders;
- have low absenteeism, high commitment, low turnover, and few conflicts with others; and
- use feedback from others constructively to alter their behavior as needed.

Individuals in the In-Agreement/Poor category tend to:
- be unsuccessful, poor performers;
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- make ineffective job-relevant decisions;
- have low KSAs (knowledge, skills, and abilities), negative attitudes, or both;
- have low self-worth and self-esteem;
- demonstrate either high or low motivation to improve, depending on the cause of poor performance (e.g., ability vs. attitude);
- have high absenteeism, low commitment, and high turnover; and
- accurately diagnose weaknesses, but take few actions to improve their performance.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

These different self-other rating types and their differential individual and organizational HRM outcomes suggest several implications for training and development. First, most if not all of the elements and issues discussed here can be at least partially addressed by training and education programs. Consequently, a comprehensive, organization-wide training-needs assessment and evaluation effort is critical. All individuals, regardless of job position, should be monitored, evaluated, and assessed, from a variety of sources, on various job-relevant dimensions. Human Resources staff can use the results of these efforts to determine the nature of training and development programs for each individual.

Second, the use of feedback in training and development programs to enhance self-perception accuracy and self-other agreement is likewise critical. Individuals need information about their knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as about their individual characteristics, performance, and leadership, and they need this information from several sources. They need to understand how this information is similar to or different from their own perceptions of themselves. More importantly, they need constructive feedback to help them change or maintain appropriate on-the-job behaviors and attitudes. Essentially, constructive feedback, as part of a training...
program, tends to bring subsequent self-ratings in line with the ratings they receive from others.

Third, high self-other rating agreement should be a goal of all training programs that use feedback as a developmental tool. The reduction of self-other rating discrepancies and the enhancement of other ratings and commensurate self-ratings will pull more individuals into the “in-agreement/good” category—people who tend to be the best performers, managers, and leaders. It seems critical for organizational success and effectiveness to develop as many of these “ideal employees” as resources permit.

Fourth, over time, in both training programs and tracking of employee career paths, a declining self-other rating discrepancy can be used as an indicator of improved self-perception accuracy. Seeing ourselves as others see us provides an opportunity for an accurate self-assessment and substantial self-development. Through such a process, a reasonable though difficult goal is to develop an organization of “in-agreement/goods.” In this way, individual and organizational HRM outcomes will tend toward the very positive, and organizational resources will be well spent with a resulting high benefit/cost ratio.

Fifth, using upward or 360-degree feedback with the intention of changing self-ratings and behaviors (e.g., performance) must be approached cautiously. Researchers and HRM professionals who have used upward and 360-degree feedback emphasize the importance of rater training. Simply cautioning people about common rating errors (leniency bias, central tendency bias, and so forth) can be very helpful. The training should also address people’s insecurities about the rating process, its purpose and goals, and how anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained.

Sixth, individuals receiving feedback that is more negative than expected (i.e., over-estimators) may need some special attention. These managers may suffer from reduced self-esteem, temporary depression, or feelings of inadequacy. In some cases, one-to-one discussions with a counselor or facilitator will ease...
some of these ill feelings. Also, over-estimators may benefit by receiving feedback as part of a group, rather than individually. They may find comfort in seeing that others (perhaps many others) have received ratings that are more negative than they expected.

CONCLUSION

We hope the model and discussion presented here will prove helpful to practitioners in dealing with the implications of self-other rating agreement. Using this approach as a heuristic or diagnostic device, HRM and other professionals should be better able to understand individuals and design training and education programs that help employees become more effective and successful organizational members.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


For comments on a variety of self-other rating instruments, along with evaluations of their strengths and weaknesses, see Ellen Van Velsor and Jean B. Leslie, *Feedback to Managers* (Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, 1991). This work is published in two volumes: Volume 1 is subtitled *A Guide to Evaluating Multi-Rater Feedback Instruments*, Volume 2 subtitled *A Review and Comparison of Sixteen Multi-Rater Feedback Instruments*.


Statistical and analytic details for computing the four rater agreement categories of over-estimators, under-estimators, in-agreement/goods, and in-agreement/poors can be found in Leanne E. Atwater and Francis J. Yammarino, "Does Self-Other Agreement on Leadership Perceptions Moderate the Validity of Leadership and Performance Predictions?", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 45, 1992.