Getting 360-Degree Feedback Right
Maury A. Peiperl

Over the past decade, 360-degree feedback has revolutionized performance management. But one of its components—peer appraisal—consistently stymies executives and can exacerbate bureaucracy, heighten political tensions, and consume lots of time.

For ten years, Maury Peiperl has studied 360-degree feedback and has asked: under what circumstances does peer appraisal improve performance? Why does peer appraisal sometimes work well and sometimes fail? And how can executives make these programs less anxiety provoking for participants and more productive for organizations? Peiperl discusses four paradoxes inherent to peer appraisal:

• In the Paradox of Roles, colleagues juggle being both peer and judge.
• The Paradox of Group Performance navigates between assessing individual feedback and the reality that much of today’s work is done by groups.
• The Measurement Paradox arises because simple, straightforward rating systems would seem to generate the most useful appraisals—but they don’t. Customized, qualitative feedback, though more difficult and time consuming to generate, is more helpful in improving performance.
• During evaluations, most people focus almost exclusively on reward outcomes and ignore the constructive feedback generated by peer appraisal. Ironically, it is precisely this overlooked feedback that helps improve performance—thus, the Paradox of Rewards.

These paradoxes do not have neat solutions, but managers who understand them can better use peer appraisal to improve their organizations.

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