



Special UW ARC 360 Articles *from the Fall 2009 Leading Edge*

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This fall, POD is launching UW ARC 360 for mid-level managers. This feedback and development program includes an online assessment of 12 leadership competencies, a report with results, and 1.5 hours of follow-up coaching.

This special issue of The Leading Edge features articles about UW ARC 360 and using 360-degree feedback as a leadership tool, as well as testimonials from UW leaders and employees who have participated in 360-degree assessments. UW ARC 360 is being offered through POD's University Consulting Alliance; contact alliance@uw.edu for more information.

The Power of Perception

By Elizabeth Warrick, Ed.D., POD Executive Director

In the sitcom “The Office,” Michael Scott is the well-intentioned but completely self-unaware boss. He continually stumbles over his words, his actions, and his approach to leadership, and his staff bears the brunt of his stunning lack of self-awareness. Until Michael learns to see himself as others see him (often, as a buffoon), his staff will, at best, half-heartedly follow him.

Life isn’t a sitcom, but there are a great number of leaders who don’t know themselves and the impact they have on others, nor do they understand how they are perceived by those around them. “There is a saying, ‘perception is reality,’ and a good leader takes on the role of being someone others will follow, in part, through perception” (McKew).

If you don’t know what’s wrong, you can’t fix it, and if you don’t know what’s right, you can’t ensure that it continues.

Perceptions vary from person to person. Different people perceive different things about the same situation. But more than that, we assign different meanings to what we perceive. And the meanings might change for a certain person. One might change one’s perspective or simply make things mean something else. (Funch)

Whether or not you know how others perceive you, they will continue to find evidence that supports their perceptions. Once you’re perceived as a poor collaborator, for instance, those that perceive you that way will look for examples that prove their perception is right. Few leaders receive substantial and candid feedback from their direct reports, and the result is a never-ending cycle of making the same mistakes and digging the perception hole deeper.

Research has shown that when there is agreement or congruence between how leaders perceive themselves and how their direct reports perceive them, leaders are stronger, more successful, and have better relationships with others. But you’ll never find out if there is congruence—or a lack thereof—if you don’t ask. Participating in a 360-degree feedback process is one way of discovering this, as leaders see how their ratings of themselves compare with others’ ratings.

Of course, you still have to perform and deliver, but perception has its place in the quest to lead. Being good at what you do frequently takes luck, but no one seems to notice the luck that took place when outlining your business plan, project goals, or job performance ahead of time. People simply perceive you always know what you are doing, and that is why you are the leader. (McKew)

Think of a leader who may be very smart, well intentioned, and hard working—yet doesn't have the loyalty and partnership of staff members because of, for example, how he or she communicates. In such cases, no amount of hard work or good intentions will lead to success; instead, as leaders we must understand any disparities between how others see us and how we see ourselves. With the feedback garnered through a 360-degree assessment, we can start to make changes and get past the barriers that hold us and our teams back.

SOURCES

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Roundtable Interview: Developing UW ARC 360

Following are excerpts from an interview with POD Executive Director Beth Warrick and POD trainers/ organization development consultants Ujima Donalson, Renée Hanson, and Amy Hawkins.

Q. HOW DID THE PROCESS TO START UW ARC 360 BEGIN?

BETH

From my perspective, there's always been an expressed interest in 360-degree feedback at the UW, and in that vein, POD offers Extraordinary Leader for executive-level leaders. Also, I believe that an outgrowth of LCVI was a renewed interest in common leadership competencies across the University. For instance, Provost Wise brought in Brian McDonald from MOR Associates to do some leadership work with her executive group; in participating in a 360 that Brian developed, they prioritized the leadership competencies they thought were most important for the University. Later, Brian, Ruth Johnston [Associate Vice President, Finance and Facilities], Cheryl Hawley [formerly of Finance and Facilities], and I met to talk about how we could use those competencies to build consistent, University-wide competencies. We then met with Mindy Kornberg [Vice President, Human Resources], V'ella Warren [Senior Vice President], and the Provost, and they liked our ideas—but then the budget crisis happened and many things went on the back burner. At POD, we were still hearing an interest in 360s, so earlier this year we moved forward with the project.

Q: WHY DEVELOP A 360 FOR THE UW RATHER THAN USING SOMETHING OFF THE SHELF?

RENEE

People at the UW have been using 360s, but the value of one connected with the competencies that the Provost's group developed is that it connects with the values of the University and has the potential to connect across the entire University.

BETH

We used research and information from other 360-degree feedback tools to help us frame what we thought really addressed the needs and critical behaviors for leaders at UW. I think the wording, the way items are framed, and the priority we put on certain aspects of leaders' behavior is very much aligned with what we see and hear and teach here at the UW.

Q: WHY DEVELOP A 360 FOR MID-LEVEL MANAGERS? WHY IS THIS PARTICULAR GROUP IN NEED?

RENEE

Mid-level managers have a particularly difficult job because they have to integrate upward and downward and across with their peers, so we thought that getting them feedback would be a great place to start.

Q: UW ARC 360 FOR MID-LEVEL MANAGERS INCLUDES 12 LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES AND MORE THAN 50 ITEMS FOR RATING. HOW WAS THIS CONTENT DEVELOPED?

BETH

When I was working with Brian, Ruth, and Cheryl, we did a survey of competencies being used in different areas of the University, we looked at a number of 360-degree feedback tools and what they measured, and then we compared our findings with the competencies Brian and the Provost's group had identified. From there, we began prioritizing and selecting the items that we wanted to craft the 360 around. With the Provost's group, the perspective was much more strategic, so we needed to ensure that the tactical—like managing employee performance—was also being addressed.

AMY

Then, earlier this year, several POD team members began meeting to dig down into the different competencies that Beth and others had worked on. Having all of us meet and discuss this over several months was helpful because we could each key into things we knew from our own experience—through SLP, our training courses, our consulting and OD work—and bring different perspectives to the table.

Q: WHAT DID YOU EACH CONTRIBUTE TO DEVELOPING THE 360?

AMY

In looking at the competencies, we brought what we hear from our clients and what we hear in the classroom—what are some of the trends, what seems to be lacking. I also brought my HR experience, from having worked as an HR consultant over a long period of time at the UW.

UJIMA

Much of what I brought came from my ears to the ground, if you will, through classes and meeting one-on-one with individuals, not only managers but also employees.

RENEE

I think I brought my experience working as an OD consultant and doing Extraordinary Leader and related coaching here at the UW, as well as being a coach in a cohort group for the IT leadership program at UW that participated in a 360 with Brian McDonald. For any of the competencies, there are many specific items we could have included, but there are certain things that make it or break it at the UW—for character, for building trust, for performance management, and so on.

BETH

I also looked at it like, “What would I want to know as a manager? What did I wish I’d known? And what are the lessons I’ve learned in 20-plus years of being a manager/supervisor?” My experience is not unique—we find that all the time in SLP. People think they’re the only person dealing with a situation when in fact there’s a lot of commonality across the University, things that all supervisors and mid-level managers struggle with.

Q: WHAT OTHER PLANS DO YOU HAVE FOR THE UW ARC 360 PROGRAM?

RENEE

Now that we have found a vendor to administer the online assessment and have gone through the process of developing the competencies and items for mid-level managers, we will be able to apply that to expanding UW ARC 360 to include other groups like front-line supervisors and individual contributors.

Q: HOW DID YOU HELP PEOPLE GET OVER THEIR FEAR OF PARTICIPATING IN A 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK PROCESS?

BETH

Acknowledging fear is a big step. For many people, the idea is scarier than the process itself turns out to be—as an example, people being rated typically rate themselves lower than the people rating them. The one-on-one coaching that is part of the UW ARC 360 program ensures that the feedback is kept in perspective and helps participants reflect on the positive steps they can take to become a more effective and thoughtful leader.

UJIMA

In regard to receiving that feedback, I really look at it as an opportunity for information to surface for leaders. Be that positive information or opportunities for growth or improvement, it is information that can be used going forward.

RENEE

It's a gift, getting a sense of what people's perceptions are. It's not the truth of who you are; it's people's perceptions of your performance, and if you don't know what that perception is, you can't manage it, you can't change anything.

BETH

In some ways it's an expression of people's needs and to what degree you're meeting their needs. Once you understand how you may not be meeting people's expectations or how your perceptions differ from others', you can take steps to further your development as a leader. That's really what this process is about.

Ask an Expert

By Renée Hanson, Training & Organization Development Specialist

Q: WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF 360 DEGREE-FEEDBACK FOR ME AS A LEADER, AND WHAT DOES COACHING ADD TO THE PROCESS?

In a 360-degree feedback process, you rate yourself on a set of competencies and are rated by others of your choosing—such as your manager, colleagues, and direct reports—on those same competencies. This gives you an opportunity to see yourself as others see you.

We generally see ourselves through the lens of our own internal perspective and a narrow band of outside feedback, perhaps from those we work with most closely or trust most. This leaves large areas of our work life where we may not be getting feedback—from colleagues, partners in other organizations, internal and external customers, direct reports—but we must be effective in all of those areas to be successful leaders.

Coaching is an essential part of any 360-degree process because your coach can objectively view the information collected through the process and can help you move past emotional reactions and put the feedback in context of your role, goals, and aspirations. When receiving feedback, it's natural to focus on weaknesses and ignore strengths, but your coach can help you stay grounded in the strengths that are the foundation of your success. Your coach can also help you analyze the data to see if there are significant weaknesses that, if not addressed, could limit future success. And they can help you pull out the “low hanging fruit”—small changes that would take little effort and could make a big difference.

Another important part of the 360-degree feedback process is partnering with your manager to set goals and develop actions plans. Your coach will help you clarify goals and put them in the context of your career aspirations so that you have a starting point for conversations with your manager.

It's important to remember that information collected through a 360-degree feedback process is not a direct or complete reflection of who you are; rather, it's perspectives of others from a variety of viewpoints. Once you know how others see your leadership performance, you can build on your strengths to increase your influence and change the things that may be standing in your way.

Testimonials

I found the 360-degree feedback of tremendous value for my growth and development, especially during a time when my department was undergoing significant growth and change. For me, the tool was very helpful in targeting areas that I could work on that would provide the most impact to the organization. In addition, I liked the tool because it provided a method to establish a baseline and track the results of the intended changes I had made. – *Administrative Director, UW*

I asked each member of my management team to participate in a 360-degree assessment, and everyone had positive things to say about the process. For several of my team members, the opportunity to obtain feedback from staff, peers, customers, and managers in a consistent and measureable way proved to be one of the most valuable experiences of their entire career. – *Associate Vice President, UW*

Receiving input from peers and colleagues, direct reports, and managers has provided a variety of perspectives in specific areas of attention. One item offered me the opportunity to make an immediate change to a communication style. This small adjustment in style has had a large payback in results. – *Senior Manager and 360-degree participant, UW*

I found the 360 very valuable – even without the feedback from others, doing the survey myself highlighted areas where I wanted to make improvements. I most appreciated the coaching session, which helped me identify specific actions for making those improvements. – *Manager, UW*

The 360-degree evaluation was an unexpected catalyst for requesting a different job assignment. The greatest value of the 360 came when I met with a coach for the follow-up discussion. We explored my ideas and talked through my fears related to asking for change. She encouraged me to talk to my manager about reassignment to work that would revitalize my passion and drive to contribute to UW. That gave me the courage to do so at my annual performance evaluation. We are now creating a transition plan! – *Senior Manager, UW*

The 360 feedback tool allowed me to gather input in an objective and data oriented way, and it gave me a broader view than my manager alone can provide. It built my confidence to learn what a diverse set of my colleagues think about my individual strengths, weaknesses, and potential opportunities, and the cool charts and graphs gave me a powerful tool for looking at my performance to date and helped me take action right away. – *IT Professional, UW*