How Kuwaiti managers can accept the multisource feedback for development purpose in the Organization?

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Abstract
As performance appraisal method known as multisource feedback (MSF) or 360° feedback was popular in Western organizations for decades, it is questionable if the practice will offer similar benefits at international level. In this article, the literature on multisource feedback and comparative culture is reviewed. Based on best practices suggested from literature, a research was conducted at the two large-size organizations in Kuwait. This research found that managers can accept the multisource feedback for development purpose. Discussion shows as a member of Middle East countries, Kuwait has very different cultural characteristics from the U.S. As a result, it can be expected that Kuwaiti work-related values that effect performance appraisal practice will be very different as well.

INTRODUCTION
In strategic human resource management, one of the essential tasks is to align employees with common vision and values to achieve company strategies and objectives (Williams, 1996; Mabey, Salaman & Storey, 1998; Kramar, 1998; Stone, 1998). In doing so, human resource management uses performance management processes to manage employee performance, such as staffing, training and reward (Williams, 1996; Marshall, 2000; Kramar, 1998).

Multi-source feedback or 360° feedback is an extension of traditional performance appraisal by collecting information from employee, subordinates, peers, supervisors and customers (Tornow, 1993; London & Smither, 1995; Hezlett et al., 1998; Edwards & Ewen, 1996; Atwater et al., 1998; Wood, 2000). Multi-source feedback is often used as developmental tool and recently, it has been introduced as evaluative tool to complement performance management system (Edwards & Ewen, 1996; London, Smither & Adsit, 1997). In the past decade, researches have indicated that the use of multi-source feedback has grown in popularity in the United States with more than 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies use some forms of multi-source feedback system (Edward & Ewen, 1996; Nankervis, Compton & Baird, 2002). At company level, multi-source feedback has proved to be useful in terms of aligning individual behaviour and performance with corporate values, such as reinforcing team behaviours (Edward & Ewen, 1996), implementing strategic initiatives and implementation of Total Quality Management (Edward & Ewen, 1996; Nankervis, Compton & Baird, 2002). At worker point, multi-source feedback is well-accepted by fostering employee involvement (London & Beatty, 1993), providing fair and accurate performance feedback and leads to self-development (Hazucha, Hezlett & Schneider, 1993).

Given the popularity of the system in the U.S. and Europe, scholars have raised fears on the transferability of multi-source feedback to additional culture, especially in Eastern cultures (Entrekin & Chung, 2001; Hofstede, 2001). Although Kuwaiti managers were modernized by Western management style education, the culture of Kuwaiti managers is strongly influenced in many respects by traditional Islamic customs and believes. Kuwaiti cultures and Americans have been seen to differ in terms of cultural characteristics.

With admiration to the transferability of organization practices internationally, Laurent (1986) and Schneider (1988) contend that human resource management practices seem to be the most vulnerable to cultural relativity. In this context, Hofstede (2001) has cautioned that performance appraisal should be appropriately adjusted to culture with specific characteristics. Researches by Bernardin & Beatty (1984) and Bernardin et al. (1993) have indicated that attitudes towards the appraisal system and its sources may have a profound effect on the ultimate effectiveness of that system. Following these recommendations,

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the purpose of the present study is to examine the perceptions of Kuwaiti managers to multi-source feedback for managerial development.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this study is to understand the most up-to-date practice of multi-source feedback available. As there is no prior research conducted in Kuwait, the study aims to examine the perceptions of Kuwaiti managers on the usage of multi-source feedback as self-developmental tool on the following:

- perceived usefulness to the employees;
- perceptions on fairness, accuracy, and credibility; and
- perceptions on multi-source feedback as a development tool

**Research questions**

The key questions to be examined in this study of multi-source feedback will include the investigation of the following:

- Overall perceptions
- What is the perceived usefulness to the employees?
- Is the feedback fair, accurate and credible?
- Do the employees believe in the feedback?
- Which raters are more credible to employee, self or other-raters?
- What is the perception of the feedback from supervisor? Subordinates? Peers?

**Self-Development**

- What is the impact on self-development?
- Does the feedback motivate self-development?

**Performance appraisal**

- What benefits flow from the program?
- Do employees willing to include multi-source feedback in performance appraisal system to determine pay and promotion?

**Significance of Research**

With the popularity of multi-source feedback in the US, the practice on the use of multi-source feedback system in Middle East is not common. The research on multi-source feedback in Kuwait is non-existent. This study attempts to conduct an actual usage of the system and investigate users’ evaluation of multi-source feedback for further development. This research aims to investigate the perceptions of multi-source feedback in the large-size manufacturing and marketing firm in Kuwait. The findings will be useful for improvement on the practice of multi-source feedback in Kuwait.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

From a theoretical viewpoint, multi-source feedback gives an increased in reliability (reduction in measurement error) and validity (greater coverage of the individual performance domain) vis-a-vis traditional supervisor-subordinate appraisal (Edwards & Ewen, 1996; Brutus & Derayeh, 2002). Multi-source feedback is based on two major assumptions. Initially, individuals will increase self-awareness from considerate different perceptions from their constituents. Consequently, they may develop a more accurate sense of goal accomplishment and self-competence. Secondly, individuals will be provided with feedback on strengths and weaknesses for skill development and performance improvement (Tornow, 1993; London & Smither, 1995; Church & Bracken, 1997; Brutus & Derayeh, 2002). Drawing upon researches by London & Beatty (1993), Edwards & Ewen (1996), and Bracken et al. (2001), multi-source feedback is beneficial at the organization level in many ways. First of all, companies use multi-source advice to introduce organizational culture change, to enhance two-way communication and to encourage positive attitude toward learning; for example, to foster working culture on participative leadership, empowerment, customer service, quality focus, re-engineering, competency-based rewards and team-based rewards (Edwards & Ewen, 1996; Peiperl, 2001; Nankervis, Compton, et al., 2002). Secondly, multi-source feedback is used as a tool to help sustaining focused behavioral change in majority of employees that leads to the organizational effectiveness. Thirdly, it is used to align employee
performance expectations with corporate values. In this aspect, it can call attention to the important performance dimensions neglected by organization. Fourthly, companies use multi-source feedback to increase employee competencies on changing needs at work, i.e. an increased span of control, more knowledgeable workers, practices of project management and teamwork. In the fifth way, multi-source feedback is used to improve employee relations on different aspects, for instance, career development, fair reward decisions, accurate performance measures, valid performance measures, non-performance, diversity management, and legal protection. In the sixth way, it assists organization to increase legal defensibility in relations to employee appraisal (London & Beatty, 1993; Edwards & Ewen, 1996; Bracken et al., 2001).

At employee level, a survey report on the use of multi-source feedback indicated that 92% of users find the report useful for self-development (London, Wohlers, et al., 1990). Antonioni (1996) and Edwards & Ewen (1996) have reported further benefits to serve individual needs. Firstly, multi-source feedback is perceived by employees as being fair, accurate, credible and motivating (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988; London Wohlers, et al., 1990; London & Beatty, 1993). Secondly, multi-source feedback is applicable to all professions. Thirdly, it creates employee accountability and service to all stakeholders. Finally, multi-source feedback is an effective system to encourage employees’ participation (Antonioni, 1996; Edwards & Ewen, 1996; Brutus & Derayeh, 2002).

One of the most important pieces of research on the contributions of multi-source feedback was conducted by Hazecha, Hezlett & Schneider (1993). They have found that participants’ skills would increase after receiving multi-source feedbacks which identify their strengths and weaknesses for development. In addition, an raise in self-awareness from multiple perspectives causes individuals to improve themselves from program accomplishment. In another study, London & Smither (1995) have found that multi-source feedback improves individual goals, skill development, behavior and performance through self-image re-evaluation moderated by schemas, task self-efficacy, and impression management.

Other academics and practitioners have reported the value of multi-source feedback in different aspect. Previous researches reported that receivers of the reports found multi-source feedback motivating individuals to address development needs. Mabey (2001) has found that multi-source feedback provides significant benefits to be used with training and developing individuals. Nilsen & Campbell (1993) have indicated that it encourages employees’ participation and improves overall appraisal satisfaction, and at the same time, provides self-assessment ratings as reliable measures of behaviors.

Studies have indicated that multi-source feedback has improved reliability and validity of performance appraisal, such as reduction of halo, central tendency and leniency errors (London & Beatty, 1993; Edwards & Ewen, 1996; Arvey & Murphy, 1998). More importantly, the use of average ratings by subordinates has shown to have acceptable predictive validity of future performances (McEvoy & Beatty, 1989). In terms of reliability, Pollack & Pollack (1996) have found that rating reliability of others and peers are found to be valid predictors of performances.

Changes in organizational structures, processes and cultures and the limitations of traditional top-down evaluation have combined to create the conditions where other sources of presentation feedback have become not only more acceptable but more necessary. First in the America, then in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, upward feedback, peer feedback and ultimately 360 degree systems have been widely adopted. Even those organizations who have not yet introduced 360 degree feedback say in many cases that they anticipate doing so in the near future (Geake, 2009). Multi-source feedback lends itself to research; it has previously been quite unusual to have the opportunity to collect multiple perspectives on performance in a systematic way. Not surprisingly, literature on this topic is developing. This is just as well, because the speed with which 360 degree feedback has been taken up means that unless research on it moves forward rapidly, it will be left trailing in the wake of practice, and condemned to a limited role of producing conclusions on feedback systems that have already been super ceded as organizations continue to innovate in this area.

One main change that is already evident relates to the purpose of multi-source feedback. Firstly, it tended to be used purely for development purposes, and often on a one-off basis, but increasingly, it is becoming part of the formal, annual appraisal process: Geake et al. (2009) in their survey found that nearly half the
organizations responding used it in this context. This is likely to be a significant shift and one deserving of the attention of researchers. Pollack and Pollack (2005) found that managers valued upward feedback for developmental purposes but did not see it as suitable for pay and promotion decisions; Bettenhausen (2010) similarly found a more positive response for the developmental use of peer and upward feedback. Pollack and Pollack (2009) also concluded from their review of previous research that peer ratings when used for appraisal rather than development were more lenient, less reliable and less valid. Others (Fletcher, 2007) have reported that organizations introducing 360 degree feedback for appraisal purposes have in many cases dropped it within 2 years. It seems likely that there are different conditions associated with the use of this kind of feedback in a developmental context compared to the more evaluative appraisal context, and if these are not addressed, the feedback system will encounter problems. The notion that, because 360 degree feedback involves more sources of evaluation than conventional appraisal, it is one way or another more objective and accurate is difficult to support. It is certainly fairer in that it represents more than one viewpoint on an individual's performance, and it does provide a more rounded picture. But the different rater groups tend to make somewhat different assessments from their own subjective standpoints, and the psychometric qualities of 360 degree ratings may be no better than those typically found in top-down appraisal.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
A research study was conducted in two large-size manufacturing and marketing company. The company manufactures and markets the leading soft drinks brand in Kuwait with more than 2,000 employees. Due to recent financial crisis, the UAE parent company has taken over and has obtained managerial control. At present, the company is majority owned by the UAE principal company and key positions are held by Asian expatriates, such as President, the Vice Presidents of Production and Finance. Though, significant positions on Commercial Division, Corporate Administration and Corporate Planning are under Kuwaiti management with the reason that these positions require local expertise.

In terms of human resource management, the department is operated under Corporate Administration, which is headed by the Kuwaiti manager. The company has recently introduced Management by Objectives (MBO) as a part of the performance management system. In order to obtain long-term business growth, the top management has explicitly stated the concern on managerial development to improve productivity, management competency and morale.

Recently, the company has introduced the Middle Management Development Course organized by external consultant/trainer. The management development course requires managers to attend training sessions of three to four days a month for duration of twelve-month period. The curriculum includes training materials on cross-cultural studies (Western and Arab), managerial skills (such as communication, problem solving, creativity, presentation skills, etc.) and project management. The multi-source feedback was introduced on the middle of course when managerial skills have been trained. There were 80 managers participated in the research (one manager has resigned from the company during the study). The managers were divided into three classes for 12-month training program. The managers who were focus of this study were all middle managers who were responsible for functional areas of organization, e.g. finance, sales, administration, human resource, spare part, service, etc. Many managers knew each other, but may have not worked with each other before, and were peers at the time of this study.

All 80 participants of the training program were given the evaluation of multi-source feedback questionnaire by internal mail. All respondents were requested to read attached introduction letter and signed research ethics consent form for participating in this research. The questionnaire consisted of 50 questions using 5-scale rating scale. The questions were divided into five sections with two major themes; firstly, general evaluation and self-development and secondly, perceptions on supervisory, peers, subordinate and self-ratings. All questionnaires were returned and were collected by the researcher.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
Using the analysis framework in relations to multi-source feedback evaluation by Furnham & Stringfield (1998) and Mabey (2001), raw data of the 79 questionnaires were entered and analyzed using SPSS/PC software. Mean score and standard deviation of each measurement item were computed for analysis (as
presented in Appendix). According to Ticehurst & Veal (1999), paired t-tests can be performed to identify any significant differences between two means of the whole sample. In this study, paired t-tests were performed on selected items. For example, mean scores were compared between users’ evaluations on fairness of ratings by him/her and subordinates. Following that, a number of further t-tests were performed on ratings by himself/herself and superiors, and himself/herself with peers and so on. However, there were no significant differences in the means of any items. Therefore, mean scores were displayed in Figure 1 to provide indications of respondents’ perceptions.

Insert figure 1 here

From the results, it was found that users’ evaluated multi-source feedback fairly positive in terms of overall satisfaction and usage for self-development purpose. From the highest rating score of 5, respondents rated the item on ‘overall satisfaction of multi-source feedback’ at 3.6 corresponding to “somewhat agree” with the item. This is supported by having high rating scores on multisource feedback “affects me to change for the better”, “help to recognize the need to develop skills” and “helps me to improve performance”.

With mean score ratings above 3 corresponding to “agree” with the evaluation sentence, the mean scores were clearly higher on self-development items that multisource feedback helps to “set personal improvement goals”, “I made significant effort to improve relationship”, “helps to identify improvement target” and “motivates me to best use of skills”. However, in terms of self-development efficiency, the mean scores were lower in terms of users’ report on their ability to remember improvement target and low frequency of feedback review by themselves.

In terms of users’ perceptions on the contents of multi-source feedback for performance appraisal, users tend to agree that feedback reports are accurate, credible and fair. Feedback reports are perceived to help career development. Since the multi-source feedback was communicated to the participants that it will be used strictly for development, users have reported that it does not provide opportunities for promotion. In terms of system administration, users’ perceptions on report confidentiality are lower. This may be due to the fact that system administrator has to retain one copy of each report as back-up reference. In addition, it also reflects the trust on the conduct of existing human resource system.

Users’ Evaluation on Multi-source Feedback by Raters

In terms of multi-source feedback users’ evaluations on raters, it was found that supervisors’ ratings were most positive among different raters as shown in Figure 2. The users believe that supervisor’s rating is more fair, credible, accurate and suitable. With similar evaluation items, it was found that users’ evaluations on self and other raters (peers and subordinates) were positive with no significant differences.

For the concern on feedback that may effect on managers’ decision making and relationship with raters, it was found that raters have indicated that there may be concern with subordinates’ ratings. However, it was quite clear that there is no concern on peers’ ratings to influence work decision and relationship. Regarding Kuwaiti working culture, respondents were asked to rate their opinion if subordinates and peers is appropriate to be included in multi-source feedback. The result shows rather neutral answers to both subordinates and peers’ ratings.

Insert figure 2 here

In overall satisfaction, the users’ perceptions were positive toward ratings by all other raters (superiors, peers and subordinates). Similar to previous analysis, the indication was somewhat clear that ratings by all managers’ constituents help to encourage the users to improve relationship with others.

In relations to the intention to include multi-source method with current Management-By-Objectives (performance appraisal), the items were included which is an indirect question if the users were willing to use multi-source feedback method for administrative purpose to determine pay and promotion. The findings indicated that users’ mean score rated ‘agree’ to include peers and subordinates together with performance appraisal. However, there is a clear concern that including subordinates’ ratings will influence managerial line of authority.

DISCUSSION

As organizations are facing more dynamic environment that demand more productivity with lesser resources, human resource is one of the most promising assets to be developed. With efforts to develop
individuals, team, work units and organization as a whole, multi-source feedback as a form of appraisal instruments can provide meaningful feedback to individuals. With multi-source feedback report, individuals are provided with evaluations of self and others’ perceptions. This creates an awareness of perceptions’ discrepancy and may induce behavioral change in parallel with company direction.

As a member of Middle East countries, Kuwaiti has very different cultural characteristics from the U.S. Using the popular cultural dimensions by Hofstede (2001), Kuwaiti culture is always in opposite position from the U.S. civilization, specifically, power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. As a result, it can be expected that Kuwaiti work-related values that effect performance appraisal practice will be very different as well.

CONCLUSION
In conclusion the challenge of introducing multi-source feedback in Kuwaiti can be divided into four stages. Firstly, it is important to understand Kuwaiti cultural values in the workplace. Secondly, multi-source feedback system will have to be customized to avoid potential negative implications from Kuwaiti culture, while maintaining feedback objectives. Thirdly, human resource should assess the multi-source feedback system objectively by carefully designed methods. Fourthly, companies will have to continuously evaluate and improve the multi-source feedback for the next implementation.

REFERENCES

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Users’ Overall Satisfaction of Multisource Feedback
Source: Author

![Figure 1: Users’ Overall Satisfaction of Multisource Feedback](image1)

Figure 2: User’s Evaluation of Multi-source Feedback by Raters
Source: Author

![Figure 2: User’s Evaluation of Multi-source Feedback by Raters](image2)
### Questionnaire for Evaluation of Multisource Assessment Usage

**Alpha=0.93, F=6.61**

#### Dimension on Training and Development

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1. 360-degree feedback helps me to recognize the need to develop skills.
2. 360-degree feedback motivates me to best use of my skills.
3. 360-degree feedback provides me the opportunities for promotion.
4. 360-degree feedback helps my career development.
5. 360-degree feedback affects me to change for the better.
6. 360-degree feedback is a fair method.
7. 360-degree feedback is credible.
8. 360-degree feedback gives me accurate reflection of my working behavior and performance.
9. 360-degree feedback helps me to improve my performance.
10. I have reviewed 360-degree feedback many times.
11. 360-degree feedback clearly help me to identify self-improvement target for myself.
12. I used 360-degree feedback report to set personal improvement goals.
13. From 360-degree feedback, I can remember my self-improvement target items.
14. I believe that 360-degree feedback was conducted with confidentiality.
15. After receiving 360-degree feedback, I made significant effort to improve my relationship with others.
16. Overall, I am satisfied with the use of 360-degree feedback in TYM.

#### Dimension on Supervisor Evaluation in 360-Degree Feedback

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<td>3.79</td>
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17. I believe that supervisor’s evaluation is fair.
18. I believe that supervisor’s evaluation is credible.
19. I believe that supervisor’s evaluation gives me accurate reflection of my working behavior and performance.
20. I believe that supervisor is in best position to evaluate my performance.
21. After receiving 360-degree feedback, I put significant effort to improve my relationship with supervisor.
22. Overall, I am satisfied with supervisor’s evaluation.

#### Dimension on Peers/Co-workers’ Evaluation in 360-Degree Feedback

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23. I believe that peers/co-workers’ evaluation is fair.
24. I believe that peers/co-workers’ evaluation is credible.
25. I believe that peers/co-workers’ evaluation gives me accurate reflection of my working behavior and performance. 2.94 0.83
26. I feel that peers/co-workers evaluate me honestly. 3.12 0.70
27. I believe that peers/co-workers are in best position to evaluate certain aspects of my performance. 3.21 0.82
28. I feel that peers/co-workers evaluation has affected workplace relationship. 2.06 0.81
29. I feel that peers/co-workers evaluation is suitable in Thai working culture. 2.82 0.81
30. After receiving 360-degree feedback, I made significant effort to improve my relationship with peers/co-workers. 3.21 0.77
31. Overall, I am satisfied with peers/co-workers evaluation. 3.24 0.70
32. I am willing to be appraised by peers/co-workers together with MBO. 2.97 1.00

### Dimension on Subordinate Evaluation in 360-Degree Feedback

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33. I believe that subordinates’ feedback is fair. 3.12 0.82
34. I believe that subordinates’ feedback is credible. 3.21 0.82
35. I believe that subordinates’ feedback gives me accurate reflection of my working behaviour and performance. 3.21 1.05
36. I feel that my subordinates evaluate me honestly. 3.12 0.89
37. I am willing to be evaluated by subordinates together with MBO. 3.03 1.07
38. I believe that subordinates are in best position to evaluate certain aspects of my performance. 3.26 0.83
39. I felt that subordinates appraisal has affected my judgment on my authority. 2.61 1.03
40. I feel that subordinate evaluation is suitable in Thai working culture. 2.88 0.86
41. After receiving 360-degree feedback, I made significant effort to improve my relationship with subordinate. 3.44 0.86
42. Overall, I am satisfied with subordinates’ feedback. 3.44 0.82
43. I am willing to be appraised by subordinate together with MBO. 3.06 1.04
44. I feel that subordinates appraisal will undermine my authority if used with MBO. 2.36 0.93

### Dimension on Self Evaluation in 360-Degree Feedback

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45. I believe that self-evaluation is fair. 3.12 0.69
46. I believe that self-evaluation is credible. 3.24 0.70
47. I consider that self-evaluation gives me accurate reflection of my performance. 3.12 0.82
48. I feel that I have evaluated myself honestly. 3.50 0.86
49. I like to include self-appraisal as in 360-degree feedback items with MBO. 3.03 0.95
50. I am willing to be appraised by 360-degree feedback method together with MBO (This question aims to ask your opinion on 360-degree method as a part to support MBO for performance appraisal, regardless of the content used in training program)

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