

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Leadership development through 360-degree multi-rater feedback— An experience sharing of need, approach, roll-out, and the impact

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### ABSTRACT

The organizational development (OD) interventions carried out by the assessment center identifying the competencies becomes effective only if the expectation of the stakeholders is met. A 360-degree multipurpose intervention is to assess and develop project director's leadership capabilities and enable them to execute Mega Infrastructure Projects in India executed by Larsen and Toubro, the leading engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) players of India. Implementing such Mega Projects by maintaining time, cost, safety, and quality parameters require leadership skills of high order. To meet out this requirement implementation partner interacted with few project directors from each business verticals such as nuclear, hydel, metro, defense, special bridges and ports and harbor, to understand the role holders' challenges and the expectations. L&T Heavy Civil Infrastructure (HCI) Leadership Competency framework was thus drafted looking into the role intensity and specific role-based challenges of the Mega Project Leaders. The questionnaires were designed to cover all dimensions and sub dimensions of 8 competencies, covering 40 behavioral Indicators. the questionnaires were hosted on the online platform to including self, supervisor, direct repartees, peers, customers, and other stakeholders. Validation to the assessment of each dimension and sub-dimensions as qualitative feedback is done with simple average scores and the range. The study found that execution leadership was the highest rated competency followed by customer engagement and talent management. The study also found that strategic orientation and decision making were rated low compared to other competencies, got validated by comments of customers as well. This is quite evident from the feedback that was taken after 9 months of the intervention. The study by using Delphi technique revealed that by providing feedback from all stakeholders supported by systematic coaching, 88% participants showed improvement in the low rated items. The study further proved that with proper feedback and coaching at an individual level with required trust and keeping development as the core agenda and without linking to any other HR processes like appraisal and promotion, majority of the participants took full ownership, interest and worked on their individual competency development showing their learning agility.

**Keywords:** leadership development; execution leadership; customer engagement; learning agility; decision making and change management

## 1. Introduction

360-degree feedback, a multi rater feedback instrument, is an established HR methodology used in

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organizations across the world. It is very comprehensive and effective process that gives leaders and managers powerful insights. The insights come essentially by receiving clear feedback from their peers, employees, managers, and customers. The feedback creates strong ground for change by providing specific input, linked to the various aspects of leadership behavior and competencies. It further brings the right focus to improve the leadership effectiveness by learning and practicing required new skills and behavior. Gathering and getting feedback from colleagues and customers has many benefits. Besides the valuable feedback from the managers, it gives an opportunity to also know how others in his circle of influence such as peers, team members and customers perceive and think about his leadership style and behavior.

Generally, employees in many cases don't accept fully the feedback from their superiors with whatever good intention it may have been given, due to the intrinsic aspect of bias perception ingrained in the mind due to boss-subordinate relationship, which creeps in the mind for multiple reasons such as lack of objective performance evaluation, proactive and timely feedback, lack of fairness, favoritism perception, lack of trust and empathy in the relationship and not getting full support for career advancements and other developmental opportunities.

Since 360-degree feedback process throws input through a rounded view, hence less prone to biased perception as it is based on perspectives of multiple persons. For example, a manager may be thinking that the boss is biased and picky about some aspect of his competency, such as communication skills, will take it seriously, when everyone around suggest that he needs improvement in that area.

### **1.1. History and origin of 360-degree as developmental tool**

The Mesopotamians invented the wheel about 6000 years ago. They loved the number 60. Mary Blockman, in her book 'Reading the Numbers', writes that the Mesopotamians passed their base of 60 numerical system to the ancient Egyptians, who used it to divide a circle into 360 degrees.

The 360-degree circle worked out great: The Egyptians loved perfect triangles, and exactly six of them fit into a circle. Therefore, six triangular slices of 60 degrees each made for a sensible 360-degree dissection of a circle. Since then, the 360-degree circle has stood the test of time and has made its mark on time itself: When time was first recorded on the face of a circle, it was an easy leap to divide hours into 60 min and minutes into 60 s.

However, the origin of 360-degree feedback concept started with the German Military around 1930, when the military psychologist Johann Baptist Rieffert developed a methodology to select officer candidates and later during World War II, the German military began gathering feedback from multiple sources to evaluate Military officer's performance<sup>[1]</sup>. After 2 decades of start of 360° feedback concept, it was introduced into the business world in the 1950's. The Esso Research and Engineering Group (Now known as ExxonMobil) was the first company who had documented use of multisource surveys to evaluate their employees.

From there, the idea of 360-degree feedback gained momentum, and by the 1990s most human resource and organizational development professionals understood the concept. The problem of collecting and collating the feedback demanded a paper-based system, which causes delays and involves complex manual calculations. This led to despair amongst practitioners and a gradual erosion of commitment by recipients. However, with the ability to conduct evaluations by online surveys due to rise of the Internet, multi-rater feedback became popular and steadily its usage increased. Further, outsourcing of human resource functions has created a strong market for 360-degree feedback products from consultants. This has led to a proliferation of this feedback tool in the market.

Today, studies suggest that over one-third of U.S. companies use some type of multi-source feedback,

while others claim that this estimate is closer to 90% of all fortune 500 firms.

Mauri Periperl, the Pro-Vice Chancellor of Cranefield University studied 17 organisations and mentioned in her article of “Getting 360-degree feedback right”<sup>[2]</sup> that 360-degree feedback systems, and peer appraisal programs, are always work in progress—subject to vulnerabilities, requiring sensitivity to hidden conflicts as much as to tangible results, but nevertheless it is responsive to thoughtful design and purposeful change.

Companies that have achieved success with these programs tend to be open to learning and willing to experiment. They are led by executives who are direct about the expected benefits as well as the challenges and who actively demonstrate support for the process. By laying themselves open to praise and criticism from all directions and inviting others to do the same, they guide their organizations to new capacities for continuous improvement.

Zenger and Folkman<sup>[3]</sup>, after surveying the 360-degree feedback of more than 20,000 managers with 200,000 people’s feedback, indicated that the potential of this tool to transform a keen Manager into a leader is very huge. They further mention that impact of one perceived strength moves leaders to the 64th percentile of effectiveness, three strengths move them to 81st percentiles and suggest that individual should figure out in what he/she is good at and then improve it to the 90th percentile.

## **1.2. 360-degree feedback in India**

Rao<sup>[4]</sup>, a leading Human resources development (HRD) expert, pioneered the concept of 360-degree feedback and its use in India. He had initiated this during his tenure as professor of human resource management (HRM) and organization behaviour (OB) in Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A). He believed that feedback from stranger groups is likely to be more authentic and reliable than the ones coming from known persons. He further opines that feedback from known people gets coloured by the workplace relationship that we may have, while strangers having no prior views and have nothing at stake to please the feedback seeker.

Rao<sup>[4]</sup> got the insight to think about such a feedback system from the suggestions of the Management Development Program (MDP) participants that he was taking at Xavier Labour Relations Institute (XLRI), Jamshedpur, while he was on leave from IIM, Ahmedabad (IIMA) between 1983 and 1985. During the sessions, he was confronted repeatedly with this question, “If only there is some way of knowing what others around me and who interact with me thought of me and my personality, I will feel more motivated to change?”.

Immediately after return to IIMA, he decided to launch a program which is based on feedback from known people. Around this time, he was using the Supervisory and Leadership styles questionnaire. He developed this based on his work with Abigail Stewart of Wesleyan University which was funded by David McClelland. The Stewart Maturity scale had four stages of development which were converted into three leadership styles: benevolent, critical and developmental.

He used this questionnaire on many managers including doctors in charge of primary health centres and school heads and other managers. This instrument tried to test how the Indian managers are perceived by their juniors. At IIMA, subsequently, he proposed a program called as “Leadership Styles and Organizational Effectiveness”. The program was for three full days and the design required a series of tests to be administered and feedback collected anonymously from known people (subordinates, colleagues, bosses, and others) who interacted with the participant enrolled for the program.

IIMA will in turn plan to send this questionnaire along with a pre-signed letter from the participant requesting the respondent to give frank responses on the questionnaire and send to IIMA program coordinator.

Pradip Khandwalla and Singh JP, both professors of OB area in IIM-A, who had volunteered to work with him in this programme and also used their own questionnaires as additional ones.

Pradip's management styles questionnaire was tested out already in Canada and the USA which was very popular. Singh JP volunteered to work on Decision making styles. Later S. Ramnarayan joined the team to work on learning styles and so on. Thus, the four of us formed a four team and announced the program. When they were keeping their finger crossed about the registration, they got almost sixty people nominated for it and decided not to take more than 20 at a time as it was feedback intensive. The program was conducted and repeated for a few years.

In mid-nineties, T. V. Rao read a book on 360-degree feedback by Edwards and then realised that this methodology that they used has been called as 360 degree feedback in early nineties. He emphasizes further that the origins cannot be attributed to any of them as multi-rater feedback and multisource feedback were used even earlier. He quotes from the Indian epic Ramayana when Lord Rama used some form of 360 feedback to know the people's perception of his rule by using Gooptacharis (Spy) and many other kings used to go round in disguise to know and feel the impact of their leadership or rule. From mid-nineties when Dr. Rao started T. V. Rao Learning Systems, he started using the term 360-Degree Feedback and popularised the same in India.

He says that given the Indian personality which uses heart and works more on emotions, they are very cautious in interpreting such feedback and treat it as provocative and subjective and treat it with respect it deserves and not as an objective assessment. Hence very cautious in recommending it for any administrative use but liberally promote for self-reflection and self as well as organization development.

Hence T. V. Rao, in his book, *The Power of 360-degree feedback—The India way for leadership effectiveness*, second edition, 2014 advocates that this tool should be used for developmental purpose than an appraisal tool in Asian countries, though it is being used as performance evaluation and appraisal in USA and few other countries. When used as a developmental tool, he feels that it has lot of potential to build future leaders in all sectors. He further argues that hence it's potential power to strengthen and enhance leadership competencies need to be used and can't be ignored or avoided for the fear of negative feedback.

He further states that still it is not a very accepted tool and top-level leaders still dread this tool. He further emphasizes after profiling 3000 senior managers with 30,000 feedbacks, on an average of 10 circles of influence feedback for each manager from 2009 to 2014, that it is a tremendous tool for growth and enhancing leadership competencies. The process is an experience, and every manager must go through it.

### **1.3. Leadership competencies used by in his model**

Managerial and leadership competencies which is termed as RSDQ (roles, styles, delegation and qualities) is the base for this study<sup>[4]</sup>. This model of leadership and managerial effectiveness views effective management and leadership as a combination of 4 sets of variables. All these variables are part of RSDQ—360-degree feedback instrument.

#### **1.3.1. Roles**

To be effective, every manager must play several roles. These are transformational (leadership roles) and transactional (managerial) roles. Some of them are like articulating and communicating vision and values, formulating long-term policies and strategies, introducing new technology and systems, inspiring and developing teams, managing team members, managing internal customers and external customers, etc.

#### **1.3.2. Styles**

While effective managers and leaders recognize all aspects of their role and perform them well, it is not

only the roles or the activities that determine the effectiveness but the way in which they are played. The model envisages that the manager may play all the roles well but may be insensitive to the style in which they carry out the roles. The leadership style classified and included are Benevolent or paternalistic leadership style believe that the employees should be constantly guided. The critical leadership style is close to the theory of X belief system where the manager believes that the employees should be closely and constantly supervised and directed. The developmental leadership style is an empowering style where the Top Management believes in developing the competencies of the staff, treats them as mature adults.

### **1.3.3. Delegation**

The RSDQ model considers level of delegation to be important part of a senior executive's effectiveness. The dimension is included because most of the senior executive find it difficult to delegate especially those executives who get the promotions very fast.

### **1.3.4. Qualities**

The model envisages that the managers should exhibit qualities of leaders and world-class managers i.e., proactiveness, listening, communication, positive approach, participative nature and quality orientation.

## **1.4. Competencies for 360-degree as an industry practice**

While T. V. Rao Learning Systems Pvt. Ltd (TVRLS), the consulting arm has been using the RSDQ model as per his research and in Indian conditions, but there is a trend by some companies to design the 360-degree feedback system as per their organizational competencies, culture, and values that they would like to embed in the overall tool and use it for development. In India, there is also concept of competencies for different levels in general and leadership competencies for senior management. So, for 360-degree instrument that are designed are mapped into the leadership competencies or the competency of the career band or the overall competencies.

## **1.5. Need for 360-degree review feedback process intervention at HCI, L&T**

L&T's Heavy Civil Infrastructure undertakes Mega Projects execution in India and abroad. These projects pertain to various types of infrastructure segments namely metro-elevated and underground, nuclear, hydel, ports and harbor, Defense, Special bridges, and High-Speed Rail (Bullet Train) projects. Many of these projects like underground metro constructed in cities like Mumbai and Chennai, Mumbai Trans Harbor Link (MTHL), Mumbai's coastal road projects, High Speed Rail (Bullet Train) projects are happening for the first time in India, very complex in terms of design, and execution, requires high level of project management, People management, skill development, resource management, customer focus and stakeholder management competencies and skills.

These projects are high value in terms of project award value and each one is more than Rs 5000 crores with a very stiff project completion timeline. To executive these projects of mega in scale and size and of engineering marvel that are happening for the first time in India, to meet the talent requirements of diverse engineering capability, the company engages talent from India and abroad in design engineering, safety, underground construction and few such specialist professions where expat talent from other countries having global experience and exposure in executing similar complex project elsewhere in the world, are hired and posted in head office and such Mega Projects.

Looking into the complexity of these projects, the company has been posting very senior leader as project director who are mostly internally grown, though at some projects there are expat project directors. The project directors have undergone Mega Project Leadership programs conducted in collaboration with Great Lakes of Management, Chennai, and few of them also attended L&T group's 7-step leadership development programme.

Some of them have also undergone special mentoring sessions facilitated by an internationally renowned leader who had more than 4 decades of experience in executing Mega Projects of similar scale and size such as Hong Kong Metro.

These project directors that company has appointed, are required to interact with senior officials of the clients who are mostly central/state government bodies, Senior Project Management Organization's (PMO) officials appointed by the clients, engineering consultants, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Asia development bank officials, the funding agencies, other government machineries, local politicians and people representatives, peers from other functions of the same independent company, peers from other divisions and the top management of the company.

Due to the contractual and various other administrative reasons, executing these projects on time and with profitability maintaining the safety and quality standards require deft leadership skills and high standards of general management skills with high customer focus, cost management, people management and stakeholder management skills. Hence, the project directors are like mini business heads generating annual sales and profitability for the company, which gets aggregated at the business level.

As per company's succession planning and development process, many of these project directors, since having experience in various aspects business and management processes including project management and customers, act as pipeline to future segment and business heads, IC heads, directors of the company. So, to groom and hone the potential project director with requisite leadership skills and developing them in all facets of leadership holistically, its introduction was felt to be of utmost importance. In view of tremendous growth opportunities in Infrastructure development as per the focus of Govt of India, it was also imperative on the part of these project directors to focus on developing subordinates who can become future Mega Project directors to lead such Mega Projects that the company expects to bag.

Though the company had many leadership development training programmes like Mega Project Leadership with Great Lakes Institutes, 7-step leadership development programme of the group and as part of these programmes, before they attend 7-step programme, feedback taken from seniors, peers, and subordinates, to understand their development focus by the faculty and however, post the programme, that remains with the individual without any further review and coaching/follow-up support and many others who are not part of 7-seven step leadership programme, do not get opportunity of it and hence it remains limited to only to few participants of 7-step leadership development programmes. However, as per criteria, very few such Mega Project directors were eligible and were able to attend these programmes.

In view of the above perspectives, it was strongly felt to introduce a system for their holistic development based on feedback from immediate boss, Boss's boss, peers, subordinates, and customers. Accordingly, the first ever 360-degree feedback intervention for leadership development of Mega Project Leaders was conceptualized and introduced in Heavy Civil Infrastructure of L&T Construction, Chennai in the year 2019–2020.

### **1.6. Implementation partner**

Since this was for the first time that was introduced, it was decided to partner with an external consultant/agency who has the expertise and experience in helping the clients to design, develop and roll-out competency based 360-degree system in Indian Organizations. It was further decided to roll this out on a reliable on-line platform. After survey of the market, the organization development and training head recommended to empanel People Business Consulting, Bangalore for this initiative, which was agreed by the Management.

## **1.7. Research background**

By including 360-degree feedback, the organization can identify the major areas which helps for leadership development. Further his research explains the concept multi rater or multi source feedback which acts as a key component of leadership development. He found that gender also plays a key role in leadership development and study said about the issues involved with gender-based leadership development. The study was conducted with public sector organizations in the United Kingdom<sup>[5]</sup>.

Considering other development approaches based on very distinct leadership models, the proposed differentiation is fundamental. Leader development is founded on a conventional individualistic view of leadership. The fundamental notion is that developing individual leaders results in more effective leadership. It also assumes that organizations may add leadership to increase their social and operational efficiency. Leadership development, on the other hand, has its roots in a more current, relational style of leadership. This paradigm assumes that leadership is determined by social resources embedded in relationships<sup>[6]</sup>.

Developing individual leaders without regard for reciprocal relationships within people or their interactions within a larger social environment contradicts research proving that leadership is a complex interplay between individuals and their social and organizational surroundings. Attempting to construct mutually beneficial systems and mutual commitments among communities of practice without a thorough investment in individual preparation risks placing people in tough developmental circumstances that are too far above their heads.

360-degree feedback and executive coaching, mentorship and networking, and job assignment and action learning have all been praised as good for leadership development in some way. Unfortunately, there is little empirical evidence to back up those statements. It is probably safe to say that any of these practices could be beneficial or ineffective for leadership development. Effective leadership development is more concerned with continuous and intentional implementation than with whatever specific practices are accepted. The organizational discipline to introduce leadership development throughout the organization, rather than confined by specific (typically top) levels, is critical to effective implementation. Another essential to effectiveness is the integration of efforts across organizational levels and in terms of a broader developmental goal within the context a strategic business challenge.

The research<sup>[7]</sup> has expanded the proximal outcomes of leadership development to include not just the development of individuals' knowledge skills and attitude (KSA) and social skills, but also the relationships that connect people and give valuable resources to individuals, teams, business units, and organizations. Our survey determined how many leadership development practitioners agree on the necessity of establishing individuals' and collectives' social interactions. We specifically asked survey respondents about the importance of strengthening KSAs through leadership development, the emphasis placed on those objectives in their organization's leadership development initiatives, and the effectiveness of those efforts. Then we asked the same questions on enhancing workplace relationships that connect people and provide resources to individuals, teams, business units, and organizations.

Almost all practitioners tested agreed or strongly agreed that strengthening individuals' KSAs is critical for organizational effectiveness, and almost as many emphasized the importance of KSA development in leadership development efforts. A lower proportion of respondents said their organization was effective at aiding individuals in improving their KSAs. Similarly, virtually all practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that building relationships within organizations was critical to organizational effectiveness, and this goal was emphasized. Significantly fewer respondents thought their organization was effective in facilitating the formation of those partnerships. As a result, while leadership development practitioners agree that developing

leaders' KSAs and social skills, as well as the relationships that bind people together, are important goals for leadership development, they also believe their organizations could do better in terms of effectively addressing both goals.

In summary, the network-enhancing leadership development conceptual model explains various methods in how social networks can be incorporated into leadership advancement and demonstrates a requirement for strategies that employ network-enhancing approaches focusing on both people and groups as part of an integrated strategy to increasing organizational leadership capacity. The findings highlight major gaps between network-enhancing leadership development science and practice. This gap provides researchers with an opportunity and an imperative to develop theoretically relevant and tested techniques that enable people as well as groups to understand, leverage, and modify the social and leadership relationship structures that underpin organizational leadership.

The 360-degree feedback<sup>[8]</sup> has both benefits and drawbacks. It is vital to highlight that 360-degree feedback for performance and 360-degree input for development will almost certainly yield quite different results. They should not be used in the same sentence. Organizations should combine 360-degree feedback and standard performance evaluation approaches to achieve the best results. The use of several feedback methods will provide a complete and more accurate picture of overall employee performance. If used appropriately, the 360-degree feedback technique has the ability to provide invaluable knowledge for both the company and its personnel.

The goal of the study<sup>[9]</sup> is to estimate the influence of 360-degree feedback on leadership development. The findings revealed that there were 20 common 360-degree feedbacks. 360-degree feedback is critical for employees' leadership development. The responses Each feedback feature of the three categories of experienced employees is ranked in order of relevance. Based on these findings, firms must improve an employee's leadership development through 360-degree feedback. The findings suggest that there are no significant differences in leadership growth based on employee experience, and this study demonstrates the good effect of integrating 360-degree feedback for employee leadership development. Furthermore, firms that employ the 360-degree appraisal system to encourage a healthy work environment. In the future, the researchers should be concerned with new techniques to improve employee leadership development. Additionally, organizations that use the 360-degree appraisal system to promote a healthy work environment. The researchers should be concerned with innovative ways to boost employee leadership development in the future.

The findings<sup>[10]</sup> reveal that training efficacy, learner expectations and experiences, and organizational commitment to the development of leadership are all factors. Each of these themes has provided insights into basic but effective activities that can help maximize the benefits of leadership development, such as the inclusion of intentional selection techniques and scheduled debriefing and follow-up opportunities. In order to address the urgent lack of leaders, organizations and people are making considerable expenditures in leadership development. Without reform, institutions will continue to invest in developing leaders who do not pursue leadership chances. Adopting thoughtful choosing of participants and follow-up practices would improve the effectiveness and efficiency of institutional resources invested in leadership development programmes.

Paying attention to these practices will raise the applicant's and the institution's expectations, resulting in greater goal congruence between applicants and institutions. Applicants who understand the standards and have institutional support are more likely to apply for leadership positions. Institutions will profit from this by solving the leadership deficit by sponsoring and assisting qualified candidates who will then assume leadership positions within the institution.



Using a leadership development programme to encourage and assist the pursuit of leadership chances in Aramco is a solid approach that helps institutions establish a larger pool of qualified leadership candidates, according to this study. Employers can better prepare for their human resource needs if they understand how their employees make decisions about future work. Individuals are motivated by their talents, knowledge, abilities, attitudes, values, and life circumstances. Employers offer the employment and information about the occupations, as well as the opportunities and limits that employees may face in the future if they pursue other jobs. Organizations should monitor career pathways and strengthen leaders' skills.

Management seeks information in order to direct and monitor the success of certain groups of employees, as well as to ensure that capable managerial and technical talent is available to meet the needs of the organization. Similarly, Aramco works hard to deliver an intensive learning and development on-boarding programme that targets the needs of freshly employed young professionals in order to prepare them for the workplace and future leadership roles. Aramco has a programme in place to provide young talent with engaging and experiential learning opportunities. Through the use of several strategies such as talent management, participant-driven, team-oriented, and simulated work environment. This example results in a very effective Saudi Aramco employee who has the skills and confidence to lead both at work and in the community.

In today's world, leadership is a current trend<sup>[11]</sup>. Every individual must be a leader in order for an organization to be successful. According to the study, mentorship and action learning would be the most successful and outcome-based practices; managers should invest more in them while also considering other leadership development practices such as social networks and job assignments and attempting to improve them in their particular organizations. Leadership development programs (LDPs) are a method for improving organizational performance by redefining the organization's strategy, implementing relevant changes in the organization's culture, implementing continuous development, strengthening competences and skills in employees, and developing them as leaders. Organizational leaders should accept responsibility for developing strategies to apply LDPs in order to boost organizational effectiveness. By fostering these practices, organizations' leadership development would be strengthened.

The primary goal of the research<sup>[12]</sup> was to emphasise the differences between leadership training and development and to give evidence-based suggestions for where to best invest resources in leadership training and development. We will now briefly outline investments that should be avoided. Avoid investing in leadership development practises that (a) are not based on a needs analysis, (b) do not include methods for applying the training back to the job, and (c) have not been scientifically verified. In terms of leadership development, it is best to avoid investing in (a) techniques that rely primarily on classroom-based education, (b) programmes that do not offer leaders with timely feedback and support, and (c) interventions that promise quick-fix solutions.

This study<sup>[13]</sup> discovered that executives who worked in a constructive feedback context prior to attending a leadership-development programme that included 360-degree feedback performed better than those who worked in a negative feedback environment. These findings will assist practitioners in maximizing the effectiveness of expensive leadership development programmes by strengthening workplace feedback mechanisms prior to leadership development interventions. Post program leader improvement was also linked to self-awareness and learning agility.

The findings of the study<sup>[14]</sup> show a link between 360-degree leadership performance appraisal and organizational outcomes. A recent study adds to the evidence that 360-degree leadership performance appraisal has a favourable impact on organizational success. Notably, having a 360-degree leader in an organization enhances collaboration with middle-level leaders. The findings highlight the complexities of leading in all

directions, emphasizing the importance of a diversified skill set for effective leadership. Several interviewees emphasized the need of intuition when navigating diverse organizational areas. The report does, however, identify issues faced by middle or 360-degree leaders, like as pressures from superiors and demands from subordinates or customers.

According to the report, organizations should recognize their employees' varied needs and recognize the critical function of feedback in improving performance. Empirical research has found a positive relationship between 360-degree feedback adoption and employee contentment and engagement. The consensus among participating faculty members who serve as middle-level leaders implies that individuals can analyse and improve their leadership qualities regardless of their hierarchically different needed position.

This indicates that leadership development can come from a variety of organizational levels, emphasizing the importance of varied leadership competencies. Experienced leaders frequently have an innate awareness of how to navigate and connect across organizational levels. The investigation focuses on a university setting in which the head adopts the role of 360-degree leader. The study's findings highlight the link between the deployment of 360-degree leadership performance appraisal in universities and beneficial organizational outcomes.

A culture' that encourages open and meaningful feedback exchanges has been shown to dramatically boost the positive outcomes of 360-degree leadership performance reviews. To do this, it is preferable to create a climate that not only recognizes the value of feedback but actively encourages its contribution to growth.

This study<sup>[15]</sup> found that transformational leadership is a strong positive predictor of FFOs' in-role performance, psychological empowerment, and work-life balance. This could be because effective transformational leadership considers employees' psychological needs and work-life balance when developing organizational policies that improve workers' in-role performance and organizational success. The progression of transformational leadership style can ensure that an organization's overall health and goals are met. This study adds to the management literature by establishing the relationship between transformational leadership and other study variables by eliciting information from a diverse range of stakeholders using the 360-degree feedback method, making the findings more reliable and authentic. The research also demonstrated that the combined mediation of psychological Work-life balance and empowerment can improve the relationship between leaders and followers' in-role performance.

The research question which arises now are:

- 1) What would be the competencies expected at senior level starting from Joint General Manager and above the manager level, who work for infrastructure projects based in India and Abroad.
- 2) Can we bring in changes amongst the leaders by creating a system by multi rater feedback mechanism based on Delphi technique?
- 3) How does the corporate level assessment centers work by understanding the psychological aspects of leaders involved in Nation Building Infrastructure Development?

## **2. Methods**

Design and development of competency framework and the instrument with questionnaires is an important aspect to be disseminated for reiterating the science way of appraisal for the managers who are considered as leaders and business partners by the virtue of their positions held. L&T has an established competency framework and matrix for its managers which are defined band wise and are in place for the four bands. Managers at different bands go through Development Center and are assessed against these companies, which are used for development purpose and at senior level starting from Joint General Manager and above

the manager is required to clear the benchmark score to be considered for the next grade. With more than 19,000+ managers going through leadership assessment through Development Center since 2004 is an industry leading practice.

The Mega Project Leaders were mostly in Tier-3/Tier-4 level officers at the level of Joint General Manager (Tier-3), General Manager and Vice President Grade (Tier-4). Despite these two levels, it was agreed to review both the levels competencies that are used for Development Center. Since the role holder's development purpose is one and hence an integrated L&T HCI Leadership competency framework was drafted looking into the role intensity and specific role-based challenges of the Mega Project Leaders.

At first, all competencies of Tier-3 and Tier-4 were shared with People Business, the implementation partner. They were also shared the job descriptions and the write-up about various Mega Projects under implementation in various business verticals across India and Abroad. Subsequently, interaction with HR Head was arranged for briefing the partner about the strategic need of the intervention, sharing them the business of HCI, leadership interventions already in place, business growth and expansion and the challenges associated with Mega Project execution, succession planning and development pipeline for business head and for future project directors.

Further to HR Head interaction, the implementation partner interacted with the business heads to get perspectives from them about their specific business challenges. Finally, the implementation partner interacted with a few project directors from each business verticals such as nuclear, hydel, metro, defense, special bridges and ports and harbor, to understand the role holders' challenges and the expectations.

The company's Tier-3 framework consists of the following competencies:

- Strategic orientation.
- Driving and dealing with change.
- Critical thinking.
- Building tomorrow's leaders.
- Leveraging synergy.
- Customer and stakeholder partnership.
- Result and execution leadership.
- Drive to excel.

The company's Tier-4 framework consists of the following competencies:

- Strategic mind-set.
- Learning agility and digital mindset.
- Conscientious decision.
- Inspire and deliver results.
- Organizational stewardship.
- Social intelligence and collaboration.
- Strategic talent management.
- Synergistic customer engagement.

After review of our competencies, role descriptions, understanding of business, Mega Project challenges and requirements and interaction with leadership team, the following competencies were co-created as HCI Leadership competencies as per **Table 1** for the purpose of design and development of 360-degree tool:

**Table 1.** Leadership competencies.

<b>S. No</b>	<b>Competency name</b>	<b>Sub-dimensions</b>
01	Strategic orientation	Big picture thinking Managing market and business dynamics Seizing business opportunities Driving business value
02	Change management	Generating new novel ideas and solutions Challenging the status quo Thinking out of the box
03	Decision making	Quick and critical thinking Taking prompt decisions Calculated risk taking
04	Execution leadership	Driving operational excellence Fostering first time right work culture Delivering exceptional results
05	Customer engagement	Understanding customer needs Creating unique customer solutions Becoming a trusted advisor to clients
06	Relationship management	Demonstrating social intelligence Networking with impact Managing conflict
07	Learning agility	Investing high energy at work Learning and adapting to new situations Tackling demanding goals with tenacity
08	Talent management	Motivating teams Guiding and supporting team members Building a second line of leadership

The L&T HCI Leadership competency framework thus finalized, was used as the assessment criterion for the 360-Degree Feedback Survey. The questionnaires were designed to cover all dimensions and sub dimensions of 8 competencies, covering 40 behavioral indicators. Each competency consisted of 5 questions and at the end of 5 questions, it was asked to provide specific examples how the person had behaved under the situation to bring further clarity and validation to the assessment of each dimension and sub-dimensions as qualitative feedback.

It was agreed to use a 5-point rating scale for the feedback as per the below:

- Most often—4 (Acts this way 80% of the time)
- Usually—3 (Acts this way 60% of the time)
- Sometimes—2 (Acts this way 40% of the time)
- Rarely—1 (Acts this way 20% of the time)
- Unable to rate—0

To reach out to the participants and all the circles of influence seamlessly and faster, and for the analytics and reporting without any hassles, the online platform of the implementation partner was used. The questionnaires with instruments were hosted on the online platform of the implementation partner.

## **2.1. Brand name of the initiative**

Since it was a new initiative and was designed for organization and leadership development, it was felt that an appropriate name should be given. After discussion with the Organisation Development & Training Development (OD & TD) team and the implementation partner, the initiative was named as My Darpan. Darpan in Hindi language means—Mirror. Since the feedback will come from known and not very known

circles, which provide a good reflection opportunity for the participant leading to change, the name Darpan was accepted by all as very appropriate to the intervention.

## **2.2. Circle of influence**

To initiate the process, a mail was sent to the project directors from the desk of HR Head inviting them to participate. It was clearly stated that the tool is meant to facilitate their development and will not be used for any other purpose of HR process like performance appraisal, promotion, and succession planning and hence the outcome will be kept confidential.

A write-up about 360-degree intervention, the process and benefits were also enclosed for their reference. 26 project directors gave their consent to participate in the process and they were invited to attend the kick-off meeting. The implementation partner, HR Head and Head-TD & OD spoke about the initiative, the purpose and thanked them for their voluntary participation.

The implementation partner made a detailed presentation about 360-degree process, the process, the roadmap with timeline, and the expectations from them. At the end of the session, implementation partner took feedback from all about the initiative, the concept and the timeline and very positive feedback was received giving confidence that there is a buy-in by the participants.

## **2.3. Roll-out**

As a first step, the participants were asked to share their circle of influence, including self, supervisor, direct repartees, peers, customers, and other stakeholders. They were asked to provide as below:

Self: 1

Supervisor: 2 (Immediate Boss and Boss's boss)

Peers—4, Sub-ordinate—4, Customer—2

The above was the minimum no's stipulated in the process norms; however, it was clarified that participants can nominate few more in category of customer, peers, and subordinates with whom they have professional relationships of interactions in the recent role preferably in last 1 year or so, so that they will be able to provide the feedback and views.

All were given 3 weeks' time initially to complete the survey, however, all couldn't complete it within the time and hence the time was extended for another 2 weeks by sending reminder in the mail. Still, few needed personal follow-up which included few external customers.

However, in the ultimate analysis, there was a good participation by all the targeted circles of influence as per the target and the survey was closed after attending required circle of influence of minimum 13 responses for all 26 leaders who participated in this.

## **2.4. Report preparation and sharing with all participants.**

A comprehensive report was prepared for each participant providing them the average scores of each competency as received from the circles of influence. The average rating reflected ratings given by 12 numbers of raters and the same was also compared with the individual rating. Further, the report consisted of the comments provided by the raters for each competency as was asked for.

A copy of the report was also shared with Head of OD and Training. Subsequently, a coach was assigned to explain the report to each participant, so that they understand the report, there are no gaps in reading the report and accept the feedback constructively as professional input for development and don't take it personally. It was observed that all participants were looking forward to it as they had joined the initiative voluntarily.

The Coach who was assigned for discussion/clarification on the report to start with, impressed upon the participants to identify 2 areas of development from the report. They can pick up any two items from the lowest rated average scores of others, alternatively, they were advised to go through the qualitative comments and can also some areas to be addressed even though they had received higher rating score, as it was believed that they are very meaningful observations with examples by the circles of influence and should be prioritized for action, as they will give immediate results being the low hanging fruits in the entire feedback basket. It was also decided that each participant will be assigned a trained coach, who will work them for a period of 3 months.

### 3. Analysis and interpretation

#### 3.1. Legend for interpreting the rating

Based on the best practices and discussion with OD & Training Department, it was agreed to keep the below range for classifying the analysis, only for the average ratings **Table 2** and **Figure 1** received from others, individual rating was not including in this **Table 3**:

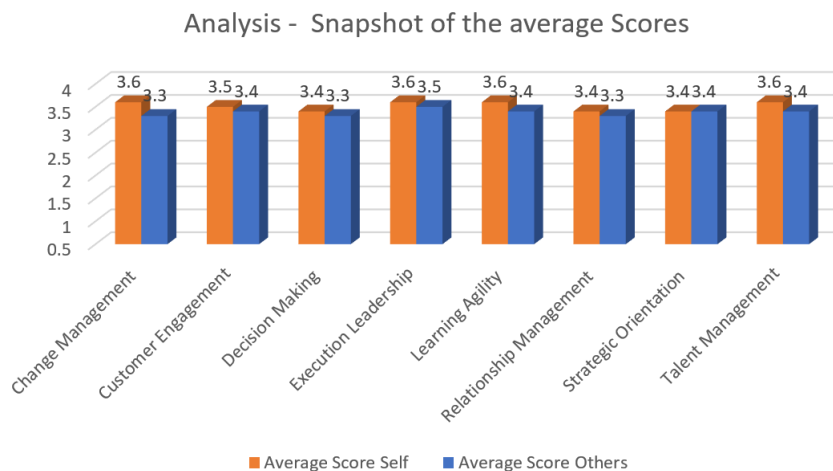
**Table 2.** Average scores—Analysis of 360 degree feedback.

Competency	Change management	Customer engagement	Decision making	Execution leadership	Learning agility	Relationship management	Strategic orientation	Talent management
Average score others	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.4
Average score self	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.6	3.6	3.4	3.4	3.6

Others—Circle of influence, direct reports, peers, customers etc.

**Table 3.** Interpretation of ratings.

Sr No	Range	Rating descriptor
1	3.5 & above	Outstanding
2	3.00 to 3.49	Very good
3	<3.00	Areas of opportunity



**Figure 1.** Average Scores based on 360 degree feedback.

#### 3.2. Summary of customer/stakeholder feedback

Like Johari window this analysis helps to increase the self-awareness and our understanding of others. In this case, most of the competencies were rated 0.1 to 0.3 points higher in four point scale by the individual. Only the strategic orientation has exactly same score rated by self and others. This creates a scope for further

improvement which leads to change and development. Most of the scores are in very good band but the leaders will always thrive to be excellent in all spheres and that's the reason for the coaching initiatives.

## **4. Findings and observations**

Managing change and bringing in development to an organization needs a strategic integration of human resources department's appropriate appraisal mechanism, management development initiatives, OD interventions, coaching, pre-test and post-test of developmental interventions. A holistic approach followed by L&T for the leadership development program in a systematic manner for enhancing the competencies for is a road map and the step by step approach is envisaged as the internal customers (Subordinates) feedback is more important for a manager who becomes the leader by the virtue of his position.

### **4.1. Interventions post the feedback and report**

To take the leadership effectiveness and development to the next level, the following specific interventions related to the developmental areas were conceptualized and implemented for a period of 5 months. Program on leadership development: All participants were invited to attend the program. The program provided input on how to inspire others, growth mindset of self and others and influencing others through leadership presence with the following sub-themes.

#### **4.1.1. Growth mindset**

Managing Yourself as a Leader—Zoom In/Zoom Out.

Working with an Entrepreneurial/Growth Mind-set (special focus on Learning Agility & Resilience).

Creating a Culture for Innovation and Creativity.

Allowing Failures: Learning—Unlearning and Relearning.

#### **4.1.2. Inspiring others**

Strengthen your skills to craft & deliver powerful executive messages.

Inspiring others as Leaders during interactive communications.

NLP and its role in influencing and inspiring others.

Working together as a team.

#### **4.1.3. Leadership presence**

Traits that make up executive/leadership presence.

The shift in paradigm needed to master influencing.

The core building blocks that help in influencing others.

Generations at work.

Leading & motivating a multi-generational workforce.

Understand the importance of image projection through physical appearance, voice tonality and body language.

Workshop on strategic orientation was conducted for the participants.

Workshop on leading change was conducted for the participants.

Providing customised learning snippets on fortnightly basis to all the participants.

Personalised and individual coach was assigned to each of the participants on 1:3 ratio, means each external coach had only 3 participants to coach on their individual development areas (IDP). The coach before starting the coaching engagement discussed with each participant with their report and feedback and helped them to define their IDP. Each participant thus finalised two to three development areas to work upon. Final

review of IDP progress was conducted after a period of 8 months followed by a 180-degree feedback from their circle of influence on the changed observations **Table 4**.

**Table 4.** The qualitative feedback from the customers and the stakeholder feedback.

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Feedback</b>
Strategic orientation	Spots opportunities where margins on additional scope can be generated. Negotiates keeping the interest of both client and organization. Demonstrates strong financial acumen coupled with strategic orientation. Soft spoken, needs to make his points and ideas heard.
Decision making	Considers various operational constraints, anticipates the potential risks, and takes actions to mitigate such risks to achieve maximum business impact. Demonstrates the ability to prioritize and take necessary actions in challenging situations. Hesitates at times to make prompt, autonomous decisions when there is incomplete information.
Learning agility	Demonstrates the enthusiasm and a quest to learn new technology. Adopts new ideas from team members and learns from mistakes. Shows commitment and is energetic, enthusiastic, and always motivated to deliver by looking for out-of-the-box solutions.
Change management	Supports the team in generating and innovating new ideas. Takes the help of team members in arriving at optimum solutions. Tries to leverage new age digital technology and innovation over conventional methods. At times adopts a traditional project approach/simply carries forward the existing process. At times adopts a traditional project approach/simply carries forward the existing process.
Execution leadership	Understands the quality aspect of the project and achieves target regularly. Motivates team members to get it “first time right” and proactively takes corrective actions to deliver high quality work outcomes. Champions the solution, rallying the team to focus on achieving the goal.
Talent management	Grooms, mentors, coaches team members to develop the second line of leadership. Provides opportunities by exposing them to versatile work fronts. Encourages team members to take responsibility for actions.
Relationship management	Negotiates to achieve win-win outcomes keeping the best interest of all the parties. Handles stakeholders with finesse by engaging & involving them to find the most suitable solution. Utilizes networking efficiently to resolve any roadblocks. Reliable, honest, and open during professional interactions.
Customer engagement	Strives to understand and work according to the client’s needs. Focused on achieving customer satisfaction with zero accidents and best quality. Builds everlasting relationships by working within frameworks. Takes accountability and is very calm and composed during interactions.

#### **4.2. Results after the IDP based coaching journey**

23 participants have moved towards closure on their coaching journey and have shown good progress on their IDP, substantiated by coach comments. Participants have used their customized development dossiers in an optimal manner, participants have shown low interest despite regular follow-ups by coach, participant could not join the program due to health-related issues.

#### **4.3. Observable behavior changes: Post IDP based coaching**

The overall interest level of participants was high in **Figure 2** and the progress was also high for 65 percent of them in **Figure 3**. On ‘THINK’ cluster of competencies: It comprises of strategic orientation, decision making and change management in **Table 5**.



OVERALL INTEREST LEVEL OF THE PARTICIPANTS

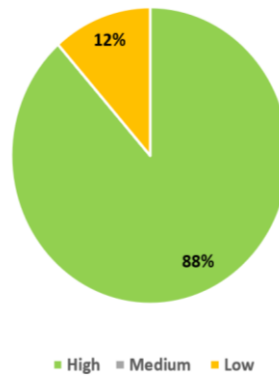


Figure 2. Overall interest for coaching.

PROGRESS ON IDP BASED ON COACH FEEDBACK

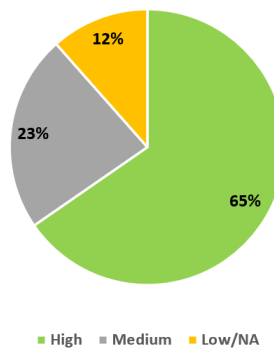


Figure 3. Progress on individual development areas.

Table 5. Competencies—Strategic orientation, decision making, and change management.

Current observations of the group	What could be better
<p>THINK:                      Applies functional knowledge and relevant experience to business situations and is able to spot new opportunities.                      Able to gather insights from the available information and has a deep understanding of various project functions.</p>	<p>Big picture thinking and long-term orientation.                      Prompt decision making even in challenging and ambiguous situations.                      Understanding of emerging trends in the dynamic external environment to generate fallback options.</p>

The participant has shown improvement in strategic thinking, long term orientation in terms of anticipating potential risks and effectively generating fall back options, shows openness in adapting with change and exploring digital solutions.

On ‘ACT’ Cluster of competencies: It comprises of execution leadership and learning agility in **Table 6**.

The participant has shown ability to make decisions promptly or take risks even without complete information and in ambiguous situations.

Table 6. Competencies—Execution leadership, learning agility.

Current observations of the group	What could be better
<p>ACT:                      Plans and actively contributes to the set goals.                      High commitment and ownership of tasks at hand.                      High process orientation and quality focus.</p>	<p>Challenges self to learn new skills and build an innovative mind-set.                      Develop their risk-taking ability in the face of unfamiliar projects and tasks.</p>

#### 4.4. Shows willingness to learn new skills, projects more confidence and greater conviction in ideas

On ‘engage’ cluster of competencies: It comprises of relationship management, talent management, customer engagement in **Table 7**.

**Table 7.** Competencies—Relationship management, talent management, and customer engagement.

Current observations of the group	What could be better
<p>ENGAGE: Supports, motivates, and respects team members. Understands customer/stakeholder context and engages well to build trust. Is able to anticipate needs of stakeholders and honours commitments made to them.</p>	<p>Need to leverage digital technology while finding solution. Executive presence and influencing peers and seniors. Comfort in challenging the status quo as required. Manage expectations of a multi-generational workforce.</p>

Dedicated in developing second line of leadership by coaching and mentoring team members.

Going beyond comfort zone to build relationships with key internal and external stakeholders.

Improvement in active listening.

Proactively anticipating customer needs for better engagement.

Some success stories, practices and projects initiated by the Leaders as an outcome of the IDP based coaching journey **Figure 3**.

##### Leader-1

The leader started process for developing his 4 of his direct reports to build succession.

Building a high-performance team through effective delegation, regular performance review and feedback and looking at building an innovative mind set for continuous improvement with his team.

##### Leader-2

The leader worked on bottom-up innovation and doing an Idea Burst Program (collect, collate and look at relevance) where inputs are taken actively from team members.

##### Leader-3

The leader rolled out IDP to his team members too for their development.

##### Leader-4

The leader conceptualized two high-impact projects as his developmental targets in change management.

The cost optimization project introduced by him in the project and results were made tangible in FY 21–22.

Further, he decided to analyse ROI, based on electricity rates, the scope for introducing power generation using gas in the new Mega Project.

##### Leader-5

Leader introduced My Journey-View-Thought (My JVT) program to create an open atmosphere for sharing and learning.

He also implemented the 5-stage process for project reviews.

##### Leader-6

The leader started a Mentor-Mentee Program within his team.

## **5. Conclusion and the model for the way forward**

It was a first ever multi-Rater feedback for leadership development in a very systematic manner linked to the development goals, an intervention for the Project Directors, though L&T deploys 360-degree feedback system for the high potential leaders who go through 7 step leadership development.

The top management supported the intervention with full involvement in design, roll-out and providing feedback to the participants, which had made lot of difference to its success.

HR Head's direction and training & OD head's full ownership to drive ensured that the gaps that arises during implementation of any new and change management initiatives are addressed at the right time with mutual discussion and follow-up. The project coordinator from L&T side and from the partner side worked on it with all sincerity and commitment. Their ownership made lot of difference.

The implementation partner chosen by the TD & OD Head proved to be very helpful as they had the requisite experience and expertise, had the On-line tool available where our customized questionnaires could be hosted. Further, they brought the outside. In perspective by offering their advice at every stage. Also, they helped in development of concepts and post feedback development intervention. The approach of the intervention was kept as developmental and the openness and transparency maintained from the beginning and throughout the intervention and after it was completed, helped to build trust and get commitment of the participants to the intervention. Since it was made voluntary, it further enhanced the trust level and ownership from the participants.

The feedback sought from customers made it more attractive. However, getting feedback response from the customers was a challenge and needed a lot of follow-up. Last but not the least, the participants saw and experienced lot of newness in the approach with personal engagement, individual coach assignment and Coach helping them to draw the IDP, coaching discussions around the IDP, which gained their buy-in and full involvement.

To sum-up, the initiative of 360-degree feedback development was a great intervention for developing future leaders and project directors in Heavy Civil Infrastructure. It is recommended to replicate in other Divisions, also others can also learn enrich their leadership developing by using this approach and practice.

## **Author contributions**

Conceptualization, BKD and RG; methodology, BKD; software, BKD; validation, RG; formal analysis, BKD; investigation, BKD; resources, BKD and RG; data curation, BKD and RG; writing—original draft preparation, BKD and RG; writing—review and editing, BKD and RG; visualization, BKD; supervision, RG; project administration, BKD; funding acquisition, BKD. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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