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EXTRACT - FEATURES ARTICLE

The International MLQ360 Report Makes a Hit with a National Health Insurer: Practitioner Perspective



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In late 2008, Tim Boyd, Executive Manager HR at GMHBA, a national health insurer approached me to develop and implement 360 degree feedback as part of GMHBA's overall Leadership Development program for the Executive and Leadership Teams.

The program was to form part of Tim's broader GMHBA HR Strategy for 2009/2010 and meet the intent of the CEO Mark Valena to initiate a long term change to the company's direction. From his standpoint, this would require significant leadership capacity from all executives and managers.

The program was linked closely with other initiatives including a team development program provided by a separate consultancy earlier this year. All participants of the Leadership Program had therefore participated in team based feedback and development of team trademarks (a code or set of behaviours that are common to and most important to the team).

Having considered a number of options, Mark and Tim chose the MLQ as the preferred instrument for 360 feedback and the

entire executive and leadership structure of GMHBA participated, namely:

- Mark and the five Executive Managers (the Executive Team); and
- 16 members of the Leadership Team (one level below the Executive Team).

Objectives

The stated outcomes were:

- Enable participants to receive 360 degree feedback from colleagues.
- Enable participants to develop increased self awareness of their leadership style.
- Create a Leadership Development Plan (LDP) for each participant.
- Enable and encourage participants to undertake coaching and take responsibility for improving leadership practices and behaviours.
- Enable participants to develop a more effective leadership approach to manage organisational change.
- Build on and reinforce previous work undertaken by GMHBA to manage change, coach effectively in the workplace and operate as effective teams.

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GMHBA took a very strong development focus to this project and wanted to conduct internal benchmarking to gain greater awareness of both functional and hierarchical leadership performance and develop leadership capacity for the future. We therefore agreed to use the newly developed MLQ International 360.

Program Design

We agreed to conduct the 360 degree program in five phases:

1. Design and preparation which included a 90 minute start up brief for all 22 participants. The purpose of this brief was to introduce the FRLM and 360 feedback process as well as providing advice on selection of Raters.
2. Online MLQ Assessment utilising the MLQ International 360.
3. Individual Feedback Phase consisting of 22 accommodation sessions.
4. Leadership Development Planning conducted two weeks after the accommodations sessions via two 2 hour small group workshops supported by a 15 minute individual consultation to provide advice on selection of leadership objectives and to introduce the LDP Worksheet. Participants were then given two weeks to complete their LDP worksheet and liaise with me to convert this to a Draft LDP.

We agreed during the design that this would be my last official interaction with the participants. They would be required to finalise their own LDP as individuals or in peer support groups if they were happy to mutually disclose and work with a partner/s. I remained engaged with them by phone and email and provided guidelines for them to successfully move from DLDP to LDP and ultimately to implementation of their plans.

5. Evaluation, analysis and reporting involving a verbal and written report to Mark and Tim on the achievement of outcomes, validation and organisational observations.

Results and Lessons Learned

Broad analysis of the results indicates that GMHBA performed well both as individuals and organizationally.

In Builds Trust (IA), Acts With Integrity (IB) and Inspires Others (IM) results were slightly better than the Universal International Research norms. There was evidence that some leaders are reluctant to talk about Values, Beliefs, Vision, Mission and Purpose which is consistent with my observations from other MLQ programs I have conducted. Greater emphasis on this in their LDP will provide leaders with a great opportunity to strengthen authenticity and inspire confidence in the future. Mark in particular has made it a high priority for all managers to take more responsibility for shaping and leading GMHBA's future as

the company continues to redefine itself.

Encourages Innovative Thinking (IS) and Coaches People (IC) were on par with norms and it was pleasing that Rewards Achievement (CR) scored very strongly.

Of course, comparison with norms does not always present an accurate picture of leadership competence. While in many cases results were "above the norm", overall results in the Transformational areas were still below the optimal frequency for most effective leadership results. Again, this presents a great opportunity to move to a higher level of organisational and individual leadership competence.

Monitors Mistakes (MBE-A), Fights Fires (MBE-P) and Avoids Involvement (LF) showed very pleasing results, being comfortably in the optimal ranges.

The outcomes of GMHBA's leadership practice were marginally higher than the norm which is again pleasing. Extra Effort scored lower than Effectiveness and Satisfaction. It is my view that some raters continue to misinterpret the questions in this area, particularly "*I get others to do more than they expected to do*". I believe that raters often see this as a negative question and mark it lower than others. Evidence suggests that this was the case in GMHBA.

In terms of project design, it is fair to say that we could have dedicated some more time to ensuring participants knew what to do once I stepped out of the process. Program validation suggested that individuals reach a natural "crisis of confidence" when this occurs (what do I do now). In hindsight, perhaps we could have added another short workshop or individual session to overcome this. Mark and Tim have been active in their encouragement of individuals since my formal involvement in this project ceased and we are discussing my ongoing involvement in providing coaching support in 2010.

The MLQ International 360 is easy to use. MLQ has produced a very good guide which leads you through the differences in the setup process. The report itself provided useful benchmarking data at multiple levels both for individuals and the organisation. In the analysis phase, Mark and Tim were able to see a broad picture of how each functional department and hierarchical levels was placed in terms of leadership competence. This will be valuable as they place more emphasis on leadership of the future direction of GMHBA. They have used the analysis to identify where greater support to leaders is required. The only disadvantage of using the International 360 is that you lose the opportunity to compare with Australian and industry sector norms. This would still have been useful for the participants and from an organisational perspective.

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We strongly encouraged disclosure throughout the program, particularly during LDP development, giving individuals the option of setting up peer support groups. Where this was done, it aided the development of LDP as well as help participants gain a better understanding of the feedback. Of particular interest, the Executive Team has subsequently shared their leadership objectives and has produced a plan on a page summary showing everyone's objectives and this will be used as a feedback mechanism.

Conclusion

GMHBA have taken a strategic long term, developmental approach to aligning leadership to organisational performance and strategy. All participants were actively involved from the start and have received quality feedback from raters and from each

other. LDP's are now being implemented and each participant has a unique opportunity to shape the future of GMHBA through effective leadership. Organisationally, Mark and Tim are well informed in terms of the areas they need to place emphasis on supporting leaders and I commend them on their strong and active focus on this.

The MLQ International 360 provided a great medium to support these aspirations. I commend it to you to use with your clients and am happy to discuss any aspects with you.

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