MANAGERS SQUEEZED
from all sides

A comparison of upward feedback results from Australian and UK studies shows that Australian managers face greater pressures for change.

By Dr Ron Forbes and Peter Farey

SINCE its Australian launch in mid-1995 (Forbes 1996), enough results have been gathered to explain why the upward feedback process, based on Peter Farey's leader/manager model, is so successful in opening up communication between staff and managers. Let's begin with the unique process of team-manager improvement known as upward feedback, and what differentiates it from more common techniques of appraisal and feedback.

Appraisal systems inevitably give rise to apprehension because one person has to make a judgment about another, in some sense of "good", "bad", or "ideal". At present, almost all 360-degree feedback systems are in fact part of an appraisal system. Some feedback systems exist that are not used for appraisal, but they still use language that judges the manager, often in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Not all use behaviors.

Upward feedback does not appraise the manager (in the judgment sense of the word), but simply gathers requests for more, less, or the same of specific behaviors. It does not say whether the manager is good or bad at anything. This

has the effect of separating judging from learning, and making the process readily acceptable and learning easier, even in a defensive environment. Using the process sends an immediate message that it is OK for staff to discuss openly what they require to work at their best and for managers to learn from them.

The leader/manager model (Farey, 1993) asks for feedback on a full range of practices (behaviors) in the areas of people leadership, people management, task leadership, and task management. Asking only for feedback actually makes responding to the 100 practices rather easy. Figure 1 (next page) shows a typical leader/manager map. The range of behaviors includes within it any competencies that are likely to be selected as significant to an organisation. By comparison, most other models and sets of defined competencies deal mainly with management issues, with little attention to leadership practices.

The 100 practices, sorted into 20 areas of behavior, were selected by Peter Farey based on his investigation of the decades of research that have taken place into

leadership and management and his own experience with upward feedback since he began it in the UK in 1974. The model has proved effective in Australia and the UK in industries as different as financial services, retailing, air transport, broadcasting, and manufacturing, as well as many areas of the public sector.

When organisations define the competencies required, those they chose may not all be relevant to particular teams. Here, the leader/manager model provides an automatic gap analysis: the practices that do not concern the respondents are scored "happy with" or can be omitted. They are not the issues that concern them. However, the staff have the chance to respond to the entire range of leader/manager practices and go beyond the organisation's defined competencies to whatever issues affect their work.

The **process.** In many appraisal/feedback processes, the profiles returned stop with the manager. Sometimes the senior manager (used here to mean the manager's manager) also sees them. The manager may be counselled on the results. Systems that do only this much have a
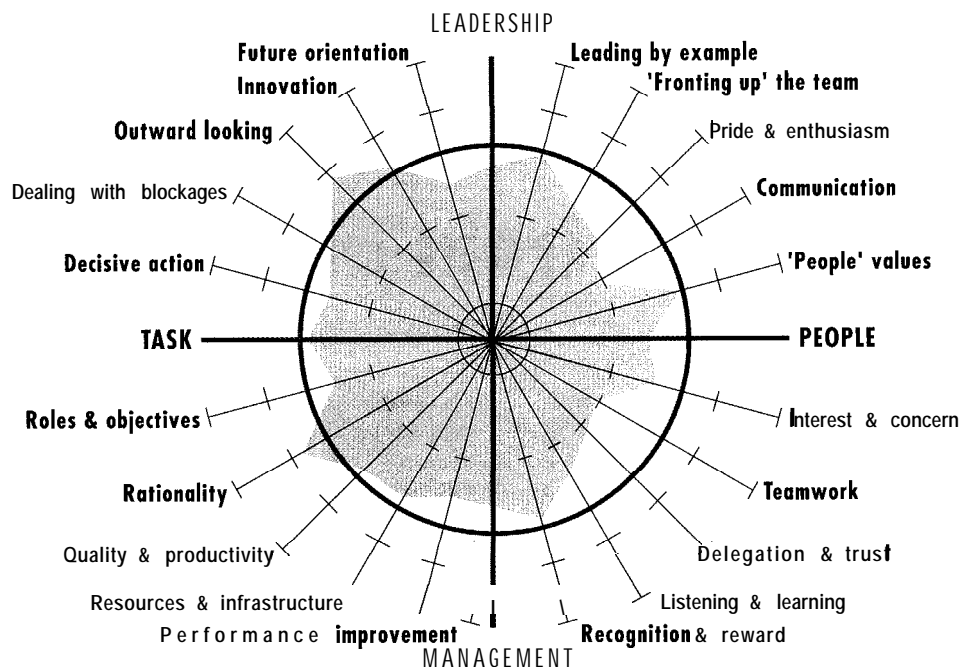
FIGURE 1

A SAMPLE LEADER/MANAGER MAP

TABLE 2

PRIORITISED REQUESTS FOR CHANGE

	Australia			UK		
	Staff	Manager	'Senior Manager'	Staff	Manager	'Senior Manager'
FIRST FIVE	Communication	Quality & productivity	Quality & productivity	Communication	Quality & productivity	Roles & objectives
	Teamwork	Recognition & reward	Roles & objectives	Teamwork	Teamwork	Quality & productivity
	Delegation&trust	Roles & objectives	Teamwork	Delegation & trust	Roles & objectives	Teamwork
	Recognition & reward	Teamwork	Future orientation	Recognition & reward	Outward looking	Performance improvement
	Innovation	Outward looking	Outward looking	Listening & learning	Performance improvement	Communication
LAST FIVE	'People' values	Resources & infrastructure	Rationality	Quality & productivity	Rationality	Recognition & reward
	Outward looking	Rationality	Leading by example	Decisive action	Interest & concern	Interest & concern
	Decisive action	'People' values	'People' values	Rationality	'People' values	'People' values
	Rationality	Leading by example	Resources & infrastructure	Outward looking	Leading by example	Resources & infrastructure
	Leading by example	Decisive action	Interest & concern	Leading by example	Decisive action	Leading by example

limited effectiveness and may not do a great deal to open up communication with the team. The inclusion of the senior manager, or peers, at this point may merely solidify a management perspective versus that of the staff. Any feedback system becomes more powerful when the manager reports back to the team or staff that they lead.

The upward feedback process pioneered and incorporated the best of the above together with two further features:
. A relational mapping technique that helps a team to reach the underlying issues rapidly.
• A carefully facilitated "manager absent" approach to help the team reach clarity on the issues of most concern, while maintaining a high degree of confidentiality.

To these must be added a method of joint action planning in which team and manager work together from the basic issues that they uncover. A result is development for *both team and manager*. The skills and value set of the facilitator in this process are critical throughout. A sensitive and supportive approach allows any difficult situation to be dealt with constructively.

After the team session, discussion usually takes place between manager and senior manager. This provides a way to resolve conflicting pressures from management and to improve alignment.

Lateral feedback where required, including self-managing teams (Forbes 1996), is brought in after the manager has learned from the staff-the ones who have the direct experience of being managed. The results. The leader/manager model is not an appraisal system or a psychological measurement instrument. Although statistically it can yield a 100% response, the individual map is not intended for comparison. The map obtained by one manager cannot be compared with that of another because each represents the perceptions of a team trying to do its job. This can be influenced by members' particular work, environment, location, and by temporal factors such as organisational changes. If two managers were to swap teams, they would not take their maps with them. The map is a request to improve how team and manager work together.

In its detailed section, the map provides the raw data in the form of the responses given to each question. These are numerically sorted to retain confidentiality, but show the precise spread of perception within the team. Contradictions that would be lost by averaging are clearly visible in the raw data.

Once any group of managers in an organisation has completed the map, the

aggregate results begin to build up a pattern. It then becomes possible to make some generalisations about what people are asking for. The greater the number of maps, the more this aggregate reflects a cultural diagnostic of the organisation at a point in its development.

At the broadest level, it will indicate whether there is a greater request for, say, people management or for task leadership. At greater levels of detail, it compares the 20 areas of behavior and gives meaningful data right down to the level of the 100 practices. It also provides a measure of "organisational pressures" between managers and their managers. Layers and divisions of a large organisation can be viewed separately for this purpose.

Accurate information for planning organisational change and training initiatives comes from the aggregate data taken in conjunction with the action plans for each team and the 'Issues Outside the Scope of the Team' (captured during the team session). This approach contrasts with many conventional training programs and change interventions that languish because they are put into place without the benefit of such precise foreknowledge.

The first rerun of upward feedback to be analysed took place in New Zealand in 1996. A learning program for managers had been set up based on the 1995 results. A year later, upward feedback was run again and showed an almost uniform 38% reduction in the staff's request for change in 19 of the 20 areas of behavior. The 20th, which hadn't changed, was "Resources and Infrastructure"! A rerun in the UK showed a 30% reduction. Such results are a clear measure of organisational alignment.

We first compare the prioritised requests for change between staff, manager, and senior manager for 126 Australian managers and 501 UK managers, using Pearson's correlation coefficient (where perfect agreement would be 1) (see table 1).

These results suggest that there may be somewhat better understanding between staff and their immediate managers in Australia than in the UK, but at the expense of more difference between levels of management. The overall result reflects the tendency in organisations to manage upward to the boss, rather than pay attention to the needs of the staff, and the isolation of staff from more senior management. It vindicates the methodology in separating senior manager feedback (and peer feedback) from that of the staff in the early part of the upward feedback process.

The 20 areas of behavior as ranked by staff and their managers show marked differences in priorities, with great similarities in the pattern between Australia and the UK (see table 2).

Different perspectives show u in the rankings (out of 100) given to the practices by staff compared with those given by manager and senior manager (see table 3).

Astonishingly, the first four priorities of staff turn out to be the same in Australia and the UK! The first two priorities must reflect the strong climate of change in both countries. In comparing the top 10 priorities: in Australia, staff only share two priorities with managers and one with "senior managers". In the UK, there is just one in each case. These indicators of organisational pressures demonstrate a clear rationale for the use of upward feedback.

Upward feedback uses a scale of 2 (a lot more) to 0 (happy with) to -2 (a lot less). Most responses are on the positive side so that in general terms we are looking at a scale of 0 to 2. On this scale, we can compare the averages for each of the four quadrants. In overall requests for change, senior managers in Australia turn out to be asking for 34% more than their UK counterparts, indicative of greater "squeeze" on the manager in this country (see table 4).

Finally, the evidence from the quadrant averages, as shown in table 5. Australian staff ask most for people management, their managers ask of themselves both people and task management, while the senior managers want most in task leadership. In the UK, results are similar, but with more emphasis on task

TABLE 3

Rankings given by staff and managers	Australia			UK		
	staff	Mgr	Snr mgr	Staff	Mgr	Snr mgr
Giving full & early information about changes	1	39	37	I	21	39
Communicating directly with the whole unit	2	55	23	2	4	10
Gettitng team issues & concerns openly aired	3	10	11	3	13	21
Helping team know each other's roles & goals	4	58	10	4	11	11

TABLE 5

	Australia				UK			
	Task l/ship	People l/ship	Task mgt	People Mgt	Task l/ship	People l/ship	Task mgt	People mgt
Staff	0.31	0.33	0.33	0.43	0.30	0.34	0.31	**0.45**
Manager	0.46	0.43	**0.52**	**0.52**	0.45	0.39	**0.52**	0.47
Senior Manager	**0.48**	0.32	0.41	**0.35**	**0.32**	0.23	**0.33**	0.27

management from managers and on task management and leadership from senior managers. In both countries, we see managers squeezed between the people management demands of their staff and the task leadership demands of their boss. Conclusion. The methodology separates judging from learning in order to achieve a non-defensive culture of improvement. As far as the individual manager is concerned, the statistical norms usually associated with surveys and psychological profiling do not apply here. The aggregate statistics do, however, measure

TABLE 1

	Australia	UK
Staff - Manager	0.55	0.42
Staff-'Senior Manager'	0.30	0.26
Manager-'Senior Manager'	0.62	0.72

I= perfect correlation

TABLE 4

Averages of areas	Australia	UK
Staff	0.35	0.35
Manager	0.48	0.46
Senior Manager	0.39	0.29

organisational culture, vertical pressures, and requirements for training and development.

Results highlight the disconnects generally found between staff and their managers, and validate use of the model as directly addressing the improvement of managers, teams, and organisations, both culture and processes. Extensive experience demonstrates its success in a wide variety of industries in Australasia and the UK.

HRM

References
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Forbes, Ron (1996), 'Upward Feedback, a New Power for the Learning Organisation'. *HRMonthly,* November 1996. Australian Human Resources Institute.

PETER FAREY, MA, was a senior HR manager with British Airways and a part of the team that helped BA become the "World's Favorite Airline". A former CEO of the Air Transport Industry Training Association, Farey was the first in the UK to use upward feedback in 1974. He now leads his own consultancy, specialising in leader/manager feedback.

RON FORBES, PhD, has pioneered the application of leader effectiveness training, neuro-linguistic programming, and accelerative learning in Australia, and supported innovations in continuous improvement and self-managing teams. He is director of the Leaderskill Group, which launched upward feedback in Australasia in 1995.

Post **Script to article:**

In general terms, the requests for change in Australia and UK are concentrated as below