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Evaluating competencies: the conception and implementation of a 360° feedback instrument for managers. A case study

Martine BRASSEUR, Pascal BRASSIER, Isabelle GALOIS, Steffi GANDE, Laurent MAGNIEN, Stéphanie ARNAUD and Frédérik BARBIEUX

Abstract How can we evaluate competencies? What instrument can we use to implement individual and organisational development? To provide some answers, we present the results of a study addressing the conception and implementation of a 360^0 feedback-type instrument for managers. Our goals were to identify the conception process of the evaluation instrument, then the way in which it is implemented in organisations. We used a qualitative methodology consisting of a case study addressing the conception and implementation of a tool (the '4LS' Evaluation) used in organisations to develop the competencies of 3638 managers. Our results show primarily that, if a pragmatic approach was used in the conception of the instrument, the outcome is congruent with self-determination theory. Secondly, the way the system is used, and the transmission of its related competencies, follow a dual process: the self-development of competencies and the standardisation of behaviours. In this paper, after setting out the research problem based on a literature review, we will present the main features of our methodology, followed by the results and their discussion. We will arrive at the first elements of a model and an outline of future explorations. In conclusion, does the instrument support a conditioning or learning process?

Key words Competencies evaluation, 360° feedback, managerial competencies, individual and organisational development.

A famous management theoretician already claimed in the 1950's that the manager was a rare and precious resource for the organisation. Thus, organisations have to pay attention to the way they manage and train their own managers (Drucker, 1957). The development of managerial competencies has become a main concern for many organizations all over the world (Wickramasinghe and De Zoyza, 2009 ; Dragoni, Tesluk and Oh, 2009). This article focuses on evaluation instrument and system and their contribution to competency development. This study complements previous researches on the 360°feed-back approach, for example for leadership (Kets de Vries, Vrignaud and Florent-Treacy, 2004).

The aim of the article it to understand how do evaluation systems contribute to competency development? In order to answer this question, we present the results of an exploratory study about the creation and implementation of a 360^0 feedback instrument addressing to managers and providing the basis for a larger research project exploring the evaluation of competencies[1]. Explaining the procedure by which the evaluation tool was created, then the way in which it is applied and used, we will demonstrate the following: if the nature of evaluated competencies is related to a concept of the employee on a quest for self-determination, positioning the evaluation approach in a perspective of individual and collective competency development, rather than one of control, the implementation of the tool, and the transmission of its accompanying competencies, correspond to a dual process. This process implies both the self-development of competencies and the standardisation of behaviour. After setting out the research problem based on a literature review, we will present the main points of the study methodology, followed by the results, the discussion of these, and the first elements of model allowing us to set a course for further work. In conclusion, we will examine the deployment of an evaluation-development procedure: is this a form of

[1] The study was conducted in the framework of a research partnership between Krauthammer and CEDAG (Le Centre de Droit des Affaires et Gestion) – a research laboratory attached to the Université Paris Descartes. The full team is composed of: Stéphanie Arnaud, Frédérik Barbieux, Martine Brasseur, Pascal Brassier, Jean-Louis Chandon, Isabelle Galois, Steffi Gande, Christophe Girodon, Erick Leroux, Laurent Magnien, Ewan Oiry and Pierre Piré-Lechalard.

conditioning, or of organisational learning? The former would hinder the development of the autonomy of organisational players, whereas the latter would support it.

The problematic of competency evaluation

In this first section, taking a definition of the concept of competency as a starting point and then addressing the different approaches to evaluation, we will explicitly present the objective of our research and the first research questions which lie at the origin of this exploratory phase.

Definition of concepts

The concept of competency

The use of the term "competency" in the field of human resources management is fairly recent. It symbolises a destabilisation of the employer-employee relationship (Rozenblatt, 2000) followed by its current reconstruction (Lichtenberger, 2003) within the context of the increased involvement of employees in finding or optimising solutions to HRM problems. In the 1990's, the model of the learning organisation positioned competencies at the heart of work organisation. Competencies have become strategic, sources of value creation and performance. Organisations have therefore begun to install individual remuneration systems based upon competencies, as well as evaluation and training practices which allow the individual to utilise his/her talents (Amadieu and Cadin, 1996). It is now a question of being able to identify and name competency, in order to be able to value, reward and develop it.

How can we capture competency? The most widespread approach consists in viewing competency as a sum of knowledge, of knowing "how to do", and knowing "how to be". (Bellier, 2004). It enables practitioners to refer, respectively, to the training, professional experience, and personality of the knowledge owner, and has the advantage of being easily transferable into HRM practices, notably, recruitment. Despite this, the approach does not

take into account the transversal and dynamic character of the competencies needed, in terms of exercising responsibility. It also suggests that an individual competency can only emerge within, and thanks to, a collective and that this dynamic is a constant. In this article, we retain the approach of Lévy-Leboyer (1996), defining competencies as "behavioural repertories" whilst considering that their mastery and development in a professional situation depends as much on the person concerned, as on the context of his/her activity (Defélix, Klarsfeld and Oiry, 2006).

Personal evaluation approaches

Multiple evaluation approaches exist and these differ in terms of their goals, which in turn differ according to a company's logic of action (Galambaud, 1991). This latter is not necessarily linked to the identified needs of human resources and line management. Some even consider that the large-scale uptake of evaluation practice has more to do with the phenomenon of an organisation submitting to the external pressures of its competitive environment, than of any internal management act. Several studies have highlighted that this disconnect between individual employee-evaluation and other human resources practices is a source of dissatisfaction and loss of sense for its users (Kennedy, 1998; Coens and Jenkins, 2000). Over time, this leads to more-or-less official procedures being abandoned. Where the evaluation has real managerial consequences, it can have several intentions: conservational (ensuring alignment between the competencies needed to occupy a function, and the deployed competencies), adaptational (to prepare a professional evolution), orthopaedic (to close a gap) or clarificational (to create knowledge regarding the object of the evaluation) (Aubret, Gilbert and Pigeyre, 1993). Traditionally, evaluation systems have been categorised following their primary orientation: either generally directed towards control and centred upon results and the measurement of past performance, or installed to support forward development (Igalens and Roger, 2007). This second form of evaluation is disassociated from any system sanctioning

counter-performance. This disassociation emerges as a condition determining whether evaluees can actually be placed into a competency-development process. Indeed, the recognition of the right to make mistakes is a pre-requisite for learning (Carbonnel and Roux, 2006). The positioning of evaluation systems studied in a competency management framework confers several, specific, characteristics on them. With reference to Pichault (2006), they are characterised, notably, by a significant degree of integration into HRM policy and in a wider sense, to the strategy of the organisation, and a system which seeks to prioritise broadening the competency spectrum or enhancing given competencies. Our study addresses competency-development systems.

Research object and research question

Our main research question can be formally expressed as follows: "How can the creation and implementation of a 360^0 feedback-type tool, based on behavioural scales, benefit the development of managerial competencies?"

Study focus on 360° feedback

Our research therefore focuses on specific evaluation systems, and takes into account answers to interrogations which allow practices to be characterised (Cadin, Guérin and Pigeyre, 2002): "Why evaluate?" "Evaluating what?" "Evaluating whom?" At the heart of development-evaluations lies the study of systems to evaluate individual competencies, which we have defined as behavioural repertoires. The remaining interrogations: "Who evaluates?" and "How?" span panoply of different procedures. Our study concerns one of these: "360^0 feedback" whose originality lies in its consultation of multiple evaluators. These can be chosen according to their hierarchical position with respect to the evaluee: subordinates (n-1, n-2), peers, hierarchical superiors (n+1, n+2), or following a functional logic, all professional contacts, including clients, suppliers, colleagues. Several characteristics of 360^0 feedback emerge from our literature review (De Vries and al., 1981; Ashford, 1993; Mc Gee Wanguri,

1995; Dalton, 1997; Seifert, Yukl and McDonald, 2003). We retain the notion of rigour, due to several factors. Firstly, a confrontation of viewpoints allows objectivity following the principle of inter-subjectivity. Secondly, the possibility to access an otherwise-inaccessible type of information. Thirdly, the precision enabled by the contextualisation of information, and the possibility of relativising this, and finally, the translation of this information into recommendations for development which favour learning. Since the 1980's, the use of 360^0 feedback has become large-scale; initially applied in large North American companies, it spread internationally, to penetrate all types of organisation. Today, managers no longer consider it merely as a prop for control or selection, but as a powerful tool for change (Handy, Devine and Heath, 1999). Other studies have raised the parallel use of 360^0 feedback to measure performance as being a source of contradictions, dilemmas and conflicts within organisations (Toegel and Conger, 2003). What seems to emerge from them is the notion that, like all tools, it is not the 360^0 feedback itself that is a development factor, but the way it is used and integrated into wider management practice. Despite all of this, little research addresses the impact of 360^0 feedback on the development of managers (Fletcher and Baldry, 1999). The main output concerns the deployment conditions that are needed for, or which facilitate the opening of a field of progress for evaluees without necessarily guaranteeing any effects. It is far less concerned with validating the hypothesis that this management tool, used well, is a determining factor in competency-development. In the same way, Bailey and Fletcher (2002) have underscored the facilitative role which certain organisational players could adopt, once the evaluation is returned.

Behavioural scales

Evaluation methods can be more or less formalised. For example, the most often-used is the individual annual performance review, yet this can embrace several very different realities; from an intuitive discussion led by the hierarchical responsible, to a precise interrogation,

based on a pre-established grid known to the evaluee, and even drawn up in consultation with social partners. Even when criteria have been pre-defined, several positioning methods exist: referring to indicative keywords or to precise and observable behaviours linked to quotation scales. Numerous studies have emphasised that the sophistication of the tools may give users a false impression of objective positioning, whereas, in reality, we are dealing with nothing more or less than judgements set in a context of social interaction. Our study addresses systems based on formal grids and scales. We have identified three types used in evaluation in organisations, of which two are behavioural scales.

1. "Graphic rating scales" are based upon broad criteria. These criteria are selected according to their level of desirability for a particular function, or for the organisation, and are, equally, based upon the judgement of the evaluator.

2. "Behaviourally anchored rating scales" (BARS), define competencies through a description of the evaluee's behaviour, proposing scales to measure his/her performance level (Smith and Kendall, 1963).

3. "Behavioural observation scales" (BOS), describe competencies through behaviours, but position the evaluee according to the frequency with which these are observed. (Latham and Wexley, 1981). The creation process of these two types of behavioural scale is similar. It is based upon three groups of independent experts who are approached in three clearly differentiated steps, all intended to favour the relevance and reliability of the items chosen[2]. Our research confines itself to behavioural scales.

Managerial competencies

Evaluating managerial competencies is generally considered to be an important concern, as well as a difficult task, given the nature of their professional role. Indeed, a general approach

[2] The 3 steps in creating behavioural scales are as follows : 1st group: definition of factors relevant to the evaluee's occupancy of his/her professional role, 2nd group: definition of behaviours typically associated with each factor, whose occurrence indicates that the evaluee fulfils his/her role as desired, 3rd group: testing the links between the factors and the behaviours; selection, adjustment, confirmation of the behaviours

would be to consider that managing consists of seeking to attain goals "*by others*" (Robbins and Judge, 2006, p.5). Comparing the manager to an orchestra conductor who is also a composer, Drucker (1954) considered that the manager's responsibility is to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts, a productive entity which yields more than the sum of the resources attributed to it. Management emerges first and foremost as being a relational exercise, requiring its practitioners to develop human qualities (Chanlat, 1990). It is not a question of reducing the spectrum of managerial competencies, however, by considering these as purely relational. Rather, it is about considering relationships to be central to management practice, without necessarily marginalising its other aspects, seeing management, for example, as a practice of reflexivity. If the relational dimension of management is recurrent and permanent, its associated key competencies, captured by defining behavioural repertoires, will be linked to the main concepts of organisation and management. Our study identifies the theoretical framework, in which the reference system is positioned in order to deploy a procedure for individual and collective competency development, then discusses its range and limits.

Methodology

In this research we will study a 360° feedback-type evaluation process, conceived and deployed with the objective of optimising the competency development of the managers evaluated, and based upon behavioural scales.

General study design

Epistemological positioning

From an epistemological viewpoint, we position ourselves within an interpretativist paradigm. This seeks to develop an inside understanding of a phenomenon, based upon the scheme of representation of researcher and practitioner. Articulating these representations allows us to gain better insight into the data collected in the field (Hlady-Rispal, 2000). Although our

research is exploratory, we do not seek to make an abstraction of the existing theoretical frameworks, which would be pointless (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). We seek, instead, to identify the most relevant theories, to compare them and investigate the reality of the associated practices. In order to do this, we follow an abductive or "non-demonstrative induction" procedure, according to Girod's definition (1995). We therefore neither confirm nor refute any hypothesis, whilst nonetheless identifying and discussing the relevance of the conceptual choice operating. This re-surfaces throughout the course of the study, to make sense of its scope and set a course for further investigations.

Positioning the study in the overall research project

This research is part of a larger project exploring the evaluation of competencies. It is the first, foundation, study of three current projects, each applying different methodologies as follows:

- The quantitative analysis of data captured in user-organisations: 3638 evaluations conducted with managers. The goal is to deepen the study of the behavioural scale upon which the 360^0 feedback tool is based.

- An intervention-study of the development of the 360^0 feedback tool concerning the production of new competencies within the initial reference system. The integration of a new step in the evaluation deployed in organisations, allowing evaluees to identify competencies not foreseen by the system, and on which they seek feedback.

- Longitudinal studies of the development of managerial competencies undertaken by sub-groups of the research team in several organisations selected due to their systematic use of the 360^0 feedback tool under study, for all their managers.

Choice of an in-depth case study

We considered the case study methodology to be the most relevant in seeking some initial answers to our research questions, and to defining next steps. According to Miles and

Huberman (1991), this allows us to develop new conceptualisations thanks to deeper descriptions of the phenomena. We wish to consider the phenomenon of manager-evaluation within a complex system, all of whose dimensions we wish to capture and case study methodology supports this (Giroux and Tremblay, 2002). Finally, the evaluation of managerial competencies is a contemporary organisational concern and suits a specific context. The case study method, as outlined by Yin (1994), is by definition a research procedure which links the treatment of phenomena directly to the context within which they emerge.

Case study protocol

Research field and case choice

Three kinds of criteria have been applied to selecting our case. The first emerge primarily from our problem: a 360^0 feedback-type instrument based upon behavioural scales and embedded in a process of individual and collective competency development. Secondly, the choice of studying the professional role of managers assumed that the grid would concern specifically this profession. The third set of case study selection criteria is linked to the fact that we seek, thanks to this first foundation study, to pursue our work with other studies, both quantitative, based on evaluator positioning, and qualitative, conducted within organisations. The evaluation instrument we will call "4LS" met our selection criteria. It was developed at the outset of 2002 to measure the impact of the training delivered by a firm of consultant and trainer, which we will call "K.". 3638 managers were evaluated in organisations distributed over 16 sectors of activity, with 6 size bands, from less than 50 employees, to more than 5001 employees, and located on all continents. In total, 35539 people responded to the evaluation questionnaire, either as evaluees, or as evaluators. By definition, this was a support directed towards learning and with the primary objective of practice improvement. The tool, furthermore, was based upon behavioural scales, in order to establish a 360^0 feedback

evaluation of each subject. Finally, the international scope of K., the use of technology to transfer evaluation questionnaires and analyse the positioning results, as well as the availability of these data to us, gave us the material we needed for an in-depth exploration.

Data collection and analysis methodology

For this primary, exploratory phase of the research, two types of data were collected and analysed using a qualitative approach which would offer a higher guarantee of the internal validity of the results (Baumard and Ibert, 2003), and better enable us to capture the complexity of the evaluation-development procedure under review (Marshall and Rossman, 1989):

- Primary data mainly consisted of the narratives of the organisational members of K. who were at the origins of the evaluation grid. These subjects had undertaken/followed the grid's implementation, then tested its effects: the series ranged from one, to thirty interviews of 30mn to 90mn, depending upon the interviewee. We also drew on two series of interviews of 30mn to 60mn. These interviews, conducted from 2006 to 2008, followed a group of managers in training at K. whose programme included the transfer of the 4LSE. Six consultants were also interviewed at K.'s summer university in August 2007 (one interview per person, of 30mn). Since the process was exploratory, one researcher accompanied one of the consultants from 2006 to 2009 in his activities, seeking to gather as much information as possible, and partially based on non-participative observation.

- Secondary data consisted of all the documentation produced by the consulting firm on the tool, or made available by them online, including the evaluation questionnaire.

As a next step, we conducted a thematic analysis of the contents of interviews, encounters in meetings with organisational members, and the documentation. This was performed in three stages (Harvatopoulos, Livian and Sarnin, 1989). Firstly we performed a "free scan" of all the data harvested, coding the content to identify the major themes (in this case, content and

process of the evaluation). Secondly we created a thematic grid on the basis of the major key concepts (for the content: behavioural competencies; for the process: development and standardisation). Thirdly, we performed a qualitative analysis enabling us to understand the importance of the themes within the content harvested, rather than to measure it (Thiétart, 2003). The results of this primary content analysis were then returned to the individuals concerned, in order to ensure internal validity "*in qualitative methods, the validation of the work...depends upon its acceptance by the subjects concerned, since they are the only ones able to confirm what they experienced*" (Mucchielli, 1994, p.112). The results also gave rise to interviews comparing the different interpretations of the data, between researchers, and between researchers and practitioners.

Results and Discussion

As Gilbert (1998) and Thévenet (1992) state, in the case of evaluation, a management instrument always has a dual aspect: content and process. This distinction, which we have retained to structure the presentation of this section, enabled us to emphasise and discuss one of our main results. The content corresponds to the conception phase of the evaluation tool and its associated support, whereas the process corresponds to the tool's implementation and use in organisations.

The emergence of the content: the conception of the evaluation tool

From the results of our study of the tool's creation the finding emerged that, if a pragmatic approach was used in the conception of the instrument, the outcome is strongly congruent with Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory.

A pragmatic approach to developing a reference framework for managerial competencies

At the time the evaluation tool "4LSE" was built, a 360° type framework – known as "361° feedback" already existed. This was deployed as a training support to enable participants to identify their development points by comparing their self perceptions with those of their

professional entourage. Doubts surrounding the arbitrary nature of positioning led to the decision to develop a new, and more "objective" tool – (this being the term used by its creators), in the sense of being "rigorous" in both its creation and use. Behaviours are described in each scale according to four levels, which vary according to the level of evaluee performance perceived by the evaluators. These in turn follow three criteria: the way in which the manager takes account of his/her environment, develops relationships, and impacts performance. The notion of performance was clarified by the tool's creators as "reaching organisational goals". Reference to independent experts was observed in the first two groups involved in the tool's development: a first group, represented by a consulting firm external to K., was at the origin of the four levels of the scale considered relevant to capture managerial behaviours. The second group was composed of three K. training consultants, employed by the firm for between 10 and 15 years in 2002, and in charge of its research and development projects. They subsequently designed the 4LSE questionnaire, by linking observable behaviours to each of the four levels based on K.'s 30 years' experience in management training. The development of this reference system is described by its creators themselves as empirical. As a starting point they took the behaviours which K. had identified as key to developing good management practice, to define 64 competencies, subsequently grouped into 13 categories. The process was therefore inversely related to referencing methodology, which takes an abstract concept as its basis, concretising this.

A reference system corresponding to Self-Determination Theory

The reference competencies obtained following K.'s pragmatic approach emerge from our analysis as being strongly congruent with Self-Determination Theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (2000). Indeed, one of K.'s driving principles, upon which the tool's creators based themselves, is that "all human beings possess, within themselves, the resources they need to evolve". Self-Determination Theory departs from the same founding principle, stating that

every human being is on a quest for self-determination and will strive to implement, together with his/her environment, a form of self-regulation. This, in order to satisfy three fundamental needs: competency (feeling effective, able to face stimulating challenges) ; autonomy (self-organise one's experiences, feel ones-self to be the initiator of one's own actions), relatedness (social interactions based upon mutual respect and trust). Self-determination is linked to a subject's internal locus of control (DeCharm, 1968). As such, a subject's behaviour cannot be reductively attributed to external incitements. According to Gagné (2003), the manager's role will therefore be to facilitate a sense of self-determination in employees, either directly through his/her interactions, or indirectly, by assuring a facilitative work environment. Several studies have attempted to define the managerial competencies associated with self-determination theory and to check their impact (Deci, 1971; Deci and Cascio, 1972; Boggiano and Ruble, 1979; Koestner and al., 1984). Questionnaires have been designed by self-determination theorists to conduct their research and deepen the theory. These cannot however be used as instruments to evaluate managers[3].

K.'s tool emerges as an instrumentation of Self-Determination Theory, enabling an evaluation whose typology can be considered as the development of managerial competencies. To support this statement, we obtained from our literature review 9 major managerial competencies associated with self-determination theory. A content analysis of the 64 4LS competencies confirmed that 57 (89%) corresponded strongly to, or were similar to, these 9

[3] For example, the Problems at Work Questionnaire (PAW), created by Deci, Connell and Ryan (1989), aim to measure the tendencies of managers to control or to support employee autonomy through the self-positioning of the evaluees of their behaviours in 8 situations, presented in scenario form. Although the four-level scales used (from HC "highly controlling" to Highly Autonomy Supportive (HA)), and the use of items proposing choices of behaviours to adopt, seem to resemble an evaluation tool, such as the 4LSE, the artificial nature of the situations places the respondent outside his/her work context, to provide him/her with tendencies more related to his/her general attitude to control, than his/her professional competencies. Furthermore, the PAW was not created to be proposed to an entourage. Another questionnaire is used to identify the positioning of managers; the Work Climate Questionnaire (WCQ) (Baard and al., 2004). It is composed of 15 statements, to which the respondents must indicate their level of agreement according to a 7-level scale. Again, this tool does not have the intention of developing managerial competencies and cannot be used in such a system. It is however important to note that the 6 items of the WCQ which directly provide a description of the manager's behaviour, also feature amongst the 64 4LSE competencies.

competencies. If the development procedures had not been disassociated and if, for K. they had not followed an inverse process – from competencies, to their categorisation - the 4LS items could emerge as the 57 behaviours into which the 9 factors of self-determination theory could be declined. The 7 unassigned 4LS competencies concern the notions of vigilance in reaching organisational goals, loyalty vis-à-vis the hierarchy, an ability to communicate, but also a capacity to manage conflict situations, or situations featuring divergent interests. These items seem to correspond to a second level of managerial competency. This is the manager's contribution to the development of his or her organisation according to two factors. Firstly, his/her capacity to foster the regulation of individual goals, those of the manager, and/or those of his or her employees, vis-à-vis organisational goals, and secondly, his/her capacity to learn from experience, which is linked to the concept of reflexivity as defined by Giddens (1987). The 57 competencies seem to correspond to the first competency level: the support of subordinate self-determination. This, to be effective would become more relevant when linked to two second-level factors: regulation and reflexivity. Seen in this light, development of the 7 remaining competencies is called for.

Table 1: Distribution of the 57 managerial competencies of 4LS

Re-thinking the evaluation grid by anchoring it in self-determination theory and integrating the dimensions of regulation and reflexivity, is a primary recommendation for K.. This is supported by the notion that, if the 4 levels were initially defined by taking into account relationships, organisational goals and the environment, the scale items are almost exclusively relational. To define new items, integrating the notion of organisational goals linked with regulation, and re-introducing the way the environment is taken into account as a capacity to adjust behaviour according to experience, would not represent a departure from the 4LS, but a development of it.

Establishing a process: implementation of the evaluation instrument

From the results of our study of the implementation process the idea emerged that, if the process supports managers' self-development of their competencies, it is also a way of standardising behaviour.

A procedure supporting the individual self-development of competencies

The evaluation procedure emerges from our case study as being a determining factor in positioning the instrument in a process of either development or control. In fact, the process presents several characteristics which confirm its positions within a dynamic of competency development, rather than one of controlling performance:

- The results are confidential, and collected by the evaluee, who is the sole recipient;
- The evaluators are chosen by the evaluee according to K.'s recommendations, in certain instances with the help of a K. consultant, with the objective of enlightening the evaluee about his axes for development and in response to his/her questioning
- It is the evaluee who invites his/her evaluators to answer the questionnaire anonymously, with an internet link to the 4LSE site, having first self-positioned
- Once all the evaluators have answered the questionnaire, a feedback document is sent by email to the evaluee, or handed over during a restitution session by a K. consultant, who is by nature external to the organisation and held to an obligation of confidentiality
- The positioning results, which the evaluee can decide not to share, are disassociated from any kind of negative or positive sanction and this is in any case technically impossible
- The positioning results act as a support for exchanges with the evaluators, taken on the evaluee's initiative, with the objective of clarifying any gaps in the interpretation of questionnaire items, and positioning on the scales

- The positioning results result in self-recommendations formulated by the evaluee with or without the help of the K. consultant, and presented in the form of concrete actions, whose implementation s/he plans with the objective of developing his/her competencies.

For the evaluation mechanism to run successfully pre-supposes that the organisation's management is committed, upfront, to respecting certain principles, such as the confidentiality of answers and the selection of the evaluators by the evaluee.

Openness towards discussions between the evaluee and his/her evaluators enables users to transcend the classic limitations of evaluation tools, by fostering three types of further exploration which support the employee's self-development of his/her competencies. The first type concerns the parameters of evaluee development. Managerial competencies remain difficult to observe and the associated behavioural repertoires will never enable these competencies to be completely and perfectly captured. Discussion with an entourage provides a better understanding of the chosen positioning and the exploration of modes of development specific to the evaluee and his/her organisation. The second type concerns the contextualisation of positioning, to avoid two kinds of bias, interpretation, and generalisation. For example, it is possible for evaluators to answer by projecting reference contexts which differ from evaluator to evaluator, and which differ, too, from those held by the creators of the evaluation grid. Other limits also surface and these are inherent to the way that organisational members adopt the evaluation tool: some have managed to corrupt its end result – developing competencies – by using it to "settle scores" as the K. consultants express it. Indeed, since the procedure runs in a transparent way, by comparing different viewpoints, one or more evaluators can deliberately opt for a positioning logic whose aim is to "get a message across", and this message can be penalising for the evaluee. Despite all of these factors, however, the possibility of engaging in a dialogue about the evaluation of behaviours is, generally

speaking, and as Greenberg stated (1986), one of the determinants of perception of justice surrounding the instrument, and is supportive to its implementation.

At this stage in the research, the K. system seems to materialise as a "common code of expression" upon which the manager bases him- or herself to regulate "the different work relationships which are established" with his/her professional environment: in this respect it is the way it is used to perform a 360° feedback which emerges as a motivational lever (Brasseur, 1993, p.17) corresponding to Self-Determination Theory.

A collective process to standardise managerial behaviour

If the process of implementation and the application of results, irrespective of the tool's content, facilitate the self-development of competencies, it also appears to be a process of standardising managerial behaviour:

- The behavioural reference system was developed by K. and remains the same as, or the basis for, evaluation grids for all organisations and all managers.
- The decision to implement it within an organisation in the context of an "evaluation campaign" is taken by senior management; so that the evaluation is proposed to, even imposed upon, managers; the number of individual requests being low
- Evaluation campaigns are usually linked to a management training plan running over several months; they therefore act as the first stage in a K. training initiative, with the aim of reinforcing its efficacy
- The goal is to foster managers' adoption of the values and the concept of management proposed by K.'s reference system
- Since 2002, the 4LSE questionnaire has in most cases been based on the grid developed by K. with its 64 managerial competencies. On several occasions, a selection or regrouping of the questions has been applied at the request of the senior

management of certain organisations. Some have asked for questions to be developed which corresponded to situations specific to their organisation, or to its values

- Even when the behavioural norms are adjusted by K. for the organisation, these are never produced by the evaluees themselves.

What kind of standardisation process? A primary form of social conditioning is innate in all human behaviour within a given social context. Social/human science sheds light on this. In 1961, Arendt (1983, p.43), explained that "men are conditioned beings, because everything they encounter is immediately transformed into a condition for their existence. The world in which the *vita activa* is led consists of objects produced by human activities: nevertheless, those objects which owe their existence exclusively to men constantly condition their creators." This dynamic re-surfaces in the results of the study of K.'s evaluation process: organisational members define a tool whose aim is to foster and support their self-determination. The tool, as soon as they have used it, determines them, re-aligning them, if they deviate, to an induced behavioural norm. Evaluation, like all social practices, seems unable to avoid producing a standardisation effect, even if it is based on a reference system which has as its very focus the notion of emancipating its evaluees from forms of social determinism. We are therefore facing a stubborn contradiction of content and process. The results highlight a second level of standardisation specific to evaluation, considered by Simonet (2009), whatever its form, as being an "object whereby social practices can be standardised". It falls under the domain of a "supposedly knowing power" (Zarka, 2009), or even, of a power which claims as knowing, or able to know. Through the positioning of behaviours, evaluees and evaluators are placed, following Foucault's expression of Foucault for the psychiatric expertise (2003, p.15), into a "truth game" which unfolds via the production of "speeches of the truth". Their final outcome, in management terms, is the fulfillment of organisational objectives, proceeding according to K.'s standardisation

framework. This is positioned as a truth, because of its external and neutral origin, and because it corresponds to the concepts held by top management, concepts which act as prescriptive guidelines for the evaluation campaign. Confronting the viewpoints of several of the evaluee's internal observers is considered to be a dynamic which allows a reasonable approximation of the actual truth about the evaluee's behaviour, as compared to the accepted truth of the behaviour that should be adopted. Viewed in this light, a behavioural standardisation seems to be at play, following an influence process comparable to that defined by engagement and rationalisation theory (Beauvois and Joule, 1985). Drawing upon Cognitive Dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), this entails preserving subjects' sense of freedom by inducing them to change their behaviour. As primary players in the process of K.'s self-development of competencies, managers come to adopt a reference system of competencies that they have not chosen, but find themselves engaged towards. Whereas, for a part, highlighted by the evaluation grid, they distance themselves from their initial line of behaviour. Viewed from this perspective, K.'s evaluation process requires a sense of employee self-determination to be developed in order to individually influence them, and collectively induce them to adopt an external behavioural standard. Despite all of this, and unlike the experimental tools applied by social psychologists to support and develop this explanatory model, it is difficult to attribute any deliberate desire to manipulate evaluees to one or more K. organisational members or consultants. On the contrary, during the interviews and meetings organised by this study, they expressed discomfort when facing the proposition of "latent manipulation", asking a number of questions which our analysis enabled us to organise into three groups: "If this is a bias or a drift, how can we avoid it?" "Who's manipulating who? Aren't we manipulated by ourselves?" "Isn't this more a way for managers to behave as they'd like to?" This leads us to the third level of behavioural standardisation - through the integration of the goals and values of the organisation that its

members contribute to producing. This, we find, is indirectly indicated by Self-Determination theorists. They consider, indeed, that when people feel self-determined, they develop a form of motivation we can call "self-regulated" (Gagné and Deci, 2005). This emerges as a self-subordination to the collective interest of the organisation. In the case of the 4LSE, it seems that the goals of subjects and organisation self-regulate in an interactive dynamic. In this way, the self-regulation of organisational members, directed towards their self-determination, would be reciprocal and supported by the evaluation process.

The above questions led us to a second recommendation which would help to secure the positioning of the device in a self-development process. This is to integrate in the reference system competencies which managers would self-define. To allow evaluees to intervene in the production of the content, and to self-position according to their own behavioural norms, transpires as essential to avoid a drift into institutionalised conditioning. Generally speaking, researching points of coherence between the norms of the reference system aiming at the self-determination of organisational members, and the evaluation system, is one of the developmental axes for the 4LS.

First modelling, next steps of the research

A first modelling materialises. This allows us to partially answer our research question, whilst deepening it and arriving at the three new studies currently underway. We have been able to shed light on the two following points:

1. Evaluation methods which can be inscribed in a competency development process. Our study leads us to consider certain 4LS characteristics as being conditions for implementing an evaluation-development : its anchoring in self-determination theory, for example, and the self-development of competencies. Our analysis leads us to suggest that these conditions should be completed by their integration into the content production phase, meaning allowing evaluees to contribute to the production of the

reference system. In this way, a third type of observational behavioural scale could be defined, with a dual composition methodology, one prior to the process and the other integrated in it. This would lead to two components of the reference system: a permanent one pre-defined by K. and a contingent one, auto-produced by the evaluee.

2. Self-Determination Theory as a conceptual framework for evaluation-development. On the basis of the congruity between the 4LSE reference system and managerial competencies emerging from the work of Self-Determination theorists, we arrived at the following observation. It is the entirety of the evaluation process that corresponds to the principles of Self-Determination Theory favouring competency-development. In this way, using this theory to create reference frameworks and define an evaluation process would not be specific to a given professional role – that of the manager - but could be presented as a general conceptual framework for the self-development process.

Conclusion

The main contribution of this primary study is to have highlighted a potential conceptual framework _self-determination theory_ allowing to approach not only management, but procedures for evaluation-development. Apparent contradictions seem to arise from a pragmatic definition mode leading to the instrumentation of a theory on one hand, and a process simultaneously involving self-development and behavioural standardisations on the other. Beyond these, it is the fundamental question of individual and organisational development which is raised, and which further studies in this research project will attempt to answer. Is the 4LS a way of favouring social control, or rather, a real tool to manage competencies? Does it fuel and sustain a form of conditioning, or one of organisational learning? The former would hinder the development of the autonomy of organisational members, whereas the latter would support it.

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