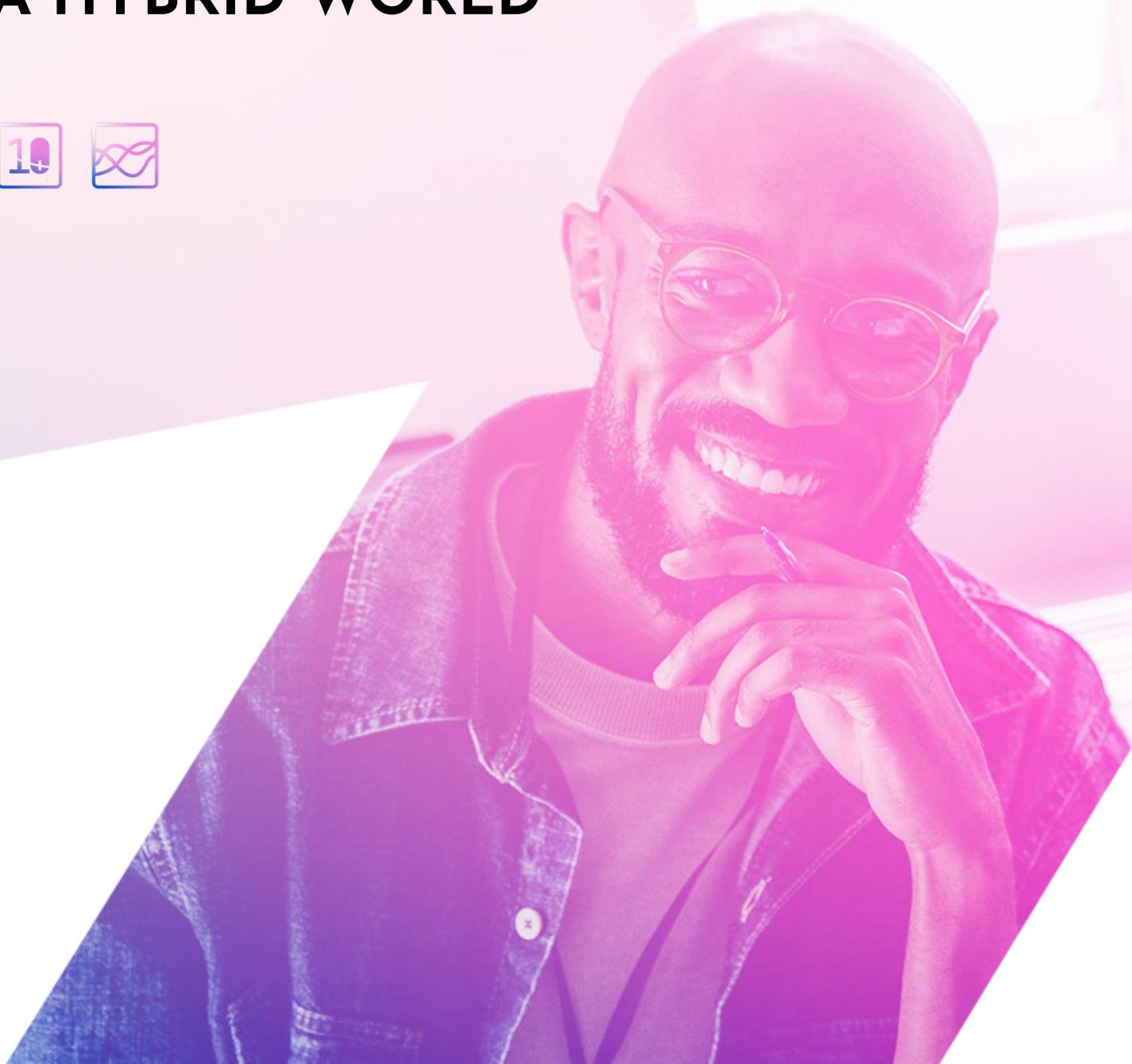




UNSEEN

POST-EVENT SUMMARY

A LEADERSHIP DINNER ON 360 FEEDBACK IN A HYBRID WORLD



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 5th June 2025, a curated group of senior HR and talent leaders came together for an evening of evidence-led discussion, hosted by Evolve Assess and Sten10, part of the Unseen Group.

The event explored the challenges and future potential of 360-degree feedback tools—especially in hybrid working environments. The evening blended research insights, practical examples, and peer discussion to surface themes around trust, bias, and meaningful developmental impact.

FULL SUMMARY

SETTING THE SCENE

Ben Williams (Managing Director, Sten10) opened the evening by acknowledging that 360 feedback is simultaneously widespread and controversial. He reframed the discussion around its idealistic goal: to foster trust, growth, and multi-perspective insight. However, he also warned that when done poorly, 360s can lead to defensiveness, strained relationships, and disengagement.

“When applied correctly, 360s build trust and self-awareness. But when mishandled, they do more harm than good.”

WHY MANY 360S FAIL

Drawing on Zenger Folkman’s 2024 findings, Ben explained that:

- Follow-up is essential: Leaders who engaged in structured conversations post-feedback saw stronger performance gains.
- Linking to pay is risky: According to the 2024 CIPD Insight report, 40% of organisations use 360s in performance reviews and 15% tie them to bonuses—often resulting in gaming, biased rater selection, and reduced honesty.
- Psychological safety is often low: People Insight (2025) showed that 39% of employees felt feedback strained relationships; 30% said it reduced motivation. Hierarchies and anonymity were major contributing factors.
- Ben posed a critical reflection to the group: How do you currently manage psychological safety and structured follow-up in your 360 processes?

HYBRID AND REMOTE FEEDBACK

The hybrid context added further complexity:

- Proximity bias: The SHRM/WeWork 2023 study found managers seeing staff weekly were twice as likely to rate them as high performers.
- Generic feedback: Gartner’s 2024 study highlighted vague remote feedback—“good team player”—lacking behavioural anchors.
- Style over substance: CMI’s 2024 report revealed that expressive communicators (camera on, emojis, praise) were more likely to be rated well, regardless of actual contribution.

“In hybrid settings, visibility often trumps value—raising questions about fairness.”

Guests discussed how hybrid feedback might be made more intentional and training raters can help.

NARRATIVES VS NUMBERS

Moving on to the format of feedback, Ben presented:

- Narratives = Fairer: Research from Academy of Management Discoveries (2024) showed narrative feedback was seen as more human and motivating.
- The Goldilocks Zone: According to Qualtrics (2024), comments between 25–75 words had the greatest impact—too short felt dismissive; too long became confusing and onerous.
- Scoring inconsistency: Gallup (2023) showed a standard deviation of 1.1 points across raters using a 5-point scale—revealing significant interpretation differences.
- Hybrid model success: Hogan’s 2024 recommendation was for simplified scoring supported by meaningful narrative.

“Short scores show trends—but it’s the stories that drive action.”

EMERGING TRENDS

Two final trends were noted:

- AI for theme extraction: Deloitte (2025) found AI was increasingly used to surface themes at cohort level, though individual application remains in development.
- Feedforward, not feedback: Marshall Goldsmith's 2023 work showed that future-oriented suggestions were 32% more accepted and less stressful than critiques.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR PRACTITIONERS

- 360 tools work best when trust, training, and follow-up are built in from the start.
- Remote environments amplify existing biases; intentional design is critical.
- Narrative feedback outperforms scores in motivational impact—but a hybrid model may offer the best of both.
- Linking 360s to pay undermines trust and honesty.
- Psychological safety is the foundation—if people fear retaliation, honest feedback is impossible.

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