

Using 360° Feedback in Management Development

Traditional appraisals simply involve line management assessment of an individual's performance. Whilst the manager might be the best judge of an individual's performance in some aspects of the role, there are situations where others could offer greater insight into their capabilities. For example, direct reports may be able to offer useful insight into the individual's leadership skills and colleagues could provide more accurate assessment of their teamwork. The purpose of 360° feedback is to provide a more rounded picture of an individual's performance. In addition to asking the line manager to provide feedback, the views of direct reports, colleagues and sometimes even customers and suppliers are collated. The individual completes a self-assessment which enables comparison of perceived strengths and development needs with the feedback from others. The process of 360° feedback presents the opportunity for a detailed discussion of individual performance in the whole work context. As such, a 360° feedback process is a useful developmental exercise in itself, and can also be utilised as part of an executive coaching activity.

The administrative process of 360° feedback can be off-putting for some organisations and in this guide, Sarah Broadhead, Managing Consultant of the Occupational Psychology Group, outlines her top ten tips for ensuring the process is constructive and problem-free.

1. ENSURE THAT THE INDIVIDUAL'S LINE MANAGER SUPPORTS THE PROCESS

In order for the process to have a significant impact on the individual's performance at work, it is crucial that their line manager is able to provide the support required to address any issues highlighted. Progress is much more likely if the manager is actively encouraging the individual to tackle their identified development needs. Line managers need to be shown that the process is a tool to support them rather than an additional burden that is being imposed on them by HR.

2. ENSURE THAT DIRECT REPORTS, CUSTOMERS AND COLLEAGUES ARE OFFERED ANONYMITY

A key concern of direct reports is the possibility that the process will impact on their relationship with the individual being rated. It is only by providing a confidential and anonymous approach to the rating that their views are likely to be honest. The views of these individuals should be reported as averages and should combine the ratings for at least two people. Ideally the identity of these respondents should be further protected by selecting them from a pool of possible individuals. Only the self-rating and line manager's rating should be reported as an individual result.

3. CONSIDER USING AN ON-LINE SYSTEM

Perhaps the greatest stumbling block in the process is the collection of data. Paper and pencil 360° feedback processes are time-consuming and present an administrative burden when introduced to more than a few individuals. An on-line system provides an efficient way of collecting the views of a large number of people along with the fast and accurate processing of data. Savings are made in printing, postage and data handling. In addition, follow-up e-mails for non-respondents are often a standard part of these on-line systems.

4. USE A BESPOKE COMPETENCY MODEL OR PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Whilst it is possible to map a generic framework onto the organisation's own model of performance, the specific behaviours that underlie the generic model might be quite different from the behaviours you wish to target in your organisation. Competencies such as leadership or interpersonal skills are culture dependant and may vary significantly. A generic assessment of leadership skills may highlight an individual who will be an effective leader generally but not necessarily the right type of leader for your organisation.

5. INCLUDE INFORMATION ON IMPORTANCE AS WELL AS PERFORMANCE

It is useful to gain an understanding, not only of the individual's performance in each of the behaviours, but also the importance of these to overall job performance. There are two main methods of eliciting this information. One is to ask respondents to rate the importance of each behaviour or competency to overall job performance. The second is to identify importance through statistical analysis of the data provided. This is only possible on larger scale programmes but does remove the need to ask for ratings of importance.

6. PROVIDE A CLEAR REPORT OF THE FINDINGS

The reporting of the results is a crucial part of the 360° feedback process. The findings need to be presented in a meaningful and constructive manner that helps to highlight both strengths and development needs. If you fail to break down the information into specifics, it is unlikely the individual will be able to draw out the useful points. Graphical presentations can help an individual to see which behaviours are seen as less positive and by which group of raters. Large differences between performance and importance need to be highlighted and discussed.

7. MAKE COMPARISONS WITH OTHER MANAGERS PERFORMANCE

Where more than ten people are involved in the process, it is possible to build up an average rating for each competency to provide an additional insight for the individual into their current level of performance. For example, whilst their lowest rating might be in creativity, it could be an above average rating in the context of the organisation. This highlights an organisational development need but also provides useful information for an individual to help prioritise development activities.

8. PROVIDE FACE TO FACE FEEDBACK

Whilst the reporting of results should provide self-explanatory information on the individual's performance, the process of feedback is more about the discussion of those findings. An effective feedback session will not only help the individual to make sense of the results but also begin the process of identifying ways of addressing their development needs. This session will help to ensure that the report is fully utilised rather than being an interesting read that is soon gathering dust on the person's bookshelf!

9. PUT IN PLACE A PROPER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The 360-degree feedback process clearly shows an individual where they need to focus their attention, but it does not, in itself, provide development. It is only through a proper set of development activities that they will be able to address these development needs. The 360° feedback will need to be backed up with a clear action plan that is supported by the individual's line manager. The organisation will need to ensure that appropriate development opportunities are made available such as coaching, mentoring, formal training and reference literature.

10. EVALUATE THE PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE

The purpose of implementing 360° feedback is to focus development in order to improve an individual's performance. One method of evaluating progress is to repeat the exercise 6-12 months further on. This will allow a proper evaluation of an individual's success in addressing the development needs that have been identified. Where more than 30 people have been involved, it is possible to validate the findings of the 360° feedback tool to ensure it predicts performance in the job as assessed by other hard measures of performance.

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As business psychologists, our focus is on providing high quality bespoke consultancy, training and products that enhance individual and organisational performance. We work in a true partnership with our clients to recruit, develop, motivate and retain the most talented and engaged employees.

If you have any questions or would like to talk to the Occupational Psychology Group about your 360° feedback requirements, please contact us on **0161 848 0048** or **opg@ramseyhall.com**.

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