USING 360 DEGREE FEEDBACK.

Checklist 074

» INTRODUCTION

360 degree feedback is most often used in to support employee development, for measuring the impact of training and in performance management systems. It is particularly relevant for appraising leadership skills.

Changes in organisational structures towards flatter hierarchies and higher levels of employee empowerment have had implications for the appraisal process. An individual manager will now often have a greater span of control that in the past, so an employee's colleagues may be in a better position to assess his or her performance. This has led to an established interest in 360 degree feedback which, by combining the perspectives of subordinates, peers and team members can provide a well-rounded and more accurate and objective overview than the perceptions of a single person. 360 degree feedback can be particularly good for motivating people who undervalue themselves. It can also increase general awareness of the impact people have on each other and lead to more open working relationships and improved teamwork. It is most effective in organisations which have, or are moving towards, an open, supportive, and participative culture.

This checklist makes the assumption that a scheme will be managed by an HR department rather than individual managers.

» DEFINITION

360 degree feedback (or appraisal) involves appraisal by those above, below, and to the side of the appraisee and incorporates self-assessment. In practice, it may not include all of these elements. Depending on the level of openness required, feedback may be handled by a third party, to ensure that individual comments are anonymous.

» ACTION CHECKLIST

1.   Decide which behaviours you want to measure and whom to assess

Consider which sets of knowledge, skills and abilities you want to measure: for example, should they be competency-based, job-related, or behaviour-related? Remember that 360 degree feedback can be used at any level of the organisation, so decide whether you wish to assess specific individuals, particular teams, particular levels, or the whole organisation. Decide also at this stage whether the scheme will be anonymous or not, and if so who will analyse the submissions.

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2.   Design a feedback questionnaire

Devise detailed questions or, if you do not have the necessary expertise in-house, consider buying in a ready-made questionnaire or employing a consultant. It is worth considering the use of a web-based questionnaire in order to reduce administration, improve the quality of feedback, and ensure accuracy and confidentiality. Check that the questions are phrased to elicit a descriptive, rather than a judgmental, response, as the former is less likely to give offence and more likely to provide information on which the appraisee can act. Avoid asking questions which the majority of prospective appraisers will not be qualified to answer or which contain jargon or language that might be open to misinterpretation.

3.   Communicate the scheme and prepare participants

Good communication and an open management style are vital to the success of 360 degree feedback. Make sure that the scope and purpose of the scheme are clearly explained and encourage the airing of worries and objections. If necessary, circulate a pilot questionnaire asking employees, for example, for their views on managers in the organisation in general. This will serve to demonstrate how the scheme will work and to give reassurance. A questionnaire which focuses on strengths as much as weaknesses will help to make the exercise non-threatening, so consider building in specific questions about what someone does well or less well. Appoint a manager to act as a facilitator and publicise his or her roles and responsibilities. This person should be widely respected and have a good reputation for fairness and honesty. If it is not appropriate to nominate an internal manager, consider using a consultant.

4.   Train all appraisers in giving, and all appraisees in receiving feedback

Encourage appraisers to be constructive, positive and specific, rather than being critical, negative or vagye. In describing a colleague's behaviour, for example, "*I notice that you rarely acknowledge us when you arrive in the morning.*" is more helpful than "*I think you are a bad communicator*". "*I note that you need time and space to yourself but when you get it you can really produce the goods*" pinpoints the message in an acceptable way. This should be better received than "*You're too much of a loner*". Do not allow the appraisal to become an opportunity for subjective gripes. If this happens, those who receive a critical appraisal will tend to get their own back when appraising others, especially if the individuals are identified or identifiable.

5.   Allow appraises to choose their own appraisers

Allow employees to select who is to appraise them from an agreed pool, but ensure that those chosen include people with whom they do and don't get on well. The aim is to achieve a rounded appraisal. Set limits on the number involved in each appraisal, as otherwise the exercise can become an administrative nightmare. Instruct appraisers to return their questionnaires to the appointed facilitator. If it has been agreed that all comments will be treated anonymously, reassure everyone that their views will not be attributed specifically to them

6.   Decide how feedback is to be presented

Work out how the results are to be collated and presented by the facilitator: is your objective to allow employees to be able to compare their own performance over time, compare themselves with like employees, or compare themselves against a set of competences? Consider whether feedback on particular actions is to be linked to the importance of the action to the job. If so, the results will need to be weighted accordingly.

7.   Provide assistance through coaching and mentoring

Decide whether improvement actions should be left to individuals or whether they should be offered support and guidance. If you wish individuals to take responsibility for their own improvement, don't show the results to their boss without their approval. The facilitator or another trained person should be

available to help employees deal with feedback, particularly to advise on how to deal with diverging views. Consider whether to hold development sessions in which appraisees can offer support to each other.

8.   Set action plans for improvement

Follow up appraisal with a programme of suitable training or development. This may range from attending a course, or working with a colleague, to internal or external secondments. Remember that learners will have different needs and preferences.

9.   Evaluate the use of 360 degree feedback

Evaluate the appraisal initiative, taking into account the views of all participants, including any difficulties that arose in completing the appraisal questionnaire or in analysing the data from it. Compare the results of using 360 degree feedback with previous appraisal schemes. Details from the evaluation should be acknowledged when undertaking any subsequent appraisals.

Glossary of terms related to 360 degree feedback

Peer appraisal: employees are evaluated by their colleagues and their supervisor.
Team appraisal: team members assess their own team's performance. Feedback should preferably also come from representatives of clients of the team and from a supervisor.
Upward feedback: managers are appraised by those who work under them.

»   POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Managers should avoid:

› forgetting that employees may find the introduction of 360 degree feedback threatening or challenging
› treating 360 degree feedback as a one-off exercise
› leaving long periods between appraisals
› allowing appraisers to make personal attacks on individuals
› generating a climate of suspicion.

»   ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

Performance management: theory and practice, Sue Hutchinson
London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2013

One page talent management: eliminating complexity adding value, 3rd ed., Marc Effron, Miriam Ort,
Boston Mass: Harvard Business Press, 2010

The art and science of 360 degree feedback, 2nd ed., Richard Lepsinge and Anntoinette D Lucia
San Francisco Calif: Jossey Bass, 2009

Armstrong's handbook of performance management an evidence based guide to delivering high performance, Michael Armstrong
London: Kogan Page, 2009
This book is also available as an e-book.

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360 degree feedback beyond the spin, Michael Silverman, Maire Kerrin and Alison Carter
Brighton: Falmer, Institute for Employment Studies 2005 (IES report 418)

This is a selection of books available to borrow from CMI's library. More information at:
www.managers.org.uk/library

JOURNAL ARTICLES

360° feedback, Colin Newbold
Training Journal, August 2013, pp 55-59

360-degree feedback: eliminating the blind spots in your managerial abilities, Steven Reissig
British Journal of Administrative Management, Summer, no 75, 2011 pp 30-31

Doing the rounds, Angus McLeod and Wendy Jenkins
Training Journal, July 2010, p 20-21

This is a selection of journal articles available for members to download from CMI's library. More information at: www.managers.org.uk/library

RELATED CHECKLISTS

036   Conducting a performance appraisal
069   Preparing to be appraised
129   Establishing a performance measurement system
222   Giving feedback as a coach

INTERNET RESOURCES

Team Builders Plus www.360-degreefeedback.com
Basic introduction to 360 degree feedback with details of tools and products

ORGANISATION

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Tel: 01536 204222 www.managers.org.uk
CMI offers a tailored online 360 degree system which can be used as a stand-alone activity to scope future personal development planning or as a pre and post training evaluation tool to identify development needs. In addition CMI, in partnership with Warwick Business School, have developed a 360 degree tool which helps to identify and evaluate political awareness skills. For further information on the **CMI 360°** and the **Political Awareness Skills 360°** please call 01536 207404 or email insidesales@managers.org.uk

» **NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP**

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

›   Unit DB4: Manage people's performance at work
›   Unit DC5: Help individuals address problems affecting their performance