



NCVO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

How to... Conduct 360 degree feedback

Introduction

What is it?

360 degree feedback, sometimes simply called 360 feedback, is a method of gaining feedback from a variety of people about an individual's performance and can be a highly powerful input to performance management and employee development.

It can provide more detailed and robust feedback about an individual's performance than the traditional line manager led appraisal. It fits with the changes in many of today's organisations where there is less hierarchy and more cross-functional working.

The process involves gaining feedback, via questionnaires, from a number of individuals who have contact with the employee during their work. This may include: peers, more junior staff, more senior staff and the employee's line manager. In addition, feedback may be sought from people who are not employees, such as service users, customers and suppliers. Often, the employee will also fill in a questionnaire, to assess their own performance.

Feedback into the questionnaire is confidential and the 360 feedback is usually given at a formal appraisal meeting by the line manager or sometimes by a skilled coach.

When to do it

360 degree feedback should be integrated into your organisation's performance management system, alongside appraisals and regular 1-1 or supervision meetings. 360 degree feedback does not replace the traditional manager-subordinate relationship, it augments it.

Whilst 360 degree feedback is frequently a part of the annual appraisal, it is also possible to undertake it at another time, for example as part of a management development programme.

The Johari Window Concept

A useful way of explaining the 360 degree feedback concept is via the Johari Window. Johari identified four dimensions of each person as follows:

	what you see in me	what you do not see in me
what I see in me	The Public Self	The Private Hidden Self
what I do not see in me	The Blind Self	The Undiscovered/Unknown Self

360 degree feedback can be particularly powerful in reducing the 'blind self', that is what other people see but what we do not see. This helps individuals to know what to reinforce or change in their behaviours.

What are the potential benefits?

Benefits for the individual

360 degree feedback can help people to:

- see themselves as others see them
- get a rounded view
- know what to do more of
- know what to do differently/better
- become more aware of and understand the relevance of competencies (see below)
- enable senior managers to see their own development needs.

Benefits for the organisation

360 degree feedback can help organisations to:

- identify key development areas for individuals, a department and the organisation as a whole;
- identify strengths that can be used to the best advantage of the organisation;
- support a climate of continuous improvement and continuous learning;
- design more effective training and coaching initiatives.

What are the potential downsides or barriers?

Many of the potential disadvantages concern how the system is implemented in practice.

Downsides may include:

- **Feedback is not accepted.** This could be for a number of reasons, including:
 - feedback is poorly delivered
 - there is a lack of credibility in the process
 - there is a lack of credibility in the individuals from whom feedback is sought, perhaps because of perceived inexperience or ineffectiveness

- the appraisee is not ready for open and honest feedback.
- **Paperwork.** If more feedback is gathered than those operating the system can cope with, the whole process may seem like a bureaucratic burden, rather than a positive experience.
- **Quality of questionnaire.** A poorly-developed questionnaire, which asks questions in an ambiguous way or asks questions that are not wholly relevant to the employee's role and job or to the strategic aims of the organisation, is likely to deliver poor results.
- **Ongoing peer conflicts.** Transparent feedback can be adversely affected by such conflicts.

How to develop and implement 360 feedback

Below are some areas you may wish to consider.

- **What do you need to achieve?** What difference must 360 feedback make? Are you doing it to measure performance, assess potential, identify training needs, facilitate development, or a combination of these?
- **Deciding the areas to seek feedback on.** It is best to seek feedback on competencies/behaviours, rather than on job objectives. This is because those giving feedback are unlikely to have an in-depth understanding of the objectives of the person's job, but they will be able to comment on behaviours.
- **Check relevance.** Seek feedback on areas that are clearly related to the job.
- **Simple wording.** Use straightforward, unambiguous language in the feedback questionnaire. Vague, complex questions rarely produce good feedback.
- **Rating scale.** Use a rating scale, such as the one below. You can also include the opportunity for 'free text' comments.

4 – This competency is displayed very effectively by the employee, who is a role model in the organisation.
3 – This competency is displayed well by the employee.
2 – There are some learning needs concerning the demonstration of this competency.
1 – There are significant learning needs in relation to this competency.
DK - I don't have sufficient information/knowledge to be able to comment on the individual in relation to this competency.

- **Involve people.** Rather than developing 360 feedback in isolation, consider setting up a half day workshop with representatives of your staff and management to decide how the scheme will operate. If you don't already have a competency framework, use the time to agree and define the behaviours you'll assess via the 360 scheme.

- **Agree who will be included in the scheme.** You'll need to think through: who will the scheme cover, eg all employees or just managers? One option might be to pilot the approach with senior managers first, then roll out the scheme to other managers and staff after the pilot. 'Top down' is nearly always the best way to pilot, as it demonstrates that senior managers are committed to the change.
- **Agree how the scheme will work in practice.** Considerations might include: how many people will be asked for feedback; what are the key dates by which feedback needs to be sought, collated and fed back to individuals; and what documentation will you need.
- **Confidentiality.** You will need to consider whether the feedback will be reveal who gave which feedback, or whether this will be kept anonymous. Most organisations tend to keep this information anonymous.
- **Format of feedback report.** The feedback report should be concise and simple to understand. Use of graphics makes it easy to explore differences between questions. Graphics are much easier to produce if you have 360 software (see below).
- **Whether you will use a paper-based system or use 360 software.** If you put '360 feedback software' into your computer search engine, you will find literally hundreds of software suppliers. Using online 360 feedback cannot only reduce the time and effort required to distribute the questionnaires and collate the answers, but there can also be improvements in confidentiality and accuracy.
- **How you will brief the individuals who are invited to give feedback.** Your briefing might cover the following areas:
 - Feedback only on behaviours, with examples. Don't feed back on personality.
 - Give your feedback using the word 'you'. It will help you address the person 'as a person'.
 - Make sure you answer the question and avoid repeating yourself.
 - Keep the feedback respectful and constructive – think about what you would like to receive from someone else.
 - Only write a comment if you feel strongly about the issue of if you feel it would be helpful to the individual.
 - When you have finished, review what you have done to make sure you are happy, before submitting it.
- **Whether you will run the scheme in-house, or with external support.** Some organisations use an external consultant or organisation to deliver 360 feedback, either with or without software. Alternatively, many organisations simply run their scheme in-house with the line manager receiving the feedback.
- **How will you help individuals to make good use of the feedback?** If you simply give someone their feedback report, not much will change. Most people need the help of a coach or skilled line manager to use their feedback to produce a personal development plan that is practical and relevant.

- **What training will be given to managers giving the 360 feedback to their employees?** Training in coaching and feedback skills will be invaluable here.
- **How will the scheme be introduced into the organisation?** You will need to consider what communications materials you will need, what briefings you will undertake as well as whether the scheme will initially be introduced on a pilot basis. You will need to be clear on issues like confidentiality of the review, whether giving feedback is optional or compulsory and how the completed reviews will be used in the organisation.
- **How will the scheme be evaluated?** You could have an evaluation of the scheme 6 months after implementation, perhaps running a focus group to gain views from individuals involved. The organisational impact might be assessed via an employee satisfaction survey; you would be looking for positive changes in organisational behaviours.
- **How will you choose reviewers?** Those who have a personal conflict with the individual, or who lack insight themselves, will not be the best people to provide feedback. Some organisations invite the person who will receive the feedback to select reviewers; this is a good practice approach.
- **How will 360 feedback be integrated into the organisation's processes?** 360 feedback needs to be seen one part of developing the organisation's capacity and so it needs to be supported by a culture that promotes continuous learning, coaching and effective feedback.

Case study - TACT

TACT is a foster care and adoption services charity. TACT is a national organisation with an annual turnover of c.£14m, 105 full-time equivalent staff and working agreements with around 300 foster carers.

Daniella Black, HR Manager, was responsible for introducing 360 degree feedback in 2004. At this stage, a paper-based system was adopted.

Daniella and her colleagues defined a set of competencies for managers and a set for staff. They invited staff to suggest 15-20 people (peers, managers, more junior staff, local authority contacts and foster carers) to give feedback on their performance. From these 15-20 people, the HR team then chose around eight people from whom to seek feedback. HR was responsible for all aspects of coordination: selecting feedback persons, dispatching forms, monitoring, receiving forms and summarising responses.

TACT ran this system for two years running, but there were several disadvantages. The first was the sheer administrative volume for the HR team! In addition, there was some staff mistrust about the confidentiality of the process and managers were not totally 'bought in'.

As a result, in 2007, TACT introduced a new 360 feedback scheme, this time using software and engaging an external consultant to assist them. They revised their competencies, taking into account staff views.

The current system still involves staff nominating a number of individuals, with HR selecting a smaller number, to whom they send an electronic invitation to give feedback. The feedback is on a numerical rating scale, but with the opportunity to

give comments as well. Individuals who give feedback do so anonymously via the software.

Once all feedback is received, reports are generated using the software. The reports include graphical, narrative and data table reports. Daniella and her team have worked with the external consultant to customise the reports to the needs of TACT.

The 360 feedback reports are integrated into the appraisal process. There is a section in the appraisal which prompts the manager and employee to discuss and record feedback from the 360 process.

Managers have been trained on the 360 feedback system.

Benefits of the system

Daniella feels it is difficult to evaluate the 360 degree process in a totally objective way, since organisational change often comes about due to a number of factors.

However, she does perceive the following benefits:

Reduction of the 'blind areas'

Danielle feels that 360 feedback at TACT has definitely enabled staff to become more self-aware of how they come across to others – a really valuable development tool.

More effective management of performance

Managers have found that the 360 feedback helps them substantiate to staff both learning areas and areas of performance which is already effective.

Greater ownership of learning and self-development amongst the workforce

Daniella said that staff have started to take more responsibility for their own development, because 360 degree feedback requires everyone to really think about how they are working and how they can improve.

Improvement in behaviour from some individuals

Some individuals who were negative or disruptive in their behaviours to other staff have made positive changes for the better. Daniella attributes these changes mainly to the 360 scheme.

Organisational benefits

From an organisational perspective, 360 feedback has: helped to communicate and reinforce organisational culture and values; helped improve customer service; and helped identify learning and development needs.

Drawbacks

Lack of internet access

One disadvantage of the online system is that many foster carers do not have access to the internet. As a result TACT is looking to introduce a paper-based feedback system for this group of individuals only.

Time required

Daniella says that 360 degree feedback is still quite time-consuming. As a result of this, TACT now has a rolling programme of appraisals, which are linked to the

date each employee completed his/her probation, rather than all appraisals being undertaken at a set time each year. One option in the future might be to collect 360 feedback on a two-yearly, rather than annual, basis.

Next steps

Number of respondents

In the future, the plan is to limit the number of respondents to six, in order to make the process more manageable.

Increased requirement for coaching

One unanticipated need arising from the introduction of 360 feedback was for coaching. Coaching has been arranged for a number of individuals, to help them develop in response to feedback from the 360 degree feedback.

Additional training

A next step will be to provide additional training to managers on how best to feed back the results of the 360 process. In addition, training will be arranged for staff on how to use and interpret their 360 reports, as well on how to receive feedback.

Further differentiation of competencies

TACT currently have two sets of competencies – one for managers and one for staff. They are contemplating whether, in the future, they might further differentiate, so that, for example, they have different sets of competencies for administrative staff and for social work staff.

Evaluation

TACT is keen to evaluate the effectiveness of their 360 feedback system further and is in the process of considering appropriate ways to do so. TACT has benchmarked internally areas and placement numbers and linked this to the 360 competency ratings. The 360 feedback system has given TACT the opportunity to address performance of individuals in a constructive way and therefore help improve organisational performance.

The competencies used

TACT has kindly agreed to share their competencies. They are reproduced below.

Commitment

Takes work responsibilities seriously and makes every effort to do a good job. Is prepared to adapt to changing circumstances and to help others when the situation requires

Behaviour associated with effective performance

Works hard to get the job done
Is punctual and reliable in coming to work and attending meetings
Is prepared to be flexible and accommodating
Speak highly of TACT to outside parties
Helps others when they are under pressure
Put in extra effort when the situation requires

Problem Solving

Behaviour associated with effective performance

Maintain a calm, organised and objective approach when faced with a problem
Increase his / her understanding of problems through discussion with others
Quickly and accurately analyse all information relating to a problem
Check information or assumptions and not accept things at 'face value'
Identify the underlying causes of complex or difficult problems
Identify wider issues and trends, and anticipate future requirements

Working with People

Encourages people to use their judgement and experience. Treats people fairly and builds a positive work environment.

Behaviour associated with effective performance

Treat other people in a way that makes working life enjoyable
Make fair and unbiased judgments about people's performance
Encourage people to take personal responsibility for key tasks and activities
Explain to people how their work contributes to overall performance
Praise people for their contribution and encourage them to continue
Take steps to eliminate personal criticism or abusive behaviour at work

Focusing on Results

Demonstrates personal drive and initiative with a clear focus on the standards and objectives that need to be achieved.

Behaviour associated with effective performance

Maintain a clear focus on the objectives and standards that must be achieved
Demonstrate the personal drive and resilience to overcome problems
Take the initiative in developing new, more effective ways of doing things
Keep people aware of time-scales and the progress made in achieving objectives
Cope well with conflicting priorities and pressure, remaining positive and focused
Demonstrate flexibility when faced with an unexpected change of plans

Client Focus

Builds and sustains long-term relationships with internal and / or external clients. Focuses on identifying and meeting client needs in the most effective way.

Behaviour associated with effective performance

Build relationships and establish rapport quickly with clients
Ensure needs are met within the structure of TACT Standards
Monitor and act on client feedback
Follow through until the client is satisfied
Tailor his / her approach to meet the needs of clients
Deliver on promises to clients: 'gets the job done'

Professional Behaviour

Dependable, reliable and accountable for own behaviour. Acts within professional, legal and ethical boundaries and guidelines.

Behaviour associated with effective performance

Accept responsibility for his / her own decisions and actions

Keep appropriate people informed when things don't go as planned
Takes own share of responsibility for resolving problems
Demonstrate accountability; can be trusted to do a good job
Avoid publicly denigrating or undermining other managers/colleagues
Act professionally and ethically
Behaves in an anti-discriminatory manner towards others

Team Work

Cooperates and collaborates with colleagues inside and outside own area to achieve shared goals. Contributes actively to help create effective partnerships which meet organisational objectives

Behaviour associated with effective performance

Treat all people fairly and respectfully
Appear approachable, listens well and makes time for colleagues
Collaborate with and learn from others
Build rapport and trusting relationships with colleagues
Encourage the involvement of colleagues and helps to build team spirit
Promote the sharing of information within the team

Communication and Influence

Conveys information clearly, accurately and succinctly and adjusts to the audience's needs and requirements. Has credibility and impact and uses a range of effective interpersonal skills to persuade others to adopt a particular position and / or take action.

Behaviour associated with effective performance

Communicate clearly and succinctly
Adapt his / her communication style to suit topic, audience and situation
Aware of his / her non verbal behaviour and its impact on others
Easily gains agreement from others to a particular course of action
Demonstrate credibility when stating a position
Deliver information in an engaging way

Further information

Factsheet on 360 appraisals by the CIPD, see
<http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/perfmangmt/appfdbck/360fdbk.htm?IsSrchRes=1>.

Wendy Blake Ranken
HR Consultant
wendy@blakeranken.clara.co.uk