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HR Zone *Feature*

Making 360 feedback work in your organisation

Using 360 feedback within performance management is becoming increasingly popular. Peter Goodge explains how HR can ensure buy-in from everyone and support managers throughout the process.



Using 360 feedback in performance management is not new, but it seems to be a developing theme for HR. The CIPD's recently updated **factsheet** reports that "360 feedback is growing in popularity as an input to performance management". We can only guess why that is so - maybe 360 addresses some of the new, emerging issues for performance management?

We asked HR professionals, each with first-hand experience of 360 feedback, how it contributed to performance management. They identified a few features and benefits:

- o 360 provides impartial, detailed information on competencies, and that creates a better-informed, more objective review
- o Well-designed 360 questions define clear behaviours and standards; it is easier to judge competencies and performance
- o 360 fosters a more open and honest discussion, by putting shared, sometimes challenging, information on the table

Using 360 in performance management is not particularly difficult, but it does need some thought. The aims and context are quite different to 360's common applications to leadership development, talent management and coaching. Here's our suggestions on things to think through:

Winning people over

HR often seems to be told to integrate 360 into performance management. Sometimes it's an edict from group head office; sometimes a request from a managing director with previous experience of 360. Rarely do line managers and their teams ask for 360 as part of performance management. So, there's a real need to explain things to people and win them over.

"Rarely do line managers and their teams ask for 360 as part of performance management."

We all know what happens when people aren't convinced. Things get done poorly with little thought and no positive outcomes. A project without buy-in becomes a box-ticking exercise, and one that makes HR appear bureaucratic and pointless.

Briefing meetings will really help - use them to introduce 360, explain your proposals, listen and agree changes. If you can't run briefings, you might train HR business partners or good line managers to do so. Try to keep briefings out of the technical details, but elicit people's concerns and show how you will address them. Good online information, with updated answers to frequently asked questions will help a lot too.

Making it really easy

Performance reviews often occur within one or two months, and that might mean thousands of 360 questionnaires completed in the same short window. If the 360 processes are time-consuming, intrusive or unreliable it will create problems which will be greatly magnified by the huge number of questionnaires. Aim for a 360 process that asks for a few minutes from everyone - those completing questionnaires, those setting up feedback, and HR.

Particular managers will be asked to complete many questionnaires - usually they will be senior managers and the most able managers. You'll need a mechanism which limits their 360 workload, and does so intelligently. For example, a senior manager might want to decline most questionnaire requests, but complete a questionnaire for an individual with high potential.

Think about your managers and individuals using the 360 feedback report. If the report is detailed or difficult, too much of the performance management discussion will be devoted to understanding what the feedback means. Or, managers might give the report only quick, cursory attention. 360 could detract from the honest, helpful performance review you are trying to engineer.

Try to use clear, pertinent questions in the 360 questionnaire, competencies your people are familiar with, and a feedback report that's so simple it needs almost no explanation.

"If you can, start with a small pilot, and use its success to win over the sceptics."

Supporting managers

Maybe your managers are great with people and run excellent performance management reviews. More likely they aren't, so you can't provide 360 reports and hope that managers will make positive, constructive use of them. You will almost certainly have to put some support in place, and it's likely to be one of the biggest, most important parts of the project.

Things that work well are:

- o A step-by-step process for managers - simple guidelines on how to work with 360
- o A directory of personal development options - having identified a development need managers often have very few ideas about what to do
- o Illustrative 360 feedback reports and personal development plans

If there's time, try to include training for managers as part of the briefings run at the start of the project.

Where to start

Sometimes 360 in performance management has to be launched across the organisation all at once, but that has its risks. If you can, start with a small pilot, and use its success to win over the sceptics. Then, provide 360 feedback to top managers as part of their personal performance management discussions. And, then cascade the process to middle managers and team leaders.

Starting at the top and cascading down means managers have first-hand experience of 360 before using it in the reviews they conduct. Additionally, cascading demonstrates senior managers' commitment to the process. One of the most frequent and robust arguments for not doing performance management well is 'my boss didn't do it with me'.



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