Successful 360 Degree Feedback:
A Guide for Implementing 360 in your organisation

What's this about?

360 Degree Feedback is a powerful tool used by many organisations to define and monitor key skills and capabilities, and to measure changing behaviours as a result of development and talent programmes. But beware – without adequate preparation and communication, a 360 Degree Feedback programme can run into problems.

Why it's important to you

Your organisation will be investing time, effort and costs into its 360 Degree Feedback. It's important that you can clearly show its relationship to the business, engage everyone with it in a positive way, and demonstrate its effectiveness and relevance on an ongoing basis. This guide will help you do that.

Getting Started:

Understanding the Feedback culture in your organisation

If there has there been some formal feedback activity in the organisation for at least a year, and this has been visibly followed up or communicated on, or there is a good culture of regular feedback, then it should be reasonably straightforward to implement 360 Degree Feedback. You will still need to communicate widely and frequently, and use champions and supporters to help you with that communication.

If your organisation is not familiar with the use of feedback in daily work and in appraisals, it may be useful to introduce 360 Degree Feedback for a small group first, to test the concept and allow them to give you feedback for the next running.

Be clear about your objectives

To create a useful and robust 360 instrument (assuming you are creating a bespoke 360), it is important to be clear about your objectives. To do this, you can

- Link the skills and behaviours that the 360 measures linked to the goals of the business
- Clearly define what the resulting skills/behaviour changes will look like
- Specify how the 360 Degree Feedback will support a strategic activity such as leadership or management development, team productivity, customer service or identifying and developing talent
- Specify the target group for the 360 Degree Feedback exercise and why the 360 will help them

Implementing a 360 Feedback Project

Get a sponsor

There must be at least one member of senior management/Board of Directors who fully understands and supports 360 Degree Feedback. This person should be prepared to get feedback themselves, and then to be able to talk publicly about how their feedback helped them.

Each division or group undergoing 360 should have individual 'champions' who will actively encourage participation in the 360 Degree Feedback.

Piloting & Communicating

It is important to pilot the 360 Degree Feedback with a sample group from the target group and from the pool of reviewers (people who will be providing the feedback). From the pilot group, you need to get feedback on their experience of

- The content of the 360
- The process and support
- The output and actions following on from the 360

You should incorporate any process changes from the pilot into your ongoing 360 implementation.

Communication is a critical part of the 360 implementation. You should create a communications plan that covers:

- What 360 Degree Feedback is about
- How it works, what the process will look like
- What the results mean
- What it will be used for (training and development, appraisal, performance review, promotion, salary review?)
- What happens after the 360 Degree Feedback
- Who sees the output
- Who owns the data
- Confidentiality and security
- How 360 will fits in with other processes (goal-setting, appraisal, training, development, leadership, management etc.)
- Confidentiality, attribution of feedback scores and comments, and what happens to the data employees provide about each other

We recommend you use as many channels as possible to communicate to the organisation about 360 Degree Feedback. Remember it is not just the participants who are receiving feedback that need to be briefed. There will be people who will be asked to participate by giving feedback about their colleagues, and line managers and other who may be asked to comment on or discuss the results.

Channels for communicating 360 information can include:

- E-mails

- Team briefing pack
- Champion/expert networks
- Intranet/Learning Management System updates
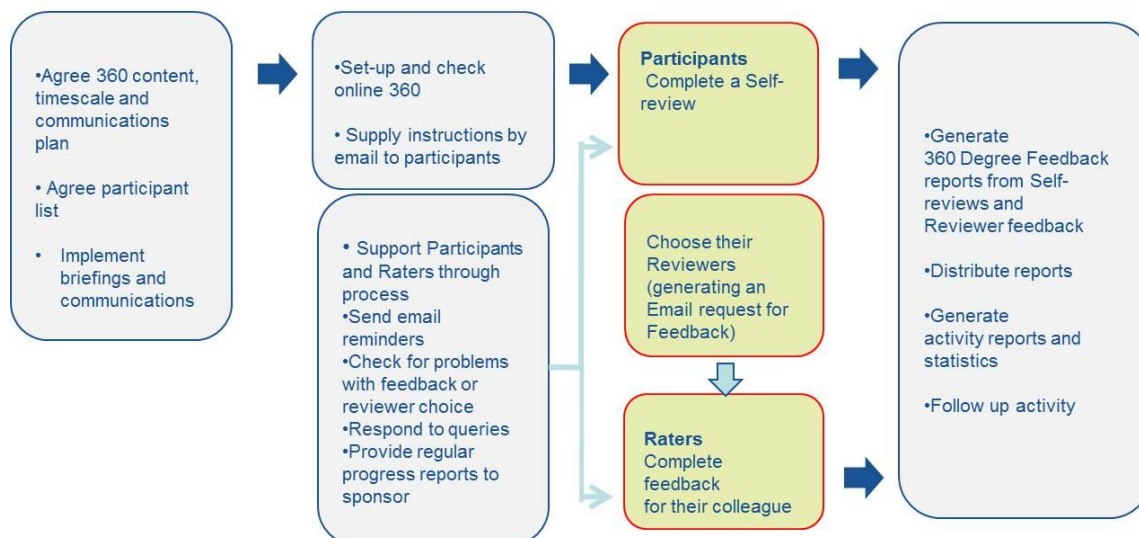- Newsletters and regular communication channels

The Feedback Gathering and Reporting Process

The 360 Degree Feedback process should be simple and clear for participants and their raters. Emails should describe what they need to do and should provide them with a secure and confidential way of giving feedback.

360 Degree Feedback Software is available that can make the process very easy to manage, providing templates for creating 360 questionnaires and emails, and allowing the administrator to easily check progress, send reminders and collate reports automatically.

These are the key steps of the Feedback gathering process:

Key process steps

- Agree 360 content, timescale and communications plan
- Agree participant list
- Implement briefings and communications

- Set-up and check online 360
- Supply instructions by email to participants

- Support Participants and Raters through process
- Send email reminders
- Check for problems with feedback or reviewer choice
- Respond to queries
- Provide regular progress reports to sponsor

Participants
Complete a Self-review

Choose their Reviewers (generating an Email request for Feedback)

Raters
Complete feedback for their colleague

- Generate 360 Degree Feedback reports from Self-reviews and Reviewer feedback
- Distribute reports
- Generate activity reports and statistics
- Follow up activity

360 Feedback Reports

Your 360 Degree Feedback system should generate reports that are clear and easy for participants, their one-to-one coaches, and their managers (if appropriate) to understand. Complex reports with mathematical data can be difficult for people to understand, and can also make them focus on the calculations, rather than the key messages that the 360 feedback is giving them.

A good 360 report will show scores and ratings data in graphic format (i.e. pictures and diagrams), and will highlight key trends (strengths, development needs), at a glance. It will provide deeper detail if this is required. The report should also show 'free' text comments in a structured way, allowing the thoughts of the raters to be clearly explained, while still maintaining their anonymity.

A good 360 report will also provide guidance on how to understand and interpret the data, help the participant reflect, and create a model for a personal development plan that comes out of the 360 feedback and conversation.

One-to-one Discussions

It is important to ensure that participants have an opportunity of at least one meeting with a suitably qualified person to discuss their feedback in confidence. This will help them to better understand the feedback, allow them to ask any questions and deal with any resistance they may feel towards the feedback.

Follow up activities

To embed the 360 and ensure future engagement with the process, we always recommend you consider the following, as these have been found to increase the benefit of 360 for most organisations:

- Create a clear plan within the organisation to follow up the 360 Degree Feedback with goal-setting/review, training, coaching or other activities

- Include regular communication to the organisation about the results from the feedback, the learning and skills that people are concentrating on, and the benefits to them and to the organisation

- Link and use the bespoke 360 Degree Feedback you have created to support people processes such as leadership and management development, training and succession planning, so it becomes a key part of how things happen in the organisation.

Track Surveys is a specialist in 360 Degree Feedback, supporting organisations and consultancies with 360 feedback software, implementation, training, content design and advice.

For a free, confidential discussion on 360 Degree Feedback, please contact us on +44 (0) 20 8360 4455, or email Jo Ayoubi, Business Director, at jo.ayoubi@tracksurveys.co.uk.