

## 5 Steps to implementing a high impact 360 degree feedback project

### A Talent for Growth Guide

The introduction of a 360 degree feedback programme can be transformational or disastrous – few HR initiatives have such an immediate impact. Giving careful thought to a number of important questions and taking some simple steps will ensure your project is a success.

There are 5 key stages involved in implementing a high impact 360 feedback project which are outlined in this guide:

1. **Planning**
2. **Communication**
3. **Design of the Questionnaire**
4. **Implementation**
5. **Organisation Learning**

### 1. Planning

Lack of planning is a common cause of disappointing 360 degree feedback programmes. It's essential to decide on a number of important considerations prior to implementation.

Such programmes need to have a clear purpose and objectives in order to be effective. Ideally, they should align with other processes or initiatives

360 degree feedback should be undertaken wholly for development purposes. It should form part of a larger developmental strategy or programme. This makes it be more easily accepted and probably even welcomed by likely participants.

Research indicates that the use of 360 feedback as part of a performance appraisal has mixed success. Where performance appraisal is linked to pay, it invariably produces mediocre or poor results.

Consider too, the culture of the organisation. This powerful development tool flourishes where openness, mutual trust and honesty are part of the organisational culture and there is a genuine interest in, and desire for, performance improvement.

Timing is everything. Don't introduce it at, or around, the same time as an organisation change. Where there is any uncertainty and insecurity, it will result in a negative impact on your efforts.

Engaging the top team is key to success. Therefore, it's worth ensuring that the timing is right for them, if they are to lead by example and participate.

### Questions to ask:

- Why are we doing this?
- How does it fit with our people development strategy?
- What is the anticipated return for our investment?
- Who is the target audience?
- Would a pilot be the best first step?
- Do we have sufficient budget to deliver on some of the development needs identified?
- How open and honest are we as an organisation?
- How engaged is the leadership with the project?
- What else is going on in the organisation that may distract people?
- Is the timing right?

## 2. Communication

It's very likely that the project will be greeted with some degree of suspicion— even if only from a few individuals. Ensuring that communication is pro-active, transparent and clear to everyone (including those not actively participating) will go a long way to minimise this. Linking the process to organisation goals helps people to see the bigger picture and understand the purpose.

For many people, 360 degree feedback will be a new process. Detailed explanations (or access to more information) are, therefore, important.

Transparency is particularly important when a specific group or population are being selected for inclusion in the 360 project. Providing an explanation for the selection is important for those who are wondering why they are included, and for others concerned about their apparent exclusion. Stop the rumour mill or second-guessing in its tracks, with open and honest communication. A very useful explanation is that the first programme is a pilot – as long as there is a genuine likelihood of a further roll-out.

### Questions to ask:

- Who needs to be included in the communication plan?
- What links can we make to other processes?
- Can senior leaders deliver the messages, for increased credibility?
- What are the different messages that we need to create?
- What's the best way to provide the right guidance and education to participants?
- How do we ensure that respondents give high quality feedback?
- Should we create a Frequently Asked Questions to address unspoken concerns?
- If we communicate it as a pilot, how do we manage the follow up?
- What timings do we need to communicate for stages of the process?

### 3. The Questionnaire

The heart of the project is the questionnaire. The quality of the output, and therefore the amount of value for participants, will hinge on the quality of the questions. It sounds obvious, but it's not as easy as seems.

Some questionnaires contain ambiguous, unclear, multiple questions that leave many respondents opting for the middle ground. Unhelpful, average scores follow, with little value to the recipient.

If you are investing time and money on a 360 degree feedback programme, consider using bespoke questions that measure what matters to your organisation, rather than buying a questionnaire off-the-shelf. The cost will be minimal with the right provider, and the impact is much stronger.

#### Questions to ask:

- Do we have a competency framework or set of leadership behaviours to work from?
- If not, is this an opportunity to create them?
- Would it be appropriate to use a range of questionnaires for different levels of participant?
- Do we have the skills and resources in-house, or is this work best outsourced?
- What behaviours might we need in the future that should be included in the questionnaire?
- How do we incorporate our values in the questionnaire?
- What is the optimum length of a questionnaire?
- What free text questions would be best for us?

### 4. Implementation

This requires good project management capability. One of the key aspects to consider is timing. Specifically, you must strike the right balance between allowing sufficient time for activities, and maintaining momentum.

Using an external provider is recommended – creating an in-house process is time-consuming and usually onerous for everyone involved. Choose your provider carefully, and check for things like flexibility, available support, robust systems and high standards of service.

We strongly recommend that you never allow someone to read their report without support from a facilitator. Facilitating the feedback is probably the area that requires the greatest skill. An external facilitator is always preferred if budgets allow – it demonstrates the value placed on the process, reassures people about confidentiality, and guarantees more open and honest discussions.

#### Questions to ask:

- How do we manage the process?
- Who can be the contact person/administrator?
- How can we ensure the right respondents are selected by participants?
- Who sees the report?
- What are our requirements regarding confidentiality?
- How do we find the best provider for our needs?

- Should we involve external customers /suppliers as potential respondents?
- How do we deal with/manage resistance?
- How can we create internal champions for the process?
- What's the best way to manage the distribution of the report?
- How do we find the best facilitator to deliver feedback?
- If we use internal people to facilitate feedback, how do we give them the skills?

## 5. Organisation Learning

This project provides a unique opportunity for the organisation to learn about their development requirements and priorities. Smart organisations maximise the value of this process, but many fail to exploit opportunities beyond individual development plans.

When an external facilitator is used, these important themes and insights can be shared whilst maintaining individual confidentiality. In addition, some 360 systems can produce a report using aggregate, anonymised data. This gives a valuable picture of collective strengths and skills gaps.

### Questions to ask:

- Does the selected 360 system enable a broader view of development needs across the participant group?
- Are there themes in the feedback that tell us about our culture?
- Which of our line managers are believed to be great leaders?
- What is the general level of engagement from participants?
- What should be our priorities be, from a development investment perspective?
- What organisation strengths do we have?
- Are our people being stretched enough?
- How equipped are we to be successful in the coming years?

## Summary

This guide is intended to provide food for thought and an overview of what's needed to make your 360 project a real success.

A poorly implemented 360 degree feedback remains with people for a long time. As consultants, we've met people who have remained negative for many years after a bad experience. However, a highly valued experience creates a group of enthusiastic ambassadors for future participants. A great project can also go a long way to shift your organisation culture.

### Talent for Growth

This guide was written by Caroline Lark, Managing Director of Talent for Growth, a leading 360 feedback consultancy. Our experience is based on over 20 years of working on 360 feedback projects in a range of organisations and industries.

We provide a comprehensive and flexible 360 feedback solution and service. But, don't take our word for it. Visit [www.talentforgrowth.com](http://www.talentforgrowth.com) and see our case studies and testimonials.



### **Our online 360 system**

Talent for Growth's online 360 degree feedback system enables fast, robust, flexible and value for money 360-degree feedback. We'd love to talk with you about how we can help you deliver a powerful 360 experience for your leaders.

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T: +44 (0)1647 277 709