CIPD Three60 Fact Sheet

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This factsheet gives introductory guidance. It:

- introduces 360 feedback and considers its value
- looks at what makes good questionnaires and feedback reports
- considers online methods
- includes the CIPD viewpoint.

What is 360 feedback?

360 feedback (sometimes called 360 degree feedback) provides information on an individual from a number of sources. Its supporters claim that this gives managers and individuals better information about skills and performance, and working relationships.

In 360 feedback, normally, 8 to 10 people fill in questionnaires describing the individual's performance. Often the individual fills in a questionnaire for themselves too, assessing their own performance. Ideally the whole process should be anonymous and the feedback presented to the recipient by a skilled coach.

The questionnaire usually consists of a number of statements rated on a scale, for example from one to five, and often includes the opportunity to add free text comments. The report should summarise the answers given. It often shows the actual ratings given for each question, as well as averages for each question and for each competency, and any written comments (a 'competency' is an area of performance measured by a group of questions).

Different people use different terminology for those giving and receiving feedback. Examples are 'rater', 'ratee', 'appraiser', and 'appraisee'. In this factsheet, the term 'recipient' is used for someone receiving feedback, and 'respondent' for someone giving feedback.

Why do 360 feedback?

As the term '360' suggests, the recipient receives feedback from those all around them in the organisation. In more complex matrix organisations, managers cannot always fully understand the contribution of the people they manage who may be part of many different team andmanage autonomous relationships with customers. There is therefore a strong argument for more wide ranging information to form an accurate picture of performance. .

Does 360 feedback work?

If 360 feedback is to make a difference, it is important to ensure that:

- The questions asked are short, clear and relevant to the person's job.
- The respondents are credible to the recipient (in many instances recipients choose the respondents).
- Feedback is only given by individuals trained to give it.

Done well, 360 feedback challenges the recipient's perceptions of their skills and performance, and provides the motivation to change. It can challenge perceptions in three ways:

- The feedback on an aspect of behaviour is the opposite of what the recipient expects.
- An aspect of behaviour is shown to be more (or less) important as an explanation of their performance than the recipient thought.
- The results highlight relationships between aspects of behaviour.

What can people discover about themselves?

360 feedback should not bring any surprises to people. It should help them to understand how their behaviour is perceived by others and confirm the behaviour that is most likely to get results. If implemented appropriately, it can give good information about:

- the difference between the way individuals see themselves and how they are perceived by others

- the differences between the perceptions of different groups of respondents (for example, do the recipient's direct reports have a different view to his or her line manager?)
- helping to make performance management a more objective and fair process.

What concerns will people have?

If individuals are going to trust the 360 feedback process, practitioners must ensure that:

- Issues of confidentially are clearly communicated detailing who will have access to the data and for what purpose.
- It is clearly stated how feedback will be given and by whom.
- The process for identifying respondents is clearly set out with recipients having some opportunity to input.
- Sufficient time is allowed to pilot the process and to consult with individuals and employee groups on both the design and implementation of the process.
- Both recipients and respondents are adequately briefed on the process, how to complete the relevant forms and the aims and objectives of the exercise.
- Adequate opportunity is given for people to comment and raise their concerns.
- People are not forced or coerced to take part by managers.
- Feedback is never attributed to an individual, that feedback reports and developments plans are kept secure and that data protection rules are obeyed - see our factsheet on data protection.
  - Go to our factsheet on Data protection
- The process is constantly monitored and evaluated, all concerns acted on and any changes adequately communicated.

In organisations that do not have a tradition of open feedback or upward communication, it is likely that 360 feedback will be seen with greater levels of mistrust. This can be overcome with sufficient attention to the above issues but may also have to be accompanied with some pertinent challenges to the prevailing culture to establish higher levels of trust.

Generally, an organisation may not be ready for 360 feedback if is in the middle of a change programme which includes downsizing or restructuring and where the aims and objectives can be misinterpreted.

What does a good questionnaire look like?

Questionnaire wording

- Questions should be relevant to the recipient's job. If they are not, the recipient will not be motivated to change or understand what changes are required.
- Each question should be concise, use plain English, and omit qualifiers, such as 'when appropriate' and 'as necessary'. Vague, complex questions rarely produce clear feedback.
- Each question should be similar to other the questions used to measure its competency, and be different from all other questions relating to other competencies. Muddled competencies make muddled feedback.
- Questions should set standards, for example 'Makes decisions' is a poor question, because the decisions made could be unclear, late, autocratic, or wrong.

'Free text' questions

These provide the opportunity to add comments in support of the answers to the rated questions. They can be enormously helpful. The recipient can look for frequently used words or phrases, and for common themes which explain or expand on the report's findings. When wording these questions avoid the use of HR jargon and use clear language, for example 'what does the recipient do well', and 'what does the recipient need to improve?'

Rating scale

A performance scale, from 'poor' to 'excellent' for example, usually works best. Sometimes a frequency scale is used, (for example, from 'never does this' to 'always does this'). The problem with this type of scale is that it confuses ability with opportunity.

What does a helpful feedback report look like?

The most helpful feedback reports:

- are concise and simple to understand - lengthy complex reports just add to people's workload.

- are visual - they use graphics to make findings stand out, and make it easy to see patterns and explore differences between questions and different respondents.
- are self-explanatory - they need almost no explanation or interpretation.
- avoid averages, statistics or factors - they just provide the ratings and written comments people give. Averages hide important information
- give clear guidance on how the information can be used.

Individuals should also be given support to understand and act upon the feedback they receive.

360 feedback online

Traditionally, 360 feedback was collected using pen and paper questionnaires. The opportunity to do 360 feedback online has done much more than reduce the time and effort required to distribute questionnaires and collate the answers.

Questionnaires are now interactive, so that:

- Recipients can choose which competencies to receive feedback on.
- Confidentiality is improved, as questionnaires and reports can be protected by passwords.
- Questionnaire rules can improve the quality of feedback by, for example, requiring that a minimum number of questions are answered, and a minimum percentage of critical feedback, or of positive feedback.
- Accuracy is improved - an online system can ensure that essential data is provided.

Other benefits of online systems are:

- Reports are available online; answers can be collated instantly, so reports are immediately available and up-to-date. Reports can also include comparison with previous feedback.
- The amount of administration required is much reduced. Individuals can be responsible for managing their own feedback, for requesting feedback and for chasing late questionnaires.
- Demographic information can be collected, and the fact that data is held in a database simplifies analysis and the production of summary reports.

CIPD viewpoint

It is important that people receive regular honest feedback on their performance. They should understand how their role contributes to overall organisational aims and objectives and how they are performing against agreed criteria. 360 feedback can enhance this process by widening the scope for information from the line manager relationship to embrace a wider range of opinion. However, it is important that this is carried out sensitively and fairly. The individual should remain in control of the process and the output should be confidential. Those giving feedback should be encouraged to do so in an objective, positive way using examples to back up perceived opinion of performance. The confidentiality of all participants should be respected at all times and the feedback should be summarised and delivered to the recipient by individuals trained in feedback techniques. Recipients should always be offered support to act on feedback.

Done well, 360 feedback can significantly enhance the performance management process. However, if is perceived to be in any way threatening, it can seriously damage both engagement and performance.

Further reading

CIPD members can use our Advanced Search to find additional library resources on this topic. They can also use our online journals collection to view selected journal articles online. *People Management* articles are available to subscribers and CIPD members on the *People Management* website. CIPD books in print can be ordered from our online Bookstore.

Books and reports

360 handbook [online]. (2009) Bedford: Simply360. Available, free of charge on online registration, at
http://www.simply360.co.uk/handbook

ARMSTRONG, M. and BARON, A. (2005) *Managing performance: performance management in action.* London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

FLETCHER, C. (2008) *Appraisal, feedback and development: making performance review work.* 4th ed. Abingdon: Routledge.

SILVERMAN, M., KERRIN, M. and CARTER, A. (2005) *360 degree feedback: beyond the spin.* Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies.

Journal articles

ATWATER, L., BRETT, J.F. and CHARLES, A.C. (2007) Multisource feedback: lessons learned and implications for practice. *Human Resource Management*. Vol 46, No 2, Summer. pp285-307.

GOODGE, P. (2005) How to link 360 degree feedback and appraisal. *People Management*. Vol 11, No 2, 27 January. pp46-47.

GOODGE, P. and COOMBER, J. (2008) 360 feedback: once again the research is useful! *Selection and Development Review*. Vol 24, No 2. pp13-16.

ROGERS, E., ROGERS, C.W. and METLAY, W. (2002) Improving the payoff from 360-degree feedback. *Human Resource Planning*. Vol 25, No 3. pp44-54.

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