

Getting the Most Out of Performance Appraisals- the 360 Degree feedback Approach

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Performance assessment has become standard practice for most organisations across the world. Successful organizations strive to evaluate and guide their employees toward constant improvement, but a standard performance review system is often found to be inadequate. Many have started incorporating the 360 Degree Feedback process as part of their performance review process. This tool has been found to be effective for some organisation whilst others find it difficult to administer. According to Jack Zenger, a highly-regarded global expert on organizational behavior, "More than 85% of all the Fortune 500 companies use the 360 degree feedback process as a cornerstone of their overall leadership development process...."

What is 360 Degree Feedback?

360 degree feedback is a method and a tool that provides each employee the opportunity to receive performance feedback from his or her supervisor or manager and four to eight peers, reporting staff members, co-workers, and customers. Most 360 degree feedback tools are also responded to by each individual in a self-assessment. People who are chosen as raters or feedback providers are often selected in a shared process by both the organization and the employee. These are people who generally interact routinely with the person who is receiving feedback.

The purpose of the 360 degree feedback is to assist each individual to understand their strengths and weaknesses and to contribute insights into facets of their work which require development.

Why 360 degree performance appraisal is important?

Unlike the standard performance review techniques, the 360 degree assessment goes beyond receiving feedback from managers, it gives employees a more objective view of their performance. Since feedback is received from multiple assessors it gives a broader insight on the individual being assessed. While managers tend to focus most on productivity, peers and direct reports can share insights about collaboration, leadership, and other critical skills the individual may possess.

Getting the most out of 360 feedback

This assessment tool is only effective if the feedback is kept confidential, respondents are encouraged to be candid, and everyone is transparent about the purpose behind the 360. According to Behr, 2019 the

following key aspects need to be taken into consideration when administering the 360 degree assessment for it to be objective:

1. Confidentiality- In such an appraisal, confidentiality is key and is the only way to get objective responses. Coworkers can be more honest and direct knowing that their comments won't be attributable to them, but many may worry that their responses won't be kept confidential. When choosing the ideal method of administering the assessment, organisations would need to consider which approach would work for confidently in their organisation. The assessment can either be conducted online using online platforms like SurveyMonkey or interview based using an independent consultant (this also will assist in assuring a level of confidence in the respondents).
2. Candor- When using online survey approach, HR needs to make sure the instructions cover how important it is for respondents to be candid and not worry about wounding subjects' self-esteem. The expectation should be that people are direct and open while ensuring their comments are productive. In conducting either online or interview, there is the need to emphasise to the assessors the need for candor (frankness/ openness) removing any forms of possible bias.
3. Transparency- In order to yield the best results out of the 360 assessment, there is need for the parties involved to understand the purpose of the 360 assessment and their role in the assessment and the possible outcomes or consequences of such an assessment. With transparency the assessment is likely to yield the expected results.
4. Customisation- For the 360 performance appraisal approach to fit well in an organisation it needs to be customized to speak to the company's language and its vision, mission, and valued competencies.
5. Follow Up- After the assessment has been conducted, there is need for feedback, the person being assessed will need to be taken through the results of the assessment and assisted with coming up with a possible action plan to address gaps identified. Same goes for the respondents, for them to participate again in the assessment HR would need to make them aware of the outcome, without necessarily disclosing the assessed individual's results.

No assessment process is perfect, but when the 360 degree assessment tool is thoughtfully implemented, it can provide valuable insights and a reliable baseline for leadership development, delivering feedback to executives that's otherwise hard to come by.

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