



How to plan for 360 Appraisals

Appraisal schemes are an essential part of any business, as a means of measuring how people are performing in their roles in the work-place. The appraisal scheme may not be formalised and happen in an adhoc, unsystematic way. Often that means someone is only told about their performance when they get things wrong – good performance goes unnoticed or at least un-remarked. We all know that appreciation is appreciated; it's good and motivating to be told when we get things right.

Frequently appraisal schemes are set up with the best of intentions, only to collapse after one or two rounds under the pressure of other work. If this start-stop cycle is to be halted, the value-added of an effective appraisal scheme must be identified, clarified and quantified.

The term '360 appraisal' refers to an appraisal scheme that seeks information about a person's behaviour in the work-place from all those who work with them – line manager, direct reports, team members, peers, sometimes external clients and suppliers. The recipient or appraisee is given feedback on their skills and behaviour – their competencies – by a circle of 'raters' or appraisers.

It is important to firstly establish the purpose of 360 appraisals. Why is it being introduced? What information is being sought and for what reason? Generally the purpose would include seeking information on a person's skills and behaviour to acknowledge the good and effective and to challenge the poor and unhelpful. A consequent purpose would frequently be to identify the development needs to reinforce the good and remedy the poor behaviour and/or skills. Where a competency framework exists and is used in the organisation, the 360 appraisal incorporates this framework through its design.

Having established the purpose, the next step is to establish the process. The most critical feature of any appraisal scheme and especially a 360 process is to design a process that ensures confidentiality and enhances trust. Generally raters will only be honest in their feedback if they are assured their response is given in confidence and cannot be traced back to them. Therefore most systems report anonymous responses. Where such responses are classified by category of rater – line manager, team members, peers – the degree of anonymity varies. One line manager response is easily identifiable!

Thirdly, having established the purpose and the process, it will be necessary to establish the resources. There are many computer-based systems on the market to help with the process and guarantee confidentiality of responses, especially if the process is out-sourced to an external consultant or company rather than delivered and managed in-house.

While computer systems assist the process of delivering and collating questionnaires, it is still critical that a facilitator is available to feedback and interpret the results. This is most important where the overall feedback is negative and coaching is required to discuss and construct an individual development plan to address the issues highlighted by the raters. Even when feedback is generally positive, there will still be issues to consider of how to build on success and avoid complacency.

360 appraisal schemes tend to be well received if there is good planning and discussion prior to implementation, a sense of buy-in from all staff and a genuine lead from senior leadership within the organisation, including a willingness to be vulnerable to criticism and prepared to accept and build on positive appreciation.

Ref: 360 Feedback ([CIPD](#), 2007); 360 degree feedback: Best Practice Guidelines ([CIPD / DTI](#))



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