

Everything you ever wanted to know about '360'

What is a 360?

The term comes from 360 degree appraisal or an 'all round' view. It is a process of obtaining structured feedback from a group of individuals that have insight into how a person operates at work. It is focused on **HOW** they do their work, not **WHAT** they do or achieve.

Individuals rate themselves on a defined set of behaviours, typically linked to organisational Values or Competencies, and have their boss(es), direct reports, peers and others such as internal or external clients or customers rate them as well. This feedback is then collated into a summary report.

Why use it?

Performance is typically improved or even sustained as a result of attending to feedback. If you do something and the feedback is positive you keep doing it. If you do something and the feedback is negative you might reassess what you do or how you do it.

The 360 degree feedback process provides information to individuals which is often unavailable; few individuals go out of their way to provide feedback and we do not always know what others think about what we do.

The process gives a more comprehensive view of where strengths and weaknesses lie thus informing development planning.

How does it work?

Most 360's are based on an organisation's specific VALUES, COMPETENCIES or whatever determines what is seen as desirable or effective behaviour resulting in high levels of both individual and organisational performance.

A questionnaire is constructed that details the observable behaviours which underpin effective performance; these are usually grouped under the Values or Competency headings.

The questionnaire is then sent, via an email invitation, to a select group to complete. This will include the individual, their boss or bosses, their direct reports, their peers and then others such as internal or external clients or customers. The questionnaire sent is the same for all.

Respondents are asked to rate the target individual on each of the behaviours using a five-point scale to reflect the strength of their performance on that particular behaviour as perceived by the respondent., e.g.:

Score	Description
1	Rarely/never does this
2	Occasionally does this
3	Often does this
4	Frequently does this
5	Consistently does this
NE	Not enough evidence to make a judgement

In addition to supplying a numerical rating respondents can add supplementary written comments to expand on the rating, their view of the individual or to provide examples to help understanding.

Once completed questionnaires are returned for processing and the collation of the summary report.

Respondents

The quality of the feedback contained in a 360 report is entirely dependent on the respondents.

Respondents should be selected on the basis of:

- Opportunity to observe the individual at work
- Relevance of their involvement in the individual's work
- A minimum time they may have known the individual

It is rare that a respondent's input is worthless or worst still can be discounted. Where individuals have the option on 'choosing friends' to complete it they will know the feedback is biased. Where individuals have limited experience working with the individual, even their first impressions may be useful although they will struggle to deliver meaningful ratings against many behaviours.

In general, the respondent group should represent a cross-section of work colleagues and client/customers.

The Report

360-degree feedback reports contain a lot of information, all of which is very personal whether it be overwhelmingly positive or contain some tough messages.

For this reason individuals will not work through their report alone, but will do so with the support and guidance of a trained 360-coach.

The report summarises the feedback received without editing or manipulation. Individuals see the rating against each behaviour given by each respondent group and the verbatim comments they have provided. Direct Report, Peer and Client/Customer ratings are amalgamated for confidentiality.

The report is comprehensive but not prescriptive; whilst highlighting strengths and weaknesses in performance it does not dictate what should be done as a result that is for the individual and their coach to decide.

After an initial reading of the report and some reflection, individuals are encouraged to approach their respondents for further clarification should that be useful.

After the 360

360 is not an end in itself. It is the start point for informed discussion about performance and how it can both be sustained and improved.

Some organisations include 360 as part of a more general appraisal and development process, whilst others link it to particular initiatives such as development programmes. The overriding responsibility for working with 360 feedback however always lies with the individual for whom it was completed and it is up to them to exploit the information it provides.