

Guide to 360° Assessment

What is 360-degree assessment, feedback or review?

360-degree feedback, also known as multi-rater feedback, multisource feedback, or multisource assessment, is feedback provided by an individual's subordinates, peers, and supervisors. "360" refers to the 360 degrees in a circle, with an individual figuratively in the centre. It would also usually include a self-assessment and, in some cases, feedback from external sources such as customers and suppliers or other interested stakeholders.

It may be contrasted with "upward feedback," where managers are given feedback by their direct reports, or a "traditional performance appraisal," where employees are only assessed by their manager(s). The results from 360-degree feedback can be used in performance assessments and are often used to plan training and development. Results are also used by some organisations in making decisions such as pay or promotion. When this is the case, the 360 assessments are used for evaluation purposes, and are sometimes called a "360-degree review."

Why might you use a 360-degree feedback process?

- Many employees feel 360-degree feedback is more accurate, more reflective of their performance, and more validating than prior feedback from their manager or supervisor alone.
- The "horns and halo" effect, in which a supervisor rates performance based on his/her most recent interactions with the employee, is minimised.
- Discrimination due to personal preferences, race, age, gender, and so on, is reduced.
- 360-degree feedback provides comprehensive information about an organisation's training needs and therefore supports planning for classes, cross-functional responsibilities, and cross training.
- The process helps people understand how other employees view their work and behaviour and therefore a well-planned process can improve communication and team development.
- It helps team members learn to work more effectively together as they take action in response to feedback. This can be particularly important as individual team members often know more about how others are performing than their manager or supervisor).
- In turn this leads to greater accountability of team members to each other as they share the knowledge of performance.

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- It can provide excellent information to an individual about what he/she needs to do to enhance his/her career.
 - In feedback processes that involve the internal or external customer, each person receives valuable feedback about the quality of his product or services. This feedback should enable the individual to improve the quality, reliability, promptness, and comprehensiveness of these products and services.

Why might you not use a 360-degree feedback process?

- 360-degree feedback cannot replace an effective performance management system. It is merely a tool, which can form part of performance management. It can be and is often viewed as too time-consuming for the additional benefits it provides.
- Participants often expect too much from the feedback system due to the time invested in it.
- Often, a 360-degree feedback process arrives as a recommendation from the HR function or is shepherded in by an executive who learned about the process at a seminar or in a book. To successfully implement the process in an organisation requires effective change management skills and implementation should be thought through and requires buy in from stakeholders – particularly if the process will have an impact on people’s remuneration or promotion prospects.
- For a 360-degree feedback process to work, it must be connected with the overall strategic aims of the organisation. The process is likely to fail if it is an add-on rather than a supporter of the fundamental direction and requirements.
- Since 360-degree feedback processes are usually anonymous, people receiving feedback have no recourse if they want to further understand the feedback. They have no one to ask for clarification of unclear comments or more information about particular ratings and the basis on which they were given.
- Many people believe that great managers focus on employee strengths, not weaknesses. Rather than waste time trying to change people according to feedback, is it better to focus entirely on what they do well?
- The organisation must be willing and able to provide sufficient training to the people giving and receiving feedback. If not then the system may not perform as envisaged and it could lead to significant distrust and even harm performance. If sufficient attention isn’t given to reviewing and addressing the feedback reports (which happens in many cases) through effective line management then the benefits from using 360-degree feedback are unlikely to be realised.



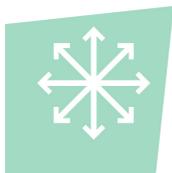
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- Raters may inflate ratings to make an employee look good. They may deflate ratings to make an individual look bad. They may informally band together to make the system artificially inflate everyone's performance. Checks and balances must be built in to guard against these pitfalls.
 - The process creates a significant amount of work, even when typically the completion of feedback is done via on-line entry, usually including paper reports and the need to support effective feedback.
 - The process will usually be administered through a third party and will therefore add cost over and above what is already taking place. Performance and development reviews will need to continue and the information obtained form part of them.

We would be very happy to have a conversation on the benefits and pitfalls of using 360° processes and whether these would be suitable for you and your organisation. Our contact details are below.





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