

Managing your 360 feedback project

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“The key ... is the quality of the design and implementation, not simply the existence of the system. The same can be said for 360 Feedback...”

Creating shareholder value through people: Human Capital ROI Study, Deloitte and Touche, 2002



We've been lucky enough to be involved in some great 360 Feedback projects; we have learnt a lot from them. And, we've often heard about projects that went wrong or went nowhere. We learnt from those too!

This short article summarizes all that learning; it is about how to (and how not to) run a 360 project. It is the successes and mistakes of dozens of projects and ten years' experience condensed into a few pages. We can't claim it is the one definitive way to succeed with 360, but its pertinent questions and practical advice will probably be useful to many HR professionals.

Starting with a problem

Sometimes an organisation buys a 360 system because it believes it should have one. They purchase an online system because 360 is an important and widely applicable HR tool. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that, and it might be HR being proactive and anticipating its customers' needs.

However, it is much easier to create an immediate and visible success if 360 tackles a pressing business problem, e.g. managers who need new skills, talent shortfalls, teams that don't work well. Easier because the organisation will give the budget, time and support if 360 is fixing an urgent commercial issue. And, easier because HR will be able to demonstrate its success with tangible benefits.

Start with problem, not with a solution, if you can.

There are vital clues as to the big problems that concern your organisation in...



- What do executives give time to, talk about, and want help with? If in doubt, ask executives what keeps them awake at night!
- The performance measures your business uses - what is going well and poorly, what the trends are, and which measures executives focus upon?
- The visible problems, e.g. queues, shortages, backlogs, complaints, struggling people, inefficient processes, etc...

Keeping it simple

Complex tools and processes are more likely to cost, confused, fail, etc... So, part of the art of designing a successful 360 project is to make things very, very simple.

The three things to keep really simple are usually...

- The questionnaire. Managers are unlikely to have the time, desire or knowledge to complete a long, intricate questionnaire. Use a clear-cut rating scale, and about 30 concise, explicit questions. Don't use more than four comments questions asking for written feedback, and avoid "HR speak" (e.g. stop-start-continue).
- The feedback report. Every person's 360 Feedback contains just four or five key messages - no more than that. A big, detailed feedback report might seem impressive but it hides the few key messages. Time and energy will be spent trying to understand graphs and statistics of a big report, when time ought to be spent on strengthening skills and performance. Aim for a 360 feedback report that is just a few pages, uses colour to make things really visible, and is so simple it needs almost no explanation.
- Performance planning. People change when they have made one or two clear decisions for themselves. So, we need to provide a helpful, performance focused coaching process; something which helps the manager understand the relevance of the feedback and plan changes.

We are famous for designing short, pertinent 360 questionnaires, and uncomplicated, persuasive feedback reports. And, we've proven, pragmatic coaching process that has worked consistently well. You might take a look at the Handbook's "Invitation to Feedback and Coaching" chapter.

Building on small successes

It's really worrying when an organisation plans to launch 360 in a big way.

Although their 360 software can provide feedback to large numbers of people, they may not have the very considerable skills, resources and time needed to brief and coach people. Software is



always a fraction of what is needed to make a project successful.

For those reasons it is really important to start small, have successes, and then do bigger, bolder things as the organisation learns about 360, and is able to provide further support and resources.

Many organisations have found it helpful to start with a small pilot, perhaps feedback/coaching to just two or three individuals. That is inexpensive and virtually risk-free, but its successes will win understanding and support for something bigger. The pilot will have greater credibility if the individuals are widely respected in the business and hold different roles.

Consultant should have no problem providing a pilot tailored to your competencies, people and preferences. And, they ought to be to do it in a couple of weeks. We can!

Then you might use 360 as part of a process, such as a leadership program, development centre, performance review, etc... That next step might involve feedback to 20 or so people, and using your own managers or HR professionals as coaches.

Finally you might extend 360 to other, more challenging parts of the business.

At every stage, use meetings, reports, people and e-mail to engage people and publicise how well things are going. Personal stories from valued individuals are persuasive, but bottom line improvements are even better. Your promotion of 360 and what it has done for the business may need to be pretty relentless for the first year or so.

But, you also need to be honest about the mistakes and lessons. Change and build your 360 system and its applications to meet the needs of the organisation.

More information

If you have questions, or if there's anything we might do, please call Peter Gooode on 07976 373 562, or e-mail Peter at info@NextHR.co.uk.

