



**Head
Light**

Using 360-degree Review in ‘High-stakes’ HR Processes

part of our We think... series

The Talent Cloud Platform

Developing Skills. Encouraging Performance. Boosting Recognition.



Contents

Contents	2
360 degree feedback as part of succession planning, promotion or performance management	3
The challenges	3
<i>Key factors to control</i>	3
<i>Moderated reviews</i>	4
In summary	5
Next steps	5
About Head Light	5

360-degree feedback as part of succession planning, promotion or performance management

The 360 review is traditionally used to help an individual gain a greater self-awareness of their performance and how their behaviour affects others they work with. It enables them to identify specific actions they can take to improve their overall performance. Used in this way, for personal development, there is little motivation for collusion or bias, and relatively low consequence. If the only reviewers selected are those that will provide positive feedback, then less will be learnt with lower benefit.

But, as an assessment strategy, a 360 review is increasingly being used as part of other 'high stakes' Talent Management processes including performance management, succession planning and selection for promotion.

Common drivers for doing so include:

- the need for greater objectivity and transparency in decision-making,
- a desire to implement assessment methods suited to the purpose and culture of the organisation,
- a desire to find more robust ways to address difficult performance issues within the organisation.

A 360 degree review offers some attractive characteristics in these respects. By gathering feedback from a range of people who work with the individual and are in a position to observe their performance from a range of perspectives and over a period of time, is more objective than a single-sided view of a manager, or of an assessor who has restricted opportunity to observe the behaviour under simulated conditions. With suitable controls in place it can be a very effective way prompting and providing evidence to enable 'difficult' conversations about current performance.

The challenges

The trouble with using 360 degree assessment in this way is that, if you think the outcome of a review could affect your performance appraisal or promotion prospects, would you be prepared to ask someone to be a reviewer when it might resurface some past 'less-than-perfect' encounter?

There is a temptation for collusion, where participants mutually agree to provide only positive feedback. The reverse, where the review is used as an 'axe to grind', is also a possibility. However, with the right checks and balances in place, both of these elements can be managed-out making 360 a powerful tool. The challenge is to recognise the points in the 360 degree review process which are vulnerable to bias and to introduce suitable controls.

Key factors to control

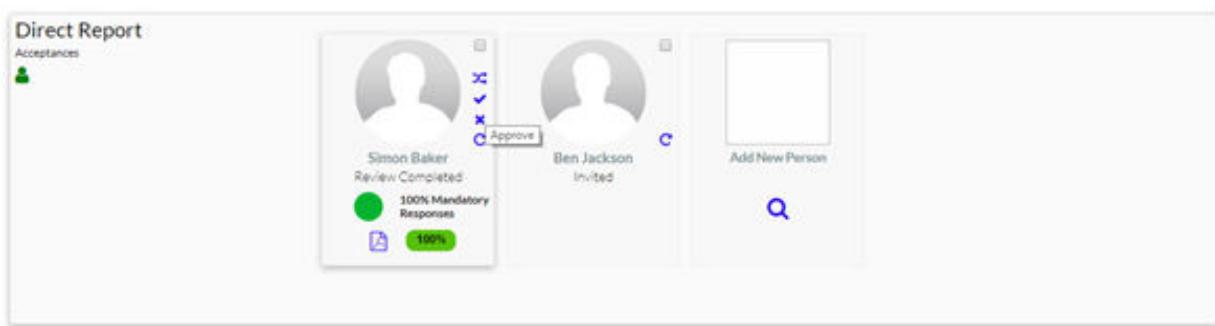
So what are the factors you need to control? In our view, these are the most important:

- **clear positioning up front about the purpose of the process**, why you are doing it, how the results will be used and the process controls that are in place to demonstrate it is a fair process.
- **early involvement of an independent, trusted person** to moderate the selection of reviewers and to identify and eliminate evidence of collusion, bias or grudges.
- **controls** to enable vulnerable reviewer groups to give anonymous feedback.
- the use of **psychological, moral contracts** with everyone involved in the process so that they sign-up to role, process and values and ground rules of the review process.
- use of **well designed, validated and 'bought-into' 360 assessments**, through piloting and an inclusive review with internal groups.

Moderated reviews

One of the key points to control is the selection of reviewers, to prevent collusion and ensure an objective balance is maintained. For this reason we have introduced a new role within the normal 360 degree workflow for an independent manager to moderate the reviewer selection process. This person needs to balance the interests of the individual; which are to receive constructive developmental feedback from a well-balanced group of people, with the interests of the organisation; which is to ensure the feedback is objective and accurate. To achieve this, they may need to be independent of the individual, i.e. not necessarily their line manager, and independent of the review itself, i.e. not necessarily providing review feedback themselves and not involved with making decisions based on the outcome of the review. The role is well suited to someone who the individual trusts such as a coach, mentor or HR. This person may also be able to identify people the individual might not consider that would provide useful feedback for the individual and to help the individual interpret and take appropriate developmental action on the feedback they receive.

To enable them to perform this role they must be able control the reviewer invitations process. They must be able to intervene and not invite all the people the participant has suggested, and to invite others the participant has not suggested. They also need to be able to review the balance and composition of the people who have agreed to provide feedback in each of the reviewer groups before approving the reviewer group. These controls enable them to not invite someone who they suspect may be in collusion with the participant. They provide the flexibility to ensure that each group contains enough people to give an objective review and to preserve the anonymity of individual contributors. They also allow the flexibility to ensure that the group remains well balanced in the event that some reviewers decline the invitation.



Optionally the person selected to moderate the reviewer selections may also be asked to approve the reviews submitted, before they are included in the final reports. This provides the opportunity to spot evidence of collusion, or feedback that demonstrates an unacceptable degree of bias or unconstructive/unsupported feedback and either ask the reviewer to repeat the review to address the issue or to exclude the review data.

It can be seen from the panel above, from Talent 360, that the person responsible for managing the review for their participant has the ability to examine the feedback completed by their peer reviewer, John Brown. On this occasion they are asked to approve it, reject it or to ask the reviewer to repeat it.

In summary

In our experience, applying these types of controls makes 360 degree review a valid and useful tool in high stakes Talent Management processes.

By building them into the workflow from the start, and briefing everyone involved on the process and their role, the process can run smoothly without the additional controls being regarded as overly onerous or bureaucratic. Participants have provided feedback that implementing these controls gives them confidence that the process is fair, providing a 'level playing field' for all.

Next steps

If you would like to know more about how 360 degree feedback can be used in 'high stakes' talent activities, please get in touch.

About Head Light

Head Light is an award-winning talent management and talent retention software and consulting firm that works with clients to define and implement impactful talent management strategies.

Talent Cloud® is our cloud-based portfolio of integrated talent management platform tools designed for those who expect the maximum return from talent management processes. Our training and consulting services uniquely complement our platform that engages employees, managers and senior leaders in the selection, development and progression of people in their businesses.

Companies in the FTSE 350, public sector, large and small, from retailers to high tech innovators have all benefitted from our tools, techniques and expertise Founded in 2004, we are headquartered in the UK.

Head Light has attained the ISO27001 standard for Information Security. Certificate No 217613.





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How do I...

transition to Continuous Performance Management

How do I...

introduce robust Succession Planning

How do I...

spot High Potentials and Future Leaders

How do I...

boost Recognition

How do I...

drive Engagement through Career Conversations and Development

How do I...

embed new values and improve culture

How do I...

develop Skills of the Future