Head Light

Introducing 360 Review to Your Organisation: Keys to Success

part of our series of Tools

The Talent Cloud Platform

Developing Skills. Encouraging Performance. Boosting Recognition.

Contents

Contents 2

Introduction 3

Positioning 3

Get your competency model right 3

Be clear about the purpose 3

Align the process to the culture of your organisation 3

Design 3

Keep it short and sweet 3

Remove the 'it doesn't apply to me' excuse 4

Tailor the assessment depending on the respondent 4

Balance qualitative and quantitative questions 4

Prepare to use 4

Mediate the selection of response groups 4

Balance input; avoid 360 overload 4

Interpret and take action on results 4

Equip people to receive interpret and take action on feedback 4

Don't be tempted to over-simplify the outputs 5

Build on strengths 5

Demonstrate commitment to individual and organisational development 5

Next steps 5

About Head Light 5

Talent® and Talent Cloud® are registered trademarks of Head Light Ltd. All other trademarks belong to their respective owners.
© Head Light Ltd, 2024

Introduction

In this paper Debbie Hance, Head of Business Psychology at Head Light identifies key learning points from over fifteen years' experience designing, implementing, interpreting and giving feedback on 360 degree review programmes for a variety of clients in both the public and private sectors.

360 degree review is a process commonly used for gathering feedback about an individual from their peers, and subordinates as well as their manager, and in some cases from customers and suppliers. It promotes greater self-awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses and enables the person being reviewed to focus their development and improve their promotion prospects. The results are also used by some organisations to identify candidates for promotion or inclusion in high potential programmes.

When used well 360 degree review processes provide individuals with highly valuable feedback that they would not normally receive through other methods. When used poorly it can be a laborious 'tick-in-the-box' exercise that generates huge quantities of paperwork, is difficult to analyse and provides very little insight. So how can you ensure you optimise your 360º review process?

Positioning the 360 framework

Get your competency model right

Depending on the size of your organisation, it's worth investing in a bespoke model which really focuses on the things that drive success in your business. Challenge competency frameworks which are out of date, do not discriminate between superior and average performers or do not encompass the skills, knowledge and behaviours which will allow your business to thrive and grow in the future.

Be clear about the purpose

360 is used most effectively when the purpose is clearly developmental; helping the individual to raise their levels of self-awareness and gather feedback that they might not usually receive on a day-to-day basis. It also provides useful information for career development, promotion prospects and talent management. Be very clear about how the results from 360 will be used, who will have access to the results, how anonymous or confidential it is and which processes it might inform.

Align the process to the culture of your organisation

If your culture encourages open communication and shared feedback then you may benefit by implementing an open review (one that does not provide anonymity). Feedback attributed to individuals can be even more powerful as the recipient can develop awareness of how they interact differently with different people, and can have follow-up conversations to discuss the feedback in more depth. Sharing feedback with others in this way is a powerful way of building self-awareness and commitment to change.

Designing the 360 assessment

Keep it short and sweet

The longer an assessment takes to complete, the less likely people will be to complete it and the longer it takes to analyse results and provide feedback. Focus on the key competencies that distinguish between high and low performance in this role, to achieve a balance between having enough questions to provide a reliable assessment, but not so many that it takes more than about 15-20 minutes to complete.

Talent® and Talent Cloud® are registered trademarks of Head Light Ltd. All other trademarks belong to their respective owners.
© Head Light Ltd, 2024

Remove the '*it doesn't apply to me'* excuse

Using a bespoke competency model and focussing on key competencies that are relevant to the role dramatically improves utility, and removes the 'it doesn't really apply to me' excuse, as well as reducing the number of 'not applicable' ratings from the respondents.

Tailor the assessment depending on the respondent

When designing the 360 assessments, think about who is best placed to comment on the various areas. Direct reports will probably provide accurate and useful feedback on Planning and Performance Management, but how much Strategic Thinking will they see their manager doing? Senior peers could comment on Influencing Skills and Teamwork and but would they know how effective an individual was at Developing People?

Balance qualitative and quantitative questions

Interspersing 'rating' type questions with 'comment' type questions increases the quality of narrative and focuses the feedback provider on specific competencies or behaviours. Think about where the qualitative questions are positioned within the assessment itself. If they are all positioned at the end they are less likely get the attention they deserve.

Preparing to use the 360

Mediate the selection of response groups

Define and mediate a selection process that reduces the likelihood of individuals just picking those who will rate them highly, especially if the data will feed into other processes such as appraisal or promotion. Would feedback from external stakeholders or clients be useful? Could you get feedback from other teams or other parts of the organisation? Who could provide feedback on competencies that you are just starting to use? Who could help you determine whether you've made any progress in developing key competencies?

Balance input; avoid 360 overload

If the 360 degree review is to be anonymous at all levels other than the manager then have at least two people in each respondent group. This means there will be between 7-11 respondents in addition to the self-assessment. Depending on the size of the organisation you need to consider whether there will be issues of 360 overload; people at certain levels or certain positions getting dozens of review assessments to complete.

Interpreting and taking action on results

Equip people to receive interpret and take action on feedback

It's common to focus on training managers to be able to facilitate 360 degree feedback, but it's worth also thinking about the support you provide to other individuals who will be giving feedback (peers, direct reports) and to those who will be receiving it. Run briefing sessions or workshops (face-to-face or on-line) with the recipients to help them get the most out of the feedback. Help them with interpretation, how to deal with constructive feedback, what to do with anomalous results, how to discuss it with their manager and how to translate the results into developmental objectives or training plans, and how to monitor progress or measure results.

Talent® and Talent Cloud® are registered trademarks of Head Light Ltd. All other trademarks belong to their respective owners.
© Head Light Ltd, 2024

Don't be tempted to over-simplify the outputs

The most effective 360 degree processes provide a combination of quantitative (scores against competencies) and qualitative feedback (comments on the person's performance, strengths and areas for development). It is common, and useful for management, to produce a short graphical summary, but a 360 degree review process provides very rich data, and this is its strength. Don't be tempted to over simplify the results and rely too much on the summary.

Build on strengths

When using the feedback for development planning with individuals, it is a common practice to focus on filling the gaps and developing against weaknesses, however some gaps might not be 'fillable' and some peoples' strengths can compensate for relative weaknesses. Look at what's realistic and appropriate to the job. Focusing on where the person performs exceptionally, and capitalising on their abilities in this area can be more effective at improving overall performance than adopting a 'deficit' approach.

Demonstrate commitment to individual and organisational development

Use the 360 degree review data to identify the key competencies that will drive success in the business, not only on an individual level, but on a team/unit/organisational level. Look at trends and patterns. The results can inform your training and development strategy to ensure there are structured opportunities for developing these competencies, and over time, can help to demonstrate the impact of such strategies. See our article on building competence in line with business plans.

Next steps

If you would like to take a closer look at how best to introduce and implement 360 degree feedback to your organisation, 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.

Talent® and Talent Cloud® are registered trademarks of Head Light Ltd. All other trademarks belong to their respective owners.
© Head Light Ltd, 2024

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

E: info.request@head-light.co.uk W: www.head-light.co.uk