



**Head
Light**

The 14 essentials to
making your 360 a success

part of our We think... series

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Contents

Introduction	3
1. <i>You realise that not all participants are the same</i>	3
2. <i>You recognise and reflect the differences in review timing – and adjust your plan and manage expectations accordingly</i>	3
3. <i>Your 360 questionnaires or assessments are fit for purpose, considered relevant and have great face validity</i>	3
4. <i>You can create and articulate a ‘What’s in it for them’</i>	4
5. <i>You can create a ‘What’s in it for the Management population’</i>	4
6. <i>You have a plan to manage the ‘emotional’ objections</i>	4
7. <i>Your leaders are champions of the 360</i>	4
8. <i>Those taking part are ready, willing and able</i>	5
9. <i>You don’t talk about “filling in questionnaires”</i>	5
10. <i>You don’t ask about ‘should’</i>	5
11. <i>The output from the 360 aligns with your talent management processes</i>	6
12. <i>You won’t let others hijack the data</i>	6
13. <i>You’re not looking to assess individuals in relation to others</i>	6
14. <i>You’re keen to run a pilot</i>	7
Next steps	7
About Head Light	7



Introduction

There is no doubt that a well implemented 360 degree review and feedback process makes a significant and cost-effective contribution to your organisation. But, are you putting in place what is needed to give you, your managers, your employees and your organisation as a whole the best chance to get the most from a 360 project?

In this article, we share what we have learned from designing and implementing numerous 360 review programmes. We share the 14 essential elements that help maximise the effectiveness of 360 feedback programmes.

If you're doing these, then you're likely to be implementing a valuable and productive 360 approach. If you come up short on any of these, you may want to take action.

1. You realise that not all participants are the same

An obvious point perhaps – but we're not talking about you understand that there's a difference between managers / supervisors and non-managers taking part in a 360 review. We mean that you recognise the quite significant differences between different groups of employees and reflect this in the 360 questionnaires you offer. For example, you'll know that you need to think about the actual nature of people's roles and you're probably considering the differences between part- and full-time employees, the area of business in which a person works, the length of service with the company as well as how senior they are.

Typically we find that in a bid to streamline and simplify, HR tend to want to 'sheep dip' their 360 participants. They want a single questionnaire that covers all competencies, all values, all business areas and all experiences. Of course it is simpler to set up and administer this – but not only does it not encourage buy-in, it is also goes against the desire for a more personalised, employee-centric approach. Having a single, 'sheep dip' approach will not deliver the most valuable 360 project!

2. You recognise and reflect the differences in review timing – and adjust your plan and manage expectations accordingly

With all projects, HR or otherwise, the scheduling of tasks and management of expectations is essential to ensure overall success.

We see that one of the most common pitfalls is the assumption and insistence by HR that all the timings for all the participants should be equal.

They fail to recognise that some people need more time; perhaps because of different business issues, priorities or focuses that conflict with the HR timetable, or perhaps managers need more time given the number of reviews required.

Either way, to give your 360 project the best chance of success, it's a good idea to build these factors into your original timeline – and tell people you're doing this. People will be grateful for it and the timeframe will be perceived as realistic.

3. Your 360 questionnaires or assessments are fit for purpose, considered relevant and have great face validity

Organisational competencies and values are important – and a good 360 can mean that employees across the business see and understand those which the organisation sees as significant.

But these competencies need to be translated into meaningful and relevant language and behaviours for each segment of your organisation. In short, you need to take the core competencies and reflect these into the behaviours you need to see from your people and that you measure in your



360 questionnaire.

If your organisation doesn't use competencies, make sure that the language used in the 360 is common across the organisation, appropriate to the respondents and can clearly elicit the desired responses.

We find that it's useful to discuss the design of the questions and format with a pilot group of differing levels of employees to ensure your format will deliver what is required and provide one clear consistent message of its worth. We can help you with this and also make sure that your 360 software lets you run different questionnaires to different people but within the same general timeframe.

4. You can create and articulate a 'What's in it for them'

When you're positioning the 360 with the end-user, it's imperative that you define and articulate clearly the rationale and purpose of the 360. Is it to inform and support Management Development, Coaching, Career Development or Performance Management? Are you introducing new competencies, ways of working or bonus schemes?

It may be some or all of these. By thinking through this and then exploring with the participants it will help to sell the "what's in it for me", gain buy-in and provide clarity to how the organisation will use the results.

5. You can create a 'What's in it for the Management population'

As well as successfully gaining buy-in from the participants, you'll need to make sure that your managers and leaders understand and share the vision for 360 in the company.

Look at the overarching strategy or goal that the organisation is working towards and see how 360 could help to show the clear links between the current situation and striving to achieve the future vision of your organisation. Are there values or a core mission statement that the behaviours link to?

We know that those organisations that work on articulating the value of their 360 are the organisations which get the most benefit from the programme.

6. You have a plan to manage the 'emotional' objections

Whenever a 360 approach is adopted, a wide range of emotions surge through the organisation. Concern about feedback anonymity, who will access the results and how they will be used are the most obvious and prevalent concerns.

You need to develop clear explanations and processes to support your approach – and make sure that the online 360 system you are using fits with this.

Explain how the 360 will be administered including who will ask reviewers for feedback, who will collate the results and how, when will each participant receive the feedback and from whom? Ensure that the process is transparent and everyone can see what the desired outcomes are.

We find it is also useful to show at this stage how the 360 process will be revisited to allow individuals to see how they have improved based on feedback captured over time.

7. Your leaders are champions of the 360

The most successful 360 implementations are those in which the leaders of the organisation are fully engaged with the approach and actively support it.

Identify the key stakeholders to act as 'champions' supporting the pilot of the process and promoting its worth and usefulness as a management tool. These may be a Senior Management Group or well respected members of specific business areas. This group then helps to define and promote the organisational need for the 360 i.e. to identify current skills against those required for future growth and develop training plans to assist this.



8. Those taking part are ready, willing and able

Success of a 360 project is impacted by the attitude, commitment and preparedness of those taking part. If your 360 is to be a success, be specific when and how the feedback will be delivered.

Ensure that the individuals are briefed on the different stages on feedback - shock, anger, rejection, and acceptance. This helps them to mentally prepare for the sessions and understand their emotions are natural and expected. In our experience individuals can move more quickly to acceptance (and therefore action) when they understand the stages and the reasons for their feelings. Thus helping the feedback to be digested and understood more fully.

Ensure each individual understands that by being a willing participant in a 360 feedback process, they own the feedback. By accepting to be involved, make sure any ground rules are laid out in advance and that choosing to decline is 'ok'. It is only they that can act upon the feedback and use it to provide deeper self-insight. Also explain that what they receive is in no way altered or edited - it is the views of their chosen respondents as provided on the forms.

9. You don't talk about "filling in questionnaires"

The objective of a 360 degree process is to provide individuals with constructive and actionable feedback that will help them to develop themselves and improve their performance. It's a collaborative and culture-changing process.

But, the minute you mention "*filling in a questionnaire*", the whole initiative will descend into a tick-box, compliance-driven exercise; it fundamentally diminishes the importance of the process - and it changes the context of your project into something that can be dismissed as a low-priority, and will lead to an unsuccessful outcome of the 360 approach.

So, be very careful about the terminology that you use when you describe your 360 degree process.

Never ask people to go and fill in a questionnaire. Ask for people's contribution: "*We'd like you to go online to a website to provide constructive, structured feedback*".

Successful 360 organisations stay output-focussed, not input-focused, and keep the bigger picture in mind about what they're trying to achieve. Make sure everything you do - and how you describe the process - is aligned with that overall objective.

10. You don't ask about 'should'

Some 360 degree feedback questionnaires ask a reviewer to rate not just how frequently an individual does something, but also how frequently he or she thinks that person 'should' do it.

It's a deadly mistake; it introduces a judgemental element into the process.

Having individuals rate their work colleagues on what they 'should' do isn't the purpose of 360 degree feedback. It blurs the lines between feedback (which should be about information that's helpful for an individual) and performance management (which offers a judgement about their behaviour).

It can be especially toxic when direct reports, who may not understand their manager's role fully, are asked these questions.

We find that a better way forward is to create a 'norm group' of the required behaviours for each job grade. Some 360 degree tools enable you to do this – and, of course, our Talent 360 has this functionality!

Anyone who aspires to a higher grade can then compare their own feedback against the norm group for that grade, so they can quickly see where they're already hitting the mark and where they need to up their game. They therefore learn which specific behaviours they need to improve if they want to be a



credible candidate for that role in the future. Their career is in their hands, so whether they 'should' change their behaviour or not is up to them. If they do, it will be because they're personally motivated to do so and not because they've been 'criticised' by a direct report who couldn't possibly make that judgement.

Using comparative data can be a powerful way to help individuals understand how their behaviour standards relate to others and where they need to improve. It's certainly more persuasive and more helpful than the judgement of others.

11. The output from the 360 aligns with your talent management processes

360 degree feedback should not stand in isolation.

For it to have real personal, professional and business relevance, it needs to, wherever possible, align with the Personal Development process within your organisation.

Formalising action plans based on the feedback and then reviewing these perhaps quarterly shows commitment to the original participant. It also ensures that the feedback is revisited and discussed regularly keeping the process alive and helping to embed it into the organisations culture.

The choice should be given to the individuals to discuss the action plans with their manager, a mentor or a coach. Sharing by choice in this way can then help to naturally encourage a feedback-rich team who seeks to adopt the process into every day operations, and thereby leading to a more valuable use of 360.

12. You won't let others hijack the data

Today's organisations are obsessed with 'big data', so the fact that 360 degree feedback generates data is often attractive and tempting for secondary stakeholders. For example, your colleagues in reward or selection (who are trying to make decisions about people) might be interested in the 360 degree results.

They know that, in the course of a 360 degree assessment, when asked about a particular behavioural indicator or a set of competencies, an employee may have rated her colleague at the fourth mark out of six in a scale. Her input here is that her colleague does these things 'most of the time'. However, others can simply seize on the detail that the colleague scored 'four out of six'.

HR teams must avoid the temptation to allow 360 degree feedback results to be used by others for analysis and interpretation. It's unethical and inappropriate – and an abuse of trust. If you ask individuals to provide structured, observational feedback for development purposes and they then find out that their responses have been used for other agendas, such as to support reward or selection decisions, you'll have lost their trust and the next time you try to run a 360 degree project and it'll be dead in the water.

13. You're not looking to assess individuals in relation to others

If you need to provide feedback for five people, there are some 360 degree tools on the market that put all five of them on the screen at the same time. The idea seems to be that this makes the process quicker and easier for you, as you don't have to complete five separate reviews.

However, the problem with this is that, in the resultant feedback, you're not really providing an objective measure of each person but rating each of them in relation to the others. You think: if I'm giving one person a four for that, then I should only give his or her co-worker a three in comparison.

Quick and easy shortcuts such as this may seem seductive, especially in our 'immediate gratification society', but they're an illusion that undermines success.

If you really want to provide 360 degree feedback that is objective, considered and constructive, then ranking everyone together on the same page isn't going to help. The answer is to treat everyone



individually and to use a 360 degree tool that lets you provide considered feedback for one person at a time.

14. You're keen to run a pilot

360 should be approached as an evolutionary way to capture feedback.

If there is no historical approach in your organisation to feedback being seen as a fundamental and accepted part of the culture it may encounter significant obstacles. To help in this, we see that the most successful implementations are introduced gradually to lay the foundations for the full 360 and help to realise the value it can add to an open, honest culture with a genuine desire to improve performance.

Perhaps a pilot in a certain part of the business (usually the top) might be a better starting point? We can help with this.

Next steps

If you would like to take a closer look at how you can develop and shape your 360 degree feedback programme, then please get in touch.

About Head Light

Head Light is an award-winning talent management 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 software tools designed for those who expect the maximum return from talent management processes. Our training and consulting services uniquely complement our breakthrough software 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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