

## Is your 360 process helping people thrive and excel at work?

In this article Yellow Edge highlights some of the unhelpful and potentially dangerous developments associated with 360-degree feedback processes and how you can ensure your 360 process is set up to have the right impact.

When feedback is given and received in the right way it can help people thrive both professionally and emotionally.

“The provision of constructive feedback in supportive, regular dialogue and conversation does much to support high performance, manage underperformance, to build trust and to demonstrate that staff and their contributions are valued” says Andrew Simon, Co-CEO of Yellow Edge.

Whilst organisations emphasise the importance of giving and receiving feedback and provide the latest tools and training to help support their staff to engage in regular, real-time feedback moments in the workplace – the reality is that feedback is often deprioritised or neglected due to our busy work agendas, our geographically dispersed teams and our perceived lack of confidence or ability to deliver feedback.

Whilst often a starting point for leadership development programs and coaching engagements, 360-degree feedback processes can also be an effective employee engagement tool to help individuals elicit feedback from multiple people at the same time in a way that can be empowering.

So, what is it about the 360-feedback process itself that can empower and help individuals to thrive and excel at work?

- 360-degree feedback processes can “break the ice” in feedback-poor environments.
- 360 degree can offer more balanced feedback and go some way to minimising bias and systemic error, since the feedback comes from multiple raters selected by the individual.
- 360-degree feedback processes keep the raters anonymous (except for the Manager) and the reports are only viewed by the individual seeking the feedback.
- 360-degree feedback processes include a debrief with a professional coach who can draw out the key learnings and take-aways, clarify any misunderstandings and put things into perspective.

- 360s reports can come with a customised set of developmental recommendations, mapped to the organisation’s leadership competencies, to help individuals create a personal development plan.
- 360s can inform learning and development opportunities without affecting performance reviews.

Despite the benefits outlined above, there are some unhelpful and, in some cases, potentially dangerous developments creeping into the 360-degree feedback process.

### **A lack of leadership buy-in and support for the 360-degree feedback process.**

A lack of support and buy-in to the 360-degree feedback model from organisational leaders and participants can mean at best the 360 process is a long, drawn out and inconsequential process. At worst it can be a process that may have negative impacts professionally and personally upon individuals due to a lack of clarity around the purpose and objectives of the 360 degree feedback model, and poorly considered, framed and delivered feedback as well as a lack of wrap around support.

### **Tying the 360-feedback process to performance review cycle.**

Some organisations are not clearly differentiating between their formal performance management review and 360-degree feedback processes. We know intuitively that being given feedback in the context of an assessment or review means we are less likely to take it onboard therefore reducing its effectiveness.

The purpose of the 360-degree feedback process is to generate insights, awareness and information to help an individual to learn, improve and grow in their role. Formal performance reviews however are about assessing someone’s performance in the role.

## **Launching a 360-degree feedback process during a period of change or business transformation.**

Asking people to provide feedback on their colleagues' capabilities and behaviours during periods of significant change is unfair, distracting and counterproductive.

When we are under stress, we can become defensive and particularly when the organisation is in a state of flux we may not "hear" the feedback. It may be that the behavioural capabilities being explored during the 360-degree feedback process are not the ones being demonstrated during change period and so can be an unfairly focus on the wrong things.

## **A lack of attention to the psychological safety and welfare of staff.**

Psychological safety is about fostering an environment where there is interpersonal trust and respect among team members, and allowing them to talk about social risks such as admitting failures and asking for help.

Now and then we notice organisations failing to adequately prepare and brief staff on the purpose and objectives of the 360 degree feedback process and failing to provide external, independent and confidential support provided throughout the process and beyond.

## **The use of generic capabilities which hold little meaning or relevance or context.**

Some teams and organisations are opting to populate their 360-degree surveys with generic capabilities or behaviours. Research tells us that asking the wrong questions or seeking feedback against generic capabilities can be demoralising and leave staff confused as to what behaviours are important and desired within the team.

In 2019, Yellow Edge undertook desktop research into performance management systems and processes. This involved reviewing online publications, talking to HR Practitioners within the public and private sectors, scouring HR blogs and more.

Based on our findings and more than fifteen years of experience administering 360 surveys, a successful and rewarding 360-degree feedback process comes down to adherence to four guiding principles:

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## **1. Empower stakeholders**

For best results:

- Teams and organisations should host forums to discuss the purpose and objectives of the 360-degree feedback process, the benefits for individuals, teams and the organisation as well as to canvass staff views and concerns.
- HR Units offer their staff training and development on feedback and communication.
- HR Units develop clear communication and engagement plans which set out realistic timeframes and the role of managers throughout the process.
- Participants are encouraged to select their raters and to reach out to them personally to ask for feedback.
- Participants receive follow-up support including but not limited to individual debriefing, ongoing coaching and career planning assistance.

## **2. Emphasise development**

Follow up activities including individual learning, action learning sets and coaching are just as important as the 360-degree feedback itself. 360 feedback followed by the creation of an individual learning and development plan, ongoing coaching or mentoring has the potential to lead to a change in behaviours.

## **3. Focus on a small number of future focused behavioural capabilities**

Feedback is most impactful when it is focused on a small number of areas or key objectives which are describable, visible and assessable. A bespoke 360-degree survey is based on the team or organisation's key competencies, value-based behaviours and the outcomes they are seeking to achieve. This ensures capabilities clearly align with the organisation's corporate objectives.

## **4. Create a psychological safe and supportive environment**

For best results:

- Ensure the timing for a 360 works i.e., not during peak periods, school holidays, business transformation.
- Provide ample opportunity for participants to voice concerns or challenges.
- Establish clear principles or prompts for framing and delivering 360-degree feedback.
- Schedule preparatory conversations between participants and a person they trust to discuss their concerns, fears and the opportunities associated with gaining feedback.
- Schedule one-on-one debriefs with a professional coach to help participants unpack the feedback.
- Invest time and resources in the development of individual learning plans.