



In our Experience

What do you do when the feedback isn't good? Tips for discussing 360 degree appraisal reports

360 degree appraisal is an effective way of helping managers, supervisors and team leaders understand their interactions with others. It's a valid basis for coaching as it can quickly highlight areas of strength and development needs that relate directly to how people work. It can also be an excellent start to organization-wide development where a business is introducing a culture change programme.

The keys to reliable 360 degree feedback include a well designed competency model, effective briefing of managers and their respondents, an efficiently run questionnaire and skilled feedback. Some businesses can achieve this in-house – most buy-in specific expertise to ensure the programme runs efficiently. Businesses will want to know that their investment has been worthwhile and that they have achieved the results they need.

Effective feedback of the results is the basis for learning and change. Giving feedback can be an uncomfortable experience for many people, especially if it is negative or potentially contentious. Feedback can sometimes touch a 'raw nerve' and feedback providers need to be skilled enough to help managers understand the results whilst giving them space to talk about what's important to them.

If you are thinking of introducing 360 degree appraisal or would like to review your existing programme, you might find the following points helpful.

What is 'bad' feedback?

Even if the feedback appears to be negative, it's important to be honest and not try to avoid potentially contentious issues. Experienced feedback providers present feedback non-judgmentally allowing the recipient to interpret and understand it in their own way. They ask questions about how the recipient feels about the feedback and don't try to predict the recipient's response. Most 360 degree feedback results aren't interpreted in relation to a comparison group so it's important not to make generalizations about the results.

Confidentiality

Ideally the 360 degree report and feedback meeting need to be confidential. This means that individual reports are shared with the feedback recipient and their feedback provider but not with their HR department or their boss unless the feedback recipient chooses to do so. There needs to be a very clear and explicit policy on what happens to reports and the data, such as how long it is kept and who sees it. Being explicit about this will help people feel more comfortable about giving honest feedback to their colleagues and managers and will improve the integrity of the feedback.

This is my 3rd feedback today.....

There is a danger of treating feedback sessions like a production line, especially in large organizations. This will reduce the learning and will make managers feel like they've been through a 'sheep dip' experience. Ways you can avoid this include using a number of different feedback providers and not squeezing too many sessions into a day. It also helps if the sessions allow plenty of time for scene setting and discussion so that feedback providers don't have to rush to get through the report.

Pace yourself

In the feedback meeting, it's important for the feedback provider to pace the session appropriately, allowing time and space for reflection. Inexperienced feedback providers often fear silence and feel they have to fill it. More experienced feedback providers understand that managers need time to process and understand their feedback. Asking questions and allowing time to process the answer is critical. They understand how to adjust their own pace to that of individuals who need more time, and how to slow down managers who are in danger of going too fast and missing important learning opportunities.

It can touch on a raw nerve

From time to time feedback can touch on a raw nerve that can be entirely unrelated to the feedback. Just having the opportunity to talk to a skilled coach or feedback provider gives managers the opportunity to explore troubling issues. A skilled feedback provider will know when to help managers explore issues that aren't in the 360 degree feedback report. This can be as valuable to them as the feedback itself.

Feedback isn't just telling people the results

Whilst the concept of feedback suggests 'telling' without interruption, the best 360 feedback sessions are an exploration of the results between feedback provider and manager. The best feedback providers ask the right questions to help managers reflect on their results and then listen effectively so they can help with the learning process.

What next?

It's important that people realize that 360 degree feedback is only the start and feedback recipients often ask 'what's next? They need time to reflect on the feedback conversation and consider what they would like to do. It may be appropriate to help managers put together an action plan at the end of the session so that they consider how to take things forward. Alternative you could provide an action planning session after a couple of weeks. If the 360 degree feedback is the start of a larger process, it's important that this is made clear at the time and to keep up the momentum.

If you want to read more about how to introduce 360 degree feedback into your organization, we recommend

360 Degree Feedback, by Peter Ward. Published by CIPD in 1997

If you'd like to talk to us about introducing 360 degree feedback please contact us on enquiries@chromis-consulting.com