

Should I use 360 feedback in career assessment?

Author Jane Barrett

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Jane founded The Career Farm to provide people with a structure for career thinking and the essential resources to help you 'grow your own career'.

This article talks about effective 360 feedback and how to log onto the career Maximiser to help you with your career goals.

Should I use 360 feedback in career assessment?

As part of the career assessment process you go through in our online programme Career Maximiser you will be considering,

What are my top skills?

What do I enjoy doing?

What am I good at?

I was recently asked about the value of getting feedback from work colleagues and, specifically, is 360 feedback something you should consider?

My answer depends on the type of organization you're working in.

Where there is a very supportive environment and 360 degree feedback is universally viewed as a tool for development then it is worth considering including this in your career thinking.

In certain environments 360 degree feedback can be seen more negatively; an opportunity to settle scores, or for the reviewer to advance his/her own position. And then there's always the potential for people to guess who said what!

If you feel confident that your organization falls into the former camp and not the latter, then I'd say 360 feedback can be an extremely valuable tool.

However, as with all these things, there are ways of doing it. The method of gathering feedback can significantly affect its quality.

My best experience of this feedback is when it is gathered via face-to-face or telephone interviews (as opposed to an online questionnaire or via email).

Obviously this requires more effort and you will want to involve your HR team, or possibly a completely impartial third party, in gathering the feedback.

In my experience more personalized feedback can be more valuable than an online questionnaire where colleagues are interviewed.

I have seen this used in the context of soliciting feedback on a senior manager around what he needed to do to develop his competencies for promotion. This worked very well as specific evidence of behaviours was gathered to back up the feedback.

It's often easier to talk to a third party who can then carefully frame the feedback.

At the end of the day the senior manager didn't agree with all the feedback but he couldn't argue with how he was perceived and the behaviour that had contributed to this image. Viewing the feedback in this light gave him a positive framework in which to consider how he could improve.

Crucially, the manager in question had been involved in structuring the information requests. He'd reviewed and approved the questions to be asked prior to any interviews taking place. If you're soliciting 360 feedback I'd strongly recommend you do this as well, as it will give you more confidence in the results – especially if they contain some challenging information!

If your company does not have an HR department, then you may want to consider hiring an HR consultant to run this as a one-off project.

A less formal approach

In addition to soliciting information from your colleagues, or if your company is not going to be supportive of this process, another area worth looking at is informally asking your mentor, or colleagues you trust, to give you feedback on which skills they perceive as your strongest, and which you seem to enjoy.

Spread the net

You also might want to widen your pool of assessors.

Research from the University of Toronto's Business School indicates that the best raters for personality assessments are actually family and friends.

So don't dismiss asking your nearest and dearest – as their input might be equally valuable!

Recap

- Consider if your organization is “right” for 360 feedback.
- Involve HR, or if there's no HR team, consider using a third party
- Try to have the feedback gathered face-to-face or by phone
- Pre-approve the questions to be asked
- Understand that the feedback represents other people's perceptions of you
- Consider gathering less formal feedback from trusted colleagues, mentors, etc
- Don't forget to ask friends and family

So to answer the question, 360 feedback can be a powerful and positive tool in your career assessment. But take care to ensure it's structured so that you get the most out of it.

Career Maximiser

As an OUBS alumnus you have free access to the online career strategy course, Career Maximiser, to access this you:

Visit www.thecareerfarm.com

- Click on Log In
- Enter user name: oubs
- Enter password: sbuo
- You have now entered the Open University Business School area for Alumni
- Click on OU Career Maximiser Free Sign Up link
- Once you have completed the sign up you will receive a confirmation email with your user name and password. Please keep these in a safe place.
- You will now need to re-login with your new details.

Other Resources

http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/factsheets/360-degree-feedback.aspx#link_3

<http://www.talentglue.co.uk/blog/2012/12/12/raters-for-360-assessments/>

<http://blogs.hbr.org/2012/09/getting-360-degree-reviews-right/>