

THE 3 STEPS THAT ENSURE YOUR 360 DEGREE FEEDBACK PROCESS ADDS REAL VALUE

This article provides a pragmatic 360 degree feedback model for supporting feedback recipients to convert their 360 feedback into the best possible outcomes. Research carried out by Lumus360, supported by the practical experience gained through coaching hundreds of 360 degree feedback participants, suggests that real performance improvement and personal growth occurs when feedback recipients are provided with the appropriate support to work through the following 3 transition steps:

Step 1 - Accept feedback in a positive way

This first and very important step focuses on supporting feedback recipients to 'open the feedback door' and 'hear' what is being said, in an open and non-defensive way, so they gain a genuine and accurate picture of how they are seen by those around them. It builds on the belief that to make sound development decisions, people need to start with a clear and factual understanding of the current situation.

This step also aims to address the issues normally associated with feedback recipients working through their 360 degree feedback reports alone, namely that most will instinctively skip over or underplay positive feedback messages and reject, exaggerate, deny or defend feedback that they find difficult to accept. Both can lead to a blurred understanding of what is actually being said.

Accepting feedback in a positive way involves the feedback recipient placing equal weight on positive, developmental feedback, hearing positive feedback messages as strengths to be played to / capitalised on, and seeing disappointing / critical feedback as a good source of information from which continuing development ideas can be drawn. In real terms, this involves providing a safe, supporting environment where feedback recipients can go beyond any initial emotional responses and constructively unpick disappointments, shocks and surprises.

Hearing and accepting the feedback is more than just reading words and interpreting strings of data. It also involves clustering feedback messages together to pinpoint patterns, themes and underlying causes from which a depth of understanding and an overarching picture / set of accurate feedback conclusions can be drawn.

Step 2 - Action planning

Having understood and made sense of the feedback, this step deals with the 'so whats', facilitating the feedback recipient to convert their feedback conclusions into a set of pragmatic, forward looking actions that will benefit them and their organisation. In practice, this step works best if a 'mulling over' period of between 5 – 10 days is provided after the feedback recipient receives their feedback report, allowing time for personal reflection and an opportunity to clarify key feedback messages and how they feel about them.



The action planning outputs should not be a 'wish list' of courses or an overwhelming and unmanageable set of improvement objectives, but instead should aim to capture 3 – 4 key deliverables that the participant is committed to, and that will make a real and measurable difference if followed through on.

Effective post 360 degree feedback action plans should be balanced, aiming to identify:

- How talents and strengths can be applied to further benefit the organisation.
- How an acceptable / mediocre area of performance can become a key strength with some behavioural refinement.
- One or two development goals to address behaviours that are currently hindering or even blocking higher performance.

Goals should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound). We've all heard this a million times before, but only those who take the time to actually do it will reap the benefits. If a goal is missing any of these components, it is far less likely to be followed through on.

Supporting people through action planning goes beyond simply facilitating the development of a logical set of objectives and implementation actions. Action planning is also about building enthusiasm and commitment to change and supporting the feedback recipient to gain the self confidence to give development goals a determined go and building the faith to see them through.

Step 3 - Follow through

Providing ongoing support to enable participants to deliver on their plans and adopt new ways of working is a key step in driving plans into delivered goals and one which most organisations get wrong. When combined, the following four elements play a significant part in converting action plans into improved performance:

a. Line Manager's Development Discussion

The aim of this meeting is to confirm the alignment of objectives and gain the line manager's buy-in, signoff and continuing implementation support. Whilst this sounds obvious, our research indicates that it is not common practice. An effective way of raising their importance and steering the conversations to produce the best possible outcomes is to make the Line Manager's Development Discussion an expectation from the outset and provide an outline meeting agenda.

By the end of the Development Discussion the participant and their line manager should have:

- Shared the participant's 360 degree feedback report conclusions – the key messages and how he/she felt about them.



- Explored any areas of the line manager's feedback that needed further clarification.
- Discussed the draft development plan to make sure objectives are clear and aligned to the organisation's needs.
- Agreed how success will be monitored and measured.
- Identified the support and resources needed to enable their delivery.

b. Engaging the team

This can be successfully achieved by publicly recognising the team's contribution to the 360 process to date, by thanking them for their feedback and acknowledging it in a positive way. This is best achieved by sharing the positive and developmental messages taken from the report (not the report itself). Publicly sharing development plans with the team is an effective way of engaging them and reinforces the participant's commitment to their delivery. This approach also means the participant's team are consciously aware of the intended improvement changes, which makes changing their future perceptions easier and provides an opportunity to ask for continuing feedback on progress going forward.

c. Monitoring

It is important to diarise review dates and have a mechanism to track and monitor progress against milestones and overall aims in order to drive accountability. People are far more likely to get something done if they have to answer for it to someone other than themselves. Some key monitoring questions that should be answered early are:

- What will be monitored and how will it be tracked?
- How can the measure be made easy?
- How frequently will it be monitored?
- How much slippage is acceptable?
- How will contingencies be identified early?
- How will corrective action be taken?
- How will objectives be updated to meet changing circumstances?

d. Coaching support

This includes ongoing coaching to support development objectives and/or to investigate the behaviours and mindsets that are creating barriers and any other issues that are preventing the achievement of performance excellence.

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