

Making the Most of 360 Degree Feedback: Briefing Notes for Managers

When work associates give you feedback, try to remember that their observations or concerns are likely to be based on your approach to particular situations or the way you respond to certain demands. In some cases you may not fully recognise how certain *patterns of behaviour* affect your overall performance. Remember that the feedback is based on the opinion of different groups, each with a distinct perspective. It is important to focus on the issues relevant to each group (e.g. customers or stakeholders) and not to allow personal feelings and defensiveness to block important insights.

Feedback is very important at work as it helps managers adapt and develop leadership skills, significantly strengthening the 'Learning Agility' that enables them to respond positively to new demands. It is through feedback that we become aware of what other people require, of how we need to adapt our approach, and the skills we need to strengthen. Our own perception of what represents "the best approach" is often based on work habits and attitudes that have developed over a lengthy period of time. New job demands and changing expectations may mean that we need to look at things in a new way.

There are four key steps that contribute to a positive outcome:

1. Listen to the Feedback

Having the opportunity to hear what other people think is useful. It gives you additional insight. It may be uncomfortable, but try to understand the opinion or perception of each group of respondents. Do not immediately reject the feedback or argue about the points that are being raised. Remember that you still retain your opinion, and you can subsequently decide if the feedback is relevant.

2. Clarify the Information

Before responding directly to the feedback, or seeking to rationalise or debate points, try to clarify what is being said. Be clear about the context. When and where does this take place, who is involved and what are the outcomes? A useful tip is to reflect on what you are trying to achieve. Avoid jumping to conclusions or becoming defensive.

3. Explore the Alternatives

If you focus on the situation and circumstances that have resulted in you receiving specific feedback, you can now do something about it. Think about the way you approached the situation and how you could handle things differently in future. What is the 'best outcome' scenario? Discuss options and consider the benefits of adopting a different approach.

4. Develop an Action Plan

Feedback will provide you with new insights and increased self-awareness. However, old attitudes and ways of dealing with things may continue unless you set out some clear plans which define the situation, and how you will deal with similar events in future. It is often useful to identify two or three main areas of strength and then consider one or two areas for development. Action plans tend to be more successful when they are focused on specific objectives, linked to clear performance criteria, and follow well-defined timescales.

Effective 360 degree feedback should help you identify personal strengths and development objectives, the support needed, and the target date by which you aim to accomplish a particular goal.