# 180-degree and 360-degree Feedback

Multisource feedback describes a range of processes by which feedback is collected about an individual from a variety of sources with whom the person interacts in the course of their job. It is then collated and presented to the individual in such a way as to let them see the comparison between self-evaluation and external evaluation.

"Multisource feedback is valuable for development because it provides comprehensive information from different perspectives. It builds self-awareness, which in turn increases self-reflection and suggests directions for behaviour change." [1]

Multisource feedback can be collected from managers, peers, clients, team members and the individuals themselves; essentially, anyone with the experience to give an informed opinion about areas of job performance. The first step in implementing multisource feedback is to decide who to collect feedback from. Think about the information you want and the different perspectives various people will have on each individual.



Another important factor to consider is whether to make the respondents anonymous. Manuel London argues that this is essential to the success of 360-degree feedback. [2] In fact, he takes it so far as to suggest that upwards feedback should not even be presented to a manager if there are less than five respondents, as it could be too easy for the feedback recipient to identify the sources of specific feedback.

## 180-degree and 360-degree feedback

Perhaps the best known blueprints for multisource feedback are the 180-degree and 360-degree models. The 180-degree model suggests collecting feedback from supervisors, peers, clients and the individuals themselves, [3] while 360-degree adds upwards feedback from team members the person is responsible for.

A common mechanism for collecting multisource feedback is to have respondents rate the person on a numeric scale against a set of job-related proficiencies. This is then collated and presented to the person in a form that gives them the opportunity to see how they are performing and how their own ratings compare with those of others.

The self-assessment part of this process is crucial. Firstly, it makes the individual think about their own performance, which increases self-awareness. Secondly, it allows them to see the difference between self-perception of performance and the perception of those they interact with. Making this a regular occurrence also allows them to track their own development as feedback from others changes or their own ratings become closer to the external ones.

Below is an example of a 360-degree feedback report: [4]

| Proficiency | Self Rating | Feedback | | | Number of Respondents |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | Average | High | Low | |
| Communication | 8 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 8 |
| Planning | 7 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 9 |
| Problem-Solving | 8 | 8 | 9 | 6 | 8 |
| Staff Development | 6 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Decision-Making | 9 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 9 |

- **Self Rating:** this is the score the individual has given herself for each skill.
- **Feedback:** these are the average, highest and lowest scores given by the feedback providers.
- **Number of Respondents:** this is the number of people who felt qualified to rate this specific proficiency.
- **Peer Norm:** this is the average score given to peers of the individual across the organisation, and can be directly compared with the average feedback scores.

This format allows the person to see how their own perception of their performance compares with that of their colleagues. It also gives context in terms of showing them the range of scores they received, how many respondents there were for each proficiency and what the average score was for their peers across the organisation.

For example, if we look at the skill 'staff development', the individual has rated herself at 6, which is lower than all her other ratings and suggests she might already see this as an area for development. Her average feedback score, however, is only 4, with a lowest score of 2 and a highest of only 5. With the average score across her peers being 7, this report clearly identifies 'staff development' as an area she needs to work on.

In the above example, the proficiencies being rated are quite generic. Research suggests that the more specific and job-relevant the proficiencies are, the more accurate and useful the feedback will prove to be. Involving employees in the design process is also advised in order to help them engage with and understand the process, so working with staff to identify the specific skills and proficiencies which should be rated may provide the most useful feedback.

It is also worth thinking about allowing space for additional, narrative commentary in feedback. Studies into the efficacy of multisource feedback have shown that subjects often found narrative commentary, including specific suggestions for improvement, to be the most useful in identifying areas for development. The attached templates, *Gathering 180-degree or 360-degree Feedback* and *Delivering 180-degree or 360-degree Feedback* are helpful tools to use as a starting point for designing your own process.

## The importance of self-other agreement
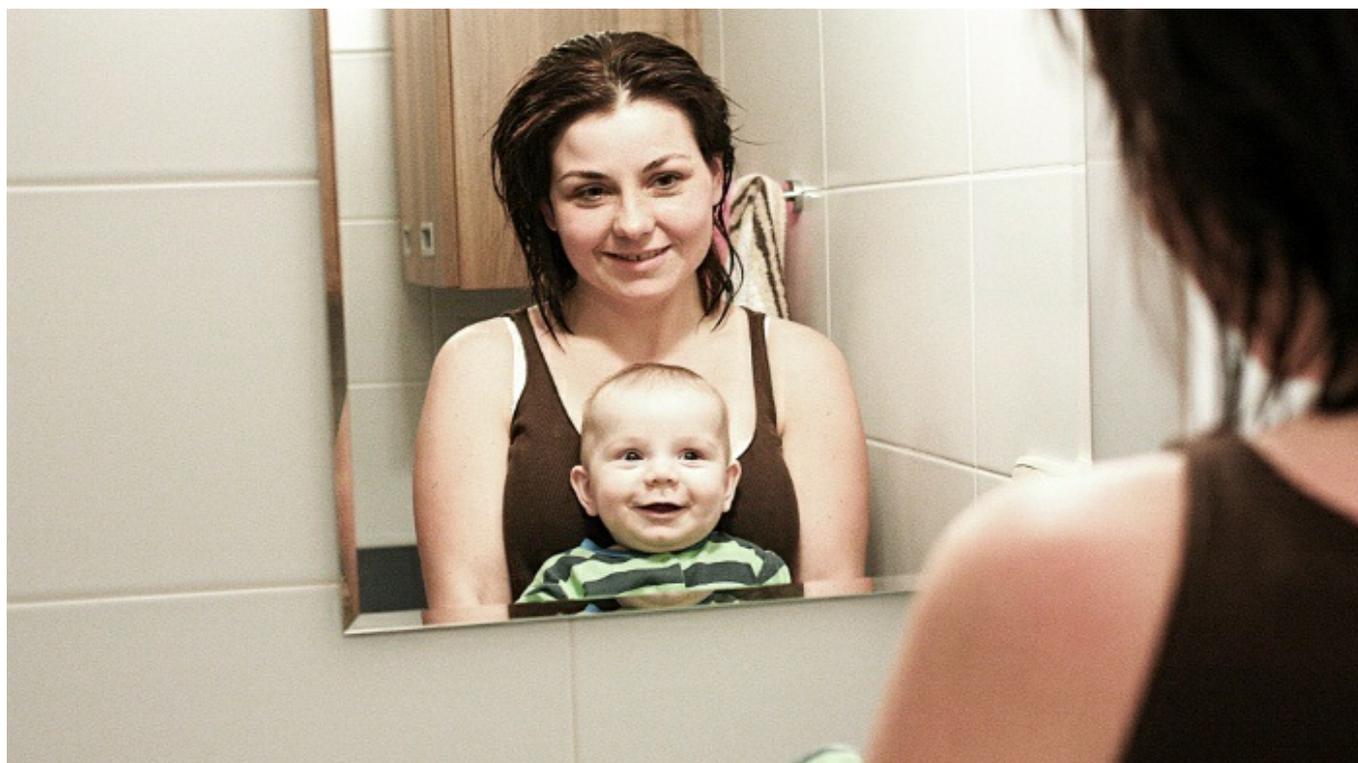


A number of studies have shown the validity of multisource feedback when compared with other performance measurements and career progressions. [5] One particular 2002 study looked at the extent to which agreement between self-assessments and 360-degree feedback related to promotion within a sample of Air Force officers. [6] The strongest correlation was found between promotion rates and agreement of self-ratings with upwards feedback – meaning that those officers who rated themselves the same as their subordinates did were more likely to be promoted.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this correlation was strongest amongst those who were rated

favourably – meaning officers who were seen as good leaders by those under their command and who also saw themselves as good leaders were the most likely to be promoted. Importantly, it was not the ratings themselves that were the strongest indicator, though, but the agreement between self and subordinate ratings – showing that self-awareness in itself may be a key factor in career progression and leadership performance. [7]

# Drawbacks

There are potential drawbacks to the multisource process. For example, it can become a burden to administer regularly. This can be overcome with the use of technology to automate much of the process, though this, in turn, can have the effect of depersonalising the activity and potentially reducing its perceived importance over time.

There is also some thought that the whole process of rating people with numbers or performance measures like 'satisfactory' can be demeaning in and of itself. This school of thought recommends a 'ratingless appraisal' system based solely on narrative feedback, with no measurement or comparison scale involved.

While there are potential problems to consider, the overall results of multisource feedback do seem to indicate an improvement in job performance over time.

"Most studies have found that 360-feedback or upward feedback often, but not always, increases performance." [8]

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[1] Manuel London, *Job Feedback* (Psychology Press, 2010) p102.

[2] Manuel London, *Job Feedback* (Psychology Press, 2010) p92.

[3] There are variant definitions to 180-degree feedback, with some models, for example, simply making feedback a two-way process between supervisor and employee.

[4] Adapted from *Table 7.3*, Manuel London, *Job Feedback* (Psychology Press, 2010) p95.

[5] Manuel London, *Job Feedback* (Psychology Press, 2010) p107.

[6] Stefanie K Halverson, Scott Tonidandel, Cassie Barlow and Robert L Dipboye, 'Self-Other Agreement on a 360-Degree Leadership Evaluation', paper presented at the *17th Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Toronto, Canada (April, 2002).

[7] The authors did add the caveat: "This may be particularly relevant in a military setting, where the ability to command the respect and obedience of one's subordinates is important to leadership success."

[8] Manuel London, *Job Feedback* (Psychology Press, 2010) p116.

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