

360-Degree Reviews in Global Corporations

Five Tips to Help You Implement Smoothly

by Angie Gallop, eXplore



Eagle's Flight runs many leadership development programs, including 360s

Implementing a 360-degree process in a large corporation may seem a daunting task, but many of the challenges involved are similar to those in smaller organizations.

According to Christy Pettit, Executive Vice President Strategic and Organizational Effectiveness at Eagle's Flight — a training provider well-accustomed to

implementing programs with the Fortune 500s — no matter what the size of the company is, a successful process depends on how well one is prepared.

The Eagle's Flight client list includes names such as BMW, Microsoft, Nike, and Toyota. Its programs are offered in 25 languages and available in more than 35 countries around the world.

The company sets up approximately eight to ten 360-review processes per year for its Fortune 500 clients.

In a discussion with *eXplore*, the Eagle's Flight shared five tips on what you absolutely must have in place to ensure the 360-degree review process is a success in a large, global corporate setting.

Tip #1: Find a Vendor Who Will Work With You

A key aspect of the 360-degree process is information-gathering, so the software you use for this process is critical.

eXplorance's Blue/360 is designed to support 360s in most organizations. But, one size may not fit all.

As a consultant that sells Blue to its clients as part of a larger program bundle, Eagle's Flight often customizes the program to fit a client's needs.

Whether you are a consultant, or an employee in charge of implementing a 360 in-house, you may want to customize the survey tool. This means that you will need to have a close working relationship with a vendor you trust.

"It seems we're always looking for something just a little bit different," says Sheila Anderson-Cousins, Director of Measurement, Communications and Training Transfer at Eagle's Flight, and the person most directly involved in overseeing the day-to-day implementation of the 360-degree process.

In her experience, the fact that eXplorance has very responsive customer service has been incredibly important.

"eXplorance's phone support goes that extra mile. They are willing to listen to our needs and work with us. Our experience has been that whenever they can incorporate our changes into their upcoming release, they do so," she says.

What this means for Blue/360 is that everyone else benefits from the tweaking required by one particular customer.

Tip #2: Carefully Consider Who Should Participate

Generally, 360-degree reviews are onerous to do on a large-scale because of the massive organizing effort involved. So think carefully before conducting them. Typically, a 360-degree review process is reserved for smaller groups, usually senior leaders in the organization.

"We used to do big groups — anywhere from two to 400 people at a go — but companies aren't doing that anymore," says EVP Christy Pettit.

"They've wised up to the idea that to make it meaningful, you need to be really selective about who is doing the exercise; or at the very least, stage the process in a way that you can follow up adequately with the group as they go through it."

The value of a 360-degree process to a large organization is the same as it is for smaller companies.

Done correctly, the process delivers a well-rounded view of participants' areas of personal strength and opportunities for development. It can also provide a good picture of where the leadership group, as a whole, excels and areas where additional training should be focused.

Just remember to keep the scope reasonably limited for better chances of success.

Tip #3: Have a Person Dedicated to the Process

On the client side, compiling a list of raters and defining their relationships with the participants is a major and potentially time-consuming task.

“I think this is the biggest factor. Unless people have been through it, they really have no concept about how much work it is going to be for them,” says Pettit.

“No matter how much work we do, we can’t take on these pieces for them,”

Anderson-Cousins adds that Eagle’s Flight has learned it takes at least one person within the client-organization dedicated to the job.

Larger organizations tend to have more layers, which makes things more complex.

With all the communications and approvals involved, this task typically takes two weeks to complete.

Tip #4: Be Clear About the Work Involved

Good communication and responsiveness seem to be the biggest themes that emerge in discussions with Eagle’s Flight about what it takes to implement a 360-degree process.

Communication with the client before the process starts is critical to success.

“It’s important to lay it all out up front — what you will need from the client and why it is important that you get it in a timely manner,” says Anderson-Cousins.

She adds that Eagle’s Flight typically likes to get the IT contact early so it can start communicating about system issues while the rater list is being compiled.

It is important to note, however, that the setup can’t begin in earnest until the list of raters is complete.

Tip #5: Give Yourself Sufficient Time to Test

IT testing is another big concern, as larger corporations tend to have more complex systems.

Anderson-Cousins says that when implementing a program, particularly when it involves the use of third-party tools such as Blue/360, it is vital to leave sufficient time for testing.

“It is very important to make sure you allow a lot of time for any IT issues to come up in a larger corporate setting because problems with firewalls, browsers, e-mail addresses that bounce back, etc. are often magnified.

“To make matters worse, it can be more time-consuming to find the right person, in the larger corporate setting, who knows how to resolve an issue.”

Anderson-Cousins says Eagle’s Flight likes to allow at least a week for testing and resolving issues.

“There will always be a number of IT glitches, so it’s critical to be able to work through all of these before you launch your program.”

As Eagle’s Flight works with Blue, everyone is learning valuable lessons that help to smooth the deployment of the 360-degree process in companies with a global reach.