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Conducting a Performance Appraisal Checklist 036



Introduction

An effective performance appraisal offers managers the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of those who report to them and how they work - their achievements, their potential and their development needs. It can also help to motivate and engage employees, improve their performance in their work role, facilitate their personal development and enhance their contribution to organisational objectives. For employees, the performance appraisal should deepen their understanding of their work and what is expected of them, in relation to individual and organisational targets, provide recognition of their achievements, identify areas of weakness or poor performance and give them an opportunity to discuss any problems or development needs they have. It also encourages employees to take ownership of, and responsibility for, their performance and personal development.

Performance appraisal meetings should not be seen as one-off events – they formalise ongoing performance discussions between employees and their line managers and support the process of performance management in the workplace. In the past it was common practice for performance appraisals to take place annually, but six monthly meetings are now much more the norm, often alternating with development-focused reviews, and supported with additional, regular one-to-one meetings to discuss current activities and progress towards objectives. In many organisations performance appraisals now form part of a performance management scheme covering performance across the organisation; some, however see performance appraisals and performance management schemes as overly bureaucratic, time consuming and costly.

This checklist aims to help managers to prepare for and carry out performance appraisals in a positive and professional manner and to gain the maximum benefit from the process.

Definition

A performance appraisal is a face-to-face discussion between an employee and another member of staff (usually the employee's line manager) within which the employee's performance at work is discussed, reviewed and assessed, using an agreed and understood framework. A performance interview should include feedback on past performance, assessment of achievements against objectives, discussion of workloads and priorities, setting of individual and team targets and objectives and personal development needs and plans.

Action checklist

1. Prepare for the meeting

The most difficult part of appraising performance is the preparation, prior to the meeting. If your organisation has an established scheme, this will provide a framework for the interview. If not, the following outline structure gives a starting-point.

- Objectives for the period under review and the level of achievement and progress towards them

- Continuing or unresolved problems during this period
- Evaluation of any development activity during this period
- Objectives for next review period
- Support required in order to achieve these objectives
- Personal development objectives - these may vary from the above, or provide a means to their attainment
- Any issues of major importance or concern relating to the forthcoming review period.

Gather your thoughts, information and evidence and fit these into the framework. This will help to steer the discussion. The use of 360 degree feedback can help to minimise bias and provide a more balanced and nuanced view of performance.

2. Make arrangements for the appraisal discussion

Before the interview make sure that the appraisee understands the purpose and aims of the appraisal.

- Advise the appraisee how to prepare, e.g., by identifying strengths, achievements, weaknesses or failures, over the past year
- Ask the appraisee to prepare an assessment of how well the last set of objectives were achieved, and consider what the next year's objectives should be
- Ask the appraisee to reflect on the value and practical application of any training or development activities undertaken during the past year
- Explain that this is an opportunity to discuss problems, and agree work directions and methods for the coming period
- If the appraisal is linked to pay or promotion, explain how this works
- Introduce any necessary documentation and forms that will be used
- Agree the time and place for the discussion.

3. Prepare the meeting place

The environment for the discussion should be informal, friendly, comfortable, and completely private and confidential. Avoid sitting the appraisee in front of your desk, as this could form a barrier hindering the free flow of conversation. Instead, arrange your chairs so that you can communicate easily. Make sure that you will not be interrupted and divert or switch off your telephone.

4. Use a consultative approach

It is important to be conversational but focused, discussing specific activities and issues. Ask open questions and listen attentively to what is said. Reflect back what you hear and respond appropriately. Be positive and keep the focus on improvements for the future. Coaching skills will be helpful here. (See Related checklists below).

5. Start the discussion

At the start of the discussion, it is important to help the appraisee to relax. There is no set formula for this, but it is always important to show respect and tact. Gauge the extent to which formality or informal banter or conversation will be appropriate, depending on how well you know and work with the appraisee.

- Re-state the meeting's purpose and structure
- Emphasise the aim of supporting the appraisee's development
- Re-state the reasons for using documentation - it keeps a record of the meeting and what is agreed, ensures consistency across the team or organisation and provides a baseline for measuring progress).

6. Develop the discussion

In theory, and with good preparation by both parties, discussion should follow the framework outlined. To keep it on track, the appraiser should:

- encourage - but not lead - self-assessment and diagnosis

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- maintain and build the appraisee's self-esteem, where appropriate
- offer help and suggestions, but allow the appraisee to find their own solutions
- concentrate on job performance rather than discuss personalities
- discuss specific examples of behaviour or performance rather than vague comments or criticisms
- summarise the discussions at critical or agreed action points
- give guidance and reach agreement on goals and plans.

7. Deal with difficulties and focus on improvements

If ongoing conversations and discussions have been taking place, there should be no surprises at this stage. If, however, there is a need to address poor performance, focus on the need for improvement and discuss with the appraisee how and when improvements might be made, and what support might be needed to help achieve them. If appropriate, be prepared to admit that you - as appraiser - might be a cause of problems yourself, or could do more to help the appraisee. If there is disagreement stay calm but be firm. Try to focus on the available evidence and be prepared to consider carefully any counter-evidence presented by the appraisee. Avoid arguing and listen attentively, taking care to separate facts from feelings. Remember the focus should stay on the job-holder's actions and behaviour, not on the job-holder as a person.

8. Agree areas for improvement

Try to distinguish areas that need remedial attention from those that are developmental. Agree preferred training outcomes and development activities, and encourage the appraisee to identify ways to achieve these. If encouragement is not successful, then try steering and guidance, using instruction only as a last resort. Remember there are many different types of training and development activities which can help employees to achieve the agreed objectives.

9. Rate the performance

Some appraisal schemes use performance ratings. These can vary in nature and scope and can be useful or destructive, depending on how well the system is understood and how effectively the rating is carried out. Ratings can be detrimental if they are not:

- fair - reflecting performance against expectations, not comparisons with other employees
- honest - respecting what the individual has to say
- flexible - reflecting the level and extent of individuals' achievements
- consistent - across different sectors of the organisation
- separated from discussions about rewards.

If ratings are perceived to be unfair, the credibility of the system will be undermined and future reviews compromised.

10. Close the discussion`

Ensure you have reached and agreed a mutual understanding of the appraisee's objectives, how they will be achieved and the target or review dates. Agree who is doing what and set a date for follow-up. Ensure that you or the employee writes up the plans and objectives, preferably on a form used across the organisation. Agree a deadline by which this will be completed so that it can be reviewed and signed off promptly. End the discussion on a positive note.

Managers should avoid:

- criticizing the appraisee's personality or allowing personality clashes to affect the appraisal
- falling into the pitfall of recency, where performance over the whole period is assessed on the basis of one recent incident
- allowing personal prejudice to label the appraisee as good or bad (halo or horns effect)
- using closed, rhetorical questions
- talking rather than listening (A recommended ratio would be 70% listening to 30% talking)
- letting the conversation become one-sided
- allowing fear to lead to a good review rather than an accurate one

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- ignoring job-holders' views and thoughts
- planning action without first reaching agreement on what is needed.

National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance to the following standards:

Unit DB4 Manage people's performance at work

Unit DC5 Help individuals address problems affecting their performance

Unit DC2 Support individuals' learning and development

Additional resources

Books

Thanks for the feedback: the science and art of receiving feedback well, Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen
London: Portfolio Penguin, 2014

The end of the performance review: a new approach to appraising employee performance, Tim Baker
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013

Performance management, 2nd ed, Robert Bacal
McGrawHill, 2011
This book is available as an [e-book](#).

Appraisal feedback and development: making performance review work, 4th ed, Clive Fletcher
Abingdon: Routledge, 2008

Ready to use performance appraisals: downloadable customizable tools for better faster reviews, William S Swan
Hoboken NJ: John Wiley, 2007

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from CMI's library. More information at: www.managers.org.uk/library

Journal Articles

Total contribution planning, Tom Kenny
Training Journal, March 2014, pp 37-42

Re-appraising appraisals, Tim Baker
Training Journal, July 2013, pp 12-16

An integrated fuzzy multi-attribute decision-making model for employees' performance appraisal, T.R. Manoharan, C. Muralidharan, Deshmukh, S.G.
International Journal of Human Resource Management, January 2011, vol 22 no 3, pp 722-745

Related checklists

Performance management (180)
Using 360 degree feedback (074)
Giving feedback as a coach (222)

Internet resources

Businessballs.com: www.businessballs.com/performanceappraisals.htm

Information on performance appraisals and performance evaluation, including free forms, tips, etc.

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Freemanagementlibrary.org <http://managementhelp.org/employeeperformance/performance-appraisals.htm>

How to Conduct Employee Performance Appraisals (Performance Reviews)

CMI members can access step by step guides and templates for performance appraisal and performance management from the **BusinessHR** service at www.managers.org.uk/businesshr. Look in the Training and Development section.

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Preparing for a performance appraisal Checklist 069



Introduction

Performance appraisals, meetings or reviews or progress meetings as they are now sometimes called, provide a regular opportunity for line managers and employees to review the employee's performance in their job role and discuss work objectives for the future. In recent years the focus of performance appraisals has shifted from simple evaluation to focus on performance improvement and development. Performance appraisal is no longer regarded as an annual opportunity for the line manager to give an assessment of performance. Performance appraisal now normally takes place within the framework of an overall organisational performance management system. Six-monthly reviews and regular one-to-one meetings give both line managers and employees opportunities to raise issues of concern as they arise throughout the year. The annual performance meeting should not lead line managers to neglect their day to day management responsibilities, so that issues raised with employees at an appraisal come as a surprise. Employees, on the other hand should not have to wait for an annual meeting to raise any concerns they have relating to their work.

The appraisal meeting should involve an open and honest discussion with a focus on "evidence" of performance rather than personal opinions. The discussion should be guided by an emphasis on performance improvement and development and cover any issues and problems, as well as development to improve performance and support the employee's personal growth. It is also important to consider the impact of past and forthcoming changes in the workplace, looking at whether goals and objectives need to be amended or development activities planned. This checklist provides guidance for employees preparing for a performance appraisal. The employee should expect to:

- get advance notice of the appraisal and sufficient time to prepare
- be given a clear picture of what to expect at the appraisal
- be given enough time for the appraisal itself, e.g. one hour, in a suitable private location
- receive the undivided and uninterrupted attention of the line manager
- be able to discuss priorities
- receive feedback on performance
- know what the feedback is based on - who has given the feedback (e.g. 360-degree, supervisor etc)
- be heard and respected
- be offered constructive guidance on attaining agreed goals
- receive help with personal development plans and targets
- take responsibility for their own performance
- understand how their work relates to both team and organisational objectives
- have the opportunity to discuss how organisational changes will affect their work.

Definition

A performance appraisal is a face-to-face discussion on job performance and objectives between an employee and another person, usually their line manager. A set framework is used as a basis for: reviewing and appraising the employee's past performance, providing guidance for improvements, discussing needs and opportunities for learning and development, and reaching mutual agreement on objectives and targets for the future.

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Action checklist

1. Understand the objectives and terms of reference

Appraisals are usually part of an overall scheme of performance management and follow an established framework set by your employer or manager. Make sure that you understand how the scheme works. For a successful appraisal, you need:

- a clear understanding of the purpose and the process of the appraisal
- a clear understanding of the terms of reference of the appraisal - whether it is linked to pay, for example, what evaluation criteria are used, and how they are applied
- thorough preparation by both employee and line manager
- a resolve to tackle problems honestly
- a relaxed attitude, even if past objectives have not been achieved
- a positive approach, especially in terms of further personal development
- time and an appropriate location for the appraisal.

2. Agree a date for the appraisal

Ideally, at least two weeks should be allowed for preparation and reflection, so the date should be agreed a few weeks before the meeting takes place to give you reasonable time to prepare.

3. Prepare for the meeting

You and your manager should be provided with a template form or guidance notes on the purpose of the appraisal process and an outline of the structure of the meeting. This will help both of you to prepare and for the appraisee to consider what evidence they can show to support their achievements. Broadly appraisals will be in two sections - reviewing the past year's performance and agreeing goals and objectives for the next year.

4. The appraisal itself

Although your manager will lead the appraisal, you will be expected to contribute substantially to the discussion. Key areas to focus on include:

- tasks or projects that gave you particular satisfaction - and why
- tasks or projects that gave you least satisfaction - and why
- your overall performance
- challenges you face and difficulties you foresee
- areas for improvement
- objectives for the coming year
- short and long-term personal development needs.

5. Ask for, and give, feedback

You should be given feedback on your work performance and contribution. You should also offer your own feedback to your manager, using events, instances and examples to highlight aspects of learning and development.

6. Don't be reticent about problems

Use the appraisal process to raise any issues or problems that may be affecting your performance. For example, a faulty piece of equipment may be delaying your efforts, you may have to attend lots of meetings, or you may feel you need extra help. Whatever the issues involved, open discussion is essential to resolving problems and you can propose your own solutions.

7. Establish priorities

You and your manager may have differing views on what your key priorities should be. There may be reasons for your differing perspectives on this: for example, your manager may be trying to align the

department's output with organisational goals and objectives, while your own focus may be on balancing different priorities, work structure problems or time limitations. Discussion should help to clarify the issues so that you can both arrive at an agreed set of priorities.

8. Bring departmental relationships into the open

Discuss any ongoing difficulties or problems you have experienced with other people or departments, especially if these have not already been discussed or past discussions have failed to resolve the issues. You will need to give clear examples of how you are being affected and consider what suggestions you can make to help improve working relationships.

9. Propose objectives

Do not go into an appraisal meeting assuming that your manager will have your next set of goals and targets finely defined. Work out your own proposals, your own tactics and your own targets, and remember that you have an advantage your manager should recognise, in that you are the one who is doing the job.

10. Agree goals and targets

The setting of goals and targets should not be a one-way process. If changes are needed, these can be discussed. At best, you can discuss with your manager a reassessment of factors contributing to the need for change. Do not be afraid to take a completely fresh look - you may need to establish different kinds of goals and targets, or consider alternative ways of achieving business and personal development objectives. Make sure that objectives are SMART, i.e. specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely, (See related Checklists below.) This will help both you and your line manager to monitor progress accurately and assess the extent to which they have been achieved.

11. Agree further learning and development plans

As well as specific problems and concerns, discuss aspects of continuing development which have not yet been addressed or which form part of a general programme of skills acquisition. Make time to reflect on and plan a flexible development programme which will benefit both you and your work.

12. Explain personal development requirements

Your manager will help you to identify training or development needs. Take the opportunity to review your competence and capabilities, both technically and in terms of general management development. Think about your potential future development and promotion opportunities, as well as your immediate job role. Consider, for example, about what you would like to be doing in, say, three years' time.

13. Identify the support required

Once objectives have been agreed and targets set, assess whether you need extra support to move forward, such as training, resources, or even time for further clarification.

14. Agree the evaluation

If the appraisal process has an evaluation element rather than the discussion focus which this checklist assumes, then be clear on what you can contribute to the process and how far you agree with the overall evaluation.

15. Do the summing-up

The appraiser will usually summarise agreed action points and plans from the discussion. It is important that you 'own' the tasks and activities ahead and that these are clarified and expressed in a way that you understand. On receiving the summary, ask about anything that you do not understand, and suggest any changes or adjustments you think are necessary. The summary or report gives both you and your manager a signed record of agreement for the future, and will act as a useful reminder on what you need to do before your next meeting.

Managers should avoid:

- viewing appraisals as a threat rather than an opportunity
- sidestepping difficult issues
- allowing emotions to take over
- failing to challenge any unfair conclusions or decisions
- being over-critical of other departments or colleagues
- attributing blame for difficulties to the personal characteristics of others.

Related checklists

Using 360 degree feedback (074)
Setting SMART objectives (231)

National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance to the following standards:
A: Managing self and personal skills, units 1, 2

Additional resources

Books

How to be good at performance appraisals, Dick Grote
Boston Mass, Harvard Business Review Press, 2011

Appraisal feedback and development: making performance review work, 4th ed, Clive Fletcher
Abingdon: Routledge, 2008

Ready to use performance appraisals: customizable tools for better, faster reviews, William S Swan
Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2007

The power of feedback: 35 principles for turning feedback from others into personal and professional change, Joseph R Folkman
Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2007

Performance management: key strategies and practical guidelines, 3rd ed, Michael Armstrong
London: Kogan Page, 2006

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Using 360 Degree Feedback Checklist 074



Introduction

360 degree feedback is most often used in to support employee development, for measuring the impact of training and in performance management systems. It is particularly relevant for appraising leadership skills.

Changes in organisational structures towards flatter hierarchies and higher levels of employee empowerment have had implications for the appraisal process. An individual manager will now often have a greater span of control than in the past, so an employee's colleagues may be in a better position to assess his or her performance. This has led to an established interest in 360 degree feedback which, by combining the perspectives of subordinates, peers and team members can provide a well-rounded and more accurate and objective overview than the perceptions of a single person. 360 degree feedback can be particularly good for motivating people who undervalue themselves. It can also increase general awareness of the impact people have on each other and lead to more open working relationships and improved teamwork. It is most effective in organisations which have, or are moving towards, an open, supportive, and participative culture.

This checklist makes the assumption that a scheme will be managed by an HR department rather than individual managers.

Definition

360 degree feedback (or appraisal) involves appraisal by those above, below, and to the side of the appraisee and incorporates self-assessment. In practice, it may not include all of these elements. Depending on the level of openness required, feedback may be handled by a third party, to ensure that individual comments are anonymous.

Action checklist

1. Decide which behaviours you want to measure and whom to assess

Consider which sets of knowledge, skills and abilities you want to measure: for example, should they be competency-based, job-related, or behaviour-related? Remember that 360 degree feedback can be used at any level of the organisation, so decide whether you wish to assess specific individuals, particular teams, particular levels, or the whole organisation. Decide also at this stage whether the scheme will be anonymous or not, and if so who will analyse the submissions.

2. Design a feedback questionnaire

Devise detailed questions or, if you do not have the necessary expertise in-house, consider buying in a ready-made questionnaire or employing a consultant. It is worth considering the use of a web-based questionnaire in order to reduce administration, improve the quality of feedback, and ensure accuracy and confidentiality. Check that the questions are phrased to elicit a descriptive, rather than a judgmental, response, as the former is less likely to give offence and more likely to provide information

on which the appraisee can act. Avoid asking questions which the majority of prospective appraisers will not be qualified to answer or which contain jargon or language that might be open to misinterpretation.

3. Communicate the scheme and prepare participants

Good communication and an open management style are vital to the success of 360 degree feedback. Make sure that the scope and purpose of the scheme are clearly explained and encourage the airing of worries and objections. If necessary, circulate a pilot questionnaire asking employees, for example, for their views on managers in the organisation in general. This will serve to demonstrate how the scheme will work and to give reassurance. A questionnaire which focuses on strengths as much as weaknesses will help to make the exercise non-threatening, so consider building in specific questions about what someone does well or less well. Appoint a manager to act as a facilitator and publicise his or her roles and responsibilities. This person should be widely respected and have a good reputation for fairness and honesty. If it is not appropriate to nominate an internal manager, consider using a consultant.

4. Train all appraisers in giving, and all appraisees in receiving feedback

Encourage appraisers to be constructive, positive and specific, rather than being critical, negative or vague. In describing a colleague's behaviour, for example, "*I notice that you rarely acknowledge us when you arrive in the morning.*" is more helpful than "*I think you are a bad communicator.*" "*I note that you need time and space to yourself but when you get it you can really produce the goods*" pinpoints the message in an acceptable way. This should be better received than "*You're too much of a loner.*" Do not allow the appraisal to become an opportunity for subjective gripes. If this happens, those who receive a critical appraisal will tend to get their own back when appraising others, especially if the individuals are identified or identifiable.

5. Allow appraisees to choose their own appraisers

Allow employees to select who is to appraise them from an agreed pool, but ensure that those chosen include people with whom they do and don't get on well. The aim is to achieve a rounded appraisal. Set limits on the number involved in each appraisal, as otherwise the exercise can become an administrative nightmare. Instruct appraisers to return their questionnaires to the appointed facilitator. If it has been agreed that all comments will be treated anonymously, reassure everyone that their views will not be attributed specifically to them

6. Decide how feedback is to be presented

Work out how the results are to be collated and presented by the facilitator: is your objective to allow employees to be able to compare their own performance over time, compare themselves with like employees, or compare themselves against a set of competences? Consider whether feedback on particular actions is to be linked to the importance of the action to the job. If so, the results will need to be weighted accordingly.

7. Provide assistance through coaching and mentoring

Decide whether improvement actions should be left to individuals or whether they should be offered support and guidance. If you wish individuals to take responsibility for their own improvement, don't show the results to their boss without their approval. The facilitator or another trained person should be available to help employees deal with feedback, particularly to advise on how to deal with diverging views. Consider whether to hold development sessions in which appraisees can offer support to each other.

8. Set action plans for improvement

Follow up appraisal with a programme of suitable training or development. This may range from attending a course, or working with a colleague, to internal or external secondments. Remember that learners will have different needs and preferences.

9. Evaluate the use of 360 degree feedback

Evaluate the appraisal initiative, taking into account the views of all participants, including any difficulties that arose in completing the appraisal questionnaire or in analysing the data from it. Compare the results of using 360 degree feedback with previous appraisal schemes. Details from the evaluation should be acknowledged when undertaking any subsequent appraisals.

Glossary of terms related to 360 degree feedback

Peer appraisal: employees are evaluated by their colleagues and their supervisor.

Team appraisal: team members assess their own team's performance. Feedback should preferably also come from representatives of clients of the team and from a supervisor.

Upward feedback: managers are appraised by those who work under them.

Managers should avoid

- forgetting that employees may find the introduction of 360 degree feedback threatening or challenging
- treating 360 degree feedback as a one-off exercise
- leaving long periods between appraisals
- allowing appraisers to make personal attacks on individuals
- generating a climate of suspicion.

National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance to the following standards:

Unit DB4: Manage people's performance at work

Unit DC5: Help individuals address problems affecting their performance

Additional resources

Books

Performance management: theory and practice, Sue Hutchinson
London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2013

One page talent management: eliminating complexity adding value, 3rd ed., Marc Efron, Miriam Ort,
Boston Mass: Harvard Business Press, 2010

The art and science of 360 degree feedback, 2nd ed., Richard Lepsing and Anntoinette D Lucia
San Francisco Calif: Jossey Bass, 2009

Armstrong's handbook of performance management an evidence based guide to delivering high performance, Michael Armstrong
London: Kogan Page, 2009
This book is also available as an [e-book](#).

360 degree feedback beyond the spin, Michael Silverman, Maire Kerrin and Alison Carter
Brighton: Falmer, Institute for Employment Studies 2005 (IES report 418)

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Journal articles

360° feedback, Colin Newbold
Training Journal, August 2013, pp 55-59

360-degree feedback: eliminating the blind spots in your managerial abilities, Steven Reissig
British Journal of Administrative Management, Summer, no 75, 2011 pp 30-31

Doing the rounds, Angus McLeod and Wendy Jenkins
Training Journal, July 2010, p 20-21

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Related checklists

Conducting a performance appraisal (036)
Preparing to be appraised (069)
Establishing a performance measurement system (129)
Giving feedback as a coach (222)

Internet resources

Team Builders Plus www.360-degreefeedback.com
Basic introduction to 360 degree feedback with details of tools and products.

Organisations

Chartered Management Institute

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CMI offers a tailored online 360 degree system which can be used as a stand-alone activity to scope future personal development planning or as a pre and post training evaluation tool to identify development needs. In addition CMI, in partnership with Warwick Business School, have developed a 360 degree tool which helps to identify and evaluate political awareness skills. For further information on the **CMI 360°** and the **Political Awareness Skills 360°** please call 01536 207404 or email insidesales@managers.org.uk

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