What is 360 Degree Feedback?

360 Degree Feedback is a system or process in which employees receive confidential, anonymous feedback from the people who work around them. This typically includes the employee's manager, peers, and direct reports. A mixture of about eight to twenty-four people fill out an anonymous online feedback form that asks questions covering a broad range of workplace competencies. The feedback forms include questions that are measured on a rating scale and also ask raters to provide written comments. The person receiving feedback also fills out a self-rating survey that includes the same survey questions that others receive in their forms.

Managers and leaders within organizations use 360 feedback surveys to get a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. The 360 feedback system automatically tabulates the results and presents them in a format that helps the feedback recipient create a development plan. Individual responses are always combined with responses from other people in the same rater category (e.g. peer, direct report) in order to preserve anonymity and to give the employee a clear picture of his/her greatest overall strengths and weaknesses.

360 Feedback can also be a useful development tool for people who are not in a management role. Strictly speaking, a "non-manager" 360 assessment is not measuring feedback from 360 degrees since there are no direct reports, but the same principles still apply. 360 Feedback for non-managers is useful to help people be more effective in their current roles, and also to help them understand what areas they should focus on if they want to move into a management role.
How is 360 Degree Feedback Used?

Companies typically use a 360 feedback system in one of two ways:

360 Feedback as a Development Tool to help employees recognize strengths and weaknesses and become more effective

When done properly, 360 is highly effective as a development tool. The feedback process gives people an opportunity to provide anonymous feedback to a coworker that they might otherwise be uncomfortable giving. Feedback recipients gain insight into how others perceive them and have an opportunity to adjust behaviors and develop skills that will enable them to excel at their jobs.

360 Feedback as a Performance Appraisal Tool to measure employee performance

Using a 360 degree feedback system for Performance Appraisal is a common practice, but not always a good idea. It is difficult to properly structure a 360 feedback process that creates an atmosphere of trust when you use 360 evaluations to measure performance. Moreover, 360 feedback focuses on behaviors and competencies more than on basic skills, job requirements, and performance objectives. These things are most appropriately addressed by an employee and his/her manager as part of an annual review and performance appraisal process. It is certainly possible and can be beneficial to incorporate 360 feedback into a larger performance management process, but only with clear communication on how the 360 feedback will be used.
What a 360 Feedback Survey Measures?

- 360 feedback measures behaviors and competencies
- 360 assessments provide feedback on how others perceive an employee
- 360 feedback addresses skills such as listening, planning, and goal-setting

A 360 evaluation focuses on subjective areas such as teamwork, character, and leadership effectiveness

What 360 Feedback Surveys do not assess?

- 360 feedback is not a way to measure employee performance objectives (MBOs)
- 360 feedback is not a way to determine whether an employee is meeting basic job requirements
- 360 feedback is not focused on basic technical or job-specific skills

360 feedback should not be used to measure strictly objective things such as attendance, sales quotas, etc.
Ten mistakes that cause a 360-degree feedback program to fail?

Ineffective Assessment Items

If you are not asking the right questions, how can you expect to get good data? You need to consider organizational expectations as well as job-specific competencies. Moreover, your assessment items need to be well written to gather the data you are looking for. Poorly written items will yield useless data. Garbage in - garbage out...

Lack of Alignment with the Organization's Vision, Mission, and Strategy

If the things you are measuring are not important to the organization's vision, mission, and strategy, then employees will not be developing competencies that are aligned with the direction of the organization.

Lack of Senior-Level Support

If the leaders of your organization do not vocally support and encourage participation in the feedback program and express their belief in the benefits it will provide, your 360 initiative will never get off the ground.

Lack of Communication

You MUST communicate with both the people receiving feedback and the people getting feedback. If you do not tell them what, why, how, and when, they will not be comfortable with the program. You must get buy-in at all levels of your organization to make it work.

Fear / Lack of Trust

If participants are afraid to get feedback or if respondents are afraid to provide feedback, you will be fighting an up-hill battle. Communication helps reduce fear. One of the most effective ways to reduce anxiety is to use a neutral third party to administer your feedback program.

Poor Planning

If your feedback program is not well thought out, it will not run smoothly. There are many logistical issues to consider before launching a feedback program. If your employees perceive that the program is not well planned, your credibility will be undermined.
Inappropriate Delivery of Feedback

The idea of a feedback program is to help employees perform better. Negative feedback can be demoralizing and counterproductive. If feedback is not provided in an appropriate manner, your program could backfire. We recommend using professional, neutral coaches to deliver feedback.

No Development Plan

So what if you run a smooth 360 program? If you fail to do anything with the data, you have wasted your time as well as the time of both participants and respondents. Every person who receives feedback needs to create some developmental goals based on the feedback he or she received - and remember - those goals need to be both measurable and achievable.

No Accountability

Developmental goals are meaningless unless people are held accountable for achieving them. Make sure your employees and their managers understand how to create S.M.A.R.T. goals - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely.

No Follow-Up

How will you know if your program has been a success if you do not follow up? How will participants know if they are improving without follow-up feedback? Plan to solicit additional feedback six to twelve months after the initial data are collected.
360 Degree Feedback Communication?

Communication

Communicate to those getting feedback: It is essential that you educate the people being rated as to why they are being rated. If they are wary and do not trust your intentions, they can sabotage your initiative through their resistance to participate. If the 360 feedback program is developmental, tell them so. Let people know that they are not going to be fired, demoted, or penalized based on the results. The more information you can provide up-front, the more willing they will be to participate. Some important pieces of information to address include:

- Why are you doing this?
- Who will see the results? Will their boss see the results? Will HR?
- How and when will the results be delivered?
- Is participation mandatory?
- How will respondents be chosen? Is the participant choosing them or is HR managing this?

Communicate to the people giving feedback: Respondents are being asked to take time out of their busy days to fill out the survey. Some respondents will likely be asked to provide feedback on several of their coworkers. Let the respondents know how their answers will be used, who will see them, and why they are being asked to give feedback. Keep in mind that giving feedback can be threatening to respondents. Be sure to emphasize that all feedback they provide will be anonymous and confidential.

Solicit Senior Level Support: Your initiative will be more successful if you have the vocal support of the leaders of your organization. Have them help you kick off your feedback program and make sure they communicate to all employees that this is something they consider important. An email message or announcement from the CEO or Business Unit leader is a good way to let employees know that your 360 feedback program has support at the highest levels.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

In order to get candid feedback and make sure people are comfortable receiving feedback, it is important that you convey to both participants and respondents that the 360 assessment is anonymous and confidential. This is often most effectively accomplished if a neutral third party conducts the surveys. Respondents will feel more comfortable giving honest feedback to a third party and participants will feel more comfortable getting feedback from an outside source.

Remember, if people do not feel comfortable giving feedback, they may not be as candid or forthright in the feedback they give - or they may simply not participate. If
people do not feel comfortable getting feedback, they may resist participating or be less open to the feedback they receive.

**Ready to Launch?**

Double check that you have thought through the entire process before you start collecting feedback. Careful planning and communication are essential to a successful program. Timely delivery of the data is also important, so do not wait until the data are in to think about what you are going to do with the results.