

## **Maximizing Your Development with a 360° Evaluation**

Feedback. We all know that feedback can help us improve in any area of our lives. Yet feedback doesn't automatically help us—feedback can be short-sighted, unbalanced, unhelpful and ill-timed. Any of these challenges can reduce the value of the feedback we receive.

Enter the 360° evaluation or assessment.

The 360° evaluation provides 360° perspective for an individual—typically including feedback from a boss, co-workers, direct reports, customers, and others as appropriate. The intent of a 360° evaluation is to reduce the challenges mentioned above and to provide people with a balanced perspective on their performance—both what they are doing well and should continue, and the areas that would benefit from some improvement.

This feedback process can be an outstanding tool—if used intelligently. The rest of this article will help you be more intelligent when using this process.

### **The Mechanics**

Most all 360° evaluations are done with a tool—either via pen and paper or increasingly using the web. This approach allows all of the feedback to be summarized, reviewed in a variety of ways, and remain anonymous.

While this is the most typical approach, 360° assessments can be done in group settings with or without anonymity. I have both participated in and facilitated these types of sessions and they can be very effective. While the rest of this article focuses on the use of standardized assessment tools, the comments apply to a group approach as well.

### **Choosing the Tool**

There are a variety of 360° assessment tools available. While most all of them are well tested and excellent, you should select one based on your particular needs. Consider the questions and areas of focus in relationship to your participants and their needs. Some tools are designed for leaders at all levels, some are more helpful for executives, some for first-line supervisors, some for team members, etc. Review the questions to make sure they will provide helpful feedback to those who will be using the tool.

Also consider the process (communication approaches, who does the administration of the assessments, etc.) used to make sure it will fit into your culture and resource availability.

### **Choosing the Participants**

Choosing participants means two things: who will be requesting feedback and who will

be providing the feedback (they're also called 'raters').

Those being evaluated should understand the process and the purposes and benefits of it. For example, for people who are not yet supervisors, depending on the tool used, they might find some of the feedback less valuable. Make sure you select people carefully and bring them onboard purposefully so they are excited about the process.

Participants must then select who will rate them. Some of the choices may be obvious—the tool will probably include feedback from their boss. Beyond that, as a participant, you have some discretion as to who you select. In the interest of the process having maximum value, select raters who:

- Provide a broad perspective. Get co-workers and direct reports. Consider teammates, vendors, or customers if appropriate.
- Provide a balanced perspective. Don't just include the co-workers who "like" you.
- Have enough experience and exposure to rate you. It is hard to rate someone when you don't have enough experience with them—this challenge can often lead to skewed or difficult to understand feedback.

### **Selecting a Coach**

Whatever tool you choose, it will create a report with a lot of data! In order to get the most out of this process, include a coach to help participants accurately and dispassionately analyze the results and help them think about what the results really mean.

The right coach should understand the tool and the report it generates, and have great coaching skills to help the participant maximize the learning from the feedback provided. Select coaches for both their skill and their fit with those they will be coaching.

### **Having a Follow-up Plan**

Getting feedback, however it is received, is only as valuable as how it is used. While the coach may help a participant set up an action plan, that plan should be followed up with conversations between the participant and his/her boss. It is through these plans and the action they create that real improvement will come.

360° assessments can truly be a valuable tool when used correctly and for the right reasons. Understanding those reasons and planning your approach as described in this article will help individuals and organizations get far more from this valuable feedback process.

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