

# 360 Frequently Asked Questions

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## FAQ

### Q: What is 360-degree feedback?

A: 360-degree feedback is a process of comparing self-perceptions of skills, performance or personality attributes to those of others who work closely with the individual. The invited feedback typically comes from direct reports/subordinates, peers, colleagues, managers in the organizational hierarchy and in some cases external sources such as customers and suppliers or other interested stakeholders. The goal of 360-degree feedback is to enhance awareness of one's strengths and potential developmental opportunities to increase personal or team effectiveness. "360" refers to the 360 degrees in a circle, an all round view, and 360-degree feedback is also known as multi-rater feedback.

### Q: Can 360-degree feedback be used alongside personality and style assessments?

A: Most, but not all, 360-degree feedback processes tend to compare self-perceptions of skills, effectiveness or performance to others who have had a chance to work with the individual. It is possible, but less common, to also utilize a 360-degree feedback process measuring personality or style. Some consultants find value in combining skills-based 360-degree feedback process with a separate personality or style instrument in their coaching and training programs. Personality and style, measuring underlying motives, can help explain the why someone might behave as they do whereas 360-degree feedback provides a more complete picture about how one's behavior is being perceived by others.

### Q: What are some of the major features of 360-degree feedback?

- A:
- Typically measures specific behaviors and competencies associated with job performance and success
  - Provides for a confidential process to obtain feedback from others who work closely with the individual (example: one's manager, direct reports, team members, customers)
  - Focuses on observed behaviors that can be modified

- Provides graphic, numerical and open-ended information to be used for developmental purposes in the form of a summary feedback report
- Provides clarity about one's strengths and insight about potential areas of improvement and development
- Is a process of improving individual or team performance by continuously providing ongoing feedback when administered over time

Q: What are potential uses of 360-degree feedback?

- A:
- Self-Development
  - Executive Development
  - Supervisory and Management Training
  - Team Building
  - Performance Management
  - Leadership Development
  - Training Needs Assessment
  - Talent Management/Succession Planning
  - Personnel Selection

Q: Should 360-degree feedback be used for performance appraisal or remuneration?

A: 360-degree feedback can support performance appraisal systems but should cautiously be directly linked to remuneration. The generation of an individual performance development plan can be a strategic part of most performance appraisal systems and should be considered to support employee growth and career development.

Q: What are the benefits of 360-degree feedback?

- A:
- 360-degree feedback provides the participant with an opportunity to learn how others perceive them, leading to increased self-awareness
  - 360-degree feedback encourages self-development
  - 360-degree feedback helps increase understanding of the behaviors required to improve both individual and organizational effectiveness

- 360-degree feedback promotes an open culture where giving and receiving feedback is an accepted norm
- 360-degree feedback increases communication within an organization
- 360-degree feedback clarifies supervisory and managerial expectations
- 360-degree feedback is a powerful initiator for individual and team change

**Q: How do I know if my organization is ready to conduct a 360-degree feedback intervention?**

**A:** Not all organizations are “ready” to utilize 360-degree feedback systems or the time it is introduced is not optimum to ensure success. For example, it is not recommended to introduce a 360-degree feedback process in the middle of a very large organizational change (e.g., merger or acquisition). 360-degree feedback systems should be piloted with a willing stakeholder or group that is open to giving and receiving feedback. Often, the use of feedback between one’s manager and employee only is a wonderful way to softly introduce the benefits of 360-degree feedback to the organization. Finally, 360-degree feedback processes should be used to solve real business needs—in this way it is introduced as a solution to improving leadership effectiveness or team building.

**Q: How do I ensure 360-degree feedback success?**

**A:** Current research on “best practices” in the use of 360-degree feedback suggests that you can optimize results if you utilize the following principles: 1) Hold the participant and line manager accountable for creating and implementing a development plan; 2) Provide individual coaching to assist in interpreting the multi-rater feedback; 3) Link the 360-degree feedback intervention to a performance management process; and 4) Target competencies for 360-degree feedback interventions that are related to strategic business needs.

**Q: What is the focus of 360-degree feedback?**

- A:**
- 360-degree feedback typically has a development focus
  - Feedback is always anonymous (except for the manager)
  - Feedback assesses ‘perceptions’ and not ‘reality’
  - 360-degree feedback is comprehensive and behaviorally focused

**Q: What is a typical 360-degree feedback time schedule?**

A: Most 360-degree feedback processes share a common time line. The recommended process below will give you an idea of how long each step in rolling out a complete 360-degree feedback process might take:

1. Communication of process
2. Selecting raters (1-2 weeks)
3. Distribution of online questionnaires
4. Completion of online questionnaires (2-3 weeks)
5. Processing of 360-degree feedback reports
6. Feedback meetings
7. Completion of development plan
8. Re-assessment (6-18 months)

**Q: How often should 360-degree feedback assessments be repeated?**

A: Given that people need time to make change, and then time for that change to be seen by others we recommend that somewhere between 6 and 18 month intervals are most appropriate. This allows people to work through their development and action plans to create change.

**Q: How should respondents be chosen?**

A: To gain appropriate and balanced feedback, participants should choose respondents based on:

- Length of time the respondent has known them (at least 3-4 months)
- Amount of contact
- Understanding of the full nature of what the participant does
- Select respondents who work well with the participant as well as those who do not

**Q: How many respondents should be chosen?**

A: You need only one person who would be specific, candid and totally accurate. However, since we often can't identify this "special" one person we tend to use a sampling approach to asking for feedback. We need a critical mass of feedback to have confidence that how others perceive and experience us is how most people do — not just our strongest supporters or critics. Some limited research suggests that validity of feedback can be maximized by asking 8 to 12 raters, if possible, in each rater category you use (e.g., peers, team members, direct reports).

**Q: Should new employees be included?**

**A:** We suggest that employees should be with an organization approximately 6-9 months before participating in a 360-degree feedback process. First impressions can often be erroneous and not very useful for developmental planning processes.

**Q: Should participants inform respondents that they have been invited to give feedback?**

**A:** It is a good practice to notify invited raters that you are participating in a 360-degree feedback process and you are interested in their candid and specific comments and perceptions to help you to improve and grow. This communication often helps motivate raters to be candid and want to participate in the 360-degree feedback process.

**Q: What if a participant doesn't have enough raters in a category?**

**A:** Many vendors utilize an "anonymity protection" process to ensure that enough raters have completed the online questionnaire to ensure confidentiality. If needed, participants can be encouraged to invite additional raters or the few that have responded can be categorized and grouped with others to allow for their feedback and input to be included in the summary feedback report.

**Q: Who gets a copy of the 360-degree feedback report?**

**A:** In most 360-degree feedback processes used for developmental purposes, usually the participant is the only person who gets to keep a copy of their individual summary feedback report. In some cases, the report might be made available to an internal or external coach the participant is working with or a trainer/facilitator who is conducting an organizational workshop. It is typical for talent management/succession planning purposes that a copy of the feedback report might also be made available to one's manager or human resources.

**Q: How long should the 360-degree feedback questionnaire be?**

**A:** In general 360-degree feedback questionnaires should be targeted and contain relevant questions. They should be long enough to accurately measure the competencies they are attempting to assess (reliability) but not too long as to decrease motivation to complete them. As a general guide it takes, on average, between 30-60 seconds to answer each question and if a respondent is asked to complete on a number of people it's important that respondent fatigue doesn't set in. Typically, 360-degree feedback questionnaires contain between 40 and 70 items.

**Q: Is a customized 360-degree feedback questionnaire better than an off-the-shelf questionnaire?**

**A:** Not necessarily. Well designed and psychometrically sound (reliable and valid) off-the-shelf 360-degree feedback questionnaires (such as those available from Envisia Learning) can be used effectively if the behaviors are all relevant. If behaviors are not relevant to the organization, then completing the 360-degree feedback questionnaire could be difficult and not give you the results you are looking for. A customized 360-degree feedback questionnaire can be useful if designed to fit your exact needs and support organizational competency frameworks or development objectives.

**Q: How confidential is the process?**

**A:** Confidentiality is an important aspect of 360-degree feedback to both participants and respondents to ensure everyone participates and feels able to answer honestly and candidly. If there are any doubts around confidentiality then people will feel anxious about completing and unsure of the purpose of the 360-degree feedback process and the use of the data.

If respondents are not guaranteed that their responses are anonymous they may not provide accurate responses (in fact, research suggests that ratings are inflated when raters do not perceive their input is anonymous). To ensure confidentiality it can help to have a neutral person administering the 360-degree feedback process, either Optima360 as an external processor or an in-house human resources representative.

All online questionnaire data that is collected is encrypted, and unique passwords are assigned through Optima360's web-based system and data stored on a secure server.

**Q: How can I be sure that my customized 360-degree feedback questionnaire is reliable and valid?**

**A:** There are many different types of reliability and validity. Ideally, a customized questionnaire should have established scale reliability (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) to ensure that the questions are accurately measuring a single concept. It would also be useful to know whether the customized questionnaire had acceptable test/re-test reliability.

Validity is also important for 360-degree feedback questionnaires. There are many different types of "validity" so it is easy to be confused when someone says that their 360 tool is "valid." Minimally, a customized questionnaire should have "face validity" so that participants and raters tend to believe that the questions and competencies are relevant to the purpose and goals of the feedback process.

It is possible to establish face validity by running a focus group with a representative group from within your organization, or by piloting the 360-degree feedback questionnaire before a wider roll-out. It is important to establish whether the 360-degree feedback behaviors are clear and can be answered, that the questionnaire itself is relevant to those individual's participating in the 360-degree feedback project and that all of the organization's key competencies are being measured.

Other kinds of validity that should be considered in the development of a customized assessment include criterion related validity (does the customized instrument actually predict anything meaningful like performance?) and convergent/divergent validity (does the customized instrument correlate with like/dislike measures?).

**Q: How do I write good behavioral statements?**

**A:** Writing good questions for a customized 360 feedback assessment is critical to ensure that what is being measured is accurate and useful for developmental purposes. Here are some recommended tips to ensure your questions are specific, behavioral and useful:

- Ask only one thing in each question
- Ask something that can be observed by others
- Write in a clear language and avoid terms that may not be obvious, e.g. jargon or technical terms
- Double check that the item is relevant to the competency area
- Verify that the wording of the question matches the scale
- Utilize Optima360's research based competency library of items

**Q: How many behavioral statements should I have under each competency?**

**A:** To ensure reliability you should ensure that you have a minimum of 3 behaviors for each defined competency.

**Q: Is 360-degree feedback ever inappropriate?**

**A:** Use caution in utilizing 360-degree feedback processes under the following situations: 1) If the person participating in 360-degree feedback is very new to the organization; 2) If there are not enough respondents who truly understand the full scope of the individual's responsibilities; 3) During a time of major change such as just before or after a merger or acquisition; and 4) In an environment where there is a high degree of mistrust.

**Q: What scale should I use?**

**A:** Most 360-degree feedback assessments use one of four different types of rating scales: 1) Effectiveness; 2) Potential; 3) Ranking and 4) Frequency.

Effectiveness scales ask participants and raters to provide judgments about how “effectively” the individual demonstrates specific competencies and underlying behaviors.

Potential scales are more commonly used for succession planning systems and ask respondents to predict how well the participant might perform in the future or what potential they have to succeed.

Ranking scales typically ask raters to compare to some type of standard (e.g., evaluate the participant compared to the most effective leader that he/she has experienced within their organization).

Frequency scales typically ask about how often the participant has demonstrated or expressed specific behaviors.

A Likert type scale of at least 5 points should be used to give an adequate spread of response. An “Unable to answer” or “Not applicable” response can also be included.



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At Envisia Learning, our mission is to improve the quality of work-life by helping facilitate meaningful and lasting behavior change in people's lives. We do that by offering leadership development solutions that are backed by sound principles and extensive research.

For over 20 years, we have provided tools that are researched and developed by licensed industrial/organizational psychologists with decades of coaching and consulting experience. We offer a variety of customized and off-the-shelf solutions that are designed to help individuals through the development process and establish measurable, sustainable behavior change. This results oriented approach combined with our superior customer service will make your talent management efforts a success.

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