

How to Get the Most from your 360° Feedback

TalentSmart staff frequently administer multi-rater and 360° assessments in large numbers with our clients who request support. As a result, we have had the opportunity to not only provide support to people as they administer 360°s with their leaders, but also to see both the benefits as well as the common mistakes, oversights, and missed opportunities that can occur. From our vantage point to yours, here are a few thoughts about how to select a 360° assessment and how to get the most from your 360° process.

Selecting a 360° Assessment

A multi-rater is an assessment where a person rates him or herself on a set of questions and invites other people to rate him or her on the same set of questions. The responses from the other people are averaged and results are presented as “self” scores versus “average of all others” scores. A 360° assessment is a specific type of multi-rater assessment where the “all others” is split into specific groups such as “supervisor”, “staff”, “peers” and “others”. These groups represent the 360°, or full circle of colleagues, around the person.

The bottom line for selecting a 360° is that it should measure what you want someone to work on. There are eight features that we find recipients most appreciate.

The 360° Assessment You Select Should Have:

1. Sound competencies: Competencies that support your business strategy
2. Relevant questions: Questions that are relevant to the audience
3. < 100 questions: Less than 100 questions to prevent rater fatigue
4. Online administration: Online administration is easier for processing
5. A clear final report: The report should be easy to read and understand
6. Group categories: Results by self, supervisor, staff, peers, and others
7. Gap scores: “Self” ratings versus the average of “all other raters”
8. Written comments: 2-4 open ended questions is about the right amount

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Maximize Your 360° Process

Administering a 360° does take time. Here are recommendations that will maximize the rater experience as well as the results.

Recommendations for Your 360° Process

1. Conduct the 360° assessment for development purposes, not evaluation. When used for development purposes, raters are more honest and constructive. When used for evaluation purposes, raters understand what's at stake and either rate too high or too low depending on their motives. If you select a 360° to be part of a formal performance evaluation process, make sure it is only one of multiple sources of input and that the ratings of the supervisor are weighted more heavily.
2. Communicate the purpose and process to participants in advance, and preferably in person to allow for questions.
3. Advise the participants on how to select raters to invite. A balance of supporters and critics is best. When the participants choose the raters, with input from the supervisor, the feedback is more credible to the person receiving it.
4. Allow participants to send an email to the raters, in advance, explaining the 360° process and welcoming their feedback.
5. Include in the invitation an explanation that the 360° will not be used for promotion or hiring decisions.
6. Invite at least 3-5 raters in each group, though it's appropriate to include only one supervisor. The ideal number of total respondents is 11-15. More than 15 are fine, though the numeric results don't statistically change.
7. Provide the results in a one-on-one meeting with a feedback coach who is knowledgeable about the report.
8. If one-on-one coaching isn't possible, provide a small group session with a skilled facilitator.
9. Avoid giving the report to the participant without opportunity to discuss the results and what they mean. Without context, the results can be misinterpreted.
10. Allow participants to absorb the feedback for 1-2 days before finalizing the development plan. They need the extra time to consider the feedback, accept it, and prepare to do something about it.
11. Encourage the participants to send a "thank you" to the raters for their time and perspectives.
12. Encourage the participants to meet with his or her supervisor to discuss what they learned from the process.
13. Conduct a full 360° only once a year, once every 18 months or once every other year.

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360° Refined

TalentSmart's 360° Refined measures a leader's skills in the 22 Core and Adaptive Leadership skills most critical to executive performance. This assessment has gone through a rigorous validation process and contains all of the 8 features a 360° assessment should have— making the 360° Refined a great coaching tool to help leaders take their performance to the next level.



Sample graph of scores on the Communication skill:

