

What is a 360-Degree Assessment and Why Should You Be Interested?

You may already be able to answer the first part of that question about *what* a 360-degree assessment is - a questionnaire in which multiple raters provide an employee with feedback on the same set of questions.

But even if you know the “what,” you still may be unsure of the “why.”

Regardless of the assessment tool - and whether an employee volunteers to participate or does so under recommendation from a supervisor to enhance his or her development - the process is essentially the same:

- The participant creates a list of people from whom he is requesting feedback (typically: supervisor, direct reports, if applicable, and peers; sometimes participants want feedback from customers).
- The participant completes a questionnaire about himself or herself.
- All surveys are conducted online.

Usually, people request feedback from three perspectives or no more than five. As its name **suggests, a 360 assessment gives participants feedback from many “views”**: above (the boss); below (direct reports); and to the side (peers).

So, the question remains - how is that kind of feedback of benefit to the participant? More to the point, why should you be interested?

I think most people are naturally curious about how they are perceived by others. And most **of us also know that people don’t typically come right** out and tell you what they think of you, for a variety of reasons - everything from not having enough time to thinking you **wouldn’t care**.

A 360 assessment allows those providing feedback to do so anonymously, with the exception of the supervisor. Most 360 surveys require at least three respondents in a category to provide feedback on that particular perspective. That anonymity is attractive to some people who may be nervous about being identified as the source of the input.

But if the feedback is anonymous, what good is it?

There are three steps in the survey process: 1) collect the data; 2) understand the data; 3) act on the data.

Most 360 surveys provide two types of feedback: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative feedback uses the same set of **questions and scale for people's responses. That continuity allows the person to compare his or her assessment to everyone else's.**

Take, for example, Collaborating, which is one of the Learning Agility dimensions. Perhaps I **am a person who doesn't think I** collaborate very well, so I rate myself low in that category. But I receive a high rating on collaborating from my other respondents. The quantitative data allows us to look at the same question and compare perceptions.

The second step in the survey process is understanding why someone rated you this way. To do that, you need to obtain - either personally or through a third party - specific examples of what you do that led to his or her rating. Most 360 assessments include at least a couple of open-ended questions, **which may provide examples that would explain the "why."**

Once you have understood the feedback, you are at the "so, what?" point. Are you going to take action on any of the things you learned about yourself?

Hopefully, you have learned a few things during the assessment process that you will then commit to work on. Connecting the area(s) you are going to work on (Collaborating or Experimenting as examples), you can attach or integrate those development areas with an actual performance objective. If you announce that goal to others, it could increase your commitment and accountability.

E·A·S·I·Consult® is currently doing a lot of work in 360-feedback with the 360° Burke Learning Agility Survey® (360° Burke LAS®). People who are more learning agile tend to be more effective leaders. Volunteering to participate in a 360-degree assessment is a way to get feedback from others that you might never get any other way.

You might say, ***Why would I open Pandora's Box and subject myself to this feedback from others?***

People are going to have perceptions about you, so not knowing what they are makes it difficult or impossible to change. While it is not always uncomfortable, having that feedback does create a greater likelihood for change.

About the Author

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