

How to Evaluate Your 360 Feedback Efforts

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You can demonstrate results through this follow-up survey.

Your training manager calls you in and asks how well your 360-degree feedback programs are actually resulting in more effective supervisory behavior and management practices. You assure her that the use of the multirater instruments are always the highlight of your training and OD consulting assignments and that participants seem to feel that they're extremely useful for becoming more aware of their strengths and areas needing development.

Your training manager mentions that her own boss, the senior vice president of HR, isn't totally convinced of the value of multirater feedback instruments and wonders whether anyone "is really candid" or "takes the time" to provide quality feedback. In fact, he wonders

whether this isn't just "another training and development trend" that many companies are using without much evaluation to back it up. You're asked to provide some information to the senior VP to demonstrate that the use of multirater interventions is having a positive effect on participants and on the strategic business of your organization.

You also want to know what impact your 360-degree feedback interventions are having in your organization. After all, you put a tremendous effort into designing and implementing a variety of programs—supervisory training, individual coaching, and management development—that have included some type of multirater feedback system. You've purchased some instruments

from outside vendors and designed others specifically to assess critical competencies relevant to the particular needs of an internal client.

You know that an evaluation study will be a bit challenging because of some recent downsizing in your department and because the multirater instruments have been used in several different interventions, have targeted different competencies, and have linked to development planning after completion of the intervention. In some cases, follow-up feedback has been given by outside consultants who helped facilitate the interpretation of the summary reports.

You begin contacting colleagues in other organizations to see what they've done about evaluating their multirater feedback interventions, looking for best practices. You begin to realize that few organizations have tried to measure whether the use of 360-degree feedback makes a real difference in skill transfer or development. It appears that despite the growing use of multirater feedback interventions for development and performance evaluation, few evaluation studies have been conducted.

As you begin designing your evaluation study, you realize you don't have a lot of time to interview participants and feedback providers or to hold focus groups. You decide that the most efficient way to help you evaluate your programs is to administer a post-program, multirater, 360-degree feedback survey.

Step 1: Defining what to evaluate and measure

The first step in evaluating your multirater 360-degree intervention is to define what you hoped to accomplish. The use of a multirater intervention should always be purposeful and tied to specific business needs and strategic organizational objectives. The business needs and objectives should be tied directly to your evaluation approach. The following questions should help you determine the focus of your multirater evaluation effort and the kinds of survey, interview, or fo-

A Checklist

Here are some typical challenges to conducting a multirater evaluation survey.

- ✓ Multiple 360-degree assessment instruments have been used in your organization (purchased from different vendors for different programs or custom designed for different departments).
- ✓ The competencies being measured in different multirater feedback interventions aren't the same.
- ✓ The 360 instruments have been used in diverse types of interventions, such as training or coaching assignments.
- ✓ Some of the 360 interventions have been linked to other HR systems, such as performance management.
- ✓ Raters are difficult to identify for post-program evaluation purposes.
- ✓ Employee turnover and downsizing have resulted in a loss of evaluation subjects.
- ✓ The follow-up timeframe to measure transfer of learning may effect results.
- ✓ The sample size of raters and participants is small.
- ✓ Organizational changes concurrent with the 360 interventions make it difficult to determine their impact.
- ✓ There's little or no senior management support for conducting an evaluation.
- ✓ A poor response or participation in the evaluation survey results in a small sample size.
- ✓ There's a lack of clarity or focus in the evaluation survey.
- ✓ The evaluation, focus group, interview, or survey questions are poorly designed.

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cus-group questions to use.

- Were participants expected to have increased awareness about their strengths and development areas?
- Were participants expected to become more proficient in one or more competencies?
- Were participants expected to have more trusting, collaborative, or effective relationships with their bosses, staff, or peers?

- Were participants expected to have greater readiness and motivation to improve one or more critical competencies?
- Were participants expected to have greater confidence and a sense of efficacy in their ability to use more effective behaviors on the job?
- Were participants expected to create and implement a professional development plan successfully?
- Were participants' development plans integrated within other HR systems (such as performance evaluation, succession planning, and so forth)?
- Were participants expected to meet with their managers to discuss development plans?
- Did the multirater intervention result in some key changes in specific and measurable organizational outcomes?
- Did it result in some key changes in specific and measurable individual outcomes?
- Was the multirater intervention cost-effective?

Once you've clarified what you want to evaluate, you're now ready to design a set of questions that can be part of a multirater evaluation survey in-

strument, interview guide, or focus group. The questions may address only one or several of the questions listed previously.

Step 2: Designing the survey

The key to evaluating your multirater feedback intervention is to develop a well-constructed survey. Here's how.

Select a target audience (rater or participant). Typical multirater programs include participants and their managers, staff, team members and other peers, and internal and external customers as part of the rating process. Each rater group has a different, yet important, perspective. In fact, current research suggests that different rater groups emphasize different aspects of an individual's competencies and performance. Bosses tend to emphasize technical competence and bottom-line performance; staff weight interpersonal and relationship factors.

Multirater Feedback Evaluation

Participant Survey: Sample Questions

Feedback Results

In general, the 360 feedback I received from my supervisor was

- 1 positive
- 2 negative
- 3 mixed

Compared to my direct reports, my ratings on the 360 feedback instrument were generally

- 1 higher
- 2 lower
- 3 about the same

The average length of time following the 360 feedback that I had a meeting with my supervisor to discuss my results was

- 1 less than one week
- 2 one to two weeks
- 3 three or more weeks
- 4 never met after receiving my feedback

In general, the developmental feedback I received from others on the 360 instrument was

- 1 very unexpected
- 2 somewhat unexpected
- 3 somewhat expected
- 4 expected

In general, the extent to which there was direct agreement among the feedback I received from my supervisor and direct reports was

- 1 high
- 2 moderate
- 3 low
- 4 very low

Feedback Impact

The 360 feedback I received increased my motivation and willingness to change specific management behaviors back on the job.

- 1 yes
- 2 no

Overall, the results of the 360 feedback increased my awareness of developmental areas.

- 1 strongly agree
- 2 agree
- 3 neither agree nor disagree
- 4 disagree
- 5 strongly disagree

The activities outlined in my developmental plan generally covered these time periods:

- 1 less than six months
- 2 more than six months but less than one year
- 3 one year or more
- 4 not applicable

The 360 program I participated in will increase the trust, cooperation, and communication between my supervisor and myself.

- 1 strongly agree
- 2 agree
- 3 neither agree nor disagree
- 4 disagree
- 5 strongly disagree
- 6 not applicable

As a result of the feedback I received on the 360 instrument, I am likely to change my management behavior on the job.

- 1 strongly agree
- 2 agree
- 3 neither agree nor disagree
- 4 disagree
- 5 strongly disagree

For that reason, it's important to identify the audience you'll focus on when evaluating the impact of your multirater process. Most likely, you'll want to know how participants reacted to their feedback, how they're using the feedback for development planning, and what behaviors they intend to change on the job. You may also want to explore the effect of the multirater process from the multiple per-

spectives of people who provide feedback to the participants. For example, you might want to measure a manager's perception of a participant's behavior change or progress in his or her development plan. If you're interested in multiple target audiences, you will have to construct more than one evaluation survey, with specific questions on areas you want to measure. Identify the appropriate evaluation

level (reaction, awareness or insight, transfer, or cost-effectiveness). Once you decide on the target audience to survey, you need to define what level of evaluation you're most interested in. It's possible to construct a survey that lets multiple levels be assessed. For example, you can measure participant reaction to the multirater intervention process as well as specific behaviors modified back on the job. A

Multirater Feedback Evaluation

Rater Survey: Sample Questions

Feedback Process

- Overall, I support the 360 assessment and feedback process for my direct reports.

1 strongly agree
2 agree
3 neither agree nor disagree
4 disagree
5 strongly disagree

- I believe that our organizational culture supports the 360 assessment and feedback process.

1 strongly agree
2 agree
3 neither agree nor disagree
4 disagree
5 strongly disagree

- I believe that the 360 feedback reports were kept confidential and were not shared with anyone in the organization except the program participants.

1 strongly agree
2 agree
3 neither agree nor disagree
4 disagree
5 strongly disagree

- Overall, I spend quality time completing the behavioral rating section (for example, the nonwritten comments section) of the 360 instrument to ensure that my responses were thoughtful, complete, candid, and accurate.

1 yes
2 no

Feedback Impact

- The 360 assessment and feedback process will increase the trust, cooperation, and communication between my direct reports and myself.

1 strongly agree
2 agree
3 neither agree nor disagree
4 disagree
5 strongly disagree
6 not applicable

- As a result of the 360 assessment and feedback process, I have been able to observe some improvement in one or more specific behaviors or management skills in my direct reports.

1 yes
2 no
3 no opportunity to observe
4 not applicable

- Overall, I have confidence that by participating in the 360 feedback process, my direct reports will be successful in changing their behaviors and in enhancing their effectiveness on the job.

1 strongly agree
2 agree
3 neither agree nor disagree
4 disagree
5 strongly disagree
6 not applicable

- At the time of our 360 follow-up meeting, my direct reports

1 had not completed an action plan
2 presented a partially completed plan
3 presented a completed plan
4 had not met with me.

well-designed survey instrument will let you gather critical information that's most relevant to your evaluation questions. Once you've decided on the appropriate evaluation level and focus of your survey, you're ready to begin writing the survey questions.

Generate survey questions. Survey questions should be written specific to the evaluation level you're assessing. For example, if you're most interested in

behavior transfer, the questions should enable you to measure what participants are doing more, less, or differently as a result of their participation in the multirater feedback process. The more specific a question is, the more accurate your results will be. Regardless of the rater audience, each question must be concrete and concise and must not be "double barreled" (two questions in one). The sample surveys provide typi-

cal evaluation questions for assessing a multirater feedback process.

Your survey should be comprehensive, yet brief, to ensure compliance. Although lengthy evaluation surveys may provide more information, they're unlikely to be completed and returned, and a low response rate almost always creates doubt about the validity of the

findings and whether they can be generalized across the entire organization.

Determine appropriate response scales. Once you've written the evaluation questions, you should determine what you're actually trying to measure, such as frequency of behavior practiced back on the job, level of satisfaction, commitment, or confidence. Then, you can create the appropriate response scales. Most numerical-response, Likert scales can be even (1 to 4) or odd (1 to 5). Regardless of which you prefer, make sure to provide labels or anchors for each number in the scale—for example, 1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, 4 = satisfied, and 5 = very satisfied. Check against each survey question to ensure that you're using an appropriate response scale.

Pilot test the survey. It's important to pilot test the survey with a group of employees. That will provide you with feedback about the clarity of your instructions, survey questions, and administration procedures. The pilot will also give you valuable information about poorly designed or ambiguous questions, which you can revise. Remember that the pilot can reveal serious flaws in the survey before you administer it to your target audience. Better to redesign and improve your survey than to send out one that's inaccurate or confusing. Respondents are busy and are likely to ignore poorly constructed, ambiguous surveys, and you'll get a low response rate and limited data.

Revise and finalize the survey. Your revised survey should look graphically appealing and easy to complete. Some surveys may be administered through the Internet or intranet or in written format. In any case, the survey should be easy to read and complete. Don't forget to include a cover letter on why you're conducting the evaluation, where to send completed surveys, and when they're due. Now, you're ready to begin the administration process.

Step 3: Gathering data

Now that you've prepared a customized multirater survey, it's important to ensure

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a high rate of compliance. Getting respondents to complete the survey can be challenging. Here are some suggestions.

- Consider administering the survey online—through your company's intranet or via the Internet.
- Provide feedback and specific findings from your evaluation study through appropriate means to all respondents (company newsletter, email, intranet postings, and so forth.)
- Insert survey questions into a broad annual employee satisfaction or other organizational survey project.
- Maximize anonymity and confidentiality for respondents.
- Minimize the use of multiple, open-ended questions to ensure that the survey is brief yet comprehensive.

Step 4: Analyzing the data and summarizing results

Once you have returned surveys in hand, you're ready to analyze the results. With the use of commercially available statistical software (such as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) or spreadsheet software (such as Excel), you should be able to generate basic data analyses useful for your evaluation study, including item frequencies, chi-square analyses, correlations, and t-tests for specific analyses.

For example, you might be interested in the effects of organizational tenure or gender as related to specific multirater experience—such as whether gender differences in self-ratings exist or whether younger employees take greater initiative in development

planning. You can explore such differences easily, using statistical software programs.

Whether you use sophisticated statistical analyses or simple frequency analysis (percentage responding to each of the response categories within a question), it's important to summarize your evaluation results in a simple, straightforward manner. Remember: The purpose of your evaluation is to facilitate successful implementation and use of multirater feedback processes within the organization. Consider your audience, and that will serve as your best guide for preparing a summary report that's easily understood. Keep in mind that you aren't attempting to do academic research but to learn how to use multirater feedback interventions more effectively.

By designing and administering a well-constructed multirater feedback evaluation survey, you can explore how well participants gained insight and translated their learning to new behaviors. Carefully developed, a multirater feedback evaluation survey helps you understand what you can do to ensure that your organization is implementing best practices in these types of training and development interventions. □

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