

# How to Benefit from 360-degree Feedback



*How do you know what you need to do to become the leader you want to be?*

**I**N RECENT YEARS, "360-degree feedback" (multi-rater feedback) has become a popular tool for helping leaders and managers develop. This feedback enables us to get an accurate glimpse of how other people see us. By revealing how others perceive our strengths and our shortcomings, it can tell us which aspects of our style go over well and which ones may need work. If used properly, it can be a powerful stimulator for change, especially in areas of "emotional intelligence."

Research has identified five components to emotional intelligence: persistence in the face of failure; emotional control in dealing with interpersonal stress and conflict; humility or lack of arrogance in dealing with others; interpersonal sensitivity and empathy; and self-awareness and insight.

The manager who is short on EQ is not likely to realize what the problem is. For that person, 360-degree feedback can be a crucial first step toward improving his or her performance.

## Seven Guidelines

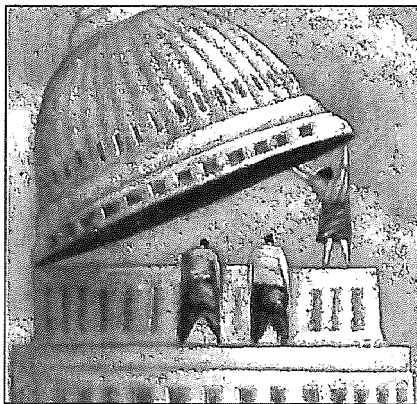
How can you design a 360-degree feedback system in a way that will create maximum value and minimize the chances for unintended problems? Here are seven guidelines to help you get the most from 360-degree feedback.

**1. Have a clear purpose.** People may find it bothersome to complete surveys about other people—especially their bosses. And, they had better know why they are being asked to do it. They need to know what the organization expects

and whether they are being encouraged or held accountable to do anything with the results of the feedback they receive. Agree on the purpose at the outset, and communicate it clearly.

**2. Start at the top.** You can set the right tone for 360-degree feedback if you personally demonstrate your commitment to it—not only by your support for its use but by being receptive to the feedback that you personally receive. So, participate actively and enthusiastically.

**3. Have an open mind, and be willing to change.** It takes courage to put aside your own beliefs about yourself, and be



open to learning how others see you. Getting feedback can be an eye-opening experience. It can be rewarding and disconcerting. Try to avoid the temptation to write off negative feedback. Most of us have some degree of "defensiveness" and would rather not have our self-perceptions challenged. By being aware of that tendency and correcting for it, you can get the most from your feedback. In addition to benefiting personally from it, you set a powerful example for others by modeling how to use feedback constructively. By adjusting your behavior, you encourage others to do the same.

**4. Conduct a pilot test.** Pilot your 360-degree feedback system thoroughly before rolling it out. There is a danger in being too ambitious too soon in making any major change. And soliciting upward feedback about one's bosses or lateral feedback about one's peers can be seen as a radical change in most top-

down cultures. Also, apart from the psychological adjustments needed in getting used to 360-degree feedback, there are also a host of logistical challenges.

**5. Communicate, communicate, communicate!** Whether using paper and pencil surveys, floppy disks, e-mail, or a combination of methods, you face many details. People need to know exactly who will be completing surveys for whom. They will need to know that data will be analyzed, reports generated, and delivered to the feedback recipients and possibly to others. People need to know just what happens with the data generated.

**6. Safeguard confidentiality at all times.** The cornerstone to 360-degree feedback lies in the confidentiality and anonymity, which allows people to express themselves honestly and openly. Confidentiality is not a trivial issue. When designing the system, take pains to provide a foolproof method for ensuring confidentiality. If it is compromised—or if there is the perception it is compromised—then the process can be ruined and people's trust may be damaged irreparably. In designing the process for how recipients get data, use a format that does not allow people to guess who said what.

**7. Evaluate and fine-tune the system.** With dispassionate eyes, evaluate what was effective and what was not. Be sure to get input from all relevant stakeholders—those giving feedback, those receiving feedback, their managers, and anyone else with a relevant perspective. Use their input in correcting the system and adapting it for future use. That way, 360-degree feedback can be a process repeated over time. Feedback is most useful when people get a chance to respond to it, make changes, and then see what is working.

In addition to what individuals learn from multiple doses of feedback, this process also sends an invaluable message: That everyone's input is important, that their views are taken seriously, that people are encouraged to speak their minds, that the organization cares about people's development and is willing to invest in them. By encouraging people to share feedback, you create a feedback-rich culture, a hallmark of a high-performing organization. You are letting people know you want them to feel free to contribute to each other's development, and to use their talents most effectively to help themselves and each other contribute to the organization's goals. **EE**

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