

Connecting the dots
IN EMPLOYEE LISTENING

The Complete Guide to

360° Surveys for Leader Development

Everything you need to know
to implement a high-value
360° survey program

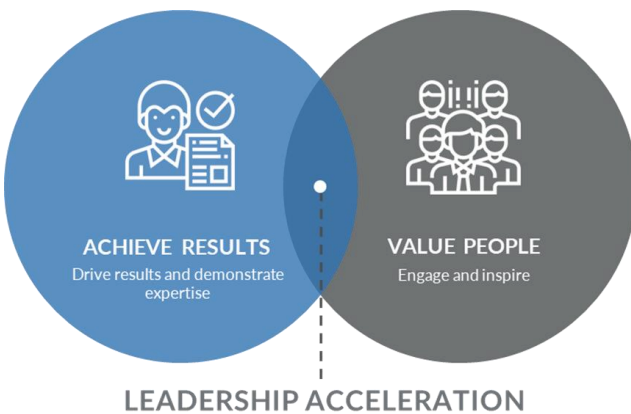


Introduction

This comprehensive guide offers insights and strategies for designing a 360° feedback program to enhance leadership effectiveness.

Topics

- [The Value of 360° Surveys](#)
- [Important Questions to Consider as You Design Your 360° Program](#)
- [Best Practices for Maximizing Your Investment in a 360° Feedback Program](#)
- [How to Help Your Leaders Get the Most from Their Feedback](#)



The Value of 360° Surveys

High performing leaders are a critical leverage point for any successful organization.

The key to effective leadership is creating a balance between achieving results and valuing employees. However, managers and executives often do not have an accurate understanding of how well they perform these two critical aspects of leadership.

Feedback from employees, peers, and one’s manager provides important self-awareness that can accelerate a leader’s skills and maximize their impact on achieving the organization’s goals.

An effective 360° survey will:

- Help the leader understand if their style is balanced between achieving results and valuing people
- Uncover strengths and development opportunities
- Identify gaps between the leader’s self-perception and the perceptions of others
- Provide rich detail on strengths and areas for improvement through narrative comments

Important Questions to Consider as You Design Your 360° Program

1. Who Should Participate in a 360°?

Leaders who want to participate and are committed to developing self-awareness. Leaders who aren't willing to receive feedback or take ownership of the 360° process are not likely to get much out of this opportunity.

Leaders with a support system. Leaders often benefit from going through a 360° program in a cohort where they can share experiences, process the feedback and discuss best practices with each other. In cases where one leader is going through the process on their own, it is critical to have the support of a manager or coach.

Future leaders. Most leaders are not prepared when they step into a leadership role. A 360° survey will give high potential employees key insights for development before they are in the role - helping them springboard their career to the next level.

Front-line, mid-level, or executive leaders. Leaders at any level may be the right choice for a 360° survey, but you will want to ensure that the content of the 360° is appropriate for the level(s) you include in the process.



2. Who Should Provide Feedback?

The best evaluators are those most familiar with a leader's performance. Evaluators should have had many opportunities to observe the leader in action so they can provide feedback based on their own specific experiences with the leader, not stories heard from others.

Leaders should invite their direct manager(s), all direct reports, 3-10 peers with whom they work closely, and 3-5 other individuals who may have unique and important perspectives (if applicable). Inviting a variety of evaluators who observe the leader's performance from different roles will provide a holistic perspective on their behaviors.

Evaluators must be willing to be honest and candid. They are expected to give both positive and constructive feedback.

3. Who Will See the Feedback?

The decision about who will receive a copy of the feedback report has far-reaching implications. In most cases, our point of view is that the participant should own their report and be allowed to choose whether to share their reports with their manager. This approach reinforces the intent for the feedback to be used for development – not performance evaluation. We also suggest that HR and/or senior leadership be able to view the aggregate results for the leaders in their organization. Doing so can inform future leadership development plans.

Best Practices for Maximizing Your Investment in a 360° Feedback Program

Ask the Right Questions

A 360° survey should build an accurate sense of self-awareness that points both to opportunities for improvement and strengths. This is primarily accomplished by using a reliable and valid tool that has strong measurement properties.

Consider including items that give leaders a perspective on their ability to drive results and demonstrate value for people. This will help leaders understand if their approach to leadership is balanced.

Align Content with Your Organization's Strategic Focus

360° surveys are only valuable if they provide feedback on the right behaviors. It's important to make sure that the competencies are based on the mission, vision, values and strategic goals of the organization. For example, if your organization is focused on driving innovation, leading innovation should be included in the items on the 360° survey.

Be Future Oriented

Leadership development should ensure the organization has the leadership skills to be successful now and in the future. When designing your 360° survey, consider what skills will be needed from leaders in the next three to five years. Include these competencies in the 360° survey so leaders can begin strengthening their skills in these critical areas now.

As an example, one Newmeasures client had been focused on operational efficiencies and cost savings. When a new CEO began to emphasize more of a growth strategy, the Learning & Development team recognized that different leadership skills would be required. The team expanded their survey to include skills such as building external relationships and understanding new markets so that leaders would be prepared to support the change in strategy.



Expert Tip: Leverage your program to build the leadership capabilities that will be needed 3-5 years from now.

Ensure Smooth Survey Administration

A solid communication strategy is critical to successful 360° survey administration. An internal project manager should kick-off the 360° program by 1) conducting an internal meeting to discuss the process from the perspectives of the leaders who will be evaluated and the evaluators, 2) sharing the purpose of the 360° feedback process and a timeline so people allocate time in their schedules to participate, and 3) sending a heads-up communication to leaders and evaluators one week prior to the survey start.

Develop detailed survey invitation and reminder messages that allow leaders and evaluators to easily access the survey. The messages should include information about why they are being invited to participate in the feedback process.

Determine how often you want to remind leaders to complete the 360° survey. Automatic reminders every other day can be effective to keep the survey at the top of evaluators' inboxes. Be careful to only send reminders to evaluators who have not yet completed their evaluations. It is important to maintain confidentiality; avoid sharing the names of evaluators who have or have not completed their surveys.



Expert Tip: Ensure that evaluators have enough time to provide meaningful feedback. Plan to administer the survey over two weeks with an option for a one-week extension.

Provide Feedback Coaching

Provide coaching support and resources to help leaders understand their 360° feedback. This may include a report guide, post-360° workshop, or working with a feedback coach.

A skilled feedback coach can be invaluable to helping leaders interpret their data and stay focused on constructive insights.



A recent study conducted by DecisionWise found that **94%** of 360° participants who experienced a 90-minute debrief with a feedback coach found their 360° program to be valuable. Only **34%** of those who didn't have a debrief with a coach found value in the program.

Whether a coach is internal or external to the organization, they should be trusted advisors who are able to help leaders understand their results and focus on key insights. When selecting a feedback coach, look for someone who has a clear process for coaching, strong business experience, and a willingness to help leaders integrate their development plan into their daily work.

How to Help Your Leaders Get the Most from Their Feedback

Encourage an Open Mind

Getting feedback is hard, and it can be tempting for a leader to dismiss it. Comments like, “that person isn’t really familiar with my performance,” or “people are trying to punish me” are not uncommon among leaders receiving the 360° feedback.

Remind leaders to be curious and seek to understand their feedback.

Rather than explaining away the feedback, encourage leaders to look for key nuggets of insight that will help them grow as a leader.

Remind leaders to focus on positive feedback as well. Knowing and leveraging one’s personal strengths are important to effective leadership.

Focus on What’s Most Important

Not all the items measured on a 360° are equally important to every leader. Start with the end in mind rather than focusing on the areas where the leader received the lowest scores.

In other words, identify which competencies are most important for achieving current and future goals and view the feedback through that lens.

Highlight Gaps in Perception

It can be eye-opening to understand how one’s leadership is perceived by different groups of people.

Ask leaders to consider how they show up in different situations.

- Does a leader show up differently for their boss than for his/her direct reports?
- Are there notable differences in ratings of the leader’s performance across the evaluator categories?
- Does the leader’s view of their own performance differ from others’ perceptions?

Prompt Dialogue

360° survey feedback inevitably raises further questions. Some feedback can take leaders by surprise. Remind leaders not to dismiss or discredit “outlier” feedback. Perception is reality, so encourage leaders to initiate follow-up conversations to learn more about unexpected feedback.

A peer or direct report can help leaders understand their feedback.

Talking to a supervisor, trusted peer, or direct report can help the leader gain richer insight into concrete opportunities for improvement. By asking others for specific examples of behaviors they’ve observed, a leader can get clarity on the exact nature of the feedback.

Prioritize Development Opportunities

While there is a tendency for leaders to want to address all areas of feedback at once, this approach can be overwhelming and will not likely lead to lasting behavior change.

Encourage leaders to focus on 1-2 improvement areas at a time.

Encourage leaders to work on the topics that are most relevant to their current role, priorities, and/or career development goals.

Document Action Plans

Once a leader knows what they want to work on, the next step is to figure out how. This is where an IDP (Individual Development Plan) or Action Plan comes in. Provide a template to help leaders formulate a concrete plan.

Promote Accountability

Encourage leaders to share their action plans with a trusted accountability partner. Inviting others to hold them accountable is a great way to ensure the leader's focus on improvement doesn't fall by the wayside.

Ask leaders to share their action plans with someone they trust.

For example, if a leader is working to improve their communication skills, they might ask a colleague to pay attention to their communication style when leading a meeting and provide feedback afterwards. (Did the leader get defensive? Did they give clear direction?)

Accountability partners should deliver feedback while it is fresh in their minds, highlighting what went well and where there is room for improvement.

Final Thoughts

When done effectively, 360° feedback programs can increase employee self-awareness, strengthen leadership development efforts, and foster a culture of feedback that allows for open communication.

Getting your 360° program right can mean the difference between giving leaders a lot of busy work and providing an invaluable development experience. Taking the time to align on your objectives and investing in the best practices outlined in the guide will help you design and administer an effective and impactful 360° program.

About Newmeasures

Newmeasures is a boutique firm of Industrial & Organizational Psychologists with expertise in designing and executing employee listening strategies. Our mission is to help people within organizations listen to one another so they can thrive – both as individuals and collectively. We are passionate about providing white-glove service and tailoring our services to meet our clients exactly where they are.

The Newmeasures 360° Survey for Leadership Development combines validated content with the power of the Qualtrics 360° platform to offer an easy-to-launch survey solution for four leader levels. Our 360° instrument can also be customized to align with your organization's values or competency models. Our technical consultants can administer your program for you or teach your team to self-administer. In addition, we offer participant workshops, 1:1 feedback debriefs, and train-the-coach sessions.

Contact us to learn how we can help you launch a successful 360° survey program!

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