360º-Degree Feedback Debriefing Guide

(Audience: for feedback providers of all types)

What is 360º-degree feedback, anyway?
It is performance-appraisal data collected from "all around" an employee, including his or her peers, subordinates, supervisors, and sometimes, from internal and external customers, and is used most often when assessing leadership and management skills. The main objective usually is to assess training and development needs and to provide competence-related information for succession planning, not promotion or pay increases.

Introduction

If an organization has invested time and resources into 360º-degree feedback it is critical that the results of the survey are properly discussed, or de-briefed, in a positive and constructive way so that both the individual and organization benefit.

Often, a skilled and experienced organizational consultant, psychologist, or human resources professional will present the feedback to the participant in a one-on-one, confidential discussion meeting. Some organizations may choose line managers and/or HR staff to deliver results; however, inexperienced feedback-givers may benefit from help and careful preparation to be effective in discussions with participants.

This brief feedback discussion outline aims to provide some overall guidelines to feedback providers to be used in their confidential, one-on-one conversations.

The information offered in this guide follows an 8 step process:

- Step 1: Establishing Purpose / Background
- Step 2: Receiving Feedback
- Step 3: Survey Design
- Step 4: Results
- Step 5: Identifying Patterns
- Step 6: Development Priorities
- Step 7: Sharing Your Results
- Step 8: Conclude the Meeting

In addition, a One-on-one Feedback Session Map is included as Attachment 1. A chart with helpful "do's and don'ts" appears as Attachment 2: Feedback-Giver Language to Use During the One-on-One. Finally, a reading list, Attachment 3: Further Reading, is available for further study for those interested in learning more about this area.

<u>Step 1:</u> Establishing Purpose / Background

Every feedback conversation should ideally start with the provision of a clear framework, or context, for the discussion. In this first part of the feedback discussion, the feedback-giver should focus the participant on the broader "why?" part of the 360º process. That is, explain the reasons behind the decision to use 360º° feedback from a strategic perspective – that is, potential benefits to be gained from such an effort.

In this first part of the discussion, you will want to cover:

- **Survey intent.** For many organizations, the decision to use 360º feedback is focused around the desire to build and encourage an organizational culture that values frequent, open and constructive feedback from all contributors (up, down, sideways, etc.). For others it might be that the primary aim is to upgrade leadership skills through assessment to prioritize areas for further development. In any event, it is best to be honest and straightforward about the survey intent, which may be two-fold, or even more.

- **Refer to specific organizational values.** If your company has a mission/vision or values statement that would support the intent of the project you may want to include reference to this as supportive of feedback / leadership development and focus the participant on core organizational values throughout the exercise (i.e. a purpose beyond focusing entirely on their own results).

- **Review competencies that are assessed by the tool used.** Talk about the specific organizational values and expected competencies that were used to create the survey itself, if a custom survey. If an "off-the-shelf" survey, you may want to cover the selection criteria for using the specific questionnaire (i.e. broad content areas covered by the 36-Degree Feedback instrument).

- **Explain your role** in the survey effort and in the de-briefing process, whether an external consultant and thus impartial, or internal to the organization but charged with employee development. Describe how you have been involved with the 360º project (e.g. survey design, implementation, data collection, communication plan). If you are simply de-briefing, explain why you were chosen for this role (for example, *"I have over 10 years experience in a counseling role",* or *"as an external consultant, I have worked on a number of 360ºs with other organizations"*). It is important that you establish your credibility as someone who can be trusted to tell the truth, maintain confidentiality, help the participant understand the data correctly, and guide the initial development planning process with them.

Discuss confidentiality and clarify the limits of this. Most people are very concerned about their results becoming public. For this reason, it is critical that you address confidentiality very specifically and thoroughly early on in the discussion. Openly discuss the extent to which the discussion and the results will be treated confidentially. Be careful not to overstate -- if there are aspects of the data or your meeting that will be shared with senior managers, or with the person's direct manager, then it is important that you address these points directly.

This is no "right" way to conduct a 360º -- some organizations choose to make the entire process confidential, which means that the participant's data is not shared with anyone at all outside of the one-on-one discussion room walls (unless the participant decides to share the information him or herself). Other organizations choose to share summaries only with senior management, while others forward reports automatically to the participant's direct manager. It is critical that you be very clear about the degree of confidentiality you can guarantee before you go into a one-on-one discussion.

- **Acknowledge Resistance.** Many people are anxious and even fearful of the 360º experience. While there are substantial benefits to 360ºº feedback, there are also risks -- because the data is collected anonymously, raters may be more brutally honest than they would ever be in a face-to-face feedback exchange. Thus, for some participants, being confronted with uncensored data can be upsetting. It is important for you to acknowledge that some resistance to the 360ºº experience is to be expected.

  Also, the 360º rating process takes time -- an increasingly precious commodity in the workplace. Participants may have developed resistance because of the time factor involved. They may have even heard complaints about the time away from work from the people who rated them. It can be very effective to simply acknowledge the nature of this resistance in the discussion so that the participant realizes that you understand some of his or her concerns and possible reluctance.

- **Ask them to summarize.** At the end of Step 1, it can be a good idea to get the participant talking about him or herself. Even if you know something about the participant, you will want to ask him or her to give you a brief summary of his/her career to date, time at the company, career goals, and even his or her feelings about the survey so far as a rater; however, be careful not to get ensnarled in a discussion about the survey design, technical “glitches”, etc. You may want to take notes, but if so, ask permission and explain that your notes will not be shared with anyone else.

  After the participant fills you in on his or her background, be sure to thank him or her, and explain that this background information will be very helpful to you in going over the participant's report with him or her. Be sure to ask if he or she has any questions for you before you move on to the next step in the discussion.

Step 2: Receiving Feedback

Few people welcome feedback with open arms, and it is therefore always helpful to ask people how they feel about the feedback process. This helps to determine how open you can be in the conversation. In specific terms you should aim to:

- **Feelings about feedback.** Explore the individual’s general feelings about receiving feedback, such as:

Do you like to hear feedback?

Do you regularly solicit feedback from others? How? How often?

What do you hope to get out of this experience?

- **Feedback is a "Gift."** Explain the critical role that feedback plays in better understanding one's own performance and behavior; feedback is a unique "gift". Few of us ever receive truly honest, specific feedback from others about how they view our performance and us. Even when we ask others for feedback we know that they are reluctant to give it -- they don't want to hurt our feelings, have us "shoot the messenger", or feel awkward. We've even been told as children that, *"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all!"* The truth is that most people do not know how to give honest feedback in a constructive way, and few people know how to accept honest feedback in a constructive way. The 360º experience is a very unique opportunity to have access to honest feedback, sometimes for the first time in our lives.

- **360º Feedback is Time Bound.** Each participant's results are essentially a "snapshot in time" -- how a particular group of raters viewed the participant at a particular point in time, in a particular environment, based on fairly recent interaction, and are not necessarily "truth." Reinforce that each person's unique results are just a "snapshot" in time of how others perceive you at this point in time, in this environment, and are not necessarily "truth".

- **Feedback is Subjective**. Acknowledge that feedback is, by its very nature, subjective and can be influenced by a variety of factors, including likes, dislikes, level of exposure, organizational environment, and even personal agendas. Feedback is only one way to look at performance – more objective assessment techniques, such as a highly structured "test" could yield different results.

- **Blind Spots.** Everyone has "blind spots" – that is, less positive aspects of themselves of which they may not be completely aware. Be sure to emphasize that the survey results will most likely contain both known and unknown data. Unknown data about how one is perceived is a key advantage of this process – it can raise our awareness of our own blind spots.

- **You Be the Judge.** The report contains the collective perceptions of selected raters. What the participant chooses to take to heart, or accept about that data is up to him or her. Explain clearly to the participant that ultimately he or she is the only real judge of what the results really mean. Emphasize that this is not the same as assessing skills objectively, as a highly structured "test" might.

Communication Models can be Helpful to Understanding 360º Feedback

Good feedback can help to facilitate the whole process of self-discovery. A useful model for better understanding some of the subtleties of interpersonal communication is called, "Johari Window." Named after its inventors, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, the Johari Window describes the process of human interaction through a paned window visual diagram. The window divides personal awareness into four different quadrants, each of which represents a different type: Open, Blind, Hidden, and Unconscious.

Johari Window

	Known to Self	*Unknown to Self*
Known to Others	**Open** (Public knowledge; what I show to you)	**Blind** (Feedback – your gift to me)
Unknown to Others	**Hidden** (Private; mine to share if I trust you)	**Unconscious** (Unknown; new awareness can emerge)

Open In this quadrant, information exists that is both “known to others”, and “known to self.” For example, a new employee might share basic information about him or herself on the first day of work, such as where he or she was previously employed, attended school, or currently lives. This data is then in the “open” area (also referred to as the “arena”). The more an individual shares, the larger the “open” zone becomes.

Hidden In the “hidden” quadrant exists information about an individual that has yet to be disclosed; communication that is “known to self”, but “unknown to others.” Over time, our new employee would most likely progressively disclose more and more about his or her “hidden” self, thus expanding the “open” quadrant and shrinking the “hidden” quadrant. Naturally, the more comfortable one feels with a particular work contact, the more self-disclosure is likely to take place. Moving from the “hidden” zone is largely dependent upon mutual trust.

Blind The “blind” area contains information that is “unknown to self”, but “known to others.” For example, consider that our new employee went to lunch with her new manager on her first day of work. Wearing an attractive new suit, she sits talking confidently and comfortably with her manager, not realizing that she has lettuce between her teeth, salad dressing on her chin, and breadcrumbs in her hair. Her lunch companion doesn’t say anything, but is thinking, “what a slob!” The only way to move communication from the "blind" zone to the "open" zone is through feedback. Everyone has "blind spots," and 360º feedback is one way to learn more about them. Feedback need not always be gathered formally and anonymously, however. The extent to which someone asks for and welcomes feedback greatly influences how likely he or she is to get it. A powerful side benefit of 360º programs is that more regular, informal feedback can begin to be encouraged, valued, and even practiced.

Unconscious Information in this last quadrant is that which exists, but has yet to be known either by self or others. For example, our new employee may actually have incredible management talent that she has not become aware of. Given the right conditions, she may discover this truth about herself at some point, or she may not. Others may see it in her and share that information with her, or they may not. The "unconscious" quadrant represents potentiality.

The Johari Window model helps us to understand that we can learn a lot from our interactions with others in a feedback discussion but we must be intelligent about what we say and share in terms of feedback or interpretation of report outputs and what people are prepared to share about themselves. In other words, sometimes these kinds of discussions take us in to the "Private" area of the Johari Window where we need to 'tread carefully'.

<u>Step 3:</u> Survey Design

Whether you decide to use a customized survey or an "off-the-shelf" one, you may want to explain key points about the survey used, including:

- Major categories or competencies and behaviors measured
- Explain the decision made to include, or not include, particular rater groups to complete the survey. (Rater groups such as peers, customers, direct reports, second-level reports, etc.)
- If a consultant or other third-party was brought in to assist with the process, you should explain why this done (often so that confidentiality could be ensured), and what pieces of the process were managed by the third party.
- Whether raters could "opt out" of the rating process if they did not feel qualified to participate
- Time allowed to complete the ratings
- Any other considerations that affected the survey design

You might want to wrap-up this section by asking a few questions, such as:

"How did you find the survey to complete, as a participant?"
"Could you tell that the content was customized? What parts?"
"Did you find it easy to complete, or more difficult?"
"What did you hear others saying about the survey?"

<u>Step 4:</u> Results

Review the report format well in advance of your debriefing session and the individual's specific report, as well, so that you are prepared for the discussion without surprises.

At this point, you can bring out the participant's personalized feedback report. You may want to have two copies: one for you, and one for the participant, so that you can both be looking at the same material comfortably, while discussing each part of the report.

It is generally best to "walk" the participant through the report, page-by-page, so that the information is slowly and carefully understood and absorbed. Most likely, the report includes a detailed report for every participant consisting of quantitative and qualitative information.

Be sure to cover the following in your discussion:

- Explain that many people react emotionally and even negatively to their feedback at first (very personal); most people become more comfortable with their results in time - after the information has a chance to "sink in" - and then deal with the results in a constructive way.
- Give him or her the report to look at as you go over it together.
- If statistics are used in the report, such as standard deviation or mean, be sure you are able to explain what these mean and how calculations were made.
- If "Free Form Comments" were collected in the survey that means that the report may contain anecdotal information that can be helpful because it is specific. Do not try to identify raters from this section; violates the intent of the survey.
- Ask questions as you go through the report such as:

Do these surprise you at all? Make sense? Examples?

<u>Step 5:</u> Identifying Patterns

A good feedback discussion will find patterns of perception and behavior within the report. Your job as a "debriefer" is to stimulate the participant's thought processes with respect to identifying patterns, and try to make sense out of patterns. Some places to find such patterns include:

- Look for differences between how the participant views him or herself and how the different "other" groups see him or her (i.e. consistently higher, or lower, congruent or not).

- Rating tendencies of the different groups (for example, peers rate him or her higher on factors they directly observe, vs. indirectly observe).

- Look at congruence of ratings, despite number differences.

- Gaps between self and other raters.

Ask open-ended questions to encourage the participant to see the data more deeply, such as:

> ***"What kinds of things have happened recently that you think this group of raters might be reacting to?"***
>
> ***"Can you think of an incident, or example, that would support this perception?"***
>
> ***"Do these patterns make sense to you, given your history recently?"***
>
> ***"What pattern would you like to see here?"***
>
> ***"Is this something about you that has changed over time?"***
>
> ***"Have you received feedback like this in the past?"***

Step 6: Development Priorities

Throughout Steps 4 and 5, encourage the participant to make notes in the report, particularly noting the areas in need of further development. The 360º data takes time, usually a few days, for the participant to fully absorb. For this reason, it is generally not advisable to develop a complete, personal development plan right away. However, it is a good idea to begin the process of development in this discussion. The details of a full plan can come later.

Start the participant thinking about development by:

1. Talking about the role that continuous learning plays in our professional lives.
2. Review summary reports and ask him or her to consider their own priorities in relation to the results.
3. Target 1 - 3 priorities for development. Explain that focusing on the development of more than 3 behaviors may not practical.
4. Discuss the different ways one can develop: on-the-job activities or assignments, learning from others through observation or "shadowing" someone who excels in a particular area, reading and self-study, courses or workshops, educational experiences, and internet research.
5. Explain that true behavior change takes time and commitment.
6. Set a date for consideration of further development.

Step 7: Sharing Your Results

Most 360º-program design does not mandate sharing results with others in the organization. Many participants want to share at least some of their results with others – their boss, team, or a trusted peer. You will want to bring this issue up for his/her consideration.

With whom do you wish to share your results, and what do you hope to get out of it?

1 With your own manager(s) / leaders?
2 With your team?
3 With your family?
4 Discuss ways to obtain additional input, if desired.

<u>Step 8:</u> Conclude the Meeting

Sharing personal information can be stressful and exhausting for anyone. Be sure to express your appreciation for the participant's candor and participation in the meeting. A few other points to cover include:

- Stress the importance of letting the report content "sink in" a little bit before taking any action (couple of days).
- Discuss possible next steps.
- Incorporating feedback into your professional life.
- Explain development assistance that will be available.
- Go over plans to roll this process out further in the future.
- Give contact information for future questions and information.
- End on a positive note: thank him or her for her participation in the process and future support of the project.

Attachment 1

One-on-One Feedback Session Map

Purpose& Timing	***What to Do, and Steps to Achieve***	***Say (Verbal)***	**Do** ***(Non-verbal)***
Set the Stage: 15 min.	**Prepare the Participant to Hear the Data Non-Defensibly** Step 1: Establishing Purpose / Background Step 2: Receiving Feedback Step 3: Survey Design	*Be sincere.* ***No jokes, but not too formal.*** ***Be the expert.*** ***Deal openly with any negativity; acknowledge it, but don't let it dominate.***	*Non-verbal messages need to be aligned with verbal communication to maintain your credibility.* ***Quiet and calm is better than animated and excited.***
Go Over the Report: 30 min.	**Review the Data Together** Step 4: Results	***Ask questions.*** ***Ask for examples.*** ***Encourage note taking.*** ***Point out strengths, but don't sugarcoat.***	***Provide 2 copies of the report (one for each of you).*** ***Pause often to allow for reflection; be patient.*** ***Listen a lot.***
Encour-age Reflec-tion: 15 min.	**Allow the Data to Have Impact** Step 5: Identifying Patterns Step 6: Development Priorities Step 7: Sharing Your Results Step 8: Conclude the Meeting	***Ask for impressions.*** ***Don't over commit.*** ***Speak from the heart; be authentic.*** ***Share ideas.*** ***Do not disclose information about others.***	Make encouraging noises and gestures to bring out ideas. ***Listen, don't tell.*** ***Let him or her ask questions – remain receptive.***

Attachment 2

Feedback-Giver Language to Use During the One-on-One Session

SKILLED **DO say things like**	UNSKILLED ***Don't say things like***	WHY? ***The point is . . .***
"Senior management is very concerned with building a culture that values and practices on-going, feedback."	*"They wanted you to get to see what others really thought about your work performance."*	To keep the focus on the <u>organizational value</u> of the exercise early on, rather than strictly on the participant.
"We will go over your report together in a few minutes. First, it is important to set the groundwork."	*"Your results were actually quite good."*	Not to jump to results too quickly – set the stage properly first.
"Our conversation today is completely confidential; I hope you will be comfortable speaking freely; this experience is entirely for you."	*"Please talk to me as a friend – I'm on your side."*	To put the person at ease so that they get the most value out of the 360º experience; be sincere and don't overstep your bounds; you are not a "friend"; you are a company representative whose role it is to facilitate understanding of the survey results.
"Most people have very mixed feelings about participating in a 360º – it is an incredible opportunity, on the other hand, there is always fear of the unknown."	*"Believe me, you are going to enjoy this experience; 360º is a good thing for everyone; trust me on this."*	Not everyone agrees with, likes, or even wants to see his/her 360º data. Some people will not enjoy the experience even if you debrief them flawlessly. Most people ultimately find value in their 360º results, even when the data is tough to hear.
"Much of the data in your report probably will not surprise you. Most participants report learning more about themselves through understanding how others see them."	*"I'm sure there is nothing in here that you don't already know . . ."*	To acknowledge that everyone has "blind spots," and that this information is a rare "gift", not to be dismissed out-of-hand.
"Information about how you are perceived by others is interesting, and may or may not correspond with how you view yourself."	*"'Perception is reality', as they say; even if you don't agree with some of the feedback, it is still real."*	That "truth" is not the issue here -- perception is the issue. What one chooses to do with new information is entirely his or her own decision.
"The survey was highly customized to fit our company's values, culture, goals and priorities."	*"What is in the survey doesn't matter so much – it is how people rated you that really matters."*	Time and effort was spent creating survey content to be relevant and mission-critical.
"Care was taken to include representatives from throughout the organization in the design and content of the survey (explain the process) . . ."	*"There were a few people in charge of putting the survey together. Its really close to our mission statement, I think."*	The survey content was developed thoughtfully and was taken seriously; not an "off-the-shelf" or generic instrument; CircumNavigator was selected because we wanted customization.

Attachment 3

More about 360º-degree feedback

The 360º-Degree Feedback Management Pocketbook, by Tony Peacock. Available as a e-book at www.ReadyToManage.com for $12.50 U.S.

Conducting the Performance Update Discussion: A Janus Development Resource (PDF Downloadable) at www.ReadyToManage.com for $17.50 U.S.

The 360º Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization (Hardcover), by John C. Maxwell (also has a workbook version to mirror this book)

360º-Degree Feedback: strategies, tactics, and techniques for developing leaders (Paperback), by William L. Bearley

360º Degree Feedback: The Powerful New Model for Employee Assessment & Performance Improvement (Hardcover), by Mark R. Edwards

Building Performance-Based 360º Degree Assessments: From Design to Delivery (Paperback), by Lawrence J. Cipolla