



YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO RUNNING 360 FEEDBACK REVIEWS

We'll walk you through every step involved in the process, from launching 360 reviews to leveraging the results.



Contents

Introduction	03
How can you integrate 360 reviews into your performance management strategy?	05
Getting started: How to successfully implement 360	06
Common misconceptions about 360 reviews	11
How to interpret and deliver 360 review results	13
Empowering employees with valuable insights	17
Sources	18



Introduction

A 360 review gives you a well-rounded view of an employee's competencies, performance, and attitude. Rather than just giving the employee top-down feedback from a manager, it provides a rich perspective of input from a broad spectrum of people. As a result, your 360 review will paint a clear picture of how others truly perceive that person.

Through the review process, you'll learn how well the employee is doing in the following areas:

- Effectively collaborating with others.
- Fulfilling the assigned role.
- Showing up with the right attitude.

In these ways, 360 reviews allow you to thoroughly assess the interpersonal skills an employee needs to strengthen in order to excel on a team. You'll also learn what the employee is already doing well, and recognizing these areas of strength will build morale.

In your 360 surveys, you can ask peers, direct reports, clients, and leaders about how the employee is performing. The employee will benefit from receiving detailed feedback, which assists in career development. Meanwhile, the organization will benefit by strengthening each team member's interpersonal skills and aptitudes with every review cycle.



A 360 review gives you a well-rounded view of an employee's competencies, performance, and attitude. Rather than just giving the employee top-down feedback from a manager, it provides a rich perspective of input from a broad spectrum of people.

The purpose of 360 reviews is to promote personal development and help teams function together more smoothly. Making that clear at the outset of the review cycle will help all employees to welcome the constructive feedback they'll receive through the reviews. The purpose is to help them strengthen their abilities so they can achieve their career goals, not to evaluate them for a promotional opportunity. In other words, the 360 review benefits them as individuals and is not used in organizational decision-making. With this understanding, employees will feel more comfortable both giving and receiving 360 reviews.

We'll now delve into how to integrate 360-degree reviews into your existing performance management strategy. Afterward, we'll discuss how to launch your 360 review program and effectively deliver the feedback to employees.



How can you integrate 360 reviews into your performance management strategy?

Your 360 reviews will [complement rather than replace](#) your existing performance appraisals. Usually conducted once or twice a year, 360 reviews will enhance your current performance management system. Holding regular one-on-one performance reviews between managers and employees will remain as important as ever. They serve two different purposes—as discussed, the 360 review is used primarily for personal development purposes, while a performance appraisal can be used to make decisions about promotions and raises.

These other elements of your performance improvement strategy will remain vital as well:

- One-on-one check-ins
- Continuous feedback
- Engagement surveys

Work to actively assess and improve performance on an ongoing basis, not just at periodic intervals. Use 360 reviews to take the pulse of how employees are collaborating with their teams from time to time, but use real-time, daily feedback to keep engagement strong.

Getting started: How to successfully implement 360 reviews

Let's take a look at best practices for setting up your 360 review program. They'll help you get the most from your 360 feedback.

1. **Choose the appropriate technology.**

Select software that is simple and intuitive to use. Make sure it allows you to customize your survey questions. Also, ensure that the platform will keep employees' sensitive data secure and help you interpret your data.

2. **Set clear administrative roles.** Avoid confusion about who will see and deliver the results by defining these roles before you begin.

3. **Define how you'll select participants for each review.** Will you gain peer feedback, customer feedback, leaders' feedback, or upward feedback from

subordinates? You'll need to select respondents in a way that provides a broad [representative sample](#) of the people each employee works with. Standardize your approach for employees at each level of the organizational hierarchy so reviews are conducted in the same manner for same-level employees. This will help ensure the fairness of the process. Also, [include self-ratings](#) so you can compare how employees think they're performing to how others see them. This will help detect blind spots and hidden strengths.

Your 360 reviews will complement rather than replace your existing performance appraisals.



How can you choose reviewers?

- Think about who that employee interacts with regularly. Select people who work closely with the reviewee as well as those who engage with the reviewee in other ways, like colleagues from other departments who must occasionally collaborate or exchange information and ideas.
- Be careful not to only select people who are close friends with the employee (or only those without a strong rapport), as this can bias results.
- Allow the reviewee to suggest their own reviewers. This will ensure you include reviewers who work closely with the reviewee. Consider adding an approval step so HR can vet potential participants to make sure there is a balanced set of reviewers.
- Consider using open feedback, which allows everyone in your organization to choose who they want to provide feedback for. You can still have a group of designated reviewers for each employee, but other people can opt to provide a review as well.

Careful selection of participants will help ensure that responses are not [overly positive or negative](#), promoting accuracy.

4. **Decide what level of anonymity you'll ensure.** Determine whether to keep the process completely anonymous, allow managers and/or participants to see who made which comments, or allow only HR staff to see respondents' names. The last type is the most common, as it allows HR staff to clarify or follow up on particular comments when needed. Let employees know the specific level of anonymity you've chosen.



If you're using quality software, you can compare results between different review cycles to assess employees' progress in particular areas.

Edit Questionnaire

Questionnaire name: Define respondents:

Rating scale: Status: ☒ Active Question weights:

« Communication

« This person uses meeting time wisely.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree Not applicable

Please explain your choice here:



5. Create a questionnaire following best practices.

- Design different questionnaires specific to various departments and roles. Avoid having too many of them, though, because that would make comparing results across people and groups more challenging.
- Format the majority of your questions as multiple-choice or rating questions. This aids in accurately interpreting data by allowing it to be easily synthesized into clear results.
- Include a smaller number of [open-ended questions](#) so you can gain more detailed input where needed.
- Avoid very long questionnaires so participants don't feel they need to rush through their answers. Fifteen to 20 questions is a reasonable number.
- Create a balanced set of questions that reflect a wide range of competencies and attributes, as discussed under the following point. Your software may offer templates that will help you structure your reviews.

6. **Measure the things that are most important.** Don't attempt to measure anything and everything just because you can. Instead, focus on measuring the specific behaviors you want to promote. Here are some examples:

- Communication
- Attitude
- Collaboration
- Integrity
- Accountability
- Leadership ability
- Skills specific to their role

By measuring competencies like these, a 360 review can help you assess whether employees are engaging in effective teamwork.

7. **Determine the best number of participants for each review.** Consider how many employees each reviewer needs to complete a survey for. If the list of people they need to respond about is long, the quality of replies may decrease because they'll feel rushed. Try to keep the number reasonable (for example, each person might review three other employees). Around 8 to 12 reviewers for each employee being reviewed is a reasonable number; more than 12 could be overkill. Strive to balance getting feedback from a wide range of people and making sure your reviewers don't feel overwhelmed, which will give you the highest quality of feedback.





Thoughtfully analyzing and introducing the feedback to employees and then following up with a clear plan of action will help them make the most of their results.

8. **Educate employees on what type of feedback to give.** If you include rating questions, make sure everyone understands the different rating scale options. Provide guidelines on what each number on the rating scale represents. Ensure that people also know the 360 feedback won't affect promotions, affirming that it is purely development-oriented.

If you're using software to conduct your reviews, you can add these guidelines directly into the questionnaire so employees can refer back to them. It may also be beneficial to meet with employees before they begin the questionnaire in order to explain the purpose of the review, how the rating scale works, and the type of feedback you're looking for. Clearing up any questions or misinterpretations beforehand will give you the most accurate feedback.

9. **Launch your first 360 review!** With the right tool, this step will be easy. Just make sure the timing is right—the 360 review shouldn't accidentally happen [too close to a performance appraisal cycle](#). That could create a misperception that the two are linked.

10. **Make sure all reviewers complete the questionnaire.** A quality tool will remind them that they need to complete it if they have not yet done so, and it will let you know when all the results are in.



Common misconceptions about 360 reviews

There are a lot of myths about 360 reviews, so let's take a moment to examine them. Using 360 reviews in the wrong way can be worse than not using them at all!

Myth 1:

You're already gaining 360 feedback because you have open communication.

Open communication is a noble goal, but without the structure and anonymity of a 360 review, you are probably not gaining the full picture. Even if employees want to have an open culture, many people do not feel comfortable giving constructive criticism unless prompted. They may fear that others will perceive them as critical rather than helpful.

Myth 2:

360-degree feedback should be used to determine who gets a promotion.

This is absolutely false! You should not use 360 feedback to make decisions about promotions or raises. Instead, use the 360 feedback for developmental purposes. Otherwise, you'll run into serious issues like these:

- Employees will feel guilty about giving constructive feedback because it could negatively affect a coworker.
- Employees will feel resentful about the process and fearful of the feedback it could provide.
- A culture of mistrust will develop. Employees could even form agreements with coworkers about the type of feedback to give one another rather than being open and honest.

Avoid those issues by assuring employees that the feedback will only be used to support their growth.



Myth 3:

Employees will just “game the system” by making agreements with friends to give each other great reviews rather than honest feedback.

This relates directly to myth 2. If employees know the 360 review does not affect who gets a promotion, they won't feel the need to sway the results. Instead, they'll know the feedback will directly benefit them, so they'll want the results to be as accurate as possible. Communicating the true purpose of the process will, therefore, ensure honest feedback.

How to interpret and deliver 360 review results

Follow these tips to understand the results of your 360 reviews and deliver them in the most effective way possible!

1. Identify key strengths and areas for improvement.

- Look for patterns in reviewers' comments, which will help you provide more detailed feedback than ratings alone. Consider whether multiple reviewers have flagged a particular competency as needing work.
- Determine which strengths and areas for improvement are most critical to the employee's role so you can focus on them when discussing the results.
- Use a self-assessment to pinpoint blind spots and hidden strengths—areas where employees might think they are doing better (or worse) than how others perceive them.
- Consider different rating styles across reviewers. Even when people are coached on how to provide accurate ratings, their style can vary. Quality software can illuminate a rater's tendency to deliver high or low ratings across different reviewees. This can help you understand how fair a particular comment might be compared to the results from other reviewers.
- Benchmark each reviewee's results against the rest of the team or a model employee. This will allow you to gauge how an employee compares to peers in particular skill sets and behaviors.





2. Create a development plan for the employee that will help improve key areas of weakness.

- Define a manageable number of goals based on the most important priority areas you've noted in step 1. Focus on a handful of particular areas for improvement rather than a long list of objectives.
- Illustrate what success in each of these areas looks like using concrete examples. For instance, if employees need to bring a more positive attitude to meetings, share specific details about how they are showing up now and what they could do differently.
- Set a clear timeframe for achieving these goals, such as a three-month period. Then, break each goal into measurable steps that the employee can carry out week by week.
- Provide action items that will enhance learning, sharing tools and resources to support the achievement of each goal. This could include mentoring, daily and weekly feedback from the employee's manager, and access to classes and workshops in their area of growth. If an employee needs to improve greatly in a particular skill or quality, consider pairing them with someone else who is excelling in this area. Through a peer buddy system, they can receive regular and real-time feedback from someone who works with them directly.
- Keep in mind that the plan you create may need to be further tailored to the employee's needs in step 3. This will ensure employees feel fully invested in the plan and gain the specific support they need.



3. Plan how to introduce this feedback to employees.

- Always deliver the feedback in a one-on-one conversation, either in person or on a video call. Some of the feedback may be surprising, and employees deserve to have assistance in making sense of what it means.
- Be straightforward but positive, focusing on how the employee can use this feedback to move forward. When delivering hard-to-hear feedback, focus on the opportunity for growth it presents.
- Clarify any feedback ahead of time if need be. If any feedback is overly harsh, you could ask the reviewer to rephrase it in an accurate but slightly more approachable way before you deliver the results (if you're able to see which reviewers made particular comments).

Likewise, if any feedback seems too vague, ask reviewers follow-up questions to better understand their meaning. Tough feedback can feel easier to hear and internalize when the reviewer makes it easy to understand and, therefore, act upon. Rather than imagining it means something worse than it actually does and feeling stumped about how to move forward, the reviewee can immediately begin envisioning how to improve.

- Synthesize the results before delivering them (your tool should help with this!) so you're not sharing an overwhelming amount of information all at once. Make sure you've grouped the comments into particular topics so employees can easily digest them and see patterns.
 - Focus on the big picture and sharing the plan for improvement that you've laid out. At this point, you can talk with employees about further customizing the plan to their needs. Ask whether they need additional support aside from what you've already outlined in the plan for improvement.
4. **For people in leadership positions, consider sharing a condensed version of the results with other employees.** This will highlight a commitment to accountability and openness to constructive feedback while emphasizing the importance of the 360 review process. Other employees will feel more inclined to receive feedback when they see that even leaders are welcoming it. Plus, when other employees see that their feedback about a leader is taken seriously, they'll feel highly valued.



Thoughtfully analyzing and introducing the feedback to employees and then following up with a clear plan of action will help them make the most of their results. Benchmark their progress in the weeks to come as they implement this plan and provide regular feedback on how they are improving. If you're using quality software, you can compare results between different review cycles to assess employees' progress in particular areas.

Empowering employees with valuable insights

Your 360 reviews will give you a wealth of valuable feedback on how employees need to grow—and where they're already excelling. By following best practices for conducting your review, you'll provide crucial insights that will help them become more effective team members. Then, by following up with the appropriate developmental support, you'll help employees feel empowered to take action on the feedback they receive. This feedback will help them thrive on teams and in other collaborative settings, bringing a positive attitude and strong people skills. By using the data from your 360 reviews wisely, you can progressively help your employees reach the next level of success.





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