Creating 360 Feedback Questions: Guidelines

Once you have a leadership competency model for your organization, you can create a 360 feedback survey to support the development of your organization's leaders. This document provides guidelines for creating questions for your 360 feedback tool.

The first step in creating questions for your 360 feedback survey is to write a list of all observable indicators of each competency. To do this, ask yourself these questions; "What behaviors would I observe in a person that is proficient at this competency?" and, "What would that person do or say?" Once you have an exhaustive list of these observable indicators, use them to create questions for your 360 feedback tool while adhering to the following five guidelines:

Questions should be behaviorally-based*

There are two main reasons questions should be behaviorally-based. First, behaviorally-based feedback is imminently actionable. If you were told you didn't have good listening skills, would you know how to improve upon that? If, however, you were told you didn't paraphrase what others said in order to ensure you understood the message conveyed, you would know exactly what to do to improve upon that (i.e., start paraphrasing what other people say). A second reason questions should be behaviorally-based is to maximize the usefulness of the feedback. If a manager is told he doesn't "value his employee's time," he can easily dismiss this as malicious feedback by disgruntled subordinates, or say that other people couldn't know what he feels inside. If, however, he is given the feedback that he doesn't "set realistic time boundaries," he may be more apt to change his behaviors or engage others in a conversation about "realistic time boundaries" when assigning projects.

Avoid double-barreled questions

Make sure you are asking one question at a time. For example, the question "How frequently does your manager set goals and follow up on them?" is actually two questions in one. The manager may set goals, yet never follow up. If this were the case, how should this question be answered? When you are finished writing your questions go back and read them to make sure they are not double-barreled. A good hint that a question is double-barreled is the use of the word "and". Double barreled questions should be broken into two separate questions, or revised to ensure they are asking about just one behavior.

Avoid jargon and abbreviations

It is a common mistake to think that others are familiar and comfortable with the same terms and abbreviations we are. Make sure to minimize jargon and abbreviations in your questions, and whenever there is doubt as to whether or not someone will understand what you are saying, spell it out.

Use the simplest word choice

Complex constructions and eloquent phrasing may work well for novels and poetry, but for questions on your 360 feedback survey, use plain, straightforward language and words any high

school graduate would know. You don't want to alienate people by using words they don't understand.

When possible, put questions into context
To say a manager "always asks for employees' opinions" may give the impression that the manager lacks the ability to be decisive. To say the manager "always asks for employees' opinions when it has a direct impact on their work" conveys a very different impression and highlights specific desirable behaviors.

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[*] If you are having difficulty making behaviorally-based questions, there may be a problem with the competency you have defined. Most likely it is too broad to be measured behaviorally. In that case, you may need to break it into smaller competencies that can be behaviorally measured, or you may need to revise the definition of the competency to be more specific, direct, and clear.

The question scale for the LeaderNation tool defaults to have the anchors of "Never" and "Always" to reflect our stance that good questions are behaviorally-based. You can, however, change these anchors if you would like. All questions will still utilize a sliding scale, so choose your anchors wisely to ensure that placing the slider anywhere from one end of the scale to the other makes sense.