

- Other

A more conventional set of respondent types is...

Option R2: Traditional

- You are the individual requesting feedback
- Direct report or team member
- Colleague
- Manager
- External customer or supplier
- Other

A potential problem with the traditional descriptions is that terms such as "Manager" may mean little in today's flat and flexible organization structures.

Hints

- Use plain English, and avoid jargon and politically correct terms such as "Senior Colleague".
- Watch out for short, ambiguous descriptions, e.g. simply "Direct Report" might mean I am the individual's manager or he/she is my manager.
- The "Other" answer is important; failing to provide it as an option means a few respondents will be forced to incorrectly classify themselves as something else. Every set of choices in the questionnaire should offer an "other", "unsure" or "don't know" option.

Rating Scale

The rating scale decision often creates considerable debate; its descriptions need to fit both the organization's culture and 360 applications. Finding words that are both honest but not demotivating for the critical (1 and 2) ratings can be challenging!

Many 360 questionnaires aim to gauge how well an individual displays competencies. The following rating scale seems to fit those applications well...

Option S1: Performance

- 1 Struggling - Jo Brown has made attempts but been largely unsuccessful
- 2 Poor - Jo Brown has tried but has a lot to learn
- 3 Variable - Jo Brown can be good or poor
- 4 Good - Jo Brown usually does it well



- 5 Excellent - Jo Brown does it outstandingly well
Unsure Rarely/never have you known Jo Brown try

A performance focused rating scale such as the above often fits appraisal, and other assessment applications such as recruitment. But, for personal development applications, such as training courses, a performance focused rating scale can seem harsh. And, the following softer worded scale with its developmental focus may be more helpful...

Option S2: Development

- 1 Weaker: something Jo Brown is least good at
 - 2 Not so strong: a task Jo Brown performs less well in comparison with other things he/she does
 - 3 OK: neither strength nor one of the things he/she does less well
 - 4 Strength: a task Jo Brown performs well for him/her
 - 5 Exceptional: one of Jo Brown's outstanding strengths
- Don't know Insufficient information to give an answer

A development orientated rating scale such as this one asks for relative judgments about individuals' strengths and development needs. It often highlights the relevance of workshops and other personal development activities, whilst avoiding comparisons between individuals. Hence, it is not suitable for making judgments or decisions about people. In particular, it's not suitable for appraisal.

A frequency scale asks how often an individual does something. For example...

Option S3: Frequency

- 1 Probably never: you have never seen Jo Brown do it
 - 2 Rarely: Jo Brown does it occasionally
 - 3 Sometimes:
 - 4 Often: Jo Brown completes the task fairly often
 - 5 Very frequently: Jo Brown takes every opportunity to act as described
- Don't know No information - it's not something you would see individual doing

A frequency scale may seem more objective; it requires simple factual judgments. However, it has a problem. A person's job may prevent them doing something often, e.g. an individual with a small team will be less involved in developing others. Individuals with critical ratings may, with some justification, subsequently argue that critical feedback is "unfair".



Hints

- Using an even numbered scale, does not avoid largely average ratings (respondents will still give ratings around the middle). Similarly, a big rating scale, e.g. 1 to 9, doesn't prevent largely favourable ratings. A balance of critical and favourable feedback is only achieved by (a) briefing respondents very carefully and/or (b) smart software.
- Once again, use plain English; avoid HR terms like "mastery" and "role model". Line managers won't have a clue what those terms mean.
- Watch out for phrases such as "Above average", because very, very few respondents will ever give a "below average" rating.

Rated Questions

This is probably the most difficult aspects of questionnaire design. Research suggests getting this wrong actually produces misleading feedback. If you choose to create your own questions, we offer some succinct advice...

- Base your questions directly on your competency indicators/behaviours. Well written competency indicators/behaviours make good 360 questions. For example, the competency indicator "Providing the helpful coaching" is a great 360 question; nothing has to be changed. But, a considerable amount of "word-smithing" might be needed to convert a tangled set of competencies to a good 360 questionnaire.
- Ensure every question implies some kind of standard. For example, "Making decisions" is a bad question, because I might make awful, late and confusing decisions, but and I'm still "making decisions". A better question might be "Making clear decisions".
- Similar questions should never used to define different competencies. For example, the questions "Asks others for their views" and "Seeks the input of others" mean the same thing, and should not assess different competencies. That is equivalent to similar questions being used to measure different traits on a personality questionnaire, and it will produce muddled feedback.
- The questions used to define each single competency should all mean the same thing. If a competency contains significantly different questions, then it's measuring two or more things. For example, "Gives direction to team members" and "Provides helpful coaching" are different things, and should not be used to measure the same competency. It will produce featureless, unhelpful feedback, especially where competency averages are used in reports.
- The questions must use very few qualifiers such as "as appropriate" and "when necessary". The problem with qualifiers is that everyone has different ideas about them, e.g. when is something "appropriate" or "necessary"? Qualifiers create subjective, inconsistent assessments, and feedback that



can be difficult to explain. Two or three qualifiers in a large questionnaire may be acceptable, but no more than that.

- Questions should never use jargon. The problem with jargon, such as 'Leads on the front foot', is that it means different things to different people. Avoiding jargon can be particularly difficult with competency frameworks that use senior, middle and junior levels of management.
- Questions should never use outcomes, results or achievements. The problem with outcomes, such as 'Delivers results' or 'Acts as a role model' is that no specific competency is implied. Outcomes are the result of having a number of good competencies, not a single competency. They produce feedback that's difficult to work with, e.g. exactly what does a person have to do differently to improve 'Delivers results'?
- Questions should not put two or more questions in one statement by using commas, hyphens, and words such as "and" and "or". For example, "Leads people with clarity and enthusiasm" is a bad question. Clarity and enthusiasm are different things; I could display one and not the other.

Hints

- Use the minimum number of words; keep your rated questions as short as possible. Respondents have to think harder about wordy questions; your questionnaire will take longer to complete.
- There is no definitive answer to how many questions you should have; it's largely a matter of how much patience and time your people have. If questionnaire respondents are busy people aim for 30 questions or less, especially if they will be asked to complete several 360 questionnaires in a short period.
- Using questionnaires in other languages isn't simply a matter of translation, because what's judged to be good management/leadership differs across cultures. For example, delegation may be seen as a weakness, as failing to meet your responsibilities in some Asian cultures. Even within Europe there are significant cultural differences.
- Think carefully about every question from an equality perspective. For example, "Gives whatever time and energy it takes" might be construed as discriminating against those with family commitments.

Open/Comment Questions

Open or comment questions invite questionnaire respondents to provide written feedback; perhaps summaries, examples and explanations. Reports simply present the resulting text feedback verbatim with no editing or analysis. Yet, text feedback is often enormously valuable in supporting and explaining the ratings given.



Most 360 questionnaires contain two or three open questions. The following two open questions work well, probably because they are so simple.

Option O1: Simple

- What is Jo Brown doing particularly well?
- What should Jo Brown improve upon?
- For appraisal and related applications answers you might try...

Option O2: Performance focused

- Which of Jo Brown's objectives have been met?
- Where has Jo Brown struggled to meet his/her objectives?

Option O3: Stop, start, continue

- What should this person stop doing to improve their effectiveness?
- What should they start to do?
- And, what should he/she continue to do to maintain their effectiveness?

Stop/start/continue often fits an organization's training and development methods, and for that reason it's a good choice. However, it can introduce some ambiguity when similar answers are given to different opening questions. For example, "Start to conduct helpful appraisals" and "Stop avoiding appraisal discussions" mean the same thing, but would appear as answers to different questions on the feedback report.

Hints

- A useful question is sometimes "What important things has this questionnaire missed"? Or, more simply "Any other comments?".
- Additionally, "Please make three specific recommendations for improving the individual's performance" often produces clear, pertinent feedback.

More information

If you haven't done so, take a look at the Handbook's chapter "Managing your 360 feedback project". That might help you think through some of the bigger, broader topics.

If you have questions, or if there's anything we might do, please call Peter Goodge on 07976 373 562, or e-mail Peter at info@NextHR.co.uk.

