

Exhibit 2.8.

Standardized Instrument Checklist

Date:

Instrument:

____ The items and scales make sense to our organization (they have face validity).

____ The competencies the instrument assesses are relevant to the behaviors we want to change in our organization.

____ The competencies it assesses are related to our organization's underlying management model.

____ The data will be meaningful to our managers. It will be perceived as consistent and accurate.

____ The behaviors assessed are amenable to change.

____ The provider has suitable experience and expertise with the instrument, target audience, and subject matter.

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of the results.) Some organizations fail to conduct these studies; however, this approach is extremely shortsighted. If the organization expects its employees to be open and to make changes based on the feedback, it must provide evidence that these changes are actually the ones that are needed.

Demonstrated reliability and validity are essential for an effective and defensible 360-degree feedback process. It's counterproductive to give employees feedback that is based on unstable and inaccurate data. Designing a reliable and valid survey requires the involvement of an expert in instrument development. A doctoral degree in psychology, educational measurement, or a related field is usually required. If the organization doesn't have this expertise internally, it may have to hire the services of a consultant who has the necessary training and experience.

Much of this expense and difficulty can be avoided by using a customizable instrument offered by a provider of 360-feedback services. These instruments allow the selection of desired competencies from a collection of competencies that have been tested for reliability and validity. The content and length of a customized instrument can be tailored by selecting important competencies and combining them to create an assessment that closely reflects the needs of the organization. All of the guidelines that apply to selecting an off-the-shelf instrument apply to customizable instruments, and you can use the Customizable Instrument Checklist (see Exhibit 2.9) to expand your analysis of instruments you are considering.

Exhibit 2.9.

Customizable Instrument Checklist

Date:

Instrument / Provider:

- Does the application require both paper and online options, and does the assessment provide both options?
- What customization options exist?
- Can e-mails and greetings be personalized?
- Can the website be branded for your initiative?
- Is the software hosted or must you install it at your site?
- What are the technology requirements to access and use the software?
- What administrative capabilities are available to you?
- How is project status monitored?
- What report options are available?
- How long does it take to set up your survey once customization choices have been made?

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PREPARING THE PEOPLE INVOLVED

Every person involved in the assessment and feedback process should be adequately prepared for his or her role. The purpose for the 360-degree feedback initiative and the expected outcomes should be explained fully, and it should be made clear how the feedback will be used.

As an example of how such preparation might work, consider the case of a regional electric utility that holds a half-day orientation session to kick off the assessment phase of its development program for upper managers. The participants who are to receive feedback, their bosses, and their raters attend this session together. The president of the company introduces the background and goals of the overall program. The senior HR executive then introduces the 360-degree feedback instrument and discusses its purpose. Raters are given instructions to reduce rating errors, and screenshots of the web-based user interface are demonstrated. The bosses or coaches of the participants attend an additional afternoon session that helps them understand how to best support the developmental planning process.

Preparing Senior Management

Once an organization has selected an instrument to use, it must provide the proper structure to help the participants collect the best data possible.

Frequently, organizations are ill-prepared for what lies ahead, especially if their senior leaders have not experienced 360-degree feedback before or if they have experienced a less-than-successful implementation. To prepare your organization, conduct a briefing for the executive team. Your agenda might include the following:

- Discuss the business drivers for the feedback and development process.
- Describe the leadership framework of skills, perspectives, and capacities that will be assessed in the process.
- Describe the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the participants, managers, and organization.
- Introduce and describe an overview of the 360 project plan and/or process.
- Identify the integration points to other people management processes.
- Outline next steps and implementation schedule.
- Share sample materials and outputs (optional).

Identifying and Preparing Participants

The organization should choose participants according to the business need for the assessment. People at any level of the organization can benefit from 360-degree feedback, and individuals need different feedback at different times during their careers (Chappelow, 2004). For example, new employees need feedback on which skills are important to their jobs, while mid-level employees require feedback on their strengths and developmental areas. As employees move up the organizational ladder, they require more feedback on their ability to create a vision for the organization's success.

Be sure to provide the participants with some type of orientation to the 360-degree feedback process. The example outlined above is a fairly typical example of a participant orientation session. A sample presentation for an orientation session can be found in Appendix A.

The single most common question among participants is, "Who should I select to be my raters?" The participant typically collects feedback from the boss, peers, direct reports, and a catch-all category called "others." Some 360-degree instruments also allow for rater groups such as superiors or board members. The instrument provider usually suggests the optimal number of raters for each group; a typical distribution is one boss, five peers, and five direct reports. The most accurate responses come from raters who have had a chance to observe the manager's variety of behaviors over time. Therefore it is most beneficial for the participants to select raters who know them well and know their work.

Some organizations prefer to control distribution of surveys by selecting the raters for the participant. However, this could undermine the participant's openness to the resulting data. A better approach is to let the participant select the raters. Alternatively, the organization may supply a list of required raters to the participant and let the participant decide who, in addition, he or she will include.

To ensure that you have covered all the significant steps in participant and executive preparation, use the checklist in Exhibit 2.10.

Data Confidentiality

The data collected through assessment-for-development instruments belong to the individual participants. It should be the participant's decision whether or not anyone else reviews the feedback report. Breaches of confidentiality, even if accidental, can jeopardize the feedback process, compromise the integrity of the people who administer the organization's development program, and lead to a

Exhibit 2.10.

Participant and Organization Preparation Checklist

Date:

360-process initiative:

____ We have received endorsement for the initiative at the highest levels.

____ We have conducted a presentation or other orientation to the 360 process for participants.

____ We have explained to the participants how they were selected for this process.

____ We have explained the milestones and deadlines involved.

____ We have explained to the participants and their facilitator that the feedback reports will be confidential.

____ Participants have been instructed to select raters who know them well and who have had the opportunity to observe a variety of their behaviors over time.

____ We have conducted an executive briefing.

____ We have linked the initiative to specific business goals.

____ We have a clear communication plan in place with the participants and raters.

____ If there have been any recent similar initiatives that failed, we have determined how to do things differently this time around.

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mistrust of subsequent assessment activities. Take the utmost care throughout the entire feedback process to protect these data.

Even though paper-and-pencil surveys are still available through some providers, the vast majority have moved online. Protecting the data in this environment requires commonsense safeguards such as password access and unique rater and participant identification using login names or similar entries.

Choosing and Preparing Raters

Just as critical as preparing the participant is preparing the raters to provide useful feedback. A rater is someone who completes a survey on behalf of the participant on a 360-degree instrument. This person should have worked with the participant during the past year and be able to provide appropriate feedback.

Two components help to ensure quality ratings: (1) using raters who have the ability to accurately assess and evaluate the behaviors measured and (2) preparing these individuals to provide accurate ratings. Rater training can help prevent errors in providing accurate feedback. Specifically, training can help reduce recency errors (ratings based on most recent experiences) and halo errors (generalizing ratings across items—for example, rating an individual high on all items because he or she is outstanding on one particular item).

One aspect of preparing raters consists of exposing them to the scales and items before they are asked to provide responses. Typically referred to as *competency scale training*, this type of training can increase rater accuracy. Another type of preparation, *frame-of-reference training*, involves calibrating each scale by using a list of behaviors that correspond to performance levels in the organization (that is, what constitutes effective and ineffective behaviors in the organization). The checklist in Exhibit 2.11 summarizes the major considerations in choosing and preparing raters.

Rater Perceptions Raters are likely to have sensitivities to the 360-degree feedback process that may affect the results, including:

- Perceptions of the instrument
- Thoughts about how and why they were chosen as raters
- Expectations about the outcomes of the process
- Perceptions of their anonymity
- Perceptions of the return on the time they are asked to invest

You can manage these sensitivities by educating raters about the competencies, providing examples of behaviors associated with the competencies, working to improve observational skills, explaining how they were selected to be raters, and explaining the outcomes of the process.

Exhibit 2.11.

Rater Preparation Checklist

Date:

360-process initiative:

____ We have explained to raters how they were selected and what the outcomes of the process are to be.

____ We have provided rater training to help prevent errors in providing accurate feedback.

____ Our rater training included competency scale training (a review of the 360 instrument's scales and items).

____ Our rater training included frame-of-reference training (matching each scale to a list of behaviors that correspond to performance levels in the organization).

____ We have described to raters how they can provide ongoing support to the participant.

____ We have clarified for raters how anonymity issues will be handled.

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Explain the Outcomes of the Process Raters are asked to invest time in the development of others, and it is important to consider what raters might expect in return. These outcomes may include the following:

- Increased awareness of performance and work-related behaviors
- Increased awareness of raters' expectations
- Greater alignment of performance expectations between employees and the organization
- Improved communication about work expectations
- Improved work behavior

One goal of a 360-degree feedback process is to provide participants with information about strengths and areas for development. Remind raters that they must provide information in both areas. After reviewing the feedback, participants should send their raters follow-up notes thanking them for helping with their development. Afterward, the participants may decide to share with their raters the insights, goals, and challenges that resulted from receiving their feedback. Change rarely occurs overnight, nor does it occur in a vacuum. Help raters understand that they can help by providing ongoing support to the participant.

Clarify Rater Anonymity The sensitive nature of personal feedback requires that you protect the privacy of the raters. If the raters suspect that their feedback is not anonymous, they may be reluctant to participate in the process or may shade their answers. Two areas in which your efforts will engender active participation are in clarifying anonymity and in buttressing the confidence in the feedback itself.

Anonymity means that no one will be able to tell which feedback a particular rater provided. It is a safeguard to ensure that the information gathered is candid and accurate. Many raters are concerned about retaliation or punitive consequences for their ratings, especially when the person they are rating is their boss. Explain whose scores will be anonymous and whose will not be. Anonymity usually is ensured by averaging the individual ratings within a particular rater group (direct reports, peers, and so on) and by not reporting the ratings for a group unless the actual number of raters exceeds a minimum number (usually three).

Construct your questionnaires (or evaluate the instrument you select) so that participants cannot tell who said what on their reports. CCL does this on our assessments by requiring a minimum of three respondents in the rater categories of “peers” and “direct reports.” If three or more people from within the same category return surveys, their answers are combined and presented as an aggregate score. If fewer than three people in one category return surveys, then the participant’s report does not include item-level feedback in that category. A common exception is with the boss’s feedback. This data is frequently identified separately. In this case the materials should give the boss clear notice that his or her responses are not anonymous.

Research shows that anonymous raters are more likely to provide accurate, objective feedback than are their counterparts who are required to identify themselves (Kozlowski, Chao, & Morrison, 1998). If the raters believe that their anonymity will be compromised, then less honesty can be expected in future administrations of the 360 process (Bracken, Timmreck, Fleenor, & Summers, 2001).

Some instruments provide a way for raters to add written comments, expanding their feedback to include data that the instrument does not capture. These broader, deeper impressions can be quite helpful to a participant, but at the risk of losing anonymity (see Exhibit 2.12) because the participant may be able to identify the rater's communicative style.

ADMINISTERING THE ASSESSMENT AND PROCESSING THE RESULTS

The assessment process should be administered in a manner that is consistent and fair for all participants and raters. The data collection and processing should be both efficient and cost-effective (Bracken, Timmreck, Fleenor, & Summers, 2001).

Exhibit 2.12. Tradeoffs of Written Commentary

Written comments from raters may introduce *verbatim bias*. In its work facilitating one-on-one feedback sessions, CCL has noticed that sometimes participants give more attention to written comments than to numerical or graphical scores. No matter what their scores on the standardized part of the assessment, some people tend to focus on and remember the written comments more. As a result, verbatim comments that are seemingly inconsistent with the numeric results can unfairly bias the feedback. Feedback facilitators should help participants put these comments in perspective if written responses are included in the 360-degree process. On the other hand, written comments allow a rater to provide feedback that might not otherwise surface within the limitations of the survey questions.

The feedback report should contain clear information as to how the recipient is perceived by his or her raters. If appropriate, the report may contain statistical comparisons to others in the organization and industry norms from outside organizations. The final feedback package should be delivered in a sealed envelope. It should contain a summary of the feedback, including the questions responded to by the raters, directions for interpreting the results, and action-planning worksheets. We go into the details of delivering the feedback in the next chapter.