RESEARCH | 360 Feedback

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

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Asking the Right Questions

Just as a sculptor uses a hammer and chisel to give shape to a stone, so are questions used to draw out a person's qualities and shape our assessment of them. A sculptor cannot shape his sculpture correctly if his chisel is not sharp enough. In a similar way, our assessment cannot be accurate if our questions are not sharp enough.

Quick Highlights

- Ensure that your questions are 'Mutually Exclusive & Collectively Exhaustive'.

- Avoid questions that are compound or ambiguous

- Create positively framed questions that do not use adjectives and are gender agnostic.

"Ask the right questions if you're to find the right answers." - Vanessa Redgrave.

Designing a good questionnaire is one of the crucial steps in a 360 degree feedback exercise. Here are some things to bear in mind while creating a questionnaire for your 360 degree survey.

1. Develop clarity on the purpose of the 360 degree exercise

Do you want to support the participants for their development? If so, invest in developing a competency framework, which describes the behaviours expected from the focus persons. Your questionnaire should collect feedback on those behaviours.

2. Ensure the questions are 'mutually exclusive & collectively exhaustive'

- ✓ "Mutually Exclusive": Avoid overlaps among different questions
- ✓ "Collectively exhaustive": All the questions together should cover the entire range of the required competencies
- ✓ Also, maintain a good balance between the number of questions for each competency.
- ✓ Avoid asking too many questions on some behaviours, and not including any questions for other behaviours within a competency.

3. Keep the Rater profile in mind while framing the questions

Create questionnaires that are easy to understand for your 360 degree raters. For e.g. if your raters' have limited vocabulary, use simple words while framing questions. Also, be open to create the questionnaire in a language that will be easily understood by all raters.

4. Ensure Questions are value-adding

Every single question should serve a purpose. If you find that removing a particular question is not affecting the overall coverage of behaviours and competencies, remove it. Any question that is included in the questionnaire should be value-adding.

5. Ensure questions are focussed on behaviours rather than only outcomes

The questionnaire should focus on behaviours. This will result in feedback which will also naturally point towards 'how to change'. Avoid questions that just collect perceptions about outcomes. For instance, Avoid 'Is popular with clients'. Instead use something like 'Does he resolve customer problems or issues?'

6. Avoid compound questions

A parameter like - 'Provides objective and comprehensive feedback' can be a difficult question to answer as it talks about two different dimensions simultaneously. Break it up into two questions: 'Provides objective feedback', and 'Provides comprehensive feedback'.

7. Avoid ambiguous questions

Ensure that your questions are not ambiguous or vague. Consider the question - 'Has a tendency to procrastinate taking decisions especially in situations involving interpersonal dynamics'. It is likely that different raters may interpret this question in different ways. This may lead to unreliable scores.

8. Avoid long questionnaires

Avoid long questionnaire to avoid rater fatigue. This is especially true if raters have multiple feedback forms to fill.

9. Frame questions positively

Ensure that your questions are phrased positively. E.g. rather than ask 'does she speak harshly', ask 'does she speaks politely'.

10. Use neutral toned Questions

Try to avoid the use of Adjectives while framing questions. Questions without adjectives are amenable to a variety of scales. Also, aim to make the questions Gender agnostic so that the same questionnaire can be used for male & female participants.

Following the above points will help you design an effective questionnaire which will form a critical base to get good quality responses for your 360 project.

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