

RESEARCH | 360 Feedback

# OVERCOMING RATER BIASES



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# Overcoming Rater Biases



The quality & impact of the exercise varies significantly depending on the seriousness and accuracy with which raters respond to the survey.

## Quick Highlights

- Clarify the objective of the 360 degree exercise to all stakeholders
- Invest time in explaining to the raters the detrimental impact of false and distorted responses
- Urge raters to overcome biases by being aware and reflecting upon the well known biases while rating.

Launch of a 360 degree feedback exercise often causes apprehensions. Part of the apprehensions in participants stems from the impact of rater biases on their profile. At times, it also generates anxiety in raters (especially subordinates) connected with sharing honest feedback for their superiors.

This concern can be transparently addressed by training the raters on the following:

1. Explicitly clarifying the objective of the exercise
2. Sensitising audience to their role and responsibility as raters
3. Equipping them to provide a more objective response by increasing their awareness towards rater biases

## Clarifying the Objectives

In order to ensure success of the 360 degree initiative, it is very important for the project sponsors to clarify the objective of the 360 degree exercise – whether it is for the Development OR Evaluation of the focus persons (participants) OR both. In addition, there should be transparent communication regarding who the report will be shared with, and how the findings will be used.

## Sensitising Raters

The quality & impact of the exercise varies significantly depending on the seriousness and accuracy with which raters respond to the survey. So, invest time in explaining to the raters the detrimental impact of false and distorted responses on individuals and the Organisation.

**Damage to Individual:** Mutual back slapping and inflated ratings can create a false sense of satisfaction and dampen the individual's enthusiasm to learn and correct behaviour. On the other hand, harsh and negatively biased comments can hurt and lead to loss of motivation for the participant. Both of these prove damaging in the long run.

**Damage to Organisations:** Casual, careless comments, or false and frivolous comments can cause an organisation to lose an opportunity to wake and learn about its management and leadership capabilities. This can set the organisation back or 'close' an effective means to learn. An opportunity that is once wasted can cause negativity against the initiative for a long time.

It is the responsibility of the raters to:

- ✓ respond with a positive mindset
- ✓ provide considered responses
- ✓ be objective, accurate and truthful while responding.
- ✓ respond as a friend whose purpose is to support development of the focus person.

## Overcoming Biases

Raters should be made familiar about common biases that subconsciously creep in and impact the quality of their feedback. Urge them to overcome these biases by reflecting upon them while giving ratings. Share with them common biases to guard against:



**Halo Effect** | This usually happens when one good quality of a person or one good aspect of their performance gets generalized to all other aspects. Often times, this translates to mean that "This Person can do nothing wrong"

**Horn Effect** | In contrast, Horn effect represents a tendency to generalize one bad quality of a person or one bad aspect of their performance to all other aspects. In short, "This Person can do nothing right".



**Leniency** | It is a tendency to generally view people's performance favourably leading to uniformly high ratings

**Harshness** | In contrast, this is a tendency to generally view people's performance unfavourably leading to uniformly low ratings

**Central tendency** | This is a tendency to give “middle of the road” ratings. This happens when one “plays safe” to avoid justifying low or high ratings.


 Central  
Tendency

**Recency** | This bias is active when recent good or bad performance overshadows earlier contrary evidence. For example the last big order by a sales person leads one to ignore earlier non performance


 First  
Impressions

**First Impressions** | A tendency to be most influenced by initial impressions and to disregard subsequent contrary evidence


 Recency  
Effect

**Stereotyping** | Allowing personal biases and prejudices arising from stereotyped views of groups of people to distort evaluation of actual performance


 Stereo-  
Typing

Raters can also use comments to clarify multiple interpretations sensed for a question. They could also outline how they would like the focus person to behave. Finally, after scoring all questions on a competency, raters could take an overview of their ratings and provide their views on the overall competency profile of the focus person.

## Conclusion

To conclude, urge your raters to:

- ✓ respond to the survey with a base of **goodwill** for the focus person
- ✓ give **true** feedback & **fair** ratings
- ✓ use **comments** to make the feedback easy to understand.
- ✓ avoid the well known **rater biases**.

## Using Comments

One effective way that raters can add value to their response is through comments. Comments improve comprehension and therefore contribute to clarity and acceptance of their feedback by the focus persons.

Raters can write actual incidents - both positive and negative in the comments. Especially those incidents that stand out and have led to the ratings. At times, when raters have difficulty choosing a rating for a particular question, they can write a comment to capture this, and then go back to give the rating

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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### Vernalis

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### TrueSphere 360

TrueSphere 360 is an end-to-end 360 feedback solution by Vernalis. It's not just a 360 software, but also runs the 360 as a developmental program. Value adding services include questionnaire design, rater training, monitoring response quality, personal development dialogues, development plans and more. More details available at [www.truesphere.in](http://www.truesphere.in)