

# THE 360° FEEDBACK DIFFERENTIATOR

A COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS OF  
TRADITIONAL 360° FEEDBACK  
SYSTEMS TO CONTEMPORARY TOOLS

The 360° Feedback process has followed a storied history to its current prominence in the business world. Because of its unique ability to understand and convey the perceptions of those who interact most closely with the individual being evaluated, the 360 tool provides an unsurpassed level of insight as to an individual's job functions and their overall effectiveness. The personal nature of the analysis, though possibly intimidating at face value, allows for the establishment of an actionable plan for continuous improvement. In this brief overview of the 360° Feedback system, we'll discover the origins of the 360 process, its evolution over the course of the last 100 years, the common shortcomings of 360° Feedback, and the current market's answer to these challenges.



**TALEXES**  
TALENT SOLUTIONS

# HISTORY OF THE 360° FEEDBACK PROCESS

Though the development of a formalized 360 tool is fairly recent, its foundations can be traced to basic human psychology. Since leaders have existed they have sought ways to improve their performance by seeking the counsel of trusted advisors. Kings sought the advice of their political counselors, conquerors built strategy on the recommendations of their tactical officers, scientists expanded theories from the progress of fellow members of academia, and on and on over the course of human endeavor. A structured procedure surrounding the process of collecting relevant feedback did not come until the early 1900s, when the American military

process the structure it needed to survive the conflict, and its ensuing success created an appreciation among tactical leadership from all sides, leading to the adoption of the informal multi-rater feedback system for performance evaluation among soldiers.

This newfound respect for the insights gained by interpersonal analysis led to a major breakthrough in the development of the process, when Kurt Lewin began experimenting with a "T-Group", or a small group wherein the goal is to learn as much as you can about each other via simple interaction. This research culminated in



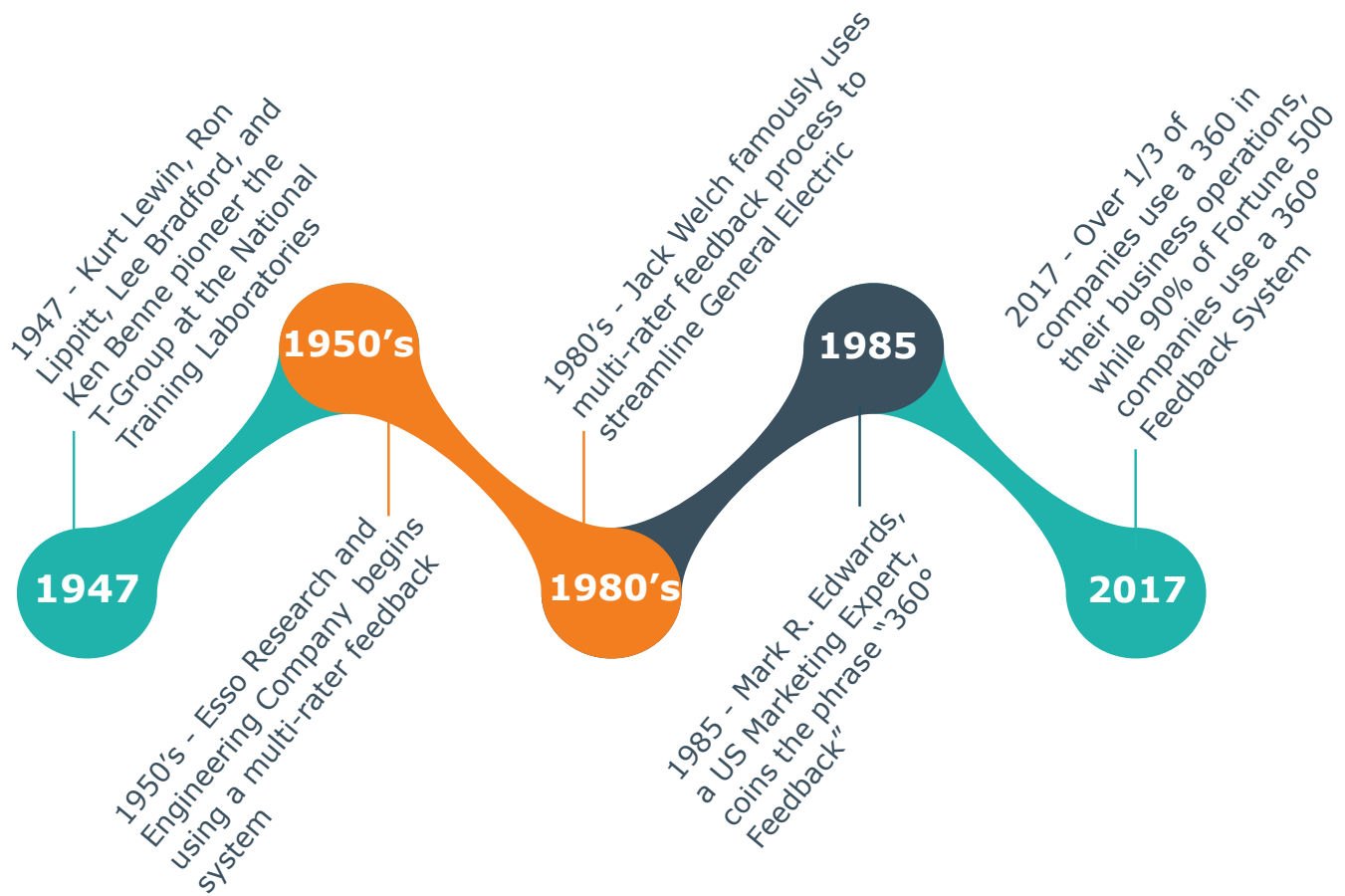
sought to improve their officers by collecting feedback from their peers and superiors. Due to the informality and untested nature of the process, it produced menial results, and was not again used until WWII, when the process was expanded by the Germans to include feedback from those who reported directly to the officer in question. The inclusion of input from direct reports gave the

the formation of the National Training Laboratories (now the NTL Institute) in 1947. Sadly, Lewin would pass on soon after its creation, and progress would be continued by his co-founders Ron Lippitt, Lee Bradford, and Ken Benne. The National Training Laboratories was instrumental in creating standardized, formal systems for improvement of internal employee development processes.

Later, during the 1950s, Esso Research and Engineering Company began using a multi-rater feedback system in its business operations. Its use here introduced many business professionals to the concept of the system, though Esso's restructuring in 1972 slowed its rise in popularity. Esso's application of the system to the business world, in addition to the use of the typewriter (as feedback was previously handwritten), caused the multi-rater feedback system to gain momentum, and more companies began adopting multi-rater feedback for leadership development.

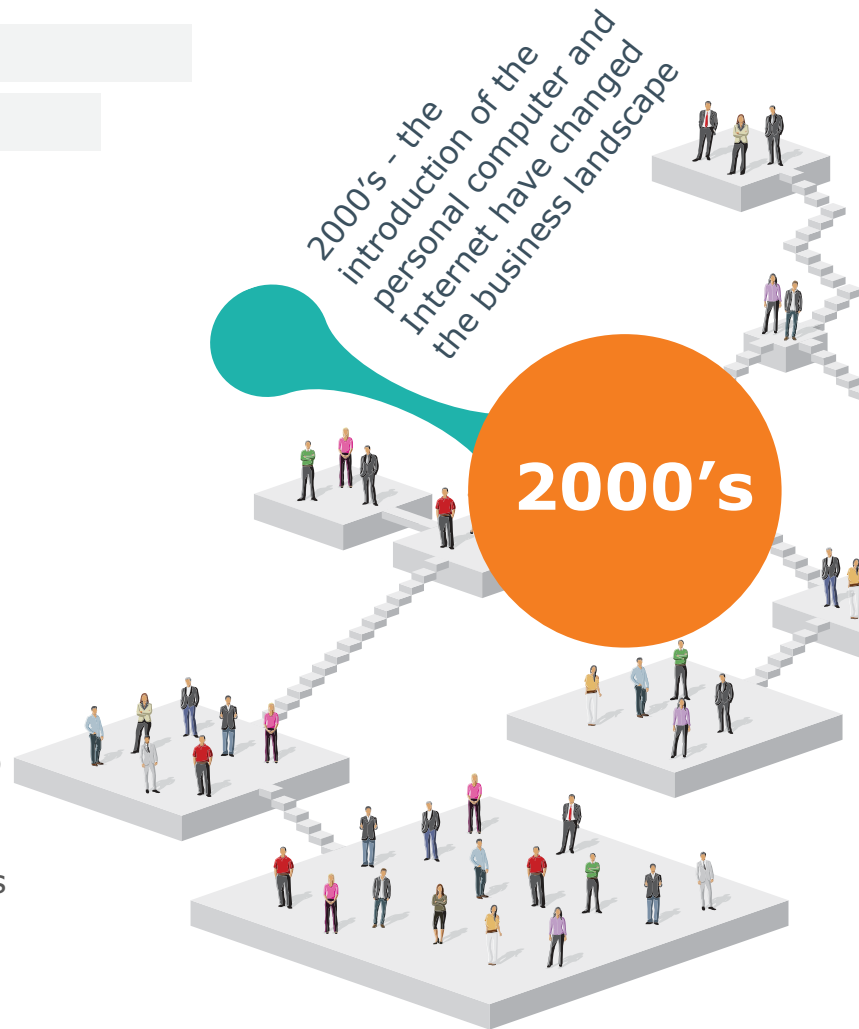
Perhaps the most critical breakthrough came in the 1980's, when Jack Welch famously used the multi-rater feedback system

in addition to other business philosophies to streamline General Electric, raising the company's value by 4000% during his 20-year tenure. In 1985, in an effort to provide structure, consistency and validity to the multi-rater feedback process, Steven Covey established "Steven R. Covey & Associates" (now FranklinCovey). With the help of leading psychologists, Covey helped to develop one of the first modern, structured multi-rater feedback processes with business applications. Because of this progress, Mark R. Edwards – a US Marketing Expert – coined the term "360° Feedback" in reference to the specific type of tool Covey was utilizing.



## PROGRESS SINCE THE 80'S

Since its initial adoption as a formal business practice, the 360° Feedback process has been appropriated and redefined. Fast forward to the early 2000s, when the introduction of the personal computer and Internet drastically changed the business landscape. Now, companies who offer software packages to assist businesses with their HR needs have begun building modules into their existing programs to allow HR Professionals to create their own 360s. These programs allow a user to create a 360 with questions that the client or company selects, evaluate employees, then distribute the results to whomever the administrator of the assessment deems appropriate. These user-created online programs cannot be categorized with the 360 as a standardized tool, and must be labeled according to their purpose as "employee performance appraisal systems". The sudden influx of these online tools created an easily-accessible space in which people who have little or no experience in the development of psychological evaluations were (and still are) able to create their own appropriated version of the 360, leading to a proliferation of inconsistent and ineffective tools in use on the market today. Even the popular survey software SurveyMonkey has an app in which anyone can create their own 360. This is problematic, as the fundamental science that makes a 360 successful



was formulated by psychologists and behavioral professionals who were able to determine significant causal relationships between a leader's behaviors and their effects on coworkers. The ability to create a questionnaire using no relevant psychological expertise has diluted the meaning of the 360° Feedback tool, distracting from its core principles of standardized leadership development. Because of this, many business professionals carry a sour taste in their mouths for 360° Feedback, as it has become to them a means to distribute employee evaluation results rather than a validated method of leadership development.

# CHALLENGES WITH TRADITIONAL 360 TOOLS

The stigma attached to the 360 process can be attributed to several different challenges, rather than one clear issue alone. Here, we'll explore some common shortcomings of traditional methods.



## Paralysis by Analysis

Most 360s measure so many behaviors that users suffer from information overload, and have a difficult time sifting through the sheer quantity of data presented to find the most impactful results. Often, it is recommended that companies choosing to implement the process pay a "360 Coach" to interpret data and make recommendations based on the information, adding to the cost of the process and making implementation more difficult.

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"Most 360s measure so many behaviors that users suffer from information overload."



## Lost in the Woodwork

In most cases, the report for a traditional 360° Feedback tool is lengthy and densely packed with information. The complexity of most 360s in terms of implementation and usability makes their application so difficult that many department heads simply do not perform the secondary follow-up that is intended to reveal the effectiveness of the process. This wastes the effort of the initial collection of data, and leads to a lack of identifiable benchmarks in progress.

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## Thrust into the Limelight

Offering yourself up for dissection by those who interact with you rarely seems like an enjoyable task. In fact, many of the most effective leaders exhibit more anxiety than their less productive counterparts, often because of the prevalence of self-analysis in their daily routine. Often, this leads them to color the results with more negativity than was intended.

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"Many of the most effective leaders exhibit more anxiety than their less productive counterparts."



### Not so Anonymous

Many people who take 360 surveys are promised that their results will remain completely anonymous, and therefore they need not be concerned in providing their most candid, meaningful feedback. Unfortunately in some cases, respondents find themselves answering for their opinions. In others, just the fear of being revealed causes takers to pad their responses.

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"Respondents find themselves answering for their opinions."



### A To-Do List a Mile Long

How many things can you fix at once? It's a question that many 360° tools fail to take into consideration. The majority of 360 assessments make far too many recommendations to be able to identify the most impactful changes in behavior. Leaders find themselves overwhelmed, feeling the pressure of the sheer quantity of required results. It's an unrealistic approach to development that too often negates the value of the accumulated data.

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### TMI

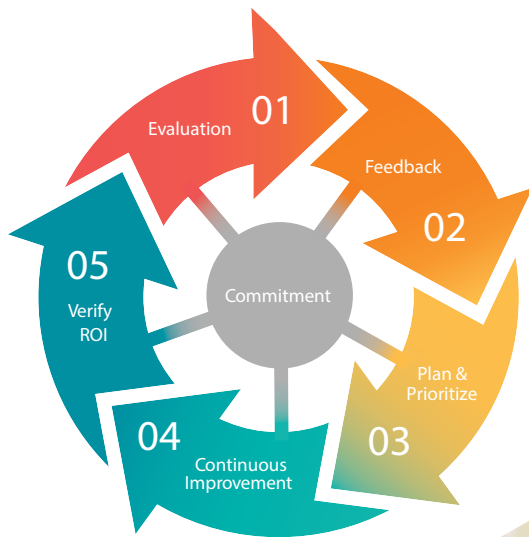
At its core, the most tangible problem with current 360° Feedback processes are that they are simply too complicated. With too much information, a convoluted method of implementation and reporting, an uncomfortable situation for the person being assessed, and a lack of confidence in the anonymity of the responses, traditional 360° Feedback tools leave much to be desired.

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# THE NEW FACE OF THE 360

It is time for a new approach to the 360, one that is friendly to every generation, and which addresses the shortcomings of traditional 360s. In the following sections, we'll target a modern incarnation of the multi-rater feedback system, and explore how it addresses the challenges faced by traditional methods. The development of the Talassure360 was finalized in 2017, and as such provides the most contemporary basis for comparison to traditional methods. In the following sections, we will explore the ways in which the Talassure360 addresses challenges faced by traditional 360 methods.



THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF INFORMATION

CLEAR DIRECTION MOVING FORWARD

USER-FRIENDLY ACROSS DEMOGRAPHICS

NO INTERPRETATION NEEDED

A TOOL FOR EVERYONE





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## THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF INFORMATION

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The Talassure360's report of results – which contains all of the data required to develop an improvement plan – is manage-ably short, compiling the data into easy-to-understand graphs and charts. The results are organized in a way that does not require interpretation, and highlights areas requiring immediate attention. This allows more focus to be placed on the implementation of effective behavioral changes, rather than the determination of which changes to adopt.

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## CLEAR DIRECTION MOVING FORWARD

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The Talassure360 report includes a process for creating an actionable plan of improvement going forward, focusing on the most impactful areas of behavioral modification. The data focuses on those behaviors that would have the greatest impact should they be modified, instead of fragmenting a leader's focus with excessive suggestions. In this way, the Talassure360 is able to bring about true, meaningful change without making the subject feel overwhelmed or incapable.

IT'S TIME  
FOR A  
NEW  
APPROACH  
TO THE  
**360**

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## USER-FRIENDLY ACROSS DEMOGRAPHICS

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The Talassure360's questions are written in a way that can be understood by every sector of the workforce. Although the intent of the process is to aid leadership, lower-level employees will not encounter business jargon while participating. This facilitates communication among superiors, peers, and subordinates. In this way, the Talassure360 broadens the scope of traditional processes, allowing for interdepartmental dialogue and improved cohesion across the organization.



## NO INTERPRETATION NEEDED

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The Talassure360's reporting does not include unexplained acronyms, and eliminates the use of unique terms that apply to it alone. Talassure360 automatically extrapolates the most meaningful data, and presents it in a way that makes acting upon it simple and quick. In this way, leaders within the organization are able to create developmental plans without hiring an expensive outside source for the sole purpose of interpreting

data. Consultants should not have to interpret results, their value should be in implementing the changes driven by the 360. Some of the most influential indicators of a 360° Feedback tool's effectiveness are ease of implementation and consistency of follow-up. Not only does lack of reliance on an interpreter make the initial 360 tool easier to implement, it increases the likelihood that a follow-up will be conducted to verify performance improvement.



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## ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

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Those who use traditional 360° Feedback systems often encounter difficulty when creating an actionable plan of development because of the lack of tangibility surrounding the process. This is in part due to the fact that reading data and applying data are not interchangeable. Additional action is required on the part of a leader than simply skimming the results of their 360. They must take the information presented and apply it to their daily routine, monitoring progress and making adjustments when needed. To facilitate this process, the Talassure360

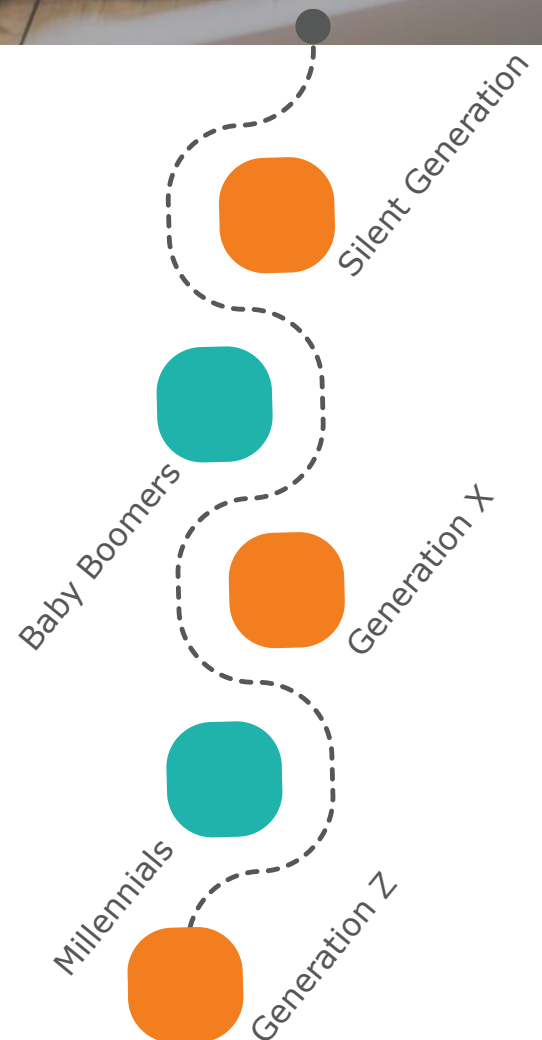
includes a document called the *Guide to Your Personal Development Plan*. This workbook is intended to assist leaders and their superiors in formulating a developmental plan derived from collected feedback. Leaders address every element of creating a personal development plan, including mindset preparation, definition of strengths & weaknesses, and pinpointing of crucial behaviors. Providing a physical framework for improvement allows a leader to take a weightless idea and put into tangible action.

# The Talassure360 was written intentionally to represent the positions of the various generations within the modern workforce

## A TOOL FOR EVERYONE

We do not live in the same world that developed the 360. As such, it is important that modern 360s incorporate the developments between 1985 and 2017. Today, feedback could potentially be collected from members of five distinct generations (Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers, Silent Generation).

So the questions that a 360° Feedback tool asks must be applicable to every generation. Along the same lines, methods of collecting feedback must be compatible with the needs of the various generations. The Talassure360 was written intentionally to represent the positions of the various generations within the modern workforce, and because it was built on a mobile platform that is compatible across devices and operating systems, it allows for any generation to engage in the process at their personal convenience.





## NOW WHAT?

As we've seen, the multi-rater feedback system has outgrown its humble tactical beginnings, and taken on a new life as a powerful tool for business professionals across the globe. Though the initial success of the 360 incited dreams of open lines of professional communication, the over-saturation of "360" software in the 90's and early 2000's slowed its rise in popularity. Up to the present, the standardized 360 tool has been overshadowed by online competency-development questionnaires. Though the actual structure of the 360 tool has seen no significant changes, modern interpretations of the process have revitalized an aging system, and addressed many traditional challenges that have yet to be resolved. With a new take on reporting, and the ability to utilize and engage every sector of the workforce, the 360 ° Feedback tool is poised once again to impact the business sphere. Perhaps with this new technology and new face, the 360 ° Feedback process can finally realize its full potential.

Contact Talexes today to get started with Talassure360!

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