

AVION CONSULTING

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Diagnose Before You Prescribe

Interview-based 360s paired with psychometric assessment identify the actual root issue before anyone jumps to a development plan. An asynchronous survey alone usually cannot.

61%

Of a typical performance rating reflects the rater's own tendencies, not the person being rated

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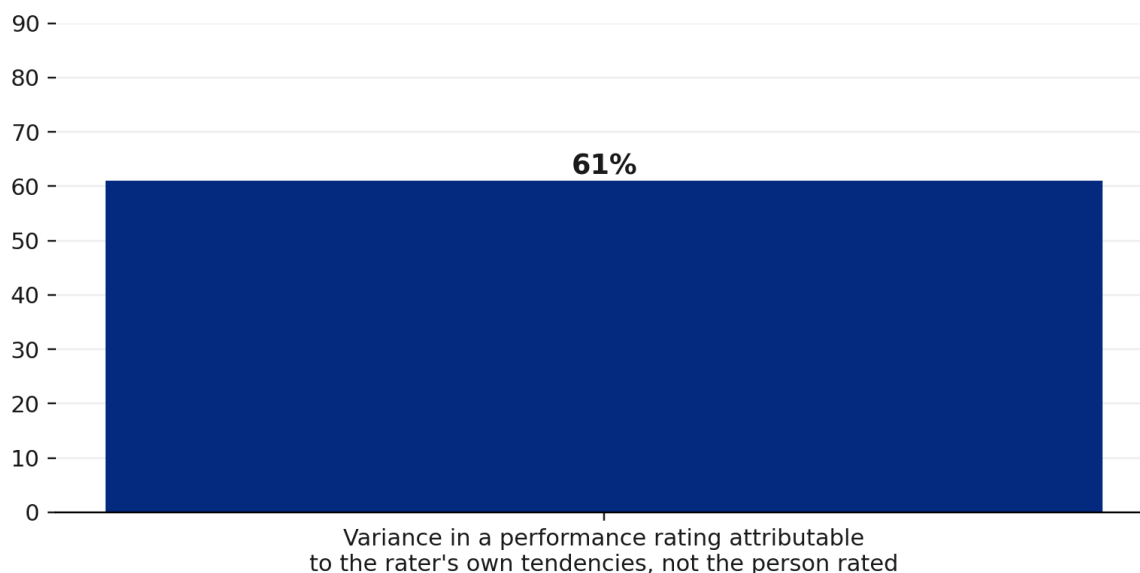
The Instinct to Skip Straight to a Development Plan

The moment feedback data comes back on a leader, the organizational instinct is to move immediately to solution mode: a development plan, a training module, a stretch assignment. That instinct skips a step the data suggests is not optional. Before a solution is credible, someone has to correctly diagnose the root issue, and a growing body of research says the tool most commonly used for that diagnosis, the anonymous online 360 survey, is far noisier than it looks on the summary page.

What the Survey Score Is Actually Measuring

Research on the idiosyncratic rater effect has found that roughly 61 percent of the variance in a typical performance rating reflects the tendencies of the person giving the rating, not the actual performance of the person being rated. Layered on top of that is the halo effect: once a rater forms a general impression of a leader, positive or negative, every item on the survey tends to converge toward that single feeling, regardless of how specific or behaviorally anchored the question was written to be. A manager raters generally like will score well on strategy, communication, and execution alike. A manager they find abrasive will score poorly across the board, independent of actual performance on each dimension.

How Much of a Rating Is About the Rater, Not the Leader

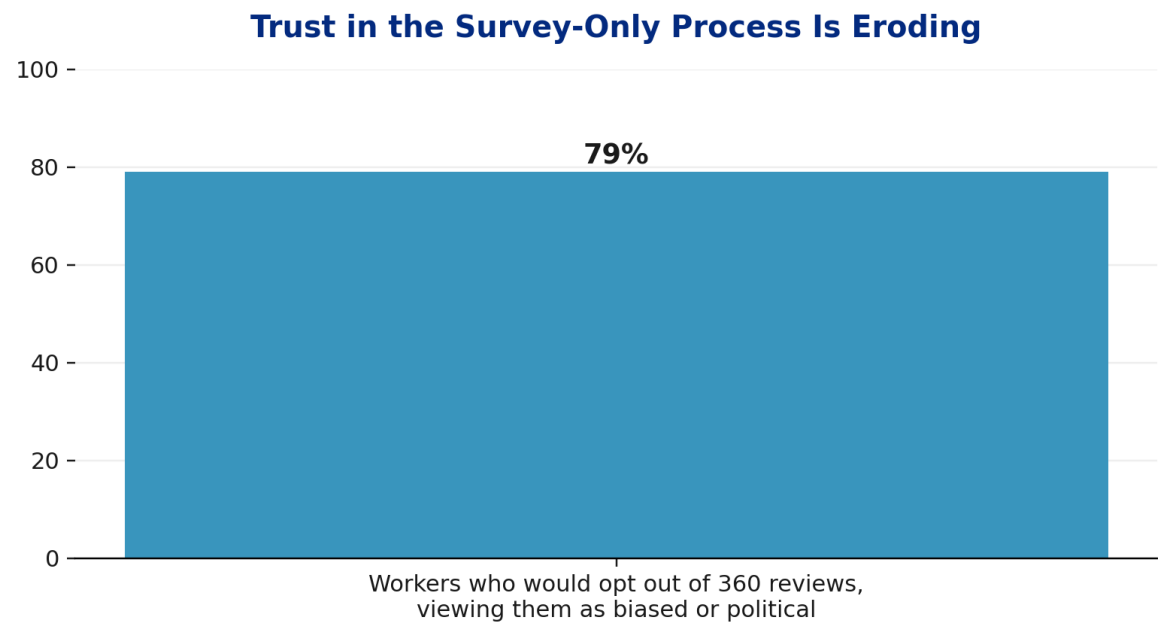


Source: Idiosyncratic rater effect research compilation, 2026

A majority of the signal in a typical multi-rater score is about the rater, not the leader being rated.

The Trust Problem Compounding the Measurement Problem

The measurement noise is compounding with a trust problem. A 2025 workforce poll found 79 percent of workers would opt out of 360 reviews if given the choice, viewing them as biased and political rather than developmental. When raters do not trust how their input will be used, they either inflate scores to avoid consequences or default to vague, safely neutral ratings that give the leader almost nothing specific to work with. Feedback fatigue compounds it further: as surveys proliferate across an organization's talent processes, response quality drops even among raters who started out willing to be candid.



Source: 360-degree feedback workforce poll, 2025
Trust in the survey-only 360 process has eroded to the point of active resistance.

What Interview-Based Assessment Actually Adds

A structured interview conducted by a skilled practitioner does not eliminate rater bias, but it changes what the process can surface. A number on a five-point scale tells you a leader scored low on executive presence. It cannot tell you whether that low score reflects how they run a room under pressure, how they communicate difficult decisions, or something narrower and more specific that a well-run conversation would surface in the first ten minutes. Interview-based feedback allows problems to actually be diagnosed rather than simply flagged, produces meaningfully more context than a numerical rating alone, and gives a skilled practitioner room to probe past a rater's first, most surface-level answer toward what they actually mean.

The Numbers at a Glance

Metric	Figure	Source
Rating variance attributable to the rater, not the ratee	~61%	Idiosyncratic rater effect research compilation, 2026

Metric	Figure	Source
Workers who would opt out of 360 reviews as biased or political	79%	360-degree feedback workforce poll, 2025
Recommended survey length before fatigue degrades response quality	30-40 items	Multi-rater feedback design research, 2026

Where Psychometric Assessment Fits, and Where It Doesn't

Structured psychometric instruments add real, validated signal when used as one input among several, particularly for surfacing patterns a leader and their raters may not consciously see. The caution is specific: self-report personality and behavioral instruments are vulnerable to social desirability bias, and a substantial body of research has found that correcting mathematically for that bias does not meaningfully improve the accuracy of the resulting scores. An asynchronous survey completed alone, without a trained practitioner to contextualize the result against how the person actually behaves under real pressure, risks measuring how a leader wants to be seen rather than how they actually operate. Used as the sole basis for identifying a developmental issue, rather than as one data point triangulated against interview-based feedback and direct observation, it is precisely the kind of clean-looking number that produces a confident, wrong diagnosis.

Two Different Jobs to Do

For the CEO

Before approving a development plan for a senior leader, ask what the diagnosis was actually built on. A plan built entirely on a survey score, however official the platform looks, is not the same thing as a plan built on a properly triangulated diagnosis, and the two will not produce the same result.

For the CHRO

For your most senior and highest-stakes leadership assessments, treat interview-based feedback as the default, not the upgrade you reach for only when budget allows. The extra cost and time is precisely what buys the diagnostic clarity a survey alone cannot provide.

The Discipline Worth Building

The organizations getting the best return on leadership assessment are not the ones running the most surveys. They are the ones treating diagnosis as a distinct, disciplined step that happens before anyone commits to a solution, triangulating interview-based feedback, validated psychometric data, and direct observation rather than defaulting to whichever single instrument is fastest to deploy.

References

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