



The Theory behind the Task Cycle[®] and 360 Feedback

The Task Cycle is a logical sequence of steps essential to directing the performance of tasks. It relates core competencies to operational performance and interpersonal relations. The focus is on the interaction between the person who is in charge of that performance and those who are carrying out the task. This pairing of individuals includes: managers and their direct reports, executives and their subordinate managers, sales representatives and their prospects, and team members and their team mates.

The basic Task Cycle has six phases:

Phases	
I. Communicating goals.	Ensuring that people know what is expected of them and how their work objectives relate to the organization's strategies.
II. Planning and problem solving.	Communicating steps and solving anticipated problems so that the goals can be achieved efficiently.
III. Facilitating the work of others.	Instructing, coaching, providing the time and resources needed to reach goals.
IV. Obtaining and providing feedback.	Monitoring performance and giving feedback to those working on the task.
V. Exercising positive control.	If progress is off-course, setting it right by implementing the competencies outlined in Phases I through IV.
VI. Recognizing contributions.	Acknowledging the efforts of those who have reached the goal or achieved optimum performance.

When Clark Wilson was first working with this approach, he wanted to make it easy for people to remember their feedback. One of the fundamental tenets of learning theory is that it's easier to learn a chain of events than a series of independent events. It uses clustered learning versus independent learning.

The real breakthrough occurred when Wilson discovered through workplace research there was a mathematical basis for the sequence he proposed. In other words, if managers, leaders and executives practice the steps of the Task Cycle in sequence, their effectiveness is significantly enhanced.

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How Clark Wilson Group and the Task Cycle® Surveys Began

In 1973, Clark Wilson, Ph.D., developed the first 360 feedback survey instruments for management development. The first instrument was the Survey of Management Practices™ (SMP) and it has been used and studied since 1973.

The Survey of Management Practices was developed as a teaching tool for Dr. Wilson's management class at the University of Bridgeport (Connecticut) Graduate School of Business. With the SMP, Wilson introduced two important ideas.

- First was the concept of **multilevel feedback**. Managers, he believed, could learn by receiving feedback about their management skills from others. This technique had been used for many years in psychological assessment, but it had not yet been applied to the training of managers.
- Second, Wilson used the concept of **sequence**. Viewed in a logical sequential pattern, he theorized, management skills can be learned like any other skill. Although we are accustomed to this approach today, it was new thinking at the time.

The real breakthrough occurred when Wilson discovered there was a mathematical basis for the learning sequence he designed. In other words, when a manager or executive practiced the key management skills in sequence, the manager's measurable effectiveness is enhanced.

At first, Wilson had his management students complete the SMP on themselves or their supervisors. As more students and their peers and supervisors were exposed to the SMP, it made its way into industry. The DuPont Company was the first corporation to adopt the SMP in 1973. What the company found most effective was that the SMP focused on specific, observable behaviors as opposed to broad evaluative statements. By the mid-1970s more companies, including Dow Chemical, Pitney Bowes and several utilities were using the instrument and contributing data to the norm database. Meanwhile, consultants around the country became interested in using the SMP in their practices as well. With wider use and accumulated data, Dr. Wilson produced updated editions and further developed the Task Cycle® model. Because of their foundation in theory and research, and their initial use in the graduate classroom, Clark Wilson instruments are not only used as assessment instruments, they are also used as teaching tools. Clients requested additional instruments to address other roles in the organization and found the operational logic of the Task Cycle® to be a powerful teaching model for many organizational activities.

Today, the SMP norm base contains more than 2 million surveys. It offers a six-step, sequenced approach to improved management and leadership skills. SMP's success in facilitating skill development led Dr. Wilson to create other surveys. All of them use an approach derived from learning theory that Dr. Wilson called the Task Cycle®.

The Task Cycle family of validated 360 feedback surveys is published by The Clark Wilson Group, Boulder, CO. The Task Cycle® is a registered trademark of the Clark Wilson Group.

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