

RESEARCH QUESTION

“What are best practices in creating a feedback-friendly culture and equipping employees to give and receive feedback effectively?”

INTRODUCTION

During the early and mid-2010s, early adopters (such as Kelly Services, Adobe, Deloitte, and PwC) abandoned annual performance management methodologies in favor of continuous feedback systems.^[1] This was largely done to move away from feedback which punishes employees based on past performance and towards ongoing developmental feedback. Now, approximately 70% of multinational companies are using or moving towards a similar model.^[1] Not only does this signify a huge change in performance management, but it also exemplifies how regular feedback is becoming more and more common in the workplace. It is now critical that managers and employees understand how to give and receive feedback on a daily basis in order to remain effective and content. In this whitepaper, we aim to address this skill need by recommending methodologies and practices for giving and receiving feedback and highlighting key aspects of feedback-friendly organizational cultures.

METHODOLOGIES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR PROVIDING FEEDBACK

Strengths-Based Approach: This feedback model focuses on areas related to employees’ strengths as they relate to job performance, skills, and expertise.^[2] In this model, the supervisor is responsible for providing positive feedback on the areas in which the employee is succeeding via their strengths while simultaneously asking the employee to maintain or improve results or behaviors by more intentionally utilizing said strengths. Studies indicate that when feedback is geared toward employees’ strengths, motivation to grow, develop, and practice these strengths rises significantly.^[2] Moreover, the body of research on this method suggests other highly correlated factors, such as improvements in the desire to improve productivity; actual productivity; feelings of individual well-being and engagement; perceptions of fairness; and job satisfaction.^[2] See Appendix 1 for elaboration of this model.

Feedback Ecosystem: This method offers a simple approach to receiving, interpreting, and integrating feedback in a systematic manner. The first step defines receiving feedback as a developmental opportunity and encourages employees to approach these conversations with a growth mindset.^[3] The second step advocates for a period of reflection—either individually or with team members—to fully process the information and contextualize it within performance outcomes or behaviors. The third step involves designing a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goal action plan in collaboration with a manager or an HR representative that simultaneously offers the employee a roadmap to achieving the desired growth while building trust and accountability within the team. The final step involves the employee committing action towards the plan, requesting support from advisors or colleagues for support and accountability when necessary, and celebrating small successes throughout the process. See Appendix 2 for a graphic of this model.

Future-Focused Feedback: Studies show that mixed or negative feedback often leads employees to feel disillusioned, causing them to question its validity and the credibility of the provider.^[4] Research into prospective thinking found that people generally find it easier to create practical solutions to future problems (as they tend to focus more on aspects under their direct control) than to identify ways they could have avoided them in the past (which they more likely attribute to matters outside their control).^[4] Shifting the focus of feedback towards what employees can do to mitigate the repetition of past problems boosts employees' acceptance of feedback and their intention to change (Appendix 3). In order to do this effectively, researchers offer a template which includes clearly stating the purpose for improving future performance, discussing performance expectations, including targets and milestones, devising strategies to overcome obstacles, and offering feedback throughout the process.^[5]

KEY ELEMENTS OF FEEDBACK-FRIENDLY CULTURES

Learning Continuum System: A learning continuum is a performance feedback system which offers continuous, specific, and action-oriented feedback that builds sequentially over time.^[6] Studies show that when feedback is provided in this manner, employees are: able to understand and see the significance of their progress over time; more accepting of feedback due to its accuracy; and more willing to modify their behavior accordingly.^[6]

Trusting Culture: Research indicates that trust and psychological safety are of paramount importance to employees' willingness to seek constructive feedback; their absence increases the likelihood that an employee will take constructive feedback negatively.^[7] Of the two forms of trust (cognitive and affective) it is highly recommended that managers find ways to build affective trust with colleagues and subordinates, as strengthening these relational bonds will allow for employees to be more honest about their vulnerabilities, ultimately mitigating the chances that their insecurities will hinder learning or performance.^[6] Furthermore, research also shows that when leaders display humility—whether through sharing constructive feedback they have received or by seeking it from colleagues—it enhances feedback-seeking behavior in subordinates and boosts employee perceptions of psychological safety.^[8, 9]

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Moderators for Effective Reception of Feedback: Research illustrates that employees are particularly sensitive to unfavorable feedback, especially that which is not perceived as useful. However, feedback is proven to motivate employees and improve job performance when “the feedback source is perceived to be credible, the feedback is of high quality and the feedback is delivered in a considerate manner.”^[1, 10] Therefore, feedback providers should be cognizant of how different factors—such as their relationship with the recipient, role in the organization, justification for providing feedback, and so on—may impact their intended message. Cultural differences between a provider and their recipient may further impact a message's effectiveness. This phenomenon may be especially noticeable on an international scale but can be identified in all communication scenarios. It is important that feedback providers be aware that cultural differences (such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, positivity versus negativity, etc.) can affect communication. Providers should attempt to customize their behavior to bridge the gap between cultural expectations rather than assert their own.^[1, 10]

APPENDICES

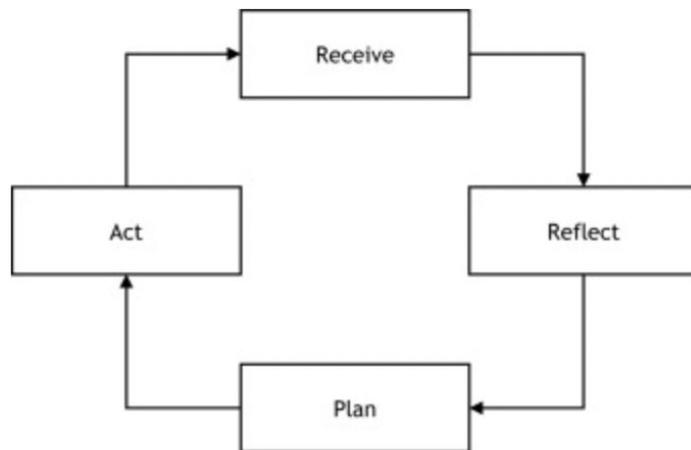
Appendix 1: Recommendations for a feedback development plan.^[2]

Recommendation	Short description
1. Adopt the strengths-based approach as the primary means of providing feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify employees' strengths. • Provide positive feedback on how employees are using their strengths to exhibit desirable behaviors and achieve beneficial results. • Ask employees to maintain or improve their behaviors or results by making continued or more intensive use of their strengths.
2. Closely link any negative feedback to employees' knowledge and skills rather than talents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus weaknesses-based feedback on knowledge and skills (which are more changeable) rather than talents (which are more difficult to acquire).
3. Adopt a strengths-based approach to managing employees' talent weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help employees improve a bit on the desired talents with an understanding that employees are unlikely to substantially improve the talents that they lack. • Create a support system that will serve as a crutch for a talent weakness. • Encourage employees to see how their strongest talents can compensate for their talent weaknesses. • Make it easier for employees to work with partners who possess the talents that they lack. • Re-design jobs for employees who are deficient in certain talents, and give other employees the responsibilities that require talents that certain employees lack.
4. Make sure the person providing feedback is familiar with the employee and the employee's job requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you are familiar with the employee's knowledge, skills, and talents. • Make sure you are familiar with the employee's job requirements and work context.
5. Choose an appropriate setting when giving feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver feedback in a private setting.

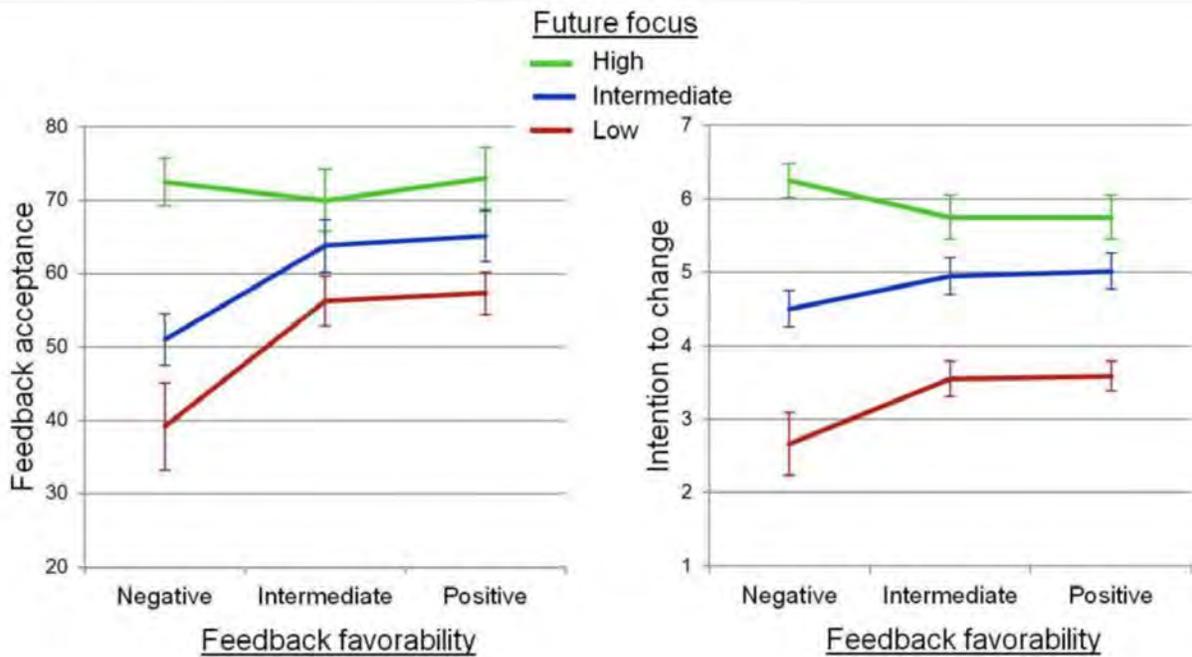
Skyler Hill

6. Deliver the feedback in a considerate manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide at least three pieces of positive feedback for every piece of negative feedback. • Start the feedback session by asking the employee what is working. • Allow employees to participate in the feedback process.
7. Provide feedback that is specific and accurate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid making general statements such as “Good job!” • Evaluate and give feedback closely based on concrete evidence.
8. Tie feedback to important consequences at various levels throughout the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain that the behaviors exhibited and results achieved by the employee have an important impact not only on the employee in terms of rewards or disciplinary measures, but also on the team, unit, or even organization.
9. Follow up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide specific directions by including a development plan and checking up on any progress that is made after a certain period of time.

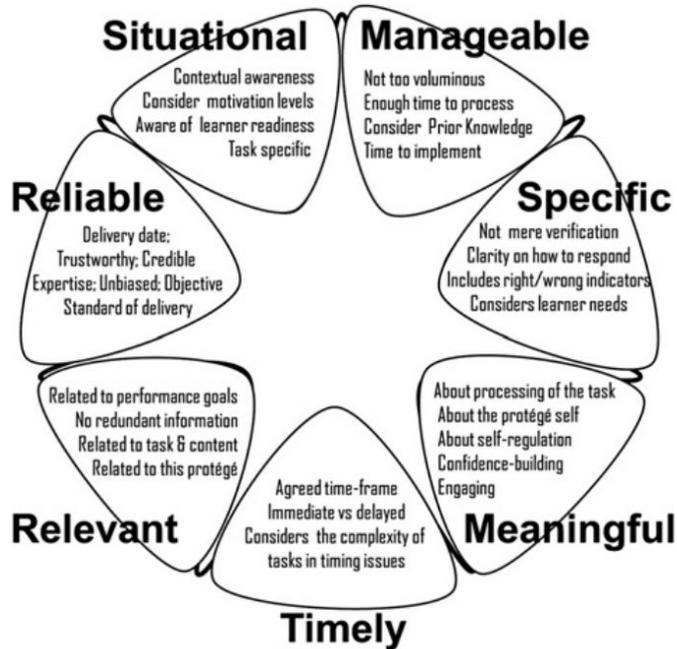
Appendix 2: Feedback ecosystem.^[3]



Appendix 3: Study of recipients' ratings of feedback acceptance and intention to change.^[4]



Appendix 4: Seven principles of highly effective feedback.^[11]



REFERENCES

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FURTHER READINGS

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Videos:

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