

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: This paper focuses on presenting information on the importance of feedback in the organizational communication process, with emphasis on employees' development and improvement. In this paper, we analyzed the concept of feedback and its role. The second chapter illustrates how employees respond to the process of giving and receiving feedback, leading to the topic of chapter 3 - types of feedback. The last chapter is dedicated to analyzing the role of managers as feedback providers.

Keywords: *Feedback, organizational communication, performance, formal feedback, informal feedback*

Classification JEL: E23, E24, E52, G38. M12, M48

Introduction

In this paper I tried to make a brief presentation of the concept of feedback and the importance it has in the communication process at the organizational level.

The objective was to build a starting point in understanding that feedback is an element of organizational communication that plays a special role in the process of employee improvement.

I started from defining the notion of feedback, continued with the analysis of how employees react to feedback in order to subsequently present the types of feedback and their impact. Finally, to have a complete perspective, I also analyzed the role of managers as providers of the process of giving feedback.

The documentation included the review of specialty articles and treaties in the field.

1 The concept of feedback

Communication is the most powerful bond in the case of human relationships. At present, feedback is a permanently used tool, both in personal and professional life being the result of the communication process and the conclusion of the message we transmit, our mirror and the way we relate to the environment.

According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, feedback stands for "the retroaction that is manifested at the level of different systems (biological, technical, etc.) in order to

Maintain their stability and balance against external influences, inverse retroactivity, inverse connection, closed causal chain.”

In the evaluation process, feedback is the information received by employees about their performance. Providing feedback is the “the activity of providing information to employees on performance appraisal of job tasks” (Hillman, Schwandt, & Bartz, 1990, p. 20).

Hence, feedback is also an extremely important part of the learning process. In school, exam scores lead students to see what they have accumulated and what they have to learn to get better results. At work, feedback is used to encourage the right behavior and correct the wrong one. The feedback receiver is the one who values it and chooses whether accepts it and takes action accordingly, rejects it or ignores it.

Feedback has different roles depending on the level at which an employee is. For those at the beginning of their career, feedback is a guide to understanding their role and mission. For middle level employees, it is a way of improving performance and identifying development opportunities, and for senior employees the means of maintaining the productivity.

Managers are an important source of feedback because they set performance targets and offer rewards to reach them. Other sources of feedback are colleagues, subordinate employees and clients.

In the last century, researches on feedback in organizations were oriented towards providing feedback through formal channels - direct messages or rewarding (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). With the approach of the present century, research has focused on how people perceived feedback. Feedback is considered not only should be provided in a proper way, but also to take into account the readiness of the receiver to receive it and to take measures to improve. Thus, emphasis was placed on the activities by which a person directly seeks feedback, proposing a theoretical model called “Feedback-seeking behavior.”

In addition, research on feedback indicates many reasons why it is so important at work. The following effects result from the study of specialty literature in the field - Ilgen, Fisher, and Taylor (1979), Larson (1984), London (1988) and Nadler (1979):

- Feedback directs behavior (keeps goal-directed behavior);
- Feedback influences obtaining future performance, especially by setting new higher goals. Employees know what they can already do and what they could get if they persevere.
- Feedback motivates even if it is not represented immediately by money or other material benefits. People appreciate knowing how their work is seen through the eyes of others.
- Feedback sets performance standards, with employees being able to self-assess.
- Feedback sets the level of power and control that employees feel. The feedback provider understands how important information is to improve performance. The feedback receiver realizes how this information helps take control of his own performance level.

- Feedback increases the sense of engagement in a task. When an employee knows the importance of their contribution, they want to take control over its achievement.

2. Employee perception on receiving and giving feedback

Feedback is a dynamic process between the receiver and the transmitter, and providing feedback has effect on both sides (Larson, 1984). For example, supervisors say that they like the subordinates to whom they give positive feedback and dislike those to whom they have to give negative feedback. In addition, providing feedback increases the sense of control over subordinate employees if they subsequently improve their performance after receiving feedback. Otherwise, the sense of power diminishes.

Employees realize that managers avoid giving negative feedback. Those who think they are performing poorly use feedback-seeking strategies to diminish negative feedback in order not to affect their self-esteem (Larson, 1988). As a result, they do not receive enough feedback, fact that exacerbates the hierarchy relationship, jeopardizing the way that both accomplish tasks (Baron, 1988).

Feedback is constructive when it provides concrete information that can be used. The goal is to help (to maintain, correct or improve behavior at work). It must be offered in such a way that it can be used by the one receiving it - to be clear and easy to understand. Moreover, it must be interpreted in the same way by the transmitter and receiver.

The constructive feedback should not necessarily be positive, although it would be good to start so as to draw the attention and involvement of the person who receives it. A good technique that can be used is that of sandwich feedback. By interposing the negative element between two positive aspects, what can be felt as critical becomes constructive and easier to understand.

Attention must be focused on the behavior of the receiver and consider his ability to understand and accumulate the information. The large amount of information or too complex information can be misunderstood, ignored or forgotten.

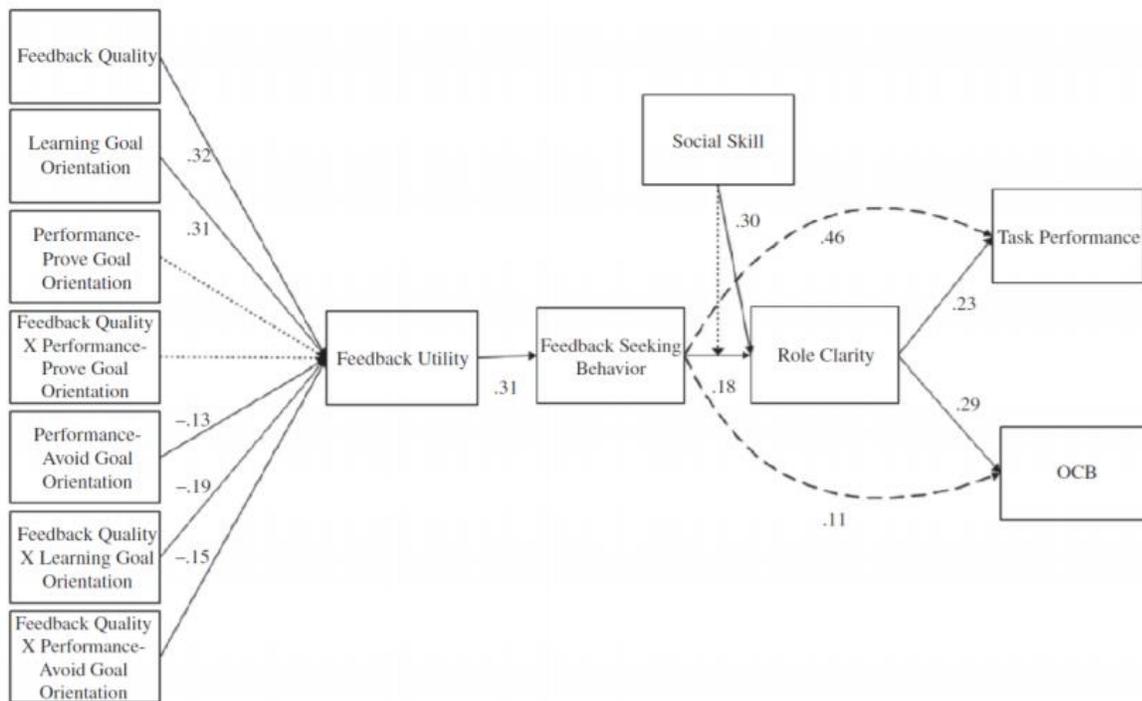
Feedback should refer to those elements whose fulfillment contributes to the correct completion of the tasks and targets directly the receiver. In addition, it must have a credible source because otherwise it will be ignored by employees.

In addition, it needs to be accompanied by explanations for the receiver to understand how it can be applied to improve performance. There may also be support mechanisms to help apply the feedback received (specialized trainings, intermediate tasks, etc.).

It should be noted that avoiding negative feedback to employees who do not perform is not a constructive feedback. Providing neutral messages will lead to an inability to correct misconduct and to a detrimental relationship between leader-employee and employee-colleagues.

A model of constructive feedback is proposed by Whitaker & Levi (2012, p. 160), considering the usefulness of feedback, orientation towards learning and development, feedback-seeking behavior:

Figure no 1- Type of feedback



Source: Own contribution

They can come from a boss, from a subordinate, from a colleague or even from customers and/or suppliers. Sometimes the feedback can come without being asked - the annual performance appraisal system and rewarding. Sometimes we need to ask for it, but most times, employees are afraid or ashamed to do so. Most of the time, when feedback is required there is a further motivation - for example, when someone wants to make a person say something nice about him/her. Otherwise, feedback is not required for fear of not revealing a mistake that has gone unnoticed by others, not to change what the source believes or not to be humiliated in front of others.

3. Types of feedback

3.1 Informal feedback

The informal feedback on workplace performance may come from a superior, a subordinate, a customer or a supplier. Indeed, feedback is about constantly observing how others react when interacting with them. This involves a direct interaction within the work environment.

In the situations of one-to-one interaction, people communicate information about each other. Within this process, they express their needs and expectations (London, 1995a, Chapter 9). Hence, we learn from others when making direct statements (“I do not understand you say”, “You should keep working on this project”, etc.), ask questions (“Why were you so tough with him?”, “Why did not you let them present their opinion?”, etc.) or react (they seem confused, surprised, excited, unsatisfied) (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). This feedback is provided spontaneously in any kind of interaction. Other times, clues are presented to us in a less direct way. For example, we can see how quickly a person returns a call, how often does someone ask for our opinion, how much we are left to wait when we have an appointment.

The danger is how we perceive and interpret this type of feedback. It depends on the perception we have on that relationship, the attention and involvement that we offer, the degree of subjectivity, the expectations we have from the others.

Studies on the benefits of informal feedback at the organization level have shown that in the case of the sales teams it had led to significant performance improvements at both team and individual level (Chakrabarty et al, 2008).

3.2 Formal feedback

Formal feedback is provided after a longer period of observing employee behavior, after a performance appraisal process or workplace surveys.

It may target several types of performance (Johnson, 2001):

- Performances related to the performance of work tasks;
- Performances on the level of adaptation within the company;
- Contextual performance, especially when running projects.

Two extremely important aspects on this kind of feedback are:

- Level of standardization for appraisals. The lower their level of subjectivity, the more the feedback will achieve its goals. They need to focus more on the behavior of employees, on their way of performing the tasks rather than on general views on the personality of the employee. A highly transparent rating system, originally communicated and accepted across the organization, will reduce the level of subjectivity.
- The way the feedback is transmitted. Many times, managers are taking communication courses to understand the issues they need to consider when providing feedback to employees.

3.3 360-degree feedback

Multi-source feedback or 360-degree feedback (grades from supervisors, subordinates, peers of the same rank, internal and external customers, suppliers) is growing as popularity among organizations as a method of employee appraisal and providing information for development. In this way, data is obtained from several people involved in the process and the receiver’s attention is channeled to its role viewed from several perspectives.

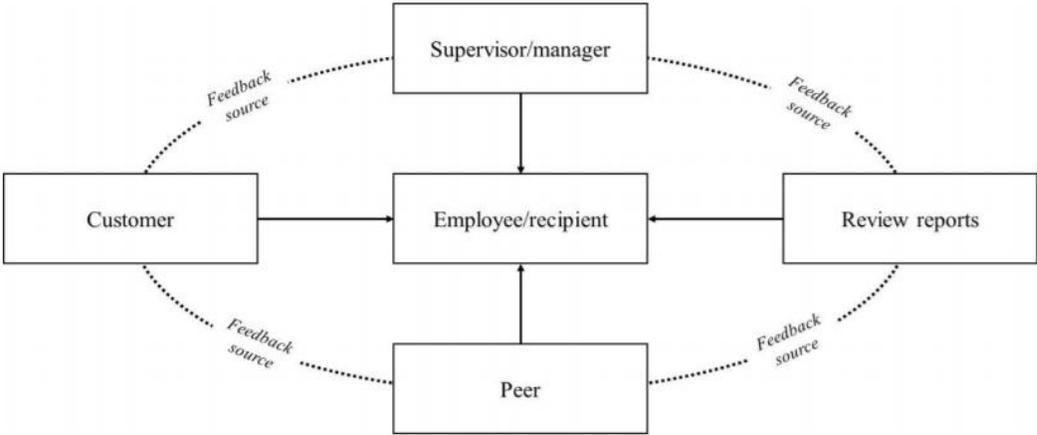
It was introduced as a concept in 1997 by Peter Ward and was designed to capture feedback from unused sources not used until then. It is much more constructive and based on psychological processes that model, integrate and enhance the role of feedback in the process of development and improvement of employees.

It is subordinated to formal feedback and modern studies have shown that this feedback time regains its reputation every day. The influence of globalization and the use of the term “stakeholder” draws attention to the diversity of feedback sources.

The area of subordinates that provides feedback to managers was less analyzed in the performance management literature prior to introducing the 360-degree feedback model. This has been considered taboo, traditionally considering that employees are the ones who learn from managers and not vice versa.

The bottom-up feedback was subsequently introduced by Bauer & Mulder (2006), identifying the benefits of this type of feedback in terms of empowering employees at work. It aims at increasing motivation and satisfaction.

Figure no 2- Benefits of feedback



Source: Own contribution

4. The Role of Managers as Feedback Providers

Appraisals are not valuable unless they are communicated and interpreted. Managers have an essential role in communicating feedback and facilitating its use. Most of the time, however, employees are not sure of why they receive feedback or what the manager aims with that feedback (Fedor, Buckley & Eder, 1990).

When a manager gives feedback to an employee about his performance, he may be confused about his purpose or goal, and may not know how to respond or become aware of what is at stake (salary or job stability). He may not be prepared to change behavior, so managers need to understand the stages of change and be able to support them throughout the process.

It is also extremely important to establish clear objectives through which feedback justifies change. He can have cognitive benefits to show a person what is wrong in his behavior and to demonstrate corrective ways. Therefore, a good manager must also be a good coach.

Silverman (1991) offers a specially tailored guide for managers:

- Avoid generalizing your feedback. Words like “always” or “never” make people become nervous or defensive. It’s much easier for them to say “It’s not true. Not always ...”
- Focus on major responsibilities and performance standards. People want to know what is expected of them and not to be compared with others.
- Help your employees identify the causes of poor performance. Self-appraisal leads to avoiding defensive attitude, understanding the exact need for change.
- Give feedback frequently. Performance feedback should not be provided only once a year, but permanently.
- Talk about behaviors and results not about a person for feedback not to be understood that personal.
- Specify what to do. It is not enough just to tell the employees what is wrong. They need support in choosing a direction.
- Use both positive and negative feedback.
- Train instead of criticize.

Therefore, managers play a key role in the process of providing feedback. Even if appraisal centers or multiple-source feedback provide important data, supervisors are the source of the performance feedback. Their appreciation is usually followed by an objective performance analysis, representing the opportunity for a bureaucratic process to become an opportunity for employee training and development. Managers can learn to become good behavioral observers and guide employees to changing behavior and improving performance.

They must not forget that an objective is the link between the place where a person is and the one he wants to reach. Permanent feedback is the one helping employees to work around the entire process of change, being clear indicators on the way they have to follow. Goals must be set together with the employees, not many in number, be clear and followed by an action plan.

Conclusions

Feedback is an essential tool in the communication process within an organization, especially in the context in which employees' development and improvement is desired.

The 360-degree feedback is starting to occupy the most important place in recent years as it offers employees the ability to receive information from multiple sources, lowering the level of subjectivity, and building a more complex view of performance achieved within the company.

Managers play a vital role in the process of providing feedback, and it is important to learn both how to observe employees and how to communicate with them to guide them towards changing behavior and achieving better results.

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