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## What are Some New and Innovative Ways Companies are Encouraging, Delivering, and Utilizing Feedback?

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## What are Some New and Innovative Ways Companies are Encouraging, Delivering, and Utilizing Feedback?

### Abstract

[Excerpt] The role of feedback in the employee experience is well entrenched. However, until relatively recently, its role in not only evaluating performance, but in shaping and improving it, has been largely misunderstood and misapplied. This includes not only giving meaningful feedback to employees, but receiving it as well. A recent survey conducted by Deloitte reports that 79% of companies survey employees annually or less. While conventional practices lead companies to meet the needs of shareholders above other stakeholders, turning attention to employee needs such as providing adequate feedback systems can enable companies and employees to better take care of customers, who in turn take care of shareholders in a reversal of the stakeholder arrangement.

### Keywords

Human Resources, HR, innovative, innovation, feedback, employee experience, conventional practices, 360 degree, continuous feedback, goals, performance reviews, workplace collaboration, teamwork, coaching, culture, voluntary turnover, performance appraisals, rewards

### Comments

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# November 2017 Executive Summary

Kyle Schamberger & Daniel Manjarrez

## Research Question

What are some new and innovative ways companies are encouraging, delivering, and utilizing feedback?

## Introduction

The role of feedback in the employee experience is well entrenched. However, until relatively recently, its role in not only evaluating performance, but in shaping and improving it, has been largely misunderstood and misapplied. This includes not only giving meaningful feedback to employees, but receiving it as well. A recent survey conducted by Deloitte reports that 79% of companies survey employees annually or less.<sup>1</sup> While conventional practices lead companies to meet the needs of shareholders above other stakeholders, turning attention to employee needs such as providing adequate feedback systems can enable companies and employees to better take care of customers, who in turn take care of shareholders in a reversal of the stakeholder arrangement.

## Innovations in Feedback

Many businesses have begun redefining what represents 'feedback' in the workplace, as well as the timing, the way it is delivered, and how it is used to impact company goals and performance.

**360-Degree Feedback:** 360-Degree Feedback focuses on expanding the feedback experience beyond the traditional 'manager to employee' relationship to incorporate feedback from a multisource approach that includes peers, adjacent managers, subordinates (if relevant), and self-evaluation. 360-degree feedback has seen increased usage lately, particularly in an increasingly global and internet-linked workforce. A goal of the system is to uncover overall patterns and trends with which to provide constructive, comprehensive feedback to an employee in a way that is less overwhelming.<sup>2</sup> While previously targeted towards only top leadership, organizations are shifting towards broader application, particularly as feedback-oriented millennials make up a larger portion of the labor force.<sup>3</sup>

**Continuous Feedback:** Companies that practice continuous feedback take the position that conversations between leaders and their employees need to happen more than once or twice a year, with the goal of normalizing feedback.<sup>4</sup> While conversations between employees and managers can and do happen informally, providing a structure and vehicle for feedback ensures that there is proper alignment between employee and company goals cross-functionally. Identified as a way to replace traditional performance appraisals, 'real-time' feedback supported by software can give better insights for project and goal progress, eliminate personal bias in the feedback process, and save time for managers and employees alike when compared to annual performance reviews.<sup>5</sup>

## Application of Feedback

The effective application of feedback yields positive results within a company, particularly between managers and employees. Feedback gives managers and employees frequent opportunities to assess and adapt their efforts, allowing for greater efficiency and teamwork. Specifically, continuous feedback establishes a foundation of communication and dialogue between managers and their employees; this is especially important to have in place for when major projects or workplace challenges arise.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the practice of giving feedback builds relationships and contributes to the strengthening of workplace collaboration.

While feedback can be applied for evaluating employees, emphasis should be on coaching them on how to improve their current performance to reach a desired state. The Association for Talent Development explains that for feedback to be effective, it must be directed towards a specific goal and be able to answer where the employee is going in terms of performance, how the employee is getting there, and where the employee needs to move next<sup>7</sup> (see Appendix A). Furthermore, managers must be willing to help employees set goals while avoiding impossible expectations.<sup>8</sup> Coaching and providing ongoing help in closing the gap between employees' current and desired states must be present for feedback to be effective.

One overlooked group who also requires feedback is those who give feedback. A company's feedback culture must thrive, and Triad Consulting explains that "the fastest way to do [this] is for visible leaders in [an] organization to work to become better receivers".<sup>9</sup> Research performed by Zenger Folkman shows that leaders who ask for feedback are ranked as highly effective in their positions. Additional studies further demonstrate that "feedback-seeking behavior" is connected to higher job satisfaction, greater creativity, and lower turnover. As these various findings reveal, the application of feedback serves to ultimately enhance the development of both employees and leaders, enabling them to perform at a higher level on both individual and team-based settings.

### Case Studies

**Adobe**—As a part of a transition away from traditional performance appraisals, Adobe installed a system called 'Check In', incorporating elements of continuous feedback to foster real-time discussions between managers and subordinates.<sup>10</sup> To facilitate this shift, line managers are heavily trained in the system, reducing the role of HR in the employee-manager relationship and empowering business groups to own the process. Since installing 'Check In', Adobe's voluntary turnover fell by 30%.<sup>11</sup>

**Microsoft**—In 2013, Microsoft disbanded its 'rank-and-yank' performance management system, replacing it with 'Connects', a real-time feedback system that introduced a focus on how employees engaged with peers around them.<sup>12</sup> This served to separate feedback conversations from rewards, leading to more open conversation and iterative reflection.<sup>13</sup> With a more flexible cadence for discussion, managers were able to provide more meaningful conversations than was possible during performance reviews.

### Recommendations

**Train your line:** An effective feedback system requires preparing company leaders to own and carry the process. A recent poll found 37% of managers are uncomfortable giving feedback, while 69% report being uncomfortable communicating with employees in general.<sup>14</sup>

**Make the feedback experience a process, not an event:** As a company looks to make feedback a more frequent and living process, it must shift the perception around feedback and emphasize that it is a practice meant to help individuals develop, not to evaluate performance.

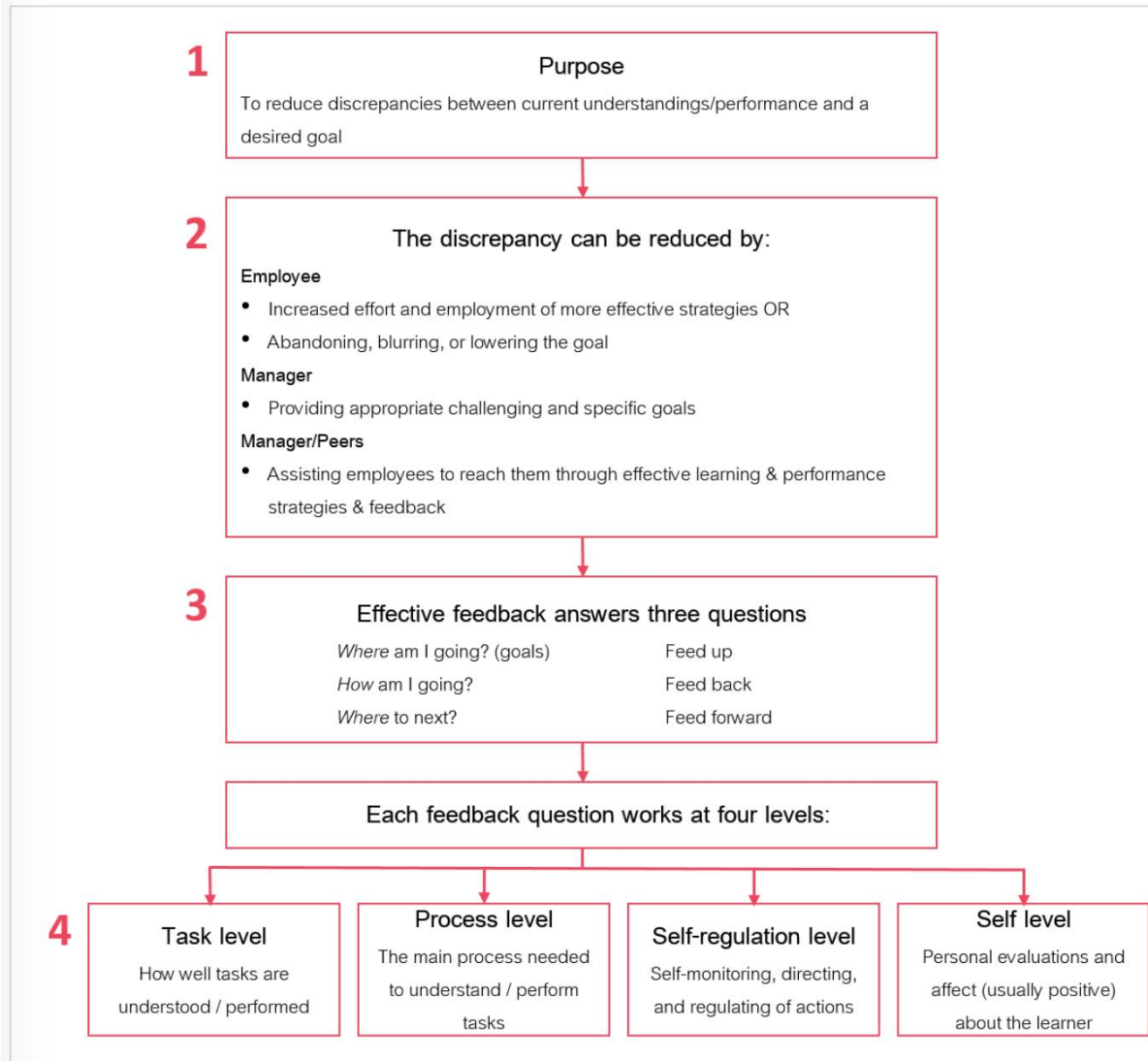
**Invest in a holistic feedback culture:** Evolving feedback culture will require serious investment from various groups. Regardless of budget flexibility, the company must be prepared to take the time to assess, design, and rollout this new phase of change, involving HR, IT, and the appropriate business leads in the process.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A



### Association for Talent Development, Feedback Model