



***Straight from the Horse's Mouth:
Strategies for Increasing Feedback
Acceptance***

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Straight from the Horse's Mouth

Purposes of Current Research

- Examine the assessor/coach's point of view.
- Provide additional evidence to factors that influence.
- Identify proven strategies and best practices to influence feedback acceptance and use.
- Identify strategies for “turning participants around.”

Participants

- Fifteen professionals active in developmental assessment center feedback and coaching
- Average age = 50.85 years (SD = 8.3)
- 14 White; 1 African-American
- 10 male; 5 female
- 12 with Masters or higher; 7 with Doctorate
- 10 currently self-employed
- Average coaching experience of 12.04 years (SD = 7.9)
- Average assessment center experience of 16.46 years (SD = 8.2)

Procedure

- Structured phone interview
- Combined both qualitative and quantitative aspects
 - **Qualitative:** 5 open-ended questions
 - **Quantitative:** Numerical ratings on the importance of several factors for the acceptance and use of feedback.
- Participants were directed to answer questions based on their DAC experiences
- All interviews were transcribed

Open Ended Questions

- What factors have the greatest influence on whether or not users accept the feedback you provide to them?
- For those users with whom you have had an extended coaching relationship, what factors influence whether or not users actually use the feedback you provide to them?
- What strategies, techniques, or behaviors have you employed that have been effective in getting recipients to accept and use developmental feedback?
- What strategies, techniques, or behaviors have you done that, in retrospect, influenced users to become defensive or reject the feedback?
- What strategies, techniques, or behaviors have worked best for you in helping a user to overcome his or her initial defensiveness or rejection of performance feedback?

Analysis

Qualitative:

1. Authors grouped and retranslated comments into themes, labeled and defined themes.
2. Discussion to resolve disagreements.

Quantitative:

1. Calculate average and standard deviations for each factor.

Factors Related to Acceptance of Feedback

- Trust and Rapport Between Assessor and Recipient
- Recipient's Openness to Feedback and Development
- Consistency with Previous Feedback
- Credibility of the Assessor
- Behavioral, Non-judgmental Feedback
- Recipient's Motivation to Change
- Recipient Confidence
- Valence of Feedback
- Mandatory vs. Voluntary Involvement
- Follow-up Structure and Planning
- Pre-Assessment Communication and Planning
- Open Discussion

Factors Related to Use of Feedback

- Organizational Support for Making Changes
- Personality
- Change has to Have Benefit
- Realistic, Concrete Action Plans
- Recipient's Taking Ownership and Responsibility
- Follow-up Monitoring and Support

Top 5 Rated Factors Impacting Acceptance of Feedback

- Credibility/Expertise of Assessor (4.30)
- Usefulness of Feedback for Career Development (4.27)
- Recipient's Personality (4.23)
- Job Relatedness of Exercise (4.17)
- Supervisory Support (4.07)

Top 5 Rated Factors Impacting Use of Feedback

- Acceptance of Feedback (4.54)
- Usefulness of Feedback for Career Development (4.38)
- Extent that Feedback is Integrated with other HR Systems (4.21)
- Supervisory Support (4.15)
- Recipient's Personality (4.15)

Lowest 5 Rated Factors Impacting Acceptance of Feedback

- Recipient Age (1.73)
- Recipient Education Level (1.73)
- Recipient Job Level (1.93)
- Favorability of the Feedback (2.47)
- Enjoyment in the AC (2.86)

Lowest 5 Rated Factors Impacting Use of Feedback

- Recipient Education Level (1.92)
- Recipient Job Level (2.15)
- Favorability of the Feedback (2.31)
- Voluntary vs. Mandatory Participation (2.33)
- Feedback Based on Exercises (2.33)

What Can Organizations Do to Increase Feedback Acceptance and Use?

- Schedule time for assessor-recipient rapport building
- Provide recipient with purpose, information, and planning prior to attending DAC
- Provide information on assessors' experience and expertise in order to build credibility
- Provide training to assessors
- Provide a mechanism(s) for follow-up support and monitoring (e.g., external coaching)
- Build and demonstrate organizational support (e.g., rewards for skill improvement)

What Can Organizations Do to Increase Feedback Acceptance and Use?

- Provide supervisor support (e.g., allow employees to attend training, to make mistakes, and provide coaching)
- Build recipient's ownership and accountability for development and improvement
- Make the assessment exercises job-related
- Integrate the developmental assessment program and feedback to other HR systems
- Provide opportunities for face-to-face feedback

What Can Assessors Do to Increase Feedback Acceptance and Use?

- **Foster an Open Discussion and Shared Dialogue** (e.g., involve the participant, ask questions, invite their insights)
- **Provide Practical Help, Teaching, and Follow-up Support** (e.g., developmental ideas, encourage participant, role play, outline what others have done, help create a strategy/plan for improvement)
- **Establish Trust and Identify Needs and Interests** (e.g., what matters to them, what are their goals, demonstrate interest, acknowledge their perspective)
- **Give Recipient Ownership and Accountability for Change** (e.g., allow participant to choose developmental area, to drive the discussion, require participant to document progress)
- **Demonstrate Concern, Interest, and Empathy** (e.g., let participant know you are there to help him or her)

What Can Assessors Do to Increase Feedback Acceptance and Use?

- **Link Feedback and Coaching to Outcomes** (e.g., tie feedback to a payoff, align feedback with participant's interests and goals, articulate benefits, outline potential drawbacks to continued behavior)
- **Provide Specific, Behavioral Feedback** (e.g., avoid inferences, don't make absolute statements)
- **Set Clear Expectations Upfront** (e.g., purpose of AC, process of AC, standards for ratings and participation)
- **Establish Credibility** (e.g., highlight examples from experience, use stories, accuracy of feedback)
- **Discuss Themes** (e.g., executive overview, outline patterns)
- **Create Realistic, Actionable Development Plans** (e.g., plans that require too much don't get acted upon)

What Should Assessors Avoid Doing?

- **Being Judgmental and Making Assumptions Without Testing Them** (e.g., not presenting reasons as possibilities, not asking participant to interpret a behavior, presenting conclusions as absolute, putting a “value” on a person’s feedback)
- **Being Inattentive to a Participant’s Needs, Motives, or Perspective** (e.g., not understanding what is important to him or her, not seeing world or feedback from their perspective, not attending to the feelings of the participant)
- **Trying Too Hard to Convince** (e.g., overplaying expertise, “selling” more than collaborating, indicating “I am right and you are wrong”)
- **Being Too Direct and Confrontational** (e.g., argumentative, couching feedback in a negative light)
- **Being Too Telling and Prescriptive** (e.g., telling person “you need to” rather than using a questioning approach to involve him or her)

What Should Assessors Do When a Participant Becomes Defensive?

- **Problem-solve** (e.g., confront defensiveness, ask questions, try to get them to open up about why being defensive, ask for their understanding of the feedback, ask what matters to them)
- **Listen More Closely** (e.g., understand their perspective, pay attention to nonverbal behaviors to see where defensive)
- **Reframe the Feedback** (e.g., appeal to the person's interests and goals, outline how feedback affects them in other areas, reiterate measurement standards and non-relative ratings, explain how feedback and process fits into big picture of organization)
- **Ensure Subsequent Data is Accurate** (e.g., be even less assuming or conclusive with feedback)
- **Remain Empathetic and Non-Judgmental** (e.g., accept their perspective and point of view, empathize with their concerns)

What Should Assessors Do When a Participant Becomes Defensive?

- **Make “What if” Suggestions** (e.g., suggest they try out a new behavior “just to see”, “what is worse that can happen?”)
- **Communicate That Everyone Has Areas to Improve** (e.g., let them know they are not alone in needing improvement)
- **Move on** (e.g., if not making headway after multiple redirects, then move on to another point)
- **Discuss Context** (e.g., outline have only seen small sample of behavior, AC prediction is not perfect)
- **Reiterative Confidentiality** (e.g., let them know no one else will hear the feedback)

Conclusions

- No one “right” way to deliver feedback and coach.
- Much the organization and assessor can do to improve the acceptance and use of feedback.
- Skills required for assessment vs. feedback delivery may differ.
- Beyond the numbers, facts, and data, being a “psychologist” is critical.
- Consider factors’ interactive influence on acceptance and use.
- View the process of acceptance and use as dynamic.

Limitations of Study

- Small sample size
- Convenience sample
- Prior knowledge of literature may bias responses
- Response framework bias