

# Feedback and Organizations: Feedback is Good, Feedback-Friendly Culture is Better

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Scholars have noted that an incomplete understanding of various important aspects of feedback still remains prominent (Whitaker & Levy, 2012). The value of organisational feedback culture on feedback outcomes is a recognised gap in the literature. The present article begins with a brief conceptualisation and definition of individual feedback and highlights the element of meaning as a principle intricate to all feedback techniques. The article then builds a case for the added benefits of creating a feedback-friendly culture in order to gain more insight and enhance the meaningfulness of feedback. Three recommendations are offered to support such a culture including the promotion of the learning continuum, the fostering of a trusting climate, and the endorsement of authentic dialogue. Finally, the implications and future research directions are discussed.

*Keywords:* feedback, feedback-friendly culture, psychological safety and trust

In a recent article that has toured the Web globally, Sullivan (2013) describes how Google is using an algorithm-based approach in decision making, incipiently referred to as “people analytics,” in order to make room for innovation and growth within the firm. Google’s strategic shift toward a people focus has contributed to enhancing the company as a whole. When considering the latest progress of the company based on the evidence shown by the stock market (Giles, 2013), its decision to make this shift paid off. The underlying principle of this novel human resource management strategy is simple: Every important decision that has an impact on future outcomes of the organisation are made by people—it is in the firm’s best interest then, to make sure that the management practices of those people are at their finest (Bryant, 2011; Sullivan, 2013). As the research on this company’s own internal data has recognised countless times, the number one key characteristic of great leaders as identified by employees is their ability to give frequent, transparent feedback. Proactive feedback practices were unexpectedly rated by associates as more important and influential than leadership experience and technical knowledge (Sullivan, 2013).

Individual feedback has generated a fare amount of research and has been developing over several decades (Ashford, Blatt, & Vandewall, 2003). Only recently have researchers and leaders

began to think about feedback from a large-scale perspective (Dahling & O’Malley, 2011). The present article provides a brief section on individual feedback and subsequently introduces recent empirical evidence neighbouring the impact of a feedback-friendly culture on organisations. The article then offers guidelines to work toward building and nurturing a feedback-friendly organisational culture based on sound research and experience stemming from more than 20 years of practice in various organisations worldwide. Finally, the article will close with future directions and reflections for researchers and practitioners.

## Feedback

Individual feedback has long been utilized as a tool for facilitating improvement and advancement within organisations and businesses (Levy & Williams, 2004). Feedback is defined as a dynamic communication process occurring between two individuals that convey information regarding the receiver’s performance in the accomplishment of work-related tasks. For most, feedback is used to provide information on proximal goals and immediate and recent behaviours. It is also utilized to inform members of desirable development and outcomes (Baker, 2010; London, 2003). Evidence shows that a company that makes effective use of feedback practices have a greater competitive advantage especially in today’s fierce economic climate (Baker, 2010; Chatman & Cha, 2003). Indeed, feedback is an essential element in organisations because it binds organisational goals with continuity and fluidity, boosts creativity, propels trust, and drives motivation in individuals (Mulder, 2013). More generally, it aligns performance with the overall objectives and missions of the organisation (Sharma & Marandure, 2011). Ideally, both formal and informal feedback practices are needed at all levels of the organisation (Rummler & Brache, 2012). A formal feedback channel example could be a

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bimonthly employee evaluation, whereas an informal feedback exemplar may simply translate in a supervisor who opens communication by asking employees in the middle of a training session whether they have understood the explanations thus far (Mulder, 2013). Such feedback practices enrich learning in organisations and broaden understanding and goal alignment among employees.

Despite the fact that the benefits of well-designed feedback approaches are widespread, in reality, feedback in day-to-day organisational life is for the most part negative or delivered using a nonconstructive approach thereby making the majority of it nonproductive. McCoy (2010) points out that managers and leaders overlook the good work of employees and disregard the act of acknowledging smaller accomplishments that are in line with greater long-term objectives. When communicated, feedback frequently focuses on how one is not performing to standards and how one did not reach the goal that was set (Selden & Sowa, 2011). Kluger and DeNisi (1996) concluded via their meta-analysis that more than a third of the studies reported that feedback is detrimental to performance. Some counterproductive outcomes that have surfaced when feedback leads to unanticipated results are negative receiver perceptions of the feedback process, lack of understanding by the receiver, increases in the level of stress, competition, and perception of threat, as well as subjective or biased measurements, poor reliability, and one-sided conversation (DeGregorio & Fisher, 1988; Gravina & Siers, 2011; Mulder, 2013).

Feedback is too frequently perceived as just another assignment to be done and for many, this task generates anxiety. The recipient's reactions to the feedback or the choice of words to use to deliver feedback are some of the concerns repeatedly worrying feedback providers. Such concerns and cognitions surrounding the use of feedback may indeed lead to procrastination and possibly avoidance. If competence is not optimal and the stakes of delivering feedback are high, a manager or leader may end up moving feedback delivery lower on the list of priorities because it may be perceived as negligible. Essentially, providing quality feedback requires quality time which most managers' tend to lack. Unfortunately, deciding to sidestep feedback entails missed opportunities to benefit from potentially useful feedback and enable one to connect and engage in positive exchange with followers. This is not to say that feedback is necessarily low or absent in most organisations. On the contrary, approaches and techniques are well-known in organisations and have been shown to be effective.

The three leading techniques of formal feedback used in organisations are the more or less traditional scheduled mentor/novice assessment (Rai & Singh, 2013), the 360 degree feedback system (Brett & Atwater, 2001; Sharma & Marandure, 2011), and the ongoing coaching method (Baker, 2010; Gregory & Levy, 2012; for a full review, see Baker, 2010). In addition, feedback occurs at an informal level (van der Rijt, Van den Bossche, & Segers, 2013), hence, emphasising the importance of thinking about feedback not only within the formal paradigm. Informal feedback is valuable because it can be provided in a timely fashion during day-to-day interactions and contingent upon the evolution of the situation (Farr, 1993; van der Rijt et al., 2013). For instance, a suggestion made by a manager to guide an employee through a problem or a challenge while the task is being performed is certainly a constructive informal feedback practice. These diverse techniques are

regularly used in organisations and have been associated with some degree of success.

Nevertheless, the focal theme or key component intricate to all of the various techniques, whether formal or informal, is the degree of meaning accompanying feedback. To increase feedback effectiveness, meaning has to be central to the message. Organisational psychologists increase meaning through a variety of ways. Meaning can be amplified by relating the feedback to the task and to the individual, thus delivering the message as it relates to proximal and distal goals (i.e., moderate and long-term goals) at the individual and organisational level. Thus, meaning can be deepened by focusing the content of feedback on more personal aspects of the employee. More specifically, some tasks may require an employee to actually step out of their comfort zone. Providing feedback and support for these specific "out of comfort zone" tasks will bestow meaning through self-development and reinforcement. In light of future tasks, feedback will provide profound implications for the employees' work in general. As well, meaning can be emphasised by creating bridges between the task and team effort, thus a positive team dynamic may prove to be quite useful for broadening the significance and meaning of work-tasks. In a similar vein, but moving to a more encompassing level, augmenting meaning may be accomplished by supporting an organisational culture that celebrates and values free-flowing communication channels. More and more innovative and unconventional pioneering companies are being creative in their methods of supporting feedback-friendly cultures. To illustrate, American Airlines CEO gathered a rather large number of employees in the parking lot to burn the books and binders describing work policies and guidelines (Covey, Link, & Merrill, 2012). The message the CEO sought to put forward was simply employees first. Manifesting a culture where people, feedback, and communication take precedence is yet another way to develop and enhance meaningful feedback.

Taking feedback to a more macro level is an ambitious goal, but one that leaders and organisations should consider endorsing. That is, creating and sustaining a feedback-friendly culture ensures that meaning transpires through the communication of feedback. The present article will focus on deriving meaningful feedback at the organisational level by means of a feedback-friendly culture. The benefits associated with such an orientation are beginning to surge. The next section will delve into this alternative perspective on feedback and explore the implications for such a culture.

### **Taking Feedback to a New Level: The Benefits of Feedback-Friendly Culture**

Monitoring and evaluating human performance is a fundamental aspect of ensuring a successful organisation (Baker, 2010). Simultaneously, scholars have noted that an incomplete understanding of many aspects of feedback, such as the influence of the feedback context and organisational culture, still remains prominent (Whitaker & Levy, 2012).

Edgar Schein (2010) has studied organisational culture extensively and has developed a formal definition for culture:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught

to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 18).

The culture provides an organisation with a shared set of values, rules and regulations for how to behave and it creates an identity for its members that is dynamic and can be customized (MacIntosh & Doherty, 2005; Mamatoglu, 2008; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). An organisational culture encompasses the tangible and unobservable elements of an organisation including but not limited to the dress, rituals, language, behaviours, and beliefs about employment and knowledge in the workplace (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013).

The notion of a feedback-friendly culture is relatively recent and it advocates proactive feedback in the organisation as well as shapes a safe feedback-sharing environment (London & Smither, 2002; Morin, Jawahar & Boyer, 2011). The emerging breadth of literature on feedback-friendly culture suggests that environmental elements influence the connotation of feedback as well as its impact on a corporation (Dahling & O'Malley, 2011). The culture of an organisation prescribes the kinds of feedback techniques exercised and influence how employees perceive feedback (London, 2003). London and Smither (2002) proposed the concept of feedback-oriented or as contemporary organisational psychologists call it, feedback-friendly culture. This concept refers to the organisational practices and interventions that emphasise the importance of feedback in the organisation while providing support for using feedback and taking a stand on the quality of feedback.

According to current research, the outcomes of a feedback-friendly culture are already promising and substantial. Increasingly more evidence indicates that a feedback-friendly culture can create growth opportunities in various organisations (Baker, 2010; Mulder, 2013). Evidence for better receptivity to feedback, increased feedback seeking behaviour, and motivation to actively use feedback and modify performance behaviour has also been noted (de Stobbeleir, Ashford, & Buyens, 2011; van der Rijt, Van de Wiel, Van den Bossche, Segers, & Gijsselaers, 2012). Experienced consultant in performance management, Manuel London (2003) explains that establishing a supportive feedback environment within an organisation helps produce behaviour changes which drive the organisation to be much more efficient. A feedback-friendly culture then, explicitly integrates both formal and informal feedback processes and environmental factors which in turn increases the meaning and acceptability of feedback and its usefulness among employees (Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006).

In their work, Dahling and O'Malley (2011) noted that organisations choose which feedback technique(s) to utilize for the best possible outcome, yet many organisations neglect the notion that a feedback-friendly culture is necessary for the technique to be most efficacious (see also Chatman & Cha, 2003; Jacobs et al., 2013 for more research on feedback-friendly culture). Management also characterizes one source of feedback among many but leaders should take into account the added value of traditional and non-traditional feedback together and from other levels such as sources like peers, the organisational system, and the task itself (Northcraft, Schmidt, & Ashford, 2011). Overall, feedback-friendly environments bring supplementary significance and adaptability to organisational life. Feedback-friendly culture research provides further evidence for role clarity, job satisfaction, and career motivation (Dahling & O'Malley, 2011; Whitaker &

Levy, 2012; Whitaker, Dahling, & Levy, 2007) as well as increased commitment and decreased absenteeism (Jawahar, 2010; Rosen et al., 2006). These outcomes surface through a culture that believes and celebrates the significance of feedback and the dynamics involved in giving and receiving feedback (Dahling & O'Malley, 2011).

To date, there has yet to be a sound theory on organisational feedback-friendly culture. Denison and Mishra (1995) attempted to build a trait theory on the general notion of organisational culture and proposed that cultures require four traits in order to drive effectiveness and advancement across the workplace. The traits include involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission (Denison & Mishra, 1995). Essentially the two former traits consist of developing openness and elasticity in the workplace whereas the latter two traits encompass the objectives, values, and vision within the workplace. Together, if these traits are visible and coherent throughout the organisation, development and prosperity is expected to ensue (Denison & Mishra, 1995). As it turns out, developing an organisational feedback culture through these means may work for some organisations, but not for all. It has been suggested that these traits were particularly strong predictors of success for larger corporations only (Denison & Mishra, 1995, p. 219). Theory development on organisational culture and feedback has yet to transpire. Nonetheless, current research proposes that organisations should aim to unfold a feedback-friendly culture to improve work-related outcomes and succeed in the market (e.g., Dahling & O'Malley, 2011; Jawahar, 2010; London, 2003; van der Rijt et al., 2012).

The next section introduces three principal elements. These elements are deemed important to develop a feedback-friendly culture. The first element that will contribute to building such a culture is known as the learning continuum. The second element of absolute importance is trust and psychological safety. Both the learning continuum and a trusting work environment must exist prior to implementing the third element as they are prerequisites for free-flowing communication channels and authentic dialogue. Accordingly, the third and final element required to shape a feedback-friendly culture is dialogue (i.e., discourse between all levels of the organisation). Each element will be considered in the following section to further elucidate their importance in the development of a feedback-friendly culture.

## **Implementing a Feedback-Friendly Culture: The Key Elements**

### **Promoting the Learning Continuum**

Systems that embrace a feedback culture are typically open to learning new knowledge (Kuchinke, 2000). According to Kauffman (2000) feedback and learning leads to achievements and generally success for a corporation. Research on feedback and organisational culture reveals that facilitative (i.e., continuous feedback) and directive (i.e., appraisals) feedback may boost learning among associates, but only feedback that is presented along a learning continuum within a feedback-friendly culture is truly valuable for the organisation (Archer, 2010). A learning continuum is a structure for providing supportive or facilitative feedback. Feedback is best when embedded in a sequential process to help

employees truly understand the meaning and significance of their progress over time (Archer, 2010). In other words, the provision of feedback and the influence of feedback on the receiver are most efficient when it is offered in a structured, timely manner and builds off of the preceding series of feedback. Feedback must also be interpreted as active information in order to become a pedagogic activity and this is most attainable when it is provided sensibly, specifically, and when it is rooted in a greater organisational goal. The notion of creating a culture which embraces active feedback provided over continuous learning stages is the most effective way to advance companies as this would create an environment where employees desire and strive for learning opportunities.

Interestingly, van der Rijt, Van de Wiel, Van den Bossche, Segers, and Gijssels (2012) demonstrated that the perceived learning environment influences employees' perceptions and attitudes around work-related problems. Given that employees learn to accept that mistakes are made, inevitably, and errors prompt learning, dealing with problems in the workplace seems less troublesome. A learning environment not only encourages providing meaningful and reliable feedback but it also encourages and shapes positive attitudes among employees. As well, the context in which transfer of learning occurs (i.e., turning feedback into action) primarily takes place in a feedback and learning oriented environment (Tayfur, 2012). To exemplify, Bindal, Wall, and Goodyear (2011) explained that when feedback was provided to a trainee physician long after the assessment period, feedback was received less well and could not be acted upon as there were no connections made between the message and the trainee's knowledge. Trainee physicians also reported that the feedback was not an accurate representation of their performance likely because it was not timely nor presented in a supportive learning environment (Bindal et al., 2011). Creating a learning continuum system would ensure that feedback is delivered on time which would allow employees to reflect as well as actively make changes to their behaviours right from the get-go. Consequently, staff would be more accepting of the feedback because it would be presented more accurately and perceived as helpful and meaningful advice for behaviour modification (Rummler & Brache, 2012).

In general, organisational leaders should aim to cultivate a learning environment in order to implement a feedback-friendly culture. Feedback will not only be perceived as supportive suggestions, it will also be delivered in a timely manner that would guarantee the transfer of learning. Three guidelines to follow to develop learning include promoting learning on a daily basis (i.e., through communication), encouraging and coordinating team work (such as creating opportunities for group work in order to target those who learn best in teams), and giving employees optimal challenges. Learning occurs especially when individuals face novel situations and receive new information. Tasks that are too easy become habits that no longer involve thinking or much effort by the performer. Leaders should therefore create environments that allow employees to experience some challenges in order to keep them focused and involved. These three guidelines will support the development of a functional learning system in an organisation and in turn, this system will, with time, translate into a feedback-friendly culture.

## Fostering a Trusting Climate

The second element that will reinforce and inspire a feedback-friendly culture is trust and psychological safety. Psychological safety consists of an employee's sense of being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career (Kahn, 1990). Trust is a psychological state that individuals feel and experience to accept vulnerability without dread of negative consequences. Trust may shine through when positive expectations and the intentions or behaviour of another are explicit rather than ambiguous (Crossley, Cooper, & Wernsing, 2013; Li & Tan, 2013). According to Marsick and Watkins (2003) specific dimensions of organisational culture, including continuous learning processes and inquiry and dialogue, require a trusting relationship between each of the organisations levels (i.e., organisational, environmental and individual) in order to be efficient. Certainly communication across any domain within an organisation requires trust in order to be understood and received well by each end (Avolio & Reichard, 2008).

A "trust-based" model (Nyhan, 2000, p. 102) was formerly set forth and stated that feedback is most useful in a trusting work environment. The model suggests that the culture of an organisation should be generally nonthreatening and supportive. Grenier, Chiochio, and Beaulieu (2012) also emphasised that an organisational-level feedback strategy which targets employees and organisational development should encompass mutual exchanges and a trusting environment. To further test the relationship between a trusting work environment and feedback, Peterson and Behfarb (2003) studied longitudinally the dynamic relationships of members across different groups. The findings revealed that negative feedback led to task and relational conflict. However, the results also suggested that member's who evolved in a safe and trusting group responded better to the negative feedback which inhibited any form of conflict from evolving. Essentially, employees who perceived trust in the workplace acknowledged that negative feedback still holds value and meaning rather than unconstructive implications.

Furthermore, trust can be divided in terms of affective and cognitive trust (Zhu, Newman, Miao, & Hooke, 2013). The former focuses on emotional and relational ties and the latter represents the characteristics of the truster and trustee such as competence and reliability. Zhu, Newman, Miao, and Hooke (2013) investigated whether trust would impact the relation between transformational leadership and performance. The findings reveal that only affective trust mediates the relationship between leadership and performance. These results stress the importance of affective trust as it involves the deeper emotional state of the employee. Affective trust allows individuals to be honest about their vulnerabilities and reduces concerns and insecurities which, in their presence may hinder learning and consequently reduce performance. The emotionally arousing nature of trust leads to mutual exchange and rapport which eventually translate into positive work outcomes for the organisation (Zhu et al., 2013).

In the same line of thought, van de Rijt et al. (2012) investigated the effects of an organisational feedback-friendly culture on employee feedback seeking. The authors hypothesised that a psychologically safe environment would encourage higher levels of feedback seeking and therefore higher levels of feedback in general. More recently Li and Tan (2013) explored the mediating role of

psychological safety between trust in supervisors and performance. The results were conclusive and also support the idea that individuals are more inclined to ask for help and take risks when they feel psychologically safe and have trust in their workplace and supervisor (Li & Tan, 2013). The implications advocate that trust and a psychologically safe environment are components required to build and maintain a feedback-friendly culture and one that respects and appreciates meaningful feedback (Nyhan, 2000).

Organisation leaders should aim to foster a trusting environment in order to implement a feedback-friendly culture. A safe environment is related to the reception of feedback as it will ensure that negative feedback is not transformed into relational conflict and it will ensure that levels of feedback seeking activity increases among employees. Trust also enhances the meaningfulness of feedback because it promotes openness and encourages employees to receive feedback mindfully. To build a trusting and safe environment, employees and leaders at all levels need to communicate reciprocally and find a common ground. Moreover, Rosen, Levy, and Hall (2006) demonstrated that high levels of informal feedback between supervisor and coworkers also builds trust and removes ambiguities. Therefore, focusing on the characteristics of informal feedback such as timeliness, specificity, and sensible communication efforts between both the feedback provider and receiver will emanate trusting relationships.

### **Positioning the Lens on Dialogue: Leading the Way to a Feedback-Friendly Culture**

Once some thought has been put into creating the learning continuum and some special attention has been devoted to making sure psychological safety is in place, further efforts can be geared toward building dialogue, hence leading the way to a feedback-friendly culture. Here, leaders and managers are invited to gradually move away from feedback and consider directing their thinking and their philosophy toward the notion of dialogue. Dialogue is desirable because it encompasses free-flowing communication channels and is conducive to feedback-friendly cultures. Dialogue is threat-free and is engaged out of genuine interest from both parties. When demystifying dialogue, the organisation as a whole will be targeted, but the initiation, the sustaining and much of the success will be determined by the extent of endorsement provided by the leader and management team. Three main points will be emphasised in order to uncover dialogue. They are (a) to reckon dialogue as a strategic goal, (b) to embody and model this new goal at the management level, and (c) to empower followers or employees to subsequently embody this important new goal.

To begin, dialogue implies that channels for communication are open, feedback flows in all directions, and that this exchange of information is embraced throughout the organisation (Schein, 1993). It is relevant to note that most management and subordinates are not comfortable with sharing feedback in a multidimensional fashion (i.e., upward feedback, downward feedback, and feedback between colleagues; Kudisch, Fortunato, & Smith, 2006). The lack of comfort is most likely symptomatic of a lack of clear expectations across the workplace, a lack of learning continuum, and a lack of psychological safety thus signaling a poor feedback-friendly culture. In essence, the expectations and the beliefs put forth by the leaders affect the culture of the organisation (i.e., their expectations and beliefs around feedback) (Heathfield,

2013). As such, the expectations and perceptions need to be synchronized to assure that dialogue transpires' across the organisation.

The first recommendation is to reckon dialogue as a strategic goal. It is imperative that senior leaders view dialogue as a strategic action and promote it as much as other strategic goals such as growth, profitability, and quality. These key players are called upon to initiate the movement which will then snowball to middle managers and first level managers. These three levels of management have to undertake this new goal through inspiration and practice of true dialogue amongst themselves and with their immediate followers in everyday organisational life. In leading by example and in expecting it, employees will sense and accept that dialogue is part of the performance expectations of the organisation and eventually adopt similar actions, hence manifesting a cascading effect. Top leaders must articulate and emphasise action plans at all levels of management to ensure dialogue becomes a cultural standard as is similarly seen with other work-related strategic goals. In fact, high performing organisations include dialogue objectives in their Performance Management Process which assesses the success of these objectives with evaluative tools like key performance indicators (KPI's; for more details see Marr, 2012).

Still emphasising the integration of dialogue as a strategic goal, human resource (HR) leaders must ensure that business and HR processes are aligned with the dialogue initiatives that are being implemented by higher management. Suggested business and HR processes that will leverage the use of feedback include the strategic alignment process, the performance management process, and rigorous training and development at all levels of management. HR should also consider dialogue as a basic competency during the assessment phase of candidacy for a leadership position as part of the selection and hiring process. In light of the HR implications, management and leaders play a crucial role in the deployment of these business and HR processes, either at a strategic level or at the implementation level, in order to effectively support dialogue.

The premise that continues to emerge in the discussion of dialogue is the idea that the top leader of an organisation plays a fundamental role in the development of genuine discourse. At the top of the list, the leading member must accept and substantiate dialogue by transforming it into an objective that will be considered as relevant as all other business objectives. The leaders are then advised to lead by example and communicate the expectations to other members of the management team. More specifically, a leader should be consciously aware of how often they inquire about their followers' opinions on their own leadership or management style. One must ask for feedback in order to demonstrate the expectations regarding the frequency of feedback, what constitutes suitable reactions, and when to respond or take action. Therefore, when inquiring and being open to feedback from followers, the leader is in a perfect position to influence their employees to do the same via such role modeling. The leader may begin by receiving the feedback in a constructive way (Ruscher, Wallace, Walker, & Bell, 2010). They may then require reformulation of the words used or reinterpret the feedback in order to successfully receive the meaning of the feedback and in turn, convert the feedback into concrete actions. Basically, when a leader prompts a follower for feedback, they must control their

humility level to genuinely “take” the feedback, again serving as a model (Collins, 2002; Collins, 2005). It is not always easy for an individual in a leadership role to solicit feedback, agree to be challenged, and accept criticism. Some education, coaching, and a certain degree of wisdom may be required in order to accept this vulnerable position and transform it in a constructive action (Sheldon, Dunning, & Ames, 2013).

Particularly, efforts to reduce formality and careful word selection may also incite communication and the sharing of information. Engaging in dialogue in a formal setting is not ideal, rather, an informal (i.e., through the door frame) exchange is recommended as it is a more neutral setting. Sharing feedback in an informal setting prevents potential biases and helps reduce discomfort for either the feedback provider or receiver. Something as simple as the feedback location can affect the tone of the message. In addition, feedback providers should remain cognizant about the choice of words during dialogue exchanges. Author Peter Sims (as cited by Tugend, 2013) maintained that using words such as “and” or “what if,” promote positive ambiance compared with using the word “but” during feedback exchange. Although many leaders consider the adjectives and verbs to be influential, conjunction words that connect phrases and ideas are also pertinent language cues to consider when conveying a feedback impression (Ruscher, Wallace, Walker, & Bell, 2010).

In addition to the role and responsibilities of higher management, a third recommendation focuses on employee empowerment. Employees contribute immensely to the development of dialogue and feedback-friendly cultures. They too have to endorse the feedback culture and take a participative role in promoting and honouring these novel culture goals. It is important to bear in mind that higher management owns the responsibility of authorizing and tolerating empowerment but employees are also expected to show courage and step up to progress in their new role (Chaleff, 2009). In essence, mobilizing followership action will empower many players in an organisation and participation on their part will guarantee success. In fact, if a leader empowers the members at all levels of the organisation, the team may feel quite willing to be open and share their opinions and ideas. This form of upward feedback is not only favoured in organisations but is essential to support change in the workplace, improve creativity, exploit all resources, and aid individuals in leadership positions to adapt to internal and external environments (Reid, 2013). Emphasising dialogue then, motivates employees to take initiative and seek feedback because such an orientation diminishes vertical relations and simultaneously promotes horizontal relations (i.e., promotes communication between all levels).

Interestingly, research from feedback seeking behaviour theory reveals that individuals’ personal image within the organisation affects their decision to seek feedback (Northcraft & Ashford, 1990). By thoughtfully acknowledging an employee’s contribution to the organisation, this may actually increase the sense of belonging and engagement, thus feeding into the employee’s personal image and leading to more feedback seeking behaviours. What is more, feedback seeking has been found to occur most frequently among employees who believe that this behaviour is the norm across the organisation (Morrison, 2002). A key point is that the culture of a workplace establishes the norms in regards to feedback and it reinforces desired behaviours (Chatman & Cha, 2003; Reid, 2013). Accordingly, employee empowerment, aspects of the re-

ceiver, provisions of feedback, and stigma around feedback are all volatile and sensitive components to take into account when focusing on dialogue and building a feedback-friendly culture.

Similar to all meticulously designed interventions, a communication and feedback system should be installed to allow for some monitoring and evaluation of the strategies in place. The use of quick surveys or open-ended questions to capture the change, obstacles, and efficacy of the implementation methods are recommended. Such monitoring practices are useful and advantageously, this system will also reinforce the central message of open dialogue. In conclusion, organisations with boundless channels of communication show increased levels of meaningful feedback. With the commitment and involvement of all leaders and followers as well as the implementation of each of the business and HR processes alluded to earlier, an organisation will develop and reinforce a key performance driver, the feedback-friendly culture (Collins, 2002; Reid, 2013).

## Discussion

The feedback literature is slowly branching out and increasing its scope. By focusing on the meaning of feedback, research is moving from a simple task-related feedback practice to a dialogue and systematic approach; hence, the feedback-friendly culture (e.g., Dahling & O’Malley, 2011; London, 2003; van der Rijt et al., 2012). Mulder and Ellinger (2013) noted that most academics and practitioners tend to investigate and conceptualise feedback as a single entity. The same authors also stated that feedback should truly be studied in terms of an all-encompassing system that is a complex, multifaceted by-product of the organisations culture. Based on the review provided, evidence supports the notion that a company can create and maintain higher performing individuals if they focus on meaning and practice a feedback-friendly culture. In turn, this will create a multitude of positive outcomes such as improved performance across the organisation (e.g., Sharma & Marandure, 2011; Rummeler & Brache, 2012). Establishing a feedback-friendly culture in the workplace helps facilitate behaviour change which will consequently permit the organisation’s system to provide space for innovation and growth (Baker, 2010; Mulder, 2013). As has been demonstrated in the tabloid press, Google’s focus on people would lead to greater opportunities for the company to excel—and so their management jumped on the opportunity and the team is now only striving as a conglomerate.

To succeed in the current economic climate, leaders and managers must take the first step in adopting the system. Leaders should acutely consider the importance of delivering meaningful feedback at the organisational level. Augmenting meaning may be accomplished by supporting an organisational culture that values free-flowing communication channels between all members. The present article hopefully triggers and reinforces management and leaders to reflect on ways to implement a feedback-friendly culture. To reiterate, three necessary elements are required to build this sort of culture. First, a leader must emphasise the added value of working toward a learning organisation. Second, one must establish a psychologically safe and trustworthy workplace. Third, beginning with the top leaders, dialogue must be the norm and communication must be flexible across all levels of the organisation. The three elements collectively help a leader start envisioning

feedback in terms of an organisational dialogue system which in turn instigates a feedback-friendly culture.

### Challenges and Future Directions

Various potential challenges have been identified that should be taken into consideration when aiming to develop a feedback-friendly culture. Indeed, research demonstrates that even organisational transformations led with the best intentions are not sheltered from setbacks and failures in their learning practice applications (Grol, 2001). This section will focus on two points, notably, the research limitations and future directions with a concentration on virtual organisations.

Organisations are becoming an increasingly virtually existent phenomenon. That being said, feedback, dialogue, and culture take a different spin. Leaders must think in terms of online feedback, online dialogue, and virtual culture. Geister, Konradt, and Hertel (2006) found that online feedback use indeed increased motivation and satisfaction among members. Interestingly, the researchers also noted that trust was a key element which mediated the effects of feedback on performance. Researchers Mulki, Bardhi, Lassk, and Nanavaty-Dahl (2009) subsequently investigated the impact of frequency of feedback provided to remote workers. The results showed that feedback from managers should be a priority because employees outside of the institution walls require advice, guidance, and feedback in order to stay on track with an organisations orientation and culture. These studies highlight the fact that online feedback in general is valuable to the virtual employee. Future reflection on building a feedback-friendly culture in an alternative work environment is needed and welcomed.

Interestingly, the Internet-based mechanisms used for feedback initiated a bidirectional communication stream (i.e., feedback between individuals to share opinions and offer advice about restaurants, movies, airlines, performance, etc.) and seemingly had a rapid influence on the behaviour of those reviewing the feedback (Dellarocas, 2003). With that in mind, new challenges have arisen due to these new means of communicating feedback. For example, trusting online identities, building rapport (Walther et al., 2011), and accurate interpretation of feedback (Dellarocas, 2003) are just a few that appear with online feedback instruments. Hence, building a feedback-friendly culture for Internet-based organisations would likely reduce the impact of these challenges and in turn positively affect work-related outcomes. Future research is required in the domain of virtual organisations and feedback-friendly cultures.

Ideally, prospective research should explore the effects of a virtual feedback-friendly culture in online and oversea organisations. It would be worth studying how a feedback-friendly culture (i.e., supporting the use of feedback and learning, encouraging feedback exchanges between all communication channels, and providing quality feedback through a trusting and psychologically safe environment) influences virtual organisational outcomes. Prospective research should look at whether Web-based feedback programs truly help create a feedback-friendly culture. This matter is certainly imperative because for those that work external to the organisation, this is typically the only means of giving and receiving feedback. Feedback-friendly cultures in organisations lead the way to positive outcomes; it is therefore in the best interest of the organisation to implement a feedback-friendly culture.

To conclude, much of the attention has been devoted to assessing the impact of organisational culture on several performance-related outcomes such as feedback receptivity, transfer of learning, performance improvement, feedback-seeking, and creativity in the workplace (Rosen et al., 2006; Song, Kim, & Kolb, 2009). However, individuals should be cognizant of how different sources of feedback impact an organisations feedback-friendly culture. As aforementioned, both formal and informal feedback add value in various ways. Given that the workforce has expanded in numerous ways as a result of globalization, nowadays it is highly common to see individuals physically removed from their colleagues, superiors, and the establishment itself (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003; MacDuffie, 2007). Aiming for a more systemic approach such as establishing and preserving dialogue in the workplace may encourage these remote workers to stay in the circle of things. Based on the review, a good place to start for any organisation aiming to succeed in the business world is to create and support a feedback-friendly culture to authenticate constructive, meaningful feedback (Joo, 2012).

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### Résumé

Des chercheurs ont évoqué qu'une compréhension incomplète de plusieurs aspects de la rétroaction demeure fréquente (Whitaker & Levy, 2012). Entre autres, la valeur que revêt une culture organisationnelle de rétroaction sur les conséquences de la rétroaction même est reconnue comme un élément manquant dans la littérature. Le présent article débute par une brève conceptualisation et une définition de la rétroaction individuelle, pour ensuite mettre en relief la notion de sens en tant que principe intrinsèque à toutes les techniques de rétroaction. L'article poursuit en mettant de l'avant les avantages que fournit l'instauration d'une culture favorable à la rétroaction en vue d'en arriver à une meilleure compréhension de la situation et d'améliorer la pertinence des commentaires. Les auteurs formulent trois recommandations en vue d'appuyer une telle culture : la promotion du continuum de l'apprentissage, l'établissement d'un climat de confiance et le soutien à un dialogue authentique. Sont ensuite présentées les éventuelles répercussions ainsi que des perspectives de recherche future.

*Mots-clés* : rétroaction, culture favorable à la rétroaction, sécurité et confiance psychologiques.

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Received July 4, 2013

Revision received August 27, 2013

Accepted August 27, 2013 ■