

E-book

Benefits of a feedback culture in project teams

Author: Wang Ching

Translation to English: Fabrício França e Gustavo Uchoa



Project
Management
Institute®
Paraíba, Brazil



Project
Management
Institute®
Distrito Federal, Brazil



The dream of leaders and organizations is to have highly competent, engaged, and high-performance teams.

Competency is easier to identify when hiring. And in the absence of this, provide development from the beginning.

Engagement, on the other hand, depends on a series of factors related to the interaction between people and activities. Factors such as a work environment that favors those individuals can use more of their strengths and have support to overcome limitations and continually learn, can be decisive in keeping people engaged. And as a team, an environment that favors dialogue, the exchange of experiences, collaboration and the convergence of efforts in the same direction.



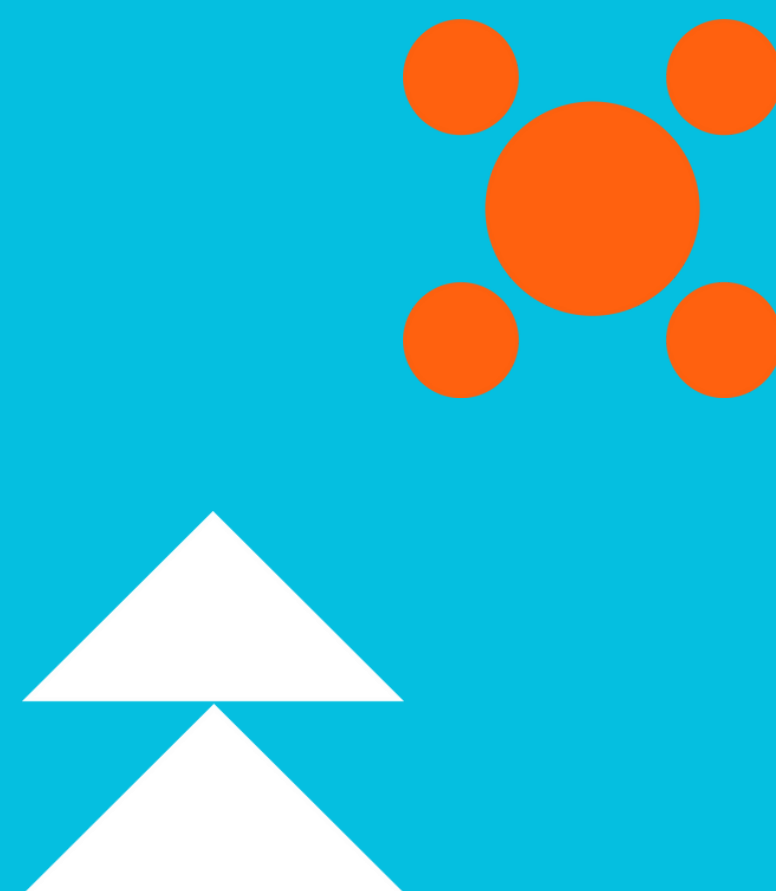
Having favorable conditions for high performance, with competent and engaged people, is perfectly possible, but it doesn't happen by chance. It is necessary to intentionally foster and manage a set of values, beliefs, symbols and norms that are part of the culture and define an organization. The organizational culture guides and aligns the behavior of employees in the day-to-day work of that organization, as well as the strategies and desired results.

What is practiced recurrently becomes the culture of what must be done and accepted by the group. When left to chance, in addition to not reinforcing desired behaviors, it can go against the stated objectives of the company. For a strong culture that naturally generates desired behaviors, it is necessary to align what is said with what is done, at all levels. Ideally, in all processes, especially those that deal directly with people, be clear and include the promotion of culture, the selection process, promotion, awards and even dismissal.

But keep in mind that regardless of the size of the organization or whether you look at such a project team, there is a culture, even if you do not manage. And this culture is present in people's perception of what should be done or avoided and is somehow manifested in their behavior. And it can contribute or hinder the results of the team, as well as the perception of the organizational climate.

Whatever the culture of your organization and your project team, feedback is a critical resource for bringing clarity to people by reinforcing what needs to be done and correcting what has not been done properly. Feedback can even be decisive in reinforcing the desired culture and behaviors.

Contrary to the belief of some, even when they are contained in codes of conduct, manuals, norms and even strategic plans, it is not clear and obvious to people whether they are doing well. And most importantly, what they need to do to perform better and stand out positively.

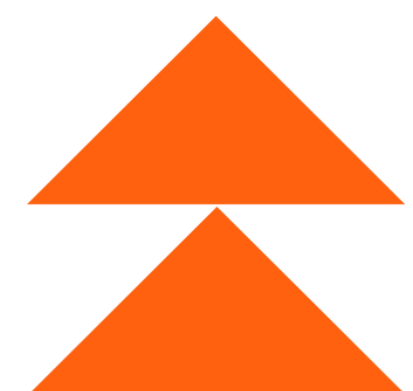


Feedback can and should be an integral part of a culture, especially if the organization embraces people-centeredness as a competitive advantage. In this culture, employees are encouraged to develop and grow. They express their opinions and are listened to, which also results in innovation and growth for the company itself. A good employee value proposition tends to attract and retain talent.

But how important is feedback?

Firstly, because everyone has blind zones. In other words, some people are more self-aware than others, but no one can claim that they do not have blind zones. So, the perspective of others tends to bring new angles of what the individual alone can perceive. A second relevant point is that everyone has their own self-image, because of how they perceive themselves and what they want to be.

Using our own plus external references, about how we are doing and what can be improved, provides a diverse perspective and greater breadth of information for our decision making, about what we do and how to improve the results. And it often avoids self-sabotage by superimposing self-image over reality perceived by others.



You may be wondering why you care about other people's opinions. Let us put it in the following perspective. It is more than someone else's opinion. Everyone impacts others, and there are consequences of that impact on individual and group relationships and productivity, sometimes immediate and sometimes long-term. Consequences can include: upset people, slowness, not following your priorities, lack of commitment, lack of attention, avoidance of talking and even working with you.

For anyone looking for above-average professional growth, you must learn to encourage feedback about yourself, as an excellent resource for accelerated development. But for that, it is necessary to learn to receive feedbacks and make the most of information, which is not always easy to assimilate.

But we cannot fail to show the importance of giving feedback. We know that people are different and that is why they also value actions differently. A working relationship favorable to high productivity depends on reducing the expenditure of time and energy on actions that do not generate results, such as misunderstandings, conflicts, rework, etc. And maximize the convergence of differences into better processes and solutions. Much of the waste could be avoided with better communication and feedback as part of the culture.

A team does not align and remains aligned without dialogue and openness to feedback. Sometimes, avoiding disagreeing and talking about discomforts, favors their increase, and cultivates a defensive and hidden environment, where problems only increase with time.

There is no doubt that feedback can reveal blind zones and lead to important improvements, but it is important to prepare people to give and receive feedback, for the best use of this resource. Wanting to give feedback is different from knowing how to give feedback. And both are important for implementing a feedback-oriented culture.



What are the types of feedbacks?

In this material, we will address the two most important types that must be part of the culture in organizations:

Corrective Feedback

- Objective: encourage an improvement.
- Based on evidence, with reporting on facts occurred and behaviors observed.
- It should be given shortly after the event, if possible and in the proven.
- Focus on what has been done and on improving for the future.
- Distinction between what has been done and who the person is.

Appreciative Feedback

- Objective: encourage the recurrence of certain desired behaviors.
- Based on evidence, with a report on the events that have occurred and observed
- Behaviors in public or private.
- Focus on what has been done and the positive impacts generated.
- Distinction between what has been done and who the person is.

When a colleague or team member has a behavioral pattern that bothers or harms the group and the results, someone needs to be willing to give corrective feedback, making it clear that it was noticed, had a negative impact and for the good of that person and others of the team, there is need for improvement. In general, the leader is expected to assume this responsibility. However, depending on the culture, it is possible that colleagues also have the openness to take this initiative.

Equally important is giving appreciative feedback when an employee excels and does something above average. Being noticed and having the achievement appreciated encourages you to maintain your commitment and expand your achievements.

How to give feedback?

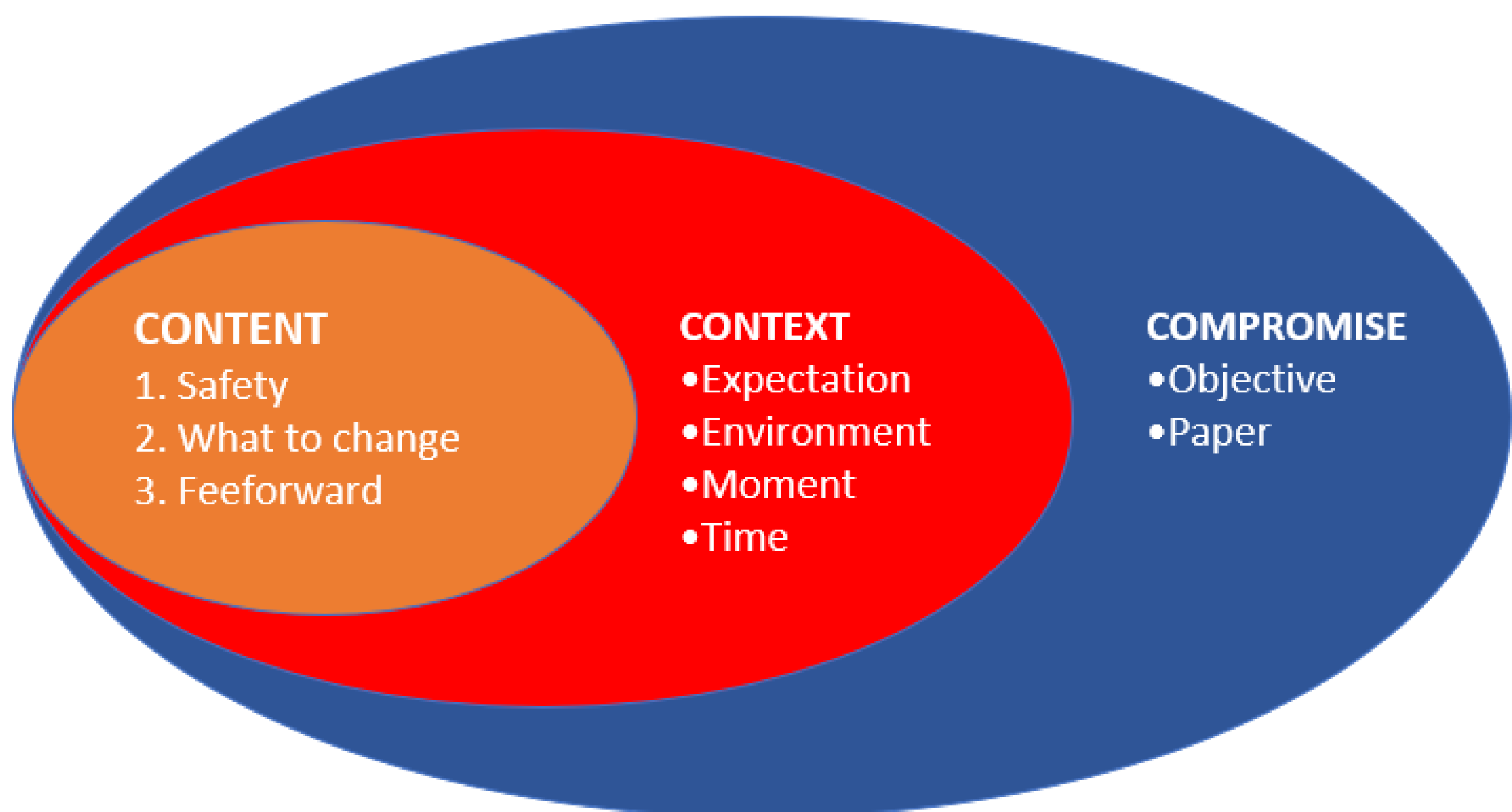
Let's start by talking about corrective feedbacks, those that are intended to bring about an improvement. Perhaps it is the type of feedback that has the greatest potential to cause discomfort, either for the giver or the receiver. But keep in mind that not always what we need, it's what we want. Just like what we want, it may not be what we need.

Corrective feedbacks can also be called evolutionary, when they consider, in addition to feedback information about what was done, also information about how it could be done in the future.

Conceptually, feedback is feedback on past events. The term feedforward, which several authors cite, including Marshall Goldsmith, is the feeding of information aimed at a change with a focus on the future.



There are several feedback models, but I have compiled the main points presented by some authors and I use this one, presented below, which we can call 3Cs:



Curso Comunique-se Melhor 



Commitment

The starting point for those who will offer feedback is the clarity that their main objective is to favor the development of the other, respecting their role in that relationship. Leaders have a greater responsibility than their peers and it may be within their responsibilities in the organization to give periodic feedback, but that does not mean that it is more or less important. Team members may feel the need to provide feedback. Everyone can contribute to each other's growth, seeking suitable conditions for this. But it is common for people selectively to be more open to feedback from one another than from others.

Context

To increase the chances of feedback being received and processed, context elements need to be considered. Anticipate the person's possible expectations, choose an appropriate environment and time for the conversation, and reserve quality time without interruptions. These small actions reinforce the importance given to the moment and the person.

Contents

The content of the feedback conversation itself must always preserve the truth and respect equally. The perception that there is no truth creates distrust and affects the credibility of what is being said. And the perception of lack of respect leads to the rejection of the content, even if it is absolutely right.

As you practice and master the art of giving feedback, people develop their own style, which makes it more authentic and fluid. For those who have not yet found a suitable model or are in their first experience of consciously giving feedback, try this structure:

- 1st step – provide security. Validate the importance of the person and the relationship. Show respect and deal with the truth, without aggression.
- 2nd step – report on the situation and observed behaviors. Do not bring judgment. Base your speech on evidence about what happened. After reporting the situation, distinguish how you perceived or felt. Bring what you believe needs change/improvement.
- 3rd step – associate the changes with a vision of the future for the person and the team (if it makes sense).

For clarity, let us exemplify a dialogue between a leader and his or her subordinate:

- **1st step** – Hello André. Glad we are going to talk. I appreciate your dedication to the tasks assigned to you and want to have the opportunity to contribute to your growth.
- **2nd step** – I would like to better understand what happened that day between you and Angela at that goal monitoring meeting. What I noticed was that you interrupted her twice, but she resumed. The third time, you said she was wasting everyone's time. And in my perception, that contributed to a negative atmosphere on the team and a tension between the two of you. The focus shifted and we were unable to complete the meeting points in the allotted time. Please also share your perspective so that together we can deal with any discomforts we may have with that moment.
- **3rd step** – I consider your dedication to be exceptional and I would like you to have the greatest possible recognition. And I know this can be achieved broadly when we add your dedication to more positive ways of dealing with people who may not have the same skills and values as you. I think that if you allow her to finish what she was talking about and demonstrate that she heard, everyone present, including her, will be more willing to equally value her arguments, which are very consistent. That way you will receive the recognition I believe you deserve. How does what I put sound to you?

Some essentials. Feedback is a dialogue, so both need space to speak. Those who provide feedback must also be prepared to listen. Prepare to be assertive and offer respect. It's not a dispute of reason. It is a contribution to the other's growth, so make sure the other understands what you did, how it impacted you and others present, and what changes provide tangible improvement for the person.

And whenever possible, feedback should follow the values present in the organizational culture, stimulating and reinforcing desirable behavior in the team.

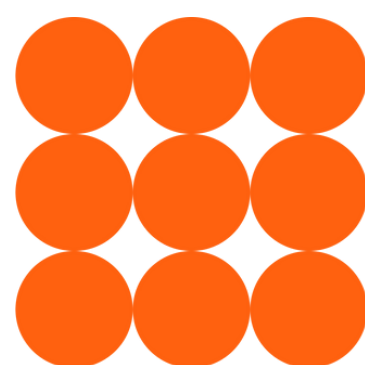
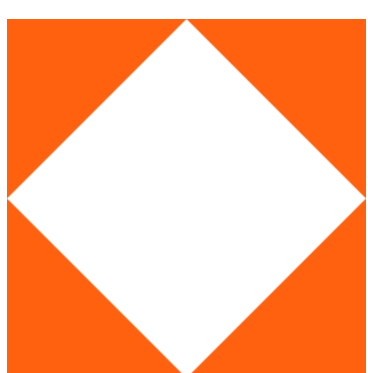




What is the big difference between corrective feedback discussed above and appreciative feedback?

In corrective feedback, we normally observe resistance to accepting the negative perception and the need for improvement indicated by the other, so it is critical to provide security and remember to make a clear distinction between what a person has been done. And relying on evidence, addressing it right after the fact, while the parties involved still remember.

Without appreciative feedback, there is the challenge of “truth” and demand. If it doesn't seem like an important achievement from the point of view of the giver, it doesn't seem important to the recipient. And so, it will not add value to a particular relationship nor will it encourage the other to remain dedicated.

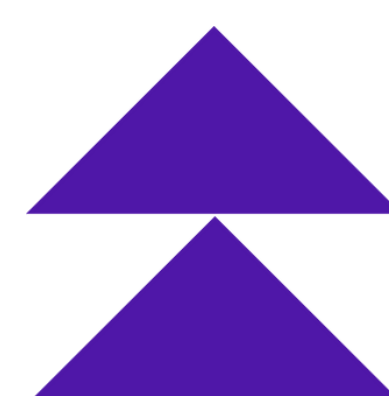
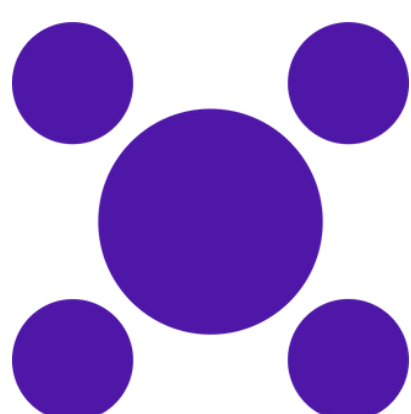


Why learn to receive feedback?

Some organizations even provide feedback training and require their leaders to provide it regularly. However, this is far from being a people-oriented, feedback-based culture. It is necessary to go further, where all employees understand the value and adopt feedback on a day-to-day basis to drive each other's growth and, with this, also, expand the collective result.

If, on the one hand, employees need to learn to give better feedback, on the other hand, it is also necessary to learn to receive feedback. Environments where there is no culture favorable to feedback and responsibility is few, makes the mission of those who need to give feedback more difficult, requiring greater skill from them. Which contributes to a recurrent situation that we observe in organizations, of lack of feedback, even those required by internal rules.

However, how to develop employees' ability to receive feedback? A great book on the topic is by authors Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen, titled "Thanks for Feedback – The Science and Art of Welcoming Feedback from Bosses, Colleagues, Family and Friends".



One of the first sentences in the book says: We swam in an ocean of feedback. Further defines feedback as any information you receive about yourself. And it addresses the great challenge of treating feedback not just as something that needs to be tolerated, but actively sought after. That same book claims that feedback-seeking behavior is associated with greater job satisfaction, greater creativity, faster adaptation to a new organization or role, and lower turnover. And the search for negative feedback is associated with better performance rates, according to surveys and other cited authors.

In other words, actively seeking feedback effectively accelerates our evolution and has many benefits since we can become better receivers of feedback, regardless of whether it is good or bad, right or wrong, indifferent, caring or insensitive. Not everyone masters techniques or has the natural ability to give good feedback, but that does not mean they do not have information that might be important to you and maybe even in your blind zone.



So do not depend on the other to get feedback. Piece! And be willing to embrace the perspective of others, process, assess the consequences, and select the change to make (if applicable). Listen and be thankful. Do not rebut.

And remember: not knowing about how others feel impacted by you does not eliminate consequences for you.

What are the benefits of a feedback culture in project teams?

There are many benefits to a feedback culture on project teams. Let's name a few more observable ones:

- Fluidity of information
- Greater clarity of direction
- Greater team alignment and synchronicity
- Fast problem detection and resolution
- Less waste of time and rework
- Greater autonomy and self-responsibility
- Greater development of team individuals
- Better use of talents and collective intelligence
- Greater potential for innovation, whether incremental or disruptive
- High performance

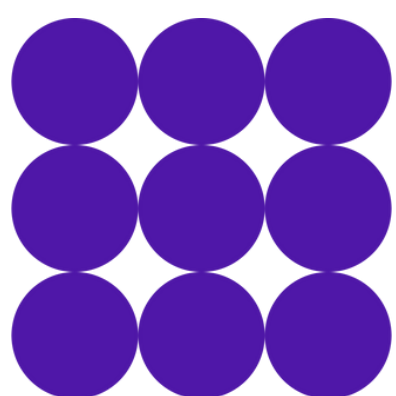


Where to start with a Feedback Culture in your project team?

There is no way to talk about a feedback culture without talking about the importance of the leader in implementing and maintaining it. The leader has a determining role for a project team to adopt feedback as a resource in their day-to-day.

The starting point is to identify the organization's most important values and behaviors that you want to see practiced in the team. Those that, if they are latent in the team's behavior, will favor the execution of strategies and the achievement of organizational goals.

Engage the team in this reflection and define only the most important items. With the definition and dissemination of what is most important, create opportunities, whether in daily meetings or other meetings, to have feedback included. On daily meetings, feedback can be to the group. What is going well and what is not. On the other hand, in more spaced meetings, like monthly or bimonthly goals monitoring, there may be a time for reciprocal feedbacks. Or private feedback from the leader to the subordinate right after these meetings



In award opportunities, courses, trips and other items understood as benefits by the team, practice consistency. If speech is one and practice is another, it will not be sustainable. If you lead a team, be judicious about who should be prioritized.

And finally, the leader has greater visibility and it is natural that the team has higher expectations of him, so his example will be decisive for the team's understanding of what should or should not be done.

To implement a culture, it is not enough for the leader to give feedback. You need to be open to listen, even when the feedback was not solicited and came from your team member. Give an example of how to receive feedback.



In summary:

1. Define desired values and behaviors.
2. Create recurring opportunities for people to receive feedback related to these desired values and behaviors.
3. Establish recognition and/or benefit policies aligned with what you want to encourage.
4. The leader behaving as an example with his daily practice.

Now that we have covered what to do to start a feedback culture, it's important to bring up some premises that are part of the how. And they should be understood as preconditions for a feedback culture:

- Incentive listening
- Focus on learning and not punishing
- Appreciation of diversity as a value
- Low judgment environment and greater appreciation
- Valuing individual talents as well as collective capacity
- Valuing the team's total results over the results of an individual alone
- Respect, truth and appreciation of the done



For feedback to become a culture, it needs to be relevant, not weighed down. It is necessary to contribute to the growth of the other.

In summary, a feedback culture makes sense when the organization is focused on people development, providing better opportunities to use talent and accelerated growth from recurrent feedback as part of day-to-day.

How to prepare to receive feedback?

Whether you are the leader or led, if you want to get the most out of the feedback, then what is next is for you.

Put yourself as an apprentice. Be curious to learn about the many angles at which others perceive you. These are not absolute truths. It is about action and reaction. There is always a different way we interact with others that will result in different reactions from people. How people perceive themselves affected by you generates reactions and consequences for you and the relationship.



Keep in mind that every perception is a truth of someone from a certain condition. And different people may have different perceptions. We can say that all perceptions are at the same time real, at the same time partial. And the focus of those who receive feedback should be to learn as much as possible about themselves. In the space of receiving feedback, right and wrong is not discussed, but what undesirable consequences you may be having in your life and career.



The best use of feedback is to practice active listening first. Understand not only the words, but also what the other is trying to say. For many people, giving feedback is not an easy task and can end up being disastrously placed.

Hold back any impulse to reject what happened. Take a moment to put yourself in an observer's shoes.

And explore what the other might be perceiving and feeling. Expand your perspective.



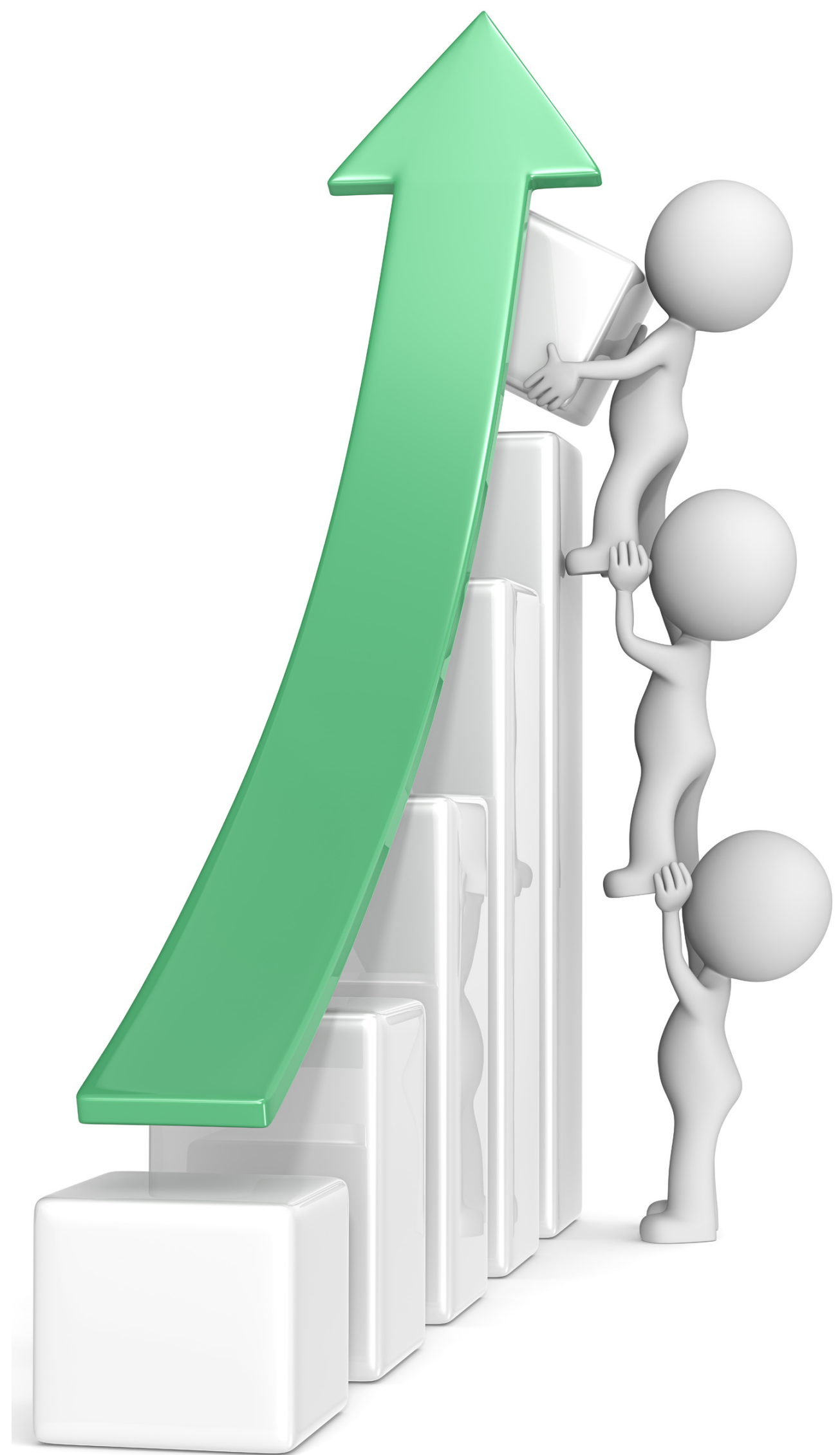
What you do with the feedback is your choice. However, remember that better decisions result from more information.

However, if at all that day you do not feel brave to productively receive feedback, it is always time to say you would rather schedule for another day.

Final reflections

The world is rapidly changing, with the growing need to prepare people to learn new topics and skills more quickly.

If your organization is knowledge-intensive and/or has people as its main asset, greater care is needed in their selection and development. Shortening the learning curve in new roles is good for the employee and good for the organization. In addition, being clear about the direction and receiving feedback on whether they are doing well provides security for people to evolve more quickly.



Additionally, diversity can effectively bring complementarity and expand the repertoire of solutions. And very critical environments do not favor new solutions, but the repetition of what has been proven to work in the past. But it is worth remembering that technology is driving greater competitiveness and the repetition of more of the same can mean loss of competitiveness compared to other more innovative organizations and even become obsolete.

Therefore, if you want to have a highly competent, engaged and high-performance team, you need to start by remembering that we deal with people, and therefore, it is a process to be managed, with ups and downs. And people have unfamiliar potentials and blind zones, where feedback provides opportunities.

When you reach a point where it becomes natural to give feedback to peers and even to superiors and everyone looks for feedback as a valuable resource for their own evolution, you achieve more than high performance, but an environment of attraction and retention of talent.

Feedback as part of the culture in your project team is an idea worth investing in! Try it!



References

STONE, Douglas. HEEN, Sheila. Obrigado pelo Feedback. Edição 2016.

STONE, Douglas. HEEN, Sheila. Thanks for the Feedback. Edição 2014 (versão original).

SCOTT, Kim. Empatia Assertiva: Como Ser Um Líder Incisivo sem Perder a Humanidade. Edição 2018.

SCOTT, Kim. Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity. Edição 2017 (versão original).

PATTERSON, Kerry. GRENNY, Joseph. Conversas decisivas. Edição 2010.

ROSENBERG, Marshall. Comunicação não violenta: técnicas para aprimorar relacionamentos pessoais e profissionais. Edição 2006.

SLAP, Stan. Comprometa-se de Coração. Edição 2011.

Author

Wang Ching

Coach e Facilitadora de treinamentos

4COACH – Coaching, Consultoria e Treinamentos

Especializados

wang@4coach.com.br