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Micro-feedback in Performance Management

Published on April 22, 2019

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When it comes to performance of people in an organization, what typically happens is that the expected behavior from an employee is checked or used in a reactive way at the time of annual or half-yearly performance evaluation cycle. This is a dreaded exercise for the both the stakeholders: for the employers (simply because of the massive time and effort that is spent towards this exercise) and the employees (the effort they have to put in to gather data points to prove their performance and the psychological effect of the possible consequences).

Performance feedback is an important component in the performance management process. In the study of Control Systems, we come across feedback loops. There are two types of feedback loops – positive or self-reinforcing and negative or self-correcting. The interest earned in a bank deposit (especially when the compounding effect is at play) is an example of positive loop. The setting a temperature in a thermostat is an example of negative loop.

Feedback is provided to course-correct an employee's actions so that the desired outcome (a department's goal, or a target or an individual's target) is reached. For decades, in majority of the organizations, the performance review and feedback-giving has been an annual or semi-annual routine. While the intention of the exercise is self-reinforcement, in effect, it has been primarily used in a self-correcting mode. In the last few years, many organizations such as IBM, Gap, Adobe, GE, Microsoft have moved away from the annual performance reviews and bringing in some other form more frequent reviews that is more helpful to both the stakeholders. With more frequent reviews, more frequent feedback becomes important.

Feedback: For Behavior or Action?

Feedback should be given for encouraging the change in the behavior that will get the employee closer to the desired outcome rather than directing change in actions or activities.

For example, 'Hey Bob, you should have done this way to get the vendor to give you more discount'. This feedback limits the scope of self-improvement. The employee may start to look for more advice from the managers in subsequent situations. Another example is "Hey Sam, here after, don't do it as you have done it in the 'xyz' case". Managers tend to be judgmental in giving feedback this way. Past performances become riders in the feedback.

But, when you say, 'Hey Bob, have you thought about any other ways of getting more discount? What other factors have you considered or who else have you talked to or what additional information could have you had to get more discount?', you are opening up a possibility of the thought process of Bob and an eventual change in the behavior for better negotiations in the subsequent vendor interactions. Obviously, when there is a change in behavior, a change in action will follow.

More managers spend lot of time in giving advise on changing the activities. There are many factors like project duration, severity of the deviation can force the managers to resort to directing change in activities to bring about immediate and visible results for the desired outcome. However, to develop an effective performance culture, a positive, self-reinforcing feedback loop will be beneficial for the organizations.

Micro-messaging and Nudges:

Recently, I have watched [Rajendran Dandapani](#) of Zoho explaining an experiment called micro-messaging being run in his organization to improve the employee engagement especially with the millennial workforce. Watch this [video](#) to know more on it. They have

chosen 9 categories for which employees can appreciate or thank any other employees through an internal messaging system. This proved to be a hit and boosted the engagement level significantly.

In a recent LinkedIn [article](#), [Dr. Kiran Bala](#) has talked about nudge management to drive change. The behavioral science based Nudge theory suggests positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions can influence behavior change in individuals and groups without them realizing. Nudges are used very effectively by online marketers and organizations. Examples of use of nudges vary from influencing people's behavior for organ donations, recyclable waste separation, ordering extra fries or drinks, reusing the towels in the hotels.

Micro-Feedback

The micro-messaging concept along with the nudge management can be extended to the performance feedback. A **micro-feedback process** can be developed with evaluation categories and behavioral nudges towards the desired outcomes. More millennial are entering or already there in the workforce of many organizations. Managing their expectations of continuous feedback becomes one of the critical success factors for an effective performance management process.

Micro-feedback has three important characteristics:

1. *It should create a positive reinforcement for the receiver to perform better.*
2. *It should be given frequently.*
3. *It should be given only when there is a context for the feedback.*

With the help of technology, a simple and effective micro-feedback platform can easily be developed and deployed. With its continuous and more frequent (by design) nature, the micro-feedback process will help employees achieve a higher performance with a more positive mindset.

Have you seen or come across micro-feedback or any other similar systems in your organization or others? Please share your thoughts in the comments section below. Learning never stops.

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Wrote a new article about developing a micro-feedback process for an effective performance management system.
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Prakash Gunasekaran · 1st
Director at Firstlight Media

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Really useful... I follow the practices of questioning more than reinstating what is correct in a scenario and yes seen results of higher engagement with my teams..

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