

Managing Feedback 1/6

Kirk and McDonald (The Role of Feedback in Management Learning' MEAD Journal, Spring 1989) define feedback as:

'All those communications, verbal and non-verbal, concerning perceptions and feelings regarding the impact of human behaviour. We can only plan and achieve personal change when we have some basis for evaluating the impact of our behaviour on others. If it is true that how we see determines who we are, then feedback from other people provides us with the data necessary beyond our individual perspective'.

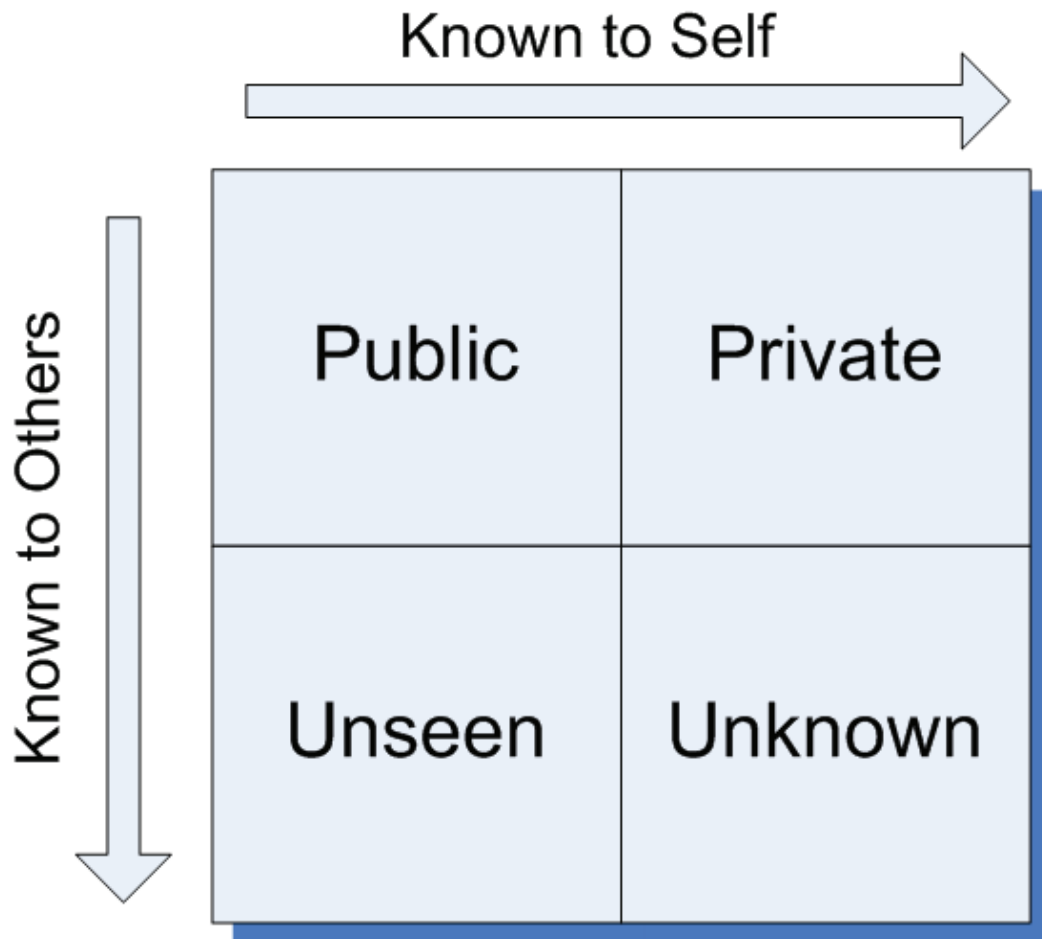
For managers, much of their received feedback refers to competence. Kirk and McDonald's model (which defines competence as a set of abilities, attitudes and beliefs capable of enabling the successful complete of tasks) identifies five different categories of competence.

1. Conscious competence; sure of and know competence in specified areas, re-enforced by repeated success.
2. Assumed Competence; a belief a person has in his/her competence which is at variance with the belief of others and not congruent with his/her behaviour or performance.
3. Unconscious competence; someone unaware of his/her competence although it is perceived by others.
4. Unconscious Incompetence; 'blissful ignorance'. Not being aware a deficiency exists.
5. Conscious incompetence; a person's assessment of a development need, often based on their perception of others feedback.

These categories relate specifically to competence; a similar pattern exists in the Johari Window, which demonstrates that in an individual's awareness of himself/herself there exists a public, private, unseen and unknown area.

Much of the purpose of management development is to raise awareness of the starting points so that the 'unconscious' or 'unaware' can be moved into the conscious or public arena and create an opportunity for choice; choice to build on existing competencies and develop areas I which growth is necessary.

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Johari Window

Frequently, we hear statements of this kind, 'I can't help it – it is just the way I am'. This indicates that self-acceptance stands in the way of change. Carl Rogers (1976) suggests that self-acceptance, in a group experience, is the beginning of personal change. If feedback facilitates self-acceptance and self-development then it is a powerful tool. It is essential that the environment and conditions are created in which feedback is positive, creative, and not destructive.

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1. A belief in honesty and an awareness of when discretion is appropriate
2. A belief that each person has potential for enhanced performance and that feedback will help this.
3. An 'unconditional positive regard' for the individual and ability to separate identity from behaviour and beliefs.

If these things are in evidence, the person receiving the feedback is more likely to accept it. However, it is vital that the recipient experiences the right personal conditions to move forward.

These include:

1. A desire to change and a willingness to seek feedback as part of the change process.
2. An acknowledgment that development and change may be uncomfortable and potentially disturbing.
3. An ability to retain choice about accepting, filtering or rejecting feedback which is offered.

Assuming that these conditions exist, there still remain questions about how feedback should be given. It needs to be given in a way that gives information, challenges assumptions, clarifies and does not damage the receiver. In a dependency relationship, the norms and values of the giver are often accepted as 'the truth' and this distorts the ability of the receiver to value his/her own perceptions of himself/herself. It is also true, of course, that feedback frequently says much about the giver.

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Feedback should be:

1. Directed at specific actions, events and behaviours. It is much less threatening for an individual to consider what he/she does rather than what he/she is.
2. Feedback should be given at the appropriate time, soon enough to be relevant – far enough removed to be unemotional and rational.
3. Focussing on the outcomes of actions rather than the causes.

Feedback and Appraisals – guidelines

For the person giving feedback:

- Don't wait too long
- Use "I" statements to own your feedback. "I feel that..."
- Make time – find the right place
- Think about what you want to say and how to say it
- Clarity through preparation
- Positives as well as negatives
- Spoken better than written
- Be specific
- Informality
- Be honest but constructive
- One to one
- Self appraisal as a starting point
- Give only what could be useful
- Make sure its accurate

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Distinguish:

1. Their behaviour
 2. Their identity
 3. Your standards
- Be supportive/empathetic
 - No lectures
 - In a group, address person by name. Speak to them as if just the two of you are there.
 - Remember, feedback says as much about you as it does the receiver.

For the person receiving feedback

- Listen carefully
- Expect positive and negatives
- There is no point defending or arguing. You are unlikely to change the givers mind. If you argue/defend consequences could be:
- Giver may wish they hadn't bothered
- May feel unable to be honest with you
- Be reluctant to take a risk next time
- Don't swallow whole or treat it as a truth – it is just a perception of the truth. Treat it as useful information
- Ask for the sort of feedback you want. e.g., honest, informal, factual, positives and negatives.

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Distinguish: Your feelings and relations towards the giver with your reaction to the feedback

- Decide what to do with it, consider telling giver
- Remember it's a risk for giver
- Clarify where necessary "Can you be more specific?"

In a nutshell

- Ask them if they would like some feedback first
- Focus your feedback at the behavioural level, not identity (you are...)
- Own it – it's your experience, your truth but not fact and 'the truth'
- Give examples for clarity
- Offer what you would have liked instead
- Ask for their experience

E.g. *"Before I had finished putting my idea across, I noticed that you started performing the task. For me, I felt you were quick to act and didn't fully listen to me or value what I had to say. I would have preferred it if you had waited until I had finished what I had to say instead. What was your experience?"*