

Effectively Managing Responses to Constructive Feedback in a Classroom Setting:

A Proposed Model

by

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Feedback is a mature field of inquiry (Audia and Locke, 2003). A great deal has been written about the meaning and significance of feedback, types of feedback, guidelines for delivering effective feedback, theoretical models of feedback and various variable affecting the process of feedback. Most introductory management and organizational behavior textbooks incorporate the topic. The Journal of Human Resource Management Review devoted an entire issue (2003, issue 13) to the subject. Despite such extensive coverage of the subject in its multiplicity, it seems the aspect of managing recipient response to feedback especially to negative or constructive feedback is under-examined. Audia and Locke (2003) state, "...theoretical models give little attention to specific issues raised by positive versus negative feedback. ... Acknowledging the importance of feedback sign in the feedback process, this paper

focuses on factors that prevent people from benefiting from negative feedback.” (Audia and Locke, 2003, pp. 631-632). Their paper outlines a three step model revolving around: (1) the search for negative feedback, (2) the appraisal of feedback; and (3) the action taken in response to negative feedback. In the proposed model, they analyze the issues from the recipient perspective. Same is the case with psychoanalyst, Kerry J. Sulkowicz’s piece in the Business Week He advocates that while neither giving nor receiving negative feedback is pleasant for understandable reasons, but “for most of us it’s still easier to give this kind of feedback than to get it.” (Sulkowicz, 2009, p. 6). His advice is aimed at the recipient too.

No doubt recipient is one of the three key elements in a basic performance feedback process model along with feedback message and its source (Ilgen et al., 1979; Fedor, 1991; O’Leary-Kelly, 1998 and Herold & Fedor, 2003). Comprehensive performance feedback models elaborate on the multiple characteristics of these three basic components. London (1995), in his model does explore the process of feedback giving from the source’s perspective. He also advocates that, “the relationship between feedback source and recipient is a dynamic interactive process.” (London, 1995, p.163). Depending on its nature, feedback affects the recipient (e.g., causing the recipient to ignore the feedback, take it with a grain of salt, or take it to heart) which, in turn, influences the source and thus completing a cycle. London proposes that this cycle between the source and recipient can be a cycle of destructive behavior resulting in negative or poor performance on the part of recipient or alternatively a cycle of mutual support and encouragement resulting in excellent performance.

Creating an opportunity for excellent performance for each student is generally the goal of teaching. Integral part of the teaching/learning process is providing accurate performance feedback including constructive feedback (Ovando, 1994). Giving reinforcing or positive

feedback is easier as recipients are generally accepting of the information (Audia and Locke, 2003). It is constructive feedback that creates more challenges for instructors. If the cycle of behavior concerning constructive feedback between a source (i.e., teacher) and recipient (i.e., student) is managed ineffectively, it can result in poor performance (London, 1995) and/or anti-social behavior (O’Leary-Kelly and Newman, 2003). Alternatively, the dynamics of constructive feedback between teachers and students when well managed are likely to result in successful teaching, learning and personal satisfaction (Ovando, 1994).

In summary, while performance feedback models acknowledge an interactive play between source and recipient, they do not go beyond giving possible reasons for recipient’s reactions. Feedback literature specifically offering practical advice to the source about ways to manage the predictable recipient response in the case of negative feedback is sparse. Most advice concerning effective use of constructive feedback, as noted in the first paragraph, is aimed at recipient. This gap of knowledge in the feedback literature is regrettable. As reasoned in the preceding paragraph, effective management of source-recipient dynamics when offering constructive feedback is important to elicit excellent performance and to avoid anti-social behavior. In a traditional teaching situation, the greater responsibility of managing the process effectively lies with the instructor. The absence of notable feedback literature concerning what a teacher (often a source) can do in a situation that happens commonly as a regular part of the teaching/learning process establishes the significance of this proposed paper.

The purpose of our paper is to address the gap in the performance feedback literature concerning management of recipient response by a source in the case of constructive feedback especially in a classroom setting. Specifically, we will:

Conduct a literature review distilling wisdom for instructors about ways to offer constructive feedback. The focus will be on offering practical tips for classroom use. We will address the question: How do you offer constructive feedback to minimize negative student response?

Offer insights into student response to constructive feedback based on existing performance feedback models. This will address the question: What kind of a response can you expect from students when offering constructive feedback?

Build and present a systematic model focusing on managing student response to constructive feedback. The model will address the question: How can you effectively manage student response to constructive feedback to elicit better performance and higher student/teacher satisfaction?

Such paper will be of interest to many in the conference because regardless of the discipline they teach, all instructors participate in the process of offering feedback. They will benefit from the presentation because of its applied nature and its universal appeal.

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