

Government leaders who connect 360-degree feedback to three stages of change—enlighten, encourage, enable—will have more success improving performance.



360 Feedback: From Insight to Improvement

by Kenneth M. Nowack

With increasing frequency, 360-degree feedback is being used for diverse purposes in the public sector, including executive coaching, performance evaluation, talent management, and succession planning. Under the right circumstances, this sort of multi-rater feedback can foster successful behavioral change in the workforce.

The fundamental goal of multi-rater feedback is actual behavior change on the job. However, implementing new behaviors and sustaining them over time is particularly challenging for most individuals. And many managers, coaches, and consultants trying to initiate change can ignore some potentially problematic issues.

Indeed, the likelihood that an employee will—or will not—engage in a specific behavior is influenced heavily by their personal expectations about the consequences that behavior will have on their professional goals. In fact, studies have shown that many feedback efforts create no measurable change, or may even result in negative effects on engagement and productivity.

The lesson: Organizations must prepare the workforce to give and receive feedback effectively—and be ready to initiate the change that feedback identifies.

Implementing Feedback Best Practices

Feedback is a necessary condition for initiating and sustaining change, but organizations have to get it right. Fortunately, other talent management

professionals have already paved the way, developing multi-rater best practices that any organization can follow:

- ♦ Ensure that an adequate number and type of raters are invited to provide feedback to the individual, and that the composition of the final rater pool is discussed and agreed on with the manager or coach. (Research suggests there should be eight to 10 people in a rater group, in addition to one's manager.)
- ♦ Have someone who is knowledgeable about assessment and multi-rater feedback tools interpret the compiled data to minimize any negative reactions that might occur.
- ♦ Hold managers accountable for meeting with participants to discuss the feedback and mutually agree on professional development action plans, as well as for tracking and monitoring progress over time with periodic follow-up discussions.
- ♦ Create and implement individual development plans that involve meaningful and measurable behaviors and activities that enhance learning and deliberate practice, such as special assignments or on-the-job experiences.
- ♦ Balance feedback. Despite the recent popularity of focusing on "strengths," keep in mind that overemphasis on only these behaviors may lead to any weaknesses being ignored.
- ♦ Evaluate the reaction (formative) and impact (summative) of multi-rater feedback from multiple perspectives (individual, manager, and raters) to demonstrate the return-on-investment, individual behavioral change, and

relevant organizational business outcomes.

- ♦ Repeat the multi-rater feedback process in 12 to 24 months following the first meeting to evaluate progress.

Integrating Feedback With Change Readiness

An integrated individual change framework can help public leaders expand the traditional uses of 360-degree feedback beyond mere insight and awareness to facilitating successful short- and long-term behavioral change. The three-stage "Enlighten, Encourage, and Enable" change model offers a way to use

help individuals identify their personal motivations for enacting change and potential obstacles, target specific goals, and prepare for reappraisal. In other words, it's a powerful tool for revealing self-insight and commitment to change.

A manager or coach can use information garnered during the motivational interview to identify which change-readiness stage the individual has reached: pre-contemplation (no intention to change), contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, or relapse. Then they can apply specific approaches, techniques, and strategies to facilitate successful long-term change.

Helping government workers become more self-aware—identifying signature strengths and development opportunities and clarifying potential derailment factors—can increase change readiness.

multi-rater feedback to facilitate both awareness and commitment to behavioral change—with an emphasis on sustaining behavior over time. (See the model on page 22.)

Stage 1: Enlighten

This first stage of the change process is to answer the question: "What's in it for me?" Helping government workers become more self-aware—identifying signature strengths and development opportunities and clarifying potential derailment factors—can increase change readiness. Enter motivational interviewing.

Motivational interviewing is a collaborative approach that relies on probing and reflective listening to

For example, during a motivational interview, a coach may ask open-ended questions to pinpoint the association between specific leadership behaviors and enhanced performance and engagement. The coach can then help the individual reflect on the advantages of committing to behavioral changes and elicit "change talk" to increase readiness and motivation to try new behaviors on the job.

However, insight and self-awareness is merely a first step of the change process. During this stage, it's also important to interpret and value the other raters' perspectives, compared to their own self-perceptions.



A critical task during this stage is to manage potential reactions. Reactions from multi-rater feedback can range from pleasant surprise to hurt, anger, and even depression—with predictable consequences to performance, health, and psychological well-being. Therefore, it is crucial for managers or coaches to focus those emotional reactions and consequences toward engaging in new behaviors.

Stage 2: Encourage

Setting developmental and performance goals are addressed in most feedback models, but typically in general or vague terms. One key mission of the Enlighten stage of change is to translate feedback into realistic, specific, and measurable performance

development plans that are implemented during the Encourage stage. A primary goal of this stage is gaining commitment to a collaborative—and explicit—behavioral change plan.

An individual’s motivation to change is a function of the discrepancy between their action plan and current situation. A coach, for example, can help an individual determine whether a specific goal is realistic, because a significant gap between ideal and current states can lower someone’s confidence about his ability to sustain change over time, and possibly lead to a relapse in poor behavior. Managers and coaches will need to explore signs of resistance and actively clarify action plans.

Clearly, the responsibilities of managers or coaches during this

stage may be to encourage specific methods for achieving goals and to help workers explore potential barriers and challenges. By the end of this stage, an individual should have a precise summary of why the behavior or performance goal is important, how to achieve the goal, and what metrics will be used to monitor progress. In addition, there needs to be a verbal or written commitment to implement change.

Stage 3: Enable

The Enable stage is when workers begin to acquire knowledge, increase self-efficacy, and practice skills to initiate and maintain change. Although this stage is critical for long-term behavior modification, it is often overlooked or minimized by leaders.

In fact, it is during this stage that managers or coaches must accomplish many crucial tasks, including:

- **Provide encouragement and support.** Help individuals explore their feelings about the developmental journey through writing or conversations.
- **Monitor self-esteem issues.** Self-esteem is a complicated construct that can facilitate goal completion, but also increase chances of failure by encouraging risky options or unrealistic outcomes. Try to help individuals build stable self-esteem, while safely exploring areas of self-doubt.
- **Offer practice opportunities.** Many leaders know that for behavioral change to be successful, individuals must find ways to deliberately practice skills and use their strengths. Practice builds confidence and unconscious competence. Evidence shows that people are more likely to try and maintain new behaviors when they are confident of a successful outcome and feel a sense of mastery, despite possible setbacks and challenges.
- **Manage lapses in performance.** Be sure to enlist support systems. Educate employees on how to follow up and reinforce key behaviors and learning. More importantly, arm them with tools to handle potential failures and prevent relapse.
- **Track progress.** Work with the individual and key stakeholders to define ways to track, monitor, and evaluate progress on specific goals. Focus on progress through structured reminders, recognizing and rewarding achievements. Keep in mind that it may

be necessary to reevaluate the importance of goals.

Leveraging Feedback for Successful Change

Sustaining behavioral change for anyone is challenging, even in the most ideal situations. Managers, coaches, and consultants working in the public sphere who use multi-rater feedback must become familiar with key factors that can influence reactions—and ultimately advance any related change efforts.

These leaders also need to be particularly vigilant of decreasing engagement and performance following feedback. Fortunately, the Enlighten, Encourage and Enable change model can help extend current practice to focus more on the distal (behavioral change), rather than proximal (insight) outcomes inherent with most feedback instruments.

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