



Adapting via Feedback

Feedback is vital in knowing how we are faring. Unfortunately, in Asia, it faces limitations due to the hierarchical nature of the culture. A change is timely.

WHILST working in Europe for Pricewaterhouse Coopers, a mandatory feedback process took place at regular intervals and at the end of a project, which usually entailed a 360-degree survey. This mechanism was set in place that feedback requests were sent directly to recipients or raters. More importantly, the content of the collective feedback was used to measure an individual's overall performance for the year, including promotion, strengths and areas for further development.

It was done with a matter-of-fact attitude by all concerned, as it was seen as a critical tool to help with an individual's personal and professional development. There were no emotions involved and whatever personal differences between rater and the individual being evaluated were put aside during the feedback process.

Feedback was discussed with the individual's manager, including what went well and not so well. The discussions were open and inquiring. Strengths were congratulated and sometimes, cautioned (if they could work against you). Areas for further development, once agreed upon, were documented in the coming year's development plan, along with goals

and objectives, for the individual to work on as part of his/her action items. The manager in turn was evaluated on, amongst other objectives, his/her team's overall performance and it was therefore in his/her best interest to ensure the team's well-being and development.

FEEDBACK AND GLOBALISATION

Adapting a global mindset, embracing diversity, dealing with the unfamiliar, managing differing perspectives, authentic leadership are all phrases that I have used in past articles. They are also mentioned in other articles as ingredients necessary to succeed in the globalised environment.

These are terms that we all know and understand, but how do we make it real for ourselves in our organisations, environment or community?

Multinationals make it real for its employees by giving them the opportunity to work in another country or region. In doing so, organisations hope that by immersing themselves in new cultures and surroundings, employees learn about similarities and how to deal with differences and the unfamiliar, for the benefit of all in the organisation. This should lead to the added understanding of their own and others' behaviours during interactions, which potentially develops a mindset that is often collaborative yet decisive. The aim is



to adapt in as many differing scenarios.

I believe the impact of this is to develop the individual and the greatest way to develop the individual is via feedback. In my time in Europe, the feedback I received helped in developing my personal brand, which I use in helping leadership teams today. Through feedback we learn and through learning we have the potential to change our behaviour and actions. It also helps us strengthen, better understand and utilise diversity.

FEEDBACK AND THE ASIAN CULTURE

As human beings, we have an intuitive interest in wanting to know 'how we are doing?' In a team leader-team member relationship, marital relationship or just

friendship, as human beings we seek affirmation, from the other party, of appreciation, value and significance. This, I believe, is universal especially where positive feedback is concerned. The difference lies when dealing with the negative and here, culture seems to impact the feedback process considerably.

I have been in work situations in the past, in Europe and Australia, where I had been told very bluntly by my bosses, at that time, that a proposition I presented required more thought or that I needed to get back to the drawing board. There was nothing personal in the feedback as these bosses are now good friends. I later found out that I was 'pushed', in certain circumstances,

because they knew I was capable of more. I certainly rose to the challenge and delivered to my highest potential.


In Asia, receiving and giving feedback is sometimes seen as a chore and something that usually finds its way to the bottom of a manager's to-do list. To overcome this, managers usually take the middle road and evaluate team members favourably or equally without much discussion. Unfortunately, this is a disservice to the individuals concerned as it has the potential to limit their growth and capabilities.

Feedback is also usually top-down as the Asian culture is hierarchical. Respect for the elders, which is ingrained since young, often follows us through to adulthood. Questioning a superior or remarking on a situation can sometimes cost one their job. Hence, a 360-degree feedback is at times a means of 'getting back' at a superior.

EVOLUTION OF THE ASIAN CULTURE

We are in the 21st Century, in a fast-changing world where components within culture – tradition and custom – may need to evolve and make way for 'what works now' without sacrificing our identity. I feel culture is often a shield we use and in the process, we sideline our own common sense.

Organisations are ultimately about a group of individuals who need to work together towards a common goal. As human beings, we strive to adapt and perform well when engaged. Engagement is a two-way street in that a team leader's impact on the team is as important as the teams' impact on the leader.

We need to start having more two-way open, real (non-judgemental) and regular conversations with teams on 'how we are doing?' This is the start to engaging with the team, where differences and culture begin to take a backseat and the collective whole takes charge. At the heart of it is the sense of belonging that human beings seek, and feedback is the best method to affirm this. 



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