

Innovative aspects of feedback delivery in management process by applying emotional intelligence

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Abstract. This article focuses on examining new specific practical recommendations for delivering feedback in the process of staff management in organizations by applying the resources of emotional intelligence. Managers' I-statement mistakes, imperceptible at first sight, are analyzed and explained from the point of view of their psychological correctness; ways of correcting them are presented. In detail, with real-life examples of the feedback in the organizations, it is explained how a leader can take into account the psychological difficulties of feedback perception and increase its effectiveness. Thus, the following mistakes of the feedback are analyzed: the feeling the one giving feedback is not mentioned at all; his feeling is generalized; it is determined in an unspecified way or expressed to a person in general; the person's behavior, which evokes a feeling, is not described at all or is described in an unspecified way; it is not specified what exactly has caused a feeling in a communicative situation; a conclusion on the person's actions and the person in general as a generalization of his actions; exaggerating; identifying a trait of character of someone's actions as a generalization of his actions; emphasis; describing internal processes of another person; expressing another person's attitude to something or someone; a subjective evaluation; interpreting a person's actions; an instruction (lecturing, sermonizing); a tirade; a mockery; an accusation; comparing a person with someone; a condemnation; a threat, an insult, a humiliating statement; condescending phrases; a wish; a request. Correct I-statements are a universal mechanism of self-regulation, self-support.

1 Introduction

Emotional management or emotional-intelligence-based management is one the recognized modern approaches in management [1–10]. However, this approach cannot be seen as deeply developed in its practical aspect in management and psychology.

On the one hand, there is enough experimental evidence accumulated in modern science regarding the positive effects that emotional intelligence as well as effective feedback has on management success in organizations, on the development of students', prospective consulting psychologists' and psychotherapists' professional skills [11–23]. It is commonly believed that a leader sets the dominant tone for an entire organization in dealing with their own and other people's emotions, which improves the interpersonal relationships in a team, the quality of work environment and employees' social skills [1–10, 17–23]. Nowadays, it is acknowledged that the ability to be conscious of one's feelings, to reflect on them well and to express them openly and naturally in one's behavior is an internal condition of a person's individuality self-actualization (along with its other internal conditions) [26, 33–35].

On the other hand, emotional intelligence in management and team work can be used effectively and

reasonably only if a manager himself has a high emotional intelligence. It is known that it requires a manager to specially develop and master necessary skills [1–10].

2 Materials and methods

Not every manager realizes the importance of working with one's and employee's inner feelings. A manager may have a mindset and illusion of purely rational staff management, whereas the irrational factors are not only present, but then also remain really uncontrolled. In this case, managers especially lack their own psychological proficiency for effective team management. A manager's habit of ignoring and setting aside their own feelings (as well as subordinates' emotions and feelings), "maintaining their composure" is far from being the ideal of successful self-regulation. The accumulation of one's feelings may cause unreasonable actions (emotional explosions) at an unpredictable moment, when it is no longer a person oneself who chooses to express their feelings, but the feelings explode uncontrollably determining the person's actions. Feelings and emotions which have not been realized at the right time are known to affect the person's conscious life, their professional decisions, the manifestations of the unconscious through wrong actions and neurotic symptoms, chronic diseases, all of which significantly

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influence the process and results of work and communication [32]. As revealed by the practice of corporate psychologists working at organizations, the complexity of communication and interpersonal relationships between staff members may significantly impede work interaction and reduce the efficiency of employees' work [10]. Feedback is often present in the communication between colleagues and between manager and subordinates, it is necessary, but in fact it often complicates work interaction, even though it is supposed to have many positive functions [31].

On the one hand, feedback in the communication process has traditionally been a subject of psychological studies for solving the problem of optimizing communication in various areas of human life and activity [11–16]; on the other hand, there is a need to study more deeply the use of feedback in the process of staff management.

Seeing that the term feedback (**FB**) has multiple meanings, it is important to delineate the approach to studying it [25, 24, 29, 30]. We shall use a complex, narrow-sense definition of FB [29, 30, 24]. In other words, when we speak of FB from a manager to subordinates, FB means information from the manager on a subordinate, on how the manager sees their words and actions, their personality in general and interpersonal communication with them.

In actual everyday communication, the functioning of FB is often connected to many circumstances which limit its effectiveness [24]. It is known that under the conditions of a social perception training, these limitations are overcome and the FB effectiveness increases [24]. First of all, the intentional delivery of FB intensifies, its adequacy and informativeness increase; the perception of FB in a training also intensifies, probably due to minimizing value judgments, increasing the use of self-descriptive judgments, increasing feedback specificity [29]. E.V. Lushpaeva has determined that socio-psychological trainings create specific conditions for developing self-reflection owing to an extensive FB system [27].

In the Feedback intervention theory, A.N. Kluger and A.S. DeNisi propose five theses, three of which, it would appear, are extremely important in management: a person's attention is limited; under regular conditions, attention is directed according to the level of a target in the hierarchy; interactions accompanied by FB shift the attention locus, thereby affecting behavior [11, 12]. The authors have made a significant generalization that in case of FB, individual differences have not been an important explanatory principle of its effectiveness [12]. Thus, feedback directs person's attention and what is relevant is the determination not of its individual principles, but of the general ones.

Feedback occurs extensively in psychotherapy practice and helps clients to know and explore the "blind spots" in their psyches [33–35]. Here, it is important to remind the following principles of FB effectiveness in psychotherapy: the readiness of a client to perceive feedback, the absence of value judgments on the part of a psychotherapist, the concreteness of FB and its directedness at a particular person [33–35].

It appears that this accumulated knowledge on FB may and must be realized and used in everyday work communication, and not only within the framework of psychological work with people, but also to establish a more effective FB delivery by managers in the process of staff management.

Now we shall examine and compare two ways of delivering FB best known in psychology nowadays: You-statements and I-statements.

Ways of delivering feedback

1. You-statement. It is the most common way of giving FB in everyday life.

It is structured according to the formula: *You + are like this.*

A person who gives FB notices various psychological qualities of another person, says 'you are' and names some quality (a characteristic, personality trait, state, feeling, attitude, motive, purpose, value, etc.).

Examples: 'You are very conscientious'; 'You are disorganized'; 'You are too careless'; 'You are too persistent'; 'I think you are sensitive'; 'I may be wrong, but you seem upset'; 'I see you are not being sincere now'; 'Your work is the most precious thing for you'; 'You have an amazing talent for upsetting us all'.

A person's psychological defense is triggered when they get negative FB, when someone mentions qualities which are unpleasant personally to them or which are condemned and seen as negative in society (for example, 'irresponsible', 'impudent', 'silly', etc.). From the point of view of S. Freud's theory of the unconscious, a person tends to automatically (unconsciously, without thinking) dismiss, that is, to defend themselves from, any disagreeable information about themselves and negative emotions associated with it [32]. In this case, FB is not very effective. When it is important to make a person hear, reflect on themselves and their behavior, it often proves impossible to achieve using You-statements, as a person does not perceive such information attentively and seriously, does not reflect on it deeply, does not want to. Using You-statements has a great risk of ruining a relationship (they are considered conflict-generating), because in this case communication is associated with strong negative emotions. The game of 'you are like this and you are like that' may continue in further communication or, conversely, may end abruptly by breaking off relationships.

2. I-statement. A less common way of delivering FB in everyday life.

It is structured according to the formula: *I (or to me) + feel (or perceive) such (specific) feeling (or sensation, state) + about such (specific) external action of another person in the communication process.*

A person who delivers FB, by means of reflection, defines a feeling (or sensation, state) which they experience at the present moment of communicating with another person, and says 'I (or to me)', names the feeling, then specifies by which external action of another person the feeling (or the sensation) has been triggered.

Examples: 'I admire you when you finish all the necessary work so quickly'; 'I feel tense when I see so many errors in your work documents'; 'I am happy to

see how many clients you have managed to attract today'; 'I get upset and angry when your tasks have not been completed in a week'; 'I feel uncomfortable when people come close to me and stare into my eyes'.

I-statements are a more effective and more psychologically correct way of delivering FB as compared with You-statements, because a person receiving FB does not dismiss information about themselves automatically, can consider it more attentively within themselves, reflect on their behavior and actions. I-statements are far from being a 'magic pill to solve all troubles' (they cannot replace requests, wishes, explanations, demands, punishments, control, support, motivation and other essential interactions of a manager with employees). They are not aimed at making another person do something, but they may give a chance to change a person's actions and behavior in general by their own intention, as well as to improve the communication process. Furthermore, I-statements allow a person who gives feedback to deal with their own emotions and feelings by expressing them directly.

Acquiring the skill of making correct I-statements requires not only training, but also deep understanding and awareness of numerous mistakes made when attempting to use I-statements, even when a person is familiar with its formula. These mistakes may be involuntary, imperceptible to a person. Thus, in real everyday life, You-statements and I-statements are most often mixed together in our speech, of which we are also poorly aware. Unfortunately, the mixing and mistakes often completely outweigh the efficiency of FB.

It is impossible to completely avoid You-statements in the communication process (the more so since they perform a positive function when identifying positive qualities—improve self-esteem of a person who gets FB, support them, truly make them happy, inspire, give strength and energy). However, if and when we want someone to hear and consider our FB, reflect on themselves, use it for self-knowledge and improvement of their work and behavior, it is important to learn, even after having made unconscious You-statements, and notice the mistake to convert it into I-statements.

The problem in mastering I-statements and their effective use is a common wrong view that simply using the pronoun "I" and expressing one's feelings can be considered an I-statement (for example, 'I am mad at you'). On the contrary, there are numerous social stereotypes identified in literature which limit or completely exclude any verbal expression of one's feelings and emotions in work relationships and make it impossible for a person to use I-statements at work [10].

We shall now examine particular FB mistakes in using You- and I-statements (and ways of correcting them) often seen in the professional life of managers, and explain them from the point of view of psychological correctness. These mistakes have been identified during our work as a psychologist for training employees at several commercial and state organizations. The psychological work has been performed with employees of different departments (psychological trainings and psychotherapeutic dialogs). The following research methods have been applied: the

method of observing everyday communication between managers and subordinates (the object of observation is feedback from a manager to a subordinate), the method of analyzing and summarizing FB mistakes. The examples below illustrate only potentially problematic situations. FB mistake correction in every case is conducted by bringing a statement to the full and precise I-statement formula (given above). Thus, general recommendations for delivering FB are given, regardless of the individual qualities of communication partners.

3 Results and discussion

Feedback mistakes

1. The feeling is not mentioned at all.

Examples of the mistake: 'You have ruined our platforms'; 'You have not even discussed this issue with me personally'; 'You are not looking at me when talking'.

These FB examples only describe the facts of what is happening, the specific external actions of another person. However, a person who gets FB may easily ignore these facts or interpret them in their own way, unless it is said how exactly the facts are seen, how they affect another person and the work communication process. It is necessary to specify and add a feeling which is experienced at the present moment by a manager who delivers FB.

Correction: 'I am mad at you for presenting your material in diagrams on the platform'; 'Too bad you have not even discussed this issue with me personally'; 'I feel uncomfortable that you are not looking at me when talking'.

Feelings and emotions are a person's subjective evaluation of things that happen. Much more often, managers tend to accumulate and hold back most of their feelings by their will, and when the restraint mechanisms no longer work, they tend to uncontrollably and inadequately (more intensely than a trigger in the situation) release the emotions in the form of You-statements on their subordinates, which causes even greater negative social consequences. It is important to remember that there are no right and wrong feelings. It is also necessary to understand that even short-tempered people will be less offended by a contextual personal feeling (about oneself) than by a negative generalized judgment about them. Moreover, it is easier to express a less intense feeling, consciously choosing the way to express it, than to express a very intense feeling, if it has been accumulating for a long time. It is more reasonable to direct one's will not at holding back (hiding) feelings, but rather at choosing a more appropriate creative way of expressing one's feelings, taking into account the communicative situation, the qualities of a communication partner, the relationship with them, the importance of maintaining the relationship, one's own qualities (goals, values, resources, etc.).

2. The feeling is not specified:

- **only the negative or positive pole of a feeling is expressed;** a person who gets FB may interpret a statement in their own way and misunderstand the

feelings of a person who gives FB. **An example of the mistake:** ‘It is unpleasant when you are not looking at me’. **Correction:** ‘It is unpleasant, uncomfortable when you are not looking at me’;

- **a feeling is expressed metaphorically;** when expressing feelings in metaphors, everyone implies something personal which may be absolutely unclear to another person. **An example of the mistake:** ‘I am down in the mouth because of your words’. **Correction:** ‘I am down in the mouth, upset because of your words’;

- **only the degree of a feeling is expressed.** **An example of the mistake:** ‘It is unbearable when you make your report for such a long time’. **Correction:** ‘I begin to worry and get angry when you make your report for such a long time’.

In all the examined cases, it is necessary to specify and identify one's feeling arising at the present moment.

3. Generalization and expressing feelings about a person in general.

An example of the mistake: ‘You annoy me’. **Correction:** ‘It annoys me that you laugh when we are discussing this important issue’, ‘It surprises me that you still have not submitted the report’.

It is necessary to specify a person's external action which evokes the feeling. It is very useful to identify feelings in each particular situation and express them for a particular reason. Too often, subordinates interpret the manager's feelings and words about them literally and wrong because of vague expressions used by the manager, and they react according to their literal interpretation. Eventually, it becomes more and more difficult to fix the relationships and to communicate further. Furthermore, feelings about a person may become not only more intense, but also more contradictory, if they have been accumulated after different situations, and then it becomes objectively more and more difficult for a manager to express them.

4. The person's behavior, which evokes a feeling, is not described at all.

An example of the mistake: ‘I get tense when I see you’. Behavior, actions or their elements, external expressions (or, conversely, the absence of desired behavior, actions and expressions of another person) are not stated, nor are characteristics of the environment created by them. It remains unclear what has caused the feeling. **Correction:** ‘I get upset if you do not greet me when we meet (get angry that you do not bring the final version of your work for so long)’. Here, a subordinate's external action, which causes the feeling, is specified.

5. Another person's behavior is inadequately described as a generalization of their actions.

Examples of the mistake: ‘I feel offended if you are not with me’. ‘It's a shame it happened like this’, ‘Your eccentricities make me laugh’.

It is necessary to specify a person's external action which evokes the feeling. **Correction:** ‘I feel offended if you do not share your thoughts during a meeting’, ‘It's a shame it happened like this, that you have not come to talk to me personally’, ‘The way you have just rapidly and abruptly waved your hands when talking makes me laugh’.

6. It is not specified what exactly has caused a feeling in a communicative situation, when it does not concern the behavior of a FB recipient directly, but concerns the communicative situation.

An example of the mistake: ‘I am sorry it is so’. A specification is needed. **Correction:** ‘I am sorry that your computer broke right at the time of the important negotiations’.

7. Conclusion on the person's actions and the person in general as a generalization of their actions

Examples of the mistake: ‘I am shocked that you are unable to negotiate’, ‘It is awful that sorting out things with you is impossible’. **Correction:** ‘I am shocked that you often lecture your colleagues’, ‘It is awful, painful that you end the conversation as soon as we start talking tensely’. It is again important to specify a person's external action which causes the feeling.

8. Exaggerating another person's actions as a generalization of their actions (or words). In this case, there is a dogmatic tone, a negative generalization in describing another person's actions. An exaggeration usually contains such words as ‘**everywhere**’, ‘**never**’, ‘**nowhere**’, ‘**in no way**’, ‘**nothing**’, ‘**at all**’, etc. Even if a person has done something well and right once in their life (usually, they remember it perfectly), a ‘never’ is already a distorted description of the person and reality. Because of the fact that a person who delivers FB is not objective, one does not wish to listen to them any longer. One inaccurate word causes a protest, a defense reaction, FB is no longer perceived and all I-statements become ineffective.

An example of the mistake: ‘It disgusts me that you are **always** shouting’ **Correction:** ‘It disgusts me that you are shouting now (speaking so loudly, expressing your thoughts so loudly)’.

9. Identifying a person's quality (psychological quality, character trait) as a generalization of their actions. As said before, a negative generalization about a person provokes a psychological defense and makes them imperceptible to FB. Every person tends to unconsciously dismiss any negative information about themselves, automatically, without thinking (see above). Moreover, it is not known for sure whether what is expressed in FB as a psychological trait is more due to the qualities of a person who gives FB or a person who gets it.

An example of the mistake: ‘I am mad at you for being so naive’. **Correction:** ‘I get mad when you just take the suppliers' word for it’.

10. Emphasis—a word or phrase which emphasizes the seriousness of a negative generalization about a person, it may increase the negative feelings of a person who gets FB and complicate its acceptance.

An example of the mistake: ‘It amazes me **how** slow you are’. **Correction:** ‘It amazes me that you make mistakes in such simple calculations’.

11. Describing internal (psychological) process of another person. The internal psychological processes of another person (sensations, perception, memory, thinking, imagination, desires, motives, needs, goals, meanings, values, etc.) are invisible to an eye, so one

cannot know and judge them from outside with full confidence; they cannot be proven because they occur within another person. If one speaks of the internal processes incorrectly, a person may not take it seriously, and in case of a description mistake they completely dismiss the entire FB, hence it becomes ineffective.

Examples of the mistake: ‘I am upset that you do not understand me (that you haven't tried hard, do not work hard, do not understand, do not see, do not hear, do not remember your responsibilities, do not recall, do not want, do not appreciate)’. Correction: ‘I am upset that you haven't even asked how I am’.

12. Expressing another person's attitude to something or someone—another person's attitude is part of their internal processes, so it is always only an assumption. We cannot see, truly know another person's attitude, we should not assert our assumption unless they tell us about it. Seeing that this mistake is very common and important, it is examined separately from all the other internal processes (see section 11).

An example of the mistake: ‘I am angry that you are so suspicious of me’. Correction: ‘I am angry that you check my computer’.

13. Expressing a subjective evaluation, an opinion on the behavior of a person who gets FB. Many arguments and explanations can be found for any opinion, and different people have different opinions (I think that..., in my view..., one may..., one may not...), other people may disagree, they are not obliged to agree. Expressions of one's opinion often turn into a sermon or discussion, and FB is not perceived and slips away, if a person does not agree with the expressed opinion. Of course, every person and especially a manager must be able to express their opinion on all sorts of things. But when delivering FB, it is a mistake to express one's evaluation or opinion on a person's behavior, because it decreases the effectiveness of this FB. It is better to deliver FB separately from expressing an opinion.

An example of the mistake: ‘You talk rudely to your colleagues’, ‘I am shocked that one can offend a young woman like that’. Correction: ‘It surprises and upsets me when I hear you saying to your colleague: “you are not welcome here”...’, ‘I am shocked that you insult a young woman’.

14. Interpreting person's actions—explaining the words or actions of another person to whom FB is given, when the meaning of their words and actions is not obvious and can be understood differently, including understanding the true deep reasons of person's actions.

Too often, interpretations trigger psychological defense, are perceived negatively and distract a person from hearing something about themselves which they could analyze on their own if they wanted to. In psychotherapy, there are many requirements for using the interpretation technique by a psychotherapist, so that it may be perceived, be useful and effective for a client. In everyday life, interpreting another person (becoming their “psychologist”, analyzing them) without their permission, without agreeing to have a private conversation, is a trespassing of another person's boundaries. If colleagues have agreed on this (it is preferable to agree anew in each new communicative

situation), the interpretation must be separate from other FB.

An example of the mistake: ‘I am upset that problems at home may have made you so cold-hearted’. Correction: ‘I am upset that you refuse to speak with your colleague and discuss the situation’.

15. Instruction, lecturing, sermonizing—direct or implicit, polite or rude instructions, lecturing and sermonizing decrease the FB efficiency. If there is no agreement with an adult person that they will be taught, it is unnatural and inappropriate, another person is not obliged to listen to anyone. The feeling of protest stops a mature person from perceiving such FB.

An example of the mistake: ‘It's important that you learn to listen to people’. Correction: ‘I am offended that you often interrupt me’.

16. A tirade—an explosive expression of emotions about what one may or may not do, directed at another adult person. It annoys and distracts most people from the FB content. One must launch into a tirade also separately from giving FB, if a person who gives FB needs it (thinks that they may release their emotions) or it happens in an uncontrolled way.

An example of the mistake: ‘It's outrageous, I'm sick of them playing computer games at work’. Correction: ‘I'm tired of waiting for you to return to work’.

17. Mockery — something exaggeratedly good is said about a person, while a negative sense is implied. Mockery irritates most people, thus distracting them from the FB content.

An example of the mistake: ‘I can see you are a real “champion”!’. Correction: ‘It surprises me how many things you do at the same time and I worry that it may affect the quality of work’.

18. Accusation, blaming—it is always difficult to evaluate something objectively: whether certain traits and actions leading to negative consequences (such as alcoholism) are a person's fault or trouble, or both, or a fault and trouble shared by somebody else. Any suggestions or direct words about guilt (even if the guilt is obvious for a person themselves and for everybody) trigger psychological defense and, consequently, impede the perception of FB, complicate its acceptance. One must decide what is more important at the moment: to accuse or to deliver FB so that a person may hear.

Examples of the mistake: ‘I am sad that we couldn't meet because of your fault’, ‘Don't you understand that I'm waiting for your initiative?’. Correction: ‘It's sad that you refused to meet me yesterday’, ‘It annoys me that you don't give any proposals on how to increase our profits’.

19. Comparing a person with someone or something—when a person in general (or their certain quality, feeling or action) is compared, the value of their own uniqueness (which is an important psychological fact) is questioned, a person who gets FB is reluctant to perceive this information and the FB effectiveness decreases.

An example of the mistake: ‘It offends me that you are talking down to me, like my father’. Correction: ‘It offends me that you are talking so harshly to me’.

20. Condemnation—an expression evoking shame, a feeling which is very difficult to handle and which denies something good and valuable in a person at the moment. As a rule, it causes a strong psychological defense and insensibility to FB.

An example of the mistake: ‘It is insufferable, it’s shameful to live like you’. Correction: ‘It is insufferable, your lies disgust me and make me feel desperate’.

21. Threat, insult, humiliating statement—a normal person is definitely not obliged to listen to FB, take it seriously and consider it after being threatened, insulted or humiliated. It is important to decide in every communicative situation whether one wants to humiliate a person or to make sure they hear what one has to say about them.

An example of the mistake: ‘Too bad you are brainless’. Correction: ‘Too bad you haven’t considered the facts’.

22. Condescending phrases cause a natural wish of an adult person to protect themselves and their point of view and not to take FB seriously.

An example of the mistake: ‘I am shocked, you dare to contradict me...’. Correction: ‘I am shocked that you refuse to act the way I tell you to’.

23. Wish and request are only indirectly considered FB, because they are information about a person who gives FB. Wishes are often insufficient, and feelings more clearly express our view of a person, it is necessary to state them. It is also better to express a wish concerning another person specifically enough and separately from FB, otherwise attention of a person who gets FB is directed at doing or not doing what is wished or requested by another person, evaluating it, instead of being directed at self-reflection.

An example of the mistake: ‘I get angry, I would like you to understand me’, ‘I am so uncomfortable, I ask you to stop talking near me’. Correction: ‘I am angry that you call every hour asking confirming questions’, ‘I feel uncomfortable, uneasy to overhear you talking about too personal experiences’.

4 Conclusion

1. Compared with You-statements, I-statements are more correct and sustainable way of delivering FB in subject-subject interactions in communication, creating conditions for the maximum possible effectiveness of FB in the management process.

2. There are numerous FB mistakes in everyday communication, most of which remain unnoticed and unconscious despite knowing the differences between You- and I-statements. These ways of delivering FB differ not only in their pronouns, it is necessary to take into account all the elements of the I-statement formula: I (or to me) + feel (or perceive) such (specific) feeling (or sensation, state) + about such (specific) external action of another person in the communication process.

3. Deep understanding of particular FB mistakes by managers gives opportunity to correct them under the conditions of real management communication, apart from socio-psychological trainings and psychotherapeutic space.

4. Effective FB improves the quality of the self-knowledge process of a person who gets FB, expands opportunities for correcting their behavior and work. And for a person who gives FB, correct I-statements are a universal mechanism of self-regulation, self-support, as well as developing the qualities of a mature person.

6. Using correct I-statements is one of the ways of developing emotional intelligence at an organization for its proper functioning and increasing the effectiveness of a team.

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