



# Performance Management

Team Performance Management: How to Provide Effective Feedback to Teams?

CQ Dossier | Evidence-based Management

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## Executive summary

This CQ Dossier focuses on how organizations can effectively provide feedback to teams. Within performance appraisal research, attention has been paid on how best to provide feedback to individuals. It is less clear how to provide feedback to teams to help them be effective and efficient. Lately, top-performing companies like Google and Deloitte have changed their performance management systems. These systems focus on assessing future performance rather discussing past performance and the traditional annual appraisal review has been discarded by many organizations (Buckingham & Goodall, 2015). Although there are pros and cons for these changes in performance management, there is a trend in assessing how best to evaluate team work, particularly as organizations are moving to team-based work. There has been a debate concerning whether eliminating performance ratings is beneficial or deleterious to organizations (Adler et al., 2015). This dossier provides recommendations based on scientific principles on how best to provide feedback to teams.

### Recognize the strengths of each team member

In an earlier study, Li and colleagues also conducted additional research to show that individual performance within teams matters (Li et al., 2015). Although team research focuses on what constitutes an effective team, it is important to recognize that teams are ultimately composed of individual members who contribute to the success of the team (Li et al., 2015). In this earlier study, Li et al. (2015) demonstrated that one exceptional team member (termed an extra miler) was able to influence team effectiveness beyond all the contributions of other team members. This extra miler also played an important role in driving team processes such as team monitoring and backup processes. Consequently, this research shows that it is important for organizations to recognize high flyers who are able to increase team effectiveness.

### Provide positive feedback to team members

It is important to provide feedback to individuals and research has shown that positive feedback can have an impact on team performance. High-performing teams share

nearly six times more positive feedback than average teams. In comparison, low-performing teams share nearly twice as much negative feedback than average teams (Losada & Heaphy, 2004). It is important to highlight team member strengths in order to generate a sense of accomplishment within the team. A recent Gallup survey found that 67% of employees whose managers focused on their strengths were fully engaged in their work, as compared to only 31% of employees whose managers focused on their limitations.

## **Use effective communication styles when giving feedback**

It is important to give constructive feedback to team members and to show empathy when focusing on a weakness. However, it is also just as important to focus on the way in which feedback is conveyed to team members. In an article by Goleman and Boyatzis (2008), they describe a study conducted by one of their colleagues –Marie Dasborough. She studied the effects of delivery on feedback when she observed two groups. In one group the team members received negative feedback accompanied by positive nonverbal feedback, such as smiles. In the second group the team members received positive feedback yet the communication style was negative with the appraiser frowning or narrowing their eyes. Dasborough found that team members who received positive feedback accompanied by negative emotional signals felt worse than those who heard the negative feedback that was delivered in a positive way. So, the research shows that delivery matters as much, if not more so, than the content of the feedback.

## **Ensure that managers are coached in how to give effective feedback to team members**

It is important to ensure that managers provide effective feedback because it is a crucial managerial competency. Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer (2011) conducted a rigorous analysis of 12,000 diary entries provided by 238 employees in seven companies. In assessing motivation, Amabile and Kramer (2011) state that a sense of progress is a more powerful motivator than personal recognition or pay. It is important that managers provide specific feedback to employees in how they are helping the team and organization.

## Allow team members to provide feedback to each other

Organizations can also ensure that team members provide feedback to each other. One way in which to organize this feedback is through 360 degree feedback that includes input from various stakeholders, such as supervisors, peers, subordinate and individual self-evaluation (Foster & Law, 2006). The organization must also assess whether a team is ready for a 360 degree review because it takes time for team members to become versed in each other's strengths and weakness. Anonymity and fairness should be established with a minimum number of raters agree upon prior to feedback (Morgeson et al., 2005).

### Key take-aways

- Acknowledging individual achievement within teams
- Reward high achievers who go beyond collective team effort
- Be effective in delivering feedback to team members
- Provide coaching to managers in how to deliver feedback
- Allow team members to provide feedback to each other using a 360-degree review system

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