

PDR GUIDE—RECOGNITION AND FEEDBACK

THE NATURE OF RECOGNITION

An understanding of the different kinds of feedback is important in mediating how a manager responds or reacts to events and outcomes in a team. Insufficient attention paid to these characteristics can result in significant impairment of motivation.

The Recognition Grid¹ sets out four kinds of feedback.

Generalised positive	+100
Specific positive	+50
Specific negative	-200
Generalised negative	-1,000

Feedback may be provided in words or by actions, and needs to be genuine.

1. A *generalised positive* is a comment like ‘You’re good to work with’ or ‘I appreciate you.’ It applies to the person, valuing who he or she is, and is not connected to any specific behaviour.
2. A *specific positive* is a comment like ‘Thanks for helping me with that job yesterday’ or ‘I’m glad you got that to me so quickly.’ It applies directly to a good task or action the person has done and is only half as potent as a general positive.
3. A *specific negative* is feedback like ‘You need to run a spell check on this report, there are numerous errors!’ or ‘This isn’t done properly, there is no executive summary!’ In this case the performance is poor and being clearly pointed out which allows for correction. This feedback is clearly demotivating. It may be necessary however when performance is poor and specific criticisms need to be addressed.
4. The final type of recognition is the *generalised negative*. This includes expressions like ‘You’re hopeless!’ or ‘You’re impossible to work with,’ or actions such as ignoring the person altogether. This applies to the whole person and is not limited to a particular behaviour or action. It can also apply to something that a person does not have the ability to change. It causes the most serious level of demotivation and needs to be avoided.

Negative feedback is always more potent and remembered far longer than positive feedback. Because of this, it is easy to compound poor motivation and lowered morale, if care is not taken about the nature of feedback given.

¹ Carlopio, J., Andrewartha, G. & Armstrong, H. 2005, *Developing management skills: a comprehensive guide for leaders*, 3rd edn, Longmans, Australia, p. 409–410.

Generalised positive feedback may contribute to self-esteem, self-confidence and creativity. This form of recognition tends to encourage innovation and risk taking. However, this type of feedback can cause suspicion in the work place if it lacks genuineness.

Specific positive feedback and specific negative feedback are needed for training people in new tasks. Specific negative feedback is easier to give, but quite demotivating, whereas specific positive feedback usually requires more patience and tolerance. Specific positive feedback is more likely to be accepted in the workplace than generalised positives. Specific negatives that are given with the intent of improving someone's performance and that are also achievable have a more positive outcome.

Generalised negative feedback can shock people into short-term performance improvement, but it quickly causes demoralisation and reduced productivity. This type of feedback damages self-esteem and confidence.

GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Is the organisation getting the most out of our rewards and recognition by administering them on a timely basis as part of the feedback process?

Staff need to understand and agree on performance standards.

- They should feel that management is working hard to help them reach their performance goals.
- They should feel that available internal and external rewards are personally attractive and attractive to their team.
- They should believe that recognition (positive and negative) is distributed fairly.
- They should feel that these outcomes are administered primarily on the basis of performance.

It is important to be honest and open with staff regarding their current performance and future opportunities.

To summarise, it is important to:

1. get to the point, don't beat around the bush
2. listen openly and non-defensively
3. clarify and explore points of difference
4. check readiness for acting on feedback.