



Beginner's guide to

Continuous Feedback

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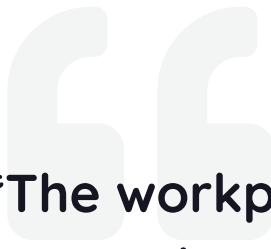
1. Introduction

The phrase 'Continuous Feedback' has been used very commonly in the last half decade or so, but not many organisations have actually adopted this practice in ways that will be the most beneficial to them, or their employees. Considering how shifting to Continuous Feedback marks a cultural shift from a tasks-oriented one to a people focused environment, the reasons can be many.

Exploring such roadblocks is essential to Re-architect work for growth in present-day organisations. Changes in talent pool, engagement models, cognitive tools are accelerating shifts and exposing drawbacks in the older methods. Work From Anywhere (WFX) is creating the rise of the augmented workforce; by using the principles of Continuous Feedback, organisations can form a learning culture that is conducive to iterative development around it.

The iterative development process includes not just products and solutions, but employees too. The positive impact of Continuous Feedback on employee morale and performance can be seen on the organisation's bottom line: [A Gallup survey](#) showed that organisations in the top quartile of the employee engagement scale, report 21% higher profitability compared with those in the bottom.

Once the roadblocks are identified, managing them while introducing the concepts of Continuous Feedback needs some finesse. Leaders of the organisation, across all levels, should understand the processes and their importance, so that they can instill the same understanding in their team members.



“The workplace and workforce are going to change pretty dramatically as we look forward. The entire concept of work is going to become more flexible. The skills needed in the workforce are going to be less about IQ and a little bit more about EQ, because if you think about it, a lot of IQ knowledge is going to be available at our fingertips through hand-held devices and the computer and technologies that we have at our disposal.”

Deborah Henretta

Ex-Group President, Procter & Gamble

Continuous Feedback: does the name explain all?

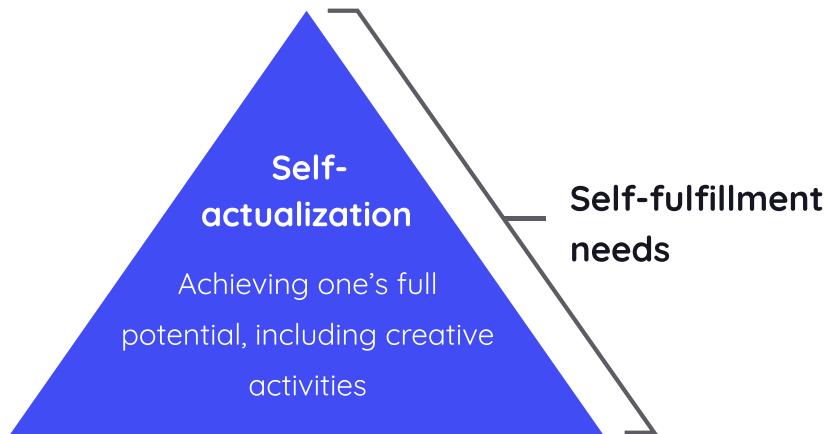
Well, yes and no. Continuous Feedback is what one gets if annual performance appraisals evolve into something that is more effective, efficient & development focused. It helps managers to elevate competencies of their employees on a short and regular basis, as opposed to annual or even semi-annual reviews which require feedback for a long duration, all at once.

The formal nature of annual or semi-annual reviews more often than not end up in making the communication one way. On the other hand, Continuous feedback encourages regular discussions amongst all the stakeholders. With the right adoption, this approach opens up channels for 2-way communication and helps managers give constructive feedback, and receive the same as well.

The need for Continuous Feedback

The inherent driving factor behind Continuous Feedback is rooted in Psychology. By seeking feedback, employees seek to satisfy their esteem needs. They take efforts to understand and execute newer features and technologies, as they crave recognition. While the desire for recognition may be different as compared to the hierarchy that Maslow speaks of, it is still a strong motivator to perform at one's best.

1. INTRODUCTION



THE TOPMOST LAYER OF
MASLOW'S HIERARCHY
OF NEEDS PYRAMID

The concept of Continuous Feedback is nothing new: Consider a house renovation situation, where work starts once the owners and interior designers decide on the look and feel. During the process, the owners regularly check if the work is going on as intended and share feedback with the interior designers, whether positive or negative. If better design options were to be provided within the budget, the designers get appreciated. On the other hand, if something is not satisfactory – the owners can immediately point it out and steps can be taken to rectify the issue.

This iterative process of feedback and improvements, leads to a house that looks much better than what was originally planned. The efforts to check in from time to time and review the work leads to better understanding of requirements, and results in a better end product.

Similarly, Continuous Feedback works not just on the professional front, but also on the personal side. By giving people a chance to constantly reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, the feedback process ensures progress towards the ultimate goal.

31%

lower turnover for organizations with retention programs and employee engagement measures

Annual reviews Vs. Continuous Feedback

Annual review is a busy time for managers across industries - they have important tasks that take up most of their time, and they have to make time for detailed, in-depth one-on-one reviews with their team members too. The urgency and the magnitude of the task makes it difficult for them to remember minute details about every team member in their department. Eventually, these performance reviews tend to end up being hurried and subjective in their evaluations.

Such evaluations fall short of motivating employees to get better. Instead of identifying areas where the employee can contribute better, annual reviews focus on identifying instances of success and failure. If employees are not assisted in their learning and growth, they perform inefficiently - and that ends up reflecting poorly on the entire team. If this happens across various teams, it could lead to a huge loss in productivity.

Managers can arrest such slides by continuously evaluating the performance of their team members. By doing so, they can identify gaps and take necessary steps like providing training or direction. The recurrent and bite-sized nature of Continuous Feedback process helps employees to improve their skills at a faster rate, and provide better solutions.

The aspect of timely recognition loses its importance in annual reviews. Employees whose efforts are not recognised at the right time, tend to lose interest and stop taking efforts altogether. A disengaged employee is worse than a poor performer, as the latter can at least be trained to perform better.

1. INTRODUCTION

In case of Continuous Feedback, the manager is free to communicate with his colleagues in a timely manner, and recognise achievements – big or small – with appropriate decorum. The act of recognition turns the focus on the journey, and contributes to an environment of trust.

If we consider both approaches in terms of mere numbers, the difference leaps up from the paper. Assuming the average salary of a manager in the US as \$45/hr and that there are a 100 employees in the manager's department, the cost of conducting a 2-hour employee review for a 100 employees, comes up to 200 hours - and would cost the organisation \$90,000.

Manager Avg. salary per hour	Employees in depart- ment	Time to review, per employee	Total time spent	Total cost
\$45	100	2 hours	200 hours	\$90,000

2. The case for Continuous Feedback

The advocacy for Continuous Feedback has increased over the last few years, as has the definition of work. Previous classifications of blue and white collar jobs have grown in size, adding new industries under them altogether. Work is not confined to a rigid set of hours anymore, and the way it is evaluated needs to change too. Here are some of the reasons that have accelerated the popularity of the process.

The Millennial equation

Millennials far outnumber generation X at the workplace. While the earlier generation was used to a certain pace, millennials are now changing the game. They seek consistent career advancement, instant recognition and gratification, and annual feedback simply doesn't cut with them. A [survey by Gallup](#) shows a sizable number of millennials want to "be known for what makes them unique". This quest of meaningful work and individuality will only go up as newer generations line up for work.

Globalised workforce that can switch jobs easily

Companies all over the world are seeing fierce competition to attract talented workforce at all levels. They offer attractive packages and a variety of unique benefits to entice this talent. But employees are looking beyond the benefits – and they value a growth-oriented culture more. When they are not able to see the growth in their current organisation, they can easily opt out and look for better opportunities where their efforts are appreciated.

2. THE CASE FOR CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK

Ease and optimum utilisation of internet

Spread of internet has made some fundamental changes to how life and work are perceived. From the time when everything was manual and on paper, most processes took a long and thus were rendered ineffective. But now, all essential information is available at the tip of fingers. Any task, be it the smallest or the biggest, can now be done online at a fraction of time. When it comes to feedback, it can be given the minute it is demanded or required.

“With Generation Y coming into the business, hierarchies have to disappear. Generation Y expects to work in communities of mutual interest and passion – not structured hierarchies. Consequently, people management strategies will have to change so that they look more like Facebook and less like the pyramid structures we are used to.”

Vineet Nayar

Former CEO, HCL Technologies

94%

employees prefer real-time feedback, and more than half of office professionals want performance check-ins at least once a month

Wakefield Research survey

3. Continuous Feedback, contiguous advantages

The benefits of Continuous Feedback can not only be seen in the increase of productivity (and subsequently, the profit margin of the organisation), but also in non-tangible ways that can help an organisation to adopt a culture of learning. Few important ones are mentioned below for ready reference.

2-way communication

Because of the high frequency of conversation built into the process, Continuous Feedback helps build trust between team members & their managers. Eventually, this leads productive 2-way communication where managers can regularly guide employees to realign their performance, and employees can bring up the bottlenecks or issues that hinder the quality of their work. This continued communication helps employees understand the importance of their work and the impact it has on the organisation. In such environments, if someone is facing particular obstacles, they can openly reach out to their managers and get feedback on finding the best solution.

48%

of highly engaged employees receive feedback at least once a week



compared to only

18%

of employees with low engagement.

Timely evaluation

Remembering the pluses and minuses of different employees is not the only responsibility managers have. They are often called into meetings, have decisions to make, and expecting them to be cognizant of all achievements of their team members is not practical. So, timely evaluations are beneficial for both the managers as well as employees. Managers do not have to keep tracking employee's performance for the entire year, and they can choose to schedule the evaluations for short and regular intervals, or even on the completion of certain tasks. Such a step helps in keeping the achievements and areas of improvement fresh in their minds, leading to more interactive and productive discussions, and motivates employees further to give their best and increase productivity.

Consistent development

The primary purpose of feedback is to identify weaknesses and overcome them, in order to work better. The process presents a chance to develop one's skill sets, and is linked to consistent learning and professional growth of employees.

No major expenditure required

When done on a weekly basis, Continuous Feedback session don't take more than a quick 2-5 minutes to convey the feedback. When compared to the huge expenditures that annual reviews incur, there are hardly any associated costs.

4. Starting, back from the start

Continuous Feedback is very simple in theory, and hence it is easily confused with being easy to adopt - But nothing could be further from the truth. The process is difficult to introduce in organisations, as everyone needs to be on board before any decisions are made. It can drive to be a good way to increase productivity, it won't be so unless everyone is educated about how it is to be done. There are certain steps that need to be initiated:

Seeking feedback

Beginning with a feedback form to test the effectiveness of annual performance reviews, helps organisations adopt to the methods of Continuous Feedback. It will also show that the annual review process does not provide timely feedback – employees have no way of knowing how their performance is being perceived till the very end of the year.

It is essential that employees themselves understand that the current performance measurement system is flawed and needs to be changed in order to be efficient. To assist in this regard, [questionnaires](#) can be used. Having a ready list eases a lot of confusion, and gives employees a set number of items to focus on, as they learn the ropes of the Continuous Feedback Process.

[Download Now](#)

Introducing Continuous Feedback through sessions

Conducting sessions across all departments throughout the organisation, helps employees clear the doubts they have about the process. Demonstrating how it is done, with use case studies or dummy examples, shows how this is beneficial for them as well as the organisation.

Setting goals across the organisation

Setting short term goals for managers, such as giving x number of feedback to team members in week1, simplifies the process for them in the all-important initial phase. Similarly, for employees, setting goals which require them to provide feedback to their peers on a weekly basis can help. It becomes easy to ensure that everyone is giving regular feedback when it's one of the goals for the week.

Rewarding colleagues publicly

Evaluating performances as per the time frame set for every employee provides a boost of motivation to the team. Publicly praising or rewarding those who show high adoption, encourages employees to embrace the feedback process. Equally important is taking feedback from those who show low adoption, and trying to assuage their concerns. These steps help in getting everyone on the same level of understanding so that there is uniformity across the organisation.

69%

of employees say they would work harder if they felt their efforts were better recognized.

5. Hurdles to the continuity

One of the unforeseen advantages of Continuous Feedback process is how it exposes systems that are obsolete or broken, but not all organisations are in a position to benefit from it. Recognising these roadblocks is the first step towards transformation, and here are a few to begin with.

Resisting change

People develop resistance to all concepts that have the potential to break the status quo. They are reluctant to step out of their comfort zones, and Continuous Feedback too has to face this roadblock. Employees who are used to an annual review pattern tend to increase their efforts only in the last 2-3 months of the year, so that their latest performance stays fresh in their managers' mind. Moving from such a setup to the one where they are constantly being given feedback, feels like someone is constantly breathing down their necks – and managers must ensure this is not the case. Once the Continuous Feedback mechanism starts showing positive results, any lingering doubts will get cleared.

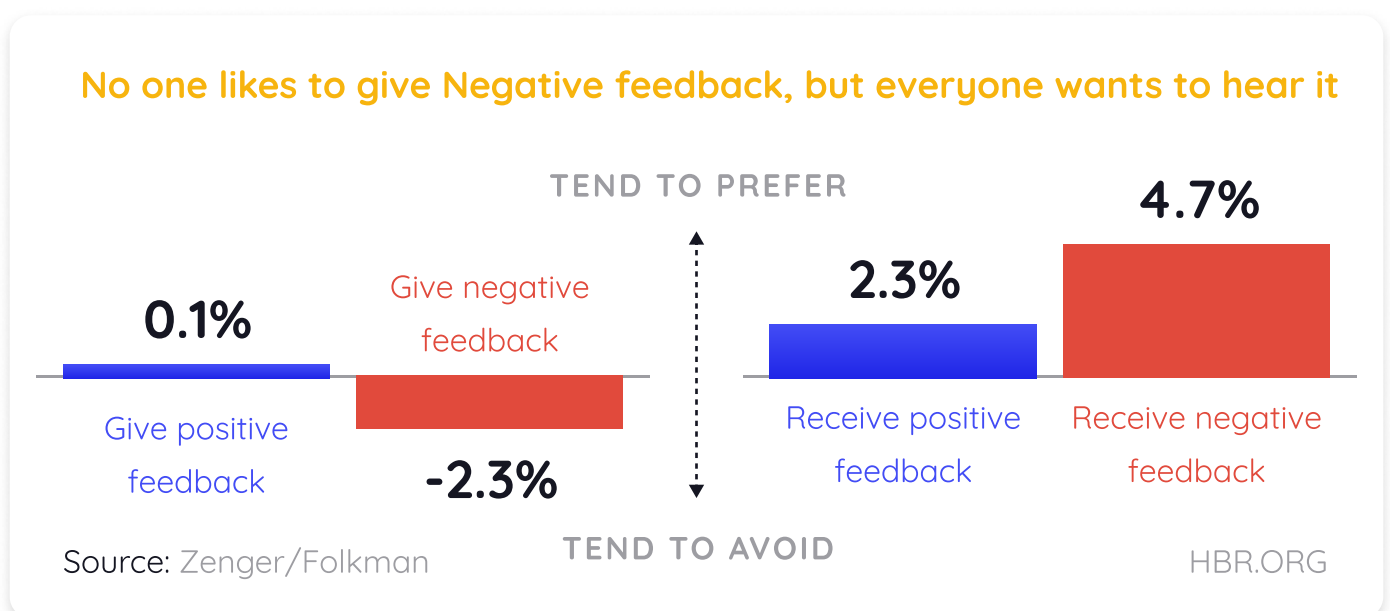
Time and money

Annual reviews have been the norm for more than 2 decades now. They are so ingrained within the organisation that everyone is well aware of how the process is carried out. In a Continuous Feedback process, however, managers face the daunting task of educating everyone about the process, how to implement it and most importantly how it can be beneficial for everyone in the organisation. It takes weeks at times to make sure everyone is on board. Many sessions need to be conducted with all the departments of the organisation until every single person has understood and accepted Continuous Feedback. It takes commitment and discipline for everything to fall in place.

5. HURDLES TO THE CONTINUITY

Not all feedback is constructive

Since Continuous Feedback is a 2-way communication, there are bound to be incidents where the feedback is biased and subjective. Managers might hesitate to warm up to a platform where they might have to deliver critical feedbacks often as opposed to once a year, and they might shy away from duty. But stats suggest the opposite: a [HBR survey](#) reveals that while managers struggle to provide feedback that can be considered as 'negative', a large part of the workforce actually welcomes it.



There are many such common psychological biases that managers need to avoid at all costs, and care needs to be taken to consider all information and provide objective feedback. The purpose behind giving or seeking feedback is to improve the performance and productivity of the organisation as a whole, and any feedback, even critical, can be worded to highlight that purpose.

92%

of the respondents agreed that “Negative (redirecting) feedback, if delivered appropriately, is effective at improving performance.”

Harvard Business Review survey

6. Champions of Continuous Feedback

As businesses and business processes have become more dynamic, roles and responsibilities of employees in an organisation evolve constantly. In such a scenario, having an end-of-the-year appraisal is definitely redundant. Some of the biggest names such as Microsoft, Accenture, Gap, Deloitte and Adobe have **let go of the archaic process of annual performance reviews**. Instead, they ensure that the feedback is continuous and backed by data-driven actionable insights. Tools such as Employee Success, Employee Garrison, and People can help managers provide feedback and coaching in a timely manner.

- No better place than JIRA to find context
- No separate system, rapid adoption
- Connect execution with strategy