Building a feedback culture

... developing positive attitudes of learning

Management Coaching and Culture

Where you are aware of the performance of others through their Inspirometer feedback data*, you will not use this information to coerce a change in their behaviour by means of guilt, pressure, or any form of threat or sanction.

Source: Inspirometer Terms and Conditions

Given the right conditions, 99 in 100 of us will choose to do a good job. The issue of management is about enabling those 'right conditions'. And that is what this document is about - creating the right conditions for your people to do a good job in meetings.

We opened with this excerpt from the Inspirometer terms and conditions because it is pivotal to how you can do that effectively and sustainably. What might appear to some as a limitation (at first glance at least) is actually a safety rail, discouraging practices that might appear to be effective in the short term, but which block real ownership culture, and which can result in people hiding the truth and setting up longer term problems which are much harder to resolve.

It is true, that even in our best organisations, there may be 1 person in 100 who does not care about their work irrespective of the circumstances, but it makes little sense to create a system which potentially undermines 99 good people in order to compensate for one bad one. Futhermore you will become aware of problem people through other data and systems anyway, and probably far better able to address their behaviour through those.

✳✳✳ Inspirometer is a learning tool ✳✳✳

Inspirometer is intended to generate data for individual and collective learning, and to build ownership within its users for applying it to circumstances where learning is most available (i.e. where performance shortfalls provide the most lessons). In this way, people's growth and development are maximised as they seek new insights about themselves and opportunities to improve.

Contrast this with evaluation tools, which are intended to test competence, and which people approach with a goal of demonstrating their strengths rather than illuminating their potential weaknesses. Inspirometer feedback data (as opposed to operational data) is not allowed to be used for this purpose because it will change the attitude of its users away from using it to develop and grow toward demonstrating that they don't really need such development.

However, please do not let the idea that Inspirometer is learning-centric distract you from its central role in transforming operational performance. Inspirometer is all about driving your business more effectively and yielding better business results through a demonstrable and sustainable increase in ideas, teamwork, engagement, efficiency, and insight. And personal responsibility for learning is the most effective way to achieve this.

We are seeking a culture in which people can be open and honest, with themselves and with each other, about their strengths and weaknesses, because they can see the benefits and do not feel in any way disadvantaged by doing so. The outcome of this is two-fold:

1. They retain ownership over their own development and achievements, and focus on growing their abilities and performance themselves
2. You can adopt a coaching role of helping them to think that through and provide support where required

So, if the 'You messed up! Do better or else!' approach is excluded from the options, how do we propose that managers use Inspirometer data to coach progress in their people?

Understanding how people see their own progress

Step 1 is to be informed about what your people are seeing in respect of their meeting performance. This has two components to it: what data and insights (trends, patterns etc.) does Inspirometer present in respect of their meetings; and are they seeing this?

The first component can be seen by looking at the trends for your people in your own Inspirometer account. You can do this by going to your Meeting Effectiveness graph (Analysis > Meeting Effectiveness) and resetting the Data Source to your team. You can then see the overall picture, and look at the trend lines for different individuals. This will enable you to identify those who seem to be finding it easy to make progress, and those who may be in need of some support and encouragement.

However, just because you have seen their data does not mean that they have seen their data, and so you also need to look at the user stats (Manage my Team > User Stats) to see their activity in accessing their account (look for the 'Last Account Visit' column and/or the 'Time on Learning' column).

So those are the raw facts, but how does the owner of that data see them? What is their perspective on all of this? To answer this, you will need some time with the person concerned, with an open and curious (but non-prejudicial) enquiry into their perspective:

- I have just been looking at the Inspirometer data, and noticed … , and I was wondering why that might be, and if I can do anything to help?
- I was wondering how the Inspirometer tool is working for you at the moment? I noticed …, and I was curious as to why?

- How are things working out for you in respect of meeting effectiveness? I have seen the data, and was wondering if you would like a sounding board to talk through your strategy?

The key thing in each of these approaches is to be truly curious, truly non-judgemental, truly supportive. If there is an issue, it is THEIR issue (even after they have asked for help), but judgement is the surest way to put them on the defensive and push them to seeing it as your issue - and as soon as that happens it becomes a whole lot more difficult to solve.

So how do you do this?

Bringing an attitude of understanding

By being curious, in the same way as a concerned friend is curious, you can begin to see and understand how they see things, and that will enable your curiosity to ask more questions, some of which may concern the perceived implications and consequences of their choices, the data they have used in making them, and what they plan to do next. Gently pursuing the development of your own insight and understanding into their perspectives will cause them to do the same as they seek to respond to your curiosity, and that will cause new perspectives to emerge (perhaps for both of you) which they 'own'.

The 'Inner Condition' model developed by Otto Scharmer of MIT provides a useful framework to both understand this dynamic and to become self-aware of how you are doing in your questions. It is about understanding what is happening to your own perspectives and motivations, and whether that is leading to the conversation becoming more open and emergent, or more closed and polarising.

It is based on a picture of ourselves as shown on the right.

In conversation, if we monitor our inner condition, we will become aware that we are tending either to:

- judge what we are hearing and seeing, or we are becoming curious about it;
- be cynical about situations, or feel compassion for those who are involved;
- sensing stress and defensiveness in our bodies, or the energy that accompanies courage.
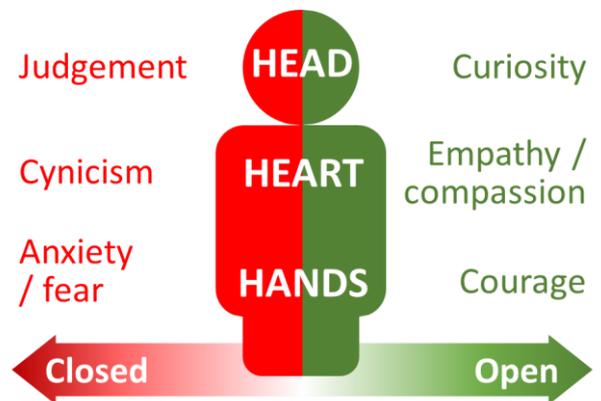
Or we may be somewhere along a spectrum between the two. Furthermore, as we sense we are moving toward one end or the other, we will have a corresponding effect on those we are talking to, and that can either tend to open the conversation up to new possibilities or close it down into established positions. In this way, we are able to shift the field of the conversation from a "win/lose" paradigm of arguing and compromise through debate and exchange towards a far more collaborative paradigm of co-creative/generative dialogue that stimulates new ideas and crystallises new actions that can be prototyped and tested together.

Clearly, in developing understanding and ownership in your people, tending toward green is far more productive than tending toward red. But, as Thomas Jefferson put it - 'The price of freedom is eternal vigilance' - you will only be free of the 'red' if you are mindful to monitor it within yourself.

By modelling this approach, you enable your people to see the advantages of adopting this 'attitude' themselves:

■ Curiosity over their own data (rather than self-judgement);

■ compassion for themselves and the people in their meeting (rather than criticism);

■ and the courage to try things differently.

Using the GROW model to help people develop their own strategies for improvement

As they move from their perspectives to what they are going to do about them, you may find that the simple GROW model may help you to pose the right questions at the right time to help them develop their own productive strategies for moving forward. GROW is an acronym standing for: Goals; Reality; Options; Will - four simple steps which you can use to guide the conversation through to a productive outcome.

Goals is about exploring what they would ideally like to achieve in their meetings and why. It is about tapping into their own standards and values, and the aspirations they have for being able to influence outcomes and enable their colleagues - both in terms of current responsibilities and in terms of developing their potential. It is about clarifying some point in the near future, and getting them to articulate the criteria by which they will know that they have been successful.

Reality is about understanding how far short of that they currently are - not in a judgmental way, but simply as a means to determine what they actually want to change. It is about clarity, not despondency. It is about being able to handle the facts objectively and dispassionately without any feelings of disappointment or shame, or of feeling identified by them. It is about 'becoming friends with failure' so that it can be fully utilised in moving forward.

Options is about thinking through all of the possible routes they may be able to take between the reality and the goals. Sadly this is where coaching becomes difficult - how do you help them come up with ideas without suggesting them yourself, and thereby removing some of the ownership they have for them? Fortunately Inspirometer provides its own solution to this - the meetings clinic presents them with a range of possible strategies to any meeting issue without you having to suggest anything. You can then concentrate on asking the question that encourage them to move around the clinic in the right way.

Will is about encouraging them to pull the conclusions into a clearly defined plan. Questions like: So what precisely are you going to do?; How soon do you want to have achieved your goal(s)?; What does that mean for the timescales by which you need to have this in place?; How will you know if you are on target?; What might distract you from this, or undermine your progress?; How will you ensure it doesn't?; What help do you need from others (or me)?; How will you ensure you get it? - will help to strengthen this step.

The GROW model can be entirely delivered from the Open/Green side of the Inner Condition Model, and doing so will do much to increase ownership, improve efficacy, and build deep, meaningful and productive relationships between you and your people. It will also model for them how meetings can be.

Once the plans are in place, you can clearly track progress within the Inspirometer, as can (and should) they. However, their plans may involve changing behaviours which will take time to show up on the meeting feedback. In this case you might like to help them reinforce and track their behaviour changes with other Inspirometer Tags. For more on this, see http://help.inspirometer.com/using-tags/#train

Changing the prevailing culture

Adopting the above approaches to managing meeting effectiveness in your team is all very well if you have just one layer of staff beneath you, but what if some or all of your direct reports also manage others. How will you get them to adopt a similar approach to your own.

There are of course some obvious things to do, like ensure they have read this document, and apply the GROW model to discussions with them about how they will apply it, and there is your own modelling of the approaches in your sessions with them.

But you may find it more useful to work with them to develop a common understanding of the culture you are trying to create, and a shared plan for how you will collectively deliver it. A resource that we would recommend to help you to do this is a 'maturity model'.

Maturity models are grids which describe a sequence of increasingly virtuous states across a series of aspects which reflect the current situation. An example of this (for the topics covered in this document) can be seen below.

	Selfish	Siloed	Mobilised	Engaged	Responsible
Attitude of care and service to others	Charity begins (and ends) at home	Got to look after your mates	Our community / society matters	Humanity matters (where it is good)	Humanity (life) in all its forms, matters
Curiosity and openness to creative possibilities	Its about winning others to my ideas	It is about fitting in	It is about reaching out	It is about the journey	It is seeking things we can't yet explain
Ability, confidence, commitment to make a difference	Success is keeping your head down	Sometimes we surprise ourselves	You have to stand up to be counted	You have to step out of your comfort	Life lies in moving beyond ourselves
Appreciation of interdependence; desire for teamwork	I am better off working on my own	I like being part of our group	Get all the groups pulling together	We look to create novel partnerships	Vulnerability is key to transcendence
Extending perceived boundaries of personal responsibility	Looking out for #1	Looking out for our team	What goes around comes around	If I can make a difference, I should	I bear responsibility for the plight of all
Valuing diversity, authenticity, integrity in self and others	Justice is about my rights	It is essentially 'us and them'	Neighbourliness over race/creed/..	I grow from being open with diversity	I am a steward of diversity
What organisations are like where their people are at this level	Money and contract centric. Just a job!	Bureaucratic and resistant to change	Single-minded with a bias on efficiency	Agile & intentionally evolving	Organisation as life to the full
What are meetings/ discussions like where their attendees are at this level	Largely contentious with little listening or progress	Mundane, parochial & intolerant of 'different' perspectives	Focused but largely routine - somewhat auto/merito-cratic	Exciting, creative, full of possibility and learning	Inspirational and full of newly emergent wisdom

The model is used in a group environment (i.e. your management team) to understand the current culture, and to define shared aspirations for changing it. The steps for using it in your team can be aligned with the GROW model as follows:

1. **Goals:** Get people to stick dots in the boxes (one in each row) which reflect the culture they would like to achieve and which they believe is currently practical. Use the differences in dot positions to stimulate discussion and shared understanding in the group, and define the level the group would like achieve on each row by consensus

2. **Reality:** Repeat the above exercise, but with different coloured dots, to reflect the culture they believe they currently have. Once again, use differences in perspective to stimulate discussion and insight, and arrive at a consensus position for the current reality as a group.
3. **Options:** Look at the differences between the Goal and Reality cells on each row, and use these to identify what will be required to move from one to the other. Explore the options for doing this, particularly around: communication; education; meeting practice; reward and recognition; modelling.
4. **Will:** Define a practical programme to deliver the change. This will most likely contain a mixture of projects and management behaviour change if it is to be successful. Think through how the change can be tracked within the Inspirometer system, and put the relevant progress measures in place.

Getting the basics right first

It should be noted that all of the above is premised on the idea of getting the Inspirometer feedback in the first place. This means that people who run meetings enable feedback for those meetings, and that people who attend meetings provide that feedback when the opportunity arises. However, despite its single-click nature, and it rooting in a supportive mindset, this sometimes proves more difficult than you would imagine.

Some of the reasons for this, and the solutions to it, are covered in the document on Giving and Receiving Feedback. Micro-feedback for meetings is a new concept, and people's experiences with feedback in the past have not always been that rewarding. As a result, although people accept the benefits of feedback logically, they are emotionally concerned, and this unreconciled tension can lead to them subconsciously sabotaging their progress in adopting it ... normally along the lines of: I meant to, but I forgot.

Changing a habit becomes a lot easier when we see the rewards that it brings us, but most habit changes start with the need to adopt certain disciplines. Meeting effectiveness is no exception. While we can see how feedback can really help us to improve and affirm us in that improvement, it still requires the disciplines of enabling feedback and providing feedback to be in place.

The quote used at the beginning of this article has an asterisk in it. Within the terms and conditions, this asterisk is used to clarify that feedback data relates only to the data obtained through clicking the faces and providing comments – it does not relate to data concerning whether people are using the tool or not. This differentiation is important because our experience is that developing an effective feedback culture is a two-step process – one firm, and one gentle.

- You may need to be firm to get people to adopt the disciplines of generating the feedback data
- But once the feedback data exists, you need to be gentle in how you help people to engage with it, so that they retain full ownership for their learning and improvement

How did we do?

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