Feed*forward* first – feedback later

A keynote lecture

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RUNNING HEAD: Feedforward

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3. To what degree would you like to try feedforward in your life, and organization?

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Abstract

To enhance happiness and productivity, we propose that managers perform FEEDFORWARD interviews before, or instead of, feedback interventions. Feedforward begins with a three-phase appreciative interview (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987): 1) Elicitation of a story during which the interviewee was at his or her best; 2) Discovery of the conditions that allowed one to be at his or her best, and; 3) Identification of the emotions experienced during the story's climax. It continues with the feedforward question: "To what degree do your plans for the immediate future take you closer to, or further away from, the conditions that allowed you to be at your best?" This question sparks a behavioral change towards greater alignment between one's deep interest and one's plans. Unlike feedback, which has multiple detrimental consequences, feedforward creates positive emotions, fosters bonding, builds psychological safety, and promotes the elicitation and sharing of vital new information regarding keys for personal and organizational flourishing. Furthermore, it blocks unproductive responses, common to feedback, such as lowering performance, rejecting the feedback message, and giving up. In this paper, we (a) review the drawbacks of feedback interventions; (b) Apply concepts from the field of negotiation to diagnose the personal and organizational needs underlying the use of one prelavant feedback system -- performance appraisal; (c) explain the feedforward interview step-by-step, coupled with several application examples, especially as a replacement or an antecedent of performance appraisals; (d) we provide a theoretical account for the putative effectiveness of feedforward; and (e) conclude with an invitation for varions experimentations with feedforward.

During a feedforward workshop, we conducted for approximately 30 high-school principals, one of the principals got up at the beginning of the session and said excitedly: "I must tell you what happened to me. I tried the feedforward interview with an employee I had already decided to dismiss, and asked him to tell me about an event at work during which he felt at his best. In response, he told me that for a long while now he had felt that his performance was not satisfactory. He then went on to explain about all the remedial steps he had taken and how great he felt about the changes he had made." The principal further added: "following the feedforward interview, I saw him in a new light, and discovered new things about him that I could not have imagined beforehand". She was very glad to tell her colleagues that instead of losing a worker with potential, she discovered a chance of him turning into a productive and desired employee.

In light of this story, we can ask what would have happened if this principal and this worker had not met during a feedforward interview, but rather during a traditional performance-appraisal interview, in which the principal would have given him feedback on his performance. Imagine what would have been the likely response of that employee, had his principal presented to him a performance appraisal form indicating that his performance is poor. In most likelihood that encounter would have deteriorated into anxious-ridden argument that would have blocked any possibility of gaining new knowledge about each other as well as the possibility of having an amicable-work relationship between them, perhaps for good (Coens & Jenkins, 2000). The feedforward story above depicts a different kind of interaction, an interaction in which the employee and the principal were engaged in an open and innovative dialogue. In this process, the employee did most of the talking and the principal gained new insights regarding her

employee. As a result, both parties were willing to re-consider their view of each other, and a hopeful and enthusiastic forecast for the future was created.

In this paper, we present feedforward and propose that it is effective in addressing the interests of multiple organizational constituencies (workers, management, human resource departments), which are often cited as reasons for using feedback interventions. Furthermore, we suggested that the feedforward interview can be implemented in organizations an alternative to feedback, or as an antecedent to feedback.

First, we first review the relative ineffectiveness of feedback systems in organizations, while focusing on one of the most prevailing feedback systems – the performance-appraisal system. Next, we explore the needs and the interests that performance appraisal is expected to address using concepts from the negotiation field. Then, we present the feedforward interview – an interview based on principals derived from Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), Positive Psychology (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), and Positive Organizational Scholarship (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn, 2005). Last, we propose a theoretical account for the putative effectiveness of feedforward, and end with a call for various experimentations with feedforward.

<u>Feedback</u>

Our senses provide us with information that is essential for our adaptation to the environment. We use this information as feedback in a self-regulation process that allows us to approach desired stimuli and to avoid aversive stimuli (Carver & Scheier, 1981). This regulation is achieved by comparing feedback information to internal goals and standards. Feedback is so crucial that without it we cannot live. Hence, expanding

our abilities to obtain feedback, beyond what our senses can provide, seems advantageous both for survival and for prosperity. For example, people have developed telescopes, IQ tests, X-rays, and learned to seek information from others proactively to increase their feedback range. Yet, the mere measurement, required to obtain the feedback, often changes the system it measures, albeit to different degrees: whereas using a telescope may have little cosmic effects, using X-rays can influence the health of the measured person.

Similarly, organizations, as living systems, also use elaborated feedback systems designed to enhance their survival and prosperity (e.g., financial reports, customer satisfaction surveys, market share, employee morale, and employee training evaluations). In some instances, the mere measurement may have negligible, or no consequences. For example, measuring market share will have little effect on the behavior of the market. However, in many organizational settings, the mere measurement has unintended negative consequences that are incompatible with, or even contradictory to, important interests and goals of the organization that initiated the measurement in the first place. For example, as many can attest, and as one of the fathers of behaviorism noted, classroom grades (learning or training evaluation) can impede learning and often change the focus of the student from learning to getting good grades (Thorndike, 1913, p. 286). Similarly, customer surveys reduce customers' willingness to return to hotels that placed feedback forms in the room (Ofir & Simonson, 2001) or to supermarkets that asked about pre-purchase expectations (Ofir & Simonson, in press). In the case of performance appraisal systems, the mere evaluation of employee contribution to the organization often changes the contribution of the employees - to the worse (Coens & Jenkins, 2000).

Specifically, performance-appraisal systems produce multiple undesirable organizational

outcomes, such as destruction of trust and communication, decline in morale and

cynicism (Coens & Jenkins, 2000). Thus, proactive organizational efforts to obtain

feedback often have undesired consequences that counter important strategic interests

including employee development, motivation, communication, future sales, and continual

learning. If this is so, why do organizations use detrimental feedback processes? One

answer may lie in the partial effectiveness of feedback systems. Probably, feedback

interventions would not have survived, had they not fulfilled some important

organizational needs. Thus, we propose that to understand why organizations are

employing feedback systems and to offer useful alternatives or means to reduce its

destructive effects, we must first identify the strategic goals organizations attempt to

address via formal feedback systems.

Discerning interests from positions

To explore the interests underlying the application of feedback in organizations,

we apply insights gained in the field of negotiation regarding integrative (win-win)

solutions. Reaching integrative solutions, as opposed to reaching distributive outcomes

or compromises, can be facilitated by using principled negotiation – a term given to the

interest-based approach to negotiation first formulated by Fisher & Ury (1981). The core

of this approach, which is considered the "Big bang theory" in negotiation (Thompson &

Leonardelli, 2004), is that understanding one's deep-seated needs and interests, rather

than one's positions, is the key to creating innovative and creative solutions, and reaching

integrative agreements.

Interests are distinct from positions in that interests are the underlying concerns, needs, desires, or fears that motivate a negotiator to take a particular position (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991). Positions, on the other hand, are the tangible items people say they want. Positions with respect to feedback systems are claims such as "we need to improve our performance appraisal system" or "we need to implement a performance-appraisal system". To understand the interests underlying these claims, we need to probe stakeholders for their deep-seated needs or strategic goals. Next, we analyze the needs underlying these positions.

Goals of feedback systems – the performance appraisal case

In the case of performance appraisal, there are at least three stakeholders that have different and discrete needs: Upper management, the Human Resource (HR) division or department, and the employees. Eliciting the interests that are significant to each of these stakeholders, in a specific organization, can be achieved through asking a series of questions (for examples, see Appendix 1). However, although the interests surrounding the performance appraisal system are likely to be unique for each manager and each organization, we can construct a general picture of these organizational needs from the cumulative experience of multiple organizations. For example, an Academy of Management Association survey of 2,400 US managers suggests that organizations use performance appraisals for the following purposes: improvement (quality, efficiency, alignment), coaching and guidance, feedback and communication, compensation, staffing decisions and professional development, and termination and legal documentation (Coens & Jenkins, 2000). In addition, HR managers often face the unspoken challenge of proving their contribution to the organizational "bottom line" and feeling relevant to their

organization. A manifestation of these needs can be found in the home page of the

Society for Human Resource Management, whose vision suggests that "the Society is

committed to advancing the human resource profession and the capabilities of all human

resource professionals to ensure that HR is an essential and effective partner in

developing and executing organizational strategy" (SHRMOnLine, 2005). This statement

indicates that the prevailing feeling is that HR has low relevance for the "important"

organizational matters, and that they must succumb to upper management pressures.

Among the comments we heard from HR managers are "we are not counted", "they say

that we are non-productive hours", "we are considered to be the touchy-feely types" (i.e.,

we really do not matter). This suggests that implementing changes in, or designing a new

performance appraisal system is a means for HR to prove upper management that HR is

important and valuable. The fulfillment of this hidden need is necessary but not

sufficient to support a win-win evaluation system.

As for upper management, they also have the visible need of achieving

organizational goals such as profit, production targets, increasing efficiency, development

and more. In addition, management have a less visible need to cultivate an appearance of

being both in the <u>forefront</u> of their business and <u>rational</u> about they way they conduct

their business (Abrahamson, 1996). Upper management must be convincing to their

stakeholders including their investors, employees, peers and competitors, otherwise they

suffer a loss of legitimacy (Abrahamson, 1996). The need to maintain this appearance is

what gives rise to various management fads, in which case these hidden needs might get

priority over the visible needs. Note that implementing changes in performance appraisal

system and looking for more ways to quantify the measurement of employees seems

compatible with upper management hidden need for appearing at the forefront and being

rational at the same time. However, appearing at the forefront and being rational at the

same time is necessary condition (because it is a real need) but not sufficient condition (if

other needs are not met) for a win-win organizational feedback system.

Finally, the employees whose voices are often unheard in the processes of

designing a performance-appraisal systems, have several interests that surface when they

are appraised. Employee often view the performance appraisal as an opportunity to

satisfy the following needs: to get a raise or promotion, to obtain challenging

assignments, to move to a position that better fits one's talents and interests, to improve

work conditions, to increase the value of the employee in the eyes of the manager, to

discuss problems and tp create better interpersonal communication. Regardless of the

particular issue that an employee may wish to discuss, the hidden need appears to be a

need for a voice. A win-win evaluation system therefore is likely to afford the fulfillment

of both the visible and the hidden needs of all parties.

The various needs of all the parties reviewed above could be easily understood

with the aid of three conflict-based theories of motivation (Nohria & Lawrence, 2002;

Ronen, 1994; Schwartz, 1992). These theories, which are consistent with a modified

taxonomy of Maslow's need-hierarchy theory (Kluger & Ganzach, 2004), converge to a

similar idea: Humans have four basic categories of innate needs that are organized as two

set of conflicting needs. The need of security (preservation, defense) conflicts with the

need for self-actualization (change, learning, renewal); the need for power (recognition,

esteem, property) conflicts with the need for belongingness (affiliation, connectedness).

Furthermore, these conflicting needs drive whole organizations (Nohria & Lawrence, 2002).

Now, we can easily map human basic needs to the interests pertaining to performance appraisal (see Figure 1). For example, the organizational need for employee development appears to address the basic need of self-actualization in the work place. Similarly, communication maps to belongingness, training and coaching map to both self-actualization and belongingness, compensation maps largely to power, and termination and documentation maps to security. Of course, each interest may satisfy more than one need. For example, for one person compensation may satisfy security needs, in addition to power, while for another it may also satisfy self-actualization. Note that our mapping is consistent with the general empirical findings regarding these dimensions found in research in multiple countries (Ronen, 1994; Schwartz, 1992).

In addition to the conflicting nature of the explicit interests reflected in basic needs, the hidden needs appear to encompass the entire set of conflicts, as well. For example, the need of upper management to be both avant-guard and rational, seems at first sight to suggest self-actualization with security. However, it is clear that being perceived as avant-guard and rational is in the service of advancing the organization, that is, gaining power and esteem from stakeholders. The hidden interest of HR to be counted suggests both a need to belong to the organization and to have power, thus increasing their security. Similarly, the interest of the employees to have a voice may serve all four basic needs.

In light, of the complex set of interests, it appears that if a feedback system, such as performance appraisal, fails to yield a holistic answer to conflicting needs it will lead

to a win-lose situation, or to poor results. Indeed, this seems to be the outcome of many

feedback systems, as we review below.

Feedback outcome

Reviews of various feedback systems and feedback interventions show negligible

benefits. Below, we consider the effectiveness of performance appraisal systems,

teaching (training) evaluations, customer surveys and feedback interventions in general.

Performance appraisals. A meta-analysis of 24 longitudinal studies, which were

based on a total of 7,700 employees, showed that improvement in direct report, peer, and

supervisor ratings over time is generally negligible (Smither, London, & Reilly, 2005).

Moreover, among those employees facing either a threat of dismissal or were expecting a

promotion there was no change in evaluations across time. Importantly, the average time

between appraisals was a year and the (negligible) change in evaluations was similar for

employees appraised by their manager and those appraised by a 360-degree feedback

instrument.

The above conclusions which are based on a quantitative approach are consistent

with an in-depth qualitative review of the effects of performance appraisals on

organizations (Coens & Jenkins, 2000). A book titled "Abolishing Performance

Appraisals" (Coens & Jenkins, 2000) cites poignant questions raised by different experts:

"If less than 10% of your customers judged a product effective and seven out of 10 said

they were more confused than enlightened by it, you would drop it, right? So, why don't

more companies drop their annual job-performance reviews? (Timothy, D. Schellhardt,

The Wall Street Journal)" (p. 1); and "The pain of performance appraisal is like a low-

grade fever. It doesn't prevent you from working, but you have this vague sense that

something is not right, and you don't get over that until you in fact have successfully dismantled the performance appraisal" (attributed to Peter Scholtes, p. 39). So, if the appraisals are so problematic then why do organizations continue to use them?

Coens and Jenkins (2000) argue that the choice of performance appraisals as tools to obtain the above goals is based on untenable assumptions. Most crucial is the assumption that human contribution can be assessed objectively. The lure of objectivity and its destructive organizational consequences was well described both in the classic paper by Kerr "On the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B" (Kerr, 1975) and by Joseph Heller in "Catch 22". Additional untenable assumptions are: (a) one appraisal system can simultaneously serve the goals of employee development and employee termination; (b) one can foster true commitment through a processes that coerce employees to participate; (c) the responsibility for employee development rest within the manager and not within the employee; and (d) termination without performance appraisals is impossible due to legal and other constraints. These assumptions reveal that whereas organizations often espouse a desire to manage according to McGreggor's theory Y – the belief that workers can naturally enjoy work if given the freedom to express their creativity and imagination, the coercive nature of performance appraisal that puts the responsibility on the appraisers reflect the application of theory X – the belief that workers despise work and, thus, must be controlled and coerreced (McGregor, 1960). Moreover, the fact that performance appraisal systems focus on evaluating individuals shows how embedded is the hidden assumption that individuals' behavior, and not the teams' performance, largely determines organizational success. In Peter Scholtes words "We live our lives in webs of interdependence and yet we keep telling ourselves the story

that we are independent" (Coens & Jenkins, 2000, p. 33). Therefore, Coens and Jenkins

(2000) conclude that even though many managers are doing their best to apply

performance appraisals with a humane and considerate approach, the untenable

assumptions will repeatedly breed organizational problems that can be solved only with a

radical approach to discovering new ways to attaining the goals for which organizations

currently employ performance appraisals.

Teaching evaluations. Similar results to those found for performance appraisals

were found in reviews of teaching evaluations, that is, no systematic change was found

over time (Marsh & Roche, 1997). This conclusion is consistent with data on

approximately 1,000 professors at the Hebrew University appraised by half a million

students over 3 years (Kluger, 1999). These data showed no significant change in

evaluations, where the statistical power guarantees that even minor changes would have

been detected, had they existed. The exception occurs when teaching evaluations are

coupled with coaching and training professors (Marsh & Roche, 1997). Yet, one can ask

what will happen if Universities train their professors in teaching without evaluating their

teaching? A review of laboratory answers to this question suggests that training without

evaluations leads to better results than training with evaluations (Balzer, Doherty, &

Oconnor, 1989). These results may also reflect the effectiveness of training evaluations

in government and business in changing the behavior of trainers.

Customer evaluations. Marketing surveys of customers (e.g., hotels, tangible

products, etc.) are commonplace. Yet, when consumers know that they will be asked to

evaluate the product, the expectation "leads to less favorable quality and satisfaction

evaluations and reduces customers' willingness to purchase and recommend the evaluated

services. The negative bias of expected evaluations is observed when actual quality is either low or high, and it persists even when buyers are told explicitly to consider both the positive and negative aspects" (Ofir & Simonson, 2001, p. 170). Once again, the mere measurement changes the system in an undesired way.

Feedback interventions: Basic research. One of the most prominent goals in using performance appraisal is performance improvement. How effective are Feedback Interventions (FIs) in general? That is, does providing people with some information regarding their task performance lead to performance improvement? There is a growing body of evidence that such interventions yield highly variable effects on performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Indeed, a meta-analysis suggested that while FIs improve performance by 4/10 standard deviation on average, FIs reduce performance in over 1/3 of the cases (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996), a fact that is contrary to the common belief that FIs most often improve performance. Furthermore, Kluger & DeNisi (1996) found no evidence that FI effects are moderated by FI sign. That is, negative FIs (information about failure) and positive FIs (information about success) do not differ, on average, in their effects on performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). In summary, the data suggest that FIs can impair performance.

Moreover, the processes through which FIs affect performance are very complex and yet not fully understood. Most notably, the feedback sign, one variable out of many that are likely to moderate FI effectiveness, appears to influence FI effectiveness in multiple ways. For example, when people are involved in a task out of desire (e.g., toying with new ideas for the company), it seems that positive feedback increases motivation whereas negative feedback decreases motivation; In contrast, when people are

involved in a task out of perceived necessity (e.g., following safety procedures), negative

feedback tends to motivates and positive feedback tends to de-motivate (Van-Dijk &

Kluger, 2004). Yet, the motivating effect of negative feedback on a task performed out

of a necessity may be completely reversed when self-efficacy is reduced or when the task

is complex (Levontin & Kluger, 2004). To translate these findings to practice could be a

nightmare. Based on these findings, it seems that a manager wishing to improve

performance has to gauge the personality of employee receiving the task, the nature of the

task, they way the employee construe the task, and the level of self-efficacy in the task

that the employee posses. This seems to suggest that FI where one size fits all is not

possible.

<u>Summary of existing feedback collection methods: Positions that do not answer interests</u>

Common to all the areas reviewed above is the position that feedback will help to

attain a goal or set of goals. Exposing the interests behind the position suggests that

many existing feedback collection tools such as performance appraisals, training

evaluations, and customer surveys not only often fail to satisfy the espouse interests, but

they create a reaction in the measured system that works against multiple interests of the

organizations employing the tools. We suggest that this difficulty stems from the

multiplicity of interests, which are naturally in conflict, and from assumptions behind the

feedback collection tools that address only partial interests of the members of the

organizations. For example, performance appraisal tools may address the need for

security of upper management through getting information believed to accurately reflect

the performance of the workforce, while at the same time the need for employee voice is

not met, which leads to distortion in the information upper management receives.

Similarly, customer surveys provide some useful information at the cost of hurting the

customer base merely through the measurement. Feedforward, below, is introduced as a

versatile tool designed to address the above problems while answering the interests of all

stakeholders.

<div align="center">Feedforward step-by-step</div>

Feedforward is based on Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was shown to have a potential for organizational

transformation when it focuses on what people think, rather on what people do (Bushe &

Khamisa, 2004). Feedforward creates a process of learning from past successes and

relying on internal strength via a dialogue (the appreciative interview stage or discovery

stage of AI). This dialogue connects the interviewee to cases and events in which he or

she were at their best, asks the interview to review the facilitated conditions that allowed

one to be at their best, and elicit the positive emotions related to the told case or event.

The core idea of feedforward is that the identification of the facilitating conditions creates

a beacon or a lighthouse. This beacon serves one to evaluate plans in light of the just

discovered facilitating condition. This comparison is the essence of feedforward.

Questions regarding the relationship between the beacon and the plans show the paths to

reconstructing and expanding the facilitating conditions that allow one to fulfils the

deepest needs and desires. Next, the process of feedforward is described step-by-step.

The Appreciative Interview Stage

The Appreciative Interview, which is part of AI (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987),

includes three parts: asking the interviewee to tell a story during which he or she felt at

their best, reviewing the conditions that facilitated the story, and eliciting the emotions

felt during the peaks moments of the story. Below is a generic, and yet modular, framework for these questions:

- Address your interviewee sitting face-to-face. Preferably, sit without a barrier between you and the interviewee, and without papers, pens or pencils in your hands, as to concentrate totally on the interview. State the following:

  "I am sure that you have both negative and positive experiences at work. Today, I wish to focus only on the positive aspects of work".

- Ask the following questions:

  1. Can you tell me a story about a specific event at work during which you felt energized, full of life, creative and enthusiastic, and you felt you were at your best, even before you knew the outcome of this event?

  2. What where the conditions that allowed this event to happen? That is, what was there in yourself (actions, capabilities, virtues), the physical surroundings (organization, timing), and the other people around you that made this event possible?

  3. What was the highpoint of the event? How did you feel during that moment?

The Feedforward question

The analysis of the facilitating condition that brought the interviewees to optimal performance allows some interviewees to spontaneously review and reconsider their immediate plans. To support this process among some and to trigger it among others, we

add the feedforward question. The rationale of this question is that humans function with

cognitive comparisons (Carver & Scheier, 1981) and that the feedforward question

focuses attention on the discrepancy between current plans and the just-discovered

optimal-performance conditions. A general feedforward question can be stated as

follows:

> "Now, recall the conditions that allowed you to be at your best.
>
> Consider these conditions as road signs or a beacon that shows
>
> you the way to reach optimal performance. To what degree do
>
> your plans for the immediate future take you closer to, or away
>
> from, the conditions that allowed you to be at your best?"

Feedforward in practice

Below is our summary of the reaction of two managers who used feedforward a

couple of weeks before the annual performance appraisal, which was mandated by

headquarters. These informants were the branch manager and her vice-manager of one

Israeli bank. The vice-manager heard about feedforward and invited us to introduce

feedforward to his boss. We interviewed the managers in the office of the branch

manager and discussed commonalities in the conditions discovered in their stories (this is

a variation on feedforward reported in our paper). We used their interviews to give them

a personal experience of how being appreciated by an interviewer produces new

managerial insights coupled with positive emotions, hope and eagerness. The branch

manager enjoyed the process but was concerned that she will not know how to interview

employees, as "professionally" as we did. We suggested that she practice with people

outside of her work setting. Next, these managers split the task of interviewing all their

employees (approximately 25) with feedforward.

Following the feedforward interviews and the mandatory performance-appraisal

process, we interviewed these managers again. The branch manager opened with "What

have you done to me?" Her strongest reaction was to one feedforward interview she

conducted with the clerk who received their "excellent worker" recognition every year in

the past 10 years. In response to the request to tell a story about an event during which

the clerk felt good and was full of life at work, the clerk responded "I have never felt like

that at work!" While the stunned branch manager was considering her response, the clerk

added, "Actually, I felt great when I was filling in for one first-level manager in the

branch when he was sick". In light of this new information, the branch manager decided

to promote this excellent clerk to a first-level management position. The branch manager

added "What would I have done, had I not had a position open for this clerk?" We of

course, have no answer, but we note that feedforward enabled a clerk labeled by her

superiors as "excellent", but who was previously frustrated and underutilized, to be

promoted and to promote the operations of the branch.

The vice-manager opened his report with a similar tone of "What have you done

to me?" and proceeded to tell us about the most illuminating experience he had. He

interviewed a credit clerk assigned to work with small businesses. In response to his

request to tell a story about an event during which the clerk felt full of life at work, the

clerk noted a case in which she decided to give a loan to a businessmen who appeared

risky but turned out to be a good investment. The conditions that allowed this story to

evolve according to this clerk included: (a) insisting on getting to know the client

personally before making a decision; (b) clear guidelines supplied by the bank; and (c) management support in making decision in "grey areas". The vice-manager proceeded to say: "You understand, I didn't sleep the following night, because I couldn't stop thinking, why is it that only in some cases she receives management support … that is, my support … and not at all times?"

Next, we asked them to describe the meetings with their employees regarding the annual performance-appraisal ratings. The branch manager, who had over 10 years of experience in conducting performance appraisal, noted that, in previous years, she and her vice-manager often had to defend themselves and explain to their employees many ratings that were lower than the maximum-possible rating. However, after the feedforward interviews and unlike previous years, no single employee asked to change ratings assigned by the branch managers.   Her feeling was that having just being heard in the feedforward interview, the employees were not so concerned about the performance-appraisal ratings. That is, it seems that deep interests of the employees to have their voice heard and to be seen as meaningful contributors to their organization were met during the feedforward interview, so that the annual meeting regarding the ratings became irrelevant for meeting those needs.

These two managers exemplify one principle of Appreciative Inquiry in that it leads people to see the connection between the parts that makes the whole, rather then viewing each employee as independent performer. Specifically, unlike the results of a typical performance appraisal, each of these managers not only led their employees to learn how to replicate work conditions that foster well being and high performance, they

also learned something about their own role as managers in producing these conditions for their employees.

Variation and extensions of Feedforward

The example above demonstrated how managers can use feedforward as an antecedent to performance appraisal. In this example, the question presented to the employees was a general one regarding when they were at their best at work. However, feedforward is a flexible and versatile process that can be adapted to any topic the organization desire to inquire into and at any organizational level. Below, we demonstrate different variations on the feedforward interview. First, we show how a consultant can use feedforward to explore organizational interests. In our first example, we rely on our experience as consultants called in to either to design a new performance appraisal system or to change an existing one,

When clients indicate that they want a either a new performance appraisal system or a change in an existing system, we ask what is the primary interest that lies behind the organization's need for a performance-appraisal system. If, for example, the primary organizational interest behind performance appraisal is employee development, we adapt the the first appreciative-interview question as follows (note that no change are needed in the second and third questions):

1. "Could you tell me a story about a case in which you were

   involved in employee development and you felt energized, full of

   life, creative and enthusiastic, and you felt at your best, during the

   process?"

2. "What allowed this employee development to take place?

   Consider the factors that enabled this successful employee

   development to occur, that is, what were there in other people, the

   physical places where the case happened, and in you that

   facilitated these outcomes?"

3. "What was the peak moment in this story? How did you feel in

   that moment?

This route of inquiry can help discover and illuminate the most effective means to

achieve employee development that do not require performance appraisals. If, on the

other hand, the organizational interest behind performance appraisal is training, the

appreciative interview question can be phrased as follows: "Could you tell me a story

about a case in which you were involved in employee training and you felt energized, full

of life, creative and enthusiastic, and you felt at your best, during the process?"

Correspondingly, the information elicited from this inquiry will illustrate the most

effective means to achieve employee training that do not necessarily involve performance

appraisal processes.

Below are two employee-development stories, in addition to the one brought at

the introduction to this paper. Note how the same interview can generate variability in

content.   We interviewed a HR manager in a communication company with a generic-

appreciative interview. She told us that that upper management wanted to get a sense of

the feelings among their call-center workers (note: this request to create some channel of

communication and feedback between management and workers is one of interests

professed by management for using performance appraisal). In response, this HR

manager organized several "round table" discussions with approximately 10 participants each time. She used her interpersonal skills to create relaxed atmosphere around the table and as a result, in most meetings, the conversations around the table were open. In these conversations, the HR manager learned about topics that concerned employees, ranging from the sanitary conditions at the toilets to the interpersonal relationships among the workers. She shared the information with upper management, who in turn took some immediate remedial actions. She became a mediator of information and an agent of positive change, while receiving the trust of both management and the workers. In her analysis, the conditions that facilitated these outcome included her interpersonal skills, ability to create rapport, openness, and laughter, professional acquaintance with the "round table" technique, and trust of upper management.

This case is a story within a story because we interview an HR manager reflecting on best practices, in general, that turned out to be an alternative for performance appraisal, at least for meeting the interest of communication.

In another case, we heard a story from a manager of a boarding school. His story started with a discovery that his handy man stole equipment from the premises. The manager then reported the handy man to the police and dismissed him. Prior to this event, the manager also noted that one of the social counselors does not fit the job of working with youth. A month before the handy man was caught, he assigned the counselor to help organized a costume party. To the surprise of this manager, the failing counselor was discovered as talented administrator with technical abilities that help turn the party into a success. Therefore, when the handy man was fired, he gambled and offered the failing counselor the job of the handy man. This staffing decision turned out

to be a success. According to this manager, the conditions that allowed this story of turning a failing counselor into an excellent handy man include observing subordinates, identifying strengths in subordinates, and searching for challenges that fit their strengths. Once again, this is a story where multiple professed functions of performance appraisal are achieved without performance appraisal.

It is important to note, that not every round of appreciative interviews lead to the discovery of conditions that allow one to function at his or her best. From our observations, both the emotions reported in the last question and the non-verbal behavior of the interview helps to determine whether we found conditions of being at one's best. Emotions of happiness, elation, flow, of enthusiasm, as well as a "true" smile, which includes the contraction of muscles around the eyes, as well as teary eyes, suggest that the story is about win-win case. In contrast, emotions of victory, "I showed them", and report of mixed feelings all hint at experience with bitter components. In this case, we ask for a second story emphasizing that we are interested in a story during which the interviewee felt at his best during the story (good processes) and not only when the episode ended (the bottom line test). Below is such a story.

We interviewed an HR manager in a multi-national corporation in the high-tech industry. His first story was about organizing an internal conference, where he was very proud with the accolades he received. He added, that he felt good, but knew that he could not "rest on his laurels" and plan for the next project. We asked him for a second story, and then a third. After telling about the success of the third conference, mixed feelings were noted, prompting a question regarding how he felt during the preparation for the third project; he answered promptly "terrible". Then, the interviewer asked him to recall a

story where he felt good while things are happening. He could think of none. The interviewer suggested recalling a story of feeling at his best outside work settings. He gave wide smile and recalled playing with his two boys on the grass during the weekend. He was detailing tumbling, conversations and laughter. Next, the interviewer asked him if he ever experienced a similar sensation at work. He started with saying "Yes. But, it happened four years ago before I took this job. I have organized a management-training day that ran like a jamboree. We had inflatable slides and other activities". In retrospect, this HR manager said that this day was both fun during the process of planning and executing, and it was considered a success by his supervisors. That is, the first three stories were of personal depletion that was sustained for getting recognition, while the last story was one of personal growth that brought recognition as a side-benefit.

Following the appreciative inquiry, which was tailored for performance appraisal, the feedforward question can be adapted to spark a learning processes regarding performance appraisal. For example, if the appreciative interview was focused on the employee development interest of performance appraisal, the feedforward question can be tailored in the following manner:

- Recall now the conditions that allowed you to best develop your employees. Think about these conditions as road signs or a beacon that shows you the way for best way for developing employees. To what degree, in your opinion, introducing, or augmenting, a performance-appraisal system would bring you closer to, or further away from, the conditions under which you developed employees in an optimal manner.

Typically, this question lead to silence followed with a "but" of a protest. The essence of the feedforward question is to point at strengths of the interviewee discovered while the interviewee was fulfilling deep-seated needs and interests, and at the discrepancy between these strengths, known from experience, and the positions that dominate the interviewee's plan during the interview. The independent processing of these discrepancies by the interviewee provides the interviewee an opportunity to review one's plan in a new light, and consider new alternatives. These alternatives are based on personal experience. Moreover, they create excitement or optimistic expectation for change. In summary, in feedforward, people compare the conditions that brought past optimal functioning to their plans.

To augment the effects of discovered success, we apply two additional feedforward steps. First, at times, one of the conditions for past optimal performance appears crucial. For example, "I was trusted". We therefore repeat the feedforward interview only this time focused on the critical condition. For example, we can inquire about another case in which the interview "was trusted" as to allow the interview to reconstruct the ability, and the conditions to repeat such success in the future. Second, when a feedforward process is performed on entire organizations, we teach participants to perform the appreciative interview with each other in pairs. Next, we ask them to form 4-6 participants groups without their interviewing partner. The groups are requested to answer the following question:

- Listen to the synopsis of each of the stories that came up during the interviews. Analyze the common features of the conditions for success among all the stories.

Are there common features? One of you will present your group's conclusion to

the plenary.

In the plenary, commonalities among groups conclusions are noted and are made

public. Making the conditions public legitimizes the consideration of the deep interest of

the group members in the next stage. In this process, participants learn about the common

conditions (the organizational code) that lead to optimal organizational performance. To

activate the feedforward process in the group, we next ask the group:

- Are your plans (your performance appraisal system) take you closer to, or move

  you away from, the common conditions that are known to bring about optimal

  functioning in your organization.

For example, in a group feedforward exercise with high-school principles, it was

discovered that performance appraisal system is irrelevant to dismissal of employees due

to transgression of discipline code. In these cases, the performance appraisal record was

not relevant because regardless of the ratings the transgressions necessitated dismissals.

In another example (a government agency), the conditions that were crucial for employee

development included informal communication that broke the expectation of doing things

through the chain of command. Specifically, a nation-wide manager learned from one

HR manager that the employees of one of his subordinate have disciplinary problems.

This manager called the employees of his subordinates (a district-wide manger) for

consultation. The subordinate was informed of this conversation in a manner showing

utmost sensitivity for taking this unusual step. The result of this meeting was the flow of

new information that the nation-wide manager used in discussing this one performance

weakness with his subordinate. Consequently, the subordinate was relieved to receive the

support of his boss in the area of his weakness, the problem disappeared, and a

communication channel was opened between the subordinate and the boss. All felt

rewarded because the problems were solved whereas the honor of the subordinate was

respected and he felt relieved. The conditions that facilitated this event included the trust

that the HR manager enjoyed both by the lower-level employees and nation-wide

manager, and personal sensitivity of the nation-wide manger to the district-wide manager.

In a group meeting where this and other employee development stories were shared, the

nation-wide manager thought that a formal performance appraisal will move him away

from the opportunity to learn about the problem (an interest in opening communication

channels) and consequently from the possibility of helping his subordinate (an interest of

employee development).

<div align="center">Feedforward: theoretical rationale</div>

To offer a single theoretical explanation for why feedforward appears to work is

similar to trying to explain feedback effects – a feat that defeated researchers over a full

century (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Therefore, below we explore several processes that are

likely to be simultaneously involved in feedforward. The processes we explore include

activating positive emotions, fostering bonding via interpersonal activities, illuminating a

gap between unmet needs and behavior plans, igniting an internal dialogue that allow a

mutual change of both interviewer and interviewee, and creating safety for sharing

information. We suggest that these processes contribute to feedforward effectiveness

based on our observations in multiple feedforward sessions. Because these processes are

hypothesized on the basis of clinical observations, they can be viewed as hypotheses that

can be tested with quantitative method. Yet, we believe that qualitative experimentation

with this method is crucial for obtaining an in depth understanding of these processes (cf. Roberts et al., 2005). Each of these processes will be discussed separately for exposition purpose although these processes operate most likely in parallel and with multiple mutual influences.

Positive emotions

Appreciative inquiry (the interview) arouses positive emotions among most participants because it allows one to recall being at one's best in the past. The focus on the positive and the telling of a story in which one was "at best" creates a unique experience, often opposite to daily experiences that involve attempts to analyze problems and a focus on failures. This positive experience is not a fantasy because it is based on positive events that were actually experienced, that is, they are possible. Focusing on positive experiences evoke positive emotions. Positive emotions broaden our thinking, increase our openness to new information, increase willingness to cooperation, reduce conflict (Barsade, 2002) and increase creativity (Fredrickson, 2001). We further observed a positive spiral in which the interviewer reacts, sometimes unconsciously, to positive emotions aroused in the interviewee (signaled by a smile, gaze, or laughter), which in turns augment the positive emotions of the interviewee. Furthermore, we hypothesize that positive emotions signal success in meeting deep interests in the past, and thus the discovered conditions signal behaviors (or attitudes) that support attainment of a win-win dialogue between the interviewee in his or her organizations or between multiple needs within the interviewee.

Fostering bonding via interpersonal activities

Belongingness is one of the deepest needs that all humans have (Baumeister &

Leary, 1995). This need is addressed immediately by the processes of interviewing in

pairs. When the pair is composed of strangers, it expands the social network of

participants, some of whom feel isolated and lonely at work. When the pair is composed

of employees who know each other, the positive nature of the interview often deepens

their ties. Furthermore, some interviews are reciprocal. We encourage reciprocity of the

interviews, both in workshops and in cases where the interviewing boss or consultant

invites the subordinate or the client to interview him or herself. Reciprocity creates a

sense of bonding, even when the pair is composed of supervisor-supervisee dyads. In all

cases , data collection regarding the employee addresses the interest of communication --

one of the proclaimed goals of performance appraisals. When the superior is interviewed

by supervisee, the human aspect of the supervisor is exposed, which often creates a sense

of gratitude and increasing the informal authority of the supervisor. Expanding the

informal ties between organizational members contributes to the organizational goal of

expanding the informal communication channels in the organization. This, in turn,

addresses one of the missions of HR departments -- to cultivate the human resources.

Illuminating a gap between unmet needs and behavior plans.

Many researchers, starting from different and even opposing theoretical views,

agree that identifying discrepancies between goals and current states create a motivation

to act as to reduce the discrepancy (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Feedback interventions

(performance appraisal) attracts attention to discrepancies between external information

(information received from others), and external ideals or standards (ideals defined by

management). The discovery of discrepancy may yield one of four responses: change

behavior to decrease the discrepancy, change the standard, reject the feedback, and escape the field (Mikulincer, 1994). The response is likely to be the route with most benefits and least costs. When we receive feedback, from our supervisor for example, we may discover a discrepancy between our self-view and the supervisor's view. We may choose to deny the information (e.g., think that the supervisor exaggerates) because the benefit of accepting this information may not offset the cost of hurting the self-view (reduction in self-efficacy). Following feedback, we can also reject the external standard or the goal, or we can give up the goal while lowering our self-efficacy (Mikulincer, 1994). Lowering self-efficacy following (mainly negative) feedback reduce performance – a phenomena observed by researchers working out form different theoretical perspectives (Bandura, 1986; Dweck, 1986; Mikulincer, 1994).

In contrast, feedforward focuses on <u>internal</u> standards and <u>internal</u> comparison processes. In the first stage, it promotes the discovery of internal standards by searching for the subjective conditions that lead to superior performance. In the next stage, it sparks a process of internal comparisons, by asking one to review one's plans in light of internal standards just discovered. Feedforward makes it harder to give up internal standards evoked by the interview because they are based on experience of success. The remembered experience augments self-efficacy, induces positive emotions, and creates strong attraction to the recalled standards. We suggest that feedforward creates a discrepancy between internal information (current plans for the future) and internal ideals or standards (ideal conditions that enable success). Eliciting this discrepancy blocks the possibilities of escape, rejection, and lowering standards. Consequently, behavior is likely to change accompanied by a re-negotiation among multiple-internal standards.

Igniting an internal dialogue that allow a mutual change of interviewer and interviewee

The act of telling a story changes the interviewee's understanding of his or her own story and brings to consciousness one's successes and abilities. Moreover, if the story is accompanied largely by positive emotions, we hypothesize that the story reflects a win-win dialogue between typically opposing voices with the self. The self can be conceived as a theater containing multiple characters or voices (Hermans, 1996). For example, voice A may tell us "I need to be tough" or "I have to exercise" and voice B may tell us "I need to be humane" or "Eat the cake, you live only once". Typically, one of these voices takes control over our behavior such that in cyclical pattern they rotate taking control over our behavior. The conversation between these voices is like an argument that typically does not change their positions, and according to circumstances, one of them takes control. Change in the positions of one of this voices or more is possible when we tell a story to another person whose naive questions or rephrasing may cause one of the internal voices to reconsider its position. When one of the internal voices provides a new position within the self, the opposing voice must update its answer and hence a new dialogue (innovation within the self) is triggered. The voice that is triggered in the interview, provided that is accompanied by largely positive emotions, is such a voice that has good negotiating practice when dealing with its opponent. For example, stories may include condition that allowed one to be both tough and humane and the same time (e.g., "I knew exactly what I wanted and I was very considerate of the needs of others") or reminds one of a win-win dialogue within one self. We hypothesize that a win-win dialogue within the self paves the road to applying the same approach in dealing with others in one's work place.

<u>Creating psychological safety for sharing information.</u>

Focusing on the positive and <u>listening</u> to the interviewee often reduce anxiety and allows the interviewees to enjoy a positive reflection of their selves (Roberts et al., 2005) which serve as an affirmation of their social standing. The positive experience, in turn, allows one to share with others and to bring to consciousness difficult aspects of the self while searching for ways to change. This observation is consistent with laboratory findings showing that participants who were induced to be in a good mood were most willing to explore negative aspects of the self (Trope & Pomerantz, 1998). In this way, organization interest that employee learn about their shortcoming and correct them can be gained without the typical psychological threat and resistance pattern that characterizes employee-performance appraisals.

<div align="center"><u>Feedforward before feedback</u></div>

Although we suggest that feedforward can address the interest of all parties in the organization, we recognize that implementing feedforward instead of feedback can be difficult for several reasons. First, feedback (performance appraisal) might be mandated by the corporation and its elimination might be beyond the abilities of many managers that may nevertheless enjoy the benefits of feedforward. Second, upper management may be reluctant to give up a known feedback system for an unknown feedforward systems. In this case, we recommend using feedforward before feedback. The story, above, regarding the two branch managers of a larger bank, shows the feasibility of feedforward before feedback internvetions.

Summary and an invitation for experimentation

In this paper, we presented feedback interventions as organizational tools that often fail to address the organizational interests for which they were designed in the first place. Next, we offered a step-by-step description of feedforward as an alternative or as an antecedent of feedback intervention. Feedforward is a flexible interview containing elicitation of a specific story regarding "at best" experience at work, analysis of facilitating conditions of that story, reflection on the emotions involved, and a feedforward question comparing plans to just-discovered facilitating conditions. We continued with our hypotheses regarding the various processes that confer feedforward with its putative advantages, such as positive emotions, bonding, and elicitation of new internal knowledge. Our hypotheses are based on an amalgam of our personal experience in using feedforward in organizations and on our reading of the relevant management and psychological literatures. As such, we are proposing a theory-driven tool that needs to be tested and considered with additional perspectives. Below, we invite the reader to consider our call for experimentation.

First, in the spirit of positive organizational scholarship (Roberts et al., 2005), we suggest that to explore the potential of feedforward both qualitative and experiential approaches are needed. Hence, we invite readers to try out the feedforward interview with several people. Our experience suggests that there are large individual differences in the ability to gain immediate benefits from a single interview. Hence, only by experiencing multiple responses one can gauge the potential of feedforward. This observation, in turn, shows that the moderating role of individual differences in the

effectiveness of feedforward needs further development, an issue into which we delve in the last part of this section below.

Second, as with feedback, we believe feedforward influences multiple variables including one's cognition, affect, behavioral tendencies, and interpersonal processes. Hence, we invite readers to entertain additional or more parsimonious processes that are likely to explain reaction to feedforward.

Last, some writers regarding Appreciative Inquiry, which serves as the basis for feedforward, suggest that the approach excludes the possibility of testing AI arguments with quantitative methods (van der Haar & Hosking, 2004), we believe that with attention to many details it is possible to test the effectiveness of feedforward. Yet, we believe that testing feedforward experimentally creates a difficulty in defining performance criteria. Whereas in most organizational research the performance criteria is defined on the basis of management objectives, feedforward supposedly helps the individual develop towards one's intrinsic goals. Thus, for example, few students of one of the authors discovered, via feedforward, that they are in the wrong place (i.e., MBA program) and chose to quit. Is this outcome a success? From a point of view of a dean that is concerned about retention rate, the answer might be different from the point of view of this student that feels relieved, happier and armed with a better sense of one's life missions. The nature of quantitative experimentation is the construction of success criteria, which is the mind of the researcher and its constituency, not in the mind of its participants. Nevertheless, we believe that the engagement of such processes as positive mood, bonding, and reduction in anxiety, are all processes that are likely to leave their mark on success criteria defined by the researcher. A second difficulty is the timing of performance measurement. The

feedforward intervention may create sadness among participants who discovered that their plans largely deviate from the conditioned that prevailed when they were at their best. The processes of recovery and realignment of behavior with one's real interest may vary both among individuals and among topic of inquiry. Again, in testing feedforward, attention is needed to individual differences and to the nature of the inquiry. Last, we noted large individual differences in response to feedforward. We hypothesize that high levels of anxiety related to chronic differences in attachement style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003) as well as high levels of psychodynamic denial (Westen, 1998) may lead initial resistence to feedforward questions (e.g., difficulty in telling a specific story and insisting on describing abstract stories, inability to recall positive events or inability to choose a story because "everything is so good"). Hence, we suggest that quantitative experiments be coupled with quantitative measurement of relevant individual differences (Eysenck, 1997) that may shed more light on the processes involved in feedforward.

Finally, now that you have read this paper and ready to consider your feedback, we invited you to consider feedforward. What was your best moment, if any, reading this paper? What allowed that moment to happen? What were emotions you experienced during this moment? If your emotions were not positive, we suggest you drop this article and forget about it. If your emotions were positive, how are you going to use the insights gained from the best you found here?

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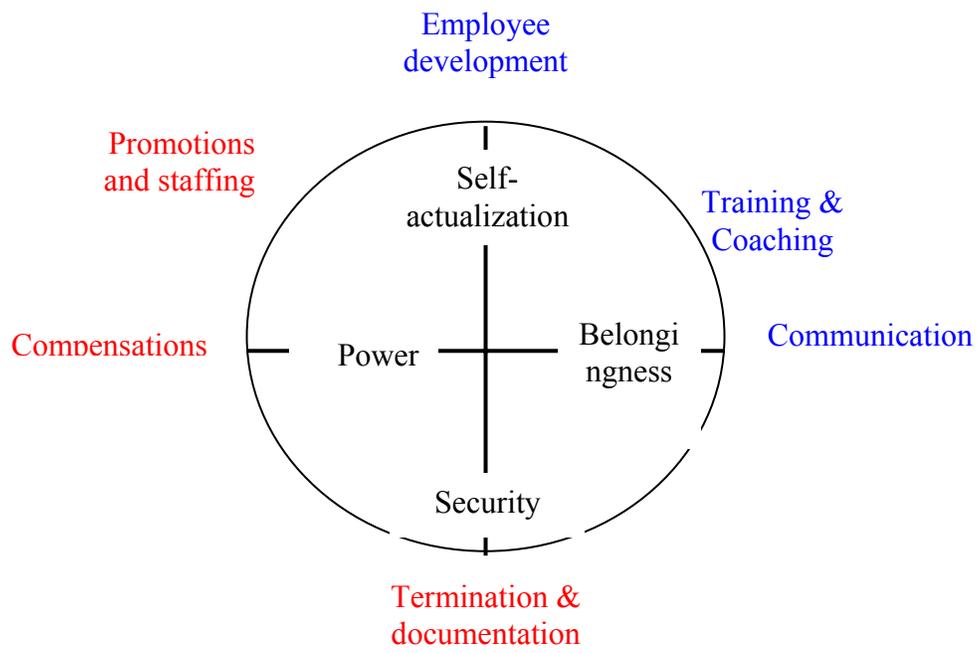extraordinary in work organizations. *Academy of Management Review, 30*(4),

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Figures

<u>Figure 1.</u> A map linking basic needs to visible interest surrounding performance

appraisal systems.

Employee
development

Promotions
and staffing

Training &
Coaching

Self-
actualization

Compensations

Power

Belongi
ngness

Communication

Security

Termination &
documentation

Appendix I

Specific questions that can be use to uncover interest related to performance appraisal

The following questions are designed to discover the underlying interests of the HR manager or of upper management representative: "what are the goals that you are trying to achieve via performance appraisal"? "What organizational goals are going to be met via performance appraisal"? "What will happen if you do not have a performance appraisal system"? The answer to these questions can elicit the unique interests that underlie the (HR) manager's position "we need a performance-appraisal system".

In analyzing the interest, it is important to distinguish between visible and hidden interests. Visible interests are those interests people are willing to talk about and discuss openly. Hidden interests are often personal interests that people tend to avoid discussing, such as increasing status, power, recognition and esteem. However, more often than not, these hidden interests have a decisive effect on organizational decisions and outcomes and therefore it is important to search for them. The aim of the following questions is to get a glimpse of these hidden yet formative interests: "What is really important to you as a (HR) manager"? "What will you personally gain if the performance appraisal system will be successful implemented?" "Why do you want to implement it"? "How will the successful implementation of a performance appraisal system affect the image of your company (division)"?