

The feedforward interview (FFI)

Definition = An interview protocol designed to reveal new organizational knowledge, which can lead to better alignment between employees' needs and organizational practices, while cultivating the manager-subordinate interdependence as to improve both relationship and performance

Goals:

- Facilitate positive change by sparking a self-evaluation of one's current behaviour and plans in relation to one's strengths and proven practices
- Enrich the interviewer's knowledge of the interviewee's strengths and the conditions that facilitate the expression of these strengths in the organization
- Build and improve the relationship, existing or new, between interviewer and interviewee

= Based on:

- **Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**
 - ❖ **Idea** = Build organizations around what works, instead of focusing on fixing what's wrong
 - ❖ The first stage (= The Discovery stage) includes the **Appreciative Interview**
 - **Purpose:**
 - Bring the positive aspects of employee experiences into focus
 - Discover what processes work well in the organization
 - **How?**
 - Elicit stories of concrete successes, regarding instances and events in which employees were at their best
 - Inquire into the facilitating conditions that allowed them to perform at their best
 - ❖ **Positive psychology** = If you use optimism and hope instead of pessimism, then you will get more performance
- Strength-based feedback, reflective listening and **storytelling**
 - ❖ **Concentration:** True listening, focused on the other
 - ❖ **Cooperate:** Being actively involved
 - ❖ **Empathy:** Let the other explore the problem
 - ❖ Not evaluating, judging or advising

→ Requires little training

= Easy to implement

= Characterized by:

- An invitation to tell a story
- A focus on what works
- The insights of the interviewee

= Designed to:

- Uncover performance-facilitating conditions
- Foster interviewer-interviewee bond

Why?

- Brings to the foreground data that are forgotten or outside of discourse
- Identifies keys for optimal functioning
- Foster communication and interpersonal contact
- Creates opportunities to recognize abilities and talents of the other
- Allows personal growth via discovery of one's strengths and virtues

Types of organizational benefits:

- Uncovering unique information (cognitive)
- Creating a positive atmosphere (affective)

Protocol:

1. Elicit a success story

- ❖ *"I am sure that you have had both negative and positive experiences at work. Today, I would like to focus only on the positive aspects of your experiences."*
- ❖ *"Could you please tell me a story about an experience at work during which you felt at your best, full of life and in flow, and you were content even before the results of your actions became known?"*
→ **Active listening:** Reflect the story back to the interviewee by summarizing the story in your own words
- ❖ *"Would you be happy to experience a similar process again?"*
- ❖ *"What was the peak moment of this story? What did you think at that moment?"*
- ❖ *"How did you feel at that moment (including your emotional and physiological reaction)?"*
→ **Active listening:** Reflect the emotions back to the interviewee

2. Discover your personal success code

- ❖ *"What were the conditions in you, such as things you did, your capabilities and your strengths that made this story possible?"*
- ❖ *"What did others do that enabled this story?"*
- ❖ *"What were the conditions facilitated by the organization (even physical or temporal) that enabled this story?"*
→ **Active listening:** Reflect the conditions back to the interviewee

3. The feedforward question

- ❖ *"The conditions you have just described seem to be your personal code for reaching [insert the key achievement in the story]."*
- ❖ *"If this is so, think of your current actions, priorities and plans for the near future, and consider to what extent they incorporate all of these conditions."*

Creating an atmosphere of sharing:

- Sit face-to-face
- Give your total attention to the interviewee
- Practice listening with reflection and without writing
- Get ready to hear stories

= Useful as a complement or replacement for (= Applications):

- **Feedback interventions = Performance Appraisal = Feedforward before feedback**
 - ❖ FFI could enable a clerk labelled by his/her superiors as "excellent", but who is frustrated and unfulfilled, to be promoted and in turn to further promote the operations of the branch
 - ❖ Reconstructing the conditions for optimal performance (the code for success) will allow the credit clerk to repeat his/her success in the future
 - ❖ The deep-seated needs of the employees to be heard and seen as meaningful contributors to their organization were met during the FFI and the annual meeting regarding the ratings became less relevant to meeting these needs
 - ❖ AI leads people to see the connection between the parts that make up the whole, rather than viewing each employee as an independent performer
- **Customer satisfaction surveys**
 - ❖ Use FFI to learn what works in the organization by interviewing those who come in close contact with its products, services, systems and procedures
 - ❖ Use FFI to create a meaningful learning process with clients and customers
 - ❖ Customer satisfaction surveys miss crucial information about the business's strength and its strategic competence
- Career planning sessions = Placement
- Strength-based strategy development

- **Job selection interviews**

- ❖ Drop step 3 of the protocol
- ❖ FFI could aid in meeting the interests of effective selection processes and leave a good impression on the candidates (those who will be hired and those who will be rejected)

→ Can be used for different purposes/objectives in all levels of the organizational setting

→ Supports a continuous process of self-enhancement and growth

Theoretical considerations:

- **Incorporating a win-win or integrative approach that focuses on maintaining employee-organization alignment:**

- ❖ **Inter-personal:** The negotiating parties show concern both for their own outcomes and for the outcomes of others and collaborate to reach mutual gain
- ❖ **Intra-personal:** All the diverse needs of the person are met at the same time

↔ **A win-lose or compromise outcome:**

- ❖ **Inter-personal:** The needs of one party are met at the expense of the unmet needs of the other party. Negotiators fail to realize they have compatible interests and settle for solutions that are sub-optimal for both parties
- ❖ **Intra-personal:** Some of the person's needs are met at the expense of other important needs that remain unsatisfied

- **Adding the benefits of active listening to the process:** The practice of putting one's values, opinions and attitudes aside while trying to fully understand the message of the other and probing for rich information from the other party while creating rapport. Interviewers must reflect what they have heard by paraphrasing, asking for clarification and summarizing the content of the answers after every question

- **Utilizing the advantages of episodic memory in eliciting success stories:** Detailed episodes are better than generalizations. Episodic memory is closest to on-line experience and is based on specific event memories. Retrieval of episodic memory is the memory function most damaged in depressed people

- **Using the motivating force of cognitive discrepancies to facilitate change (cognitive comparison and the feedforward question):** Identifying discrepancies between goals (standards) and current states (feedback) create a motivation to act in order to reduce the discrepancy. Without attention for discrepancies there is no behaviour change. The feedforward question creates a comparison process by connecting internal standards with internal practices and plans (comparing the future simulated from current practices and plans with the future simulated from the standards discovered in the story). Fantasizing and envisioning new realities (alternative behaviours) that come after the feedforward question are likely to generate change in behaviour and improvement in performance. Successive FFIs build awareness of a growing number of strengths and capabilities the interviewee already possesses that could help close the gap(s) between his/her code for optimal performance and the current working conditions.

→ **Four possible responses of people once a discrepancy receives attention:**

- ❖ Change their behaviour
- ❖ Change the standard
- ❖ Reject the feedback
- ❖ Escape the field altogether

Theoretical reasoning:

- **Fostering bonding and communication:** FFI satisfies the employee's need for belonging.

- ❖ **The superior and the subordinate know each other:** The positive nature of the interview helps to improve and deepen their relationship
- ❖ **The superior and the subordinate are strangers to one another:** It offers an opportunity to get to know each other

- **Activating positive emotions:** FFI initiates a positive emotional spiral that begins with the interviewee recalling a positive past experience, which is followed by a positive reaction from the interviewer, which in turn augments the positive emotions of the interviewee
 → **Contributions to the attainment of multiple organizational interests:**
 - ❖ Broaden our thinking
 - ❖ Increase our openness to new information, willingness to cooperate and creativity
 - ❖ Reduce conflict
 - ❖ Increase the likelihood of reaching a win-win outcome in non-equal dyadic negotiations
 - ❖ Increase the likelihood that the interviewee will be able to reach a win-win outcome in internal dialogues among multiple conflicting voices
- **Igniting an internal dialogue that allows for a mutual change of both interviewer and interviewee (igniting innovation within the self):** Innovation within the self is set in motion by the feedforward question.
- **Creating psychological safety for sharing information and learning about shortcomings:** Focusing on the positive and listening to the interviewee reduces anxiety and allows the interviewees to enjoy a positive reflection of their selves. This positive experience allows one to share with others and bring to consciousness difficult aspects of the self while searching for ways to change

Limitations:

- Some people have hard time telling a story (depression? avoidant attachment style?)
 → **Suggestion:** Do not make feedforward mandatory. If some people in the organization change, the organization changes
- Some people may become sad from realizing that currently they are not at their best
 → **Suggestion:** Be ready to follow up and offer a “complaint based” feedforward to help the person become more optimistic
- Some people find it easy to recall conditions that seem to have been created by others but do not easily recall facilitating conditions within themselves.
 → **Suggestion:** Ask *“In addition to these conditions, what was your own contribution to this story?”*
- Some people find it easy to recall self-related conditions but do not easily convey how others or the organization contributed to their success
 → **Suggestion:** Ask *“Was there any person that directly or indirectly contributed to this story?”*
- Some people may express initial opposition followed by enthusiastic endorsement after several sessions, but some people never come to like it
- Some people find it hard to identify and discuss the emotions they felt at their peak experience or avoid focusing entirely on the outcome of their success
- Some people cannot recall a positive work experience
 → **Suggestion:** Ask *“What upsets you now the most? Let’s assume that the thing that upsets you is only the tip of an iceberg of a bigger issue. If so, the thing that upsets you is a symptom of what? What is the ideal opposite of this fundamental issue?”*