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Feedback: Changing an Action While Keeping Your Dignity

Freedom and Action

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Epigraph

> *not all feedback is the same*

Benedikt Wisniewski, Klaus Zierer, and John Hattie, 2020, discussion of a meta-analysis of educational feedback. This concerns differences in feedback types and information within the learning conditions studied. It promises neither that every comment is helpful nor a standard of respectful communication; this article considers those questions separately. The Russian companion uses a United Wisdom editorial translation.

What this article is about

Daniil made an announcement for a neighbourhood meeting: people want to agree how to improve a small shared courtyard area. He included a photograph, a title, and an invitation. Two replies arrived after he circulated it. One neighbour could not tell whether advance registration was needed. Another said that the image looked unprofessional. Seeing the messages together, Daniil feels as though he has been judged as a whole: he tried to help and has done something badly again. Yet the messages contain different information and call for different decisions.

The first can be checked: does the invitation describe registration, is registration needed at all, and what will a first-time reader see? The second is still vague: does it concern readability, layout, or the sender's taste? A general assessment does not yet imply a particular change. Feedback becomes usable grounds when its subject, relation to the aim, and limits of reliability can be understood. The feeling it produces does not disappear on command. It can be acknowledged without becoming the sole judge of the message's usefulness.

We consider working with a response to an action already taken. Choosing an adviser before beginning is another task. Here the point is to separate observation from a verdict on the person, retain permission to clarify or decline, and turn useful information into a proportionate change. The scene and exercise are the author's proposals. Learning research offers limited grounds about differences in feedback, but does not test this neighbourhood conversation or replace a person's decision about acceptable treatment.

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I. Find the event inside the assessment

The reply about registration describes a recipient's difficulty: they opened the invitation and did not know what to do next. It is not a complete description of the image, but is sufficiently specific. Daniil can look for the date, place, and a way to signal participation. He can decide whether he intended registration at all. This examination changes a particular condition connecting an invitation to its recipient's action. He need not first decide whether he deserves the general title of a good organiser.

Unprofessional works differently. It combines an impression with an implied criterion that has not been named. One person means small print, another too many colours, and a third compares a neighbourhood meeting with the promotion of a large event. Immediately changing everything means following an unknown requirement. Immediately dismissing the reply as rudeness may lose a useful observation. A possible next step is to ask about a specific detail and the task it obstructs, while keeping judgements of the person outside the discussion.

Clarification need not be lengthy. Daniil can ask which part is difficult to read or what information is missing. This invites specificity rather than requiring someone to justify unpleasant words. The other person may not reply. Uncertainty then remains, and Daniil may decline to change the work on that basis. An absent explanation does not establish his own correctness, but an unnamed criterion need not become binding simply because it was stated confidently.

Sometimes a message already includes a personal verdict: someone writes that Daniil always ruins things. It might contain a pointer to a real problem, yet that does not make the general verdict acceptable or established. He can ask separately about a particular action, state a conversational boundary, or end the exchange. Daniil need not extract a lesson from every form of treatment. Being able to hear feedback is not measured by willingness to remain in humiliating communication for a potentially useful detail.

II. Keep the aim to which the response belongs

The announcement should help neighbours understand the proposal, time, place, and way to participate. If those are accessible, it can fulfil its purpose without elaborate design. Appearance still matters, in the sense and to the extent that it relates to an actual aim or another chosen requirement. Daniil may want a beautiful invitation, but that aesthetic aim deserves to be named separately. It should not quietly displace clarity or turn an urgent correction of the date into a redesign of the whole image.

A comment about small print can concern accessibility: some people cannot easily read it on a phone. Preferring another colour may concern taste without affecting understanding. More

ceremonial language may even make a neighbourhood invitation less clear. To choose a change, it helps to ask who will use the result and what they need to be able to do. The answer depends on the task. There is no universal rule that every comment from an experienced person must become a compulsory revision.

A recipient may also expose a limitation in the aim itself. They ask whether someone who cannot do physical cleaning may attend. Daniil initially thought of participation only as working with tools and overlooked other forms of help. This calls for a conversation wider than editing the announcement. It may refine the understanding of the shared meeting, rather than merely improve a means towards the previous goal. Keeping authorship does not mean protecting the first intention from clarification. An aim can be changed and the change explicitly acknowledged.

An aim does not justify crossing boundaries either. If someone suggests using a neighbour's photograph without permission to attract attention, expected effectiveness does not make the means acceptable. The feedback can be understood while its suggested action is declined. Usefulness and acceptability are connected questions, but neither replaces the other. Participants' dignity is not a resource an organiser can spend on an attractive result. These conditions belong to the author's ethical argument, rather than an established effect of educational feedback.

III. Distinguish information, explanation, and suggestion

Feedback may have several parts. A neighbour could not find the time: information about their experience. They concluded that Daniil had not checked the announcement: an explanation of the cause. They suggest remaking the whole image: a recommendation. The first part may be reliable, the second needs grounds, and the third may be excessive. Accepting an observation does not automatically mean accepting the explanation and following the recommendation. Separating them preserves useful information without requiring agreement with the entire story built around it.

Daniil looks and sees that the time is indeed absent. He knows he checked the wording but accidentally saved an earlier image. The time needs correcting whether or not the neighbour's explanation about inattention was right. Checking which version he sends may help prevent a recurrence. A complete redesign is unnecessary. A specific error and repair can coexist with rejecting an overall explanation that he habitually does everything badly. A fact need not be accompanied by humiliation to remain a fact.

In other cases, the observation itself needs clarification. One neighbour missed the time because the notification cropped the image. Another opened the whole file and found it easily. The task then concerns delivery as well as the original image. That is no reason to label the

first person inattentive. Their difficulty occurred under particular conditions. Understanding those conditions can improve the message for future recipients without assigning dignity according to who managed to understand it and who did not.

A suggestion should likewise be considered as an option, rather than a ready-made answer. Adding the time beside the image, enlarging the print, and changing the delivery format are different actions. They differ in cost, accessibility, and the problem they address. Daniil can choose something other than his neighbour suggested while still taking the response into account. Thanking someone for useful observation does not require transferring control of the whole work. Feedback supports clearer action when it leaves room for this choice.

IV. Do not turn an average effect into a personal promise

Wisniewski, Zierer, and Hattie's meta-analysis concerns educational feedback and shows differences between the forms studied. In the discussion read, the authors emphasise heterogeneity and the information content's significance. This perspective helps avoid treating usefulness as a single property of every remark. Learning data cannot, however, calculate the effect of a particular neighbourhood comment. Nor do they establish that Daniil should gratefully accept every criticism for the sake of development.

One message may point to an available next step, another offer only a general judgement, and a third overload someone with incompatible requirements. Useful information for Daniil connects with what he can understand and do: add registration details, check readability, or clarify a promise to participants. This is the author's move towards an everyday task, rather than reproducing an experimental condition in the meta-analysis. It needs to be judged within the particular conversation. A research reference does not remove the need to see whether a message fits the action and has grounds.

Educational effects and dignity also concern different questions. Even if a form of treatment changed a task outcome in some study, that would not create a right to humiliate someone. Standards of respect cannot be derived solely from differences in performance measures. In this article, preserving dignity means refusing to equate a whole person with one piece of work, retaining conversational boundaries, and accepting responsibility for a particular action. This is the author's ethical position, rather than a statistical finding attributed to the researchers.

When someone invokes science, it helps to ask what was actually studied: which people, task, message, and outcome? Here we can simply acknowledge differences in feedback and the limits of generalisation. There is no need to list studies as an argument against one's feelings. Daniil can find a remark painful while finding a fact within it; he can enjoy approval while

recognising that it offers no usable grounds. Feeling matters, but does not replace examining the content.

V. Preserve dignity without defending every detail

Admitting a problem in the work may feel like giving someone the right to judge your whole person. Defence then spreads to every detail: small print becomes an artistic choice, an absent time a way to stimulate interest. But dignity does not depend on successfully justifying every choice. Daniil can acknowledge that the invitation was inconvenient and change it. That concerns an action under particular conditions. It establishes neither his overall inadequacy nor an obligation to abandon future initiatives.

The opposite extreme is to accept all criticism as proof of openness. Daniil lists his weaknesses, promises never to make an announcement again, and gives the neighbour control of every detail. Such agreement may end an uncomfortable conversation without improving the work. It connects a local correction with a general surrender of authorship. A more precise position is possible: he has seen this problem and will correct it, while declining other assessments without specific grounds. This requires neither aggressive confidence nor immediate calm.

The book XV context read in the Analects proposes not rejecting suitable words solely because of one's attitude towards their speaker. Here that distinguishes source from content. It does not require hearing every remark in every form. The historical tradition has its own roles and demands, which we do not turn into an obligation to tolerate pressure. Someone can acknowledge a true fact, end unacceptable communication, and choose another way to obtain information. These actions are compatible even when emotionally difficult.

A proportionate response also helps preserve dignity. Correcting the meeting time may be quicker than explaining every intention at length. If the mistake affected people's plans, they need a clear replacement message and, where appropriate, an apology for a specific inconvenience. If no harm occurred, a solemn declaration of inadequacy adds no responsibility. What matters is making the necessary repair without promising impossible errorlessness. A person answers for an action without buying permission to continue through general self-humiliation.

VI. Choose one substantial correction

After several responses, Daniil has a list: add registration, change the print, remove the photograph, choose another colour, explain the aim more fully, and shorten the wording. Some suggestions fit together and others conflict. Changing everything at once makes it hard to distinguish the problem removed from one created by revision. A rigorous experiment is unnecessary for every detail. With limited time, however, it is useful to address what matters first: missing information, a misleading promise, or a condition that actually obstructs participation.

Priority comes from the task and consequences, rather than the loudest message. A wrong date matters more than a colour preference. Inaccessible wording may need attention before decoration. Consent to a photograph cannot wait for the next beautiful version. Daniil chooses clear wording with the time and participation details, then checks that the image agrees with it. He can leave aesthetic matters until later or decide not to develop them. Finished useful work need not include every possible improvement.

At the beginning of book two of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle connects action with the formation of habits; the quality of what is done matters for subsequent ability. The relevant historical perspective is limited: repeating an action and changing a particular part is substantive work, beyond receiving an assessment. This philosophical text does not establish the effect of our revision sequence or demand errorless conduct. Nor do we transfer the ancient role system to a neighbourhood meeting. The practical measure remains the author's suggestion for this task.

A change needs an observable completion. Daniil adds the time and registration method, opens the message as a recipient would, and checks that the needed action is clear. This does not guarantee attendance. It makes a particular difficulty the subject of a particular correction. He can tell the neighbour that their comment exposed missing information without promising to accept every future recommendation. Someone's contribution to improving the work and their authority over the whole work are different things.

VII. Check the revision and close the conversation

Feedback can create an endless chain of improvements. Each change prompts another suggestion and the invitation never becomes ready. Daniil needs to identify what is sufficient now: the information is accurate, clear, accessible, and creates no misleading expectations. When those conditions are met, he can circulate the final wording. Stopping concerns a particular result and time; it means neither that all future comments are forbidden nor that the work has achieved lasting perfection.

Check the particular difficulty that was corrected. If participation was unclear, a willing recipient can be asked to explain what they would do after reading. If the image was cropped, examine it in the same delivery channel. Approval such as looking beautiful now may be pleasant without answering the registration question. This is the author's practical proposal, rather than the reproduction of a full research protocol. Its limited aim is to see whether the revision addresses the observation that prompted it.

Knudsen and colleagues' review of healthcare PDSA projects discusses limits in methodological reporting and conclusions about outcomes. The analogy here is narrow: calling a revision an improvement does not establish its cause or transferability. If more people attend after a new message, the time, group, other messages, and weather may also have changed. Daniil can note the result without attributing it entirely to the new print. An everyday decision does not always require causal proof, but a cause should not be declared established without appropriate grounds.

The conversation can close as clearly and calmly as is currently possible: necessary information has been added, the final wording sent, and other preferences are outside the present task. Someone may remain dissatisfied with the colour. The organiser may stop revising after the aim is fulfilled. If a response reveals harm or an unfulfilled promise, finishing does not cancel repair. The limits of conversation and responsibility may differ: personal judgements can be declined while necessary corrections for participants are still completed.

VIII. Offer feedback that leaves authorship intact

When Daniil responds to another person's work, he can begin with the subject and condition: he opened the invitation on a phone and could not find the time. That reports an observation and its limits. It differs from asserting that someone generally cannot organise. A proposed revision can be offered as an option related to the aim: the time could be added beside the image. The recipient retains the choice of another solution that addresses the same difficulty.

Before offering an extensive assessment, it is appropriate to ask whether it is wanted and which part of the work is being discussed. Sometimes only the date needs checking and a general design review consumes time and attention. Sometimes the work has been published and only a caption can change. An observation need not be forbidden, but this changes a proportionate form of help. Useful feedback considers available action. Recommending the reconstruction of a life or project from one detail readily exceeds both the request and the responder's knowledge.

A successful part can be acknowledged without using praise to package pressure. The aim is clear, for example, but the time is missing. Both comments concern the work. A positive judgement of the person is not needed to acquire a right to correct their shortcomings. A

recipient need not demonstrate gratitude, agree immediately, or change the work in front of you. Feedback remains offered information when it preserves choice. If responding becomes a test of obedience, the relationship with authorship has changed.

The responder can also be wrong. Daniil missed a time on the second page, compared an invitation with an unsuitable model, or suggested inconvenient registration. Acknowledging this is more useful than defending expert status. Dignity is mutual: one person can change the work and another their own response. Both remain more than a particular outcome. A useful conversation guarantees neither pleasant feelings nor a perfect decision, but permits a more precise connection between observation and action without assigning respect according to the invitation's quality.

What this means in practice

Choose one response you have received and identify its subject. What did the person observe, under which conditions, how do they explain the cause, and what action do they suggest? A general assessment can be clarified through a specific detail. If the manner crosses your boundary, you may state it, postpone answering, or finish the exchange. Potential usefulness does not make every form of treatment compulsory. You need not accept the whole message or reject it entirely.

Compare the observation with the task. Is there a necessary criterion, a chosen preference, or a new aim? Are there sufficient grounds for the conclusion? Note the feeling the message produced separately: discomfort does not establish a fact's falsity, nor enjoyment a recommendation's truth. Choose a substantial correction or an explainable decision not to make it. State the particular problem and the limits of change. Personal worth and permission to keep working need not enter the criteria.

After changing the work, examine it under conditions close to the recipient's difficulty. Seek more than approval: check whether necessary information is available and the relevant action possible. If the requirement is met, finish the current work and conversation. If another substantial difficulty appears, consider it separately. Stopping does not remove responsibility for an error, but responsibility need not mean endless refinement until every potential evaluator agrees.

When offering feedback, describe the event and the limits of your knowledge, connect the suggestion with an aim, and preserve choice about the revision. Where necessary, ask which examination is wanted now. This exercise promises no absence of conflict, assesses no mental condition, and demands no conversation through humiliation. Its limited aim is clearer information exchange, so a particular action can change without a verdict on the person or quietly transferring control of the whole work.

Key quotation

> *one (average) effect size does not fit all*

Wisniewski, Zierer, and Hattie, 2020, discussion of heterogeneous findings in the meta-analysis. A single average does not describe every type of educational feedback studied. This does not predict a particular remark's effect or turn a personal feeling into a research measure. Here it supports attention to a message's content and conditions. The Russian companion uses a United Wisdom editorial translation.

Connections between traditions

The Analects context read distinguishes one's attitude towards a speaker from the content of their words. Aristotle connects the formation of ability with actions' quality. The contemporary meta-analysis examines differences in educational feedback. These concern moral cultivation, the ethics of action, and studied learning outcomes; they do not constitute one historical communication programme. In our scene, they offer different questions about content, subsequent revision, and the limits of generalisation.

Preserving dignity and agreement remains a separate authorial condition. It is not derived from an average effect and requires no adoption of historical hierarchy. The limited PDSA-review analogy concerns care with causal conclusions after a change. This article does not claim that its suggested conversation improves measures like the studied educational interventions. The practice remains open to modification and refusal within a particular situation.

Sources

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Tags

feedback, action, dignity, comment, observation, assessment, criterion, aim, explanation, recommendation, clarification, boundary, consent, authorship, error, revision, outcome, conditions, accessibility, responsibility, respect, completion, choice, communication, learning, Wisniewski, Zierer, Hattie, Aristotle, Confucius

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