


UNITED WISDOM

# How power changes access to feedback

Relationships and Intimacy

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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## Epigraph

> *the voice of praise*

Xenophon, *Hiero*, I, Simonides speaking; H. G. Dakyns, exact Project Gutenberg web version, web152. A short fragment; his interlocutor subsequently questions whether praise can be trusted.

## What this article is about

After a promotion, someone feels they have become easier to work with. Colleagues used to argue; now meetings are calm, proposals quickly gain support and final reports sound confident. Perhaps the director has become more attentive. Perhaps people have learned to communicate only what she welcomes. Other explanations are possible too. The changed tone alone establishes nothing. A separate question nevertheless arises: what information reaches her now, from whom, in what form and at what cost to the speaker? Power concerns not only deciding, but the conditions for learning about a decision's consequences.

We will consider an imagined exhibition project and its director, Irina. Feedback here means messages concerning her decisions, work in progress, uncertainties and results. This is neither a psychological diagnosis nor an empirical law about every organisation. Xenophon's dialogue helps compare praise with trust in its origins. Contemporary distinctions remain editorial proposals: access to an original message, selection boundaries, substantive responses and checking what changed. They do not guarantee frankness and require no dependent participant to test power's reactions through a risky comment.

## I. New authority changes relationships to a message

Imagine that Irina was previously a coordinator and now allocates deadlines and chooses contractors. Her colleague Pavel says the room is almost ready. Among equals he usually listed every difficulty; now he postpones two until the next meeting. We do not know why. They may be insignificant or already being resolved. He may think the director only needs the outcome. He may fear assessment. The changed message establishes no single motive. Its new scope nevertheless bears on the director's ability to see the project's actual condition.



@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Irina may sincerely ask people to speak plainly. She also determines Pavel's future role and assesses his work. The request exists within that relationship rather than cancelling it through good intentions. A participant may distinguish what a report requires from what feels possible to say at a meeting. Even without intentional concealment, information may become shorter, more cautious or more favourable. These are possible forms in our scene, not universal descriptions of subordinates. Actual message histories need examination where available; fear cannot be assigned merely because the recipient acquired authority.

Irina's own work changes too. She previously saw the room daily; now she receives a summary. More reports can make her feel she has more information. But page counts do not establish the scope of direct access. A detailed table may derive from one verbal answer; a brief note may contain a new observation. Message quantity differs from information's origins. A director need not check every detail personally, but should understand what was communicated: an observation, someone else's account, an assessment of readiness or a promise of future correction.

The first question therefore concerns relationships rather than people's moral quality. What changed after the appointment: who communicates, to whom, for which decision and under what recipient authority? Trust in Pavel can coexist with clarifying a summary's limits. Irina's attentiveness can be recognised while dependence on her assessment is named. Feedback becomes more precise when the recipient's role has visible scope. Otherwise conversational calm may quietly replace knowledge about the room, even though participants discussed different subjects and did not promise an equal scope of checking.

## II. Praise communicates an assessment, not necessarily its grounds

In Xenophon's *Hiero*, Simonides connects pleasure with praise, while Hiero questions its value when flattery is suspected. The dialogue retains the ruler's and interlocutor's particular roles; it does not prove contemporary leaders are inevitably deceived. A limited question suffices here: what can favourable words establish when their reason and grounds are unknown? A literary and philosophical exchange distinguishes a response's pleasantness from confidence in its origins, without diagnosing Pavel's intentions.

Colleagues tell Irina that the new arrangement is convenient. This may be sincere. But convenience does not identify for whom or against what comparison. Pavel might mean a short meeting, someone else clear deadlines, another the opportunity to avoid a disputed subject. If Irina uses these answers to establish the room's readiness, the assessment acquires a different subject. Clarifying which part of the work was praised requires calling nobody a flatterer. It retains a useful answer within the scope in which it was actually given.

The opposite danger is distrusting every favourable response. Each pleasant answer becomes an attempt to gain an advantage, each agreement a sign of dependence. Participants then cannot report a good result in a form that will be accepted. Suspicion becomes another filter distorting access. A director may demand criticism even where evidence supports her decision. Independence is not defined by unpleasantness. Pavel can conscientiously confirm a completed part while identifying an unfinished one. Consideration must allow both contents, or it selects an emotional tone in advance instead of examining grounds.

It helps to ask about observation, comparison and limits. What became more convenient, for whom and in which part? Who saw the result, and who repeats an assessment? Sometimes someone cannot answer because they expressed a general impression. That is not necessarily deception. An impression remains an impression; readiness needs different information. Praise is then neither forbidden nor converted into a complete report. Its human meaning can remain while management refrains from using gratitude and pleasantness as undeclared confirmation of every factual condition for a future action. For example, a favourable assessment of scheduling does not authorise placing a heavy work on a wall. That requires a relevant answer from a competent person. Different decisions need different grounds, even when made on the same day within one calm conversation.

## III. Several selections may stand between an event and its director

Pavel receives messages from installers, writes a note for a coordinator, and the coordinator shortens it for Irina. Every transition involves selecting what matters. Selection is necessary: a director cannot read everything. Useful compression nevertheless differs from deleting something that changes a decision. An installer reports an unfinished section of wall; the note calls it a minor delay, and the final summary says work is on schedule. Deliberate deception is not required. Categories and recipient expectations may differ. Irina ends up with wording that cannot establish the wall's condition directly.

The particular answer's origins need establishing. Who saw the section, when, what was communicated and what changed in shortening? This is not a demand for every private exchange. Placing a painting requires information about the relevant wall, rather than the installers' entire relationship history. An original observation can be retained in an appropriate form, with the author of the summary judgement identified. The recipient then sees two levels: an event and its assessment. Explaining origins does not guarantee authenticity, but prevents attributing an independent confirmation that nobody performed.

A counterexample is a long original message containing irrelevant material and one unreliable detail. Direct access does not automatically provide better knowledge. A coordinator may

correctly remove an erroneous statement after checking it. The article therefore does not propose bypassing every intermediary to find perfect truth. Selection needs explainable grounds, especially when an excluded detail changes the result. Irina can ask about a significant discrepancy without rejecting the coordinator's entire work. The intermediary retains a role and ability to correct; the original writer gains no automatic correctness merely by writing first and at greater length.

For this imagined project, the path of one necessary piece of information can suffice. Sometimes a record reference helps, sometimes a competent participant's separate answer, sometimes clarification of a summary category. Access and cost determine the choice. A new channel need not be created for an attractive diagram if nobody will use it. A record's existence, delivery, reading and influence on a decision remain distinct. Uncertainty can persist at every stage. A correctly named report does not establish that Irina received the significant amendment before directing the placement of artworks.

## IV. An available channel may require an excessively costly answer

Irina creates a meeting for any comments. Everyone is invited, but Pavel must discuss the delay before the contractor who determines his next job. A formal opportunity to speak exists; the cost of the content remains. An invitation alone cannot establish a fully accessible channel. Nor can Pavel be declared obliged to remain silent or the contractor certain to retaliate. Known dependence, anticipated consequences and an unknown reaction need distinguishing. The question concerns arrangements for answering, rather than demanding more courage to demonstrate the new system's openness.

Another format might be a limited message to an appropriate recipient without unnecessary personal disclosure. Privacy should not automatically be called protection. The recipient may be known, the record forwarded, and the content recognisable even without a name. We establish no technical anonymity and do not promise safety. A specific format needs assessment against actual conditions. Where that assessment is absent, uncertainty is more honest than inviting frankness under a convenient label. Pausing and limiting a message remain possible for a dependent participant, even when a director sincerely wishes to hear everything.

A director also has limits: not every complaint outside the project can be received, and preferred outcomes cannot be guaranteed. A channel should therefore identify its questions, readers and possible responses. Pavel's information about a wall creates no automatic authority to assess the contractor's entire personality. If a question concerns his participation conditions, reducing it to one technical category for a shorter report is equally inadequate.

Defined scope retains both sides: participants need not disclose their whole lives, and recipients need not promise authority they do not actually possess.

Sometimes no safe, functioning format is presently available. The project then has a feedback limitation worth acknowledging. Demanding more honesty from everyone cannot fix it. Dependence might be reduced, decision scope changed, or current silence no longer treated as confirmation that all is well, where such actions are available. These are editorial options, not a tested protection programme. Pavel does not become responsible for the absence of a good channel. Understanding the limitation gives Irina no access to his private doubts. The unknown remains unknown, but is no longer disguised as everyone's free confirmation of a complete result.

## V. A director's response matters to the next message

Pavel finally reports the unfinished wall. Irina says news like this should arrive earlier. This may be a fair question about timing, but does not yet answer the room's condition. If discussion immediately becomes personal assessment, the original information may disappear. Two tasks need separating: what to do about the current section and why information arrived late. Both can matter. The first does not cancel reporting responsibility; the second should not justify ignoring a placement condition for which the news is still significant.

A substantive response can be simple: who checks the wall and when will a usable conclusion appear? Thanks for the comment does not replace that work. Harsh wording does not establish rejection either if the information was subsequently considered. An action history is needed, not just one meeting's mood. Irina may arrange a check and separately clarify reporting deadlines. That does not guarantee future frankness from Pavel. It shows a narrower result: this message prompted specified work that can be checked without guessing people's future intentions.

The opposite case is immediately accepting every message as established fact. To demonstrate openness, a director cancels installation after the first worrying note. It later turns out to concern another section. Others now bear the cost of an unchecked response. Receiving a message for consideration differs from accepting its conclusion. Pavel needs the ability to correct a mistake, and Irina to request relevant support. Checking should not automatically be called suppression of feedback. What matters is the subject examined and whether the possibility of error is recognised across different sources.

The next message arrives with a memory of the previous one. This is a reasonable possibility in our scene, not an established psychological mechanism for everyone. Someone may speak in greater detail, someone less, someone change roles. Irina can learn through available responses, but should not supply motives from a convenient story. Her task is narrower:

distinguish the message, consideration and consequences for current work. Actual punishment for a comment needs its own record. Substantive resolution deserves retention too, rather than reducing every history of power to a predetermined accusation.

## VI. Channel quantity does not establish diverse grounds

Irina receives a verbal report, the coordinator's table and a contractor's email. All confirm readiness. Three formats look like three confirmations, but may derive from Pavel's one answer. Channel variety does not equal independent information. Each conclusion's grounds can be queried while respecting its author's work. If all conscientiously repeated one result, their agreement adds no new check. It may establish delivery of a shared message, but supports the room's condition no more strongly than the original observation. These limits matter particularly before an action requiring a factual condition.

Dependence on a competent source is not inherently deficient. Nobody must personally repeat a professional assessment. A contractor may have the necessary knowledge, and the group reasonably delegates a particular check. It needs naming as a delegated check with an understood result. A director's independence does not mean personally measuring every wall. It can involve an intelligible source choice and limited conclusion. Where Irina lacks information about the check, repeated confident emails should not portray it as complete. Where a result exists, dependence between channels alone should not invalidate it.

An additional perspective may be available for a significant disputed section, given a person, access and authority. But a new signature is not automatically independent. The reviewer might read the same summary or depend on the same contractor. Their actual work needs specifying. Additional consideration may confirm the original conclusion, narrow it or retain uncertainty. An opposing response should not be compulsory to display diversity. Another perspective's value concerns its grounds rather than the number of people now permitted to express views about the room without performing corresponding work.

Many comments do not establish good feedback either. They may concern only safe details, repeat one conflict or arrive after a decision. Scope and timing help a director where information is available. Yet each author of a small comment cannot be deemed part of concealment. A small question may be their actual concern. Arrangements are assessed through significant areas remaining unknown, rather than requiring everyone to provide sufficiently serious criticism. Feedback retains meaning when it illuminates a particular choice, instead of becoming competition in channel counts and the force of inconvenient statements.

## VII. A director can examine access on a small scale

Irina chooses one decision: placing a painting by a particular wall. She reconstructs the available chain from observation to instruction. Who reported readiness, when, who shortened the response and which limit disappeared? This concerns one case, not the entire organisation. If significant information arrived on time, that deserves retention. If it did not, a particular transition can be clarified. Wholesale redesign of meetings need not come first without grounds. A small scope reveals an actual difficulty and correction costs without promising that a new form will remove every dependence.

Suppose the table has no place for readiness conditions. Pavel selected a positive category because most of the room was completed. Irina can change the category description or separately request the section on which placement depends. That corrects communication arrangements without establishing the author's dishonesty. A new case then needs checking: was the condition recorded, delivered and considered before action? Adding a column does not establish that result. It may stay empty or become another formality whose content nobody reads.

Alternatively, the chain shows accurate information that Irina herself remembered selectively. Her choice of attention can then be considered without attributing it to all directors or passing a final verdict on herself. The overlooked condition and its present consideration can be specified. Correction does not guarantee future impartiality. It has a defined subject and accessible result. A director can acknowledge a work limitation without requiring subordinates to comfort her or confirm that she remains good irrespective of the consequences of this decision.

Such examination has limits: participants need not disclose every private conversation and feeling for their director's inquiry. Information should concern the selected decision and available authority. Irina may find part of the history unrecoverable. Uncertainty then remains, and further work can be chosen without pretending to have a complete explanation. Accountability for her role differs from a right to know everything. That limit preserves others' dignity and the conclusion's quality: missing access is not filled by confident stories about who feared, flattered or wanted to hide the wall.

## VIII. A good outcome does not remove limits on knowledge

The exhibition opens on time, the painting is well placed and visitors are pleased. This is a significant possible outcome. It does not establish that previous messages were complete or every uncertainty reached Irina. Successful action differs from the quality of the route to it. Success can be acknowledged alongside a discovered limitation. Otherwise a favourable result excuses ignoring the history, and an unfavourable one excuses accusing everyone who spoke. Our question concerns access to particular significant information. It remains after the event, although further checking costs and the need for change may now differ.

An unsuccessful outcome can also follow conscientious feedback. The wall was checked and its condition known, but circumstances changed later. Failure does not then mean information was concealed. Timing and available knowledge need establishing. Irina may have made a justified choice that no longer suited a changed situation. Pavel may have reported everything he knew without access to the next change. This distinction does not automatically remove responsibility. It identifies its actual subject rather than assigning guilt solely because a project ended worse than expected.

Power need not deprive someone of truthful answers, but can change the conditions for receiving them. A director can retain trust while asking about origins, accept unpleasant information while checking it, and limit discussion while leaving a clear route for a significant question. These combinations are not always available. The article does not claim conversational technique removes dependence or protects speakers. It proposes identifying a role's effects on messages within a defined scope where information exists. Without access, honest leadership does not turn absence of response into approval on everyone's behalf.

Returning to the first calm meeting, Irina can now ask more precisely. Did agreeing become more convenient than reporting conditions, or did work actually improve? Available evidence must answer, rather than a preselected attractive story. The summary may remain and acquire clear grounds. One path for significant information may change. A limitation may persist. The director gains no complete knowledge, and participants need not become heroic critics. Feedback receives a modest meaning: information about power's consequences has an opportunity to reach someone able to consider a particular decision.

## What this means in practice

If you wish, choose a small decision within a role where you receive others' messages and can direct action. In a private note, identify the condition you need to know, who observed it and who communicated the result. Distinguish direct information, an account and an assessment. Silence alone assigns nobody fear or flattery. A short chain may be complete or leave uncertainty. This editorial exercise is neither a tested management method nor a measure of a director's morality or everyone else's frankness.

Where consideration is available, clarify one significant transition and possible amendment. Demand no risky admission from a dependent participant and do not promise anonymity without established conditions. The recipient, access circle and response scope should fit the question. Receiving a comment need not mean accepting its conclusion: grounds can be checked. A favourable answer need not be rejected to appear independent. Under threats, direct contact and public criticism are not prescribed; people retain the ability to limit involvement, pause or decline the proposed step.

Later, inspect the particular result: was the condition recorded, the message delivered, the answer read or the action changed? These are different achievements. A new form does not guarantee new knowledge. Irina might learn about the wall before placement, Pavel gain a clear reporting subject, and the group understand a summary's limits. That outcome is possible, not promised. The exercise makes information access visible within its actual scope. Further choices remain with people who know real relationships, authority and conversational costs better than readers of our imagined example.

## Key quotation

> *bestowing praise out of mere flattery*

Xenophon, *Hiero*, I, Hiero's response, web156, H. G. Dakyns. A short fragment of a question about suspected origins of praise; not a claim that all praise is false.

## Connections between traditions

| Basis | Question for comparison | Difference and limit |
|---|---|---|
| Simonides in Xenophon's dialogue | Can praise give pleasure? | A literary and philosophical interlocutor's statement, not research on directors |
| Hiero's response, I | Can praise be trusted when flattery is suspected? | A question within an ancient dialogue, not an established contemporary employee motive |
| Imagined exhibition | What information reaches someone with authority? | Our editorial examination of selection, access and responses; effects unestablished |

## Sources

1. Xenophon. *Hiero*. H. G. Dakyns, Project Gutenberg, eBook 1175, exact web version. Metadata web0–45 and the continuous selected Chapter I context, web152–161, including Simonides' and Hiero's exchanges about praise and suspected flattery, were actually read. No complete-work or Greek-original reading claimed. Translator identified; exact print basis unestablished. Territorial rights UNKNOWN; short attributed excerpts and bounded paraphrase, no full-source import. The dialogue supplies no empirical evidence for contemporary feedback mechanisms.

## Tags

power, feedback, leadership, access, message, information, praise, flattery, trust, source, summary, observation, account, assessment, authority, dependence, channel, recipient, privacy, response costs, consideration, correction, checking, deadline, outcome, uncertainty, exhibition, Xenophon, Hiero, Simonides, United Wisdom

## About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is the co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.