



By Peter Clarke explains how 'poker' is breaking down the barriers of giving and receiving feedback.

Communication at work – getting behind the poker face

The messages we think we are giving our colleagues about ourselves may be different from the messages they are receiving about us. Objective feedback from others about our interpersonal impact can be invaluable in deepening our self-awareness and improving the way we manage our behaviour in and outside of work.

Most organisations recognise the importance of feedback, but getting this right can often be a difficult challenge. Indeed, in today's business world, increasing importance is attached to peer feedback and upward feedback. However, there are often concerns about the effectiveness of this style of feedback. Employees can be reluctant to provide feedback about their colleagues and managers because of

the possible implications this may have on working relationships and their future prospects.

However, the concerns may be a result of the actual feedback process with questionnaires being completed anonymously and feedback taking place through a one way process, often delivered by the line manager or independent consultant. It is therefore not surprising that people are suspicious of the feedback process. But that is no reason to throw the baby out with the bath water. If the process isn't working, work on finding a new process rather than losing honest and open intercollegiate feedback.

Personality poker

A new and interactive tool designed to break down the barriers of giving

and receiving feedback is now available. It is called Personality Poker and has been developed to enhance individual, team and organisational success. Personality Poker is ideal for testing out individual strengths, clarifying individual possibilities for growth, helping individuals understand how they currently impact on others and promoting understanding among team members.

As the name suggests, Personality Poker is based around a card game. Team members give and receive cards with reference to how they see themselves, how they see other members of the team and how others within the team see them. The process takes place through two stages – playing the game, then evaluating the outcomes.

So, how does the game work? Participants each have three cards in front of them, 'More of this', 'Maintain', and 'Less of this'. There is a pack of 230 different Personality attribute cards in the middle of the table. Participants are then dealt 10 cards from this pack and are asked to consider two questions:

■ Which nine of these cards do I associate with my own personality? Which of these cards do I see most within my own personality?

■ With regards to the 10th card, which one of my colleagues does this attribute apply to? Is there a colleague whom I think should display more of this attribute, should display less of this attribute or maintain the level they are currently showing?

The participant takes the card they have chosen to discard and places that attribute in front of the selected colleague on the chosen 'More of this', 'Less of this' or 'Maintain' card. The first participant then collects another card from the attribute pile and begins the consideration process again. Meanwhile play has progressed with the next participant.

As play continues, participants are very eager to discuss the reasons why they have been given their cards, but it is vital that this is kept to a minimum at this stage as it can stagnate the game process and isolate some members from the discussion.

Evaluation takes place over three phases:

■ **Phase one: Group exchange** – Immediately following the card play there is usually a great need for information and discussion. Initial exchanges are aimed at clarification via targeted questions such as "Why did you give me the card with that particular attribute on it? The person being asked then explains their interpretation surrounding this term.

■ **Phase two: Individual work** – Participants consider the self-perception and the perception of others through consideration of a series of questions. For example, which card suits me best/ least? Which card am I most happy about receiving? Which card forces me to stop and think the most? Which card am I most opposed to?

■ **Phase three: Group reassembled** – Participants offer their thoughts and

ideas based upon their individual work and discuss ways in which to progress as a team.

Playing the game

A training company wanted to use Personality Poker within their own organisation. The group selected members from all levels of the organisation from sales consultants to the managing director. The session had been organised by one of the organisation's training consultants, but the MD was slightly sceptical about the value of such a session. However, like the other participants, he agreed to enter the game with an open mind. Because of time factors, it was decided to run the card playing aspect for 45 minutes, with the evaluation stage intended to last a further 45 minutes.

The game progressed as cards were sorted and exchanged, and the energy within the team increased,

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eyebrows were raised, frowns appeared and smiles were exchanged. However, there was much laughter and all the participants were clearly enjoying themselves. A facilitator to the session ensures the process moved along swiftly and smoothly.

The evaluation process began with an initial stage of self reflection. Did they agree with the cards they had retained themselves and were they surprised by any that they had been given? A group discussion followed where each of the participants fed back their thoughts on the cards they had been given.

One of the most interesting aspects of the group discussion involved the MD. When asked whether there were any cards he was surprised to receive, he said that he couldn't understand why he had been given the 'Solution Oriented' card under the 'More of this' category. When the others in the group were encouraged to comment on this, one participant said: "You are an excellent ideas generator and you're innovative, but you don't really think of the consequences of these ideas or even how they can be achieved. This is sometimes very frustrating."

The MD responded by saying: "But that is exactly my position! I generate the ideas, that is what I do. I then pass these on to you to work through and advise on the hows and ifs. If I were to do everything, we'd do half the work and you would have no say, no influence and would, in effect, be following my orders. This way, you all have a major part to play in the working of this organisation."

This proved hugely valuable to the group as it clarified people's roles, but also emphasised the culture and objectives of the organisation.

At each stage of the evaluation process the participants were able to review the feedback they had been given with whoever had said it and had the opportunity to discuss their own point of view with colleagues in an open environment.

As the session finished and everyone went back to their desks, discussion was still continuing about the game and what they had learned. The MD of the organisation was delighted by the session as he said that it gave everyone the opportunity to sit together and discuss aspects of the organisation and the team. He also praised the informal feel to the 'game' which encouraged open and honest discussion about themselves and others in the team. "It has given each and every one of us some very valuable things to think about, which should help individual and organisational success."

Everyone wins with Personality Poker

The interactive feedback that Personality Poker encourages is the key element in the process. It allows feedback to take place through a two way discussion which is often not permitted using traditional feedback approaches. It is a lot more open than other traditional feedback instruments. Instead of completing questionnaires about colleagues behind their backs, which can breed suspicion and resentment between colleagues, this instrument breaks down all of the feedback barriers and actively encourages people to openly discuss their feelings and positions. This is hugely important for team and organisational success.

Peter Clarke is a business psychologist at The Test Agency, a Hogrefe Group Company. Personality Poker is available from The Test Agency, priced £130+VAT. To order, or for further information, call 01865 402900.