



On Feedback

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1. Introduction

a. There is no right and wrong

Many people are afraid of feedback. “Can I give you some feedback?” is typically followed by criticism, and we don’t do well with criticism. When we face criticism, the most typical reaction is to shut down, get reactive, defensive or withdraw. If you want your feedback to be heard, criticism is not going to be effective. Your feedback is not going to have an impact that way.

We try to avoid receiving feedback not (only) because it is negative but because criticism locks us into a binary system of right and wrong. Labeling someone or something, no matter whether negative or positive, is always uncomfortable. How can positive labeling be uncomfortable? Let me share what comes to my mind first: “you’re such a good girl” already



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sounded uncomfortable when I was a child. It would then, and still would, trigger all kinds of reactions in me: who are you to judge that? What do you really know about me? Why are you telling me that? Labeling puts us into a box and all we want is get out of that box.

Non-violent communication teaches that everything people do they do to meet needs. We all have needs, met and unmet, in every moment of our lives. By that we don't only mean food and shelter. We mean the need for connection, for belonging, for contribution, to be heard and seen, to matter. Harmony, cooperation. Although all human beings can relate to all those needs, the priority those needs have for someone will vary from moment to moment. If generally, you'd say you are not someone for whom harmony is important, a disagreement with a loved one might let that need rank higher among your universal needs for that situation.



What we choose to do to meet those needs, is referred to as strategy. Strategies are not good or bad. But some are more effective than others, and that depends on individuals and context. Going to the movies for some is an effective way of meeting their need for connection, for some it is not and they would choose to do something else to meet their need for connection. When we are not aware of our needs behind our strategies, it is very easy to get side-tracked into astonishingly ineffective strategies. Have you ever steamed out of a room, upset because what you really needed was connection? Leaving the room does not seem to be an effective strategy to get connection

Before we go back to feedback and criticism, let us have a quick look at feelings. We all walk around having needs with changing priorities/needs/values. What happens if one of our needs (that was important in that moment) is not being met, for instance our need for connection? We might get sad. Or mad. Unmet needs will trigger uncomfortable feelings. On the flipside, when an important need is met, we might feel happy. When you get an unexpected phone call from a friend in a moment where connection was what you were



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longing, you will probably feel happy or excited. In that way, feelings are pointers to met or unmet needs.

b. Messages, needs and feelings

It is the basic, and revolutionary, insight from non-violent communication (NVC) that in a world based on people using strategies to meet universal needs, there is no right and wrong. There are just people trying to meet needs. We can disagree on the level of strategies, on how we want to meet our needs. Movies or dinner out, what works for your need for connection, what works for mine? But who can argue with the need for connection? All humans share this need. And that is true for every universal need. Our basic outfit of universal needs is probably roughly the same. On strategy-level, there is a lot of variation. The same need can be met by different strategy. A strategy can meet several needs at once, and there is no 1:1 relation between needs and strategies. For instance, going to the movies might need my need for connection, or stimulation, or both, or something else.

Exposure to NVC has impacted many lives very deeply and we urge every reader to learn more about it. If these are new concepts for you (and even they are not), you are very likely to have missed a detail in the above paragraph: when people hear “there is no right and wrong”, it is easier to accept that no one is ever wrong. However, if we deeply immerse into NVC, there is no wrong AND right. We have to leave the entire binary system behind and embrace that we all have our own angle on reality.

Once this is understood, there are two options of how to relate to others: (a) only talk about what we can observe more or less directly (i.e. stay away from interpretations) or (b) become aware that we are making assumptions. Since (a) by itself is not very realistic, we try to combine both options. What does that mean for giving feedback?

First, you have to leave every thought behind that you are right and the other person is wrong (or right). You can talk about your observations and talk about your assumptions or judgements *as such*. Since we live in a society that is still very much engrained in a binary system of right and wrong, it is all too easy for your conversation partner to forget that you are aware that you are making assumptions. That does not mean you cannot share them. In talking, you have to be extremely transparent and clear about the fact that you are sharing your own interpretation, no absolute truth. Just saying “oh, I know that was just my assumption” is not enough, you have to be up front with it. Below will be some useful phrases that make it clear that all we can possibly share is our own perception and interpretation, no absolute truth. Keep in mind that although *how* we say things matters, just saying the words will not be enough. Only when it is truly felt, it will be genuine and effective. People have a very fine radar and can sense judgement underneath anything you say, no matter how elaborate your words might be.



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In sharing your observations and interpretations, you are sharing what the impact of someone's actions or words is on you. You can share feelings, or you can share what needs are met or not met for you.

One more caveat before we jump into how to give feedback: no one and nothing can directly *cause* your feelings. "You make me angry" is just not an accurate description of what is going on, considering the steps between a trigger and a feeling. First of all, we react to what we hear, not to what has been said or done. It is safe to assume that everything we see and hear is at least slightly tainted because we inadvertently add a layer of interpretation. We can make an effort to talk about observations but we will make assumptions. What is more relevant in this context is what happens after we receive (and interpret) a message. We talked about the concept that everything we do or don't do is a

Messages, needs and feelings in NVC



strategy to meeting needs. That means, when encountering a message, we will evaluate: does this meet my needs that are salient in this very moment? Unmet and met needs will then trigger feelings. Again: not other people's actions trigger feelings but our own met or unmet needs.

Let us look at one example. Let us say I see my partner drop a towel on the bathroom floor. I might get annoyed because he dropped it. Did he cause my anger? Let us look at it from a needs perspective. What needs of mine will be met or unmet? It could be my needs for beauty and order that is not met. It could be that I am worried about the damp towel getting moldy and I want to use my resources wisely without wasting things (behind that could be the desire to have peace of mind financially, or environmental concerns or whatever else).



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I might have had a conversation about towels on the floor with my partner in the past, and we both agreed to hang them up. In that case, I could see my need for cooperation, mutual understanding, love or respect as not met. I might feel sad or upset. Laying it all out like this, it might be easier to understand that it is not my partner's behavior that makes me sad or upset. My feelings are a reaction to how my needs are met. There is some impact of my partner's actions on how my needs are met but there is no direct cause-effect relationship.

How can you address something that upsets you? By referring to your needs. Instead of saying "you make me upset when you leave the towel on the floor", saying something like "When I see the towel on the floor, I am worried that it might get moldy, and I don't like wasting things we own" is more adequate to what happened. If you compare those two statements, notice how the second one does not contain the word "you". When you hear people talking about "I"-statements, that's what is referred to. (However, it is very easy to tweak an "I"-statement, for instance in "I don't like how you make me upset". We cannot just change the words – or the first word in a sentence. We have to change the mindset.)

What you do when you talk about your needs that are met or unmet is you talk about the *impact* something has on you and how your needs are met. Since your feelings and your needs are saying something about *you* instead of putting the other person on the spot, this is information that is very easy to hear.

c. Learning through feedback

How does change come about if everyone "just" talks about their own experience? Change comes in the shape of requests. A request has the form of "would you be willing to...", and the answer can be yes or no. For any request, we need to reveal what need of ours would be met with the other person's help. Since we can all relate to universal needs (because we all have them), often the other person will be very willing to support you in meeting your need.

When I am friends with someone, I want to hear when their need for connection is not met and they feel lonely. Note that it is not my fault when they are lonely. That would be going back to right/wrong thinking. (For instance in demands or blame of the "why don't you ever call me first" type.) Everyone's needs are their own, and the responsibility to meet them is no one's but theirs. They have a need for connection, and there are many strategies to meet that need. One of the strategies would be to call me and talk. Another strategy would be for them to look at old pictures. Or to spend time on social media, go out to dance, call



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some other friend or call their sister. Only they can pick and choose what might work for them in that moment, for I am not responsible for their met needs.

Let's say my friend calls me. I don't like talking on the phone. Talking on the phone for me simply does not work as a strategy to meet my need for connection. Maybe it is because my hearing is not good, so listening without visual cues is straining and not relaxing. I am also concerned that my kids in the house might hear what I am saying which keeps me from speaking freely. When I cannot relax and have to monitor what I say, connection is hard to get. What works really well for me is texting. So I do not answer the phone but I text back. I want to maintain connection, and texts can be sent quietly without anyone overhearing our conversation, so this really works for me. My friend, however, prefers talking on the phone. She might get upset. Did I *make* her upset? No. Her being upset is her reaction to her own need for connection not being met through a strategy that works for her for meeting her need. My texting instead of answering her phone call is my way of meeting my need for connection, relaxation and privacy. So, what can we do? Are we doomed to stay in a disconnected place, neither of us really getting what we want? This is where feedback comes in. You might notice that it took a long time to talk about feedback, which is just because so many assumptions we typically have about actions and feelings ignore the most important factor: our needs.

What can we do to meet our needs more effectively? We can give feedback. The first step is to share your experience.

Hey, thanks for texting back when I called but I was looking for connection, and texting does not cut it for me.

Texting makes connection easier for me because I can relax better when my kids are not listening to what I say! And I have background noise here, I might not be able to hear well.



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Again, notice how both are able to share their experience without labeling the other person. They are just talking about their own experience. Now they both have some relevant information. Both know what is going on for the other person and why they act the way they do. Once that first step of mutual understanding is complete, the path is open to a shared decision on what to do. Talk on the phone later when kids are in bed? Go with texting, or a more unilateral phone call (for privacy) with headphones? We are rarely short on ideas once we have clarity. A whole set of options opens up when we collaborate with fully shared information. The more information we have, the more we are in choice about what strategy works best in that moment.

Feedback is data, that is all. It is sometimes described as something very neutral as in steering a bike: my eyes and sense of balance perceive cues that the horizon might be tipping. I steer to make up for it. I see that the road makes a curve. I steer to stay on the road. There is a branch on the ground? Important information. The branch on the ground is not there to upset me. It just is. And I will find my way around it. The more information I have, and the more we put our minds together, the more easily I can ride to my destination without getting hurt.

Your organization can use all relevant data to steer itself, and your relationship can use all relevant data to grow together. “How is this working for you” is a question that helps us get to a place of growth.

Feedback is neither negative or positive. It is just information. What works for you, what works for me? The two key points to keep in mind:

- Separate out needs and strategies. Do not judge actions as bad or good. Instead embrace the underlying need and talk about effectiveness of strategies in meeting needs.
- Giving feedback serves to increase the level of information. The more is mutually known, the better we can collaborate.

d. Feedback fosters connection

Now that we know how to look at feedback as neutral information, there is more. Feedback can be a way to foster connection. How?

There are two ways how that is the case that I see. First, if it is mutually acknowledged that the more information we have, the more easily and successfully we can collaborate, then giving someone feedback is providing them with more information. (Whether or not that



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information is relevant to them, that is not in our hands.) Why would I not be grateful for more information that makes my journey smoother? Giving feedback is a way to contribute to your fellow traveler's well-being. Think back to the steering of a bike: someone's feedback is information that there is a car from the left and a patch of black ice.

Second, if someone shares how my behavior has an impact on them, this is proof that we are connected and interdependent. *What I do matters to someone else, and what they do matters to me.* The more I get to learn about what is important to others, the more closely we can be connected. Giving or receiving feedback is a strategy that can meet many universal needs: the needs for connection, learning, shared reality, to matter, to contribute, stimulation, to be seen, consideration, discovery, growth... look at a list of universal needs, and feedback can be a good strategy for almost all of them!

The goal is to come to a place where we can welcome any feedback (ideally even ineffective feedback) as data. That is not always easy. We have our own stories going on and get caught up in our own judgements. But as a goal, wouldn't it be a peaceful place to be in if we were able to gracefully take in all the feedback and to be deeply grateful for it?

e. Summary: successful feedback

Constructive feedback is feedback that

- shares information you can access
- can be heard
- fosters connection

What data do you have access to? You do not have access to absolute truth, thus do not present what you say as absolute truth. What you *do* have access to is what you can observe, what you interpret or project (both needs to be marked as such) and what the impact is on you. Observations are only attempts at being a "video camera". No matter how skilled we are at observing and reporting, it is still subjective and therefore more of an experience than an observation. Whatever we call it, it is data that the other person can work with!

Feedback that can be heard is feedback that is free of blame. Any added layer of blame will cover up the data you want to be known. Making sure that the other person is in a good enough place to receive the feedback is part of that as well. An easy way to do that is to ask

- "I am sitting on some judgement here. Are you open to hearing it?"
- "I have been observing something. I might be mistaken but I thought maybe it might help you to hear what I have been thinking. Do you want to hear it?"



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Feedback fosters connection when it is aimed to share information instead of distancing us from each other. A key ingredient to connecting feedback is curiosity. How did what I said land on you? What is important to you? What is there for me to learn?

Checklist for successful feedback:

- Check if the person is open to hearing the feedback
- Express your feedback using
 - your observations
 - your interpretations (marked as such)
 - a description of how well your needs are (un)met
- Be curious about the other person's thoughts, feelings and needs as they arise.

2. Feedback in your organizations

We have talked about observations and how we can talk about our experiences. On a more general level, everything is information. Unanimated beings also give us feedback. In that thinking, everything is feedback. If we think back to the steering of a bike, we need to check on our data frequently enough to be able to steer successfully. The counterpart of how we steer our bike in an organization are our policies (how we do our work) and our interactions as humans. Both areas will be addressed in this section.

a. Feedback about content

Every policy decision in sociocracy has a term end when the policy will be up for review. Why that? Because it keeps our policies up to date, fresh in our minds and it encourages to strive to improve in every aspect of our organization. It is like a regular check-up of our tools. All in order, all working and doing what we intend them to do?

Term ends are a way to remind us to do a check-up. For instance, we could make new policy and consent to reviewing it again in 3 months. Or in 10 years. What are useful terms for a policy? That depends on the nature of the organization and on how new the policy was. In



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general, we try to make the cycles long enough to not overload our circle meetings with policy reviews. Sociocracy is about getting work done, not only about talking *about* work! If you are a bike shop, you want to fix or assemble bikes. You might want to talk about tool maintenance and make policy around that but you also want to get your actual work done.

On the other hand, we want to be sure to keep our policies current. If we only review our policies every 10 years (or never!), we will most likely not keep them current. How many organizations have policies in their logbook that they are not even aware of? We don't have policy just so it is there. We make policy to support us in doing our work. Therefore, every policy has to reflect the current state of how things are being done, otherwise the organization becomes stiff and ineffective in the long run. Of course, if we review a policy and all is fine, then we do not have to make it a big deal. Putting a term end on policy is just a reminder to review policies. If no one sees need for changing a policy, then reviewing a policy can be a matter of under 10 minutes.

Policy is made to help people in the organization do their work. If how things are done interferes with the ability of people to fill their roles and do their work, then they need to be changed. This can happen at any time. If there is a reason to change policy, there is no reason to wait until a term is up.

How do we review policy? We follow the protocol for any consent process on policy. First, we present the policy -- make sure everyone in the circle really reads it! If the policy is complex and/or detailed and there are many new people in the circle, you can ask for clarifying questions next. Then call a round on reactions. If the effectiveness of the policy has been surveyed or measured in any way, bring in that information now.

Reviewing policy

1. present current policy
2. clarifying questions
3. quick reactions
4. consent round (objections?)

If everyone thinks the policy reflects what is being done currently, and there are no reasons to do things otherwise, then give it a new term end and ask for consent. If there are reasons to change policy, then we are going into the standard process of dealing with objections. (See next section.)

Here, the "old" policy then serves as the proposal that is being considered. There is only one difference to a consent process for new policy which is that until there is a new decision made, the "old" policy is still in place! (Technically, that depends on whether the term is up yet. A policy is void after the term is up. If no new decision is made before its term is up,



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there is *no* policy guiding those operations. Practically, an organization might not choose to interpret it that way but keep it in place until an improved version is consented to.)

b. Feedback in the form of objections

In sociocracy, any decision on policy requires the circle's consent. Consent is defined as "no one has an objection". An objection is defined as a concern that carrying out policy might harm the circle's aim. The circle's aim is a description of the doing of their work. That means that an objection is a concern that carrying out a policy might interfere with the work of the circle. Having clarity both about the circle's aim and about the concern, makes it easy to object with reference to a need driving the objection. Expressing an objection with reference to a need also gives the circle information on how to address the objection because it points towards a direction: how could we amend/change/test the policy to be sure your need can be met. Here are a few examples:

- "I am concerned that if we form another subcircle, we might be stretched too thin. I am worried that we won't be able to do our work well when our plate is so full."
- "I object to this proposal because it lacks information about how we will be able to get prepared on time. I want to make sure I have peace of mind that we'll be able to complete the project on time."
- "My objection to this proposal is that if we require bike helmets on scooters in addition to bikes, then no one will take it seriously which will undermine the purpose of this policy. So I have a concern about practicability and ultimately about safety."
- "I object because I see no sense in adding a bureaucratic layer. The advantage of this step does not justify the extra work for everyone which will slow our real work down."

The aim of the circle --doing the work-- is a need of the workers, just like their more universal need of harmony, effectiveness, belonging, stimulation and so many others. In that way, expressing feedback in form of objections can be addressed in the same ways as feedback to content.

c. Feedback loops vs. decision-making

In sociocracy, we want to learn as much as we can and work with all the data we can access to feed into our decision-making. We also try to keep the groups who make decisions to a reasonable group size. It is crucial to understand the difference between "hearing everyone's feedback" and "including everyone in the decision-making". Sociocracy clearly



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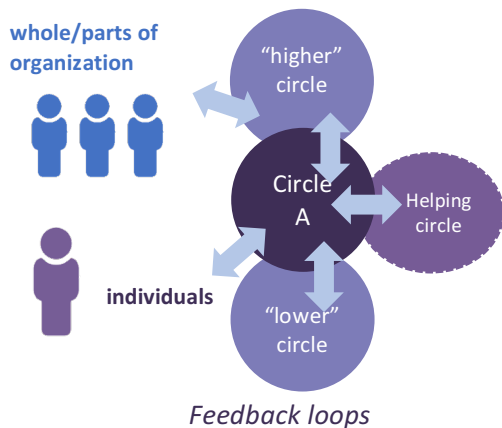
says yes to getting as much feedback as your circle can handle, while we are clearly against involving everyone in the decision-making process.



What's the difference? If circle A makes a decision about significantly raising the membership fees, they might want to hear people from outside the circle about that. They might even want to survey their entire membership. However, that only means that circle A now has more information. They are not bound to anything but to inviting and taking in the feedback they get. In an organization that is new to sociocracy, you have to be very clear on the difference between “being involved in the decision making” and “being heard”. Sociocratic governance would be slowed down tremendously if not made impossible if we involved everyone in every decision. That is why we need to trust smaller groups – circles – to make decisions. The strength of sociocracy comes with the ability to make decisions effectively in a small groups while including a lot of data through gathering feedback.

Who do we get feedback from? Sociocracy comes with its own support system. The support system is built into the circle structure.

If a circle is making a decision they assume is uncontroversial, or that only affects their own



work, they will probably just make a decision. If they would like to get more feedback – either because they would like to hear more opinions, test the waters, or get more expertise, there are several options. They can ask their next-higher circle for input. That circle might have a broader understanding of the issue and know more about the impact on other circles, for instance circle A's sibling circles. The next-lower circle might have some insights about some specific parts of the proposal, that might be in their domain. They could get feedback from (parts of) the whole organization, for

instance in a survey or all-member meeting. They could ask specific individuals for input, if those have some expertise of if a policy would affect them specifically. Circle A could also form a helping circle to look more deeply into a topic.



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This is not about involving everyone who might be affected. Instead, this is about gathering enough input to make a good decision. If you make a decision, and the reaction to your policy is surprise or outrage – then that is good feedback that you did not get enough input before making the decision or in explaining how you got to your decision. The small group mandate is based on trust – an organization trusts a small group of people to make decisions in their domain for everyone. This trust is earned through decisions that take input and feedback from other people in the organization into deep consideration.

d. Feedback to people

In our organizations, although we might come together to do work together, much of the communication and policy has to do with how we relate to each other as humans. How we work together, in meetings and outside of meetings, forms a huge part of organizational life. Therefore, feedback to people – that might be coworkers, supervisors, but also clients, donors or investors. Feedback can be given in any interaction between beings. It can be given in person, in writing or in a phone call. Feedback can be given to anyone. Non-violent communication operates from the assumption that all are equal. We might be in different roles. In a parent-teacher conference, our interaction might be different from talking among friends. In a perfectly equal world, what changes with different roles is not power (as in power-over) but the needs behind my actions. Even though our needs might be different in an interaction, everyone’s needs matter and cannot be ignored. That does not mean that everyone always gets their way. Everyone’s needs matter does not mean everyone can always meet them, but everyone’s needs need to be *considered*.

The guiding principles for giving feedback to a supervisor, a child, a teacher or a neighbor are always the same: build a relationship on trust and connection, express your thoughts while owning that your truth will be different from their truth, check in on how your feedback was perceived.

People encountering NVC for the first time often struggle with “but that does not allow me to say what is really going on”. People who feel that way have not yet accepted that good and bad are labels that have to do much more with your own set of values (=needs) and judgements than with what is happening around you. Remember that in a mindset without right and wrong or good and bad, the only truth you have access to is what you observe (being aware that you might be adding some interpretation even to very tangible observations) and what impact something has on you. However, actions do not have impact on you directly, only your needs have.



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You do not have access to information of *why* people are doing what they are doing. In that way, feedback about how you are being impacted, without assigning other people's action any meaning or interpretation, is the only truth you have access to. Going back to "I want to be able to say what is *really* going on": we agree. What is *really* going on is that your feelings point to needs of yours as met or unmet, not that other people are ill-intentioned. In that way, you are encouraged to talk about what is *really* going on, and learning about NVC will actually enable you to use a magnifying glass on what is true for ourselves and to share all of that.

The good news here is that as long you stay with your own experience and you clearly present your truth as what it is (= your truth/experience), sharing everything becomes enlightening, connecting and effective. Effective because you are not tempted to add a layer of interpretation that will drive people away, interfering with their ability to hear your truth.

Although we can give feedback in virtually any situation, we might forget to do so which would compromise our ability to learn. Since feedback is so important for learning, it is a good idea to implement times when we pay attention to feedback. There are four easy ways to express feedback:

- Meeting evaluations
- Feedback form
- Performance reviews



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Do not play “NVC police”!

This is dear to us: do not use recommendations to act as “NVC police”. A statement like “what you said was not good NVC” undermines everything NVC stands for. A statement like that serves to judge and criticize, and it shuts people down. Some thoughts to consider:

- We want to provide a place for everyone to speak, and we trust that everyone will speak as constructive and gentle as they can. If they did not meet your standards of “good” feedback, that is proof alone that in this particular situation (for whatever reason) they were not able to do better – if they would have been, they would have done so! NVC is not only about how we talk but also about how we listen. Try to hear other people’s need that is underneath of how they express themselves. (You might be able to paraphrase what you heard, but coming from a curious, not a “knowing” place: “Is it that you were hoping for more focus/effectiveness/time for connection during the meeting?”)
- With our examples, we are *not* intending to introduce “standards”. The more a statement expresses your own experience, the better. Use your own words!
- The advice in this paper is meant to support you in giving more effective feedback, and we have described effective feedback as truthful, blame-free and connecting. Any feedback that has the potential to disconnect, is not “bad” feedback, it is just not as effective of a strategy to reach the goal of having a learning, loving organization. If you want to encourage your circle members to give more effective feedback, then say that. An example would be “Meeting evaluations work best for me if everyone speaks about their own experience without blaming people. I want to know what is going on for you because I care about you, but I don’t want to be held responsible for other people’s experience.”



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Meeting evaluations

After the content part of every meeting, we evaluate our meeting in a round. Everyone says how the meeting worked for them. If you look at it from a needs/feelings perspective, they are sharing how well the meeting (a strategy to do work together) met their needs. Did the meeting meet your need for productivity? For connection? Did it give you clarity or maybe companionship. Or maybe you created a policy that contributes to your need for safety or harmony. This is a good moment to share those. You can also share feelings, for instance “I am happy about how the meeting went”, or “I was anxious before the meeting wondering whether the agenda was too full, and now I am relieved that we got through all the agenda items.”

What do we do with “negative” feedback? We share it as well: if you stay on the level of needs met or unmet (remember, no one can make you angry, unmet needs trigger feelings, other people do not trigger feelings), then it will be easy to share those.

Here are some examples of how to express our meeting evaluation with a universal need or a feeling and no blame or labeling, just talking about our very own experience with no expectation that we are accessing any absolute truth.

Which needs were met:

- “I enjoyed this meeting because to me it seemed effective for time.” (effectiveness)
- “I am glad about our decision and the sense of integrity it gives me.”
- “To me, it seems like there was balance in how much each of us contributed, so there was equality and harmony, and I enjoyed that.
- “I want to appreciate Mary for giving me space to express myself during the consent round. I felt heard and understood by everyone.”
- “This was a fun meeting for me. Stimulating and connected, which works really well for me.”



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Which needs were not met:

- This meeting was very effective but I would have wished for more connection and space for reflection.
- I noticed some cross talk in the meeting with people speaking out of turn, and that makes it hard for me to be at ease. I like the sense of equality that comes with rounds.
- The meeting did not work for me at all. I am curious to hear how other people experienced the meeting but I know that I was sitting with a lot of confusion because I was not really sure what we were doing.
- It is hard for me to be around what I perceives as hostility during the meeting.

Feedback forms

A feedback form is a form that provides a frame for giving feedback. Every organization can agree on additional ways to give (and receive) feedback. If it is already an agreed upon strategy, it will be easier to do it when you want to actually do it.

For every piece of feedback outside of meetings, we have to hear whether the person is open to hearing our feedback. If they are not open to it, it still makes sense to write one and not to share it with the other person. In that case, the inner peace and clarity that comes with expressing our unmet needs will be achieved by filling out the feedback form only. It is still worth it, and your clarity will have a positive effect on your interaction with the other person even though they have never seen your feedback. Here is a real live example of what that could sound like. Note how positive and connecting this email is, and it leaves the other person maximal choice for their actions, while taking responsibility for their own actions.

I've been thinking that the least I could do for mending our last circle meeting was to fill out a feedback form. I remember you and I sitting on the front steps during lunch break a couple of summers ago to assist you in filling one out for your circle and feeling very positive about it. So now i have pulled one out of my files and gone through it myself with the same positive feeling. One of the principles for effective feedback is to engage the persons willingness to receive feedback. So that's what this email is about. I wanted to check in with you to see if your willingness is there. My relationship with you matters to me and therefore I want to be as respectful as I know how. I also want to invite your feedback in my direction. Let me know how this all feels. I will be ok with whatever you decide.



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Below is an example of what a feedback form could look like. Your organization might want to design their own -- or use ours. (You can find a printable, high-resolution version at the end of this article.)

Collaborative change

Giving effective feedback:

- ✓ Process what happened with someone first – what was important to you during the event?
- ✓ Fill out this form.
 - Use observational language, refer to specifics to support understanding
 - Invite feedback in the other direction
- ✓ Check if there is willingness to receive feedback
- ✓ Find a good channel to give feedback (in person, phone, letter)

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My experience:

What I appreciate:

What I was hoping for:

With care and respect, _____

Receiving feedback

- See this feedback as what it is: data.
- If feedback is hard for you to receive, find someone to go over it with you.
- Stay in choice about how you are taking in this information, and how you respond to it.

It is a good idea to put the pointers about what to keep in mind for filling out a feedback form right on the form. Remember that everyone who fills out a feedback form will be in a triggered state in some way, so making it as easy as possible for them to act in an effective, constructive manner is key here.

Here again is an authentic example of a feedback form that has been used in an organization (slightly changed for privacy).



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My experience:

I experiences a tone of sarcasm in our circle meetings. It was hard for me to translate the sarcasm into the heartfelt content underneath. I went into a shut-down reaction.

What I appreciate:

Your willingness to speak up when important values are at stake.

What I was hoping for:

I was hoping for an expression of respectful sincerity with ownership of any judgement.

It might be a good idea to use a feedback form for the next small incident so that you can reduce any anxiety around using it. Or use it for something completely positive. Giving feedback is like a muscle that can be trained. Practice!

Performance reviews

Performance reviews are a useful way of receiving feedback from the people who know you best in your role in your organization – your coworkers. The person whose performance is reviewed is called the focus person. Imagine you would want to harvest the feedback from the people you work with, which would make you the focus person. How do you go about it?

The first step is to have the right people in the room. The goal of a performance review is to give feedback to you in your role(s) in the organization. You can do a performance review in your circle if you are only part of one circle. The performance review can also be done by group of members who don't usually form a circle: for people in linking roles (leader or delegate), you need the perspective of all circle layers you are a part of. If there is substantial interaction to another circle (for instance in a hand-off to a more specific "sub"circle), then one or two members from that circle can be invited to the performance review. The idea is that every level relating to the focus person is represented. Below are some examples showing the focus person, their position (in purple) and who might get invited (in blue). Not everyone in a related circle needs to be invited, keeping the group to a workable group size.

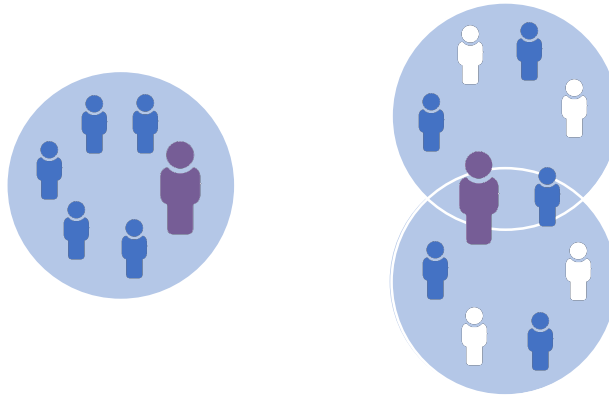


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Who is part of the performance review?

The focus person

- determines the members of the performance review
- sets a date and time for the performance review
- appoints a facilitator
- gives the members of the performance review access to relevant documents

Below is a possible format for a performance review. Other formats are possible if the basic objectives of the performance can be supported in the new format: the feedback in the performance review represents all relevant and related levels from the organization (transparency), consists of members who know the focus person well (for the feedback to be useful and effective) and includes a variety of voices (equivalence of voices).

Performance review format

- Check-ins
- Consent to selection of facilitator
- Present/consent to agreed-upon process
- Round on achievements (focus person starts this round)
- Round on possible improvements (again, the focus person starts this round)
- Action steps?
- Meeting evaluation



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Check-ins are an essential part of every sociocratic meeting (see chapter on meeting format on website), just as consent to who fills roles and what the process (agenda) of the meeting will be. The performance review process follows the regular meeting pattern.

The content part of the meeting consists of three parts. First, the group does a round on what the focus person has achieved in the areas of content, process and interpersonal interaction. Without any expectation of completeness, here are some possible statements that would include effective feedback in that round, both by the point person and by the other participants of the performance review. Good feedback in a performance review includes general assessments (while making crystal clear that they are no absolute truth) and specific examples for illustration. Describe the impact the point person's actions and way of being has on you.

- "I enjoy your leadership style. I experience you as reliable, for instance when it got forgotten to call the electrician and you noticed that on time and were able to intervene successfully."
- "I appreciate your voice in the circle. What you say always seems to add to the discussion. I very much admire how you always pass when you do not have anything new or relevant to say. To me, that just makes your voice more valuable because you seem to choose wisely what needs to be said when without taking yourself too seriously."
- "I think your energy is great. Your attitude is positive and genuine, you seem to give this circle a sense of 'we can do this'. I loved when you pulled out that diagram a few meetings back that showed all the ways of dealing with an objection. What I noticed was how important it was for the circle, and certainly for me, to be aware that we have options. You really moved the circle forward there in my view."
- "I love how you seem to be the calm center of the circle. Even when people are stuck or excited and want to do everything at the same time, you keep calm, and in my opinion that contributes so much to the group because you're a needed counterpart to us. That gives me some piece of mind because I know we might drop things but you will noticed. That also shows in your writing minutes, they are always correct and thorough and organized. That supports us all in doing our work."

In the next round, people are going to share what they would like to see improved. Everyone speaking should remember that, in our culture, this can be hard to hear because in everyone's past, ideas for improvement have been expressed using blame. To counteract, make an effort to be kind, loving and self-responsible – without compromising on what is true for you.



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It helps a lot to keep the phrase “this is not about you, it is just that I...” in your mind. Talk about yourself and the impact of the focus person on how your needs are met or not met. Do not interpret their actions without making clear that you are interpreting and assigning meaning to their actions. More often than not, when we assign other people’s actions meaning, we are at least a little off. So we cannot talk about our judgements? Yes, we can. Hearing your judgements is very valuable feedback for the focus person (and everyone else in the room), but they are probably not entirely true. Just be transparent about that. There is no rule “you cannot talk about this”. There is just the appeal to be true and transparent, and in a world without right and wrong, “true” has to be what your experience is and what is true to you, and transparency means to share how you come to your truth.

It is a good idea to make a request of the focus person during a performance review. A request is different from a demand in that the other person can say no. (And if they say no, it is because they are saying yes to another need of theirs.) A request has to be doable and specific. The chances of the other person saying yes to a request are higher when you reveal your own heart before you make the request.

Requests

- Share the need of yours that is not met or that you are trying to meet.
- Express how the other person could contribute to your needs being met.
- The other person is free to say yes or no.

Below are some examples of what is traditionally called “negative feedback” (which, in this case, is not really negative feedback but expressing someone’s need not getting met sufficiently).

- “I have a hard time staying engaged during meetings in general, and it helps me when a meeting is structured so I know what’s going on. I would love for you to support me in that by saying more often, what the frame is for a round and where we are in the process. Maybe we could put a poster up of the different steps, and then you and we could refer to it? That is my request of you because it would help me be more relaxed in meetings.”
- “I appreciate that you are carrying so much of the load when it comes to our finances. I would like to express some concern because we don’t seem to have any redundancy, which also means no one can help you, and I would like to have some basic understanding of how our coop is doing financially to give me some peace of



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- mind. I have trust but any role should have some redundancy. I would like for someone to learn from you so it does not always have to be you doing our finances.”
- “I have something to say that might be a little hard to hear because it is clearly judgmental from my part. I am aware that this is probably just a story that is going on in my head, but it impacts the way we work together. It is important to me to feel comfortable in all our meetings, and I am currently not comfortable when we talk about IT tools. I am often picking up on some impatience, and in me, it sounds like all the IT was easy to understand while I am really struggling. Just taking care of myself for a second I would want to know that I am seen for my intentions which are to be productive and to be doing my best to learn the new tools. It is just something that seems to not flow as easily. I am actually curious how my judgement lands on you that, when it comes to that topic, you get annoyed and brief. I guess I already said my part: I am doing my best, and I’d like to people to know that. If I am making up the part that you are annoyed with us and don’t think we’re trying hard enough, I’d like for you to share that so we can talk about it and are not stuck in projecting things about each other. If you do not hold any judgements there, then my request would be for you to be a bit more gentle with me because I get anxious when I do not feel competent, and I would sense judgement even where there is none, and this is hard for me and it is really impacting how I participate in our work here.”
 - “I have to say there is something that is not working for me. I often come in for my shift after yours and find food on the counter that belongs into the fridge. I am worried about safety here and I am sure that is something we can all get behind. I’d love to hear your observations and what comes up for you hearing this.”

3. Closing remarks and other resources

a. Be the change!

I am guessing that for some of the example phrases and tools we presented, you thought to yourself, “yeah, that would be nice. But no one ever does that”. Maybe you are lucky to be around role models, at least some, of people who have done their work and have more practice in giving effective feedback. Having a role model goes a long way!

If the foundations of this article, non-violent communication most of all, are new to you, we highly recommend for you to embark in a journey and learn more. For many, learning NVC has been a life-changing experience that sharpens the focus for what kind of world we want to live in. Giving up on being right, and embracing being connected.



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Dear _____

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