

## Feedback Environment and Coaching Communication in Malaysia Education Organizations

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to investigate the relationship between feedback environment with coaching communication by the perception of polytechnic lecturers. Quantitative descriptive study was conducted through a survey using questionnaires as research instruments. A total of 251 lecturers in the conventional polytechnics in Penang and Sarawak took part in this study. The findings showed that the mean score for the two main variables of feedback environment (mean=5.102) and coaching communication (mean = 4.524) is high and moderate respectively. Each component of the feedback environment is also at a high and moderate level at the mean range between 4.7 and 5.5. Next, the correlation coefficient has shown the seven components of the feedback environment has a significant, moderately strong, positive with coaching communication ( $0.37 \leq r \leq 0.68$ ) at significant level 0.01. Findings also showed that the promoting feedback seeking component has significant difference between the mean score for male lecturers (mean = 4.736) and female lecturers (mean = 4.971). The result of this study can help leaders at all levels in order to apply the components of the feedback environment and coaching communication in educational organizations to generate high efficacious teaching staff in line with the government Agenda of Polytechnic Transformation.*

**Keywords:** Feedback Environment, Coaching Communication, Educational Organization

### INTRODUCTION

Educators in any educational organizations play an important role in implementing curriculum, vision, and mission of the Ministry of Education Malaysia in realizing the aspirations of the designated agenda of transformations. Thus, it is the responsibility of the leader in every educational organization to take the initiative to awaken the followers' potential. This action is necessary in order to assist the followers on the right track of their career based on the standards set by the organization and the leader's expectations. In this case, leaders need to take consideration especially on organization psychology in influencing the achievement of their followers in their organization.

One of the work environment aspects that needs to be emphasized is the channeling of the feedback between leader-follower and/or the followers of the organization. Feedback on job performance or the understanding of a person whether in the form of advice, encouragement, strategies, alternatives, information, and the truth needs to be channeled effectively because it affects a person's performance (Hattie & Timperly, 2007). Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) have explained the situation as a weak psychological situation due to the lack of accurate feedback delivered. Consequently, the followers of the organization have different expectation for the performance incentives and desired behaviors by the leader. Therefore, more focus should be given to the development of the organizational environment that supports interaction feedback process within the organization.

More and more organizations are choosing coaching as an interactive medium to channel feedback to its followers. Reviews of Bowles, Cummingham, De La Rosa, and Picano (2007) have found coaching provides opportunities to receive feedback and practise the skills learnt. This means, coaching provides a two-way communication process that involves the readiness and the willingness to face the personal changes throughout the process in order to improve one's performance (Stewart & Palmer, 2009). In other words, coaching is also referred as a process of co-directionally between leaders as coaches and followers as clients to develop individual capabilities with comprehensive feedbacks (Chidiac, 2006; Ives, 2008).

Feedback environment is believed to play an important role in determining how the employees seek, receive, process, and use feedback. To receive and use feedback, the employees need coaching presented as a practice within the organization to rectify the communication gap between the leaders and followers. Thus, both the concepts of feedback environment and coaching communication are interdependent and can improve the quality of educators in education organizations.

## **RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES**

The concept of feedback environment in this study consists of seven components: (1) feedback credibility, (2) feedback quality, (3) feedback delivery, (4) favorable feedback, (5) unfavorable feedback, (6) feedback availability, and (7) promotong feedback seeking. Feedback environment equipped with such components should be established in order to provide space for workers to obtain feedback on their work performance. This is in line with the opinion of Lam, Yik, and Schaubroeck (2002) in which feedback within the organization aims to maintain and strengthen the level of motivation and job satisfaction among employees. Based on the definition given by Steelman, Levy, and Snell (2004) on feedback environment where daily feedback channeling on job performance among employers, employees and/or employees. Daily feedback is to ensure workers are constantly on the right track and understand what they are doing. Therefore, there is no doubt the concept of feedback environment is appropriate and should be implemented in the management of educational organizations nowadays.

In forming high-performing workers, coaching between leaders and followers needs two-way communication. In other words, workers need to be guided by the employer through the integration of proficiency, knowledge, attitudes, and experiences of employers. Feedback through the process of coaching ensures the coaching transfer happens and producing the workers who can form their own ability to create the resolutions. Stewart, Palmer, Wilkin, and Kerrin (2008) said that the coaching transfer as the application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and characteristics of other qualities of which have been acquired by an individual in the process of coaching in the workplace. Indeed, coaching communication is believed to give the desired results through feedback environment.

Refer to the Leader-Follower Exchange Theory, leaders serve their followers equally, refrain from practising favoritism and discrimination, as well as high quality fertilizing relationship between leaders and followers based on mutual trust respectively. This means that leaders must be able to establish a working relationship with his subordinates individually. Thus, the interaction between leaders and followers through two-way communications needs an ongoing basis, especially in an encouraging feedback environment. As a result, followers who sucessfully receive and use feedback during the coaching process will get more attention and have the opportunity to access learning resources within the organization. Relationship formed between leaders and followers is opened to receive and impart information.

The objective of this study is to identify the perception of the practice level of feedback environment as a whole and based on its components. In addition, this study also aims to identify the perception of lecturers towards the practice of coaching communication. Next, the study also aims to determine whether there is a significant difference between the practice of the seven components in feedback environment with gender. Finally, the study also aims to investigate the relationship between the practice of the seven components of feedback environment and coaching communication according to the lecturers' perception.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES**

### **Research Population and Sample**

The study population comprised the polytechnic lecturers in Category 1. Refer to the Service Circular Numbered 3 in the year 2007, lecturers of Category 1 are those who perform teaching duties in polytechnics. A total of 251 lecturers from four polytechnics in the state of Sarawak and Penang were randomly chosen to participate in this study. This means that there are 251 sets of data on perception of their leaders – Head of Program / Head of Course by their votes. Four polytechnics involved in this study are Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak, Polytechnic Mukah Sarawak, Polytechnic Seberang Perai, and Polytechnic Balik Pulau.

### **Research Instrument**

This study used a survey method to measure the perception of the lecturers towards feedback environment practice and coaching communication. Items in this questionnaire are comprised of questionnaires from the previous researchers. All the questionnaires have been merged into one instrument and places in three main parts including respondent demographic information. For the purpose of this study, the questionnaire used was adapted to suit the local environment.

The instrument consists of a questionnaire consisting of three parts, namely Part A, B and C. Part A was used to obtain data about the respondents' background. This section contains three items as gender, highest academic qualification, and teaching experience as lecturer. For Part B, the instrument Feedback Environment Scale (FES), which was built by Steelman et al. (2004) used to diagnose the feedback process that occurs in an organizational setting. There are seven components from the 32 items in this study based on seven-point Likert Scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". While Part C, the instrument of Heslin, VandeWalle, and Latham (2006) have been used to measure the behavior of leaders through coaching communication. This section contains 13 items based on seven-point Likert Scale ranging from "Never" to "Very Often". All questionnaires were translated into Malay language.

A pilot study was conducted and confirmed by the five experts on the content of the instrument. The findings of the pilot study showed that the instrument has good reliability according to Darren and Mallery (2003) with the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.934 obtained for Part B and 0.979 for Part C. Analysis used in this study covered descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

A total of 251 questionnaires collected with the response rate as high as 95 percent. There were 147 female respondents participated in this study. It is indeed a trend of the teaching profession in Malaysia in which the profession is dominated by women. The majority of the respondents are novice educators which comprised of 88.8 percent with teaching experience ranging from 1 to 12 years. A large number of respondents have their highest academic

qualification in Bachelor level which comprised of 162 respondents or 64.5 percent. This was followed by 83 respondents whom qualified Master degree while there are 2.4 percent of respondents who are Diploma holders.

**Table 1. Respondent profile by category (N=251)**

<i>Category</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Male	104	41.4
	Female	147	58.6
Highest Academic Qualification	Diploma	6	2.4
	Bachelor	162	64.5
	Master	83	33.1
Teaching Experience	1 – 12 years	223	88.8
	13 – 22 years	26	10.4
	23 years and above	2	0.8

In determining the level of feedback environment practice in educational organizations, the mean scores between 0.0 and 3.0 is calculated lower, 3.1 and 5.0 is considered moderate, while the mean scores above 5.0 is considered high. Based on Table 2, the results shown that the leaders more often give quality feedback (mean = 5.448, SD = 0.886) according to the perception of lecturers. This was followed by the component of feedback credibility, feedback delivery, unfavorable feedback, favorable feedback, promoting feedback seeking, and feedback availability. The lecturers' perceptions on the practice of feedback environment found to be high, either overall (mean = 5.102, SD = 0.7337) and in respect of each component with the mean range between 4.7 and 5.5.

**Table 2. The perception of lecturers on the level of feedback environment practice (N=251)**

<i>Component</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Level</i>
Feedback Credibility	5.383	0.878	High
Feedback Quality	5.448	0.886	High
Feedback Delivery	5.349	0.871	High
Favorable Feedback	4.931	0.943	Moderate
Unfavorable Feedback	4.989	0.936	Moderate
Feedback Availability	4.729	0.952	Moderate
Promoting Feedback Seeking	4.874	0.961	Moderate

In determining the level of coaching communication practice in the educational organizations, the mean scores between 0.0 and 3.0 is calculated lower, 3.1 and 5.0 is considered moderate, while the mean score above 5.0 is considered high. Referring to Table

3, the perception of lecturers on the level for the practice of coaching communication is moderate (mean = 4.524, SD = 1.331). This reflects the existence of a two-way interactions between leader and followers in educational organizations.

**Table 3. The level of coaching communication practice according to the lecturers' perception**

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Level</i>
Coaching Communication	4.524	1.331	Moderate

Based on Table 4, the results shown that the seven components of feedback environment and coaching communication practice have positive relationship, moderately strong, and significant at the significance level of 0.01. Among the seven components, the coefficient *r* spread between 0.37 and 0.68. Unfavorable feedback is the component of feedback environment with the strongest relationship as high as 0.679 with coaching communication practice. This was followed by the feedback quality (*r* = 0.541), favorable feedback (*r* = 0.518), feedback credibility (*r* = 0.487), promoting feedback seeking (*r* = 0.475), and the component of feedback availability (*r* = 0.440). However, the component of feedback delivery has the lowest correlation (*r* = 0.374) with the coaching communication practice compared to the other components of feedback environment.

**Table 4. Correlation between the components of feedback environment with the level of coaching communication practice**

<i>Components of Feedback Environment</i>	<i>Correlation Value (r)</i>	<i>Significant Value (p)</i>
Feedback Credibility	.487**	.000
Feedback Quality	.541**	.000
Feedback Delivery	.374**	.000
Favorable Feedback	.518**	.000
Unfavorable Feedback	.679**	.000
Feedback Availability	.440**	.000
Promoting Feedback Seeking	.475**	.000

\*\*Significant level at  $p < 0.01$

Shapiro-Wilk test is used to identify whether the data according to gender are normally distributed. From Table 5, the *p*-value is greater than 0.05, then the data according to gender are normally distributed. Therefore, parametric test used to investigate the components of feedback environment significantly differences by gender. In this case, *t*-Test was chosen. Findings of Table 5 reveals that the female respondents had the higher mean score than male respondents in the components of the feedback credibility, feedback quality, feedback delivery, feedback availability, and promoting feedback seeking. In contrast, male lecturers have higher score mean in the component of favorable feedback and unfavorable feedback compared to the female lecturers. However, *t*-Test has shown that there was a significant difference in the mean score of promoting feedback seeking for male lecturers (mean = 4.736) and the female lecturers (mean = 4.971) conditions;  $t(249)=1.923$ . These results suggest that gender really does have an effect on the component of promoting feedback

seeking. Specifically, the results suggest that the leader should give feedback more frequent, especially more female staff in the workplace.

**Table 5. Finding for Shapiro-Wilk**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Significant</i>
Gender	Male	0.991	104	0.722**
	Female	0.993	146	0.744**

\*\*Significant level at  $p=0.05$

**Table 6. Comparison of mean score between male and female**

<i>Component</i>	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>
Feedback Credibility	104	5.371	147	5.391
Feedback Quality	104	5.406	147	5.478
Feedback Delivery	104	5.244	147	5.423
Favorable Feedback	104	4.962	147	4.910
Unfavorable Feedback	104	5.041	146	4.952
Feedback Availability	104	4.673	147	4.769
Promoting Feedback Seeking	104	4.736	147	4.971

## DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATION

Descriptive analysis using mean has been conducted to identify the level of feedback environment practice in educational organizations in Malaysia. The findings have shown that the middle leader – Head of Program/Head of Course in polytechnics regularly practising the seven components of the feedback environment at high and medium levels. The component of feedback environment that records the highest mean score is the feedback quality (mean = 5.448). It is because the middle leaders always provide consistent information at all time and specific, and it is considered more useful in the perspective of lecturers. However, component of feedback availability has recorded the lowest mean score (mean = 4.729) as practised by middle leaders in the organization. Most leaders use only annual performance evaluation to provide feedback to their followers in the context of Malaysia education. Even some of the leaders have never given reflection of the followers’ job performance. However, access to feedback should not be limited to the performance evaluation once a year. Instead, consistently with the view of Ashford and Cummings (1983) in which the employees should refer to the informal daily information at their workplace.

The findings also revealed that the level of coaching communication practice only performed at a moderate level (mean = 4.524). It shows leaders are not ready to use coaching in developing employees in the education organization. Leaders need to interact with their followers to provide the opportunity to the followers to develop themselves continuously.

High level of feedback environment components among the leader-followers had shown the high relationship with the coaching communication practice. Therefore, leaders need to demonstrate a major concern to fertilization and the formation of an organizational culture that encourages feedback effectively to improve the motivation of followers. This is necessary because the subset of information available to individuals in the work environment should help the individuals who accept the feedback (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). Indirectly, this shows the relationship between leaders and followers as emphasized in Leader Followers Exchange Theory can be confirmed in the work environment with the support of the organization in terms of feedback environment and coaching communication.

Analysis of *t*-Test also found that female respondents had higher mean scores than the male respondents in promoting feedback seeking. It shows that more female lecturers take the initiative to get more information about their performance and use the information sought to improve themselves on the right career track. Thus, leaders must take the initiative to meet the followers more regularly so that the coaching transfer can be done effectively.

Studies on feedback environment and coaching communication should be explored in more comprehensive specifically in the context of Malaysia education system. This is because the study of the effectiveness on these both variables provide effect on the potential of the followers. In addition, success and excellence in education in every organization should not only focused on the top management. The literature review has shown many leadership studies have been conducted on a group of top leaders but not given enough focus to the middle leaders. Therefore, it is expected that more studies should be conducted in the future to explore in depth the role of middle leaders in education organization.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings have proved that the relationships between the components of the feedback environment and coaching communication. Through encouraging feedback environment, coaching communication will be able to help followers to accept and use feedback constructively. Leaders who have a variety of leadership skills should adopt the components of feedback environment. The failure of leaders to channel their feedback to the followers would cause vision and mission and organization expectations failed to be achieved along with his followers. Hence, constant feedback and non-seasonal feedback can develop the talent of the followers and improve their job performance.

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